

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED JUL 1 1980  
DATE ENTERED AUG 22 1980

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Downtown Richford Historic District

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

intersection of Main and River streets and proximity

CITY, TOWN

Richford

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Vermont

STATE

Vermont

CODE

50

COUNTY

Franklin

CODE

011

**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"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Multiple--See Continuation Sheet 4-1

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

VICINITY OF

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of the Town Clerk, Town Hall

STREET & NUMBER

Main St.

CITY, TOWN

Richford

STATE  
Vermont

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Vermont Historic Sites and Structures Survey

DATE

1980

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

CITY, TOWN

Montpelier

STATE  
Vermont

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input 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 village of Richford is located at a major millsite on the upper Mississquoi River, less than three miles from the Canadian border. Although the village itself stands on broken, hilly ground around the falls, it is surrounded by a broad plain which is physiographically an extension of Quebec's Eastern Township lowlands. Jay Peak and the heavily-forested Green Mountains lie nearby to the southeast.

A quarter mile south of the falls, major highways from the east, south, and west merge to form Main St.; this wide commercial street runs gently downhill to the Mississquoi River, which it crosses by means of a steel pony truss bridge surmounted by an archway reading: "Welcome to Richford, Vt." Beneath the bridge, the river runs in rapids through a channel of exposed rock; the banks are built up on both sides with continuous walls of stone building and mill foundations. On the north side of the river Main St. becomes the axis of a T-intersection with River St., another major thoroughfare which runs parallel to the river.

Around this intersection stand six commercial blocks of 2½ to 4½ stories, all with brick veneer facades, and all in compatible scale and style. Most of these structures show outstanding brickwork and exterior detail. From the bridge, the intersection is visually framed by the prominent corner turrets of the two closest buildings. The other four buildings are situated in a planar streetscape along the north side of River St., forming a backdrop to the axial view from the bridge. Although these structures were built over a period of nearly half a century (1881-1925), and range in style from Italiannate and Second Empire to Georgian Revival, they achieve an overall effect of architectural integrity through repeated use of corbelled brickwork, even fenestration, horizontal rooflines, and similar storefronts.

The Downtown Richford Historic District is comprised of these six buildings and two adjoining wood commercial blocks on River St., as well as the Main St. bridge and the Sweat-Comings complex on the south bank of the river. The two large buildings which comprise the Sweat-Comings plant were constructed in 1908 of bevelled-edge concrete blocks with molded concrete cornices and trim, and are faced with matching storefronts. The adjacent town fire station was built at the same time in matching style.

This district represents a second generation of development in downtown Richford; every structure in it replaced an earlier building on the same site. The Main/River street intersection was originally the location of a dozen or so stores and shops, most of which were 1½-story, gable-fronted structures of clapboard/frame construction, built in vernacular Greek Revival and Italiannate styles. A large brick edifice called the Town House was for many years the most prominent landmark here.

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Erected as a church, but used for most of its life as the town hall, it looked down the length of Main St. from an elevated site behind the present A.+P. Building (#3), and could be seen from throughout the village. Beginning in 1881 all of these early buildings were moved or destroyed, and gradually replaced by the present brick structures.

The bridge is the third or fourth span to cross the falls here. A wood bridge with a solid waist-high median and outer rails stood here from c.1820 until 1881, when a steel through truss replaced it. The south side of the falls has always been the village's milling center. A sprawl of wood frame shops, mills, and outbuildings grew steadily throughout the nineteenth century until 1908, when the Sweat-Comings Co. bought out and razed all the smaller operations and replaced them with the present furniture factory.

One of the Downtown Richford Historic District's greatest assets is that every structure within it remains almost virtually unchanged in its exterior physical appearance. This is due largely to the depressed state of Richford's economy throughout most of this century. The dying local commercial market has been a continual disincentive against the usual periodical "modernizing" which most commercial buildings experience, with the result that even the storefronts have only been superficially altered. Unfortunately, these economic circumstances have also discouraged even minimal structural maintenance, so that many of the buildings badly need physical rehabilitation.

All buildings and structures within the district are as follows:

1. Woodworth Block

This three-story rectangular commercial block is essentially Queen Anne in style, with a Romanesque Revival flavor added to the third story fenestration. The brick facade features a rowlock-motif corbelled cornice, lintels, and lintel course, as well as a wide sawtooth-motif belt course and decorative panel on the front elevation. A stone tablet below the cornice reads "Woodworth 1904." The brickwork is similar to the facades of the Boright and Taylor Blocks (#6 and #11); all three buildings were erected within a three-year period and may have been the work of the same master mason.

