

Architectural Description:

The Pawtucket Congregational Church, 15 Mammoth Road, Lowell (1898-1899) is a prominently sited and architecturally significant church of Victorian eclectic design, retaining notable opalescent stained glass windows, a well-preserved two-manual organ, and Revere Bell, all original to the building. Situated on the northern bank of the Merrimack River overlooking the Pawtucket Falls, the church is located in the Pawtucketville neighborhood in the northern section of the city, annexed in 1874 from the neighboring town of Dracut. The church property occupies the northern corner of the Mammoth Road intersection with Riverside Street, at the head of the Pawtucket Bridge over the falls; this bridge connects Pawtucketville with Lowell's historic industrial center. The immediate neighborhood displays a mix of residential and small-scale commercial development.

The church yard, which has frontage on Mammoth Road and Riverside Street, is partially located within the boundary of the Lowell National Historic Park (NRDIS 1978). Bordering the church yard at the street edges is a very simple iron picket fence (ca. 1900?). Situated in the south corner of the church yard is a standing sign (ca. 1900s) oriented toward the Mammoth Road -Riverside Street intersection. The remaining components of the property are located outside the boundary of the Lowell National Historic Park. In addition to the church, these include a detached concrete block shed (early 20th cent.) adjacent to the rear wall of the church, and a stone retaining wall (1850) that was constructed in connection with improvements to the meetinghouse that originally occupied the property. The stone retaining wall runs along a portion of the Mammoth Road frontage, starting at the western corner and extending south as far as the Mammoth Road entry on the church tower. A break in the retaining wall allows access to the parking area at the western end of the church property. The retaining wall is topped with an iron picket fence that appears to be contemporary with the picket fence enclosing the church yard.

The church is a red brick building, one story on a raised basement of granite block, with a slate roof and a wood cornice. The double-height sanctuary space is roughly square in massing, having a broad cross-gabled and a two-story square tower with octagonal spire anchoring the southern corner. A one-story, side-gabled lateral wing contains the chapel immediately adjacent to the sanctuary and the Ladies' Parlor marked by a cross gable larger at the western end. This wing has an interior end wall brick chimney on the west elevation (at the Ladies' Parlor) and a larger brick chimney behind the roof ridge.

The church has four public entrances. The two at the base of the tower are approached by way of granite stairs from Mammoth Road and the church yard, respectively. Two other entrances are shielded by gable-front projecting porches: one on the Mammoth Road elevation, at the vestibule adjoining the sanctuary and chapel; and the other on the church yard elevation. The Mammoth Road entrance, which currently serves as the principle entry to the church, is approached by way of granite stairs from the street, while the church yard entry is located at the grade.

Pawtucket Congregational Church exhibits a fusion of Romanesque Revival and Queen Anne-style ornamental details. Round-arched surrounds frame all openings on the tower, as well as those containing the three largest stained glass windows: two in the sanctuary and one in the Ladies' Parlor (see below for description of stained glass windows). The arched heads of these openings are executed in pressed brick. Granite is used for all window sills, the lintels on the church's smaller rectangular windows, the caps of the buttresses on the Mammoth Road side of the sanctuary, and the belt courses, corbelling, and coping seen on the tower. The square tower features brick corner piers, wood louvers in the paired openings of the bell tower, and a granite plaque over the Mammoth Road entry that reads "Pawtucket Cong. Church 1797-1898." The tower entry contains paired paneled doors and stained glass in the round-arched transoms above. The wood-frame projecting porches are typically Queen Anne in their styling. Each features a broad front gable in-filled with board and batten siding, overhanging eaves, bargeboards in the gable end, and decorative round-arch brackets between posts. The porches have bead board ceilings.

Interior

The interior of the Pawtucket Congregational Church is in very good condition and retains its historic integrity. The double-height sanctuary space is roughly square in massing. At the front of the space (rear wall of the church) are the chancel, with pulpit and lectern, and the organ (see below), which is set beneath a double-height arched surround. In the front left corner of the sanctuary is the choir loft, separated from the main space by an oak railing with turned balusters. The front right corner has an interior doorway leading to the pastor's office, the entry porch on the church yard elevation (see above), and a stair hall to the basement. At the rear right corner of the sanctuary are two double-door entries to the tower. The tower vestibule, which is currently closed to the public, provides access to the bell tower by way of a steep narrow staircase. The rear left corner of the sanctuary has an interior doorway opening onto a vestibule at the entry porch on the Mammoth Road elevation of the church.

The sanctuary, which seats approximately five hundred people, has two distinctive design features: exposed steel trusses supporting the vaulted ceiling, and a sloped floor that allows for clear views of the chancel from all pews. The ceiling is clad with acoustical tiles and plaster. Walls are plaster with vertical board wainscoting. All interior woodwork is oak, including the pews, which are arranged in three sections curving slightly toward the chancel, yielding two inner aisles and two outer aisles. On the left (west) wall of the sanctuary, a bank of six sliding doors divides the sanctuary from the adjacent chapel; opening these doors allows for overflows seating in the chapel. The oak doors are paneled, and have pebbled glass in transoms above.

While the chapel has the plaster walls and oak wainscoting and trim of the sanctuary, the vaulted ceiling of the chapel features trusses that are boxed in wood rather than exposed. In addition to the bank of sliding doors on the east wall, the chapel includes two pairs of paneled sliding pocket doors on the west wall: one opening onto the ladies' parlor, and the other opening onto another room at the northwest corner of the church building. There is no fixed seating in the chapel, which allows for flexible arrangements of chairs and tables to suit the need of the congregation.

The ladies' parlor is a formal space and reception area. The fireplace on the west wall displays elaborate carvings on the wood mantel and over-mantel. The ladies' parlor has a plastered vaulted ceiling, plaster walls, and matchboard wainscoting. Paneled oak doors open onto the chapel (see above) and another room at the rear left corner of the building, now used as a kitchen area. Furniture in the ladies' parlor includes pieces dating to the construction of the present church (1897-1898) as well as pieces from the meetinghouse previously on the property.

On the basement level of the church are additional meeting spaces and utility rooms. Access to the basement is by way of stair cases in the Mammoth Road vestibule (currently the church's principal entrance) and from the church yard. Both entrances are marked on the exterior by the protecting porches. Most windows in the basement contain wood sash, either a double-hung, 2/2 configuration or hopper sash.

Stained Glass

All stained glass windows in the church are plated American opalescent-style windows, designed and fabricated by Redding, Baird and Company of Boston. The sanctuary features two double-height windows, each approximately fourteen feet wide and twenty-two feet high, with a row of four smaller windows below. On the Mammoth Road elevation is *The Good Shepard*, illustrating Jesus carrying a lost sheep in a richly detailed landscape. The window is also known as the Mother's Window; centered beneath the window is a marble memorial plaque inscribed with the names of mothers who lost children. The smaller memorial windows, on the same level as the plaque, depict Biblical images (from left to right): a cluster of golden fig blossoms (Parable of the Fig Tree), clusters of purple grapes (Parable of the Vine and the Branches), the Ark of the Covenant, and a white dove (coming of the Holy Spirit). On the church yard Elevation, facing the Pawtucket Falls is *He is Risen*, illustrating Mary Magdalene and the two other woman greeted by an angel at the mouth of the empty tomb of Jesus on the first Easter morning. The

Biblical images depicted in the four smaller windows beneath are a red cross with jeweled yellow points; water from a flowing rock; an open Bible with a lamb resting on it; and a golden crown with multi-colored jewels. Two smaller windows in the choir loft make reference to Joy. In the tower vestibule outside the sanctuary, stained glass also appears in the round-arched transoms over the two entrances. Both windows illustrate a dove descending and light radiating downward from the dove. The transom over the Mammoth Road entrance includes the symbol for Alpha, i.e. the beginning. The transom over the entrance facing the church yard and Pawtucket Falls includes the symbol for Omega, i.e. the end. There is a smaller stained glass window on the tower that is not inscribed or dedicated to a particular person. [Thurlow]

Additional stained glass windows appear in the Ladies' Parlor and the chapel. In the Ladies' Parlor is the third largest window in the church, donated by Christian Endeavor, the congregation's young people's organization in 1898. This window, located on the Mammoth Road elevation, depicts in the center panel the head of Christ; above is the text *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*. A symbol containing the letters CE for Christian Endeavor appears in two places on this window. In the chapel, three smaller windows on the Mammoth Road elevation depict (from left to right in the chapel): the head and shoulders of a knight in armor (in memory of Col. James Varnum); the face of an angel as a child, gazing into the distance; and an image of the Holy Bible. Two windows on the rear wall of the chapel illustrate a crown with jewels, in the left window, and lilies, in the right. [Thurlow]

Some smaller stained glass windows in the church have intricate multi-colored designs but bear no picture or inscription. These include two windows flanking the fireplace in the Ladies' Parlor, the window in the tower vestibule (see above) a window in the porch entry hall on Mammoth Road, and a window in the room at the left rear corner of the building, near the Ladies' Parlor, which is now used as a kitchen area. [Thurlow]

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE:

Pawtucket Congregational Church is located in Pawtucketville, which was annexed to Lowell from Dracut in 1874. This section of the city is bounded by Beaver Brook, the Merrimack River, and the present town lines of Tyngsborough and Dracut. Richard Santerre's research on the Pawtucketville Social Club (Le Club Social de Pawtucketville) has uncovered a strong French-Canadian association with the neighborhood, recording a Franco-American population increase from twenty-five families in the 1890s to 5,000 residents in 1959. Pawtucketville, along with the Lowell neighborhood of Centralville, was one of the "strongest, most homogeneous Franco-American sections of Lowell, and was more closely associated with the nearby Roman Catholic churches rather than congregational parishes such as the Pawtucket Church.

Some members of the Pawtucket congregation likely had ties to neighboring Dracut, given the church's proximity to and long association with residents in that town. The congregation's association with the present site began January 7, 1796, when Col. James Varnum of Dracut conveyed the present church property, "lying on the easterly side of the County road near Middlesex Merrimack River Bridge" to Parker Varnum, Esq., Jonathan Varnum, and Peter Coburn Jr., all of Dracut, members of the committee appointed by the proprietors of the West Meetinghouse. This meetinghouse location at Pawtucket Falls was deemed central and accessible, convenient for those residing in the westerly portion of Dracut and the easterly portion of Chelmsford, which became Lowell in 1826. The "great Mammoth road" from Boston to Concord, New Hampshire crossed the Merrimack River at this point, and was laid out through Dracut in March 1792. The toll bridge itself, which later became known as the Pawtucket Bridge, opened to travel in November 1792. In 1807, individuals using the bridge to attend meetings at the West Meetinghouse were not charged the toll; all tolls were abolished in 1861. The new meetinghouse site was located in the general area of Pawtucket Falls where Rev. John Eliot had preached to the Pawtucket tribe from 1647 onward. In addition, Dracut's first meetinghouse (built 1711-1718, demolished) also had been located near Pawtucket Falls, on the present Varnum Avenue in Lowell. [Varnum, 14, 37-39; Goodwin, 62]

The framing for the wood-frame meetinghouse on the Varnum lot at Pawtucket Falls had been removed from its original location (1794) on land purchased from Jonathan Taylor. Framing of a meetinghouse on the Taylor lot was undertaken by parties who had opposed construction of a new meetinghouse on the “Central Line,” or the surveyed geographic center of Dracut. In the late 18th century, Dracut was long and narrow in configuration, requiring (cont.) substantial travel for those residing at the extreme ends. In addition, there was considerable controversy as to the proper center of the town from the standpoint of population and settlement. The Taylor lot was situated one mile west of the Central Line. The meetinghouse subsequently built on the Central Line (1794) remained there only until 1830, after which the society associated with the building constructed the Hillside meetinghouse (1835) under the name of the Evangelical Congregational Church of Dracut, a Unitarian Congregation. [Varnum, 14-39; Thurlow, N.P.; Hurd, 296]

