

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

received MAY 29 1987  
date entered JUL 10 1987

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic South Main Street Historic District

and or common N.A.

## 2. Location

street & number Cady, South Main, and Wood Streets N.A. not for publication  
city, town Coventry N.A. vicinity of congressional district #2  
Hon. Claudine Schneider  
state Rhode Island code 44 county Kent code 003

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Multiple; see owners list on file at R.I.H.P.C.

street & number

city, town

vicinity of

state

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Coventry Town Hall

street & number 670 Flat River Road

city, town Coventry

state Rhode Island 0281

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Preliminary Survey Report,  
Town of Coventry

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1978

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records R.I. Historical Preservation Commission  
150 Benefit Street

city, town Providence

state Rhode Island 02903

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The South Main Street Historic District is a linear, residential district in the town of Coventry; it developed largely in the early and mid-nineteenth century and extends about one quarter mile between the South Branch of the Pawtuxet River at the north to a short distance south of Wood Street at the south. Twenty seven of the twenty nine major buildings along the street are residences. At the north end of the district, along the river, is an early twentieth-century factory occupying the site of an earlier mill building. A large metal structure near the north end of the district is the major intrusion.

Although there were six factories operating at one time near the district, few of the South Main Street houses were occupied by mill workers, but rather by people of various occupations--a mill owner, a policeman, a carpenter, a doctor, farmers, the town clerk, and several dealers and manufacturers, including a carriage maker who had his shop on South Main Street. Reflecting this essentially working class population, most of the houses are plain vernacular structures that reflect their Federal, Greek Revival, or Victorian origins with only a minimum of architectural detail or decoration. Of the twenty-seven houses in the district, nine were erected during the Federal era, four were built in the Greek Revival style, eleven were built in mid-nineteenth century, most of these before 1850, and one dates from the late nineteenth century. There are four twentieth-century buildings, two 1920s bungalows, a mid-twentieth-century rural house, and a Veterans of Foreign Wars hall. There are no high-style or architect-designed houses and it is this characteristic of South Main Street--its almost solid line of simple, frame houses--that makes it significant architecturally and historically.

South Main Street is located in the southern part of the village of Washington in the southeastern part of the town of Coventry in western Rhode Island. The northern end of South Main Street forms a T with Main Street, State Route 117, the principal road of the village and one of the town's main arteries. At the north end of the district, South Main Street crosses the South Branch of the Pawtuxet River over a bridge. The river was the site of about half a dozen factories in Washington village and supplied water power for mills at several sites downstream in Coventry and West Warwick. The south end of the street curves sharply before it joins Tiogue Avenue, State Route 3. Wood Street connects the northern part of South Main Street with Tiogue Avenue. Off South Main Street are side streets, all developed in the twentieth century. Both Main Street and Tiogue Avenue, at each end of South Main Street, are commercialized and heavily traveled.

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

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South Main Street (cont.)

and a large 2½-story ell at the rear. In 1870 C.J. Batty, who resided here, was a Coventry policeman and a clerk at I. Andrews store.

- 21-23 G. Beard House (early 19th century): A 2½-story, clapboarded, flank-gable Greek Revival house, with paired brick interior chimneys; a central entry with a bracketed hood (a later addition), in a 5-bay facade; and a large rear ell with a 2-story spindlework porch at the right side.
- 22 Charles Morse, Jr., House (1827): A 2½-story flank-gable Federal house with two large brick interior chimneys, an asymmetrical 4-bay facade, a pedimented portico entry with side lights, corner quoins and a 2-story ell at the rear. Built by Charles Morse, Jr., in 1827, in 1870 it was the residence of W.A. Stone, a dealer in cattle, horses, carriages, sleighs, harnesses, whips, robes, and real estate.
- 25 Bungalow (c. 1920): A 1½-story shingled bungalow set gable end to the street, with a large hip-roofed dormer and a porch formed by the roof overhang in the front.
- (30) House (mid-20th century): A 3-bay, 1½-story, flank-gable house with attached garage.  
NC
- (31-33) Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall, Post 9404 (mid-19th century, mid-20th century): The north side of this two-part structure, a 2-story, hip-roofed, heavily-altered, early to mid-19th-century residence, was home to the Whipple family in the latter half of the 19th century. Henry Clay Whipple (1857-1909), farmer, lumber dealer, and auctioneer, was a state representative and state senator. The south side is a mid-20th-century, 1-story, flat-roofed, aluminum-clad building, used by the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 9404.  
NC
- 37 Dr. A. Tillinghast House (c. 1840): A 1½-story, Greek Revival house, set gable end to the street, with its entry at the left side of the front, a modern fixed sash window at the right side of the front, and a shed roof dormer at the left side.
- 38 J.J. Kilton House (early 19th century): This fine 2-story clapboarded Federal house, with a handsome central entry with a closed fan and side lights, in a 5-bay facade, and a large ell at the rear, was the home of a local mill owner.

