

3222

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

DEC 23 1988

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name NORWALK ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE
other names/site number Sheffield Island Lighthouse

2. Location

street & number Sheffield Island N/A not for publication
city, town Norwalk N/A vicinity
state Connecticut code CT county Fairfield code 001 zip code 06854

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: [X] private, [] public-local, [] public-State, [] public-Federal
Category of Property: [X] building(s), [] district, [] site, [] structure, [] object
Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 2, Noncontributing 1 buildings, 1 sites, 1 structures, 1 objects, Total 2

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official: [Signature]
Date: December 9, 1988
Director, Connecticut Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
[] entered in the National Register. [] See continuation sheet.
[] determined eligible for the National Register. [] See continuation sheet.
[] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[] removed from the National Register.
[] other, (explain:)

[Signature: Alloriah Beyer] 1/19/89

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION: water-related

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls STONE

roof ASBESTOS

other METAL: cast iron

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Norwalk Island Lighthouse, better known today as Sheffield Island Lighthouse,¹ is a 2 1/2-story stone dwelling surmounted on the west gable end by a cast-iron tower (Photographs 1 and 2). It was built in 1868 to replace an 1826 lighthouse, of which the stone keeper's house (Photographs 6 and 7) lying 30' northeast of the present lighthouse is the only visible remain. The lighthouse is located near the southwestern tip of Sheffield Island, one of a series of islands at the entrance to Norwalk Harbor, about a mile offshore and three miles from the commercial center of South Norwalk. The land immediately surrounding the lighthouse is open from the north shore to the south. The lighthouse property shares the flat, sandy island with a summer cottage to the southwest and a nature preserve to the east. The lighthouse operated from 1868 to 1902. In 1914 it became a privately owned summer home until its recent purchase by the Norwalk Seaport Association. It is currently being restored as an historic site. A caretaker/tour guide resides during the season of visitation. The building is in good condition both inside and out.

The lighthouse measures 30' x 32' in plan, with a one-story kitchen wing, 16' x 18', at the rear. The walls are a random ashlar of rough-finished brown, pink, and grey gneiss, with prominent quoins and water-table. The gable roof flattens out at the eaves where there are copper-lined rain gutters. The considerable overhang to both eaves and gables is finished with a large cornice molding and additional bed moldings beneath the projection. There is one chimney centered on the ridge near the rear; stone above the roofline and brick below, it divides in the attic with a separate flue leading to the kitchen wing. The main entrance (Photograph 4) is centered on the southwest elevation within a shallow porch or vestibule whose gable roof repeats the profile of the main roof. Paneled double doors are set below a three-light transom within a segmental-arched opening. The large stones framing the doorway have beveled edges, with simple rusticated bases for the side stones. There is a window on either side of the entrance, two full-sized second-story windows and paired narrow windows over the doorway, and a small attic window. Side elevations have three windows on the first story and two on the second. The segmental-arched window openings (Photograph 5) are outlined with large raised stones for the heads, jambs, and sills and most are fitted with original six-over-six double-hung weighted sash; the arched heads have a simple paneled design formed by applied arch segments flanking a circle.

¹The name of this light in its period of use is given in government documents as both Norwalk Island Light and Norwalk Islands Light, with the former the more common. See continuation sheet

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Norwalk, CT

Description (continued):

The tower (Photograph 3) is built of cast-iron plates bolted together (Photograph 12) and rises to a height of 46'. It rests on a square base with large consoles extending down to flank the attic window; the building's date of construction appears on the southwest face. Large stepped moldings form the transition to the second stage, in plan an octagon of unequal sides. The side window openings on this stage are blind, so only the front one contains sash. The projecting roof forms a walkway, guarded by a simple wrought-iron railing of uprights and diagonal braces, around the final stage, a round lantern with twelve flat glass panes and a domed roof surmounted by an orb ventilator.

