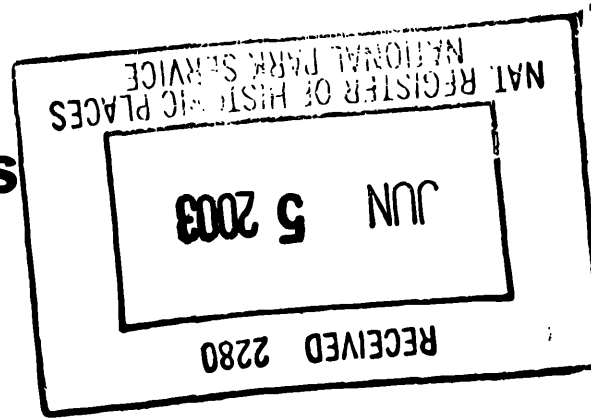


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



*6526*

1. Name of Property

historic name: National and Providence Worsted Mills

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: 166 Valley Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Providence vicinity: N/A

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

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>13</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	objects
<u>14</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

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

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Property name National and Providence Worsted Mills, Providence Cty., Prov., RI

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination X request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria.

     See continuation sheet.

Frederick C. Williamson 14 May 03  
Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.

     See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Signature of Keeper

7-11-03

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: INDUSTRY  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Current: COMMERCE/TRADE  
INDUSTRY  
\_\_\_\_\_

Sub: manufacturing facility  
  
Sub: business, professional  
manufacturing facility

Property name National and Providence Worsted Mills, Providence Cty., Prov., RI

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification:

OTHER: vernacular mill construction

Other Description:

Materials: foundation STONE roof Other: tar and gravel  
 walls BRICK other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):

Areas of Significance: INDUSTRY  
ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1881-c.1930

Significant Dates: 1881

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder:

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

X See continuation sheet.

Property name National and Providence Worsted Mills, Providence Cty., Prov., RI

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property:

8.4

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing			Zone Easting Northing				
A	<u>19</u>	<u>297220</u>	<u>4632920</u>	B	<u>19</u>	<u>297380</u>	<u>4632880</u>
C	<u>19</u>	<u>297300</u>	<u>4632660</u>	D	<u>19</u>	<u>297240</u>	<u>4632600</u>
E	<u>19</u>	<u>297160</u>	<u>4632740</u>				

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description:  See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification:  See continuation sheet.

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title: Clark Schoettle, Jennifer Gould, and Ned Connors

Organization: PPS Revolving Fund and Betty Bird & Associates Date: 12/20/02

Street & Number: 24 Meeting Street Telephone: 401-272-2760

City or Town: Providence State: RI ZIP: 02903

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Property name National & Providence Worsted Mills, Providence County, Providence, RI

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Description

The National & Providence Worsted Mills is a large factory complex; it consists of several large brick, 1- to 4-story buildings constructed to house the spinning of worsted wool yarn and the weaving of worsted cloth. Most components of the complex are slow-burning mill construction, with heavy timber frames and load-bearing red brick walls. Roofs are flat or shallow gables; two buildings have monitors. The complex is located on a 10-acre, 2-block parcel west of downtown Providence on the Woonasquatucket River in the Olneyville neighborhood. Typical of industrial complexes in continuous use, the National and Providence Worsted Mills complex has been altered over the years. Several buildings have been demolished, but demolition occurred at the edge of the complex. The mill's configuration and function remain clearly legible. The remaining buildings are relatively intact, with alterations largely confined to window and entryways.

The National & Providence Worsted Mills complex consists of 13 contributing buildings and one contributing structure that housed the National & Providence Worsted Wool Company. One non-contributing building and one non-contributing structure, built after National & Providence sold the complex, also occupy the site.

The Olneyville neighborhood in the Woonasquatucket River valley is the historic center of Providence's textile industry. The 2-block site of this mill complex is bounded by the Woonasquatucket River to the west, a car lot (historically part of the mill site) to the north, Valley Street to the east, and house lots to the south. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century single- and multi-family workers' houses, small stores, and small industrial buildings line neighboring streets. Two other mill complexes are visible from the National & Providence site.

