

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JAN 26 1984

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Smith Street Primary School

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 396 Smith Street not for publication

city, town Providence N.A. vicinity of congressional district #2
Honorable Claudine Schneider

state Rhode Island code 44 county Providence code 007

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name City of Providence, c/o Superintendant of Schools

street & number 480 Charles Street

city, town Providence N.A. vicinity of state Rhode Island

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Providence City Hall

street & number 25 Dorrance Street

city, town Providence state Rhode Island

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Smith Hill, Providence has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date June 1980 federal state county local

depository for survey records Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

150 Benefit Street

city, town Providence state Rhode Island

7. Description

Condition

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

Check one

unaltered

altered

Check one

original site

moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Located adjacent to a small commercial node on the busy thoroughfare of Smith Street in the dense late nineteenth-century residential neighborhood of Smith Hill, the Smith Street School (1885) is a large and imposing brick structure two-and-a-half-stories high with a cross-gable roof and irregular massing. Its contrived siting greatly enhances its visual impact: the building is turned at an angle to Smith Street, and one corner of the basement is cut at approximately a forty-five-degree angle at the sidewalk line; above the basement, the wall is corbeled out over the sidewalk to form a regular, ninety-degree corner. Exterior articulation--save for the steeple and clock on the bell tower--remains intact and includes terra-cotta trim, decorative slate in the gable ends, and original, paired two-over-two sash.

The interior is organized around four large classrooms per floor, asymmetrically arranged around a central corridor (see plan). Interior finish is predictably plain but largely intact: it includes original hardware, turned pendants and newel posts on the stairs, and simple wainscot.

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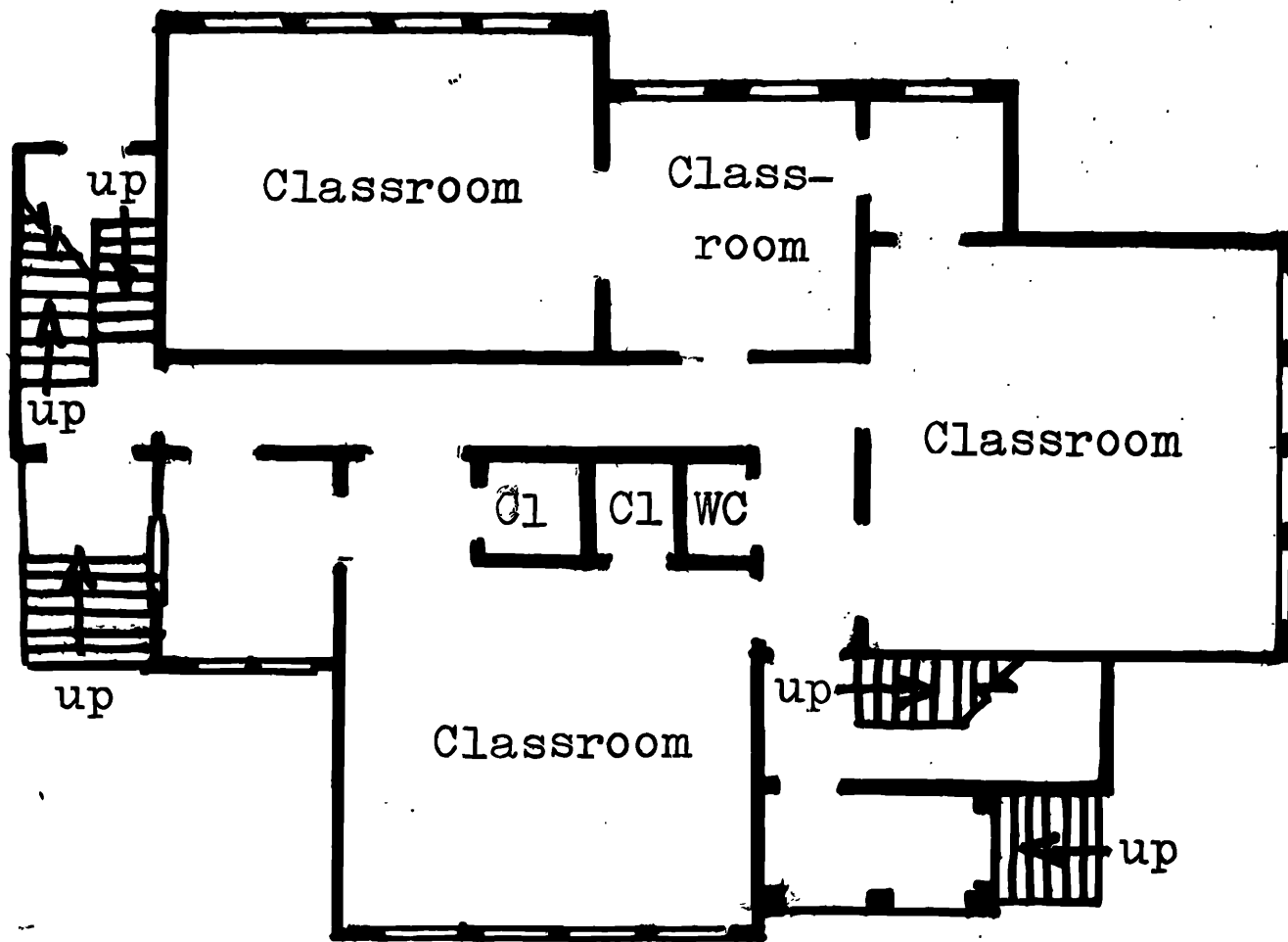
Continuation sheet

