

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

### 1. Name of Property

historic name: Perkins Buildings

other name/site number: Ada Building, Charles H. Perkins Building, Providence  
Lithograph Company Building

### 2. Location

street & number: 85 Sprague Street, 101 and 102 Westfield Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Providence vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Providence code: 007 zip code: 02907

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private non-profit

Category of Property: Buildings

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>3</u>	<u>      </u>	buildings
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	sites
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	structures
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>      </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

Property name Perkins Buildings, Providence County, Providence, RI

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria.

     See continuation sheet.

Frederick Williamson  
Signature of certifying official

10 Dec 03  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.

     See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

     entered in the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.

     determined eligible for the  
National Register  
     See continuation sheet.

     determined not eligible for the  
National Register

     removed from the National Register

     other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

Date  
of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: INDUSTRY

Sub: manufacturing facility

Current: VACANT/NOT IN USE

Sub:

Property name Perkins Buildings, Providence County, Providence, RI

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

OTHER: industrial construction

Other Description:

Materials: foundation STONE, Granite roof ASPHALT  
BRICK, CONCRETE  
 walls BRICK, WOOD, other  
Clapboard, METAL

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):

Areas of Significance: Industry

Period(s) of Significance: 1887-1952

Significant Dates: 1887, 1890, 1892, 1952

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Johnson, Freeborn (Providence Lithograph Building, 1890)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: RI Historical Society Library, 121 Hope St., Prov., RI

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property: 2.5 acres

UTM References: Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>298360</u>	B	<u>4631460</u>	B
C	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	D	<u>          </u>	D

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description:  See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification:  See continuation sheet.

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title: Edward Connors, Principal

Organization: Edward Connors and Associates Date: January 2003

Street & Number: 14 Brook Street Telephone: 401-433-2871

City or Town: Barrington State: RI ZIP: 02806

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Description

The Perkins Buildings are three moderate-sized industrial buildings, multi-story, gable and flat-roofed, built of wood, brick, concrete, and steel. They occupy most of the block bounded by Sprague, Dexter, Warren, and Harrison Streets in Providence, an area of about 2.5 acres. Two houses (on the same block) at the corner of Warren and Harrison Streets are separately owned and are not part of this nomination. A section of Westfield Street, now closed to traffic, passes through the complex. The surrounding neighborhood is predominantly industrial to the south and east, and residential to the north and west. The south (Cranston Street) boundary of the Broadway-Armory Historic District (NR, 1974) is two blocks to the north.

Between 1887 and 1892 Providence industrialist Charles H. Perkins constructed three neighboring factory buildings here in South Providence in an area that had been dominated since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by the diverse industrial activities of the A. and W. Sprague Company. The three buildings are referred to as the Perkins Buildings; individually they are: the Charles H. Perkins Building (101 Westfield Street, 1887), the Providence Lithograph Company Building (102 Westfield Street, 1890), and the Ada Building (85 Sprague Street, 1892).

The Perkins Buildings originally housed separate industrial concerns until all were consolidated over time by the Rau Fastener Company. The complex has been vacant since the failure of Rau in 1994.

The present owner, West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation, acquired the complex in 2002.

INVENTORY

Unless otherwise indicated, all buildings contribute to the historic character of the nominated property. Contributing buildings are defined as those constructed within the period of significance which retain sufficient integrity to document their historic significance.

Sprague Street

85 ADA BUILDING (1892): An asymmetrical T-plan, 4-story brick,

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Sprague Street (continued)

predominantly pier-and-spandrel, open plan building, fronting on Sprague Street. A rear wing extends north to Westfield Street.

The building is 118x190' with a shallow-pitched gable roof. Framing is of the slow-burning type: 9.5" wooden columns on the first and second floors (7.5" columns on the third and fourth) with roughly 2" flooring laid on 13x9" beams. Windows are wooden frame, grouped generally in threes, double-hung, with 9/9 sash set in segmental arch openings; some are damaged, filled, or plywood covered. Sills are of quarry-faced granite. A monitor roof is located over the stairwell near the corner of Sprague and Harrison.

The front elevation is eight bays. A hooded and recessed entrance is found at the third bay from Harrison Street. A metal-frame, double glass door is a mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century alteration. Centered above the door is a panel that reads: *ADA Building 1892*. The cornice is corbelled along the spandrel walls and plain at the piers. The rear (Westfield Street) elevation, part of the west (alley) elevation, and the southeast elevation (corner of Harrison and Sprague Streets) depart from the pier and spandrel pattern of the rest of the building. These walls are undifferentiated as to pier and spandrel, and windows are single, not grouped in threes as found on the other elevations.

A single-story, pitched-roof boiler house, 60x25', is located at the Westfield Street end of the alley and attached to the southwest wall of the Ada Building. Similar in treatment to the rest of the building, the boiler room has segmental arch windows with quarry-faced granite sills. Windows are wooden frame, 9/9 double-hung. There is a monitor window on the boiler room roof. Double wooden doors set in a recessed segmental arch open onto Westfield Street and the alley.

Charles Perkins named this building after his daughter, Ada Lucretia Perkins (1868-1931).

