

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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HISTORIC NAME: Indian Oaks, ~~The~~ Senator Nelson W. Aldrich Estate

COMMON NAME: Our Lady of Providence Seminary

LOCATION: 836 Warwick Neck Avenue

OWNER: Roman Catholic Bishop of Providence

One Cathedral Square

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

CONDITION: Excellent, Fair, Deteriorated; Altered; Original Site

DESCRIPTION:

The former Aldrich Estate, now Our Lady of Providence Seminary, occupies a seventy-five-acre tract in a suburban residential neighborhood on Warwick Neck. The grounds, partly bounded by a stone wall with a tall, double-leaf wrought-iron gate at the northwest corner (now unused) and a second gateway about two hundred feet south of the former, run down in gentle slopes and terraces from Warwick Neck Avenue on the west to Narragansett Bay on the east. They are handsomely landscaped in the manner of an English country-house park, with a variety of deciduous and evergreen trees and large shrubs planted informally about the lawn areas surrounding the buildings.

The focus of the estate is a large stone mansion in the style of the French Renaissance. The main block, two stories high with a tall, slate-covered hip roof containing a third story and a garret, is seven bays broad, with projecting end pavilions on the entrance front (west side) flanking a one-story, five-bay frontal block containing the main entrance. The main block is flanked by two-and-one-half-story, hip-roofed, four-bay side wings joined to the main block by two-story connecting bays. The side wings are somewhat shorter than the main block, with the segmental pediments or arched tops of their second-story windows breaking up through the eaves. The exterior walls are of random-coursed rough-face ashlar with smooth limestone quoins, stringcourses, and window surrounds. The one-story main entrance block, constructed entirely of limestone, has paired Ionic pilasters defining the window bays and a central arched entrance flanked by Ionic columns supporting a segmental pediment. Windows in the entrance block are surmounted by carved decorative panels, and the block itself is topped by an entablature with dentils and a roof balustrade. The east facade of the main block, facing the bay, is nine bays broad and contains a three-bay central loggia on the first floor. The loggia, constructed of limestone, has engaged Tuscan columns, paired at the ends, flanking its arched openings and supporting an entablature topped by a balustrade. The loggia is now enclosed with screens.

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The elaborate interiors of the main rooms are modeled after those typically found in the high-style mansions of eighteenth-century England and France. The main entrance, with wrought-iron grillwork, opens into a vestibule with reception rooms and lavatories on each side. The vestibule leads into a central hall with a vaulted ceiling divided by gilded ribs into panels containing allegorical frescoes. An arcade on the east side separates the hall from a subsidiary passageway fronting the loggia and linking the morning room and dining room. At each end of the center hall broad archways open into subsidiary halls. The southern hall leads to a salon on the southeast, a library and a ballroom on the southwest (both rooms now used as a library), and a small drawing room in the center. The central hall and stairhall have stone walls and bronze sconces and torches. The reception rooms, small drawing room, library, and ballroom have plastered walls and marble mantels on the fireplaces. The salon and dining room are more elaborate. The salon has dado paneling surmounted by plastered areas framed by stiles and rails; a marble mantel and molded plaster overmantel; a classical cornice with modillions, dentils, and an egg-and-dart molding; and a pair of molded plaster ceiling medallions. The dining room is paneled in oak. Fluted Composite pilasters on pedestals define bays containing beveled panels. A garland band runs around the walls between the pilaster capitals, beneath an entablature with dentils, an egg-and-dart molding, and rosettes in the frieze. A black marble mantel, with herms supporting the shelf, is surmounted by an oak panel surrounded by a band of fruits, foliage, and figures carved in high relief, with a central cartouche at the top. The plaster ceiling has a broad, molded decorative band around the edge and a row of three medallions down the center. Both the dining room and the salon have tall French windows opening onto a rear terrace.

On the second floor, a long central corridor runs from the stairhall on the north to a sitting room at the south end. On each side are doors opening into bedrooms and suites (the latter consisting of bedroom, dressing room, and bathroom) for family and guests. The third floor has more guest rooms off a central corridor. The doors to these upstairs rooms all have louvered upper panels for ventilation, and most of the rooms contain fireplaces with handsome mantels.

Most of the estate's outbuildings remain intact. Connected to the tall wrought-iron gate at the northwest corner of the property is a one-and-one-half-story, hip-roofed, French-style stone gate lodge. Between the gate lodge and the main house is an extensive one-and-one-half-story, hip-roofed, stone stable, carriage house, and service complex. This rambling, L-shaped building comprises a long, rectangular carriage-house block with projecting central and end pavilions on its south side, linked by an archway to a square, 126-foot, fieldstone tower with a

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pyramidal roof. The tower, with gabled dormers capping projecting shingled wall panels on its four sides, contains a water tank and an observatory at the top with windows overlooking the bay and Warwick Neck. Ells extend west and south from the base of the tower, the southern one connecting to a pavilion which was originally a pumphouse that pumped well water up to the supply tank in the tower. The carriage-house complex is connected to the main house by a tunnel. Provisions were delivered to and stored in this outbuilding and were then conveyed to the main house through the tunnel.

A gable-roofed, rectangular, stone and shingle boat house stands east-northeast of the main house at the shoreline. It is one-and-one-half-stories high with a tall basement story. The building has a stone, segmental-arch porte-cochere surmounted by a shed-roofed porch; a main-floor-level, shed-roofed porch on the east end, overlooking the water; main-floor loggias on the north and south sides, with cylindrical pillars supporting segmental arches; oriel windows; gabled dormers; and a central roof-top belvedere or observatory capped with a roof balustrade. The gables have shingled verges creating a Gothic- or Tudor-arch profile with the wall plane recessed behind it.

