Form No. 10-306 (Rev. 10-74) PH0359017

STATE NOMINATION: (SEE READ)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED MAY 11 1977
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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON
(* Beavertail Light

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
south end of Beavertail Road

__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Jamestown __ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
#1--Hon. Fernand St. Germain

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Rhode Island	44	Newport	005

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	XPUBLIC	__OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
XBUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	XUNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
XSITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	XYES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	XTRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	XOTHER: recreation

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: *(If applicable)*
U. S. Government--under the jurisdiction of First Coast Guard District

STREET & NUMBER
150 Causeway Street

CITY, TOWN
Boston __ VICINITY OF

STATE
Massachusetts

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Jamestown Town Hall

STREET & NUMBER
71 Narragansett Avenue

CITY, TOWN
Jamestown

STATE
Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

__FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
_EXCELLENT	_DETERIORATED	_UNALTERED	XORIGINAL SITE
_GOOD	_RUINS	XALTERED	_MOVED DATE_____
XFAIR	_UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Beavertail Light is located at Beavertail Point, a rocky, windswept promontory at the southern tip of Conanicut Island which divides the East and West passages of Narragansett Bay. It is a strategic position which has been the site of beacons and lighthouses since the early eighteenth century. The site encompasses about four acres and is bounded on the north by Fort Burnside, a U.S. Navy reservation. A public access road runs around the perimeter of the property and connects to Beavertail Road, leading from the point up Beaver Neck toward the town center about three miles away. The road is lined for part of its length by a low stone wall on the inland side, while its southern portion is bounded by a rail fence. The ground is covered with grass, but exposure to strong on-shore winds has prevented the growth of any shrubs or trees.

Five buildings and the remains of a sixth stand on the property. Most prominent is the lighthouse tower, built in 1856. It is a ten-foot-square, straight-sided stone structure surmounted by an iron lantern room and lantern with circular galleries, set about 100 feet back from a steep slope which falls to the island's rocky shoreline. The tower walls are of rock-faced grey granite blocks approximately twelve inches high and eighteen inchestall and of two different lengths (eight feet and ten feet). The blocks are laid up with the longer ones on opposite sides of the tower, overlapping the end of the shorter ones. The orientation of the blocks is reversed in adjacent rows and is repeated in alternate rows, creating a quoined effect at the corners. The tower is now unpainted, as it was originally, but the upper half was painted white in 1900 as a distinguishing feature, and it remained that way until a few years ago. There are three window openings in the walls: one at ground level on the west side, one at the top on the north side, and one about half way up the south side. The original 6 over 6 sash have been removed and the openings have been filled up with concrete blocks. The interior of the tower is cylindrical in form, with an iron spiral staircase leading up to the lantern room. The lantern room and lantern are decagonal in plan, with the latter situated above the former and reached by a short ladder. The beacon here was originally a fixed white light produced by oil lamp. In 1899 it was converted to a flashing white light. An electric lamp was installed in 1931. Today the lantern is glazed with green convex plexiglass panes, and the beacon is a flashing green light with a range of seventeen miles produced by a 45,000-candlepower electric lamp. The focal plane of the lantern is 45 feet above the ground and 68 feet above mean sea level.

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To the north of the lighthouse tower is a one-story, gable-roofed ell of stuccoed brick about thirteen feet square. It connects the tower to the keeper's house and was originally used to store lamp oil. The keeper's house, to the north of the oil room, was also built in 1856. It is a two-story, hip-roofed structure measuring approximately 25 feet by 31 feet, with a one-story, gable-roofed, 16 by 17-foot ell on the west side. A small, shed-roofed wooden addition stands on the south side of this ell adjacent to the keeper's house, and a two-story, hip-roofed assistant keeper's house measuring about 25 by 31 feet is attached to the west side of the ell. The assistant's house was built in 1898. The long axes of the dwellings are perpendicular to one another, with that of the keeper's house running east-west. Both dwellings are built of brick, now stuccoed over and painted white, with granite door and window sills, painted grey. They have been unoccupied since the light was automated in 1972, and all the door and window openings are boarded up.

