

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name JOHN R. ROLLINS SCHOOL

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 451 HOWARD STREET not for publication

city or town LAWRENCE vicinity

state MASSACHUSETTS code MA county ESSEX code 009 zip code 01841

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination  
☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of  
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  
☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  
☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Judith B. McDonough  
Signature of certifying official/Title Judith B. McDonough, Executive Director  
Massachusetts Historical Commission, State Historic Preservation Officer

6/30/2000  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register  
☐ See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined eligible for the  
National Register  
☐ See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined not eligible for the  
National Register  
☐ removed from the  
National Register  
☐ other (explain):

Edson H. Beall  
Signature of the Keeper

8/10/00  
Date of Action

John Rollins School

Name of Property

Essex, MA

County and State

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

☐ private  
☒ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

(Check only one box)

☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1 building  
\_\_\_\_ sites  
\_\_\_\_ structures  
\_\_\_\_ objects  
1 Total

### Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

n/a

### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: educational

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: educational

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

RICHARDSONIAN ROMANESQUE

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation rubble-stone, red brick, North Conway granite  
walls pressed red-brick masonry with North Conway granite trim  
roof slate with copper flashing/sheathing  
other \_\_\_\_\_

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**

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The John R. Rollins School, located in Lawrence's local Prospect Hill historic district, was constructed in 1892 and is situated on the northeast corner of Howard and Pratt Streets. Located at 451 Howard Street and bounded by Platt Street, easterly by Platt Court and westerly by Howard Street on a lot of approx. 39,700 square feet, the building is placed forty feet back from Howard Street and twenty feet in from Platt Street. The real estate lot and school's walkway are bordered by their original smooth-finish, North Conway granite half-round curbstone which delineates the site and allows the property to be slightly elevated from its surrounding sidewalk.

Howard and Platt Streets date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are part of a rectilinear street system found in this section of Prospect Hill. Active residential development of the Prospect Hill area began in the 1870s with surrounding streets characterized by single-family homes, two-to-three family residential and multiple-unit dwellings in present day. Various styles form an eclectic mixture and range from Bungalow, Mansard Victorian and Queen Anne styles. Likewise, numerous late-19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century apartment and commercial type buildings of one to four floors are present. The commercial presence in this neighborhood is often represented by small retail variety stores, located at street level and often incorporated into the corner of a building.

The Rollins School is a three-story structure of pressed red brick, laid in common bond masonry. It is set on an elevated foundation with two primary entrances on its Howard Street elevation and is approximately 48 feet in height at its front, center pediment. The clock tower, which is engaged into the body of the structure, is approximately 125 feet high and is also constructed of red brick in a common bond.

The school was completed in 1892 and was initially designed in a U-shaped configuration. In 1923 it was enlarged by the addition of two identical and symmetrical extensions to its rear by the architectural firm of Aston, Hunter and Alter. These are contextual in design, choice of materials, construction and fenestration to those of the original building as designed by architect George G. Adams.

The difference in grade between the front and the rear allows the school to have four rear entrances; two entrances down into the basement level of each wing, and two entrances into the first floor of each wing. All entrances lead directly from the building onto an asphalt-paved recess area. A smokestack at the rear elevation of the school was conveniently designed so that its height is hidden by the school's steep roof pitch

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allowing it to remain unseen from the front. Serving as a centerpiece on the roof is a large, square-shaped louvered cupola, covered with a pyramidal, slate shingled roof. Placed in a central location on the school roof, this cupola is actually the main ventilation flue for the building.

The Howard Avenue façade (western elevation) displays a slight asymmetrical composition due to the incorporation of its clock tower. This is engaged into the structure as part of the building's left, front entrance. Overall, the remaining body of the school is symmetrical in mass, proportion, design and fenestration patterns. In 1980 the original paneled oak entrance doors and their corresponding, decorative fenestration were replaced by plain, steel-panel doors that are not contextual to the original Rollins School design of 1892.

While both entrances are covered, the right entrance is a one-story porch and is covered by a flat roof, while the left entrance serves as the base of the clock tower. Both entrances are recessed and covered by voussoirs constructed of North Conway granite which is dressed in a rock-face finish with flat, square drove borders at their edge. The individual stone segments which comprise these voussoirs are equal in size and collectively create what is known as a stilted-semicircular opening. Strong in both compression and tension, this masonry construction evolved from Romanesque architecture. The two stones in each arch rest on a larger, granite springer-stone and impost of the foundation's raised base. These in turn connect with the granite belt course found at the basement level and it is this granite belt-course which connects together the granite window lintels found at the raised basement level. Above each individual voussoir stone is a slightly curved and projecting granite rib, which forms a continuous hood mould around the arch and prevents rainwater from dripping directly on the heads of those entering the building.

Cornice lines for both porches are decorated with a horizontal granite belt course, dressed in a hammered-finish. Cornice spaces are further divided into equal squares by vertical granite posts, which in turn create equal and geometrical squares within. Into these squares are placed unglazed terra-cotta tiles, which contain a Victorian Aesthetic Movement design of two concentric circles.

Above the left entrance cornice line is a horizontal granite drip-sill, which delineates the base of the clock tower from the entrance below. The tower can be divided into four major segments: base, midsection, belfry and cornice with roof. The midsection is subdivided into three sections by the use of two, narrow and horizontal belt courses of granite which balance, and likewise frame the two sets of window groups found here.

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Between these two belt courses are elongated windows, which are equally balanced and are divided by a masonry pier. The upper set of windows are complimented by transom windows. Flanking the windows in this section are equal-sized masonry piers, which are the corners for the tower. Ornamentation in the form of ribbing appears on the tops of these masonry piers. A paneled brick design appears on the spandrels between floors of these windows and also over the entrance just above the drip sill, creating a basket-weave pattern with raised rectangular panels. Raised masonry in the form of dentil molding identifies the transition to the belfry section of the tower. Capping this molding is a broad, two-part overhanging granite sill.