1

Item number

7

Page 1



Smith Street School
396 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island

Sketch Plan--Not to Scale

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 type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1885 **Builder/Architect** William R. Walker & Son, architects

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

In the history of educational architecture, the Smith Street Primary School is significant both as a well-preserved and now rare document of Providence's elementary educational facilities of the late nineteenth century and for its particular design quality as a primary school.

Many of the public school buildings erected in Providence during the nineteenth century have been demolished--a great loss given the importance of public education in Providence and the leadership the city demonstrated in that field. Providence first provided free, tax-supported public schools in 1800. The city embarked on a major building campaign between 1838 and 1842, but these buildings were physically and functionally outmoded by the late 1860s. As Providence grew rapidly between 1870 and 1930, the School Department attempted to keep pace with the population, and new schools rose at a steady clip. The Smith Street Primary School opened in September 1885 to educate the children of Smith Hill, then one of the fastest growing neighborhoods in the city. It complemented the Candace Street Grammar School (now demolished), which had opened in 1877. The neighborhood continued to grow during these years, and by 1895 some of the pupils here removed to the recently-opened Ruggles Street Primary School. Both primary schools remained in use until superceded by the Camden Street School in 1958. After seventy years of service as a school, the building was used for offices for another twenty before closing its doors. Of the fifteen public schools in Providence documented as built in the 1880s, only three now remain.

The Smith Street Primary School is remarkable for its design. While many--and perhaps all--contemporary public schools in Providence were designed in the Queen Anne mode and some were built of brick, none so imaginatively conceived is known. Providence public schools were generally foursquare, symmetrical structures sited doughtily in the middle of open schoolyards. The Smith Street School sidles asymmetrically up to the street and rakishly overhangs the sidewalk. The plan is asymmetrical as well and suggests the open, additive approach to planning found in contemporary domestic architecture. William R. Walker, who designed this and many other Providence public schools during these years, was certainly capable of the oft-prized picturesque whimsy of the day in his domestic buildings, but his public buildings were usually more staid. For whatever--and now unknown--reason, Walker provided and the School Department accepted this handsome, and slightly amusing, episode in Providence's educational architecture.

9. Major Bibliographical References

"Smith Hill, Providence," Statewide Historical Preservation Report, P-P-4. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, June 1980.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Providence

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

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

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

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 boundary for the Smith Street School coincides with that of Providence Tax Assessor's Plat 67, lot 44. This boundary represents the limit of land historically associated with the property.

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 William McKenzie Woodward, Principal Historic Preservation Planner

organization R.I. Historical Preservation Comm. date November 15, 1983

street & number 150 Benefit Street

telephone 401-277-2678

city or town Providence

state Rhode Island 02903

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

Frank Williams

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date January 5, 1984

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date

2/23/84

for Delores Byer
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration