

The Early Houses of East Providence:  
*The Early Architecture of Our Homes*

Represents a Historic Presence  
In Our Community

Those Still Standing and Those That Are Gone Forever

EAST PROVIDENCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY '07

# THE RING OF THE GREEN: THE BEGINNING

In 1641 the Plymouth Bay Colony gave John Brown and Edward Winslow permission to purchase 64 square miles of land from the Chief of the Wampanoag Indian tribe, Massassoit. The piece of property extended 8 miles from the Seekonk River east to the Taunton border and 8 miles from the Attleboro south to the present Silver Spring Golf Course. William Sabin and Richard Wright, surveyors, were sent into the area to lay out the settlement of the new Seekonk Plantation.

Rev. Samuel Newman of Weymouth rounded up all those wishing to be potential settlers, 58 in all. The new settlement was a circular layout of lots with 5 gates for entrance. The center area was to enclose the farm animals. The house and farm lots would form the outer perimeter with a fence in front of them. First known as the Seekonk Plantation, it was later named Rehoboth by Rev. Newman. Today, the outer borders comprise Pleasant Street, Bishop Avenue, Hoyt Avenue, Bourne Avenue, Elm Street, and finally Greenwood Avenue,- presently Rumford.

John Brown made several more purchases which include the Sowams Purchase (Sowams being Indian for south in English), and now present day Riverside. Brown built his home in this southern area. In 1643 the 58 formed the Seekonk Plantation as Proprietors and Planters and drew lots for which size lot they wished to buy. Soon their new homes were built and we will never know what they looked like for in 1676 Kin Philip, new leader of the Wampanoag, burned everything in the new settlement to the ground. All that was left were the foundations and cellars of the settlement homes.

# This is where the story of our historic homes begins...

After the fire several families moved to outer areas of the Purchase, also named Rehoboth, to start over and some rebuilt on the old foundations.

One of those who never lived on the Ring of the Green was Philip Walker. He bought acreage extending from what is today North Broadway east to the Seekonk River and north to the Ten Mile River where he built a sawmill where trees could be cut into wood for the building of the community. His home burned during the Indian attack and later his wife, then the Widow Walker, rebuilt on the old foundation.

The Philip Walker House is the oldest house in East Providence. It was built between 1678 and 1679 (this date is constantly being challenged. It was later doubled in size. It was owned by the Walker family until the mid 1980's- which was remarkable! The house was willed by the last owner to what was to become Preserve Rhode Island. All the furnishings were sold at auction, but the Hunt House obtained enough as a gift from Preserve R.I. to furnish a bedroom at the Hunt House dedicated as the Philip Walker Bedroom. The Walker House stands vacant today and is located at the corner of Massasoit Avenue and North Broadway in Rumford.



The early settlers had spent time in the Netherlands as refuge after leaving England to find religious freedom. The 3 earliest houses had gambrel roofs in the style of Dutch colonial homes found still today in the Netherlands. We do not know if the first homes were in this style but we do have two outstanding homes still standing from the period after the fire.

The first home rebuilt after the fire was the Viall House in 1720 to 1730 at 787 Willet Avenue on land bought from John Brown. Center chimneys were common for 3 fireplaces on each floor could use flues in the one chimney. The house was added onto later and dormers were installed to accommodate a second floor. The Viall family owned the property from 1679 until 1874.

The other similar Dutch colonial house that was rebuilt after the first was that of John Brown who settled in the South Purchase and built his home. John died before the fire so his son James rebuilt the house on the original foundation in 1730. It is located at 319 Willett Avenue. We were a colony of England at this time so windows were long and narrow for home owners were taxed by the English King on the amount of glass in their house. The front porch and rear ell were added in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.





In 1670 the New England saltbox house evolved. The distinguishing feature was the rear roof which extended almost to ground level in the rear. This long roof was built facing the North and gave additional protection from northern wintry winds, there being no windows. The front of the house faced the southern exposure where windows gave more access to warmth from the sun.

Nathaniel Dagget built this house on the shore of Omega Pond before 1708. He owned a shipping business and had a wharf for the ships right beside his home. Originally the house had a center chimney. The building was added onto as well as another chimney later along with dormer windows in the attic.

The Dagget House is located at 74 Roger Williams Ave.



