

Newport Steam Factory  
449 Thames Street  
Newport  
Newport County  
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-324

HABS  
RI,  
3-NEWP,  
75-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

HABS  
RI  
3-NEWP  
75-

## NEWPORT STEAM FACTORY

Location: 449 Thames Street

Present Owner: Newport Electric Company

Present Occupants: Newport Electric Company

Present Use: Warehouse facilities

Significance: The Newport Steam Factory is an important surviving example of the nineteenth century industrial development of the Newport waterfront, as well as an interesting large example of early mill construction dating from, 1831. With its green, Jamestown granite walls, it is an imposing and handsome piece of architecture in its setting.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

The building is located in Plat 32, Lot 76. The following is an incomplete chain of title from Newport City Clerk's Records for the City of Newport. Reference is to number and volume of the Land Evidence Books, (LEB.--, p.--).

1831 Deed of July 25, 1831, recorded in LEB. 18, p.343.

From: Christopher Fowler (heirs of)  
To: Newport Steam Factory  
For: \$600.00

"...beginning at the North Easterly corner thereof at the intersection thereof Thames Street and Howard Street thence running on said Thames Street three degrees forty-five minutes west, to a corner on the passage way or avenue between the estate herein described and the estate adjoining the same on the south side thereof, one undivided half which belongs to the grantors in this deed, and which said passage way is to be kept open seventeen feet wide from Thames Street to its intersection with a drift or passage way here in after described, for the use of said two adjoining lots forever, thence in said passage way or avenue North 82 degrees in 15 minutes west 200 and 37 feet 9 inches, thence north 28 degrees 45 minutes, twelve feet 9 inches

to an angle, thence north 82 degrees 15 minutes west 81 feet 6 inches, into the water to a corner, thence North 6 degrees, East across the wharf to the North side thereof, thence South 82 degrees 45 minutes East three hundred and 22 feet along Howard street to the beginning.

Also 6/7 of one undivided quarter part of the wharf adjoining estates on west side - to be maintained, and right of way - one rod wide - to begin 4 feet from store and to Eastward thereof, and to run South twenty-nine degrees 45 minutes East until it strikes the passage way between two estates,.... to factory to contain 4356 spindles."

Plat map attached on page 342.

1831 Deed of July 25, 1831, recorded in LEB. 18, p. 346.

From: Christopher Fowler (heirs of)  
To: Newport Steam Factory  
For: \$100.00

1/14 part of the property.

1831 Deed of July 25, 1831, recorded in LEB. 18, 348.

From: Audley Clarke  
To: Newport Steam Factory  
For: \$700.00

7/14 part of the property.

1845 Deed of December 27, 1845, recorded in LEB. 25, p. 502.

From: Newport Foundry and Machine Company  
To: Newport Steam Factory  
For: \$44,500.00

Purchased adjacent plant and property.

1858 Deed of February 15, 1858, recorded in Assignments, Leases, Bills of Sale, Etc., Book 1, pp. 46-48.

From: Newport Steam Factory  
To: Seth W. Tracy  
For: \$1.00 +

Established Mr. Tracy as assignee to sell the property for the best price.

- 1858 Deed of April 29, 1858, recorded in LEB. 34, p. 161.  
From: Seth W. Tracy  
To: Samuel Rodman, Isaac P. Rodman and Rowland G. Rodman  
For: \$9,500.00
- 1861 Deed of May 15, 1861, recorded in Assignments, Leases,  
Bills of Sale, Etc., Book 1, pp. 202-205.  
From: Samuel Rodman, Isaac P. Rodman and Rowland G. Rodman  
To: Henry A. Hidden  
For: \$1.00 ++  
Established Mr. Hidden as assignee to sell the property.
- 1863 Deed of November 13, 1863, recorded in LEB. 37, pp. 569-570.  
From: Henry A. Hidden  
To: Gideon Reynolds  
For: \$12,000.00
- 1865 Deed of August 12, 1865, recorded in LEB. 38, pp. 549-550.  
From: Gideon Reynolds  
To: The Richmond Manufacturing Company  
For: \$40,000.00
- 1890 Deed of April 2, 1890, recorded in LEB. 61, pp. 445-449.  
From: The Richmond Manufacturing Company  
To: George W. Dean  
For: \$100.00 +  
Agreement to sell upon the return of the company president  
from vacation in Europe. Plat map of the property attached  
to p. 499.
- 1890 Deed of April 22, 1890, recorded in LEB. 61, pp. 459-462.  
From: The Richmond Manufacturing Company  
To: George W. Dean  
For: \$100.00 +
- 1892 Deed of July 11, 1892, recorded in LEB. 70, pp. 298-302.  
From: George W. Dean  
To: Newport Illuminating Company  
For: \$100 +

