

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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Continuation sheet 129

Item number 7

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NAME: Gilbane's Service Center Building
LOCATION: 175-191 Pawtucket Avenue
OWNER: Robert and Theresa Hill
175-191 Pawtucket Avenue
Pawtucket, RI 02860
CONDITION: Good; altered; original site

DESCRIPTION:

Gilbane's Service Center building, a whimsical Art Deco-derived design of the early 1930s, is located on the southwestern corner of Randall Street and Pawtucket Avenue (U.S. Route 1) on the edge of the late-nineteenth-century residential neighborhood of South Woodlawn. The stucco-covered, concrete-block gas station building follows a rounded L-plan, leaving an open service area between the structure and the two intersecting streets. A two-story, hip-roofed office block anchors the northern end of the building; a fanciful five-tiered tower at the opposite end balances the office block visually, while also attracting the attention of drivers traveling along busy Route 1. The flat-roofed, single-story portion of the station between the tower and the office is divided into eleven bays of several sizes. The front wall of each bay is marked by corner pinnacles sandwiching pent-roofs--the same motif is repeated (reaching a rather dramatic climax) on the multi-tiered southern tower.

The stucco covering of most of the exterior walls has a pale orange tint, but plain white stucco fills the blind arches atop each ground-floor opening. Further color contrast is added by the red brick soldier course, which outlines the top of each arch and then continues across the building's front at the impost line, and by the green-painted roofs. A recent coat of bright red paint on much of the formerly green painted trim has additionally enlivened the station's unusual color mix. And, finally, a red neon sign and clock in the upper tiers of the tower have recently been put back into service, and add their own distinctive, ruby glow to the overall color effect.

Exterior alterations of the building have chiefly been replacing the original windows (those in the southern end of the structure have been filled in with wavy glass block) and closing in several of the eight originally open service bays. The five pumps which were originally aligned along a single island in front of the building have also been removed. In terms of both its overall form and its fundamental visual impact, however, the station remains basically intact.

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PERIOD: 1900-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture; Transportation; Commerce

SPECIFIC DATE: c.1931

ARCHITECT: Phillip Eddy

SIGNIFICANCE:

Gilbane's Service Center Building is architecturally significant as a free-wheeling vernacular interpretation of the Art Deco style, certainly the finest of its type in Pawtucket, and one of the best in Rhode Island. Historically, Gilbane's is significant as one of the earliest and largest examples of the second generation of American gasoline stations--those which included service and repair functions in addition to selling gasoline. Gilbane's was advertised in 1934, in fact, as "New England's Largest Drive-In Service Station."¹

The present Gilbane Service Center Building, designed by Phillip Franklin Eddy, was erected for Francis Gilbane, Incorporated, around 1931, replacing an earlier building owned by that company on the same site. Gilbane's new station building with its five gasoline pumps and eight service bays, represented a dramatic advance over the much smaller filling stations (see the 1927-28 Art's Auto station, for instance, at 5-7 Lonsdale Avenue, already listed on the National Register) which, with their limited service facilities, had hitherto predominated in Pawtucket. The Gilbane organization in the 1930s actually owned three locations in Pawtucket and operated an extensive fuel oil and oil burner business in addition to their Route 1 gas station. These non-automotive operations gradually expanded to the point where the Pawtucket Avenue service station was eventually converted into office and private garage space serving the burgeoning fuel oil business.

¹Pawtucket and Central Falls (Providence County, R.I.)
City Directory. (Boston: Sampson & Murdock Company, 1934) p. 71.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nominated property is Pawtucket Assessor's Plat 54A, lot 648, and includes the Gilbane's Service Center Building and its immediate surroundings.

ACREAGE: less than one

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: Local

UTM: A 19 301710 4637810

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