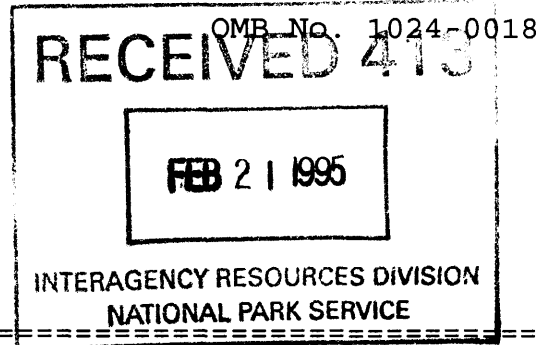


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**



1. Name of Property

historic name: DEPARTMENT STORE HISTORIC DISTRICT

other name/site number: N/A

2. Location

street & number: 884-956 Main Street, 36 Talcott Street

city/town: Hartford not for publication: N/A
vicinity: N/A

state: CT county: Hartford code: 003 zip code: 06103

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private, public-local

Category of Property: district

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
		sites
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>1</u>		objects
<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: Historic Resources of Hartford

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. See cont. sheet.

Signature of certifying official: John W. Shannahan, Director; Date: 2/15/95

State or Federal agency and bureau: Connecticut Historical Commission

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official; Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet.
determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register
removed from the National Register
other (explain):

Signature of Keeper: Edson H. Beall; Date of Action: 3.23.95

Entered in the National Register

Signature of Keeper; Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: COMMERCE/TRADE; Sub: department store
Current: COMMERCE/TRADE; Sub: specialty store/restaurant/business
DOMESTIC; Sub: multiple dwelling
VACANT/NOT IN USE

=====
7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification:

- Romanesque
- Renaissance
- Neo-Classical Revival

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation	<u>STONE</u>	roof	<u>OTHER: built up</u>
walls	<u>BRICK</u>	other	<u>TERRA COTTA</u>
	<u>STONE: sandstone</u>		<u>STONE: limestone</u>

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

=====
8. Statement of Significance
=====

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: state.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A,C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : _____

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE
COMMERCE

Period(s) of Significance: 1876-1944 _____

Significant Dates: see Item 7

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: see Item 7

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.
X See continuation sheet.

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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

RECEIVED 413

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INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE 7-1

Description Department Store Historic District
Hartford, Hartford County, CT

Description

The Department Store Historic District is located on the eastern side of Main Street in the heart of downtown Hartford. The district consists of three former department stores: Sage Allen & Co., Brown Thomson & Co., and G. Fox & Co. Also included in the district is the former warehouse of G. Fox & Co. (contributing building), a 1918 bridge connecting the G. Fox warehouse with the store (contributing structure), and a large 1889 sidewalk clock outside the Sage Allen building (contributing object).

The buildings were all built as department stores in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and together made up the core of Hartford's main retail center. The buildings, all of which have masonry exteriors, range in height from five to eleven stories and are extensively detailed with decorative ornament characteristic of their architectural styles. The 1876 Brown Thomson building, also known as the Cheney Block, is an example of Richardsonian Romanesque (designed by Henry Hobson Richardson himself), the Sage Allen building is in the Second Renaissance Revival style, and the G. Fox building is Neo-Classical Revival in inspiration. Except for the southwest corner of the Brown Thomson building, architectural elaboration is confined to Main Street elevations.

There are two noncontributing properties in the district. A modern one-story store is situated at 906 Main Street between the Sage Allen building and the Brown Thomson building. Also, Temple Street, which formerly ran between the Sage Allen and Brown Thomson buildings, has been discontinued and replaced by a three-story glass and concrete covered pedestrian walkway.

The buildings in the district retain most of their integrity. The G. Fox building was altered in 1935 with a streamlined Art-Deco canopy over the ground-level storefronts, but this itself, along with contemporary interior renovations, has achieved significance as one of Hartford's best examples of the style. The rear elevations of the buildings have been altered with trompe-l'oil paintings and Post-Modern decorative detail, but these changes are not visible from Main Street. The G. Fox warehouse has been renovated for use as offices, with several floors opened up as parking levels, and new parking structures (not included in the district) abut three sides of the building. Despite these changes, the original extent of the warehouse is still

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description Department Store Historic District Hartford, Hartford County, CT 7-2

visible, and it retains most of its original appearance on its Talcott Street facade. The only highly visible alterations are the modern storefront on the lower levels of the Sage Allen building and the removal of all signage indicative of the buildings' original tenants.

