

# PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

## RECORDS FOR

**109 TRANSIT STREET  
Plat 16, Lot 400  
(Known as 83-85 Transit Street, 1872-1895)**

**Edward Luther House  
Built 1804-1818**

### Summary:

Located on the south side of Transit Street, just southwest of its intersection with Thayer Street, 109 Transit Street was built by Edward Luther, a mason. The house seems to have been constructed sometime between 1804, when Luther acquired this property (with no buildings on it), and 1818, when he sold it (along with "all buildings and improvements thereon") to Consider Miller. Edward Luther bought the property back in 1826, and it remained in his family until his grandchildren sold it in 1896. The property changed hands numerous times in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was purchased by the current owners, Marguerite Schnepel and Paul Evans, in 1998.

109 Transit 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 1803-1814 and named the Edward Luther House. The dates in the heading of this report vary slightly from the National Register inventory, but reflect the results of my own research. No documentary evidence was found giving a more specific construction date.

### Note:

Transit Street was originally laid out in 1754, but apparently houses thereon did not have numbered street addresses until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1832 and 1846, street addresses with even numbers could be found on the north side of the street, and odd numbers on the south side. In 1847 this system was reversed, with odd numbers located on the north side of the street and even numbers on the south side. In 1872 the street was renumbered again, and even numbers were relocated to the north side of the street while odd numbers were relocated to the south side. In 1895 the street was renumbered yet again, but the odd numbers remained on the south side of the street. (*Research by Carol Pace from records at RI Historical Society*).

### Chronology

#### **1754-1798**

A new "highway" called the Road to India Point was laid out in 1754 between what was then called New Street or Back Street (now Benefit Street) and the Ferry Road to India Bridge (now Hope Street). The road was built on land that had been owned by the Tillinghast family (one of the founding settlers of Providence) since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, subdivided and sold after the death of William Tillinghast in 1754. (Contemporary property deeds refer to a "Plat of a Highway through Land Formerly of William Tillinghast and Others" and identify specific numbered lots on that plat. No map of this plat was found at Providence City Hall.)

In 1769 an astronomical observatory was apparently built on this highway to provide views of the "transit" of the planet Venus. Historian Moses King, on page 29 of his "King's Pocketbook of

Providence,” explains that unlike many Fox Point streets, which were named after local property owners, Transit Lane (later Street) got its name from this astronomical event. (*Archives*)

Deed Book 19, Page 510: On December 13, 1784, land on both sides of Transit Lane, which had come into the possession of a Nicholas Cooke sometime after 1754, devolved to several of his children as an inheritance after their father’s death. This deed describes Jesse Cooke’s acquisition of a tract of land on the south side of the highway now known as Transit Street. (Jesse paid 5 shillings each to his mother and eight siblings, and released any claim to other portions of his father’s estate.) The property, identified as “Lot #7” on the Tillinghast plat of 1754, measured 88 feet deep on its east and west sides, and 142 feet long on its north and south sides. The lot was bounded on the west by land of Thomas Bennett, on the north by the highway, on the east by Lot #11, and on the south by land of Captain Christopher Sheldon (for whom today’s Sheldon Street was named). (*Archives.*)

Deed Book 21, Page 550: On March 11, 1788, Jesse Cooke, mariner, of Providence, sold to George Gordon, yeoman, of Providence, for 18 pounds sterling, “a lot of land on the south side of Transit Lane (so called),” measuring 44 feet on its north side (bounded by Transit Lane), 88 feet on its east side (bounded by land of Jesse Cooke), 40 feet on its south side (bounded by land of Christopher Sheldon) and 88 feet on its west side (bounded by land of John Geainor<sup>1</sup>).

