

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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Newport Historic District (Additional Documentation)

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## 2. Location

Street & number: Roughly bounded by Van Zandt Avenue, Newport Harbor, Thames Street, Pope Street, William Street, Bellevue Avenue, Bull Street, Broadway, and Kingston Street

City or town: Newport State: RI County: Newport

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

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

☒ national ☐ statewide ☐ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☒ D

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title :

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency/bureau  
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#### 4. 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): \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

- *Ownership of Property and Category of Property* are not changing.
- *Number of Resources within Property*: The property that is the subject of this Additional Documentation – the Newport Town Spring site – is located within the existing boundary of the Newport Historic District. A gas station, identified as noncontributing in the Historic District nomination, stood on the property until 2019. The property contains the Newport Town Spring Box and a memorial plaque, neither of which are enumerated in the existing nomination. This Additional Documentation, therefore, removes one noncontributing building (the gas station) from the resource count and adds one contributing structure (the spring box) and one noncontributing object (the memorial plaque).

#### 6. Function or Use

- One *Historic Function* is being added: INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: waterworks
- One *Current Function* is being added: VACANT/NOT IN USE

#### 7. Description

- *Narrative Description* is being amended; see continuation sheets.

#### 8. Statement of Significance

- *Areas of Significance*: The existing nomination identifies several areas of significance, all of which still apply. Another area of significance is being added (Archaeology: Historic – Non-Aboriginal); see continuation sheets.
- *Period of Significance*, defined as 1636-1944, is not changing.
- *Narrative Statement of Significance* is being amended; see continuation sheets.

#### 9. Major Bibliographic References

- *Bibliography* is being amended; see continuation sheets.

#### 10. Geographical Data

- The boundaries of the district are not changing.

#### 11. Form Prepared By

- See continuation sheets.

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- *Maps*: The boundaries of the district are not changing, and this Additional Documentation does not include a USGS Map or equivalent.
- *Sketch Map and Photographs*: Photographs of the property that is the subject of this Additional Documentation – the Newport Town Spring site – are attached.
- *Photo Log*: See continuation sheets.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Newport Historic District was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1968, and thus automatically listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Additional Documentation was prepared in 1995 in order to bring the nomination up to contemporary standards; this was done using the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. In 2008, the boundary of the Newport Historic District – as defined by both the National Historic Landmark and National Register of Historic Places programs – was expanded to include the Common Burying Ground and the original period of significance was adjusted slightly to 1636-1944.

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 is within the existing boundary of the Newport Historic District, as defined by both the National Historic Landmark and National Register of Historic Places programs. This Additional Documentation will become part of the National Register of Historic Places record for the Newport Historic District but not, at this time, part of the National Historic Landmark record.

## SECTION 7: NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Newport Town Spring Site (Parcel 17-230) is located in the west-central section of Newport at the center of Washington Square. It is bounded by Touro Street to the south, Spring Street to the east, Court House Street to the west, and by a ca. 1931 brick building to the north (Figures 1 and 2). The architectural landscape surrounding the site is a mix of late-17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>-century residential, commercial, municipal, and religious buildings, including several that would have been standing when the Town Spring was in active use, such as the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (1697); the Colony House, one of the state's five original state houses (1739-41); and Touro Synagogue (1763). There is also some 20<sup>th</sup> century infill nearby, such as the brick commercial building at 42 Spring Street (post-1921); the 2009 Loeb Visitor Center at 56 Touro Street; and the two-story brick building that abuts the site on the north, built ca. 1931 for the Short Line Bus Company and now used as a law office. The .14-acre site is at the comparatively level midpoint of an east-to-west downslope to Newport Harbor and is where a natural spring originally broke through to the ground surface. The spring was later enclosed in a stone Spring Box and, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, incorporated into a public water supply system. In 2017, after decades of being concealed underground, the Spring Box was discovered during a remediation project undertaken as part of an ongoing effort to create a park at the site.

## INVENTORY

The **Newport Town Spring Box** is located belowground at the northeast corner of the Newport Town Spring site, just southeast and outside of the footprint of a gas station that occupied the site until it was demolished in 2019. It consists of a narrow, crescent-plan, 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 wall.<sup>1</sup> 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. Research has not determined an exact

<sup>1</sup> 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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construction date for the spring box; it may have been built as part of a ca. 1802 water distribution system or, being located in an area that was densely developed by the mid-eighteenth century, may have been constructed earlier and then incorporated into that system.

The **Old Town Spring Plaque (1941; non-contributing)** is a rectangular brass plaque affixed to a large conglomerate stone. The plaque 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

The plaque originally was installed at the north end of the site in a small, landscaped island at the southeast corner of the gas station (not extant). It has since been removed and is stored on-site, awaiting reinstallation. The plaque is primarily commemorative in nature and “design, age, tradition, or symbolic value” has not “invested it with its own historical significance.” It is therefore non-contributing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> National Park Service, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (1995), page 2.

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**SECTION 8: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Newport Historic District, as previously amended and expanded, meets several National Register areas of significance, all of which still apply. The Newport Town Spring site meets one already identified area of significance (Exploration/Settlement), as well as another, not previously identified (Archaeology: Historic – Non-Aboriginal). The Newport Historic District's period of significance remains 1636-1944.

**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 under Criterion A in the area of Exploration/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 in the area of Archeology: Historic – Non-Aboriginal for the belowground survival of its stone spring box. Research has not determined an exact construction date for the spring box; it may have been built as part of a ca. 1802 water distribution system or, being located in an area that was densely developed by the mid-eighteenth century, may have been constructed earlier and then incorporated into that system. In either case, the spring box is a rare example of an early infrastructural feature that, 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. 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 before the spring was closed with the completion of centralized waterworks in 1881. The site retains integrity of location, setting, materials, and association and, with the stacked stone spring box, clearly conveys its functional intent and central importance to Newport's original English settlement and urban development.

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

**Criterion A – Exploration/Settlement**

***Newport's Settlement and the Establishment of the Town Spring (1639–1700)***

In 1630, 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 peninsula<sup>1</sup> to create the Massachusetts "Bay Colony." The vast harbor and gentle climate encouraged a thriving agricultural and maritime

<sup>1</sup> 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, Blackstone 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 other colonists in the following decades, including Anne Hutchinson.

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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, the Antinomian<sup>2</sup> Anne Hutchinson, who had been banished from Winthrop's "city upon a hill," led a group roughly 60 miles south to the north end of Aquidneck Island in Narragansett Bay and established a settlement called Pocasset (now Portsmouth, Rhode Island). Nineteenth-century historians ascribed religious freedom as the primary factor behind the exodus (Bayles 1888; Peterson 1853), but later historians argue that economic freedom was an equally compelling motivation (Bridenbaugh 1971:21; Stensrud 2006:17). Hutchinson's group contained several of Boston's wealthiest individuals such as William Brenton, John Coggeshall, and William Coddington, a prosperous merchant and magistrate (Stensrud 2006:5, 15). These men were eager to expand their wealth by selling products to the growing English colonist population, but this would require the acquisition of large tracts of land – a difficult task in the Bay Colony (Stensrud 2006:8).

