

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

Form 10-300  
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

(NATIONAL HISTORIC INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM  
LANDMARKS)

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Rhode Island
COUNTY: Newport
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

1. NAME

COMMON: Old Colony House
AND/OR HISTORIC: Old State House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: Washington Square and Court House Street			
CITY OR TOWN: Newport		CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:	
STATE Rhode Island	CODE 44	COUNTY: Newport	CODE 005

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 type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" 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)	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: State of Rhode Island, Department of Public Buildings
STREET AND NUMBER: State House
CITY OR TOWN: Providence
STATE: Rhode Island
CODE 44

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Newport County Courthouse
STREET AND NUMBER: Washington Square
CITY OR TOWN: Newport
STATE: Rhode Island
CODE 44

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Building Survey
DATE OF SURVEY: 1937, 1970 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Library of Congress, Division of Prints and Photographs
STREET AND NUMBER:
CITY OR TOWN: Washington
STATE: D.C.
CODE 11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Rhode Island  
COUNTY: Newport  
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

Following the specifications of the General Assembly, Richard Munday, in 1739, designed a new Colony House for Newport, Rhode Island. He constructed it of brick, laid in Flemish bond, with a seven-bay front and a three-bay side, with two stories and a full attic, elevated on a basement of drafted granite masonry. The gabled roof, cut off to form a flat deck at its peak, was surmounted by a two-story octagonal cupola.

The walls are of red brick with rusticated sandstone trim which surrounds the windows and forms quoins on the corners and a belt course between the stories of three courses of stone. Rusticated segmental arches, with prominent keystones encase the wooden window casings which are curved to fit these stone arches. The wooden cornices over the dormer windows form similar segmental arches.

The central section of the building is accented by a cupola, segmental headed dormers, a truncated gable and a balcony. The main entrance design is constructed of wood, painted white, and rises two stories with a balcony on the second floor. Approached by a flight of granite stairs, the main door is flanked by Corinthian pilasters. The balcony, directly above, is the focal point of the building, and since colonial times has been the stage for ceremonies and speeches by the most prominent visitors to the city. The balcony is surrounded by a Chippendale balustrade and elegantly finished by a broken segmental pediment with elaborately carved foliage ends on either side of a fine gilded pineapple finial.

The roof is cut flat at the peak to make a deck with the cupola at the center. Above the main entrance is a truncated pediment which contains an octagonal clock, with a round window on either side. These are all trimmed in sandstone also. Richard Munday left his personal trademark, the Union Jack, on the Colony House, worked into the paneling design on the underside of the balcony.

The interior, which was much altered during the 19th century, was partially restored in 1917 by Norman M. Isham. At this time the Great Hall, which occupies the entire first floor, was cleared of many partitions and now it is again a fine open room with a single row of square Doric columns, set on high pedestals and finished by entablatures. These central columns were originally unfinished timber poles and were cased in paneling probably during repairs made in 1784. The original floor in the Great Hall, made of heavy timbers of up to twenty-three and one-half inches in width, contrasts with the elegant paneling and columns of the post-war period.

Upstairs Munday designed three rooms, the Council Chamber, the Middle Room, and the Chamber of Deputies. However these rooms have not been restored to the original design. Today there are two rooms, one richly paneled and decorated with Corinthian pilasters and elegant moldings, the other a courtroom, with simple benches and chairs, intact from the early 19th century period, which was the chamber for the General Assembly and later courts.

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

## 8. 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) 1739-1800

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education           | <input checked="" 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           | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian  | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture        | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater              | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature          | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation       | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            | <input type="checkbox"/> Music               |   |  |

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old State House, erected in 1739-41 in Newport, Rhode Island, is probably the finest and least altered example of Early Georgian public building architecture in the United States. Designed and constructed by Richard Munday, a master carpenter of Newport, the Old State House is a fine public building of colonial America, possessing both historical and architectural distinction. According to Hugh Morrison, it is "a worthy rival, among civic buildings, of Boston's Town-House and the Philadelphia State House."<sup>1</sup>

The building, popularly known as the Old Colony House, was built to house the General Assembly of the Colony of Rhode Island, but served also as a center for public meetings and religious and social functions. As Newport's most prominent public building during colonial and Revolutionary times, it was associated with many of the most important events which took place in Newport, a most influential city and strategic port in 18th century America.

