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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

JAN 1993

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Providence Commercial Historic District

other names/site number N/A

## 2. Location

street & number 100-200 on E & W Main and N & S Broadway NA  not for publication

city or town Providence NA  vicinity

state Kentucky code KY county Webster code 233 zip code 42450

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

David L. Morgan David L. Morgan, Executive Director/  
Signature of certifying official/Title State Historic Preservation Officer  
Date

Kentucky Heritage Council/State Historic Preservation Office  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	<u>Patrick Andrews</u> Signature of the Keeper	<u>3/1/93</u> Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other. (explain:)	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
25	4	buildings
0	1	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
25	5	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE: businesses

COMMERCE: department stores

COMMERCE: financial institutions

COMMERCE: speciality stores

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE: businesses

COMMERCE: department store

COMMERCE: financial institutions

RELIGION: religious facility

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian

Late 19th & 20th C. Revival: Beaux Arts

Late 19th & 20th C. Revival: Classical Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: limestone

walls BRICK

MARBLE

roof ASPHALT

other CAST IRON

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

**Period of Significance**

1882-1930

**Significant Dates**

1882

1888

1912-1930

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

UNKNOWN

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property ONE

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

UTM grid 1: Zone 116, Easting 432470, Northing 4139050

UTM grid 3: Zone, Easting, Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lynn David / Historic Resource Surveyor
organization Providence Chamber of Commerce date April 1, 1992
street & number 1334 1/2 State Street telephone (502) 781-2750
city or town Bowling Green state KY zip code 42101

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name
street & number telephone
city or town state zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, should be directed to Washington, DC 20503.

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Webster County, KY

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DESCRIPTION

The Providence Commercial Historic District is situated in the town center along the intersecting streets of Main and Broadway and extends approximately one block in each of the four directions. These historical commercial buildings face Main and Broadway which was and is still the hub of all major roads entering and leaving the community. Of the 29 principal buildings in the district, 25 or 86% are contributing buildings. The overall Victorian historic character is strong as little new construction occurred due to reversals in the economy after 1930. The buildings primarily consist of Victorian and early twentieth-century commercial brick structures embellished with cast iron storefronts, stone or sheet-metal window hoods, and brick or sheet-metal cornices. The immediately surrounding blocks consist mostly of early and mid-twentieth-century houses.

Providence, Kentucky, population 4434 in the 1990 census, is the largest town in Webster County. Webster County is located in the Pennyroyal physiographic region of Kentucky. Providence is situated in the southwestern corner of the county in the Tradewater River Valley. The county is bounded on the north by Union and Henderson Counties and on the east by McLean County. The south is bounded by Hopkins County. The west is bordered by Crittenden and Union Counties. Much of Webster County's boundaries are formed by water ways. Green River forms most the eastern boundary line and Tradewater River bounds the south-west section of the county. Traditionally and today the primary activity in the county is agriculture. The other towns located in the county are considerably smaller and have little or no commercial districts. Historically, Providence was and remains today, the major commercial center of the county.

Providence, with an elevation of 580 feet, is located on an upland surface northeast of the Tradewater lowland. This area has been eroded so that the tops of hills or ridges are exposed.

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The town is situated on rolling land with the historic commercial district located at the center on one of the highest points. The town is laid out on a grid pattern with the principal crossroad at the intersection of Main and Broadway. The original settlement was located in 1839 on 24 lots laid out from the convergence of present day Main and Broadway. Providence was not incorporated until 1896 and encompassed 142 acres. Most of the growth since that time has been to the south of the railroad lines and consisted of housing for miners and railroaders.

The area included within the district was part of the original platted area and the district is thought to include most of that plat. The historic commercial district represents the earliest and the most densely developed part of the town. The present sites contain later historic buildings that replaced the early wooden buildings that were either destroyed by fire or torn down to make way for later, larger and more up-to-date buildings. Today, the architecture along Main and Broadway retains its strong Victorian flavor as little new construction occurred due to reversals in the economy after 1930. The buildings primarily consist of Victorian and early twentieth-century commercial brick structures embellished with cast iron storefronts, stone or sheet-metal window hoods, and brick or sheet-metal cornices. The immediately surrounding blocks consist mostly of early and mid-twentieth-century houses. The downtown Providence area remains a busy commercial and traffic center because of the convergence of the town's main streets. This is a continuance of Providence's historic patterns of travel and commerce.

Some of the buildings' storefronts have been modernized in order to attract more business and to respond to new styles in advertising and merchandising needs. These changes have included the covering of the upper facades with metal and other applied sidings, bricking in or covering with wood of second story windows. These changes have contributed to the H. Cooper and Company (WEP-2, #2) and the City Cafe (WEP-22, #22) being listed as non-contributing buildings in the historic commercial district. Other buildings have more restrained modifications, maintaining their Victorian flavor with a minimum of exterior alterations. Providence retains many original store fronts.

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Three examples of this retention of the original integrity are the J.B. Benjamin Hardware Building (WEP-23, #23), C. & P. Hardware (WEP-11, #11), and 109 Nisbet-Berry Block (WEP-5, #5). These buildings have their cast iron frames, original panels, doors and display windows. They have distinctive brickwork decoration around their windows and parapets.