In March 1638, Coddington negotiated the purchase of settlement rights to "the great Island of Aquedneck" from the Narragansetts, securing a place for Hutchinson's group and setting the stage for Newport's founding the following year. In April 1639, Coddington, Coggeshall, Brenton, and other like-minded families left Pocasset for the island's southern tip, which 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." In May, the new settlement was named Newport (Stensrud 2006:6). William Brenton and Nicholas Easton soon built the first of what grew to be hundreds of wharves bristling into the cove like so many jagged teeth (Downing and Scully 1982:16) – evidence of the role the harbor played in enticing the group southward.

Because "a spring of good water was the first requisite of a place of settlement" (Bicknell 1920:146), the presence of Newport Spring undoubtedly also influenced the choice of location. A good spring certainly was a consideration for Roger Williams'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). Indeed, at their first meeting in the new settlement, Newport's founders declared that "the Towne shall be built upon both sides of the spring & by the sea-side Southward" (as quoted in Stensrud 2006:6). Access to freshwater being a prerequisite for human settlement at all times and in all places, Native Americans, who had been living in the area for thousands of years, surely also availed themselves of the spring.

The agreement that Coddington negotiated with the Narragansett sachems secured consent for English colonists to fan out across Aquidneck Island while registering an agenda to evict the island's resident Native Americans. For example, the language in the March 1638 conveyance states, "That by givinge by Miantunnomus' 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

<sup>2</sup> 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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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 1888:27). 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.

The longstanding habitation of the area by Native Americans is supported by archaeological evidence. 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 Farewell 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 (Yentsch et al. 1979).<sup>3</sup> 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 debitage<sup>4</sup> 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.

However, traditional Native American access to the land and resources of Aquidneck Island diminished quickly as an expanding English colonial population imposed its legal, economic, and cultural standards, 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 17<sup>th</sup>-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, 1639. The spring site itself may have originally been owned by John Coggeshall, a founder of Newport; the first known recorded owner is his son, Joshua Coggeshall (NHS 2016:5, 14-15).

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 a landmark in colonial records. Its value to the town is evident, however, in the naming of Spring 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, which, after the town of Middletown was set off from Newport in 1743, marked Newport’s northernmost border.

***Prosperity, Expansion, and War (1700–1780)***

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, most of Newport’s major roads had either been laid out or improved (Bridenbaugh 1971) and the town had become increasingly compact. More than 400 houses, most of which served both

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Debitage is the debris generated during chipped stone tool manufacture and is most commonly subdivided into flakes and shatter.



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residential and commercial purposes for shopkeepers, shipwrights, housewrights, blacksmiths, masons, cordwainers, and mechanics, were shoe-horned into a long, narrow strip of land along the eastern shore of the harbor and stretching a short distance to the northeast, encompassing the area around the spring (Downing and Scully 1982:17-18). 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 2016:28). This unique call-out suggests that even as Newport began to overspill its original settlement nodes, the spring remained an important focus of everyday life and a geographic landmark.

In 1758, Ezra Stiles (1727-1795), a Congregational minister, president of Yale College from 1778-1795, and one of the founders of Brown University, drew a map of Newport illustrating the increasing density 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. Streets are unlabeled, 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. 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. Given the spring’s prominence on Mumford’s (1712) map, Stiles’ omission seems surprising and suggests that by the mid-eighteenth century the owners of the spring lot, the Marchant family<sup>5</sup>, had enclosed the well so that it was no longer such a conspicuous landscape feature (NHS 2016:28). Whether the spring box had been built by this time is unknown.

During the Revolutionary War – from December 1776 to October 1779 – Newport was occupied by the British. 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 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 fewer than 4,000 people with more than 300 homes having been 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 1982:92). Most of the local merchants

<sup>5</sup> 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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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 an explicit reference to the spring's location in its identification of Spring Lane (labeled No. 18 and distinct from Spring Street) (Figure 8). In 1783, Henry Marchant sold his Spring Street property to Peleg Barker Esq. (1716–1794), a lawyer, merchant, and politician; by that time, the property had been divided into two parcels on either side of Spring Lane, with the spring being located on the southern lot.

Newport's economy began to rebound at the turn of the nineteenth century with a renewed focus on shipping and shipbuilding. That nascent recovery was halted, however, by the War of 1812 and the Great Gale of 1815, which caused widespread destruction (Stensrud 2006:265). 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, Massachusetts and Bristol and Warren, Rhode Island (Stensrud 2006:254). With the loss of the maritime economy, Newport stagnated politically and structurally and Providence emerged as the state's new center of prosperity.

During this period, the primary land use surrounding the spring remained residential. On October 21, 1802, twenty men formed the Newport Aqueduct Company in order to build a water distribution system using the water from the town spring. Early in 1803, they hired Colonel Jeremiah Olney<sup>6</sup> as the project surveyor and solicited bids for the supply of 2,000 feet of pitch pine logs, to be hollowed out and used as piping (Pierce 2015). Records related to the construction of the aqueduct do not specifically mention the spring box; additional research may reveal that it was built as part of the project or that it pre-dates the aqueduct and was incorporated into the system. In any case, the enclosed spring would have been a critical part of the system, helping control water pressure and flow.

***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. 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 the State House. The 1859 Dripps map illustrates the formerly separate Spring Street lots merged and occupied by 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, 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

<sup>6</sup> 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).

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Newport Water Works Company was incorporated in 1879, and in 1881 Norman transferred the completed waterworks to the corporation (Peirce 2021). *The Manual of American Water-works* (1888) 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, which were commissioned by the architect Charles F. McKim<sup>7</sup>, incidentally documents many of Newport's private water sources, including the town spring (Figure 12); this photograph may be the last image of the spring as a functioning water source.

**Criterion D – Archaeology: 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 ensuing report (1913), 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 did 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 1925, possibly earlier, Horace Hassard was operating a gas station on the former Town Spring site (NHS 2016:18). An undated photograph of the site shows the lot as leveled, likely in preparation for the construction of the gas station; no physical trace of the spring is visible (Figure 13).

By 1940, the site was leased to the Colonial Beacon Oil Company, which likely replaced Hassard's gas station with the one 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)** at the north end of the site in a small, landscaped island that sat at the southeast corner of the gas station (Figure 15). The plaque has since been removed and is being stored on site, awaiting reinstallation.

<sup>7</sup> Charles F. McKim (1847–1909) was one of the founding partners of the architectural firm McKim, Mead and White. 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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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 Newport Historical Society (NHS), which in turn preserved the Seventh Day Baptist Meeting House, the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, and the Great Friends Meeting House. The Preservation Society of Newport County was formed in 1945, and the Newport Restoration Foundation in 1968 (Jeffries 2008:67–75; NHS 2021b). During the same period, Antoinette Downing and Vincent J. Scully, Jr. published their landmark book *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640–1915* (1952). In the more than 500-page work, the authors 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” – and second in discussing it as just one of several settlement centers that formed in Newport immediately 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 1982:18). 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.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Newport Naval War College (established 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. The result was 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. In 2012, Washington Square Roots (WSR) 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 2016:23; 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,

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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 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 speleologist<sup>8</sup>, marshalled his colleagues from Roma Sotterranea<sup>9</sup> 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).<sup>10</sup> The images produced from inside the spring box show a narrow, crescent-plan, 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 Cultural and Historic Preservation Program. The

<sup>8</sup> 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 archaeologists in studying underground ruins, tunnels, sewers, and aqueducts.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

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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 Box is a rare and important example of the infrastructure used to capture and distribute the spring's 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.

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date: August, 2022

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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 Historic District (Additional Documentation)
City or Vicinity:	Newport
County:	Newport
State:	Rhode Island
Name of Photographer:	Kristen Heitert
Date of Photographs:	March 10, 2021
Location of Original Digital Files:	Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, 150 Benefit Street, Providence RI 02906
Number of Photographs:	6

Photo #1 Newport Town Spring Site, view northeast.

Photo #2 Newport Town Spring Site, view west

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

Photo #4 Old Town Spring Plaque, view west.

Photo #5 Newport Town Spring Site, view north; the spring box shelter and plaque are both visible.

Photo #6 One Court House Square, view northeast.

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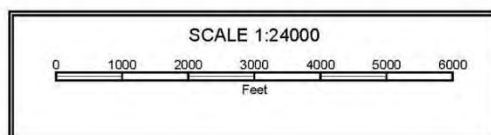
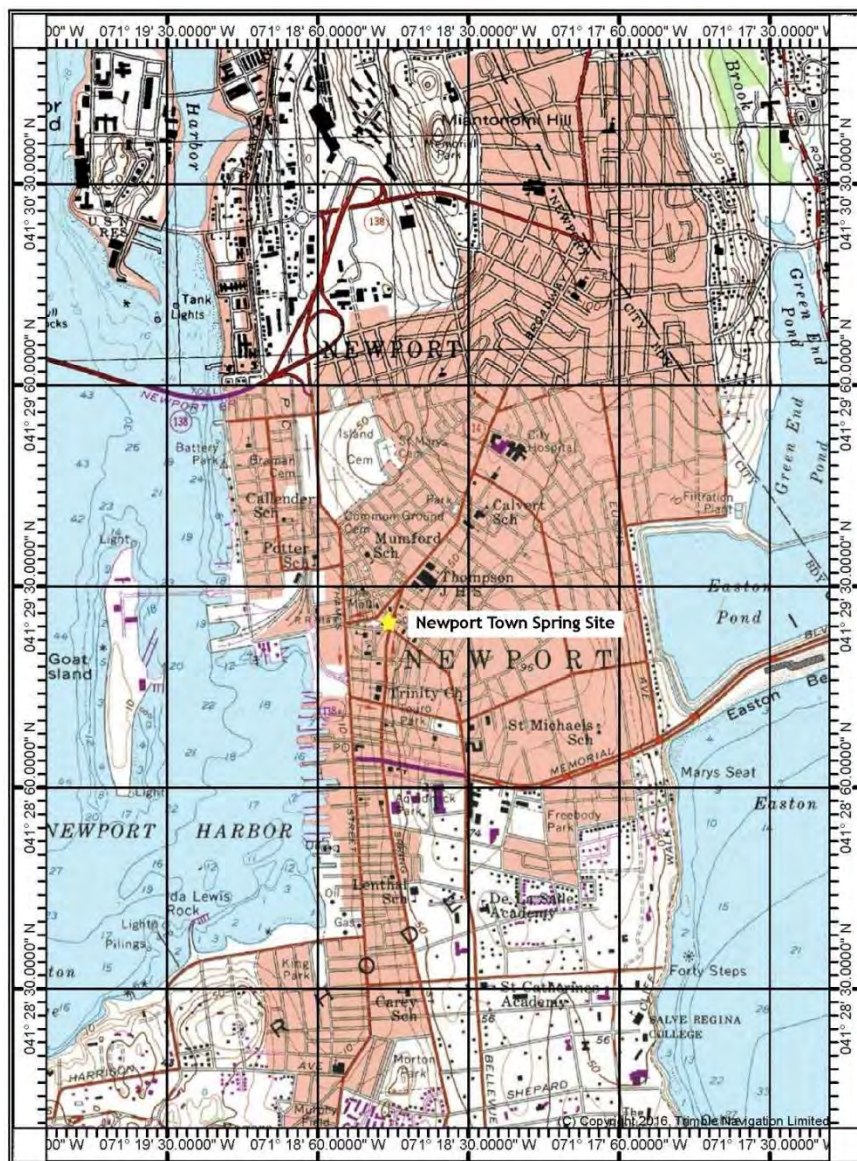


Figure 1. Location of the Newport Town Spring Site on the Newport, RI USGS topographic quadrangle, 7.5-minute series.

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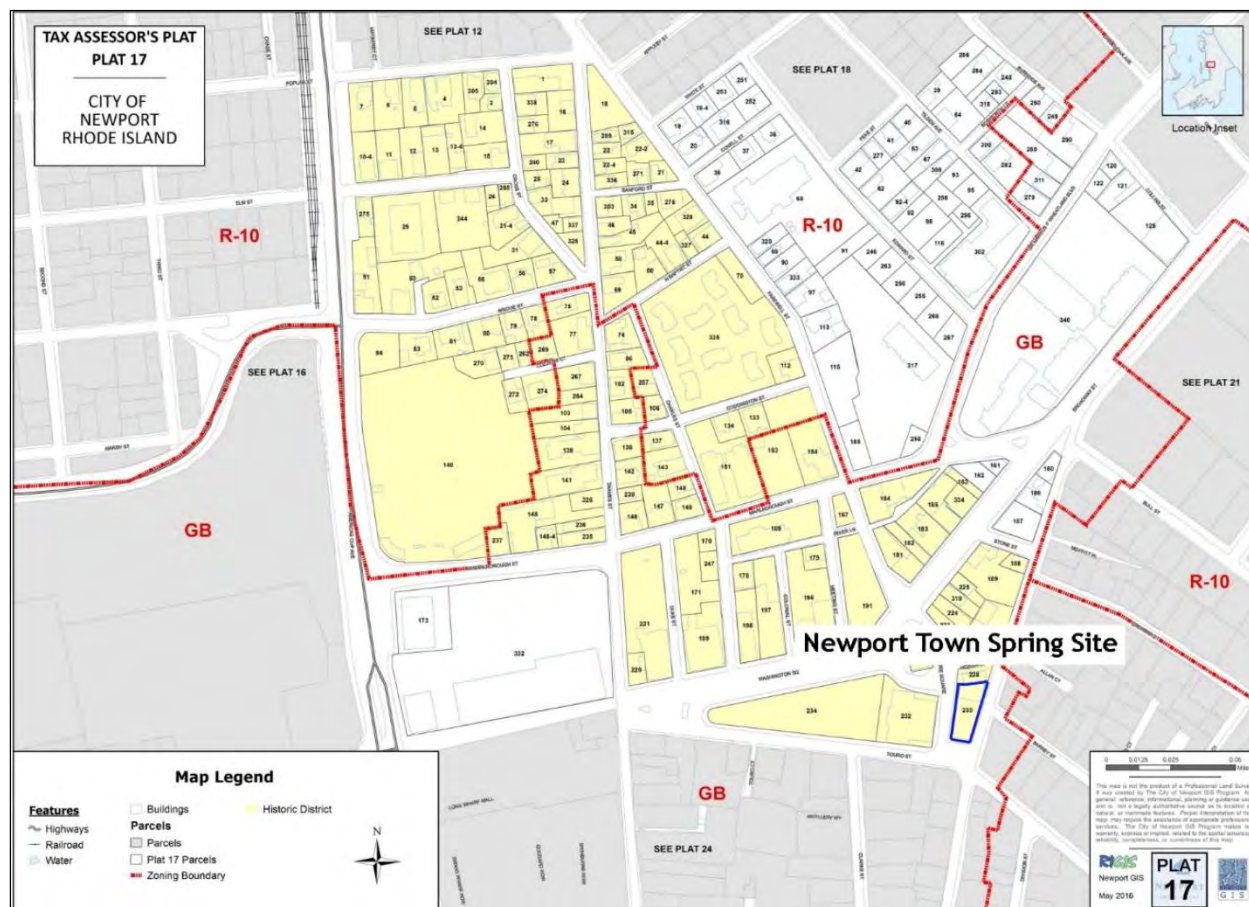


Figure 2. Newport Town Spring Site on city assessor's map (17-230).



