



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
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MINUTES
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION
November 9, 2016

I. MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Michael Abbott, AIA
Mr. Mohamad Farzan, AIA
Mr. Michael Hebert, NR Review Board
Mr. Karst Hoogeboom, Chairman
Ms. Lisa Lawless representing Janet Coit, Director DEM
Mr. Kevin Nelson, representing the Associate Director of the Division of Planning
Dr. Ronald Onorato
Mr. Edward F. Sanderson, State Historic Preservation Officer

STAFF PRESENT

Ms. Joanna Doherty, Principal Architectural Historian
Mr. Jeffrey Emidy, Deputy Director
Ms. Virginia Hesse, Principal Historical Architect
Dr. Timothy Ives, Principal Archaeologist
Ms. Michaela Jergensen, Senior Reviewer RIDOT Projects
Ms. Katherine Pomplun, 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
Dr. Patrick Malone
Dr. E. Pierre Morenon
Mr. Pieter N. Roos
Mr. Clark Schoettle
Ms. Ruth Taylor
Vacant

GUESTS

Quinn Stuart, PAL (American Supply Co Building)
Edward Connors, NR Consultant (Former Woonsocket High School)
Mr. Jack Martin, Executive Director, Providence Public Library

II. AGENDA

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:35 A.M., Chairman Hoogeboom presiding.

2. Minutes of October 12, 2016

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

VOTED to approve the Minutes of October 12, 2016.

3. Executive Director's Report

- a) Mr. Sanderson reported on discussions with the RI Department of Environmental Management to transfer operation of the Eisenhower House, located at Fort Adams State Park, to DEM. RIHPHC was assigned operational control of Eisenhower House in 1994 when functions of the former Heritage Commission were transferred to RIHPHC. Since that time a number of significant improvements have been made to restore and preserve the property as an events facility, and in State FY2016 earned revenue was about \$160,000. DEM is interested in rationalizing and coordinating activities and programs within the State park and approached RIHPHC regarding transfer of the house. Coincidentally, Joan Kelley, RIHPHC site manager, will retire in January 2017, making this a good time to consider a transition. RIHPHC has done a very good job of operating the facility, but property management is not a core RIHPHC mission, and we agree with DEM's plan to absorb Eisenhower House. RIHPHC will continue to review preservation of the historic property.
- b) Mr. Sanderson distributed a Federal FY2015 report on federal historic rehabilitation tax credit investment that shows that Rhode Island's annual total of \$79 million ranked 18th in the nation.
- c) Ms. Pomplun and Dr. Ives reported that the National Park Service has approved use of unobligated Hurricane Sandy relief funds to create Geographic Information System records for archaeological and historical properties located in communities affected by the storm. The work will be carried out by a GIS specialist at the Applied History Laboratory at the University of Rhode Island in cooperation with RIHPHC staff.

4. National Register of Historic Places

Evaluation of Significance: Providence Public Library

RIHPHC Architectural Historian Joanna Doherty presented information about the Providence Public Library. At the RIHPHC meeting on October 12, 2016 she presented a

detailed research analysis of the building's historical and architectural significance. At that time, the Library presented its own comments. Following discussion at the October 12 meeting, the Commission voted its preliminary finding that the Library possesses historical and architectural significance in accordance with the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. However, the Commissioners stipulated that its preliminary finding would not become final until after further consideration at the November 9, 2016 Commission meeting in order to provide time to consider the Library's October 12 comments.

National Register Criteria of Significance

The earliest part of the Providence Public Library was constructed in 1900, and a large addition was constructed 1952-1954. The library building and addition were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984 as part of the Downtown Providence Historic District. PPL does not dispute the National Register areas of significance for which the library is listed: community development (Criterion A) and architecture (Criterion C). PPL does, however, question whether the *addition* is significant in these areas.

Criterion A for Community Development

PPL objects to the assertion that the addition is significant under Criterion A for community development, arguing that "It is unclear...what the addition conveys about the intentional history of the institution or its aspirations..." RIHPHC finds that the construction of a substantial addition to the central library would seem to relate directly to the PPL's institutional aspirations. At the time, the PPL was the second-largest public library in New England with 500,000 books in its collection. The addition was intended to allow for future growth and alleviate current overcrowding for books (many of which were being stored off-site), staff and users; to rationalize the interior program; and, in so doing, to improve services for patrons of the library system as a whole. The choice of a locally prominent firm to design the addition indicates an intention to make an architectural statement, and the involvement of two nationally prominent library consultants suggests an effort to create a programmatically up-to-date facility. Features such as open stacks (stacks in the original library were closed), a 300-person auditorium (considered standard for libraries of the time), a street-level entrance and sidewalk-level display windows were intended to project a more welcoming image.