(See Continuation Sheet #3)

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## South Main Street (cont.)

- 41 F. Baker House (mid-19th century): A 2½-story Greek Revival/Bracketed house, covered with clapboards and set gable end to the street; a 1-story, flat-roofed, wrap-around porch in front; entry at the left side of the 3-bay facade; two tall brick chimneys; and a large ell at the rear.
- 46 Albert Keach House (c. 1775): A 1½-story clapboarded Colonial house, with a central entry, with side lights, in a 5-bay facade; a brick center chimney; and a 1-story wing at the right side, rear. The house was in the Keach family in the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th century.
- (49) W.F. Miller House (mid-19th century): A 1½-story, 3-bay, clapboarded end-gable house, with entry at the right side, front, and a small, brick chimney at the ridge. In 1870 this house was the home of W.F. Miller, manufacturer and dealer in heavy and light harnesses, robes, whips, cards, combs, and brushes.
- 54-56 J.T. Miller House (early 19th century): A 1½-story, flank-gable Federal house with a central entry with a 2-light transom and pilasters, in a 5-bay facade, and a large ell at the rear.
- 55 Wayne Whitman House (c. 1920): A 1½-story cottage, set back from the road atop a hill; it is largely screened from view by evergreens.
- 58 J.T. Miller House (early 19th century): A 2-story Federal/Greek Revival house, two bays wide and set gable end to the street, with an entry at the left side of the front, and a brick center chimney.
- 62 Whipple House (c. 1840): A 1½- and 2½-story Greek Revival house with a slightly recessed central entry in a 5-bay facade; aluminum siding; a large, brick, center chimney; and a 1-story ell at the right side, rear. The house has been in two families since it was built.
- 65 A.E. Keach House (late 19th century): A 1½-story, clapboarded house with a central entry, with a hood, in a 5 bay facade, and 1-story flanking wings.
- 66 A.M. Sweet House (early 19th century): A 1½-story aluminum-sided Federal house with a central entry with a 5-light transom in a 5-bay facade and an ell at the right side, rear.

(See Continuation Sheet #4)

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## South Main Street (cont.)

- 70 House (mid-19th century): A 1½-story, 3-bay, aluminum-sided house with a central entry under a hip-roofed portico; a 3-bay facade; and a small brick center chimney.
- 73 S. Champlin House (late 18th/early 19th century): A 1½-story, shingled Federal house with a central entry in a 5-bay facade; a large brick off-center chimney; and a flanking gable roof.
- 76 J. Waite House (mid-19th century): A 1½- and 2½-story clapboarded house, with a high basement at the rear; a central entry in a 5-bay facade; and two gabled dormers in front.
- 82 Fones House (c. 1784): A 1½-story clapboarded Federal house with an asymmetrical, 5-bay facade; flanking gable roof; porticoed entry with a curved roof; and a small off-center chimney.
- 83 S.W. Griffin House (early 19th century): A 1½-story shingled house with a central entry in a 5-bay facade; a small, brick chimney near the center; and a tall, 1½-story wing at the right rear.
- 93 G. Franklin House (mid-19th century): A 1½-story clapboarded duplex with two separate entries at the center of a 6-bay facade, and 2 brick interior chimneys.
- 94-96 W. Mathewson House (early 19th century): A 1½-story shingled Greek Revival house with a central entry in a 5-bay facade; a small brick chimney at the right side; and a small ell at the right side, rear.
- 97 J.S. Tarbox House (mid-19th century): A 1½-story clapboarded house, set gable end to the street, with a hooded entry at the right side and a small brick chimney near the center. In 1894, Henry T. Whitman had his carriage manufactory here, behind the house.
- 101 Rogers House (early-mid-19th century): A 1½-story clapboarded house with a "salt box" roof; an asymmetrical 5-bay facade; and a large brick center chimney.

