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The Landmarks of Federal Hill: A Walking Tour of Federal Hill

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A Walking Tour of Federal Hill

By Comm. Joseph R. Muratore © 1982

LANDMARKS OF FEDERAL HILL

A walking tour of Federal Hill, pointing out historical sites and points of interest.

The following are but a few of the many landmarks of Federal Hill, that are deeply rooted with the development of Federal Hill. There are many other notable landmarks on many of the side streets of Federal Hill, connecting Atwells Avenue to Broadway. However, the following are typical of the more prominent landmarks that have endured the elements of time and weather.

AMOS ATWELL

In 1788, Amos Maine Atwell (named after an ancestor who owned the entire Province of Maine) and several other businessmen formed a syndicate (a type of corporation) to improve the West Side of the city of Providence. Lots were auctioned at $100 each. Atwell was a leading citizen of that time. He was a dry goods dealer and had served as a Colonel in the Revolutionary War.

He was a member of the first Providence School Committee, a charter member and president of the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers. Because of his activity in the real estate development of Federal Hill, Atwells Avenue was named for him. He can be credited with the physical appearance of the area.

FRANKLIN PARK
(Presently renamed Garibaldi Park)

This bathhouse was erected on land which was donated by Amos Atwell. It was donated by Amos Atwell with the stipulation that the land be set aside for the use and enjoyment of the community in perpetuity. This park was named Franklin Park until 1978, when the bathhouses were demolished, and a park was created. A bust of General Garibaldi was moved to this area, benches were erected, and it was renamed, GARIBALDI PARK.

PINE CONE ARCH

The Pine Cone Arch that separates Federal Hill from Downtown looks like "La Pigna." The ornament is shaped like a pine cone which suggests the greatness of Renaissance Italy, and hangs on the Romanesque Archway on Atwells Avenue.

It is the gateway to Federal Hill. This Pine Cone Ornament is 25 feet above the street. La Pigna, or Pine Cone is one of the most common arch motifs in Italy. The two molds for the top and the pine cone were hand made. The dyes for the bronze ornament were made by Kenneth Lynch and the bronze ornaments were made and installed in 1980. It was one of the last installations made to Atwells Avenue from the $3.6 million dollar renewal effort of the 1930's and 1940's.

THE OLD CANTENE RESTAURANT
120 ATWELLS AVENUE

It is located in a 3½-story, early colonial building, with a hip roof, portico, with much detail throughout. This was an abandoned mansion that was completely rebuilt, and a few years later was again remodeled and the interior of the first floor was completely renewed and to the rear of it, a banquet hall was added. This excellent restaurant was opened in 1938. It specializes in all types of Italian foods, with a wide variety of dishes. It is owned and operated by Joseph Marzilli. It is a gourmet's delight and an atmosphere of elegance.

Atwells Avenue by Pasquale Paroli. The name given at that time, was Marconi's Restaurant. In 1919, the restaurant was moved to its present location at 71 Bradford Street. Camille's Roman Gardens Restaurant specializes in Italian and American Cuisine. It's a gourmet's paradise for discriminating people, who enjoy well-prepared Italian food. It is one of New England's finest restaurants. The interior is elegant, and has an atmosphere truly Roman and Italian, as if transplanted from Rome to Federal Hill.

THE JONATHON DROWN HOUSE
150 ATWELLS AVENUE

A ¾-story Greek revival gable roof house with early Victorian ell on the west end of the house. It is the only surviving Greek revival home on Atwells Avenue. It was originally owned by the Drown Family, and later by Frederick Rice, who was the proprietor of a popular periodical shop. It was abandoned for many years and later completely restored in the 1930's and 1940's.

CAMILLE'S ROMAN GARDENS RESTAURANT
71 BRADFORD STREET

The original Camille's Roman Gardens Restaurant was established in 1914 at 178 Atwells Avenue. It opened in 1979 by Gerard Di Santo. It is a building that was an original historical building, that was added to. The rear portion of this building was originally a blacksmith's shop. The two original arches which were used for the horses to gain entrance to the blacksmith portion of the building are still visible from the side of the building. This restaurant specializes in all four of the Italian dishes, reflecting the menus
OUR LADY OF MT. CARMEL CHURCH 
BRAYTON AVENUE 

Built in 1925. It is a two-story gable roof of early 20th Century Renaissance revival church, with recessed central nave. It has a square arched bell tower; its elaborate facade was designed by O'Malley and Fitzsimons of Pawtucket. The Church of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel was established in December, 1920. Reverend Nicola Armento was the first pastor, this church was an outgrowth of Holy Ghost Church. Reverend Louis D'Alenio became and was its pastor for over 40 years, during a very trying time when the church outgrew itself with the wave of immigrants of 1920 and 1921. Later this parish was diminished with the area being reduced by super highways and the resettlement of the neighborhood. In 1946, the original church and rectory was sold and a new rectory was built at 12 Spruce Street. The entire interior of the church was refurnished and refinished under the vigorous leadership of the Reverend Monsignor Galliano Cavallaro.

Today, the simplicity of the interior of this church is beautiful.

263-267 ATWELLS AVENUE 
THE A.F. CAPPELLl BLDG. 

