

# DATA SHEET

Form 10-300  
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Rhode Island	
COUNTY: Providence	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
APR 13 1972	

### 1. NAME

COMMON: Customs House
AND/OR HISTORIC: Federal Building

### 2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 24 Weybosset Street			
CITY OR TOWN: Providence			
STATE Rhode Island, 02903	CODE 44	COUNTY: Providence	CODE 007

### 3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____

### 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: United States Government		
STREET AND NUMBER:		
CITY OR TOWN: Washington	STATE: District of Columbia	CODE 11

### 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: City Hall		
STREET AND NUMBER: Dorrance and Washington Streets		
CITY OR TOWN: Providence	STATE: Rhode Island, 02903	CODE 44

### 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Buildings Survey		
DATE OF SURVEY: 1956	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local	
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress		
STREET AND NUMBER: Independence Avenue and 1st Street, S. E.		
CITY OR TOWN: Washington	STATE: District of Columbia	CODE 11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:	
COUNTY:	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	APR 13 1972
DATE	

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)				
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins
	(Check One)		(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Providence Customs House was designed by Ammi B. Young, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department, and was erected in 1855-1856 in the Italianate style, which had become a dominant style for public buildings during the 1850's and 1860's, especially under Young's aegis. Placed directly on the street, it is a rectangular granite palazzo-- three bays wide and seven bays deep--of three storeys below its cornice. A low basement, strongly quoined corners, and a full entablature with dentils and modillions bound the block and reinforce its "blockiness." Above the entablature, a hip roof supports a hemispherical metal dome capped by a cylindrical metal lantern with flaring cornice.

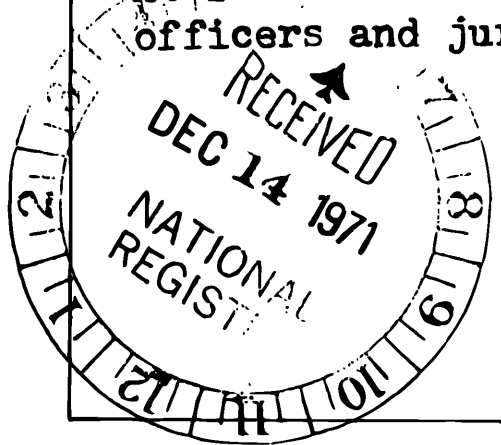
On the main (west) façade the entire ground floor between the rusticated angles is taken up by a series of five contiguous moulded arches on panelled piers. These contain the main entrance and flanking windows. The lower rear of the building has only a wide (latterly enlarged) loading portal and plain doors at first-floor level. The west and east elevations of the building are pierced by three regularly-spaced windows on each upper floor, those of the second storey having moulded architraves carrying modest pediments upon consoles, those of the third storey having moulded, eared architraves simply capped, without pediments.

At the sides of the building the three central bays of the regularly-ranged seven have been projected slightly from the casing of the building and further defined above by quoining. Ground-floor openings at the sides are recessed in simple round-headed arches (without piers or mouldings). Window treatment above is the same as at front and back, excepting the three central windows of the top floor, which have been given rounded heads for the sake of variety and further emphasis of the central projection.

The main entrance from the Weybosset Street pavement opens into a nearly-square vestibule flanked by offices. This in turn leads into a hall whose left end contains the main staircase of cast-iron (much of it ornamental openwork) running the full three-storey height of the building. When the building originally housed several federal agencies, this hall was a lobby for the postal service, with the space behind it (now a customs warehouse) serving as the mail-sorting room. The second floor originally contained a sizeable hall for the customs service, with smaller offices at front and rear; but it is now differently divided and used. Originally, the third floor was given over to the Federal District Court, whose climactic chamber at the centre of the building occupies more than one-third of the floor space and runs the full width of the building. At front and rear were offices and accommodation for the judges, legal officers and jury.

(See Continuation Sheet.)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

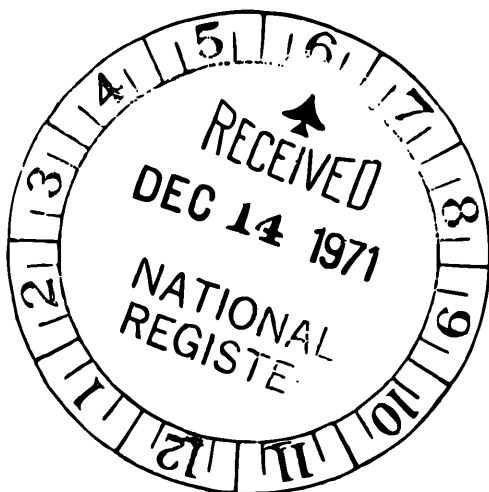
STATE Rhode Island	
COUNTY Providence	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
APR 13 1972	

(Number all entries)

