

COLLEGE HILL

Bounded roughly by Olney, Hope,
Governor Streets, and the Seekonk
and Providence Rivers
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HAER No. RI-406

HABS
RI
4-PROV,
197-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

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Location: Bounded roughly by Olney, Hope, Governor streets, and the Seekonk and Providence rivers, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island.

USGS Providence, RI Quadrangle (A through D), Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:

A: 19.299460.4633820
B: 19.300540.4634400
C: 19.301240.4632050
D: 19.300580.4631700

Present Owners: multiple.

Present Occupants: multiple.

Present Use: residential, education, religion, and commerce.

Significance: College Hill is significant at the national level as a well preserved collection of historic residential, commercial, educational, and religious buildings dating from the early eighteenth century to about 1930. The area was listed as a district in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. Covering an area of nearly 500 acres, the district contains a variety of resources associated with the development of Providence from Colonial times to the present. Among the most significant resources are a line of remarkably well-preserved homes along Benefit Street, the campuses of Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design, and commercial, religious, and public buildings found along Water, Main, Wickenden, Thayer and Prospect streets. The development of the patchwork of neighborhoods that make up the district was governed by changing patterns and economic conditions that played significant roles in the evolution of Providence. The district retains its historic appearance, feeling, and association to a high degree.

Note: The text below has been adapted from the College Hill Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Edward F. Sanderson, prepared for the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1976.

PART I. COLLEGE HILL: DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

The College Hill Historic District boundaries encompass a large and highly significant collection of historic properties. More than 95 percent of the approximately 1,200 properties within the boundaries contribute to the district. Those resources reflect a wide variety of architectural styles and building types from the early colonial period through about 1940. For the most part, the contributing buildings are in good condition and retain a high degree of integrity in terms of their original architectural design and setting.

The College Hill area developed as distinct neighborhoods distinguished by relative affluence, land use, and architectural styles. College Hill is adjacent to Providence harbor on the South, the Providence River and central business district on the west, and residential districts on the north and east (including the Stimson Avenue, Power-Cooke, and Hope Street Historic Districts). The topography of a steep west-facing hillside has served as a barrier to commercial expansion from the center city. The area contains a large number of locally and nationally significant buildings as well as typical structures that help make up its fabric.

The western section along Main and Benefit Streets represents the oldest part of the city. Main Street, at the foot of College Hill, is primarily commercial, with the buildings close to each other and the street. Benefit Street, halfway up the hill, is a tree-lined residential area with a dense concentration of domestic Colonial period architecture. The section known as Fox Point lies at the southern end of College Hill, with Wickenden Street serving as its east-west commercial artery. The houses along the narrow streets that parallel Wickenden north as far as Arnold Street, are small or medium-sized dwellings that have sheltered several waves of immigrants to Providence. Further to the north, between Arnold and Williams Streets, wealthier residents built handsome houses during the first half of the nineteenth century. Tree lined streets and small lots characterize this section.

Through the center of College Hill runs an east-west corridor of institutional buildings from the Rhode Island School of Design, along Main and Benefit streets, to Brown University at the crest of the hill. The historic and picturesque campus of Brown University is the nucleus of this corridor. Outside of Brown's original fenced, four-block-square yard are modern academic buildings and houses that have been acquired by the University. North of the Brown campus, between Angell and Olney streets, is a post-1850 residential neighborhood with middle and upper class houses set back on tree-lined streets.

The original townsite of Providence was laid out along the eastern shore of the Providence and Moshassuck rivers. Following an Indian path, Town Street (now North and South Main Streets) served as the main community axis. Fifty-two long, narrow house lots, fronting on the mile-long Town Street, extended east over the hill to Ferry Road, known as Hope Street since 1807. Commercial and residential structures were mixed along Town Street, with the lands to the east used for agriculture and the Waterfront used for commerce. The section of the city with the longest history of development, this area is now characterized by a mix of structures dating from the early eighteenth century to the present.

In general, the earliest remaining structures on College Hill are a few dwellings from the 1730s located on the narrow lanes that climb the hill from Main Street. The Benjamin Cushing house of 1737 at 38 North Court Street is a good example. It is two stories high with a central chimney and a gable roof which overhangs at one gable end, a type of construction found on many houses of this period. The central doorway is pedimented and is finished with Doric pilasters set on high pedestals. A carved shell decorates the frieze above the pilaster cap. The Stephen Hopkins house (possibly 1707), 15 Hopkins Street is another highly significant building in the area constructed during its early period of development. This two-story gable-roofed dwelling is built on a two-room center-hall plan with the original one-room gabled house, now the ell, extending to the rear. Moved twice to avoid demolition, the building has been designated a National Historic Landmark.

A new neighborhood was created in 1756 when Benefit Street was laid out midway up the hill, paralleling Town Street. It was the first highway to disrupt the pattern of the original proprietors' lots. Known at first as the Back Street, this area has the best remaining concentration of Colonial and early Federal period residential architecture in the city. Containing primarily houses from the end of the eighteenth through the end of the nineteenth centuries, the street boasts several structures of national significance.

