THEME: Arts and Sciences

Form 10-300 (Rey. 6-72)

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SUBTHEME:
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

STATE: Rhode Island

COUNTY:

Washington

Painting and Sculpture

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The environment that young Gilbert Stuart knew as home two centuries ago, remains relatively unchanged and removed from modern intrusions. The woodland and river-fed streams surrounding the house are quite undisturbed by man-made development. The original Stuart house, with a working replica of its water wheel and millstone for grinding snuff have been carefully preserved by local efforts.

Only a few yards from the house, on the opposite side of the stream is a one room grist mill, built in 1757 while Gilbert Stuart was an infant. Its water wheel shared the waterfall's power with the snuff mill wheel and the grist mill is so close to the Stuart house that for a long time the two were connected by a wooden covered passageway which spanned the stream in between. The only major contemporary elements in the environment are the caretaker's cottage (a remodeled carriage house), and a small parking lot near the road. The house, grist mill and grounds are open to the public six days per week.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Rhode Island	:
COUNTY	
Washington	
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(Number all entries)

7. Description: (1)

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

BOUNDARIES

Local historians believe that the Stuarts originally owned approximately three acres of land around their house. Since there is no documentation to verify the exact limits of their property, I have used the dimensions of Lot #9 on the enclosed plat map #38 as the landmark boundaries. This 2.18 acre section includes the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace, the nearby grist mill, the caretaker's cottage (non-historic) and a small parking lot, as well as a visually protective portion of the streams, pond and woodland. The Gilbert Stuart Memorial, Inc. who own and maintain the property, have acquired twenty acres surrounding the landmark during the past forty years and they plan to keep and increase this area as a protective buffer zone around the Stuart Birthplace.

The boundary of the landmark is that of lot #9, plat 21 as shown in red on the accompanying map #38. Beginning at a point on the north side of Gilbert Stuart Road 510 feet west of where the road makes a right angle, 270.3 feet north, then west 132.44 feet and across the mill creek, thence continuing 48 feet, thence southwest 224.90 feet, thence south 265.83 feet to the north side of Gilbert Stuart Road, thence 310 feet along the north side of the road to the point of beginning.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Gilbert Stuart, perhaps the most famous American portrait painter, was born and spent his early childhood in this tranquil spot at the junction of the Mattatoxet stream and the Pattaquamscott tidal river in southern Rhode Island. The gambrel roofed house was built between two streams, beside a waterfall which propelled the waterwheel on the east side of the house. On the ground floor of this building, in 1751, the artist's father began what was possibly the first snuff mill in America, while his family lived in the stories above. December 3, 1755 Gilbert Stuart was born in this house and he lived here until 1761, when his father sold his share of the unsuccessful snuff producing venture and moved his family to Newport.

BIOGRAPHY

Stuart, at an early age, showed his artistic talent. The young Stuart's ability in drawing induced a Scotch artist, Cosmo Alexander, to take on the youth as a protege, and the two subsequently travelled to South Carolina and then to Scotland. Alexander's death in Scotland stranded Stuart, who eventually managed to return to Rhode Island, wearing little more than rags. Nevertheless, Stuart immediately resumed painting, hiring a blacksmith to pose for him. In spite of some success in attracting commissions, the artist wanted to go to England to study and in the spring of 1775 he sailed from Boston.

Once in Great Britain, Stuart remained abroad for almost twenty years, where he achieved fame as a portrait painter. After arriving in England, Stuart was aided by an old Newport friend, but within about four years he had entered the studio of Benjamin West, the expatriate American painter and benefactor of young American artists who studied in London. Although Stuart lived with West for almost four years, the young artist apparently gained more from West's important social contacts then from any painting instruction by the older man. Whereas West delighted in mammoth historical subjects, which Stuart said West painted by the acre, Stuart concentrated on portraits. His portraits, moreover reflected his own inherent skill and keenness, Stuart evidently being as uninfluenced by other artists of current note as he was by West.

