# ÍNAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



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

Butler Hospital is a private psychiatric hospital incorporated in 1844. The Hospital complex, located on the residential East Side " of the City of Providence, comprises thirteen major buildings situated on 114 acres of naturally landscaped lawn, woodland, and open meadow. Bordered on the west by Grotto Avenue (where the main entrance is located), the property extends a third of a mile eastward to the Seekonk River and follows its shaded bank for three-quarters of a mile. This tract of land was originally known as "Grotto Farm," and here Richard Brown built a brick house (still extant) in 1731. The Hospital acquired the site in 1844, and Center House (the first Hospital building) was completed in 1847. During the next eighty years, other buildings were designed in architectural sympathy with the 1847 unit and connected by wings or passages to form a considerable crescent-shaped extension of the original building.

Center House, which is still the main entrance and administrative core of the Hospital, is set well back on the grounds. The structure, built of brick with brownstone trim, is Tudor-Gothic in style although the rectilinear masses of the symmetrical pavilions and connectors are generally Italianate in derivation. Both the plan and architectural style of Center House were suggested to the Board of Trustees by Dr. Luther V. Bell (then Superintendent of McLean Asylum for the Insane in Somerville, Massachusetts). The Providence architects William Tallman and James Bucklin prepared the working drawings and had charge of construction. An 1847 engraving credits T. A. Tefft, an employee of Tallman and Bucklin at the time, with the drawing for the final elevation for Center House.

Sited facing south, Center House was designed to accommodate 108 patients. Before alteration, the structure was a hip roofed, five-part composition consisting of a seven-bay, three-story central section, connected by three-bay, two-story, recessed wings to threebay, three-story end pavilions. The main entrance is set in a central three-and-one-half story gabled bay. The door is recessed in a fourcentered Tudor arch enframement which is surmounted by a two-story wooden oriel and a pointed-arch window in the gable. The importance of the entrance bay is heightened by the sparseness of detailing, limited to band courses at the second and third floor levels and Gothic label-molds over paired windows, in the rest of the building. A deep brick cornice incorporating a diaper pattern capped the original building. In 1906 the central section was raised to a full four stories, and mansard roofs with brick dormers were added to the connectors.

(See Continuation Sheet # 1)

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Long before 1906, however, there had been extensions to the original building at its eastern end, the rear, and to the north-west, giving the now large agglomeration a sprawling and irregular shape. All the enlargements, which have bay-windows, Tudor arched porches, and Gothic label-molds, complement the 1847 building in scale, texture, and architectural style.

The second building built for Butler Hospital, located to the rear of Center House, was Ray Hall (1864) which originally housed recreational facilities. It is a two-and-one-half story brick building with segmental window caps trimmed in brownstone. The David Duncan Ward, a three story annex to Center House's northwestern dormitory, was built in 1873-1875 by Stone, Carpenter, and Willson. The Kane Gymnasium, located some distance behind Center House, also by Stone, Carpenter, and Willson, was built as a stable in 1882 and remodelled as a gymnasium in 1915-1916. It is a two-and-one-half story, gableroofed brick structure. Frontal gables contain glazed carriage entrances under brick label-molds. The center section of the roof extends down to shelter a projecting one story, enclosed entrance porch. Sawyer House (1886-1888), again by Stone, Carpenter and Willson, is a ward of irregular plan and varied detail designed to house men of wealth. The Hospital Superintendent's house, Duncan Lodge (1889), is located a little to the north of the main entrance gates. It is a picturesquely massed two-and-one-half story brick residence with Tudor detail, which includes an entrance porch supported by slender octagonal columns and enclosed with trefoil-arched railings. Goddard House (Hoppin & Ely) a women's luxury ward comparable to Sawyer House, was attached to the eastern pavilion of Center House in 1897-1898. Weld House (1899-1900), also by Hoppin and Ely, is composed of two Gothic Revival buildings connected by solaria which stand northwest of Center House. The main building of Weld House, originally a dormitory for severely disturbed patients, is a wide three-and-onehalf story brick structure fronted by a gabled two bay central block and projecting end pavilions. In the central block a two story wooden bay window decorated with trefoil arches and capped by an open balustrade is flanked by the main portal of receding brownstone Tudor arches. A three story crenelated stairtower stands just east of the entrance. The second, or rear, structure (today known as Weld Infirmary) is a two story octagonal brick building located at the intersection of two Gothic decorated solaria.

(See Continuation Sheet # 2)

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Other buildings in the hospital include 'the present greenhouse, added in 1906, and an industrial shop, erected in 1909. In 1912 the Potter Home for Student Nurses (Jackson and Adams) was built to conform to the Gothic style of Center House, and the Henry C. Hall Staff House (1926-1928) echoes the nearby Ray Hall.

In a remote northwestern portion of the grounds on the "Grotto Farm" property, the Richard Brown house (c. 1731) is still standing. One of the first brick dwellings erected in Providence, it was originally a three bay, two-and-one-half story gambrel roofed house with a side front entry and a large end-chimney in the west wall. At an early date it was extended two bays to make a center entry house, and a second chimney was built on the new east end. The dormers were probably added at the same time. The typically narrow early windows have nine-over-nine sash and are finished with segmental headed brick window caps. Other trim is limited to a molded cornice and brick string courses above the first story windows and, on the gable end, above the second-and attic-story windows. The original chimney is triangular in plan permitting a corner fireplace in each of the main rooms on both floors. Bolection moldings surround the fireplace openings, and chimney-breasts are panelled. Opposite the chimney, on the original east end but now in the center of the house, is the stairhall. The stairs, which rise in one long run against the easternmost wall, have a closed string with turned balusters and newels. The Brown house was headquarters for the old farm property, and after hospital acquisition no doubt served as a residence for the farm overseer.

While the Butler Hospital buildings are architecturally significant in design and continuity, the landscaped grounds on which they stand are also a key part of the design concept. Horace Williams Shaler Cleveland was employed as "landscape gardener" for the Butler grounds in 1859, and in 1906 Olmsted Brothers was commissioned for further work. Today broad lawns on either side of the main drive stretch toward the hospital buildings, and the appearance is park-like. There are many large deciduous and coniferous trees, especially around the perimeter of the property, and shrubberies and flower-beds are spotted across the lawn. The grounds are crossed by curving walkways and drives, and parking areas have been placed so as to be relatively unobtrusive. The land falls off steeply at its eastern end and is forested as it drops to the Seekonk River.

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#### BUTLER HOSPITAL INVENTORY

- 1. Richard Brown house, c. 1731: two and one-half stories, gambrel roof, one of the earliest brick dwellings in Providence; it has been extended to the east but originally was three bays long by two bays deep served by a single large chimney in the center of the west end.
  - 2. Center House, designed by Dr. Luther V. Bell and built by Tallman and Bucklin, 1847: Tudor-Gothic style, a four story central block is flanked by two and one-half story hyphens and three story end pavilions; brick with brownstone details including label-molds and a four-centered Tudor arch entrance enframement. This building housed the entire hospital until 1864.
- 3. Ray Hall, 1864: two and one-half stories, brick, hipped roof with corbel cornice, three bay facade with brownstone window arches and central arched doorway; Colonial Revival style addition on east with segmental pedimented doorway. This was originally a recreational building which contained bowling alleys, billiard tables, a reading room and museum.
- 4. David Duncan Ward, Stone, Carpenter & Willson, 1873-1875: conforms in style to Center House to which it is connected; three stories, brick, flat roof, three bay facade with brownstone label-molds and a wooden oriel above the pointed arch central entrance.
- 5. Kane Gymnasium, Stone, Carpenter & Willson, 1882: stable remodeled as a gymnasium in 1915-1916; two and one-half stories, brick, gabled roof, some Gothic detail.
- 6. Sawyer House, Stone, Carpenter & Willson, 1886-1888: three and one-half stories; brick, cross-gabled roof; windows have brownstone label-molds and lintel trim; two and three story bay windows--some with crenelated trim; entrance under a long wooden one story arcaded porch with trefoil moldings; prominent pilastered chimneys and unusual copper dovecotedrainspout. Built as a dormitory for men of wealth.

