

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JAN 26 1984  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Charles Dowler House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 581 Smith Street

not for publication

city, town Providence

N.A. vicinity of Honorable Claudine Schneider  
congressional district #2

state Rhode Island

code 44

county Providence

code 007

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N.A. in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. and Mrs. John R. Watkins

street & number 581 Smith Street

city, town Providence

N.A. vicinity of

state Rhode Island

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Providence City Hall

street & number 25 Dorrance Street

city, town Providence

state Rhode Island

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Smith Hill, Providence

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date June 1980

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission  
150 Benefit Street

city, town Providence

state Rhode Island

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## 7. Description

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**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

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**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Dowler House (1872) is an elaborately decked out, asymmetrical, T-plan, mansard-roof cottage prominently sited at the corner of Smith Street and Oakland Avenue. Exterior articulation includes fish-scale slate shingling in the roof, incised detailing on the dormer windows, an oculus window in the mansard over the entrance, a narrow front porch with Corinthian columns in the nook of the "T," prominent bay windows on the facade and west side. Original porch railings have been replaced.

The interior has been somewhat altered, but the principal front rooms remain intact. (See plan.) The four-panel, double-leaf entrance with etched glass gives access to the central stairhall; here, the curving staircase, with a massive newel post, rises to the second floor. To either side of the hall is a parlor. The southeast parlor has a wooden mantel centered on the north wall; its floriated-relief ceiling has an elaborate molded plaster cornice and, in the center, a framed tapestry of cherubs. The southwest parlor has a wide plaster cornice ornamented with floral motifs and high-relief busts of cherubs' heads; in the center of the ceiling is a large, multifoil, gilt panel with bucolic scenes painted in each of the foils. The bedrooms on the northeast side of the house are simply finished, and the kitchen, at the rear of the front stairs, has been recently refinished.

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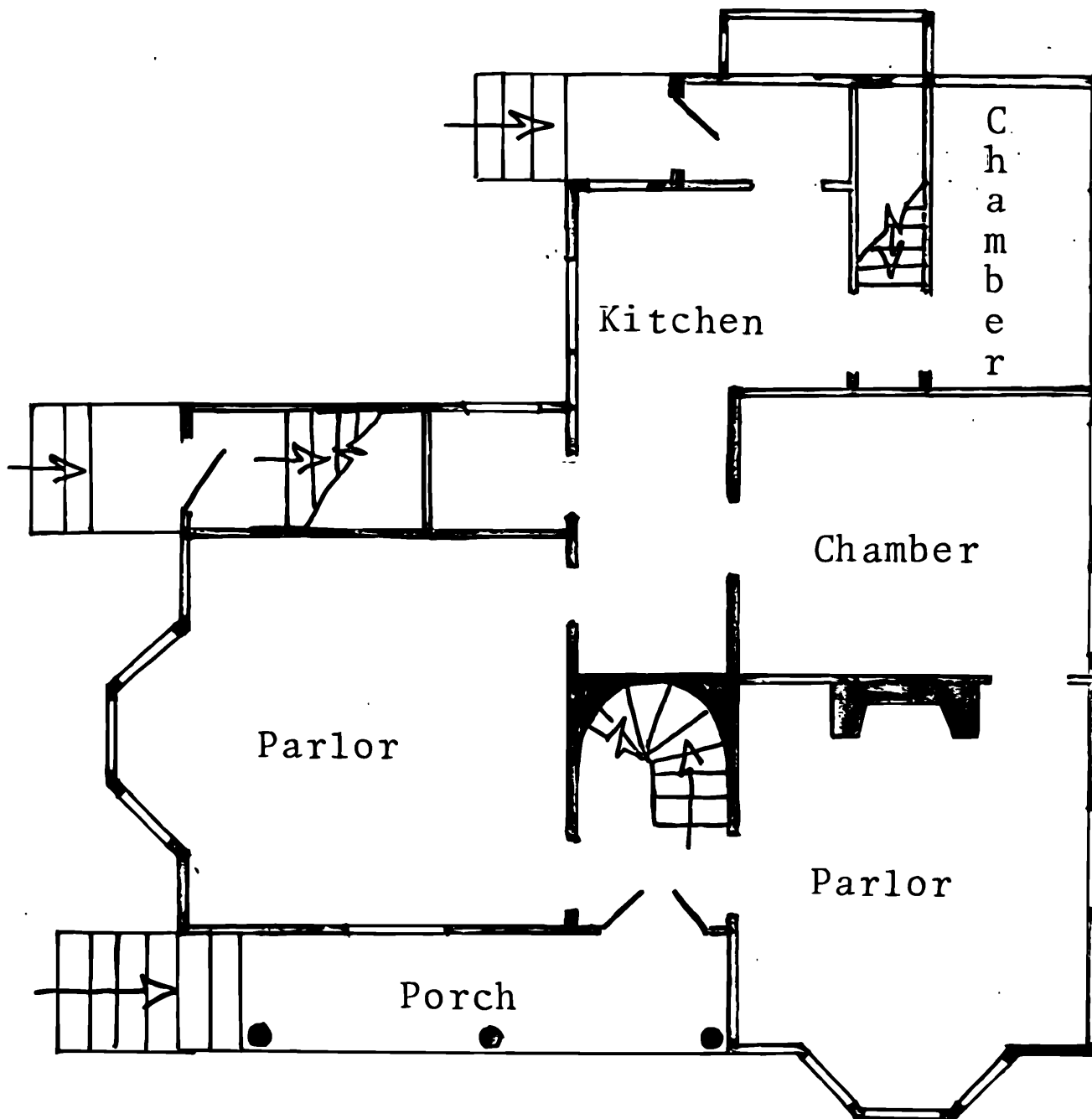
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Continuation sheet 1

