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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC "Oak Glen"  
AND/OR COMMON Julia Ward Howe House

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 745 Union Street  
CITY, TOWN Portsmouth VICINITY OF #1 Honorable Fernand J. St. Germain  
STATE Rhode Island 02871 COUNTY Newport CODE 005

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Mrs. Jerald J. Delisle  
STREET & NUMBER 745 Union Street  
CITY, TOWN Portsmouth STATE Rhode Island 02871

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Portsmouth Town Clerk  
STREET & NUMBER East Main Road  
CITY, TOWN Portsmouth STATE Rhode Island 02871

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Interstate 895 Corridor Study Survey  
DATE 1976-1977  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission  
CITY, TOWN Providence STATE Rhode Island

# DESCRIPTION.

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

"Oak Glen," the summer residence of Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe and Julia Ward Howe, is a property of approximately 4.7 acres overlooking Lawton's Valley in the still rural central part of Portsmouth. Samuel Howe acquired this land, part of the Lawton Farm, on the north side of Union Street by 1870. At that time there were standing an old, dilapidated farmhouse which he demolished and a small, well-built cottage dating from c. 1850 which he retained and moved back somewhat (northerly) from the road; this latter became the rear ell of the new house he built across its south front and also served as a temporary dwelling while the new frontal section was under construction. As completed, the house, in its conjoined parts, has a T-shape.

Set upon a brick basement which is quite high and well lighted at the rear due to a sloping grade, the now white-painted house is wood-framed (using the new "balloon" construction method), covered by clapboards in its 1870's section and shingled on its older part. The south, two-story front section has a high gambrel roof--almost a mansard really -- with jerkinhead gable ends. On the three-bay main front, two large, peak-roofed cross gables flank a small hip-roofed dormer. The first story of the symmetrical three-bay main elevation has single windows flanking a central entrance protected by an altered, peak-roofed portico, which echoes the form of the two cross gables above. Exterior trim on this section of the house is quite simple (indeed, may have been simplified in the twentieth century): plank verge boards with triangular cutouts along the edges; plank corner boards and horizontal members at the level of the second floor typical of stick style detailing; small bracket blocks on the window sills and at the dormer cornice line; and louvered window blinds. Sash both here and in the ell is of six over six double-hung type. The principal entrance is a large, tall and wide one with sidelights, and the big oak door itself is fully glazed, between strong, flat muntins, with small square panes of clear glass giving needed light to the hall within.

The older, 1½-story gabled ell has dormer windows; and one-story sitting-porches are brought out from its sides to the full width of the newer frontal mass. These porches, probably added in the 1870's, have chamfered wooden piers with angular ornamental brackets and have also sawn and pierced railings of vertical boarding. The eastern porch partially covers the basement service entrance and shelters under its roof a stairway up from the latter. After the house left Howe ownership, a subsequent resident made a further shingled extension to the rear and constructed a tiled terrace on brick arcading beyond this. A small, flat-roofed second-floor enlargement -- on the east, also shingled, and containing a bathroom -- was made, too, in the angle between main house and ell.

(See Continuation Sheet 1)

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The entrance stair-hall takes up nearly one-third of the width of the house and runs almost the full depth to the rear ell. From a handsome parquet floor there rises a surprisingly monumental staircase of dark wood, with a heavy, carved newel and elaborately turned and carved balusters. Doorway trim in this hall is of heavy, moulded architraves in natural dark wood, as are the doors themselves. On the left is the drawing-room, which runs the full depth of the 1870's section, and has a particularly fine inlaid floor of contrasting woods featuring a Greek-key border and a geometrical centre medallion. An imposing white marble mantel is centered on the west wall, and there is a plaster chandelier rosette in the middle of the ceiling. The east wall has two symmetrically-placed doors, one opening to the stair-hall and the other a false one, non-opening. A French door in the north corner opens onto the rear porch. Door and window trim here is similar to that of the stair-hall, on the east side of the front of the house are two small sitting-rooms having back-to-back corner fireplaces with mantels of tan or black marble.

