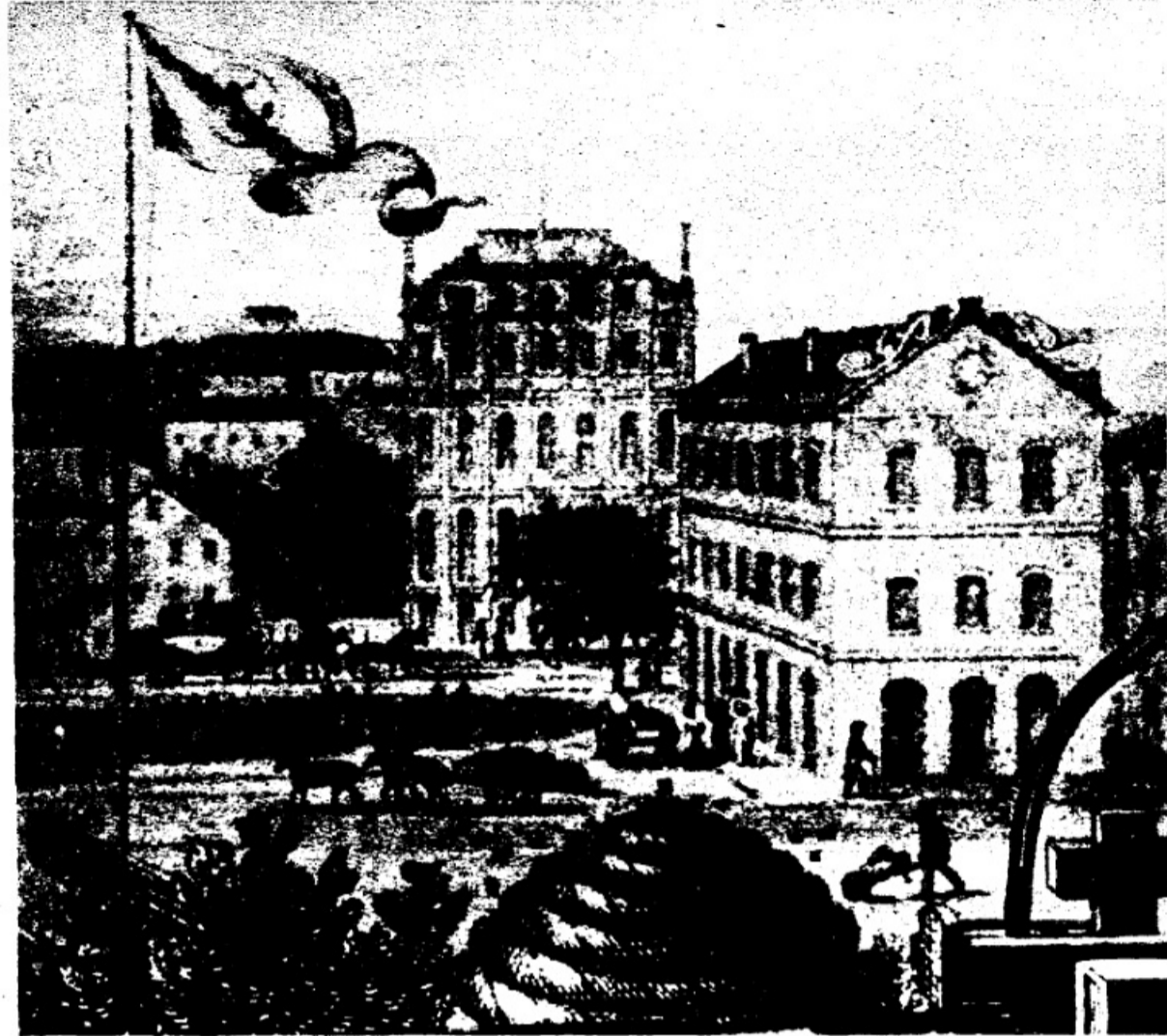


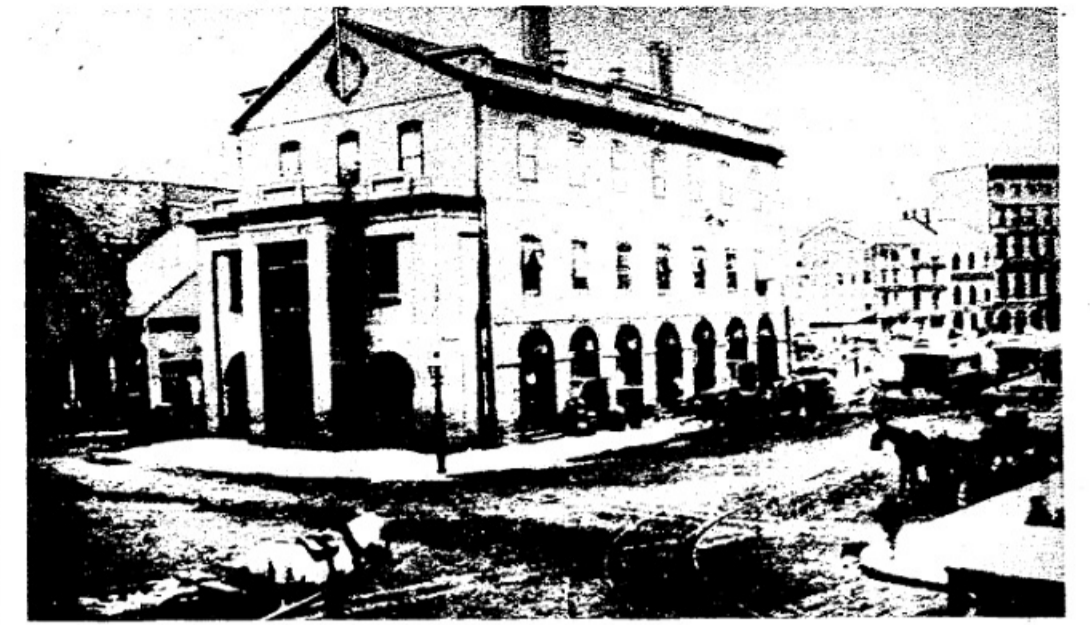
NOW and THEN in R.I.



AN EARLY VIEW (about 1824) of the Market House. The drawing is from the diploma of the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers, whose emblems appear in foreground.



TWO DECADES later, farm wagons, some of them covered, crowded the market area. This brilliant photograph shows a Masonic emblem in the west gable. The billiard room at left would be on Benefit Street, about where the entrance to the art museum is today.



CITY BUILDING was the name of the Market House when this picture was taken sometime between 1864, when the horsecars came, and 1867, when the Abbott Still House (left) was razed to make way for extension of College St. to South Water St.



IN THE NINETIES, the twin spires of the Central Congregational Church on Benefit Street towered above Market House and lowgears rumbled over cobbled square.

THE OLD MARKET HOUSE COMES TO LIFE AGAIN



STUDENTS of architecture, landscape architecture and interior design last week moved into the ancient building where traders once drove their bargains and aldermen passed their ordinances. Instructor (right) is J. Carol Fulkerson, chairman of RISD planning division.

After many lives—as a market, barracks, Masonic hall, city hall and Board of Trade building—it's now a schoolhouse

BY ROBERT L. WHEELER

LAST Monday 100 students of the Rhode Island School of Design's Division of Planning moved into the historic, much fought-over, and now rejuvenated old Market House in Market Square, deeded to their alma mater by the City of Providence two years ago and adapted for school purposes. As these young people swarmed into its classrooms and draughting areas, history's pages fluttered to the opening of a new chapter in a story which began 177 years ago.

