



PROVIDENCE CITY HALL

Its History,
Its Mayors and a
Self-guided Tour



Providence is a city that offers a diverse and rich historical experience. A city where the past remains preserved in our architectural artistry throughout all of our 25 unique neighborhoods. A city that embraces our founding qualities not only through inclusive and welcoming policies, but also every day in Providence City Hall where many city services are delivered directly.

Designed by Samuel J.F. Thayer and built in 1878, this magnificent building is the cornerstone of city government where 28 of Providence's 38 mayors have presided and several American presidents have come to address thousands of residents upon its grand entrance steps.

Our City Hall's astonishing appearance is built upon distinctive characteristics, such as its construction of iron and brick and a façade of Westerly granite, granting it an invaluable artistic value and historic legacy. Through continued commitment from residents and city stakeholders, this nearly one and a half century-old building has been maintained and preserved earning Providence City Hall a seat in the National Register of Historic Places.

By paying close attention to the details you come across in this grand space, I hope that your visit to Providence City Hall will give you a glimpse into Rhode Island's Creative Capital.

Thank you for visiting us and welcome to Providence City Hall.

Enjoy your tour,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Elorza'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jorge O. Elorza
Mayor of Providence

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Providence City Hall: Its History, Its Mayors and a Self-Guided Tour was originally compiled by student interns in 2000 during the Cianci Administration under the direction of DeWolf Fulton. The students were: Andrew Goltra, Caroline Grogan, Lindsay Shinn, Cedar McGrathSolomon, Maguerite Dunbar, Meghan McHale and Rebecca Hartshorn, with assistance from photographer Nanette Goodridge, archivist John Myers, Brown University faculty member Dietrich Neumann, and Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission specialist Mack Woodward. It has been updated in 2019 during Mayor Jorge Elorza's administration.

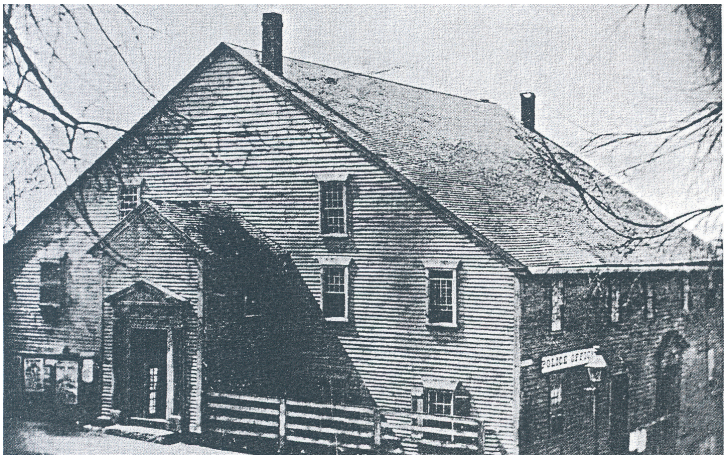
A Brief History of Providence City Hall

During the first two hundred years after the founding of Providence by Roger Williams in 1636, local government functioned informally. One of the shortcomings was the lack of a central facility where town business could be transacted in an efficient, orderly manner.

It was said that early town meetings were held under a sycamore tree near the present corner of College and South Main streets. Sometime later, the Quaker Meeting House or private homes were used for meetings. In 1731 a two-story town meeting house was built on Meeting Street, just off Benefit Street, but in December 1758 it burned to the ground.

The first “city hall” dates from 1773 when the town constructed a two-story brick market house. The street level contained market stalls for merchants and the second floor town offices. In 1797, a 3rd floor was added to accommodate the first Masonic Lodge in Rhode Island.

In 1832, when Providence became a city, most municipal offices including the City Council, Mayor’s Office, and Board of Aldermen were located on the second floor. The city’s rapid growth in the decades spanning the 1840s and ‘50s resulted in a corresponding growth in city government. Cramped for space, the city purchased the 3rd floor from the Masons in 1853 to become the new home for the City Council and, just after the conclusion of the Civil War, the city removed the first floor tenants and remodeled the entire building for the exclusive use of city offices. On June 12, 1866, an ordinance was passed designating certain rooms within the building for use by city departments. The first floor allocated space for city departments, a vault for records storage, and speaking tubes for communication to offices on the upper floors. The mayor occupied two southeast rooms on the 2nd floor. This floor also contained the Clerk’s Office as well as the Municipal Court. The top floor was shared by the City Council and Board of Aldermen. Following the remodeling, the building was re-christened the “City Building.”



But a number of government officials realized that this building would be inadequate to handle the rapidly growing needs of its citizenry. The initial action to construct a new city hall was taken on November 10, 1845 when the Providence City Council resolved that “the safety of city records and the convenience of the city government, and the citizens generally, require more safe and ample accommodations.” A committee of one councilman from each of the six wards, one Alderman and the Mayor was selected to prepare plans for a city hall, estimate the cost, and recommend a suitable location. In those days, there were six wards in the city, three on the east side of the Providence River and three on the west side. Because of the even division of votes on the committee, neither side could garner enough votes to secure the location for the new City Hall for their side of the city. This stalemate continued for three decades and became known as “Providence’s Thirty Years War.”

Despite the bickering over location, in April, 1854 the city purchased a lot formerly occupied by the Harrington Opera House, on the corner of Dorrance and Washington streets. The purchase did little to end the controversy, but by 1873 the City Council had pushed obstacles aside and declared that City Hall should be built on the site as soon as possible. The Opera House was closed in 1874 to make way for the building we see today. Mayor Thomas Doyle, still unhappy with the location, vetoed the plan, but in October 1874 the City Council overrode his veto 30 to 8. Finally, on October 10, 1874 – more than two decades after securing the property – ground was finally broken

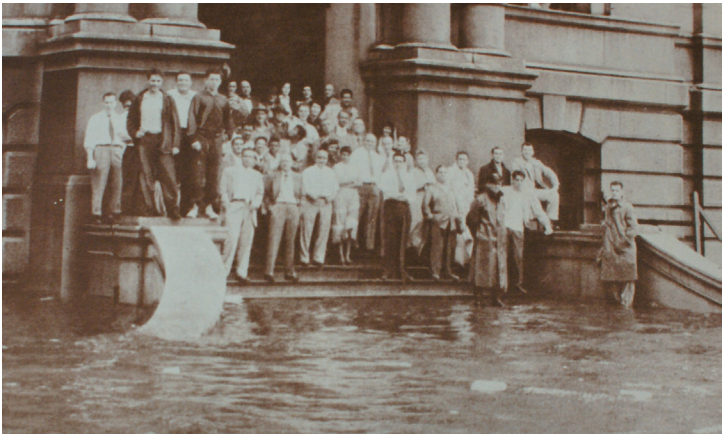
and the cornerstone was set in place on April 24th the following year.

The building, designed by Samuel J. F. Thayer, was one of twenty-one sets of drawings submitted to the city in a design competition. Drawings of the four finalists were placed on display and to avoid any appearance of favoritism in selecting the winning design, all identification was removed and names such as “Fait,” “Maltese Cross,” and “Blue Wafer” were assigned to the drawings. Thayer’s “Blue Wafer” plan was chosen and he was awarded the \$1,000 first prize. The Boston native described his design as “renaissance, of the character widely adopted for civic buildings in the most advanced cities of the world.” Thayer’s plan included a massive tower atop the dome, but the effects of an economic recession nixed the plans. The council had originally budgeted approximately \$635,000 for the building, however, cost overruns brought the eventual total to \$1.1 million.

The impressive five-story, block-long fireproof building was dedicated with great fanfare on November 14, 1878. The old city hall was leased to the Board of Trade (later the Chamber of Commerce) who occupied it until



The first “city” hall dates from 1773 when the town constructed a two-story brick market house. The street level contained market stalls for merchants and the second floor town offices.

