CITYWIDE SURVEY OF HISTORIC PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS EAST PROVIDENCE, R.I.

FINAL PROJECT REPORT AUGUST 31, 2021

KATHRYN J. CAVANAUGH
HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONSULTANT

The activity that is the subject of this report has been financed in part by a Certified Local Government Grant from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as administered by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior.

This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above or if you desire further information, please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity National Park Service 1849 C Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20204.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In March of 2021, the City of East Providence commissioned a historic architectural survey of twenty current and former public-school buildings, for the purpose of gathering sufficient information about each building to evaluate its potential eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Field work and research were conducted during the Spring of 2021. For each school building, exterior photographs and data sheets were produced according to Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission standards. The project also produced a narrative statement describing the historical development of public education in East Providence and how changes in school building architecture over time reflected corresponding changes in public policy for education.

The twenty schools researched for this survey were all built as public schools by the Town or City of East Providence. In chronological order and identified by their historic names, they are:

Union Primary and Grammar School, 1320 Pawtucket Ave. (1873-74)
East Street Primary School, 65 East St. (1889-90)
Williams Avenue Primary School, 115 Williams Ave. (1888-90)
Central High School & Junior High School, 20 Whelden Ave. (1910, 1929)
Riverside Grammar School/Junior High School, 100 Bullocks Point Ave. (1911)
Lincoln School, 25 Metropolitan Park Dr. (1924)
East Providence Senior High School, 2000 Pawtucket Ave. (1950-52)
Carl T. Thompson Elementary School, 215 Ferris Ave. (1950)
J.R.D. Oldham Elementary School, 640 Bullocks Pt. Ave, (1951)
Alice M. Waddington Elementary School, 101 Legion Way (1955)
Grove Ave. Elementary School, 110 Grove Ave. (1957-58)
Emma G. Whiteknacht School, 261 Grosvenor Ave. (1957-58)
Agnes B. Hennessey Elementary School, 75 Fort St. (1957-58)
Meadowcrest Elementary School, 60 Bart Dr. (1964)
Riverside Jr. High/Middle School, 179 Forbes St. (1964-66)
Silver Spring Elementary School, 120 Silver Spring Ave. (1968)
Orlo Avenue Elementary School, 25 Orlo Ave. (1970)
East Providence Area Vocational-Technical School, 1998 Pawtucket Ave. (1970)
Edward R. Martin Middle School, 111 Brown St. (1977)
Kent Heights Elementary School, 2680 Pawtucket Ave. (1989, 2003)

Not included in this survey were two public-school buildings already listed on the National Register: District School No. 6 (now, Riverside Girl Scout House) at 351 Willett Ave. in Riverside, built 1869-70 (NR 1980); and Primary School No. 9 (now owned by Grace Chapel Assembly of God) at 132 Roger Williams Ave. in Rumford, built in 1879 (NR 2011).

The Myron J. Francis Elementary School at 64 Bourne Ave., built in 1989, was also not included in the survey because it is less than 50 years old, which is the basic threshold to be considered for National Register eligibility.

NATIONAL REGISTER RECOMMENDATIONS

As explained in this report, seventeen public-school buildings appear to meet National Register Criteria A and C and are recommended for a thematic nomination:

Union Primary and Grammar School, 1320 Pawtucket Ave. (1873-74)
East Street Primary School, 65 East St. (1889-90)
Williams Avenue Primary School, 115 Williams Ave. (1888-90)*
Central High School & Junior High School, 20 Whelden Ave. (1910, 1929)
Riverside Grammar School/Junior High School, 100 Bullocks Point Ave. (1911)
Lincoln Elementary School, 25 Metropolitan Park Dr. (1924)
Carl T. Thompson Elementary School, 215 Ferris Ave. (1950)
J.R.D. Oldham Elementary School, 640 Bullocks Pt. Ave, (1951)
Alice M. Waddington Elementary School, 101 Legion Way (1955)
Agnes B. Hennessey Elementary School, 75 Fort St. (1957)
Grove Ave. Elementary School, 110 Grove Ave. (1957-58)
Emma G. Whiteknacht School, 261 Grosvenor Ave. (1958)
Riverside Jr. High/Middle School (1964-66)
Meadowcrest Elementary School, 60 Bart Dr. (1964)
Silver Spring Elementary School, 120 Silver Spring Ave. (1968)
Orlo Ave. Elementary School, 25 Orlo Ave. (1970)
East Providence/Bristol County Area Vocational-Technical School,
1998 Pawtucket Ave. (1970)

*The former Williams Ave. school has been so altered that its original historic architectural character has been significantly compromised. It does not meet NR Criterion C, but it may meet Criterion A as the only surviving 19th century public school building in Watchemoket, and one of only five surviving 19th century public-school buildings in the city.

The survey results confirmed that Martin Middle School (1977) and the surviving structures at Kent Heights Elementary School (1989, 2003) are too recent to be considered potentially eligible for National Register listing at this time. After the survey work was completed, but before this report was finalized, demolition began on East Providence Senior High School (1952), so that building is no longer eligible for National Register consideration.

Ten of buildings recommended for National Register nomination (Union, Oldham, Waddington, Hennessey, Whiteknacht, Riverside Middle, Meadowcrest, Silver Spring, Orlo, and the Vocational-Technical School) are currently owned by the City of East Providence, and all but two (Union and Oldham) still function as public schools. Of the eight buildings now in private hands (East, Williams, Central High, Central Jr. High, Riverside Grammar, Lincoln, Thompson, Grove), two (Thompson and Grove) now function as private schools.

HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT: PUBLIC EDUCATION IN EAST PROVIDENCE

The history of East Providence spans two states, three towns, and nearly four centuries, beginning with the settlement of Rehoboth, Mass. in 1643 and carrying forward through the founding of Seekonk, Mass., which separated from Rehoboth in 1812. Fifty years later, the U.S. Supreme Court resolved a long-standing boundary dispute between Rhode Island and Massachusetts by moving the state line a few miles east of the Seekonk River, bringing the western half of Seekonk into Rhode Island. This area of about 13 square miles was incorporated as the town of East Providence, Rhode Island in 1862. The town became a city in 1958.

In providing for public education, Massachusetts and Rhode Island followed different paths in the 17th and 18th centuries. Those paths began to run along parallel tracks by the early 19th century; nonetheless, when East Providence inherited an existing public school system from Seekonk in 1862, the transition presented some challenges.

This narrative begins with an explanation of how public education evolved in Massachusetts and in Rhode Island prior to 1862, and then focuses on East Providence's public school system and architecture from 1862 to 1970. During that period, East Providence built 47 primary, elementary, grammar, junior high, and high school buildings. Nineteen survive, each reflecting the prevailing educational paradigms and architectural design principles and styles of their time.

Overview of Public Education in Massachusetts Before 1862

To the Puritans who founded Massachusetts, literacy was the gateway to salvation: only by reading the Bible, following the teachings of Scripture in their daily lives, and strictly observing the Sabbath, could the faithful live a morally and spiritually pure life, and hope to ascend to heaven after death. A learned citizenry was also needed to meet the Puritans' goal of building viable communities in the New World.

To those ends, Massachusetts established both the first public school and the first college in American colonies: Boston Latin School, for boys, in 1635; and Harvard College, for men, in 1636. (A "Latin" school focused on the teaching of classical languages and literature.) The Massachusetts General Court also enacted America's first public education law in 1642, ordering every town to take steps to ensure "that all children learned to read, and that they were taught to understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of the country, and finally … that they were put to some useful work."[1] Five years later, in 1647, the Court enacted another law requiring all towns with fifty or more households to appoint a teacher to instruct all children in reading and writing. Towns with one hundred or more households had to establish a grammar school where older boys could prepare for college (i.e., Harvard).[2]

[1] Johnson, p. 1.

[2] Huntington, cited at https://www.mass.gov/doc/old-deluder-satan-law/download. It is unclear whether the 1647 law applied to children of color.

In communities too small to support a teacher, the 1647 law still required parents to provide basic literacy and religious studies for their children, whether by teaching them at home, sending them to a "dame school" taught by a local woman in her home for a small fee, or hiring a private tutor.

Beyond learning to read and write, any additional formal schooling was only available to boys and young men. Women in Puritan society could not own property or a business (unless they were widowed and did not remarry), nor could they vote in town meetings, so despite the phrase "all children" in the 1647 statute, girls were not universally taught to write, as that skill was not considered necessary for their future roles as wives and mothers.[3] Girls and young women with the intellect, the desire, and the opportunity to pursue additional learning had to do so on their own initiative, not in a school setting.

Financial support for public schools in this period came from a variety of sources including tuition fees, subscriptions, taxes, land grants, contributions of farm produce, and even the occasional bequest from an individual to a town for educational purposes. Students had to bring their own books and supplies from home; many learned to read using the Bible, as even poor families usually owned a copy. School was taught for a term of three or six months, timed around an agricultural planting and harvesting schedule. Children of varying ages and abilities learned their lessons together in the same room, all taught by one male instructor. Sometimes the local minister would take on the additional job of schoolmaster, but otherwise teachers had to be recruited from within or outside the town; their qualifications and capabilities varied widely. Memorization, rote learning, moralistic texts, and harsh discipline were the hallmarks of public education in early Massachusetts.[4]

Although the Puritans placed a high value on education, they paid scant attention to the physical learning environment. Purpose-built schoolhouses began to appear in the mid-17th century, but generally these were small and very rudimentary post-and-beam structures with a single interior room, a stone fireplace and chimney, a few windows (which might be covered with paper, a less-expensive alternative to glass-paned window sashes), and crude benches. Cramped, dimly lit, cold, and uncomfortable, the prototypical one-story, wood-frame, one-room schoolhouse remained the status quo, especially in small towns and rural areas, until the mid-19th century.

Over time, as the influence of the Puritans waned and Massachusetts became more secular, public schools ceased teaching religious doctrine. But the fundamental premise that public schools should teach Christian morals and values as well as academic subjects spread throughout

[3]The Peabody Essex Museum's 2020-21 exhibit on the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 included court documents that demonstrate this inconsistency: the eloquent petition penned by the condemned Mary Esty shortly before her execution, pleading for fair trials for others who had likewise been falsely accused, contrasts with a sworn affidavit on the physical examination of several accused witches, conducted by a jury of nine women who each put "her mark" next to their names in lieu of a signature. https://www.pem.org/exhibitions/the-salem-witch-trials-1692.

[4]Conforti, p. 10.

New England and eventually across the country, influencing public education laws, policies, and practices well into the 20th century.[5]

When Rehoboth was founded in 1643 (one year after Massachusetts' first public school law was enacted), its proprietors chose a site for their settlement in what is now the Rumford neighborhood of East Providence. They laid out several dozen house lots and a meetinghouse lot, all arrayed around an enormous town common in a formation that came to be known as "the Ring of the Green [or, Town]." Among the proprietors were Abraham Martin, "the Teacher," and Thomas Holbrooke, "the Schoolmaster," both of whom were granted homestead lots in a prime location near the meetinghouse: evidence of the elevated status that educators enjoyed within the community. At one of the first town meetings, voters approved a requirement that each household contribute a portion of corn to help pay the teachers.[6]

Rehoboth town records confirm the existence of a purpose-built school as of 1698.[7] The following year, Robert Dickson was engaged as schoolmaster and tasked with teaching "both sexes of boys and girls to read English, and write, and cast accounts" for a period of six months, at a salary of £13, paid half in silver money and the other half in lumber.[8]

As Rehoboth's population grew, demand increased for schooling also to be provided in outlying areas. John Lynn was hired as schoolmaster in 1709 under a one-year contract to teach in multiple locations on a rotating schedule:

> The school was kept in different sections of the town for different parts of the year, so as to give residents of all parts some convenience in attending it. The "Ring of the Town" and the neighborhood on the east of it was to have the school 21 weeks; Palmer's River, 14 weeks; Watchemoket, 13 weeks, and Captain Enoch Hunt's neighborhood and the "mile and a half," 9 weeks. As this amounts to more than the 52 weeks of the year, we assume that Mr. Lynn had an assistant part of the time, or that the school day was shortened so that the teacher could keep two schools in operation during the same week for a part of the time.[9]

---

[5] In 1947, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled for the first time that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment applied to the states. The Court subsequently made a series of decisions restricting religious activities in public education, notably banning school prayer in 1962. Nonetheless, social and political debates as well as legal challenges over this issue persist to this day. https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/03/religion-in-the-public-schools-2019-update/

[6] Bayles, pp. 146-147; Major, p. 6.

[7] Tilton, p. 97.

[8] Major, p. 9.

[9] Bayles, p. 148.

By 1712, Rehoboth had three schools: a common (primary) school and a grammar school in the more populous parts of town, and an "English school" (so called to distinguish it from a "Latin school") in Palmer's River, which was about six miles east of the town center.[10]

After the Revolutionary War, Massachusetts enacted legislation in 1789 and 1799 that established a district system for public schools, intended to give all children equal access to education by requiring each town to build schools in locations convenient to where people lived. Rehoboth created fifteen school districts, overseen by a School Committee.

In 1812, the Massachusetts General Court approved a petition to separate the more densely developed western section of Rehoboth from the primarily agricultural eastern section. The new town on the west side of the divide, called Seekonk, included all of present-day East Providence.

Massachusetts enacted new legislation for public schools in 1826 that emphasized not just academic learning but also the teaching of moral virtues and values that would shape children into productive, responsible adults of good character. Every town was to hire "a teacher or teachers of competent ability and good morals … for the instruction of children in orthography, reading, writing, English grammar, geography, arithmetic, and good behavior …" The number of families or households in each town (at benchmarks of 50, 100, and 150 or more) determined how many schools a town was required to provide, as well as the length of the school term. Each town had to establish a School Committee to oversee school operations, plus individual committees for each school district that would be responsible for raising money, hiring teachers, choosing school locations, and building, maintaining, and furnishing schoolhouses.[11]

Seekonk created its first school committee in 1829, and by 1841 had established fourteen school districts.[12]

Due to the vagaries of local politics and fiscal capacity, the quality of education under the district school system varied considerably from town to town, and sometimes from district to district within the same town. These rampant inequities eventually prompted calls for statewide reforms, led by Horace Mann (1796-1859), a lawyer, state senator, and vocal proponent for universal public education. In numerous writings and public lectures, Mann proclaimed that a strong public education system was necessary to promote good citizenship, democratic participation, and a healthy, orderly society. He proposed that public schools should be: free; open to children of all religious, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds; nonsectarian, but with a strong moral foundation; paid for by local government; and taught by well-trained, professional teachers. Under Mann's leadership, Massachusetts established a State Board of Education in 1837 (which Mann then ran for the next decade). He was also instrumental in establishing Massachusetts's

[10] Tilton, p. 100.

[11] Erhardt, Vol. IV, pp. 168-169.

[12] Erhardt, Vol. IV, p. 226 and 399-408.

first "normal school" for teacher training in 1838, and endorsed the employment of women as teachers.

An 1849 report from the Massachusetts Board of Education indicated that Seekonk had 1,996 inhabitants, of whom 504 were children between the ages of 4 and 16. The town had 14 public schools, attended by 390 students in summer and 466 students in winter. Thirteen women taught the summer school, while ten men and three women taught in winter.[13]

An 1850 map of Seekonk (see Appendix I) showed the locations of the town schools. It also depicted, in the western part of the town that would become East Providence, several textile mills along the Ten Mile and Seekonk Rivers; a Boston and Providence Railroad line; a variety of residential, commercial, and civic buildings; a network of roadways; the beginnings of a platted street grid in Watchemoket; and a nascent summer resort called "Vue de l'Eau," in what is now the Riverside neighborhood. All of these factored into how East Providence would later develop.

No school buildings from the Seekonk or Rehoboth eras survive in East Providence today.

Overview of Public Education and Public School Buildings in Rhode Island Before 1862

In contrast to Massachusetts, Rhode Island did not enact any laws relating to public education in either the 17th or the 18th centuries. This was due to some key differences in how the two colonies were settled and governed.

When Roger Williams, who espoused a philosophy of "soul liberty," and a group of like-minded followers established Providence Plantations in 1636, they intentionally kept religion out of civic life, so there was no need to create a public school system specifically for the purpose of perpetuating the Puritan (or any other) faith. Rhode Island also did not have a colonial government until nearly 30 years after the first English people arrived in the Narragansett territory. Thus, in Providence and other early settlements – Portsmouth (1638), Newport (1639), Kingstown (1641), Warwick (1642), and New Shoreham (1661) – each community created its own form of self-government, and independently decided how to educate its children.

Newport established the first public school in Rhode Island in 1640 (two years before Massachusetts enacted its first public education law), and stipulated that its school was intended "for encouragement of the poorer sort, to train up their youth in learning," a mission that seems to have been unique amongst Rhode Island communities of this period.[14] Warwick built a meetinghouse that also served as a schoolhouse by 1652; Providence hired its first schoolmaster in 1663. Newport and Providence set aside a sizeable amount of acreage as "school lands," intended both as the site for a schoolhouse and for the purpose of producing crops, meat, firewood, and lumber to support the school and its teacher.

[13] Mass. Board of Education, p. xxvii.

[14] Stockwell, p. 5. Although Carroll, p. 14, claims that Newport's was the first public school in all of English-speaking America, Boston Latin School has that distinction.

Perhaps because many of its early settlers came from Massachusetts, Rhode Island's earliest public schools were locally managed and financed in much the same way as in Massachusetts, and its schoolhouses were likewise rudimentary.

After England's King Charles II granted a charter to Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in 1663, the colonial government spent the next 65 years continually fighting claims asserted by Massachusetts and Connecticut to various parts of Rhode Island. The borders were not confirmed until 1728,[15] which slowed down the influx of new residents and impacted efforts to build stable communities. Only three additional towns were established during this time: Westerly (1669), East Greenwich (1677), and Jamestown (1678). Many Rhode Island towns also suffered extensive damage during King Phillip's War in 1675-76, after which rebuilding took time. As of 1700, fewer than 6,000 people lived in Rhode Island, primarily in coastal communities. The sparsely populated interior had no formally organized towns, only scattered farmsteads and isolated hamlets. All of these circumstances contributed to the fact that Rhode Island did not enact any laws relating to public education in the 17th century.

As Rhode Island shifted from an agricultural to a maritime economy, its population steadily grew, reaching about 58,000 inhabitants by 1770. Historian Charles Carroll found that of the twenty-seven Rhode Island towns that existed prior to the Revolution, early records were incomplete or did not survive for eighteen of them (although, as he observed: "The absence of town records does not indicate that these towns were without schools.").[16] Public education remained under the auspices of individual towns throughout the 18th century.

Town-appointed school committees began to appear in the 1750s, charged with hiring teachers, constructing and maintaining school buildings, and finding the funding for both. Newport continued to take the lead in ensuring education for poor children: in 1763, at a time when assistance for the poor was frequently funded through charitable donations to churches, town leaders ordered that the school lands were to be divided into lots, "and to be sold or loaned on condition that the purchasers should pay to the town treasurer an annual rent to constitute a fund for the schooling and educating of poor children, according to the direction of the town council for the time being, who are hereby empowered to direct, regulate, and manage the said charity on behalf of the town…'[17] By the 1770s both Providence and Newport had grammar or Latin schools for older boys, as well as several private schools for boys and girls, some of which were church-sponsored and charitable in intent, such as the school in Newport for enslaved Black children.[18]

---

[15] Even so, Rhode Island and Massachusetts continued to argue about their borders until the U.S. Supreme Court finally settled the dispute in 1862.

[16] Carroll, p. 33.

[17] Stockwell, p. 5, dates this order to 1663. Carroll, pp. 26-27, contends that the date should be 1763, because Newport land evidence records do not confirm the sale of school lands in 1663, and that Newport's population at that time was far too small for this fundraising scheme to succeed.

[18] Stockwell, pp. 10-11; Carroll, pp. 19-20.

Providence was the first town to try to establish free public schools. In 1767, after voters approved the construction of four new schoolhouses, the School Committee proposed that these new schools should be free, open to all, and fully supported by the taxpayers. Voters shot that idea down the next year (a defeat that School Committee member Moses Brown characterized as "the poorer sort of poor people, being strangely led away not to see their own as well as the public interest therein …"[19]), but approved an alternative proposal to construct a new two-story brick schoolhouse near the Colony House (where the General Assembly met when in Providence), which would offer a taxpayer-funded free public school on the ground floor, and a tuition-supported "proprietor's school" on the upper floor.[20] Completed in 1769 and located on Meeting Street, the Brick Schoolhouse's original upstairs occupant was Rhode Island's first institution of higher learning, a college for training Baptist ministers (which later became Brown University). Founded in Warren in 1764, the college relocated to Providence in 1770, and temporarily moved into the Brick Schoolhouse while awaiting completion of its own edifice atop College Hill.

By the beginning of the 19th century, Rhode Island had over 69,000 inhabitants and 193 schoolhouses across the state,[21] indicating a broad public acceptance of the premise that education was a community responsibility, despite the fact that no state law yet compelled towns to provide public schools. That finally changed in 1800, primarily thanks to the efforts of John Howland (1757-1854).

A barber by trade, John Howland was also a founding member of the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers, organized in 1789 for the purpose of promoting those industries and supporting their workers. Recognizing that many of the Association's members (including himself) had had at best an indifferent education in their own youth, Howland began writing newspaper articles and meeting with government officials to advocate for free and better public schools, particularly for poor children. Finding it a struggle to persuade both the very people he was trying to help, as well as the politically influential whose support would be crucial to achieving this goal, it took Howland a decade of work, but finally in 1799 he drafted and submitted a petition, on behalf of the Association to the Rhode Island General Assembly:

> That in consequence of there being no legal provision for the establishment of schools, and for want of public attention and encouragement this so essential a part of our social duty is left to the partial patronage of individuals whose cares do not extend beyond the limits of their own families, while numbers in every part of the State are deprived of a privilege which it is the common right of every child to enjoy …

---

[19] Stockwell, p. 8.

