

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  
 AND/OR COMMON

The Shepard Company *Building*

Shepard's

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 259 Westminster Mall  
72-92 Washington Street

CITY, TOWN

Providence

— VICINITY OF  
CODE

#2 Representative Edward Beard

STATE

Rhode Island

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

PROVIDENCE COUNTY CODE  
007

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

| CATEGORY  | OWNERSHIP                                   | STATUS   | PRESENT USE   |
|---|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT               | <input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC             | <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE              | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE                   | <b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>                   | <b>ACCESSIBLE</b>                                    | <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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER:               |

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

The Shepard Development Company

STREET & NUMBER

122 Mathewson Street

CITY, TOWN

Providence

— VICINITY OF

STATE  
Rhode Island 02903

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Providence City Hall

STREET & NUMBER

25 Dorrance Street

CITY, TOWN

Providence

STATE  
Rhode Island

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Interface: Providence

DATE

1975

— FEDERAL — STATE — COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN

Providence

STATE  
Rhode Island

# 7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION                                     |                                       | CHECK ONE                                     | CHECK ONE   |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GOOD                 | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS        | <input 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 Shepard Company building occupies an entire city block bounded by Westminster Mall, Union Street, Washington Street, and Clemence Street in the heart of downtown Providence. The present structure evolved between 1880 and 1903, and incorporates a number of smaller buildings, dating from the 1870's, that existed on the formerly three-block site. The unified exterior treatment of the present building gives little indication of the complex history of acquisition, alteration, and construction that characterized the evolutionary growth of the Shepard Company from its modest beginnings in 1880. The building's large size and prominent location make it a dominating visual element on three major downtown streets.

The Westminster Mall section of the building is four stories in height. The two lower stories are faced with formed metal sheets whose classically inspired detailing divides the facade into six bays. The first story of each bay consists of a large display window which is topped by a horizontal strip window with tripartite or quadripartite divisions. The vertical divisioning established here extends to the second story windows above, and helps to unify the facade. The third bay from the corner of Clemence Street contains an entrance with a projecting metal and glass, segmentally arched canopy overhead. Directly across from this entrance, and near the middle of Westminster Mall, is the tall, free standing Shepard Company clock which has been a city landmark for more than ninety years. The most prominent feature of the facade is the two-story arched corner entrance which pierces the building on both Westminster and Union Streets. The arches spring from square metal columns and are decorated with coffering on their undersides. The two-story open space which they create produces an effective transition from one side of the building to the other. The elegance of the entrance is further enhanced by handsome metal lanterns which project from the facade of the building at the second story level at the juncture of each bay. The simple articulation of the two upper stories contrasts with the decorative richness below. Except for a molded string course between the third and fourth stories, and a simply detailed flat parapet above, there is no decoration except for the windows themselves. These are grouped in threes, and are simply recessed in the buff-colored stucco surface without framing or moldings. The tripartite window grouping does, however, echo the rhythm established in the lower stories, and the integrity of each vertical bay is maintained.

A three bay section of the building on Union Street continues the Westminster Mall facade treatment. The arched, two-story entrance is, again, the dominating feature. The next adjoining section of the Union Street facade is an extremely handsome four-story brick building with a datestone of 1878 prominently displayed at the arched top of its narrow central bay. This bay is flanked at each side by three wider bays, each of which is defined by brick pilasters which run through the height of

(See Continuation Sheet 1)

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the building. At the first and third story levels, the pilasters are surmounted by delicately carved stone capitals. Buff-colored stone is used liberally throughout the building, not only for capitals but also for window sills and lintels, and a rich, polychrome effect is produced. Three windows fill each bay on the upper three stories, with the exception of the central bay. On the second and third stories, the central rectangular window in each bay is capped by a triangular lintel with a floral rondel at its center. Each of the windows on the fourth story is round-arched, with a keystone in the central window. The fenestration of the first story has been altered to conform to the first floor window treatment that continues uniformly around three sides of the entire complex. Without disturbing the vertical, seven bay divisioning of the facade, large display windows, topped by horizontal tripartite strip windows, have been installed in five of the bays, while a multi-door entrance fills a sixth. The character of the building has not been compromised through this alteration, and continuity with the other sections of the long Union Street facade has been increased.

Adjoining the 1878 section, and stretching to Washington Street, is the six-story brick addition to the complex which was completed in 1903. At street level, the overall pattern of large display window topped by horizontal strip windows is maintained across the building. The five upper stories contain uniformly spaced rows of windows, each pair unified by a brownstone lintel. At the fifth story level, a corbelled brick string course differentiates the attic story from those below.

