

JOHN BROWN HOUSE, 1786

HOME OF
The Rhode Island Historical Society

52 POWER STREET
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

DEXTER 1-8575

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

CLIFFORD P. MONAHON
Director

CLARKSON A. COLLINS, 3RD
Librarian

Library Hours:

OCTOBER through MAY

Monday . . . 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Tuesday—Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Saturday . . . 9 a.m. to 12 noon

JUNE through SEPTEMBER

Monday—Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

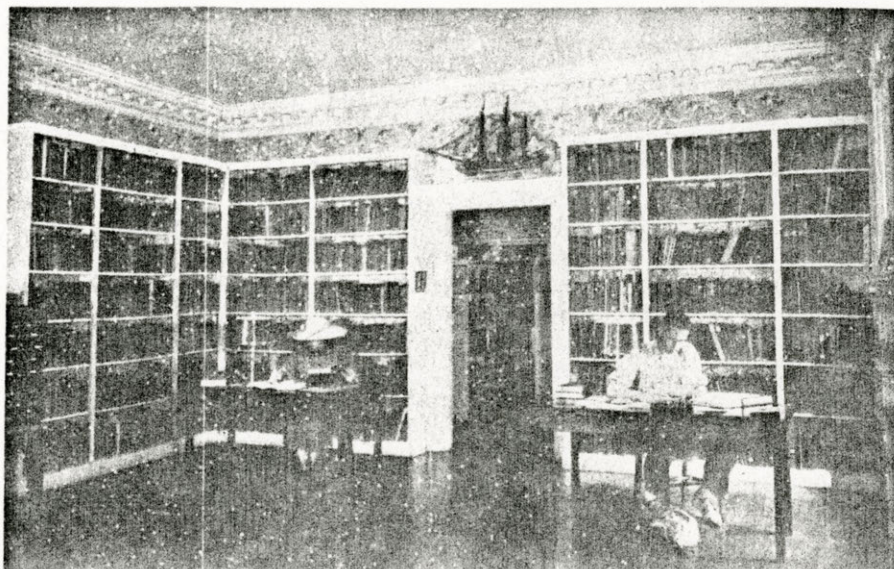
Closed Saturday

Closed on Sunday and the following holidays: Jan. 1, Feb. 22, May 30, July 4, Aug. 14, Labor Day, Oct. 12, Nov. 11, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

THE LIBRARY

THE library contains one of the largest genealogical collections in New England. In the field of Rhode Island history the manuscript and printed matter is particularly valuable. There is also abundant material on the other New England states as well as much on the country at large. The collection of Rhode Island imprints, beginning with items printed by James Franklin in 1727, is unequalled and of particular value to students of bibliography. Equally outstanding is the collection of Rhode Island newspapers, including the complete file of the Providence *Gazette* begun in 1762 (available on microfilm).

Among the thousands of manuscripts in the library are several collections of particular value to students. They form but a small part of the manuscript source material and are listed merely to give an idea of the Society's holdings. In the field of business history are the Almy and Brown Papers, the earliest records of an American tex-



GENEALOGY ROOM

tile manufactory, and the papers of the Builders Iron Foundry. The Nightingale-Jenckes Papers, the Champlin Papers, and the Obadiah Brown Papers, are all largely concerned with Rhode Island's oversea trade in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. On this same subject are the Custom House Papers, (1790-1894). For the searchers in legal history there are the Richard W. and Albert C. Greene Papers, and the Thomas A. Jenckes Collection. The Foster Papers, the Ward Papers, and the Hopkins Papers are rich in source material of the eighteenth century. The Peck Papers, The Rhode Island Historical Society Manuscripts, the Shepley Collection, and the Moses Brown Papers contain miscellaneous but important documents.

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

The Rhode Island Historical Society is the fourth of its kind to be founded in the United States. Incorporated in 1822, its object has been "to procure and preserve whatever relates . . . to the history of the State of Rhode Island." Without a building of its own for the first few years of its existence, the Society was finally located in the Cabinet (1844) at 68 Waterman Street, designed by James C. Bucklin, an eminent Rhode Island builder. It continued to occupy this building for nearly a hundred years until 1942, when it moved to John Brown House, its present permanent home, the generous gift of John Nicholas Brown.