7. Description.

Used now as the business hall of the customs service, the former court-room remains the most impressive interior although ad hoc alterations have diminished its original character. It is lighted by three tall round-headed windows on either side. Originally it received additional light from the glazed lantern of the dome directly above, which is supported on four iron columns rising through the room, although the dome has now been sealed off from this room. A round-arched apsidal recess at the east end backed the judges' bench, and the customary seating areas and stalls filled the rest of the room, excepting the space beneath the dome, which was left as a railed open area. Trim in this room is of a heavy, angular type, closer to the Greek Revival style than the Italianate, and consists of a high dado with narrow panels beneath wall surfaces flatly plastered; the wide architraves of the arched windows (which are within rectangular enframements) have acanthus-leaved keystones, and there are foliate spandrels beneath the simplest of capping cornices. There are simple architraves and friezes and prominent cornices for the tall doors. One would imagine that a prominent plaster ceiling cornice would also be present; if still existing, this cannot be seen because of a new, hung ceiling which cuts across the arch of the judges' niche. In the judges' niche there remains on its high bracket the finely-carved, gilded American eagle, poised for flight and shrieking, which has always been there and which is a notable piece of wood sculpture in itself.

The building to-day remains essentially intact, although internal renovations and re-arrangements, re-painting etc. have concealed or destroyed some features--such as the graining of many wood surfaces specified by the architect and the fresco panel designs for walls. However, the fine iron stairways, the window enframements, the panelled and louvred interior shutters for the windows are still to be seen, and the building enjoys good care.



**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century            | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1855-1856

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

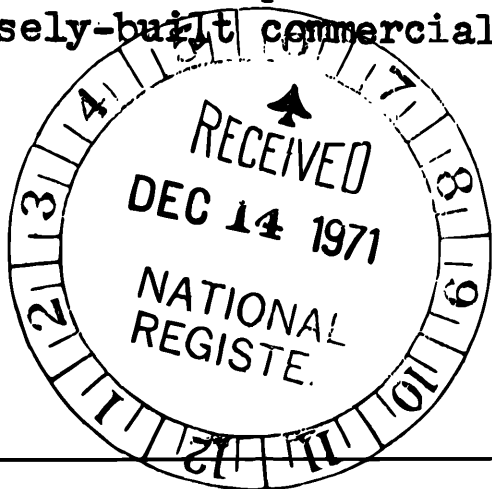
- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |  | _____                                    |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Providence Customs House is one of the handsomest surviving creations of Ammi B. Young, who was from 1852 to 1862 the first Supervising Architect of the United States Treasury Department, in charge of federal buildings being planned or erected throughout the country. Although the Greek Revival style was dominant in Young's earlier buildings (e. g.: Vermont State House, 1837; Boston Customs House, 1837-1847) and was in any case to remain always a favourite style of this architect, the Providence building represents a full excursion by Young into the newly popular Italian Renaissance style introduced by John Notman, a Scotsman, in his Philadelphia Athenaeum of 1845-1847. As the products of the office of the Supervising Architect were widely influential on official (and private) architectural taste of their time, the massive and rectangular Italian palazzo style was to rule governmental and institutional buildings (and the grander private ones) for some years, until a succeeding Supervising Architect should introduce the mode of the French Second Empire. The Providence Customs House is a particularly pleasing and academically correct example of Young's Renaissance phase.

Insofar as local architectural history is concerned, it takes its place importantly between the famous Greek Revival Arcade of 1828 across the street and the mansarded City Hall of 1875 not far away. Besides being a physical landmark the building is also one in the sequence of construction innovations, importantly employing cast-iron for bearing members and staircases, sheet-iron for fireproofing. Designed and placed so as to be prominent in downtown Providence, at the head of its harbour, the Customs House to-day remains a prominent, dignified and handsome structure, unaltered in exterior appearance and--particularly since the renovations of 1966--well maintained over-all. As tall buildings have arisen (and continue to rise) around it, the lowness of the Customs House provides a welcome shaft of space in the midst of a densely-built commercial enclave.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Cady, John Hutchins: The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence, 1636-1950 (Providence, Rhode Island, 1957), p. 129.  
 Hitchcock, Henry-Russell, Jr.: Rhode Island Architecture (Providence, Rhode Island, 1939), p. 50.  
 The Providence Preservation Society: The City: 1809-1908 ... (Providence, Rhode Island, 1971), pp. 22-24.  
 Young, Ammi Burnham: Suite of engraved plates after drawings for plans, elevations, details of the Customs House, at Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		41° 49' 29" N	71° 24' 36" W	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **Less than one acre**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Richard B. Harrington, Consultant**

ORGANIZATION: **Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission**      DATE: **August 23, 1971**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**State House, 90 Smith Street**

CITY OR TOWN: **Providence**      STATE: **Rhode Island, 02903**      CODE: **44**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National       State       Local

Name *Frederick Williams*

Title State Liaison Officer

Date December 7, 1971

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

*Robert M. Utley*  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date *4/15/72* RECEIVED