The six-story Washington Street facade is the most impressive section of the complex. With its Renaissance inspired design, and careful detailing, it is a distinguished landmark on the downtown scene. The lower two stories of the six bay facade are, like those on Westminster Mall, faced with metal and feature a similar window treatment. An entrance is contained in one of the bays. The four central bays are separated by engaged columns. The corner bay at Washington and Union Streets is framed by square columns which enclose engaged columns from which the semicircular arches of the two-story entrance spring. Large arched windows, extending through two stories, rise above the arched entrance. At the base of each is a projecting balcony with iron railings which is supported by four curving consoles. Above each arched window on the fifth story is a triple window, while a single window is centered in the attic story. As on Westminster Mall, the wrap around effect of the corner treatment is an effective transition device, and

(See continuation Sheet 2)

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stands out boldly as the building is approached along Washington Street.

While the end bay at the corner of Washington and Clemence Streets contains no entrance, it repeats the upper story treatment of the opposite bay in all other respects. This treatment is again carried around the corner to Clemence Street. The brickwork on the upper stories is extremely fine. Brick quoins articulate the corner bays above the springing of the arched windows, and the facade is enlivened by a complex horizontal pattern created by the alternating projection and recession of courses of red brick. The central four bays on the third through sixth floors each contain a triple window which repeats the window pattern below. A continuous brownstone string course extends across the facade at the fifth floor level, setting off the attic story. A boldly projecting dentiled cornice caps the building in an effective manner. It is of sufficient visual weight to balance the plastic mass of the lower sections of the building. Like the metal surface on the two lower stories, it is painted brown, and harmonizes well with the red brick below.

The Clemence Street facade of the Shepard Company is of minor importance. The street is a narrow thoroughfare, no longer open to traffic, which serves mainly as a service drive for the buildings on either side. Of chief interest here are the two, second story enclosed pedestrian bridges that connected the Shepard Company with the Cherry & Webb and Gladdings stores on Westminster and Mathewson Streets and with the Shepard Tea Room which was located in a Mathewson Street building.

The four floors of continuous former retail space that extend from Washington Street to Westminster Mall are, in spite of the large number of alterations that have occurred through the years, quite unified. Ceilings throughout are of tin, and a uniform height of fifteen feet is maintained. Each floor is supported by rows of metal columns (806 in all according to advertisements that appeared in 1903) which extend through the length of the building. Terrazzo covers the ground floor, while those above are hardwood, in some instances carpeted. A recent owner, who had planned to develop the building as a shopping mall, cut two rectangular holes in the ceiling between the first and second floors to create a two-story open space in the center of the structure. Offices, storage areas, and banks of elevators border the central open space on each floor. Escalators rise through the building at various locations. Along the Washington Street front on the third floor are a series of handsome, wood-panelled offices.

(See continuation Sheet 3)

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The fifth floor of the 1903 addition is also fifteen feet in height, and consists of offices and storage rooms. The sixth floor attic space has a nine foot ceiling with exposed beams and brick walls, and a hardwood floor. The basement contains a boiler room, low ceilinged storage space, and a nine foot high display space.

**The History of the Site and Building**

Shepard and Company opened its doors for business on April 3, 1880 in a three-story Italianate building at the corner of Westminster and Clemence Streets which had been formerly occupied by MacKee, Edwards & Company. From this modest beginning, the business expanded during the next twenty-three years to become the largest retail store in New England. John Shepard, Jr., the founder of the new enterprise, soon set about remodelling his store, installing large, floor to ceiling display windows on the first floor to attract attention and effectively display his merchandise. The need for greater space was soon felt, and the upper floors of the building were taken over. In 1885, Shepard had the opportunity to acquire the adjoining three story building which was occupied by Robinson jewelers and Howe & Carr druggists. With the acquisition of this building, which was also soon remodelled, Shepard and Company had a Westminster Street frontage of 80 feet, "which was reckoned as one of the large stores of the town."<sup>1</sup> On December 5, 1890, a serious three alarm fire occurred in the store. Undaunted by his misfortune, Shepard arranged for rapid repairs, and the store reopened on December 15, 1890 with a well publicized fire sale. As his business continued to prosper, the need for additional space became evident. In 1896, the dry goods firms of H. W. Ladd, a four-story structure on the corner of Westminster and Union Streets, was acquired. Shepard and Company now extended the length of the entire block between Clemence and Union Streets along Westminster Street. The expansion of the business, however, was only beginning.

