

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Stephen Allen House

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Sharp Street

CITY, TOWN

West Greenwich

VICINITY OF

2 - Hon. Edward Beard

STATE

Rhode Island 02816

CODE

44

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

COUNTY

Kent

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Normand A. Leveillee

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Sharp Street, RFD 2

CITY, TOWN

West Greenwich

VICINITY OF

STATE

Rhode Island 02816

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

West Greenwich Town Clerk

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Victory Highway

CITY, TOWN

West Greenwich

STATE

Rhode Island 02816

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE West Greenwich, Rhode Island -- Preliminary Historical and  
Cultural Resources Survey

DATE

1977 - 1978

--FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Stephen Allen House stands in one corner of a six-acre pastoral, wooded property, all that remains of what was once a 120-acre farm in the still-rural and remote town of West Greenwich. The house, whose oldest and principal section dates from c. 1787, is a timber-framed, gable-roofed, one-and-one-half story structure with central chimney and wall cover of clapboards, long overlaid with shingles (which the present owner plans to remove). It is five bays in width and two in depth and stands on a foundation of granite blocks. The chimney is built of granite to the roof ridge, and of brick above.

The entrance faces south; the original doorway was altered c. 1830, when a very simple Greek Revival entrance with narrow sidelights was installed. At the same time, an eastern gabled ell of one-and-one-half stories with an end chimney was added. The ell is not as deep as the original house and has a recessed porch which shelters a second entrance. The porch is supported by square wooden piers with very simple molded Greek Revival capitals. At the rear of the ell a one-story sun room has been built out to the north; but this addition is not visible from the street.

Reflecting its remote location, the house has little sophistication in design or decoration. There are no eaves-cornices or fascia boards; windows are surrounded by simple frames without moldings. The original sash was nine-over-six; some of these windows survive in storage. They were replaced by six-over-six sash c. 1830 and by storm-tight twelve-over-twelve windows installed by the present owner.

The front door has two tall vertical panels; the original door (of batten construction on the inside and panelled externally) was re-used as a rear door for the ell, when the house was re-modelled c. 1830. Each entrance has large granite stone steps. Four narrow, peaked dormers have been built into the north (back) slope of the roof, and a semi-circular bay window (said to have come from a New York house) has been added on the north side.

On the interior of the earlier section, one finds an interesting variant of the five-room plan associated with Rhode Island center chimney houses. The front door opens into a small entry in which an enclosed stair angles up tightly against the front of the chimney. A door to the right opens into the kitchen; the placement of the kitchen in the front side position (rather than in the rear) is typical of rural hill country houses in Rhode Island and is a fairly common variation on the standard five-room plan. Doors at

See Continuation Sheet 1

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the rear of the kitchen open to a pantry (in the northeast corner) and a chamber, now used as a dining room, in the middle of the north elevation. The parlor, occupying the left front position, is reached by a door opening off the entry. Behind the parlor in the northwest corner is a small chamber now used as a den.

There have been changes in this basic plan: the pantry has been reduced to half its original width to enlarge the dining room and to create space for a stair to the cellar and a bathroom; its original proportions can be seen in the floorboards of the enlarged dining room. The original doorway between the dining room and the kitchen has been removed to create a wider opening.

Upstairs, the original part of the house contains three bedrooms and closet space; the upper part of the ell is one long open space, now used as a sewing room.

Interior trim is minimal. Corner posts are cased; doors and windows have simple architrave surrounds; there are no ceiling cornices nor any wainscot, except in the kitchen. First floor doors have four recessed panels, while those upstairs are of plain, flat, wide, vertical boarding. On both floors, original hardware is intact. In the west parlor (whose walls are now covered with panelling from another building), the fireplace has a raised and bevelled panel in the upper fascia of its mantel; a similar treatment is also employed for the mantel in the dining room. Simple, robust moldings form the surround for the kitchen's hearth (which has a brick bake oven) and also form a support for its shallow shelf. There is a cupboard with a door of vertical boarding to the left of the kitchen hearth and a small cupboard to the upper left of the dining room fireplace. The railing at the top of the stairwell is made of slender posts with small bun tops between which run flat narrow board rails. Except for the front entry, all floors are original wide boards.