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

*Note that the gas station that was located just north of the spring (demolished in 2019) is visible in this image.*

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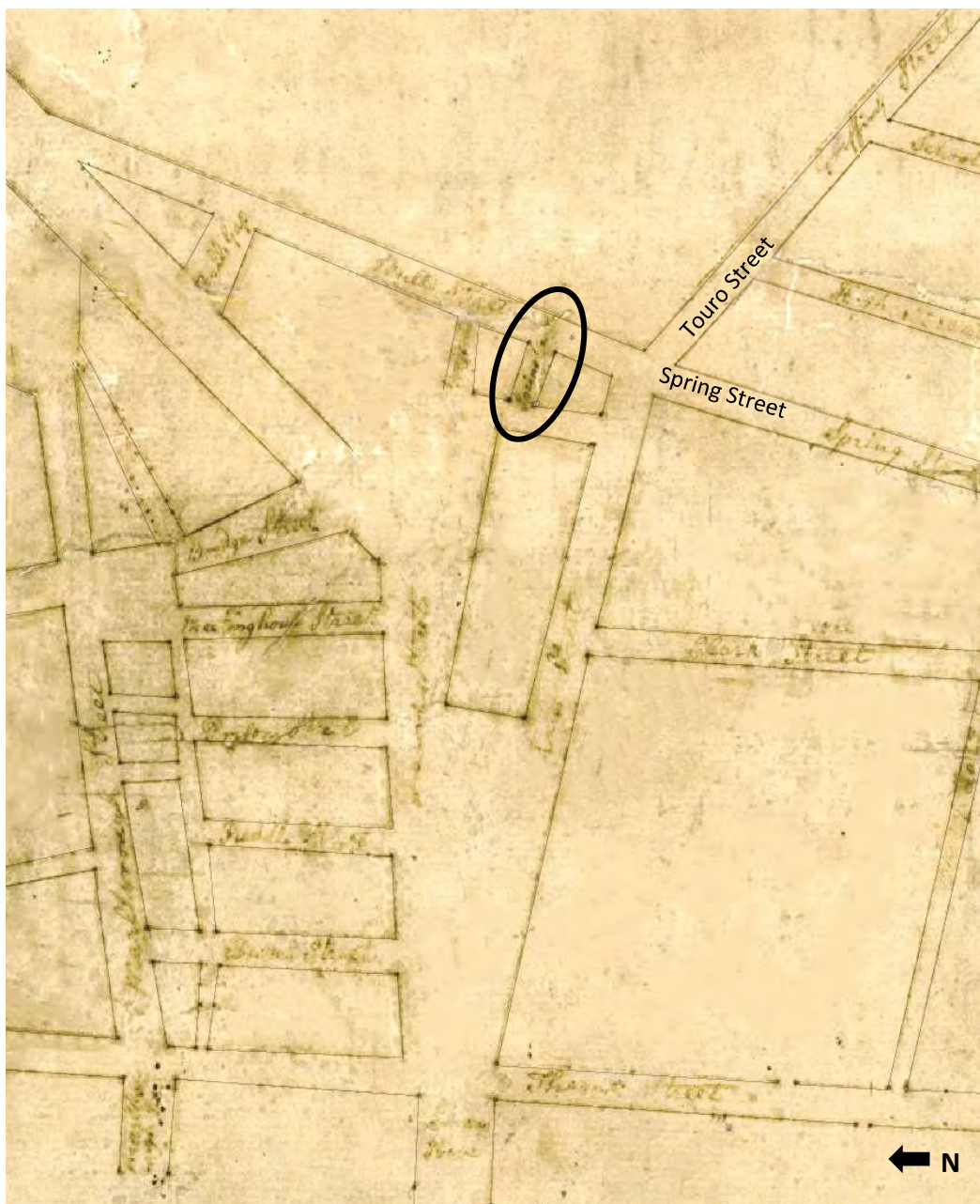


Figure 4. Mumford (1712) map showing the Newport Town Spring.



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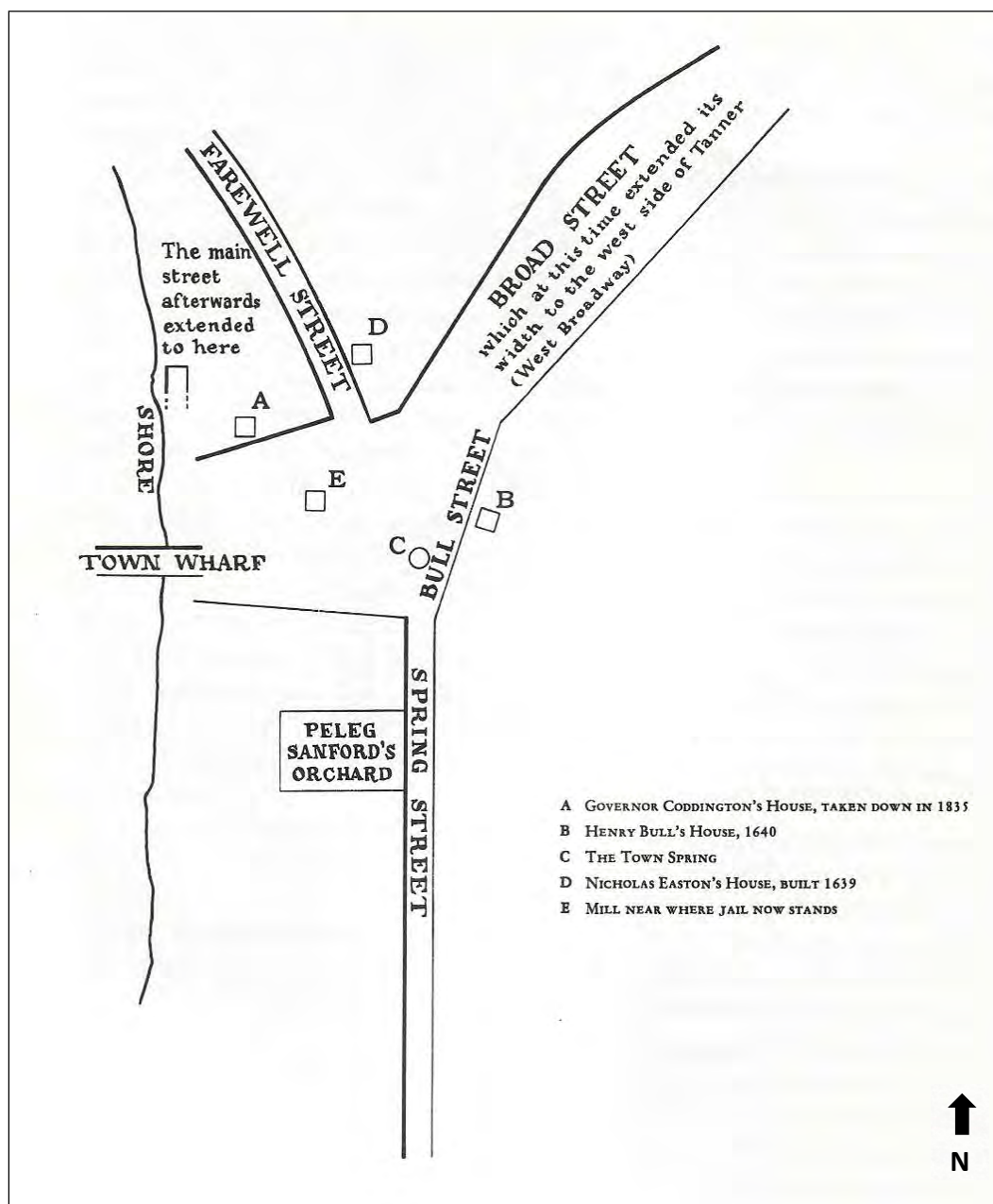


Figure 5. John Munford's *Map of Newport* (1712), as redrawn by Marian Stickney in 1951 and published in Downing and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island*.



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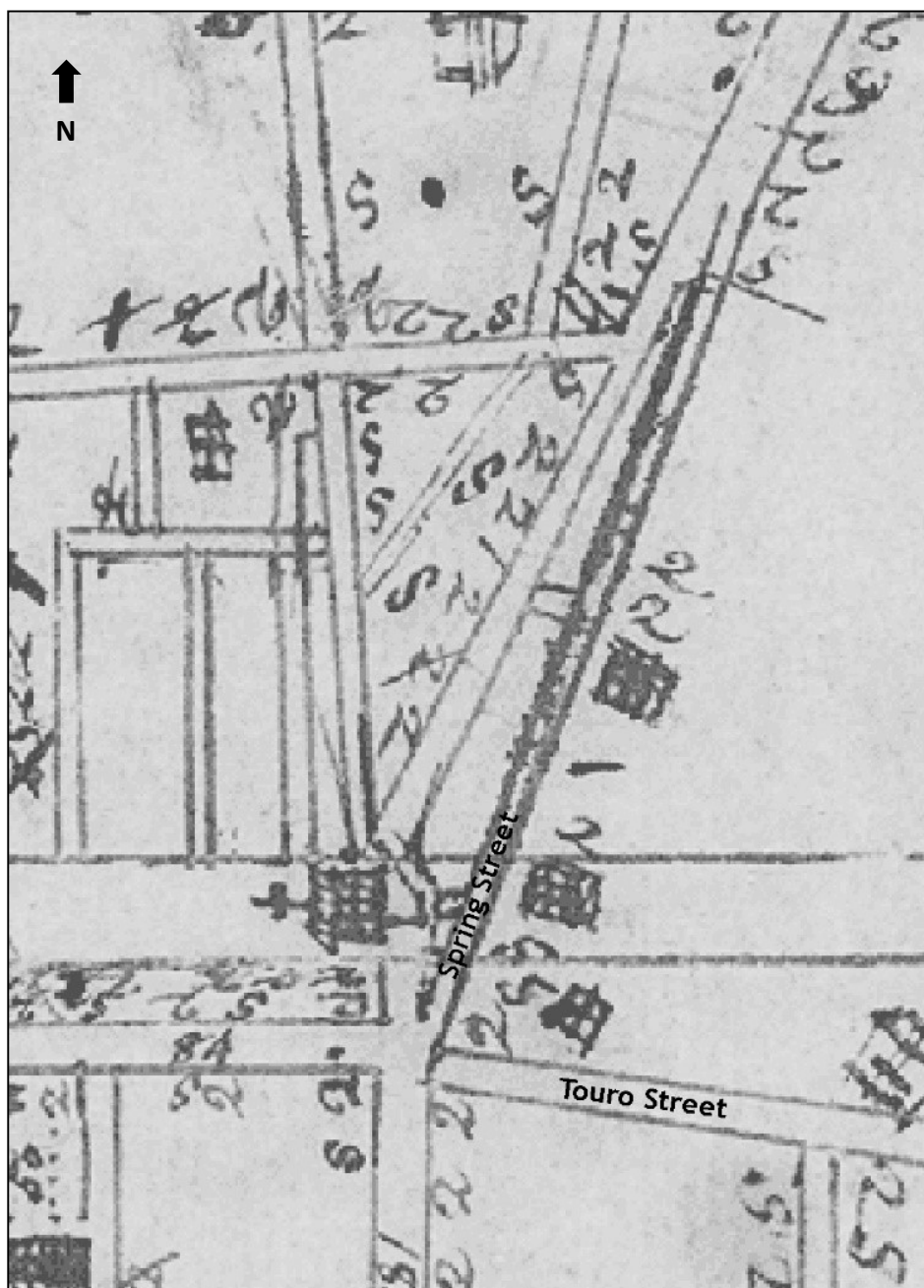


Figure 6. Detail of Stiles (1758) map of Newport showing the intersection of Touro and Spring streets; the town spring is not mapped or mentioned in the accompanying key.

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Figure 7. Detail of the Blaskowitz (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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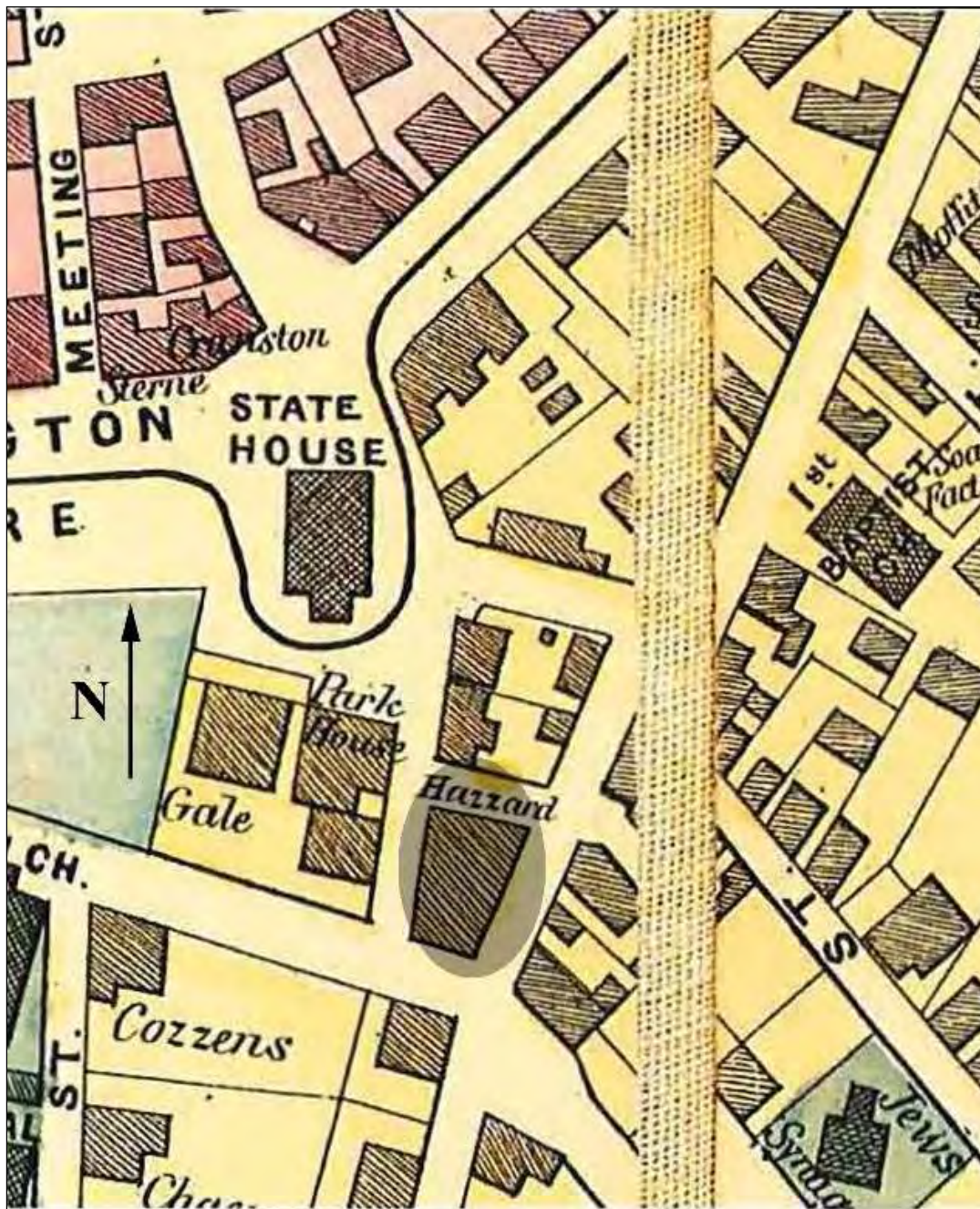