The complex includes two groups of buildings, one designed for spinning yarn (Group 1), the other for weaving cloth (Group 2). Group 1 is located near the river and mill pond (now filled), on the north end of the site, as yarn production required a water source for washing wool and dumping waste; Group 2 is located near the street for transportation of finished goods.

The National & Providence Worsted Mills are typical of fire-resistant industrial buildings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The buildings have shallow-gable or flat roofs surfaced with tar and gravel and have segmental arched window openings with multiple-pane wood windows. The ca. 1880s mill buildings are narrower than the later buildings.

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The most significant alteration to the complex occurred ca. 1926-37 when several buildings were demolished. One NC building and one NC structure have been built since the period of significance; the mill pond was filled ca. 1955. Exterior changes to these buildings are largely limited to filled windows, altered and added entries, and small one-story additions.

**INVENTORY**

Sanborn maps from 1900, 1921, 1950, 1956, and 1982 provide building numbers, names, uses, and interior connections. Building dates are derived from EA Engineering, Science, and Technology, "Phase I Site Assessment Report: Blacker Brothers, Inc./Donstan Corporation, 166 Valley Road, Providence Rhode Island 02909" (2002) and Sanborn Maps: 1900, 1921, 1950, 1956, and 1982. *Providence Industrial Sites* (1981) dates the complex ca. 1887, citing a fire in 1885. Although further research needs to be conducted to confirm and refine the dates of construction, visual analysis of the buildings bears out the range of dates for the 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings given in the Site Assessment Report.

**GROUP ONE**

Building interiors in Group 1 were not examined for this nomination, but interiors are generally open floor plan with regularly spaced wood columns supporting the floor joists.

**Building 3 (1881):** A four-story 16x6-bay brick building with a rectangular footprint and shallow-gable roof. The building has a granite foundation, granite sills, a corbelled brick cornice, and a tar and gravel roof. The three visible elevations (east, north, and west) of Building 3 have segmental arched window openings with multiple-pane wood double-hung sash. One bay of windows on the east elevation is filled with brick. On the north elevation, the first and second story display an irregular fenestration pattern and the shadow of a Dye House (demolished). Part of the first floor of the north elevation has been rebuilt and is marked by a steel beam. Building 3 is attached to Building 3L to the south and to Storage Building 2, by bridge and by hyphen.

**Building 3L (1886):** A four-story 7x12-bay brick building with a rectangular footprint and shallow-gable roof. The building has a granite foundation, granite sills, a corbelled brick cornice, and a tar and gravel roof. The three visible elevations (east, north, and west) of Building 3L have segmental arched window openings with

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multiple-pane wood double-hung sash. A few window openings on the south elevation have been filled with brick and/or plywood. A sally port opening is located on the first floor of the east elevation. A portion of the first story of the east elevation is blank and displays the shadow of what was once an attached shipping room (demolished). The west elevation has loading bays with double doors and block and tackle. Building 3L is attached to Building 3 on its northside

Addition, Building 3L (ca. 1900-1921): A four-story 9x6-bay brick building with a rectangular footprint and shallow-gable roof, added to the east end of Building 3L. The building has a granite foundation, wood sills, deep wood eaves, a tar and gravel roof, segmental arched window openings, and multiple-pane wood sash.

Building 3A, Picker House (1881): A two-story 6x3-bay brick building with a rectangular footprint and shallow-gable roof, attached to Building 2 on the north. The Picker House has a two-story 5x1-bay brick dustroom ell that extends from the west elevation. The building has a granite foundation, granite sills, a corbelled brick cornice, and a tar and gravel roof. The three visible elevations have segmental arched window openings and multiple-pane wood double-hung sash. The first story of the ell has small square window openings (only one of which has a granite lintel) and a filled loading bay. Here, debris was picked from the wool.

