

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC Covell Street School

AND/OR COMMON
Joslin Multi-Service Center

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 231 Amherst Street

CITY, TOWN Providence

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF 2 Rep. Edward Beard

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

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Joslin Multi-service Corporation

STREET & NUMBER 231 Amherst Street

CITY, TOWN Providence

VICINITY OF

STATE Rhode Island 02909

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Providence City Hall

STREET & NUMBER Washington and Dorrance Streets

CITY, TOWN Providence

STATE Rhode Island 02903

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Providence Broadbrush Report: Valley Neighborhood

DATE July 1976

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS R. I. Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN Providence

STATE Rhode Island 02903

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Covell Street School is a well-preserved example of a once-numerous Providence building type: the four-room schoolhouse. Located on the northwest corner of Amherst and Covell Streets, in a densely built-up neighborhood of modest, frame, 2-story, Late Victorian houses, the building is essentially an American Queen Anne style two-story clapboarded box capped with a complicated hipped and crossgabled roof. The geometry of the basically rectangular structure is enriched by the modulation of the exterior walls into a series of projections and recesses.

The principal elevation facing south toward Amherst Street is accentuated by a square, three-story, projecting, central tower. The tower, the most prominent architectural feature of the composition, contains an elaborate multi-paned ornamental window on the first floor, a hooded triple window on the second floor and a blind Palladian window motif surmounted by a carved floral lunette at the third level. Currently, the tower is topped with a flat lead roof; the presence of a trap door onto the roof, however, suggests that it may have originally had another treatment. Although there are no known illustrations of this building's original appearance, other schools of the period frequently had open or louvered belfries containing the school bell.

A wooden one-story entrance porch abuts the west wall of the tower. It is simply articulated by two elliptical arches with carved sunburst spandrels springing from square posts. A one-and-one half story bell-cast shed-roofed projection flanks the tower on the east.

The east elevation, facing Covell Street, is composed of a tall gabled pavilion containing two large bays of triple windows, flanked on the north by a single recessed bay containing a simple 2-over-2-sash window. The west elevation is similar except that the single recessed bay is on the south side of the large gabled pavilion.

On the west elevation, modern glass doors have been substituted for the sash in one of the large triple window units of the pavilion to provide direct access from the first floor classrooms to the play yard.

The north elevation is of utilitarian design with irregularly-spaced fenestration and broken wall planes arranged to suit floor plan requirements. The principal architectural feature of this facade is the porch, which is of the same design as the south porch.

The massing of the building is visually complex, belying the spatial simplicity of the interior. As in many American Queen Anne style buildings, the pursuit of the picturesque is most fully realized in the roof line where the mergings of gables, hips, tower, and chimney create a dramatic silhouette.

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The complexity of the massing is complimented by the architectural detailing. The fenestration is particularly well articulated. All of the windows are prominently enframed, those of the first floor with small bracketed window caps, and those of the second floor with vertical board trim, unifying the cornice and string course. The fenestration is further elaborated by the use of intricate small-paned sash for the transoms of the large windows and to compose ornamental windows not intended for viewing. Wood string courses, cornices, corner boards, and other carpentry further enrich the exterior clapboard wall surfaces. The brick chimney with its pilastered stack and widely corbelled cap is another handsome detail.

Although the interior has been modified over the years to accommodate the different functions the building has served, the basic plan and much of the original woodwork are still intact. The plan of each floor was composed of a front and rear stair hall and two large classrooms each adjoined by a smaller room and storage closet. The simple interior treatment included panelled doors, three foot vertical matchboard wainscoting, plaster walls and ceilings, and wood slat stair balusters with chamfered, square newel posts, capped by ball finials. In the past 30 years the original large classroom spaces have been united by the removal of the dividing wall, and modern bathrooms and space partitions have been installed.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" 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 1886

BUILDER/ARCHITECT unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Covell Street School is of architectural and historical significance to the city of Providence as one of the last well-preserved examples of a small 19th century neighborhood school.

Architecturally, the Covell Street School represents an important phase in the evolution of school building design in Providence. In the 18th century, Providence laid the foundations for a system of free public education. The first building designed specifically for use as a schoolhouse was built on Benefit Street in 1768. The 1769 Meeting Street School, already listed on the National Register, is the oldest extant school building in Providence. A broader free public school system was established in Providence in 1800, by which time there were four school buildings. These early schools provided one or two large lecture halls where pupils of all ages were instructed in ungraded groups.

By 1828 the shortcomings of this system were apparent and, although the number of pupils in the public schools had not significantly increased in 30 years, the schools were divided into two categories: primary schools to teach four to eight year olds, and grammar schools to teach more advanced students. These innovations were instituted in the existing school buildings with the primary school occupying one large hall on the first floor and the grammar school, one on the second floor.

