

DOWNTOWN PROVIDENCE

Roughly bounded by the Wonnasquatucket River,
Providence River, Interstate Highway 195,
and Interstate Highway 95

Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-405

HABS
RI
4-PROV,
196-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORICAL AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
DOWNTOWN PROVIDENCE

HABS
RI
4-PROV,
196-

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Location: Roughly bounded by the Woonasquatucket River, Providence River, Interstate Highway 195, and Interstate Highway 95, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island.

USGS Providence, RI Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:

A: 19.299720.4633360
B: 19.300080.4632750
C: 19.299450.4632210
D: 19.299020.4632760

Present Owners: multiple.

Present Occupants: multiple.

Present Use: commercial, government, and institutional.

Significance: Downtown Providence is significant as a concentrated, well-preserved collection of resources associated with the historic development of Rhode Island's most important city. Buildings within the district chronicle the history of the city's commercial development from about 1800 to 1940, the era in which Downtown Providence substantially achieved its present form. A wide variety of commercial types and styles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are represented. As the financial, commercial, governmental, and theatrical center of the state, the Downtown Providence area is an important cultural resource that preserves a wealth of information about Rhode Island's economic, cultural, and architectural history.

Note: The text below has been adapted from the Downtown Providence Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, William McKenzie Woodward, prepared for the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, 1983.

PART I. DOWNTOWN PROVIDENCE: DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

The Downtown Providence Historic District contains one of the most concentrated and significant collections of historic resources in Rhode Island. With a percentage of contributing to non-contributing elements of approximately 78 percent to 22 percent, the district retains a high degree of its integrity in terms of its setting, architecture, and historical associations.

Providence's central business district, unlike those of most other major American cities, is an easily definable entity physically separated from adjacent industrial and residential neighborhoods by distinct natural and man-made boundaries. It is bounded on the east by the Providence River, on the south by Interstate Highway 95, on the west by Interstate Highway 95, and on the north by the Woonasquatucket River, the Amtrak Northeast Corridor railroad tracks, and the Rhode Island State House.

Downtown Providence sits in a shallow topographical bowl south of the confluence of the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers. The land rises gently to the southwest, and steeper hills rise to the north and east across the two rivers. This topographical configuration is a result of leveling hills and filling bodies of water that once occupied much of the northeast section of the area.

Streets in Downtown Providence form a basic grid system, intersecting one another at right angles. The major axes run northeast-southwest and northwest-southeast. The only significant deviations from this grid pattern are Weybosset Street, which curves along its course and intersects Westminster Street at its northeast end, and Memorial Boulevard, which extends in an arch around the downtown area, connecting with ramps to Interstates 95 and 195 northwest and southeast of the district, respectively. The oldest of the downtown area's streets, Weybosset Street follows the course of the Pequot Indian Trail and originally skirted the southern edge of Weybosset Hill which rose at its northeast end. Created in the 1980s as part of the Capital Center Plan for the revitalization of the area between the State House and downtown Providence, Memorial Boulevard is the most recent street in the district.

Downtown Providence is a densely built area dominated by commercial and institutional structures. While these structures span the years between 1810 and the present and include representations of major architectural trends since the early nineteenth century, the greatest part of the architectural fabric is composed of buildings erected between 1870 and 1930. Despite the variety of styles that appeared during that period, the buildings share common architectural qualities, such as scale, massing, and materials, which distinguish them from the modern buildings that have been constructed in and adjacent to the district since World War II.

As a functioning business center, Downtown Providence is best understood as three separate, interrelated areas, each characterized by a predominant land use or activity and by concentrations of building types erected for specific functions that relate to the activity. These areas are not sharply delineated, and visual continuity exists among them.

The easternmost area is the financial district, bounded on the north by Kennedy Plaza, on the west by Dorrance Street and on the south by Weybosset Street. Traditionally the locus of financial institutions, this relatively small, eight-block area still contains the greatest concentration of banks, brokerages, insurance companies, and professional offices in the city. To accommodate the many businesses, the largest buildings in the downtown have been built in this area, including Providence's first high-rise steel-frame building, the 10½-story Banigan Building (1896), and the more recent 30-story Hospital Trust Tower (1974) and 20-story Fleet Center complex (1983). The large size and vertical massing of these tightly-packed skyscrapers lends the financial district a distinctive character sets it apart from the other areas of the city.

Directly north of the financial district is the government and transportation center, which, because of its large open space, contrasts sharply with the tall, tightly-packed buildings of the financial district. Providence City Hall, the Federal Buildings, the Biltmore Hotel, and former Union Station dominate the perimeters of Kennedy Plaza and City Hall Park, the largest open space in downtown Providence and an important terminal for intra-city mass transit. The buildings around Kennedy Plaza, built at regular intervals since 1870, form a frame for this large open space, which is itself a major monument of downtown civic planning.

The area southwest of Dorrance Street and north of Pine Street is predominantly commercial. Buildings there are generally three to six stories in height and reflect a variety of commercial types and architectural styles. Originally an early and mid-nineteenth-century, middle- and upper-class residential neighborhood, it was gradually transformed by the construction of stores and combination retail-and-office buildings after the Civil War. So complete was the transformation, that today only a handful of residential structures remain; all are now converted to commercial use. Beneficent Congregational and Grace Episcopal churches are two remaining historic buildings associated with the early residential function of the area. The area also contains the city's hotel and theatre district. Prominent examples of those building types include the Biltmore Hotel at the corner of Dorrance and Washington streets, Shubert's Majestic Theater at 195 Washington Street, and Loew's State Theater (now the Providence Performing Arts Center) at 200 Weybosset Street.

Two major types of intrusions detract from the integrity of downtown. New construction that is insensitive to its surroundings (including several recent parking decks, garages and minor commercial buildings) has been placed along major thoroughfares. More common and more easily changed are the poorly remodeled storefronts on the first and second stories of many commercial buildings. These alterations are much more frequent in the retail section of the downtown than elsewhere. Several recent projects throughout the area have restored original storefronts or created harmonious new ones. One prevalent theme in recent years has been the lead taken by local educational institutions, most prominently Johnson and Wales College and the University of Rhode Island, in refurbishing existing historic buildings and new construction. An example of this trend is the University of Rhode Island's rehabilitation of the former Shepard Company Building (1903) at 259 Westminster Street for use as its college for continuing education.

PART II. DOWNTOWN PROVIDENCE: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Downtown Providence is a highly cohesive urban environment which evinces its growth from an agricultural adjunct to the East Side of the city (the site of its original settlement) into the vital core of the City of Providence and the State of Rhode Island. It has served as the financial, commercial, transportation, and

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governmental center of state since about 1800. Downtown's homogeneity is richly complex, for many forces have shaped it. The area's buildings chronicle the history of architecture from Federal buildings of the early nineteenth century through the vast array of commercial types and styles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The growth of the area and its building patterns reflect mainstream attitudes toward the civic, commercial, and cultural development that characterizes the birth and evolution of a central business district as a nineteenth- and twentieth-century urban phenomenon.