Following the establishment of its meetinghouse at Pawtucket Falls, the West Congregational Society of Dracut was incorporated on June 22, 1797. Among the Society’s preachers in its early years were students of the Theological Seminary in Andover, which opened in September 1808. The church and society changed to Presbyterianism in 1819, and until 1837 was known as the Presbyterian Church and Society of Dracut. Congregationalists and Presbyterians were alike in their doctrine and manner of worship, and differed only in their form of church government. The change was seen as a matter of “pecuniary expediency,” which allowed the Society to receive support from the Presbytery in Newburyport to procure the services of a settled minister. In 1820, Society memberships increased due to an influx of individuals from East Chelmsford (known as Lowell after 1826), which has been set off from the rest of Chelmsford to be associated with the church at Pawtucket Falls. The first pastor of the Society, the Rev. Reuben Sears, was installed January 31, 1821. Sufficiently strengthened, the Society returned to the Congregational denomination in 1837, but the name was not restored until an act of legislature in 1850 established the West Congregational Church and Society in Dracut [Varnum, 49-51,102]. The name was changed to the Pawtucket Congregational Church and Society after Lowell annexed Pawtucketville from Dracut in 1874.

The formation and early growth of both the Pawtucket Church and the town of Dracut owed much to members of the Varnum family, and Varnum descendants remain part of the church congregation today. In 1636, Samuel Varnum sailed from England to America, settling first in Ipswich, Massachusetts, then in Chelmsford, which was incorporated as a town in 1655. Varnum acquired land on the north side of the Merrimack River about 1675, naming the place Dracut. [Varnum, 8] He is believed to have been the first European settler in town. The town of Dracut was incorporated in 1701. A Varnum descendant, Col. James Varnum (1747-1832), was one of the principal supporters of the Pawtucket Church, contributing liberally for its establishment and the support of preaching. According to the church’s published history (1888), Varnum was a large landowner in the vicinity, and had “ample means at his disposal, which he freely used for religious purposes, although he made no public profession and belonged to no church.” [Varnum, 138] He is memorialized with a stained glass window on the Mammoth Road side of the chapel. Like Col. James Varnum, Parker Varnum (1747-1824) was known as an extensive farmer and large landowner. Parker Varnum’s name led the 1797 petition to the Legislature to establish the West Congregational Society of Dracut, and he was instrumental in furthering the Society in its early years. He was elected one of the deacons in 1819. [Varnum, 135-136]

The Church established a Sunday school and Sewing Circle in 1828. The Sewing Circle, which later became known as the Female Charitable Educational Society and still later as the Ladies’ Sociable, advanced the interests of the Society, including gathering funds for distribution to local charities or making repairs and improvements to the Society’s buildings. The Pawtucket Temperance Guild was organized at the church in 1828; the group donated one of the stained glass windows on the Pawtucket Falls side of the present church sanctuary, located beneath the larger window, *He is Risen*. Other organizations established in connection with the Pawtucket Church have included the Pawtucket Local Circle of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (1885), and the Young Peoples’ Society of Christian Endeavor (1884). The latter group donated the large stained glass window on the Mammoth Road side of

the present ladies' parlor, entitled *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions*. The "CE" insignia that appear on this window signifies Christian Endeavor. [Varnum, 54-73; Thurlow, n.p.]

Members of the Society were active in anti-slavery circles in Lowell. The earliest anti-slavery meeting held by the Church occurred about 1834, under the direction of Deacon Jeremiah Varnum and others. Deacon Samuel B. Simonds was active in organizing anti-slavery meetings in Lowell, among them the meeting held in the autumn of 1834, when English philanthropist George Thompson spoke on the subject. The locally prominent African-American family of Barzillai and Dinah Lew were among the musicians in an orchestra that accompanied the singing during public worship, before the society purchased its first organ in May 1850. According to the Society's 1888 history, singing had always been accompanied by instrumental music of some kind. Musical instruments used in the society's orchestra include the violin, bass-viol, flute, clarinet, bugle, cornet, trombone, and flageolet, among others. The Lew family, which included 16 children of Barzillai and Dinah Lew, were widely known as skilled musicians. Barzillai Lew died in 1822, leaving his farm near Varnum Avenue to his sons. One son, Zadock Lew (d. 1826), played a bassoon and other wood instruments in the society's orchestra. Adrastus Lew, possibly another son, played the clarinet. [Varnum, 67-68, 94-97; "Profiles in Courage"]

