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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name: Our Lady of Lourdes Church Complex

other name/site number: _____

2. Location

street & number: 901-903 Atwells Avenue not for publication: N/A

city/town: Providence vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Providence code: 007 zip code: 02909

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: buildings

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

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

Name of related multiple property listing: Historic and Architectural Resources of Providence (RI), 1636-present

Property name Our Lady of Lourdes Church Complex

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.

[Signature]
Signature of certifying official

11 Jan 1990
Date

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

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): _____

[Signature]

3/15/90

[Signature] Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: RELIGION
RELIGION

Current: RELIGION
RELIGION
VACANT

Sub: religious structure
church related residence

Sub: religious structure
church related residence

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7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

Other Description: _____

Materials: foundation CONCRETE roof CERAMIC TILE
walls BRICK other _____

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): A

Areas of Significance: ETHNIC HERITAGE, OTHER
ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1905-1935

Significant Dates: 1905 1912 1925

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Murphy, Ambrose J.
Fontaine, Walter

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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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: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: C. 2 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>296710</u>	<u>4633090</u>	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Sheldon Watts, Consultant, and Pamela Kennedy, Deputy Director

Organization: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission Date: Sept.89

Street & Number: 150 Benefit Street Telephone: 401-277-2678

City or Town: Providence State: R.I. ZIP: 02903

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Description

The church complex for the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes consists of four major buildings: a church (Ambrose J. Murphy, architect), a rectory (Walter Fontaine, architect), a school (Walter Fontaine, architect), and a convent (see site plan). The complex occupies a hillside site on the north side of Atwells Avenue, a busy thoroughfare. It is surrounded by a densely built, early-twentieth-century residential neighborhood composed largely of three-decker dwellings, located near the heavily industrialized Woonasquatucket River corridor. The oldest buildings in the complex are a combined school/chapel and an adjoining rectory, built in 1905. In 1912, the parish built the rectory at 901 Atwells Avenue. The church, built in 1924-25, is of an Italian Romanesque style much favored for Roman Catholic churches in the early twentieth century.

The principal building in the complex is the parish church built to supercede the chapel in the earlier school/chapel building. The gable-roofed, basilica-plan church has a low campanile and is clad in red tapestry brick. It is nine bays long and measures 132 feet by 47 feet. It is a steel-frame building, without a basement; the roof is of red tile. The principal entrance is within a tripartite arcade with columns of crushed marble and cement. Above the entrance are three inset stone reliefs depicting the arms of the Diocese of Providence, the apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes and the arms of the Bishop of Providence. Above the insignias is a rose window below a corbeled gable end. To the east of the entrance is a low campanile with channeled base, blind arcade second stage, and arcaded belfry. Stone crosses cap both the gable end and the campanile's hip roof. The east and west walls of the seven-bay nave are buttressed between the windows at both the aisle and the clerestory levels. The red brick of the lower walls gives way to stucco just below the level of the rounded tops of the clerestory windows. To the east of the two-bay choir the walls of the vestry project approximately twenty feet beyond the wall of the choir. This is matched by a similar, smaller projection for a chapel on the west wall of the choir. The two clerestory windows on each side of the choir are capped by small pediments. In its exterior appearance, the church is as it was built in 1925.

On the interior, the seven-bay nave arcade consists of simple pillars with modified Corinthian capitals containing symbols representing the four evangelists and other iconographic motifs. There is a two-bay arcade in the chancel. Above the arcades of the nave and chancel are the round-arch windows of the clerestory. The church has a slightly flattened barrel vault of lath and plaster with small painted roundels. Slightly flattened arches are also found in the two aisles, supporting the slanting aisle

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roofs. To the east of the chancel is the sacristy measuring eighteen feet by twenty-three feet; most of the woodwork in this room appears to be original.

