

DRAFT

United States Department of the Interior
 National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Copley Chambers

Other names/site number: Milner Hotel, Copley Plaza Hotel, Continental Hotel

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 206 Broad Street

City or town: Providence State: Rhode Island County: Providence

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> | <p>_____ Date</p> |
| <p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p> | |

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p> | |
| <p>_____ Signature of commenting official:</p> | <p>_____ Date</p> |
| <p>_____ Title: State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p> | |

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19th AND 20th CENTURY REVIVAL/Classical Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: Brick/Concrete

Walls: Brick

Roof: Rubber Membrane

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Copley Chambers is a north-facing, four-story, five-bays-wide, flat-roofed, mixed-use building located at 206 Broad Street in Providence, Rhode Island. It was constructed in 1913 with commercial spaces on the first floor and a rooming house above. Exterior walls are brick, with the exception of the rear elevation, which is composed of concrete masonry units. The building has modest Classical Revival-style detailing on its Broad Street façade, including symmetrical fenestration and a roof parapet. The front of the building abuts the sidewalk while its side elevations are set at an angle, giving it a parallelogram footprint. The building is approximately 54 feet wide by 96 feet deep. It is bounded on the north by Broad Street, on the east by a one-story commercial building (ca. 1965), on the west by a condominium development (2023) and on the south by a paved parking area. Copley Chambers is situated west of downtown Providence, in a neighborhood that is mixed residential, institutional, and commercial.

Narrative Description

Setting

Copley Chambers is located in the northern part of South Providence, a densely developed neighborhood located southwest of the city's central business district. Copley Chambers fronts onto Broad Street, a two-lane thoroughfare that stretches from downtown to Providence's southern boundary. In the vicinity of

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Copley Chambers, Broad Street is lined with concrete sidewalks and scattered street trees. Three high schools are located across Broad Street from Copley Chambers: Classical High School and Central High School, with their associated playing fields, and, further south, the South Providence Career and Technical Academy. The surrounding blocks are otherwise characterized by scattered small-scale businesses, restaurants, and an occasional apartment building or church. Most buildings in the vicinity are two or three stories in height, making the neighborhood feel open and bright, despite its density. Interstate 95, built in the 1960s, wraps around South Providence to the northeast, east, and southeast, effectively cutting the neighborhood off from downtown. Copley Chambers is about 1/10 of a mile – roughly two blocks – west of I-95.

Exterior

Photos 1-5

Facing north onto Broad Street, the Copley Chambers building is four stories in height and has a flat roof covered in EPDM rubber. It is composed of two sections: a mostly buff brick front and a mostly red brick rear block. The brick is set in running bond. Window openings are rectangular, unless otherwise specified, and evenly spaced on all elevations. Most are filled with 6/1 (paired on the front elevation) or 8/2 replacement aluminum sash, similar to the originals; a few have been filled.¹

The front block of the building is five bays wide and three bays deep. It features a simple corbelled cornice with drip molding at the corners, and a shallow, curvilinear parapet with aluminum coping. The principal entrance to the building is recessed within the center bay of the façade. It consists of a pair of replacement, fully glazed, metal doors topped by a large, fixed, single-light transom. The entrance bay is topped with a stone spandrel tablet with molded edges. The entrance is flanked by fully glazed, storefront windows composed of fixed, aluminum sash: five tall lights topped with small lights, giving the appearance of a transom. On the second through fourth floors of the façade, the bays are recessed slightly and punctuated by paired, 6/1 window sash. On the second and third floors, there are stretcher-course brick lintels and header-course brick sills. The fourth floor features segmental-arched window openings with header-course brick sills. The lintels of the fourth-floor window openings are characterized by alternating soldier and stacked-rowlock bricks. Recessed spandrels, each filled with three header-course brick panels, are located beneath most of the window openings. Some of the spandrels are filled with what appears to be large-conglomerate terrazzo tiles, which were added sometime prior to the mid-1970s (see Fig. 15).

The side elevations of the front block are flat, and at the first story have no openings. Above the first story, there are three window openings per floor on the east elevation and one per floor on the west elevation. Side elevation openings generally contain new 8/2 sash windows at the east and 6/2 at the west, exceptions being in the easternmost bays of the east elevation, which have been infilled with solid wood panels, and a 6/2 sash at the third story, north bay. The lower portion of the west elevation is composed of red brick. The south elevation of the front block is largely obscured by the rear block, though two narrow portions, composed of red brick, are visible at either side, above the first story. Here, a single window opening at each floor has been filled with brick.

¹ Prior to the building's rehabilitation in 2023, most of the window openings on the façade were infilled with plywood panels, but at least four pairs of historic 6/1 wood sash windows survived at the fourth floor. There were also at least three 8/2 wood sash windows at the east and west elevations of the front block, and remnants of perhaps six or more windows in the rear block.

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The rear block of the Copley Chambers building is as wide as the front block at the first story, but narrower at the upper stories. This creates a long, narrow, one-story, shed-roof section at both the east and west sides and, on floors two through four, a T-shaped floor plan. The rear block is eight bays long and has little ornamentation. On the side elevations, regularly spaced, rectangular window openings feature header-course brick sills and new 6/1 sash; a few have been filled with brick. Small, square window openings, which once served bathrooms, are regularly interspersed at each floor. They have been infilled with deep-set solid wood panels, thereby preserving the openings and the rhythm of the original fenestration pattern. The location of the interior stairwell is revealed by the fenestration pattern on the east elevation: a tall window opening is located at the fourth floor and filled with paired, 4/1 sash with two, two-light windows above, while a pair of 2/1 sash windows is located between the second and third stories. The stair tower rises above the roofline. The locations of former fire escapes are indicated by regularly spaced staining between every floor on the side elevations.

The south elevation of the rear block is constructed of concrete masonry units (CMU), painted red to match the adjoining brick.² A new metal, four-story switchback stair accesses a new, solid metal door at each story. Simple, contemporary, single-leaf, metal doors are centered in the elevation at each floor and provide egress from each floor's central corridor. To the west of the doors, there is a window opening at each floor, filled with new 6/1 sash.

Interior

Photos 6-24

The historic interior spatial organization of the Copley Chambers building is largely intact (see discussion of the original plan of Copley Chambers, in Section 8 of this nomination). On all four floors, spaces are organized around a double-loaded, central corridor. Vertical circulation is provided by the original U-shaped stair located near the middle of the east side of the building, which runs from the basement to the top floor. Secondary egress is provided by doors at the south end of the building which, from the second through fourth floors, lead to the exterior fire escape. Many historic finishes remain, particularly at the upper floors, as described below.

The basement (Photos 6-7) is primarily a utilitarian, largely unfinished space. It has an open floor plan, with rows of square, metal columns running north to south. Floors are concrete and perimeter walls are a combination of rough-cut stone, structural terra cotta tile, and concrete. Ceilings are typically open, with exposed wood framing and structural decking. The historic stair hall, along with two storage spaces to its south, is enclosed within historic partitions of vertical tongue-and-groove boards. Near the northeast corner of the basement, two walls of structural terra cotta tile partially enclose the oil tank and boiler; the latter adjoins the remnant of the former chimney base.

At the first floor (Photos 8-12), the main entrance on Broad Street opens to a small, rectangular entry vestibule. To either side of the vestibule is an office/storefront, each of which is accessed from the vestibule via a single leaf, fully glazed, replacement metal door. A pair of metal doors, identical to the main entry doors, is centered in the vestibule's south wall, providing access to the double-loaded corridor. The east side of the corridor is lined with storage spaces, the stair hall, and a lounge with a historic arched door opening. A restroom and three apartments open off the west side of the corridor. Historic partition locations, except as noted, are unknown, due to alterations prior to the building's rehabilitation in 2023;

² According to the current owner, the original red brick south wall was replaced with CMU in 2019-2020 due to deterioration.

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the new partitions are drywall. Historic door openings in the corridor walls (several of which were uncovered during rehab) have been retained, filled with drywall, and their locations indicated by new wood casings, based on historic examples found elsewhere in the building. Operable door openings are generally new, with new two-panel wood doors and wood casings. A number of historic, horizontal, multi-light, wood windows set high in the corridor walls were exposed during the rehabilitation; they have been preserved and trimmed with new wood casings (Photo 8).³

Historic finishes on the first floor include the terrazzo floor in the corridor; the wood flooring, baseboard, treads, and risers in the stair hall; and the lath-and-plaster walls and ceiling in both the corridor and the stair hall. (Lath-and-plaster walls and ceilings have been repaired with plaster and/or drywall, as needed.) No historic flooring was extant prior to the rehabilitation in other first-floor spaces. The two offices/storefronts at the north end of the building have new wood flooring, as does the public restroom. The lounge and bike storage area have new carpet. Residential units have new carpet and, in their efficiency kitchens and bathrooms, wood flooring.

The upper three floors (Photos 13-24) are identical in plan, each containing eight residential units with efficiency kitchens and private baths. The front block of the building contains two one-bedroom units. The historic locations of partitions in the front block are unknown, due to alterations prior to the building's rehabilitation; the new partitions are drywall.⁴ In the rear block, the original central corridor remains, running north-south to an exit to the fire escape. The east side of the rear block contains, north to south, a one-bedroom unit, the historic stair, and a two-bedroom unit. The west side of the rear block contains three one-bedroom units and, at the south, one studio unit. At the central corridor, a majority of the original door openings have not been reused but, as on the first floor, they have been filled with drywall. They are trimmed with their original wood casings or, where needed, matching replacement casing, thereby retaining physical evidence of the historic plan (Photos 13, 20). (Original door openings appear to have been retained at rooms 03, 08, and 09 of the rear block.) All operable door openings are filled with new two-panel, wood doors.

Many historic finishes on the second, third, and fourth floors remained in place prior to the rehabilitation project and were retained. These include the wood flooring, baseboard, treads, and risers, as well as the lath-and-plaster walls and ceilings in the stair hall. Historic lath-and-plaster is also present at the wall that divides the front block from the rear block, and at the corridor in the rear block. Where needed, plaster walls and ceilings have been repaired in-kind or with drywall. Most of the original molded wood baseboards at the corridor, stair hall, and along the exterior walls survives, as do most of the wood window casings and a number of wood door casings; when missing, they have been matched in-kind. Original wood floors have been retained throughout the upper floors, both in the corridor and the residential units, and have been patched in-kind or repaired as necessary. Ceilings in the residential units are new drywall.

The demising walls in the residential units in the rear block are new and composed of drywall, trimmed with wood baseboards to match the historic baseboards. The precise arrangement of new partitions varies somewhat from the historic plan, but the principal east-west demising walls divide rooms in similar one-

³ These windows are not transoms, per se, in that they are not located above historic door openings. Their exact function is unknown.

⁴ Surviving evidence prior to rehab indicated that, historically, major north-south partitions intersected the exterior wall at the midpoint between windows, as they did in the south block, rather than at the edge of a window, as they do now. The original location of secondary partitions (such as bathroom and closet partitions) in the north block is unknown, due to lack of evidence.

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window-bay modules to the original. As a result, the new plan reads as a variation on the old, maintaining the overall volumes, rhythm, and feeling of the original (historic plan, see Fig. 17; for current plan, see interior photo keys).

Today, under the Historic Tax Credit program, Copley Chambers has been rehabilitated into twenty-seven studio, one-, and two-bedroom units for young adults transitioning out of foster care. With this rehabilitation, and after more than a decade lying vacant, Copley Chambers is again providing conveniently located, high quality, small-unit housing for members of the Providence community, much as it did when it opened in the autumn of 1913.

Statement of Integrity

Built in 1913, the Copley Chambers building possesses sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, feeling, workmanship, and association to convey its significance as a good example of an early-20th-century, mixed-use rooming house in Providence. Its setting remains, as it was historically, a dense urban neighborhood on a major thoroughfare. The neighborhood has evolved over time – for example, the site of Classical High School, Central High School, and their athletic fields was once home to numerous wood-frame buildings and Union Congregational Church, and in 2023 a five-story condominium building replaced a ca. 1970, one-story commercial structure on the lot immediately west of Copley Chambers – but overall, the neighborhood retains its mix of institutional, residential, and commercial uses. The Copley Chambers building retains its massing and the majority of its character-defining exterior architectural features, including its brick walls and trim (except for the south elevation, which is composed of concrete masonry units); roof parapet; corbelled cornice and drip molding; brick spandrels on the building's primary façade; and fenestration pattern. The building's replacement window sash have the same configuration as the original windows. The contemporary storefront window systems, which represent the third iteration of storefront windows at Copley Chambers, fit within the original storefront window openings. On the interior, the historic circulation pattern and overall spatial arrangement is largely intact. Many original interior finishes remain, such as terrazzo flooring in the first-floor corridor; most of the wood flooring on the upper floors; portions of lath-and-plaster walls and ceilings; a number of wood door casings; nearly all window casings; and many of the original molded wood baseboards.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Social History

Architecture

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Period of Significance

1913-1975

Significant Dates

1913 – Copley Chambers constructed
1975 – residential use of Copley
Chambers ended

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Copley Chambers is significant at the local level under National Register Criterion A in the area of Social History, as an expression of Providence’s early-20th-century population boom, changing demographics, and the accompanying development of new types of housing. Located in the South Providence neighborhood,⁵ just west of downtown, Copley Chambers served a rapidly expanding class of urban workers seeking affordable lodging with easy access to workplaces and commercial amenities. The period of significance for Social History ranges from the building’s construction in 1913 to 1975, when residential rentals at Copley Chambers ceased. Copley Chambers is also significant at the local level under National Register Criterion C in the area of Architecture, as a good example of a turn-of-the-20th-century building type with a distinctive form: the downtown rooming house, with its characteristic mix of

⁵ Note that Copley Chambers is on the northern edge of South Providence, near the West End neighborhood. Note also that the boundary between South Providence and the central business district was likely somewhat fluid when Copley Chambers was built; the construction of Interstate 95 in the 1960s created a strong division.

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first-floor commercial spaces and simple, standardized living quarters on the upper floors. The period of significance for Architecture is 1913, corresponding to the building's date of construction.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

CRITERION A: SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance: 1913-1975

Historical Development of Providence: A Brief Overview

The first permanent colonial settlement in present-day Rhode Island was established by Roger Williams in 1636, in what was at the time the territory of the Narragansett Indians. Williams and other European colonists built dwellings along present-day North and South Main streets in Providence, on the east bank of the Providence River. The settlement remained agricultural through the 17th century but became an increasingly important maritime center in the 18th century, with a busy harbor, wharves, and warehouses. Providence's population increased from 1,200 in 1700 to 4,321 in 1774. Although most families remained on the east side of the river, by 1776 over 1/3 of the city's residents lived on the west side of town. The population of Providence grew dramatically after the Revolutionary War, reaching 16,836 in 1830. The city continued to expand to the west, due in part to topography: College Hill rose steeply alongside the colonial settlement, discouraging eastward expansion. By 1835, for the first time, a majority of the city's residents lived on the west side of the river.⁶

Rhode Island was rapidly industrializing in the early 19th century, though mostly outside Providence, where waterpower was more readily available. Technological advances, including the introduction of steam power, and the expansion of the railroad network altered this pattern so that, by the mid-1800s, Providence had become an important center for the manufacture of textiles, jewelry, and base metals. Industrialization was accompanied by rapid population growth, including an increasing number of immigrants. In 1865, Providence's population was 54,595 – more than three times what it had been in 1830 – and nearly half of these were foreign-born or the children of foreign-born parents. The city's population doubled between 1865 and 1880 and doubled again by 1910, at which point 70% of residents were immigrants, drawn to the jobs offered by the city's expanding industrial base. At the turn of the 20th century, Providence was the twentieth largest city in America and home to the largest tool factory, file factory, engine factory, screw factory, and silverware factory in the world.⁷

When Copley Chambers was constructed in 1913, Providence was in its heyday. Over 200,000 people called the city home, and the numbers were growing; the population would peak at around 250,000 in 1940. Immigrants continued to account for a large share of the populace, though 1924 federal laws establishing quotas lowered the numbers of new arrivals.⁸ South Providence, where Copley Chambers was constructed, was a microcosm of the city at large. The neighborhood experienced rapid growth in the latter half of the 19th century, largely the result of immigration. In 1910, immigrants and their children

⁶ William McKenzie Woodward and Edward F. Sanderson, *Providence: A Citywide Survey of Historic Resources* (Providence, RI: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1986):40-47, 54.

⁷ Woodward and Sanderson 1986:50-59

⁸ Woodward and Sanderson 1986:2, 61

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comprised 60% of South Providence's residents. Most hailed from Ireland, followed by Russia, Sweden, Canada, Austria, and England.⁹

South Providence and Broad Street

The 1895 *New Topographical Atlas of Surveys: Providence County, Rhode Island* provides a snapshot of South Providence on the cusp of the 20th century (Fig. 1). There was a significant amount of industry, with large factories located near the railroad lines and the river. Many blocks in the southern part of the neighborhood had been platted but remained empty. In contrast, houses, churches, schools, and smaller manufacturing concerns filled nearly every lot in the northern part of the neighborhood. Proximity to downtown no doubt accounted for the difference in density. Weybosset Street, a principal downtown thoroughfare with office buildings, hotels, and commercial blocks, stretched into the northern part of South Providence, where it was renamed Broad Street and took on a more residential character. Streetcars connected South Providence to downtown, first on Eddy, Ocean, and Public streets in 1875, followed soon after by lines on Broad Street and Prairie Avenue.¹⁰

By the early 20th century, most of the land in the northern part of South Providence had been developed,¹¹ as illustrated by the 1918 *Plat Book of the City of Providence, Rhode Island* (Fig. 2). The area in the immediate vicinity of Copley Chambers, built five years prior, was densely developed by this time. The Young Men's Christian Association had constructed a 9-story facility a block to the east of Copley Chambers. A block to the north, on Pond Street (no longer extant), two large school buildings had been erected: Classical High School and the Technical High School (no longer extant). Numerous wood-frame buildings in the vicinity, likely dwellings, that were depicted on earlier maps had been replaced by masonry commercial buildings, including the Olney Block, the Lily Building, and the John M. Dean Co. Building, which lined the north side of Westminster Street.¹² The names of several buildings on the 1918 atlas indicated their use as apartment buildings or rooming houses, such as Wellington Chambers, The Wilhelm, The Merritt, The Astor, and The Stanifeld – strongly suggesting that the area was becoming a locus for apartment dwellers.¹³ Indeed, the 1919 Providence City Directory included a list of 35 apartment buildings, ten of which were within a half-mile radius of Copley Chambers.¹⁴

The city of Providence entered a period of decline in the mid-20th century; even today, its population is less than it was at its peak in 1940.¹⁵ Many residents, including those in South Providence, left the city for the suburbs and the neighborhood's building stock began to deteriorate.¹⁶ The neighborhood was deeply affected by urban renewal and the construction of Interstate 95 in the 1960s and 1970s; entire blocks were cleared to make way for the highway, which not only disrupted the social fabric of South Providence, but

⁹ Woodward and Sanderson 1986:32-33

¹⁰ Woodward and Sanderson 1986:33; Everts & Richards, *The Topographical Atlas of Surveys, Providence County, Rhode Island* (Philadelphia: Everts & Richards, 1895):52-53, 56-57.

¹¹ Woodward and Sanderson 1986:34

¹² Everts & Richards, *The Topographical Atlas of Surveys, Providence County, Rhode Island* (Philadelphia: Everts & Richards, 1895); G.M. Hopkins, *Plat Book of Providence, Rhode Island* (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins, 1918).

¹³ Hopkins 1918.

¹⁴ *Providence Directory and Rhode Island State Business Directory* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1919):796.

¹⁵ Providence had a population of 253,504 in 1940. The 2020 census counted 190,934 residents. U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, Volume I, Number of Inhabitants* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942):964; U.S. Census Bureau, "QuickFacts" about Providence, Rhode Island in 2020 Census.

¹⁶ Woodward and Sanderson 1986:34

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created a physical barrier between the neighborhood and downtown. A comparison of aerial photographs from before, during, and after the construction of I-95 provides a stark illustration (Fig. 8).

The Evolution of Multi-tenant Housing in 19th- and 20th-century Providence

Historically, Providence residents showed a preference for detached residences, perhaps in part due to the relative availability of land. The influx of new residents in the 19th century, however, created an acute need for housing, and by the late 1800s there were strong economic incentives for larger scale, multi-tenant housing. Land values in desirable areas, especially near downtown offices and commercial districts, were increasing and the availability of streetcars meant people no longer needed to live within walking distance of their work. In South Providence, well served by streetcars and proximate to downtown, large numbers of multi-tenant rental properties were built in the last two decades of the 1800s. These were typically two- or three-family residences set on small lots. Indeed, “triple-deckers” or “three-deckers” – three-story, three-unit apartment buildings, often with porches at each story, that were built in New England cities between roughly 1870 and 1920 – proliferated in South Providence.¹⁷ In form and scale, these were not radically different from many of the city’s single-family homes. Soon, however, different types of multi-tenant housing would be constructed in Providence, introducing new building typologies that served a variety of demographic groups.

Apartment Buildings

One form of multi-tenant housing was the **apartment building**, which first became popular in major American cities after the Civil War and served primarily wealthy residents. Boston had 108 apartment buildings by 1878, while in New York 200 apartment buildings were built from 1869-1876.¹⁸ These early apartment buildings were relatively small, rarely rising more than a few stories, often housed a single family per floor, and were built for luxury. They might, for example, include food service from in-house kitchens and an in-house laundry service. Typically, they included gas lighting, running water, and central heat. These buildings were often referred to as “French Flats,” inspired by glamorous Parisian apartments. Toward the end of the 19th century, new types of apartment buildings emerged to serve the middle class. Two popular examples were the “bachelor flat,” originating in the 1870s, and the “apartment hotel,” well-established by the turn of the 20th century. The bachelor flat, as the name suggests, offered housing for single people and ranged from studios up to as many as five rooms. Buildings with bachelor flats might include first-floor commercial space. The apartment hotel provided multi-room suites to young professionals, travelers, artists, and middle-class families, with varying degrees of hotel-like amenities, such as maid service, food service, and laundry service. Many apartment hotels were eventually converted into hotels.¹⁹

Apartment buildings did not appear in Providence until the 1880s, with the construction of the Whitfield Apartments, which occupied an entire block at 280-300 Broad Street (1886; Howard Hoppin, architect; not extant), and the Aylesworth Apartments at 188-194 Broad Street (1888-89; Individual NR 1982). The Aylesworth was similar to the French flats of New York and Boston in that it was inhabited primarily by the wealthy. Early tenants included a physician, the owner of a drug and chemical company, and a

¹⁷ Woodward and Sanderson 1986:33

¹⁸ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1981):137-138.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999):187-199.

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provisions merchant.²⁰ In the first two decades of the 20th century, construction of apartment buildings shifted mostly to Wayland Square on the east side of Providence, with some also being built in the Elmwood neighborhood – both middle- to upper-income locales. These later buildings served a range of middle-class tenants, including businesspeople, young single people, older couples with grown children, widows, and young married couples.²¹

Boarding Houses and Rooming Houses

America's working class had a different housing experience. Through most of the 19th century, many lower-income urban residents lived in **boarding houses**. Typically, these were former single-family houses that had been subdivided and in which tenants rented a single room, with access to a shared bathroom. Rent included meals (board), which were eaten at designated times in a communal dining room. Boarding houses were often run by widows, either the home's owner, who relied on the boarding house for income, or a woman hired for the purpose. Boarding house quality, status, location and consequently cost, varied widely, such that they accommodated a wide variety of lodgers, from working class laborers to artists and professionals. (The most distinguishing feature in the wide variation of single-room housing was plumbing: at the high end, each room had a private bathroom, while at the low end, a dozen lodgers might share a single bathroom.)²² By the late 1800s, boarding houses were giving way to **rooming houses** – also typically subdivided single-family homes with rented rooms and shared baths, but without meals, a kitchen, or dining service. In the absence of such amenities, rooming houses needed to be located in neighborhoods with inexpensive restaurants; proximity to employment opportunities and entertainment was also important. The shift from boarding house to rooming house was rapid in some locations; in Boston, for example, the percentage of people in single-room housing who were rooming rather than boarding rose from 60% in 1885 to 86% just ten years later.²³

Data on the number and location of boarding and rooming houses in Providence is scarce, but it is clear that, by 1919, when nationally recognized housing authority John Ihlder published *Houses of Providence: A Study of Present Conditions and Tendencies*,²⁴ there was a concentration of them in South Providence. Ihlder, who referred to these types of housing as “furnished-room houses,” wrote:

...there are a great number [of furnished-room houses] in the district between Weybosset Street and Hayward Park. [Fig 1] Here old two and three-family houses have been cut up into small apartments of one, two and three rooms, which are rented in every possible combination and for any length of time, from one night up. This is a typical “blighted” district, existing, as many of its inhabitants do, on sufferance and from day to day, always hoping that something will turn up. The something for which the district is waiting is an

²⁰ William McKenzie Woodward, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for Aylesworth Apartments, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1982).

²¹ Joshua Safdie, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for Ontario Apartments, Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1997): 9-10.

²² Cromley:16-18; Paul Erling Groth, “‘Marketplace’ Vernacular Design: The Case of Downtown Rooming Houses,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture 2* (1986):181-182.

²³ Groth 1986:181, 185.

²⁴ It should be noted that Ihlder's *Houses of Providence*, while a useful source of data, is riddled with prejudice. Ihlder writes extensively about “alien” groups and their failure to assimilate, and his descriptions of different racial, ethnic, and religious communities are filled with stereotypes.

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extension of the business area. Meanwhile it gets along as it can, a tax upon the social agencies of the city. This district merges into that about Ship and Elm streets.²⁵

Downtown Rooming Houses

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a new form of multi-tenant housing had emerged in the United States: what geographer Paul Groth calls the *downtown rooming house*. Different from converted residences in that they were purpose-built, downtown rooming houses (sometimes referred to as “rooming hotels” or “upstairs hotels”) were located in or near the city center and were typically two to four stories tall, with commercial space on the ground floor. The residential units, located on the upper floors, generally consisted of single rooms with access to a shared bath. Unlike older rooming houses converted from existing homes, where a single bathroom may have served twelve to eighteen residents, downtown rooming houses might have one toilet and bath for every six rooms, in addition to a small sink in each unit. The units did not include kitchens and, with no dining facilities on site, tenants were expected to eat out or make do with a hotplate. Like the multi-tenant housing that preceded them, downtown rooming houses were located in areas with dining, shopping, and entertainment, as well as proximity to workplaces. Downtown rooming houses were usually run by a building manager who lived in one of the units and was hired by the absentee owner. Rooms usually rented for the short term, either by the day, week, or month.²⁶

Residents of the downtown rooming house were most often young and single (either never married or divorced), though occasionally there were married couples. Their professions were a cross-section of the urban middle-class work force, from clerks, agents, policemen and salesmen, to nurses, machinists, and carpenters. These young professionals – who included men and women – lived in downtown rooming houses, rather than apartment buildings, for the simple reason that they could afford them.²⁷ While tenants of the downtown rooming house may not have derived personal identity from their home in the same way that, for example, a middle-class family did from a single-family residence with its connotations of domestic virtue, Groth argues that they nevertheless derived, “a social identity – literally a place in society – from the location and basic conditions of their homes.”²⁸ Although downtown rooming houses were simple buildings and their residents moved frequently, they were home to a significant proportion of Americans and were integral to the built environment and cultural fabric of urban America.

By the time of Ihlder’s 1919 report, the construction of purpose-built, multi-tenant housing in Providence was booming. Ihlder wrote that “Providence is increasing the proportion of its three-deckers and other multiple dwellings,” citing the Providence census from 1900 which showed that there were 1,313 three-family houses, 85 six-family houses, 2 ten-family houses and 7 houses with eleven families or more.²⁹ The “houses” with six or more units may well have been apartment buildings or rooming houses, though based on Ihlder’s terminology, it is impossible to know for certain. The Providence Directory of 1919 listed 35 “Apartment Houses” – a large increase from just five years earlier, when the directory listed nine. Many had aspirational names, such as Adie Mansion, Brunonia, Buena Vista, Hope Mansion,

²⁵ John Ihlder, *Houses of Providence: A Study of Present Conditions and Tendencies* (Providence, RI: Snow & Farnham Co., 1916):48. Ihlder’s work was also summarized in “Housing Conditions in Providence,” *Providence Magazine*, XXIX, no. 2 (Feb. 1917):79-88.

²⁶ Groth 1986:181-182, 184-185, 188-189.

²⁷ Groth 1986:183, 185.

²⁸ Groth 1986:191.

²⁹ Ihlder:31.

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Imperial, Leicester Arms, Princess Apartments, Ritz Apartments, and Copley Chambers.³⁰ The inclusion of Copley Chambers in this list strongly suggests that at least some of these “apartment houses” could be classified as downtown rooming houses.

Copley Chambers: A Downtown Rooming House on Broad Street

Copley Chambers was constructed in 1913, in the midst of Providence’s multi-unit housing boom. Located on the edge of the central business district, with commercial space on the first floor and approximately forty³¹ small, shared-bath residential rooms above, Copley Chambers exemplified the downtown rooming house building type (see Criterion C, below). It also provided affordable and flexible short-term housing for Providence’s growing number of urban workers, illustrating the city’s changing demographics and the development of new modes of housing.

Copley Chambers was built by local real estate developer Edwin Foster Cary (1869-1942). Born in Providence, Cary had joined the Samuel A. Nightingale Company, a real estate firm, by 1901 and appears to have taken over leadership of the company a few years later. He soon went into business under his own name and, by 1914, had an office in the newly built Turk’s Head Building in downtown Providence. The 1917 *Directory of Directors in the State of Rhode Island* identified Cary as treasurer and manager of five real estate companies, one of them in New York City. Cary was also a founder and one-time president of the Providence trade organization, the Real Estate Exchange.³²

On April 2, 1913, Cary, under his Oxford Land Company, submitted an “Intention to Build” with the City of Providence. The clerk recorded that Cary planned a new, four-story “Apartment House + Offices” on Broad Street, to be built of “Brick + Hollow Tile.” (The clerk’s entry states that the building would contain 12 apartments, but other documentary and physical evidence strongly indicates that there were many more. Either Cary’s plans changed, or the clerk’s notation was incorrect.)³³ The project would replace an existing one-story, wood-frame building on the lot.³⁴ Work was underway by August, when the *Providence Journal* reported that two large elm trees were being removed to make way for Cary’s “office and apartment block,” which was being constructed “on the property line next to the sidewalk.”³⁵ Construction likely was completed or close to it in the fall, when Cary began to place advertisements seeking tenants (Figs. 9-10). (Cary sold the property to Henry T. Arnold in November 1914, about a year after it was constructed, suggesting he built it as a short-term investment.)³⁶

³⁰ *Providence Directory and Rhode Island Business Directory* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1914):754; *Providence Directory and Rhode Island State Business Directory* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1919):796.

³¹ This is an approximation based on physical and documentary evidence; for further information, see discussion in section titled “Original Plan of Copley Chambers,” below.

³² Bankers Service Company, *Directory of Directors in the State of Rhode Island* (Boston: Bankers Service Company, 1917):32; “Edwin F. Cary” (obituary), *Providence Journal*, 15 June 1942:12; Edward F. Cary, death certificate, 12 June 1942, State File No. 1441, Rhode Island Department of Public Health; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1901):207; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1909):1027; *Providence Directory and Rhode Island Business Directory* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1912):1199; *Providence Directory and Rhode Island Business Directory* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1914):1217.

³³ “Formal Record of Intentions to Build,” Jan. – July 1913, no. 557, Providence City Archives.

³⁴ Everts & Richards, 1895.

³⁵ “City is Cutting Down Two Large Elm Trees,” *Providence Journal*, 16 August 1913:3.

³⁶ City of Providence, Recorder of Deeds, Chain of Title Card for 206 Broad Street (Plat 24, Lot 36).

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On October 29, 1913, Cary ran an ad in the *Evening Bulletin*, announcing, “I WANT A DOCTOR FOR MY DOCTORS BUILDING.” (Fig. 9) The medical offices, located on “street-floor,” rented for \$9.50 per week and consisted of a suite with a “waiting room, private office, room with water closet and set bowl, another room with sink and shelves.” The ad was also accompanied by an illustration of the building façade, with its paired windows set within recessed bays, parapet roofline, and modest architectural ornamentation. A large doorway is centered on the façade. The total number of doctor’s offices in the building is unclear, though if they were limited to the “street-floor,” as this ad suggests, there were probably no more than a few. In any case, by the time this ad ran Cary evidently had just one “suite not yet engaged.”³⁷

A large ad in the November 9, 1913, edition of the *Providence Sunday Journal* (Fig. 10) promoted the building not just to physicians and dentists, but also sought “gentlemen” or “man and wife” for the upstairs apartments. For \$5.75 a week, a residential tenant could secure a “sumptuously furnished room with private set bowl” – presumably a “set bowl” was a sink – “also use of water closet and bath exclusively with gentleman in adjoining room, a combination which cannot be secured elsewhere downtown for \$8.00.” (Other advertisements specifically called out “brass beds and mahogany furniture.”) Couples could rent slightly larger, unfurnished quarters with a private bath for \$9.00 per week. (These larger apartments may have simply consisted of two of the single rooms, with the bath between them, rented together, or there may have been slightly larger units in the front block of the building.) A billiard room and men’s lounge was provided on the third floor, facing the street, and utilities were included in the rental fee. Apartments featured electric lights, steam heat, hot and cold water, maid service, janitor service, and phone messaging.³⁸

Cary was keen to maintain order and respectability, noting, “Here is a superb building, owned and directed by a realty man of 25 years experience, whose large investment will depreciate tremendously if any ‘tainted people’ are permitted within its walls as tenants.” He specified that physicians should be of the “regular school,” i.e., “No animal doctors, neither manipulators of mind or body, nor women ‘specialists.’” Residents were permitted “lady visitors (not in their apartments), but in reception rooms, street floor.”³⁹ By December, Cary had given his new building a name: Copley Chambers. Cary likely borrowed the name from Boston’s Copley Plaza Hotel (1912), which was designed in the Beaux-Arts style by architect Henry Janeway Hardenberg. Still a luxury hotel today, it faces Copley Square, which had been named, in 1883, for Boston’s famous colonial painter, John Singleton Copley. The name Copley Chambers was undoubtedly intended to project a respectable and elegant image – a common tactic among the many rooming houses and apartment buildings of the period.⁴⁰

Copley Chambers exhibited many of the hallmarks of the downtown rooming house, both in form (discussed in greater detail under the Criterion C heading, below) and in function. It offered short-term rentals to single people and couples who were seeking “small apartments providing maximum comfort and minimum expense of living...within five minutes walk of ‘down-town.’”⁴¹ Baths were shared, but only by two rooms, likely a better ratio than was offered by many rooming houses, especially those located in converted dwellings. Copley Chambers did not provide a meal service, dining area, or kitchens for its tenants. Meals would have been taken out, or perhaps cooked on a hotplate (each apartment had a

³⁷ “I Want A Doctor For My Doctor’s Building,” Advertisement, *Evening Bulletin*, 29 October 1913:15.

³⁸ “New Building,” Advertisement, *Providence Journal*, 9 November 1913:15.

³⁹ “New Building,” Advertisement, *Providence Journal*, 9 November 1913:15.

⁴⁰ “New Copley Chambers,” Advertisement, *Evening Bulletin Extra*, 19 December 1913:22.

⁴¹ “New Building,” Advertisement, *Providence Journal*, 9 November 1913:15.

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gas line to which residents could connect). This was not necessarily perceived as a drawback. As Paul Groth notes:

Individual freedom in eating was a primary advantage of restaurant-and-rooming-house life over boarding life. On the boarding plan, tenants had to eat at predetermined times and pay for meals they often missed. On the rooming plan, tenants could vary the times, places, and expenses of dining...⁴²

Copley Chambers' location in the northern part of South Providence, within easy reach of the central business district either by foot or by streetcar, was also emblematic of the downtown rooming house. Although the rentals were short-term, residents were, by necessity, integrated into the surrounding neighborhood. As Groth explains:

This scattering of daily life is a distinguishing element of most single-room life downtown, and particularly of rooming houses. The surrounding sidewalks and the commercial establishments function as parts of a rooming-house patron's home. The "house" is distributed up and down the street: the dining room is at the end of the block, the laundry is three doors down, and the living room and den are at bars, coffee shops, or favorite corners.⁴³

A review of the 1918 *Plat Book of the City of Providence, Rhode Island* suggests that Copley Chambers was set amid a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood (Fig. 2-3). Potential employers were within easy walking distance: less than a mile to the southeast were American Screw Company, Providence Machine Company, a foundry, a baking company, the city's highway department, and Rhode Island Hospital, among others. Numerous office buildings, housing scores of businesses, were located in the central business district, a short distance to the northeast (and not yet cut off from South Providence by Interstate 95). Necessities, as well as entertainment, could be found in downtown restaurants, department stores, and theaters. Given all this, Copley Chambers was, not surprisingly, one of many multi-tenant residential buildings in its neighborhood. As of 1918, Raleigh Apartments (by 1904; not extant) stood immediately to the east of Copley Chambers, with the Aylesworth Apartments (1888-1889) also on the block. The YMCA (1913) was just down the street, providing short-term housing, a gymnasium, and other services, and the Pilgrim Apartments (1897; Westminster Street NR Historic District 2003) stood about a block to the north, at 715 Westminster Street. Nearby blocks were filled with detached, wood-frame houses, some of which were no doubt rentals; in several cases, a single owner's name – sometimes a realty corporation – spans multiple adjoining house lots on the atlas.⁴⁴

Advertisements, census records, and city directories provide information about Copley Chambers' tenants who, in the early years at least, were mostly male, American-born, and employed in white-collar jobs. They were also all white, which was likely not an accident: in 1913, Cary placed an ad in the *Evening Bulletin* seeking a couple to manage the building, specifying, "No colored people."⁴⁵ (Fig. 11) Cary ended up hiring his widowed aunt, Hannah H. Wattles (1862-1930), for the job. Initially managing the rooming house while living in her own home in a different neighborhood, Wattles appears to have moved into Copley Chambers by 1915; she is listed at 206 Broad Street in the state census from that year, with the job title "Manager" of an "Apartment House." Her 23-year-old daughter, Mabel, lived with her. Wattles

⁴² Groth 1986:185

⁴³ Groth 1986:185

⁴⁴ Hopkins, 1918.

⁴⁵ "Wanted, Man and Wife," Advertisement, *Evening Bulletin*, 19 November 1913:14.

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ceased being the building manager around 1924; she was succeeded by Charles S. Domler.⁴⁶ This arrangement – an absentee owner hiring out the job of managing day-to-day operations – was common at downtown rooming houses.⁴⁷

The 1915 Rhode Island census listed twenty-six residents at 206 Broad Street, in addition to Hannah and Mabel Wattles: twenty men living alone; two men living with their wives, who were homemakers; and one man living with his mother. Residents ranged in age from 29 to 76, with a median age of 40. All were born in the U.S., except for one Canadian, but several had foreign-born parents, from Ireland, Germany, or England. Of the twenty-three men living at Copley Chambers, just two appeared to be employed in manual work. Ten of the men were salesmen, including Frank T. Donahue, who worked for the Boston Belting Company. A 1914 issue of *Fibre & Fabric* announced that “Frank T. Donahue, the well-known traveling representative of the Boston Belting Co., will in the future make his home in this city [Providence] in order to look after the increasing business of the concern, which he represents in this section of New England. Mr. Donahue will reside at the Copley Chambers at 206 Broad Street.”⁴⁸

The federal census of 1920 indicates that not a single tenant from 1915 remained at Copley Chambers, illustrating the rapid turnover typical at downtown rooming houses.⁴⁹ Interestingly, there was a marked decrease in the number of single residents, with just six men and one woman living on their own. Other residents included six married couples, a father and son in a single unit, and a woman sharing an apartment with her two daughters. There had been a shift, too, in the types of occupations represented; a handful of salespeople, a bookkeeper, teacher, and physician made Copley Chambers their home, as did several tenants with blue-collar jobs, including a toolmaker, carpenter, laborer, broom maker, and stone setter. As was the case in 1915, all the tenants were white and most had been born in the United States (two hailed from Ireland and three from Nova Scotia).⁵⁰ Conditions were similar at the nearby Pilgrim Apartments on Westminster Street which, as of 1920, was home to five married couples and eighteen single lodgers. The majority of residents were American born, though there were several people from Canada or Europe, and most were between 20 and 60 years of age. Occupations included blacksmith, press hand, toolmaker, bench hand, salesman, operator, stone setter, wire worker, waiter, clerk, seamstress, laborer, dentist, stenographer, railroad engineer, asbestos worker and a serviceman in the U.S. Navy.⁵¹

Information about Copley Chambers’ earliest first-floor commercial tenants is scarce. Based on ads from 1913 and 1914, Edwin Cary hoped to fill those suites with doctors, but, if he was successful, the doctors do not appear to have stayed long. By 1917, automobile dealers had moved into the building: the city

⁴⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 1910 Population Schedule, Providence County, Rhode Island, City of Providence, Enumeration District 165, sheet 9, dwelling 147; Rhode Island Census Board, 1915 Population Schedule, Providence County, City of Providence, Enumeration District 276, sheet H, household 54; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1917):271; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1923-1924):185; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book*(Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1925-1926):187.