Tall, paired windows with tinted radiating-muntin fanlights illuminate three sides of the third floor's large front room. All other fenestration and secondary entrances have segmental arched lintels, stone sills, and one-over-one sash or glazed doors. The two-shop storefront has a southeast corner entrance which is angled 45° with hinged brick corners. An Art Deco period Coca-Cola sign surmounts the dentilated wood cornice. Paired shop entrances, one of which is recessed, have glazed doors and rectangular transom lights.

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## 2. Shephard Block

This brick commercial building has an unusual quoined false front with a matched pair of ornate oriel windows projecting from the second floor. The highly-eclectic style is a late (1890) vernacular version of the Italiannate Revival, with an excellent period storefront. A dentilated wood cornice with paired brackets extends across the false front, down the side eaves, and across the veneered facade of a large ell which projects westward in the rear. The false front obscures the 2½-story building's gable roof, and effectively gives it the appearance of a 3-story, flat-roofed block. All windows have one-over-one sash with segmental arched upper lights; west elevation windows have corbelled drip moldings, and an attic window on the front gable has a narrow granite lintel. The ell facade shows a full service bay entry, loft entry, and two plain two-over-two windows.

The storefront has a recessed entrance framed by cast iron columns supporting a continuous course of heavy granite lintels. A walk-up entry is at the far right. All display windows and doors have blind transom lights and granite sills. The entrance has a cast iron sill, one of the first castings produced at the Richford Foundry.

## 3. A.+P. Building

This 3-story brick commercial block was built c.1925 to house Richford's first automobile dealership. Its plan is 6 bays deep, 4 bays wide across the front, and 5 bays across the rear, with a 1-bay projection breaking the east elevation wall plane. The highly symmetrical fenestration uses paired one-over-one sash and brick flat arches with keystones and impost blocks of white stone, which, along with the plain classical wood cornice, give the building a Georgiannesque style. The storefront extends across the street elevation and two bays down the east elevation; it uses plate glass and stainless steel muntins. Two full bay service entrances are located on the east elevation. The rear is faced with clapboards.

## 4. Janes Block

This French Second Empire style building occupies a prominent corner site. Its massing and plan are more typical of residential than commercial buildings. Built in 1881, it was the first brick store erected at this busy intersection, and thus established a development trend which lasted nearly half a century.

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The 2½-story rectangular main block is 2x3 bays and is enriched with brick quoins and a column of brick panels centered on the south elevation. The steeply-pitched mansard roof has a bracketed wood cornice and dormer windows with bracketed metal peaks. All windows have one-over-one sash, wood sills, and corbelled, segmental arched lintels with labels. A west elevation 2-story bay window has decorative half-timber-motif panelling.

The 2-story, flat-roofed east wing was built in 1886 to give the building a second store. Although this addition has a cornice of corbelled brick rather than wood, it is visually joined to the main block by the matching storefronts which were also added in 1886. A 1½-story gabled rear ell has cornice returns, a gabled dormer window, and a two-tiered screened porch. The storefronts flank a central walk-up entry and share a single dentilated wood cornice. Recessed central entrances and flanking display windows have a continuous course of transom lights overhead.

#### 5. Union Block

This clapboard-faced commercial block has a rather plain 8-bay stick-motif facade with a typical dentilated box cornice. It is a remnant of the old (c.1863) Union Block, Richford's first multiple-shop commercial building. The original 2½-story Italiannate style structure had a gable roof which fronted on Main Street; six or seven secondary storefronts extended down River Street on the north elevation. When the bulk of the Union Block was replaced in 1902 by the Boright Block, this rear portion was retained as an adjoining structure separated by a brick firewall. After being damaged by fire in 1922 it was rebuilt with the present facade and given a new shed roof which raised the building to three stories.

The storefront has an asymmetrical arrangement of display windows, angled entrance recesses, and Queen Anne sash, capped by a projecting cornice with a simple frieze. The upper floor fenestration is single and paired one-over-one sash with plain surrounds. The rear elevation, overlooking the river, has 3½ floors of windows with two-over-two sash, including full basement level windows and attic level eyebrow windows. The high exposed stone foundation sits on a rock outcrop on the riverbank.

#### 6. Boright Block

The Boright Block is the tallest and most architecturally significant structure in the district. The outstanding brickwork on the facade is similar to, but more extensive than, the corbelled exteriors of the Woodworth and Taylor Blocks (#1 and #11). Its prominent corner turret is nearly identical to the one on the Taylor Block across the street; together they create a picturesque visual frame to the Main/River Street intersection.

