

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Spencer, William B., House
other names/site number _____

2. Location

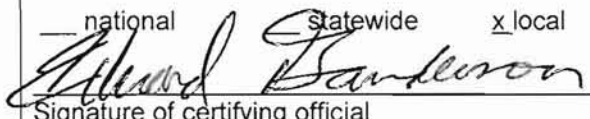
address 11 Fairview Avenue _____ not for publication
city/town West Warwick _____ vicinity
state Rhode Island code RI county Kent code 003 zip code 02893

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local



12/21/2011

Signature of certifying official

Date

Executive Director/SHPO

RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal

Title

Government

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal

Government

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Italianate

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: STONE

walls: WOOD: Weatherboard

roof: ASPHALT: shingle

other: BRICK (chimney)

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing elements if necessary. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

Located in the village of Phenix in western West Warwick, the William B. Spencer House (1869-70)¹ is a large Late Victorian Italianate-style dwelling, elaborately finished and unusually well preserved. The house is set on a .94-acre lot on the west side of Fairview Avenue near its intersection with Main Street. It sits high on a knoll and is fronted by a massive retaining wall, nearly 10 feet tall and built of granite blocks. The house is reached via several sets of granite steps cut through a high terraced front lawn. A driveway enters the lot on its south side, where it sweeps up the knoll to a paved apron on the south side of the house. Oval stepping blocks once used to assist travelers out of a carriage or off a horse remain, as do rings for hitching horses. The lot is mostly kept as lawn with ornamental trees and other plantings.

Narrative continued

The Spencer House has an asymmetrical L-shape typical of the Italian Villa form, with the front (east) elevation composed of a projecting end-gable block with a large side wing on the north. The main block has a telescoping series of gable-roofed extensions attached on the west end and a small 1-story flat-roofed wing with its own entry on the south. A small glass-enclosed conservatory formerly occupied the southeast corner formed by the south wing and the front gable; it was removed in the 1950s. The house is wood-framed and clapboarded, 2½-stories high, with a high granite block foundation and a cross-gable roof crowned with an octagonal cupola.

The house's exterior finishes are elaborate and robust in design with a high degree of surface ornament. The façade is dominated by the projecting front gable which features tripartite round-head windows under elaborate hoods on the first and second stories, and a smaller pair of windows on the third story. The windows on the first floor are set under a heavy hood supported by large console brackets and finished with a bracketed cornice with a pendant at its center. A balcony with a short heavy balustrade projects in front of the windows. On the second floor, the tripartite window has a curved canopy trimmed with cutwork drops. A 1-story porch runs the length of the north wing of the house, sheltering the main entrance with its double-leaf doors under an elliptical transom. The porch, which is supported by paired square posts with beveled corners on paneled piers, features a bracketed cornice and arched spandrels and a railing of heavy molded balusters like those on the gable frontispiece. The same type of bracketed cornice is used on the entry in the south wing and the single-story, three-sided bay on the north end of the north wing. The gable front and the north wing have corner quoining; the corners of the south wing feature rope molding. The cornice, which is set under deep projecting eaves, has elongated paired brackets and modillions that are raked in the gables. The sash windows are generally 2/2 and 1/1, flat-headed with wide frames and heavy projecting cornices supported on small consoles. On the rear wing, the trim is successively plainer on each of the extensions.

On the interior, the first-floor rooms are arranged around a narrow center stair-hall. The curved stair has turned balusters, a molded rail, a heavy octagonal newel surmounted by a lamp stand, and a paneled wainscot. A decorative niche is set in the stair wall. Parlors open into the stair-hall on both the north and south sides. Both parlors have round-arch

¹ 11 Fairview Avenue is familiarly known as William B. Spencer House II, in acknowledgement of Spencer's earlier house at 2 Ames Street (1847), also known as William B. Spencer House I.

Spencer, William B., House
Name of Property

West Warwick
City/Town

Kent County, Rhode Island
County, State

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marbleized stone fireplace surrounds, unusually heavy crown moldings, deep and heavily molded door and window surrounds and baseboards, six-panel doors, plaster ceiling medallions, and interior shutters. One doorway in the south parlor opens onto the foundation of the conservatory which once stood on the south side of the house; two others open into the south wing, one into a hallway leading to the south entry, and the other into a smaller room now fitted as a library.

Behind the stairhall are a smaller parlor on the south side and a dining room on the north side of the house. The dining room repeats the paneled wainscot of the stairhall and has a parquet floor of several woods.

In the rear section of the house are a bathroom and kitchen (installed in the 1950s), a back stair, a separate stair to the basement, and (at the far end of the house) a garage.

The plan is repeated on the second floor, with large chambers at the front of the house (over the parlors) opening off a wide landing. Smaller chambers are located on either side of a hall running from front to back. Each second story bedroom contains a marble-top washstand with running water. The rooms at the rear of the second floor are finished very simply. The attic is unfinished. The basement extends the full length of the house (excepting the garage) and contains utility spaces.

Throughout the house, original finishes are unusually well preserved—varnished surfaces on wood elements, decorative hardware, marbleized fireplace surrounds, plaster moldings and ceiling medallions, and flooring.

There is a non-contributing late-20th century gable-roof garage located to the south of the house.

[End of Section 7]

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from NPS instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

1869-1918

Significant Dates

1869-1870: construction

1870-1881: residence of William B. Spencer

1881-1918: residence of Robert Reoch

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Spencer, William B.; Reoch, Robert

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Period of Significance justification

Criteria Considerations (If considerations have been checked, explain them here)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Begin with a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria. Provide at least one additional paragraph for each area of significance. Include additional historic context or developmental history as appropriate).

Summary Paragraph

The Italianate William B. Spencer House (1869-70) achieves significance in the category of architecture (Criterion C) as a local landmark that combines stylish design, substantial construction, and a commanding site on a rise overlooking the North Branch of the Pawtuxet River and the village of Phenix. The house also meets Criterion B at the local level as the home of two men who played an important role in the development of Phenix as a prosperous industrial village in the Pawtuxet River Valley: William B. Spencer, a prominent businessman and civic leader; and Robert Reoch, an important manufacturer associated with several local mills. As realized and as preserved, the Spencer House retains a strong sense of time, place, and personality and palpably represents a significant period in its community's history.

Narrative continued

Note

When the William B. Spencer House was erected in 1869-70, it was located in the western part of the Town of Warwick. Beginning in the second half of the 19th century, community leaders had discussed the division of Warwick into two towns to recognize the contrasting economic base and land use between the industrialized and urbanized villages in the west and the farms, shore resorts, and suburban communities in the east. The division of Warwick was passed in a local referendum in 1912, and the Town of West Warwick was chartered by the General Assembly in 1913. This nomination will use the place name "West Warwick" to refer to western Warwick before, during, and after it was designated a municipality.

West Warwick's Mill Villages

The construction of the William B. Spencer House is closely linked with the development and maturation of West Warwick's mill villages, specifically Phenix. In the 19th century, the United States became a major industrialized nation, and Rhode Island became the most industrialized state—with the Pawtuxet River Valley emerging as one of its most productive areas for textile manufacturing. The process of industrialization had important social and economic consequences, but it also modified the visual character of towns like West Warwick; the landscape was transformed from an agrarian hinterland dotted by farmsteads and laced with narrow roads into a series of industrial villages connected by the two branches of the Pawtuxet River.

In the colonial era, there were several small-scale milling operations in the area—grist mills and saw mills that processed the products of nearby farms. In 1794, West Warwick's first textile mill was constructed, presaging the later dominance of spinning and weaving over the town's economy and development. Only four years after the opening of Samuel Slater's successful mill in Pawtucket, a group of investors led by Job Greene built a small stone mill at Centerville and began to spin cotton thread on a scale hitherto unknown in the Pawtuxet Valley. In 1799, William Almy and Obadiah Brown of Providence, whose company, Almy, Brown, and Slater, had been pioneers in the mechanization of spinning, bought a partial interest in Greene's mill and turned it into a successful enterprise which operated well into the next century.

Drawn by the usable water power of the town's rivers, textile manufacturers moved into the Pawtuxet River Valley, dammed the river falls, built mills and workers' housing, and transformed West Warwick into a bustling manufacturing area. Mill villages sprung up along the Pawtuxet River and its tributaries, the North Branch and the South Branch. Entering West Warwick via Coventry and Scituate, the North Branch flows through the villages of Phenix, Lippitt, and Clyde before meeting the South Branch at Riverpoint. The South Branch originates in Coventry and then enters West Warwick to pass through Crompton, Centerville, and Arctic before reaching Riverpoint. From Riverpoint, the Pawtuxet flows through Natick and then on through Warwick and Cranston to Narragansett Bay. The creation of the mill villages gave West Warwick its characteristic arrangement and flavor which it retains even now.

In West Warwick, as in the nation, the manufacture of textiles led the way and set the pace for the Industrial Revolution. Several developments in the early 19th century encouraged textile manufacture. The War of 1812 and the embargo which preceded it offered material encouragement for industry by closing off overseas competition for the American market.

After the war, a series of tariffs imposed by the federal government protected domestic cottons and woolens. Samuel Slater's spinning system (1790) and Eli Whitney's cotton gin (1793) had previously allowed for the rapid production of cotton thread. After 1817, more widespread use of the Gilmore power loom allowed weaving to keep pace with mechanized spinning.

By 1840, all of West Warwick's suitable water power sites were being used by textile manufacturers. Before 1860, most of West Warwick's factories numbered their employees in the tens or hundreds. Their size was limited by the water power available, and by the meager capital available to their owners, most of who were organized as partners or joint owners. Changes in ownership were fairly frequent. By comparison with the rest of Rhode Island, however, West Warwick's early 19th-century mills operated at a large scale. Of the seven mills in the state operating more than a thousand spindles in 1810, five were in West Warwick—a remarkable record.

By 1860, most of the small communities surrounding the mills had grown into substantial villages and were beginning to assume their present character. Local development included the mills, mill housing, private residences, churches, schools, post offices, stores, and banks. Although the villages had developed as nodes along the rivers, they were still set in a rural matrix. Open land remained to separate them and soften their industrial aspect. The gradual filling in of the spaces between some of the villages awaited the second half of the century.

The Village of Phenix

Located in the northwest corner of West Warwick, the village of Phenix had its origin when a dam and a cotton mill were built here by the Roger Williams Manufacturing Company in 1810. Following an 1821 fire, the mill was purchased by new investors and rebuilt with an improved water-power system on a site between Main Street and the river. Its new owners named their enterprise the Phenix Manufacturing Company after the mythological bird that is consumed by fire and regenerated. The village also came to be known as Phenix, with the name growing even more appropriate in 1855, 1871, and 1873 when fires devastated the business district. Historian Noah J. Arnold claimed that Phenix always "emerged from the disaster, better, and more beautiful than before."²

Like so many early industrial ventures, the Phenix Manufacturing Company failed, and in the 1830s the mill was leased by Crawford and Zachariah Allen, noted mill planners and builders. Between 1839 and 1867 the mills were purchased by the Lonsdale (later, Hope) Company—the corporate successor of the old Providence merchant house of Brown & Ives. The Lonsdale Company already had wide experience in operating textile factories both in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Thus, early in their history, the Phenix Mills were tied into a corporate system which coordinated purchasing, production, and marketing for several mills.

By 1875, Phenix was home to 615 people who worked in the mills and commercial buildings, lived in mill housing and private residences, worshipped in local churches, saved their money in two banks, and collected their mail from the village post office. While it was not the largest of West Warwick's villages, Phenix played an important role as a commercial center, its stores serving a wide population from nearby farms and villages. In addition, successful merchants constructed handsome and relatively sophisticated houses in the village. Especially notable are the Henry D. Brown House (c. 1840) at 19 Fairview Avenue and two houses erected by William B. Spencer at 2 Ames Street (1847) and 11 Fairview Avenue (1869-70).

William B. Spencer House

In his essay on "The Valley of the Pawtuxet: Its History and Development," Noah J. Arnold wrote, "Outside of the mill owners, no one has done so much to enlarge and beautify Phenix, as Hon. William B. Spencer....Such a man is a benefit to the community, by whatever motive he may have been actuated in doing it."³

William Bennett Spencer was one of Phenix's leading citizens for nearly six decades. Spencer was born in Cranston on February 7, 1811, and his family moved to the village of Lippitt in 1815. He was educated at home and worked as a mason for two years and as a teacher in Natick. In 1831, Spencer launched his career as an entrepreneur, opening his first dry-goods store in Phenix and soon after built a store in nearby Lippitt, where he lived until 1837. In 1833, he established the post office at Lippitt (which subsequently moved to Phenix) and served as postmaster. Following a brief stint in Washington village as a manufacturer of cotton yarn, he returned to Lippitt and began to deal in paper-stock—a waste product from cotton mills. He was involved in this business for many years, buying from 40 manufacturing companies and selling to dealers in Providence and elsewhere.⁴

² Noah J. Arnold, "The Valley of the Pawtuxet: Its History and Development" in *The Narragansett Historical Register* 6, no. 2 (April 1888): 246. Several of the commercial buildings wiped out in the fires were owned by William B. Spencer.

³ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁴ *The Biographical Cyclopaedia of Representative Men of Rhode Island* (Providence: National Biographical Publishing Co., 1881), 369.

Spencer married Weltha Carpenter (1814-1851) in 1834, and their daughter Elizabeth was born six years later. In 1841, Spencer purchased two acres of land from Darius Levalley on the hill leading out from the center of the village. He and Weltha built the substantial Greek Revival house at 2 Ames Street at the corner of Fairview Avenue (still extant) in 1847. One year after Weltha's death in 1851, he married Harriet Clark Gorton (1817-1885), and they had one daughter, Ida Harriet (1857-1948).⁵

Spencer's success as a dealer of cotton waste provided capital for additional buildings and investments in Phenix. He erected Spencer's Hall (1849, rebuilt after 1855), a brick block (1873), and at least two bakeries for Nathan A. Capron, who purchased the Ames Street house in 1868. Spencer's capital supported the creation of the Phenix Village Bank and the Phenix Savings Bank, and he served as bank president of the two institutions for a total of 34 years; his likeness and a view of the village including his Ames Avenue house were portrayed on the Phenix Village Bank notes. Spencer provided funds for Phenix's first public library and the *Kent County Atlas* newspaper, established in 1850. He was also a historian of the area, having authored "A History of Phenix and Adjacent Villages" as a serial in the *Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner* newspaper beginning in January 1888; an excerpt from this work was published in the *Narragansett Historical Register* in 1888.⁶

Spencer represented Phenix in local and state politics. In 1842, he was a delegate to the People's Convention, though would change his affiliation from Dorrite to Whig to Republican. He served as a representative to the General Assembly in 1845 and spent six years on the Warwick Town Council from 1845 to 1851.

The Spencer family resided in the Ames Avenue house until 1868, when the property was divided and the parcel with the Ames Street house was sold to local baker Nathan A. Capron. In his "History of Phenix and Adjacent Villages," Spencer explained, "After the writer sold his house to Nathan A. Capron he moved into the house vacated by Mr. Capron, which he owned, known as the old bake house where he resided until he had built a house next south of the one sold to Mr. Capron..."⁷

Larger than his previous residence, the fifteen-room house at 11 Fairview Avenue is a fine example of the Italianate style, displaying its distinguishing characteristics: a picturesque outline, the cross-gable low-pitched roof, wide eaves and decorative brackets, tall narrow windows with arched and curved crowns, and the square cupola. Architectural historian William H. Jordy noted the similar Italianate style used for the Spencers' house and the Phenix Baptist Church at 10 Fairview Avenue (1859-1869) designed by architect-builder Augustus Truesdell of Rockville, Connecticut and suggested that Truesdell might have also furnished designs for the house. Indeed Spencer was a leading light in the church, donated land for its new meetinghouse, and chaired its building committee. On the other hand, it took a full decade to build the church because the contractors, Post & Truesdell of Rockville, failed to fulfill the requirements of the contract. Would Spencer choose to hire the same architect for his own house?⁸

The 1870 census recorded four residents in the house: waste dealer William B. Spencer, his wife Harriet C. Spencer, their daughter Ida H. Spencer, and their domestic servant Ann McCabe.

An etching depicting the Spencer House was included in Oliver Payson Fuller's *History of Warwick, Rhode Island*, published in 1875 (**figure 1**).⁹ The house and landscape look largely as they do today. The house is intact, except for the loss of finial atop the cupola, the conservatory nestled in the southeast corner of the house, and the balustrades atop the veranda and first-story triple window. Three flights of steps descend terraces to the large ashlar wall that marks the property's front boundary. The shrubs and small trees planted on the terraces and the fountain sited southeast of the house are no longer extant. A c. 1875 photograph of the Phenix Baptist Church captured a glimpse of the Spencer House in the background—visible are the front gable, cupola and finial, terraced lawn, and front porch.¹⁰

The Spencers lived in the second Phenix house until September 8, 1881 when they moved to Providence. William B. Spencer was first listed in the *Providence Directory* in 1879 as working for the R.I. Spring Roller Co. on Peck Street in the city and residing in Phenix. During the 1880s and early 1890s, he was often identified as a broker working in the central business district and residing on Warren or Point Street.¹¹ Spencer died in Providence on March 2, 1893, and his body

⁵ Ibid., 370.

⁶ Ibid., 369-70; William B. Spencer, "A History of Phenix and Adjacent Villages" in *The Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner* (7 January 1888 et seq); Spencer, "A History of the North Branch of the Pawtuxet Valley" in *The Narragansett Historical Register* 6, no. 2 (April 1888): 122-35.

⁷ Spencer, "A History of Phenix."

⁸ *Biographical Cyclopaedia*, 369-70; William H. Jordy, *Buildings of Rhode Island*, Ronald J. Onorato and William McKenzie Woodward, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 327. Truesdell is alternatively spelled Truesdale.

⁹ Oliver Payson Fuller, *The History of Warwick, Rhode Island* (Providence: Angell, Burlingame & Co., Printers, 1875).

¹⁰ Albert F. Hill, "Phenix Baptist Church, Phenix, Rhode Island" [photograph], Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

¹¹ Providence Directory, 1879-93.

was returned to Phenix by train for burial.¹² His final resting place is the Greenwood Cemetery in Coventry, just half a mile southwest of his former residences. The cemetery had been yet another personal project: Spencer had purchased a parcel for the cemetery in 1858 and had it cleared and laid out at a cost of \$10,000. The Spencer-Arnold family plot is located directly south of the central receiving tomb.

In 1881, the Spencer house was purchased at auction by Robert and Helen Reoch.¹³ At the time, Robert Reoch (1840–1918) was the president of the Clyde Print Works (S.H. Greene & Sons). Born in the village of Elderslie in the county of Renfrewshire, Scotland, Reoch attended school until the age of fifteen when he began a seven-year apprenticeship with Thomas Boyd & Sons, proprietors of Fereneze Print Works in Renfrewshire. He continued at Fereneze for another three years as assistant manager of the coloring department and also took a course in chemistry as applied to the coloring of textile fabrics. Reoch married Helen Stewart (1838-1894) in 1865, and they had eight children.¹⁴

In 1876, Reoch immigrated to the United States to manage the Clyde Bleachery & Print Works at River Point. As Thomas Williams Bicknell reported in Reoch's biography, "Not only was he exceedingly successful in time of business prosperity, but in several critical periods in the textile industry his quick grasp of the situation enabled him to put out new colors and designs, which kept his mill profitably running." For instance, in 1876 in connection with the Centennial, he developed a line of flags for the United States, England, France, and Germany, and in 1878, he introduced "Turkey red" handkerchiefs to the United States. Under his management, the print works increased its output from 8000 to 35,000 pieces per week and become one of the most successful print works in the nation. Reoch was widely regarded as a pioneer in the development of calico printing in the United States, having invented many widely used processes and having authored publications on the subject.¹⁵

When the S.H. Greene & Sons Corporation reorganized in 1894, Reoch took a new position as manager of the Cranston Print Works. Reoch also became involved in the lace manufacturing industry as part of the group that incorporated the Warwick Lace Works at River Point and the Phenix Lace Mills. He served as president of the Phenix Lace Mills until his retirement in 1900. He also held the position of vice president of the Pawtuxet Valley Water Works.¹⁶

In community affairs, Reoch was active in the Congregational Church at Riverpoint, as a chorister and as president and conductor of the Choral Union. He served as president of the Pawtuxet Valley Agricultural Park Association, Howard Musical Union, Pawtuxet Valley Amusement Association, and British American Club of Kent County. Other associations include Rhode Island Fruit Growers' Association, Rhode Island Horticultural Society, and Congregational Club of Providence.¹⁷

The O.H. Bailey birdseye view of "Harris, Phenix, and Lippitt, Rhode Island" offers two views of the Spencer House. An inset illustration of the "Residence of Robert Reoch" presents the house from the east with conservatory intact and what appears to be stables at the end of the driveway in back of the house. The terraces are lined with small shrubs. The large map presents the house from the west (rear) and does not reveal the stable building, unless it was built into a bluff (**figure 2**).

The 1900 census recorded nine residents in the Fairview Avenue house: Robert Reoch; his children Lillias, Robert, Archibald, Mary, and Norman; his second wife Lillias (married 1894); and their two Irish-born domestic servants, Annie and Catherine McGovern. In 1910, residents included Robert, Lillias, Lillias, Archie, Mary, and servant Mary McCartin. Robert Reoch died on 9 November 1918 and was buried at Greenwood Cemetery, in a family plot directly south of the Spencer plot. His family continued to reside in the house after his death.

The William B. Spencer House remained in the Reoch family until 1949, when it was purchased by Arthur J. Kershaw (a dentist) and his wife Vivian Kershaw.¹⁸ In the 1950s the Kershaws engaged architect Lawrence McClean to provide designs for several minor projects, such as modernizing the kitchen and baths, updating building systems, maintenance, and expanding the back wing to accommodate a new single car garage. In subsequent years, some portions of the house lot were sold into separate ownership, and several small outbuildings were demolished. In 2007, Jerry Ecklund and Gary Colbert purchased the property at 11 Fairview Avenue.¹⁹

¹² *Daily Gleaner* (6 March 1893).

¹³ Warwick Real Estate Mortgage Book 11, p. 415 (8 July 1880).

¹⁴ Thomas Williams Bicknell, *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* (New York: The American Historical Society, 1920), 195-96. See also J.R. Cole, *History of Washington and Kent Counties, Rhode Island* (New York: W.W. Preston & Co., 1889), 1052-54 and "Robert Reoch Dead At Home In Phenix," *Pawtuxet Valley Daily Times*, (9 November 1918).

¹⁵ Bicknell, 195-96.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ West Warwick Land Evidence Records, Deed Book 36: 665-67 (7/8/1949); "Three R.I. Landmarks Figure in Sales," *Providence Sunday Journal* (10 July 1949).

¹⁹ West Warwick Land Evidence Records, Deed Book 1844, 77 (3/16/2007).

Architectural Significance

The Italianate villa form, in one of the earliest examples in the country, first appeared in Rhode Island in the mid-1840s. Newport's Edward King House (1845-47) was designed by Richard Upjohn and published by Andrew Jackson Downing as a "A Villa in the Italian Style," Design XXVIII, in his 1850 *Architecture of Country Houses*. Downing noted:

The first impression which this villa makes on the mind is, that of its being a gentleman's residence. There is dignity, refinement, and elegance about all its leading features. . . .In a more strictly architectural sense, the exterior of this villa is worthy of note for the *harmony* which pervades it. . . .[T]o a highly cultivated taste, the satisfaction derived from harmony growing out of variety, is as much greater that that arising from uniformity and simplicity....²⁰

Downing characterized the Italian Style house as "remarkable for expressing the culture and variety of accomplishment of the retired citizen or man of the world," and explained that its picturesque irregularity reflected "the multiform tastes, habits, and wants of modern civilization."²¹ The influence of *Country Houses* extended far beyond Downing's death in 1852, with nine printings of the book into the late 1860s.

Downing's characterizations of the emerging Italian Style surely appealed to newly rich merchants and industrialists, for across Rhode Island, Italianate villas became and remained popular among this group for almost 40 years, especially in suburban areas. The villa, Downing maintained, "should, above all things, manifest individuality. It should say something of the character of the family within—as much as possible of their life and history, their tastes and associations, should mould and fashion themselves upon its walls."²²

Significant Rhode Island examples of villas located at the then-edges of the community, one built for a prominent jurist and three for industrial leaders, include the Charles Bradley House²³ (1850-55; Thomas Tefft, architect), 235 Eaton Street, Providence; Amos N. Beckwith House²⁴ (ca 1861; Alpheus C. Morse, architect), 2 Stimson Avenue, Providence; John K. Kendrick House²⁵ (1867; Perez Mason, architect), 514 Broadway, Providence; and George Corliss House²⁶ (1878-81), 45 Prospect Street, Providence. Each of these Italian Style houses, including the Spencer House, "...expresses not wholly the spirit of country life nor of town life, but something between both, and which is a mingling of both."²⁷

William Spencer built his second house at what was probably the high point of his life. At the age of 58, he was a successful merchant, president of the local bank, landlord of several commercial properties, proprietor of a new cemetery, library benefactor, and chair of the building committee for the recently completed Phenix Baptist Church. He had been married to his second wife for 17 years and had a 12 year-old daughter. This house, because of its proximity to and elevation above his first house, more than suggests his sense of rising in the world, a phenomenon, coincidentally, exactly contemporary with the great success of the rags-to-riches novels of Horatio Alger. The style and posture of the Spencer House no doubt held appeal to its second owner, who, like Spencer was successful in local business and prominent in the community.

Architecturally, the Spencer House bears formal and programmatic similarities to Downing's Design XXII, "A Villa in the Italian Style." In describing Design XXII, Downing commended Italian Style-house for their rather-flat roofs with brackets, windows with varied forms and massive dressings, round arches, arcades and verandas, and "...an Italian tower, bringing all into unity and giving picturesqueness, or an expression of power and elevation, to the whole expression."²⁸ Inside, the Spencer House, like Design XXII features a stair hall that is flanked to one side by a parlor with a large bay window and also provides direct access beyond to "a pretty dining hall." Interior finishes, like those described for the Italian Style by Downing in his chapter "Interior Finishing of Country Houses," include the use of circular forms, such as moldings with curved elements for railings and cornices, curving-plan staircases, and round or segmental arches for doors, windows, and fireboxes—elements all found in the Spencer House.

The siting of the Spencer House, located on terrace some 80 feet above the nearby Pawtuxet River, seems heavily influenced by Downing's Design XXXII, "A Lake or River Villa." Downing characterized its setting:

²⁰ A.J. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York, 1850, reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1969): 317-18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 285-86.

²² *Ibid.*, 262.

²³ Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, 13 January 1972

²⁴ Listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing element of the Stimson Avenue Historic District, 24 April 1973.

²⁵ Listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing element of the Broadway-Armory Historic District, 1 May 1974

²⁶ Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, 3 April 1970, also a contributing element of the College Hill Historic District, 10 November 1970.