The mid-eighteenth century focus of the city was the old Providence County Court House, a building which served as one of Rhode Island's two State Houses from 1788 to 1900. Erected in 1760-62 on a parade ground between Town and Benefit streets, it is a five-bay, two-story brick structure set on a stone basement with quoining and rusticated window surrounds of brown sandstone. The west (main) facade was altered in 1850-51 by the addition of an Italianate stair tower and clock cupola designed by Thomas A. Tefft. In 1867, James C. Bucklin extended the building to Benefit Street on the east. A second major colonial landmark is the "College Edifice" of Rhode Island College (now Brown University). Sited on the crest of College Hill, the building was designed in 1770 by Robert Smith, a Philadelphia architect and designer of the very similar but earlier Nassau Hall at Princeton. The structure is a four-story brick building, rectangular in plan, with a central pedimented projection on each of its long sides. It has a balustraded hipped roof and a central bell tower. The interior was redesigned by the firm of Perry, Shaw and Hepburn in the 1940s. The building is now a National Historic Landmark.

Providence's first architect of note was the gentleman-amateur Joseph Brown (1733-1785), who was a member of the nationally prominent Brown family, a merchant, philosopher, and amateur astronomer. Brown designed his own house (1774) on South Main Street; the Providence Market House (1773), seat of city government until the third quarter of the nineteenth century; and the first Baptist Meeting House (1774-75). He relied heavily on English design books, owning James Gibbs' Book of Architecture and Abraham Swan's Designs (1745). From the former he selected a rejected design for the spire of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, London, as a model for the tower of the First Baptist Meeting House. Conservative in flavor, the buildings represent the apex of Colonial architecture in Providence.

College Hill residential expansion during the Federal and Early Republican periods continued along Main and Benefit streets, but was most concentrated in the newly-developing neighborhood east of Benefit Street, at the southern end of the College Hill district. This development corresponds to the commercial activity centered along the wharves of India Point and South Main Street. The area of intensive Federal-era construction stretches north from Wickenden Street, one of the oldest thoroughfares in the city, to John

Street. Impressive mansions on extensive lots were erected on Power and Williams Streets near Benefit Street.

The period immediately following the Revolution, which marked the emergence of Providence as the principal city of the state, produced some of the city's most notable buildings. In 1786, Joseph Brown designed for his brother, John, a three-story brick residence with central pedimented pavilion and a balustraded one-story Doric portico at what is now 52 Power Street. The interior followed a four-room plan with central stair hall, and featured carved woodwork and elaborate double-level pilastered mantels. This mansion established a standard of size and elegance that was emulated by four nearby houses, three of which still stand: the Joseph Nightingale House (1792) at 359 Benefit Street, the Thomas Poynton Ives House (1807) at 66 Power Street, and the Edward Carrington House at 66 Williams Street, built in 1811 and enlarged the following year. The house Caleb Ormsbee built for Joseph Nightingale repeated in wood the general scheme of the John Brown House, but the exterior is somewhat heavier, with large quoins and rusticated window caps. The Ives House is built of smooth brick and has a semi-circular entrance portico and a fanlight above a central second-story window. Showing generally lighter proportions characteristic of the early nineteenth century this mansion maintains the palatial scale of the adjacent John Brown House. In 1811, John Corliss, Jr., built a two-story brick house at 66 Williams Street. It was purchased the following year by Edward Carrington who added a third story and a double-level Corinthian entrance porch.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the practice of architecture turned from the domain of the amateur to that of men who made their living designing and erecting buildings. John Holden Greene, active from 1809 to about 1835, was trained essentially as a carpenter-builder, relying heavily upon design and pattern books. Greene's earliest known commission was the house he designed for Sullivan Dorr at the corner of Benefit and Bowen streets in 1809. Using colonial elements—Palladian window, Gothic detailed door and portico, handled in a Federal manner—he broke from the colonial block, to compose a house with a raised, three-bay, three-story central section flanked by single-bay, two-story wings.

Here and in several later houses, Greene solved the problem of College Hill's steep topography and narrow house lots by facing the house onto a side street and placing the service wing at right angles to form a forecourt. The houses that Greene built during the second and third decades of the century exerted a strong influence on the domestic design of Providence. Characterized by reduced scale, monitor roof and carved window caps, these houses were constructed in both wood and brick. Three prominent examples in brick are the houses constructed for Candace Allen (1819) at 12 Benevolent Street, Truman Beckwith (1826) at 42 College Street, and Benoni Cooke (1828) 112 South Main Street. In public buildings Greene left his stamp on College Hill with the Cathedral of St. John (1810) on North Main Street, a structure of Colonial form with Gothic details, modeled on Charles Bullfinch's Federal Street Church in Boston; and the First Congregational Church (1816) at the corner of Benefit and Benevolent streets, again inspired by a Bullfinch building, New South Church in Boston.