As built in 1924-5 the whole of the interior was of simple white-painted plaster, including the wall at the back of the chancel and the walls of the shrine to the Virgin to the right of the altar. The altar was backed by a simple wooden Gothic reredos; financial constraints made it impossible for the parishioners to provide much else in the way of ornamentation. In 1936 an elaborate baroque reredos was installed topped by a mural portraying the appearance of the Virgin at Lourdes. The baroque reredos was removed in 1965 and replaced with a simple paneled wooden reredos; above this, the mural remains in place. The altar and the wall to the rear of the altar have thus been returned to an appearance similar to that built in 1924-5. Still in place are the simple stained glass windows and stations of the cross, both inscribed in French, and the stained glass of the rose window; all were installed in 1936. As repainted in 1965, the walls of the church are now a light brown and golden yellow, with the semi-circular arches of the arcades picked out by darker paint. In overall appearance the church interior remains essentially as it was built.

The largest structure in the Our Lady of Lourdes complex is the school/chapel building (1905; Walter Fontaine), which was converted into a twelve-room school in 1925. The building is a two-and-a-half-story (because of the height of the ground floor, effectively three-story), roughly rectangular, pressed red brick structure in the Italian Revival style measuring 112 feet by 66 feet, with a low hip roof partially hidden behind pediments. Externally, it remains much as built in 1905, with the exception of an unsympathetic flat-roofed red brick addition on the west front, built in the late 1930s to accommodate city-mandated bathrooms for the students.

At the west end is a two-and-a-half-story vestibule block, forty-four feet wide and fourteen feet deep that contains staircases connecting the three floors of the building. The original entrance was through a double doorway on this elevation; the entrance was covered by the late 1930s one-story brick addition. On the facade's upper level are three large, regularly spaced windows. Secondary separate entrances for boys and girls are located on the north and south sides of the vestibule block. These entrances are capped with hoods supported by paired fretwork braces. At the east end of the school/chapel building is an enclosed two-story wooden porch that connects the building to the convent. The third floor of the east wall is lit by a single window.

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Both the long north and south walls of the school/chapel building are divided into three bays in an A-B-A pattern; the central bay is slightly recessed. Each bay has three two-story windows six feet wide, topped by lunettes and divided at the level of the second floor by a wood spandrel. Beneath the water table, which girds the entire building, are large windows that illuminate the basement; each window is in line with an upper-story window. The central recessed sections of both north and south walls are topped by an overhanging roof. The other two units in the north and south walls are topped by modified pediments. At the point of transition between the central unit and the flanking bays are blank-wall, tower-like units, three-and-a-half feet by seven feet which originally extended upwards a full story beyond the roof pediments and were capped with wooden roofs.

The structure of the brick building is reinforced internally by two parallel rows of cast-iron columns, twenty on each side. As built in 1905, the first floor of the interior consisted of a central double-loaded corridor with three classrooms on each side. The renovation of the original chapel on the second floor in 1925 produced a similar configuration of classrooms on that floor. The classroom partitions on both floors were removed sometime soon after June, 1987, by previous owners of the building. However, the staircases, with plain utilitarian wood balustrades typical of the period remain, as do most of the window casings and trim. The high-ceilinged basement contains a large assembly room fitted out with a stage. The school of Our Lady of Lourdes was closed in 1969.

The third of the four major buildings in the Our Lady of Lourdes complex is a Colonial Revival house built as a rectory and converted later to a convent, for the sisters who taught at the school. Set at a slight angle to the eastern wall of the school/chapel, the convent is a three-story, cubical brick building measuring forty feet by thirty-six feet, with a low hip roof. At its northwestern corner the convent abuts the east wall of the school; at its southwest corner it is approximately ten feet from the school. Facing Carleton Street is the three-bay, symmetrical principal facade of the building. Two, two-story oriel windows flank a one-story entrance porch at center. On the south side is a one-story porch. South and north walls contain five windows on each floor, two paired sash windows and a single sash window in a B-B-A arrangement. The wide eaves of the convent have paired ornamental brackets. At the first and third stories, the convent is connected by a brick passageway to the 1905 school/chapel's basement and second stories. Externally the convent is much as when built in 1905.