Figure 9. Dripps (1859) map.

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Figure 10. Hopkins (1883) map.



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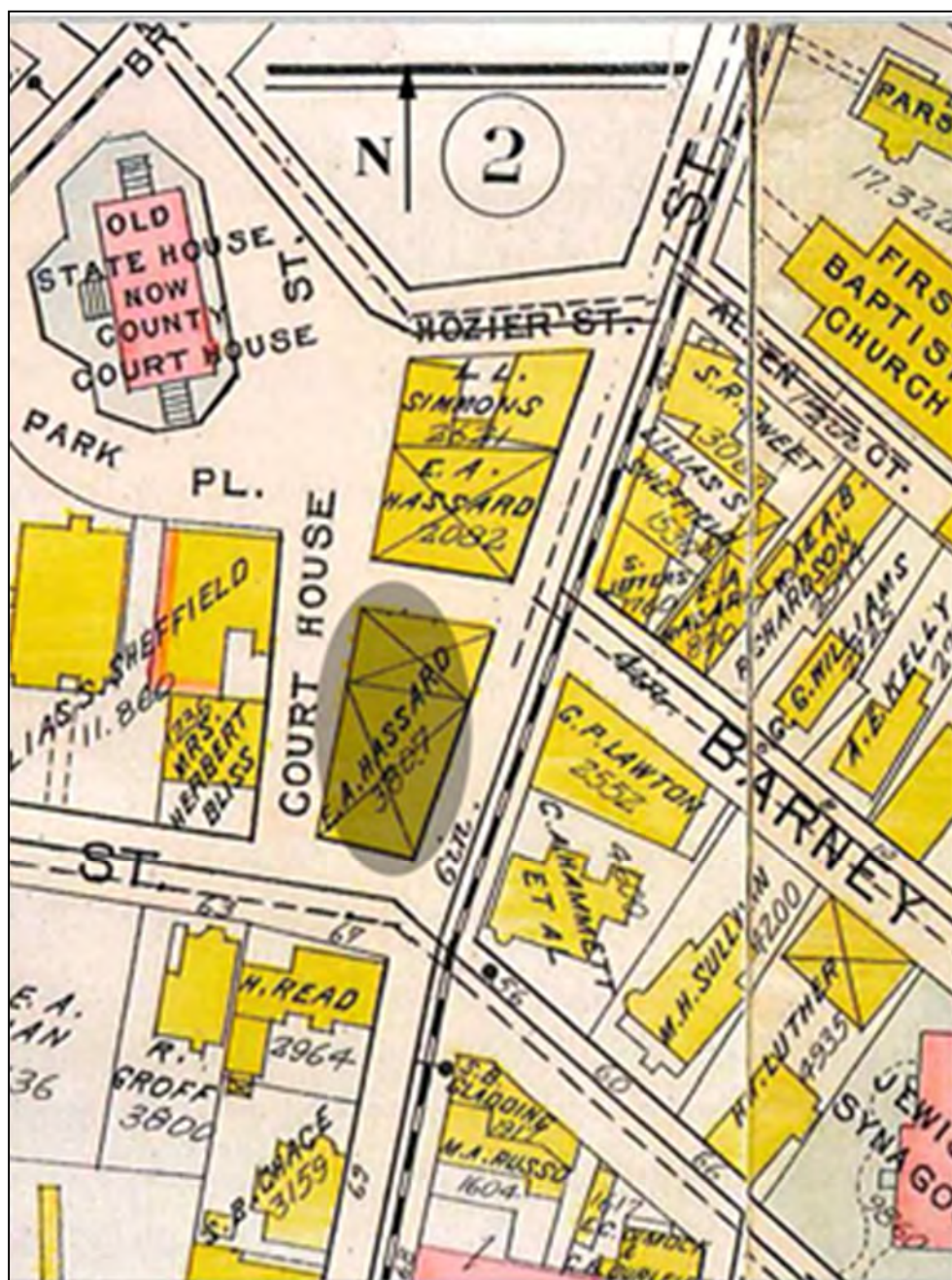


Figure 11. LJ Richards & Co. (1907) map.

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Figure 12. 1874 photograph of the Newport Town Spring, commissioned by Charles McKim.



