

ARMOUR & COMPANY BUILDING
100 Harris Avenue
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HAER No. RI-409

HABS
RI
4-PROV,
198-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ARMOUR & COMPANY BUILDING

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RI
4-PROV,
198-
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Location: 100 Harris Avenue, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island

USGS Providence, Rhode Island Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates:
19.298760.4633180

Present Owner(s): National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak)

Present Occupant(s): Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: Constructed in 1943, during the final phase of development for the Provisions Warehouse Historic District, the Armour & Company Building is the only contributing building in the district that was associated with a nationally-known food processing company. The plant played an important role in the supply of meat products to local and regional markets during World War II, and at its height of operation employed approximately 100 people. The building is a good example of the Art Moderne style as it was applied to industrial structures during the mid-twentieth century and retains a significant amount of the mechanical apparatus used in its original ammonia and brine refrigeration system and meat smoking processes.

[Note: Text adapted from the Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. Provisions Warehouse Historic District National Register of Historic Places Evaluation (Prepared for Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, December 1994).]

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Based in Chicago, Armour & Company grew into one of the nation's largest producers of fresh and processed meat products during the late nineteenth century. It was among the first food processing companies to utilize a system of refrigerated railroad cars and satellite storage and processing facilities to distribute its products to large urban centers throughout the nation. The company established its first processing plant in Providence on Canal Street in the late nineteenth century.

In the early 1940s, the company decided to move from its by then outdated facility in the congested downtown area of the city to a more accessible location within the developing provisions district surrounding the Merchants Cold Storage Warehouse (MCSW) on Kinsley Avenue. The site the company purchased was located on the south side of Harris Avenue, directly south of the MCSW. It was previously the location of a lumber yard belonging to the William Gilbane & Brothers contracting company, which maintained its offices in a building located across the street at 96 Harris Avenue until about 1915. When Armour & Company purchased the lot, the land had been vacant for about twenty years.

The Armour & Company Building was completed in 1943. The Art Moderne-style building was equipped with an elaborate ammonia and brine refrigeration system and a series of steel meat smokers. The rear of the building was curved to match the route of the New York, New Haven, & Hartford Railroad right-of-way and contained a wide concrete loading platform. A large detached garage, evidence of the growing importance of overland trucking to the industry, was constructed to the west of the building to house company trucks.

The construction of the new Armour & Company plant coincided with national rationing of all foodstuffs, especially meats, milk, and dry goods, brought on by the need to supply overseas troops during World War II. Armour & Company, with its extensive system of refrigerated railroad cars for long-distance transport and satellite plants, was among the leading suppliers of beef and poultry during the war. With the backing of the national system and its large, modern facility the Providence division of Armour & Company, outstripped its local competitors, which included the regional Wilson and Cudahy companies and the local Saugy, Lovett, and Marcello companies, all which were at that time still located on Canal Street. Soon after the war, some of those firms followed the lead of Armour & Company and abandoned their plants on Canal Street in favor of new facilities in the Provisions Warehouse District.

During the post-World War II era, Armour & Company remained a dominant force in the local provisions industry, employing up to 100 people at a given time. The plant closed in the mid-1980s and was purchased by the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak). Amtrak used the building for storage for awhile before abandoning it completely. The building is currently vacant and in a serious state of deterioration.

PART II. DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

The Armour & Company Building is located in the center of the southern edge of the Provisions Warehouse Historic District at 100 Harris Avenue. The property on which the building is located is bounded by Harris Avenue to the north, the Providence Fruit and Produce Building to the east, the mainline and a spur of the former New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad to the south, and an open side yard to the west.

The building is an example of the Art Moderne style, reflected in its low, horizontal profile, smooth stucco exterior wall fabric, and ornamentation in the form of recessed stringcourses, curved corners, and fluted striations. The facade (north elevation) of the building is divided into 11 bays. The center bay, which contains the primary entrance, projects slightly and is topped by a low parapet. The curved, fluted door hood is located above the entrance. The corners of the main block also project slightly, to create symmetry and to break the horizontality of the one-story building. On the east elevation, a square, red-brick smokestack served the basement boiler. The building is presently unused, and windows have been sealed with plywood. However, some exposed sections reveal 1/1, double-hung, wood-sash. The rear (south) section of the building breaks from the rigid geometry of the facade into a curved loading dock which held the rail area's sheltered platform. A vandalized Toledo Scale that was used to measure incoming carcass cargo, stands on this platform. The west elevation holds a two-bay garage and another sheltered platform used for truck distribution.

