

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 4, 2010

Providence Plantation: The official name of our smallest state is the "State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantation." Roger Williams wandered into the area from Massachusetts Bay in 1636 and set up his religious colony, supposedly free from Puritan persecution. Abigail Adams sailed up Narragansett Bay in 1789 and was entertained by the Quaker ladies of Providence on the way to join her husband, the new Vice President of the United States, in New York, the first capital of the 13 states under the Constitution. Brown University was founded on a hill above the city in the early 19th century, and it is still considered one of the Ivy League colleges.

The *Weekly News* of September 8, 2008, told of the pre-meteorology program I joined in March 1943. I didn't know anything about Brown when I got orders to report there. Upon arrival at the campus after dark, no one seemed to be around, and few lights were on due to the World War II black-out. A T/4 (something like a PFC or a corporal) named Prime assigned me to a dormitory room, and I went to bed. The next morning, an equally confused young man named Dick Ramsey from Lexington, Kentucky, arrived and was assigned to a room next door. He seemed to have a uniform, but I didn't. We were provided with meals in a cafeteria building called Faunce House, and we went to bed. In the middle of the night, we were aroused by great commotion. The unit we were supposed to join was arriving with all their gear from Basic Training at Clearwater, Florida. They crowded in and even slept in the halls until things could be sorted out and proper room assignments made the next day. The "Pre-Meteorology Squadron," as we became known, consisted of about 225 young men, divided into seven units (which were later called "flights").

The dormitories at Brown were old and in need of maintenance, but they sufficed for a military unit. Sixteen of us occupied one floor that had been intended for four civilian students, with one old-fashioned bath (one lavatory and one toilet) in which had been installed a makeshift shower. Since the total squadron was divided into seven units or "flights," an equal number in our flight was housed on a similar floor above (or below). In less than a month, we were moved to an even older dormitory called Hope College, probably the oldest building on the Brown campus. A four-floor building, it was divided into either three or four sections, each separate from the others with no connecting doors. There was an old wooden stairway with badly worn step treads to the fourth floor in each section. Bob White, John Banks, and I had a spacious corner room on the fourth floor. Here there were only 12 boys using the only bathroom. We were here through the spring and summer months and left in late September, when those of us still in the program, about 2/3 of those who had started, moved on to our final meteorology school.

Almost all the teachers at Brown were civilians. Some, such as I. J. Kapstein, head of the English Department, were excellent. However, the faculty, like the student body, had been hit hard by the war, and many foreign teachers were employed who were refugees from European countries. They tried hard, but it was difficult for American youths to understand everything. Falling asleep in class was a common problem. Our recesses were almost non-existent. We had drills and parades on the Brown campus and marched all over Providence every afternoon singing patriotic marching songs, many from World War I. We were permitted to have a softball league on Saturday afternoons. Our flight won the league championship.

In retrospect, I liked Providence. I loved the New Haven Railroad, with the location of its passenger station requiring double horseshoe curves to serve downtown and avoid the steep hills. With through New York-Boston passenger trains every hour, I could hear their high-drivered steam locomotives pulling away from the station and picking up speed from my dormitory bed on summer nights. The downtown portion of the city at the head of Narragansett Bay had several movie theaters and at least two good hotels, the Biltmore and the Weybosset. Weybosset was also the main shopping street, which was turned into a mall about 1960. A stiff climb up Waterman Street from downtown went almost past the Rhode Island School of Design and the USO before skirting the Brown campus on the right. Pembroke College, all girls, was about a block off Waterman to the left. A trolley tunnel, four short blocks in length, was under Waterman Street with the west end at the downtown

level and the east end some 150 feet higher. Rhode Island's capitol building was on another hill in the northwest section of the city. Governor McGrath would occasionally come to the Brown campus to review the "troops" (us). John Hay, born about 1840, was a young but favorite secretary to President Lincoln after his graduation from Brown. Very successful in life, he was Secretary of State in the McKinley administration and gave generously to Brown, which named its modern library for him in the 1930s. At the bottom of the hill mentioned above, there was a high-water mark on one of the buildings, showing that the bay had risen to a crest of about 10 feet over the streets of Providence in the New England Hurricane of 1938.