

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Pawtucket Congregational Church

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 40 and 56 Walcott Street

CITY, TOWN

Pawtucket

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

1 Hon. Bernard J. St. Germain

STATE

Rhode Island

CODE

44

COUNTY

Providence

CODE

007

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Pawtucket Congregational Church

STREET & NUMBER

40 Walcott Street

CITY, TOWN

Pawtucket

VICINITY OF

STATE

Rhode Island

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Pawtucket City Hall

STREET & NUMBER

167 Roosevelt Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Pawtucket

STATE

Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Pawtucket, Rhode Island - Statewide Historic Preservation Report Pr - P

DATE

1978

___ FEDERAL STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Built in 1867-1868 and designed by Boston architect John Stevens, Pawtucket Congregational Church is a vibrant example of Romanesque and Italianate architectural elements combined in a bold and rather Baroque whole. The church has long been a landmark in Pawtucket, where it is sited commandingly on the flank of a hill facing westward across the Blackstone River to the historic Slater and Wilkinson Mills¹ (Photo 2) and beyond to Pawtucket's present heavily "renewed" downtown. East of the church, ascending the hill, is the city's well-heeled, primarily late-nineteenth-century residential neighborhood known as Quality Hill, for which the Church serves as a focal entry point.

The church is a broadly proportioned, gable-roofed, frame building, five-bays deep and three bays wide, with a projecting two-story narthex and heavy foretower on the west and a narrow, two-story gable-roofed service area on the east (Photo 1). It is set on a foundation of ashlar, with cut fieldstone infill, which varies in height from a full story on the north flank to only three feet on the south, due to the slope of the hillside. A small, frame connecting unit and a large brick Federal Revival parish house were added to the east end of the Church in 1936, following designs of Monahan and Meikle, a Pawtucket-based architectural firm. These additions were carefully designed -- the hyphen was clearly intended as a stylistic transition between the old and new sections, with its drip cornice continuing that of the main building and its semi-circular modified fanlight above the entrance echoing Federal details of the parish house -- but it is the architectural distinction of the original section which commends the church for nomination to the National Register.

The church is visually dominant in the Pawtucket city-scape, not only by virtue of its physical siting but also, and especially, because of architect John Stevens' extraordinarily successful combination of bold, heavy massing with a lively mixture of large-scale applied ornament -- label mouldings over doors and windows, corbel tables and running courses of massive flat drips, and a variety of wiry brackets. The four-story foretower, in particular, with its horizontal matched-boarded buttressed corners and cornices, is a hefty blunt visual form, despite the careful graduation in scale of apertures and ornament of the tower as it rises and the angled and graceful consoles of its open belfry. Old photographs (c. 1880)

¹Both mills have already been entered on the National Register.

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showing the original tapering spire (damaged by the hurricane of 1938 and subsequently replaced by a small ogee-curved copper cap) reveal that the tower has always appeared somewhat squat and thickset in proportion to the rest of the church. The ogee-curved roofline of the narthex, swelling out on each side of the tower, adds to the qualities of width and weight.

The sense of heaviness is further increased by the use of buttress-like forms to define the five bays on each flank of the church. These buttresses reflect the architect's conscious attempt to translate into the nineteenth century wooden building tradition Romanesque originals of stone. There is a lively visual tension between wood which is obviously wood, in the rhythm of the narrow clapboarding of the facades of tower and nave, and wood which is used to imitate more solid stone in the buttresses and corbel tables.

The vocabulary of ornament used to define and enliven the various sections of the church displays a similar tension between materials and use. Label mouldings with chiseled spring blocks over doors and windows and the corbel tables on all four sides of the nave have the three dimensional quality and structural characteristics of carved stone. In contrast, the wiry brackets which trim the eaves in several variations (paired and in a running course) and the simple elongated corbels or "drips" which seem to "frost" the entire church indicate the carpenter's materials and skills. The heavy flatness of the applied "drip" courses creates an effective foil for the brackets, which are cut back with such a spring that they seem to resemble snakes arching back their heads. All of the applied moulding is well-defined and thick enough to throw patterns of shadow across the flatter facades of tower and auditorium in the romantic fashion recommended by Downing, Wheeler, and other mid-nineteenth century architectural theorists.

Within, the church follows a plan fairly standard in many aspects but unique in others (see sketch plan). Several remodellings -- a major one in 1915 and a relatively minor one in 1968 -- have effected subtle but significant changes; the present style of the interior is essentially of a restrained Federal Revival type. Federal Revival elements were cleverly applied to the original features of the church, once the mid-nineteenth century ornament had been removed, cut off,

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or painted over. Lost to twentieth century restraint were such lively features as corbeled tables on the gallery faces, heavy turned balusters and ball finials on the staircases, and the elaborate, ornately stencilled painting of the auditorium ceiling. Despite these changes, the interior of the church retains a strong nineteenth century flavor.

The entrance of the church opens into a broad narthex from which flanking staircases rise to the auditorium (Photo 3). These stairs have been widened, most likely to accommodate the additional space taken up by a one-story interior entry shelter added during remodeling in 1915; the rails and newels of the original stairs were re-used, but crisply turned Federal Revival balusters were inserted. The much heavier balustrade fronting the passage at the auditorium level is the original and provides an instructive contrast. From the passage; at either side, open, Federal Revival staircases give access to the galleries and choir loft. Below the passage, at entry level, stairs descend to what was originally used as a single large lecture room which has subsequently been taken over by Chapel, Sunday School, and kitchen functions.

The rear wall of the auditorium curves slightly as do the present pews of heavy dark wood (installed in 1915 along with new narrow hardwood flooring). Old photographs indicate that this curving arrangement is original, even though the pews themselves are not. A main aisle and two side aisles beneath the galleries lead toward the pulpit (Photo 4).

The pulpit area suffered the greatest changes in the church. Originally, an open, incomplete triple-arch motif with heavy pendent bosses rose behind an elaborate wooden pulpit, serving both to ornament the rear wall and to display the handsome organ pipe casings recessed therein (Photo 4). In 1915, the triple arch and two flanking applied motifs were removed entirely and a wide square opening with two curved Federal Revival corner volutes (reminiscent of Asher Benjamin details) was installed. This, at least, still allowed the handsome organ pipe casings to be seen. Remodelling in 1968 has returned the wall treatment to a full triple arch but the pipe casings are now covered with drapery (Photo 5).

One of the unique aspects of the auditorium is the fact that the galleries have stairs at the pulpit end which curve gracefully down

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on either side of the pulpit area (Photos 5 and 6). Unfortunately, in the 1915 remodelling, the heavy Victorian ball finials, which terminated the octagonal newel posts and put a visual stop to the curve of the stairs, were sawn off. Interestingly, the pulpit built during the 1960s remodelling adapted and combined the curved solid panelled gallery rail and newel posts in its form. The original pulpit had been removed during the 1915 changes.

At the opposite end of the auditorium is the choir loft. Originally open with stairs enclosed in curved corner quadrants, the loft arcades have long since been filled in (presumably to decrease drafts) and the stairs have been opened and fitted with Federal Revival balustrades. The auditorium is lighted by full-height, round-arched windows, five on each side, once probably filled with translucent, faintly colored Belgian glass, but now filled with good twentieth century stained glass memorials.