Building 2 (1881): A three-story 8x6 bay brick storage building with a rectangular footprint and shallow-gable roof. The building has a granite foundation, granite sills, a corbelled brick cornice, and a tar and gravel roof. The three visible elevations (north, south, and east) have segmental arched windows with multiple-pane wood double-hung sash and steel replacement sash. Building 2 has a one-story brick addition (c. 1905) with a trapezoidal footprint and flat roof on its west end.

Building 1, Dry House (ca. 1880-1900): A one-story 5x1-bay brick building with a rectangular footprint and a shallow-gable roof. The freestanding building has a brick foundation, wood sills, deep wood eaves, a tar and gravel roof, and multiple-pane wood double-hung sash.

Building 10, Office (1890): A square two-story 5x5-bay freestanding Second Empire brick building. The building has a slate mansard roof with hip-roofed dormers, granite water table, lintels, and sills, and a deep corbelled brick cornice. The Office has a one-story addition that wraps around part of the building's south and west elevations.

Gatehouse (ca. 1930): A one-story, square, 1x1-bay brick building with a granite foundation and lintels, and arched window openings.

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Rising Sun Dam (1905): A concrete dam on the Woonasquatucket River; the abutments and spillway (98') are concrete; the river walls are drylaid rubble.

**GROUP TWO**

Building 6 (1889): A four-story 10x31-bay brick building with a monitor roof. The building has a granite foundation, wood sills, deep eaves, a tar and gravel roof, segmental arch window openings with multiple-pane wood sash. A freight elevator and a loading dock have been added to the building. The interior is open; the floors are heavy wood planks. A one-story brick office ell is located on the east elevation. A small one-story addition (mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) projects from the south elevation of the office ell.

Building 6A (1889): A three-story 9x11-bay brick building with a monitor roof. The building has a granite foundation, wood sills, wood eaves, a tar and gravel roof, arched window openings, and multiple-pane wood sash. Many of the window openings are filled in. A portion of the first story of the rear (west) elevation is blank except for the shadow of a (demolished) bridge connection to Building 8. A one-story brick engineer room ell extends from the north elevation and is sandwiched between Building 6 and Building 6A.

Building 7 (1891): A four-story 6x13-bay brick building with a shallow-gable roof. The building has a granite foundation, wood sills, a tar and gravel roof, segmental arched window openings with multiple-pane wood sash. A freight elevator is located in the northeast corner of the building. Facing the elevator shaft, two bays of windows on the east and north elevations are filled with brick. A one-story brick engine room ell extends from the west elevation.

Building 8, Picker/Storage House (1890): A two-story 4x7-bay brick building with a shallow-gable roof, granite foundation and sills, a tar and gravel roof, and segmental arched window openings with multiple-pane wood sash. Much of the east elevation is obscured by a pair of metal-clad bridges that connect Building 6 and Building 6A.

Boiler House (1907): A one-story 3x7-bay brick structure with a flat roof, concrete foundation bollards, a tar and gravel roof, projecting brick piers, and arched window openings with concrete lintels. Some windows have industrial steel sash; many are filled in.

Building 5, Dye House (1907): A one-story 4x13-bay brick building with a flat roof, granite foundation, steel



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window lintels and metal sash, a heavy brick cornice, and a tar and gravel roof.

**Non-Contributing Buildings**

Storage Building (ca. 1962): A one-story L-shaped concrete-block building, with steel sash and a flat roof.

Tank House (unknown/recent): A one-story, rectangular, flat roof wood structure.

**Photographs**

Photographer: Clark Schoettle

Date: January 2003

Negatives: RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission  
150 Benefit Street  
Providence, RI 02903

(The above information applies to all photographs)

**Photo #1**

View: Buildings 6, 10, gatehouse, 3L, and 3. East and north elevations. Photographer facing southwest.

