

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH 0692 867

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED DEC 5 1978

DATE ENTERED

APR 6 1979

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME Historic Resources of Central Falls, Rhode Island
HISTORIC (Partial Inventory: Historic and Architectural Properties)

AND/OR COMMON

Central Falls Multiple Resource Area

2 LOCATION *various locations in Central Falls*

STREET & NUMBER Incorporation limits of Central Falls, Rhode Island

CITY, TOWN

Central Falls

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

#1 Honorable Fernand J. St. Germain

STATE

Rhode Island

CODE

44

COUNTY

Providence

CODE

007

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

—DISTRICT

—BUILDING(S)

—STRUCTURE

—SITE

—OBJECT

Multiple resource

OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC

☒ PRIVATE *(see cont. sheet)*

—BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

—IN PROCESS

—BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED

☒ UNOCCUPIED

☒ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES: RESTRICTED

☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED

—NO

PRESENT USE

—AGRICULTURE

☒ COMMERCIAL

—EDUCATIONAL

—ENTERTAINMENT

☒ GOVERNMENT

☒ INDUSTRIAL

—MILITARY

—MUSEUM

☒ PARK

☒ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

☒ RELIGIOUS

—SCIENTIFIC

—TRANSPORTATION

☒ OTHER: Nursinghome

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Multiple ownership

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Central Falls City Hall

STREET & NUMBER

580 Broad Street

CITY, TOWN

Central Falls

STATE

Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Statewide Historical Preservation Report, P-CF-1, Central Falls, R.I.

DATE

January, 1978

—FEDERAL ☒ STATE —COUNTY —LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN

150 Benefit Street

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

See continuation sheet 1

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET

1

ITEM NUMBER 6

PAGE 2

Rhode Island: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites, HAER, to be published, 1978: Central Falls Mill Historic District, Fales and Jenks Mill, Jenks Park and Cogswell Tower, Valley Falls Mill.

13182 1883

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☒ EXCELLENT
☒ GOOD
☒ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

(7A.)

The Multiple Resource Area encompassed in this nomination is the entire city of Central Falls, Rhode Island. Central Falls is bounded by the Blackstone River and Valley Falls Pond on the north and east, the town of Lincoln on the west, and the city of Pawtucket on the south. Part of the Providence metropolitan area, the city is approximately 6 miles directly north from Providence; it is roughly square in shape and is only 1.3 square miles in area.

Topographically, the city has a generally flat, outwash terrain, except for the steep banks of the Blackstone River and bedrock outcroppings visible at several points. The topsoil is relatively thin and not well suited for agriculture. Several minor hills were graded during 19th-century development.

The Blackstone River is the most important natural feature and was a major force in the evolution of Central Falls; it makes up over half of the city's boundaries and, although not a large river, was intensively used throughout the 19th-century as a source of power. As the water flows down from Valley Falls Pond toward Narragansett Bay, it passes between steep banks and over a series of falls -- Valley Falls at the north end of Broad Street; the middle waterfalls (the source of the city's name) at the north end of Roosevelt Avenue; and to the south, Pawtucket Falls. The physical appearance of the falls has been modified by filling and by the construction of dams.

Although it is the smallest municipality in Rhode Island, Central Falls is intensively developed and ranks fifteenth in population (with 15,600 persons per square mile). The man-made environment is unusually extensive, with only small scattered parcels of open land.

The most visually prominent of Central Falls' historic resources are its mills and churches. On its Roosevelt Avenue side the Mill Historic District is obscured by the Bryan Marsh Mill, but from the river side it is an impressive array of large industrial structures. The Valley Falls Mill is prominently sited, its large tower dominating the skyline of its neighborhood. Central Falls' churches, most located at the center of residential neighborhoods, are similarly prominent. Set among groups of 2- and 3-story houses, their scale, mass, and towering steeples make them major visual landmarks.

The most easily recognized and widely visible of all of Central Falls' resources is Cogswell Tower in Jenks Park. Though the park entrance fronts on Broad Street, it is almost hidden from the street view, tucked in between a row of houses on Summit Street and Notre Dame Church. However, Cogswell Tower, rising above the park and the city is visible for miles. Not only visually prominent, the tower is symbolically important and is by common assent the sign and emblem of the city.

See continuation sheet 2

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET

2

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 2

7B.

The city of Central Falls achieved its primary historical significance during the eighty years between 1820 and 1900. The city had its origins in two small industrial villages -- Valley Falls and Central Falls -- located at the falls of the Blackstone River.

By 1820, only tiny clusters of buildings existed in each of the villages. At Valley Falls, the Wilkinsons' Mill (and perhaps a small cluster of houses) were the only evidence of development, connected to Pawtucket by the Valley Falls Turnpike. In Central Falls no more than 2 or 3 small wooden mills for textile and metals operation existed. In the next decade, there was some expansion of the industrial plant at Central Falls, with small stone and brick mills supplementing the earlier wooden ones. Mill workers' houses are known to have existed at this time in Central Falls, though none of this period remain; and the first civic building, a small one-room school-house, had been constructed.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Central Falls was still largely an extension of development to the south in Pawtucket and Providence. The major roads of the area and the railroad (1847) were oriented to the south, and the traffic of materials, goods, and people was directed south. In the 1850s, the population (probably under 1500) was still clustered in two small industrial centers on the river: the Chace family's Valley Falls Mill (1849) accounted for the growth of the more northerly village; and Central Falls, the more substantial of the two, was developing in a linear fashion along High Street and Roosevelt Avenue. A number of east-west side streets, existing by the 1860s and crossing from Roosevelt to the Valley Falls Turnpike, were the site of the shops and homes of the residents.