Westfield Street

101 CHARLES H. PERKINS BUILDING (1887 et seq.): A long, L-shaped, gable-roof, wood frame mill, now disguised by steel panels covering the wall surface, oriented east-west between Dexter and Harrison Streets. The

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### Westfield Street (continued)

building's present configuration is the result of a series of additions and expansions between 1887 and 1950. A center, single-bay entrance opens onto Westfield Street. Historically, this building housed as many as four separate companies, each occupying roughly half the space on each floor.

It appears that much of the building's original clapboard sheathing survives underneath the exterior steel panels applied in 1970. The roof is asphalt shingle and the slightly overhanging cornice is also metal-sheathed. There are several small, modern, awning windows. These were inserted into the lower sash openings of the original 12/12 double-hung windows, which are still intact and visible inside the building. ~~Shallow-gable-ends-face-Dexter-and-Harrison Streets.~~

Though much altered, the Charles H. Perkins Building is defined as contributing because it is an unusually rare example of its type (only a handful of wood frame mills remain in Rhode Island) and because some of its alterations appear to be at least partially reversible.

MAIN SECTION, PERKINS BUILDING (1887): A narrow, 2-story frame structure, 210x140', built on a brick foundation, with a clapboard wall surface and regularly-spaced, 12/12 double-hung windows. The windows and wall surfaces are no longer visible from the exterior as they are covered, but can be seen from the interior. The original plan of the main section of this loft building was open, a single row of wooden columns running the length of the building. This layout permitted adaptation to the varying needs of industrial tenants. The second floor is now subdivided with modern office partitions likely dating to the purchase of the building by Rau Fastener in the 1970s. Framing is of the slow burning type: 8.5" timber columns with roughly 2.5" thick flooring laid on approximately 13x9" beams. Although there is no evidence of the original power shafting, some sub-framing for this purpose is evident below the roof trusses on the second floor.

The main section of the building was originally of rectangular plan with a small, trapezoidal, two-story office projecting from the east elevation at the corner of Harrison and Westfield Streets.

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Westfield Street (continued)

Between 1887 and 1895 this space was incorporated into the footprint of the main section, producing the footprint visible today.

A detached, 2-story brick section, about 20x40', at the north elevation of the main mill began as a 1-story boiler room in 1887. The second floor of the boiler room was added between 1920 and 1956; the space between the boiler room and the main section was filled in and roofed over in a series of small additions.

PATTERN SHOP/NORTH ELL, PERKINS BUILDING (1918? et seq.): Originally a detached, single-story pattern shop at the northeast corner of the property, this section is now contiguous with the rest of the building due to infill construction (the middle ell) commencing c. 1895. By 1918 this building and the Middle Ell were two-stories. The pattern shop is about 20' in width along Harrison and about 50' deep, with a garage entrance on Harrison Street. It is unclear whether this shop was demolished during c. 1918 construction or new construction occupied the same footprint. By 1956 this 2-story ell had been extended to the west along the north lot line to enclose the boiler room, as seen today.

MIDDLE ELL, PERKINS BUILDING (c. 1895 et seq.): This section of the building is 25' wide along Harrison Street and roughly 65' deep. Until about 1895, there was open space between the main building and the single-story pattern shop described above. By 1895 this section appeared as single-story infill between these two buildings. By 1951 this section was predominantly 2-story.

- 102 PROVIDENCE LITHOGRAPH COMPANY BUILDING (1890, Freeborn Johnson, carpenter-builder): A rectangular plan, 3-story brick building oriented north-south between Sprague and Westfield Streets. This building has a shallow-pitched gable roof and plain wood cornice. Framing is of the slow-burning type: approximately 9" wooden columns with 2.75" thick subflooring laid on 13.5x9" beams. Third floor trusses span the entire space. Rows of secondary steel columns have been added on both sides of the original single row of wooden



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### Westfield Street (continued)

columns.<sup>1</sup> Many of the original wooden-frame windows survive; some are replaced with 20<sup>th</sup>-century metal frame inserts. Most of the windows, set in segmental arch openings, have fixed sashes (either 8/12 or 12/12) with swinging four-light transoms. A likely later alteration allows some of the formerly fixed lower sashes to pivot and swing out on a central axis. Sills are quarry-faced granite.

The front (Westfield Street) elevation consists of five symmetrical bays with a recessed entranceway occupying the first (westernmost) bay. The rear (south) elevation also has five bays; the center bay has a double, wood-frame loading door at each floor. Once freestanding and separated from the Ada Building by an alley, the Providence Lithograph Building is now connected to the Ada Building by mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century infill and an elevated walkway.

A single-story 17'-wide brick wing extends the full length of the east elevation. This wing evolved as a series of extensions to an original, 35x16' pitched-roof boiler house at the south (Sprague Street) end of the building. This room originally had two segmental-arch windows on the Sprague Street elevation, now filled with brick. Although a rectangular, mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century metal frame window has replaced them, some evidence of these original window openings is visible in the brickwork. A brick chimney is contiguous with the north wall of the boiler room. This once-visible boiler house is now enveloped by mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century infill that has closed off the alley.