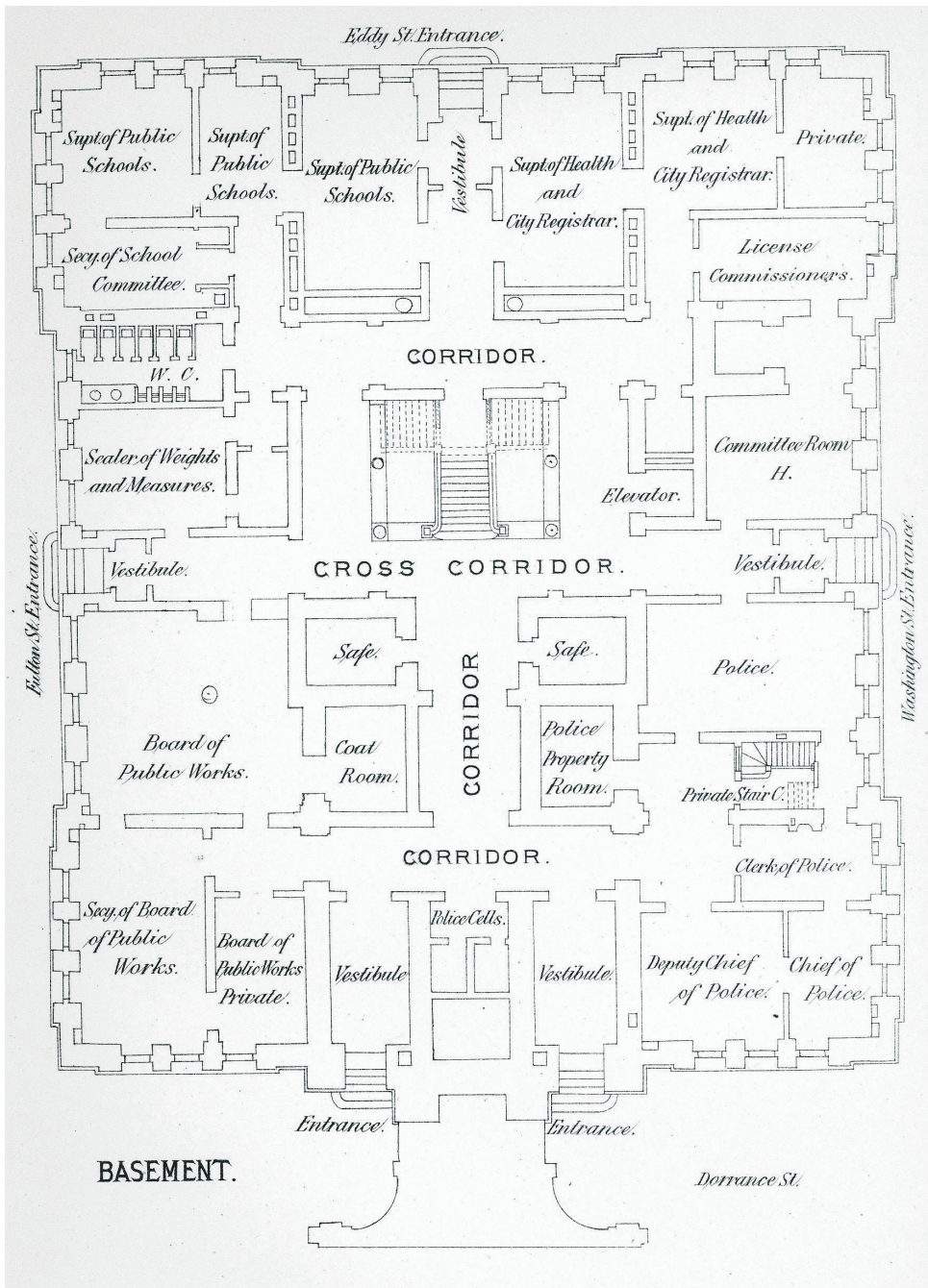


Individuals marooned on the steps of Providence City Hall during a devastating hurricane that flooded most of the City in 1938.

1938 when it was condemned as unsafe, partly due to a devastating hurricane that flooded most of the city. Rebuilt by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the building was gifted to the Rhode Island School of Design in May 1948 and is currently used for offices.

The Thayer-designed City Hall stretches 133 feet along the Dorrance and Eddy Street sides and 160 feet on the Washington and Fulton Street sides. It is located over what was once part of the Cove Tidal Water basin requiring an artificial foundation resting on 3,128 piles driven into hardpan at various depths. Resting on the piles are large blocks of granite which provide a secure anchor for the building. The construction is of iron and brick and its façade consists of both Westerly granite on the Dorrance and Washington Street sides and New Hampshire granite on the other two sides. The sidewalks are also of granite blocks, 5 to 6 feet wide and 18 to 20 feet long. There is a subbasement, which originally contained four coal-fired boilers, each with a capacity of fifty horsepower that heated the building and provided energy to operate the water- powered elevator machinery.

The elevator was capable of carrying as many as fifty passengers at one time, and it was estimated that each trip to the top of the building would cost eleven cents if the city were to charge for the water used. The elevator was connected with electric bells at each landing so that it could be summoned to the desired floor. The ground level, which was considered the basement, is five feet



1878 Floor Plan - Basement

above street level to provide protection from high tidal waters. It could be entered through doors on the north, south, and west sides of the building. Extending from this floor level to the roof is a large stair court, which rises to a skylight that provided natural light for the internal well of the building. Surrounding the staircase are corridors twelve feet wide, laid with colored marble. Much of the original interior decoration remains, including the light-colored wood wainscoting, etched glass windows in the office doors, polished granite columns, cast iron stair railings and brass handrails. When City Hall opened, the first level, or basement, was assigned to the superintendents of Police, Fire, Health, Schools, Hacks and Lamps. Also occupying the first floor were the City Registrar, Board of Public Works, and the Sealer of Weights and Measures.

The main floor, or what was considered the first floor of the building, can be reached by way of a wide internal staircase from the lower level and also from the arched main entrance through a double set of doors on the east side (now facing Kennedy Plaza) of the building. Access to this entrance is via a flight of granite stairs with a railing that curves toward the sidewalk. Under these stairs were two dark cells where the police detained people who were being held for questioning. Inside the double doors a barrel-vaulted hall leads to a great marble staircase which rises to a landing and then divides into two shorter flights of stairs that terminate on both sides of the second floor level.

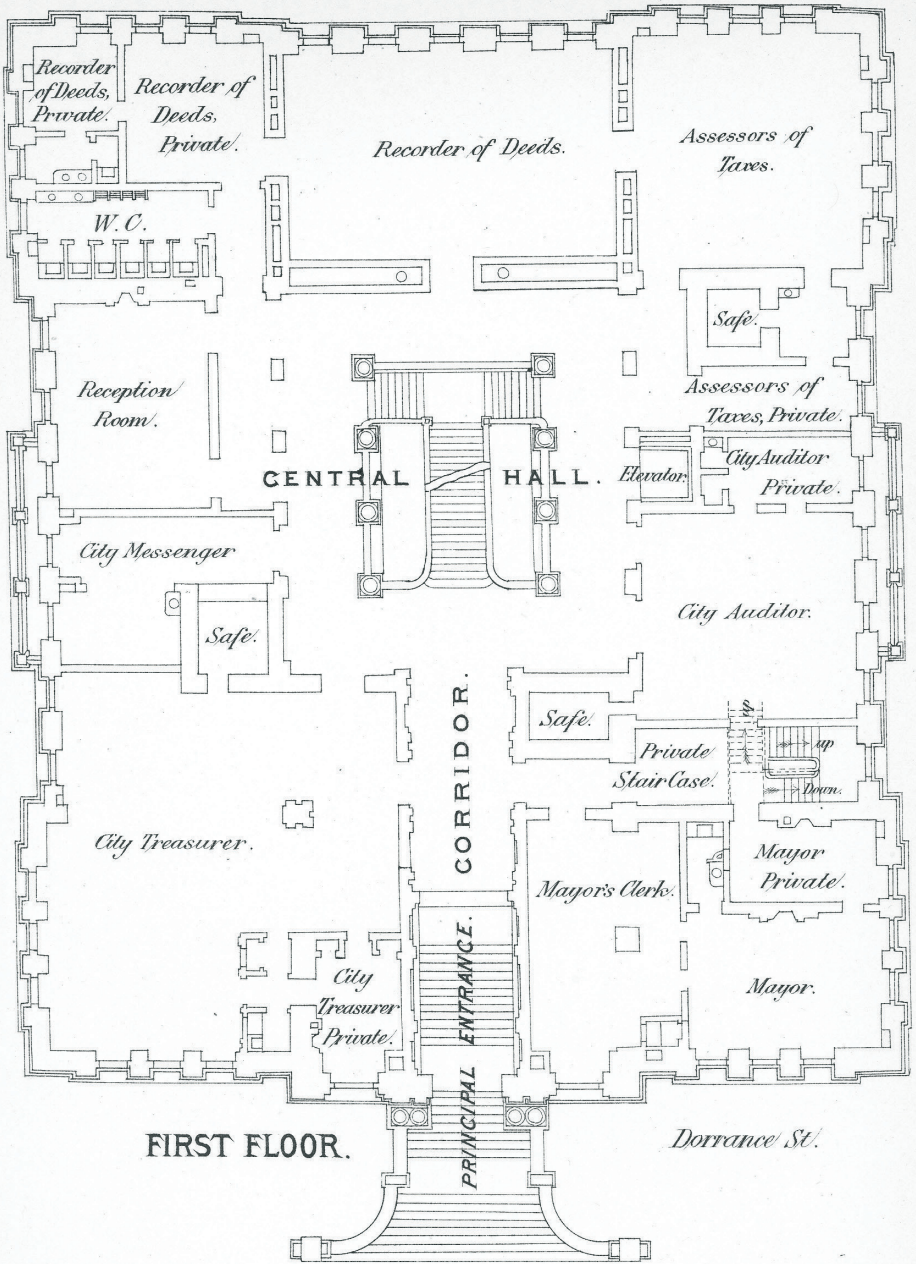
Business offices on the main floor level were assigned to the Executive Department and consisted of the public and private offices of the Mayor and a separate office for his clerk. Located in the Mayor's public office is a black marble fireplace along the west wall. The ceiling is skillfully decorated with designs of plaster and at one time a beautiful gas-lighted chandelier added to the charm of this elegant suite (electric lighting was in its infancy). There is an internal flight of stairs, which rises from ground level on Washington Street to the Mayor's Office and to the Board of Aldermen Chambers on the floor above. The City Treasurer, Auditor, Tax Assessor and Recorder of Deeds occupied the remainder of the main floor. Also on the same level were a reception room and the office for the City Messenger. His office contained



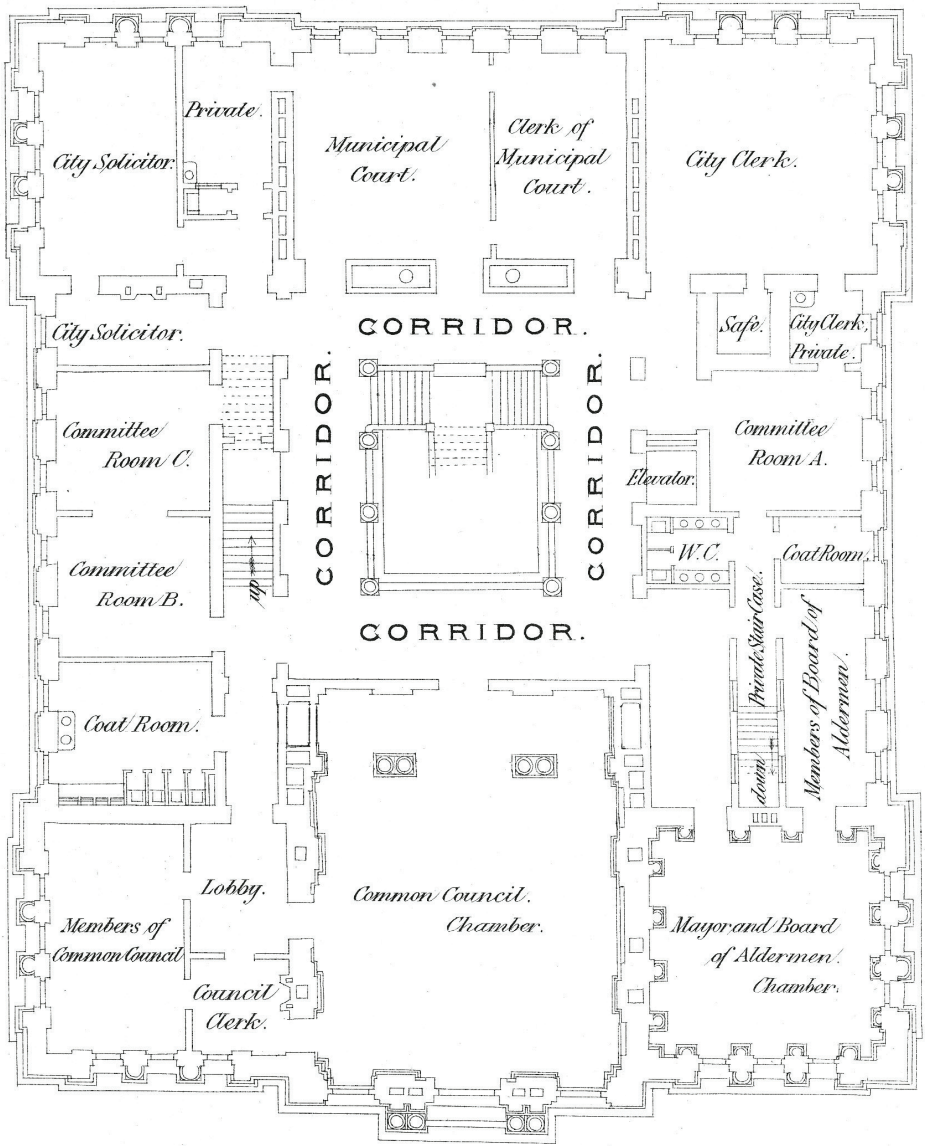
an interesting array of communication devices--fifty speaking tubes, fifty electric bells and fifty enunciators, which provided connections to all departments (Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone just two years before the dedication of City Hall). Next to the Messenger's Office was an ornate reception room, twenty-three feet by thirty-three feet, with large mirrors hung at each end of the room. The walls were finished in mahogany and stamped leather.

The level above the main floor contained the Common Council Chambers, the Board of Aldermen Chambers, the Municipal Court, City Clerk, and City Solicitor. The Council Chamber is a beautifully decorated, spacious and lofty room, fifty-eight feet long, forty feet wide and thirty-six feet high. At this time, a chandelier of fifty gas-burning lights lighted it and each burner was shaped in the form of a candle. About two-thirds of this chamber was railed off for the exclusive use of the council and their aides. Forty desks were arranged in three semi-circular rows for the council members (four from each of the city's ten wards). On the outside of the railing were benches that could seat one hundred and fifty spectators. The Council Chamber is decorated with the same light-colored wood wainscoting as elsewhere, and paired pilasters with gold stenciling 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 stenciling. Trim is simpler in the numerous meeting rooms and offices which occupy the remainder of the building.

The Board of Aldermen Chamber is thirty-five feet square



1878 Floor Plan - First Floor

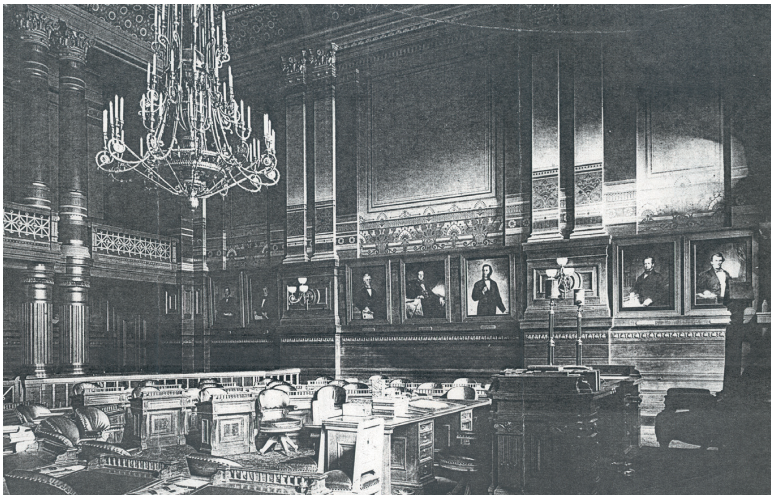


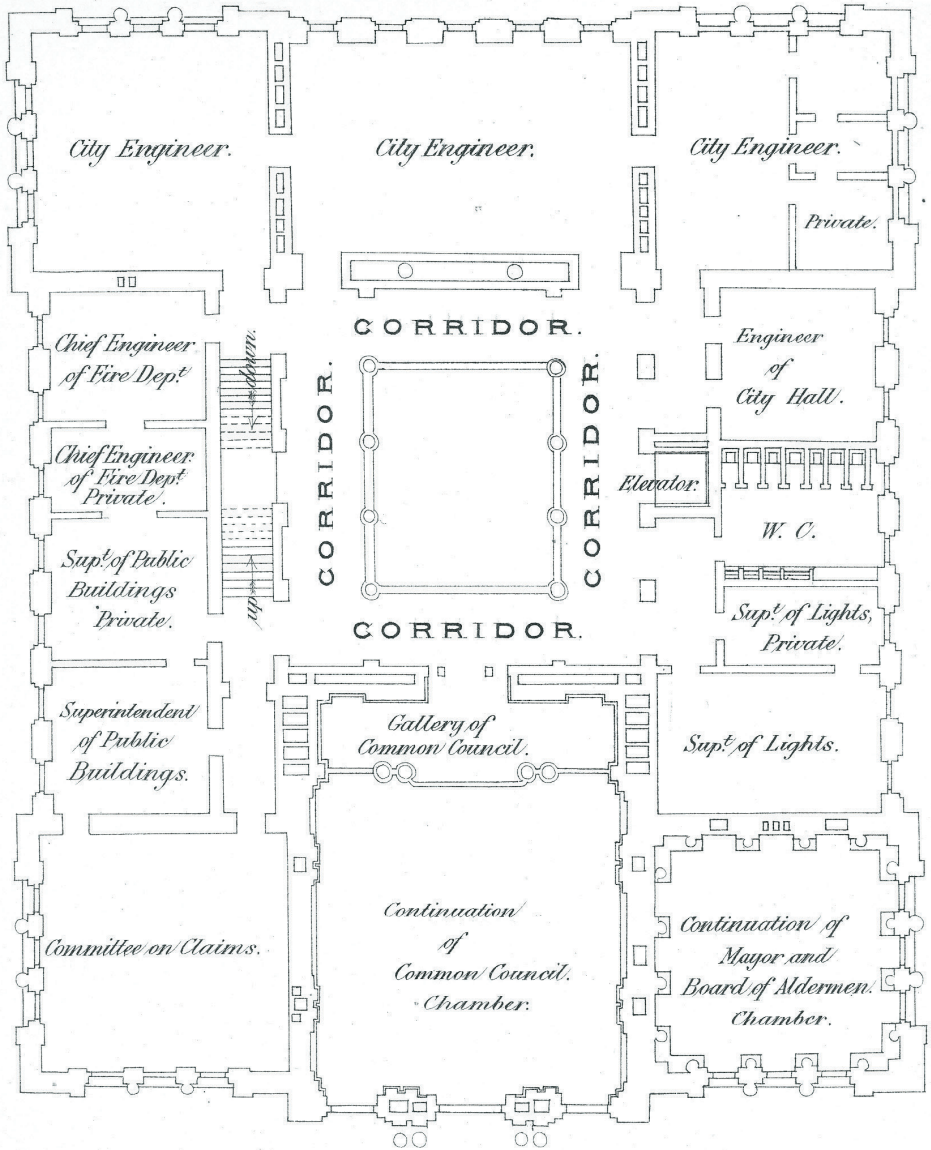
SECOND FLOOR .

1878 Floor Plan - Second Floor

with a height of twenty-eight and one-half feet. It was too small for the required number of desks, so a large table was used for the meetings of the Board of Aldermen. Also located on this floor were council committee rooms. Housed on the third level were the Chief Engineer's Department, the Superintendents of Public Buildings and Lights, and the Chief Engineer of the Fire Department. Stairwells leading to the upper floors are located on the Fulton Street side, just off the corridors. Located on the fourth floor were living quarters for the janitor and his family. Their suite consisted of a kitchen, parlor, two bedrooms and a bath. The rest of the space on this floor was used by the City Engineer and for storage. A meteorological station also shared space on this floor. The upper levels of the building are housed within a high, convex, angular, mansard slate roof that rises above the parallelized parapet. Fashioned into the mansard dome are ornamental bulls-eye dormers. The mansard roof area is reached by an iron stairway from the fourth floor where, originally, large batteries were stored that generated the electricity for the citywide fire alarm system and for the operation of the clocks and bells in the building. Another flight of stairs lead to a higher area in the mansard dome, which was also used for storage. When City Hall was built, the rooms were lit by gas and many of the original gas fixtures remain in their places. Electricity for lighting was introduced in 1888.

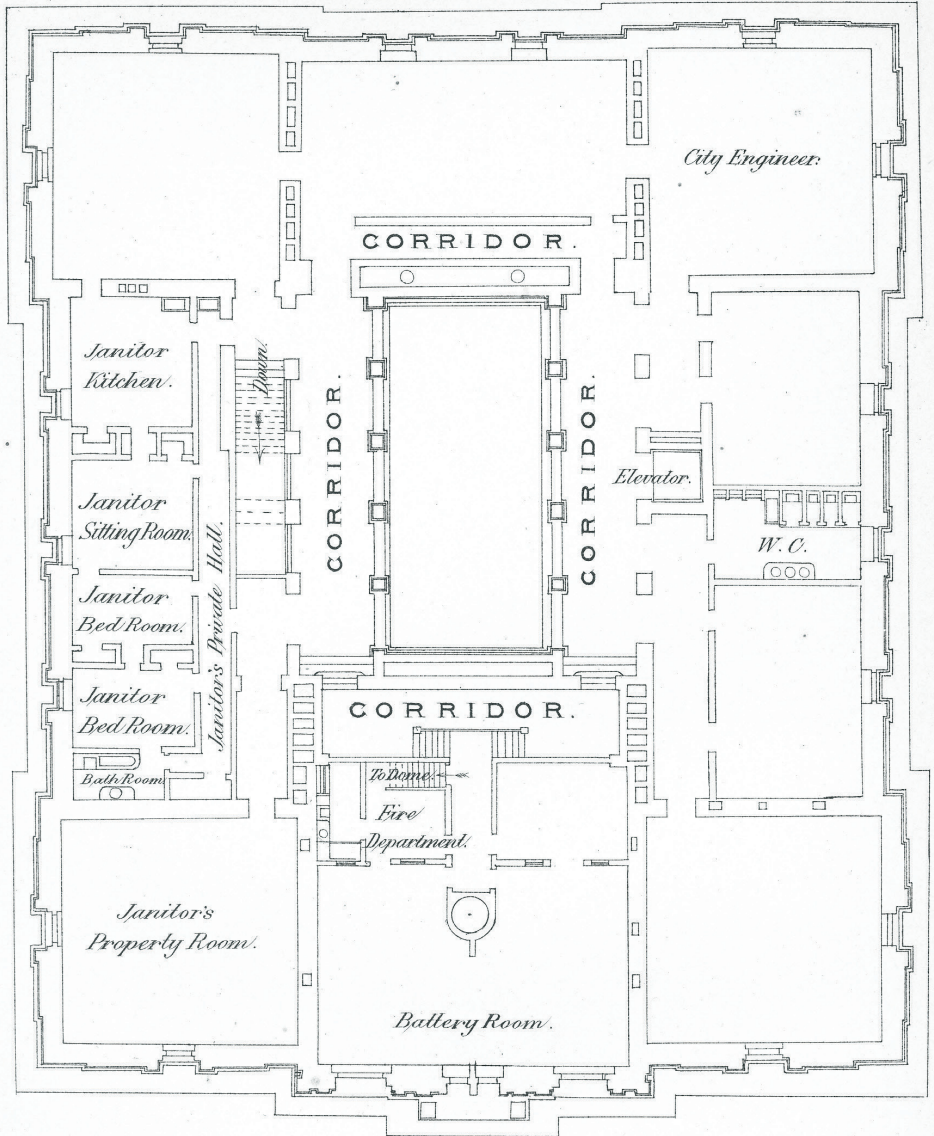
During the intervening years, City Hall experienced many changes and alterations. In some instances, desired





THIRD FLOOR.

1878 Floor Plan - Third Floor



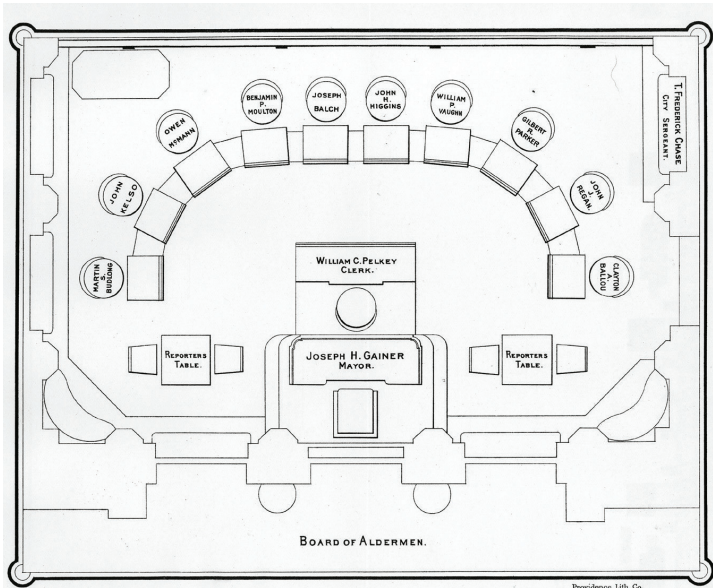
FOURTH FLOOR.

1878 Floor Plan - Fourth Floor

changes were impossible because the exterior walls were of granite, backed with vaulted brick four feet thick. Some departments were enlarged, others relocated and some were moved to outside locations. In 1914, major alterations were made in the roof area, additional floor space provided, and the entire refitting of all offices was carried out. Some of the visible changes are a triple set of windows on the fourth floor where only one window appeared before. Also some ornamentation was removed and the cornice work just below the center of the mansard dome was changed.

In the 1960s, the demolition of this French Second Empire building was given serious consideration. Fortunately wiser heads prevailed. In 1975, Providence Mayor Vincent A. Cianci, Jr. and a group of local preservationists were successful in their effort to add City Hall to the National Register of Historic Places. Shortly thereafter a decade-long renovation effort highlighted by the spectacular restoration of the Mayor's Office and the Council and Aldermen's Chambers, which helped return the building to its original splendor.

