

PH005 2680

# 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
JAN 23 1975	

### 1. NAME

COMMON:  
**Providence City Hall**

AND/OR HISTORIC:

### 2. LOCATION

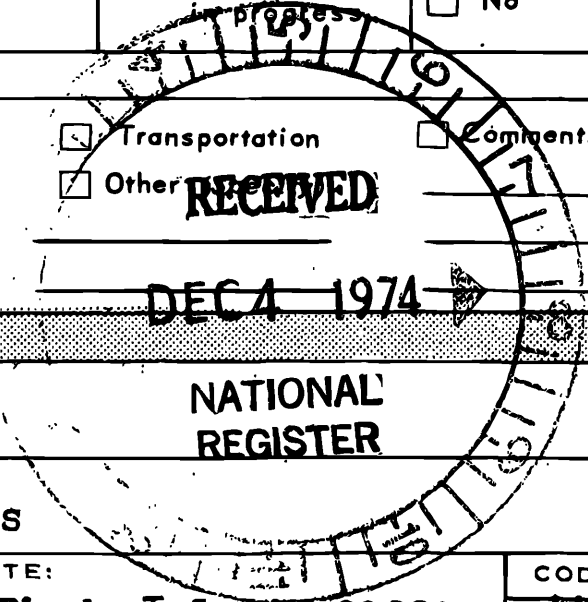
STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Dorrance and Washington Streets**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Providence**

STATE <b>Rhode Island, 02903</b>	CODE <b>44</b>	COUNTY: <b>Providence</b>	CODE <b>007</b>
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### 3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<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 <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> Comments



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

### 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
**City of Providence**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**City Hall, Washington and Dorrance Streets**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Providence**

STATE: <b>Rhode Island, 02903</b>	CODE <b>44</b>
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### 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**City Hall**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Dorrance and Washington Streets**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Providence**

STATE: <b>Rhode Island, 02903</b>	CODE <b>44</b>
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### 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Historic American Buildings Survey**

DATE OF SURVEY: **1962**     Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**Library of Congress**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Independence Avenue and 1st Street, S. E.**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Washington**

STATE: <b>District of Columbia</b>	CODE <b>11</b>
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STATE:

COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

**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	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(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 City Hall was constructed in 1875-1878 from the designs of Samuel F. J. Thayer, a Boston architect who won a competition entered by twenty or more. It is a large free-standing rectangular building, nine bays wide and thirteen bays deep, of iron and brick construction faced with granite, and it stands at the end of an open plaza in the city's downtown section. It is of three storeys above a high, full-storey, basement and has an additional storey and attic space contained within a high, angular mansard roof rising above a panelled eaves parapet. Like many other public buildings of the post-1850 period in this country and abroad, it was designed in the manner of the Louvre and Tuileries Palaces in Paris, which were being enlarged and further elaborated at this time (France's Second Empire). Official architecture thus inspired was characterised by tall and wide façades, conspicuously articulated, and by imposing interior spaces, liberally ornamented.

The main or entrance front faces east, and its chief feature is its centre pavilion surmounted by a high square dome of convex mansard form. The walls are constructed of smooth-faced ashlar above the high basement which is finished with horizontal rustication. The large, recessed, round-arched main entrance portal of the central east pavilion is en-framed by paired Tuscan columns on pedestals, carrying a flat entablature and forming an unpedimented aedicula. Leading up to this entrance from sidewalk level (or one might say flowing down to sidewalk level) is a perron whose curving sides, with panelled railings, widen with a flourish towards the bottom, where there are two "triumphal" columns on ornamental pedestals, intended as torchères. Unemphasised window openings flank the main entrance at both basement and first-storey levels. Surmounting the entrance is another aedicula with paired columns supporting a pediment which lets into the parapet banding the roof; this enframingent contains a two-storey round-headed window and is flanked by similar windows. Further above, beneath the bulging mansard dome, is a fourth or true attic storey with paired round-headed windows between pilasters (the centre pair was originally sheltered by a small pedimented portico). Finally, above an entablature, comes the dome with ornamental copper-work at its base and crest and with ornamental copper bull's-eye dormers. Other features of this façade are the groupings in the end pavilions of tall, tripartite windows, separated by columns, on the second floor, with bull's eye windows above in the third floor; further above, three-part dormers (a 1914 change from the original design) in the mansard break through the eaves parapet.

