

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.

Name of Property

Historic name: Newport National Historic Landmark District (Additional Documentation)

Other names/site number: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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

Location

Street & number: Spring Street at Touro Street (Parcel 17-230)

City or town: Newport

State: RI

County: Newport

Not For Publication: ☐

Vicinity: ☐

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

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B ___ C X D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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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

National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

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Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) ☐

District ☐

Site ☒

Structure ☐

Object ☐

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
<u>1</u>	_____	structures
_____	<u>1</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE/natural feature/spring
DOMESTIC/secondary structure/spring

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

N/A

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: STONE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Newport National Historic Landmark District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1968. This Additional Documentation provides information about Newport's earliest public water source, the town spring, at the intersection of Spring Street and Touro Street. The site, which is within the boundaries of the original district, is bounded by Touro Street to the south, Spring Street to the east, Court House Street to the west, and by a privately-owned brick building constructed in 1945 to the north. The boundary of the site is coterminous with the property boundaries of the 0.10-acre parcel (Parcel 17-230) owned by the Church Community Housing Corporation (Figures 1 and 2). The Additional Documentation comprises one contributing resources, the Newport Town Spring Box, and one non-contributing resource, The Old Town Spring Plaque.

Narrative Description

Setting

The Newport Town Spring Site is in the west-central section of Newport at the center of Washington Square within the boundaries of the Newport National Historic Landmark District. The site is in one of the more congested parts of the city and is tightly bounded on all sides by colonial-era road alignments expediently adapted to modern uses. Because of this, the site also is surrounded by many buildings that would have been standing when it was in active use, including the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (1697); the Colony House, one of the state's five original state houses (1736); and Touro Synagogue (1763). Its position at the comparatively level midpoint of an east-to-west downslope to Newport Harbor is where the natural spring originally broke through to the ground surface. The architectural landscape surrounding the site is a mix of late 17th to 19th century buildings in use as residential, commercial, municipal, and religious properties with some 20th century infill: the post-1921 brick commercial building at 42 Spring Street; the 2009 Loeb Visitor Center at 56 Touro Street; and the two-story brick building at One Courthouse Square, built in 1942 for the Short Line Bus Company and now used as a law office.

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Contributing Resources

The **Newport Town Spring Box (c. 1802–1881)** was found belowground at the northeast corner of the site just southeast and outside of the footprint of a former gas station building. It consists of a narrow, four-sided, stacked fieldstone chamber with “beehive” stonework supporting massive stone-slab ceiling beams and a stone “riser” to allow access to the collection chamber. A stone lintel at the top of the spring box formerly supported the opening for the lead-in structure, and a wood pipe with a wood plug projects from the base of the west wall¹. A lead pipe extends down the spring box’s west wall and an iron distribution pipe and bronze valve and copper screen run east-to-west across the spring box floor. The north wall of the spring box is collapsed.

Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark “x” in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☒

Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐

Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☐

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.

☒

Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark “x” in all the boxes that apply.)

☐

Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes

☐

Removed from its original location

☐

A birthplace or grave

☐

A cemetery

☐

A reconstructed building, object, or structure

☐

A commemorative property

☐

Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

¹ The report produced for the LiDAR investigation does not provide linear dimensions or detailed physical descriptions for the spring box or any of its internal features.

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EXPLORATION AND EARLY SETTLEMENT
ARCHAEOLOGY, HISTORIC–NON-ABORIGINAL

Period of Significance

1639–1876

Significant Dates

1639 – English settlers move south from Pocasset and settle around the spring site

1802 – Newport Aqueduct Company is incorporated and likely constructs the Newport Town Spring Box

c. 1876 – spring is permanently abandoned and buried with the installation of Newport’s public water system

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Historic: Euro-American

Architect/Builder

N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Newport Town Spring Site is eligible for listing at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Exploration and Early Settlement as a primary natural feature that influenced Newport’s 1639 settlement and subsequent town organization. Under Criterion D, the site is eligible for listing at the state level in the area of Archeology, Historic-Non-Aboriginal for the belowground survival of its c. 1801–1881 stone spring box. Early infrastructural features such as spring boxes, while critical when in use, rarely survive the depredations of urban development and as such are poorly documented and all but ignored in discussions of municipal water management. For that reason, the Newport Town Spring Site has provided important information about the construction and modification of spring boxes and has the potential to provide additional information about how, where, and to what extent water from the spring was distributed throughout Newport before the spring was closed after the installation of centralized waterworks, which were completed in 1881. The site retains integrity of location, setting, materials, and association and, with the discovery of the stacked stone spring box, clearly conveys its functional intent and central importance to Newport’s original English settlement and urban development.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

CRITERION A – EXPLORATION AND EARLY SETTLEMENT

Newport's Settlement and the Establishment of the Town Spring (1638–1700)

Ten years after the first English settlement was established at Plymouth, another group of English families disembarked along the shore of Massachusetts Bay. Led by the Puritan lawyer John Winthrop, they first settled in what is now Charlestown, Massachusetts, before moving east to a low-lying, blueberry-strewn peninsula² to create the Massachusetts "Bay Colony." The vast harbor and gentle climate encouraged a thriving agricultural and maritime economy so that by 1640, Boston (as it later would be named) supported a population of close to 1,200 (Bridenbaugh 1971:61).

Many in the Bay Colony, however, felt its growing prosperity was undermined by a stifling religious conformity enforced by Winthrop's autocratic governing style. In early 1638, more than 200 people under the spiritual leadership of the Antinomian³ Anne Hutchinson abandoned Winthrop's "city upon a hill" and migrated roughly 60 miles south to the north end of Aquidneck Island in Narragansett Bay (now Portsmouth, Rhode Island). Nineteenth-century historians ascribed religious freedom as the primary motivating factor behind the Hutchinson-led exodus (Bayles 1888; Peterson 1853), but later historians argue that economic freedom was an equally compelling motivation (Bridenbaugh 1973:21).

Hutchinson's group contained several of Boston's wealthiest individuals such as William Brenton, John Sanford, and William Coddington, a wealthy merchant and magistrate who would become the owner of the first brick house in the colony (Bayles 1888:145). The idea that economic, rather than religious, freedom was paramount in these men's minds is supported in part by Coddington's March 1637 purchase of "the great Island of Aquednecke" from the Narragansetts, a date well before the Antinomians' emigration from Massachusetts Bay (Bayles 1888:18). This purchase undoubtedly was meant to provide a soft landing for Hutchinson and her followers and to allow the settlement, which would be named Pocasset, to expand.

And expand it did. In April 1639, Coddington, Sanford, Brenton, and other like-minded families left Pocasset and settled along a small harbor at the island's southern tip. In May 1639, that new settlement was named Newport. Newport possessed what was described by the King's Commissioner as "the largest and safest port in New England, nearest the sea, and fittest for trade," an asset that was capitalized on as early as 1639 when William Brenton and Nicholas Easton built the first of what grew to be hundreds of wharves bristling into the cove like so many jagged teeth (Downing and Scully 1952:16). Like

² Winthrop negotiated the settlement of the Shawmut Peninsula from its then sole English resident, William Blackstone, an eccentric Anglican clergyman at odds with the Church of England. When offered an invitation by Puritan authorities to move within the Massachusetts Bay Colony boundaries at its original location in Charlestown, he declined, commenting that "I came from England because I did not like the Lord Bishops, but I will not join you because I do not like the Lord Brethren" (Fischer 2000: 126). His comment would prove prescient for many others colonists in the following decades, including Ann Hutchinson.

³ Antinomianism is the doctrine according to which Christians are freed by grace from the necessity of obeying Mosaic Law. Antinomians rejected the idea of obedience as legalistic and believed that salvation was conferred by faith alone. In effect, this belief denied the authority of the Bay Colony's political, social, and religious structure, a denial men like John Winthrop viewed as a direct threat to their personal authority.

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Providence, its similarly break-away neighbor to the north, Newport's primary settlement node coalesced around a large freshwater spring by order of the incorporators who

agreed and ordered that the Plantation now begun at this south west end of the island, shall be called Newport... and that the Towne shall be built upon both sides of the spring, and by the sea-side, Southward (Barlett 1856:88).

Because "a spring of good water was the first requisite of a place of settlement" (Bicknell 1920:146), the presence of Newport Spring (and a fine shipping harbor) undoubtedly influenced Coddington's choice of location. The presence of a good spring certainly was a consideration for Roger William's intrepid band at Providence, and John Winthrop's settlement at Charlestown was abandoned in favor of the Shawmut Peninsula (now Boston) for lack of one (Kempe 2006:6–7). Access to freshwater, however, is a prerequisite for human settlement at all times and in all places. So long before Coddington and his group of entrepreneurial-minded partners worked their way south to Newport, Native Americans had been living at and around the spring for thousands of years.