If Stuart developed his own style, there is little doubt that West's hacking aided Stuart's rise to a position of prominence as a portraitist

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

(NATIONAL HISTORIC INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM LANDMARKS)

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8. Statement of Significance: (1)

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

in Great Britain. As a result, by 1782 Stuart enjoyed such a handsome business, that he rented a luxurious home in London and lived in a lavish fashion. He painted very rapidly, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, John S. Copley, his old mentor West, and innumerable other prominent people sat for him. An even more exact indication of Stuart's success is that his price for a portrait quickly rose from five to thirty guineas.

Stuart's zest for living equalled his artistic talent. Because of his gay life in London, the painter by 1788 had acquired such debts that he had to move to Ireland in order to escape imprisonment. As before, he painted furiously, occasionally having six sitters on a single day, and lived as he had in London. Within five years debt again forced a move, this time to America.

Although Stuart's financial straits influenced his return to America in 1792, the painter's desire to paint George Washington also stimulated Stuart to leave Ireland. Stuart was to paint three life portraits of Washington, the first of which was done in 1794. Although Stuart had never been overawed by any previous famous sitter, he apparently was by Washington, and his first portrait of the general has a stiffness in it. A full-length portrait then followed, but it was only with the "Athenaeum Portrait" of the general that Stuart caught the inner spirit of Washington. Stuart never completed the painting, realizing that he could not improve on the spontaniety of the moment as Washington had sat before him, and this portrait has become the most famous of all of the paintings of Washington. Even in Stuart's day the excellence of the painting was appreciated, and Stuart, who always needed money, unabashedly made copy after copy of it, referring to the copies as his "hundred-dollar bills."1 Indeed, he produced so many copies that they came to be little more than superficial renderings of the subject.

Stuart is just as interesting as a person as he is as an artist. He had a warm personality and a sharp mind. Proud and witty, he once retorted to Samuel Johson's inquiry as to where he had learned to speak English so well by saying that it was not from Johnson's dictionary; and when an actor fell asleep as he sat for Stuart, the incensed painter gave the sitter ass's ears in the portrait. Primarily concerned with character in a sitter, Stuart once groaned about his art, "What a damned business is that of portrait painter. You bring him a potato and expect he will paint you a peach." Stuart also hugely enjoyed talking, and following I Quoted in James Thomas Flexner, Gilbert Stuart, A Great Life in Brief

(New York, 1955), p. 143.

2 Quoted in Eugen Neuhaus, The History and Ideals of American Art (Stanford, California, 1931), pp. 37-38.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(Continuation Sheet)

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8. Statement of Significance: (2)

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

a rare visit to church after moving to Boston in 1805 the painter remarked: "I do not like the idea of a man getting up in a box and having all the conversation to himself. . . ."³ After settling in Boston, Stuart continued to paint almost until the day he died, July 9, 1828.

CDA 491 77

³ Quoted in Flexner, Stuart, p. 182.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Form No. 10-301 a (7/72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

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Form No. 10-301a (7/72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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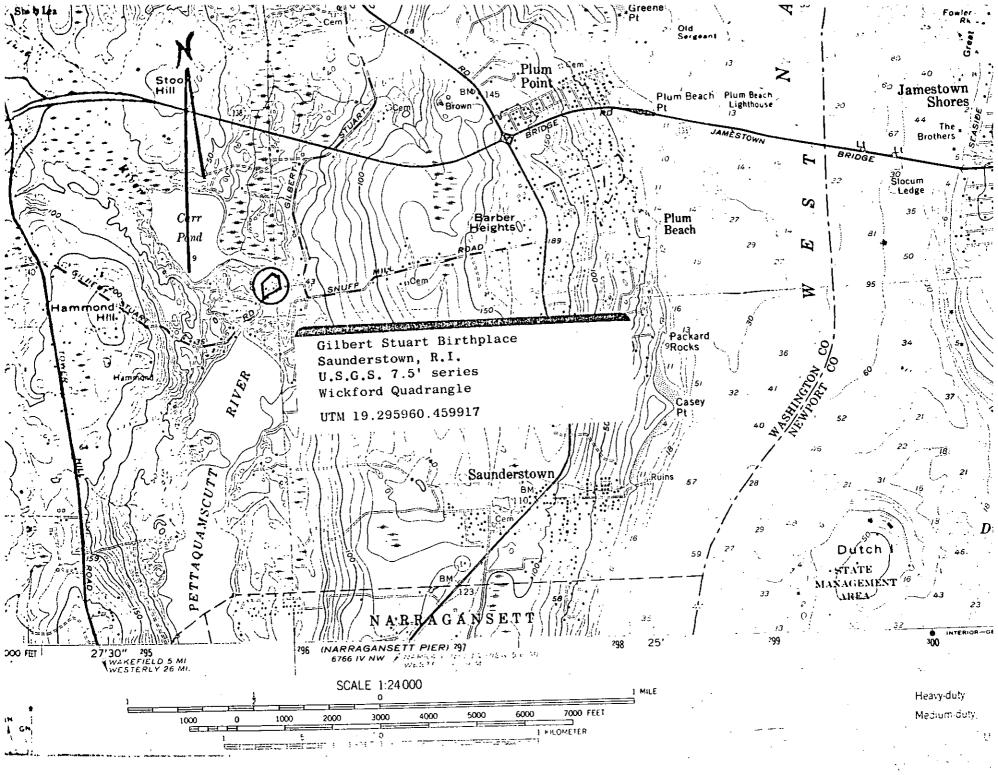
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY MAP FORM