1896 Deed of March 31, 1896, recorded in LEB. 70, pp. 298-302.

From: Newport Illuminating Company  
To: Continental Trust Company of New York  
For: Indenture of \$100,000.00 at 6%

1926 Deed of January 30, 1926, recorded in LEB. 117, pp. 557-561.

From: Central Union Trust Company of New York  
To: Newport Electric Company  
For: Mortgage complied with and paid

2. Date of erection: 1831
3. Architect: None known
4. Builder or contractor: Harry Eldred, stonemason and Nathan Hammett, carpenter
5. Original plans: None known
6. Alterations and additions: Throughout the history of the building there have been numerous additions to the structure and the site. The purchase of the adjacent Newport Foundry and Machine Company, in 1845, expanded the complex. Damaged by fire in 1860, the plant was refurbished, and in 1865 the brick addition to the east, four stories, was erected. A plan and sketch attached to insurance policy No. 927 with the Factory Mutual Engineering Corporation shows eleven structures on the site.
  1. The stone stair tower: Recent use of the building for warehouse facilities has resulted in loading entrances being opened in the north wall to the east and west of the stair tower. The stone stair tower presently lacks its Greek Revival cupola.
7. Important old views and descriptions:
  - a. Old views: Providence Public Library has a photograph, possibly by C. Stanhope, that shows the missing wooden cupola and north wall before alterations. A panoramic cupola and north wall before alterations. A view of Newport by J. A. Williams (c. 1871) in the Newport Historical Society shows the factory from the water.
  - b. Descriptions: Newport Mercury (July 23, 1831), p.  
"For Sale - the wharf and stores belonging to the estate of C. Fowler, Esq. deceased, for many years occupied by P. P. Remington.

Newport Daily News (August 1, 1882), p.2, col. 4-5.  
The following is a letter to the editor titled "A Summer in Newport."

April 12, 1831, the good sloop Reformation, Captain Pratt left Priket wharf, in Providence, bound for Newport. She had on board, in addition to her complement of merchandise as freight, five passengers (of whom the writer was one) who were drawn towards the island town by an agreement with a contractor whose business it was to assist in setting in motion the initiatory of a manufacturing industry then contemplated. A violent gale had just sufficiently subsided to enable the veteran skipper to risk the voyage, and two hours and fifteen minutes were only required to land us on Banister's [Bannister's] wharf in Newport.

A manufacturer of northern Rhode Island, whose finances were crippled by the disaster attending the business crisis in 1829, was the prime mover of the enterprise, and the object was to better his condition by starting the manufacture of cloth in that locality where the hum of the spindle and clatter of the shuttle had not been heard.

An unused distillery building located on the wharf at the south end of the town was to be raised up, and an additional story of stone built under it to adapt it to the designed purpose. Daniel E. Carpenter, though then just a young man, yet a veteran in his profession as a mover of buildings had proceeded us with his jack screws and other implements of his trade, and while waiting for some preliminaries before commencing on his job essayed to show his skill by forcing into her proper element the brig Wave, of Boston, which had been driven ashore by the recent gale, near what was then called Fort Greene, on the Point. His efforts were worthies, whose methods to the same ends were of a different character, and recourse was had to the lifting power of empty hogsheads, placed within the hold of the vessel, which floated her at high tide. A few weeks only were required to complete the work and fit the building for the reception of the machinery, which having been accomplished, . . . They united in the formation of a company to build a cotton factory, to be known as the Newport Steam Factory.' The preliminaries were soon arranged, contracts given out, and the work speedily entered upon. Harry, Eldred, of South Kingston, contracted for the stone work, furnishing and laying, the stone to be quarried from a ledge on the island of Conanicut, and Nathan Hammett, was to superintend the woodwork. Our little company sought for and obtained a chance to labor on the new mill, and spend the intervening time between the completion of the first job, and the commencement of the new, in helping Charlie Whitfield remodel his summer boarding house on Touro street,...

Among the many leading men of the town that frequently appeared to be interested, probably most of them as owners, were Nathaniel Ruggles, George Hall, Audley Clarke, Governor Gibbs, Lieutenant Governor Charles Collins, and Samuel Fowler Gardner .... Early September found the walls of the factory ready for roofing, and our labors at Newport were finished.

A. H. (Providence, July '82).

Newport Mercury (November 10, 1860), p. 2.

About 8 o'clock Thursday evening, while Thames Street was thronged with people to witness the display proposed by the Wide-Awakers, a cry of fire was sounded through the city.... The Fire Department ... proceeded to the "Old Stone Factory," where they found a fire raging within the walls which gave every appearance of causing a serious conflagration. When the alarm was given, the fire was burning in the passageway leading from the picker-house (which is a distinct building at the southeast corner of the mill) to the main building. Before the engines arrived, the powerful forcepump of Messrs. Mason and Bradford, attached to their Lead Works, was got to work, and had nearly extinguished the fire when the water gave out. The fire then rapidly extended into the Mill, and by the time the engines commenced working the second and third stories were engulfed in flames. There being a strong wind from the northwest the fire increased in fury, and finally broke through the roof at the west end....

As it became known to be impossible to save the Mill, attention was turned to saving the property surrounding it, and streams from several engines were directed on to the Lead Works and dwelling house at the east, and by these efforts not a building in the vicinity was even scorched. The Lead Works, which is a wooden building situated within thirty feet of the factory, miraculously escaped, to the gratification of every citizen who feels an interest in the prosperity of our city and the success of this enterprising firm.

About 3 O'clock Friday morning, after seven hours of hard labor .... the extent of the damage much less than thousand loafers who stood in Thames street, deaf to the calls of the fireman for assistance had predicted. The second and third stories, some of the works of the lower floor, and machinery in picker-house were destroyed; but the new and beautiful engine worth \$3,000, five speeders on lower floor worth \$5,000, were saved undamaged. The walls of the factory and picker-house, which were of stone, were injured but little, leaving property saved amounting to \$10,000. The insurance, part of which was effected but six weeks since, was for \$30,000, as follows: Gaspee, \$5,500, Washington, \$5,000; Merchants, \$5,000; Slater, \$2,500; Atlantic, \$4,000; Hope, \$5,000; American, \$3,000. This will more than cover the loss. The number of hands employed in the mill was sixty-four.

This mill was built in 1831 by a corporation, and cost about \$40,000. It continued in operation until September 1857, the owners being compelled to stop it then on account of the depression of the cotton manufacturing business, and as their losses were very heavy. In April 1858, it was purchased by Messrs. Rodman and Sons, of South Kingston, for \$9,500, and after the change of the machinery and putting up a new engine, and other matters which swelled the evaluation to about \$25,000, it was used for factories at South Kingston. At the time of destruction it was turning out about 7000 lbs. of Warp per week, and making a saving to the owners of about \$15,000 per annum, between the cost of manufacture and the market prices.... We are pleased to learn that Messrs. Rodman and Sons have decided to rebuild at once, and will commence today to clear the ruins."

Newport Mercury (October 29, 1870), p. 2, col. 5.

