

Benjamin Cushing House  
38-1/2 North Court Street  
Providence  
Providence County  
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-193

An addendum to  
Cushing House  
38-1/2 North Court Street  
Providence, Rhode Island  
in HABS Catalog (1941)

HABS  
RI,  
4-PROV,  
93-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

## BENJAMIN CUSHING HOUSE

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Address: 38-1/2 North Court Street, Providence, Providence  
County, Rhode Island.

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Providence, Rhode Island, in HABS Catalog (1941)

Present Owner  
and Occupant: R. Gretchen Nelson

Present Use: Dwelling

Brief Statement  
of Significance: "Most of the mid-eighteenth century houses, which  
once stood along the west side of South Main  
Street and elsewhere in the then newer sections  
of town, are gone or dilapidated beyond repair,  
so that this sturdy house is the more valuable  
as a record of this phase of Providence build-  
ing" (Downing, Early Homes of Rhode Island, p.  
205).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Original owner: Benjamin Cushing
2. Date of erection: "In 1737, 'Benjamin Cushen' (Cushing)  
. . .bought of Joseph Williams of Scituate a piece of  
property on North Main Street at the corner of North  
Court. Shortly afterward he erected his 'mansion  
house,' which has long since been moved to 38-1/2  
North Court Street" (Downing, Early Homes of Rhode  
Island, p. 205).
3. Notes on alterations and additions: The house was moved  
a short distance from North Main Street to its present  
location c. 1869. The present owner, who is an architect,  
renovated the house in 1961 under her own direction.  
Some partitions have been changed, but the general lay-  
out and most of the detail is the same.
4. Sources of information: Antoinette Forrester Downing,  
Early Homes of Rhode Island (Richmond, Virginia: Garrett  
and Massie, 1937), pp. 128, 139, 142, 161, 169, 170, 204,  
205, 209, 269.

HABS Inventory prepared by John Hutchins Cady, January  
24, 1957.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This two-story frame house is one of the few surviving from the mid-eighteenth century in Providence. Notable original features include the doorway, stairway, large cooking fireplace, and paneled fireplace wall in parlor.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Rectangular house, 33' (five bay south front) x 26'-3", two stories.
2. Foundations: Brick.
3. Wall construction: Plank walls, heavy timber frame, clapboards, corner boards.
4. Stoops: Granite entrance stoop from new sidewalk, four steps high.
5. Chimneys: Center brick chimney.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Pedimented doorway with fluted Doric pilasters on pedestals, shell motives in the architraves, horizontal toplight, molded pediment with stepped horizontal cornice. Six panel door apparently new.
  - b. Windows and shutters: New nine over nine light double hung windows. Molded cornices and sills on first floor windows. Second floor cornices continuous with roof cornice. No shutters.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape and covering: Gable roof. Gable ends overhang lower floors about 1-1/2' on both ends. Shingles.
  - b. Cornice: Molded cornice.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Five-room center-chimney-type plan. Entire house remodeled 1961 by present owners, some partitions changed but the general layout still the same. Two parlors on south front, more formal one on southwest; rear entrance in northeast room, previously a kitchen, now open to southeast parlor now used as a family room; dining room in north center; kitchen in northwest corner. Bedrooms on second floor, partially altered on north side for bathrooms. Third floor finished in 1961 with two bedrooms.
2. Stairways: Main stair in entrance hall, U-shape, closed string with heavy molded outside string, heavy molded rail, turned balusters, square newels with pendants. New rear stair between dining room and northeast room. Both stairs continue to third floor or attic.
3. Flooring: Wide board floors, up to 20", mostly original, some replaced in recent renovation.
4. Ceiling and Wall finish: Ceiling beams in dining room and southeast parlor recently exposed. Plaster, painted, or papered walls.
5. Doorways and doors: Mostly two-panel doors, with over panels in southwest parlor. Some six-panel doors on second floor. Simple molded doorways.
6. Trim: Simple wood trim, beaded edges on exposed corner posts.
7. Hardware: Iron hardware, H-L and strap hinges, mostly thumb latches, some open locks with brass knobs, large box lock in southwest parlor.
8. Lighting: Modern electric.
9. Heating: Central. Five fireplaces. In southeast parlor or family room, large original cooking fireplace, 2-1/2' deep, 6' wide, with oven, and oak lintel. Elaborate mantel in southwest parlor, fluted pilasters at the sides on pedestals are carried up to the ceiling, paneled over-mantel with carved shell niche in center, blue figured tiles around fireplace opening, fireplace opening enframed with crossetted molding. Downing, Early Homes of Rhode Island, p. 205, says of this mantel: "Originally the parlour fireplace opening was probably framed with a heavy bolection moulding,

but the lower part of the fireplace panelling has been altered."

Simpler, molded mantels on other fireplaces. The mantel in the southwest bedroom which is of a later date than the house, was taken from the southeast parlor where the large fireplace had been cut down in size but restored several years ago.

D. Site

The house is on a narrow lot in the middle of the block, set 40'-6" behind 38 North Court Street which faces on the street. Present landscaping in 1961.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect  
National Park Service  
February 1962