Construction in Providence during the second quarter of the nineteenth century began to pull the College Hill district to the east. Greek Revival houses were erected at the north end of Benefit Street, along Halsey and Pratt streets climbing the hill, and on Congdon Street near its crest. In the center of College Hill, a number of institutional structures reflect the national interest in antiquity and the Greek Wars of Independence. The John-Arnold-Wickenden Street area at the southern end of the district continued to develop with Greek Revival structures constructed between earlier Colonial (along Wickenden) and Federal houses, while the

area between Brook and Governor streets, from John to Wickenden streets, filled up during this period with simple carpenter-Greek-Revival houses.

College Hill houses of the Greek Revival period generally did not include a full temple portico. Most are gable-roofed structures, set end to the street, with the line of the eaves and cornice carried across the gable end to suggest a portico treatment. The typical carpenter-Greek-Revival house is three bays wide with the doorway to one side; the doorway is commonly framed by an unpedimented columned portico, or recessed with pilasters and entablature surround. Square hip-roofed houses with Greek Revival detailing are also common.

While widely used for domestic architecture, the Greek Revival was better represented in Providence by several public buildings. Following the designs of Russell Warren, Manning Hall, Brown University's third building, was erected in 1833 to serve as a chapel and library. Fronted by a tetra-style Doric portico, the building was constructed of brick and stuccoed and scored to resemble stone, a solution also used for Rhode Island Hall (by Bucklin and Tallman, 1840, front campus, Brown University) and the Rhode Island Historical Society Cabinet (by James Bucklin, 1844, 68 Waterman Street). Sited between University Hall and the similar Hope College (1822), Manning Hall dramatically displays the new scale and institutional character of the Greek Revival style. Another important monument from this period is the Providence Athenaeum (corner of Benefit and College streets), a granite Doric temple *in antis* designed by William Strickland in 1838.

The picturesque esthetic, which dominated so much of nineteenth-century architecture, appeared on College Hill in the 1840's with the erection of several Gothic Revival structures. In 1840 the Providence Marine Corps of Artillery constructed an armory designed by Russell Warren (now located at the corner of Benefit and Meeting streets) which, although still symmetrical, has square castellated corner towers and a monumental pointed-arch entrance portal. In ecclesiastical architecture, St. Joseph's Church (corner of Arnold and Hope Streets) of 1853 by P. C. Keeley was the first archeological Pugin-inspired Gothic structure in the district, followed by Richard Upjohn's St. Stephen's Church of 1860 (George Street). The Gothic Revival cottage, more popular for suburban or country residences, can be seen in only a few College Hill houses, 336 Benefit Street being the finest example.

The College Hill area experienced its most significant period of development during the second half of the nineteenth century. The northern section (from the Brown University area to Olney Street) was developed by Providence's middle and upper classes during and immediately following the Civil War. This period also shows the marked change from scattered construction to large-scale development.

The Italianate style, preferred for city dwellings by Alexander Jackson Downing, America's leading arbiter of taste at mid-century, was quickly accepted in Providence. Two prominent examples from 1853—the Thomas Hoppin House (383 Benefit Street) designed by Alpheus C. Morse and the Tully Bowen House (389 Benefit Street) designed by Thomas A. Tefft—illustrate this style well. Derived from the Italian Renaissance palazzo, these houses are generally block-like in massing, constructed of dark brick or smooth ashlar brownstone, and have quoins and aedicular window surrounds. A notable group of large Italianate mansions lines Prospect Street, including the William Binney House (1860) at 72 Prospect Street and the Smith Owen House (1861) at 79 Prospect Street—both designed by Alpheus C. Morse—and the Woods-Gerry House (1860-63) at 62 Prospect Street, designed by Richard Upjohn. The most impressive house of the group is

the George Corliss residence (1875) at 45 Prospect Street, designed by its owner on an asymmetrical scheme, with a four-story corner tower. Many smaller wooden structures were modeled on the Italian-villa prototype. The use of low, hipped roofs with wide overhangs supported on brackets, windows and doors with entablatures or pediments, and occasionally, an asymmetrically-placed tower or arcaded porch, characterize this style.

Paralleling Italianate forms from the 1850s to the 1870s was the architecture inspired by France's Second Empire. Among the few high-style domestic examples on College Hill is the George R. Drowne house (1864-66) at 119 Benefit Street. Set on a high platform, the two-and-one-half-story house rises from a tall rusticated basement with a double flight of steps to the main floor. The house has projecting end pavilions, flat boarded walls, elaborate quoining, pedimented windows, and a slate mansard roof. General Ambrose Burnside built an asymmetrical mansarded structure in 1866 following designs of Stone and Carpenter. Located at 314 Benefit Street, the building features a curved corner projection and shingled second-story bay window, which show the less academic nature of Second Empire design after the Civil War. Among smaller examples, the mansard roof, appealing because it provided another story without raising the cornice line (and the taxes on the house), was commonly combined with symmetrical forms characteristic of the Italianate style. Three good examples are located at 208, 214, and 238 Bowen Street.