The belfry appears on all four sides of the tower and is composed of corner masonry piers on granite plinth bases with a granite cornice on top. Connecting each corner pier is a horizontal granite stringer, and between these piers is an open-air belfry framed by granite pilasters and divided into two openings by a middle one. Pilasters contain single and double fluting on their flat surface, astragal molding and are capped with cavetto and cyma recta moldings. Above is keystone construction that completes the window openings and their lintels. The upper part of this belfry contains the four clock faces and displays an interesting masonry form as it corbels out slightly and then in again to meet its pyramidal roof. Masonry work surrounding each clock face forms a circular-brick opening which projects slightly outward at the point where the brick begins to corbel. This frame provides a flat surface for the clock face. Above each face is a semi-circular hood-mould constructed of copper, which protects the clock face from the elements. This hood-mould breaks into a 90 degree, horizontal return and connects itself at all four sides of the tower. Beneath the hood-mould is dentil molding constructed of copper.

The four iron clockfaces of this tower and individually constructed of a section white milk-glass dial with Roman numerals and hour segments both of iron. Each clock face was manufactured in sections, assembled on site, and measures nine feet across. They are held in place on their frames with brass clamps. The sections are bolted together with iron bolts which themselves tie into the tower's masonry. Joints for the clock faces were originally sealed with head, serving to waterproof the dials, while the four sides of the tower's roof begin at its gutter line and slopes upwards in a concave manner with all sides forming a pyramidal roof. It is capped with a copper finial. All copper on the building has oxidized to a green color.

The projecting section of the school's front elevation is designed as a symmetrical and proportionate unit containing two equal bays of two-story window groups equally

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divided by a central, broad masonry pier. Located on this central pier at the second floor level is a granite tablet embossed with the words "*John R. Rollins School 1882*".

Rising the building's two full stories, this central pier transitions itself into a rectangular dormer at roof and attic level. This projecting dormer contains five rectangular windows with the center window balancing this fenestration composition due to its slight elongation. Lintels and sills are constructed of smooth-dressed granite and connect each window in the group. Granite also serves as the coping-stone, with the top stone ending in a squat finial. Additionally, the pediment of this dormer displays a design of paneled brick masonry in a raised rib and basket-weave pattern. The two equal window bays in this façade contain five rectangular windows per floor, which are grouped together and divided by two, two-story masonry piers. These two piers divide the window groups into a one-three-one configuration for both stories in both bays, again providing its symmetry. Granite is used for both lintels and sills and broad copper spandrels, paneled with raised vertical ribs, separate and define the first and second stories. A second, narrower copper spandrel serves as a lintel beneath the transom windows found above the slightly elongated windows of the second level. In addition a narrower mullion space between thee transom windows is evident here. Window sills are constructed of North Conway granite in a dressed finish and cut to a bevel so that their sills tilt outward, removing rain water away from the building and likewise preventing its occurrence into the classroom. Above the second story window groups can be found smooth-dressed granite lintels constructed in three segments with the thicker centerpiece placed over the three center windows. The granite centerpiece enjoins the roof overhang of the building and interrupts the horizontal course of projecting masonry dentil molding which are constructed of paneled brick masonry segments.

The overall roof of the Rollins School is an exaggerated pyramidal shape, or hip-roof style which slopes slightly upward from all four sides beginning at its gutter line in a concave manner. Each side can be seen as a triangle, which transitions into a steep pitch of c. 45-degrees with all four sides meeting at their apex. The Rollins School still retains its original copper flashing, trim, roof crests and dark gray slate roof. In 1993 a window replacement program removed the original wood-sash windows, replacing them with contextual, double-hung windows that are outlined in white.

The original wings of the school building are set back from the main body of the building and extend to the rear of the structure. Both are identical in mass, design and proportion, and with the exception of the placement of the tower, both are two-story extensions which contain two classrooms apiece per floor. Accordingly, windows appear

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in groupings but in this instance each window is separate by a narrow masonry pier and floors are defined by a recessed masonry spandrel, which contains a design of raised brick panels. Lower windowsills here are connected by segments of smooth dressed granite as are the lintels found at the top of the second floor level. Singular granite slabs serve as window lintels and sills between the spandrels. This same configuration is identical on both southern and northern elevations.

The rear of the building illustrates the 1923 additions which provided additional classroom space to the original school. These are constructed of red brick, laid in common bond masonry and evident here is a noticeable color difference in brick than what was originally used in 1892.

The school's interior retains its original floor plan, as corridors radiate through the building's center and staircases are placed at the ends of these corridors. Both corridors and classrooms retain their original ventilation grates, which connect via a system of flues to the ventilation cupola located on the roof. The system is no longer in use. Classrooms are placed facing the building's exterior, enabling their interiors to receive the most direct sunlight and natural daylight. Ancillary rooms, offices and storage closets are situated towards the interior of the building's core, where natural light is less abundant. Flooring for the corridors is Rock Maple and all corridors are divided throughout the school by wooden, swinging, fire doors, that serve to reduce noise levels emanating from other classrooms. Corridors and front staircases are paneled in quarter-sawn, fir wainscoting in a matchstick paneling. Staircases are constructed with oak threads and risers and contain no fire-stops to the backs of their risers. Balusters are square, carry no ornament; newel posts are also of fir and display a simple non-repeating band ornament, chamfered edges and a half-orb placed at the top. Woodwork in the building retains its original varnish finish and has not been painted since installed in 1892. The remaining staircases are constructed of fireproof iron and throughout the building a sprinkler system was added at one time.

Fir wainscoting is present in the school's classrooms, and many rooms still contain their original wooden cloak closets and storage drawers, usually placed to the side of the front blackboards. Most classrooms still retain their original slate blackboards, eraser and chalk trays. Utilitarian elements such as the original 19<sup>th</sup> century coat cloak-hooks and mitten snaps are still in place and are located in the corridors outside of each classroom. Strictly for a child's use, they were installed at a student height and are still in use.

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The basement contains a lunchroom, playroom, boiler room, storage rooms and, in addition, two classrooms which are located in the rear of the structure. The exterior drop in grade allows these classrooms full height windows and permits direct sunlight during the morning hours into these rooms. The original foundation can be seen here and former basement windows, which were bricked over as a result of the 1923 additions.

The Rollins school's first floor contains six classrooms placed around the exterior of the building's U-shaped configuration. The general floor plan for each floor of the building allows every classroom two methods of egress in case of fire; one to the main corridor and the second into an adjoining classroom. In a few cases, classrooms have three exits. Classroom doors are topped with transom windows to facilitate the flow of air and are adjustable by means of a brass lever.

The second floor contains six classrooms, the entrance to the clock tower, and an auditorium measuring 44 x 68'. The auditorium is placed at the front of the building where it projects and runs the depth of the building's U configuration. Windows on this side offer an eastern exposure to the interior. Across the auditorium and across from these windows are the window groups and their transom windows that appear in the front elevation in a one-three-one configuration and offer the most amount of light with their western exposure. The auditorium contains a small stage and two entrances, both directly from the second floor front staircases. Entrance to the clock tower and the clock's mechanism room is also from this floor and access to the clock-room is by a spiral, cast-iron staircase and a wooden ladder to the belfry.

**Archaeological Description**

While no prehistoric sites are present on the property, it is possible that sites are present. Environmental characteristics of the property indicate some locational criteria (slope, soil drainage, proximity to wetlands) that are favorable indicators for many types of prehistoric sites. The school is located on a well drained level to moderately sloping ridge at the top of Prospect Hill. However, the property is located over 1000 feet from the nearest wetlands, a factor that generally reduces the prehistoric sensitivity of this area. The Spicket River lies downslope, approximately 1500 feet west of the school. The Spicket and Merrimack Rivers converge approximately one-half mile south of the school. A large bend in the Merrimack River to the north also locates the river slightly over one-half mile east of the school. Given the above information, known patterns of prehistoric settlement in the Merrimack River Basin, the size of the nominated property

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(less than one acre) and impacts associated with construction of the 3-story school with full basement, a low to moderate potential exists for locating prehistoric resources on the school property. Locational criteria for the property indicate the presence of larger habitation type sites on the property is unlikely. Smaller, short term sites may be more typical in this area possibly utilizing the hilltop vantage point as a look out for game, fish or Native travel on the river.

A moderate to high potential exists for locating historic archaeological resources on the property. Structural remains may survive from the residence and outhouse of James Cunningham, a retired sea captain who removed the structures after selling the land to the town to build the school. The date of construction for the Cunningham house is not known, however, it was likely of 19<sup>th</sup> century origin. Structural evidence from other outbuildings originally located on the property might also exist. Archaeological evidence from occupational related features (trash pits, Privies, wells) also associated with the Cunningham residence may also survive on the property. Sheet type refuse or artifact scatters associated with school activities on the property might also exist.

**(end)**

Rollins School

Name of Property

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Essex, MA

County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

**Period of Significance**

1892-1950

**Significant Dates**

1892

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

George G. Adams (1850-1932)

**Primary location of additional data:**

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☒ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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The John R. Rollins School is located within the local Prospect Hill Historic District and from its prominent location, captures scenic views in all directions. It is also clearly visible from Interstate Route 495. From this elevated setting, the school and its clock tower commands a strong, unobstructed visual presence as it overlooks downtown Lawrence and the city's 19<sup>th</sup> century textile mill buildings. As such, the Rollins School represents important associations to Lawrence's municipal growth and the city's turn of the century economic prosperity. Likewise, the clock tower is easily identified as one of the city's numerous, late 19<sup>th</sup> century landmarks. It is an important example in the context of late 19<sup>th</sup> century, urban neighborhood expansion; its associative connections to the textile industry and textile workers in America; and with the development of Lawrence's public education system and local public works from this period.

The John R. Rollins School meets criteria A and C at the local level. It retains integrity of location, design, materials, setting, workmanship, feeling and associations to the City of Lawrence. Although the school is still used for educational purposes and still provides a vibrant social center to its community, its primary significance is derived from its architectural and social importance within the Prospect Hill section of Lawrence.

The Rollins School is one of the few surviving, essentially intact, late Victorian schoolhouses in Lawrence which is still being used for its intended purpose and possesses all original architectural details. It is the oldest school in the city, serving as the anchor point for the local Prospect Hill Historic District. Similarly, the school complements the Victorian-era firehouse, Engine No. 6, located across the street from the school and to which its bell-chime was once integrated via a municipally sponsored, fire and telegraph system.

Today the Rollins School serves to remind the community of the importance of the public elementary education movement during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which took place in industrial cities such as Lawrence and elsewhere in New England. During the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, prior to the establishment of child labor laws and education reform, many children had to work grueling hours in Lawrence's textile mills. Often they were the children of illiterate rural people or non-English speaking immigrants who were employed locally. Education was not easy to come by and most children had to work in order to survive. With little opportunity available for education, many children frequently remained illiterate like their parents.

Education reform laws made public education mandatory and available to the general population. It was thought that education of immigrants would enable them to

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assimilate into society and exist in an industrialized nation. Paralleling this concept was progressive thought of the time which felt that an education would also help to "Americanize" these individuals. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, public education became a reality with a growing number of the city's youth staying in school through the eighth grade. However, high school was still unavailable to many and the importance of an eighth-grade education was reflected in the receipt of a certificate upon completion. While the population continued to grow and the ranks of elementary school students swelled, Lawrence embarked on an expansion of its public school system and replaced the earlier wooden clapboard, four-room schools with massive brick structures like the Rollins School. Each grade level received its own separate classroom and instruction.

The Rollins School is a well-preserved, exception example of late 19<sup>th</sup> century schoolhouse architecture where is form and function are carefully integrated. Constructed at the height of the city's prosperity as a leader in the textile industry, the school displays various design principles once considered to be modern approaches to education. When this school was designed, strong emphasis was placed on educational standards such as reading, writing and arithmetic. Frequently, manual arts such as woodworking and domestic sciences, such as sewing, were included in order to prepare a pupil for a trade. Concepts of light and air were also important and were considered conducive to the proper educational development and learning process of all grade levels. This became a standard component of educational reform measures of the period and were eventually integrated into schoolhouse architecture design. These were inspired by 19<sup>th</sup> century sanitation theories, as well as studies of crowded tenement living conditions, which many immigrants and rural workers faced when living in an urban environment. Around the same time period, developing philosophies regarding tenement architecture brought forth the belief the belief that proper light and air could improve living conditions and result in the proper development and restoration of man's spirit. The resulting tenement laws influenced education reform.

The school stands on land once owned by retired sea captain James Cunningham, who removed his dwelling house and outhouse from the site after selling his land to the city for \$1. The school is named in honor of John Rodman Rollins (1817-1892), a prominent Lawrence citizen who made significant contributions to public education locally. Born in Newburyport, Massachusetts in 1817, Rollins was a descendent of one of the earliest settlers of Dover, New Hampshire and, on his maternal side, one of the settlers of Newbury, Massachusetts. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1836 and for twenty years lived at 39 Prospect Street in Lawrence. Rollins was paymaster of the Essex Company, a leading textile manufacturer, and served as mayor (1856-57) and School Committee member (1854, 1861, 1864). In January of the latter year Rollins was elected to the post of Superintendent of Schools. During the Civil War, Rollins served

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as a Captain in the Union army. Since 1855 he had been a trustee of the Essex Savings Bank, and in December of 1866 was employed as paymaster and accountant for Lawrence's Pacific Mills. Rollins also served on the Board of Aldermen and was a member of the Veteran Volunteer Fireman's Association. His retirement years were spent in Derry, New Hampshire, and was buried in Bellevue Cemetery, Lawrence, following his death in 1892. His presence and activity in the city's business community, local government and his keen interest in public education encouraged the community to dedicate the new school building on Prospect Hill to him. In his thanks he is quoted as saying, *"that the schools shall ever fulfill their mission of educating the young to the duties of American citizenship, and remain always, in the best sense of the words, the nurseries of civil and religious liberty."*

Lawrence began as a rural farming community. Located in Essex County approximately 25 miles north of Boston on the Merrimack River, it is bounded by the towns of North Andover, Andover, Methuen, and the City of Haverhill. In 1845 a group of Boston financiers began to purchase land along the Merrimack for the purpose of building a planned textile community, similar to the successful project previously developed in nearby Lowell. The Boston financiers (later known as the Boston Associates) who planned this experimental large-scale textile mill were led by brothers William and Abbott Lawrence, but also included Nathan Appleton, John Amory Lowell, Charles Storow, William Sturgis and Patrick Jackson; all important names in the development of the textile industry in Massachusetts. Together their collective efforts established the Essex Company, an industrial textile production facility which harnessed the waters of the Merrimack and used it to power textile looms.

Such a venture resulted in rapid industrial and urban growth for Lawrence and led to incorporation in 1847. The new city was named after its principal stockholders, the brothers Lawrence. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Lawrence became one of the nation's greatest industrial textile production centers. By 1920 the population had reached 94,000, one-third of which were employed by the textile industry. Like other manufacturing cities Lawrence attracted massive number of rural New Englanders and European immigrants seeking unskilled work. Notably during three periods beginning in 1855, 1870 and 1905, these people came to Lawrence for employment opportunities in the textile mills, to begin life anew, usually choosing to live within the city.

The success of Lawrence's various textile industries contributed to its urban growth and cultural diversity. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century contributing social and demographic changes continued to make Lawrence an ethnically diverse and densely settled city. In response to the transformation from an experimental, textile mill town into that of an industrial

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city, Lawrence's urban growth necessitated housing for workers. Such a growth fed the need for fire fighting services and more schools.

The John R. Rollins School represents a significant milestone in the career of its architect, George G. Adams, a prolific architect who designed more than seventy buildings during his sixty-year career. The Rollins School displays Adams' extensive knowledge of schoolhouse design principles that were popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and were considered a "science" at the time. Adams integrated the intended purpose of the school with its form and function, the principles of light and air, and relevant sanitation theories of the day.

The school is designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The dressed, rock-faced granite entrance voussoirs of the school are clearly Richardsonian-Romanesque, a style which George Adams understood and had used most notably in two of his other designs, the Lawrence Public Library and his own Adams Block.

George G. Adams (1850-1932) can be viewed as one of the last, old school, apprentice-trained architects practicing during a period when the majority of those entering the field were receiving some form of advanced academic training. Having received no formal academic training other than his apprenticeships to prepare him for his architectural career, he nonetheless became an important contributor to the built environment of downtown Lawrence, and in the nearby areas of Methuen, North Andover and Carlisle, Massachusetts. During his long career Adams became a qualified architect and was adept in designing in a variety of revival styles, including Romanesque, Queen Anne and Neo-Classical. His commissions included residential, commercial and municipal buildings.

George Adams was born in 1850 in Rollinsford, New Hampshire, and moved to Lawrence with his parents four years later. Educated in the city's public schools, Adams found employment under civil engineer Baldwin Coolidge, from whom he received valuable training in preparation to become an architect. In 1872 Adams became the apprentice/draftsman of Charles Emerson, the first architect to establish an office in Lawrence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Adams entered into a partnership with Emerson in 1875, and when Emerson moved to Boston in 1878,

George Adams remained in Lawrence, establishing his own practice on Essex Street. Adams established his office and studio in downtown Lawrence where he purchased the land, and designed and developed the resulting Adams Block (1890) at 288 Essex Street (NRDIS). He was also responsible for numerous prominent public, institutional and

(continued)

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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetJohn R. Rollins School  
Lawrence, (Middlesex Co.), Mass.Section number 8 Page 5

residential buildings in Lawrence. Many of Adams' works are listed on the National Register, or are located in local historic districts. Among his works are the Lawrence City Hall, the Essex County Superior Courthouse, Lawrence Masonic Temple, Old Public Library and the Bradlee School of Andover.

Adams' knowledge and utilization of late 19<sup>th</sup> century schoolhouse architectural concepts are reflected in the design of the Rollins School. These "scientific methods" include the orientation of the building to natural light which would infiltrate the building's interior throughout the school day; interior classroom configuration and fenestration rules, which would optimize this light; and the school's interior ventilation system, which introduced a constant flow of fresh air. The Rollins School is situated so that it receives early morning light on its eastern and northern elevations, and eventually as the sun moves across the day, direct afternoon sunlight on its south and west elevations. Siting the structure in such a manner was a prime component of 19<sup>th</sup> century school design.

The interior likewise illustrates 19<sup>th</sup> century schoolhouse design principles with regards to classrooms being placed facing the building's exterior along its floor plan. In turn, classroom interiors were oriented according to window placement of the room, which usually occurred on one side of the classroom. Educational beliefs encouraged pupils to write with their right hand. In such a fashion, natural light fell over the child's left shoulder and cast a minimal shadow on the point where the pen touched paper, much less that if light were arriving from the child's right. This can be seen in the Rollins School where all classrooms were originally designed so that when facing the blackboard most windows would have been on the pupil's left side.

When built, classroom size was planned large enough to accommodate upwards of 30-40 students per room; sufficient space for aisles and furniture; mathematical formulas for air circulation per student' and comfortable in length so that a pupil in the rear would not have difficulty in seeing or hearing.

Similarly, the classroom's width should never exceed twice the distance from the floor to the top of the windows, which was usually 25', as commonly found in the Rollins School.

Schoolhouse architecture of this period planned for maximum and efficient spatial use per floor. Popular beliefs in their day, the Rollins illustrates these intelligently in its corridors and staircases, which were planned wide enough to facilitate its pupil circulation, even in present day. Ornamentation was thought to distract a student's attention and concentration to and from the classroom, and was often eliminated from common areas, corridors and staircases. As such, the Rollins School's corridors and

(continued)

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National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****John R. Rollins School  
Lawrence, (Middlesex Co.), Mass.**Section number 8 Page 6

staircases are of simplistic, utilitarian design. Limited ornamentation is usually in the form of uncomplicated design images that are simplistic for a child's eye and are easily related to elementary geometric studies that a student would comprehend, such as the two concentric circles within the terra-cotta tiles located above each exterior entrance.

The ample height of all windows in general, and specifically the addition of transom windows above the auditorium's windows which use a narrow mullion spacing, allowed the most natural light into the interior. Narrow mullions reduced space between windows and reduced interior classroom shadows caused by wide mullions and wider masonry piers between the windows. With electric illumination still in its infancy and often untrustworthy, the dependency on natural light was strong. Reduction of this spacing was often achieved in construction with the use of cast-iron mullions between windows as found here in the middle three windows of the school's auditorium.

Architectural principles of the time promoted the use of ventilation systems to deliver constant fresh air into the interior of the building by a system of internal flues. These were a method to remove harmful, stale air caused by human exhalations, gas illumination systems and gases from the decomposition of organic matter found at ground level. Often called "miasma" or "carbonic acid" during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this "bad air" was believed to cause classroom fatigue and contribute to such diseases as tuberculosis. Ventilation systems, as found in Rollins School, often used a plenum system to pump fresh air into flues, and a gravity exhaust to help remove the stale air. These systems were powered by large electric fans, which were often located in the basement or attic of the school building. Chain pulls connected to flue-dampers were used to regulate the air exchange and to help cool the classroom. The Rollins design utilized two smaller service chimneys to expel stale air. Removal of this air was only considered conducive to the physical health and welfare of the pupil, but a continual fresh air supply was thought to promote better learning condition, pupil alertness and a higher attention level.

The John R. Rollins School has continuously provided public education to the Lawrence community for over 100 years. It represents the city's commitment to its youth and to public education during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Originally, the Rollins School educated its pupils through the eighth grade. This remained unchanged for over 80 years until the 1980s when grade six became the highest level to be housed in the building. Recognized as a public place, the Rollins School symbolizes the local government's presence in the Prospect Hill neighborhood where it also serves as a polling station for national and local elections.

**(continued)**

**United States Department of the Interior  
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Continuation Sheet****John R. Rollins School  
Lawrence, (Middlesex Co.), Mass.**Section number 8 Page 7

The clock system, installed in the school's tower, represents one of the first uses of telegraph fire alarm signaling devices in the City of Lawrence. Incorporated as an original feature, the device was connected to the firehouse across the street which in turn was connected to fire alarm call boxes located on the city's streets. In the 1890s, Lawrence's firefighting forces were predominantly a volunteer organization comprised of local citizens. When a local fire alarm call box was pulled, the signal would transfer and trip the electronic connection and allow the school's bell to ring. The sequence of the bell's ring would indicate the location of the fire within the Prospect Hill section of the city, and would permit volunteers to travel directly to the scene of the blaze without having to report to the firehouse. Of other schools constructed at this time period in Lawrence with this feature, only the Rollins retains this original 19<sup>th</sup> century system of fire signaling.

The clock movement is an 1886 Seth Thomas Tower Clock, Model 16A, gravity escapement, 8-day, time and strike, and weighs 1600 pounds. It has a pendulum swing capable of 8 or 14 feet, depending on the number of clock faces incorporated (in this case four). The pendulum ball weighs 175 pounds and the bell approximately 2800 pounds. Originally a hand-crank, weight-driven model, the clock had been converted to an electric wind, weight driven mechanism. In the 1950s the 125-foot high clock tower and belfry were deemed to be in disrepair, and the city considered demolishing the tower. A grassroots preservation effort initiated by local citizens saved the clock tower and curtailed further demolition discussion. Upon the approach of the school's centennial, citizens and alumni united to have the clock tower and mechanism restored to its original condition. In 1992-93 the clock's mechanism was removed, cleaned, repaired and its bell-chime restored. While the electric wind mechanism was restored during this effort, the clock remains a fine example of a 19<sup>th</sup> century, key-wound and weight-driven tower clock. Winding and maintenance is now provided on a weekly basis. The Rollins School, which in the 1890s symbolized the City of Lawrence's commitment to the community, now symbolizes the community's historical commitment to the school and the City of Lawrence.

Combined together, the 19<sup>th</sup> century principles representing educational reform, school design, technologies of telegraph fire alarm signaling, which were successfully integrated into the Rollins School, make it an excellent example of planned, municipal and educational architecture of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Archaeological Significance**

Despite a long history of amateur and professional archaeology in Essex County and one of the higher site densities for counties in the state, patterns of prehistoric occupation in

**(continued)**

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Continuation Sheet****John R. Rollins School  
Lawrence, (Middlesex Co.), Mass.**Section number 8 Page 8

Lawrence are poorly documented with relatively few sites recorded in the town. This disparity likely results from 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialization of the Lawrence area culminating in relatively little open land in the town today. Given this information, any surviving sites in the town or on school property could potentially be significant. Prehistoric resources on school property can contribute information on the Native American settlement and subsistence of the lower Merrimack Valley emphasizing the area at the confluence of the Spicket, Shawsheen and Merrimack Rivers. This locale, an important core area during the Contact and early historic periods, might also have been an important locus of settlement during the prehistoric period.

Historic archaeological resources described above have the potential to provide detailed information relating to social, cultural and economic patterns of 19<sup>th</sup> century residency in the city of Lawrence and land use that may have occurred around a municipal and educational structure in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Additional historical research combined with archaeological survey and testing can document structural evidence of the Cunningham residence, outbuildings and occupational related features that may survive on the grounds surrounding the school. These resources might contribute information on the architectural details of the Cunningham residence and activities that may have occurred on the property. Detailed analysis of the contents from occupational related features can provide important information on 19<sup>th</sup> century lifestyles in Lawrence and the life and possibly career of James Cunningham. Evidence may be present on the property that documents aspects of Cunningham's naval career and his possible access to foreign or regional trade items. Patterns of artifact distribution on the grounds surrounding the school may also contain information describing the types of students that attended the school and their recreational and academic activities.

**(end)**

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National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

John R. Rollins School  
Lawrence, (Middlesex Co.), Mass.

Section number 9 Page 1

**Major Bibliographical Resources:**

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(continued)

Rollins School  
Name of Property

Essex, MA  
County, State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

### UTM References See continuation sheet.

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

|                          |         |          |      |         |          |  |
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| Zone                     | Easting | Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing |  |
| 2.                       |         |          | 4.   |         |          |  |
| Zone                     | Easting | Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing |  |
| — See continuation sheet |         |          |      |         |          |  |

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Joseph Concannon, Preservation Consultant, with Betsy Friedberg, MHC, NR Director

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date June 2000

street & number 220 Morrissey Boulevard telephone 617-727-8470

city or town Boston state MA zip code 02125

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional Items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Lawrence, Mass.

street & number 200 Common Street telephone 978-794-5803

city or town Lawrence state MA zip code 01840

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

John R. Rollins School  
Lawrence, (Middlesex Co.), Mass.

Section number 9/10 Page 2/1

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(end)

**Boundary Description.**

The boundaries of the district follow the property lines of the parcel of the John R. Rollins School, shown on detail of the Tax Map for the City of Lawrence: Map number 70, as prepared by the James W. Sewall Company, Old Town, Maine.

**Boundary Justification:**

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the John R. Rollins School.

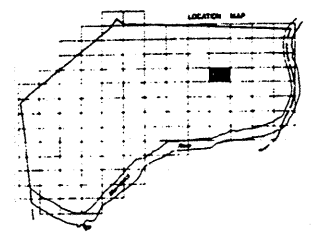
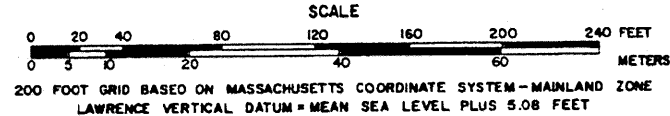
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LEGEND  
PARCEL NUMBERS ..... 2  
MATCH LINE .....  
  
For Assessment Purposes  
Not to be used for Conveyances



DATE OF AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY 4-20-79  
DATE OF COMPLETION 9-10-80  
DATE OF REVISIONS 6-17-85  
1-1-87  
1-1-88  
1-1-89  
1-1-90  
1-1-91



TAX MAP  
CITY OF LAWRENCE  
ESSEX COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS  
PREPARED BY  
JAMES W. SEWALL COMPANY, OLD TOWN, MAINE

|    |    |    |
|----|----|----|
| 90 | 71 | 52 |
| 89 | 70 | 51 |
| 88 | 69 | 50 |

MAP NUMBER

JOHN R. ROLLINS SCHOOL  
451 HOWARD STREET  
LAWRENCE, MA

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Rollins, John R., School  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Essex

DATE RECEIVED: 7/10/00 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 7/25/00  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 8/10/00 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 8/24/00  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 00000956

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 8/10/00 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the  
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



























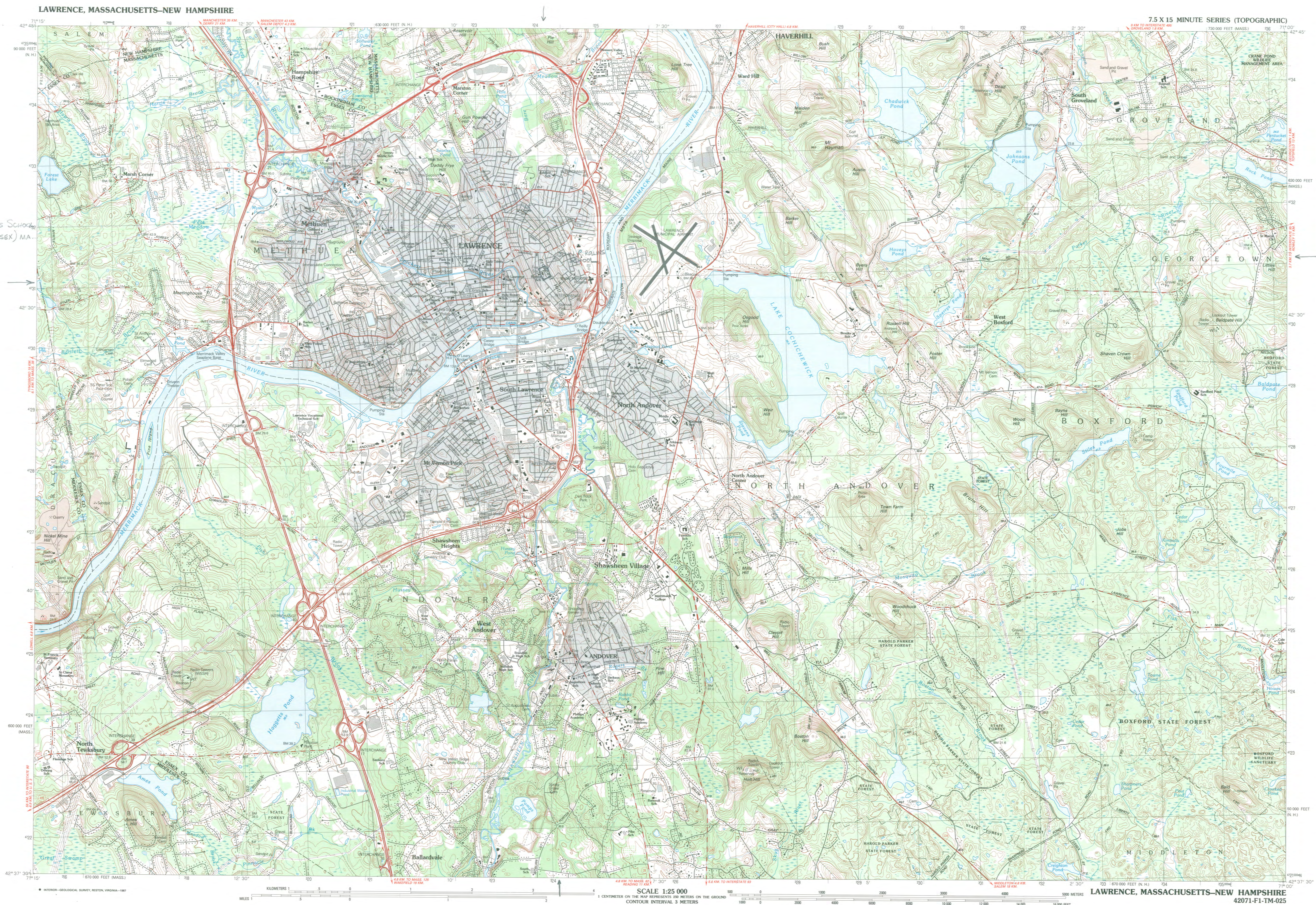












JOHN ROLLINS SCHOOL  
LAWRENCE (ESSEX) MA  
ZONE 19  
4731050  
324040

42071-F1-TM-025  
LAWRENCE (ESSEX), MA

Lawrence

MASSACHUSETTS-  
NEW HAMPSHIRE

1:25 000-scale metric  
topographic map

7.5 X 15 MINUTE QUADRANGLE  
SHOWING

- Contours and elevations in meters
- Highways, roads and other manmade structures
- Water features
- Woodland areas
- Geographic names

GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

1987

Produced by the United States Geological Survey in cooperation with Massachusetts Department of Public Works  
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts agencies  
Compiled by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1978. Field checked 1979. Map dated 1987  
The west half of this area also covered by 7.5-minute 1:24,000-scale map: Lawrence dated 1966  
The east half of this area supercedes South Groveland 1:24,000-scale map dated 1966  
Projection and 1000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator (zone 18)  
10,000-foot grid ticks based on Massachusetts coordinate system, maintained zone, and New Hampshire coordinate system  
1967 North American Datum  
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983, move the projection lines 6 meters south and 41 meters west as shown by dashed corner ticks  
There may be private inclusions within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map

CONTOUR INTERVAL 3 METERS  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929  
CONTROL ELEVATIONS SHOWN TO THE NEAREST 0.1 METER  
OTHER ELEVATIONS SHOWN TO THE NEAREST 0.5 METER

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS

| CONVERSION TABLE                             |         | DECLINATION DIAGRAM                                                                                     | ADJOINING MAPS |   |   |  |
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| Meters                                       | Feet    |                                                                                                         | 1              | 2 | 3 |  |
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| 2                                            | 6.5617  |                                                                                                         | 4              | 5 |   |  |
| 3                                            | 9.8425  |                                                                                                         |                |   |   |  |
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| To convert meters to feet multiply by 3.2808 |         | UTM grid convergence (IGN) and 1987 magnetic declination (M) at center of map<br>Diagram is approximate | 1              | 2 | 3 |  |
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OFFICE OF  
RAYMOND E. DIFIORE, SR.