History is written in many ways and in many places, some of them obscure. There are annals. There are records. There are yellowed newspapers and faded letters. And there are, too, bills. Sometime in June, 1773, a man named Joseph Jewett presented a statement for digging out the cellar of the new Market House on a site east of Weybosset Bridge and identified as the Parade.

Except for its central location, it wasn't much of a site. A citizen of the period grimly describes the area south of the Great Bridge as "a deep filthy dock in which the tidewater flowed up to the west line of the main street" (the "Towne Street," now South Main). But it was close to the bridge and history is also written by bridges—particularly bridges whose boards echo to the rumble of farm wagons bringing hay and other produce to market. The farm lands of Providence were on the west side of the river beyond Weybosset Point, a muddy finger exploring the stream near the intersection of Westminster Street and Washington Row.

As early as 1744 a "hayward" was set up near the easterly abutment of the bridge and the area established as a market center—a mucky flat a few feet above tidewater, bounded by a straggle of warehouses, distilleries and unkempt dwellings and a wharf where vendors of fish and lobsters hung out—but nevertheless a place where there was buying and selling of hay, grain and foodstuffs.

In August, 1771, on petition of certain citizens of the infant town of Providence the General Assembly granted a lottery; one of its purposes was the erection of a public market on the town's land near the bridge. Moses Brown was among the directors who ran this pre-Revolutionary bingo. The money raised, he had John Wiley fill the mudhole, quaintly termed the "Parade", up to the level of the bridge. In 1772 John Brown built a retaining wall 10 feet high from the first "trussel" of the bridge to the end of the town land. And on June 12, 1773, Nicholas Brown Esq. laid the first stone of the Market House.

Still preserved in city hall are brownish scraps of paper spider-webbed with faded writing—statements from which John Hutchins Cady, in his monograph on the Market House in Providence, traces the construction of the building whose rejuvenation he directed as architect. The Cady history of the Market House, illustrated, is to be published under the School of Design imprint during the present school year.

