

PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

The Gaspee House....
D. A. R. Headquarters.

209 WILLIAMS STREET.

The Gaspee House, 209 Williams Street, contains paneling from the original Sabin Tavern on South Main Street, in which the burning of the "Gaspee" was planned.

Built by George S. Dow & Miles Hobart - 1850

PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Records of

#209 WILLIAMS STREET...wood

Known as the "GASPEE HOUSE"

Plat 17
Lot #157..form-
erly also #166

#110-112
1853-1870

#127-129
1871-1893

#207-209
1894 to 1930

#209
1931-.....

1850 Harriot Brown for \$1800 sells to George S Dow, sailmaker, and Miles Hobart sailmaker (of Dow and Hobart) 2 certain lots of land being #7 and #8 on Williams Street shown on the map of the Rope Walk Lots...platted and surveyed by Benoni Lockwood in 1830 (see Map)...Deed Book 60.132(as Ten.in common)

→ 1850 POLICY RECORD: George S Dow and Miles Hobart...wood...ss Williams Street.. 44' x 30'. Addition 10' x 24'...all 2 stories high in part and 3 in rear Occupied for a Dwelling house...On Leased Land...PR Vol 45...#19515

1853 George Dow, sailmaker, lived here...Prov Directory ..&until 1865
1853 Miles Hobart, sailmaker lived here and until 1863..Prov Dir

1858 George S Dow quit claims his W/ly part of the above property and Miles Hobart quit claims his E/ly part of the said property to George S Dow, thereby changing the owner ship of the whole property from tenants in common to joint ownership...DB 150.501-2

1863 Thomas J Griffing, guardian of the three minor children of Miles Hobart, deceased, sells for \$1404 to William R Talbot a certain lot of land and Dwelling House and other improvements, being a portion of the land that Harriot Brown sold to George S Dow and the late Miles Hobart as tenants in common in 1850...(see map #2)...DB 164.438

1863 Abbie Hobart, widow of Miles Hobart sells for \$466 1 full, equal, undivided 4th part of the above property...DB 166.233

1863 George S Dow, sells for \$6000 to William R Talbot a certain lot of land with a Dwelling House and other improvements, being the E/ly part of land bought by grantor and Miles Hobart of Harriot Brown as tenants in common (DB 122.5) and Miles Hobarts interest to grantor in 1858 (DB 150.502) ...DB 168.81

1865 William Talbot and/or family lived here and until 1876..Prov Dir.

1929 Property was taxed to Barbara H, Mary C, Arnold G Talbot and Helen T Porter

1930 Gaspee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution taxed for the property

#209 WILLIAMS STREET...continued

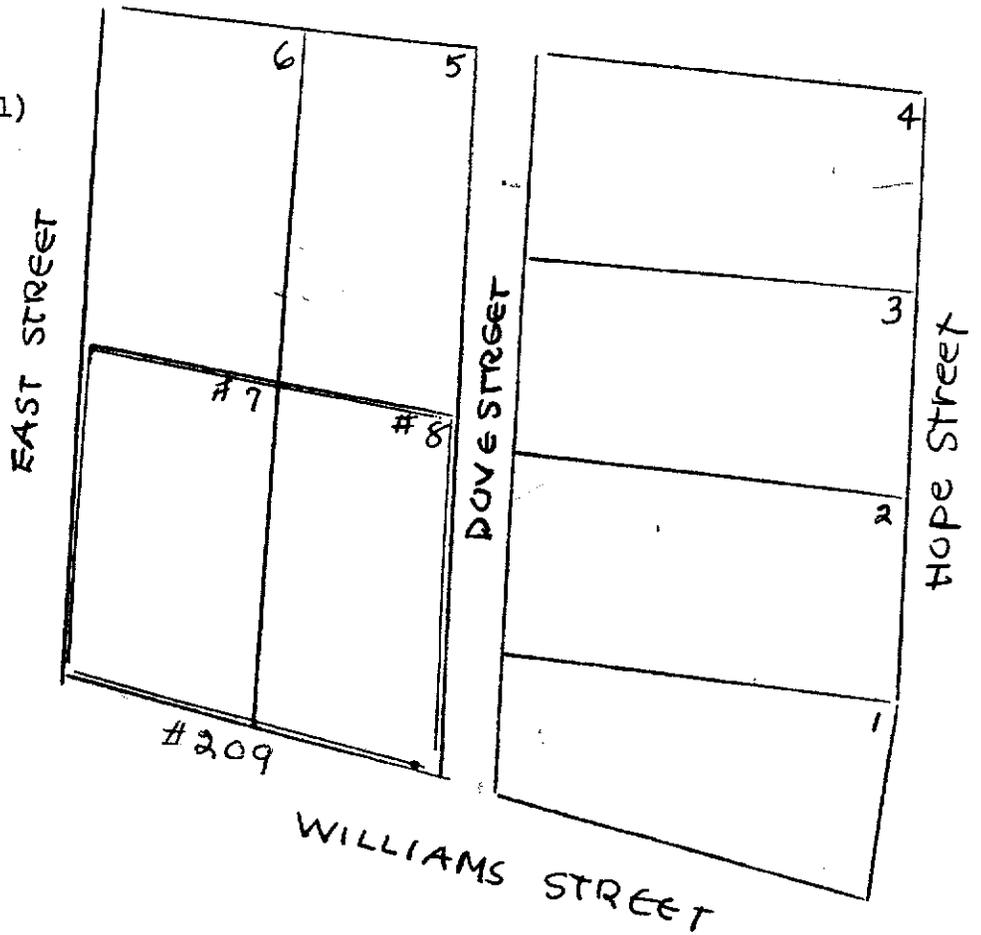
ROPE WALK LOTS (partial)

1890

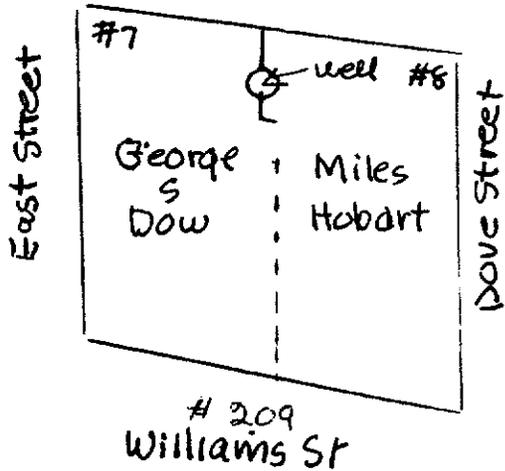
Platted & surveyed by
Benoni Lockwood

Deed Book 60.132

Scale 50' to 1 inch



Map #2



7. Description. GASPEE ROOM,
209 WILLIAMS STREET,
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND.

In a house at 209 Williams Street in Providence have been inserted various elements of XVIII-Century interior architectural trim, some of which adorn what is there called the "Gaspee Room" and others of which are used variously throughout the house. These came from the one-time Sabin Tavern, originally built c. 1763 at 124 South Main Street (on the north-east corner of its intersection with Planet Street) and demolished in 1891. This building seems to have been begun as a residence on a site owned in 1640 by the Burrows family and in the early XVIII Century by the Lapham family. Apparently it was not fully completed (or at least decorated) when it was taken over in 1767 by James Sabin, who until 1773 operated a tavern and stage-coach stop there. Following this use it was purchased and "completed" as a residence by Welcome Arnold, who lived there until his death in 1798, after which it ~~continued~~ ^{continued} ~~was~~ ^{the Arnold and Bartlett families} in ~~his family~~ --being enlarged or altered from time to time in the first half of the XIX Century.

The house is recorded in 1823 as being of "wood ... 40' front .. 36' front to rear ... with a hipped roof ... all 2 stories high ..." (At this time there is also recorded a two-storey brick wing at the rear, doubtless not original to the 1763 structure.) One would construe the former Sabin Tavern, then, to have been a timber-framed, clapboard-faced rectangle standing on a brick or, more likely, stone basement dug into the Planet Street slope and rising high from South Main Street due to that slope. It is probable that the basement contained fully-usable space not counted as a storey and that the hip roof contained an extra half-storey or at least a good garret. It is also probable that the main entrance was ~~on the~~ ^{2^d one} ~~side~~ ~~(~~it was, as, in, the, past,~~)~~, well above the South Main Street level (a characteristic of surviving nearby houses). We must assume simple exterior trim typical of the mid-XVIII Century and of the area, as no particularly elaborate outside features have been recorded, and existing interior remains transferred to Williams Street upon demolition are not extravagantly treated.