[20] Carroll, p. 22.

[21] Carroll, p. 35.

> We solicit this Honorable Assembly to make legal provision for the establishment of Free Schools, sufficient to educate all the children in the several towns throughout the State … we are at the same time, advocating the cause of the great majority of children throughout the state, and in particular, those who are poor and destitute …
>
> Trusting that our occupations as mechanics and manufacturers ought not to prevent us from adding to those reasons an argument which cannot fail to operate on those to whom is committed the guardianship of the public welfare, and that is, that liberty and security, under a republican form of government, depend on the general diffusion of knowledge among the people.[22]

After considerable and often acrimonious debate, in 1800 the General Assembly approved an Act to Establish Free Schools, requiring:

> That each and every town in the State shall annually cause to be established and kept, at the expense of such town, one or more free schools, for the instruction of all the white inhabitants of said town between the ages of six and twenty years, in reading, writing, and common arithmetic … and further, that it shall be the duty of the Town Council of every town to divide said town into so many school districts as they shall judge necessary and convenient …[23]

The 1800 law specified that the school-age population of each town would determine both the number of schools and length of school terms that the town must provide. It provided some state financial support for local public schools; mandated that while town councils were to oversee local schools, each school district was to regulate and finance its own operations; and required that all teachers be citizens of the United States.

This law did not address curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, or any criteria for constructing and outfitting school buildings. Furthermore, as indicated by the phrase, "all the white inhabitants," the law pointedly excluded any provision for the education of children of color. In 1800, Rhode Island's population of 69,122 included 380 enslaved and 3,304 "free non-white" residents, or about 5% of the total. How many of these people of color were under age 20 is unknown, but all were denied the right to a free education because of their skin color.[24]

Providence immediately took steps to comply with the "free school law," creating a single school district with four schoolhouses, each with its own schoolmaster and an assistant, all supported by a tax levy. New municipal regulations mandated that school be kept year-round, with six hours of daily instruction on weekdays in winter and six-and-a-half hours in summer (excluding certain holidays such as the Fourth of July and Christmas Day). Tuition was free, but students still had

---

[22] Stockwell, p. 18.

[23] Stockwell, p. 19.

[24] Bouton, at https://userpages.umbc.edu/~bouton/History407/SlaveStats.htm.

to furnish their own books and supplies, and also paid fees for ink and for heating fuel. Boys and girls were seated separately within the schoolroom, and schools were graded (i.e., organized by age group and learning levels). The curriculum focused on reading, writing, spelling, grammar, and arithmetic, but students were also expected to learn proper behavior as well as moral, civic, and patriotic values.[25]

Many Rhode Islanders had strong reservations about the idea of free schools, and when the 1800 law was repealed just three years later, most towns promptly returned to the practices they had followed in the past. Providence, however, continuing to be a pioneer in public education, hired its first woman teacher in 1827, and converted the Brick Schoolhouse to the first free school for Black children in 1828.[26]

Public School Laws of 1828 and 1839

In January 1828, the *American and Gazette* newspaper published a report highlighting numerous inconsistencies in how Rhode Island towns approached public education. Foster, for example, with 2,000 residents, had more schoolhouses (15) than did a dozen other more populous towns. Some towns did not provide the required number of schoolhouses for their population. Some still offered school only on a part-time or seasonal basis, while others had moved to a year-round schedule. Some provided boys' schools in winter and girls' schools in summer.[27]

A few months later, the General Assembly acted. The school law of 1828 primarily focused on financing and management: the state set up a permanent fund to support free public schools, out of which annual appropriations would be paid to each town in amounts proportional to its population of school-aged children (up to age 16). This money was specifically dedicated for teacher salaries, so each town was also permitted (although not required) to levy taxes to support its own schools. Local school committees were mandated to inspect each district school at least every three months while school was in session, and to correct any deficiencies promptly; they were also required to make annual reports to their respective town councils. Like its predecessors, however, the 1828 law contained no provisions for curriculum standards, teacher qualifications, school buildings, or the education of children of color.[28]

In 1839, all but one section (relating to the state's permanent fund for local public schools) of the 1828 school law was repealed, then replaced with revised legislation. Among the changes: the formula that the state used to distribute money to towns for public education was revised to include a town's white population under age 15, Black children under age 10, and five-

[25] Carroll, p. 61.

[26] College Hill Historic District NR Nomination (Amended 2018), Section 7, p. 22. The Brick Schoolhouse served in this role until public schools were integrated in 1865, but its student body remained primarily Black until it ceased operating as a public school in 1887.

[27] Stockwell, pp. 47-50.

[28] Stockwell, pp. 43-45.

fourteenths of Black children between the ages of 10 and 24 years (that data to come from the most recent U.S. census). The Town of Charlestown also received an extra $100 annually to support a school for children of the Narragansett tribe. School committees in two or more adjacent towns could now (with voter approval) make cross-border arrangements to share school resources and costs. All teachers, male and female, were required to be "of good moral character, temperate, and otherwise well-qualified for the office."[29]

Public School Law of 1845

Despite these actions, Rhode Island's public education system had not kept pace with its regional neighbors, notably Massachusetts and Connecticut. In 1843, Rep. Wilkins Updike of South Kingstown introduced a bill calling for the Governor to appoint "some suitable person" to visit all public schools in Rhode Island, to collect data on their operations, and to report back to the General Assembly with recommendations for legislative and other remedies. In explaining the need for this study, Updike proclaimed:

> Our self-respect should be roused by a knowledge of the last census of the United Sates, from which it appears that Rhode Island is behind the other New England states in this matter. With a population of 108,830, we have over 1,600 adults who cannot read or write, while Connecticut with a population of 309,978 has only 526. The other New England states not only educate their own teachers, lawyers, doctors, and clergymen, but help to supply our demand for these classes of men. It is time to bestir ourselves in these matters.[30]

The "suitable person" charged with conducting this school survey was Henry Barnard (1811-1900), arguably the most influential figure in Rhode Island public education in the 19th century.

Henry Barnard came to Rhode Island from Connecticut, where he had served in the state legislature and had undertaken a survey of public schools that resulted in the creation of that state's Board of Common Schools, which Barnard then chaired from 1838 to 1842. During that time Barnard also consulted with Horace Mann on the establishment of the first "normal school" for the training of professional teachers Massachusetts. Wilkins Updike sought Barnard's counsel when drafting his bill calling for a statewide public school survey in Rhode Island, so Barnard was the natural choice to undertake this mission.

Over the course of about eighteen months in 1843-44, Henry Barnard visited every school district in the state. He talked to local officials, school committee members, and teachers. He organized hundreds of public meetings to gather information and to drum up support for improving local schools. He gave countless lectures, wrote a blizzard of pamphlets, and produced a 16-page special supplement on public education for the Rhode Island edition of the *Farmer's Almanac*, which had an annual circulation of 10,000 copies.[31] Finally, he produced an

[29] Stockwell, pp. 51-55.

[30] Ibid., pp. 59-61.

[31] Downs, p. 31.

encyclopedic report on his findings and recommendations, and drafted a new public school law, which the General Assembly approved in 1845.

Under the 1845 statute, Rhode Island created a State Commissioner of Public Schools, and reorganized the administration of school systems at the state, town, and district levels. Towns were now required to provide funding for public schools, to educate all children under age 15, and to pay all costs for poor children to attend school (otherwise, parents still paid the cost of tuition, books, and supplies). The law also ordered the establishment of a normal school to train teachers (although no funding was provided, rendering this provision essentially moot), and established regulations for teacher certification. It enacted a number of new requirements relating to how schools operated: a standard school term of at least four months; a minimum district size of 40 pupils; and a maximum class size of 50 students per teacher. It required teachers to keep records of each student's attendance and schoolwork, and to report regularly to parents on their children's progress.

In addition, the legislation empowered local school districts to build, purchase or rent, and repair schoolhouses, and to supply them with blackboards, maps, furniture, and other necessary and useful appurtenances. Schools were also encouraged to have libraries, stocked with reference books and textbooks as well as general-interest reading materials, that would be open to the public. All plans and specifications for new construction and for repairs of school buildings were to be approved by the town school committee or by the Commissioner of Public Schools.

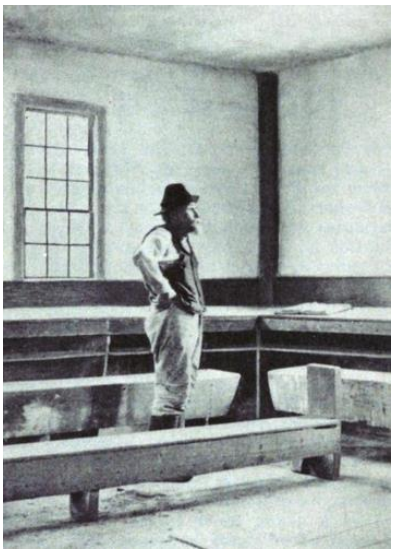
The 1845 law had several flaws: it did not hold rural and city schools to the same standards; did not bar discrimination against students on the basis of race; did not make school attendance compulsory (to the particular detriment of child laborers on farms and in mills and factories); did not require uniform textbooks; and did not make public education entirely free of cost to students. All of those defects were remedied in the ensuing decades. But this legislation did lay a foundation for educational policy in Rhode Island that persisted well into the 20th century.

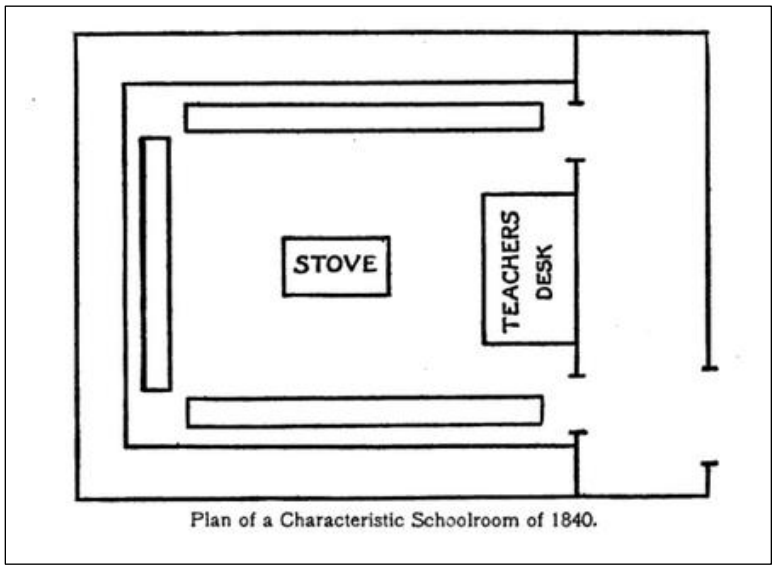
Henry Barnard was appointed Rhode Island's first Commissioner of Public Education, an office he only held until 1849 when ill health forced his resignation. Although some of his recommendations in Rhode Island were only realized years later, his legacy was immense, especially in establishing standards and guidelines for the design and outfitting of schoolhouses.

Public School Buildings in Rhode Island Before 1862

Outside of cities like Newport and Providence, where two-room and larger brick schools had existed for several decades already, the typical district schoolhouse in Rhode Island (and all over New England) in the early to mid-19th century was a one-story, wood-frame, one-room structure of modest size, with a gable roof, clapboard walls, masonry foundation, a single doorway, one or two windows per side, and a fireplace or a cast iron stove for heating. These buildings had little architectural ornament, sometimes not even a coat of paint. They were frequently located in or near the geographical center of a school district, at a crossroads when possible, and sited close to the road so as not to encroach on any valuable land. Few schools had an enclosed outdoor play area, or any sanitary facilities.

As seen in the illustrations below, the typical schoolroom was plainly finished with lath-and-plaster walls and ceiling, and wood plank flooring. Boys sat on one side of the schoolroom, girls on the other. Children of all ages were taught in the same room by one teacher, who occupied a desk or table at one end of the room. All students sat on backless benches. Shelves attached parallel to the walls served as desks for older pupils, who consequently faced the walls or windows rather than the teacher. Younger children sat on shorter benches in the middle of the room, facing the teacher's desk, but with no writing surfaces or storage spaces of their own. A small vestibule just inside the entryway served as a cloakroom.[32]





Plan of a Characteristic Schoolroom of 1840.

In an era when families typically had multiple children who would need to go to school, the district schoolhouse was not nearly spacious enough to meet that demand:

> The main purpose of the constructors of the buildings seems to have been to see into how small a space the children could be crowded, and some schoolrooms not over thirty feet square accommodated a hundred pupils. … The number of children the schoolhouse would hold depended on how closely they could be packed onto the benches.[33]

Building maintenance and repair depended upon both the financial resources of the school district and the diligence and expertise of those charged with these responsibilities. It was not unusual for a leaky roof, rotting wood, deteriorated plaster, or broken window glass to linger unrepaired. As schools did not have janitorial services, a teacher would assign a few of the older students to light the fire each morning in cold weather, to clean the fireplace or stove, and to sweep the floors.

[32] Johnson: photo between pp. 100-101; plan, p. 104.

[33] Johnson, pp. 103-104 and 106.

During Henry Barnard's grand tour of Rhode Island in 1843-44, he personally visited 312 school buildings, and he also sent questionnaires to school committees and to teachers to solicit data and comments on these buildings' physical characteristics and conditions. In reporting his findings, Barnard pulled no punches about "the many and great evils to the health, manners, morals, and intellectual habits of children" engendered by the poor condition of schoolhouses:

> Of these (312 schoolhouses visited), 29 were owned by towns in their corporate capacity; 147 by proprietors; and 145 by school districts. Of 280 schoolhouses from which full returns were received, including those in Providence, 25 were in very good repair; 62 were in ordinary repair; and 86 were pronounced totally unfit for school purposes; 65 were located in the public highway, and 180 directly on the line of the road, without any yard or out-buildings attached; and but 21 had a playground enclosed.
>
> In over 200 schoolrooms, the average height was less than 8 feet, without any opening in the ceiling or other effectual means for ventilation; the seats and desks were calculated for more than two pupils, arranged on two or three sides of the room, and in most instances … these seats were unprovided with backs. Two hundred and seventy schools were unfurnished with a clock, blackboard, or thermometer, and only five were provided with scraper and mat for the feet. [34]

All of these problems, Barnard asserted, discouraged school attendance, impeded learning, and caused actual harm to children: "the unhealthful condition of our school buildings *make*s them sick."[35] As a remedy, Barnard produced a 72-page pamphlet with dozens of illustrations describing recommended plans and specifications for school buildings, which was widely distributed across Rhode Island. A model schoolhouse built to these new standards was also erected in each of Rhode Island's four counties.[36]

His work in Rhode Island informed Barnard's nationally acclaimed treatise, *School Architecture*, published in 1845 with several later editions. In this book, Barnard scathingly critiqued the "common errors" found in public schoolhouses across New England and elsewhere:

> They are, almost universally, badly located, exposed to the noise, dust, and danger of the highway, unattractive, if not positively repulsive in their external and internal appearance, and built at the least possible expense of material and labor.
>
> They are too small. There is no separate entry for boys and girls appropriately fitted up; no sufficient space for the convenient seating and necessary movements of the scholars; no platform, desk, or recitation room for the teacher.

[34] Barnard, pp. 30-31.

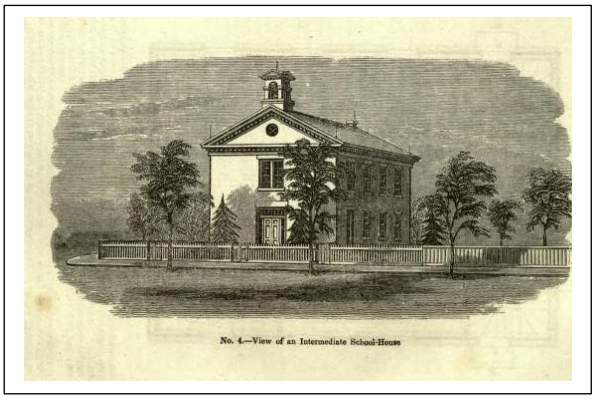
[35] Downs, p. 31.

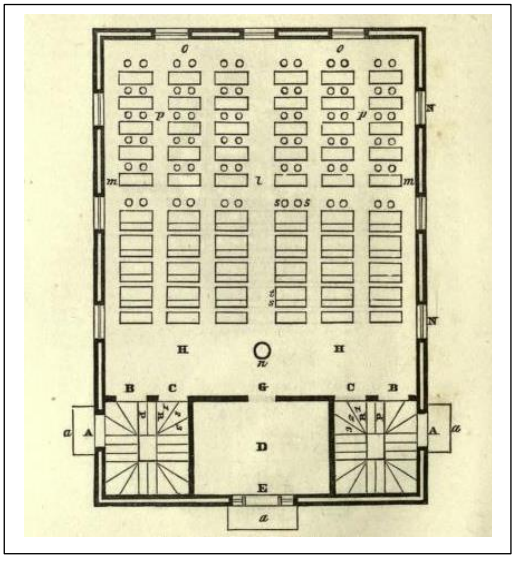
[36] Barnard, p. 30. He did not specify where these model schools were situated.

> They are badly lighted … not properly ventilated … imperfectly warmed … [and] are not furnished … in such a manner as to promote the comfort and convenience of the scholars, and the easy supervision on the part of the teacher.
>
> They are not provided with blackboards, maps, clock, thermometer, and other apparatus and fixtures which are indispensable to a well-regulated and instructed school.
>
> They are deficient in all of those in- and out-door arrangements which help to promote habits of order, and neatness, and cultivate delicacy of manners and refinement of feeling. There are no verdure, trees, shrubbery and flowers for the eye, no scrapers and mats for the feet, no hooks and shelves for cloaks and hats, no well, no sink, basin and towels to secure cleanliness, and no places of retirement for children of either sex, when performing the most private offices of nature.[37]

School Architecture, which ran nearly 400 pages, offered a list of guiding principles and a meticulously detailed and illustrated set of standards for the design, construction, and furnishing of primary, grammar (or "intermediate"), and high school buildings of varying sizes. Barnard intended these plans and specifications to be readily adaptable by any school district, large or small, urban or rural, to suit its own needs.

Asserting that "No public edifice more deserves, or will better repay, the skill, labor, and expense" needed to build schools according to these standards, Barnard also advocated for architectural styles that would inspire respect for education, both among students and in the larger community, and would allow a school to "bear a favorable comparison, in respect to attractiveness, convenience, and durability, with other public edifices." Most of the illustrations of building exteriors are in the Greek Revival style, which was prevalent in the 1840s, although there are also some examples with Gothic Revival and Italianate details.[38]





The images shown here, published in *School Architecture*, represent a two-room school in

[37] Barnard, pp. 39-40.

[38] Barnard, pp. 40-63.

Providence that followed Barnard's prescriptions. Standing on a generous (12,000 sq.ft. to 15,000 sq.ft.) lot with shade trees and enclosed with a wooden fence, this brick building, 33 feet wide by 44 feet long, had a primary school on the first floor and an intermediate school on the second floor. The first floor plan shows separate entrances at the sides for boys and girls (A), two corner stairways with doors at first and second floor levels (B, C), a recitation room with its own interior and exterior doors (D, E, G), the teacher's area (H) with a stove (n) in the middle, and an array of two-seater student desks separated by precisely measured aisles to facilitate movement around the room. The windows were 6/6 double hung sash, with Venetian blinds. The classroom ceilings had 12 feet of clearance. Vents (on the side walls downstairs, in the ceiling upstairs), controlled by ropes and pulleys, led to flues that pulled indoor air up to the attic and out through the roof.[39]

Barnard and other educational progressives of his day forged explicit connections between the design of school buildings and the quality of the teaching and learning that occurred within their walls, and also linked excellence in public education with the future health and wellbeing of American democracy. These ideas took deep root in the national consciousness. As industrialization, immigration, and urbanization wrought profound changes on American society, the public school became a civic icon: an immediately recognizable symbol of American values, culture, nationalism, and aspirations.[40]

Additional Legislative, Policy, and Architectural Improvements in Rhode Island Schools, 1862-1930

From the mid-1860s until the late 1920s, Rhode Island enjoyed a booming industrial economy and a prolonged period of prosperity. A massive influx of new residents resulting from both foreign and domestic immigration (Rhode Island's population went from 174,620 in 1860 to 687,497 in 1930), created an enormous demand for new housing, particularly in the Providence metropolitan area. More school-age children required cities and towns to provide more and bigger schools.

Henry Barnard's successors as Public Education Commissioner oversaw a series of progressive improvements to the state's public education system:

1854 Rhode Island Normal School established. This was the first public college in the state, and the first fully-state-supported teacher training instution in the U.S. (It closed in 1865 due to lack of funding, but was reinstated six years later.)

1866 Racial discrimnation in public schools prohibited.

1868 Tuition fees in public schools abolished.

1870 State Board of Education established. State funding extended to public "evening schools," which gave working adults (and anyone over age 16) access to basic or

[39] Barnard, pp. 237-238.

[40] Cutler, pp. 1-3.

continuing education. Many evening school attendees were illiterate formerly-enslaved Blacks who had migrated north followng the Civil War, and foreign-born immigrants needing to learn to read and write in English.

1871 Towns required to appoint a School Superintendent, responsible for day-to-day administration under the supervision of the School Committee.

Rhode Island Normal School re-opened.[41]

1872 Manufacturers prohibited from employing children under age 12; work hours curtailed for children aged 12 to 15. (The minimum age for child laborers was raised to 13 in 1905 and to 14 in 1907.)

