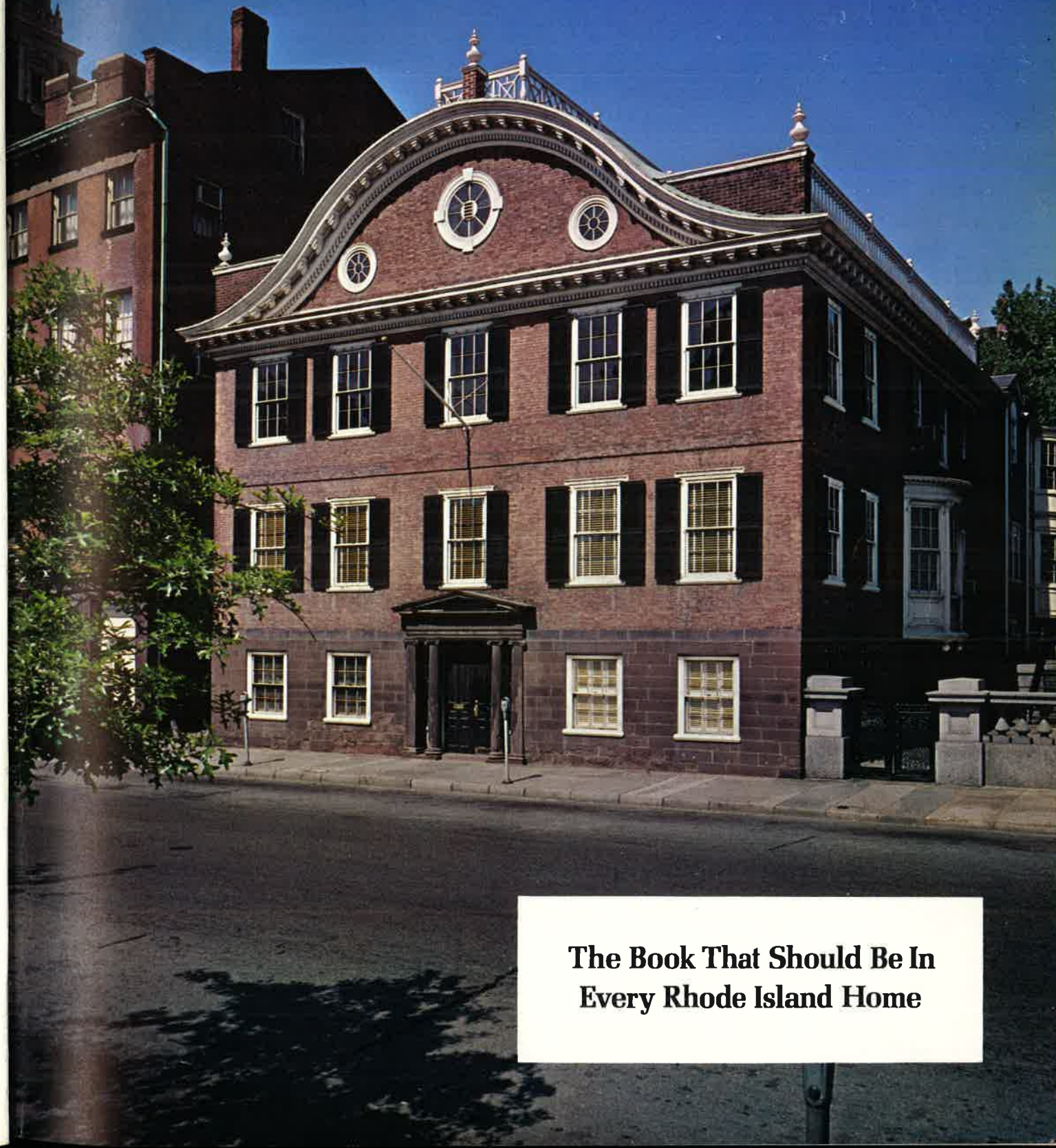


1970

# RHODE ISLAND YEARBOOK

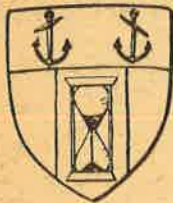


**The Book That Should Be In  
Every Rhode Island Home**

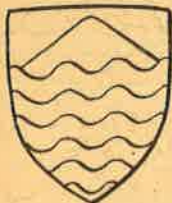




South Kingstown



East Greenwich



Bristol



Newport



Providence



## Rhode Island State Houses

BY CLARKSON A. COLLINS, 3RD

ONE source states: "It has been said that Rhode Island is the state that never had a capital. Its various instruments of government have never mentioned any town or city specifically as 'the capital', the only provision being that the sessions of the legislature were to be held in one town or another. Even in the amendment designating Providence as the place in which sessions of the General Assembly were to be held in the future, the city was not called a 'capital'. Newport was merely quietly and unostentatiously dropped."

