

*Central St.***United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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date entered

Continuation sheet 5

Item number 7

Page 6

NAME: Central Street Historic District
LOCATION: Portions of Central, Caswell, and Rockland Streets
OWNER: Multiple - see owners list
CONDITION: Excellent to good; altered; original site

DESCRIPTION:

The Central Street Historic District is a tightly built-up residential neighborhood of twenty-seven late nineteenth-century cottages spreading for four blocks along the narrow, tree-lined axis of Central Street. The cottages, ranging from small, simple dwellings to later, more elaborate residences, are typical of those constructed at seaside resorts from the 1870s to the 1890s. The district also includes the former religious core of the community, two churches and one building originally used for that purpose, and several early twentieth-century houses. The west end of Central Street is anchored by a brick school building that has recently been converted into the Town Hall; the east end leads to the Atlantic Ocean. Intrusions to the late nineteenth-century character of the district are minimal, and the architectural continuity is reinforced by thick hedges, stone walls and gateposts, and large trees.

The land traversed by Central Street was originally part of the eighteenth-century Benjamin Robinson farm. In 1867 when Central Street was laid out it was owned by George L. Hazard, trustee for Hannah and Elisha Watson. Early cottages along Central Street were small and rather plain. They were joined in the 1880s and 1890s by more elaborate cottages in the Stick, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, and Shingle styles, many built after the Casino opened in 1885. Typical residences of the latter period feature broad verandas, eclectic detailing, and fanciful names such as Sansea (56 Central), Kabyun (now Sonnenschein, 60 Central), and La Sata (94 Central). Most are two-and-one-half stories tall, and are sited on large lawns enclosed by hedges and shaded by old trees.

As the summer community at Narragansett Pier grew, regular religious services were established. A group of Episcopalians who had gathered for worship at hotels and homes since the 1850s erected a wood-frame church, the first St. Peter's-by-the-Sea, at the southeast corner of Central and Caswell streets in 1869. A gale in September of the same year demolished the structure but, undaunted, the congregation immediately voted to replace it with a stone edifice modeled after an English parish church, a practice encouraged by the Ecclesiologist movement begun in England a few decades earlier. The new structure was consecrated in 1874 and, with subsequent additions of a porch and tower, continues in use today.

Other religious groups became established south of Central Street in the following decades. A mission effort by the St. Francis parish of Wakefield led to the erection of a Roman Catholic chapel (recently demolished) in 1884. By 1907 growth of the congregation prompted construction of a larger building, the shingled edifice at 59 Rockland Street,

(See Continuation Sheet #6)

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet 6

Item number 7

Page 7

that was originally dedicated to St. Philomena and rededicated in 1961 to St. Thomas More. A Baptist congregation occupied the gable-roofed building at 101 Caswell Street (now a residence) which dates from 1889. The former Presbyterian Church at 114 Boon Street, built between 1875 and 1881, has been irreparably damaged by fire and is thus not included in the district.

During Narragansett Pier's major surge of growth in the Late Victorian era, proximity to the Casino and beach--only a few blocks to the north--made Central Street a prime location for residential development. Even after the Casino's destruction and the decline of the Pier as a summer colony, Central Street and the surrounding area remained well maintained and little altered. The only significant twentieth-century addition is the Fifth Avenue School (1924, renovated as the Town Hall in 1976-77). While larger in scale and of a different material than other structures in the vicinity, it is a pleasing western terminus for Central Street. The building's brick bulk is softened by a broad gable end punctuated with carefully designed fenestration. The building complements the nineteenth-century character of the Central Street Historic District.

INVENTORY

Contributing structures are defined as those built during the late nineteenth century when Narragansett Pier was in its heyday and later structures that harmonize in size, massing, and materials with the nineteenth-century neighborhood. All buildings are of frame construction unless otherwise indicated.

Contributing Structures

Caswell Street

- 64 Metatoxet Cottage (1885-86): A 2-story, gambrel-roofed dwelling with a conical-roofed, cylindrical corner tower and an octagonal room over a gazebo-like veranda extension. It was built for John H. Caswell as a rental property associated with the Metatoxet Hotel.
- 68 Starr Cottage (1883-84): A 2½-story, gable-roofed frame dwelling with gabled central pavilion and simple Eastlake style bargeboard and veranda trim. It was built as a summer residence for Mrs. William Butterfield of Chicago.
- 74 Althea Cottage (ca. 1884): A 2½-story, gable-roofed building basically "L" in plan. An exterior stone chimney rises along the south wall. Aluminum siding sheathes the once shingled house and encloses an originally open veranda across the front.

