

**PPS RECORDS FOR  
669 PUBLIC STREET  
PLAT 49, LOT 57**

**MILES B. LAWSON HOUSE  
Built ca. 1855**

**(Previous addresses:  
283 Public Street, ca. 1869-1886;  
487 Public Street, 1887-1894)**

## **DESIGNATIONS**

The house at 669 Public Street is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor located within any historic district overlay zone designated by the City of Providence.

## **NOTES**

What is now the Elmwood neighborhood of Providence was part of the Town of Cranston from 1754 to 1868 (source: "Elmwood, Providence: State Historical Preservation Report P-P-3," R.I. Historical Preservation Commission, 1979). So, when it was first constructed and for about 13 years afterward, the house at 669 Public Street was located in Cranston. (Some research for this report was conducted at Cranston City Hall.)

RIHPC's 1979 survey report on the Elmwood neighborhood specifically mentions the house at 669 Public Street in the inventory of significant properties on p. 58; also, a photo of it is found on p. 19. The photo accompanies a brief discussion of octagonal houses, which were a short-lived architectural fad of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century following publication in 1848 of Orson S. Fowler's book, "The Octagon: A Home for All." Providence reportedly had the most (7) octagonal houses of any American city; as of the writing of the RIHPC survey report, four of them were still standing including three in Elmwood (the location of the fourth is not specified). All three in Elmwood survive today (see also 36 Crescent St. and 63 Elmwood Ave.).

In 1983, research on the history of this property covering the years 1833-1977 was compiled into a report for PPS's Gowdey Files (see <http://www.ppsri.org/ppsresources/research-library>.) Some of that earlier research was double-checked as part of this current report, with a focus on confirming the historic name and construction date for the PPS Marker; those records are summarized herein. The Gowdey File also included some sources (e.g. mortgage deeds, water board records, probate records) that typically are not investigated for PPS Marker Reports today. Readers of this report are encouraged to seek out the Gowdey File records for

more information. However, please note the following errors in and comments on the Gowdey File records for 669 Public Street:

- P. 1, listing of previous addresses: “#683 [Public St.]... 1869-1877” should be 283 Public St., from 1869 to 1886.
- P. 1, 1860 sale of the property to Earl P. Mason: the date of the deed is July 5, not July 6.
- P. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph marked with “\*\*\*\*\*” mistakenly indicates that the property was located in Cranston until 1887; Providence annexed Elmwood in 1868. The 1887 date also conflicts with the information on p. 3 indicating that the house at 669 Public first appears in a Providence city directory (under a previous address, 283 Public) in 1869.
- P. 2, list of directory entries: Miles Lawson lived at rear 172 Pine St. in 1836-37, not 1841 (he lived on Stewart St. in 1841). In 1855-56, his home address “house at Elmwood” is not actually listed in those directories.
- P. 3, 1873 listing in Providence Water Board records – the address 669 Public (at least in relation to this house) did not exist in 1873 (see 1<sup>st</sup> bullet point, above).
- P. 3, 1875 Hopkins atlas. The Gowdey report indicates that the house’s footprint appears on this map, but “no other information.” In fact, the map indicates the house’s owner was Laura B. Bradford. [Deeds and tax records verify that her middle initial was in fact “A.”]
- P. 3, 1878: the deed transferring ownership to George B. Harris is found on page 513 of Deed Book 299 (not page 515).
- P. 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph marked with “\*\*\*\*\*”: clarify that “#487” is a previous address for this house.

Additional information in the Gowdey File report from 1897-1977 was not double-checked as part of this report, but additional errors may be found.

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

**Assessor’s Plat Maps and Chain of Title Cards (Assessor’s Office)**

The map for Assessor’s Plat 49 identifies 669 Public Street as Lot 57, located on the north side of Public between Elmwood Avenue and Updike Street. The plat map

indicates the lot has a long trapezoidal shape, 53.6 feet of street frontage, and a total area is of 7,946 sq.ft.

Chain of title card for AP 49, Lot 57 – PUBLIC STREET:

Charles H. Smith owned the property as of October 2, 1893.

Charles H. Smith Estate owned the property as of May 1, 1901.

James F. Freeman, Harry S. Hathaway and Walter F. Angell, trustees under the will of Charles H. Smith, owned the property as of June 1, 1920.

Percy A. Harden, H.S. Hathaway and W.F. Angell, trustees u/w Charles H. Smith, owned the property as of April 1, 1923.

Percy A. Harden, Harry S. Hathaway and James J. McGovern, trustees u/w Charles H. Smith, owned the property as of March 1937 [? – date is not entirely legible].

City of Providence owned the property as of June 16, 1947 [? – date is not entirely legible].

President and Fellows of Harvard College owned the property as of June 1947. (Refers to Deed Book 919/Page 313.)

