

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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

For NPS use only

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7/6/83

date entered

Continuation sheet 43

Item number 7

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NAME: Knight Estate

LOCATION: 486 East Avenue, Providence, R.I.

OWNER: State of Rhode Island
Department of Education
Board of Regents
199 Promenade Street
Providence, R.I.

CONDITION: Excellent; Altered; Original Site

DESCRIPTION:

The Knight Estate, developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century as a farm and country retreat, comprises a main house and several outbuildings set on a grassy tract with trees and shrubs planted randomly about the grounds. It centers on a large, rectangular, two-and-one-half-story, wooden dwelling in a transitional Federal/Greek Revival style with a stone foundation, a monitor-on-hip roof with balustrades, a rear (south) wing, paired brick interior chimneys in the main block, a brick end chimney at the east end of the rear wing, an Ionic portico with roof balustrade, and Ionic side porches with roof balustrades (an early twentieth-century addition). The house is now covered with aluminum siding but the elaborate trim consisting of quoins, window architraves, and cornices with dentils and rows of tiny balls remains. The main entrance is centrally placed in a symmetrical five-bay facade (north side) and opens into a central hall running through the main block to the rear wing and containing a single-run staircase that curves at the top. There were originally two rooms on each side of the center hall, but the partition between the rooms on the east has been removed and the fireplace has been moved to the outside wall, creating a single large parlor with French doors opening onto the east side porch. These changes were apparently made when the present dining room was added in the 1920s. Ornamental detailing in the parlor includes full-height corner pilasters topped by an elaborate dentil cornice and a chimney piece with a one-story Federal-style mantel surmounted by a molding-trimmed panel. West of the center hall are a library at the front of the main block and a den at the rear. The library has paneled walls, bookcases, and a one-story mantel with Ionic colonettes; the den has a semi-hexagonal bay with a door opening onto the west side porch and a one-story Greek Revival mantel with paneled pilasters.

The rear wing comprises two sections: the western one contemporaneous with the main block or constructed shortly thereafter, the eastern one added in the 1920s. The latter contains the dining room, which connects to the parlor through a broad open archway. The dining room has paneled wainscotting and a one-story mantel with Ionic colonettes.

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The older, western section of the rear wing contains the kitchen, a back staircase, a pantry, a rear vestibule, and other service and storage areas. The parlor, library, dining room, and center hall all have molded door and window architraves with elaborate corner blocks containing fruit and foliage carved in high relief. The second floor has a central hall, five bedrooms, a den, a bathroom, and separately located back staircases leading down to the first floor and up to the third floor. Fireplaces in the bedrooms have one-story Greek Revival mantels with either pilasters or engaged colonettes. There are two rooms at third-floor level, lit by the monitor.

A driveway approaching from East Avenue terminates in a circle on the west side of the main house. Another drive runs south from the approach drive in a straight line. Several surviving outbuildings are sited along the latter driveway, among them a carriage house, a corn crib, a wash house, stables, and a barn, all on the west side, and a greenhouse on the east side, (see site plan). Of these the most notable is the carriage house, a gable-roofed structure with a cupola and gable-roofed front pavilions. At attic level, these pavilions contain Palladian motifs composed of a central arched door flanked by lower flat-topped windows.

Directly behind the main house stands a small, gable-roofed summer house, and a water tower is located at the extreme southeast corner of the back yard. The water tower is the most important outbuilding. It is a four-story shingled structure with a flaring pyramidal roof which originally was topped by a windmill. The water tower is square in plan, with battered walls and a two-story cylindrical corner tower topped by an open, gazebo-like porch with a conical roof. The uppermost level of the main tower, containing the water tank, has arched openings and shallow balconies formed by outward swellings of the wall surface.

PERIOD: 1800-1899

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture

SPECIFIC DATES: ca 1830, late 19th century, 1920s

BUILDER/ARCHITECT: Unknown

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Knight Estate is a fine example of a nineteenth-century country estate with a variety of well designed, well preserved structures and is notable for its association with figures prominent in Rhode Island economic and political history. The main house is an exceptionally handsome early nineteenth-century dwelling combining features of the Federal and Greek Revival styles, while the water tower is a particularly

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notable example of picturesque Late Victorian design. The property, originally known as Natick Farm, belonged initially to the Sprague family, owners and operators of Rhode Island's most extensive mid-nineteenth-century textile-manufacturing empire.

The main house was constructed about 1830 to serve as a country retreat and as a family residence near the Sprague mills at Natick village. The house was used by William Sprague (1789-1866), who in addition to his industrial interests was a politician, serving as the state's governor in 1838 and 1839 and as U.S. Senator from 1842 to 1844. The acreage surrounding the house was used to produce foodstuffs for the Natick Mill store. Ten years after the Spragues went bankrupt during the Panic of 1873, the estate, together with the nearby Natick Mills (now largely demolished), was acquired by the Knight family--the Spragues' chief rivals in the textile industry--who became the state's most prominent textile manufacturers after the Spragues' decline. The house was used by Robert Knight (1826-1912), his son Webster Knight (1854-1933), and by Webster Knight's descendants. Originally used as a part-time residence, the house became a year-round residence in the 1920s, and was slightly altered and enlarged at that time. Royal W. Knight (1919-1967), Webster Knight's grandson, gave the property to the State of Rhode Island in 1964 to use as a site for a new state college. The Knight Campus of Community College of Rhode Island was subsequently built on part of the land, while the house itself is used as the college president's residence.

ACREAGE: Approximately 10 acres
QUADRANGLE NAME: East Greenwich, R.I.
UTM: A 19 293640 4621160
B 19 293640 4621000
C 19 293430 4621000
D 19 293430 4621250

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION:

The nominated property includes the area delineated on an accompanying site plan of the Knight Estate (see Continuation Sheet 45C), drawn at a scale of 200 feet to the inch. It is bounded on the north by the southerly curb of East Avenue, on the east by a straight northerly-southerly line along the east side of a stone wall, on the south by a straight easterly-westerly line that runs along the south side of the cider mill (building M on the site plan), and on the west by a straight northerly-southerly line that runs along the west side of a box-stall building (building G). This boundary encompasses the constituent buildings of the estate complex and their immediate surroundings.

The nominated area, measuring approximately ten acres, is a portion of

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137.14-acre tract designated as lot 3 in City of Warwick Assessor's Plat 259. Much of the larger tract is wooded land or grassy fields, with no special landscape features designed in relation to the main house or out-buildings. It is not known whether the present bounds of lot 3 represent the original limits of the property owned by the Sprague and Knight families when they developed this estate. A large part of lot 3 is now occupied by the Knight Campus megastructure of the Community College of Rhode Island (built 1968-1972; visible on USGS map) and adjacent parking areas. To exclude this non-contributing, later development and conform with National Park Service guidelines prohibiting the nomination of excess acreage, the boundary of the Knight Estate nomination is drawn to encompass only the historical estate buildings and their surroundings.

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: Local

(See Continuation Sheet #45B)

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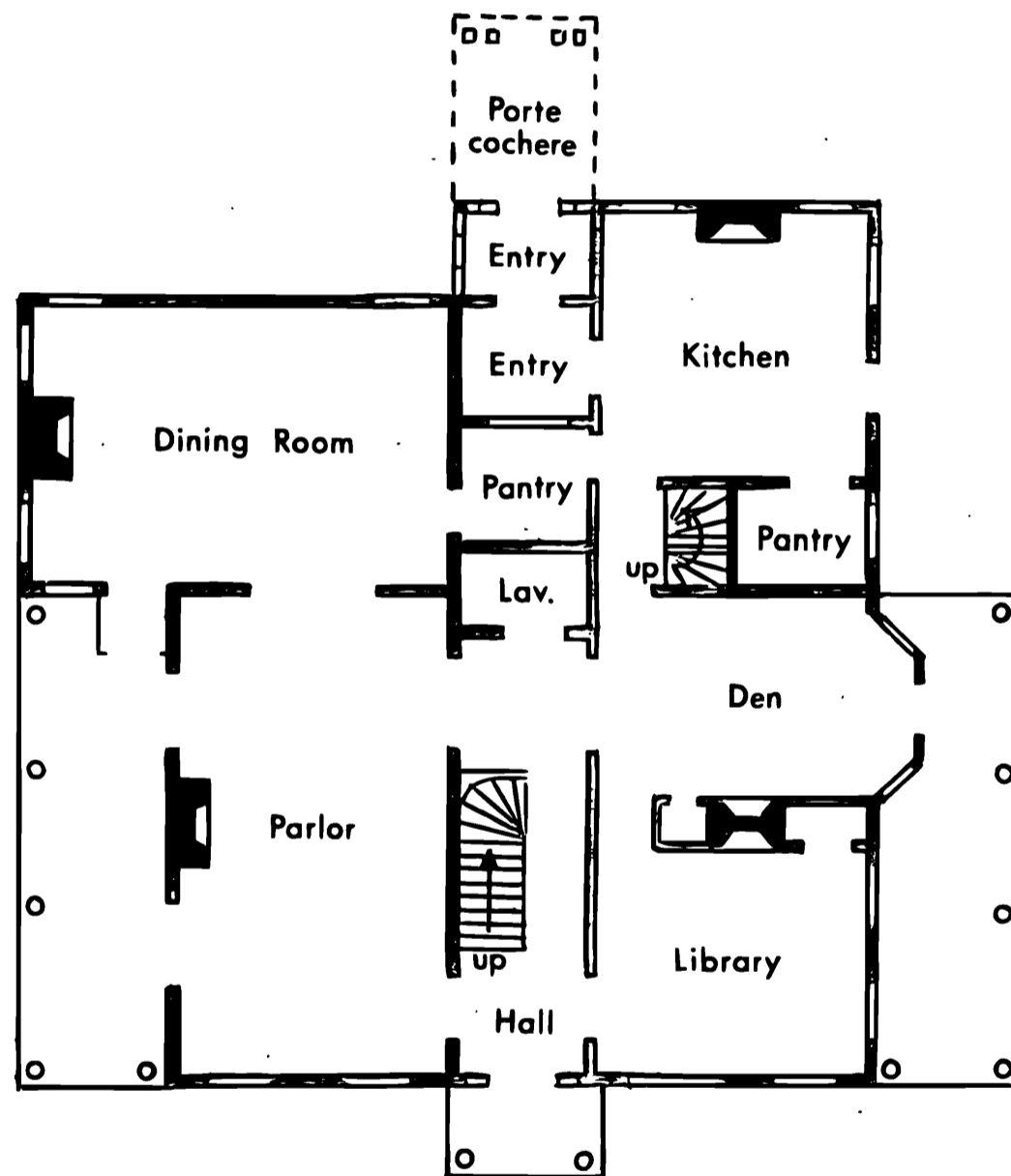
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KNIGHT ESTATE
46 East Avenue
Warwick, Rhode Island

First floor plan -- Main House
Not to scale
R.I. Historical Preservation Commission
1983

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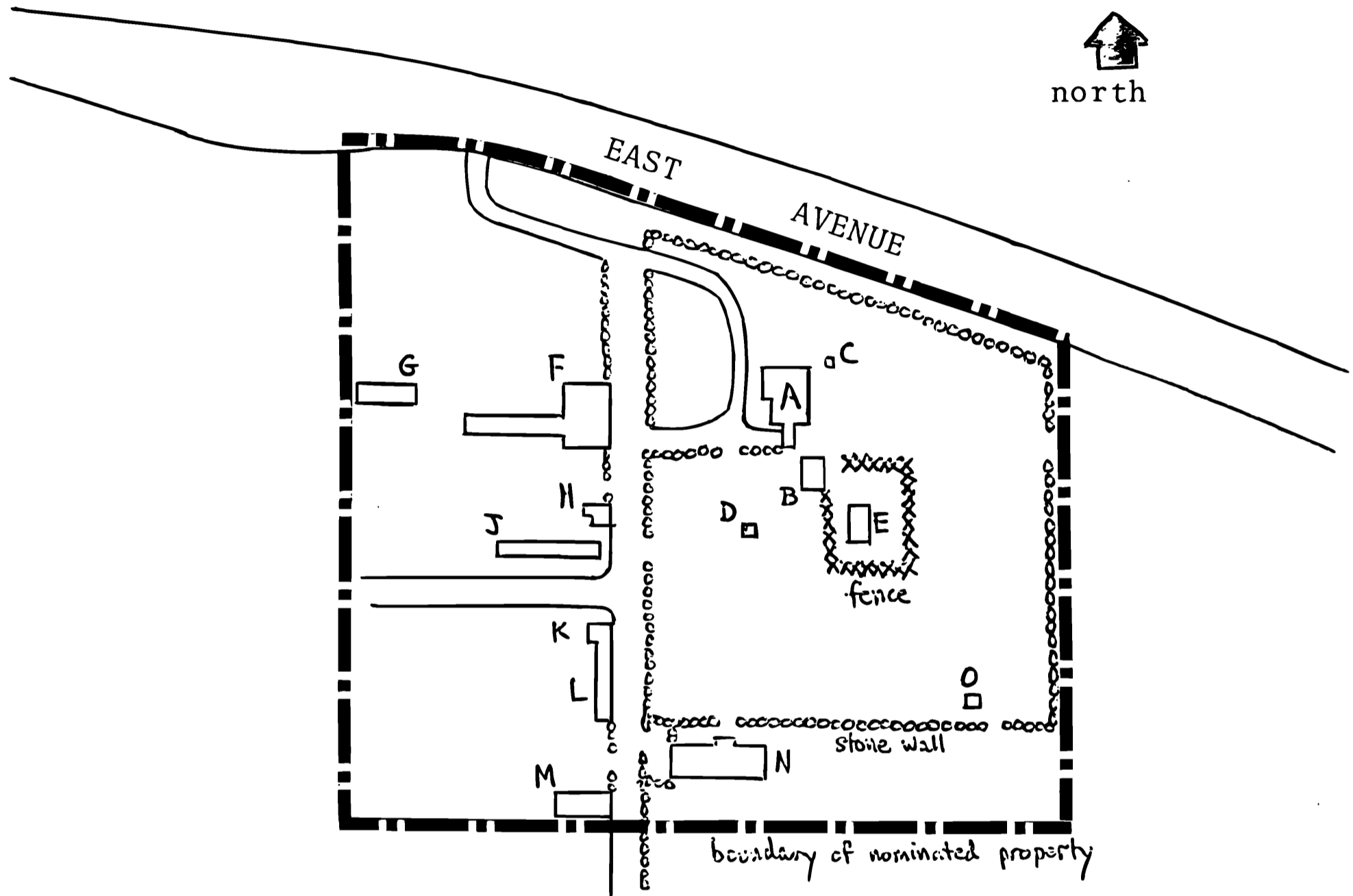
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KNIGHT ESTATE
486 EAST AVENUE
WARWICK, RHODE ISLAND

Site Plan -- Scale: 1 in. = 200 ft.
R. I. Historical Preservation Commission
1983

KEY

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| A -- Main House | H -- Corn Crib |
| B -- Guest House | J -- Henhouse |
| C -- Well Head | K -- Wash House |
| D -- Tool Shed | L -- Box Stalls |
| E -- Pool | M -- Cider Mill |
| F -- Carriage House | N -- Greenhouse |
| G -- Box Stalls | O -- Water Tower |