Yet if a "capital" is to be considered a town in which the legislature sits and the governing officers convene, Rhode Island has had at least nine capitals, Providence, Newport, Warwick, Portsmouth, Pawtuxet, East Greenwich, Bristol, South Kingstown and Narragansett.

This multiplicity of capitals probably derives from the fact that Rhode Island, unlike most other colonies, was originally an amalgamation of towns founded by different groups at different times, by men with different aims, who finally joined together, or allowed themselves to be joined together, only because common interest proved stronger than divided impulse.

Various attempts at union, contested both from within and without the present area of Rhode Island, took place between 1640 and 1654, when by the efforts of Roger Williams the union granted by the Earl of Warwick in 1644 and established for a short time in 1647, was restored. Permanent existence, however, was not fully confirmed until the granting of the Charter of 1663 by Charles II. Under the terms of this grant Colony and State continued to operate until 1843. In the early years, meetings of the General Assembly, Town Meetings and court sessions were held in taverns, private homes, and even in barns, but with the growth of population and the increasing complexity of government the inhabitants felt the need for buildings erected specifically for these purposes. They were located in the major towns or county seat of each county, and though none of the original court houses, or Colony Houses, as they were also known, any longer exists, a number of buildings in which the legislature has met can be visited today, and may be used for public purposes.

The Constitution adopted in 1842 provided for two sessions, one at Newport on the first Tuesday in May and the other on the last Monday in October, to be held at South Kingstown once in two years and in the intermediate years alternately at Bristol and East Greenwich, and adjournment from the October session was to be held annually at Providence.

In 1854 an amendment provided: "There shall be one session of the General Assembly, holden annually, commencing on the last Tuesday in May, at Newport, and an adjournment from the same shall be holden annually at Providence." The 11th Amendment adopted in 1900 established all sessions in Providence. The last meeting at Newport was held in June 1900. Since January 1901 all sessions have been held in Providence.





Tilley

## Court House, South Kingstown

AS EARLY as 1686 the General Assembly ordered that a court house be erected in the then undivided town of Kingstown, but this order appears not to have been carried out, and in February, 1730, a new act provided: "that the County Court House and Jail for the King's County, be set upon a hill, near Robert Case's house in South Kingstown." This location was near the center of the then flourishing, now vanished, village later known as Tower Hill. The General Assembly first met in the new building in October, 1732. By 1752 the court house had fallen into disrepair, and a group of inhabitants of the growing village of Little Rest, a few miles to the west, saw a chance to benefit their own area. Led by Col. Elisha Reynolds a group of leading inhabitants presented a petition setting forth the advantages of their village and offering to build a new court house and jail at their own expense.

Despite strong protests from Tower Hill, Little Rest (now Kingston) won out, and the second King's County Court House was erected on a site approximately opposite the present building and just east of the present church on the main street of Kingston.

In 1773 the General Assembly decided that a new court house was needed, and appointed William Potter a committee of one to draw up plans. They were accepted, and he purchased a lot across the street as a site for the building, the erection of which he supervised. It was finished in 1776, and served as a meeting place for the General Assembly until 1854 and a court house until 1900.

The building has been considerably altered, the original gable roof with a cupola and end chimneys being replaced by a French roof and projecting stairway hall with a tower around 1865.

It now houses the Kingston Free Library and Reading Room.







Tilley

## Court House, East Greenwich

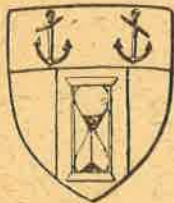
**W**HEN Kent County was established in June 1750, a section of the act of incorporation provided: "that a court house of the dimensions, or near the dimensions of the court house in Providence, be built in the town of East Greenwich, by a free contribution of the inhabitants of the said county of Kent." If the court house was not ready by the last day of October, the act was to be null and void.

John Peirce and his wife gave a lot for the building, but raising the money in the sparsely populated towns was difficult. The county met the dead-line, but three years later the court house was still not finished. A lottery was provided by the General Assembly. However, it was not, it appears, fully built and furnished until 1771.

The original court house soon proved too small and in 1805 it was replaced by the one still standing which was completed in February, 1800. Though the interior has been altered, the building repeats the original design of the Providence Colony House.

The most recent historian of East Greenwich writes: "This building . . . has been, and continues to be, a source of great pride to the people of Kent County."

It still serves its original purpose as a court house.







Tilley

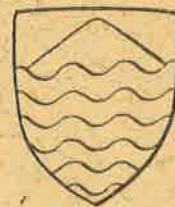
## Bristol Court House

**B**RISTOL was annexed to Rhode Island in 1747, having previously been a town of Plymouth and Massachusetts colonies.

The first record of a court house built under Rhode Island jurisdiction occurs in June 1776 when the General Assembly made an appropriation of £7,000 for "building a court house in the county of Bristol . . . in the same place where the old court house now stands." The old court house was moved and became a dwelling house on Bradford Street. The General Assembly met in Bristol for the first time in 1785.

In May, 1816, the General Assembly voted to accept a lot of land "on the common in Bristol, 200 feet square, and that a State House be immediately erected thereon." Shortly afterwards a committee of the town contracted with Charles Shaw and Isaac Borden to build a Court House, which was probably designed by the well-known architect, Russell Warren.

This building is still in use today, though the interior has been extensively altered and the present small porch is a fairly recent addition designed by Mr. Wallis Howe.





# A Front View of Providence Court House



*Clarissa Daggett's Work. Wrought at Providence August 31 1799.*

Embroidered by Clarissa Daggett

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

## Colony House, Providence



Colony House, Providence  
Sixth District Court today

THE first building erected in Providence for the specific purpose of housing sessions of the General Assembly, town meetings and court sessions was completed near the end of 1731 and stood on what is now Meeting Street, then called Gaol Lane, near Benefit Street. This wooden structure burned down in December 1758, one of the casualties of the fire being the greater part of the books of Providence Library Company, which kept its collection in the building.

In 1760 the town took steps toward obtaining a new and finer Colony or Court House. Land was acquired on North Main Street (then Towne Street) and Court Street, and on it the brick Court House still standing, was completed late in 1762 or early in 1763. Construction was paid for by lotteries and grants from the General Assembly. Since 1900 the Providence Colony House has been headquarters of the Sixth District Court.

Alterations, the addition of the tower and wood belfry and the long flight of stone steps were made in 1850-51; an addition on the Benefit Street side was constructed later.





Tilley

## Newport Colony House

**T**HE first Colony House in Rhode Island was built at Newport in 1690. By 1738 this frame building had become inadequate and it was replaced on the original site by the present brick edifice at the head of Washington Parade.

One of the foremost authorities on colonial architecture has termed it "one of the best colonial public buildings in existence today."

Richard Munday, who planned and built it, also built Newport's famed Trinity Church and was associated in some way with almost every architectural undertaking in the town during the years when he was working there (c.1719-1739).

In addition to its service as Colony and State House, Town House and court house, it was the site of many historic events. Deaths and successions of kings, declarations of war and peace, and news of similar important events were announced from the balcony. The commission investigating the burning of the *Gaspee* met there in 1773.

On May 4, 1776 Rhode Island's Declaration of Independence was adopted there and during the Revolution the British used it as a barracks and the French as a hospital.

In 1790 the convention which voted Rhode Island's adoption of the Constitution of the United States held its first meeting there.

In a later period, in 1844, the trial of "Peoples' Governor" Thomas W. Dorr for treason was held there.

It is a national shrine.







*Architect's Sketch (Design) for New Rhode Island State Capitol accepted January 1890*

*Courtesy Industrial National Bank*

## Rhode Island State House Providence

**T**HE Rhode Island State House on Capitol Hill in Providence is a worthy successor to the many which have preceded it.

Built of white Georgian marble, it has one of the four marble domes in the world. In all, the building contains 327,000 cubic feet of marble, 15,000,000 bricks and 1,309 tons of iron floor beams.

The building was designed by the famous architectural firm McKim, Mead and White of New York City and built by Norcross Brothers of Worcester, Mass.

It was first occupied by the department of the Secretary of State in December 1900, followed by the other state officers and the General Assembly on January 1, 1901.

The bronze statue which now tops the marble dome represents "The Independent Man" and was not shown in the architect's sketch pictured above.

*Courtesy of R. I. Development Council*



*The Independent Man*

