The Old Brick Schoolhouse, now serving as Headquarters for the Providence Preservation Society, is closely associated with the story of the development of free public schools in Providence. In the middle of the eighteenth century children were taught in the "dame" schools and in private schools; several flourished in Providence and in 1735 George Taylor was given permission by the town to keep school in a room in the Colony House. By 1768 James Manning was a leader in an attempt to establish a public school system in Providence. This attempt was doomed to failure, but the proprietors were authorized at this time to buy land "to be used for a schoolhouse and no other purpose," replacing an older inconveniently located structure. By 1769, the brick school house had been built on Meeting Street on the site of the Old Court House that had been destroyed by fire in 1758. The Town maintained a school on the first floor, but the upper floor was controlled by a group of proprietors (several of whom were members of the Brown Corporation) and they leased this floor to the College, which had recently moved to Providence from Warren. Brown maintained a Latin School during part of the time from 1770 to 1800, and while College Edifice was being built on the hill, some University classes were held in the brick Schoolhouse. Classes were probably also held in the building in 1779 or 1780 when University Hall was occupied by Revolutionary War Troops. A state record for repairs to the building for housing Brown Students is still in existence. During the Revolution it was also used as a storage house for munitions and a laboratory where cartridges were manufactured.

In 1800, with the efforts to establish a state wide public school system led by John Howland, one of the first free public schools in the United States was instituted in this building and it became one of the four graded schools in the city. Later it served as a school for colored children, and was enlarged in 1850. After 1865 it housed a cooking school and in 1908 the upper floor was converted into a fresh air school for tubercular children, the first such school in America. The large windows on the south side were probably put in then. During the days when the fresh air school was in session upstairs, an eye and ear clinic was being held downstairs. In the 1950's this ancient building was the home of the School for Crippled Children and Adults of Rhode Island. In 1960 the City of Providence offered the building to the Providence Preservation Society and since that time it has served as the Society's Headquarters. It is presently being restored. (1967)
Address: 24 Meeting Street, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island.

Present Owner: City of Providence

Present Occupant: Providence Preservation Society

Present Use: Headquarters for the Providence Preservation Society

Brief Statement of Significance: Built in 1768, this was the first brick school house in Providence.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Originally built for the Proprietors of Providence; Providence was subsequently incorporated as a city, and it is now owned by the City of Providence.

2. Date of erection: 1768


B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure

The town maintained a school in the first story of this building from 1768 to 1800. During part of that period it was leased to Brown University for a Latin School. For a time during the Revolutionary War it was used as an ammunition arsenal. When free public schools were established in 1800, this became one of four graded schools.
During the first half of the present century it served as a cooking school and an open-air school. Later it was used by Crippled Children and Adults of Rhode Island, Inc.

C. Supplemental Material: The following is quoted from Deed Book 17, page 476, in Providence City Hall:

"Know all men by these presents that I, Ambrose Page of Providence in the County of Providence, mariner, and in consideration of $5 to me in hand already paid by the Town of Providence and for the encouragement of Learning therein, do covenant, promise, agree that if the said Town of Providence shall and do within the Space of three years next after Date hereof build a Good and convenient School House on the Lot in Providence whereon the Late Court House which was burnt down did stand lying near John Waterman’s House that then and in such case the said Ambrose Page will give, grant and release to said Town of Providence so long as it is appropriated for that use and no longer. And I do hereby if a School House be built on said Lot with said Terms, give, grant, remise, and release and forever Quit Claim and confirm unto the said Town Providence forever, all the Estates, Right, Title Interest, Claim and Demand whatsoever which I the said Ambrose Page ever had now have, or which I, my Heirs or Assigns in Time to come, can, may, should or ought to have or Claim of, in and to the said Court House Lot to have and to hold the said released Premises (upon the conditions aforesaid) unto the said Town of Providence forever. In Witness whereof the said Ambrose Page have hereunto Set my Hand and Seals the Sixteenth Day of May One Thousand Seven Hundred Sixty-six."

Prepared by Antoinette P. Downing and
Elvira Cowsey for the
Providence Preservation Society
August 1962

and Osmond R. Overtty, Architect
National Park Service
February 1962

PART II. A RCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is a simple, two-story brick building, built in 1769 as a school house.


B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: Rectangular building, facing south, about 45' (five bays) x 28', two stories; entrance and stairway in 12' x 12' projection on center of south, two stories high.

3. Wall construction: Brick, common bond, painted. Brick 7" x 3" x 2", laid with narrow mortar joints. Slightly projecting brick belt course between stories.

4. Stoops: Brownstone entrance stoop on south front, four steps high.

5. Chimney: Two brick chimneys in end walls.

6. Openings:
   b. Windows: Six over six light double hung windows in simple wood frames with molded sills, segmental brick arches over first floor windows. Large casement windows on west end of second floor on south side added later.

7. Roof:
   b. Cornice: Simple molded cornice.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: First floor divided into one large room on west side, east side divided into four rooms used for offices, storage and toilets. Second floor, one large room and small kitchen along east side.

2. Stairways: Main stair in entrance tower, U-shape, enclosed. Rear stair in northeast cornice, enclosed, U-shape.

3. Flooring: Modern asphalt tile on first floor, later hardwood strip flooring on second floor.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: High horizontal board wainscot to window sill level, plaster walls and ceilings. Wood trussed ceiling on second floor apparently not original.

5. Doorways and doors: Various types in interior, wood doors.

6. Trim: Simple wood trim on doors and windows; some simple, mitered window architraves probably original.

7. Hardware: Miscellaneous later hardware.

9. Heating, Central, fireplaces on west wall closed.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Faces south on small lot that slopes from east down to west. Small yard in front. Modern parking lot in rear.

2. Enclosures: Brick wall on west, wood fences on north and south. High brick wall of adjoining building on east.

Prepared by Osmond R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
February 1962