

**United States Department of the Interior**  
 National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: E. J. Bullock Block

Other names/site number: Music Hall/Masonic Hall

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 7012 Main Street

City or town: Readsboro State: Vermont County: Bennington

Not For Publication:

Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     statewide   X   local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

  X   A     B   X   C     D

<p><b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>  <u>Vermont Division for Historic Preservation</u>  <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>
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E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Title :</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ entered in the National Register
- \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register
- \_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register
- \_\_\_ removed from the National Register
- \_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	buildings
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/ Department Store

SOCIAL/ Meeting Hall

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN/Second Empire

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Foundation: Stone, Concrete

Walls: Wood

Roof: Metal

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The E. J. Bullock Block located at 7012 Main Street in the Town of Readsboro, Bennington County, Vermont, is a large French Second Empire mixed-use commercial building that serves as a major visual focal point in the community. Readsboro is a small community located at the junction of the West Branch of the Deerfield River and the Deerfield River's main channel. The community is oriented east to west on Main Street, the town's primary thoroughfare. Along Main Street are a mix of religious, commercial, and residential buildings, the majority of which are between one and two stories tall. The buildings mainly date to the late 1880s and display a mix of high style and vernacular architectural forms executed in wood. This construction period coincided with the completion of the Deerfield Valley Railroad which brought a surge in industrialization to Readsboro.

The E. J. Bullock Block was erected in 1891 and is a large rectangular five-by-eight bay wood frame building that sits on a site which gently slopes downhill from north to south. The building sits on a rubble stone foundation which has been augmented by a poured concrete slab and concrete block. Narrow reveal clapboards sheath the walls which are supported by stud walls. The building is covered with a steeply pitched metal mansard roof which features regularly spaced gabled dormers on all four elevations. The roof structure consists of three principal timber trusses supported by a rafter beam support system and timber posts. The center of the façade is dominated by a large tower covered by a hipped metal roof with a short ridge. On the ground level an arched entryway located in the center of the base of the tower provides access to the second and third floors. This entryway is flanked on either side by storefronts with recessed entryways and large windows facing the street. Inside the first floor consists of an open volume

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

space historically used by commercial tenants. The second floor consists of four apartments arranged around a double loaded corridor. The third floor contains a fifth apartment and a small performance space. Interior finishes are largely utilitarian and consist of simple decorative wood details.

The exterior of the E. J. Bullock Block has experienced a loss of decorative details such as cornice brackets and original windows, but retains sufficient integrity to reflect its Second Empire design. Key character defining features such as the storefront system, mansard roof, and central tower remain largely intact, and the building's original function remains easily understood. Given this, the E. J. Bullock Block retains integrity of location, setting, feeling, association, design, materials, and workmanship.

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## **Narrative Description**

### ***North Elevation (façade)***

The E. J. Bullock Block is three stories tall, and its façade, which is five bays in width, consists of two first story storefronts separated by a central arched entryway that provides access to the upper stories. The second story consists of five one-over-one double hung windows set beneath a wide fascia board. The third story is sheltered beneath the metal mansard roof and dominated by two large dormers and the central tower which rises several feet above the flat-topped mansard roof.

Access to the building is provided by a set of stone steps. The first story storefronts are identical and consist of recessed entryways with paired entry doors, the upper two-thirds of which are glazed. Above the doors is a rectangular glass transom. Flanking the entryways are narrow one-over-one windows on the inside walls of the portico. Flush with the sidewalk are large four-paned storefront windows which light the interior spaces. The central recessed entryway consists of another set of double doors set within an arched portico. Wood corbelling is present at the corners of the building and flanking the central arch entryway while decorative wood paneling accents the facade above and below the storefront windows and around the central entry. The first story is physically divided from the upper stories by a shallow wood cornice. On the second story clapboard siding replaces the more ornate wood paneling around the storefronts. Five windows are present on the second story. Four of these windows, those occupying the right and left most bays, are shorter than the historic windows and consist of one over one double hung replacements. Patching in the clapboard reveals the original height of the window openings. In the center bay is an original set of paired one over one double hung windows. Above the windows is a wide fascia which sits beneath the eaves of the metal mansard roof. The E. J. Bullock Block's mansard roof is steeply pitched with a slight flare at the bottom. On the façade the mansard roof, which covers the entire third floor, features a pair of gabled dormers which flank the central tower. Each dormer has paired window openings, presently filled with plywood, and the gable pediments that feature a decorative applied floral motif. The central tower features clapboard siding and a single one-over-one replacement window with an empty transom. There is an applied wood decorative ornament below the sill. A bracketed cornice encircles the tower's hipped metal roof which is capped by a short decorative metal ridgeline.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

### ***East Elevation (Side)***

The east elevation of the E. J. Bullock Block faces the Readsboro First Baptist Church; along this elevation the building lot slopes downward from north to south. Along the four bays closest to Main Street the stone foundation is exposed; this foundation is a mix of cut stone blocks and rubblestone mortared into a solid wall. A concrete foundation supports the rear bays. The stone foundation is punctured at grade level by two openings each of which contains a horizontal, three-light window with vertical metal bars on the exterior for security. The rear portion of the foundation has a pair of two-light windows set within the clapboard siding. On the first story two additional fixed sash two pane windows occupy the frontmost bays while the rear bays feature three original two-over-two-double-hung windows. On the second story the original windows have been removed and the window openings are presently filled with plywood to protect the interior from wind and water damage. Prior to these coverings patches in the clapboard siding indicate that the window openings were shortened. Above the window openings is the fascia board which wraps the full length of the eastern elevation. The third story is dominated by the mansard roof and six gabled dormers. Each dormer is clad with a metal roof and has a decorative applied floral motif in the pediment. As with the second story the dormer window openings are all covered with plywood.