Frank H. Allen and wife Betty A. Allen owned the property as of June 1948.

Betty A. Allen owned the property as of [date not indicated].

William E. Fox owned the property as of February 23, 1971. (Ref DB 1160/896.)

Mary J. Angeloni and Claire A. Campbell owned the property as of September 12, 1972. (Ref DB 1169/1144.)

Mary E. Gomes owned the property as of December 28, 1978. (Ref DB 1210/222.)

Leslie A. Perry and Joseph A. Gomes owned the property as of January 28, 1986. (Ref Probate #81431)

[Last entry on the card.]

According to the Assessor's computerized data base, the current owners (since December 2012) are Alexander Karoff-Hunger and Chandelle O. Wilson, and the immediate previous owners were Leslie A. Perry and Joseph A. Gomes.

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

*Maps indicate that the house was standing by 1875. The 1895 map was the first to identify an address for this house.*

**1832:** "Plat of Benjamin Allen's Land Situate in Cranston, Part of the Col. T. Mawney Estate," surveyed and platted by Benoni Lockwood, October 26, 1832. (Recorded in Plat Book 10/Page 10 and copied on plat card 263. Also recorded in Cranston Deed Book 13/Page 450.) The plat shows a section of Public Street – here, "Direct Street" – between "Greenwich Road" (now Elmwood Avenue) and "Pawtuxet Road" (now Broad Street). On the north side of what is now Public Street is Lot No. 8, a triangular-shaped lot subdivided into Lots A through L inclusive. Lot C, with 50 feet of street frontage (other dimensions not indicated), is the future site of the house at 669 Public St. Lot D,

immediately adjacent to the east, which also has 50 feet of street frontage, was added to the property in 1864 (see Deeds, below). (*Providence Registry of Deeds; also Cranston City Hall, City Clerk's Office.*)

**1857:** "Map of Providence, R.I." by H.F. Walling. The house at 669 Public Street had been built by this time, but the Elmwood neighborhood, which was then in Cranston, is not shown on this map. (*Archives*)

**1875:** "City Atlas of Providence," Vol. 2, Wards 5, 6, 8, and 9, by G.M. Hopkins, Plate P: shows the house with its distinctive octagonal footprint standing on a 14,444 sq.ft. lot on the north side of Public St. between "Greenwich Street" (now Elmwood Ave.) and Broad St. An outbuilding (no longer extant) stands behind the octagon in the rear NW corner of the lot. The owner was Laura B. Bradford. [Note: the map seems to indicate that this house stood within the Locust Grove Plat. However, that plat map (dated 1847, PB 10/2, copied on plat card 255) does not cover the section of "Direct [Public] Street" where this house would later be built.] (*Archives, Registry of Deeds*)

**1882:** "Atlas of the City of Providence, R.I. and Environs," by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 16: shows the octagonal house with an outbuilding behind it, although no address or lot size is indicated. The owner was C.H. Smith. [See the note about the Locust Grove Plat on the 1875 map, above.] Greenwich Street had been renamed Elmwood Avenue by this time. (*Archives*)

**1895:** "Atlas of the City of Providence" by Everts & Richards, Page 61, shows the octagonal house with the address "699" Public St. (apparently a typo), standing on a 14,444 sq.ft lot with an outbuilding in the rear NW corner of the lot. The owner name is not indicated. (*Archives*)

**1908:** "Atlas of the City of Providence" by L.J. Richards Co., Plate 17, shows the octagonal house at 669 Public St. standing on a 14,444 sq.ft. lot that is now also shared by a house at 665-667 Public St. The same outbuilding stands behind the octagon. The owner name is C.H. Smith Estate. (*Archives*)

**1918:** "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 9, shows the octagonal house at 669 Public St. standing on a 14,444 sq.ft. lot along with the house at 665-667 Public St. (although that address is not shown). The same outbuilding stands behind the octagon. The owner name is C.H. Smith Estate. The map references the Locus Grove Plat (see note on the 1875 map, above). (*Archives*)

**1926:** "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 19, shows the octagonal house at 669 Public St. standing on a 14,444 sq.ft. lot that is now also shared by a house at 665-667 Public St. The same outbuilding stands behind the octagon. The owner name is C.H. Smith Estate. The map references the Locus Grove Plat on plat card 255 (see note on the 1875 map, above). (*Archives*)

**1937:** "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 19, shows the octagonal house at 669 Public St. standing on a 14,444 sq.ft. lot that is now also shared by a house at 665-667 Public St. The original outbuilding behind the octagon is gone, but another large outbuilding stands behind 665-667 Public. The owner name is P.A. Harden et al. The map references the City Savings Bank Plat on plat card 894 (however this plat is not relevant to this specific property) (*Archives*)

**1956:** Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. Map, 1921, updated to 1956; Vol. 5, p. 10: shows the octagonal house at 669 Public Street on its own lot (subdivided from 665-667 Public). The 2-story house has a small 1-story addition on its rear NW side. A 1-story concrete block garage stands behind the house. (The outbuilding behind 665-667 Public, seen on the 1937 map, is gone.)

