

**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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Friends Meeting House and Cemetery

other names/site number N/A

**2. Location**

street & number 234 West Main Road  not for publication

city or town Little Compton  vicinity

state Rhode Island code RI county Newport code 005 zip code 02837

**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  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the 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
  - See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
  - See continuation sheet.
- other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Friends Meeting House and Cemetery  
Name of Property

Newport County, Rhode Island  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box.)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	buildings
1	sites
1	structures
	objects
3	total

**Name of related multiple property listings**

(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.)

RELIGION: Religious Facility

FUNERARY: Cemetery

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL: Meeting Hall

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Museum

FUNERARY: Cemetery (inactive)

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation STONE: Fieldstone

walls WOOD: Shingle

roof WOOD: Shingle

other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Friends Meeting House and Cemetery  
Name of Property

Newport County, Rhode Island  
County and State

**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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) 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 #

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- ARCHITECTURE
- RELIGION
- SOCIAL HISTORY
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1815, 1870

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1815 construction; 1870 modifications

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository  
Little Compton Historical Society

Friends Meeting House and Cemetery  
Name of Property

Newport County, Rhode Island  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** \_\_\_\_\_ 0.85 \_\_\_\_\_

**UTM References**

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	9	3	1	6	9	5	3	4	5	9	9	2	4	0
	Zone		Easting					Northing							
2															

3															
	Zone		Easting					Northing							
4															

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Alyssa L. Wood , Jenny R. Fields, and Virginia H. Adams

organization PAL date December 2006

street & number 210 Lonsdale Avenue telephone (401) 728-8780

city or town Pawtucket state RI zip code 02860

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Little Compton Historical Society

street & number 548 West Main Road telephone (401) 635-4035

city or town Little Compton state RI zip code 02837

**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 amend 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. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

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### DESCRIPTION

#### Location and Setting

The Friends Meeting House and Cemetery is located on the east side of West Main Road, which runs north to south through rural Little Compton, in the easternmost edge of coastal Rhode Island. The Meeting House faces west and is set back approximately 60 feet from the street on a rectangular 0.85 acre lot, a flat, open field with few trees, which is surrounded by a stone wall. A small 6-row rectangular cemetery is located approximately 19 feet to the east (rear) of the building, and a horse mounting block made of piled large stones is located directly next to the exterior southwest corner of the building. There is no direct vehicular access to the building. Pedestrians may reach the property via a wide white gate at the west side of the property. The first Friends Meeting House on this site was constructed in 1700. The building was entirely rebuilt in 1815 with some original 1700 materials, and was modified in 1870. The Little Compton Historical Society (LCHS) restored the building back to its 1815 appearance in the early 1960s, after many years of deferred maintenance in the twentieth century. The following description incorporates information about these themes and construction events.

#### Exterior

The Friends Meeting House is a two-story, four bay, 34-foot long (north-south), by two bay, 22-foot wide (east-west), timber-frame building. The building has a medium-pitched, side-gable roof with wood shingles and two brick internal ridge chimneys located at either gable end. A projecting overhang added to the roof in 1870 was removed in 1963. The exterior walls are clad in coursed, weathered wood shingles. Trim consists of simple, plank watertable and corner boards, and window and door surrounds. All trim is painted white. The building has a fieldstone foundation with no crawl space, exposed a maximum of approximately one foot at the south elevation.

The Friends Meeting House has a regular, symmetrical fenestration pattern on all four elevations. Fenestration consists of rectangular window openings at each bay with protruding wood sills and lintels and reproduction double-hung wood sash. The window openings on the north, west, and south elevations contain 8-over-12 sash on the first story and 8-over-8 double-hung wood sash on the second story. These windows were restored to an 1815 sash and opening appearance in 1963 during restoration of the building. Two second-story, replica, 16-light fixed windows located on the east (rear) elevation are set in original 1815 window openings

The west, primary facade is distinguished by two identical entrances aligned in the two middle bays of the elevation. This configuration is original to the 1815 design of this building and is typical of traditional Quaker meetinghouses. Each entrance contains a single replica door constructed of wide vertical wood planks fabricated and installed in the 1960s. A one-story, front-gable enclosed entrance porch was added

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to the two middle bays of the west elevation in 1870 and served as the primary entrance to the building until the 1960s restoration. The west elevation of the 1870 entrance addition contained two wood doors aligned with the original door openings, and a centrally located 6-over-6 double-hung window. The north and south elevations of the entrance addition each contained one wood door. Flat stones in front of the west elevation porch entrances, which were used as steps, were retained during the restoration and placed in front of the restored entrances.

### Interior

The interior frame of the Meeting House is constructed of exposed wood posts and beams with mortise and tenon joints. Diagonal braces between posts and girts are exposed on the east wall at the second story. All of the walls are finished with white plaster, and the floors consist of exposed wooden planks ranging in width from approximately one-half foot to two feet. The first floor is an open, rectangular room and the second floor is a U-shaped gallery with a portion of the second floor in the center of the east wall open to the floor below. The first floor room can be divided into symmetrical north and south halves by an original, vertically sliding, east-west partition. This built-in, tongue-and-groove wood partition consists of a fixed, approximately 3-foot-high section on the first floor that connects to a moveable, vertical plank section that can be kept at the top of the second floor or lowered to the first floor to divide the room. The original iron weight system that facilitates the moveability of the upper section is extant. A small door built into the fixed first-floor partition located near the east end of the room is the only interior passage between the north and south halves of the first floor. Horizontal planks attached to the beams in the south half of the first floor supported a temporary ceiling in the winter. A slightly raised wooden platform spans the length of the east wall of the first floor.

An original 1815 quarter-turn staircase in the northwest corner of the building provides access to the second floor gallery. The stairs consist of plain plank treads with a vertical plank and wood post railing. This staircase was one of two staircases removed from the main building and positioned inside the enclosed front-gable entrance porch addition during the 1870 modifications. The LCHS moved this staircase to its current location during the 1960s restoration. Although the original locations of the two staircases are unknown, staircases were typically placed in the front corners of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Quaker meetinghouses. The LCHS did not restore the second original staircase, but currently retains the original materials in storage in an outbuilding at the Wilbor House, the LCHS's office and museum at 548 West Main Road in Little Compton (currently being nominated to the National Register).

Long rows of original, unpainted wood benches comprise the seating inside the Meeting House. These benches have open backs and a single board for a back stile. The majority of the benches on the first floor face east and are reserved for assembly seating. The north and south ends of the first floor each have three rows of east-facing benches while the center of the space has five rows evenly split by the partition. Three

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rows of benches, known as 'high seats,' are positioned along the east elevation of the first floor and face west to each group of assembly benches. The first row is positioned to face the assembly at eye-level, while the remaining two rows are built on two wide steps that form the raised platform. The third row of 'high seats' uses the wall in lieu of a back stile. On the second floor, four rows of benches that face the atrium space are located on the north, south, and west walls. The first three rows of benches have single-board back stiles and the fourth row is situated against the wall. A continuous wood guardrail constructed of plank studs and wide horizontal boards surrounds the open portion of the second floor.

A projecting fireplace is located against the center of the north and south walls of the first floor. Each fireplace has a brick hearth and interior, and a plastered hood that narrows to chimney width at the ceiling of the first floor. The south fireplace has a hole approximately one foot in diameter, from a stove pipe for a stove formerly located in front of the fireplace in the nineteenth century.

### **The 1960s Restoration**

Extensive restoration of the Meeting House began in 1963. The Friends Meeting House and Cemetery retain a high degree of cultural, material, and design integrity dating to the 1815 construction of the Meeting House. The Little Compton Historical Society's 1960's restoration program stabilized and preserved the original fabric, while introducing some restoration elements that do not detract from the building's overall historical integrity.

The most obvious change made to the building was the reversal of all 1870 alterations, as described above, notably the treatment of the entrance porch and stairs, and the restoration of fenestration. Two 1815 stairwells, which had been located inside the original building, were relocated to the inside of the entrance porch in 1870. Upon entering the porch at the north or south end, a stairwell led immediately to the second floor. Two window openings at the west elevation at the second and third bay, original to the 1815 design, were transformed into second-level entryways to accommodate the relocation of the stairwells. These original window openings were restored in 1963. The north elevation also received changes in 1870. A modern window was added to the west side of the north elevation on the first level. With the removal of the stairwell from inside the Meeting House, the Quakers may have decided to utilize the space better and add a window to this location. The window opening was boarded when the stairwell was returned to the inside of the building during restoration work. The exact location of the stairwells in the 1815 design is not known.

In 1870, the original 1815 windows on the north, south, and east elevations had been removed and the openings enlarged to accommodate taller 6-over-6 windows. When the 1815 replica windows were installed, the original sill height of the openings was restored. The LCHS fabricated the replica windows with glazing from demolished circa 1800 houses in Tiverton, Rhode Island, set within a new frame. The two second-story, replica, 16-light fixed windows located on the east (rear) elevation are set in window

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openings that had been boarded over during the 1870 modernization of the building and were revealed intact in the early plank sheathing during the 1963 restoration. In 1870 these windows were covered over and two new window openings created directly below them on the first story. The LCHS reasoned that this change was made because the east elevation second-story windows were located in an atrium space and therefore inaccessible.

The LCHS also completed a substantial amount of less visible work during the restoration. Repair work throughout the building revealed a variety of construction materials, often reused. The LCHS found old oak timber and boards next to newer pine; mortises had been re-cut on large beams; studs showed marks indicating a former use as floor joists; and old, wide, floor boards had been used as siding. One re-used board was scratched with the date "1775." Restoration of the exterior cladding system on the west elevation revealed an original, non-uniform orientation of the boards beneath the shingles. Some boards were attached horizontally and some vertically. New boards used to replace any failing ones were laid in the exact position as the removed original board. On the east wall, restoration exposed early-nineteenth-century construction practices different from other areas of the building. The east wall was found to have a layer of plaster on the interior, applied to split wood lath, which was nailed directly to vertical boards shingled on the exterior. Studs were absent on this elevation and the west elevation. In some areas, walls contained studs at the first floor, but not the second. The LCHS retained the original structure of each wall, exactly how they found it, and did not add any studs. The restoration concentrated on the exterior envelope of the building. The interior floor plan, finishes, and furnishings were not altered.

### Cemetery

Rhode Island Historic Cemetery No. 7, an approximately 71-foot-long by 41-foot-wide rectangular cemetery, is located 19 feet to the east (rear) of the Meeting House. There is no enclosure around the Cemetery. Headstones ranging in dates and stone material span six rows across the Cemetery from north to south. It is probable that unmarked Quaker graves are present in the burial ground. The Cemetery contains multiple uninscribed fieldstone and slate headstones, which likely predate the nineteenth century. Small, white, nineteenth-century marble headstones in the Cemetery are plainly inscribed. The burial ground may have been used for local non-Quaker residents as well. Two slate stones at the northwest corner are the earliest dated graves in the cemetery. These graves, dated 1714 and 1729, mark the burial of non-Quakers since the headstone inscriptions provide the death month by name, rather than number, a Quaker practice. The latest burial in the cemetery occurred in 1903, when Edward Howland, the last Quaker living in Little Compton, died. There are 18 inscribed headstones in total, ranging from 1812 to 1903, marked with ages of the deceased from 8 to 85. All inscribed headstones face west.

