

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill

Other names/site number: Imperial Knife Factory

Name of related multiple property listing:

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

## 2. Location

Street & number: 60 King Street

City or town: Providence State: RI County: Providence

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this x 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 x meets     does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     x statewide     local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

x A     B     x C     D

		<u>6/2/2017</u>
<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>		<b>Date</b>
<u>Rhode Island Historical Preservation &amp; Heritage Commission</u>		
<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>		

In my opinion, the property <u>   </u> meets <u>   </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Title :</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
 determined eligible for the National Register  
 determined not eligible for the National Register  
 removed from the National Register  
 other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 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.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: manufacturing facility

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

WORK IN PROGRESS

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Industrial

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, CONCRETE, ASPHALT

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill was constructed ca. 1923, with several additions built between 1933 and 1984 (Fig. 1), on an approximately 8.65-acre lot on the north bank of the Woonasquatucket River in the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island. Located to the southwest of Manton Avenue, the neighborhood's principal thoroughfare, the property is bounded by King Street on the north, Sheridan Street on the east, Route 6 on to the south, and on the west by the rear lot lines of properties facing Salmon Street. The ca. 1923 building was designed by Woonsocket, Rhode Island architect Walter Fontaine and built by O.D. Purington and Company of Providence. The building is three stories tall, constructed of brick with minimal ornamentation, features pier-and-spandrel walls, and is capped by a flat roof. Because the site slopes down to the south, there are three full floors on the south elevation but just two are above-grade on the north. Despite several later additions, the ca. 1923 building is a well-preserved example of industrial architecture constructed for textile manufacture and retains a high degree of historic and architectural integrity.

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### Narrative Description

#### *Main Block (ca. 1923)*

The main block of the Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill, built ca. 1923, is a three-story, steel frame industrial building clad with red brick. The building is constructed on a poured-concrete

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foundation and topped by a flat roof. The building measures roughly 220 feet wide by approximately 110 feet deep. Regularly spaced brick piers extend from the foundation to the roof. The resulting bays contain groups of rectangular window openings with cast concrete sills, mostly set in groups of four, and divided into pairs by a wide wood mullion. Where the sash survive, most are 24-pane, fixed steel sash topped by eight-pane steel transoms with operable awning sash.

The north elevation is nine bays wide (Photos 1, 2). Its second and third floors are above-grade, while the first story is below. An approximately 14-foot high concrete retaining wall parallels the elevation, creating a 22-foot-wide areaway that is open at the east end. At the west end, the areaway is occupied by a 1968 two-story concrete block addition that wraps around the northwest corner of the building (described below). The window openings at the first story contain plywood infill. Many of the openings at the second and third stories contain the original steel sash; some of the transoms are filled with wood infill and exhaust vents. Wood panel and glazed fire doors are located in the fifth bay of each story (Photo 3). At the second and third stories, the doors access a metal fire escape.

The composition of the south elevation nearly matches that of the north (Photos 4-6). At its west end, there are two narrow bays divided by a slender brick pier, each containing a pair of window openings, rather than a group of four. A three-story stair tower projects out from the east end of the elevation, obscuring the easternmost bays. There are four first-floor entries: a flush metal door surrounded by wood panel infill, capped by a modern wood canopy, occupies the first bay; a window opening has been converted and infilled with a rolling overhead garage door in the seventh bay; and the eighth bay contains a rolling overhead garage door and a replacement metal slab. The window openings at the first story contain brick and wood panel infill. The second and third stories contain mostly plywood infill or exhaust vents; some of the multi-light transoms retain their original glazing units. The three-story, brick stair tower is three-bays wide by two-bays deep; its bays are delineated by brick piers (Photos 6, 7). The stair hall is accessed via a segmental-arched wood door on the south elevation, with diagonal bead board panels set beneath plywood infill (Photo 8). Windows are set within segmental arched openings with cast concrete sills; the south elevation contains windows in the center bay between the first and second and second and third floors, while the west elevation contains a single window in each of its two bays, at all three floors. The east elevation of the stair tower, the first story of which is obscured by a later addition, contains no visible window openings. Six of the openings retain portions of the original sash, and the remaining openings contain plywood infill.

The four-bay-wide west elevation is partially obscured by the 1968 concrete block addition that extends across the width of its first floor (Photos 9, 10). The third story retains most of the original steel sash and cast concrete sills. Window openings at the second floor, largely obscured by the addition, are filled with concrete block and plywood but most retain their transom sash. A flat-roofed, brick stair tower, part of the original ca. 1923 construction, projects from the south end of the west elevation, rising to half the height of the building's third story and being one-half the width of one bay of the building. The tower contains two elongated window openings on its west elevation; the opening at the first story contains plywood infill and the second-story opening contains a 28-light, steel sash window with a 4x2 light awning section. Both openings

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are framed by cast concrete sills. The south and north elevations of the stair tower are blank walls.

The east elevation of the main block measures four bays wide (Photo 11). The first story is connected to the 1937 Manufacturing and Storage addition (described below) and is not visible. The window openings at the second and third stories retain their original cast concrete sills but are mostly filled with concrete block; each opening contains two small window openings with four-light, fixed, steel sash.

On the interior (Photos 17-26), each floor is comprised of a large, open space with evenly-spaced rows of painted, I-beam posts supporting I-beams above. The I-beam posts are bolted to the floor plates on the second and third floors. Walls are largely intact and are constructed of exposed, painted brick. The first level has a poured-concrete floor and at the second and third floors, there is painted wood floor decking (deteriorated in some locations due to water infiltration and fire damage). Plywood and sheetrock partition walls subdivide the south end, the northwest corner, and the east end of the space. A boiler room is located in the northeast corner of the first floor. A boiler house is shown on maps from 1937, 1950 and 1956, attached to the southeast corner of the ca. 1923 mill. The interior walls of the former boiler house are painted brick, the floor is concrete, and there are exposed painted wood sheathing boards above. Later additions to the mill, including a 1957 expansion of this space, have obscured the exterior walls of the former boiler house and visible window openings have been bricked in.

Vertical access in the main block is provided by two runs of wood stairs located within the stair towers at the southeast and southwest corners of the building (Photos 20, 23). Both stairs provide access from the first floor to the third floor and feature simple wood treads with a metal grooved nosing, simple square-plan newel posts, and hardwood landings between each floor. The stair halls are enclosed by painted bead board knee walls with wood handrails. Pipe metal handrails are mounted to the outer brick walls. The main block also contains one enclosed 4,000-pound capacity freight elevator (inoperable) at its southeast corner (Photo 17).

### ***Additions (1933-1984)***

*The ca. 1923 building has been expanded with a number of additions, described below, which themselves lack significance and/or lack integrity.*

Building permits indicate that the one-story, flat-roof, concrete-block building located to the southeast of the ca. 1923 main block was constructed in 1933 (Photo 12). Although the permit states that the building would be used for storage, a 1939 aerial image shows its roof with seven north-facing sawtooth windows, suggesting it was used for manufacturing (Fig. 3). The sawtooth windows were removed by 1955. This building was originally connected to the ca. 1923 mill by a narrow, L-plan passage that extended north off the northwest corner of the building and then turned west to meet the east elevation of the ca. 1923 mill (Fig. 2). This connector does not survive; a large 1937 addition (described below) and an addition to the boiler house from 1957 are in its location. The north, south, and east elevations of the 1933 building are obscured by the 1937 addition and by later additions from 1957 and 1972. The elevations have also been heavily

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modified through the infilling of window and door openings and the insertion of new openings. Due to additions from 1957 and 1971, only a portion of the west elevation remains visible. It features one loading bay with a rolling overhead vinyl garage door capped with a wood hood, a pair of metal doors on a roughly-square plan bump-out near the north end of the elevation, one infilled entrance, and six window openings with plywood infill. Four of the window openings have concrete sills and lintels. The interior features a long concrete floor plate with cylindrical steel columns supporting steel I-beams. The concrete block walls are painted and the ceiling features exposed wood decking (Photo 27).

