

#### **IV. CURRENT PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Present day Warren, with a population of approximately 10,500, combines manufacturing and industrial development with growth of suburban sprawl. Population in the town of Warren is expected to increase 36% by 1990 and travel, primarily due to this growth, by more than 50%. The Bristol County area is considered a transportation corridor between I-195 to the north and Mount Hope Bridge leading south to Aquidneck Island. The recent revival of a plan to construct an interstate throughway from the Massachusetts line south, first proposed as the East Shore Expressway in August, 1966, could obviously affect the growth of, and demand for land in Warren. Uncontrolled growth could create an East Bay megalopolis.

Land zoned for industrial use is available in North Warren off Market Street and for residential development in both East and South Warren. The original Warren Village is strategically situated as a regional commercial center; housing within its waterfront Historic District will increasingly attract young professional families moving outward from the urban core of Providence, many of them already seeking homes in a compact historic community with easy access to work, services, and the water.

##### **Waterfront District**

The waterfront area covered by this report is densely populated, highly developed, and in sections deteriorated. The breakdown of established residential uses is indicated by frequent conversion of eighteenth and nineteenth century houses to one and two-room tenements. Some unused mill space along Water Street should be studied for possible renovation as apartments, specialty shops, or as a motel-hotel in a water-recreation oriented community. Both the northern and southern ends of the waterfront are highly industrialized. No land is available for expansion except by more demolition. A constant problem is the resulting heavy trucking along North Main Street and in the quiet neighborhood of Manning and Broad Streets, where a textile plant has long been established in a residential neighborhood.

The original streets and sidewalk lines established in the eighteenth century, almost unchanged for more than 200 years, have developed a pattern which should be preserved if the character of the old town is to be

respected. Most views from Main Street to the water still exist; the integration of small wooden houses, great churches, and the river landscape still survives in Warren. Under no circumstances should demolition for public parking, street widening, or encroachment on open spaces (such as the "Town Common") be permitted west of Main Street within the densely developed historic district. This section must be protected.

##### **Central Business District (CBD)**

In the past four years the Central Business District (CBD) along Main Street has become stagnant. At present five empty stores exist along Main Street. The need for a centrally located in-town grocery store remains unsolved. Like many older commercial sections, the impact of a new million-dollar shopping center constructed on Metacom Avenue is now being felt in this central area which remains essentially a locally owned specialty shop complex. Revitalization of this busy, traffic clogged, visually chaotic commercial center is now under study. Interest within the community has resulted in the initiation of a program to be administered through the Department of Community Affairs as the Warren Bicentennial Planning Project.

##### **Zoning**

Zoning is still the most effective tool by which a town can control, protect, and direct its growth. A new, comprehensive zoning ordinance for Warren was adopted by the Town Council in March, 1971. Changes from industrial use west of Water Street to a new category, "waterfront," and from residential use to general business north of Liberty Street in the densely populated area encompassing Union Street and Warren Avenue west of Main Street have already affected the waterfront historic area. Protests by residents at the time of passage resulted in an amendment which restored land to residential use on the west side of Main Street and prevented the establishment of a huge general business zone covering one-quarter of the predominantly northern section of Warren. An amendment detailing the requirements of the multi-family section of the Zoning Ordinance has now passed. It permits planning and construction of condominiums on the Harlan Moses property and the historic "Villa Sera" estate recently demolished in South Warren. At present Warren has no Historic District Commission legislation such as exists in Providence,

Newport, Cranston, Warwick, South Kingstown, and other Rhode Island towns. Establishment of an official town body with authority to specify districts and individual buildings of historic value and to control exterior alteration of such historic structures or their demolition would be a major step in helping to check the process of decay in Warren.

A well-defined, community-wide effort will be needed in order to educate and convince local businessmen and residents in Warren of the real values of historic district zoning. Recent nomination of the "Warren Waterfront Historic District" to the National Register of Historic Places by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission has generated new interest in the restoration and preservation of historic structures and in the recognition of sites in Warren which deserve the further protection of historic district zoning. To quote from the National Register nomination form:

Despite modern encroachments, the Warren Waterfront Historic District still presents a telling image of a typically densely-built modern seaport town, made all the more interesting by the late architectural and social influences of the mills. The District is an architectural treasure and a unique social and historic record worthy of commendation and of preservation from the depredations of present-day commerce, industry and slum landlordism.