**Photo #2**

View: Buildings 10, 6, 3L, and 3, north and east elevations. Photographer facing southwest.

**Photo #3**

View: Buildings 5, 6A, and 6, east elevation. Photographer facing northwest.

**Photo #4**

View: Buildings 3L and 3, east and north elevation. Photographer facing southwest.

**Photo #5**

View: Buildings 3L and 6, west elevation. Photographer facing east.

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**Photo #6**

**View:** Buildings 3, 2, and 2A, north elevations. Photographer facing southwest.

**Photo #7**

**View:** Buildings 2A, 2, 3, and 1, west elevations. Photographer facing east.

**Photo #8**

**View:** Buildings 3, 2, and 2A, north and west elevations. Photogrpaer facing southeast.

**Photo #9**

**View:** Building 6 and Boiler House, west and south elevations. Photographer facing northeast.

**Photo #10**

**View:** Buildings 2, 3A and 3, southwest elevation. Photographer facing northeast.

**Photo #11**

**View:** Buildings 7, 6A, 5 and 6, east elevation. Photographer facing northwest.

**Photo #12**

**View:** Building 9, northwest elevation. Photographer facing southeast.

**Photo #13**

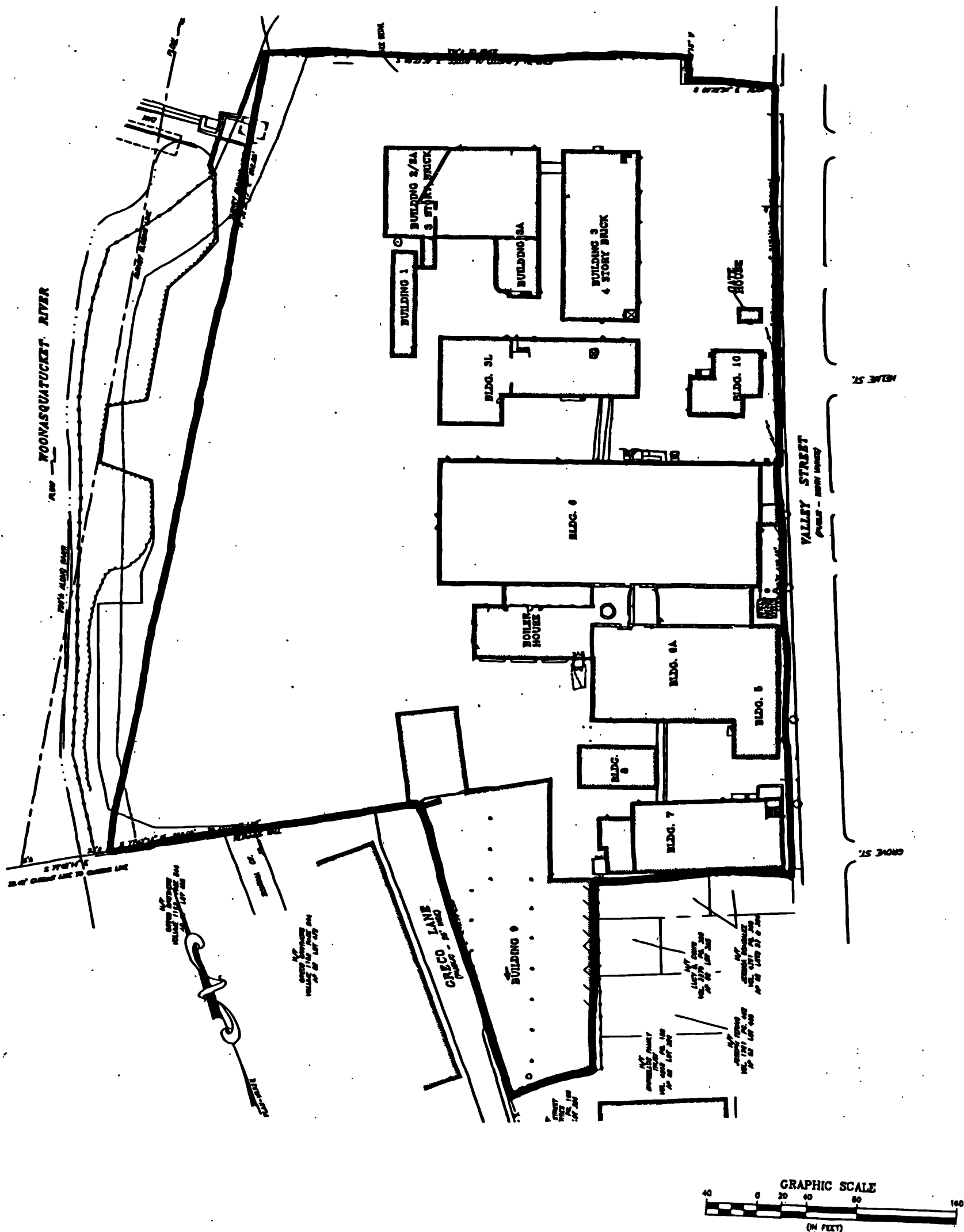
**View:** Dam at rear of property. Photographer facing west.