This house located at 1527 Pawtucket Avenue was built at the same time as the Daggett House on Roger Williams Ave. The original foundation still exists and was located at the rear of a lot on the ring of the Green. Originally one room in depth on each floor and called a single room Rhode Island Plan house, it later had an ell added across the back giving it a saltbox look. And again in the open windowed side of the house faced South and the protective roof faced North. Several additions were later added over the years and one was later removed. To the east of the house is a smaller house which was separated from the original house in the early 1900's and moved to the next door lot after a disagreement between the homeowner and a tenant who ran a dress shop in the addition. An unusual aside-the front porch was added after the original house was built and the porch railing balusters match the stair railing and balusters inside the Walker House. Original deeds for the house have never been found.



Very early 18<sup>th</sup> century cottage at 68 Roger Williams Ave. with center chimney and a later addition added. Probably was owned by the Cove Mills. Originally a one story three bay house.

The next set of historic homes were built on or near the Ring of the Green on the foundations of the older homes which King Philip had burned. They were built while we were still a colony under the rule of English Kings George I, II, III, and IV, who ruled England from 1714 to 1830. Hence they are described as Georgian in style.

Most were five bay (meaning five openings across the front) center chimney houses with two floors and attic space. The center chimney allowed for three fireplaces on the first and second floors, a smoke room in the attic, and a fireplace in the basement which was used as a summer kitchen. They were stately looking homes with classical exterior features.

East Providence has been blessed by quite a few remnants of the era, but some of them have already been razed for new development. We will consider this phenomenon later.



The house pictured here was built by John Hunt on land inherited from his father who bought the area in 1712 (property was known as Hunt's Mills). There were four mills on the site to service the community. Built originally in 1643 by Israel Sabin was a sawmill, gristmill, fulling mill, and dye mill which were rebuilt after King Philip's War. The left side of the house was built in c. 1750 as a customary in that time (note the center chimney is not centered) and the right side was built later around 1780. this property is owned by the City of East Providence and is leased as headquarters by the East Providence Historical Society





An exception to the five bay rule is this house at 1419 South Broadway. This house was built in 1760 with only three bays, a center chimney, and the entrance at the end. The right side of the building with three more bays as well as a second chimney were added in 1780. The front door was moved to the front of the house. The home was only one story- another exception to other houses of the time period.



The Hyde Bridgham house was built in 1768 on the Pleasant Street section of the original Ring of the Green on an old foundation left from the fires. It is described in a survey done by the RI Historic Preservation Commission in 1976 as, “a very fine example of the large mid 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse”.

It was built by Ephriam Hyde, pastor of Newman Congregational Church. Later it was bought by Dr. Joseph Bridgham whose son later, while living here, became a member of the State House of Representatives and the first Mayor of Providence. The first Rumford Library was located in an ell added on the North side. It was owned by the Bridghams until the 1990's when it was sold and restored. At the time of the sale it was the only property in East Providence which still boasted an eighteenth century Georgian garden.

The Abel House was built in c. 1750 at what is today 66 Greenwood Avenue. It is a four bay Georgian Colonial with a center chimney. The ell was added in the 1880's.

Built on the old foundation of the original house it is said to be the location where King Philip dragged an armchair from the first house here to watch the Ring of the Green burn in 1676. Town meetings were sometimes held here between 1812 and 1862 when the area was known as Seekonk.

The second Abel House was built in c.1760, also on the foundation of an original Ring of the Green home and is located at 8 Greenwood Avenue. It was a four bay center chimney home with a gable roof. The rear and side ells were added after 1880.





The Phaneul Bishop House was built in 1771 on the foundation of the Reverend Samuel Newman's house which was burned in 1676. It is located at 150 Greenwood Avenue and is a five bay Federal style home. At the end of the eighteenth century it was thought that by removing the chimney and having one chimney at each end of the house would make the house cooler in the summer, for keeping room fireplaces had to be kept stoked to prepare the meals. The prevalence of end chimneys really became popular after 1800.



Abby Dexter's house was built in c. 1780 behind the Philip Walker House on Massasoit Avenue. Originally a five bay one floor colonial with a center chimney and gable roof. It was transformed into a Dutch Colonial style home in c. 1900. Abby was part of the Walker family. At one time there was a large 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian style garden between this house and the Walker House.

*After the American Revolution when we became a Federated Republic the Georgian description of these homes was changed to the Federal style home.*

11 Roger Williams Ave was built in c.1750. It was a one story three bay with an end chimney. Several additions were added later. The building's first use was possibly that of a store. (not photographed)

The Izra Ide House is a five bay center chimney Federal style building built between 1780 and 1810. once a part of the Providence Country Day School it was slated to be demolished for a drugstore and was saved from demolition in the 1980's by the city of East Providence. It has become a centerpiece of the campus of the E.P. Senior Center. The house is a wonderful example of what historic preservation really is- preserving priceless buildings from elimination.