Two extant features of the Pawtucket Congregational Church property were improvements made in the 1850s, and predate the present church building. Both improvements were associated with the 1794 meetinghouse that originally occupied the site. In 1850, the Society built the present stone retaining wall along a portion of the Mammoth Road street frontage, with funds contributed by Daniel Varnum. [Varnum, 76] The church bell was acquired in 1859 from an old meetinghouse at Middlesex Village, located on the other side of the Merrimack River. The Society's earlier bell was sold, destined for a smaller society in Maine. The bell from Middlesex Village was cast in 1822 by Paul Revere & Son of Boston, then operated by Joseph Revere, a son of the Revolution-era hero who died in 1818. The event surrounding the removal of the Revere bell from Middlesex Village to the Pawtucket Church on December 2, 1859 coincided with the hanging of abolitionist John Brown, who had led the seizure of federal armory buildings at Harper's Ferry, Virginia six weeks earlier and was subsequently convicted of treason. The bell tolled in memory of Brown as a procession made its way to Pawtucket Square, at the southern corner of the church property. [Varnum, 76-78; "Revere bells and bellfoundries"]

In 1874, the Pawtucketville section of Dracut, which included the Pawtucket Congregational Church property, was annexed to Lowell. Pawtucketville grew rapidly in the last quarter of the 19th century, as residential development and city institutions expanded into the newly annexed section. This growth reflected Lowell's population increase, from 59,485 in 1880 to 94,969 by 1900. Electric trolley service arrived in Pawtucketville in 1890, fueling new residential construction. The Pawtucket school was built in 1884, the Lowell Textile School was opened in 1895, Lowell General Hospital was founded on Varnum Avenue, and the city opened a new grammar school on Textile Avenue in 1898. ["Pawtucket Social Club"]

When Pawtucketville was annexed to Lowell, Pawtucket Church joined five other Congregational churches in the city. Established Congregational churches were the First Congregational Church (established 1826); the Eliot Church (established 1830, formerly known as the Second Congregational Church and later as the Appleton Street Church); the John Street Church (established 1839); the Kirk Street Church (established 1845, known until 1846 as the Fourth Congregational Church); and the High Street Church (established 1846). A later Congregational society, the Highland Congregational Church, was established in 1884. Pawtucket Congregational Church was one of four Congregational churches in Lowell that completed new church buildings in approximately the last quarter of the 19th century, and the only one not designed in a Gothic mode. Eliot church built a High Victorian Gothic-Style church in 1874. First Congregational Church completed a Victorian Gothic church in 1885. The newly established Highland Congregational Church built its first church building, also in the Victorian Gothic mode, in 1888. [Hurd, 130-136; Varnum, 144-174]

In 1888, the Pawtucket Society began planning the construction of the present church building. Resident membership was 100 persons, including 56 families. Average attendance at the morning service was 140, with 114 families represented. Some individuals had to be turned away due to lack of seating. Sunday school enrollment totaled 238, with 71 in the infant class. [Varnum, 86] Construction of the present building was undertaken in 1898-1899. To allow services to continue while the new church was being built, the 1794 meetinghouse was moved to a corner of the lot. [Thurlow] The older building was demolished shortly after completion of the new church, though the stone retaining wall (1850) along a portion of the Mammoth Road frontage has been preserved.

The church building was substantially completed on the exterior by February 11, 1899, when a fire caused an estimated \$10,000 worth of damage. The contractor, Thomas H. Connell, had lit a fire on the floor of the space intended as the ladies' parlor to help dry out the newly applied plaster. Drafts through the building, attributed to wind and the intense cold (-18 degrees), caused the fire to burn through the bricks into the floor beneath, and the blaze quickly spread. A newspaper account of June 14, 1899 notes that the church was nearly complete, pending the installation of the stained glass windows. Interior spaces included the sanctuary, which seated five hundred, separated by sliding doors from the chapel, which seated an additional 200-250 persons. The design of the sanctuary is particularly distinctive. It has been suggested that the exposed steel trusses at the ceiling were intended to be boxed in with wood, as they are in the adjacent chapel, but were left exposed following the fire in February 1899. The sloped floor of the sanctuary allows clear views of the chancel from all pews. At the western end of the church, on the other side of the chapel, was the ladies' parlor, featuring a vaulted ceiling, sliding doors, and a fireplace. In addition to room for utilities, the basement level incorporated spaces for a ladies kitchen, a serving room, a banquet hall seating three hundred, and a Sunday School room. [Architectural plans; "Conservation