Providence was settled on the east side of the Providence River by Roger Williams and his followers in 1636. Refugees from the Puritan society of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the early settlers established a community based on religious freedom and the separation of church and state. Unlike other New England settlers, the founders of Providence (who built no church until 1700) had no use for a square of common ground dominated by a meeting house, and the town grew in linear fashion along a major axis, Main Street, which parallels the Providence River on its east.

The area west of the Providence River, known as Weybosset Neck, remained unsettled for a century after colonization. The land was unappealing, dominated at its eastern end by the steep Weybosset Hill, which was surrounded by marshy lowlands and traversed by Muddy Dock Creek, which followed the course of present-day Dorrance Street. To the north, the Great Salt Cove (filled at the end of the nineteenth century) separated the Weybosset Neck from the broad plains and rolling hills between the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck Rivers.

In the seventeenth century, the Weybosset Side was common ground, an agricultural and pastoral adjunct to the more densely settled "Town" on the east side of the river. A bridge was built over the Providence River in 1660 to connect the Town with the hinterland and the Pequot Trail, which followed present-day Weybosset Street. That bridge, however, was found structurally unsound and demolished, and a permanent link across the river was not effected until 1711. Land on the Weybosset Side was gradually parceled out to individuals in the early part of the eighteenth century, but settlement there was limited until Weybosset Hill was leveled, beginning in 1724.

A new impetus was given to settlement on the Weybosset Side when Reverend Joseph Snow, Jr. led a group of dissidents out of the First Congregational Society during the Great Awakening and established the New Light Meeting House in 1746 on the site of the present Beneficent Congregational Church on Weybosset Street. Daniel Abbott, impressed with the "true New England meetinghouse" quality of the venture, donated the land immediately east of the structure in 1746 as a village common, now Abbott Park.

Joseph Snow, Jr. provided not only spiritual leadership, but also the motivating force behind the development of the Weybosset Side in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. In 1749, Snow launched a major real estate venture by forming a corporation to purchase the Mathewson farm (bounded today by Westminster and Weybosset Streets from Clemence Street to Cathedral Square). In 1751, Snow induced the new owners of this land to donate portions of it for a new street from Weybosset Bridge to Cathedral Square. By 1753 Westminster Street was constructed as far west as Dorrance Street, reaching Cathedral Square by the late 1760s. This eighteenth-century community was thus chiefly responsible for the current street system and a residential neighborhood, well-established on the West Side by 1800.

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Despite some commercial and industrial development on the Weybosset Side in the eighteenth century and the construction of Long Wharf (present-day Custom House Street) in 1792, the original settlement east of the Providence River remained the center of such activity until the early nineteenth century. Bounded by the Providence River on the west and a steep hill on the east, this area was limited in its potential for growth. This physical restraint was emphasized on January 21, 1801, when a devastating fire destroyed a total of thirty-seven structures along South Main Street. Consequently, several commercial institutions moved across the river to less crowded land.

The first major commercial enterprise to move across the river, Exchange Bank, established new quarters at the corner of Exchange and Westminster Streets at the heart of what would become the financial center of Providence. Exchange Bank was followed in 1802 by the Washington Insurance Company at the corner of Washington Row and Westminster Street and in 1814 by the Union Bank, which erected its offices (not extant) at the corner of Westminster and Dyer streets. The movement of the Post Office in 1802 from the Market House to the Whitman Block further signaled the growing importance of today's Turk's Head area as a commercial center. Turk's Head took its name from the ship's figure head resembling a Turk that was displayed in the balustrade over the piazza of Jacob Whitman's house (ca. 1750) which stood at the intersection of Westminster and Weybosset Streets. The sculpture was destroyed in 1815, but the place-name remained. (The Turk's Head Building erected on this site in 1913 features the Turk's effigy in the stringcourse above the second story.)

This commercial growth at Weybosset Neck decreased the isolation of the residential area farther west. Its adjacency to the new commercial district made it an appealing place to live, and in the years after 1800 it became a fashionable area with high-style dwellings, such as the elaborate Benjamin Hoppin House on Westminster Street (1816, John Holden Greene, architect; demolished 1875). Only three early-nineteenth-century dwellings, all dating from the 1820s, remain downtown: the Stephen Waterman House at 181 Weybosset Street (1823, John Holden Greene, architect), now altered almost beyond recognition; the Benjamin Dyer Block (ca. 1820, John Holden Greene, architect) at Weybosset and Mathewson streets, probably the earliest row house built in nineteenth-century Providence; and the Arnold-Palmer House at Chestnut and Pine Streets (1826, John Holden Greene, architect), moved to this site and restored in the 1960s.

The growth of the Weybosset Side residential neighborhood changed the religious composition of the New Light village. The original congregation continued to flourish and erected a new meetinghouse, the Beneficent Congregational Church, on the site of the 1746 structure in 1808. Remodeled into its present Greek Revival form by James Bucklin in 1836, the church's gold dome continues to dominate upper Weybosset Street. In addition, Baptists and other Congregationalists erected churches (long since demolished) on Pine Street in 1807. Another group of Congregationalists erected the Westminster Congregational Church on Mathewson Street in 1829. Heavily altered, the building retains only a small fraction of its original fabric. In 1845, Episcopalians commissioned Richard Upjohn to design Grace Church, which still stands at the corner of Westminster and Mathewson Streets. This building was the first American church with a corner tower and spire; it presages the innumerable asymmetrical Gothic-style churches built in the late nineteenth century. In 1847, the Second Universalist Church, designed by Providence's premier mid-nineteenth-century architect, Thomas A. Tefft, was constructed at the corner of Weybosset and Eddy Streets. Now heavily altered on the first story, the building's upper-story articulation and corbeled cornice intact. The growing Roman Catholic community erected its first church, SS. Peter and Paul, at the western

intersection of Westminster and Weybosset Streets in 1838, and Mathewson Street Methodist Church followed in 1851. Both buildings were later demolished for the present structures on the sites.

While upper Weybosset and Westminster Streets continued at least partially as residential neighborhoods through the nineteenth century, the increasing complexity and scale of Rhode Island's economy demanded a centrally-located area devoted specifically to the distribution of goods and money. Geographic barriers to the east necessitated westward expansion of the commercial area centered around Market Square and Turk's Head.

Before 1800, Rhode Island's economy centered on mercantile activity largely supported by shipping trade with Europe, Africa, the Far East, and other coastal American cities. Industry was limited to the small-scale processing of agricultural products, shipbuilding, and distilling. But events during the early years of the nineteenth century necessitated a shift in Providence's economic base. Shipping was hindered by the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, crippled by the Embargo of 1807, and dealt a devastating blow by the War of 1812. The future of continued economic growth lay in industrial development. Consequently, textile manufacturing, which had been slowly expanding since the introduction in 1790 of water-powered cotton spinning at Samuel Slater's mill in Pawtucket, received new attention after 1812. Rapid industrialization, the key to Rhode Island's economy in the early nineteenth century, required a more sophisticated and specialized marketplace for the exchange of goods, services, money, and credit. Beginning in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the downtown area was developed to handle that new and increasingly complex commercial activity.