In 2011, the 375th anniversary of the city's founding,



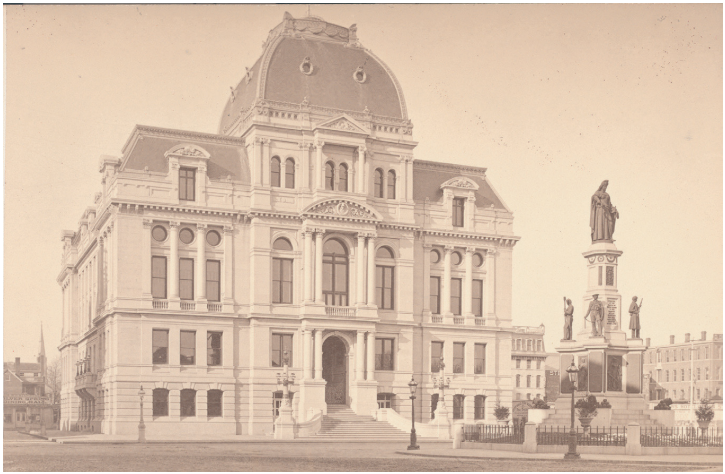
Seating chart of the Board of Aldermen during Mayor Joseph Gainer's administration



Providence City Hall retains its prominence as the seat of municipal government and as one of the most outstanding examples of our city's rich architectural heritage.



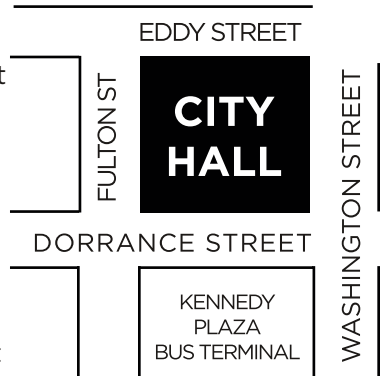
Your Self-Guided Tour of Providence City Hall



In the following pages, you will find a useful guide to some of the interesting features and history to be found while on your visit of Providence City Hall.

We suggest that you begin your tour from outside the building at the Kennedy Plaza Bus Terminal, facing Dorrance Street and the original main entrance to Providence City Hall.

City Hall consists of a basement and five public floors. The first floor was built five feet above street level to protect it from tidal waters. It can be accessed by street-level doors on Washington and Fulton Streets and by a handicap-accessible entrance on Eddy Street. These entrances are the most commonly used today.





1. Start tour on Dorrance St. facing City Hall

From the top of the grand staircase, with its twelve-foot-high doors overlooking Kennedy Plaza, Providence's mayors have delivered speeches and presided at rallies for the general public. Several American Presidents have also addressed crowds from atop these steps, such as: Theodore Roosevelt (ca. 1902), Harry S. Truman (1952), John F. Kennedy, Jr. (1960 - photo below), Gerald Ford (1970s), and William J. Clinton (1990s).

Facing the staircase, to the right of the main entrance is the Mayor's Office; to the left is the Tax Collector's Office. The Dorrance Street entrance remained opened up until September 11, 2001. Two dark holding cells under these stairs were used by police for suspects being detained for questioning.

These holding cells can still be seen today, which are now being used as storage units.

2. Enter City Hall from Washington St.

To the left of the entrance on Washington Street, underneath the green awning is the Mayor's private entrance. At the time the building was constructed in 1878, the staircase behind this private entrance only went to the third floor. When rehabilitation was done in 1989, the stairway was brought all the way up to the fifth floor.

Upon entering on Washington Street, visitors will find the Mayor's Center for City Services to the right and the Board of Canvassers and Voter Registration Office to the

left.

In the middle of the first floor, past the Board of Canvassers Office is the former holding cell where police questioned detained suspects. When City Hall opened in 1878, the first floor offices were occupied by the Superintendents of Police, Fire, Health, Schools, and Hacks and Lamps, as well as the City Registrar, Board of Public Works, and the Sealer of Weights and Measures.

The City Registrar, or the Department of Vital Statistics – where citizens can obtain birth, death and marriage certificates – is still located on the first floor of the building, next to the City Hall Police desk.

3. Continue up the staircase, bear a right



Handicapped visitors may rejoin the tour at the elevator to the second floor. The elevators go all the way up to the fifth floor of the building.

On the second floor, visitors will find the Gallery at City Hall. During his first month in office, Mayor David N. Cicilline created the Gallery at City Hall to showcase the work of local artists. Offering space to artists and organizations that might not have a permanent gallery, the Gallery at City Hall has held an eclectic array of work highlighting the artistic and cultural diversity that is found in the Providence community. The tradition and space has continued on with Mayor Jorge O. Elorza.

Shows are held on a monthly basis and often coincide with cultural events occurring elsewhere in the City of Providence. Past shows have included a number of student art exhibits as well. The Tax Assessor's Office, one

of the original occupants of the second floor, is located just behind the railing.

4. Mayor's office retains original appearance

If you're facing the elevator, to the right of it is the Office of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff and a frequently used City Hall Conference Room. Inside this office is a door that leads to the Mayor's Executive Suite.

Around the corner from the Office of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff' is the Mayor's Executive Suite. Originally, a number of offices on the second floor were assigned to the mayor, including public and private offices of the mayor and a separate office for the Mayor's Clerk. In 2018, a number of the Mayor's staff still occupies offices on the second floor, including his Communications, Administration and Policy Departments. Just outside of the Mayor's Office are the twelve-foot- high doors that lead to the grand stairway facing Kennedy Plaza and to its right is the Office of the City Collector.



Hanging on the wall outside of the Collector's Office is a plaque with a list of individuals inducted to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Hall of Fame. This tradition began under Mayor Cicilline and continues on with Mayor Elorza. It is one of the only municipal halls of fame dedicated to the great civil rights leader and the people of Providence who personify his work through their commitment social justice and equality.

5. A visual ascent to the third floor

As visitors encounter the main interior staircase, they'll notice a visual ascent up to the third floor, and even higher to the expansive atrium above. This dramatic entrance provides the visitor with the sense of sweeping grandeur that is a signature characteristic of a Second

Empire building.



The wide interior staircase leads from the second floor to a central landing where a large bronze plaque, marking the building's dedication in 1878, overlooks the entire atrium. Commissioners' names are inscribed with those of Mayor Thomas A. Doyle, and the architect, Samuel J. F. Thayer. Also noted on the plaque is the date the cornerstone was laid on June 24, 1875.

Above the plaque is the artwork found in the City Seal, painted tile depicting Roger Williams coming ashore and greeted by Native Americans. This landing is also a favored podium location for official events and public addresses.

From this point, the stairway splits in two directions as it reaches the third and other principal floor. Reaffirming the belief that Providence City Hall is the finest Second Empire municipal building in the country is the natural light from rooftop windows above that fills the central, four-story atrium that serves as the building's magnificent, airy centerpiece.

6. Paintwork echoes inlaid marble



The color scheme of the paintwork throughout the building echoes the decorative inlaid marble elements in the stairway. The deep sage, maroon, green, and tan are not only lush and strong, but also somber and soothing tones, appropriate for the seat of city government.

In contrast to these darker colors, the banisters and railings were originally leafed in gold and silver. Sunlight from the skylight reflects off these metallic colors to brighten the entire interior space.

In the late 1800s, factories spewed black coal smoke into the downtown air, two hundred trains a day roared through the city, and air pollution soon tarnished the silver leaf paint throughout the building. When City Hall was restored in the 1970s, radiator paint replaced the silver leaf. This paint offers a cost-effective variation with the same formal look but does not need the frequent polishing of silver leaf.

7. City Hall built in Doyle administration

Mayor Doyle, whose portrait hangs on the 3rd floor, was in office during the planning and design of City Hall, and helped bring about its construction at a cost of about \$1 million. Doyle was a dynamic mayor who initiated a number of reforms and established a wide range of programs and projects during his tenure. Until Doyle's longevity in office was eclipsed by Mayor Cianci in 1999, he was the longest-serving mayor in the city's history. City Hall remains Doyle's most visible legacy.