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This corner has been the site of Richford's largest commercial building since the Civil War. The present  $4\frac{1}{2}$ -story, 8x6 bay edifice is built on the frame of the old Union Block, a long and narrow (@90'x25')  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -story clapboard building which had a gabled roof and a bracketed Italiannate style cornice. In 1902 the foundation and frame were extended ten feet toward the river, two stories were added, and the present elaborately corbelled brick facade was erected. The rear portion of the old building was left standing; it later received a third story and a new clapboard facade, and stands today as the Union Block (#5).

The corner turret which projects from the second and third stories of the northwest corner overhangs the building's primary commercial entrance, and is supported by a barrel-shafted brick column mounted on a square pedestal. A massive dentil-motif cornice extends across the north and south elevations, partially obscuring the round-arched attic windows above it. The frieze below recesses to panelled bays on the fourth story. The second and third story windows have corbelled segmental arched lintels with labels joined to courses of sawtooth brickwork. The turret has a parapet with battlements and a corbelled cornice.

The commercial front includes not only the main corner storefront, but also a secondary north elevation storefront flanked by separate walk-up entries, one with rectangular door, transom and sidelights, and the other with a corbelled brick drip molding. The entire street level is trimmed with a projecting dentilated cornice. A west elevation basement-level storefront with dentilated wood cornice was occupied for many years by a newspaper/printing office.

#### 7. Sweat-Comings Building A.

This large industrial building was constructed in 1908 of concrete blocks with bevelled edges to simulate cut stone, and is one of the earliest uses of concrete block construction in the state. The street elevation matches the scale and proportions of Building B (#8), lying to the north, and both structures have identical storefronts. A molded concrete cornice features large modillions.

The building is comprised of two parts. The front half is 3 stories, 7x11 bays, and has one-over-one sash set between concrete lintels and sills. Third floor windows have transom lights, and the front (east) elevation fenestration is all paired sash. Two typical period storefronts flank a central walk-up entry, and are capped by a dentilated cornice of molded concrete. The display window openings are supported by heavy steel posts hidden from view by decorative wood posts. Side elevations show freight entries, including a north elevation loading dock with a large corrugated steel hood.

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The rear part of the building houses the main manufacturing facilities. It is also 3 stories in height and shows 19x8 bays of large 16-light square windows in which the center 6 lights swivel on gimbals. They are set on concrete sills and enclosed by single concrete lintel courses. A 40'x60' underground concrete and brick structure and a large open drying shed are appended to the rear.

8. Sweat-Comings Building B.

Similar in construction and plan to #7, and faced by an identical storefront, this structure differs from its mate in its cornice, fenestration, and rear industrial section. The molded concrete cornice features large dentils and a tablet inscribed: "Sweat-Comings Co. Building 1908." The fenestration is paired nine-over-nine sash with concrete lintels and sills. The south elevation has a 3x1 bay projection and two enclosed corrugated steel walkways which connect the second and third floors of the two buildings. In the rear, jutting out over the river bank, is the factory's power plant, constructed of brick, and topped by a 75' chimney.

Because of the distinctive appearance of their common concrete block construction, and because they are situated in a single plane fronting on Main Street, this building and its neighbors (#7 and #9, on either side) share a strong visual relationship, and establish a viable axial streetscape which extends through the bridge and terminates at Main Street, in the heart of the historic district.

9. Richford Fire Station

Although much smaller in scale, this building is nearly identical in style and construction to the two Sweat-Comings Co. buildings. All three were built at the same time of the same bevelled-edged concrete blocks; however, this structure takes the intended cut-stone effect of this construction technique even further through its use of simulated rock-faced blocks on the first story. The modillioned cornice of molded concrete is identical to that on #7. The 2-story, 3x7 bay plan has a large garage-type door on the front elevation. Now flanked by sidelights, it replaced the narrower original door in order to accommodate the larger size of today's firetrucks. "1908 Fire Station" is inscribed overhead. To the right is a walk-up entry with a glazed transom. The windows have one-over-one sash, concrete lintels, and transom lights on the second floor. Side elevation fenestration is arranged in 2-3-2 groupings. The north elevation rests on a high stone foundation which drops directly into the river. A river level gauge is painted on the foundation to allow local authorities to measure rising flood waters. A large wood storage shed is appended to the rear at the basement level.