²⁷ Downing, 286.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Spencer, William B., House
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City/Town

Kent County, Rhode Island
County, State

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It is in such picturesque scenery as this—scenery which exists in many spots in America besides the banks of the Hudson—...but especially where river or lake and hill country are combined—is it that the highly picturesque country house or villa is instinctively felt to harmonize with and belong to the landscape. It is there that the high tower...and the boldly varied outline seem wholly in keeping with the landscape...²⁹

The Spencer House II thus represents stylish mid-19th-century domestic architecture as created for and occupied by prosperous members of the upper-middle class then proliferating in industrializing Rhode Island.

[End of Section 8]

²⁹*Ibid.*, 344.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other — name of repository

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form)

- Arnold, Noah J. "The Valley of the Pawtuxet: Its History and Development." *The Narragansett Historical Register* 6 (April 1888): 223-59.
- Bailey, O.H. "Harris, Phenix and Lippitt, Rhode Island." O.H. Bailey & Co.: Boston, 1889.
- Beers, D.G. & Co. *Atlas of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*. Philadelphia, 1870.
- Bicknell, Thomas Williams. *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*. New York: The American Historical Society, 1920.
- The Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of Rhode Island. Providence: National Biographical Publishing Co., 1881.
- Cole, J.R. *History of Washington and Kent Counties, Rhode Island*. New York: W.W. Preston & Co., 1889.
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- Fuller, Oliver Payson. *The History of Warwick, Rhode Island*. Providence: Angell, Burlingame & Co., Printers, 1875.
- Hill, Albert F. "Phenix Baptist Church, Phenix, Rhode Island." Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.
- Jordy, William H. *Buildings of Rhode Island*. Edited by Ronald J. Onorato and William McKenzie Woodward. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Kent County, Rhode Island. U.S. Census, Population Schedule. 1860-1920.
- Pawtuxet Valley Daily Times*.
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- Providence Directory*, 1879-93.
- Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. *Historic and Architectural Resources of West Warwick, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report*. Providence, 1987.
- Spencer, William B. "A History of the North Branch of the Pawtuxet Valley." *The Narragansett Historical Register* 6 (April 1888): 122-35.
- Walling, Henry F. *Map of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*. New York: John Douglass, 1862.

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Warwick Land Evidence Records and Real Estate Mortgage Records.

West Warwick Land Evidence Records.

[End of Section 9]

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property (do not include previously listed acreage) Less than one acre

UTM References

1 19 289258 4621563
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

 (describe the boundaries of the property)

The boundary of the nominated property is lot 37 on Assessor's Plat #2, located in the West Warwick Land Evidence Records.

Boundary Justification

 (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The nominated lot is the land now associated with the Spencer House. The house lot was once somewhat larger, but some portions have been sold. The lot encompasses the house, a non-contributing garage, and some vestigial remains of a landscape.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Pamela Kennedy, Pamela Kershaw, and Sarah Zurier
organization R.I. Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission Date August 2011
street & number 150 Benefit Street telephone 401 222-2678
city/town Providence state Rhode Island zip code 02903

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **map** (to scale or sketch) for historic districts or properties having large acreage and/or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets** (if necessary)
- **Additional items** Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items they require.

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Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600 x 1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: William B. Spencer House

City: West Warwick

County: Kent State: RI

Photographer: Pamela Kershaw

Date Photographed: 2007

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

Photo 1: View west of east (principal) elevation

Photo 2: View north of south elevation

Photo 3: View southwest, showing west end and north elevation

Photo 4: Detail, east elevation; corner post of balustrade outside first-floor front windows

Photo 5: Door hood, south elevation

Photo 6: Cupola, from the south

Photo 7: Front stairhall, facing west

Photo 8: Mantel, north parlor, facing west

Photo 9: Doorway, separating dining room and stairhall, facing southeast

Photo 10: Floor, dining room

Property Owner: (complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Jerry R. Ecklund and Gary A. Colbert

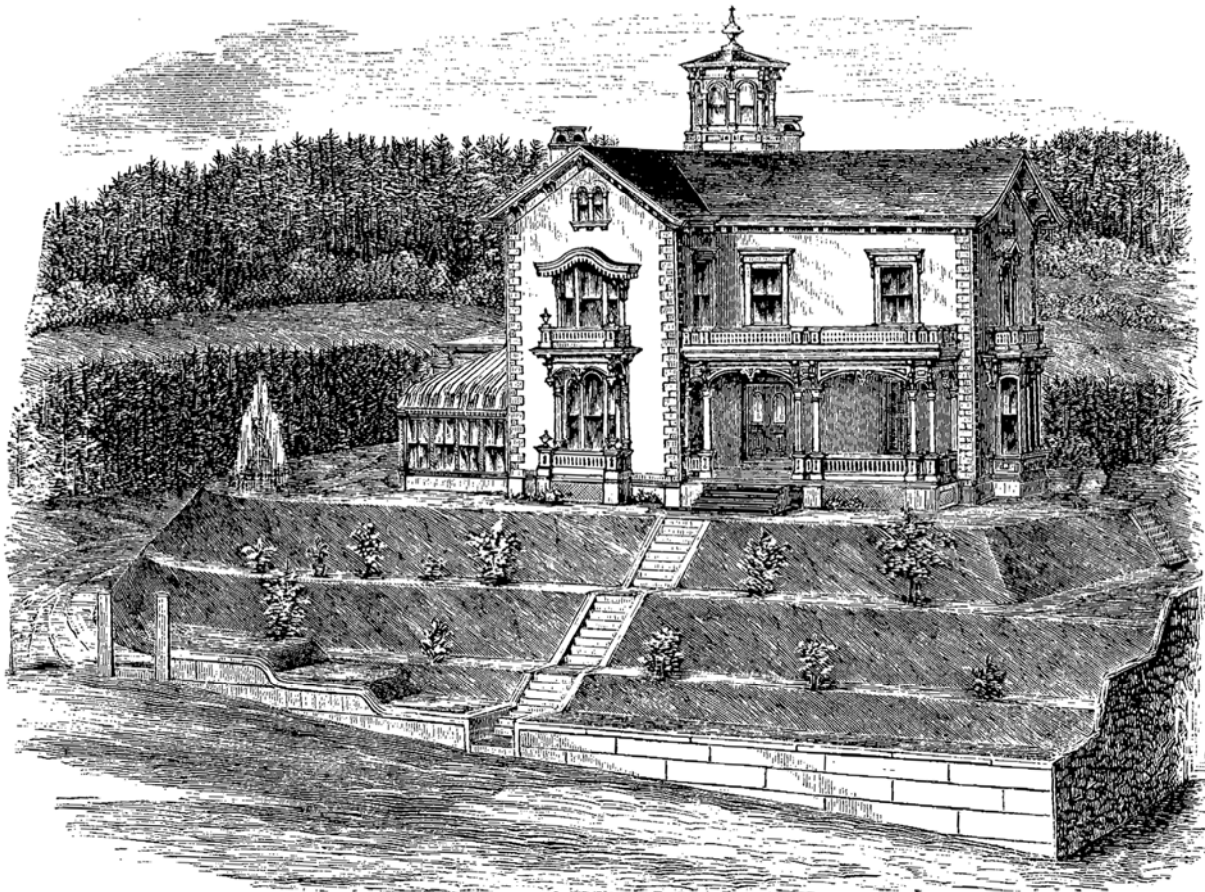
street & number 11 Fairview Avenue telephone (401)821-0704

city or town West Warwick state RI zip code 02893

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



RESIDENCE OF WILLIAM B. SPENCER, PHENIX, R. I.

Figure 1
Residence of William B. Spencer, Phenix, R.I.
Image from *The History of Warwick, Rhode Island* (1875) by Oliver Payson Fuller

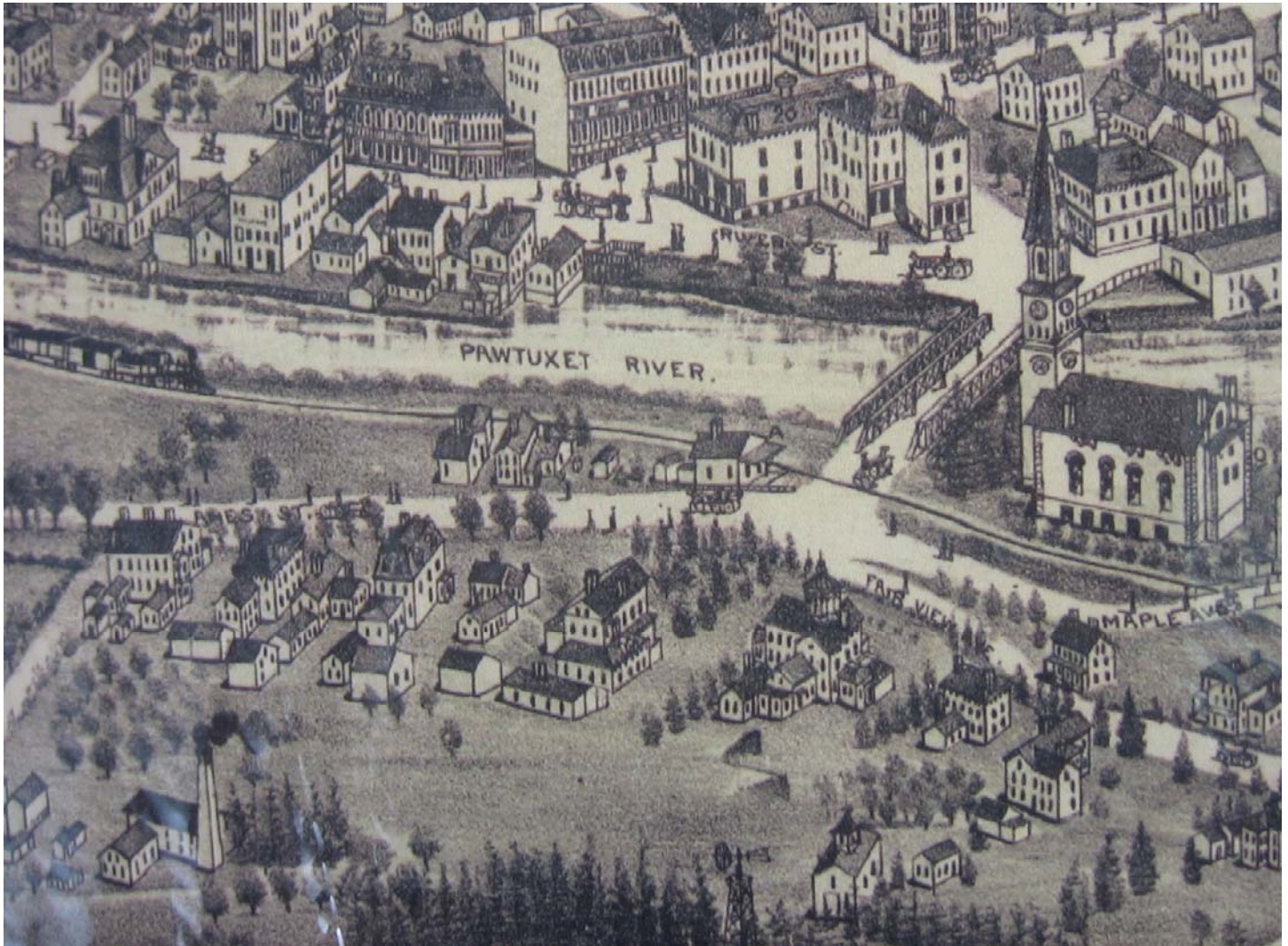


Figure 2

Cropped image from "Harris, Phenix and Lippitt, Rhode Island" (1889) by O.H. Bailey. Includes western view of Reoch [Spencer] House—located in right foreground opposite bridge.

Note: the map also includes an inset rendering of the "Residence of Robert Reoch"



Figure 3

Undated historic view of Spencer House from Fairview Avenue showing the conservatory.
Collection of Pamela Kershaw.

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is: Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
entered in the National Register
see continuation sheet
determined eligible for the National Register
see continuation sheet
determined not eligible for the National Register
removed from the National Register
other (explain below)

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
public - Local
public - State
public - Federal

- building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing and 5 rows: buildings, district, site, structure, Total

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing) N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

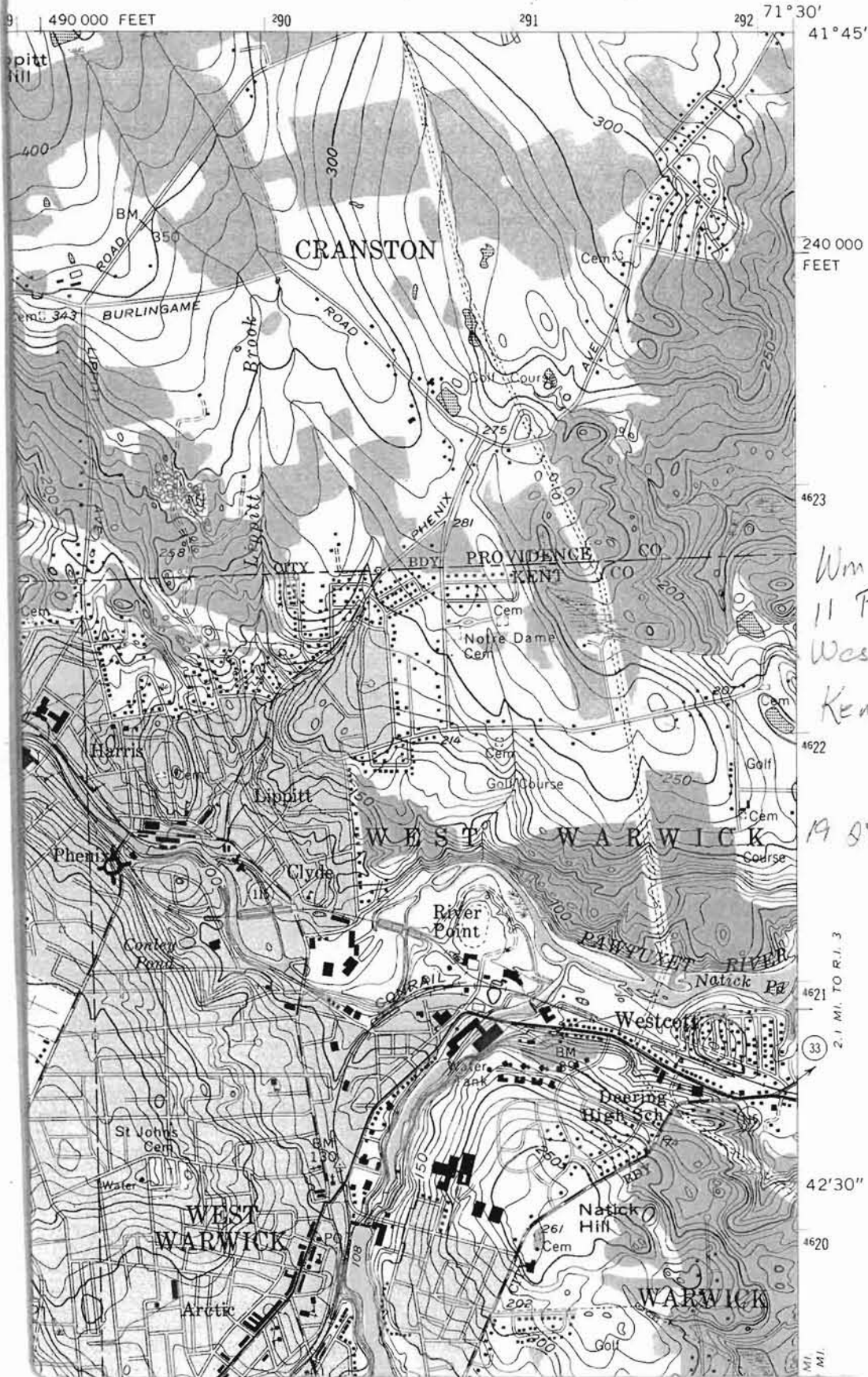
Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

CROMPTON QUADRANGLE
 RHODE ISLAND
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

6767 IV SW
 (PROVIDENCE)



Wm B. Spencer House
 11 Fairview Ave
 West Warwick RI
 Kent County

19 889258 4621563

2.1 MI. TO R.I. 3

MI.
 MI.



