After 1823 and before 1851 the house was further ~~enlarged~~ enlarged by the

an additional storey covering both the main structure and the rear wing and by "an octagon c. 16' x 10' ... 3 stories high"--probably a protrusion back of the main house. One might place these improvements in the mid- or late 1840's and assume that the house was being given a higher, more formal and cubical frontal appearance and some Greek Revival-cum-Italianate trim. A sign at 209 Williams Street states that the Doric entrance portico now there, which shelters a rounded-headed Italianate doorway with a coloured-glass surround "formed the Original [sic] Main Entrance to the Old Gaspee House."

Inasmuch as the Sabin Tavern-Arnold residence was considered historically important because of its association with the "Gaspee" affair of 1772 (See 8. Significance^{below}), certain portions of its old interior trim, along with the later entrance features just mentioned, were salvaged when the building was demolished in 1891. Among these were the main staircase, a mantel, much panelled wainscoting and apparently some panelled inside window shutters. Taken to Williams Street, these materials were re-cut, inserted and re-used as best they could be with the existing room-shapes and trim of the plain, rectangular XIX-Century house ~~at that location~~ ^{already} at that location: The Sabin Tavern items have in general therefore been re-used with little thought of their original placement or relationships.

The staircase, as now installed in the narrow Williams Street hallway, is the most intact salvaged feature. It starts its first run up towards the north, along a west wall, takes a right-angle turn--with a short set of "winders," to a landing over the front door (door and landing each interfering with the other) and then another short, right-angled run to its second-storey ending (this may not have been its original arrangement or contain its original number of steps). A heavy, very ^{ramped} simple cushion-rail of dark wood is supported on turned, light-painted balusters, three to a step; posts at the upper ^{turns} ~~angles~~ of the stair are let descend as pendants, with mushroom finials. The ends of the painted stairs have sawn console motifs, and below them runs a string moulding, beneath which large, plain raised panels are stopped just above a baseboard. An old eight-panelled door, now helps ^{close off} ~~fill~~ the space
with an ~~an~~ ^{an} ~~Knare~~ ^{Knare} panel above,

beneath the stair's "winder"-turn. A dado of re-used panelling--not all matching-- up the west wall follows the incline of the stair-rail. Above this dado the wall is in part faced with an assemblage of re-used panelling cut off diagonally along the bottom, and incorporating an old mantel enframing rather surprisingly located ^{high up.}

What is called the "Gaspee Room" is of modest proportions and occupies the north-eastern portion of the first floor. At its east end the corners are canted so as to form a bay in which there is a ^{fall} ~~wide~~ triple window; on its north side there is a window-bay enframed by an arch; on the south wall there is a fireplace whose mantel of simple design is said to have been created from timbers taken from the old Sabin Tavern kitchen; above the mantel is panelling which may be made from old interior shutters of the tavern. Around the room runs a fairly high waincot of ^{horizontal} painted panelling, probably from the tavern. Above this is a busily-patterned wallpaper rising to a wooden cornice moulding which is probably not of the XVIII Century. The proportions of the windows and their trim are not old, but the three six-panelled doors could be from the tavern. The room contains a Victorian chandelier and wall-brackets, numerous pictures, furniture and ornaments of various periods.

The dining-room backs up on the south to the "Gaspee Room" and has apparently antique, re-used panelling up to a height of six feet. Between this panelling and a cornice of indeterminate age, the walls are papered, and so ^{is} ~~is~~ the ceiling. Here the fireplace has a XIX-Century mantel of grey marble. The south wall of the dining-room has ~~the original arch~~ a broad double-door contained within an arched enframingent which is ^{labelled} ~~said~~ to be "the original arch between the ~~Gaspee Room and Ballroom~~ Gaspee Room and Ballroom of the Gaspee House." Other rooms at 209 Williams Street are without distinction. ^P The house and the numerous historical mementoes which it contains are well maintained by the Gaspee Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution. While it cannot be said that the "Gaspee Room" is preserved there intact, or even in reconstituted form, it is commendable that, in 1891, this organisation undertook to save as many remnants of the Sabin Tavern as it did.