(See Continuation Sheet #7).

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet 7

Item number 7

Page 8

Caswell Street (cont)

- 75 Ocean House Cottage (ca. 1870): A 1½-story, gable-roofed, frame dwelling with gabled dormers breaking up through the eaves, decorative Stick Style trusswork in the gables, and a bracketed veranda. It was originally a rental property associated with the Ocean House Hotel.
- 79 Burr Cottage (ca. 1882): A 2½-story, cross-gabled dwelling with bracketed veranda and modillion cornice. It was built for Norman and Henrietta Burr of Narragansett.
- 101 Former Baptist Church (1889): A 1½-story, gable-roofed, shingled building with a corner turret topped by an octagonal belfry and spire. A Palladian window is centered in the front facade. The building was adapted for use as a residence in the 1960s with little alteration to the exterior.

Central Street

- 40 Idlewild (1869): A 2½-story, mansard-roofed dwelling with a Tuscan-columned veranda (a later addition, replacing the original veranda with jigsaw ornament) and round-head dormer windows. It was the first summer "villa" erected at the Pier and was built for Charles E. Boon of Providence, a partner in the firm of C.E. Boon & Co., dealers in drugs, dyestuffs, chemicals, and paints. Boon later sold his interest in this business and became involved in real estate in Providence and later, in Narragansett.
- 45 Willow Cottage (ca. 1870): A 1½-story, gable-roofed dwelling with gabled dormers breaking up through the eaves and decorative Stick Style trusswork in the gables. Built for Charles E. Boon, it is a good example of an early summer cottage.
- 49 Boon Cottage (1870): A 1½-story, gable-roofed dwelling with gabled dormers breaking through the eaves, a bracketed cornice, an octagonal-roofed tower at the rear, and veranda. It was built by Charles E. Boon of Providence and was the first summer rental cottage erected at the Pier.
- 50 Shingle-nook (ca. 1887): A 2½-story, hip-roofed, Shingle Style dwelling designed by George A. Freeman, Jr., for Brander Matthews of New York. It is a plain, shingled, cubic mass surrounded by a veranda with cigar-shaped posts. Matthews was a translator, playwright, drama critic, and free-lance writer. He was a professor of literature at Columbia University from 1892 to 1900 and served as Columbia's first professor of dramatic literature from 1900 to 1924. He wrote an article on Narragansett Pier which appeared in Harper's Weekly magazine in 1906.

(See Continuation Sheet #8).

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet 8

Item number 7

Page 9

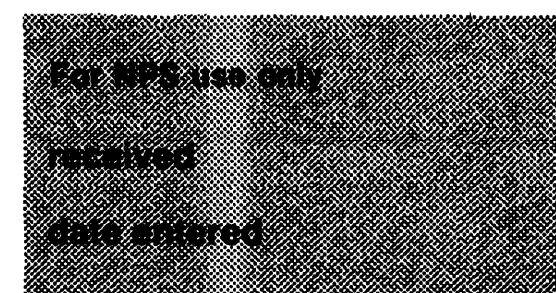
Central Street (cont)

- 55 Sea Croft (1885): A 2½-story, gable-roofed, Shingle Style dwelling with "Colonial" detailing. It has a gable-roofed front pavilion, with a Palladian window, and a porte-cochère on the west side. Nancy K. Bishop of Providence built it as a rental property and later sold it to George H. Coursen of Baltimore. Coursen sold the house to Mr. and Mrs. I.R. Grossman of Boston, son-in-law and daughter of Edwin Booth, the famous 19th-century American actor and brother of John Wilkes Booth. Edwin Booth visited his daughter here several times in the late 1880s and the early 1890s.
- 56 Sansea (1902): A 2½-story, gable-roofed dwelling with a Tuscan-columned veranda and a 3-story, conical-roofed, cylindrical tower at the northeast corner. It was built for Edgar W. Watts.
- 60 Sonnenschein (1884-85): A 2½-story, hip-roofed dwelling with two projecting end pavilions on the front, one gabled and one hip-roofed. It is an eclectic house combining Stick Style wall articulation, "Swiss chalet" jigsaw ornament, and a mixture of wall-cover materials typical of Queen Anne architecture. It was built for Emma B. Carver of Philadelphia and was originally called Kabyun.
- 61 House (ca. 1955): A 2½-story, 3-bay, gable-roofed cottage with two gabled dormers on the front facade and a small extension to the east. It is set far back from the street, and is almost completely obscured by a thick growth of trees and bushes.
- 65 Homeleigh (1885): A 2½-story, gable-roofed dwelling with a gabled ell extending forward over the veranda. Built as a rental property for Nancy K. Bishop of Providence, its design was inspired by 17th-century New England architecture.
- 66 Former Saint Peter's Rectory (1879-80): A 2½-story, hip-roofed dwelling built to serve as the rectory of Saint Peter's-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church. It has a gabled front pavilion with a cove cornice over the front entrance and a side door hood with curved supporting members.
- 72 St. Peter's-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church (1870, with additions of 1879 and 1889): A gable-roofed stone structure modeled after English country churches of the Gothic period. It has a front porch set beneath a rose window, buttressed walls, an attached hall, and a 3-story side tower with buttressed corners, blind arcading, a belfry, and a pyramidal roof. The first Episcopal church at the Pier was a wood-frame structure erected on this site in 1869 and destroyed in the September Gale of that year. The present edifice, designed by Edwin L. Howland of Providence, was begun in August 1870, and the sanctuary was

(See Continuation Sheet #9).

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

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



Continuation sheet 9

Item number 7

Page 10

Central Street (cont)

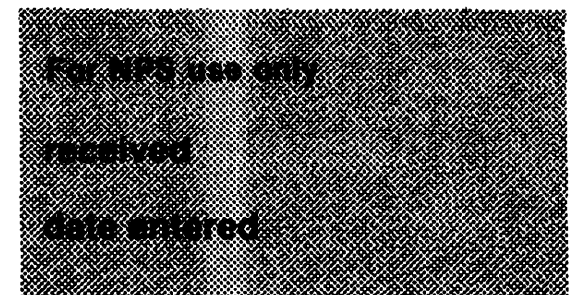
consecrated in August 1874. The porch was added in 1879, and the tower was erected by Mrs. Samuel Welch of Philadelphia in 1889 as a memorial to her husband. Local tradition ascribes the design of this tower to Stanford White, but this attribution has not been substantiated. Saint Peter's originated from a series of prayer meetings held by early vacationers at the Pier, and the construction of the church edifice was funded by generous contributions from many prominent summer residents.

- 73 Tyn-y-coed (1884-85): A 2½-story, gable-roofed dwelling with gabled dormers and a polygonal bay on the south side. It was built for Nancy K. Bishop, widow of William W. Bishop, agent for the Rhode Island Bleach Works in Providence.
- 80 House (ca. 1900): This 2½-story house, sited gable end to Central Street, has several gable-roofed dormers on its flanks and a Palladian window in the front gable peak. It has been re-sided in vertical board sheathing and has suffered other unsympathetic alterations as well. It is currently used as the local home of Planned Parenthood of Rhode Island.
- 84 J.A. Tucker House (ca. 1890-1895): A broadly-massed, 2½-story, cross-gable-roofed Queen Anne style house with a 1-story, hip-roofed veranda across the front and a mansard-roofed tower on the west side. It has been re-sided in aluminum clapboards.
- 85 Shadowlawn (ca. 1887): A 2½-story, gable-roofed dwelling with a jerkin-head roof on a projecting front wing and Chinese Chippendale style ornament on the front porch. It was built for Clarke S. and Annie Pullen of Narragansett.
- 93 Linger Longer (ca. 1890): A slightly off-center cross-gable roof covers this 2½-story building. Scalloped shingles fill in all gables. The roof of a 1-story veranda on the front (a later addition and now partially enclosed) is supported by fluted Tuscan columns and extends beyond the house to form a porte-cochère. A second-story overhang on the east side is braced by two consoles.
- 94 La Sata (ca. 1887): A 2½-story, gable-roofed dwelling with a side wing, a veranda, a porte-cochère, "Swiss chalet" style porch and gable ornamentation, and scrolled consoles punctuating a row of four closely set windows in the front gable. It was built for John H. Shepard of New York.

(See Continuation Sheet #10)

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

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



Continuation sheet 10

Item number 7

Page 11

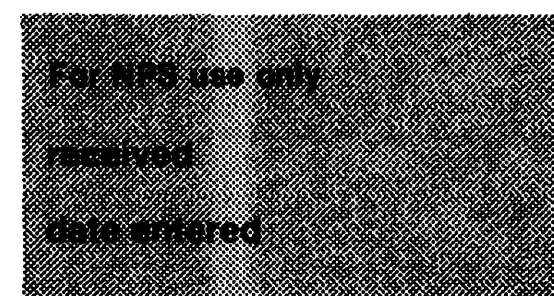
Central Street (cont).

