

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name: Washington County Court House

other name/site number: South County Center for the Arts

2. Location

street & number: 3481 Kingstown Road

not for publication: N/A

city/town: South Kingstown vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Washington code: 009 zip code: 02892

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

Property name Washington County Court House, Washington Co., RI

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.

___ See continuation sheet.

Fredrick Williamson
Signature of certifying official

30 Sep 1992
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

___ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this 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
 - ___ removed from the National Register
 - ___ other (explain): _____
- Signature of Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic:	<u>GOVERNMENT</u>	Sub:	<u>court house</u>
Current:	<u>RECREATION AND CULTURE</u>	Sub:	<u>theatre, auditorium, museum</u>

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7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE VICTORIAN /Romanesque

Other Description: _____

Materials: foundation	<u>STONE/GRANITE</u>	roof	<u>STONE/SLATE</u>
walls	<u>STONE/GRANITE</u>	other	<u>METAL/COPPER</u>

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): _____

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE

LAW

Period(s) of Significance: 1890-1940

Significant Dates: 1892-94 1896

Significant Person(s): _____

Cultural Affiliation: _____

Architect/Builder: Langworthy, Leslie P.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property: 2 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>286620</u>	<u>4595420</u>	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

The nominated properties occupies South Kingstown City Plat 22-4, lot 47.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes the entire lots that have been historically associated with the property.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Wm McKenzie Woodward, Prin. Historic Preservation Specialist and Robert O. Jones, Sr. Historic Preservation Specialist

Organization: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission Date: June, 1992

Street & Number: 150 Benefit Street Telephone: 401-277-2678

City or Town: Providence State: RI ZIP: 02903

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Description

The Washington County Court House is a cruciform-plan, two-and-a-half-story, random-course rough-face granite ashlar building with a cross-gable roof; a four-story, pyramidal-roof tower at the southwest corner; and a circular-plan, conical-roof turret integrated into the building on its northwest corner. The building sits on a low, four-course water table of random-course rough-face granite ashlar darker than that of the wall surface; the same dark material is used for stringcourses above the first and second stories and for the radiating voussoirs above all round-arch openings in the wall surface.

The façade (south elevation) is divided into three unequal bays: the one-bay south elevation of the tower on the west and the two-bay gable end on the east. The west section has a small rectangular inset panel on the first story, paired rectangular windows on the second, a small round arch window on the third story, and a tripartite blind arcade on the fourth story. The east section has a one-story, round-arch porch just off center and two small, evenly spaced rectangular windows on the first story, two large, symmetrically placed, round-arch windows on the second story, and small paired, rectangular windows in the attic.

The west elevation has three sections: two narrow bays on either side of a wide, central, gable-roof section. The northern bay has an entrance set within a round-arch supported on low columns and a round-arch window on the first story and three rectangular windows on the second story. A chimney rises between the north and central bays. The central bay has three symmetrically placed windows on the first, second and third stories: the first-story windows are rectangular, the second-story windows are round-arch, and the small third-story windows are rectangular. The southern bay, comprising the west elevation of the tower, has paired rectangular windows on the second story, a round-arch window on the third story, and a tripartite blind arcade on the fourth story.

The north elevation of the building has regularly spaced windows. Windows are rectangular, save for the round-head window between the first and second stories. Three barrel-vault dormers pierce the roof. A round-plan tower is at the northwest corner, and an oriel is at the second story on the east corner; both have conical roofs.

The east elevation has three sections: two narrow bays on either side of a wide, central, gable-roof section. The narrow south bay has paired rectangular windows on the second story. The central bay has three symmetrically placed windows on the first, second and third stories: the

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first-story windows are rectangular, the second-story windows are round-arch, and the small third-story windows are rectangular. A chimney rises between the north and central bays. The north bay has two symmetrically placed windows on the first and second stories.

The interior is organized around a double-loaded central corridor that traverses the depth of the building from the principal entrance on the south to a secondary entrance on the rear. The principal stairs, with a mid-level landing, are located in the vestibule immediately east of the principal entrance. Secondary stairs are at the rear of the building. On the first floor are three principal rooms on each side of the corridor: District Court, Clerk, and Petit Jury on the east; Superior Court Clerk (with vault in the base of the tower), library, and Deputy Sheriff on the west. The second story has a lawyers' room in the tower at the southwest corner, District Court and Superior Court Judges on each side of the north staircase, and two court rooms in the middle section of the building, one on the east and one on the west.