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## 10. Main St. Bridge

This steel bridge was one of the first designed by the State Highway Dept. after the great flood of November, 1927. It is a curved-chord Pratt pony truss with a bearing-to-bearing span of 125 feet and width of 28 feet. A non-structural steel archway mounted across the middle shows, on both sides, a clock in the keystone position, Lions Club emblems at the impost position, and the inscription "Welcome to Richford, Vt." The bridge is completely enclosed by flanking sidewalks with heavy iron outer rails and balisters which flare at all four extremes and connect to the walls of the nearest buildings. The trusses have polygonal top chords of 7 slopes supported by 7 verticals in compression, each with a diagonal inclined outward in tension. The "Carnegie U.S.A." steel members have all rivoted connections, and were constructed in sections by Shoemaker Bridge Co. of Pottstown, Pa. The bridge is the visual focal point of downtown Richford, splitting the commercial district about equally in half. It replaced a c.1881 steel through truss which proved to be no match for the great height and power of the flood of 1927. Photographs show an even earlier bridge on this site as a wooden span with solid, waist-high median and outer rails.

## 11. Taylor Block

This brick commercial block is one of the key structures in the district. It is similar in style and scale to the Boright Block, which was built a year later (1902) and occupies the opposite interior angle of the intersection. Most significantly, both buildings have matching corner turrets which together form an effective visual frame for the view of Main St. from both north and south.

The block is 3 stories high with a 4x3 bay rectangular plan. A wide corbelled cornice, enriched with panels of stone chisled in a jagged-tooth motif, extends around the north, east, and south elevations, as do the upper floor windows constructed of bonded brick segmental arched lintels, rock-faced stone sills, and one-over-one sash. The turret has a corbelled parapet which rises above the main block roofline. An iron fire escape on the east elevation may be original to the building.

The typical period storefront extends 2x3 bays on either side of the recessed corner entrance. The display window lintels are supported by fluted cast iron pilasters; metal caps and frieze are enriched with large stamped stars. The cast iron post supporting the corner turret is in matching style. The entry has a glazed door and transom, and a polished pink marble sill. The distinctive orange metal wall signs and overhanging blue neon sign read: "Rexall Drug." A north elevation walk-up entry is recessed, and has a glazed and panelled door and a glazed transom.

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12. (non-contributing) This 1-story structure fills in the space between buildings #11 and #13. The plain brick veneer facade has been extended across the front of #13.

13. Disabled American Veterans Hall

This small c.1920 brick block is 2 bays wide, 2 stories high in front, and 2½-stories in the rear, with an unusual clapboard-faced shed dormer-like monitor lighting the rear of the upper floor. The windows are segmental arched with one-over-one sash. The street level retains its original molded cornice and walk-up entry with large rectangular transom light; the brick veneer facade of #12 has been extended across the original storefront.

14. American Legion Hall

This 2½-story clapboard-frame structure has a flat roof with a bracketed Italiannate style cornice. The Queen Anne sash is paired on the outer bays of the 3-bay facade. A plain entrance portico was probably a later addition to the original c.1890 main block.

15. (non-contributing) This 2-story frame commercial block has been almost totally altered. Of the structure's original fabric, only a few c.1880 molded window heads on the east and south elevations remain.

16. P+G Market

This 3-story, 4-bay commercial block features a molded cornice with paired brackets. The outer bays have paired sash. The storefront and siding are alterations. Although superficially non-contributing, this turn-of-the-century building maintains the scale of the streetscape established by the Boright and Union Blocks, and would not require substantial rehabilitation to return it to its near original appearance.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
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<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The historical development of the Downtown Richford Historic District is tied directly to the waterfalls around which it was built. The first settlers in 1796 recognized its potential as a millsite, and in 1798 they erected a dam, gristmill, and sawmill here, as well as a store and distillery. The town's earliest years of settlement were utterly typical of the frontier experience throughout Vermont; an influx of pioneers cleared farmland and built log cabins; virgin soil produced bumper crops; and rising land values and grain prices maintained that staple of frontier life: unbridled optimism about the future. Within a decade, however, the bubble was popped by a combination of geographic and economic circumstances which have persistently retarded growth throughout the town's history.

The immediate cause of the collapse was the embargo on trade with Canada which Jefferson imposed in 1807. The Mississquoi River above Richford winds northward into Canada through a broad, fertile plain. Richford is the natural market for this region, and the loss of its trade was a blow to the town. Even worse, Richford farmers shipped their produce, mostly grain and potash, down the river to Lake Champlain, where it was then sent north to Quebec. This trade was also disrupted. Although smuggling was no doubt rampant, and kept some commerce alive, the situation worsened further when a series of natural disasters of almost biblical proportions struck. Blight destroyed crops, floods wiped out the mills as quickly as they could be rebuilt, and by "1816 and froze to death," the year of no summer, the few remaining inhabitants faced virtual starvation. Finally, a long-standing dispute over the town's land titles caused bankruptcies and more emigrations.