The library addition also reflects broader historical trends in Providence. Within twenty years of the construction of the library on Washington Street, the PPL Trustees saw the need to expand. Presumably this reflected increasing public demand for library services; Providence's population grew from about 175,000 in 1900 to approximately 237,000 in 1920, peaking at around 253,000 in 1940. The years immediately following World War II saw a slight decline, but the population did not drop off significantly until the 1950s. It was within this context that, in 1946, Mayor Dennis J. Roberts put a \$1.3 million bond issue on the city ballot to fund the addition. Its passage represented the first time public funds were used to support a capital project at the library. The addition in 1952-1954 was a product of an optimistic, post-War Providence, before the city entered a period of decline in the mid- to late 20th century.

Criterion C for Architecture

PPL contends that the addition is not architecturally significant in its own right, characterizing it as an imitation of the Toledo Public Library, stripped of its ornamentation, and arguing that, while it is an example of its period or type, it is not an “outstanding” example. RIHPHC finds that the PPL misunderstands the NPS white paper and the National Register requirements. A building listed under Criterion C for architecture must be of “exceptional importance” only if it is less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years. A property (or addition) that is greater than 50 years old may be listed under Criterion C if it “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction...” The PPL addition clearly possesses characteristics that are distinctive of the Classical Moderne style, including strict symmetry, vertical recessed window panels, stripped-down ornamentation and horizontality. The addition’s architectural significance is further enhanced by the rarity of the Classical Moderne in Providence and by the involvement of a locally prominent architectural firm in its design.

Period of Significance

PPL notes that the NPS white paper says that, in cases where a property is listed under Criterion A, whether an addition contributes “is generally based on whether or not it was constructed within the period of significance.” RIHPHC finds that, while the Downtown Providence Historic District nomination identifies the period of significance as between “1800 and 1940,” it is in fact somewhat ambiguous. First of all, at least two properties that contribute to the district were built after 1940: People’s Savings Bank (1949) and the Old Stone Bank Trust Department (ca. 1945). A handful of other contributing properties in the district include additions or significant alterations that post-date 1940, including the Providence National Bank Building (1929 with addition in 1950). Further, the nomination was amended in 2012, with a period of significance ending in 1962.

In any case, the NPS white paper clearly states “For already-listed properties, the additions may have been built outside the previously recognized period of significance and require the evaluation of a longer or additional period of significance.” In other words, the existing period of significance could be changed if the addition’s significance warrants it; however, the 2012 amendment already extended the National Register period of significance to 1962.

Impact of Addition on Integrity of the 1900 Library

PPL argues that the addition 1) substantially damaged the original library building; 2) overwhelms or dominates the historic character of the property as a whole, is out of scale, and obscures the principal elevation; 3) changed the perceived orientation of entry; and 4) impairs significant character-defining features of the original library building.

RIHPHC notes that the original, Renaissance Revival-style library building is characterized by sculptural exterior walls of granite and brick, with rustication at the first floor and classically-inspired pilasters, balustrades and round-arched window openings above; a decorative frieze; a copper-clad, hip roof with a bracketed cornice and elaborate cresting; and a triple-arched entry portico on the main façade, accessed via a double set of curving steps. All of these features

remain intact.

The 1952-1954 addition obscures one side and a portion of the rear of the main 1900 library building. A boiler house and smoke stack – structures of secondary importance – were removed when the addition was built. According to the PPL, the addition is 30% larger than the original in terms of gross square footage. However, much of that square footage is contained in the stacks. The footprint of the addition's main block (about 200 ft by 40 ft) is roughly equal to that of the original building's main block (about 140 ft by 55 ft).

The PPL argues that the addition was “clearly intended to obscure principal façades, purposely stepped forward to the property line, especially from the prime view corridor...up Washington Street...” While one view of the original building looking up Washington Street (southwest), has undeniably been obscured, views of the front and looking down Washington Street (northeast) have not been obscured. It is worth noting, that even when the original library building was constructed, the view up Washington Street was partially blocked by five other buildings that shared the block. The 1952-1954 addition introduced a second entrance to the Library, and from time to time the Washington Street or Empire Street entrances have been considered the main entrance. The Empire Street entrance is currently used only for special events, but it was open for use by library patrons for several years beginning in 1988.

Conclusion

The RIHPHC finds that the addition does not overwhelm the original building nor dominate the historic character of the property as a whole, nor does it damage or block the original building's principal elevations. As an example of the Classical Moderne, the 1952-1954 addition has gained significance in its own right. When the Downtown Providence Historic District was nominated to the National Register in 1984, the library was deemed to have sufficient integrity to be included in the district as a contributing property, and the nomination included a photograph of the library and the addition. Conditions have not changed since that time.

In 2015, the PPL applied to RIHPHC for a State Preservation Grant for restoration of the copper roof of the 1900 building, and RIHPHC awarded \$150,000 to the project. In the grant application, PPL described the 1900 building as: “a prime example of turn-of-the-century American architecture. Its architects created a library of elegant proportion and delightful detail. . . .The building is a richly articulated, two-story, granite-and-brick sheathed structure of Venetian Renaissance inspiration with Indiana limestone trimmings and a low, copper-clad hip roof.”

In their grant application, the PPL did not devalue the historical and architectural significance of the 1900 building because of any effect of the 1952-1954 addition. In reviewing the grant application, RIHPHC gave the historical and architectural value of the building a high score of 8 points out of a possible 10. In the context of the 2015 grant application, PPL and RIHPHC both recognized that the historic Providence Library was unimpaired by the 1952-1954 addition, and both PPL and RIHPHC signed a historic preservation easement that recognizes that the historic Providence Public Library includes the 1900 original building and the 1952-1954 addition. The

recorded easement states: “the library building...now includes a major modern addition (1952-1954) by Howe, Prout & Ekman....The 11-bay, center entrance, Streamline Moderne addition...now serves as the principal entrance to the building. . . .The restraint of the addition contrasts with the classical ornament of the original building.”

Mr. Jack Martin, Executive Director of the Providence Public Library was invited to respond to Ms. Doherty’s presentation. Mr. Martin stated that PPL wants to bring 21st-century library space to Providence and to develop spaces for new library programs. He said that PPL has been criticized by some in the past for a lack of administrative and program transparency, and the Library is trying to demonstrate its commitment to transparency by making its programs visible to the street. The Library wants to show to the community its commitment to diversity and inclusiveness through its architectural design.

Mr. Sanderson thanked Mr. Martin for his comments. He stated that RIHPHC was very willing to discuss with PPL ways to find compatibility between the Library’s mission and preservation of its historical architecture.

Ms. Lawless observed that the 1954 addition increased the 1900 Library’s transparency by adding a new entrance and extensive glass windows. Today’s program goals seem to her to be consistent with the 1954 building.

Other Commissioners expressed appreciation to Mr. Martin for explaining the Library’s views, but they reiterated their opinions from the October 12 Commission meeting that the addition possesses significance in its own right. Mr. Hoozeboom stated his opinion that the addition is an excellent example of the Moderne style, though it is distinct from the Classical Revival 1900 building.

On a motion by Dr. Onorato, seconded by Ms. Lawless, the Commission unanimously

VOTED to endorse the RIHPHC Staff evaluations presented by Ms. Doherty at the October 12, 2016 and November 9, 2016 Commission meetings that find the 1954 addition to the Providence Public Library possesses historical and architectural significance in its own right and as a contributing element in the Downtown Providence National Register Historic District. This is the Commission’s final opinion.

Preliminary Review: Former Woonsocket High School, 357 Park Place, Woonsocket

RIHPHC Deputy Director Jeffrey Emidy presented information about the property. The high school was constructed in 1914-15. It is a three-story, Classical Revival-style, 7-by-3-bay, H-shaped building with a gymnasium attached at rear. The building is brick with granite and limestone trim. An addition was constructed in 1925 off the east corner of the building. Windows and doors have been replaced and the original gymnasium was removed and replaced in 1952.