Deed Book 21, Page 551: On March 13, 1788, George Gordon, yeoman, of Providence, sold to Edward Dickins, laborer, of Providence, for 18 pounds sterling, “all the same lot which I purchased of Jesse Cooke by deed dated March 11, 1788.” (*Archives*)

“Map Showing the Owners of Lots in Providence in 1798” (by Henry Chace, 1912), Plate 1, shows the the Road to India Point (now Transit Street), laid out between Benefit Street and the Ferry Road to India Bridge (now Hope Street). Thayer Street (which did not exist in 1798), is only shown as a paper street laid out from Power Street to John Street; it does not yet intersect with Transit Street. Owners of land fronting on the south side of what is now Transit Street include Thomas Bennett, Jonathan Dexter, Edward Dexter, William Church, the Welcome Arnold heirs, and several others. Neither Jesse Cooke nor John Geainor’s names appear on this map, although Mr. Geainor’s name appears as an abutting property owner in deeds relating to 109 Transit Street dated 1801 and 1803. The surnames Dexter, Church and Arnold were not found in deeds referring to this property. Possibly the map is in error. (*Archives*)

### 1801-1803

Deed Book 27, Page 296: On September 8, 1801, James Burrill Esq. of Providence, executor of the will of the deceased Edward Dickins, merchant, of Providence, sold the property to Benjamin Clifford, merchant, of Providence. Mr. Clifford had been the high bidder, paying \$225, at a public auction held on July 1, 1901. The deed describes a lot of land on the south side of Transit Lane, measuring approximately 40 by 88 feet, “being the same conveyed by George Gordon to Edward Dickins on March 13, 1788.” John Geainor’s name is mentioned as an abutting property owner. (*Archives*)

Deed Book 27, Page 653: On December 14, 1803, Benjamin Clifford of Providence sold to Edward Luther, mason, of Providence, for \$260, a lot of land “with appurtenances thereon” on the south side of Transit Lane. The boundaries are described as Transit Lane on the north, land formerly of Jesse Cooke on the east, land formerly of Captain Christopher Sheldon on the south, and land of John Geainor on the west. The lot measures 40 feet wide on Transit Lane and 88 feet deep, “being the same which was conveyed by James Burrill Esq., Executor to the Estate of Edward Dickins, by deed dated September 8, 1801 and recorded in Deed Book 27, Page 296.” (*Archives*)

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<sup>1</sup> Neither this nor subsequent deeds in which his name appears is the correct spelling of Mr. Geainor’s name clearly indicated. In some cases it reads as “Grainor,” or “Gesnior.”

**1804-1818**

Note that the 1803 deed above mentions appurtenances on the lot, but no buildings. The next deed in the chain, dated 1818, does mention both buildings and improvements on the lot, so the house must have been constructed after December 1803 and before April 1818. No tax records, maps or other documentation was found to further clarify the exact construction date of the house.

Deed Book 41, Page 259: On April 15, 1818, Edward Luther of Providence, mason, sold to Consider Miller of Providence, for \$1,400, a lot of land on the south side of Transit Street, 40 feet wide by 88 feet deep, "together with all buildings and improvements thereon, being the same conveyed to me by Benjamin Clifford by deed dated December 14, 1803." The property boundaries are identical to those described in Clifford's deed to Luther. (*Archives*)

**1820**

Deed Book 44, Page 79: On March 2, 1820, Consider Miller of Providence, yeoman, sold to William A. Smith of Providence, chain maker (or "chair maker" – the handwritten deed is not clear), for \$751.25, a lot of land on the south side of Transit Street "with all buildings and improvements thereon." The lot is now 40 feet wide by 89 feet long but is described as "the same conveyed to me by Edward Luther by deed dated April 15, 1818," and the property boundaries are identical to those described in Luther's deed to Miller. (*Archives*)

**1826**

Deed Book 51, Page 428: On December 16, 1826, William A. Smith of Providence, chain maker (chair maker?), sold to Mary Ann Luther, wife of Edward Luther, for \$760.24, "all my right and title to a certain mortgage deed made by Consider Miller and wife Olive Miller dated March 2, 1820 (Deed Book 44, Page 79)." Apparently Mr. Miller defaulted on his mortgage to Mr. Smith, and the courts assigned the property back to Mr. Smith on October 10, 1826. This deed does not specifically describe the mortgaged premises, but the reference to Mr. Miller's deed from Mr. Smith connects this document to the chain of title for 109 Transit Street. (*Archives*)