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- 7. Duncan Lodge, 1889: two and one-half stories, brick, cross-gabled roof with paired frontal gables, symmetrically placed double and triple windows with stone lintel trim, central wooden entrance porch with grouped octagonal columns and trefoilarched railings, projecting bays on the side elevations and pilastered chimneys; sited on a well landscaped rise of the hospital lawn.
- 8. Thomas Poynton Ives Goddard House, Hoppin & Ely, 1897-1898: conforms in style to Center House to which it connects, three stories, brick, flat roof. It was built as a dormitory for women of wealth.
- 9. Weld House, Hoppin & Ely, 1900: two Gothic Revival buildings connected by solaria originally built to house severely disturbed patients; the three-and-one-half story main building is composed of a two bay entrance block with a Tudor-arched entrance and crenelated stairtower flanked by projecting end pavilions; the second building is a two story, octagonal, brick structure.
- 10. Shepard Conservatory, 1906: a one story greenhouse with brick foundation, entrances at either end and centered on the southern side have Colonial Revival pediments.
- 11. Harry Hale Goss Industrial Shop, 1909: two stories, brick with cement trim, flat roof; at one time used as an occupational therapy facility but used today by the Hospital maintenance department.
- 12. Potter Home for Student Nurses, Jackson & Adams, 1912: a three story, brick, with brownstone trim, gable roofed building thirteen bays wide with gabled end pavilions one bay wide and a central pavilion also one bay wide with a one story arched entrance porch.
- 13. Henry C. Hall Staff House, 1926-1928: three stories, brick with stone trim, flat roof, twin brick-pier entrance porches.

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#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Butler Hospital is significant as one of the oldest psychiatric hospitals in the United States, for its important place in the social history of Providence, and for its excellent architecture and landscaped grounds. Founded by locally prominent individuals in 1844, the Hospital was intended as a humanitarian reform of the existing conditions of care for the insane in private houses or at the Dexter Asylum for the Poor (1830). Even before admitting its first patients, Butler Hospital had become nationally known as a model medical facility. It was established as part of a revolution in the care and treatment of the insane in America which took place during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Before this time clinical psychiatric care was almost unknown in America, and the insane were often classified as paupers to be cared for at public expense. In the 1830's, however, American doctors became convinced that most mental disorders were curable if treated correctly. Many doctors believed that proper treatment required hospitalization, as it was supposed that the pressures and excitements of contemporary society were the major cause of insanity, and the insane asylum functioned at once as a hospital for the care of mental illness and as a retreat away from the chaos of everyday life. The Butler Hospital buildings and grounds, impressive in themselves, were considered to be key elements in the cure of patients and were designed as parts of a master plan developed for the Hospital in accordance with the latest scientific thought.

As a private hospital, Butler never could have come into being without the active and generous support of several Providence families who provided both executive and financial leadership. The Hospital had its inception in 1841 when Nicholas Brown, a member of a family long known for its benevolence in Providence, bequeathed thirty thousand dollars for a new accommodation where persons "deprived of their reason may find a safe retreat... conducive to their comfort and to their restoration to a sound state of mind." No progress was made toward realizing Brown's project until after the Dorr Rebellion, but in January of 1844

(See Continuation Sheet # 5)

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#### CONTINUATION SHEET 5

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the Rhode Island Asylum for the Insane was incorporated, and a fund raising campaign was opened. Although contributions to the philanthropic cause were received from all over the state (including 414 of ten dollars or less) most of the money raised came from wealthy Providence residents. Foremost among these was the entrepreneur Cyrus Butler who gave forty thousand dollars and for whom the institution was renamed. In subsequent years the Board of Trustees was drawn almost exclusively from the Providence elite, and the 1868 Annual Report noted that with only one exception all gifts to the Hospital in excess of one thousand dollars had come from members of the Board.