The decades between 1860 and 1895 witnessed a phenomenal growth in economic activity, population, and construction. By the turn of the century, Central Falls' basic street and land use patterns were set in their present form; virtually all of the city's land had been platted and much of it built upon; the villages of Central Falls and Valley Falls were no longer distinct as construction filled in the open space between them; and the area had lost its village orientation. It took on a characteristically urban form, symbolized by the incorporation of the city of Central Falls in 1895.

The political, social, and civic coming-of-age which took place in the late 19th century in Central Falls was revealed in the physical form of the city: significant industrial zones, large tracts of multi-family housing, and a number of imposing religious and civic buildings. In the older, southeastern section of the city there was little undeveloped space by 1895. Mills lined the river bank from

See continuation sheet 3

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 3 . ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3

the middle falls southward, and the land enclosed by the river and the railroad was occupied by a variety of residences and shops. The central section of the city (between Broad Street and Lonsdale Avenue) was, except for its northernmost section, occupied by long, shallow blocks tightly packed with houses. The commercial enterprises of the city were located along Broad and Central Streets. (see also: Accompanying Documentation for series of maps illustrating physical development of the area.)

7C.1.

Central Falls' present building stock was largely created within the few decades of the mid and late 19th century. Little remains of its early 19th century development: only a few mills and a scattering of modified Greek Revival houses. No civic or church buildings constructed prior to the Civil War survive. Likewise, little building has taken place since the 1930s; 90 per cent of Central Falls' housing pre-dates 1939.

The extraordinary expansion of development in the 19th century, a result of industrial prosperity, is reflected in the buildings which remain today. The city's small share of architecturally ambitious houses, built in a variety of Victorian styles, is largely confined to the southern section of Central Falls, the city's most prestigious neighborhood, where they are surrounded by smaller single-family houses built by the middle class.

Modest 2- and 3-family houses and occasional single-family houses, built along narrow blocks, set close together, and with no particular stylistic treatment fill the large central section of the city. Most of these houses were built by small contractor-builders with modest capital and few legal controls. As a result, the neighborhoods built between 1860 and 1900 exhibit a heterogeneous mixture of building types and numerous variations in siting, plan and style. As pressure on limited land grew stronger in the early 20th century, scattered vacant lots were built upon and some landowners subdivided already-established lots and built behind existing buildings. More common was the creation of small side lots between older houses. This "filling-in" process has resulted in a mixture of styles and types along the city's streets.

Central Falls' residential buildings are constructed, for the most part, of wood -- the solidity of brick and stone being reserved for industrial, church, and civic buildings. Most structures are 2 or 3 stories tall, even along the commercial

See continuation sheet 4

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APP 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET

4

ITEM NUMBER

7

PAGE

4

areas of Broad and Dexter Streets. Notably out of scale with their environment are two new elderly housing projects -- tall massive structures, without precedent in the city.

7C.2.

The man-made environment of Central Falls is unusually extensive, with little open land remaining, and is characterized by dense development with structures set close together.

The city's land use pattern is heterogeneous; land use controls were adopted only in the 1960s and, since most of the city had been built by then, zoning is not prescriptive, but rather descriptive of building decisions made decades earlier and based on economics, convenience, and idiosyncrasy.

Industry is concentrated on the east between Broad Street and the Blackstone and west of Dexter Street. Although both areas contain residential sections, most of the city's housing is located in the truncated triangle formed by Dexter and Broad Streets and varies in density, with the least compact development occupying the area around Shawmut Avenue.

The river front industrial section and the neighboring residential areas are separated from the rest of the city by the tracks of the Providence and Worcester Railroad line, traversing the area in a north-south direction and branching off across the Blackstone River south of Blackstone Street. Although the tracks interrupt east-west traffic across the city, there are crossings at Clay, Jenks, and Cross Streets, Sacred Heart Avenue, and Blackstone, Hunt and High Streets.

Three major thoroughfares traverse Central Falls in a north-south direction: Broad Street (State Route 114), Dexter Street, and Lonsdale Avenue (State Route 122). They connect Central Falls with Pawtucket and Providence to the south and with the mill villages along the Blackstone to the north. The fact that the city developed along pre-existing roads rather than around a village center is reflected in the linear concentration of commercial activity along Broad and Dexter Streets. The city's major public buildings and Jenks Park are located on Broad Street between Central and Fales Street.

The street pattern of Central Falls reflects its stages of growth. The south-eastern section, where the earliest development occurred, is characterized by an irregular street pattern, with dead-end streets and uneven lot and block sizes.

See continuation sheet 5

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET

5

ITEM NUMBER

7

PAGE

5

The rest of the city, developed largely in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, has a more even pattern, with streets and lots typically meeting at right angles.

7C.3. See land use map of Central Falls.

7D.

No comprehensive archaeological survey or testing has yet taken place in Central Falls; no archaeological sites are listed on the state inventory. Although river banks near the fall lines were likely the location of seasonal fisheries activity during the prehistoric period, intensive development of these same locations during the recent historic period suggests a very low survival potential for pre-historic resources.

A cultural resource reconnaissance survey undertaken for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers evaluated the proposed impact of flood control measures for sections of the lower Blackstone River, including portions of Central Falls (G. Moran, 1976. Cultural Resource Reconnaissance: Slater Mill Dam Modification and Blackstone River Basin Study). While no subsurface testing was undertaken, industrial archaeology potential of standing and below grade components in Central Falls was briefly described and evaluated.

