

**PPS RECORDS FOR  
147 BENEFIT STREET  
PLAT 10, LOT 202**

**JAMES HUMPHREYS HOUSE  
Built 1863-1864  
Architect: Alpheus Morse**

**DESCRIPTION:**

“A brownstone-faced, brick Italianate townhouse, built right on the sidewalk line, 3 stories above a full, rusticated basement. The main entrance is on the south side, up a tall flight of stairs leading to a portico. Morse achieved a suggestion of picturesque massing by breaking out the northernmost bay of the 3-bay façade from the plane of the wall. This is a rare Providence example of the “English” house plan – Italian, really, with the principal story one flight above the street level – as suggested by the tall windows at that level. ... Ellery Millard was the mason for the project.”

-- From Providence: A Citywide Survey of Historic Resources, p. 142.

Originally a single-family house, variously known as 145-147 Benefit, the building is now a 5-unit condominium.

On the north elevation is the outline of a house with a gable roof, now demolished, that once shared a party wall with this house. The abutting lot is now a small public garden.

The house stands on a 6,536 square foot lot on the east side of Benefit between South Court Street (to the south) and Bowen Street (to the north). The other street bounding the block is Wheaton Street, to the east. The lot measures approximately 50 feet wide on Benefit St., and approximately 99 feet deep.

**HISTORY:**

Joseph Humphreys was the treasurer and agent for the Eagle Screw Company, one of Providence’s major industrial businesses. He was living on Angell Street when in November 1862 he acquired a vacant lot of land on Benefit Street from Richard Hamlin. (Architect Alpheus Morse completed nearly 30 major residential and institutional commissions in Providence alone over the course of his illustrious career.) A building permit was issued in July 1863, and the house was apparently completed by 1864, when it was assessed for tax purposes at \$25,000 – an extraordinarily high value. The Humphreys family continued to own the property until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, then between 1905 and 1989 the house changed hands 22 times.

The building was converted to a 5-unit condominium in 1989; all five units have changed hands at least twice since then. The current unit owners are: Unit A, Pierre St. Armand (acquired 1999); Unit B, Barrett Bready (acquired 1999); Unit 1, Robert and Sidney Knisel (acquired 1999); Unit 2, Marrie Hadfield (acquired 2001), and Unit 3, Christopher B. Hearn and Kate Hines (acquired 1995).

## DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT<sup>1</sup>:

The College Hill neighborhood is part of the original settlement area of Providence, established in 1636. The first residents laid out their settlement in a linear plan on the east side of the Moshassuck and Providence Rivers, with house lots fronting on the rivers and stretching eastward up and over a steep hill to what is now Hope Street.

The town was confined to the riverbanks at the foot of the hill until after 1769, when Benefit Street was laid out on the western slope of the hill to relieve some of the congestion below, “for the benefit of all” residents of the town. The following year, Rhode Island College (now Brown University) built its first structure on top of the hill, giving the neighborhood its name.

The College Hill neighborhood continued to develop over the next 150 years, reaching its present density in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Benefit Street has been a fashionable address in Providence for most of its existence and has come to be known as “The Mile of History” for the its diverse and well-preserved historic architecture, with many buildings designed by prominent architects.

## DESIGNATIONS

147 Benefit Street is a contributing building to the College Hill National Landmark Historic District; in the inventory, the house is dated 1864-1866, but records indicate that the house was standing by 1864.

The house is also located within the College Hill Historic District overlay zone designated by the City of Providence.

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

### Maps and Atlases (Archives, Registry of Deeds)

1798: “A Map of Owners of Lots in Providence,” compiled by Henry B. Chace in 1912: Plate III shows Benefit Street laid out, extending from Power Street north to Smith Street. The land on the east side of Benefit Street, opposite North Court Street, was owned by Hannah Cushing and Jacob Smith. This is where 147 Benefit would eventually be built.

1875: “Atlas of the City of Providence,” by G.M. Hopkins Co., Vol. 1 (Ward 1), Plate M shows the house at 145-147 Benefit Street standing on a 6,367 square foot lot. (By 1875 it had been there for over 10 years.) The property is owned by R.C. and S.L. Humphreys (that is, Rebecca and Sarah, perhaps James’s daughters). The block bounded by Benefit, South Court, Wheaton and Bowen Streets has 17 house lots within it, all but two at the northern end of the block have houses on them.

1882: “Atlas of the City of Providence” by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 2, shows the house (without a street address or lot size indicated), standing on the east side of Benefit Street five lots north of South Court Street (just north of the Knowles Block rowhouses). The owners are still R.C. and S.L. Humphreys. By this time, water lines have been installed on Benefit Street, but sewer lines have not yet been extended north of Waterman St.

