

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse Company Building

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 6-64 Harris Avenue

not for publication

city or town Providence

vicinity

state Rhode Island

code RI

county Providence

code 007

zip code 02903

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Fredrick C. Williamson 13 April 2005
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register
 - See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
 - See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
 - See continuation sheet.
- other (explain)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Name of related multiple property listings

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation CONCRETE

walls CONCRETE

BRICK

roof SYNTHETICS: rubber; METAL: steel

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse Company Building
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Providence County, RI
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # 408
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1929-1955

Significant Dates

1929

Significant Person

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Jenks and Ballou, engineers

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property approximately 4 acres

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	9	2	9	8	1	8	0	4	6	3	3	2	9	0
	Zone		Easting					Northing							
2															

3																		
	Zone				Easting				Northing									
4																		

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Edward Connors, Principal

organization Edward Connors and Associates date October 21, 2004

street & number 14 Brook Street telephone 401 433-2871

city or town Barrington state RI zip code 02806

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Note: Much of the text for this nomination has been drawn from documentation prepared in 1994 and 1998 by the staff of the Public Archaeology Laboratory. This documentation, cited in the bibliography, includes the 1994 nomination for a Provisions Warehouse District, the 1998 Historic American Building Survey (HABS-408) recording of the Provisions Warehouse District, and the 1998 Rhode Island Historic Resources Archive recording of the Providence Fruit and Warehouse Company Building (RIHRA Prov-0004).

DESCRIPTION

The Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse Company Building (PFPWC) is a long, two-story, flat-roofed vaguely Art Moderne industrial building, built of reinforced concrete and brick. It is located on a 4-acre lot in the former provisions warehouse district north of downtown Providence. This parcel, fronting on Harris Avenue, faces the Woonasquatucket River to the immediate west of Interstate Route 95 and north of the tracks of the former New York New Haven and Hartford Railroad.

The structural system consists of a reinforced-concrete skeleton, finished with red brick. The grid-like structure of the building is evident on the exterior, with intersecting cast-concrete piers and lintels framing the nonstructural red brick knee walls and banks of metal awning windows. Loading docks attached to the north and south elevations have poured concrete and fill foundations topped by a slab concrete floor. The loading docks are covered with a flat, steel-framed canopy, which is held in place by steel rods attached to the vertical concrete piers that divide the bays of the building.

This immense, horizontal building was originally 965 ft. long but lost several bays and a railway tower at the east end during the construction of an Interstate 95 ramp built in the 1980s. As a result, the east elevation of the building was sealed with concrete blocks. In all, 64 of the building's original 71 bays survive. The flat roofline on the north and south elevations is interrupted every 10 to 11 bays with a raised, stepped parapet that tops a three-bay section of alternating concrete piers and metal awning windows. The parapets at the west end of the building wrap around the corners to the west elevation. The section of the building removed on the east end was similar to that of the west. Slightly projecting piers with pointed tops divide the bays. Pavilion-like clusters of four more-closely-spaced piers capped with stepped parapets punctuate the north and south elevations and bolster the northwest and southwest corners.

Bays not under parapets contain a ribbon of metal awning windows and a red brick kneewall in the second story. The first stories of those bays contain similar ribbons of windows above two loading bay openings. Most of the loading bays have their original side-hinged, double metal doors with three light windows behind protective wire mesh. Twenty square, red brick elevator shafts with nine light metal windows on each side rise above the south elevation of the building. A prominent brick chimney stack near the center of the building is also visible from that elevation.

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The interior of the building consists predominantly of large, open rooms divided by concrete block partition walls. Wood-frame cashier's offices were found in some units. Historically, the walls were constructed to enclose space required by the businesses operating out of the units. The dominant architectural features of the interior are the large reinforced concrete mushroom columns that support the first and second floors and the roof. The floors are reached by at least one freight elevator on the south wall of each unit and a set of metal, scissor staircases at the northwest corner. The concrete basement walls are covered with cork, which served as insulation for cooling with circulating water refrigeration systems that were optional to each tenant in the building. A tunnel, which runs under the south loading platform, supplies access to utility lines, drains for the cooling systems, and, at one time, access under Harris Avenue to the Merchants' Cold Storage Warehouse (demolished 1998). A boiler, which served as the heating plant for the building, is located in the basement.

