PPS RECORDS FOR
1447 WESTMINSTER STREET
PLAT 32, LOT 357

Previously known 773 High Street (1889-1892)

HENRY T. MOLTER HOUSE
WILLIAM H. COLWELL, ARCHITECT
JOHN L. SPRAGUE, BUILDER
Built 1888-1889

DESCRIPTION:

1447 Westminster Street is a stately Queen Anne-style house, distinguished by its multiple roof peaks, a three-story turret, and a detailed, three-story projecting front entryway. Topped by a slate roof with copper ridges and finials, the main hipped roof is marked by twin pyramidal gable dormers on the east elevation, and triangular twin and single gable dormers on the remaining elevations. The house is clad in red slate shingles above the second-story water course, with brick, below, providing a distinct contrasting horizontal differentiation to the variously shaped verticals which punctuate the roofline. Wood trim includes brackets at cornice edges, detailed frieze at projecting window bays and front porch. A wooden band outlines the perimeter of the house just above the second story windows, at the lintel level. On the first floor, multiple brick bands outline the perimeter at the lower and upper levels of the decorative wood panels above the windows. Rusticated brownstone is used for the first floor window sills, front porch, and the foundation. Windows are wood one-over-one double hung sash on the lower levels and diamond pattern windows in the upper sash at the third floor level.¹

The house stands on a 6,551 sq. ft. lot on the north side of Westminster Street, between Harkness Street and Almy Street. The lot has about 54 feet of frontage and measures approximately 121 feet deep.

HISTORY:

Henry T. Molter purchased a vacant lot on High Street in November 1887 and filed for a building permit in August 1888. The building permit records name John L. Sprague & Co., builder; and W. H. Colwell, architect. Colwell’s business address was 65 Westminster Street, Room 28. J. L. Sprague and Co. also built the brick carriage house that adjoins the lot at the northeast corner.

Henry was owner of "What Cheer Brewery," which was located on Potter Street (at Pine) in downtown Providence. The brewery was passed down to Henry and John in 1885, when their father Nicholas retired after operating the "What Cheer Lager Brewery" since 1868. Henry became sole owner in 1893. The three Molter men all built large mansions on Westminster Street in close proximity to each other. Henry and his father

¹ Investment Tax Credit Application, Architectural Description, PPS Revolving Fund
Nicholas lived next door to each other, and brother John lived across the street about a block away. Of the three houses, only 1447 Westminster Street survives, along with its carriage house on Slocum Street. Henry lived in this house with his wife Augusta until his death in 1922. In 1928, the house was sold to Will J. Carpenter & Son, undertakers. The building then operated as a funeral home under several different names until 2002. According to the Assessor’s Office, the latest owner of record of 1447 Westminster Street is Kismetro LLC since December 2004.²

DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT³:

After the founding of Providence in 1636, the area west of the Providence River was initially used for common grazing land. Isolated farmsteads began to appear on the “West Side” in the 18th century, after several highways were built leading to the hinterlands of the Providence Plantations and to distant towns in other British colonies. The Plainfield Road (portions of which were later called High Street, and now Westminster Street), was laid out in 1711, extending from the Providence River many miles westward into Connecticut; the Moshanticut Road, now Cranston Street, was built by 1717. By the time of the Revolutionary War, more than 1,600 people lived on the West Side.

By the middle of the 19th century, Providence was growing increasingly industrialized and urbanized. The introduction of public transportation (horse-drawn streetcars) along Westminster and Cranston Streets in the 1860s facilitated development on the West Side at a much faster pace. By 1900 the area surrounding the Dexter Parade Ground had become a densely built upper and middle-class suburban neighborhood. Today known variously as the Armory District or the West Broadway neighborhood, its population is more economically and culturally diverse, but the 19th century housing stock remains largely intact.

DESIGNATIONS

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing building to the Broadway-Armory Historic District. The NR nomination lists the house as the “Henry T. Molter House (1888).