The importance of the Sabin Tavern building (whose site is now marked by a plaque) and the reason that parts of its interior were saved, re-located and taken into care of the Daughters of the American Revolution are in connection with the locally important and historic "Gaspee" affair of 1772, a happening as important here as was the Boston Tea Party in that city--prefatory to and symptomatic of the full-scale war of colonial revolution which was to burst out in short years thereafter.

In 1772, Rhode Island shipping and merchant interests had been severely harassed by the British revenue schooner H. M. S. "Gaspee" which had been chasing and stopping colonial shipping in Narragansett Bay. On June 9 of that year the "Gaspee," while engaged in such a chase, ran aground and lay stranded off the West Warwick shore. Word of this quickly travelled to Providence, and on the evening of that day a meeting was held at the Sabin Tavern, just above Providence's harbour, and presumably in the room whose panelling has been taken to 209 Williams Street. There it was agreed that an armed band should embark from Fenner's Wharf across the street, go out to the disabled ship, remove the crew and destroy the vessel. In boats supplied by John Brown, a prominent local citizen, and under the command of Captain Abraham Whipple, later also to be a notable Rhode Islander,--this mission was accomplished, the schooner being burnt where she lay. (Namquid Point, off which this event occurred, was later re-named Gaspee Point, and the event is now annually celebrated there.)

After Sabin gave up ownership and use of the building as a tavern, it became a private dwelling owned by the Arnold and Bartlett families, both prominent in Providence history and as Rhode Island historians. During their occupancies it was enlarged and embellished in accordance with the tastes of their times; but by 1891 its locale had lost ~~its former~~ desirability, and the structure was demolished, the land sold.

By 1891 historical and literary preoccupation with the recent Civil War had mercifully begun to die down, and in what was thought to be a very modern decade there arose again a strong sentimental interest--for a time it had been ~~in a~~ ^{dormant} ~~in a~~, though partly revived by the 1876 Philadelphia celebrations--in our XVII- and XVIII-

Century history, buildings and artifacts. Of these, much had been neglected, thought outmoded, purposely destroyed or allowed to disappear. All at once, anything "colonial"—a house, a panel, a chair or a spinning-wheel—became the object of considerable interest and admiration, much sought after; and it was at about this time that our Colonial Revival style in architecture began to flourish.

Nevertheless, thoughts of architectural conservation, restoration and interpretation in the 1890's were far from what they are to-day, and the suddenly-loving approach to old structures and artifacts was frequently unskilled and unintentionally brutalising or else of an uninformed omnium-gatherum nature, collecting and combining unexplained and unrelated bits and pieces from here and there. Even so, such an enthusiasm may be given credit, but the lack of proper study then given to old buildings and the careless physical handling of their components are to be regretted. In time, in the course of thirty-five years, period rooms were to be installed intact and with care in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and meticulous methods of archeology and architectural study were to be introduced at Williamsburg in Virginia. Now, after another thirty-five years, we have profited from the example of Williamsburg but consider it perhaps too glossy and antiseptic a resuscitation and are giving thought to other forms of ~~restoration, preservation~~ ^{preservation, restoration} and interpretation of our surviving architectural heritage.

What the Daughters of the American Revolution did with their salvage from the Sabin Tavern in Providence is of interest to record and to see—as it was first assembled and is still displayed—as an example of early, well-intentioned, but unguided, historical preservation in this country.

Richard B. Harrington.
August 7, 1972.

(preparing National Register
applications)

"Revolutionary Relics in Room Where Burning of Gaspee Was Planned"

"Gaspee Day" is a field day in the annals of patriotic societies in Rhode Island, but special observance is always accorded it by Gaspee Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, which was named in commemoration of the burning of the British schooner Gaspee in Rhode Island waters.

Local interest in this historic event is intensified by the fact that the room in which the conspirators met in the old Sabin Tavern to perfect their plans and, incidentally, to melt the lead for their bullets, has been carefully preserved to this day and contains many relics of the Gaspee affair and Revolutionary days.

