

EAST GREENWICH
Roughly bounded by Division, Water,
London, and Peirce streets
East Greenwich
Kent County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-404

HABS
RI
2-GREWIE,
9-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

EAST GREENWICH

HABS
RI
2-GREWIE,
9-
HABS No. RI-404

Location: Roughly bounded by Division, Water, London, and Peirce streets, East Greenwich, Kent County, Rhode Island.

USGS East Greenwich, RI Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:

A: 19.295210.4615400
B: 19.296420.4615400
C: 19.296420.4614560
D: 19.295210.4614560

Present Owners: multiple ownership.

Present Use: residential, institutional, civic, and commercial.

Significance: The town center of East Greenwich is significant as a concentrated, well-preserved collection of resources associated with the development of the Town of East Greenwich from its founding in the mid-seventeenth century to about 1935. Established initially as a small mercantile center to support the surrounding farms, East Greenwich grew into one of the state's leading trade and shipbuilding centers, and became the county seat of Kent County in 1750. The district contains a variety of building types and designs that reflect the various periods of the town's development and provide a wealth of information about Rhode Island's mercantile and architectural history. The East Greenwich Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

Note: The text below was adapted from the *East Greenwich Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*, Clifford M. Thatcher-Renshaw, Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1973 and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission's *Statewide Preservation Report: East Greenwich, Rhode Island*. Providence, RI, 1974.

PART I. EAST GREENWICH: DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

Thirteen miles south of Providence, the Town of East Greenwich rises in a series of hills from Greenwich Cove, an inlet on the west side of Narragansett Bay. The town is organized around two primary thoroughfares, which intersect near the northern boundary of the town's center. The historic commercial center is located along Main Street, the major north-south route through town. Division Street, which forms East Greenwich's northern border with the Town of Warwick, has long provided a route to the town center from the western country-side. Several blocks to the south, King Street runs down the hill from Main Street, providing access to the wharves and waterfront along the western shore of Greenwich Cove.

The East Greenwich town center (East Greenwich Historic District), which includes portions of both East Greenwich and Warwick, contains more than 300 contributing elements that were constructed or established within the district's period of historic significance (ca. 1677-1935). There are about 40 non-contributing elements, which include resources that date from the period of significance, but have been altered to the point where they no longer exhibit their historic appearance, and those constructed after the period of significance.

The eastern boundary of the district follows the coastline, including the wharves and buildings on Water Street. The northern boundary runs along Division Street to Main Street, where it jogs north into Warwick and then west to Dark Entry Brook. The western boundary is formed roughly by Dark Entry Brook, Kenyon Avenue, and the western lot lines of properties located along the west side of Peirce Street. The southern boundary runs along the lot lines of properties several lots south of London Street.

The double-track Amtrak main line bisects the eastern half of the district, between Duke and Water streets. The rail line passes numerous significant structures such as the 1870 East Greenwich Station at 146 Duke Street; the Bay Mill on King Street, a three-story textile mill built ca. 1840; and the Providence & Stonington/King Street Railroad Bridge, a two-span, stone-arch bridge built in 1837.

The majority of the buildings located in the district are late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century single-family dwellings. They range from simple vernacular cottages to large mansions with elaborate architectural details. Other significant property types include commercial, governmental, industrial, military, social, transportation, and religious buildings.

Division Street, a narrow, well-shaded, two-lane road, remains bordered by well-preserved and restored eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses, set back on modest, landscaped lots. Typical of the buildings located there are the Greene and Allen Fry houses at 15 and 40 Division Street, respectively. Both are two-story, five-bay-wide houses with Federal-style designs. In the same area are two of the oldest houses in the district. The Miller-Congdon House at 20 Division Street, a small, one-story, gambrel-roof cottage that dates from the first settlement of the city lots, was constructed in 1711. At the west end of the district is the Samuel Gorton, Jr., House, which was constructed in 1680 and is surrounded by formal gardens that date

from the eighteenth century. Although much altered and enlarged in the eighteenth century, the two-story clapboard house retains its fine, pilastered stone chimney, and some of its original original interior.

At 144 Division Street is the Windmill Cottage, which was originally a typical two-story Federal house (1818), but was altered by the addition of an early windmill (ca. 1790) into a picturesque Victorian composition in 1870 by the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow for his friend, Professor George Washington Greene.

While Division Street retains its rural character, King Street, and the surrounding grid of Marlborough, Duke, Queen and Wine Streets, is densely built-up and reflects the urban character that the town acquired during its most intensive period of historic development during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Laid out to provide access to the wharves and the waterfront from the town center on the hill above, King Street is a wide avenue, lined by an almost solid border of well-preserved, closely-spaced eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century houses. The Jonathan Salisbury House (ca. 1785) at 19 King Street, with its five-bay, symmetrical facade built right up to the sidewalk and its gable roof running parallel to the street, is the outstanding house on the street.

The Kent County Courthouse (1804) on Main Street at the head of King Street is an excellent example of an early Federal period public building. The two-story, clapboard Old Kent County Jail (1795) faces towards the courthouse from the foot of King Street. Across from the Jail, the Bay Mill (1840) is one of the best surviving examples of early-nineteenth-century steam mill architecture in the state. This three-and-one-half-story stone building is evidence of a period of industrial expansion that spurred the construction of dozens of small cottages in the area. Notable examples of such buildings include the Greek Revival-style Remington House at 149 Marlborough Street and a well-preserved collection of modest houses along Lion and Castle Streets, on Ropewalk Hill, just south of the mill. Another significant feature of King Street is the Providence and Stonington Railroad Bridge, which was constructed in 1837 and features two graceful stone arches.

Whereas King Street was fashionable for the successful merchants and ship captains of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, those with larger fortunes erected their houses on generous lots along Peirce Street, overlooking the town and the cove beyond. The General Varnum House (1773) on its large lot above the Courthouse, and the Dr. Charles Eldredge House (1773) at Peirce and Division streets, are the finest eighteenth-century mansions in town. Very similar in design, the buildings are two stories in height and have gable-on-hip roofs and clapboard siding. Built on the four-room, central-hall plan, both houses retain exceptionally good period detail, interior as well as exterior. Peirce Street remained a popular location for wealthy families throughout the nineteenth century. Examples of these later mansions include the Greek Revival-style Knowles House at 110 Peirce Street, the Italianate-style Potter House at 154 Peirce Street, and the Queen Anne-style house at 140 Peirce Street.

The section of Peirce Street immediately west of the Courthouse developed into the town's civic center during mid-nineteenth century. Here was built the Armory of the Kentish Guards (1843), an exceptional example of Greek Revival architecture, as well as two fine churches—the stone, Gothic Revival-style St. Luke's Church (1875), and First Baptist Church (1884), a clapboard-and-shingle structure that remains as one of the state's finest examples of Queen Anne architecture. The only significant disturbance to the

historic appearance of Peirce Street is the modern brick town hall, which was constructed on a site formerly occupied by the Old Quaker Meeting House (1804) and the Kent Academy (1802).

Below Peirce Street to the east, Main Street presents the most diverse streetscape in the East Greenwich Historic District. The majority of the buildings there are commercial structures, but other types, including residential and public buildings are also represented. At the northern end of the street stands the eighteenth-century, gambrel-roof Abraham Greene House (1770), and at the southern end the brick Micah Whitmarsh House (1767). The Kent County Courthouse (1804) is located at the head of King Street. Between these early structures stands an unbroken line of Victorian era commercial buildings. Prominent among those buildings are the three-story, brick Masonic Block (1893) at 181 Main Street, and the two-and-one-half-story, mansard-roof Browning Block (1876) at 112 Main Street. The Late Gothic Revival-style Varnum Memorial Armory (1914) at 6 Main Street and the Colonial Revival-style U.S. Post Office (1935) at 11 Main Street are two of the most impressive twentieth century buildings in East Greenwich. Many of the commercial buildings along Main Street are hidden by recent siding, obscured by modern signs, or rebuilt with plate-glass storefronts. Despite those alterations and intrusions, the street retains most of its historic scale and rhythm.

There have been relatively few changes to the physical appearance of the East Greenwich Historic District since it was listed in the National Register in 1973. The most significant alteration has been a large wood-frame addition constructed on the rear of the Kent County Courthouse in 1996. Other changes have included adaptive use projects that have put businesses in buildings originally designed for other functions. The most notable of these projects is the recent conversion of the former Post Office into a restaurant.

PART II. EAST GREENWICH: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The East Greenwich town center (East Greenwich Historic District) has significant associations with the development of the Town of East Greenwich over a period of more than 250 years. Although the area that comprises East Greenwich was included in the Rhode Island Charter of 1644, there is little evidence to suggest that European settlement occurred there until after King Philip's War (1675-77). Until that time, the area was within the territory occupied by the Narragansett Indians. The Cowesetts, a sub-tribe of the Narragansetts, reputedly established a village on the Pequot Trail, near where Bleachery Pond is today. The Pequot Trail later formed the basis for what became Post Road (now Main Street in East Greenwich).

That portion of present-day Rhode Island lying between Warwick and the Connecticut border was included under the authority of Rhode Island in the Charter of 1644. A few trading houses were established within the area during the early 1640s, but all lands there had been abandoned by the beginning of King Philip's War. After the defeat of the Narragansetts in 1676, some of the early settlers returned to their lands, but were met by a Connecticut proclamation asserting control over the territory by right of recent conquest. In attempt to reassert its authority over the area, the Rhode Island General Assembly established the Town of East Greenwich in 1677. The town consisted of some 5,000 acres, of which 500 were reserved for the town proper and the remaining 4,500 for farmsteads in the surrounding lands to the south and west. Located on the eastern shore of what is now Greenwich Cove, the town was divided into fifty lots. To foster settlement, the General Assembly granted lots to 48 Rhode Island men, mostly from Newport, Jamestown, and Prudence

Island, as reward for their service in King Philip's War. This early division of East Greenwich into town and country remains evident today.

Settlement of the area occurred first in the rural divisions where a number of farmsteads were established during the second half of the seventeenth century. Development at the town site lagged behind, with only a few homes constructed there before 1700. The only documented seventeenth-century building in the district is the Samuel Gorton, Jr./Governor William Greene House (ca. 1685) at 777 Love Lane.

The pace of development at the town site quickened during the first half of the eighteenth century as it began to grow in importance as a shipping center for the area's farm products. In 1700 the area included in the East Greenwich Historic District was subdivided into quarter-acre city lots, a number of which survive today in their original configuration. The population of the town, which stood at 240 in 1708, grew to 1,223 by 1730. New industries, including shipbuilding and fishing, added diversity to the local economy. The important role that East Greenwich played as a center for commercial activity in southern Rhode Island was recognized in 1750, when the town was made county seat of the newly-formed Kent County.

Vestiges of the development that took place in East Greenwich during the first half of the eighteenth century include the Miller-Congdon House (ca. 1711) at 20 Division Street and the Old Baptist Burying Ground on Wine Street. Established in 1729 on Meetinghouse Hill, the Old Baptist Burying Ground is representative of the important role that the Baptist sect played in the early development of the town.

Like most other towns in Rhode Island, East Greenwich entered a protracted period of economic decline in the mid-eighteenth century. Still based largely on agricultural expansion, the colony's economy suffered as the relatively small amount of fertile land in the interior reached its productive limits. The population of the state as a whole stood at a virtual standstill for more than a decade after 1755. During that period, no significant development occurred in East Greenwich.

As has been the case throughout its history, the town's sheltered location on Narragansett Bay was a significant factor in its ultimate recovery from the depression. In the early 1760s, the excellent harbor at East Greenwich began to attract colonists to mercantile rather than agricultural pursuits. In 1770 the port of East Greenwich, which remains in essentially its original configuration today, was laid out in the harbor. By 1790, East Greenwich had become the fifth largest shipbuilding town in the state. The fishing industry grew with boats fishing widely in the North Atlantic Ocean, and later the town would be long known as the "Shellfish Capital" of the state. A rising class of village artisans produced products for local consumption and export. The shipping industry, previously limited to nearby coastal markets, expanded to include the shipment of fish and other products to the major population centers along the eastern seaboard. A small amount of slaving and foreign trade also occurred.

By the Revolution, the fabric of streets which make up the town center today had been established. Main Street was laid out over the ancient Pequot Trail of the Narragansett Indians in 1737 as part of the Post Road from New York to Boston. Although now a major highway, throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was secondary to the east-west axis formed by King and Division Streets. The Exchange, intended as the common market place, though since used in a variety of functions, was laid out on a triangular lot where King Street intersects Duke Street.

East Greenwich played a significant role in the events of the Revolutionary War. Founded in 1774, the Kentish Guards, headquartered in their Armory (1843) on Peirce Street, is the fifth oldest military company in the Nation and is still active. Marching for Lexington and Concord after receiving word of the battle there, the Guard soon returned to defend Rhode Island for the rest of the war. East Greenwich was also the home of such important Revolutionary War figures as Dr. Peter Turner, a prominent surgeon whose house (ca. 1774) still stands at 21 Court House Lane, and General James Mitchell Varnum, who was elected to Congress in 1780 and 1786, and who later served as a District Judge. The Varnum House (1773) at 57 Peirce Street, now restored and opened as a museum, was visited by the leading men of the period, including Generals Lafayette, Rochambeau, and Sullivan, as well as General Nathaniel Greene. Also visited by these leaders, the Governor William Greene Homestead (the Samuel Gorton, Jr., House (ca. 1685)) on Division Street served as the headquarters for the Rhode Island government during the War while Greene was Governor of the state.

Rhode Island recovered quickly from the effects of the Revolution and during the decade between 1780 and 1790 saw its first substantial gain in population since 1750. East Greenwich had by 1790 become the fifth-largest population center in the state, with 1,824 residents enumerated during the first Federal census. Development in the town kept pace with the expanding population. Prominent merchants, artisans, and ship captains erected a number of large homes along Division and King streets. One example is the Captain Jonathan Salisbury House (ca. 1785) at 19 King Street. The wealthy of the town erected their mansions on large lots above the town on Peirce Street. A notable example is the Federal-style Oliver Wicks House (ca. 1785) at 21 Peirce Street.

The earliest public buildings in the district date from the latter part of that era of commercial expansion. The Georgian style Kent County Courthouse at 127 Main Street is the most historically significant public building in East Greenwich. Constructed in 1804, the building features a central hip-roof clock tower with a weathervane finial; a flat-hip-roof with a decorative balustrade; pedimented gable dormers; dentil cornice; and a symmetrical facade with quoins, and sash windows with keystone lintels. Another prominent public building constructed during the period is the East Greenwich Jail (1795), which is located at the eastern end of Kings Street.

As with other coastal Rhode Island towns, the Jefferson Embargo of 1808 and the War of 1812 caused a rapid decline of trade and shipbuilding. Once again, local entrepreneurs were forced to expand into new fields of endeavor. This time it was the establishment of light-industrial factories that provided a needed boost for the local economy. The oversupply of labor and the advantageous location and topographical features of East Greenwich provided an excellent setting for industries, primarily textiles. By the mid-1820s East Greenwich was developing into a minor industrial center. Further industrial expansion was spurred by the completion of the New York, Providence & Boston Railroad's Stonington Road through East Greenwich in 1837. The railroad provided a safer and faster means of transporting goods and helped to attract additional industries to the area. Elements of the town's railroad history within the district include the stone, double-arch railroad bridge over King Street (1837) and the East Greenwich Railroad Station (ca. 1870) on Duke Street.

Bay Mill, located on the south side of King Street, along the East Greenwich waterfront, is an excellent example of a typical Rhode Island textile mill. Constructed in 1840, the mill features elements of the Greek

Revival style in its front-facing gable roof with returns, arched, circular, and rectangular windows, and masonry quoins.

Industrial expansion resulted in the introduction of workers' housing in the district. Mill workers filled in the grid of streets east of Main Street with their small Greek Revival and simple Victorian cottages, especially on the old Ropewalk Hill, south of King Street. The wealthy, meanwhile, continued to erect large houses on Peirce Street. Greek Revival was the dominant style between about 1830 and 1860. Most buildings constructed there during the latter third of the nineteenth century have either Gothic Revival or Victorian designs. Among the most outstanding architectural examples from this period are the Italianate-style Potter House at 154 Peirce Street and the Queen Anne-style house at 140 Peirce Street.

Main Street was developed as the commercial center of East Greenwich during the second half of the century. The area features a concentrated and relatively intact collection of one- and two-part masonry commercial block designs, typical of those erected in small towns throughout the nation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The most prominent commercial building is the Masonic Block (1893) at 165-175 Main Street. The building has a two-part commercial design, consisting of a three-bay storefront with large plate glass display windows on the ground floor and two upper floors that are divided into five bays by brick columns.

Also dating from the Victorian era, are several significant religious buildings, including the First Baptist Church at 35 Peirce Street and St. Luke's Church at 101 Peirce Street. First Baptist Church, constructed in 1884, has an unusual design that incorporates elements of the Queen Anne, Shingle, and Colonial Revival styles. Built in 1875, St. Luke's is a more traditional example of an ornate Gothic Revival-style religious building.

By the turn of the century, the architectural fabric of the East Greenwich Historic District was largely complete. The absence of a significant number of twentieth-century buildings in the district is attributable to the extent to which the area was developed over the previous two centuries and the failure of the textile mills, which initiated a prolonged period of economic depression. Full recovery from the effects of the depression did not occur until after World War II, when the town began to gain popularity as a suburb of Providence.

Among the most prominent buildings constructed during the early twentieth century was the Varnum Memorial Armory at 6 Main Street. Constructed in 1914, the Armory features a Late Gothic Revival design, complete with a crenellated parapet. The end of the historic period for the district is marked by the construction of the East Greenwich Post Office in 1935. Located at 11 Main Street, the building was designed by Federal architect, Frank J. Anthony in the Colonial Revival style.

Today, the primary significance of the East Greenwich Historic District is the rich, diverse, and remarkably intact architectural fabric which was woven through three centuries. While King Street displays an almost unbroken line of Federal-style buildings dating from the turn of the eighteenth century, the surrounding neighborhood developed over time. In those areas small pockets of modest nineteenth-century houses often surround houses constructed in earlier periods. Similarly, such streets as Peirce, Division, and Main streets developed gradually, with construction continuing into this century as East Greenwich became a Providence suburb. Yet here as well, the maintenance of the scale of the neighborhood allowed the later Victorian

structures to enrich the established architectural character, while preserving the unique character of each neighborhood.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings

None available.

B. Historic Views

Photo collection of the Town of East Greenwich Planning Department, East Greenwich, Rhode Island.

C. Interviews

None conducted.

D. Bibliography

Cole, J. R.

1889 *History of Washington and Kent Counties, Rhode Island*. W. W. Preston & Co., New York, NY.

Downing, Antoinette F.

1937 *Early Homes of Rhode Island*. Richmond, VA.

Greene, Daniel H.

1877 *History of the Town of East Greenwich*. Providence, RI.

Hitchcock, Henry Russell

1968 *Rhode Island Architecture*. DaCapo Press, New York, NY.

McPartland, Martha P.

1960 *History of East Greenwich*. East Greenwich, RI.

Thatcher-Renshaw, Clifford M.

1973 *East Greenwich Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form*. On file at the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, Providence, RI.

Gibbs, James H.

1974 *Statewide Preservation Report K-EG-1: East Greenwich, Rhode Island*. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence, RI.

Jones, Robert O.

1981 *Statewide Preservation Report K-W-1: Warwick, Rhode Island*. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence, RI.

Maps

D. G. Beers & Co.

1870 *Atlas of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*. Philadelphia, PA.

Everts & Richards

1895 *New Topographical Atlas of Surveys-Southern Rhode Island*. Philadelphia, PA.

Walling, H. F.

1855 *Map of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*. New York, NY.

Walling, H. F.

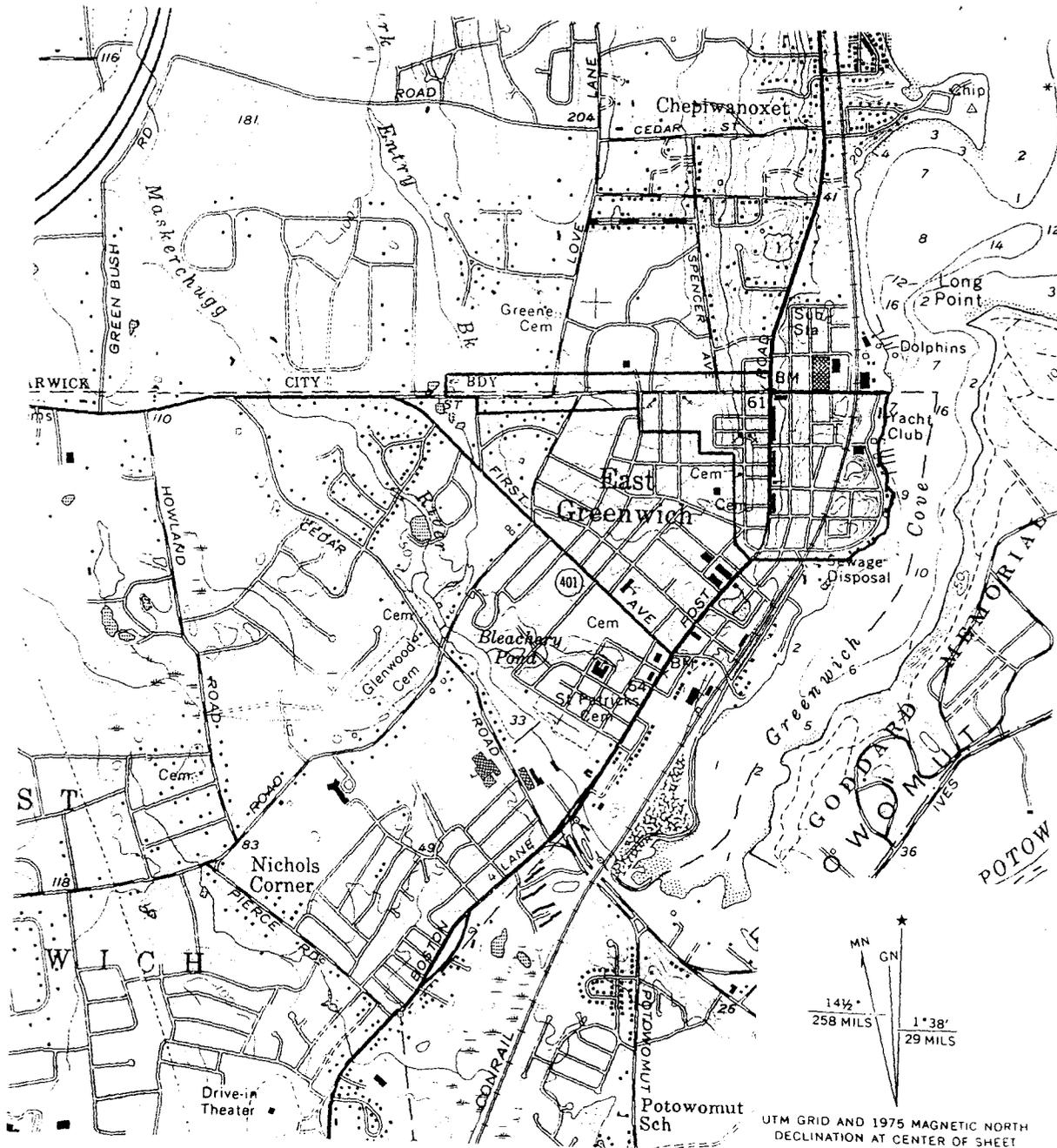
1862 *Map of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*. New York, NY.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