The present commercial buildings are concentrated along both sides of the 100 blocks of East and West Main and North and South Broadway Streets, (See photo #s 5-9). They are flush with the concrete sidewalks and all have party walls. On the west side of North and South Broadway they are located between the H. Cooper and Company Building (WEP-2, #2) at the north end and the Providence Bakery Building (WEP-12, #12) at the corner of South Broadway and Cedar on the south end. One of the five non-contributing buildings in the district, the two-story H. Cooper and Company Building (WEP-2, #2) is located on the north end of the district. It is included in the district because it is joined by a party wall to the Alexander Niswonger Building (WEP-1, #1) which is a contributing commercial building to the district. With some renovation to remove a later metal facade, the H. Cooper and Company Building could become a contributing member of the district. The Ruckman Store Incorporated (WEP-9, #9). (see photo #2) is the only three-story building in the district and is located on the southern corner of South Broadway and Bank Street. The Providence Mining Company Building (WEP-8, #8), (See photo #1), located on the corner of West Main and South Broadway, is the only example of glazed yellow brick in the district. It has the most restrained facade with only a minimum of decorative brickwork. However, the yellow glazed bricks and cast iron sign make it a prominent building in the district and reflects the historical importance of mining to the area.

The block of South Broadway between the corner of East Main and the J.G. Gist Building (WEP-15, #15) contains the only Beaux Arts Building in the commercial historic district. The distinctive Providence Banking Company Building (WEP-13, #13), (See photo #3) with its Bowling Green marble facade is a focal point of the historic commercial district.

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The buildings on either side of East Main appear to be the heart of the commercial historic district since the 1880s. The historic commercial buildings are two-story brick buildings built between 1880 and 1920. A fire destroyed a prominent department store on the west end of the block on the north side of East Main. The lot now contains the non-contributing site, a city park (WEP-24, #24) which is dedicated to the coal miners and presents a visual reminder of the importance of coal in the town's commercial history. Parks were often an integral part of Victorian life and many contain statues commemorating events or honoring famous citizens. Providence's honoring of the coal miners, who brought prosperity to the town, is appropriate to this important theme in local history. The placing of the park on this crossroad lot instead of a modern building enhances the Victorian streetscape. The United States Post Office (WEP-25, #25) and the Dr. Cardwell Building (WEP-30, #30), both non-contributing buildings, are included within the district and located on the north side of East Main. However, three of the most distinctive commercial buildings are the center of this side of the street. They are two-story Victorian examples of highly decorated commercial buildings. The Citizens Bank Building (WEP-26, #26), (See photo #4), the Perkins Furniture Store (WEP-27, #27), and the Providence-Enterprise Building (WEP-28, #28) have retained their galvanized, unbroken pedimented and decorated iron hood molds, ornamented cast iron cornices and pediments. These are the most elaborately detailed buildings in the district.

The south side of East Main consists of two-story late 19th century and early 20th century commercial buildings of brick. The only other non-contributing building, the City Cafe Building (WEP-22, #22) is located in this block. The other commercial buildings all have cast iron storefronts with large plate glass windows, transoms, decorative attic vents and decorative brick cornices hiding flat roofs. The J.B. Benjamin Hardware Building (WEP-23, #23) which anchors the east end of the district is a combination of Italianate, Beaux Arts and Neo-classical styles that have merged into an interesting eclecticism which is unique in the district.

The four buildings on the north side of West Main present a solid reflection of a turn-of-the-century two-story commercial



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brick block. The Nisbet-Berry Block buildings, (WEP-3, #3; WEP-4, #4; WEP-5, #5; and WEP-6, #6) are long narrow buildings with party walls. They all have cast iron storefronts, recessed doorways with plate glass windows and transoms, decorative attic vents, and double hung glass sash windows on the second floors. They had first floor businesses with the second floors used as apartments by the owners or operators of the small businesses. The Hust Bottling Plant (WEP-7, #7) is the fifth building in the block. It is a one-story brick building that reflects the decorative corbelling found on the other four buildings.

INTEGRITY

Despite some changes to the storefronts and covering of some of the upper story windows and facades, the majority of the buildings have retained their large open storefronts with cast iron frames, recessed doorways, and glass transoms. The upper brick facades, with their decorative brickwork and cast iron cornices, have retained their integrity and reflect the local craftsmen's superior workmanship. Two of the buildings are now considered non-contributing (WEP-2, #2 and WEP-22, #22) because of their incompatible remodeling. However, they could be reclassified as contributing, at a later date, if their original facades were uncovered and the buildings restored to their original state. In spite of the five intrusions, there is a feeling of unity and history of the commercial development of Providence in the contiguous commercial historic district.

VERBAL BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The district boundaries were selected on the basis of age and building size: the two-story brick buildings are distinctively turn-of-the-century commercial structures surrounded by one story modern commercial buildings or twentieth-century dwellings. There is a unified appearance to the commercial historic district. The structures continue to convey an impression of quality Victorian buildings and present a unified Victorian streetscape indicative of a small and prosperous Kentucky commercial center.

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In the following entries, the resources considered contributing are marked by (C), non-contributing are marked by (NC):

NORTH BROADWAY (West Side)

1. Alexander Niswonger Store, 104 North Broadway (1911).  
Two-story brick building with original ornamented cast iron storefront and recessed double door. The building retains its original display windows and transom. The second-floor facade has been covered with a metal panel, but the West Main elevation remains intact with six porthole windows and corbelling. (C)
2. H. Cooper and Company Building, 106 North Broadway (1911)  
Two-story brick building with two units that have been combined into one store. The facade has been covered with a metal siding and the only original exterior features still in evidence are the cast iron corner columns. It was erected as a companion to the Alexander Niswonger Store. H.Cooper and Company operated a dry goods and clothing store at the location from 1911 until 1952. With the removal of the later metal facade, the H. Cooper and Company Building could become a contributing member of the district. (NC)

WEST MAIN (West Side)