About twenty feet east of the tower and oil room stands the old signal house. It is a one-story, gable-on-hip-roofed structure built in the early twentieth century, measuring approximately 22 by 26 feet, with the long axis running east-west. The signal house has a concrete foundation and yellow brick walls which are stuccoed over and painted white. On the south side the wall breaks through the eaves at the center to form a little gabled dormer containing two blocked-up circular openings from which fog horns once projected. The fog horns have been removed from the signal house and a new horn has been set up about fifty feet to the south (across the access road) on a concrete-filled circular fieldstone foundation approximately 24 feet in diameter. This foundation is the base of the second Beavertail Light, built in 1755, burned by the British in 1779, rebuilt in 1783-84, and demolished after the present lighthouse was completed in 1856-57. Buried for many years, the foundation was uncovered by tidal action during the hurricane of 1938. A slate plaque with a commemorative inscription carved by John Howard Benson (a prominent contemporary American stonecutter associated with Newport's John Stevens Shop, a stonecutting firm dating from the early 18th century) is set in a fieldstone marker on the north side of the foundation.

A one-story, hip-roofed garage stands about 52 feet north of the signal house. Built in the mid-twentieth century, it has concrete block walls and measures about 22 by 24 feet, with the longer axis

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running north-south. The area between the signal house and the garage is paved with asphalt and is connected to the access road by a short driveway.

The last two structures on the property are a one-story, gable-roofed shed about twenty feet west of the garage and a one-story, flat-roofed shed about 92 feet north of the garage. The former is built of concrete block and measures approvimately 12 by 20 feet, while the latter has brick walls and measures approximately 13 by 17 feet. Both are painted white and are set with their long axes running north-south.

The buildings are in fair condition, with a few areas of chipped stucco and peeling paint the only signs of deterioration. Since the light was automated, vandalism has become a problem, and is a source of continuing concern for the Coast Guard and for local residents.

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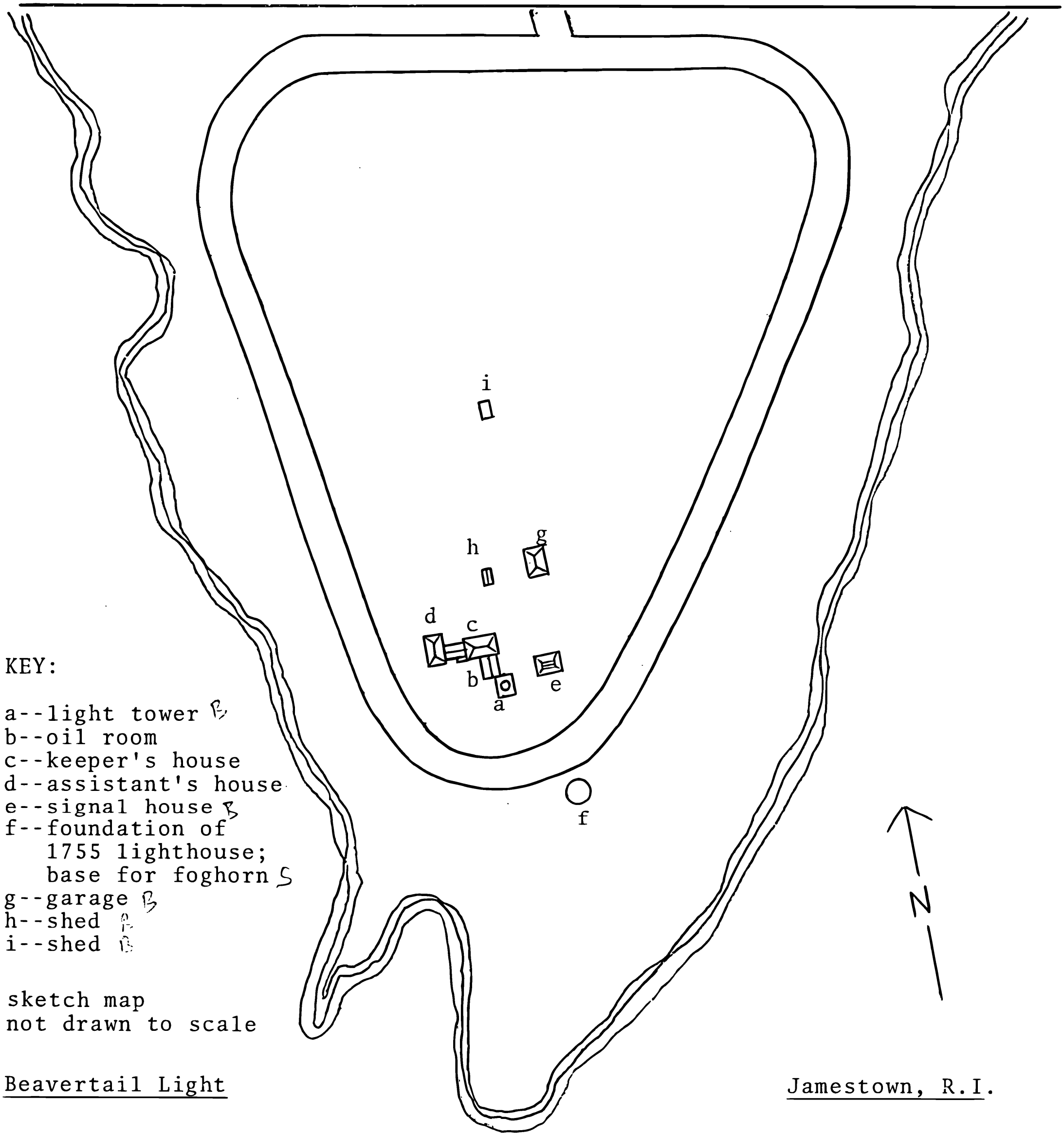

KEY:

a--light tower
b--oil room
c--keeper's house
d--assistant's house
e--signal house
f--foundation of
1755 lighthouse;
base for foghorn
g--garage
h--shed
i--shed

sketch map
not drawn to scale

Beavertail Light

Jamestown, R.I.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
_PREHISTORIC	_ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	_COMMUNITY PLANNING	_LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	_RELIGION
_1400-1499	_ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	XCONSERVATION	_LAW	XSCIENCE
_1500-1599	_AGRICULTURE	_ECONOMICS	_LITERATURE	_SCULPTURE
_1600-1699	XARCHITECTURE	_EDUCATION	_MILITARY	_SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
X1700-1799	_ART	_ENGINEERING	_MUSIC	_THEATER
X1800-1899	_COMMERCE	_EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	_PHILOSOPHY	XTRANSPORTATION
_1900-	_COMMUNICATIONS	_INDUSTRY	_POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	_OTHER (SPECIFY)
		XINVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1856 BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The fact that Beavertail Light is one of the oldest lighthouse sites in America would perhaps be enough to qualify it for nomination to the National Register. Its antiquity, however, is not its only noteworthy feature. The successive lighthouses at Beavertail, set at a vital location, have helped to ensure the safe transportation of passengers and goods in the Atlantic and in Narragansett Bay for over 200 years. The present light tower has great architectural value, both intrinsic (as a well preserved and unusual example of 19th-century masonry construction) and associative (it is an important part of the local landscape and, consequently, is an object of cultural significance). As the site of early experiments with gas illumination and fog signalling equipment, Beavertail has earned a place in the annals of science and invention. In addition to this, the unique biological and geological resources of Beavertail make it an important conservation area.

Early settlers of Rhode Island were quick to grasp the strategic value of Beavertail Point. The colonial records of Jamestown refer to the existence of a watch-house at Beavertail in 1705, while orders for the building of a beacon and maintenance of a regular watch at Beavertail are recorded in an entry dated 9 June 1712. The purpose of all this vigilance was probably strictly military, to warn of the approach of hostile foreign ships, but it is possible that the beacon was sometimes used to help guide merchant vessels into Narragansett Bay. In 1738 the General Assembly of Rhode Island authorized the construction of a lighthouse at Beavertail, but nothing was done until 1749, when a 58-foot wooden tower was erected under the direction of Peter Harrison of Newport, one of America's most eminent Colonial architects. This lighthouse was the third one to be established in America. It burned down in 1753, whereupon Harrison supervised the construction of a 64-foot fieldstone tower which was completed in 1755. This structure was burned by British troops when the occupying forces evacuated Newport in 1779. The lighthouse was repaired in 1783-84 and was used until 1856 when the present tower and keeper's house were completed. By that time the old tower was extremely decrepit and it

See continuation sheet 4

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Champlin, Richard L., "Rhode Island's First Lighthouse," Newport History, volume XLIII, part 3, number 139 (Summer 1970), pp 49-64.

Franklin, Susan B., "The Beavertail Lighthouse," Rhode Island History, volume X, number 4 (October 1951), pp. 98-100.

See continuation sheet 6

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 4 acres 7.5 see plat report 11.17.

