

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic The Seamen's Church Institute of Newport

and/or common The Seamen's Institute

## 2. Location

street & number 18 Market Square

N.A. not for publication

city, town Newport

N.A. vicinity of

#2 - Hon. Claudine Schneider  
Congressional district

state Rhode Island

code 44

county Newport

code 005

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N.A.</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: institu-

## 4. Owner of Property

name Seamen's Church Institute of Newport, Inc.

street & number 18 Market Square

city, town Newport

N.A. vicinity of

state Rhode Island 02840

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Newport Recorder of Deed's Office, City Hall

street & number Broadway

city, town Newport

state Rhode Island 02840

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title "The Urban Design Plan, Historic Hill" (Project No. R.I. R-23) has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1970-71

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records R.I. Historical Preservation Commission  
150 Benefit Street

city, town Providence

state Rhode Island 02903

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Seamen's Church Institute stands on the south side of Market Square in the heart of Newport's historic waterfront. Erected in 1929-30, the imposing Institute building was originally surrounded by a densely built-up commercial district. Urban renewal begun in the 1960s has removed entire blocks of nearby structures, and today it is one of the most prominently sited buildings downtown, related visually (across new boulevards, parking areas and squares) to such landmarks as Trinity Church and Perry Mill.

The well-preserved Seamen's Church Institute is a brick, 2½-story, Georgian Revival structure with a high podium, slate-clad gambrel roof, and parapetted end walls terminating in paired chimney stacks which give the building a distinctive, high-shouldered profile (Photo #1). Rising directly from the sidewalk line, the Institute occupies nearly the whole of its lot; landscaping is restricted to a small garden immediately to the east closed off from Market Square by a high brick wall. String courses, gauged brick window arches, and a moulded water table elaborate the Institute's Flemish bond brickwork. The east and south elevations, originally obscured by adjacent buildings, are somewhat irregular and are not fully articulated, but the always "public" west elevation and the north-facing entrance front are symmetrical and fully elaborated. Nine bays long and four wide, the building measures roughly ninety by thirty feet. The nine gabled dormers of the north front contain windows hung with 6/6 sash. Below a modillion cornice the segmental-head first- and second-story windows of this elevation have cast-stone lug sills and 9/9 sash. Twin twelve-light oculi flank a central entrance. Its cast-stone architrave bears a broken segmental pediment framing a draped urn and pine cone. The plate-glass entrance doors and transom replace the 1930 panelled doors and fan-pattern transom.

Like the exterior, the interior of Newport's Seamen's Church Institute remains intact, retaining not only most of its original layout, finish and fittings, but a number of original furnishings as well (see photos 2, 3, 4, and 5; detailed descriptions of the interior are contained in the Newport Daily News article and Memorial Chapel booklet referenced under item 9 below). The first floor (plan, see Continuation Sheet #4), reached by a short flight of steps from the entrance, contains a pine-panelled stairhall (now accommodating a snack bar) lit by four oculi and embellished with a false fireplace (in which is carved a dedicatory inscription) and, above the mantel a picturesque painted map of Narragansett Bay. To the left, off the hall, is the lounge (Photo #2), where a portrait of Senator George Peabody Wetmore hangs above the fireplace. To the right, off the hall, a service corridor gives access to a suite of offices and the former writing room, now also functioning as an office. The basement and a small, single-story rear ell contain a shower/laundry room, a former dispensary, locker rooms, and utility spaces. The second

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

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floor central hall leads to what was a pine-panelled billiard room (intact but subdivided into offices occupied by the Women's Resource Center) and a panelled and bookshelf-lined library (Photo #3). A passage leads from the library to the back stairs and the chapel (Photos #4 and 5). Completed in 1934, the chapel is the most unusual and the finest interior in the building. This intimate, rectangular space has frescoed walls and ceiling and a floor covered with handmade glazed tiles incised with sea shells, coral, seaweed, and a compass. Above a marbleized wainscot murals portray a host of saints, all associated with the sea. A number of these figures bear the likenesses of well-known Newporters. Fictive cloth-of-gold drapery cast in plaster embellishes the altar niche and frontal. Piercedwork screens cover the chapel windows and the door is paneled in chevron-pattern marquetry. A back-lit, block-letter inscription from Psalm 107 which begins "They that go down to the sea in ships..." forms the room's cornice.