3. 105 Nisbet-Berry Block, 105 West Main (c. 1910) Two-story brick building with stepped back false front cornice. Three arched brick bays on second story facade. The storefront retains its cast iron frame and recessed double doors with two glass display windows and transom. The store front has been boarded with vertical planks. One of four identical buildings built as a block by Mr. Nisbet and Mr. Berry, two partners in the Providence Mining Company. (C)
4. 107 Nisbet-Berry Block, 107 West Main (c. 1910)  
Two-story brick building with stepped back false front cornice. Three arched brick bays on second story facade have been covered with boards. The glass transom has been boarded, as have the plate glass display windows. Red Front Cash and Carry Store No.19 occupied the building from 1928 until 1948. Remnants of their painted sign is still in evidence on the second-story facade. (C)

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5. 109 Nisbet-Berry Block, 109 West Main (c. 1910)  
Two-story brick building with stepped-back false front cornice. Three arched brick bays on second story facade. These bays have been boarded, but the store front is intact with two display windows and recessed double doors capped with a single light transom. The southwest display window has been covered with board. (C)

6. 111 Nisbet-Berry Block, 111 West Main (c. 1910)  
Two-story brick building with stepped-back false front cornice. Three arched brick bays on second story facade have been boarded. The first floor facade retains its cast iron frame, but was bricked over in the 1940s when the Journal-Enterprise Newspaper occupied the building. A brick flower box extends across the front to the edge of a replacement metal and glass door. (C)

7. Hust Bottling Plant, 113 West Main (c. 1910) One-story, three bay, brick building features decorative brick course work that echoes the cornice corbelling found on the Nisbet-Berry Block buildings. The storefront is framed with cast iron, but the display windows, door and porch were replaced in 1984. The replacements are sympathetic to the original structure. (C)

SOUTH BROADWAY (West Side)

8. Providence Mining Company, 100-104 South Broadway (c.1873- 1897) The present building consists of two separate units probably built within a few years of each other and joined around 1898. The first unit, constructed circa 1873, is located on the west corner of South Broadway and West Main on the south side of West Main. It is a two-story brick building that has retained its cast iron frame with decorative corbelling on the second-story facade. The second-story arched windows have stone hood molds and stone sills, but have been boarded. The first-story facade has lost its original storefront which has been replaced with a continuous plate glass window and brick veneer panels. The northern elevation mirrors the Alexander Niswonger Building with porthole windows and decorative brickwork. Old painted grocery advertisements are still visible on the northern elevation.

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The circa 1897 building is situated on the corner of Bank and South Broadway. It is a two-story brick building with yellow glazed brick facade extending around the southern elevation. Two sets of double windows on the second-story have been covered with tin, but retain rust colored brick quoin surrounds and a continuous stone sill. The Providence Mining Company Incorporated sign, constructed of iron and erected circa 1908, still remains on the upper facade framed by extended yellow glazed brick headers. Like its companion building, the storefront has replacement plate glass windows and doors. However, the recessed entrance appears to be in situ as does the cast iron storefront corner posts.

The Dollar Store now occupies both buildings and has erected a modern metal yellow and black sign extending across the storefront of both buildings. The two storefronts are shaded with a continuous metal awning. (C) (photo #1)

9. Ruckman Store Incorporated, 108 South Broadway (c. 1905)

The only three-story brick building in the district. The storefront was remodeled with a metal and plate glass display windows. There is a brick veneer panel, but the canted door appears to have been retained. The four bay second and third-story facade has remained intact, although the windows have been boarded. The two upper floor facades are separated by a brick stepped-back broken string course dissected by vertical brick columns. Simple extended brick crosses topped by stepped-back brickwork complete the design work in each third-story recess. A rear shed addition was remodeled in 1980 with stucco applied to the exterior walls. A raised seam metal store front with replacement plate glass windows and brick veneer panel were added. Only the original wood and glass door remains. The rear shed addition was the original Ruckman Mining Company office with the Ruckman Coal Company Store occupied the main building. (C) (photo #2)

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10. N.T. Cole Building, 112 South Broadway (c. 1905) A two-story brick building with the facade mirroring the Ruckman Company Building third story facade. The N.T. Cole building has the same decorative brick work and arrangement of the bays as found on the third floor of the Ruckman Building. The storefront retains its plain galvanized frame, but sheet metal covers the transom and a new glass and metal door has been installed. The front panel has been covered with stone veneer. (C)

11. C. and P. Hardware, 114 South Broadway (c. 1900) A two-story brick building lacks bays on the second-story, but reflects identical brick columns found on the Ruckman and N.T. Cole buildings. Although the transoms have been covered with insets of tin, the storefront appears to be original. It is framed in cast iron with fluted corner columns and stylized leaf capital designs. The storefront retains its original recessed center entrance and double doors with rectangular light. It has retained the original wood panels with raised centers. (C)

12. Providence Bakery, 120 South Broadway (circa 1900) A two-story brick building with altered storefront. Ribbed metal obscures the original store display windows and a new metal and plate glass door sits in the recessed entrance. Only the cast iron frame is visible. The corner posts of the frame are fluted with Greek style palmette capitals. The second story facade has been divided into three sections by brick columns transected above and below the boarded arched windows with stepped-back string courses. (C)

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A one-story Beaux Arts styled building with a raised basement. It is a three bay, narrow brick building with a Bowling Green stone (marble) facade with four columns resting on rusticated stone piers. The two exterior columns have Doric style capitals with the center Ionic style capitals projecting from obelisk columns. Three segmental arched windows with Bowling Green stone hood moldings and sills are recessed into the facade between the columns. The recessed door is approached by stone steps and flanked by two boarded windows. The transoms over the lobby and windows have been covered with plywood. The entrance lobby floor has white pentagon tiles with the word "Bank" in dark red tiles. Two above ground basement windows located between the rusticated piers have been boarded. Above the entrance, three arched multi-paned bays with stone hood molds and sills give the building an appearance of being two-stories. The stylized cornice rests on stone dentils and brackets. "Providence Banking Co." is carved on and below the cornice. The triangular pediment contains the carved date of 1914. The rear windows on the upper elevation mirror the front multi-paned bays. (C) (photo #3)