⁴⁷ Groth 1986:188-189.

⁴⁸ Rhode Island Census Board, 1915 Population Schedule, Providence County, City of Providence, Enumeration District 276, sheet H, household 54; “Personal Notes and News from the Mills,” *Fibre & Fabric: A Record of American Textile Industries in the Cotton and Woolen Trade* 59 (February 7, 1914):18.

⁴⁹ Groth 1986:189.

⁵⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 1920 Population Schedule, Providence County, Rhode Island, City of Providence, Enumeration District 215, sheet 4, dwelling 57.

⁵¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 1920 Population Schedule, Providence County, Rhode Island, City of Providence, Enumeration District 216, sheets 7-8, dwelling 75.

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directory from that year shows Union Motor Car Co. at 204 Broad Street and Knight Automobile Co. at 208 Broad. (Based on historic maps, the address for Copley Chambers was at times 204-206-208 Broad Street, with the residential address in the center, flanked by the storefronts.) The 1920 Sanborn atlas shows the first floor of the building occupied by “auto ware r[oo]ms” (Fig. 4), and in the 1921-1922 directory, 204 Broad Street was occupied by Indiana Motor Sales Co. and 208 Broad Street by Vanasse Armand Automobiles. In 1923-1924, Sills Chevrolet Company had moved into both Copley Chambers storefronts. The last automobile related business at Copley Chambers was M&Z Auto Exchange in 1929-1930.⁵²

Four of the salesmen residing at Copley Chambers in 1915 worked for car companies⁵³ – perhaps for businesses within the building, or elsewhere on this stretch of Broad Street, which appears to have been a center for automobile sales and service. A large “auto sales bldg.” is shown a block east of Copley Chambers, on the other side of Broad Street, on the 1918 atlas (Fig. 2). Chandler Motors of Rhode Island was located immediately west of Copley Chambers from around 1919 to 1923, in a building that would later be occupied by a series of Chevrolet dealers. In 1937, the Franklin Auto Supply company occupied a building just a few doors east of Copley Chambers, in the same block (Fig. 5).⁵⁴

In June 1925, Copley Chambers was sold to Rebecca Botvin, who appears in the 1930 U.S. census as living on Princeton Avenue, about a mile south of Copley Chambers, with her husband, Louis Botvin, and their four daughters. At the time, Louis was working as a real estate agent. (In the 1920 census, his job was listed as “fruit – dealer” and by 1935, he had opened Botvin Auto Sales at 861 Broad Street.) Rebecca had been born to Russian-immigrant parents, while Louis was a naturalized American citizen, having emigrated from Russia in 1903.⁵⁵ The Botvins owned the building for seven years, apparently making some improvements: a 1930 advertisement in the *Providence Journal*, under the heading “Rooms without Board,” touted the “Newly renovated rooms for gentlemen only, by day or week” at Copley Chambers.⁵⁶

Census data suggests that the occupancy rate at Copley Chambers declined during this period; in the 1925 state census, there were 26 men lodging at Copley Chambers while the 1930 federal census listed just fifteen. All but one of the 1930 residents were single (either never married, widowed, or divorced). As with previous tenants, they were all white and most were American born (one each came from Canada, England, and Ireland). Several worked as salesmen, though there was one teacher, one tinsmith, and one

⁵² *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1921-1922):192; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1923-1924):185.

⁵³ Rhode Island Census Board, 1915 Population Schedule, Providence County, City of Providence, Enumeration District 276, sheet H, household 54.

⁵⁴ *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1919-1920):158; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1921-1922):192; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1923-1924):185; Hopkins 1918; Hopkins 1937.

⁵⁵ Providence Recorder of Deeds, Chain of Title Card for 206 Broad Street (Plat 24, Lot 36); U.S. Census Bureau, 1920 Population Schedule, Providence County, Rhode Island, City of Providence, Enumeration District 215, sheet 4, dwelling 57; U.S. Census Bureau, 1930 Population Schedule, Providence County, Rhode Island, City of Providence, Enumeration District 4-26, sheet 14, dwelling 132A; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1935-1936):206.

⁵⁶ Copley Chambers, Advertisement, *Providence Journal*, 15 January 1930:24.

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accountant, among others.⁵⁷ Commercial, first-floor tenants in the late 1920s and early 1930s included Lord Piano Co., the Copley Delicatessen, and the Copley Restaurant.⁵⁸ No doubt the deli and restaurant were welcomed by the building's residential tenants, who would have taken their meals out.

By 1933, Copley Chambers had been acquired by the Rimnik Corporation, a subsidiary of the Rhode Island Hospital Trust Company that managed and disposed of foreclosed real estate,⁵⁹ suggesting that the Botvins' investment – coinciding with the Great Depression – had not been successful. The Rimnik Corporation held on to Copley Chambers until December 1940, when they sold it and two adjacent parcels to Milner Hotels, Inc. for approximately \$40,000.⁶⁰ (As early as 1937 the building is listed as the “Milner Hotel,” suggesting a relationship between the two companies prior to the sale).⁶¹ Milner Hotels, Inc. was founded in 1918 by Earle R. Milner (1891-1947), when he, a self-made entrepreneur, purchased a hotel property in Detroit. By the 1940s, Milner Hotels was allegedly the largest hotel chain in the world; when Milner died in 1947 – leaving an estate valued at \$4.5 million – there were 176 properties in the company portfolio.⁶² The involvement of a national company may have ushered in a period of greater economic success; while the 1940 census listed just six residents, the 1950 census showed 44 lodgers at 206 Broad Street.⁶³

Despite the “hotel” nomenclature, the building seems to have continued to function much as it had previously, providing short-term rentals for urban residents rather than a night or two of lodging for visitors. Advertisements continued to appear under the “Rooms without Board” heading in the back pages of the *Providence Journal*; a 1940 ad promoted rooms for \$4 per week, while a 1953 ad quoted a rate of \$8 per week.⁶⁴ The doubling of cost may indicate that some improvements had been made by Milner Hotels, Inc., though during research for this nomination, the only information found was a notation in a 1949 newspaper, referencing the installation of “firedoors [sic] and partitions at hotel and stores.”⁶⁵ Commercial entities continued to operate out of the first floor; the 1951 and 1956 Sanborn maps show a restaurant in the northwest quadrant of the ground floor, while a store – indicated by an “S” – occupied the remainder (Fig. 6).⁶⁶

⁵⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 1930 Population Schedule, Providence County, Rhode Island, City of Providence, Enumeration District 4-26, sheet 14, dwelling 132A.

⁵⁸ *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1929-1930):237; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1931-1932):208; *The Providence House Directory and Family Address Book* (Providence, RI: Sampson & Murdock Co., 1935-1936):203.

⁵⁹ City of Providence, Recorder of Deeds, Chain of Title Card for 206 Broad Street (Plat 24, Lot 36); *Rhode Island Hospital Trust Co. v. Commissioner*. 7 T.C. 211 (U.S. Tax Court, 1946).

⁶⁰ “Property Changes Hands,” *Providence Journal*, 24 December 1940:14.

⁶¹ Milner Hotel, Advertisement, *Providence Journal*, 31 January 1937:14.

⁶² “Hotel Chain Operator Dies, Owned Two Places Here.” *The Cincinnati Post*, 24 June 1947:20; “Hotel Estate Settled.” *New York Times*, 2 April 1961:71.

⁶³ U.S. Census Bureau, 1940 Population Schedule, Providence County, Rhode Island, City of Providence, Enumeration District 220, sheet 61, dwelling 149; U.S. Census Bureau, 1950 Population Schedule, Providence County, Rhode Island, City of Providence, Enumeration District 7-343, sheets 51-52, dwelling 901.

⁶⁴ Milner Hotel, Advertisement, *Providence Journal*, 11 July 1940:20; Milner Hotel, Advertisement, *Providence Journal*, 4 March 1953:19.

⁶⁵ “Building in This Area Takes a Sharp Slump,” *Providence Sunday Journal*, 20 March 1949:75.

⁶⁶ Sanborn Map Company, Providence, Rhode Island (New York, NY: Sanborn Map Co., 1951):51; Sanborn Map Company, Providence, Rhode Island (New York, NY: Sanborn Map Co., 1956):51.

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After Milner Hotels, Inc. sold the property in 1957, it was briefly rebranded as the “Copley Plaza Hotel”⁶⁷ – a direct reference to the Boston institution that likely inspired the name “Copley Chambers” – and then sold again in 1961 to Arthur and Thomai Petropoulos, who named it the “Continental Hotel.” The Petropouloses, who emigrated from Greece, kept the building as a rooming house, with the 24-hour Continental Diner occupying most of the first floor. In a 1987 profile in the *Providence Journal*, Arthur Petropoulos noted that, historically, the building was “never a high class hotel,” but, rather, a “second hand place.” According to the article, the Continental Hotel contained 60 rooms which, if accurate, would have represented an increase from the original number of units; perhaps some multi-room units had been subdivided by this time. The article explained,

The hotel started to go downhill in the late 1960s or early 1970s. It was cited for one code violation after another. City code enforcers said the building needed a sprinkler system, a second stairway and emergency lighting, among other things. In an 18-month period between 1974 and 1975, it had a dozen fires. The couple was finally forced to close the hotel in 1975.⁶⁸

With that, the building’s time as a downtown rooming house ended, though the Petropouloses continued to operate the Continental Diner on the first floor until Arthur’s death in 1997.⁶⁹

The demand for rooming houses like Copley Chambers shrank considerably in the latter half of the 20th century, as new housing options became available. The Providence Housing Authority (PHA) was established in 1939 to provide affordable, clean, and safe housing for poor, working families. Its first development, Chad Brown, opened its doors in the North End in 1942, and Codding Court on Dodge Street (about 1/3 mile southwest of Copley Chambers) welcomed 120 families in 1951.⁷⁰ According to the *Providence Journal*, the PHA required that prospective tenants at Codding Court “must. . .now be living in sub-standard housing units.”⁷¹

Many of South Providence’s rooming houses fell victim to the construction of Interstate 95 in the 1960s. Numerous rooming houses in the vicinity of Hayward Park – a short distance southeast of Copley Chambers – were demolished, displacing about 400 people, while a “slum clearance” project a few blocks to the northwest razed another 50 rooming houses. This was consistent with national trends. By the 1950s, social reformers and urban planners across the country had rooming houses – home primarily to low-income tenants – in their crosshairs; the American Planning Association, in a 1957 report, called them “both symptoms and causes of neighborhood decay.”⁷² Highways were pushed through rooming-house districts in many cities, leaving residents “looking out at freeway ramps or giant ditches built for six lanes of traffic, or contending with traffic noise and exhaust generated by automobiles on new through-roads and one-way pairs of downtown streets.”⁷³ Once within an easy walk or streetcar ride to downtown,

⁶⁷ Copley Plaza Hotel, Advertisement, *Providence Journal*, 9 November 1958:157.

⁶⁸ “A South Providence Success Story: Arthur, Thomai, and Continental Diner,” *Providence Journal*, 18 May 1987:29, 31.

⁶⁹ Obituary for Thomai “Ethel” (Karageorgos)Petropoulos. Woodlawn Funeral Home, Cranston, RI.

⁷⁰ Providence (RI) Housing Authority: History, <https://provhousing.org/about-pha/history/>.

⁷¹ “More Than 500 View City’s Newest Housing Project at Codding Court,” *Providence Journal*, 2 July 1951:13.

⁷² Antonia Noori Farzan, “Rooming Houses Were Once Plentiful and Cheap Housing. Now, in RI, They’re a Dying Breed.” *Providence Journal*, 6 March 2024.

⁷³ Paul Erling Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994):269-70.

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residents of Copley Chambers would have found themselves cut off from the central business district by highway overpasses.

Urban renewal projects further changed the character of the neighborhood. In 1957, the Providence Redevelopment Authority proposed a massive redevelopment area on the densely built out blocks north and west of Copley Chambers. The *Providence Journal* reported that the project would erect new schools and housing after clearing “an old and blighted neighborhood of tenements and shabby rooming houses mixed with businesses.” Completed in 1973, the new Brutalist-style James L. Hanley Education Center incorporated buildings and athletic facilities for Classical, Central, and Vocational-Technical high schools. Wiggin Village, a privately-financed low-rent housing complex with 284 apartments, had opened five years earlier west and north of the Hanley campus.⁷⁴ These large-scale developments with their modernist designs and dedicated open spaces presented a new urban landscape for South Providence, just across the street from Copley Chambers.

CRITERION C: ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance: 1913

Paul Groth, in his 1986 article, “‘Marketplace’ Vernacular Design: The Case of Downtown Rooming Houses,” identifies several defining physical characteristics of this turn-of-the-20th-century building type. A typical downtown rooming house was two to four stories in height, with no elevator. The outward form of the building was highly influenced by the shape of the plot, with rooming-house developers wanting to maximize the available land. Rooming houses generally had commercial space on the first floor and, on the upper floors, contained between 15 and 40, single-room residential units with shared baths. The ratio of rooms to baths was commonly 6:1 but varied; in rooming houses intended for higher earners, the ratio was lower. Each unit also typically included a small sink, often alongside a closet, and a window for fresh air and daylight. The residential units were of a uniform size and configuration and did not include kitchens. There were no shared dining facilities nor much in the way of “public spaces;” there was no lobby, for example, as one might find in a finer hotel.⁷⁵

When built in 1913, Copley Chambers exhibited all of the essential design traits of the downtown rooming house type. It was four stories tall and took up the entirety of its lot, resulting in its trapezoidal footprint. Commercial spaces occupied the first floor while single-room, kitchenless residential units were located above; the upper floors were reached by a single staircase. Each floor had a double-loaded, central corridor, and each residential unit had at least one window for light and ventilation. The rooms – at least in the large rear block of the building, where the original floor plan is better understood – were of a roughly uniform size and had a closet, sink, and shared bath, as demonstrated by advertisements and physical evidence (see Criterion A discussion, above, and discussion of the building’s original plan, below). (The 2:1 ratio of rooms to baths suggests the builder’s desire for a professional-class clientele.) The building’s limited public spaces – a men’s lounge and billiard room on the third floor and a reception hall for women visitors on the first floor – reflect the original intent of Copley Chambers as a residence for single men or married couples (as detailed in Criterion A discussion, above).

