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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Central Falls Congregational Church
AND/OR COMMON St. Joseph's Parish Center

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 376 High Street

CITY, TOWN Central Falls

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF #1 Rep. Fernand J. St. Germain

STATE Rhode Island 02836

CODE 44

COUNTY Providence CODE 007

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME St. Joseph's Church

STREET & NUMBER 39 High Street

CITY, TOWN Central Falls

VICINITY OF

STATE Rhode Island

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Central Falls City Hall

STREET & NUMBER 580 Broad Street

CITY, TOWN Central Falls

STATE Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Central Falls, Rhode Island Statewide Preservation Report
P-CF-1, 1976

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN Providence

STATE Rhode Island

DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Central Falls Congregational Church is a fine example of vernacular Shingle Style architecture. It was erected in 1883 at the junction of High and Jenks Street in the southeastern corner of Central Falls. The church is essentially one story high, although its fenestration is arranged on three levels. The basic plan is rectangular, but the steep cross-gable roof, interrupted by a variety of porches, overhangs, and bays, creates an asymmetry of form and massing. The exterior is clapboarded with various patterns of shingles used in the gable ends.

A three-level, flat-roofed tower rises from the northern Jenks Street facade. West of the tower the roof rises into the high gable of the north/south roof axis, while the length of the east/west axis is visible along the east side. The tower was originally topped by a spire (damaged in the 1938 hurricane and later removed); it has two small windows on the second level; the third level originally held the church bell. A balustrade surrounds the top of the tower. The main entrance to the church is in the tower's first level and is set under a gabled porch. The upper portion of the gable is covered with patterned shingles, the lower with panelling. The porch was originally supported by four heavy posts, but the front two have been replaced by stock, wrought-iron supports, as have the porch railings. This northern facade has two sets of stained glass windows. Six windows line the wall right of the tower. The left side of the facade is divided by a concave band of shingles which form a shallow bay filled by a row of windows, five small squares set over five rectangles. The bay crosses the middle section of the gable and rests on a convex molding. The upper level of the gable contains a small window topped by a semi-circular molding. A row of ground-level basement windows are also visible, as the site slopes up slightly toward the south and west.

At the northeastern corner are the side entrances to the church. Two sets of double doors are set at opposite ends of a porch covered by an extension of the main roof. As in the main entrance, three of the porch posts have been replaced by stock, wrought iron. Above the entrance porch is a gabled dormer with a semi-circular window.

The east side of the building, facing High Street, contains the gable end of the east/west roof axis; six stained glass rectangular windows are arranged on its lower level, four others are set in the gable end.

Two doors are located on the west facade of the church. On the left side is a service door under a small, gabled overhang supported by heavy brackets, and on the right a short, gabled extension covers a door and stairs leading to the basement. Between these two doors

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the roofline rises into a gable under which there is a set of four square and four rectangular windows.

The southern facade of the building has a central door leading into the social room. To the left is a set of triple windows; to the right is a shallow, shed-roofed extension, lighted by a small window with a curved pediment. Above the extension on the second level is a set of Palladian windows. High in the peak of the gable is a small window topped by a wooden sunburst design.

Inside the church, as one enters from the north porch, is a small vestibule with plainly plastered walls. To the right a door opens into a narrow stairway to the basement. On the left are double doors leading into the nave of the church which is simple and restrained. Its lack of ornament is a striking contrast with the exterior. The main framing of the church is visible and forms the principal ornament. Lancet arches of laminated oak rise from the floor to the center of the ceiling where their intersections are filled in by wooden fretwork set on crossbeams. The arches are decorated by simple incised concentric circles. The sanctuary at the southern end of the building is framed by a round arch enclosing three stained glass windows; the wall below the windows is panelled in oak, contrasting sharply with the white plaster walls of the rest of the room. In front of the arch is a raised dais which originally held a lectern. To the right of the sanctuary a door leads into a small dressing room, and to the left is the church's original and still functional organ, decorated with gold floral work.

The southern half of the west wall (which leads into the church's social room) was originally screened with oak panels set under windows all of which could be raised to open the two rooms into one. The panels and windows have been replaced by modern accordion doors. The social room retains its laminated-wood arches, but its ceiling has been covered by acoustical tile. It is lighted by windows on the west and south walls and, at its west end, contains a small stage. Opening off the social room is the service area of the church which originally contained a kitchen, serving room, and coat room. It has been extensively altered to accommodate the changing function of the building from church to parish center. A small serving area now opens into the social room and the kitchen has been shortened to make space for lavatories. At present the serving room (entered from the social room or from the service door through a small vestibule) leads into the kitchen, now being fitted with modern equipment. From the kitchen

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one passes through a short corridor onto which open the new coat room and lavatories and through which one arrives at the main vestibule. The stairs to the basement of the church lead into a short corridor, lined on the right with storage spaces and lavatories. The left side of the corridor leads to a roughly finished recreation room which was formerly used as a Sunday schoolroom.