The front of the property is marked off from Sharp Street by a long, dry-laid stone wall with breaks for the door path and the driveway; a row of tall trees is set just inside it. To the north of the house is a shingled, gable-roofed two-seater privy. To the northwest are the stone foundations of a barn which burned in 1971; a new, partially open carriage shelter uses some of these foundations; beyond them is a fenced pasture.

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The most interesting of the outbuildings is a clapboarded, one-and-one-half story shed with a gable roof, east of the house. Its entrance, in a recessed space at the southwest corner, opens into a square room whose walls and ceiling are plastered; from this room a narrow, steep stair leads to the attic. The date of construction is not known, but an 1862 map shows a store at or near the farmhouse, which may in fact be this shed. The sheltered entrance and window-lighted and plastered interior not only substantiate the fact that this small building was used as a store, but also strongly suggest that it was built for that purpose originally. The present owner has added a horse stall to the north end of this building and intends to restore it.

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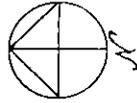
CONTINUATION SHEET 3

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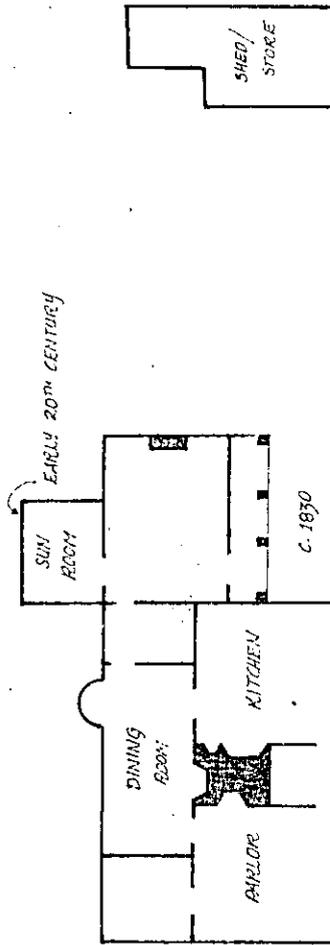
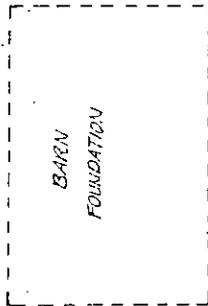
PAGE

4

STEPHEN ALLEN HOUSE  
SKETCH PLAN - NOT TO SCALE



□ OUTHOUSE



1787

SHARP STREET

SHARP STREET

SHARP

ROUTE

ROUTE

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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

The Stephen Allen House is a modest example of a late eighteenth century farmstead built by a prosperous western Rhode Island family. Its significance to the town of West Greenwich lies primarily in its association with a number of locally-important individuals and families and in its ability to illustrate rural life in the hinterlands of the state in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an important aspect of Rhode Island's agricultural history.

A well-proportioned, five-room-plan, central chimney house, with plain interior, Stephen Allen's homestead is a well-preserved representative of a type which for so long dominated much of rural domestic building in Rhode Island. The farmstead, with its simple house, shed, barn foundation, privy, fenced pasture and stone walls, still in a visually rustic setting, suggests in fragmentary form a prosperous late eighteenth century farm. Such farmsteads were once common in the state and, while many remain today, most have either been extensively altered or encroached upon by modern development. At the Stephen Allen House, the integrity of the structures is still generally unimpaired and much of the original siting and orientation of the elements of the farmstead to each other, the road, and the landscape, is still clear.

Stephen Allen's farm lands were located on Sharp Street, an early and important east-west road between the coastline and western Rhode Island, and were purchased from Thomas Joslin in 1787. The land originally included a forty-acre parcel of the Greene family's homestead; Allen later added an additional eighty acres of land to his farm. When Allen, a physician from East Greenwich, located his family in West Greenwich, the inland town was itself only forty-five years old; it was set off in 1741 from its more prosperous coastal neighbor, East Greenwich. Like other inland western towns in the state, West Greenwich was cut off from the trade of Narragansett Bay, which was the focus of Rhode Island's economy in the eighteenth century, and was primarily an agricultural town. Its population, always small, was thinly scattered over its 35,000 acres. In 1755, the population was only 1246; by 1800, the town had grown but slightly to 1757.

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In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several widely-separated hamlets existed in West Greenwich, but settlement for the most part occurred along the roads which crossed the rural town; there was no substantial town center and few public buildings. The nearest village to Stephen Allen's house was West Greenwich Center, to the west; but even this tiny village had no church until 1825; only in the 1840s was a post office established here. While some of the townspeople worked in small wood-products mills or at a granite quarry on the Wood River, most were subsistence farmers. In 1810, for example, there were 122 farms in West Greenwich, all occupied by single families, most of whom probably produced for their own needs and operated on only a small cash surplus.

It seems likely that Stephen Allen was the only doctor in this community and was probably more affluent than his neighbors, for the Census of 1800 lists not only his family of four, but also three "free persons" who were probably Black servants.

The Allen House was inherited in 1811 by the doctor's daughter Sally and his son-in-law George Weaver, who farmed the acreage until 1828. It was during the Weavers' tenure that the ell was added to the house and the barn (of which only the foundations remain after a fire in 1971) was constructed. In 1828 the farm was leased (and sold in 1829 and 1831) to William Nichols and members of the Nichols family owned and operated the farm into the 1860s, growing products typical of western Rhode Island--corn and potatoes--and keeping a small stock of animals--oxen, sheep, and swine.

During the Nichols' occupation of the Allen farmstead, a small parcel of land was donated to the town for construction of a schoolhouse. In 1829, West Greenwich was divided into twelve districts, each to be provided with a school. District #9's Sharp Street School was erected adjacent to the Stephen Allen House some time between 1834 and 1855. Like most rural schoolhouses in Rhode Island, it was a small structure in which ungraded classes were taught during farming's off-season. Unfortunately, the school burned in 1929. Its site is not included in the present nomination.

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A map drawn in 1862, when the farm was owned by Albert and Susan Nichols, indicates a "store" at or near the farmhouse. Though the date of construction of a small shed on the property is unknown, its lathed and plastered interior finish and its size and shape suggest that this may indeed have been a local store. Census records list Albert Nichols's occupation as "farmer," not "merchant" or "store-keeper," though it is possible that the census taker recorded only his major trade and not his subsidiary interest, that the store was too short-lived to have been noted, or that an unknown proprietor leased the premises from Nichols. If the shed did serve as a store, it would have been a rarity in rural West Greenwich--even a decade later there were only four stores in the entire town. As a survivor, the store is an even greater rarity today when only a few such trading places remain to illustrate the minimal commercial life of isolated mid-nineteenth century farming areas.

In 1867, the Allen farmstead was sold to the Reverend Benedict Johnson. The clergyman was newly-arrived from Woodstock, Connecticut, and had come to West Greenwich to lead the nearby First Baptist Church. However, the property remained in the hands of the Johnson family for only seven years and was purchased in 1874 by Stephen H. Capwell who, with his wife and seven children, worked the farm for forty years. Norman Capwell, Stephen's son, retained possession of the farm (after his father's death in 1914) until 1952. The Capwell family were a large and many-branched clan; from the mid-nineteenth century until well into the twentieth, various members of the family owned farms in this locale and were prominent in local affairs, especially politics. Norman Capwell himself served several terms in the Rhode Island General Assembly as a representative of West Greenwich.

There is presently a potential threat to the Stephen Allen House; a proposal to widen State Route 102 which forms the western border of the property is now under study. Such a widening might take a section of the yard from the house and adversely affect its pleasant visual setting.

As a well-preserved farmstead of a once-common form, typical in aspect, and illustrative of farm family life, and for its association with locally important families, the Stephen Allen House is worthy of the protection and recognition of entry on the National Register.

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Land Records, Town of West Greenwich.  
Rhode Island State Censuses, 1855, 1865.



AVL--

Joe Towner of the National Register points out that the boundary description for the Stephen Allen House is not precise--two southern boundaries, no eastern bound, and the east and south bounds too vague. I believe this is something Harrington should take care of--

Pam

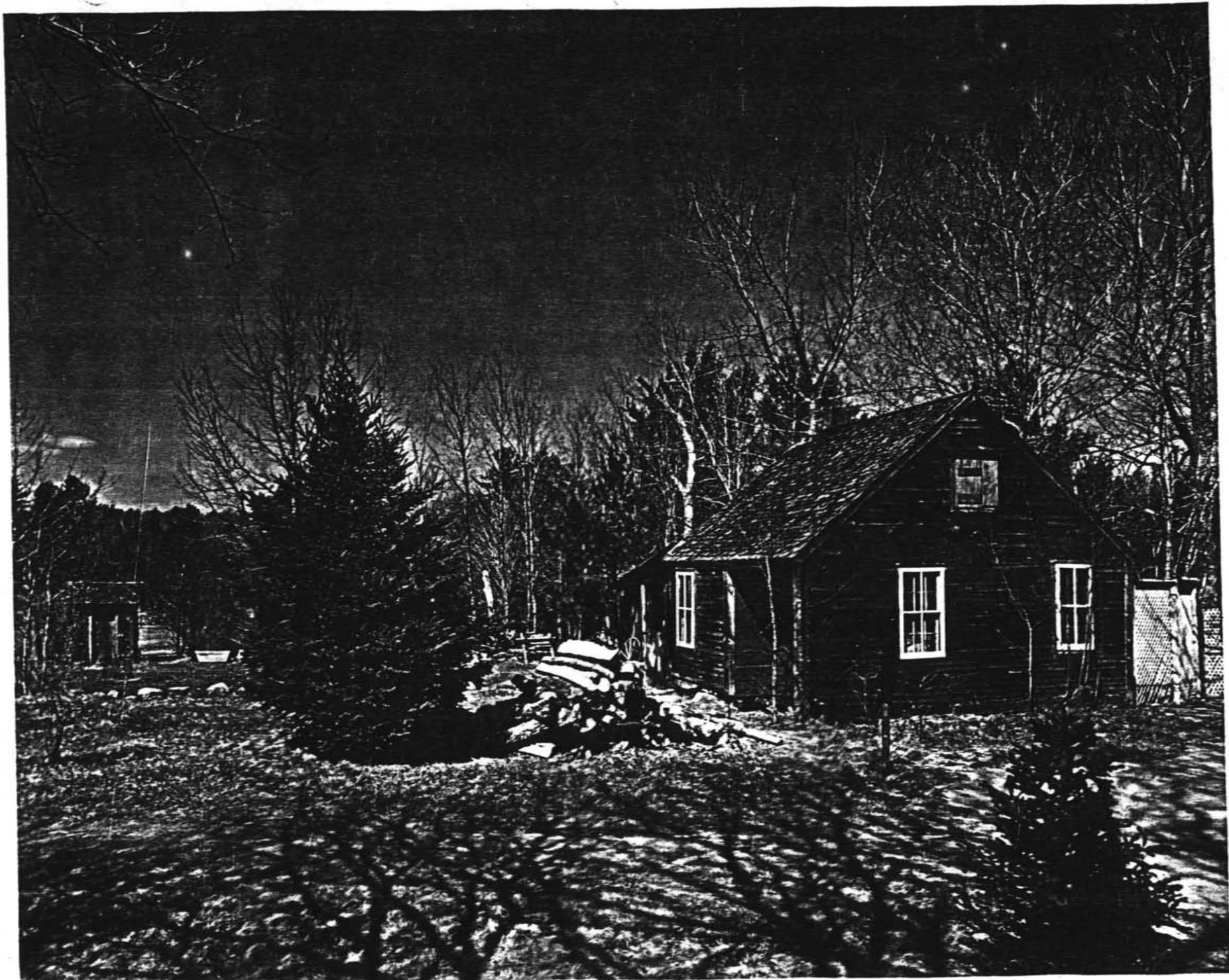
Plat 26, lot 15-4B

Plat 20 Lot 1-1