A more systematic description of industrial archaeology is represented by the recently completed HAER Survey (Rhode Island: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites, to be published, 1978).

7E.

The historical and architectural survey of Central Falls was initiated by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission in cooperation with the Division of Planning, of the City of Central Falls in July, 1975. The survey was conducted by Pamela A. Kennedy, Senior Historical Survey Specialist (historian) and Richard W. Longstreth, Consultant (architectural historian), of the Preservation Commission's staff. The results of the survey were reviewed by David Chase, Deputy Director (architectural historian), and by members of the Rhode Island Review Board: Winslow Ames (architectural historian), Antoinette F. Downing (architectural historian), Irving Haynes (architect) William Jordy (architectural historian), Albert T. Klyberg (historian), and Geoffrey P. Moran (archaeologist).

See continuation sheet 6

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET

6

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 6

The entire area of Central Falls was included in the survey; every structure visible from a public right-of-way was examined on its exterior. For approximately 500 buildings, standard R. I. Historical Preservation Commission "Historic Building Data Sheets" were completed (see p. 59 of survey report). Each survey property was identified by plat and lot numbers, address, ownership, present use, neighborhood land use, and at least one photograph. Each property is identified by one or more broad time period designations. The "comments" section of the data sheet includes brief notations regarding a building's style, structure, details, function, present condition, architectural significance, and relationship to its environment. The "History and Sources" section includes notes on individuals, organizations, and events associated with the building; dates and nature of significant additions or alterations; and selected bibliographical references, including identifications on historical maps and in city directories. An "Evaluation" section appraises various aspects of a property's preservation value.

A large area of the city (roughly, the southern tier), including approximately one fourth of the city, was surveyed intensively; that is, every building, regardless of apparent architectural or historical value, was surveyed. This area was chosen because it represented the limits of earliest development and because, on the basis of preliminary work, it seemed to present the highest concentration of historically valuable structures. The remainder of the city, though it was examined as completely, was surveyed selectively for important and representative buildings.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

(8A.)

The historic resources of Central Falls, including one district and nine individual structures (four of which are already entered on the National Register) represent many of the historical forces which shaped the growth of this small industrial city. They include three important houses, two major churches, a mill district, an individual mill, a small neighborhood schoolhouse, and a city park.

In its earliest years, the undeveloped land of Central Falls was part of the "North Woods" of Providence. Only sparsely settled throughout the 18th century, the area did not experience intensive development until technological innovations made the water power of the Blackstone River a valuable resource. The community was shaped largely by the process of industrialization, and, among the historic resources of the city, industrial structures hold primacy. They include two dams, part of a trench system, and industrial district and an individual mill located on major falls of the river. Central Falls' location on the east coast rail corridor was a key factor in sustaining its 19th century industrial development and included in this nomination is one major industrial building on the rail line. The wealth created by manufacturing is visible not only in the mills themselves, but also in the houses built by several of Central Falls' industrial magnates.

Central Falls' early population consisted mostly of Yankee families and some Englishmen and Scots employed in the textile industries. However, the city as it exists today is largely the product of building for and by the large immigrant population which arrived in Central Falls between 1840 and 1920. As in many New England industrial cities, these immigrants were drawn first from Ireland, and later from French Canada (especially Quebec's small towns and farms), Poland, Syria and Russia. Most of the immigrants came to work in the city's mills and the demands they placed on the city's housing market for eighty years resulted in the extensive development of densely concentrated residential building which characterizes Central Falls. Architecturally and culturally, the most significant legacy of these ethnic groups is the Catholic church built by each community.

For most of its history, Central Falls was not an independent municipal entity; it had been a village in the town of Smithfield, and was later a semi-independent fire district in Smithfield and Lincoln, before its eventual incorporation in 1895. The continuing theme of Central Falls 19th-century political history is the pressure of population and the demands for municipal services placed on an inadequate

See continuation sheet 35

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 35

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

(until 1895) governmental framework. One well-preserved 19th-century schoolhouse remains to document this long-standing political dilemma.

8B and C.

First Settlement (to 1750)

Before the arrival of European settlers, the land which is now the city of Central Falls was probably common ground used by the Nipmuc, Wampanoag, and Narragansett Indians. When European settlement began in Rhode Island, this Indian territory offered few advantages to the early settlers and development in the vicinity preceded very slowly in the 17th century.

In 1636, Roger Williams and his followers acquired the land of Central Falls as part of Providence. The land was not included in the original laying out of Providence and remained the common property of the town, "lands of public domain," to be sold to newcomers to the colony. It is unclear whether 17th century landowners actually lived in the area, but it is likely that they did not.

Central Falls was, however, the scene of a major confrontation between white settlers and Indians during King Philip's War. In March, 1676, the garrison of Rehoboth, Massachusetts, on the offensive against Canonchet, was wiped out on the banks of the Blackstone River.

In 1714, the Smithfield Road (now Lonsdale Avenue) was built to provide access from Providence to the Blackstone Valley. In Central Falls this north-south road was connected to the falls and fords of the river by footpaths. Despite the thinly-scattered population of the region, the colony's legislature, prompted by transportation and communication difficulties between Providence and this "North Woods" region, created three new towns in the area in 1730. The small area now known as Central Falls became part of the new town of Smithfield, one of the largest towns in the state.

