Form 10-300 (Rev. 6-72)

## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

#### Rhode Island

COUNTY:

_( N.	NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM ATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) (Type all entries complete applicable sections)						Providence County  FOR NPS USE ONLY ENTRY DATE						
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The John Brown House is a large, square, three-story building of brick with four exterior chimneys and a central entrance in accord with colonial tradition. It has a hipped roof with a flat deck, finished with balustrades at both cornice and deck levels. The lower balustrade is composed of rows of turned balusters alternating with plain block panels and ornamented with flame finals. The balustrade above is of Chinese Chippendale design. The third-story windows are characteristically smaller than those of the lower stories, and are set close under the classic cornice. The facade is accented by a slightly projecting central pavilion crowned by its own pediment. A one story porch with sandstone Doric columns protects the entrance and a Palladian window under a brick relieving arch is used for the ornamental window above. Sandstone is also used for all of the window lintels.

A pedimented side entrance (now closed) on the west side opens onto a balustraded terrace which continues to the north into a pergola of Doric columns. The later rear additions harmonize perfectly with the original block and are unseen from the front facade. There is a dormer with broken scroll pediment on the west end east side. These are set back so they are not readily noticeable to disturb the flat roof profile.

The interior of the house is laid in the traditional Georgian plan of central stairhall with two rooms on either side. The grand staircase, rising in two flights in the traditional place at the rear of the hall, has beautifully twisted balusters and a gracefully curved railing finished in a spiral, turned around the twisted newels. They were considered almost essential for fine mansions in the Colonies during the early to mid-eighteenth century, and Newport account books show that Job Townsend and other cabinetmakers were often commissioned to make balusters. The rest of the boldly scaled, correct and richly used architectural detail comes from the pages of Gibbs, Swan, Langley, Salmon and other eighteenth-century architectural books.

A pair of engaged Ionic columns, placed opposite each other on either side of the hall form pedestals for architectural busts designed for the house. Paired doorways with broken scroll pediments above a modillioned and dentiled cornice and a full cornice ornamented with dentiles, modillions and a swag frieze fill the hall. The walls in all the rooms, no longer paneled or wainscoted, have heavily molded base and chair rails. The walls themselves were wallpapered.

The southeast parlor overmantel has double engaged mahogany pilasters supporting a broken pediment with polychrome bust. The mantel itself has a carved cushioned frieze supported by mahogany Ionic columns. Column pedestals, supporting architectural busts like those in the hallway, are used to frame the arched doorway from this room into the northeast parlor. These and the hall busts were ordered from

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	e and Known) 1786-88	3	
AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Che	ck One or More as Appropri	ate)	
Abor iginal	☐ Education	☐ Political	Urban Planning
☐ Prehistoric	Engineering	Religion/Phi-	Other (Specify)
☐ Historic	Industry	losophy	
☐ Agriculture	Invention	Science	
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Commerce	Literature	itarian	
Communications	■ Military	☐ Theater	
☐ Conservation	Music	Transportation	
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE			

The John Brown House, Providence, Rhode Island, is a magnificent example of a Late Georgian mansion. Built in 1786-38, at the end of the colonial era, the exterior design is conservative. The three story brownstone trimmed brick mansion, with its hipped and balustraded roof and central projecting pedimented entry pavilion resembles such pre-Revolutionary American houses as the Chase-Lloyd house in Annapolis. In Providence, however, it was the first of a number of similar and elaborate houses constructed during the period of expansion following the Revolutionary War. Pedimented pavilions, balustraded entrance porches and Palladian doors and windows soon appeared in other houses. The interior of the house is laid out on the classic eighteenth-century plan composed of a broad central hallway, flanked by paired rooms. The major importance of the house is found in the richness of the carving and other interior appointments, including imported french wallpaper.

#### HISTORY

John Brown was the youngest of three sons of a wealthy prominent Providence family of merchants. In 1771 he left the family firm, probably as a result of his interest in the slave trade, which was strongly opposed by his older brother Moses, a Quaker. One of his ships, the General Washington, was the first Rhode Island vessel to the East Indies and one of the first American ships to sail on Chinese waters.