On all four sides the building is horizontally divided at basement, first-floor, second-floor and eaves levels by mouldings, belt courses and of course the main cornice. However, on its sides and rear the building is much plainer in composition and is given elaboration only at its corners, where the tall, tripartite window and column treatment used on the east front is repeated. These elevations otherwise have simple, regularly-spaced ranges of plain windows at each floor level and large, but plain, arched entrances centered at street level.

(See continuation sheet)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**3. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1875-1878**

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

Samuel F. J. Thayer, architect of the Providence City Hall, was a lifelong resident of Boston and of course knew well Bryant and Gilman's Boston City Hall of 1866, which "set off a nation-wide programme of public building in the Second Empire mode." To-day, few of these buildings remain: the old Boston City Hall, that of Philadelphia, the St. Louis Post Office, the Executive Office Building and the first Corcoran Gallery in Washington are the best known among the few survivors. As they had been doing for some time, Americans were still turning to Europe for artistic inspiration, and they were turning there for guidance in architectural taste during the years when Napoleon III was re-using and inflating French XVII-Century styles. At its dedication the Providence City Hall was lauded as an equal of the great civic buildings of "the continent," and an engraving of the Hôtel de Ville in Paris was included in the souvenir pamphlet.

From the first the Providence City Hall was thought of as a very important structure; much interest was expressed, even outside Providence. Competitors included Charles B. Atwood, Ware and Van Brunt, T. M. Clark, McKim and Mead. Both the Architectural Sketch Book and the American Architect and Building News published articles on the competition and on Thayer's winning design and his ideas for interior decoration. The Providence City Hall took place among the important buildings of its era; it holds place as an important relic of them.

Architecturally valuable in itself, the building is visually enhanced by its siting at one end of a long plaza, the only green and planted "park" in the city's downtown area. At the opposite end of this plaza, to the east, is located the later, handsome Federal Building (which about matches the City Hall in height and width of elevation); the spread-out complex of the railroad station closes the north side, while the south side is walled by tall modern business buildings. The area remains the core of governmental, commercial and financial activity. Thus, in design and in placement the City Hall is an architectural landmark of Providence and a sort of anchor which keeps coherently, in pleasing visual order, a very important downtown space. This

(See Continuation Sheet.)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

American Architect and Building News: Vol. 1, p. 99; Vol. 2, p. 376; Vol. 3, p. 110, Vol 4, p. 43. 1876-1878.  
Architectural Sketch Book (Boston, 1874), Vol. 1, pl. 23, 24.  
Cady, John Hutchins: The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence, 1636-1950 (Providence, Rhode Island, 1957), pp. 137, 149, 150, 218.  
The City: 1809-1908. An Architectural Tour in Providence, Rhode Island (Providence, Rhode Island, 1971), pp. 5-7.

19/299570/4632820  
 DIM REF  
 12-16-75 am

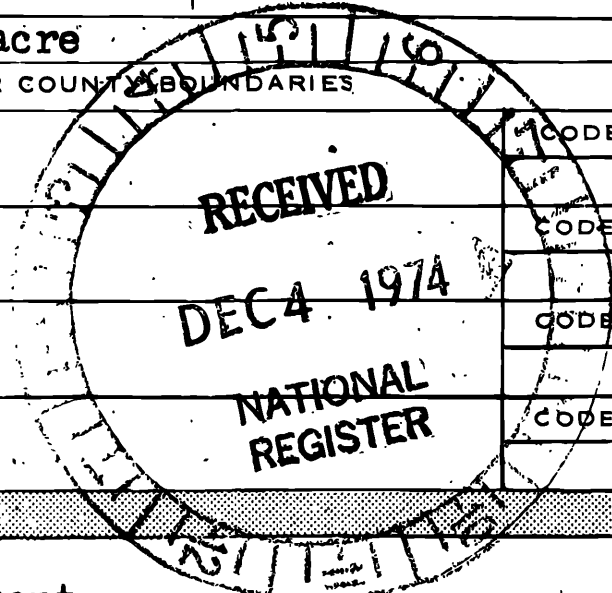
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	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	0 ' "	0 ' "		41 0 49 . 27 . N	71 0 24 . 49 . W	
NE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SW	0 ' "	0 ' "				

