# Forestdale Mill Village

## Location
- Street and Number: Running east and west along Main Street, northerly upon Maple Avenue.
- City or Town: North Smithfield, Rhode Island, 02824
- County: Providence
- Code: 007

## Classification
**Category (Check One):**
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

**Ownership:**
- Public
- Private
- Both

**Public Acquisition:**
- In Process
- Being Considered

**Status:**
- Occupied
- Unoccupied
- Preservation work in progress
- Yes:
  - Restricted
  - Unrestricted
- No

**Present Use (Check One or More as Appropriate):**
- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Educational
- Entertainment
- Industrial
- Military
- Museum
- Scientific
- Park
- Private Residence
- Religious
- Transportation
- Other (Specify)

## Owner of Property
**Owner's Name:**

**Street and Number:**

**City or Town:**

**State:**

## Location of Legal Description
**Courthouse, Registry of Deeds, etc.:**
- Town Clerk

**Street and Number:**
- Memorial Town Building, Slatersville

**City or Town:**
- North Smithfield

**State:**
- Rhode Island, 02876

## Representation in Existing Surveys
**Title of Survey:**
- Not so represented

**Date of Survey:**

**Depository for Survey Records:**

**Street and Number:**

**City or Town:**

**State:**
Forestdale is embanked above the Branch River in the Blackstone Valley, near the centre of Rhode Island's northern borderline with Massachusetts, and is in the town of North Smithfield. It is a village which developed because of the two mills which were (as early as 1821 in the case of the first one) constructed near the river to use its water power. The built-up part of the village was and remains concentrated on (a) a stretch of about one-half mile along Main Street, whose central section runs east and west above mills and river and whose outer portions tend towards north-east and north-west and (b) a length of less than a quarter-mile on Maple Avenue, which runs northerly from the centre of Main Street; there is only one other short linking or intersecting street. This area comprises approximately fifty to fifty-two acres and to-day contains fifty or sixty buildings (a small number being modern insertions); only a few of the buildings, however, have individually as much as an acre of land. (An 1870 map shows closer to thirty buildings, and an 1895 lithographic view shows about thirty-five.)

Except that the first factory of 1821 and its dependencies have been pulled down and some of the workers' houses altered in exterior detail, Forestdale remains in size and aspect much as it was in the latter half of the XIX Century, and the most notable buildings or building types are described below:

The cotton mill was built in 1860 for Mansfield and Lamb, who had bought an adjacent scythe factory of 1821 and the village. It is sited above falls in the Branch River, but on a level much lower than Main Street, and is a three-storey timber-framed structure walled in stone and carrying a gable roof with pedimented dormers; its dimensions before additions were 166 feet by 68 feet. Projecting massively from the centre of the north elevation is a tower which was originally of four storeys and which has entrance and freight doorways at the various levels and round, keystoned windows in the fourth one. When the mill was enlarged c. 1885 this tower was built up another full storey in masonry, where slit windows appear, and trimmed at the top with machicolation; it was then capped by a fine Shingle Style open belfry of wood which shows some lattice-work and has a peaked roof with copper ornament. The other addition to the main building at that time was a four-storey western extension of 65 feet by 45 feet, of brick-pier construction covered by a low pitched roof.

The mill office is a small rectangular storey-and-a-half, gable-roofed building, apparently of the 1860's also, and is located on the high Main Street border of the mill site; a bridge connects it with an entrance in the third level of the mill tower. The office building is covered by clapboarding and displays Victorian-Italianate trim--
quoining, a deep cornice above paired brackets, strongly-moulded architraves enframing windows and bearing heavy crown mouldings. The schoolhouse near the eastern end of the village, though slightly larger (and originally having a little belfry) echoes this design.

The store-and-post-office building built in 1858 still stands in excellent condition across Main Street from the mill property, on a corner of Maple Avenue. It is L-shaped and gable-roofed, containing two-and-a-half storeys. Granite posts and lintels permit wide street-level door and window openings along its south front; above, that front is faced in brick, but stone entirely faces sides and rear. The eastern part of the "L", which still houses the post office, has a stepped brick "false front" concealing the gable facing Main Street. The west wing is now used for offices, and the whole structure has recently been renovated.

Houses formerly occupied by the proprietors and overseers of the mills are located in the Maple Street area, and are roomy but not excessively large or pretentious two-and-a-half-storey wooden structures in the Victorian bracketed and "stick" or "shingle" styles, set back on lawns and accompanied by stables or barns.

The workers' housing is ranged along the south side of Main Street's north-eastern stretch and along the north side of its north-western stretch. With one exception, it consists of clapboarded, gable-roofed duplex dwellings of either one-and-a-half or two-and-a-half storeys. These houses mostly have paired central front doors of simple Greek Revival style with sidelights, and are trimmed with panelled corner pilasters. Strikingly different is a single one-and-one-half-storey house opposite the mill; it is faced in local stone in alternating tall and short ashlar courses whose varying coloration produces a striped effect; here the two entrances are placed at the end of the front elevation rather than paired at its centre. Most of these houses have in front of them grass plots contained by stone retaining-walls. Some houses have had alteration in the form of new exterior wall coverings, modern porches and changed window openings or sash; the numerous privies ranged along behind the houses and noticeable in the 1895 view are no longer present.
Forestdale, little changed physically, is typical of the many mill villages which have formed Rhode Island's heritage of early industrial architecture, which Henry-Russell Hitchcock has said to be "unique in America (and possibly the world)." The use of Forestdale as an industrial site dates from at least 1821, when water rights were acquired by Newton Darling to establish there a scythe manufactory. This was the dominant local industry until 1860, when Mansfield and Lamb, who had acquired the scythe works, erected above the 11-foot waterfalls a neighboring stone mill for the production of cotton. During excavation, a large quantity of usable small flat stones was found and was employed in the building of the cotton mill itself and in enlarging the scythe shops and other buildings.

The village had its heyday in the latter half of the XIX Century, and during that period its prosperity and its paternalistic management were constant and successful; a small railroad station (no longer standing) and a public school were built. Now, matters are different: the scythe factory is gone; so are paternalism and company ownership. Persons living in houses now owned by themselves drive out to work elsewhere, and other workers drive in to work in the cotton mill.

Yet the visual entity still exists. From a distance, on an interstate highway, the mill tower remains a landmark, and in the village the mill and tower are still the presiding elements. Much stands as it did one hundred years ago: there remains the basic layout; the old buildings are still there—with some changes, some new construction (the latter mostly away from the centre and the mill). There are telephone wires and a few electric signs. Some workers' houses display in minor exterior applications the fancies of present owners, but they nevertheless remain in their original planned placement, size and form.

This small locale presents in intimate and quickly understandable form an excellent picture of mid-XIX-Century rural, industrial Rhode Island, both sociologically and architecturally. Fortunately, people in Forestdale, and the North Smithfield Heritage Association as well, wish to preserve this presentation: a first goal is restoration of the mill tower, which is looked upon as the village's "symbol" and which still, with its high and picturesque belfry, announces Forestdale to those far away.

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell, Jr.: Rhode Island Architecture (Providence, Rhode Island, 1939), np. 36 ff.


Steere, Thomas: History of the Town of Smithfield (Providence, Rhode Island, 1881), pp. 94-95.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CORNER</th>
<th>LATITUDE</th>
<th>LONGITUDE</th>
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<td>71° 31' 01.82'' W</td>
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<td>NE</td>
<td>41° 59' 57.39'' N</td>
<td>71° 33' 35.15'' W</td>
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<td>SE</td>
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<td>SW</td>
<td>41° 59' 46.04'' N</td>
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APPRAOHT ACRES OF Nominated PROPERTY: 50-52 acres

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

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Richard B. Harrington, Consultant

ORGANIZATION: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

STREET AND NUMBER: John Brown House, 52 Power Street

CITY OR TOWN: Providence

STATE: Rhode Island, 02906

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

- National [ ]
- State [X]
- Local [ ]

Name ________________________

Title ________________________

Date ________________________

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

______________________________

Chief, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

ATTEST:

______________________________

Keeper of The National Register

Date ________________________
FORESTDALE, R.I.
After U.S.G.S., 1954

Forestdale Mill Village Historical Dist.
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**PROPERTY MAP FORM**

*(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with map)*

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<th>ENTRY NUMBER</th>
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1. **COMMON:** Forestdale Mill Village

2. **STREET AND NUMBER:**
   - Running east and west along Main Street, northerly upon Maple Avenue

3. **CITY OR TOWN:** North Smithfield

4. **STATE:** Rhode Island

5. **SOURCE:** Walter Nebiker, after U.S.G.S. map, Georgiaville quadrant, 1951

6. **SCALE:** 3"; 1,000'

7. **DATE:** 1951; adaptation, 1972

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**SECTIONS**

**1. NAME**

**COMMON:** Forestdale Mill Village

**AND/OR HISTORIC:**

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**2. LOCATION**

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**COUNTY:** Providence

**CODE:** RI 007

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**3. MAP REFERENCE**

**SOURCE:** Walter Nebiker, after U.S.G.S. map, Georgiaville quadrant, 1951

**SCALE:** 3"; 1,000'

**DATE:** 1951; adaptation, 1972

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**4. REQUIREMENTS**

**TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS**

1. Property boundaries where required.
2. North arrow.
3. Latitude and longitude reference.
**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

**Rhode Island**

**STATE**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

*(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph)*

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<td>DATE OF PHOTO: March, 1972</td>
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<td>DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.</td>
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   DATE OF PHOTO: 1972
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   John Brown House, 52 Power Street, Providence, Rhode Island, 02906

4. IDENTIFICATION
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   Cotton mill, showing tower, seen from the north-west.
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<td>COUNTY: Providence</td>
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<td>Mill office on Main Street in front of the mill, seen from the north-east.</td>
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</table>
Store and post-office building of 1858, on Main Street at the corner of Maple Avenue, seen from the south-east.
¹NAME:
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AND/OR HISTORIC:

２LOCATION
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³PHOTO REFERENCE
PHOTO CREDIT: Eric Hertfelder
DATE OF PHOTO: 1972
NEGATIVE FILED AT: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, John Brown House, 52 Power Street, Providence, Rhode Island, 02906

⁴IDENTIFICATION
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.
Two-family workers' house of stone from the factory site across Main Street.
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AND/OR HISTORIC:

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North Smithfield

STATE:
Rhode Island

DATE OF PHOTO:
1972

PHOTO CREDIT:
Eric Hertfelder

NEGATIVE FILED AT:
Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, John Brown House, 52 Power Street, Providence, Rhode Island, 02906

DESCRIPTION VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.

Typical workers' housing along Main Street.
GEOGRAPHICAL COORDINATES

**Latitude**
- NE 41° 59' 57.89" N
- SE 41° 59' 47.29" N
- SW 41° 59' 46.04" N
- NW 41° 59' 57.95" N

**Longitude**
- 71° 33' 35.15" W
- 71° 33' 34.49" W
- 71° 34' 3.86" W
- 71° 34' 4.82" W
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STATE:
Rhode Island

3. MAP REFERENCE

SOURCE:
U. S. Geological Survey

SCALE: 1: 24,000

DATE: 1951

4. REQUIREMENTS

TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS
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