## WOOD STREET

- 4 House (1784): A 1½-story flank-gable clapboarded house with a transom-lighted entry near the center of a 5-bay facade; a large brick center chimney; a large shed dormer across the front; and a small wing at the left front.

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The buildings of the South Main Street Historic District are ranged along the east and west sides of South Main Street. As a transportation corridor South Main Street has historical significance--it has carried traffic between the Country Road (running from Apponaug to Connecticut) and the road from Coweset to Hopkins Hollow since at least the early nineteenth century. In addition, the road is the organizing principle of the historic district: the buildings inventoried above are set along the road, are oriented toward it, and derive much of their significance from their uniformity of siting and their relationship to each other and the road. The actual road surface, however, appears to have been altered and resurfaced within recent times and, thus, does not appear to retain integrity.

Building count:

27 buildings

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion	
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science	
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture	
1600-1699	X architecture	education	military	social/	
1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian	
X 1800-1899	commerce	exploration settlement	philosophy	theater	
X 1900-	communications	industry	politics government	transportation	
		invention		X other (specify)	
	various;			community de-	
Specific dates	see inventory	Builder Architect	Unknown	velopment	

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The South Main Street Historic District is significant as a well preserved fragment of Washington, the leading village in the town of Coventry; for its ability to document the appearance of a western Rhode Island village which developed over the course of the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries; and for the quality of its vernacular houses which represent the various types built throughout the period of significance.

The district is a relatively intact residential neighborhood that developed along South Main Street in the early years of the settlement of Washington village. Washington is one of many Rhode Island villages that started around a grist and saw mill site or a highway then experienced its period of greatest growth and development in association with the establishment of textile factories, beginning in the early nineteenth century. The village development pattern that included stores, banks, taverns, a post office, churches, and schools, as well as a variety of residential buildings, following in the wake of factory construction, is a common one in the state. In Washington, most of these public and private institutions were built along Main Street. South Main Street, except for a factory at its northern end, became an almost exclusively residential street, and has remained so to the present.

South Main Street's character is further reinforced by the architectural quality of its constituent buildings that are, with a few exceptions, stylistically plain or vernacular. Its significance lies in its tightly-knit streetscape, its uniformity of siting and massing, and its strong nineteenth century identity. It is a well-preserved slice of history.

The houses set along both sides of South Main Street are good examples of the Federal, Greek Revival, and Victorian styles in their vernacular modes. Most are rectangular, box-like, wood frame structures; their stylistic references usually limited to entryway treatments. Though plain, they are testimony to the skill of Rhode Island's anonymous country builders.

Little building took place here after about 1860, and the few later buildings are architecturally compatible with their predecessors. Despite radical changes on Main Street at the center of the village--destruction of old buildings and construction of new ones, especially commercial

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structures--South Main Street has survived as a rare streetscape and an important artifact of the town's history.

Coventry, originally part of the town of Warwick, was laid out in four tracts between 1701 and 1735. In 1741, Coventry was incorporated as a town, and about that time roads were laid out from Narragansett Bay to interior Rhode Island and Connecticut. The Country Road, established by the General Assembly in 1742-43, was laid out from Apponaug through Centreville, Quidnick, Washington, and over Bowen's Hill to Connecticut. Another highway connected the old settlement of Warwick at Coweset, on the Bay, with Tiogue, Maple Root, and Hopkins Hollow in western Coventry. The site of Washington village thus lay between these two major east-west roads.

