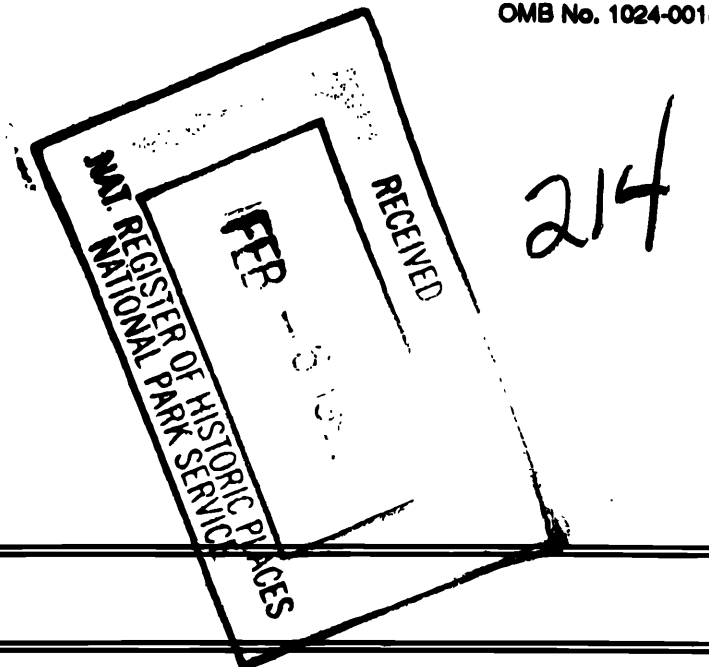


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



1. Name of Property

historic name: Ontario Apartments

other name/site number: _____

2. Location

street & number: 25-31 and 37-41 Ontario Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Providence

vicinity: N/A

state: RI

county: Providence

code: 007

zip code: 02907

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Buildings

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Property name Ontario Apartments, Providence, Providence County, RI

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

See continuation sheet.

Frank Williams
Signature of certifying official

1/29/98
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

___ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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

3.5.98

for
Signature of Keeper

Date
of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: DOMESTIC

Sub: multiple dwelling

Current: DOMESTIC

Sub: multiple dwelling

Property name Ontario Apartments, Providence, Providence County, RI

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/
Spanish Colonial Revival

Other Description: _____

Materials: foundation	<u>BRICK</u>	roof	<u>CERAMIC TILE</u>
walls	<u>STUCCO, BRICK</u>	other	_____
	<u>ASBESTOS</u>		

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): _____

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period(s) of Significance: 1925 1927

Significant Dates: 1925 1927 _____

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: A Page & Page
B Soren, Harry

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

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Description

The Ontario Apartments (1925, 1927) are two large, early twentieth-century, Spanish Colonial Revival-style apartment buildings located at the intersection of Ontario and Niagara streets. They are three-story, flat-roofed, wood-framed structures with a partially exposed foundation, a brick-clad first story, and stuccoed upper stories, now in part re-clad with asbestos shingles. Regularly placed, single and tripartite windows divide all elevations into clearly defined bays of varying widths, the larger of which are twice as wide as the smaller. Portions of the roofs are edged with tile-covered, pent parapets, and overhanging eaves and flared belt courses between the first two stories bring a strong horizontality to the buildings. The flat roof, sharp corners, and flat wall treatment create a solid, blocky appearance that is typical of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The two buildings are set back approximately twenty feet from the road and thirty feet apart and are separated by a paved parking area that also extends to the rear (north) of the buildings. The corner lot on which they sit is bounded on the south by Ontario Street, on the west by Niagara Street, and on the north and east by a combination of chain link and wooden stockade fencing. The lot features a minimally landscaped yard with foundation plantings, several young trees, and a simple network of cement walkways leading to the buildings' various entrances.

25-31 Ontario Street (1925), located on the eastern half of the lot, is constructed in a modified U-shaped configuration with a large central block flanked by two identical projecting wings on the east and west (see site plan). This central block measures approximately forty feet long and sixteen feet wide, although only twenty-five feet of the facade (south elevation) is exposed due to the projecting wings on the east and west ends. Similarly, these two wings each measure eighteen feet long by sixteen feet wide, with only sixteen feet of their interior faces exposed, due to the fact that the east and west elevations of these two wings do not extend all the way to the north (rear) elevation of the main block. The facade of the central block is punctuated by three wide bays with tripartite windows separated by two narrower bays with simple rectangular windows. The southern elevations of the two projecting wings are similarly divided by wide and narrow bays, with the wider bay on the interior half of the elevation and two narrow bays on the exterior. The interior faces of the projecting wings are more simply divided by four narrow bays with single windows. Four entrances—one centered on each of the interior faces of the projecting wings and one in each of the two narrower bays of the

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central block—open onto a small central courtyard within the interior of the U.

The first story is clad in a brick veneer that features running bond walls, with soldier-coursed lintels and rowlock sills on the windows. The four front entrances feature modern, hollow-core doors and are flanked by half-height sidelights with blank panels for apartment door bells. These entrances are approached by simple brick and concrete stoops and are covered by segmental-arched, barrel-vaulted hoods supported by square, tapered supports topped by wide capitals. Rear entrances primarily feature simple surrounds filled with modern hollow-core doors or original doors that have been boarded over. All of the basement lights have been filled with plywood.

The upper two stories are sheathed in rough stucco and each elevation is framed by a six-inch wide band where the stucco has been raised in order to imitate fascia, corner, and base boards. Additionally, the stucco sheathing flares outward at the base of the second story in order to meet the top of a molded wooden belt course between the first two stories. All window surrounds are constructed of simple wood framing, and the windows themselves feature six-over-one, double-hung wood sash in the single rectangular windows and eight-over-one, double-hung sash flanked by four-over-one, double-hung sash in the wider tripartite windows. The roof of the building is flat with a molded cornice that spans all elevations. Additionally, all elevations visible from Ontario Street feature overhanging eaves and pent parapets covered in regularly laid, straight barrel mission tiles that spring from the cornice line. Special tiles carved in low relief and simple spherical finials mark the junctures at each corner of the building.

Although nearly identical in detail to number 25-31, 37-41 Ontario Street (1927), located on the western half of the lot, is configured differently. This building also consists of three separate blocks, but they are arranged with a small, north/south hyphen connecting the western end of one large block to the eastern end of another large block, forming a simplified Z (see site plan). The southeasterly of the two main blocks measures approximately twenty-seven feet long by sixteen feet deep, while the northwesterly block is the same width but is seven feet longer. The two larger blocks both feature symmetrical, seven-bay facades (south elevation) with a central entrance flanked on each side by a wide bay with tripartite windows and two narrow bays with single windows. The west elevation of the connecting block features a similar, symmetrical arrangement of a central entrance flanked by two wide bays with tripartite windows.

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Stylistically, 37-41 Ontario is nearly identical to 25-31 Ontario Street. The first-story brick veneer features running bond walls and rowlock window sills. Immediately above the basement windows and below the beltcourse are bands containing a single soldier brick and three stretchers, laid in alternation. The three primary entrances to 37-41 Ontario differ from their counterparts, featuring similar brick and concrete stoops but flat-roofed hoods with a blank entablature supported by carved brackets similar to those under the eaves. Additionally, each entrance hood is topped by a wrought-iron balustrade, and the third-story window directly above each entrance has a shallow, wrought iron false balcony. Although now clad in asbestos shingle, the building originally was stuccoed like the neighboring building, and the raised, stuccoed portion that frames each elevation is still visible framing the new shingles. The windows and window surrounds are identical to those of 25-31 Ontario, and the building features the same clay tile and finials on the elevations visible from Ontario and Niagara streets, although the molded cornice does not continue around the rear (north) of the building. In addition to these tiles, 37-41 Ontario also features heavy, carved wood brackets supporting the eaves at each corner.

The two buildings are divided into two- and three-bedroom apartments, ranging from five to eight rooms in size and including a kitchen, living room, one or two bathrooms, and sometimes a den. Typically, each floor contains four apartments although some hold more, and each "stack" of apartments is reached by its own stairwell. Typical original interior details include textured, plastered walls; molded baseboards and architrave trim on doors and windows; crown molding; chair rails; either paneled or multi-light "French" interior doors; and hardwood floors. The architectural integrity of the interiors seems to be mixed: of the two apartments made accessible for viewing by the current owners, one was in nearly perfect, original condition, while the other had received many modern alterations, including dropped ceilings, replacement moldings, and linoleum tile floors.

Three one-story, concrete-block garages along the northern edge of the property have been removed since 1956.

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Photographs

3. Photographer: Clark Schoettle
4. Date: April 1997
5. Negative: RIHP&HC

The above information applies to all photographs

6. View: 25-31 Ontario Street, south facade, photographer facing north.
7. Photo #1 of 9

6. View: 29-31 Ontario Street, entrances, photographer facing northwest.
7. Photo #2 of 9

6. View: 31 Ontario Street, interior staircase, photographer facing east.
7. Photo #3 of 9

6. View: Interior, 25-31 Ontario Street, photographer facing west.
7. Photo #4 of 9

6. View: Interior, 25-31 Ontario Street, photographer facing south.
7. Photo #5 of 9

6. View: 37-41 Ontario Street in foreground, 25-31 in background, photographer facing northeast.
7. Photo #6 of 9

6. View: 41 Ontario Street, south facade, photographer facing north.
7. Photo #7 of 9

6. View: 39 Ontario Street, entrance and iron work, photographer facing northeast.
7. Photo #8 of 9

6. View: Interior kitchen and living room, 37-41 Ontario Street, photographer facing south.
7. Photo #9 of 9

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Significance

The Ontario Apartments (1925, 1927) are significant in the development of the city of Providence, both architecturally and historically. They are well-preserved examples of early twentieth-century apartment buildings and are typical of a significant development in the architectural development of the city: the construction of apartment buildings in middle-class neighborhoods during the 1910s and 1920s. They also reflect new domestic patterns that were evolving in the early twentieth century. The Ontario Apartments retain integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and embody many of the distinctive characteristics of early twentieth-century apartment buildings in a neighborhood which has seen some deterioration of its historical and architectural integrity in the last forty years, making them eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Apartment buildings first became popular in large American cities such as Boston and New York immediately after the close of the Civil War. Apartment buildings from this time period generally were posh, luxurious structures characterized by centralized kitchens and laundries that were operated by a full-time staff, making it possible to "do away with many of the smells, sounds, and wasted space of household drudgery."¹ Furthermore, many featured the latest advances in domestic technology such as hot-water heating, central gas mains, running water in the bathrooms, and a switchboard and operator for private phones. As a result, these apartments generally were rented to wealthy tenants, including families and bachelors.² Although some structures reached the height of contemporary office buildings, most of these apartments were smaller in scale and accommodated only one family per floor. These apartments, referred to as "French Flats" or "apartment-hotels," evoked for their tenants "a cosmopolitan social life, the glamorous influence of the continent, and the slightly risqué practice of living in close proximity to one's neighbors."³

In Providence, the availability of building sites and a local preference for detached houses prevented the introduction of apartment buildings to the area until the very end of the nineteenth century.⁴ The

¹ Wright, Building the Dream, p.139

² Woodward, Aylesworth Apartments, section 8, p. 1.

³ Wright, p. 136.

⁴ Jones, East Side, Providence, p. 38.

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first apartment buildings constructed in the city were the Westfield Apartments (1886; Howard Hoppin, architect; not extant) and the Aylesworth Apartments (1888-89; Individual NR 1982) on Broad Street. The Aylesworth was similar to the French flats and apartment hotels of New York and Boston in that it was inhabited primarily by wealthy tenants, including a physician, the owner of a drug and chemical company, and a provisions merchant.⁵ Other early apartment buildings constructed in Providence were located primarily on the East Side, including the Cushing Apartments (1902; Hilton & Jackson, architects; listed in the NR as part of the College Hill Historic District) at 311-15 Thayer Street and the William P. Powers Apartment Building (ca. 1905), Laura C. Powers Apartment Building (1908), Apartment House Corporation Building (ca. 1909), and Emma Rising Apartment Building (ca. 1906), all on Medway Street.⁶

