

GEORGE C. CARR FARM
(Cedar Hill Farm)
Eldred Avenue and North Road
Jamestown
~~Conanicut Island~~
Newport County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-395

HABS
RI
3-JAMTQ
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GEORGE C. CARR FARM (CEDAR HILL FARM)

HABS No. RI-395

Location: Intersection of Route 138 (Eldred Avenue) and North Road, south of Route 138 and west of North Road, Jamestown, Conanicut Island, Newport County, Rhode Island

USGS Wickford, RI Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
A: 19.301140.4599690
B: 19.301810.4599690
C: 19.301800.4599170
D: 19.301160.4599170

Present Owners: The land comprising the original George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) is under multiple ownership, including the Rhode Island Depositors Economic Protection Corporation, Vivian J. Palmieri, Robert and Sandra Guarino, Charles McCabe, and other various private owners.

Present Use: Historic residence and contemporary residential subdivision

Significance: Eldred Avenue (Route 138) is the northern boundary of the Windmill Hill National Register Historic District. The district is significant for its excellently preserved eighteenth and nineteenth century architecture, including agricultural, religious and residential structures and its unspoiled rural landscape. The district is the best example of an eighteenth century Quaker farming community extant in Rhode Island. The George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) is one of six farmsteads that comprise the district. The Carrs were early proprietors of Jamestown, prominent for their involvement in state and local politics, and prosperous from their farming and business exploits on the island.

Note: Sections of the text below have been adapted from the Windmill Hill Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Leslie J. Vollmert, Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, February, 1978; Phase I/II Cultural Resource Survey, Jamestown Drainage Alternative/I-895, Wilbur Smith and Associates, Inc. April, 1985; and Phase I Cultural Resource Survey, Jamestown SEIS (Route 138), Wilbur Smith and Associates, Inc., July, 1985.

PART I GEORGE C. CARR FARM (CEDAR HILL FARM) - DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

The George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) is located within the Windmill Hill Historic District, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. The district includes approximately 772 acres on Conanicut Island bounded by Eldred Avenue on the north, East Shore Road on the east, Great Creek on the south and Narragansett Bay on the west. The district is comprised of rolling fields and forests containing six farmsteads, an eighteenth century burial ground (HABS No. RI-398), an eighteenth century Quaker meetinghouse and an eighteenth century windmill and miller's house. The cleared land is used primarily for pasture and is divided by numerous stone walls and three seventeenth century roads. North Road is the principle north/south artery that bisects the district, Weeden Lane connects North Road with East Shore Road, and Eldred Avenue is the northern boundary of the district. Picturesque, tree-lined farm lanes provide access to the farms on the west side of North Road. The district also contains the archaeological remains of several Indian settlements.

The George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) is the northernmost farm in the Windmill Hill Historic District. It occupies a rise of 120 feet elevation that overlooks the lower lying Thomas Carr Watson, Jr. and Hodgkiss Farms with a vista that continues southward across the island to the Newport Bridge and Jamestown Center. The original 105 acre lot assigned to Nicholas Brown and six other individuals consisted of a rectangular parcel. The western half of the property includes the crest of a large hill, while the eastern portion slopes down to a swamp. Jamestown Brook runs northeast to southwest through the swamp.

The George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm), at the northern edge of the historic district, is adjacent to the Benjamin Carr Farm (HABS No. RI-394). In the 1980s the George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) was platted into house lots, which have only begun to be developed. The parcels along Eldred Avenue remain undeveloped and are densely wooded.

The farm is located on a commanding site on a high terrace facing south toward Great Creek. The wealth of its builder, George C. Carr is reflected in the ten foot high, stone retaining wall constructed on the hillside to elevate the mid-nineteenth century house above the surrounding land and provide it with a level front garden. The house is adjoined on the north by numerous late nineteenth and twentieth century farm buildings of traditional design. All of these are excellently maintained, weathered cedar shingled buildings grouped in farm yards enclosed by drylaid stone walls. In addition to several small sheds there is a corncrib, chicken coop and large barn.

George C. Carr, a prosperous farmer and businessman, erected the two-and-a-half story, five bay, flank gable roofed, clapboard and shingled Victorian farmhouse about 1870 to replace the early eighteenth century Carr homestead that stood nearby on his ancestral farm. The house has a one-and-a-half story ell to the north and a small, late nineteenth century, two story addition on the west elevation. The house was made fashionable by the addition of wooden brackets at the eaves and a one story, bracketed veranda across the entrance on the south side. The traditional center hall plan, the sidelighted front door and the simple Greek Revival detailing all demonstrate the conservatism of rural building of the period. Reflecting new heating concepts, the house was designed to be heated with stoves and contains no fireplaces.

Other structures on the property include:

Shed: a late nineteenth century, one story, gable roofed, shingled shed.

Garage: a late nineteenth century, one story, gable roofed, shingled, Queen Anne garage and storage room with a mid-twentieth century, two car garage addition with modern roll up doors on the east end of the structure.

Corncrib: a late nineteenth century, one story, gable roofed, shingled corncrib with full height doors on the west elevation and a one story, gable roofed addition on the south elevation.

Barn: a late nineteenth century, two story, gable roofed, shingled barn with full height doors on the west elevation and a one story, gable roofed addition on the south elevation.

Lean-to: an early twentieth century, one story, shed roofed, frame sheep shelter open to the west.

Chicken Coop: a mid-twentieth century, one story, gable roofed, shingled chicken coop.

PART II GEORGE C. CARR FARM (CEDAR HILL FARM) - HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Conanicut Island was purchased from the Narragansett Indians by a group of 98 Newport colonists in 1656, primarily for its value as pastureland. The Indians, who had inhabited the island for centuries, had at one time lived within the boundaries of the Windmill Hill Historic District along the shores of Great Creek and Narragansett Bay.

The proprietors, who were mostly Quakers, divided most of the island's 6000 acres and laid out a township of 260 acres in the center of the island near the site of present-day Jamestown Center. Most of the land was held for speculation until the 1670s when the first settlement began to occur. By 1675, a ferry was in operation between Conanicut and the town of Newport on Aquidneck Island to the east, and the island gradually became settled.

The early history of the George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) overlaps with adjacent properties, including the Benjamin Carr Farm (HABS No. RI-394) and the Nicholas Carr Farm (HABS No. RI-396). The land encompassing the three properties, as well as other parcels surrounding them, was purchased by Caleb Carr (1624-1695) in the mid-seventeenth century, and was in ownership and farmed by the Carr family into the twentieth century. The land was inherited by Caleb Carr's son Nicholas (1654-1709), who in turn left it to his son Thomas (1696-1776). Thomas Carr subdivided the land and left it to his sons Benjamin (Benjamin Carr Farm HABS No. RI-394) and Nicholas (George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm)). The Benjamin Carr Farm passed out of Carr family ownership when it was sold to Jeremiah Hazard in 1783. The George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) was in Carr family ownership until 1972; and the Nicholas Carr Farm was sold from Carr family ownership in the mid-twentieth century. The Carr family continues to own property on the island outside of the Windmill Hill Historic District.

Caleb Carr (1624-1695), a Newport merchant, Quaker leader, and governor of the colony in 1695, was one of the original proprietors of Conanicut. In 1678, he was one of several Newporters who signed a petition asking the General Assembly to incorporate the island into a township.

The George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) went through several ownerships until about 1680 when

this lot, along with two others to the west, were acquired by Caleb Carr. The property, at the intersection of North Ferry Road (now Eldred Avenue) and North Road, was located at the hub of the Windmill Hill area in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The Town House (demolished) was also located at this intersection. These roads provided the vital transportation link with the north and south ends of the island and with the outside world by means of the ferries that had been established at either end of Eldred Avenue as Conanicut's increasing population and agricultural production required new water links with nearby Aquidneck Island and the mainland. The Howland Ferry at the east end of Eldred Avenue connected the Windmill Hill area farms with Newport, while Slocumb's Ferry at the west end of Eldred Avenue provided a link to the mainland at North Kingstown as early as 1707.

