

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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

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NAME: Bristol Ferry Lighthouse

LOCATION: Ferry Road  
Bristol, RI  
Bristol County

CLASSIFICATION

Category - building(s)  
Ownership - private  
Status - occupied  
Accessible - yes, restricted  
Present Use - private residence

OWNER OF PROPERTY

Henry W. Wallace  
151 West Lane  
P.O. Box 402  
Guilford, CT 06437

LOCATAION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

Town Clerk's Office  
Bristol Town Hall  
10 Court Street  
Bristol, RI 02809

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

none

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DESCRIPTION

Condition - good / altered / original site

Bristol Ferry Light is located on a .21-acre site on the southern tip of Bristol Point, at the north side of the entrance to Mount Hope Bay. A small road running just to the south of the light tower, separates the property from the water's edge. No longer active, it now is used as a private residence.

Built in 1855, the lighthouse consists of a two-story square brick light tower attached to the front of a one-and-a-half-story, brick, keeper's dwelling with two small connected back ells, all painted white. The main (front) section of the dwelling is two bays wide by two bays deep, with an asphalt-shingled gable roof and a ridge chimney at the end of the north gable. The two small one-story gable-roofed ells project northward off the rear of the front section. The first section is brick while the second is a wood frame addition with plywood siding which replaced a shingled ell of similar dimensions. A round metal chimney protrudes through the roof of this last section.

The lantern has been removed from the light tower's corbelled top so that the tower's roof is now a flat square platform. The iron balustrade, which originally surrounded the lantern, remains in place.

The backmost ell serves as an entrance to the lighthouse and as a furnace room. This leads to a kitchen in the brick ell, which, in turn, leads to the front section of the dwelling. The first floor originally contained separate dining and living rooms, but the dividing wall between the two has recently been removed to create a single large area. An outside doorway on the west wall of the living room served as the main entrance into the lighthouse while it was active. In the first floor of the tower is a storage room and a stairway which leads to two second-floor bedrooms above the dining/living room. A bathroom installed in the second floor of the tower contains a wooden ladder leading to the platform at the top of the tower. The building has no basement.

North of the lighthouse is a 1904 one-story, brick, oil house originally used for storage of lamp fuel and other flammable liquids; it now serves as a storage shed. Although the lighthouse needs paint, both it and the oil house are in good

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condition.

SIGNIFICANCE

Period: 1800-1899

Specific Dates: 1855

Bristol Ferry Lighthouse is significant for its role in the history of Rhode Island's commerce and transportation, and as an example of one of the state's early surviving lighthouses. Established in 1855 on the entrance to Mount Hope Bay, the light served to guide ships en route to the textile mills of Fall River. The light is also important as a navigational mark for numerous passenger steamers which, during the middle of the nineteenth century, provided the main form of transportation between the cities and towns on Mount Hope Bay with those on Narragansett Bay, the Providence River, and with other major New England ports outside the state. Architecturally, it is significant as one of three early surviving lighthouses in the state of the type which features a keeper's dwelling with an attached light tower.

The land on which the lighthouse stands was acquired on October 9, 1854, and the tower and dwelling were completed the following year. The lighthouse took its name from a Bristol-to-Portsmouth ferry, which operated from a landing a few yards to the west of the light.

In addition to the lighthouse, the original 1/5-acre reservation included at least five outbuildings: an 1880 woodshed; two oil houses, one built in 1904 and another in 1909; a hen house; and a privy. Of these, only the 1904 brick oil house survives. In 1908 the size of the site was increased with the purchase of an additional 1-1/4-ares.

The most significant change to the lighthouse during its active period occurred in 1918 when the original wooden lantern at the top of the light tower was removed, the height of the tower was increased by six feet, and a new cast-iron lantern, gallery deck and balustrade were installed.

The construction in 1928-1929 of the Mount Hope Bridge directly above the lighthouse provided a more highly visible navigational aid. With its completion, the importance of the light declined. In 1928 the lantern was removed from the light tower, and the light was replaced by an automatic beacon placed atop a new steel skeletal tower built just south of the lighthouse, across Ferry Road. The following year, after serving

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for seventy-four years, the lighthouse, the three outbuildings, and most of the land were sold. The Lighthouse Service retained possession of a small parcel of land south of Ferry Road as well as the skeletal tower, which they continued to operate as a navigational aid until 1934 when it was taken down and replaced by the Bristol Harbor Light.

Since 1929, the lighthouse has served as a private residence. Few alterations have been made to the exterior, with the exception of a small section at the back of the ell, which was torn down and replaced with a wood-frame addition of similar proportions. The interior has been remodeled with a change in the original first floor plan, but the original second floor plan is intact. Many of the original details, such as the flooring, doors, window trim, and tower staircase, remain. The 1904 brick oil house is the only outbuilding that still stands.

Recently the property was subdivided when the previous owner sold the lighthouse with only the original 1/5-acre plot, and kept the 1-1/4-acre piece that had been added to the site in 1908.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage: .21 acres

Quadrangle name: Bristol, RI

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

UTM References: A 19 311750 4612410

Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property occupies all of lot 36, Bristol Town Assessor's Plat #167; this boundary includes the entire resource.

Level of Significance: State

SHPO Certification:

*David A. Williamson*

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The period of significance extends from 1855, the date of construction, to 1928, when the last of a series of significant alterations was made to the light.