Between 1895 and 1899, Providence Lithograph extended the boiler house northward to the stair tower to house a zinc and graining room. Original window openings survive along walls that were once external, now made internal through 20<sup>th</sup>-century infill. Although some are filled with brick, the original lines of these windows are visible in the brickwork.

Between 1937 and 1956 Rau Fastener extended this wing around the stair tower north to Westfield Street. Departing from the design of the boiler and graining rooms, the windows of this section are rectangular with metal frames; the roof pitch matches the older

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<sup>1</sup> Current redevelopment plans call for the removal of these secondary columns.

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Westfield Street (continued)

sections. This addition reduced the original roughly 30'-wide Westfield Street alley entrance to about 15.'

PLATING AND SHIPPING ADDITION, PROVIDENCE LITHOGRAPH BUILDING (1952): A 2-story, 60x190' addition attached to the Dexter Street wall of the Providence Lithograph Building. The original exterior wall of the older building is intact. Built by Rau Fastener in 1952, this addition is typical of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century industrial construction: near-flat roof, brick skin on steel frame, metal frame windows, and concrete foundation. A moderne two-story entrance surfaced in cast stone opens onto Westfield Street. A wide stairway leads to a recessed glass and metal frame doorway. Above this doorway is a wide, 15-light metal frame rectangular window, above that a decorative panel of white brick. There are two concrete shipping platforms on the Dexter Street elevation.

ALLEY: Between 1890 and 1956 there were significant changes in the alleyway between the Providence Lithograph and Ada Buildings. Around 1920, a roughly 25x30' single story brick addition was built on the alley entrance to the Ada Building, replacing a small, freestanding frame structure that had occupied this space for about ten years. Between 1956 and 1970 Rau Fastener built a cinderblock extension (NC) to this entrance, thus enclosing the entire south end of the alley and closing off exterior traffic between Sprague and Westfield Streets. This included the cinderblock wall visible today along Sprague Street. By 1937 a steel beam and cinderblock elevated walkway provided passage between the Ada and Providence Lithograph Buildings. This walkway is aligned with the second story of the Providence Lithograph Building, meeting the Ada Building at a point halfway between its second and third floors.

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Photographs

Photographer: Clark Schoettle  
Date: June 2003  
Negative: RIHPHC  
(The above information applies to all photographs)

Photo #1 of 12

View: Rau Fastener, Providence Lithograph, and Ada Buildings, Dexter and Sprague Streets, west and south elevations, photographer facing east.

Photo #2 of 12

View: Charles Perkins, Ada, Providence Lithograph, and Rau Fastener Buildings, Dexter Street, west and north elevations, photographer facing east.

Photo #3 of 12

View: Boilerhouse, Providence Lithograph, and Rau Faster Buildings, Westfield Street, photographer facing west.

Photo #4 of 12

View: Ada Building (foreground) Harrison and Sprague Streets, south and east elevations; Providence Lithograph Building at left (background), photographer facing northwest.

Photo #5 of 12

View: Ada Building, Harrison Street, east elevation, photographer facing west.

Photo #6 of 12

View: Ada Building, entrance detail, Sprague Street, south elevation, photographer facing north.

Photo #7 of 12

View: Charles Perkins Building (foreground), Harrison Street, east elevation; Ada Building (background) Harrison Street, north elevation, photographer facing southwest.

Photo #8 of 12

View: Providence Lithograph Building, Westfield Street, north and east elevations, photographer facing southwest.

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Photo #9 of 12

View: Rau Fastener Building, Westfield Street, north elevation,  
photographer facing southeast.

Photo #10 of 12

View: Ada Building, third floor, photographer facing northeast.

Photo #11 of 12

View: Charles Perkins Building, second floor, photographer facing east.

Photo #12 of 12

View: Providence Lithograph Building, third floor, photographer facing  
north.

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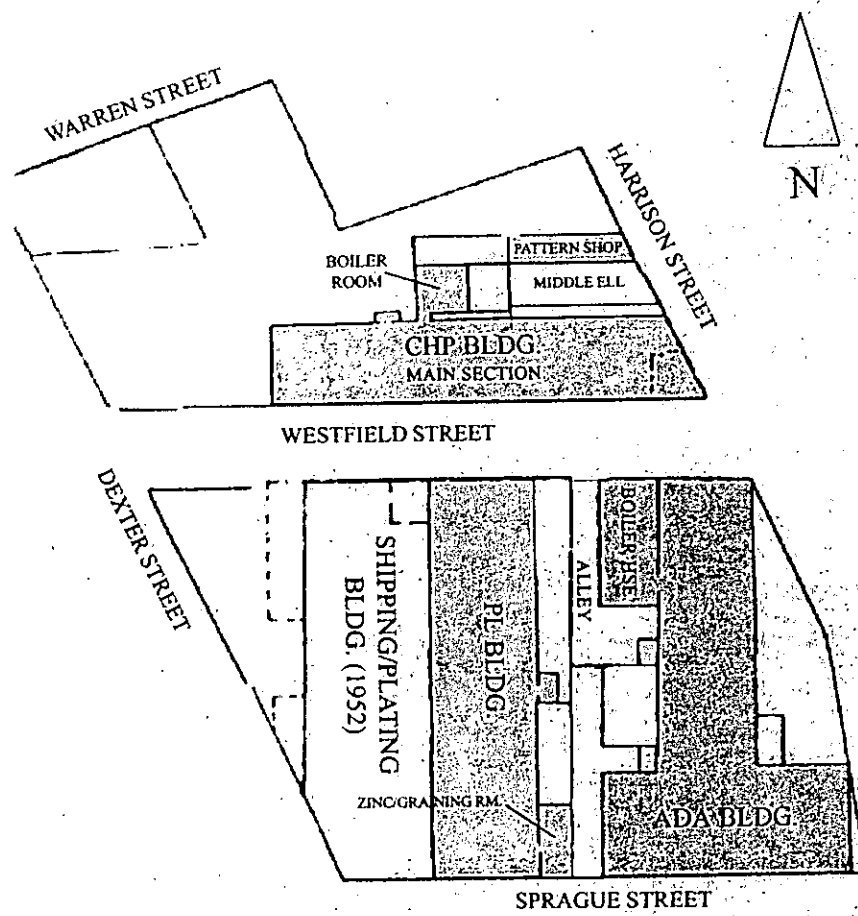
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Sketch Plan  
Charles Perkins Buildings  
Providence County, Rhode Island