1882 Towns required (not just permitted) to support public schools through taxation, and to institute regular maintenance programs for school buildings.

1884 Abolition of local school districts permitted.

1893 Towns required to provide textbooks and school supplies. Nearly a century after the first free school law was enacted, Rhode Island public schools were, finally, free of charge for all students.

1898 Teachers required to obtain state certification as a condition of employment in public schools.

1902 School attendance made compulsory for all children up to age 16.

1904 Local school districts abolished; all cities and towns shifted to a consolidated town system.

1909 Towns required to provide a high school.

1911 State Board of Education empowered to "approve proper standards of lighting, heating, ventilation, seating and other sanitary arrangements for school buildings." (Those standards were formally adopted in 1917.)

1914 Standard 36-week school year established.

1917 All children under age 16 must attend day school regularly throughout the school year unless "regularly and legally employed or engaged in business." Minimum employment age was 14.[42]

[41]In 1958 the Normal School in Providence relocated from downtown to the Mount Pleasant neighborhood, and in 1959 it was renamed Rhode Island College.

[42] Carroll, pp. 159, 177, 192, 216-17, 239-241, 256, 269-271.

Also introduced during this period: standardized currucula, uniform textbooks, physical education, student health services (medical and dental), schools for children with special needs, and vocational training, both in high schools and in separate facilites for young offenders detained in the judicial system.

While one-room schools continued to be built in rural areas, the two-room school (often a combined primary and grammar school) became the norm in urban and suburban communities, with four-room and larger typologies in the most densely populated neighborhoods. School buildings, particularly on mid-block urban sites, began to exhibit more complex footprints (T-shaped, L-shaped, H-shaped, a quadrangle with an atrium in the middle) intended to bring more natural light and fresh air into all parts of larger buildings. Beyond classrooms, these buildings also needed to accommodate spaces that served the moral and character-building mission of public education, such as art and music rooms; an auditorium, where the entire student body could gather for assemblies with inspirational content; and a gymnasium, playground, or other athletic facility where students could socialize with peers of different backgrounds, enjoy healthful exercise, and learn fair play, good sportsmanship, and teamwork. (School auditoriums and gymnasiums frequently hosted community gatherings and events as well.) High schools also needed specialized spaces like science laboratories and workshops for vocational and technical training.

A steady parade of advancements in building technologies – balloon framing; mass-produced elements like bricks, lumber, concrete, clapboards, shingles, windows, doors, cupolas, and ornamentation; central heating; indoor plumbing; gas and later electric lighting – helped municipalities to meet this demand.

As school buildings – particularly, high schools – grew in size and complexity, they became more expensive to build and maintain. In 1911 the U.S. Bureau of Education published *American Schoolhouses* with the express intention of helping municipalities promote cost savings through standardization:

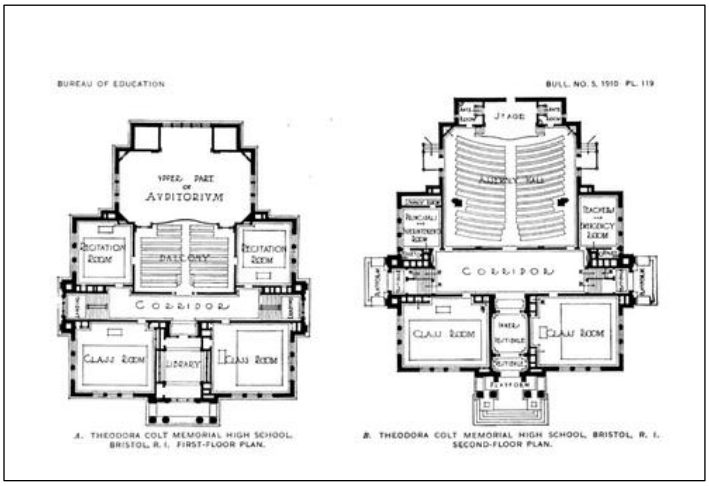
> It has been estimated that this country spends approximately $70 million dollars annually in the erection of public-school buildings. … There can be no doubt that a substantial portion of this sum might be saved and improvement made at the same time in the adaptation of these buildings to sanitary and educational purposes, as well as in their architectural appearance, by a more general diffusion of knowledge respecting the recognized standards for schoolhouse construction.[43]

Like Henry Barnard's treatise of six decades earlier, *American Schoolhouses* offered detailed and lavishly illustrated design standards for every feature of school buildings, from siting to bathroom fixtures. Author Fletcher B. Dresslar also strongly encouraged local school boards to seek out professional expertise, both from educators and from capable architects who specialized in planning and designing schools.

[43] Dresslar, p. xiii.

Among the examples Dresslar cited from across the country, one Rhode Island school was featured: Colt Memorial High School in Bristol. A monumental Classical Revival style two-story

B. THEODORA COLT MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL, BRISTOL, R. I. COOPER AND BAILEY, ARCHITECTS.



A. THEODORA COLT MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL, BRISTOL, R. I. FIRST-FLOOR PLAN.

B. THEODORA COLT MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL, BRISTOL, R. I. SECOND-FLOOR PLAN.

white marble structure designed by Boston architects Cooper & Bailey and built in 1906, Colt featured four classrooms (two per floor) at the front of the building, a central transverse corridor, two recitation rooms, a teachers' room, a principal's office, and a large 2-story assembly hall/auditorium with balcony at the rear of the building.[44]

Many of the other examples featured in *American Schoolhouses* were high schools of similarly impressive grandeur, with Classical Revival or Colonial Revival detailing expressing the philosophical ideals of public education. At first glance, these examples might not appear to demonstrate fiscal prudence. But at the end of the book, Dresslar outlined several current trends in school architecture that would aid making even the largest school buildings more economical:

> Eliminate towers and belfries ("useless, impertinent, unsightly, dangerous in times of storms or earthquakes, and expensive beyond all possible need.").
>
> Eliminate excessive and "gaudy" exterior ornamentation in favor of "beauty of proportion and fitness for use."
>
> Provide "unilateral" lighting for classrooms by placing windows only on one side of the room (preferably east or west; never south), sited toward the back of the room (to reduce glare on blackboards), as close together as possible, and with the tops of windows as close to the ceiling as possible, at least 12 feet above the floor. Provide glass space equivalent to one-fourth of the floor area. Use metal mullions to add load-bearing strength to walls with large expanses of glass.
>
> Provide a flat roof to remove the weight, expense, and fire risk of a complex roof form as well as the need for extra structural strength in load-bearing walls.

[44] Dresslar, pp. 118-119. Note that Colt's floor plans are misidentified: the drawing at left is for the second floor, and at right, for the first floor.

Utilize the "H" plan to give most classrooms exposure to either east or west light

Design to accommodate future additions. (The "H" plan was particularly adaptable for this, as the center "bar" could be built first, then wings added on one or both sides as needed.)[45]

These trends influenced the design of school buildings in America well into the middle of the 20th century.

Public Education and Historic School Buildings in East Providence, 1862-1970

At the time of its incorporation in 1862, East Providence had about 1,850 inhabitants. Over its first half century, its population grew an astounding 1,000%, to 18,584 residents by 1915. In the next 55 years, the population swelled another 260%, reaching 48,207 residents as of 1970.[46] The town became a city in 1958.

Several factors contributed to this remarkable pace of growth. East Providence was located next to the two largest cities in Rhode Island, Providence and Pawtucket, both industrial powerhouses and business centers, both part of an evolving major metropolitan area that prompted extensive suburban development within their own borders and in the surrounding towns. Advances in transportation, from railroads to horse-drawn and electric streetcars to, eventually, the automobile, made it possible for people to live wherever they wished (and could afford), instead of within walking distance of workplaces and central business districts. Several nationally prominent manufacturers including Rumford Chemical Works, American Electrical Works, and Glenlyon Bleachery were based in the northern part of East Providence and collectively employed thousands of workers, many of whom lived in company-built housing near the mills and factories. The southern part of town, meanwhile, transformed from a sparsely settled farming and fishing community into a thriving summer resort and eventually into a year-round neighborhood with its own major manufacturer and employer, Saucony Oil Company.

Five distinct neighborhoods emerged in East Providence during this period: the mill villages of Rumford and Phillipsdale in the north; the resort area of Riverside in the south; the densely populated town center of Watchemoket; and the residential neighborhood of Kent Heights, centered along Pawtucket Avenue between Watchemoket and Riverside. East Providence's ethnic makeup also grew more diverse, with immigrants from Europe and French Canada joining the Yankee stock descended from previous generations who had lived in "Old Seekonk" and "Old Rehoboth."

Among the many impacts of more than a century of growth was a constant need for more and eventually bigger schools, and for improvements in educational programs and practices. Between 1862 and 1970 East Providence built a total of 47 schools (a complete list can be found in

[45] Dresslar, pp. 69-76 and 123-125.

[46] Conforti, pp. 69, 73, and 137; also Rhode Island Statewide Planning statistics.

Appendix II), following national and statewide trends in public education policy and in the planning and design of school buildings.

One-Room District Schools, 1862-1870

One of East Providence's top priorities in 1862 was to reorganize the school system that it had inherited from Seekonk. Voters immediately elected a three-member School Committee and appropriated $500 for schools. The School Committee's first annual report noted:

> Our school districts were divided by the new State line, and it became necessary to redistrict the town; we were left with an insufficient number of schoolhouses, and most of the houses which did remain to us were either by age rendered unfit for use or were too small to accommodate the sections of the town for which they had been provided when the number of inhabitants was much smaller than at present.[47]

The Town Council promptly created eight new school districts, each with one schoolhouse (depicted on the atlas of 1870; see Appendix I). From north to south, they were:

Districts 2, 3, and 8 in Rumford
District 1 in Watchemoket
District 4 centered on "Leonard's Corner" at the intersection of Warren and Pawtucket Aves.
District 5 centered on "Armington's Corner" at the intersection of Pawtucket and Vernon Aves., now in Kent Heights
District 6 in Riverside
District 7 in the southeast part of town, on the border with Swansea, Mass. and near the Ruhlin (a.k.a. Runnins) River.

Given the numerous problems identified with the physical condition of the schoolhouses inherited from Seekonk, East Providence quickly embarked on its first building campaign to construct new schools. The initial $500 school budget proved wholly inadequate for that task; appropriations doubled in 1863, and steadily increased from there. School costs were financed in part by state and town appropriations, and in part by school district taxes and miscellaneous fees for municipal services.

The town also appointed its first School Superintendent in 1866; his principal duties were to oversee the hiring of teachers, and to visit schools routinely to assess conditions and make recommendations for needed improvements.

By 1870, all but one of the old Seekonk schoolhouses had been replaced with new district schools. The lone survivor was "District School No. 1," later known as the Potter Street Primary School. School Superintendent Joseph E. Farnum, in his 1894 *Manual of the Public Schools of East Providence*, wrote:

[47] Major, p. 17, quoting East Providence School Committee's 1863 Annual Report, p. 3.

> This is the oldest school building in use in the town, and was in part received from the Town of Seekonk … it was at that time a one-story wooden building, but within a year after it was raised and an additional story of brick was placed under it. The north half, which is an exact counterpart of the original building as improved, was erected in 1867. It is located at the corner of Potter and School Streets and has four large school rooms with small recitation rooms.[48]

District No. 1/Potter Street Primary School, at Potter and School Streets. Demolished ca. 1957.

These improvements increased the capacity of the District No. 1 School to 200 students, or 50 per classroom, the maximum permitted under Rhode Island's the 1845 school law.[49] The No. 1 School was by far the largest district school in East Providence, befitting its location in the town's most densely populated neighborhood. Although it somewhat resembled a warehouse with its plain exterior, it did have many of the typical features found on district schoolhouses of this period: a gable roof, two entrances, three windows per classroom, a chimney and two vent stacks at the ridge indicating a heating and ventilation system, and a belfry.[50]

The seven new district schools, in chronological order, were built: in Districts 3, 4, and 8 in 1862-63; in Districts 2 and 7 in 1864; and in Districts 5 and 6 in 1869-70. Several of these were "ungraded," with both primary and grammar school students mixed together. Historic photos and School Committee reports indicate that these buildings varied in size but all were one-story, one-room, wood-frame, clapboarded structures with gable or hip roofs, raised masonry foundations, several windows offering natural light and fresh air, and a chimney (the heat source was most likely a cast-iron stove). Late Victorian period details such as paired arched windows in a gable end, and a bracketed or trussed hood over a doorway, were also present. Typically, separate entrances were provided for boys and girls. An outdoor privy stood near the school.[51]

The lone survivor of this first generation of public-school buildings is the District No. 6 School (1869-70), located at 351 Willett Avenue. This was the first schoolhouse built in what is now

[48] Farnum, p. 20.

[49] 1876 School Committee Annual Report, p. 47.

[50] East Providence Historical Society, p. 30. The photo dates from 1867 or later.

[51] Farnum, pp. 21-23.

Riverside, sited in approximately the same location as an earlier Seekonk schoolhouse (see the 1850 and 1870 maps in Appendix I). Its modest size reflects the sparsely populated farming community that existed here at this time, but its dimensions of 28 by 36 feet or about 1,000 square feet (according to the East Providence Tax Assessor's website) were relatively spacious for this type of schoolhouse.

District No. 6 School, 351 Willett Ave. at the corner of Hoppin Ave., Riverside (1869-70)

Note the Late Victorian embellishments of bracketed hoods over the two doorways, representing separate entrances for boys and girls, and the paired arched windows. The three windows on each side and two in the gable end offered good natural light, fresh air and ventilation for the schoolroom. Seating in the schoolroom was likewise divided by gender, on either side of a central aisle.

Even as the No. 6 School was being built, the rural character of this area was already beginning to change. About a mile to the northwest of this school was the little summer community of Vue de L'Eau (shown on the 1850 map of Seekonk); by the late 1860s another waterfront enclave called Cedar Grove was already taking shape. These were the vanguard of a wave of development that within just a few years turned southern East Providence into a thriving summer resort called Riverside, accessible by train and later by streetcar, and filled with amusement parks, shore dinner halls, hotels, rooming houses, and summer cottages. On the inland side of all this waterfront development, year-round suburban homes, churches, stores, a library, and other hallmarks of a residential neighborhood also began to appear. The District No. 6 School was far too small to accommodate Riverside's burgeoning population: two additional schools (on Turner Avenue and on East Street) were built in the 1880s, and by the early 1890s, the No. 6 School had closed. It reopened periodically over the next four decades to relieve overcrowding at other Riverside schools; in the early 20th century it was called Willett Ave. Primary School. This school closed permanently as of 1937, and since then has been the home of the Riverside Girl Scouts.

Despite some later alterations (including the stairs and railings, the wheelchair ramp, and the brick chimney), the District No. 6 school exhibits the typical historic architectural characteristics of a mid-late 19th century rural one-room schoolhouse. As the earliest surviving public-school building in East Providence, and a well-preserved example of its type, period, and style, the District No. 6 School was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

Historic photos found for some of East Providence's other one-room district schoolhouses indicate that for the most part, they followed Henry Barnard's advice about providing more space, fresh air, ventilation, abundant natural light, and separate entrances for boys and girls. [52]

[52] School No. 3 photo in the 1899 Town of East Providence Annual Report, between pp. 130-131. Undated photos of Schools No. 4 and No. 7 in East Providence Historical Society, pp. 48-49.

District No. 3/Broadway Primary School (1862-63) on Broadway, opposite Orlo Ave. Demolished ca. 1969.

District No. 4/Leonard's Corner Primary School (1862-63) on Pawtucket Ave. north of Warren Ave. Demolished ca. 1927.

School No. 3 (later, Broadway Primary School, on North Broadway across from what is now Orlo Avenue) and School No. 4 (later, Leonard's Corner Primary School, on Pawtucket Avenue just north of Warren Avenue) were both located in populous areas on the outskirts of "downtown" Watchemoket. Both were larger and had more complex forms than the No. 6 in Riverside. They also had a bit more sophistication in their exterior details: note the paired windows, and the paired doors with decorative trusswork on the No. 3; and the enclosed side entrances and quarter-round gable windows on the No. 4. A privy is visible behind No. 4.

District No. 7/Ruhlin or Runnins River School (1864), ungraded, on the Wampanoag Trail near the Runnins River. Demolished ca. 1925.

In contrast, the ungraded No. 7 school looked more like the No. 6, and may have been of a similar size although it only had one door and two windows per side. This was located in an even more remote setting than the No. 6, near the Ruhlin (later, Runnins) River and close to the town border with Swansea, Mass. Apparently there were very few children either of primary or grammar school age in this vicinity since both levels were taught together here. Yet even this rural outpost had some period decorative embellishments in the arched gable window and the pedimented hood over the doorway. A privy can be seen behind the building.

The Shift from District to Town School System, and from One-Room to Multi-Room Plans 1870-1900

The second generation of schoolhouses, constructed between 1873 and 1896, reflected some significant changes in East Providence's school system and in the architecture of its school buildings. The ten schools constructed during this period were: Union Grammar & Primary School, Rumford (1873-74); Grove Avenue Grammar School, Watchemoket (1875); District No. 9 School, Phillipsdale (1879); Turner Avenue Grammar & Primary School, Riverside (1880-81); James Street Primary School, Watchemoket (1882-83); Mauran Avenue Primary School, Watchemoket (1884); Williams Avenue Primary School, Watchemoket (1888-89); East Avenue Primary School, Riverside (1889-90); A.P. Hoyt Grammar School, Watchemoket (1890-91); and Ellis Primary School, Watchemoket (1896). Most of these were specifically built as primary or grammar schools, although several were later enlarged to accommodate both levels.

Two new educational programs were also introduced in this period. An evening school for adult learners, initiated in 1874, rotated amongst different neighborhoods depending on enrollment in a given year. Attendance was often spotty, but tended to be most consistent in Rumford, where many factory workers who had immigrated from Northern Europe took English language and American history classes at the evening school. (As of 1905, East Providence began sending its evening school students to Providence as a cost-saving measure; that arrangement persisted into the early 1950s).[53] A decade later, in 1884, East Providence established its first high school, initially located at the Mauran Avenue Primary School, which had just opened that same year at the corner of Sixth Street. The High School moved into the Grove Ave. School in 1888, and remained there until Central High School opened in 1909.

Union Grammar and Grove Ave. Grammar Schools were the last two built under the district system; in 1877, the School Committee assumed responsibility for all town schoolhouses.[54] Union Grammar and the No. 9 School were the last of the one-room schools, although both were quickly enlarged to two rooms. The other eight schools of this second generation were constructed with two-room, four-room, or larger plans.

Four schools of this second generation survive today: Union, No. 9, East Street, and Williams Avenue. Like the No. 6 School, all four have been altered and repurposed for other uses, but all are still recognizably late 19th century school buildings.

Union Grammar and Primary School, located at 1320 Pawtucket Avenue, was the fourth schoolhouse built in Rumford (following District Schools No. 2, 3, and 8), and was constructed to serve students in Districts 2 and 8. It is the only late 19th century schoolhouse still standing in that neighborhood.

Union Grammar and Primary School, 1320 Pawtucket Ave., Rumford (1873-74, 1888-89; several later additions). Christopher Dexter, William R Walker & Sons, architects. Currently vacant.

Situated a short distance north of what was then the town center (at the intersection of Pawtucket Ave., Pleasant St., and Greenwood Ave.), this wood-frame school was built in several phases. The original building (at far left, in the photo), designed by architect Christopher Dexter of East Providence and constructed in 1873-74 as a grammar school, was a one-story, gable-roofed, one-room structure similar to the seven district schools that the Town had constructed in the previous decade.

In 1888-89 a large, one-story, gable-roofed primary school addition with a distinctive Queen Anne-style tower was constructed perpendicular to the original building. This addition, and two others built at either end of the structure in 1900 and 1904, were all designed by the prominent

[53] Major, pp. 27-30.

[54] Major, p. 23.

Providence architectural firm of William R. Walker & Son, which designed multiple other East Providence schools over a period of about forty years (see Appendix II). A 1961 brick one-story, flat-roofed addition at the rear of this building was designed by architect Michael Traficante.

School Superintendent James E. Farnum, writing in 1894, praised the Union Grammar and Primary School as providing "ample accommodations for both Grammar and Primary schools, each being separate and independent of the other. It is one of the best buildings in the town, is well lighted and ventilated, and with its recitation and other adjacent rooms is especially convenient for schoolwork."[55]

Eventually this entire building came to function exclusively as a primary, then an elementary school, and remained in that use until about 1990. After the school closed, the building served as a community center for several years. It is currently vacant. The City of East Providence has attempted several times in recent years to seek redevelopment proposals for Union Primary School, most recently in November 2020, but to date, no plans have come to fruition.

No. 9 Primary School stands at 132 Roger Williams Avenue in the mill village of Phillipsdale.[56] Built in 1879 on a waterfront lot at the northern end of Omega Pond, it was constructed to serve the children of workers at several local factories such as Rumford Chemical works, Clyde (formerly Omega) Mill, and Riverside Mill.

No. 9 Primary School, later Phillipsdale Primary School, 132 Roger Williams Ave., Phillipsdale (1879, addition 1902). Now owned by Grace Chapel Assembly of God.

Walker & Gould's drawing of this school identified it as the "Primary School, Clyde Village," referring to a small mill village located at the southern end of Omega Pond, about half a mile away.[57] The original building had separate entrances for boys and girls, as well as several banks of windows to provide natural light and fresh air; the small

[55] Farnum, p. 19.