Eighteenth century Coventry was dominated by agriculture. Farmers and their families comprised most of the population. The scattered farmsteads were serviced by small, water-powered grist mills that ground grain, mostly corn, and by saw mills that manufactured lumber used in the construction of buildings. Francis and Thomas Brayton, the first recorded settlers in what is now Washington, came here from the Island of Rhode Island (Aquidneck Island), and in 1765 they purchased a large tract of land. Each man built a grist mill on the opposite bank of the river near the present bridge. Thomas Brayton later had a fulling mill, and there was also a saw mill operating here in the eighteenth century. Another fulling mill was established by Judge Stephen Potter. The small settlement, known as Braytonville at that time, had five houses in 1795. Potter's house, no longer standing, was probably located on South Main Street, then merely a cart path connecting the two east-west highways; the other houses were north of the river. In 1797, Henry Whitman purchased from Thomas Brayton two grist mills, a saw mill, a fulling mill, and half the water power here; the other half was owned by Judge Isaac Johnson and William F. Potter.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Braytonville was still a hamlet, but the industrial revolution that started with the Slater Mill in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, in 1793, was about to sweep through rural Rhode Island. In 1806, the first textile mill in Coventry was established along the South Branch of the Pawtuxet at neighboring Anthony Village. Within the next fifteen years, another five textile factories were erected in Coventry. In Braytonville, Henry Whitman sold his mill property and water rights to Peleg Wilbur, Colonel George Arnold, Caleb Kilton, and John Bissell in 1809. They formed the Washington Manufacturing Company, which gave the village its name.

The Washington Company built its first mill about 1810 at the intersection of Main and South Main streets. Its fifteen hundred spindles made it a relatively large factory for the time. Another mill was

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erected about 1810 by Thomas Whipple and Colonel Peleg Wilbur. A small, wooden structure along the south side of the river downstream from the bridge, it manufactured yarn and cotton cloth. About 1813, Hines and Arnold constructed a two-story machine shop which employed sixty men in the manufacture of machinery for the factories of the Pawtuxet Valley. As Cole reported in his 1889 history, "The factories and this machine shop made Washington one of the liveliest villages in Rhode Island."

In 1818, the Bank of Kent was incorporated. It was located at the northwest corner of South Main and Bank streets at the north end of the district. The bank failed in 1867; its building is no longer extant. A store was established at a very early date, as was a tavern, referred to as Brayton's Tavern, and many houses were built. Judging by architectural styles there were ten houses erected along South Main Street before c. 1830, nine of them within the district; they include modest one-and-a-half-story cottages and some larger two-and-a-half-story houses.

The Hines and Arnold Machine Shop failed after a few years; it was operated by a number of men, including Russell Chace, and became known as Chace's Mill. In 1826, the Washington Company's factory was destroyed by fire; it was rebuilt in 1827 in an enlarged form. The two- and three-story structure operated between four and five thousand spindles. Thomas Whipple built a mill in about 1828.

In 1831, when the village was identified as "Washington Factories," the Washington Methodist Church was erected on Main Street by a society that was organized in 1823. About 1833, John J. Kilton erected a two-story building, operating about thirteen hundred spindles, along the south bank of the river and along South Main Street, opposite the Washington Mill. A school house was built in 1844 on Cady Street, just off South Main Street, to serve the growing population in this area. Along South Main Street, about fifteen houses date from this period.

The Coventry National Bank was established along Main Street in 1852, and in 1856, the Hartford, Providence, and Fishkill Railroad began service through the village, its tracks running through the northern part of Washington. Benjamin Moon built a factory along Main Street, which took his name, and he also purchased another small factory across the river for use as a saw and shingle mill.

In 1862, J.E. Kilton owned the two Washington Company factories, one on Main, one on South Main Street. The Bank of Kent stood nearby and South Main Street was lined with an almost solid row of houses from the river to beyond Wood Street. By 1870, Main Street also was lined almost solidly with buildings which included a town clerk's office, a store and

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post office, another store, and the Methodist church. Four mills were operating. Kilton's Mill north of the river, with fifteen hundred spindles and twenty-three employees, bleached shirtings; the cotton mill across the river, with forty-five hundred spindles, was run by sixty-two workers. Benjamin Moon's factory along Main Street operated thirteen hundred spindles and employed twenty hands in the manufacture of twines and warps, and the Chace Mill Company, along the river, with twenty-seven hundred spindles and thirty-eight workers, manufactured cotton printing cloth. In 1872, the Coventry Savings Bank was incorporated. At about this time, South Main Street contained a mixture of inhabitants. Among the most prominent were the owner of the Kilton Mill, a state senator, and the town clerk; others included carriage manufacturers and dealers in coal, wood, harnesses, and other implements and goods, doctors, farmers, grocers, a carpenter, and a policeman.