### **Preservation Progress**

Preservation efforts in Warren are growing, in both the public and private sectors. On Main Street the recent \$290,000 renovation of Town Hall (1890-1894) by the Town of Warren, illustrates how an historic building can be upgraded to serve the civic demands of a modern community. The First Methodist Church has engaged in a successful "Save the Steeple" campaign. The \$32,000 renovation of this landmark was completed in December, 1970. In 1974, this church received a grant from the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission to assist in painting both the church and the parsonage.

At present, no sustained program for restoration and rehabilitation of individual homes exists. However, Water Street has recently witnessed a small-scale renaissance with the establishment of a core of antique and crafts shops in long-empty stores. Young professional families are beginning to restore homes within the waterfront district. The availability

of increased levels of flood insurance under the National Flood Insurance Program, announced in January, 1974, should help to encourage new investment in rehabilitation projects in this area.

The revitalized Massasoit Historical Association has initiated a broad program that includes the marking of historic buildings and sites, a lecture series on the architectural and social heritage to be found in Warren, establishment of a consultant committee for free advice on technical and aesthetic aspects of restoration, duplication of an irreplaceable collection of late nineteenth century photographs of Warren, and the successful sponsorship of the first walking tour of the historic waterfront section held in June, 1974, which will be repeated as America celebrates its Bicentennial.

The Warren Bicentennial Planning Project, constituted in March, 1974, is responsible for coordinating proposals made by the Department of Community Affairs, the Department of Transportation, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, the Statewide Planning Program, and locally the Town Council, the Town Planning Board, the Massasoit Historical Society, and concerned merchants and citizens. The intent is to develop a master plan for the renewal, rehabilitation, preservation, and improvement of the Warren Central Business District and the "North End." Stated objectives include "the revitalization of the Central Business District, improvement of parking, traffic circulation and transportation as well as the preservation of historic structures within the project area." Problems of visual pollution and need for sign control, need for planting and for town parks, and historic district zoning are all to be considered in this planning project.

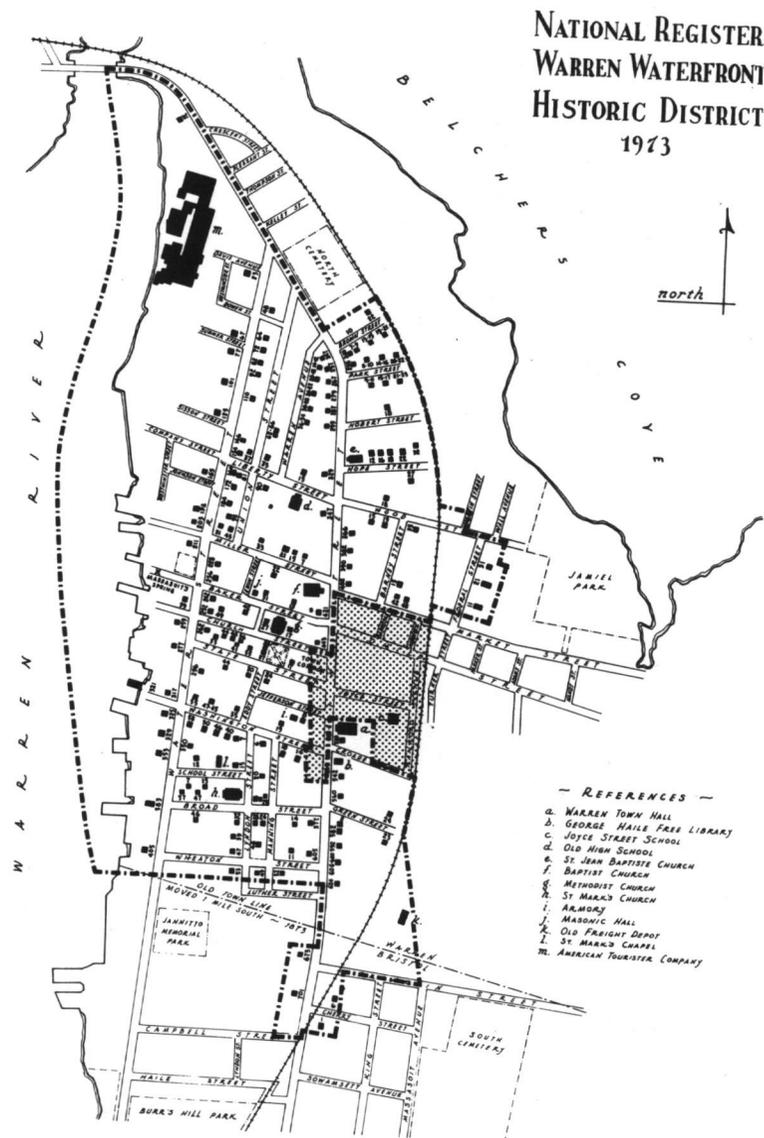
As a first step, the Warren '76 Commission has been formed to guide the project, and local funds of \$6,000 have been appropriated. Dedication of the Warren Civic Parking Plaza in November, 1974, is the first successful project undertaken by this energetic commission. In January, 1975, Vision, Inc., of Cambridge, Massachusetts, began a Townscape Conservation Plan for Warren with special emphasis on Main Street and the waterfront areas. The opportunity exists for the Warren Bicentennial Planning Project to become, upon completion, a landmark program in the field of preservation and to provide a model of federal-state-local cooperation, not only for the State of Rhode Island, but also for the nation.