14. Thompson Dry Goods, 111 South Broadway (1910) A

two-story brick building with a plain cast iron storefront is intact, except for ribbed metal over the transoms. The recessed wood and glass door is located at the north end of the storefront. There are three plate glass display windows with wood transoms and panels. The four, plywood covered, second-story bays have stone sills. The false front is pierced with two rectangular vents. A single row of brick coursework separates the facade from the false front. The southern elevation retains the original double wooden doors used for loading and unloading of merchandise. (C)

15. J.G.Gist Building, 115 South Broadway (c.1910) A

two-story brick building with an ornamented cast iron storefront and side entrance is intact except for plywood over the store display windows. The building features a recessed doorway and glass transoms. The cast iron frame has a floral design on the columns with fleur-de-leis decorated capitals. The second story is divided into three sections by brick columns. The one-over-

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one double sash arched windows have brick segmented lintels and stone sills. Brick dentils are below the cornice line of the false brick front. (C)

EAST MAIN (South Side)

16. Wynn Building, 102 East Main (1898) A two-story brick building that retains little of the original storefront except for a cast iron frame. The windows and recessed door have been replaced and the panel covered with a brick veneer. The transoms are boarded and a new metal awning has been installed. The second-story is intact and exhibits Neo-classical details in ornate metal hood molds and garlanded tin cornice. The windows have been boarded. A string course of stepped-back brick caps the hood molds with a decorative brick basket weave pattern transversing the space between two exterior brick columns. (C)

17. 104 East Main (c. 1890s) A two-story brick building with remodeled storefront of glass, metal and brick with sheet metal covering the transoms and extending to the second floor just below the windows. Traces of the cast iron frame can still be seen at the corner columns. The recessed entrance has a replacement door. The side entrance to the second-story has been removed and replaced with a narrow display window. The second-story facade has four bays that are one-over-one with brick hood molds and stone sills. The two center windows have a continuous hood mold and sill. The brick cornice rests on brick dentils. (C)

18. Wynn and Morgan Company, 106 East Main (c. late 1890s) A two-story brick building that is identical to 107 East Main. The storefront has been remodeled with sheet metal covering the transoms and extending to the second floor just below the windows. Traces of the cast iron frame can be seen at the corners of the storefront. The recessed front and side entrances to the second floor have replacement doors. The second-story facade is intact. (C)

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19. Boston Store, 108 East Main and 109 South Broadway (c. 1885) Two, two-story brick buildings have been joined by an open arch at the rear of the East Main building and the rear of the north wall of the building located on South Broadway. The facade of the the main entrance on East Main has a remodeled storefront with brick, metal and glass. Sheet metal covers an early sign panel. Only the cast iron frame columns remain in view. The second story has maintained its Victorian character. The South Broadway storefront has been completely remodeled with a glass and brick front. (C)

20. Union National Bank Building, 110 East Main (1912) A two-story brick building that was originally constructed as a bank and continues the same function. The original first-story facade has been enclosed in a historically compatible extended facade. The second story retains its original configuration, but the windows have been covered with green wooden shutters. The original geometric fretwork and brick corbels remain intact. (C)

21. Wither Howard Insurance Building, 112 East Main (c. 1910-21) A two-story brick building that lost almost all of its storefront integrity in 1974, when it was extensively remodeled. Only the cast iron metal frame is visible. The second story was recently uncovered and revealed a four bay yellow glazed brick facade. (C)

22. City Cafe, 114 East Main (c. 1909-1921) A two-story brick building that no longer retains any of its historical facade. The second-story bays are bricked over. Only a brick header cornice remains of the original facade. (NC)

23. J.B. Benjamin Hardware, 116 East Main (c. 1905) A two-story brick building that is eclectic in style. The unknown builder combined Italianate, Beaux Arts and Neo-classical styles in a compatible vernacular interpretation. The building appears to have retained its external facade and storefront. The five bay storefront has remained unchanged. The second-story facade has a balustrade of twisted wrought iron surrounding the projecting first floor roof. The facade retains its channeled brick columns and corbeling. Decorated metal



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brackets and lintels frame the shuttered bays. A swag decorated tin cornice supported with decorated tin dentils cap the facade.  
(C)

EAST MAIN (North Side)

24. Providence United States Post Office, 107 East Main  
(1961) A one story concrete block building with a veneer of brick. Modern glass and steel complete the building's facade.  
(NC)

25. Providence Downtown Park, Northeast corner of Broadway and Main Intersection (1989) The park contains brick walkways, wooden benches and artistically landscaped hedges and shrubs. The focal point of the park is a bronze statue of a coal miner. Beneath the stature is a bronze, open book style, plaque; set in concrete. The plaque acknowledges Providence's sesquicentennial in 1990 and the importance of coal mining to the region. It was donated by the Providence Chamber of Commerce. (NC site)

26. Citizens Bank Building, 109 East Main (1902) A two-story brick building that is one of a block of three buildings that reflect the high Victorian era aesthetics. The Citizens Bank Building, 111 East Main, and 113 East Main have retained their galvanized, unbroken pedimented and decorated iron hood molds, ornamented cast iron cornices and pediments. The facades are portholed with porthole windows situated above the three bays. The storefronts exhibit cast iron frames with fluted columns and stylized rosettes with Greek palmettes capitals. The Citizens Bank Building storefront has been remodeled with a plate glass door and brick veneer panel. A metal awning extends over the transom which has been covered with ridged metal. (C) (photo #4)

