

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

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



Continuation sheet 26

Item number 7

Page 27

NAME: Newman Congregational Church

LOCATION: 100 Newman Avenue

OWNER Newman Congregational Church
100 Newman Avenue
East Providence, R.I. 02916

DESCRIPTION:

Newman Congregational Church stands at the northwest corner of Newman Avenue and Pawtucket Avenue (U.S. Route 1A and State Route 114). East of Pawtucket Avenue is a suburban residential neighborhood with some commercial-strip buildings; west of the avenue, around and opposite the church, are cemeteries (see separate inventory entries). The church, a timber-frame structure erected in 1810, follows the standard rectangular meeting house plan with projecting central steeple at the front (south side). The body of the building is a two-story, gable-roofed mass and the tower is five stories tall, topped by a belfry with Greek Revival corner pilasters and corner and central pinnacles. In 1890 the church was raised and the present high brick basement was constructed, as were the projecting vestibule and gable-roofed, columned portico at the base of the tower. The walls, originally clapboarded, are now covered with aluminum siding, but its application has been handled with some sensitivity and the windows, arranged in two registers along the front and sides, still retain their splayed-lintel caps.

The interior of the meeting house is a two-story space with a shallow vaulted ceiling and a chancel opening off the auditorium. The horseshoe-shaped gallery with paneled front, dentil courses, and acorn pendants is suspended from the ceiling on iron rods. A two-story, gable-roofed, neo-federal Parish Hall constructed in 1953-54 runs across the back of the meetinghouse and extends westward, forming an "L". A paved parking lot bordered by areas of lawn and trees is set within the "L" and the churchyard is surrounded by a fine nineteenth-century granite-post and iron-rail fence.

DATES: 1810, 1890

SIGNIFICANCE:

Newman Congregational Church is of great historical and architectural significance. It is the home of the oldest Congregational society in Rhode Island, first gathered in 1643. The congregation was founded at the same time as the Puritan settlement at Rehoboth and served as the chief center of local religious and social life through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a role it continues to play to a lesser extent today.

(See Continuation Sheet #27).

**United States Department of the Interior
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Inventory—Nomination Form**

Continuation sheet 27

Item number 7

Page 28

For a number of years the administration of civil affairs was closely tied to ecclesiastical matters, and the church was thus an important political center as well. Earlier meeting houses, located on various sites near the center of the Ring of the Green, the Rehoboth town common, were used for town meetings, and the First Continental Congress of the American colonies was held here in 1709. The present structure, dating from 1810, the fourth edifice erected by the congregation, stands several hundred feet northeast of the sites of the first, second, and third meeting houses. Architecturally, it is noteworthy as an example of a typical early nineteenth-century New England church using traditional forms derived from the work of the English architects Wren and Gibbs.

ACREAGE: one acre

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: Assessor's Plat 36, Lot 98

UTM: 19: 304820: 4634600

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: State

(See Continuation Sheet #28).