

Nathaniel Pearce House  
305 Brook Street  
Providence  
Providence County  
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-184

HABS  
RI,  
4-PROV,  
84-

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

## NATHANIEL PEARCE HOUSE

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RI,  
4-PROV,  
84-

Address: 305 Brook Street (moved from 41 George Street, in 1888), Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island.  
PLAT 13, LOT 222

Present Owner and Occupant: Dr. Halsey DeWolf

Present Use: Dwelling.

Brief Statement of Significance: This is a moderate sized frame house, built early in the nineteenth century for a shipmaster and owner, typical of that period.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1794 Mary Young sells for 60E to Joseph Peck a certain lot of land on the N side of George Street, bounded: N by James Manning 50'; E by grantor 130'; S by George Street 50'; and W by grantor . . . Deed Book 23, page 386, in Providence City Hall.
- 1798 U S Tax List shows Joseph Peck here as the owner of 1 lot of land.
- 1801 Joseph Peck sells for \$550 to Nathaniel Pearce, mariner, the above property, being the same as Deed Book 23, page 386, . . . Deed Book 28, page 386, in Providence City Hall.
- 1820 Fire Record . . . George Street . . . Nathaniel Pearce Self occupied . . . wood 2 stories hi in front and rear. 38' in front, 34' front to rear. Addition of wood 12' square, 2 stories high . . . Mss fire insurance records of the Providence Mutual Insurance Co. at the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, R. I. Vol. 6, policy #1933.
- 1852 Will of Nathaniel Pearce: "I give and bequeath to my wife Sally (Stoddard) all my property both real and personal for the term of her natural life. At her death I give to my beloved son Thomas Pearce for the term of his natural life 1/2 part of the estate on George Street where I now reside and

- then to his lawful children . . . The other 1/2 to my son Edward Pearce . . . Wills Book 16, page 435, in Providence City Hall.
- 1868 Edward Pearce et al sell for \$17,500 to Charlotte R Goddard a certain lot of land with all buildings, being the Mansion House of Nathaniel Pearce bounded: Beginning 6-1/2" E of the corner foundation of said house, then N 129.82' bounded E by Edward Pearce, trustee for Thomas Pearce; N by Brown University 49.96'; W by Brown University 132'; S by George Street 51' . . . Deed Book 180, page 311, in Providence City Hall.
- 1887 William Goddard et al u/w Charlotte R Goddard sell to Thomas P I Goddard "that lot of land with all buildings and improvements, being the same conveyed to Charlotte R Goddard by deed from Edward Pearce jr in 1868. . . Deed Book 342, page 268 in Providence City Hall.
- 1888 Thomas P I Goddard sells the above property to Brown University. (The Dwelling House thereon was occupied by John J DeWolf, physician who had lived there one year . . . Providence Directory). . . . Deed Book 347, page 165, in Providence City Hall.
- 1888 William Gammell and wife Elizabeth sell to Elizabeth DeWolf "a certain tract of land in the E/ly part of Providence Bound: W by Brook Street 60' (75.93' S of SW corner of George and Brook Streets) S by grantors and Charles Corvell 100'; W 60'; N..100' . . . Deed Book 345, page 103, in Providence City Hall.
- 1888 In this year the house was moved from #41 George to the above property being #213 Brook Street. John J DeWolf, physician, lived here . . . Providence Directory.
- 1889 The number of the house was again changed to #293 Brook Street. John J DeWolf, physician, and John H DeWolf lived here . . . Providence Directory.
- 1895 The number of the house became #305 Brook Street. John H DeWolf lived here. Dr DeWolf died in 1894.
- 1915 Property taxed to Dr Halsey DeWolf.

ANECDOTE as related to Antoinette F. Downing and Elvira Gowdey by Dr Halsey DeWolf, November 1961:

"My Uncle John (the physician) was a close friend of Tom Goddard's. Tom lived across the street from Uncle's home (41 George Street). Tom told Uncle John that he had just sold the property to Brown University who insisted that the house be either moved or destroyed. Uncle remarked that it was certainly a lovely old house at which Tom said: "Yes, I'd sell it for \$1.00 to any one who would keep it and not destroy it." . . . at which Uncle passed Tom a dollar bill and said "The house is mine."

2. Date of erection: Between 1801 and 1820, probably c. 1801.
3. Notes on additions: There are two wings to the rear, an earlier one at the northeast, and a later one at the southeast added about 1940, Wallis Howe, architect.
4. Source of information: Antoinette Forrester Downing, Early Homes of Rhode Island (Richmond, Virginia: Garrett and Massie, 1937), p. 382. (identified as the Dr. Halsey DeWolf house).