There are few examples of the Victorian Gothic and Romanesque styles in the College Hill area. The influence of the writings of John Ruskin and of the architecture of H. H. Richardson appears mainly in buildings constructed by Brown University from the 1870s through the 1890s. Robinson Hall (corner of Waterman and Prospect streets), built as a library by Walker and Gould in 1878, is a good example of the Venetian-inspired Victorian Gothic, characterized by pointed arches and cast-iron crestings. Cruciform in plan, the building is surmounted by an octagonal lantern dome. Pembroke College, an English Gothic-style building by Stone, Carpenter and Willson at 172 Meeting Street, was founded in 1892 and eventually incorporated by Brown University. The Richardson Romanesque-style is evident on the Brown University campus in Sayles Hall, erected in 1881 following designs by Alpheus C. Morse; Wilson Hall, designed as a laboratory for the study of natural science by Gould and Angell in 1891; and Lyman Gymnasium, designed by Stone, Carpenter and Willson in 1896.

In domestic architecture, the influence of the English architect, Richard Norman Shaw, can be seen in several Providence Queen Anne houses. Although the largest number of excellent examples is located in the Stimson Avenue and Hope Street districts, a representative house is at 134 Brown Street, possibly designed by Stone, Carpenter and Willson. The two-and-a-half-story, cross-gabled house has a brick first story, a red tiled second story, and carved wooden decorative panels. A second, even more picturesque, example of this style is the Dr. George W. Carr house at 29 Waterman Street, designed by Edward I. Nickerson about 1885. This wood-framed double house rises from a basement of coursed ashlar to a second story of scalloped and plain shingles, and is capped by half-timbered and paneled gables. The nearby Fleur-de-Lys building (7 Thomas Street) was planned in 1885 by the painter, Sydney Burleigh, as his studio. More overtly romantic and deliberately medieval in appearance, the structure features half timbering with inset stucco decoration, overhangs in the second and third floor fronts, and the use of diamond-paned sash.

Having always retained a feeling for the past, Providence architects and clients readily accepted the new interest in Colonial architecture which emerged in the 1880s. The lingering Victorian penchant for vertical massing influenced the adoption or re-use of early Colonial styles with high-pitched gable and gambrel roof

forms. More truly Colonial were the forms used to ornament these buildings—Palladian windows, corkscrew balusters, scroll pediments—which were mixed with later, Federal and Early Republican forms like fanlights, swags, urns and sunbursts. The Metcalf house at 132 Bowen Street, built about 1890 by Andrews, Jacques and Rantoul of Boston, is a good example of Colonial Revival design. It has a gambrel roof and a central entrance portico, which is finished with a balustrade of twisted balusters, ramped railings and posts topped by flame finials. Another interesting Colonial Revival example is the Nancy Bishop residence (1894) at 141 George Street, loosely modeled on the late-eighteenth-century Jumel Mansion in New York City.

Although a number of twentieth-century houses are found in almost every section of the area, the primary building thrust in College Hill during this century has been institutional. The expansion of Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design, as well as the construction of two secondary schools, the Providence County Courthouse, and two insurance company buildings have been significant factors in shaping the appearance of the east-west corridor through the center of the district. Substantial residential architecture has been localized along Charles Field Street on land held by the Brown family until this century. Triple deckers, a common Rhode Island form in developing industrial towns, have filled in vacant lots or replaced older buildings throughout the district.

Beaux-Arts classicism, introduced to the United States by the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, was quickly accepted in Providence. The John Carter Brown Library of 1904 and the John Hay Library of 1910, both designed for Brown University by Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge of Boston, are representative examples of this formalistic approach to design using various classical sources. During the first three decades of this century, Beaux-Arts-trained architects provided College Hill clients with handsome residences in a variety of styles. Colonial Revival remained a dominant force, incorporating elements of Federal and Early Republican architecture, especially the forms of John Holden Greene. Although consciously archeological because it was planned as a museum for American decorative arts, Pendleton House, part of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, was designed in 1904 by Stone, Carpenter and Willson as an imitation of a typical Greene house, such as the nearby residence for Truman Beckwith. Of red brick with light stone trim, this "early Republican" house form includes flat incised window lintels, a fanlight at the doorway, fan and bat wings over the central second-story window, and a parapet of alternating panels and turned balusters. This loosely interpreted version of Colonial architecture continued into the 1930s with the houses at 155, 159, and 163 George Street representing an intact block of good late examples.

Despite the romantic associations of the Colonial past, other styles also appeared. The pair of houses on Prospect Street designed by Parker, Thomas and Rice for the Sharpe family are notable examples. The Ellen D. Sharpe house (1912) at 87 Prospect Street is Elizabethan in flavor with vertical cross-gable massing and pilastered chimney piles. Across the street, Henry D. Sharpe built a two-and-a-half story brick residence of French eighteenth-century design in 1928. The entrance door is flanked by two pink Marble columns and the walled garden behind is landscaped in a formal French manner.