The attic story of the Institute is occupied by spartan sleeping quarters. Originally there were six single rooms and a dormitory, all sharing a common bath; now the dormitory has been subdivided to form two more singles. In addition, the west end of the attic story is set-off as a private, two-room suite with private bath.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
				maritime heri- tage
<b>Specific dates</b>	1929-30	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	Frederic Rhineland King	

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Founded in 1919, and harkening back in purpose to such nineteenth-century philanthropic organizations as the Newport Auxiliary Marine Bible Society and specifically inspired by the Coddington Point Hut which served the needs of Navy recruits training at Newport during the First World War, the Seamen's Church Institute of Newport is an Episcopalian institution created to minister to a large and largely transient population of sailors, fishermen, ferrymen and dockhands. Housed in rented quarters for the first decade of its existence, the Institute's own building, opened in 1930 and still in use, was erected on Market Square when that location was the hub of the waterfront: Government Landing, where all Navy sailors came ashore, was on the north side of the Square; the Jamestown Ferry docked at the foot of the Square; and the wharfs for fishing boats and cargo vessels were all around. By charter, the Institute's superintendent must be a clergyman and in the 64-year history of the organization, there have been but three superintendents: the Rev. Roy Magoun (1919-1945); the Rev. Archie Burdick (1946-1982); and the Rev. Dwight Hamblay, Jr. (1982- ). With termination of ferry service in 1969, substantial reduction in the Navy force stationed at Newport in 1974, decreased commercial activity in the port and the radical transformation of Market Square and environs over the past decade-and-a-half, Seamen's Church Institute now serves fewer Navy men and more fishermen, yachtsmen, and people from the community at large. Newport's fishing fleet remains large, yachting has increased enormously, and the essentials of the Institute's mission remain little changed. It stands today both as an historic and a living element of Newport's rich maritime heritage.

Like so many Newport institutions, the Seamen's Church Institute has benefitted substantially from the support and leadership of the summer colony. The Institute's building testifies to this important aspect of local institutional life. Given by summer residents Maude and Edith Wetmore, it memorializes their parents, Senator and Mrs. George Peabody Wetmore. Similarly, the Institute chapel was donated by a summer Newporter, Mrs. Hamilton Fish Webster, in memory of her mother, Marie Caroline Post. Even the building's designers--the architect, Frederic Rhineland King, and the artist responsible for the chapel, Durr Freedley--were socially and professionally identified with the summer colony.

Both Wetmore sisters were active in the Seamen's Church Institute from its inception, but it was Miss Edith who had a particular interest in architecture, and it was she who took charge of erecting the building they funded. In 1929, she engaged her longtime friend Frederic King to design the new facility. This was the third commission Miss Wetmore brought him; earlier King had done her garden house at Chateau-sur-Mer,

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National Park Service

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Newport, and a Hyde Park weekend retreat. Son of a prominent, old-line Newport family, Frederic King (1887-1972) attended Harvard, Columbia University School of Architecture, and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. His New York-based practice was devoted mainly to the design of substantial residences in and around the city, at Newport, and as far afield as Honolulu and Palm Beach. Something of a departure from his usual work, Seamen's Church Institute is an accomplished exercise in Georgian Revival design, related to eighteenth-century prototypes like Harvard's Massachusetts Hall (1718) and Newport's own Colony House (1739). It is worth noting that at the very time King was working on the Institute, his patroness, Edith Wetmore, was also very much involved in a major restoration of the Colony House and there is much that relates these two buildings, from basic form to such eccentric details as their paired oculi.

For its artistic merit and interest, the Institute chapel deserves special praise. Executed between 1930 and 1934, it is a remarkably original achievement, combining traditional media and Trecento design conventions, iconography and text, into a striking "moderne" interior. Its little-known author, Durr Freedley (1888-1938), had a career as unusual as this emanation of his genius. A native of Indianapolis, upon graduating from Harvard in 1911 Freedley was hired as an assistant curator for decorative arts at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. His particular responsibility was finding and acquiring major period rooms for installation in the museum's planned American Wing; one of his most important catches was the famous polychrome panelled room from a great country house, Marmion, in Virginia. After World War I, Freedley left the museum and devoted himself to portraiture, living out the 1920's in Paris and Rome. In 1930 he settled in Newport, continued painting "society" portraits, exhibited his work in New York, and began executing mural decorations, many on religious themes. Intimate yet monumental, curious in conception yet full of repose, Durr Freedley's delightful Memorial Chapel in Newport's Seamen's Church Institute is a major work, exhibiting extraordinary skill, imagination and insight.

