UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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 The Pawtucket Post Office
AND/OR COMMON Municipal Welfare Building

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER 56 High Street (Corner of High and Summer Streets)
CITY, TOWN Pawtucket
STATE Rhode Island

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY
DISTRICT
BUILDINGS
STRUCTURE
SITE
OBJECT

OWNERSHIP
PUBLIC
PRIVATE
Both
PUBLIC ACQUISITION
IN PROCESS
BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS
X OCCUPIED
UNOCCUPIED
WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
X YES: RESTRICTED
YES: UNRESTRICTED
NO

PRESENT USE
AGRICULTURE
MUSEUM
COMMERCIAL
PARK
EDUCATIONAL
PRIVATE RESIDENCE
ENTERTAINMENT
RELIGIOUS
GOVERNMENT
SCIENTIFIC
INDUSTRIAL
TRANSPORTATION
MILITARY
OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME City of Pawtucket
STREET & NUMBER 137 Roosevelt Avenue
CITY, TOWN Pawtucket
STATE Rhode Island

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE
Pawtucket City Hall
STREET & NUMBER 137 Roosevelt Avenue
CITY, TOWN Pawtucket
STATE Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE Rhode Island Statewide Inventory
DATE 1974
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission
CITY, TOWN Providence
STATE Rhode Island
With the construction of a new post office in the 1890's, much of the civic identity of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was centered in the area of Summer and High Streets. The Post Office (now the Municipal Welfare Building) was erected following plans of William M. Aiken and James Knox Taylor, consecutive Supervising Architects of the U. S. Treasury. Although the city conveyed a deed for the land at the corner of Summer and High Streets to the United States government as early as 1892, the construction of Pawtucket's new Post Office was not begun until 1896 when the arrival of "contractor Leach of Chicago" was heralded with great joy in the newspapers. The original designs for the building were drawn up under the direction of William M. Aiken, Supervising Architect of the Treasury from 1895 to 1897. Since Aiken was replaced by James Knox Taylor while the building was under construction, various plans were signed by Taylor. Completed around November 1, 1897, the new government office was quickly proclaimed the handsomest structure in Pawtucket.

A wedge-shaped building with central domed tower, the Pawtucket Post Office reflects the enthusiasm for Renaissance classicism and monumental urban planning popularized by the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition (1893). The building is constructed of red brick on a granite pedestal. Superimposed major and minor Doric order columns, arches, entablature and balustrades are of cast concrete. A slate mansard roof with copper trim crowns the composition; its wrought iron cresting has been removed. In general, the building is a stylistic combination of the Roman High Renaissance and France's Second Empire.

In typically Beaux Arts fashion, the building was sited to command the view up High Street from the main commercial district. On axis with this vista is the tower at the corner of High and Summer Streets. This tower signals the entrance to the building and provides a central focus for the structure. The tower served as a circular entrance lobby for the Post Office. Granite Doric columns supporting an entablature and two stone American Eagles frame the doorway. Between the cornice of the minor order and the more elaborate triglyph and metope cornice of the major order of the tower, the designers located three vertically oriented elliptical windows cased by rectangular architraves, broken at the corners and containing scroll and foliate decoration. Above the major cornice, the ribbed copper dome is supported on a copper-covered drum articulated with piers separated by Roman thermal windows. At the base of the dome is a band of alternating palmette and anthemion forms. The ribbed copper dome is capped by a small louvered cupola surmounted
by a ball finial.

The flanking sides of the post office are composed of runs of five arched window bays ending in slightly projecting pavillons. The window bays are defined by major columns with a minor order pilaster and arch within. A brick and cast concrete balustrade above repeats the rhythm of the arched units. The ends are emphasized by projecting pavillons containing a window with aedicular surround.

As originally constructed, the facade along Summer Street consisting of four window bays, while that on High Street was composed of three arched units. In the early twentieth century, the building was extended thirty feet to the northwest (along Summer Street) and twenty-five feet to the northeast (along High Street), equalizing the two main facades in five arched bays each.

