



**Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
HISTORIC PROPERTY DATA FORM**

DATABASE ID# _____

TOWN Providence VILLAGE _____

ADDRESS 68-76 Dorrance Street PLAT/LOT 20/136

NAME(s) Case-Mead Building/Joseph G. LeCount Law Office

PROPERTY TYPE Bld OWNERSHIP Priv

STATUS NR Dist C

NR DISTRICT Downtown Providence Historic District

USES: Select terms from National Register table

CURRENT Mixed HISTORIC Mixed

SITING: SETBACK 10 ft LOT SIZE 5,227 sq ft

STORIES 5 ROOF(s) Flat

MATERIALS: Select terms from National Register table

ROOF Tar and Gravel WALL Stucco

FOUNDATION Stone OTHER _____

WINDOWS Casement, 1/1double-hung metal sash



Photo ID PROV_DorranceSt_68-76_N



Photo ID PROV_DorranceSt_68-76_E

ALTERATIONS:	PORCH	WINDOWS	TRIM	OVERALL
Material	Min	Min	None	Min
Configuration	Min	Min	None	Min

INTEGRITY X Excellent Good Fair Poor Destroyed

PROPERTY COMPONENTS: List & number in order of importance. Include the primary component of the resource as number 1.

Component Type	Code	Count	Component Type	Code	Count
(1) Building	B-C	1	(4)		
(2)			(5)		
(3)			(6)		

EVENT	DATE	SOURCE	NAME (person/firm/organization)	ROLE
Original construction	1859	NR		
Building remodeled	1906	NR		

ARCHITECTURE: If more than one, list & number in order of importance

TYPE _____ STYLE(s) Italianate

SURVEYOR PAL DATE April 2019 REVIEWER _____ DATE _____

Use reverse for comments, history, and bibliography

This form was produced as part of a survey of resources associated with the twentieth-century African American Civil Rights Movement in Rhode Island and provides a summary of information relevant to that historical context. The surveyed property may have associations with additional historical contexts that are not discussed.

History:

The Case-Mead Building was originally constructed as a four-story building in 1859. The fourth floor was initially occupied by an infantry hall, and in the late nineteenth century the building hosted an infamous Turkish Parlor. In 1906, the building was completely renovated and a fifth floor was added, which resulted in the current unusual fenestration pattern. The first story is currently occupied by stores and restaurants, and the upper stories were converted from offices into microloft, studio, and one-bedroom apartments (Paolino 2019; Woodward 1983).

The Case-Mead Building's association with the civil rights movement stems from the occupation of an office at 76 Dorrance Street by lawyer Joseph G. "J. G." LeCount (1887–1981) from 1950 to 1969. LeCount was born in Washington, D.C., and came to East Providence, Rhode Island, to live with relatives when he was two years old. His family later moved to the racially mixed West Elmwood section of Providence. As a high school student, he was one of the founders of the Marathon Club, an organization that sponsored athletic teams and later took up complex social and political issues to prove that black youth had ambition, could be respectable, and were involved in civic issues. The Marathon Club supported the activities of the NAACP, secured a pardon for a black man, and worked to reinstitute an all-black militia company in Rhode Island (LeCount 1976). Upon earning his law degree at Howard University Law School in Washington, D.C., LeCount returned to Providence where he became further involved in civil rights (Bell Jr. 1997:106–107). In 1914, LeCount and his new wife settled in an East Side neighborhood referred to as Sugar Hill, in reference to an upscale black neighborhood in Harlem, New York. He was an active member of the Providence NAACP branch, serving as its president from 1935 to 1939, then as the chairman of the organization's legal redress committee (Bell Jr. 1997:107).

In the 1940s, LeCount worked with Thurgood Marshall, a member of the NAACP National Legal Defense Team, in the prosecution of a discrimination case involving members of the Providence International Brotherhood of Boilermakers working at the Walsh-Kaiser Shipyard who were being forced into a segregated auxiliary union (see 59 Chestnut Street) (APA 1981:26). In 1949, the NAACP assigned LeCount, along with J. Clifford Clarkson of Springfield, Massachusetts, to assist in the defense of Ralph Jennings, a black man from Rochester, New Hampshire, who was accused of murdering a white children's nurse from Newark, New Jersey (*Portsmouth Herald* 1949). LeCount later became an expert in family law and laws relating to the rights of children (APA 1981:26).

LeCount was initially opposed to the establishment of the Urban League in Providence, believing that the NAACP could accomplish everything the Urban League was trying to do (Bell Jr. 1997:107). Despite this, he was a member of the Urban League from its founding, although he was not very active within the organization (LeCount 1976). He later changed his stance and led the Providence NAACP in working with the local branch of the Urban League to address issues in the black community. He also enjoined the Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut NAACP branches to band together and became the first president of the New England Regional Conference of the NAACP (APA 1981:26). In 1963, LeCount became the legal adviser to the statewide NAACP Housing Committee, which worked toward the passage of a fair housing bill in Rhode Island (*Newport Daily News* 1963). LeCount was elected Grand Master Mason in the Prince Hall Grand Lodge in Rhode Island and belonged to other fraternal organizations (Bell Jr. 1997:109). In the early 1980s, the Rhode Island Bar Association gave him a special award in recognition of 63 years as a practicing attorney and the University of Rhode Island awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Laws (APA 1981:26). In 1989, the Providence NAACP created the Joseph G. LeCount Award for community service and leadership and gave it to social worker Cleophas N. Clark, the former program director of the John Hope Settlement House (see 7 Thomas P. Whitten Way) (*Boston Globe* 1989).

The Case-Mead Building was listed in the National Register as part of the Downtown Providence Historic District in 1983.

Bibliography:

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1981 “Alphas on the Move: Brother Joseph G. LeCount.” *The Sphinx*, Vol. 67 (1), p. 26.

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1997 *An Assessment of Life in Rhode Island as an African American in the Era from 1918 to 1993*. Vantage Press, New York, NY.

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Paolino Properties

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Woodward, William McKenzie

1983 *National Register Nomination – Downtown Providence Historic District*. Providence County, Rhode Island, NRIS# 84001967.