It was built in 1909. It is a four-story, early 20th Century commercial-residential building with a flat roof, a parapet, and bracketed cornice. The design of this building includes four stories, with projecting bay windows; the use of red and yellow brick in matching and repeating patterns, makes for an interesting brick pattern. This building was originally owned by Antonio F. Cappelli, a leading Federal Hill builder, is located on the prominent northeast corner of DePasquale Square and Atwells Avenue. In 1979, this building was acquired byLt. Governor Thomas R. DiLuglio and Associates, and was completely remodeled, refurbished and the interior was redesigned. Care was taken not to destroy the exterior architecture. Today, it is used as an apartment house it has a formal restaurant and the law offices of Lt. Governor Thomas R. DiLuglio. It is now one of the most beautiful buildings along Atwells Avenue.

DE PASQUALE PLAZA 

That portion of DePasquale Avenue, between Atwells Avenue and Spruce Street, the site of where 1930-1972, both sides of the streets were lined with fruit stands, where all kinds of fruits and vegetables could be purchased, creating an open-air marketplace. This was an area which attracted people from throughout Rhode Island. These vendors offered their wares for sale Saturdays, from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. The DePasquale Plaza was originally known as ARTHUR AVENUE. In 1936, it was renamed BALBO AVENUE, in honor of the Italian Marshal Italo Balbo. In 1942 during World War II, Italy became belligerent and Balbo Avenue was again renamed in honor of Judge Luigi DePasquale. Judge Luigi DePasquale was a Federal Hill resident who became one of the most compassionate judges the state has ever seen, who meted out unusual punishment to those who appeared in his court, such as 30 days of blackboard washing for some student. He would wear white gloves and hold no court on St. Joseph's Day. In 1981, this section of the street was closed off, redeveloped a fountain, benches, antique lantern-type lights were installed and it was renamed, DePasquale Plaza.

277 ATWELLS AVENUE 
THE NICOLA CAPPELLl BLDG. 

Built in 1922. It is a two-story, early 20th Century commercial building, with a flat roof and bracketed cornice. The exterior wall surface is finished with tapestry brick; originally, it had recessed entrances on Atwells Avenue, with marble trim. In 1978, this building was acquired by Joseph R. Muratore & Associates, DBA Charito Investors, Inc., at which time the first floor area was redesigned, removing the doors from Atwells Avenue, and recessing that area where the doors existed, creating an angular corner, in this manner, exposing the original columns which have now been boxed with tapestry brick. The entrance and the marquee now created, together with the boxed columns, have made this building Romanesque in appearance, and an integral part of the DePasquale Plaza. On the walls of this building on the DePasquale Plaza side, descendants of the original fruit dealers have erected plaques in honor of their parents.

280 ATWELLS AVENUE 
THE COLUMBUS BANK BUILDING 

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Built in 1946. It is a two-story, mid-20th Century commercial structure with a flat roof, a parapet, and a slightly projecting central bay. The wall textures include marble veneer base, a granite facade, and brick sides. The entrance, is a two-story arched and recessed one, which contains Corinthian pilasters and a beautiful modified Palladian window.

352 ATWELLS AVENUE
ST. JOHN'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
Built in 1871. It is a two-story, late Victorian Romanesque Revival, gable roof church with a square based, octogonal belfry. The steeple of this church was damaged by lightning on two separate occasions. In 1935, it was removed and reduced. This church contains excellent brick cornices, and an abundance of granite for trim on the main steps. Saint John's Parish was created in 1870 from portions of St. Mary's Church Parish, before the Diocese of Providence was separated from the Diocese of Hartford, Connecticut. It was completed in 1872, for a total cost of $100,000. For many years, it was one of the most influential churches in the diocese. This is a so-called "nationality church," originally founded for the convenience of the English-speaking people of Federal Hill, during a period when many Irish families resided on Federal Hill.

407 ATWELLS AVENUE
THE PROVIDENCE CHEESE & TAVOLA CALDA
This is one of Rhode Island's most unique stores of its kind. It is owned and operated by Cav. N. Francis Basso, specializing in Italian food products. Cav. Basso and his staff prepare, on sight, pasta, ravioli, bread and pastries of all kinds, boasting that no salt, artificial preservatives, colors or refrigeration are used. This is a must spot to visit.

470 ATWELLS AVENUE
THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST
Built in 1901. It is a large, one-story building of 20th Century Italian Renaissance revival, gable-roof church, with arched campanile, designed by Murphy, Hindle & Wright, of Providence. This design includes the use of polychrome terra cotta brick, elaborate cornices and turrets. Included on the front of this church is a rose window and central arched entrance, with panels depicting the "Last Supper." The Holy Ghost Church was organized by Reverend Luigi Paroli in 1889, then Reverend Antonio Franchi became its pastor in 1892, followed by Reverend Paolo Novati in 1894. Bishop Scalabrini, founder of the Scalabrini Order to aid Italian immigrants, came from Paicenza, Italy to dedicate this church in 1901. Later, Reverend Flaminio Parenti, became its pastor for more than 50 years. This church flourished and expanded under his able leadership.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission; R.I. Historical Society; and R.I. Public Library.