The Kent Family homestead was built on the Wampanoag Trail between 1780 and 1790. the Kent family ran the largest family farm operation in the Town of Seekonk and later East Providence at one time. It is a five bay center chimney with later additions such as the ell and front porches.



This is a Federal five bay originally one story house with center chimney built in 1785. A second floor and an addition were added later along with a Greek Revival style doorway. It is located at 42 Pleasant Street.



## Dr. John Radloff House



This one story five bay Federal house at 232 Pleasant St. was built in 1790. It was owned initially by another Bishop family member- James M. Bishop. The Greek Revival ell, front door treatment and dormer windows were added in c.1860. The State Historical Commission cites that it is “the finest surviving example of 18<sup>th</sup> century one story houses in the City.”



This house is located at 1290 South Broadway. It originally was a three bay one story building built in the early 1800's by the side of a stream. It was built on a hill with the kitchen in the basement along with a root cellar and cold room. A two floor addition was added later.





A second Ide House is located at 2585 Pawtucket Avenue. It is a five bay, center chimney in the Federal style. The house has been somewhat altered over the years and includes an ell, altered front windows and the addition of a porch- all of which can be reversed. This house (January 2008) is in danger of being demolished to make way for a housing development. A great loss to the city's list of historic homes. The Ides were a well known farming family in the community.



The well cared for and restored Pearce-Allin House is located at the corner of Pawtucket Avenue and Willet Avenue. Underneath the wooden façade is an entirely brick building- the only one left of this type in the City. It was built in c. 1805 as a five bay Federal style house with end chimneys. The interior areas of the house are palatial in size and style.

Garfield Street in Rumford is named for the Garfield House. It is probably two one room buildings built early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that were later joined together.



The Hoyt-Hammond House is at 101 Hoyt Avenue and was built in c. 1780 across the street from its present location on the Ring of the Green. It is a five bay Federal style with the center chimney removed, possible when the house was moved c. 1890. It is famous for its fancy fanlight over the front door.





The so-called "Widow Hill" House was built c.1780-1790 on the foundation of an original Ring of the Green house. It is located at 324-326 Newman Avenue. Originally a three bay Federal style house with a gable roof and probably having end chimneys, it had been added onto and a front porch was added over the years. In 1810 it was occupied by the Reverend Hill, Pastor of the Newman Congregational Church. Lore has it that at one time a small school was located in the ell.

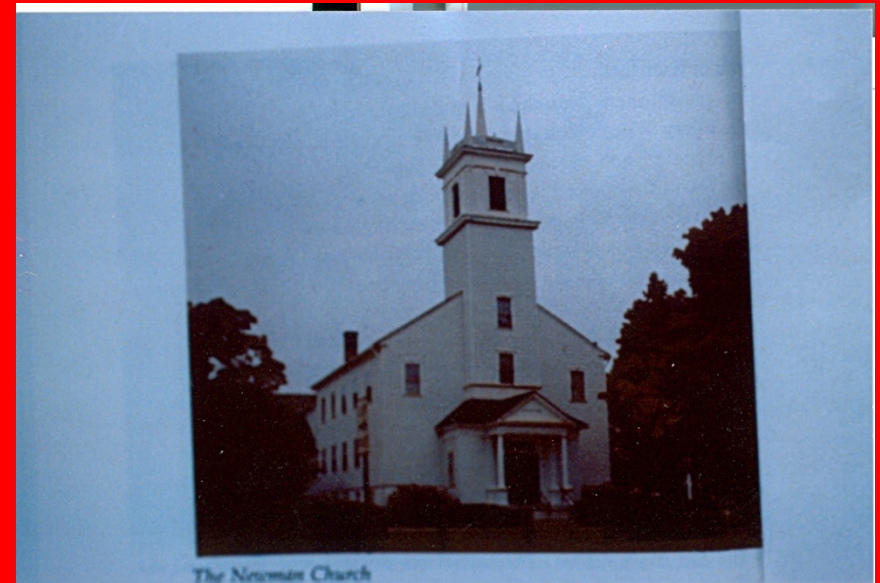


The Richard Walker House was built on Centre Street in 1792. Richard was a great grandson of Philip Walker. The house is a two story five bay Federal building with a gable roof and center chimney. The photo to the left is an old photo but the house has hardly changed today except for the outbuilding in the rear.

