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National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Mrs. William Davis Miller House

and/or common N.A.

2. Location

street & number 130 Main Street

N.A. not for publication

Wakefield,
city, town South Kingstown

N.A. vicinity of

congressional district #2
Honorable Claudine Schneider

state Rhode Island

code 44

county Washington

code 009

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N.A. <input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: club house

4. Owner of Property

name South Kingstown Lodge #1899, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks

street & number 130 Main Street

Wakefield,
city, town South Kingstown

N.A. vicinity of

state Rhode Island

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Tax Assessor's Office, South Kingstown Town Hall

street & number 66 High Street

city, town Wakefield

state Rhode Island

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

South Kingstown Preliminary

title Report

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date November 1984

federal state county local

depository for survey records Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

city, town Providence

state Rhode Island

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Mrs. William Miller Davis property is a substantial country estate comprising a large residence (1934, 1935), a smaller one-and-a-half-story garage (1934, 1935), a garden construction known as a monk's walk (1936), and a round stone and shingle water tank.¹ Prominently sited on 10.7 acres along the north side of Main Street in the village of Wakefield in South Kingstown, the Miller property is bounded on the east by Belmont Avenue and on the north by Perry Avenue, both residential streets of modest mid-twentieth century houses, and on the west by a densely overgrown natural landscape of native plant material. Although Main Street (also known as Old Post Road) is now characterized by mixed commercial/residential use, in the 1930s the immediate environs of the Miller estate were primarily residential in nature. Most of the houses along this section of the main road were constructed in Greek Revival, Italianate, and Queen Anne styles. The residential character of the original development is still evident.

The relationship of buildings on the Miller property is dictated in part by topographical and natural landscape features. The land slopes back from the main thoroughfare at a slight rise, mostly grassy in nature, and reaches its highest elevation at the northern bounds along Perry Avenue (See site plan on continuation sheet). This rise is popularly known as Sugarloaf Hill, a portion of which is occupied by the Miller estate. At the northwest corner of the grounds are a densely overgrown swampy area and pond fed by a nearby spring. Large, indigenous coniferous and deciduous trees frame the estate on its eastern and western boundaries, and complement plant material introduced when the residence, garage, and monk's walk were constructed in the 1930s.

The Miller house is sited well back from the road on a grassy knoll near the geographic center of the property. It is neo-Georgian in style with elements of French Norman inspiration. This two-and-a-half-story building, U-shaped in plan, is constructed of whitewashed rose brick with high, hipped textured-slate roofs and five symmetrically located brick chimneys. The house is set on a low stone foundation with a double-course molded-brick water table. The five-bay main block has a central pediment breaking the roof line on the north elevation. Recessed hyphens connect this center section with two-bay flanking dependencies. The building's principal orientation is along an east/west axis.

The exterior of the structure is characterized by a balanced distribution of windows and doors on the primary north and south elevations. Sash generally four-over-six in arrangement; windows are arranged both singly and in pairs. A slight segmental brick arch caps most windows and doors.

The main entrance to the residence faces north, to the forecourt and circular drive rather than to the street (see site plan). This gives the property a secluded feeling by shielding access from public view. A strongly defined three-bay pediment with central oculus rises above this portal. Except

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for an elaborate, Regency-inspired latticework entrance portico, the north facade of the house is devoid of decorative embellishment. Six-foot-high brick walls on this side of the building extend from the forecourt facades of the flanking dependencies, adding greater depth to the area around the circular drive. These brick walls, intended as backdrops for ornamental plant material, are capped by double courses of slates arranged in gable form.² The circular drive leading to the entrance of the residence is finished in stone and asphalt. A small, round, whitewashed stone well serves as a purely decorative focus to the drive, and is adorned with a simple cast-iron well head. The well has been non-functional, at least since 1934.³

The street, or south, elevation of the house is symmetrical. A five-bay central section (here without a pediment) is set several feet forward of the two bay wings at the east and west ends of the structure. Architectural embellishment on this elevation is minimal, with a central oculus providing a break in the slate roof. A sundial, conceived by architect Albert Harkness for the mid-point of the facade at the ground level, was apparently never constructed.⁴ A low stone terrace spans almost the full width of the street-facing side of the building, with a series of four double-leaved, screened French doors providing access to the terrace from within. Except for the omission of the sundial, the only other identifiable change from the architect's design for this elevation is the introduction of two twentieth-century one-over-one window units on the first floor of the east wing.

The narrow eastern elevation of the residence, facing the driveway from Main Street, has a raked roof entrance porch which accommodates access to the service wing of the building. The porch roof is supported by simple, square wooden posts and has a balustrade of two-dimensional sawn wood balusters. A small storage shed, adjacent to the porch, has been added after initial construction, and does not appear on original drawings for the commission.⁵

The west facade of the residence fronts onto an intimate, formal box-wood garden with natural landscape beyond. A terrace, obscured from public view by vegetation, is reached from the library by a double-leaved, screened French door. A garden pavilion adjacent to the house provides shelter from the western sun. The pavilion, more simple in design than the main entrance portico, is crowned by a sheet metal hipped roof and decorated with wooden lattice on its southern exposure. The supporting columns of the porch, which feature a vertically arranged, open-work tulip motif, are different than what the architect specified; they were to have replicated the entwined leaf forms of the main entrance portico.⁶

The interior of the house generally follows architect Albert Harkness' original floor plans; deviations from those plans are few and reversible.⁷

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One enters the residence from the north into a long, shallow hall, its axis on an east/west orientation. The hall has a red brick floor, a heavily molded black marble fireplace opposite the door, and a cornice of decorated flat dentils and molding adorned with a regularly spaced flame motif appearing in groups of four. Paired, double-leaved paneled doors flanking the fireplace lead to the residence's original living room and dining room. The wall and Colonial Revival style display shelves separating these two interior spaces have since been removed, and the enlarged space now serves as a dining/meeting area for the owner; an Elks Lodge. Fireplaces at the far ends of the original living and dining room are intact. They are constructed of wood with narrow mantels, beaded moldings, and fluted pilasters.

A striking circular stair hall at the northeast corner of the main block of the house has a scrollwork cornice and a chandelier designed to architect Harkness' specifications. The lighting fixture, a sketch of which was displayed in a 1983 exhibition of Rhode Island architectural drawings at the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, is a combination of Colonial and Art Deco motifs. It is described by architectural historian, William H. Jordy, as "very much the ultimate cachet of elegance in domestic architecture of the 1920s and 1930s."⁸ From this stairhall, one enters the original service wing of the residence, now occupied by the caretaker for the property. Although room functions here no longer correspond directly to 1930s uses, the plan, nevertheless, is similar to Harkness' 1934 design. Originally, the kitchen, pantry, servants' sitting room, and a garage (with its wide arched door) were located in this east wing.

At the other end of the first floor, one passes through a narrow hallway past a coat room, a flower-arranging room with brick floor and direct egress to the outside, and an office opposite the flower room. At the terminus of the passage, a wood-paneled library occupies the entire ground level of the west wing. The library, lined with open and screened bookshelves, is essentially unchanged from the architect's conception.⁹ The room's cornice is ornamented with a deeply profiled crown molding of American Colonial inspiration. The fireplace along the north wall is surrounded by a marble bolection mold.

The second floor of the house also parallels the architect's original plan. Room functions, as previously noted, no longer correspond to initial uses when the building served as a private residence. Three bedrooms, ranged along the south side of the structure, afford a perspective of the terrace, lawn and main street below. A dressing room, bath and sewing room are opposite, on the north side of the structure. Linen and cedar closets and three servants' chambers occupy the second floor of the wing at the east end of the building. A bath and dressing room at the other end of the second floor connect through a narrow hall to a large sitting room. This room is

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now used as a billiard parlor by the Elks. A small storage area at the south side of the sitting room remains, as does a neo-Colonial fireplace on the southerly wall facing into the main room. The junction of ceiling with wall in this space is detailed by a crown molding capped with a simple sloping cornice.

Decorative treatment on the second floor is, not surprisingly, more chaste than that for the rooms on the first floor. The wooden doors on the second level are uniform in design: two vertically arranged panels with a diagonal plywood overlay at the top and bottom. Door surrounds are fluted in some cases and ceiling moldings are mostly non-existent. Fireplaces in the family bedrooms have simple mantels supported on consoles, with fluted and eared moldings surrounding the openings.

The residence remains in regular use by a fraternal lodge, but shows evidence of inadequate maintenance over a period of years. Room functions have changed from the time when the building served as a single family house. The floor plan is essentially intact, with the exception of the removal of the wall originally separating living room from dining room. On the exterior, the facade brickwork appears to be in good condition, but chimneys show signs of mortar failure, necessitating repointing. In some places, downspouts and roof cornices have deteriorated. The stone terrace, minus its ornamental plantings, is in fair condition with some mortar work required.

Outbuildings on the Miller estate, identified on the site plan, include the remains of a combination water tank and windmill (date of construction unknown), a garage designed by Albert Harkness in 1934 which is now used by the Elks as a dining hall, a small storage shed, and a garden construction identified as a monk's walk by the architect on his 1936 drawings.¹⁰

The round water tank and adjacent windmill, located to the northeast of the main house, are of rubblestone and unpainted wood shingle construction. The tank, now bramble-covered, sits on a high stone foundation and has a shingled second story. A series of regularly spaced casement windows and a single door fit tightly under the overhang of its roof. The wooden windmill rises from a small, gable-roof shed. Both structures are in deteriorated condition, with roof cornice failure and missing windows. The stone foundation and brick chimney of the tank need mortar repair and perhaps some rebuilding.

At the northeast corner of the estate near the junction of Belmont and Perry Avenues, the former garage is now surrounded on three sides by an asphalt parking lot. The building also originally functioned as chauffeur's and gardener's quarters. The garage was designed by Albert Harkness in March, 1934.¹¹ It is a one-and-a-half-story, gable-roof structure with a

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roof cupola. Flanking the five-bay central block at both the east and west ends of the building are smaller, one-story hipped-roof sections where the servants had their rooms. The building sits atop a concrete slab foundation, and is sheathed primarily with painted wood shingles. Six-over-six windows predominate. A one-story, flat-roof addition (probably dating from the mid-1900s) on the south elevation obscures the architect's design for the garage, and detracts from the charm of the original conception of the structure. In plan, the building retains its 1934 room divisions. Interior decorative treatment is inspired by Colonial sources, and is rather simple, befitting the structure's function. The Elks now use this building as a dining hall for their locally popular Friday evening "fish fry" suppers.

Located off the southwest corner of the former garage is a small, wood-shingled one-story storage shed with a gable roof. Its date of construction is unknown, although one might surmise that it was built at the time of the garage given their similarity of materials. Both it and the dining hall are in fair condition.

The most curious outbuilding on the Miller estate is a Roman Etruscan style monk's walk, an architectural conceit situated behind a formal boxwood garden, west and slightly north of the house. The long, narrow building of rubblestone was designed by Harkness in early 1936.¹² Now bramble and ivy covered, the monk's walk has a raked wooden roof supported on the south elevation by rough dressed, narrow wooden posts set on concrete plinths. Partially open to view on all but the north elevation, the monk's walk has a brick floor laid in a basket weave pattern, and stuccoed interior finished with decorative ceramic tiles in mosaic patterns. A door in the interior of the structure leads to a potting shed and a high stone wall at the rear of the building. The monk's walk is markedly deteriorated with a decaying roof, loose mortar joints, and missing sections of stucco on the interior. A bamboo screen under a brick arch at the east end of the structure, designed by the architect, is either now missing or was never erected.¹³

Harkness conceived the property's landscape as an incorporation of indigenous plant material (for a naturalistic effect) with introduced species and varieties (as complementary ornamentation).¹⁴ It is apparent from drawings that the landscaping concept was developed and implemented between 1934 and 1937. The last revision of the scheme, dated January 22, 1937, called for foundation plantings at the main house of rhododendron, laurel, juniper, andromeda, hawthorne, and quince. Harkness further specified espaliered fruit trees for the entrance forecourt, arranged along brick walls running from south to north at the outer perimeters of the circular drive. Wisteria and bittersweet adorned the terrace on the south side of the residence.

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Harkness also called for new spruces, horse chestnuts, maples and lindens to augment the large indigenous trees. In addition, he planned a small formal boxwood garden with cedar accent trees adjacent to the terrace off the library. Existing stone walls which meandered through the property were repaired and retained as landscape features. No herbaceous plantings or flower beds as such were specified in the architect's plans for the site.

The once handsomely landscaped grounds are now severely overgrown, with much of the 1930s plant material missing, decayed, or blighted. The undeveloped, naturalistic components of the landscape along the north and west bounds of the site are jungle-thick, especially around the small pond at the western perimeter of the lot. The old stone walls are intact, but need shoring up in some spots.