## V. PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATIONS

The National Register of Historic Places is a record maintained by the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, of structures, sites, areas, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, and culture. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as the official inventory of the cultural and historical resources of our nation, it includes historical areas in the National Park System, National Historic Landmarks, federal properties nominated by federal agencies, and properties of state and local significance nominated by the states and approved by the National Park Service. It is an authoritative guide for federal, state, and local governments, and private groups and individuals everywhere, identifying those properties thus worthy of preservation throughout the nation. The National Register is the legal instrument by which registered properties threatened by federally assisted undertakings are insured review. Listing on the National Register is, in addition, a primary prerequisite for matching grant-in-aid eligibility (see Appendix C).

The Warren Methodist Church (1844) was entered on the National Register in August, 1971 and the Methodist Parsonage (1858) added in 1973. A \$4,500.00 grant-in-aid was awarded to the buildings by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission in 1974 for restoration work. In March, 1974, the "Warren Waterfront Historic District" with a selective inventory of 156 structures and sites of special historical and architectural significance was entered on the National Register as a result of the first phase of the Warren survey.

The "Warren Waterfront National Register Historic District" is described as follows (see map Plate H):



Map Plate H: 1974 Warren Waterfront, National Register District



Fig. 36: Industrial National Bank, postcard c. 1906, Main Street

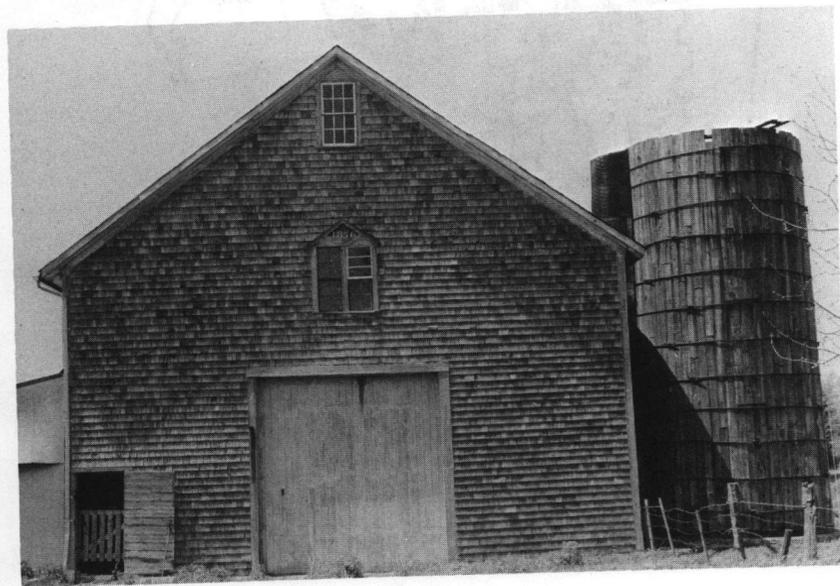


Fig. 37: Barn, Touisset Farm (1876), Touisset Road

There are, in addition, a number of significant individual structures and smaller complexes in Warren which should be protected and are considered worthy of National Register status. Additional districts recommended for nomination to the National Register as a result of the completed Warren survey include:

- Main Street Commercial District: containing all the commercial structures fronting on Main Street in the central business district (CBD) from the junction of Main and Market Street to the middle of the block bounded southerly by Broad Street (see shaded area on map Plate H). This district includes the Industrial National Bank (c. 1906), a fine Neo-Classical Revival structure; J. J. Newberry Company (c. 1930), a typical Art Deco early twentieth century commercial building; Goff's Hotel, now known as the "Tavares Building" (c. 1895), a significant Late Victorian hotel considerably altered; the Glenwood Building or "Lanoue's" (c. 1870), an excellent Early Victorian, post Civil War, brick and granite commercial building; Delecta's or "Mrs. Joyce's House" (c. 1870), an Early Victorian-Bracketed house raised one story to provide commercial first-floor space; Fessenden House (c. 1895), now the "Warren Manor," an excellent Late Victorian-Queen Anne Building, with district patterned brick, stucco and half-timber, and wood shingle exterior wall cover; and the Joyce Street School (1903), an outstanding Colonial-Revival educational structure.
- Barton Avenue-Touisset Road District: an unspoiled area dating from the earliest days of Warren and of agricultural importance in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, containing the Alfred Bosworth Farmhouse (c. 1840), a fine Greek Revival house overlooking the head of the Kickemuit River; the Augustus H. Fiske House (1921), an early twentieth century Tudor Revival manor designed by architects Allen & Collins-Harold Buckley Willis, of Boston; General Barton's Birthplace (c. 1720), a Colonial central chimney farmhouse where Revolutionary hero William Barton was born May 26, 1748; the Barton Historical Cemetery on the south side of Barton Avenue; the Nathan Leroy Gardner Estate (c. 1900) including the Late Victorian-Queen Anne house and the complex of stone and wood barns and silos built as a "model farm"; the George Sisson Farmhouse (c. 1720), reputed to be the oldest house on Touisset Point; the George Tinkham Farmhouse

(c. 1850), a delightful Early Victorian-Mansard house with symmetrical facade; the Robbins Cottage (c. 1907), a typical Late-Victorian Shingle Style "summer cottage"; and Touisset Farm (c. 1870), a large Early Victorian-Bracketed house with elaborate front hood concealed by a front porch added c. 1900 and barn (1876) on the west side of the road.

- The Serpentine Road-Kickemuit River District: containing all the rural property, marshlands, and riverbed extending southwesterly from the historic Cole-Bosworth Farm (1690-c. 1800) on the corner of Poverty Corner Road and School House Road to the southerly boundary of 216 Serpentine Road containing the Easterbrooks House (c. 1850). Within this district are four eighteenth century structures in an unspoiled landscape, the oldest cemetery in Warren, the site of Lafayette's campground at "Windmill Hill," and the site of a "Grist Mill" burned by the British in May, 1778.

Individual houses and sites of particular historical or architectural value which are considered worthy of National Register status and are not within a proposed district include:

Burr's Hill Park (before 1621, 1775), South Water Street, containing the major Wampanoag Indian burial ground excavated in 1913, and the site of the Watch House manned by Daniel Cole and Samuel Miller, from June of 1775, to protect Warren from maurading British vessels in Narragansett Bay.

Butterworth House (1728), Child Street and Long Lane, an early eighteenth century Colonial farmhouse with original woodwork and hardware still owned by the Butterworth family.

George Cole House (c. 1860), 18 Turner Street, a handsome Early Victorian-Italianate villa built by William Cole for his brother George, proprietor of Cole's Hotel, a popular Warren hotel for over two hundred years.

William Cole House (c. 1840), 97 Child Street, an unusual example of a traditional Greek Revival to Early Victorian house built by William Cole (1818-1898), noted Warren builder, and lived in by Cole family descendants today.

George Hatch House (c. 1855), 963 South Main Street, an excellent Early Victorian house typical of pre-Civil War era architecture built along Main Street.

L. B. Hatch House (c. 1860), 901 South Main Street, an Early-Victorian-Bracketed house noted for an excellent wrap-around front porch with trefoil pendants, cut-out brackets, and geometric balustrade.