APPROXIMATE SCALE  
1" = 70'

*shaded area indicates 1887-1892 construction*

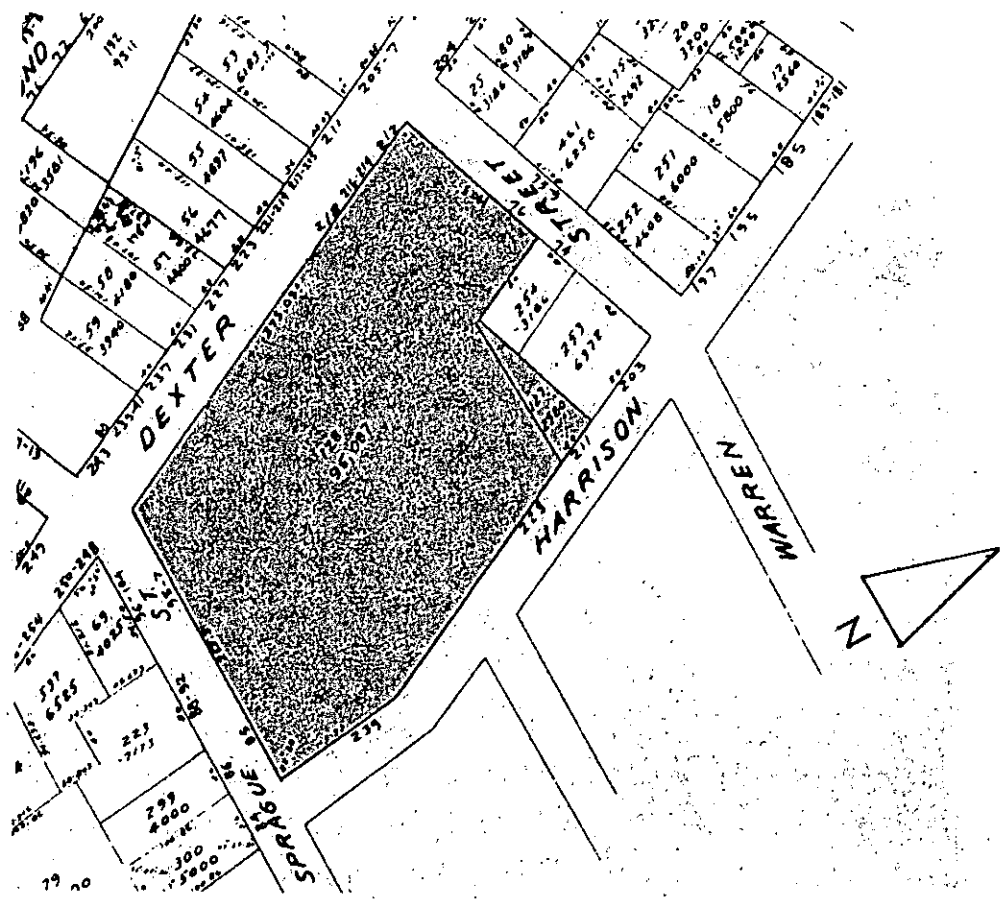
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Perkins Buildings  
Vicinity of Westfield and Sprague Streets, Providence, RI

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Significance

The Perkins Buildings are significant as a good example of the small concentrations of moderate-sized factories created throughout Providence in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the decades following the Civil War, Providence was the location of large industrial firms that created huge factory complexes across the city, but these great industrial complexes were set in a matrix of smaller industries. Using the same technologies, skilled workforce, and investment capital, these smaller enterprises collectively represent an important part of the industrial economy of the city. The factories created for these smaller operations, especially in the neighborhoods south and west of downtown, are a significant part of the city's historic industrial landscape.

The Perkins Buildings are the work of Providence mechanic and inventor Charles Henry Perkins (1830-1904), who availed himself of investment capital provided by the vast textile interests of A. & W. Sprague in the 1860s. Over a 35-year period, Perkins acquired more than fifty patents in horseshoe manufacture and metalworking. With the demise of the Sprague interests in 1873, he set off on his own, meeting with great success in his various enterprises. He reinvested his wealth in industrial real estate in South Providence and, in the process, expanded the city's industrial base.

