



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
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MINUTES
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
February 10, 2016

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA
Mr. Mohamad Farzan, AIA
Ms. Caitlin Greeley, representing the Associate Director of the Division of Planning
Mr. Michael Hebert, NR Review Board
Mr. Karst Hoogeboom, Chairman
Dr. Patrick Malone
Dr. Ronald Onorato
Mr. Pieter N. Roos
Mr. Edward F. Sanderson, State Historic Preservation Officer
Mr. Clark Schoettle
Ms. Ruth Taylor

STAFF PRESENT

Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Deputy Director
Ms. Michaela Jergensen, Senior Reviewer RIDOT Projects
Ms. Katherine Jurczyk, Senior Grants Coordinator
Mr. Glenn Modica, Senior Project Review Coordinator
Ms. Sarah Zurier, Principal Special Projects Coordinator
Ms. Elizabeth Warburton, Senior Architectural Historian

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Al Cocce, AIA, representing John P. Leyden, State Building Commissioner
Mr. Darin Early, COO, Commerce RI
Ms. Lisa Lawless representing Janet Coit, Director DEM
Dr. E. Pierre Morenon
Vacant

GUESTS

Edward Connors, National Register Consultant
Jonathan Bell, Architect

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:45 A.M., Chairman Hoogeboom presiding.

2. Minutes of January 13, 2016

On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Mr. Farzan, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to approve the Minutes of January 13, 2016.

3. Executive Director's Report

There was no Executive Director's Report.

4. National Register of Historic Places

Final Consideration: American Brewing Company, 431 Harris Avenue, Providence

Mr. Emidy presented information about the property. Located in a densely-settled industrial area west of downtown Providence, Rhode Island, the American Brewing Co. plant occupies a corner parcel of approximately 1.5 acres bounded by Harris Avenue on the south and Eagle Street on the west. The property includes three contributing buildings: a 3-story, brick Main Building operated as an industrial-scale "gravitation brewery" from 1892 to 1922, a ca. 1900 Ice Plant and a 1911 Boiler House. Three connected garages along the east edge of the property built in the mid-20th century and unrelated to the brewery operation are non-contributing.

The main building was designed in 1891-2 by Philadelphia-based Adam C. Wagner (1860-1935), a nationally-recognized architect/engineer/brewer who also supervised construction. While the interior organization of Wagner's breweries represented the most up-to-date expression of late 19th-century brewery design, the exterior presented highly-elaborated Romanesque and Beaux-Arts detailing. The original Wagner design was enlarged significantly in 1911 with infill and expansion at the north end of the building and the relocation of the original interior boiler room to a freestanding, extant building along the east property line. Despite post-brewery exterior alterations to the Main Building, the three American Brewing Co. buildings exemplify the scale, interior layout and organization of industrial-scale, mechanically-cooled, "scientific breweries" of the late 19th century.

The American Brewing Co. Plant is significant under **Criterion C** on the local level in the areas of architecture, industry and engineering, as a fine example of an urban, industrial-scale,

“gravitation brewery” built in 1892 and expanded ca. 1900 and 1911. The plant, as it exists today, reflects this 1911 expansion. This brewery was designed by Philadelphia-based architect-brewmaster-engineer Adam C. Wagner (1860-1935) to incorporate a new scientific understanding of all aspects of brewing, the implementation of precisely-controlled brewing techniques, and the use of steam-powered refrigeration equipment as developed and marketed in the last quarter of the 19th century. Wagner designed American Brewing Co. for the brewing of lager beer, which required longer and more controlled cooling and aging than the ales and porters that had dominated American beer tastes since the colonial era. Thus, the plant comprises a massive (3-story plus basement), mechanically-cooled “Stock House,” a process formerly carried out by an earlier generation of brewers in underground caverns or above-ground ice houses. To ensure controlled cooling, the plant was designed to accommodate the installation of newly-patented De LaVergne mechanical refrigeration equipment.

The American Brewing Co. Plant retains integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling and association as an expression of industrial-scale scientific brewing as it emerged in the late 19th century and as an example of the work of Adam C. Wagner, an acknowledged master of the science of brewing, brewery architecture, and engineering. This a rare survival of a Wagner brewery and the only industrial brewery of the period surviving in the state. The Period of Significance includes the years from construction in 1892 to the cessation of brewing and the company’s failure during national prohibition in 1922.