The old Sabin House, as it was known, in which the conspirators met, was then in an unfinished state and was occupied as an inn by James Sabin, who "kept a house of board and entertainment for gentlemen." The house was purchased a few years later and completed by Welcome Arnold, who lived there until his death in 1798. South Main street was then the residential part of the city, many of the prominent citizens living in the vicinity.

The house became the residence of Welcome Arnold's eldest son, Samuel G. Arnold, and subsequently of his youngest son, Col. Richard J. Arnold, who enlarged and altered it materially.

Nineteen years ago the room was detached and moved up the hill to be added to the house of Mrs. William Richmond Talbot on Williams street. Her grandfather was the Welcome Arnold

who bought the tavern a few days after the event which made it famous. It is now a part of the house and, with the relics it contains, forms a private museum of great interest to students of Rhode Island colonial history.

The moving of the room was an event of considerable interest at the time. "It was the last instance of the removal of a wooden house up the hill and everyone predicted disaster," says Mrs. Talbot. "We brought everything we could, even the old steps and flat stones which are now at the front door, too, and as much of the entry as possible, and the stairs my grandfather used to climb."

On the face of the old mantelpiece in the room is inscribed the legend:

"Built 1761. Enlarged 1823. South Main street, corner Planet. Detached and removed to Williams street, corner East, 1891.

"In this room, June 9, 1772, was formed the plan for the destruction of the British Naval Schooner 'Gaspee.'"

Since its removal to Williams street the walls of the old room have looked upon scenes of far different character from the one which has enshrined it in the history of the State. It was in this room, whose storied walls looked down upon their ancestors, the conspirators, that the founders of Gaspee Chapter, D. A. R., met on Jan. 11, 1892, and organized the chapter.

A 16-inch rusty nail, one of those with which the old tavern was put together, is one of the relics in the room and affords ample evidence of the difficulties encountered in dismembering the house. Even the little old doors were brought, so that neither doors nor windows had to be cut after removal. The oak wainscotting of hall and "Gaspee Room" was part of the woodwork of the old dining room and entry

of the old mansion on South Main street.

The room is now the library of the Talbot house. Here the Gaspee Chapter met constantly in the early days of its existence, and it is often welcomed now on special occasions by its Regent, Barbara Harriet Talbot, daughter of the founder:

The Revolutionary relics it contains are supplemented by pieces of old mahogany, and treasures of china, glass, brass and copper, historic heirlooms from both sides of the family. The fireplace, made of the original bricks, is fitted up with andirons belonging to the Talbot family; on the mantelpiece are the old Washington lamps, like those at Mount Vernon; an old Revolutionary musket, bearing marks signifying that it had killed six Indians, stands by the fireplace, and a cane which belonged to Commodore Silas Talbot, commander of the Constitution, a great-great-grandfather of Mr. Talbot. On a table rests a gavel made from the wood from the prison ship Jersey, on which Commodore Silas Talbot was once imprisoned.

An invitation from Lord Howe to Miss Arnold "to attend an assembly on Monday, the 19th inst.," the invitation bearing Lord Howe's compliments, written on a six of clubs, signifying that there would be cards, is one of the treasures of the room. Then there is a revolver, marked 1762, with the heavy butt, which was so deadly a weapon; an old hand-carved chest that was brought from Europe; the old padlock from the "witch's prison" in Salem; the main truck of the old Kearsarge, which was saved from the wreck of the Roncador in 1894; a piece of the cable which was stretched across the Hudson to keep the British from sailing up the river, and pieces of old brass, copper, china and glass are among the curiosities of this historic room.

The walls are hung with family portraits, reproductions of family coats

of arms and old silhouettes, and the windows are hung with old hand-woven silk curtains in the famous "hit-or-miss" pattern.

One of Mrs. Talbot's treasures is the account of the burning of the Gaspee written by Col. Ephraim Bowen, the last survivor of the expedition, written the year before his death and engrossed by his daughter.

This account is in part as follows. . . . " . . . and my age is 86 years this 29th day of August, 1839. Ephraim Bowen."