Copley Chambers was designed to have modest detailing consistent with the Classical Revival style and generally limited to the façade, including brick spandrel panels, segmental arches at fourth-story

⁷⁴ Dante Ionata and Merrill R. Bailey, “Traditions Preserved and Visions Fulfilled,” *Providence Journal*, 3 June 1973:1, 8-9.

⁷⁵ Groth 1986:182-190.

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windows, a corbelled cornice and drip molding, and a decorative parapet with copper coping. A shallow, ornamental, second-story balcony was originally located above the recessed center entry, and a large sign hung above the sidewalk below (Fig. 15).⁷⁶ Double-hung, wood sash filled most of the window openings, except at the bathrooms, which had wood hopper sash with textured glass set high on the walls to allow for privacy. Fire escapes, touted as the best in the city, were located on the side elevations.⁷⁷ The interior finishes at Copley Chambers were simple, befitting its modest design. They included lath and plaster walls and ceilings; terrazzo flooring in the first-floor corridor and wood flooring elsewhere; wood stair treads and risers; molded wood baseboard, window and door casings, and closet trim; wood, two-panel doors; and, in some locations, narrow crown molding.

Conclusion

Copley Chambers was constructed during a time of rapid population growth in Providence, in a neighborhood adjacent to the downtown business district and in close proximity to jobs, dining, shopping, and entertainment. It offered short-term, inexpensive lodging for urban workers – mostly single men – who were seeking a new kind of housing, different from the boarding houses of previous generations. As such, Copley Chambers is eligible for the National Register at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Social History. In addition, the four-story building, with its first-floor commercial spaces and single-room, kitchenless residential units on the upper floors, exemplifies the distinctive characteristics of the “downtown rooming house” building type. Copley Chambers is therefore also eligible for the National Register at the local level under Criterion C, in the area of Architecture.

Original Plan of Copley Chambers (Fig. 17)

Key elements of Copley Chambers’ historic floor plan were intact prior to the property’s rehabilitation in 2023 and remain evident today. The first floor originally had a central corridor running north-south from the Broad Street façade to the rear of the building; much of the corridor’s framing (i.e., plates, studs, door headers) and even the lath survived, and the corridor has been re-established. A U-shaped, historic stair is roughly centered on the east side of the corridor, allowing residential tenants to enter on Broad Street, walk down the corridor and access their living quarters on the upper floors. A wide, arched doorway opens into a space immediately south of the stair hall; this was likely the first-floor reception area for female guests, noted in early advertisements.⁷⁸ Other first-floor spaces were altered over the years, as commercial tenants changed; at the time of the rehabilitation, most of the demising walls on the west side of the building, for example, had been removed. However, the presence of several small, multi-pane, fixed, interior windows set high in the corridor framing, as well as evidence of door openings, suggest that there were originally multiple rooms on either side of the corridor. This is consistent with early newspaper advertisements for the building, which sought to rent four-room units on the first floor to physicians. It is not clear from the ads how many doctor’s offices there were, but, assuming they were

⁷⁶ Connection points for the ornamental porch are visible above and at either side of the entry and connection points for supports to the original sign were visible prior to rehabilitation below and at either side of the center third-story window.

⁷⁷ “New Building,” Advertisement, *Providence Journal*, 9 November 1913:15.

⁷⁸ “Small Apartments, Superb Building,” Advertisement, *Evening Bulletin*, 29 October 1913:14; “I Want A Doctor For My Doctor’s Building,” Advertisement. *Evening Bulletin*, 29 October 1913:15; “New Building,” Advertisement. *Providence Journal*, 9 November 1913:15; Providence Tax Assessor, Tax Assessor Card for 206 Broad Street, 1940 Field Assessment Records. Evidence remained above one corridor door opening for a transom, but this does not appear to have been typical of interior doors and may have been the only example.

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roughly equal in size, there may have been three: one in the northeast corner, one in the northwest corner, and one in the southwest corner. (The southeast portion of the first floor, as noted above, contained the stair hall and reception area.) Offices in the north end of the building, facing Broad Street, were likely accessed through the first-floor vestibule; indeed, prior to the rehabilitation, there was a historic door off the west side of the vestibule. If there were a third unit in the southwest corner of the building, it must have been accessed from the central corridor.

On each of the upper floors, the stair hall opened onto a double-loaded, north-south, central corridor that ran the length of the rear block of the building. The south end of the corridor terminated at a door, set within a vertical recess in the rear elevation, which led to a fire escape.⁷⁹ The north end of the corridor connected to a second corridor, which ran east-west along the back of the front block. The east-west corridor provided access not only to the rooms in the front block but also, via windows, to the fire escapes that abutted the front block's southeast and southwest corners. Early advertisements noted the presence of a billiard room and men's lounge on the third floor of the front block; on the second and fourth floors, the front block was presumably occupied by residential units. Due to changes, such as the removal of demising walls, prior to the building's rehabilitation, the exact configuration of the rooms in the front block is unclear. It is possible, however, that some of multi-room units, advertised to married couples, were located in this part of the building.

More historic fabric survived in the rear block prior to rehabilitation. The framing for the central corridors was present and, while many of the original demising walls were not, their locations could be discerned based on physical evidence, such as framing remnants (Figs. 18-19). None of the shared bathrooms survived, but their placement could be ascertained from the pattern of small, square window openings, which once held hopper-type sash, set high in the exterior walls.⁸⁰ A single waste pipe survived, suggesting the location of a toilet.⁸¹ Every room showed evidence of an in-room sink, through profiles left in the plaster. Some spaces contained molding, hooks, and evidence of hinges, indicating the presence of a small closet in each room.

This physical evidence, alongside historic rental advertisements, strongly suggests a simple floor plan for the upper floors of the rear block. On each floor, the central corridor was double loaded with a series of small, one-bay-wide rooms; a bathroom was located between every two rooms.⁸² In this two-room-one-bath module, each room was a mirror image of the other. An in-room sink with a counter was located in the corner, where the shared demising wall and exterior wall met. The sink had a high backsplash and shallow shelves above.⁸³ (Fig. 18) At the other end of the shared demising wall, next to the corridor, was a small closet (Fig. 19). In between the sink and the closet was the shared bath. Advertisements described separate "compartments" for the toilet and "bath tub room," suggesting that each residential unit had a

⁷⁹ There was a single window opening at each story, at either side of the recess, roughly centered between the recess and the corner. The brick at the south wall was, according to the current owner, badly deteriorated and replaced with concrete masonry units in 2019-2020.

⁸⁰ Remnants of the hopper windows were present prior to rehabilitation.

⁸¹ Only one waste pipe survived and it was located at the corridor wall and had very short branching runs, so it seems likely the toilets were located closer to the corridor. At the suggested location of the tub, the framing below has often been replaced, perhaps the result of water damage.

⁸² With the exception of the southernmost rooms, which had two exterior walls (the south wall being angled to follow the lot line) and multiple windows, each room in the rear block was of a uniform size and layout.

⁸³ Evidence for the location of the blocking that supported the counter (often the blocking itself), evidence for the short partition, and evidence for shelves, was visible below every bathroom window in the upper floors, except at the possible housekeeping units. Paint lines indicated the presence of the backsplash.

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door to the bath area, within which there were separate rooms for the bath tub and toilet.⁸⁴ Based on the location of the waste pipe, the toilet room was next to the back-to-back closets, meaning the bathtub room was butted up against the back-to-back sinks. The hopper-style window appears to have provided ventilation for the bathroom, via a soffit that began at the exterior wall and extended over the bath area, ending at the closet.⁸⁵ (How tenants opened and closed the window remains unclear; perhaps there was hardware, like a transom operator, extending down through the soffit at the in-room sinks.) This modular layout was both efficient and flexible: a single room could be rented, or two adjoining rooms could be rented together, with the space between the bathtub and toilet compartments functioning as a passthrough.

Each floor in the rear block contained six two-room-one-bath modules. On the east side of the corridor, there was one module north of the stair hall and two modules to the south of the stairs. The layout was the same on the west side of the corridor except that, in place of the stair hall there was a small, narrow room, likely for housekeeping.⁸⁶ Thus, the second, third, and fourth floors of the rear block each contained twelve residential rooms, for a total of thirty-six. As noted previously, the front block may have contained multi-room units for couples on the second and fourth floors, though that is speculative. In any case, the total number of potential residential rental units in Copley Chambers was originally likely at least thirty-eight – thirty-six single rooms in the rear block plus two, multi-room apartments in the front block – or possibly slightly more.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ “Small Apartments, Superb Building,” Advertisement, *Evening Bulletin*, 29 October 1913:14.

⁸⁵ This is supported by remnants of wall framing that were present prior to the 2023 rehabilitation. In several locations, there were top plates for full-height partitions running from the exterior wall to the corridor wall, on either side of the hopper window. In a few locations, there was a short crosspiece running perpendicular to the top plates, indicating a full-height wall between the bathroom and the closet. No additional top plates or crosspieces were present, suggesting that there were no other ceiling-height partitions between the exterior wall and the closet, which would indicate a soffit.

⁸⁶ Evidence for the housekeeping unit includes: the room’s narrow width, its atypically narrow window, the surviving plaster at one floor showing a pattern of floor to ceiling shelves and at another floor showing that something, perhaps a counter, had been mounted horizontally. Originally, these rooms may have included plumbing, such as a mop sink; prior to the rehabilitation, these rooms appear to have been converted to bathrooms.

⁸⁷ Census records cannot provide a definitive answer to the number of units at Copley Chambers – tenants could have rented one room or two, and at any given time some units may have been empty – but the available federal and state census data does not contradict the idea of there being around 40 rentable residential units. The 1915 Rhode Island Census listed 28 residents; 1920 U.S. Census listed 25; 1925 R.I. Census listed 29; 1930 U.S. Census listed 15; 1940 U.S. Census listed 6; and the 1950 U.S. Census, by which time the building had been converted into the Milner Hotel, listed 44 residents.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property: less than one acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 41.817218 | Longitude: -71.418478 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Copley Chambers is bounded on the north by Broad Street, on the east by a one-story commercial building (ca. 1965), on the south by a paved parking area and on the west by a five-story condominium building (2023). The nominated property corresponds to the City of Providence Tax Assessor's Plat Map 024, Lot 36.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries encompass the entire parcel of land historically associated with the Copley Chambers building in the City of Providence, Providence County, Rhode Island.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Ryan Cameron and Mark Foster
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e-mail: mark.foster@ryan.com
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date: August 2025

name/title: Joanna Doherty, Deputy Director
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city or town: Providence state: Rhode Island zip code: 02903
e-mail: joanna.doherty@preservation.ri.gov
telephone: (401) 222-4136
date: August 2025