**1867**

Deed Book 179, Page 191: On June 24, 1867, Edward Luther and wife Mary Ann Luther created an Indenture of Trust, naming Daniel H. Luther of New York as Trustee. This document placed the Transit Street property (including all buildings and improvements thereon) in trust for Mrs. Luther and for their daughter, also called Mary Ann. (There is a proviso that Edward Luther would have use of the property if he survived his wife and daughter, or was still living after his daughter's marriage.) After Edward Luther's death, the Trust was to be dissolved and the property conveyed to Mrs. Luther's heirs. The property is described as "being the domicile and place of residence of Edward Luther and Mary Ann Luther, and being the same lot conveyed to Mary Ann Luther by William A. Smith by deed dated December 16, 1826 (Deed Book 51, Page 428)." The property boundaries have changed slightly: the lot now measures about 41 feet on the north (Transit Street), 91.5 feet on the east, 42 feet on the south, and 91.5 feet on the west. (*Archives*)

**1875-1882**

1875 Atlas of the City of Providence by G.M. Hopkins Co., Vol. 1, Plate Q, shows the block bounded by Transit Street on the north, Brook Street on the east, Sheldon Street on the south, and Benefit Street on the west. Thayer Street has also been extended to Transit Street. Almost every lot in this block has a building on it. The house on the south side of Transit Street, just southwest of the

intersection with Thayer, is numbered 83-85 and sits on a lot measuring 3,672 square feet. (This measurement is slightly smaller than would be yielded by a 41-by-91.5 lot.) The owner's name is given as "Ed. Luther." (Recall that Transit Street was renumbered several times in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; this map reflects the numbering system adopted in 1872. It would change again in 1895.) (*Archives*)

1882 Atlas of the City of Providence by G.M. Hopkins & Co., Plate 1, shows the same block completely built out, with the house numbered 83-85 Transit sitting just southwest of the intersection with Thayer Street. Neither an owner's name nor lot size are indicated. Of the 16 lots fronting on Transit Street, all with houses on them, only four are shown to have street addresses: 53, 83-85, 109 and 117. Note that the 109 Transit shown on this map, located two lots west of Brook Street, is not the house that is the subject of this report. (*Archives*)

### 1895-1896

Atlas of the City of Providence by Everts & Richards, Plate 7, page 37, shows that the houses on Transit Street have been renumbered. The house on the south side of the street, just southwest of Thayer Street, is now numbered 109. The lot contains 3,672 square feet of land; no owner's name is indicated. (*Archives*)

Deed Book 405, Page 263: On September 30, 1896, Daniel H. Luther of Los Angeles, Calif., Caroline P. Mumford of Rochester, New York, Frederick S. Luther, J. Foster Coates and Adelaide C. Coates of New York City, Edward Luther of Cranston, and William T. Luther and James W. Luther of Providence sold the property to Joseph H. Taibe of Providence for \$100. The lot is described as measuring 40.6 feet on the north (Transit Street), 89.69 feet on the east, 41.5 feet on the south, and an unspecified length on the west (abutting land of the heirs of William Franceville). The deed notes that the property is "the same conveyed by Edward Luther and wife Mary Ann to Daniel H. Luther by deed of trust dated June 24, 1867 (Deed Book 179, Page 191), and that said trust has ceased. Apparently the grantors are the heirs of Mary Ann Luther (senior), as directed by the trust document. (Note: this and all subsequent deeds convey the land as well as "all buildings and improvements thereon.") (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's Plat Card for Plat 16, Lot 400 lists Daniel H. Luther Trustee as the property owner on July 1, 1895, and Joseph H. Taibe as the property owner on May 1, 1897. (*Assessor's Office*)

### 1902-1908

1902 Assessor's Plat Map, Plat 16, shows Lot 400 fronting on the south side of Transit Street, just southwest of the intersection of Thayer Street. The lot measures 40.6 feet on the north (Transit Street), 89.63 feet on the east, 41.5 feet on the south, and 89.51 feet on the west, containing a total of 3,672 square feet. (*Archives*)

