

“Lovecraft’s Providence” Map Notes

Most of the named places and streets on the map were mentioned in at least one of five tales by H. P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu”, “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward”, “From Beyond”, “The Haunter of the Dark” and “The Shunned House”, each of which was set partly or wholly within the Providence, Rhode Island, area. Note that “From Beyond” only stated that protagonist Crawford Tillinghast’s house and laboratory were located on Benevolent Street, without making clear it was definitely Benevolent Street in Providence that was intended. This is generally assumed to have been the case by most independent modern commentators, however. A few additional places which feature prominently on the map, such as the State Capitol, and Davis Park on the western edge, which do not feature in Lovecraft’s stories, have been named for interest, along with a small number of street names not found in Lovecraft, where additional clarity or completeness was felt useful.

Identifying specific places and street names was accomplished using a variety of freely-available maps, blogs and other informative webpages online, in conjunction with information provided in the two volumes of Leslie S. Klinger’s “The New Annotated H. P. Lovecraft” (2014 & 2019, both published by Liveright Publishing Corporation; Vol. 2 bears the subtitle “Beyond Arkham”), allowing cross-checking and amending of some items based on the best-available evidence. A few places, chiefly private houses and minor streets, that featured only slightly in the tales, were excluded from the final map, and the mapped area could not be extended sufficiently to also include a small number of other places, such as the North Burial Ground (whose southern tip lies around 2,200 feet, 670 metres, north of the map’s northern edge, along the angled line of North Main Street, and which extends about a further 4,300 ft, 1,310 m, north from there), and Joseph Curwen’s farmhouse by the river bluffs northwest of Pawtuxet, roughly 2½ miles, 4 kilometres, beyond the map’s southern limit.

Two property locations are uncertain, Olney Court, where Joseph Curwen’s house was situated, as no site of this name appears to have existed, and Crawford Tillinghast’s home on Benevolent Street. Online notes, coupled with Lovecraft’s description, suggested Olney Court was likely intended as being, or along, a short, narrow, western extension of Olney Street between North Main and the next north-south street parallel to it on the map (the unnamed Stampers Street), on Stampers Hill. If indeed the Tillinghast house was meant to be in Providence, Lovecraft’s story details suggest it was more likely one of the larger properties set back from the roadway in its own grounds, and somewhat isolated from its neighbours, which are found only towards the eastern end of Benevolent Street. A suitable property here was simply selected from what the online maps showed. Few online sources seemed to have noticed this particular Lovecraftian place, so there was no extra guidance here.

A third uncertain location, Number 17, at the junction of Well and Williams Streets, may have been the site of Professor George Gammell Angell’s death in “The Call of Cthulhu”, according to the source for Note 8 on page 125 of Klinger’s first (2014) “Annotated Lovecraft” volume. Lovecraft did not state so precisely however, and another spot, if likely nearby, may have been intended instead.

The base map here was generated from details on the 1935 1:36,180 scale map of the city by the Geological Survey of the US Department of the Interior, as this helpfully combined a full street and railroad plan with a topographic, 10-foot-contour-interval, map. The hilly nature of Providence northeast of the Providence River is such a feature of Lovecraft’s writings, it was felt essential to give some indication of this. Street names and

specific locations derived chiefly from the very detailed maps of 1857, 1895 and 1918 that indicated plot and property owners' names or building titles, where appropriate. Note that in common with some of the published maps, the word "Street" has been omitted for clarity on all roads where some alternative appellation was not used.

Some features might be of interest to note further. The Moses Brown School is more often shown mapped as the Hope Street High School. Dr. Marinus Bicknell Willett's House (Number 1; "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward") was also Lovecraft's home between 1926 and 1933. Robert Blake's House (Number 11; "The Haunter of the Dark"), later physically moved from College to Prospect Street, was Lovecraft's final home in the city when it was still on College Street. What Lovecraft called the "Great Bridge" is more usually known as the Weybosset Bridge, and "Town Street" ("The Case of Charles Dexter Ward") was the earlier name for the original riverside route east of the Providence River, here shown by the line of Canal and South Water Streets. The Pawtuxet Road, which ran south from the Great Bridge to Pawtuxet past Joseph Curwen's farmhouse ("The Case of Charles Dexter Ward"), features on some early Providence maps as "Pawtuxet Street", the northern part of which was "Broad Street", a name later adopted for most of its length. The more northerly part of this roadway is named - as shown on this map - as Weybosset Street. Broad Street is the unnamed southeastern fork just as the road leaves the southern edge of the map. For the inspiration behind what is shown as the Starry Wisdom Church on Federal Hill in western Providence ("The Haunter of the Dark"; actually a fictitious place as Lovecraft described it there), see the very valuable discussion *via* this page on the H. P. Lovecraft Historical Society's website, <https://www.hplhs.org/darthod.php>.

One additional place, the Milton Hotel in central Providence near City Hall, is not derived from Lovecraft. Instead, it came from the "Call of Cthulhu" RPG scenario "The Shadow Over Providence" (Chaosium Inc., 2019).

And one last quirk. Owners' names on the old, detailed maps clearly showed that Lovecraft had sourced many of the family names for characters used in his stories from the history of Providence. While checking through these maps to find various locations, one name sprang out from the 1857 map, that of the owner of the block between North Main and Canal Streets, just south of the western end of Meeting Street. The name is "Z. Allen"; so maybe... (If uncertain why this name is significant, see Lovecraft's tale, "The Shadow Over Innsmouth".)

The map was constructed using the ProFantasy Campaign Cartographer 3+ mapping software, most particularly its "Cthulhu City" add-on from the December 2017 "Cartographer's Annual" issue. Red coloration shows built-up residential and commercial areas, grey industrial ones, green and brown parks and other open spaces. Rail lines are indicated by solid black lines, ending where short cross-lines form a "T"-shape, with thinner curving black lines cutting across the rail lines indicating the two mapped places where they pass beneath roads. One further thinner curving line cutting over a pair of rail lines north of the minor Thomas Street, just before the lines would seem to have crossed Benefit Street, shows the start of a tunnel under much of the eastern part of Providence as mapped here. Note that the number of rail lines has been reduced for clarity in places.

- Alastair McBeath, September 2022.