A one-story, flat-roof, concrete-block manufacturing and storage addition which extends off the east elevation of the ca. 1923 main block was constructed in 1937. The only exposed elevation is the north elevation, which features four window openings with plywood infill, cast concrete sills, and wood lintels (Photo 13). The east elevation is obscured by a 1957 addition (described below). The south elevation abuts the 1933 building. The interior features a concrete floor plate with cylindrical steel columns and beams and exposed wood decking (Photo 28).

A small, one-story, red-brick addition was constructed in 1944, extending off roughly the center of the south elevation of the ca. 1923 main block (Photos 4, 5). It has an exposed concrete foundation and a flat roof. Measuring three bays wide and two bays deep, the addition has infilled window openings and a wood pedestrian door topped by a multi-light transom. All of the openings are framed by cast concrete sills and lintels. The south elevation of the addition is almost entirely obscured by an addition from 1972 (described below). The interior features a carpeted floor, sheetrock walls, and exposed, painted wood roof decking.

A small, one-story, brick addition was constructed ca. 1950 on the south elevation of the southwest stair tower (Photo 9). The addition first appears on the 1950 Sanborn map. It is unknown what the addition was used for. The block is two bays long and two bays deep. Square window openings feature concrete sills, and a pedestrian door opening on the east elevation contains plywood infill.

At the northeast corner of the complex is a one-story, concrete-block addition with a raised concrete foundation and a flat roof, built in 1957 (Photo 14). This addition, which replaced a machine and carpentry shop shown on maps from 1937, 1950 and 1956 (Figs. 2, 4), was used by Imperial Knife for the manufacturing of table knives and forks. It abuts the east elevation of the 1937 addition and the north elevation of the 1933 addition. The eight-bays-wide east elevation features an aluminum-framed curtain wall of multi-light windows arranged in groups of two and three and separated by wide steel mullions. An awning sash is located at the bottom half of the opening as well as within the center column of the top half of the openings. A wide, corrugated metal panel is affixed to the elevation below the roofline. A rolling overhead vinyl garage door and a pedestrian entrance are located a bit south of center. The north elevation features five punched openings; two at the east end are infilled with metal vents and the other three to the west are infilled with plywood. The interior features a concrete floor plate with exposed ductwork and painted wood roof decking (Photo 29). The concrete-block walls are painted and sheetrock office partitions are located at the southeast corner.

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A one-story, corrugated metal shed (Photo 15) is located in the areaway, along the east elevation of the addition. Building permits indicate that four metal blower sheds were constructed by the Imperial Knife Company in 1957; however, it is unlikely that this corrugated metal shed is one of these blower sheds, since it is built up against the poured concrete retaining wall which was constructed in 1958. Aerial images do not show this area of the mill clearly so it is difficult to determine a date of construction. The shed is supported by metal frame on a poured concrete foundation. Boxed wood pipe chases extend from the main block to the shed.

A one- and two-story, L-plan, concrete-block, flat-roof building extends north from the southwest stair tower of the ca. 1923 main block, runs along the entire west elevation of the main block, and wraps around nearly half of the north elevation of the main block (Photos 1, 9, 10). This addition was constructed in 1968. The building permit indicates that the building was used for the manufacturing of tableware. The one-story west elevation features a stepped concrete water table following a downward north to south slope, regularly-spaced infilled window openings, and a rolling overhead vinyl garage door at the northwest corner. The addition rises to two stories at its northwest corner. The north elevation lacks windows except at its east end, where there are three fixed steel sash. The east elevation of the north wing of the addition has a pair of six-by-four-light metal sash windows on the second story. Portions of the roof of this addition recently collapsed. The interior features a concrete floor with painted concrete block walls and exposed painted wood decking on the first floor (Photo 30). The second floor has sheetrock office partitions with dropped acoustic tile ceilings.

An addition to the boiler room and another shipping and receiving platform was added in 1971 at the intersection of the ca. 1923 main block and the 1933 addition (Photos 4, 6). Its plan consists of a rectangular mass between the buildings with a narrow loading dock extension to the west from its southwest corner, in front of, and separated from, the main building's southeast stair tower. The one-story, concrete-block addition rises from an exposed concrete foundation to a flat roof and features four loading bays on the south elevation, two inoperable steel slab doors, and several window openings and pedestrian entrances with cast concrete sills. The addition of this block obscured the south elevation of the original boiler house.

A one-story, concrete-block, flat-roof, L-plan manufacturing addition with an exposed concrete foundation extends along most of the east and all of the south elevations of the 1933 addition (Photo 16). Constructed in 1972, this block features loading bays with rolling overhead vinyl garage doors, several window openings, and a total of five pedestrian entrances with flush metal replacement doors and cast concrete sills. The interior is subdivided with concrete block and sheetrock partitions to accommodate office space and lavatories. Interior finishes consist of modern ceramic tile and concrete flooring, painted concrete block and sheetrock walls, and dropped acoustic tile and sheetrock ceilings.

A one-story, red brick structure that extends off the south elevation of the 1944 addition was also constructed in 1972 (Photos 4, 5). This appears to have been constructed to increase the capacity of the shipping and receiving area. The block is constructed on an exposed concrete foundation and is capped by a flat roof. Two bays wide and two bays deep, the addition has two loading bays on its south elevation (one infilled with concrete block), two infilled window openings with



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cast concrete sills, and a flat, steel replacement door on the west elevation accessed by a concrete stair. A metal-enclosed conveyor extends from the east end of the north elevation to the second story of the main block. The interior features a poured concrete floor, painted brick exterior walls, and exposed painted wood roof decking.

A one-story, concrete-block, flat-roof addition was constructed in 1984 on the east elevation of the first 1972 addition (Photo 16). The building permit indicates that this block was to be used for a new hydration system and a woman's lavatory. The south elevation of this block features a single pedestrian entrance and a rolling overhead garage door. Several window openings (one infilled) and a pedestrian entrance are located on the east elevation. A single infilled window opening is located on the north elevation. The interior is subdivided with sheetrock partitions to accommodate storage space and lavatories. Interior finishes consist of concrete flooring, painted concrete block and sheetrock walls, exposed wood decking and dropped acoustic tile ceilings.

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## 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.)

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

INDUSTRY

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

ca. 1923 – 1956

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

ca. 1923

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Walter F. Fontaine, architect

O.D. Purington and Company, builder

\_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Built ca. 1923, the Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill is significant at the state level under Criterion A in the area of industry, for its association with the French worsted industry in Rhode Island. The “French system” mills, which differed from English system mills in their spinning methods, garnered a foothold in the state during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the cotton spinning and weaving industry began to decline due to southern competition. The Rochambeau Worsted Company was the third textile-related

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operation in Rhode Island begun by the Lepoutre family of Roubaix, France; the first two were located in the city of Woonsocket, which had a large French-Canadian immigrant population. The construction of the Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill is illustrative of the expansion of French investment into Providence. The history of the mill also exemplifies the success and resilience of the French system mills; the company survived the Great Depression and even expanded in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with its introduction of synthetic yarn manufacture. The Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill is also significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture, as a well-preserved example of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century industrial architecture in New England and for its association with the locally-significant architect Walter Fontaine. The ca. 1923 building has been expanded with a number of additions – typical of active industrial buildings – which themselves lack significance due to age and/or lack integrity. The ca. 1923 main block, however, retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The period of significance begins with the construction of the mill in ca. 1923 and extends to 1956, when the Rochambeau Worsted Company ceased operations at the site.<sup>1</sup>

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Rochambeau Worsted Company was incorporated in 1922 by Louis and Auguste Lepoutre of Roubaix, France, with plans for a large textile complex in the Olneyville section of Providence.<sup>2</sup> The Lepoutre family was not new to Rhode Island industry. In 1900, the brothers built the Lafayette Worsted Company Mill in Woonsocket. Auguste's son, Jacques, founded the Verdun Mill, also in Woonsocket, in 1922.<sup>3</sup> The Lepoutres were initially attracted to the city through the efforts of Aram Pothier (1856-1928), a Quebec native who moved to Woonsocket in 1870 and became a state representative (1887-1888), Mayor of Woonsocket (1894-1895), Lieutenant Governor (1897-1898) and Governor (1909-1915). Pothier was appointed to serve as a commissioner to the Paris Trade Expositions of 1889 and 1900, with the goal of attracting foreign investment to Woonsocket. Pothier targeted interests at the center of French wool textile production, in Tourcoing and Roubaix, France and in Verviers, Belgium. His selling points were threefold: first, foreign outfits could bypass the recently-approved McKinley Tariff, which raised the average duty on imports to almost 50 percent, if they owned manufacturing facilities in the United States; second, Woonsocket sheltered a significant French-speaking workforce; and third, the City was willing to offer substantial tax incentives to textile investors. Pothier's efforts were hugely successful, resulting in a wave of new Belgian- and French-owned worsted mills in Woonsocket at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the Guerin Spinning Company (1895), the

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<sup>1</sup> City directories indicate that the Rochambeau Worsted Company was located at 60 King Street in 1956 but in 1957 the address is identified as vacant. *Polk's Providence City Directory* (Providence, RI: R.L. Polk & Co., 1956 and 1957).

<sup>2</sup> Records do not indicate why the company chose the name Rochambeau. It is possible that it was intended as a tribute to Marshal Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau (1725-1807), commander-in-chief of the French Expeditionary Force that helped the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. It was from Newport, Rhode Island that Rochambeau departed with his French forces to assist the Continental Army.

<sup>3</sup> "Franco-Belgian Industrialists." <http://www.woonsocket.org/francobel.html>. *Textile World*, vol. 61, part 2 (27 May 1922):3193.

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Loridan Worsted Company (1899; demolished), the French Worsted Company (1906; NR 2008; demolished) and the Jules Desurmont Worsted Company (1907; NR 2006).<sup>4</sup> These mills represented a significant investment of European capital in Rhode Island's worsted spinning industry.

The introduction of French system mills in Woonsocket also represented a shift in worsted spinning methods from the well-established English or "Bradford" system. The English process involved sorting wool fibers by length, oiling the fibers, heating and twisting the fibers during combing, and spinning the yarn on a wood frame. The French system involved sorting wool fibers by fineness rather than length, combing the fibers with unheated rollers or pins without oil, and spinning the yarn on mule spinners. This system resulted in soft, smooth, elastic yarn that was suitable for wool blends with cotton or silk, such as underwear, hosiery and dress goods. The yarn was initially used for high quality women's wear, but gradually became the yarn of choice for almost all woolen or worsted cloth produced in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

The Lepoutres' Lafayette Worsted Company Mill was one of the largest textile operations in Woonsocket in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While this was a period of decline for New England's cotton-related industry, as companies moved south to take advantage of cheaper labor, woolen-related concerns continued to do well. It is in this context that the Lepoutre family founded the Rochambeau Worsted Company in Providence, which would produce French and Belgian-spun Merino wool yarns, worsted yarns, silk and specialty blends. As noted above, the city of Woonsocket had enjoyed significant French and Belgian investment in its industry since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the Rochambeau Worsted Company illustrates the expansion of foreign investment in Providence's textile industry.

The Lepoutres chose to locate their new mill on the west side of Providence, in Olneyville, a heavily-industrialized neighborhood along the Woonasquatucket River. Olneyville was home to various minor industries, including a grist mill, a paper mill, a forge and a foundry, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, development in Olneyville intensified. Numerous woolen textile mills were established or expanded during or soon after the Civil War, including the Atlantic Mills (1851, 1863), Riverside Mills (1863; demolished) and the Weybosset Mills Complex (1866; NR 2008). Olneyville continued to serve as an important center for worsted production in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with new firms going into operation, including the National Providence and Worsted Mills (1881; NR 2003), Paragon Worsted Co. (1898; NR 2007) and Colwell Worsted Mills (ca. 1906).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Connors, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for French Worsted Company Complex, Woonsocket, RI*.

<sup>5</sup> Mira Wilkins, *The History of Foreign Investment in the United States to 1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989):358.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Connors, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for Earnscliffe Woolen/Paragon Worsted Company Mill Complex, Providence, RI*. Jenny R. Fields and Alyssa Wood, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for Weybosset Mills Complex, Providence, RI*. Clark Schoettle, Jennifer Gould and Edward Connors, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for National and Providence Worsted Mills, Providence, RI*.

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In Olneyville, the Lepoutre Brothers found land in an established industrial corridor and a site that was very close to the Woonasquatucket Railway line (chartered by factory owners in 1871). They also found a population of French-Canadian immigrants,<sup>7</sup> which would have been appealing to a company that was based in France and one that was working at the time with a French-Canadian workforce in Woonsocket. The first large-scale migration of French-speaking immigrants from eastern Canada to Rhode Island occurred in the 1860s, prompted by a long-term agricultural depression. In search of employment opportunities in the rapidly expanding industrial towns and cities of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, nearly one third of Quebec's population relocated to New England between 1860 and 1930.<sup>8</sup> In Rhode Island, Woonsocket was the center of the French-Canadian immigrant community. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, pockets of French-Canadians could be found in other areas, as well, including Olneyville.

In the spring and summer of 1922, the Rochambeau Worsted Company purchased five pieces of land in Olneyville totaling about 400,000 square feet (about 9 acres), received a permit to construct a three-story brick mill, and awarded the contract to O.D. Purington & Co. of Providence. By August of that year, construction on the foundation had begun<sup>9</sup> and the building appears to have been completed in 1923; the 1923-1924 *Providence House Directory* includes an entry for the Rochambeau Worsted Company at the corner of Dearborn and King.<sup>10</sup> The mill was designed by Walter Fontaine, a Woonsocket-based architect, and is typical of textile-manufacturing buildings of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The design employed "slow-burning" construction techniques like brick exterior walls, hardwood floor decking, and widely-spaced cast-iron columns supporting heavy timber and steel I-beams. Large windows lit the open-plan interior spaces, while the turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century development of tar paper and gravel-tar coatings allowed for a flat roof. The exterior, with its simple pier-and-spandrel walls, exhibits minimal ornamentation – typical of the plain brick buildings constructed throughout Rhode Island for the manufacture of textiles.

The Rochambeau Worsted Company anticipated employing 200 workers at the outset but, according to a trade journal from the period, expected to expand to a work force of 1,000. Accordingly, the company "planned to eventually build a structure which will be five times as large as the present building," which would have made it one of the largest worsted yarn mills in New England. In fact, the three-story mill had been designed to be six stories; the company planned to add the additional stories later, though they were never built.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 1930 and 1940 census records indicate that the residents of the area around the mill were largely New England born with some French Canadian, Irish, and Italian immigrants.

<sup>8</sup> Gerard J. Brault, *French-Canadian Heritage in New England* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986):2.

<sup>9</sup> *America's Textile Reporter*, vol. 36 (18 May 1922):1278. *Textile World*, vol. 61, part 2 (27 May 1922):3193. *Drug & Chemical Markets*, vol. 11 (22 August 1922):417. *Fibre & Fabric*, vol. 75 (22 August 1922):17. *Textiles*, vols. 20-21 (September 1922):50.

<sup>10</sup> *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book, 1923-1924* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co.):271.

<sup>11</sup> *Textiles*, vols. 20-21 (September 1922):50.