After approximately 1910, apartment construction accelerated dramatically in Providence as a fashionable alternative to single-family housing for those who did not wish to or were unable to maintain their own house. Apartment buildings during this period also were built primarily within neighborhoods of choice in the city—most particularly on the East Side and in Elmwood. City directories from this time period indicate that rather than catering exclusively to well-to-do tenants as the earlier French flats did, these early twentieth-century apartment buildings were the home to an interesting mix of tenants of varying socioeconomic status, including, but not limited to, "single people, young married couples, older couples whose children had left home, and corporate employees frequently transferred by their companies."⁷ In particular, apartment living came to be viewed during this time as an acceptable alternative for single women, and city directories reveal that a large number of apartment residents were widows and single women.⁸ The varying socioeconomic status of apartment dwellers suggests that the popularity of apartment buildings may be attributable at least in part to the fact that it provided people of lesser means with the opportunity to live in some of the city's most desirable neighborhoods.

⁵ Woodward, section 8, p. 2.

⁶ Jones, p. 38.

⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

⁸ The fact that women began living by themselves in apartments at approximately the same time they began to find acceptance in the workplace and to gain voting rights is probably not a coincidence, and the role of the apartment building in women's history is a topic that clearly deserves further study.

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With the increase in the number of apartment buildings came also an increase in the number of units within each building and the abandonment of some of the organization of services that characterized the earlier apartment-hotels. By 1923, no fewer than sixteen apartment buildings on the East Side of Providence had ten units or more.⁹ Architects and builders also adopted contemporary styling for their buildings, relying primarily on Colonial Revival and Mediterranean Revival details, and to incorporate several standard forms into their buildings, in many cases abandoning the typical block plan in favor of L, U, E, or open quadrangle plans. Several builders and architects began to specialize in the construction of apartment buildings, including developer William E. Horton, and the architects Frank W. Woods and Page & Page. Extant apartments built during this time include: on the East Side, the Buena Vista Apartments (1912-13) at 230-36 Butler Avenue, the Washington Apartments (1912-13) at 98 Irving Avenue, and the Lafayette Apartments (1913) at 380 Lloyd Avenue, all designed by Frank Woods, the Primavera Apartments (1928-29; Harry Marshak, architect) at 490 Angell Street, the O'Connor Apartments (1917; Martin & Hall, architects) at 234-42 President Avenue, and the Wayland Manor (1926-27; T.H. McHale, architect) at 500 Angell Street; and, in Elmwood, the Harry Weiss Tenements (1909; Page & Page, architects) at 974-984 Broad Street, the Whitmarsh Apartments (1913; Frank W. Woods, architect; NR listed in 1980 as part of the Elmwood Historic District) at 78-82 Whitmarsh Street, the Stephens Apartments (1928) at 315 Elmwood Avenue, and the Sheraton Manor (ca. 1930) at 70-76 Peace Street.

The Ontario Apartments, constructed during the heyday of the apartment building boom in Providence, are representative of many of these broad patterns of development in apartment buildings in Providence. Containing fifteen and seventeen units respectively, the two buildings at 25-31 and 37-41 Ontario Street were typical in size. Similarly, the U-shape design of 25-31 Ontario and the Spanish Colonial Revival-style detailing on both buildings echo several other contemporary apartment buildings in the city. Both the architects, Page & Page, and the developer/builder, Harry Soren, were locally based professionals specializing in the construction of apartment buildings. In the midst of this affluent neighborhood consisting primarily of fashionable, single-family homes, the Ontario Apartments were constructed at the southern end of an approximately ten-block area along Niagara Street from Public to Lexington that was designated an "apartment" zone by the original 1923 zoning ordinance of Providence.¹⁰ Lastly, the

⁹ Jones, p. 38.

¹⁰ Hopkins, Plat Book, 1926.

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tenants of the Ontario Apartments represent a wide mix of socioeconomic classes, including a number of single women.