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
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:  
Alice H. R. Hauck, Richard B. Harrington, Consultants

ORGANIZATION: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission DATE: July 4, 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: Frank C. Williams

Title: State Historic Preservation Officer

Date: November 25, 1974

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

[Signature]  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 1/23/75

ATTEST:

[Signature]  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date: 1.23.75

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE Rhode Island	
COUNTY Providence	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	JAN 23 1975

(Number all entries)

7. Description

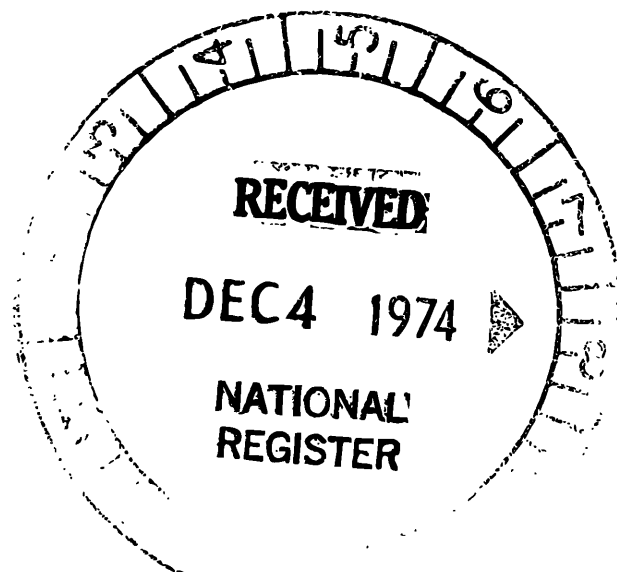
Entering from the east portal at first-floor level, one passes through a monumental barrel-vaulted hall and sees ahead the dramatic upward sweep of the great marble staircase, which rises in one long run to a landing where it divides into two shorter lateral runs terminating at the second floor. Interior accommodation is laid out around the stair court, which rises sixty feet to a barrel-vaulted skylight. Corridors, or galleries, twelve feet wide, extend entirely around this court on all floors; all of the principal rooms open off these galleries. On the first floor, the mayor's suite is at the north-east and the offices of other important officials at the south-east. On the second floor, the two-storey-high council chamber occupies a large central space at the front of the building.

Much of the original interior decoration remains, including panelled and incised wainscoting of light-coloured wood, etched glass lights in many doors, polished granite columns, cast-iron stair balusters carrying a brass hand-rail. The walls of the mayor's office are of plaster relief in an intricate vine pattern somewhat resembling a pressed-leather design, and the plaster ceiling there has a more open floral pattern, also in relief.

The council chamber is decorated with the same light-coloured wood wainscoting as elsewhere, and paired pilasters with gold stencilling at top and bottom are spaced along the walls. Above the main entrance a spectators' balcony is supported on two pairs of Ionic columns. The ceiling is decorated with concentric rings of gold stencilling. Trim is simpler in the numerous offices, meeting-rooms etc. occupying the remainder of the building.

8. Significance.

remarkably well-built and well-preserved building is a fine and vigorous monument to the XIX-Century flourishing of its city and to the dominant architectural style of its era, both in this country and elsewhere. By itself it is worthy of preservation, and the disappearance of so many companions of its era seconds the motion for preservation.