The house featured in the picture on the top right is a five bay center chimney two story late 18<sup>th</sup> century Federal house at 324 Pleasant Street. The Greek Revival doorway was added later in c. 1850. Once owned by William Ellis.



The church photographed on the bottom right hand side is Newman Congregational church which was built in 1810. The front porch and ell were added in later years. It is very carefully preserved even though it has received vinyl siding. The interior is pristine. It was the fourth church building built since it was organized in 1643 by Reverend Newman. The lumber for the new Town Hall once located on Pawtucket Avenue next to the library came from the third church (then called a Meeting house) building. All the houses cited thus far were built while we were Rehoboth. The “new” Town Hall celebrated out becoming Seekonk in 1812.





The Allen Cole and later known as the Brand House is on Pawtucket Avenue at the Ten Mile River. It is a Federal five bay house with two end chimneys at each end. It is the only brick Federal left standing in East Providence. It was built in 1812. In about 1922 the outer surface was given a stucco finish.

The next housing style to take over America's taste was the Greek Revival style. Influenced by the French Empire style which came into vogue after the French Revolution, America clamored to copy Napoleon's new Greek and Classical style buildings. New construction in France consisted of buildings resembling Greek temples with tall pillars in front. They flourished between 1820 and 1860. There are no such houses in East Providence as there are on Cape Cod, but there are facsimiles which come close. The Greek Revival style lasted until the Victorian period.

One very famous one is the Lightning Splitter House at 3591 Pawtucket Avenue in Riverside. It does not have the pillars, but the windows give that suggestion. The unusual high roof was built in such a way that if lightning struck the house, the lightning would split into two parts and travel down the roof to split into two parts and travel down the roof to the ground. There are only three such houses in the State, one on Transit Street in Providence and another on Willett Avenue. Some other Greek Revival style buildings are located at 150 Pleasant Street and at 1361 Pawtucket Avenue, both in Rumford and neither having columns.



In addition to these 21 buildings there are a few others which have age, but have been altered drastically over the years or have had vinyl siding added to them. They are:

- The Bishop-Leonard House at 35 Bishop Avenue
- The Martin House at 1323 South Broadway
- Another Martin House at 1401 South Broadway
- The Chaffee House at 284 Pleasant Street
- The Nathan West House at 355 Pleasant street
- The Joseph Fitts House at 325 North Broadway

We have cut off our listing of historic buildings at this point in our history, but there are many more in existence in the Gothic Victorian, Italianate Victorian, Queen Anne Revival, and Cottage Victorian styles still standing today. All of these homes and we can quote from the R.I. Historic Properties Commission's "Statewide Preservation Report on East Providence" published in 1976, "These (houses) represent...those properties deemed most essential to maintaining the city's historic legacy. Surrounding and supporting these are much larger number of properties which, individually and as a group, do much to enhance the overall historic, visual and social character of East Providence."

# WHAT HAS BEEN SAVED SO FAR!



There have been some notable preservation projects in East Providence already.

The John Hunt House took the East Providence Historical Society fourteen years to restore using grants from the Champlin Foundation and donations and volunteer labor from the Society members.



The city has restored the Union Primary School which was built in 1874. District No. 6 School (The Girl Scout House c.1870) has been restored by the city.

The Pomham Lighthouse has also been recently restored by a private association.





The last remaining building from the Hunt's Mills Amusement park is being restored with grants made to the East Providence Historical Society.

Most recently the Weaver House built in 1868, a wonderful example of Greek Revival architecture, has been restored by the city of East Providence.

Of course the gem in East Providence's crown of restoration is the Crescent Park Carousel. It was built in 1895 and later restored in the 1990's.

Presently the 1858 original Rumford Baking Powder factory has been moved from Newman Avenue to its new location on the property off Greenwood Avenue in preparation for the new condominium/office buildings on the site of the old Rumford Co. It is called the Rumford Center and its being restored and developed by the Peregrine Group LLC. This is the second time the building has been moved since 1858.

