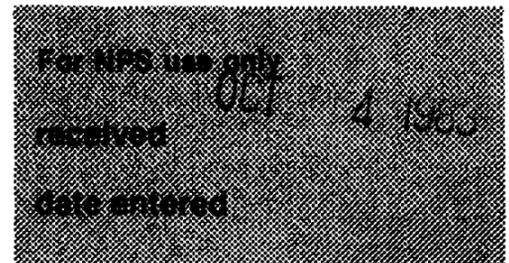


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NAME: ~~Church of St. John the Baptist~~/St. Jean Baptiste  
LOCATION: 68 Slater Street; the site includes the entire block  
bounded by Slater, Quincy, Bullock and Capital Streets  
OWNER: Church of St. John the Baptist  
Bullock Street  
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

CONDITION: Good; unaltered; original site

DESCRIPTION:

The landmark, early twentieth-century church and rectory of St. John the Baptist are sited on a full city block in the nineteenth-century residential neighborhood of Woodlawn, just west and south of Pawtucket's downtown. This neighborhood was bisected by the construction of Interstate 95 in the early 1960s; St. John the Baptist is located atop the northern edge of the east-west trench which that highway carved through Woodlawn.

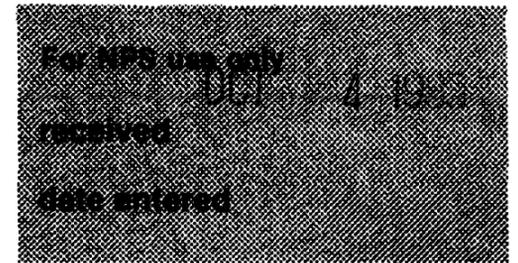
The long, rectangular church building is oriented with its short end facing eastward, and is essentially basilican in form. Its long, gabled roof is covered with green tiles and is broken by a short blind clerestory. Slightly projecting pavilions mark the locations of the narthex and the transepts on the long northern and southern flanks; a semi-circular apse projects from the western end, and the eastern facade is dignified by a monumental arcaded pavilion. A tall, square belltower with an octagonal belfry and a stubby spire is located near the western end of the southern flank; a two-and-a-half-story, hip-roofed rectory adjoins the tower's base. The church building is constructed of reinforced concrete with a yellow, Belden brick facing accented by Indiana limestone trim.

Stylistically, the design of St. John the Baptist was inspired by the early Renaissance churches of Florence (most specifically, Filippo Brunelleschi's S. Spirito, designed in 1436). The building's chief exterior feature is the grand-triple-arcaded pavilion of its eastern facade. Here, three round-headed arches are carried by monumental Corinthian columns; the end columns, only, are doubled. In the gable peak above, a carved stone figure of Christ in low relief is flanked by a pair of similarly carved angels. Three pairs of round-headed windows pierce the pavilion wall between the carved stone figures and the monumental arcade. The building's long, unbuttressed flanks display a major range of tall, round-headed windows above a lower range of smaller, square openings. The brickwork throughout is subtly banded--darker, header courses are used for every sixth course below the limestone impost line; this

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pattern is varied by the inclusion of regularly spaced soldier courses above the impost line.

Within the triple arcade of the facade, three sets of bronze doors (cast by Brandt of Paris) open into a narthex beneath the single, eastern gallery. Beyond the narthex lies an airy, spacious nave, 200 feet long by 72 feet wide, without any interior columns or side aisles. The long side walls of the nave are developed as columned blind arcades, surmounted by a continuous entablature. In each bay of the arcades, rich Corinthian columns with polished marble shafts and gilded capitals stand just free of the wall and carry engaged entablature blocks from which the round-headed arches spring. Stained glass windows by Maumejean Frères of Paris fill each of the long, round-headed windows within each arch. Corinthian pilasters carry the continuous entablature around the transepts and choir and into the apse, where a pair of monumental Corinthian columns support the entablature behind the altar. The flat ceilings (59 feet high above the nave floor) are subdivided into shallow panels. The four major panels along the building's axis are filled with powerful, Expressionist paintings by Jean Desauliers illustrating the Ascension. In the apse, two wall panels painted by Robert Mahias illustrate St. John the Baptist preaching in the desert and baptising the Lord. The overall effect of the interior is, as its architect intended, one "noble and severe."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ernest Cormier, "Notes pour la Redaction d'une Description de l'Eglise St. Jean Baptiste de Pawtucket." Undated ms. in the St. Jean Baptiste church archives.

PERIOD: 1900-  
AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture; Art  
SPECIFIC DATES: 1925-27  
ARCHITECT: Ernest Cormier (Montreal)

SIGNIFICANCE:

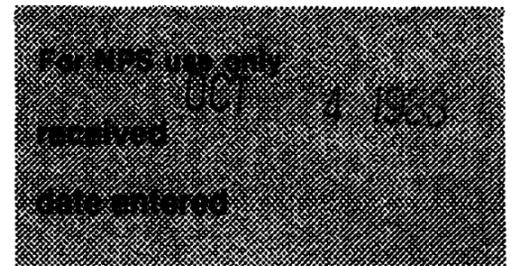
St. John the Baptist derives its primary significance from the outstanding architectural character of its interior. This magnificent interior space, lavishly detailed and appointed, is highlighted by a set of unusually fine early twentieth-century ceiling paintings by Jean Desauliers. Architecturally, this is one of the very finest early twentieth-century interior spaces remaining in Pawtucket.

The present building on Slater Street is the third church edifice erected for the French Catholic population of Woodlawn. The French-speaking people who settled in this neighborhood in increasing numbers

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in the 1860s and 70s had formerly attended the parish of Notre Dame in Central Falls. In 1886, land was purchased in Woodlawn, and a small wooden church building was erected the following year. The new Pawtucket parish of St. Jean de Baptiste was formally organized in 1890, and a new stone church replaced the original wooden building in 1897-98. A parochial school had already been founded by this date, and Rev. Alphonse Graton, the long-time rector of the church, built up an extensive parochial school system which included primary, junior and senior high and business schools, as well as an academy. After the 1897 stone church burned in 1918, Father Graton galvanized the parish for the construction of the new church and rectory, designed by the Montreal architect, Ernest Cormier. The completed church complex was and is still a focal point for Woodlawn's French Catholic community. This community, however, has been deeply affected by the massive dislocations caused by the construction of Interstate 95 through Woodlawn, and the parishioners of St. John the Baptist today number far fewer than when the monumental church edifice was built in the 1920s.

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:**

The nominated property is Pawtucket Assessor's Plat 52B, lot 790; it includes St. John's Church and Rectory, and their immediate surroundings.

ACREAGE: 1.29 acres

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: Local

UTM: A 19 301010 4638280

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