RECEIVED  
DEC 4 1974  
WOODS HOLE  
SDALE

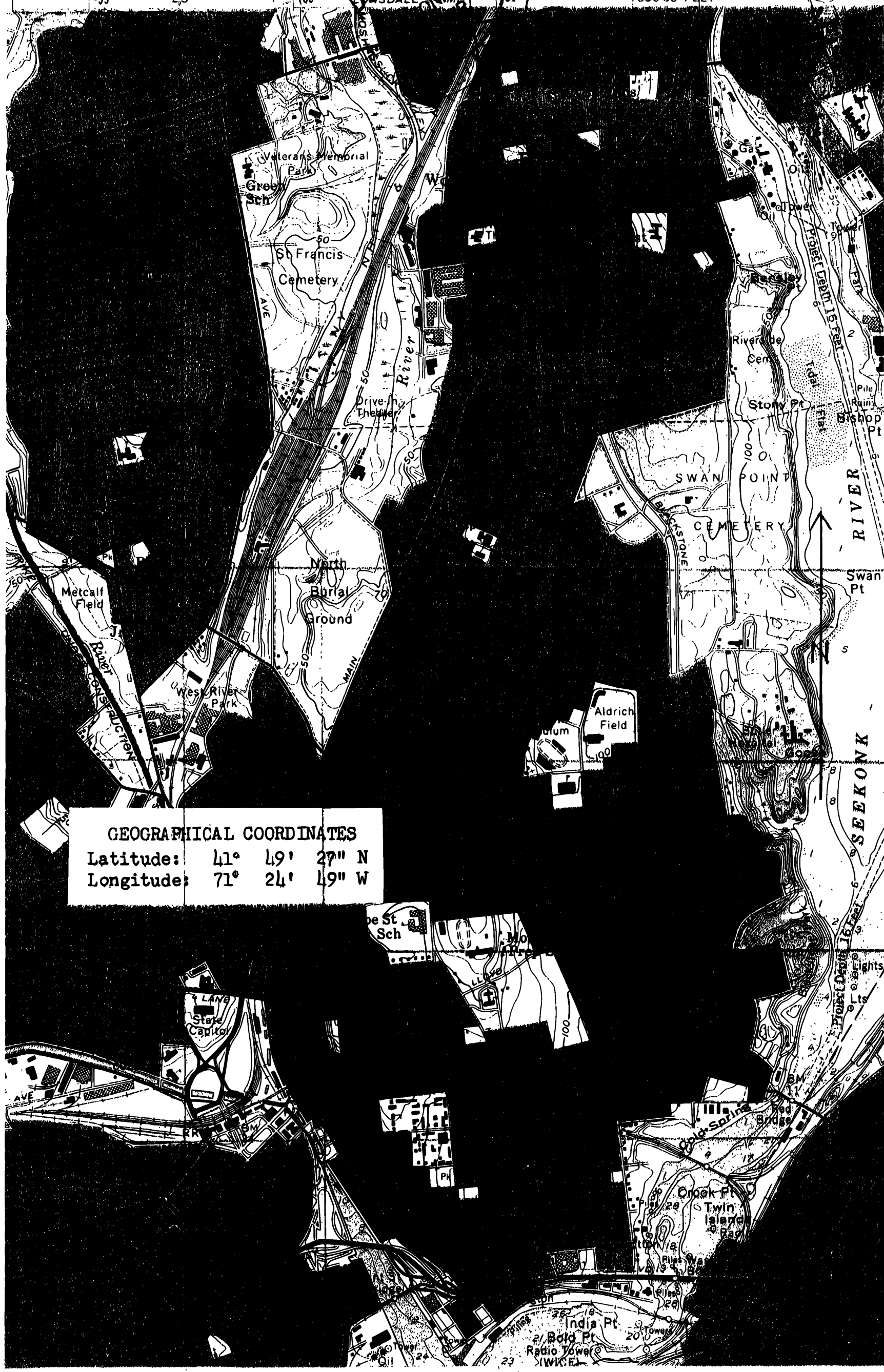
PROVIDENCE QUADRANGLE  
RHODE ISLAND  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

BOSTON, MASS 40 MI.  
SOUTH ATTLEBORO, MASS. 2.2 MI.  
53000 FEET

71° 22' 30"

41° 52' 30"

6767 IV NE  
ATTLEBORO



4638  
RUMFORD 2 MI.  
BARRINGTON 11 MI.

4636  
280 000  
FEET

4635

4634

4632  
TAUNTON, MASS. 16 MI.  
PLYMOUTH, MASS. 42 MI.

4632  
RUMFORD 3.4 MI.  
PLYMOUTH, MASS. 8.9 MI. TO U.S. 1

GEOGRAPHICAL COORDINATES  
Latitude: 41° 49' 27" N  
Longitude: 71° 24' 49" W