---

<sup>1</sup> From Providence: A Citywide Survey of Historic Resources, by Edward F. Sanderson and William McKenzie Woodward, R.I. Historical Preservation Commission, 1986.

1895: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by Everts & Richards, Plates 28-29, shows the house labeled 147 Benefit Street on a 6,367 sq. ft. lot. The owner is not indicated. Sewer lines have been installed on Benefit Street, and a streetcar line on North Main Street: both of these amenities facilitated residential development on the upper slopes of College Hill.

1902: Assessors Plat Maps, Plat 10 shows Lot 202 on the east side of Benefit Street, five lots north of South Court Street. The lot size has increased slightly, to its current size of 6,536 sq. ft. The irregularly shaped lot measures 50.15 feet on Benefit Street, approx. 128 feet on the north, 50 feet on the east, and 129 feet on the south.

1908: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by L.J. Richards Co., Plate 7 shows 147 Benefit St. on a 6,536 sq. ft. lot owned by H.R. Guild.

1918: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 19 shows 147 Benefit St. on a 6,536 sq. ft. lot owned by S. Rosen.

1926: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 19 shows 147 Benefit St. on a 6,536 sq. ft. lot owned by A. Paolino.

1937: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 19 shows 147 Benefit St. on a 6,536 sq. ft. lot owned by Lenox Realty Co.

#### Intent to Build Records (Archives)

On July 6, 1863 a permit was issued to W.S. Humphreys, on behalf of James Humphreys, to build a house on Benefit Street on the lot north of E.P. Knowles's property. (See box folder: RG 102, Series AN 20358).

#### Deeds (Archives, Registry of Deeds)

Deed Book 137, Page 412: An indenture dated December 30, 1854 between George I. Chace and Richard E. Hamlin, whereby the two agreed to share a party wall on the property line between their two lots. Chace had already built a brick and stone house on the east side of Benefit Street, 6 lots north of South Court Street; Hamlin "contemplated" constructing a house of like materials on his own lot, abutting Chace's to the south. For \$250, Chace deeded to Hamlin a sliver of land (90 sq. ft.) just south of his house's south wall, as well as the southerly half of that south wall itself, "for the support of the sills, girts, plates, joists, and timbers of said building to be by [Hamlin] erected; but shall have no right to enter either of the chimneys or to place any incumbrance on the front or rear of [Chace's] house." Hamlin also agreed not to put any windows in the north or east side of his new house where it adjoined Chace's property, and to pay for any damages to Chace's house resulting from the new construction. The party wall was not to be changed by either party without consent of both. This agreement was to run in perpetuity with the title of both properties.

DB 163, Page 427: On November 19, 1862 Richard E. Hamlin of East Providence sold to James Humphreys, for \$7,750, a lot with improvements on it on the east side of Benefit Street, on which it measures approx. 52 feet, bounded southerly by land of Edward P. Knowles approx. 123 feet, bounded easterly by another lot included in this same deed, and bounded northerly by land of George I. Chace approx. 123 feet. The property was the same conveyed to Hamlin by William A. Howard (see DB 134, Page 393). The deed also included a lot directly east of this

one, fronting on Wheaton Street, measuring about 40 by 73 feet with a dwelling house on it. The deed notes the transfer was subject to the terms and conditions of an agreement dated December 30, 1854 (DB 137, Page 412).

Condominium Documents: DB 2053, Pages 12-106 (June 20, 1989). Unit Ownership:

Unit A: 147 Benefit St. Associates to Gary Goldberg (1992, DB 2630/269) to Pierre St. Amand (1999, DB 4165/65).

Unit B: 147 Benefit St. Associates to 144 Benefit St. Associates (1989, DB 2053/106) to Barrett Bready (1999, DB 4024/51).

Unit 1: 147 Benefit St. Associates to Jeffrey P. Gagnon (1995, DB 3123/265) to Kathy A. Henninger (1998, DB 3940/142) to Robert A. and Sidney H. Knisel (1999, DB 4230/342).

Unit 2: 147 Benefit St. Associates to William D., Anne M. and Emily F. Hansen (1995, DB 3137/208) to Benjamin Carr and Laura L. Phillips (1998, DB 3853/255) to Marrie Hadfield (2001, DB 4678/125).

Unit 3: 147 Benefit St. Associates to Christopher B. Hearn and Kate Hines (1995, DB 3112/261).

#### Directories (Archives)

City Directories, 1861-1865: James Humphreys, treasurer and agent of Eagle Screw Co., had a business address of 33 Westminster St. and a home address of 17 Angell St. Richard E. Hamlin, who worked for a wholesale grocer called Knowles & Waldron, lived at "Vue de L'Eau."

City Directory, 1866: James Humphreys now lives at 147 Benefit Street, and Henry A. Humphreys boards there.