"Manufacturing and Mechanical Industry of Rhode Island"

"Manufacturing and Mechanical Industry of Rhode Island"

There are only two cotton mills in this place, both of course, operated by steam. The "Newport Steam," now owned and occupied by the Richmond Manufacturing Company, was at first a stone edifice, erected in 1831, of the most substantial character. It was 102' x 45' four stories, with a tower 12' x 14'. In 1865, there was erected a brick edition, 102' x 46', four stories, and a brick boiler house, 54' x 52'; a picker house 45' x 40'; store house, two stories, 41' x 20'; cotton house 32' x 40'; blacksmith shop, 15' x 18'; and a machine shop, two stories 36' x 22'. The office and the cloth room are 59' x 17', with all.

The company owns one two story wooden dwelling house, 65' x 32'; one two story, 32' x 28', two, 32' x 28'; two tenement houses each 151 x 28'; one and a half stories high, and a boarding house, two stories, 50' x 30'. There are 210 looms, 9,632 spindles; the engine is 125 horse power, about 175 hands are employed, and the annual product is about 2, 500,000 yards of print goods, 64 square, consuming about 1200 bales of cotton. The superintendent is Mr. Nathan Chamberlain, who informed the writer, that only about a year and a half ago were the last slave pens standing on the grounds of the company demolished.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The Newport Steam Factory was a key building in the history of the Newport Illuminating Company. This company was formed from the Edison Illuminating Company financed by General Electric Company. A detailed description of the financial arrangements is in Land Evidence Book 65, pp. 371-373, in the Clerk's Office, Newport City Hall.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Records of Deeds in the Newport City Hall  
Insurance records of the Factory Mutual Engineering Corporation,  
1151 Boston-Providence Turnpike, Norwood, Massachusetts. 02062.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Downing, Antoinette F. and Scully, Vincent, J., Jr. The  
Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915.  
New York: Clarkson N. Potter, second edition, 1967.

Newport Daily News (August 1, 1882), p.2, col. 4-5.

Newport Mercury (July 23, 1831)

Newport Mercury (November 10, 1860), p.2.

Newport Mercury (October 29, 1870), p.2, col. 5.

3. Likely sources not yet investigated:

The personal papers of the numerous individuals involved in  
ownership of the building and companies. Fire insurance  
policy records of other companies that were known to have  
issued insurance on the structure.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is an important, and with its green  
Jamestown granite walls a handsome example of early mill construction,  
built in 1831 as part of the unsuccessful effort to revive Newport's  
economy in the nineteenth century.
2. Condition of fabric: The condition of the structure is good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 46' x 116', rectangular plan, eleven bays,  
three-and-a-half stories.
2. Foundations: All foundations are masonry.
3. Wall construction: Green granite stone from Conanicut Island,  
Jamestown, is laid in a random uncoursed pattern with flat un-  
dressed faces. The window sills and lintels are roughly dressed.

4. Structural system, framing: Exterior masonry walls are load bearing. Heavy timber mill construction on the interior that becomes lighter in the upper stories. The wooden trussed roof dates from after the fire of 1860.
5. Chimneys: There are no chimneys.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways: Simple masonry framed openings in the projecting stairtower provided access to the building. Some window openings have been enlarged on the north facade to serve as loading entrances. Principal access is now through the east end wall which has been rebuilt with the addition of the later brick building.
  - b. Windows: The double hung windows of twelve-light sashes are larger on the first floor. Five skylights in the north side of the pitched roof light the attic fourth story.
7. Roof: The low gable roof, framed by simple boxed eaves, has a later asbestos covering. The square stair tower at the center of the north side, now finished with a low pitched roof at about the height of the main roof ridge, originally carried a square wooden belfry with an arched, louvered opening on each face.

C. Description of the Interior:

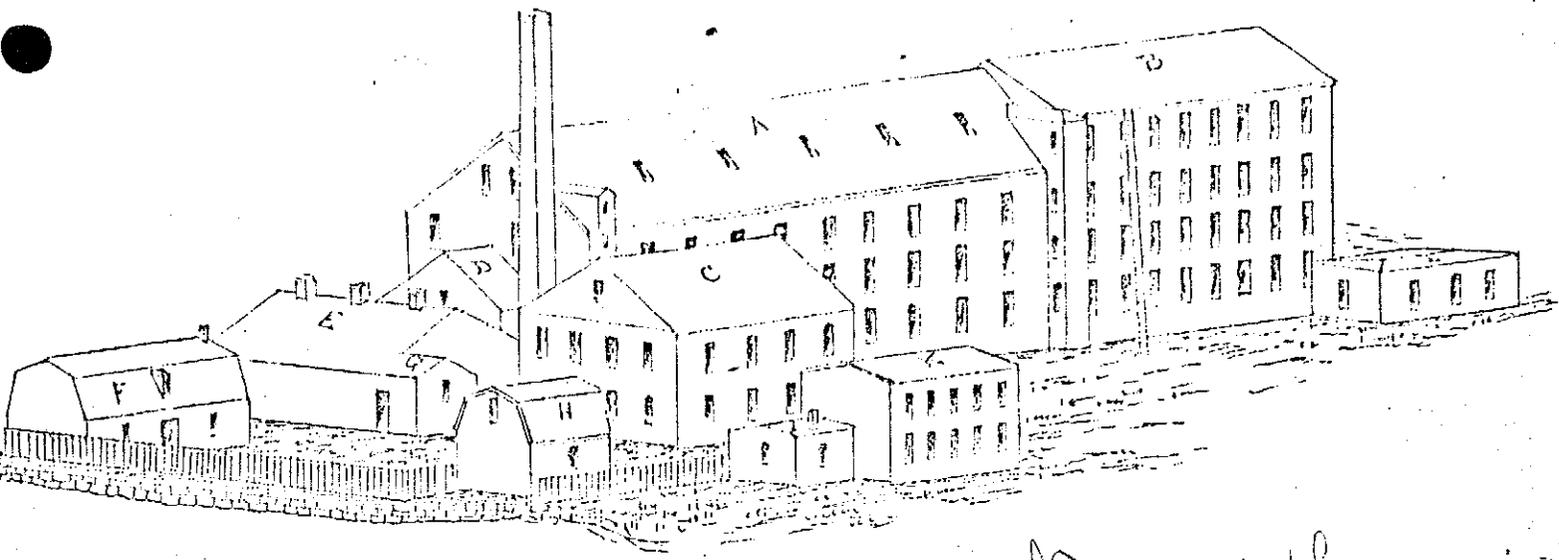
1. Floor plan: Probably open floor space on all four floors originally as is now seen on the fourth and most of the third floors. The first two floors have been partitioned for storage purposes. Part of the east end of the third floor has been joined to the new building to the east in order to provide an auditorium.
  2. Stairways: An extensively rebuilt metal and wooden stairway is contained in the stairtower.
  3. Flooring: Heavy plank flooring on a heavy timber frame structure that is overlaid in some areas with diagonal wooden flooring of a possibly later date.
  4. Walls and ceiling finish: The walls were plastered. Apparently, there was wainscoting in some areas, particularly the attic story which seems to have been better finished.
- D. Site: General setting and Orientation: With an east-west axis the building faces north in an industrial waterfront setting with later mill buildings adjoining on the east and west ends, and surrounding the original building.

Prepared by: Osmund Overby  
Historian  
National Park Service  
August, 1970

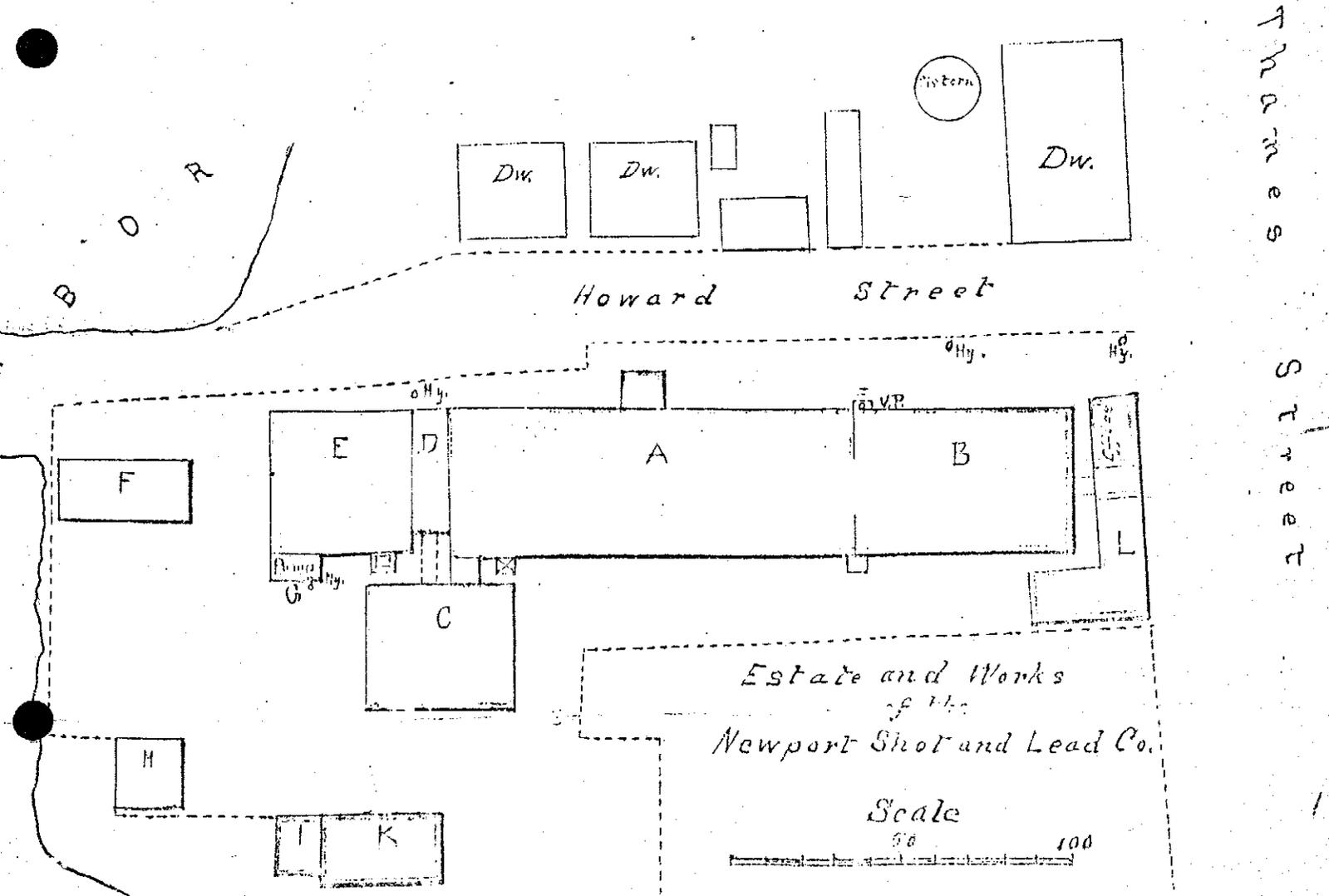
PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

Newport HABS Project - - 1969. Sponsored in cooperation with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Antoinette F. Downing, Chairman. Under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of HABS, and Osmund Overby, (University of Missouri), Project Supervisor, Jack E. Boucher, photographer.

Perspective and site plan (No. 927) in files of Factory Mutual Engineering Corporation, 1151 Boston-Providence Turnpike, Norwood, Massachusetts.



Newport Steam Mill  
Newport R. I.



Thames Street

Estate and Works  
of the  
Newport Shot and Lead Co.

Scale  
0 50 100