The interior walls of the building are finished in hard, fire-glazed concrete block throughout. Floors are red brick. Refrigerator and freezer lockers are scattered throughout the various meat processing sections of the basement and first floors. Insulated doors for the refrigeration areas were constructed by the Jamison Company in Hagerstown, MD. Separate areas were established for each type of meat: the basement was used to process poultry, while the first floor was used for pork and beef.

The basement held the machinery that supported the building's refrigeration and heating. The cooling system used for refrigeration and freezer spaces was an ammonia compression and brine circulating system. It included Frick Company, Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, and Worthington, Buffalo, NY, 7½ horsepower ammonia compressors. Other surviving machinery from the cooling and heating of the building's facilities includes a 2.25 horsepower Howell Electric Motor, a boiler motor, and three brine circulating pumps. In addition, some machinery from the York Ice Machinery Corporation survives.

The Armour & Company Building retains its overall appearance from the time of its construction. The major changes to the historic fabric of the building have been the result of neglect. The exterior of the building remains relatively intact, while the interior has suffered serious water and fire damage. All windows on the facade have been covered with plywood. The original blue-glass skylights have been broken, which has allowed rain, snow, and pigeons to enter the building, further damaging the interior. Much of the interior has been further damaged by vandalism, constituting partial demolition of the interior fabric and remaining machinery, as well as arson damage.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings:

No architectural drawings were identified. Repositories searched included the Rhode Island State Archives, the Providence City Archives, the Providence Public Library, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission Library. No appropriate historic views were identified in those places.

B. Historic views:

One historic view of the building, taken in 1958, is located in the photographic archives of the Providence Journal newspaper, Providence, Rhode Island. Photographs belonging to the newspaper are copyrighted material. A xerographic copy of the view has been included with permission from the Providence Journal.

Other repositories searched for historic views were the Rhode Island State Archives, the Providence City Archives, the Providence Public Library, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission Library.

C. Interviews:

No interviews were conducted

D. Bibliography:

Moyer, James A. and Raymond U. Fittz.

1928 *Refrigeration Including Household Automatic Refrigerating Machines*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York.

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc.

1994 *Provisions Warehouse Historic District National Register of Historic Places Evaluation*. Submitted to Vanasse, Hangen & Brustlin, Inc., Providence, Rhode Island.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT), under the auspices of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is proposing to improve ramp access from Interstate 95 at the Civic Center Interchange, Providence, Rhode Island. The construction of ramps for south bound traffic requires the demolition of four contributing buildings in the Provisions Warehouse Historic District, a property that has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The buildings are the Armour & Company Building at 100 Harris Avenue, M.T. Marcello Company Building at 105 Harris Avenue, Costello Brothers, Inc. Warehouse at 111 Harris Avenue, and Terminal Building at 11-25 Terminal Way and 184 Kinsley Avenue. The project Memorandum of Agreement among the Rhode Island State Historic Preservation Officer (RISHPO), the FHWA, and RIDOT outlined stipulations to minimize or mitigate any

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adverse project impacts on historic properties. One stipulation calls for the recordation of the Provisions Warehouse Historic District and the four buildings slated for demolition to Historic American Buildings Survey standards prior to the commencement of construction.

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL Inc.) of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was retained by Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., on behalf of RIDOT. This report was compiled in May 1998 by the PAL Inc. project team, including Stephen Olausen, Senior Architectural Historian and Nicolas C. Avery, Architectural Historian. The large format archival photography was completed in March and April 1998 by Robert Brewster of Warren Jagger Photography, Inc., Providence, Rhode Island.