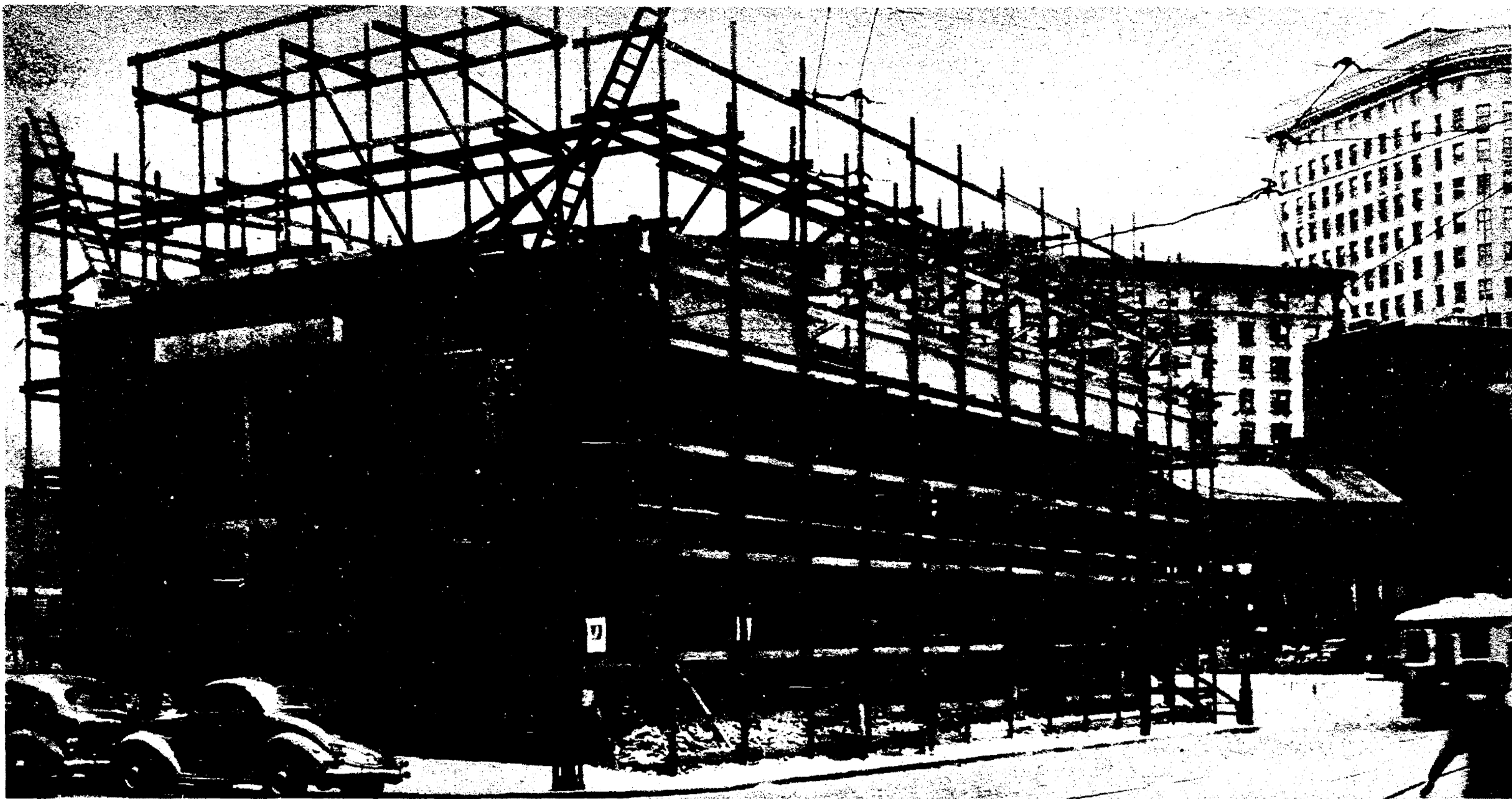
After Joseph Jewett put in his bill for the excavation, there was a steady dribble of statements

for the town fathers to mutter at, grumpily approve and sighingly file—bill from James Field for four cords of building stone; bill from Messrs. Green and Arnold for carting timber. Zephaniah Andrews wanted pay for the mason work he did and Nathaniel and Elisha Burr presented a bill for brick. And so it went as the summer and fall wore away and the sturdy arcaded gable-roofed building planned by Joseph Brown and Stephen Hopkins rose to second-floor level, rearing arches made by Asa Hopkins. An arch is an event in the life of a civic structure; no arch is raised without libation to the builders' god. When the Messrs. Green and Arnold came to make out their bill for nails, lime and chalkboard for the arches they did not forget one most important item: "one gallon of rum for the raising."

Following a winter's layoff work was resumed in June, 1774. Those enterprising fellows Green and Arnold were carting timber again in that month and William Seman was repairing arches and scaffolding. One can almost see the second story going up as Amos Horton demands his money for setting windows and cutting and laying a water table—the Connecticut stone had been delivered on the river bank by scow in the previous December—above the arches. In July the "sidewalk in-



ARCHITECT John H. Cady, who was in charge of the Market House restoration, designed this new doorway on the easterly side after entrance to the John Brown House on Power Street. Both buildings had the same architect.



THE FATE of the Market House was uncertain when a *Journal-Bulletin* photographer made this picture in November, 1938, when workmen were taking down the roof and upper walls because they were "unsafe." The structure was put together again as WPA project in 1940-41.

The Market House Survived City Condemnation

Continued from Preceding Page

spectors" (they had them in the 18th century, too) had something to talk about and wag their sagacious heads over: Asa Hopkins was billing the town for the work he did "shifting the second floor which was put on wrong by reason of the marks being worn out Dragging on the pavements when brought from the Courthouse yard."

