

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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Continuation sheet 105

Item number 7

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NAME: First Ward Wardroom (currently Major Walter G. Gatchell
Post 306 V.F.W.)

LOCATION: 171 Fountain Street

OWNER: City of Pawtucket
137 Roosevelt Avenue
Pawtucket, RI

CONDITION: Good, altered, original site

DESCRIPTION:

Pawtucket's First Ward Wardroom, an unusual red brick building of Queen Anne design, is located on a small corner lot at one edge of late nineteenth-century neighborhood of Pleasant View; directly across the street from it, the depressed canyon of I-95 completes its S-curve through eastern Pawtucket and heads northward out of town. The wardroom itself is a single-story red brick building of basically rectangular plan with a low-pitched, gable-over-hipped roof. A projecting closed entry pavilion at the building's narrow western end was originally flanked by twin open porches, one oriented toward Fountain Street, the other toward the cross street, Blake Street. (The Fountain Street porch has since been rather carefully bricked in, sympathetically reusing original materials.) The original brickwork was laid with a dark red mortar; color contrast was originally provided by the drafted granite sill course and the drafted brownstone stringcourses, window sills and door and window lintels. (All of these brownstone details appear to have been painted gray at some point and they now closely match the color of the granite sill course.) Three pairs of double-hung, two-over-two-light windows in segmental-arched openings are set in each of the long side walls; three (currently boarded up) small window openings with flat brownstone sills and lintels are placed in the front wall of the entry pavilion. One pair of probably original eight-panel doors survives under the Blake Street entry porch. Virtually all of the original exterior wooden detail--heavy porch piers, simple, classical cornices, flush boarded pavilion pediment with the title "1st Ward" applied in raised letters, and ornamental scalloped shingles in the upper gable peaks--survives as well.

Inside, the original layout seems to have been composed of a small western entry opening into the large open space of the meeting hall, which occupied most of the central block of the structure, with some auxiliary service spaces tucked in at the building's eastern end.

PERIOD: 1800-1899

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture; Politics/Government

SPECIFIC DATE: 1886

ARCHITECT: William R. Walker & Son

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SIGNIFICANCE:

The First Ward Wardroom possesses architectural significance as a well-preserved example of an exceedingly rare building type; and as a picturesque example of the work of the important Providence architectural firm, William R. Walker & Son. It is, in addition, an historically significant physical reminder of a pivotal event in Pawtucket's political evolution--the community's 1885 decision to give up the town-meeting form of government and to accept incorporation as a city.

The Fountain Street wardroom is one of only four wardrooms currently known to exist in Rhode Island. Woonsocket and Providence each have a single wardroom remaining; the fourth is Pawtucket's own Fifth Ward Wardroom (47 Mulberry Street, also included in this nomination.) Both of these Pawtucket wardrooms (along with a third example, since removed) were designed by William R. Walker & Son and built by S. Mason & H.A. Smith, in 1886. Architecturally these two Walker-designed wardrooms are clearly related but are far from identical. The two buildings thus present an interesting comparison--two variations on a theme by an important late nineteenth-century architectural firm.

Historically, these buildings are representative of an expansive, prosperous period in Pawtucket's development, an era when first the Town and then the City government initiated a whole series of public improvements intended to transform Pawtucket into a "well-ordered, energetic, modern American community of the first rank." The construction of these handsome brick wardrooms to serve as polling places and meeting halls in the City's densely built-up neighborhoods was one important facet of that late nineteenth-century drive for civic development.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nominated property is Pawtucket Assessor's Plat 20A, lot 514 and includes the wardroom and its immediate surroundings.

ACREAGE: less than one
LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: Local
UTM: A 19 302680 4639560

(See Continuation Sheet #107)