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The convent has a center-hall plan on all three principal floors. There is no at-grade passageway between the first-floor classrooms and the convent, and access is limited to the enclosed stair. The ground floor of the convent contains two large rooms, each with a bay window facing Carleton Street, as well as the entrance hall with its staircases. This pattern is repeated on the second and third floors except for a small room at the front of each hall over the entrance. Much of the original woodwork remains in this building: staircases with balustrades, five-panel doors and surrounds of varnished oak or fir, an impressive built-in sideboard on the first floor, the wainscoting in the old robing room in the second floor passage, and other fittings are all similar in quality to the woodwork found in many local houses built during the first decade of the twentieth century.

The present rectory (1912; architect unknown) is a two-story, hip-roofed, red brick buildings measuring forty-two feet by forty-two feet, built in Colonial Revival style. Roughly in the center of the principal facade facing Atwells Avenue is a doorway within a porch with an open pediment; to the right is a two-story bay window. The second story is three bays wide. On the west side of the building facing the church is a doorway and a porch running the length of the building. There is a central dormer in each roof face.

Internally, a central hallway runs half the length of the building and ends in a stairway. Opening off the hallway on the right area reception room and a kitchen with bath; on the left are a small office and a dining room. On the second floor, to the right of the stairs are three rooms, and to the left is a large room created from three bedrooms. In the northwest corner, overlooking the church, is an office. The attic story contains a bedroom and two large storage rooms. Despite changes in room arrangement on the second floor, the house appears much as built in 1912.

Two small garages are located in the Our Lady of Lourdes complex; both are gable-end, wood frame structures, approximately 22' x 20.' Each garage has two bays with overhead doors. Both were constructed in the early 1930s by T. England, builder. Though constructed during the period of significance, these buildings do not contribute to the property's areas of significance in the fields of ethnic history and architecture, and are therefore considered non-contributing elements of the nominated property.

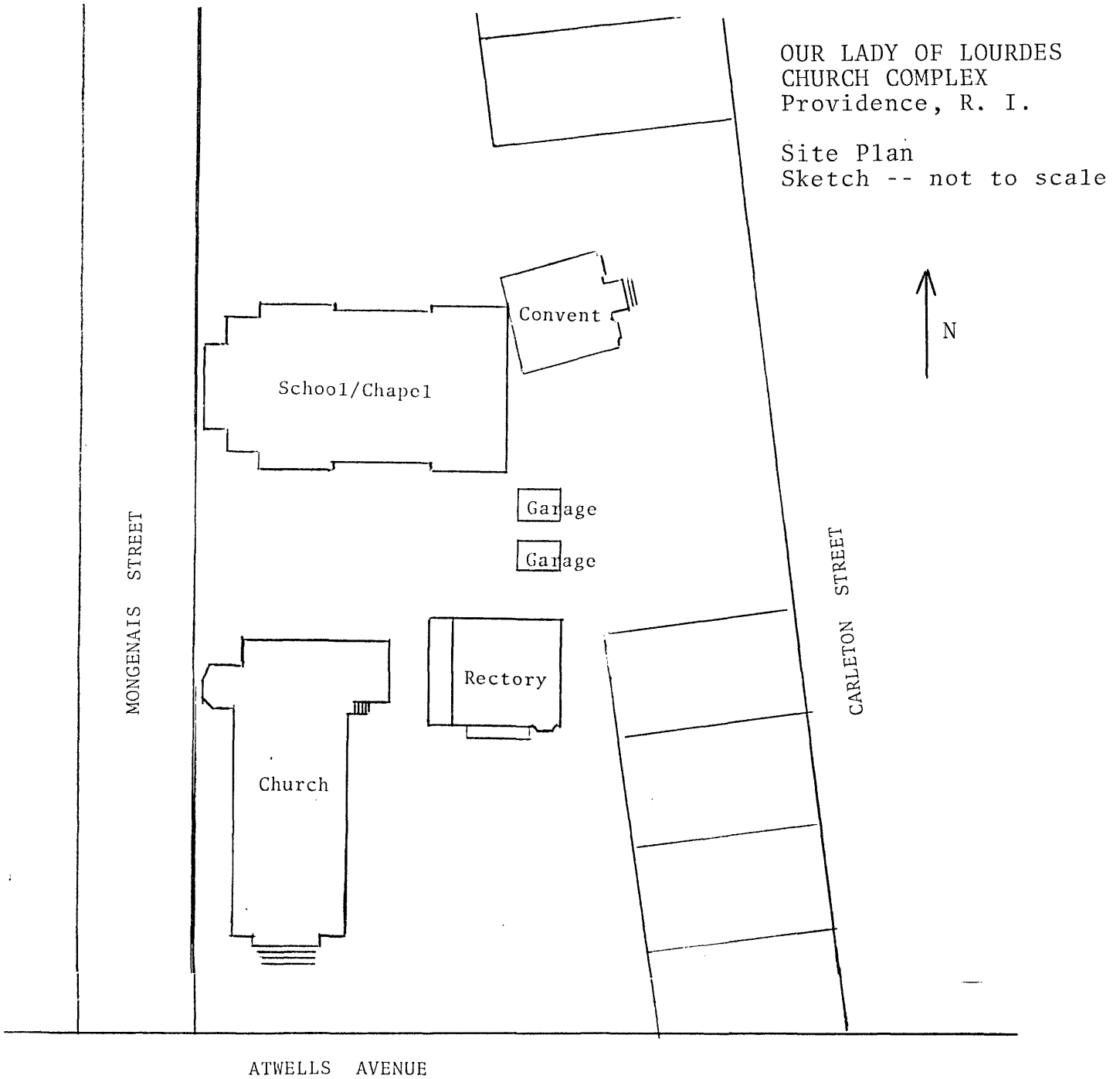
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Significance