It was not until 1824 that a permanently-successful commercial and milling operation was established at the falls. By 1840 the town's population was 914, nearly all of whom were farmers. The village then had only 2 stores, 2 starch factories, and a handful of artisans, including a blacksmith, a gristmill, and a sawmill. This was at a time when most farming towns in Vermont had already peaked in their growth, were as industrially developed as they ever would be, and were rapidly losing people and wealth to the western frontier. Richford's best years were still ahead of it.

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

See Continuation Sheet 9-1.

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

UTM NOT VERIFIED

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY + - 12

QUADRANGLE NAME Jay Peak

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:62500

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,8 | 6,8,3 | 6,2,5 | 4,9,8,5 | 1,0,0

B 1,8 | 6,8,3 | 5,7,5 | 4,9 | 8,4,8,0,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
C 1,8 | 6,8,3 | 4,0,0 | 4,9 | 8,4 | 8,5,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
D 1,8 | 6,8,3 | 4,2,5 | 4,9 | 8,5 | 1,2,5

E | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

F | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

G | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

H | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at the intersection of Powell Street and Main Street, the district boundary runs westerly along Powell Street to the west property line of the Sweat-Comings Co. (buildings #7 and #8). Thence northerly

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE John C. Page

ORGANIZATION Preservation Consultant

DATE April, 1980

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE 802 644-2796

CITY OR TOWN

Waterville

STATE Vermont

**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

*William B. Pinney*

TITLE Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE 6-19-80

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*John F. Sallee*  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 8/22/80

ATTEST: *Patrick Andrews*  
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 5/19/80

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This brief recount of the town's early history serves to underscore a fundamental geographic/economic fact of life in Richford. Because it is boxed in on the east and south by mountains, and because trade along the river tends to move downriver, away from Richford, the town's economic destiny has always depended either upon trade with Canada, its only real natural market, or on good transportation facilities to negate its great geographic isolation. The development of both of these factors resulted in Richford's boom period of 1854-1910, and the consequent construction of the commercial-industrial district which is today the core of the downtown.

Population Growth, 1840-1920

1840	914
1850	1,074
1860	1,338
1870	1,481
1880	1,818
1890	2,196
1900	2,421
1910	2,907
1920	2,842 (-65)
1970	2,116
1977	2,127 (Vt. State Planning Office Estimate)

The first great spur to growth was the signing of the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854, which eliminated tariff barriers for natural goods crossing the U.S.-Canadian border. Although this pact was not renewed in 1866, the decade of free trade with the farming regions to the north made Richford a prosperous commercial center; capital accumulated during this period provided an economic base which would allow the town to escape its agricultural malaise and industrialize with the rest of the nation after the Civil War. Another important facet of this period was the introduction of large numbers of French-Canadians to the population. A map and business directory for the village in the 1871 Beers Atlas shows such names as Phaneuf, Lovlette, Faufaw, Libberty, and Rochessun. J. Lestourneau was listed as a farmer and "teacher of languages," an indication of cross-lingual interaction. French-Canadian immigrants became an increasingly important part of the community, as larger, labor-hungry industries developed at the end of the century. Although many were mill workers, there were merchants, lawyers, and farmers among them; today they are the predominant ethnic group in Richford.

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The economic growth of the 1850's and 1860's centered around the falls. The mills which had stood here in the first half of the century were small affairs which provided only the barest necessities of a farming community: flour and lumber. Now there appeared larger operations in more substantial buildings producing a wider variety of manufactures for both the local and export market. Most of these products were made of wood. At this time Vermont was 80-90% cleared of its forests, and the Green Mountains around nearby Jay Peak comprised one of the state's last major lumber reserves. In Richford, this timber was turned into lumber, sash and doors, butter tubs, furniture, and other wood products. All of these mills stood on the south bank of the river; this site was actually an island cut off from the mainland by a deep, narrow cleft in the rock, running approximately in between the two present Sweat-Comings buildings. When the river was dammed up just below the head of this channel, a powerful force of water was diverted through it, creating, in effect, a natural flume for the mills.

The village's primary commercial district grew up across the river from the mills, at the intersection of Main and River Streets. The key structure here was the Union Block, a long, narrow, 2½-story gabled wood building on the southeast corner. Built c.1863, this Italiannate style block housed a large general store, bookstore, hardware and harness shop, doctors and lawyer's offices, and, after 1866, the printing offices of Richford's first newspaper, the "Frontier Sentinel." A dozen or so wood frame shops and stores lined the rest of the intersection. These buildings were similar to each other in style and scale, being 1½-stories, gable-fronted, and built in vernacular Greek Revival and Italiannate styles with plain commercial fronts and balconied front gables. A number of these typical mid-19th century stores still stand to the west of the district on the north side of River Street.