Caleb's son Nicholas (1654-1709) erected a house on one of his father's lots (Nicholas Carr Farm HABS No. RI-396), and managed his father's Conanicut properties. A large portion of the three lots, totaling about 175 acres, was probably grassland and was most likely used for pasturage. Nicholas Carr received his father's island properties by will at his death. He probably leased these lots, for his will, probated in 1709, refers to them as "Thomas Fisher's Field". The property along with 50 sheep, three cows, and two oxen went by will to his son Thomas (1696-1776).

The Thomas Carr Farm (George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) and Benjamin Carr Farm HABS No. RI-394) was established in the early eighteenth century and attained its peak of prosperity before the Revolution. The farm was settled by Thomas, who built a substantial frame house in the first quarter of the eighteenth century (demolished). The Thomas Carr Farm was typical of the farms of the period on Conanicut and produced corn, barley, oats, and livestock.

Thomas Carr married Hannah Weeden in 1720, and it was probably around this time that he erected his house on the property. He built his house on the south side of the North Ferry Road (Eldred Avenue) and about 200 feet west of North Road. The farmland was suitable for raising sheep and its prime location bordering on North Ferry Road facilitated the transportation of wool and sheep to the Newport market.

Thomas Carr also held several public offices, including that of deputy to the General Assembly in 1746-47. Of the 91 island landowners assessed in 1760, Thomas Carr was rated the fourth highest and paid a tax of 19 pounds. The Carrs, like most of their prosperous neighbors, kept slaves, usually between three and eight. The colony census of 1774 indicates that Thomas Carr owned eight blacks, four adults and four children. These servants labored alongside their masters in the fields and usually lived in the attic of the farmhouse or in outbuildings, as on the Carr Farm. A burial plot of unmarked stones on the farm is said to be the Carr slave cemetery.

About 1760, Thomas Carr set off the west half of the farm, consisting of 115 acres to his son, Benjamin, who shortly thereafter, erected a dwelling (Benjamin Carr Farm HABS No. RI-394). At his death in 1776, Thomas Carr left the remaining 70 acre farm to his other son, Nicholas (1732-1813) (George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm)). He also left to his son Nicholas farm animals, which included 41 sheep, four hogs and eight cows, as well as five black slaves.

By 1760, the growth and prosperity of the community necessitated the expansion of ferry service to the island, the construction of a new grist mill and the construction of a larger Quaker Meetinghouse. Conanicut Island reached the peak of its prosperity as an agricultural adjunct of Aquidneck Island, by 1775. The slave owning Quakers had much of the island under cultivation and their fortunes rose with the ascendancy of Newport over New England trade before the Revolution. In 1775, however, the British invaded Newport and Jamestown. The occupation of Conanicut began with the burning of Jamestown Village and the surrounding farms on December 10, 1775, and continued until the

departure of the British Fleet in 1779. Most of the Quaker inhabitants evacuated the island in 1775, and upon their return four years later they found a ruined, deserted island of burned farmsteads that had been totally deforested by the occupying forces scavenging for firewood. Newport's trade had been destroyed by the long British occupation and with it went the basis for Jamestown's prosperity.

The Carrs, who were Quakers, survived the war relatively unscathed. An assessment of island farms, taken in September, 1783, reveals that 60 acres of the Nicholas Carr Farm (George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm)) were used as pasture and 10 acres were under cultivation. Nicholas Carr also had 46 sheep, four hogs, six cows and two oxen on the farm, roughly the same number of animals that he had received from his father, by will in 1776. The farm, consisting of the house, one stable, one corncrib, lands and personal estate, was valued at 725.9.0 pounds in the 1783 assessment.

A brief flurry of building activity ensued in the late eighteenth century as the islanders struggled to rebuild their community. The 1780s and 1790s witnessed the rebuilding of the Windmill Hill area after the depredations of war. The period included the construction of the present windmill, miller's house and meetinghouse. The optimism of the rebuilding period belied the loss of Jamestown's economic base. The market vanished with Newport's maritime trade, and the decline of Newport was reflected in the dwindling population of Jamestown to less than half the 600 inhabitants of 1774. Gradually, the Conanicut farms sank into self-sufficiency. The remarkable preservation of the buildings in the Windmill Hill District can be attributed to the thrifty and conservative nature of the Quaker farmers and to the economic stagnation the island experienced throughout the nineteenth century.

Sometime between 1783 and 1813, Thomas Carr (1772-1837) took over the management of the farm from his father, Nicholas. At Nicholas' death, in 1813, Thomas inherited the farm. Thomas and his wife, Abigail (Hull), had no children, so the farm was inherited by a nephew, George Cross Carr (1818-1900).

George C. Carr was initially involved in farming, but in later life took an active role in managing the island's ferries which his ancestor, Governor Caleb Carr, had begun in 1695. He eventually became the President of the Newport Steam Ferry Company. In 1844 and again in 1853, he was elected a member of the State Senate.

The 1873 United States Coast Survey Map reveals that the farm was subdivided by stone walls into ten fields or units of varying sizes. One contained the old Thomas Carr farmhouse and outbuildings and the others contained meadows, pastures, cultivated land and a small orchard. About 1875, George C. Carr built a new two and a half story residence on the farm. The George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) house, occupies the most commanding site in the area, on a high-terraced podium facing south toward Jamestown Brook. The house is adjoined on the north by late nineteenth century outbuildings, a connecting barn, shed and garage. The abandoned Thomas Carr house and its outbuildings fell into disrepair. An 1875 map clearly indicates that the old homestead was located on Eldred Avenue and immediately south of it were four outbuildings. In 1895, the old house and one of the outbuildings were still standing. In 1898 or 1899, the old Thomas Carr house was torn down by George C. Carr because of its advanced state of deterioration.

George C. Carr consolidated his farm to become one of Conanicut's most prosperous residents by 1870. His prominence was reflected in the Italianate farmhouse he constructed on his farm, now George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm). The George C. Carr house, the only significant nineteenth century building in the Windmill Hill District, reflects the case of an enterprising native who subsequently made a fortune speculating in Jamestown land and improvement projects during the period when the island was developing into a summer resort in the late nineteenth century. George's son, John Carr, inherited the property in 1900, and after John's death in 1937, it was passed

to his wife, and then to her nephew, John A.C. Knudsen, in 1963. The property was acquired by Mr. and Mrs. Murray Keeler from Knudsen, in 1972. By the early twentieth century the property was no longer an active working farm, and the open fields and pastures had become densely overgrown with secondary growth.

Eldred Avenue (Route 138) was widened in 1941-1942 to accommodate the traffic from the new Jamestown Bridge. The completion of the bridge in 1940-1941 resulted in increased movement of through, east-west, vehicular traffic along Eldred Avenue and East Shore Road. The completion of the Newport Bridge in the mid-1960s produced an even heavier movement of traffic along this route.

The widening of Eldred Avenue required the taking of some of the George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) property fronting the road by the Rhode Island Department of Public Works. The stone walls along the south side of Eldred Avenue were relocated outside of the newly designated state right-of-way to their current location at the state highway line. The road construction resulted in the filling of the Thomas Carr house foundation which now lies underneath the present roadbed. Only the surface remains of one outbuilding/enclosure is presently visible, the function of which has not been determined.

The Thomas Carr house site was the subject of a 1981 archaeological investigation as part of the I-895 project. Phase I and Phase II archaeological examinations were undertaken at the site of the farmstead on the Keeler property. The investigations located intact domestic refuse dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth century, as well as the remains of an outbuilding. The Keeler Site (RI-707) was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. In 1988, a Phase III data recovery investigation was conducted at the Keeler Site in accordance with the 1987 Memorandum of Agreement.

In the 1980s the farm was platted into house lots, which has only begun to be developed. The parcels along Eldred Avenue remain undeveloped and are densely wooded.

From the 1870s to the present, few significant changes have occurred within the district with the exception of the subdivision of the George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm) and the adjacent Benjamin Carr Farm (HABS No. RI-394). The George C. Carr house along with the other meticulously maintained buildings still exist in a relatively unspoiled landscape of rolling fields and forests criss-crossed with stone walls, with only an occasional glimpse of the Newport and Jamestown Bridges to suggest the presence of the twentieth century. Much of the land continues in agricultural use by the same families who have owned it since the eighteenth century, though there is increasing pressure to subdivide the farms for development. The Windmill Hill Historic District, including the farmsteads, windmill and miller's cottage, Quaker Meetinghouse and Friends' Burial Ground (HABS No. RI-~~398~~), affords the most complete picture of eighteenth century Quaker farm life extant in Rhode Island.

PART III PROJECT INFORMATION

In the fall of 1992, The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL, Inc.) of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was retained by Wilbur Smith and Associates, Inc. of Providence, Rhode Island to provide Historic American Buildings Survey documentation to the Rhode Island Department of Transportation for four properties within the proposed Route 138 Improvement Project, Jamestown, Newport County, Rhode Island. Under the Section 106 review process, as mandated by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (36 CFR 800), consideration of historic and cultural resources is required for projects utilizing federal funds. A section of the project area, the Windmill Hill Historic District, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. The HABS documentation of four properties within the district, (Benjamin Carr Farm HABS No. RI-394, George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm),

Nicholas Carr Farm HABS No. RI-396 and Friends' Burial Ground HABS No. RI-398) is one component of a mitigation plan outlined in a 1987 Memorandum of Agreement among the Federal Highway Administration, the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Other mitigation includes the relocation of stone walls and the development of an acceptable landscaping plan.

This report was compiled between December 1992 and January 1993 by the PAL, Inc. project team including Maureen A. Cavanaugh, Preservation Planner; Virginia H. Adams, Architectural Historian; and Leighlan Ranucci, Architectural Projects Assistant.

SOURCES

A. Architectural Drawings

Plat Showing Land in Town of Jamestown Taken on Behalf of the State of Rhode Island, By vote and order of the Department of Public Works on the 21st day of December A.D. 1939.

Plat 645, Sheet 4, North Road from 1.1 Miles North of Round Swamp Bridge to Eldred Avenue.
Original plan located at the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, Drafting Section.

Plat Showing Land in Town of Jamestown Taken on Behalf of the State of Rhode Island, By vote and order of the Department of Public Works on the 26th day of June A.D. 1942.

Plat 711, Sheets 4-6, Eldred Avenue from Jamestown Bridge to North Road. Original plan located at the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, Drafting Section.

Plat Showing Land in Town of Jamestown Taken on Behalf of the State of Rhode Island, By vote and order of the Department of Public Works on the 13th day of May A.D. 1952.

Plat 852, Sheets 8-12, Canonicus Avenue, East Shore Road and Eldred Avenue from Narragansett Avenue to North Road. Original plan located at the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, Drafting Section.

Route 138 Improvements, Rhode Island Department of Transportation, Division of Public Works, Jamestown, Rhode Island.

Plans by Wilbur Smith and Associates, Inc., Providence, Rhode Island, October 30, 1992.
Original plan located at the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, Providence, RI.

B. Historic Views

Aerial Photographs of Conanicut Island, Rhode Island, May 15, 1939.

Photograph numbers 500 and 502, RISWHPS Cont. No. 3903. Original photographs located at the Rhode Island Department of Administration, Division of Planning, Graphics Section.

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Ninth Annual Report of the State Department of Public Works. Providence, Rhode Island, 1943.

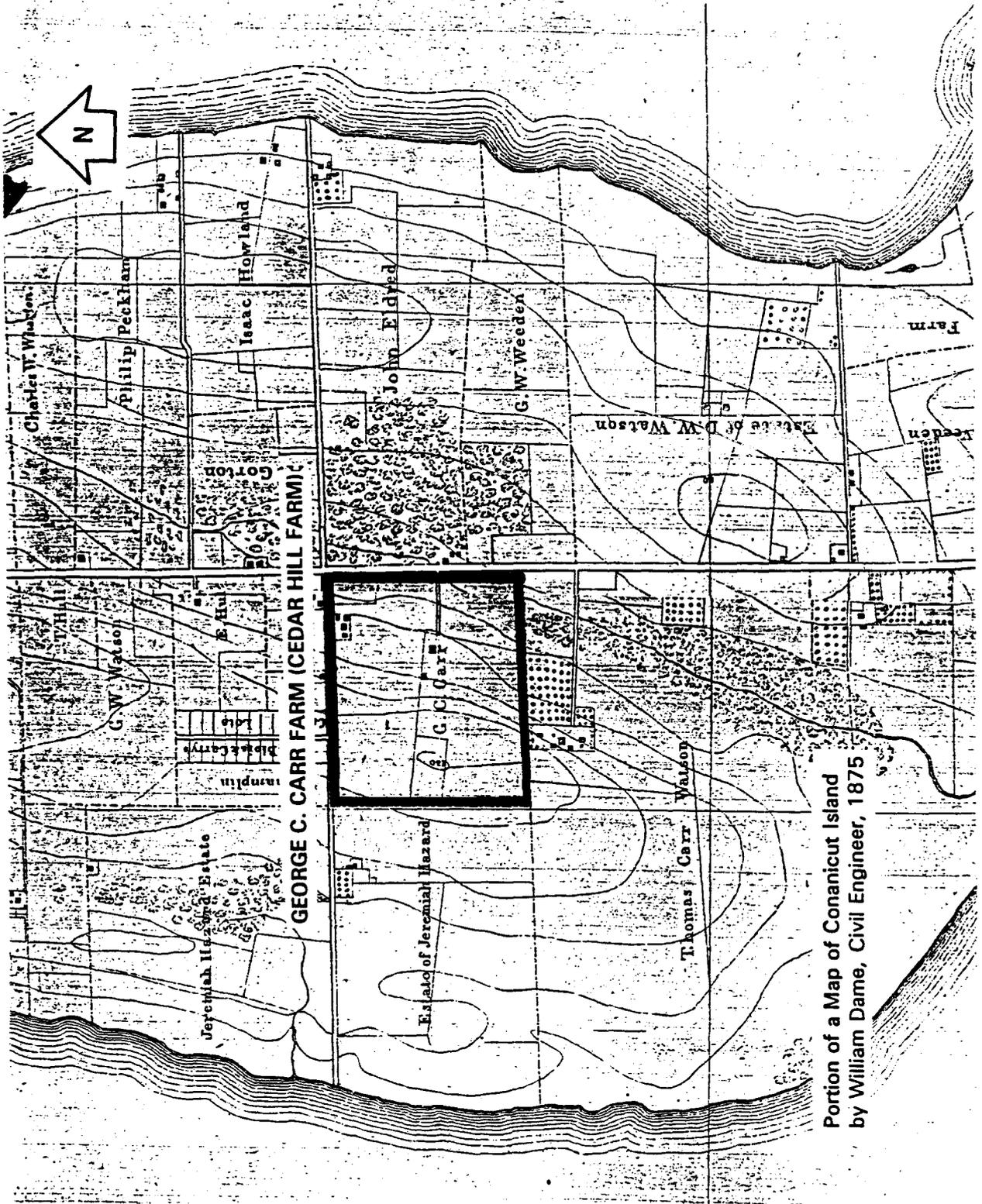
C. Bibliography

Vollmert, Leslie J., Windmill Hill Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-

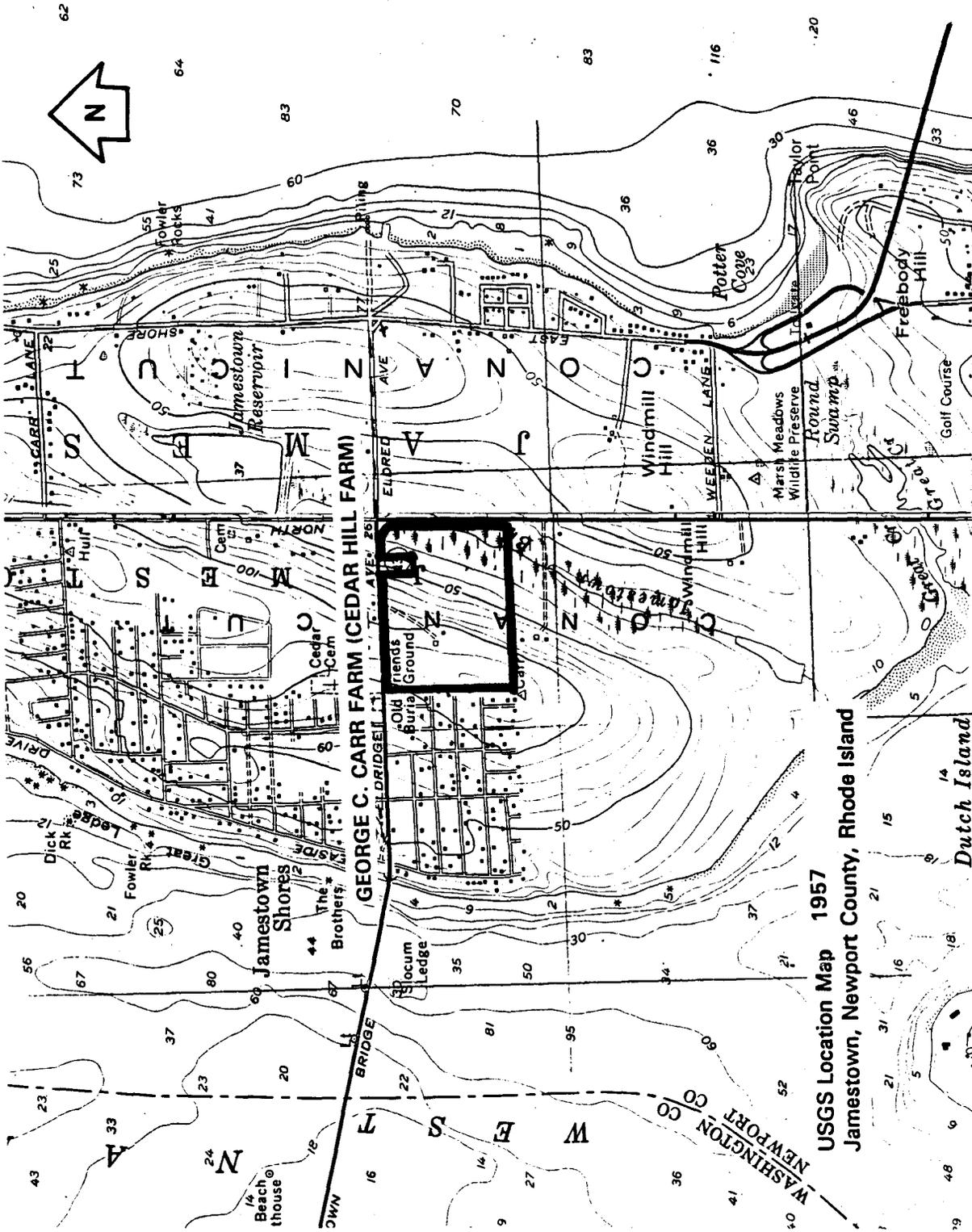
Nomination Form. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence, Rhode Island, February, 1978.

Wilbur Smith and Associates, Inc., Phase I/II Cultural Resource Survey, Jamestown Drainage Alternative/I-895. Providence, Rhode Island, April, 1985.

Wilbur Smith and Associates, Inc., Phase I Cultural Resource Survey, Jamestown SEIS (Route 138). Providence, Rhode Island, July, 1985.



Portion of a Map of Conanicut Island
by William Dame, Civil Engineer, 1875



USGS Location Map 1957
Jamestown, Newport County, Rhode Island