The Grotto Farm property was purchased in 1844, but final plans for building were delayed until after information about European asylums could be collected. In January, 1845, Dr. Luther V. Bell, Superintendent of McLean Asylum for the Insane, Somerville, Massachusetts, sailed to Europe on a tour of inspection on behalf of the trustees of Butler Hospital. He spent little time on the Continent, finding the recently constructed asylums of England and especially the "new and splendid Morningside Asylum, near Edinburgh," to be the best guides in planning Butler. Bell returned from Europe much impressed with what he had seen, and the architectural plans he presented to the trustees of Butler Hospital were a blueprint for one of the first comprehensively designed psychiatric institutions in the United States.

The Hospital's engineering, architecture, and grounds were aspects of an overall medical plan in which the facilities themselves (rather than medicines or therapy) were to be the primary elements in curing insanity. The key to such treatment was the removal of the insane person from the everyday world to an ideal environment where a carefully regulated daily routine would reaccustom the patient to leading an orderly and rational life. Leading psychiatrists like Dr. Bell and Dr. Isaac Ray, first superintendent at Butler, believed that many Americans were engaged in a mad scramble for wealth and social advancement during the Jacksonian era which "produced a morbid irritability of the brain, but a single remove from overt disease." Thus, anyone was liable to insanity, and while professional treatment helped the severely disturbed, the sponsors of mental hospitals also viewed progressive ayslums like Butler as examples of properly organized living for all of American society.

(See Continuation sheet # 6.)

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The underlying principle of Dr. Bell's plan for Butler Hospital was that "there is no such thing as a just and proper curative or ameliorating treatment of the insane in cheaply constructed and cheaply managed institutions;" and when the architect-builders, Tallman and Bucklin, objected that the cost of Bell's plans would exceed their original estimates the trustees concluded to support Bell and increase their building fund. Much of the increased cost was due to Bell's insistence on a spacious room arrangement which would permit an elaborate classification of patients according to the severity of their illness. Bell himself devoted much of his energy to designing a central heating and forced air ventiliation system. His plans for patient accommodations tried to combine practicality with a domestic residential feeling. Broad, high galleries with sleeping rooms on one side only were a radical departure from the prison-like plan of many hospitals where tiny rooms opened onto both sides of a long, dark unventilated corridor. Dormitories were provided for charity patients (a majority of patients paid less than the full cost of their care), while wealthy patients were accommodated with private bedroom and sitting-room suites. Since wealthy patients were charged in excess of the cost of their maintenance, they helped to support the charity patients. Sawyer House (1886-1888) for men and Goddard House (1897-1898) for women were designed to provide additional luxury accommodations to augment this source of income.

The architectural design of Center House was a matter of particular concern since it was thought that physical appearances affected the diseased mind. Though the architects Tallman and Bucklin were employed to execute the building, the Tudor-Gothic elevation was suggested by Dr. Bell who modeled it after one of the buildings he had examined at the Royal Glasgow Lunatic Asylum. Bell wrote that the Gothic style was selected for "its absolute or intrinsic beauty; its adaptedness to the beautiful site...as it would harmonize so happily with the forest, headland and water view of the location. But its peculiar advantages are its fitness as regards internal structure and convenience. The windows will admit of being made of such sizes and at such intervals as internal arrangements may require. The sizes of the lights...can be of

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the small size essential without the prison-like aspect which small panes in large sashes usually produce. Neither dome, portico or cupola will be required to give a public character to the edifice. Its aspect will be that of a villa of ancient date."

The Grotto Farm and the landscaped grounds were integral parts of the treatment offered at Butler. Daily labor on the farm where vegetables and dairy products for the Hospital were raised was part of the therapeutic routine. The patients were also encouraged to take advantage of what Dr. Ray described as "the healing influences" of "the most beautiful scenery which wood and water, ravine and dell, meadow and pasture can form." Extensive and picturesque grounds had been a major attraction of the Grotto Farm property purchased by the Hospital in 1844. In 1859 the Hospital trustees employed Horace William Shaler Cleveland as "landscape gardner." The design for natural landscaping at Butler was similar to the design which Andrew Jackson Downing prepared for the New Jersey Lunatic Asylum in 1848. In both cases the grounds "protected" the patients from the everyday life of the nearby community while at the same time affording a pleasant and "therapeutic" natural setting for their cure. Cleveland also provided landscape designs for Swan Point Cemetery in 1886 which adjoins the Butler grounds to the north and for Blackstone Boulevard which was extended from the south in 1906 to connect the hospital and cemetery with the residential section of the city. In the same year Olmsted Brothers designed the present entrance to the Butler Hospital grounds from Grotto Avenue.