Before snow flew that year the versatile Green and Arnold had glazed 22 windows of the city's fine new Market House, seven on each side and three on each end in the second story and one in each garret gable end. Although there were more bills in 1775 for lumber, boarding, nails, lime and lath and for completing work on 20 doorways and doors, by Lexington year the new civic center of Providence was practically a finished job, from Joe Jewett's cellar to the partitioned offices on its second floor and its corniced gable. But it was not until 1777, with the Revolution two years old, that the building began to function as a Market House and the town started renting the 10 stalls on its

ground floor to produce merchants and installed scales and weights.

Already, however, the march of events had caught up with the Market House by Weybosset Bridge, it had kept a date with history. On the night of Mar. 2, 1775, leaping flames were reflected from its ruddy walls and there was a smell of burning Bohea that outstank the odors of the river at low tide as rantipole patriots burned the tyrant's tea and drank confusion to him in raw rum. During the war the French troops visiting Providence stored part of their baggage in the "Upper Lofts" of the Market House and the "lower room" was made available as quarters for some of the French officers.

When peace returned to a distracted land and the gaitered feet of the French grenadiers marched away to receding drum taps, two gentlemen in the insurance way, a Mr. James Lawrence and a Mr. Theodore Foster, moved into separate offices, paying the town "as much rent as any other person will offer for the same room." Providence was growing up and as it lustily grew the stream of farm carts and wagons crossing Weybosset Bridge increased in size, the Parade became aroar with hallooing farmers and the town appointed Capt. Benjamin Hoppin clerk of the market to regulate its use.

The stalls in the arcaded ground floor were outfitted, the Parade and wharf were paved and trees and posts were set out. There were further filling operations along the waterfront and year by year the Market House and its surrounding area developed into the business center of Providence.

The year 1797 is an important date in the story of the Market House. It was in that year that St. John's Lodge of Masons received permission to build a third story at its own expense and devote it to the uses of the square and compass. With the raising of the outside walls and the addition of a new gable roof and cornice, the structure assumed its present form.

All through the early years of the 19th century, despite a beginning trend of business to express the needs and ambitions of the growing community west of the river, the pulse of commercial life beat strongly in and about the Market House. Its principal rival in civic importance at the turn of the century was the three-story Exchange Coffee House near the bridge—rendezvous of Java-sipping ship owners and merchants as well as post office, stationery store, bookshop and publishing office of the Providence Gazette, the Journal's ancestor.

Set down Sept. 23, 1815, as another significant date in the history of the Market House. On that

