

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name: Smith Hill Branch, Providence Public Library

other name/site number: _____

2. Location

street & number: 31 Candace Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Providence vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Providence code: 007 zip code: 02908

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

Property name Smith Hill Branch, Providence Public Library, Prov. Cty., RI

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

___ See continuation sheet.

Frederick C. Williamson
Signature of certifying official

1/29/98
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

___ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
- ___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
- ___ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ___ removed from the National Register
- ___ other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: EDUCATION Sub: Library

Current: EDUCATION Sub: Library

Property name Smith Hill Branch, Providence Public Library, Prov. Cty., RI

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY
REVIVALS/Colonial Revival

Other Description: _____

Materials: foundation rubblestone roof slate
walls BRICK other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: _____

Applicable National Register Criteria: A & C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): _____

Areas of Significance: EDUCATION
SOCIAL HISTORY
ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1932 _____

Significant Dates: 1932 _____

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A _____

Architect/Builder: A Harkness, Albert
B Rathbone, C.K.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Providence Public Library

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>298840</u>	<u>4634100</u>	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

Plat 68, Lots 421, 515

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the 1932 Smith Hill Branch Library.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Jean Douglas, Consultant

Organization: _____ Date: April, 1997

Street & Number: 79 Rumstick Road Telephone: 401-245-1804

City or Town: Barrington State: RI ZIP: 02806

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Description

The Smith Hill Branch of the Providence Public Library at 31 Candace Street, designed by Albert Harkness, is a one-story brick building blending Colonial Revival and Moderne features. Its T-shaped plan is barely discernable by virtue of the length and width of the rear reference area, stair hall, and fireplace nook (63'-7" x 12'-8"). The library occupies a small (120' x 50') lot between Bernon and Wayne Streets in a mixed residential/commercial area of Smith Hill northwest of downtown Providence.

Facing west, the principal elevation is composed of a bold projecting central entrance pavilion flanked by recessed walls. The front entrance is at street level and features a slightly projecting triangular sandstone pediment with incised pilasters framing the two panel glass and wood door; a metal security cage door now closes over the entrance at night. A large multi-pane fixed sash window extends over the main entrance. Above this window is a decorative oval brick medallion. Two small glass showcases flanking the front entrance are now boarded over. Metal letters "Providence Public Library" and "Smith Hill Branch" originally fixed above the showcases have been removed; a painted sign affixed to the building now identifies it.

A 16' bay window consisting of a 56-pane fixed sash central unit and hinged 12/12 side units is contained on each side of the entrance pavilion. Six symmetrically placed rectangular windows punctuate the basement. Glass panes have been replaced by plastic throughout the building; all windows are covered with wire mesh for security. A molded brick watercourse articulates the separation of the raised rubblestone basement from the brick facade. Original plans called for sheet metal urns above all the quoins; a 1931 memo deleted four of these, leaving two urns above the entrance pavilion. Both urns have been removed.

The north and south elevations are identical in their composition, except for the large brick chimney at the end slope of the slate roof on the north. Both elevations are punctuated by three casement windows (the central window being twice as wide as the two flanking windows) with three basement windows placed symmetrically below. At the rear the reference room, fireplace nook, and basement stairway are housed. Another large brick chimney is located on the east elevation. The property is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence.

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The interior retains its original configuration and has survived largely unaltered. The main door opens into a vestibule featuring marble wainscot and mahogany panelling. In the vestibule a "Moderne" treatment is evident in the curved aluminum handrails, the suspended geometric glass and metal electric light fixture, and the incised metal pilasters on the walls at the top of the stairs. The smooth, sleek lines of the handrails and the use of metal contribute to a "streamline" vestibule.

Seven steps up from the vestibule is the central hall/delivery room separating the children's reading room and the adult reading room. The librarian's office is defined by original wood and glass partitions; the square clock above the office is shown in early photographs. On both sides of the lobby three tall arches separate the reading rooms from the central hall: the entrance to each reading room is an open arch; the central arch (above the bookshelves) has two casement windows topped by an open arch; and the westernmost arch (above bookshelves) has a central casement window flanked by cork bulletin boards with the top of the arch being a solid plastered wall. The reference room is located behind the adult reading room.

On the east wall, directly across from the circulation desk, is a huge fireplace (non-functioning); the back and jambs are of glazed tile set edgewise laid in a herringbone pattern. The back hearth is brick and the front hearth is soapstone. Conspicuously Moderne is the formed-metal bolection molding surrounding the firebox. Mahogany benches are built in on either side of the fireplace. The skylight above the circulation desk has been painted over, and the Moderne electric light fixtures in the reading rooms shown in early photographs have been replaced with fluorescent lights. The plaster ceiling features massive 12" x 16" solid mahogany beams.

A curved mahogany window seat is built in under the large bay windows in both the adult and children's reading rooms. Throughout the building, heavy Phillipine mahogany is used for window seats, bookshelves, panelling, and partitions. The reference room is separated from the adult reading room by bookshelves with glass partitions above; the doorway features a triangular mahogany pediment. Lining the walls of both reading rooms are wood bookshelves with bottom shelves angled to improve the visibility of book bindings. Shelving capacity exists for 12,000 books. Windows above the bookshelves provide natural light. Sleek turned wooden urns decorate the top corners of the bookshelves. Many of the tables and chairs which appear in early photographs are still in use.

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The raised basement provides natural light for the community room which seats eight-five. The basement also includes a conference room, book storage room with capacity for 12,000 volumes, shipping and repair room, staff rooms, rest rooms, and boiler room. It is entered from enclosed interior stairs or an exterior entrance on Wayne Street. The basement is simply detailed reflecting its utilitarian function.

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Photographs

3. Photographer: Jean Douglas
4. Date: March 1994
5. Negative: R.I. Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
150 Benefit Street
Providence, RI 02903

The above information applies to all photographs

6. Facade, view to northeast.
7. Photo #1 of 4

6. View: South elevation, view to north.
7. Photo #2 of 4

6. View: Interior vestibule with suspended geometric light fixture, view to northeast.
7. Photo #3 of 4

6. View: Interior, looking toward bookshelves with glass partitions above in adult reading room, view to northwest.
7. Photo #4 of 4

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Significance

Designed by noted Providence architect Albert Harkness and completed in 1932, the Smith Hill Branch continues to serve in its original capacity. Its construction was made possible by a \$10,000 annual increase in appropriation from the City of Providence which had also been provided for the South Providence and Rochambeau Branches; the city's allocation reached \$63,000 in 1932. C.K. Rathbone was the general contractor; cost of construction was \$67,000. The library retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials and association. It meets the requirements for registration under Criteria A and C for its educational and architectural significance as more fully described in the multiple property submission "Branch Buildings of the Providence Public Library, Rhode Island, 1926-1932."

The Smith Hill Branch provided a permanent home for what began as a delivery station in 1907 at the North End Working Girls' Club on Orms Street. In 1910 the delivery station became a branch with circulation increasing to 10,312 from the previous year's total of 8,361. By 1926 the building at 49 Orms Street which housed the library also contained a dispensary and a naturalization center conducted under the auspices of the International Institute. Three years later circulation at the branch had reached 70,318 and well-attended Americanization classes were held twice weekly. A close relationship developed between the library and the grammar school closest to it, the Candace Street School.

Located on the second floor, the North End Branch needed more space, a community room, and the separation of adult and juvenile readers. When the City of Providence agreed to make an annual increase in appropriation to the PPL of \$10,000, the Board of Trustees purchased a lot between Bernon and Wayne Streets as a site for a new branch which would be designed by Albert Harkness.

The decision to change from Wallis Howe's branch prototype to the design of a different architect probably resulted from changes at the PPL during this period of time. On February 7, 1930 William E. Foster resigned as librarian after serving in that capacity for 53 years. Associate librarian, Clarence E. Sherman, was appointed as Foster's successor. During the prior year Henry B. Gardner, President of the Board of Trustees since 1903, had refused re-election. William Davis Miller was elected President and served in this role from 1929 to 1941. Harkness was a long-

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time friend of Miller, and in 1934 Harkness designed a house for the Miller family in Wakefield.

Miller "was especially concerned with the completion of the development of the branch library system which his predecessor had begun with Wallis Howe's designs."¹ On October 1, 1931 the Trustees voted to proceed with the erection of the branch library on Candace Street. The close friendship between Miller and Harkness may account for a change in architects at this juncture. Harkness's design follows the same interior division of space as Howe's, but he articulates the Colonial Revival with the inclusion of Moderne elements. Harkness's design for the Smith Hill Branch was featured in a 1932 article in Architectural Record, "The Small Public Library." His plans were included with plans of six other library buildings in the northeast as an exemplary design for a small library building.

On September 28, 1932 the North End Branch closed and the new Smith Hill Branch was dedicated and opened to the public. Its popularity exceeded all expectations and by 1933 circulation totalled 119,011. The Branch Neighborhood Advisory Committee was formed in 1936. By this time six Americanization classes were meeting weekly in the community room.

The branch continues to have close contact with the Smith Hill community. An educational and cultural resource for people of all ages and nationalities, it remains a widely used resource. The largely unaltered interior and exterior of the Smith Hill Branch are reminders of its significant historical associations.

¹William H. Jordy, Christopher P. Monkhouse et al, Buildings on Paper, Rhode Island Architectural Drawings 1825-1945 [Providence:] Bell Gallery, List Art Center, Brown University; The Rhode Island Historical Society; and Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1982), p. 75.

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Major Bibliographical References

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Loring, Charles G. "The Small Public Library." Architectural
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Jordy, William H., Monkhouse, Christopher P. et al. Buildings on
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[Providence:] Bell Gallery, List Art Center, Brown
University; The Rhode Island Historical Society; and Museum of
Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1982.