The unincorporated village of Wakefield, the site of the Miller estate, is in the southern part of the township of South Kingstown. It extends to both sides of the Saugatuck River. Originally inhabited by the Narragansett tribe, the first record of European land transaction is in 1696, when John Pole of Boston sold his share in a piece of land. Prior to 1800, John Dockray built a store at Dockray Corners marking the beginning of a continuous commercial center of Wakefield. By the closing decades of the eighteenth century, Wakefield was a full-fledged community with a number of stores, several churches, a bank, and two hotels. Wakefield has continued growing in the twentieth century, and suburban residential and commercial sprawl melds the village with its neighbors, Peacedale and Rocky Brook. Wakefield is now a regional commercial center for the largely rural township of South Kingstown.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1934-1937 **Builder/Architect** Albert Harkness

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Mrs. William Davis Miller property is significant in a statewide context for its architecture, its landscape design, and its role in the social history of Rhode Island. The estate is important as a product of the noted Providence architect, Albert Harkness. Harkness' work at this early stage of his career is characterized by the use of stylistic elements from multiple sources combined to create well-integrated, highly innovative, individualistic designs. As a landscape scheme of the 1930s, the property epitomizes the country seat approach that families of means developed as an alternative to city living. Although not a *ferme ornée*, the Miller estate was richly landscaped, with careful attention paid to siting buildings to take advantage of the natural topography. The various buildings were then intentionally interspersed with combinations of native and specimen plant material, judiciously selected. In terms of social history, the property is significant because of its association with William Davis Miller, a prominent Rhode Island civic leader and amateur historian. The development of the estate capitalized on the revivalist architectural sentiments that so many men like Miller used as inspiration for their country residences built between the two world wars. The large, eclectic country house represents a felicitous confluence of patron and architect to create something quintessentially 1930s.

Albert Harkness was born in 1886, the son of a Latin professor who came to Providence and Brown University about 1890. As a child, Harkness traveled extensively with his family, and in particular relished opportunities for first-hand observation of European architecture, notably in France. Evidently, the young man aspired to the architectural profession from an early age.¹⁵ Graduating from Brown University in 1909, he went on to formal training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, from which he graduated with a degree in architecture in 1912.¹⁶ After apprenticeships, including one in New York with the celebrated firm of McKim, Mead and White, Harkness returned to Providence in 1919, where he opened his own office. He practiced independently until 1948, when he formed a partnership with Peter Geddes that lasted until 1973. Harkness died at the age of ninety-four, in 1981.

In active architectural practice for over fifty years, Harkness established his professional reputation through his designs for numerous private dwellings in Providence as well as for country and vacation homes elsewhere in Rhode Island. He was also the creative force behind some of the state's public schools, including major buildings at the University of Rhode Island and the 1963 Central-Classical High School in Providence.

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Prior to World War II, the architect was known primarily for combining French Provencal, English Renaissance, and American Colonial sources in domestic commissions. He drew upon extensive and sophisticated knowledge of historic and foreign architecture, using that knowledge in creative ways to produce unified designs of great clarity, characterized by careful attention to detail. With the advent of World War II, Harkness expanded upon an earlier interest in "modern" design (for instance, his 1918 commission for a furniture building in Providence on Weybosset Street), and ventured experimentally into Art Deco and then toward a more complete commitment to modern, exemplified by his 1939 design for the California Artificial Flower Company building in Cranston.

Throughout his career, Harkness combined a thriving architectural practice with numerous civic responsibilities. He was one of the first appointees to the Providence Redevelopment Agency where he was a member of the board for nineteen years. He was active with the Rhode Island and New England chapters of the American Institute of Architects and served for years as chairman of his profession's state licensing committee. Harkness was an associate of the National Academy of Design, and was named a fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1941, based on his architectural achievements.

The Wakefield estate that Harkness created for the William Davis Miller family is representative of the large, eclectic country houses built between the two world wars for families of means and leisure. Architectural historians have given little scholarly attention to this house form of the period, which was widely published as the epitome of graceful living in popular magazines like House and Garden. The country estate, in various guises depending upon locale, became what people aspired to. Buildings in the manner of the Miller residence were constructed in rural communities like Wakefield as well as in newly created suburbs like Grosse Pointe, near Detroit; River Oaks in Houston; and the Blackstone Realty Plat in Providence.