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	19	299700	4591320	B	19	299640	4591080
C	19	299400	4591150	D	19	299460	4591390

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property occupies lots 1, 2, and 3 in Town of Jamestown Assessor's Plat 13.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Robert O. Jones, Jr., Survey Specialist

ORGANIZATION
Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE
April 1977

STREET & NUMBER
150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE
401-277-2678

CITY OR TOWN
Providence

STATE
Rhode Island

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES X NO ____ NONE ____

X [signature]
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is ____National X State ____Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE See attached letter. (We used the wrong form) DATE May 3, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

[signature]
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 12/12/77

ATTEST: [signature]
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
DATE 12.9.77

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was quickly torn down. The second Beavertail Light was one of the most important lighthouses on the Atlantic coast, for it marked the entrance to the East Passage of Narragansett Bay, which led in turn to Newport Harbor, one of colonial America's largest and busiest ports. As a result, mariners of the period often referred to it as "Newport Light." The present lighthouse still serves as a major aid to coastal navigators.

Architecturally, the 1856 light tower is unique. The granitework, described in detail in item 7, is unlike the masonry of any other lighthouse in New England. The tower is also a prominent landmark, familiar to generations of Rhode Islanders and to out-of-state tourists. It is an important element in the visual fabric of lower Narragansett Bay, a cultural artifact with great emotional significance for many local residents.

The 18th-century lighthouse was the site of an early experiment to improve lighthouse operations. During the year 1817-18 David Melville of Newport, a pioneer in the use of gas for residential and street lighting, fitted the lantern at Beavertail with a lamp which burned a gas he manufactured by heating tar and rosin over a coal fire. The gas lamp burned much brighter than the oil one, with the light reportedly visible 25 miles away. This experiment probably constituted the first use of gas as a lighthouse illuminant, and though Melville was pleased with the results, the government had doubts about the cost and reliability of using gas, and the lantern was refitted with an oil lamp at the conclusion of the trial period.

Beavertail Light was also closely associated with the development of new types of fog signals. In 1851 a fog whistle and a fog trumpet invented by C. A. Daboll were installed at Beavertail on an experimental basis. The new apparatus was much more efficient than the fog bells which had been used up until that time, and after the trial period the whistle and trumpet were left in place. These instruments were operated with compressed air produced by a horse-driven air pump; hot air engines soon replaced the horse as power sources for the equipment. Six years later, a steam whistle was installed and tested at the new lighthouse. It did not work as well as the compressed air signals and was replaced by a reed trumpet about 1866. An improved version of the steam whistle was erected at Beavertail in 1881 and proved to be very successful. In both cases (the air whistle/air

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trumpet and the steam whistle) the installations at Beavertail were the first of their type in the United States.

Equal in significance to these historical and cultural associations are the natural resources of Beavertail Point. The exposed rock outcroppings here have many folds, intrusions, and crystal formations which can be easily studied by geologists. The high algal population of the water makes Beavertail a favorite outdoor laboratory for marine-life classes. The area is also noteworthy as a nesting spot for migratory birds, and as a site where large numbers of monarch butterflies gather before they fly south.

These feature combine to make Beavertail a unique historical and cultural resource worthy of preservation.

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Fredericksen, Robert C., article on Beavertail Light in Providence Evening Bulletin, 26 August 1972, p. 1

Holland, Francis Ross, Jr., America's Lighthouses, Their Illustrated History Since 1716, (Brattleboro: 1972), pp. 11, 73-4.

Inspection report of Beavertail Light, 12 February 1876, corrected 15 July 1890. Photocopied material from First Coast Guard District files.

Inventory of Federal Archives in the States, Series X, Number 38, p. 15.

Low, William Gilman, "A Short History of Beaver Tail Light, Conanicut, Rhode Island," Jamestown Historical Society Bulletin, number 7 (August 1936), pp. 3-15.

Material from R. I. Audubon Society inventory, "Unique Natural Areas of Rhode Island."

National Archives, Record Group #26, photostats of elevation and plan of Beavertail Light and Dwellings and photocopies of material from Beavertail Light House Clippings File.

"Notice to Mariners," Providence Journal, 10 October 1856, p. 2.

Putnam, George R., Lighthouses and Lightships of the United States, (Boston & New York; 1933), p. 24.

Willoughby, Malcolm F., Lighthouses of New England, (Boston: 1929), pp. 105-13, 207-08, 227.