**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: ____BLISS, JOHN, HOUSE_____
Other names/site number: ___WILBUR FARM_____
Name of related multiple property listing**:** ___N/A_____
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

## 2. Location

Street & number: ___2 WILBUR AVENUE_____
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Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐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 _X_ 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 __X_ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

**__national X statewide _X_local**
Applicable National Register Criteria:

**_X_A ___B _X_C ___D**

State Historic Preservation Officer August 26. 2025

**Signature of certifying official/Title:** **Date**

Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission

**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 or Tribal Government**

## 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:) _____

_____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

| | |
|---|---|
| Private: | [X] |
| Public – Local | [ ] |
| Public – State | [ ] |
| Public – Federal | [ ] |

### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

| | |
|---|---|
| Building(s) | [X] |
| District | [ ] |
| Site | [ ] |
| Structure | [ ] |
| Object | [ ] |

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | buildings |
| | | sites |
| | | structures |
| | | objects |
| 1 | 1 | Total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DEFENSE/military facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COLONIAL: Postmedieval English

COLONIAL: Georgian

EARLY 20th CENTURY REVIVALS: Colonial Revival

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property:
WOOD/weatherboard, shingles; STONE; BRICK; ASPHALT

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

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**Summary Paragraph**

The John Bliss House, built ca. 1680-1715, is one of Newport's oldest extant residential buildings *(Appendix 1)* and the city's only surviving example of an early Rhode Island typology, the "stone-ender." Located outside of Newport's town center, the house is one of only a handful of confirmed and extant stone enders surviving in the state *(Appendix 2)*. A well-preserved Colonial-era dwelling, the 2½ story post-and-beam frame building is clad in vertical board sheathing covered with clapboards and wood shingles and features a large fieldstone chimney mass partially exposed on its north exterior wall. The building has a steeply pitched, side gambrel roof, offset entrance on its façade (west), and Georgian style alterations (ca. 1715-1748), including a segmental-arch-pediment front door surround and 12-over-12, double-hung sash windows. The Bliss House retains its historic floor plan and exhibits many hallmarks of the Colonial and Georgian styles on its interior, with exposed wood-pegged mortise-and-tenon joints; an asymmetrical four-room plan; cased summer beams, posts, and girts; and four stone fireplaces (two on each floor) with wood surrounds. The house was carefully restored in 1947-1951 and remains well-preserved today. The property also includes a 1½-story, end gable garage (2022, non-contributing). The Bliss House was originally part of a 150-acre farm; today it occupies a 0.907-acre lot in a densely developed residential neighborhood of houses dating from the late 19th century to the present. Despite the loss of its rural setting, the John Bliss House retains a high level of integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

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**Narrative Description**

**Setting** *(Maps 1 and 2)*

The City of Newport occupies 11 square miles at the southern end of Aquidneck Island, the largest island in Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay. Newport shares the island with the Town of Middletown, abutting Newport to the northeast, and the Town of Portsmouth, abutting Middletown to the northeast. The Bliss House is situated about a mile northeast of the Newport

National Historic Landmark District (NHL, 1968; amended 2022), and less than a quarter mile northeast of the Kay Street-Catherine Street-Old Beach Road Historic District (NR, 1973, updated 2018).

The John Bliss House at 2 Wilbur Avenue stands on an L-shaped 9,073 sq.ft. corner lot bounded to the west by Wilbur Avenue and to the north by Bliss Road. This location is in northeastern Newport, about one-quarter mile west of the Middletown town line, which crosses Bliss Road diagonally from northwest to southeast. Bliss Road extends about 0.66 mile between Broadway in Newport at its western end, and Bliss Mine Road, partly in Middletown and partly in Newport, at its eastern end.[1] Broadway provides access to downtown Newport as well as to West Main Road/RI Route 138 in Middletown. At roughly the midpoint of Bliss Road, Wilbur Avenue extends southward two blocks, crosses Wilbur Street, and terminates a short distance further beyond *(Map 1)*. Wilbur Avenue (originally called Anthony Avenue, renamed in 1948[2]) and Wilbur Street were laid out as part of the Wilbur Farm Plat, recorded by the Anthony Land Company in 1907 *(Map 12)*. The Wilbur Farm Plat was slowly built out between 1907 and 2018. The plat and the surrounding neighborhood are predominantly characterized by moderate-sized lots and single-family wood-frame houses ranging from 1 to 2½ stories tall, with examples of Late Victorian, Colonial Revival, Bungalow, Cape Cod, and Ranch as well as more recent architectural styles.

The house is set back approximately 18 feet from Wilbur Avenue and approximately 70 feet from Bliss Road. Site features include a grass lawn, planting beds, and mature trees and shrubbery; stone-paved and crushed-oyster-shell walkways; a wood pergola (likely erected in the early 21st century) in the north side yard; and two stone-paved patios, one beneath the pergola and the other adjacent to the rear elevation of the house. An asphalt-paved driveway runs parallel to the south side yard, leading to a free-standing garage (non-contributing, 2022).

**House (ca. 1680-1715, with later alterations ca. 1715-1748; ca. 1791; ca. 1900-1930; 1947-1951; and ca. 2015-2019)**
**One contributing building**

Analysis of physical evidence and of Bliss family history suggest that John Bliss likely constructed his home before 1700. Many of its architectural features reflect late 17th and early 18th century building practices and a deed from John Bliss to his son Josiah Bliss indicates that the house was standing as of 1715. Josiah Bliss, who owned the house from 1715-1748, most likely was responsible for the introduction of the Georgian-style front door surround and 12-over-12, double-hung sash windows. The date "1791" carved into a fireplace mantelpiece may refer to repairs and improvements that Henry Bliss (Josiah's son) made after filing claims for compensation to rectify damages that the house had sustained during the Revolutionary War. Historic photos showing the exterior of the house ca. 1900, ca. 1930s, and ca. 1950s, document

[1] As the street name indicates, the area occupied by Bliss Mine Road was part of the Bliss Farm in the 17th and 18th centuries.
[2] *Newport Mercury*, March 5, 1948.

some of the minor exterior changes to the building and illustrate the work conducted during a restoration project undertaken in 1947-1951. Recent owners have also made some additional, minor alterations.

### *A Note About Dates*

It can be difficult to determine a precise construction date for houses built in the early Colonial period, especially when, as is the case with the John Bliss House, few primary source records are available; later alterations and restoration work have obscured some physical evidence of original features; and evolving scholarship by architectural historians over a period of over half a century has called into question some earlier conclusions about when and how the house was built (see Section 8 of this nomination). Dates of all known post-1715 alterations are noted below.

### *Exterior*

The John Bliss House is a 2½-story, post-and-beam "stone ender" single-family dwelling, four bays wide and two bays deep. The building's main entrance is located in the northernmost bay of the west façade *(Photos 1, 2, 5)*.

The side-gambrel roof is clad in asphalt shingles, which were first installed during the 1947-1951 restoration project; any roofing repair or replacement since then has been in kind. (The historic roof material was wood shakes *[Figure 3.]*) The roof frame was assembled using mortise and tenon joints fastened with wooden pegs (visible in the attic; *Photo 43*) and extends over the entire four-room floor plan. Two late 20th or early 21st century flat skylights on the eastern (rear) slope of the gambrel roof are out of view from Wilbur Avenue and only minimally visible from Bliss Road. The front eaves, boxed in with a board false plate, overhang the plane of the façade by about eighteen inches.[3]

Painted wood clapboards cover the west façade, while the south (side) and east (rear) elevations are clad in unpainted wood shingles (*Photo 4*). Wood trim elements include narrow corner boards on all four elevations, a slim belt course on the façade between the foundation and first floor level, rakes beneath the gambrel ends, and door and window surrounds. Some of these wall materials were replaced in kind in 1947-1951.

The north elevation faces Bliss Road and features the building's "stone end," a large rectangular expanse of exposed fieldstone chimney mass at the first and second floor levels (*Photo 3*). Unpainted wood shingles appear on both sides of the stonework as well as above it up to the roofline. Shell mortar is also present in this chimney mass, which includes a fieldstone beehive

[3] Stachiw, p. 124.

oven protruding from the first floor of the east bay. The beehive oven (*Photo 3; Figures 5, 8 and 10*) was reconstructed in 1947-1951, based upon physical evidence in the Old Kitchen fireplace.[4]

A large T-shaped brick chimney stack rises several feet above the peak of the gambrel (*Photos 1 and 2*). Part of this chimney is exposed in the attic, where evidence of mortar made with lime from pulverized oyster shells is visible. Early Rhode Island houses typically had stone chimneys until about 1700, after which brick became more common; both stone and brick chimneys typically were pilastered until about 1720.[5] As this brick chimney stack is not pilastered, it appears to have replaced the upper portion of an earlier stone chimney sometime after that date.

The house sits on a small rise a few feet above street grade, on top of a raised fieldstone foundation built with shell mortar. Fieldstone steps and wrought iron handrails leading up to the main entrance were introduced in 1947-1951 *(Figures 2, 6 and 7)*.

The main entrance, situated in the northernmost bay of the façade, has a 6-panel wood door (now protected by a wood and glass storm door), with a 5-light wood transom above. The entry is framed by Doric pilasters on both sides and topped with a segmental-arch molded pediment, all executed in wood (*Photos 1 and 2*). Both the door and its surround are characteristic of the early to mid-18th century and can be seen in a ca. 1885 historic photograph *(Figure 1).* The surround was restored, and the transom was introduced, during the 1947-1951 restoration project *(Figure 8)*. A secondary entrance on the rear (east) elevation, also added at that time, features a wood-framed glass door protected by a wood vertical-board-and-batten storm door, surrounded by simple wood trim and a molded lintel. A bulkhead on the south side of the house with stone steps accessing the cellar has been in that location since before ca. 1900 *(Figure 3).* The bulkhead's solid wood hinged doors and concrete base are modern replacements (*Photo 4*).

All but one of the windows are wood 12-over-12, double-hung sash, as was typical of the first half of the 18th century; these are protected by wood storm windows. Windows on the façade have molded lintels while those found on secondary elevations have flat lintels which project outward and slant down to shed water. Windows on the second story of the façade and rear elevation are located just below the roofline. The 1947-1951 restoration project replaced most if not all windows in kind, according to historic photographs *(Figures 7, 8 and 10)*. Concurrently, some minor adjustments were made to the fenestration patterns on the side and rear elevations. On the north elevation, a small square window opening containing a four-light fixed wood sash was inserted at the second floor level next to the stone chimney mass. On the rear (east) elevation, a wood 12-over-12 window on the first floor level was moved closer to the southeast corner of the house, and in its former location a back door was installed. A wood 4-over-4,

[4] Stachiw, p. 123, mistakenly described the external beehive oven as original. Historic photographs confirm that the external part of the oven had been removed prior to ca. 1937 but was reconstructed (based upon interior evidence) during the 1947-1951 restoration project *(Figures 2, 5 and 8)*.

[5] Downing and Scully, pp. 29-31. Prior to the mid-18th century, most brick used in building construction in Newport was imported to the island by boat and thus in limited supply, primarily used for chimneys and for wall infill.

double-hung sash window at the first floor on the east bay of the south elevation (that was smaller than the adjacent 12-over-12 sash) was eliminated *(Figure 3).*

On the rear elevation near the northeast corner of the house stands a small one-story, wood-frame, side-gable-roofed addition clad in unpainted wood shingles. On its south elevation are a wood multi-light, true-divided-light picture window and a wood-framed multilight glass door protected by a wood vertical-board-and-batten storm door (matching the kitchen storm door). The north elevation has a similar door. This addition was formerly an outbuilding that once stood a short distance from the house but was relocated and attached to the dwelling during the 1947-1951 restoration project, then subsequently renovated into living space (ca. 1960s), and more recently altered again (date unknown, estimated post-2000). An outdoor shower, enclosed by an unpainted solid board fence approximately 6 feet tall with wood latticework across the top, was added post-2019 on the north side of the east addition.

***Interior***

*Note:* the names of the Great Room, Old Kitchen, Chamber, two Bedrooms adjacent to the Great Room, Cellar, and Garret, were derived from the will and probate inventory of Henry Bliss (grandson of John Bliss), who owned the house from 1749 to 1805.

*Floor Plan (Plan 1)*

The John Bliss House measures 29 feet (north to south) by 30 feet (east to west) and has an asymmetrical four-room plan on both the first and second floors. Two large rooms with stone fireplaces are located on the north side of the house, and two small rooms are on the south. As explained in Section 8 of this nomination, architectural historians have had differing opinions as to whether this is the original plan, or whether the house was first built on a two-room plan and later expanded to four rooms. Both arrangements were utilized in colonial Rhode Island houses of the late 17th and early 18th centuries, but recent scholarship and physical evidence indicate that the Bliss House originally had a four-room plan.

*Cellar*

The cellar is enclosed by the massive stone base of the chimney on the north side, and by mortared fieldstone walls on the east, south, and west sides. The floor is paved with mortared cobblestones *(Photos 6, 7).*

On the south side, a small doorway leads to the bulkhead; the wood interior bulkhead door is a post-2019 replacement. Primary access to the cellar is provided by a steep wooden stairway that was added in 1947-1951, situated underneath the back stairs between the Old Kitchen (Northeast Room) and the current Kitchen (Southeast Room).

The cellar ceiling is about 6 feet above the floor, with exposed wood joists and beams (many of which were replaced in 1947-1951). Two heavy beams, each apparently hewn from a single log

and far older than 1948, bisect the ceiling from north to south. The eastern beam is supported by a single vertical brick pier, roughly in the middle of the cellar, that may date from 1947-1951. The western beam has recently been covered with plywood, but a small opening cut into the plywood reveals part of the aged beam.

The foundation stonework and the two major ceiling support beams indicate that the entire cellar was dug out at the same time, supporting the theory that the house was originally constructed with a four-room plan.[6]

*First Floor: Entryway and Front Stair Hall*

At the northwest corner of the house, the front door opens into a small entry vestibule *(Photos 8 and 9)*, measuring approximately 5 feet from north to south and 3 feet from east to west. Its walls are clad in wide vertical boards; the ceiling is lath-and-plaster, floorboards are wide planks, and baseboards and door surrounds consist of simple wood trim. The northwest corner post and girts on the north, west, and south sides, are enclosed in wood bead-edged casings likely installed during the 1947-1951 restoration project[7] (see Section 8).

The original stairway butts up against the chimney, as was typical for a Rhode Island stone-ender, and the chimney stonework is exposed between the first and second floors. One end of the "chimney tree," a hefty horizontal beam above the Great Room fireplace, as well as a chimney girt and a chimney post, are also visible within the stairway. The steep, narrow stairs ascend with several tight turns to the attic level. The majority of the treads are triangular rather than rectangular, and may reflect a post-1715 upgrade, as they "have integral molded nosings typical of early eighteenth-century work."[8] A modern, simple wood handrail extends along the east side of the stairway against the chimney stonework; a similar wood handrail is attached vertically to the edge of the stair enclosure.

A wood door with two raised panels and wrought iron hardware opens from this stair hall into the Great Room.

[6] Amidst the ceiling joists near the cellar stairs, the bottom ends of several vertical sheathing boards can be seen. The deteriorated condition of some of these board ends may suggest exposure to the outdoors and prior use as exterior sheathing materials. Board ends generally align with the south wall of the Old Kitchen above and the interior partition wall between the Great Room and the Old Kitchen. Additional forensic investigation may yield more definitive information on these boards, the ceiling beams and the building's evolution over time.
[7] Further investigation may determine whether some casings predate the restoration project, as those found in the Great Room and elsewhere appear to be hand hewn and have additional layers of paint build-up vs. those known to be newer. It is conceivable that during the restoration project, the 18th century casings were removed and then put back into place.
[8] Stachiw, p. 123.

*First Floor: Great Room (Northwest Room)*

The spacious Great Room *(Photos 10-13)*, with its finer finishes, would have been considered the "best" room in the house: it was the Bliss family's principal living space and the place where guests would be welcomed. It is presently used as a living room.

The Great Room measures approximately 16 feet square. Its walls are vertical board with applied plaster. The ceiling is lath-and-plaster, some of which was restored in 1947-1951, as were presumably some of the wide floorboards. Windows and doorways are trimmed with beaded boards; baseboards are plain wood. Framing elements include one post in the northwest corner, girts on the north, east, and west sides, and a summer beam that extends across the middle of the ceiling from north to south; all framing elements have wood bead-edged casings.

On the north side of the Great Room is a large stone fireplace with splayed sides, measuring 7 feet wide, 4 feet 6 inches tall, and 4 feet deep. (A modern freestanding wood-burning stove, vented into the chimney flue, has been installed in the fireplace.) In 2001, architectural historian Myron Stachiw noted that two unusual features of this fireplace include "a small wood-lined niche set high up in one jamb" (on the west side) and "a flue-like feature" (on the east side) that connects it with the rear fireplace (in the adjacent Old Kitchen). The function of the flue and when it was added have yet to be discovered[9] *(Plan 1).* A large wood mantelpiece composed of wide boards with beaded edges and topped with a narrow, molded mantel shelf, is finished with a dark stain. The lintel is 9 feet 3 inches wide and 12½ inches tall. The plaster cove between the mantelpiece and the chimney girt was restored in 1947-1951. Historians Antoinette Downing and Vincent Scully noted: "This coved form was often found in the earliest brick fireplaces but was not common to stone. Its appearance here suggests that the construction of the chimney had been modified by a knowledge of brick-building practice."[10] To the west of the fireplace (beneath the front stairs) is a closet featuring a board-and-batten door with wrought-iron hardware (L-shaped hinges). The opening has a simple molded surround, similar to that around the adjacent doorway to the front stair hall.

The Great Room has two other doorways, in the east wall accessing the Old Kitchen, and in the south wall leading to the Southwest Room. Both doorways feature wood, two-panel doors with wrought iron hardware, similar to the door to the front stair hall. The more decorative character of these three doors (as compared to the other interior board-and-batten doors) befits the elevated status of the Great Room as the "best" room in the house.

[9] Stachiw, p. 124.

[10] Downing and Scully, p. 29; the authors also commented that "the stonework above the chimney in the front room is crudely corbeled out in a way which suggests that there was once a huge cove (perhaps plastered) between the chimney tree and the chimney girt." As this book was first published in 1952, the phrasing of this comment indicates that the authors visited the Bliss House prior to the 1947-1951 restoration project, thus the cove plasterwork was restored at that time.

*First Floor: Old Kitchen (Northeast Room)*

Currently used as a dining room, the original Old Kitchen *(Photos 14-22)* is located to the east of the Great Room. The room measures approximately 13 feet 4 inches long from north to south, and 7 feet 6 inches wide from east to west. Originally this room was similar in length to the Great Room, but during the 1947-1951 restoration project, an enclosed, straight-run wood stairway up to the second floor was added on its south side. Approximately 2½ feet wide (*Photo 42*), the stairway is accessed by a board-and-batten door in the southwest corner of this room. The walls and ceiling of this back staircase are lath-and-plaster.

The Old Kitchen has vertical-board walls coated in plaster except on the south wall that encloses the back stairs, which is lath-and-plaster. Other features of this room include wide wood floorboards (installed in 1947-1951), framing elements including northwest and northeast corner posts as well as girts on all four sides (all with wood beaded-edge casings), and simple wood trim (similar to that in the Great Room) for windows, doorways and baseboards. The unfinished ceiling with exposed joists was a result of the 1947-1951 restoration project, which also replaced several of the girts.[11] Interior doors in this room, all board-and-batten with wrought-iron hardware, are situated on the south wall leading to the back stairs, on the east wall leading to the addition, and on the north wall enclosing a closet next to the fireplace.

On the north side of the Old Kitchen is a large stone fireplace with splayed sides measuring 6 feet 10 inches wide, 4 feet 6 inches tall, and 4 feet deep; the beehive oven in its rear wall was restored in 1947-51 *(Photo 18).* The large wood mantelpiece (its lintel is 8 feet 9 inches wide and 10½ inches tall) is very similar to the one found in the Great Room. This mantelpiece exhibits some hand-carvings, including a sailing ship with what appear to be two conjoined initials in its sails, and the date "1791" *(Photos 16-17).* As the house required repairs following British occupancy during the Revolutionary War (see Section 8), the "1791" may be the year that those improvements were made. The conjoined initials are difficult to decipher, but may refer to a member of the Bliss family.[12] A small closet situated to the east of the fireplace provides access to the stone chimney mass and one end of the "chimney tree" above the fireplace.

An open doorway at the southwest corner of the Old Kitchen leads to both the cellar stairs, situated directly beneath the back stairs, and the present Kitchen. The cellar stairs are accessed through a board-and-batten door with wrought iron hardware.

[11] A historical photograph from the collections of the Newport Historical Society dated circa 1947, shows the fireplace wall and a portion of the ceiling in the Old Kitchen prior to restoration (Figure 13). The image provides a glimpse into what the room and fireplace looked like prior to restoration.

[12] The conjoined initials might be read as "HB," "JB," or "IB." "HB" presumably would be Judge Henry Bliss, a grandson of John Bliss, who owned this house from 1749 to 1805. "JB" or "IB" (a capital "J" was sometimes rendered as a capital "I" in colonial-era handwriting) could refer to John Bliss, or to his son Josiah Bliss (Henry's father), who owned and lived in this house from 1715-1749. However, the initials being rendered within an image of a ship could also be an homage to Henry Bliss's son Josiah Bliss, a sea captain who died in 1799. (Research for this nomination did not uncover any evidence that Henry Bliss, his father, or his grandfather were involved in maritime commerce.) No documentation related to these carvings was found.

*First Floor: Southeast and Southwest Rooms*

According to the will and inventory of Henry Bliss, who died in 1805, these two rooms were both used as bedrooms in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. At other times, these rooms may have been used as bedrooms, work spaces and/or storage areas. Both rooms were unheated until the mid-20th century restoration project.[13]

The Southeast Room *(Photos 22-23)* measures approximately 7 feet 6 inches from north to south and 13 feet 4 inches from east to west and presently serves as the kitchen. It has plank wood flooring, vertical-board walls coated in plaster on its north, east, and south sides; a lath-and-plaster ceiling; and simple wood window and door trim. Posts are visible in the northeast and southeast corners of the room, and there are girts on the north, east, and south sides; all have wood beaded-edge casings. This room was converted to a kitchen during the 1947-1951 restoration project and was most recently updated around 2015, retaining historic elements and installing modern cabinets and fixtures. A door on the east wall accesses a paved patio at the rear of the house.

The Southwest Room *(Photo 24)* measures approximately 7 feet 9 inches from north to south and 10 feet 8 inches from east to west and is presently used as a study. It has plank wood flooring, vertical board walls coated in plaster on its north, west, and south sides; a lath-and-plaster ceiling; and simple wood window trim and baseboards. Encased posts are at the southwest and northwest corners of the room, and there are exposed girts on the north, west, and south sides; all have wood beaded-edge casings. A small half-bathroom (about 3 feet deep from east to west) and closet, enclosed by a lath-and-plaster partition wall, were installed on the east side of this room in 1947-1951; doorways for both have molded trim surrounding board-and-batten doors with wrought-iron hardware.

*First Floor: East Addition (Former late 19th or early 20th century outbuilding, Relocated ca. 1948, Renovated ca. 1960s and ca. 2015)*

To the east of the Old Kitchen, this one-room addition *(Photo 43)* measures approximately 9 feet 6 inches from north to south and 11 feet 1 inch from east to west. A former woodshed that was attached to the house in 1947-1951, it was enclosed in the 1960s, and later used as a laundry room prior to being converted to a home bar ca. 2015 by a previous owner. Finishes in this room include a clay tile floor (overlaying the original fieldstone floor (*Figure 4*)); painted vertical tongue-and-groove paneling on the north, east, and south walls; painted wood shingles on the west wall (which is the exterior wall of the main house); and exposed tie beams and rafters on the underside of the gable roof. This addition, presently used as a small sitting room and home bar, accesses the north pergola and patio, and the east patio.

[13] *Providence Journal*, "Let's Do Newport," March 3, 1952.

*Second Floor: Plan and Materials (Plan 1)*

The second-floor layout mirrors that of the first floor. Three of the four rooms (excluding the Southeast Room) have wood plank flooring, vertical-board walls coated in plaster, lath-and-plaster ceilings, molded wood trim around windows and doorways, wood baseboards, and board-and-batten doors with wrought iron hardware. Other historic features specific to each room are described further below.

*Second Floor: Front Stair Hall*

The front stair hall *(Photos 25-26)* has an encased northwest corner post, and girts in its north, south, and west walls with wood beaded-edge casings. A small, four-pane window illuminates the staircase at the second floor level. Similar handrails as those located in the lower sections of the staircase are found here, affixed to the side wall and vertically to the center pole.

*Second Floor: Chamber (Northwest Room)*

The Chamber above the Great Room, now the master bedroom *(Photos 27-31)*, has three doorways: on its north side (to the front stairs), east (back stairs), and south (Southwest Room). Visible framing members include one post in the northwest corner and girts along the north, east, and west sides, all of which have wood beaded-edge casings. A summer beam with molding and a beaded-edge casing bisects the ceiling from north to south *(detail, Photo 28)*. A stone fireplace in the north wall measures approximately 3 feet 11 inches wide, 3 feet 5 inches tall, and 2 feet 1 inch deep. It is surrounded by a wood mantelpiece similar in design to the two mantelpieces found on the first floor, although this one is painted rather than stained, and the horizontal piece above the firebox measures approximately 6 feet 3 inches wide and 9 inches tall. The east end of the fireplace abuts the east wall. What perhaps could be the carving of a date appears in the vertical piece framing the west side of the mantelpiece *(Photo 31),*[14] possibly relating to post-Revolutionary War repair and improvements. A closet situated on the north wall between the fireplace and the doorway was installed at an unknown date.

*Second Floor: Northeast Room*

Located above the Old Kitchen is another bedroom *(Photos 32-34)*, accessed by a single doorway on its south side. Visible framing members include one post in the northeast corner, and girts along the north and east sides, which have wood beaded-edge casings. A small stone fireplace in the north wall, butted up against the west wall, measures approximately 3 feet 1 inch in width and height, and 2 feet 1 inch deep. Its wood mantelpiece, finished in a dark stain, measures approximately 4 feet 5 inches wide and 9 inches tall above the firebox and is similar in design to those elsewhere in the house. The north wall to the east of the fireplace is clad in wide

[14] Three numbers, "174" or "179" can be seen carved into the now painted wood. A vertical line or the number "1" appears further to the right of these numbers. Without further examination, it is difficult to discern whether this may be the date "1791," which also appears carved on the Old Kitchen mantelpiece on the first floor.

vertical planks stained in a dark finish, with a small closet with a vertical plank door in the northeast corner. This north wall appears to be a later alteration, as exposed framing members (corner post and girt) as well as a small vertical board door providing access to the chimney mass, are situated inside its closet. As with the Old Kitchen downstairs, this bedroom was reduced in size when the back stairs were built along its south side in 1947-1951; a built-in cabinet in the south wall presumably was added at the same time.

*Second Floor: Southeast and Southwest Rooms*

The Southeast Room *(Photo 35)* was apparently converted to a full bathroom at the time of the 1947-1951 restoration project; bathroom fixtures and finishes have since been upgraded, most recently ca. 2015, when another layer of wood flooring was laid over the earlier wood plank floor, and the walls and ceiling were finished with skim-coated sheetrock. A duct chase (encased in wood to resemble a summer beam) now extends north-south across the bathroom ceiling, and built-in cabinets have been installed on its west wall. This room still has two visible early framing members with wood beaded-edge casings: a southeast corner post, and a partially exposed girt on the south wall.

The Southwest Room *(Photo 36)*, presently used as a home office, has encased posts in the southwest and northwest corners and girts on its south and west walls in wood beaded-edge casings. The room is accessed via a single doorway on its north side from the Chamber room (northwest room) and features a wood paneled door matching the historic doors found elsewhere in the house.

*Garret*

At the top of the front stairs is a wood trap door (date unknown) opening into the "garret" or attic level, which extends across the entire length of the house from north to south *(Photos 37-41).*The garret was converted to a bedroom at an unknown date and is finished with wide plank flooring, and skim-coated sheetrock on the walls and on the ceiling between the exposed rafters and ties of the gambrel roof structure. Much of the roof framing has wood-pegged mortise-and-tenon joints, and there is at least one hand-carved Roman numeral *(Photo 41)*, a common means of guiding assembly of roof framing in the Colonial period. The brick chimney stack is exposed next to the north wall. Other recent alterations on this level include a small bathroom inserted in the northeast corner, an enclosure for two closets along the west wall, two skylights in the east roof slope, and a wood-burning stove standing on a small area of brick pavers in front of the chimney. A door in the east wall accesses a storage area in the lower slope of the gambrel. Entry and closet doors in this room are vertical wood panel with wrought iron hardware.

**Garage (2022)**
**One non-contributing building**

At the eastern end of the driveway, approximately 20 feet southeast from the southeast corner of the house, stands a 1½-story, front-gable-roofed, post-and-beam garage built by the current owners in 2022 *(Photo 44)*. It has asphalt shingle roofing, a small cupola atop the ridge, vertical board siding, wood trim, and a small shed-roofed lean-to on its northern side. The west façade features a vertical board pedestrian door with wrought iron strap hinges; and an opening wide enough for a single car garage bay, enclosed with paired doors that match the pedestrian door, and with a 16-light transom above. Above these doors, centered in the gable is a 6-over-6, double-hung sash window flanked by wood shutters. Cobblestone and granite block pavers line the front (west) and north sides of this outbuilding.

The driveway and garage previously stood on a separate lot (Assessor's Plat 11, Lot 250) that was merged with the house lot (Plat 11, Lot 196) in 2024.

## 8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria**
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [x] A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [x] C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- [ ] A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- [ ] B. Removed from its original location
- [ ] C. A birthplace or grave
- [ ] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance**
(Enter categories from instructions.)
EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT
MILITARY
ARCHITECTURE
CONSERVATION

**Period of Significance**
ca. 1680 - 1779
1947 - 1951

**Significant Dates**
ca. 1680 - 1715: house built
1778: British occupation
1947 - 1951: restoration

**Significant Person**
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

**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 John Bliss House meets two National Register criteria. Under Criterion A, the house represents three Areas of Significance: Exploration/Settlement at the local level, relative to Newport's early Colonial period of the late 17th and early 18th centuries, and Conservation at the local level, as an expression of the city's historic preservation movement of the mid-20th century;

and Military at the state, as a Revolutionary War site. John Bliss (1645-1716), an affluent landowner, elected official, and officer in the local militia, built this dwelling house sometime between ca. 1680 and 1715 on what was then a farm of about 150 acres situated on the northeastern outskirts of Newport's town center. The Bliss Farm sustained three generations of that family for over a century. During the Revolutionary War the Bliss House served as a British field headquarters during the Siege of Newport that preceded the Battle of Rhode Island in August 1778. The Bliss House also illustrates Newport's active historic preservation movement and embodies mid-20th century historic preservation philosophies and practices. The Bliss House was the first property to be purchased by Restorations Inc., a "subcorporation" of the Preservation Society of Newport County, which embarked upon a nearly four-year restoration project that preserved its 17th and 18th century architectural character: a legacy that all subsequent owners have continued to steward.

Under Criterion C, the John Bliss House is significant at the local and state levels as the only surviving example in Newport, and one of very few examples statewide, of an early dwelling typology in Colonial-era Rhode Island: the "stone-ender." The Bliss House has many of the defining characteristics of late 17th /early 18th century stone-enders, including an asymmetrical four-room end-chimney plan; a massive fieldstone chimney structure and four stone fireplaces in the north end wall; a 2½-story post-and-beam frame with many historic framing elements on the interior including posts, girts, summer beams, and roof structure; and a steep, narrow stairway abutting the chimney mass. The Bliss House also exhibits several features of early to mid-18th century Georgian architecture, including the segmental-arch-pedimented door surround at the main entrance and wood 12-over-12, double-hung sash windows.

The Period of Significance for the areas of Exploration/Settlement, Architecture, and Military is ca. 1680 – 1779, and the Period of Significance for the area of Conservation is 1947-1951.

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

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE JOHN BLISS HOUSE

### Colonial Newport and the John Bliss House, 1639-1776[15] (Criterion A: Exploration/ Settlement)

Newport was founded in 1639 near the southern end of Aquidneck Island, the largest island in Narragansett Bay. It was the fourth English settlement on Narragansett tribal lands, after William Blackstone's homestead in what is now Cumberland in 1635 and Providence Plantations in 1636

[15] Bayles, p 483: during the Revolutionary War, British forces confiscated all of Newport's public records when they evacuated the town in 1779 after a three-year occupation; while many records were later recovered, many were lost or damaged. Newport's Colonial-era public records are now in the custody of the Rhode Island State Archives and the Newport Historical Society, but since neither collection is complete, some deeds and probate records related to the Bliss House could not be located.

(both on the mainland), and Portsmouth in 1638 at the northern end of Aquidneck Island. The settlers of Portsmouth and Newport soon renamed the island Rhode Island.[16]

Within the first few years of settlement, Newport's founders had divided the southern half of the island amongst themselves, constructed several dwellings near a fresh-water spring, laid out a street parallel to the waterfront (Thames Street), and built several docks and wharves. Broad Street (later divided into two streets, Broadway and West Broadway, the latter now called Dr. Marcus Wheatland Boulevard) entered the town from the northeast, the southern end of a cross-island "highway" that connected Newport with Portsmouth (now, West Main Road in Middletown and Portsmouth). Thames Street and Broad Street anchored a small network of streets and lanes adjacent to the waterfront. "A wide swath of land bounded by present-day Broadway, Washington Square, Marlborough Street, and West Broadway, was set aside as the Great Common. … At the east edge of the Great Common was the Town Spring,"[17] situated near the present intersection of Spring and Touro streets.

Newport's excellent harbor facilitated population growth as well as commerce and trade, and it soon became the largest and most prosperous town in the colony. The area around the harbor emerged as the town center, densely built out with houses and other buildings:

> By 1680, then, Newport had become a thriving seaport town, with grist and saw mills, tanneries, cooperages, breweries, and bakeries. It supported shipwrights and housewrights, blacksmiths, masons, cordwainers, mechanics, and shopkeepers, as well as silversmiths and artisans. By this time, there were over four hundred houses in the town and although "the generality of building" was, and continued to be "of timber and generally small," a few were of stone, and some were spacious according to the standards of the day. … Moreover, if the houses were small, New England winters were partly responsible for keeping them so, and the estates they belonged to often were not.[18]

Outside of the town center, large expanses of farmland dotted with scattered dwelling houses spread out to the north, east, and south. Some Newport landowners held many hundreds of acres; one of them was Benedict Arnold, who was among the wealthiest men in the colony and served four terms as its President or Governor between 1657 and 1678. Governor Arnold "owned

[16] In 1647, Great Britain's King Charles I granted a Patent which incorporated the five independent towns of Providence (which land area included much of present-day Providence County), Portsmouth, Newport, Kingston (founded 1641, later North and South Kingstown), and Warwick (founded 1643) into a single colony called "Providence Plantations," governed by a General Assembly of elected representatives from each town. Sixteen years later, in 1663, King Charles II granted a Royal Charter for the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, naming Benedict Arnold of Newport as Governor. At that time, the colony had six towns, as New Shoreham on Block Island had been founded in 1661.

[17] Newport NHL District nomination, Sec. 7, p. 6.

[18] Downing and Scully, p. 17.

extensive tracts in Newport, much of Jamestown, Coasters Harbor Island, which he gave to Newport, and more lands in South County."[19]

No houses built by Newport's first generation of settlers survive, but there remain a handful of late 17th century buildings in downtown Newport, all of which exhibit 18th century (or later) exterior modifications. The Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House at 17 Broadway (ca. 1697 et seq; NHL, 1966) is a 2½ story, wood-frame, gable-roofed, center chimney house with a 5-bay Georgian-style façade; it has been owned by the Newport Historical Society since 1927.[20] The Reverend Daniel Wightman House at 2 Coddington Street (ca. 1694; Newport NHL District, 1968) is also a 2½ story wood frame, 5-bay façade structure, with a gambrel roof with bracketed cornice, two internal chimneys, and a late-19th century entrance porch. The Governor Peleg Sanford House at 2-4-6 Broadway (pre-1700, ca. 1845, 1976; Newport NHL District, 1968) has an early core hidden inside a 2½ story, wood-frame, gable-with-monitor-roof mid-19th century building with several ground-floor storefronts. The earliest portion of the Bull-Mawdsley House at 228 Spring Street (1680, 1748; NR, 1972) forms the rear section of a 2½ story, wood-frame, hip-roofed, 5-bay, Georgian style house. The White Horse Tavern at 26 Marlborough Street (pre-1673; ca. 1750 et seq; NR, 1972), the oldest tavern in America still in operation, occupies a converted 2½ story, gambrel-roofed, center-chimney house that has a Georgian style exterior.[21] Other extant non-residential 17th century structures are the Stone Mill in Touro Park on Bellevue Avenue (1673-1677; Newport NHL District, 1968) and the Great Friends [Quaker] Meeting House at 21 Farewell Street (1699, 1705, 1729, 1807; Newport NHL District, 1968).

The John Bliss House is therefore one of only six surviving residential buildings representing Newport's 17th century history and development, and the only surviving rural farmhouse of that era.

John Bliss (1645-1716) was four years old when his father George Bliss (1591-1667) relocated to Newport from Plymouth Colony in 1649. The location and extent of George Bliss's landholdings in Newport could not be confirmed, but he was admitted as a freeman of the town in 1655, and land ownership was typically a pre-requisite for that status.[22] George Bliss also served in the island militia as an armorer.

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[19] Bayles, p. 50 summarized Benedict Arnold's various offices. Quoted passage is from Downing and Scully, p. 17. "South County" is a locally popular nickname for Washington County in southern Rhode Island.

[20] Newport Historical Society's website gives the date of the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, traditionally recognized as the oldest extant house in the city.

[21] Downing & Scully's Appendix A (pp. 433-438), describing "Some Seventeenth Century Buildings," also mentions: the Rev. Daniel Wightman House at 6 Coddington St., a "17th century type" built ca. 1721; the Perry Weaver House at 8 Coddington St. with a late 17th century frame (no longer extant, according to the city's tax assessor database); and the Weston Clarke House at 18-20 Marlborough Street, a double house with "one or two gunstock posts to indicate the presence of an earlier dwelling" (also no longer extant; that house does not appear in the Newport NHL District inventory, and the address 20 Marlborough Street is presently associated with St. Paul's United Methodist Church (1806)).

[22] R.I. Colony Records Vol. I, p. 300; also Arnold, p. 132; Austin, p. 22; and Bliss, pp. 22 and 31-32. Bliss additionally reported that "Gov. Arnold mentions [George Bliss] as one of whom he had bought land, and as one of the original purchasers of the island of Quononicut [Conanicut, now the Town of Jamestown] … and he bought land

In 1666, at the age of 21, John Bliss married 18-year-old Damaris Arnold (1648-1720), a daughter of Governor Benedict Arnold of Newport. The following year, John Bliss was appointed to the local militia with the rank of Ensign; among his initial duties was to make a town-wide inventory of all the "arms, ammunition, and weapons of war" owned by local residents that could be used for island defense purposes, and to report that information to Governor Arnold.[23] Although Newport was not attacked during King Phillip's War (1675-1676), and therefore escaped the destruction wrought in mainland communities, military readiness continued to be a priority for the town. By 1693, John Bliss had achieved the rank of Captain, and in 1696 he was appointed "Major for the Island."[24]

In addition to his lengthy military career, John Bliss held various public offices: he represented Newport in the General Assembly in 1679, 1683, and 1695; and was elected to the Town Council in 1689 and 1690. He also served as an Elder in his church.[25]

John Bliss was admitted as a freeman of Newport in 1668, the year after his father died, indicating that he likely inherited some amount of land (George Bliss's probate records could not be located). Deeds confirm that John Bliss owned at least 150 acres of land in Newport as of 1715, but no deeds in which he acquired any land have been found; there are very few records of his landholdings during the period 1668-1716 (the year he died).[26]

Damaris Bliss inherited 27 acres of land from her father after his death in 1678, but this parcel was located within the settled part of Newport:

> Unto my beloved daughter Damaris Bliss ye wife of John Bliss of Newport, I give and bequeath a certain parcel of land being and lying in ye precincts of ye said Town, containing seven and twenty acres more or less and bounded as followeth, namely on ye North partly by

in Newport as late as March 22nd, 1660. On that date, articles of agreement were made whereby Sosos, an Indian captain of Narragansett, deeded (June 29, 1660) a large tract of land called Misquamicutt to seventy-six of the colonists, George Bliss being one of the number." Note that Misquamicut is in Westerly, not Newport. No deeds were found to confirm George Bliss's purchase of any land in Newport.

[23] Bliss, p. 38.

[24] Records of the Colony of Rhode Island, Vol. 3, p. 312.

[25] Several sources referred to "Elder John Bliss" or "the Elder John Bliss House," including Downing & Scully, pp. 29, 181, and Plate 38; Yarnall, p. 5; Onorato, p. 92; Anderheggen, p. 49; and Walsh et al, p. 137. Which church John Bliss belonged to could not be confirmed. Sanford, p. 75, and Thorngate, p. 113, respectively cited 1692 and 1708 membership lists for Newport's Seventh Day Baptist Church in which Damaris Bliss's name appeared but John Bliss's name did not. Both Yarnall and Onorato identified John Bliss as a Quaker Elder, although his long military career presumably could have put him at odds with the Quaker tenet of pacifism. The Baptist Church used the term "Elder" to denote a leadership position, including clergy. While no evidence has been found indicating that John Bliss was an ordained Baptist clergyman, his grandson Elder William Bliss (1728-1808) was pastor of the Seventh Day Baptist Church in Newport from 1780 until his death.

[26] Bliss, p. 38, noted that the Town granted to John Bliss one acre of land in 1695 on which to build a mill. Austin, p. 22, mentioned a grant of unspecified land to John Bliss in 1702. Neither of these deeds was found during research for this nomination.

> land I sold to James Card lately, and partly by land in ye possession of Joseph Card, on ye east partly by Joseph Card's land aforesaid, and more largely by land in possession of William Weeden, on ye South by land now or late in ye possessions of Lieut. Joseph Torry dec'd, and on ye West by ye Great Common of ye said Town, ye premises to be and remain to ye only proper use an behoof of my said daughter Damaris Bliss and to her heirs and assigns forever.[27]

The western boundary of Damaris Bliss's 27 acres being the Great Common indicates that her land was east of the southwestern end of Broadway and/or the Town Spring, approximately 0.8 mile southwest of the John Bliss House.[28]

The John Bliss House presently has a Newport Historical Society plaque mounted near its front door, bearing the date "ca. 1680-1715." As discussed in more detail under "Criterion C: Architecture" (see below), several architectural historians have had differences of opinion as to the building's construction date. The available documentary evidence researched for this nomination did not definitively confirm the construction date, but the house undoubtedly has architectural features that are consistent with late 17th century building practices, and John Bliss's family life suggests that a ca. 1680 (or pre-1700) date is plausible. Regardless of the exact year of construction, the house is one of the few from the early Colonial period that survive in Newport, even with later additions.

Genealogical sources differ, but recent research suggests that John and Damaris Bliss had eight children over a period of about twenty-five years. The two eldest died very young, but Freelove (1672-1715); twins John and Henry (1674-before 1716); Josiah (ca. 1685-1748); and twins George (ca. 1690-?) and Marcy, whom some records identified as Content (ca. 1690-1715), all lived to adulthood.[29]

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[27] Last Will and Testament of Governor Benedict Arnold, dated December 24, 1677; he died June 19, 1678. Verbatim transcription.

[28] Lacking any indication of this parcel's specific boundary measurements it is impossible to determine its shape or exact location, but an online land area calculator (https://www.calcmaps.com/map-area/) indicates that the parcel would have had to be very long and narrow to extend from the Great Common to Bliss Road, so it seems unlikely that the John Bliss House was built upon Damaris's land. Austin, p. 22 noted that in 1680, John Bliss's name appeared on a Newport tax list with the amount "£1 4s 2d" (one English pound sterling, 4 shillings, and 2 pence, or approximately $437 today); how much acreage and/or how many parcels of land that figure may represent is unknown, so whether this tax record relates to the John Bliss House has not been confirmed. (Value converter: Eric W. Nye, *Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency*, accessed Monday, August 12, 2024, https://www.uwyo.edu/numimage/currency.htm). Falino, p. 19, stated that the John Bliss House "was built in the late 1670s on land deeded to Bliss by his father-in-law, Governor Benedict Arnold;" that deed was not found, and the full text of Governor Arnold's will indicates that John Bliss did not receive any bequest of land from his father-in-law.

[29] Bliss, p. 38, did not name the eldest child of John and Damaris who died in infancy; he provided birth dates for all but Henry, and also recorded the youngest daughter's name as Marcy, twin of George. Find A Grave.com named the eldest son who died in infancy as John and indicated that Henry and another son named John were twins born in 1674; there too, the youngest daughter was named Marcy. Arnold, in Newport Births and Deaths p. 83, did not list all eight children but concurred that George and Marcy were twins. Whitman, p. 136, listed the eight children in order as John, Damaris, Freelove (1672-1715), Josiah, John [his twin Henry not mentioned], George, Content

In 1680, John and Damaris Bliss had been married (and presumably, living in the town center) for fourteen years and had an eight-year-old daughter and twin sons aged six. Why they chose to build another home on a farm about a mile outside of town, and whether they gave up their in-town residence or split their time between the two properties, is unknown. They had three more children between 1685 and ca. 1690, and a two-story, four-room plan house could easily have accommodated a family of eight. (No evidence has been found of any paid or enslaved domestic or farm laborers living with the family.) Eldest daughter Freelove married at age 18, around the same time that the youngest twins were born, so apparently the entire Bliss family did not live under the same roof for an extended period of time. [30]

On November 29, 1715, John Bliss divided 150 acres of land between his sons Josiah Bliss (102 acres) and George Bliss (48 acres), each parcel containing a "messuage" with a dwelling house. Neither deed provides specific measurements for these parcels, so it is not possible to plot their exact locations on a current map, but the boundary description in Josiah Bliss's deed strongly suggests that his 102-acre parcel contained the John Bliss House:

> Wherefore for and in consideration of that Parental Love and Affection that I have and do bear towards my well beloved son Josiah Bliss … Grant unto my said son one Certain Messuage House and Land situate lying and being in the Township of Newport abovementioned the Land containing by Estimation 102 acres be it more or less butting and bounded as followeth that is to Say *by the Pond on the Southeasterly part*, and by land in the possession of Stephen Easton on the southwesterly part and by land in the possession of John Stanton on the southwesterly and west part and *by the Highway and Land that I bought of Jonathan Maxon and by land in the possession of William Weedon on the North part* all of which the aforesaid land butting and bounded as aforesaid with the dwelling house thereon standing and together with all and singular other Improvements Benefits Privileges Immunities in or upon the premises being or thereunto in any Sort properly belonging or appertaining for him the said Josiah Bliss …[emphasis added][31]

Assuming that "the Pond on the southeasterly part" is Green End Pond, then the "Highway on the north" is likely Bliss Road, which appears on maps of 1777 - 1780 *(Maps 3-6)* and conceivably could have existed, at least in part, some 62 years earlier.[32] Moreover, using an

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[Marcy not mentioned], and Freelove (1672-1708). This second Freelove is a mystery and may be an error in this source: parents in this era often gave a child the same first name as an older sibling who had died, but to have two living daughters with the same first name born in the same year would have been very unusual.

[30] Torrey, p. 500: Freelove Bliss married Jeremiah Meacham ca. 1690.

[31] RI Colony Records, Land and Notary Public Records, Vol. 3, pp. 258-259. Transcribed with spelling, capitalization and punctuation verbatim.

[32] Per the 1777 and 1778 maps, the only other possible candidate for a "highway" on the north – or, more accurately, northwest – side of Josiah Bliss's 102 acres would be the part of Broadway adjacent to Bliss Road. Of the three roadways that lie directly north of Bliss Road today (all in Middletown), Vernon Avenue and Miantonomi Avenue do not appear on the 1777-1778 maps, and East Main Road is about 1.25 miles from Bliss Road – too far away to be part of the northern boundary of Josiah's 102 acres.

online area calculator, it is possible to draw a polygon partly bounded on the north by Bliss Road and enclosing approximately 102 acres that would include the John Bliss House plus two other geographic features presently in Middletown that bear the family name: Bliss Hill, which is about half a mile northeast of the house and overlooks Green End Pond; and the northern end of Bliss Mine Road, about half a mile to the east.[33]

George Bliss's deed from his father was for 48 acres north of "the highway," and its boundary description did not mention any nearby body of water. His property was also situated in Middletown as of 1743.[34] Taken together, this information supports the conclusion that Josiah Bliss became the owner of the John Bliss House as of 1715.

At the time John Bliss conveyed these two properties to his sons, he was 71 years old and in ill health (both deeds acknowledged "the many weaknesses that do frequently attend my body"). In addition, two of his adult sons had apparently predeceased him, and both daughters had died tragically earlier that same year, causing John and Damaris Bliss to temporarily take custody of two young grandchildren.[35] These difficult circumstances make it unlikely that building himself a brand new "Messuage House" in 1715 would have been a priority, or perhaps even a possibility, for John Bliss. A more likely explanation is that John Bliss gave his own dwelling house along with a larger tract of land to his unmarried eldest living son Josiah; and gave a smaller parcel to his youngest son George, who was newly married and probably built himself a home (no longer extant) on that land.

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[33] According to a *Newport Mercury* newspaper editorial published September 6, 1851, the "Bliss mine" was a natural cavern that had been enlarged during Newport's early years of settlement, extending a passageway through solid rock to a hidden opening near the western shore of Green End Pond. Local legend held that "Old Mr. [John] Bliss, who owned the tract of land where the cavern is situated, *in 1680 or thereabouts"* [emphasis added] began excavating in this cavern for gold, but after years of effort never found anything of value. The author of this editorial, noting that the cavern's manmade improvements were far beyond the capacity of one person to build, theorized that the work had actually been done by a band of pirates, and that the "mine" was a cover story that John Bliss, "a man of sound mind on every other subject," had invented to explain the many hours he spent searching for pirate treasure. The cavern was infilled long ago. The northern end of Bliss Mine Road first appeared on the 1777 map; although the street name apparently had been designated in the mid-19th century, it first appeared in Newport city directories in 1895.

[34] Newport Land Evidence Records, Deed Book 7, page 92. Middletown Town Council Records, Vol. 1, pp. 14-15, noted that George Bliss was repeatedly asked in 1744 and 1745 to pay a bond to confirm his status as a resident of that town. How long George Bliss lived in Middletown is unknown; neither the family genealogy nor FindAGrave.com noted his death date or location, but Bliss, p. 44, stated that George Bliss's wife died in Freetown, Mass, and FindAGrave confirmed that two of his daughters were buried there.

[35] On March 22, 1715, John and Damaris Bliss's daughters Freelove Meacham and Constant (a.k.a. Marcy) Jersey were murdered by Freelove's husband Jeremiah Meacham, who apparently suffered from mental illness. He was swiftly hanged for the crime, and John and Damaris Bliss took in Freelove's orphaned young son and daughter. (After John's death the Meacham children apparently went to live with other relatives.) In some accounts of this infamous episode, Jeremiah Meacham's wife was identified as "Patience" and her sister as "Constant Garsey" (see, for example, "Seven Dreadful Stroaks: The Demons of Jeremiah Meacham" (2022) on the New England Historical Society's website.) However, "The Correct Ancestry of Jemima Meacham," in the *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* (1938) confirmed that Jeremiah Meacham's wife was Freelove Bliss.

John Bliss died shortly after these conveyances were made. His will, probated in 1716, named his heirs as his wife Damaris, his sons Josiah and George, and the three minor grandchildren whose mothers had died the previous year. Damaris, Josiah, and George each received some additional real estate of unknown acreage or provenance:

> I give and bequeath to Damaris my Dear Beloved Wife all my household goods and that Land at Town to have the use and benefit of during her natural life.
>
> I give to my well beloved son Josiah Bliss a certain lot of land lying in Newport butted and bounded as follows: on the East by a highway that leads to the Beach [probably Bliss Mine Road]; on the North by land of John Jersey; on the South and West by land in my possession, which lot of land containing 60 foot front and 50 foot back [3,000 sq.ft.].
>
> I give to my well beloved son George Bliss all the rest of my lands undisposed of and my Wind Mill with all the privileges and appurtenances thereunto appertaining, and also 20 ewe sheep and one cow.[36]

Josiah Bliss (ca. 1685-1748) was admitted as a freeman of Newport in 1707. He was 29 years old when he became the owner of his father's dwelling house in 1715. Records about Josiah's life are scarce, but as best could be determined, he married a widow named Sarah Belcher in 1720, and they had six children.[37] Sometime between his marriage and his death in 1748, Josiah apparently made some alterations and improvements to the John Bliss House: the front door surround with segmental arch pediment and pilasters, and the 12-over-12, double-hung sash windows are consistent with early to mid-18th century Georgian architecture.

In 1743, the northeastern part of Newport was set off as a new town, called Middletown. The new boundary line running from northwest to southeast *(Map 3)* placed part of Josiah Bliss's farm, including Bliss Hill, Bliss Mine Road, and much of the western shoreline of Green End Pond, within Middletown. But the John Bliss House and some of its surrounding acreage remained in Newport.[38]

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[36] Will of John Bliss, in Newport Town Council Records 1714-1719, Vol. 3, pp. 120-121. The location of the wind mill could not be determined.

[37] Bliss, p. 44, stated that Josiah "was married a widow Belcher" (date not noted) and recorded only some of their children's birthdates (and not in birth order). The only record of Josiah Bliss found in Arnold's Vital Extracts was in Vol. 11, p. 293, related to his baptism in the Sabbatarian (Seventh Day Baptist) Church in 1712. Thorngate, pp. 114-115, named Sarah (Collins) Belcher, widow of Benjamin Belcher, as Josiah Bliss's wife; both were members of the Seventh Day Baptist Church.

[38] Although Bliss, p. 44, identified Josiah Bliss a resident of Middletown (which would only have been from 1743 until his death in 1748), no deeds or probate records related to Josiah Bliss were found at Middletown Town Hall.

When Josiah Bliss died in 1748, his sons Henry Bliss (1722-1805) and William Bliss (1728-1807) each inherited land in both Newport and Middletown.[39] In a series of transactions between April and August 1749, the brothers adjusted their landholdings.[40] As a result, William Bliss quitclaimed a 59¼-acre farm to his brother Henry:

> … to Henry Bliss (in his actual possession and seized now being) and to his heirs, executors and assigns forever, *a certain messuage or tenement and piece or parcel of land situate partly in Newport and partly in Middletown containing by estimation 59-1/4 acres or thereabouts (being part of the homestead farm lately belonging to their father Josiah Bliss deceased)***,** butted and bounded as followeth: *Northerly partly on land of the said* [William? - obscured by water damage] *Bliss and partly on a highway, Easterly partly on land of the said William Bliss and partly on a large pond, Southerly partly on said pond and partly on land of Nicholas Easton and partly on land of Joseph Slocum, and Westerly partly on land of the said Nicholas Easton* and partly on land of the said Joseph Slocum, as in and by a plan or draft of the hereby granted premises relation being thereunto had may more fully and at large appear [no plan attached to this deed], together also with all and singular Messuages, Houses, Outhouses, Barns, Stables, Buildings, Ways, Waters, Rights, Liberties, Privileges Improvements, Hereditaments and Appurtenances whatsoever unto the hereby granted premises belonging or in any way appertaining, and the Reversion and Reversions Remainder and Remainers of Rents Issues and Profits thereof and all the Estate Right Title Interest Use Possession Property Claim and Demand whatsoever of him the said William Bliss in and to the hereby released Premises. [emphasis added][41]

Again, the "highway" that formed part of the northern boundary of this tract was likely Bliss Road (although that street name did not appear in city directories until 1865). The Middletown portion of Henry's parcel was adjacent to Green End Pond. The various agricultural references in this deed confirm that this was a working farm; at this point in the mid-18th century, northeastern Newport was still a rural adjunct to the urban town center.

A few months later, Henry Bliss deeded back to William Bliss 6½ acres adjacent to the pond, leaving Henry with just under 53 acres.[42]

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[39] Bliss, p. 44, references "the record of administrator's receipts upon his [Josiah Bliss's] estate bearing date January 31, 1749," but Josiah Bliss's name is not in the index to the Town records at Newport Historical Society, so his probate records have not been located.

[40] Newport Land Evidence Records, Deed Book 3, pp. 207-208: Henry and Mary Bliss leased to William Bliss, 59-1/4 acres 25 rods, for one year, on April 27, 1749. DB 3/208-209: Henry and Mary Bliss sold to William Bliss, for £5,000, the same 59-1/4 acres 25 rods, on April 28, 1749. DB 3/212-113: William Bliss recorded an easement to Henry and Mary Bliss allowing them to freely "pass from one part of [Henry's] land to the other … with Stores, Oxen, Cattle, Carts, or any other Carriage provided;" the document is water-damaged but the date appears to be April 28, 1749.

[41] Newport Land Evidence Records, DB 3/214, May 16, 1749.

[42] Newport Land Evidence Records, DB 3/210-211, August 21, 1749.

Charles Blaskowitz's *Topographical Chart of the Bay of Narragansett*, published in 1777 *(Map 3),* shows what may be the earliest visual representation of the Bliss House: a lone structure standing just south of (unnamed) Bliss Road. According to its title block, this map was commissioned by "the Principal Farmers of Rhode Island," whose names were listed on the map. That list did not include Henry Bliss, whose approximately 53 acres probably precluded him from being considered a "principal farmer." This map also illustrated the densely developed town center, and a scattering of other farmhouses to the north and east.