The agreement between Coddington and the Narragansett sachems that allowed the English to fan out across Aquidneck contained specific language about the voluntary removal of the resident Native American population from the island. For example, the language in the March 1637 conveyance as witnessed by Roger Williams explicitly states

That by givinge by Miantnnomus' ten coates and twenty howes to the present inhabitants, they shall remove themselves from off the Island before next winter (as transcribed in Bayles 1888:19–20).

This prohibition against a permanent Native presence on the island was further reinforced on July 7, 1640, when the newly-appointed Governor Coddington entered into a treaty with the Narragansett stating

That upon their trading and bargaining, having agreed, they shall not revoke the said bargaine or take their goods away by force, and that they shall not be Idling about nor resort to our houses, but for trade, message, or in their Journeys (as transcribed in Bayles 1888:26–27).

In warning the Narragansett off with such strong language, the treaty implicitly acknowledged a deeply-rooted Native American presence on Aquidneck Island that was proving difficult to eliminate.

Archaeological evidence illustrates the time depth of that occupation and further suggests the spring was a strong settlement draw not just to Coddington and his followers in the seventeenth century but to Indian groups for thousands of years before that. Although only a few pre-contact archeological sites have been recorded on Aquidneck Island, one of the most significant was excavated in 1969 and 1970 from beneath the floorboards of the Great Friends Meeting House at 21 Farwell Street, 0.2-miles due north of the spring. The site consisted of a crowded complex of trash pits, postmolds, and hearths, and an artifact assemblage comprising multiple stone tools (e.g. Brewerton and Levanna-style projectile points) dating to the Late Archaic (5,000–3,000 B.P.) and Late Woodland (1,000–450 B.P.) periods.⁴ (Yentsch et al. 1979).

⁴ Pre-contact Period dates refer to radiocarbon years before present (B.P.) unless stated otherwise. Radiocarbon years can differ by as much as several centuries from calendrical years. Archeological convention defines the "present" as 1950 A.D.

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Follow-up excavations 20 years later documented additional pit features and a grave shaft (Garman et al. 1999). The site's size, complexity, and range of diagnostic artifacts indicates it was occupied intensively and repeatedly by Native American groups for millenia. Another significant pre-contact occupation was recorded southeast of the spring at Touro Synagogue. That work recovered more than 250 artifacts including quartz, quartzite, and rhyolite debitage⁵ and tools, and a possible hearth marked by a concentration of burned stone (Stachiw 1999, 2002). Based on the artifact profile, the site likely was occupied during the Late Archaic Period, a period when previously fluctuating sea levels would have stabilized to near-modern conditions to allow the formation of a freshwater spring so close to the coast.

The Native presence on Aquidneck Island, however, would diminish over time as the English presence grew, especially in Newport. While the sea would shape Newport's financial fortunes, the spring, at least in the beginning, shaped its road network and settlement pattern (Newport Historical Society [NHS] 2021a). The topographic contours formed by the many streams flowing from the spring influenced the irregular pattern of the early 17th-century roads that wound their way down to the harbor. The land surrounding the spring also was the first to be allotted to the settlement's most prominent members including Henry Bull[e], a signatory to Newport's original compact drafted on January 7, 1638 (NHS 2016).

Settlement at first was focused on house construction, marsh draining, and field clearing in service to a small but stable farming economy. The islands in Narragansett Bay were uniquely well-suited for animal husbandry due to the low incidence of predators and their bay locations that allowed for the development of an inexpensive and efficient export network. With the introduction of large-scale sheep farming in 1642, animal husbandry soon became the sole focus of small and large landowners alike. The trade in finished goods derived from those animals, however, was nearly the exclusive purview of Newport's wealthiest families including the Benedict Arnold, Caleb and Robert Carr, and Wanton families. That new group, who were among the island's second wave of settlers after 1650, teamed with the original founders to become the chief architects of the vastly profitable trade network that developed among Newport and the colonial ports of Boston, New Amsterdam, the West Indies, and England (Bridenbaugh 1971). The arrival of the Quakers in 1657, who also were fleeing Massachusetts Bay's religious intolerance and economic strictures, contributed important kin-based trade relationships to the mix, further expanding Newport's wealth. By 1680, these parties banded together to form "The Proprietors of the Long Wharf" to promote the town's shipping and trade interests (Downing and Scully 1953:16).

Like many things important to day-to-day life but so common as to preclude comment, after Newport's founding the spring largely disappears from historical mention apart from its use as landmark in colonial records or as a marker by which one's social status could be inferred by the distance one's house was built from it. Its value to the town is evident in the eponymously named street (first laid out in 1642 and called Back Street or the Way Leading to the Neck) and the spring's use as the starting point for the measurement to One Mile Corner at Newport's northernmost border. The spring site itself was on a house plot owned by John Coggeshall (1623–1688), one of Hutchinson's original group of dissidents (NHS 2016:15).

⁵ Debitage is the debris generated during chipped stone tool manufacture and is most commonly subdivided into flakes and shatter

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Prosperity, Expansion, and War (1700–1780)

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, most of the major roads had either been laid out or improved (Bridenbaugh 1973) and the town had become increasingly compact. More than 400 houses, most of which served both residential and commercial purposes for shopkeepers, shipwrights, housewrights, blacksmiths, masons, cordwainers, and mechanics, were shoe-horned into a long but narrow strip of land (Downing and Scully 1967:17). A 1706 order to sub-divide the common lands into house lots for newcomers illustrates the mounting population pressures (Rudolph 1978:22).

The earliest known map of Newport was produced in 1712 by town native, John Mumford (1670–1749) (Family Search 2021). The now tattered and water-stained map is carefully annotated with street names but does not depict any landmarks or buildings except for the “Spring” just west of the intersection of Griffin (now Touro) Street and Spring Street (Figures 4 and 5). At that time, the lot was still owned by the Coggeshall family (NHS 2016:26). This unique call-out suggests that even as Newport began to overspill its original settlement boundaries, the spring remained an important focus of everyday life and a geographic benchmark in the town’s physical organization.

In 1758, Ezra Stiles, a Congregational minister, seventh president of Yale College, and one of the founders of Brown University, drew a map of Newport illustrating the increasing compactness and urban nature of the settlement. The map is enormously detailed and includes a key for one- and two-story houses; two-story houses with two chimneys; houses of worship; municipal buildings; and commercial buildings and stables. For all its detail, none of the streets are labeled but all the wharves and docks jutting into the bay are meticulously identified by owner (e.g., Redwood, Brown, Coggeshall, Tweedy, and Tillinghast), an implicit nod to the primacy of maritime commerce to Newport’s economy. A ropewalk and almshouse are spelled out at the north edge of the town immediately east of Thames Street.

The spring, however, is not depicted (Figure 6). It also is not mentioned in any of Stiles’ comments scribbled along the map’s margins, which include paced distances from one point to another and a summary building inventory of 188 one-story houses, 140 two-story houses, and 110 “stores, stillhouses, stables, etc.” Given the spring’s prominence on Mumford’s (1712) map, Stiles’ omission seems unusual and suggests that by the mid-eighteenth century the owners of the spring lot, the Marchant family⁶, had enclosed the well so that it was no longer such a conspicuous landscape feature (NHS 2016:26).

By the time of the American Revolution, Newport had staked much of its economic security on its trade relationship with England, so much so that it underwent a period of political and cultural “re-Anglicization” as an expression of mutual solidarity (Deetz 1973). That re-Anglicization, in turn, made the town highly resistant to the revolutionary rhetoric beginning to develop in the colonies. Nonetheless, Newport was pulled into the conflict beginning in the winter of 1775 and into the first of half of 1776 when the Rhode Island Legislature put militia General William West in charge of rooting out local loyalists. Those caught in the net included some of Newport’s most prominent citizens. Joseph Wanton, scion of a prominent family of Quaker merchants, and Thomas Vernon, another wealthy merchant and active Loyalist, both were exiled to the northern part of the state. Wanton’s house, which still stands at 17 Broadway as the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (c. 1696), is only 0.1 miles north of the spring, suggesting the family’s prominence within the concentration of Newport elites in that area. Despite

⁶ Captain Huxford Marchant (1712–1747) purchased the lot from the Coggeshalls, and with his death it passed to his the very young son, Henry (1741–1796), who would go on to become the Attorney General of Rhode Island from 1770 to 1777.

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West's vigorous efforts to weed out British sympathizers, the population of Newport remained deeply divided, and many pro-independence "Patriots" left town while loyalist "Tories" remained.

