

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received JUN 5 1985
date entered JUL 19 1985

Continuation sheet 8

Item number 7

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NAME: Davisville Historic District (North Kingstown MRA)
LOCATION: Davisville Road
Owners: Multiple; see owners list or file at Rhode Island Historical
Preservation Commission
CONDITION: Good, Excellent; Altered; Original site, except 277 Davisville
Road, moved 1856, within the district.

DESCRIPTION:

The Davisville Historic District along both sides of Davisville Road south of Hunts River, is an area of fields, woodland, the site of a nineteenth-century textile mill (and earlier grist mill), five well-preserved eighteenth and nineteenth century dwellings, a cemetery and the sites of some additional mill nineteenth century houses.

The district includes a mill site, used since 1700, first for a gristmill, later for a textile manufacture. The district's five houses are all 2½-story, gable-roofed, wood-frame structures, dating from 1715 through the 1850s. Most are set back only slightly (20-30 feet) from Davisville Road, which has been widened several times; however, there is a short by-pass on the west side of the road, passing in front of 277 and 299 and divided from the road by a narrow greensward; it documents the relationship of some of the district's buildings to the early road and suggests the character of the road before its widening and straightening. The Joshua Davis House, 296 Davisville Road, is set far back, about 200 feet from the road. On both sides of the road, the houses are backed by woods; and cleared fields on the west side of the road, the woods stretch back to Hunts River. Some fine dry-laid stone walls divide 299 and 277 Davisville Road from the road, and outline the Davis family cemetery set behind 299.

INVENTORY OF CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES:

Contributing buildings are defined as those dating from the period of Davisville's development as a small, rural milling hamlet. There are no non-contributing structures and the district retains to a large extent its nineteenth-century setting: the close integration of woods, cleared fields and houses; the relationship of the houses to the road and to one another; graveled and dirt paths leading to the houses from the road. The North Kingstown Planning Commission has granted permission for the development of a housing subdivision on the east side of Davisville Road (between 296 and 350) but the land has not yet been platted. The path of a proposed access road has been cleared from Davisville Road to the east building of the district.

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DAVISVILLE ROAD

Mill Site (1700-1929): The mill site at Davisville, set on the south side of Hunts River near the Davisville Road Bridge, has been used since an eighteenth-century gristmill operated here. Today only the mill trench lined with dry-laid rubble, some foundations and what appears to be fragments of the mill's turbine remain. The mill was demolished in the 1970s as the site has been little disturbed since then, it appears to be a good candidate for future archeological investigations.

Mill House Sites (mid-19th century): The west side of Davisville Road, north of 277, was the site of several houses owned in the late 19th century by the Davises' company and presently used to house company's workers. Probably demolished in the 1920s or 1930s, the outlines of some foundations remain. It is unlikely that their sites have been heavily disturbed since demolition and, in the future, they may prove good candidates for archeological investigation. Together with the mill site and the remaining owners' workers' houses would help to complete the portrait of mill life at Davisville.

- 277 Ezra Davis House (1805): A 2½-story, central-entry central-chimney, Federal house with a doorway with fanlight under pediment and fluted pilasters. This, the second Davis house in Davisville, was moved about 1500 feet north in 1856 when Bellefield (299 Davisville Road) was built. The interior, whose finish is now much altered, is arranged in the typical 5-room, center chimney plan.
- 296 Joshua Davis House (c. 1715 and 1820): This 2-story clapboarded house with an unusual plan was built in stages, beginning in the early eighteenth century as Joshua Davis' home. The plan of the older, western part is unusual for an eighteenth-century house, with its chimney well off center: the five rooms are grouped asymmetrically around the large chimney rather than following the typical center-chimney plan. Restoration architect John Hutchins Cade, who restored the house for Rhode Island historian, William Davis Miller in 1948, believed that the beaded, encased summer beam and exposed girts in one of the rooms of the western section might have originally been the frame of a two-story, two-room stone-ender, a house type characteristic of Rhode Island's first building period. This could explain the unusual plan. Later in the eighteenth century the house was nearly doubled by an addition to the east built by the second Joshua Davis. The house is set back from the road, and the property also includes a barn, a shed, and a handsome picket fence.

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DAVISVILLE ROAD (cont)

- 299 Bellefield (1856; barn, 1883): An unusually well preserved and substantial, 2½-story, Victorian house typical of the mid-1850s in its mixing of Greek Revival form with bracketed Italianate detailing: the corner posts with recessed panels are typical of the earlier period as is the pedimented treatment of the facade, while the brackets under eaves and window hoods are characteristic of the later style. A one-story, flat-roofed, open veranda wraps around the front and the sides. The interior is handsomely finished and little altered since the 1890s.

Outbuildings, including an early shed and a barn, are strung in a row behind the rear ell. Across the drive and north of the house is a clapboarded barn built in 1883 and ornamented by patterned shingles, with a delicate cupola centered on its cross-gable roof. West of the house is the Davis family burial ground, set at the edge of cleared fields and woods.

- 345 Henry Sweet House (ca. 1850): This is a 2½-story clapboarded, end-gable house. The house is a far less exuberant example than Bellefield of the transition between the Greek Revival and bracketed styles. Corner posts and a closed pediment front are conservative as is the modest application of brackets under the eaves. A two-story ell with a modern fieldstone porch extends from the south side of the structure's main, two-and-one-half story mass. An unusual lattice screen with a Palladian motif, probably early twentieth century, connects the house to a large shed in the rear. Further back from the road is a barn with a jerkinhead roof erected in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

- 350 Albert S. Reynolds House (ca. 1850). A simple, clapboarded, Greek Revival, 3-bay house. A 2-story ell projects from the 2-story, end-gable main section. A glazed porch and entrance portico were added in the 20th century.

PERIOD: 1700-1799; 1800-1899

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture, Industry

SPECIFIC DATES: c. 1715, 1805, 1847, c. 1850, 1856

BUILDER/ARCHITECT: See inventory entries

SIGNIFICANCE:

Davisville is a diminutive linear hamlet, significant for its early and long history of water-powered milling, for its ability to document the visual aspect of a small nineteenth-century industrial village which never grew into a substantial development, and for the

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architectural quality of its constituent buildings.

Milling had taken place at this location on Hunts River since 1700 when Joshua Davis operated a gristmill here. Davis' first house (in East Greenwich to the north) is gone, but his second dwelling dating from c. 1715 remains, embedded in a series of later additions. From 1811 to 1824, Ezra and Jeffrey Davis operated a water-powered woolen loom, one of the earliest in the state, an enterprise which developed from Jeffrey Davis' previous ventures in carding and dressing wool for home weaving. The early mill burned in 1847 and was replaced by a small wooden mill where manufacturing by the firm of Davis, Reynolds & Company continued until 1924; The mill's principal product was "Kentucky jean." The mill was demolished in the 1970s, but its trench and some remnants of its gatehouse remain.

The small-scale prosperity of Davisville produced a series of well-preserved houses associated with the Davies family: Joshua Davis' c. 1715 house, later enlarged by a second Joshua Davis' the 1805 Federal house built by Ezra Davis; James Davis' handsome 1856 Bellefield; the c. 1850 house built by Henry Sweet, son-in-law of Ezra Davis and superintendant of the mill; and the simple Albert Reynold's house (c. 1850), built by the Davises' partner. A series of small workers' cottages, a stove, and a post office which once stood on the west side of the road are gone, but the remarkable collection of houses which are left document the presence here of a small industrial operation, owned and managed by members of a single family for over three centuries. The five residences erected by the Davis family and business associates not only reflect the profits of the milling enterprises, they are in themselves architecturally noteworthy. The Joshua Davis House is particularly interesting as it appears to have evolved from a stone-ender, a characteristic early Rhode Island house type. The three Davis houses (277, 296, and 299 Davisville Road) and their outbuildings exhibit high quality craftsmanship and fine design, and are well preserved. The other residences (345 and 350 Davisville Road), while not as outstanding, are nonetheless good examples of mid-nineteenth century construction and they are visually and historically related to Davisville. Together, the five properties form an impressive display of architectural styles popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the 1970s, the Davis family sold some of their land to the south to O. S. Briggs, who platted lots and sold them; Reynolds Manufacturing Company built a steam-powered mill here; and eventually the newer village (also called Davisville) overtook in size and import its early neighbor.

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ACREAGE: Approximately 30 acres.
QUAD NAME: Wickford, R.I.
UTM REFERENCES:

A	19	293800	4601400	B	19	293570	4610480
C	19	293200	4610210	D	19	293020	4610680

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The boundary of the Davisville Historic District has been drawn to include the remaining structures historically associated with the Davis family's occupation and use of the mill site on Hunts River and some land which is historically associated with those structures and which documents their historic environmental setting. The boundary excludes some modern residential development, especially along the north side of Charles Street and includes some wooded land on the west side of Davisville Road which, according to 19th-century maps, was the site of a small group of workers' houses, since demolished (at a date unknown, but probably early 20th century) this cluster may be a candidate for future archeological investigation.

All numbers refer to plats/lots: The boundary begins at the southeast corner of 154/3, proceeds west along the south line of 154/3, across Davisville Road, and along the south line of 152/46, north along the west line of 152/46, west along the south line of 152/1 to the point where the line turns southwest; proceeding across 152/1 to the west corner of the historic cemetery, northeast and southeast along the cemetery bounds to the north line of 152/1, then west along the north line of 152/1 to the southwest corner of 152/13, north along the east line of 152/13, 152/11, crossing 152/10, along the east line of 152/12, east along the north line of 152/12, crossing Davisville Road, north along the west lines of 152/13 and 153/1 to Hunts River, east along the river to a point opposite the northeast corner of 153/13, then south across 153/1, along the east line of 153/13 to the southeast corner of 153/13, then south to the northeast corner of 154/3, crossing 153/1, passing south along the east line of 154/3 to the point of beginning.

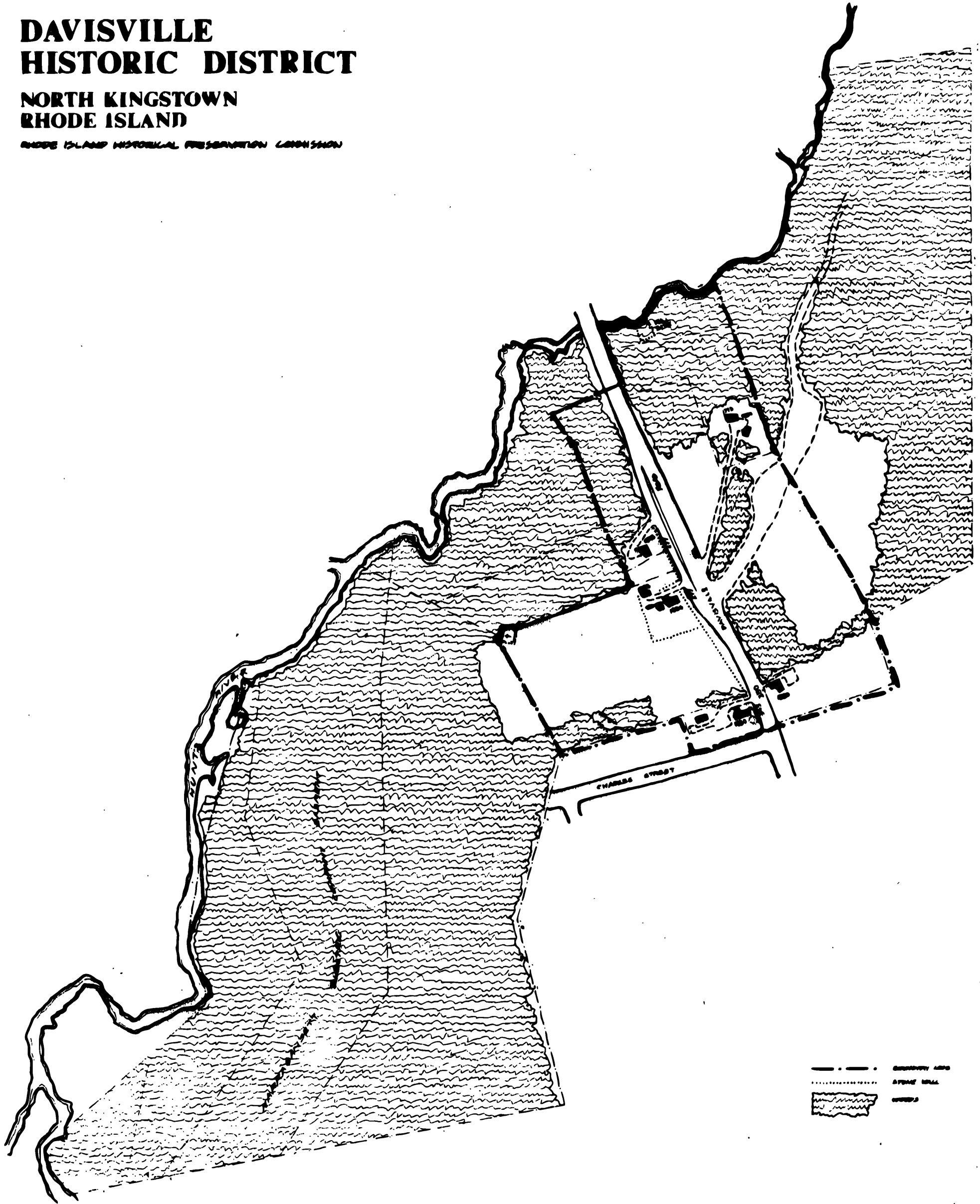
Level of Significance: State

Photo numbers 7-12

DAVISVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

NORTH KINGSTOWN
RHODE ISLAND

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION



--- -- -- -- -- BOUNDARY LINE
..... STONE WALL
[Hatched Area] WATER

0 100 200 300