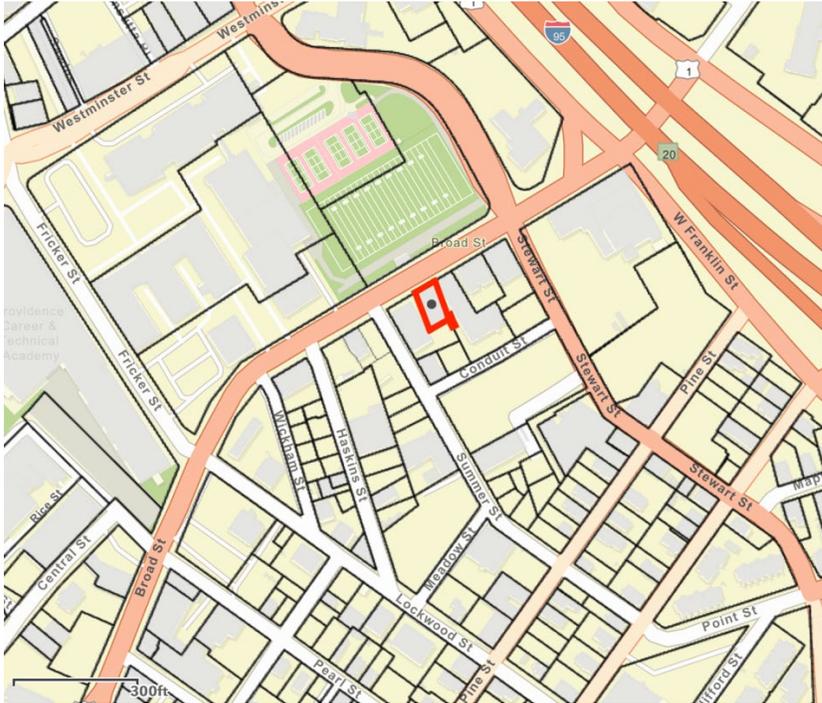
Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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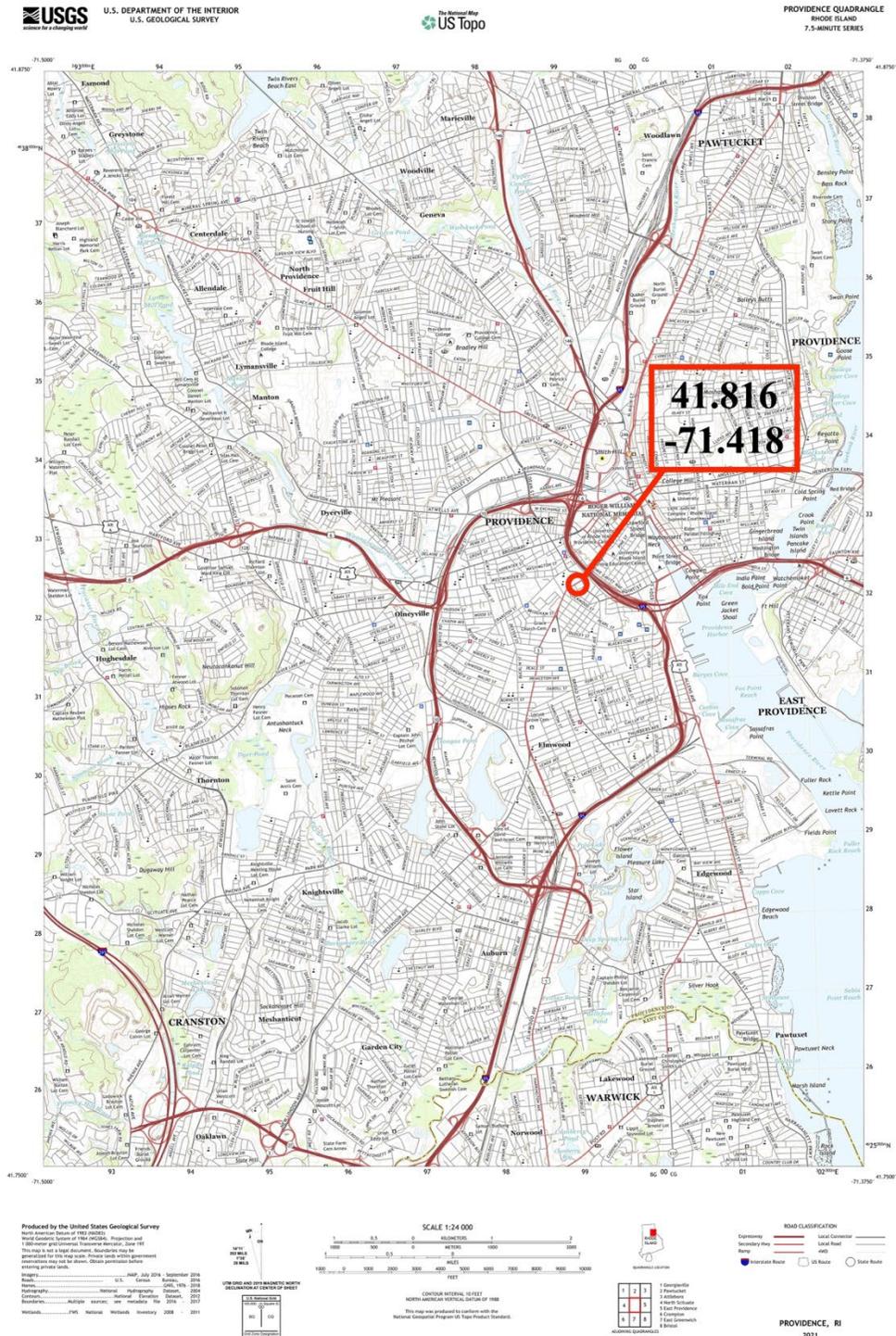
Providence County, Rhode Island
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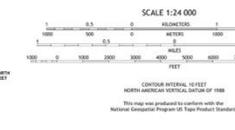
Rhode Island GIS map showing Copley Chambers lot (outlined in red, center).

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Produced by the United States Geological Survey
 North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83)
 1983 Geoid Height of Mean Sea Level
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PROVIDENCE, RI
 2011

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Copley Chambers
City or Vicinity: Providence
County: Providence
State: Rhode Island
Photographer: Kim Smith
Dates Photographed: February 2024
Location of Original Digital Files: Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission,
150 Benefit Street, Providence, RI 02903
Number of Photographs: 24

- Photo 1: North (primary) and west elevations, facing southeast
- Photo 2: North (primary) elevation, facing south
- Photo 3: North (primary) and east elevations, facing southwest
- Photo 4: South (rear) elevation, facing north
- Photo 5: North elevation storefronts, facing southeast
- Photo 6: Basement, facing north. Note exposed metal columns, wood framing, and hollow tile block wall partially enclosing boiler/oil tank.
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- Photo 8: First floor, corridor, facing south. Note terrazzo flooring and windows set high in the corridor walls.
- Photo 9: First floor, northeast office/storefront, facing east
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- Photo 11: First floor, lounge, facing northwest toward historic arched door opening.
- Photo 12: First floor, accessible unit, looking west
- Photo 13: Second floor, corridor, facing south. Note original wood flooring and historic door openings, now filled in.
- Photo 14: Second floor, one-bedroom unit, facing west
- Photo 15: Second floor, one-bedroom unit, bathroom, facing southwest
- Photo 16: Second floor, one-bedroom unit, facing southwest
- Photo 17: Third floor, historic stair hall, facing northeast

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- Photo 18: Third floor, one-bedroom unit, facing southwest
- Photo 19: Third floor, one-bedroom unit, facing northeast
- Photo 20: Fourth floor, corridor, facing northeast. Note original wood flooring and historic door openings, now filled in.
- Photo 21: Fourth floor, historic stair hall, facing east
- Photo 22: Fourth floor, two-bedroom unit, facing east
- Photo 23: Fourth floor, two-bedroom unit, facing northwest
- Photo 24: Fourth floor, one-bedroom unit, facing northwest

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Figures

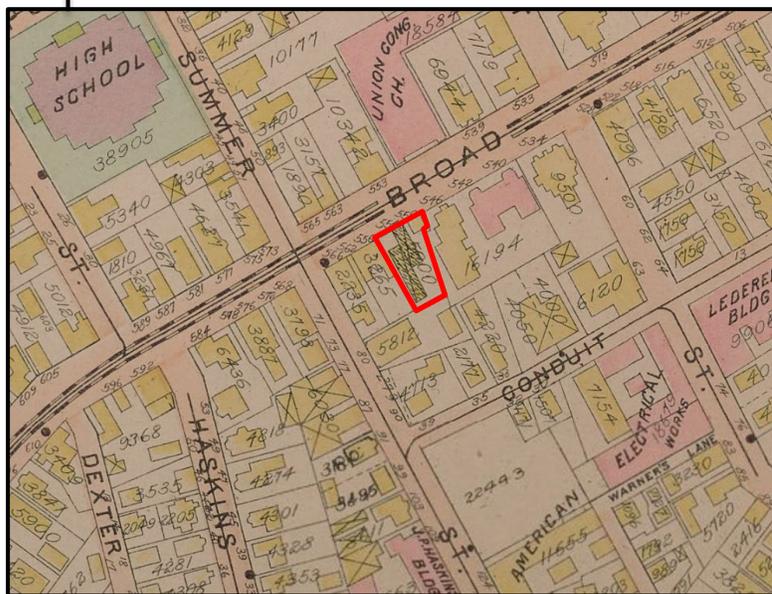


Figure 1
Atlas showing South Providence in 1895. The future site of Copley Chambers is outlined in red.

Everts & Richards, *The Topographical Atlas of Surveys, Providence County, Rhode Island, 1895*

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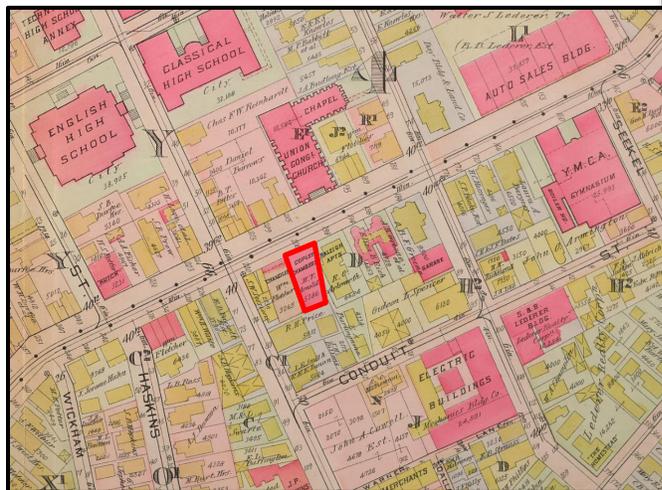
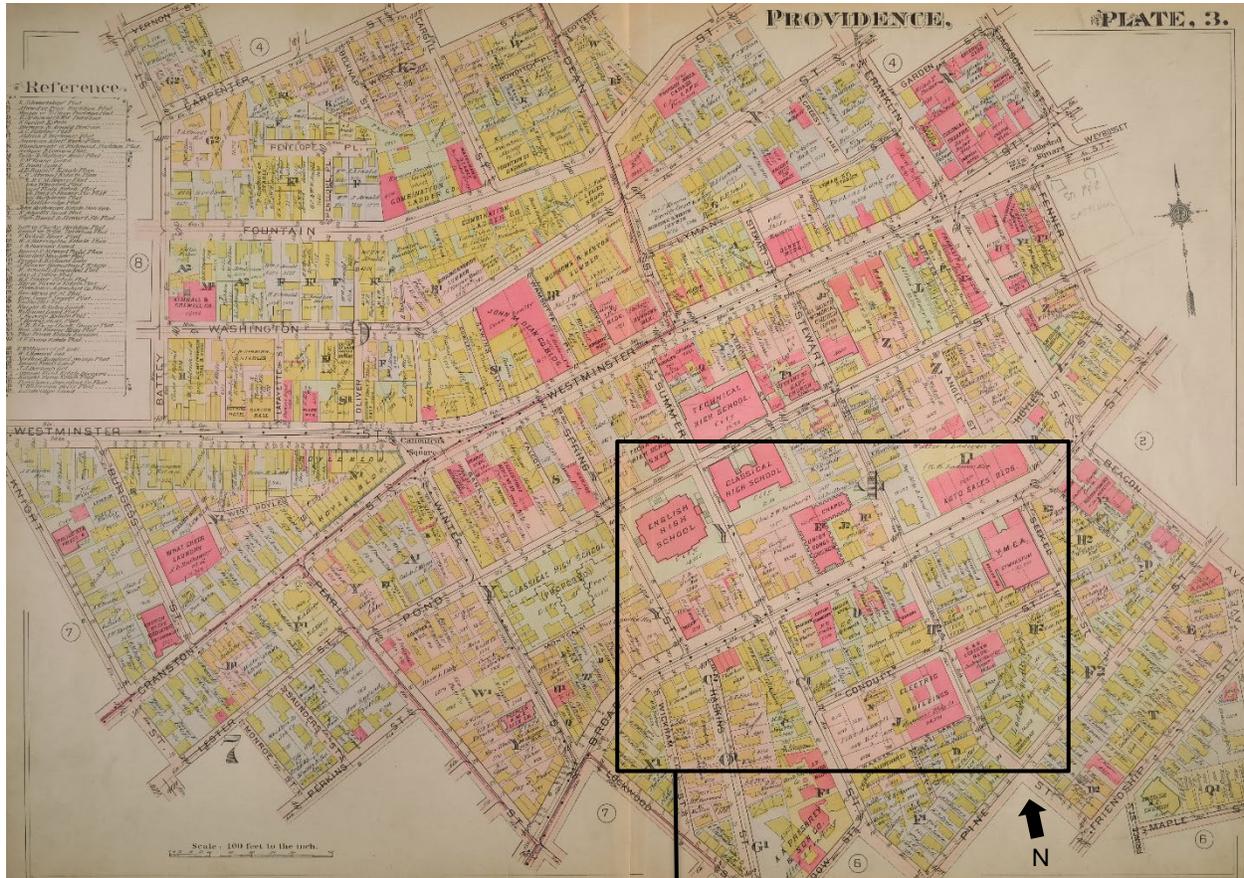


Figure 2
Atlas showing the northern part of South Providence in 1918. Copley Chambers, which was owned by Henry T. Arnold at the time, is outlined in red.

G. M. Hopkins, *Plat Book of Providence, Rhode Island, 1918*

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Figure 3
Atlas showing the southern part of South Providence in 1918. The approximate location of Copley Chambers is indicated with a red star. Residents would have been within easy walking distance of the many industries in the neighborhood.

G. M. Hopkins, *Plat Book of Providence, Rhode Island*, 1918

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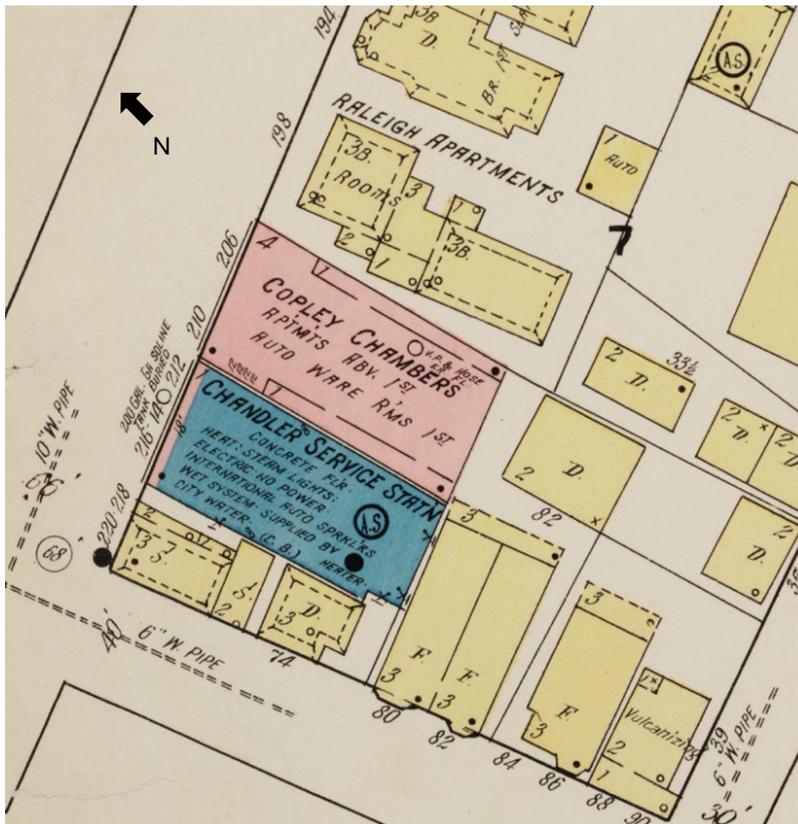


Figure 4
Copley Chambers, as depicted on the 1920 Sanborn atlas. Note that the first floor was occupied by “auto ware r[oo]ms” at the time.

