

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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Continuation sheet 57

Item number 7

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NAME: John F. Adams House
LOCATION: 11 Allen Avenue
OWNERS: Robert A. & Cecile M. Lemieux
11 Allen Avenue
Pawtucket, Rhode Island
CONDITION: Good; altered; moved, c. 1929

DESCRIPTION:

The John F. Adams House, an imposing Italianate mansion built in 1867, presently occupies a small lot on a quiet residential street just off the bustling commercial strip of Broadway (U.S. Route 1) in Pawtucket's Pleasant View neighborhood. This clapboarded, timber-framed house stands three stories high and is modeled in the Italianate palazzo form popular during the mid-nineteenth century. A projecting, pedimented pavilion is centered on the building's major facade; a two-story kitchen ell projects from the building's rear; and a central, pilastered cupola, perched upon the virtually flat main roof, echoes the cubical form of the body of the house.

The building's exterior is handsomely detailed in a lush interpretation of the Italianate style with some strong touches of both Moorish and Indian influence apparent in some of the details of the front facade. Prominent Italianate details include the paired brackets supporting deeply projecting eaves and the flat, segmentally arched, and pedimented window heads (each supported by a pair of projecting consoles) which appear over most of the building's windows. A bit of Moorish inspiration is evident in the intricately profiled wooden hoods hung over the two first-floor windows on the main facade; while the leafy ornament characteristic of Indian architecture is clearly reflected in the heavily carved bases and capitals of the columns supporting the single-story front porch.

The interior follows a standard central-hallway layout with a single set of double parlors (now subdivided) to the right of the hallway. A modestly carved grey marble mantel survives across the hallway in the opposite (southern) front room; other mantels may be hidden beneath furred-out modern walls. The typical, heavily molded Victorian paneled doors, corresponding Victorian standing trim, parquet floors, and the rather long and narrow central staircase, culminating in a square newel post with chamfered edges and applied filigree ornament, all appear to be original. The handsome unpainted woodwork with applied diamond bosses in the two rear rooms on the northern side of the first floor (including extensive built-in cabinets in the kitchen, and full-length window enframements in the room behind) appear to be later.

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PERIODS: 1800-1899
AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture
SPECIFIC DATE: 1867
ARCHITECT: Unknown
BUILDER: Nathan Crowell (Central Falls, R.I.)

SIGNIFICANCE:

The John F. Adams House, erected in 1867 for a wealthy print-cloth manufacturer (and eventual Mayor of Pawtucket) is the finest late Italianate dwelling still standing in Pawtucket. The exotic details of its principal facade--the Moorish window hoods and Indian porch columns--are unmatched in the city and link the Adams House to a group of similar mid-nineteenth-century dwellings designed by Henry Austin and his followers in the vicinity of New Haven, Connecticut.

Although the architect of the Adams House is not presently known, there is documentary as well as stylistic evidence to suggest that the designer was not a local man. The Providence Journal's list of important buildings erected in Rhode Island in 1867 (Providence Journal, 25 January 1868) includes the Adams House and names Nathan Crowell of Central Falls as the carpenter, but it does not give an architect's name. This suggests that the house was not designed by one of the several Providence architects whose names appear repeatedly throughout these annual lists. Stylistic similarities suggest that the designer may actually have been from the New Haven, Connecticut, area, where Henry Austin had introduced leafy, Indian-derived columns and other Eastern details, as early as the 1840s. Moreover, there is (or was) in South Norwalk, Connecticut, a house which is in many respects virtually identical to Adams' dwelling. The James Knapp House, West Avenue, South Norwalk (date and designer unknown; illustrated on p. 82 of Edmund V. Gillon, Jr.'s Early Illustrations and Views of American Architecture) shares, among other things, the overall form, the Moorish windowhoods, and the unusual pilastered cupola of Pawtucket's Adams House. Alternatively, carpenter Nathan Crowell may have copied the design published in Gillon's book. In any event, John F. Adams apparently decided to pass over the local talent in 1867 and to import, instead, a design which is characteristic of the distinctive vernacular taste of lower Connecticut.

John F. Adams, for whom the house was built, was a figure of some note in Pawtucket's industrial and political history. The son of a prominent Central Falls thread and yarn manufacturer, Adams began a cotton-goods business in Pawtucket in 1862. Two years later Adams purchased the property and plant of the Lanesville Manufacturing Company,

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located across the state line in Attleboro, Massachusetts, and he built the concern into a highly successful print-cloth manufactory. Adams also became the treasurer of the Hope Thread Company in Pawtucket and in 1892, he succeeded his father as President and Treasurer of the Stafford Manufacturing Company of Central Falls. Like many other successful late nineteenth-century industrialists, Adams eventually became active in local politics, serving as a Republican City Councilor and, in 1898, he was elected Mayor of Pawtucket.

John F. Adams' Italianate mansion originally fronted upon Broadway, and was one of the series of nineteenth-century upper-class residences which once gave to this thoroughfare a distinctly fashionable tone. In the present century, though, Broadway has developed into an auto-oriented commercial strip, and a large number of the nineteenth-century dwellings along it have been either altered or destroyed. The Adams mansion has escaped this fate through being moved. The Broadway end of Adams' original one-acre house lot was purchased by the Beacon Oil Company in 1929 (a gas station still stands upon this portion of the lot, but the 1867 mansion was moved approximately 50 feet toward the rear of the original house lot and turned 90° to face Allen Avenue. Here the house still stands, with its exotic exterior trim virtually intact, and many of its original interior features still visible, a striking reminder of the days when manufacturers and mayors were proud to live on Pawtucket's Broadway.

Although the John F. Adams House, as a moved building, would not ordinarily be considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register, the building's outstanding architectural character and important historical associations (combined with the relative insignificance of the move) make the property eligible for National Register listing.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nominated property includes the city lot on which the Adams House is built: Pawtucket Assessor's Plat 20B, lot 529.

ACREAGE: Less than one acre; 5482 square feet

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: Local

UTM: A 19 302760 4639300

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