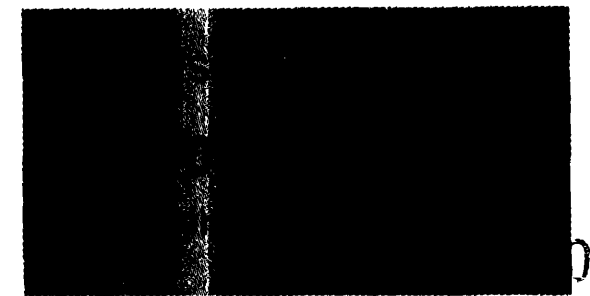


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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



Continuation sheet 56

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NAME: Whitcomb Farm

LOCATION: 36 Willett Avenue

OWNER: Reginald D. Whitcomb and Carolyn P. Ray, Trustees
Estate of T. Howard Ray
36 Willett Avenue
East Providence, R.I. 02915

DESCRIPTION:

Whitcomb Farm, set on a large lot on the northeast corner of Willett and Pawtucket Avenues, stands opposite the Bicknell-Armington Lightning Splitter (see inventory entry) in a suburban neighborhood containing for the most part early twentieth-century houses. It is a two-and-one-half-story, gable-roofed brick house with clapboard sheathing on the front and rear (south and north) walls. The front entrance, in the center of the five-bay facade, is flanked by sidelights that are part of the original doorway and is topped by an elliptical fanlight that was added when the house was refurbished in 1929 following a fire. Windows on the front and rear have splayed-lintel caps. The interior is arranged on a center-hall plan with four end chimneys. The mantel and cornice molding in the former southeast parlor (the wall between the western ground floor rooms has been removed) have reeded decoration; mantels in other rooms are plain. The dining room contains a very fine Colonial Revival china closet with a broken pediment top and leaded-glass doors. The kitchen in the northeast room dates from 1929, the original kitchen having been in an outbuilding on the site of the present three-car garage northeast of the house. A nineteenth-century ell extending from the east side of the structure was demolished during the 1929 rehabilitation of the house.

DATE: between 1780 and 1805

SIGNIFICANCE:

Whitcomb Farm is an architectural landmark that has been associated with important figures in local history. Built between 1780 and 1805, it is an outstanding example of Federal domestic architecture noteworthy for its sophisticated center-hall-plan, a feature not commonly found in Providence houses at the time and certainly remarkable in a rural residence of the period. Its clapboard-sheathed brick construction is also of interest. This is probably the sole Rhode Island example of a building practice used in Massachusetts and it serves as a reminder that this land was long a part of the latter state.

Whitcomb Farm has been owned by a number of individuals who have figured in the history of the greater Providence area. William Whitcomb, co-owner and proprietor of Providence's City Hotel, long the city's chief hostelry,

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owned the house in the 1860s and used the surrounding acreage to grow fresh produce for the hotel restaurant. The house later belonged to Warren Fales, leader of the American Brass Band and Orchestra, an institution that played an important role in the cultural and social life of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Providence. The band often practiced at Whitcomb Farm in the southwest second-floor chamber. After a damaging fire in 1929, the house was purchased and refurbished by T. Howard Ray, a prominent East Providence realtor and developer with a great interest in and knowledge of the city's old houses. His care and effort have been instrumental in preserving Whitcomb Farm.

ACREAGE: less than one acre

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: Assessor's Plat 61, Lot 329

UTM: 19: 303660: 4627510

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: Local

(See Continuation Sheet #58).