During the years between 1925 and 1936, anywhere from nineteen (1931-32) to fifty-six (1927-28) percent of the inhabitants of the Ontario Apartments in a given year were female. Residents varied in socioeconomic status from janitors, iron workers, and waitresses to manufacturers, provisions dealers, jewelers, and a furrier. Turnover at the Ontario Apartments seems to have been high, with only two of the original eleven inhabitants of 25-31 Ontario and none of the original nineteen inhabitants of 37-41 Ontario remaining by 1936. Similar demographics existed at two nearby apartment buildings, the Whitmarsh (78-92 Whitmarsh Street) and the Sheraton (70-76 Peace Street). For example, the Sheraton Manor hit a high of forty-five percent female occupants during this period (1936), while the Whitmarsh topped out at fifty percent (1932). Both buildings were home to a wide variety of professionals and blue-collar workers, and both exhibited a high turnover rate. Sixteen out of eighteen tenants left the Sheraton between 1930 and 1937, while twelve of twenty-one moved out of the Whitmarsh. Furthermore, two of the nine that remained in the Whitmarsh changed apartments during this period.

The history of the Ontario Apartments may also provide insight into the life of their developer, Harry Soren, and through Soren into the lives of Swedish-Americans in Providence during the early twentieth century.

Approximately 1.25 million Swedes emigrated to the United States between 1851 and 1930.¹¹ Swedish immigration to America tailed off during the 1930s and 1940s, with a final peak following the close of World War II in 1945. At its greatest level in 1910, the Swedish-born population in the U.S. exceeded 1.3 million people.

According to Adolph Benson and Naboth Hedin, editors of Swedes in America (1938), many Swedish-Americans earned their living in the building trades--first as bricklayers and carpenters, and later as builders, contractors, and developers:

With an instinct for building, [Swedish immigrants in America] soon branched out, becoming adept, not only in general construction, but also in fabricating materials and tools for building... Many Swedish immigrants developed into

¹¹ Ljungmark, Swedish Exodus, pp. 11-12.

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builders of houses... Gradually some of these became general contractors, responsible for the construction of large building projects.¹²

Swedish immigration to Rhode Island began in the 1880s; Swedes settled on Smith Hill in Providence and in some villages in the Pawtuxet Valley. Though never equal in numbers to immigrant groups from Canada and from southern and eastern Europe, Swedish-American Rhode Islanders were a substantial community: 5000 residents were identified as Swedes in the 1895 census. Harry Soren's career in the United States may provide insight into some aspects of the history of Swedish-Americans in Rhode Island. Soren appears to have immigrated to the United States at the height of the Swedish exodus, during the first decade of the twentieth century. Soren worked independently as a carpenter in Providence from 1909 until 1914, when he took as a partner Abraham Kelman, another carpenter (possibly from Sweden) who came to Providence in 1910 and had lived up the street from Soren in that year. The two men established an office at 110 Willard Avenue, just off Broad Street, and called their firm Soren & Kelman, Carpenters and Builders. Soren and Kelman remained partners until 1921, after which year Soren returned to working by himself, this time as a full-fledged contractor. By 1925, Soren had opened a new office down the street at 259 Willard Avenue and had established his residence nearby at 199 Sackett Street. The construction of the Ontario Apartments in 1925 and 1927 seems to have been the major achievement of Soren's career, and the importance that Soren assigned to this project is reflected in his naming the building at 37-41 Ontario "Lil Ann," after his wife, Annie.

¹² Benson and Hedin, Swedes in America, p. 419.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property: less than 1 acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>298960</u>	<u>4630180</u>	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Joshua Safdie, Consultant

Organization: _____ Date: June, 1997

Street & Number: 86 Preston Street, 2nd floor Telephone: 401-274-6711

City or Town: Providence State: RI ZIP: 02906

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Geographical Data

Verbal boundary description: Providence Tax Assessor's Plat 52, Lots 146 and 127.

Boundary justification: The property nominated includes the two current assessor's lots that historically comprised the property on which the Ontario Apartments were erected.