SIGNIFICANCE

PÉRIOD

PREHISTORIC
 1400-1499
 1500-1599
 1600-1699
 1700-1799
 1800-1899
 1900

ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC
 ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC
 AGRICULTURE
 ARCHITECTURE
 ART
 COMMERCE
 COMMUNICATIONS

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

COMMUNITY PLANNING
 CONSERVATION
 ECONOMICS
 EDUCATION
 ENGINEERING
 EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT
 INDUSTRY
 INVENTION

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
 LAW
 LITERATURE
 MILITARY
 MUSIC
 PHILOSOPHY
 POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

RELIGION
 SCIENCE
 SCULPTURE
 SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
 THEATER
 TRANSPORTATION
 OTHER (SPECIFY)

SPECIFIC DATES 1883

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Central Falls Congregational Church is one of the most handsome buildings in the city of Central Falls and is the focus of one of its oldest neighborhoods. The history of the church reflects the demographic and social changes in the High Street area from its construction by an affluent Yankee congregation to its present use as the parish center of a Polish-American Catholic church.

The church was built in 1883 by a congregation whose history reached back to the beginnings of industrial development in Central Falls. Sparsely settled in the early nineteenth century, the village experienced a rapid growth in the 1820's when the power of the Blackstone River was first fully utilized. The tiny cluster of mills and houses along the river had little institutional life of its own and remained for several years merely an extension of development in Pawtucket. Central Falls' Congregationalists traveled each Sunday to the Pawtucket Congregational Church which they had helped organize in 1820. By 1845, when the congregation had outgrown its church building, however, the village had grown extensively, and the forty members from Central Falls organized their own church. They built a wooden structure on High Street, directly across from the present building.

The early church members included many of the village's small manufacturers, businessmen, and professionals, among them Joseph and Samuel Wood, who manufactured cotton; John Moies, who owned a yarn mill; and Sylvester Pierce, who operated a confectionary. Until the later years of the nineteenth century, the Central Falls Congregational Church continued to serve families of wealth and influence, many of whom built handsome houses in the High Street neighborhood, only a block away from Roosevelt Avenue which was lined with their mills. When the early building was outgrown in the 1880's, the congregation replaced it with the present church. John A. Adams, the treasurer and agent of the Stafford Mills whose house faces the church, donated the land. Adams and Henry A. Stearns, vice-president of the Union Wadding Company and later Lt. Governor of Rhode Island, served as the building committee. The new building was constructed at a fortuitous time in the congregation's history, since its resources were extensive and its purse was full. The church is a fine example

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of Shingle Style architecture and may well have been designed by one of Rhode Island's leading architectural firms. To date, however, no record has been found of its architect. The handsome structure, a contrast in mass and height with the houses that surround it, rises above the neighborhood landscape and dominates it. One of the finest buildings in the city, it was the visual focus of the neighborhood as well as its institutional center.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the character of the High Street neighborhood began to change. As Central Falls became a full-fledged industrial city, it attracted large numbers of immigrants who sought work in its textile and metals industries, and High Street became the center of Central Falls' Polish community. Immigration quickly altered the demography of the neighborhood. It was now more densely populated, its residents were less affluent, and most of them were Catholic. Fewer of Central Falls' industrialists lived in the area, as many moved to other sections of the city or to other cities, and the Congregational Church lost its members. Polish Catholics built their own church, St. Joseph's, across the street in 1919. They later added a rectory and acquired the Stafford House for use as a school. With its variety of educational and social functions, St. Joseph's became the institutional focus of the neighborhood, as the Congregational Church had once been.

In response to the continually declining residential base, the Congregational Church abandoned its building in 1973 when its membership merged with two Pawtucket churches. Convinced that their handsome building should be maintained and used, they sought a buyer who would make appropriate use of the structure and eventually sold it to St. Joseph's for use as a parish center. The Congregational Church is now one of five buildings on High Street owned by St. Joseph's and completes the church complex.

Work on the conversion of the church is now underway. The nave of the church will serve as a banquet room; the social room will be used for small gatherings; and the basement schoolroom will become a recreation room. Some alterations in the building have been required by its new function. The addition of new service facilities is virtually completed and new oak floors have replaced linoleum. Where architectural elements have been removed (such as the wood panels and windows separating the nave and the social room), they have not been discarded, but have been carefully stored. The parish center will soon be a model for the re-use of churches for the rest of the city. The acquisition of the Central Falls Congregational

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Church by St. Joseph's ensures that the building will once again become part of the institutional center of the neighborhood.

Recent changes in the physical fabric of this area make preservation of the structure imperative. While Central Falls avoided the wholesale demolition of urban renewal which many other cities experienced during the last two decades, the High Street area has lost several of its most important buildings. Within a short radius of the Congregational Church, several structures have been demolished, including a handsome commercial block and one of the earliest remaining mill houses. Their replacement by unsightly parking lots makes the protection of the remaining legacy of the neighborhood all the more important.

