

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form



984
1984

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Westerly Downtown Historic District

and/or common

2. Location

street & number High, Canal, Broad, Union, and Main Streets,
and Railroad Avenue not for publication

city, town Westerly N.A. vicinity of cong. district #2
~~Congressional district~~ Hon. Claudine Schneider
state Rhode Island code 44 county Washington code 009

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N.A. in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name List on file at the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

street & number

city, town vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Westerly Town Hall

street & number Broad Street

city, town Westerly state Rhode Island

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Statewide Survey of Historic Structures - Town of Westerly has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1978 federal state county local

depository for survey records Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

city, town Providence state Rhode Island 02903

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved	date 18-22 Canal St. (1866);
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			88, 88½, 90½ High St. (early 20th century)

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Downtown Westerly district includes fifty-four structures and encompasses most of the commercial and civic core of the town of Westerly, the largest town in southern Rhode Island. The district is situated on the east bank of the Pawcatuck River, about six miles north of Long Island Sound. It is primarily linear in configuration, extending parallel to the river along Main, High, and Canal Streets, and is basically characterized by two- and three-story, closely spaced masonry commercial structures set directly along the edge of the sidewalk. An adjacent cluster of institutional buildings within the district on Broad Street sit on small lawns and are more widely spaced, as are the group of mid-nineteenth century residences at the northern end of the district along High Street.

The central focus of the district is the open space formed by the "T" intersection of Broad and High Streets, known as Dixon Square. It was named after the imposing Dixon House Hotel which faced the square from 1866 until it was destroyed by fire in 1928. Today the square is dominated by the five-story, Renaissance Revival, limestone headquarters of the Washington Trust Company, built at Broad and Main Streets in 1925. The northeast corner of the square is formed by the continuous row of two- and three-story, late Victorian and early twentieth-century commercial structures which run north on High Street and extend west on Broad Street to the Pawcatuck River bridge. The northwest corner of the square is formed by the curving, colonnaded marble facade of Westerly Post Office, built in 1913.

With its curved form, the Post Office serves as a visual (as well as functional) link between the row of commercial buildings along High Street and the cluster of civic structures just east of the square on Broad Street. This small civic center includes the yellow brick, Romanesque Revival Westerly Memorial and Public Library, built in 1894, and the granite Westerly Town Hall and Court House, built in an Academic Revival style in 1912, as well as the 1872 red brick Victorian Old Town Hall just south of Broad Street on Union Street. There is a spaciousness to the district at this location provided by both the well-maintained lots on which these institutional structures sit, and by adjacent Wilcox Park, a late nineteenth-century park already listed on the National Register as part of the Wilcox Park Historic District. The district extends a short distance south from Broad Street along Main Street and includes another locally important civic institution, the well-preserved, mansard-roofed Victorian headquarters of the Utter Company, publishers of the Westerly newspaper since the 1850s.

North of Dixon Square the district extends parallel to the river for two blocks along High and Canal Streets to its termination at the railroad. This is the principal commercial zone of the town, and both sides of the street are lined with an almost unbroken row of two- and three-story commercial blocks and a continuous band of plate-glass store-

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet 3

Item number 7

Page 4

Broad Street (cont.)

projects from the center of the facade, and wood traceries decorate the round headed windows on the third floor. Large brackets support a projecting cornice. The storefronts are modern, although it appears as if the originals may have been covered over. The Welch Building occupies the site of the old Phenix Bank.

Westerly Memorial and Public Library (1894, 1924): Designed by Longstaff and Hurd, an architectural firm from Bridgeport, Connecticut, this two-story, yellow brick structure with local granite and red sandstone trim was built in the Romanesque Revival style. With its distinctive hipped roof which is covered with red terra-cotta tiles, the library is an important visual landmark in the Westerly Downtown district. An addition to the east side, similar in style to the original building, was built in 1924. The structure is listed on the National Register as part of the Wilcox Park Historic District.

Westerly Town Hall and Courthouse (1912): Designed by William R. Walker and Son of Providence in the Academic Revival style, this two-story granite structure is capped with a slate hipped roof above a decorative copper cornice. Massive granite columns support a portico at the main entrance to the Town Hall on Broad Street. A much more modest side entrance on Union Street serves the Court House portion of the building at the rear. The structure is included within the Wilcox Park Historic District.