Early Use of Water Power (1750-1820)

The first use of Central Falls' most valuable natural resource, its water power, and the origin of all later industrial development occurred during the 1750s when Benjamin Jenks built a power trench by the side of the river and erected a snuff

See continuation sheet 36

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 36

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 3

mill. However, it was not until the construction of the first dam in 1780 that extensive use of the middle falls was made possible. The dam was built by Sylvanus Brown of Pawtucket for Charles Keene, who manufactured edged tools in a shop near Roosevelt Avenue.

By 1812, there was two small mills and two dwelling houses at the site. The War of 1812 provided a boost for the infant settlement when Stephen Jenks, under a contract with the federal government to manufacture 10,000 muskets, set up a machine shop here to finish the weapons.

Development at the Valley Falls proceeded at an equally small scale during this period. The Wilkinson family, known for their mechanical and inventive enterprise, were the first to use the water power here. The Wilkinson brothers, David, Abraham, and Isaac, built a small metal products mill here in 1823, located on the recently completed Valley Falls Turnpike (now Broad Street; chartered in 1813). The turnpike was built by Isaac Wilkinson and considerably mitigated transportation difficulties for these early manufacturers.

By 1820, the two villages of Central Falls were still infant settlements of but a few families, accessible from the south only by two roads and separated by uninhabited territory. But the industrial pattern set in these early decades of development continued through Central Falls' history. The metals industry (soon to be joined by textile manufacture) remained a cornerstone of the city's economy throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. None of the houses or factories of this early period remain today.

Emergence of an Industrial Center (1820-1830)

During the 1820s, the development of Central Falls expanded considerably as a regulation of water power rights led to an expansion of the small industries and, in turn, attracted a growing population. In 1823, the water power of the middle falls was divided among the members of the Central Falls Mill Owners Association. The power was divided into six separate privileges apportioned to individual owners, who were each entitled to an aperture in the side of a canal dug roughly parallel to the Blackstone River. This division and regulation of the use of the river's power promoted the first real boom in Central Falls' development; in 1815, there had been three small thread mills here; by 1825 there were eight textile operations, six making cotton cloth, two spinning cotton thread. Within a few years, four of the six power rights were occupied; two mills from this period survive, the

See continuation sheet 37

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 37

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 4

Kennedy mill (on Privilege 1) and the Pawtucket Thread Mill (on Privilege 3). Both are included in the Central Falls Mill Historic District.

The importance of the hamlet lay in its industrial plant since the village was still outside the major commercial and industrial areas of the state and was, for the most part, an extension of development further to the south in Pawtucket. Little genuine community life existed as yet: a small schoolhouse was built in 1920, but religious services were conducted only intermittently by visiting clergy.

The Beginnings of Urbanization (1830-1860)

In the thirty years between 1830 and 1860, the potential for growth revealed in the 1820s was realized, though Central Falls and Valley Falls remained discrete industrial villages.

In Central Falls, industrial development continued along the riverside and followed the earlier pattern of textile and metal enterprises. Several small wooden mills, none of which survive, were added to the industrial plant. The small brick Kennedy Mill was expanded by the Stafford Company until it reached its present large dimensions.

The more extensive development of Valley Falls was largely the product of investment by the Chace family and their Valley Falls Company. Samuel and Harvey B. Chace built a large mill here in 1849 and, in 1854, constructed a new dam and canal.

Although the number of mills in the area did not increase substantially (from 14 in 1835 to 17 in 1845), the productive capacity of each expanded considerably, as did their average size, number of employess, and the output of individual workers. This change in the scale of operations brought an increasingly population; it is estimated that in 1832 about 500 people were employed in manufacturing here; by 1850, there were 800 and over 1000 by 1860.

Increasing population and productivity intensified the need for a more sophisticated transport system, a need filled by the construction of the Providence and Worcester Railroad line. The Worcester line was completed in 1847 and the Boston connector was completed the following year, joining Central Falls to a far-ranging rail distribution line and allowing movement of goods and materials in and out with relative ease.

See continuation sheet 38

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978 APR 6 1979
DATE ENTERED	

CONTINUATION SHEET 38

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 5

As industry and population expanded, so did the need for local institutions. Two Protestant congregations, the Baptists and Congregationalists, built churches in the 1840s. Their presence reflected the early demography of the area - most residents were white, Protestant, and American-born. In the 1840s and 1850s, however, a large number of Irish immigrated to the area. Most worked in manufacturing, providing a ready source of labor for industry.

As the Central Falls area took on an increasingly urban character, a division of interests arose between it and the larger township of Smithfield and their political relationship became strained over the question of public services. The conflict was temporarily resolved in 1847 when the state legislature created the Central Falls Fire District, a quasi-municipal organization with the power to tax residents for fire protection. Creation of such districts was a common response by the state to the needs of quickly developing manufacturing centers. As the need for other services became more imperative, the fire district was empowered to provide them. In 1860, for example, a street-lighting system was authorized.

Industrial Expansion (1860-1890)

In the 1860s under the pressure of war-time demands, Central Falls' industrial plant expanded considerably. Interrupted only by the depression of the 1870s, this great boom continued until the 20th century. By 1862, though the two villages were still distinct, both were expanding, leaving less open space between them. All of the water privileges along Roosevelt Avenue were occupied.

As in previous decades, Central Falls' economy continued to be based upon the textile and metals trades. Several of the city's largest extant mill complexes date from this era, including the Stafford Mill (1829, 1860s), the Pawtucket Hair Cloth Company Mill (1864), and the Central Falls Woolen Mill (1870), all located on the river. The Stafford Company built a new dam in 1863 at the middle falls and rebuilt the power trenches, increasing the available water power and making the waterfront mill sites as attractive as ever despite the availability of steam power. The largest mill constructed on the rail line was Fales and Jenks' textile machinery mill (1863).