The inventory that follows includes a count of contributing (C) and noncontributing (NC) properties.

INVENTORY

ADDRESS	DESCRIPTION	C	NC
884-902 Main Street	SAGE ALLEN & CO. BUILDING, 1898, Second Renaissance Revival style, 8 stories, yellow brick; Isaac A. Allen, architect. Store complex includes two 2 and 3-story buildings to south, now covered up by modern brick and concrete front. Architectural detail: fourth, fifth, and sixth stories organized as three large round-arched openings, with six smaller round-arched openings on top two stories; terra cotta cartouches (two with building date), roundels, cornucopias, and egg-and-dart molding; cornice with large modillions, festoons, and cresting of antefixae. Photographs 1-3, 7. Large clock on sidewalk in front of building, dating from 1889. Photograph 12.	2	0
904 Main Street	LERNERS BUILDING, c.1950, no style, 1 story, brick. Photograph 2.	0	1
914 Main Street	Covered pedestrian walkway, c.1980, 3 stories, glass and concrete. Photograph 11.	0	1
920-944	BROWN THOMSON & CO. BUILDING (Cheney Block), 1876, Richardsonian Romanesque style, 5 stories, brownstone with limestone trim; H. H. Richardson, architect. Listed on National Register as Cheney Building and G. Fox Building (at one time, G. Fox & Co. department store extended into this building). Architectural details: banded round-arched window openings, rough-surfaced stone, corbelled cornice, corner tower, gargoyles, engaged columns. Large 9-story addition, 1937, steel-framed with brick walls. Photographs 4 and 8.	1	0

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description Department Store Historic District 7-3
 Hartford, Hartford County, CT

ADDRESS	DESCRIPTION	C	NC
956 Main Street	G. FOX & CO. BUILDING, 1918, Neo-Classical Revival style, 11 stories, steel-framed with brick walls (gray-brick facade, yellow-brick sides); Cass Gilbert, architect. Architectural details: 2-story Corinthian marble columns and pilasters on window openings of ninth and tenth floors; Classical cornices above second, eighth, tenth, and twelfth stories, of which that above tenth story, with dentils and carved lion-heads, is largest and most elaborate; Art-Deco rounded-corner stainless-steel marquee above first story (1935, Taussig-Flesch Associates). Addition to rear of similar construction, 12 stories, 1938, with additional 3-story extension, c.1950. Photographs 5, 6, 9.	1	0
36 Talcott Street	G. FOX & CO. WAREHOUSE, 1918 (enlarged 1930), no style, concrete frame with brick walls (gray-brick facade), 8 stories. Architectural details: corbelled cornice with simple parapet. Altered with new windows for office floors, conversion of lower floors to parking garage. Photograph 10. Warehouse is connected to store by copper-clad 2-story bridge above Talcott Street; Neo-Classical style, 1918. Details include paneled pilasters, clock face on second story, cornice with modillions and stepped parapet, and 12-over-12 windows. Photograph 10.	2	0

United States Department of the Interior
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance Department Store Historic District 8-1
Hartford, Hartford County, CT

Summary

The Department Store Historic District is significant because the stores associated with the district's buildings played an important role in Hartford's historical development as an economic center (Criterion A). G. Fox & Co., Brown Thomson & Co., and Sage Allen & Co. were Hartford's leading department stores, unparalleled among the city's merchants in size and in the range of goods that they offered. Located together on a short stretch of Main Street, the department stores drew people into the downtown area, helping to create a vibrant commercial district. Customers from the entire region of central Connecticut would travel into Hartford specifically for these stores, and then stay on for other activities. The district's buildings also are significant as notable examples of particular architectural styles and as the work of important architects (Criterion C). The department stores commissioned the most prominent architects of the period to design richly embellished facades for their flagship buildings, resulting in some of the most distinguished late 19th and early 20th-century commercial architecture in Hartford.