The area around Turk's Head became firmly established as the city's commercial and financial center by the 1820s. In 1824, the Whitman House at Turk's Head was demolished to make way for the three-story, brick Whitman Block, perhaps the earliest of the commercial blocks on the Weybosset Side. The Hamilton Block, at the northeast corner of Westminster and Exchange streets, was constructed the next year. The most important new commercial building of the period, the Arcade, was erected just west of Turk's Head by Cyrus Butler and the Arcade Realty Company in 1828. This monumental Greek Revival structure, designed by James Bucklin and Russell Warren, housed a revolutionary marketing concept incorporating a number of small shops on three levels along a skylighted passage linking Westminster and Weybosset Streets. The Arcade was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1976.

Highway construction in the 1820s further facilitated the growth of the area. Waterfront roads circumscribed the Turk's Head area: Cove Street extended along the southern side of the Cove following what is now the southern roadway of Kennedy Plaza; Dyer Street extended south along the Providence River from Westminster Street; and a bridge was constructed to connect Cove Street and Westminster Street at the western edge of the Providence River, along present-day Washington Row. A series of cross streets, consisting of Hay, Peck, and Orange streets, was constructed from Weybosset Street to the wharf area at present-day Dyer Street.

Major thoroughfares converging on the downtown facilitated the growth of the area as a regional center. New roads to outlying areas were established and aboriginal roads improved, beginning late in the seventeenth century. A second link in the transportation network was created in 1828 with the completion of the Blackstone Canal, which linked Worcester, Massachusetts with Providence. The swift industrial and commercial development in the early nineteenth century had created a need for such a transportation

improvement, but with the concurrent development of rail transportation, the utility of the canal ended in the 1840s.

While the highways and canal that converged on downtown reinforced its role as a transportation and commercial center, the railroad further provided a direct link between Downtown Providence and other major East Coast cities. Rail service in Providence commenced in 1835, but because of geographical barriers and lack of coordination between the independent railroad companies, through service was not immediately possible, and trains from the south stopped at the west side of the Providence Harbor, where passengers were boarded a ferry to a terminal across the Harbor at India Point to make connections with trains going north. The need to facilitate continuous rail lines through Providence brought about the first major physical transformation of the downtown.

The Providence and Worcester Railroad Company, incorporated in 1844, petitioned the City Council in 1845 for permission to establish continuous tracks through Providence, with rail yards and passenger and freight terminals near the business district on the Weybosset Side. In January 1846, the City Council approved plans for the partial filling of the Cove and the construction of the elliptical Cove Basin, with highways and railroad tracks running along its southern edge and a promenade eighty feet wide surrounding the basin. Until this time, the Cove remained much as it was at the time of Roger Williams' purchase. Construction began the following year on the Union Station complex, which was located on the southern side of the Cove Basin, on the site of the present north roadway of Kennedy Plaza. The passenger depot, designed in the Lombard Romanesque style by Thomas A. Tefft, was supplemented by two freight depots to the east of the Cove Basin on Canal Street. The project, completed by 1848, gave definition for the first time to the northern border of downtown Providence by creating a major public square on the West Side, Exchange Place, which soon became a focus for civic activity as well as the center of Providence's transportation network. The last remaining structure of this first station complex, the northernmost freight station on Canal Street, was demolished in 1980.

Business and building activity flourished in the downtown area during the prosperous years between the Panics of 1837 and 1857. Providence's lead as the economic center of Rhode Island, established after the Revolution, greatly increased during these years. Manufacturing became the mainstay of the state's economy, and its impact had two major effects on the downtown beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century: the large industrial enterprises located along the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers began to seek office space near the city's commercial center, and many new banks and insurance companies were incorporated by the General Assembly to provide financial support for industrial expansion. To accommodate this growing economy, a number of handsome, substantial buildings and commercial blocks were constructed downtown.

The Turk's Head area continued to be the focus of major downtown building activity during the 1840s and 1850s. In 1843, the Providence Washington Insurance Company erected the Washington Buildings on Washington Row. This monumental three-story structure, designed by James Bucklin in the Greek Revival style, consisted of a central pilastered- and-pedimented granite pavilion flanked by balustraded brick wings. (The Washington Buildings were demolished in 1916 for the construction of the present Hospital Trust Bank Building.) Bucklin was also responsible for the 1845 Exchange Bank Building, a three-story vernacular Greek Revival structure that still stands at the corner of Exchange Street and Kennedy Plaza (a fourth story was added in the twentieth century). The mid-1850s saw the addition of three extremely important buildings

in the Turk's Head vicinity, all built in the Italianate style. The four-story Bank of North America Building at 48 Weybosset Street, one of the last buildings designed by Thomas A. Tefft, and the Merchant's Bank Building at 20 Westminster Street (Alpheus C. Morse and Clifton A. Hall, architects) represent the growth of banking during these years. The Federal Building (known as the Custom House, Ammi B. Young, architect), at 24 Weybosset Street consolidated the various United States Government agencies in one location. Located at the corner of Weybosset and Custom House (then known as Long Wharf) streets, the building was close both to the core of the central business district and to shipping activity along the Providence Harbor.

During those years the central business district became an area of specialized land uses. While the area around Turk's Head was gaining importance as the city's financial center, an entertainment district began to grow on Westminster Street. In 1847 Howard Hall, the first of four structures on its site, was constructed from designs by Thomas Tefft at the northeast corner of Dorrance and Weybosset streets; this structure accommodated public presentations by celebrities as diverse as Jenny Lind, Sam Houston, Tom Thumb, and Edgar Allen Poe. Howard Hall, rebuilt in 1856 after a major fire in 1853, was augmented in 1854 by the adjacent Forbes Theatre, which, like the first two Howard Buildings, met a fiery end shortly after its construction.

Events after mid-century reinforced the burgeoning industrial economy and contributed to the intensification of commercial development in Downtown Providence. With the development of steam power for industrial use, manufacturing was no longer restricted to locations near swiftly flowing rivers for water power, and geographical dispersion of industrial facilities became practicable, precipitating a period of rapid economic growth in the second half of the century. The Civil War further spurred Rhode Island's industrial growth. Burnside Rifle Works, Providence Tool Company, and Builders Iron Foundry produced weapons for Union troops, while the Providence woolen mills expanded production to provide uniforms. The textile industry decisively captured the growing domestic market from foreign competition because of the blockade of Southern ports and the consequent cessation of cloth making in England. The initiation of horse-drawn streetcar service in 1864 and its subsequent expansion began to knit the various neighborhoods of Providence into an urban whole. By the end of the century, electric streetcar lines radiated in all directions along major streets from downtown, thereby reinforcing its role as a transportation center.

The years following the Civil War saw vigorous growth in the downtown. New construction in the area around the Turk's Head further reinforced its commercial importance. Most of these new structures were designed in one of the various Victorian styles. Among them were the Gothic cast-iron-front Equitable Building at 38 Weybosset (1874), Wilcox Building at 42 Weybosset (1875), and Hall's Building at 45-53 Weybosset (1876). The largest private structure downtown at that time was the six-story, Second Empire-style Butler Exchange Building, which was erected in 1873 between Westminster Street and Exchange Place just north of the Arcade. Butler Exchange provided a large amount of office space consolidated in one location at the middle of the financial district as well as a shopping arcade on the ground level which, in concert with that of the Arcade, provided a thoroughfare between Exchange Place and Weybosset Street. (Butler Exchange was demolished in 1925 for the construction of the Industrial National Bank Building.)

While the Turk's Head remained the City's financial center, commercial and retail activities that had previously been located east of Dorrance Street began a steady movement westward, occupying and eventually replacing the residential structures that had been erected in that area during the first half of the

nineteenth century. This movement signaled a further diversification of commercialization and specialization of land use within the central business district. Among the earliest major commercial structures west of Dorrance Street were three examples of the work of architect George Waterman Cady. They were the High Victorian Gothic-style Dorrance and Gaspee buildings (both built in 1876) at 180 and 206 Westminster Street and the Second Empire-style Burgess Building (1870) at 230 Westminster Street. Another important building in that area during the 1870s was the Second Empire-style Earle Building at 56-70 Washington Street. A group of smaller commercial buildings were erected in the early 1870s on the north side of Westminster Street between Mathewson and Moulton Streets. While commercial growth was slower on upper Weybosset Street, several early Victorian period buildings, including the Italianate-style Bush Company Building (1873) at 214 Weybosset and the Gothic-style Richmond Building (1876) at 270 Weybosset Street, were constructed in that old residential neighborhood during the 1870s.

A number of important educational institutions were established downtown during the middle years of the nineteenth century. The State Normal School, forerunner of today's Rhode Island College, occupied the Second Universalist Church on Weybosset Street beginning in 1852. Mowry and Goff's English and Classical School for Boys opened in the Lyceum Building (1858) at 100 Westminster Street in 1864 and later built its own structure on Snow Street (both buildings have since been demolished). The Providence Public Library, founded in 1875, occupied several buildings downtown, including Butler Exchange and the English and Classical School Building, before erecting permanent quarters at Washington and Greene Streets.

The election of Thomas A. Doyle as Mayor of Providence (1864-1869, 1870-1881, 1884-1886) marked the beginning of a twenty-year period of administrative continuity for the City. One of the earliest proponents of urban renewal, Doyle reorganized city bureaus and played a major role in the reorganization of the City's transportation system. Further, he laid the groundwork for the filling of the Cove Basin and the construction of a new Union Station. The bronze statue of Mayor Doyle, commissioned by the City and installed at Cathedral Square in 1889, honors the man who guided the City through two decades of steady growth; it was moved to the corner of Broad and Weybosset Streets during the 1960s.

Mayor Doyle's major civic project of the 1870s, the construction of City Hall, not only provided much-needed office space for the growing City government, but also gave monumental definition to the west end of Exchange Plaza. Designed in the Second Empire style by Samuel J. F. Thayer, the building was erected between 1874 and 1878 on a lot acquired for the construction of a city hall in 1851.

Continued economic growth in the last two decades of the nineteenth century supported building activity which gave the downtown much of its present form. Many of the buildings and institutions that continue to dominate the downtown date from this period, and the area's present topographical form was conceived and executed at this time.

The Turk's Head area was the site for four prominent new buildings during the 1880s and 1890s. In 1886, the firm of Stone, Carpenter and Willson designed a new edifice for the Exchange Bank to replace the southern half of the earlier building on Exchange Street between Westminster Street and Exchange Place. The Banigan Building at 10 Weybosset Street signals a change from the complex and picturesque late Victorian compositions to more academic styles based on classical and Renaissance prototypes. This ten-story, steel-frame structure, designed in the Renaissance Revival-style by the firm of Winslow and Bigelow, was Providence's first "skyscraper." The Francis and Lauderdale Buildings, designed by Stone, Carpenter

and Willson and erected on adjacent lots on Westminster Street in 1894, are fine examples of the reemerging classicism in commercial buildings that proliferated in Providence between 1890 and 1920.

By the 1880s, the area west of Dorrance Street was well established as a retail center for downtown. Stores there represented a new distinction between wholesale and retail trade, a change in the distribution mode that was largely a product of nineteenth-century specialization of merchandising. Department stores in particular represented an economy of scale and mass marketing that was both made possible by and necessary for the increasingly complex economy. The first department store in Providence was Callendar, McAuslan and Troop's "Boston Store," which opened in the early 1870s at the corner of Westminster and Union streets. The success of that store led not only to its expansion by 1892 to most of the block of Westminster between Eddy and Union Streets, but also to the organization of competing firms. The Shepard Company was founded in 1880 in a small building on Westminster Street between Union and Clemence streets. Shepard's soon achieved great popularity with the buying public, and expanded by building and acquisition to occupy the whole block bounded by Westminster, Clemence, Washington, and Union streets. Both the Shepard's and the Boston Store buildings were designed with a mixture of Romanesque and Classical motifs within the context of the emerging Commercial Style. The latter form continued to be re-interpreted for downtown retail and commercial buildings until the First World War.

The success of Shepard's and the Boston Store helped secure Providence's role as a regional commercial center and no doubt encouraged other retail enterprises to move to middle Westminster Street and to nearby Weybosset Street. Gladdings, a well-established women's wear firm, moved into the Burrill Building at 291 Westminster Street (Stone, Carpenter and Willson, architects) upon its completion in 1891. With its "base-shaft-capital" vertical arrangement and articulated steel-frame construction, the Burrill Building is reminiscent of contemporary buildings by Louis Sullivan.

The Tilden-Thurber Building, directly across Westminster Street from the Burrill Building, is far more exuberant. Designed by Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge and completed in 1895, the four-story building relies more heavily on classical and Renaissance motifs, assembled in a highly original way, for the elaboration of its wall surface.

A third competitor in the department-store field opened on Weybosset Street in the Hodges Building in 1891. Like the Boston Store and Shepard's, the Outlet Company rapidly expanded to occupy an entire city block, and absorbed the Hodges Building in its expansion. Like Shepard's, the Outlet Company was a "full service" department store, stocking furniture, housewares, clothing, books, cosmetics, and comestibles. The two stores remained in one-to-one competition until the demise of Shepard's in 1974. The Shepard's Building was rehabilitated in the mid-1990s for use by the University of Rhode Island's Continuing Education program. The Outlet Company Building was left vacant in 1982 and was destroyed by fire in 1986.

The growth of the retail shopping area was not limited to single-store buildings. A number of large buildings containing smaller retail enterprises and services were constructed in the area west of Dorrance Street during the two decades before 1900, perpetuating an older pattern for the conduct of commerce. The most elaborate of those was the Conrad Building designed by Stone, Carpenter and Willson in 1885 and located at 371-391 Westminster Street. Drawing on a wide range of historical styles, this building represents the pinnacle of Victorian eclecticism in Providence. The Lederer Building of 1897 at 139 Mathewson Street combines the rudimentary format of the Commercial style with more elaborate Beaux-Arts-style detailing. The seven-

story Alice Building (Martin and Hall, architects, 1898) at 236 Westminster remains within the tradition of Second Renaissance Revival style buildings, and is further distinguished by arcades of small shops on each of the upper floors.