The primary alterations to the PFPWC Building are the loss of the seven easternmost bays and the removal of most of the first-story and some of the second-story windows. The openings where the windows have been removed have been filled with concrete blocks. A rectangular concrete block structure has been added on top of the loading platform in the westernmost bays of the south elevation. During the period of vacancy, the exterior has suffered from deterioration and vandalism. Recently the windows and entryways have been secured with plywood panels and the Harris Avenue property line secured with fencing.

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SIGNIFICANCE

From 1929 to its closing in 1998, the Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse Company Building served as the state's most important distribution center for Rhode Island-grown and imported fresh fruits and vegetables. This building once stood among a number of provisions warehouse buildings and related structures in this area of the city. Most have been demolished as part of highway ramp improvements associated with the construction of Providence Place Mall. The Providence Fruit and Produce Company Warehouse is thus a survival of a once-vital commercial district associated with the growth of metropolitan Providence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The building is also significant as an excellent example of utilitarian industrial architecture. Designed by the locally prominent engineering firm of Jenks & Ballou, this building represents the mainstream adoption of reinforced concrete structural systems and the use of poured concrete mushroom columns.

History

The Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse Company Building (PFPWC) at 4-64 Harris Avenue is a surviving building of a once-vibrant provisions warehouse district. Located on the north side of the tracks of the New York, New Haven, & Hartford Railroad (NYNH&H), the district once included ten buildings constructed between 1894 and 1947. Collectively, these buildings represented over a century of development of Providence's food storage, processing, and distribution industries.

The PFWC Building was constructed in 1929 in response to a need for local fruit and produce merchants to have a central and convenient location to market their goods. Since 1773, when the Market House was built at Market Square in downtown Providence, local produce dealers operated from wagons and carts along Dyer and South Water Streets in the vicinity of the former Weybosset Street Bridge over the Moshassuck River. This open-air market flanked Providence's commercial waterfront. Construction of the Merchant's Cold Storage Warehouse along the tracks north of the city in 1894 represented the beginning of a shift from maritime delivery of perishable goods to delivery by rail. The growth of metropolitan Providence over the period from 1830 to 1930 required a centralization of the provision of food.

In Providence, food supplies were in demand to feed the growing urban population, which tripled between 1830 and 1865 and increased again during the peak of industrial expansion in the late-nineteenth century through the 1920s. The trend toward urbanized living required centralized sources for successfully supplying goods to the industrial and commercial centers. As rural people moved to the city and immigrants were drawn to the mills, the problems of providing food without the waste likely with perishable goods became an important issue. By the middle of the century, both warehousing and cold

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storage technologies were being developed to improve the storage and long-term preservation of foods and other commodities.¹

In the late nineteenth century, sections of the streets surrounding open lots near the river were leased to market gardeners for early morning trade.² By the mid-teens, frustration with traffic congestion in the downtown area and a restriction requiring that dealers vacate Market Square by 10:30 a.m. prompted a group of local produce men to seek a more suitable location for an outdoor market.³

The group formed the Providence Market Gardeners' Association and purchased a four-acre tract from the Dyer family in the Woonasquatucket valley, between Promenade Street and Davis Park. The dealers operated in open-air stalls at what became known as the Governor Dyer Cooperative Market. A large market building (extant) was planned in 1929, but construction was delayed until the late 1930s.

While the Governor Dyer Cooperative Market attracted many local produce dealers, a number remained at Market Square until the late 1920s. By that time, traffic congestion had increased to the point where local officials wished to move the dealers out of the downtown area. Early in 1927, the City Council ordered that all produce dealers move out of the area by July 1. In response, a group of Market Square dealers, headed by Frank A. Crossley, banded together to form Providence Terminal Market, Inc. (PTM, Inc.), for the purpose of securing land and constructing a market building at a convenient location on the fringes of the downtown area. Former Providence Mayor Joseph H. Gainer, served as the attorney and spokesman for the corporation, and headed the search for an appropriate location.⁴ In October 1927, the stockholders of the corporation voted unanimously to enter into an agreement with the Providence Produce Warehouse Company, a subsidiary of the NYNH&H Railroad, to erect a building on the railroad's former Yard 17. The site, which fronted on the tracks, was located south of the Merchants Cold Storage Warehouse (1894) on Harris Avenue in Providence's provisions warehouse district. The initial plans for the property included the construction of a \$740,000 building, which would be paid for over a period of 25 years from rent charged to the produce dealer occupants of the building's units.⁵

