

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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1. NAME: Historic - Conimicut Lighthouse
Common - Conimicut Light Station

2. LOCATION

East of Conimicut Point in the Providence River
Warwick, Rhode Island
Kent 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

First U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters
150 Causeway Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02114

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

Conimicut Light is located one mile offshore, midway between Conimicut Point and Nayatt Point, at the entrance to the Providence River. Still an active light, it serves to warn ships of the Conimicut Point Shoal, a long sandbar which extends from Conimicut Point to the Light.

The present tower was built in 1883 to replace a granite beacon that had been established in 1868. Referred to as a caisson light, for the type of foundation on which it stands, the tower is a six-story, 60-foot-high prefabricated cast-iron cylindrical structure, approximately 18 feet in diameter. Built from standardized plans that were modified for its individual site and requirements, the tower is of the same basic design as Hog Island Shoal, and Plum Beach and Sakonnet Lights in Rhode Island as well as numerous others on the east coast.

The base of the tower rests on a large cement cylinder that is sunk approximately 10 feet into the bottom of the bay, and which rises about an equal height above the water level. Bands of cast-iron sheathing plates surround the foundation's entire length and extend upward above the water line to enclose the basement level as well. Scattered around the base is a pile of loose boulders, or riprap, used not to give the tower additional support, but to deflect ice flows from striking its base. A short wooden pier off the east side, rising to the second floor level, provides the only landing.

Surrounding the outside are three separate galleries. The bottom of the three is a covered gallery offering protection from the weather at the entrance (second) level. Around the watch room at the sixth level is an open gallery surrounded by an iron railing and supported underneath by cast-iron brackets. A small bell, still used, sits on the east side of this second gallery beside two automatic fog horns. The top gallery, which surrounds the lantern, is also open.

Nine round arched windows with pedimented casings, now boarded over, pierce the walls of the tower. Three each are found at the second, third, and fourth levels while eight round porthole type windows light the fifth floor. At the top is a

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ten-sided lantern with a spherical ventilator and a lightning rod spike.

A doorway on the second level leads into the tower. Vacant since 1963 when the light was automated, the interior contains living space for the keeper as well as a work area for tending the light. Connecting each of the six levels is an enclosed circular stairway which runs along the walls of the tower. In the basement are two fuel bins, no longer in use. The kitchen was on the first floor, a living room on the second, a bedroom on the third and a tool room on the fourth. At the fifth level was a watchroom with an iron ladder leading to the lantern. The fourth order light, which is 58 feet above sea level, has a range of 13 miles and its white light flashes every two and a half seconds. The bell sounds once every fifteen seconds.

The foundation cylinder is unpainted, the shaft of the tower and first two galleries are white, while the lantern and top gallery are both black. Although paint is peeling off most of the interior walls and rust streaks are visible on the outside of the tower, the light appears to be in good condition.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

Period: 1800-1899, 1900- Specific Dates: 1883

Established in 1868 off Conimicut Point at the entrance to the Providence River, Conimicut Light is significant as an important navigational aid for ships en route to Providence and as the first light in Narragansett Bay to be built offshore. Prior to its construction, only unlighted day markers and buoys warned ships of offshore reefs or shoals within the Bay. The present tower, which dates from 1883, is also architecturally significant as an example of nineteenth century engineering and prefabricated cast-iron construction, and as one of four surviving caisson type lighthouses in the state. Finally, it has the unique distinction of being the last lighthouse in the country to be converted from kerosene to an electric lamp.

Although a light had been established at Nayatt Point on the east side of the entrance to the Providence River in 1828, it was not effective in warning ships of the sandbar that extended from Conimicut Point, across the entrance from Nayatt Point to the middle of the river. However, because of the difficulty in constructing an offshore marker in the middle of the river, it was not until 1857 that an unlit granite day beacon was placed at

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the sandbar's eastern edge. In 1868, after its height was increased and a store and watchroom were added for a keeper, the marker received a lantern and lens that was lit for the first time on November 1 of that year. With Conimicut's completion, the Nayatt Point Light was rendered unnecessary and was deactivated.

The Nayatt Point Lighthouse was retained by the Lighthouse Service as quarters for the keeper of the new light since the Conimicut beacon had no overnight accommodation of its own. A boat landing was built at Nayatt Point from which the keeper rowed across the river to the new tower.

In 1874 a dwelling was constructed on the landing pier of Conimicut Light, but during the following spring it was destroyed by an ice floe. Although repairs were made to the tower and pier, which were also damaged, the dwelling was not rebuilt. Instead, the keeper moved back to Nayatt Point.

By 1880, both the Conimicut tower and the dwelling at Nayatt Point had fallen into disrepair. Instead of appropriating funds to repair both structures, the old tower was torn down in 1883 and replaced by the present iron one which had living quarters within it. With the tower's completion, the use of Nayatt Point was discontinued and it was eventually sold.

Initially, access to the site was provided by a small boat landing on the east side. In 1896 a set of iron davits, for lifting a small boat out of the water, were installed at the end of a pier on the side opposite the landing. A larger pier with a covered storm porch was built to replace the earlier landing on the east side in 1898. These have all been removed and replaced with the present single landing pier off the east side.

Few alterations have been made to the tower itself. In July, 1960, with the conversion of its lamp from kerosene to electricity, Conimicut Light became the last lighthouse in the United States to be electrified. Three years later, the light was automated.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage: less than 1 acre
Quadrangle name: Bristol, RI
Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000
UTM Reference: A 19 304850 4620790

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Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated property includes the land on which the lighthouse rests.

Level of Significance:

SHPO ~~FPO~~ Certification:

Frank Williams

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Period of Significance: The period of significance dates from 1883, when the lighthouse was constructed, to 1938.

Level of Significance: State

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

67° 1' N SW
(Providence)

71° 22' 30"

303000m.E.

304

305

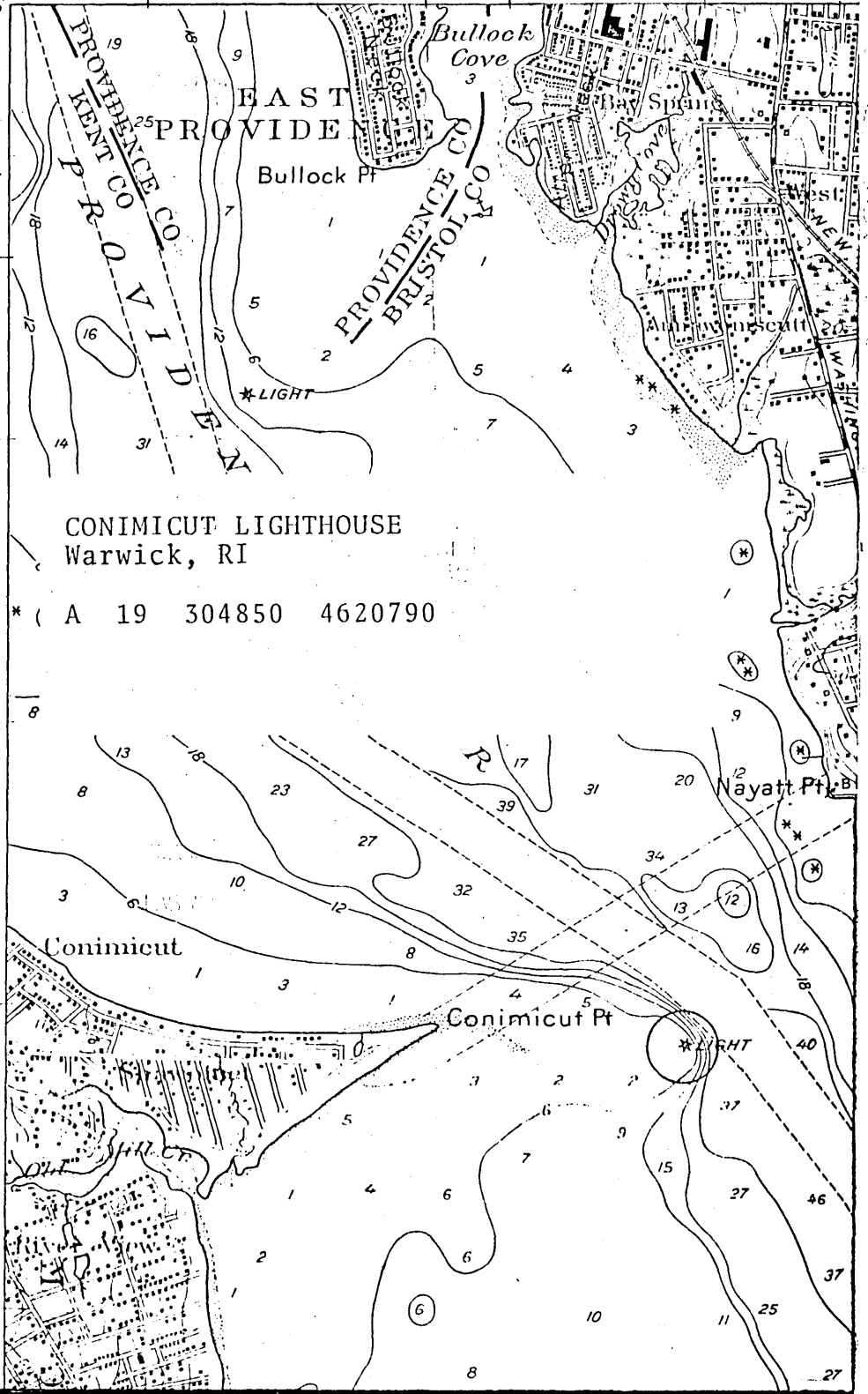
4624000m.N.

4623

4622

4621

42' 30"



CONIMICUT LIGHTHOUSE
Warwick, RI

* (A 19 304850 4620790

Conimicut

Conimicut Pt

Nayatt Pt.