

PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

RECORDS FOR

248 BOWEN STREET Plat 13, Lot 103

Hollis Chaffin House Built 1868-1869

Summary: The single-family house at 248 Bowen Street, located on the north side of Bowen Street between Thayer and Brook Street, was built in 1868-1869 for Hollis Chaffin, who had been the superintendent of the Dexter Asylum for the Poor since at least 1850. Chaffin apparently left that position around the time that he purchased the land and began building this house, and went into the provisions business as a partner in the firm of Bicknell and Chaffin, which operated until at least 1880. Since its construction, the house has changed hands seven times, most recently in 1983 when purchased by the current owners, Seth Kurn and Barbara Harris.

At the time this house was built, very few homes existed on the north side of Bowen Street between Prospect and Hope Streets. The house now identified as 248 Bowen had the street address of 138 Bowen from 1868 until 1895, when Bowen Street addresses were renumbered to accommodate a large increase in buildings on the street.

248 Bowen Street is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the College Hill National Register Historic District (listed 1977). In the inventory, the house is dated 1868.

Chronology

1798

"Map Showing the Owners of Lots in Providence in 1798," Plate IV, shows the division of property on part of College Hill. The map indicates that Zachariah Allen owned a 14-acre lot stretching from Prospect Street to Ferry Lane (now Hope Street). Allen's immediate neighbors were Jabez Bowen and Clark & Nightingale to the north, and John Mawney to the south. Bowen, Thayer and Brook Streets did not exist in this area in 1798. (*Archives*)

1857

Map of Providence in 1857 by Walling & Cushing shows most of College Hill's current street layout. Bowen Street has been built between Canal Street and Hope Street; Thayer Street has also been constructed. The land on the north side of Bower between Thayer and Hope is shown as owned by Ann Allen. The block is platted into residential lots, but no buildings are shown. (College Hill Plan, 1959)

Ann Allen was one of six children of the Colonial-era merchant Zachariah Allen. Together with her siblings (Zachariah Jr, Philip, Crawford, Lydia, and Candace), Ann Allen inherited substantial property on the East Side from her father. The Allen family was prominent in Providence's civic, industrial and commercial circles in the early to mid 19th century. (*"Providence: A Citywide Inventory of Historic Resources," RIHP&HC, 1986*).

1859-1861

Ann Allen, daughter of Zachariah Allen, died August 19, 1859, aged 75 years. The disposition of her estate was affected by a court case (Crawford Allen vs. George C. Nightingale.) The Supreme Court, in rendering judgment in this case, platted out Ann Allen's estate in June 1860 (Plat Book 5, Page 19,

copied on card 149). This map shows Ann Allen's property on Bowen Street, between Prospect Street and Hope Street (Thayer Street is indicated as a paper street on this map). On the north side of Bowen Street, between Thayer and Hope, is a single large lot labeled #13, measuring 396.3 feet on Bowen Street, 99.2 feet on Hope Street, 88.6 feet on Thayer Street, and 352 feet along a stone wall bordering the Halsey estate on the north. (*Archives; Registry of Deeds*)

A second map, also drawn in June 1860, specifically shows the Bowen Street Lots from Ann Allen's estate awarded to Zachariah Allen, assignee of Philip Allen, in the case of Crawford Allen v. George C. Nightingale (Plat Book 6, Page 6, copied on card 164). This map divides Lot 13 on the north side of Bowen Street (so designated on card 149), bounded by Thayer and Hope Streets, into nine lots numbered 20 through 28. The third lot east of Thayer Street (where 248 Bowen would eventually be built) is numbered 26, and measures 3,530 square feet. (Lot 27, to the west, measures 3,534 s.f.; Lot 25, to the east, measures 3,526 s.f.). (*Registry of Deeds*)

Deed Book 158, Page 412: On August 16, 1860, Zachariah Allen as assignee of Philip Allen sold Lots 26, 27 and 28 from Ann Allen's estate, to William B. Rider of Providence, for \$1,457.74. The deed references the map of Bowen Street Lots in Plat Book 6, Page 6, copied on card 164. (*Archives*)

Deed Book 158, Page 414: On May 9, 1861, William B. Rider of Providence sold Lots 26 and 27 (a total of 7,064 square feet of land) from Ann Allen's estate, to George Leonard Clarke of Providence, for \$200. The deed references the map of Bowen Street Lots in Plat Book 6, page 6, copied on card 164. (*Archives*)

1868-1869

Deed Book 180, Page 207: On January 9, 1868, George L. Clarke of Providence sold Lots 26 and 27 from Ann Allen's estate to Hollis Chaffin of Providence for \$1,600. The deed reference's Clarke's purchase of these lots from William Rider in 1861 (deed book 158, page 414). The property is described as being bounded southerly on Bowen Street (80 feet), easterly upon Lot 25 (88 feet 10.5 inches), northerly upon land of the Halsey Estate (80 feet), and westerly upon Lot 28 (88 feet 4.75 inches). The deed does not refer to any buildings on this tract of land. (*Archives*)

