

[ 1999 ]



H. M. ... 1888

# The HOPPIN HOUSE

The Hoppin House, now the home of the Brown University Development Office, was built in 1853 for artist Thomas Frederic Hoppin and his young wife, Anna Almy Jenkins. Just three years before construction of the villa began, Anna Almy Jenkins had lost her mother, heiress to two of Rhode Island's largest fortunes, and her sister to a fire that destroyed the family's Federal period mansion on the Hoppin House site. The Italianate villa, designed for the newly married Hoppins by Alpheus C. Morse, was considered one of the finest houses in Providence. Morse's first commission in the city, Hoppin House is an excellent example of the Italian Renaissance style he favored. The architect later designed Brown University's Sayles Hall, the Merchant's Bank Building on Exchange Place, and a number of distinguished East Side residences.

Preservationists today rank Hoppin House among the city's most distinctive buildings of its period, citing in particular the quality of its interior detail – its fine plasterwork, marblwork, paneling, and other woodwork, including its open stairway in the Eastlake style.

Known as "The House of a Thousand Candles" because of the brilliance of its indoor and outdoor illumination on festive occasions, the Thomas and Anna Hoppin home was a center of social activity, particularly for Providence's arts community. A painter, sculptor and graphic artist who had studied with Paul Delaroché, Thomas Hoppin was best known for his stained glass windows of the four Evangelists in New York's Trinity Church. His "Sentinel," a bronze statue of the dog that broke its

chain to save Anna Almy Jenkins and her brother from the fire that razed their childhood home, now stands at the entrance to Roger Williams Park Zoo.

During the 1870s, following the death of Thomas Hoppin, the house was rented to a succession of prominent tenants. Rhode Island Governor George Wetmore, whose Chateau-sur-Mer (1852) is one of Newport's most elaborate historic "cottages," wintered at Hoppin House during his tenure at the Capitol. President Rutherford B. Hayes and his wife were entertained in the house in 1877 by Governor Ambrose Burnside. Hoppin House, which had been vacant, was opened and furnished especially for the occasion. The interior lights shone again, and the grounds were illuminated by hundreds of lanterns.

Around the turn of the century, the great crystal chandelier that had contributed so much to the fame of Hoppin House was removed from the drawing room, sold, and taken to Hollywood. The Hoppin heirs put the house at the disposal of the Episcopal Church for a time, and the drawing room became a chapel. In 1920 Hoppin House was purchased by an architectural firm; its rooms would be used as offices for architects and designers for the next 66 years. In 1982 the building was purchased by the Robinson Green Bérretta Corporation, architects, who designed and managed its historic restoration. Hoppin House was sold again in 1986 to the Abedon Group of insurance and investment brokers.

Brown University purchased Hoppin House and its Carriage House in 1990 as headquarters for its Development Office.

ILLUSTRATION BY THOMAS SGOUROS

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# The Hoppin House

The Hoppin House is one of the great mansions on Benefit Street and an important part of the largest historic residential district in the United States. Built in 1853, the three story structure is considered by some preservationists to be **the most architecturally distinctive house in Providence.**

## History

- 1790 John Innes Clark's "Mansion House" originally stood on the site of the Hoppin House. It hosted George Washington in its first year.
- 1849 A fire razed the house during the occupancy of William Jenkins. **The entire family was lost, except for two of the children, seventeen year old Anna and fifteen year old Moses, who were awakened by the family dog.**
- 1852 **Anna married Thomas Hoppin three years later.** She was described at the time of her marriage as the wealthiest woman in America, having inherited the fortunes of her grandfathers, Moses Brown and William Almy. Mr. Hoppin, also of prominent descent, was a gentleman painter, sculptor, and graphic artist. He is particularly noted for his stained-glass windows of the Four Evangelists in New York City's Trinity Church.

## RGB

### HOPPIN HOUSE RESTORATION

- ARCHITECTURE
- INTERIOR DESIGN
- CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

By

The Robinson Green Beretta Corporation

Our special thanks for their invaluable assistance, the State of R.I. and  
Providence Plantations Historical Preservation Commission.

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