A Junior High School wing was added to the north elevation in 1927. This L-shaped, 3-and-4-story, brick, with limestone trim building has an entrance pavilion of limestone with classical columns. Windows and doors have been replaced; it is otherwise intact on the exterior. A Gymnasium Annex was added in 1951-52 at the north elevation of the High School, but running east-west, rather than north-south. It is a tall 1-story brick building with concrete and articulated brick detail.

Interiors throughout the building are a mix of replacement materials – as expected in a 100+ year old school – and original. Original oak trim, wood doors (though with new hardware), terrazzo and wood floors, oak cabinetry and closets, slate blackboards, plaster walls, and some tin ceilings remain throughout the building. The interior plan is largely unchanged, with the exception of what was originally the auditorium (or library?) of the high school building, which has been subdivided, likely around the time that the Junior High School wing was constructed with a large auditorium.

History:

In the first decade of the 20th century, the school parcel was privately-owned open space known as Villa Nova Park, after the Villa Nova neighborhood of which it was the center. In the 1910s, Woonsocket's population was still growing as textile, specifically worsted, factories continued to be constructed. A new high school was needed to support this population. The previous high school (on High School St.) had been built in 1876 to a design by William Walker. That high school would become Harris Elementary School. (It was demolished for a new Harris Elementary in 2001.)

The City purchased the park property and hired architect Walter Fontaine, of Woonsocket, to design the new High School. Fontaine would design a number of churches in Woonsocket and beyond, plus factories and a number of the grand homes in Woonsocket's North End Historic District.

The High School was constructed in 1914-15. An addition (Fontaine design) of 12 rooms was added in 1925. In 1927, a 67-classroom addition was constructed to house the new Woonsocket Junior High School (it appears that prior to this building, the junior high grades were in elementary schools). Fontaine was the architect of this addition, as well. Finally, in 1951-52 a new gymnasium was constructed in place of the original high school gymnasium. This building was designed by Fontaine's son, Oliver – the elder Fontaine having died in the 1938 hurricane.

In 1974, the city opened a new high school on Cass Avenue, and this building became solely a junior high school. From 1991 to 1993, the school department transitioned to an elementary-middle-high school format. The ninth grade moved from Park Place to the Cass Avenue School, and sixth graders moved to the Park Place building, then known as the Woonsocket Middle School. In 2009, the city opened a pair of new middle schools on Hamlet Avenue - at the site of the former Lafayette Worsted Company mill complex – and the High-Junior High-Middle School was abandoned. It has been vacant ever since.

The building meets National Register criteria A and C at the local level, in the areas of education and architecture. All Woonsocket children received their secondary education in this building for a 95-year span. In some cases, three generations of families attended the school. As the only high school and later the only junior high school in the city, it was the place where children from different areas of the city were first introduced. In addition, the former Woonsocket High School is an extraordinarily large example of civic educational architecture. Despite its almost 40-year span of construction, the building has a unified architecture expressed through its massing, materials, and design.

During discussion, Mr. Abbott remarked on the building's amazing amount of original materials and finishes (except replacement windows). Dr. Onorato said he considers the 1952 gym to contribute to the property's significance. On a motion by Mr. Abbott, seconded by Dr. Onorato, the Commission unanimously

VOTED preliminary approval for the nomination.

Preliminary Presentation: American Supply Company Building, 1420 Broad Street, Central Falls

Mr. Emidy presented information about the property. The American Supply Company Building is a 2½-story, frame, end-gable building erected in 1875 on the south bank of the Blackstone River in Central Falls, R.I. The setting is a dense mix of industrial, residential and commercial uses. The American Supply Co. Building is across Broad Street from and upstream of the surviving buildings of the Valley Falls Company. Despite its location adjacent to a water privilege controlled by the Valley Falls Company, this building operated from the time of its construction as a steam-powered plant built for the manufacture of loom reeds, loom harness, heddles and leather belting. Interior, slow-burning framing consists of original round-section timber columns supplemented by modern insertion of some square-section columns. A three-story rear-ell built in 1890 was demolished ca. 2000. At that time, the west (rear) party wall shared by the original building (the subject of this nomination) and this ell was sheathed in plywood. A single-story shed built at the southeast corner of the property ca. 1890 was demolished ca. 1920.