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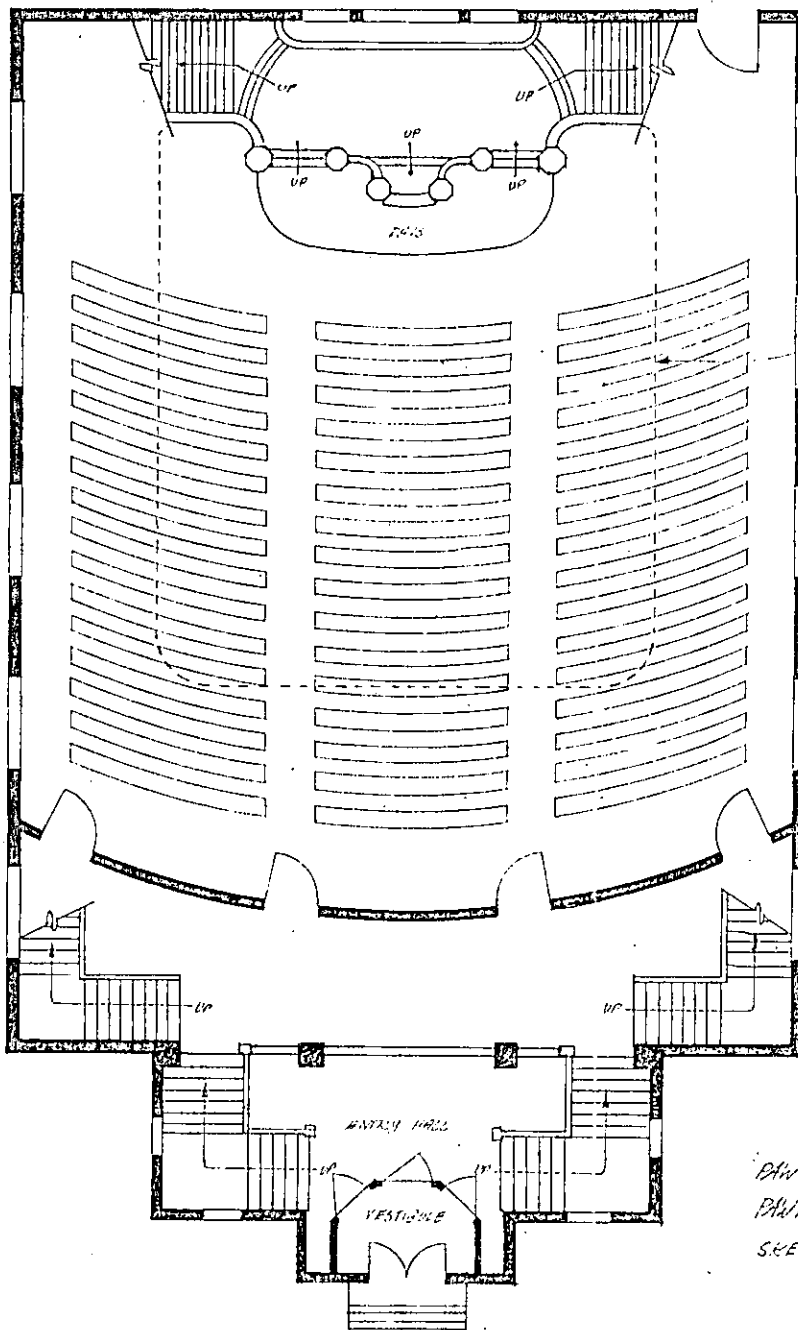
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PAWTUCKET CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
PAWTUCKET, RHODE ISLAND
SKETCH PLAN - NOT TO SCALE

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES: 1867 -1868

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

John Stevens

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Despite interior and exterior twentieth century alterations, Pawtucket Congregational Church is unquestionably worthy of preservation and of nomination to the National Register as an architectural landmark of statewide importance. It is, perhaps, the outstanding church in the Romanesque-Italianate style still standing in Rhode Island. The history of the church body and that of the church building, which parallel the development of Pawtucket, are also of some local historical interest.

The church was designed by John Stevens (1824-?) an architect whose office was in Boston but whose practice included much of New England. His known buildings, primarily churches and such public structures as schools and town halls, were erected in Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Rhode Island, the majority of them being in Maine and Massachusetts. Stevens' earliest known work was the Punchard Free School in Andover, Massachusetts, designed in the Italianate style in 1855-1856. By the late 1850's Stevens' buildings combined Italianate and Romanesque elements in a highly plastic and distinctive personal style which Pawtucket Congregational Church embodies. Stevens designed at least four other Congregational Churches in the 1860's which are practically identical in form and detail to the Pawtucket Church.¹ Many of Stevens' subsequent buildings, particularly churches, share the same vocabulary of details as these churches, but vary in the composition of forms.