The facilities were expanded during the second half of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth, as Butler Hospital continued to serve Providence and Rhode Island until increased costs forced it to suspend operation in 1956. Fortunately a solution was found the 'following year, and a reorganized Butler Hospital opened again, now known as the Butler Health Center. Fewer long-term in-patients are admitted, and an extensive outpatient department has been established. In addition, other community and state agencies have rented surplus space in the complex. Thus the Butler Hospital buildings and grounds still serve the community, continuing its distinguished 131 year tradition.

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Butler Hospital, Providence, Rhode Island, (c.1950)

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Dr. Luther Bell to Robert H. Ives, May 21, 1844.

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1. Center House, Butler Hospital

2. Providence, R.I.

3. Keith N. Morgan

4. October 1975

5. R.I. Historical Preservation Commission 150 Benefit St., Providence, R.I. 6. southern elevation from east

7. No. 2



1. 1846 engraving Center House, Butler Hospital

- 2. Providence, R.I.
- 3. Louis Federici
- 4. December 1975
- 5. R.I. Historical Preservation Commission 150 Benefit St., Providence, R.I.
- 6. southern elevation
- 7. No. 1



1. Weld House, Butler Hospital

2. Providence, R.I. 3. Keith N. Morgan

4. October 1975

5. R.I. Historical Preservation Commission 150 Benefit St., Providence, R.I. 6. western elevation from north

7. No. 4



- 1. Duncan Lodge, Butler Hospital
- 2. Providence, R.I.
- 3. Keith N. Morgan
- 4. October 1975
- 5. R.I. Historical Preservation Commission 150 Benefit St., Providence, R.I. 6. wouthern elevation from east 7. No. 3