In the 1860s, Washington was Coventry's largest and most prosperous village, a thriving rural center. In 1878, however, only Moon's mill was operating; the others were idle. Noah Arnold, in his 1888 account of the Pawtuxet Valley, said that the village, with between eight hundred to a thousand inhabitants, had three factories running. The Chace factory, he reported, had burned a few years earlier. Only one house was erected in the district during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

In 1907, the Moon Mill burned, but the Washington Company mills continued operating. A 1937 guide to Rhode Island described Washington as a thriving community with a population of twelve hundred and containing several mills that manufactured lace, cotton, and woolen goods. Some time after this, the large mill on Main Street was demolished; its site is now occupied by a gasoline station; other buildings in the center of the village, most built before 1860, were demolished to make way for commercial buildings in the mid-twentieth century. The Kilton Mill on South Main Street was replaced in 1914 by the Stillwater Company Mill, a typical structure of its era, of brick, with large windows and a flat roof. In the South Main Street District, four buildings--two early-twentieth-century cottages, or bungalows, a mid-twentieth-century ranch house, and a Veterans of Foreign Wars meeting hall were added to the streetscape.

Today, Washington continues its role as the town's most important village, and includes a new town hall, churches, and many commercial establishments, some in a mid-twentieth-century plaza at the village center; South Main Street, as in the past, remains a relatively quiet, residential neighborhood, the best preserved section of the old village and a readily identifiable concentration of historic buildings. Its

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nineteenth-century streetscape remains essentially intact, conveying to the traveler along the street a sense of passing through a distinctive place.

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- Cole, J.R. History of Washington and Kent Counties. New York. 1889.
- Fowler, A.N. Rhode Island Mill Towns. Pencil Points 17:5, 1936.
- Greene, Welcom Arnold. The Providence Plantations for 250 Years.  
Providence, 1886.
- Hall, Joseph Davis, (ed.). Biographical History of the Manufacturers  
and Business Men of Rhode Island. Providence, 1901.
- Harpin, Mathias P. Prophets in the Wilderness: A History of Coventry,  
Rhode Island. (Vol. 1) Oneco, Conn., 1974.

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The boundary of the South Main Street Historic District, as drawn, encompasses the residential neighborhood which grew up along the street from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries and excludes, as much as is possible, non-contributing properties. All of the district's buildings, except for a school on Cady Street and 4 Wood Street, are located on South Main Street. The north boundary, at the river, represents a distinct change in patterns of development; the side streets running east and west from South Main Street are lined with later buildings; the southern bound is the least distinct, but, in general, the houses which line South Main Street south of the district line are later than those included within the district.