In early January 1928, PTM, Inc. announced that it expected to be in the new building by the end of the year. They also asked for and were granted an extension by the City Council to allow dealers to continue operating in the Market Square area until the new market building was completed.⁶ Construction of the building began in late July and was scheduled for completion by January 1, 1929, when the City Council agreement expired.⁷ Difficulties encountered with the construction of underground tunnels to the Merchants Cold Storage Warehouse, however, delayed the opening of the building until April 1929.⁸

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Financed by the Providence Produce Warehouse Company, the building was hailed by the national, state, local, and railroad officials who attended its opening celebration as the "finest and most efficient distributing unit for perishable foods in the United States."⁹ The \$1 million, Art Moderne facility was designed by Emory W. Ballou of the prominent local engineering firm of Jenks and Ballou.¹⁰ Constructed with a steel frame and poured concrete skeleton and finished with red brick, the two-story building measured 965-ft.-long by 60-ft.-wide. Its basement level extended to 90 ft. in width, extending out below the loading docks attached to the north and south elevations of the building. The interior was divided into narrow 15 to 20 ft.-wide units, but renters could customize their spaces by leasing adjoining units. The amount of rent depended on the number of units occupied and whether or not an elevator was installed and cooling apparatus was needed. If additional cold storage space was needed, the dealers could rent it at the neighboring Merchants Cold Storage Warehouse, which was easily accessible via the tunnel connecting the two buildings. Imported produce could be brought up to the building by rail on four spurs off the NYNH&H Railroad. After the goods were processed and packed, they could be loaded on to trucks from the Harris Avenue platform for local distribution.¹¹

The building was in continuous use by local produce dealers from 1929 to 1998. Among the longest-running businesses to operate there were the Tourtellot Company, an original tenant in 1929, remaining there until the early 1990s; and William J. Canaan, Inc., which operated there for some 60 years. From the time of its establishment until the late 1980s, the PFWC Building was a thriving hub for local food distribution, handling all manners of locally grown and imported vegetables and fruits. In the 1990s, however, large supermarket chains began buying much of their produce direct from growers, thereby eliminating a significant portion of the wholesalers' business.

The physical appearance of the building reflects the downturn in the fortunes of the city's produce dealers. In the 1980s, several bays and a railway tower at the east end of the building were removed to make way for construction of a ramp off Interstate 95 necessitated by the construction of Providence Place Mall. In 1998 the State of Rhode Island acquired ownership of the PFWC, transferring supervision of the property to the R.I. Department of Transportation. The last produce vendors left the building in the same year; it has been vacant since that time. Current plans (2004) call for a rehabilitation of the building and conversion to mixed residential and commercial use.

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Notes

- ¹ National Register nomination form for *Provisions Warehouse Historic District*, p. 24
- ² John Hutchins Cady, *The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence*, p. 238
- ³ *ibid.*, p. 239
- ⁴ *Providence Journal* (27 September 1927): 5
- ⁵ *Providence Journal* (5 October 1927): 24
- ⁶ *Providence Journal* (8 January 1928): 6
- ⁷ *Providence Journal* (14 July 1928): 6
- ⁸ *Providence Journal* (16 April 1929): 1
- ⁹ *ibid.*
- ¹⁰ This description of Jenks & Ballou is taken from the 1994 *Provisions Warehouse Historic District* nomination form (pps. 33-4):
- Jenks and Ballou, established about 1914 by Richard P. Jenks and Henry W. Ballou, is another important engineering firm of the period whose work is represented in this district. Little has been documented of their career and designs. This is, in part, due to Henry Ballou's final wish that his personal papers be destroyed and his office disbanded when he died in 1964 at the age of 89. However, it is known that Henry Ballou graduated from MIT, that the firm's office was located on the top floor of the Industrial Trust Building, and that the firm was active in Rhode Island for almost 50 years (*Providence Journal* 3 January 1964: 1,4). Jenks & Ballou worked both in the designing of buildings, for instance Fram Engineering, Inc (1963-4), 105 Oak Avenue, East Providence; New England Telephone and Telegraph Co. (date not recorded), East Providence; laboratory and pumping facilities at Quonset Point Naval Air Station (date unknown); and various sewage line projects throughout the state.
- ¹¹ *Providence Magazine* (May 1929): 190, *Providence Journal* (16 April 1929): 2

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Books and Monographs

Cady, John Hutchins. *The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence: 1636-1950*. Providence: The Book Shop, 1957.

