1. NAME

COMMON: Woonsocket City Hall

AND/OR HISTORIC: Harris Institute

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 169 Main Street

CITY OR TOWN: Woonsocket

STATE CODE: Rhode Island 44

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One):
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

OWNERSHIP:
- Public
- Private
- Both

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

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC:
- Yes:
- No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate):
- Agricultural
- Commercial
- Educational
- Entertainment
- Government
- Industrial
- Military
- Museum
- Private Residence
- Religious
- Library
- Other (Specify)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: City of Woonsocket

STREET AND NUMBER: 169 Main Street

CITY OR TOWN: Woonsocket

STATE CODE: Rhode Island 44

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Woonsocket City Hall

STREET AND NUMBER: 169 Main Street

CITY OR TOWN: Woonsocket

STATE CODE: Rhode Island 44

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Rhode Island Inventory

DATE OF SURVEY: 1974

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

STREET AND NUMBER: 52 Power Street

CITY OR TOWN: Providence

STATE CODE: Rhode Island 44
Woonsocket City Hall at 169 Main Street occupies a key visual position in a district of banks, stores and office buildings. The density of development here has been broken by occasional parking lots and the vacant building site immediately north of City Hall now landscaped as a park. Nevertheless, this is the hub of downtown Woonsocket.

The oldest section of City Hall is the Harris Block erected between April, 1855 and the spring of 1858 by Edward Harris, Woonsocket's leading industrialist. As built, the Harris Block was a three story brick structure with ground level access to the basement story in the rear. It measured approximately 65x100'. The masonry contract for the building was awarded to Albert B. Cole of Woonsocket, the carpentry contract to a "Mr. Slade" of Providence. The architect is unknown.

The Main Street facade of the Harris Block originally had an arcuated cast iron front on the first floor. A central entrance with an enclosed porch led to a stairhall and the upper floors. Four lateral entrances gave access to the stores which occupied the street level space. The first floor of the building was altered in 1891 by extending it out about fifteen feet and facing it with plate glass store fronts. At that time a cubical one story stone addition was made above the central entrance. It bears two date stones: 1856, 1859.

The mastic-coated upper register of the Harris Block's Main Street facade is otherwise little altered. It is divided into three units by a broad and slightly projected central pavilion. This pavilion is defined less by projection than by the cross gable surmounting it which breaks the continuity of the roof line. A projected string course at the level of the third story window sills creates a counterpoised horizontal accent.

As is characteristic of Italianate buildings of the 1840's and 50's Romanesque and Renaissance details are freely juxtaposed on the Main Street elevation. The entablature -- with its plain frieze and heavy dentillated and modillioned cornice -- is based on Renaissance models. So too are the quoins and the volutes which support the cornice returns of the cross gable. The paired roundhead windows, elaborated with engaged Corinthian colonnettes, were inspired by Romanesque architectural precedent. And coming full circle, the use of cast iron for much of this detail is a nineteenth century innovation.

The interior of the structure has been drastically changed. In the 1850's, the entire third story was a single room, 96x62' with a 25' ceiling height. It was known as Harris Hall and could seat 1100. The second floor was probably first used as a "Sunday School." The first floor contained stores, and the basement was at least planned to accommodate a public bathhouse, though there is no evidence that it was ever used for this purpose.
7. Description cont.

Only one section of Harris Hall has been retained, functioning as the City Council Chamber. The second floor has been the home of the Harris Institute Free Library since 1863, but the library will soon move to new quarters and this space will be taken over for city offices. Until recently, most of the first floor was rented out. Now it too houses city offices.

At the time the front of the building was altered in 1891, a large addition was made on the north. This 1891 addition, looking like a separate building, is a stone-veneered four story structure in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Its corner tower is a Main Street landmark. The first floor facade of both this addition and its extension across the first floor of the Harris Block have been faced with aluminum siding in the past two years.

The 1891 addition was built by the Trustees of the Harris Institute Library to whom Edward Harris had deeded the Harris Block in 1863.

In 1902 the trustees of Harris Institute transferred their property to the city. Since then the Harris Institute has been City Hall. The city government has recently determined to remain in its present quarters rather than building a new structure and now contemplates making extensive repairs on the complex.

8. Significance cont.

latest architectural fashion of the day. In 1902 the enlarged building now City Hall, was transformed from a primarily cultural institution into the political and administrative heart of Woonsocket. No structure has greater significance in the history of the city.
### S. SIGNIFICANCE

#### PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)
- Pre-Columbian
- 15th Century
- 16th Century
- 17th Century
- 18th Century
- 19th Century
- 20th Century

#### SPECIFIC DATES (If Applicable and Known)
- 1855-58
- 1860
- 1891

#### AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)
- Aboriginal
- Prehistoric
- Historic
- Agriculture
- Architecture
- Art
- Commerce
- Communications
- Conservation
- Education
- Engineering
- Industry
- Invention
- Landscape
- Language
- Literature
- Military
- Music
- Political
- Religion/Philosophy
- Science
- Sculpture
- Social/Humanitarian
- Urban Planning
- Other (Specify)

#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Woonsocket City Hall, the former Harris Institute, bears witness to the enterprising vision of the man who made Woonsocket a place of consequence. Edward Harris put Woonsocket "on the map." When Harris came to the community in 1831, it was little more than a collection of six distinct mill villages. At his death in 1872, it was a single, politically unified town.

In large measure, Edward Harris was responsible for this transformation. Harris owned the largest textile mills in Woonsocket, brought in the railroad, donated the first high school, laid out new streets and residential districts, and lobbied for political unification of the area. The Harris Block indicated his desire to improve the community, and signaled Woonsocket's growing importance, its coming of age as an urban center.

Main Street in the 1850's was a straggling accretion of warehouses, factories and wood frame dwellings converted to use as stores. The Harris Block began the transformation of Main Street into a citified downtown district. Today, City Hall continues to function as the linchpin of Woonsocket's central business district.

The Harris Block reflected the economic pragmatism and intellectual idealism of the man who built it. Street-level stores generated income which helped to maintain the building. The rest of the space was devoted to uses benefiting the people of Woonsocket. The second floor "Sunday School" was not a religious institution, but a free school teaching reading and writing to mill workers on their day off. The school was soon superseded by the Harris Institute Library, the first free public library in Rhode Island. Harris Hall, on the third floor, was reputed to be the finest meeting room in the state. Lectures were an important form of education and entertainment in the mid-nineteenth century and many prominent speakers came to Harris Hall. The most famous was Abraham Lincoln who delivered a campaign address here on the night of March 6, 1860. Woonsocket's City Hall is the only building left in the state in which Lincoln spoke.

The Richardson Romanesque structure of 1891 and the 1856 Italianate Harris block form a melange of divergent styles, each reflecting the

See continuation sheet 1
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date
1. NAME

COMMON AND/OR HISTORIC NUMERIC CODE

Aulgned by NPs

2. LOCATION

STATE COUNTY TOWN

Rhode Island Providence Woonsocket

3. PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

4. IDENTIFICATION

NEGATIVE FILED AT

View of City Hall/Harris Institute from the southwest;

February 1974

52 Power Street, Prov., R. I.

169 Main Street

Woonsocket Providence

STATE COUNTY TOWN

Rhode Island Harris Institute

HARRIS INSTITUTE

CITY HALL

NUMERIC CODE (assigned by NPS)

(6/72)

PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

FORM 10-301 A
View of City Hall/Harris Institute from the southwest.
**National Register of Historic Places**

**Property Map Form**

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

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**Requirements**

To be included on all maps:

1. Property boundaries where required.
2. North arrow.
3. Latitude and longitude reference.