Summary

The parish complex of Our Lady of Lourdes is evaluated in the context "Historic and Architectural Resources of Providence, Rhode Island, 1636-present;" property type "Ecclesiastical Buildings (Roman Catholic Parish Churches and Parish Complexes)." The parish complex is eligible under Criteria A and C. The complex meets registration requirements set out in the Multiple Properties Submission, in that

- 1) the church is sufficiently well preserved on its exterior and interior to illustrate its original appearance; the auxiliary complex buildings are sufficiently well preserved on their exterior to document the historic appearance of the complex;
- 2) the history of the parish complex documents some important aspects of the development of immigrant communities in Providence; and
- 3) architecturally, the complex is a good representative example of a parish church complex of the early twentieth century.

The four-building parish complex of Our Lady of Lourdes is a physical testimony to some of the aspirations and accomplishments of a working class, French Canadian immigrant community in early twentieth-century Providence, Rhode Island. Some aspects of the history of the parish buildings and activities testify to important antagonisms between the Canadian Catholics and other immigrant groups. Among the Roman Catholic immigrants who dominated the population of the city in the early twentieth century, the Canadians represented a small but significant minority. They were heavily outnumbered by the Irish, and, as the building history of this present parish church shows, were sometimes at odds with the Irish-American bishops and hierarchy of the Catholic Diocese of Providence. They were also at times in conflict with the diocesan hierarchy concerning the continuing role of the French language in the life of the community; changes in the language of instruction used at the school of Our Lady of Lourdes reflect these disagreements. The modest economic circumstance of the parishioners is reflected in the fact that for the first twenty years of the parish's existence, the original building, designed by Walter Fontaine of Woonsocket (himself the son of a Canadian immigrant), accommodated church, school, and community center. In 1925, the parish built a new church, designed by Ambrose J. Murphy, an Irish-American, at the order of Bishop William Hickey, an Irish-American. Ten years later, the Canadian pastor, using in part his own funds, installed stained glass

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windows with French inscriptions to reinforce the parish's Canadian cultural heritage. Architecturally, the four-building grouping is a good, illustrative example of a Catholic parish complex of the early twentieth century.

Background

Canadian immigrants first arrived in Rhode Island in substantial numbers in the 1860s, inaugurating a great exodus from the Quebec Province. Prompted by a long-term agricultural depression in eastern Canada and drawn by the opportunity for work in the expanding industries to the south, nearly one third of the province's population moved to New England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

For the most part, Canadian immigrants to Rhode Island settled in the Blackstone and Pawtuxet River Valleys, not in Providence. But the capital city also received a substantial share of Canadians; by 1910, the census identified 4019 Canadians in the city. Their first place of worship was the Christian Brothers' Academy on Fountain Street; in 1881, French Canadians dedicated their first national Catholic church, St. Charles Borromeo. By 1902, St. Charles had grown substantially, and the Canadians living in the northern part of the parish petitioned their bishop for the creation of a second Canadian church: Our Lady of Lourdes.