Between 1896 and 1903, the store expanded northward to Washington Street, obliterating two city streets in the process, and transforming a formerly three block area into one huge retail store. Parallel to Westminster Street, and about 165 feet to the north, ran Comfort Street.

<sup>1</sup>"Story of Remarkable Business Growth in Twenty-Five Years."  
Providence Sunday Journal, April 2, 1905, p. 23.

(See Continuation Sheet 4)

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To provide for additional storage needs, Shepard had built an annex across this street at the rear of the main store in the mid 1890's. When the city abandoned Comfort Street in 1898, this annex was connected to the main building. With the further addition of the handsome 1878 building located at the corner of Union and Comfort Streets, the Shepard Company's domination of the site was becoming increasingly solidified. The final step in the process was made possible when the city gave up an additional thoroughfare, Happy Street, which ran between Comfort and Washington Streets. A new six story building was constructed between 1900 and 1903 which extended westward from the former corner of Union and Comfort Streets to Clemence Street (engulfing the existing annex) and north to Washington Street. At the same time, the Westminster Street section of the building was raised to four stories and given a unified treatment that complemented the new Washington Street facade. By October, 1903, when the last portion of the new building was opened, the complex covered an area of one-and one-quarter acres. The total floor area was nearly seven acres. It had grown from 6,400 square feet of space in 1880 to approximately 301,000 square feet.

The architect for the new, six-story addition was George Frederic Hall (1866-1928).<sup>2</sup> A Providence native, he studied at local schools and was associated with the Providence firm of Stone, Carpenter and Wilson in the early years of his career. In 1893, he formed a partnership with Frank Howard Martin which continued until 1917, when Martin died. The firm was responsible for many important public, private, and commercial buildings in the area. Hall was associate architect for the Industrial National Bank building which was nearing completion when he died.

A prominent feature of the Washington and Union Street addition to the Shepard block was "The Wellington," a "metropolitan restaurant," which opened on November 11, 1901. It was located on the second floor of the Union Street side of the complex, next to the 1878 building, and was entered from a semicircular driveway which cut into the building at approximately the point where Comfort Street had once met Union.

<sup>2</sup>See: "Shepard Company to Start Work on Reconstructing Building Today." Providence Journal, March 10, 1923, p. 1. For Hall's obituary see: Providence Journal, September 6, 1928, p. 1.

(See continuation Sheet 5)

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The entrance was framed by square columns topped by a wide, simply articulated entablature. A single round column was at the center of the opening, with the driveway curving behind. Although the driveway was subsequently removed, the entrance is still visible on Union Street with the area between the columns infilled with display windows topped by quadripartite strip windows.

The Shepard Company already had a "regular" restaurant, which was also located on the second floor of the new addition. "The Wellington," however, was something special, a "first class" restaurant that was advertised as the equal of the great hotel restaurants in New York and Boston. It was described as "a spacious apartment 40 x 50 feet, finished in a high wainscoting of rich weather oak and with a handsomely decorated ceiling, embracing elaborate papier mache handworked designs."<sup>3</sup> The restaurant was lighted by incandescent lamps in clusters, was richly carpeted, and also featured two private dining rooms. The entire new addition to the store was by no means complete by the time of the restaurant opening. Indeed, a photograph of the Washington Street facade which was published in August, 1903 reveals the lower stories of the building still surrounded by scaffolding.<sup>4</sup>

Although no major new construction occurred after 1903, a continuing process of remodelling took place through the years as the store adapted to new needs. On March 8, 1923 a disastrous million dollar fire struck the store. The sixth and part of the fifth floors at the Washington Street end of the building were severely damaged. As was the case with the 1890 fire, little time was lost in making necessary repairs, and the store reopened on March 29, 1923. Supervising the reconstruction was George F. Hall, the architect for the building. The acquisition of additional space also continued after 1903. In 1920, the company acquired the building at 122 Mathewson Street which was located across Clemence Street from the main store. A new restaurant was opened here in 1923. Subsequently, in 1939, the Shepard Tearoom opened in the building and remained until closing on January 5, 1974.

<sup>3</sup>"The Wellington Open Tomorrow." Providence Sunday Journal, November 10, 1901, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>"Washington Street is Advancing." Providence Sunday Journal, August 2, 1903, p. 19.

