

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
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DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS.

1 NAME

HISTORIC David Sprague House  
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 263 Public Street  
CITY, TOWN Providence  
STATE Rhode Island  
VICINITY OF Rep. Fernand J. St. Germain, Dist: 1  
CODE 44 COUNTY Providence CODE 007

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Mr. & Mrs. Frederick P. Thomas  
STREET & NUMBER 263 Public Street  
CITY, TOWN Providence  
STATE Rhode Island

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Providence City Hall  
STREET & NUMBER Dorrance Street at Washington Street  
CITY, TOWN Providence  
STATE Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE South Providence Neighborhood Survey  
DATE August, 1975  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission  
CITY, TOWN Providence  
STATE Rhode Island

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The David Sprague House was erected on the north side of Public Street between Eddy and Plain streets about 1839. It stands on its original site in the center of a 4200-square-foot lot in South Providence, a densely built-up neighborhood of large, mid-to-late-nineteenth-century Victorian houses.

The building is a small, rectangular, one-and a half story, gable-roofed, center-chimney, five-bay, clapboarded, late Federal style dwelling with a one-story ell on the north side that appears to be part of the original construction. It has dry-laid fieldstone foundations that are now parged with concrete.

The principal architectural feature of the exterior, the side-lighted central doorway on the south elevation, has simple Federal detailing with reeded pilasters. The eight-panel door is original. Except for the formally composed south elevation, the six-over-six sash windows are spaced unsymmetrically on the exterior walls to respond to floor plan requirements. All of the windows retain their wooden exterior blinds, except for those on the north elevation.

A clapboarded, end-gable garage was constructed on the west side of the house abutting the end of the ell about 1935.

The house has a traditional, colonial, five-room, center chimney plan consisting of an entrance hall and two front rooms, with three rooms across the back. The front door leads into a vestibule with a small, wooden niche in the wall abutting the central chimney. On either side of this hall doors lead into the two front rooms. These rooms, the most elaborately trimmed in the house, are very similar in finish. Each has panelled chair rails inset in the plaster walls and a large fireplace with a simple wooden late Federal mantel with plain pilasters flanking the firebox, surmounted by an unornamented frieze.

The rear portion of the house originally consisted of three simply finished rooms - two small end rooms with a long narrow room between them. The plan was modified about 1935 when the wall separating the small northeast room and the central rear room was removed; access to the northeast room was gained from the southeast room. The central rear room opened off the southwest room and had two windows across the back. The small closet built into the chimney space is an original feature. The northwest room appears to have always been the passage between the ell and the southwest room and contains the stairs to the garret. The tiny room on the west side of the passage that may have been the pantry has been

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converted into a bathroom. The steep, narrow, winding attic stairs are open to the passage.

The ell contains a single, long, low room with a chimney near the north end and a small partitioned-off pantry space beyond it that contained an old soapstone sink until recent years. The chimney was apparently used as a stove flue. Today the ell is used as a kitchen, as it probably originally was, but contains little of its interior finish. Doors lead to the driveway on the west side of the house and to the small screened porch that was added to the east side of the ell in the 1970's.

The low-ceilinged, plastered garret, which is lighted by a window at each gable end, is divided into two spaces by a wooden partition located just to the east of the chimney stack.

The cellar is reached through an exterior bulkhead on the west side of the house. It has been excavated only under the west portion of the dwelling and has dry-laid stone walls and an earthen floor, a very late example of this type of construction. The remains of a brick, circular cistern, now filled-in and partially destroyed to accommodate a modern furnace, can still be seen. Beyond the excavated portion of the cellar is a crawl space containing the dry-laid stone supports for the floor framing.

The house contains all of its original four-panel interior doors with raised panels. The wrought-iron hardware and latches (there are no interior door knobs or locksets) appear to be mostly original with a few twentieth-century reproductions. The woodwork is extremely simple, consisting primarily of door and window enframements composed of flat backbands and beveled moldings. The 2½ inch-thick interior partitions are plastered and papered. The wide, random-width floor boards are well-preserved throughout the house.