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



Figure 14. c. 1950 photograph of the gas station that occupied the lot until it was demolished in 2019 (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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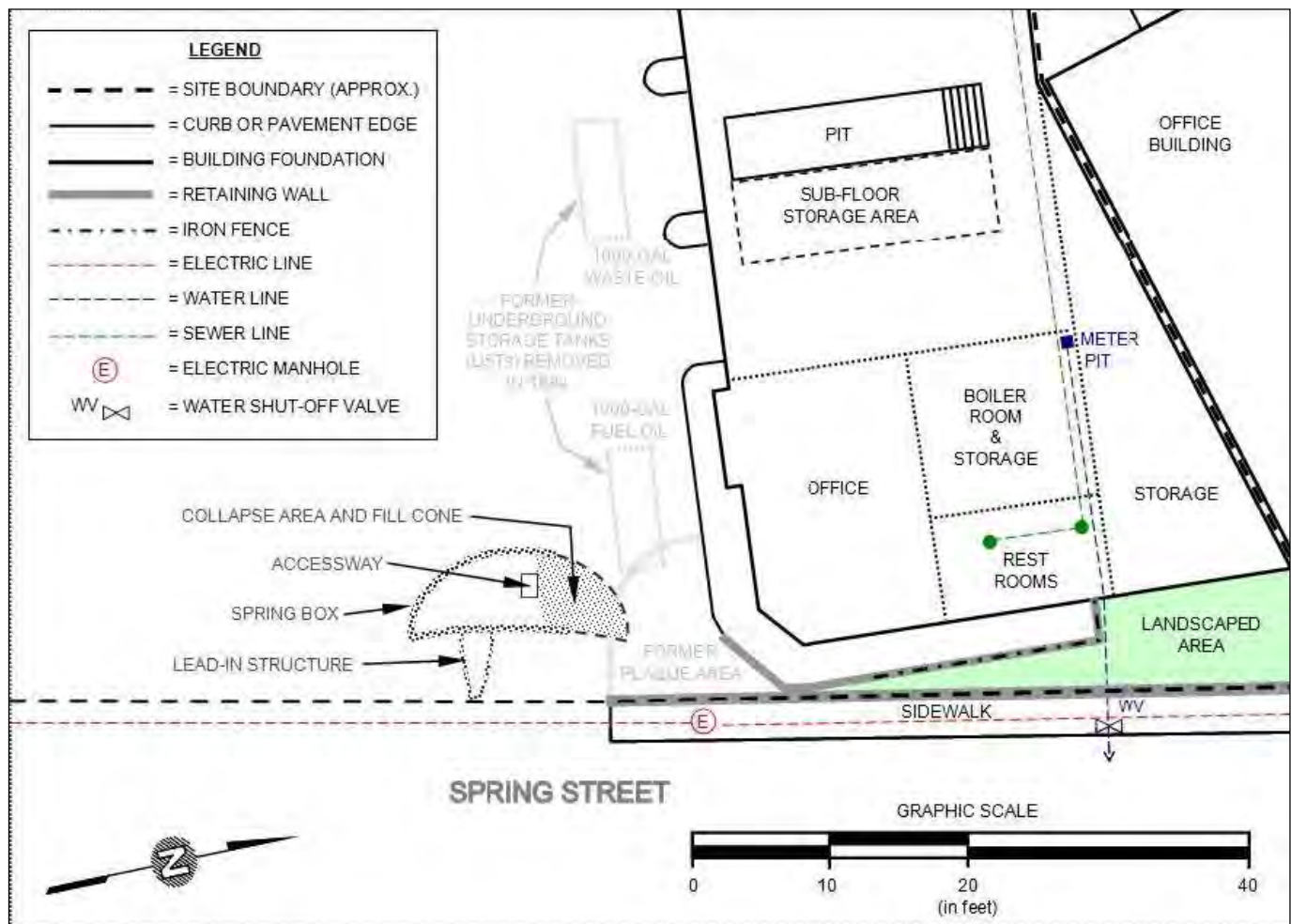


Figure 16. Site Plan showing the spatial relationship between the archaeologically identified Newport Town Spring Box and the former gas station building (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 17).

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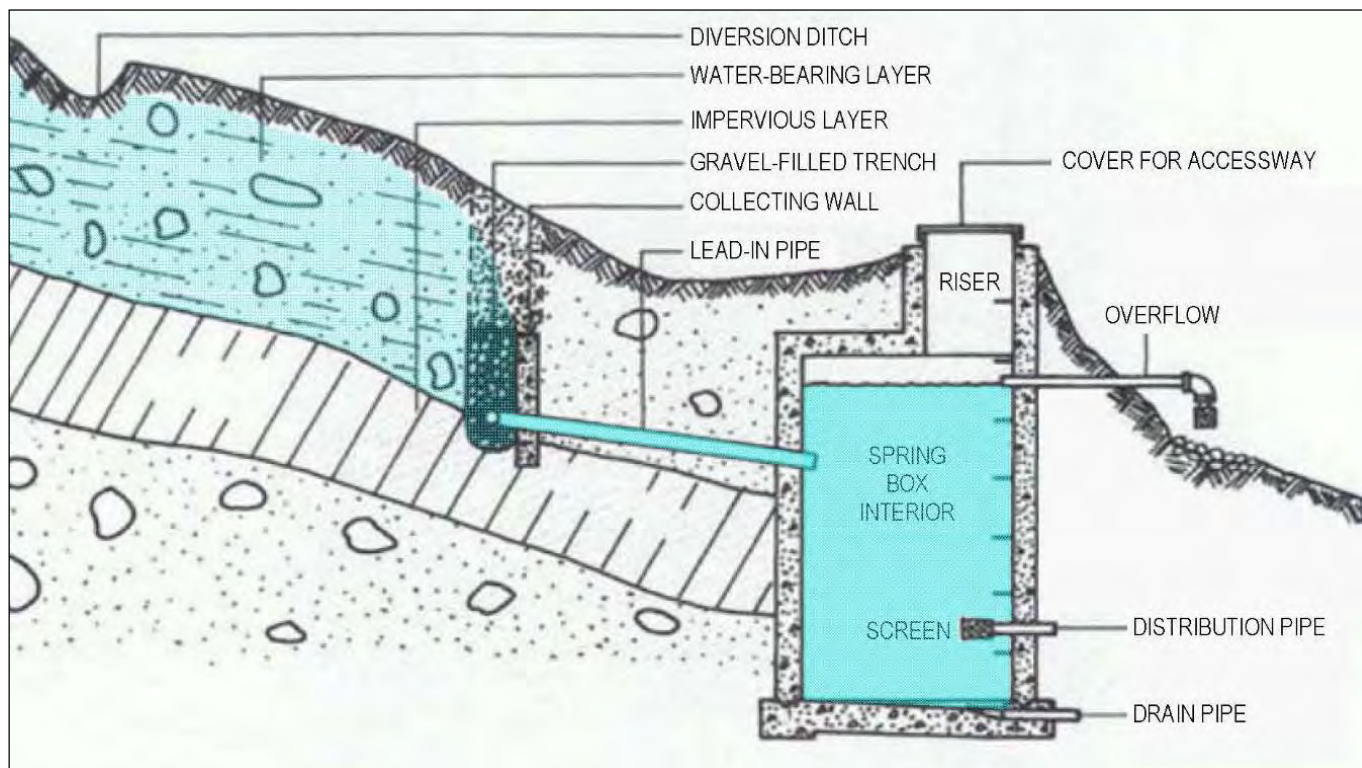


Figure 17. Schematic showing the components of a typical spring box (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 9).