Mason Farmhouse (c. 1870), on the north side of Maple Road, Touisset, an outstanding example of a 1½ story, mansard roof, post Civil War home with elaborate Victorian porches, segmental arched dormers, and unusual interior woodwork.

Louis R. Seymour House (c. 1870), 976 South Main Street, a fine Victorian cross-gable plan house with Gothic bargeboard and finials trimming the rooflines.

Captain Benjamin Usher House (c. 1780), 1080 South Main Street, a typical Colonial farmhouse with only minor alterations on the interior and a front porch added c. 1910.

Appendix D contains a complete inventory of structures and sites having architectural and historical significance for the town of Warren. Properties already entered on the National Register are marked by an asterisk (\*); those within a proposed National Register Historic District or recommended for individual nomination are indicated by a double asterisk (\*\*). In reviewing these lists of potential National Register nominations, it should be recognized that they represent those properties most essential to Warren's historic/architectural identity. Surrounding and supporting these properties are many lesser known properties which enhance the overall historic and social character of Warren and contribute to understanding its growth and development.

## VI. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the first contact of the Pilgrims with Massasoit, Indian sachem of the "Sowams" lands, the growth of Warren can be traced clearly through successive stages:

- The first settlement in 1653 around the Kickemuit River.
- The development of "Little Town" following King Phillip's War of 1675.
- Incorporation of Warren in 1746 and growth into a thriving pre-Revolutionary seaport.
- The re-emergence of Warren after the Revolution as a maritime center generating great wealth and civic and architectural development.
- The introduction of textile manufacturing in 1847 coming to dominate the economic, social, and architectural growth of Warren well into the middle of the twentieth century.
- The turn of the century development of Touisset Point into a summer colony.
- The late twentieth century industrial and commercial growth severely altering the original harmony and balance of buildings on Main and Water Streets, and population growth which has resulted in demands for new land use of the remaining rural areas of Warren.

Today, the compact waterfront area of Warren is an outstanding example of the architectural, social, and historical development of a Rhode Island seaport. Modern progress has not yet destroyed the fabric or street pattern of the original Warren Village, although serious encroachments have occurred in the north end with the expansion of the mill complex and the south end with development of marine interests. Clearly, the need for a restoration and conservation program is of paramount importance if land values, the intimate scale, and the architectural/social heritage of the waterfront environment are to be protected. Further large scale commercial or industrial development, demolition of older residences for parking, or new housing in this section of Warren would irrevocably destroy the historic area. Planning should

capitalize on the still unrecognized assets that make this part of Warren unique.

Stimulating awareness in both residents and town officials of the value of this legacy has been a major problem. Unlike Newport, Wickford, and Providence's "College Hill," a coordinated effort to upgrade the waterfront district, to develop the real social advantages of living in a cohesive historic area close to major cities, to attract "restoration dollars," and to publicize Warren did not develop until 1974. The recent selection of Warren by the Department of Community Affairs for its Bicentennial Planning Project, the nomination of the Warren Waterfront Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places, and efforts by the Massasoit Historical Association to emphasize the architectural and social heritage of Warren through a lecture series and successful walking tours are first steps necessary toward improvement of the economic, social, and psychological climate of this fine and long neglected town.

The following recommendations are therefore offered to stimulate a coordinated program of action which may prevent further erosion of Warren and encourage continued efforts of preservation, restoration, and recognition.

1. To protect the heritage of Warren through the expansion of the National Register program by
  - a. publicizing the entry of the Warren Waterfront Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places in order to stimulate a program of restoration and conservation and assure protection from damaging projects involving the use of federal funds. Structures within the district are eligible to receive grant-in-aid funds administered by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission (see Appendix C);
  - b. amending the Warren Waterfront Historic District to include the Central Business District (CBD) fronting on Main Street, extending from the intersection of Main and Market Street southerly to the middle of the block bounded southerly by Broad Street;
  - c. nominating additional districts and structures and sites, listed previously in Part V, to the National Register of Historic Sites and Places.

