

THE CLAY ARSENAL NEIGHBORHOOD

Our past...

Clay Arsenal is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the City and there are several areas and individual structures that remain today. The Clay Hill Historic District (listed on the National Register of Historic Places) covers most of the neighborhood south of Mather Street. Portions of the district along Albany Avenue include retail and commercial uses. In addition, there are several properties of historic significance listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places. The Windsor Avenue Congregational Church at 2030 Main Street; the Union Baptist Church at 1913 and 1921 Main Street; the Widows' Homes at 1846-1860 Main Street; Old North Cemetery, 1821 Main Street; Engine Company 2 Fire Station, 1515 Main Street; the Chevry Lomday Mishnayes Synagogue at 148-150 Bedford Street; and the Beth Hamedrash Hagodol Synagogue at 370 Garden Street. The Union Baptist Church and the Old North Cemetery are sites included on the Connecticut Freedom Trail celebrating the contributions of the State's African American citizens.

The neighborhood developed gradually during the second half of the 19th Century and early 20th Century. Through the years, the area has been home to various groups, Yankees, Irish, Jewish, Blacks, and Hispanics. Prior to 1850, the neighborhood was mostly farms and woodland. In 1844, the Hartford and Springfield Railroad, which now forms the eastern border of the neighborhood, constructed a tunnel under the intersection of Main Street and Albany Avenue. Within five years, Main Street and Albany Avenue were lined with houses. By 1850, several new streets appeared in the southern part of the neighborhood.

Development occurred in an irregular pattern as farms were subdivided for residential developments. The first areas to develop were along Main Street, Albany Avenue and in the southeastern section near Downtown. The rest of the neighborhood filled in with residential development. Churches and schools were built to serve the growing population. Industrial and commercial development grew up adjacent to the railroad.

By the late 1880s, multi-family housing dominated housing development as the neighborhood became home to immigrant working families moving out from the eastside (where Constitution Plaza now stands), the oldest part of Hartford and the port of entry for all new groups. During the next 25 years, side streets were filled with two and three family houses, commercial buildings appeared on the main corridors, and the northern part of Clay Arsenal was built up.

The Black community had significant presence in Clay Arsenal as early as 1860, when Talcott Street Church first located its parsonage on Fairmont Street. Most of the Blacks were concentrated in the east side of Clay Arsenal, which later came to be known as Pigs Town. The name Pigs Town was coined due to the fact that some people used to raise pigs on their properties.

The Black population began to grow significantly during the first World War, when Connecticut Valley tobacco growers recruited large numbers of southern Blacks, often from the same church congregation, to work in the fields and sheds. Most of the workers settled in Hartford to the east side of Clay Arsenal.

Just like the earlier ethnic groups before them, Black families looked for opportunities to move out of the crowded east side. Although most of the City's neighborhoods were closed to them, with property owners unwilling to rent or sell to Blacks. The only areas open to Blacks during the World War I era were parts of Clay Hill and South Arsenal. After World War II, Clay Arsenal became an entrance point for Puerto Ricans, Hartford's newest group. Many Puerto Ricans first came to work in the tobacco farms as the southern Blacks before them did, and later made their homes in the

neighborhood. A significant portion of Clay Arsenal's residents now are Puerto Ricans and other Latinos who have evolved a strong community, developing its own churches, businesses, and institutions.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Clay Arsenal saw severe deterioration and disinvestment from which it has not fully recovered. Clay Arsenal has been the poorest of the City's neighborhoods since then. Businesses lost during riots and civil disturbances have not returned and the neighborhood experienced a dramatic decline in population due to the exodus of residents. In the ten year period between 1960 and early 1970, Clay Arsenal lost 3,597 residents, and between 1970 and 1980, it lost 6,406 residents. Unlike most of the City's neighborhoods, however, Clay Arsenal gained 1,139 residents between 1980 and 1990.

What the 1990 Census says about us...

According to the 1990 census, the Clay Arsenal neighborhood had a total population of 7,869 persons, comprising about 5.6% of the total City population. There were more females (4,214 or 54%) than there were men (3,655 or 46%). Between 1980 and 1990, the female population increased by 7%. Racial breakdown shows that the majority of the population was Blacks (54%), with 40% of the population classifying themselves as "other race"* and 0.06% as White. 52% of residents classified themselves as being of Hispanic origin.

The age profile, to the right, indicates that the Clay Arsenal neighborhood's population tended to be younger than that of the City as a whole. In 1990 the Clay Arsenal median age was 22.5 years and the City median age was 28.6 resulting in a 6 year difference.