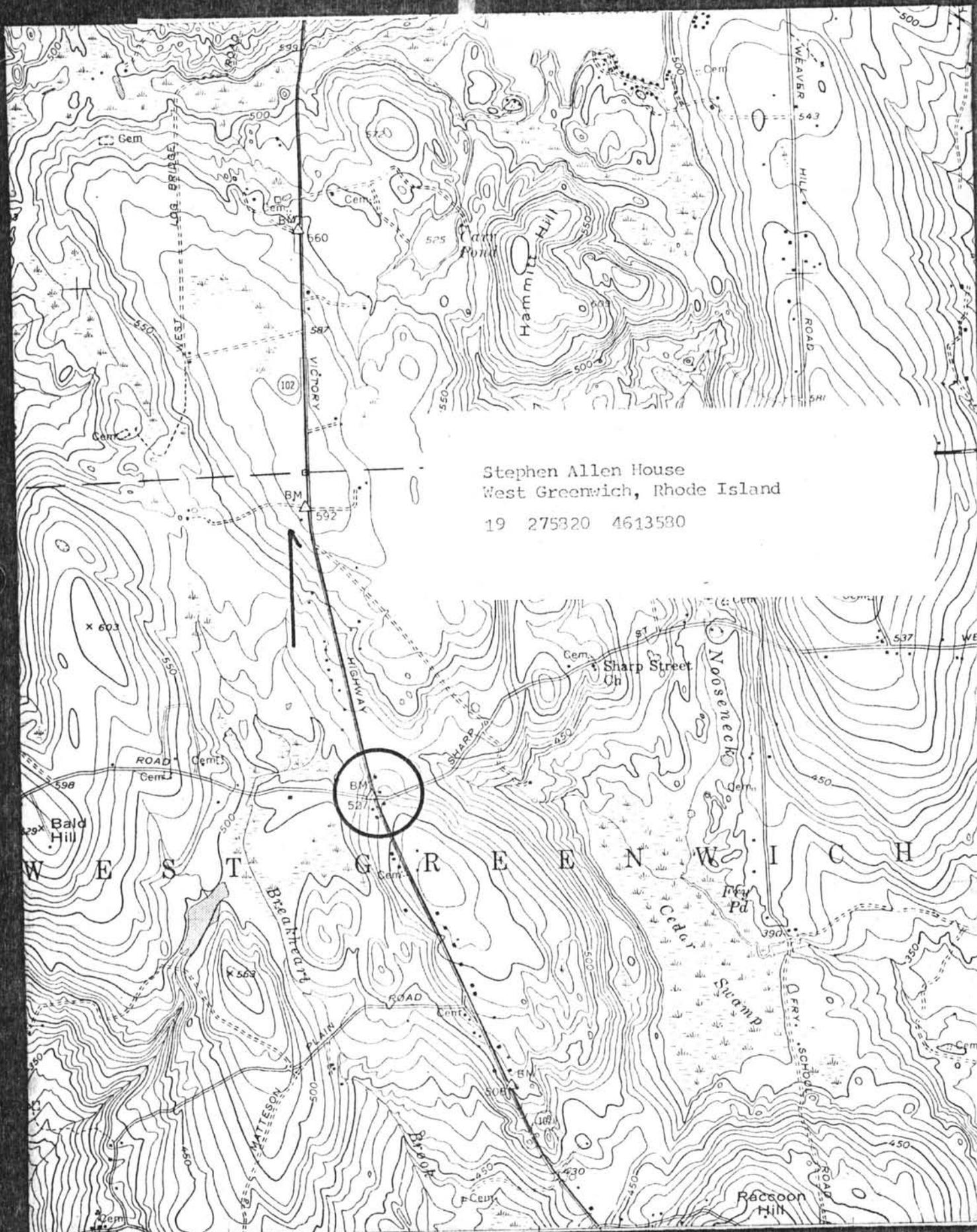
3.6 acres for Stephen Allen











Stephen Allen House  
West Greenwich, Rhode Island  
19 275320 4613580

BM  
527

WEST GREENWICH

Raccoon Hill

Hammit Hill

Nooseneck

Sharp Street

Bald Hill

Breakneck Hill

Fry School

Gem

Cem

Cem Pond

Cem

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