As an institution illustrating significant aspects of Newport's religious, philanthropic, maritime and social history, for its value as an example of early twentieth-century Colonial Revival civic architecture, and the artistic importance of its frescoed "moderne" chapel, the Seamen's Church Institute of Newport merits nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

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Benezit, E. (ed.), Dictionnaire des Peintres..., vol. 4, (1976), p. 512.

Breunig, M., "Durr Freedley Memorial Exhibition at Maynard Walker's,"  
Magazine of Art, vol. 32, January 1939, pp. 51-52.

Hosmer, Charles, Presence of the Past, 1965, p. 219.

Jordy, William & Christopher Monkhouse, Buildings on Paper, R.I.  
Architectural Drawings, 1825-1945, 1982, pp. 106, 220.

The Mainstay, Fiftieth Anniversary, 1919-1969, 1969, passim.

The Memorial Chapel of the Seamen's Church Institute of Newport,  
n.d., passim.

Newport Daily News, 25 January 1930, p. 3.

Newport Mercury, 28 February 1824, p. 3.

Interviews with the Rev. Dwight C. Hambly, Jr., Superintendent of the  
Seamen's Church Institute, May 1983.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Art News, vol. 34, 7 January 1939, p. 14.

(See Continuation Sheet #

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Newport

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UMT References

A 

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

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The area nominated is the site of the Seamen's Church Institute, Newport assessor's plat 24, lot 239. The building itself and a small garden immediately to the east occupy almost the entire parcel.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title David Chase, Consultant

organization

date May 1983

street & number 5613 Boxhill Lane

telephone 301-435-8221

city or town Baltimore

state Maryland 21210

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Frederick Williamson*

title

date 24 June 1983

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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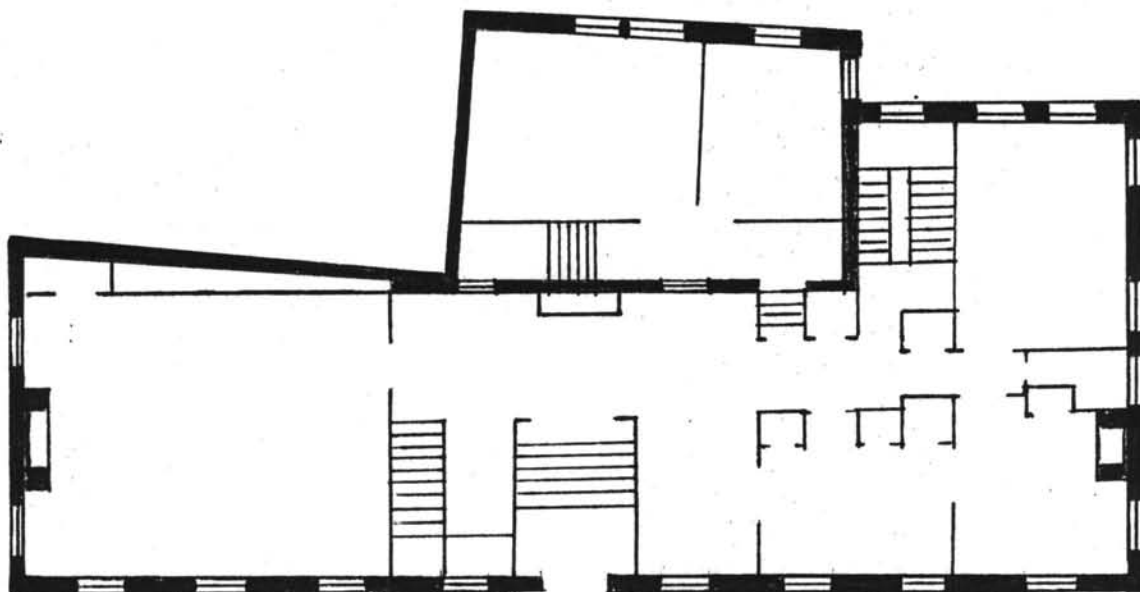
date entered

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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Seamen's Church Institute  
Market Square  
Newport, RI 02840

Sketch plan: first floor  
Not to scale





SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE  
18 Market Square  
Newport, Rhode Island 02840

Photographer: Ronald L. Manville  
Date: May 1983  
Negative filed at: 3 Fowler Avenue  
Newport, RI 02840

View: General view from the northwest.