During discussion, Commissioner Taylor questioned whether exterior alterations to the building affected its integrity and whether interior features might be altered by future redevelopment. Dr. Malone stated his opinion that the building still conveys its historic character and significance notwithstanding the regrettable loss of original rooftop ornament. Several Commissioners noted that National Register eligibility evaluation should be based on a building’s condition at the time of nomination, and that conjecture of possible future changes cannot be considered. If the property applies for historic rehabilitation tax credits and is converted to new uses, the project would have to conform with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards in order to receive tax credits. The intent of the Standards is to preserve the historic character-defining features that qualified the property for the National Register. Dr. Onorato and Mr. Hoogeboom noted that while the American Brewing Company Plant is being nominated as an individual property, it is surrounded by National Register listed mill complexes that almost constitute an industrial historic district. Dr. Malone agreed and noted that the Brewing Plant was powered by a George C. Corliss steam engine. After further discussion, on a motion by Dr. Malone, seconded by Mr. Farzan, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to approve the nomination.

Final Consideration: William J. Braitsch & Company Plant, 472 Potters Avenue, Providence

Mr. Emidy presented information about the property. The William J. Braitsch and Company Plant occupies a 0.7-acre lot in the predominantly residential Elmwood section of Providence. The property includes two contributing industrial buildings erected in 1892 for the manufacture of silver and gold specialty goods. The main building is a brick, three-story, pier and spandrel structure. Attached to the east elevation of this building is a single-story, brick boiler/engine house with a brick stack. A nearby concrete-block "Dry Cleaning Room" dating to the mid-20th-century tenancy of a commercial laundry is non-contributing. All buildings are in generally good condition.

The William J. Braitsch and Company Plant is significant at the local level under **Criterion A** in the area of industry, as the physical expression of the evolution in 19th-century Providence of the silversmith trade from small-scale artisanry to large-scale manufacture of finely-crafted silver goods. The factory's subsequent use by varied businesses reflected the importance of diversification and flexibility.

The market for silver novelties and accessories expanded dramatically in the last quarter of the 19th century. The discovery of huge silver deposits like the Comstock Lode (Nevada, 1859) made silver widely available as a material for luxury accessories for a rising class of wealthy entrepreneurs and administrators of an expanding industrial and commercial economy. In 1893 the company was reorganized, and the Braitsch operation, with its workforce of 135 designers and industrial operatives, was described in an 1892 *Board of Trade Journal* item as "the largest cane factory in the United States." Punishing economic conditions in the 1890s and changing taste for silver-handled walking canes and umbrellas affected the business which reduced its workforce and eventually closed in 1915.

Even prior to his company's demise, Braitsch had begun leasing portions of the plant to other industrial tenants. From 1896 to 1898, he leased the third floor to the Whitten Cycle Manufacturing Company. The precise metalworking capacity of Providence jewelers and silversmiths firms had much to offer to entrepreneurs of the burgeoning bicycle trade of the 1890s. The capability for precision machining, casting, plating, etc. lent itself well to the requirements of bicycle manufacture. In 1899, Braitsch leased a full floor to George F. Greene and Co., manufacturing jewelers. This Providence company (established 1891), manufactured rings and scarf pins, employing about 75 operatives. In 1903 Braitsch leased space to optical goods manufacturers. The last chapter of the factory's production history was the Colonial Laundry which operated here until 1965.

During discussion, Dr. Malone stated that bicycle production is an under-recognized industry in Providence, and that Braitsch's efforts to stay afloat by changing his own business and leasing space to others were typical of many smaller jewelry manufacturing operations. Ms. Taylor suggested that Braitsch's business flexibility and diversification have relevance to today's

economy. Mr. Schoettle noted that the Braitsch factory was built within the larger West Elmwood residential neighborhood which may have provided workers. Dr. Malone added that its location was near the Gorham Manufacturing factories as well.

Following discussion, on a motion by Dr. Malone, seconded by Ms. Taylor, the Commission VOTED to approve the nomination. Mr. Schoettle was recorded as not voting.