[Note: While tax records confirm that the house was standing by 1864 (see below), it was not unusual for city directories to be a year or so out of date by the time they were published; thus the 1864 and 1865 directories contain Humphrey's previous address.

#### Tax Records (Archives)

Tax Ledger A4, Page 148: Richard Hamlin owned Plat 10, Lot 202 (6469 sq. ft.) as of Feb. 1, 1862, when it was assessed at \$5,823 for the land and \$100 for buildings. This may indicate that a foundation had begun to be laid, or some other improvement had been made, but it does not signify completion of the house. The ledger notes the transfer of the lot to James Humphreys as of December 1, 1862 (ref. DB 163, Page 427), along with another lot (#203).

Tax Ledger A4, Page 113: James Humphreys owned Plat 10, Lot 202 (6,469 sq. ft.) as of Dec. 1, 1862, when it was assessed at \$5,823 for the land and \$100 for buildings. The lot was assessed again on August 15, 1864, at which time the value of the land was \$5,823 but the value of the building had increased to \$25,000. Clearly the house had been completed by the time this assessment was done.

Tax Ledger C3, Page 423: James Humphreys and wife owned Plat 10, Lot 202 (6,367 sq. ft.) as of Nov. 1, 1872, when it was assessed at \$6,685 for land and \$28,000 for buildings. The

ledger notes the transfer of the lot to Rebecca C. and Sarah L. Humphreys as of May 1, 1873 (DB 241, Page 14), along with two other adjacent lots (#203 and #206).

[Note: In later years, Rebecca and Sarah Humphreys successfully petitioned twice to have the value of the house reduced, once in 1879 to \$26,000 and again in 1889 to \$20,000. See Tax Ledgers C3, Page 437 and E5, Page 424.]

Assessor's Field Cards (Assessor's Office)

Field Card for AP 10, Lot 202: Benefit Street

Owned by Sarah L. Humphreys as of June 1, 1892.  
Owned by Howard R. Guild of Boston as of Feb. 1, 1905.  
Owned by Henry T. Guild as of March 1, 1905.  
Owned by Howard R. Guild of Boston as of Nov. 1, 1905.  
Owned by Annie L. Brown as of Jan. 2, 1909.  
Owned by Sigmund Rosen as of Apr. 1, 1909.  
Owned by Hyman Frank as of May 2, 1921.  
Owned by Sigmund Rosen as of March 1, 1922.  
Owned by Anthony C. Paolino as of April 1, 1926.  
Owned by Samuel and Gertrude Levin as of December 1926.  
Owned by Annie Rosenblatt as of December 1926.  
Owned by Samuel and Elizabeth Sherman as of June 15, 1927.  
Owned by Lenox Realty Company as of November 1929.  
Owned by Samuel and Elizabeth Sherman as of December 1941.  
Owned by Charles H. and Helen P. Pyne as of February 1947.  
Owned by Henry A. and Andrea L. Godin as of December 1950.  
Owned by Wheaton Realty Co. as of November 1955.  
Owned by Thomas House Investment Corp. as of December 1958.  
Owned by The Massasoit Company as of December 1959.  
Owned by Hallmark Realty Inc. as of Jan. 31, 1968 (DB 1146, p. 116).  
Owned by Y & S Realty as of June 15, 1972 (DB 1168, p. 203).  
Owned by Baron Realty Inc. as of May 11, 1984 (DB 1261, p. 384).  
Owned by 147 Benefit Associates as of June 6, 1984 (DB 1263, p. 633).  
Declaration of Condominium June 20, 1989 (DB 2053, p. 12).

[Condo Unit Owners]

147 Benefit Condo. as of June 20, 1989 (DB 2053, p. 12).  
144 Benefit St. Assoc. as of June 20, 1989 (DB 2053, p. 106).  
Gary Goldberg as of September 21, 1992 (DB 2630, p. 269).  
William D., Anne M. and Emily F. Hansen as of March 22, 1995 (DB 3137, p. 208).  
Christopher B. Hearn and Kate Hines as of March 28, 1995 (DB 3112, p. 261).  
Jeffrey P. Gagnon as of April 24, 1995 (DB 3123, p. 265).  
Benjamin Carr and Laura L. Phillips as of July 24, 1998 (DB 3853, p. 255).  
Kathy A. Henninger as of November 13, 1998 (DB 3940, p. 142).  
Barret Bready as of March 1, 1999 (DB 4024, p. 51)  
Pierre St. Amand as of August 25, 1999 (DB 4165, p. 5 or 65).  
Robert A. and Sidney H. Kneisel as of November 18, 1999 (DB 4230, p. 342).  
Marrie Hadfield as of May 7, 2001 (DB 4678, p. 125).

*Research compiled by Kathryn J. Cavanaugh, February 2002*