Several organizations, such as the Roger Williams Family Association, the Society of the Cincinnati, the Sons of the American Revolution, the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, and the Mayflower Society hold meetings in John Brown House. This is in keeping with the Society's policy of making its headquarters available to the citizens of the state who are interested in the historical development of Rhode Island. Many visitors, including students and researchers, avail themselves of The Rhode Island Historical Society's resources. Persons recommended by a member of the Society will be cordially received as new members.

OPEN HOURS at JOHN BROWN HOUSE

Tuesday through Friday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday afternoons 2 to 4 p.m.

Closed Mondays

OPEN OTHER HOURS BY APPOINTMENT

Closed on Jan. 1, Feb. 22, Easter Sunday,

May 30, July 4, Aug. 14, Labor Day, Oct. 12,

Nov. 11, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

JOHN BROWN HOUSE

... home of The Rhode Island Historical Society, was built by John, third of the famous "Four Brown Brothers" (Nicholas, Joseph, John, and Moses), merchants of Providence. Joseph, professor of natural philosophy at Rhode Island College (now Brown University), designed the house in the Georgian style, but died before the work was commenced in 1786.

The original house was 54 by 50 feet, three stories and attic, with four rooms on a floor, divided by a wide hall running north and south through the center. The ends of the heavy oak beams are embedded in massive brick walls, even the interior partitions being of solid brick.

The house has ever been of historic interest. As early as 1789 Mrs. Abigail Adams, wife of

Vice-President John Adams, dined with the Browns while journeying from Braintree to New York. Her son, John Quincy Adams, sixth President, wrote in his journal September 9, 1789, concerning the house: "We only saw the outside of it, which is the most magnificent and elegant private mansion that I have ever seen on this continent." In 1790 Washington was entertained by his admirer, John Brown, who named in his honor several ships and the bridge he built to Seekonk (East Providence).

The ell, which at present houses the museum on the first floor, was built at a later date. Originally there were several detached buildings: woodshed, bath house, stables, and coach house.

Several architectural features of the house set a precedent for many of the domiciles built in Providence later on: the four chimneys rather than two; the slight projection, crowned by a pediment, in the center of the facade, with the open entrance porch set in the projection; and the Palladian window over the entrance.

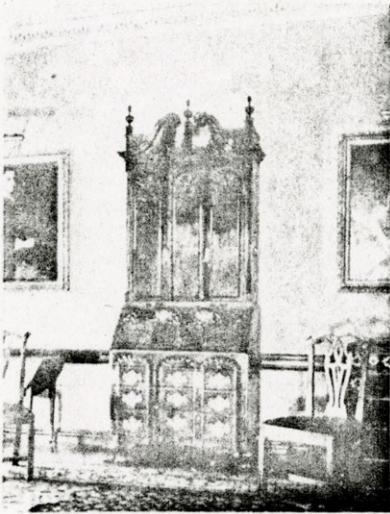
The central hallway is decorated with a heavy cornice and deep frieze, with carving in relief. Mahogany is used for the baseboards, chair rails, doors, and the dominating stair case with its twisted balusters and ramped rail. There is a shadow rail at the left and a small piece of ivory in the newel, known as the "peace point," signifying that satisfaction had been reached by the owner and the builder. Variety is the keynote, as exemplified in the carving and the scroll, open, and broken pediments over the doorways. Tradition says that the marble busts in the hallway and the drawing room, as well as those on the gateposts, were brought from France.

At the right of the front door is the former drawing room with the northeast parlor beyond, rooms used by the Society for lectures. The ornamental ceilings are not original.

At the left is the southwest parlor with Mrs. John Brown's portrait in oil over the mantel. The mahogany secretary, reputedly was made for Joseph Brown, by the Goddards, famous Newport cabinetmakers of the eighteenth century. The portraits flanking it are a self-portrait of Robert Feke (Newport, ca. 1750), America's foremost artist prior to Copley, and his wife Eleanor (Cozzens) Feke.

The present dining room is decorated with modern scenic wall paper, depicting Washington's inauguration in New York City (1789).

There are furnished rooms on the third floor.



SOUTHWEST
PARLOR

A CORNER OF THE DINING ROOM