In December 1776, the British occupied Newport to prevent it from being used as a naval base to attack New York City, which had been seized that August. In assessing the suitability of Newport for use as a base, the British Admiralty consulted a map produced by one of their top surveyors, Charles Blaskowitz (Heritage Charts 2021). Blaskowitz's 1777 map provides excellent coverage of the city in its depiction of buildings and outbuilding; street names; streams, rivers, and wetlands; wharves and drawbridges; burying grounds, ropewalks, and windmills; and critical military infrastructure such as a powder house and Fort George on Goat Island. The map was reprinted in 1777 with several additions, including a "battery raised by the Americans" at the far northwest corner of the city overlooking the bay. Like the Stiles map before it, however, the Blaskowitz map does not depict the Town Spring, which was still owned by the Marchant family (Figure 7).

The Fall and Rise of a Port City (1780–1850)

Before the war, Newport was at its cultural and economic peak. After the war, the city's population dropped precipitously from 9,000 to less than 4,000 people with more than 300 homes destroyed or burned to the ground. Another 200 abandoned buildings were demolished after 1783. Even before the end of the war, Ezra Stiles, who returned to Newport for a brief visit in 1780, reported the city in ruins (Downing and Scully 1967:92). Most of the local merchants relocated to less heavily damaged cities like Providence, Boston, and New York, and with them went any hope of quick economic recovery. This destruction is not evident on Joseph F.W. Des Barres (1781) map of Newport, but the map does provide for the first time an explicit reference to the spring's location in its identification of Spring Lane (labeled No. 18 and distinct from Spring Street) (Figure 8). By 1783, Henry Marchant had sold his Spring Street property, which included the two parcels on either side of Spring Lane, to Peleg Barker Esq. (1716–1794), a lawyer, merchant, and politician.

Newport's economy began to rebound at the turn of the nineteenth century with a renewed focus on shipping and shipbuilding. In 1808, that nascent recovery was walloped by a massive hurricane that destroyed most of Newport's wharves, warehouses, and shipping establishments. With the War of 1812, shipbuilding ceased entirely, and Newport's maritime economy was gone for good. With the loss of the maritime economy, Newport stagnated politically and structurally. Providence emerged as the state's new center of prosperity, effectively negating Newport's need or desire to expand its infrastructure.

New investments in the whaling and textile industries between 1825 and 1845 provided a minor boost to Newport's struggling economy but did not generate nearly the same level of growth experienced by nearby cities such as New Bedford, Bristol, and Warren. Another boost to the city's flagging economy was the federal government's construction of Fort Adams, part of its Third System of Coastal Defenses. Work on the enormous granite fort, named for former president John Adams, started in 1824 and continued at regular intervals until 1857, with upgrades and additions through World War II. While the fort was never involved in a military engagement, it did encourage a general housing boom to accommodate the skilled and unskilled laborers flooding into the city, many of whom were Irish. That influx was supplemented by the annual return of summer daytrippers and wealthy households and their staffs, both of which increased demand for hotels, boutiques, and restaurants, and city safety staff (e.g., fire- and policemen) to control and protect those people (Zipf et al. 2008).

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During this period, the primary land use surrounding the spring remained residential. The spring itself likely remained an open-air landscape feature until the first decade of the nineteenth-century and the incorporation of the Newport Aqueduct Company. On October 21, 1802, 20 men formed a company to build a water distribution system for Newport using the water from the town spring. After receiving a charter from the state, they hired Colonel Jeremiah Olney⁷ in March 1803 as the project surveyor and moved forward using hollowed wooden logs as piping (Pierce 2015). The spring box almost certainly was constructed at the same time to enclose the spring and control water pressure and flow throughout the system.

Commercial Development and the Disappearance of the Town Spring (1850–1881)

By the mid-nineteenth century, the area surrounding the Spring, Barney, and Touro streets intersections was beginning to transition from a primarily residential to a primarily commercial area focused on carriage manufacturing and horse stabling (essentially the nineteenth-century version of a modern parking garage). Among those most prominent in the livery business was Edward Hassard, a Connecticut relation of the Newport Hazards who established a stable at the intersection of Spring and Touro Streets as early as 1854 to service the well-heeled patrons of the adjacent Park House Hotel and State House. The 1859 Dripps map illustrates the formerly separate Spring Street lots are merged under a single large building (Figure 9). In the livery business, the spring would have been a valuable asset for watering horses. The Hassards continued their successful business into the twentieth century, eventually purchasing or leasing land north of the former Town Spring lot to build another stable (Figures 10 and 11).

By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, however, the town spring was proving insufficient to service Newport's expanding population. Following an act passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly allowing towns and cities to grant individuals or corporations exclusive rights to construct public water supply systems, in 1876 Newport granted George H. Norman, a Boston contractor, the right to build a system for the city drawing from Easton's Pond and the marshlands around it. The Newport Water Works Company was incorporated in 1879, and in 1881 Norman transferred the completed waterworks to the corporation (Peirce 2021). In 1888, *The Manual of American Water-works* describes Norman's system as originating in "Easton's and Paradise ponds, pumping to reservoir from two stations... Easton's pond was formed by impounding the water of 4 ½ sq. m. drainage area by two dams of sand... The pond has an area of 160 acres" (Baker 1888:72). With the construction of the new water supply system, the town spring and well pump would have been abandoned and removed. A series of photographs taken in 1874 by the famous architect Charles F. McKim⁸ incidentally documents many of Newport's private water sources, including the town spring (Figure 12); McKim's photograph may be the last image of the spring as a functioning water source.

⁷ Evidently this was not Olney's only aqueduct project in Rhode Island. In 1803, he also began laying wooden piping from a spring on his Providence property to provide water to the residents of the city's east side. Most of those people, however, had adequate water supplies from their own wells and so didn't encourage Olney to proceed with the venture (Croes 1881:202).

⁸ Charles F. McKim (1847–1909) was one of the founding partners of the architectural firm McKim, Mead and White. Formed in 1872, the firm gained prominence for their work during the Gilded Age, including the Rhode Island State House, Newport Casino, the Isaac Bell House, and Rosecliff. In 1874, McKim compiled a portfolio of Newport houses, architectural elements, landmarks and furniture from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; his collection is available online through the Newport Historical Society (<https://collections.newporthistory.org/Gallery/96>).

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CRITERION D: ARCHEOLOGY, HISTORIC-NON ABORIGINAL

By the 1910s, Newport in general and Washington Square in particular were becoming increasingly congested. In 1912, the Newport Improvement Association approached the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. (1870–1957) about preparing a report addressing the best ways to manage the city's expansion while maintaining its historical integrity. In Olmsted's (1913) ensuing report, he praised Newport's unique charm but commented, "There is often an unfortunate lack of harmony between the new and the old" (Olmsted 1913:6). In keeping with that sentiment, his recommendation for relieving congestion in the center of the city was explicit in its exclusion of any alterations to Spring or Thames Streets, writing that

The cost of such widening would be prohibitive, but entirely aside from this the picturesque character of these streets is so telling in the quaintness of Newport that I am glad to feel that sufficient provision for north and south traffic can be provided in other ways (Olmsted 1913:32)

Olmsted's other ways included "removing the old stables and other buildings between Spring, Touro and Court House streets" and widening both Touro and Barney streets to make them into primary east-to-west thoroughfares. He also recommended banning parking in Washington Square, instead creating a lot behind the Colony House. At no point does Olmsted mention the Town Spring, either as a significant historical feature or a physical impediment, an omission that substantiates the idea it was abandoned with the installation of the central water system in 1881.

Olmsted's recommendations for the Washington Square area were not implemented and development continued apace. With the widespread availability of automobiles beginning in the 1920s, the city's livery stables transformed into service stations; by at least 1925, Horace Hassard was operating a gas station on the former Town Spring site (NHS 2016:17). An undated photograph of the site shows the lot as leveled, likely in preparation for the installation of the gas station (Figure 13). No physical trace of the spring is visible.

By 1940, the site was leased to the Colonial Beacon Oil Company, which likely replaced Hassard's original gas station with the building that stood on the property until 2019 (Figure 14). Although the spring no longer surfaced at the site (and hadn't for quite some time), the oil company chose to commemorate its location in 1941 with the installation of **The Old Town Spring Plaque (non-contributing object)**, rectangular brass plaque affixed to a large conglomerate stone. It is engraved with an image of the town spring pump and water trough backed by the Old Colony House and reads

THE OLD TOWN
SPRING

AROUND WHICH NEWPORT
WAS FOUNDED AND SOME OF
THE EARLIEST HOUSES OF THE
TOWN WERE BUILT AND FOR
WHICH THE STREET WAS NAMED

ERECTED BY
COLONIAL BEACON OIL COMPANY

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The plaque originally was installed at the north end of the site in a small, landscaped island at the southeast corner of the former gas station. It has since been removed and is lying in the middle of the site awaiting reinstallation⁹.