THE STREETS OF THE CITY

Written By: Florence Parker Simister

Sponsored By: The Old Stone Bank

Broadcast By: Station W E A N, Providence

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THE STREETS OF THE CITY
STATION W E A N

Mon - May 17

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8:15 A.M.

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The Gaspee Room and the Russell Parlor

Many times in the history of Providence houses and buildings have been moved from one location to another, but the instances of rooms being taken out of one building and put into another are rare indeed, ^{however} ~~but~~, it has been done. One famous room that was moved is the Gaspee Room, that room, once part of Sabin's Tavern at Planet and South Main Sts., where the plot to burn the British ship "Gaspee" was hatched. When the tavern was sold for the last time the new owners decided to move it to another location, but when this plan could not be carried out, it was decided to move only one room, the Gaspee Room. This room was detached from the rest of the tavern, with its staircase and the main hall, mounted on rollers and carried to Williams St. Here a new chimney was built for it out of the old brick from the tavern and it was attached to the house at 209 Williams St. The mantel was then constructed out of timbers from the old kitchen of Sabin's Tavern where the bullets were cast for the Gaspee affair. And here still you will find the Gaspee Room, now the home of the Gaspee Chapter of the D.A. R.

Now, at 114 North Main St. there stands to this day what was once a beautiful old house, the Russell House. It has been raised now and stores put underneath, but once it was the only three story house in town and one of the few built of brick. The Russell brothers were prosperous merchants and in 1773 built this lovely house. For a while after the Russells occupied it, Zechariah Allen lived there, then it became the Clarendon Hotel and finally the rooms in the house were put up for sale. In the 1920's the Brooklyn opened 19 early American rooms and one of them was the Russell Parlor which the museum bought in Providence and reconstructed in Providence.

It has been said of this room that it is "...a Providence room... the finest possible example of a room from a fine city house of the time." Of the other room in the Russell house one of the upstairs one is owned by the R.I. School of Design but has not been assembled; another, owned by Providence people, is still in storage and a panelled living room bought by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts is assembled there. So when you pass 114 North Main St. and look at the Russell House, you are looking at a shell because four rooms were moved from this house, two of them to distant places. And when you pass 209 Williams St., you are passing a room that used to be in Sabin's Tavern at So. Main and Planet Sts. So not only houses and buildings, but, rooms, too, are moved up and down the streets of the city!

Mehanticut is a word all Providence natives know. Listen Wednesday for the history of the word and its connection with the streets of our city.

MISS M. C. TALBOT DEAD IN WICKFORD

Custodian of Gaspee House on
Williams Street Was in
Her 77th Year.

ACTIVE IN D. A. R. CIRCLES

Funeral Services Tomorrow Will
Be Private With Burial in
Swan Point Cemetery.

Miss Mary Cornelia Talbot of this city died late Saturday night at her summer home, Barberry Hill Farm, Talbot Corners, Wickford, in her 77th year.

With her sister, the late Barbara H. Talbot who died in June, Miss Talbot was custodian of the historic Gaspee House at 209 Williams street. Active in Gaspee Chapter of the D. A. R., and interested in historical activities, she assembled a notable collection of old cook-books and recipes during her lifetime.

Miss Talbot was born in Providence, a daughter of William Richmond Talbot and Mary Cornelia (Arnold) Talbot. She is survived by a sister, Mrs. J. Benton Porter of Wickford; a brother, Arnold G. Talbot of Philadelphia, Pa.; a nephew, William Richmond Talbot, and a niece, Frances Katharine Talbot, both of Philadelphia.

Miss Talbot was a member of the "Irrepressibles," a pre-Junior League society of Providence young women, and she and her sister Barbara were both members of the Female Charitable Society in Providence. She was also a member of the Central Congregational Church.

Miss Talbot served as commissioner from Rhode Island at the Atlanta Exposition, and was hostess of the Rhode Island Building at the Jamestown Exposition.

For 11 years she ran the Katydid Cottage Tea Room.

The funeral tomorrow morning will be private. Burial will be in Swan Point Cemetery.

Mary C. Talbot



Providence Resident Dead at Her Summer Home, Barberry Hill Farm, Wickford, in Her 77th Year.

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