27. Perkins Furniture Store, 111 East Main (1902) A two-story brick building that mirrors 109 and 113 East Main. The three bay storefront has a replacement plate glass door and brick veneer panel. The original glass transom remains intact. Plywood covers the facade's three bays, but they retain their decorated iron hood molds and stone sills. (C)

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28. Providence-Enterprise Building, 113 East Main (1902) A two-story brick building that completes the block consisting of 109 and 111 East Main. The storefront retained its cast iron frame, but has been remodeled with a replacement plate glass door and brick veneer panel. The original glass transom is covered with ribbed metal and the facade bays are hidden behind plywood. The brickwork has been painted white, but the building retains all of the second-story facade decorated hood molds, cornice and pediment. (C)

29. Payne Auditorium, 115 East Main (c. 1905) A two-story brick building with altered storefront. The storefront has new display windows, plate glass double doors and brick veneer panel. A metal awning covers the storefront. The second-story facade retains its original details. The six bays have arched brick lintels and stone sills. A stepped-back brick string course symmetrically divides the facade into two sections transected by raised brick columns. The building is topped by a brick sawtoothed cornice. Decorated plywood covers the bays. (C)

30. Dr. Cardwell Building, 117 East Main (c. 1950) A one-story concrete block building with brick veneer. It has a plate glass door and two display windows. (NC)

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The Providence Commercial Historic District sits at the center of Providence, Kentucky and is significant within the historic context of the era of railroads and coal between 1882 and 1930. This era had an impact on the growth and development of the commercial district of Providence. The Providence Commercial Historic District is comprised of an important group of historic properties in the center of Providence. The District's period of significance occurred between 1882 and 1930. This time frame included the coming of the railroad lines to Providence in 1882, the establishment of the first major coal-mining company in Providence in 1888, the completion of all new construction in the district by 1912 and the Great Depression of 1930 which ended the prosperity and importance of the Western Kentucky coal fields. The district meets National Criterion A by reflecting the effects of two key events in the town's history, during that period: the building of the railroads in 1882 and the coal mining companies' arriving in 1888. The district reflects the importance of Providence as the mining companies' headquarters and as the place where the first financial institution in Webster County was established. In terms of Criterion A, it is significant in the area of commerce with the buildings in the district providing evidence of how Providence grew from a small early 19th century farming settlement to an important commercial and banking center in the late 19th and early 20th century. The district includes commercial and banking buildings that date from 1873 to 1912. Only one extant building in the district was constructed before 1885. The structure was built circa 1873 and became one of the two buildings that formed the headquarters for the Providence Mining Company, (WEP-8. #8). This structure reflects the bridge between the earlier settlement period of the Commercial Historic District and the later boom years in the district. The Providence Mining Company headquarters and other buildings in the district provide an excellent picture of the development of Providence during the western Kentucky coal boom between 1888 and 1930.

The planning and development of Providence from 1820 to 1882 is the best framework for discussing the significance of the diverse commercial and banking resources in the district and the streets and lots on which they are located. These buildings and their setting are extremely significant in Providence and Webster County for providing excellent documentation of how the

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county's largest town was laid out and developed. Providence is the largest town in the county, but unlike many other towns of its size in western Kentucky, it is not the county seat, and the commercial center is not located around a square. Its period of significance begins in 1882 with the construction of the railroad lines into Providence until 1930, the year the economy began a dramatic downturn and ended the district's historic development.

### The Planning and Development of Providence: 1820 - 1882

Providence was founded on 158 acres purchased by Richard Savage in 1820. The acreage encompassed two trails that intersected at the top of "Buzzard's Roost". These trails had been used by Indians; later settlers in western Kentucky had appropriated these trails as roads into the area. Sometime between 1825 and 1830 Savage cleared the hill and adjacent land and laid out 24 town lots. Savage built a trading post on lot #1 which is thought to be on the lot where the Pantry stands today. By 1837 Savage had also built a tavern. Daniel and his brother William Head and Wiley Ledbetter constructed stores on the corners of what is now Broadway and Main. From Providence's earliest days, commercial uses have defined the main crossing streets.

Madisonville lies fourteen miles to the southeast, Henderson is thirty-six miles to the north and Princeton is located twenty miles south of Providence. Providence's rapid expansion of business in the first three years can be attributed to the distances between these other settlements and the needs of the settlers for businesses that could supply their needs more quickly with less travel and inconvenience. The area farmers welcomed a local source of supply and a distribution point for their surplus crops. This new community and its thriving businesses also gave impetus to more families coming into the area to settle. Providence's location at the center of the Madisonville, Princeton and Henderson trails made it an ideal place for businessmen who would profit from its crossroads location. The early businessmen were quick to recognize the potential and erected their businesses at the crossroads where they would have optimum access to trade and customers. These first commercial buildings, one and two-story frame or log

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structures, were quickly erected to house their new businesses. None of these early buildings have survived. The town's name was changed to Savagewille and by 1830 the name Providence was adopted.

Providence had a slow but steady growth between 1840 and 1880 with the population more than doubling. In 1840 Frankfort passed an act to establish the town of Providence. There were 101 citizens listed as residents in 1840, with 5 stores, 2 hotels, a brick school house, two Baptist churches, a Masonic Hall, and three tobacco stemmeries.

The first coal mine was opened by Ambrose Lovan in the 1840s. This coal mine was the forerunner of a boom that would increase the prosperity of the town and create the present business district. There were five other small local mines in operation between 1858-1861.