In addition to being a farmer, Henry Bliss, who had been admitted as a freeman of Newport in 1743, held various town offices throughout his adult life. In his later years he was appointed a Justice of the Court of Common Pleas for Newport County, hence some records refer to him as "Judge Henry Bliss." He married twice: first, in 1741 to Mary Clarke, then after her death, to Sarah Champlin ca. 1766. He fathered a total of twelve children born between 1744 and 1778. According to the Bliss family genealogy, Judge Bliss was "a man of great ability, strict integrity, commanded universal respect and esteem, and is best described by the simple and expressive epitaph on his gravestone: 'A pious Christian, an upright judge, an honest man.'"[43] He was also, during the Revolutionary War, a patriot: at age 54, Henry did not serve in the militia himself, but two of his sons joined the Continental Army.[44]

**NEWPORT AND THE JOHN BLISS HOUSE IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR, 1776-1779 (Criterion A: Military)**

By the early 1770s, Newport was the fifth largest city (population around 10,000) in the American colonies, as well as one of the busiest and wealthiest ports. As relations between Great Britain and America deteriorated to the brink of war, Newport became a strategic target for the British military: if they could capture Newport, they could control all of Narragansett Bay from an easily defended island. More importantly, as British Admiral George Rodney observed, Newport was "…the best and noblest harbor in America capable of holding the whole Navy of Britain, and whence they could in all seasons lie in in perfect security and from whence squadrons in forty-eight hours could blockade the three capitals of America, namely Boston, New York, and Philadelphia."[45]

On December 7, 1776, seven months after Rhode Island's General Assembly declared the colony's independence from Great Britain and five months after the Continental Congress in Philadelphia issued the Declaration of Independence for all thirteen colonies, British General Sir Henry Clinton, along with approximately 7,100 British and Hessian soldiers, sailed into Narragansett Bay and, with little resistance, quickly proceeded to capture all of Aquidneck Island. The British occupation lasted three years. Newport lost about half its population as

[43] Quote from Bliss, p. 61. Henry Bliss's marriage records from Thorngate, p.151.
[44] Bliss, p. 61: Henry Bliss's son Brenton Bliss (1751-?), an Ensign in the 2nd Rhode Island Regiment, died a prisoner of war in Jamaica, West Indies; and son James Bliss (1753-?) died a prisoner of war in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.
[45] Battle of Rhode Island website: "The British Occupation: The Occupation of Newport" [unpaginated].

thousands of residents fled, in some cases never to return. Those who stayed lived under martial law. Communications and travel between the island and the mainland were heavily restricted. The British confiscated livestock and crops to feed themselves, and destroyed many buildings and wharves, using the lumber for the construction of barracks and for firewood. Some troops were billeted in private homes, for which their owners were rarely compensated. With shipping suspended by a British blockade, Newport's maritime economy came to a standstill.

In the summer of 1778, Aquidneck Island became the site of the first joint American-French military operation of the Revolutionary War: the Rhode Island Campaign, which culminated in the two-week Siege of Newport (August 14 – 28), followed by the Battle of Rhode Island on August 29.[46] During these events, the John Bliss House, situated between the two British defensive lines north of Newport (*Map 4*), was commandeered for use as British field headquarters.

Conceived by Admiral Jean Baptiste Charles Henri Hector, Comte d'Estaing, and General George Washington, the Rhode Island Campaign was a mission to recapture Aquidneck Island via a dual assault on the British garrison there: d'Estaing's fleet of French warships with 4,000 troops would attack the west side of the island from Narragansett Bay, while Major General John Sullivan of the Continental Army would amass some 6,000 men at Tiverton, on the east side of the Sakonnet River across from Portsmouth, and attack from the north.

Major General Robert Pigot, the British commander at Newport, realizing that a combined American and French military force could far outnumber his own troop strength, sent for reinforcements and beefed up the land and water defenses around Newport. A recent comprehensive study of Revolutionary War sites in Middletown described in detail the two British lines of defense built adjacent to or north of the Newport-Middletown line to deter an American attack on Newport from the north. The outer line, erected along the high ground between Bliss Hill (in Middletown overlooking Green End Pond) and Tomini Hill (the highest point in Newport) was further protected by an abattis: a barrier of felled trees with sharpened branches pointed toward the enemy. The inner defensive line was built south of Bliss Road, closer to the town.[47] Lieutenant Frederck Mackenzie of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who kept a detailed diary during the occupation, wrote on June 3, 1778: "the new Chain of Redoubts lately constructed for the defence of Newport are now completed … named Green-End, Dudley's, Bannister's, Irishes, and Tomini."[48] Green-End Redoubt was built on Bliss Hill.

When the French fleet sailed into Narragansett Bay on August 8, trading cannon fire with British shore batteries, Pigot ordered his troops stationed near Portsmouth to retreat to Newport; as they began marching south, Sullivan's American troops crossed over from Tiverton to Portsmouth.

[46] Walsh et al, p. 29 stated that General Sullivan began building fortifications on Honeyman's Hill on August 14. The Battle of Rhode Island Association website, "The Rhode Island Campaign: Siege of Newport," reported the beginning of the siege as August 9.
[47] Walsh et al, p. 32.
[48] Mackenzie, p. 291.

On August 9, as Mackenzie described in his diary the locations of various companies of British troops along the first and second defensive lines, he noted: "The headquarters are fixed at Blifs's house, the first on the road to Green-End."[49]

A 1778 map *(Map 4)* illustrates why the British chose the Bliss House as their field headquarters: it was strategically situated between the two defensive lines. Although British troops burned down many farmhouses outside of Newport (particularly in Middletown) in order to remove any potential shelter or cover for American forces, the Bliss House's location allowed it to escape that fate.[50]

Henry Bliss and his family were "turned out" of their homestead farm when the British claimed the property; where they went, and how long they had to stay away, is unknown.[51]

Despite the allies' high hopes for the Rhode Island Campaign, "changing circumstances, a lack of coordination, an unexpected hurricane, and a near diplomatic disaster made an operation with much promise completely unravel."[52] The Siege of Newport officially got underway on August 14 when Sullivan took position on top of Honeyman Hill, east of the British fortifications on Bliss Hill; but the numerous volleys of artillery that went back and forth for nearly two weeks were largely ineffective due to the distance between the two hills. The French navy had sailed back out to sea to engage a fleet of British warships led by Admiral Richard Howe (Pigot's reinforcements), but both fleets were badly damaged by a hurricane on August 11-12. When d'Estaing arrived back in Narragansett Bay on August 20 and informed Sullivan that he was taking his ships to Boston for repairs, Sullivan had little choice but to opt for a strategic retreat from the island. [53]

While all this was happening, Mackenzie's diary mentioned "Blifs's house" five additional times:

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[49] Mackenzie, p. 343. Note that Thornhill, in a brief biographical sketch of Seventh Day Baptist Church Elder William Bliss (Henry's brother), p. xcix, quoted the following from an 1852 church publication: "British troops built their entrenchments on the farm of Mr. Bliss, cut down his trees, and destroyed his fences. He was, however, permitted to remain with his family, on account of his sacred calling. Yet his house was made the quarters of the British officers, and all he had was at their mercy." William Bliss probably lived on or near Bliss Hill, as he was interred in a family burial ground near Simmons Terrace, off of Miantonomi Avenue (R.I. Historical Cemetery database, Elder William Bliss Lot, MT058, no longer extant; William Bliss's headstone is now in the custody of the Newport Historical Society). Presumably William Bliss's property suffered similar depredations during the war. But as seen in *Map 4*, it was Henry Bliss's house that stood "on the road to Green-End," as Mackenzie described it, therefore that was the house used as the field headquarters.

[50] The Bliss House is also shown on the 1779 "Plan of Rhode Island" by Edward Fage labeled as "Blifs" (Map 5).

[51] Quoted phrase from *Revolutionary War Claims for Damages, 1776-1781*: undated claim of Henry Bliss, p. 8. The 1774 Rhode Island census confirmed that Henry Bliss's household included 9 people: one white male above age 16 (Henry Bliss), three white females above age 16 (Sarah Bliss and possibly Henry's two eldest daughters from his first marriage), two white males and three white females under age 16. Most of the names and birth dates of Henry's twelve children were recorded in Bliss, p. 61.

[52] Walsh et al, p. 4.

[53] Walsh et al, p. 35.

> Aug. 11: "The other troops are posted as follows: … Flank Companies, near Blifs's house, front to Weedon's Mill. … Part of Artillery, right to Blifs's house, & left to the great road."
>
> Aug. 13: "The General [Pigot] removed this day from Blifs's house to his former quarters in Newport."
>
> Aug. 19: "At 8 this Morning when the fog cleared away from the heights, the two Batteries of the Rebels appeared completed. They began very soon after to fire from that on their left: first from one Gun only, but soon after from four (18 pounders). A few of the first shots were directed against our 10 Gun battery, one of which going over it, went nearly as far as the Camp of the Flank Companies near Blifs's house …"[54]
>
> Aug. 20: "The Flank Companies to post [58 guards] in Green-End Redoubt; from whence [24 guards] are to be detached to take post at Blifs's house; and will return to Camp at Sunrise, or as soon as the weather is clear."
>
> Aug. 27: "Our fixed posts at night, in front of the line, and in the Redoubts, are as follows: Green-End Redoubt; Blifs's house, near the Damms; Dudley's Redoubt; Bannister's Redoubt; Irishes Redoubt; At the Junction of the Roads; Fleche on the left of Tomini."[55]

By August 28, all of the American forces had withdrawn to Portsmouth, where they engaged in fierce fighting with the British on August 29: the Battle of Rhode Island. Sullivan's forces completed their retreat off the island on August 30 and 31.

As the focus of the war shifted to the southern colonies, British forces continued to occupy Newport for another year. (No records were found to confirm whether they continued to use the Bliss House and farm during the last year of occupation.) When they finally evacuated Newport in October 1779, they left behind a devastated city. The landscape outside of Newport also reflected the ravages of war:

> "The country within a mile of the works [the outer defensive line, in Middletown] has the most desolate appearance that possibly can be imagin'd … The houses are all burnt for fear they should afford shelter to the enemy, their fences are destroy'd, and their orchards cut to the stumps either for opening the country or making the abattis. In short this island, formerly the Garden of America, is now the picture of war and rapine."[56]

[54] The *Newport Daily News* reported on September 6, 2022 that the current homeowner of the John Bliss House discovered a 5.5 -inch diameter, 23 pound cannonball, probably of British origin, underground in his back yard.
[55] Mackenzie, pp. 347-348, 352, 361, 365, and 377, respectively.
[56] Walsh et al, pp. 93-94, quoting the diary of a Thomas Hughes (also referenced in Abbass, Vol. 1, p. 434).

## THE JOHN BLISS HOUSE AFTER THE OCCUPATION OF NEWPORT, 1780-1805

In 1781-1782 the Rhode Island General Assembly appointed a committee to investigate and respond to property damage claims resulting from the British occupation of 1776-1779. Henry Bliss filed two separate claims documenting his considerable financial losses. The first claim confirmed that Henry Bliss had been forced out of his home during the Siege of Newport:

> An account of the Depredations done by the British Troops on the property of the Subscriber.
>
> One good Large Dwelling House in the compact part of the Town [not the John Bliss House] in good repair with a good stable and necessary house and all the fence round the Lot all Destroyed – Judged to be worth one Thousand Dollars in Specie.
>
> The House I now live in [the John Bliss House] greatly Damaged *when I was Turned out of it at the time of General Sullivan's Expedition* by having all the Doors torn off from the cellar to the garret except the two outside doors near half the windows broke Several sash and all and sundry other damages done to it a Large good stable destroyed a good Large crib & necessary House likewise Destroyed a good Riding Chair Destroyed my Store broke open and much damaged and all my farming utensils together with a Large quantity of Household Goods plundered and carried off which I was obliged to put in there *when I was turned out of my House* Viz: 2 cases of Drawers 9 Tables 2 Chests Sundry Boxes and Trunks 1 feather Bed 5 Tramels 1 pair of Large Andirons 1 pair of Tongs & [illegible] 1 Large [illegible] used in Baking 1 Spit 1 Jack 1 Gridiron 1 warming pan Sundry Iron pots and kittels Sundry puter [pewter] Basons and plates 1 Case of knives & Forks 1 good new Loom and Tackle Harness [?] Bench quilling wheel [illegible] Shoe maker's Bench and Tools a large number of Carpenters Joiners & Turners Tools 5 Spinning wheels 1 pair of worsted combs [illegible] wool cards 4 Iron Bars 4 hoes 2 Iron Shovels 2 Spades 5 Pitchforks 8 Rakes 3 Syths & Sneads fit for mowing Sundry old syths 2 plows 2 Iron teeth harrows 2 breaks [?] for flax 12 Chairs [?] 20 Hogsheads & Barrels a good Large Grindstone a good Bucket chain & Rope a good Plank Threshing Floor Syder mill and part of the press 1 very likely young Cow Ten Ton of good Hay 2 acres of very good corn 1 ½ acres of Potatoes a stack of Barley about 30 Bushels a very good garden of cabbage squashes Cowcumbers Beets Carrots Turnips Beans peas Radishes peppers & & all of the Fruits in my Orchard *as it was the beginning of August that I was turned out of my House* and about 100 Trees cut down and Destroyed of Black Cherry Locus and Button Wood mostly Large all the wooden Fence on my Land destroyed and Burnt and 100 Rod of stone wall thrown down with a great number of other articles not enumerated to the Loss of all which I am ready to attest. Which Losses I am Satisfied is more than Three Thousand Silver Dollars to Henry Bliss. [emphasis added][57]

[57] Revolutionary War Claims for Damages, 1776-1781: undated claim of Henry Bliss, p. 8. All spellings, capitalization, and punctuation (or lack thereof) are rendered verbatim.

Bliss later filed a similar claim, complaining that the compensation he had previously received was woefully inadequate:

> An Account of the Damage I Sustained by the British Troops while they were in Possession of Rhode Island from the 4th December 1776 to the 25th October 1779.
>
> One good Large Dwelling House [not the John Bliss House] 5 rooms on a floor one Stable a necessary House and the fence round the Lot all Destroyed in the Town *for all which Damage I received only 65 Dollars.* [emphasis added]
>
> Destroyed on the place where I live [the John Bliss House and farm] one good Large Crib 16 foot by 14 a Stable 22 foot by 16 a good necessary House all the doors and window [illegible] Destroyed except 2 in the House in which I live near half of window glass broke and several of the Sashes the Tile took out round the fire place the floors and ceilings Broke and my Store Broke to Pieces and all my farming utensils & tools of all sorts and two thirds of my Household Goods plundered and Destroyed [a similar accounting of damage to household goods, trees, crops, garden produce, stone walls, fencing, and orchards] … *all of which Damage and much more which I cannot recollect I Suffered without receiving one Single Copper Satisfaction except the 65 Dollars which I had for the Damage done in the Town which I think cannot be less on a moderate Compensation than 3000 Silver Dollars Damage* to the Subscriber Henry Bliss. [emphasis added][58]

Whether Henry Bliss ever did receive the additional compensation he sought is unknown, but on the Bliss Farm, as elsewhere in Newport, recovery was slow. The mantelpiece in the Old Kitchen on the first floor has the date "1791" carved into it, suggesting that at least some repairs and improvements were carried out eight years after the war had ended[59] *(Photos 15 and 16).*

The 1790 U.S. Census listed Henry Bliss living in a household of six people: two white males over age 16 and four white females of unspecified ages. These were probably Henry, his wife Sarah, and their four unmarried children (one son, three daughters) still living at home.

Judge Henry Bliss died in 1805 at the age of 83. His will gave his wife Sarah "the privilege of living in and improving the Great Room and two Bedrooms adjoining thereto in my Dwelling House where I now live, with that part of the Cellar under the Great Room as it is now partitioned off. Also the third part of the Rents and Profits of my Land, and her choice of the Cows that I may have at my decease." Son Clark Bliss received "all the Rest, Residue and Remaining of my Lands Houses Buildings with their Improvements Privileges and Appurtenances … Together with all my remaining Stock, Carts, Plows, harrows, and farming

[58] Ibid, undated claim of Henry Bliss, p. 9. All spellings, capitalization, and punctuation are rendered verbatim.
[59] As mentioned in Section 7, there is also a carving of numbers on the mantelpiece found in the Chamber on the second floor above the Great Room.

Utensils of every sort & kind." The inventory of Henry Bliss's household goods and furnishings (including four beds, a loom, and three spinning wheels) referenced various rooms in his home, including "the bedroom," "the other bedroom," the "Kitchen," "the Closet in the Kitchen," "the Chamber" (i.e., the bedroom above the Great Room), "the Garrett," and the "Cellar."[60]

**THE JOHN BLISS HOUSE IN THE 19th AND 20th CENTURIES**
**The Wilbur Farm – 1807-1907**

One of the appraisers of the inventory of Henry Bliss's estate was Anthony Wilbour.[61] He had already acquired land adjacent to the Bliss Farm when, in 1807, he purchased from Clark Bliss (Judge Henry Bliss' son, a farmer and lumberman) 34½ acres of farmland, including "all the buildings thereon standing," i.e. the John Bliss House and several outbuildings. In 1815 Anthony Wilbour bought an additional 14 acres (which he had been leasing since 1807) from the deceased William Bliss's sons and executors.[62] Soon, this property became known as the Wilbur Farm.

By 1820, a family burial ground had been established on the Wilbur Farm. The Judge Anthony Wilbur Lot (R.I. Historical Cemetery #NT020) is presently located at the southern end of Wilbur Avenue approximately 250 feet south of the John Bliss House on a separate parcel. It contains 27 marked burials for members of the Wilbur family and their Hazard, Ensworth, and Peckham relatives. Among them are three generations of owners and occupants of the Wilbur Farm: Judge Anthony Wilbur, Esq. (1759-1826) and his wife Grace (Shaw) Wilbur (ca. 1759-1837); their son Arnold Wilbur (1784-1867) and his wife Abigail (Congdon) Wilbur (1790-1874); and two of Arnold and Abigail's four children, Abby Frances (Wilbur) Ensworth (1813-1876) and Betsey C. Wilbur (1818-1885).[63]

In 1825 Anthony Wilbur conveyed to his son Arnold Wilbur a total of 60 acres of land in two separate deeds. Both tracts bounded north on "a highway" (Bliss Road); the 10-acre tract included buildings and improvements (i.e., the John Bliss House and farm outbuildings), while the 50-acre tract lay partly in Newport and partly in Middletown and bounded on the south partly

[60] Last Will and Testament of Henry Bliss, Newport Probate Records Vol. 4, pp. 206-209; Inventory, p. 234. Henry's son Josiah Bliss originally was to receive a 10-acre, "walled in" parcel in Newport; but after Josiah, a sea captain, died in England in 1799, Henry added a codicil to his will indicating that those 10 acres were to be sold and the proceeds shared equally amongst all of his living children.

[61] The surname was variously spelled "Wilbour," "Wilbor," or "Wilbur" in some records. Spellings in this nomination are taken verbatim from the specific records referenced.

[62] Newport Deed Book 10/Page 357: Clark Bliss and his wife Abigail Bliss sold 34½ acres to Anthony Wilbour on October 12, 1807. DB 10/285: William Bliss of Middletown leased 14 acres in Newport and 20 acres in Middletown to Anthony Wilbour on January 9, 1807. DB 14/105: Arnold Bliss and Jeremiah Bliss sold the same 14 acres to Anthony Wilbour on May 4, 1815.

[63] Arnold Wilbur's son Albert A. Wilbur (1825-1909) and daughter Emma G. Hazard (1816-1902), wife of Henry B. Hazard, who with their sisters Betsey C. Wilbur and Abby Frances Ensworth inherited the Wilbur Farm from their father, are interred at Newport's Island Cemetery (R.I. Historic Cemetery #NT001).

by Easton Pond.[64] Arnold Wilbur also acquired additional land over time, bringing his total acreage to 100 acres by 1850.[65]

Census records for the period 1850-1880 indicate that in addition to various members of the Wilbur family, several employees also lived on the Wilbur Farm. (Whether they actually shared living quarters with the family is unknown.) In 1850, Arnold Wilbur of Newport, age 66, a farmer, lived with his wife Abby Wilbur, age 60, his widowed daughter Abby F. Ensworth, age 37, his unmarried daughter Betsy Congdon Wilbur, age 31, and his unmarried son Albert A. Wilbur, age 24, also a farmer. The household also included 15-year-old Irish-born Ellen Hardington, likely a domestic servant; two Black laborers, George Perry, age 30 and William Bardley, age 18, plus another Black youth, John Bardley, age 13; and an older woman named Elizabeth Garder, age 73 (her relationship to the family could not be confirmed). In 1860, Arnold, Abby, Abby Frances, Betsey, and Albert still resided together, and the household also included four male farm laborers and a female servant, all born in Ireland. By 1870, Abby Wilbur, age 85 (Arnold's widow), Abby Ensworth, age 57 (also a widow), and Elizabeth [Betsey] C. Wilbur, age 51 (unmarried), lived on the Wilbur Farm with one Irish-born domestic servant and three farm laborers, two of them also Irish; meanwhile Albert A. Wilbur, farmer, and his wife Elizabeth Wilbur, both age 44, lived in a separate household.[66]

The 1880 census indicates that Albert Wilbur, age 54, his wife Elizabeth, age 53, and his sister Betsey Wilbur, age 61, were all living at "109" Bliss Road; any domestic servants or farm laborers they may have employed apparently lived elsewhere.[67] The 1890 U.S. Census is not available for Rhode Island, but the 1900 census shows Albert A. and Elizabeth Wilbur, both aged 74, residing at 131 Church Street (in downtown Newport).

The 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880 U.S. Census also included schedules of "Agricultural Productions in Newport," which reveal a picture of slowly diminishing agricultural land use within the city in the second half of the 19th century, as Newport became a popular summer resort for both the wealthy and the middle-class. It was during this period that estates with extravagant mansions were built on former farmland east and south of downtown Newport, along and near Bellevue Avenue and Ocean Drive, and a neighborhood with both seasonal and year-

[64] Newport DB 15/246: Anthony Wilbur to Arnold Wilbur, 10 acres with buildings and improvements, July 26, 1825. DB 15/247: Anthony Wilbur to Arnold Wilbur, 50 acres, on July 27, 1825.

[65] U.S Census for Rhode Island: Agricultural Productions in Newport, 1850.

[66] The 1850 census indicated that the three Black men living on the Wilbur Farm were all Rhode Island natives, but nothing else about their personal histories was discovered. The presence of Irish immigrant workers on the Wilbur Farm over a period of at least twenty years reflects a larger trend of Irish immigration in Newport and in Rhode Island in the middle decades of the 19th century.

[67] The 1880 census was the only reference found for the address "109 Bliss Road." City directories confirm that Arnold Wilbur, his wife, and daughter Betsey Wilbur lived on Bliss Road, with no address number, at various times during the period 1863-1886; while Albert Wilbur and his sister Emma Hazard lived next door to each other on Church Street during the period 1856-1884; Albert Wilbur was listed at both Church Street and Bliss Road from 1888-1905. Directories did not assign an address number for the John Bliss House until 1940, when it was identified as 35 Anthony Avenue (the original name for Wilbur Avenue). The address changed to 35 Wilbur Avenue as of 1948, and finally to 2 Wilbur Avenue as of 1953.

round dwellings developed in the vicinity of Kay Street, Catherine Street, and Old Beach Road northeast of downtown. In 1850, Newport had a total of 38 farms, collectively containing 3,214 acres of improved land and 130 acres unimproved; fully half of these farms held 50 or fewer acres of land. Arnold Wilbur's farm in 1850 held 100 acres; he owned 6 horses, 14 milch cows, 4 working oxen, 1 other cattle, 75 sheep, and 11 swine; and the farm produced 15 bushels of wheat, 15 bushels of rye, 600 bushels of Indian corn, 100 bushels of Irish potatoes, 50 bushels of barley, and 3 tons of hay. By 1880, when Albert Wilbur and his sister Betsey C. Wilbur owned the farm, Newport had 33 total farms still in operation, collectively containing 2,481.5 acres of improved and unimproved land; 18 of those farms held 50 or fewer acres of land. The Wilbur Farm, down to 70 acres of improved land, held 4 horses, 19 milch cows, 2 working oxen, 22 sheep, 16 swine, and 90 poultry. Farm production included 20 fleeces (100 lbs. of wool), 100 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 20 bushels of apples. Maps of 1876, 1878 and 1907 *(Maps 7, 9 and 13)* show the Wilbur Farm increasingly surrounded by residential and other development during the second half of the 19th century and first years of the 20th century.

In 1885 Albert A. Wilbur, Betsey C. Wilbur, and Emma G. Hazard recorded a partition deed for their late father Arnold Wilbur's farm, "situate partly in Newport and partly in Middletown." Albert Wilbur received ten numbered lots, as illustrated on an accompanying plat map *(Map 8)*, including Lots 1 and 2 (totaling 1,120,416 sq.ft., or about 25.72 acres) which bounded north on "the Bliss road" and contained "the Mansion House which was lately the dwelling of the late Arnold Wilbor and other buildings thereon."[68] The 1893 city atlas *(Map 10)* shows this partition of the property and identifies A.A. Wilbur as the owner of the Bliss House. A historic photo dated ca. 1885 shows the house with some adjacent farm outbuildings (not extant) *(Figure 1)*.

In 1906, after Albert A. Wilbur had died, his administrators sold to real estate speculators Henry C. Anthony and William E. Brightman a 210,477 sq.ft. (4.83 acres) parcel of land with buildings and improvements, bounded northerly on Bliss Road 322 feet and measuring easterly 988 feet, southerly 112 feet, and westerly 958 feet.[69] Anthony and Brightman formed the Anthony Land Co. and recorded the Wilbur Farm Plat in 1907 *(Map 12)*. The plat map depicted 98 numbered house lots of modest size (ranging from about 2,400 to 5,200 sq.ft.) arrayed along five new streets south of Bliss Road: Anthony Avenue (later renamed Wilbur Avenue), which extended southward for 5 blocks, and five cross streets named (from north to south) Brightman Avenue, Wilbur Street, Hazard Street, Peckham Street, and Taber Street. That same year, William E. Brightman placed an advertisement in the *Newport Mercury* (headline: "Would You Be Happier?") appealing to middle- and working-class homebuyers seeking a suburban lifestyle within easy commuting distance of downtown Newport:

[68] Newport DB 55/580-584, Partition Deed by and between Betsey C. Wilbor, Henry B. Hazard and Emma G. Hazard his wife in her right, and Albert A. Wilbor, dated October 17, 1885.
[69] Newport DB 87/139: George R. Chase and Frederick B. Coggeshall, administrators of the estate of Albert A. Wilbur of Newport, deceased, sold to Henry C. Anthony of Portsmouth and William E. Brightman of Tiverton, a 210,477 tract of land on September 6, 1906 (being part of the parcel conveyed to Albert A. Wilbur by partition deed of October 12, 1885, DB 55/580).

> "The Anthony Land Co. have subdivided the Wilbur Farm tract into just the right sized house lots, and now offer them to the public at from 3 to 15 cents per foot.
>
> Take a little trip out Bliss Road and see for yourself, if this is not the ideal place for a little home.
>
> Note the short distance from the city, the beautiful view of the ocean and surrounding country. Note also that it is the right distance from the electric road [a streetcar line on Broadway, seen on the 1907 city atlas], to have its convenience and escape the dust. Note that Bliss Road is macadamized. … Act quickly and get your pick of the land."[70]

On the Wilbur Farm Plat map, the John Bliss House stood on Lot 6 (5,210 sq.ft.), with 53 feet of frontage on Bliss Road, 100 feet of frontage on Anthony Avenue, 51.2 feet on the south side and 100 feet on the east. Two farm outbuildings stood in the next block south, between Brightman and Wilbur Streets; and the Wilbur burial ground is noted at the southeast corner of Anthony Avenue and Wilbur Street. The 1907 city atlas, 1921 and 1953 Sanborn maps *(Maps 13-15)* illustrate the relatively slow pace of housing development within the Wilbur Farm Plat through the first half of the 20th century, when two world wars and the Great Depression impacted the demand for new housing.

Almost immediately after the Wilbur Farm Plat was recorded, William H. Scott, a clerk, purchased the 5,210 sq.ft. lot containing the John Bliss House. In 1915 Mary Elizabeth Scott, William's wife, purchased the vacant lot immediately south of the Bliss House: from then on, the two lots were consistently sold together (merged in 2024). The Scotts owned and lived in the Bliss House for over two decades; their address in city directories was "Wilbur Farm, Bliss Road" from 1908-1910 and then "Bliss Road opposite Almy Street" until 1930. The next owners of the John Bliss House were William Goodman, proprietor of the William Goodman & Son clothing store on Thames Street, and his wife Jennie Goodman; they lived directly across Bliss Road at the corner of Almy Street. William Goodman died in December 1934, while living in his home on Bliss Road[71], but the property remained in the Goodman family until 1947. During this period (1930-1947), city directories indicate that the house was either rented out to tenants or vacant; by 1935 it had acquired the address 35 Bliss Road, which changed to 35 Anthony Avenue as of 1940.