The two themes of commercial development and notable historic architecture directly address the principal areas of significance of the Downtown Hartford Multiple Properties listing, to which this district is an addition.

Commerce/Trade Significance

The district is significant because of the role of these department stores in making downtown Hartford the primary shopping area for the entire central part of the state. Located only one block north of the city's principal trolley stop (and later the center of the metropolitan bus system), the grouping together of three large stores created a tremendous attraction, not only for city residents but also for people throughout the general area.

The department stores offered convenience and modernity to their customers. Through extensive advertizing, each store boasted of its commitment to offering customers the best and latest merchandise; convenience, large selections, and high-quality were all stressed. In 1920, for example, Brown Thomson called itself "Hartford's Great Shopping Center" and claimed to be "Connecticut's Biggest Department Store," Sage Allen used the catch-phrase "Hartford's Popular Store,"

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance Department Store Historic District 8-2
Hartford, Hartford County, CT

and G. Fox, with the newest building, alluded to Fifth Avenue when it advertized itself as "Hartford's Most Modern Department Store, with all the equipment and every convenience of the best metropolitan houses." (Hartford City Directory, 1920-1921). One could shop for the entire house without having to leave these stores, where one would find a wide variety of furniture, carpets, draperies, apparel for men, women, and children, cosmetics, toiletries, jewelry, sewing machines, and gifts. The Brown Thomson store carried a full line of automobile supplies, and one could even purchase a new Cadillac there. In addition, the department stores also provided many personal services, such as interior decorating, tailoring, shoe and watch repair, and travel planning. Although the buildings no longer serve as department stores, their former commercial importance is still evident in their elaborate facades and large size, which in each case includes additions from the 1930s that more than doubled the original space.

Once customers came to Hartford to shop in one of these stores, they would often stay for the day; in this way, the presence of G. Fox, Brown Thomson, and Sage Allen greatly enhanced the success of surrounding businesses. Theaters, banks, restaurants, and stores in the city's other commercial areas nearby all benefited from the popularity of the department stores. From the 1880's, when these merchants first began to expand their businesses beyond their small dry-goods shops, until the early 1990s, when the last one succumbed to competition from the region's two large suburban malls, the department stores on Hartford's Main Street played an important role in the local economy and formed a vital part of the city's identity.

Hartford's department stores were part of a general trend in urban retailing in the late 19th century, in which even small cities developed at least one large department store. All three Hartford stores started as small dry-goods operations with only the partners and a few clerks as employees. Gerson Fox, the founder of G. Fox & Co., had been a street peddler before starting a dry-goods store with his brother Isaac in the 1840s. The Cheney Block was a large building by the standards of the 1870s, but it was intended by its owners, the prominent Hartford merchant and manufacturing Cheney family, to accommodate numerous small stores. Frank Brown and James Thomson were among the original tenants of the Cheney Block; however, their store only filled one of the five Main Street bays. When Normand F. Allen and Jerome D. Sage founded their business in 1889, the coat and suit

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National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance Department Store Historic District 8-3
Hartford, Hartford County, CT

department occupied less space than a single dressing room of their later building.

During the 1880s and 1890s all three businesses increased the scale of their operations. Moses Fox substantially expanded his father's store by taking over adjacent commercial space, and Brown Thomson, under the leadership of one-time junior partners George A. Gay and Harry B. Strong, incorporated ever more of the Cheney Block until, by 1900, the firm occupied the entire structure and employed 500 people. Sage Allen, originally just one level of a single storefront, came to occupy two entire Main Street buildings in the 1890s, continuing in them even after constructing its own 8-story store on an adjacent lot. These merchants' larger scale not only allowed them to offer a wider range of the most fashionable items, but also gave them the purchasing power to sell at highly competitive prices that challenged Hartford's several dozen smaller dry-goods dealers.

The G. Fox building has special significance because it recalls the contributions of Jewish immigrants and their descendants in Hartford's history. The store's founder, Gerson Fox (1811-1880), emigrated from Germany and settled in Hartford about 1840. He was one of earliest members of the Hartford chapter of the benevolent organization B'nai B'rith, and he was active in Temple Beth Israel, the city's first synagogue, which he served for a time as treasurer. His son Moses (1850-1938), who made the decision to rebuild the store on an even grander scale after a disastrous fire in 1917, and granddaughter Beatrice Fox Auerbach (1887-1968), who took over management of G. Fox and Co. in 1927, created a business that rivaled the accomplishments of any among Hartford's mostly Yankee entrepreneurial class. Auerbach, who actively ran the company for several decades, is notable as a rare woman in that period's almost exclusively male business world. Under her leadership, G. Fox and Co.'s business reached new heights. Auerbach was also responsible for reinvesting profits from Fox's by means of a far-ranging program of philanthropy: the foundation she established in 1941 was a major benefactor of Hartford hospitals, colleges, and arts organizations.

Architectural Significance

The buildings in the district are notable examples of their respective architectural styles and were designed by some of the most prominent architects of the period. The oldest of the three, the Brown Thomson

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance Department Store Historic District 8-4
Hartford, Hartford County, CT

building, built in 1875-1876, was designed by Boston architect Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886) in the Romanesque style that he pioneered. Characterized by massiveness, rough-surfaced masonry, polychromatic effects, round-arched openings with deep reveals, and medieval detailing, the Richardsonian Romanesque style influenced a generation of Victorian architects. The Brown Thomson building is one of the state's leading examples of the style, embodying all of its key characteristics.

9. Major Bibliographical References

X See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register Cheney Building and
G. Fox Building
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office Connecticut Historical Commission
- Other state agency 59 South Prospect Street
- Federal agency Hartford, Connecticut 06106
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property: 4 1/2 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	___	_____	_____	B	___	_____	_____
C	___	_____	_____	D	___	_____	_____

X See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ___ See continuation sheet.

The boundary is shown on the accompanying map, scale 1"=100', adapted from Hartford Assessor Map 429.

Boundary Justification: ___ See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes all adjacent historic commercial buildings on Main Street. It excludes a small 19th-century church on Market Street because it does not fit the theme of the district. Another historic church on the opposite side of Main Street is separately listed.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Bruce Clouette and Maura Cronin, reviewed by John Herzan,

Conn. Hist. Commission

Organization: Historic Resource Consultants Date: September 16, 1994

Street & Number: 55 Van Dyke Avenue Telephone: 203-547-0268

City or Town: Hartford State: CT Zip: 06106

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Bibliography Department Store Historic District 9-1
Hartford, Hartford County, CT

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Geographical Data Department Store Historic District 10-1
 Hartford, Hartford County, CT

UTM REFERENCES:

- 1: 18.693440.4626550
- 2: 18.693500.4626540
- 3: 18.693490.4626480
- 4: 18.693540.4626470
- 5: 18.693550.4626420
- 6: 18.693460.4626440
- 7: 18.693460.4626330
- 8: 18.693380.4626330
- 9: 18.693380.4626510
- 10: 18.693410.4626510

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Photographs Department Store Historic District Photos-1
 Hartford, Hartford County, CT

All Photographs:

1. Department Store Historic District
2. Hartford, Hartford County, CT
3. Photo Credit: HRC, Hartford, CT
4. September, 1994
5. Negative filed with Connecticut Historical Commission
 Hartford, CT

Captions:

Sage Allen Building at 884-902 Main Street; building at 906 Main Street; Brown Thomson Building (Cheney Block) at 920-944 Main Street, and G. Fox Building at 956 Main Street, camera facing northeast.
Photograph 1 of 12.

Building at 906 Main Street (noncontributing) and Sage Allen Building at 884-902 Main Street, camera facing southeast.
Photograph 2 of 12.

Detail of Sage Allen Building at 884-902 Main Street, camera facing east.
Photograph 3 of 12

Brown Thomson Building at 920-944 Main Street, camera facing northeast.
Photograph 4 of 12.

G. Fox Building at 956 Main Street, camera facing east.
Photograph 5 of 12.

Detail of G. Fox Building at 956 Main Street, camera facing east.
Photograph 6 of 12.

Rear of Sage Allen Building at 884-902 Main Street, camera facing southwest.
Photograph 7 of 12.

DEPARTMENT STORE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Hartford, Hartford County,
Connecticut

- District Boundary
- 9 ▶ Photo Position
- ▨ Noncontributing

0 100 feet