## Deeds

*Deeds indicate that the house was built between 1855 and 1856, when Miles B. Lawson owned the property. The lot expanded in size in 1864 by the acquisition of adjacent land by the house's owner at that time, William A. Mowry.*

### Deeds In Cranston City Hall, City Clerk's Office

Deed Book 31/Pages 265-266: On March 20, 1855, Theophilus Salisbury of Providence sold to Miles B. Lawson of Cranston, for \$390, one house lot in Cranston, being Lot C on a plat drawn by Benoni Lockwood recorded in Cranston Deed Book 13/Page 450. The lot was on the north side of Public St., formerly Direct St. and measured 50 feet on the street and along the rear lot line; it was bounded on the west by Lot B of the same plat, and on the east by Lot D.

DB 31/493: On June 11, 1855, Miles B. Lawson enacted a mortgage deed for \$1,400 to Amos C. Barstow and George C. Elliott of Providence, using the property on Public Street as collateral in the event of default. The property was described as "a lot of land with buildings and improvements," being Lot C on a plat drawn by Benoni Lockwood recorded in Cranston DB 13/450, and being "the same conveyed to me by deed from Theophilus Salibury" on March 20, 1855 (DB 31/265-266).

DB 31/494: On September 11, 1856, Miles B. Lawson paid off the mortgage to Barstow and Elliott in full, and the property reverted back to Lawson's ownership.

DB 31/104 and 106: On September 11, 1856, Miles B. Lawson of Cranston enacted another mortgage deed for \$1,400 to Reuben Smith of Providence, using the property on Public Street as collateral in the event of default. The property was described as "a lot of land with a dwelling house and other buildings and improvements," being Lot C on a plat drawn by Benoni Lockwood recorded in Cranston DB 13/450, and being "the same conveyed to me by deed from Theophilus Salibury" on March 20, 1855 (DB 31/265-266).

[In 1860, Miles B. Lawson's financial difficulties resulted in his Public St. house being sold at auction to the highest bidder, Earl P. Mason (DB 39/148 and 39/409). That same month, Mason sold the property to William A. Mowry (DB 38/373). See the Gowdey File for more information.]

DB 39/504: On September 11, 1860, William A. Mowry paid off Lawson's mortgage to Reuben Smith in full.

DB 45/195-196: On May 7, 1864, Henry J. Root of Cranston sold to William A. Mowry of Providence, for \$600, Lot D on the Plat of Benjamin Allen's Land surveyed and platted by Benoni Lockwood, dated October 26, 1832, recorded in DB 13/450. No buildings were mentioned in this deed.

#### Deeds in Providence City Hall, Registry of Deeds

DB 186/399: On July 13, 1869, William A. Mowry sold to Willard F. Inman of Providence, for \$1, two lots with buildings and improvements on Public Street in Providence (formerly in Cranston). These were a portion of Lots C and D on the Benjamin Allen Plat previously referenced, collectively measuring 100 feet on Public Street, 150.62 feet on the west, 138.26 feet on the east, and 100 feet on the north. [Comparing these dimensions to the plat map, which only indicates 50 feet of street frontage for both Lots C and D, those two lots were originally +/- 200 feet deep.] The deed refers to Cranston DB 38/373 and 45/195-196. [Tax records indicate the area of this property was 14,444 sq.ft.; see below.]

DB 237/227: On July 29, 1872, Willard F. Inman of Providence sold to Laura A. Bradford of Providence, for \$1, the same two lots as described in DB 186/399 (which is referenced in this deed as "the same conveyed to the grantor by William A. Mowry by deed dated July 13, 1869;" the deed book and page number are not indicated.). The property was sold subject to three mortgages held by Economical Mutual Life Insurance Co. of Providence, by Freelove W. Weaver, and by George B. Harris. Willard Inman apparently retained responsibility to pay these mortgages.

DB 299/513: On May 7, 1878, a public auction was held to sell the two lots on Public Street that Willard F. Inman had mortgaged to the Economical Mutual Life Insurance Co several years earlier. The mortgage had subsequently been sold several times, and by 1874 it was held by the National Life Insurance Co. of the United States of America. Inman later defaulted on this mortgage, and because he had used the property on Public Street as collateral, the mortgagee sold it to pay Willard Inman's debt – despite the fact that Inman no longer owned it. [Apparently Laura Bradford had no legal standing as a grantor in this sale, as her name does not appear anywhere in the grantor index between 1872 and 1878.] The highest bidder at the auction was George B. Harris of Providence – also one of Inman's mortgagees – who paid \$7,100. [See Gowdey File for more information.]

