

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

Crompton Free Library

AND/OR COMMON

Main Street, Crompton

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Main Street, Crompton

CITY, TOWN

West Warwick

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2 (Representative Edward Beard)

STATE

Rhode Island 02893

CODE

44

COUNTY

Kent

CODE

003

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

DISTRICT
 BUILDING(S)
 STRUCTURE
 SITE
 OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC
 PRIVATE
 BOTH
PUBLIC ACQUISITION
 IN PROCESS
 BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

OCCUPIED
 UNOCCUPIED
 WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
 YES: RESTRICTED
 YES: UNRESTRICTED
 NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE MUSEUM
 COMMERCIAL PARK
 EDUCATIONAL PRIVATE RESIDENCE
 ENTERTAINMENT RELIGIOUS
 GOVERNMENT SCIENTIFIC
 INDUSTRIAL TRANSPORTATION
 MILITARY OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Town of West Warwick

STREET & NUMBER

1170 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

West Warwick

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Rhode Island 02893

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

West Warwick Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

1170 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

West Warwick

STATE

Rhode Island 02893

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

not so represented

DATE

— FEDERAL — STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

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

In October, 1976, the Crompton Free Library observed the one-hundredth anniversary of its existence and of the completion of the building it still occupies on Main Street in Crompton, a small industrial village in central Rhode Island. Set well forward on a lot of about two acres which it shares with a park and playground, only a few steps from the sidewalk, the library is a balloon-framed wooden structure of one story only, although its steep and picturesquely-shaped gable roof gives the external appearance of a story and a half (photo 1). It is set upon a foundation of rough - finished granite and has wall cover of clapboarding and vertical boarding; roof cover is now of asphalt shingling although it was probably originally of either wooden shingles, or, more likely, of patterned slate. A slender brick chimney at the south end serves the basement heating equipment, and incidentally, provides an excellent vertical visual accent to the little building's rather snug and bonneted form.

In its first form the library was a simple oblong of 35 by 22 feet, with the long axis running north-south; it contained only one large room, with the exception of a narrow "slice" at the south end to accommodate a small vestibule, the stair to the basement, and a little store- and wash-room. In 1952, a one-story, one-room gabled extension was pushed out at the north-west (rear) corner of the building, giving it an overall "L" shape (photo 2).

There have been no changes within or without since 1952 except for a thorough and sympathetic refurbishing and repainting of the exterior in the library's anniversary year; it is still painted "barn red" with white trim, as those were its original colors, never departed from.

The architectural style employed here can best be described as an economical but successful carpenter's vernacular version of the "stick" and "bracketed" styles so fashionable in the 1870s and generally concomitant with a picturesque and asymmetrical form. The interesting and frequently complex shapes typical of these styles are here present, simplified and reduced to a small size. In fact, the library was built by workmen from the Crompton textile mills. The street elevation shows a plain clapboarded frontage with the entrance placed near its south end, under a peaked, projecting Gothic hood which rises above the eaves-line; in the remaining wall space, under a shadowing and bracketed roof projection are two well-spaced windows of modest size within plain board enframements which have flat, square suggestions of tablets, or consoles, ostensibly supporting their sills. At the both ends of the library vertical boarding with beaded joiners is substituted for clapboarding above window-level, and this makes a good stick style textural

see continuation sheet 1

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contrast. Also, at the ends, the gable roof has been shaped to provide a high jerkin-head shelter over a large, high-set triple window (to be above bookcase level inside) at the north, and to come down in a steep hip like a hood or half-umbrella over the two low windows of the south elevation. Externally, the library displays its builder's imaginative use of form and ornament...keeping up with the style of the moment in an economical yet effective way.

Except for the small areas in the south end required by the corner vestibule, the basement stair and a store-room, the interior of the 1876 structure is one large, high ceilinged space, very simply finished in cream-colored plaster and dark-stained woodwork, the latter including doors, window sash and their casings, wainscot, the "ribs" dividing ceiling and wall areas, and book-shelving (photo 3). The ceiling is flat with flat, angled coving on its east and west sides in conformance with the lower slopes of the gable roof within which it is set. This ceiling is visually, if not structurally, supported by chamfered horizontal ribs or beams running east-west across it and carried down the front and rear walls in a somewhat Gothic pilaster fashion.

Wainscot is of narrow vertical matched boarding; diagonal matched boarding fills the panels of the several doors. Book-shelves rise to window-sill height along three walls of the main room, and there are five rows of free-standing stack shelving occupying the north portion of this room. These rows of stacks are of Eastlake-Gothic design, having heavy, pyramid-topped corner supports upon three-legged bases at each end, where the space between supports is filled with vertical matched boarding across which is applied an ornamental wooden member, serving as a brace or tie, and having carved into it, the gilded initials C.F. L.

All of this joinery was executed by craftsmen from the Crompton textile mills. Door hardware, not executed by them, is of heavy cast brass, and the knobs have a raised diaper pattern. Floor cover, no doubt originally of hardwood, is now--practically and pleasingly--of marbled linoleum, and lighting is provided by modern fluorescent ceiling fixtures. Embellishments provided when the library was built include four plaster busts of classical authors on paired consoles set high on the north and south walls and a large plaster statuette of Minerva looking down from atop the central one of the five shelving units; there are also a square-case clock high on the west wall and a "Rogers group" of a genre scene. Furniture is plain and utilitarian.