In 1871 Richford was connected to the outside world by two different railroads, the Mississquoi R.R. from St. Albans, and the Southeastern R.R. from Quebec. Although this event did not have the fortuitous economic consequences such as occurred when the introduction of railroads turned Burlington into a great lumber port, or Barre into a granite city, it nonetheless contributed to the town's burgeoning industry, and made further growth possible. At this time the village consisted of 8 or 10 small mills, 3 hotels, a dozen or more artisans' shops, and perhaps twice that many stores of various kinds, including a jeweler, a bookdealer, a druggist, and a bowling alley. Nearly all of this commercial activity was housed in wood frame buildings.

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The Downtown Richford Historic District represents the second generation of development at the falls. In 1881 John N. Powell, a grocer, built the first brick structure in the business district, on the north side of River Street, across from the Union Block. Known today as the Janes Block (#4), this French Second Empire style building housed the grocery on the ground floor, the Powell family living quarters on the second, and a meeting hall for the Odd Fellows under the mansard roof. In 1886 Powell added the east wing to expand the building's commercial space. The success of his business undoubtedly made rival merchants look askance at their own small, wood frame stores. In 1890 Charles Casavant and Aleck Mosier, who kept a market in the Union Block, followed suit and built the unusual brick store known today as the Shephard Block (#2). This vernacular building type draws on a variety of eclectic styles. The vertically-delineated panel brick false front gave it the appearance of a 3-story, flat-roofed block, and effectively disguised its 2½-story gable roof. The bracketed cornice, "bug-eye" oriel windows, and arched fenestration gave it a late Italiannate style. Meanwhile, other merchants in Richford were erecting brick blocks outside the bounds of the present historic district.

More than half of the district's contributing structures were built in the years 1901-08. The first of these was the Taylor Block (#11), erected by druggist Fred Mitchell shortly after the turn of the century. Mitchell moved his old wood store down River Street, where it still stands as the Richford Cleaners. The new building was stylistically innovative in Richford, featuring a large turret on the corner, and corbelled brickwork in the style of the day. Sheldon Boright, the owner of the old Union Block across the street, perceived correctly that his building was no longer the gem of downtown Richford. In a fit of personal rivalry so typical of the Edwardian mind, Boright immediately built a bigger and grander structure on the expanded frame of the Union Block. His sole avowed purpose was to make his building once again the tallest store in downtown Richford; the interiors of the upper two floors were never finished, and today still show bare studs and subflooring. Fortunately, the architect gave the Boright Block, as it became known, a style and massing which worked beautifully with the drug store across the street. The key to this compatible visual relationship was a nearly identical corner turret on the new building. The Boright Block's corbelled brick facade is perhaps the village's single most significant architectural feature. It represents the high state of the art of turn-of-the-century masonry. In 1904 William Woodworth built the 3-story commercial block which bears his name (#1). The similarity of its brickwork to that on the Taylor and Boright Blocks suggests that they were all the work of the same builder or architect.

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In 1908 two local businessmen, Ira Sweat and W.B. Comings, under the name of the Sweat-Comings Co., purchased all the mills and shops which had steadily been built up on the south side of the falls. They razed this sprawl of wood structures and built a modern two-building furniture factory constructed of an innovative building material--molded concrete blocks. In a successful attempt to alleviate the blank gray appearance of concrete buildings, the blocks were made with wide bevelled edges, which create the effect of cut stone masonry. Cornices, lintels, sills, and other exterior detail were made of molded concrete. The front portions of both buildings were finished as income-producing storefronts and office space. The natural flume which had powered mills here for a century ran between the two new buildings. It was lined with concrete and easily adapted to the new factory complex. At the same time a new municipal fire station (#9) was built of the same materials and in the same style. The Sweat-Comings Co. may well have subsidized its construction; the resulting lower cost of fire insurance, always high in a furniture factory, could have meant a net savings to the firm. As a group, these three buildings present an interesting streetscape leading up to the bridge and the river, and remain as the only reminder of Richford's industrial history. They are also one of the earliest uses of concrete block construction in Vermont. The Sweat-Comings Co. still manufactures furniture here under the management of one of its founding families, and is a critical segment of the town's now-meager economic base.

The present composition of the historic district was completed in the 1920's. In 1922 a bad fire struck the remnant of the old Union Block which had been left standing when the Boright Block went up in 1902. The building was rebuilt the next year with a third story, a new shed roof, and a new clapboard facade. Although it is not a particularly significant structure architecturally, it contributes to the district by maintaining the scale and streetscape established by the Boright Block, and by its historical relationship to its larger neighbor and the district as a whole. About 1925 the last brick building erected in downtown Richford was built at the foot of Main St. to house the town's first automobile dealership (#3). It replaced an old 1½-story gable-fronted store, and drastically changed the appearance of the intersection by creating a large brick backdrop to the axial view from the bridge and across the river. Although it lacks stylistic complexity, it is a vital link in the district's overall appearance of large brick commercial blocks.