CANAL STREET

- 1-7 Nardone Block (1926): This large, three-story brick building which fronts both Canal and High Streets continues the tradition of earlier brick commercial buildings in downtown Westerly. First-floor shops face both streets. The corner of the structure, which is treated as a curve in the plan, serves as the visual focal point of the building. The two upper floors house apartments.
- 2-8 Murphy Building (1913): A simply detailed, three-story, primarily brick business block. Rectangular stone lintels are set above double-hung windows, and the facade is capped by a metal cornice. The original storefronts have been mostly covered over with stucco and an applied mansard roof. The Ninigret Hotel originally occupied the upper floors.
- 9-13 United Theater (early 20th century): Since the closing of the nineteenth-century Bliven's Opera House in the Main Street neighborhood, just south of the Downtown District, this straightforward, two-story

(See Continuation Sheet #4)

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
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–1940s	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Urban develop- ment
Specific dates	Various	Builder/Architect		

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Westerly Downtown Historic District has played an historically significant role as the commercial and governmental center for the largest community in southern Rhode Island from the early nineteenth century through the present day. The development of the district reflects significant regional development in industry and transportation and its subsequent growth in population and prosperity. This district is one of relatively few, and one of the most intact, small town "downtowns" in Rhode Island, characterized as a relatively compact, self-sufficient village core, urban in character, which incorporates commercial, civic, institutional, and transportation facilities servicing a larger region. South of Providence, similar small urban districts in Rhode Island can perhaps only be found at East Greenwich and in the Arctic settlement of West Warwick. The Westerly Downtown District is also architecturally significant for its visually cohesive, linear grouping of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century commercial structures which is punctuated at both its north and south ends by distinguished monumental public buildings from the same period.

The village center of Westerly developed largely as a result of its strategic location on the Post Road, the major land route along the New England coast, at the head of navigation of the Pawcatuck River, just six miles from the deep water of Long Island Sound. In addition, falls in the river at this spot (no longer evident) offered a potential source of water power. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the village, formerly known as Pawcatuck Bridge, had grown to include fifteen residences, a gristmill, and a bank. In 1814, the Pawcatuck Manufacturing Company built a stone mill just south of the Pawcatuck River bridge and introduced water-powered textile industry to the region. This was soon followed by the establishment of mills upriver at Stillmanville and White Rock, and nearby at Potter Hill and Bradford. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Westerly also developed as an important regional center for shipping, shipbuilding, and, to a limited extent, whaling. In 1832, the construction of the Stonington and Providence Railroad along at the northern edge of the village introduced a new form of transportation to Westerly which eventually supplanted the local shipping industry.

A quarry was put into operation near Bradford in 1834, establishing the local granite industry which was to bring Westerly into national prominence in the decades following the Civil War. Eventually at least

(See Continuation Sheet #13)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Best, Mary Agnes, The Town That Saved A State. Westerly: The Utter Company, 1943.

(See Continuation Sheet #17)

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property Approx. 24.7 acres

Quadrangle name Ashaway, Connecticut--R.I.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

1	9	2	6	3	5	4	0	4	5	8	4	7	4	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

1	9	2	6	3	4	4	0	4	5	8	4	2	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

1	9	2	6	3	1	2	0	4	5	8	4	2	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

1	9	2	6	3	2	0	0	4	5	8	4	7	2	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

The district includes the following properties in the town of Westerly, Rhode Island: Plat 56, lots 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, (See cont. sheet #18)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Clifford M. Renshaw, A.I.A.

organization

date 8 May 1984

street & number 25 Main Street

telephone 401-294-6538

city or town Wickford

state Rhode Island

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



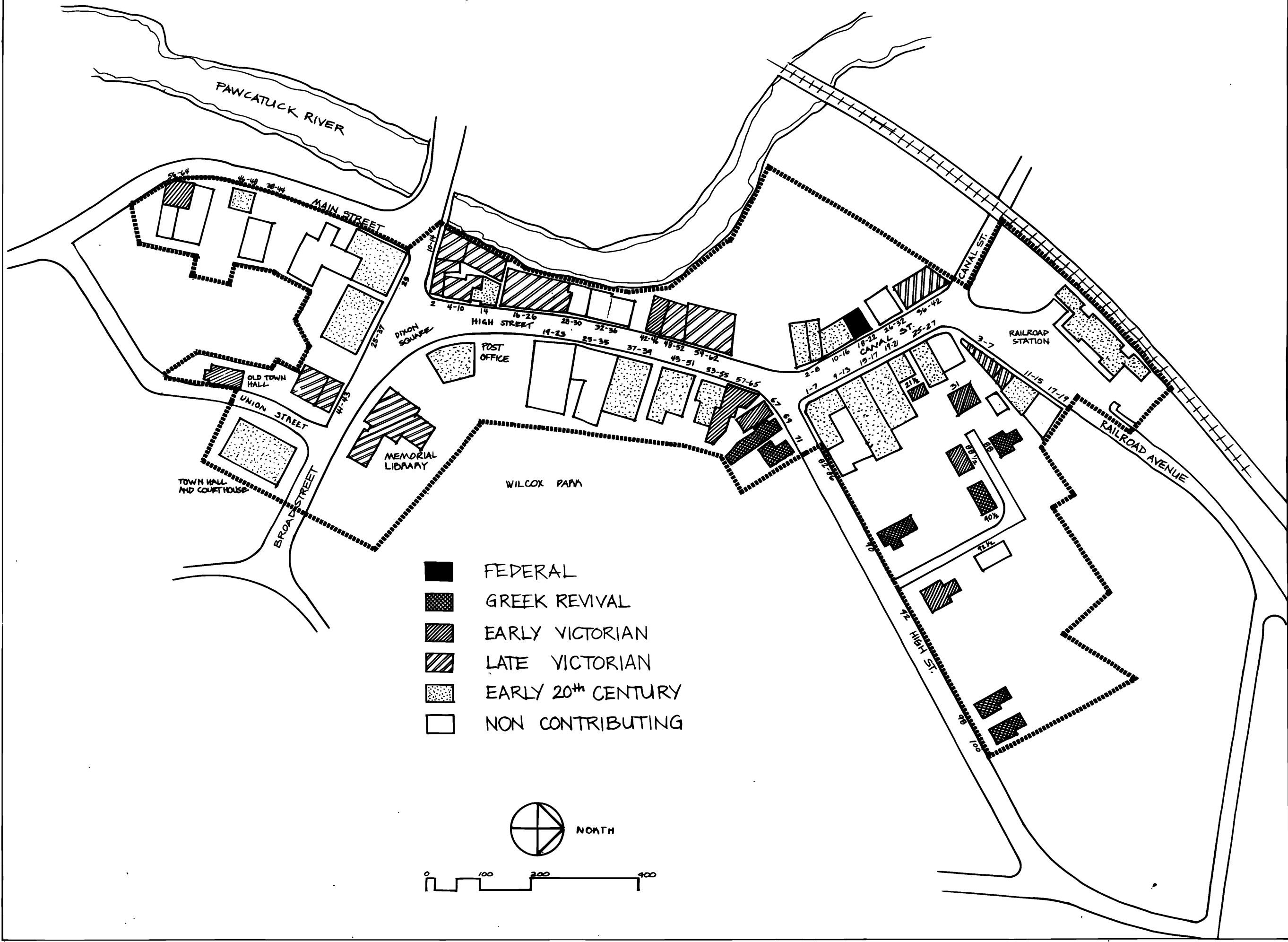
title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 7 June 1984



WESTERLY DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

Westerly, Rhode Island



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Downtown Westerly Historic District Additional Documentation (PofS)		Westerly	Washington R.I.
Name of Property		City/Town	County and State
Section Number	<u>7,8</u>	Page	<u>1</u>

Additional Documentation, change in Period of Significance:

The Downtown Westerly Historic District was listed in the National Register in 1884. With a few exceptions, buildings which were not yet 50 years old in 1984 were designated as non-contributing in the nomination document. These included several whose visual character was an important part of the district's significance, but whose historic significance was not exceptional. Several of these buildings should now be considered contributing.

The district as a whole is significant for its ability to document the growth and expansion of a small 19th and 20th-century downtown. The district is a visually cohesive unit, urban in character, though diminutive in size.