Historic preservation has long been a priority in Newport. As early as the 1840s, George Champlin Mason, writer and editor of the Newport Mercury, fought to save Trinity Church and went on to found the NHS. The NHS preserved the Seventh Day Baptist Meeting House in 1884 and later acquired and restored the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House and the Great Friends Meeting House. In 1945, The Preservation Society of Newport County was formed with its “principal purpose... to save one of the greatest historical possessions of the Country, the old houses of Newport” (Collins 2006:21). Doris Duke, eccentric billionaire tobacco heiress, philanthropist, and socialite, founded the Newport Restoration Foundation (NRF) in 1968 and purchased and restored more than 83 historic houses throughout the city, one of the largest preservation efforts undertaken in modern times (Jeffries 2008:67–75; NHS 2021b).

During the same period local preservation organizations were undertaking their work, Antoinette Downing and Vincent J. Scully, Jr. published their landmark 1952 book *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640–1915*. In the more than 500-page work, the authors discuss the socio-economic, political, and architectural history of the city by period, illustrated with beautiful black-and-white photographs, historical maps and plans, and architectural drawings. They also include an appendix entitled *Spot Restoration Program for Historic Newport* (Downing and Scully 1967:458–468) in which they provide restoration recommendations for 13 resource-rich areas in Newport. In that program, they make no recommendation for work at or around the Touro and Spring Streets intersection. This omission is undoubtedly the result of the area’s intensive commercial development. It is curious, however, that its importance with regard to the Town Spring is not referenced more explicitly, especially as it pertains to the locations of the city’s oldest surviving houses. In fact, Downing and Scully mention the spring only twice: first, in reference to Henry Bull’s (1830) map of Newport in 1641 and the naming of Spring Street

Peleg Sanford’s orchard and three houses were drawn in – Nicholas Easton’s on what is now Farewell Street, William Coddington’s on the north side of the river near the cove, and Henry Bull’s hard by the spring which gave Spring Street its name (as quoted in Downing and Scully 1967:17–18);

and second in discussing it as just one several settlement centers that formed in Newport just after its founding including

Houses clustered around the spring back of the Colony House and followed the shore southward on Thames Street (Downing and Scully 1967:17–18).

Downing and Scully’s cursory mention of the spring is understandable in a book dedicated to the city’s extant architecture. The spring’s practical absence in such an important publication, however, underscores its slow fade from public consciousness, including that of historic preservation organizations, which would not be halted until the late-twentieth century.

⁹ The non-contributing status of the plaque is based on Criteria Consideration F, which states that “A commemorative marker erected to memorialize an event in the community’s history would not qualify simply for its association with the event it memorialized.” The How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation National Register Bulletin further elaborates that properties that are primarily commemorative in nature are not eligible unless “design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own historical significance.”

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Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Newport Naval College (established immediately after the Civil War) and the Naval Education Training Center and North Atlantic Destroyer Squadron grew to dominate the city's economy and, to some extent, define its culture as distinct from the Gilded Age past. These disparate historical trajectories, that of the military versus the moneyed elite, resulted in a mixed urban landscape characterized by an unparalleled collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings and streetways infilled with twentieth-century bars, restaurants, shops, apartments, navy supply stores, gas stations, and parking lots.

By the beginning of the 1980s, several citizens groups coalesced around the idea of developing a comprehensive land use plan with a specific emphasis on historic preservation. Washington Square Roots (WSR) focused on the preservation of its namesake, and in 2012 organized a charrette to publicly brainstorm ideas to improve the square. One of the ideas presented the creation of a park at the end of Spring Street to extend Washington Square to the east, create a more expansive public space, and acknowledge the central role of the Town Spring in the city's founding.

When Neil Coffey, the owner of the Spring Street gas station at that time, indicated his intent to sell the property, proposals were advanced once again to purchase the lot and develop it as a public space. The Church Community Housing Corporation in collaboration with the Newport Spring Leadership Committee purchased the site in 2015 and commissioned a series of environmental, historical, and urban planning studies to explore redevelopment options (NHS 2016:22; Newport Historic Spring 2021). One of those studies, conducted in November 2018, was the archaeological documentation of the subterranean spring box using a 3-D imaging LIDAR scanner. The gas station was demolished in September 2019.

Archaeological Investigations of the Town Spring

As part of an overall site development proposal, Newport Environmental completed a Phase I and Phase II environmental study of the former gas station location. Remediation involved the removal of two 10,000-gallon gas tanks, hydraulic lifts, and contaminated surface materials. While removing the gas tanks, the water-filled Newport Town Spring Box was discovered (Figure 16).

A spring box is a structure engineered to capture and store water from a natural spring and protect that water from contamination, typically surface water runoff. It also allows any naturally-occurring sediments to settle to the bottom of the structure as a sort of passive filtration system. The basic elements of the structure consist of a reasonably watertight, belowground collection chamber; a filtered lead-in pipe that routes the spring water into the chamber; an overflow pipe at the top of the chamber to release excess water; a drainpipe at the bottom of the chamber to allow for periodic cleaning; and a screen covered distribution pipe (Hart 2003). Some spring boxes, including the Newport Town Spring, were built with risers to allow controlled access to the collection chamber (Figure 17) and a small-diameter pipe running straight up the side chamber to feed a surface pump.

Dr. Jon Marcoux, archaeologist and former head of Salve Regina University's Noreen Stonor Drexel Cultural and Historic Preservation Program, and Nick DePace, a landscape architect from the Rhode Island School of Design, became involved with the project to ensure the professional documentation of the spring box. DePace, a certified urban speleologist¹⁰, marshalled his colleagues from Roma

¹⁰ Speleology is the scientific study of caves and other karst features including their structure, physical properties, history, life forms, and the processes by which they form and change over time. Speleologists also work with

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Sotterranea¹¹ (Rome Underground) to document the spring box using a Leica BLK360 3-D imaging scanner, an instrument that creates a three-dimensional digital image of an object using LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging). LiDAR is a surveying method to measure the distance to a target by illuminating it with pulsed laser light and then measuring the return times of the reflected pulses with a sensor. Knowing the laser wavelength and other environmental parameters, the pulse return time is used to calculate the target distance. By scanning an object from a single perspective and recording the distance measurements at many points, a “data cloud,” or two-dimensional representation of the scanned object, is formed. The instrument is then moved to collect the same data from two or more additional perspectives, with all of the data combined in the end to create a highly-detailed, highly-accurate, three-dimensional picture of the target object (Newport Environmental 2018: Images 5A, B, and C).

The images produced from inside the spring box show a narrow, four-sided, stacked fieldstone chamber (Figure 18). The image generated looking south shows the “beehive” stonework supporting the massive stone-slab ceiling beams; the stone lintel that formerly supported the opening for the lead-in structure, and a wood pipe with a wood plug projecting from the base of the west wall (Figures 19 and 20).

The image generated looking north shows a lead pipe extending down the spring box’s west wall, the placement of the stone ceiling beams to form the riser opening, and an iron distribution pipe and bronze valve and copper screen running east-to-west across the spring box floor (Figures 21 and 22). The wood pipe also is clearly visible and appears to be spanned by a stone lintel, likely to prevent it from being crushed by the weight of the stacked stone above. The image also shows the north wall as mostly collapsed. The collapse likely occurred during the 1994 removal of an adjacent underground storage tank when the weight and pressure of the soil used to fill the hole pushed the north wall of the chamber into itself. The wall’s collapse has created a great deal of structural instability at the north end of the spring box (Newport Environmental 2018: Images 14A and B).

In addition to surveying the structure, sediment from the bottom of the spring box and surrounding fill materials were sampled and screened by students from Salve Regina University’s Department of Cultural and Historic Preservation. The collected assemblage consisted of several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ceramic sherds, pieces of a can, a riveted metal strap, a burnt chicken bone, and other burnt bone and slag chunks (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 4).

As discussed above, springs were the primary focus for at least two major seventeenth-century New England settlements and influenced their subsequent physical developments. However, early infrastructural features such as spring boxes, while critical when in use, rarely survive the depredations of urban development and as such are all but ignored in discussions of municipal water management. Moreover, review of the archaeological literature for the Northeast provided no comparable examples in urban contexts, a phenomenon attributable to the fact that spring boxes were either lost altogether during urban development (e.g., Boston) or concealed by later twentieth-century constructions (e.g., Providence). As such, the Newport Town Spring is a rare and important example of the infrastructure used to capture and distribute the springs output during its period of use and is significant for its potential to provide important information about the construction and modification of spring boxes in urban contexts not otherwise available in the written record.

archaeologists in studying underground ruins, tunnels, sewers, and aqueducts, such as the various inlets and outlets of the Cloaca Maxima in Rome

¹¹ Roma Sotterranea is a non-profit organization founded in 2000 that combines the methods of speleology and archaeology to document and study Rome’s belowground structural ruins.