1908 Atlas of the City of Providence by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 8, shows the building at 109 Transit Street on a 3,672 square foot lot owned by "J.H. Taibe." (*Archives*)

### 1916-1926

Deed Book 564, Page 152: On October 17, 1916, Joseph H. Taibe of Warwick sold the property to Solomon Swartz and wife Ruth J. Swartz of Providence for \$10. The property boundaries are the same as described in Mr. Taibe's deed from Daniel H. Luther et al. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Deed Book 573, Page 337: On April 29, 1918, Solomon Swartz and wife Ruth J. Swartz of Providence sold the property to Marianno Souza Oliveira and wife Rosa Oliveira of Providence for \$10. The property is described as located on Transit Street "partly opposite from Thayer Street," with

measurements identical to those in the Swartzs' deed from Mr. Taibe. The deed also mentions a mortgage on the property, from Mr. Taibe to the grantors (Mortgage Book 363, Page 3).

Assessor's Plat Card for Plat 16, Lot 400 lists Solomon Swartz and wife Ruth J. Swartz as the property owners on November 1, 1916, and Marianno S. Oliveira and wife Rosa Oliveira as the owners on May 1, 1918. (*Assessor's Office*)

The 1918 Atlas of Providence, Plate 18, shows 109 Transit Street as a 3,672 square foot lot with a building on it, owned by "G. Swartz." Apparently the initial "G" is an error. (*Archives*)

The 1926 Atlas of Providence by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 18, shows the building at 109 Transit Street on a 3,672 square foot lot, owned by M. Oliveira. (*Archives*)

### 1934-1937

Marianno S. and Rosa Oliveira both died in 1934, within a few months of each other. From the transactions described below, it appears that legally, Mr. and Mrs. Oliveira each owned one-half of the property at 109 Transit Street. Mr. Oliveira had taken out a mortgage on his half interest, and had a balance still due at his death. Therefore, instead of Mrs. Oliveira inheriting her husband's half of the property, it was sold by the mortgagee; Mrs. Oliveira's half interest was sold by one of her heirs shortly thereafter. The grantee in both cases was the same person, Robert Ortoleva.

Deed Book 784, Page 1: On September 1, 1934, Manuel P. Andrade of East Providence, holder of a mortgage by Marianno Souza Oliveira dated March 2, 1926 (Mortgage Book 538, Page 321), sold the property at public auction due to default by Mr. Oliveira. Robert S. Ortoleva was the high bidder, paying \$1,100. The property is described as situated on Transit Street partly opposite Thayer Street, and being the same as conveyed to the mortgagor (Mr. Oliveira) by deed from Solomon Swartz et ux dated April 29, 1918 (Deed Book 573, Page 337). The lot measures 40.6 feet on Transit Street, 89.69 feet on the east, 41.51 feet on the south, and 89.51 feet on the west. (Note, however, that this deed does not describe Mr. Oliveira's ownership as one-half of the lot.) (*Registry of Deeds*)

Deed Book 784, Page 2: On November 19, 1934, Maria Bleena Oliveira of East Providence, administrator of the estate of Rose (Rosa) Oliveira, late of Providence, sold "one undivided one-half of a lot on Transit Street partly opposite Thayer Street" to Robert S. Ortoleva of Providence for \$200. The property is described as being one-half of the same parcel conveyed to Marianno Souza Oliveira and wife Rosa Oliveira by deed dated April 29, 1918 (Deed Book 573, Page 337). The lot measures 40.6 feet on Transit Street, 89.69 feet on the east, 41.5 feet on the south, and 89.51 feet on the west. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Deed Book 789, Page 364: On April 14, 1936, Robert S. Ortoleva of Providence sold to the Columbus Construction and Mortgage Corp. of Providence, a lot on Transit Street partly opposite Thayer Street, "being one undivided half of the same parcel of land conveyed to Marianno Souza Oliveira et ux Rosa Oliveira by deed dated April 29, 1918 (Deed Book 573, Page 337). (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's Plat Card for Plat 16, Lot 400 lists Robert S. Ortoleva as the property owner in March 1935, and the Columbus Construction and Mortgage Corp. as owner in June 1936. (*Assessor's Office*)