Government Publications

Sanderson, Edward F. and Wm. McKenzie Woodward.

Providence: A Citywide Survey of Historic Resources. Providence: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1986.

Statewide Historical Preservation Report P-P-6: Providence Industrial Sites. Providence: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1981.

Articles

“\$1,000,000 Produce Terminal Opened.” *Providence Journal*. 16 April 1929: 1

“Marketmen Vote Unanimously to Enter Into Contract with New Haven Railroad.” *Providence Journal* (5 October 1927): 24.

“Million Dollar Market Terminal Is Opened.” *Providence Magazine* (May 1929): 190.

“Produce Men Plan Move About Jan. 1.” *Providence Journal* (14 July 1928): 9.

“Terminal Market Agreement Signed.” *Providence Journal* (8 January 1927): 6.

“Terminal Market Plan Advancing.” *Providence Journal* (29 November 1927): 24.

“Terminal Market to be Built.” *Providence Journal* (27 September 1927): 5

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Electronic Sources

Terp, Rachel. Providence Architecture: Providence Produce Warehouse. Brown University 24 September 2004.
<http://www.brown.edu/Courses/HA0191/providenceproducewarehouse.html>

Unpublished sources

Adaptive Reuse Plan for the Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse Company Building. William D. Warner Architects and Planners. March 2003. On file, Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

Providence Fruit and Warehouse Company Building, RIHRA No. PROV-0004 (1998). On file, Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

Note: This document includes process photography taken while the warehouse was still in operation.

Providence Industrial Sites and Commercial Buildings Survey. Providence Preservation Society, 2001.

Provisions Warehouse Historic District. National Register of Historic Places Evaluation (1994). Prepared by Virginia Adams and Anne E. Tait, Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. On file, Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

Provisions Warehouse Historic District. HABS No. RI-408 (1998). Prepared by Nicolas C. Avery, Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. On file, Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

Engineering Drawing

Typical Building Section. Prepared by Odeh Engineers as part of the Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse Co. Investigation (November 2002).

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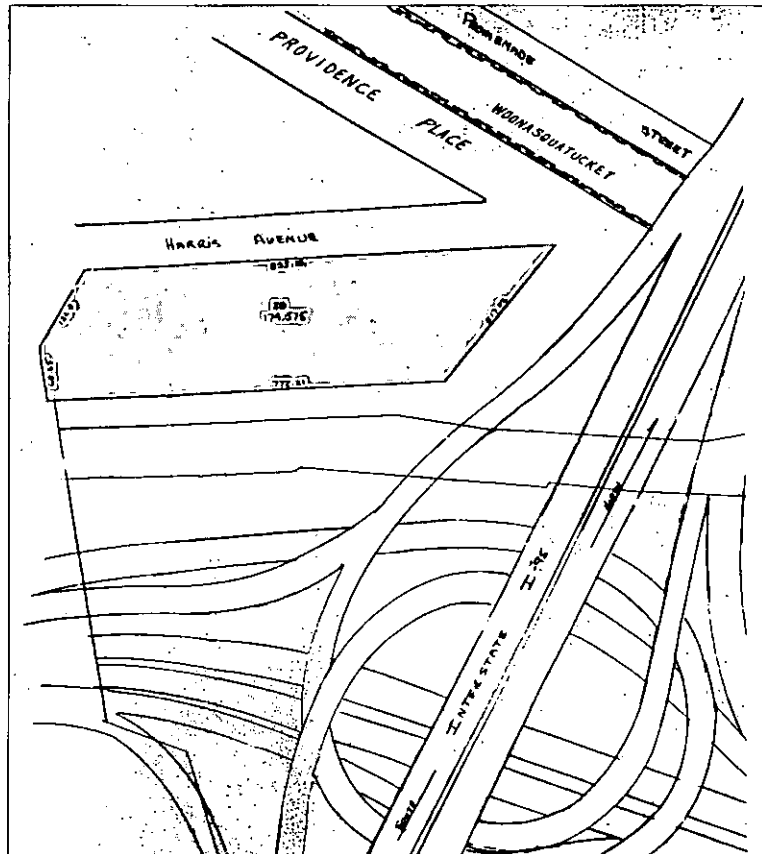
GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Boundary Description

The boundaries of the Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse Company building are contiguous with Providence Tax Assessor's Plat 19, Lot 38.