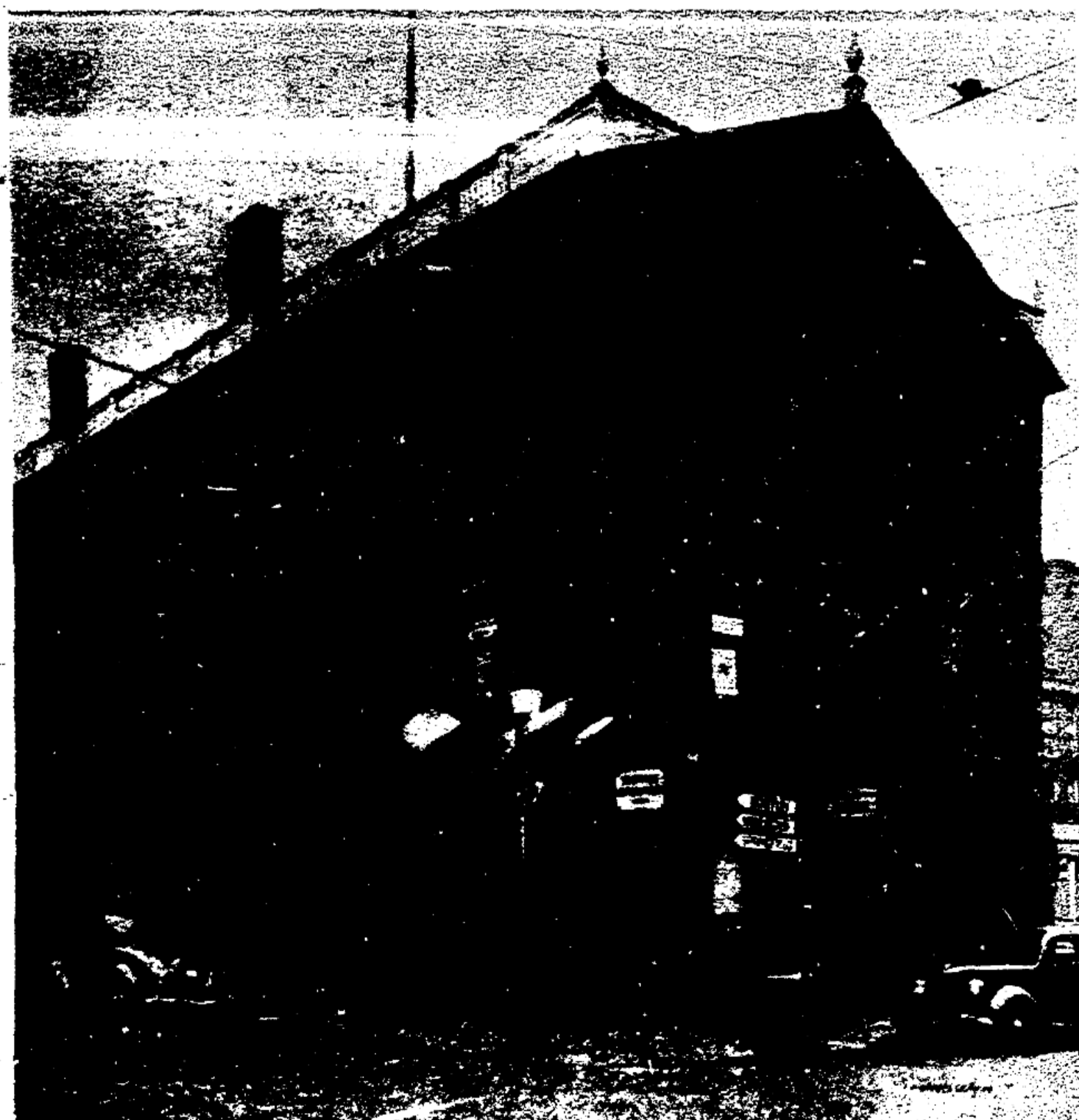
day occurred the Great Storm that wrecked the Great Bridge of Weybosset and lashed the waterfront with a tidal wave that sent ships careening up the river with bowsprits stabbing at second-story windows. The angry waters frothed three feet and a half above the sidewalk surrounding the Market House and the aftermath of the Great Storm was a wave of waterfront improvements, new construction, new streets, a new bridge—this one a fixed span closing the Providence River to navigation above the Parade, first listed as "Market Square" by the directory of 1824.

While changes went on all about it, the Market House itself stood unchanged, a structure of character. New and noteworthy buildings were erected—the great five-story Franklin House, terminus of the Boston and New York stage lines; the Granite Block; the Roger Williams Bank Building with sculptured parapet. They overlooked the old Market House but did not overawe it. Foursquare it faced a changing city as today it faces a changing world.

After the city received its charter in 1832 the city council met there and in 1833—as if to show the Roger Williams Bank that it, too, was capable of dancing a few classic fal-lals on the parapet—it dressed its main cornice and newly erected east entrance wing in Greek balustrades. A few years later there were more improvements: the first-story line was raised and windows installed in the arched openings; a basement was built in the western part of the building; a basement market was installed, accessible by bulkhead entrance and steep stone steps.