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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 # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository: Newport Historical Society, Newport, RI

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

2. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.10

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 41.490058

Longitude: 71.312783

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2. Latitude: 41.473356 Longitude: 71.312572

3. Latitude: 41.489789 Longitude: 71.312675

4. Latitude: 41.489797 Longitude: 71.312794

5. Latitude: 41.489858 Longitude: 71.312817

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Newport Town Spring Site is an asymmetrical polygon of land bounded by Spring Street to the east, Touro Street to the south, Court House Street to the west, and private property to the north.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary of the Newport Town Spring Site conforms to the boundary of Newport Assessor's Parcel 17-230. Historical maps dating as far back as 1712 indicate the street and parcel configurations have remained largely unchanged, and the selected boundary captures the contributing resource as generally cited on those maps.

3. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kristen Heitert (senior archaeologist)
organization: The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc.
street & number: 26 Main Street
city or town: Pawtucket state: RI zip code: 02861
e-mail kheitert@palinc.com

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telephone: 401-728-8780

date: March 31, 2021

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Newport Town Spring Site

City or Vicinity: Newport

County: Newport

State: Rhode Island

Photographer: K. Heitert

Date Photographed: March 10, 2021

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

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1 of 6. Newport Town Spring Site, view northeast.



2 of 6. Newport Town Spring Site, view west.

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3 of 6. Newport Town Spring Site, view east; the Newport Town Spring Box is beneath the white shelter.



4 of 6. Old Town Spring Plaque, view west.

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5 of 6. Newport Town Spring Site, view northwest; the spring box shelter and plaque are both visible.



6 of 6. One Court House Square, view northeast.

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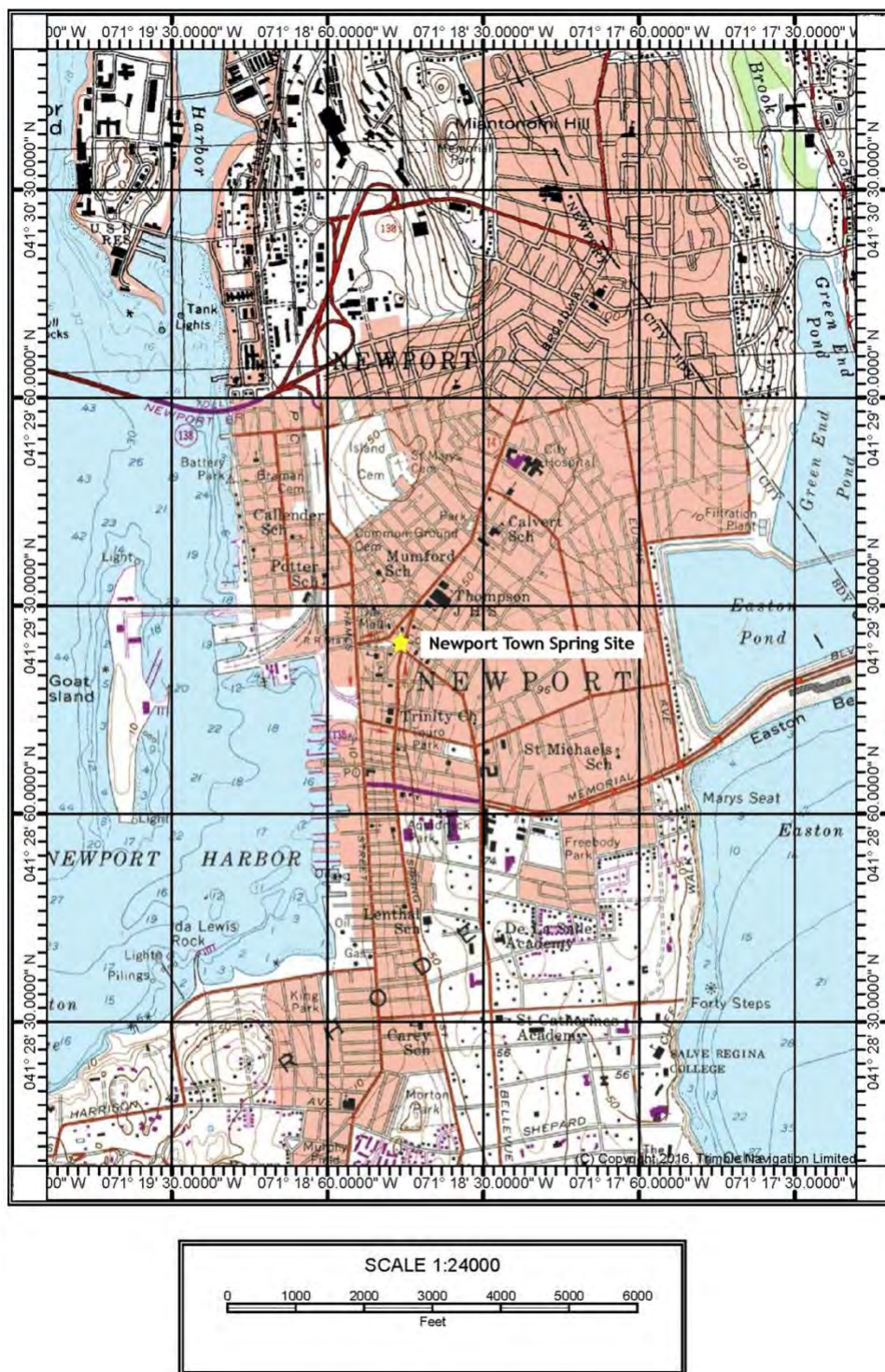


Figure 1. Location of the Newport Town Spring Site on the Newport, RI USGS topographic quadrangle, 7.5-minute series.

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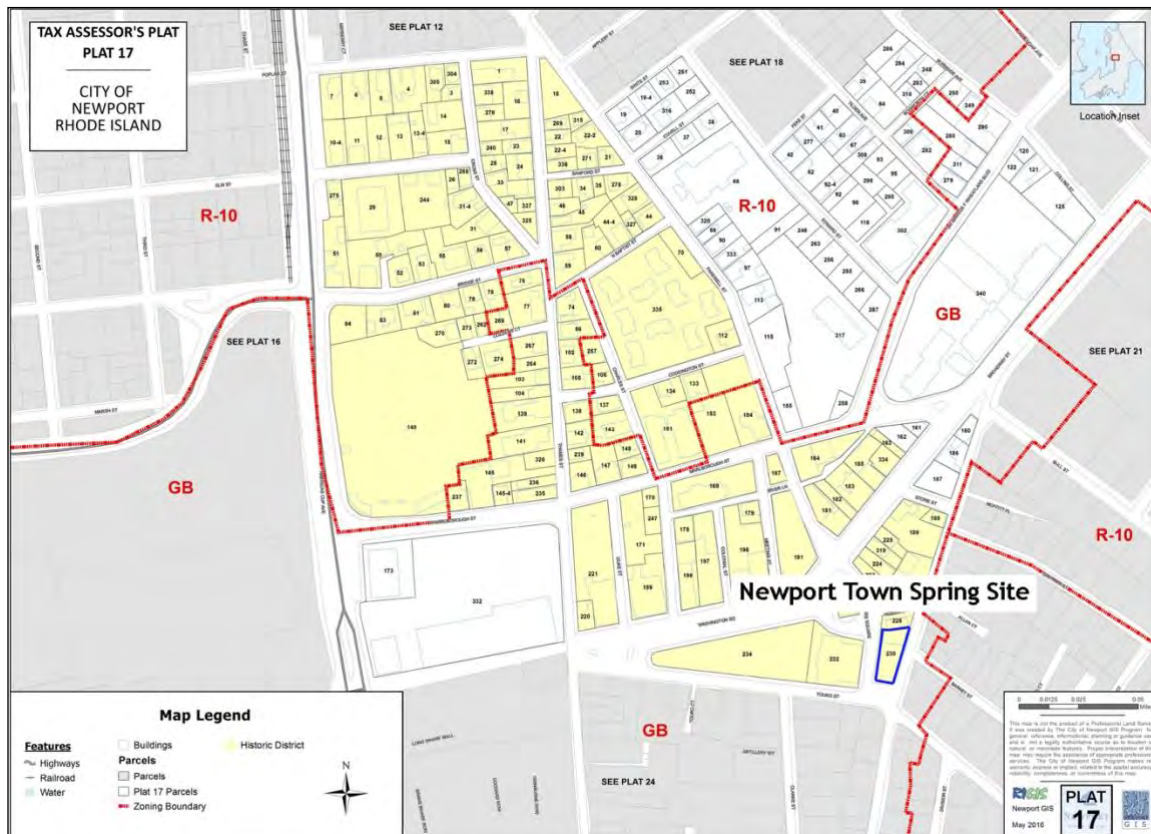


Figure 2. Newport Town Spring Site on city assessor's map (17-230).