The renovation of the Central Falls Congregational Church into a parish center and its preservation as the principal visual ornament of the area could be a catalyst for the regeneration of the neighborhood.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Friends and Neighbors, A Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, Central Falls, R.I., 1975

Grieve, Robert, An Illlustrated History of Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Vicinity, Pawtucket, R.I., 1897.

(See Continuation Sheet 5)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A	19	0302160	4639530	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Pamela Kennedy, Survey Specialist

April 28, 1976

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

401-277-2678

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island 02903

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE April 30, 1976

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Haley, John, The Lower Blackstone River Valley, Pawtucket, R. I.
1936.

Interview with Rev. Maxwell Clough, former minister, Central Falls
Congregational Church, April 20, 1976



Central Falls Congregational Church

Central Falls, Rhode Island

Photographer: Richard Longstreth

Date: April, 1976

Negative: Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission
150 Benefit Street, Providence, R.I.

Description: Southern facade, showing gable end of
north/south roof axis.

Photograph #2



Central Falls Congregational Church

Central Falls, Rhode Island

Photographer: Richard Longstreth

Date: April, 1976

Negative: Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission
150 Benefit Street, Providence, R.I.

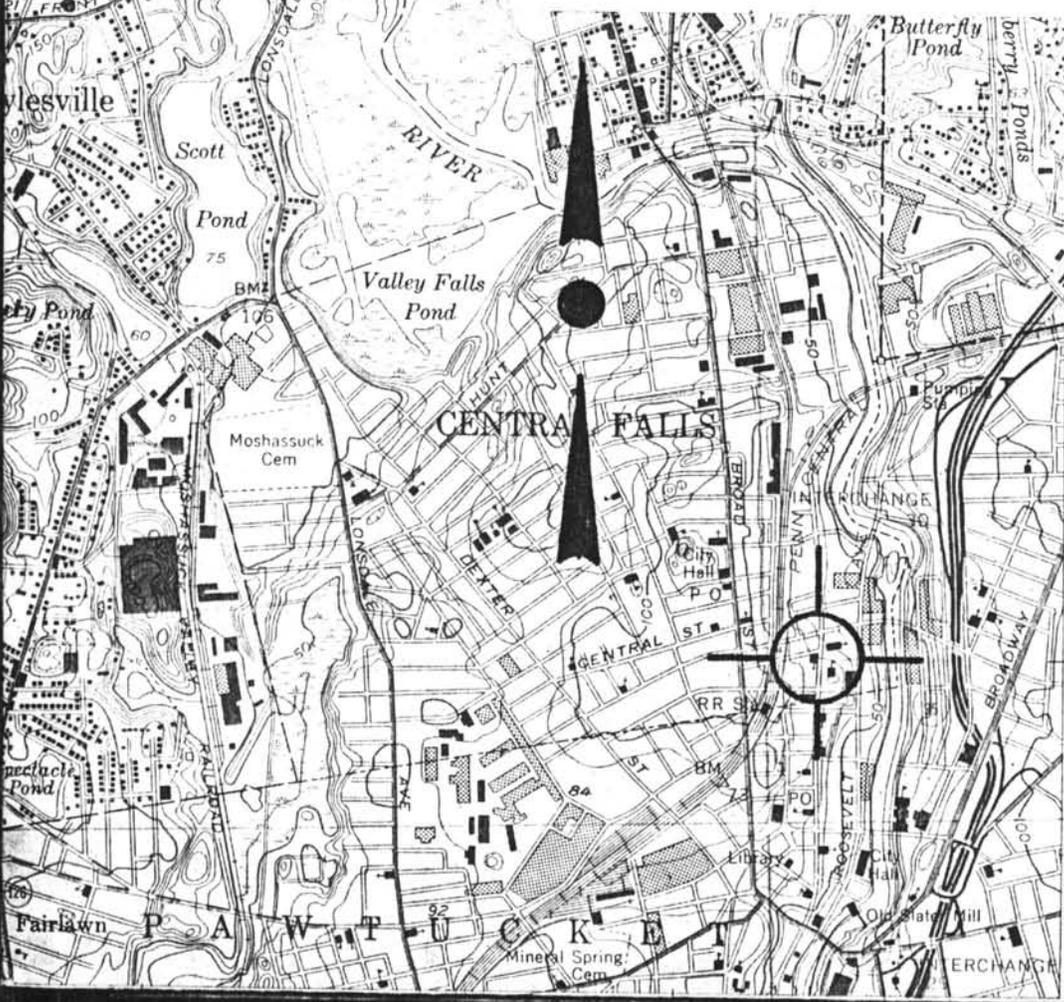
Description: Northern and eastern facades, showing main
entrance to right under tower and northeastern
corner entrance porch.

Photograph #1



Central Falls Congregational Church
 Central Falls, Rhode Island

19 302160 4639530



4641

200519

4639530 N

290 000 FEET
 (R.I.)

41°52'30"