### ***West Elevation (Side)***

The west elevation of the E. J. Bullock Block faces a small commercial building. As on the eastern elevation the building lot slopes gently downward from north to south. Closer to the façade the foundation is barely visible with the clapboards reaching almost to ground level. On the first story are a pair of two-light windows set within the clapboard siding followed by a single two-over-two double hung window. Alongside these windows is a modern concrete access ramp which leads to a small modern porch composed of pressurized lumber with a simple lattice railing surrounding the decking. The porch provides access to the building's secondary entry which is a four-light paneled door with a single pane transom window. South of the door are two additional full sized window openings, one infilled with plywood, the other infilled with clapboards. The second story has eleven one-over-one replacement windows with clapboard infill set in the historic window openings. The fascia board wraps the western elevation just beneath the third story mansard roof. Gabled dormers are also present on the western elevation and the arrangement of these dormers matches the eastern elevation. Again, the dormers have decorative applied floral motifs in their pediments and the window openings are covered with plywood. Alongside the second and fifth dormers are brick chimneys which have been cut from their original height and capped at the same level as the gable peak of the dormers.

### ***South Elevation (Rear)***

The rear elevation of the E. J. Bullock Block faces Railroad Alley and a number of small domestic buildings. Near the western elevation the ground level has a new diagonally paneled wood door. East of this door a window opening has been infilled with clapboards, following this is a diagonally paneled entrance door and a small square paneled casement delivery opening. Two window openings on the first story are covered with plywood; the third (easternmost) has a two-over-two double hung window. The second story has two window openings; the westernmost opening is in-filled with plywood and clapboards, and the easternmost has a modern

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

one-over-one replacement window with clapboard infill above. The third story has two dormers that are both covered with plywood. A large section of damaged clapboards were recently removed from the rear elevation and new clapboards have been spliced into the wall between the second story and basement.

### ***Interior***

The E. J. Bullock Block is three stories in height and sits on a fully excavated basement. The basement can be accessed from a door at the rear elevation or from a narrow staircase on the first floor. The basement is an unfinished space presently used for storage and mechanical systems; floor joists run east to west and are visible throughout the basement as are the foundation walls. A new concrete floor has been laid over the historic dirt floor. Three large timber beams run north to south and are supported by a mix of thin metal columns, pressure treated lumber posts and brick piers.

The first floor of the E. J. Bullock Block can be accessed from the two storefront entryways on the façade or via the secondary egress point on the western elevation. Inside the first floor the most easterly storefront has been separated by a modern drywall partition to create a small gallery. Inside this gallery, finishes consist of wood moulding around the interior of the storefront along with bullseye corner blocks around the entryway and the frame of a single fixed sash two pane window. The gallery's storefront also retains its original window platforms for displaying merchandise and these platforms feature decorative wood paneling around their bases. Hardwood flooring is present throughout the gallery space while painted beadboard covers the ceiling. The remainder of the first floor largely consists of open volume space lit by a mix of hanging and surface mounted fluorescent light fixtures. The use of painted beadboard in the ceiling continues as does the use of narrow hardwood flooring; in many places this hardwood has been patched. Additionally, wood moulding and bullseye corner blocks are used around many of the entryways and windows. Four evenly spaced full length chamfered wood posts support a central carrying beam that runs north to south through the center of the building. Near the front of the building are a pair of four panel doors separated by a large square post; these doors provide access to the basement. At the rear of the first floor a modern partition has been made to create ADA compliant bathrooms while another small space has been sectioned off in the southeast corner to create a kitchen. In this kitchen a mix of hardwood and modern vinyl flooring is utilized while a mix of shiplap and early fiberboard covers the kitchen walls. Finally, in a small room between the kitchen and ADA bathrooms is the E. J. Bullock Block's original circa 1890 Morse Freight elevator. This now inoperable elevator once carried goods from the basement to the first floor and remains largely intact with its wooden frame and metal gears retained.

The second and third floors of the E. J. Bullock Block can be accessed from Main Street via the central arched entry doors. Past these doors is a wide staircase which leads to a landing on the second floor and a hallway that wraps the central tower before climbing to the third floor. The staircase's walls have wainscoting that extends a few inches above the handrailing and original plaster is present above the wainscoting and along the ceiling. Faux wood paneling is also present in the stairwell. The original metal handrail supports also remain intact. The second floor

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

itself consists of four apartments which radiate off the centrally located double loaded corridor which travels north to south through the space's entire length. These apartments each contain a single large living room with a single bedroom and bathroom located at the rear of the unit. Many of the walls in these spaces are not original and consist of stud walls covered by drywall and faux wood paneling. These newer materials are used throughout the apartments and in the corridor while the floors are a mix of vinyl tile and original hardwood. Dropped acoustic tile ceiling with metal support frames are present throughout though these are in poor condition. Above the drop ceiling the original plaster ceilings are visible though these are also in poor condition with bare lath visible throughout many of the apartments. Modern solid wood doors are present in the apartments while the windows are framed with flat stock trim.

The third floor of the E. J. Bullock Block is accessed from a stairway on the second floor. This staircase has its original hardwood risers and metal handrail supports. The stairwell features sidewalls with wainscoting on the lower half and original plaster on the upper walls and ceiling. At the base of the staircase is an open entryway with a four-panel transom window. At the top of the staircase is a small landing. To the west of this landing is another apartment which features identical finishes to the second-floor apartments while to the south a doorway leads to a performance space; just before entering the performance space there is also a small coatroom. The apartment occupying the front of the third floor wraps the stair tower in a U shape and takes the full width of the facade. Above the drop ceiling the original plaster ceiling and walls are visible and generally in better condition than the ceilings on the second floor. Along the building's eastern wall is a long hallway which runs the length of the third floor. The eastern wall of this corridor has alcoves for the dormers and in some of these windows the original stained glass remains in place. The hallway's interior wall is a non-historic subdivision whose features match those of the eastern wall. The hallways contain original hardwood flooring and ceiling plaster though some of this plaster has fallen away due to water damage. Painted baseboards are present throughout the hallway as is painted chair rail. Situated over the center of the hallway are three hanging chain ceiling lights. At the rear of the eastern hallways is a narrow utilitarian space which occupies the width of the rear elevation and features exposed wood framing and deteriorating floors. A doorway from the back room leads into the rear of the performance space. The third floor's performance space features a set of three low risers at the southern wall which act as a stage. Faux wood shiplap paneling covers the walls, though in places the original plaster is visible; tile covers the floor. Baseboards and chair rail are present throughout the room along with a thin strip of crown moulding. The space's western wall is a later addition that covers the dormer windows; these windows can be accessed from doors on the western wall. A large freemason star occupies the center of the floor and four checkered squares surrounding the star. The ceiling is plastered. Each door in the performance space features decorative moulding and bullseye corner blocks.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

SOCIAL HISTORY

**Period of Significance**

1891-1964

**Significant Dates**

1891, 1908

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The E. J. Bullock Block at 7012 Main Street, Readsboro, Bennington County, Vermont is a three-story French Second Empire mixed-use commercial building, locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Social History. Built in 1891 for local businessman Elmer J. Bullock, the Bullock Block was one of the most important commercial buildings in the small community of Readsboro. Sanborn maps reveal a total of four commercial properties in Readsboro of which the E. J. Bullock Block stands as the most substantially intact property. The building is a two-part commercial block with a first floor which features a pair of storefronts that were occupied by groceries and dry goods stores until the 1960s while the building's second floor served as professional office space and later tenement housing. The building's third floor served as both an opera house and lodge rooms for the Balanced Rock Lodge of the Free and

E. J. Bullock Block

Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont

County and State

Associated Masons. Regionally known performers ranging from musicians, lecturers, and magicians appeared on the Bullock Block's stage as did local theatre organizations. During the late nineteenth century opera houses were built in small communities across America. These opera houses, built by municipal governments and private individuals, provided entertainment for local people and in the case of the Bullock Block helped draw customers to the commercial tenants. The building's consistent commercial occupancy coupled with the role its third-floor opera house played in binding together the community of Readsboro justifies the E. J. Bullock Block's significance in Commerce and Social History.

The E. J. Bullock Block is also locally significant under Criterion C in Architecture as a vernacular example of the French Second Empire Style. Defined by the presence of a mansard roof and an eclectic application of architectural details, the French Second Empire Style rose to prominence in America in the aftermath of the Civil War and remained a popular design form into the 1880s. Built in 1891 the E. J. Bullock Block represents a late example of the French Second Empire style, however the building features key stylistic identifiers most notably a steeply pitched mansard roof. This roof is pierced at regular intervals by gable dormers with scroll cut garlands in the pediment and the storefront features a rich collage of woodworked details that helped draw customers to the shop windows and to the centrally placed doorway that led to the second-floor offices or third floor opera house. The combination of these details and the use of the French Second Empire Style is not seen anywhere else in Readsboro and as a result the E. J. Bullock Block is a striking visual landmark in the community.

The Period of Significance for the E. J. Bullock Block stretches from 1891 until 1964. These dates encompass the building's construction in 1891, its heaviest period of use by local businesses, and its occupation by the Balanced Rock Lodge, the building's longest single tenant. The cutoff date of 1964 reflects the last known use of the building by the Freemasons and the gradual end of its use for commercial purposes.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### ***Development of Readsboro***

First colonized in the late 1770s, the Town of Readsboro is located in the Green Mountains and throughout the town's first century the Green Mountains left Readsboro largely isolated from neighboring communities. Settlers built farmsteads along the Deerfield River and harnessed the river's power to develop grist and woolen mills. Early residents raised food crops, cattle, and sheep which were driven to larger regional markets to exchange for household goods and farm implements.<sup>1</sup> Additionally residents built a tannery, however poor roads and the mountains made it difficult to successfully develop industry.<sup>2</sup> Though Readsboro contained workable farmland, the town struggled to grow due to its isolation. With land continually opening up in the western territories many residents of Readsboro opted to leave their farms to pursue opportunities in less

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Cass Aldrich ed., *History of Bennington County* (Syracuse: D. Mason & Co. 1889), 555.

<sup>2</sup> Aldrich ed., *History of Bennington County*, 487.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

geographically challenging circumstances.<sup>3</sup> Given this, by the 1880s Readsboro's population stood at approximately 750 with no indication that the town would grow.

Life in Readsboro began to change after the completion of the Hoosac Tunnel in 1875. The tunnel, which carried trains beneath the Hoosac Mountain Range, opened the Deerfield River Valley along with vast stands of largely untouched timber in the southern Green Mountains. The presence of a rail connection eleven miles from Readsboro encouraged three brothers, Daniel, John, and Moses Newton to investigate if Readsboro would make a suitable site for their new pulp mill. Arriving in 1880 the brothers, who already operated a successful pulp mill in Holyoke, Massachusetts, noted the availability of timber and the presence of a potential power source in the fast-flowing Deerfield River.<sup>4</sup> In 1882 the Newton Brothers secured water rights in Readsboro and erected a fifty-foot dam across the Deerfield River near the village of Readsboro and commenced building a pulp mill downstream of their new impoundment.<sup>5</sup> Powered by the Deerfield River, the mill began producing wood pulp in 1883 and had the capacity to generate twelve to twenty tons of wood pulp in a day.<sup>6</sup> Initially, the Newton Brothers hauled their pulp eleven miles overland to the Hoosac Tunnel, however this required teams of between twenty and forty horses to travel over poorly maintained roads, a difficult feat particularly in winter.<sup>7</sup> Hoping to better connect their mill to markets in New York and Massachusetts, in 1884 the Newton Brothers began work on a narrow gauge railroad to span the eleven miles between Readsboro and the Hoosac Tunnel.<sup>8</sup>

Started in 1884 and completed in 1885 the Deerfield Valley Railroad (later known as the Hoosac Tunnel and Wilmington Railroad) connected Readsboro to regional markets, led to a significant growth in the town's population, and encouraged industrialization in the community. The Newton Brothers built their rail terminal on the eastern bank of the Deerfield River and erected a bridge across the river to carry a spur line which served manufacturing interests in town [See Figure 8].

Following the railroad's completion new factories were quickly erected to take advantage of the infrastructure improvements. During the 1880s factories belonging to the National Metal Edge Box Company, the Readsboro Leather Company, and the Readsboro Chair Company were built near the railroad, employing close to two-hundred men.<sup>9</sup> As a result of the increase in industrialization, Readsboro saw a forty percent spike in population between 1880 and 1890 as people moved into the Deerfield Valley seeking jobs.<sup>10</sup> Seven years after completing the rail line to Readsboro the Newton Brothers extended it another thirteen miles to the towns Whittingham and Wilmington, making more efficient trade and socialization between the towns possible.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Aldrich ed., *History of Bennington County*, 555.

<sup>4</sup> Mark E. Rondeau, "A Little Economic Engine that Could," *The Brattleboro Reformer*, October 17, 2009, 14.

<sup>5</sup> "Readsboro," *Bennington Banner*, August 20, 1885, 2.

<sup>6</sup> "Readsboro," *Bennington Banner*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> "Readsboro," *Bennington Banner*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> "The Readsboro Railroad," *Vermont Phoenix*, April 11, 1884, 3.

<sup>9</sup> "Emancipated from Inertia," *Deerfield Valley Times*, November 6, 1891, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Victor B. Harrison, "Wilmington Eagerly Backed Railroad of 60 Years Ago," *The Brattleboro Reformer*, November 6, 1951, 1.

<sup>11</sup> "The New Railroad Opened," *Deerfield Valley Times*, November 6, 1892, 6.

E. J. Bullock Block

Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont

County and State

Starting in 1901 the railroad ran two daily passenger trains and in 1912 the railroad switched to standard gauge tracks, allowing freight and passengers to be hauled more efficiently.<sup>12</sup> By the 1940s the railroad became primarily a freight line and continued operating until 1971 when the development of a nearby power plant project convinced the railroad's owners to abandon the line.<sup>13</sup>

Industrially, Readsboro contracted throughout the twentieth century; in 1922 the Metal Edge Box Company factory burned over the course of three days taking with it the homes of numerous immigrant workers from the Alpine province of Tyrol.<sup>14</sup> By the 1950s Readsboro's only major factory belonged to Vermont Hardwoods Inc., a descendant of the Readsboro Chair Company.<sup>15</sup> By the 1970s the chair manufacturer employed approximately fifty people and Readsboro's population shrank to less than 700 people with most residents crossing the border to work in a Massachusetts paper mill.<sup>16</sup> The chair company ceased manufacturing in 1988 and its buildings were subsequently demolished bringing to a close Readsboro's period of industrialization.<sup>17</sup>

### ***E. J. Bullock and The E. J. Bullock Block***

As Readsboro grew following the completion of the railroad and the growth of industry around the Newton Brothers pulp mill, other entrepreneurs began taking interest in Readsboro. One resident who took advantage of the town's growth was businessman Elmer J. Bullock. Born in 1850, Bullock started working in the store run by his father James Bullock in 1870; by 1886 he had taken over the business.<sup>18</sup> During the early days of Readsboro's expansion Bullock operated a general store selling food, clothes, and other household goods which he advertised heavily in local newspapers.<sup>19</sup>

In July 1889, an arsonist started a fire in Bullock's store and destroyed the entire building along with a nearby tin shop, several tenement buildings, and the Readsboro Town Hall.<sup>20</sup> Bullock, who lived above the store along with his family and several clerks, barely escaped with his life and the damage caused by the fire came to approximately \$20,000.<sup>21</sup> Immediately after the fire, Bullock began to rebuild on the site of his former store and in the spring of 1891 work began on the E. J. Bullock Block.<sup>22</sup> Newspapers described the block being constructed as:

three stories in height and will accommodate two good stores on the ground floor. The second floor will be fitted up for offices and will provide rooms that have been badly needed for some time. The entire upper story will be used as a hall, fitted

<sup>12</sup> "Hoot Toot & Whistle R.R. Gets Story in Vermont Life," *The Brattleboro Reformer*, August 29, 1952, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Mike D'Amico, *History of the HT&W.*, <http://gino.cdfw.net/HTW/history.html>

<sup>14</sup> Cam Montgomery, "Readsboro Past has Tyrolean Tinge," *Rutland Daily Herald*, September 18, 1977, 17. The province of Tyrol was divided between Italy and Austria following World War I.

<sup>15</sup> Charles E. Crane, "Made in VT.," *The Enterprise and Vermonter*, August 15, 1957, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Montgomery, "Readsboro Past has Tyrolean Tinge," 18.

<sup>17</sup> "Liquidation of Vermont Chairs Inc.," *Burlington Free Press*, October 20, 1988, 19.

<sup>18</sup> "Wilmington," *Vermont Phoenix*, August 25, 1882, 3.

<sup>19</sup> "E.J. Bullock and Co.," *Deerfield Valley Times*, November 8, 1888, 2.

<sup>20</sup> "Fire at Readsboro," *Deerfield Valley Times*, July 12, 1889, 1.

<sup>21</sup> "Supposed Incendiary Fire," *Burlington Free Press*, July 10, 1889, 5.

<sup>22</sup> "Readsboro," *Deerfield Valley Times*, May 29, 1891, 10.

E. J. Bullock Block

Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont

County and State

with ante-rooms and everything necessary to make it a suitable meeting place for lodges and other organizations.<sup>23</sup>

After work on the E. J. Bullock Block concluded, Bullock occupied the ground floor of the building with his general store [See Figure 1]. Local professionals including doctors and dentists rented space on the second floor and Bullock fitted the third floor out as an opera house.<sup>24</sup>

The decision to utilize the third floor of the E. J. Bullock Block as an opera house is a localized example of the post-Civil War explosion in opera house construction in America. As railroads began connecting small communities like Readsboro to the wider world locals began to clamor for entertainment, culture, and diversion. Using branch lines like the Deerfield Valley Railroad, performers from Boston, Troy, and other major cities could visit Readsboro.<sup>25</sup> Opera houses and theatrical entertainments were also attractive to European immigrants, such as the Italians who helped build the Deerfield Valley Railroad and the Tyrolians who worked in the chair and pulp factories.<sup>26</sup> Town governments and businessmen eager to proclaim their towns civilized and cultured erected flat floored opera houses in municipal buildings, in bank halls, or over commercial blocks and by the late nineteenth century the opera house became an important community fixture in many towns.<sup>27</sup>

In Readsboro, Elmer J. Bullock used his third story opera house to draw people to the Bullock Block where they could buy tickets for shows in his general store prior to attending the performances. Bullock also promoted his events in Wilmington and Whittingham and made arrangements with the railroad, which ran special trains after his performances let out, ensuring anyone from the neighboring towns could attend a show [See Figure 2]. After opening, the opera house hosted a wide range of performers ranging from professional roller-skaters to minstrels, theatre troupes, and singers.<sup>28</sup> Elmer Bullock operated the Bullock Block, locally referred to as Music Hall, for close to fifteen years however around the turn of the century his economic fortunes began to turn. In addition to his commercial block Elmer Bullock owned a factory specializing in folding chairs. After promising to purchase a sizable shipment of his chairs in 1901 a large Boston concern reneged on the deal forcing Bullock into bankruptcy with the E. J. Bullock Block taken as liability.<sup>29</sup> After 1901 Bullock continued manufacturing chairs however in 1904, he went bankrupt for a second time with creditors seizing all his assets in Readsboro.<sup>30</sup> A year later Bullock moved to Athol, Massachusetts where he died in 1918.

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<sup>23</sup> "Readsboro," *Bennington Banner*, July 24, 1891, 2.

<sup>24</sup> "Announcement," *Deerfield Valley Times*, August 19, 1910, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Ann Satterthwaite, *Local Glories: Opera Houses on Main Street Where Art and Community Meet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Satterthwaite, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Satterthwaite, 2.

<sup>28</sup> "Music Hall," *Deerfield Valley Times*, November 22, 1907, 5; "Another Musical Treat," *Deerfield Valley Times*, October 28, 1892, 5; "Readsboro," *Deerfield Valley Times*, November 13, 1891, 5.

<sup>29</sup> "Assignment at Readsboro," *Vermont Phoenix*, February 8, 1901, 3.

<sup>30</sup> "Readsboro Firm Bankrupt," *Vermont Phoenix*, April 22, 1904, 7.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

### ***The E. J. Bullock Block in the Twentieth Century***

After E. J. Bullock went bankrupt, the Bullock Block remained an important community fixture in Readsboro. From 1901 until 1910 grocer C. H. Faulkner owned the building and occupied the ground floor of the Bullock Block.<sup>31</sup> After 1910 other stores occupied the ground floor among them Howard P. Billings general store, and the P. M. Davis store [See Figure 3].<sup>32</sup> Local professionals including newspaper editors, doctors, and dentists continued to occupy the second story office spaces though Sanborn maps indicate that by 1919 the offices had been converted to tenement housing [See Figure 4].

In 1908 the Balanced Rock Lodge of the Free and Associated Masons along with their sister organization the Balanced Rock Chapter of the Order of Eastern Stars leased the Bullock Block.<sup>33</sup> The freemasons were the longest tenured occupants of the Bullock Block and by 1910 local newspapers referred to the building as Masonic Hall. In addition to using the Bullock Block's third floor as a lodge room, the freemasons continued to hire musicians and theatre troops to perform in Readsboro.<sup>34</sup> Starting in 1910 motion pictures were shown in the Bullock Block; these films were provided by a man who traveled from town to town, screening films in town halls and commercial buildings throughout southern Vermont.<sup>35</sup> The appearance of motion pictures in the Bullock Block mirrored a growing national trend; as motion pictures became popular, opera houses added this new entertainment to the repertoire of acts local residents could enjoy. In some cases, opera houses were completely reworked as movie theatres, though this conversion never occurred in Readsboro.<sup>36</sup>

Due to Readsboro's diminutive size and the lack of any other large gathering spaces in town, the Bullock Block hosted a wide range of local performers, students, and community organizations that used the third floor for events. Church organizations and high school theatre groups held performances in the Bullock Block throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, high school graduations were held in the Bullock Block in the 1930s and 1940s and starting in the 1920s the town rented a portion of the Bullock Block's second floor for use as a town library.<sup>38</sup> The multifaceted use of the Bullock Block, straddling commerce, fraternization, and public assembly is a commonly seen trait in opera houses built in small communities across the country. As planner Ann Satterthwaite wrote in *Local Glories*:

Without school gyms or auditoriums, flat floored opera houses became the stage for student plays, recitations, graduations and sports like basketball along with bicycle racing, boxing, and roller-skating...Before radio, movies, and cars townspeople socialized at the many opera house programs that punctuated the long

<sup>31</sup> "Readsboro," *Deerfield Valley Times*, April 5, 1907, 5.

<sup>32</sup> "Gasoline Mixed with Kerosene," *Vermont Phoenix*, December 23, 1910, 5.

<sup>33</sup> "Readsboro," *Deerfield Valley Times*, October 16, 1908, 5.

<sup>34</sup> "Readsboro and Bennington County," *Deerfield Valley Times*, March 24, 1911, 5.

<sup>35</sup> "Change of Night for Ward's Moving Pictures," *Deerfield Valley Times*, September 16, 1910, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Satterthwaite, *Local Glories*, 259.

<sup>37</sup> "Local News," *Deerfield Valley Times*, August 27, 1909, 1.

<sup>38</sup> "Readsboro," *Deerfield Valley Times*, June 16, 1939, 3.

E. J. Bullock Block

Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont

County and State

winters. In fact one of the most enduring features of these halls was their role in community life.<sup>39</sup>

The Bullock Block's significance as a local gathering place seems to have diminished after the 1960s. After 1964 the building is no longer mentioned as the lodge building for the Balanced Rock freemasons and by the 1970s Victor Allen of the Refractory Metals Company used the building as a manufactory. Despite its decline in prominence, the Bullock Block remained an important community landmark throughout the twentieth century. In 2009 Readsboro Hometown Redevelopment Inc. purchased the E. J. Bullock Block. Since then, the organization has worked with the State of Vermont and nonprofit organizations to complete necessary repairs to the building with hopes that it can be brought back into active community use.