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In 1920, the company acquired the building at 122 Mathewson Street which, since 1939, has been known as Shepards Tearoom. Located across Clemence Street from the main store, the 45-X 112-foot, three-story brick building dates from the turn of the 20th century. On the right, it directly adjoins the Mathewson Street Methodist Church, a handsome stone, four-story church and office building complex completed in 1896. On the left, it is separated from the adjoining three-story building by the remains of Happy Street, the narrow thoroughfare that extended to Union Street before it was abandoned by the city.

The main facade of the Tearoom building is faced with yellow brick. The first story was remodeled in 1941, and is now covered with enameled metal panels. It contains an entrance to the second floor on the left, and a symmetrically disposed restaurant facade with windows flanking a central double-doored entrance. Projecting from the building above the entrance is a tall neon sign reading "Shepards Tearoom."

Above the remodeled first story, the building retains its original treatment. The second and third floors each contain three triple, double-hung, mullioned windows, unified into two-story vertical bays by brownstone sills, lintels and quoins. A brick and brownstone belt course extends across the facade above the third story, delimiting a low attic, which is lighted by five small, round-arched windows with brick voussoirs, each centered within a vertical bay. Capping the building is a corbelled and dentiled brick parapet.

The Tearoom building was connected to the main store by an enclosed pedestrian bridge which extended across Clemence Street, linking the second and third stories of the two buildings. This bridge was probably constructed about 1923, and was definitely in existence by the late 1920's. Alterations to the bridge were made in 1937 and after.

(Additional retail and storage space was leased by the Shepard Company on the second and third floors of the building at 114-118 Mathewson Street, across the former Happy Street from the Tearoom building, and in 1956, a two-story enclosed bridge was constructed between this building and the Tearoom, thus linking the main store with a third structure.

See continuation sheet 5B

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The final "bridge building" operation was completed in October, 1965, when a 14-x 22-foot second story enclosed pedestrian walkway across Clemence Street was opened to connect the Shepard Company with the Cherry & Webb and Gladding's stores on Westminster Mall).

# 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 checked="" 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE       | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY             | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION                 |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY               | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT    | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)                |  |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION              |   |   |  |

SPECIFIC DATES 1870's to 1903

BUILDER/ARCHITECT George Frederic Hall for 1903

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

addition

The growth of the Shepard Company paralleled and, to a noteworthy extent, led commercial and mercantile expansion of downtown Providence during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. From its beginnings in 1880, the Shepard Company played an important role in meeting the increasing consumer needs of a rapidly expanding population, and contributed greatly to the economic well being of the city. Its success spurred additional downtown growth, and its effective marketing techniques served as examples for other businesses. Shopping at Shepard's became a tradition for several generations of Providence and Rhode Island families, and the store's impact as a major center of downtown retail activity continued through the early 1970's. As suggested in 1936, the Shepard Company kept "pace step by step with the growth, prosperity and development of Rhode Island."<sup>5</sup>

The history of the Shepard Company also tells the personal story of its founder, John Shepard, Jr. He was not only a very successful businessman, "a man of unusual energy and enterprise," but a public spirited citizen who was concerned about his customers, his employees and his community.<sup>6</sup>

In 1880, Shepard was twenty-three years old. Born and raised in Boston, he had been associated with the firm of Shepard, Norwell & Co. which had been founded by his father, John Shepard, Sr. In striking out on his own, therefore, he brought to the new enterprise a solid grounding in business principles that had been learned under his father's guidance and supervision.

As an entrepreneur, Shepard carefully guided the growth of his company, and attended personally to the smallest of details concerning everyday operations. He successfully employed new marketing techniques, and was quick to seize upon any and all innovations. In 1881, for example, he placed the first full page advertisement that had ever

<sup>5</sup> Rhode Island Tercentenary Commission. Commemorating Three Hundred Years. Providence, 1936, p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> Jos. Davis Hall, Biographical History of the Manufacturers and Businessmen of Rhode Island. Providence, 1901, p. 354.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Advertisement. Providence Journal, October 10, 1903, p. 1.  
 Hall, Jos. Davis. Biographical History of the Manufacturers and  
 Businessmen of Rhode Island. Providence, 1901, page 354.  
 "It Was Like a Home, It Was Like One Big Family." Providence  
 Evening Bulletin, October 23, 1973, p. 25.

