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The Landmarks of Federal Hill: "The Development of Federal Hill"

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The Broadway-Armory Historic District is situated on a hill to the west of downtown Providence. It is a large "L"-shaped area, it takes as its modern opening the wide thoroughfare of Broadway, running east and west for thirteen blocks near its northern boundary, and the old Dexter Training Grounds, a large open space lying toward the southern border at right angles to Broadway and itself dominated by the Cranston Street Armory.

Westminster Street cuts the historic patterns of the Broadway Historic District was established by 1835, and the present character of the District dates primarily from its later growth during the nineteenth century as an upper-middle-class suburban neighborhood. While this section was still all farmland, in the eighteenth century, a system of turnpikes provided the first force for settlement of the District. Originally the agricultural lands of Providence were known simply as the West Side, from one of these farms, north of Cranston Street near Messer Street, was located the Asa Messer Mansion; one of the City's most extravagant Federal Houses, it was demolished in the 1890's. This property was the last of the land estates in the District to give way to development. Another of these farms, that of Ebenezer Knight Dexter, was given to the City at the beginning of the nineteenth century and named the Dexter Training Grounds; stretching north from Cranston Street nearly to Westminster Street, it is today the only open space in the Historic District.

A small hamlet dating from 1772 was once located in the neighborhood, just north of Westminster Street, near what later became Carpenter Street. This hamlet has since disappeared, and only a few houses of the Federal period remain in the entire district. The two best preserved were the G.A. Cole House at 1208 Westminster Street and the other was the S.A. Winsor House at 150-152 Courtland Street, also from the same period of 1820's which represented another type then common in the city; a Federal double house. By 1835, extensive urbanization of the area was developing, with concentration between Broadway and Cranston Street. The basic street or pattern, by then was largely established, and the exception of Carpenter Street the houses were not closely spaced. This street was settled mostly by the city's fast growing middle class, it had become by mid-century, one of Providence's most densely populated streets. Today, Carpenter Street still holds an almost solid row of Greek Revival and Early Victorian two-and-a-half story "gable enders", a style largely the result of the increasing demand for street frontage.

At 72 and 78 Marshall Street, just north of Westminster Street, near what today became Carpenter Street, was located the Asa Messer Mansion; one of Providence's mercantile and professional "nouveaux-riche".

(To be Continued)

Bibliography

- United States Department of Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Nomination Form, Rhode Island Historical Commission.
- Charles Wyman Hopkins - The house Lots of the Early Settlers of the Providence Plantations with Notes and Plate, Providence, 1886.
463 Broadway - The “John E. Thorp House” built around 1875, a 2 1/2 story Victorian Queen Ann dwelling, with a complex hip roof with projecting cross. Note the beautiful scroll work in the center gable.

72 Marshall Street - This home was built about 1830 and is a beautiful 2 1/2 story Greek Revival home with gable roof and heavy return eve mouldings set longside to the street. Please note the one-story portico with four head doric columns centered on the main entrance.

477 Broadway - This home built around 1895 is a beautiful 2 1/2 story late Victorian Queen Ann with complex roof and corner turret. Please note the two tall Elizabethan brick chimneys.

72 Marshall Street - This home was built about 1830 and is a beautiful 2 1/2 story Greek Revival home with gable roof and heavy return eve mouldings set longside to the street. Please note the one-story portico with four head doric columns centered on the main entrance.

529 Broadway - A gorgeous residence built around 1896. A 2 story late Victorian Queen Ann house with a hip roof and projecting interesting corner bay. The facade contains a gabled central element with a one story Italianate portico, beautiful double entry doors and transom lights with a modified Palladian window above. This was the home of Dr. Verdi for many years.

466 Broadway - The “Harriet E. Fuller House” built around 1870. This is a 2 1/4 story symmetrical late Victorian house with a hip roof with brackets and dentils. Details include central Italianate portico double doors and dentil cornices over windows, with an excellent iron and granite fence which still exists today. Mrs. Fuller owned a boarding house at 249 Westminster Street in 1875.

514 Broadway - The “George W. Prentice House” built around 1880. A magnificent 2 1/4 story Victorian Chateau with low flaring hip roof with gables and a six stage corner tower with a pagoda roof. The very elaborate detailing combines Italianate and second Empire style which includes brackets and bold ornaments. It was built for the President of Heaton Button Fastener Co., at 223 Eddy Street. Later it became the homestead of the Melaragno family.