The establishment of such national parishes was an institutional response by the Catholic hierarchy to the divisions among Catholics of their area which resulted from their ethnic backgrounds. The subject of historical tensions among Rhode Island's various Catholic communities is by no means a simple one, but from the 1860s until well into the 20th century the Catholic hierarchy was compelled to acknowledge substantial differences between the expectations of Irish-American Catholics (who represented the first great wave of Catholic immigrants and who dominated the church hierarchy) and the Canadian Catholics who followed them. Such differences were by no means exclusively religious, but encompassed the economic, political, cultural, and organizational lives of immigrant communities as well.

To simplify a complex historical question: Canadians were at times perceived by the Irish community as an economic threat and as competitors for jobs in the mills. In addition, political differences between the two were sometimes important, the Irish usually firmly Democratic, the French Canadians at times supporting the Republican Party. Important cultural differences between the two communities existed (especially on the question

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of language which was to become the hinge of their disputes in the 1920s). In their common Catholicism there were substantial differences between Irish and Canadians. The Quebec Canadians brought with them a tradition of decentralized control of the local Catholic parish. In Quebec the bishop was not as strong an influence as in the Irish-dominated church they found in Rhode Island. Their Canadian parishes had been operated by parish councils of 3 laymen with the local priest as president; the Irish-dominated Rhode Island church had its power base at the diocesan level, not the parish: in Rhode Island the bishop was the president of each parish corporation. Diocesan levies on parish churches in Rhode Island were a novelty to the French, whose Canadian dioceses were well established and endowed; and there were important differences in ritual as well, the Irish favoring a somewhat more simplified liturgy than the French.

Adding to such differences, French Canadians brought the long-standing ideal of survivance, preservation of their distinctive culture within the larger Canadian society. In the United States, this ideal was seen by some as a bulwark against the perceived assimilationist impulses of the Catholic hierarchy. The earliest Canadian communities had been served by French-speaking (but not Canadian) priests whose Parisian-accented French underscored the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences between the Canadians and the Irish-dominated church hierarchy. As a response, diocesan authorities created specifically national parishes for the Canadians, the first (in Woonsocket) in 1872. Thus, when Canadians in Providence petitioned their bishop for a new parish in 1902, they were already part of a decades-long tradition of national parishes. As an institutional response to long-standing and fundamental differences among Catholics, the creation of national parishes submerged, though it did not destroy, those differences.

Bishop Matthew Harkins (bishop from 1886 to 1921), an Irish-American, delayed acting on the request for a new parish for several months, pleading industrial unrest in the mills. A new parish, dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes, was finally created in August, 1904. In January the bishop authorized the construction of a combined school/chapel (not to exceed \$50,000 in cost).

In 1906, the school of Our Lady of Lourdes was completed and was heralded by the Providence Journal as "modern" both in function and in design. It was "a model of what architecture of this sort should be," and "one of the best examples in the State of an elementary institution which looks after the health of the pupils as well as their scholarship." It was also a model of cost effectiveness: for less than \$50,000 its Canadian-American architect, Walter Fontaine, had erected a building which met local

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standards for excellence. Some of the comparable public schools built of brick on similar plans in early twentieth-century Providence cost up to three times as much.

With the building of the school/chapel and convent of Our Lady of Lourdes in 1905, parishioners and newcomers from Quebec hastened to buy land and build houses in the area, most of them standard 3-decker working-class homes. Several of the houses just to the west of the chapel/school on Mongenais Avenue (named after the first pastor of the new parish) and up the hill on Atwells Avenue date from this period and reflect the central role of the new parish in the life of the French Canadian immigrant community.