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The final component in the district was added in 1928. The great flood of the previous November made short work of the old iron through truss bridge which had stood since 1881. The state highway department surveyed a new bridge site even before the flood was fully subsided, and had plans completed by Christmas, making this perhaps the first bridge built in the state after the flood. The cost was incurred by the town, with a \$5,000 contribution from the state. Shoemaker Bridge Co. of Pottstown, Pa. built the bridge in sections and shipped it here by rail. The distinctive Lions Club archway was added in the 1960's, and is perhaps the focal point of the district for travellers from the south.

Construction in the 1920's represented specific responses to new economic factors: flood, fire, and the advent of the automobile. In fact, Richford's economy has been in steady decline since WWI, as evidenced by a drop in population from 2,907 in 1910 to 2,842 in 1920 to about 2,100 today. The total floorspace in the historic districts's buildings is presently about one-third occupied; the largest structure, the Boright Block, is totally vacant. Consequently, many of the structures have suffered from neglect and are in varying degrees of deterioration. In some ways, though, the neglect has been benign. It is unusual to find turn-of-the-century commercial buildings in such a virtually unaltered state that even the storefronts are intact. There are also a number of c.1910 blue enameled street signs still mounted on the second stories of many of the buildings, giving the district an antique ambiance.

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along the west (rear) property line of buildings 7, 8 and 9 to the south bank of the Missisquoi River and crossing the Missisquoi River to the southwest corner of the American Legion property (buildings 12-14). From this point, the boundary runs northerly along the west property line of the American Legion property, crossing River Street and running northerly along the west property line of the Woodworth Block property (number 1). The boundary continues from the northwest corner of the Woodworth Block property easterly along the north (rear) property line of buildings 1, 2 and 3 crossing Main Street and continuing easterly to the northeast corner of the Janes Block (number 4). The boundary continues from the northeast corner of building 4 southerly to the center of River Street, then continues easterly along the center of River Street and its extension thereof to the northeast corner of the P & G Market property (number 16), then southerly along the east boundary of number 16 to the southeast corner of the P & G property. The boundary continues westerly along the south (rear) property lines of buildings 16, 15, 5 and 6 to the eastern edge of Main Street and the Main Street Bridge, then continues southerly along the eastern edge of Main Street, wholly including the Main Street Bridge (number 10), to the intersection of Main Street and Powell Street, the point of beginning.

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AMENDMENT

DOWNTOWN RICHFORD HISTORIC DISTRICT, RICHFORD, FRANKLIN COUNTY, VERMONT

## Section 8: Statement of Significance

The Downtown Richford Historic District reflects Richford's greatest period of growth and economic development at the turn of the nineteenth century, through its largely intact commercial buildings. Built around the falls on the Mississquoi River, the Village's mills, in an area booming with the lumber industry provided the prosperity responsible for the development of the buildings which survive today, many with their storefronts unchanged. French-Canadians, who first immigrated to Richford in the late nineteenth century, compose a large percentage of the population of Richford today, many of them employed at the 1908 Sweat-Comings Co. which still manufactures furniture along the falls.

## Section 10: Boundary Justification

The District is a cohesive section of commercial buildings which, at the west is bounded by intrusive structures, at the north and east, by a change in character from commercial to residential, and at the south, by a break in continuity visually because of vacant lots where buildings have been lost, or intrusive buildings occur.