Political, Social, and Civic Developments (1860-1890)

The expansion of the industrial capacity of Central Falls was reflected in its growing population. Early figures are imprecise, but, by 1870, an estimated

See continuation sheet 39

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED DEC 5 1978	APR 6 1979
DATE ENTERED	

CONTINUATION SHEET 39

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 6

9,000 people lived in the area; by 1890 the population had jumped to nearly fourteen thousand. Much of this increase was accounted for by the great influx of French Canadians who constituted the largest group of immigrants to Central Falls in the second half of the 19th century. Prompted by an agricultural depression in eastern Canada and by the opportunity for work in the expanding mills, workers journeyed south to settle in the manufacturing towns of the Blackstone River Valley. The continuing arrival of Irish (although immigration from Ireland had peaked before the Civil War) also swelled the population figures. Of the 9,000 people in Central Falls in 1870, 40 per cent were foreign born and an additional 10 per cent had at least one foreign-born parent.

Church building in these decades reflects the general prosperity and an increasing heterogeneity in nationality and religion. The Baptists and Congregationalists replaced their early churches; the Congregational Church (1883) still stands -- a handsome Queen Anne structure reflecting the wealth and social prominence of its 19th-century members. In addition, the Episcopalians and Methodists organized and built churches as well.

With foreign immigration, the Roman Catholic population expanded rapidly. The French Canadians, under the leadership of Fr. Charles Dauray, organized in 1873 and built a church (since demolished and replaced) in 1875. In 1889, the Irish formed the parish of Holy Trinity and began construction of their church the same year.

Throughout the second half of the 19th century, the urban-rural dichotomy that had led in 1849 to the creation of the Central Falls Fire District continued. ✓ Agitation to reorganize the town government led to the division of Smithfield in 1871, and Central Falls, once the largest industrial village in Smithfield, now occupied the same position in the new town of Lincoln. The new town hall was erected on Summit Street in Central Falls, reflecting the village's civic and economic pre-eminence. The status of the fire district was upgraded as the state legislature extended its powers -- first, to provide for a water, hydrant, and sewer system in 1874; to set up a police department in 1875; and to provide library services in 1887.

The number of institutional and civic buildings which were erected between 1860 and 1890 to accommodate the demands of the expanding population of the area reflects the change in Central Falls' character from industrial village to small city: ✓ the Broad Street Fire Station (1889), the Broad Street School (1861), four small neighborhood schoolhouses (between 1875 and 1886), the Lincoln High School (1889, now City Hall), and, finally, Jenks Park in 1890.

See continuation sheet 40

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 40

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 7

Residential Development (1860-1900)

The extraordinary expansion of industry and population in the second half of the 19th century produced a rapid growth of residential development. In the 1860s, development was concentrated in the southeastern corner of the community; by 1870, construction on east-west cross streets was extending the area of dense development. By 1880 most of the land of the city had been platted except for the northern tier and a few scattered large estates; by 1895 even these had been broken into building lots. This rapid expansion of residential building produced a number of architecturally ambitious dwellings built by Central Falls' wealthy citizens and, in far greater numbers, modest multi-family houses built for the thousands of immigrants. This late 19th-century housing stock still dominates the city's environment.

Several of Central Falls major manufacturing and business leaders constructed large houses on the tree-lined streets of the southern section, its most prestigious neighborhood, and some fine examples of Victorian styles remain. Three such houses (the Greene, Fales, and Conant houses) are nominated to the National Register.

Surrounding such grand houses and filling much of the rest of the city were the more modest houses of Central Falls' middle and working classes. With the rise in population during the second half of the century and the necessity of housing thousands of new residents, several forms of multi-family housing became popular. Double houses (usually 2½ stories, gable-roofed, with entrances set at each end) were built from the 1860s on, but by far the predominant form of 2-family dwelling is the 1½-story, sidehall-plan house, divided horizontally into two flats. Built from the 1860s through the 1890s and beyond, this became a standard form decorated by details reflecting the progression of architectural tastes in these decades: earlier examples exhibit Italianate detailing while later examples have the contrasting wall covers of clapboard and shingle typical of the Queen Anne style.

By the 1880s and 1890s, this 2½-story form had evolved into a full three-decker. Such houses were an expedient way of housing the influx of industrial workers in an era of rising land values and are the building type most closely associated in the popular mind with Central Falls, though, in fact, they are actually outnumbered by 2-family houses. In a few cases, the three-decker form was expanded to a full four stories, but houses for more than three families are relatively rare in the city and only a few large tenement buildings were constructed.

See continuation sheet 41

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED DEC 5 1978	APR 6 1979
DATE ENTERED	

CONTINUATION SHEET 41

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 8

Such compact dwelling units coupled with the density of building in Central Falls made it one of the most thickly populated areas in the state. In 1875, for example, the town of Lincoln as a whole had 875 people per square mile while Central Falls' population density was 3,576 people per square mile.