1, Kane Gymnasium, Butler Hospital

2. Providence, R.I.

3. Keith N. Morgan

4. October 1975

5. R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

6. southern elevation from south

7. No. 5



1. Richard Brown House, Butler Hospital

2. Providence, R.I.

3. Dennis Albert

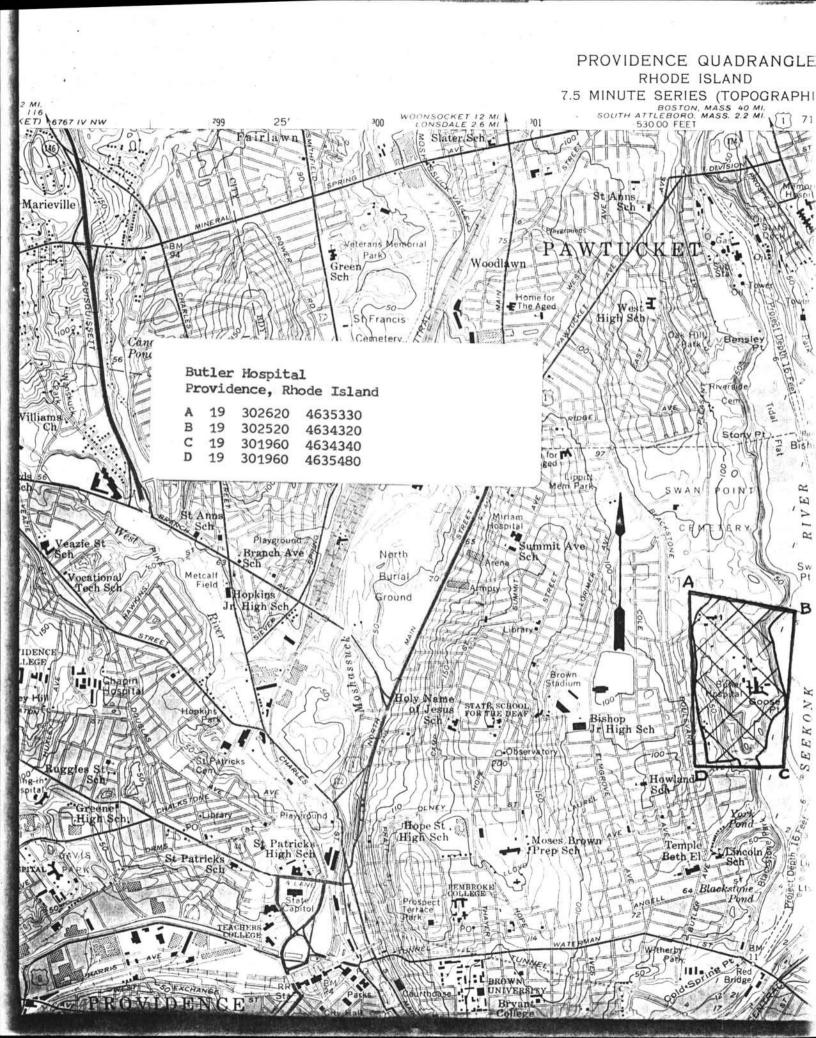
4. January 1976

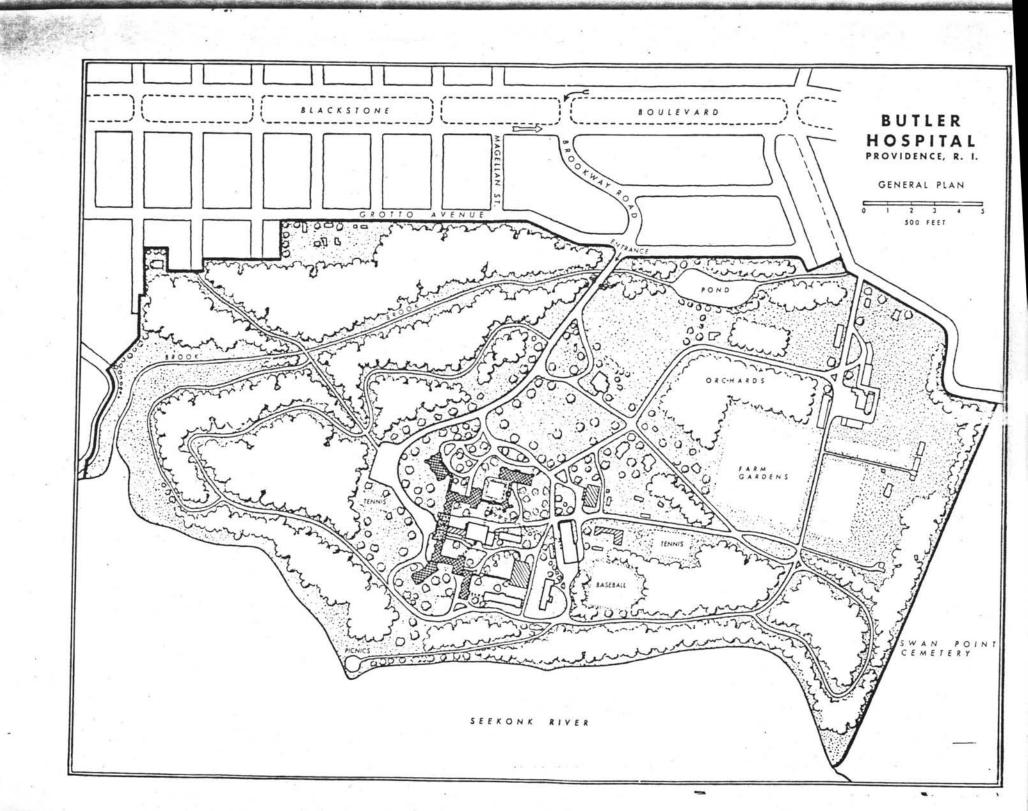
5. R.I. Historical Preservation Commission\*

6. northern elevation from northwest

7. No. 6

\*150 Benefit St., Providence. R.I.





Butler Hospital Providence, Rhode Island Map taken from: <u>Butler Hospital, Providence, Rhode Island</u>, c1950. (Numbers key to inventory.)