

Summary Paragraph

The Barre Downtown Historic District (the “District”) was originally listed in the National Register of Historic Places on September 4, 1979. The 2017 work updates the number, description and documentation of properties within the boundaries of the existing District. It clarifies and expands the period of significance and documents previously unrecorded resources as well as those constructed after 1979. Non-contributing buildings are inventoried but only briefly described. In this document, each resource in the District has been re-numbered to account for buildings that have been removed and/or constructed since the original nomination in 1979. The District focuses on the city’s core central business district, which includes a mix of commercial, civic and religious buildings generally constructed between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. Based on this update, the District contains 54 individual resources, categorized as follows: 37 contributing buildings; 12 non-contributing buildings; 1 contributing site; 1 contributing structure; and 3 contributing objects. As a whole, the District retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

Narrative Description

Located approximately six miles southeast of Montpelier, Vermont’s capital, Barre City lies in a hill-rimmed valley along the Stevens Branch of the Winooski River. The world-renowned granite quarries that gave form to Barre as an industrial city are located approximately three miles further southeast of the downtown area, in Barre Town. The principal street in the Barre Downtown Historic District (the “District”) is Main Street (North and South), oriented on a northwest-southeast axis, and roughly following the route of the Stevens Branch. The properties included in the District form the core of Barre City’s historic commercial center.

The District is comprised of two contiguous sections: 1) the linear business district along the North Main Street axis, and 2) the City Hall Park area. Both sides of North Main Street are bordered by late-19th and early 20th century commercial buildings, ranging in height from one to four stories. Development occurred in an orderly fashion, with consistent setbacks from the street, and most of the buildings are built of durable materials, including brick and, most notably, granite from nearby quarries that was cut and finished locally. North Main Street sprang up when the large-scale industrial production of granite became a reality with the advent of rail service in 1875 and a quarry railroad in 1888. This section also includes Depot Square, a short spur off North Main Street where the former Central Vermont Passenger Depot (HD #35) is located. A second railroad station, for the Barre Branch of the Montpelier and Wells River Railroad, is no longer extant.¹ The City Hall Park area is located at an important crossroads which, by the second quarter of the 19th century, was a developing focus of community life for the various settlements in the greater Barre area. Today it is the showplace of the city, with an architecturally cohesive grouping of primarily late-19th and early 20th century buildings. Mainly civic and religious in nature, these buildings are organized around the triangular form of City Hall Park. The eastern edge of the railroad right-of-way defines the western boundary of the District. Rail operations historically skirted along the back of the businesses along the southwest side of North Main Street to service the many granite cutting and finishing facilities located in the Burnham's Meadow/Granite Street area (between the railroad tracks and the north bank of the Stevens Branch). The meandering course of the Stevens Branch used to flow in a horseshoe bend directly behind many of the buildings on the

west/southwest side of North Main Street. The river was rechanneled remove the horseshoe bend around 1910, filled in, and a rear drive was built (known today as Merchant's Row). Today this area serves as a large parking lot.

These two contiguous areas, North Main Street and City Hall Park, draw the strength and continuity of their architectural character from a common period of extensive building activity between approximately 1880 and 1910. A key architectural and design characteristic specific to Barre City in this period is the pervasive use of granite for building details. The material is handled with virtuosity, reflecting the skills of the craftsmen that helped build the granite industry: from superbly executed public statuary such as the Robert Burns Monument (HD #9a) and the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial (HD #1b), to finely dressed granite window trim and wall reliefs, to highly polished, flawlessly turned columns, the granite on display in the historic district supports Barre's reputation as "The Granite Center of the World." Thus, while other cities utilized terra cotta, cast iron, concrete, or other materials to articulate building and design details, in Barre the important local resource of granite was often the preferred choice.

Buildings in the district are of several primary types: residential, religious, institutional, civic and commercial. The building stock is predominantly in good condition, and many buildings retain their original use or have been adapted for compatible use. Three former dwellings in the City Hall Park area have been converted to office use (HD #5, #7, and #8), and the former Hotel Barre (HD #3) has been converted into senior housing and is known as the Washington Street Apartments. Commercial blocks have generally retained their multi-purpose character with retail, office, and residential spaces often occurring in one building (several also had meeting halls on upper floors).

Despite sharing the same period of construction, the North Main Street and the City Hall Park areas have very distinct and different qualities. The commercial buildings north of the Barre City Hall and Opera House (HD #16) to the Granite Block (HD #19) share design of the North Main Street axis, which has the frontality characteristic of most commercial districts and employs the typical late nineteenth-century three-part design divisions consisting of a prominent cornice, an¹elongated, flat mid-section with regular openings, and street-level storefronts. The horizontal proportions, however, differ from buildings in metropolitan centers where multi-windowed central bays are favored to give a horizontal emphasis. In Barre, narrow, single window-width central bays are almost ubiquitous.

The City Hall Park area is architecturally and spatially more three dimensional than the North Main Street area. The buildings surrounding City Hall Park generally have a compatible rhythm of spacing, similar and often common frontage lines, are usually set back from the roadway on a short span of lawn, and create a variety of vistas as one travels through the several intersections around the triangular City Hall Park (HD #1). The Aldrich Public Library (HD #2) and the former Spaulding Graded School (HD #9) have dramatic, deep setbacks, and are important visual and cultural landmarks in the District. The Universalist Church (HD #13) also dominates its site, and its massive side clock tower gives special emphasis to the intersection in front of the Barre City Hall and Opera House. In addition, an important visual focus occurs at the head of City Hall Park where the compelling granite figure of "Youth Triumphant" – part of the crescent-shaped Soldiers and Sailors Memorial (HD #1b) – commands the North Main Street axis as it bifurcates to the south

¹ The Barre Branch Railroad Station was documented in the 1979 nomination, but has since been demolished.

and southeast.

Architecturally, the City Hall Park area is comprised of religious and civic buildings and shows a more conscious and systematic expression of style than does the linear commercial section. Most of the buildings come from the late picturesque phase of the Victorian period: some notable examples include the Gothic Revival-style Church of the Good Shepherd (HD #10); the Queen Anne-style Hedding Methodist Church (HD #6); and the Richardsonian Romanesque-style Spaulding Graded School (HD #9). The Neo-Classical Revival style is largely reserved for civic architecture and is used to achieve a monumental effect for buildings of relatively small scale. The United States Post Office (HD #15) and the Aldrich Public Library (HD #2) are important examples. Most buildings are of brick with granite used for trim and foundations. Two buildings, however, make extensive use of granite masonry: the Church of the Good Shepherd with rock-faced blocks and the United States Post Office with dressed blocks more appropriate to the Neo-Classical Revival style.

In general, the exteriors of most buildings in the City Hall Park area have remained intact, with two notable exceptions: the Congregational and Universalist churches. These two frame buildings, originally built in the Greek Revival style, were substantially altered to reflect then- current architectural trends. The Congregational church gained Richardsonian Romanesque features, while the Universalist church gained Gothic Revival features. These alterations have now gained historic significance in their own right.

The District's continuity of appearance primarily derives from a late and eclectic use of Victorian-era stylistic sources. The French Second Empire-style Wheelock Law Office (HD #42) dates from 1871 and is one of the few survivors from the early growth of the city. Averill's Block (HD #18) at City Hall Park is a good example of Panel Brick/late Italianate. Panel Brick, an ornate patterned brickwork characteristic of urban centers such as Boston and New York in the 1870s, was popular in Barre through 1900. The Granite Block (HD #19) is Neo-Classical with Victorian Gothic detailing. The Richardsonian Romanesque style is the basis for the Blanchard Block of 1904 (HD #17).

It is not uncommon to find examples of three and even four of these styles on a single building such as with the Worthen Block (HD #43). Modest examples of Commercial Moderne are found at the M.H. Fishman Building (HD #26) and the Commercial Building at 145 North Main Street (HD #41).