(See continuation Sheet 9)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 4

UTM REFERENCES

|   |      |         |     |          |      |     |     |      |
|---|------|---------|-----|----------|------|-----|-----|------|
| A | 1,9  | 2,9,9   | 4,6 | 3,2      | 4,00 | 4,6 | 3,2 | 6,20 |
|   | ZONE | EASTING |     | NORTHING |      |     |     |      |
| C |      |         |     |          |      |     |     |      |
| D |      |         |     |          |      |     |     |      |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Plat 25, lots 350, 355, 356, 357, 359, 361, 362, 363, 365,  
 376, 378, 381

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

Robert T. Gifford, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Downtown Providence Preservation Project

DATE

April 14, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

44 Washington Street

TELEPHONE

(401) 351-4300

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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Frederick C. Williamson*

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

April 30, 1976

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

ATTEST:

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

*8/1/76*

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

*8-9-76*

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appeared in a Providence newspaper. This simple act generated a great deal of interest--and business--and his competitors soon followed suit. Shepards had the first completely motorized delivery service in New England. In 1922, the company began operation of the first broadcasting service in Rhode Island, radio station WEAN.

The Shepard Company was a unique enterprise. It was John Shepard's desire "to have for sale under the one roof practically all the necessities of life, as well as the luxuries."<sup>7</sup> When his grocery and provision store was opened in October, 1903 in the Washington Street addition, his wish was fulfilled. The Shepard Company was almost self-sufficient. It had its own ice-making and refrigeration plant, laundry, bakery, and printing plant. Shepard insisted that his company was not a department store, "but rather a collection of stores, each more complete in itself than the small separate store."<sup>8</sup> Each of the more than 60 stores in the complex was managed individually, "except that they all share in the great economies made possible by their location under one roof and by the direction of one head."<sup>9</sup> Each store paid its proportionate share for rent, light, heat and general expenses, and was "absolutely upon its own footing."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the economies of scale which such an arrangement provided were indicative of widespread trends occurring throughout the country during this period which brought about the gradual disappearance of small, specialized stores that were unable to compete with their larger and more diversified neighbors. The gradual acquisition by the Shepard Company of four existing stores in a one block section along Westminster Street is a prime example of such broad currents of development.

It was during the same years that the Shepard Company was experiencing such impressive growth that the large downtown department store was emerging in cities across the United States. While such stores as

<sup>7</sup>"Story of Remarkable Business Growth in Twenty-Five Years," p. 23.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

(See continuation Sheet 7)

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Lord & Taylor and Jordan Marsh had begun operations in the early decades of the nineteenth century, they were initially concerned with traditional retail lines, especially dry goods. The second half of the century saw the development of the first real department stores such as Stewarts in New York, Wanamakers in Philadelphia, and Marshall Field in Chicago. The Stewart Department store, for example, was designed by John Kellum and built between 1859 and 1863 on Broadway in New York. An enormous structure, with a cast iron front, it was subsequently taken over by Wanamakers who continued to use it until it was demolished in the mid 1950's. At the same time that the six-story Shepard Company addition was being built, Louis Sullivan's great Schlesinger & Meyer Department store (now Carson, Pirie & Scott) was appearing on the Chicago scene. Functional needs shaped both buildings, in spite of stylistically divergent exterior treatments. Each consists of a unified two-story section at street level with large display windows and inviting corner entrances to effectively lure the prospective customer inside. The floors above are large, well lighted, and adaptable to the changing display needs of such diversified stores.

Shepard's was not the only Providence department store that was expanding at the turn of the century. 1903 saw the completion of additions to three other large stores, including the O'Gorman Company, Callender, McAuslan & Troup (The Boston Store), and the Outlet Company. These developments were in no small measure a result of the impetus and example given by the Shepard Company, which "was one of the first big stores to break away from the rut of having just a few lines of goods."<sup>11</sup>

John Shepard, Jr. effectively capitalized on all opportunities to bring people into his store. When the new addition was completed in 1903, a special feature was the "Main Aisle," a "covered thoroughfare from Westminster to Washington Street paved with marble tiles--bordered by rich displays of merchandise."<sup>12</sup> Advertisements heralded it "as one of the many unique and advantageous features of this combination of stores" and suggested that the would-be customer "use it in going from street to street."<sup>13</sup> Aside from providing his patrons with almost any

<sup>11</sup>"Stores Within A Store." Providence Board of Trade Journal, Vol. 21, No. 3 (March, 1909), p. 145.