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The Rochambeau Worsted Company successfully maintained operations at the King Street location throughout the Great Depression, faring much better than many of its cotton textile counterparts who witnessed a southern migration in search of cheaper power and labor costs. This was likely due at least in part to diversification: an advertisement in the Board of Trade Journal from the October 1930 edition of Providence Magazine indicates that in addition to woolen goods, the Rochambeau Worsted Company was also manufacturing Rayon by that time. A synthetic silk fiber invented in France, Rayon was cheaper and more resilient than wool. First manufactured in the United States in 1910, Rayon production boomed after 1927, with the invention of a crepe twist in Rayon yarn that made the material suitable for dress fabrics. In Providence, two companies began producing Rayon yarn in 1928: the American Silk Spinning Company at the former Oriental Mills (ca. 1860 et seq.; NR 2005) and the Franklin Rayon Corporation, later renamed Atlantic Rayon (ca. 1873 et seq.; demolished).<sup>12</sup> The Rochambeau Worsted Company appears to have followed soon after.

The Rochambeau Worsted Company continued to expand in the 1930s and 1940s. Annual Reports of the Chief Factory Inspector indicate that the firm grew from 94 employees in 1930 to 271 employees in 1935, and two large, one-story additions were built in 1933 and 1937. The 1933 addition was constructed by O.D. Purington & Co.; its sawtooth roof (not extant) indicates it was used for manufacturing. The building permit for the 1937 addition stated it would be used for storage and manufacturing. The company also built a small shipping and receiving block off the south elevation of the ca. 1923 building in 1944 and a small addition to the southwest stair tower by 1950.

Unfortunately, a general downturn in the wool market, exacerbated by the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, presaged the Rochambeau Worsted Company's decline. The firm terminated operations in the 1950s and appear to have vacated the mill on King Street in 1956.<sup>13</sup> By 1957, the property was owned by the Imperial Knife Company, a manufacturer of folding pocket knives founded in 1916. The Imperial Knife Company planned to use the King Street property primarily to produce stainless steel tableware, while maintaining its larger complex in Providence's Jewelry District (1893, 1903; NR 1985). According to building permits, the one-story, concrete-block 1957 addition was built for the manufacture of table knives and forks. Imperial Knife was also responsible for the large 1968 addition along the west and north elevations of the first mill, three additions erected in the 1970s and the small addition built in 1984.

The King Street mill became the Imperial Knife's main production plant after the Jewelry District plant closed in the 1970s, but only for a brief period. The company vacated the King Street location in October of 1987 and the tableware division was relocated to Imperial's

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<sup>12</sup> Virginia H. Adams, Jenny R. Fields and Mark G. Rayburn, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for Oriental Mills, Providence, RI*.

<sup>13</sup> City directories indicate that the Rochambeau Worsted Company was located at 60 King Street in 1956 but in 1957 the address is identified as vacant. *Polk's Providence City Directory* (Providence, RI: R.L. Polk & Co., 1956 and 1957).

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Ellenville, New York factory, with the objective of reducing overhead.<sup>14</sup> In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill was utilized by multiple commercial and manufacturing tenants. In 2014 the property was acquired by a local community development corporation after being vacant for seven years with the goal of rehabilitating and redeveloping the site into an affordable and market rate rental property.

*Walter F. Fontaine, Architect*

Walter F. Fontaine (1871–1938) was a prominent Woonsocket-based architect of French-Canadian descent, who began his career apprenticing under fellow Woonsocket architect Willard Kent. After additional training in Europe, Fontaine returned to the United States and found employment with the Providence firm of Stone, Carpenter and Willson, the leading architectural firm in the city, where he remained for eleven years. Fontaine opened his own practice in Woonsocket in 1901, partnered with Elmer H. Kinnicutt from 1903 to 1910, worked independently for several years, and was then joined by his sons in the firm, which became known as Walter F. Fontaine & Sons. He died at this home in Charlestown, Rhode Island, in the Hurricane of 1938.<sup>15</sup>

Fontaine designed a number of civic and religious buildings in Woonsocket and elsewhere in Rhode Island, either alone or with Fontaine & Kinnicutt or Walter F. Fontaine & Sons. Examples include: the Woonsocket Police Station (ca. 1904), Church of the Holy Family (1909; NR 1982), Woonsocket YMCA (1910), St. Ann's Church (1913-1914; NR 1982), Woonsocket High School (1914), and Mount St. Charles Academy (1924), all in Woonsocket; Our Lady of Lourdes Rectory and School (1905; NR 1990), St. Charles Borromeo R. C. Church (1915; NR 1988), and St. Charles Borromeo R. C. School (1932; NR 1988) in Providence; and St. Matthew's Church (1929; NR 1979) in Central Falls. Fontaine designed factories for the Alsace Worsted Company (1904), the French Worsted Company (1906; NR 2008; demolished) and the American Paper Tube Company (1916), all in Woonsocket.<sup>16</sup> This experience, along with his deep roots in Woonsocket, where the Lepoutre family operated the Lafayette Mill and the Verdun Mill, likely contributed to Fontaine being selected to design the Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill in Olneyville.

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<sup>14</sup> Ruth Morrison Associates, "Imperial Announces Fall Closings of King Street Plant" [Press Release], 1987. <http://www.collectors-of-schrades-r.us/articles/King-st-closeing-06-1987.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> *Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island, Vol. III* (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1908):2205-2206. "Walter F. Fontaine." <http://www.woonsocket.org/fontaine.html>.

<sup>16</sup> *Engineering News*, vol. 51 (January-June 1904):498. *The American Contractor*, vol. 37 (8 January 1916):33. Edward Connors, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for French Worsted Company Complex, Woonsocket, RI*.



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“Cutlery will carve out new home for Rhode Island textile mill.” 29 October 1956.

### ***Providence Journal* articles**

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“France honors Woonsocket mill man for War heroism.” 31 December 1929.

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“Rhode Island mills set up plant in Maine.” 15 December 1935.

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“To close Imperial Place plant, unite at King St.” 31 January 1984.

“Verdun Co. head dies at age 62.” 20 March 1956.

“Woonsocket mill founder is dead.” 8 August 1922.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) 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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** 8.65 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                         |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 41.823045° | Longitude: -71.454047° |
| 2. Latitude:            | Longitude:             |
| 3. Latitude:            | Longitude:             |
| 4. Latitude:            | Longitude:             |

Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill  
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Or

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill is located on the south side of King Street at its intersection with Salmon Street in the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island. The nominated property occupies an approximately 8.65-acre lot that corresponds with Providence Assessor's Plat 96, Lot 284.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary is limited to the parcel of land historically associated with the Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Geoffrey E. Melhuish/Senior Preservation Planner & Alisa Augenstein/  
Preservation Planner  
organization: Epsilon Associates, Inc.  
street & number: 3 Clock Tower Place, Suite 250  
city or town: Maynard state: MA zip code: 01754  
e-mail: gmelhuish@epsilonassociates.com  
telephone: 978-461-6224  
date: January 31, 2017

---

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill  
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## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property:	Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill
City or Vicinity:	Providence
County:	Providence
State:	Rhode Island
Name of Photographer:	Alisa Augenstein, Epsilon Associates, Inc.
Date of Photographs:	June 2014
Location of Original Digital Files:	Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, 150 Benefit Street, Providence, RI 02903
Number of Photographs:	30

#### Photo #1

North elevation of ca. 1923 mill and north elevation of 1968 addition, camera facing southeast.

#### Photo #2

North elevation of ca. 1923 mill, camera facing southeast.

#### Photo #3

Detail of wood paneled fire door on north elevation of ca. 1923 mill, camera facing southwest.

#### Photo #4

South elevation of ca. 1923 mill and 1944 (center left), 1971 (right) and 1972 (center right) additions, camera facing northeast.