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Smith Hill Branch Library
Providence City, Prov., R.I.
Photo #1 of 4



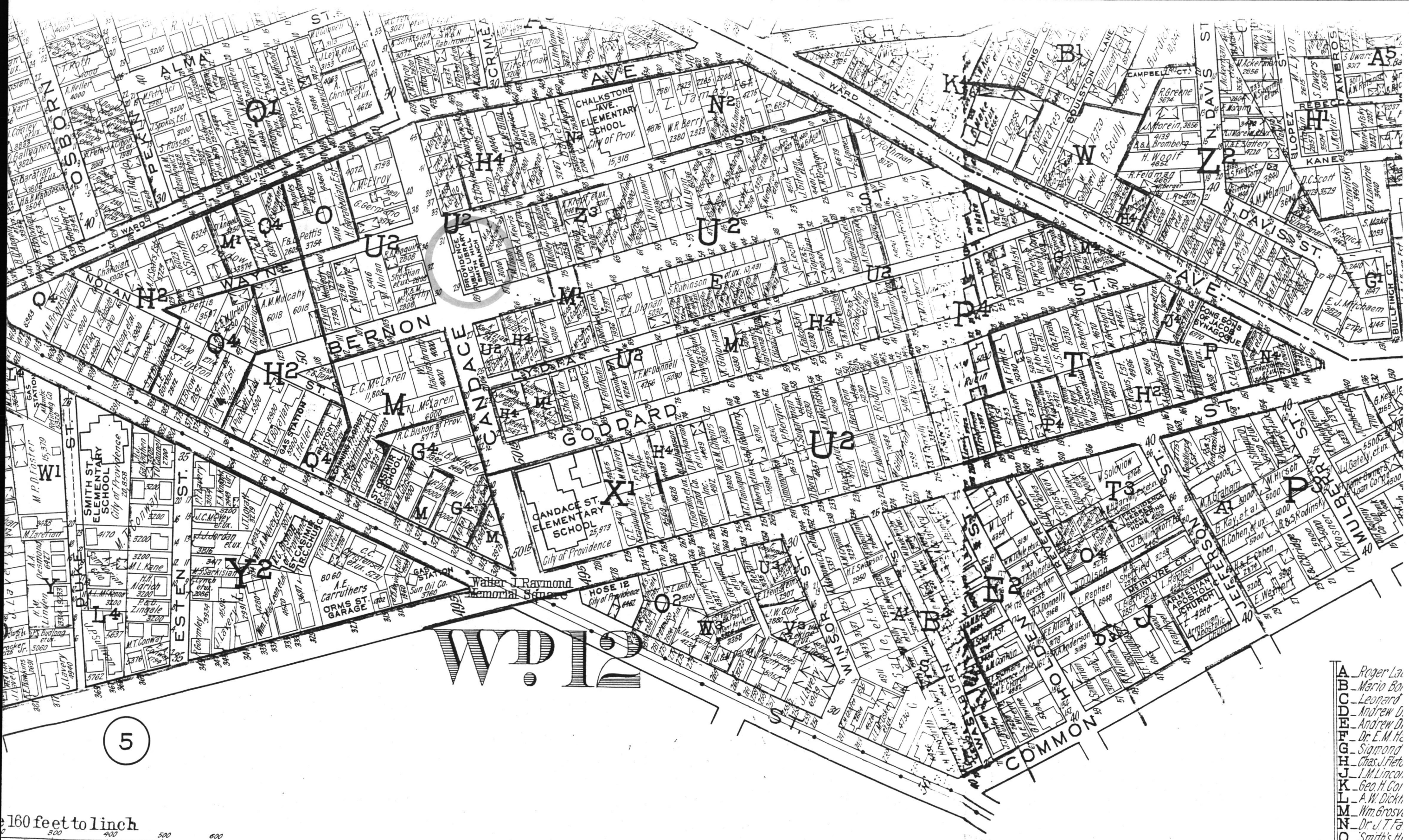
Smith Hill Branch Library
Providence City, Prov., R.I.
Photo # 2 of 4



Smith Hill Branch Library, Prov. Ctr., R.I. Photo # 3 of 4



Smith Hill Branch Library
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5

160 feet to inch
 300 400 500 600

- A - Roger La
- B - Mario Bo
- C - Leonard
- D - Andrew D.
- E - Andrew D.
- F - Dr. E. M. H.
- G - Sigmond
- H - Chas. J. Flet
- J - J. M. Lincol
- K - Geo. H. Coi
- L - A. W. Dicki
- M - Wm. Grosu
- N - Dr. J. T. Fa
- O - Smith's H
- P - Crawford
- Q - Sarah C. M
- R - Geo. H. Coi
- S - James A.
- T - Mrs. E. A.