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 XVII shows the future site of 1447 Westminster Street lies within Bennett’s Hill, Christopher Olney’s 95 acre farm, bounded by Plainfield Road on the south (Westminster Street.)

² From Investment Tax Credit Application, Statement of Significance, PPS Revolving Fund
1857: “Map of Providence,” by H.F. Walling, Page C#2(14) shows the future site of 1447 Westminster Street lies within the property owned by Charles T. James bounded by High Street on the south, Harkness Street on the west, Meader Street on the north, and Almy Street on the east. Three buildings are shown on this estate (none of which is the present house).

1866: “Plat of the Gen'l James Estate (so called) as laid out into lots September 5, 1866” recorded in Book 6 Page 53 and copied on Card 178. This map shows a block bounded by High Street on the south, Harkness Street on the west, an unnamed street on the north, and Almy Street on the east. The block has been platted into lots numbered 1 through 14 and further marked by letters identifying the owners. Lots marked with the letter A belong to the heirs of M. B. Ives, letter B belong to Robert H. Ives, letter C belong to Mrs. C. R. Goddard, and letter D belong to John Carter Brown. The future site of 1447 Westminster Street is located on lot number 3 belonging to the heirs of M. B. Ives. The lot is the third lot east of Harkness Street and has a 54' frontage on High Street and is approximately 121' deep.

1875: “Atlas of the City of Providence,” by G.M. Hopkins Co., Vol. 2, Plate K shows the block bounded by High Street on the south, Harkness Street on the west, Slocum Street on the north, and Almy Street on the east. The future site of 1447 Westminster Street lies within a 23,828 sq. ft. lot owned by Taylor and Russell, Trustees. The only house on the block is a large frame building at the rear of the Taylor and Russell lot, on Slocum Street. A horse car line and hydrants are found on High Street.

1882: “Atlas of the City of Providence” by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 14, shows the block bounded by High Street on the south, Harkness Street on the west, Slocum Street on the north, and Almy Street on the east. The future site of 1447 Westminster Street lies within a lot owned by Russell et al. The only house on the block remains the large frame building at the rear of the Russell lot, on Slocum Street. There is a street car line on High Street and water and sewer lines on the street.

1895: “Atlas of the City of Providence” by Everts & Richards: Plate 10 shows the block bounded by Westminster Street on the south, Harkness Street on the west, Slocum Street on the north, and Almy Street on the east. Westminster Street has been platted into lots. A frame house is shown at 1447 Westminster Street on a 6,551 square foot lot. It is the second lot east of Harkness Street. Greenhouses exist on the lot at the corner of Harkness and Slocum Streets. There are streetcars on Westminster Street, Broadway, and Cranston Street. Sewer and water is on the street.

1902: Assessors Plat Maps, Plat 32 shows that the block bounded by Westminster Street on the south, Harkness Street on the west, Slocum Street on the north, and Almy Street on the east. No house numbers or buildings are shown on this map. Lot #357 is a 6,551 sq. ft. lot and is the second lot east of Harkness Street.
1908: “Atlas of the City of Providence” by L.J. Richards Co.: Plate 15 shows the block bounded by Westminster Street on the south, Harkness Street on the west, Slocum Street on the north, and Almy Street on the east. At the second lot east of Harkness Street, a brick house owned by H. T. Molter is shown at 1447 Westminster Street on a 6,551 square foot lot. A stable owned by H. T. Molter exists on the lot diagonally on the northeast corner of 1447 Westminster. The vacant lot that adjoins 1447 Westminster Street on the right is owned by J. N. Molter. Greenhouses exist on the lot at the corner of Harkness and Slocum Streets. There is a streetcar on Westminster Street, Broadway, and Cranston Street. Sewer and water is on the street.