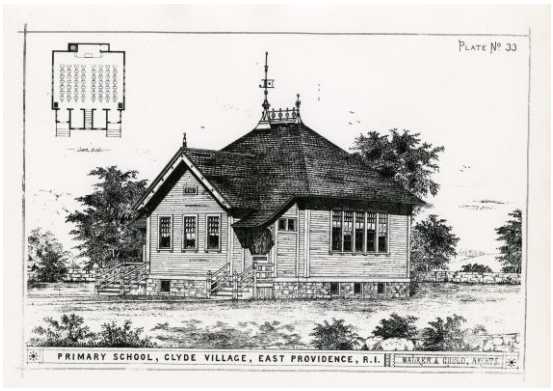
[56] This building was misidentified as "District School No. 9" in the Phillipsdale Historic District National Register nomination. That name was derived from early town directories (1892-1905), which refer to "School No. 9, Primary," and because the other numbered schools were named after the school districts in which they stood, it was assumed that this one was as well. New research has revealed that East Providence abolished its district system for schools in 1877, so the town did not create a ninth school district two years later. The School Committee's Annual Report of 1880, p. 39, mentions the construction of a new schoolhouse in 1879 on land donated by Rumford Chemical Company – in District No. 2. Why the School Committee used the number 9 in naming this building is unknown (chronologically, it was the town's eleventh schoolhouse), but Farnum, p. 23, identified it as "Primary School No. 9," which jibes with the phrasing in the town directory listings.

[57] Drawing published in *Builder and Woodworker*, May 1880, p. 33; cited by RIHPHC in a 1975 historic architectural survey data form for 132 Roger Williams Ave.

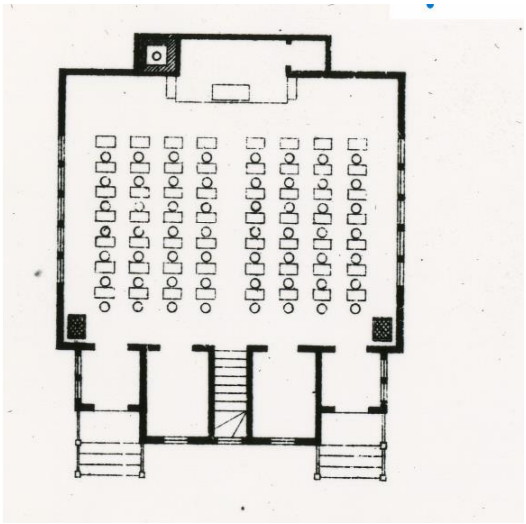
chimney at the rear, as shown in the floor plan, lacked a fireplace, indicating that the building was heated by a cast-iron stove.

Superintendent Farnum wrote of School No. 9:

> This, although a one-story, one room building, is of the newer and more modern pattern of school edifices. It is of ornate architecture … from plans of William R. Walker & Gould, architects. … The lot on which this building stands was given to the Town for the purpose for which is it used by the Rumford Chemical Works.[58]



Drawing by architects Walker & Gould (before 1902 addition)



Enlargement of interior plan, showing separate seating areas for boys and girls divided by a central aisle, with the teacher's desk against the back wall. The dark square next to the teacher's desk represents a chimney.

In 1883 the Richmond Paper Co. began constructing a manufacturing plant on a spit of land on the west side of Omega Pond, behind School No. 9. In 1893 that plant was acquired by American Electrical Works, which became an internationally known producer of steel and copper wiring. By the turn of the 20th century the adjacent mill village had become known as Phillipsdale, in honor of A.E.W. founder Eugene Phillips, and two other major manufacturers had begun operations nearby: Washburn Wire Co. and Glenlyon Bleacheries. Together these three plants employed several thousand workers, many of whom lived in company-built housing.

The rapid growth of Phillipsdale brought more school-age children into the village, and as a result School No. 9 was enlarged and altered in 1902. The addition was essentially a mirror image of the original, but the separate doorways were replaced by a single main entrance. Town directories indicate that by 1910, this had been renamed Phillipsdale Primary School.

Despite the air and water pollution, toxic waste, and noise produced by the nearby manufacturing plants (hardly a healthful learning – or teaching – environment), Phillipsdale Primary School

[58] Farnum, pp. 23-24.

remained in this location until 1929, when it moved to a new building on Horsford Avenue in Rumford. (That new building was later renamed Roger Williams Primary School, then "Wilson II School;" it no longer exists. The Myron J. Francis Elementary School at 64 Bourne Ave., built in 1989, occupies that site). For several decades after the school relocated, School No. 9 was occupied by an American Legion Hall. Grace Episcopal Church next door bought this building in 1965 and converted it to a parish house. The church and the former school are both currently owned by Grace Chapel Assembly of God.

The No. 9 School retains its historic and architectural significance, and was listed on the National Register in 2011 as part of the Phillipsdale Historic District.

Williams Avenue Primary School (1888-89) at 115 Williams Avenue stands in the first block of that street west of North Broadway, and two blocks north of Taunton Avenue in Watchemoket. Designed by William R. Walker & Son, this was originally a two-story, two-room plan school; it was enlarged to four rooms in 1916 (that addition also by Walker). As described by Superintendent Farnum in 1894, "Each floor is a single school room, with recitation room and cloak room, halls, etc. It is a light, airy, and well-ventilated building."[59]

This school's original architectural features included a hip roof; a square cupola with belfry; a central front-pedimented-gable pavilion on the façade containing two entrances; one-story projections on either side of the pavilion (likely, containing stairways); side elevation windows grouped in pairs or in threes; brick foundation; and an exterior chimney at the rear.

Williams Ave. Primary School (1888-89), 115 Williams Avenue. William R. Walker & Sons, architects. Photo taken before construction of east addition in 2009.

Williams Ave. Primary School in 2021. Now owned by the East Providence Boys & Girls Club.

Williams Avenue Primary served as a primary and then an elementary school until 1954. The following year, the Town sold the property to the East Providence Boys Club, which has owned and occupied the building ever since. The facility's name changed to Boys & Girls Club as of 1987. Over the past 66 years the Club has performed numerous alterations on this building, including adding a front porch and a dormer on the roof, infilling the openings of the belfry,

[59] Farnum, p. 21. Also, School Committee Annual Report for 1917, p. 43.

replacing windows and doors, and constructing two sizeable additions on either side of the former school.

Williams Avenue Primary School is the most altered of the five surviving 19th century public-school buildings in East Providence, but it is historically significant as the only school of that era still standing in Watchemoket. In addition, for more than half a century this former school has provided a home to the local branch of a national civic organization that has an education-related mission to mentor and support young people, particularly those in need, as they prepare for adulthood. That aspect of the building's history may merit further investigation.

East Street Primary School, at 65 East Street in Riverside, is situated just south of Shore Road and one block west of Bullocks Point Avenue. Designed by Providence architect George W. Cady (who also designed the A.P. Hoyt Grammar School in Watchemoket; see below) and constructed in 1889-90, one year after the Williams Avenue School, this was also a two-story, two-room-plan school with many similar exterior architectural features including a hip roof, raised brick foundation, two entrances on the façade, and paired windows.


East Street Primary School (1889-90), 65 East Street. George W. Cady, architect. Now a multi-family residence.

The details here vary a bit from Williams Ave.: the two shorter projections on each side of the building (which likely contained stairways originally) have a first-floor recess sheltering a secondary entryway, and the south projection is topped with what looks like a tower roof. (Whether this building originally had a belfry is unknown.) According to Superintendent Farnum this school was likewise quite similar to Williams Ave. in its interior arrangements: "… a modern building, each floor being devoted to a single school room with its attendant recitation and cloak rooms."[60]

The East Street Primary School remained in that use until 1940, and then was sold to a private owner and converted to apartments. Alterations including the added front porch and the replacement windows and stair railings were all associated with the residential use. It is historically and architecturally significant as the only second-generation public school remaining in Riverside.

[60] Farnum, p. 21.

Historic photos found for a few of the second-generation schools that no longer exist further illustrate some of the changes in school architecture that occurred in the late 19th century.[61]

Grove Ave. School (1875). Edward L. Angell, Architect. Demolished 1956.
.

The last school to be built under the district school system, the Grove Avenue Grammar School (1875) in Watchemoket, presaged the larger typologies that would become standard in the 1880s and 1890s. Designed by Providence architect Edward L. Angell, this two-story, T-shaped, multi-room structure with a mansard roof, a gabled dormer over a centered main entrance, a cupola with belfry, and groups of multiple windows, signaled a shift toward a more monumental appearance for urban schools.

As the largest school building in the geographic center of town, the Grove Ave. Grammar School began sharing its quarters with East Providence High School in 1888. When the grammar school moved in 1891 to the new A.P. Hoyt Grammar School a few blocks away (see below), the high school took over this entire building and adapted its interior, introducing an auditorium, a gymnasium, a science laboratory, and two typing rooms.[62]

East Providence was not alone in having multiple primary and grammar schools located in various neighborhoods but only one high school to serve the entire town; other Rhode Island towns did the same. Although teenagers could reasonably be expected to walk longer distances to and from school than could younger children, getting to downtown Watchemoket on foot from Rumford and Riverside was too long a hike, and not all parents could afford daily streetcar fares. In 1890-91 voters began approving an annual appropriation (for the first few years, $500 per year) to help cover transportation costs for high school students.[63]

The Grove Ave. building was East Providence's high school from 1888 until Central High School opened in 1909. After that, this building was briefly known as the Grove Ave. Training School (1912-1935), and finally Grove Ave. Elementary School (1935-1957).[64] It was taken

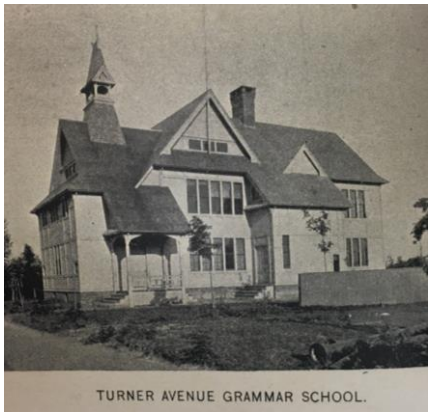
[61] Turner Ave photo in Farnum, between pp 18-19. James St. photo from East Providence Historical Society collection. Hoyt photo in Farnum, between pp 16-17.

[62] Farnum, pp. 16-18.

[63] School Committee Annual Report of 1895, p. 121.

[64] The Grove Ave. Training School was an early vocational and technical school for high school students. "Manual training" programs were introduced in high schools in the late 19th century for students who wished to learn a trade. While the term "training school" also referred (and still does refer) to a correctional facility where young offenders receive education and job training to help them rehabilitate and transition back into society, the Grove Ave. Training School was not a reform school.

down around 1956 and replaced by the Grove Avenue Elementary School, built 1957-58 at 100 Grove Ave. (see below).



Turner Ave. Grammar & Primary School, Riverside (1880-81, enlarged 1893-94). William R. Walker & Son, architects. Demolished ca. 1963.

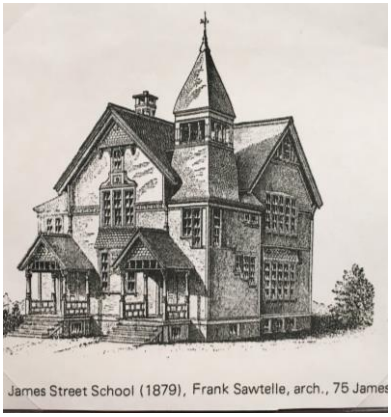
The Turner Avenue Grammar & Primary School, built in 1881-82 as a two-story two-room grammar school and enlarged to a four-room building in 1893-94 with a primary school on the first floor and grammar school on the second floor, was designed by William R. Walker & Son.

Located at the corner of Turner Ave. and Smith St., this was the second public school built in Riverside, and with its complex massing and roof form, two entryways (one enclosed, one under an open porch) bell tower, and banks of classroom windows, it would have seemed ultra-modern compared with the then twelve-year-old District No. 6 School.

This school operated until 1943 (solely as a primary school as of 1912), and then was sold to neighboring St. Brendan's Catholic Church and used as a parochial school until about 1961. It was demolished around 1963.

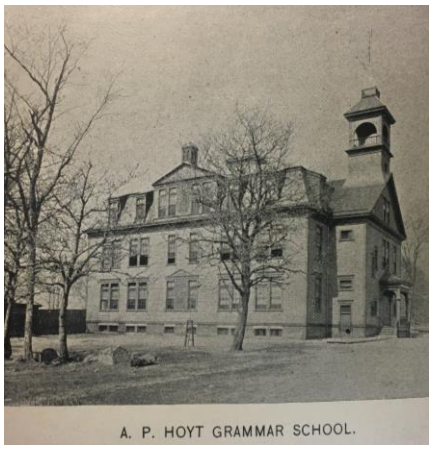
The James Street Primary School, designed by architect Frank Sawtelle of Providence and built in 1882-83, presented a similar architectural vocabulary to the Turner Ave. School. Built in Watchemoket just a few blocks north of the Grove Ave. School, it was two stories tall with two entrances under gable-roofed porches, and a two-room plan (one classroom on each floor) as well as a recitation room and cloak room.

This remained in school use until about 1961, after which the R.I. Department of Human Services occupied the building for about two decades. It was demolished around 1985.



James Street Primary School, Watchemoket (1882-83). Frank Sawtelle, architect. Demolished ca. 1985.

The A.P. Hoyt Grammar School, designed by George W. Cady of Providence and built 1890-91, was located at the corner of Lyon Avenue and Freeborn Avenue. Named for Albert P. Hoyt, the chairman of the School Committee who oversaw the planning and fundraising for this new school but died before construction was completed, it was 3 stories tall with an eight-room plan. The grammar schools previously located at the Grove Ave. and Mauran Ave. Schools were consolidated here.



A.P. Hoyt School, Lyon Ave. at Freeborn Ave., Watchemoket (1890-91). George W. Cady, architect. Demolished ca. 1957.

Similar in exterior appearance to the Grove. Ave. School, the Hoyt School had four classrooms (each spacious enough to accommodate 56 pupils), as well as recitation rooms, teacher rooms, and supply rooms arrayed around a central corridor, on the first and second floors. An auditorium on the third floor seated 800 people. The basement level held a furnace room, teacher toilet rooms, and other conveniences. Hoyt School, which stood on four combined lots, also had an unusually large schoolyard for recreation. Proclaimed as "the largest and best school building in the town" shortly after it opened, Hoyt School remained in use until 1957, and was demolished shortly thereafter.[65]

In the School Committee's Annual Report of 1896, Chairman William W. Ellis echoed the prevailing sentiments of public school advocates nationwide when he wrote:

> Duly recognizing the essential need of educating the boys and girls in such branches and sciences as shall best equip them for the highest usefulness in life, and of thus giving to them the surest means for gaining a livelihood, we are also striving to inculcate principles of loyalty and love of country, temperance and sobriety, purity of lips and tongue, - in fact a rounding out and making of such a character in each individual case as shall stand in the community for intelligence, patriotism, chastity and virtue.[66]

This annual report also noted that in the previous year, 1895, Rhode Island had conducted a state census, and East Providence had conducted its own census of schoolchildren. Of the town's 10,170 residents, 2,200 were school-age children and 1,805 were enrolled in public schools, comprising about 20% of the total population. This represented an eye-popping 186% gain in the number of students since 1875. East Providence, which abutted the two largest cities in the state, had become "a town of homes," offering quick and easy access to workplaces and businesses in Providence and Pawtucket; its public school needs were significant and expected to continue to grow.

At this time, the town had fifteen school buildings (one eight-room, four four-room, four two-room, and six one-room; excluding the old District 6 and 7 schools, which were then unoccupied), and employed 47 teachers and 11 janitors. But all of the schools in Watchemoket, especially Mauran Ave. Primary (which had a capacity of 192 but an enrollment of 301, stuffed into four rooms), were chronically overcrowded, forcing the town to rent makeshift classrooms in nearby commercial buildings. Chairman Ellis urged that any new schools should have eight rooms for use of both primary and grammar grades, or at least four rooms but designed to be

[65] Farnum, p. 18.

[66] School Committee Annual Report of 1896, p. 104.

easily enlarged as demand increased in the future.[67] Voters at the 1896 town meeting, either unpersuaded by this argument or reluctant to absorb the cost of a larger building, approved the construction of a two-room school at the corner of Lyon Avenue and Juniper Street to help relieve overcrowding at Mauran. This, the last of the second-generation schools, was named Ellis Primary School in honor of the School Committee Chairman; it is no longer extant.

Early 20th Century Schools, 1900-1930

Overcrowding in public schools remained a persistent problem in the early years of the 20th century, as East Providence's population climbed from about 12,000 in 1900 to nearly 30,000 in 1930. Yet the town did not build any new schools between 1896 and 1905, evidently due to fiscal constraints. For example, the School Committee began recommending construction of a new high school in 1901, but voters consistently declined to appropriate the funds until 1908, when they approved a bond issue instead.[68]

In 1910 the job of School Superintendent became a professional administrative position responsible not just for hiring teachers but for all of the day-to-day operations of the school system.

The first two decades of the 20th century saw thirteen new schools built (none during World War I): Dean Primary School (1905) in Riverside; Brightridge Primary School (1907) in Kent Heights; Central High School in Watchemoket (1909); Riverside Grammar/Junior High School (1911, with Junior High School addition in 1929); Bourne Avenue Grammar School (1911) in Rumford; Tristram Burgess School (1917) on South Broadway; Bliss Elementary School (1922) in Rumford; Lincoln Elementary School (1923) in Riverside; Kent Heights Elementary School (1927); Arthur E. Platt Elementary School (1927) in Riverside; a new Phillipsdale Primary School (1927) in Phillipsdale; Central Junior High School, built behind and soon connected to Central High, thus combining two buildings into a single complex (1929); and the Warren Avenue School (1930) in Watchemoket.

The firm of William R. Walker & Son, which had clearly cemented its position as East Providence's go-to school architects, designed all but two (Dean Primary and Central High School) of this third generation of public schools.

Of these thirteen, only four survive: Central High School and Central Junior High, Riverside Grammar/Junior High, and Lincoln Elementary.

Central High School (1909) and Central Junior High School (1929), a complex of two buildings with a current address of 20 Whelden Avenue, occupies an entire triangular city block in the town center, prominently situated at the intersection of two of East Providence's major thoroughfares: Taunton Avenue, running east-west, and Broadway, running north-south. The high visibility of the site enhances the monumental presence of these buildings.

[67] School Committee Annual Report of 1896, pp. 100-101 and 115-118.

[68] Conforti, pp. 86-87.

Central High School, which faces west toward the intersection of Taunton and Whelden Avenues, was the town's first purpose-built high school. By the early 20th century the twenty-five year old Grove Avenue School, which the high school had occupied since 1888, was in desperate need of a bigger and more modern facility. In 1908, after voters approved a bond issue for its construction, the School Committee tapped Boston architects Banning & Thornton to design a new high school. Central High School opened in 1909, with a capacity of 375 students.

Central High School (1909), Taunton Avenue and Whelden Avenue. Banning & Thornton, architects. Photo ca. 1909-1922.

As seen in the historic photos,[69] Central High School stood on a par with many of the high schools that two years later would be featured in the U.S. Dept. of Education's book *American Schoolhouses:* a monumental brick multi-story building with a parapeted flat roof, a rectangular footprint (with an atrium in the middle, to maximize natural light and fresh air coming into interior spaces), a raised basement level, and a Colonial Revival style design featuring a symmetrical arrangement of paired windows surrounding centrally located entryways, a wide molded cornice with dentil moldings, and two-story Ionic pilasters topped with pediments. The original main entrance on the west façade was recessed beneath a wide archway framed by Ionic pilasters and architrave and topped with a keystone; brick stairways provided access to this entryway and another on the north side.

Central High School (1909); photo ca. 1909-1922

Originally 2 stories tall, a third story was added in 1923, its design complementing the original.


Central High School in 2021, showing 3rd floor added in 1923. Now, Taunton Plaza Apartments.

A World War I memorial, a bronze statue of a soldier standing on a granite plinth, stands at the westernmost point of the triangular lot.

[69] West façade, view looking east, East Providence Historical Society collection. Three-quarter view looking southeast, Conforti, p. 143.

Central Junior High School, East Providence's first purpose-built junior high school, was constructed directly behind Central High School in 1928-29. (The connector between the two buildings was added in 1933.) Designed by William R Walker & Son, which by this time was one of Rhode Island's leading specialists in school architecture, Central Junior High is also a monumental brick 3-story flat-roofed structure that complements the style and architectural detailing of the High School, with a similarly symmetrical arrangement of window and door openings, and concrete and brick Colonial Revival style trim elements. It has a trapezoidal footprint enclosing a large atrium. The two original main entrances, projecting slightly forward near the northwest and southeast corners of the building, face south toward Whelden Avenue; both doorways are framed by concrete pilasters and a decorative entablature, above which is some ornamental detailing and a two-story, vertically proportioned window opening containing a large triple window. The windows are arranged in groups of six, separated by brick piers.

Central Junior High School (1929), 20 Whelden Avenue. William R. Walker & Son, architects. View of west façade. Now, Taunton Plaza Apartments.


Central Junior High School, southeast corner. View from South Broadway looking northwest.