In the early days of City Hall, the Common Council Chambers, council committee rooms, Board of Aldermen Chambers, Municipal Court, City Clerk, and the City Solicitor were all



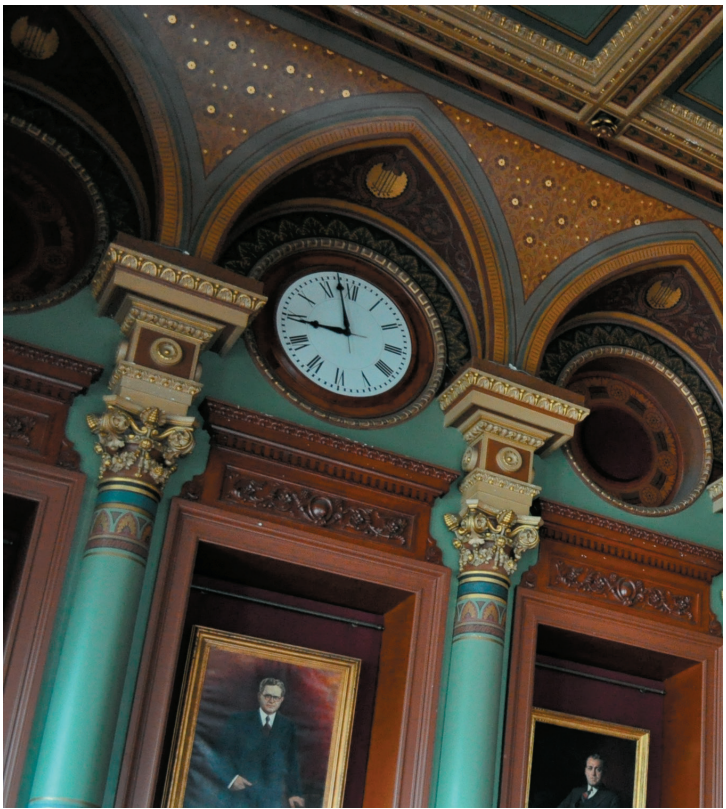
housed on the third floor.

The City Council Chamber, one of the largest and most ornate rooms in City Hall, remains the principal venue for public municipal meetings, hearings of the City Council and annual addresses by the Mayor, including the State of the City and Budget Addresses.

Two-thirds of the chamber is railed off for exclusive use by the council members and their aides. The other third of the room provides seating for up to 150 spectators. The interior remains true to its original 1878 appearance, and features highly stylized Néo-Grec stenciling along the walls. The handsome tile floor has been exposed and restored. Original furniture including the councilors' desks and spectator benches remain intact.

8. Aldermen's Chamber is now a reception hall

The Board of Aldermen's Chamber was once used as a meeting room for the Aldermen. It was too small to accommodate desks for all the Aldermen, so a large table was used for their meetings. Since the Aldermen's council was dissolved in 1940 by a new city charter, the room has been used for smaller meetings, civic events, receptions and exhibits. With the Mayor's Office and Council Chambers, it is the third room that has been fully reappointed with the elaborate detail of the original building.



9. Onto the fourth floor

Located on the fourth level of the original building were the Chief Engineer's Department, the Superintendents of Public Buildings and Lights, and the Chief Engineer of the Fire Department. Still in use today on this floor is the spectators' balcony for the Council Chambers, complete with plush-backed wooden benches to observe the meetings of the City Council. Though small, it can boost capacity numbers for the room to 200.

The fourth floor now also houses the Human Resources and Payroll departments, the Department of Public Property and Purchasing, and the Employees' Retirement Board.

10. Original gas lamps still adorn the fifth floor archives

When City Hall first opened, the fifth floor housed the janitor and his family. Part of the janitor's job was to wind the clocks and light the gas lamps that filled City Hall.



The original gas lamp fixtures can still be seen in the archivist's office.

The remainder of the fifth floor was used by the City Engineer and for the storage of large batteries that powered the citywide fire alarm system. Extensive renovations of the roof area took place in 1914, when more floor space was added, and the number of windows on the fourth floor was increased. Later, a row of windows on the second floor of archives were blacked out during the air raid alerts of WWII. The fifth floor became the home of Providence City Hall's Archives, where it remains today, open to visitors.

Clearly, the officials and visionaries of Providence who helped build City Hall felt an enormous sense of pride in this architectural accomplishment. To tour this building today from its grand entrance to its expansive interior is to revisit that civic pride, savor its architectural sensitivity, and reaffirm its historic preservation.

Before you end your tour...

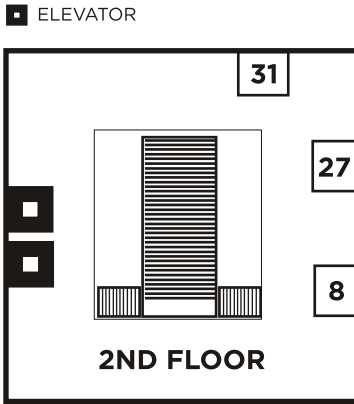
We welcome you to visit the Mayor's Center for City Services on the first floor of City Hall to learn more about what is happening in Providence.

Thank you for visiting Providence City Hall!

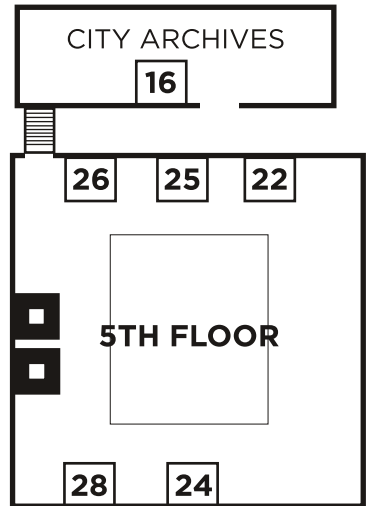
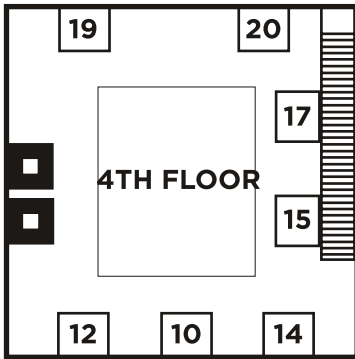
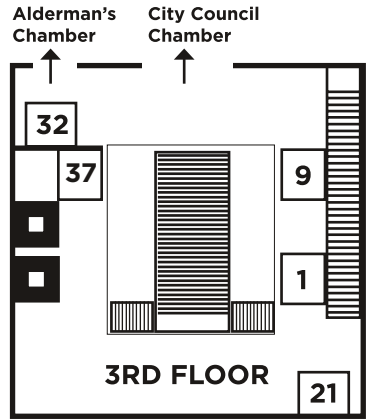
MAP OF THE PORTRAITS OF PROVIDENCE MAYORS AT CITY HALL

DORRANCE STREET

WASHINGTON STREET

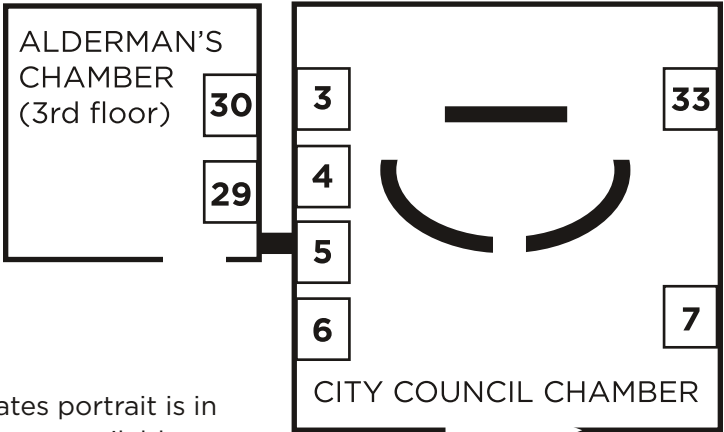


(Floor plan - next page)



FULTON STREET

EDDY STREET



(*) indicates portrait is in storage or unavailable

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 Samuel W. Bridgham | 23 Elisha Dyer (*) |
| 2 Thomas Burgess (*) | 24 Patrick McCarthy |
| 3 Amos C. Barstow | 25 Henry Fletcher |
| 4 Walter Raleigh Danforth | 26 Joseph H. Gainer |
| 5 Edward Peck Knowles | 27 James E. Dunne |
| 6 James Young Smith | 28 John F. Collins |
| 7 William Mitchell Rodman | 29 Dennis J. Roberts |
| 8 Jabez Comstock Knight | 30 Walter H. Reynolds |
| 9 Thomas A. Doyle | 31 Joseph A. Doorley |
| 10 George L. Clarke | 32 Vincent A. Cianci, Jr. |
| 12 William S. Hayward | 33 Joseph R. Paolino, Jr. |
| 14 Gilbert F. Robbins | 35 John J. Lombardi (*) |
| 15 Henry Rodman Barker | 36 David N. Cicilline (*) |
| 16 Charles Sydney Smith | 37 Angel Taveras |
| 17 William Knight Potter | |
| 18 Frank Fuller Olney (*) | |
| 19 Edwin D. McGuinness | |
| 20 William C. Baker | |
| 21 Daniel L. D. Granger | |
| 22 Augustus Miller | |

Mayors of the City of Providence

Samuel W. Bridgham (1774-1840)

Served June 1832 to December 1840 (Whig)
Birthplace: Seekonk, Massachusetts. A graduate of Brown University, Bridgham became the first mayor of Providence at a time when disorder and vice threatened the city. His solutions were free public education, temperance, and relief for the poor. He laid down foundations for good municipal government in Providence and served during one of the city's most significant expansions of the public school system. He died in office at 66

Thomas Burgess (1806-1856)

Served February 1841 to June 1852 (Whig)
Birthplace: Providence. Burgess graduated from Brown University in 1822. When Providence became a city in 1832, he was elected one of the original members of the Providence Common Council. He served as the President of the Providence and Boston Railroad Company. Burgess was in office during Dorr's Rebellion, a violent free-suffrage movement that promoted voting rights for all men regardless of property ownership. He served during a turbulent time when Rhode Island had two separate governors vying to run the state concurrently.