Colonial Revival was the dominant form for twentieth-century public buildings in the area. Rockefeller Hall (enlarged and renamed Faunce House in 1931), designed by McKim, Mead and White of New York in 1904, is one of Brown's earliest Colonial Revival-style designs. In the 1920s, the Philadelphia firm of Day and Klauder designed a group of buildings in the style to fill out the remaining space on the west end of the school's original four-block campus: Metcalf Laboratory (1923), Hegeman Hall (1926), and Littlefield Hall (1930). Pembroke College was further developed by the erection of two buildings with Colonial-influenced

designs on Cushing Street: Metcalf Hall (Andrews, Rantoul and Jones, 1919) and Alumnae Hall (Andrews, Jones, Broscoe and Whitmore, 1926). A new Court House was erected in 1928-33 on the site bounded by College, Benefit, Hopkins, and South Main streets. Designed by Jackson, Robertson and Adams, the immense brick structure with stone trim climbs the hill in a series of gabled units with Adam-inspired decoration. The building directly across College Street, built by the Rhode Island School of Design in 1940, demonstrates a similar statement by the same firm trying to duplicate the massing of smaller individual connected buildings. Even through the 1940s and into the 1950s, a diluted Georgian style was used commonly. The firm of Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, notable for its work at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, designed two complexes for Brown—Wriston Quadrangle (1949-1950) and West Quadrangle (1956-1957)—and the headquarters of the Providence Washington Insurance Company (1949).

Except for a handful of houses and a few commercial structures, all construction on College Hill since mid-century has been institutional. Restoration and adaptive re-use have been the essence of domestic architecture. Most recently, townhouse apartments have been erected in the urban-renewal areas along South Main Street. The Medical Arts Building (Thayer and Waterman Streets) designed by B.S.D. Martin in 1938, is almost unique as an early example of modern design, showing an all-glass first story and continuous steel casements set in the limestone second story. The dormitory complex designed for the Rhode Island School of Design (between Waterman and Angell east of Benefit) by Robinson, Green and Beretta (Warren Peterson, consultant) in 1958 was constructed of red brick, but without specific Colonial detail. Two buildings by Philip Johnson for Brown University—the Computing Laboratory (corner of Brook and George), 1959-60, and the List Art Building (College Street), 1967-71—are among the significant modern structures built in the last two decades. The construction of the five-story, poured concrete List Building represented a new scale and image for academic buildings on College Hill. Even more out of scale with its surroundings is the Sciences' Library, a fourteen-story concrete and glass tower, designed by Warner, Burns, Toan and Lund in 1967-71. The same firm designed the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library in 1962-64; sited on the crest of College Hill, it is a prominent landmark of the district.

PART II. COLLEGE HILL: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

College Hill has played an important role in the State of Rhode Island's history from its establishment as a colony in the seventeenth century to the present. As the site of the original settlement of Providence Plantations in 1636, the area has witnessed the transformation of the region's economy from agriculture to commerce to industry. Throughout its history, the area has served as a center for political, governmental, scholarly, and artistic life in Providence and Rhode Island. The area also has important associations with people prominent in local and state affairs, who erected many of the fine houses that line the streets of its diverse neighborhoods. Beyond any specific event, person, or building, however, College Hill embodies several crucial stages of American social development. A progression of architectural styles and intact historic neighborhoods reveals the physical growth of Providence from a colonial town to a modern city. During the nineteenth century, residential demands of an increasingly stratified society of income classes vastly expanded the original area of settlement. During the twentieth century, pressures for expanding institutional development have been a constant threat to the survival of some of the historic College Hill neighborhoods. In recent times, a new importance has been added to the district by the outstanding work carried on by preservationists who have done much to ward off wanton redevelopment and enhance the historic character of the area.

Providence had its origin when Roger Williams and his followers settled around a spring located on the west side of what is now North Main Street. At a town meeting on August 20, 1637, this band of freemen signed a "civil compact" which guaranteed religious liberty for the first time in the new world. This tolerance of free-thinking fostered the growth of widely divergent religious beliefs. As a result, Providence, unlike towns in Massachusetts and Connecticut where the focus on religion prompted the establishment of townsites around a church set in a village green, developed in a linear pattern, with the proprietors laying out their house lots in along the Towne Street at the foot of the steep hillside by the eastern bank of the Providence River. John Smith's mill, built in 1646 at the falls of the Moshassuck River, near the junction of Charles and Mill streets, became the earliest "civic center" where town life centered for fifty years or more. By 1650 the settlement consisted of about fifty-one houses, the mill, and a tannery—all but two of which were burned in King Phillip's War (1675-1676). Rebuilt on its original plan, by 1700 the town had some 1,200 inhabitants.

In spite of early poverty, Providence's location at the crossroads of two great Indian trails and on natural water highways at the head of Naragansett Bay and the confluence of two rivers assured the town's mercantile future. As early as the 1650s Providence settlers were already turning away from agriculture to trade with Barbados and Newfoundland, and by 1700 Providence's geographic position had begun to make it the entrepot of southeastern New England. Ships from the coastal, triangle, and European trade routes moored at wharves on the west side of Towne Street, extending southward along the Providence River. Spermaceti works, rum distilleries, shops and warehouses added to the commercial activity of the port.