In 1838 further refinements were made in the educational system. By that time the number of school children had doubled to over 1700, and it was determined that better instruction would result from the subdivision of the large groups into more manageable units of 50 or 60 pupils in separate rooms. The old school buildings were subsequently remodelled to provide small classrooms and several new schools were built. This was the genesis of the two-story four-room school house type that the Covell Street School represents.

During the 1840's new refinements were made in Providence's educational system with the introduction of intermediate schools for the fourth and fifth grades and the establishment of a high

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school for students seeking education above the grammar school level or ninth grade. Under the influence of progressive educator Henry Barnard, the Rhode Island Commissioner of Public Education, well-known early Victorian architect Thomas A. Tefft executed a number of standard plans for intermediate and grammar schools. Rhode Island moved into the vanguard of educational reform in the 1840's and the new school designs were published and widely distributed throughout New England. Among Tefft's designs was one for a Providence intermediate school. These designs further developed the four-room school house plan by incorporating separate entrances and stairs for boys and girls, and such amenities as cloak area, elaborate heating and ventilation systems, and better natural lighting, all of which were reflected in the design of the Covell Street School forty years later.

In the decade from 1838 to 1848 the number of school children skyrocketed from 1700 to over 6000, largely as a result of Irish immigration. The growth rate subsequently continued, although at a somewhat slower pace, until by 1875 there were over 12,500 children in the public schools of Providence. From 1868 through the 1880's a large number of new schools were built. The majority of these were primary and intermediate schools since grammar and high school were rarely attended by the children of working class families. After 1868, it became common for each of the different educational levels to be housed in its own building. As a result, many neighborhoods had a separate primary school, an intermediate school, and a grammar school in the late 19th century.

Although many of the new primary and intermediate schools continued the four-room plan developed in the 1830's and 1840's, the new grammar schools of the 1860's and 1870's were huge and costly structures of considerable architectural pretension. These buildings could accommodate hundreds of students and were counted among the major architectural monuments of Providence. By 1876, however, the trend toward large school buildings was viewed as an educational evil. Educators began advocating that numerous small neighborhood schools be built so as to avoid "...thereby the evils which spring from massing large numbers of children under one roof."¹

¹Edward Martin Stone, "A Century of Education (Prov. R.I. 1876) p.81.

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In the 1880's the four-room schoolhouse plan was revived and became the standard for primary and intermediate level school design.

The Covell Street School is the best preserved and most architecturally significant of the half dozen surviving nineteenth century, wooden, four-room, schoolhouses of Providence. Its design reflects the American Queen Anne style which was fashionable at the time the building was completed in 1886. The large window walls in the classrooms illustrate the concern of the period with adequate natural lighting and ventilation. The building is similar in composition and detailing to the 1883 Vineyard Street School designed by the prominent and prolific Providence architecture firm of William R. Walker & Son, and it is possible that the Covell Street School was also designed by this firm. This attribution cannot be made with certainty, however, because of the lack of documentary evidence.

The Covell Street School is an important landmark of the historical development of the Joslin-Manton neighborhood on the West Side of Providence. Industrial development along the Woonasquatucket River had been proceeding slowly since the 18th century, but the combination of the construction of the railroad along Valley Street and the tremendous influx of Irish immigrant laborers in the 1840's drawn by expanding industry caused the Joslin-Manton and Olneyville sections to boom. Dozens of huge mills, mostly involved in textile manufacturing, were built between 1850 and 1890. By 1885 the neighborhood above Olneyville Square, the commercial hub of the area, was built up with modest working class one and two family homes as far as Atwells Avenue. A primary school had already been built on Amherst Street by the time the Coville Street Intermediate School was completed in 1886. Because there was already an Amherst Street School the new building was named Coville Street School to avoid confusion in spite of its principal orientation to Amherst Street. Coville Street was later renamed Covell Street and the school name followed suit.

The building functioned for years as an intermediate school, housing 4th and 5th grade classes taught by a faculty of four women instructors. In 1941 the school was closed as part of a general program of school consolidation in Providence. The vacant building was finally sold to a Roman Catholic parish and opened in 1954 as St. Teresa's High School, a small women's parochial school taught by five nuns. St. Theresa's was closed in 1969 as a result of

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declining enrollment, and rising costs. At that time the school was sold to the Joslin Multi-Service Corporation, a private, neighborhood-oriented, social service agency which operates youth programs and a large day care center in the building. Today the former Covell Street School continues its historic role of service to the neighborhood as a focus for youth activities in the Joslin-Manton area.

Recently the Joslin Corporation has applied for funds from the Community Development Block Grant Program of the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for exterior stabilization and restoration of the building. Since the Covell Street School is the most visually prominent and architecturally distinguished landmark in the area today, the preservation of the building in its original condition would serve as a focus for civic pride and as an incentive for private restoration efforts in the neighborhood.