The Market House underwent no other important alterations until 1865-1866, when it was used to provide quarters for practically all city departments. For 12 years it was known as the City Building, a hive of small offices scarce big enough to contain a city factotum's sense of self-importance. Abandoned when the present city hall was opened in 1878, the building was then leased to the Providence Board of Trade, which occupied the first story, and rented the rest of the old Market House. One tenant was the Rhode Island Electric Lighting Co. which installed the first arc lights in the city in 1882 in Market Square and on Westminster Street across the river, which had long since lost its significance as a dividing line between a commercial and an agricultural Providence.

Numerous changes were made in the Market House in ensuing years. Entrances were placed in the central arches on the side walls and the roof balustrade came off. Yellow paint covered the ripened scarlet of the old brick walls and large-



JUST BEFORE condemnation as unsafe, the Market House, then occupied by the Providence Chamber of Commerce, looked like this.



SCHOOL OF DESIGN students at work in a corner of one of the draughting rooms in the Market House. The interior of the building is completely renovated for school work.

paned sash were installed in the second and third-story windows. The first story was stripped of its partitions and converted into a single room.

In 1915, two years after the Providence Board of Trade was reorganized as the Chamber of Commerce, the city renewed the chamber's lease of the Market House for 10 years. Norman M. Isham and John Hutchins Cady undertook a partial exterior restoration which put the balustrade back on the roof and got rid of the yellow paint. Minor interior alterations were made from time to time.

The name of the Market House lost all modern significance when the market era of the Square closed in 1927. In that year a new produce center was opened on Harris Avenue and market gardeners' leases of highway spaces adjoining the river were canceled by the city. What is more, a holocaust of demolition, followed by new construction, swept the Market Square area during the next nine years, leaving the Market House one of the few survivors of Colonial Providence between Benefit Street and the river. It even looked for a time as if the Market House might go, too, for early in 1938, the Commissioner of Public Buildings pronounced the building unsafe for occupancy and condemned certain aged roof trusses which—strangely enough—stood up all right when the Sept. 21 hurricane of that year hit the city. Plans for reconstruction were drawn up calling for replacement of the old oak roof beams by steel trusses, a proposed desecration which was heatedly opposed by the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The chapter's plea for an authentic restoration, if any, was heard and heeded by Mayor John F. Collins, who ordered reconstruction plans revised, and in due course the restoration became a WPA project which was well under way when it was suspended in 1940. The upper part of the walls had been rebuilt with bricks conforming to the original size and a steel and concrete roof was erected and covered with slate.