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: From "Ships Documents of Rhode Island" . . Vol 1 Part 1 . . . Rhode Island Historical Society:

Sloop ALONZO . Master: Nathaniel Pearce also part owner

Ship MARY . . . Owners John Corlis and J. H. Olney,  
Master N Pearce

Vol 1 Part 2:

Brigantine POLLY. . Built 1795 . . Owners Nicholas Brown  
and Thomas P Ives. Master: Nathaniel Pearce.

Prepared by Antoinette F. Downing and Elvira Gowdey  
for the Providence Preservation Society  
December 1961.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: This is a typical, medium size, two-and-a-half story frame house, built early in the nineteenth century. Characteristic details include the Ionic frontispiece, the window lintels with molded key blocks, the U-shape stairway with delicate step end ornaments, the mantelpieces, and other interior trim.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Main block, 38' (five bays) x 34', two-and-a-half stories, facing west. Plus two, two-story wings joined at first floor level.
2. Foundations: Random coursed ashlar brownstone, presumably from date house was moved.
3. Wall construction: Heavy timber frame visible on inside, clapboards, wood quoins.
4. Porches, stoops: Brownstone entrance stoop, seven steps, iron railings, two-story porch on later rear addition.
5. Chimneys: Two inside brick chimneys in main block, one in rear wing.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Main entrance, later lighted door, Ionic frontispiece, highly ornamented, fluted pilasters, modillion cornice, semicircular top light with molded key block, reeding around openings. French doors from dining room to back porch in southeast and rear wing, c. 1940, eight-panel rear kitchen door. Three doors on north side of house: side door to main block, eight-panel, Doric frontispiece, pediment, semicircular top light; two paneled, top lighted, wood doors in simple frames to northeast rear wing.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Six over six light, double hung windows. Adjustable louvered shutters. Three part window in southeast room of main block, with four over four light on sides and nine over nine light center windows. Wood lintels with molded key blocks on first floor front windows and on side windows. Two six over nine light windows in later dining room.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gable roofs, shingled.
  - b. Cornice: Molded cornice with fret bed mold on main block.
  - c. Dormers: Three gabled dormers on west front with cornices similar to house. Small shed roofed dormer on east side of main block.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Central hall, 8' wide, four-room plan. Present dining room in southeast rear wing, and kitchen in northeast rear wing. Bedrooms on second floor in similar arrangement. Storerooms in attic.
2. Stairways: Main stairway at rear of central hall to second floor, U-shape with landing, open string; delicate, scroll, step end sawn ornaments; molded, ramped handrail; round, fluted bottom newel; other newels round; slender, rectangular balusters, three balusters per step. Short flights of steps branch out from the landing to each side giving access to rear wings; on south side apparently dates from addition of dining room wing c. 1940. On north side may date from same time, but appears earlier. Side stairs at north center side of house against north chimney, U-shape with winders, open well, closed string, outside string has band of reeding, turned balusters and newels, molded handrail, continue to attic.
3. Flooring: Later 2-1/2" strip flooring on first floor. Original board floors on second floor, average 7" - 10" widths.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plastered. French scenic wallpaper in southwest parlor added later.
5. Doorways and doors: Eight-panel wood doors. Molded mitered double architraves, in more important location crosseted.
6. Trim: Ceiling cornices throughout, denticulated in southwest and northwest parlors, bracketed in central hall, molded elsewhere. Molded chair rail with band of reeding. Plaster wainscot, paneled in central hall. Second floor hall divided by archway, fluted pilasters, molded architrave, keystone.
7. Lighting: Electric.
8. Heating: Central hot air. Fireplaces in all rooms, one-story wood mantels. Southwest parlor, fluted pilasters, volutes under mantel shelf, high entablature with reeded bands and panels, dentil course under shelf, solid mahogany mantel shelf with molded, stepped-out edge. Northwest parlor, paneled pilasters and entablature, molded mantel shelf, fluted dentil course under shelf. Similar but simpler mantels on second floor, with crosseted molded fireplace surrounds in west rooms. Open, cast iron stove fitted into fireplace in northwest bedroom.

9. Hardware: Brass knobs and locks on first floor, glass knobs on second. Mostly butt hinges, some H and HL hinges on second floor. Original kitchen fireplace with oven in northeast room of main block, later cut down and fitted with a mantel similar to the others.

D. Site

1. General setting: Small level city lot, set back slightly from street.
2. Enclosures: Open wood fence on west and south with square posts, some with urns. Wood stake fence on north and east sides.
3. Walks: Brick.
4. Landscaping: Informal with small rear yard. Trees, lawn, shrubs, flowers.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby, Architect  
National Park Service  
December 1961.