The Providence Directory for 1868 notes that Bowen Street ran from Canal Street east to Hope Street at this time. It also lists Hollis Chaffin as "keeper of the Dexter Asylum," but provides no residential address for him, possibly because he might have lived on the Asylum grounds while acting as superintendent there. The 1869 Directory lists Hollis Chaffin (business: Bicknell & Chaffin, provisions) as living at 80 Bowen Street (possibly temporary rental quarters after Chaffin left his job at the Asylum, while his house was under construction). Directories for 1870-1880 list Hollis Chaffin (Bicknell & Chaffin) as living at 138 Bowen Street. (As noted above, in this period very few homes existed on the north side of Bowen Street between Prospect and Hope Streets. The house now identified as 248 Bowen had the street address of 138 Bowen from 1868 until 1895, when it was changed to 248 Bowen.) (*Archives*)

Providence Tax Records for 1868 indicate that Hollis Chaffin owned real estate assessed at \$3,000 in 1868. By 1869, the assessment had increased to \$5,000, verifying that the house had been constructed. (Note that tax records at this time did not identify property by plat and lot number or by street address, nor do they break down real estate assessments by land and buildings.) (*Archives*)

1870

City Atlas by G.M. Hopkins, Ward 1, Vol. 1, Plate L, shows the block bounded by Bowen, Thayer, Hope Streets and Lloyd Avenue. The only house in this block is situated in a double lot numbered 27 (3,542 square feet) and 26 (with the house, and 3,544 square feet of land). The owner is Hollis Chaffin. The

house has no street address on this map, but a house on the north side of Bowen 5 lots west of Thayer Street is numbered 120 (today it is 206 Bowen), making it logical to theorize that the Chaffin House might have been numbered 138 Bowen when it was originally built. (*Archives*)

1880

Deed Book 309, Page 65: On July 9, 1880, Hollis Chaffin and wife Louise E. Chaffin sold Lots 26 and 27 on the northerly side of Bowen Street, "with buildings and improvements thereon," to Albert B. Place of Providence, for \$5. The deed references the previous purchase by Chaffin from George L. Clarke in 1868 (deed book 180, page 207). (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's plat card for Plat 13, Lot 103 indicates that Albert B. Place owned the property as of July 15, 1880. (*Tax Assessor's Office*)

The Providence Directory for 1880 indicates that Albert B. Place, a fruit vendor, lived at 128 Williams Street. The 1881-1894 Directories list him as living at 138 Bowen Street. (*Archives*)

1882

City Atlas by G.M. Hopkins, Plate 2, shows the layout of Bowen, Thayer, Lloyd, Brook and Hope Streets as they are today. The block bounded by Bowen, Thayer, Lloyd and Brook Street is divided into 12 lots; 6 of these front on Bowen Street. Lot #26 (now the second lot east of Thayer Street) is shown as a double lot with a house upon it (the only house on the block, to date). Lot sizes are not given, nor is the owner's name indicated. (*Archives*)

1894-1895

The 1894 Providence Directory indicates that Bowen Street addresses run from 12 to 159 but no higher, and also that 138 Bowen Street is the residence of Albert B. Place. The 1895 Directory shows that Bowen Street has been renumbered: 138 Bowen is now located between Prospect and Brown Streets, while 248 Bowen is located between Thayer and Brook Streets. Albert B. Place's residence is now listed as 248 Bowen Street. (*Archives*)

City Atlas by Everts & Richards, plate 5, pages 28-29: the 12 lots in this block have been reconfigured slightly, so that although the total number of lots fronting on Bowen Street is still six, the lot containing 248 Bowen Street is now (as it was in 1860) the third lot east of Thayer Street. The lot is depicted with a house on it, the street address #248 is shown, and the lot area is indicated as 3,544 square feet (slightly larger than it had been in 1860). Three other houses have also been constructed on Bowen Street by this time. (*Archives*)

1902

Assessor's Plat Map 13 shows the block now subdivided into 11 lots. Lot #103, third east of Thayer Street, has 3,544 square feet of land. (*Archives*)

1908

City Atlas by L.J. Richards & Co., Plate 7, shows that this entire block has been built out. The owner of 248 Bowen (and 244 Bowen as well) is indicated as A.B. Place. The lot at 248 Bowen has a house on it and contains 3,544 square feet. (*Archives*)

1910

The 1910 Providence Directory indicates that Albert B. Place died on February 12, 1910. In the 1911 Directory, Jessie C. Place is named for the first time, as the widow of Albert B. Place living at 248 Bowen. (*Archives*)

Assessor's plat card for Plat 13, Lot 103 indicates that Jessie C. Place owned the property "for life" as of June 10, 1910. Almost certainly, Jessie inherited her husband's property upon his death; the Registry of Deeds grantor/grantee index for 1910-1911 contains no record of a transaction between Albert and Jessie Place. (*Tax Assessor's Office*)