The Perkins Buildings exemplify a type of decentralized industrial development of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century made possible by the availability of steam power and the expansion of the utilities of water, gas, and streetcar lines. These buildings, close to sources of labor, acted as an incubator for new, innovative, and expanding enterprises over a period of several decades. Many of these small enterprises, such as Providence Lithograph Company and Beaman and Smith, went on later to great success elsewhere. Rau Fastener Company moved in as a tenant in 1917, expanded its operations, and owned and occupied the three Perkins buildings by the 1970s. These buildings are thus significant locally under Criterion A for their association with one of the broad patterns of the industrialization of the city of Providence.

The original construction of the three Perkins Buildings is virtually intact. Despite a sizable 1952 addition to the Providence Lithograph Building and infill along the alley between the Ada and Providence Lithograph Buildings, original construction has not been significantly altered. The Charles H. Perkins Building at 101 Westfield Street, though altered, is nonetheless a rare survivor, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century wood frame

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industrial building. The Perkins Buildings are thus significant under Criterion C in their ability to document the distinctive characteristics of a building type and architectural period.

Charles Henry Perkins (1830-1904) was born into a Bristol County, Massachusetts, family with a long history in iron working. He learned the blacksmithing and machining trades after his school years with Gilbert and Wheeler, near Taunton. By age 16 he had completed his apprenticeship and relocated to Taunton to work as a machinist. Soon after, he moved to Providence where he found employment in the manufacture of cotton machinery as well as locomotive work. While in Providence, Perkins met George M. Morse who encouraged him to move to Putnam, Connecticut, to work in the machine shop of the cotton mill co-owned by Hosea Ballou and Morse's father, Milton. He remained with this company from 1850 until the crash of 1857. Taking advantage of the slow textile trade during the depression years, he invented a self-oiling axle<sup>2</sup> and a machine for the manufacture of horseshoes.<sup>3</sup> These were the first of Perkins's inventions; by 1892 he would hold some fifty patents relating to horseshoe manufacture and rolling mill technology.

Seeking a more hospitable climate for exploitation of his inventions, Perkins, who had married Lucretia Bundy<sup>4</sup> of Putnam, moved to Providence seeking investors and technical expertise. He formed a partnership with E. A. Cutler (Cutler and Perkins), which eventually became the Union Horseshoe Company (located on Point Street, Providence). During the Civil War, Union Horseshoe Company secured an Army contract, but despite this, the company struggled financially. By 1864 Perkins had severed ties with Cutler.

In the mid-1860s, Perkins allied his business interests with those of Amasa and William Sprague, whose textile company was expanding into one of the largest and most diversified firms in the country, encompassing

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<sup>2</sup> This device does not appear to be patented.

<sup>3</sup> Perkins was not the first to mass manufacture horseshoes. The first machine of this type was developed and patented by Henry Burden of Troy, NY, in 1835. Capable of producing a shoe every second, Burden's machine was the first to form iron blanks into finished shoes. Perkins's innovation is described in the patent application: "By means of the said machine, a bar or piece of iron may be bent around into a proper form and hammered out and creased so as to reduce it to the shape of a horseshoe." (US Patent 20,441, "Horseshoe Machine," June 1, 1858).

<sup>4</sup> Perkins married Lucretia Bundy of Putnam, CT, in 1854. They had six children; the youngest was Ada Lucretia (1868-1931). She eventually married Providence jewelry manufacturer Henry A. Kirby, whose company (founded 1896) occupied the fourth floor of the Ada Building for a time.



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manufacturing and printing plants, with mills located from Maine to Georgia, western lands, and utility companies. The Spragues owned a number of operations near Long Pond in South Providence. Perkins worked for the Spragues and they, in turn, provided financial backing for a number of his new enterprises. Between 1864 and 1873, Perkins managed a number of Sprague operations, partnered with the Spragues in others, and borrowed their capital to fund his own enterprises. All were iron-working plants, and several of the companies had important relationships with the others (as suppliers of materials or power and with shared management): Perkins Sheet Iron Company, the Rhode Island Horse Shoe Company, Wilcox Caloric and Steam Engine Company (for all three William Sprague was president, Perkins was agent or superintendent), Comstock Foundry, and American Horse Nail Company. When the Sprague firm failed (they were the principal bankrupts of the Panic of 1873), the relationship with Perkins ended.

As the Sprague empire fell apart, Perkins acquired several small pieces. He and two partners purchased and operated one of the Sprague properties, the Rhode Island Horse Shoe Company. Perkins also built a new horseshoe plant (1875) in the Blackstone Valley north of Providence.

In 1887, Perkins purchased an undeveloped parcel on the north side of Westfield Street from the defunct Sprague Mowing Machine Company and began construction on the Perkins Buildings. Over the course of the next five years, he acquired additional parcels adjacent to the site and began construction on those as well. With the completion of the Providence Lithograph Building in 1890 and the Ada Building in 1892, Perkins had created a small complex of manufacturing buildings--and he had become a landlord as well as a manufacturer.