<sup>12</sup>Advertisement. Providence Journal, October 10, 1903. p. 1

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

(See continuation Sheet 8)

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article they might desire, Shepard pioneered in providing other services to make shopping as convenient as possible. Included in the store were a resting room with facilities for letter writing, a nursery where children could be left under the care of a trained nurse, an information bureau, and a post office substation.

Shepard was equally concerned about the welfare of his employees, a concern that was also shared by his son, Robert F. Shepard, who assumed the presidency in 1928. Newspaper articles throughout the company's long history tell a story of exceedingly warm relations between management and employees. The company held annual dances, outings and clambakes for all the employees, and sponsored a large number of intra-store organizations and clubs. In 1914, Shepards became the first store in Providence to close on Saturday nights--and it remained the only one to do so for over a year. In 1915, the payment of a \$1000 death benefit was initiated. By 1936, all employees received a two week paid vacation, and those who had been with the firm for five or more years also had a midwinter vacation. When the Shepard Company was about to close in 1973, a newspaper headline summed up what must have been the feelings of many employees: "It was like a home, it was like one big family."<sup>14</sup>

The physical growth of the Shepard Company transformed a three block area in the heart of the downtown retail district, and created a major landmark on the urban scene. While the Shepard Company no longer exists, its building remains a dominating and unifying visual element on three important downtown streets. The building is distinctive, and lends continuity and a sense of tradition to its environment. Unlike many of the surrounding buildings, the exterior of the Shepard Company has remained essentially unchanged since the complex was completed in the first years of the present century. With its gracefully elegant arched entrances on two important pedestrian intersections, its handsome Westminster Mall and Union Street lanterns, its imposing, yet human humane, scale, and its famous old clock, it recalls an earlier era and evokes the memory of a vibrant and bustling shopping area that existed not so very long ago. Through current plans for its renewed retail and commercial usage, it can once again regain its position of eminence in the life of the city, serve as a prime generator of human activity, and provide additional impetus for the continuing revitalization and rehabilitation of the downtown shopping district.

<sup>14</sup>"It Was Like a Home, It Was Like One Big Family,"  
Providence Evening Bulletin, October 23, 1973, p. 25.

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The Tearoom building has housed many functions over the years. The third floor was the initial home of WEAN, Rhode Island's first radio station, begun by the Shepard Company in 1922. (The station was moved to the top of the Biltmore Hotel in 1928, and in 1932, to the Crown Hotel building on Weybosset Street which was owned by John Shepard, Jr. WEAN was acquired by the Providence Journal in 1954, and moved to its building on Fountain Street. In 1974, it relocated in the Howard Building on Dorrance Street.) The third floor of the Tearoom building was also used for an employees lounge, lunchroom, and kitchen. When WEAN left the building in 1928, the entire third floor became a lounge and cafeteria, a use which continued until the store closed in 1973.

The second floor of the Tearoom building has been used for retail space since the building was acquired. In the recent past it housed the Shepards Christmas gift shop and women's sportswear department.

On October 13, 1923, a new restaurant was opened to the public on the first floor of the Tearoom building. On the previous evening, John Shepard, Jr. had entertained 200 guests at an opening party in the restaurant, which was able to seat 300 diners. The restaurant apparently replaced "The Wellington" and the "regular" restaurant that had occupied portions of the second floor of the main building since 1901.

In 1927, minor alterations, designed by George Frederic Hall, were made on the exterior of the existing first floor. Hall's involvement with the Shepard Company thus spanned a period of nearly thirty years -- from the design of the six story addition at the turn of the century, through reconstruction after the 1923 fire, to the Tearoom building alterations.

In 1939, extensive renovations of the Tearoom's first floor were completed. The individual tables that dated from 1923 were replaced by built-in booths and a lunch counter extending through the building. Except for subsequent redecorating and updating of kitchen facilities, the Tearoom remained essentially unchanged until it closed on January 5, 1974. The Tearoom was "a Providence landmark for 35 years."<sup>1</sup> Its closing prompted a newspaper article, "A Way of Life Ends," which expressed the feeling of employees and customers, many of whom had worked in, or patronized, the Tearoom for 25 or 30 years.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"A Way of Life Ends." Providence Evening Bulletin, January 4, 1974, p.1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

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- "Shepard Company's 29th Anniversary." Providence Journal, April 3, 1909, page 11.
- "The Store That Obliterated Two Streets." Providence Board of Trade Journal, volume 26, number 12 (December, 1914), page 851.
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