

**PPS RECORDS FOR
57 BROWNELL STREET**

PLAT 4, LOT 107

**Previously known as: 4 Brownell (1866-1875)
 17 Brownell (1875-1882)
 133 Brownell (1895-1918)**

**MOWRY-NICHOLSON HOUSE
Built 1856, 1867, 1877**

DESCRIPTION

Originally built as a cruciform-plan Italianate villa; remodeled in 1867 and again in 1877 with a northwest addition, including a 3-1/2 story tower with quoins, oculus windows and a steeply pitched roof. The house is now 2-1/2 stories with Italianate and Queen Anne detailing. Its gabled front is dominated by wide paneled corner pilasters and has a Palladian window over a bracketed window hood at the façade. Shed dormer on the cross gable added in the mid-1920s.

The house stands on a 10,924 sq. ft. lot on the north side of Brownell Street, between Holden Street and Interstate 95. The lot has about 115 feet of frontage and measures about 97.29 feet deep on its eastern boundary.

HISTORY:

The house was built in 1856 for the residence of William G. R. Mowry by his contracting firm, Mowry & Steere. Ten years later, William T. Nicholson, owner of the nearby Nicholson File Company, purchased the house and modified it in 1867 and 1877, according to tax records. William died in October 1893 and his widow Elizabeth continued to live in the house until 1897. Following her death, the estate sold the house to Jane V. Bailey, widow of Richard A. Bailey, a foreman at A. T. Cross.

The house fell on hard times in the late 20th century and faced demolition. It was listed on Providence Preservation Society's Ten Most Endangered Properties list. Following a substantial historical restoration, the house is now a bed-and-breakfast inn.

DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT:¹

The Smith Hill neighborhood was "sparsely settled before 1850, but achieved its present form between 1875 and 1925 when small cottages and larger multiple-family dwellings

¹ Sanderson, Edward F. and William McKenzie Woodward. Providence: A Citywide Survey of Historic Resources (Providence: RI Historical Preservation Commission, 1986), pp. 29-32.
Wm McKenzie Woodward. Smith Hill, Providence (Providence: RI Historic Preservation Commission Statewide Historical Preservation Report P-P-4, 1980), p 16.

packed the neighborhood's primary thoroughfares and the short, irregular cross-streets in between."

Several plats of house lots were developed on Smith Hill north and west of the cove between 1830 and 1850 which resulted in a scattering of houses (now mostly removed). Many of these were comfortable single-family dwellings built for merchants or industrial managers.

57 Brownell Street was built in the Italian villa style, at the time eminently suited to the semi-rural site on the hillside overlooking the Woonasquatucket River. The integration of design and location clearly followed the tenets of Andrew Jackson Downing, the prominent mid-nineteenth-century theoretician and architect, as expressed in *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850). Modified by William T. Nicholson in the 1860s and 1870s, the house reflects changing demands of both style and function in what was by then becoming an urban area adjacent to incipient industry along the river.

More intensive development followed due to the proliferation of factories along the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck rivers after 1860 and the dramatic increase in Providence's population which resulted from mid-century immigrations.

DESIGNATIONS

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing building in the Smith Hill Historic District. The house is listed as the Mowry-Nicholson House (1856, 1864, 1877.)

RECORDS (*All Records were found in Providence City Hall unless otherwise noted*).

Maps and Atlases (All in Archives unless otherwise noted)

1798: "A Map of Owners of Lots in Providence," compiled by Henry B. Chace in 1912: Plate X shows the future site of 57 Brownell Street lies on 14 acres of land owned by Benjamin Stille and wife, bounded by Broad Lane (Smith Street) lies on the north and the Great Salt Cove lies on the south.

1850: "Plat of the Holden Estate in Providence and North Providence including land belonging to Nathaniel Smith" platted by Cushing & Farnum in November 1850, recorded January 11, 1851 in Book 4, Page 3 and copied on Plat Card 101. This map shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, Elizabeth Street (West Park) on the north, and Thatch Street (Park) on the east. The first three lots on Brownell Street are platted as Lots #50, 51, and 52. The future site of 57 Brownell Street lies here.

1857: "Map of Providence," by H.F. Walling, Page B3(9) shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, Elizabeth Street on the north,

and Park Street on the east. Two houses are built on the block. The subject house is built on the second lot east of Holden Street. The area is sparsely developed.

1875: "Atlas of the City of Providence," by G.M. Hopkins Co., Vol. 1 (Ward 1), Plate A shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, West Park Street on the north, and Park Street on the east. The block is platted into 15 lots. W. T. Nicholson owns the frame house on the second lot east of Holden Street containing 4,862 sq. ft. The lot is further identified as lot #51 of the Holden Estate Plat. W. T. Nicholson also owns Lot #50 and #52 on either side, as well as the lot in the rear at the corner of Holden and West Park Streets containing barns and/or stables. There is a fire plug on Brownell. The area is developed with a mixture of manufacturing, residential and government uses. Browne & Sharpe Manufacturing and the Cove Basin lies on the south and the State of RI Prison lies on the southeast. Reference Holden Estate Plat.