#### Photo #5

East elevation of 1972 addition (left), east elevation of 1944 addition (center) and south elevation of ca. 1923 mill (right), camera facing west.

#### Photo #6

South elevation of stair tower at the southeast corner of the ca. 1923 mill and 1971 addition, camera facing northeast.

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Photo #7

West elevation of stair tower at the southeast corner of the ca. 1923 mill, camera facing east.

Photo #8

Detail of entry door on south elevation of stair tower at the southeast corner of the ca. 1923 mill, camera facing northeast.

Photo #9

South and west elevations of stair tower at the southwest corner of the ca. 1923 mill, ca. 1968 addition (left) and ca. 1950 addition (right), camera facing northeast.

Photo #10

North and west elevations of ca. 1923 mill and west elevation of 1968 addition, camera facing southeast.

Photo #11

East elevation of ca. 1923 mill and north elevation of 1937 addition (left), camera facing southwest.

Photo #12

West elevation of 1933 addition, camera facing southeast.

Photo #13

North elevation of 1937 addition, camera facing southeast.

Photo #14

East elevation of 1957 addition, camera facing southwest.

Photo #15

Metal shed in areaway between ca. 1923 mill and retaining wall, camera facing northwest.

Photo #16

East elevation of ca. 1923 mill (behind) and south and east elevations of 1972 addition (left) and 1984 addition (right), camera facing northwest.

Photo #17

Freight elevator, first floor ca. 1923 mill, camera facing southeast.

Photo #18

First floor ca. 1923 mill, camera facing west.

Photo #19

First floor ca. 1923 mill, opening at center leads to 1944 addition, camera facing south.

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Photo #20

Second floor of ca. 1923 mill, detail of southeast stairwell, camera looking south.

Photo #21

Second floor of ca. 1923 mill, camera looking west.

Photo #22

Second floor of ca. 1923 mill, camera looking west.

Photo #23

Second floor of ca. 1923 mill, detail of southwest stairwell, camera looking east.

Photo #24

Third floor of ca. 1923 mill, detail of opening to freight elevator (left) and opening to stairwell (right), camera looking southeast.

Photo #25

Third floor of ca. 1923 mill, camera looking west.

Photo #26

Third floor of ca. 1923 mill, camera looking northeast.

Photo #27

Interior of 1933 addition, camera facing northwest.

Photo #28

Interior of 1937 addition, camera facing west.

Photo #29

Interior of 1957 addition, camera facing southeast.

Photo #30

Interior of 1968 addition, camera facing northeast.



Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill  
Name of Property

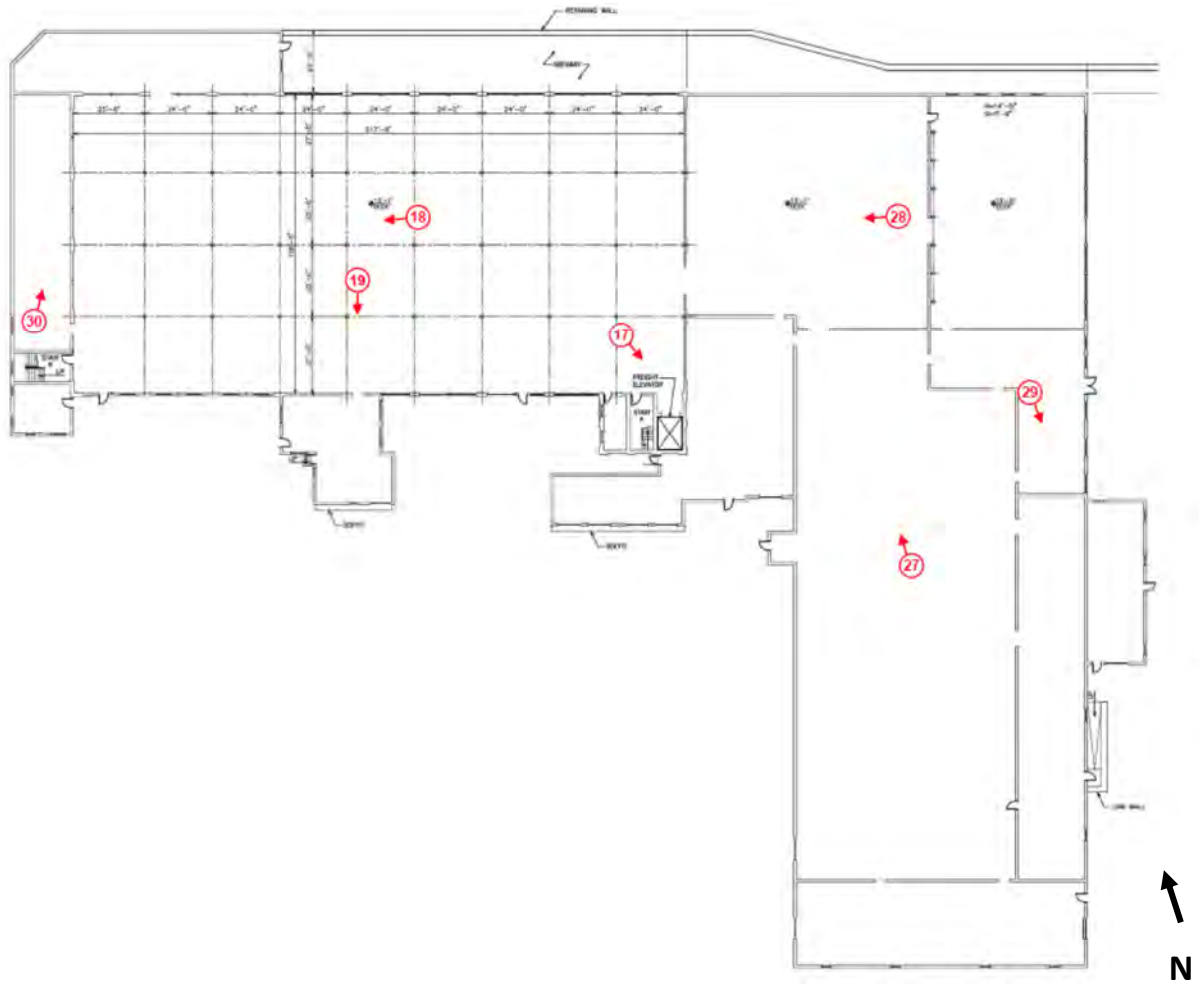
Providence, RI  
County and State



**Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill – Site Plan Keyed to Photographs**

Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill  
Name of Property

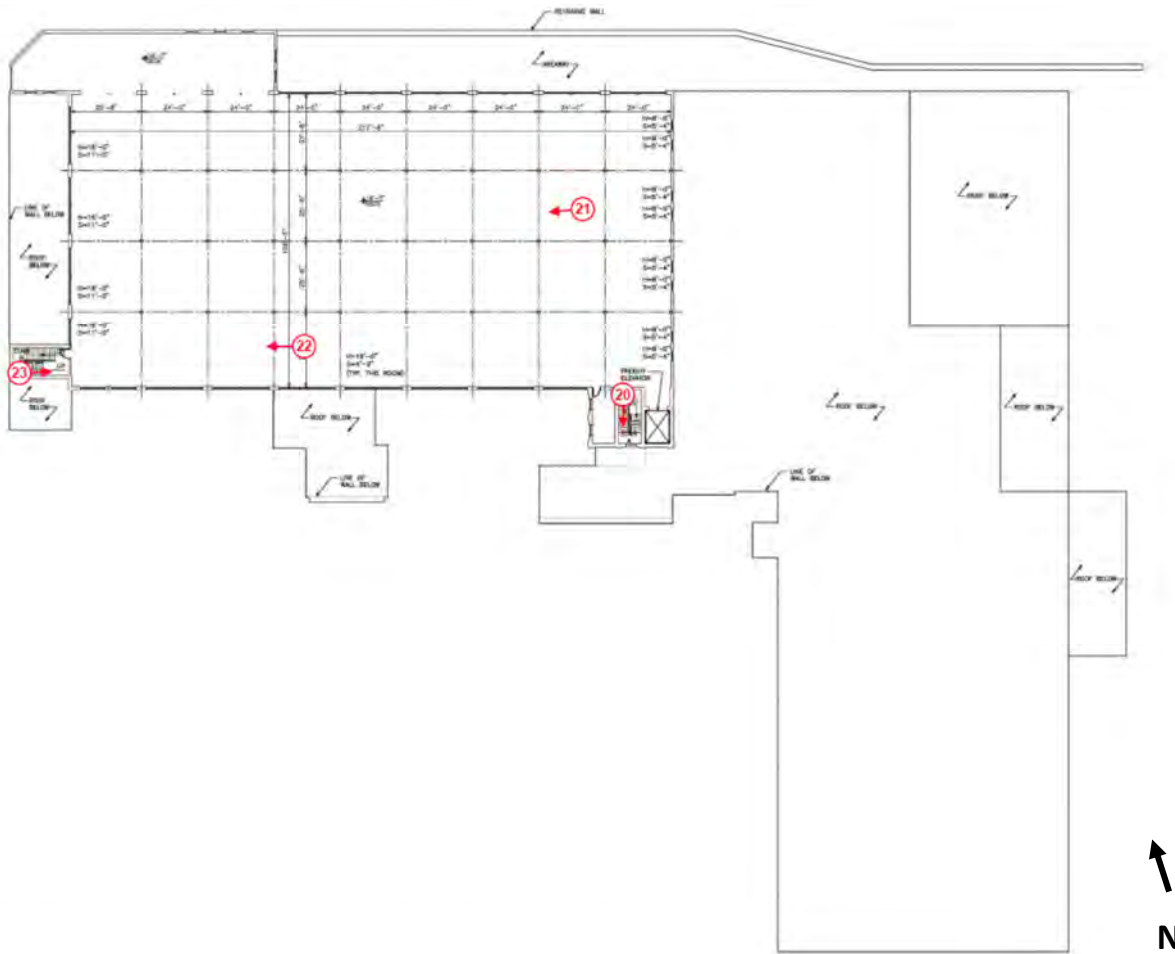
Providence, RI  
County and State



**Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill – First Floor Plan Keyed to Photographs**

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Name of Property

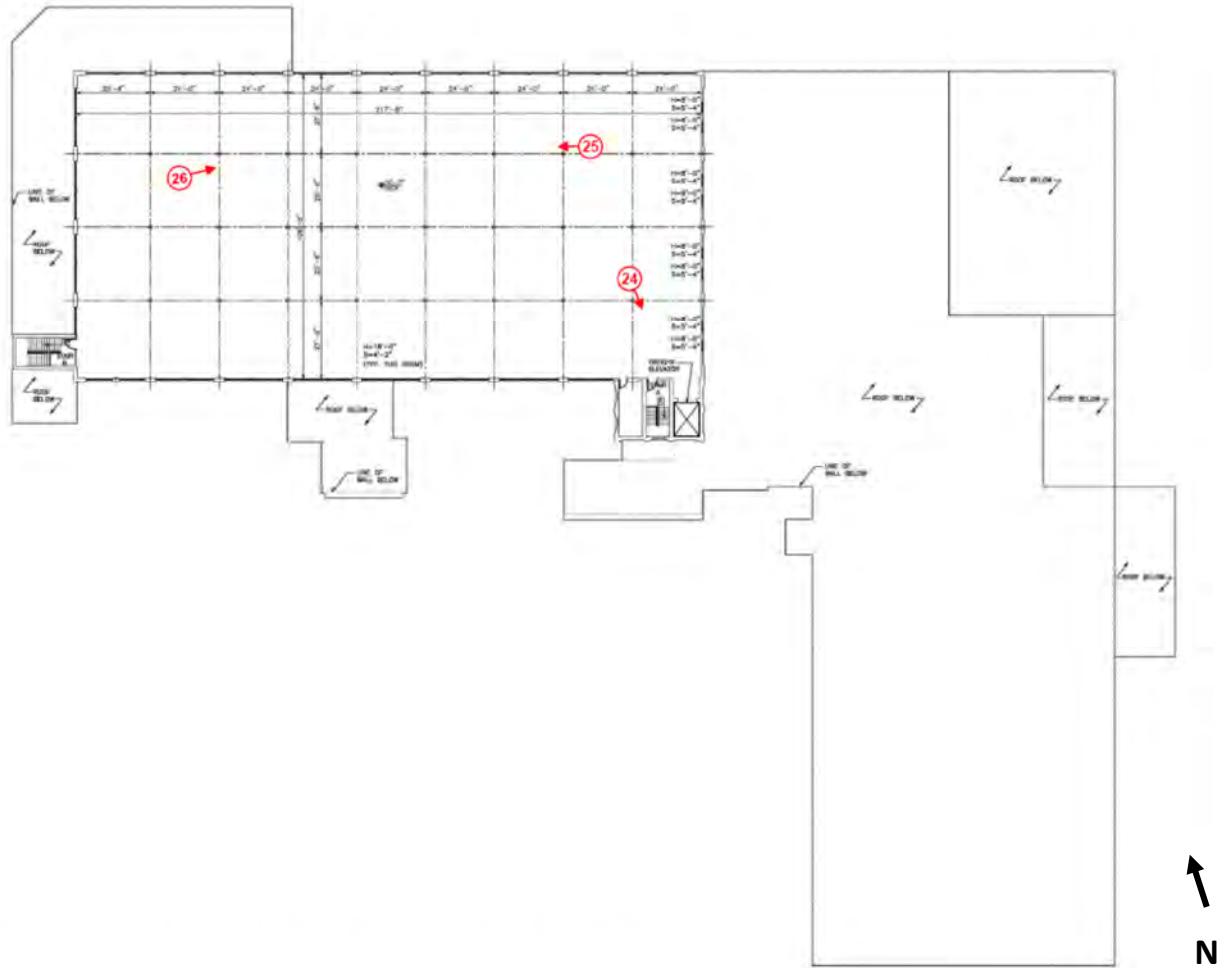
Providence, RI  
County and State



**Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill – Second Floor Plan Keyed to Photographs**

Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill  
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### Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill – Third Floor Plan Keyed to Photographs