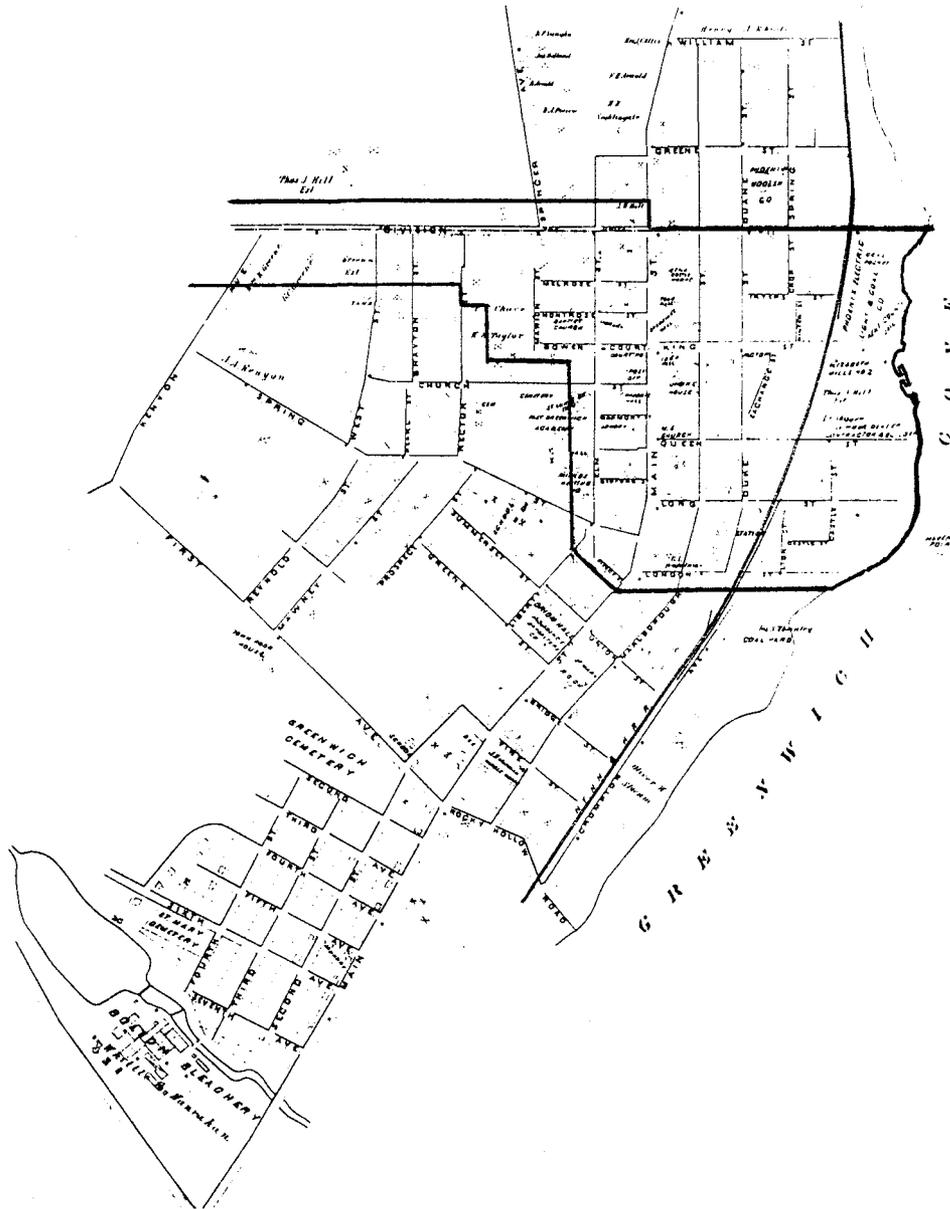
The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak), in association with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), is proposing a number of infrastructure projects to upgrade the Northeast Corridor Railroad right-of-way in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. In consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs), Amtrak and FRA have determined that the proposed "Northeast Corridor Improvement Project—Electrification: New Haven, Connecticut to Boston, Massachusetts" project will have adverse impacts on significant historic properties. Three memoranda of agreement outlining stipulations to eliminate, minimize, or mitigate adverse project impacts have been drafted by Amtrak, the FRA, and the respective SHPOs, and have been accepted by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The stipulations include the recordation of the East Greenwich town center, East Greenwich-Warwick, Rhode Island, a resource listed in the National Register of Historic Places, to Historic American Buildings Survey standards. The proposed project will necessitate the installation of catenary poles and overhead wiring and has been determined by the Rhode Island SHPO to cause an adverse effect.

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL Inc.) of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was retained by ABB Environmental Services, Inc. on behalf of Amtrak and FRA to prepare HABS documentation for the East Greenwich Historic District. This report was compiled in September 1997 by the PAL Inc. project team including Virginia H. Adams, Director of Architectural Projects, Stephen Olausen, Senior Architectural Historian, and Mary Kate Harrington, Architectural Historian. The large format archival photography was completed in April 1997 and September 1997 by Robert Brewster of Warren Jagger Photography, Inc., Providence, Rhode Island.

USGS Location Map
East Greenwich Historic District
East Greenwich
Kent County, Rhode Island
Scale 1:24,000



Portion of an Atlas of
the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
D. G. Beers & Co. 1870
Scale Unknown



TOWN OF
EAST GREENWICH
KENT CO. R. I.



Portion of a New Topographical Atlas
of Surveys: Southern Rhode Island
Everts & Richards 1895
Scale Unknown