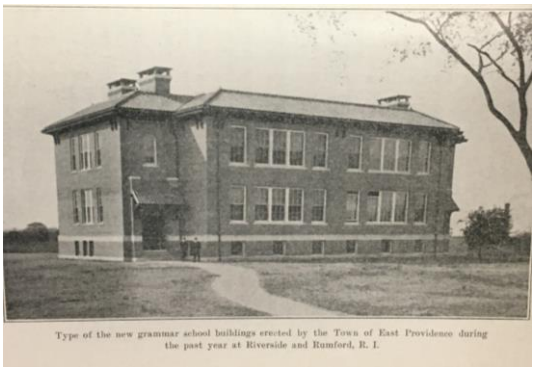
The concept of the junior high school evolved from a series of conferences sponsored by the National Education Association in 1892-93. A group of educators led by Harvard University President Charles W. Eliot, after studying secondary school programs across the country, recommended a set of academic standards for all American high schools to reassure college admissions officials that candidates would be adequately prepared. In its final report, the so-called "Committee of Ten" noted that the main purpose of secondary schools was to prepare students to become independent, capable, and responsible adults, whether or not they went on to college. However, the then-current practice of putting subjects like algebra, geometry, natural sciences, and classical and foreign languages in the high school curriculum hindered those students who aspired to go to college from advancing far enough in their high school studies to meet college admission requirements. As a remedy, the Committee of Ten proposed to shorten the length of time that students spent in primary and grammar school from eight years to six. This would allow seventh- and eighth-graders (and eventually, ninth-graders also) to acquire some proficiency in advanced subjects before entering high school, and would also ensure that "all the mental habits that the adult student will surely need, begin to be formed in the child's mind before the age of fourteen." [70] By the early 1900s

[70] National Education Association, pp. 14 and 43.

junior high schools were beginning to be established across the United States. East Providence caught up with this trend in 1929, when it opened two new junior high schools for grades 7-9; the other was in Riverside (see below).

East Providence High School moved to 2000 Pawtucket Avenue in 1952. Central Junior High closed in the late 1970s, its students dispersed to the Riverside Middle School and to the Edward R. Martin Middle School in Kent Heights. The City sold this complex in 1979 to a developer who converted it into multi-family residential use, now known as Taunton Plaza Apartments. Despite some alterations like replacement windows, removal of original exterior stairways, and relocating the main entrance to Whelden Avenue, both buildings retain their historic architectural significance.

Riverside Grammar School (1911, 1922), later Riverside Junior High School (1929), located at 100 Bullocks Point Avenue near Riverside Square. East Providence again hired William R. Walker & Son to design two identical grammar schools, one here in Riverside and the other on Bourne Avenue in Rumford. (The Bourne Ave. Grammar School, later known as Wilson I School, no longer exists.)


Type of the new grammar school buildings erected by the Town of East Providence during the past year at Riverside and Rumford, R. I.

Bourne Avenue Grammar School, the twin of Riverside Grammar School (both 1911); William R. Walker & Son, architects. 1912 photo.

In Riverside, the chosen site, highly visible on top of a hill overlooking a main thoroughfare, was enhanced by this two-story, monumental, brick, Italian Renaissance Revival-inspired design. Character-defining features include the low-pitched flat hip roof (the lower slopes of which were originally clad in clay tiles); the deep cornice with paired decorative brackets; similar bracket detailing at the matching entryways that are recessed at the front corners; and the symmetrical arrangement of windows and doors. Most windows are in groups of three, separated by brick piers. The original building held eight classrooms.[71]

Superintendent James R.D. Oldham described the new Riverside and Rumford Grammar Schools:

> Beautiful structures of brick, located amid pleasant environment, and having within their walls practically every necessity that is considered requisite in modern school construction, these buildings appeal to the eye and arouse an honest pride in the breast of every citizen who has at heart the highest welfare of our boys and girls. Provided with an

[71] School Committee Annual Report for 1912, p. 40; photo facing p. 5. The photo caption says, in part, "Type of the new grammar school buildings erected at Riverside and Rumford." Since the building depicted does not appear to be standing on top of a hill (the Riverside building does not have that much land in front of it), it must be the Bourne Ave. School.

> ample playground, with inside playrooms, spacious classrooms, roomy corridors, modern drinking fountains; and with heating, lighting, and sanitary conveniences of the very best type, each building seems admirably adapted to serve the interests of the community in which it is located. [72]

Riverside Grammar's 2-story north wing and 1-story rear addition were built in 1922. The matching 2-story south wing was added in 1929 when the building was converted to Riverside Junior High School, which opened the same year as Central Junior High. All three additions embrace the original block and match its materials, fenestration patterns, and ornamental detailing.

Riverside Grammar & Junior High School (1911, 1922, 1929), 100 Bullocks Point Ave. William R. Walker & Son, architects. Now, East Bay Community Action Program.

In 1967 Riverside Junior High School relocated to a new building on Forbes Street (now, Riverside Middle School; see below). This building on Bullocks Point Avenue remained in City ownership for many years, occupied by a variety of city and state government offices and non-profit organizations. The City finally sold it in 2003; it is presently owned and occupied by East Bay Community Action Program.

Despite some later alterations (including replacement of the roofing material and windows, and a wheelchair-accessible addition at the front northwest corner), Riverside Grammar & Junior High School retains its historic architectural significance.

Lincoln Elementary School (1922, addition 1926), 25 Metropolitan Park Drive, Riverside, also designed by William R. Walker & Son.[73] This is the southernmost public school building constructed in East Providence, located between Crescent View Avenue and Haines Memorial State Park. Unlike the two "make a statement" junior high schools that the Walker firm would design just a few years later, Lincoln Elementary School was designed to fit in with the modest scale of the single-family homes in the surrounding neighborhood: a one story, wood-frame structure with a hip roof, wood shingle walls, wood trim, and a raised brick foundation. The main entrance at the northeast corner of the building has a Colonial Revival style pedimented portico with Doric columns. (A second, matching south entrance, seen in a 1976 photo, was later removed to accommodate a wheelchair ramp and accessible entrance at the first floor level.[74])

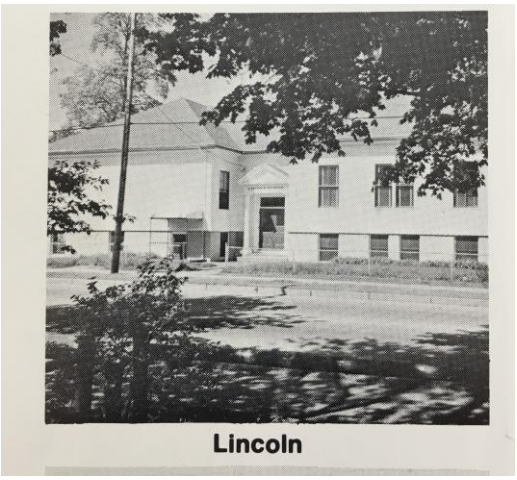
Originally a two-room-plan school, Lincoln Elementary was enlarged to four rooms in 1926; that addition was also designed by the Walker firm.

[72] School Committee Annual Report for 1922, pp. 9-10.

[73] School Committee Annual Report for 1922, pp. 7-8. Also report for 1927, pp. 87-88.

[74] Photo in School Superintendent's Annual Report for 1976 (unpaginated).

Lincoln Elementary School (1922, 1926), 25 Metropolitan Park Drive. William R. Walker & Son, architects. Now, Christian Community Bible Church.



1976 School Superintendent's Annual Report showing original south entrance, matching the surviving north entrance seen in the photo at left.

Lincoln Elementary served this neighborhood until 1981, when its students were relocated to the Waddington Elementary School a short distance away. The City then sold the building to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, which operated a youth center here for several years. In 2013 the Christian Community Bible Church purchased the building, and is the current owner/occupant.

Despite some alterations (notably, the wheelchair ramp and accessible entrance at the front, and changes to windows), the former Lincoln Elementary School retains its historic and architectural significance, both as the only surviving wood-frame 1920s school in East Providence, and as the work of a major architectural firm that designed multiple school buildings in this city over a period of some four decades.

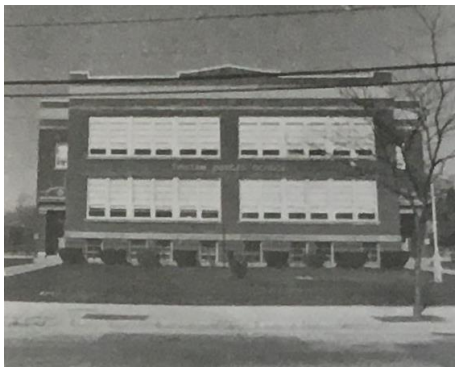
Historic photos were found for three other early 20th century, third generation public schools which no longer exist.

Brightridge Primary School (1907, enlarged 1911) stood on Pawtucket Avenue at the corner of Brightridge Avenue in Kent Heights. Originally a one-story, two-room, wood-frame, stucco-clad structure, this school was designed to be able to be enlarged either by adding rooms on the ground floor or by adding a second floor. This photo shows the remodeled building in 1913, now a 2-story four-room school with a hip roof; the addition was designed by

Brightridge School, Pawtucket Avenue at Brightridge Avenue (1907, enlarged 1911). Photo 1913. Demolished after 1979.

William R. Walker & Son.[75] From the photo it appears that the second floor level was clad in brick. Note the two entrances on the south side elevation, one near each corner.

Tristram Burgess School (1917, enlarged 1924) stood on South Broadway at the corner of Fort Street, in southern Watchemoket. Originally a 2 story, brick, four-room-plan school designed by William R. Walker & Son, this school featured a flat roof with parapet, groups of windows facing east to provide unilateral light (per *American Schoolhouse*'s advice), and two entrances, one on each side, set well back from the façade. Walker also designed the 1924 addition that enlarged the school to eight rooms. This school was named to honor Tristram Burgess (1770-1863), who despite very little formal schooling managed to educate himself well enough to attend Brown University; he went on to become a lawyer, a renowned orator, a R.I. Supreme Court Justice, and a U.S. Representative from Rhode Island.[76]



Tristram Burgess School, South Broadway at Fort Street (1917, enlarged 1924). Photo 1989. Demolished after 1989.

Kent Heights Elementary School (1927, additions 1954, 1989, 2003), located on Pawtucket Avenue at the corner of Wannamoisett Avenue, was also designed by William R. Walker & Son, and built during a time when the Kent family's former large farm was being redeveloped with suburban housing. Sited just a few blocks north of the former District School No. 4 at Armington's Corners, the original Kent Heights School building resembled the Tristram Burgess School, with its two story rectangular massing, brick walls, flat roof with parapet, and groups of windows (facing west, for unilateral light). Note the entrance on the south elevation; there was probably a matching entrance on the north side.[77] This building and its 1954 addition were torn down in 2003; however a 1989 addition at the rear and a 2003 addition together comprise the current Kent Heights Elementary School at 2680 Pawtucket Avenue. (Due to the loss of its original structure, Kent Heights Elementary is not eligible for National Register consideration.)

Kent Heights Elementary School (1927, enlarged 1954), Pawtucket Avenue at Wannamoisett Ave. Original building and 1954 addition demolished 2003; two later additions survive.

[75] School Committee Annual Report of 1913, facing the school calendar inside the front cover.

[76] School Superintendent's Report of 1989, p. 25, including photo. Also Conforti, pp. 65-66.

[77] School Superintendent's Report of 19989, photo p. 19.

Mid-20th Century Schools, 1950-1970

East Providence did not build any new public schools between 1931 and 1950, while the Great Depression raged and then the nation became embroiled in World War II. However, the Town Council did receive federal Works Progress Administration funding in 1934 for the purpose of enlarging and remodeling the Bliss School on Orlo Avenue, the Platt Primary School in Riverside, and the Central High and Junior High Schools.[78]

In the postwar era, several major forces reshaped the American landscape and its public schools. The G.I. Bill and the Federal Housing Authority offered attractive mortgage rates to returning soldiers and others looking to buy or build a home. Wartime gasoline rationing ended, causing a spike in personal automobile ownership. Birth rates soared; according to the U.S. Census Bureau, over 76 million babies were born in the U.S. between 1946 and 1964. All of this generated an explosion of new suburban development across the country, and also generated enormous pressures on municipal school systems and budgets:

> The rising population of young American children made school building, together with housing, the most widely discussed architectural challenge after World War II. Enrollment in public U.S. elementary and secondary schools during the 1949-50 school year was 25.1 million. By 1959-60, it had increased by almost 11 million, and it peaked in 1971 at 46 million. The surge of births increased the postwar demand for classrooms, which collided with an outdated and limited stock of school buildings. … High prices and scarcity of materials during the depression and wartime had left few opportunities for renovating or even maintaining older structures, much less constructing new schools.[79]

School architecture also changed. The monumental multi-story symmetrical masonry building, with ornamentation evoking classical, historicist, and patriotic ideals, and with classrooms arrayed around a central corridor as well as a large auditorium, gave way to a modernist aesthetic characterized by low-rise horizontal massing; experimental forms (e.g., long, finger-like single- or double-loaded corridors, classrooms clustered around a large common space); steel-framed modular construction on poured concrete slabs; plate glass; little or no ornamentation; and flexible interior spaces. Modernist public schools aimed to be civic icons, just as their predecessors had been, but with the added advantages of being faster and more economical to build, customizable to the needs of an individual community, and readily expandable as needed.

As the *New York Times* observed in 1952, "the 'school of the future' is rapidly becoming a thing of the present in many forward-thinking communities." That quote appeared in an article about a recent nationwide competition to choose the best-designed modern public schools. The winner and several other contenders were sprawling complexes on multi-acre sites, intended to accommodate several hundred to a thousand or more students.[80]

---

[78] Town of East Providence annual report of 1934, pp. 19-20.

[79] Ogata, p. 562.

[80] *New York Times,* "Modern Design Transforms Schools, August 24, 1952, Section E, p. 9.

New thinking in pedagogy also brought a child-centered focus to mid-century school planning and design. School buildings should make children feel at home, secure and comfortable, while school programming should nurture children's imaginations, creativity, self-confidence, self-expression, and emotional development. "The school plant designed for the child is unpretentious, open, colorful; spreading out permits him to blow off steam and breathe fresh air; doors can be opened without a major struggle … the general environment is not forbidding and monumental, but as informal and devoid of affectation as the child himself."[81]

International relations also played a role in this trend. As tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union escalated into the Cold War, the traditional view that one of the purposes of public education was to protect and preserve American democracy gained new traction, coupled with rising anxiety over whether democracy would be able to triumph over communism. In 1958 the National Defense Education Act provided a massive influx of federal money for school buildings and equipment, and for curriculum development.

East Providence – where the population jumped from about 32,000 to about 48,000 between 1940 and 1970 (the town became a city in 1958) – followed many of these national trends as it constructed thirteen new school buildings between 1950 and 1970: one high school, one vocational-technical school, one junior high school, and ten elementary schools. In chronological order, these were: Rumford Elementary, later Carl T. Thompson Elementary School (1950); Riverside Elementary, later James R.D. Oldham Elementary School (1951); East Providence Senior High School (1952) in Watchemoket; Alice M. Waddington Elementary School (1955) in Riverside; Grove Avenue Elementary School (1957-58) in Watchemoket; Emma G. Whiteknacht Elementary School (1958) in Watchemoket; Agnes P. Hennessey Elementary School (1957-58) in Watchemoket; William R. Watters Elementary School (1963) in Riverside; Meadowcrest Elementary School, now J.R.D. Oldham Pre-K and Elementary School (1964) in Riverside; Riverside Junior High School, now Riverside Middle School (1964-66); Silver Spring Elementary School (1968) in Kent Heights; Orlo Avenue Elementary School (1970) in Watchemoket; and East Bay/Bristol County Vocational-Technical School, now East Providence Career & Technical Center in Watchemoket (1970).

Of these thirteen, ten schools still stand. The Watters Elementary School at 33 Hoppin Avenue, along with the Arthur Platt Elementary School (1927) at 80 Burnside Avenue, both of which occupied the same block in Riverside but had been closed for decades, were recently razed. Demolition of East Providence Senior High School began during the writing of this report.

Many of these fourth-generations schools were constructed on multi-acre sites in what were at that time rapidly developing suburban residential enclaves within Watchemoket, Rumford, Kent Heights and Riverside. About half were designed by the same architect: R. Milton Kenyon. Of the ten survivors, all but Oldham and Thompson are still used as public schools.

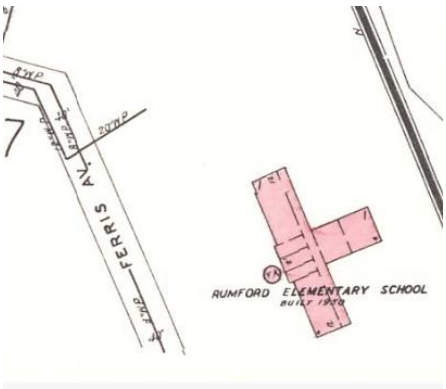
Since the typically large-to-massive scale of mid-century schools makes them difficult to photograph, map images or aerial photos are also included here.

[81] Ogata, p. 569.

The first two postwar public schools, although built at opposite ends of town, are very similar to each other, and represent the last remnants of the traditional Colonial Revival style that had long been associated with school buildings, here expressed in mid-century form.

Rumford Elementary School, later Carl T. Thompson Elementary School (1950), 215 Ferris Avenue). Designed by R. Milton Kenyon, and located on a 2.69-acre lot in the far northeastern

Carl T. Thompson Elementary School (1950), 215 Ferris Ave. R. Milton Kenyon, architect. Now, The Wolf School.



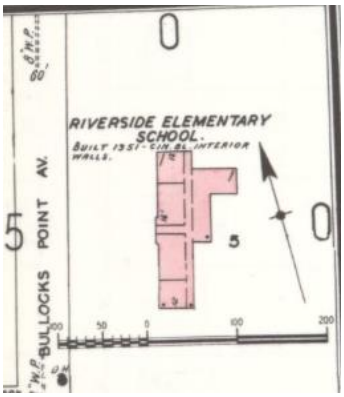
Sanborn map, 1956

corner of Rumford near the Ten Mile River Greenway, this is a one-story brick structure with horizontal massing and a T-shaped footprint. Colonial Revival elements include the hip roof with cupola, the gable-roofed, slightly projecting central entrance pavilion trimmed with concrete quoins and an ornamental concrete panel; and the doorway framing of pilasters and pediment. Windows are arrayed in groups on the west façade. Originally called Rumford Elementary School, it was renamed in 1951 following the death of then-School Superintendent Carl T. Thompson. It served as an elementary school, and later a kindergarten, until 2000 when The Wolf School (a private K-8 school) purchased the building. Wolf has since built several additions behind the original building and made some other alterations, but this school retains its historic architectural significance.

Riverside Elementary School, later James R.D. Oldham Elementary School (1951), 640 Bullocks Point Avenue. Very similar to the Thompson School, and presumably also designed by R. Milton Kenyon. Sited on a 3.91-acre lot in southern Riverside, a short distance north of Crescent View Avenue, this is a one-story brick structure with horizontal massing and a somewhat L-shaped footprint. Colonial Revival elements include the hip roof with cupola, the gable-roofed, slightly projecting central entrance pavilion trimmed with brick quoins; and the doorway framing of pilasters and pediment. Windows are arrayed in groups on the west façade.

Originally called Riverside Elementary School, it was renamed in 1953 to honor School Superintendent James R.D. Oldham, who had held that position from 1911 to 1945. The Oldham

J.R.D. Oldham Elementary School (1951), 614 Bullocks Point Ave. R. Milton Kenyon, architect (presumed). Currently vacant.



Sanborn map, 1956.

School operated for about 30 years, during which two rear additions were built and some other alterations were made; after the school closed, the building hosted a YMCA after-school program. It is still owned by the City, and currently used for storage. The building retains its historical and architectural significance.

‘

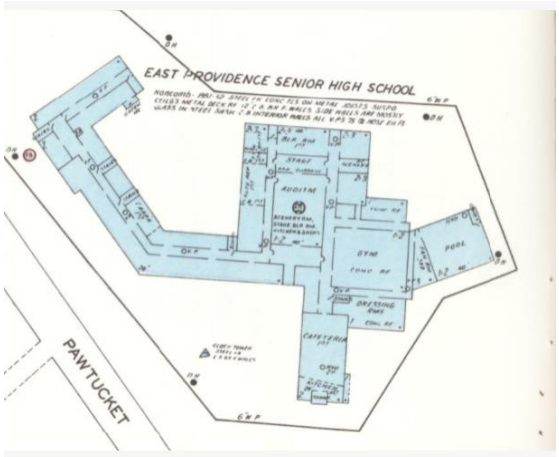
East Providence Senior High School (1952, 1999), located at 2000 Pawtucket Avenue just south of Taunton Avenue, was East Providence’s first and most distinctive Modernist school building, designed by architects Charles A. Maguire & Associates. It was the second purpose-built high school, succeeding Central High, but far larger than its predecessor (or any other public school previously built in East Providence), and it occupied a far bigger piece of property, 28.2 acres. Its siting was also unique: since the topography slopes downhill to the east from Pawtucket Avenue, most of this building sat below street grade; a grass lawn about 100 feet deep stretched between the building and the street.

East Providence Senior High School (1952), 2000 Pawtucket Ave. Charles A. Maguire & Assoc., architects. View of classroom wing, looking northeast. Demolished 2021.

After voters approved a bond issue in 1949, construction began in 1950 and was completed in 1952. Two stories tall, with horizontal massing, a flat roof, brick and glass block walls, and long narrow bands of windows, the building's sprawling mass featured a long, finger-like classroom wing attached to a large central block containing an auditorium and gymnasium, with additional wings containing a cafeteria and indoor pool angling off of the gym. The primary entrances were near the northern and southern ends of the building. A slim, light-colored brick clock tower, original to the building, stands in the lawn a short distance south of what was the school's south entrance.

View of auditorium and cafeteria, with clock tower, looking northeast.