Commercial buildings (1, 2, and 3-stories, masonry and wood) abut one another and are built to the sidewalk edge. Most have storefronts on the first floor and together they create a wall on each side of the main streets in downtown.

Major institutional buildings are located at important intersections, such as Dixon Square, but the unpretentious commercial buildings that line High and Canal Streets are also an important part of the district's character—they form the matrix within which the more significant buildings are set. Their loss would represent a serious compromise of the district's significance.

The following buildings, originally designated as non-contributing, should now be considered contributing. The rows of commercial buildings along High and Canal Streets and Railroad Avenue were completed in 1949, as the original nomination notes. The several buildings within these rows should now be considered contributing.

The buildings in question have been reviewed by the Rhode Island Review Board. The Board approved a change of the period of significance, so that it now ends at c1950, and approved the change from NC to C of the buildings which were constructed before this date and which form the continuous line of storefronts on High and Canal Streets and Railroad Avenue.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Downtown Westerly Historic District
Additional Documentation (PofS)

Name of Property

Westerly
City/Town

Washington R.I.
County and State

Section Number 7,8

Page 2

CANAL STREET

26-32 Commercial Block (1936): A one-story, flat-roofed brick commercial structure, with four plate-glass storefronts. The building is attached to the south side of the Martin House Hotel. (Photo #1)

HIGH STREET

19-23 W. T. Grant Building (1949): A two-story, flat-roofed commercial building, vaguely Art Deco in style. Its yellow brick walls have indented horizontal courses. The second floor has a long horizontal band of windows filed with glass block and steel sash; the windows are separated by steel panels in a wave pattern. (Photo #2)

25-35 Commercial Building (late 1930s): A plain 1-story brick commercial building, with a flat roof. The street side is divided into four plate-glass storefronts. Attached to 19-23 High Street on the south side and 37-39 High on the north. (Photo #3)

28-30 Commercial Building (between 1939 and 1949): A small, plain 1-story commercial building, with a flat roof. The street side is divided into two plate-glass storefronts, simply trimmed above with cast stone. Attached to 16-26 High Street (the Brown Building) on its south side and to 32-36 High on the north side. (Photo #4)

32-36 Commercial Building (late 1930s): A 1-story, flat-roofed, brick commercial building, with four storefronts. The southern two storefronts remained unaltered, but the northern two have sheet metal panels covering the area above the store windows (the original brick face appears to be in place under the panels). (Photo #5)

82-86 Commercial Building (c1950): A simple 1-story flat-roofed brick structure, with four storefronts. Set at the corner of High and Canal Streets, the building is actually L-shaped, but only its streetside storefronts are visible. It is attached to the 1-7 Canal Street, the Nardone Building, on its west side and to 9-13 Canal, the United Theater, on the north side. (Photo #6)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Downtown Westerly Historic District
Additional Documentation (PofS)

Name of Property

Westerly
City/Town

Washington R.I.
County and State

Section Number 7,8

Page 3

RAILROAD AVENUE

- 17-19 **Commercial Building (c1950):** A 1-story, flat-roofed red brick commercial building; it has bow-front shop windows on each side of a large Colonial Revival entrance. It is attached to the Chest Building Annex, 11-15 Railroad Avenue and directly across the street from the railway station. (Photo #7)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Downtown Westerly Historic District
Additional Documentation (P of S)

Westerly

Washington R.I.

Name of Property

City/Town

County and State

Section Number 7, 8 Page 4

List of Photographs:

The information for #1-7 below is the same for each photograph:

1. Westerly Downtown Historic District, Additional Documentation
2. Washington County, Rhode Island
3. Pamela Kennedy, photographer
4. June 2007
5. Original at RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, 150 Benefit Street, Providence, RI 02903

The following information is specific to the indicated photograph:

6. 26-30 Canal Street, east elevation
7. Photo #1

6. 19-23 High Street, west elevation
7. Photo #2

6. 25-35 High Street, west elevation
7. Photo #3

6. 28-30 High Street, east elevation
7. Photo #4

6. 32-36 High Street, east elevation
7. Photo #5

6. 82-86 High Street, south elevation
7. Photo #6

6. 17-29 Railroad Street, northwest elevation
7. Photo #7