Pawtucket Congregational Church is the only Rhode Island building positively attributed to Stevens. Although, considering its altered interior and missing spire, the church is not the best preserved of Stevens' extant work, its combination of Romanesque and Italianate

¹The four are: South Congregational Church, Andover, Massachusetts (1860-1861), First Parish Congregational Church, Saco, Maine (1860-1863), Third Congregational Church, Biddeford, Maine (1863-1865), and Trinitarian Congregational Church, North Andover, Massachusetts (1865-1867). All are still standing, although the Third Congregational Church has been converted into a library.

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elements gives it an appearance of unusual power and makes it truly representative of Stevens' finest work.

For its first hundred years, until 1792, the community which eventually became Pawtucket had no church of its own. Pawtucket east of the falls at that time was part of Rehoboth, Massachusetts, and land lying west of the falls was under the jurisdiction of Rhode Island. Until the erection of Pawtucket's First Baptist Church in 1792, residents attended church services in Providence, Rehoboth, and Smithfield. In 1812, Seekonk (or eastern Pawtucket) was set off from Rehoboth and, in 1828, Pawtucket, Massachusetts was set off from Seekonk. That same year the Pawtucket Congregational Society was formed, purchased a lot, and erected their first building, on the site of the present structure. Designed by noted Rhode Island master builder and Pawtucket resident Clark Sayles, the church stood until destroyed by fire in 1864.

The church Stevens designed to replace this building housed a congregation expanded in numbers but not in ethnic diversity. Most of the congregation were still native born, despite the fact that Pawtucket had experienced a tremendous increase in population (mostly of Irish immigrant laborers) between 1828 and 1862, when Pawtucket, Massachusetts, and Pawtucket, Rhode Island were at last joined into one Rhode Island town. That the congregation maintained into the twentieth century its primarily native-born composition is evidenced not only by membership rosters but also by the fact that alterations made to the church in 1915 were funded almost totally by the prosperous Yankee Darius L. Goff, head of D. Goff and Sons, manufacturers of braid and mohair plush.

The visual importance of Pawtucket Congregational Church, commandingly sited from the first, has recently been underscored by urban renewal clearance projects and the construction in the late 1960's of Interstate Route 95, from which the boldly articulated church is highly visible. The church is, thus, today one of Pawtucket's outstanding visual landmarks, outstanding in impact as well as in architectural quality.

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Grieve, Robert. An Illustrated History of Pawtucket, Central Falls
and Vicinity... Pawtucket Gazette and Chronicle, Pawtucket, Rhode
Island, 1897.

Roper, Steven J. Unpublished research on architect John Stevens.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

A Century of Christian Service 1829-1929, Pawtucket Congregational Church. E. L. Freeman Company, Providence, Rhode Island, 1929.

Johnson, Mrs. John E. Interview with Mrs. Johnson, February, 1978.

See continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A	19	302360	4638590	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Church: Plat 22A, Lot 81
Parish house: Plat 22A, Lots 116 and 84

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Judith Sullivan and Ancelin Lynch, Grants and National Register

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

Coordinators

February, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

401-277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

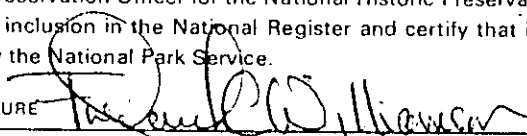
NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE



TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE March 31, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER.

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER















Pawtucket Congregational Church
Pawtucket, Rhode Island
19 302360 4638590

4642

4641

40 12 MI.
40 7 MI.

4639000m N.

290 000 FEET
(R.I.)

41 52 30

4638

RUMFORD 2 MI.
BARRINGTON 11 MI.