

FRIENDS' BURIAL GROUND
Eldred Avenue and Beacon Avenue
Jamestown
~~Conanicut Island~~
Newport County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-398

HABS
RI
3-JANTG
6-

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FRIENDS' BURIAL GROUND

HABS No. RI- 398

HABS
RI
3 - JAMTQ
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Location: Intersection of Route 138 (Eldred Avenue) and Beacon Avenue, north of Route 138 and east of Beacon Avenue, Jamestown, Conanicut Island, Newport County, Rhode Island

USGS Wickford, RI Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:

A: 19.301080.4599740

B: 19.301140.4599760

C: 19.301140.4599700

D: 19.301080.4599700

Present Owner: Cedar Cemetery Corporation, Trustee

Present Use: Cemetery

Significance: Route 138 (Eldred Avenue) is the northern boundary of the Windmill Hill National Register Historic District, with the exception of the Friends' Burial Ground, which lies to the north of Eldred Avenue. 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 Friends' Burial Ground is the site of the original Friends' Meetinghouse, and has been the community's cemetery since 1710.

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 18, 1985.

PART I FRIENDS' BURIAL GROUND - DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

The Friends' Burial Ground, located on the north side of Eldred Avenue across from the Benjamin Carr Farm (HABS No. RI-394) and the George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm)(HABS No. RI-395), is included 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, 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 small burial ground, comprising less than a one acre plot, is enclosed with a low drylaid stone wall and screened by cedar trees. It is bounded to the north and east by the Cedar Hill Cemetery, established in the mid-nineteenth century. The Friends' Burial Ground, originally the site of the Friends' Meetinghouse before the congregation moved to its present site on North Road, has served as Conanicut's Friends' cemetery since 1710. The tombstones are arranged in rows and date from the early eighteenth century through the twentieth century. In keeping with Friends' tradition, there are no pretentious monuments. The neatly carved, well preserved stones are fine examples of simple funerary art.

The burial ground is commonly known as the Old Friends' Burial Ground, as well as Rhode Island Historical Cemetery, Jamestown #6.

Part II FRIENDS' BURIAL GROUND - 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 first Friends' Meetinghouse was constructed on the site of the current Friends' Burial Ground located on North Ferry Road (Eldred Avenue). The Meetinghouse, near the intersection of 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.

By 1734, the growing Friends' congregation required a larger building located closer to the center of the expanding population, which had become concentrated near the main ferry at the present site of Jamestown Center. Nicholas Carr (see HABS No. RI-396) subsequently donated a quarter acre on North Road near the windmill. The thrifty Quakers moved their meetinghouse to the new site and added an eighteen foot lean-to addition. The former site on North Ferry Road (Eldred Avenue) has remained in use as the congregation's cemetery to the present-day.

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.

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.

The Cedar Hill Cemetery, adjacent to the Friends' Burial Ground, was founded in 1861 by Daniel Watson and George Cross Carr. It was developed in response to space constraints in the Friends' Burial Ground and Town Cemetery. The cemetery was subsequently enlarged in 1914, and has continued to be actively used to the present day.

Eldred Avenue (Route 138) was widened to accommodate the traffic from the new Jamestown Bridge in 1941-1942. The project required the taking of land by the Rhode Island Department of Public Works, and the subsequent relocation of the stone walls on the south side of Eldred Avenue to outside of the newly designated state right-of-way to their current location at the state highway line. However, the land and walls of the burial ground were not relocated or altered as a component of the public works project. 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.

A small area within the Friends' Burial Ground was the subject of a 1981 archaeological investigation as part of the I-895 project. Phase I and II archaeological investigations were undertaken within the Friends' Cemetery in the area of the former Friends' Meetinghouse, which purportedly stood at the southeast corner of the burial ground. No significant, intact, undisturbed remains of the Friends' Meetinghouse were encountered. However, a prehistoric component was identified, and has been determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

From the 1870s to the present, few significant changes have occurred within the district with the exception of the subdivision of the Benjamin Carr Farm (HABS No. RI-394) and the George C. Carr Farm (Cedar Hill Farm)(HABS No. RI-395). The meticulously maintained buildings in the district 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, 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) HABS No. RI-395, Nicholas Carr Farm HABS No. RI-396 and Friends' Burial Ground) 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.

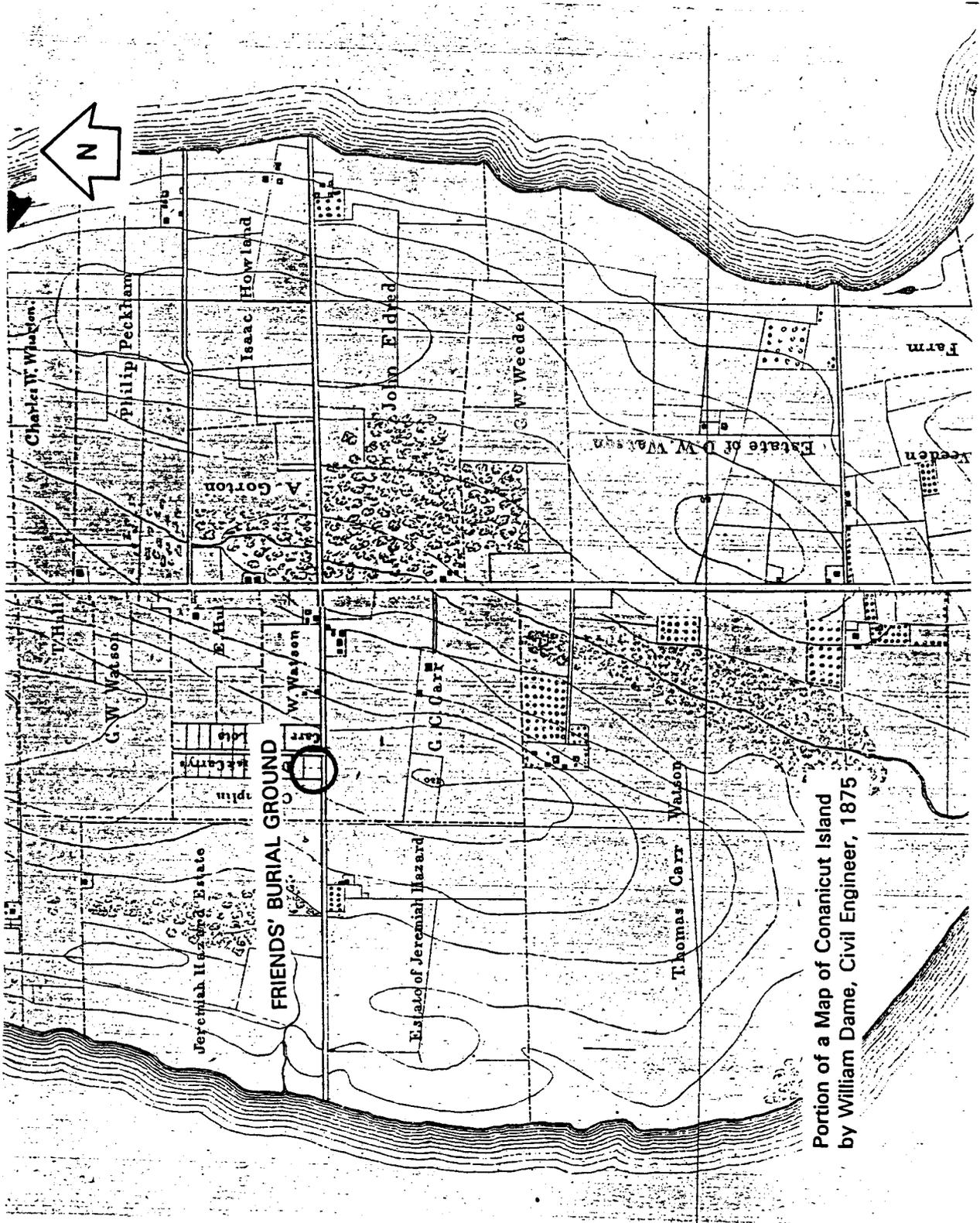
State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Ninth Annual Report of the State Department of Public Works. Providence, Rhode Island, 1943.

C. Bibliography

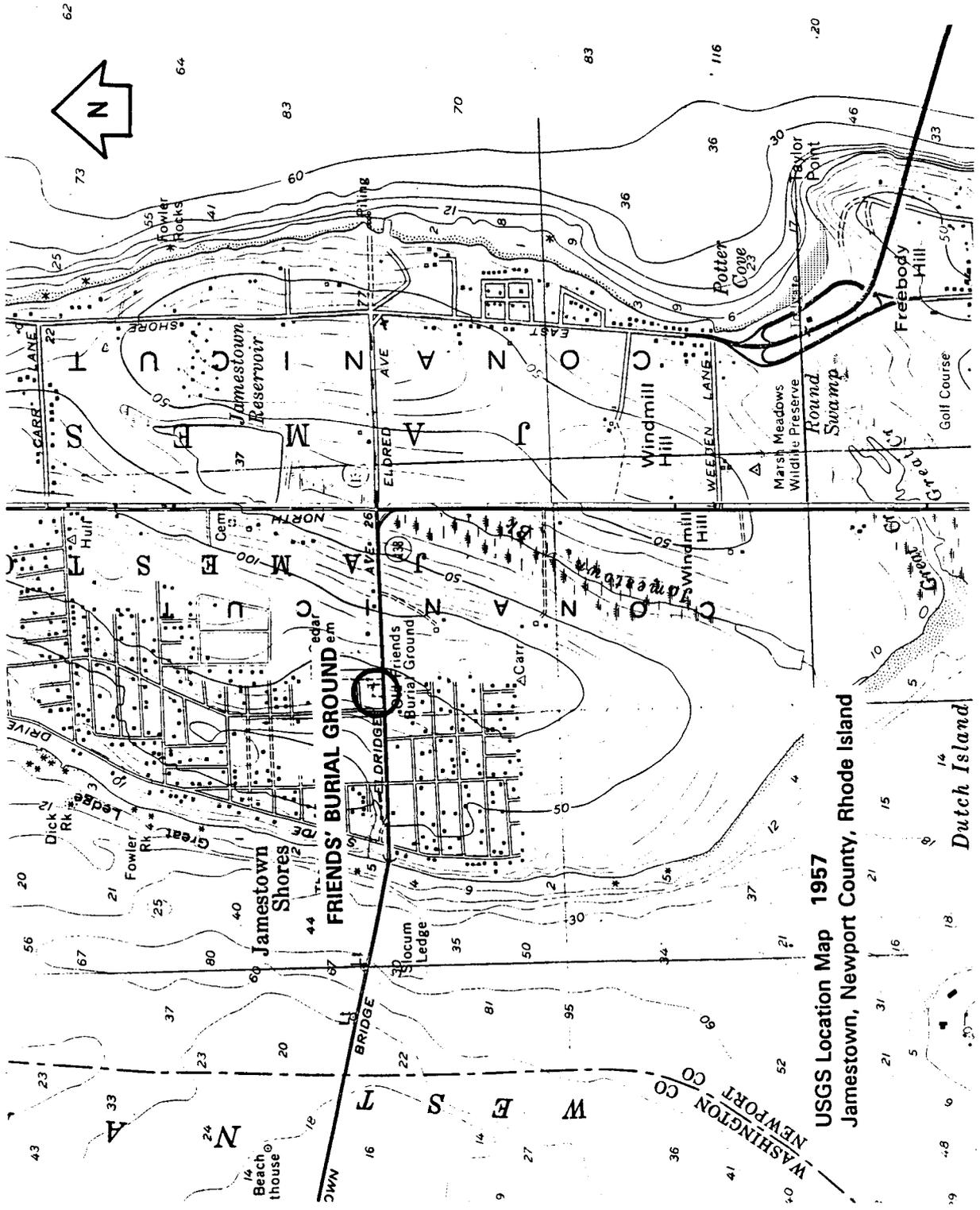
Vollmert, Leslie J., Windmill Hill Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence, Rhode Island, February, 1978.

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