### **Taxes (Archives)**

*Providence tax records were published in printed volumes from 1827 to 1853. However these early records do not specify the location of any real estate: they only note the name of the taxpayer and the amount of assessment and tax paid for all real and personal property owned by that person. In 1854, the City Tax Assessor adopted a system of plats and lots to identify individual parcels of land.*

Cranston tax records for the period 1855-1868 were not researched for this report, since deeds clearly indicate when the house was constructed. But the following entries in Providence tax records provide some additional information as to how the property transferred from Willard F. Inman to Laura A. Bradford to George B. Harris.

Ledger B3/Page 69: As of September 15, 1869 [the tax year after Elmwood was annexed to Providence], the owner of Plat 49/Lot 57 was Willard F. Inman. The lot measured 14,444 sq.ft., and was valued at \$1,155 for land and \$1,000 for buildings. Ownership was transferred to Laura A. Bradford as of June 1, 1871; refers to DB 237/227.

Ledger C1/441: As of January 1, 1873, the owner of Plat 49/Lot 57 was Laura A. Bradford. The lot measured 14,444 sq.ft., and was valued at \$2,744 for land and \$1,500 for buildings. [Note: usually when the assessment for buildings increases, it indicates either an addition to an existing building or new construction. The 1875 map shows an outbuilding behind the octagonal house; possibly the increase in valuation indicates the construction of that outbuilding.] Ownership was transferred to George B. Harris as of July 1, 1878; refers to DB 299/513.

### **Directories (Archives)**

*Providence City Directories were published intermittently beginning in 1824, and annually as of 1850. Until 1892, these volumes contained a street directory (listing the names and locations of all existing streets), and an alphabetical listing of residents and businesses. Residents' professions and business addresses (if any) were noted before home addresses. As of 1892, city directories also included a section listing residential buildings by street address; this was published separately as a House Directory from 1895-1935. The notation "(h)" indicates home or a head of household; "(b)" indicates a boarder.*

Cranston did not begin publishing city directories until 1911.

Miles B. Lawson is listed in Providence city directories as early as 1836-37, living at a variety of addresses until he moved to Cranston by 1857. Lawson's Public Street house

first appears in Providence city directories in 1869, following Providence's annexation of the Elmwood neighborhood in 1868. By tracing the address 669 Public and the names of occupants back from 1892, when Providence first published a directory of residential addresses, it was determined that this house had two previous addresses: 283 Public St. (1869-1886), and 487 Public St. (1887-1894); the address was changed to 669 Public St. as of 1895.

- 1836-37 First listing for Miles B. Lawson, painter, (h) rear 172 Pine St.
- 1841-1853 Miles B. Lawson, painter, lived and worked at various addresses in Providence [see Gowdey File for more information].
- 1854-1856 Miles B. Lawson, painter 14 Eddy St. [no home address listed]
- 1857 Miles B. Lawson, painter 56 Stewart St., (h) "at Cranston"  
[This is the first reference to 669 Public St. in Providence directories.]  
\*\*\*\*\*
- 1869 Willard F. Inman, salesman 144 Westminster St., (h) 283 Public St.  
[This is the first known reference to a previous address for 669 Public St. Inman purchased the house from William A. Mowry in 1869; see Gowdey File.]
- 1870-1878 Willard F. Inman continues to reside at 283 Public St.
- 1879-1881 Resident(s) of 283 Public St. unknown.
- 1882 Edward H. Brown (Brown & Monroe, fruit dealers) 75 Dyer St.,  
(h) 283 Public St. [1<sup>st</sup> listing for Brown at this address.]
- 1883-1886 Edward H. Brown continues to reside at 283 Public St.
- 1887 Edward H. Brown (Preston & Brown, fruit dealers) 89 and 116 Dyer St.,  
(h) 487 Public St. **[Address changed.]**
- 1888-1892 Edward H. Brown continues to reside at 487 Public St.
- 1892 First year that a house directory was included in the city directory.  
487 Public St., home of Edward H. Brown, fruit [dealer].
- 1893 No 487 Public St. listed.  
  
First listing for 487[ear] Public St., home of Elisha H. Collins, driver.

1894 487 Public St., home of James A. McCarthy, coachman; George A. Wing, teamster; and Benjamin F. Wing (boarder).

487r Public St., home of Elisha H. Collins, driver.

1895 First year that the house directory was published separately.  
James A. McCarthy, coachman; and George A. Wing, teamster, both  
(h) 669 Public St. **[Address changed.]**

Elisha H. Collins, driver, (h) 669r Public St.

*Providence House Directories* were published separately from the City Directory, 1895-1937 (published biannually from 1901) and list all residential buildings by street address.

1895 669 Public St., home of James A. McCarthy, coachman, and George A. Wing, teamster.

No 669r Public St. listed.