- 99 Pinehurst (ca. 1870): The cubic mass of this 2½-story building is topped by a hipped roof with a rather steep pitch. The roof is pierced by dormers, the front one having a gable roof and containing a Palladian window. The Classical Revival doorway has pilasters supporting a cushion frieze entablature.
- 105 Burt A. Burns House (between 1905 and 1909): A 2½-story, gable-roofed double house with a Tuscan-columned front porch and twin jerkin-head-roofed front gables over the end bays of the facade. It was built for Burt A. Burns of Narragansett.
- 106 Sunnymead (1887): A 2½-story, hip-roofed, Shingle Style dwelling with a veranda, a gabled pavilion at the east end of the main facade, and a 3-story polygonal central bay with a conical cap. It was built for the Misses Gwynne of New York.
- 115 Yellow Patch (ca. 1916): A unique, 2½-story, stuccoed dwelling which is a much enlarged version of a thatch-roofed English rural cottage. It was designed by George F. Hall of Providence for Kate Lane Richardson.
- 116 Windermere (1889): A cross-gable roof covers this 2½-story shingled building, which has a 1½-story ell extending eastward. Built for Stephen T. Caswell, it later became the home of his brother William, who started the Mt. Hope Hotel. William's son W. Herbert Caswell, who served as Town Clerk for 43 years, maintained the home until 1962.
- 120 Linden Hall (1867; greatly altered ca. 1920): A 2½-story, shingled residence with a gable roof and an early 20th-century appearance. Corbeled brick chimneys with inset cross ornamentation rising above the roof, paired windows with one-over-one sash, and the raised eaveline suggest the nineteenth-century origins of the house. A large hipped dormer is centered on the front slope. The stone entry terrace, terminated at each end by a large cement ball on a post, is said to have been built of materials salvaged from the old sea wall, demolished by the 1938 hurricane.
- 123 House (ca. 1925): A 1½-story, shingled bungalow on a stone base with a recessed, screen-enclosed porch wrapped around the southwest corner. The hip roof has broad eaves with exposed rafters, and is pierced by hipped dormers and a fieldstone chimney.

(See Continuation Sheet #11)

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

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



Continuation sheet 11

Item number 7

Page 12

Fifth Avenue

- 25 Fifth Avenue School, now Town Hall (1924, 1976-77): A 3½-story, gable-roofed brick structure designed by Willard Kent of Woonsocket and built by J. Winfield Church, with English-bond brickwork, arched doorways, blind arches over some windows, and gable parapets with twin chimneys. It was renovated in 1976-77 for use as the Town Hall by Raymond W. Schwab Associates of Peace Dale. It is a remarkable building, anticipating by several decades the work of Robert Venturi, one of the most important American architectural designers of the 1960s and 1970s.

Rockland Street

- 46 House (ca. 1885): The massing of this 2½-story, shingled structure is made complex by a large, front, gable-roofed pavilion, smaller pavilions on each side, several polygonal bays, and truncated corners. A veranda stretches across the front and wraps around the sides, its roof supported by turned posts.
- 56 Saint Philomena's (now Saint Thomas More's) Rectory (1908): The 2½-story structure is covered by clapboards on the first floor and shingles above. The gable roof, which ends in a wide overhang in the back (east), spreads down on the front to cover 1-story extensions; an uncovered entry terrace lies between these extensions. A large back yard, extending south to Caswell Street, features a small, delicate wooden trelliswork gazebo.
- 59 Saint Philomena's Roman Catholic Church, now Saint Thomas More's (1908): A tall, 1½-story, gable-roofed Shingle Style structure with a 5-story, pyramidal-roofed tower and some Romanesque-derived detail. The Narragansett Pier area, originally a mission of Our Lady of Mercy in East Greenwich, was included in Saint Francis parish of Wakefield when that parish was created in 1879. A chapel built at the Pier in 1884, now destroyed, was soon outgrown and the present edifice constructed in 1908. It was originally dedicated to Saint Philomena. Narragansett Pier became a separate parish in 1917. The church's dedication was changed in 1961.

Non-Contributing Structures

Caswell Street

- 85 House (1979-80): The main floor of this 1-story residence, which is loosely Prairie Style in inspiration, is cantilevered

(See Continuation Sheet #12)

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

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

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet 12

Item number 7

Page 13

Caswell Street (cont)

beyond a high concrete basement. A large central chimney is in the middle of a low gable roof, which has wide eaves and swells to a broad pointed overhang at each end. Windows fill a square oriel to the south. A rear deck is above a door to the walk-out basement.