The commercialization of Westminster Street and its adjacent side streets was largely influential on the form of the Mathewson Street Church building of 1895, built to replace the previous building of 1851. This Commercial-style building with Beaux Arts-style ornament was designed by Cutting, Carleton and Cutting to blend harmoniously with nearby commercial buildings, and its facade belies its ecclesiastical functions.

The railroad facilities built in 1848 had begun to prove insufficient by the early 1870s, and in 1873 the first of several commissions to study the reorganization of the land around the Cove Basin and the rail line was established. The study spanned the next two decades, and was the subject of heated debates, proposals, majority and minority commission reports. The project, which was finally undertaken in 1892, has proved of major significance to Providence's architecture, city planning, and transportation.

The collaborative project between the City of Providence and the railroads provided for construction of retaining walls for the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck Rivers, filling the Cove Basin, moving of the station and railroad tracks approximately five hundred feet north, and construction of a new Union Station complex. This project called for the demolition of Thomas Tefft's impressive Lombard Romanesque-style station of 1848. The commission for the design of the new complex was given to Stone, Carpenter and Willson.

Landscaping of the open spaces of Exchange Place and City Hall Park was an outgrowth of the City Beautiful Movement. Originally, only a block of large buildings on the south side of the area and the City Hall provided sufficiently monumental definition for this new open space, but new construction in the early years of the twentieth century filled the perimeters of the area with buildings of appropriate scale.

While the last two decades of the nineteenth century gave final definition to the present form of the downtown fabric, the first three decades of the twentieth century represented the culmination of the vigorous growth of the central business district that began in the first half of the previous century. Industrial activity continued as the primary element in Rhode Island's flourishing economy. The prosperity of those years bolstered Providence's position as a major metropolitan transportation center. The completion of the Union Station complex in 1898 had provided Providence with better, more extensive service. Railroad service was further improved in 1909 with the completion of the East Side tunnel, which linked the main railroad artery with suburban lines to East Providence, Warren, Bristol, and Newport and thus solidified Providence's position as a major regional center (this link was severed in 1981 as a first step in the Capital Center Project). Extended streetcar lines also connected outlying suburbs with downtown Providence. Those lines, like the intracity lines, emanated from a central point in Exchange Place. Providence Harbor also received a significant attention in the early years of the twentieth century, as greater international trade in goods was required by the maturing industrial economy. The harbor itself was widened and deepened to accommodate increased traffic.

Of more immediate impact on the downtown were the many new hotels and theaters that sprang up to serve the growing native and transient populations. While theaters, auditoriums, and hotels had existed in

Providence since the eighteenth century, their formal development and their impact upon the urban environment took on a greater significance in the early twentieth century.

The advent of the motion picture in the early years of the twentieth century necessitated the construction of new theaters. The first theaters were located in buildings designed for other functions. Early examples in Providence were the Nickel Theater and Keith's, both located on Westminster Street and long since demolished. By the second decade of the twentieth century, however, several new motion picture theaters were constructed in downtown Providence in the vicinity of Washington Street. The Union Theatre on Mathewson Street (now demolished), the Strand at 85 Washington Street (1916, Thomas J. Hill Pierce, architect), Schubert's Majestic at 195 Washington Street (1917, William R. Walker and Son, architects), and the Rialto at 1-19 Mathewson Street (formerly the Westminster Congregational Church, 1829, James Bucklin, architect; extensively remodeled as to become a new building) formed the core of Providence's new theater district. The most impressive of Providence's historic theaters was Loew's State Theater (C.W. and George Rapp, architects, 1928), now the Providence Performing Arts Center at 200 Weybosset Street. A combination of Italian and Spanish Baroque motifs, the Loew's State Theater is the finest expression of its type in New England.

Hotels, like theaters, had existed in downtown Providence throughout the nineteenth century, and, like theaters, they were transformed into a grander expression of the American Spirit in architecture during the early years of the twentieth century. The most significant of the early twentieth century hotels in the city was the Biltmore Hotel (Warren and Wetmore, architects), completed in 1922, at the corner of Dorrance and Washington Streets, overlooking City Hall Park and Exchange Place. Since its completion, the Biltmore has been the focus of social and business activity in downtown Providence and occupies a prominent place in the streetscape that surrounds Exchange Place and City Hall Park.

The perimeter of Exchange Place and City Hall Park was the site of other building activity in downtown Providence during the early twentieth century. The Federal Building of 1908 (Clark and Howe, architects) not only relieved overcrowding in the Federal Building of 1857, but also provided a handsome building on the east end of Exchange Place similar in scale to the City Hall at the west end. The space between the two buildings was formalized between 1908 and 1914 by the creation of a landscaped mall, the statue of General Burnside (1887) was moved from in front of the Federal Building to City Hall Park, and the Soldiers and Sailors Monument (1871) was moved from in front of City Hall to the middle of the mall. A handsome metal-and-glass streetcar waiting room (Martin and Hall, architects) was erected at the western end of the Mall in 1913-1914. In 1928, the Industrial National Bank erected a twenty-six-story Art Deco skyscraper (Walker and Gillette, architects) on the south side of Exchange Place, on the site of the Butler Exchange.

The area around the Turk's Head was also the site of significant building activity. The most flamboyant example of Beaux-Arts commercial architecture in Providence, the twelve-story Union Trust Bank Building (Stone, Carpenter and Willson, architects), was erected in 1901 at the corner of Dorrance and Westminster Streets. The Whitman Block of 1825 was razed, and in its place rose the Howells and Stokes-designed Turk's Head Building of 1913. The seventeen-story, flatiron-shaped building is a fine example of the Beaux-Arts style, which was the dominant choice for office buildings constructed in Providence during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Also Beaux-Arts in style is the Hospital Trust Bank Building, which replaced the Washington Buildings at the corner of Washington Row and Westminster Street in 1919.

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A number of new office buildings were constructed in the area west of Dorrance Street. The most important of these large buildings include the Caesar Misch Building (1903) at the corner of Westminster and Empire streets, similar in its elaborate Beaux Arts-style detailing to the Union Trust Building; the Lapham Building (1904) at 290 Westminster Street; and the Providence Journal Company Building (1906, Peabody and Stearns, architects) at 20 Westminster Street. Many smaller, well-designed office buildings were also constructed downtown during the early years of the twentieth century, including 55 Eddy Street (ca 1908), with its plastic bay-window facade and ornamental fire escapes; the Smith Building at 57 Eddy Street (1912, Martin and Hall, architects), an example of the Commercial style; and the Woolworth Building (1922) at 187 Westminster Street, also executed in the Commercial style. The Summerfield Building (1914, Albert Harkness, architect) at 274 Weybosset Street is an example of a Commercial-style form within the context of ornate Beaux-Arts detailing

Only a few buildings in downtown Providence departed stylistically from two prevalent forms—the classically derived forms such as the Beaux-Arts or the Colonial Revival and the Commercial Style—or a mixture of the two. The impact of the Art Deco movement of the 1920s was limited to the Industrial National Bank Building, a very conservative example; the Kresge Building of 1927 at 191 Westminster Street; and the small commercial building at 343 Westminster Street, built ca. 1928.