Boundary Justification

These boundaries, comprising about 4 acres, define all of the land historically associated with the Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse Company during almost seven decades of commercial occupancy.



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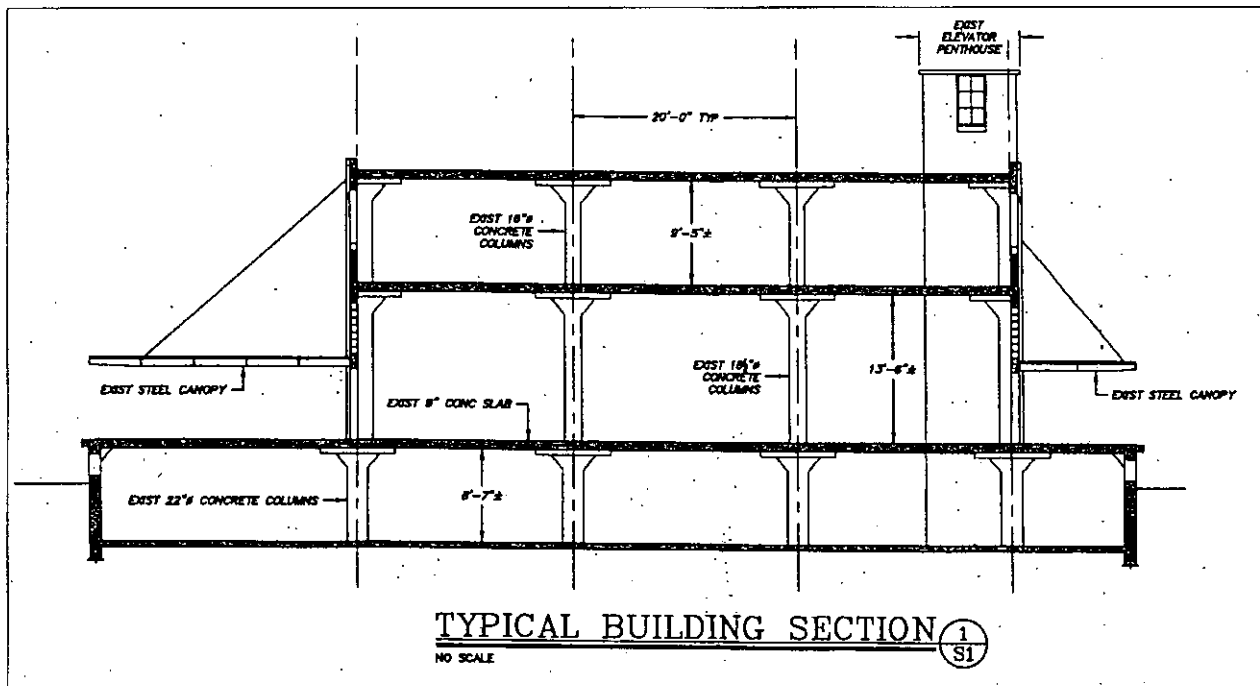


Figure 1
Typical Building Section
Prepared by Odeh Engineers, Inc.
November 2002

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Photographs

(Items 1 and 2 are the same for all photographs)

1. Providence Fruit and Produce Warehouse Company Building
2. Providence County, Rhode Island

(Items 3, 4, and 5 are the same for photographs 1-3)

3. Robert Brewster, images from RIHRA PROV-004 recording
4. 1998
5. On file: Rhode Island Historical Society Library
121 Hope Street, Providence, RI
Rhode Island Historic Resources Archive recording (RIHRA Prov-0004)

6. Exterior view northeast (RIHRA 0004-1)

7. #1

6. Exterior 2. view southeast (RIHRA 0004-2)

7. #2

6. Interior view of William J. Canaan, Inc., first floor, looking west, showing produce displays and office at right (RIHRA 0004-8)

7. #3

3. Edward Connors

4. 2004

5. On file: Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission
150 Benefit Street, Providence, RI

6. General view looking west from roof of Providence Place parking garage

7. #4