1882: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 8, shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, West Park Street on the north, and Park Street on the east. The block is platted into 15 lots. W. T. Nicholson owns the frame house at 17 Brownell Street located on the second lot east of Holden Street, identified as Lot 51. W. T. Nicholson owns the first three lots on Brownell, and lots along the west side of Holden Street. Water and sewer is on the street. The area is developed with a mixture of manufacturing, residential and institutional uses. Browne & Sharpe Manufacturing and the Cove Basin lies on the south and the State of RI Prison lies on the southeast. Reference to Holden Estate Plat.

1895: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by Everts & Richards, Plate 8 shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, West Park Street on the north, and Park Street on the east. There is a frame house at 133 Brownell Street, the second lot east of Holden Street containing 4,862 sq. ft. No owner is identified. Water and sewer is on the street. The area is developed with a mixture of manufacturing, residential, government, and institutional uses. Browne & Sharpe Manufacturing lies on the south, the State Capitol lies on the east, and the State Normal School lies on the southeast.

1899: "Plat of the Estate of the Late Wm. T. Nicholson between West Park and Brownell Streets" recorded May 17, 1899 in Book 25, Page 43 and copied on Plat Card 750. This map shows 11 lots owned by the Estate of Wm. T. Nicholson along Holden and Brownell Streets. Three lots are shown on Brownell Street. The lot at the corner of Holden and Brownell Streets (letter I) contains 6,437 sq. ft. The second lot east of Holden Street (letter J) contains 4,862 sq. ft., and the third lot east of Holden Street (letter K) contains 4,862 sq. ft.

1902: Assessors Plat Maps, Plat 4 shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, West Park Street on the north, and Park Street on the

east. Lot 107 contains 6,062 sq. ft. and Lot 106 on the east contains 4,862 sq. ft. No buildings or owners are shown on this map.

1908: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by L.J. Richards Co., Plate 5 shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, West Park Street on the north, and Park Street on the east. The block is platted into 14 lots. On the second lot east of Holden Street, there is a frame house at 133 Brownell Street owned by Jane V. Bailey. There is water and sewer on the street. There are street cars on Francis and Smith Streets and Promenade Street. The area is developed with a mixture of manufacturing, residential, government, and institutional uses. The RI Catholic Orphan Asylum lies on the eastern end of the block. Browne & Sharpe Manufacturing lies on the south, the State Capitol lies on the east, and the State Normal School lies on the southeast.

1918: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 5 shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, West Park Street on the north, and Park Street on the east. The block is platted into 14 lots. On the second lot east of Holden Street, there is a frame house at 57 Brownell Street owned by Jane V. Bailey. There is water and sewer on the street. There are street cars on Francis and Smith Streets and Promenade Street. The area is developed with a mixture of manufacturing, residential, government, and institutional uses. The RI Catholic Orphan Asylum lies on the eastern end of the block. Browne & Sharpe Manufacturing lies on the south, the State Capitol and several buildings owned by the Masons lie on the east, and the State Normal School lies on the southeast. Reference to the William T. Nicholson Estate Plan.

1926: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 5 shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, West Park Street on the north, and Park Street on the east. The block is platted into 14 lots. On the second lot east of Holden Street, there is a frame house at 57 Brownell Street owned by J. McCabe. There is water and sewer on the street. There are street cars on Francis and Smith Streets and Promenade Street. The area is developed with a mixture of manufacturing, residential, government, and institutional uses. The RI Catholic Orphan Asylum lies on the eastern end of the block. Browne & Sharpe Manufacturing lies on the south, the State Capitol lies on the east, and the State Normal School lies on the southeast. Reference to the William T. Nicholson Estate Plan.

1937: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 5 shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, West Park Street on the north, and Park Street on the east. The block is platted into 14 lots. On the second lot east of Holden Street, there is a frame house owned by J. T. McCabe. He also owns the 4,862 sq. ft. lot on the east. There is water and sewer on the street. There are street cars on Francis and Smith Streets. The area is developed with a mixture of manufacturing, residential, government, and institutional uses. The RI Catholic Orphan Asylum lies on the eastern end of the block. Browne & Sharpe Manufacturing lies on the south, the State Capitol and the Masonic Temple lie on the

east, and the State Normal School and Henry Barnard School lie on the southeast. Reference to the William T. Nicholson Estate Plan.

2004: Assessors Plat Maps, Plat 4 shows the block bounded by Brownell Street on the south, Holden Street on the west, West Park Street on the north, and Interstate 95 on the east. The block is platted into six lots. Lot 107 is the second lot east of Holden and contains 10,924 sq. ft. It is bounded by Interstate 95 on the eastern boundary. There are no buildings shown on this map.