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County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

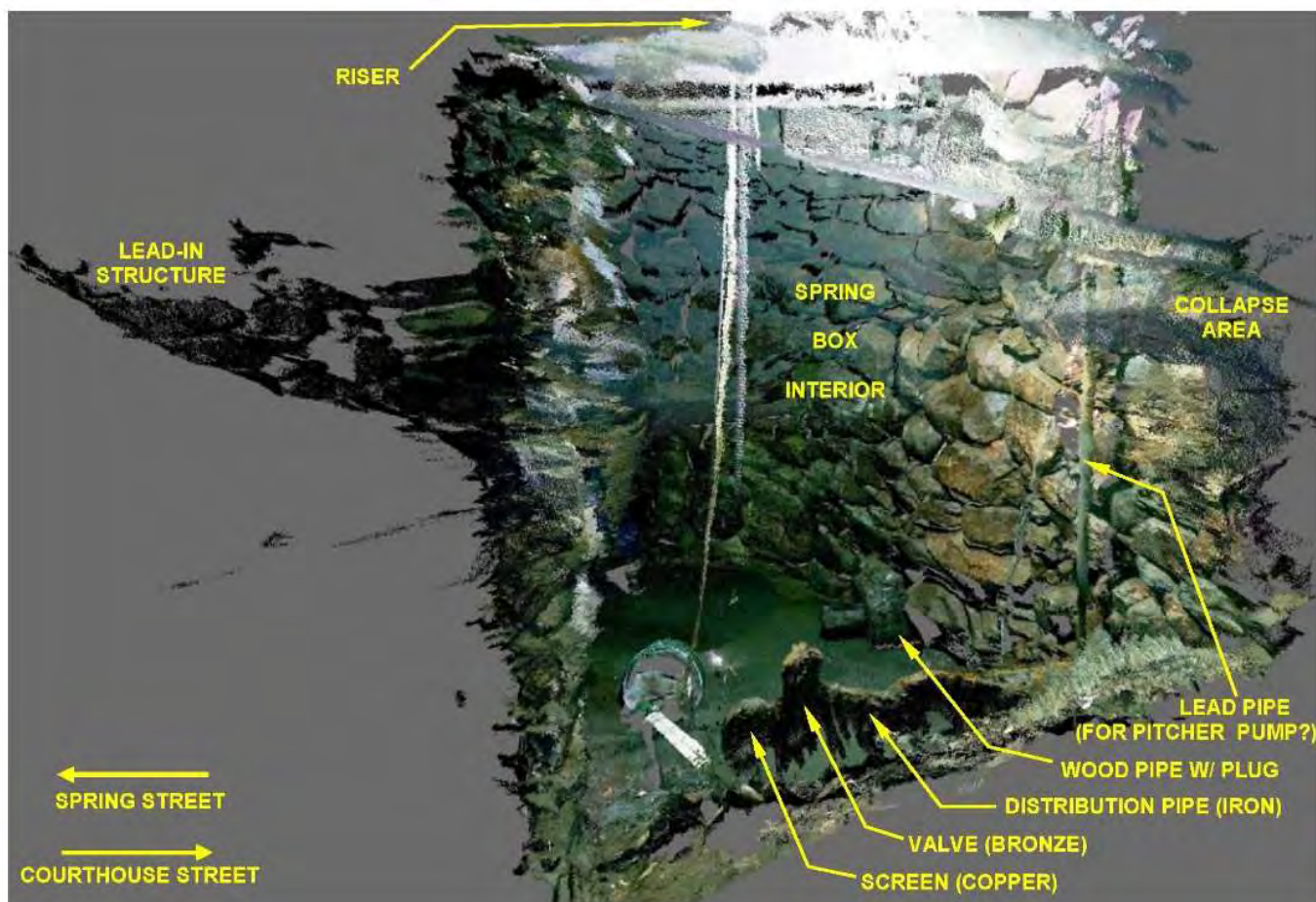


Figure 18. Cut-away view of the spring box (Newport Environmental 2018: Image 10).

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9-end Page 23

Newport Historic District (Additional Documentation)

Name of Property

Newport County, Rhode Island

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



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



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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

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Newport Historic District (Additional Documentation)

Name of Property

Newport County, Rhode Island

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



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

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

**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

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Newport Historic District (Additional Documentation)

Name of Property

Newport County, Rhode Island

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



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



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

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Newport Historic District (Additional Documentation)

Name of Property

Newport County, Rhode Island

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



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.





Photo #1





Photo #2



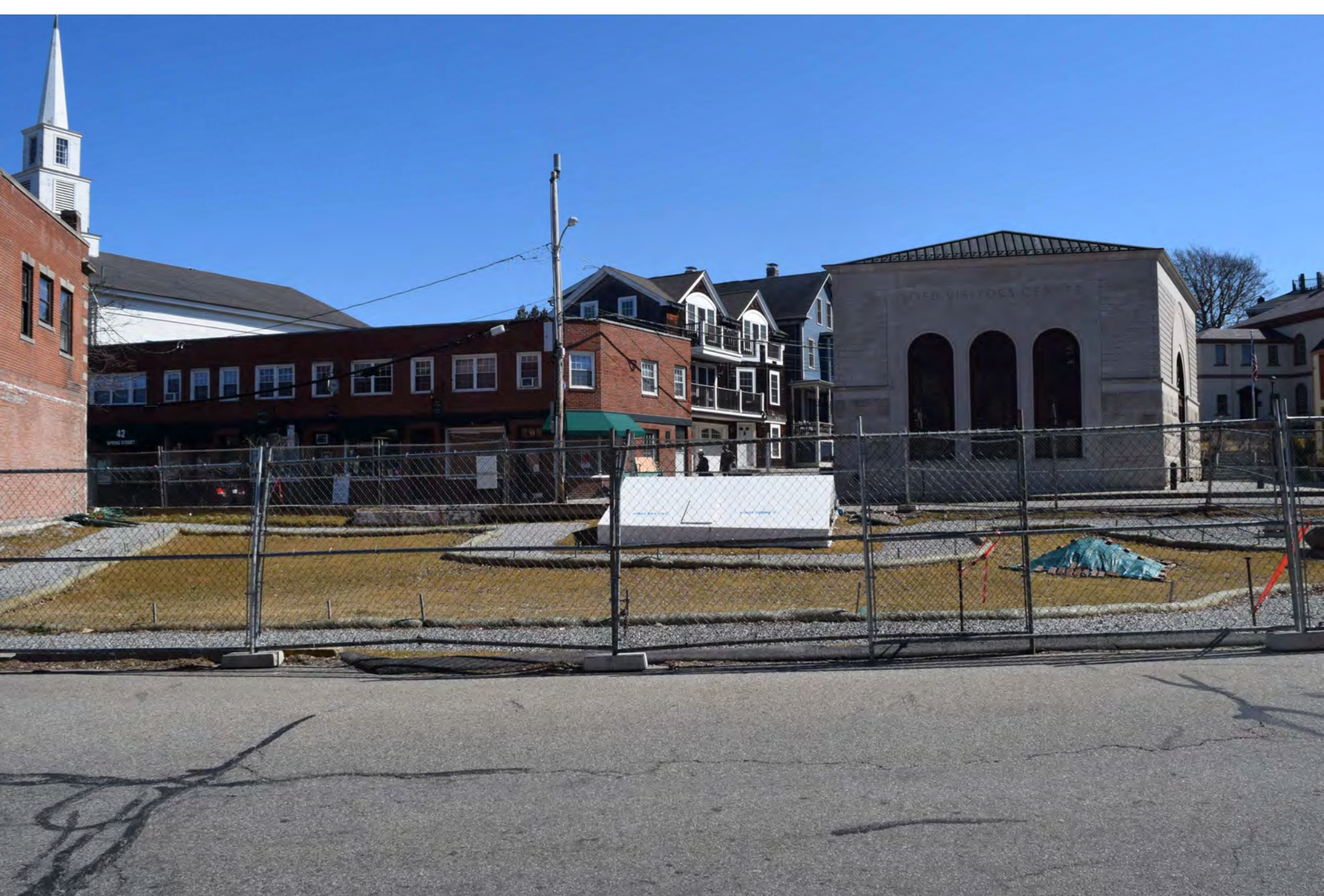


Photo #3





Photo #4





Photo #5





Photo #6