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

BOUNDARIES

Local historians believe that the Stuarts originally owned approximately three acres of land around their house. Since there is no documentation to verify the exact limits of their property, I have used the dimensions of Lot #9 on the enclosed plat map #38 as the landmark boundaries. This 2.18 acre section includes the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace, the nearby grist mill, the caretaker's cottage (non-historic) and a small parking lot, as well as a visually protective portion of the streams, pond and woodland. The Gilbert Stuart Memorial, Inc. who own and maintain the property, have acquired twenty acres surrounding the landmark during the past forty years and they plan to keep and increase this area as a protective buffer zone around the Stuart Birthplace.

The boundary of the landmark is that of lot #9, plat 21 as shown in red on the accompanying map #38. Beginning at a point on the north side of Gilbert Stuart Road 510 feet west of where the road makes a right angle, 270.3 feet north, then west 132.44 feet and across the mill creek, thence continuing 48 feet, thence southwest 224.90 feet, thence south 265.83 feet to the north side of Gilbert Stuart Road, thence 310 feet along the north side of the road to the point of beginning.

PERIOD (Check One or More as	Appropriate)		
Pre-Columbian	låth Century	🔀 18th Century	20th Century
☐ 15th Century	17th Century	[] 19th Century	• .
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AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Che	ck One or More as Appropri	atc)	
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Communications	☐ Military	☐ Theater	
Conservation	☐ Music	☐ Transportation	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Gilbert Stuart, perhaps the most famous American portrait painter, was born and spent his early childhood in this tranquil spot at the junction of the Mattatoxet stream and the Pattaquamscott tidal river in southern Rhode Island. The gambrel roofed house was built between two streams, beside a waterfall which propelled the waterwheel on the east side of the house. On the ground floor of this building, in 1751, the artist's father began what was possibly the first snuff mill in America, while his family lived in the stories above. December 3, 1755 Gilbert Stuart was born in this house and he lived here until 1761, when his father sold his share of the unsuccessful snuff producing venture and moved his family to Newport.

BIOGRAPHY

Stuart, at an early age, showed his artistic talent. The young Stuart's ability in drawing induced a Scotch artist, Cosmo Alexander, to take on the youth as a protege, and the two subsequently travelled to South Carolina and then to Scotland. Alexander's death in Scotland stranded Stuart, who eventually managed to return to Rhode Island, wearing little more than rags. Nevertheless, Stuart immediately resumed painting, hiring a blacksmith to pose for him. In spite of some success in attracting commissions, the artist wanted to go to England to study and in the spring of 1775 he sailed from Boston.

Once in Great Britain, Stuart remained abroad for almost twenty years, where he achieved fame as a portrait painter. After arriving in England, Stuart was aided by an old Newport friend, but within about four years he had entered the studio of Benjamin West, the expatriate American painter and benefactor of young American artists who studied in London. Although Stuart lived with West for almost four years, the young artist apparently gained more from West's important social contacts then from any painting instruction by the older man. Whereas West delighted in mammoth historical subjects, which Stuart said West painted by the acre, Stuart concentrated on portraits. His portraits, moreover reflected his own inherent skill and keenness, Stuart evidently being as uninfluenced by other artists of current note as he was by West.