### ***Commerce in Readsboro***

As mentioned, the growth of industry in Readsboro sparked a corresponding increase in commercial activity as existing and newly arrived businessmen sought to cater to the needs of Readsboro's growing population. By 1903 Readsboro had at least three general stores including C. H. Faulkner's Store operating out of the E. J. Bullock Block, the H.T. Goodell Store (extant 6954 Main Street), and the H.A. Parsons Store operating out of the Parsons Block (extant 7077 Main Street, presently the Readsboro Inn).<sup>40</sup> These stores were located only a short distance from each other on Main Street and provided residents with life essentials including food, furniture, clothing, and household products. The E. J. Bullock was the largest of the active commercial buildings in Readsboro with roughly 3,700 square feet of floor space on the first floor.<sup>41</sup> The Parsons Block also possessed a large footprint however the building's interior spaces were subdivided among a number of smaller commercial tenants. The H.T. Goodell Store housed H.T. Goodell's business, but the building's architecture and features were significantly more utilitarian than the Parsons or Bullock Block. Circa 1925 a fourth store appeared on the corner of Main Street and School Street just west of the Bullock Block. In addition to the general stores on Main Street, Readsboro had a number of small specialty shops located in town including a stove and furnace store, and a photography studio.<sup>42</sup> These more specialized ventures reflect the growing diversity of Readsboro's economy and the presence of enough potential customers to support more niche business ventures. Readsboro's economic contraction in the mid to late twentieth century brought an end to many of the businesses that had thrived in the early twentieth century; however the buildings these businesses occupied remained a part of the community. The Parsons Block and H.T. Goodell Store are intact, however they have experienced significant alterations as has the building at the corner of Main and School Streets. As a result, the E. J. Bullock Block, with its large storefront windows and French Second Empire details stands as the most intact example of the commercial enterprises which once flourished on Main Street at the turn of the twentieth century.

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<sup>39</sup> Satterthwaite, *Local Glories*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Melvin H. Robinson, "The Metropolis of the Upper Deerfield," *Bennington Banner Reformer*, July 16, 1903, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Robinson, "The Metropolis of the Upper Deerfield."

<sup>42</sup> Robinson, "The Metropolis of the Upper Deerfield."

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

### *Architectural Analysis*

The appearance and form of the E. J. Bullock Block's is a byproduct of the rapid growth of Readsboro after the completion of the Deerfield Valley Railroad. As industry took hold of the Deerfield River Valley and hundreds of new people came to the town Elmer J. Bullock decided to put the stamp of modernity on his newly built commercial block by having it designed in the French Second Empire style. Defined by the mansard roof, decorative dormers, towers, and ornate cornices the French Second Empire style gained popularity in the 1860s and 1870s and remained popular, particularly in the northeast, through 1900.<sup>43</sup> Originating in France during the reign of Napoleon III, American architects living and studying in Paris were exposed to the French Second Empire style which they later introduced in America.<sup>44</sup> Stylistically, French Second Empire buildings make use of expressive ornamentation and utilize mansard roofs to create fully habitable spaces without creating the visual impact of another full story. The E. J. Bullock Block's design incorporates many of the key features typically seen in French Second Empire commercial buildings. The building features a steeply sloping flat topped mansard roof with symmetrically arranged dormers on the façade and side elevations as well as a large central tower with a hipped roof and decorative cornice set beneath the roof. The façade and dormer windows both feature decorative architectural elements and the dormer windows were filled with stained glass to create a richly colored exterior.

In form the E. J. Bullock Block is also a representative example of a two-part commercial building, a common commercial building type from the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The building has an ornate commercial façade on the first floor which draws the eye to the shop windows and displays.<sup>45</sup> The second story is more domestic in scale with smaller windows to allow light into the private offices, later tenements, without allowing pedestrians to look into these spaces. The use of the central stair, which permits one to reach the upper floors without entering the shops further highlights this separation of spaces by offering greater privacy for individuals looking to visit the professional offices. Similar to the first-floor, ornamental details are concentrated on the third floor with its sloping mansard roof and regularly spaced dormers. These dormers also served a vital and practical function casting light into the third-floor opera house, the building's large quasi-public space. Built prior to rural electrification, daylight from the dormer windows mixed with lamps would have been important to lighting performances and meetings on the third floor. Though walls currently subdivide the space, the original third floor window bays remain intact and their arrangement, primarily along the eastern and western elevations, would have maximized the amount of daylight thrown into the third floor.

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<sup>43</sup> "Second Empire/Mansard Style 1860 – 1900," Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide, Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/second-empire.html>.

<sup>44</sup> "Second Empire/Mansard Style 1860 – 1900," Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2000), 24.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

***Conclusion***

Built in 1891, the E. J. Bullock Block has been a fixture on the landscape of Readsboro, Vermont for 130 years. Built during the town's period of greatest growth following the completion of the Deerfield Valley Railroad, the Bullock Block reflects Elmer J. Bullock's desire to provide the town with a modern commercial block with space for stores, private offices, and a large gathering hall. These spaces were heavily used by residents of Readsboro and the nearby communities, particularly the third floor which served as an opera house for decades, attracting performers from the greater New England area and providing the people of southern Bennington County with entertainment. These performances also brought people to the commercial storefronts thereby helping those businesses to prosper. Additionally, as one of the only large gathering spaces in Readsboro the Bullock Block saw use by the local community and housed vital community programs such as the local library. Though it fell into disuse as Readsboro's economic fortunes faltered, the E. J. Bullock Block is presently undergoing repairs and rehabilitation with the goal of ensuring this important landmark remains an active and functional space in the Town of Readsboro.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

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E. J. Bullock Block

Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont

County and State

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-

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** .12 Acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 42.772124 N