While the rate of new development remained strong in Providence during the 1920s, Rhode Island's overall economy began to falter. The textile industry never fully recovered from a slump after World War I. Worsening labor relations began to erode the state's industrial base, and many of the textile companies left the state for the South, where a cheaper labor force and the proximity to raw materials resulted in significant reductions in the cost of production. With the onset of the Great Depression following the Stock Market Crash of 1929, Rhode Island's economy entered a protracted slump. Providence suffered not only its own local difficulties, but as the financial and commercial focus of a wide region it bore the subsidiary effects of the Depression in the rest of the state as well. The drastic decline in industry, trade, borrowing, mortgaging, insurance, travel, and commerce produced the most damaging period of economic decline in Providence's history.

The Great Depression virtually halted new development in Downtown Providence, and between the crash and the end of World War II, only two major building projects were undertaken in the area. In 1934, the Providence Journal abandoned its Beaux Arts-style quarters on Westminster Street for a Georgian Revival building on Fountain Street (Albert Kahn, architect). A Post Office annex was completed in 1940 just west of the 1908 Federal Building.

The return to prosperity that most of the rest of the country experienced after World War II was slow in coming to Providence. Only two buildings of note were constructed: People's Bank at 70 Exchange Place, a simple, Moderne style building (Cram and Ferguson, architects) completed in 1948 and W.T. Grant's Department Store of 1949 at 260 Westminster Street (Leland and Larson, architects). The primary legacy of the period for the downtown area was the implementation of post-war concepts for urban renewal, which focused on long-range planning, remodeling, and demolitions and ultimately threatened the city's historic fabric.

The major planning activity of the 1950s was the production of a long-range set of guidelines for future development, *Downtown Providence 1970*. This ambitious proposal, which called for the virtual rebuilding

of the central business district, represented an effort to preserve the economic vitality of the downtown and fulfill the city's self-image of progress and modernity. The boom years in Providence, however, had passed, and—fortunately for the architectural fabric of the area—the plans went unrealized. Implementation of these plans was limited to the renewal of the area between Empire Street and Interstate Highway 95, the construction of the Civic Center on Sabin Street, and the transformation of Westminster Street into a pedestrian shopping mall between Dorrance and Snow streets.

Throughout the 1960s, older buildings west of Empire Street were demolished to be replaced with generally sterile new towers and office buildings. The best of these new structures is Paul Rudolph's Beneficent House of 1967 at Chestnut and Broad Streets, built as housing for the elderly, this Brutalist building of brick and structural concrete is a handsome addition to the renewal area. The Civic Center (1972, Ellerbee Associates, architects) is a large, hip-roof, polygonal building, that is separated from the central business district to its south both by the expanse of the asphalt parking lots that surround it and its scale and design.

While a plan for closing Westminster Street to vehicular traffic and creating a pedestrian walkway there had been suggested as early as 1907, the idea was never seriously considered until the late 1950s. Finally completed in 1965, Westminster Mall, with its brick paved streets lined with benches and planting pockets, was an attempt to bring suburban-shopping mall modernity to what was perceived as an outmoded shopping area. The project, however, met with little success because it limited vehicular access to the city's major shopping street and offered no additional amenities to entice shoppers downtown. The mall was removed and the street reopened to traffic in the early 1990s. The urban renewal effort failed to alter the public perception of downtown, which suffered a precipitous decline during the 1960s and 1970s. An increasing unwillingness of patrons to battle downtown traffic, the lure of the suburban shopping malls, and the closing of several major downtown stores were both symptoms and causes of this decline. The general decline of Downtown Providence as a retail center and the construction of new office buildings have left a number of fully and partially vacant older buildings. Some of these have deteriorated seriously, and most are generally neglected.

This decline in Downtown Providence's retail activity was offset somewhat by continued growth of the area as a financial center. Large office buildings have continued to rise east of Dorrance Street since the late 1950s. The Howard Building (1959, enlarged 1968) was the first major office construction project Downtown since the 1920s. The tower at 40 Westminster Street (1969), the first major high-rise building, is a twenty-three-story, reinforced-concrete structure. The Hospital Trust Tower (1974), at the corner of Westminster and Exchange Streets, is a thirty-story, steel-frame, glass-and-travertine, curtain-wall structure. Fleet Center (1983-84), like the Hospital Trust Tower, is a glass-and-stone sheathed steel-frame building. These buildings have reinforced the importance of Downtown Providence as a major commercial center and provide several hundred thousand square feet of office space. At the same time, growing awareness of the benefits of preservation, combined with tax benefits available for rehabilitation since 1976, have encouraged private and corporate investment in the commercial sector and resulted in the renovation of several downtown landmarks, including the Biltmore Hotel.

Plans for the revitalization of the downtown area have continued through to the present day. The Capital Center Plan, an effort to redesign and rebuild the downtown infrastructure, was created in 1979 for the Providence Foundation in association with the City of Providence and the State of Rhode Island. The Plan was prepared in response to the opportunity to relocate a section of railroad tracks north of the downtown

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Providence area, in turn creating space for the area's expansion. The Capital Center Plan designated the area between the State House and downtown as a special development district known as the Capital Center District. This district represents one of the last major buildable areas in downtown and occupies space that has historically divided the State Capital grounds from the commercial sector. This 72-acre site has witnessed several large-scale development projects since 1980, including the construction of the Providence Convention Center, Westin Hotel, Citizens Plaza, Center Place, and a new Amtrak Railroad terminal. Construction in the Capital Center District continues with plans for the Providence Place Mall, a 1.2 million square-foot shopping center scheduled for opening in the summer of 1999. The mall will occupy the site of the former Rhode Island Normal School Complex, which was used in recent years for the University of Rhode Island College of Continuing Education (Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. 1997:5-8).

The relocation of the tracks to the north also meant that Union Station, one of the landmark buildings in the Downtown Providence Historic District, would no longer be used for its original function. Under the Capital Center Plan, the complex, which consisted of four buildings and had suffered from neglect since the 1950s, received a facelift and was converted for retail and restaurant space. Also, a fifth building was added to the complex on the site of an original building that had burned in 1941. The new Providence Railroad Station (Skidmore Owens Merrill, architects) was completed north of the original station in 1986 (Woodward and Sanderson 1986:179-180, 226).