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number Of persons</u>	<u>Rate (%)</u>	<u>City-Wide Rate (%)</u>
Under 5 years	947	12.1	8.5
5-19 years	2659	33.8	23.1
20-34 years	1977	25.1	30.8
35-44 years	944	12.0	13.0
45-64 years	964	12.2	14.6
Over 65 years	378	4.8	10.0
Total	7869	100.0	100.0

Source: 1990 U.S. Census

There were 1,824 families, of which 1,261 (69%) were families that categorized themselves as female heads of household, no husband present. Of these families with female heads of household, 949 (75%) were households with children under 18 years of age. More than 60% of children lived in female-headed households in 1990 in Clay Arsenal who were under the age of 19

Families in Clay Arsenal tend to be larger (average of 3.72 persons per family) than in the City as a whole (3.29 persons per family). The family size in Census Tract 5009 (bounded by Sanford Street, the railroad, Canton Street and Main Street) was the highest in the neighborhood at 3.97 persons, followed by Census Tract 5017 (bounded by Albany Avenue/Belden Street, the railroad and Irving Street) at 3.77 persons.

In 1990, 56% of the neighborhood's households reported themselves as households with earnings. The citywide figure was 72.5%. Of these households, 95% reported themselves as receiving public

* Categories included in the census are White; Black; American Indian; Eskimo or Aleut; Asian or Pacific Islander; and other race.

assistance. It is not surprising, therefore, that 57% of all families in the neighborhood had incomes below the poverty level in 1990. The area most impacted by poverty is Census Tract 5009 where 74.7% of all families lived below the poverty level.

➤ **Education/Labor Force**

In 1990, neighborhood educational levels for those 25 years and over differed significantly from those for the city as a whole. While 59.4% of Hartford residents had a high school diploma or better (some college, an Associate’s degree, a Bachelor’s Degree or Graduate degree), only 41% of Clay Arsenal residents fell into this category. 30% of all residents in this age group had less than a ninth grade education; only 3% had attained a Bachelor’s degree; no resident reported attaining a Graduate or professional degree.

Lack of education contributes to unemployment. In the 1990 Census, only 47% of Clay Arsenal residents reported that they had worked during 1989. This figure for the City of Hartford was 65%. Within the neighborhood’s Census Tracts this figure ranged from a low of 37% in Tract 5009 to a high of 61% in Tract 5017.

➤ **Language**

The 1990 Census indicates that 44% of the persons age 5 years and over living in Clay Arsenal could speak a language other than English. Of these, 99.1% spoke Spanish. Approximately 19% indicated that they did not speak English “very well”. In Clay Arsenal, 12.6% reported that they lived in linguistically isolated households; this was lower than the citywide figure of 13.62%

➤ **Housing**

Based upon the 1990 Census the Clay/Arsenal neighborhood contained 2,561 units, 93.5% of which were occupied.

Approximately 91.82% of all units were renter-occupied. This owner-occupancy was concentrated west of Main Street where 65% of the neighborhood’s housing is located. Only 8.18% of the units within Clay Arsenal were owner-occupied. There are approximately 50 units in Community

AGE OF HOUSING UNITS

<u>Year Structure Built</u>	<u>City of Hartford</u>		<u>Clay Arsenal</u>	
1989 to March 1990	810	1%	83	3%
1985 to 1988	2,289	4%	107	4%
1980 to 1984	2,082	4%	231	9%
1970 to 1979	6,125	11%	345	13%
1960 to 1969	8,017	14%	340	13%
1950 to 1959	8,101	14%	303	12%
1940 to 1949	7,861	14%	336	13%
1939 or earlier	20,813	37%	816	32%

Source: 1990 U.S. Census

Residential Facilities (shelters or transitional housing) in the neighborhood. Most of the housing in Clay Arsenal is located in structures having six or fewer units, approximately one-third of which was built prior to 1939.

The City's annual survey of vacant buildings was conducted in July 2000 and indicated that there are 61 boarded buildings in the neighborhood, the majority of which are residential structures. For the most part these boarded residential structures are scattered throughout the neighborhood. However, clusters of boarded buildings occur on Bedford Mall (10 structures), on

<u>Units</u>	<u>City of Hartford</u>		<u>Clay Arsenal</u>	
1, Detached	6,889	12%	67	3%
1, Attached	2,247	4%	86	3%
2	5,878	10%	207	9%
3 to 4	12,722	23%	648	27%
5 to 9	9,144	16%	858	36%
10 to 19	6,926	12%	360	15%
20 to 49	6,692	12%	128	5%
50 or more	4,824	9%	0	-
Mobile home/ trailer	7	<1%	1	-
Other	769	1%	43	2%

Source: 1990 U.S. Census

Bellevue Street in the block between Warren and Battles (3 structures), on Mather Street between Center and Green (3 structures), on Mahl Avenue between Main and Bethel (5 structures), on Belden Street (5 structures) and on Enfield Street (3 structures).