If Stuart developed his own style, there is little doubt that West's backing aided Stuart's rise to a position of prominence as a portraitist

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

(NATIONAL FISTORIC INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM LANDMARKS)

(Continuation Sheet)

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Statement of Significance: (1)

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

in Great Britain. As a result, by 1782 Stuart enjoyed such a handsome business, that he rented a luxurious home in London and lived in a lavish fashion. He painted very rapidly, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, John S. Copley, his old mentor West, and innumerable other prominent people sat for him. An even more exact indication of Stuart's success is that his price for a portrait quickly rose from five to thirty guineas.

Stuart's zest for living equalled his artistic talent. Because of his gay life in London, the painter by 1788 had acquired such debts that he had to move to Ireland in order to escape imprisonment. As before, he painted furiously, occasionally having six sitters on a single day, and lived as he had in London. Within five years debt again forced a move, this time to America.

Although Stuart's financial straits influenced his return to America in 1792, the painter's desire to paint George Washington also stimulated Stuart to leave Ireland. Stuart was to paint three life portraits of Washington, the first of which was done in 1794. Although Stuart had never been overawed by any previous famous sitter, he apparently was by Washington, and his first portrait of the general has a stiffness in it. A full-length portrait then followed, but it was only with the "Athenaeum Portrait" of the general that Stuart caught the inner spirit of Washington. Stuart never completed the painting, realizing that he could not improve on the spontaniety of the moment as Washington had sat before him, and this portrait has become the most famous of all of the paintings of Washington. Even in Stuart's day the excellence of the painting was appreciated, and Stuart, who always needed money, unabashedly made copy after copy of it, referring to the copies as his "hundred-dollar bills."1 Indeed, he produced so many copies that they came to be little more than superficial renderings of the subject.

Stuart is just as interesting as a person as he is as an artist. a warm personality and a sharp mind. Proud and witty, he once retorted to Samuel Johson's inquiry as to where he had learned to speak English so well by saying that it was not from Johnson's dictionary; and when an actor fell asleep as he sat for Stuart, the incensed painter gave the sitter ass's ears in the portrait. Primarily concerned with character in a sitter, Stuart once groaned about his art, "What a damned business is that of portrait painter. You bring him a potato and expect he will paint you a peach."2 Stuart also hugely enjoyed talking, and following Quoted in James Thomas Flexner, Gilbert Stuart, A Great Life in Brief (New York, 1955), p. 143.

2 Quoted in Eugen Neuhaus, The History and Ideals of American Art (Stanford, California, 1931), pp. 37-38.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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8. Statement of Significance: (2)

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

a rare visit to church after moving to Boston in 1805 the painter remarked: "I do not like the idea of a man getting up in a box and having all the conversation to himself. . . ."³ After settling in Boston, Stuart continued to paint almost until the day he died, July 9, 1828.

³ Quoted in Flexner, Stuart, p. 182.

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-- w ш UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

PROPERTY MAP FORM

-Y
DATE

(Туре	all entries - attach to or enclose with map)	ENTA, NOMBER	DATE
. NAME			
COMMON:	Gilbert Stuart Birthplace		
AND/OR HISTORIC:	Gilbert Stuart Birthplace		
LOCATION			
STREET AND NUM B	815 Gilbert Stuart Road		
CITY OR TOWN:	Saunderstown		
STATE:	Rhode Island 44 Washi	ngton	009
MAP REFERENCE			888 . A V
SOURCE:	Plat map from records of North Ki	ngstown Town Hall	
SCALE:	1 inch = 100 feet		
DATE:	none		
REQUIREMENTS			
2. North arrow.	undaries where required.		