ATTEST: *[Signature]*  
 NATIONAL REGISTER  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date *April 7, 1972*

19/2998410/4632895 SEE INSTRUCTIONS  
 UTM PCS  
 12-16-75 (un)

PROVIDENCE QUADRANGLE  
RHODE ISLAND  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

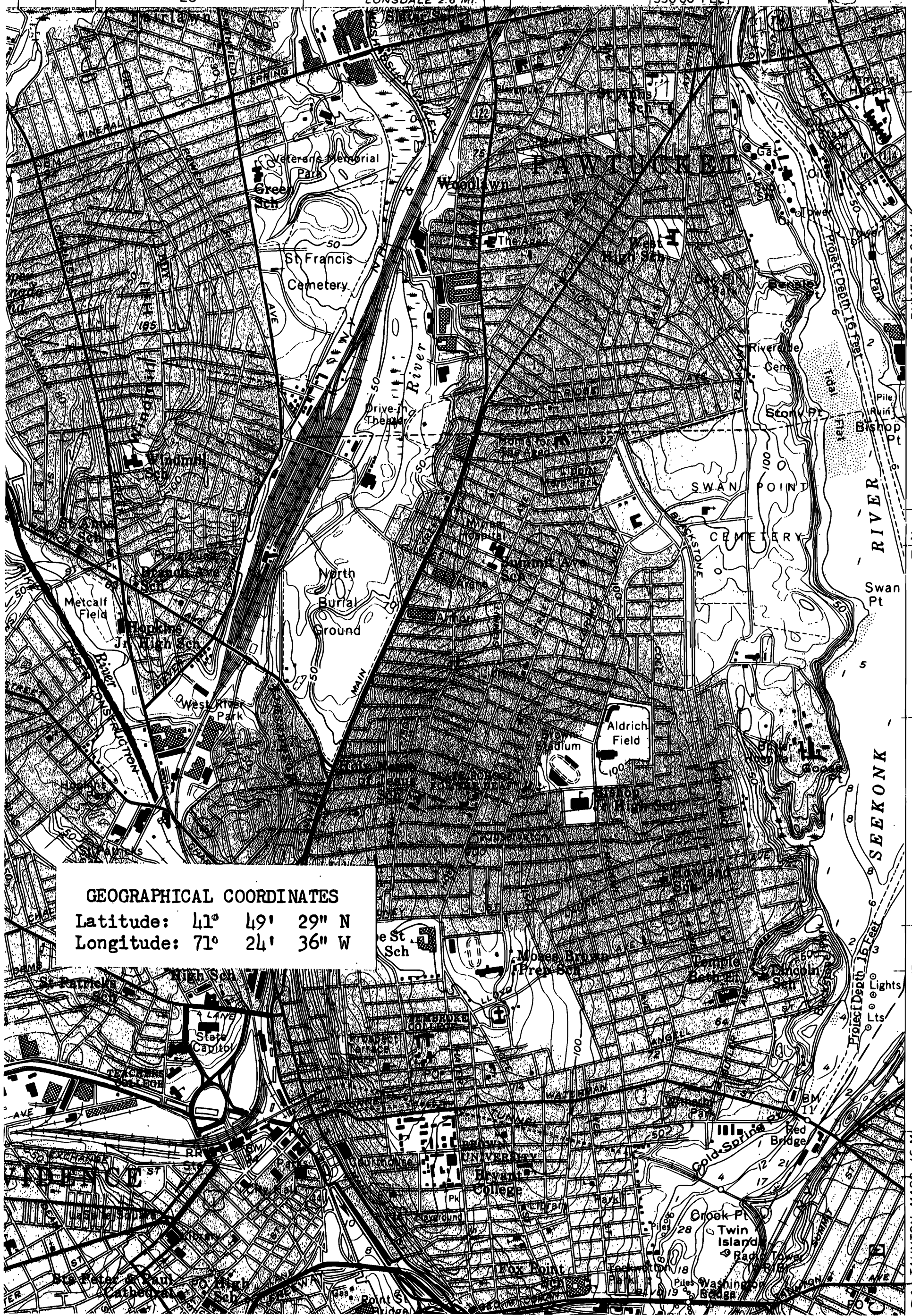
BOSTON, MASS 40 MI.  
SOUTH ATTLEBORO, MASS. 2.2 MI.  
530 00 FEET

71° 22' 30"  
41° 52' 30"

ATTLEBORO

25'

WOONSOCKET 12 MI.  
LONSDALE 2.6 MI.



RUMFORD 2 MI.  
BARRINGTON 11 MI.

280 000  
FEET

50'

TAUNTON, MASS. 16 MI.  
PLYMOUTH, MASS. 42 MI.

4 MI.  
I.S. 1

**GEOGRAPHICAL COORDINATES**  
Latitude: 41° 49' 29" N  
Longitude: 71° 24' 36" W