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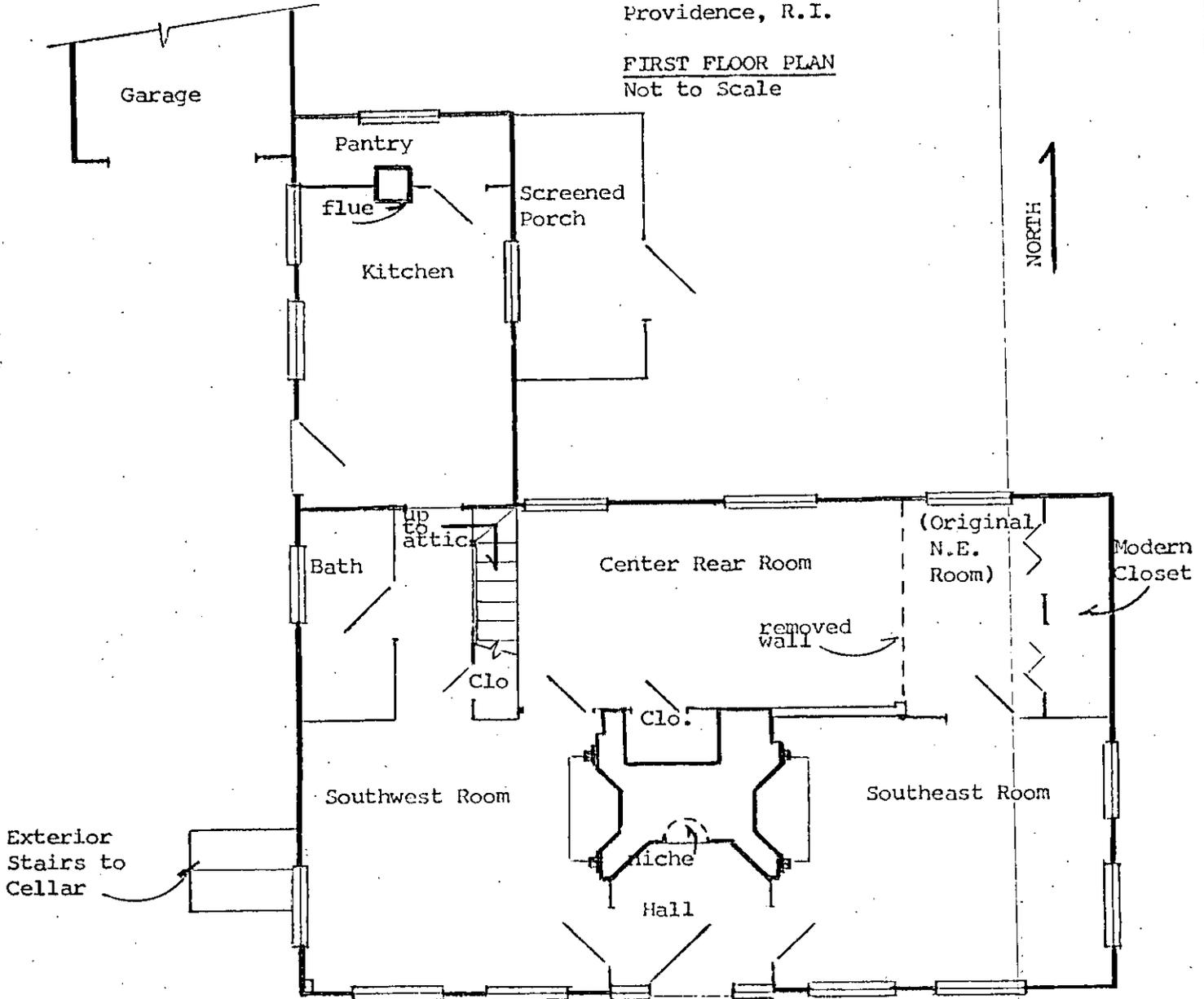
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DAVID SPRAGUE HOUSE  
263 Public Street  
Providence, R.I.

FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
Not to Scale



# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES c. 1840

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The David Sprague House is significant as the best preserved of the two oldest surviving indigenous buildings in the South Providence neighborhood. It is also important as an example of a type of Federal domestic architecture that is rare in Providence.

When the Sprague House was constructed, it was one of the few dwellings in what is now South Providence. At that time, this area was a rural hinterland of the town of Cranston containing only a few scattered farms. Its proximity to the rapidly expanding West Side of Providence and the construction in 1825 of the Pawtuxet Turnpike (now Eddy Street) adjacent to his property, however, encouraged George W. Rhodes to subdivide his ancestral farm into house lots in 1832. When David Sprague acquired Lot #3 of the Rhodes tract and constructed his house about 1839, he became the first resident on the plat. His original purchase extended easterly to Plain Street and northerly to Rhodes Street.

The development of the area was slow and it was not until the 1850's that a few other houses appeared in the neighborhood.