Richard Munday, one of the first recorded architect-builders in the colonies during the first half of the 18th century, distinguished the Colony House by constructing it of brick, in a city of wooden structures, and it was one of only six brick buildings in Newport at the beginning of the Revolution. Munday's use of brick and sandstone masonry was unusually luxurious and according to William Pierson, it "introduced into America certain Baroque qualities of texture and color that were unmatched in any other colonial work."<sup>2</sup>

The General Assembly voted that a new Colony House be constructed to replace the earlier one built in 1687, and specified that it was to be of brick, "consisting of 80 feet in length and 40 feet in breadth and 30 feet stud, the length thereof to stand near or quite north and south." Colonial Newport's most imposing public building, the Old State House was situated on a rise, with a mile-long vista down Queen Street to Long Wharf.

1

Hugh Morrison, Early American Architecture, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 444.

2 William H. Pierson, Jr., American Buildings and Their Architects, Colonial and Neoclassical Styles, Vol. I. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970), p. 109.

(continued)

# 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Downing, Antoinette F. and Scully, Vincent J., Jr., The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island. Cambridge, Massachusetts Harvard University Press, 1952.

Morrison, Hugh, Early American Architecture From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Pierson, William H., Jr., American Buildings and Their Architects, Colonial and Neoclassical Styles, Vol. I, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970.

# 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			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
NW	° ' "	° ' "	°	'	"
NE	° ' "	° ' "	°	'	"
SE	° ' "	° ' "	°	'	"
SW	° ' "	° ' "	°	'	"

UTM 19.306890.4595620

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 0.14

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

# 11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Blanche Higgins Schroer, Historian, Landmark Review Project;  
Charles Shedd, 1960; Charles Snell, 1967.

ORGANIZATION: Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service DATE: Sept 25, 1974

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L Street NW

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: D.C. CODE: 11

# 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 ☐

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) Landmark Designated: Oct 9, 1940 date

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) Boundary Certified: 6-23-75 date

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST: Chief, Hist. & Arch. Surveys

Boundary Affirmed: 7/2/75 date

Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE Rhode Island	
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(Number all entries)

6. Representation in existing surveys: (1) Old Colony House

Historic American Buildings Survey:

2 exterior photographs (1937, 1971).

7 interior photographs (1970).

Photo copy of a published exterior view (1936).

Photocopies of 4 published exterior views (1917).

Photocopies of 7 published exterior views (1917, poor quality).

6 Photocopies of published measured drawings of plans (1917).

7 Photocopies of published measured drawings of interior details (1894).

6 Photogrammetric stereopairs (1970); HABS Form (1952).

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

(Continuation Sheet)

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(Number all entries)

7. Description: (1) Old Colony House

After being used by both British and French troops during the Revolution, the State House was so badly damaged that the Courts and Assembly had to move to the synagogue. In 1784 the committee on repairs recommended improvements and ordered wainscotting and painting the wood, for the first time, "a light stone colour." They also ordered the north room on the second story to be enlarged by "removing the Partition to the First Beam South of the Present Partition."

That year Jim Moody, a Newport craftsman, carved the State House's beautiful pineapple for the balcony pediment. Receipts from 1784 show that a quantity of gold leaf was purchased, probably for the cupola dome and to gild the pineapple.

Today the State of Rhode Island has restored the building to the late 18th century--early 19th century appearance and have opened it to the public. Its halls are sparsely furnished but well maintained. It houses a Gilbert Stuart painting of George Washington, some valuable Newport furniture from the colonial period, a scale model of Independence Hall, executed in fine detail for the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial, and all the original furnishings of the circa 1800 General Assembly room, which were used continuously by the Assembly and the Courts until 1926.

Boundaries

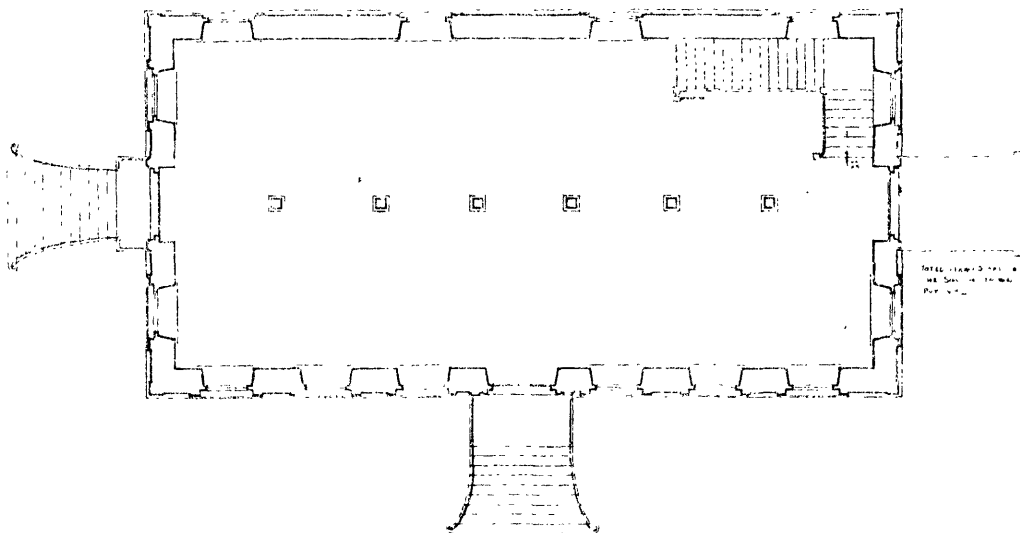
The Old State House is situated on a hill, overlooking what used to be the wharf area of Newport. The building is approximately 85 by 45 feet and is immediately encircled on every side by a sidewalk, and then a city street; on the southwest by Washington Square, and the northwest by Washington Square, on the northeast by Court House Street and on the southeast by Park Street.

STATE Rhode Island	
COUNTY Newport	
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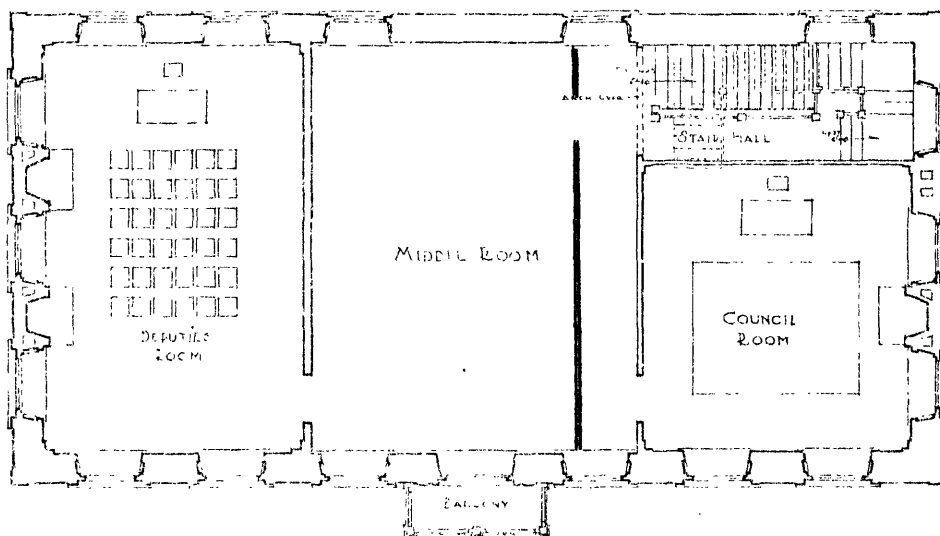
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**((NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS))**  
**INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)



FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
ORIGINAL PLAN  
1733-1743



SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
ORIGINAL PLAN  
1743-1773

— the lines of the 1784 alteration

Published in Downing and Scully, The Architectural Heritage of  
Newport, Rhode Island, plates 67 and 68.