₩ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1973-729-148/1441 3-1

Form No. 10-301 Rev. 7-72

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY MAP FORM

Rhode Island	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
county Washington	
FOR NPS USE ON	ILY
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Type	all entries - attach to or encl	ENTRY NUMBER	DATE	
NAME			}	
COMMON:	Gilbert Stuart Birth	place		2
AND/OR HISTORIC:	Gilbert Stuart Birth	place		
LOCATION				
STREET AND NUMBE	R:			
L	815 Gilbert Stuart R	oad		•
CITY OR TOWN:	·			
	Saunderstown		• •	
STATE:		CODE COUNTY:		coc
<u> </u>	Rhode Island	44 Washing	gton	009
MAP REFERENCE				(2000) (Sec. 10)
SOURCE:	·			
	U.S.G.S. 7.5'Series	***	•	
SCALE:	1:24,000			
DATE:	1957			
REQUIREMENTS 🤌				
TO BE INCLUDED ON	I ALL MAPS		·····	
1. Property broa	undaries where required.	•		

STATE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR Form No. 10-301a NATIONAL PARK SERVICE Rhode Island (7/72)COUNTY NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES Washington PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM FOR NPS USE ONLY ENTRY NUMBER (Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph) 1. NAME COMMON: Gilbert Stuart Birthplace AND/OR HISTORIC: Gilbert Stuart Birthplace 2. LOCATION STREET AND NUMBER: 815 Gilbert Stuart Road CITY OR TOWN: N Saunderstown STATE: CODE Rhode Island 44 Washington 3. PHOTO REFERENCE PHOTO CREDIT: Blanche Higgins Schroer, NPS DATE OF PHOTO: August 1974 regative filed at: Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

South facade

4. IDENTIFICATION

4. IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.

DATE

CODE

009

Form No. 10-301a UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR STATE (7/72)NATIONAL PARK SERVICE Rhode Island NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES COUNTY Washington PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM FOR NPS USE ONLY (Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph) ENTRY NUMBER DATE 1. NAME COMMON: Gilbert Stuart Birthplace AND/ORHISTORIC: Gilbert Stuart Birthplace 2. LOCATION STREET AND NUMBER 815 Gilbert Stuart Road CITY OR TOWN: Saunderstown STATE: CODE COUNTY: Rhode Island CODE 44 B. PHOTO REFERENCE Washington 009 PHOTO CREDIT: Blanche Higgins Schroer, NPS DATE OF PHOTO: <u> August 1974</u> REGATIVE FILED ATHISTORIC Sites Survey, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

Form No. 10-301a (7/72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

(Type all entries e attach to or enclose with photograph)

Rhode Island	
COUNTY Washington	
FOR NPS USE ONL	.Y
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

	COMMON:	Gilbert Stuart Bir	thplace	
	AND/OR HISTORIC:	Gilbert Stuart Bir	thplace	
2.	LOCATION			
	STREET AND NUMBE	R:	•	
		815 Gilbert Stuart	Road	
	CITY OR TOWN:	Saunderstown		
	STATE:		CODE COUNTY:	000
		Rhode Island	44 Washington	009
3.	PHOTO REFERENCI	Ē.,		
	PHOTO CREDIT:	National Park Serv	ice	
	DATE OF PHOTO:	1964		
	NEGATIVE FILED AT	[2		
	IDENTIFICATION			
4.	DESCRIBE VIEW, D	IRECTION, ETC.	•	
4	1			
4.		South facade, Stuar	rt Birtholace	
4.		South facade, Stuar	rt Birthplace	
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☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1973-729-152/1446 W-1

rm No. 10-301a 72) UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

Rhode Island
COUNTY
Washington
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY NUMBER DATE

(Type all	entries - attach to or enclose	ENTRY NUMBER	DATE	
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I. NAME				
COMMON:	Gilbert Stuart Birthp	lace		
AND/OR HISTORIC:	Gilbert Stuart Birthp	lace		
2. LOCATION				
STREET AND NUMBI	ÉR:			
:	815 Gilbert Stuart Ros	ad	<u> </u>	
CITY OR TOWN:				
į	Saunderstown			
STATE:		CODE COUNTY:		CODE
}	Rhode Island	44 Washing	ton	009
3. PHOTO REFERENC	E ,			
PHOTO CREDIT:	Blanche Higgins Schroe	er, NPS		
DATE OF PHOTO:	August 1974			
NEGATIVE FILED A	Historic Sites Survey,	, National Park	Service, Washingto	on, D.C.
4 IDENTIFICATION				
DESCRIBE VIEW,	DIRECTION, ETC.			
1	Gilbert Stuart Birthpl	lace		}
	South facade		. ,	. {