

Stephen Harris House
135 Benefit Street
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-151

HABS
RI,
4-PROV,
54-

PHOTOGRAPH
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

STEPHEN HARRIS HOUSE

HABS
RI,
4-PROV,
54-

Address: 135 Benefit Street, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island. Plat 10, Lot 200. 71 Benefit Street in 1824, 89 Benefit Street in 1847, 135 Benefit Street since 1866.

Present Owner: Sarah H. Bullock.

Present Occupant: Alfred and Sarah H. Bullock.

Present Use: Dwelling.

Brief Statement of Significance: This is an early, large frame house, preserved with few changes.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1747 Josiah Cotton, clerke, sells to John Mawney, merchant, for 4000^l in bills of public credit of the Old Tenor a certain lott of land containing 10 acres, and is the whole of "what I purchased of Peleg Williams in 1729, to wit: W on the Towne Street 8 1/2 poles between Gabriel Bernon on the N and partly on Jabez Bowen and Benjamin Cushing on the S, as the bounding fences now stand, E on a highway, together with the Dwelling House, outhouses, and all other improvements. Also...." Deed Book 12, page 159, in Providence City Hall.
- 1785 John Mawney, physician, for 12^l of current money, a certain lot of land bounded: W by Benefit Street, 50'; N by grantor, 180'; S by Benjamin Cushing, 180'. Deed Book 19, page 526, in Providence City Hall.
- 1793 John Mawney, yeoman, sells for 160^l to Stephen Harris with privilege of the fountain of water near adjoining on the E to open the same for purpose of drawing and conveying water, reserving to my use a leading way through the premises to my land. Bounded: W by Benefit St. 50'; N Samuel Jackson 130', S by grantee 180', and E Dyer 50'. Deed Book 23, page 270, in Providence City Hall.
- 1798 Chace Notes: Stephen Harris house, self occupied. Bounded: W on Benefit Street; S by Hannah Cushing; N by Samuel Jackson. House 29' x 38'...2 stories...wood. Value \$1300...Lot 60' x 90'. Also lot of land on E side of Benefit 55 x 150'. [Notes at the Rhode Island Historical Society gathered by Henry R. Chace in preparation of his book, 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)]

- 1820 House insured by Abigail Harris, widow of Stephen, self occupied. Wood; 34' in front, 40' front to rear; 3 stories high in front on Benefit Street and 2 in rear. 2 stories on the South front and 3 stories high on the North, with addition on the E end of about 18' x 14' of wood and brick 2 stories high. Store connected with house and addition by a porch 40' x 30' of wood 1 story high except on the front on Benefit Street which is 2 stories high. (Said store converted into a dwelling house in 1821)....Mss. fire insurance records of the Providence Mutual Insurance Co. at the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, R. I.--Volume 16, Policy #1902.
- 1827 In Division of estate of Stephen Harris he sets off to widow Abigail: "Mansion House improved and occupied by Stephen Harris and the new house now occupied by the said Abigail Harris, and lot of land on which houses stand. Bounded West by Benefit Street 117.4'...See Map. Plat Book 40...Page 5. Wills Book 54, page 246, in Providence City Hall.
- 1854 Property taxed to George J. Harris, Sarah Greene, and Abby Mann (heirs of Stephen Harris).
- 1885 Sarah H. Harris et al.
- 1924 Property taxed to Sophia C.H.Babbitt and Sarah H. Harris Estate.
- 1929 Property taxed to George Babbitt and Sarah H. Bullock.
- 1933 Property taxed to Sarah H. Bullock.
- 1824 Benjamin C. and George Harris lived here...Providence Directory.
- 1844 Arlon Mann, widow, and William Humphreys lived here...Providence Directory.
- 1847 Mrs. Abby (Harris) Mann lived here...Providence Directory.
- 1866 Mrs. Abby Mann lived here...Providence Directory.
- 1961 Alfred and Sarah H. Bullock still live here...Providence Directory.

B. Date of erection: The date of erection is not indicated by the documents, but from the detail it would appear to have been built about 1765. The house described in the 1820 insurance policy is the present one, but it must have been built long before then. According to the division of his estate in 1827, Harris owned two houses, and the one he was taxed for in 1798 may have been a different one from the present. The house mentioned in the 1747 deed was almost certainly a different house which has since disappeared,

and which may have stood on the old Towne Street (now North Main Street).

Prepared by Antoinette F. Downing and Elvira Gowdey
for the Providence Preservation Society
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement:

1. Architectural character: This is an early, large frame house, with typical detail of the period.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor.

B. Technical description of exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 34' (west end facing Benefit Street) x 40' (front facing south), two stories high. Five-bay facade on south front. On sloping lot with basement at ground level on west end. Two-story wing to the east, 18' x 14'.
2. Foundations: Fieldstone.
3. Wall construction: Heavy timber frame, plank walls, clapboards graduated becoming wider at the top, beaded corner boards. Clapboards carried down over exposed basement wall on the west end. Rear wing partly built of brick.
4. Porches: Small enclosed entrance porch at the main (south) entrance, probably later.
5. Chimneys: Large center chimney in main block, small chimney in rear wing, both of brick.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Two doorways from the basement open directly to Benefit Street, batten doors with shutters. Main entrance in center bay of south side, enclosed in entrance porch.
 - b. Windows: Double-hung windows; six-light sash on first- and second-floor windows, eight-light sash on attic windows, fifteen-light sash on basement windows on west side. Heavy molded window caps are typical of the period. Shutters with adjustable louvers.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof, asphalt shingles. Triangular gable end overhangs the wall below with cornice molding carried across lower edge; typical early detail.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed, molded cornice. Window caps of second-floor windows continuous with bed mold, a typical detail.
- C. Technical description of interior: Interior not accessible.
- D. Site: House placed with west end to the street, main entrance on the south side. West end at sidewalk line. Lot slopes up steeply from west to east allowing basement entrances on the west. Overgrown yard and garden on the south and east sides. Granite steps lead up from sidewalk to entrance porch.

Prepared by Osmund R. Overby
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