Director of  
PUBLIC WORKS

200 Common Street • Lawrence, Massachusetts 01840 • Tel: (508) 794-5762 • Fax: (508) 691-5414

November 19, 1996

Betsy Friedberg, National Register Director  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
Massachusetts Archives Building  
220 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

RE: John R. Rollins School, 451 Howard Street, Lawrence

Dear Ms. Friedberg:

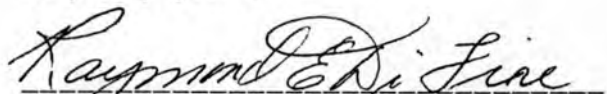
Please allow this letter to affirm the interest of the City of Lawrence in having the John R. Rollins School listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Rollins School was constructed in 1892-1893 to serve as a public grammar school for the Prospect Hill district of Lawrence. Today, more than 100 years later, the school continues to serve that function for the youth of Prospect Hill. Because the school has maintained almost all of its original architectural features, both internally and externally, it is difficult to walk its halls without feeling the deep, rich history of public education in Massachusetts.

The school is distinguished in its architectural style which is reminiscent of other late Victorian public schools, but is singular in its incorporation of a 125 foot belfry/clocktower. The school is the oldest and most prominent feature of the Prospect Hill skyline, visible from the neighboring towns of North Andover, Methuen, Andover, and Haverhill, as well as to travelers along Interstate 495. The clock and clocktower have undergone recent restoration resulting from a grass roots campaign. Today, the clock and hour bell are again marking the passing of the hours.

The residents of Prospect Hill have come to treasure this local landmark, which, because of its unique architecture, designed especially for children, has regional significance. The school is the hub of civic activity in the Prospect Hill neighborhood. It is cherished by residents and former residents alike as the place where the sons and daughters made their first steps toward social improvement in their new land. Because of the heritage of the school, its architectural significance, its cultural and historic integrity, Lawrence and its people desire to have the John R. Rollins School listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It is hoped and desired by all that this recognition will call attention to the school's architectural and cultural assets, and assist in preserving this treasure for future generations.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Very truly yours,

  
Raymond E. DiFiore  
Director of Public Works

*Lawrence Historical Commission*

December 3, 1996

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Ms. Betsy Friedberg, National Register Director  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
Massachusetts Archives Building  
220 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, MA 02125

RE: John R. Rollins School, 451 Howard Street, Lawrence, Massachusetts

Dear Ms. Friedberg:

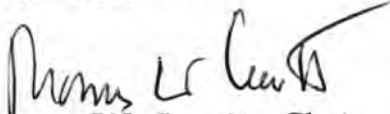
Please allow this letter to serve as the recommendation of the Lawrence Historical Commission that the John R. Rollins School be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Rollins School was constructed in 1892-1893 to serve as a public grammar school for the Prospect Hill district of Lawrence. The school maintains intact the bulk of its exterior and interior architectural details and is a "working museum" of public education in the sense that modern education is taking place in an historic setting.

The school is set apart from other 19th century brick and granite public schools because of its prominent clocktower/belfry and Richardsonian Romanesque elements. Most unique in the architectural styling of the building are the architectural details by which the architect, well-known Lawrencian, George G. Adams, attempted to adapt the structure and style to the use. The building was created to be friendly to the youth who would be educated there by dividing massive structures into smaller spaces, by bringing features down to levels within the children's sight-lines and touch, and by incorporating familiar geometric forms in the detailing. Thanks to citizen interest and fund raising, the clock and clocktower have undergone recent restoration.

The residents of Prospect Hill, Lawrence, surrounding communities as well as those interested in architecture, history, and public education have come to admire and cherish the John R. Rollins School. Because of the uniqueness of the school, its architectural significance, its proximity to the Prospect Hill Historic District, and its historic integrity, the Lawrence Historical Commission recommends that the John R. Rollins School be listed in the National Register of Historic Places, individually. It is hoped that this recognition will call attention to the school's architectural and cultural assets, and assist in preserving this treasure for future generations.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Very truly yours,

  
Thomas W. Leavitt, Chairman



## **The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth  
Massachusetts Historical Commission

July 5, 2000

Ms. Carol Shull  
National Register of Historic Places  
Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
Mail Stop 2280, Suite 400  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the following nomination form:

John Rollins School, 451 Howard Street, Lawrence (Middlesex), MA

The nomination has been voted eligible by the State Review Board and has been signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer. The owners of the property were notified of pending State Review Board consideration 30 to 45 days before the meeting and were afforded the opportunity to comment. Two letters of support have been received.

Sincerely,

Betsy Friedberg  
National Register Director  
Massachusetts Historical Commission

enclosure

cc: Thomas Leavitt, Chair, Lawrence Historical Commission  
Joseph Concannon, Preservation Consultant  
Hon. Patricia Dowling, Mayor, City of Lawrence  
David Meehan, Chair, Planning Board  
Charles Boddy  
Raymond E. DiFiore, Lawrence Dept. of Public Works