Design of the Victorian eclectic church has been attributed to Lowell architect Warren Floyd, who designed the Railroad National Bank building, the J.C. Ayer office building, and numerous private residences in Lowell. [MHC #790, 1980 form] Other area buildings designed by Floyd include the French Baptist Mission Church, West 6th Street, Centralville (ca. 1898, MHC # 778); Kenwood Elementary School, 930 Methuen Street, Dracut (1900, MHC #29); and the First Primitive Methodist Church, Gorham Street, South Lowell (ca. 1901, MHC # 476). Architectural plans in the possession of the Pawtucket Congregational Church, however, show the architect as J. Merrill Brown.

Further research is needed to determine the extent of Warren Floyd's involvement in the design of the present building. J. Merrill Brown was born in 1853 in Conway, Massachusetts, and studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He worked for the celebrated Boston-based firms of Henry Hobson Richardson and Peabody & Stearns before starting his own practice in 1882. Brown designed many houses in the greater Boston area, including a number of Queen Anne-style houses in Cambridge in the 1880s. His other works included a Methodist church in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood (1889); the Free Public Library, Rochester (1891-1892, demolished?); Town Hall, Main Street, Swansea (1891, MHC #67); the First Parish Church, 147 High Street, Medford (1894); business blocks in Fall River and New Bedford; and grammar schools in Newton and Woburn. Brown resided in Arlington, Massachusetts. [BPL Boston Architecture Index; Clarke; MHC MACRIS index]

Redding, Baird and Company of Franklin Street, Boston, designed and fabricated the church's opalescent-style stained glass windows. The windows were installed during the final stages of the church's construction, in spring of 1899. All the stained glass was restored between 1993 and 2004. The opalescent style was invented in the late 19th century and first patented in 1880 by American muralist and art critic John Lafarge. Lafarge's friend, Louis Comfort Tiffany, filed for a similar patent in 1881. The technique of producing opalescent glass involved manipulating the glass itself to achieve the desired artistic effects, rather than simply painting on glass. Irregularly made opalescent glass could suggest highlights and shadows, mute bright light, and create complimentary tones to adjacent colors. Opalescent glass could have multiple colors mixed in the same sheet. Experiments in opalescent glass produced confetti glass, streamer glass, ridged glass, drapery glass, and thick, faceted glass nuggets and chunks. ["American Opalescent Glass," SGAA] Stained glass at the Pawtucket Congregational Church consists of the three large stained glass windows (*The Good Shepard* and *He is Risen* in the sanctuary, and the *In My Father's House*/ Christian

Endeavor window in the ladies' parlor), plus twenty-two smaller windows. The high quality and detail of Redding, Baird's opalescent-style windows have long distinguished the Pawtucket Church. Walter S. Redding and John C. Baird established the company in 1831. According to an 1885 account, their business in stained glass was then the largest in the United States, employing over one hundred people. Examples of the firm's work included windows and doors for churches, halls, public and private buildings, and banks and dwellings, executed "in both the modern and medieval styles." [*Leading Manufacturers and Merchants* (1885), quoted in Thurlow, n.p.] The firm's windows could be found nationwide, though the principal business was concentrated in the Mid-Atlantic and New England States. Other Redding, Baird windows identified in Massachusetts were installed at First Parish Unitarian Church, 110 Main Street, Haverhill (church 1847, MHC #1027); Housatonic Congregational church, 1089 Main Street, Great Barrington (1893, MHC # 268); Eogg Library, 1 Columbian Square, Weymouth (1897, MHC #8); the Calvinistic Congregational Church, Fitchburg (1897); First Congregational Church, 34 Walnut Street, Clinton (1898, MHC #68); First Parish Church, Brookline (1902); and Charles Larned Memorial Library, Main Street, Oxford (1903, MHC #106.) [Thurlow; "Conservation Assessment," 14; Faith United Parish website; MHC MACRIS index]

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