By mid-century a new civic center, south of John Smith's mill, had developed near Meeting at Main Street. In 1731, a courthouse was built to house the legislature when it met for the sessions held in Providence. The Providence Library Company, formed in 1754, was established in the building. Burned in 1759, the courthouse was replaced in 1762 by a new building that was erected across the street on the Court House Parade. After the Revolution, it served as the Providence State House until the present State House was dedicated in 1900. A town Jail was also built on Meeting Street, as was the first Friends Meeting House (1725). The Brick School House was erected at 24 Meeting Street as a private school in 1767, and John Carter's house at 21 Meeting Street served as the home of the Providence Gazette (printed at the sign of "Shakespeare's Head") and as the Providence Post Office, where Benjamin Franklin visited as Postmaster General.

In the 1770s, Providence merchants, still lagging behind their commercial rivals in Newport, made a concerted effort to upgrade the town's position in the regional economy. Among the leaders of the movement were the four Brown brothers. Sons of James and nephews of Obadiah Brown, the founders of the family fortune, the brothers were played a instrumental roles in all of Providence's civic projects. Of the four, John and Nicholas were most absorbed by commercial pursuits. Moses, who helped to found the textile industry in Rhode Island, became a nationally prominent Quaker leader, and Joseph was a scientist, college professor, and Providence's first notable architect. The alliance of the Browns with another Providence merchant, Stephen Hopkins (ten times Governor of Rhode Island Colony and a signer of the Declaration of Independence), merged politics with the mercantile rivalry between Providence and Newport. When the new Baptist College (established in Warren, Rhode Island in 1765), now Brown University, was permanently seated in Providence, the preeminent position of the town within the colony was assured. The College Edifice, designed by Robert Smith of Philadelphia and completed in 1770, was located high on the hilltop in lonely isolation above the built-up section of the town. The Market House (1773) was constructed

as part of the town's new commercial center in Market Square south of the Old State House at the eastern end of the Weybosset Bridge. The First Baptist meeting House (1774-1775) was built just north of Market Square, and merchants like Joseph Brown, whose house (1774) still stands at 50 South Main Street, were building north and south of the Market House along Main Street.

College Hill was a center for Revolutionary War activity during the ensuing war years. Stephen Hopkins' pamphlet, "The Rights of Colonies Examined" (1764), was an early defense of the American cause. The burning of the British revenue schooner *Gaspee* was plotted on the evening of June 9, 1772 at James Sabin's tavern on South Main Street. British tea was burned near the Market House on March 2, 1775. And two months before the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, the Rhode Island legislature, meeting at the Old Court House in Providence on May 4, 1776, voted a "Repeal of Allegiance" to King George. After hostilities commenced, the College Edifice was appropriated as a barracks and hospital for troops, the Brick School House was converted into an arsenal, and a beacon was erected on Prospect Hill (near the present corner of Prospect and Meeting Streets) to warn the inhabitants in case of an enemy's approach. Generals George Washington and Rochambeau visited the town several times during the 1780s, and were entertained at the homes—all of which stand today—of Stephen Hopkins, John Brown, and Joseph Russell.

Providence's subsequent dominance as a seaport was assured when Newport's trade was destroyed during the American Revolution. By 1800, the population of Providence numbered 7,500. The town's commercial wealth increased steadily as the port became southeastern New England's undisputed center for economic activity. John Brown led Providence merchants in the establishment of trade with China when he sent his ship "George Washington" to Canton in 1787. Profits from the lucrative China trade helped finance development at India Point and along Main Street, as well as numerous residences built along Benefit Street for merchants and sea captains. Still surviving along Benefit Street are the Federal mansions of merchant princes like John Brown, Edward Carrington, Joseph Nightingale, Thomas Poynton Ives, and Sullivan Dorr.

President Jefferson's 1807 embargo shattered New England's maritime economy. Providence merchants were also hurt, but many by that time had begun investing in emerging local industries, especially textiles. Once more, geography served Providence well as the town continued to develop as a transportation center. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Providence became the hub of an expanding network of toll-roads, railroads, and shipping, while the Moshassuck and other rivers were supplying power to new factories. Seril and Nehemiah Dodge, whose houses and shops were on College Hill, were working in silver by 1796, and by 1803 there were thirty establishments for manufacturing in precious metals—among them Jabez Gorham's jewelry and silver factory on North Main Street, an industry which continued in Providence until the 1980s. Prominent industrial concerns, including the Providence Steam Engine Company (1834), the Fuller Iron Works (1840), the Providence Tool Company (1844), established large manufactories near India Point because of easy access to shipping and to the Boston & Providence Railroad waterfront terminus.