Over the subsequent decades, a number of manufacturing firms leased space in one or more of the Perkins Buildings, reflecting a pattern found throughout Providence industry in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As the great textile and metal-working firms that dominated the city's economy achieved maturity, the prosperous industrial environment stimulated the number and the variety of small start-up firms. Most of these new firms either focused on some specialty product in textiles or metal, or they were subsidiary to these industries, providing support services or products including marketing, packaging and transport. In addition, the jewelry industry, which was largely made up of small-scale operations, became an increasingly important part of the city's manufacturing base.

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Several of Perkins's important tenants document this pattern, especially Beaman and Smith Company (machine tools and metal-working machinery, located here 1887 to 1898); Providence Lithograph Company (printers of mill labels, tickets, and other products, located here 1890 to 1906); and Rau Fastener Company (metal stamping, buckles, and other fasteners, located here 1917 to 1994).

BEAMAN AND SMITH COMPANY: Elmer A. Beaman, senior partner of the firm, moved to Providence in 1847, working for Star Tool Company until he left to form a partnership with George H. Smith in 1886. Smith had worked for Brown and Sharpe, where he held the position of head draftsman. Although the 1889 Sanborn Insurance Map does not mention Beaman and Smith by name, their operation is described as a "machine and small pattern shop." The new company occupied the east half of the first floor of the Charles H. Perkins Building, an area of about 4,500 square feet.<sup>5</sup> By 1894 Beaman and Smith had expanded their operations within the building to occupy 12,000 square feet.

The new partnership was organized to manufacture machine tools and specialty metalworking machinery. Among these specialties were large-scale milling and boring machines. A *Providence Journal of Commerce* (April 1894) article described another Beaman and Smith specialty: the mounting of direct-drive DC motors on the machinery they manufactured. An accompanying illustration, however, shows an interior view of Beaman and Smith's operation in which all the visible machinery is powered by overhead Perkins shafting. It is possible that Beaman and Smith's decision to leave the Charles H. Perkins Building in 1898 to construct their own building on Gordon Street in Providence was a result of their appreciation of the benefits of direct drive machinery.

PROVIDENCE LITHOGRAPH COMPANY: In 1890, three years after the construction of the Charles H. Perkins Building, Perkins hired carpenter/builder Freeborn Johnson to construct a 3-story, 48x190' brick building custom-built for Providence Lithograph Company. The company, originally located in Providence at Snow and Westminster Streets, was formed in 1866 by James H. Smith and W.H. Kenyon. Starting out with three hand presses and a staff of four, by 1881 the rapidly expanding company had moved to larger quarters at 31 Pearl Street.

Before Alois Senefelder's invention of lithographic printing around

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<sup>5</sup> The other three occupants of the building in 1889 were labeled as jewelry shops.

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1800 in Austria, letterpress printing required a raised surface to accept ink and transfer to paper. The process of engraving and producing raised "cuts" for image reproduction was costly and time-consuming. This new technology was based on the simple principle that an oil-based material (in this case, ink) and water (a water-based plate dampening solution) do not mix. The practical application of Senefelder's technology dramatically reduced the time necessary to produce printed matter. By 1820 American lithographers were using lithographic technology along with letterpress. Using both letterpress and lithographic technologies, Providence Lithograph Company built its business on mill labels and tickets for the textile manufacturing, as well as letterhead and other business job printing.

The evolution of lithography was hampered by the fact that the best surface for lithography was stone, with its combination of strength and fine-grained surface for accepting the thin layers of ink and water required in the process. Because of the rigidity of stone, any mechanization of the lithographic process required a flat printing surface. By 1875 flexible sheet zinc was being used experimentally as a substitute for stone and Providence Lithograph Company was among the first to use this technology commercially. It was discovered in the 1880s that another benefit of the use of sheet zinc was that it could receive a quality lithographic image and be affixed to the rotating cylinder of a steam-driven press. This dramatically increased the output of lithographic presses.

By the 1880s Berthold Huber of Taunton, Massachusetts, working with a local machine shop, was experimenting with a rotary lithographic press using zinc plates as an image carrier. Providence Lithograph purchased his first No. 2 Zincographic Rotary Press in 1887, installing it at their Pearl Street address. Around the same time, James Smith, a principal of the company, developed and patented a process for "graining" these zinc plates so that the normally shiny surface of the zinc would acquire the superior grain and texture of lithographic stone. This process, utilizing sand, water, and metal balls, was patented by Smith in 1889 and improved ten years later. By the 1880s Providence Lithograph enjoyed a profitable specialty in the printing of Bible lesson pictures in chromolithography. By that time the company employed 51 and operated four rotary steam presses.

By 1891 the company had moved in to the Charles H. Perkins Building. An 1892 *Board of Trade Journal* article described the "good light on all four sides," overhead heating system, and Grinnell automatic sprinklers.

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Wharton-Harrison safety boilers were located in a separate boiler house to keep dust and smoke away from the work areas. Twin Armington and Sims steam engines, located just within the building near the boilers, powered the plant machinery and a dynamo for electric lighting.

