



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS  
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**A HISTORY LESSON IN BRICK AND STONE:  
PAWTUCKET’S CHURCH HILL GRAMMAR SCHOOL  
IS LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

The historic Church Hill Grammar School has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of education and architecture in Pawtucket. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added the Church Hill Grammar School to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government’s official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. The Church Hill Grammar School is a significant representative of an important era of educational modernization undertaken in the 1880s, immediately after Pawtucket was incorporated as a city.

The Church Hill Grammar School was constructed during a transitional period for public education and school building design in Pawtucket. At the beginning of the 1880s, the schools of Pawtucket were almost entirely small wooden structures that were outdated, overcrowded, and in very poor condition. Overcrowding of public schools was a significant concern, as Pawtucket’s population was booming to fill the labor needs of the city’s new and expanding

industries. In response to these needs, Pawtucket undertook a comprehensive improvement plan and in the Church Hill neighborhood, the city erected a new brick schoolhouse in 1889-90 to replace the aging 1841 wooden school.

The new Church Hill Grammar School was a modern facility designed to incorporate advancements in technology and sanitation. Brick fireproof construction, classrooms well lit by long banks of windows on one side of the room, a modern ventilation and heating system, and amenities such as gas lighting provided vast improvements over the earlier wood-frame 1841 schoolhouse. Designed by the notable architectural firm William R. Walker & Son in the Queen Anne style, the brick building features a cross-gable slate roof, a large, square bell tower, two arched shed-roof entrance porches on either side of the projecting façade on Park Place, and a variety of paired and triple window openings. The interior features the original staircases and original beadboard wainscoting and plaster walls in many locations.

The Church Grammar School remained in service as a school until 1949 and subsequently served as school administrative offices until 2006. Today it is a rare survivor of an important era in Pawtucket's growth into a modern city.

The National Register nomination for the Church Hill Grammar School was prepared by Elizabeth Porterfield, architectural historian at PAL, the Public Archaeology Laboratory. According to Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, "The Church Hill Grammar School is a monument of the history of public education in Pawtucket. With its prominent location on Park Place, the School is a handsome example of civic architecture, and a valuable resource for preservation and revitalization."

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national

history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.

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