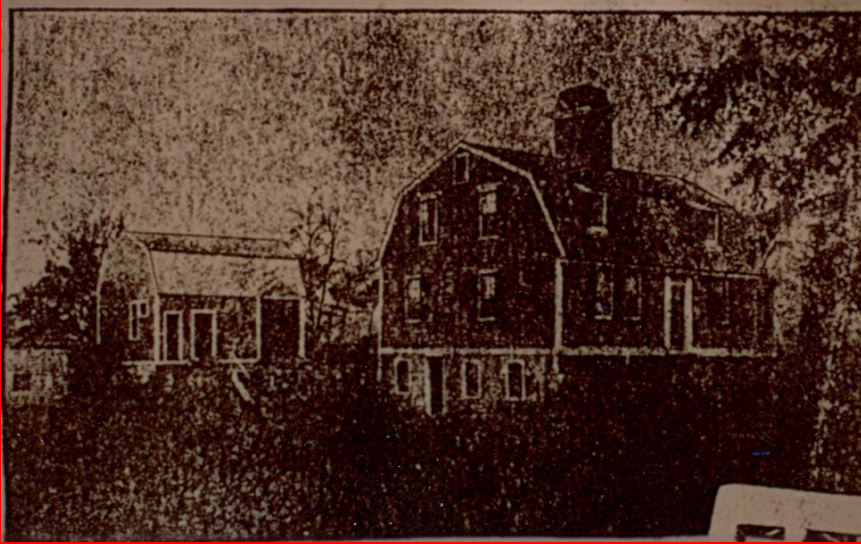


# WHAT IS GONE FOREVER!

Over the years however there have been some disastrous losses of historic buildings not all of them before 1840, but among them outstanding examples of their particular architectural style.

The oldest surviving house of note that was destroyed was built in the 1680's and no note was made of its demise. It was located at 915 Warren Avenue and what replaces it is Chelo's Restaurant.





In 1906 the Willet House Built in about 1720 in the style of the Dutch colonials like the Viall and Brown houses burned to the ground. For years the chimney remained standing which gave the name Chimney Corners to the area. Willett Arms Apartments took its place. Artifacts dug up at the site are at the Rhode Island Historical Society Museum and the Hunt House Museum.



Also in the 1930's the historic 18<sup>th</sup> century Bishop's Tavern, which serviced the Post Road travelers on their trip by coach from Providence to Boston, was torn down in favor of more modern houses. It was on the curve where Greenwood Avenue becomes Pawtucket Avenue across from the Baptist Church.



In the 1930's before Preservation was a code word in the Drowne House, built c. 1810, was torn down to make room for Drowne Parkway in Rumford.



In the 1950's the historic Town Hall on Pawtucket Avenue in Rumford, built with lumber from the third Newman Meeting House and having the former front door of the Meeting House, was razed to make way for a parking lot.



In the 1960's the Stick Style Victorian Turner Avenue School, built in 1880/81, and the only school in this style, was torn down for a parking lot.

Also in the 1960's the historic Armington House on the corner of the Wampanoag Trail and Pawtucket Avenue was torn down for a gas station. It was made of stone (the only one left of its type) and was a three bay, gable roofed Federal style house with end chimneys.



In 1976 the historic E.P. Town Hall on Tauton Avenue burned to the ground. This photo was taken after a small roof fire in the 1920's. It had been built in 1879 to celebrate a new beginning for the then Town of East Providence.





That same year the historic Cove Mill on Roger Williams Avenue, built before the American Revolution, also burned. Cannon balls had been made there for the Revolutionary War as well as ammunition during World War I.



In the 1980's the Italianate Victorian Riverside Library, built c. 1874, was considered obsolete and was replaced by an empty lot.



In early 1905 the Italianate Victorian home of the Dennis Family, built in 1870, was destroyed for vinyl sided houses of no particular style.



As recently as 2003 the Ide House, built in c. 1805, was destroyed without so much as a whisper of interest in preservation. This house was the only Federal house remaining with a brick façade. It was a handsome five bay, end chimney, Federal style two story home. One chimney had been lost during the 1938 hurricane. A vinyl sided box style apartment building took its place.



Currently, as we prepare this piece, the Ide House on Pawtucket Avenue is being prepared for demolition.

If the City and its citizens do not take any interest in preserving the gems that are left, very soon we will have lost all remnants of our historic past, which are the fabric of what we have been through since 1643, how we have survived and what we are to become.



# References

## References:

RI Historic Properties Commission “Statewide Historic Preservation Report-  
East Providence” 1976

Thanks to Elizabeth Donahue for the Power Point Presentation done as her Junior Year  
Community Volunteer Project at St. Mary Academy, Bay View.

Photos: taken by Lowell and Edna Anness.

Two donated by Victor Fedorowisc and Dorothy Thornely

Three from the “Statewide Historic Preservation Report”

Research by Edna Anness, Curator, Hunt House Museum, East Providence Historical  
Society.