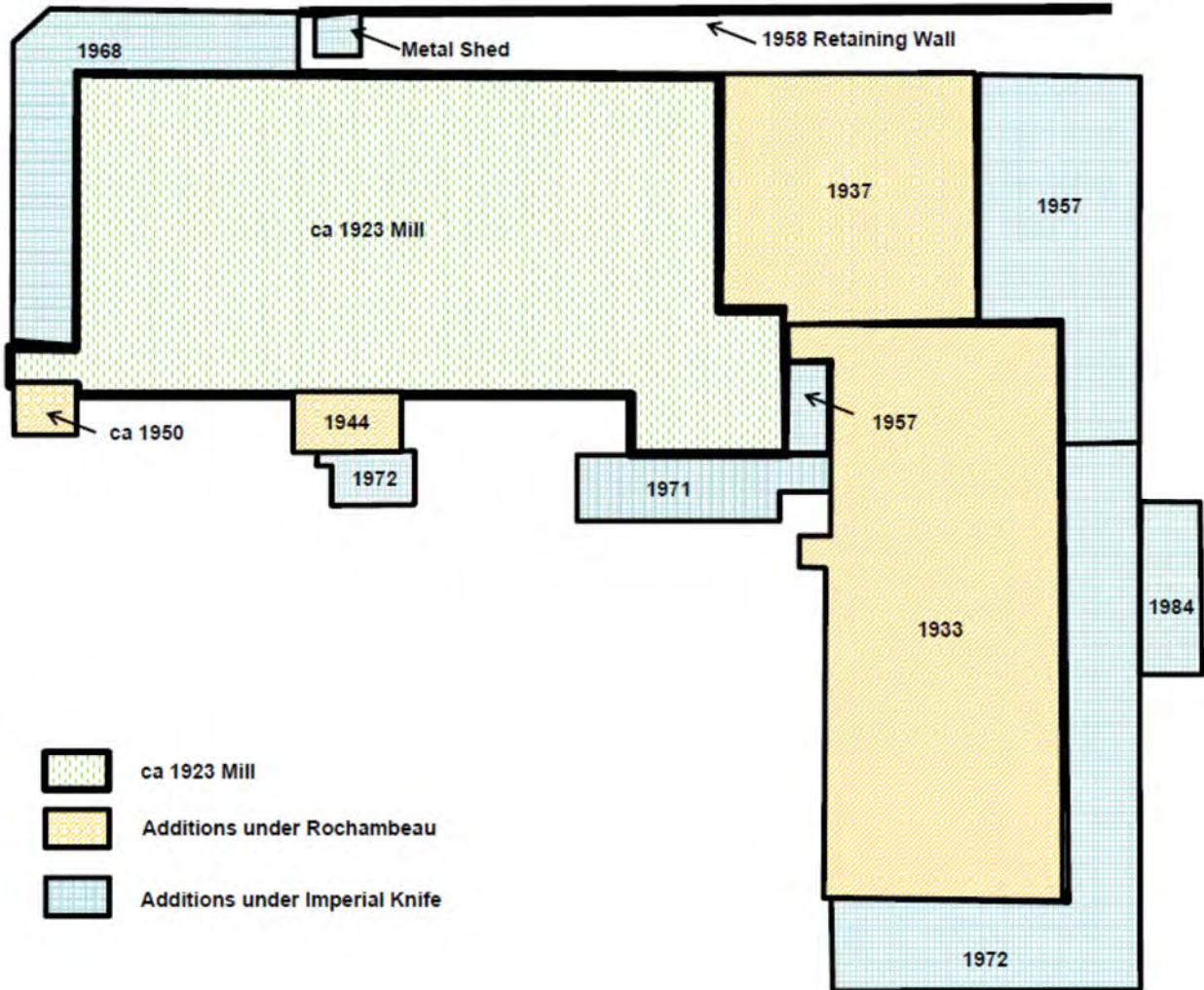
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill  
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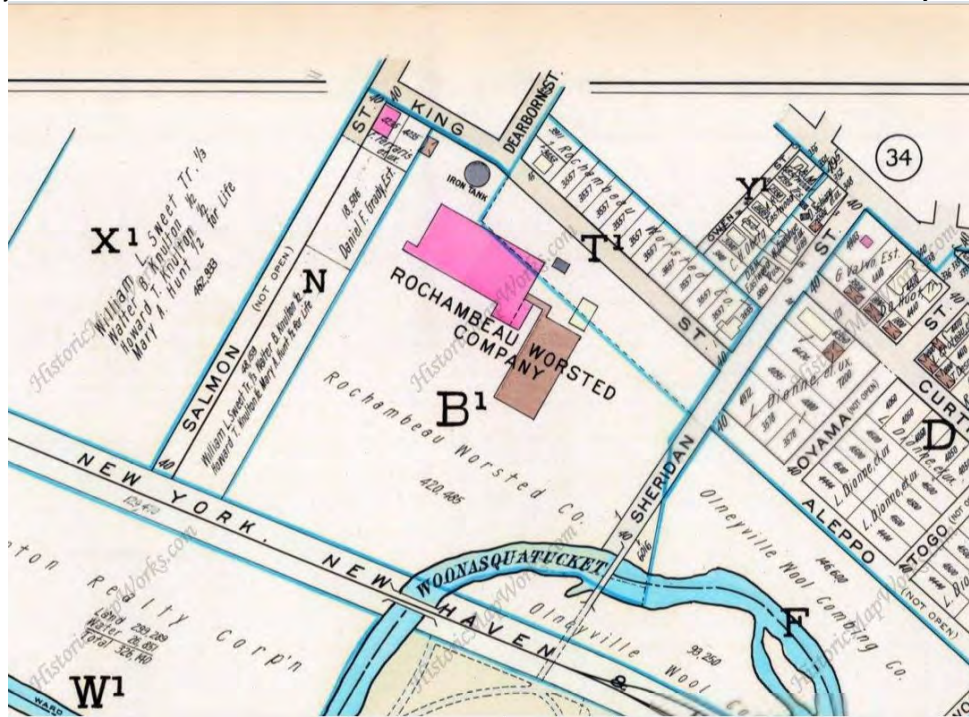
### Additional Information



**Fig. 1** Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill, Construction Chronology

Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill  
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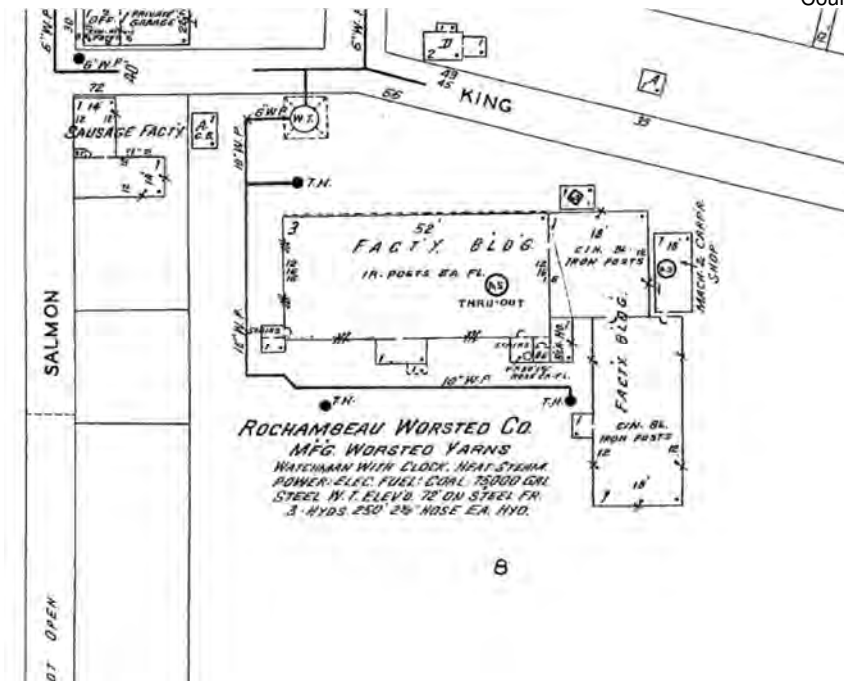
**Fig. 2** Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill, 1937  
(G. M. Hopkins Co., *Plat Book of the City of Providence, Rhode Island, 1937*)



**Fig. 3** Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill, 1939  
(Aerial Photographs of Providence, RI at <http://www.mapper.provplan.org/ha/>)

Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill  
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**Fig. 4** Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill, 1950  
(Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Providence, Rhode Island*, 1950)



**Fig. 5** Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill, 1962  
(Aerial Photographs of Providence, RI at <http://www.mapper.provplan.org/ha/>)