The American Supply Company Building is significant under National Register **Criterion A** for its exemplification of factories and supply houses erected in the 19th century to provide auxiliary services to the expanding textile economy. In the case of the American Supply Co., the company leased space at the Valley Falls Company plant, a large cotton mill, to manufacture loom reeds and harness, supplies necessary for use in textile weaving. By December 1875 the thriving company erected its own building a short distance away on Broad Street and began the independent manufacture of loom harness and reeds as well as wire heddles. Within a few years, the company began the manufacture of leather machinery belting and, over time, provided a wide range of textile supplies.

The American Supply Co. Building lies within and is an inventoried resource of the John H.

Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. The building is also listed in *Rhode Island: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites* (Kulik and Bonham, 1978).

Following discussion, on a motion by Mr. Farzan, seconded by Mr. Hebery, the Commission unanimously

VOTED preliminary approval for the nomination.

5. Report on U.S. Navy Newport Base Closures

Mr. Emidy reported that in 2006, the RIHPHC was informed that the Navy intended to dispose of land in Newport. In the spring of 2013, the Navy officially opened consultation on the undertaking to dispose of eight properties: a portion of Melville North; Tank Farms 1 and 2; the Defense Highway, aka Burma Road; Stringham Road; its portion of Greene Lane; Midway Pier; the site of the former Navy Lodge; and a portion of the Naval Hospital property.

The Navy and the RIHPHC agreed that the Defense Highway, Stringham Road, Greene Lane, Midway Pier, and Navy Lodge properties are not eligible for listing in the National Register. The Melville North property includes a portion of the Melville Fuel and Net Depot Historic District, which was identified in a 1998 report by Louis Berger for the Navy as eligible for listing in the National Register (NR). The Naval Hospital property that the Navy intends to dispose of is within the bounds of the Newport Naval Hospital Historic District, which was also identified in the 1998 Berger report as being eligible for NR listing.

The proposed disposition of the Melville property is to the Town of Portsmouth. The Navy and the Town are working out the details of that agreement. The proposed disposal of the Naval Hospital property is to the City of Newport. Transfers of historic property out of federal control are considered adverse effects under Section 106. Since the Navy's undertaking contains historic, as well as non-historic, properties, the entire undertaking is considered to be an adverse effect.

The Navy and the RIHPHC are developing a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to mitigate the adverse effects of the undertaking. The MOA has three stipulations. The first is that the Melville Fuel and Net Depot Historic District (including Tank Farms 1 and 2) and the Newport Naval Hospital Historic District will be documented to the standards of the Rhode Island Historical Resources Archive (RIHRA). Stipulation two states that National Register Determinations of Eligibility (DOEs) will be prepared for the Melville Fuel and Net Depot Historic District (including Tank Farms 1 and 2), the Newport Naval Hospital Historic District, and the Main Building at the Naval Hospital. These DOEs will be submitted jointly by the Navy and the RIHPHC to the Department of the Interior. The third stipulation of the MOA states that if the Hospital District or the individual Hospital Building are found eligible for the National Register, the Navy will grant easement(s) to the RIHPHC for those properties. The RIHPHC has not requested an easement for the Melville property, as the reuse of historic resources at that property appears to be unlikely.

It is not clear if the City of Newport has fully evaluated the option of rehabilitating the main hospital building. It could make an excellent tax credit project that would save a historically significant building in a prominent location. In the Environmental Impact Statement that the Navy prepared for its NEPA compliance, two proposed uses for the Naval Hospital property were examined. One was clearing the site and building a hotel. The other was clearing the site and building a hotel with a marina. According to a September 2016 newspaper article, the city's proposed redevelopment includes a new 3-story, 120-room hotel with space on the first floor for a retail area and a restaurant. A separate residential building would contain 36 two-bedroom units. Rehabilitation of any of the Naval Hospital buildings as a potential course of action has not been mentioned in any correspondence that we have seen from the Navy or the City, or in the press.

In anticipation of the Keeper of the National Register finding either the Hospital District or the Main Hospital Building – or both – eligible for the NR, we've been drafting easement language to parallel the federal Section 106 process. No action is currently required by the RIHPHC Commission; this report is provided for Commissioners' information.

6. Other Business: There was no other business.
7. Next regular meeting date: Wednesday December 14, 2016 at 9:30 AM.
8. Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 11:45 AM.

Minutes recorded by,



Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director
State Historic Preservation Officer