The LCHS began regular maintenance of the Meeting House land in the 1950s. The Cemetery land is kept mowed as are the north, west, and south lawns of the property. The LCHS allows the grass to grow higher than a typical modern mowed lawn to closer reflect a historic appearance. The rear lot of land east

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of the Cemetery, once overgrown with tangled brush and poison ivy, is now treated as a meadow and mowed yearly.

### Stone Wall

An approximately 3-foot-high by 2-foot-wide stone wall constructed of irregularly coursed rubblestone marks the boundary lines of the property. Flat stones project out from the west end of the north wall, forming steps. The wall dates to 1815 or earlier, and was repaired and partially rebuilt with the original material during the 1960s restoration of the property. The majority of the wall is currently in good condition.

### Mounting Block

A horse mounting block made of piled large stone is located directly next to the exterior southwest corner of the building. Four large stones are deliberately positioned to create an approximately 2-foot-high by 2-foot-wide, level stepping platform. The top two stones are approximately 2 feet square and are positioned directly on top of each other resulting in a sturdy platform. The mounting block is original and unaltered.

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Historic view of Friends Meeting House showing ca. 1870 modifications before 1960s restoration, looking east at west elevation (Source: LCHS).



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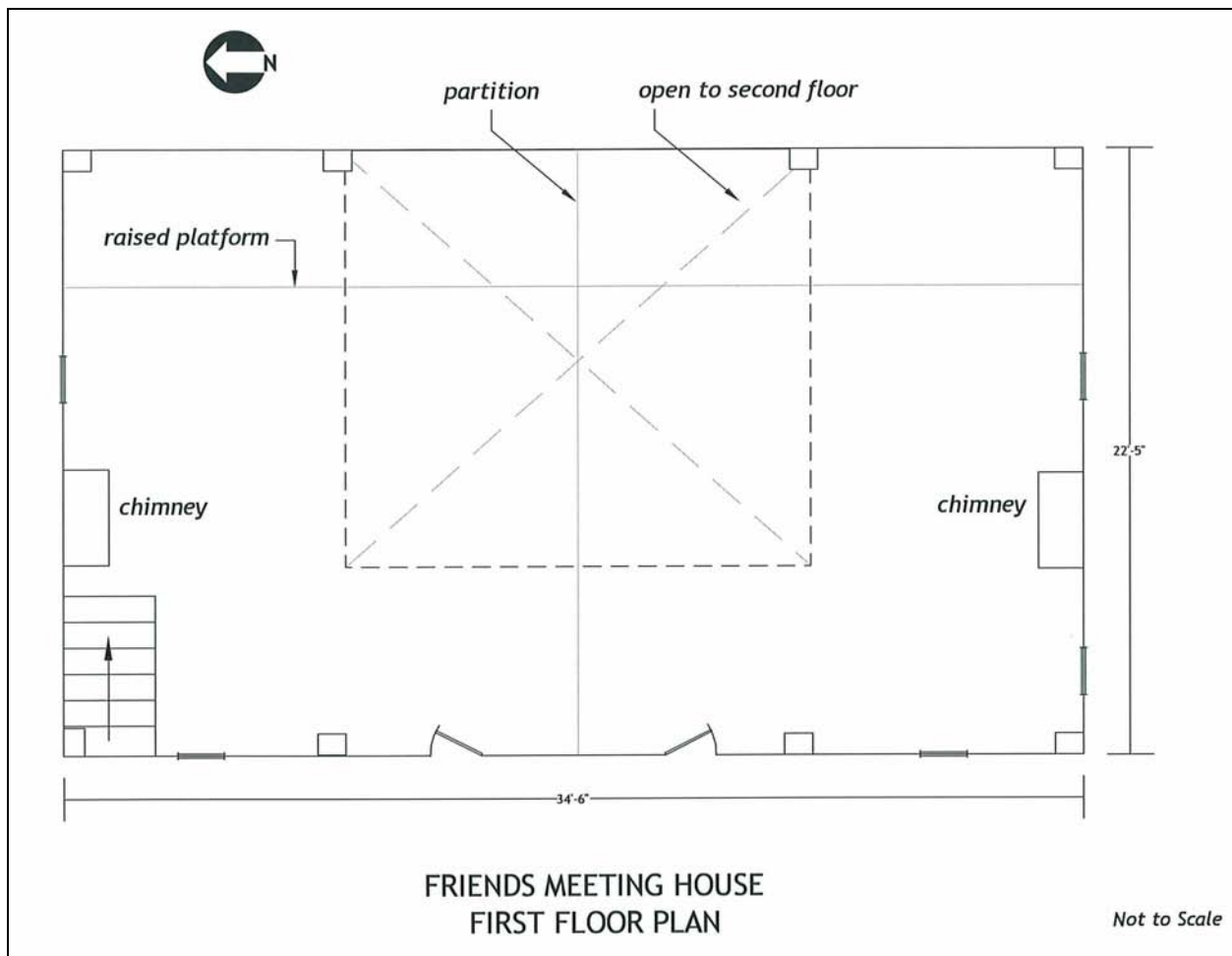
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Friends Meeting House First Floor Plan (PAL 2006).



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### PHOTOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Photographer: Alyssa L. Wood and Jenny R. Fields

Date of Photographs: July 2006

Address: PAL  
210 Lonsdale Avenue  
Pawtucket, RI 02860

(Note: These photographs were taken with a digital camera at high resolution and printed on Epson Premium Glossy paper using Epson UltraChrome pigmented inks per the National Park Service March 2005 Photo Policy Expansion list of Acceptable Ink and Paper Combinations for Digital Images).

#### Index to Photographs:

1. General view of Meeting House, stone wall, mounting block, and cemetery, looking east.
2. General view of Meeting House, stone wall, mounting block, and cemetery, looking northwest.
3. Interior view of first floor, looking northwest.
4. Interior view of first floor, looking southeast, showing fixed partition, fireplace and high seats.
5. Interior view of first and second floors, looking northwest.
6. Interior view of second floor, looking southeast.
7. Detail view of slate headstone, dated 1714, looking east.