Photo #1



SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE  
18 Market Square  
Newport, Rhode Island 02840

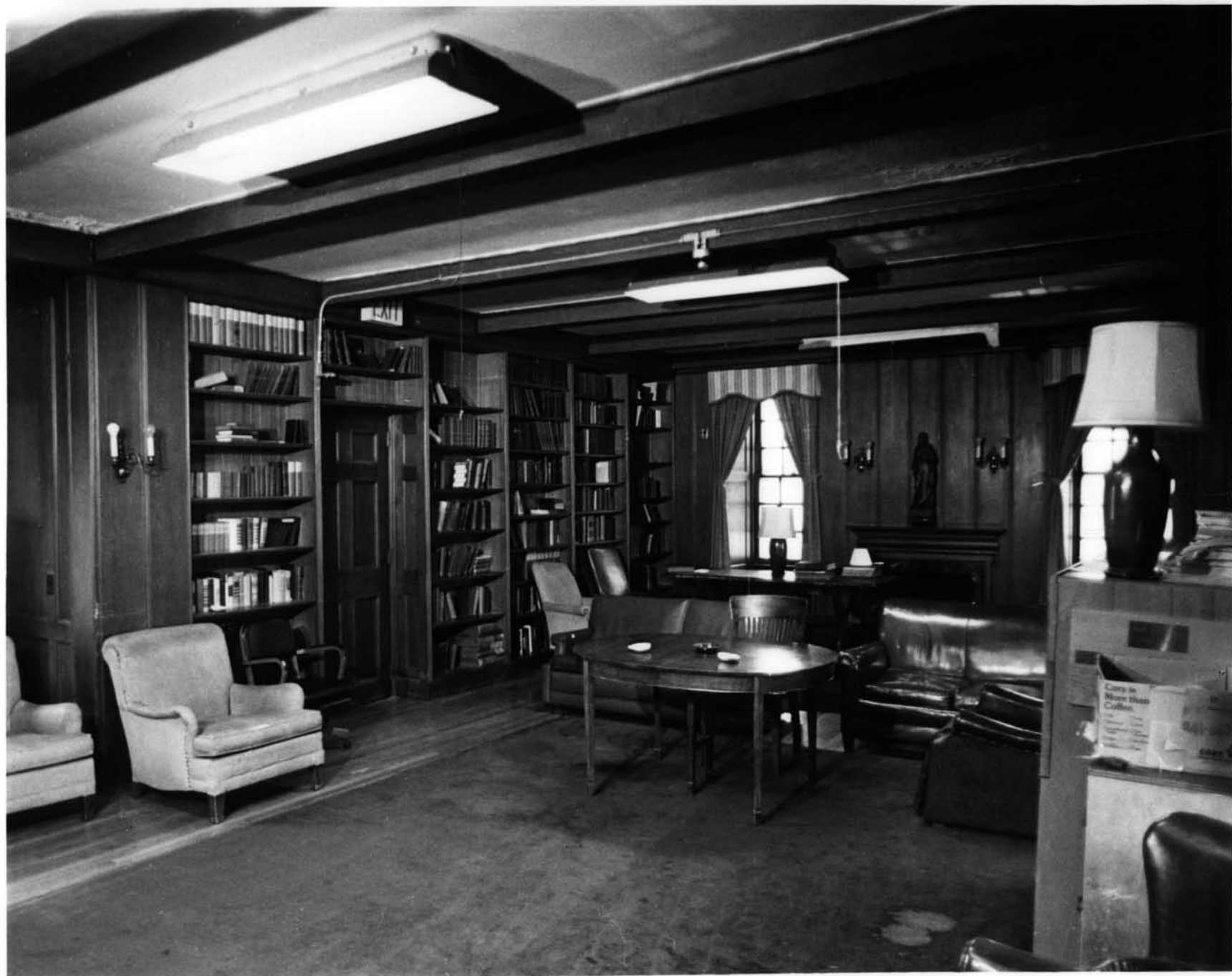
Photographer: Ronald L. Manville

Date: May 1983

Negative filed at: 3 Fowler Avenue  
Newport, RI 02840

View: General view of lounge on first floor from the southwest; portrait above mantel is of Senator George Peabody Wetmore.

Photo #2



SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE  
18 Market Square  
Newport, Rhode Island 02840

Photographer: Ronald L. Manville  
Date: May 1983  
Negative filed at: 3 Fowler Avenue  
Newport, RI 02840

View: General view of library on second floor from  
the northeast; door on left leads to back  
stair and chapel.

Photo #3



SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE  
18 Market Square  
Newport, Rhode Island 02840

Photographer: Ronald L. Manville  
Date: May 1983  
Negative filed at: 3 Fowler Avenue  
Newport, RI 02840

View: General view of chapel on second floor from the  
northeast; Durr Freedley, artist.