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As mentioned, a one-room rectangular addition was attached at the north-west in 1952; this has three windows externally, and internally copies the wall treatment and trim of the original library. It contains additional shelving and reading space and is entered from the main room through a wide opening formed where there was originally a second western window in the old building. The basement has a row of square piers down its centre to support the floor of the main room, its traffic and the weight of its bookcases; it was finished in 1934 and now serves as a place for meetings and parties. The entire building was refurbished in 1976 and is meticulously maintained.

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 1876

BUILDER/ARCHITECT probably Stone & Carpenter

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Free Library in the village of Crompton has importance greater than its diminutive size would indicate for several reasons; among these are its architectural qualities and its exemplification of the civic life of a nineteenth century Rhode Island company town. Though the architect for the Library is unknown, it is known that the Providence firm of Stone & Carpenter were the architects of the Crompton Company's #4 Mill (1881-1883); because the library resembles their work and was built only five years earlier, it is possible to attribute the design to that firm on a tentative basis.

The Library is a fine miniature demonstration of the picturesque Stick Style, economically utilizing the interesting forms and adornments of the style. The body of this building with its two kinds of wall cover, the hooded entrance, the bracketing and the high gable roof, picturesquely truncated at one end and hipped at the other all make the library an informative, minor exemplar of the vernacular Stick Style. The unchanged interior exhibits excellent craftsmanship. The original brass door hardware, probably not a local product, is excellent and appropriate. Since the building has always had care and special appreciation from the community it was designed to serve, it is well-preserved.

The village where the Library stands was originally an out-lying section of the town of Warwick in the Pawtuxet River Valley. Since 1913, the area has been part of the town of West Warwick. In 1807, the Providence Manufacturing Company built a stone cotton mill here, the sixth in New England. The enterprise prospered and additional mill buildings of brick and stone were built throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to house expanding weaving, bleaching and printing operations, resulting in a complex of impressive size. In 1823, the business was purchased by Seth Wheaton, Edward Carrington, and Benjamin Cozzens, who re-named it the Crompton Company in honor of the English inventor of the spinning mule; the locale of the mills soon came to be known as Crompton also. In 1850, the firm was incorporated; and, by 1866, George M. Richmond of Providence held a controlling interest. Under Richmond's direction, the company pioneered the American manufacture of velvet and corduroy, which were previously available only from Europe. The Crompton Company became the foremost American

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producer of these fabrics and retains that position today, although now its manufacture has been transferred to southern and western states.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the mills in Crompton attracted many immigrant workers from England, Ireland, Sweden, the Ukraine, and Central Europe. Each of these nationalities brought their own ethnic heritage and religious customs. In the tradition of New England industrial paternalism, the company proprietors provided housing, a company store, a fire station, and an enlarged and relocated school, to attract and protect their labor supply and also to enhance the civic life of the company town.

By 1876, the Richmond family had full control of the Crompton Company. That year Howard Richmond, its president, and F.E. Richmond, its treasurer, began to build and equip a library for their workers and other townspeople. They chose a flat site of about two acres, just across the Pawtuxet River from the mills, where they were able to provide land for a park and a bandstand (now gone) near the new building. These men and their descendents provided financial backing for the library and its staffing until 1945, when both the building and the land were given to the town. In 1952, a bequest from Annie Livsey, a Crompton native and a friend of the Richmonds, provided specifically for an addition to the original building, whose exterior style and trim it sympathetically copied.

From its origin, the Crompton Free Library has been extensively used by the population of the small industrial village, who regard it with appreciation and affection. Throughout its history, it has housed a variety of functions beyond those of reference and circulation. Accommodation has always been provided for the civic activities of the village--including meetings, lectures, exhibitions, and children's programs. In the early twentieth century the library was the center for Americanization and language classes for non-English-speaking immigrants. Domestic service classes, such as dress-making, cooking, home economy, house decoration, and sewing have often been taught here. The basement has been used for fund-raising sales and children's programs. On October 17, 1976, a reception was held there to celebrate the library's one-hundredth anniversary and its refurbishing, a volunteer effort by the village's citizens who made it Crompton's Bicentennial Project.

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Biographical History of the Manufacturers and Business Men of Rhode
Island, pp. 178-181. Providence, Rhode Island, 1901.
Velvet Villagers News. Various mentions, 1925-1930, in this
publication "by and for the Employees of the Crompton Company."
C. Crompton, Rhode Island, 1924-1932.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Bicentennial a natural for Crompton Library," in Pawtuxet Valley Times, October 18, 1976. West Warwick, Rhode Island, 1976.
 Crompton Free Library -- 1936. Broadside, published by the Library, Crompton, Rhode Island, 1936.

see continuation sheet 4

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than two acres

UTM REFERENCES

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------|-------------|---------------|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | 1,9 | 2,8,9,9,2,0 | 4,6,1,7,6,6,0 | B | | | |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING | | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |
| C | | | | D | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Plat 9 Lot 68

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

Richard B. Harrington and Pamela Kennedy

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

March 1978

STREET & NUMBER

Old State House, 150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

(401) 277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

STATE

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

Frederick Williams

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE June 21, 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



Crompton Free Library
Crompton, West Warwick, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, Photographer April, 1977
Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation
Commission

View from the northeast.

Photo 1



Crompton Free Library
Crompton, West Warwick, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, Photographer April, 1977
Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preserva-
tion Commission

View from the south.

Photo 2



Crompton Free Library
Crompton, West Warwick, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, Photographer April, 1977
Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preserva-
tion Commission

Interior, looking north northwest.

Photo 3