Longitude: 72.948466 W

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary for the E. J. Bullock Block corresponds to Bennington County, Vermont Tax Parcel ID# 513-161-10817.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Boundary of the E. J Bullock Block corresponds to the historic dimensions of the lot historically associated with the property.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Matthew Shoen/Principal Researcher  
organization: The Preservation Trust of Vermont  
street & number: 104 Church Street  
city or town: Burlington state: Vermont zip code: 05401  
e-mail mattshoen26@gmail.com  
telephone: 315-528-8227  
date: June 2021

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



Figure 1: Photograph of the E. J. Bullock Block Circa 1895 showing the building soon after its construction and at a point when the E. J. Bullock & Co. Store occupied the building's first floor.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Photograph courtesy of the Readsboro Historical Society.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



Figure 2: Advertisement from 1893 promoting a concert at the Bullock Block [Music Hall]. Bullock's promise of special trains back to Wilmington was a common feature of his promotions and likely helped draw patrons from outside of Readsboro.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> "Farewell Concert of the Phila May Concert Co.," *Deerfield Valley Times*, November 23, 1893, 5.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



Figure 3: Photo of a parade float passing the Bullock Block. On the ground floor the sign for P.M. Davis's store can be seen over the entrance while on the second floor a sign for the public library is also visible.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Photograph courtesy of the Readsboro Historical Society.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



Figure 4: Sanborn fire insurance map from 1909 showing the E. J. Bullock Block along with the surrounding community of Readsboro. Directly behind the Bullock Block is the Deerfield Valley Railroad which ran through town and stimulated industry in Readsboro.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Readsboro, Bennington County, Vermont, 1909*, Sheet 1.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

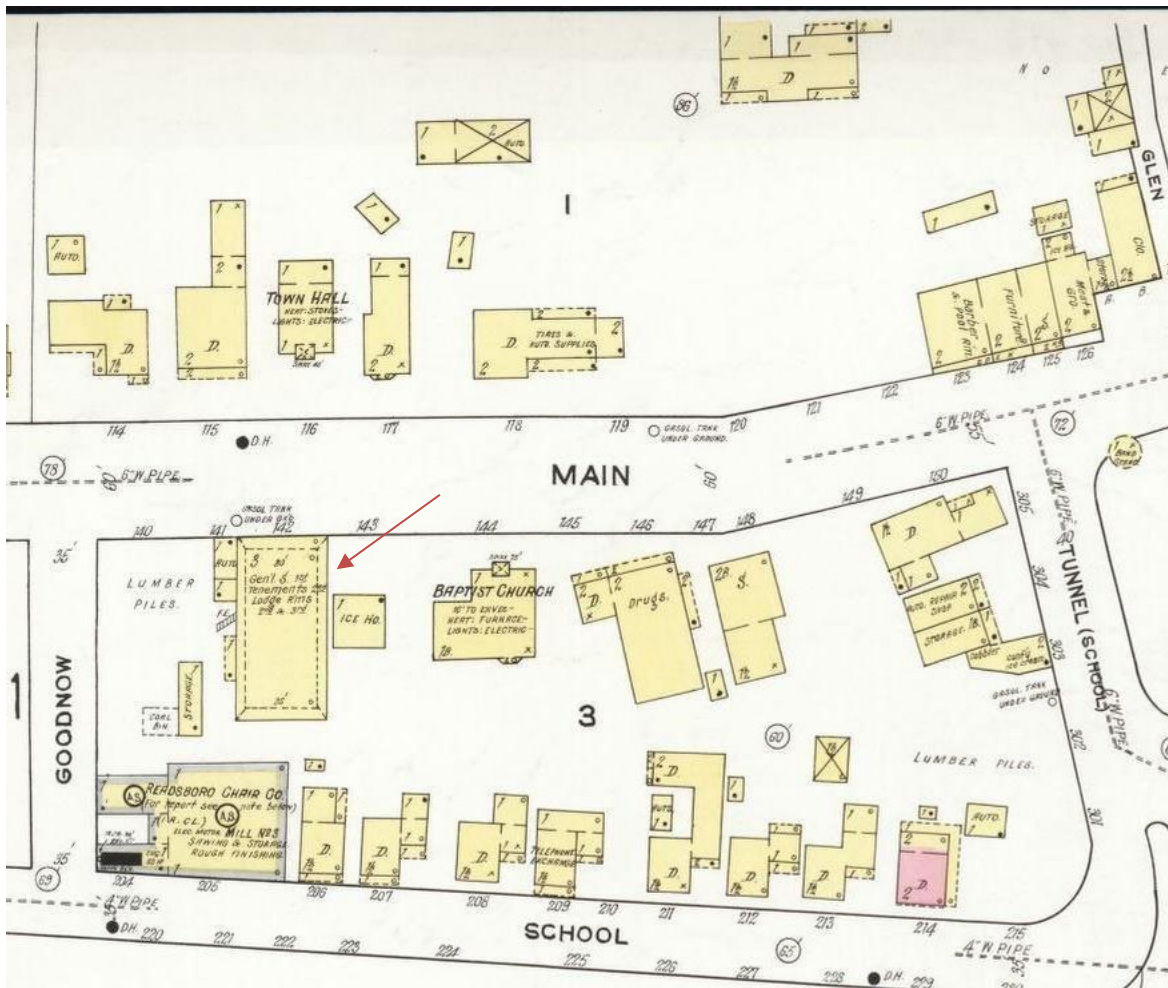


Figure 5: Sanborn fire insurance map from 1919 depicting the Bullock Block. Outbuildings such as the icehouse, storage building, and garage are non-extant.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Readsboro, Bennington County, Vermont, 1919*, Sheet 1.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