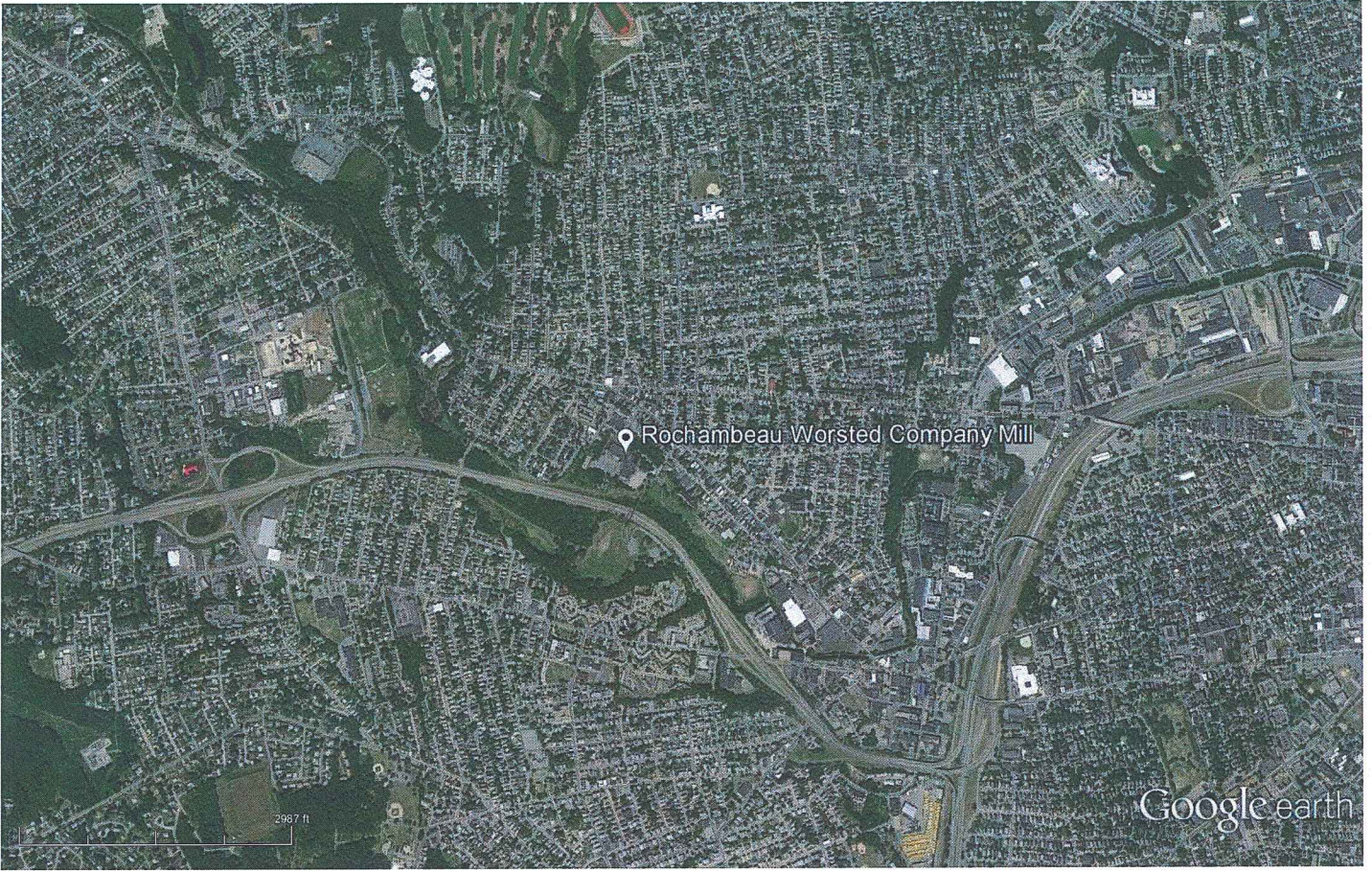
Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill  
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**Fig. 6** Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill, 1972  
(Aerial Photographs of Providence, RI at <http://www.mapper.provplan.org/ha/>)





Google earth

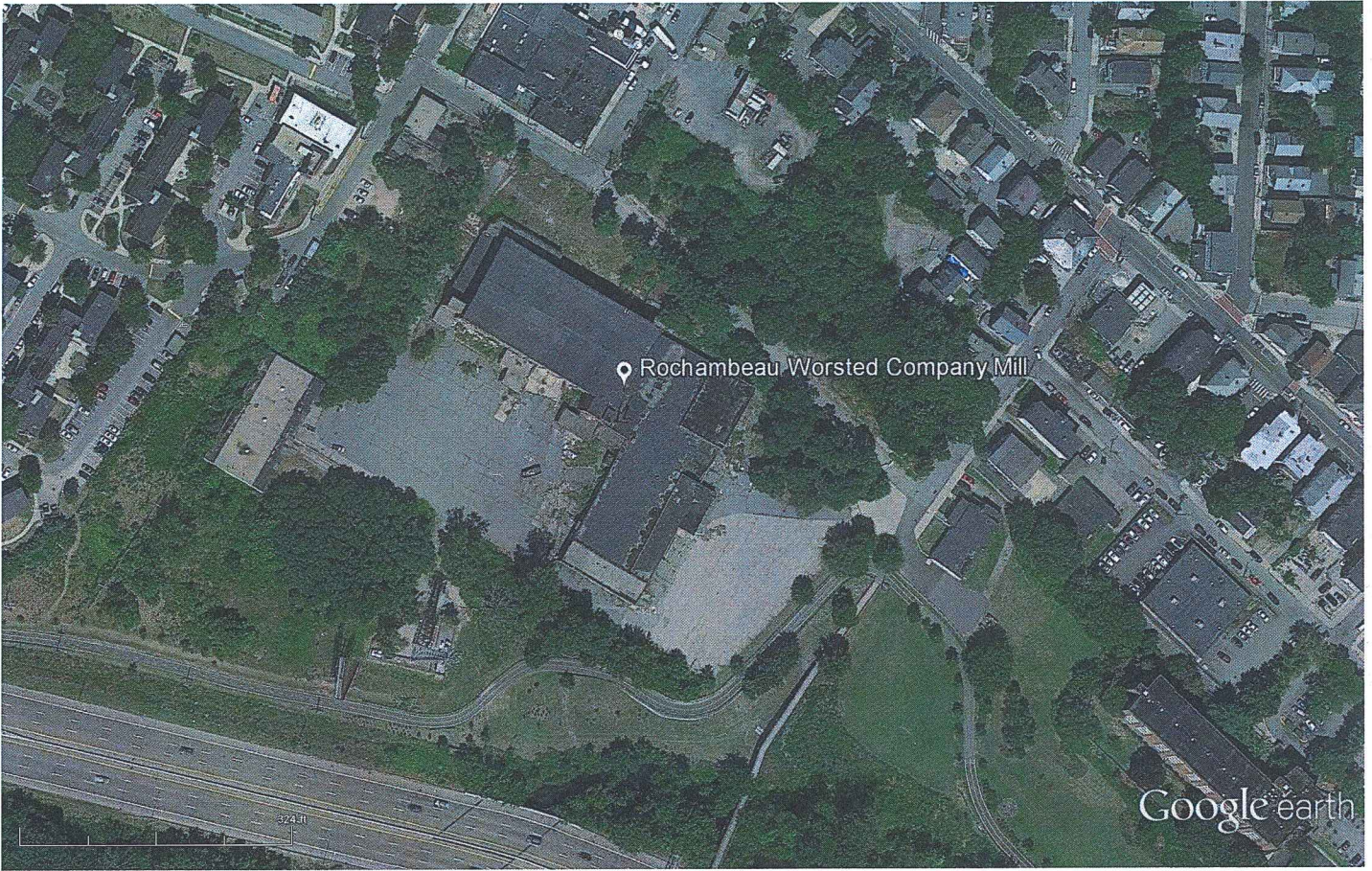


**Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill**  
**60 King Street**  
**Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island**

Coordinates

Latitude: 41.823162°

Longitude: -71.453699°



Google earth

feet  
meters



**Rochambeau Worsted Company Mill**  
**60 King Street**  
**Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island**

Coordinates

Latitude: 41.823162°

Longitude: -71.453699°



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