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### **Significance**

The National & Providence Worsted Mills are historically significant as the location of a major manufacturer of worsted textiles during the period when Rhode Island dominated worsted production. Set on the heavily-industrialized Woonasquatucket River on the west side of Providence in the Olneyville neighborhood, the mills were constructed incrementally over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and produced worsted yarns and fabrics from 1881 through the 1930s. The history of the National & Providence Worsted Mills exemplifies some important aspects of the development of worsted manufacture in Rhode Island, including the trajectory of business success and decline, the reliance of the industry on English-trained management in the early years of production, its concentration in the Olneyville area of Providence, and the development of large worsted combines and holding companies in the early twentieth century. In addition, the National & Providence Worsted Mills have architectural significance, as they are typical of the buildings constructed for textile manufacture—multi-story, timber-framed red brick, lined by large windows, with flat roofs.

### **Historical Significance**

Rhode Island's textile industries had originally been based on cotton manufacture. In the 1840s changes in wool production technology brought the woolen industry into prominence; wool production was at first concentrated in the southern part of the state. Although worsted yarns had been produced in Providence as early as 1842, worsted industries did not begin to flourish until the 1860s.

When the Civil War blockade of southern ports diminished the supply of cotton, many Rhode Island mills closed. There was, however, no shortage of wool. Domestic sheep provided inexpensive wool; imports supplied additional varieties. Short-fiber wools were used in the production of both coarse and fine goods, but worsted production required a long-fiber wool to spin a particularly fine yarn. The combing of wool used to make worsted goods had been a manual operation until the 1850s when the Noble and Lister automatic combs were introduced in England. This new technology and the availability of less expensive long-fiber wool from Canada (after the signing of the Reciprocity Treaty, 1854-1865) stimulated the growth of the Rhode Island worsted industry through the 1860s and into the 1870s.

The worsted industry recovered well from the depression of the 1870s, and large-scale expansion in worsted production occurred in the late 1870s and 1880s. The city's worsted mills were concentrated along the Woonasquatucket River in Olneyville and on the Providence-North Providence line. There were also worsted mills in Burrillville and Pawtucket, but Providence was the state's center of worsted production, and by 1890

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Providence produced more worsted goods than other American city.

The worsted industry prospered because of the popularity of worsted cloth, protective tariffs, the city's expanding labor force, and improved machinery. Manufacturers replaced hand combs and other less sophisticated automatic combs with the Noble comb after 1870, and through the 1870s, there were continual improvements in spinning and weaving machinery, especially the Crompton and Knowles Worsted Loom, which operated at a faster speed and was designed to take particular advantage of worsted yarn's strength. The worsted loom shortened production time thus providing an advantage over woolen manufacturing.

