

George Benson House  
64 Angell Street  
Providence  
Providence County  
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-172

HABS  
RI,  
4-PROV,  
72-

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

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. RI-172

## GEORGE BENSON HOUSE

HABS  
RI,  
4-PROV,  
72-

Address: 64 Angell Street, Providence, Providence County,  
Rhode Island.

Flat 10, Lot 255

Present Owner: Robert H. I. Goddard, Jr., 25 Cushing Street,  
Providence 6, Rhode Island.

Present Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. Robert Leeson, Jr.

Present Use: Dwelling.

Brief Statement  
of Significance: This house was built for Captain George Benson,  
a prominent Providence merchant at the end of the  
eighteenth century. Built in 1797, this house is  
characteristic of the conservative, but elegant,  
Providence houses of this period both in its  
general form and its extensive detail.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1792 Moses Brown for E99 to George Benson, merchant  
"a lot of land lying Eward of the Baptist  
Meeting House, beginning 40' E of Lane to be laid  
open between Grantor's land and lot of Knight and  
Phoebe Dexter. Bounded N, E, W, by Moses Brown  
and S by Angell's Street, Benson to have the fence  
on the lot and privilege of passage at rear through  
Gate. . . Deed Book 23, page 302, in Providence  
City Hall.
- 1797 William Holroyd to George Benson for \$500 being  
same lot sold to Holyrod in 1792 by Moses Brown  
bounded: S by Angell Street 50'; W by 40' Lane  
to Brown 140'; N by Moses Brown; E by George  
Benson 140' together with fencing stuff on said  
lot with right to pass by gate on Moses land at  
back of lot. . . Deed Book 24, page 297, in  
Providence City Hall.
- 1798 George Benson living at this location, Henry R.  
Chace, Owners and Occupants of the Lots, Houses  
and Shops in the Town of Providence, Rhode Island

in 1798 Located on Maps of the Highways of that Date (Providence, 1914).

- 1814 George Benson..1 dwelling house...wood..2 stories high..43' front 38' back. Projection 10' X 12'.. 2 stories high. Lot 88' front and 140' back. Barn Wood..24' x 16'. One lot adjoining W/ly 40' front and 140' back. . .Mss. tax descriptions in the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, for the 1814 Providence direct tax to the federal government.
- 1826 George Benson to Seth Wheaton for \$7000 lot together with buildings and improvements. Bounded S by Angell Street 128'; W by gangway 140'; N 128'; E 140'. Being premises conveyed to grantor by two deeds from Moses Brown in 1792 and William Holroyd in 1797, Deed Book 52, page 102, in Providence City Hall.
- 1859 Estate devised by will by Seth Wheaton to daughter Abby Watson...Wills Book 13, page 406 and Deed Book 23, page 427, both in Providence City Hall.
- 1874 Robert Watson, Mary Allen, Peleg Hall and Sarah Hall to W Seabury Simmons property on SW corner of Angell and Angell Court N by Marshall Woods; E by Rufus Waterman; S by Angell Street; W by Angell Court. . .Deed Book 246, page 223 in Providence City Hall.
- 1882 W Seabury Simmons sells property to William Grosvenor, Jr. for \$30,000 lot of land on N.E. corner of Angell Street and Angell Court bounded: S by Angell Street 128'; W on Angell Court 140'; N by Marshall Woods and wife 128'; E by William Grosvenor 140'; being same as Deed Book 246, Page 223. . .Deed Book 314, page 351, in Providence City Hall. Property occupied by the Grosvenor Family until 1950.
- 1950 Property taxed to Caroline G. Congdon.
2. Date of erection: 1797.
3. Notes on alterations and additions: Some of the interior details were altered in the nineteenth century. In 1950 when Mr. and Mrs. Congdon acquired the house, they altered some of the interiors, and stripped most of the paneling to the natural wood finish. The mantel-piece in the library (southeast room, first floor) is original, but those in the other rooms are of dark marble, and are Greek Revival in style.

