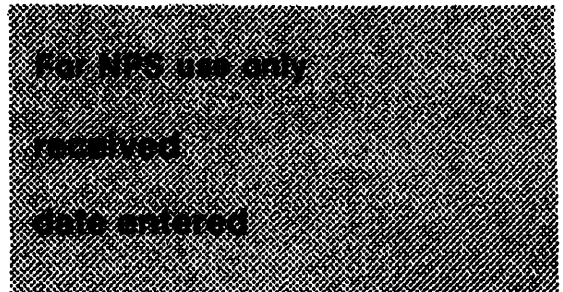


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NAME: Pawtucket West High School
COMMON NAME: Shea High School
LOCATION: 485 East Avenue
OWNER: City of Pawtucket
137 Roosevelt Avenue
Pawtucket, RI 02860
CONDITION: Good; altered; original site

DESCRIPTION:

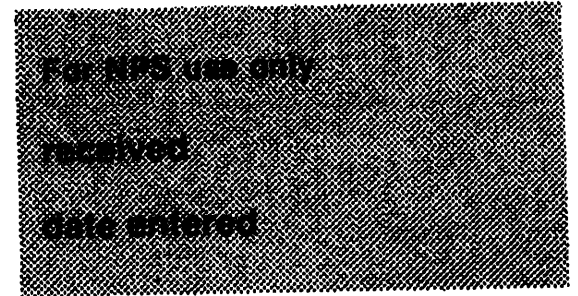
The Pawtucket West High School building, an imposing Art Deco design of 1938-39, sits well back from East Avenue on a terraced lot carved out of the northeastern slope of Oak Hill. Some widely spaced rows of recently planted shade trees may someday soften these terraces, but currently the grounds are dominated by a monumental cast-stone staircase. This staircase, rising from East Avenue on the building's central axis, branches out on the lower terrace into three separate walkways leading to the three principal entrances in the main facade. Cast-stone parapets and balustrades line these walks; the solid parapets are liberally covered with inscribed adages and quotations intended to benefit the passing students.

The High School building proper is laid out somewhat in the form of a capital "E", with its back placed toward the street and treated as the principal facade. Standing three stories and a basement high under a flat roof, the steel-framed building is sheathed in yellow brick, with extensive decorative accents of cast stone, green glazed brick, and cast iron. A central, cast-stone pavilion breaks through the building's cornice line to mark the building's major entrance; lesser, yellow brick pavilions repeat the effect on the eastern facades of the northern and southern classroom blocks. The exterior envelope of the High School building is heavily ornamented with stylized, low-relief detail so beloved by Art Deco designers. Fluted, cast-stone pilasters, three-stories high and bearing stylized foliate caps, mark each important facade division. Cast-iron grilles and plaques of stylized foliate design are centered in spandrel panels of green glazed tile. Panels of low-relief sculpture are spaced within the rudimentary "frieze", each panel illustrating the particular virtue or vice (wisdom, endurance, achievement; carelessness, fear, ignorance etc.) carved in the architrave below. Capping the frieze is a cast-stone cornice of typical Art Deco design. On the central, cast-stone entry pavilion, a pair of stylized eagles flank a central panel bearing the inscription "Take fast hold/of instruction/for she is thy life" over the two-story entry portal. Above and behind this portal, the pavilion displays the seals of Pawtucket and of Rhode Island to either side of a stylized owl--the symbol of wisdom.

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The most striking features of the building's interior are the central, split-level lobby and the auditorium which occupies the central arm of the "E" directly behind it; both are lavishly detailed in the Art Deco style. In both spaces, broad, scored (walnut?) pilasters carry gilded capitals of lushly foliate form; the recessed plastered panels and the windows between the pilasters are each topped by a gilded sculpture panel, and gilded Art Deco moldings appear in abundance. A sweeping Art Deco open staircase remains in the lobby, but the lighting fixtures there appear to be replacements. Neither the seats nor the present linoleum floor of the auditorium appear to be original, but the space as a whole remains marvelously intact.

The exterior of the high school has suffered one major alteration: the original windows and doors have all been removed and replaced by glass block and aluminum sash windows and indestructible windowless doors. The exterior fabric, otherwise, remains virtually untouched.

PERIOD: 1900-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture; Education; Politics/Government; Sculpture

SPECIFIC DATE: 1938-39

ARCHITECT: John F. O'Malley

SIGNIFICANCE:

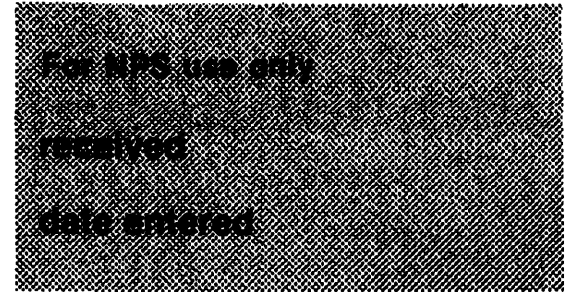
The Pawtucket West High School is architecturally significant as an important Rhode Island example of the Art Deco style of the 1930s, and is particularly notable in this regard for its highly ornamented lobby and auditorium. It is architecturally and educationally significant for its highly unusual and very extensive use of architectural sculpture and inscriptions for didactic purposes. Politically, the building is significant as one of several major building projects which Mayor Tom McCoy succeeded in securing PWA construction funds for during the great depression of the 1930s. Although the Pawtucket West High School building is still a few years short of the fifty-year threshold normally required for National Register listing, the building's outstanding architectural character strongly supports its nomination to the Register at the present time.

Pawtucket West High School was constructed in 1938-39 from the designs of the Providence architect, John F. O'Malley. (O'Malley had also designed the new Pawtucket City Hall, similarly Art Deco in style, just a few years earlier.) Funding for the project was obtained by Democratic Mayor Tom McCoy through the Federal government's Public Works Administration. McCoy proved to be quite adept at applying for these federal recovery funds and,

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with them, he managed to erect a new municipal water and filtration plant, the new City Hall, and a new municipal stadium (now renamed McCoy Stadium) as well as the new Pawtucket West High School, during the years of the 1930s depression. The Art Deco high school is a good surviving example of the type of civic project sponsored by this depression-era agency, as well as a physical tribute to the memory of Pawtucket's most famous political figure.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nominated property is in Pawtucket Assessor's Plat 65A, lot 562, and includes the high school and its immediate surroundings.

ACREAGE: 3.73 acres

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: State

UTM: A 19 301750 4637320

(See Continuation Sheet #85)