The construction of the first horsecar line into South Providence in 1865 down Public Street in front of the Sprague House spurred the residential development of the neighborhood into one of Providence's first major streetcar suburbs. Subsequent building and the gradual subdivision of the original Sprague lot have left 263 Public Street closely surrounded by large Late Victorian houses.

Little is known about David Sprague who was listed as a meal dealer in the 1850 census when he was 60 years old. He died between 1855 and 1858, after which the house descended in his family through his widow, Cynthia Maria Sprague and subsequently his daughter Amey Ann Sprague until 1932.

About 1873 Amey Sprague married William L. Vinton, a horsecar conductor on the South Providence streetcar line that passed in front of the Sprague House. No doubt its location near Vinton's workplace,

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prompted the couple to stay on at the old house and it is probably Amey's long term of occupancy that accounts for the building's remarkable state of preservation. Mrs. Vinton was born and lived the rest of her life in the Public Street house and it was only after her death in 1932 that her heir, A. Ethel Vinton, sold the property out of the family.

Since the Sprague/Vinton tenancy, the building has continued in use as a residence except for a brief period between 1936 and 1938 when it was a tearoom known as "Ye Little White House Tea Room." It was at this time that the floor plan was altered by the removal of the northeast chamber wall and the garage was added. By 1936 the house was already a neighborhood landmark noted for its antiquity and quaint architecture. The numerous tenants since 1938 have been appreciative of the house's historic importance and no further major alterations have been made in the structure.

The loss of the few other early buildings that may have existed in South Providence has left the Sprague House as the neighborhood's oldest and best preserved landmark. The only other indigenous contemporary structure, the Wm. H. Hudson House at 31 Seekell Street, has already been nominated to the National Register as part of the Pine Street Historic District.

The Sprague House's continued preservation is especially important since it is the best surviving example of this type of domestic architecture in Providence. The 1½-story structure, an example of traditional plank frame construction, exemplifies the conservatism of rural building in the early nineteenth century. Utilizing a plan and construction techniques that had been prevalent in Rhode Island since Colonial times, the Sprague House was ornamented with spare and characteristic Federal detailing of a type popular two decades earlier. The one-and-a-half story, gable-roofed house-type with the windows built close to the eaves had never enjoyed the popularity in Providence that it did in other parts of New England. Today the Sprague House is the only well-preserved example in Providence of this type of house.

The continued existence of this remarkable survival may very well depend upon its acceptance to the National Register. It is currently endangered by the high rate of demolition in its neighborhood, which

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in recent decades has decayed into a low-income, residential area where abandonment and destruction by vandalism or city condemnation have already taken a heavy toll of the housing stock. The current owners are proud of their house and would like to stay in the neighborhood. Their continued occupancy, however, is threatened by mounting structural problems caused by water leakage from the aged roofing and wooden gutters. This and the condition of the neighborhood have prompted them to be interested in the benefits and protection of being listed in the National Register so that they can take steps to ensure the continued preservation of this historic neighborhood landmark.

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Hopkins, G.M. City Atlas of Providence, 1875, 1926, 1937.

Probate Records, Book of Wills No. 9, will 363, City Hall,  
Cranston, RI

Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Frederick P. Thomas, 263 Public  
Street

Unidentified newspaper article, July 2, 1936

Vollmert, Leslie J. South Providence Neighborhood Report  
R.I.H.P.C. (1977)

1820 Federal Census of Rhode Island

1850 Federal Census of Rhode Island

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

City Directories, Providence, R.I. 1868-1967

Deed and Mortgage Records, Recorder of Deeds Office, City Hall, Providence, Rhode Island

See continuation sheet 5

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	2,9,9,10,0	4,6,3,0,9,2,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Leslie J. Vollmert

August 25, 1977

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

401-277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island 02903

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Frederick Williams*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE December 14, 1977

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER



David Sprague House  
263 Public Street  
Providence, R.I.

Photographer: Leslie J. Vollmert

Date: July, 1977

Negative: R.I.H.P.C.

View of the Sprague House from the southeast

Photo: 1



David Sprague House  
263 Public Street  
Providence, R.I.

Photographer: Leslie J. Vollmert

Date: July, 1977

Negative: R.I.H.P.C.

Detail of front door

Photo: 2



David Sprague House  
263 Public Street  
Providence, R.I.