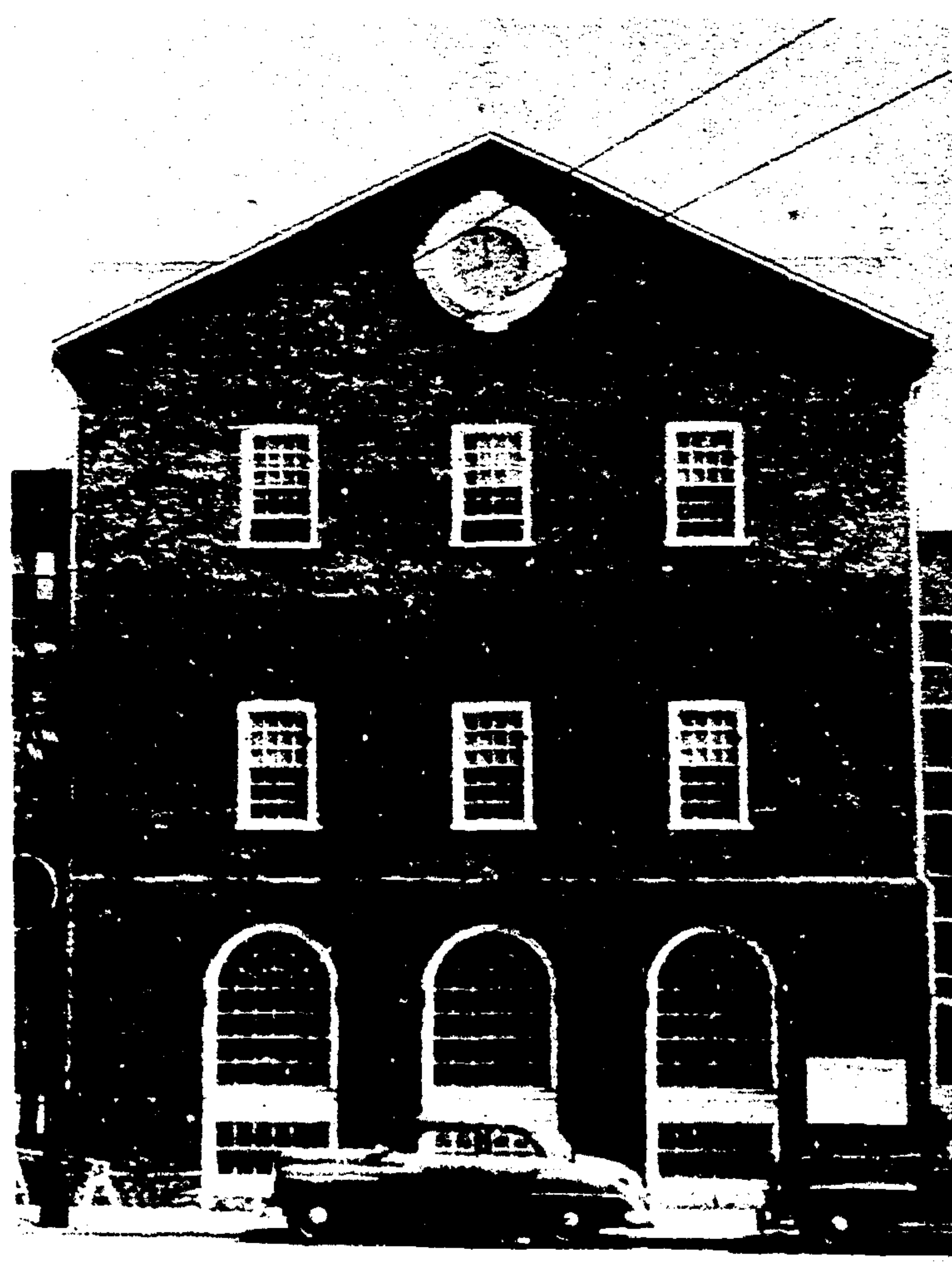
There were several attempts during World War II to complete rehabilitation of the Market House but none of them came to anything. Narrowly did the old building escape being turned into a juvenile court. The plans were drawn but the construction estimates were high.

Thus for almost a decade the historic Market House had a kind of indeterminate status unbefitting its years and dignity, to say nothing of its memories of the Parade and the haywagons lumbering over the Great Bridge of Weybosset. A deed signed by Mayor Dennis J. Roberts on May 27, 1948, restored the Market House to usefulness, made it a part of the Rhode Island School of

Design estate, which now includes virtually all of the block bounded by Waterman, North Main, College and Benefit Streets.

In April, 1949, the School of Design announced the engagement of John Hutchins Cady as architect and the office of Hollis French as engineer to draw up plans for adapting the Market House for school purposes and accommodating the departments of architecture, landscaping, and design. This work has now been completed and a new chapter in the story opened. But Joe Jewett never dreamed he was digging the cellar of a school-house!

On the first floor where, of old, buyer and seller haggled beneath open arches there is a large exhibition room approached by a corridor flanked by executive offices. The basement and second and third floors are occupied by classrooms and large draughting areas bright with some of the same sunlight that shone on Parade and "Towne Street" and fish wharf in the days when the farm wagons came rumbling over the river to market and Providence was young.



MARKET HOUSE, 1950. In 177 years, it has withstood hurricanes and seen a lot of changes.