When East Providence Senior High School (for grades 10-12) opened in the Fall of 1952, a four-page program produced for the dedication ceremony touted its numerous innovative features. The building covered 125,000 square feet and measured half a mile around its perimeter. It had 28 standard classrooms, 7 Industrial Arts shops; 6 rooms for the Commercial Department (office skills and bookkeeping); 5 rooms for Home Economics (including two kitchens); 5 rooms for the Science Department (including laboratories and a photographic dark room), 4 rooms for the Fine Arts Department, 3 rooms (plus 10 practice rooms) for the Music Department, and one room for School Publications. A Library adjoined two large study halls. The main auditorium seated 1,200 people; a lecture hall could also be used as an auditorium for smaller groups. The larger of the two gymnasiums had bleacher seating for 1,500; the pool gallery seated 350; the cafeteria, 500. Outdoor athletic facilities included eight tennis courts, baseball and softball diamonds, a football practice field encircled by a quarter mile running track, volleyball and basketball courts, and a grass pitch for field hockey. Parking for 450 cars was provided on site, as was a loading/unloading area for ten school buses. [82]



1956 Sanborn map

The *Providence Sunday Journal* considered the price tag in excess of $4 million to be money well spent:

> In the years since World War II the modern 'comprehensive' high school has come of age. … Designed by the best of contemporary architects, these broad, flat structures with

[82] "Dedication of the New East Providence Senior High School, October 18, 1952." Program in East Providence Historical Society collections.

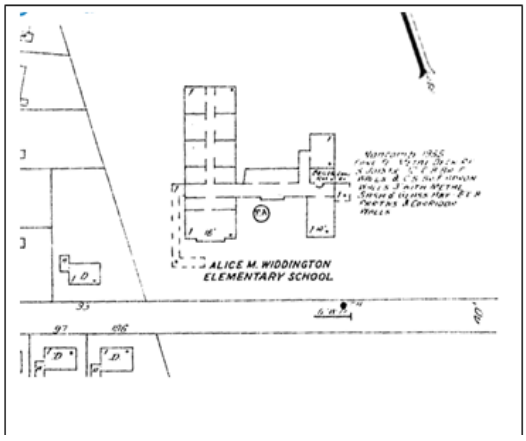
> tremendous areas of glass suggest factories, which in a sense they are – factories dedicated to turning out on a mass production basis youngsters educated in a fashion dictated by the abilities and desires of each individual. Rhode Island has kept pace with the trend. Its major high school construction since the war has all been along the line of the comprehensive school. The best and most elaborate example so far is East Providence High School.[83]

In 1999, the City built a large 2-story, hip-roofed, concrete block (tinted to resemble brick) addition containing 23 classrooms near the northern end of the original classroom wing. At that time, the entire school system was being reorganized: the high school transitioned to a four-year program for grades 9 to 12, while the two junior high schools changed to middle schools for grades 6 to 8, leaving elementary schools with kindergarten through grade 5.[84]

East Providence Senior High School was a landmark in the history of the City's public school system. But it no longer met the needs of the community, and demolition began in Summer 2021. A new high school building, constructed behind the site of the 1952 building, will open in Fall 2021.

Alice M. Waddington Elementary School (1955), 101 Legion Way, Riverside. The architect of this building was not identified, but it is very similar to three other 1950s elementary schools (Hennessey, Grove Ave., and Whiteknacht) that were designed by R. Milton Kenyon. Legion Way runs east of Willett Avenue between Rounds Avenue and Crescent View Avenue; the school stands about a quarter mile east of Willett Avenue on 6.07 acres of land. Waddington exhibits many typical Modernist characteristics: one story tall, with horizontal massing and an H-shaped footprint, a flat roof, brick and concrete walls, and large groups of metal-framed classroom windows. The original main entrance, in the horizontal bar of the "H," faces south toward Legion Way and overlooks a landscaped courtyard.

Alice M. Waddington Elementary School (1955), 101 Legion Way, Riverside. Possibly the work of architect R. Milton Kenyon.



1956 Sanborn map

[83] *Providence Sunday Journal.* "Education Today: A High School for Everybody." April 11, 1954.

[84] *Providence Journal,* "High School Bound," Sept. 7, 1999.

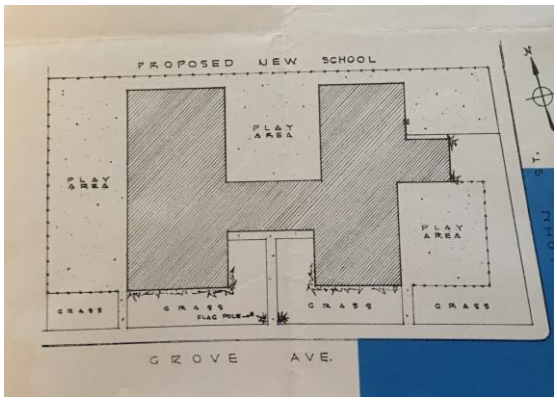
The school had two additions built between 1959 and 1962, extending behind the east wing. The 1959 addition is 1 story tall with brick walls, a flat roof, and large windows that are nearly identical to those on the original building. The 1962 addition is 2 stories tall with brick walls and a flat roof; it has four two-story bay windows on both its east and west sides, and its north elevation contains what is currently the school's main entrance, facing Glenrose Drive. The property includes a playground and athletic fields.

Alice M. Waddington taught Latin and German at East Providence High School from 1917 until her retirement in 1961, overseeing the school's foreign language department for the last decade of her career. She also organized the East Providence Alumni Association in 1947. Waddington School was named for her while she was still actively teaching, a singular honor.

Waddington School has undergone some other alterations besides the two rear additions, but retains its historic architectural significance.

Grove Avenue Elementary School (1957-58), 100 Grove Avenue at the corner of John Street, Watchemoket. This 1.26 acre site previously held the 1875 Grove Ave. Grammar and High School, which was demolished to allow for the construction of this building. Designed by architect R. Milton Kenyon, the Grove Ave. School exhibits many typical Modernist characteristics: one story tall, with horizontal massing and an H-shaped footprint, a flat roof, brick walls, and large groups of metal-framed classroom windows. The original main entrance, in the horizontal bar of the "H," faces south toward Grove Avenue and its intersection with North Carpenter Street, and overlooks a landscaped courtyard. The site includes paved play areas.

Grove Avenue Elementary School (1957-58), 100 Grove Ave., Watchemoket. R. Milton Kenyon, architect. Now, Ocean State Montessori School.



1957 plan for the Grove Ave. Elementary School

This Grove Ave. Elementary and the Emma G. Whiteknacht School a few blocks away (see below) were planned and designed as identical twins, as illustrated in a 1957 School Committee publication urging public support of a bond issue to pay for these schools:

> "As submitted for your approval, two 11-room schools will be built using the same set of plans with the resultant savings. Each building will contain: six standard classrooms; one kindergarten; two rooms for special education (required by State Law); an All-Purpose Room … an office, a health room including dental clinic, a small conference room, and a teachers' room. … The basic plans call for a one-story building of conventional construction with a concrete foundation, masonry walls, and steel roof framing. … Each standard classroom has a minimum of 800 square feet … The All-Purpose Room is designed to serve these functions: two classrooms if increased future enrollment should indicate the need; school assemblies and physical education classes; community use … will undoubtedly be used by community groups every night in the week and will be a self-contained unit when used for this purpose. Your School Committee has planned so that the greatest educational opportunity can be offered to the children through the most efficient use of space." [85]

Clearly, the School Committee chose this design to be cost-effective, flexible, expandable, and multi-purpose – all hallmarks of public school design of this era.

By about 1980, this school had closed; the building was subsequently occupied by the offices of the School Department, School Board, and East Providence Public Educational Association. In 2005 the City began renting the building to Ocean State Montessori School, which purchased it in 2011.

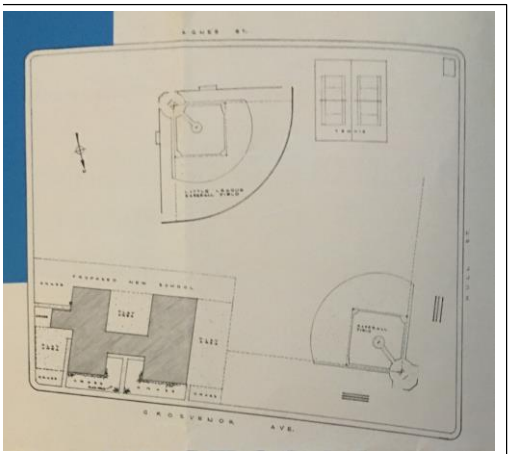
Grove Avenue Elementary is the most intact of the city's 1950s elementary schools, having undergone relatively little alteration and with no additions, and retains its historic and architectural significance.

Emma G. Whiteknacht Elementary School (1957-58, 1989), 261 Grosvenor Avenue, situated in Watchemoket about 700 feet east of South Broadway, stands on a 1.33 acre lot abutting 9.03 acres of athletic fields, together comprising an entire city block also bounded by North Hull Street on the west, Agnes Street on the south, and North County Street on the east.

Designed by architect R. Milton Kenyon and a twin to the Grove Avenue Elementary School, the Whiteknacht School likewise exhibits many typical Modernist characteristics: one story tall, with horizontal massing and an H-shaped footprint, a flat roof, brick walls, and large groups of metal-framed classroom windows. The original main entrance, in the horizontal bar of the "H," faces north toward Grosvenor Avenue and overlooks a landscaped courtyard. The school occupies the northeast corner of its lot, which also includes several playgrounds and paved play areas.

[85] 1957 School Committee brochure, East Providence Historical Society collection.

Emma G. Whiteknacht Elementary School (1958), 261 Grosvenor Avenue, Watchemoket. R. Milton Kenyon, architect.



1957 plan for the Whiteknacht School

In 1989 an addition was constructed at the rear of the building, consisting of a long 1-story brick flat-roofed 8-classroom wing extending across the south side of the "H" plan (enclosing the rear courtyard seen in the drawings above), and a perpendicular 2-story brick flat-roofed combination gymnasium and cafeteria, with large square translucent windows set high up on the wall near the roofline. (Similar additions were built at Hennessey School that same year.)

Notwithstanding the 1989 addition and some other alterations, Whiteknacht Elementary School retains its historic and architectural significance.

Agnes B. Hennessey Elementary School (1957-58, 1989), 75 Fort Street in Watchemoket, situated on a 2.02 acre site that comprises an entire city block also bounded by Fifth Street on the west, Mercer Street on the south, and Seventh Street on the east. This block is about half a mile west of South Broadway and just north of Pierce Memorial Field. Designed by architect R. Milton Kenyon, Hennessey School exhibited many typical Modernist characteristics: one story tall, with horizontal massing and an H-shaped footprint, a flat roof, brick walls, and large groups of metal-framed classroom windows. The original main entrance, in the horizontal bar of the "H," faces north toward Fort Street and overlooks a landscaped courtyard.

Agnes B. Hennessey was principal of the Potter Street School from 1912 to 1942.

Two additions were constructed about 1989: a classroom wing on the west side, likewise a one story, flat-roofed, brick-walled structure with large metal-framed classroom windows, sited parallel to the original west wing; and a gymnasium/cafeteria on the east side, a 2-story brick structure with large square translucent windows set high up on the wall near the roofline, sited perpendicular to the original east wing. (Similar additions were constructed that same year at the Whiteknacht School.) The site also includes a playground and several paved play areas.

Agnes P. Hennessey Elementary School (1957-58), 75 Fort Street. R. Milton Kenyon, architect.

Aerial photo of Hennessey Elementary. Fort Street runs across the lower left.

Hennessey School has undergone some other alterations besides the additions, but it retains its historic architectural significance.

Meadowcrest Elementary School (1964), now J.R.D. Oldham Pre-K and Elementary School, 60 Bart Drive in Riverside, was originally named for the adjacent suburban neighborhood also called Meadowcrest. The school is sited at the east end of Bart Drive, about half a mile east of Willett Avenue and two blocks north of Burnside Avenue, on a heavily wooded 11.26 acre site that abuts the Annawomscutt Brook. Although built a few years after the Waddington, Hennessey, Grove Ave., and Whiteknacht Schools, Meadowcrest exhibits many of the same Modernist features: one story tall, with horizontal massing and an irregular linear footprint, a flat roof, brick walls, and large groups of metal-framed classroom windows. The main entrance

Meadowcrest Elementary School (1965-66), 60 Bart Drive, Riverside. Now, Oldham Elementary and Pre-K School.

Aerial photo of Meadowcrest Elementary School. Bart Drive runs across the front of the school.

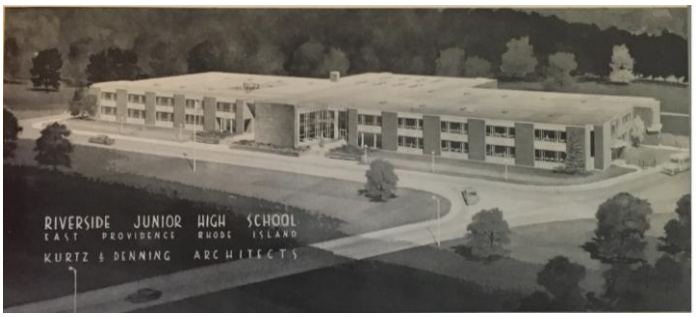
is set back within the massing at roughly the center of the building, with classroom wings branching out on either side. At the southwest corner of the south wing is a five-sided room, the walls of which are mostly windows, that appears to have been built as a classroom. This feature adds some interest to the overall design.

Meadowcrest Elementary School's name was changed in recent years to the James R.D. Oldham Pre-K and Elementary School, making this the second school to be named after one of East Providence's longest-serving School Superintendents (see also J.R.D. Oldham School at 640 Bullocks Point Avenue, built 1951).

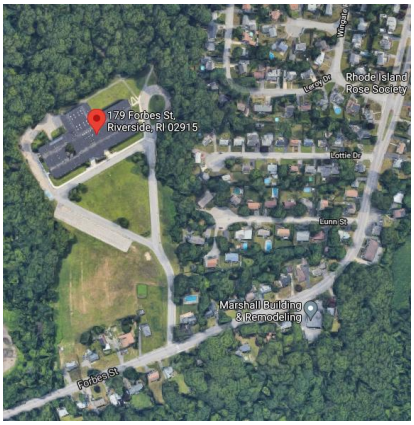
As far as is known, Meadowcrest Elementary has had no additions and has undergone relatively little other alteration. It retains its historic and architectural significance.

Riverside Junior High School, later Riverside Middle School (1964-66), 179 Forbes Street, between Willett Avenue and the Wampanoag Trail. This was the second junior high school built in Riverside: a massive structure designed to accommodate 1,000 students, constructed to replace the nearly forty-year-old and much smaller junior high school on Bullocks Point Avenue. This nearly 39-acre site slopes gradually down to the east before leveling off; the building is set back over 800 feet from the street, with athletic fields, lawn areas, driveways and a parking lot occupying the space between. Architects Kurtz & Dunning (whose principals individually later designed the Orlo Ave. Elementary School and the Martin Middle School) eschewed the typical red brick aesthetic of other 1950s Modernist schools in East Providence: here, the primary façade has a projecting 2-story central pavilion, with a concave front faced in stone veneer flanked by glass curtain walls containing the main entrances. The 2-story wings stretching out on both sides of the center pavilion are clad in horizontal bands of tan brick, with wide brown brick vertical piers framing five bays of large rectangular windows, each with a grid pattern created by metal mullions.

Riverside Jr. High School, now Middle School (1964-66), 179 Forbes St.; Kurtz & Dunning, architects.



Open House brochure for Riverside Jr. High School, ca. 1966



Aerial photo of Riverside Jr. High/Middle School.

A brochure produced on occasion of the school's grand opening stated that the 126,000 sq.ft. building was "erected as a building in which the philosophy of the modern junior-high school could be carried out," and boasted a large central library, four curriculum centers (where teachers could prepare lessons), five audio-visual aids centers, 800 sq.ft. classrooms, an auditorium (capacity 600), cafeteria (capacity 400), gymnasium, an

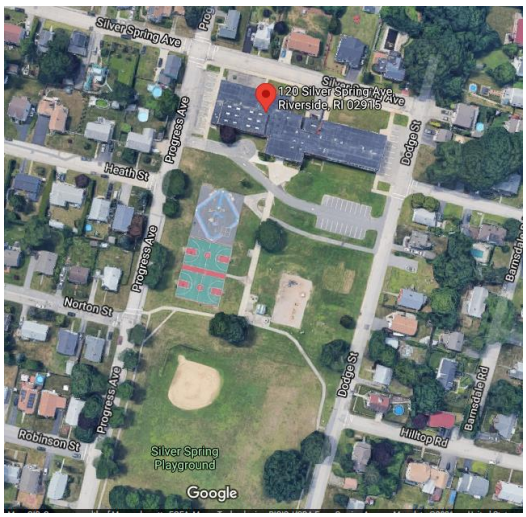
electronic teaching center, home economics department "meeting national standards," guidance suite, conference room, and health room.

Renamed Riverside Middle School in 2013, this building remains remarkably intact and retains its historic and architectural significance

Silver Spring Elementary School (1968), 120 Silver Spring Avenue, at the corner of Progress Avenue in Kent Heights. The school is sited two blocks west of Pawtucket Avenue and two blocks northeast of Veterans Memorial Parkway. (Four blocks north of the intersection of Silver Spring and Pawtucket Avenues is the former site of District No. 4 School at Armington's Corners.) The school property, which slopes downward from east to west and from north to south, is only about three-quarters of an acre, but it abuts the 6-acre, city-owned Silver Spring Playground and Athletic Area, and the school's main entrance faces north toward that playground rather than south toward Silver Spring Street.

Architect Michael Traficante (who also designed an addition to the Union Primary School) designed this building. Due to the topography of the site, the school's east wing and main entryway are one story tall, while the west wing is 2 stories tall. Otherwise, Silver Spring Elementary exhibits many of the same Modernist features as its 1950s cousins: horizontal massing, a linear footprint, a flat roof, brick walls, and large groups of windows.

Silver Spring Elementary School (1968), 120 Silver Spring Avenue. Michael Traficante, architect.



Aerial photo of Silver Spring Elementary School with adjacent city-owned playground and athletic fields

The *Providence Journal* reported that Silver Spring Elementary School was "part of a $3.5 million elementary school expansion program … With 12 standard classrooms, two special education rooms, one kindergarten, a complete library, and a TV-music, remedial reading, health room and principal's office, the school has 32,000 square feet of floor space and is the first elementary school in the city with a full gym. It has a capacity of 440 pupils." Silver Spring's

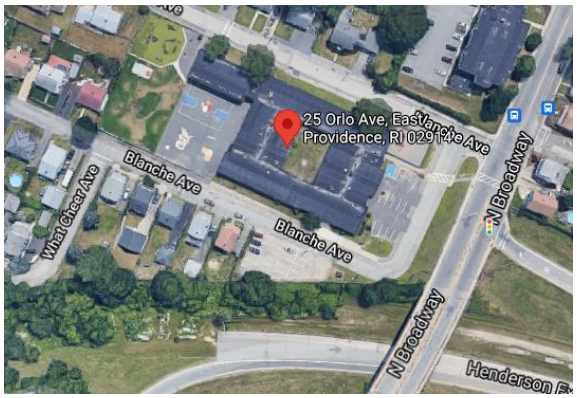
kindergarten through 6th grade students included 335 children transferred from the Brightridge, Kent Heights, and Tristram Burgess schools to alleviate overcrowding.[86]

Silver Spring Elementary has undergone relatively little exterior alteration. It retains its historic and architectural significance.

Orlo Avenue Elementary School (1970), 25 Orlo Avenue at the corner of Blanche Avenue in Watchemoket. The west side of the 1.78 acre school property abuts North Broadway and the Henderson Bridge. (Across North Broadway from this school is the former location of the District No. 3/Broadway Primary School, which was demolished for the construction of the Henderson Bridge.) Architects F. James Kurtz & Associates utilized a square footprint with central atrium for the main block, and sited a gymnasium wing perpendicular to the southeast corner of the main building. This is the last of the elementary schools constructed in this fourth generation building campaign, and although it is several years to a decade or more younger than its 1950s and 1960s contemporaries, it bears a strong resemblance to them in its one-story horizontal massing with flat roof, brick and concrete walls, and large groups of windows. The site includes a playground and several paved play areas.

As far as could be determined, Orlo Avenue Elementary has undergone relatively little exterior alteration. It retains its historic and architectural significance.

Orlo Avenue Elementary School (1970), 25 Orlo Avenue. F. James Kurtz & Associates, architects.

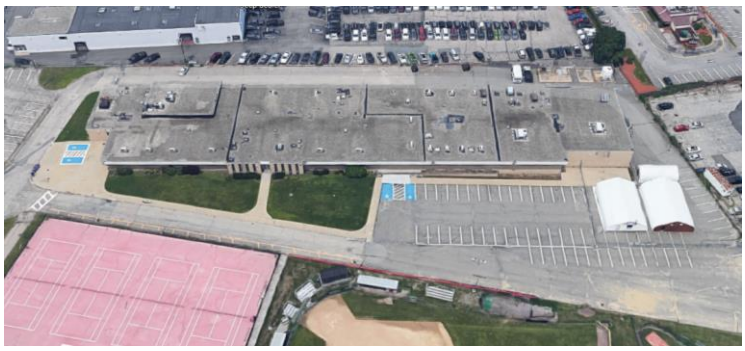


Aerial photo of Orlo Avenue Elementary School

[86] *Providence Journal,* Nov. 1, 1968: "New Silver Spring School Opening Set."

