

PH0358991

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 20 1977
DATE ENTERED	MAY 5 1978

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

**

Paradise School

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Paradise Avenue at the corner of Prospect Avenue

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Middletown - Newport

VICINITY OF

District #1 Fernand J. St. Germain

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Rhode Island

44

Newport

005

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Town of Middletown

STREET & NUMBER

Middletown Town Hall, East Main Road

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Middletown

VICINITY OF

Rhode Island 02840

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

Middletown Town Hall, East Main Road

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Middletown

Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Preliminary Cultural and Historic Resources Survey, Middletown

DATE

1975

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Paradise School, built in 1875, stands set well back on a small, grassed lot in an elevated and gently rolling residential section of Middletown. It is a one-storey, diminutive (only about 28 by 40 feet) gable-roofed structure of balloon-frame construction with wall cover of clapboarding and is set upon a basement of rubble-stone and mortar. The ridge of the roof runs east-west and is pierced by a small inside chimney at its western end; the east gable-end forms the entrance front; each of the longer side elevations contains three symmetrically-spaced windows of good size, while the western end has no openings.

Exterior architectural features or decorative motifs are kept to a minimum, as would be desirable in so small and economical a structure, but they are well made and well placed and give the building a modest, quaint dignity and true visual interest. Small yet robust sawn brackets of curvilinear, console form placed against a plain fascia under the roof overhang form a cornice treatment on all sides of the building. The severe, unmoulded window enframements rest on protruding, unmoulded board sills apparently supported by square "tablets" at each end; each tablet displays a flat sawn applique of simplified flower-blossom form. All windows are shaded by downward-sloping, shallow, plank hoods, with sharply-moulded edges, supported at each end by angular, open, stick-style brackets. The side windows contain six-over-six-pane sash; an eastern opening of narrow paired windows uses four-over-four panes.

The entrance front presents a pleasing grouping: there are two doorways flanking a joined pair of windows -- the whole preceded by a wide stoop and steps. The central window-pair is provided with a hood like those mentioned above, but the two doorways have peak-roofed, more projecting, hoods supported by the same stick-style brackets. Due to their peaked hoods, the doorways have, above their transom-lights, miniature tympana containing modest incised foliate designs. The only other exterior adornment remaining is a small oculus window placed in the east gable to light garret crawl-space; a small frontal belfry was blown off in the hurricane of 1954, and its appearance cannot now be described. Unrecorded, too, is the appearance of an outhouse or privy, which long stood at a discreet distance from the north-west corner of the schoolhouse; only traces of its stone foundation remain to today.

The right-hand exterior doorway leads into a little "L"-shaped vestibule for boys and that on the left to one for girls, each of these rooms equipped with a low bench or shelf and coat hooks around its walls. A door from each of these vestibules opens to the classroom (24 by 29.5 feet) -- high, well-lighted and austere; its only trim is a wainscot of plain matched and grooved vertical boarding and, rather surprisingly, a fine, strong ceiling cornice of moulded plaster. Across the western

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

For one hundred years Paradise School served the educational needs of Middletown's fourth school district, and it remains an unspoilt and comparatively rare example of the XIX-Century one-room schoolhouses once to be found in all rural communities and in which a single teacher taught -- and disciplined -- eight or nine grades of elementary study.

This handsome small building was erected in the autumn of 1875 at the behest of T. B. Stockwell, the state commissioner of schools, who during a springtime visit had found that its mid-XVIII-Century predecessor a little further along Paradise Avenue was no longer in a fit condition for use. He returned in July to take up the matter with local officials, and on August 30 one-third of an acre of land was acquired from the Whitman family, local farmers, for \$450.00 and the promise that there would be "a good and lawful" wall or fence around the school property, as there still is. Utilizing both a simple design and also the relatively new "balloon-frame" wood-building technique, the building was evidently speedily but soundly constructed, and first classes therein were conducted on December 20, 1875, by Peleg Taylor Coggeshall in the presence of John T. Bailey of the town school committee who had come to honour the occasion. Over a very long period this building continued to serve its original purpose, although in the course of time the number of grades it housed was reduced, so that in its last years of operation only one grade was taught.

In one hundred and two years of existence, the building and its grounds have undergone a minimum of change, and what few changes have been made occurred only as improved equipment for daily living became available and desirable. The old outside privy was eliminated, and modern water-closets were fitted into corners of the two vestibules; a sink and drinking-fountain were installed in the classroom. A coal furnace or boiler supplying steam heat to pipes around the classroom was set up in the basement to replace the old wood-burning stove on the main floor, and this furnace was in modern time converted to oil fuel. Electric lighting was introduced. Such changes as have been mentioned were, of course, thought necessary for the well-being of teachers and pupils.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Arnold, Samuel G.: An Historical Sketch of Middletown, R.I.
Newport, Rhode Island, 1876.
Land Evidence Records, Town of Middletown, R.I., Vol. 12, pp. 527-528:
Transfer of 1/3 acre from Ruth Whitman to School District 4,
Middletown, R.I.

(See Cont. Sheet #3)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1/3 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	3,1,0,6,2,0	4,5,9,6,7,1,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Site fronts easterly on Paradise Avenue with land running back westerly 137-152 feet; northern boundary is Prospect Avenue, from which land extends 90.5-108 feet southerly. Plat No. 121, Lot 3-A.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Richard B. Harrington, Consultant

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

September, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

Old State House, 150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

(401)277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island 02903

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Frederick D. Williams

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE December 14, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

William H. Coltz
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DATE

5/10/78
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

4-25-78

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end of this room was a low platform which supported the teacher's desk at one side, a pot-bellied wood-burning iron stove in the centre, and, presumably, a work-table and/or bookcase on the other side. A similar platform was also across the centre portion of the east end of the room, to enable students to reach the blackboard and book-shelving placed there. Between the "L's" formed by the pupils' vestibules exists an oblong recess providing space for a stair to the basement and for a cupboard for teaching supplies. Some of the old long and hard-seated benches for pupils are stacked in the basement, but no other school furnishings remain.

Although Paradise School ceased formal educational functions in 1975 and has been closed (but kept under watch and minimally heated) since then, it stands intact and well maintained in 1977. In one hundred years of use some minor changes of necessity and convenience were made without really destroying any of the basic plan or architectural value of the building. Small portions of the boys' and girls' vestibules were enclosed to provide modern toilet-rooms. Hardwood flooring was placed over the (no doubt, well-worn) old wide-board floor-cover. Platforms at front and rear of the classroom have been removed. A ceiling of composition-board was inserted just below the original plaster one, and from it hang modern fluorescent lighting fixtures. The old wooden steps and entrance platform were replaced by the same formed in concrete. Steam heating at an early time replaced the iron stove. But, in all, the Paradise School remains fortunately and valuably unchanged.

Some mention should be made of its small landscape surroundings. The grassed site contains a number of large old trees (oak, chestnut and maple) which shade and enhance the building and the short driveway leading to it. Low, strong walls of dry-laid native stone form boundaries to north and east, where a low-lying brook runs outside the wall, and tall picket fencing stands along the other two sides.

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ITEM NUMBER

8

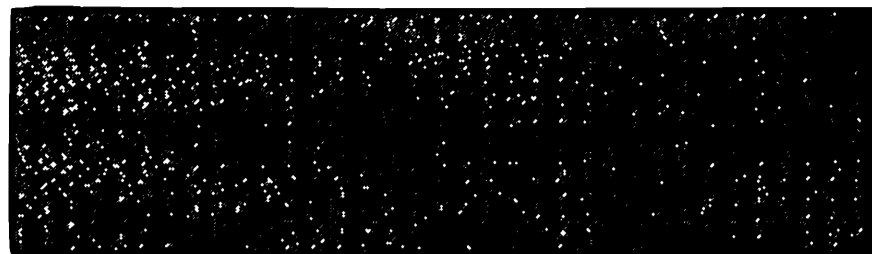
PAGE

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Except for the loss of its belfry in the severe hurricane of 1954 and the replacement of the original wooden steps and entrance platform by concrete ones (which may again be replaced by wood, approximating their old design), the Paradise School at the corner of two country roads, shaded by its tall trees, is hardly at all changed from its appearance when it first welcomed students in 1875. With its simple adornment, it is a picturesque architectural and historic feature of Middletown and, in particular, of the surrounding neighborhood it was built to serve. Spaced peacefully along tree-lined Paradise Avenue are many handsome dwellings, including a number of excellent examples of mid-Victorian styles. Not too distant to the north is "Whitehall" (already on the National Register), the early-XVIII-Century home of George Berkeley, the famous Anglican divine and philosopher, while one can look from the schoolhouse towards Honeyman's Hill at the east, where British and American forces had encampments and an important confrontation during the Revolutionary War.

Now that it no longer houses classes, Paradise School has been taken on a 99-year lease from the town by The Middletown Historical Society, which believes this structure to be a most appropriate one in which to locate itself. It is the intention of this group to restore the classroom interior to its 1875 appearance (the modern ceiling and fluorescent lights will go; the old floor may be uncovered and the steam pipes probably removed; the original paint colours will return -- perhaps also the teacher's platform and stove) and to use the space for meetings and permanent exhibits. Probably one of the most rewarding "permanent exhibits" will, on the whole, be the building itself and its setting.

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CONTINUATION SHEET 3 ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

Teachers Register of the Ungraded Department of the Public School
in School District 4 in the Town of Middletown, County of
Newport, R.I.: Summer school term, April 26, 1875, through
March, 1876.