4. Sources of information: Antoinette Forrester Downing, Early Homes of Rhode Island (Richmond, Virginia: Garrett and Massie, 1937), pp. 305, 345. The Georgian Period, Vol. III, p. 130. Norman Morrison Isham, "Providence," White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs, Vol. IV, No. 3, pp. 5, 10.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Captain George Benson was a merchant whose trade was chiefly with South America and China. He entered into partnership with Nicholas Brown in 1783, in the firm which later (1791) became Brown, Benson and Ives. He retired from the firm in 1796.

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 square, two-story house, built in 1797 in a conservative Georgian design typical of Providence of this period. Characteristic features include the hip roof with modillion cornice and balustrade, the molded key blocks on the window lintels, the Doric entrance portico, the central hall with its elegant stairway, the reeding and rope molding of the ceiling cornices, the crosseted door and window frames, and the elaborate fireplace paneling in the library.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

### B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Large five bay main block, 43' x 38', two-and-a-half stories high, facing south with additional sixth bay on first floor only on west side. Later rear wing on northeast.
2. Foundations: Cut stone.
3. Wall construction: Heavy timber frame with corner posts visible on interior, clapboards, corner boards.
4. Porches: One-story main entrance porch 10' x 12', with Doric columns at the front corners, Doric entablature and cornice, segmental roof ending in a segmental gable.

5. Chimneys: Two interior brick chimneys.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Main entrance six-panel door with top lights. East side entrance - six-panel door, Doric frontispiece. Rear door on north side.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Six over six light double hung windows. Molded frames with ornamental wood lintels with molded key blocks, louvered shutters.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Hip roof with low monitor, sheet metal covering.
  - b. Cornice: Modillion cornice with denticulated bed mold. Eave rail with turned balusters and square paneled posts surmounted by urns. Chinese lattice rail around monitor.
  - c. Dormers: Two connected dormers on front and rear, gabled and pedimented with modillion cornice.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Four-room central hall plan, additional sixth bay on the west makes the two east rooms on the first floor, small square rooms and the two west rooms much longer. Kitchen wing to northeast rear. Bedrooms on second floor in similar arrangement. Alterations mainly in northeast part of main block connecting to later northeast wing. Small bedrooms on third floor with unusual corner dormer windows.
2. Stairways: Main stair at rear of central hall, to second floor, U-shape, open well, open string, double scroll cut stop ends, molded ramped handrail, round balusters with short turned section at the bottom, three balusters per step, turned newels, ramped shadow rail with paneled wainscot. Winding rear stair continues to third floor.
3. Flooring: Later strip wood flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
5. Doorways and doors: Original six-panel doors. Molded, crosseted architraves on big plinth blocks.

6. Trim: Large ceiling cornices throughout. First floor southwest room and central hall cornices have rope mold, bead and reel, and reeded fascia. Molded chair rail and paneled wainscot. Round-headed window at stair landing with fluted pilasters. Early scenic wallpaper in southwest room. Paneled inside shutters.
7. Hardware: Brass knobs, butt hinges, HL hinges on second floor. Brass case lock on front door.
8. Lighting: Electric.
9. Heating: Central plus fireplaces. Southeast room (library), two-story wood mantel with engaged Doric columns and flat fluted pilasters, crosseted fireplace surround and over-mantel panel. Marble Greek Revival mantels in southwest and southeast rooms. One-story wood mantel in northeast room. Two-story, paneled wood mantels in west rooms on second floor.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Large lot, northwest corner of Prospect and Angell Streets, bounded by DeFoe Place on west, sloping down from east to west. House at approximately in center of lot.
2. Enclosures: Open wood fence with square corner posts with cornices and urns on east and south sides. Stake fence on west and north sides. Stone retaining walls on south side.
3. Outbuildings: Garage at northwest corner of lot.
4. Walks and driveways: Brick walks to main entrance from south, asphalt drives from east.
5. Landscaping: Informal with large trees, lawn, shrubs, and flowers.

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