August 8, 1980

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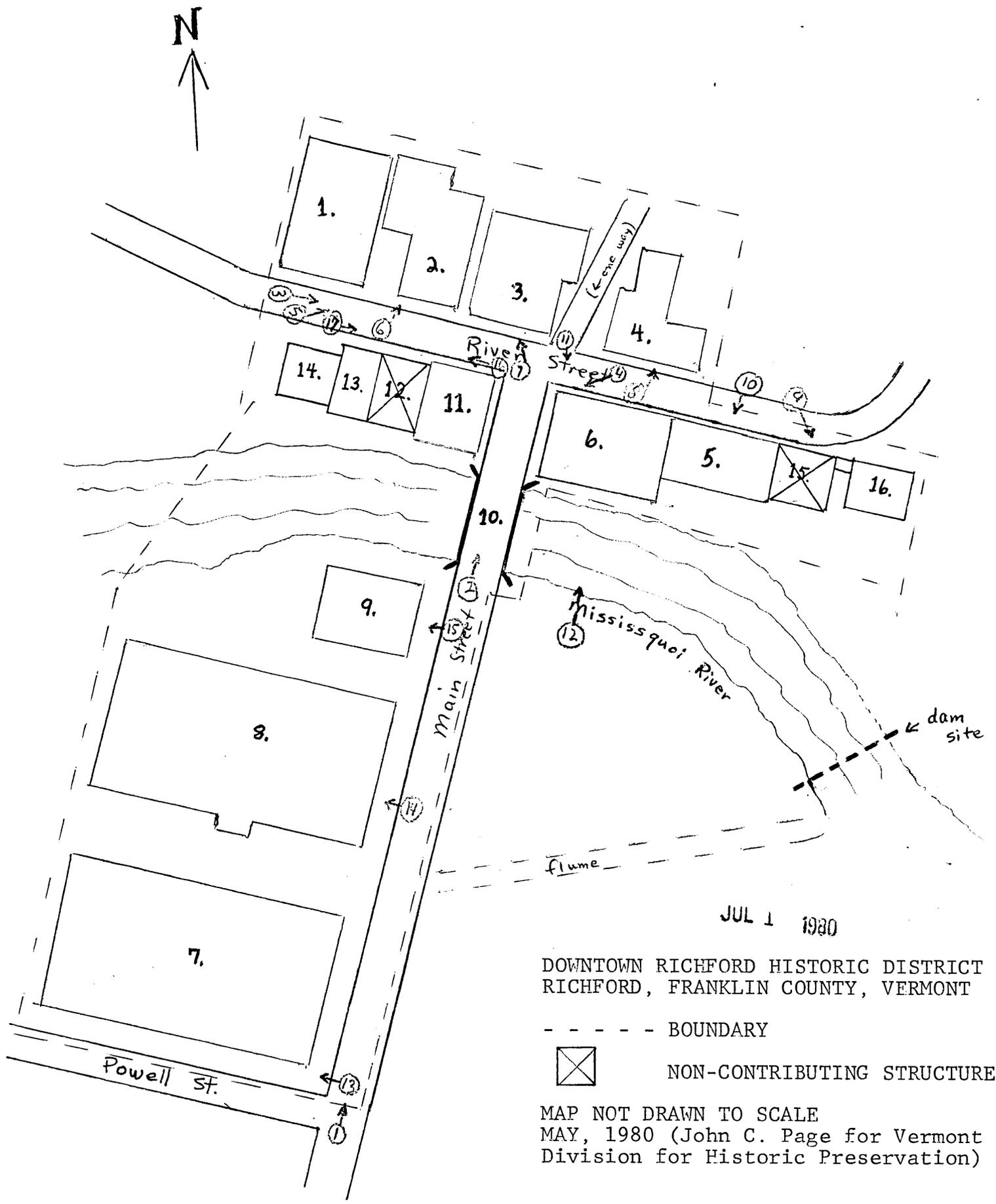
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|--|--|
| 1. Lawrence and Kathleen Smith<br>River St.<br>Richford, Vermont   | 9. Town of Richford<br>Main St.<br>Richford, Vermont             |
| 2. Arlene Balthazar<br>River St.<br>Richford, Vermont              | 10. State of Vermont<br>Dept. of Highways<br>Montpelier, Vermont |
| 3. Steve Eaglestone<br>Box 223<br>Richford, Vermont                | 11. Harry Newell<br>River St.<br>Richford, Vermont               |
| 4. Rosaire St. Pierre<br>Enosburg Falls, Vermont                   | 12. American Legion Post 12<br>River St.<br>Richford, Vermont    |
| 5. Theodore and Mamie Hurtabise<br>River St.<br>Richford, Vermont  | 13. American Legion Post 12<br>River Street<br>Richford, Vermont |
| 6. Steve Eaglestone, <u>et al.</u><br>Box 223<br>Richford, Vermont | 14. American Legion Post 12<br>River Street<br>Richford, Vermont |
| 7. Nancy Comings<br>Main St.<br>Richford, Vermont                  | 15. James and Gordon Mayhew<br>River Street<br>Richford, Vermont |
| 8. Nancy Comings<br>Main St.<br>Richford, Vermont                  | 16. Kenneth Perry<br>River Street<br>Richford, Vermont           |



JUL 1 1980

DOWNTOWN RICHFORD HISTORIC DISTRICT  
 RICHFORD, FRANKLIN COUNTY, VERMONT

- BOUNDARY
- ☒ NON-CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURE

MAP NOT DRAWN TO SCALE  
 MAY, 1980 (John C. Page for Vermont  
 Division for Historic Preservation)

Ⓢ = photos

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