East Providence/Bristol County Area Vocational and Technical School (1970, 1974), 1998 Pawtucket Avenue, Watchemoket. Located on a 4.54 acre lot on the east side of Pawtucket Ave. just south of its intersection with Taunton Ave and immediately north of East Providence Senior High School. The building is set back about 445 feet from the street and faces south toward the high school. Of all the mid-century modern public school buildings included in this survey project, this one has the simplest design: a large (480 feet by just under 100 feet) one-story rectangular box with flat roof, light-colored brick walls, and bands of large plate glass windows running in a nearly continuous line just under the roofline. Its most distinctive architectural feature is the main entrance on the south façade, which is recessed between two groups of large, narrow, vertically-proportioned windows set between brick piers.

East Providence/Bristol County Vocational & Technical School (1970), 1998 Pawtucket Avenue, Watchemoket. Now, East Providence Career & Technical School. (2011 photo, Google Maps)



Aerial photo of East Providence Vocational & Technical School.

Built by the R.I. Dept. of Education as a Vocational-Technical School for East Providence, Barrington, Warren, and Bristol, this building was constructed on land deeded to the State by the City in 1968. As far as is known, this was the first public regional vocational and technical high school in Rhode Island.[87] It offered programs in auto body work, auto mechanics, electronics, business, health occupations, electrical work, electronics, and drafting. Although a state-owned facility, East Providence School Superintendent Edward R. Martin supervised this regional school in addition to his other duties.

In 2014 the State transferred ownership of this school back to the City of East Providence. While the name of the facility has changed to East Providence Career & Technical Center, it is still a regional school also serving the four East Bay communities. Current program offerings include

[87] Rhode Island currently has four regional school districts: Bristol-Warren, Chariho (Charlestown, Richmond, Hopkinton), Exeter-West Greenwich, and Foster-Glocester. According to their websites, Chariho and Foster-Glocester both currently offer vocational-technical training programs; neither website mentions when those programs were initiated.

automotive technology, computer science, construction technology, culinary arts, electrical technology, forensic science, graphic communications, health occupations, and pre-engineering.

A one-story, flat-roofed, brick addition was built at the east end of the structure around 1974; other alterations included the replacement of some windows and of the overhead doors on the rear elevation. Although not a particularly distinctive piece of architecture, East Providence/Bristol County Vocational & Technical School still exhibits characteristics of mid-century modernist public schools, and retains historical and architectural significance.

Post-1970 Schools

Since 1970 East Providence has constructed the Edward R. Martin Middle School (1977, architect Edward P. Denning), which also hosts the Martin Annex Pre-K program, at 111 Brown Street in Kent Heights; and Myron J. Francis Elementary School (1989) at 64 Bourne Avenue in Rumford. Like the 1952 East Providence Senior High School and the 1964-66 Riverside Junior High School, these later schools also have a complex, low-rise, horizontal massing that sprawls across a multi-acre site. Neither is yet 50 years old, which is the basic threshold for National Register consideration, but both could be evaluated for their historic and architectural significance in the future.

The brand new East Providence Senior High School at 2000 Pawtucket Avenue (2020-2021, Ai3 Architects) is markedly different from its predecessor, most notably in its 4-story height and its rectangular massing; there are various projections and recesses and a diversity of exterior materials (concrete, brick, glass curtain wall) to provide visual interest.

CONCLUSION

The nineteen surviving historic public schools constructed in East Providence between 1862 and 1970 collectively represent over a century of municipal school planning and design, guided by prevailing educational pedagogies and architectural trends of the time. They also represent the generations of teachers, educational reformers, public officials, architects, and citizens who believed that public education had the power to change lives for the better, not just for students but for the larger community, in part through the design and appearance of school buildings. The buildings themselves have multiple layers of significance: in their architectural features and integrity, which present a strong sense of place and time; in being a civic icons and sources of community pride; and in the important role that public schools played both in the city's history and in the personal histories of the thousands of students who have passed through their doors since 1862. A thematic nomination to the National Register of Historic Places is recommended.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Maps

Beers, D.G. & Co. Atlas of the State of Rhode Island. Providence, 1870.

Everts & Richards. New Topographical Atlas of Surveys, Providence County, Rhode Island. Philadelphia, 1895.

Richards Map Co. Richard's Standard Atlas of the Providence Metropolitan District. Springfield, Mass., 1917.

Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps of Providence, Vol. 6. New York, 1899-1900, 1921, 1951.

Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps of East Providence, Vol. 1. New York, 1956.

Walling, Henry F. Map of Seekonk, Mass. Philadelphia, 1850.

Walling, Henry F. Map of Bristol County, Mass. New York, 1858.

Other Primary Sources

City of East Providence Tax Assessor Records.

Town/City of East Providence Land Evidence Records.

Town/City of East Providence Directories, 1892-2020.

Town of East Providence Annual Reports (including School Committee reports), 1876-1937, 1960-1990.

United States Federal Census, 1820-1970.

Secondary Sources

Barnard, Henry. School Architecture, 2nd edition. New York, N.Y., 1848.

Bicknell, Thomas W. The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Vol. II. New York, N.Y., 1920.

Bliss, George N. An Historical Sketch of the Town of East Providence. Providence, R.I., 1876.

Bouton, Prof. Terry. "Slave, Free Black, and White Population, 1780-1830," developed for "History 407: The Founding of the American Nation," at University of Maryland

Baltimore County, Spring 2010. Baltimore, Md., 2010. https://userpages.umbc.edu/~bouton/History407/SlaveStats.htm

Carroll, Charles and the State Board of Education. Public Education in Rhode Island. Providence, R.I., 1918.

Cavanaugh, Kathryn J. National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Phillipsdale Historic District. Providence, R.I., 2011.

Conforti, Joseph. A History of East Providence. White Plains, N.Y., 1976.

Cutler, William W. "Cathedral of Culture: The Schoolhouse in American Educational Thought and Practice since 1820." History of Education Quarterly, vol. 29, no. 1. Cambridge, Mass., 1989.

Downs, Robert B. Henry Barnard. Boston, Mass., 1977.

Dresslar, Fletcher B. American Schoolhouses. U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin 1910, No. 5, Whole No. 444. Washington, D.C., 1911.

East Providence High School. "Dedication of the New East Providence Senior High School, October 18, 1952" (program). Collection of East Providence Historical Society.

East Providence Historical Society. Images of America: East Providence. Dover, N.H., 1997.

Engelhardt, N. L. "Trends in School Architecture and Design." Review of Educational Research, vol. 12, no. 2. Washington, D.C., 1942.

Erhardt, John G., Jr. Historical Seekonk, Mass. 1812-1862, Pre-East Providence 1812-1828, Village of Pawtucket 1812-1828, Vol. IV. Typescript, 2001. Collection of the Weaver Public Library, East Providence.

Erhardt, John G., Jr. Historical Seekonk, Mass. and East Providence, R.I., 1812-1900, Appendix to Vol. IV. Typescript, 1999. Collection of the R.I. Historical Society Library.

Erhardt, John G., Jr. Historical East Providence, R.I., 1862-1900, Appendix to Vol. V. Typescript, 1999. Collection of the Weaver Public Library, East Providence.

Farnum, Joseph E., Superintendent. Manual of the Public Schools of the Town of East Providence, Sept. 1, 1894. East Providence, R.I., 1894.

Grover, Kathryn and Neil Larson. College Hill Historic District (Additional Documentation), National Register Nomination. Providence, R.I., 2018.

Henry Barnard School. "The Vision of Henry Barnard." Providence, R.I., undated. http://henrybarnardschool.org/our-school/our-laboratory-school/

Huntington, Henry E. The Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts, Reprinted from a Copy of the 1648 Edition. Cambridge, Mass., 1928. https://www.mass.gov/doc/old-deluder-satan-law/download

Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Bristol County, Massachusetts. Philadelphia, Pa., 1883.

Johnson, Clifton. Old-time Schools and School-Books. Gloucester, Mass., 1963.

Jones, Robert O. National Register of Historic Places Multiple Resources Nomination: Historic and Architectural Resources of East Providence, Partial Inventory. Providence, R.I., 1980.

Longstreth, Richard. East Providence, Rhode Island: Statewide Preservation Report P-EP-1. Providence, R.I., 1976.

Lupu, Ira C., David Masci, and Robert W. Tuttle. "Religion in the Public Schools." Washington, D.C., 2019. https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/03/religion-in-the-public-schools-2019-update/

Major, Helen Evelyn. A Historical Study of Public Education in East Providence, Rhode Island: A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Rhode Island College of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Education. Typescript, 1952. Collection of East Providence Historical Society.

Mann, Horace and Massachusetts Board of Education. The Massachusetts System of Common Schools, reprint of the 10th edition. Boston, Mass., 1849.

National Education Association. Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies. New York, N.Y., 1894.

National Park Service. "Roger Williams National Memorial." Washington, D.C., undated. https://www.nps.gov/rowi/learn/historyculture/rogerwilliams.htm

New York Times. "Modern Design Transforms Schools." August 24, 1952. https://timesmachine.nytimes.com

Ogata, Amy F. "Building for Learning in Postwar American Elementary Schools," in Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 67, No. 4, December 2008.

Peabody Essex Museum. "Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692," interactive virtual exhibit. Salem, Mass., 2020. https://www.pem.org/exhibitions/the-salem-witch-trials-1692.

Pollard, Kevin and Population Reference Bureau. "Just How Many Baby Boomers Are There?" Washington, D.C., 2014. https://www.prb.org/resources/just-how-many-baby-boomers-are-there/

Providence Journal. "New Silver Spring School Opening Set." Nov. 1, 1968. "High School Bound." Sept. 7, 1999.

Providence Sunday Journal. "Education Today: A High School for Everybody." April 11, 1954.

Public Broadcasting System. "Only a Teacher: Schoolhouse Pioneers - Horace Mann." Washington, D.C., undated. https://www.pbs.org/onlyateacher/horace.html

Rhode Island College. "Our History." Providence, R.I., undated. https://www.ric.edu/meet-rhode-island-college/our-history

Rhode Island Statewide Planning. Rhode Island Population By City, Town, and County, 1790-2010.http://www.planning.ri.gov/documents/census/popcounts_est/pop_cities_towns_historic_1790-2010.pdf

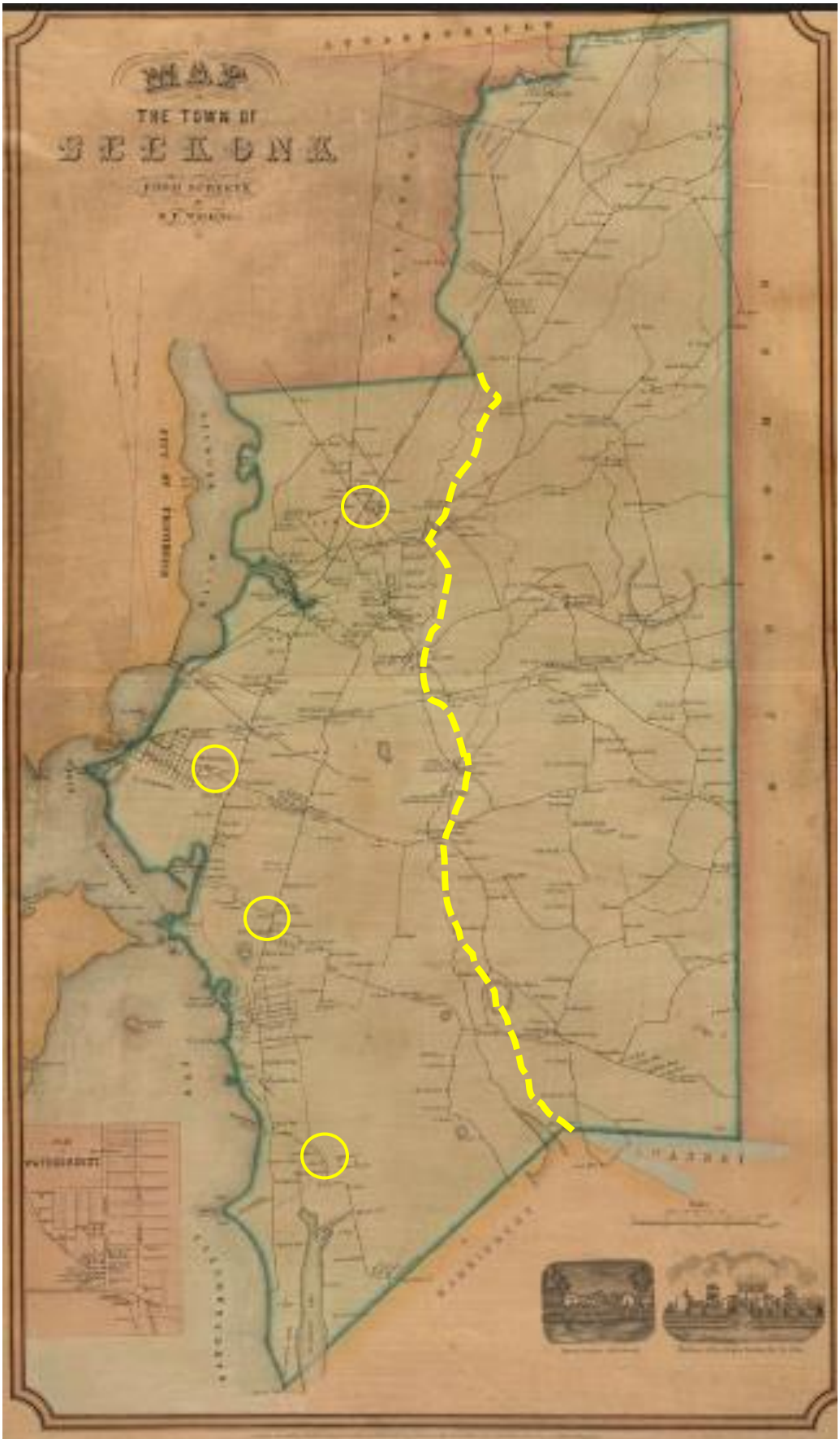
Stockwell, Thomas B., ed. A History of Public Education in Rhode Island from 1636-1876. Providence, R.I., 1876.

Tilton, Rev. George H. A History of Rehoboth, Massachusetts. Boston, Mass., 1918.

APPENDIX I

MAPS OF SEEKONK, MASS. IN 1850

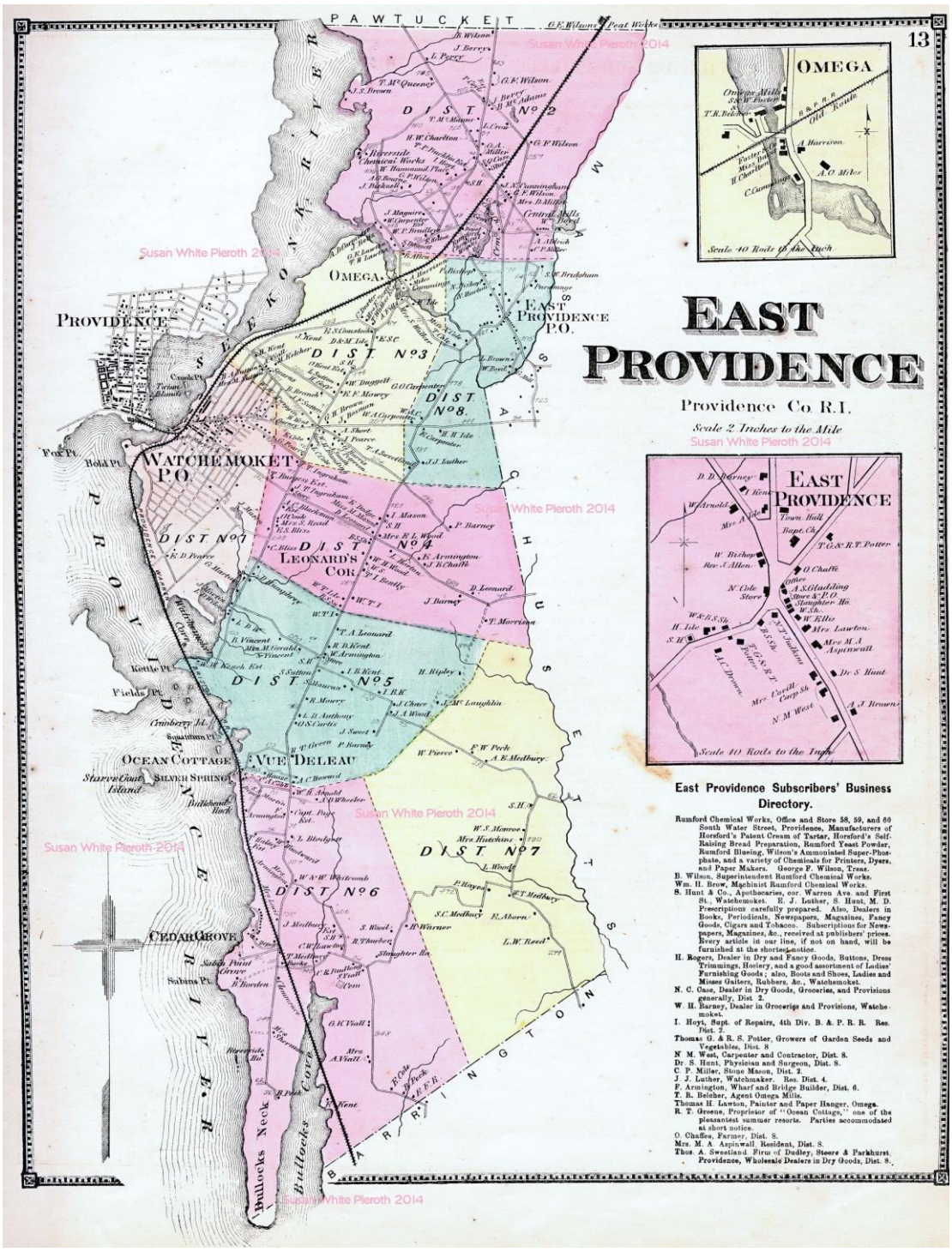
AND EAST PROVIDENCE, R.I. IN 1870



H.F. Walling Map of Seekonk in 1850.

The dotted yellow line represents the approximate location of the division that created East Providence in 1862.

Four of the schoolhouses illustrated on this map were in western Seekonk, which became East Providence in 1862.

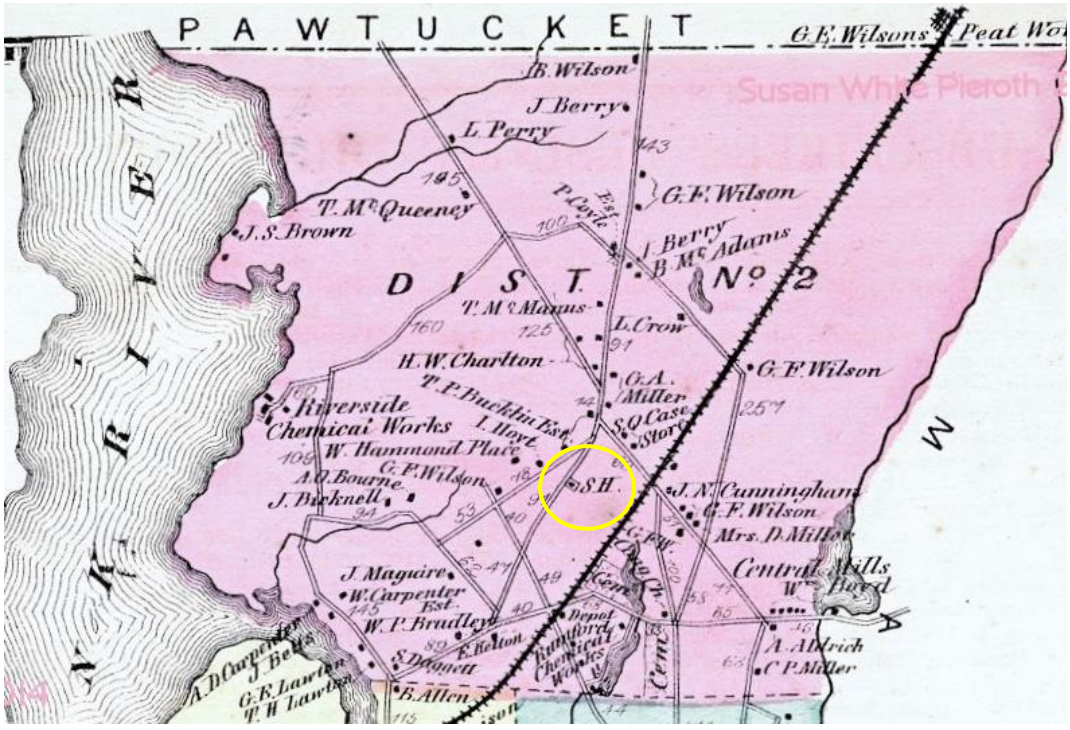


Beers Atlas of East Providence in 1870

Shows the 8 school districts created in 1862, each with its own schoolhouse. By 1870 all of the Seekonk schoolhouses had been replaced, except in District No. 1.