Amos C. Barstow (1813-1894)

Served June 1852 to June 1853 (Whig)
Birthplace: Providence. Barstow was a descendent of the first settler of Hanover, Massachusetts, William Barstow. He was active in the temperance and antislavery movements. He recommended the current site for City Hall and was chairman of the committee that purchased and planned for it. He was the first president of the Providence YMCA and built the Providence Music Hall. Barstow was also an active businessman, and his Barstow Stove Company won the Grand Medal of Merit at the 1873 Vienna World's fair for the best cooking stove and range.

Walter Raleigh Danforth (1787-1861)

Served June 1853 to June 1854 (Democrat)

Birthplace: Providence. After holding judicial posts for eleven years, he left the bench to engage in journalism and politics, which led to his one- year mayoral ten. As a journalist, he had a reputation for wit and was known for his political satire. He was a historian and lectured about the early days of Providence. He was the leader of the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers, now known as the Board of Trade and Chamber of Commerce.

Edward Peck Knowles (1805-1881)

Served June 1854 to June 1855 (Whig)

Birthplace: Providence. Despite limited school privileges as a child, he always held a deep interest in education. He was the first to propose evening schools. At one point Knowles was employed as a keeper of the tollgate at Red Bridge, which crossed the Seekonk River. A proponent of the temperance movement, he devoted years to public service before and after his mayorship. After being elected to the Common Council in 1835, he was repeatedly appointed as acting mayor until he was finally elected to the post in 1854.

James Young Smith (1809-1876)

Served June 1855 to June 1857 (Republican)

Birthplace: Groton, Connecticut. He served two years as the Mayor of Providence, and was later elected Governor of Rhode Island in 1865. Smith was the first governor-elect to garner a majority vote in every city and town in Rhode Island. He first came to Providence to enter the lumber, and later the cotton trade. Smith served as the President of the Board of Trade, the President of the Bank of Discount, the President of two savings banks, and the director of eight insurance companies. He was also the Director of the Providence and Worcester Railroad Co. and the New York and New England Railroad Co.

William Mitchell Rodman (1814-1868)

Served June 1857 to June 1859 (Republican-American)
Birthplace: Newport. Rodman attended a school taught by his father before coming to Providence to be a tailor's apprentice. An accomplished writer of prose and verse, he was considered an excellent public speaker, and served as mayor for two consecutive terms starting in 1857. He was a member of the local school committee and served two terms on the Providence Common Council.

Jabez Comstock Knight (1815-1900)

Served June 1859 to June 1864 (Republican)
Birthplace: Warwick. A member of the Providence Common Council, he was elected to the Providence Board of Aldermen. He also served on the committee charged with preparing the plans, costs and location for the new City Hall. Knight served as a trustee of Butler Hospital for 35 years and as commissioner of the Dexter Donation for 21 years. He was so popular that he ran unopposed his last four terms. Aside from his public endeavors, Knight published a poem entitled "Our Golden Wedding."

Thomas A. Doyle (1827-1886)

Served June 1864 to June 1869 (Republican); June 1870 to January 1881 (Republican); Served June 1884 to January 1886 (Republican) Birthplace: Providence. During his 18-year administration the city more than doubled in population and wealth. He made vast improvements, including the construction of City Hall, the adoption of an innovative and highly acclaimed sewage system, the development of Roger Williams Park, and improvements to the city water system. He also erected many public buildings and molded the Providence Police Department into a professional trained force. Until his record was eclipsed by Mayor Vincent A. Cianci, Jr. in September 1999, Doyle served longer than any other mayor in Providence. He died in office during his third term in 1886.

George L. Clarke (1813-1890)

Served June 1869 to June 1870 (Republican)
Birthplace: Norton, Massachusetts. Instrumental in enacting legislation that deeded valuable cove lands to the city. He was well known for his abolitionist stance, even in the days when it meant political ostracism. In 1866

he was elected Speaker of the RI House, and in 1869 he returned to the General Assembly.

William S. Hayward (1835-1900)

Served January 1881 to January 1884 (Republican)
Birthplace: Foster. Hayward supplied goods to the Union Army during the Civil War, primarily through his company, Rice & Hayward biscuit manufacturers. Because of his many and varied business interests, Hayward declined a fourth mayoral term. He was a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the Knights of Pythias. He presided over Union Trust Company and Citizens Savings Bank.

Gilbert F. Robbins (1838-1889)

Served January 1887 to January 1889 (Republican)
Birthplace: Burrillville. Robbins came to Providence as a baker, and later entered the ready-made clothing business with his brother. Requirements for suffrage were eased during Robbins' term. He was involved in numerous societies, including the Universities Society, and St. John's Lodge of Freemasons. Robbins served as a member of the Rhode Island House of Representatives, the Providence Common Council, and the Board of Aldermen.

Henry Rodman Barker (1841 -1903)

Served January 1889 to January 1891 (Republican)
Birthplace: Providence. As a young man, Barker took a leave of absence from his post, as clerk at the Providence Mutual Fire Insurance Company, to fight for the Union Army during the Civil War. After his second term he retired, but the lure of public service was so strong that Barker ran once again for mayor six years later. He was director of the Industrial Trust Company, the Rhode Island Electric Protective Company, the Narragansett Electric Lighting Company, and the Eagle National Bank.

Charles Sydney Smith (1828-1907)

Served January 1891 to January 1892 (Republican)
Birthplace: Warren. A self-educated man, Smith attended school for only three weeks each winter when he was a boy. He fought for the Union during the Civil War, and later founded jewelry manufacturer Saxson, Smith and

Co. It is reported that his reelection failed because of his vigorous campaign to combat illegal activities among a tolerant electorate inclined to look the other way. He served as president of the United Wire and Supply Company, and was a member of both the Rhode Island House of Representatives and the Rhode Island State Senate.

William Knight Potter (1844-1914)

Served January 1892 to January 1894 (Democrat)
Birthplace: New York City. He became the city's second Democratic Mayor and the first after the Civil War. Potter was Chairman of the City Democrat Committee, and served as a member of the Rhode Island House of Representatives. He was also a candidate for the United States House of Representatives.

Frank Fuller Olney (1851-1903)

Served January 1894 to January 1896 (Republican)
Birthplace: Jersey City, New Jersey. He was descended from Thomas Olney, who was an associate of Roger Williams during the settlement of Providence in 1636. Olney studied law, but never practiced. He was a strong supporter of military organizations and served for three years as Commander of the 1st Light Infantry Veterans Association. A great philanthropist, Olney was an extremely popular mayor and an avid sailor.

Edwin D. McGuinness (1856-1901)

Served January 1896 to January 1898 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Providence. McGuinness graduated from Brown University in 1877 and received his law degree from Boston University in 1879. He was both the first Irish Roman Catholic and resident of Irish decent to hold the office of Mayor. He played an extensive role in the Rhode Island Militia. Recognized in the Providence Journal as "the first great triumph for independence in politics" in the city, McGuinness also served as Rhode Island Secretary of State.

William C. Baker (1858-1931)

Served January 1898 to January 1901 (Democrat)
Birthplace: North Kingstown. Baker graduated from Brown University in 1881, remained an active alumnus

and was the permanent class president. He was the superintendent of North Kingstown public schools and taught French and German at DeVeaux College, located at Suspension Bridge, New York. He advocated reform, taxation, and municipal administration.

Daniel L. D. Granger (1852-1909)

Served January 1901 to January 1903 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Providence. An 1874 graduate of Brown University, Granger studied law at Boston University, was admitted to the Rhode Island Bar, and practiced law in Newport. He was elected City Treasurer of Providence three times. He also served as a U.S. Representative from Rhode Island and promoted free trade with Canada.

Augustus Miller (1847-1905)

Served January 1903 to September 1905 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Plainfield, Connecticut. An 1871 graduate of Brown University, Miller was a direct descendent of Roger Williams. He was always active with public and private schools and had several law partnerships. Miller also served as a clerk of the Rhode Island Supreme Court and as Attorney Counselor to the U.S. Supreme Court. He was a member of the Rhode Island House of Representatives, the Rhode Island State Senate, and served as Speaker of the House from 1889-91. He died during his mayoral term.

