

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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which, although separated from the road by front lawns and surrounded by tall trees and bushes, are an unfortunate interruption of the area's continuity. The northeast lot in the development is occupied by a simple shingled residence (#35) set far back from the road, leaving a large lawn which gives a sense of the openness that once prevailed in the district. Granite-block posts beside the road mark the entrances to Earls court. The road splits in the middle of the block to curve around the water tower base, a focal point for the development and a local landmark. Now a striking ruin, it was once surmounted by a wooden superstructure which took the form of a medieval-inspired crenellated tower with an attached turret. The wide-spread wings of an immense wooden griffin, seemingly poised to spring towards the ocean, blended into a balcony encircling the tower just above the stone base. Neglect allowed the water tower's wooden structure to deteriorate, a process abetted by the 1938 hurricane.

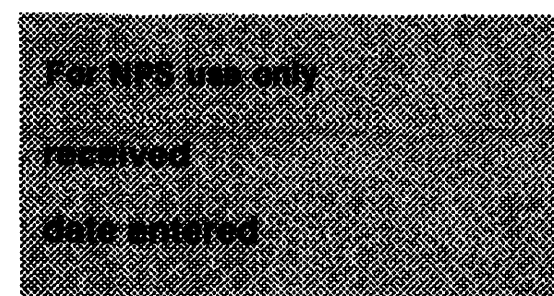
The Sherry Cottages, erected shortly after the Earls court development on land purchased from Earle, were a project of Louis Sherry, the prominent New York caterer and restaurateur, who also ran the Narragansett Casino food service. They were designed by McKim, Mead and White of New York and built by Louis F. Bell of Wakefield. The original cluster included six cottages and a large central building, designed to match the cottages but on a grander scale, containing a dining hall for the use of cottage residents and a restaurant. The restaurant, described by the Narragansett Times August 3, 1888, as in the "Swiss and Moorish style of architecture", was apparently built first. Five out of the six cottages were built by November of that year and the Narragansett Times of August 23, 1889 described the completed group as "six handsome and ornate cottages or Swiss chalets." A fire August 1 or 2, 1912 destroyed the dining hall, four of the Sherry Cottages (damaging a fifth), and three of the cottages at Earls court. What remains today of Sherry's development are four cottages (at least one, a larger reconstruction after the 1912 fire) arranged around a large lawn, once occupied by a circular driveway entered from Gibson Avenue and now forming the visual terminus at the western end of Earle's Court. More research is needed to determine if additional cottages were built at Sherry Cottages after the original six and prior to the 1912 fire; if so, this would explain why contemporary accounts indicated that four cottages were burned and one damaged, while three of the original six cottages remain today.

The cottages share a similar design, each being a two-and-a-half-story Shingle Style building with a steeply pitched hip roof sheltering a recessed veranda on the first floor. The sweep of the roof is punctured by second-floor windows which, lying in the same plane as the facade,

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break the eave line and penetrate the roof as hipped dormers. The two cottages fronting on Gibson Avenue each have, attached to the corner furthest from the central court, a round, two-story tower capped by a squat, conical roof. The form of these towers echos that the Casino Towers, McKim, Mead and White's showpiece on Ocean Road opened in 1886. Similar towers flanked Sherry's large central building. Even without those buildings destroyed by the fire, the unified design and careful siting of Sherry's cottages create an impressive and picturesque composition, especially when approached from Earles Court.

The Sherry Cottages are complemented by the Aaron Wolff, Jr., House located on Gibson Avenue just north of them. The Wolff House, designed in the early 1890s by William Gibbons Preston, is a well-maintained example of the mature Shingle Style. A recessed veranda wrapping around the first floor and a loggia set in the gable dissolve the sharp separation between interior and exterior. The plan focusses on a spacious central hall from which other rooms flow. The hall contains an open staircase and fireplace, standard features of a Shingle Style plan. The exterior shingle sheathing smoothly covers the building's simple geometrical masses.

The Earls court Historic District includes a good collection of late nineteenth-century resort architecture. The character of Earls court is retained by the prominence of the water tower base bisecting the central axis of Earle's Court, and by the surrounding structures which, with the exception of the two ranch houses, harmonize with the setting. Although lacking several of the original structures the surviving Sherry Cottages continue to form a unified composition, carefully balanced around the expansive central court. The Wolff house provides a good introduction to the district from the north. Together these structures give a sense of physical environment created as Narragansett Pier's popularity increased and the town expanded.

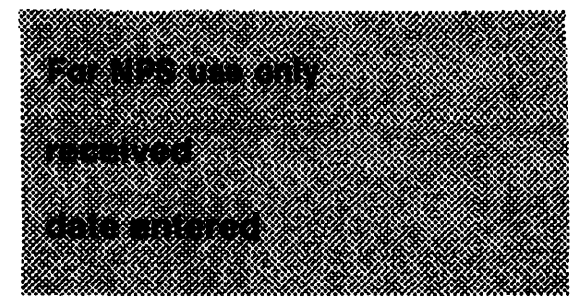
**INVENTORY**

Contributing structures are defined as those built during the late 1880s as part of the Earls court or Sherry developments, or adjacent structures erected during the following two decades which are compatible in scale, form, and material with the earlier structures. All buildings are of frame construction unless otherwise indicated.

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Contributing Structures

The Sherry Cottages (1888-89) (designed by McKim, Mead and White)

- 51 Gibson Avenue: A 2½-story Shingle Style residence with a round, 2-story tower projecting from the northeast corner and capped with a squat, conical roof. The tower's first floor, originally an open porch, has been enclosed, as has part of a once connected veranda recessed in the front facade. The sweep of the steeply pitched hipped roof to the first floor is interrupted by the second floor windows which, lying in the same plane as the facade, break the eave line and penetrate the roof as hipped dormers. Attic dormers alternate with these on the long sides. A 1½-story shingled garage with a mansard roof stands behind the house.
- 59 Gibson Avenue (84 Westmoreland Street): The 2½-story Shingle Style residence is similar to #51, but has no tower. The building is oriented to the central court, with a recessed veranda running along the first floor of the court elevation. Centered on the opposite side is a 2-story entry pavilion with an open porch on the second floor. Three tall, thin brick chimneys rise from the roof.
- 61 Gibson Avenue: Basically a mirror image of #51. The veranda and first floor of the tower remain open. A 1½-story wing, attached to the south side of the building, extends to the rear.
- 29 Gibson Avenue (55 Woodward Avenue): Quite similar to #59 Gibson. A 2½-story ell projects from the south elevation; this in turn has a one story extension, the roof serving as a deck. A 1-story polygonal bay has been added west of the ell. This was known as "Phoenix Lodge" because it burned in 1912 and was rebuilt. ✓

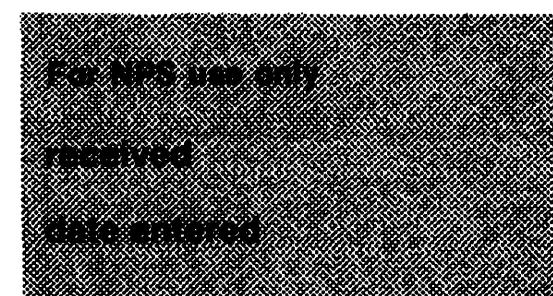
Earls Court (1886-87)

- 36 Earle's Court: Edward Earle House (1886-1887): A large, 2½-story, cross-gabled dwelling with a veranda recessed under the second story. Built for New York lawyer Edward Earle, it is one of the two surviving Earls Court cottages and served as Earle's own house. It has been much altered from its original appearance. ✓
- 46 Earle-Caldwell House (1886-87): A 2½-story, gable-roofed dwelling with a 3-story, conical-roofed polygonal tower, a bracketed cornice, and a veranda. It is the second of two surviving Earls Court cottages built for Edward Earle and occupied by F.S. Caldwell in the 1890s. ✓

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Earlscourt (1886-87)

Earlscourt Water Tower (1886-87): A 2-story, cylindrical tower of random-coursed ashlar masonry, set in the center of the street. It originally had a wooden superstructure consisting of a water tank surrounded by a balcony decorated with a carving of a giant griffin. It was designed by Constable Brothers of New York and was built to supply water to Edward Earle's Earlscourt development, a colony of large summer houses.

Other Contributing Structures

Earle's Court

- 37 House (ca. 1900): A 2½-story shingled house, square in plan, with a steep hipped roof containing hipped-roof dormers. A 1½-story shingled garage is adjacent. The residence is set back very far on the lot and is partly hidden by trees, leaving a large lawn that gives a sense of the open character of the area in the late 19th century.
- 50 Emma Ivins House, "The Hut" (ca. 1903): A 1½-story, gambrel-roofed dwelling in the Dutch Colonial style, with stone chimneys and diamond-paned windows. Built as a guest house for the once neighboring William M. Ivins house, "The Breezes", it was occupied by the Ivins family after the main house burned in 1912. A circular drive remains from the latter. A tall hedge and fountain in front of "The Hut" have been maintained from the early 1900s.

Gibson Avenue

- 41 Aaron Wolff, Jr., House (ca. 1890-1895): A 2½-story, gable-roofed, Shingle Style dwelling with a veranda, a 2nd-story bay window, and a loggia in the front gable. It was designed by William Gibbons Preston for Aaron Wolff, Jr., of New York, and complements the neighboring Sherry Cottages.

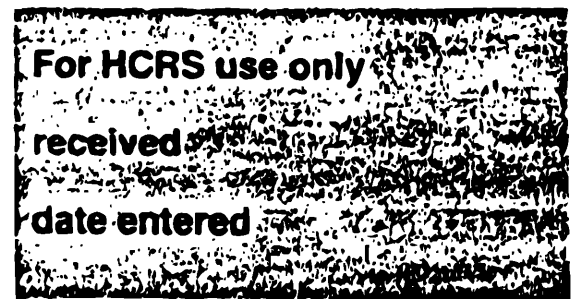
Non-Contributing Structures

Earle's Court

- 41 House (ca. 1960): A 1-story, flank-gable residence with vertical board siding. A semi-detached, concrete block garage is to east.
- 55 House (ca. 1960): A 1-story, aluminum-sided residence. A flank-gable pavilion protecting the entrance is centered on the front facade.

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DATES: Late 19th and early 20th centuries

SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture, Community Planning, Resort/Recreation

Earlscourt and the Sherry Cottages, cluster developments where individual structures shared services and related design, followed a contemporary trend in residential planning and were an efficient way to meet the housing demand created by the rapid expansion of Narragansett Pier as a resort community in the late 1800s. Although hotel life dominated Pier society, cottages were a popular alternative and their designs reflect the architectural tastes of the period. The Queen Anne, Shingle, and Colonial Revival styles are predominant in the district. Particularly noteworthy is the sophisticated use of the Shingle Style in the Aaron Wolff, Jr., House by the prominent Boston architect William G. Preston, and in the Sherry Cottages, where McKim, Mead and White use the style to advantage not only individual structures but also to create a unified composition of the entire complex.

Cluster development had precedents in England with such early nineteenth-century projects as Blaise Hamlet and the Regent Park villas (both by John Nash) and was, with the proliferation of garden suburbs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to significantly influence the landscape of Europe and America. Earlscourt, with its central water tower and shared sewer system, and the Sherry Cottages, grouped around a common dining hall and similar in appearance, represent a step in this evolution. Other cluster developments were proposed in Narragansett Pier during the same period, including a group by Charles H. Pope of which only one, Gardencourt at 10 Gibson Avenue, was built.

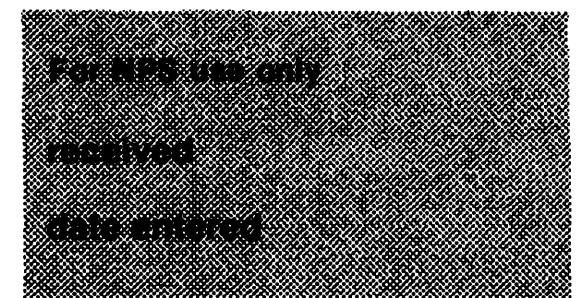
Individuals of regional and national significance were connected with developments in the Earlscourt Historic District. Louis Sherry, the entrepreneur behind the development that bears his name, operated prestigious restaurants and a catering business in New York and at the Narragansett Casino. Edward Earle, who lived in the Earlscourt cottage nearest the ocean, was active in real estate transactions throughout the area. "The Breezes" (only the guest house of which remains at 50 Earle's Court Road) was the summer home of William Ivins, a New York State Attorney General, who was influential in cracking down on gambling in his state and played a role in attempts to eliminate such illegal activities at the Pier around the turn of the century. These and other individuals helped establish the Pier by spreading word of its attractions and by shaping the environment to suit their needs and taste.

ACREAGE: Approximately 17 acres

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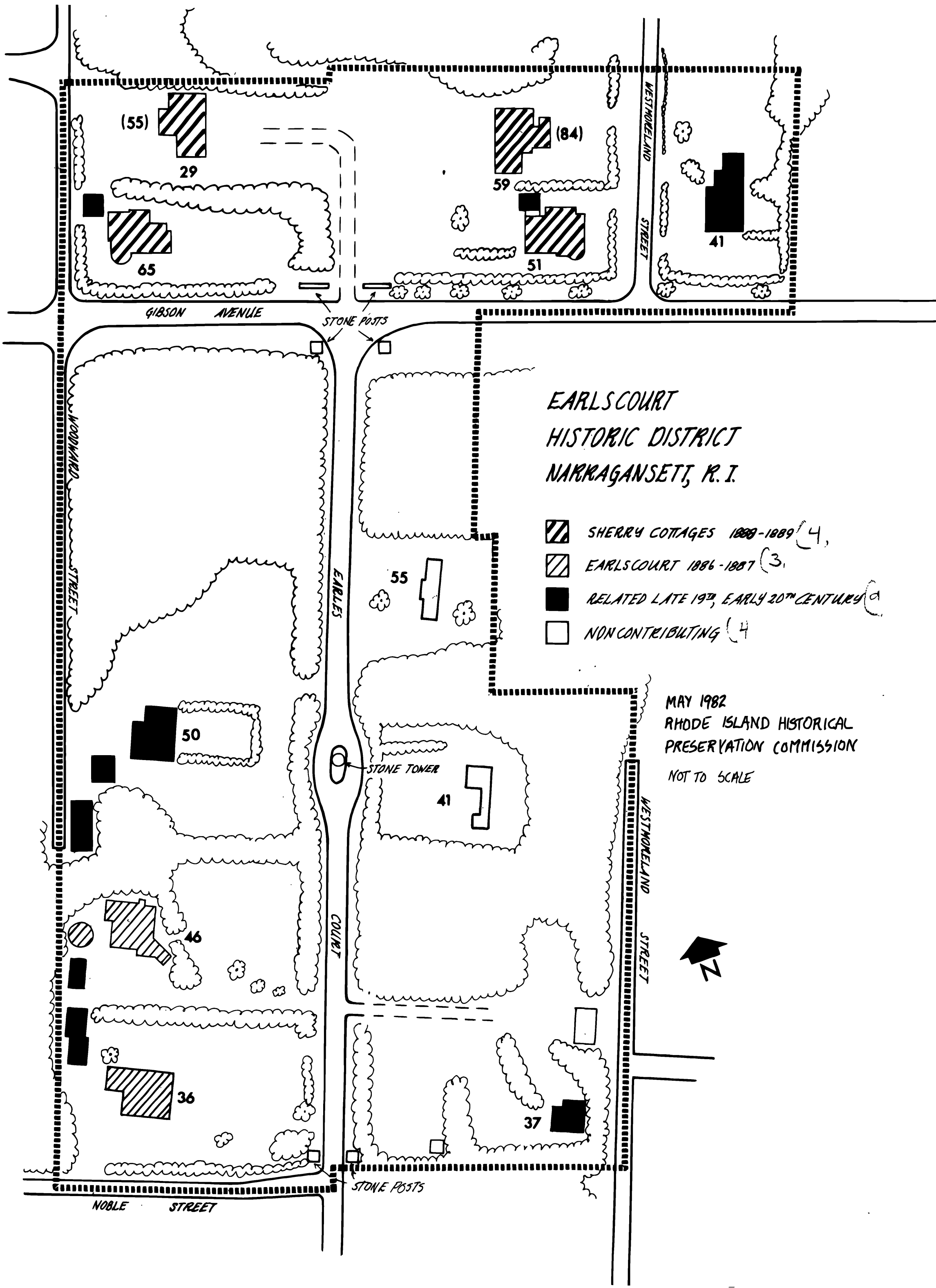
**BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:** The Earls court Historic District boundary includes structures and property from two contiguous, late nineteenth-century residential developments.

Beginning at the southeast corner of the district at the intersection of Woodward Avenue and Noble Street; running north along the western edge of Noble Street to Westmoreland Street; west along the southern edge of Westmoreland Street to the northwest corner of lot E118; south on the western bound of E118 to the northeast corner of E117-2; west on the north bound of E117-2 and E117-1 and continuing in the same line across E116 to the western edge of Gibson Avenue; north on the western edge of Gibson Avenue to the northeast corner of lot E109; thence west and south on the north and west bounds of E109 to Westmoreland Street; east on the northern edge of Westmoreland Street to a point opposite the northwest corner of lot E111; across Westmoreland Street to that corner; thence south along the western boundaries of lots E111 and E114 to the northern edge of Woodward Avenue; east on the northern edge of Woodward Avenue to Noble Street, the point of beginning.





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B 19/294460/4588020  
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D 19/294100/4588410

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: State





EARLS COURT  
 HISTORIC DISTRICT  
 NARRAGANSETT, R. I.

-  SHERRY COTTAGES 1888-1889 (4)
-  EARLS COURT 1886-1887 (3)
-  RELATED LATE 19<sup>TH</sup>, EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY (4)
-  NON CONTRIBUTING (4)

MAY 1982  
 RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL  
 PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
 NOT TO SCALE