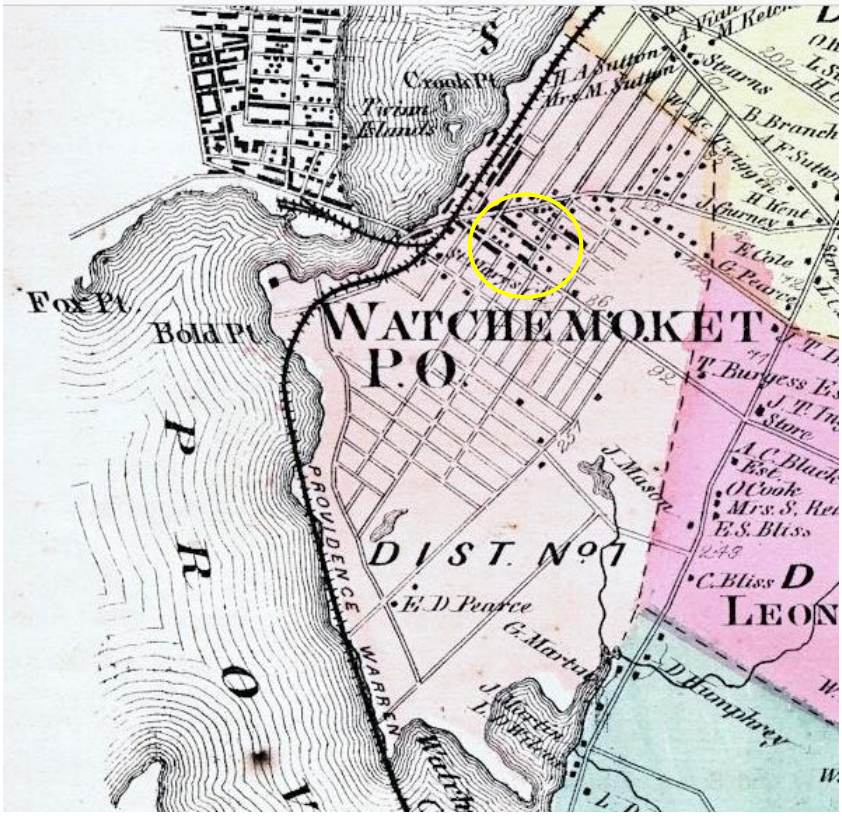
See detail maps on the following pages for the locations of schoolhouses.

Seekonk District 2 School in 1850, in what is now Rumford in East Providence.

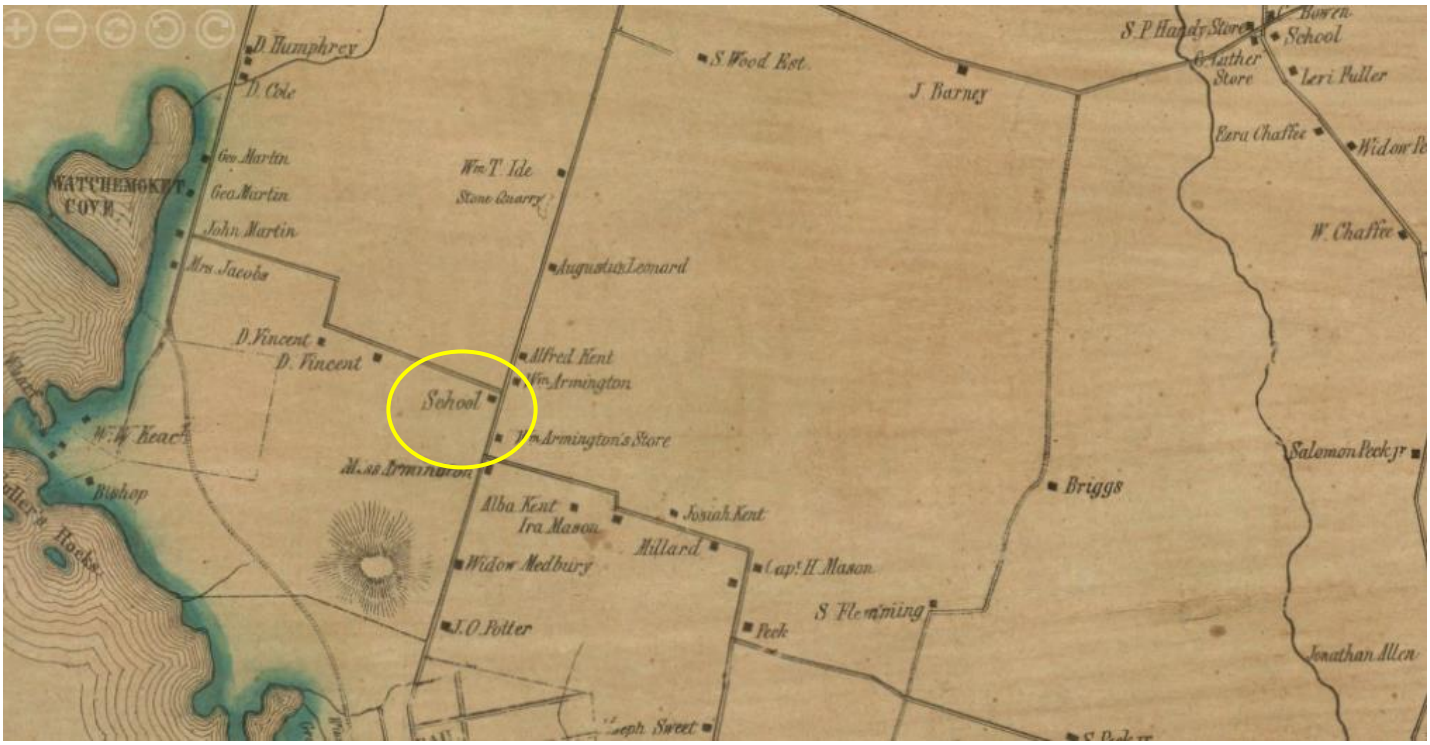


East Providence District 2 School in Rumford in 1870, in the same area as the earlier Seekonk school.

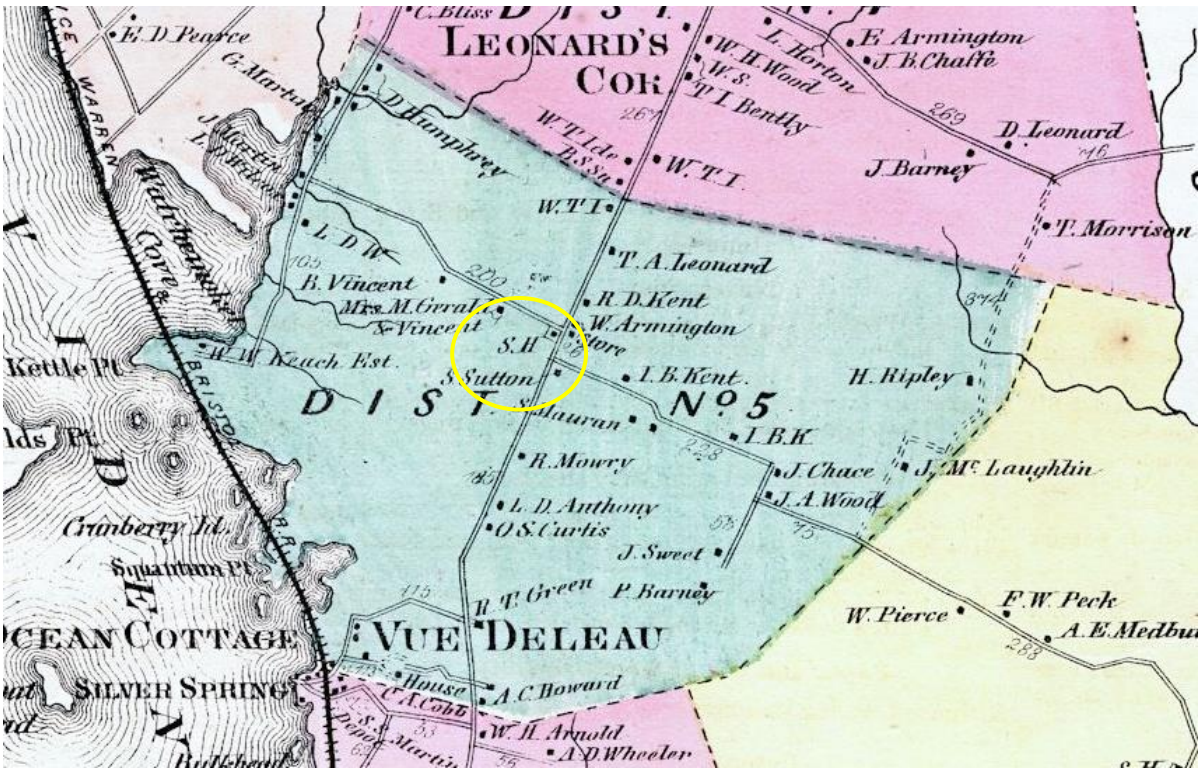
Seekonk District 4 School in 1850 stood on today's Warren Avenue west of Broadway. This is not the Seekonk schoolhouse that later became East Providence's District No. 1 School; see below.



East Providence School District No. 1 in 1870. The District No. 1 School, which records confirm was built by Seekonk, later became the Potter Street School. Its footprint is shown at the corner of Potter and School Streets.

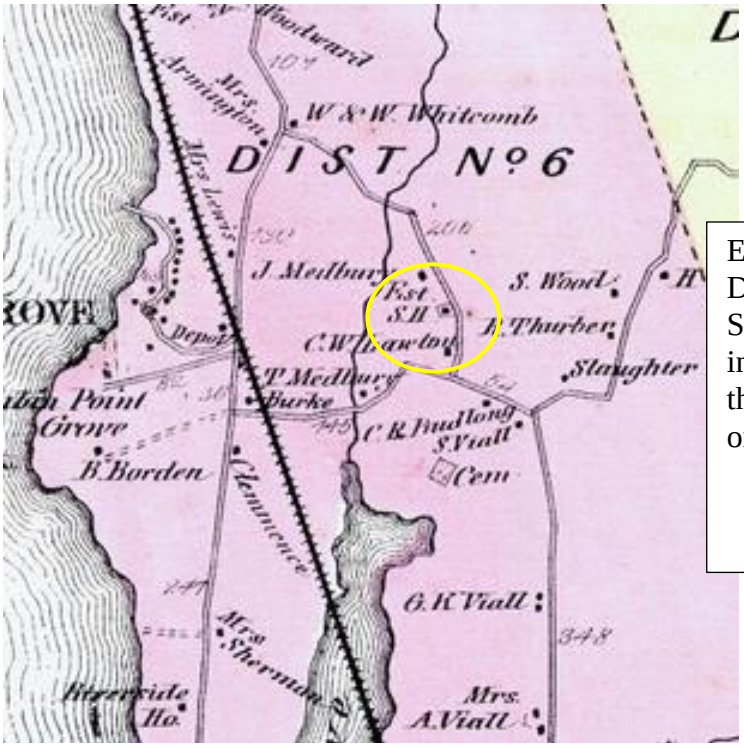


Seekonk District 6 school in 1850, in the Kent Heights area of East Providence.

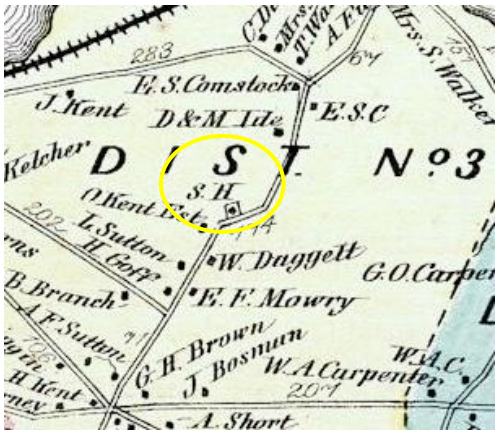


East Providence District No. 5 School in 1870 stood in the same location. Later known as Armington's Corner Primary School, at the corner of Pawtucket Avenue and Vincent Avenue in Kent Heights.

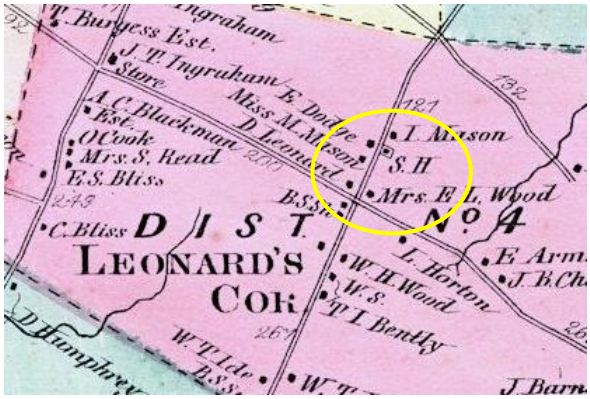
Seekonk District 7 School in 1850 stood on what is now Willett Avenue in Riverside



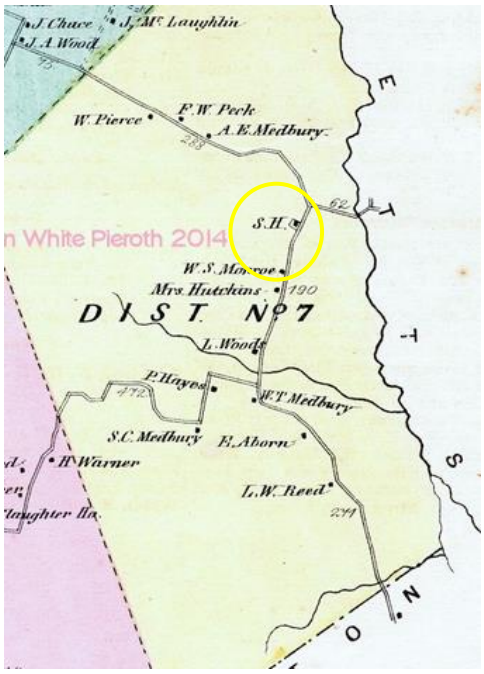
East Providence District No. 6 School in 1870, in approximately the same location on Willett Ave.



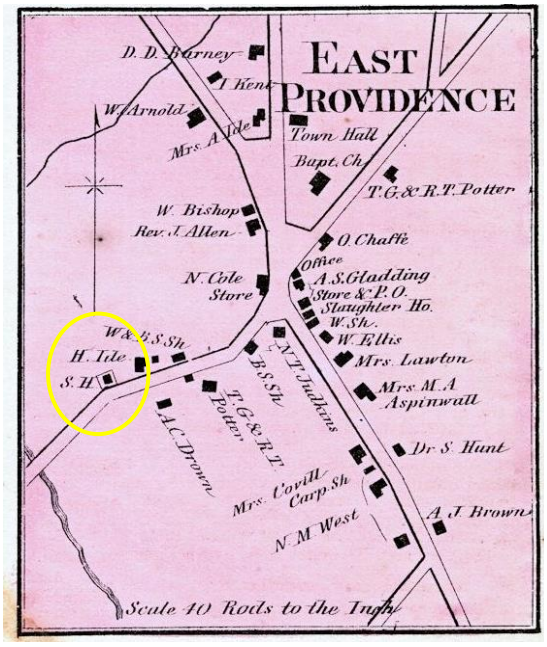
East Providence District No. 3 School, later Broadway Primary School on North Broadway, in 1870.



East Providence District No. 4 School, later Leonard's Corner Primary School, on Pawtucket Avenue north of Warren Avenue, in 1870.



East Providence District No. 7 School, later Ruhlin or Runnins River School, on the Old Barrington Road (now, partly the Wampanoag Trail) in 1870.



East Providence District No. 8 School, later Center Primary School, on Pawtucket Avenue near Pleasant Street, in 1870.

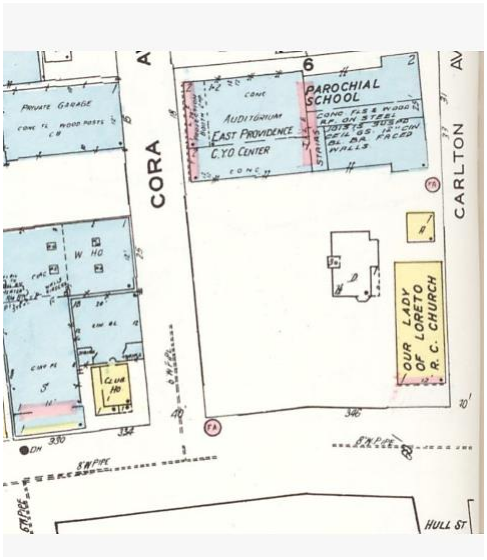
APPENDIX II

LIST OF ALL PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS CONSTRUCTED IN EAST PROVIDENCE 1862-1989

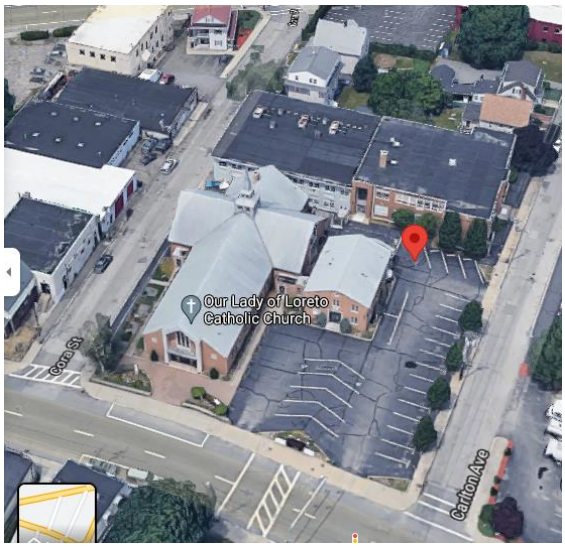
A NOTE ON APPENDIX II

Although the Carlton Avenue School and the Orchard Street School were mentioned in some research sources as having been public elementary schools in East Providence in the 1970s, they were not included in Appendix II because no documentation was found to confirm that either building was constructed as a public school by the City of East Providence.

The 1975 East Providence city directory listed the Carlton Avenue School as a public school. The school building presently standing at 35 Carlton Ave. (between Taunton and Waterman Aves.) is owned by Our Lady of Loreto Church, which occupies the same lot. Online deed research found no evidence that the City of East Providence owned this property at the time this school was built (ca. 1956; see map below): the land was purchased by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Providence in 1921, and sold in 1940 to Our Lady of Loreto Church, which has remained the owner since then.

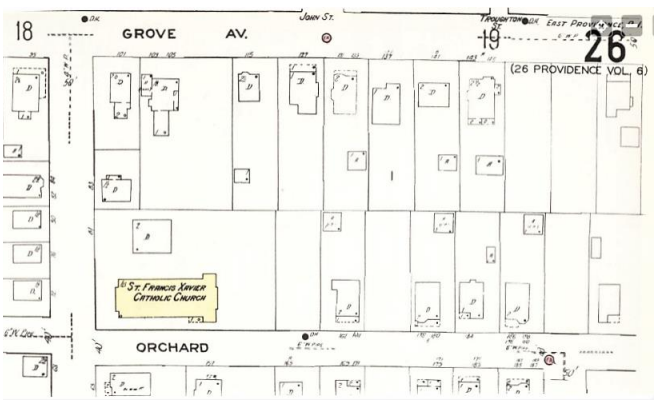


Our Lady of Loreto Church and Parochial School, Waterman & Carlton Aves. (1956 Sanborn map). Note that the church building was later replaced/relocated to a different part of the lot.

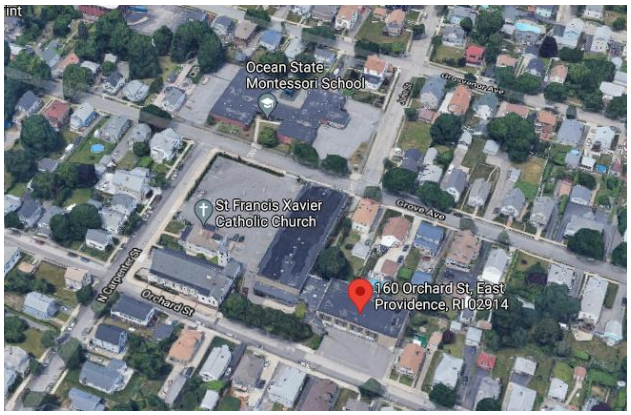


Our Lady of Loreto Church and Parochial School, Waterman & Carlton Aves. (2011 Google Maps photo)

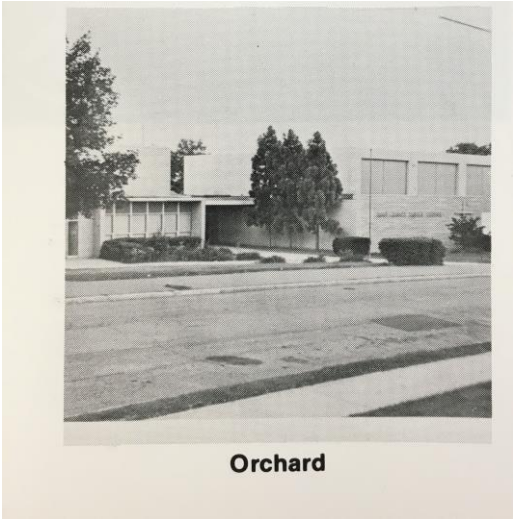
The 1976-77 city directories listed the Orchard Street School at 160 Orchard Street, and a photograph of it was published in the 1976 East Providence School Superintendent's annual report (copy available at the Weaver Library). That building is presently owned by St. Francis Xavier Church, which occupies the same lot at the corner of Orchard St. and N. Carpenter St.; the church parking lot and the school building extend northward to Grove Ave. The church's website indicates that the church was built in 1916 and the parochial school was constructed in 1959 (https://saintfrancisxavierchurch.com/parish/history). Online deed research found no evidence that the City of East Providence owned this property between the 1950s and the 1970s.



St. Francis Xavier Church, N. Carpenter & Orchard Sts., before construction of the Parochial School (1956 Sanborn map)



St. Francis Xavier Church and School at 160 Orchard St. (2021 Google Map photo)



Orchard St. School, photo in East Providence School Superintendent's 1976 Annual Report.

St. Francis Xavier School, 160 Orchard St. (Google Maps, 2011 photo)

Records were not available to confirm whether these two parochial school buildings were temporarily leased by the East Providence School Department in the mid-1970s and used as public elementary schools for a period of one to two years.

(The address 160 Orchard St. was incorrectly identified in the 1978-80 city directories as the site of the Grove Ave. School, which is actually located at 100 Grove Ave., and is now owned by Ocean State Montessori School.)