Sanborn Map Company, 1920.

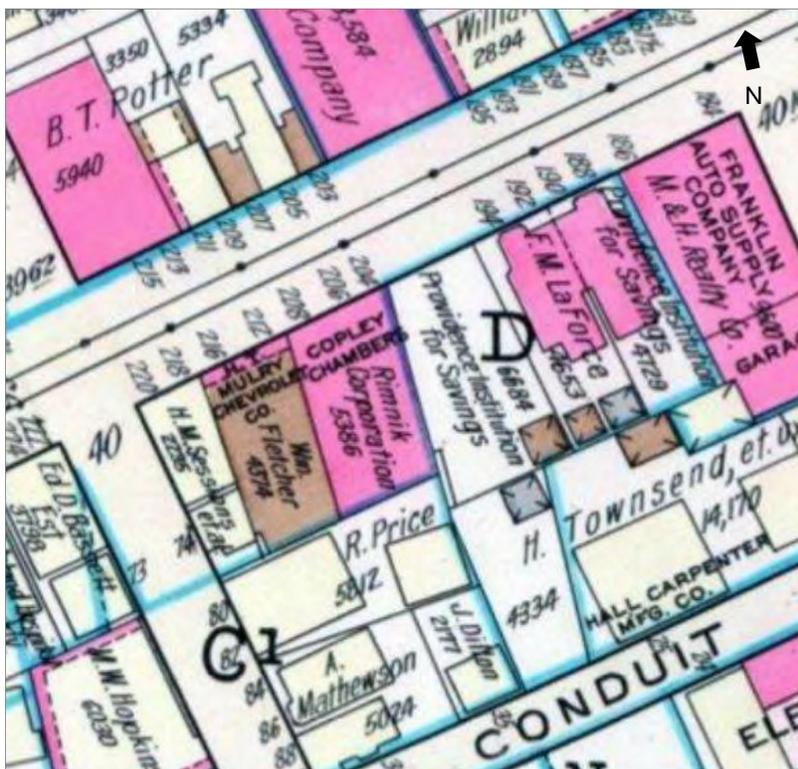


Figure 5
Copley Chambers, as depicted on a 1937 atlas, at which time the building was owned by the Rimmik Corporation. Note the auto-related businesses nearby: Mulry Chevrolet to the immediate west and Franklin Auto Supply to the east.

G.M. Hopkins, *Plat Book of Providence, Rhode Island*, 1937

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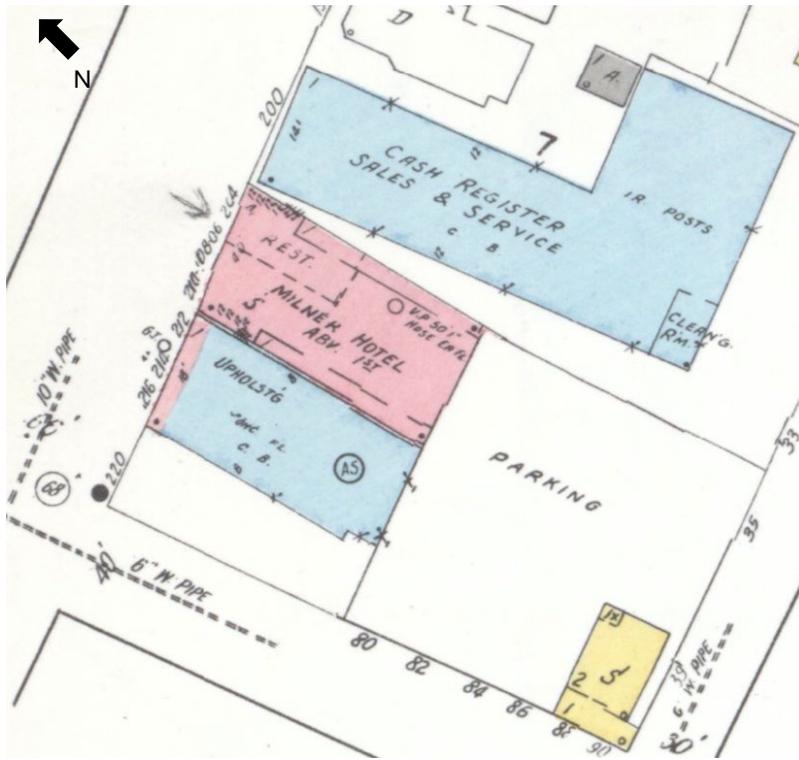


Figure 6
The Copley Chambers building, as depicted on the 1951 Sanborn atlas. At the time it was operating as the Milner Hotel.

Sanborn Map Company, 1951

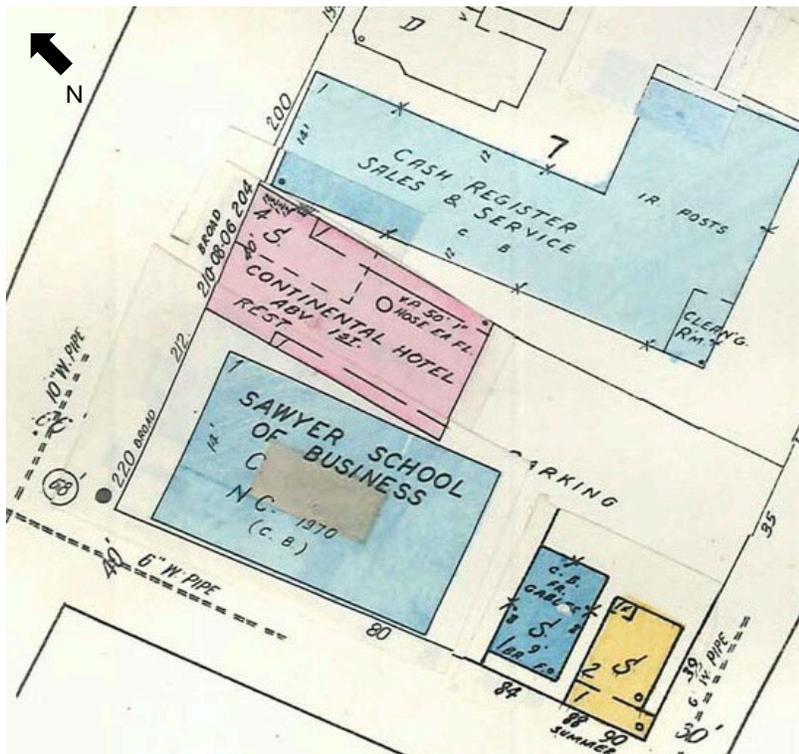


Figure 7
The Copley Chambers building, as depicted on the 1976 Sanborn atlas. At the time, the Continental Restaurant was operating on the first floor, as was a store. Although still bearing the name "Continental Hotel," residential rentals had ceased in 1975.

Sanborn Map Company, 1976

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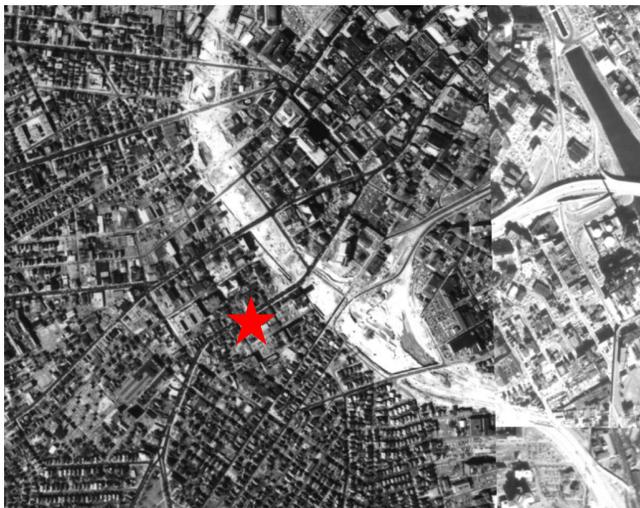
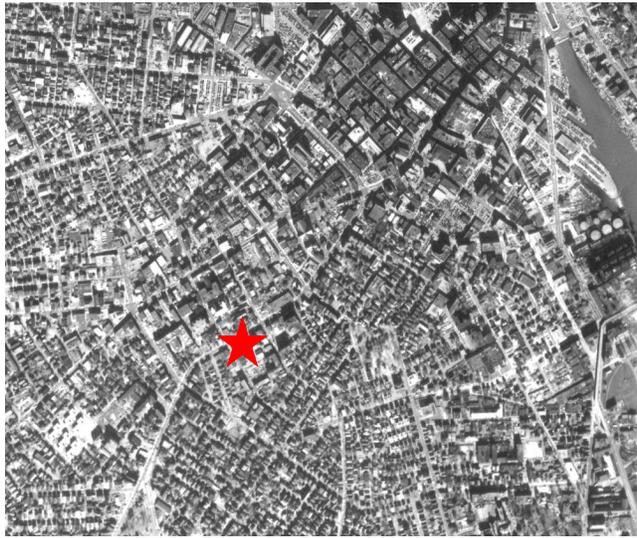


Figure 8

Aerial photos depicting Providence prior to, during, and after the construction of Interstate 95. The location of Copley Chambers is marked with a red star.

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM). Maps and Aerial Photos, 1939-2024/2025.

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I WANT A DOCTOR FOR MY



DOCTORS BUILDING

Broad near Summer Sts.
 in suite not yet engaged

RENT \$9.50 PER WEEK

INCLUDES

On street floor—waiting room, private office, room with water closet and set bowl, another room with sink and shelves free sweeping and care of same, free electric light, gas and hot water, free telephone attendance. Positively no "quacks" or Doctors of questionable reputation will be admitted and if such should by ruse get in they will be summarily removed.

EDWIN F. CARY
 Owner and Builder
 Apply to Supt., on Premises

Figure 9
Evening Bulletin,
 29 October 1913

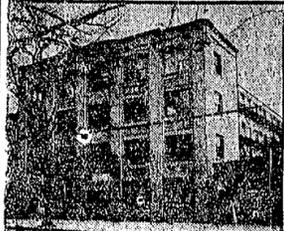
NEW BUILDING

PHYSICIANS AND DENTISTS

Positively none but practitioners of the so-called "regular school" above suspicion of irregular doings will be considered or allowed to remain. No animal doctors, neither manipulators of mind or body, nor women "specialists." Here is a superb building, owned and directed by a really man of 25 years experience, whose large investment will depreciate tremendously if any "talented people" are permitted within its walls as tenants. No such complete surety was ever given doctors in Providence.

\$9.50 per week

Includes suite on street floor, consisting of waiting room, private office, room with water closet and set bowl, another room with sink and shelves, free sweeping and care of same, free electric light, gas and hot water, free telephone attendance.



BROAD NEAR SUMMER ST.

SUPERB BUILDING, more pronounced conveniences than any similar structure. Easiest stairs and best equipped with fire escapes of any building in Providence. Stringent rules summarily enforced will insure clean moral standard. Tenants will receive lady visitors (not in their apartments), but in reception rooms, street floor. Fine billiard and lounging room for men tenants, third floor front. No children or pets.

GENTLEMEN

Will here find at \$5.75 per week sumptuously furnished room with private set bowl, also use of water closet and bath exclusively with gentleman. In adjoining room, a combination which cannot be secured elsewhere down-town for \$8.00. Two gentlemen in one of these rooms, \$4.00 each. Only limited number of gentlemen's rooms.

MAN AND WIFE

One or both employed, or larger adult families, will here find small apartments providing maximum comfort and minimum expense of living. But no such will-hire these apartments if they have not decided that living in smaller and fewer rooms within five minutes walk of "down-town" is more prudent and satisfactory than the old way of having more spacious quarters further off. Rents unfurnished with private bath for just two people, \$8.00 per week upwards, including free electric light, gas for cooking, real hot water, steam heat, janitor service, telephone messages taken.

EDWIN F. CARY, Owner. OPEN FOR INSPECTION 9 TO 9 DAILY.

Figure 10
Providence Sunday Journal, 9 November 1913

WANTED, MAN AND WIFE

Couple, neither being over 45, to care for new building, husband to tend steam heater, sweep corridors, etc., wash windows, do odd jobbing on door locks, plumbing, etc. Wife to care for a dozen furnished rooms, baths, etc. Pay of \$12 to \$14 includes nice apartment with private bath, hot water, gas for cooking and electricity free, which pay is as advantageous as \$18 for husband and \$8 for the wife in ordinary unsteady positions, when rent, light, coal and car fares are added. Positively none except bright, energetic, like-to-work folks, strictly temperate, in all things will be considered. No colored people. No one will be interviewed on this subject anywhere than at 208 Broad street, Thursday or Friday evenings, this week, between 7 and 9 o'clock. Both man and wife apply together.

Figure 11
Evening Bulletin, 19 November 1913

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Figure 12
Earliest known advertisement for the building under the name “Copley Chambers.”

Evening Bulletin Extra, 19 December 1913



Figure 13
Advertising sign for Copley Chambers found in the basement of the building prior to 2023 rehabilitation. Though undated, the reference to “Physicians’ and Dentists’ Offices” is consistent with advertisements in the first few months after the building’s 1913 opening.

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Figure 14

Detail of aerial photo of Providence, looking northeast, ca. 1930-1939. The south (rear) and west elevations of Copley Chambers, which is at the center of the image, are visible. Note the Union Congregational Church and other buildings across the street; that block is now occupied by the Classical and Central High Schools playing fields.

Avery Lord, Aerial View of Providence, ca. 1930-1939 (VMO18_29), Avery Lord Aerial Photograph Collection, Providence Public Library Digital Collections.

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Figure 15
Copley Chambers Building ca. 1975. Note large sign over entrance facing Broad Street.

Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, Historic Building Data Form for 208 Broad Street.



Figure 16
Copley Chambers Building, ca. 1980s.

Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission

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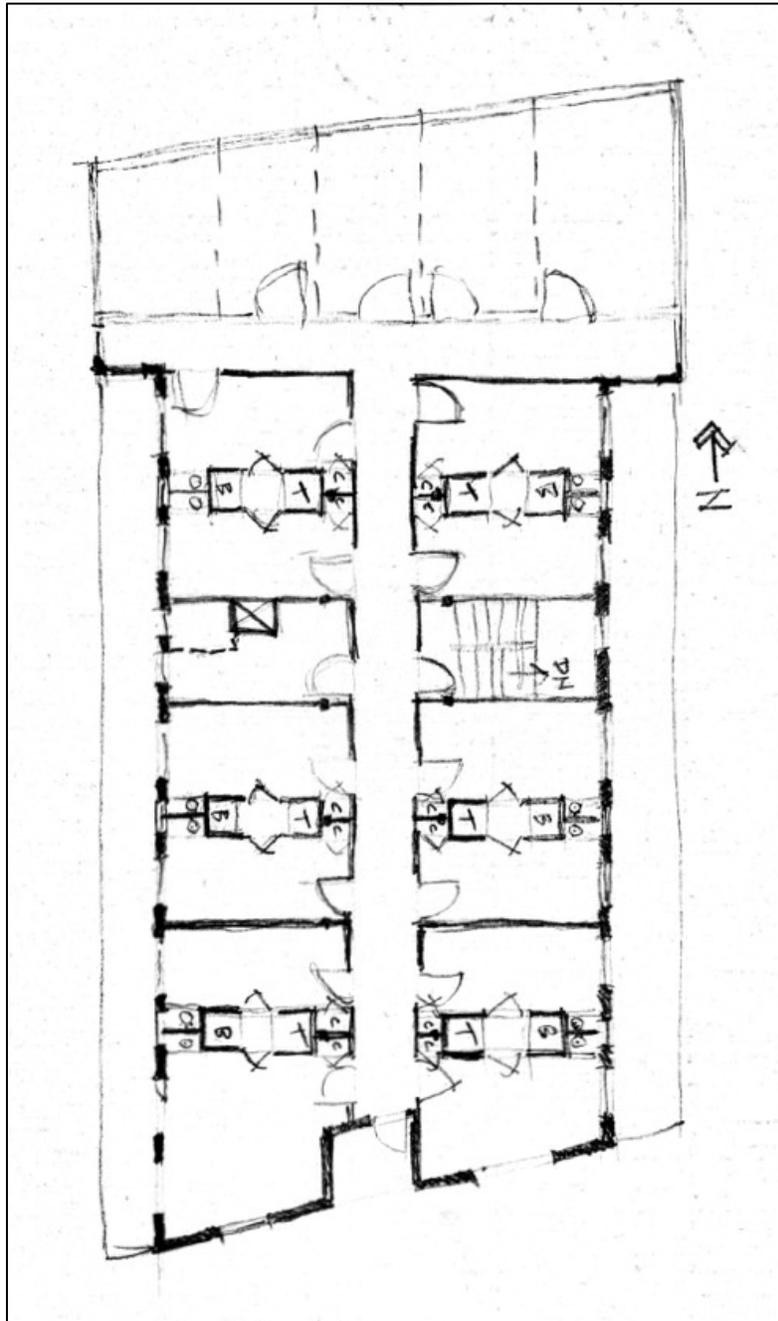


Figure 17

Sketch showing probable plan of the rear block of Copley Chambers, based on historic research and on physical evidence visible prior to the 2023 rehabilitation of the building. Sketch shows bath areas shared by two residential units; each bath area included a room with a bathtub (B) and a room with a toilet (T), with a pass-through area in between. Each unit had a sink located against the exterior wall and a closet (C) located against the corridor wall. The window set high in the wall over the back-to-back sinks provided ventilation, via a soffit that ran over the bath area.

Mark Foster, Ryan LLC, 2024.

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Figure 18

Fourth floor, rear block, facing east, 2021. Note hopper-type bathroom window with textured glass set high in exterior wall (at left); un-plastered, hollow tile block showing former location of short partitions at either side of and centered below the window; location of blocking for sinks at either side of that center partition; and portions of framing for bathroom walls at ceiling. Also note historic wood floor, wood baseboard at demising wall (at right), and wood window casing.

Kim Smith, Ryan LLC, 2021.

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Figure 19

Second floor, rear block, facing southwest, 2021. Evidence of back-to-back closets is seen between the two door openings: portions of closet door casing (left of column), historic wood trim within closet (right of column), and portions of framing for bathroom walls at ceiling. The hanging framing crosspiece indicates the location of the wall dividing the bathroom from the closets. Note also historic wood door casing and baseboard.

Kim Smith, Ryan LLC, 2021.

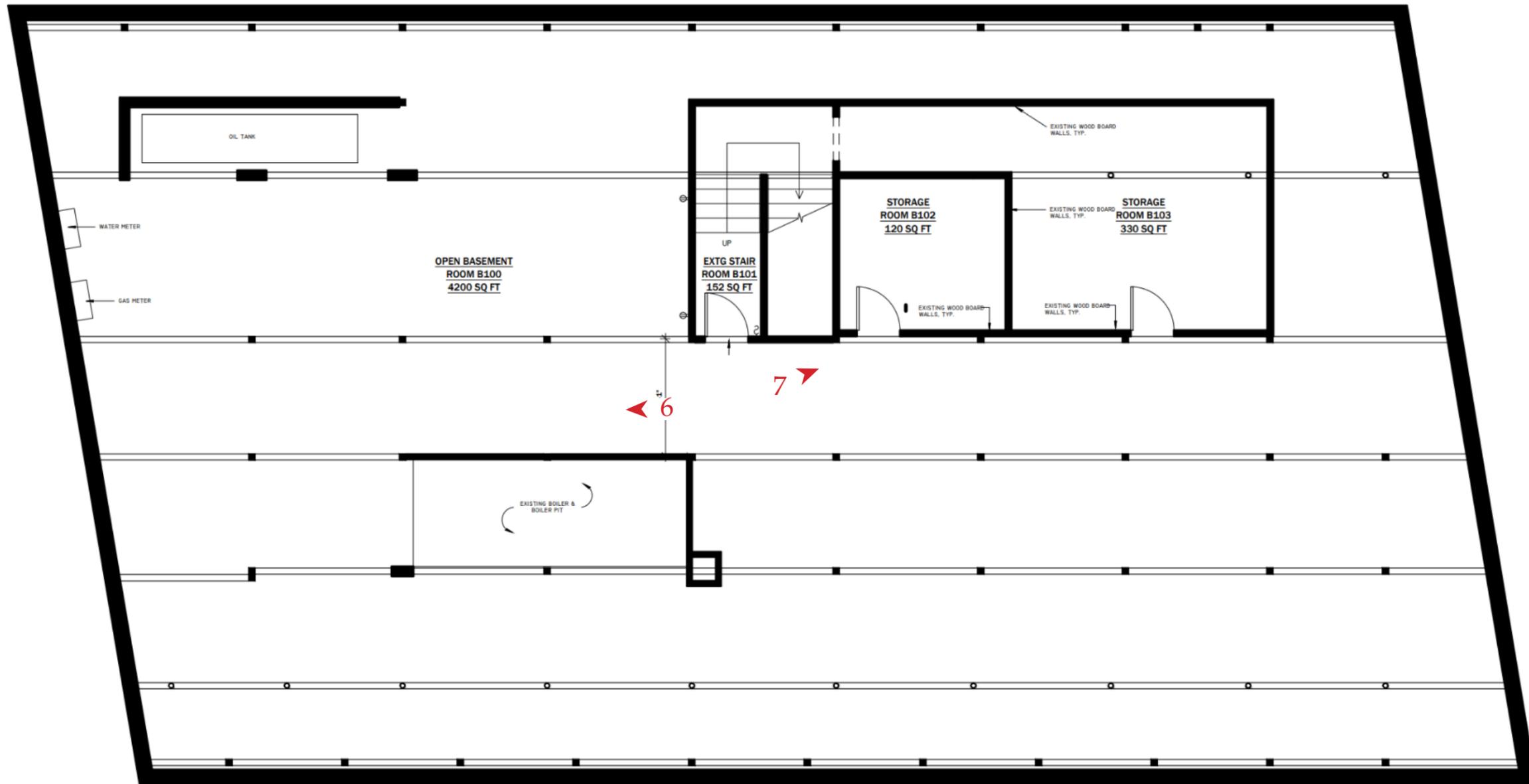
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

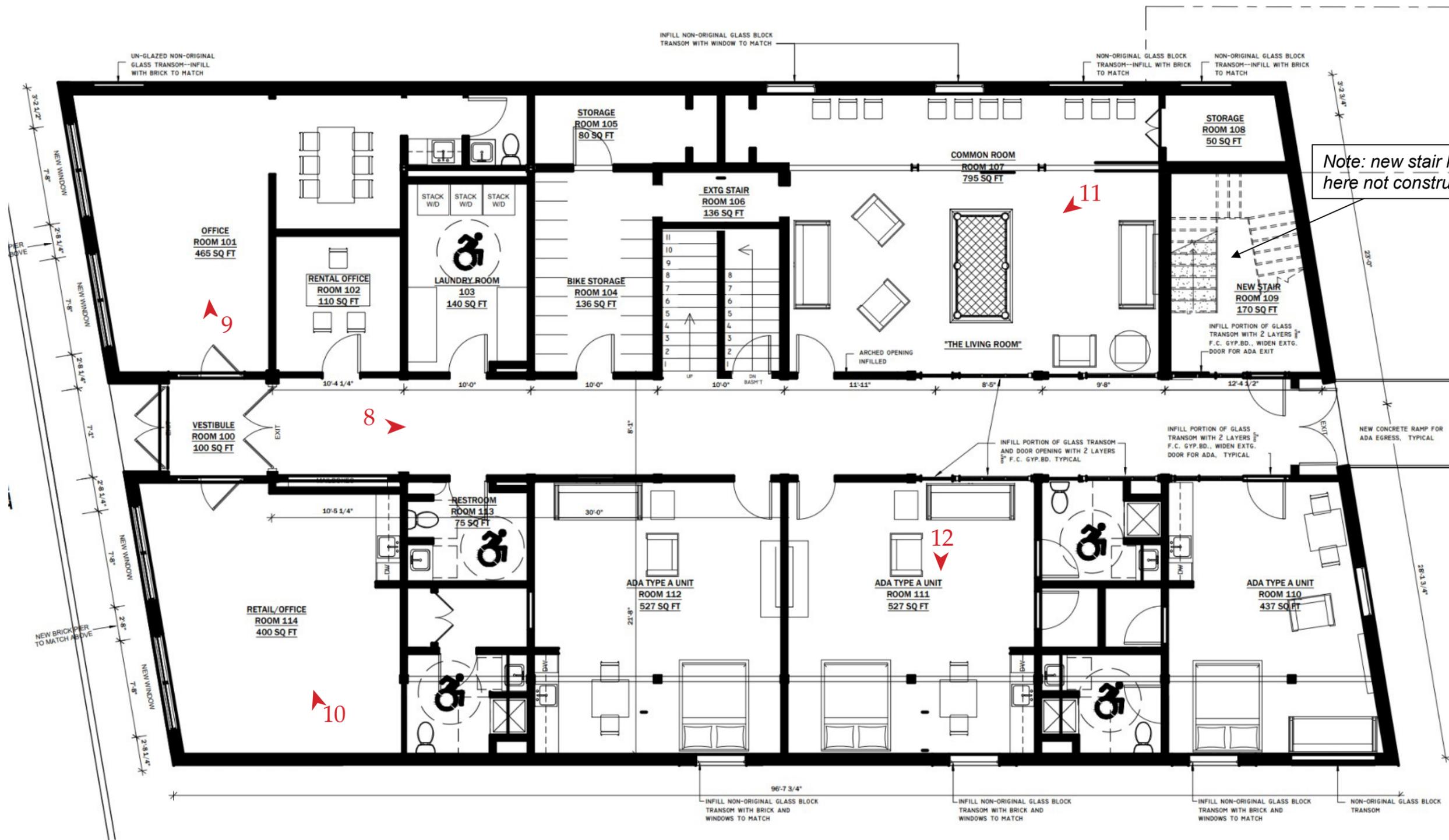
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.







Note: new stair hall shown here not constructed



Interior Photo Key: First Floor



Note: new stair hall shown here not constructed





1. North (primary) and west elevations, facing southeast



2. North (primary) elevation, facing south



3. North (primary) and east elevations, facing southwest



4. South (rear) elevation, facing north



5. North elevation offices/storefronts, facing southeast



6. Basement, facing north. Note exposed metal columns, wood framing, and hollow tile block wall partially enclosing boiler/oil tank.



7. Basement, facing southeast. Note metal columns and storage rooms/stair hall enclosure with vertical tongue-and-groove wood boards.



8. First floor, corridor, facing south. Note terrazzo flooring and windows set high in the corridor walls.



9. First floor, northeast office/storefront, facing east



10. First floor, northwest office/storefront, facing east



11. First floor, lounge, facing northwest toward historic arched door opening



12. First floor, accessible unit, looking west



13. Second floor, corridor, facing south. Note original wood flooring and historic door openings, now filled in.



14. Second floor, one-bedroom unit, facing west



15. Second floor, one-bedroom unit, bathroom, facing southwest



16. Second floor, one-bedroom unit, facing southwest



17. Third floor, historic stair hall, facing northeast



18. Third floor, one-bedroom unit, facing southwest



19. Third floor, one-bedroom unit, facing northeast



20. Fourth floor, corridor, facing northeast. Note original wood flooring and historic door openings, now filled in.



21. Fourth floor, historic stair hall, facing east



22. Fourth floor, two-bedroom unit, facing east



23. Fourth floor, two-bedroom unit, facing northwest



24. Fourth floor, one-bedroom unit, facing northwest