1918: “Atlas of the City of Providence” by G.M. Hopkins Co.: Plate 8 shows the block bounded by Westminster Street on the south, Harkness Street on the west, Slocum Street on the north, and Almy Street on the east. At the second lot east of Harkness Street, a brick house owned by H. T. Molter is shown at 1447 Westminster Street on a 6,551 square foot lot. A stable owned by H. T. Molter exists on the lot diagonally on the northeast corner of 1447 Westminster. The vacant lot that adjoins 1447 Westminster Street on the right is owned by W. H. Graham. Greenhouses exist on the lot at the corner of Harkness and Slocum Streets. There is a streetcar on Westminster Street, Broadway, and Cranston Street. Sewer and water is on the street. There is reference to General James Estate Plat.

1926: “Atlas of the City of Providence” by G.M. Hopkins Co.: Plate 8 shows the block bounded by Westminster Street on the south, Harkness Street on the west, Slocum Street on the north, and Almy Street on the east. At the second lot east of Harkness Street, a brick house owned by A. W. Carpenter is shown at 1447 Westminster Street on a 6,551 square foot lot. The vacant lot that adjoins 1447 Westminster Street on the right is also owned by A. W. Carpenter. A brick stable owned by the H. T. Molter Est. exists on the lot diagonally on the northeast corner of 1447 Westminster. Greenhouses exist on the lot at the corner of Harkness and Slocum Streets. Liberty Hall is shown behind 1447 Westminster Street on Slocum Street. There is a streetcar on Westminster Street. Sewer and water is on the street.

1937: “Atlas of the City of Providence” by G.M. Hopkins Co.: Plate 8 shows the block bounded by Westminster Street on the south, Harkness Street on the west, Slocum Street on the north, and Almy Street on the east. At the third lot east of Harkness Street, a brick house owned by E. Carpenter is shown at 1447 Westminster Street on a 6,551 square foot lot. E. Carpenter also owns the adjoining lot on the right. There is a brick structure at the rear of this lot owned by an estate. Greenhouses exist on the lot at the corner of Harkness and Slocum Streets and on the lot to the west of 1447 Westminster Street. The Federal Music Hall is shown behind 1447 Westminster Street on Slocum Street. There is a streetcar on Westminster Street. Sewer and water is on the street. There is reference to General James Estate.
Deeds (Registry of Deeds)

DB 342/404: On November 12, 1887, Henry G. Russell (husband of Hope) and William Ames, Trustees, (owners of ½) and Henry G. Russell and Hope B. Russell (owners of ½) sold to Henry T. Molter of Providence, a certain lot of land, laid out and delineated as lot number 3 upon a certain plat entitled “Plat of Gen’l James Estate as laid out into lots September 5, 1866 on Plat #178.”

Intent to Build Records (Archives)

On December 2, 1887, Henry T. and John N. Molter filed for permission to build a barn on High Street near Harkness, by J. L. Sprague.

On August 9, 1888, Henry T. Molter; John L. Sprague & Co., builder; and W. H. Colwell, architect, filed a notice of intention to build #5286 on the north side of High Street “between Almy and Marshall.” [This information was obtained from the index card file--the book containing the actual specimen of the intention to build was missing.] Cross-reference searches of the books that contain intention to build records by streets, by name, and the formal records of building permit #5286 yielded the following information: Henry T. Molter intends to build a 2-1/2-story wood dwelling for 1 tenement on the north side of High Street near Almy Street on the estate owned by H. T. M. The builder is J. L. Sprague & Co. The estimated cost to build is $9,000.

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.

1888 – Henry T. Molter lived at 16 Potter
1889 – Henry T. Molter (N. Molter’s Son’s) business at 14-20 Potter, lived at 773 High Street
Assessor's Chain of Title Cards (Assessor's Office)

NOTE: At the time of this research, the Chain of Title Cards were missing with the exception of what is listed below.

John K. Najarian and John K. Najarian, Jr., Tenants in Partnership, owned the property as of November 30, 1988. (Ref. DB 1932/088)
John K. Najarian, Jr. owned the property as of December 1990.

Research compiled by Judith A. Barlow
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