Photo #4





THIS CHAPEL IS GIVEN THROUGH THE LOVE OF A DAUGHTER'S LOVING MEMORY OF

SEAMEN'S CHURCH INSTITUTE  
18 Market Square  
Newport, Rhode Island 02840

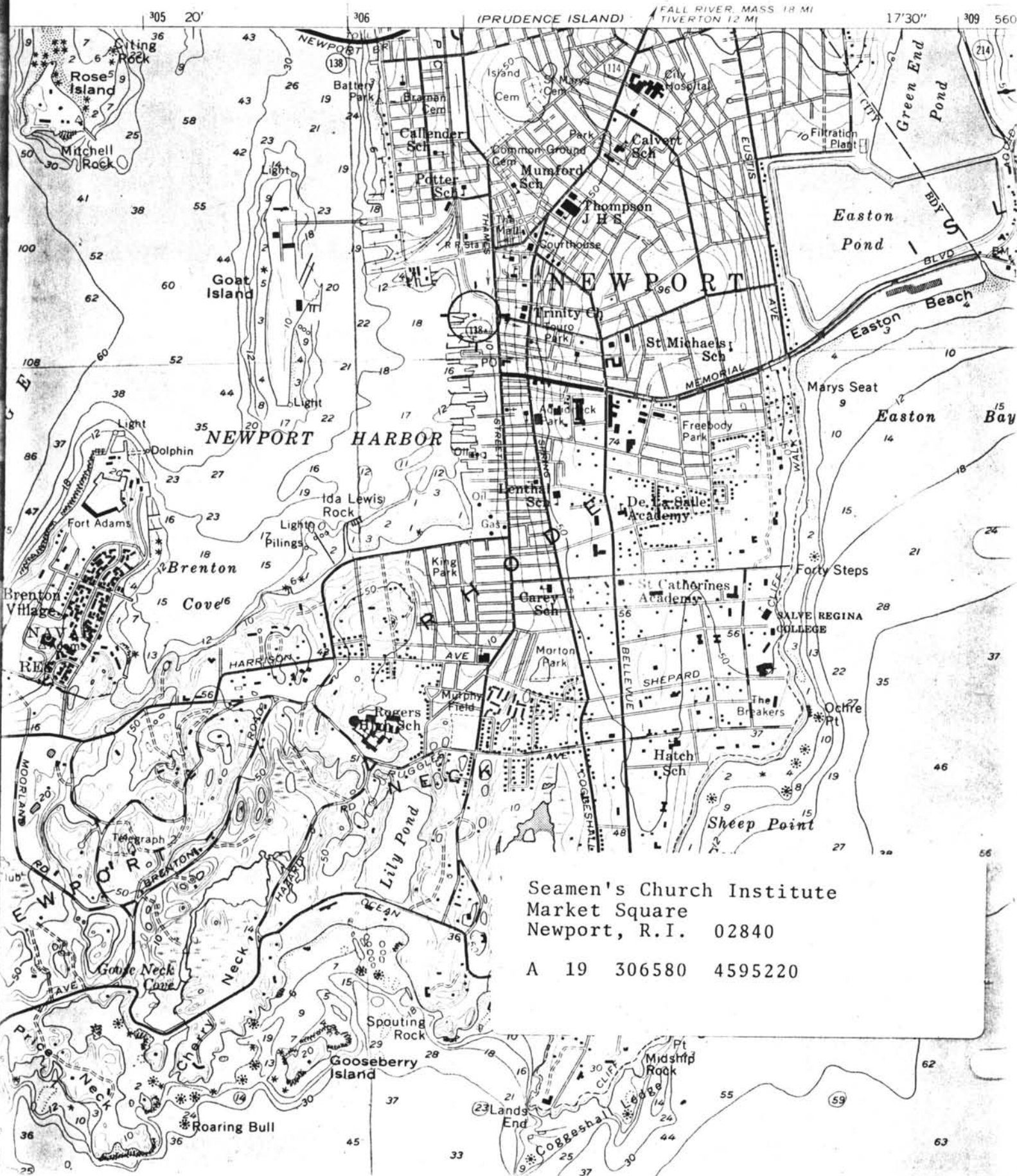
Photographer: Ronald L. Manville

Date: May 1983

Negative filed at: 3 Fowler Avenue  
Newport, RI 02840

View: Chapel: detail of mural on north wall, with  
portion of entrance door jamb on right; Durr  
Freedley, artist.

Photo #5



Seamen's Church Institute  
 Market Square  
 Newport, R.I. 02840  
 A 19 306580 4595220