Expansion ultimately depended on a large market for worsted goods. The Paris Exposition of 1867 promoted the fashion of worsted suits and coats in Europe; similarly, displays at the 1876 Centennial Exposition stimulated the worsted suit and coat market in America. By the turn of the century, worsted men's suits had nearly replaced woolen suits.

As with many other Rhode Island worsted mills, the Providence & National Mills had their beginnings in the 1870s when Charles Fletcher built the original Providence Worsted factory here. Fletcher was an Englishman who had acquired his knowledge of worsted production in the noted mills of Bradford, England. He came to United States in 1864 at the age of 25, worked at a Lawrence (MA) factory, returned to England briefly, and finally settled in Providence in 1867. He went to work at the Valley Mills, the first in Providence to produce worsted yarns, and rose to the position of superintendent of Valley's worsted production.

In 1875 Fletcher left the Valley Mill, rented an old stone mill<sup>1</sup> on the Woonasquatucket, imported a Noble comb from England, and began producing mohair and genappe yarns at his Providence Worsted Mill. In 1879 he began construction of a series of buildings and he continued to build throughout the 80s and 90s. He set up the National Worsted Mill, a weaving operation which he originally kept as a separate entity from the Providence Worsted Mill. The National Worsted Mill produced fabric for suits, overcoats, and cloaks. Originally water-powered, by 1900 the mills were driven by the eight Corliss steam engines (none still in place). When Fletcher incorporated the two operations as the National and Providence Worsted Mills in 1893, the company employed 750 workers, produced 900,000 yards of worsted goods yearly, and was the largest single consumer of wool in the United States.

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<sup>1</sup>Fletcher rented the Rising Sun Mill, Rhode Island's first paper factory, established by John Waterman, Christopher Olney, Jonathan Ballou, and William Goddard in 1765. Goddard's newspaper, *The Gazette*, a forum for anti-colonial agitation, was apparently the principal consumer of the Rising Sun paper, though the mill also did job printing in the 1760s. The stone mill used the power of the Woonasquatucket and was located about 200' back from the present-day alignment of Valley Street, north of the nominated mills. The paper mill operated until 1857 and stood into the 1870s at least; an 1875 map shows a main building (about 35x80') and a smaller structure as well. A covered raceway drew water from the river and returned it through a downstream feedmill. The Rising Sun name today identifies an early twentieth-century dam (RIDEM # 140) built by the American Woolen Company in 1905, included in the inventory.

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While Fletcher and the city's other worsted producers reached the height of their expansion in the 1890s, the seeds of their decline were in evidence also. The combined effects of the Panic of 1893, out-of-region competition, and the general financial conservatism of the maturing textile industry drove a movement toward the consolidation of independent mills into massive firms, such as Goddard Bothers and B.B.&R. Knight. The largest of the several textile combines, the American Woolen Company, was created by Charles Fletcher of the National & Providence and his partner William Wood of Lawrence.

In 1899 Fletcher sold the National & Providence Worsted Mills to his American Woolen Company. The giant company also purchased the Weybosset, Manton, Valley, and Riverside Mills, all in Providence, as well as other worsted mills in Massachusetts. The manufacturers of fine goods, such as worsteds, were able to withstand the pressures on their industry longer than those which produced coarse goods, but throughout the beginning and middle of the twentieth century, demand for the goods produced here declined. American Woolen began selling off its mills in the 1920s as business fell off and production slowed and finally became intermittent. The company continued to liquidate its holdings through the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. American Woolen was eventually absorbed in the 1950s by Textron, which finally ended production of worsteds at the National & Providence Worsted Mills.

### Architectural significance

The buildings of the National & Providence Worsted Mills are, for the part, typical of the textile factory buildings of their era. They are built of brick (likely produced in Rhode Island at the Barrington Brickyards) and are of slow-burning construction; great wooden columns support the weight of the floors. Their flat or near-flat roofs demonstrate the turn-of-the-century development of tar paper and gravel-tar coatings which would allow for a flat roof, freeing the textile mill designer from providing monitors and dormers to light the top story, and allowing for a wider building than had earlier been possible. Their large windows with segmental-arches light the interior, and shift the weight of the building above to the walls between the windows. Lacking architectural elaboration (except for the mill office), they are good examples of the plain brick buildings constructed throughout the city for the manufacture of textile goods.