Another project that grew out of the opportunity afforded by the relocation of the railroad tracks, was the Memorial Boulevard Extension. Conceived in 1985 and completed in 1994, the plan called for the relocation of the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket rivers, which had been covered over and silted-in, to create a new and attractive waterfront for the downtown area. Along with the river improvements, a pedestrian riverwalk was constructed from Promenade Street to the mouth of the Providence River and Memorial Boulevard, a wide street divided by landscaped medians, was extended in a wide arc around the downtown area to connect Interstate Highways 195 and 95 (City of Providence Department of Planning and Development 1993:29).

Two additional plans that have the potential to affect the Downtown Providence Historic District in the near future are the I-195 Old Harbor Improvement Plan of 1992 and the Downcity Providence Area Plan, which is a component of the Providence 2000 Comprehensive Plan. The I-195 Old Harbor Improvement Plan centers on the relocation of the ramps and access roads associated with Interstate 195 to the south, thereby re-establishing the historic linkage between the downtown area and the jewelry district. The plan would free up approximately 44 acres of land now within the I-195 right-of-way, extend the existing waterfront amenities, and return the Old Harbor area to its historical status as the unifying focus and gateway to the city (Warner 1992:II-2). The Downcity Plan evolved from a five-day public design campaign headed by nationally-prominent city planner Andres Duany in November 1991. The plan officially recognized the downtown area's unusually rich collection of historic buildings as one of the state's most important cultural resources and recognized the need to implement a variety of preservation and economic development strategies to revitalize the area. Among the immediate actions to occur under the plan are improvements in traffic circulation, parking, landscaping, architectural design regulations, and facilities for arts and entertainment (City of Providence Department of Planning and Development 1993:29-31).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings

N/A

B. Historic views

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C. Interviews

None conducted

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Maps

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Cady, John Hutchins
1936 *Map of a Portion of the Town of Providence...in the Year 1700*. Providence, RI.

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1870 *Map of the City of Providence, Rhode Island*. Providence, RI.

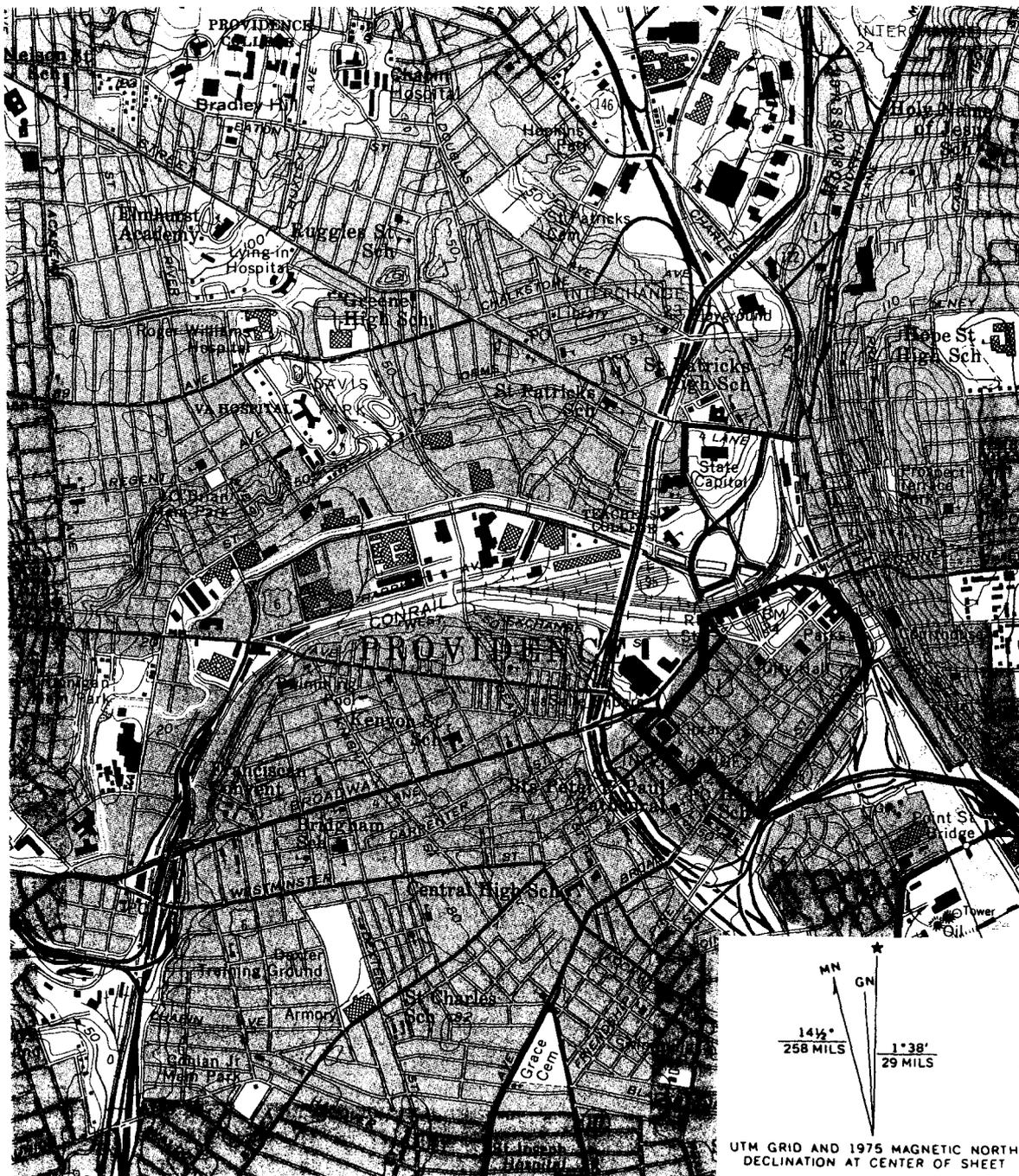
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

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 the Downtown Providence, Providence, Rhode Island, a resource 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 not cause an adverse effect.