Although the majority of Providence's factories were on the west side of the city, College Hill remained important to Providence's economy throughout this period of industrialization. Banks which financed the factories were located on South Main Street. The Providence Bank (1791) took over the Joseph Brown house in 1801, and the Providence Institution for Savings (1819) erected its own building in 1854 (enlarged in 1898). After a fire swept South Main Street in 1801, Providence's chief commercial district shifted to the west side of the Providence River. Nonetheless, Market Square continued to be an important commercial

district, as evidenced by the still extant Cheapside and Hope Block buildings. Other commercial buildings were erected along North and South Main Streets during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Public and institutional building kept pace with the commercial development of College Hill. Anglican King's Chapel, unused during the Revolution because of its association with Toryism, was replaced by the Episcopal Church of St. John (now the Cathedral of St. John) in 1810. It was designed by John Holden Greene, who also designed the First Congregational Church (1816) at the corner of Benefit and Benevolent Streets. The African Union Meeting on Meeting Street was founded in 1819 with the help of Moses Brown and served the black community which lived nearby. Since 1875, the congregation has been housed in the Congdon Street Baptist Church. Brown University expanded during this period with the addition of Hope College (1822), Manning Hall (1834), and Rhode Island Hall (1840). Nearby, the Providence Athenaeum built a handsome Greek Revival temple-in-antis granite structure, designed in 1838 by William Strickland to house Athenaeum collections and the private library begun by the Providence Library Company. The Rhode Island Historical Society, founded in 1822, constructed its "Cabinet" opposite the university campus in 1844. The Providence Corps of Artillery, a chartered command incorporated in 1801, erected an arsenal on Benefit Street in 1840. Later acquired by the state, it served as the State Armory until 1908.

The social history of College Hill can be followed in the development of its several neighborhoods. The first of these, located chiefly along Main and Benefit Streets, is the original compact part of Providence, where public and commercial building has been concentrated near the waterfront. That area retains a remarkable collection of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century residences, and a wealth of resources designed by prominent Providence architects, including Joseph Brown, John Holden Greene, Russell Warren, Thomas A. Tefft and Alpheus Morse. As Providence continued to grow, this original neighborhood expanded eastward up the hill from Benefit Street, gradually surrounding the university land with houses built in the Federal, Greek Revival, and Victorian periods. A portion of that area has been declared a National Historic Landmark (NHL) district. Individual NHL properties located there are University Hall and the Stephen Hopkins, John Brown, Thomas Poynton Ives, and Edward Carrington houses.

Fox Point, located at the southern end of College Hill, south of Power Street, received its first development soon after the Revolution. Wickenden Street served as the site of the earliest settlement, but most streets in the area were opened after 1790 when pressures for residential expansion led to building on previously open lands. Well-to-do merchants and businessmen built their large or medium-sized houses—many displaying fine architectural detail—on or near Benefit Street in the northernmost part of Fox Point. To the south and east smaller, more modest houses were occupied by tradesmen, artisans, and laborers. Many of those who lived in Fox Point followed maritime occupations connected with the India Point waterfront, which hummed with activity from 1787 to 1807. After the demise of the China trade, steamships serving the nearby factories continued to dock at India Point wharves. About the middle of the nineteenth century, the area south of Wickenden Street attracted several waves of immigrant residents.

Providence had a recognizable Irish community as early as 1814, but it was dramatically enlarged in the decades after 1847, and subsequently the waterfront section of Fox Point became known locally as "Corky Hill." St. Joseph's Church, designed by P.C. Keely and constructed at Hope and Arnold Streets in 1853, was built by Irish laborers to minister to an Irish congregation under the superintendency of the Rev. James K. O'Reilly.

A second wave of immigration to Fox Point began in 1890 when Portuguese and Cape Verdeans fled poor conditions in their homelands. Portuguese sailors who shipped aboard Yankee whalers had occasionally settled in Fox Point earlier in the century, and had already established the nucleus of the new immigrant community. At first confined to waterfront slums, many Portuguese purchased homes from Irish owners after the turn of the century. Our Lady of the Rosary, a Catholic Portuguese congregation organized in 1885, moved into its own church in 1905 at Benefit and Pike Streets. "Festas" (street celebrations) and "romarias" (religious pilgrimages) continue in Fox Point today. Although three-decker tenements were crowded in among the earlier houses to provide housing for a rapidly growing millworker population early in this century, the neighborhood has generally been well preserved, and many houses have recently been restored.

The district's third neighborhood, the main campus of Brown University, lies in the center of College Hill. Founded with the help of Philadelphia Baptists who decided to establish a college in Rhode Island Colony where their religious beliefs would be freely tolerated, it was first known as Rhode Island College. Located first in Warren in 1765, the college was moved to Providence in 1770 with the construction of the College Edifice, and it was named in 1803 in honor of Nicholas Brown (a son of one of the four Brown Brothers—Nicholas, Sr.) in gratitude for his gift of five thousand dollars to establish a professorship of oratory and belles-lettres. Among Nicholas Brown's many subsequent gifts were the Hope College building, Manning Hall, Rhode Island Hall, and a total of \$160,000 in university donations. Now surrounded by many extensions and new buildings, the old, four-block campus contains a variety of architectural resources dating from the late Colonial Period into the twentieth century.

The College immediately became a center of Providence educational and cultural interests and ultimately developed into one of the nation's leading universities. During the nineteenth century, as private residences encircled the campus, Brown was contained within a compact area with room for expansion. Early in the twentieth century a construction program filled this tract, and the University enlarged the campus to include blocks east, north and west of the main campus. Since the end of World War II Brown University has grown rapidly. Three major dormitory complexes (covering five square blocks), oratory, and library buildings, which break the scale of the adjacent residential neighborhoods were constructed during the 1950s and 1960s. Further expansion of Brown occurred in 1970 with the acquisition of the campus of the Bryant College of Business Administration, a several block area lying along Hope Street between Power and Benevolent Streets.