Continued Prosperity (1890-1920)

By the 1890s, Central Falls was a well defined urban community. Yet, despite this fact, it remained part of Lincoln and the divergence of urban and rural interests within the town was a continuing source of political difficulty. Voters of the larger township still disliked sharing the cost of services needed only in the urbanized area. In addition, local government had long been dominated by rural interests and by the manufacturers, who were mostly Republican and feared the potential political strength of the thousands of newly arrived immigrants. The problem was resolved when the General Assembly placed the question of the incorporation of Central Falls on the town ballot. Incorporation as a city was itself a tactic to exclude naturalized citizens from complete participation in local government -- since the Rhode Island constitution excluded foreign-born citizens who did not own \$134 worth of taxable property from voting in elections for councilmen.

On election day, February 27, 1895, Central Falls residents split exactly evenly on the vote for independence -- 749 to 749. Some believed that Central Falls should be absorbed by Pawtucket; others hoped that the fire district would continue. But the rest of Lincoln's voters overwhelmingly favored its independence -- 1531 to 794 -- and Central Falls was incorporated as a city and did, in fact, remain a Republican stronghold until the 1930s.

The new municipality was based on a mayor and city council form of government; Charles P. Moies was elected its first mayor. The city acquired all of the property of the former Central Falls Fire District and extended beyond those bounds to include the part of Valley Falls on the southern bank of the river. The northern section of that village had become part of the town of Cumberland.

When Central Falls was incorporated, nearly half the population was foreign born. The three early ethnic groups, the French Canadians, English and Irish, retained their numerical superiority during the next twenty-five years. Many of these immigrants and their children lived near their countrymen in ethnically cohesive neighborhoods where familiar language and customs were maintained. The central portion of the city was the home of much of the Irish population;

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 42

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 9

the French Canadians tended to settle in the eastern and western section of the city, the English were concentrated in the south.

By the early twentieth century, the French-speaking population of Central Falls had grown so large that a second parish, St. Matthew's, was created on the western side of the city in 1906 and construction of a chapel was begun the next year.

In 1905, Irish Catholic parishioners of Holy Trinity opened a new school and convent near their church and rectory on Fuller Avenue. The addition of such auxiliary structures as schools, convents and rectories to the areas near these major churches produced the characteristic church complex, called a "church estate" by one historian, in which a large church building became the centerpiece of a complex of buildings, often occupying almost an entire block.

By 1920, there were large Polish and Syrian communities in the city, as well as smaller numbers of immigrants from Russia and Portugal. These new immigrants continued the tradition of ethnic cohesion in Central Falls; many Syrians lived in the central section of the city, while the Polish community located on the southern end of High Street. Again, the center of each of these neighborhoods was a church.

Residential building to accommodate the still increasing population in these decades followed patterns set in earlier years. Between 1900 and 1920, Central Falls' population rose from 18,167 to 24,174 and the city was well on the way to becoming the most densely populated municipality in the nation. Multi-family housing continued to predominate.

Most Central Falls workers continued to be employed in manufacturing plants. Depressions in 1893 and 1897 slowed industrial growth somewhat, but there was further diversification in productive capacity and, for the most part, these were prosperous years in Central Falls. Two major new mills were added to the Blackstone's riverfront: the Royal Weaving Mill and Bryan Marsh's mill built for light bulb production.

The prosperity of these decades was reflected in additions to the public buildings of the city: three new schools were built as well as a fire station, library, and police station and court house.

See continuation sheet 43

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 43

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 10

The Shifting Economy (1920-1950)

The decades following the first World War were difficult years for the city. Until then, the growth and prosperity of Central Falls had been based on the expansion of its manufacturing. The three decades following World War I were characterized by economic decline, as the boom of the war years gave way to a downward momentum among the city's manufacturing interests. Central Falls shared in the region-wide problem of a depressed textile industry. The manufacture of cotton goods, especially, was adversely affected by the rapid industrialization of the southern states. The decline of the New England textile industry, though briefly delayed by the demand of the World War I years, became evident in the depression of 1920-1921. The 1920s, prosperous years for much of the nation's economy, saw a continued weakening in Central Falls textile industry. Manufacturers were confronted by many of the problems typical of older northeastern industrial cities -- increasing competition from southern and western states, outmoded machinery, a drop in the level of investment, and cautious business practices. The general depression of the textile industry multiplied its effects in Central Falls by influencing the city's other industrial keystone, the manufacture of textile machinery.

The great expansion in municipal building which characterized earlier decades drew to an end in the mid-20th century; the only city building erected was the 1927 high school. Despite economic difficulties, however, several churches added to, or replaced, their buildings. The Episcopalians built a new church; Holy Trinity congregation added a parish house to its complex; and Notre Dame parish replaced its small wooden church with a large Romanesque church, completed in 1933, but since extensively altered. St. Matthew's, the second French Catholic parish, created the major visual landmark of the western side of the city when it constructed its imposing granite Gothic church in 1929.

As in other Rhode Island industrial cities, the Great Depression of the 1930s posed particular difficulties. Already faced with a weakened economy, many industrial concerns closed and increasing unemployment and declining trade ended Central Falls' last period of economic expansion. In 1933, at the worst of the depression, there were 1400 unemployed residents of Central Falls. The city's economic difficulties were further complicated by the unrest of labor disputes when a 1934 strike in the textile industry erupted into violence which necessitated the calling-up of the National Guard. Unemployment was relieved slightly when federal public works became available -- unemployed workers built a small baseball stadium, laid sidewalks through much of the city, and built several streets in the Valley Pond area, the last major tract of vacant land in the city.

See continuation sheet 44

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 44

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 11

The necessity for such public programs was mitigated somewhat during the early 1940s. Although in the 1940s, the population of the city declined by 6.7 per cent, Central Falls' economy experienced a slight recovery in this decade as it shared in the general prosperity associated with World War II. However, these gains were minimized by the recession of 1951-1952.

