

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

For HCRS use only

received OCT 24 1980

date entered NOV 28 1980

Continuation sheet 40

Item number 7

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NAME: Little Neck Cemetery

LOCATION: off Read Street

OWNER: City of East Providence, City Hall, Taunton Avenue,  
East Providence, R.I. 02914

## DESCRIPTION:

Little Neck Cemetery is a very picturesque, secluded graveyard located on a small, high, wooded neck of land near the head of Bullock Cove. Its beauty is largely due to its romantic waterside setting and careful maintenance of its grounds rather than deliberate attempts at artful layout or landscaping. Established in 1655 by the town of Rehoboth, Massachusetts as a common burial ground for the early settlers of Wannamoisett (the present-day Riverside area of East Providence with Barrington, Rhode Island and parts of Warren, Rhode Island and Swansea, Massachusetts), the cemetery has been enlarged and currently encompasses an area of about 12.3 acres. Only the older section, measuring about 6.2 acres, is included in this nomination. Access from Read Street is provided by a narrow dirt lane running easterly, then southerly to loop around the neck; short cross-lanes provide vehicular access to individual plots. The older section is located toward the tip (south end) of the neck. Here many of the plots are defined by stone-post and iron-rail fences of nineteenth-century vintage. These plots contain many seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century gravestones in an excellent state of preservation. The newer section, nearer the base (north end) of the neck, contains mostly twentieth-century graves and is still used for burials.

DATES: 17th through 20th centuries.

## SIGNIFICANCE:

Little Neck Cemetery is a historical and cultural resource of great importance. It contains the graves of individuals who have played a prominent role in the history of East Providence and other American communities. The oldest recorded burial is that of John Brown, Jr. (died 1662), son of the man who purchased Wannamoisett from the Wampanoag Indians. The grave of Elizabeth Tilley Howland (died 1687) is also here. Howland was a passenger on the ship Mayflower and was one of the original settlers of the Plymouth Colony. She died at the Swansea farm of her daughter and son-in-law and was buried nearby at Little Neck. Today her grave is marked by a finely carved slate marker erected in 1946 by the Howland family association. The most famous person interred at Little Neck, however, is Captain Thomas Willett (died 1674). Willett son-in-law of John Brown of Wannamoisett, settled in what is now East Providence in a house that stood on Willett Avenue (now the site of the Willett Arms Apartments). He is noted for serving as first English mayor of New York. The Willett plot, surrounded by a stone-post and iron-rail fence, is now marked

(See Continuation Sheet #41).

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by a large boulder placed by the City Club of New York and also contains the original stones marking the graves of Willett and his wife Mary, who died in 1669.

Perhaps more significant than these historical associations is the aesthetic value of the numerous well preserved gravestones representing practically every aspect of American funerary art from the seventeenth century to the present. Included are squat, broad, unusually thick seventeenth-century stones which are really small boulders with faces dressed and smoothed to contain the inscription, and tops rudely finished in the triple-arched form that became popular in the 1700s; a wide range of eighteenth-century slate gravestones with the death's head, cherub's head, and sunburst motifs popular at the time; and early nineteenth-century slate markers with the willow-and-urn motif. Victorian monuments in a variety of styles and materials are also present; most noteworthy are a modest marble headstone with a gate-of-heaven design in low relief and a tall, banded granite pillar topped with a Greek cross. As the resting place of local residents of transcendent historical importance and a comprehensive collection of gravestones illustrating the evolution of artistic taste and memorial customs, Little Neck Cemetery merits inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

ACREAGE: about 6.2 acres

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: Assessor's Plat 58, Lots 3 and 4

UTM: 19: 304250: 4626300

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: State

(See Continuation Sheet #42).