➤ **Transportation**

Census data of 1990 on transportation indicates that 31.7% of workers drove to work alone, 18.8% rode to work in carpools, and 38.5 % used some form of public transportation. The majority of the residents of Clay Arsenal were dependent on the bus system, since 70% of the households were without a car.

Scheduled fixed bus routes serve the City from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. five days a week with limited service available on evenings, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Those routes serving the Clay Arsenal neighborhood are the K along Main Street, the U, T and Q along Albany Avenue, and S along Garden Street. The new Tower Avenue Cross-town L Route, operating between the Copaco Shopping Center in Bloomfield and the Buckland Hills Mall in Manchester, links with the existing K (Barbour Street/North Main Street), Q1 (Vine Street), and T (Blue Hills Avenue) routes. This new cross-town route enhances access to outlying areas for shopping and job opportunities, including industrialized areas in South Windsor.

Our Block Watch Network

There is a network of eight Block Watch Clubs operating in the Clay Arsenal neighborhood that has operated since 1994. ONE/CHANE provides institutional and administrative support for the Block Clubs. In turn, the Clubs are a vehicle through which ONE/CHANE has reached out to residents to foster communication and identify and help those in need.

Each Club meets once a month. The first Tuesday of each month, the Block Club captains meet at ONE/CHANE to share issues, lessons learned, identify problems, etc. This allows information to be assimilated by all Block Clubs and subsequently passed on to the neighborhood. A newsletter in support of this effort is being developed.

Through the Block Club network, ONE/CHANE is building a member base to increase accessibility to a number of programs. For a \$3 membership, attendees to the Annual Meeting eat a full meal for free. Every year, more and more residents are invited through the Block Clubs. Tickets to major events can also be purchased at a discount. There is an annual Thanksgiving Turkey Drive with those in need identified through the Block Clubs. Similarly, at Christmas a Toy Drive identifies children in need. Toys are delivered through the Block Clubs.

The SAND Complex

The SAND Complex is comprised of the SAND Elementary School and the SAND/Ropkins Branch Library and Family Resource Center. These facilities are linked physically, programmatically and philosophically to provide comprehensive opportunities for educational advancement and social development for students, parents and residents.

SAND Elementary School is a Pre-K through Grade 6 school that had a 1998-1999 enrollment of 370 pupils. The school's current building capacity is 520 pupils. All of the classrooms, libraries and laboratories in the school are wired for Internet access. The number of students per academic computer is 1.9, well below the district's K-6 number of 4.4 and the statewide K-6 number of 6.1. The school has partnered with private companies to provide homework assistance and monitoring support, and linked with other schools and educational facilities to provide academic remediation, tutorial sessions, and summer enrichment programs. In addition to educational benefits these activities allow SAND students to interact with other students and adults of diverse ethnic, professional and economic backgrounds. The school's commitment to providing a rich traditional and non-traditional learning environment has resulted in sustained improvement in Connecticut Mastery Test scores over the last five years.

The Ropkins Branch Library is a community library and neighborhood resource. The current facility of 5,300 square feet was opened in December 1998. It has a collection containing 18,000 items, and includes a Technology Center that provides free public access to its ten computers and Internet service Monday through Friday until 10 p.m. The bilingual staff, under the direction of the Community Librarian, maintains close working relationships with neighborhood and resident groups, institutional and service agencies and private and non-profit organizations to advocate for improving the quality of life in the Clay Arsenal neighborhood. Initiatives already in place include: "Family Place", a literacy program for families with children aged birth to five which organizes regularly scheduled visits to the library by neighborhood day care classes as well as hosting or partnering on programs for young adults such as scouting. Other initiatives include; Always on Saturday, SAND Teen Age Center and the Hartford Youth Project; and community-building services such as the preparation of the Clay Arsenal Business Directory and the "Arsenal of Ideas" newsletter.

Mary Shepherd Place

Mary Shepherd Place formerly known as Bellevue Square, originally contained 309 units. Built in 1942, the development underwent a \$17 million overhaul in 1998 when it was renamed. Currently there are 127 apartments and townhouse units in the development. Five of the original fourteen buildings were demolished, and a new administration and community building was constructed.

The families who reside in the Mary Shepherd Place have to pass a thorough background screening and must participate in family self-sufficiency training under the Campus Learners concept. Under the family self-sufficiency training, the residents are required to draft a five-year plan to assist them in improving their education and economic status. As a result of the program and training, the percentage of unemployed residents went from 85% before the rehab to 45% after the rehab. Furthermore, the complex is managed by a tenant association.