Recent Developments (1950-present)

As it has been throughout the history of the city, the economy of Central Falls continues to be based upon manufacturing. Even in 1970, most workers were still employed in manufacturing, and, of these, the majority were employed by textile and apparel concerns.

One of the most important recent developments has been the ever increasing popularity of the automobile which has resulted in the widening of many narrow streets and the diminishing of originally small building lots by the construction of driveways and garages. On the commercial strips of Broad and Dexter Streets, parking spaces are at a premium and have been metered since the early post-war years. Spot demolition has occurred to create parking spaces. Concurrently, new commercial construction has reflected these parking requirements; new buildings are frequently set at the rear of a lot behind a paved parking area, disrupting the building line and destroying the continuity of the nineteenth-century streetscape.

The construction of Interstate Route 95 through Pawtucket, slightly to the east of the Central Falls boundary, has caused demographic changes in the community since it has increased accessibility to other residential areas. Like many cities, Central Falls has experienced the out-migration of its younger residents. As the grandchildren of earlier immigrants became more affluent, they tended to move out to newer suburbs to the north, in Cumberland and Lincoln. As a result, the city's population contains an unusually large proportion of older people, those who chose to remain near friends and familiar institutions. These two trends, decreasing population and a large percentage of older people, have been reflected in the size of the labor force. Like the total population, which was 19,800 in 1960 and 18,700 in 1970, the labor force is decreasing.

Today, Central Falls is one of the poorest communities in Rhode Island, a substantial number -- 14 percent -- of the city's households in 1970 had incomes below the poverty level and the average income of the city's residents is well below that of Rhode Islanders in general.

See continuation sheet 45

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 45

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 12

Municipal and institutional building has accounted for many of the changes in the physical fabric of the city during the last two decades. Two new churches have replaced older structures. A branch bank and two credit unions have located on Broad Street. Some municipal buildings which were outmoded have been replaced; a new fire station and school have been built. The most extensive city construction projects have been the Forand and Wilfrid Manors, high-rise housing for older residents supported by loans from the Federal Housing Authority. While increasing the opportunities for Central Falls' elderly citizens to remain in the city, these buildings are out of scale with the neighborhoods in which they are located.

In the last ten years, a new group of immigrants has come to Central Falls; a significant Hispanic community -- mostly from Colombia -- has been added to the city's population. Settled for the most part in the northern section of the city, they, like earlier immigrants, are often employed in the textile industry.

8D.

Areas of significance checked in Block 8 and examples of buildings and sites related to each are listed below:

Architecture: Despite the fact that most buildings in Central Falls are examples of vernacular types and are not particularly noteworthy for architectural historians, there are among these properties a number of significant buildings of outstanding architectural merit. Among industrial structures, the entire Central Falls Mill Historic District is an unusual grouping of industrial buildings; of special note is the Pawtucket Hair Cloth Company Mill designed by the prolific Rhode Island architect, William R. Walker. Both the Valley Falls Mill and the Fales and Jenks Mill are architecturally notable.

Of Central Falls many churches, two are exceptional in their contribution to the visual quality of city: St. Matthew's Church, a Gothic stone building with an elaborately decorated interior, and the Central Falls Congregational Church, a Shingle Style composition. The Holy Trinity Church complex, less notable for the quality of the church itself, derives its architectural significance from the harmonious grouping of several parish-related buildings.

Of the three houses nominated, the Greene and Fales Houses are nominated primarily for their historic significance, but both are also notable as elegant examples of Second Empire; the Greene House is decorated with a variety of bold ornament,

See continuation sheet 46

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 46

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 13

while the Fales House is a more severe and restrained example. Of special note is the Conant House, an elaborate Colonial Revival mansion, whose interior detailing is unusually well-preserved.

Engineering: Jenks Park's Cogswell Tower is often cited as an unusual engineering achievement, in particular for the manner in which the weight of the tower is supported by a brick barrel vault.

Education: The Central Street School is a good example, well-preserved on its exterior, of late 19th-century neighborhood schoolhouses of Central Falls the better-preserved two surviving schools built in the years of Central Falls' greatest wealth and expansion, it represents an era of expanding population and demand upon municipal services, such as public education.

Industry: Of Central Falls' many historic resources, its industrial buildings are the key to an understanding of the city's origins and development. In the short space of a single century (roughly 1820 to 1920), Central Falls developed from a virtual wilderness into the most highly urbanized and densely populated city in Rhode Island. This dramatic growth was a direct consequence of industrialization, and, in particular, of the textile and metal industries. Several outstanding industrial structures remain to document the impact of industrialization on the city. The Valley Falls Mills, closely associated with the regionally-important Chace family, remains to testify to the overriding importance of manufacturing in Central Falls.

In addition, the Central Falls Mill Historic District contains the earliest extant mill structures in the city, one mill exceptional in its architectural quality, and a variety of other mill structures, spanning the 19th century and illustrating mill construction, design, and technique over the course of nearly a hundred years. The mill district is still largely used by manufacturing concerns and, though underutilized, offers vivid testimony to the continuing influence of manufacturing in the city and to the adaptability of these older structures to the requirements of present-day Rhode Island industrialists. In addition, Central Falls retains two dams located on major falls of the Blackstone River and, at the Valley Falls Mill, portions of the trench system are still intact.

The substantial wealth generated by 19th-century industry in Central Falls is manifest in the large, pretentious houses built by owners of major mills. Two of these houses -- Benjamin Franklin Greene's and David Fales' -- are included in this nomination.