At the end of the stair-hall a doorway opens upon a passage which, with a slight easterly swerve, leads to the rear wing. This rear wing is entered through its original front doorway, still with its narrow sidelights, and has beyond that a narrow side (east) passage with what is now the rear staircase, and a door to the east 1870's porch. A sizeable room to the left (west) opens onto the other porch (and has now been divided to form a kitchen and bathroom though none of its trim has been stripped away): presumably its former use may have been as a "family" sitting-room or library and to take care of an overflow of guests at receptions. Across the rear of the ell stretches the Howes' dining-room, served by a dumb-waiter from below. This room was given a northern enlargement by a subsequent owner, and its Howe-era marble mantel with incised putti by Marion Francis Crawford was relocated in this extension.

Upstairs in the front part of the house a good deal of space is still given over to the stair-hall, which has running up its eastern wall a steep, almost ladder-like set of steps leading to a trap-door into a storage garret. On either side of the hall are small bedrooms, four in all, with simple trim in natural woods (each room has a little plaque on the door designating it as the "Oak Room", "Spruce Room", etc.); these are lit by the front and side

(See Continuation Sheet 2)

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gable windows and by the two tall dormers at the north. Lit by the single, central, frontal dormer is a minute "sewing-room" over the main entrance. From the north end of the hall one goes down several steps to the upper floor of the rear wing, in which are contained two bedchambers, two bathrooms and three closets, lit variously by dormers, north gable windows and skylights. These rooms have plain painted trim and old-fashioned iron hardware.

The house at "Oak Glen" is set well forward on its land, but low and handsome dry-laid stone walls run across its street frontage, and tall evergreen trees screen it. Between stone posts bearing its name, a short, semi-elliptical driveway leads to the front door; and facing the entrance is a small paved and hedged recess wherein a compass rose is carefully incised in the paving, showing the house to face due south. To the west and north were once the Howes's well-tended flower and kitchen gardens, berry-bush plantings and some pasturage for horses and cows. These areas are now quite neglected and overgrown by scrub-bushes and young trees. At a south-west corner remains the burying-ground of the earliest proprietors -- Lawtons and Sissons, whose descendants still take care of it.

Down a slope, near a brook and near what once were two ponds now enlarged to form a municipal reservoir, stand the ruins of a two-story stone grist-mill which Samuel Howe had converted to house his horses, cows and carriages. The back driveway leading to this structure is now completely overgrown and undiscoverable. The present owner built, some years ago, a small, clapboarded one-and-one-half-storey garage with apartment above near to the Union Street frontage, east of the house. It was designed so as to echo the frontal form of the "Oak Glen" residence in miniature, and one would imagine it to be an nineteenth-century building.

Samuel Gridley Howe died in 1876, but his wife, Julia Ward Howe, lived until 1910. Upon her death the property went to her daughter Maud Howe Elliott, who retained it until 1925, when she sold it to Rathbone Ballou. Mr. Ballou was responsible for the northern extension of the dining-room and for the elevated terrace projected therefrom. In about 1950 house and land was bought from the Ballou estate by a Mr. Bernstein, whose widow, now Mrs. Delisle, is today the resident proprietor. The dwelling remains unaltered, and the internal arrangement and decor seemingly have never been changed (even some William Morris-type wall papers remain) except for the careful installation of modern kitchen and bathroom fixtures, and wood paneling added in the library.

(See Continuation Sheet 3)