The original detail, which remains largely intact, is simple. Hallways and principal rooms have stained cypress wainscot approximately five feet high; the hallways have matchboard finish, and the court rooms have beveled paneling. Where not paneled, walls are finished with plaster. Surfaces below the principal stairs are also paneled, and the stairs have turned balusters and carved newel posts. The secondary stairs on the north are finished simply. All door and window openings have molded architrave trim.

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Significance

The Washington County Court House possesses both architectural and historical significance. The building embodies distinctive elements of Richardsonian Romanesque public architecture and serves as a good example of the style. As a county court house, it is a symbol of state and county legal and political systems as well as the ideals underlying those systems.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Washington county's needs had outgrown the old court house, located in Kingston Village in the 1775 Colony House. The village of West Kingston was selected as the site of the new court house because of its situation at the intersection of the main line of the Boston, Providence & New York Railroad and a new main road, Kingstown Road, established in 1875. A new railroad station was completed in 1875, the Rhode Island College of Agricultural and Mechanical Arts (now the University of Rhode Island) located on the nearby Watson Farm in 1889, and the court house followed in 1892-94. The location of the court house, near the railroad and on the main highway, was chosen for the convenience of travel for lawyers and judges. Completed after two years of construction in 1894 at a cost of \$40,000, the Washington County Court House was designed by Providence architect Leslie P. Langworthy and constructed by local builders. Just as its location reflected changing technology, so too did the building accommodate the newest architectural technologies of electricity, steam heat, and modern plumbing. In 1896, the building was refurbished, including repairs to the tower and the slate roof, repointing, new ventilation system, and interior refinishing. Minor changes in the mid-1970s included installation of temporary partitions, now removed. The building continued to serve as the Washington County Court House until 1985. In 1989, the South County Center for the Arts purchased the building for conversion to use as a multiple-purpose arts center.

Henry Hobson Richardson's powerful personal interpretation of Romanesque sources became the lingua franca of public architecture in the 1870s and 1880s. Richardson's public architecture culminated in the Allegheny County Court House and Jail, built in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania between 1884 and 1888. Following its critical and popular success, Romanesque court houses became popular across the country during the late 1880s and 1890s. Rhode Island built two of these, this one and the Woonsocket District Court House (1896; William R. Walker & Son, architects; listed in the National Register in 1982). Most mainstream Richardsonian Romanesque public buildings, like this one, copy the materials and forms typically used by Richardson (light rock-face granite random ashlar walls with dark contrasting basement, stringcourses, window surrounds, and cornice; extensive use of round-arch windows; corner towers; and oriel

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windows) but lack the masterful integration of elements that distinguish Richardson's own composition. What distinguishes this building architecturally is its typicality: it fits comfortably in the contexts of 1890s courthouses both across the country and in Rhode Island.

The legal significance of the Washington County Court House relates to the interpretation and enforcement of Rhode Island's legal code more than it does to the enactment and administration of laws. Its significance must be explained by the role of the court house in the nation, in the states, and in county seats. American county courthouses symbolize our society's political and legal systems, and ideals, and shelter the activities, that attend upon or emanate from those systems. They are places for social interaction and the exchange of information, and their presence invariably contributes to local economic vitality.

Politically, Rhode Island counties function differently from counties in other parts of the country. Rhode Island courthouses differ therefore from those in other states in their design, function, and significance. In other states, counties are more functioning governmental units, and courthouses serve as government administrative centers as well as judicial centers. The functions for which counties are responsible elsewhere—running police (sheriff) departments, school systems, registries of deeds, boards of election or canvassers, collecting taxes—are charged to the cities and towns in Rhode Island. Counties in Rhode Island are largely judicial districts, and court houses contain only those activities attendant to the judicial system. Rhode Island court houses therefore differ in architectural scale and program from those in the South, Midwest, or West.

The scale and program further reflect the needs of Rhode Island's rural, southernmost county. The building is much smaller than the block-square Providence County Court (1877), an indication of the smaller population and less crowded judicial calendar. Its program was designed specifically to accommodate only the county sheriff's office, court rooms, and offices necessary for court functions.

The Washington County Court House is remarkably little changed from its appearance after completion in the mid-1890s, and it serves as a reminder of late nineteenth-century architecture and law.

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Major Bibliographical References

Historic and Architectural Resources of South Kingstown Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1984.

Klein, Maury. SK 1890: Letters from the Past. A publication of the Planning Department of South Kingstown, 1978.

Lambert, Phyllis. Courthouse: A Photographic Document. New York: Horizon Press, 1978.

Narragansett Times. October 20, 1899, pg. 8.

"The New Court House" The Narragansett Times. December 7, 1894, pg. 3.

Personal Interview:

Munroe, Kevin S., architect in charge of court house renovation project, September 23, 1991.



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(Washington County)
South Kingstown, R.I.



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