Providence was incorporated in 1860 and played a leading role in the newly established county of Webster which was formed from parts of Hopkins, Union and Henderson Counties in 1861. Although Providence was the largest town in the new county, it was decided that Dixon would become the county seat since it was located in the center of the county.

At first the commercial buildings were interspersed with residential buildings, but as the town grew, these homes gave way to other businesses which extended along Main and Broadway from the apex of the two roads. By 1870 the first brick commercial business was constructed on South Broadway by Thomas Kerr Givens. It was a dry goods and grocery business built on the lot which now houses the Broadway entrance of Baynham's (WEP-19, #19).

Development in Providence in the Era of Railroads and Coal,  
1882-1930

In 1880 there were 267 people living in Providence who would benefit from the extension of the L & N Railroad which ran a line from Madisonville to Providence in 1882. By 1885 a railroad bridge was constructed over the Ohio River which linked Providence to Evansville, Indiana. This bridge would facilitate

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the means for cheap transportation from Providence to northern cities. Two other lines also came into the town in 1905. They were the Kentucky Valley Railroad Company and the Morganfield and Atlanta Railroad. The railroad lines brought added employment and business to Providence. Hotels and stores were also opened near the railroad tracks and station.

The three railroad lines were important to the agri-business, but the impetus for their establishment was coal. It was the railroads that facilitated a coal boom in Providence. With the coming of the railroads, western Kentucky coal soon replaced Pittsburg coal as the fuel of choice for cities such as Louisville, Evansville, Memphis, and Nashville.

The years between 1888 and 1930 were the pivotal years in Providence's commercial and business history. Between 1890 and 1930 the population of Providence increased from 522 to 4742. Most of this increase was related to coal mining. To serve this increased population, more businesses were opened and older businesses now had the funds to rebuild more lasting and fitting edifices that reflected the prosperity of their community.

The first major coal-mining company to locate in Providence was organized in 1888. It was the Providence Coal Company which re-organized as the Providence Mining Company in 1908. The company opened three mines in or around Providence between 1888 and 1910. The Ruckman Coal Company began operation in 1909 and expanded in 1921 to include the Duvin Coal Company and later the Highland Mining Company and the Clover Creek Coal Company. The Diamond Coal Company was formed in 1909. The prosperity of the mining industry is reflected in the many new buildings constructed in the district between 1890 and 1914. During this time, 25 of the present businesses were built to replace earlier buildings on the commercial lots. W. A. Nisbet, the first president of the Providence Coal Company, his brother W.J. Nisbet, and the company's general manager and traveling agent Percy Berry, were responsible for much of the new construction.

In 1897 W.J. Nisbet constructed the Providence Mining Company building (WEP-8, #8) on the corner of Bank and South Broadway. It was an imposing two-story red brick building faced

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with glazed yellow brick for use as the company offices. A more traditional red brick building was built on the corner of Main and South Broadway for use as the company store. During the early days, the buildings were lighted from their own electric system and they also supplied the current for all of Providence. When the Ruckman Brothers formed their coal company in 1909, they built their company store and headquarters across Bank Street from the Providence Mining Company. Their importance to the community was reflected in the only three-story building in the town (WEP-9, #9). These two buildings, the Providence Mining Company and the Ruckman Building exhibit the prominence and importance of coal mining to the town and to the area by either their size or distinctive facade.

The Ruckman Brothers Building was one of four new buildings constructed in the South Broadway block between Bank and Cedar Street circa 1905. The M.T. Cole Building (WEP-10, #10), the C & P Hardware Store (WEP-11, #11) and the Providence Bakery (WEP-12, #12) reflect the same style of facade. At one time all the heat for these buildings was supplied by a huge coal furnace located in the basement of the Ruckman building.

In 1910 the Nisbets and Berry built four buildings known as the Nisbet-Berry Block (WEP-3, #3, WEP-4, #4, WEP-5, #5, and WEP-6, #6). These four two-story brick commercial buildings face West Main on the north side of the street. The structures represent an expression of the owners' confidence in Providence's commercial prosperity and growth of the community. These buildings were the first commercial structures to extend the central business district west on Main toward the railroad station.

On the site of the Wiley Ledbetter store, Alexander Niswonger opened a grocery and hardware business. The building burned in 1889 and he immediately built a new store on the same site. This structure burned in 1911. Niswonger rebuilt the store the same year and this building (WEP-1, #1) still stands today with the original freight elevator and some of the original store shelves. It is one of three buildings built in the block in 1911 that are referred to as the Niswonger Block (WEP-1, #1 and WEP-2, #2)

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The increased prosperity and importance of Providence as a center for coal mining operations in the western coal field made the town an active participant in the national economy. Businessmen from across the nation were coming to Webster County to do business with these coal mines and they needed access to banking facilities. This contact with the major centers in the United States led Thomas Kerr Givens to establish the first bank in Providence and Webster County in 1885. The building that housed the first bank was torn down and replaced in 1914. The new Providence Banking Company was housed in the only Beaux-Arts building constructed in Providence (WEP-13, #13). It is an imposing building constructed of Bowling Green stone, a marble quarried in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Although it had a narrow facade, the building reflects a high style of architecture found in many major cities and makes a statement of affluence.

A second bank was organized in 1902 by D.B. Baker with T.B. Payne as president. This was the Citizens Bank (WEP-26, #26). These men built their bank as part of a block of buildings on the north side of East Main. They built four impressive two-story brick edifices that reflected a more eclectic Victorian commercial style with elements of Richardsonian Romanesque. These four buildings (WEP-26 #26, WEP-27, #27, WEP-28, #28, and WEP-29, #29) exhibit ornate cast iron frames, elaborately decorated iron hood molds, cornices, and pediments. Their decorative facades are a focal point on East Main. The structures are also a visual statement of prosperity derived from the coal mines, railroads, agri-business and a larger purchasing population.