The attached single-story boiler house was located at the south end of the alley at Sprague Street. Between 1895 and 1899, the company extended this boiler room north to the central stair tower. This new addition housed the plate graining room. In the main building, the pressroom, bronzing, and ink room occupied the first floor. The artists' room, bindery, shipping area, and offices were on the second floor; the third floor was used for storage of paper and printed material. A vault below the first floor was used as storage for lithographic stones.

In 1906 the company left the Charles H. Perkins Building, moving into a custom-built, single-story building next to Beaman and Smith at Reynolds and Gordon Streets. In a special arrangement with the Narragansett Electric Lighting Company, the company converted most of their machinery to direct-drive. The new building was illuminated by a combination of incandescent and arc lighting.

**RAU FASTENER COMPANY:** This Providence-based metalworking company moved into the Providence Lithograph Building in 1917. The company expanded and diversified its operations, eventually occupying all of the Perkins Buildings by the early 1970s.

In 1911 Romanian immigrant Lues Reiter (1871-1947) established a small company of four employees producing metal stampings and fasteners for fabric. In 1917 the company moved from its Blount Street, Providence, location to occupy two floors of the Providence Lithograph Building. By 1940 Rau had a staff of 100, working in 40,000 sq ft of space that included some of the Ada Building next door.

The company grew dramatically during the war years, employing 450 and earning four Army-Navy E awards for production of a range of buckles and fasteners for the war effort. In 1943 the Army quartermaster's office in Boston contacted Rau's general manager Harold Reiter to discuss their difficulties in purchasing enough of a type of cast shoe buckle. Reiter returned to Providence and, within 24 hours, returned with a prototype of a stamped buckle as well as a production plan. Rau was awarded a contract, producing between 750,000 and 1,000,000 buckles a week for the remainder of

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the war--a figure roughly ten times what the Army had been able to procure before Rau's involvement.

Rau had hopes for maintenance of high levels of production during the immediate postwar years. By 1950 the company occupied all of the Providence Lithograph and Ada Buildings. Two years later the company went ahead with an expansion planned during the war. A new steel frame addition was built on to the west elevation of the Providence Lithograph Building providing a shipping dock and internal space for plating operations. A moderne entrance was created on Westfield Street. During the 1950s Rau diversified its product line into electronics and findings for luggage manufacture. Expanding internationally, Rau incorporated Rau of Canada and Brussels-based Unifas.

Around 1968 the company established a new division, Rau Findings Company (located in the Olneyville section of the Providence), even as it was considering the option of going public or merging with a larger company. Choosing the latter, the company was sold to U.S. Industries in 1968. In 1971 Rau purchased the Charles H. Perkins Building, refitting it for its Rimco subsidiary and machine rebuilding department.

In 1975 the Rau division of U.S. Industries was sold to Premier Metal; ten years later it was sold again to London-based Hanson Trust. By 1990 the local management of Rau was concerned that a competitor, Georgia-based Scovill Fastener, was planning to acquire the company for the purpose of consolidating it into its Georgia operation. In response Rau's officers borrowed substantially to buy the division back from Hanson. The purchase was accomplished, but the repatriated Rau lost money in 1991, 1992, and 1993. The company's net deficit for 1993 alone was over \$4 million. Faced with the loss of 160 jobs, the City of Providence loaned Rau \$2 million and the state loaned \$3.6 million more.

Rau filed for receivership in September, 1994, with a debt of \$8.8 million. Rau's buildings and machinery had secured the city and state loans. The Rhode Island Industrial Facilities Corporation, an arm of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, took ownership of the complex shortly after the failure and it has been vacant since that time. The West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation acquired the property in 2002 with a plan for extensive rehabilitation and conversion to residential use and day-care.

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### Period of Significance:

The period of significance for the Perkins Buildings is defined as 1887-1953. This period covers the dates of initial construction for the major components of the complex and for the significant alterations and additions. The significance of the complex is derived from its use through time by a variety of industrial enterprises, small-scale businesses (some of which went on later to become larger and economically substantial). This pattern of small businesses located in leased space, focused on specialty or subsidiary products, is reflected in the accretive alterations here at the Perkins Buildings.

For the same reason, the various additions to all of the Perkins Buildings are defined as contributing (except for a cinderblock wing, between 1952 and 1970). These alterations, begun almost immediately after construction and continuing through the period of significance, reflect the changing uses and technologies housed here through the decades between the 1880s and the 1940s.