The interior is largely intact and includes plaster walls and ceilings, 8"-wide floor boards, and on the first floor, molded window and door surrounds (Photographs 9 and 10). Doorway jambs and soffits in stone bearing walls are finished with recessed panels. In each window are folding shutters with separate louvered upper halves and paneled lower halves. Other interior features of note include remains of a large brick cistern in the cellar; paneled doors throughout; a passage in the ceiling (Photograph 11) near the winding stairs to the tower, through which dropped the weights of the clockwork lens-rotation mechanism; narrow-board beaded wainscoting in the kitchen, tower, and lantern; circular sliding ventilators in the base of the lantern; interior rain drains below the glass; and hooks for hanging the curtains which protected the lens from daytime sun.

When operating, the focal plane of the fourth-order Fresnel lens (fixed white light, with red flashes at one-minute intervals) was 52' above sea level and was visible for 12.5 nautical miles. There are no optics presently in the tower.

The keeper's house associated with the 1826 lighthouse is a 1 1/2-story gable-roofed dwelling built of irregularly shaped gray granite blocks (Photographs 6 and 7). The three-bay facade (south elevation) has a central entry flanked by two windows. At the rear is a small stone ell with a later shed-roofed frame addition in the angle. Windows have six-over-one sash. It appears to have been at one time stuccoed and white-washed. The interior is plainly finished, with plaster walls and simple woodwork.

Also on the property is a small shed (Photograph 8; noncontributing), associated with early 20th-century use of the property as a summer home. A wooden pier which formerly extended from the north shore of the island is marked only by some rubble in the water; boat access is by an adjacent modern floating dock.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION

ENGINEERING

Period of Significance

1868-1902

Significant Dates

1868

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Not known

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Summary

Norwalk Island Lighthouse is significant as a well-preserved example of 19th-century lighthouse engineering (Criterion C). It embodies many of the distinguishing characteristics of the period: masonry construction, pre-fabricated iron components, standardized design, limited architectural embellishment, and combined dwelling and light tower. The lighthouse is also significant because it serves to recall Norwalk's maritime history (Criterion A): the lighthouse was built to aid navigation in Long Island Sound, especially the numerous steamboats, oyster boats, schooners, and barges which were a vital part of Norwalk's economy in the 19th century.

Development of Lighthouse Technology

Prior to 1851, when Congress established the Lighthouse Board and assigned the Army Corps of Engineers the task of superintending lighthouse construction, American lighthouses employed primitive lighting technology and were constructed using vernacular building techniques (evident at this site in the stonework of the 1826 keeper's house). After mid-century, however, the Federal Government devoted substantial resources to improvements in lighthouse design and operation, and the result was the development of a standard set of construction, illumination, and management techniques better suited to the task of providing functional and reliable aids to navigation.

Norwalk Island Lighthouse illustrates several aspects of this development. Like nearly all lighthouses since Colonial times, it uses massive stone construction to provide a strong and durable structure for the light. However, part of the lighthouse, the tower, was constructed of the cast-iron plates which became the dominant lighthouse method of construction in the late 19th and early 20th-century. Iron as a lighthouse material had numerous advantages: it allowed pre-fabrication off-site, ease of construction, some mass-production and interchangeability of parts, adaptability (iron towers could be raised by adding additional tiers of plates), and low cost.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Adams, Virginia Q. "History of Sheffield Island." Typescript, 1968.
Copy at Norwalk Seaport Association, South Norwalk, CT.

Danenberg, Elsie N. The Romance of Norwalk. New York: States History Company, 1929.

Hamilton, Harlan, Lights and Legends: An Historical Guide to The Lighthouses of Long Island Sound, Fisher Island Sound, and Block Island Sound. Stamford: Westcott Cove Publishing Co., 1987.

Norwalk After Two Hundred and Fifty Years. South Norwalk, C.A. Freeman, 1901.

Norwalk Gazette, August 17, 1869.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, CT 06106

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Approximately 3 acres

UTM References

A

1	8
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6	3	2	8	0	0
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4	5	4	5	1	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary includes the three-acre parcel surrounding the lighthouse and dwelling owned by Norwalk Seaport exclusive of the cottage at the west end leased to another party. See "Map of a Portion of Sheffield Island," November 13, 1987, included.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the open land immediately surrounding the lighthouse and dwelling. It extends from the north to south shore of the island to maintain the site's maritime context.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

name/title Bruce Clouette
organization Historic Resource Consultants date August 29, 1988
street & number 55 Van Dyke Avenue telephone (203) 547-0268
city or town Hartford state Connecticut zip code 06106

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Norwalk, CT

Significance (continued):

The lighthouse also demonstrates the standardization which was part of the development of improved lighthouses in the period. It is one of at least six¹ nearly identical structures all built in the period 1867-1869, and certain components, such as elements of the lantern design, appear in exactly the same form on dozens of other late 19th-century lighthouses. Standardization allowed great efficiency in design: the plans for this light simply re-used those for Block Island North Light with a different name and minor amendments pencilled in. It also provided for some economies in both both manufacture (contractors could spread the costs of making patterns over several jobs) and operation, since the storehouse at Staten Island could stock parts, such as ventilators, which could be used at any of a number of sites. Finally, standardized designs were undoubtedly intended to avoid the numerous problems which might crop up in the country's earlier unique structures. However, there were also dangers in repetition: it appears that the original slate roofs of many of the lighthouses of this type failed and had to be replaced.

Norwalk Island Light illustrates the rugged functionalism which characterized nearly all the lighthouses of the period. Its stone and iron construction reflects the need to make the facility resistant to the ravages of weather and the sea. At the same time, it is clear that the building was intended to be a credit to the Lighthouse Board, as evident in the impressive ashlar masonry, the interior moldings and paneling, and the decorative window details, all of which go beyond the building's functional needs. As was typical of the period's lighthouses, direct reference to a particular architectural style is limited, in this case to the Italianate arched windows and paneled heads and the Classically inspired moldings and entrance details.

Nearly all the small and medium-sized lighthouses of the 1860s and 1870s combined the tower and dwelling into a single structure. The Lighthouse Board was eager to assure both attention to maintenance and smooth operation of the light on the part of its keepers, and integrating the keeper's quarters into the structure promoted both. When this light was established, the oil-fueled lamps then in use required considerable attention throughout the night.

¹Others in the region are Block Island North Light, Rhode Island; Morgan Point, Great Captain's Island, and Old Field Point, Connecticut; and Plum Island, New York.

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Significance (continued):

Transportation Significance

Norwalk in the early 19th century was a busy port, with considerable commerce with the West Indies and other coastal ports and passenger packets to New York City. A lighthouse on Sheffield Island was established in 1826 to aid vessels in entering Norwalk harbor. Although the 34'-high stone tower was replaced by the present lighthouse, the stone dwelling from the earlier light remains as a significant part of the historic resource, recalling the early 19th-century maritime history of Norwalk and the role of the site as an early aid to navigation.

After the Civil War, Long Island Sound experienced a tremendous increase in shipping which was directly related to the commercial and industrial growth of the region. Long Island Sound was one of two major routes to New York City, which saw a four-fold increase in shipping over the period 1870-1910. Adjacent areas of Connecticut were also undergoing commercial and industrial expansion, adding to the region's maritime traffic. Not only did the number of vessels increase greatly, but ships were larger and more were powered by steam. Substantially higher and visible at a much greater distance than its predecessor, the 1868 Norwalk Island Lighthouse was one of a number of small lights which served as landmarks for vessels charting their progress through the Sound.

The lighthouse was especially important for vessels entering Norwalk Harbor, a passage past numerous reefs, islands, and shallows leading to South Norwalk, a large commercial center at the outlet of the Norwalk River. The lighthouse marked the east end of the west approach to the Harbor, and also served as a reference point for Great Reef 3/8 of a mile to the south. Shipping to South Norwalk increased during the period in which the lighthouse operated, peaking in the 1880s when nearly 2,500 steamers, schooners, barges and other large commercial vessels, almost seven per day, arrived or departed the port. Although maritime traffic began to suffer somewhat in the 1890s from rail competition, the harbor continued to be a busy place, particularly because of the oyster-planting industry, in which thousands of acres of beds were harvested by a fleet of Norwalk oyster boats. In the late 1890s, the harbor was improved with a dredged channel, and in connection with this work the Lighthouse Establishment revamped local aids to navigation. Two new sites were established, Green's Ledge and Peck's Ledge, and Norwalk Island Light was discontinued (though the building was used for the keeper of Green's Ledge for 12 years).

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Section number 9 Page 1

Major Bibliographical References:

- Ray, Deborah W. and Gloria P. Stewart. Norwalk, Being An Historical Account of that Connecticut Town. Canaan, N.H: Phoenix Press, 1979.
- U.S. Lighthouse Board. Annual Report, 1867-1902.
- . List of Light Houses, Lighted Beacons, and Floating Lights. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1882.
- U.S. Coast Guard. Coast Guard Academy Library. Lighthouse drawings.
- The Illustrated Coast Pilot With Sailing Directions. The Coast of New England From New York to Eastport, Maine. Boston: N.L. Stebbins, 1891.
- The Illustrated Coast Pilot. The Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. Boston: N.L. Stebbins, 1896.

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Photographs _____ Norwalk Island Lighthouse
Section number _____ Page 1 _____ Norwalk, CT

All photographs:

1. NORWALK ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE (Sheffield Island Lighthouse)
2. Norwalk, CT
5. Negative filed with Connecticut Historical Commission
59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, CT 06106

3. Robert Sparge Photo
4. November 1987
6. West (facade) and north elevations, camera facing east
7. Photo 1 of 12

3. Robert Sparge Photo
4. November 1987
6. South and east (rear) elevations, camera facing west
7. Photo 2 of 12

3. Robert Sparge Photo
4. November 1987
6. Detail of tower, camera facing northeast
7. Photo 3 of 12

3. HRC Photo
4. August 1988
6. Detail of entrance, west elevation, camera facing northeast
7. Photo 4 of 12

3. HRC Photo
4. August 1988
6. Detail of window, south elevation, camera facing northwest
7. Photo 5 of 12

3. HRC Photo
4. August 1988
6. Keeper's house, camera facing north
7. Photo 6 of 12

3. HRC Photo
4. August 1988
6. Keeper's house, camera facing southeast
7. Photo 7 of 12

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Photographs _____ Norwalk Island Lighthouse
Section number _____ Page 2 _____ Norwalk, CT