1912-1913

Deed Book 526, Page 492: On August 12, 1912, William P. Goodwin, trustee, as directed by a decree of the Superior Court of Providence entered in the "Petition of Jessie C. Place et al," numbered Equity #2615 in the docket of said court, sold to Louis P. Tower of Providence, for \$8,000, a lot of land with buildings and improvements thereon, being Lot #26 in the plat of lots awarded to Zachariah Allen in 1860. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's plat cards for Plat 13, Lot 103 indicate that Louis P. Tower owned the property as of November 1, 1912. (*Tax Assessor's Office*)

Deed Book 539, Page 91: On August 1, 1913, H. Martin Brown sold 1,049.16 square feet of land on the north side of Bowen Street (fronting 12 feet on Bowen Street) to Louis P. Tower. The property was bounded by Tower's own land to the west, and increased the total square footage of Tower's property to 4,593 square feet. (*Registry of Deeds*)

1918

City Atlas by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 19, shows the house at 248 Bowen Street as owned by L.P. Tower. The lot now contains 4,593 square feet. The atlas also references this property as being part of the "Commissioners Plat, Z. Allen." (*Archives*)

1926

City Atlas by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 19, again shows the house at 248 Bowen Street as owned by L.P. Tower, and the lot containing 4,593 square feet. (*Archives*)

1937

City Atlas by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 19, again shows the house at 248 Bowen Street as owned by L.P. Tower, and the lot containing 4,593 square feet. The atlas also references "Z. Allen, plat card 164." (*Archives*)

Assessor's plat cards for Plat 13, Lot 103 indicate that the property was owned by Julia Jackson, wife of Fielding V. Jackson, as of March 1937. (*Tax Assessor's Office*)

Julia Jackson was Louis Tower's daughter (born 1904, married Fielding V. Jackson 1927), and she apparently inherited the house from her father upon his death on November 15, 1936: the Registry of Deeds grantor/grantee index for 1936-1937 does not record any transactions between Louis Tower and anyone named Jackson. (Providence Index of Births, 1901-1910; Index of Marriages, 1921-1930; Index of Deaths, 1936-1940). (*Registry of Deeds; Archives*)

1942

Deed Book 848, Page 330: On July 20, 1942, Fielding V. Jackson and Julia Tower Jackson of Ridgefield, Conn., sold to John C. Ham of Providence, for \$10, a lot of land with buildings and improvements thereon on the northerly side of Bowen Street, containing approximately 4,564 square feet of land, lying 136.44 feet west of Brook Street. The lot measured 51.73 feet on Bowen Street, 88.29 feet on the west, 51.73 feet on the north, and 88.17 feet on the east. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's plat cards for Plat 13, Lot 103 indicate that the property was owned by John C. Ham as of October 1942. (*Tax Assessor's Office*)

1966

Deed Book 1138, Page 511: On August 1, 1966, John C. Ham of Providence sold the property to Maxwell J. Perotta and Louise C. Perotta of Providence. The property description is identical to that given in Deed Book 848, Page 330. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's plat cards for Plat 13, Lot 103 indicate that the property was owned by Maxwell J. Perotta and wife Louise C. Perotta as of August 2, 1966 (reference Deed Book 1138, Page 511). (*Tax Assessor's Office*)

1968

Deed Book 1146, Page 1074: On March 22, 1968, Maxwell J. Perotta and Louise C. Perotta sold the property to Louis A. McCarten and Dorothy G. McCarten of Brookfield Center, Conn. The property description is identical to that given in Deed Book 1138, Page 511. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's plat cards for Plat 13, Lot 103 indicate that Louis A. McCarten and wife Dorothy G. McCarten owned the property as of April 9, 1968. The card references deed book 1146, page 1074. (*Tax Assessor's Office*)

1978

Deed Book 1205, Page 717: On May 26, 1978, Louis A. McCarten and Dorothy G. McCarten of Alexandria, Virginia, sold the property to Robert T. Jones and Mary A. Jones of North Providence. The property description is identical to that given in Deed Book 1146, Page 1074. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's plat cards for Plat 13, Lot 103 indicate that Robert T. Jones and wife Mary A. Jones owned the property as of June 5, 1978. The card references deed book 1205, page 717. (*Tax Assessor's Office*)

1983

Deed Book 1246, Page 537: On July 15, 1983, Robert T. Jones and Mary A. Jones of Providence sold the property to Seth Kurn and wife Barbara Harris of Boston. The property description is identical to that given in Deed Book 1205, Page 717. The grantees' address is given as 248 Bowen Street. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's plat cards for Plat 13, Lot 103 indicate that Seth Kurn and wife Barbara Harris owned the property as of July 15, 1983. The card references deed book 1246, page 537. (*Tax Assessor's Office*)