

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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Item number 7

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NAME: Pawtucket City Hall  
LOCATION: 137 Roosevelt Avenue  
OWNER: City of Pawtucket  
137 Roosevelt Avenue  
Pawtucket, RI 02860  
CONDITION: Good; altered; original site

DESCRIPTION:

Pawtucket City Hall, a striking Art Deco landmark of the 1930s, is located on the western bank of the Blackstone River on the northern fringe of Pawtucket's downtown core. To its south and west stretch the broad, asphalted parking lots created by the Slater Urban Renewal Project of the 1960s; to its north, a tiny, terraced lawn with an unusual clamshell fountain separates the building from Exchange Street; behind the building to the east runs a placid stretch of the Blackstone River, beyond which lies a turn-of-the-century mill complex.

A prominent Pawtucket landmark in the Art Deco style of the 1930s, the City Hall building is formally (and functionally) composed of three distinct segments: a four-and-a-half-story main block, 182 feet long by 62 feet wide, with a low-pitched curb roof, running north-south parallel to Roosevelt Avenue and culminating in a 209 foot high central tower; and two short, flat-roofed wings, two- and two-and-a-half stories high, each wing measuring 51 feet by 90 feet deep, and running east-west across the narrow ends of the long main block. (The northern wing contains the Fire Department headquarters, the southern wing, Police Department headquarters.) The entire building is of steel-framed, fireproof construction. Exterior walls are infilled with cinder block, faced with a pale yellow brick, and accented by large quantities of cast-stone ornamental trim. Green Roman tiles originally covered all of the visible roof slopes; surviving tiles have now been consolidated on the prominent western slopes while the eastern roofs have been recovered with green asphalt shingles.

The facade of the main block is organized in a basically classical manner--the ground and first stories acting as an architectural basement and the second and third stories united by pilasters between each bay. The building's three central bays break slightly forward of the remainder of the main block and this pavilion is capped with a flat-roofed attic story--an effective visual base for the stepped-back tower behind. The principal entrance into the city hall is located on the first floor of this projecting central pavilion--the original revolving door was replaced by conventional steel and glass swinging doors in the early 1960s. Fenestration is balanced, if not absolutely symmetrical, and the windows are

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filled with custom-designed, double-hung sash; each sash subdivided by either two or four vertical muntins. Three ornamental metal balconies of crisply geometrical design are used to emphasize the break between the upper stories and the "basement" on the pavilion and the two flanking wings; a smaller balcony repeats this theme over the doorway to the southern (Police Headquarters) wing. A dozen cast-stone bas-relief panels, located just below the first-floor windows in the western facade, illustrate some of the people, buildings, scenes, and events important to the city's history.

The landmark central tower, stepped back at the top and capped with an unusual tomahawk weathervane, originally bore elaborate cast-stone ornamentation on its upper stages--eagles leaned out from each corner below the (originally) open belfry, others were stretched across each face of the belfry stage. This cast-stone ornament was allowed to deteriorate, though, and one corner eagle actually fell from the tower in 1974. The present, plain yellow brick casing replaced all of the remaining cast-stone tower-top ornament at that time.

Inside the building, the principal entrance opens into a split-level lobby, across which is found the building's major staircase--an open-well arrangement serving the four principal floors, the basement and the attic. Adjoining it on the northern side of the lobby is a small passenger elevator. Broad corridors down the spine of the main block at each floor level serve the offices, conference rooms, etc. which line the building's perimeter. The interior of the tower remains unfinished above the attic floor level.

The most highly finished spaces within the City Hall are the lobby, the Mayor's Office, the Tenth District Courtroom, and the City Council Chamber. The lobby is finished in marble--yellow Boeticino wall panels are set off by mottled grey and black pilasters cut with a very flat reeding; the floor is composed of Tennessee blue and Vermont gray marble slabs. Embedded in the center of the lobby floor is a low-relief, nickel and chromium-nickel medallion some 40 inches in diameter, modeled after the Pawtucket City Seal. On the exposed soffits of the two staircase runs leading to the second floor are two Art Deco sculptural panels in low relief--"Achievement" on the left, "Activity" on the right. The Mayor's Office, the Courtroom, and the Council Chamber are all paneled in American walnut and have reeded wooden pilasters echoing their marble counterparts in the lobby. The lesser spaces throughout the building are simply finished with plastered walls.

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Plastered ceilings are used throughout the building; those in the more important spaces are generally developed into a series of shallow, sunken panels. Stylized Art Deco moldings, picked out in glossy aluminum leaf, are used as an occasional ornamental accent within these panelled ceilings. Hardware throughout the building is of Art Deco design, much of it executed in chromium. The light fixtures, in addition, are similarly Art Deco in inspiration and were specifically designed for the City Hall by its architect, a not uncommon practice in the 1930s.

Alterations to the original building beyond those mentioned above include the partitioning of the original ground floor auditorium into additional city offices in the late 1940s, and the 1970s expansion of the mayor's suite of offices into the northeast corner of the Tenth District Courtroom.

PERIOD: 1900-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture; Politics/Government; Sculpture

SPECIFIC DATES: 1933-35

ARCHITECT: John F. O'Malley

**SIGNIFICANCE:**

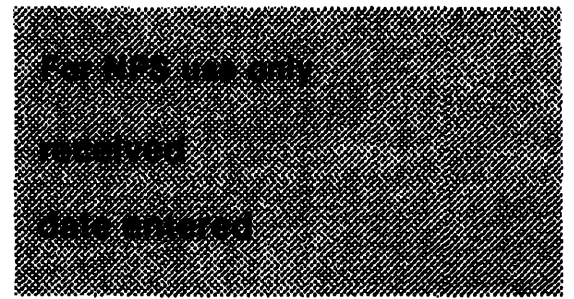
Pawtucket City Hall is significant architecturally as an outstanding Rhode Island example of the Art Deco style of the 1930s; as an early example of the consolidated city hall (housing all city department headquarters within a single building); and as a major, downtown Pawtucket landmark. The building is significant, as well, in the history of politics and government: it was the first, and one of the largest and most important Rhode Island projects started under the National Recovery Act of 1933 with Public Works Administration funds, and it remains a monument to the most colorful political figure in Pawtucket's recent history--Mayor Thomas P. McCoy, during whose twenty-year rule of the city, the building was proposed, designed, and erected.

Pawtucket City Hall, designed by John F. O'Malley (of the Providence architectural firm of O'Malley & Richards) and incorporating sculptural panels designed and executed in cast-stone by Joseph Delear of Boston, was erected at a cost of just over \$450,000 in the years 1933-36. It replaced a much smaller City Hall building on High Street and allowed, for the first time in the city's history, all of the city's department headquarters to be located in a single, central building. This consolidation of city departments was rather a novel idea at the time and is perhaps symbolic of Mayor Thomas P. McCoy's iron grip on virtually all aspects of Pawtucket's city government in the 1930s. Under McCoy's leadership, Pawtucket was one of the first American cities to benefit from the federal

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recovery programs initiated by President Roosevelt in the era of the 1930s depression. Not only the new City Hall, but a new high school, a municipal stadium, and a new filtration and water plant were erected in this period with federal assistance. It is the monumental City Hall, though, with its soaring, landmark tower, which most appropriately memorializes "Boss" Tom McCoy and his era of machine rule in Pawtucket.

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:**

The nominated property is Pawtucket Assessor's Plat 43A, lot 485, and includes the City Hall and its immediate surroundings, including the small terraced lawn with fountain just north of the City Hall.

ACREAGE: c. 2 acres  
LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: State  
UTM: A 19 302300 4638900

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