Preliminary Consideration: Jencks Spinning Company Historic District, Conant Street, Pawtucket

Mr. Emidy presented information about the property which was presented at the request of the City of Pawtucket. The Jenckes Spinning Company Historic District consists of a multi-building industrial complex of 8 to 12 shared-wall structures that occupy the block bounded by Weeden, Barton, Pine, Lily Pond, and Conant Streets, in Pawtucket. The Coates and Clark Historic District (NR-listed) borders the Jenckes property to the north. The Jenckes buildings range from one- to five-stories in height, are of brick (primarily pier and spandrel) construction, primarily have flat roofs (the sawtooth roofs on the weave sheds being the exceptions), and have a combination of original and modern sash with many window openings infilled or built down to a smaller opening. The massing of the buildings appears to be intact, and the footprint of the complex appears to date from ca. 1920. Exterior alterations appear to be limited to the window treatments and door replacements. Information was not presented about the interiors of the buildings.

In 1854, Nathan Hicks, leasing space at the Old Slater Mill, invented and began the manufacture of the ring spinner, an important innovation in cotton spinning. In 1867 he was joined in the business by brothers Edwin and Joseph Jenckes of Woonsocket, and the company name was changed to E. Jenckes Manufacturing Company. In the mid-1880s, the company purchased undeveloped land along Weeden Street and began construction of a group of steam-powered brick and frame industrial buildings.

Between 1890 and 1902, the company grew, increasing the size of its plant to the north along Weeden Street. By 1901 the company had supplemented its manufacture of ring spinners with the manufacture of automatic knitting machines. In 1905 the company split into the Jenckes Knitting Machine Company – for the manufacture of equipment – and the Jenckes Spinning Co. to spin yarn and weave cloth. A weave shed was built at the north end of the complex. In 1908, the Jenckes Company formed the Tamarack Company for the purpose of weaving silk dress goods. In 1916, the company purchased land to the west of its plant, along Conant Street, for the construction of a new Tamarack Mill. The product of this mill would be cotton tire cloth – a specialized cotton cloth impregnated into vulcanized rubber for increased durability of automobile tires. The entire property remained part of the Jenckes Spinning Co., and the

Jenckes/Tamarack build covered almost the entire block.

In 1923, Jenckes Spinning merged with the Manville Company to form the Manville-Jenckes Company.

By the 1970s, the block was occupied by various industrial tenants, only a few still involved in niche textile manufacture. Today the former Jenckes Spinning Co. buildings are occupied by a wide range of commercial tenants.

During discussion, Dr. Malone observed that this is a well-preserved factory complex. He stated that the diversification of manufacturing textile equipment and also spinning yarn and weaving cloth is significant in Rhode Island textile manufacturing, as is the adaptation of textiles to vulcanized rubber for automobile tires. Mr. Hoozeboom noted that the large Coats & Clark Mill complex is a neighboring property, and rehabilitation of both complexes would preserve significant historical resources and also be important for economic development in the cities of Pawtucket and Central Falls. After further discussion, on a motion by Dr. Malone, seconded by Mr. Abbott, the Commission unanimously

VOTED preliminary approval for the proposed nomination.

5. 2016 Certified Local Grants Approval

Ms. Jurczyk presented the CLG grant applications, reviewed the selection criteria, and recommended the following projects based on staff review:

R.I. Statewide Historic Preservation Conference	\$ 10,000
Charles I.D. Loeff Carousal Preservation	\$ 10,000
Cranston Street Armory Charrette	\$ 10,000
Boesch Farm Master Plan	\$ 7,400
National Register Nomination for the Jencks Spinning Company Historic District	\$ 9,000
Wakefield Historic District Nomination Update and Planning Tools	\$ 5,000
Forestdale Schoolhouse Master Plan	\$ 6,500

The total amount of grants funding is \$57,900, based on RIHPHC's estimated Federal FY 2016 award from the National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund. A detailed review of the applications is appended to these Minutes.

Following discussion, on a motion by Dr. Onorato, seconded by Mr. Abbott, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to approve the 2016 CLG grant awards.

6. Other Business: There was no other business.

7. Next regular meeting date: Wednesday March 9, 2016 at 9:30 AM.

8. Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 11:45 AM.

Minutes recorded by,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Edward F. Sanderson".

Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director
State Historic Preservation Officer