Historic photographs from ca. 1885-1937 *(Figures 1-3)* show the Bliss House, then more than two centuries old, with a sagging roof and warped and buckling shingles on the side (south) and rear (east) elevations. Historic photographs also show a shed-roofed portico had been installed over the front door sometime between 1900 and 1930. In 1947 the Goodmans sold the house to John Perkins Brown of Newport, an architect and member of the executive committee of the recently incorporated Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC). A *Providence Journal*

[70] *Newport Mercury*, September 14, 1907, p. 8.
[71] *Newport Mercury*, December 7, 1934, p. 3.

article from April 1947 noted that Brown planned to restore the house to its original condition.[72] Within a year, Brown had sold the property to Restorations, Inc., a subcorporation of the PSNC in which he was an officer.[73]

## THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION MOVEMENT IN NEWPORT AND RESTORATION OF THE JOHN BLISS HOUSE, 1947-1951 (Criterion A: Conservation)

In the first half of the 20th century, Newport's famed Gilded Age "summer colony" had begun to wane, and its extravagant mansions of the late 19th century were becoming increasingly more expensive to maintain. Financial constraints and development pressures began to threaten Newport's historic architecture.

By mid-century, the effects of Newport's slackened economy were undeniable; new construction essentially halted and existing buildings suffered from reduced maintenance. Economic conditions and an eroding tax base precluded any significant investment from the city in Newport's old building stock, although most remained functional and in service. [74] Fortunately, the city's collection of colonial era buildings had survived largely intact and was ripe for preservation. Unlike many cities in America that date back to the colonial period, Newport had avoided the pressures of industrialization and the associated demand for worker housing. While urban renewal had a profound impact on Newport, and many buildings were lost to demolition, a large collection of the city's historic buildings were largely spared demolition or equally destructive insensitive remodeling.[75]

Newport's historic architecture benefited from a groundswell of post-World War II patriotism and growing national interest in colonial history. This contributed to an appreciation for and interest in the city's past that brought with it a renewed focus on the preservation of historic sites. This interest, coupled with the financial resources of both year-long and summer residents, created the foundation of a preservation movement that exists to the present day. While urban renewal programs beginning in the 1950s decimated the historic building fabric along the

[72] *Providence Journal*, March 23, 1947: John Perkins Brown had purchased and restored the Peter Simon House at Stoddard Court and Bridge Street. "These are individual members of the PSNC, working independently. Formed in 1945, the Society has a number of solid achievements to its credit as an organization. Because of its efforts the historic Wilbur Farm on Bliss Road in Portsmouth *[sic]* has been made safe from destruction."
[73] Deed Book 89/Page 409: Anthony and Brightman to William H. Scott, a lot with buildings and improvements bounded north on Bliss Road 53 feet and west on Anthony Avenue 101.4 feet; October 31, 1907. DB 99/534: Henry C. Anthony to Mary Elizabeth Scott, a vacant lot partly bounded on the north by land of William H. Scott, measuring 87.5 feet on the north, 40 feet on the east, 86.5 feet on the south, and 38.6 feet on Anthony Avenue; July 3, 1915. DB 114/2, William H. Scott to himself and his wife Mary Elizabeth Scott, the two parcels together; April 27, 1923. DB 125/141: William H. and Mary Elizabeth Scott to William and Jennie Goodman, the same two lots; November 14, 1930. DB 157/96: Jennie Goodman to her son William A. Goodman, the same two lots; March 5, 1945. DB 164/476: William A. Goodman to John P. Brown, the same two lots; July 14, 1947. DB 167/188: John P. Brown to Restorations Inc., the same two lots; April 29, 1948. *Newport Mercury*, "Wilbur Farm Property Bought by Architect" July 25, 1947.
[74] Lozupone, p. 126-128.
[75] Jefferys, p. 67.

waterfront and in several neighborhoods, public and private restoration efforts were able to save and revitalize hundreds of buildings within the city.

Historic preservation efforts related to the retention, restoration and recognition of individual buildings in Newport originated in the early 19th century. Financial support from wealthy donors enabled repairs and restoration work at notable Newport landmarks such as Touro Synagogue (1759-1763; National Historic Site 1946; NHL 1966), the oldest surviving Jewish house of worship in the United States, and the Redwood Library (1747-1750; NHL 1966), the city's first purpose-built library. In 1834 the Rhode Island Historical Society (founded in 1822 with two "cabinets," one in Providence and one in Newport) led the state's first, albeit unsuccessful, attempt to save a historic building from demolition: the nearly two-centuries-old home (built 1640) of one of Newport's founders, Governor William Coddington. Two decades later, in 1853, the "southern cabinet" of the Rhode Island Historical Society was reorganized as the Newport Historical Society (NHS) with a mission to collect and preserve documents and objects pertaining to local history. In 1884 NHS acquired the Seventh Day Baptist Meetinghouse (1730; NR, Newport NHL District, 1968) for use as its own library, an early example of adaptive reuse.[76]

The 1876 centennial of the American Revolution sparked both local and national interest in the architecture of the Colonial era and spawned a new style, Colonial Revival, which became increasingly popular during the late 19th and early to mid-20th centuries. Newport's collection of colonial houses began to receive attention as artifacts of the nation's history. The rich collection of intact buildings and streetscapes offered numerous design sources for the emerging Colonial Revival style, and early Newport buildings played a part in its development. Architect Charles F. McKim undertook one of the earliest restorations in 1872 at the Thomas Robinson House (64 Washington Street), and in 1876, he remodeled the interior of the Dennis House, now St. John's Rectory, enlarging the rear room and moving the stair to create a large living hall with Colonial Revival details.[77] For the next several decades, Colonial Revival ideals would come to dominate the preservation and museum field in Newport and nationally.

It was during this period that private citizens organized to save buildings associated with historical events or important persons, such as George Washington's estate at Mount Vernon, Virginia. The Rhode Island chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and National Society of Colonial Dames undertook historic preservation projects on 18th century buildings such as Whitehall in Middletown, in 1900 (1729; NR, 1975) and the Stephen Hopkins House in Providence, in 1918 (1743; NR, College Hill National Historic Landmark District, 1970, amended 1986, 2018). The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (now, Historic New England), founded in 1910, acquired and restored the stone-ender Eleazar Arnold House in Lincoln, R.I. in 1918 (1693; NHL, 1968), and did the same for Newport's Bull-Mawdsley House in 1937 (ca. 1680, 1750, 1799; NR, 1972). The Newport Historical Society

[76] Downing, "Historic Preservation in Rhode Island," pp. 3-4 and 8. The former Seventh Day Baptist Meetinghouse presently stands at the rear of NHS headquarters (1902 et seq; Newport NHL District, 1968) at 82 Touro Street.

[77] Newport National Historic Landmark amendment, 2011.

helped raise funds in the late 1930s to save Vernon House (ca. 1708, 1759; NHL, 1968), which had been General Comte de Rochambeau's headquarters in 1780 during the Revolutionary War.[78]

In 1895, architect and antiquarian Norman M. Isham (1864-1943) published *Early Rhode Island Houses*: the first statewide study of the architecture of the early Colonial period, 1636 - ca. 1730 (see Criterion C: Architecture, below, for a lengthier discussion of this book relative to the John Bliss House). Isham went on to restore many early Rhode Island buildings, including Newport's Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (1697; NHL, 1966), Trinity Church (1724; NHL, 1965), Colony House (1739; NHL, 1966), Redwood Library, and the Brick Market/Old City Hall (1762; NHL, 1960).

Local interest in Newport's colonial past, with a focus on its early architecture, continued to grow throughout the first half of the 20th century among summer and year-round residents. In 1945 the Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC) was founded "to protect and preserve the best examples of the city's architecture," which spanned three centuries. The intent was to "'consult and advise' and to 'preserve for the City, State and Nation … outstanding examples of Colonial architecture."[79]

The new organization's first meeting was held on August 9, 1945, at the home of George and Katherine Warren on Mill Street. Original incorporators of the organization were primarily year-round residents of Newport: Maude A.K. Wetmore, William King Covell, Edward Frances Byrnes, Lawrence W. Champlin, Edith Wetmore, Michael F. Walsh, Richard C. Adams, Natalie Bayard Brown, Maxim Karolik, and John Perkins Brown, with George Warren acting as the interim chairman.[80]

PSNC's original slate of officers included as its Secretary Richard C. Adams,[81] a local real estate businessman, and John Perkins Brown,[82] an architect and antiques dealer, both of whom would

[78] Downing, "Historic Preservation in Rhode Island," p. 10 and 14.
[79] Falino, p. 1, quoting from "Objects and Purposes of the Society."
[80] Lozupone, p. 62: George Warren's wife, Katherine Warren, is frequently credited as the first president of the Society, but she did not assume this role until the organization's second annual meeting in July 1946. She served in this role for 30 years.
[81] Collins, p. 15: Richard Adams was born in Newark, N.J. on August 22, 1892, and educated at the Newark Academy and Stevens Institute of Technology. During WWI he entered the Navy, served as lieutenant in the supply corps for six years, and upon leaving the service he settled in Newport and started a real estate and insurance business. In 1929 he was a principal in the formation of the Newport Realty Trust and served as president until his death. He was vice president of the Newport Chamber of Commerce, serving on many committees, notably the community development committee. He also served on the Newport Board of Tax Assessors in 1941. His wife, Adele Bull Adams was from one of Newport's founding families.
[82] Collins, p. 17-18: John Perkins Brown was born in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1905. He received his education at Phillips Exeter Academy and the School of Design in Boston and also attended Harvard University Graduate School of Architecture, pursuing a career in architecture and moving to Providence in the 1930s. In Providence he was instrumental in saving the Arcade building and renovating historic homes on the city's East Side. He wrote and lectured extensively on the restoration of old houses. He brought his expertise to Newport and was vice president of Old State House, Inc. of Newport. As an enthusiastic collector of early American art, he once owned an antique shop

soon play a direct role in the restoration of the John Bliss House. Within a year of incorporation, the organization had made its first purchase: the Hunter House (1748; NHL, 1968), a fine Georgian-style house with an elaborately detailed interior that was rescued from potential demolition, restored, and opened to the public in 1950.[83]

The catalyst for PSNC's creation extended beyond the preservation of the Hunter House as its initial historic preservation agenda prioritized Newport's colonial architecture. As noted in the organization's first formal mission statement:

> "The primary purpose of the PSNC is to preserve Old Newport houses of the 17th and 18th centuries," noting that "Buildings of later dates will still be considered."

The organization's focus on colonial history was in keeping with established trends in local and national preservation efforts. Almost without exception, what was collected, restored, and presented to the public during this period was motivated by a desire to embrace America's colonial past.[84]

Soon after its incorporation, PSNC commissioned a citywide architectural survey of Newport to identify historically and architecturally significant buildings and sites, intending to use the data to develop preservation and protection strategies and to inform future city planning decisions. That survey resulted in Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully, Jr.'s *The Architectural Heritage of Newport,* first published in 1952[85] (second edition, 1967; also discussed in more detail under "Criterion C: Architecture," below).

Leadership of the young organization looked to national initiatives such as Colonial Williamsburg and others in considering how to model similar efforts in Newport.[86] In his March

on Pelham Street in Newport. Brown was also founder and first president of the Georgian Society of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was credited with writing the PSNC charter in 1945; *Providence Journal*, "John P. Brown XIII," Brown was the first director of the Newport Restoration Foundation and founder of the Georgian Society in Newport.

[83] Falino, pp. 9-14. As the author noted on p. 6: PSNC today owns 11 historic museum properties, seven of which are National Historic Landmarks, which collectively attract over one million visitors a year.

[84] Lozupone, p. 63.

[85] Lozupone, p. 122: "The society worked to integrate preservation into the city's economic framework and its city planning efforts. Central to this was a comprehensive architectural survey of Newport's historic resources commissioned by its board in 1946…Published in 1952, the survey report served as a resource for architects, scholars, students and the general public while also the 'cornerstone of the Society's restoration program.' While now a common tool in preservation efforts, at the time the society initiated its study, the inventorying of historic buildings was not yet common practice and Newport's inventory followed Charleston's as only the second to be published in the United States."

[86] Lozupone, p. 115: At the forefront of the mid-20th century preservation movement was Colonial Williamsburg, "which helped to set the stage for communities throughout the country that sought to capitalize on their cultural heritage." While she [Katherine Warren] "strove for the level of tourism achieved by Williamsburg, she rejected the overarching idea of the museum village. Instead, she applied the principles of heritage tourism to a living city. Her approach in Newport did not mimic any one preservation example at the time." p. 82: "It did not mirror Colonial Williamsburg's citywide museum model, nor did it replicate the practical, area preservation approach applied in

25, 1947 address in Newport, Colonial Williamsburg's President Kenneth Chorley provided an overview of restoration efforts undertaken by his organization, urging Newport to follow suit. Chorley noted that after touring Newport for two days, he was tremendously impressed with the opportunities found in the city and offered:

> "After you have made your architectural inventory, select the buildings of special significance which should be maintained as a public trust and take steps to have the Preservation Society acquire title to them. Some of these buildings, when they are restored and refurnished, should become Exhibition Buildings and be kept open for visitors to enjoy at a reasonable admission fee."

He added: "The Preservation Society itself ought to make competent architectural advice available to property owners who will wish to cooperate by rehabilitating their buildings in keeping with the Society's preservation program."[87] Chorley convinced PSNC board members that Newport could become a major center for tourism if they could leverage the city's three centuries of architectural treasures through preservation.[88] The PSNC purchased the Bliss House in 1947,[89] sharing in its retrospective of accomplishments in its first three years: "Because of interest created by the Society, the Wilbur Farm, one of the few remaining 17th century houses, has been acquired to save it from demolition and, as soon as practical, this house will be restored and made self-supporting."[90]

Charleston, S.C. Warren drew from both of the models and applied the contemporary preservation practices and theories they represented in a new way that met the specific needs of Newport."

[87]An address on March 25, 1947 by Kenneth Chorley titled "Only Tomorrow," (as read to an assembly of Newport citizens convened under the auspices of the Newport County Preservation Society *[sic]* in Rogers High School on March 25, 1947). A newspaper article leading up to Chorley's visit noted that his trip was made under the auspices of the PSNC and the Newport Historical Society and the reason was that "Newport possesses what it has cost John D. Rockefeller Jr. $25,000,000 to rebuild and restore; to wit an 18th century town of some 400 houses." *Providence Sunday Journal*, "What Will Newport Now Be Then?" Section VI, March 23, 1947. This same article notes that due to the efforts of the newly formed PSNC, "the historic Wilbur Farm on Bliss Road in Portsmouth *[sic]* has been made safe from destruction."

[88] Falino, "Rhode Island Rescues," *The Magazine Antiques*, January 15, 2021.

[89] *Newport Mercury*, February 14, 1947: Architect John Perkins Brown acquired the Bliss House in 1947 presumably on behalf of the PSNC. Brown had previously acquired several colonial-era buildings in Newport for restoration, with his name appearing on deeds and utilizing funds from "sponsors." In the early years of the PSNC, Brown had been integrally connected to the restoration of several important colonial properties in Newport, including the Pitts Head Tavern, Simon House, and the Phillips House. Newspaper clippings note Brown as purchasing several historic properties, apparently on behalf of the PSNC and other local families interested in their restoration. (The Pitts Head Tavern served as the headquarters for the PSNC in its early years.)

[90] *Newport Gazette*, "What has been accomplished: 1945-1947," October 1947. Collins, p. 83, 86: The property was prioritized as one to be documented as part of the ongoing architectural survey under the heading "Good buildings, and sections of the city which have been allowed to become run down and shabby, or to be hidden by later additions: 17th century The Wilbur Farm building." The June 1947 report by the PSNC's Committee for the Survey of Historic Buildings recommended that the building be measured and documented as soon as possible.

Local media coverage at the time reported that the property had been purchased by the PSNC, the second property to be purchased by the city's nascent historic preservation organization.[91] Brown held onto the property until the following spring when it was sold to Restorations, Inc., a newly incorporated "subcorporation" of the PSNC that would serve as the society's first foray into what would become a national preservation tool: a "revolving fund" to purchase, restore and sell historic buildings.[92]

Newspaper articles and PSNC administrative records refer to Restorations, Inc. as early as 1947, but the organization was not formally incorporated until 1948. Prior to incorporation, the entity's early efforts focused on consultation and guidance to owners of colonial era homes and identifying properties for purchase and restoration. The new organization also strove to accelerate historic preservation activities in Newport by instigating private restorations.[93]

In a 1947 issue of their *Newport Gazette* publication, the PSNC announced:

> "The basic purpose of Restorations, Inc. is to buy, restore, resell architecturally interesting old houses.
>
> However, our difficulty in obtaining authentic materials, such as wood trim, hardware, lighting fixtures, wall papers, etc. has led us to believe that home owners, decorators, and others in similar endeavors, would welcome a center, where they might obtain those component parts of an old house from latches to garden plants, without which a true restoration is impossible.
>
> For this reason we have restored and opened an old shop at 76 Bridge Street, where are displayed samples, originals and reproductions, of the following items which we are prepared to take orders" (*Figure 12*).

Restorations, Inc. quickly established itself as a respected resource for owners of colonial era historic buildings. The next step for the organization was to more formally undertake its goal of acquiring historic properties for restoration and resale.

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[91] *Newport Gazette*, October 1947: "The Preservation Society has been instrumental recently in securing from destruction the Wilbour *[sic]* farm on Bliss Road in Newport. This is a fine seventeenth century building, the loss of which would be irreparable."

[92] The fund is defined as "revolving" because the monies earned from the sale of the historic property go back into the fund to be used for future acquisitions and rehabilitations.

[93] Lozupone, pp. 65-65; 100-101: Restorations, Inc. operated out of an ell on the Christopher Townsend building with a shop open daily and by appointment staffed by volunteers. The organization offered both original and reproductions in addition to consultation services. Christopher Townsend's Bridge Street carpenter shop (1750) was later restored by the PSNC. The PSNC initiated the creation of this consulting service to ensure the quality of private restorations "for people wishing to restore and renovate buildings along their original 18th century lines." PSNC's interest in high-quality restoration was a reflection of contemporary preservation theory; "the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg made authenticity, historic scholarship and the scientific method mainstream components of preservation methodology and set a bar for other preservation efforts nationally."

In January 1948, Restorations, Inc. received its formal charter to buy at-risk historic properties in Newport and either sell them "as is" to buyers who would agree to restore them, or restore them prior to selling them; in either case the restoration work would be "guided by the purposes of the Preservation Society." "Plans for the purchase of eighteenth century houses, their restoration . . . and resale to homeowners," as well as re-establishment of "old colonial shops and old Newport crafts," were the goals of the incorporators.[94]

A 1948 *Providence Journal* article noted "Many of the group have been working on the plan for several years as public interest increased in preserving Newport's heritage. Visions of a community vying with Williamsburg have swept the historic city."[95] Later that same year, Restorations, Inc. opened its doors to the public as part of the city's "1948 Colonial Pilgrimage," showcasing activities at their shop on Bridge Street.[96]

The *Providence Journal* provided an in-depth article on the new effort, reporting on a dinner meeting of Restorations, Inc. officers before a group of Newport civic leaders at Cliff Lawn Manor in Newport:

> "The corporation seeks to provide the working capital through sale of stock to carry on the move started a year ago by the Preservation Society of Newport. Speakers included Richard C. Adams, president of the new corporation, who noted that 'the Preservation Society started the move and brought to public attention the advantages to Newport of restoring its old houses that were architecturally good, but that, lacking capital, its work was, limited.' The natural outgrowth of this movement was a corporation to do the restoration work, he said. Restorations, Inc. is a profit-seeking organization dedicated to the ideals of the Preservation Society. It will be financed by the sale of stock at $100 a share with no par value." [97]

[94] Collins, p. 28: The Corporation received its charter from the Secretary of State on February 2, 1948. Officers included: Richard Adams, president; John Perkins Brown, vice-president; Mabel Watson, secretary; and John H. Hodgson, treasurer. At an Executive Committee meeting of PSNC on January 21, 1948, Adams explained that the new corporation would carry out the aims of the Society but not be directly connected with it. "That society, however, is a non-profit organization and it could not do the work itself," Adams stated.
[95] *Providence Journal*, "Restorations, Inc. to Open Shop Tomorrow in Historic Structure," May 23, 1948.
[96] *Newport Mercury*, May 1948: "The organization has opened a shop and office in the former Christopher Townsend "joiner" shop at 76 Bridge Street, with Mrs. Harold P. Arnold in charge. The shop, which will be opened afternoons, is dealing with wood trim and hardware, the originals of which can be reproduced; paints, accessories and garden planning, all in keeping with the colonial tradition."
[97] *Providence Journal*, February 7, 1948. Adams provided detailed information on the effort and its goals, noting: "The corporation plans to restore from five to ten 18th century houses a year which the board of directors will locate in the city. Upon finding such houses we will decide how much the house will sell for when modernized, what it will cost to restore it and how much we should pay for it in the first place. It is hoped that Newport real estate firms, when they have any 18th century houses to sell, will offer them to Restorations, Inc., first. When restored and offered for sale, all Newport realtors will be given opportunity to sell them." He also noted plans to later expand to include colonial era commercial and office buildings as well as reviving Newport handicrafts and making "modern replicas of the old Newport cabinet makers' masterpieces."

Established to purchase and restore houses of significance in danger of demolition or sale and subsequently resell them to preservation-minded owners, the creation of the for-profit was an innovative tool for safeguarding the city's historic architecture. Although the corporation never realized its goals of restoring five to ten houses per year, Restorations, Inc. was one of the nation's earliest examples of a historic preservation "revolving fund" (also referred to as "acquisition fund") and set a model for later preservation efforts in the city and elsewhere.[98]

In tandem with the purchase and restoration of early colonial buildings, the group continued its outreach and education efforts with a series of exhibits and presentations to homeowners and the general public. With 10 board members, numerous volunteers, and both a shop and storage facility for its collection of salvaged building materials, the organization was able to raise additional funds for purchase and restoration efforts.[99]

The company's first restoration project was the John Bliss House, acquired from John P. Brown in April 1948.[100] As the *Newport Mercury* newspaper reported:

> "The Wilbur farm house on Bliss Road and Wilbur Avenue, built about 1680, and believed to be the oldest house in the city and one of the oldest in this section, has been acquired by Restorations, Inc. as its first purchase. Work has been started in restoring the property with the expectation the task will be completed in September or October.
>
> This house is one of the few with a stone end. Inside this five-foot thick stone wall are four fireplaces. The two downstairs have seven-foot openings. The mantel tree over them is a 75-inch oak beam, with the bark still showing. Hidden away in back of a facing of later brick was found a wooden box built into the stone work. A beehive oven on the outside of the brick wall, considered very rare, will be restored."[101]

Far from being "completed in September or October" of 1948, the restoration project took almost four years: city directories for 1948, 1949, 1950, and 1951 listed 35 Wilbur Avenue (the address of the Bliss House at that time) as "vacant."

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[98] Lozupone, p. 67, 68: Restorations, Inc. operated similarly to a modern-day revolving fund by purchasing threatened historic houses, restoring them, and reselling them to preservation-minded owners. When they were not able to save a house, they also salvaged material, and stored it at The Breakers' Stable, and used it in later restorations. Preservation history most commonly credits the Historic Charleston Foundation as the first revolving fund, but, although the idea was rooted in HCF's mission at its founding in 1947, the organization did not formally establish its fund until 1958.

[99] *Providence Journal*, "Groupings of Furniture, Old and New, on Exhibition in Newport Art Gallery," February 11, 1951, p. 3.

[100] *Newport Mercury*, "New Group to Buy, Sell Historic Houses," January 23, 1948, p. 2. Falino, p. 19, mentioned the John Bliss House in her brief discussion of Restorations, Inc. See also Deed Book 167/188: John P. Brown to Restorations Inc., April 29, 1948.

[101] *Newport Mercury*, "Restoration Inc. Buys Wilbur Farm House," May 28, 1948, p. 5. "The wooden box" is a niche that still survives in the Great Room fireplace *(see Plan 1).*

While still under construction, Restorations, Inc. held an "open house" at the Wilbur Farm in October 1948, likely in an effort to maintain interest in the restoration project while also promoting the work of the organization and availability of colonial period hardware and materials for sale.[102]

In 1955, the *Newport Daily News* chose a pen-and-ink drawing of the Bliss House by local artist John Howard Benson for its 1956 "carrier's calendar" promotion *(Figure 9)*, noting that the recently restored dwelling was one of the oldest in Newport and "at least a contemporary" of the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House:

> "…[It was] in a very run down condition, when it was taken over by Restorations, Inc. This organization, devoted to the cause of preserving Newport's historic values, saw the possibilities in the ancient dwelling, and expended much research and effort to put it back into its original state.
>
> Massive old fireplaces, eight feet wide and high enough to stand up in, were revealed in dining and living rooms when the wallpaper and plaster sealing them were removed, and two smaller and later fireplaces inside each of them were taken out. The original floors of wide pine boards in these main rooms, beneath two later floorings, were uncovered and found to be in good condition.
>
> The great beams in the ceiling were sound and have been left exposed. Plaster mixed by a colonial formula was used, and the whole house has been made to conform to the original plan as nearly as was possible. The very steep and narrow staircase has been left as it was. Concessions to present-day comfort are the modern kitchen and heating plant and a second staircase.
>
> The house is now the property of Richard C. Adams and is used for rental purposes."[103]

This newspaper article provided the only known description of the scope of restoration work done on the Bliss House, but historic photos (*Figures 7 and 8*) illustrate some minor changes made to the fenestration patterns on the side and rear elevations. On the north elevation, a small square 4-light fixed sash window was inserted at the second floor level next to the stone chimney mass; whether there was physical evidence of an earlier window opening in this location is unknown, but similar windows were present on other 17th century Rhode Island stone-enders.[104]

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[102] *Providence Journal*, "Restorations Inc., Newport, Opens Wilbur Farm to Public," October 14, 1948. The article also notes: "Whenever possible Restorations Inc. purchases colonial hardware, mantlepieces, staircases and other articles; and members watch with interest announcement of the sale of old homes or of auction items to be held. As many early items are purchased as society funds will permit. Organized only a few months, the society hopes through the medium of the sale of articles at its shop, to secure money for its own restoration program, and to provide a supply of such articles for all interested in promoting the sense of Newport's historic past."
[103] *Newport Daily News*, "John Bliss House on Daily News Calendar," December 24, 1955, p. 3.
[104] Isham's *Early Houses of Rhode Island* includes several illustrations of mid-to-late 17th century buildings with small square 2nd floor windows next to stone chimneys: the Roger Mowry House in Providence (ca. 1653), seen on

On the rear (east) elevation, a wood 12-over-12 window on the first floor level was moved closer to the southeast corner of the house, and in its former location a back door was installed. A wood 4-over-4, double-hung sash window at the first floor on the east bay of the south elevation (that was smaller than the adjacent 12-over-12 sash) was eliminated.

In addition to the restoration work done on the main house, a one-story, wood-framed, shed-roofed lean-to attached to its east elevation was removed, and an adjacent freestanding outbuilding was moved to that same location to serve as an addition. Late 19th century maps (*Maps 7, 9 and 10*) and a ca. 1900 photograph (*Figure 3*) depict both structures (dates unknown, but probably mid-late 19th century). A ca. 1947-1951 photograph (*Figure 4*) shows that the relocated former outbuilding now attached to the house did not have a wall on its south side: this appears to indicate that it had been a woodshed, and that its open side (not visible in the ca. 1900 photo) had previously faced north. The open side was later enclosed (ca. 1960s) and the addition was subsequently renovated (late 20th/early 21st century) to function as living space.

An article in the *Providence Journal* from March 1952, noted that the Wilbur House was "a practical restoration" that included central heating and that "wallpapers and paints used were selected from authentic patterns and color charts of colonial interiors."[105] Besides a ca. 1947-51 exterior photograph of the house *(Figure 8),* no other records related to the Restorations, Inc. project at the Bliss House were found in the PSNC archives. The City's Department of Building, Zoning, and Inspections confirmed that Restorations Inc. obtained building permits for unspecified repairs at 35 Wilbur Avenue in June 1948 and May 1949, but had no other documentation on file.

The expertise of Restorations, Inc.'s leadership and trained volunteers, as well as its access to early period hardware and materials, enabled a historically appropriate restoration of the building.[106] Original building fabric was retained as much as possible, and historically accurate finishes and materials were introduced as needed.

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the cover and in Plate 6; the Thomas Fenner House in Cranston (ca. 1677), Plate 18; and the Eleazar Arnold House in Lincoln (ca. 1687), Plate 28.

[105] *Providence Journal*, "Let's Do Newport," March 3, 1952.

[106] John Perkins Brown was a well-known architect in both Newport and Providence and had worked on restoration projects at a number of colonial era buildings. His approach to colonial restorations was shared in a *Providence Journal* article from 1947 when Brown was working alongside Antoinette Downing on the restoration of Pitt's Head Tavern. *Providence Journal*, June 1, 1947: "It is not so much a question of lumber, Brown pointed out last week, but the question of care and absolute accuracy in reconstruction. 'We take nothing for granted,' he said. "Brown pointed out that every bit of restoration work is being done to reconstruct as nearly as is humanly possible the original structure. From the standpoint of historical evidence, such things as joints in the wide planks in the floor attesting to the location of former partitions, the laborious and painstaking scraping of layer after layer of paint until original painted woodwork and woodwork is revealed; the opening up of small sections of walls to determine what is new and what is old construction, the uncovering of plaster, the examination of beams, and final the hoarding of the original bricks are but a part of what is being done."

In 1951, after the Bliss House project was completed, Restorations, Inc. sold the house to Island Realty[107] (also led by Richard C. Adams), which held it for five years; Adams then personally bought the property in 1956. He never lived in the house (he resided in Middletown), but he did rent it out to tenants as of 1952, according to city directories. After Adams died in 1958, the Bliss House was sold to Donald and Phyllis Carpenter in 1959; they and all subsequent owners have maintained its historic architectural character.[108] A post-restoration historic photo, ca. 1951-60 *(Figure 8)* confirms that the exterior of the house looked much the same then as it does today.

Restorations Inc. also played a role in preserving the William Claggett House [109] at 16 Bridge Street (ca. 1718; Newport NHL District, 1968); and the Augustus Lucas (a.k.a. Lucas-Johnston) House (ca. 1721; Newport NHL District, 1968).[110] After 1958, when the company ceased to be involved in restoring houses[111], that mantle was taken up by organizations such as Operation Clapboard,[112] founded in 1964 to acquire and restore 18th and 19th century homes in "the Point" neighborhood on the north side of Newport Harbor; and the Newport Restoration Foundation, established by heiress and philanthropist Doris Duke in 1968 to preserve the architectural and cultural heritage of 18th and 19th century Newport[113], including her own estate on Bellevue

[107] *Providence Journal*, March 3, 1952: Following the sale of the Bliss House, proceeds were placed in a "cash reserve, which will enable them to buy other houses to restore at a later date."
[108] Newport Deed Book 176/Page 209: Restorations Inc to Island Realty (signed by Richard C. Adams as President of Restorations, Inc.), August 27, 1951. DB 189/224: Island Realty to Richard C. Adams (signed by Adams as President of Island Realty), January 20, 1956. DB 199/190: Martin R. West, Jr. and Adele A. West, trustees under the will of Richard C. Adams of Middletown, deceased, to Donald B. and Phyllis W. Carpenter, September 14, 1959. The Carpenters obtained a building permit for "interior and exterior alterations and repairs" at 2 Wilbur Avenue (per city directories, the address changed in 1953) in 1959, but no other documentation was available.
[109] Collins, p. 28, 55: On October 5, 1956, at the annual meeting society president Katherine Warren announced that the historic Thomas Claggett House had been saved through the joint efforts of the Society, the Point Association, and Restorations, Inc. During the founding years PSNC actively promoted partnership efforts with local grassroots preservation groups such as the Point Association and later, Operation Clapboard. "It was of the furthering of projects such as this that the Society was formed and this accomplishment should be a source of satisfaction," she declared.
[110] Falino, p. 19.
[111] *Newport Mercury*, August 16, 1963: The shop and consulting services continued through the early 1960s, when Restorations, Inc., operated from the same building (the Brick Market on Thames Street) as "Newport Crafts," a shop operated by the PSNC which carried a line of historic Newport reproductions. Volunteers for Restorations, Inc., including Ms. Nancy Hay, an interior designer and preservationist, provided consulting services to homeowners from their offices, carrying a line of fabric and wallpaper suited to the 18th century.
[112] Collins, p. 97: Operation Clapboard, founded in 1964; newly founded organization in its mission to preserve Newport's architecture. Operation Clapboard member Richard Sheffield went so far as to say it was [Katherine] Warren who put the "growing organization on its feet." Operation Clapboard operated a revolving fund that allowed it to purchase threatened historic properties and hold them for future sale to owners committed to investing in their restoration. During the first year, the organization facilitated the purchase and restoration of 28 houses.
[113] Brown worked closely with Duke on acquiring Colonial period homes in Newport and went on to become the first director of NRF, serving in that role for just under one year until stepping down in 1969. Many of the individuals involved in subsequent preservation groups in the city had also been involved in leadership roles with the PSNC and Restorations, Inc. John Perkins Brown went on to work closely with philanthropist and tobacco heiress Doris Duke in purchasing 18th century houses in Newport earmarked for restoration. *Providence Journal*, November 21, 1968: "Formation of a foundation to restore colonial buildings in Newport and 'try to make the city prettier' was announced yesterday." "The announcement confirms earlier reports that such a foundation was being

Avenue, Rough Point (1887-1892; Bellevue Avenue National Historic Landmark District, 1976). Newport Restoration Foundation is still in operation today.

The Bliss House represents the early restoration work of an organization that would become one of the pre-eminent preservation organizations in the country. PSNC was at the forefront of a national historic preservation movement, led by both summer and year-round residents as well as volunteers with expertise in real estate development, architecture, interior design, history, antiques and decoration. The impact of the PSNC and its subcorporation Restorations, Inc. can be seen today in the number of extant and restored colonial period buildings in the city as well as the preservation ethic and philosophies of organizations working to continue its mission today.[114] Restorations, Inc. left an indelible mark on Newport's colonial heritage via its restoration efforts, educational and consulting services, and as an early adopter of the use of a revolving fund for historic preservation.

## CRITERION C: ARCHITECTURE

The John Bliss House is Newport's only surviving example of a "stone-ender," a Rhode Island domestic building typology prevalent in the 17th and early 18th centuries. The house also exhibits some Georgian-style features of the early to mid-18th century. It is an excellent and highly intact example of the stone ender typology, updated with early 18th century Georgian-style details and restored during the height of mid-20th century preservation activity in Newport and the country, which focused heavily on colonial period restorations. At the John Bliss House, the preservation-oriented mid-20th century restoration project was conducted under the guidance of practitioners trained in period restorations who had access to other extant colonial period homes as sources of scholarly information and comparison as well as building materials. That effort retained and restored many of the building's historic exterior and interior architectural features and introduced limited changes on the building's interior that respected the house's architectural character while modernizing the building for 20th century use. Since its restoration, subsequent owners have acted as good stewards of this significant building, implementing relatively minor changes.

### General Characteristics of Stone-Enders, and the Transition to the Georgian Style in Newport, 1636 - ca. 1730

In 17th century New England, colonists built dwellings based upon the post-medieval Jacobean vernacular domestic buildings they had known in England, adapted for the local climate and natural resources, individual owner preferences and financial considerations, and the builders'

formed and that Mr. Brown, acting as the group's agent, was arranging purchases of at least 16 colonial buildings." It appears that he served a similar role at NRF as at Restorations, Inc.: initially purchasing colonial era properties identified for restoration under his own name, with private sponsors, before transferring it to the organizations once officially incorporated.

[114] Collins, p. 28: References found in PSNC meeting minutes and in news articles in the *Newport Gazette* and *Providence Journal*, as well as several documents in Land Evidence at Newport City Hall, indicate that the company had a measure of success in saving colonial structures.

knowledge and skills. The stone-ender house was most prevalent in Rhode Island due to the readily available building materials: timber, fieldstone, and the lime needed for mortar, which was made from crushed oyster shells in seaside communities like Newport, or from limestone quarried in northern Providence County.[115]

Lime took on an important role in the development of stone enders, which featured a timber frame structure with an end wall made of stone. Limestone deposits in Rhode Island were integral to the development of a regional masonry style, which depended initially on abundant shell supplies along Narragansett Bay. Early settlers utilized available lime to construct dwellings of stone and shell lime mortar. The discovery of natural limestone in 1661 in Providence allowed for stone enders to flourish in areas away from shell supplies, but had little impact on construction near the bay, which continued to rely on the availability of shell lime.[116]

The early stone-ender was typically a compact 1½-story, one-room-plan dwelling; "the single room related in size to the sixteen foot square of the old English bay."[117] The fieldstone foundation might extend underground to enclose a small cellar.[118] The post-and-beam frame, typically featuring a steeply pitched gable roof, was held together by mortise-and-tenon joints fastened with large wooden pegs. (Gambrel roofs, likewise with a steep pitch, occasionally appeared on stone-ender houses.) A large stone chimney in one end wall, giving the typology its name, contained a massive fireplace with splayed sides, used for both heating and cooking: a beehive oven would be situated in the back wall. Wide vertical planks covered with wood weatherboard or shingles were attached to the exterior walls, and horizontal planks covered with wood shakes were laid on top of the roof structure; this "plank framing" technique both supported the structural members and provided extra insulation in wintertime.[119] A board-and-

[115] Preserve RI website: Limestone was the essential ingredient for the mortar needed to build the massive chimneys that characterize stone enders. In the northern part of the state, limestone occurs naturally and in abundant deposits– the first quarries in the colonies were established in Rhode Island as early as the 1660s to create building materials such as mortar, plaster and whitewash. Along the coast, refuse piles of shells left by Native Americans provided the oyster shells needed to make shell mortar. The natural lime in the north was much more durable than the shell mortar used in the southern part of the state, and may be why more survived in the northern part of the state [*https://www.preserveri.org/the-stone-ender-report*]. Jenison, 1976, p. 23: Rhode Island was the first New England area to discover a natural deposit of limestone.

[116] Jenison, 1976, p. 24: The availability of natural limestone fostered the early stone masonry tradition of Rhode Island. An examination and chemical analysis of mortar samples from eight remaining stone-end houses in Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts provides conclusive evidence that natural limestone was used in the mortars, with the single exception of the Bliss House. There are shell fragments in the mortars of all stone-enders, and this evidence has led to a belief that all Rhode Island masonry used shell lime. However, the shell fragments in the mortar are not, in fact, calcined and were added to the aggregate much as broken glass was added to 18th century mortars. Houses tested: Eleazer Arnold House, c. 1687; Bliss House, c. 1680; Clemence-Irons House, c. 1680; Thomas Fenner House, c. 1677; Greene-Bowen House, c. 1715; Richard Searle House, c. 1680; Waite-Potter House, c. 1677: Clement Weaver House. c. 1676.

[117] Downing, *Early Homes of Rhode Island*, p. 7.

[118] Isham, p. 69.

[119] Stud framing, with narrow vertical timbers attached to horizontal pieces at regular intervals, was also used in the 17th and 18th centuries; it typically required diagonal braces for additional support. As noted in Section 7, the ends of vertical boards are visible in the Bliss House cellar.

batten door was situated near the chimney end, and because glass had to be imported from overseas and was expensive, the few asymmetrically arranged windows (openings were cut into the plank framing) were small casement sashes fitted with leaded glass panes to provide some natural light to the interior. Framing members such as posts, girts, and summer beams were left exposed on the interior, decorated with chamfered edges. A steep narrow stairway tucked into a corner next to the chimney mass gave access to sleeping quarters above the main room. The one-room-plan house could easily be enlarged as needed by building an unheated rear lean-to or side addition to the gable end opposite the chimney.

King Philip's War (1675-76) destroyed much of Rhode Island's housing stock. Newport, located on an island, escaped the devastation wrought on the mainland; however, for various reasons, most pre-1675 buildings in Newport did not survive the next two centuries, and the last survivor, the Governor Henry Bull House (ca. 1640) was destroyed by fire in 1912.

As Rhode Island recovered from that war in the last quarter of the 17th century, 1½-story one-room-plan stone enders continued to be built. But a new and larger stone-ender subtype also emerged: the 2- (or 2½-) story two-room-plan, with side-by-side fireplaces on both floors set within a massive stone chimney that occupied most if not all of one end wall *(Plan 1)*.[120] Typically, a larger front room, or "Great Room," was used as the primary living space and the smaller back room was used as a kitchen. Beehive ovens were often installed in the kitchen fireplace. But otherwise, the two-room-plan stone-ender exhibited the same characteristics as its one-room-plan antecedent. Again, these houses could easily be enlarged with unheated additions of a rear lean-to or two small rooms to the gable end opposite the chimney.

Recent scholarship has identified another subtype that emerged between 1675 and 1735: the "fully elaborated" four-room-plan stone ender, its asymmetrical plan reflecting the traditional way that a two-room plan was enlarged with two small rooms on each floor to the gable end opposite the chimney[121] *(Plan 1).*

While stone-enders of various subtypes continued to be built in Rhode Island (especially in rural areas) into the 1720s, the late 17th and early 18th centuries were also a transition period from the post-medieval aesthetic to new building forms, construction techniques, and materials. Newport was an early pioneer of the center-chimney plan, first seen in the Sueton Grant House (ca 1670; demolished 1898), and the use of brick for chimneys, as at the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (ca. 1697), also a central-chimney plan dwelling.[122] Other new architectural details emerged during this transitional period as well, harbingers of the new Georgian style that would soon come to predominate throughout the American colonies for most of the 18th century:

> "The massive framed construction typical of the seventeenth century still survived, and houses were built with small cramped stairways, great fireplaces, and steeply pitched roofs,

[120] Isham, p. 30 and Plate 1, variant "C."
[121] Stachiw et al., pp. 23-24, "Type E."
[122] Downing and Scully, p. 30.

> whether gable, gambrel, or hipped. But grafted onto the medieval structure were ornamented doorways, a few sash windows, and cornices of classic profile. Inside, the big structural beams, still too large to be enclosed in the walls, were cased in thin boards, beaded at the corners. Paneled work of huge scale decorated walls once sheathed or left plain. …
>
> Chimneys, now almost universally built of brick, were massive and, until after 1720, often finished at the top with pilasters. Although end-chimney houses were very common, it had become less usual to construct the chimney so that it was exposed on the exterior as part of the finished house wall. …The gable, gambrel, or high hipped roofs … were often further distinguished by their wide overhangs carried across the front of the house in projections of as much as three feet. … Most of the Newport houses with wide overhanging cornices can be dated before 1730, some before 1720. … Sash windows began to supplant the earlier casement windows about 1720. The first ones were narrow and high … [but] windows in Newport took on squarer proportions earlier than they did elsewhere in Rhode Island. The upper windows were invariably set directly under the eaves and were capped by the eaves cornice which broke out around them. … Walls were shingled or clapboarded (sometimes both were used in the same house) …" [123]

The John Bliss House lacks several of these transitional characteristics, notably a wholly concealed masonry end wall, pilasters at the top of the brick chimney stack, an ornamental exterior cornice, and interior wall paneling, suggesting that the house was built prior to 1700. Stone-ender houses went through several evolutions of plan and details during the period ca. 1636-1730. Around 1700, building practices began to transition into a new mode that later became the early Georgian style.

The Georgian style, which had developed in England during the 17th century and was rooted in the classicism of the late Renaissance and the extravagant ornamentation of the Baroque period in Europe, reached the American colonies in the early 18th century and became the style of choice throughout the colonies until after the Revolutionary War. In Rhode Island, Newport was again a pioneer in architectural innovation: the Georgian style was adopted for churches and public buildings such as Trinity Church (1729, NHL 1965) and the Old Colony House (1739; NHL 1966), as well as for homes, especially those built for Newport's wealthy merchant class. Its hallmarks include symmetry in massing, plan, and fenestration; brick as well as wood materials; exterior ornamental trim at the cornice and around windows and doors; and decorative embellishments on the interior, such as wall paneling and molded trim, concealing the building's structural elements.

The John Bliss House has many exterior and interior characteristics of a late 17th century stone ender, specifically the subtype identified by the Vernacular Architectural Forum in 2001 as "Type E: fully elaborated stone-ender" with a four-room plan, characteristic of the period ca. 1675-1725. The Bliss House is similar to three other stone-enders in northern Rhode Island that were built between ca. 1680-1694: a timeframe that is consistent with events in John Bliss's

[123] Downing and Scully, pp. 49-53.

personal life that likely prompted construction of this house. Character-defining "stone-ender" features include: the asymmetrical plan, with principal room dimensions consistent with the 16-foot English bay precedent; the post-and-beam, gambrel-roofed frame with pegged mortise-and-tenon joints, clad in vertical plank sheathing, wood clapboards and shingles; the exposed stone chimney mass on one end wall; the four stone fireplaces with splayed sides, large fireboxes in the Great Room and Old Kitchen; the steep narrow stairway tucked against one corner of the chimney mass; and the exposed framing elements in every interior room including the attic.

As was typical with surviving early period homes, the Bliss House was later modified with Georgian-period elements. Changes include the introduction of a Georgian-style front door surround and 12-over-12, double-hung sash windows (ca. 1715-1748). Its upper chimney stack was apparently replaced in brick in that timeframe. The beehive oven in the back wall of the Old Kitchen fireplace was reconstructed during the 1947-51 restoration project, based upon physical evidence of its original location there. That project also restored the front door surround and the plaster cove over the Great Room fireplace and restored (or replaced in kind as needed) the beaded-edged wood casings covering the summer beams in the Great Room and the Chamber above it, and corner posts and girts in all rooms; such casings are period-appropriate for the early 18th century. All of these attributes, in concert with the available documentary evidence, supports an original construction date of ca. 1680-1715. Later alterations up to and including the 1947-1951 restoration project occurred within the Period of Significance and were in keeping with the Bliss House's historic architectural character, and are important elements of the building's architectural evolution.

**Documenting Stone-Enders: Isham and Downing, 1895-1937**

The first major study of Rhode Island architecture built ca. 1636-1730 was undertaken in the late 19th century by architect, academic, and antiquarian Norman M. Isham (1864-1943), who with architect Albert F. Brown published *Early Rhode Island Houses* in 1895. Isham and Brown provided in-depth descriptions and analysis, including drawings of plans, elevations, and framing details, for about a dozen early houses across the state, most of which were still extant in 1895 (although some were only known through illustrations). They developed a chronology for evolutions in building design (although some later scholars found those timeframes to be too rigid), and also identified some regional variations between the northern and southern parts of the state. Newport has its own chapter in this book, although as Isham noted in the preface: "In the case of Newport and Narragansett houses, we have no evidence to show for the dates. Both the Newport and North Kingstown records are in such a condition that little can be learned from them. We have given conjectural dates for all of these houses based upon the Providence [County] work …"[124]

Perhaps due to its location outside of Newport's densely developed town center, the John Bliss House was not mentioned in *Early Rhode Island Houses,* either in the chapter on Newport houses or in another chapter containing a statewide list of approximately four dozen known early

[124] Isham, p. 6.

buildings. But in a discussion of Newport's early transition, toward the end of the 17th century, from the end-chimney plan to the center-chimney plan, Isham noted how few stone-enders still existed in that city as of 1895:

> "The type of house with the end chimney, which, we have seen, prevailed to the exclusion of any other in the northern colony, does appear in the Island settlement; but it had to dispute supremacy with the central chimney type. … There are at least three houses in Newport with end chimneys. There are more than double that number with central chimneys that can claim to be ancient."[125]

Of the "three end-chimney houses" cited, two were post-1715 with brick chimneys, but one was an earlier stone-ender: "On the corner of Marlborough and Duke Streets stands a house [unnamed] with an end-chimney of stone. It is late in date, perhaps 1670-80, and the roof on the Marlborough Street side has been raised. Otherwise it greatly resembles the [Eleazar] Arnold house, at Moshassuck." That house is no longer extant.[126]

Forty years later, in 1937, Antoinette F. Downing (1904-2001), an architectural historian and former student of Isham's at the Rhode Island School of Design, published *Early Homes of Rhode Island* (1937), which covered the period 1636-1850 and (despite its title) also included many churches and public buildings as well as houses throughout the state. Building on the legacy of her mentor, but using improved survey methodologies and a larger body of architectural history scholarship (her bibliography is over three pages long), Downing likewise provided an in-depth analysis, drawings, and photographs of several dozen early buildings constructed prior to 1730, some of which had not previously been identified by Isham.

*Early Homes of Rhode Island* also did not mention the John Bliss House, which again may have been because its location was outside of the city center, and at that time it stood within a platted development of early 20th century homes. This book identified the "only surviving seventeenth century house on the Island … standing by 1700" as the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (ca. 1697 et seq; NHL, 1966), a center-chimney-plan dwelling with a flared gable roof, a large pilastered brick chimney, and a 5-bay façade with center entrance.[127] The Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House has long been celebrated as the oldest extant house in Newport, but the John Bliss House is its close contemporary, as well as being the only surviving stone-ender in Newport and on Aquidneck Island.

The first identification of the Bliss House as a significant historic building came in 1937 courtesy of the Historic American Building Survey (HABS), established in 1933 as a joint program of the

[125] Isham, p. 55.
[126] Isham, p. 57. Downing and Scully, p. 30, identified this stone-ender at the corner of Marlborough and Duke Streets as the Ebenezer Voax House; it was demolished in 1923.
[127] Downing, *Early Homes of Rhode Island*, p. 65. In 1927 the Newport Historical Society acquired the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, enlisted Norman Isham to direct its restoration, and then opened it to the public as a historic house museum; it remains in that use today.

National Park Service and the Library of Congress. HABS recorded it as "Stone End House (RI-104)." The John Bliss House was recorded as part of the Historic American Building Survey Inventory (HABSI) project but was not selected for a complete HABS survey. As part of the HABSI, one photograph was submitted,[128] showing the stone end (north elevation) of the house *(Figure 5).* A summary card dated 1975 provided this information:

> Bliss, Elder John, House (Stone End House) (RI-104). 2 Wilbur Ave. at Bliss Rd. Frame with shingles, two-and-a-half stories, gambrel roof with lean-to [seen in the 1937 photo, attached to the rear of the house; not original], typical Rhode Island stone end wall with fireplaces, brick chimney rebuilt above the roof. Built c. 1690 and early 18th c.[129]

**Documenting Stone Enders: Downing and Scully, the VAF Report, and the John Bliss House, 1952-2001**

Fifteen years after the HABS documentation, in 1952, Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully, Jr., published *The Architectural Heritage of Newport,* following a four-year citywide historic architectural survey commissioned by the Preservation Society of Newport County. This work identified only ten surviving 17th century buildings in Newport, "the largest number in any Rhode Island town," including the John Bliss House:

> "Part of Governor Peleg Sanford's house, built about 1655, is standing, concealed in the nineteenth century monitor-roofed building at 2, 4, 6, Broadway. The Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House at 17 Broadway, built before 1700, the back part of the Mawdsley house at 228 Spring Street, Whitehorse Tavern, standing in 1673, and the John Bliss House, built at the end of the seventeenth century, are the best known of Newport's extant seventeenth century houses. The present survey brought to light three more: the Daniel Wightman house, built around 1694, the Perry Weaver house on Coddington Street, and the Weston Clarke House at 18 Marlborough. … The Stone Mill and the Quaker Meetinghouse are probably the only surviving non-domestic buildings of the seventeenth century."[130]

Of those ten surviving 17th century structures, the John Bliss House was unique:

> "The sole surviving "stone ender" in Newport today is perhaps the Elder John Bliss House on Bliss Road at Anthony Place. It was probably built in the last years of the seventeenth century by Elder John Bliss, who deeded house and farm to his son Josiah in 1715. It remained in the Bliss family until 1807, when Clarke and Abigail Bliss sold the property to Anthony Wilbur. A hundred years later, in 1906, after standing deserted and in ruinous condition for many years, it was sold by the Wilbur estate to Henry C. Anthony. Recently purchased by Restorations, Inc., it is now being restored.

[128] Email communication: Prints & Photographs Division at the Library of Congress, December 2024.
[129] "Elder John Bliss House," in the HABS collection on the Library of Congress website. As previously noted, the source of the title "Elder" for John Bliss could not be confirmed.
[130] Downing and Scully, pp. 23 and 25.

> In the Bliss house, the side walls of both fireplaces are splayed as usual for stone, but the stonework above the chimney in the front room is crudely corbeled out in a way which suggests that there was once a huge cove (perhaps plastered) between the chimney tree and the chimney girt. This coved form was often found in the earliest brick fireplaces but was not common in stone. Its appearance here suggests that the construction of the chimney had been modified by a knowledge of brick building practice."[131]

As this passage makes clear, the 1947-1951 restoration project at the Bliss House was underway when Downing and Scully's book was being written. That project restored the plaster cove over the Great Room fireplace, but apparently concealed the chamfering that Downing and Scully observed on the ceiling beams (i.e., the summer beams in the Great Room and the Chamber above it) and the corner posts, all of which (and all the girts) are now clad in beaded-edge casings *(Photos 10-12, 27-29)*.

The most recent statewide study of early Rhode Island architecture was conducted in preparation for the 2001 Vernacular Architectural Forum (VAF) conference held in Newport. The study report (published in three volumes; Volume 1 focused on Newport) described domestic architecture in the Narragansett Basin, which includes all of Rhode Island plus portions of southeastern Massachusetts and eastern Connecticut. This study identified fourteen different house typologies for the period 1636-1840, of which five related to the pre-1730 era: Type A was the one-room-plan exposed-end-chimney plan; Type B, the one-room-plan enclosed-end-chimney plan; Type C, the two-room center-chimney plan; Type D, the two-room stone-ender, and Type E, the "fully elaborated stone-ender" with a four-room plan:

> "During the last quarter of the seventeenth century and into the first quarter of the eighteenth century the final stage of the stone-ender was built: a two-room-deep and two-room wide structure. Examples survive of buildings a full two stories in height in both the front and rear rooms (Valentine Whitman, Jr., House, 1694, Lincoln, R.I.; Bliss House, Newport, R.I. [date not noted]), two stories in front and one story in the rear (Eleazar Arnold House, 1687, ca. 1715, Lincoln, R.I.) or one-and-one-half stories in front and one story in the rear (Clemence-Irons House, ca. 1680, Johnston, R.I.). The frame of the fully elaborated stone-ender was two bays wide by two bays deep, with each bay defined by a post and girts and plates. Usually the front bay was deeper than the rear, and the bay next to the chimney was wider than the end bay. A longitudinal summer beam was usually framed into the large, heated front room, often referred to as the "Great Room." This basic framing scheme, with three posts to a wall and two girts crossing in the middle of the house, survived nearly another century…"[132]

[131] Downing and Scully, pp. 29-30.
[132] Stachiw et al, p. 24. Note that the VAF rendering of the Type E plan *(Plan 1)* shows the main entrance opening directly into the Great Room, and no stairway. In the Bliss House interpretation of this plan, the main entrance and the original stairway are both in the front northwest corner of the house, adjacent to the chimney mass, typical of the stone ender typology.

A 2022 report prepared for Preserve Rhode Island, a statewide historic preservation organization, identified approximately sixty stone-enders (compared with less than a dozen in Massachusetts and Connecticut combined) that had previously been recognized. Of those sixty, about two dozen houses may still survive; only one confirmed stone ender survives outside of Rhode Island. The report noted that many of these potential survivors have been substantially altered (including, some antiquarian restoration efforts), and some are no longer visibly recognizable as stone-enders; further study is needed to confirm the actual number of surviving stone-enders in Rhode Island. Nevertheless, this report's inventory of confirmed surviving stone-enders includes only one house in Newport: the John Bliss House ("most likely date: ca. 1715").[133]

**Emerging Scholarship: John Bliss House**

Among the secondary sources reviewed for this nomination (which date from 1895 to 2022), there was general consensus among historians as to the Bliss House being an important surviving example of the stone-ender typology, but some disagreement as to whether the Bliss House was built within the timeframe ca. 1680-1715 or ca. 1715, and whether it was originally a two-room or four-room plan.[134]

Recent scholarship introduced further refinements in the evolution of the stone-ender typology that, in combination with physical evidence in the Bliss House, indicates that it is reasonable to conclude that the four-room plan is original. Research in preparing this nomination supports a construction date of ca. 1680-1715. A review of the literature to date follows.

The most useful sources on Rhode Island stone-enders are the four cited in the previous section: *Early Rhode Island Houses*, by Norman M. Isham and Albert Brown (published 1895); *Early Homes of Rhode Island,* by Antoinette F. Downing (1937); *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island*, by Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully, Jr. (1952, updated 1967), and *The Early Architecture and Landscapes of the Narragansett Basin*, by Myron

[133] Anderheggen, Appendices 1 and 2. The "ca. 1715" date was sourced from Stachiw, pp. 123-124, but Downing and Scully, Jordy, and Onorato, who all estimated dates in the ca. 1680-1715 range, were also cited. Anderheggen's report mentions two other stone-enders that were moved to Newport in the late 20th century: the John Tripp House (built 1725 in Providence) and the Beniah Brown House (built 1709 in North Kingstown); these have no historic context in Newport so are not directly comparable with the Bliss House.