Pembroke College, was established in 1892 in response to agitation by the Rhode Island Women's Suffrage Association for the creation of a women's college at Brown University. Pembroke Hall, located on Meeting Street north of the main Brown campus, was completed in 1897 to house Brown's female students. Today the Pembroke campus occupies the two blocks north of Meeting Street between Thayer and Brown Streets.

West of the Brown campus, the Rhode Island School of Design erected the first building of its present campus on Waterman Street in 1892. The school was founded by members of the Rhode Island Women's Centennial Commission in 1877 to provide instruction in industrial and fine arts and to advance public appreciation of the arts. In this century, the school has expanded to include a three-block area along Benefit Street between College and Angell streets, with dormitories extending up the hill between Waterman and Angell streets.

The campuses of Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design, together with the Providence

County Courthouse, form a corridor of institutional structures covering twenty-six square blocks in the middle of College Hill. They represent a great architectural and cultural resource in the area and are central to the district's history, yet these institutions, some of which plan further growth, are also posing a major threat to the historic integrity. Beginning in 1950, when over forty buildings were destroyed and seven more were moved to make room for Brown University's Wriston Quadrangle, the erosion of adjacent neighborhoods has continued. The future of College Hill depends greatly upon the future development of its resident institutions.

The fourth neighborhood on College Hill is a residential area located north of Brown University's campus between Prospect and Hope Streets which was built up during the second half of the nineteenth century. The neighborhood developed from west to east as settlement and spread up College Hill from Benefit and Congdon Streets to Prospect Street around mid-century. Here large houses, predominately Italianate in style, were built for some of Providence's leading citizens by such architects as Alpheus C. Morse, Thomas Tefft, and Richard Upjohn. Among the earlier residents of Prospect Street were John Prescott Farnsworth and James M. Kimball, textile manufacturers and financiers; William F. Sayles, founder of the mill town Saylesville and owner of the largest bleachery in the world; and Dr. Marshall Woods, one of the United States' commissioners to the 1855 Paris Exposition. Prospect Street continued to be fashionable in the twentieth century, and some of Providence's more recent notables like Senator Peter Gerry and several members of the locally prominent Sharpe family constructed homes there. The area east of Prospect Street was developed during the latter decades of the nineteenth century after the areas closer to the city's downtown area had filled up. The area became a middle class neighborhood for the families of professional men, businessmen, and tradesmen whose houses reflect the diversity of building styles popular throughout the nation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The history and architecture represented by the contributing elements of the College Hill Historic District traces more than 350 years of development in that area. Containing a number of National Historic Landmark properties, as well as a highly concentrated collection of high-quality architectural resources with important links to the historic development of Rhode Island, the district is among the most significant cultural resources in Southern New England.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings

N/A

B. Historic views

Rhode Island Collection, Providence Public Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

C. Interviews

None conducted

D. Bibliography

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1957 *The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence, 1636-1950*. Providence, RI.

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell

1968 *Rhode Island Architecture*. Cambridge, MA.

Sanderson, Edward F. and Keith N. Morgan

1976 *College Hill Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*. Providence, RI.

Maps

D. G. Beers & Co.

1870 *Atlas of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*. Philadelphia, PA.

Anthony, David

1803 *Map of the Town of Providence*. n.p.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak), in association with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), is proposing a number of infrastructure projects to upgrade the Northeast Corridor Railroad right-of-way in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. In consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs), Amtrak and FRA have determined that the proposed "Northeast Corridor Improvement Project—Electrification: New Haven, Connecticut to Boston, Massachusetts" project will have adverse impacts on significant historic properties. Three memoranda of agreement outlining stipulations to eliminate, minimize, or mitigate adverse project impacts have been drafted by Amtrak, the FRA, and the respective SHPOs, and have been accepted by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The stipulations include the recordation of College Hill, Providence, Rhode Island, a property listed in the National Register of Historic Places, to Historic American Buildings Survey standards. The proposed project will necessitate the installation of catenary poles and overhead wiring and has been determined by the Rhode Island SHPO to cause an adverse effect.

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL Inc.) of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was retained by ABB Environmental Services, Inc. on behalf of Amtrak and FRA to prepare HABS documents for College Hill. This report was compiled in September 1997 by the PAL Inc. project team including Virginia H. Adams, Director of Architectural Projects, Stephen Olausen, Senior Architectural Historian, and Mary Kate Harrington, Architectural Historian. The large format archival photography was completed in April 1997 and October 1997 by Robert Brewster of Warren Jagger Photography, Inc., Providence, Rhode Island.

USGS Location Map
College Hill
Providence
Providence County, Rhode Island
Scale 1:24,000



Map of the City of Providence
Rhode Island
D.G. Beers & Co. 1870
Scale Unknown