On Warwick Neck Avenue, across Warner Avenue from the rest of the estate, is an asymmetrical, two-and-one-half-story, gable-roofed, stone and shingle caretaker's house. Its architectural character is similar to the boat house, with the same gable-end treatment of shingled verges in a Gothic-arch pattern. As it stands the caretaker's house is a remodeling of a mid-nineteenth-century vernacular dwelling, altered to make it visually compatible with the other buildings. Near the caretaker's house are several greenhouses in ruinous condition.

Two other outbuildings that originally were part of the estate have been either severely damaged or destroyed. North of the boat house, along the sea wall, was a stone and wood-frame tea house. North of the tea house, at the east end of the north boundary wall, was a small stone lodge at a gate near the water's edge. Today only the ruined stone portions of the tea house survive and the waterside gate lodge has been knocked down, leaving only a pile of stone rubble. These remnants are located beyond the present bounds of the seminary property and are not included in the nomination.

Since its conversion to a seminary in the 1940s, several buildings, all of buff-colored brick, have been added to the property. Among them are a small tomb north of the main house; a Romanesque-style church south of the main house; a school building with classrooms, gymnasium, and auditorium south of the church; and two two-story, flat-roofed

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dormitories west of the school building. The main house, now used for administrative offices, library space, conference rooms, and sleeping quarters for faculty and guests, is linked to the newer buildings south of it by a low, glazed passageway which is not visible from the lawns on the entrance side of the mansion. Though they obviously do not contribute to the historical and architectural value of the estate, these modern structures are not offensively intrusive, and the visual character of the property, which still contains most of the original estate buildings, remains much as it must have been in the early twentieth century.

PERIODS: 1800-1899, 1900-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture

SPECIFIC DATES: 1899, 1902, 1904, 1911

ARCHITECTS: Main house: Carrère & Hastings of New York

Outbuildings: Stone, Carpenter & Willson of Providence

SIGNIFICANCE:

The former Aldrich Estate is architecturally significant as a handsome and reasonably well preserved turn-of-the-century country estate in the grand manner of its era, and is historically significant for its association with Nelson W. Aldrich (1841-1915), a figure important in state and national finance, industry, and politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The Aldrich Estate is a fine example of the lavish domestic accommodations favored by the well-to-do in the years between the Civil War and World War I. The prosperity spawned by laissez-faire capitalism led to the rise of a class of affluent and powerful individuals with a taste for buildings that emulated architectural forms historically associated with the European aristocracy. The Aldrich Estate is a typical upper-class country residence of the period, its academic classicism reflecting the standards of taste set by American architects schooled in the design techniques of the French Ecole des beaux-arts. Though less opulent and generally smaller in scale than the great resort estates at Newport, the Aldrich Estate is similar in intent and function to its more grandiose counterparts, and is comparable in size and quality to some of Newport's smaller estates. At the same time, it is a telling manifestation of the status and position achieved by its new-rich owner, a self-made man of modest origins.

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Nelson W. Aldrich, the estate's first owner, was born in Foster, Rhode Island, in 1841. He moved to Providence at age seventeen after studying at the East Greenwich Academy, and by age twenty-four had become a partner in Waldron and Wightman, the state's largest wholesale grocery firm. He subsequently amassed a fortune through investment in banks; electric, gas, and public-transit companies; and rubber and sugar trading. His political career began with his election to the Providence Common Council in 1869. At this time Aldrich allied himself with state Republican Party chief and U.S. Senator Henry B. Anthony, a powerful conservative politician who owned the Providence Journal. Aldrich went on to serve in the state legislature in 1875 and 1876 and the United States House of Representatives from 1879 to 1881. In 1881 he began a remarkable thirty-year career in the United States Senate where, with the help of a few other Republican leaders, he virtually controlled the passage of legislation. Aldrich eventually became chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and was largely responsible for federal tariff and currency legislation favorable to the business community. Many of the nation's foremost Republican leaders--among them Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft--visited the Senator's Warwick Neck estate for working holidays that included political conferences in the boathouse. After Anthony's death, Aldrich also controlled, through Charles R. "Boss" Brayton, the political machine of Rhode Island's Republican Party, which totally dominated state affairs at that time. Aldrich was attacked by muck raking journalists of the era (Lincoln Steffens characterized Rhode Island as "a state for sale" at this period, exposing the corruption of the Aldrich-Brayton machine) and his power eventually declined as the public grew discontented with the conservatives in the U.S. Congress. He retired from the Senate in 1911 and died four years later. Aldrich's will stipulated that his heirs maintain the estate intact for twelve years, after which they were free to subdivide it. The family retained the property until 1939, when it was sold to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence for use as a seminary.

ACREAGE:

UTM:	A	19	302320	4617300	Quadrangle Name: East Greenwich, R.I.
	B	19	302300	4616620	
	C	19	301900	4616480	
	D	19	301980	4617460	
	E	19	302580	4617200	Quadrangle Name: Bristol, R.I. - Mass.
	F	19	302480	4616780	
	G	19	302300	4616680	
	H	19	302320	4617360	

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BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION:

The nominated property encompasses lots 4, 21, and 22 in City of Warwick Assessor's Plat 381. It measures a total of approximately 74.3 acres and includes all surviving estate buildings and the surrounding landscaped grounds. These grounds are an integral part of this cultural resource, both historically and aesthetically, and are included for the appropriate historical and visual context they provide. An adjoining parcel, under separate ownership, containing the remnants of two additional outbuildings, is not included in the nomination on account of the ruinous condition of the structures and the current ownership status of the property.

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: NATIONAL

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