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9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A 19 296700 46321830
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Leslie J. Vollmert

August 31, 1976

ORGANIZATION

R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

(401) 277-2678

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

R. I.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE September 1, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

ATTEST: DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Photograph
Removed for citywide
survey report

29. M. 85.

(www)

COVELL STREET SCHOOL
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Photographer: Leslie J. Vollmert

Date: August, 1976

Negative: Rhode Island Historical
Preservation Commission

View from the southeast.

Photo #1



COVELL STREET SCHOOL
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Photographer: Leslie J. Vollmert

Date: August, 1976

Negative: Rhode Island Historical
Preservation Commission

View of the tower on the south elevation.

Photo #2



COVELL STREET SCHOOL
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

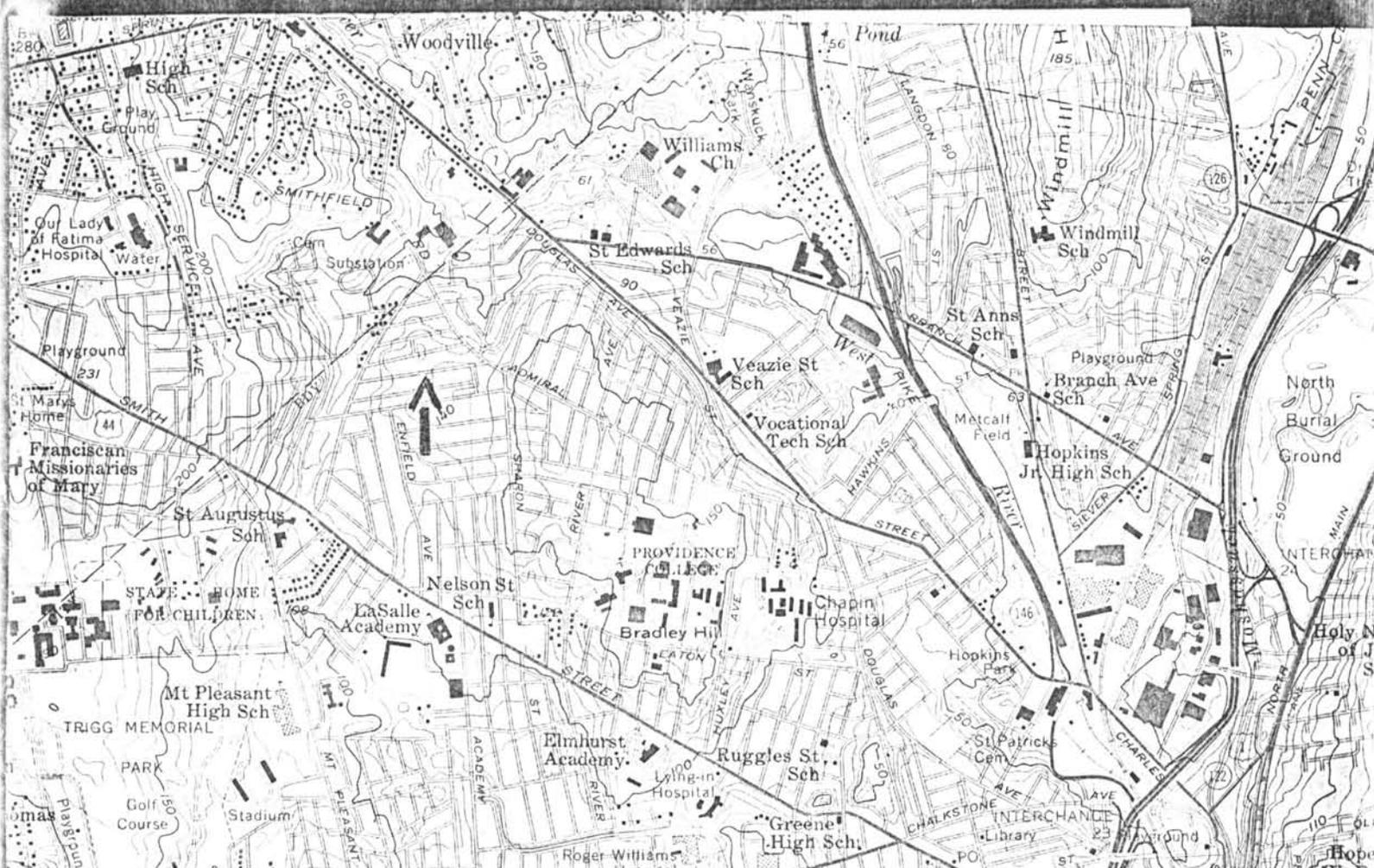
Photographer: Leslie J. Vollmert

Date: August, 1976

Negative: Rhode Island Historical
Preservation Commission

View of the west elevation.

Photo #3



COVELL STREET SCHOOL
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

19 296700 4632830