The 1937 Atlas of the City of Providence by G.M. Hopkins Co., Plate 18, shows the building at 109 Transit Street on a 3,672 square foot lot owned by Columbus Construction & Mortgage Corp. (*Archives*)

**1944-1948**

Deed Book 873, Page 234: On November 24, 1944, the Columbus Construction & Mortgage Company sold the property, described as above, back to Robert S. Ortoleva of Providence (along with two other lots on Vesta Street), for \$10. (Note that there is no reference to "an undivided half of the lot," in either this or in subsequent deeds.) (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's Plat Card for Plat 16, Lot 400 lists Robert S. Ortoleva as the property owner in April 1945, and his estate as the owner in January 1948. (*Assessor's Office*)

**1960**

Deed Book 1101, Page 270: On March 15, 1960, C. Richard Ortoleva of East Providence, Joseph V. Ortoleva, Robert S. Ortoleva, and Doris A. Ortoleva, all of Providence, sold the property to Manuel A. Moreira and Sophia P. Moreira of Providence. The property description is the same as in the previous deed from Columbus Construction & Mortgage to Robert S. Ortoleva. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's Plat Card for Plat 16, Lot 400 lists Manuel A. Moreira and wife Sophia Moreira as the property owners in December 1960. (*Assessor's Office*)

**1963**

Deed Book 1119, Page 1101: On April 25, 1963, Manuel A. Moreira and wife Sophia P. Moreira of Providence sold the property, as described above, to themselves and Frank Moreira of Providence. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's Plat Card for Plat 16, Lot 400 lists Manuel A. Moreira and wife Sophia P. Moreira and Frank Moreira as the property owners in October 1963. (*Assessor's Office*)

**1975**

Deed Book 1189, Page 102: On November 24, 1975, Sophia P. Moreira of Providence and Frank Moreira of East Providence sold the property, as described above, to themselves and Antonio P. Moreira of East Providence. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's Plat Card for Plat 16, Lot 400 lists Sophia P. Moreira, Frank Moreira and Antonio Moreira as the property owners as of November 24, 1975. The card references Deed Book 1189, Page 102. (*Assessor's Office*)

**1982**

Deed Book 1234, Page 1183: On April 22, 1982, Sophia P. Moreira, Frank Moreira and Antonio P. Moreira of 109 Transit Street sold the property, as described above, to Dana Brayton of 98 Transit Street. (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's Plat Card for Plat 16, Lot 400 lists Dana Brayton as the property owner as of April 23, 1982. The card references Deed Book 1234, Page 1183. (*Assessor's Office*)

**1984**

Deed Book 1267, Page 199: On July 16, 1984, Dana Brayton of Providence sold the property, as described above, to Marguerite S. Schnepel of 109 Transit Street. The deed references the previous transaction to Dana Brayton from the Moreiras (Deed Book 1234, Page 1183). (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's Plat Card for Plat 16, Lot 400 lists Marguerite S. Schnepel as the property owner as of July 17, 1984. The card references Deed Book 1287, Page 199. (*Assessor's Office*)

**1998**

Deed Book 3959, Page 130: On December 7, 1998, Marguerite S. Schnepel of Providence conveyed the property (as described above) as a gift to herself and Paul R. Evans III of Providence. The deed notes that the premises are the same conveyed to the grantor by Dana Brayton by deed dated July 16, 1988 (Deed Book 1267, Page 199), and also references the prior transaction between Dana Brayton and the Moreiras on April 22, 1982 (Deed Book 1234, Page 1183). (*Registry of Deeds*)

Assessor's Plat Card for Plat 16, Lot 400 lists Marguerite S. Schnepel and Paul R. Evans as the property owners as of December 9, 1998. The card references Deed Book 3959, Page 130. (*Assessor's Office*)

*Research compiled by Kathryn J. Cavanaugh  
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