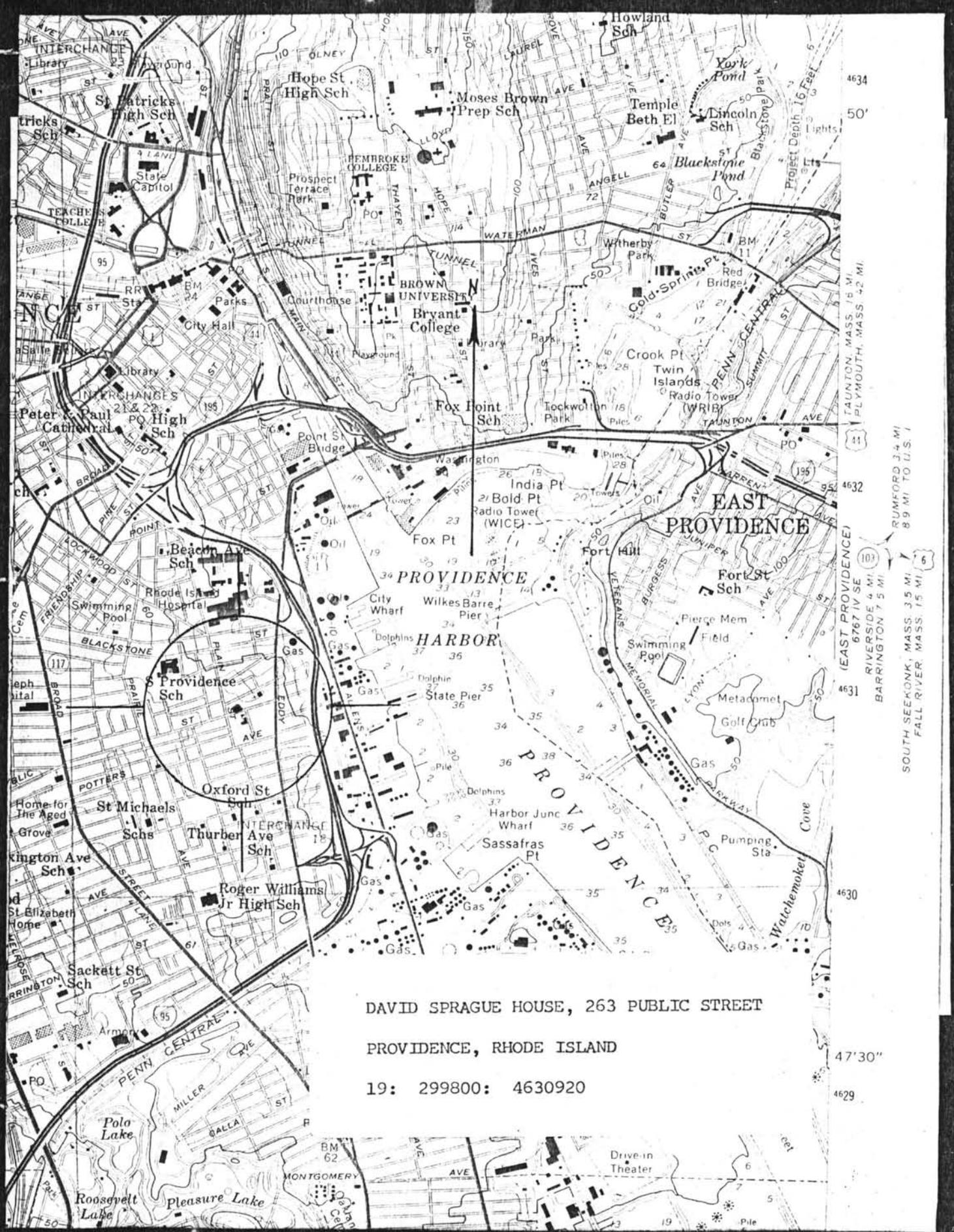
Photographer: Leslie J. Vollmert

Date: July, 1977

Negative: R.I.H.P.C.

Southwest room mantel

Photo: 3



DAVID SPRAGUE HOUSE, 263 PUBLIC STREET

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

19: 299800: 4630920

4634  
50'  
4632  
4631  
4630  
47'30"  
4629

TAUNTON, MASS. 15 MI.  
PLYMOUTH, MASS. 42 MI.  
RUMFORD 3.4 MI.  
89 MI TO U.S. 1  
SOUTH SEEKONK, MASS. 35 MI.  
FALL RIVER, MASS. 15 MI.  
EAST PROVIDENCE 6.767 IV SE  
RIVERSIDE 4 MI  
BARRINGTON 7.5 MI