Brown was an ardent patriot, and was deeply implicated in the Gaspee affair of 1772, a harbinger of the American Revolution. Brown ships supplied gunpowder and war materials for American forces and after the war he was one of the major proponents for bringing a reluctant Rhode Island into the union of states.

When he built his new house on the hill he began the development of open land along southern Benefit Street, which today provides Providence with some of its most beautiful historic houses.

The John Brown House was designed by his brother, Joseph, an amateur architect, also responsible for the First Baptist Meeting House in Providence, another national historic landmark. The house took two years

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Form 10-300a (July 1969)

### UNIT STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(Continuation Sheet)

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#### 7. Description second page

France especially for the house. The busts of Summer and Winter on the entrance gateposts are supposed to have been taken from Versailles during the French Revolution.

The northeast drawing room has semicircular moided arches framing the rectangular windows. The mantel shelf is supported by heavy consoles and has a robust garland frieze. The overmantel is framed by Ionic pilasters which support a broken scrolled pediment with another polychromed bust in the opening.

The southwest chamber mantel has a pediment supported by brackets, and the eared overmantel has scroll ends which rest on the shelf. The frieze is carved with fruit and garland swags.

Eleven of the twelve mantelpieces are original. The two small polychromed busts owned by descendants of the family, one of Milton and one of Athena, were returned, to again become part of the overmantel pediments in the main east drawing rooms. A small squirrel now in the pediment in the southwest parlor is a copy of the original.

Panels from eleven of the wallpapers were saved by family members who lived in the house until 1850 and the Rhode Island Historical Society owns five of them. Light in scale, bright in color, and composed of repeating patterns of classic figures, swags, garlands, urns, rinceau and buds, they were the latest thing from France, thus forming a link between the mid-Georgian character of the architectural detail and the late Chippendale and Hepplewhite furniture.

Although not part of the original building, a lavishly ornamented bathroom with ceramic wall murals, decorative tiles, and stained glass contribute to the overall impression of wealth and opulance.

In 1901 Marsden Perry substituted the present front doorway with its leaded glass fanlight for the old Palladian entry and replaced the door, itself a Victorian replacement, with a handsome mahogany eight-paneled door of proper period design. He also installed ornamental plaster ceilings in the east drawing rooms, and made extensive changes in the northwest room, used most recently for the offices of the Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission. The interiors have undergone extensive paint analysis and the rooms have been done in gray greens, olive greens, gray, gray blues, and buff tans with some baseboards and windowseats stained in dark mahogany red.

#### BOUNDARY

The boundary is drawn to include the John Brown House and all property connected with it beginning at the northwest corner at the intersection of Charlesfield Street and Benefit Street, continuing along the south

Form 10-300a (July 1969)

### UNIT STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

### NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

#### **INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(Continuation Sheet)

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(Number all entries)

7. Description third page

curb of Charlesfield Street in an easterly direction to the property line of the residence of the Episcopal Bishop, then following that property line south, east and south again to Power Street, then west along the north curb of Power Street to Benefit Street, then north along the east curb of Benefit Street to the point of beginning as shown on **the** sketch map.

Form 10-300a (July 1969)

### UNIT STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

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(NATIONAL HISTORIC

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance second page

to build, 1786-88. There were originally four outbuildings, a coach house, kitchen, stable, and wood house with bathing house. The first mention of an addition, an ell one story high is noted in an 1841 insurance policy. Sometime between 1860 and 1875, this addition was enlarged and the original round headed windows of the rear wall were made into openings into the ell. Marsden Perry, who bought the house in 1901, substituted the present front doorway and installed ornamental plaster ceilings in the east drawing rooms.

In 1936, John Nicholas Brown bought the building from Perry's estate and donated it to the Rhode Island Historical Society in 1942. The building has been undergoing gradual restoration of the interior and has just been renovated on the exterior. It is used as the offices of the Rhode Island Historical Society which also operates it as a house museum.