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### Summary

The Friends Meeting House and Cemetery is significant for its associations with the early settlement and development of Little Compton, Rhode Island and as a fine expression of traditional New England Quaker architectural design that. The building exemplifies the distinctive architectural austerity of this meetinghouse building type and is part of a well-preserved rural setting. The Friends Meeting House relates to the circa 1700 settlement of Quakers in Little Compton who were seeking increased religious freedom. The cemetery on the property exhibits the evolution of Quaker burial over two centuries and also contains examples of several non-Quaker burials with differing burial presentation. The property also has associations with the development of historic preservation efforts in Little Compton, as the first property acquired by the Little Compton Historical Society in 1946, which carefully restored the building in 1963–1965.

#### The Settlement and Development of Little Compton

Settlement in the agricultural town of Little Compton began soon after Awashonks, a Sakonnet sachem sold land on the Sakonnet River to the expanding 1620 Plymouth Colony in 1673. The Massachusetts Bay Colony absorbed the Plymouth Colony in 1692, and in 1747 Little Compton became part of Rhode Island, which was founded on the principle of religious freedom (Woodward 1990:5–18). West Main Road ran through the middle of the first lots, and by 1700 more than 600 people lived in Little Compton. Little Compton developed differently than other Plymouth Colony towns due in part to the town's remote location at the western edge of the Plimouth Plantation (Woodward 1990:7). For example, the settlers did not establish an official Congregational Church immediately upon settlement in the late seventeenth century, but eventually built a joint Congregational Meeting House and Town Hall on the town Commons in 1693 (Brownell 1970; Brownell 1998; Woodward 1990:8).

Agricultural interests drove the economic and physical development of Little Compton for more than 200 years. The remote location of Little Compton encouraged subsistence industry in the town and protected rural growth patterns while other communities became more urbanized and industrial. Poultry production was the first regional market to develop in Little Compton. Geese and then chicken production became the primary focus through the nineteenth century, culminating in the introduction of a popular breed of chicken, known as the Rhode Island Red, in the 1890s. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the organization of Little Compton farms shifted from small, family-run businesses to larger commercial operations, particularly for poultry, milk, and egg production. Immigrants did not settle in the remote town the mid nineteenth century, when the growing number of commercial farms provided employment opportunities, especially for the Irish and Portuguese. Development of Sakonnet Point at the south tip of

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Little Compton as a summer destination for Providence residents also began around 1850 and continues to shape the town's landscape. Town officials adjusted the local zoning code in 1970 to protect the long-standing rural agricultural character of Little Compton from the national post World War II suburban sprawl epidemic (Woodward 1990:8-34).

### **The Founding of the Quaker Religion and Its Establishment in New England**

The Society of Friends began in northern England in the early 1650s, largely through the teachings of George Fox. George Fox, born in 1624 became deeply troubled by the competing claims of Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, and other sects that each represented the true Christian church. In the 1640s Fox embarked on a series of wanderings into the north of England where he found like-minded seekers who later became the "Religious Society of Friends" (Hamm 2003:14-17). Quakers in the mid-seventeenth century England were persecuted for their nonconformist beliefs against Puritanism. Quakers who migrated to the New World also were met with persecution, imprisonment, and even deportation (Peck 1988).

Unlike the struggles in the intolerant Puritan's Massachusetts Bay Colony, Quakerism thrived in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, the colony established by Roger Williams. In 1653 Charles II signed a liberal charter granting separation of church and state enabling religious freedom to all who resided there. In addition to Quakers, the colony attracted Baptist and Antinomian, Congregationalist and Church of England, non-sectarian and Jewish people. The towns of Portsmouth and Newport developed more rapidly than Providence due to the lure of commercial opportunities in industry and trade. Quakers came to Newport in large numbers to gain political control of the colony (Downing 1937:9-10).

The first General Meeting of Friends in America met in Newport in 1661 and Quakers built their first meeting house in 1699 (Downing 1937:59). In 1672 George Fox visited New England and largely influenced the formal administration structure of the sect. The General Meeting of Friends title was changed to the New England Yearly Meeting at this time and was the largest yearly meeting to cover the region. By 1710, several monthly meetings existed in Rhode Island and neighboring southern Massachusetts. The Rhode Island Monthly Meeting at Greenwich included the local meetings from Providence (Saylesville), Cranston (Meshanticut), Warwick, and South Kingston. The Rhode Island Monthly Meeting at Newport included local meetings from Jamestown, Portsmouth, and Little Compton, Rhode Island, as well as Wickapimsett (Swansea) in Massachusetts. The Dartmouth, Massachusetts Monthly Meeting (Apponagansett) included the Massachusetts local meetings from Acoaxet (Westport), Acushnet, and Rochester. Several more monthly meetings were located throughout Massachusetts and New Hampshire (Stattler 1997:12). A modern map depicting the aforementioned 1710 affiliations between local and monthly meetings of the Friends is located in the compiled text by Richard D. Stattler, "*Guide to the Records of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in New England.*"

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Over a century later by the 1830s, new Monthly Meetings had sprung up across New England. Also by this time, some local meetings had shifted their 1710 affiliation to new or different monthly meetings. In the area around Little Compton, the Rhode Island (Newport) Monthly Meeting included Rhode Island local meetings from Jamestown, Portsmouth, and Tiverton. The Westport, Massachusetts Monthly Meeting included local meetings from Little Compton, Rhode Island and Centre, Massachusetts. The Swansea, Massachusetts Monthly Meeting included Massachusetts local meetings from Fall River and Freetown. The Dartmouth, Massachusetts Monthly Meeting included Massachusetts local meetings from Apponegansett, Allen's Neck, and Newtown (Stattler 1997:13).

In 1845 the yearly meeting was deeply divided among two factions, Joseph John Gurney of England who supported a more evangelical and pastoral approach to Quakerism, and John Wilbur of Hopkinton, Rhode Island who preferred a simpler unprogrammed form of worship. John Wilbur's father, Dr. Thomas Wilbore, was born in Little Compton (Wilbour 1967:720-721). Gurneyites totaled a larger group of supporters and therefore were referred to as the "Larger Body." Wilburites were fewer and were referred to as the "Smaller Body." Many monthly meetings, especially in Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts were divided between these two groups. In 1945 only three Wilburite meetings remained and the group united with the Gurneyite meeting forming the New England Yearly Meeting once more. Membership of the united New England Yearly Meeting has not increased greatly since this event (Stattler 1997:15).

### **Quakerism in Little Compton**

Quakers in regions of the Puritan-based Massachusetts Bay Colony and Plimouth Plantations were met with discrimination, imprisonment, and deportation, starting in the mid-seventeenth century. The first Quakers to arrive in Little Compton in 1700, however, found relaxed religious tolerance in this small, rural town. Quakers moved to Little Compton from two main areas: Plymouth Colony, Massachusetts and Aquidneck Island (Newport and Portsmouth), Rhode Island. This new Society of Friends in Little Compton belonged to the Rhode Island Monthly Meeting (Newport) in 1710 (Stattler 1997:12). According to *Notes on Little Compton: from notes collected by Benjamin Franklin Wilbour*, the Little Compton local meeting at some point prior to 1780 belonged to the Dartmouth, Massachusetts Monthly Meeting until 1780, when they joined the Westport, Massachusetts Monthly Meeting. This first wave of Quakers in Little Compton constructed a meetinghouse on the site of the extant Friends Meeting House circa 1700, with assistance from visiting Quakers from Portsmouth, Rhode Island and Dartmouth, Massachusetts. This building was an archetypal eighteenth-century New England Meetinghouse, with two-stories, a side-gable roof, a rectangular floor plan, and space for a cemetery to the rear of the building. The circa 1700 Meeting House was the first structure in town built strictly for religious use. The peaceful co-existence of Congregational and Quaker denominations in Little Compton further

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indicated Little Compton's liberal attitude toward religious tolerance, leading to its foreseeable inclusion into the Rhode Island Colony in 1747 (Brownell 1970:138; Brownell 1998; Woodward 1990:8, 11).

After a century of settlement in Little Compton, the Society of Friends reached its greatest strength about 1800. Early family names prominent in the town and Quaker community included the Wilbors, Peckhams, and Howlands (Brownell 1998). In 1815, the Quakers built a second meetinghouse on the site of the first one built in 1700, reusing some of its materials. The 1815 Friends Meeting House, though speculated to be larger than its 1700 predecessor, was similar in appearance. Like the 1700 building, the new Meeting House had a gallery, fireplaces, and a central movable partition (Brownell 1998).

Quaker presence in Little Compton began to wane by the mid-nineteenth century as did the overall population of Little Compton. Children of original eighteenth-century settlers remained in Little Compton, but their offspring chose to leave the area. The Quakers decided to modernize the 1815 meetinghouse in 1870 with exterior modifications that strayed from traditional Quaker design, perhaps, in an effort to retain and attract worshipers to Little Compton. This modernization included the addition of a projecting roof overhang, a one-story enclosed entrance addition on the west elevation, and the installation of larger-paned, taller windows. Despite this modernization effort, Quaker numbers in Little Compton continued to decline throughout the nineteenth century (Brownell 1998).

By 1900 Quaker meetings were no longer held in the Friends Meeting House. Edward Howland, the last Quaker to live in Little Compton, worshiped in the building alone on a weekly basis until his death in 1903. Curious local children used to watch Howland, as they found his practice of sitting alone in the building, odd. After his death, the Westport Society of Friends, of the Apponegansett Meeting House in Dartmouth, Massachusetts, took title to the property (Brownell 1998). In 1927, interested Little Compton summer residents assisted Quakers from the Dartmouth, Massachusetts Meeting in making minor repairs to the Friends Meeting House. This group repaired some shingles and attempted to protect the building with shutters. Yearly meetings were occasionally held in the building in the early twentieth century although no active Quakers lived in Little Compton after 1903. After World War II, the Westport Society of Friends made plans to sell the property because their own membership was declining and they could not find a use for the building. An interested buyer proposed to convert the building into a house, but Pennsylvania Quakers who summered in Little Compton were opposed to the idea.

### Little Compton Historical Society

In 1946, the Westport Society of Friends donated the Friends Meeting House to the LCHS at the persuasion of the Pennsylvania Quakers. The LCHS evolved from the Village Improvement Society, which was founded in 1913 in an effort to provide more amenities to Little Compton residents, but

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received a separate charter in 1937 (Woodward 1990:30). The early LCHS had a small office and storage space in the Little Compton Garden Club's headquarters and held annual meetings in a new school. Benjamin Franklin Wilbour, a leader in the LCHS at the time, was a passionate genealogist, with little interest in historic buildings.

The Friends Meeting House was the first property owned by the LCHS. However, the organization found the building difficult to use for modern functions and decided to retain it intact for its architectural and cultural value. In the early 1950s, the LCHS identified the Wilbor House at 548 West Main Road as their first choice for a historically significant Little Compton house suitable for the organization to occupy because it had the most continuity of historic rooms from different eras, with minimal destruction of original features (Brownell 2006). The Wilbor House is the LCHS headquarters and museum and is being nominated separately to the National Register. The LCHS opens the Friends Meeting House for the public upon request and holds an annual Quaker Meeting on Thanksgiving morning (Brownell 1998).

### Restoration of the Friends Meeting House

Information on the restoration that post-dates the period of significance is provided here as additional information.

Following restoration of the Wilbor House, the LCHS restored the Friends Meeting House from 1963 to 1965. Then LCHS president Carlton Richmond, had worked on the restoration of the Paul Revere house in Boston and with Carleton Brownell sought funding for the restoration of the building through house tours. Carleton Brownell, born in 1917, is perhaps the most active preservation advocate to emerge from the Little Compton area. Mr. Bettle, a Pennsylvania Quaker, donated the funds to start the restoration after hearing of the LCHS's intentions. The LCHS conducted an intensive study of the building in comparison to other Quaker meetinghouses and procured scaled drawings of nine meetinghouses in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania from the Historic American Buildings Survey files at the Library of Congress. Two meetinghouses in particular, in Lincoln, Rhode Island, and Adams, Massachusetts, resembled the Little Compton building closely and were studied in detail. The Adams Meeting House, built in 1793 by Quakers who left Rhode Island, is most similar although it is larger than the Little Compton Friends Meeting House (Brownell 1998). The LCHS attained additional insight into the original construction of the 1815 building through physical evidence discovered during restoration work.

### Architecture

The Friends Meeting House as it stands today restored to its 1815 configuration, is characteristic of the lives and properties of the Society of Friends in its simplistic, unornamented design and functional elements. The building is an identifiable vernacular representation of eighteenth and nineteenth century

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New England Quaker meetinghouses, and is most notably similar to the meetinghouses in Lincoln, Rhode Island, and Adams, Massachusetts. The two-story, timber-framed, post-and-beam construction in Little Compton, like other meetinghouses, created a space that adequately served and expressed the humble Quaker aesthetic. The building not only embodies the spiritual Quaker belief in harmony and simplicity but seamlessly incorporates practical elements tied to functional needs. The two identical entrances, located at the facade, were designed for the segregated entrance of men into the north half of the first floor meeting space and women into the south half. The sliding partition that divided these two equal spaces for men and women is a typical feature of Quaker Meeting Houses. The partition was usually kept raised, until the monthly worship meetings, when it was lowered to allow for separate men's and women's business meetings. The second floor gallery provided seating for children.

The design of the Friends Meeting House is characteristic of other eighteenth and nineteenth century meetinghouses in Rhode Island. The Saylesville Meeting House located in Lincoln, Rhode Island was constructed in 1704 as a one-room, two-bay wide, one story, clapboard building, with a gable roof. In 1740, a second story was added. The interior of the Saylesville meetinghouse is well preserved with the elders' bench set elevated at the north side facing the entrance and the stair which leads to a second-floor U-shaped gallery. This meetinghouse is the oldest meetinghouse in Rhode Island still in continuous use and its design guided restoration work done to the Friends Meeting House in Little Compton (Kennedy 1982:58; Town of Lincoln 2006; Brownell 1998). The Friends Meeting House in Little Compton has many similarities to the Elder Ballou Meeting House, a meetinghouse in Cumberland, Rhode Island that burned in 1961. The Elder Ballou Meeting House (ca.1740) in Cumberland, Rhode Island was a two-story, shingled structure with a pitched roof. The interior finishes of the Elder Ballou Meeting House were similar to those of the Little Compton meetinghouse despite the 75 years between construction dates. The interior framework of the Elder Ballou Meeting House was exposed and unpainted, and the building was complete with elders' seats and rows of narrow wooden benches divided into two sections by a central partition (Downing 1937:59-61). The Friends Meeting House in Jamestown, Rhode Island was built in 1786 and is a plain, shingled, one-story, rectangular planned, side-gable building, four bays wide, with two four-panel doors in the south-facing façade (Nebiker and Chase 1995:86). A meetinghouse in Tiverton, now highly altered from its original appearance, was built in 1860. The rectangular plan building in its unaltered state was three bays wide with a center-bay door. The building had double-hung six-over-six windows, a chimney, and a stone wall with a wooden plank gate marking the property boundary (Doherty 2001).

The oldest and largest meetinghouse in Rhode Island is the Newport Friends Meeting House which was built in 1699. The Great Meeting House was the most substantial recognized building in the town in the early eighteenth century. The original building had a hipped roof, dormer windows, and a turret, and resembled the Bristol Congregational Church of 1680, the First Meeting House in West Springfield, Massachusetts, and other meetinghouses erected between 1680 and 1700. The meetinghouse in Newport

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is probably the sole remaining Rhode Island example of hip-roofed turreted meetinghouses being built in New England during these years. The meetinghouse was the site of the annual New England Yearly Meeting, and its size needed to accommodate the throngs of members convening in Newport to discuss major Quaker initiatives. In 1808 and 1818 enlargements were made that concealed parts of the original structure, creating space to hold an estimated 500 people. The nineteenth century roof covers much of the original seventeenth-century design elements, including shingles, two old casement windows, turret braces, second story girts, and the shingled hipped roof (Downing and Scully 1967:24-25).

The Friends Meeting House in Little Compton is one of only a few Quaker meetinghouses built in Rhode Island in the nineteenth century (Woodward 1990:76). In addition to the aforementioned Tiverton meetinghouse built in 1860, a meetinghouse in Smithfield, Rhode Island built in 1881 has also been highly altered. The Little Compton meetinghouse retains high integrity of its original nineteenth-century design and therefore is a representative and valuable example of the Quaker building tradition of this building type in the nineteenth century.

The stone wall surrounding the property is significant as a unique characteristic of the historic rural landscape in Little Compton. Stone walls were first built in the seventeenth century to divide the farmlands of early settlers. Stones were removed from fields needing to be tilled and stacked to divide those fields. Though the construction of these walls was slow and labor intensive, the walls required less maintenance than wood fences. The construction of these stone walls still continues today as does the practical function of the walls as property boundary markers (Woodward 1990:4).

