

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

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

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Name: Old Ashton Historic District

Location: Lower River Road and Blackstone Canal towpath

Classification: District; Private: Occupied; Accessible; Private Residence

Owner: Multiple (see owners list on file at Rhode Island Historical  
Preservation Commission)

Condition: Excellent, Good; Altered; Original site

Description:

The Old Ashton Historic District encompasses five small buildings located at the northern dead-end of Lower River Road, which is a heterogeneous mixture of multi- and single-family houses dating from the 1880s and 1890s.

The district was the site of Lincoln's first textile mill. Built by a group of local investors between 1810 and 1815, the small two-story mill was set at the river's edge near the present Ashton Dam and has long since been destroyed. The mill owners built four small dwellings along Lower River Road to house their workers. All are clapboarded, one-and-a-half stories tall, of the center door, five-bay form which dominated vernacular building in the area for decades before and after their construction; 1014 and 1018 have gable roofs, 1016 and 1027 gambrel roofs.

In the 1820s the Blackstone Canal was built through the small community; paralleling the river, the canal trench cuts lengthwise through the historic district, separating the mill site from the workers' houses. By this decade ownership of the mill had passed to Wilbur Kelly who built a small house for himself just south of the mill on the towpath. The Kelly House is a small, three-bay, one-and-a-half-story, center chimney structure, now altered by the application of modern siding. The house is reached by a small footbridge over the canal.

Though located in a larger village, which grew up around it in the late nineteenth century, the historic district still has a certain isolation by virtue of its location at the end of a dead-end road. The only modern intrusion is a small concrete meter chamber north of 1027 Lower River Road.

INVENTORY OF CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES

Contributing structures are defined as those constructed during Old Ashton's period of development as a small industrial village, from 1809 to the 1820s. The Kelly House has been re-sided with aluminum, but has been defined as contributing, since it could presumably be restored to its original appearance.

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BLACKSTONE CANAL TOWPATH

Kelly House (c. 1820): A small one-and-a-half-story, three-bay center chimney house; modern siding has obscured whatever detailing exists except for the sidelights of the center door. The house is set on the canal towpath, its back facing the Blackstone River, and is reached by a small footbridge with iron railings. The house was built for Wilbur Kelly, who had been a shipmaster for the Brown family of Providence before he acquired and operated the Smithfield Cotton and Woolen Company's mill.

LOWER RIVER ROAD

- 1014 Smithfield Company House (between 1810 and 1815): A one-and-a-half-story, five-bay, gable-roofed, center chimney house on the west side of Lower River Road. The house is clapboarded and sits on a low stone foundation. Built by the Smithfield Cotton and Woolen Manufacturing Company for its workers.
- 1016 Smithfield Company House (between 1810 and 1815): A one-and-a-half-story, five-bay, center chimney house on the west side of Lower River Road. The clapboarded house has a center door and a broad gambrel roof. Built by the Smithfield Company for its workers. A small vertical-board garage is set in the north yard.
- 1018 Smithfield Company House (between 1810 and 1815): Identical to 1014 Lower River Road except for a shed-roofed addition which runs the length of the back of the house.
- 1027 Smithfield Company House (between 1810 and 1815): Identical to 1016 Lower River Road, except that this house appears to have been built for two families--it has two interior chimneys, rather than a center chimney. The house sits on the east side of Lower River Road on a stone foundation which is full height in the back as the land slopes down to the canal bank.

INVENTORY OF NON-CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES

LOWER RIVER ROAD

Meter Chamber (1978): A 6-foot-square concrete structure set into the canal bank, just north of 1027 Lower River Road. The meter chamber is virtually invisible in summer when low brush covers it.

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Period: 1800-1899

Areas of Significance: Architecture; Industry

Specific Date: 1809 to 1820s

**Significance:**

Old Ashton is the oldest and smallest of Lincoln's factory villages-- the construction of the town's first textile mill and operatives' houses here, presaging the later dominance of the textile industry and the factory village in Lincoln's development, makes Old Ashton especially significant.

In 1809, Simon Whipple, a large landowner in the Ashton area, sold thirteen acres near the Blackstone River to a group of local investors. Operating as the Smithfield Cotton and Woolen Manufactory, this group began building a small mill estate. Between 1810 and 1815, encouraged by the War of 1812 which virtually cut off the supply of imported British textiles, the Smithfield Company had constructed a small mill and several workers' houses. Their 2-story wood frame mill was probably located just under the Ashton Viaduct; it no longer survives. The four small houses built for their operatives still remain.

In the 1820s, the Blackstone Canal was built through the village; paralleling the Blackstone River, the canal was cut through the little community, separating the mill from the workers' houses. The mill, now left on the canal's towpath, was by this point the property of Wilbur Kelly, whose earlier career had been intimately tied to the fortunes of the Brown family of Providence. It was for them that he had captained the great ship Ann and Hope on her Chinese and European voyages, carrying the tea and other goods which helped to make the Browns' (and Kelly's) fortunes. Captain Kelly followed his employers into manufacturing when, in the third decade of the nineteenth century, profits from maritime trade showed signs of inexorable decline. Kelly probably lived in the small three-bay house located just south of the factory on the canal towpath.

Kelly seems to have made no additions to the mill estate, which by the 1830s still consisted only of the factory, his own house, and the four workers' houses. Kelly's tenure here was apparently short, since in the 1830s the mill was known as Olney's Factory and, in fact, passed through several changes of ownership until it was acquired in the 1840s by the Lonsdale Company and operated as a sheeting factory. After 1869, the mill was used as a storehouse, an adjunct of the Lonsdale Company's extensive operations at its new mill across the river in Cumberland.

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Little building occurred here once the original mill estate was constructed, save for a few sheds and storage buildings (no longer extant) and the nucleus of houses remained intact.

In the 1930s and 1940s the Ashton Viaduct carrying Washington Highway was built, passing over the village of Old Ashton. Construction activities seem to have obliterated the remnants of the mill here. Despite the fact that the mill no longer stands, Old Ashton is still an important component of Lincoln's historic fabric--the earliest of the town's textile mill villages, it is remarkably well-preserved and provides a useful contrast with later villages.

Acreage: c. 3 acres

Level of Significance: Local

UTM Reference:	A	19	298230	4645500
	B	19	298280	4645280
	C	19	298110	4645240
	D	19	298090	4645460

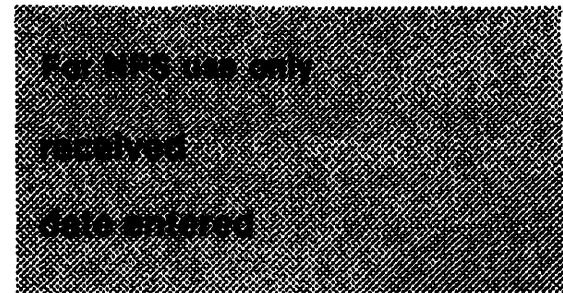
**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The boundary of the Old Ashton Historic District is drawn to encompass all of the five surviving structures from the district's period of significance as a small, rural, industrial settlement. The boundary includes the section of the Blackstone Canal (already listed on the National Register) which flows through the small community. It does not include (so far as is known) the site of the Smithfield Mill; documentary evidence suggests that the mill was located just north of the Kelly House on the canal towpath, but there is no readily apparent physical evidence of the site today. Absent the archeological testing which might locate the mill site with some precision, its supposed location has not been included in the district.

The boundary of the Old Ashton Historic District begins at the SW corner of lot 51, plat 29, and passes east along its south line and north along the east lines of lots 51 and 50, plat 29, to a point opposite lot 86, plat 29; crossing Lower River Road the boundary passes east along the south line of lot 86, plat 29, crosses the Blackstone Canal and lot 88, plat 29, on the same line; then turns north along the shore of the Blackstone River to the Washington Highway line, passes west along the southern highway line, crosses the Blackstone Canal, then passes south along the west wall of the canal to the NE corner of lot 152A, plat 29; then proceeds south along east lines of lots 152A and 48, plat 29; turns west at the NE corner of lot 49, plat 29, and turns south at the NW corner of lot 49, plat 29, running south to the SW corner of lot 51, plat 29, the point of beginning.

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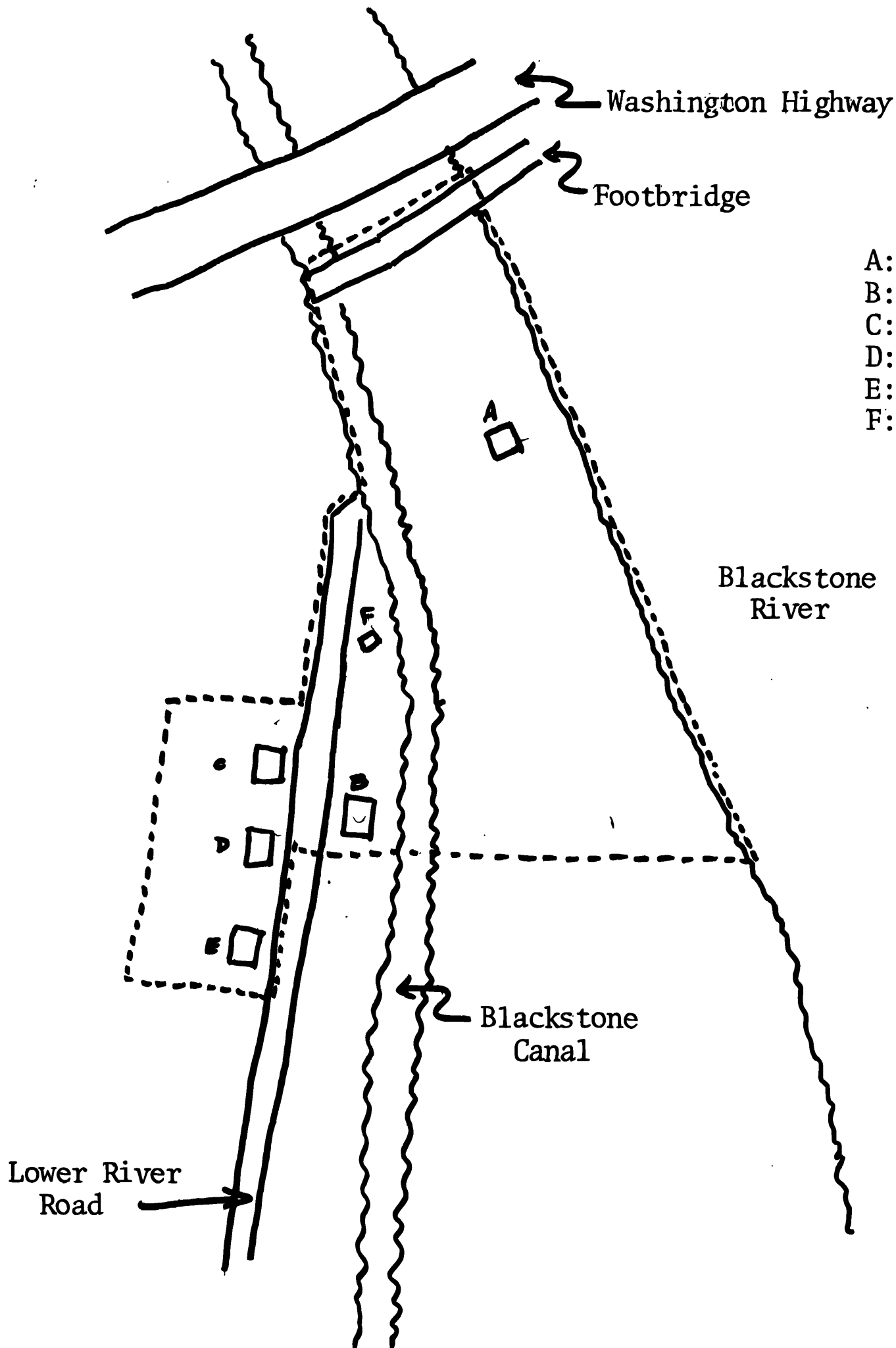


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OLD ASHTON HISTORIC DISTRICT, LINCOLN, RI



- A: Kelly House (C)
- B: 1027 Lower River Road (C)
- C: 1018 Lower River Road (C)
- D: 1016 Lower River Road (C)
- E: 1014 Lower River Road (C)
- F: Meter Chamber (NC)