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(Continuation Sheet)

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(Number all entries)

8. Significance: (1) Old Colony House

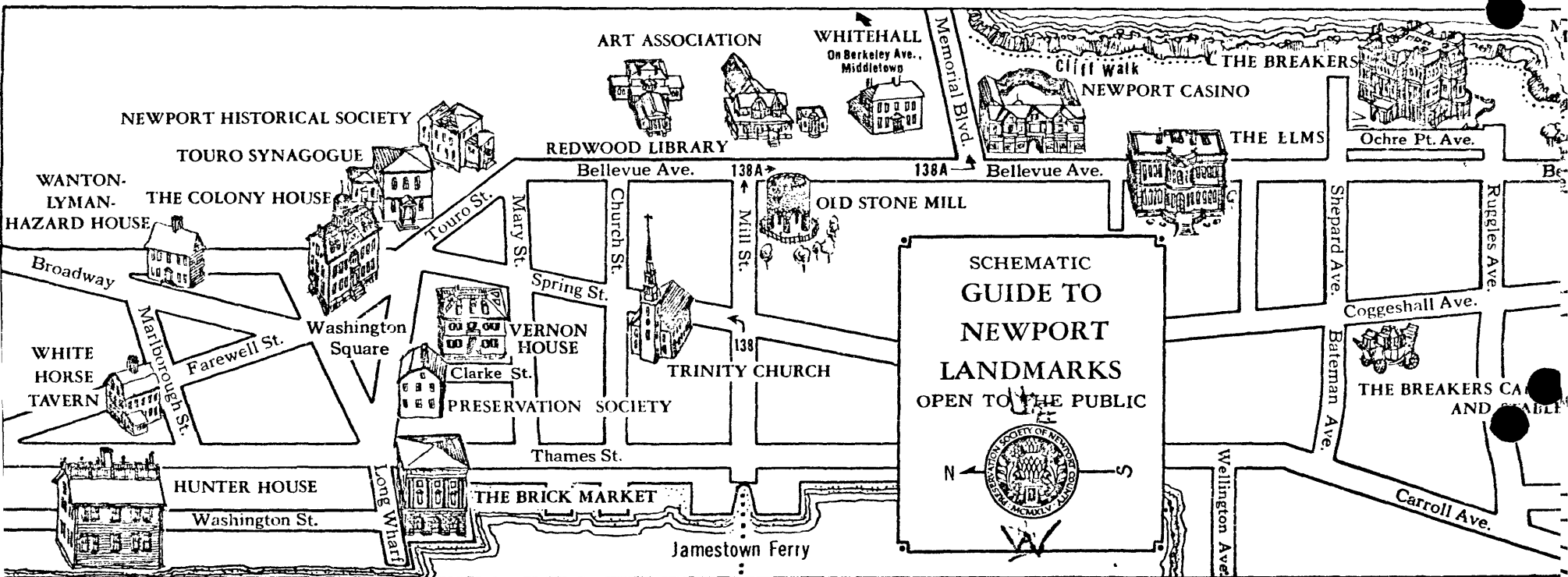
From the balcony, the death of King George II and the succession of King George III were announced to the city. In 1766, Newporters gathered in front of the Colony House to hear of the repeal of the Stamp Act. From the balcony Major John Handy read the Declaration of Independence on July 20, 1776. It was the scene of the trial for the men accused of burning the British vessel, Gaspee.

During the War for Independence the building was used first as a barracks by the British occupying force, and later as a hospital by the French troops. When General George Washington came to visit his French allies, the French General, Count de Rochambeau, entertained him at a banquet in the Great Hall of the Colony House.

A Rhode Island convention met here in 1790 to ratify the Constitution of the United States. That same year, President George Washington was again the guest of honor at a gala reception here. Dr. William Hunter, in 1756, gave the first lecture on medicine and surgery delivered in the colonies in the Colony House. Thomas W. Dorr, in 1842, was tried for treason in the court room upstairs, and sentenced to life imprisonment as the instigator of the Dorr Rebellion.

From 1776 to 1900 this building served as one of the two Rhode Island State Houses, as it was the custom for the General Assembly to meet in Providence in January and in Newport in May. The building was the County Court House from 1900 until 1926; the District Court held its session on the first floor, the Superior Court on the second.





old state (colony) House