Deeds (Registry of Deeds)

Deed Book 144/211: On May 28, 1956, Benjamin B. Brownell and Elizabeth T. Brownell of Providence, sold for \$1,200 to William G. R. Mowry and Clark Steere, of Providence, under the company name Mowry & Steere, a certain lot of land situated on Smith's Hill known as Lot No. 51 on the Plat of the Holden Estate Smith's Hill. The lot measures 50' on Brownell and 97.3' northerly.

Deed Book 169/254: On April 25, 1865, William G. R. Mowry and Clark Steere, both of Providence, sold for \$1.00 to William T. Nicholson of Providence, a certain lot of land with all the improvements and appurtenances thereto situated on Smith's Hill and laid out as Lot No. 51 on the part of the Holden Estate Smith Hill.

Deed Book 171/323: On April 14, 1865, Edward Curtis of Providence conveyed Lot #52 with improvements thereon.

Intent to Build Records (Archives)

None found.

Tax Records (Archives)

Tax records are available from 1827 to the present. Prior to 1854, tax records were published in a book listing the property owner alphabetically by name, the total assessment for any real and personal property (without specifying where real estate was located), and the total tax due. Beginning in 1854, the city kept ledgers (organized by property owner name) indicating the plat and lot number of any real estate and the assessed value and taxes therefor.

August 1, 1854, Series A Ledger 1.88: Benjamin B. Brownell and wife owned Plat 4 Lot 107 containing 4,862 sq. ft. Assessed \$680 for land; \$0 building.

May 27, 1856, Series A Ledger 2.125: Wm. G. R. Mowry and Clark Steere owned Plat 4 Lot 107 containing 4,862 sq. ft. Assessed \$680 for land; \$3,500 for building.

May 1, 1865, Series A Ledger 2.171: William T. Nicholson owned Plat 4 Lot 107 containing 4,862 sq. ft. Assessed \$680 for land; \$3,500 for building.

April 1867, Series B Ledger 4.22: William T. Nicholson owned Plat 4 Lot 107 containing 4,862 sq. ft. Assessed \$680 for land; \$4,000 for building.

April 1871, Series B Ledger 4.22: William T. Nicholson owned Plat 4 Lot 107 containing 4,862 sq. ft. Assessed \$1,215 for land; \$4,000 for building.

July 31, 1877 Series C Ledger 5.105: William T. Nicholson owned Plat 4 Lot 107 containing 4,862 sq. ft. Assessed \$1,215 for land; \$7,000 for building. [There was a notation: "building added"]

Directories (Archives)

Providence City Directories contain a street directory, noting all existing streets, and a residents' directory organized alphabetically by last name; these also included a house directory, listing residential buildings by street address, from 1892-1894 and again since 1937.

Providence House Directories were published separately from the city directory, 1895-1937 (published biannually from 1901). These directories list all residential buildings by street address, indicating the names of all residents and often their occupations as well. No distinction is made between owners and tenants. House directories also contain a street directory. This directory is sometimes a year behind the city directory.

1857 Wm. G. R. Mowry (Mowry & Steere), lumber dealer with business at 349 S. Main Street lived at 22 James Street.

1858 Wm. G. R. Mowry (Mowry & Steere), lumber dealer with business at 351 S. Main Street lived at Brownell Street.

1866 Wm. T. Nicholson, president and agent, Nicholson File Co. lived at 4 Brownell Street.

1875 Wm. T. Nicholson, president and agent, Nicholson File Co. lived at 17 Brownell Street.

1896 Elizabeth D. Nicholson, widow, lived at 133 Brownell Street.

Assessor's Chain of Title (Assessor's Office)

William T. Nicholson owned the property as of May 1, 1865.

William T. Nicholson Est. owned the property as of December 1, 1897.

Jane V. Bailey, widow Richard A., owned the property as of July 1, 1899.

Catherine McCabe, wife John T., owned the property as of April 1, 1919.

John T. McCabe and wife Catherine, Jt. Ten., owned the property as of April 1, 1923.

Isaac Rose owned the property as of November 1929.

Isaac Rose Estate owned the property as of November 1940.

Maria Antaya owned the property as of October 1942.

Morris D. and Max Rose, Jt. Ten., owned the property as of February 1948.

George Rose and wife Fannie, Jt. Ten., owned the property as of March 1948.

Fannie Rose owned the property as of April 1950.

Belle Kaplan owned the property as of December 1956.

Harold T. Prout, Jr., Harold T. Prout, Sr., and Lydia P. Cook, JT, owned the property as of December 22, 1964. Ref DB 1129/88

Edward Titzmann, Sr., and wife Mary, and Edward Titzmann, Jr. owned the property as of September 21, 1970. Ref DB 1159/72

Mary Titzmann and Edward Titzmann, Jr. and wife Carol A. owned the property as of June 11, 1976. Ref DB 1192/244

The Foundry Associates owned the property as of November 3, 1986. Ref DB 1468/249, 251

Christian Brothers LPI owned the property as of May 2002. Ref DB 5154/246

Research compiled by Judith A. Barlow

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