

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Rhode Island	
COUNTY: Kent	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER 118,44,0019	DATE 8/12/71

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Varnum (General James Mitchell) House

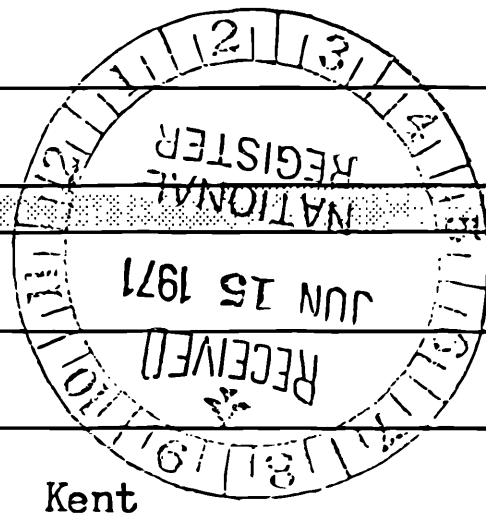
AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
57 Peirce Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
East Greenwich

STATE: Rhode Island, 02818      CODE: 44      COUNTY: Kent      CODE: 003



**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
The Varnum Continentals

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Varnum Memorial Armory, 6 Main Street

CITY OR TOWN: East Greenwich      STATE: Rhode Island, 02818      CODE: 44

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Town Clerk

STREET AND NUMBER:  
111 Peirce Street

CITY OR TOWN: East Greenwich      STATE: Rhode Island, 02818      CODE: 44

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Statewide Survey of Historic Buildings

DATE OF SURVEY: 1971       Federal       State       County       Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:  
State House, 90 Smith Street

CITY OR TOWN: Providence      STATE: Rhode Island, 02903      CODE: 44

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Rhode Island

COUNTY: Kent

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY NUMBER: 118,44,0019

DATE: 8/12/71

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

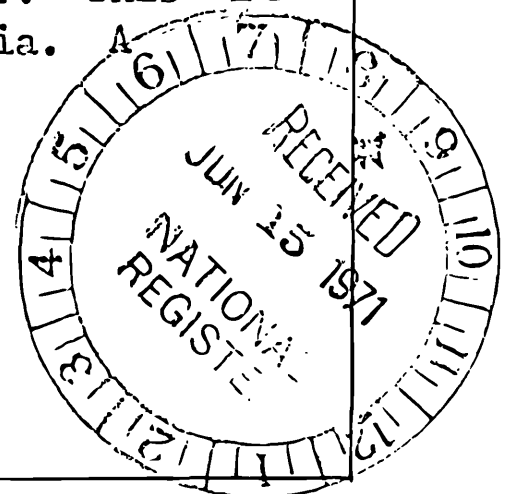
Built in 1773 by Revolutionary War General James Mitchell Varnum, the Varnum House is an elegant and commodious two-story, five-bay-wide, clapboarded house with two interior brick chimneys running through a gable-on-hip roof. Resting on a foundation of coursed granite ashlar, the house is set on a steep slope above the main street of East Greenwich and faces east towards East Greenwich Cove and Narragansett Bay beyond.

The central entrance, with its panelled door and one-story portico, forms the principal decorative feature of the exterior. The portico is simply a pedimented door design pushed forward and supported by fluted Ionic pilasters and free-standing, unfluted Ionic columns on bases. All windows are twelve-over-twelve-paned, double-hung sash, with heavy molded sills and (on the first floor) projecting capping cornices-- except for the stairway-landing window at the rear whose top is segmentally-arched and which has twenty-light sashes. The elaborate, modillioned main cornice is not broken-out above the plainly-enframed windows of the second story.

Like its exterior, the interior of the Varnum House is very similar in design and plan to the Eldredge house at Peirce and Division Streets, the other large mansion of the 1770's in East Greenwich. The two interior chimneys each provide fireplaces for two rooms on either side of the central hall on both floors. At the back of the central hall, with its panelled wainscot and old French wallpaper, the stairway rises in three runs. The turned newels and the balusters, set three to a stair, support a ramped rail which has a curved termination on the first floor. Panelled wainscoting, dentil cornices (broken-out above openings in the walls), panelled shutters, and mantelpieces surmounted by simple shelves and panelling to the ceiling decorate the first-floor rooms. The particularly beautiful dining-room fireplace, with its broken-pediment overmantel, was copied by Stanford White for a building at the Jamestown Exposition of 1907. The kitchen, with its six-foot-wide fireplace and plain, unpainted panelling, is expectedly less refined than the other rooms of the main floor. Rooms on the second floor, with simple chair-rails and fireplaces without overmantel treatment, are also less elaborate. Much of the original hardware throughout the house and some of its original wide-board floors have been preserved.

Alterations have not been extensive. Two lateral bay windows have been extended from the rear rooms of the first story, and a two-story ell of sympathetic style was added, before 1900, to the rear. This ell is currently used as a museum of Varnum and local memorabilia. A spacious walled garden is still maintained.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1773**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry		<u>Law</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Music	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation			_____

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

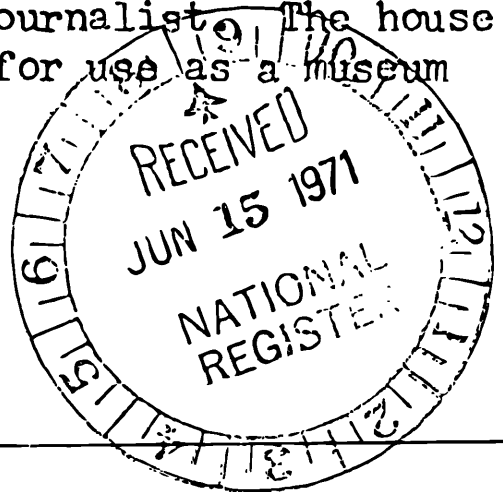
The Varnum House is an exceptionally handsome and well-maintained example of a type of elegant, large-scale dwelling built in Rhode Island just prior to the Revolution. Like the nearby and contemporary Eldredge house, it is of refined but not elaborate design.

The house is noted, of course, for its connection with General James Mitchell Varnum. As a prospering young lawyer, Varnum built his house in 1773. He was appointed first commander of the Kentish Guards in East Greenwich in 1774, and in 1775 he led that company, including Nathanael Greene, to war. He served with distinction at the siege of Boston and in the battles of Rhode Island, White Plains, Long Island, Red Bank, and Valley Forge. During the Revolution, Generals Washington, Lafayette, and Sullivan were entertained at Varnum's house. Lafayette is believed to have stayed in the south-east chamber of the house on his visits to East Greenwich.

Following the war, Varnum returned to his law practice and was elected to Congress in 1780 and again in 1786. He made his place in legal history in the case of Trevett vs. Weeden (1786), the first well-authenticated American case in which an act of a legislative body, in this instance the Rhode Island General Assembly, was declared unconstitutional.

When the Northwest Territory was established in 1787, Varnum was appointed its District Judge. Leaving his wife behind, he arrived at Marietta (now in Ohio), the established seat of government for the region, in 1788, only to die there the following year.

Subsequent owners of the house have included Ethan Clarke, Revolutionary War officer and first president of the Rhode Island Central Bank, Chief Justice George A. Brayton of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, and Dr. William Shaw Bowen, noted physician and journalist. The house was purchased in 1939 by the Varnum Continentals for use as a museum and has been sympathetically restored.



**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Downing, Antoinette F.: Early Homes of Rhode Island. Richmond, Virginia, 1937.  
 Greene, D. H.: History of the Town of East Greenwich and Adjacent Territory. Providence, Rhode Island, 1877.  
 McPartland, Martha R.: The History of East Greenwich, Rhode Island. East Greenwich, Rhode Island, 1960.  
 (The Varnum Continentals:) Varnum House. East Greenwich, Rhode Island, (1952).

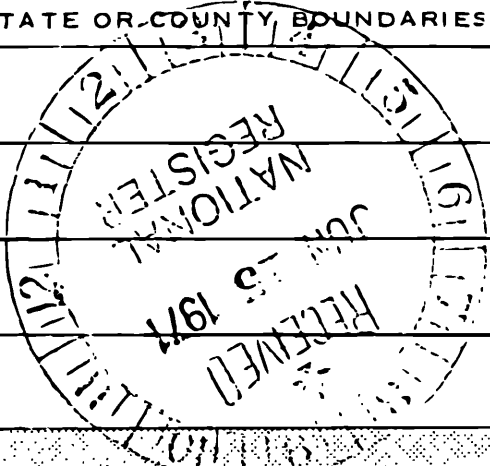
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		71° 26' 03"		
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Less than one acre

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Clifford M. Renshaw, III, Consultant

ORGANIZATION: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission      DATE: May 23, 1971

STREET AND NUMBER:  
State House, 90 Smith Street

CITY OR TOWN: Providence      STATE: Rhode Island, 02903      CODE: 44

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name Frederick Williamson

Title State Liaison Officer

Date June 8, 1971

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Ernest A. Connolly  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

AUG 12 1971

Date \_\_\_\_\_

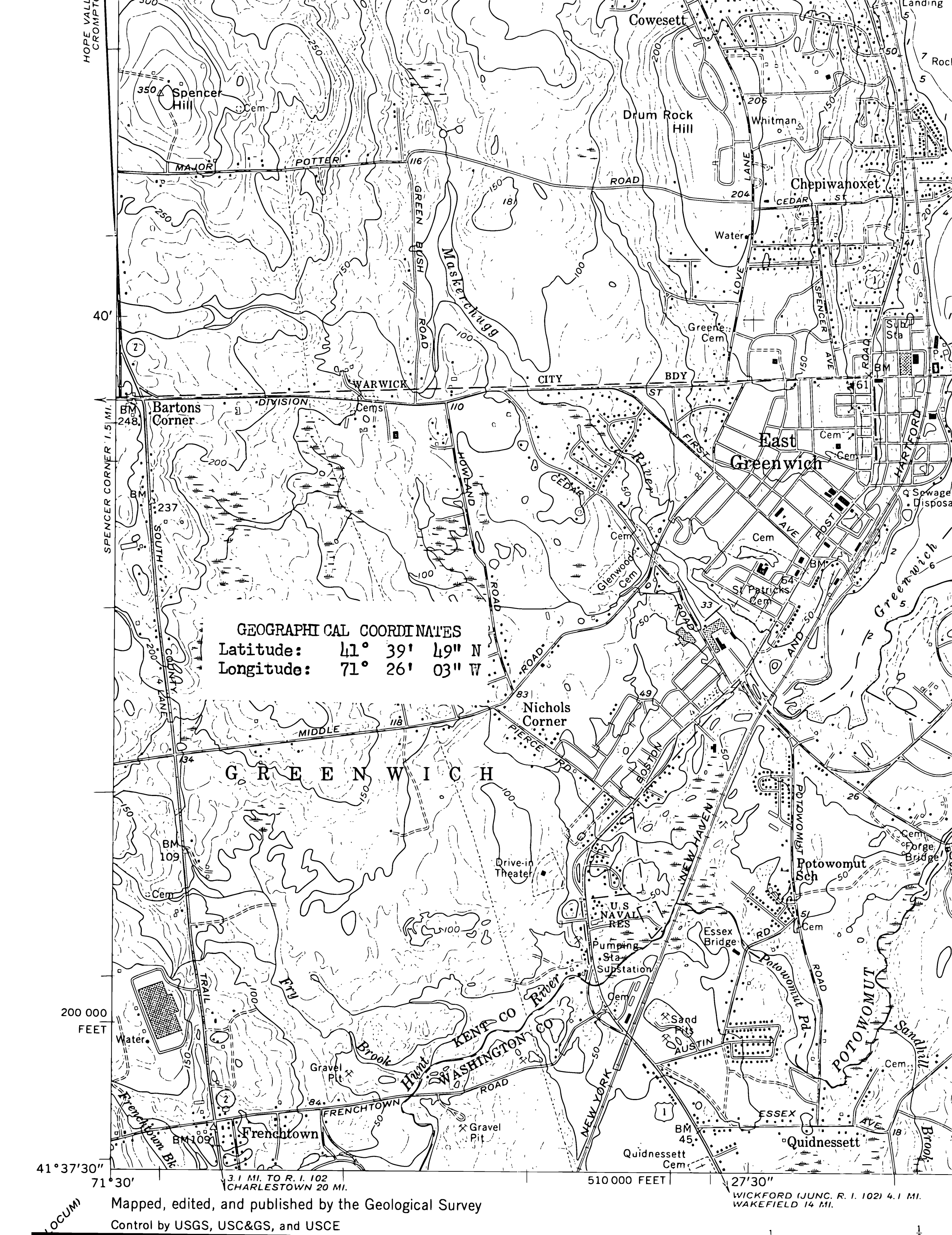
ATTEST:

William Murtagh  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date AUG 6 1971

19/295870/H615710  
 DIM REF  
 12-9-75 Wm

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



GEOGRAPHICAL COORDINATES  
Latitude: 41° 39' 49" N  
Longitude: 71° 26' 03" W

200 000  
FEET

510 000 FEET

41° 37' 30"  
71° 30'

27' 30"  
WICKFORD (JUNC. R. I. 102) 4.1 MI.  
WAKEFIELD 14 MI.

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and USCE

3.1 MI. TO R. I. 102  
CHARLESTOWN 20 MI.

LOCUM

Vermont (General James Mitchell) 1857

Windsor County, Rhode Island

U.S. Geological Survey, 1:25,000, Date 1857