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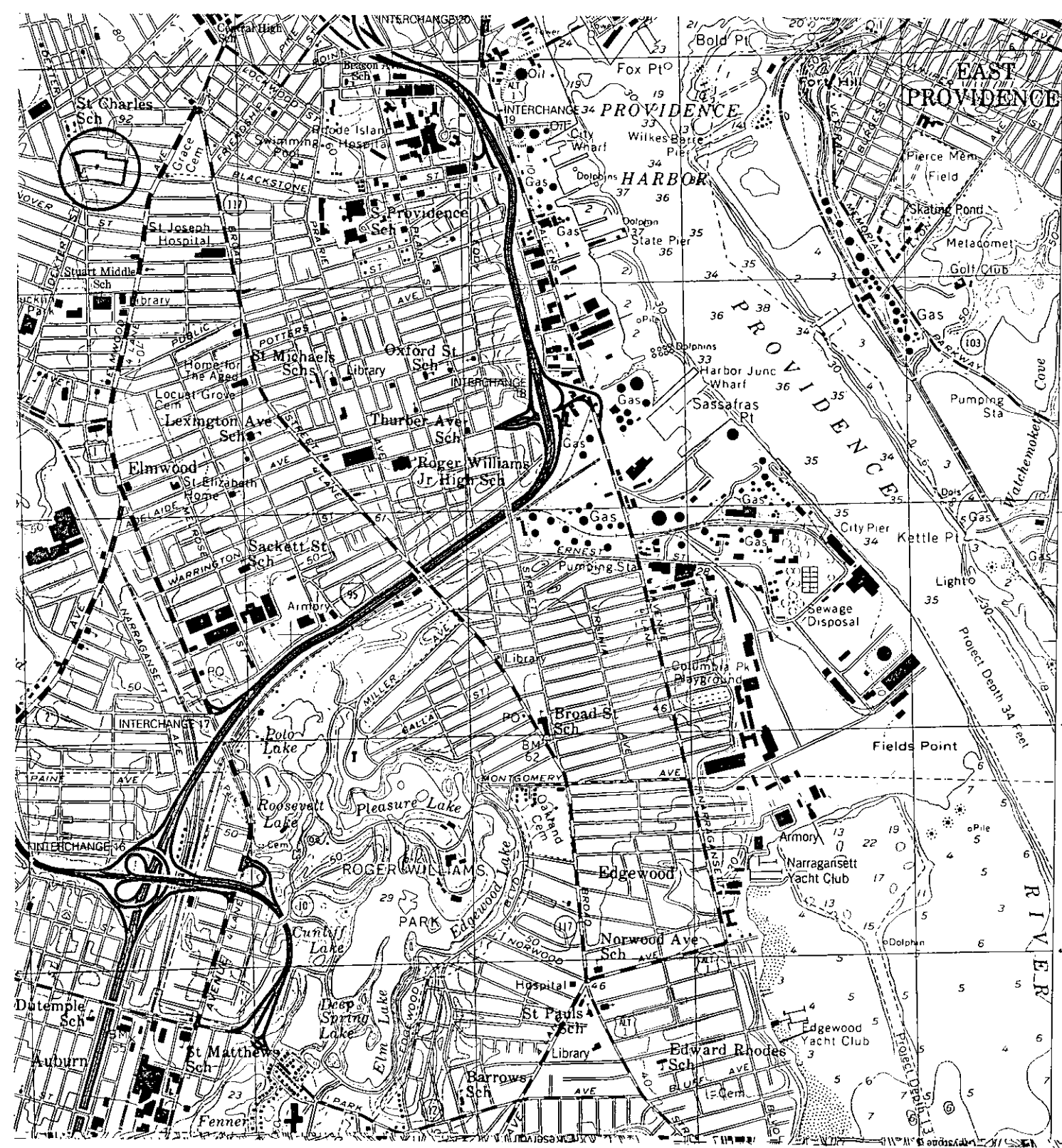
### Geographical Data

#### Boundary Description

The boundaries of the Perkins Buildings are contiguous with Providence Tax Assessor's Plat 31, Lots 127 and 128.

#### Boundary Justification

These boundaries, comprising about 2.5 acres, define all of the land historically associated with the Perkins Buildings during a century of industrial occupancy, adaptation, expansion, and decline. The boundaries include all standing buildings.



Perkins Buildings  
 Providence County  
 Providence, RI  
 1-19-298360-463146D

\*32  
 \*31  
 \*30  
 \*29  
 \*28

A black and white photograph of a multi-story brick building, likely an industrial or commercial structure, situated on a street corner. The building features several large, multi-paned windows and a prominent corner section. A utility pole stands in the foreground, partially obscuring the view. A "FOR SALE" sign is attached to the brick wall, displaying the phone number 273-2270. The street in the foreground has white painted lines, and a utility pole with wires is visible on the right side of the frame. The sky is overcast.

**FOR SALE**  
OPEN REAL ESTATE  
273-2270

Perkins Buildings  
Providence County, Providence, RI

Photo # 1 of 12



Perkins Building  
Providence County, Providence, RI  
Photo # 2 of 12



Perkins Building

Providence County, Providence, RI

Photo #3 of 12





Perkins Buildings  
Providence County, Providence, RI  
Photo # 4 of 12



18- CLEARANCE  
NOV 19 1964  
21st Street

Perkins Buildings  
Providence County, Providence, RI

Photo # 5 of 12



ADA  
BUILDING  
1892

85

250

250

Perkins Building  
Providence County, Providence, RI  
Photos # 6 of 12



Perkins Buildings  
Providence County, Providence, RI  
Photo # 7 of 12





Perkins Buildings  
Providence County, Providence, RI

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*Klikit*

Perkins Buildings  
Providence County, Providence, RI  
Photo # 9 of 12



FIRE  
↓

Perkins Buildings  
Providence County, Providence, RI

Photo # 10 of 12



Perkins Buildings  
Providence County, Providence, RI

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Perkins Buildings

Providence County, Providence, RI

Photo # 12 of 12