

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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1. NAME: Historic - Castle Hill Lighthouse
Common - Castle Hill Light Station
2. LOCATION

Off Ocean Avenue, on Castle Hill at western end of Newport
Neck off Ocean Avenue
Newport, Rhode Island
Newport County
3. CLASSIFICATION

Category - structure
Ownership - public
Status - unoccupied
Accessible - yes, restricted
Present Use - government, transportation, other: active
lighthouse
4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

U. S. Government, Department of Transportation
First U. S. Coast Guard District Headquarters
150 Causeway Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02114
5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

Recorder of Deeds
Newport City Hall
43 Broadway
Newport, Rhode Island 02840
6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Historic American Engineering Record
Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites in
Rhode Island, 1978

Historic American Engineering Record
U. S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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7. DESCRIPTION

Condition - good / altered / original site

Castle Hill Light is located on a .1-acre site south of Newport Harbor on Newport Neck, which marks the east side of the entrance to Narragansett Bay's East Passage. Built in 1890 in the Richardson Romanesque Style, the light station consists of a heavily rusticated granite block tower which rises from the side of a rock ledge at the water's edge. The rough-faced conical tower measures 21 feet in diameter at the base and 14 feet at the parapet, with a height of 42 feet from the water level to the lamp's focal plane. At the top of the tower is a cast-iron lantern containing the lens, surrounded by a 3-foot-wide gallery with an iron balustrade. An electric fog horn is mounted on the west side of the gallery deck. Three deep-set narrow windows pierce the tower's walls, two at the first floor level and another at the second. A small projecting doorway on the south side at the base provides the only entrance into the tower.

The bottom half of the tower is unpainted, the upper half is white and the lantern and railing are black. A stone bracket used previously to mount a signal bell, which has since been removed, projects from the west side of the tower just below the lantern railing, and a steel flag pole for hoisting storm warning signals is mounted on the gallery deck.

The tower is the only structure on the site. Still active, its equal interval fifth order red light, which flashes every six seconds, has a range of 12 miles. The fog horn gives one blast every ten seconds.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

Period: 1800-1899, 1900-

Specific Dates: 1890

Built in 1890, Castle Hill Light is significant as the only lighthouse in Rhode Island, and one of perhaps only a few others in the country, to be designed in the Richardson Romanesque Style. Although the plans for the tower are unsigned, they may have been drawn by H. H. Richardson himself, as a similar unexecuted design for the light is attributed to him. Located on the entrance to Narragansett Bay's East Passage, the light is also significant for its role in the state's commerce and transportation, as it serves to guide ships en route to Newport Harbor as well as those travelling further up the Bay.

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As early as 1869, the annual report of the Lighthouse Board cited a need for a lighthouse and fog signal at Castle Hill to guide ships through the entrance of Narragansett Bay and into Newport Harbor. However, because of the high price of a suitable piece of land in the area, construction of the light was delayed for over twenty years.

In 1887 Alexander Agassiz, the noted Harvard zoologist who owned a large summer home on Castle Hill, deeded a nearby .2-acre parcel of land from his original property to the government for one dollar, so that a lighthouse could be built on the site. Since Agassiz did not want Lighthouse Service personnel walking near his property, he initially stipulated that access to the light be by water only, and refused to grant a right-of-way in the original deed. However, when he learned that the government would take a right-of-way over his property by condemnation if none could be purchased, he agreed to include land access.

An early unexecuted design for the light, drawn by H. H. Richardson, consisted of a tower with an attached dwelling, both of rusticated stone block. However, probably because of Agassiz's desire for privacy, this plan was changed to the present design which included no living quarters. Instead, a separate six-room keeper's dwelling along with a wharf and an attached boathouse were built about 300 yards east of the light on Castle Hill Cove. It is not known who designed the light that was built, but its similarity to the earlier plan suggest it may also have been the work of Richardson.

The tower and fog bell were completed in 1890 and the original fifth order lens was first lit on May 1, 1890. Two years later the bell was discontinued and removed because of complaints by Agassiz about its noise level. In 1869 a new and more efficient bell, fitted with a screen to deflect the sound, was installed. The most significant alteration to the tower itself involved the remodeling of the doorway on the south side. The small hipped slate roof over the doorway was removed and the original iron door was replaced with one of a more recent design.

The 1938 hurricane destroyed the three structures at Castle Hill Cove, leaving the light without its keeper's quarters. Shortly thereafter, its operation was taken over by personnel at the nearby, newly constructed Castle Hill Coast Guard Station, which had been built to the east of the light on Ocean Avenue.

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The fog bell has been replaced with an automatic electric horn,
and in 1957 the light was automated.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage: .1 acre

Quadrangle name: Newport, RI

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

UTM References: A 19 302620 4592530

Verbal Boundary Description:

Level of Significance:

~~SHPD~~ ~~FPO~~ Certification:

Frank W. Williams

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The fog bell has been replaced with an automatic electric horn, and in 1957 the light was automated.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage: .1 acre

Quadrangle name: Newport, RI

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

UTM References: A 19 302620 4592530

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary of the Castle Hill Light includes the tenth-acre lot on which the light sits, identified and bounded by the boundary line shown on the accompanying sketch map (p. 55A).

Period of Significance: The period of significance extends from 1890, when the light was constructed, to 1938.

Level of Significance: State

FPO Certification:

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Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary of this light includes the tenth-acre on which the light sits. This includes the resource and its immediate surroundings.

Period of Significance: The period of significance extends from 1890, when the light was constructed, to 1938.

Level of Significance: State

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CASTLE HILL LIGHT HOUSE
NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