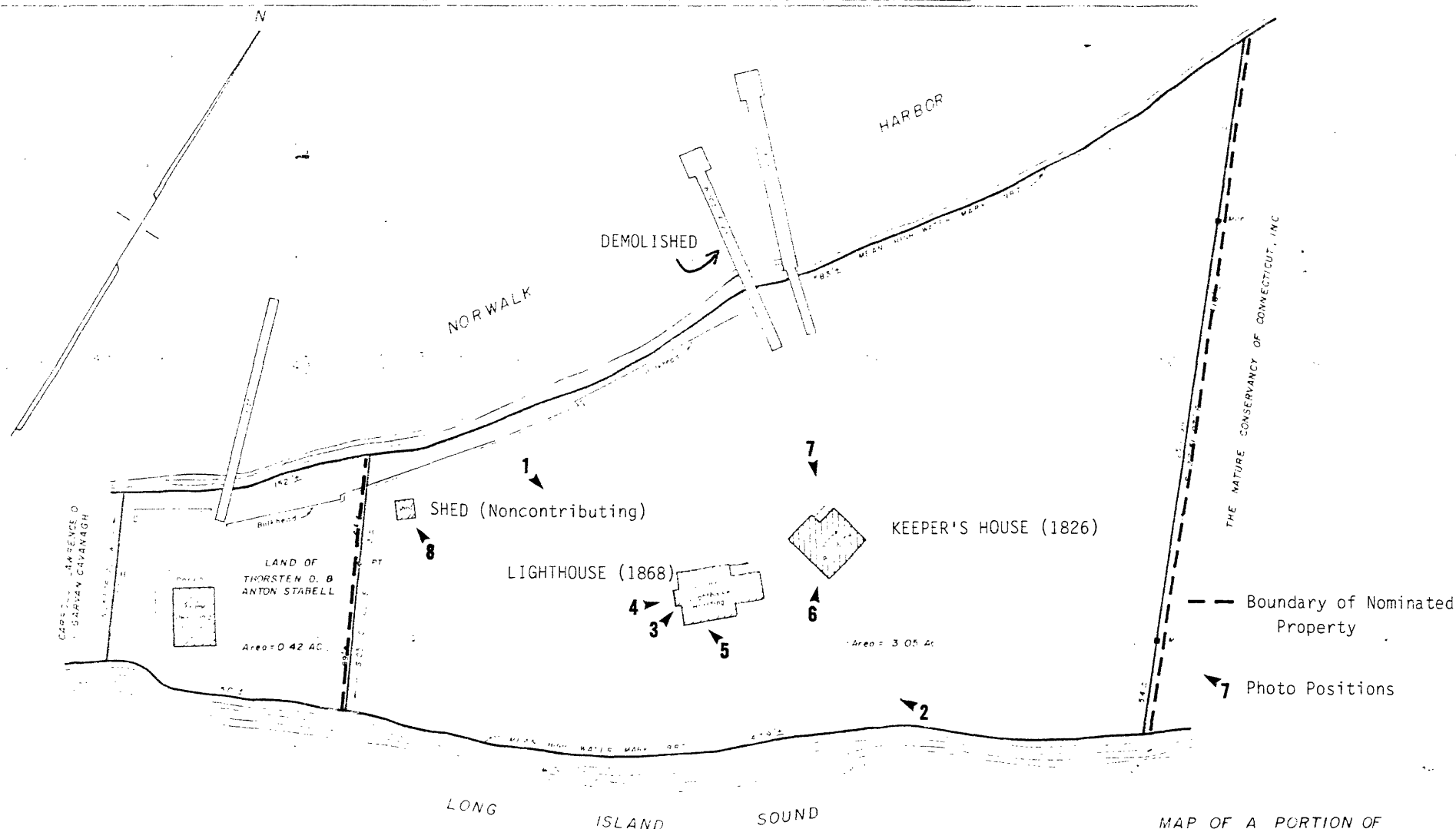
- 3. HRC Photo
- 4. August 1988
- 6. Shed, noncontributing, camera facing west
- 7. Photo 8 of 12

- 3. HRC Photo
- 4. August 1988
- 6. Interior, typical first-floor window trim, camera facing south
- 7. Photo 9 of 12

- 3. HRC Photo
- 4. August 1988
- 6. Interior, door trim, camera facing west
- 7. Photo 10 of 12

- 3. HRC Photo
- 4. August 1988
- 6. Stairs to tower, showing opening for clockwork weight, camera facing southwest
- 7. Photo 11 of 12

- 3. HRC Photo
- 4. August 1988
- 6. Interior of base of tower (wood sheathing removed), showing iron-plate construction, camera facing west
- 7. Photo 12 of 12



MAP OF A PORTION OF
SHEFFIELD ISLAND
PREPARED FOR

THORSTEN O. STABELL

AND

ANTON CARL STABELL

NORWALK, CONN.

SCALE: 1" = 40'

NOVEMBER 13, 1987

NORWALK ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE
(Sheffield Island Lighthouse)

Norwalk, Connecticut

Reduced Scale: 1" = 87'

DENNIS A. DEILUS LAND SURVEYOR
NORWALK, CONN.

CERTIFIED "SUBSTANTIALLY CORRECT" AS TO THE PRECISION
OF A CLASS A-2 SURVEY

Dennis A. Deilus
D.A. DEILUS

NOTE 1) REFER TO MAP NO. 7407 N.L.R.
2) REFER TO MAP BY UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE, SHEFFIELD ISLAND, THE NATURE
CONSERVANCY OF CONNECTICUT, INC. TRACTS (110-A, 1)
51.1 ACRES.