In 1941, the building was acquired by the city of Pawtucket and has since been used as the Municipal Welfare Building. Later additions and changes in use have greatly altered the interior configuration. The circular entrance lobby in the tower and high raised-panel wainscoting in some areas suggest the original fine interior finish, praised in contemporary accounts of the construction. On the exterior the building retains its original character and still serves well as a Pawtucket landmark and an essential link to its civic history.
SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

PREHISTORIC -- ARCHAEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC -- COMMUNITY PLANNING -- LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

1400-1499 -- ARCHAEOLOGY-HISTORIC -- CONSERVATION -- RELIGION

1500-1599 -- AGRICULTURE -- ECONOMICS -- LAW

1600-1699 -- ART -- EDUCATION -- LITERATURE

1800-1899 -- ARCHITECTURE -- ENGINEERING -- MILITARY

1900-- -- COMMERCE -- EXPLORATION/Settlement -- SCULPTURE

1900-- -- COMMUNICATIONS -- INDUSTRY -- SCULPTURE

INVENTION

SPECIFIC DATES 1896-97 ELLEFIELD

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the Pawtucket Post Office underlies the civic, historical, and architectural development of the City of Pawtucket. As a civic locus, this structure was seen as an affirmation of prosperity and progress at the time of its construction. The new Post Office was looked upon as a symbol of the community's growing size and importance at the close of the nineteenth century. The structure was declared "a model of neatness and convenience" that will compare favorably with any Post Office in any city the size of Pawtucket in the country." The building, the only physical symbol of the Federal Government, was national recognition for a community that had grown quickly and was gradually evolving a self image.

The post office was erected at a significant point in the history of the city. Pawtucket's importance as the birthplace of American industry dates to 1790 when Samuel Slater arrived in Rhode Island. During the next three years, Slater, under the patronage of Moses Brown of Providence, reconstructed the Arkwright spinning frame and opened the first successful cotton mill in the United States. The mill, (now a museum and already on the National Register) was constructed on the west bank of the Blackstone River, not far from the future site of the post office. Over the following century, Pawtucket saw rapid economic expansion in the textile industry. By the end of the nineteenth century, Pawtucket residents were proud of their position as an industrial center of national importance and eager to erect structures physically expressive of their prosperity. In 1890, the Cotton Centennial was celebrated with extensive festivities and expectations for future progress. The post office, begun in the 1890's, represents the governmental and private recognition of Pawtucket's civic identity and self esteem.

In addition to the post office, the intersection of Summer and High Streets was marked as a community center by the presence of the First Baptist Church (1822) and the construction of a new Masonic

See continuation sheet 2
Temple (1895), (both since demolished). Subsequently, the construction of a building for the Salvation Army and another for the Y.M.C.A. have continued the tradition of community service facilities in this area. Nearly contemporary was the erection of the Deborah Cook Sayles Public Library (Cram, Goodue and Furgusson, 1899-1902), located immediately west on Summer Street (and also entered on the National Register).

Finally, the Post Office is an excellent example of the architectural environment of the 1890's that continued into the early decades of the twentieth century. It closely follows the stylistic dictates of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition (1893) that had so pervasive an influence upon American architecture. Emphasizing the principles of design learned by American architects at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, the buildings of the Columbian Exposition introduced Americans to the world of symmetry, axial planning and classical forms. The Pawtucket building shows the classicism of Renaissance Italy in its arched bay units and of 17th century France in its Mansard roof. The tower's placement on axis with the vista of the street betray the Beaux-Arts love of monumentality and environmental planning.

Visually, the Pawtucket Post Office is a key landmark, prominently sited in the center of the city. Historically, the building represents the presence of federal and state government in Pawtucket. Its location corresponds to an earlier development pattern now drastically altered by recent urban renewal. In sum, the building testifies to the character and importance of Pawtucket at the end of the nineteenth century, a period of prosperity and civic awareness.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


Pawtucket Evening Times, September 14, 1896 and November 1, 1897.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 2

UTM REFERENCES

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

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FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE: Keith N. Morgan, Museum Specialist

ORGANIZATION: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Comm.

DATE: March 4, 1975

STREET & NUMBER: 150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE: 277-2678

CITY OR TOWN: Providence

STATE: Rhode Island

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS

NATIONAL ___ STATE X 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 DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE