

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)  
(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:	
Rhode Island	
COUNTY:	
Newport	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

## 1. NAME

COMMON:

Hunter House

AND/OR HISTORIC:

Hunter House

## 2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:

54 Washington Street

CITY OR TOWN:

Newport

STATE

Rhode Island

CODE

44

COUNTY:

Newport

CODE

005

## 3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP			STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No	
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____	

## 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:

Preservation Society of Newport County

STREET AND NUMBER:

Washington Square

CITY OR TOWN:

Newport

STATE:

Rhode Island

CODE

44

## 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:

Newport City Hall

STREET AND NUMBER:

Washington Square

CITY OR TOWN:

Newport

STATE

Rhode Island

CODE

44

## 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:

Historic American Building Survey (35 sheets, 6 photos)

DATE OF SURVEY: 1936-1937

 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

Division of Prints and Photographs

STREET AND NUMBER:

Library of Congress/Annex

CITY OR TOWN:

Washington

STATE:

D.C.

CODE

11

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STATE:  
Rhode IslandCOUNTY:  
NewportENTRY NUMBER  
DATE

## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
(Check One)			(Check One)			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Hunter House is a large two-and-one-half story frame and clapboard structure with a balustraded gambrel roof. The house is of heavy stud construction with brick filled walls plastered over in true English half-timber. Oak horizontal strip lapped sheathing boards are laid over the half-timbering and covered with beaded strip lapped clapboards.

The rectangular windows are arranged symmetrically on the front (land) and end sides but the water facade has an asymmetrical arrangement of two windows to a floor north of the door and one south of the door. A round-headed window lights the stair landing above the segmented pediment of the door. Two dormers light the attic of the west side. All of the windows have heavily molded frames which give plasticity to the otherwise flat clapboarding of the exterior. The asymmetry of the windows supports the belief that the southern part of the house was added after 1758. The difference in the chimneys also supports the view that the house was constructed at two different times.

Ezra Stile's map of 1758 shows a house with only one chimney, and the original construction of the west facade as shown in an old stereoscopic view, had two unique segmental-headed stair landing windows and an off center doorway, early in appearance. It is possible that James Sheffield built a house soon after 1719, and that Lt. Governor Wanton, rather than Nichols enlarged it, adding the southern part. The door as well as the detail of the interior paneling, however, dates about 1740 in style.

In 1870 when the building became a convalescent home, the doors were widened and the frame and pediments removed. That on the land side was lost but the elaborate segmental pediment was salvaged and nailed over the old west entry of the Dennis House, now St. John's Rectory. During the restoration this was returned to the house and installed above the Washington Street side instead of the waterfront as this is now the main entrance. The pediment is broken in the center with a pineapple ornament and richly foliated ends, almost in an exact copy of the doorway of the Colony House. Also in the 1870's a rear porch was added which caused the removal of the two segmental-headed stair landing windows. Only one of these has been replaced in the restoration.

The interior has a typical mid-eighteenth century floor plan of four rooms, two on either side of a wide central hall. The mahogany staircase in the center hall has richly carved balusters in a variety of twisted shapes, located behind a low elliptical dividing arch on consoles, similar in form to the Vernon House, another Newport national historic landmark.

Bolection paneling was used for all the woodwork of the Hunter House. Both the main parlor and the room above have the system of arched cupboards flanking the mantelpiece. The woodwork is beautifully executed. Corinthian pilasters subdivide the paneling and carved cherubs heads fill the spandrels of the cupboard arches. The large windows have interior shutters and deep window seats of mahogany. The cupboards and

**3. SIGNIFICANCE**

## PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century            |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1748, 1764-67

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |   |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Aboriginal                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Education    | <input type="checkbox"/> Political      | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering  | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Phi-  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry     | <input type="checkbox"/> losophy        |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention    | <input type="checkbox"/> Science        |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape    | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture      |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Human-  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature   | <input type="checkbox"/> itarian        |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Military     | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater        |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            | <input type="checkbox"/> Music        | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |  |

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Nichols-Wanton-Hunter House is probably the best example of early Georgian domestic architecture of its kind in Rhode Island, and ranks high in comparison with early Georgian houses elsewhere. It was presumably built for Deputy Governor Jonathan Nichols, Jr., sometime between 1748-1754, but there is evidence that it is an enlargement of an earlier house built soon after 1719. The enlargement may have been made for Colonel Joseph Wanton, Jr., Deputy Governor from 1764-1767. Today the Hunter House is a spacious two-story frame and clapboard building with a balustraded gambrel roof. The interior has undergone careful restoration and its elaborate interior woodwork with painted ornament provides a rare and interesting documented survival of a colorful colonial interior.

HISTORY

In 1748 a lot was sold to Jonathan Nichols, a prosperous merchant, proprietor of the Whitehorse Tavern and owner of at least one privateer. The Stiles Map of 1758 shows a house with one chimney and a western facade different from the later stereoscopic view of J. Appley Williams done prior to the 1870's.

In 1756, Colonel Joseph Wanton, Jr., Deputy Governor from 1764-1767, bought the mansion house along with a wharf, warehouse, stables, and garden which once formed the entire complex. If the Stiles Map is correct and the house was enlarged after 1758, it probably took place during Wanton's ownership. Much of the interior woodwork seems to have been cut down from another house and might have been salvaged by Wanton from Malbone, his estate which burned in 1766.

During the Revolution Admiral de Ternay, First in Command of the French Navy, was quartered there. In 1786 it was sold to John Innes Clark and Joseph Nightengale, of Providence. The house changed hands two more times until 1805 when it was purchased by William R. Hunter, a lawyer. When Hunter went to Washington he attempted to sell the house, and his advertisement at this time indicates the wharf was gradually falling into disuse. Because of the low ebb of Newport shipping the house was not sold and he returned to it in 1844, remaining there until his death in 1849.

In 1859 The Old Colony Steamboat Company bought the house to use as a

## 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Downing, Antoinette F., Early Homes of Rhode Island, Richmond, VA., 1937.  
 . and Scully, Vincent J. Jr., The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915, Cambridge, Mass., 1967.  
 Nicholson, Arnold, American Houses in History, New York, 1965.

## 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES			
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	OR	UTM	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
NW	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
SE	° ' "	° ' "		19.306190	4595830	
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 2 acres

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

## 11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Patricia Heintzelman, architectural historian, Landmark Review Project, original form prepared by Charles Snell, 1967.

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1/7/75

STREET AND NUMBER:

1100 L. Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE

D.C.

CODE

11

## 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

## NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local 

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Landmark  
(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)  
Submitted: Nov. 24, 1968Chief, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation  
Boundary Certified:(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)  
Chief, High & Date

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Arch. Survey

ATTEST:

Boundary Affirmed:

Off. Mortenson 7/2/75

Keeper of The National Register

Director, OAHP

Date

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) (Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

## 7. Description second page

paneling in these parlors give evidence of being made for different places, as do the stairs and segmental stairlanding windows. It seems likely that Wanton installed some of the various parts and supervised the decoration soon after 1758.

The walls of the main parlor seem to have first been painted with a red tone with the woodwork of pilasters, baseboards, cupboards and window seat molding painted to simulate veined marble. The four cherubs in the spandrels were rosy cheeked, brown eyed and rainbow winged. Sometime later the paneling was painted yellow grey-green. Still later all the marbling and polychrome was painted over with a light stone color. The original interior designs were carefully restored after painstaking research with special craftsman brought in to complete the work. The southeast parlor has been restored in walnut graining and the southwest dining room in rose cedar graining. The other rooms were apricot or dark green.

BOUNDARY

Although the wharf and gardens associated with the original Hunter House have long disappeared the house still maintains its vista on the waterfront. Part of the land to the south was sold to the City as a park in 1972 but is included in the boundary as part of the original land, maintaining some historical perspective on its surroundings, beginning at the northwest corner at the shore of Narragansett Bay continuing east in a straight line until it becomes Elm Street, at the northeast corner, then south along the west curb of Washington Street to the land of the Old Colony Steamboat Company, then west along the property line of the Steamboat Company to Narragansett Bay, then north along the shore to the point of beginning as described in the deed of October 9, 1945.

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**(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)** *(Continuation Sheet)*

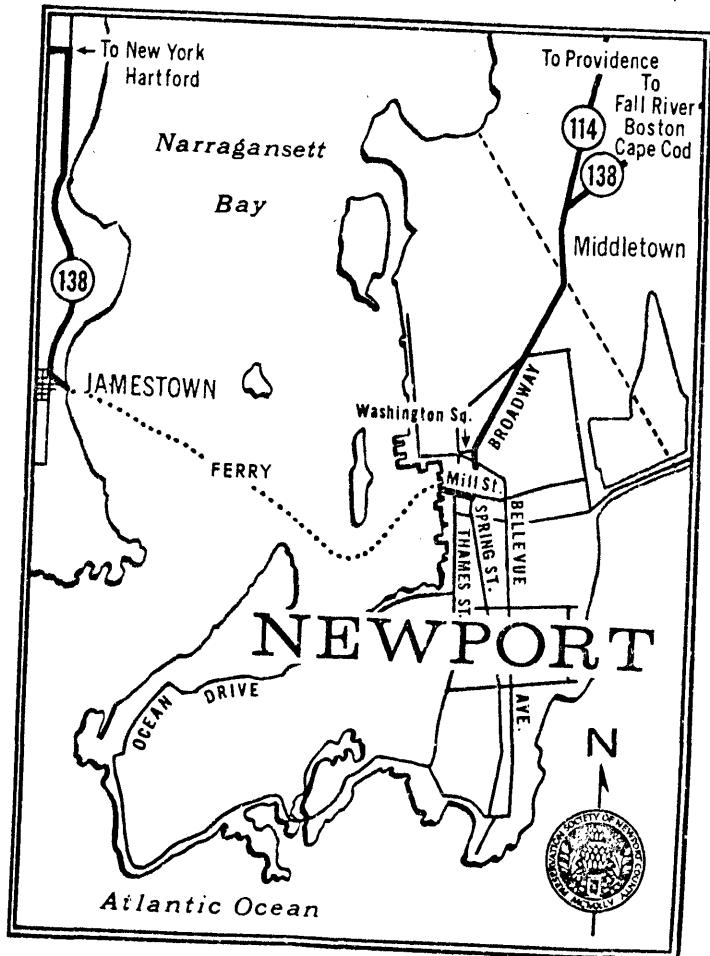
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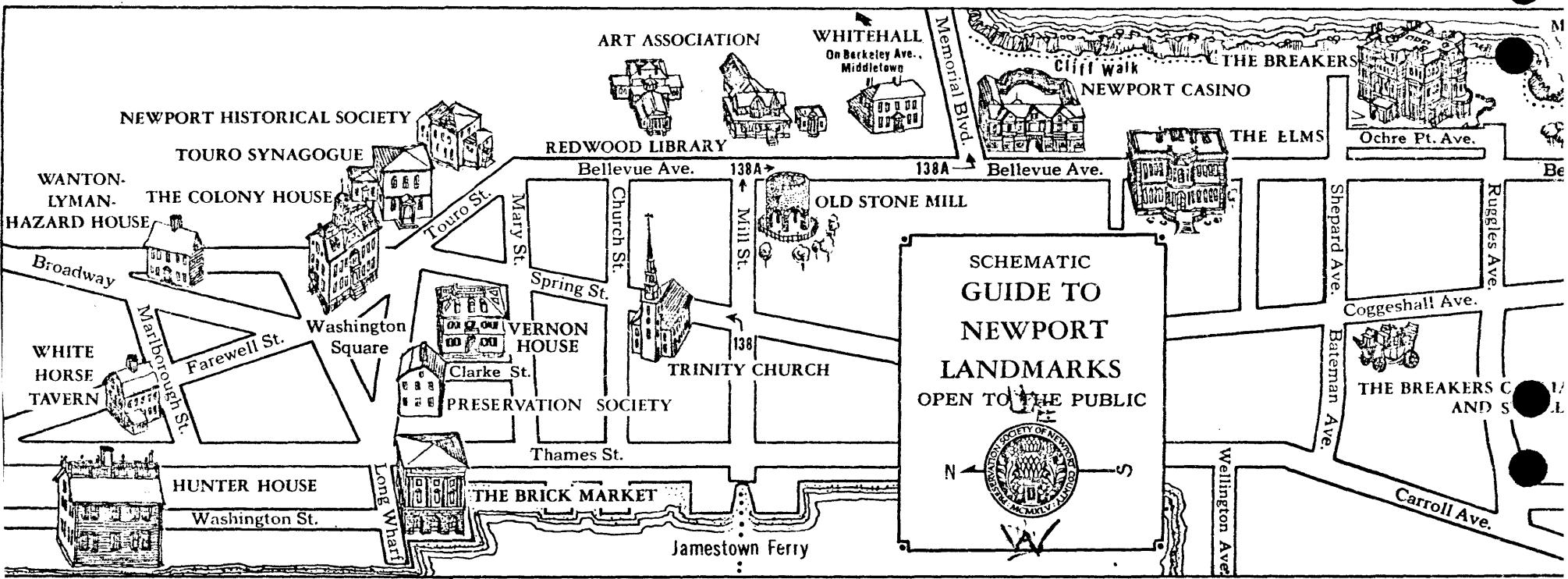
*(Number all entries)*

**8. Significance second page**

boarding house. In the 1870's it was transformed into a convalescent home and at this time some damaging interior and exterior changes were made. These included the widening of the entrances, building a rear porch and removing the front and rear door frames.

In 1915 it was sold to the Sisters of St. Joseph and finally in 1945 to the Preservation Society of Newport County who restored the house to its original form through careful research. The Hunter House is operated today as a house museum.





Hunter House