[134] Besides Isham, Downing, Downing and Scully, and Stachiw et al, other sources consulted included Yarnall, p. 5: "may be as early as 1680 … expanded and given a finer veneer in the early 18th century. … Its classical doorcase is a very common type of segmented pedimented door that belongs to the mid-eighteenth century. The gambrel or dual-pitched gable roof is also early eighteenth century." Jordy, p. 525: "before 1715 … one of only two stone enders known to exist in Newport," the other being the John Tripp House, which was originally built in Providence ca. 1725 and moved to Newport in the late 20th century. Onorato, pp. 92-93: "ca. 1680-1715. … the gambrel roof is likely original." Falino, p. 19: "late 1670s." Walsh, pp. 7 and 137, provided neither a date nor any mention of specific architectural features, beyond "stone ender," for the "Elder John Bliss House." Anderheggen, Appendices 1 and 2: "ca. 1715," largely based on Stachiw's analysis, although also referenced Onorato's "ca. 1680-1715," as well as Downing and Scully, and Jordy.

Stachiw et al (2001). Only the latter two publications reference the John Bliss House, and each drew different conclusions about it.

> "The house is built on the Rhode Island two-room plan. In this scheme, two fireplaces, one for each room, are set side by side in the stone-end wall. This way of increasing the size of the house from one room to two rooms, as opposed to that of enlarging to a central chimney plan, is especially characteristic of early northern Rhode Island building. Both schemes are found in Newport.
>
> Two rooms added on the side opposite the chimney made the ground plan one of four rooms. This same scheme for enlarging the house was employed for the Eleazar Arnold and Valentine Whitman Houses[135] in the northern part of the state. The ceiling beams and corner posts are still exposed and chamfered in the seventeenth century manner, but the stone chimney has since been finished at the top with brick. The house was brought up to date in the eighteenth century, and its early character has been somewhat concealed.
>
> Other Newport houses were built on this plan, but almost all have been destroyed. When the Ebenezer Voax house [ca. 1670-80], which stood until 1923 at the corner of Duke and Marlborough Streets [the stone ender referenced by Isham], was torn down, the original part of the house proved to be of the same two-room plan with two big fireplaces, one for each of the main rooms set side by side in the end chimney of stone."[136]

Downing and Scully's assessment that the Bliss House had developed in a similar fashion as the Eleazar Arnold House (1693 – formerly 1687, recently updated through dendrochronology; NHL, 1968) and the Valentine Whitman Jr. House (1694; NR, Limerock Village Historic District, 1974), both located in Lincoln, R.I. some 40 miles northwest of Newport, speaks to the prevalence of both the two-room-plan typology and of the experience of adding on to it on the gable end opposite the chimney. Interestingly, Isham had provided an in-depth analysis of the Arnold House in his discussion of the two-room stone-ender, but acknowledged that its four-room plan was in fact original, "different from any other house we have studied."[137] Downing (in her 1937 book), cited the Arnold House as an example of a "widened" two-room plan, noting that "there has been some doubt whether the Arnold House as we see it today was built all at one time, because the system of framing beams on the interior is not consistent throughout;" but the Whitman House "has the same widened four-room ground plan and the exceptionally fine

[135] Since Downing's survey, the Valentine Whitman House has been documented as originally having been built with four rooms on each of its two floors vs. having been originally two rooms and expanded.
[136] Downing and Scully, pp. 29-30. (Here, the title "Elder John Bliss" likely came from the HABSI documentation.) Anderheggen, in Appendix 1, identified the date of the Voax house, making it a potential, albeit lost, contemporary of the Bliss House.
[137] Isham, pp. 41-42; Plates 28-32 depict the appearance of the Arnold House exterior in 1895; its floor plan and section drawings; and a rendering of the restored house; Isham was involved in that work. The Arnold House is presently owned by Historic New England (formerly, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities) and operated as a historic house museum.

system of framing which is handled identically in every part of the Whitman House indicates that the house has come down to us with its original construction unchanged."[138]

Since 1967 (when the second edition of *Architectural Heritage of Newport* was published), at least five other architectural historians and other authors have referenced the John Bliss House in published works. These works have provided somewhat varying estimated dates for the construction of the house, although typically within the timeframe of ca. 1680-1715 with 18th century modifications. Several of these authors also posited that the house was originally built with a two-room plan and then enlarged to four rooms in the early 18th century.[139] Newspaper articles from 1949, 1951 and 1955 also ascribed the date "1680" to this house, evidently based upon some documentary research and physical inspection that had been conducted during the 1947-51 restoration project.[140]

The description of the "Type E" stone-ender in the 2001 VAF report categorized its time frame as 1675-1725 and called out the Bliss House in Newport as an example of this subtype along with three other stone-enders that were built ca. 1680-1694 in northern Rhode Island. The report also provided an analysis of the John Bliss House with the construction date of "ca. 1715" but offered this statement in its second paragraph:

> "Perhaps no earlier than 1715 – the year this property reportedly transferred to John Bliss's son – this stone-ender was erected. If the structure originally had boxed framing, and much of the cyma backband architraves and two-panel doors are original, the date of this building is perhaps even later, conceivably erected sometime in the second quarter of the century." [141]

The VAF report goes on to discuss the physical features of the house, but although the author visited the house to examine those features, and consulted *The Architectural Heritage of Newport* as well as its authors' "survey notebooks" at the Newport Historical Society, this report made several errors that call its conclusions about the construction date into question: [142]

> "Although the [beehive] oven's internal brickwork has been rebuilt, the rounded exterior projection is original. … No planning or chamfering was used on the portions that are visible,

[138] Downing, *Early Homes of Rhode Island*, p. 43; on p. 44, Drawing 2 depicts the plan of the Valentine Whitman House. The Whitman House, which is one of the most intact 17th century houses in Rhode Island, is presently owned by Preserve Rhode Island.

[139] Yarnall, p. 5: "may be as early as 1680 … expanded and given a finer veneer in the early 18th century. … Its classical doorcase is a very common type of segmented pedimented door that belongs to the mid-eighteenth century. The gambrel or dual-pitched gable roof is also early eighteenth century." Jordy, p. 525: "before 1715 … one of only two stone enders known to exist in Newport," the other being the John Tripp House, which was originally built in Providence and later moved. Onorato, pp. 92-93: "ca. 1680-1715. … the gambrel roof is likely original." Falino, p. 19: "late 1670s." Walsh, p. 137, provided neither a date nor any mention of specific architectural features, beyond "stone ender," for the "Elder John Bliss House."

[140] *Newport Mercury*, Sept. 6, 1951 and May 28, 1949; *Newport Daily News*, Dec. 24, 1955.

[141] As noted earlier in this nomination, the house is mentioned in John Bliss' will of 1715 and several doors had been removed during the British occupation of 1778.

[142] Stachiw et al. pp. 123-124.

> suggesting that the frame had originally been cased. … Sometime in the mid-nineteenth century the house was again improved with the addition of a second stair off the parlor. [143]
>
> The overhanging tie beams, board false plate, and gambrel roof all point to a date of construction near or after 1715. [144]
>
> The [chimney] stack from the attic level up is made of large bricks of an early character set in shell mortar, just like that in the stonework below. It seems likely, then, that the brick stack is an original feature." [145]

The last paragraph of the Bliss House report states, "In the third quarter of the 18th century the house was occupied by Elder William Bliss, minister of the Seventh Day Baptist Church in Newport." As noted earlier in this narrative, the house was owned and occupied by Judge Henry Bliss (William's brother) from 1749-1805. Elder William Bliss resided in nearby Middletown.

## CONCLUSION

While scholarship regarding stone enders and the John Bliss House has evolved over the last few decades, the building has demonstrated historical and architectural significance, as one of the oldest houses in Newport, the city's only surviving stone-ender, an example of a late 17th century rural farmhouse, an important Revolutionary War site, and as an early example of mid-20th century historic preservation efforts in the city. The building is notable as one of a handful of remaining Rhode Island stone enders, a unique style of Rhode Island colonial architecture based on English precedents and notable for its end wall comprised primarily of a single, large stone chimney mass. The house is also significant for its role in the Revolutionary War, when Newport was occupied by the British. During the 1778 Battle of Rhode Island, General Robert Pigot and his British and Hessian forces used the house – located between the British first and second lines of defense – as a field headquarters. The home remained in and was occupied by the Bliss family for over 100 years before being sold to Anthony Wilbur in 1807. The Wilburs retained ownership and kept the property in agricultural use until 1906. After a series of owners, the property was carefully restored in the mid-20th century by The Preservation Society of Newport County (PSNC) as the organization's first restoration effort under its subcorporation, Restorations, Inc.

It merits National Register Listing under Criteria A and C at the local and state levels.

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[143] The beaded-edge casings around the interior framing, the projection of the beehive oven (visible in the 1937 HABS photo), and the back stairs (located off of the Old Kitchen, not the Great Room) were all the result of the 1947-1951 restoration project.

[144] Steeply pitched gambrel roofs with deep overhanging front eaves appeared in Newport as early as ca. 1670.

[145] In Newport the use of brick for chimneys began to phase in as early as ca. 1697 (at the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House), and brick chimneys were topped with pilasters until about 1720. The brick chimney stack at the Bliss House has no pilasters, thus was probably built after 1720. Shell mortar continued to be used well into the 18th century.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

____ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
____ previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register
____designated a National Historic Landmark
__X_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_HABS-RI 104_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

**Primary location of additional data:**

___ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
__X__ Other
Name of repository: ___Rhode Island State Archives, Providence; Newport Historical Society, Newport, RI_____

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____**

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** __9,073 sq.ft.

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)
A. Latitude: 41.499774 Longitude: -71.302042

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

The nominated property consists of Assessor's Plat 11, Lot 196, an L-shaped lot containing 9,073 sq.ft. of land on which stand the ca. 1680-1715 John Bliss House and a non-contributing garage built in 2022. The boundaries of the nominated property reflect the current size of AP 11, Lot 196, which was merged with AP 11, Lot 250 (abutting Lot 196 to the south) in June 2024 *(Map 1)*.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries of the nominated property encompass the entirety of two adjacent lots on which the John Bliss House has stood since the property achieved its present dimensions and configuration in 1915. The Wilbur Farm Plat map of 1907 *(Map 12)* shows these two lots as Lot 6 (house lot) and Lot 15 (vacant lot); deeds confirm that the two lots together have consistently been owned and sold together since 1915.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Kathryn J. Cavanaugh, Historic Preservation Consultant, and Mary Kate Harrington, Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
organization:
street & number: 82 Larch Street
city or town: Providence state: RI zip code: 02906
e-mail kathycavanaugh82@gmail.com
telephone: 401-273-4715
date: August 2025

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

**Photographs**

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

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of Property: | John Bliss House |
| City or Vicinity: | Newport |
| County: | Newport |
| State: | Rhode Island |
| Photographers: | Kathryn J. Cavanaugh for Photos 1-7 and 8-46; Photo 7A taken by Ryan Miller (homeowner). |

Dates Photographed: Photos 1-6, 7, and 8-46 taken May 20, 2024; Photo 7A taken July 19, 2021.

Location of Original Digital Files: Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, 150 Benefit Street, Providence, RI 02903

Number of Photographs: 44

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

Photo 1: Exterior, west façade, looking east from Wilbur Avenue.

Photo 2: Exterior, west façade and north side elevation, looking southeast from Wilbur Avenue.

Photo 3: Exterior, north side elevation, looking south. Note the reconstructed beehive oven (restored in 1947-51) at the lower left corner of the stone chimney mass.

Photo 4: Exterior, east (rear) and south side elevations, looking northwest.

Photo 5: Exterior, south side elevation and west façade, looking northeast from Wilbur Avenue. Also shows the adjacent driveway and non-contributing garage (built 2022), just south of the house.

Photo 6: Interior, cellar, eastern foundation wall opposite the bottom of the stairs leading up to the first floor, looking southeast.

Photo 7: Interior, cellar floor, looking northwest.

Photo 8: Interior, first floor, vestibule, looking north.

Photo 9: Interior, first floor, main stairway rising up to second floor, looking southeast. The stonework is part of the chimney mass.

Photo 10: Interior, first floor, Great Room (northwest room, now the living room), looking northwest.

Photo 11 Interior, first floor, Great Room, looking northeast.

Photo 12: Interior, first floor, Great Room fireplace, looking north. Note the coved plasterwork above the mantelpiece.

Photo 13: Interior, first floor, Great Room, looking southwest.

Photo 14: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen (northeast room, now a dining room), looking northwest.

Photo 15: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen fireplace, looking north.

Photo 16: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen fireplace mantelpiece looking north, showing ca. 1791 hand-carved image of a ship and the conjoined initials (see Section 8 for explanation).

Photo 17: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen fireplace mantelpiece looking north, showing the hand-carved date "1791." This may indicate that the mantelpiece was installed that year, during a period when various repairs were conducted on the house to rectify damage sustained during the Revolutionary War. The second-floor fireplace mantelpiece also includes carved numbers (see Photo 31).

Photo 18: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen fireplace showing beehive oven (restored 1947-1951).

Photo 19: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen ceiling, northwest corner, showing detail of framing.

Photo 20: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen, looking southeast.

Photo 21: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen, looking southwest.

Photo 22: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen, looking south into the present kitchen.

Photo 23: Interior, first floor, Southeast Room (now, the kitchen), looking east to the back door.

Photo 24: Interior, first floor, Southwest Room (now, a study with half-bath and closet on its east side), looking southeast.

Photo 25: Interior, second floor, main stairway landing, looking north. The small 4-light window was added as part of the 1947-1951 restoration project.

Photo 26: Interior, second floor, main stairway leading up to the attic.

Photo 27: Interior, second floor, Chamber above the Great Room (now, the master bedroom), looking southeast.

Photo 28: Interior, second floor, Chamber above the Great Room (master bedroom) ceiling, detail of south end of summer beam, looking southeast.

Photo 29: Interior, second floor, Chamber above the Great Room (master bedroom), looking northeast.

Photo 30: Interior, second floor, Chamber above the Great Room (master bedroom) fireplace, looking northeast.

Photo 31: Interior, second floor, Chamber above the Great Room (master bedroom) fireplace, detail of mantelpiece showing hand-carved numbers "174 ".

Photo 32: Interior, second floor, Northeast Room (now, a bedroom), looking northwest.

Photo 33: Interior, second floor, Northeast Room (bedroom), looking northeast. The closet door shown at rear right also provides access to the chimney stack.

Photo 34: Interior, second floor, Northeast Room (bedroom), looking southeast. Just outside and to the left of this bedroom's doorway, the back stairs descend down to the first floor.

Photo 35: Interior, second floor, Southeast room (now, a full bathroom), looking southeast.

Photo 36: Interior, second floor, Southwest Room (now, a home office), looking west.

Photo 37: Interior, attic (now, a bedroom), looking down through trap door at top of main stairway.

Photo 38: Interior, attic (bedroom), looking south.

Photo 39: Interior, attic (bedroom), looking north.

Photo 40: Interior, attic (bedroom), looking northeast at chimney stack and en-suite bathroom.

Photo 41: Interior, attic (bedroom), looking up at pegged rafters with a carved Roman numeral.

Photo 42: Interior, back stairs rising up from first to second floor, looking west.

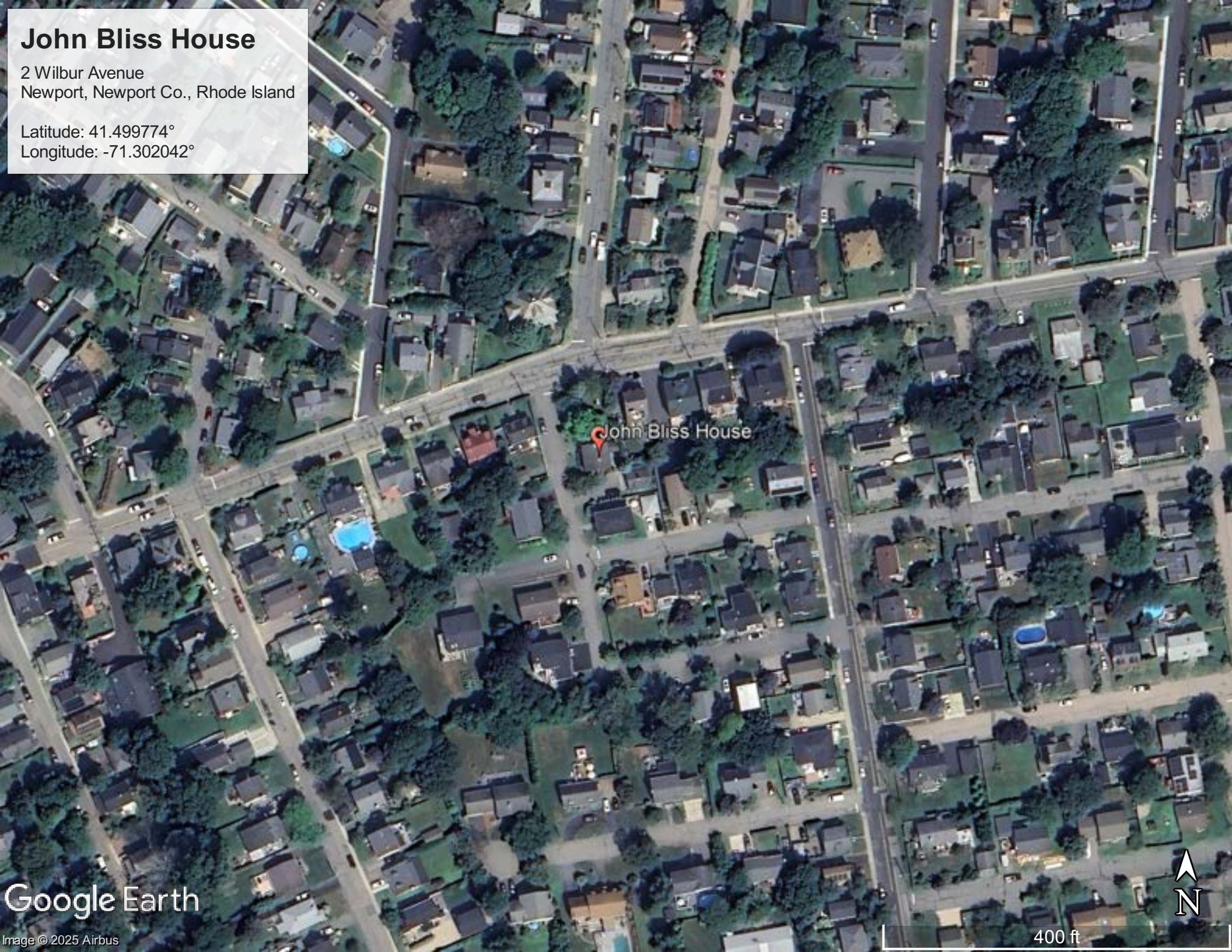
Photo 43: Interior, first floor, East Addition (now, a mudroom and home bar) attached to Old Kitchen, looking northeast. A Revolutionary War cannonball found on the property in 2022 is displayed in the northeast corner of the room.

Photo 44: Garage (built 2022, non-contributing) standing southeast of the house, looking southeast.

# John Bliss House

2 Wilbur Avenue
Newport, Newport Co., Rhode Island

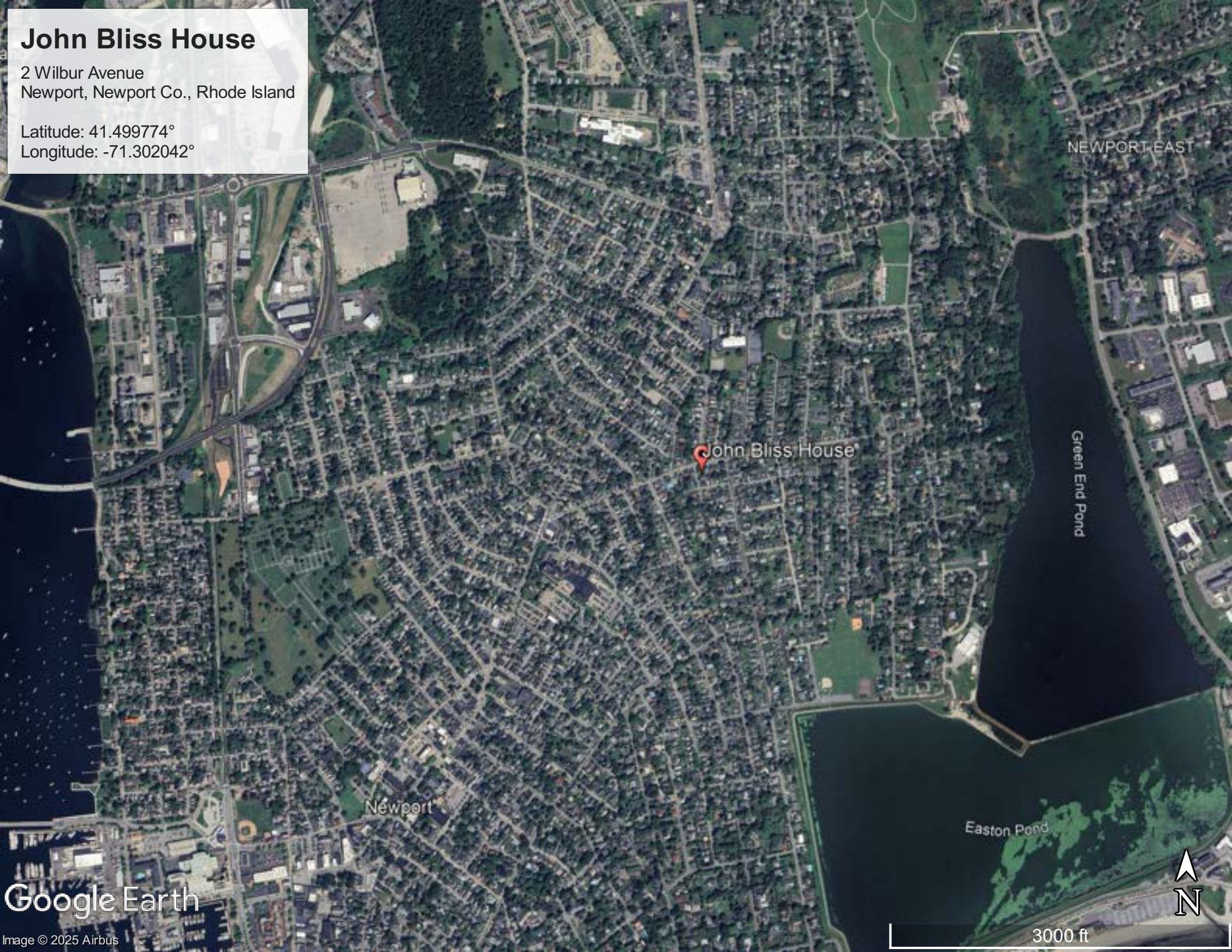
Latitude: 41.499774°
Longitude: -71.302042°



# John Bliss House

2 Wilbur Avenue
Newport, Newport Co., Rhode Island

Latitude: 41.499774°
Longitude: -71.302042°



# JOHN BLISS HOUSE
# 2 WILBUR AVENUE, NEWPORT, NEWPORT CO., R.I.
# NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION (2025)

## PLANS, MAPS, AND FIGURES

Figure 2 – Historic photo, date unknown but pre-1948, of Bliss House looking southeast.

Figure 3 – Historic photo ca. 1900, south side and rear elevations of Bliss House, looking northwest

Figure 4 – Historic photo ca. 1948-51, rear elevation, looking north.

Figure 5 – Historic photo ca. 1937, north side elevation of Bliss House, looking south

Figure 6 – Historic photo ca. 1930 west façade and south side elevations before restoration

Figure 7 – Historic photo ca. 1951-60 west façade and south side elevations after restoration

Figure 8 – Historic photo ca. 1948-51, west façade and north side elevation, during restoration project

Figure 9 – 1955 drawing of Bliss House, post-restoration

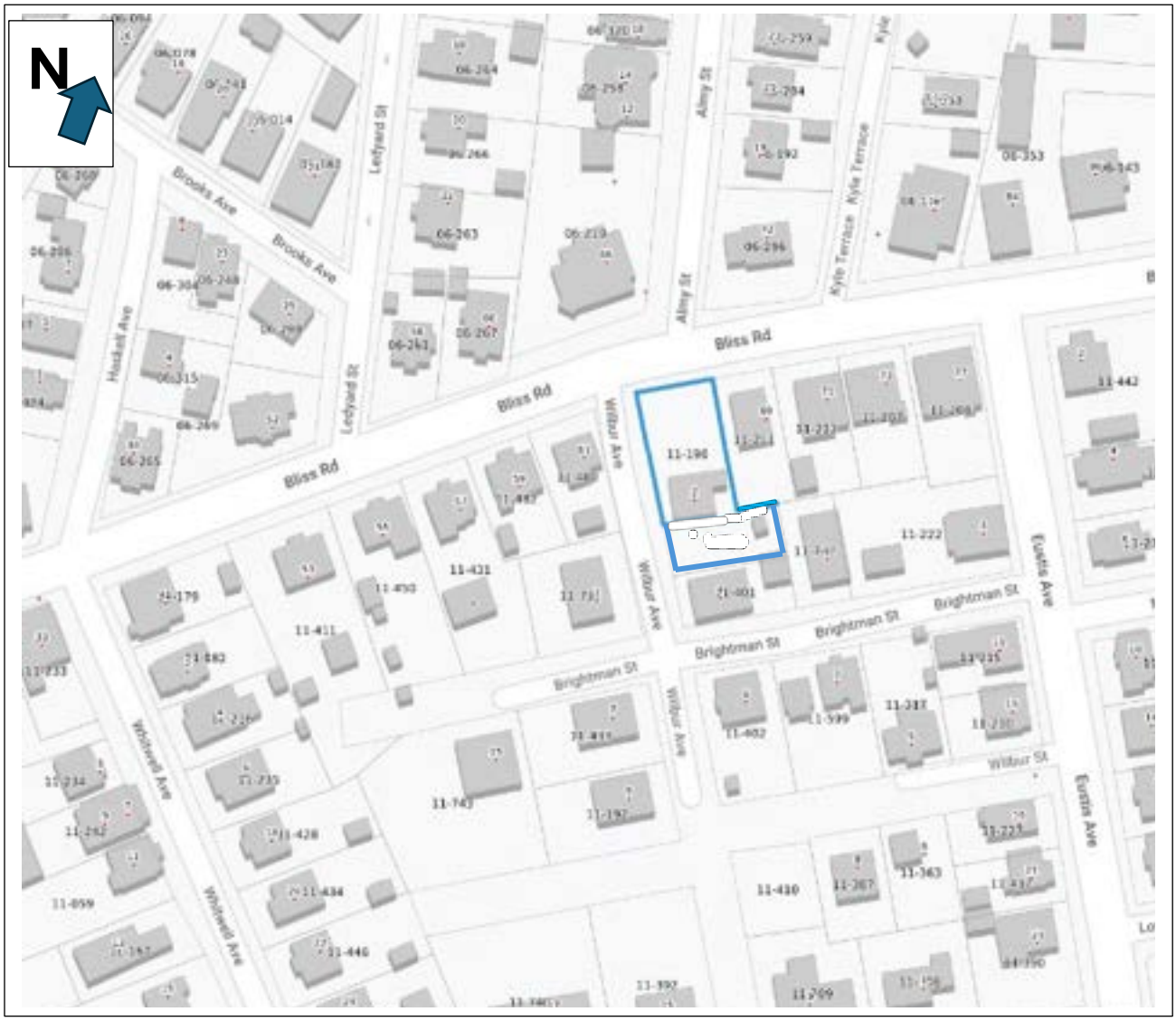
Figure 10 – Historic photo ca. 1951-1960s, west façade and north side elevation, after restoration

Figure 11 - 1975 real estate advertisement “Elder John Bliss House,” Newport Realty Company.

Figure 12 – 1947 Edition of Newport Gazette (publication of the Preservation Society of Newport County) listing the materials offered by Restorations, Inc.