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Figure 3. Newport Town Spring Site resource map and photo key.

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Figure 4. Mumford (1712) map showing the Newport Town Spring.

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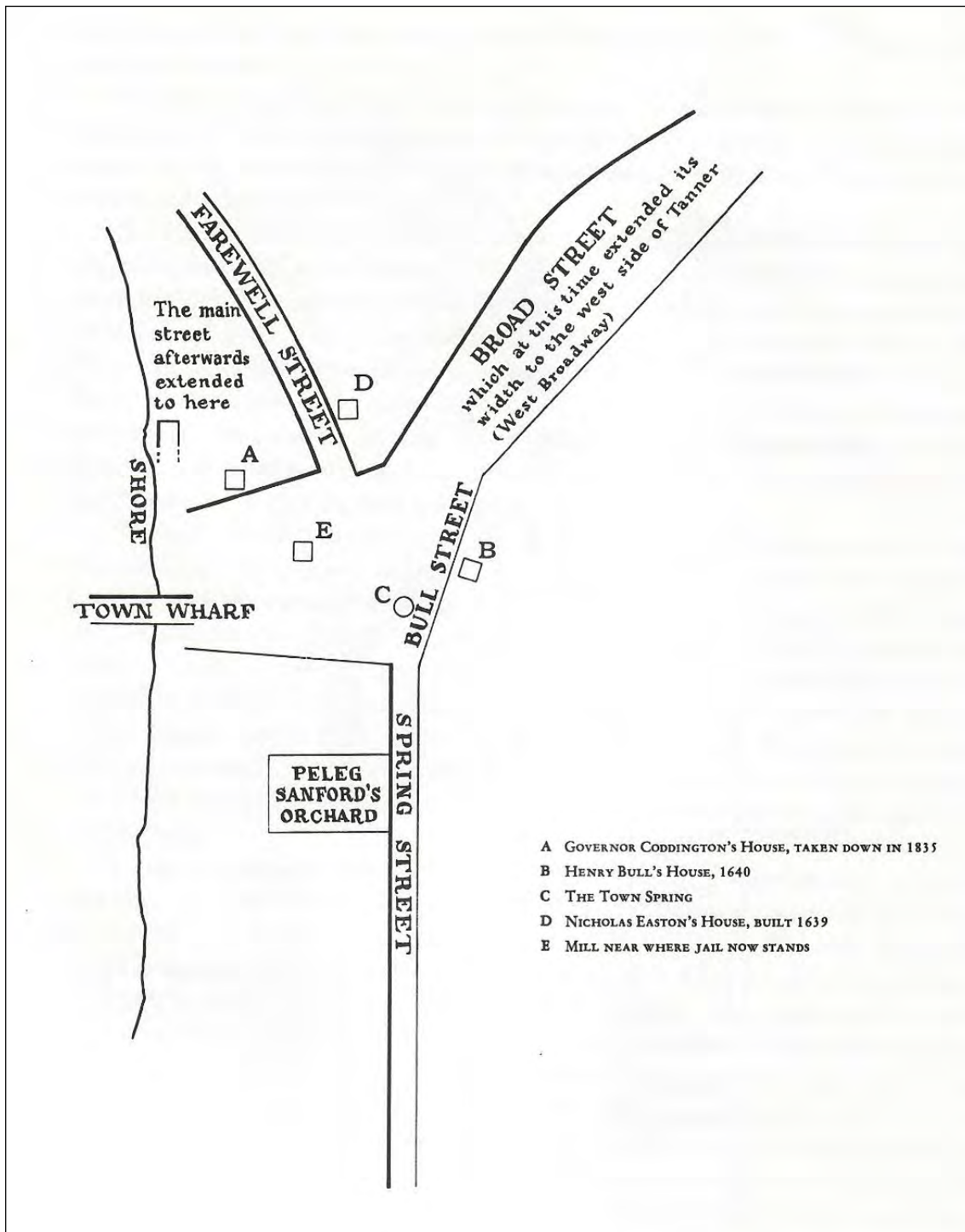


Figure 5. Downing and Scully's (1951:20) redrawn 1712 Mumford map showing the Newport Town Spring.

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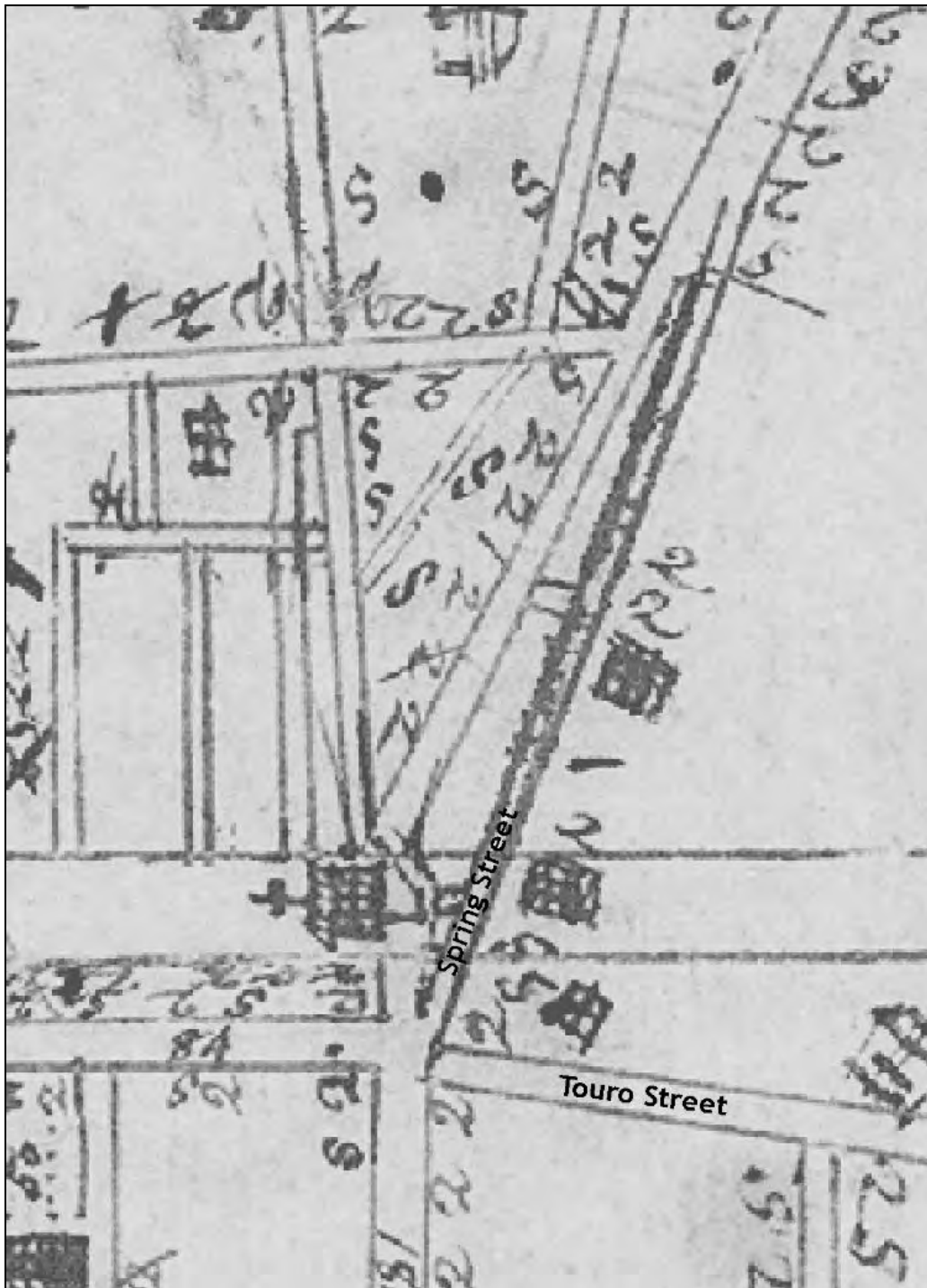


Figure 6. Detail of Stiles (1758) map of Newport showing the intersection of Touro and Spring streets; the town spring is not mapped or mentioned in the accompanying key.