2. To establish a Warren Historic District Commission in accordance with the state enabling legislation passed in 1959 (Chapter 45-24-I, as amended) with authority to provide for historic area zoning. The Warren Historic District Commission would act as a design review board for all major alteration, demolition, and new construction within the designated historic districts. The need for historic area zoning, which is designed to protect architectural, social, and environmental values as well as investments within designated districts, should be explained and promoted through the Warren '76 Commission, the Bristol County Chamber of Commerce, the Massasoit Historical Association, and other local groups.
3. In view of the coming American Revolution Bicentennial, to upgrade the downtown area through a street beautification program with facades, signs, lighting, planting, street furniture, and pavement materials all considered including
  - a. promoting restoration of original commercial facades along Main and Water Streets and thereby improving the visual quality of the major Warren business area;
  - b. obtaining passage of an improved sign ordinance which would eliminate obtrusive, over-scale, or inappropriate commercial signs and graphics;
  - c. developing an attractive north entrance to Warren by creating a small park at the junction of Main and Water Streets.
4. To maintain the scale of historic "Warren Village" with its narrow streets and original street grid by careful review of the present one-way patterns and parking needs
  - a. preventing demolition for introduction of any major artery or secondary street widening in the historic district;
  - b. undertaking a professional study of parking needs. With the revival of the proposal to eliminate curb parking on Water Street, development of off-street parking adjacent to waterfront businesses and tourist attractions must be undertaken with great care to maintain the streetscape of the historic Warren Waterfront District. Landscape buffers should be provided and a variety of paving material such as stone, brick, or aggregate concrete used in addition to standard asphalt paving.
5. To encourage the reuse of historic structures when original uses are no longer appropriate by
  - a. exploring the future use of the Liberty Street School (1847) designed by Thomas Tefft, if abandoned, to be used as a neighborhood center, senior citizen center, or expanded town library;
  - b. restoring the Warren Armory (1842) for use as an historical museum or Warren "Hall of Fame";
  - c. exploring the potential for renovation and reuse of the Providence, Warren & Bristol Freight Depot (c. 1880) for a passenger center with development of the needed public transit rail system;
  - d. renovating the unused mill space in the "Old Dye House" (c. 1870) at 325 Water Street as a restaurant-apartment-shop multiple use complex with related waterfront facilities.
  - e. renovating the "Narragansett Fire Engine #3 Station (1846), 42 Baker Street, for a Museum of the Warren Volunteer Fire Department.
6. To initiate an expanded program of restoration and conservation of historic properties by
  - a. encouraging the rehabilitation and landscaping of the mill housing located in the Westminster, Company, and Sisson Street section of the north end;
  - b. seeking creative solutions such as real estate tax relief, the creation of a low interest loan fund for rehabilitation, or the purchase of a demonstration house by a non-profit group in cooperation with local officials and commercial interests in order to attract "restoration dollars." The Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 is a potential source of funding.
7. To develop an open space program by
  - a. creating the "Belchers Cove Recreation Area" as proposed in the *Warren, Rhode Island Comprehensive Community Plan of 1966*. At present this valuable waterfront defining the entire northeast boundary of the central part of Warren is under-utilized, visually chaotic, and neglected. Improvement of this area, including

removal of billboards and development of a scenic drive to serve as a bypass for downtown Warren connecting with an improved Market Street-Metacom Avenue interchange, could be of major benefit to the community;

- b. preserving traditional stone walls which are found along early roads such as Touisset Point Road and Long Lane.
8. To support the expanded programs of the Massasoit Historical Association and seek wider community participation by
- a. appropriately marking historic buildings and sites, including the Watch House Site (1775) at Burr's Hill Park, General Barton's Birthplace (c. 1730) in Touisset, and the Windmill Hill Encampment Site (1778), as part of the American Bicentennial celebration in addition to the on-going program of marking local homes and sites;
  - b. developing an education program within the Warren school system to teach the heritage found in Warren and to encourage future youth participation;
  - c. supporting the preparation of a "restoration manual" for distribution within the Warren community with practical advice concerning such problems as selection of appropriate exterior and interior paint colors, fencing and paving materials, window trim, door design, etc. for historic houses;
  - d. upgrading the community image of Warren by continued use of information media to keep citizens informed about preservation progress.
9. To support the multi-faceted program of the Warren '76 Commission within the area generally described as the Central Business District (CBD) and the Water Street/Waterfront Area.



Fig. 38: Warren '76 Commission Fireplug, 51 Miller Street