Item number 7

Page 1



Charles Dowler House  
581 Smith Street  
Providence, Rhode Island

Sketch Plan--Not to Scale

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates      1872      Builder/Architect      —

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The longtime home of local artist Charles Dowler, this house is significant to the history of architecture and art. It is a fine, well-preserved cottage of the early 1870s. Its association with and (presumed) decoration by Dowler are important in and of themselves.

Dowler's house typifies the cottage ornée popular in the 1860s and 1870s. Such elaborate little houses were, as the name suggests, inspired by French examples, notably the fanciful vacation houses built particularly around France's popular summer watering spots on the coast of Normandy. The cottage ornée was predictably popular in Newport during this era, but fewer examples are found in Providence, whose increasingly urban character was less appropriate an atmosphere for such preciousness. Dowler's cottage, located near other, earlier country retreats (most now gone, save for the Bailey and Bradley estates on Eaton Street, both entered on the National Register) was built on land formerly part of the Eaton family's estate, Oaklands. The original rural, wooded setting, long since disappeared, must have amplified the picturesque, holiday-making quality of Dowler's rural residence.

Dowler (1841-1941) was born in Birmingham, England, and came to this country in 1863 as a gunsmith to make munitions for the Union effort in the Civil War. After the war, Dowler turned to sculpture, designing the Collyer Monument in Pawtucket (nominated to the National Register) and the John Sparks Monument in Bristol. He exhibited his work at the Providence Art Club--of which he was a member--in 1880. By the end of the century, Dowler listed himself in Providence directories as a designer of interior and exterior decorations, models for monumental work, and patterns for jewelry. After his retirement in 1919, he took up painting, working in this house until his death. Dowler was part of Providence's thriving late nineteenth-century artistic community, which included a broad range of talent from craftsmen, at one end, to the painters and sculptors at the other, who founded the Art Club and taught at Rhode Island School of Design. Dowler's career is telling--if modest--and his emergence from industry to monumental and decorative sculpture and finally to painting is pertinent to the broad picture of the artist's role in society. Dowler enjoyed some repute among his contemporaries, and his work includes this remarkably intact documentation of his own realization of the artist's cottage.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

"Smith Hill, Providence," Statewide Historical Preservation Report, P-P-4. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, June, 1980.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Providence

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A	<u>19</u>	<u>298160</u>	<u>4634200</u>	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary for the Charles Dowler House coincides with that of Providence Tax Assessor's Plat 69, Lot 1. This boundary represents the limit of land historically associated with the property.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title William McKenzie Woodward, Principal Historic Preservation Planner

organization R.I. Historical Preservation Comm. date November 15, 1983

street & number 150 Benefit Street

telephone 401-277-2678

city or town Providence

state Rhode Island 02903

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Frank C. Williamson*

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date January 5, 1984

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the  
National Register

date

2/23/84

*John A. Sweeney*  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration