

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

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

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OCT 24 1980

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NOV 28 1980

Continuation sheet 33

Item number 7

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NAME: James Dennis House

LOCATION: 3120 Pawtucket Avenue

OWNER: Parkwood Realty, Inc.
3120 Pawtucket Avenue
East Providence, R.I. 02916

DESCRIPTION:

The James Dennis House, located on Pawtucket Avenue (State Route 103) in a predominantly residential suburban neighborhood, stands on the crest of a ridge of high ground that drops off toward Narragansett Bay on the west. It is a two-and-one-half-story, end-gable-roofed frame dwelling with a three-and-one-half-story, pyramidal-roofed tower on the south side and a turned-post veranda around the north, west (front), and south sides of the building. Exterior walls are clapboarded, with some stick-style articulation on the tower, and an overhanging gable at the front of the house rests on a second-story bay window and brackets. An 1882 map of the area shows a rectangular structure without the veranda or tower on the property; these features, however, appear on an 1895 map. This would appear to indicate that the tower and porch are 1880s additions to an 1870s building, but the tower and veranda are so well integrated it seems more likely they are part of the original fabric of the house. The main entrance (now augmented by other doorways), located just west of the base of the tower, opens into a stair hall and corridor along the south side of the house. The house, now operated as a rooming house, has been altered inside but retains many original features, such as marble mantels on the parlor and dining room fireplaces (the former relocated from a bedroom) and molded plaster cornices and ceiling medallions in the principal rooms.

DATE: ca. 1880

SIGNIFICANCE:

The James Dennis House is historically and architecturally significant as East Providence's chief surviving example of a Victorian country villa. It is the primary relic of an important phase in local history that reflected a nationwide trend. In the mid-nineteenth century, a romantic view of rural life and improvements in transportation--most notably the development of rail transport--led to a suburban movement in America that was precursor of the suburban boom on the twentieth century. The construction of suburban homes in the last century, however, was at first limited to those wealthy enough to afford the expense of commuting by steam-powered train. In the Providence area, country houses were erected by the well-to-do in towns such as Warwick

(See Continuation Sheet # 34).

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and East Providence, agricultural communities with plenty of open land not far from the city. These towns were especially popular because they contained much desirable waterfront property, and one of the prime areas in the metropolitan region was a section of East Providence where the Providence-Warren road ran along a high ridge. This ridge rose above the Providence, Warren and Bristol Railroad and offered a fine view of Narragansett Bay. This section--present-day Pawtucket Avenue from Veterans Memorial Parkway to Silver Spring--was first the site of a resort hotel, the Vue de L'Eau (built 1840s, destroyed by fire 1870s), and was later built up with several notable country villas. Among these was the James Dennis House. The other imposing Victorian houses that were erected along this stretch of Pawtucket Avenue have since been destroyed or drastically remodeled. The Dennis House is the one dwelling in East Providence that best exemplifies the suburban migration of the upper classes in nineteenth-century America.

ACREAGE: less than one acre

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: Assessor's Plat 49, Lot 36

UTM: 19: 303500; 4628850

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: Local

(See Continuation Sheet #35).