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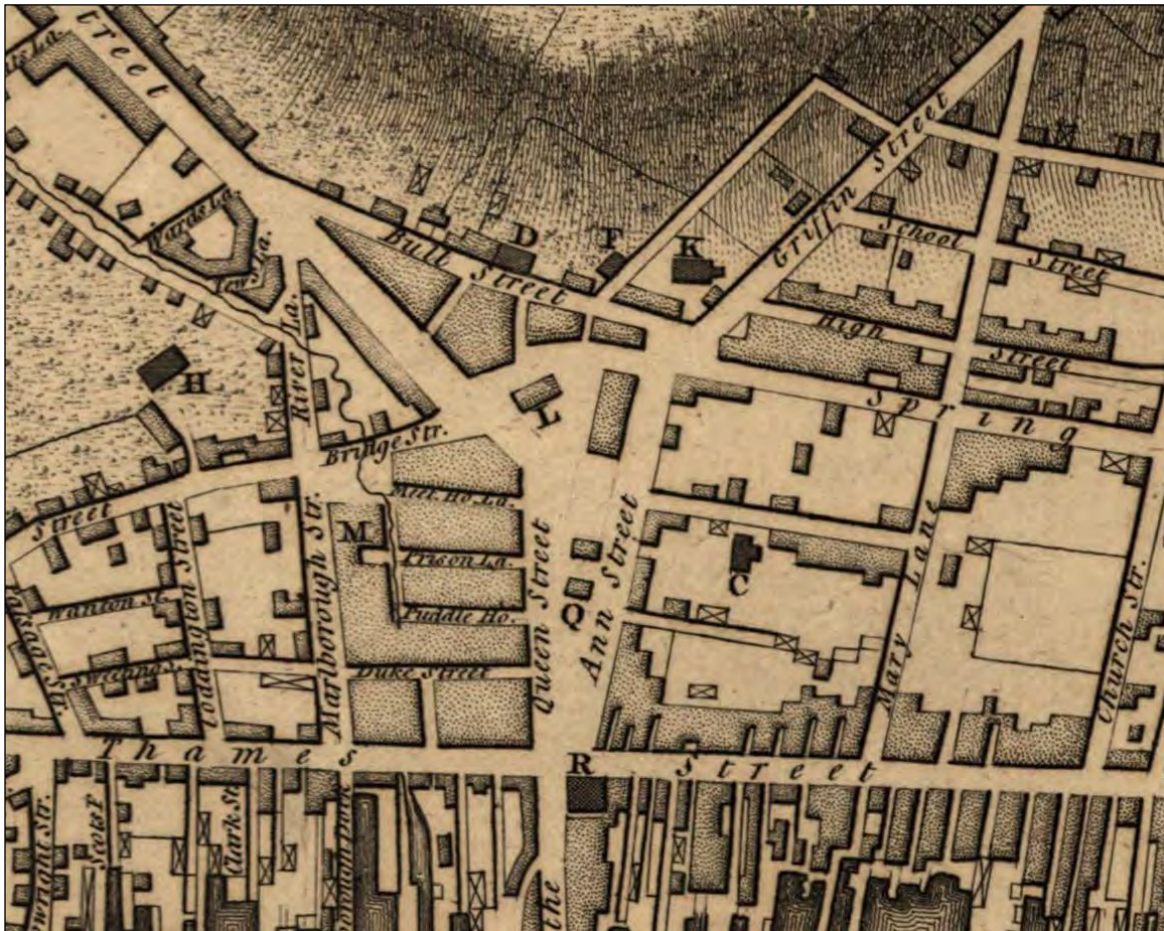


Figure 7. Detail of the Blascowitz (1777) map showing the intersection of Griffin (Touro) and Spring streets. The town spring is not mapped or noted.

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Figure 8. Detail of Des Barres (1781) map of Newport identifying “Spring Lane” (18).

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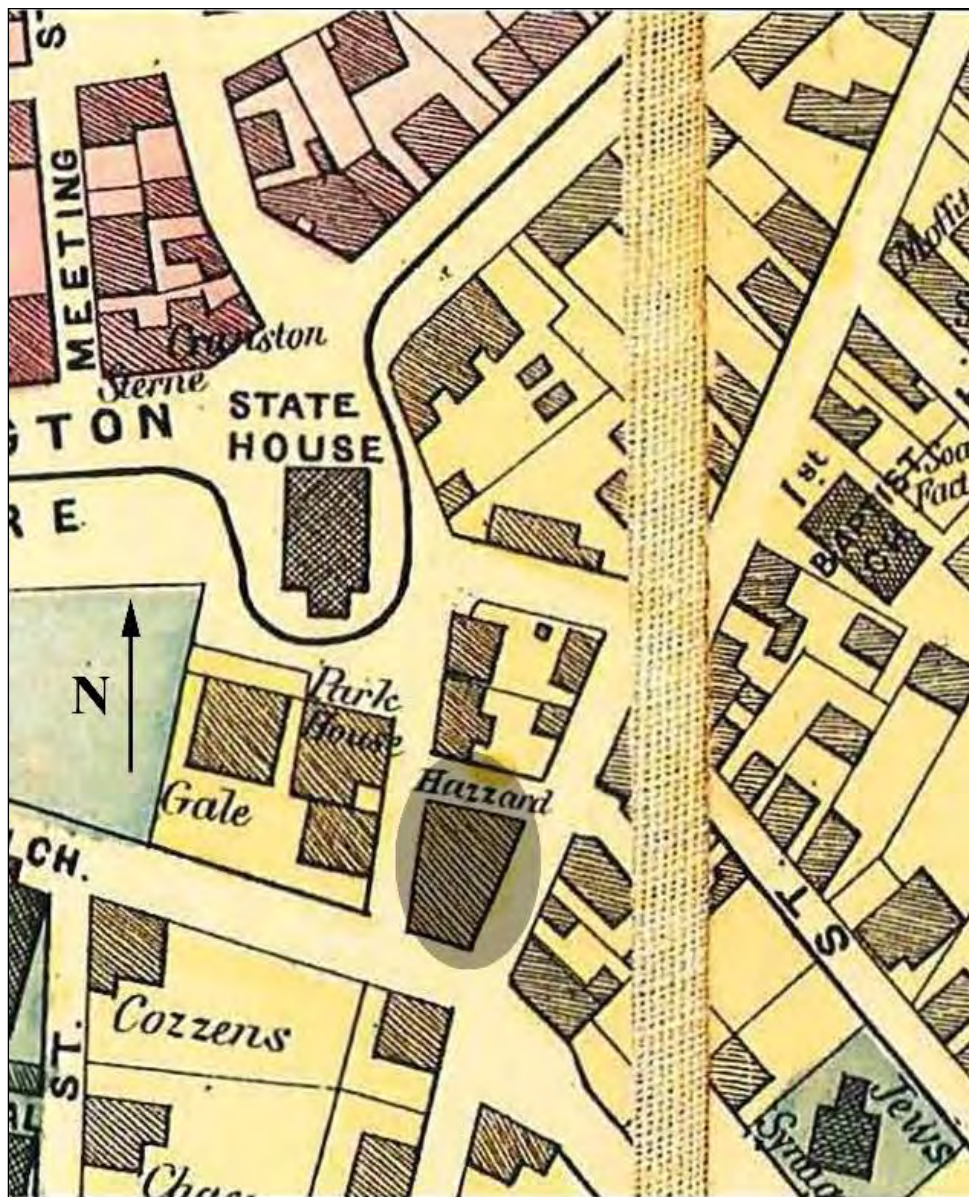


Figure 9. Dripps (1859) map.

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Figure 10. Hopkins (1883) map.

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Figure 11. LJ Richards & Co. (1907) map.

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Figure 12. Charles McKim's 1874 photograph of the Newport Town Spring.

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Figure 13. Undated photo of demolition work at the spring lot.



Figure 14. c. 1950 photograph of the Esso gas station, one of several different stations that occupied the building and lot until 2015 (courtesy of the Newport Historical Society).

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Figure 15. 1941 photograph of the dedication of the The Old Town Spring Plaque (courtesy of the Newport Historical Society).