See continuation sheet 47

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 47

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 14

Invention: The Pawtucket Hair Cloth Company Mill (in the Central Falls Historic Mill District) is particularly notable as the site of the first extensive use of Isaac Lindsley's innovations in the horse-hair loom. The Pawtucket Hair Cloth Company had been in operation for eight years prior to the construction of the mill but had not been particularly successful; with the acquisition of the Lindsley patents in 1861, however, the company built up a virtual monopoly on the manufacture of the fabric. Lindsley's automatic feeder was designed to secure individual horse tail hairs for the notched lance, or "hipper stick," of the loom.

Landscape Architecture: Despite some compromises with the original plan, Jenks Park remains an interesting example of late 19th-century landscape architecture -- with its tree-shaded walks, lawns, pond, and fountains. The use of rocky outcroppings as locations for its tower and pavillions is notable. In densely-developed Central Falls, Jenks Park is a unique resource, the major recreational site in a closely-packed city.

Religion: As a result of immigration, primarily from Canada, Ireland, and Poland, Central Falls was in the late 19th century (and is still today) an overwhelmingly Catholic city. Early settlers had been for the most part Anglo-Saxon Protestants and, while individual Protestant congregations, such as the one which built the Central Falls Congregational Church, remained in the city and served middle and upper class citizens, they were numerically eclipsed by the large Catholic parishes, organized along national lines, and established in the second half of the century. St. Matthew's Church (French Canadian) and Holy Trinity Church Complex (Irish) remain today to manifest the impact of immigration on the religious demography of the city.

8E. See Item 7D.

8F.

To date, preservation and restoration activities in Central Falls have been limited. The municipal administration has given evidence of some concern for preservation in its renovation of city-owned structures. The Central Street School has required some interior renovation for its new use, but the city has preserved its exterior features. In 1974, the city acquired the Parish Center of the Holy Trinity Church Complex for conversion to a Neighborhood Facilities Center; its renovation has left the building's handsome exterior intact. The survey from

See continuation sheet 48

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 48

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 15

which this nomination is derived represents the strongest commitment yet of the city to preservation. Funding for the survey was shared by the city and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. It is anticipated that the results of the survey will be utilized in setting goals and developing future policies by the Central Falls Division of Planning.

Prior to this nomination, four properties in Central Falls have been nominated to the National Register: Jenks Park and Cogswell Tower, the Central Falls Congregational Church, the Holy Trinity Church complex, and the Valley Falls Mill. Both Jenks Park and the Central Falls Congregational Church have received grants from the historical Preservation Commission's grant-in-aid program.

A major private preservation effort is now underway in Central Falls, as the Valley Falls Mill is renovated to elderly housing. Gelardin/Bruner/Cott, Inc. are the architects for this extensive project which will utilize the incentives of the Tax Reform Act of 1976.

8G.

The combination of districts and individual structures included in this nomination is dictated by the criteria and standards of the National Register and by the visual quality of the city of Central Falls. The Central Falls Mill Historic District is the single identifiable group of buildings, related by compatible and mutually-enhancing architectural qualities and sharing a common historical evolution. Even though there have been many modifications to individual components of the district, these reflect their continuing industrial uses.

No other grouping of structures in the city shares these qualities with the industrial district. While there are several buildings of exceptional historical and architectural merit, they are widely separated by many structures of only minor or no interest, built in various eras and often much modified. Reflecting its history as a district of a much larger township during its major period of significance, Central Falls lacks a genuine "civic center" which could have been considered for nomination as a district; its major public buildings are strung out along a section of Broad Street and are interspersed with intrusive commercial development.

See continuation sheet 49

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 49

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 16

8H. See inventory sheets for:

St. Matthew's Church
Holy Trinity Church Complex

8I.

The results of this survey, made available to the city and citizens of Central Falls in April, 1978, will be integrated into the on-going planning efforts of the Central Falls Division of Planning. In its planning for the future of the city, the Division of Planning operates with a group of individual plans for separate aspects of development: economic development, land use, transportation, capital improvements, recreation, and the like. Together these individual components function as a comprehensive plan. The results of this survey will become the historic preservation element of this comprehensive plan.

The inventory sheets, maps, and final report of the survey are deposited at the offices of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission and the Central Falls Division of Planning where they are used in environmental reviews, grant-in-aid funding, and evaluation of certification for Tax Reform Act incentives.

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See continuation sheet 50

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY see individual inventory forms

UTM REFERENCES see individual inventory forms

A	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	B	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Multiple Resource Area includes the entire city of Central Falls; its boundaries are the incorporation limits of the city. For boundaries of individual and district nominations, see inventory forms.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Pamela A. Kennedy, Historical Survey Specialist

ORGANIZATION

R. I. Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

October, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

401-277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

X See Continuation Sheet 52

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

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

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Theresa C. Williamson

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE November 27, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Charles W. Smith

DATE

4-6-79

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

William Labovich

DATE

April 6, 1979

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED DEC 5 1978

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

50

ITEM NUMBER 9

PAGE 2

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See continuation sheet 51

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 51

ITEM NUMBER 9

PAGE 3

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 5 1978
DATE ENTERED	APR 6 1979

CONTINUATION SHEET 52

ITEM NUMBER 12

PAGE 2

Property Name

Level of Significance

Central Falls Mill Historic District

State

Central Street School

Local

Samuel B. Conant House

Local

David G. Fales House

Local

Benjamin F. Greene House

State

Saint Matthew's Church

Local