The program offered at Our Lady of Lourdes primary school in its first decades reflected the competing pressures of survivance and linguistic conformity felt in the Canadian community. According to a 1906 article from the Providence Journal, the school authorities asserted that all instruction, excepting only the study of religion, would be in English. Special emphasis would be placed on the teaching of American history and patriotism. Half of the eight teachers were lay people, the others were women in holy orders, sisters of the Order of Jesus & Mary who lived in the convent. According to the reporter, by using English as the language of instruction, the teachers at Our Lady of Lourdes hoped to equip all students with the linguistic and other skills needed to gain entrance into any public high school Providence. Though most students would be Canadian, the school also welcomed non-Canadians, an action calculated both to reinforce the assimilation process and to alleviate the congestion in the neighborhood's primary schools. However, in practice the school found it difficult to maintain its commitment to teaching in English; reports from people who attended the school in the late 1920s and early 1930s suggest that by then most instruction was in French, apparently Quebec French. As late as 1989 there remained inscribed on a blackboard in a classroom on the second floor of the building the words "La langue est la gardienne de la Foi" (language is the guardian of the faith) drawn in chalk by a competent artist, perhaps by a teacher on the eve of the closure of the school in 1969.

The construction of a new church for Our Lady of Lourdes in the mid-1920s similarly illuminates the issues of ethnicity, nationalism, and religion. The choice of an architect for the new church arose at the start of the Sentinelle controversy in the Diocese of Providence. The Sentinelle movement, the most radical historical expression of survivance, was centered in Woonsocket where a vocal minority of Canadian-Americans opposed what they saw as the assimilationism of their bishop. The movement

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focussed on the issue of the language used in Catholic schools and on diocesan levies to build schools where English would have parity with French. The Sentinelle leaders appealed to the Pope and, failing there, brought a civil suit against their bishop and were, in turn, excommunicated in 1928. Only with death of the bishop and the leading Sentinelle did the controversy subside.

In this larger context, the choice of an architect for Our Lady of Lourdes' new church had important implications for larger questions about the source of authority in the Catholic diocese. In 1924, Almanzor J. Samson, a parishioner at Our Lady of Lourdes, offered to design the new church. His offer was rejected by Bishop Hickey who, instead, gave the commission to Ambrose J. Murphy, a specialist in ecclesiastical architecture and an Irish-American.

As completed in 1928, the church is a small and simple version of the basilica plan with campanile, reflecting both the limited resources of its parish (the church cost \$110,000) and the continuing popularity of its type in the early decades of the twentieth century. Later changes to the church bear witness to the continuing Canadian character of the parish: stained glass windows with French inscriptions were added in 1935. Together with its school/chapel, rectory, and convent, the church is a significant testimony to the presence here of Canadian community and to its achievements in providing for its religious, educational, and cultural needs.

The church complex of Our Lady of Lourdes is a physical manifestation of an important chapter in Canadian immigrant and Rhode Island social history. Several of these themes play an important role in four autobiographical novels by David Plante (born 1940). The Family, The Country, and The Woods (together known as the Francoeur Family Trilogy) and The Native are all set in the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes and contain frequent reference to the principal buildings of the church complex. An expatriate now living in England, Plante was born in the parish and attended Our Lady of Lourdes primary school. As interpreted in Plante's critically acclaimed novels, the parish complex of Our Lady of Lourdes in Providence has become one of the best known Canadian parishes in the United States.

Period of Significance

The period of significance is defined as 1905 to 1935. Construction of the church complex began in 1905, with the building of the school/chapel and convent, and continued into the 1920s with the construction of the

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church in 1925. The period of significance ends in 1935 with the last significant alteration to the church, the installation of windows with French inscriptions.

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Major Bibliographical References

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- Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island, Archives. File "Our Lady of Lourdes."
- Personal interview with the Reverend Robert Hayman, July 29, 1989. Father Hayman is the author of Catholicism in Rhode Island and the Diocese of Providence 1780-1886 (Providence, 1982) and is collecting materials for a second volume.
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- Sorrell, Richard S. "Sentinnelle Affair (1924-1929)--Religion and Militant Survivance in Woonsocket, Rhode Island". Rhode Island History, Vol. 36, No. 3, Aug. 1977.
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Verbal Boundary Description

Providence Assessor's Plat 64, new lot 922, (the church) and lots 819, 794, 814, 815, 816, 817, 819, 821, 822-823.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses all of the land historically associated with the church complex and no other land.