Figure 13 – A historical photograph from the collections of the Newport Historical Society dated circa 1947, shows the fireplace wall and a portion of the ceiling in the Old Kitchen prior to restoration

# Map 1




**BOUNDARIES OF THE NOMINATED PROPERTY:**
**John Bliss House, 2 Wilbur Avenue, Newport, RI**

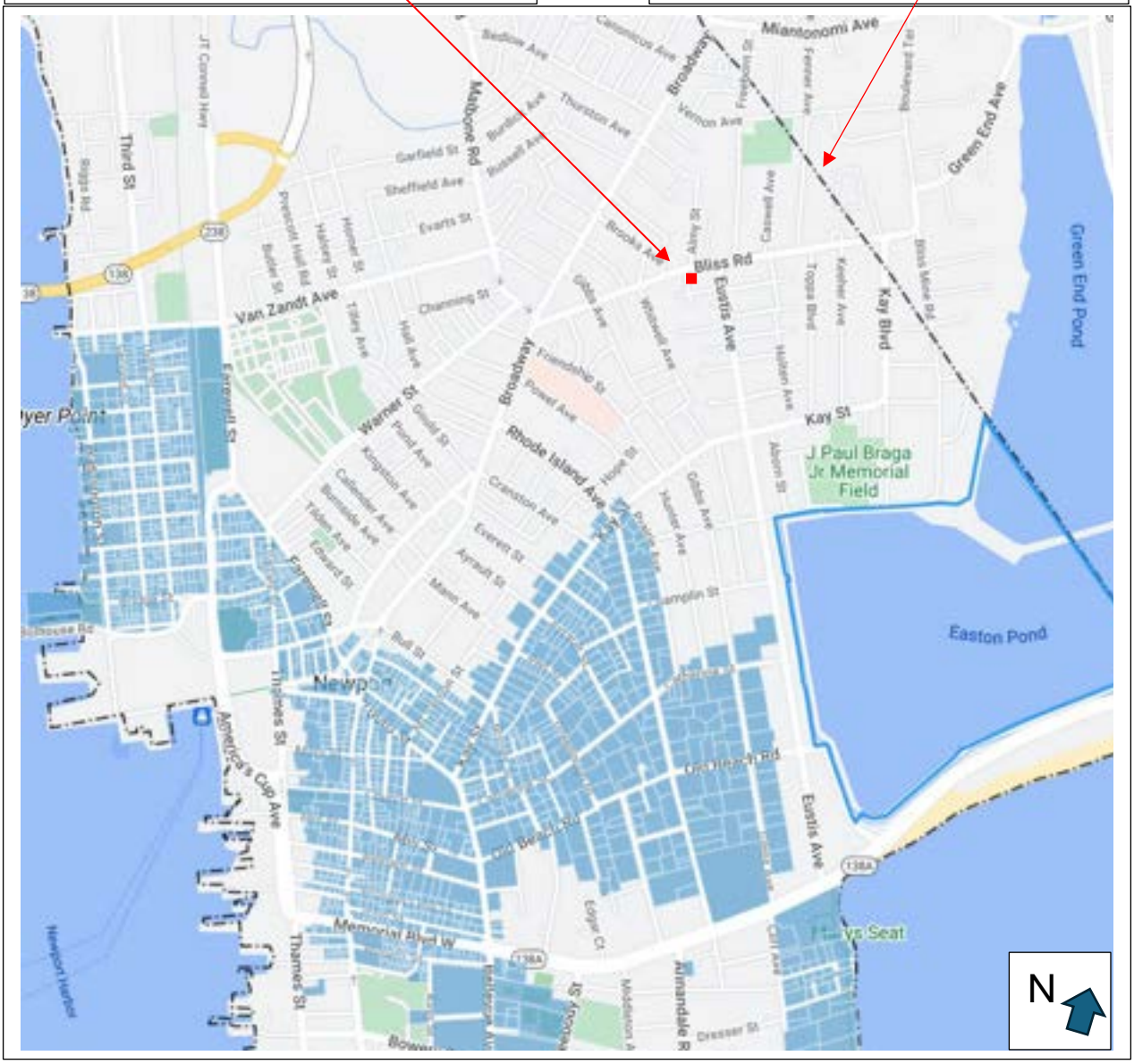
The nominated property consists of Assessor's Plat 11, Lot 196, containing the house and the non-contributing garage.

*Source: City of Newport Tax Assessor's Map*

# Map 2

John Bliss House, 2 Wilbur Avenue (corner of Bliss Road)

Boundary between Newport and Middletown

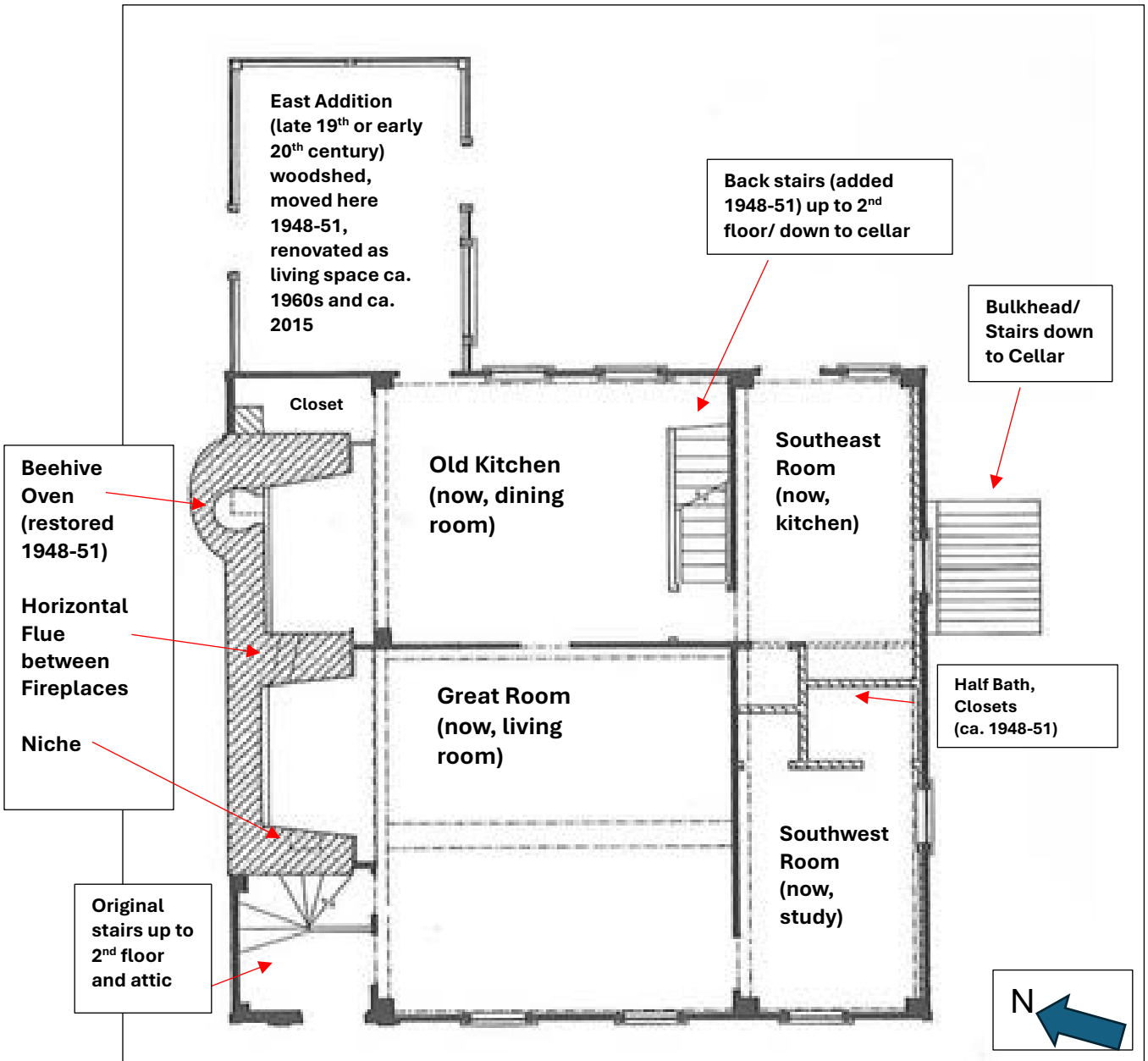



**ORIENTATION MAP**

Shows the location of the John Bliss House, northeast of downtown Newport and southwest of the municipal boundary between Newport and Middletown.

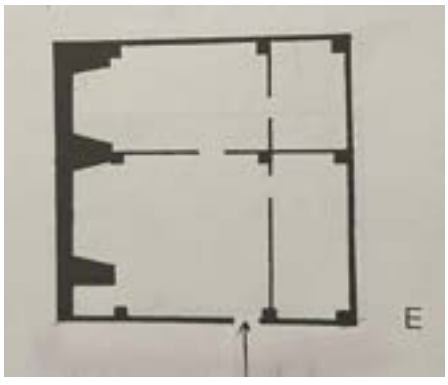
*Source: City of Newport GIS Mapping*

# Plan 1




**JOHN BLISS HOUSE - FIRST FLOOR PLAN**

*Source: Myron Stachiw et al, "The Early Architecture and Landscapes of the Narragansett Basin, Vol. 1," p. 124. Not to scale.*




*Source: Stachiw et al., p. 24. Not to scale.*

**"Type E – Fully Elaborated Stone Ender"** with four-room plan.

Note that at the Bliss House, the main entrance and stairway are offset to the west of the Great Room fireplace.

# Map 3


John Bliss House on Bliss Road

Newport/Middletown line

**TOPOGRAPHICAL CHART OF THE BAY OF NARRAGANSETT - 1777**
**By Charles Blaskowitz**

This is the first known visual representation of the John Bliss House, situated on the south side of Bliss Road, surrounded by a wall, a fence, or an enclosure of trees. The northern end of Bliss Mine Road in Middletown, leading southward from Bliss Road to "Weeden's" [Green End] Pond, is also depicted. The grid of red squares along the waterfront is the town of Newport. The dotted black line represents the 1743 boundary between Newport and Middletown.

*Source: oldmapsonline.com.*

# Map 4


First (Outer) Defensive Line, from Tomini Hill east to Green End

Second (Inner) Defensive Line

East Main Road

West Main Road

Green End Road

*Source: Kenneth M. Walsh et al, "Siege of British Forces in Newport County by Colonial and French in August 1778" (2016), cover page.*

**MAP OF BRITISH DEFENSIVE LINES NORTH OF NEWPORT – 1778**
**By Edward Fage**

British forces occupied Newport (and all of Aquidneck Island) during the Revolutionary War from December 1776 to October 1779.

This map shows the John Bliss House with an orchard to the east (red circle), on the south side of Bliss Road, situated between the British forces' two defensive lines north of Newport. The Bliss House served as British field headquarters during the Siege of Newport and Battle of Rhode Island in August 1778.

East [Main] Road, West [Main] Road, and Green End Road, all in Middletown, are depicted on the map at left showing the larger area.

# Map 6


**PLAN DE RHODES-ISLAND, ET POSITION DE LARMÉE FRANÇOISE A NEWPORT, 1780**
***(Map of Rhode Island and the position of the French Army in Newport)***

Shows plan of defense for Newport during the Revolutionary War, highlighting Gen. Rochambeau's main troop encampments and the position of the fleet of Adm. Charles Louis de Ternay at the entrance to Newport Harbor. The numbered legend indicates the forts and batteries surrounding the city and shows the British defensive lines for the campaign of 1778. French forces remained in Newport for more than a year (1780-81) before Rochambeau marched westward through Connecticut in June-July 1781 to join up with George Washington's troops in New York.

The John Bliss House is shown on the south side of Bliss Road.

# Map 5

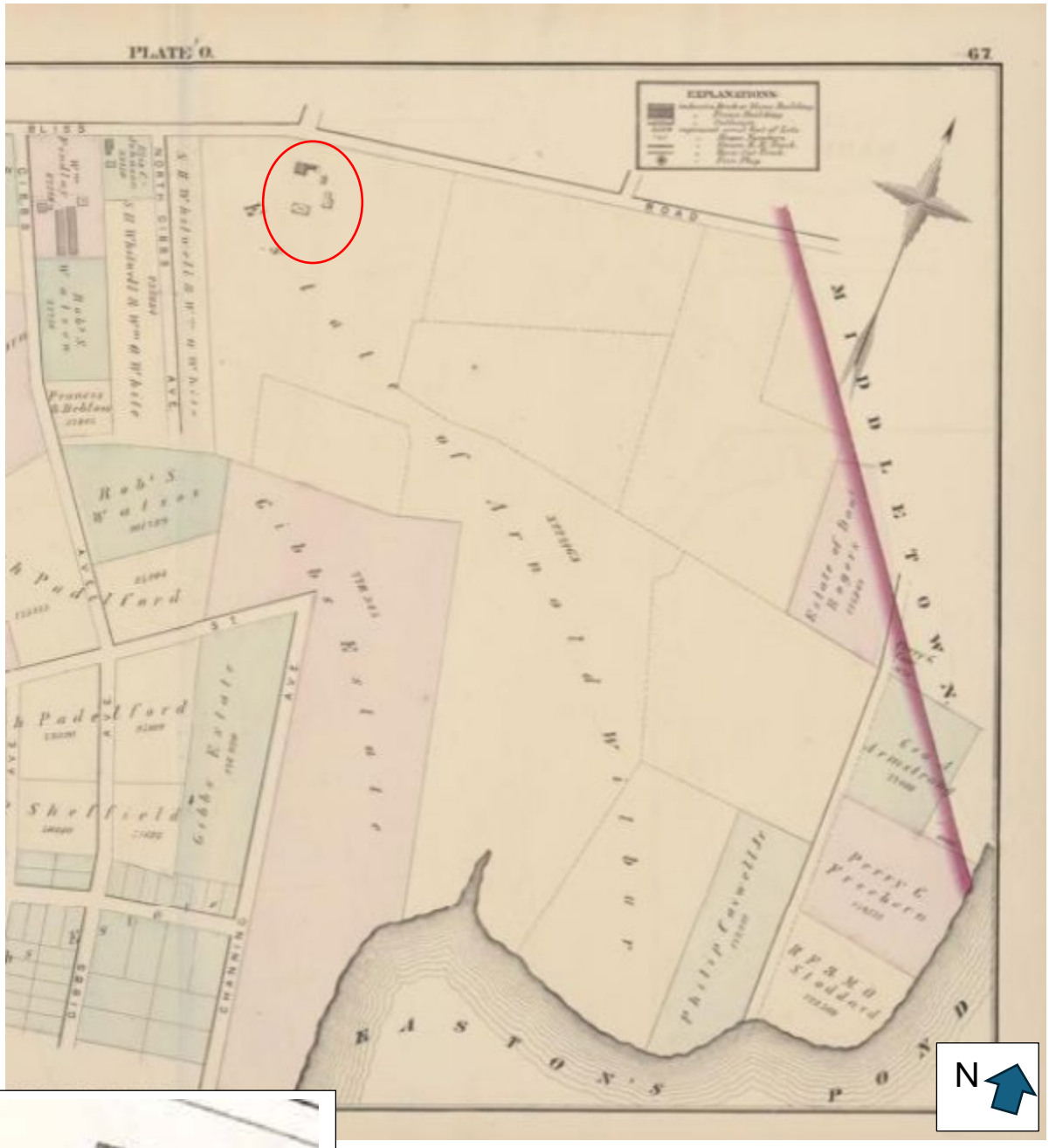

**Plan of Rhode Island - 1779**
**By Edward Fage**

Map of Rhode Island showing fortifications and details of towns, houses, and farms during the occupation of Newport.

This map shows the John Bliss House on the south side of Bliss Road, marked with the name "Blifs" (*shown on inset at left*) and an orchard to the east. This map was drawn during the period that the Bliss House was used as a British field headquarters during the occupation of Newport by the British.

*Source: In the digital collection William L. Clements Library Image Bank. William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections*

# Map 7

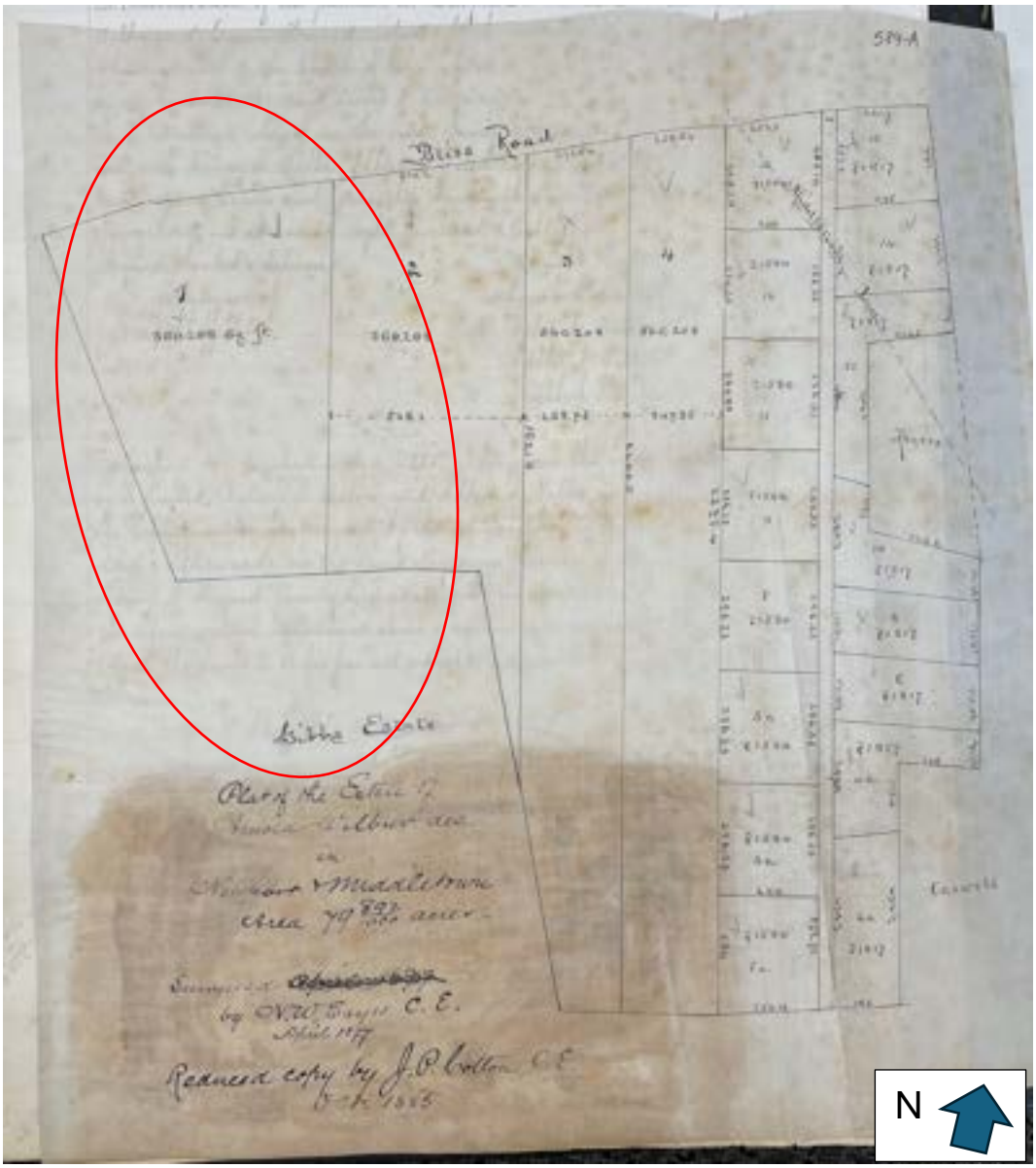



**CITY ATLAS OF NEWPORT (Plate O) – 1876**
**By G.M. Hopkins**

Shows the John Bliss House (the darker building seen in close-up at left) with two small rear additions, as well as three outbuildings, owned by the Estate of Arnold Wilbur (died 1867); the Wilbur Farm contained 3,221,463 sq.ft. (73.95 acres).

*Source: Library of Congress*

# Map 8




**PLAT OF THE ESTATE OF ARNOLD WILBUR, DECEASED, IN NEWPORT AND MIDDLETOWN (79.892 ACRES) – 1877**

Shows the division of the Wilbur Farm after Arnold Wilbur's death in 1867; this map accompanied the partition deed recorded by his surviving adult children, Albert A. Wilbur, Betsey C. Wilbur, and Emma G. Hazard. Albert Wilbur received ten of the depicted lots, including Lots 1 and 2 (totaling 1,120,416 sq.ft., or about 25.72 acres). Lot 1 contained "the Mansion House which was lately the dwelling of the late Arnold Wilbor [sic] and other buildings thereon" (not depicted here, but see Map 7).

*Source: Newport Land Evidence Records, Deed Book 55, Pages 580-584.*

# Map 9

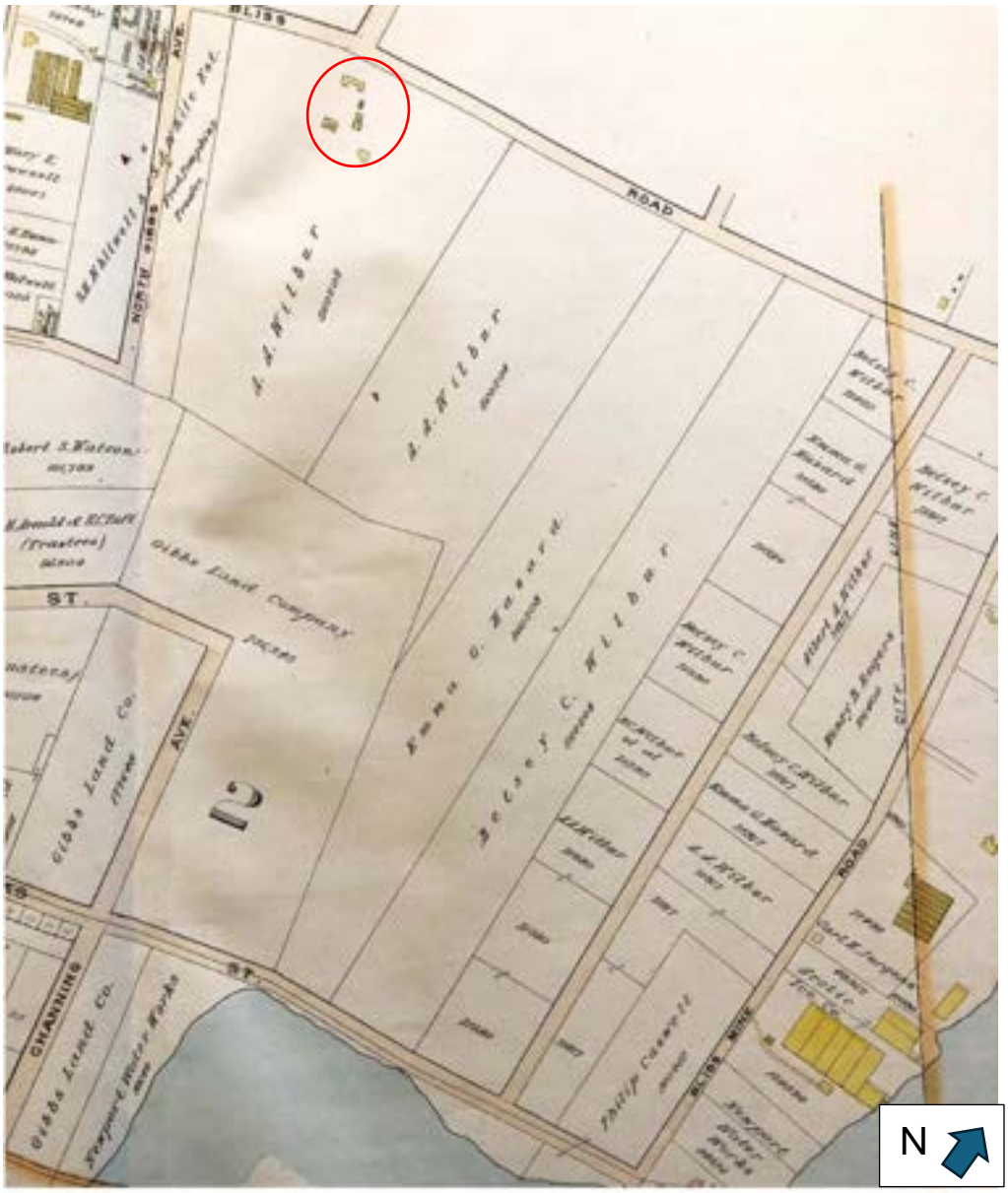


**Bird's Eye View, Newport, R.I. – 1878**

Bird's eye view of Newport, RI showing Bliss property on south side of Bliss Road. Note close up view (to left) showing ell on east side of Bliss House and outbuildings as shown on the 1876 map (Figure 6).

*Source: Galt & Hoy. (1878) Newport, R.I. [New York] [Map] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/75696563/.*

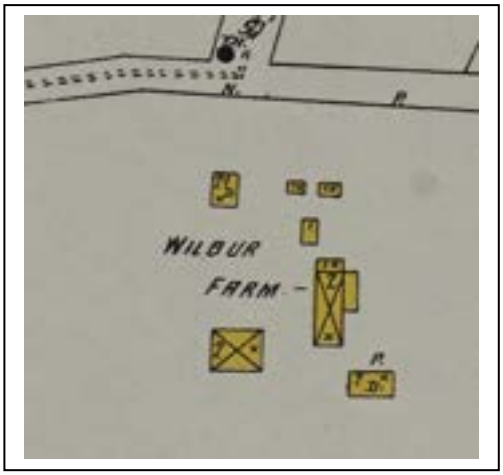
# Map 10




**CITY ATLAS OF NEWPORT – 1893**

Shows the subdivision of the Wilbur Farm per the 1877 partition plat (Map 6). Albert A. Wilbur owned the 560,208 sq.ft. (12.6 acres) lot containing the John Bliss House and several outbuildings. Adjacent and nearby properties are identified as belonging to other members of the Wilbur family: Emma G. [Wilbur] Hazard and Betsey C. Wilbur.

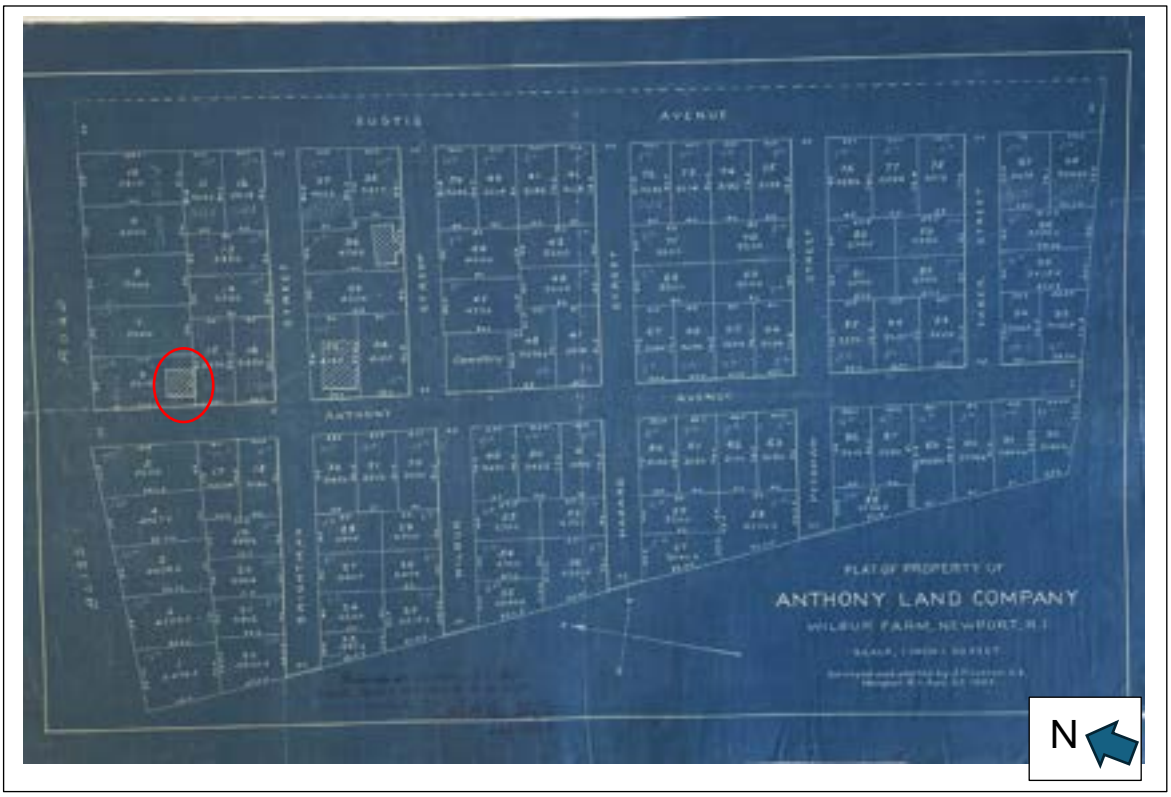
# MAP 11


## Sanborn Fire Insurance Map – 1903

The area around the Bliss House (noted as "Wilbur Farm" on the map) remained mostly undeveloped at the turn of the 20th century. The map shows the Bliss House and a series of 1- and 2-story wood outbuildings set along the south side of Bliss Road.