The increased importance of Providence led to the opening of the third bank in 1912. The Union National Bank (WEP-20, #20) was organized by A.E. Orr. The building housing this new bank was different than the other two as its facade incorporated a more modern appearance with geometric fretwork, brick corbelling and large plate glass windows. Four glazed brick columns supported the second story front. The original building was set back eight feet from the sidewalk, the only building on the block to be recessed. It is the last standing historic building to be built in the district.



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Prior to the building of the Union National Bank, three other businesses on the block were torn down and replaced with brick edifices. The J.B. Benjamin Hardware Building (WEP-23, #23 is the largest of these buildings. Built circa 1905, it is eclectic in style with a compatible combination of Italianate, Beaux Arts and Neo-classical styles. Benjamin came to Providence in 1886, in time to supply the building needs of the rapidly expanding community. This structure is virtually intact and of the businesses built in the district, it exhibits a style that is distinct from the others.

In 1902 new sidewalks were built throughout the town. The population doubled every decade between 1890 and 1920, more houses were built, new businesses opened, including two automobile dealerships and four hotels. The late teens and twenties saw other new buildings and improvements in the town. A two-story city hall and fire station were built in 1924. In 1929 a bond issue led to the installation of a water filtering plant.

Providence was not spared in 1930 when the world-wide depression began. Mining had decreased since the end of World War I and by 1929 the demand for coal from the mines in the western field was at a low ebb because of adverse freight rates to Chicago. By late 1930 forty-five mines in the field had closed. Modern machinery made the remaining miners fear for their jobs and strikes became bloody. Violence accelerated with bombings and shootings. The only building in the town during this financial crisis was that undertaken by The Works Progress Administration which built a bridge, paved roads and built a wall around the football field at the Providence High School. The depression also meant an end to the changes in the commercial business district. Merchants were no longer able to tear down earlier buildings and replace them with newer commercial structures.

Providence: 1930 - 1992

There was a minor coal boom during World War II, but profits from renewed business was used to shore up and restore the losses of the depression years. The downtown business commercial district remained intact until 1950 when the Dr.

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Cardwell Building (WEP-30, #30) was constructed at the eastern edge of the district. The Post Office (WEP-25, #25) was constructed in 1961 and, in 1989, the city park (WEP- 24, #24) was placed on the site of the 1920s Eskind building which had been torn down in the late 1960s.

Today, the commercial business district appears much as it did in the 1920s except for the few intrusions mentioned above. Only two of the historic buildings have been extensively altered and rendered non-contributing. They are the H. Cooper and Company Building (WEP-2, #2) and the City Cafe (WEP-22, #22). Most of the commercial buildings are still occupied along East Main and Broadway. The buildings on West Main are unoccupied.

The commercial business district reflects the coal boom period in western Kentucky through its imposing coal mine headquarters and the three distinctive bank buildings that resulted from this boom. The businesses built during this period show the affluence of the the community leaders who could expend their finances on distinguished commercial buildings with decorative details expressed in cast iron storefronts, effusive molded window hoods, cornices and brick corbelling. These businessmen were aware of visual aesthetics and expended the time and money to present an integrated vision of a prosperous and cosmopolitan commercial business district worthy of the investment of local and outside capital.

The 1990s have seen a renewed interest in the district by the citizens of Providence. They have replaced the street lights with those compatible with the turn-of-the-century and instigated a survey of the district to increase awareness of their heritage. Building owners are beginning a restoration and rehabilitation program. The owners of the Alexander Niswonger building (WEP-1, #1) have restored the interior and are in the process of rehabilitating the exterior of the building with exposing and repainting of the cast iron storefront. The owner of the Wither Howard Insurance Building (WEP-21, #21) has removed the sheet metal covering from the second-story facade. The Chamber of Commerce plans to rehabilitate the Providence

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Banking Company Building (WEP-13, #13). This nomination also affirms the commitment of its sponsors, the Providence Chamber of Commerce, to the town's history in the preservation and restoration of the core of Providence's commercial historic district.

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## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The proposed Providence Commercial Historic District is situated within the corporate limits of the town of Providence, Kentucky. The resources are located along the 100-200 blocks of East and West Main and North and South Broadway. The district boundaries follow property lines and streets.

The boundary begins on the north side of East Main at the northeast corner of the lot containing the Dr. Caldwell Building and proceeds along the side of the lot to its southeast corner and crosses East Main in a line to the northeast corner of 116 East Main and proceeds along the lot boundary where it turns west and proceeds along the southern boundaries of 116, 114, 112, and 110 East Main. At the southwest corner of 110 East Main the boundary turns south along the rear of lots 109 and 111 South Broadway to the southeast corner of 115 South Broadway. The boundary turns west to the southwest corner of 115 South Broadway. The boundary crosses South Broadway, at that point, and angles to the southwest to the east corner of 120 South Broadway lot located at the corner of South Broadway and Cedar streets. It proceeds west along Cedar Street until the western corner of Cedar and Walnut streets. At the corner of Cedar and Walnut it turns northwest following the western boundaries of lots 120, 114, 112, and 108 South Broadway. The boundary crosses Bank Street at this point and proceeds to the northwest corner of lot 100-104 South Broadway at the corner of Walnut and West Main. It crosses West Main at a westwardly angle to the southwest corner of the lot containing 113 West Main. The boundary continues to the northwest corner of the lot and then turns northeast and runs along the northern side of the lots for 113, 111, 109, 107, and 105 West Main. It proceeds across the alley to the northwest corner of 106 North Broadway and continues to the northeast corner of 106 North Broadway. The boundary continues across North Broadway where it runs along the northeast side of the city park, and continues on this side of lots 107, 109, 111, 113, 115, and 117 East Main until it reaches the northeast corner of 117 East Main, the beginning point.  
[See District Map]