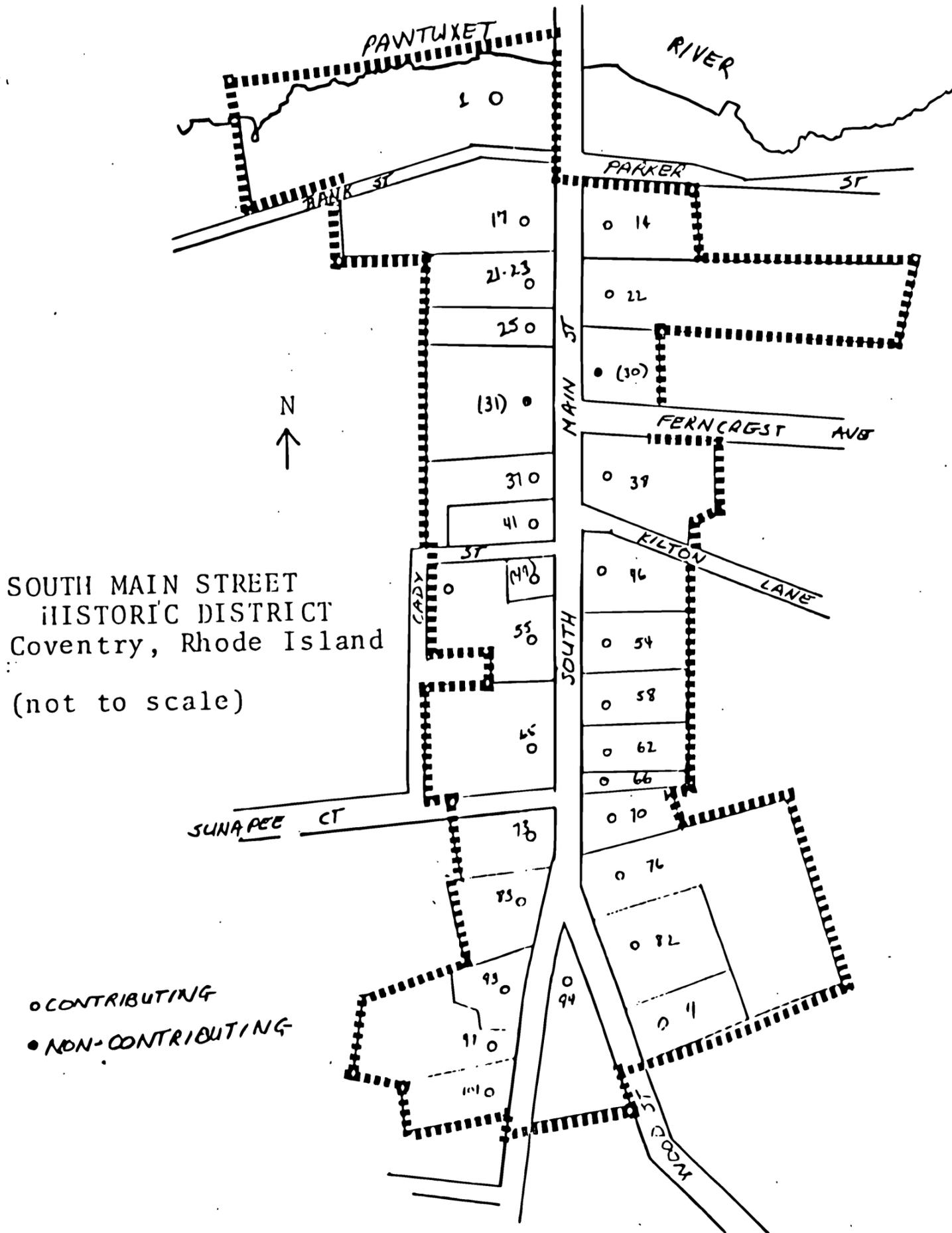
The boundary begins at the northeast corner of lot 30, assessor's plat 24, moves south to Bank Street, east along the south line of 30, across Bank Street to the northeast corner of 200, south and west along the back lines of 200, 199, and 198, along a line drawn from the southwest corner of 198 to the northwest corner of 196 (crossing 197), along the west line of 196, crossing Cady Street, along the west bound of 189, around (and excluding) 188, along the west line of 187, crossing Sunapee Court, then along the west bounds of 273, 272, 260, 259, and 258, along the south line of 258, crossing South Main Street; from there along the south line of 119, crossing Wood Street, along the south lines of 72 and 70, along the east lines of 70, 61, 60, 59, 58, 57, 56, 69, 41, 34, and 33, west along the north line of 33, across South Main Street, along the east line of 30 to the Pawtuxet River, then west to the point of beginning.

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SOUTH MAIN STREET  
HISTORIC DISTRICT  
Coventry, Rhode Island  
(not to scale)

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Barber, Ardis & Bates, Frank G. How Coventry Came to Be and Coventry: Our Town. (Souvenir Booklet--Bicentennial) 1941.

(See Continuation Sheet #9)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property c. 8 acres

Quadrangle name Crompton, R.I.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

**UTM References**

A 

1	9
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2	8	6	4	0	0
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4	6	1	8	3	2	0
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B 

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2	8	6	4	1	0
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4	6	1	7	8	8	0
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C 

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2	8	6	2	6	0
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4	6	1	7	8	8	0
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D 

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2	8	6	2	1	0
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4	6	1	8	3	2	0
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E 

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**Verbal boundary description and justification**

(See Continuation Sheet #10)

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Walter Nebiker, Principal Historic Preservation Planner

organization R.I. Historical Preservation Comm. date  

street & number 150 Benefit Street telephone 401-277-2678

city or town Providence state Rhode Island 02903

# 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 Frank C. Williamson date 5/21/87

title   date 12/15/85

**For NPS use only**  
 I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
Patrick Andrus date 7/10/87  
 Keeper of the National Register  
 Attest: Robert Sarge date 7/10/87