# Map 12





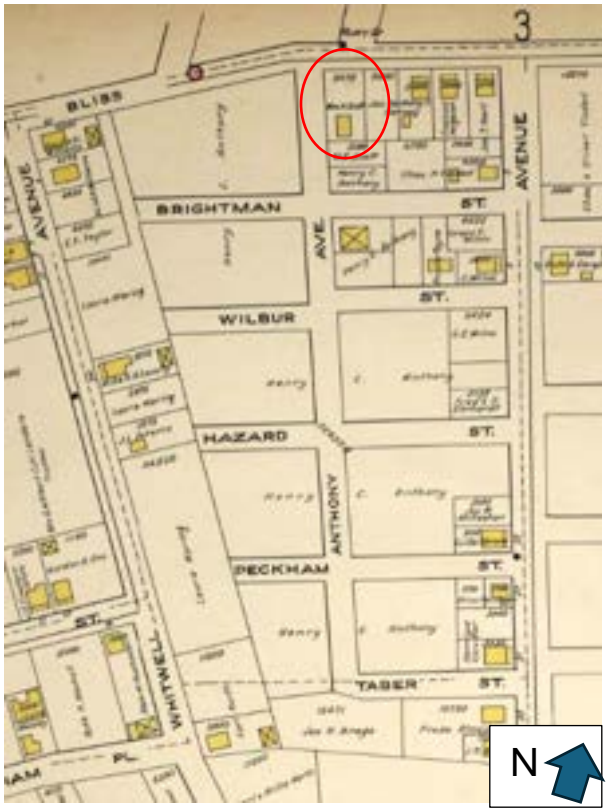
**WILBUR FARM PLAT, RECORDED BY ANTHONY LAND COMPANY – 1907**

Shows the subdivision of Lot 2 in the 1882 partition plat of Arnold Wilbur's estate (Figure 7). On the 1907 map, the John Bliss House stands on Lot 6. (Note: Lot 15, south of Lot 6, is also included in the current property.) Two farm outbuildings that stood on Lots 33 to the south and 36 to the southeast are no longer extant. The Cemetery to the south is the Judge Anthony Wilbur Lot, formerly part of the Wilbur Farm. Anthony Avenue was renamed Wilbur Avenue in 1948.

*Source: Newport Land Evidence Records.*

# Maps 13, 14 and 15


Map 13: Newport City Atlas, 1907




Map 14: Sanborn Map, 1921, p. 6 showing Wm. H. Scott as the owner of the property.


Map 15: Sanborn Map, 1953, p. 59


**DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE WILBUR FARM PLAT – 1907-1953**

Shows relatively little new housing development within the Wilbur Farm Plat during this period.

*Sources: Collection of Newport Historical Society (1907 map); Library of Congress.*

The 1953 Sanborn Map shows the John Bliss House with the address 35 Anthony Avenue (although the street name had been changed to Wilbur Avenue in 1948), standing on an L-shaped lot (combined Lots 6 and 15 in the 1907 Wilbur Farm Plat): a 2½-story dwelling with 1-story rear addition, and 1-story wood-frame garage (not extant).

# Figures 1 and 2

**Figure 1: John Bliss House and several outbuildings at Wilbur Farm, looking southeast from Bliss Road, ca. 1885.**

*(Photographer Joshua Appleby Williams; Photo courtesy of Ryan Miller, owner of Bliss House)*

**Figure 2: John Bliss House, west façade and north side elevation, looking southeast; date unknown.**

While this image appears to be of a similar vintage to the one above, it is probably later, as the front door surround is missing. The front steps and railings appear to be late 19th century; they were removed during the 1948-51 restoration project.

*Collection of Newport Historical Society (P10123)*

# Figures 3 and 4

**Figure 3: John Bliss House, south side and rear elevations, looking northwest, ca. 1900.**

The small window on the south side elevation, first floor, is no longer extant. On the rear (east) elevation, first floor, the southern-most window was relocated to accommodate a back door. The outbuilding with vertical board siding attached to the rear elevation was removed, and the adjacent freestanding shingled outbuilding was moved to that same location (see photo below). These alterations occurred during the 1948-51 restoration project.

*Collection of Newport Historical Society (P10133)*

**Figure 4: John Bliss House, rear (east) elevation, looking north, ca. 1948-51.**

Shows the formerly free-standing wood-shingled outbuilding having been relocated, pivoted 180 degrees, and attached to the house. This apparently had been a woodshed, later enclosed as living space in the 1960s (see "East Addition" on the first floor plan, Plan 1).

*Collection of Newport Historical Society (P10125)*

# Figure 5

**John Bliss House, north side elevation with "stone end" chimney mass, ca. 1937.**

Note the beehive oven is missing from the chimney mass; it was reconstructed during the 1948-51 restoration project (see Figure 8).

The shed-roofed addition shown on the building's east elevation (left side in photograph; also seen in Figure 3) was removed during the 1948-51 restoration project.

*Historic American Building Survey, Library of Congress*

# Figures 6 and 7

*Collection of Newport Historical Society (P10129)*

**John Bliss House, west façade and south side elevation, looking northeast.**

**Figure 6:** Top photo, ca. 1930. Note the wood portico and steps over the front door, added ca. 1900-1930.

**Figure 7:** Bottom photo, ca. 1951-1960s, post-restoration. The front portico has been removed, as is the eastern-most window on the 1st floor of the south elevation.

*Collection of Newport Historical Society (P10130)*

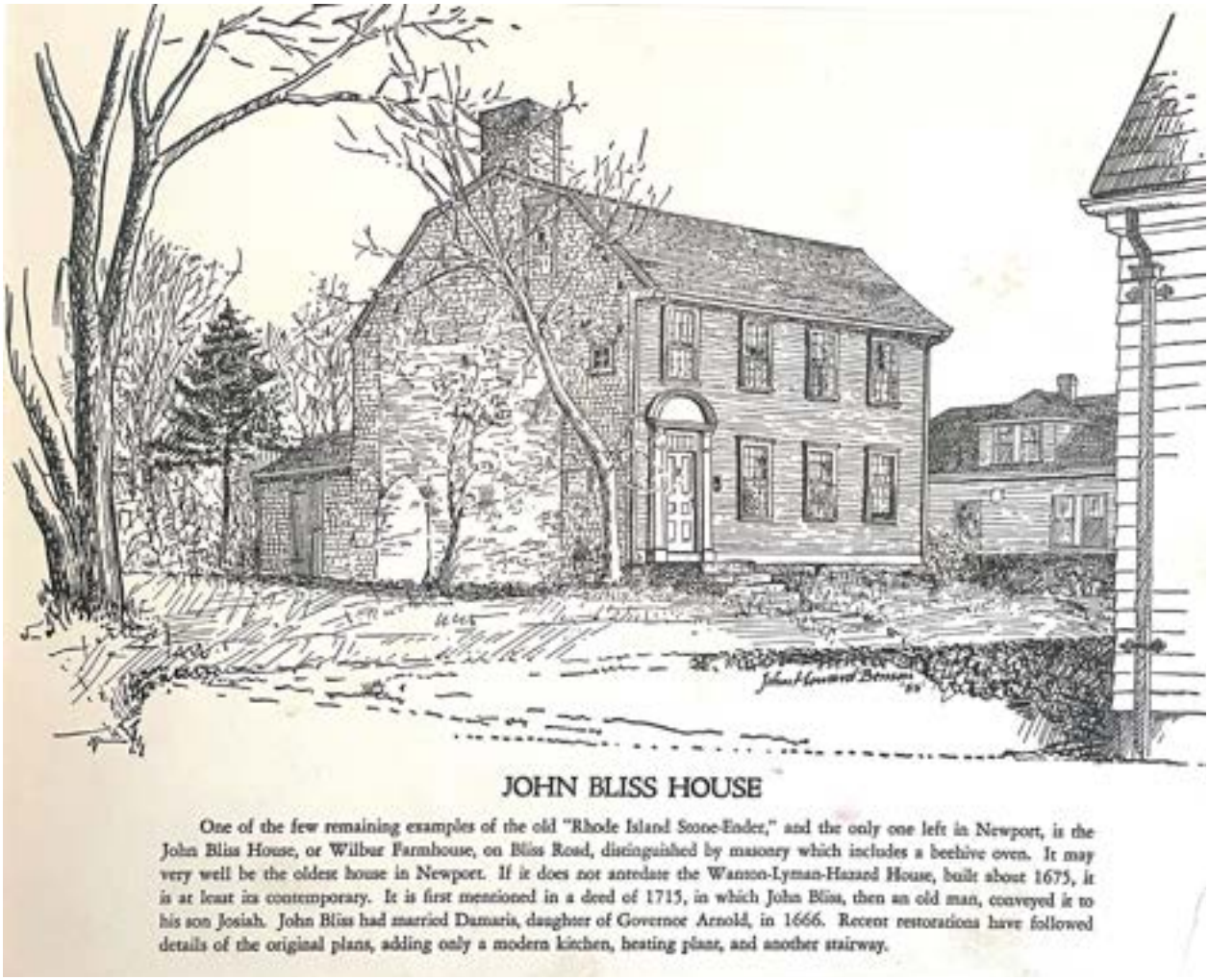
# Figure 8

**John Bliss House, west façade and north side elevation, ca. 1948-1951**

Taken during the four years that the house was owned by Restorations, Inc., this photo shows the restoration project nearly completed, with the reconstructed beehive oven and small new window at the second story on the north elevation, clapboard repairs on the west façade (not yet repainted) and the front door surround restored. A "For Sale" sign is attached to the north elevation.

*Collection of Preservation Society of Newport County*

# Figure 9




**John Bliss House**
**1955 drawing by John Howard Benson**

The *Newport Daily News* chose this post-restoration rendering for its 1956 "carrier's calendar."

*Newport Daily News, December 24, 1955, p. 3*

# Figure 10

**John Bliss House, ca. 1951-1960s, west façade and north side elevation, looking southeast.**

Post-restoration: beehive oven reconstructed; small 2nd floor window added next to stone chimney mass on north side elevation; front door surround restored and transom added; front steps replaced in stone. (The historical plaque mounted on the north side elevation is no longer extant.)

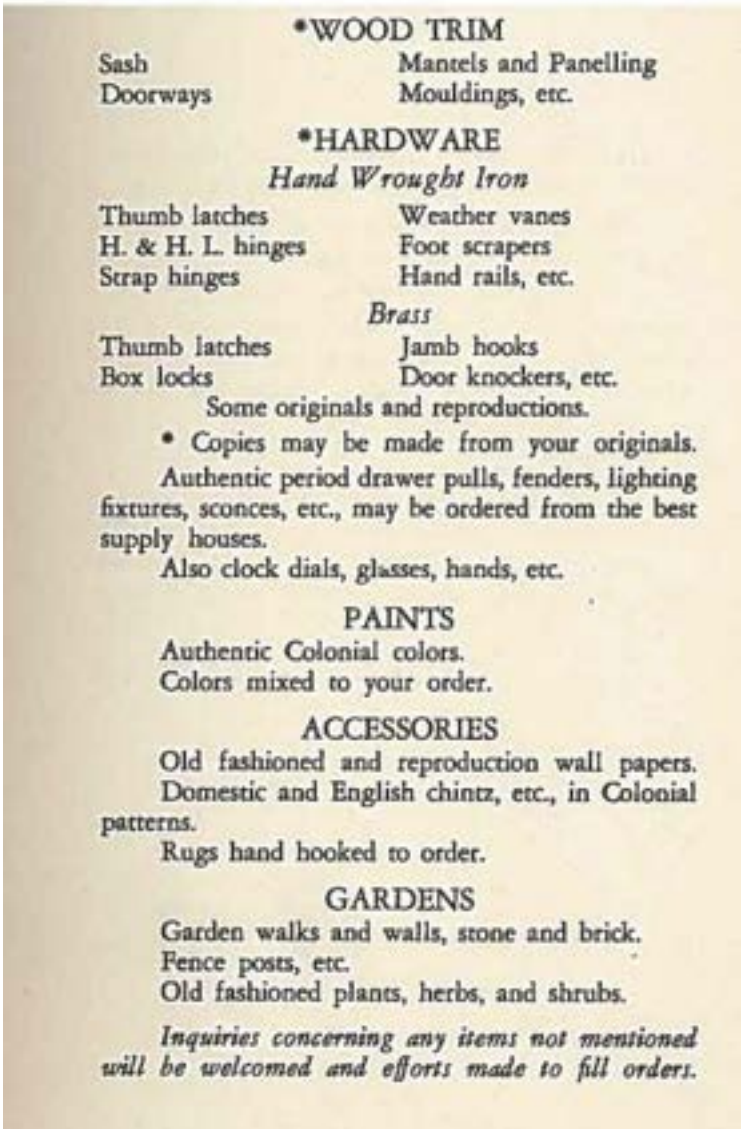
*Collection of Newport Historical Society (P4126)*

# Figure 11


**Advertisement, *Providence Journal*, June 1, 1975.**

Real estate advertisement for the Bliss House from 1975, showcasing the building's "stone wall fireplaces" and authentic restoration.

# Figure 12



*WOOD TRIM

| | |
|---|---|
| Sash | Mantels and Panelling |
| Doorways | Mouldings, etc. |

*HARDWARE

*Hand Wrought Iron*

| | |
|---|---|
| Thumb latches | Weather vanes |
| H. & H. L. hinges | Foot scrapers |
| Strap hinges | Hand rails, etc. |

*Brass*

| | |
|---|---|
| Thumb latches | Jamb hooks |
| Box locks | Door knockers, etc. |

Some originals and reproductions.

• Copies may be made from your originals.

Authentic period drawer pulls, fenders, lighting fixtures, sconces, etc., may be ordered from the best supply houses.

Also clock dials, glasses, hands, etc.

PAINTS

Authentic Colonial colors.

Colors mixed to your order.

ACCESSORIES

Old fashioned and reproduction wall papers.

Domestic and English chintz, etc., in Colonial patterns.

Rugs hand hooked to order.

GARDENS

Garden walks and walls, stone and brick.

Fence posts, etc.

Old fashioned plants, herbs, and shrubs.

*Inquiries concerning any items not mentioned will be welcomed and efforts made to fill orders.*

**1947 Edition of *Newport Gazette* (publication of the Preservation Society of Newport County)**

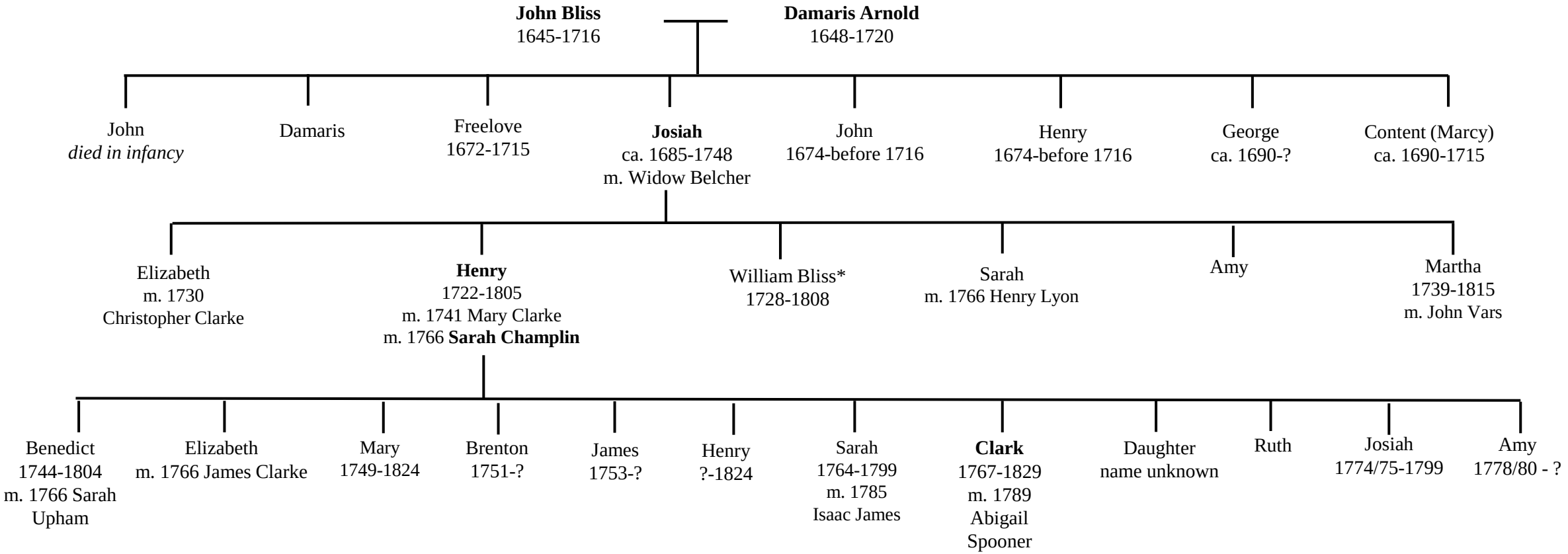
Page from 1947 issue of the *Newport Gazette* outlines the materials offered by Restorations, Inc. Items ranged from originals to reproductions, some of which came from other colonial era buildings demolished during this time. Based on the listing, it appears that the organization also worked with a range of supply houses, vendors and craftspeople.

# Figure 13

Historical photograph from the collections of the Newport Historical Society dated circa 1947, shows the fireplace wall and a portion of the ceiling in the Old Kitchen (current dining room) prior to restoration. The image provides a glimpse into what the interior of this room looked like prior to restoration.

*Collection of Newport Historical Society (P10124)*

# BLISS FAMILY TREE




*Clark Bliss was the last member of the Bliss family to own the house; he sold the property to Anthony Wilbur in 1807*

*bold font denotes ownership of John Bliss House:

# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
## Appendix 1: Surviving Stone Enders in Rhode Island (*as of February 2025*)

While up to 24 stone enders may survive in the state, only 13 extant buildings have been confirmed to be stone ender building types. Of this number, only ten (10) retain a recognizable masonry (stone or brick) end. Stone Enders were predominantly built in Rhode Island, with fewer than one dozen occurring in the surrounding area of Massachusetts and Connecticut. Today only one confirmed stone ender survives outside of Rhode Island. Identification of extant stone enders is based upon a study conducted by Shantia Anderheggen and Preservation Strategies, *Reviewing Rhode Island's Stone-End Buildings*, an unpublished project report prepared for Preserve Rhode Island, May 2022.

With few building records from the 17th century, it's impossible to tell how many stone enders were originally constructed. Field studies conducted in 2022 suggest that as many as 59 potential stone enders predating 1740 survived into the 19th and 20th centuries. Many of those have been demolished over the centuries, and two were moved from their original locations.

| DATE | ADDRESS | NAME | TYPE*/DESCRIPTION | CURRENT USE | NR STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1640/50; or 1709 | 7919 Post Road, North Kingstown | Palmer-Northup House+ | Type A: single room stone ender altered, expanded and raised to 2 stories; side-gable | Residential | Listed, individual NR (1973) |
| 1677 | 43 Stony Acre Drive, Cranston | Thomas Fenner House+ | 2 ½-story, side gable, saltbox; exposed field stone end wall and stone chimney | Residential | Listed, individual NR (1990) |
| 1677 | 109 Wilbur Avenue, Cranston | Edward Searle House | 2 ½- story, side gable; altered and expanded to center chimney plan | Residential | Contributing resource Oak Lawn Village National Register District (1977) |
| 1679 | 125 Howland Road, East Greenwich | Clement-Weaver House+ | 1 ½-story, side gable; altered and expanded to center chimney plan | Residential | Listed, individual NR (1995) |
| ca. 1680 | 38 George Waterman Road, Johnston | Clemence-Irons House+ | Type E: fully elaborated stone ender; 1 ½-story, side gable, saltbox; exposed field stone end wall and stone chimney | Owned and operated by Historic New England as a house museum | Listed, individual NR (1973) |
| ca. 1680 - 1715 | 2 Wilbur Avenue, Newport | John Bliss House+ ** | Type E: fully elaborated stone ender; 2 ½-story, side-gambrel, four-room | Residential | Recommended; nominated, 2025. |
| 1687 | 487 Great Road, Lincoln | Eleazer Arnold House+ | Type E: fully elaborated stone ender; 2 ½-story, side gable; exposed fieldstone end wall; brick | Owned and operated by Historic New England as a house museum | NHL (1968); contributing resource Great Road National Register District (1974) |

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| | | | pilaster chimney; constructed as four-room type | | |
| ca. 1690 | 548 West Main Road, Little Compton | Samuel Wilbor House | Type A: single room stone ender altered and expanded to center chimney house; 2 ½-story, side gable. | Owned and operated by the Little Compton Historical Society as a house museum | Listed, individual NR (2007) |
| 1694 | 1147 Great Road, Lincoln | Valentine Whitman House+ | Type E: fully elaborated stone ender; 2 ½-story, side gable; exposed field stone end wall; brick pilaster chimney; constructed as four-room type | Converted back to residential use in 2022 from house museum | Contributing resource Limerock Village National Register District (1974) |
| 1715 | 109 Smithfield Road, North Providence | Joseph Smith House+ | 2 ½-story, side gable, saltbox; exposed fieldstone end wall with brick at second story and chimney | Residential | Listed, individual NR (1978) |
| 1715 | 100 Mill Wheel Road, Warwick | Greene-Bowen House | 2 ½-story, side gable, saltbox; brick end wall and chimney | Residential | Listed, individual NR (1974) |
| 1738 | 1400 Gilbert Stuart Road, North Kingstown | George Douglas House+ | 2 ½-story, side gable; exposed field stone end wall and chimney with 19th and 20th century additions | Residential | Listed, individual NR (1975) |
| 1696/1716 | 645 Matunuck Schoolhouse Road, South Kingstown | Samuel Perry House+ | 2 ½-story, side gable; side lean-to; field stone end wall and chimney | Residential | Recommended, not listed |

* The 2022 report lists 13 extant buildings that have been confirmed to be stone enders. The statewide preservation non-profit that commissioned the report, PreserveRI, lists 14 buildings as stone enders on its website. The report does not include the Samuel Gorton, Jr. House in Warwick (1687) as its original form has evolved over time and it is no longer recognizable as a stone ender.

** The typologies for pre-1730 houses as defined in Stachiw, Myron O. The Early Architecture and Landscape of Narragansett Basin: Volume 1, Newport. Prepared for the Annual Meeting and Conference of The Vernacular Architecture Forum, April 25-29, 2001:

- Type A: one-room-plan exposed-end-chimney plan
- Type B: one-room-plan enclosed-end-chimney plan
- Type C: two-room center-chimney plan
- Type D: two-room stone-ender
- Type E: fully elaborated stone-ender with four-room plan

+ Stone enders retaining their recognizable masonry (stone or brick) end.

***The Bliss House is the only surviving stone ender original to Newport. While at least seven potential stone enders were known to have been built in Newport, six have been demolished. In addition, two stone enders were moved and relocated to Newport in the mid-20th century.

# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
## Appendix 2: Extant 17th Century Residential Buildings in Newport, RI (*as of February 2025*)

The John Bliss House is one of only eight surviving residential buildings representing Newport's 17th century history and development, and the only surviving rural farmhouse of that era. Seventeenth century Newport was a town of approximately 400 houses, nearly all built of wood with only a handful constructed of stone. By 1966, when the Newport NHL was listed, only a handful of these early houses survived, and many had been heavily remodeled or incorporated as wings into larger structures erected during the 18th century.*

| DATE (Source) | ADDRESS | NAME | DESCRIPTION | CURRENT USE | NR STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| pre-1673; ca. 1750 et seq | 26 Marlborough Street | White Horse Tavern | oldest tavern in America still in operation, occupies a converted 2½-story, gambrel-roofed, center-chimney house that has a Georgian style exterior | Commercial: restaurant and tavern | NHL (1968); individual NR (1972) |
| 1680, 1748 | 228 Spring Street | Bull-Mawdsley House | earliest portion of house forms the rear section of a 2½-story, wood-frame, hip-roofed, 5-bay, Georgian style house | Residential | Listed, individual NR (1972) |
| ca. 1680 - 1715 | 2 Wilbur Avenue | John Bliss House | 2 ½-story, wood-frame, 3-bay wide, side gable, stone ender | Residential | Recommended; nominated 2025. |
| ca. 1697 et seq | 17 Broadway | Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House | 2½-story, wood-frame, gable-roofed, center chimney house with a 5-bay Georgian-style façade | Owned and operated by the Newport Historical Society since 1927 | NHL (1966) |
| ca. 1694 | 2 Coddington Street | Reverend Daniel Wightman House | 2½-story wood frame, 5-bay façade structure, with a gambrel roof with bracketed cornice, two internal chimneys, and a late-19th century entrance porch | Residential | Contributing resource Newport NHL District (1968) |

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| pre-1700, ca. 1845, 1976 | 2-4-6 Broadway | Governor Peleg Sanford House | early core hidden inside a 2½ -story, wood-frame, gable-with-monitor-roof mid-19th century building with several ground-floor storefronts | Commercial/offices | Contributing resource Newport NHL District (1968) |

*Newport National Historic Landmark District nomination form, 1968.

Photo 1: Exterior, west façade, looking east from Wilbur Avenue.

Photo 2: Exterior, west façade and north side elevation, looking southeast from Wilbur Avenue.

Photo 3: Exterior, north side elevation, looking south. Note the reconstructed beehive oven (restored in 1948-51) at the lower left corner of the stone chimney mass.

Photo 4: Exterior, east (rear) and south side elevations, looking northwest.

Photo 5: Exterior, south side elevation and west façade, looking northeast from Wilbur Avenue. Also shows the adjacent driveway and non-contributing garage (built 2022), just south of the house.

Photo 6: Interior, cellar, eastern foundation wall opposite the bottom of the stairs leading up to the first floor, looking southeast.

Photo 7: Interior, cellar floor, looking northwest.

Photo 8: Interior, first floor, vestibule, looking north.

Photo 9:  Interior, first floor, main stairway rising up to second floor, looking southeast. The stonework is part of the chimney mass.

Photo 10: Interior, first floor, Great Room (northwest room, now the living room), looking northwest.

Photo 11: Interior, first floor, Great Room, looking northeast.

Photo 12: Interior, first floor, Great Room fireplace, looking north. Note the coved plasterwork above the mantelpiece.

Photo 13: Interior, first floor, Great Room, looking southwest.

Photo 14: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen (northeast room, now a dining room), looking northwest.

Photo 15: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen fireplace, looking north.

Photo 16: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen fireplace mantelpiece looking north, showing ca. 1791 hand-carved image of a ship and the conjoined initials.


Photo 17: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen fireplace mantelpiece looking north, showing the hand-carved date “1791.” This may indicate that the mantelpiece was installed that year, during a period when various repairs were conducted on the house to rectify damage sustained during the Revolutionary War. The second-floor fireplace mantelpiece also includes carved numbers (see Photo 31).

Photo 18: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen fireplace showing beehive oven (restored 1948-1951).

Photo 19: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen ceiling, northwest corner, showing detail of framing.

Photo 20: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen, looking southeast.

Photo 21: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen, looking southwest.

Photo 22: Interior, first floor, Old Kitchen, looking south into the present kitchen.

Photo 23: Interior, first floor, Southeast Room (now, the kitchen), looking east to the back door.

Photo 24: Interior, first floor, Southwest Room (now, a study with half-bath and closet on its east side), looking southeast.

Photo 25: Interior, second floor, main stairway landing, looking north. The small 4-light window was added as part of the 1948-1951 restoration project.

Photo 26: Interior, second floor, main stairway leading up to the attic.

Photo 27: Interior, second floor, Chamber above the Great Room (now, the master bedroom), looking southeast.

Photo 28: Interior, second floor, Chamber above the Great Room (master bedroom) ceiling, detail of south end of summer beam, looking southeast.

Photo 29: Interior, second floor, Chamber above the Great Room (master bedroom), looking northeast.

Photo 30: Interior, second floor, Chamber above the Great Room (master bedroom) fireplace, looking northeast.

Photo 31: Interior, second floor, Chamber above the Great Room (master bedroom) fireplace, detail of mantelpiece showing hand-carved numbers “174 ”.

Photo 32: Interior, second floor, Northeast Room (now, a bedroom), looking northwest.

Photo 33: Interior, second floor, Northeast Room (bedroom), looking northeast. The closet door shown at rear right also provides access to the chimney stack.

Photo 34: Interior, second floor, Northeast Room (bedroom), looking southeast. Just outside and to the left of this bedroom's doorway, the back stairs descend down to the first floor.

Photo 35: Interior, second floor, Southeast room (now, a full bathroom), looking southeast.

Photo 36: Interior, second floor, Southwest Room (now, a home office), looking west.

Photo 37: Interior, attic (now, a bedroom), looking down through trap door at top of main stairway.

Photo 38: Interior, attic (bedroom), looking south.

Photo 39: Interior, attic (bedroom), looking north.

Photo 40: Interior, attic (bedroom), looking northeast at chimney stack and en-suite bathroom.

Photo 41: Interior, attic (bedroom), looking up at pegged rafters with a carved Roman numeral.

Photo 42: Interior, back stairs rising up from first to second floor, looking west

Photo 43: Interior, first floor, East Addition (now, a mudroom and home bar) attached to Old Kitchen, looking northeast. A Revolutionary War cannonball found on the property in 2022 is displayed in the northeast corner of the room.

Photo 44: Garage (built 2022, non-contributing) standing southeast of the house, looking southeast.