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## BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

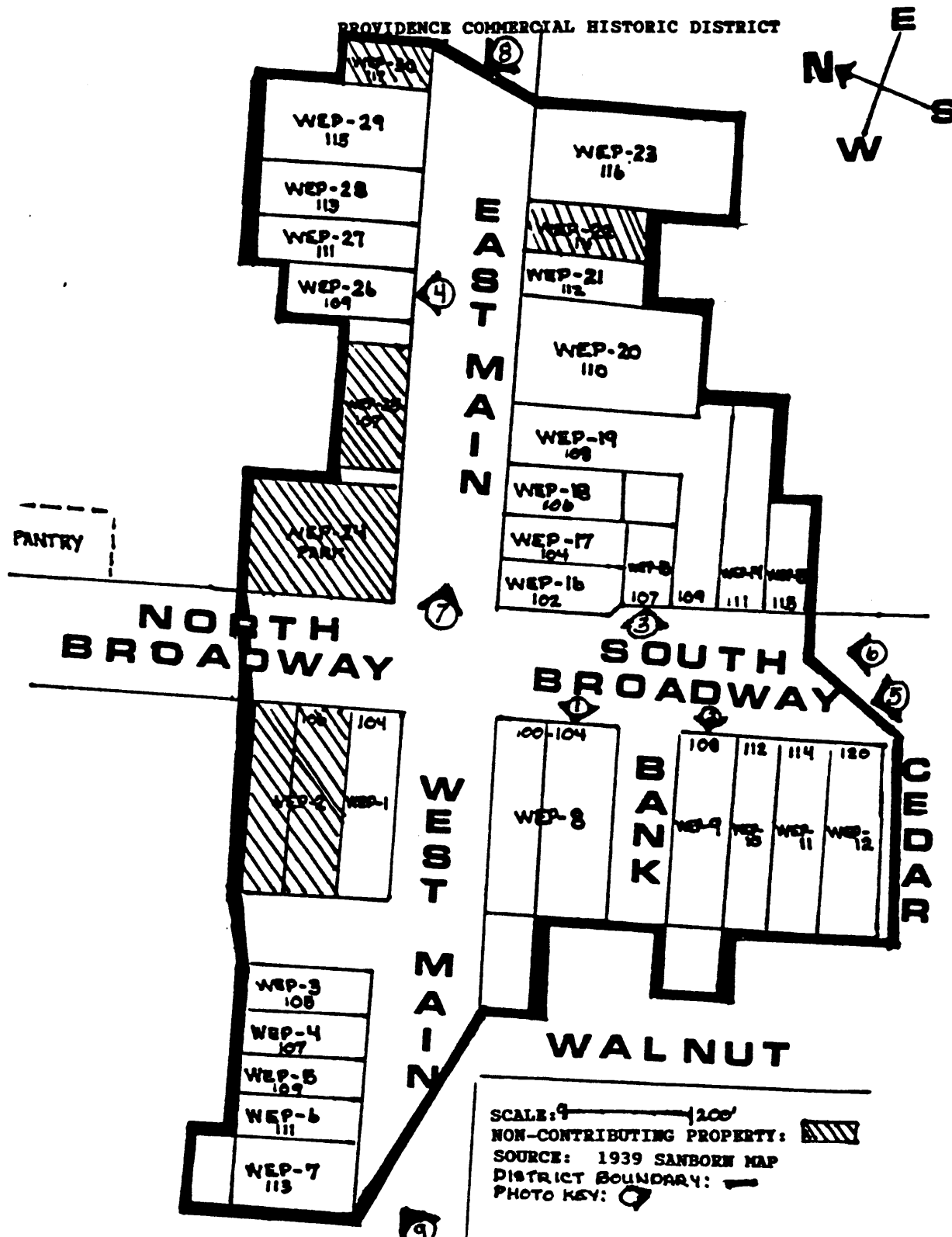
The boundary encompasses a cohesive collection of 19th and 20th century resources that form the heart of Providence's Commercial Historic District. The boundary was drawn to include the main blocks of the commercial buildings and to exclude peripheral buildings that do not contribute to the district's historic character. Overall, the district retains a high degree of architectural and historic integrity. See also page 7-5.

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SCALE: 1" = 120'  
 NON-CONTRIBUTING PROPERTY: [Hatched Box]  
 SOURCE: 1939 SANBORN MAP  
 DISTRICT BOUNDARY: [Thick Line]  
 PHOTO KEY: [Circle with Number]

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PHOTOGRAPHS

- Photo #1: 3. Lynn David  
4. October 1991  
5. Kentucky Heritage Council  
300 Washington  
Frankfort, KY 40601  
(The above information same for all photographs)  
6. East facade looking northwest
- Photo #2: 6. East facade looking west
- Photo #3: 6. West facade looking east
- Photo #4: 6. South facade looking north
- Photo #5: 6. Streetscape west side of South Broadway looking north
- Photo #6: 6. Streetscape east side of South Broadway looking north
- Photo #7: 6. Streetscape south side of East Main looking southeast
- Photo #8: 6. Streetscape north side of East Main looking northwest
- Photo #9: 6. Streetscape north side of West Main looking northeast