### **Friends Cemetery**

Rhode Island Historic Cemetery No. 7 is a significant example of an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century burial ground exhibiting various kinds of headstones. Evolution of common Quaker burial practice is represented in this small cemetery, from unmarked graves, to small uninscribed markers, to headstones in the nineteenth century with inscriptions written in succinct Quaker-style format that used numbers to exact months and days and not the Roman calendar. Though simplistic in their mortuary inscriptions, the Quakers kept complete registers of births, marriages, and deaths (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* n.d.:374).

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Early Quakers grieved the loss of loved ones, but condemned the showing of mourning as proud, vain, and needless and therefore did not mark burials with headstones until the nineteenth century. Allowing headstones and then inscribed death information was perhaps a sign of the encroachment of the spirit of the age on this once rigid sect (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* n.d.:372). The Society of Friends, like other denominations, may have gained a more optimistic view of death in the mid-eighteenth century in the age of the Great Awakening.

The cemetery is valuable as a resource in examining non-Quaker burials as well. The earliest headstones, from 1714 and 1720, are Puritan and vary from the Quaker-style graves. These slate headstones represent an era of Puritan orthodoxy before the great awakenings of the mid-eighteenth century. Graves of this nature include in the inscription, "Here lieth the body of," unlike memorial statements that came with the later optimism in view of death, "In memory of" or "Sacred to the memory of." The two gravestones are also representative of early Puritan burials given they are slate and have a round-shouldered outline as part of the stone shape. Later stones have square shoulders possibly due to classical Greek Revival influence. The 1714 gravestone also displays a death's head with cross bones, emphasizing the mortality of man, decay, or life's brevity, unlike later epitaphs with cherubs that stress resurrection and heavenly reward (Deetz 1967:31-32). The cemetery headstones most likely were carved in Newport, Rhode Island by John Stevens (the First). John Stevens was the first gravestone carver in the Narragansett Basin. The John Stevens Shop, now operated by the Benson Family, is one of the oldest continuously operating businesses in the United States (Luti 2000).

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### GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

#### Boundary Description

The nominated property is encompassed in the Little Compton Plat 21, Lot 36. It is bounded by West Main Road (West), residential house Lot 35 (North), the State of Rhode Island Agricultural Land Preservation Commission Lot 40 (East and Southeast), and residential house lot 37 (Southwest).

#### Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Friends Meeting House and Cemetery nomination are drawn to include lands historically associated with the property. The boundaries follow legally recorded property lines and road edges.

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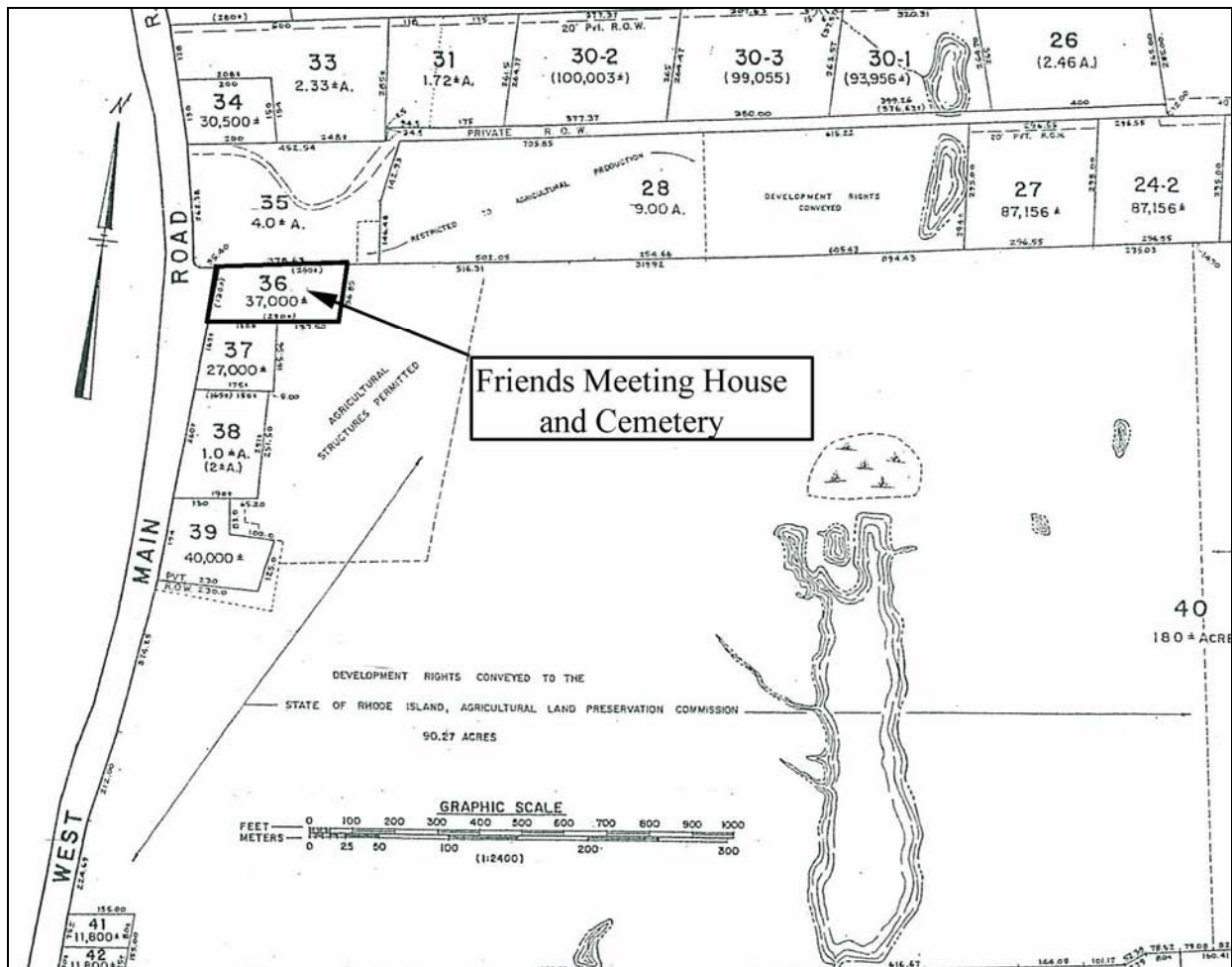
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Little Compton Assessor's Map Number 21



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FRIENDS MEETING  
HOUSE  
BUILT 1790  
REBUILT 1815  
ACTIVED 1845  
RESECTED 1962








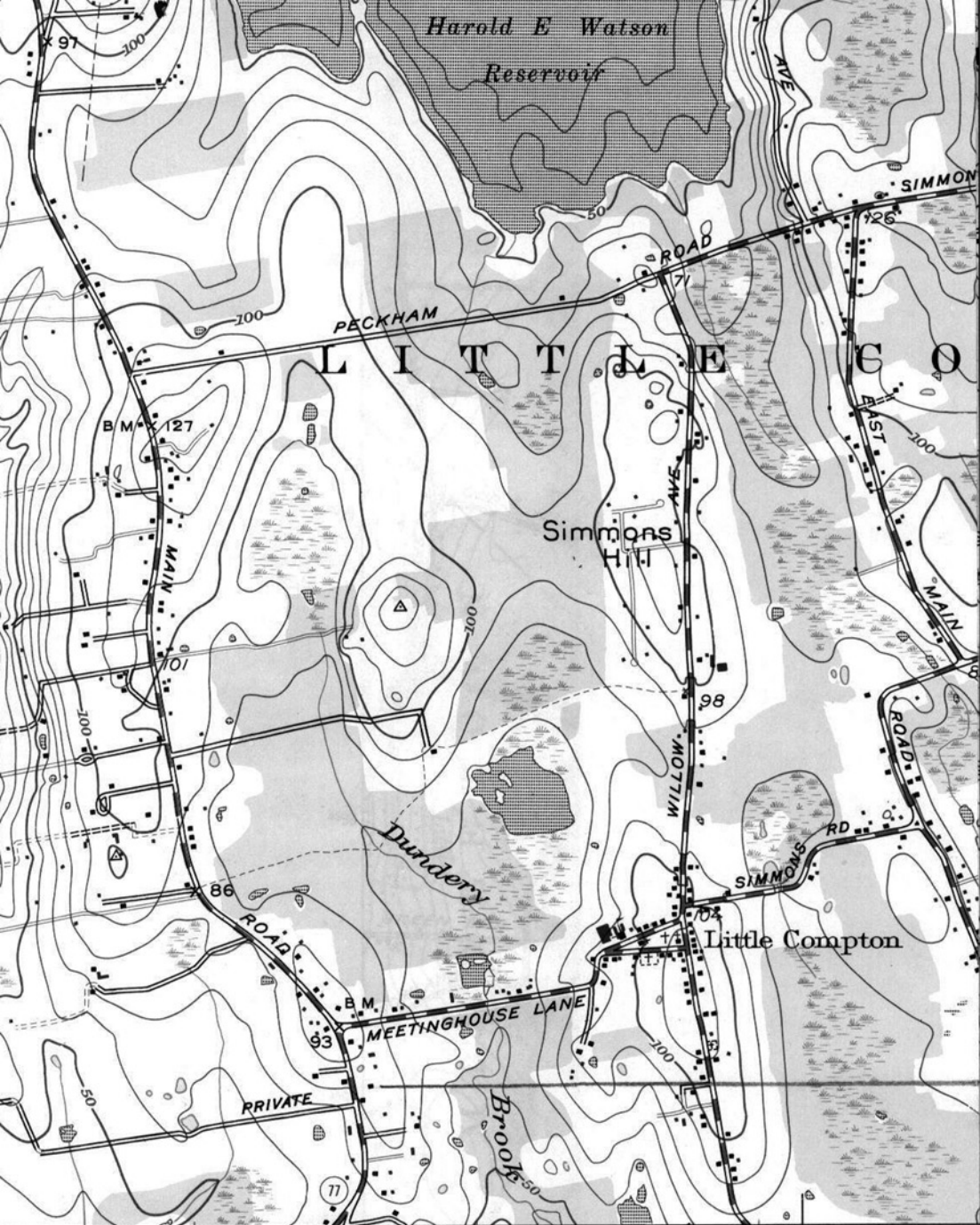






Here lies the  
body of Elizabeth  
the wife of Peter  
Taylor, who depar<sup>d</sup>  
this life may the  
24<sup>th</sup> mo<sup>y</sup> yeare  
1714 aged 45 year





ACOAXET 3.5 MI.

4600

4599

160000 FEET  
R.I.

ACOAXET 2.5 MI.

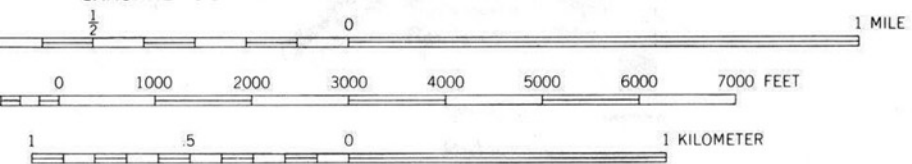
4598

4597000m.N.

41°30'  
7'30"

317 (Sakonnet Point) 6766 | NW  
WARREN POINT 3 MI.  
SAKONNET 3.3 MI. SCALE 1:24000

319 10' INTERIOR  
BRIGGS BEACH 2 MI.



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929