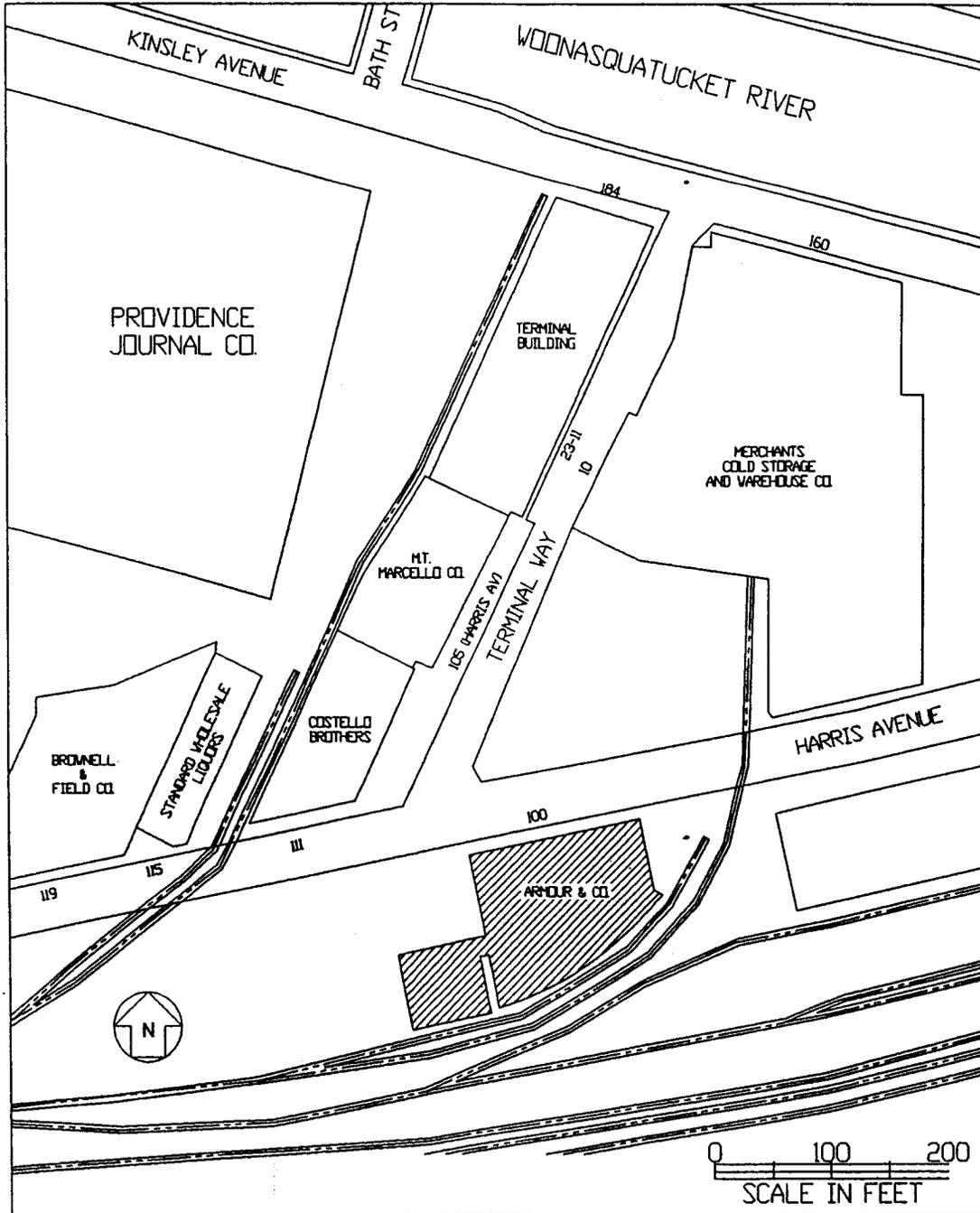
Prepared by: Nicolas C. Avery

Title: Architectural Historian

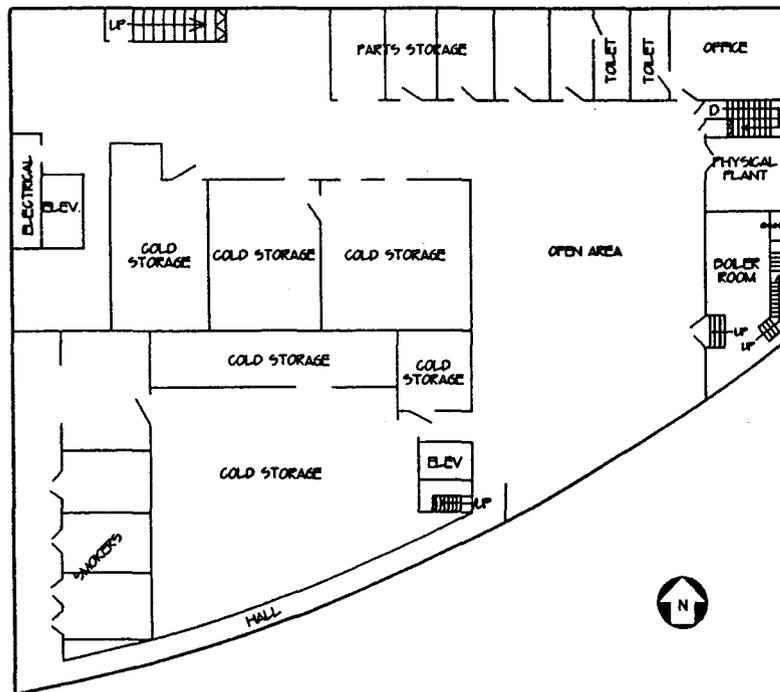
Affiliation: The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc.

Date: May 1998

Site Plan



Basement Plan



First Floor Plan