DATES: Late 19th and early 20th centuries

SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture, Resort/Recreation

Unlike some resort communities where cottages were the predominant form of residence, a majority of visitors to Narragansett Pier lodged at hotels. Cottages appealed, though, to those who desired greater privacy and space than was available at a hotel. Central Street offered, as its name implies, a location convenient to the beach and other amenities. Residences that grew up along it range in size from small rental properties to expansive, ornate residences that stretch the definition of "cottage". They display the diversity of architectural styles popular in the late nineteenth century.

Charles E. Boon started cottage development on the eastern end of Central Street with a residence he erected for himself at #40 in 1869. More significant is a cottage he built at #49 in the following year which initiated construction of rental properties in the area, an idea quickly taken up by enterprising contemporaries. By the 1880s some developers in Narragansett Pier were producing clusters of dwellings unified by common services and sharing a similar design, such as Sherry's Cottages and Earls court. Along Central Street, however, each structure stood individually, united only by frontage along the street. Nancy Bishop of Providence, for example, made no attempt to relate the appearance or functions of her home at 73 Central Street to those of the rental cottages she built at #65 and #55.

Central Street residents represented the same wide geographical range as the general population of visitors to the Pier. The area boasted a few well-known personalities, the most prominent being Brander Matthews, a New York translator, playwright, drama critic, and freelance writer, who owned Shingle-nook (50 Central Street). Sea Croft, across the street at #55, was once the property of Mr. and Mrs. I.R. Grossman of Boston, son-in-law and daughter of Edwin Booth, the famous nineteenth-century actor and brother of John Wilkes Booth. Edwin Booth visited the residence several times in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

The appearance of churches in the community is also noteworthy.

(See Continuation Sheet #13)

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

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

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet 13

Item number 7

Page 14

Construction of religious structures, with St. Peter's in the vanguard, reflects the maturity of the summer colony at Narragansett Pier.

ACREAGE: Approximately 23 acres

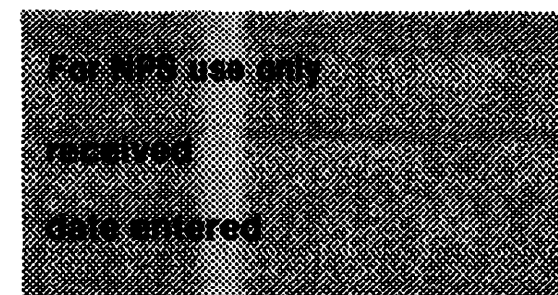
BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION (letters and numbers refer to plats and lots):
The Central Street Historic District boundary encompasses the remaining core of the late nineteenth-century resort district that grew up along the axis of Central Street.

Beginning in the northwest corner of the district a line starting at the northwest corner of H56, and following the western and southern borders of this lot to Fifth Avenue; thence south on the eastern edge of Fifth Avenue to the southern end of D93, following this east and north to the southern border of D94, and continuing east along this line to Robinson Street; thence south on the eastern edge of Robinson Street to the southern boundary of D104, turning east along this line to the western border of D106; thence along the western and southern border of D106 to a point 147 feet west of Rockland Street, the northwestern corner of D112, and following the western edge of D112 and D113 to Rodman Street; thence east along the northern edge of Rodman Street, then across Rodman Street and along the southern boundary of lot 118 to Caswell Street; then turning north along the western edge of Caswell Street to a point opposite the southwest corner of D124; across Caswell Street to that corner; thence along the southern edge of D124, D125, D126, and D127, crossing Boon Street and following the southern, southeastern, and eastern edges of D132-A; thence west on the southern edge of Central Street, across Central Street to the southeast corner of D44; north along Boon Street to the northeast corner of D44; thence following the northern edge of D44, D43, D42, D41, D40, and D40-A; turning north along the eastern edge of D37, D36 and D35; thence west on the northern border of D35 to Caswell Street, and on the eastern edge of Caswell Street south to a point opposite a point 50 feet north of the southern border of D88; across Caswell Street to that point; thence west to the eastern edge of D88-6 and turning south along this line, continuing straight across D88 to the northern border of D89; thence following the edge of D89 east, south and west, then crossing Rockland Street and continuing along the northern edge of D79-A, D79, D78, and D77, and turning north along the east border of D76; thence west along the northern edge of D76 and D76-A; turning south along the eastern edge of Robinson Street to a point opposite the northeast corner of D70; west across Robinson Street to that corner; thence along the northern and eastern border of D70 and the northern border of D69; across Fifth Avenue and turning north along the western edge of Fifth Avenue to the northern edge of H56, and returning along this line to the point of beginning.

(See Continuation Sheet #14)

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

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



Continuation sheet 14

Item number 7

Page 15

UTM: A 19/294410/4589290

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LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: State

(See Continuation Sheet #15)