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Geographical Data

Verbal boundary description

That certain tract or parcel of land situated westerly of Valley Street in the City of Providence, Providence County and State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations designated as "Area (Easterly of River)" on a plan entitled "Boundary & Topographic Survey Plan Assessors Plat 62 – Lots 252, 301 and 399 166 Valley Street, Providence, Rhode Island Project No. P02.109 Scale: 1" = 40' Date: Sept. 17, 2002. Prepared for: Environmental Science Services, Inc. Waterman Engineering Co." Said parcel is more particularly bounded and described as follows:

Beginning at a point in the westerly street line of Valley Street, said point being the southeasterly corner of land now or formerly of Carlos A. Lemus and the northeasterly corner of the parcel herein-described;

thence proceeding S 21 51'41" W, by and with the said westerly street line of Valley Street, a distance of two hundred one and 35/100 (201.35') feet to an angle point;

thence proceeding S 19 45'00" W, by and with the said westerly street line of Valley Street, a distance of four hundred twenty nine and 49/100 (429.49') feet to the northeasterly corner of land now or formerly of Jessica Gonzalez and the southeasterly corner of the parcel herein-described;

thence proceeding N 70 36'00" W, bounded southerly by the said Gonzalez land, a distance of one hundred fifty three and 91/100 (153.91') feet to a corner;

thence proceeding S 20 34'55" W, bounded easterly in part by the said Gonzalez land, in part by land now or formerly of Lucy D. Conti, in part by land now or formerly of Joseph Terino and in part by land now or formerly of the Barcellos Family Trust, a distance of one hundred fifty one and 34/100 (151.34') feet to land now or formerly of Delaine Street Properties;

thence proceeding N 85 38'48" W, bounded southerly by the said Delaine Street Properties land, a distance of seventy nine and 00/100 (79.00') feet to the easterly street line of Greco Lane;

thence proceeding N 04 21'12" E, by and with the said easterly street line of Greco Lane, a distance of two hundred forty three and 50/100 (243.50') feet to its northerly terminus;



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thence proceeding N 77 42' 14" W, in part by and with the said northerly terminus of Greco Land, in part by land now or formerly of Greco Brothers, in part by the northerly terminus of Sonoma Court and in part by other lands of Greco Brothers, a distance of two hundred seventy three (273' +/-) feet, more or less to the easterly shore of the Woonasquatucket River and the southwesterly corner of the parcel herein described;

thence proceeding northerly, northeasterly, easterly and northeasterly again, along the said easterly shore of the Woonasquatucket River, a distance of seven hundred twenty (720' +/-) feet, more or less to the said Carlos A. Lemus land and the northwesterly corner of the parcel herein-described;

thence proceeding S 68 22' 59" E, a distance of three hundred thirty nine (339' +/-) feet, more or less to a corner;

thence proceeding S 21 48' 15" W, a distance of twenty one and 00/100 (21.00") feet to a corner;

thence proceeding S 68 22' 59" E, a distance of seventy five and 00/100 (75.00') feet to the said westerly street line of Valley Street and the point and place of beginning.

Together with any right, title and Interest in and to the Woonasquatucket River.

The above-described parcel contains 364,498+/- square feet (8.368+/- Acres) of land, more or less and may be subject to easements or rights of way of record and to the rights of others in and to the Woonasquatucket River.

**Boundary justification**

The boundary of the National and Providence Worsted Mills is drawn to include all the standing buildings and structures which are historically associated with the production here of worsted yarn and fabric and to exclude (as much as possible) buildings and structures which are not related to the historic significance of the complex.