Elisha Dyer (1839-1906)

Served January 1906 to November 1906 (Republican)
Birthplace: Providence. Dyer studied in Germany, graduating with a Ph.D. from the University of Gissen. During the Civil War he fought as a sergeant until he was injured in Easton, Pennsylvania, and was sent back to Rhode Island. Later, Dyer served in the Marine Corps Artillery in Providence and spent 20 years as a chemical manufacturer. He advocated the Providence Public School Teachers Retirement Act. Before serving as Mayor, Dyer was governor of Rhode Island for two terms, 1897-1900. He died less than one year after his election.

Patrick McCarthy (1846-1921)

Served January 1907 to January 1909 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Greenvagh Parish, County Sligo, Ireland. When he was elected in 1907, McCarthy was the first mayor of

Providence born in a foreign country. His mother and father died as soon as they arrived in America, and he and his six brothers were all put into orphanages and separated. McCarthy practiced law after graduating from Harvard Law School in 1876. He favored eight-hour workdays for City laborers, retirement divisions for teachers, and pensions for members of the police and fire departments. The Cranston Armory was built during McCarthy's term.

Henry Fletcher (1859-1953)

Served January 1909 to January 1913 (Republican)
Birthplace: Birmingham, England. Fletcher served the community as director of the Jewelers' Board of Trade. He was director of Atlantic National Bank, president of the Providence Central Club, and a member of the Common Council and the Board of Aldermen (of which he was voted president in 1908). During his administration, the city acquired the property for the municipal pier, and the harbor waters were deepened. He also supported the Scituate Reservoir project.

Joseph H. Gainer (1878-1945)

Served January 1913 to January 1927 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Providence. Gainer graduated from Holy Cross College and studied law at Catholic University. Notable during his administration were the unusually cold winters of 1917 and 1918 that caused the Providence Harbor and water pipes across the city to freeze. Mayor Gainer responded to the disaster by organizing an effective emergency coal-delivery program. He also directed the Fire Department to open the city's fire hydrants to supply residents with water. Gainer developed the Port of Providence, improved the City's highway system, enacted many zoning ordinances, and modernized the school system.

James E. Dunne (1882-1942)

Served January 1927 to January 1939 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Providence. During the Great Depression, the City assumed the burden of relief, and Dunne proposed various programs. These included City work-relief projects providing jobs at parks, reservoirs, and City Hall. He also proposed borrowing funds in anticipation of taxes

to provide direct grants to the needy. In 1930 Dunne removed the property qualification for voting. He served on the Providence Common Council and was chairman of the State Central Committee.

John F. Collins (1872-1962)

Served January 1939 to January 1941 (Republican)
Birthplace: Providence. Collins graduated from St. Charles College in Baltimore and attended law school at Boston University. During World War I he was the government appeal agent and legal advisor to the Draft Board for the state of Rhode Island. He was opposed to parking meters, concerned that their installation would be unconstitutional. Collins worked to fight wasteful government spending. For example, he turned down a victory dinner to be held in his honor and initially declined to have his official portrait painted. He later agreed to have one done.

Dennis J. Roberts (1903-1994)

Served January 1941 to January 1951 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Providence. Roberts was an alumnus of Fordham University and of Boston University Law School. In 1939 he was admitted as a member of the Charter Revision Commission which proposed a new structure of government for the city. While serving as mayor during World War II, Roberts took a leave of absence to volunteer for active military duty. He became a lieutenant commander in the Navy. Roberts was responsible for the installation of a Civil Service System, the elimination of dual office holding, the creation of an Office of City Planning, and the establishment of a police training school. He was elected Governor of Rhode Island in 1951, after which he eliminated the poll tax, provided tax exemptions for veterans, and created the state Board of Education.

Walter H. Reynolds (1901 -1987)

Served January 1951 to January 1965 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Providence. During his tenure as mayor, he increased financial aid to public schools and constructed six new elementary schools. A master plan for the development of downtown Providence was prepared during his term. Although billed as a blueprint for the

renewal of the downtown, it was not implemented. Providence's hurricane barrier is named in his honor.

Joseph A. Doorley (1930-)

Served January 1965 to January 1975 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Providence. He was the chief promoter of the Providence Civic Center, which the press nicknamed "Doorley's Dream." He was the last of three Democrats to serve as Mayor of Providence in a continuous 34 year span. From 1956 to 1962 he was administrative assistant to the Governor of Rhode Island. In 1962 he was elected to the Providence Common Council. In 1964 he became the first in a succession of three mayors, each who could claim the title of Providence's youngest mayor.

Vincent A. Cianci, Jr. (1941-2016)

Served Jan 1975 to Dec 1982 (Republican); Jan 1983 to April 1984 (Independent); Jan 1991 to 2002 (Independent)
Birthplace: Providence. Admitted to the R.I. Bar in 1967, he was appointed a Special Assistant Attorney General in 1969 before becoming the prosecutor of the Rhode Island Attorney General Department's Anti-Corruption Strike Force in 1972. Mayor Cianci was first elected Mayor of Providence in 1974 at 33 years of age, re-elected in 1978, 1982, 1991, 1994 and assumed his sixth term of office in January 1999, the year he became the longest sitting mayor in Providence history. He was most known for spearheading the Providence Renaissance of the 1990's, including the revitalization of downtown and the City's river waterfront, home of the internationally renowned attraction, "Waterfire."

Joseph R. Paolino Jr. (1955-)

Served April 1984 to January 1991 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Providence. At age 29, he was the youngest Mayor of Providence. During his tenure as mayor he was responsible for streamlining local government and attracting professional municipal managers to important posts in city government. In 1985 the Rhode Island Jaycees declared him 'Outstanding Rhode Islander of the Year.' He went on to become the Ambassador to Malta and ran for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1996.

John J. Lombardi (1952-)

Served September 2002 to January 6, 2003 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Providence. While serving as the President of the Providence City Council in 2002, he became Acting Mayor for four months after the conviction of then sitting mayor, Vincent Cianci, Jr. Mayor Lombardi was first elected to the Providence City Council in 1984, representing the thirteenth ward of the city. In January 1999 he was elected City Council President. He was a social studies teacher for the Providence School Department during 1975 to 1980. Later, in 1984, he became the director of the Providence Recreation Department. He also spent time assisting the Rhode Island Senate and serving as legal counsel for both the Senate Labor Committee (1987-1988), and for the Senate Corporations Committee (1989-1992). He ran for Mayor of Providence in 2010 and garnered 2nd place in the Democratic primary.

David N. Cicilline (1961-)

Served January 2003 - December 2010 (Democrat)
Birthplace: Providence. David Cicilline was born on the South Side of Providence. In 1983, he graduated magna cum laude with a degree in Political Science from Brown University, where he established a branch of the College Democrats with his classmate, the late John F. Kennedy, Jr. He earned his J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center and served as a public defender in the District of Columbia before returning to Rhode Island to open a practice in civil rights law and criminal defense. He served as a RI State Representative (4th District) from 1994-2003. In a landslide victory in 2002, gaining 84% of the votes, Cicilline became Providence's first openly-gay mayor, serving two terms until he became a U.S. Congressman (1st District) in 2010, following longstanding congressman, Rep. Patrick Kennedy. As Mayor, Cicilline presided over many citywide programs that drew national attention to Providence, including but not limited to the community policing model adopted by the Providence Police Department and the Providence After School Alliance.

Angel Taveras (1971-)

January 2011 – January 2015 (Democrat)

Birthplace: New York City. Angel Taveras was Providence's 37th Mayor. An attorney and former Providence Housing Court Judge, Mayor Taveras was elected as the city's first Latino mayor with 82 percent of the vote in November 2010. Mayor Taveras grew up in the South Side of Providence, where he attended Head Start before entering Providence Public Schools, and went on to graduate with honors from Harvard University. In 2007, Mayor Taveras was appointed by then-Mayor David N. Cicilline to serve as an Associate Judge on the Providence Housing Court and was twice confirmed by the Providence City Council. During his tenure on the court, Mayor Taveras was instrumental in streamlining the interaction between Inspectors and the Housing Court and to improve the code enforcement tracking system.

Jorge O. Elorza (1976-)

January 2015 – CURRENT (Democrat)

Birthplace: Providence, RI. As Providence's 38th Mayor, Jorge O. Elorza has strived to build a Providence that works for all of its residents. Since taking office in January 2015, Elorza has prioritized education, ensuring transparency in city government, improving city services and providing a sound financial future for the capital city. Driven by the belief that all children should have the opportunity to thrive in a supportive environment, Elorza is confident there is no better investment Providence can make than investing in the future of its youth. Born and raised in Providence, Elorza is a graduate of Classical High school, the University of Rhode Island, and Harvard School of Law.

