

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name: Louittit Laundry

other name/site number: What Cheer Steam Laundry

2. Location

street & number: 93 Cranston Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Providence vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Providence code: 007 zip code: 02909

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public - local

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> </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Property name Louitt Laundry, Providence County, Providence, 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.

Frederick Williams
Signature of certifying official

14 Jan 2004
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: INDUSTRIAL/PROCESSING/
EXTRACTION

Sub: Manufacturing Facility

Current: VACANT/NOT IN USE

Sub:

Property name Louttit Laundry, Providence County, Providence, RI

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY
REVIVALS/Colonial Revival

Other Description:

Materials: foundation CONCRETE roof ASPHALT
walls BRICK other STONE/Granite

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: INDUSTRY
ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1925

Significant Dates: 1925

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Unknown

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

X See continuation sheet.

Property name Louttit Laundry, Providence County, Providence, RI

9. Major Bibliographical References

X 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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 0.8

UTM References: Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	19	298660	4632180	B	
C				D	

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ___ See continuation sheet.

The nominated property is lot 505, City of Providence Assessor's Plat 29.

Boundary Justification: ___ See continuation sheet.

The nominated lot is the extent of property historically associated with this building. Another building from the laundry complex survives in altered form, but it is located on a different lot.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Frederick C. Stachura, Esq.

Organization: The Historic Collaborative Date: September 12, 2003

Street & Number: 190 High Street Telephone: 401-410-0078

City or Town: Bristol State: RI ZIP: 02809

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Description

The Louitt Laundry Building (1925) is a large, long, 2-story, flat-roof, brick industrial building with some Colonial Revival detailing. It is located at the corner of Burgess and Cranston Streets on the west side of Providence, in a mixed neighborhood of commercial, institutional, and industrial buildings. There is an office block facing with a small one-story wing, and a long laundry block with a square stair tower at a rear corner.

The office block faces Cranston Street and is three bays wide on the first floor, five on the second, with a slightly projecting gabled center bay. The building is trimmed with cast concrete--window sills and splayed lintels, quoins and entryway in the central bay, a heavy cornice molding, and panels in the parapet simulating a balustrade. A tile medallion is under the pediment; it depicts Roger Williams's landing in Providence and the motto "What Cheer Brings Good Cheer." A Palladian window is located above the entry; a large triple window is set on each side of the doorway. The double-hung window sash (8-over-8) is mostly missing, but operable transoms remain in some openings. The decorative elements of the office block are carried around the corners of the building for one bay. A small single-story wing on the east end of the office block covers a loading dock. It has a flat roof and blind panels worked in the brick. On the interior the office block has a center stair and a room on each side of the stair. The offices have paneled wainscots, cornice moldings, and built-in shelving. The offices on the west side on both floors have simple Colonial Revival corner fireplaces.

The laundry block is thirteen bays long and also two stories. Its grade is about three feet higher than the office block--a short run of steps leads from the interior of one to another. Identical double windows are set on a continuous sill of cast concrete. There is a shallow cornice worked in the brick. The window sash is mostly missing, but there are sufficient remnants to show 8-over-8 double-hung sash with movable transoms. There is a squat square stair tower with a glass pyramidal roof set at the southeast corner of the building. The rear (north) elevation of the building was, until recently, joined to an earlier section of the Louitt Laundry. When fire destroyed the earlier building it was razed, and this rear elevation now shows the openings that originally connected the two structures. The interior of the laundry block is open industrial space divided only by two rows of iron columns.

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The Louittit Laundry was until 2001 a much larger complex. It included the laundry's original building (with several additions), later joined to the north end of this building, and a one-story loading/storage building on a lot to the north of this building. A fire destroyed the laundry's original building and its several additions, and they were razed. A vacant area now separates the 1925 building from the loading/storage building.

Photographs

Photographer: Frederick C. Stachura

Date: August 2003

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
(The above information applies to all photographs.)

Photo #1

View: South elevation, façade.

Photo #2

View: South entrance and first-floor window.

Photo #3

View: Plaque, over south entrance.

Photo #4

View: East elevation, stair tower at right.

Photo #5

View: Interior, main room of office block, facing north.

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Significance

The Louittit Laundry (1925) is significant as a representative example of a minor but important service industry and as a useful example of an early 20th-century industrial building.

The Louittit Laundry Company was founded in 1896 by English-born William E. Louittit, who set up operations in a small frame building on Warren Street in Providence. Louittit's firm expanded rapidly and moved several times over the course of the next five decades.

Louittit was one of the earliest companies in Providence to centralize the process of cleaning and pressing clothes and linens. The industrialization of this once-domestic function was at least partly the result of a concentrated and expanding population in Providence, the growth of other service companies (such as restaurants and hotels), and the growth of institutions (such as hospitals and colleges). In the early decades of the century, a handful of firms competed for the laundry business of the city, but Louittit became the dominant company. William Louittit purchased many of his competitors, including the What Cheer Laundry in 1918, Swiss Cleaning in 1931, and Scott Cleaning in 1936. By 1943 Louittit laundry operated five major plants in Providence and had 600 employees.

The company survived well through the second World War; its war contracts included the washing of bandage stock woven in Rhode Island textile plants. In the post-war decades, the company added dry-cleaning to its laundry service. It concentrated on the domestic market, for which home delivery was key. Louittit had always provided delivery service, but in the 1950s and 60s the company operated a large fleet of delivery vehicles and became as much a trucking operation as a laundry. The Louittit Company finally closed its doors in the 1980s.

The 1925 laundry nominated here is the last surviving building of the Louittit operation. The Louittit Company moved to this location in 1918 when William Louittit purchased the What Cheer Laundry from W. A. & A. B. Hathaway, who had been operating from this site since 1901. Louittit used a 1906 building which the Hathaways had constructed here. The location was a good one—public water was available; downtown Providence was only minutes away; and the road connections to the rest of Providence were easy. Louittit used the What Cheer trademark as well as the What Cheer building. The Louittit Company offices and operations were expanded here when Louittit added the existing building in 1925 to the Hathaways' laundry building and

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made this his principal location. The 1906 structure was recently destroyed by fire.

The nominated building is typical of industrial buildings of the 1920s, with its flat roof, large windows, and exterior stair tower. Though built specifically to house a commercial laundry, the physical form of the building does not of itself document how it was used, and none of the machinery for the laundry operation survives in place. But the processes required for commercial laundries in the first half of the twentieth century are well described in the contemporary industrial design literature. For Louittit specifically, several sources exist, including a company newsletter (the *Louittit Line*), which document the succession of processes, changes in the industry over the years, technical requirements for light and ventilation, number and gender of workers (finishers were all women, for example), and the like. At present, it is not clear how the processing steps were organized in this building and the adjacent demolished building. It seems likely that stenciling, marking, and sorting were carried out in the basement and that washing and extraction were carried out on the first floor. Drying and finishing appear to have been concentrated on the second floor. After final sorting, a packaging room apparently ramped the bundles down to ground level at the rear of the building.

This is one of the few buildings remaining in Rhode Island to document this minor industry. The Historic American Building Survey for the state does not identify other large commercial laundry buildings nor has the state survey located others.

Though the present building is largely unaltered, it is in unfortunate condition. The fire which destroyed the adjacent building and the subsequent water damage affected the nominated building as well. Many of the window sash are missing (though enough remain to document their original appearance). There are large sections of the roof which have been damaged, including the roof of the tower. This is a brownfields site requiring substantial remediation. The redevelopment of the site and the historic building is a priority for the Providence Preservation Society and the West Broadway Neighborhood Association.

A small loading/storage building, just north of the nominated building (but on a separate lot) also survived the recent fire. It has been altered and does not appear to meet the eligibility criteria for listing.

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The Louittit Laundry is zoned C-2 (General Commercial) by the City of Providence.

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Major Bibliographical References

Balderson, Lydia Ray. Laundering. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1923.

Hilton, Lorraine Louitt. Remembrances, Family lines, Origins and Tales.
Roswell, GA: Family History Enterprises, 1995.

"Industries and Wealth of the Principal Points in Rhode Island, being
the City of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket, Newport,
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Publishing Company, 1892.

Various articles, Louitt Line, 1943-1947.



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What Cheer Steam Laundry

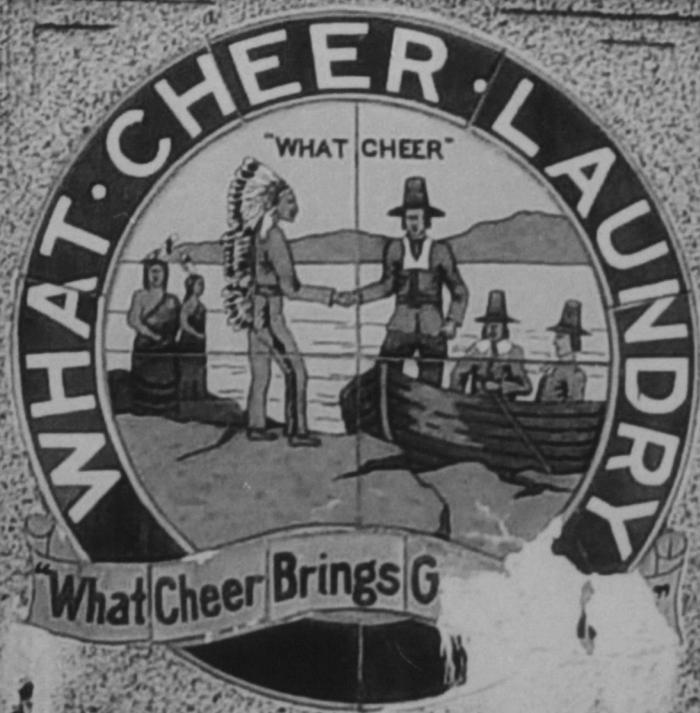
WATCHER LAUNDRY

WOOD BRICK
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DEC. 27
PRINCEDENCE
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Whit Cheer Steam Laundry
Louthit Laundry.
Providence County, Providence
Photo # 20



What Cheer Steam Laundry /
Louthit Laundry
Providence County, Providence, RI
Oct 11 1885



LOUTTIT
LAUNDRY-CLEANSING

SHIRTS

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Louitt Laundry
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