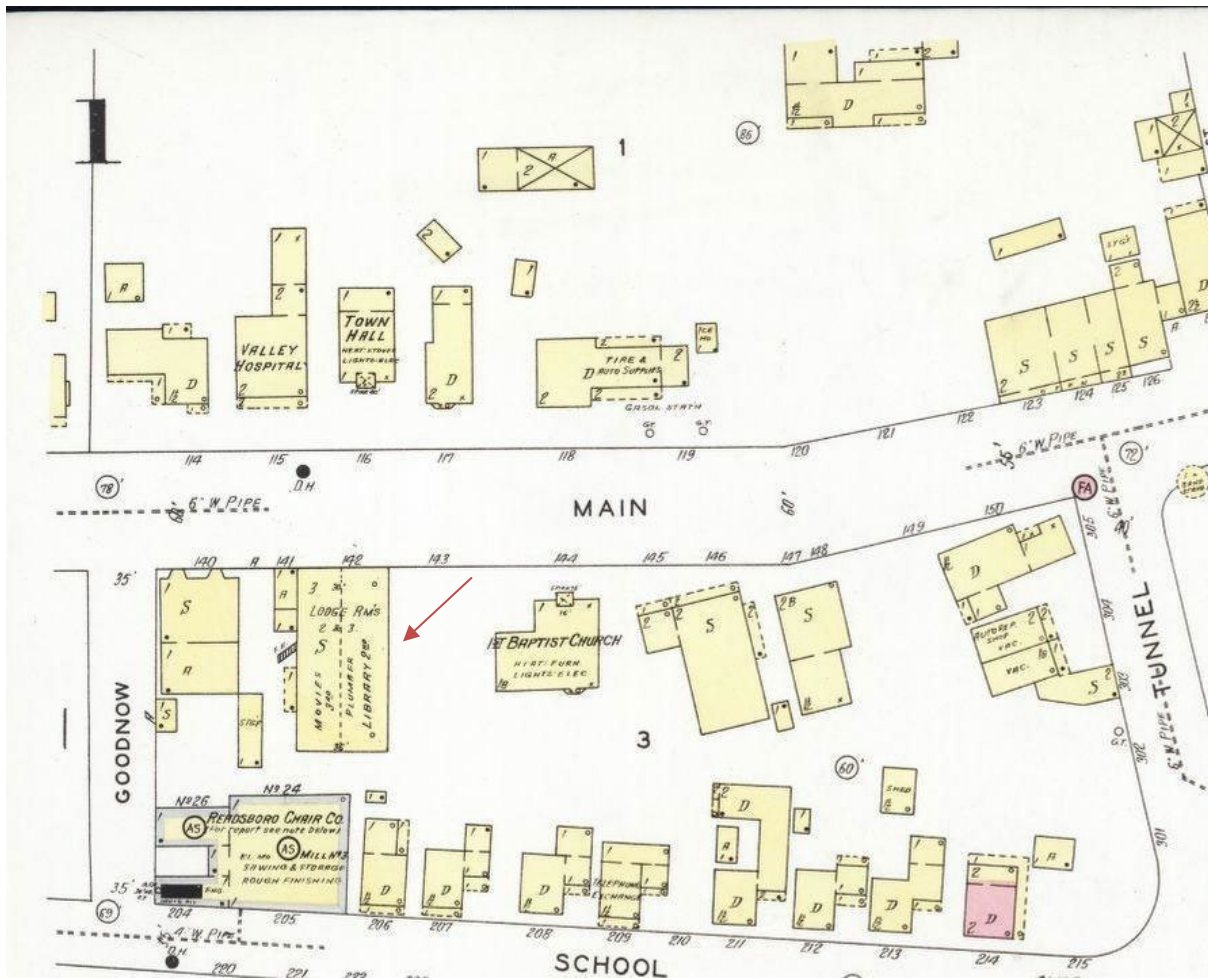


Figure 6: Sanborn fire insurance map from 1927 depicting the E. J. Bullock Block and the surrounding community.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *Readsboro, Bennington County, Vermont, 1927*, Sheet 1.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



Figure 7: Photo of the Bullock Block from Circa 1920 showing the former single car garage on the building's western elevation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Photo courtesy of the Readsboro Historical Society.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



Figure 8: Photo of the Village of Readsboro from circa 1895 showing the railroad in the foreground, along with the town's commercial and residential development. The eastern and rear elevations of the E. J. Bullock Block are visible at the center of the photograph and are denoted by a red arrow.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Photo courtesy of the Readsboro Historical Society.

E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State

### **Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### **Photo Log**

Name of Property: E. J. Bullock Block

City or Vicinity: Readsboro

County: Bennington

State: Vermont

Photographer: Matthew Shoen

Date Photographed: March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 0001: Façade (north) camera facing south
- 0002: Façade and western elevation camera facing southeast
- 0003: Detail of first floor storefronts and central entry tower camera facing south
- 0004: Eastern elevation camera facing west
- 0005: Rear elevation camera facing northwest
- 0006: Interior first floor showing open commercial space camera facing southeast
- 0007: First floor gallery space and interior of storefront windows camera facing north
- 0008: Basement of building camera facing south
- 0009: Staircase leading to the second floor camera facing south
- 0010: Second floor apartment unit at rear of building camera facing north
- 0011: Second floor apartment unit at rear of building camera facing north
- 0012: Stairway leading to third floor and transom window camera facing south
- 0013: Eastern hallway in third floor showing window openings camera facing south
- 0014: Performance space used by freemasons camera facing northeast



# E. J. Bullock Block

7012 Main Street, Readsboro, Bennington County, Vermont

vermont.gov



### LEGEND

- Airports
- Rail Lines
- Town Boundaries
- County Boundaries
- Buildings
- Village Boundaries



### NOTES

This map was created with the VT Interactive Map Viewer.

1: 10,090

June 8, 2021



0.32 0 0.16 0.32 Miles

WGS\_1984\_Web\_Mercator\_Auxiliary\_Sphere  
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THIS MAP IS NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

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# E.J. Bullock Block

7012 Main Street, Readsboro, Bennington County, Vermont

vermont.gov



## LEGEND

- - - = Property Boundary



## NOTES

This map was created with the VT Interactive Map Viewer.

1: 427

June 8, 2021



0.01 0 0.01 0.01 Miles

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E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



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E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



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E. J. Bullock Block  
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Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



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Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



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Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



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County and State

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E. J. Bullock Block  
Name of Property

Bennington, Vermont  
County and State



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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.