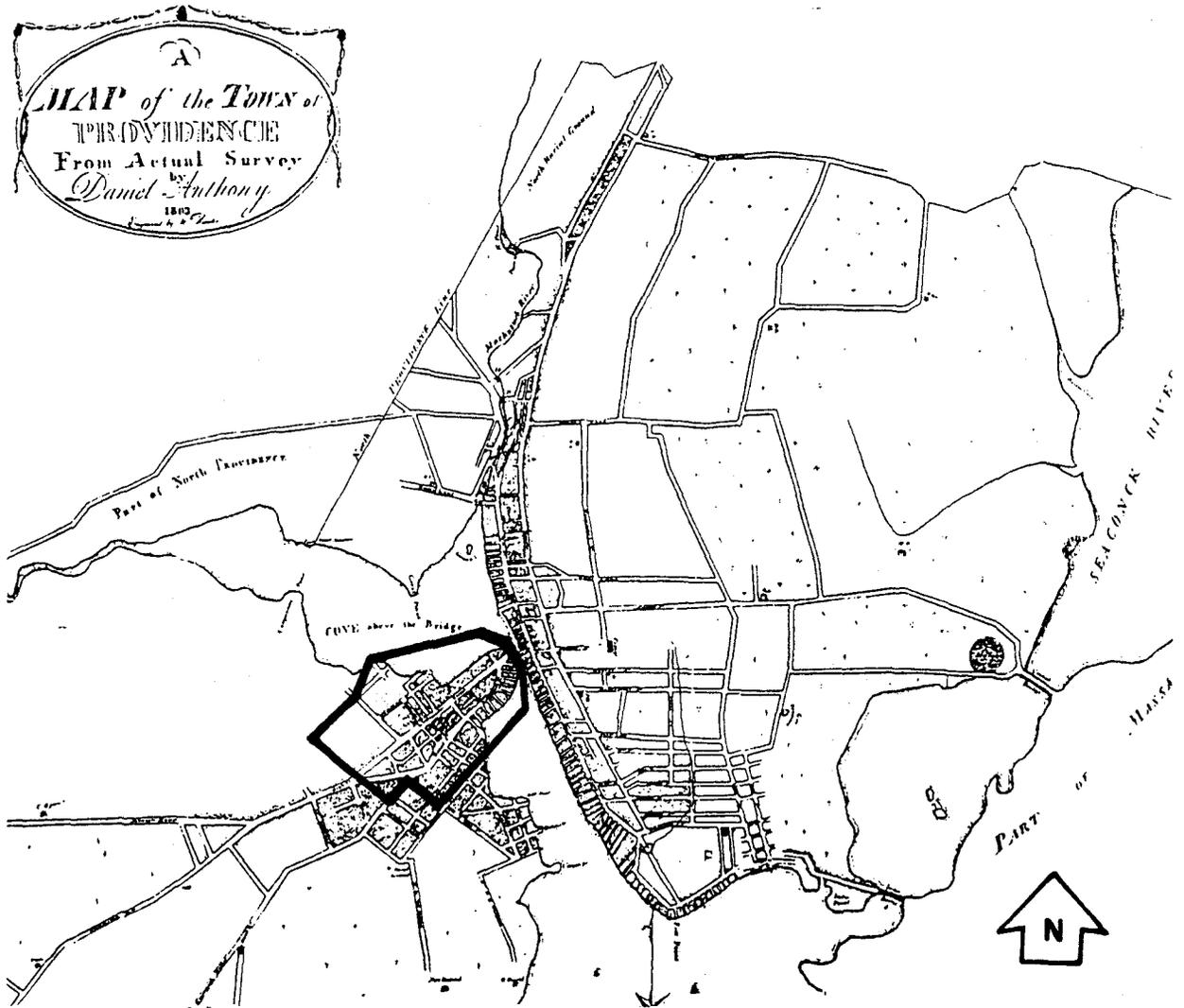
The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL Inc.) of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was retained by ABB Environmental Services, Inc. on behalf of Amtrak and FRA to prepare HABS documentation for Downtown Providence. This report was compiled in August 1997 by the PAL Inc. project team including Virginia H. 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 and October 1997 by Robert Brewster of Warren Jagger Photography, Inc., Providence, Rhode Island.

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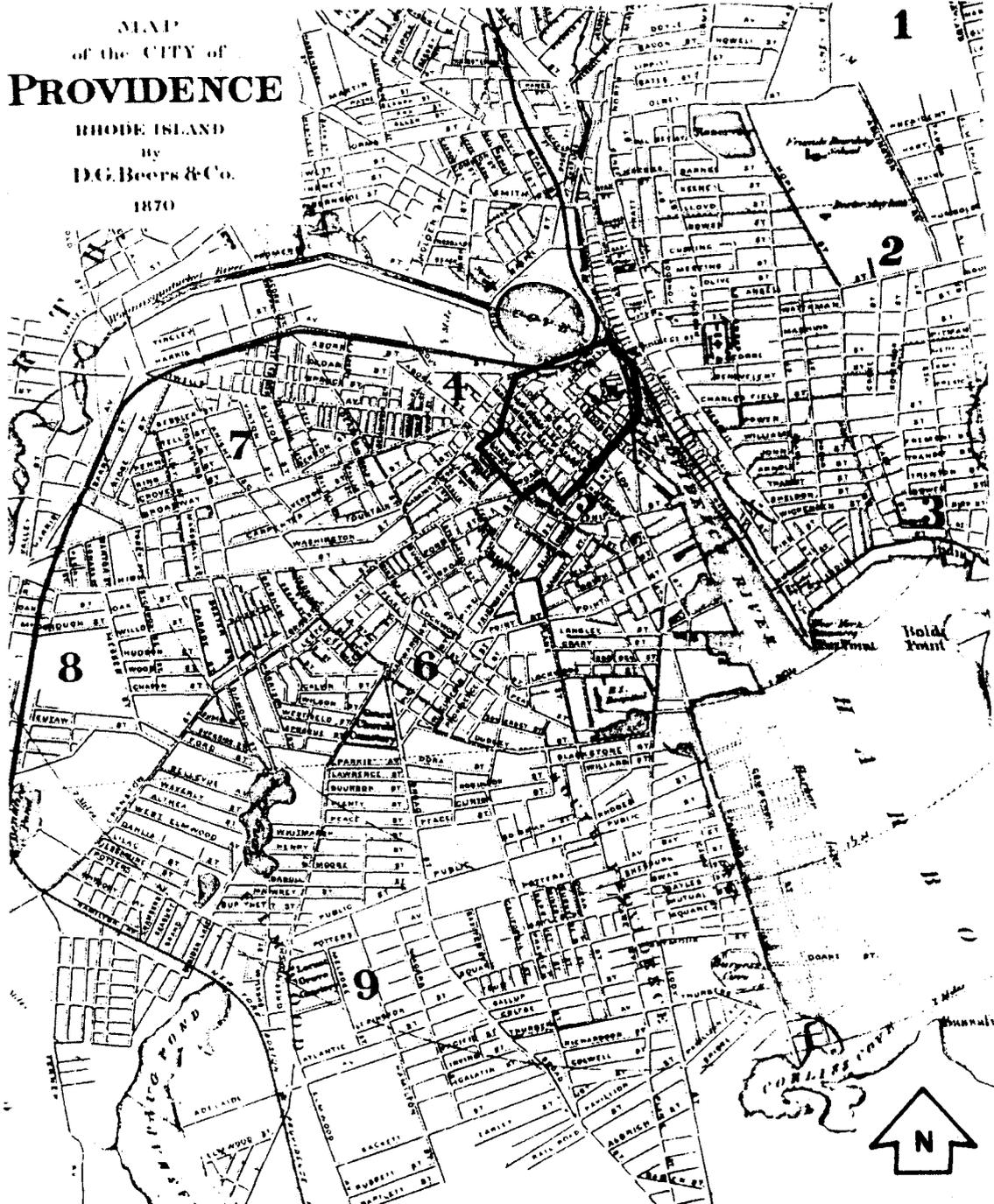
USGS Location Map
Downtown Providence
Providence
Providence County, Rhode Island
Scale 1:24,000



A Map of the Town of Providence
Daniel Anthony 1803
Scale Unknown



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



Downtown Providence
Site Plan
Providence
Providence County, Rhode Island
Scale Unknown