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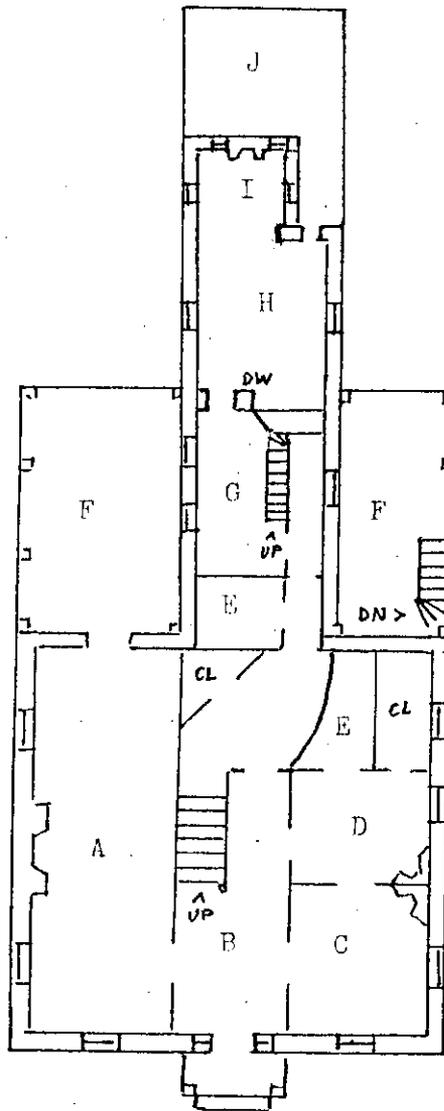
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- A: Sitting-room
- B: Stair hall
- C: Library
- D: Bedroom now
- E: Bathrooms
- F: Porches
- G: Kitchen now
- H: Dining-room
- I: Modern addition to dining-room
- J: Modern terrace

PLAN OF FIRST FLOOR.  
(Not to scale).

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Oak Glen is a fine example of the small, unpretentious mid-Victorian country seat and is significant primarily for its association with the Howe family who were at the center of many of New England's reform and intellectual movements in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Julia Ward Howe and Samuel Gridley Howe were the scions of two prominent New York and Boston families and important participants in many of the humanitarian, educational, and reform efforts of nineteenth century America. Samuel Howe (1801-1876) was born in Boston and educated at Brown University and at Harvard where he received his medical degree. He spent the six years following his training in Greece, serving as a surgeon and a relief organizer for the Greek revolutionary forces. When he returned to Boston in 1831, he was appointed first director of the Massachusetts Asylum (now the Perkins School for the Blind) and throughout the 1830s devoted himself to the education of the handicapped, retarded, and insane. A pioneer in the use of raised print books for the un-sighted, Howe issued an edition of the Bible in this type in 1841. His promotion and development of such teaching aids brought him international acclaim as did his achievement in teaching Laura Bridgman, the first deaf-blind child to learn to read and write. Howe helped to found the Clarke School for the Deaf and also participated in Dorothea Dix's efforts in prison reform. In the 1840s, Howe concentrated his efforts on the abolition of slavery. One of the leaders of the Free Soil Party in 1848, he also served on the Boston Vigilance Committee which aided fugitive slaves and eventually became one of the "Secret Six" who backed John Brown in his raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859.

In his abolitionist activities, Howe was aided by his wife, Julia Ward (1819-1910). The daughter of a New York family with distinguished colonial antecedents in Rhode Island, Julia Ward was educated privately and, after her marriage, she adopted her husband's interests in social reform and added them to her own interests in poetry and playwriting. Together the Howes were active members of the Radical Club of Boston and edited the anti-slavery Commonwealth. During the Civil War, Samuel Howe served on the U. S. Sanitary Commission and the Freedmen's Inquiry Commission. Julia Ward Howe

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is still best known for her poem inspired by the abolitionist fervor of the war -- "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". From the 1850s through the 1870s, she also published several volumes of poetry and travel writing.

Like other Bostonians and New Yorkers of ample means, the Howe family summered at Newport, Rhode Island, the country's pre-eminent resort. Julia Ward and Samuel Howe, however, established their summer residence far from the social whirl of Newport when they bought the Oak Glen property in 1852 at what was known as Lawton's Valley -- a farming district near the middle of Aquidneck Island some four miles from the city; they were among the first local summer colonists to establish themselves "out in the country". This soon became a minor fashion and people like Julia Ward Howe's cousin, Ward McAllister, the famous socialite who coined the term "The Four Hundred", kept an intentionally rustic farm several miles closer to town where he entertained with elaborate champagne picnics, hayrides, and dances. Several of the wealthiest summer people, like Cornelius Vanderbilt and H.A.C. Taylor, who vast and sumptuous intown "cottages" also maintained farms in Middletown or Portsmouth which were used to raise flowers, food, prize horses and livestock and were occasionally used as informal retreats.

The Howe's small farmhouse at Oak Glen was no such place. They enlarged it modestly, planted trees, and laid out a lawn. The life they led at Oak Glen was oriented around their six children, outdoor activities, the reception of their many literary and artistic friends, and their own work and interests. Here they lived for several months each year, sometimes for periods of six to eight months at a time. Their guests were some of Boston's and Europe's leading literary lights and intellectual leaders, including Fanny and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, George William Curtis, Thomas Higginson, and Oscar Wilde, who were entertained at small picnics, sailing parties, amateur theatricals, and musicales.

The social activities of the Howes' summer entertaining did not preclude their own serious work. While Samuel Howe's work in education was still largely oriented toward Boston institutions, Julia Howe wrote at Oak Glen, preferring to write on her porch overlooking the valley. She preached occasionally at the local Unitarian Church and organized a literary association among her friends in Newport and Portsmouth -- The Town and Country Club.

(See Continuation Sheet 5)

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Samuel Howe died in 1876, but Julia Howe continued to live at Oak Glen until her death in 1910. After her husband's death she continued to write poetry, plays, and children's songs, but she added to her literary interests a strong-minded support of women's rights and world peace. She eventually served as president of both the New England Women's Suffrage Association and the Women's International Peace Association.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Julia Ward Howe was one of the most distinguished of American women well known both as a writer and a speaker. The Town and Country Club was the focus of her social life, but many of her admirers also trekked out to Portsmouth from Newport, Boston, and New York, to visit her at Oak Glen. For the forty years between 1870 and 1910, the Howe summer house was a center of intellect and politesse in Rhode Island summer life, whose hosts and visitors included the leading figures of New England literary life and social reform.

Although her many books and published lectures are still interesting for their serious and determined commitment to social reform, they are no longer as popular as they once were and Julia Ward Howe's fame today rests largely on her composition of the stirring, evangelistic "Battle Hymn".

The well-ordered house which Julia Ward and Samuel Gridley Howe built in Portsmouth was designed for the ease and comfort of their large family and the reception of their friends and associates. The exterior of the house is simple, but the interior, though modest in scale, is notable for its fine trim, inlaid floors, and handsome staircase. Some art work was contributed by Howes' talented friends, such as F. Marion Crawford's incised putti on the dining room mantelpiece and a molded frieze of processional figures in the front sitting room. As a good example of the Victorian summer house and the home of a noteworthy family, Oak Glen deserves the protection and recognition of National Register status.

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Major Bibliographical References Con't.

Tharp, Louise Hall, Three Saints and a Sinner Boston: Little,  
Brown, 1956.







Julia Ward Howe House/"oak Glen"

Portsmouth, Rhode Island

Photographer: Warren Jagger

Date: February, 1977

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

View from the southwest

photo #1



Julia Ward Howe House, "Oak Glen"

Portsmouth, Rhode Island

Photographer: Warren Jagger

Date: February, 1977

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

View from the northwest

photo #2



Julia Ward Howe House, "oak Glen"

Portsmouth, Rhode Island

Photographer: Warren Jagger

Date: February, 1977

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

Front Staircase

photo #3



Julia Ward Howe House, "Oak Glen"

Portsmouth, Rhode Island

Photographer: Warren Jagger

Date: February, 1977

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

Top of front staircase showing the connection between new and  
old sections

photo #4



Julia Ward Howe House, "Oak Glen"

Portsmouth, Rhode Island

Photographer: Warren Jagger

Date: February, 1977

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

Parlor with parquet floor, where Julia Ward Howe had her salon

photo #5



Julia Ward Howe House, "Oak Glen"

Portsmouth, Rhode Island

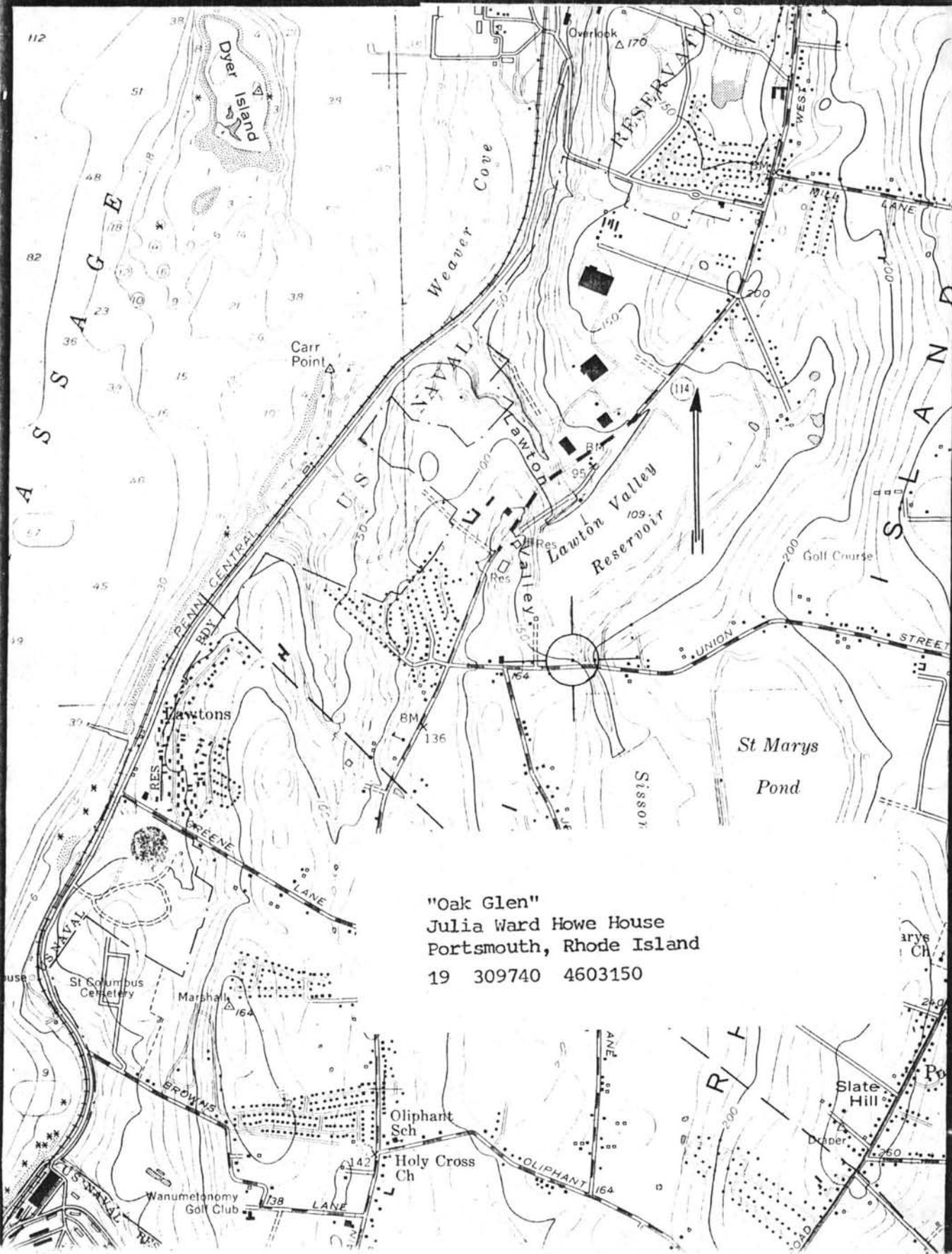
Photographer: Warren Jagger

Date: February, 1977

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

Decorative Frieze in the Library

photo #6



"Oak Glen"  
Julia Ward Howe House  
Portsmouth, Rhode Island  
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