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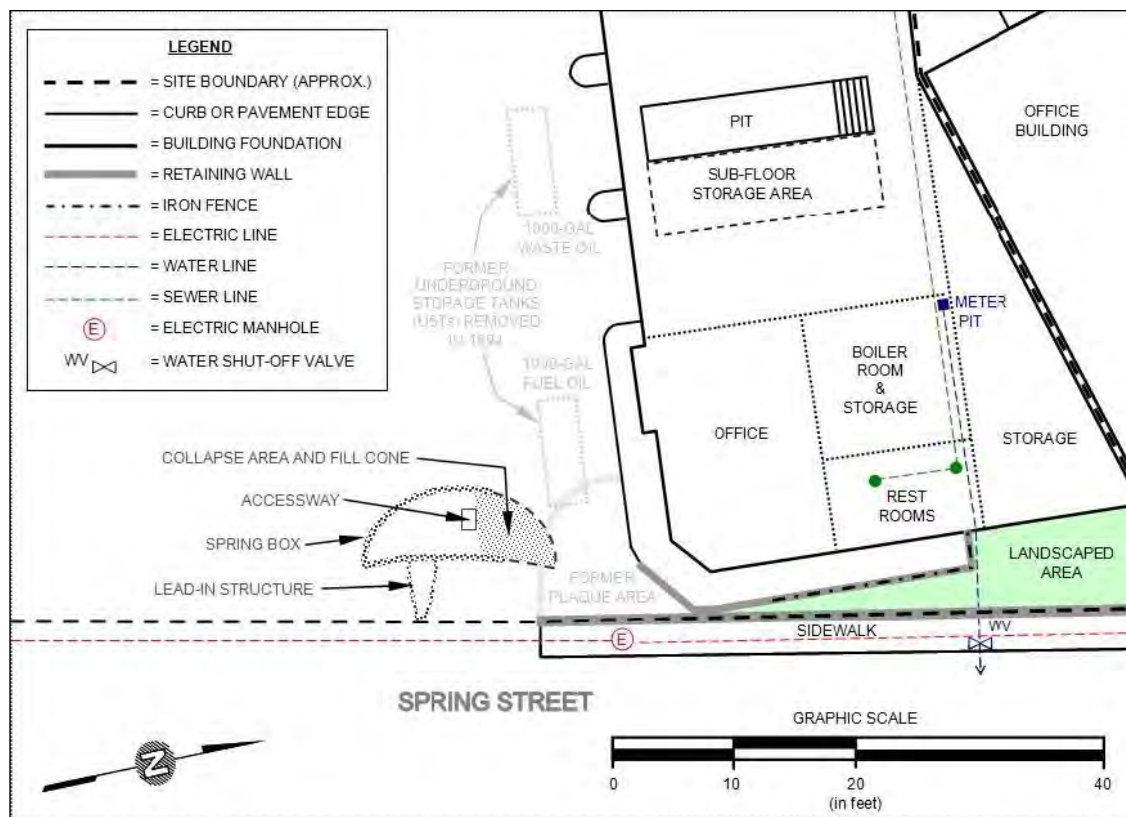


Figure 16. Site Plan showing the spatial relationship between the archaeologically identified Newport Town Spring Box and the former gas station building (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 17).

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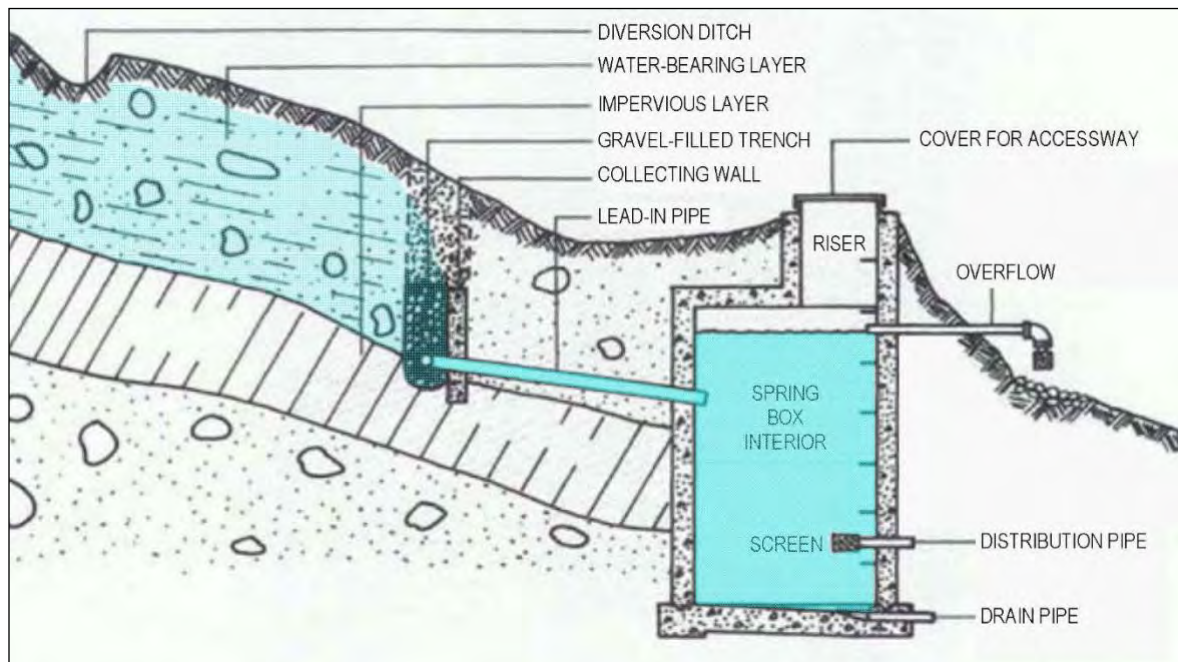


Figure 17. Spring box schematic (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 9).

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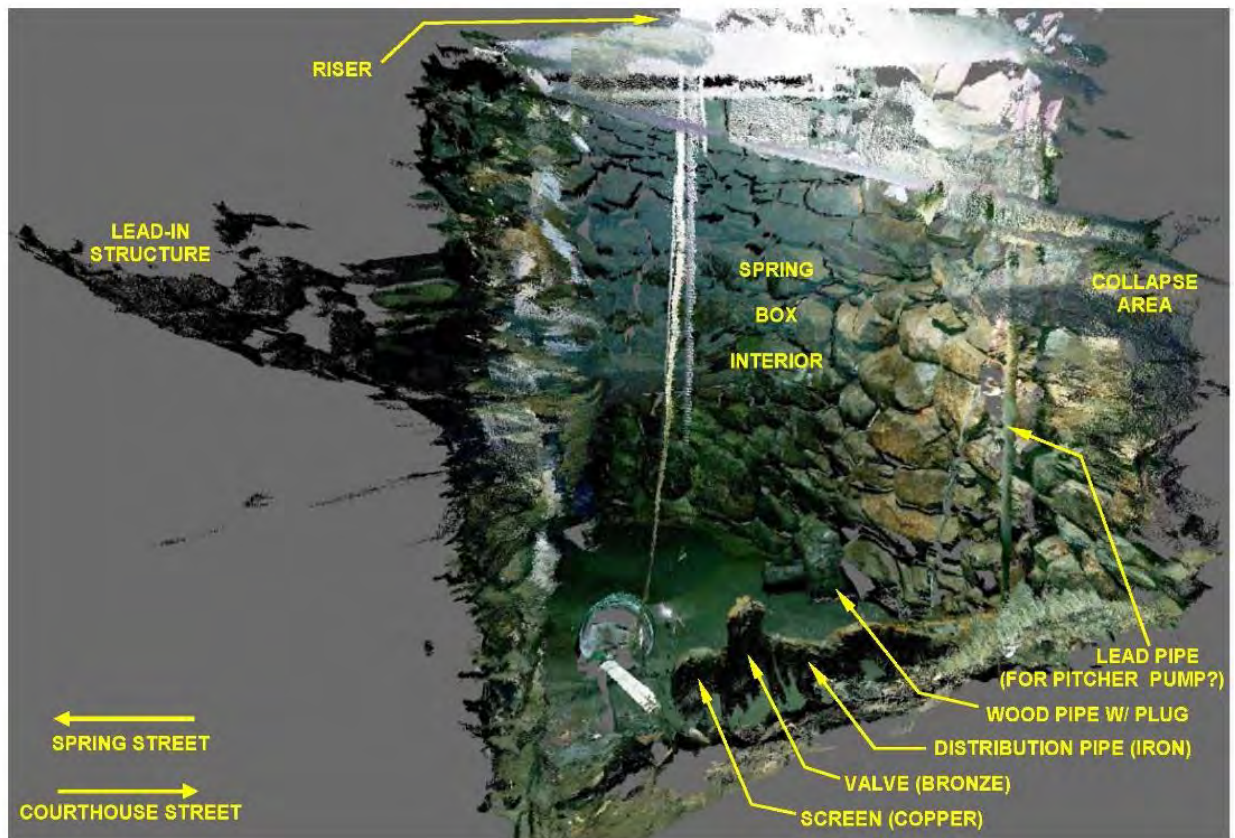


Figure 18. Cut-away view of the spring box (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 10).

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Figure 19. Spring box interior, view south, looking up (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 11a).

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Figure 20. Spring box interior, view south, looking down (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 11b).

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Figure 21. Spring box interior, view north, looking up (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 12a).

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Figure 22. Spring box interior, view north, looking down (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 12b).

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 100 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.