William H. Jordy, in his opening essay for Buildings on Paper, a catalog accompanying a 1982 exhibition of Rhode Island architectural drawings, generates interest in the grand revivalist country estates of the 1920s and 1930s by including a number of examples in his narrative on the development of style. He comments on several Harkness designs, mentioning the Miller property in the catalog. Described by Jordy as "unabashedly pretty," these representative country seats balanced the informal with the formal, a compromise much the ideal of upper-class life at the time.¹⁷ This equilibrium was in evidence in the design for the Miller property where Harkness (who also created the landscaping) conceived the estate in such a way as to integrate the house with its physical environment. A broad, formal terrace on the south elevation and a more intimate garden

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space at the east end of the residence provide easy transitions from house to grounds, a concept ardently advocated by architect and landscape designer Charles Platt at the turn of the twentieth century. Others later followed this dictum: As a balance between formal and informal, Harkness juxtaposed a naturalistic landscape with some elements of introduced formality against a symmetrically massed main house of neo-Georgian design and a picturesque garden conceit known as a monk's walk.

The revivalistic nature of much of the architecture of the 1920s and 1930s is apparent in the Miller commission. Although the residence chiefly embodies a revival of American Colonial sources, it also displays Harkness' penchant for incorporating influences from less well-known French chateaux, which had first captivated him during his travels as a youth. The textured slate and steep pitch of the hipped roofs of the Miller house are particularly French-inspired. Although much less pretentious in design than Indian Oaks, the Nelson Aldrich estate at Warwick Neck developed about the turn of the century, the Miller property is similar to the gate lodges, carriage house, and tea pavilion at Indian Oaks in the emulation of vernacular French sources. It is, to a great extent, a continuation of the movement of historicism popular in the design of Rhode Island country seats of the late 1800s.

Rhode Island contemporaries of Albert Harkness explored the opportunities a revival approach offered, and devised schemes that relied on a variety of historical styles, notably American Colonial and French vernacular. The work of Wallace Howe, particularly his design for a guest house and music pavilion for John Nicholas Brown (1932-1936), defines an orientation in which an-eclectic accumulation of architectural details from late Colonial sources combines to produce a conception very much the ideal of the 1930s. George Howe, in his T.I.H. Powel house of 1927-1930, was especially taken with smaller chateaux models. He built Hopelands, near Newport, of whitewashed brick (a popular building material at this time, taken directly from rural Norman practice), with encompassing hipped roofs and an overall symmetrical plan. Both architects were enlarging upon an attitude toward design that Providence's Edmund Willson experimented with at the end of the nineteenth century. Willson, fresh from training at Paris' venerated Ecole des Beaux Arts, explored both rural French and American Colonial models for his domestic work. Willson gave great credence to historical precedent in his design process, and, one could argue, passed this notion on to Rhode Island architects who followed him in the 1920s and 1930s.

Albert Harkness, at a very early stage of his career, was imbued with the extensively explored vocabulary of Colonial Revivalism, especially because of Rhode Island's rich treasury of Colonial and Federal buildings which served as models for creative inspiration. But he also had a deep appreciation and affection for French farmhouses and other vernacular

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structures. By incorporating elements from several architectural modes, he expressed in his domestic commissions a blend of formal values with a note of relaxed informality, so typical of country house design of this period: Harkness' Harvey J. Flint residence (1924) of unknown location was a freely inspired adaptation of Norman precedent, as was his 1932 design for the Roger Perkins house on the shore in Matunuck, Rhode Island. Additionally, his Provencal-influenced house in Providence for Eugene Graves (ca. 1930) enhances Harkness' reputation as a revivalist, as does the Edward Brayton residence (1937) in Little Compton, Rhode Island. The latter demonstrates the architect's foray into more "modern" domestic designs, with inspiration from both French and English rural buildings with a touch of Art Deco in the ornamental panels under windows.

Harkness' conception for the Miller estate in Wakefield included the design and siting of buildings within an overall landscape plan created to focus attention on the main house in its physical environment. As an outgrowth of the battle between formal versus natural in American landscape practice, Harkness, like others, chose to mingle elements of each in a painterly approach. He saved healthy indigenous plant material where possible on the property, and specified in great detail what new species should be introduced into the landscape, revising his ideas over a period of nearly three years. He devised formal outdoor spaces--the terrace overlooking a somewhat imposing grassy landscape, and a small, boxwood garden--where his patron's family could entertain in a manner befitting their social position. But he also created intimate, naturalistic settings where the Miller family and perhaps close friends could relax, escape the pressures of urban life, and enjoy the tranquility of country living.

The Mrs. William Davis Miller property is also significant for its contribution to the social history of Rhode Island. It symbolizes a need felt by families of means, social station, and leisure to remove themselves from the rigors of city life to a more peaceful environment in which they could pursue avocational interests, but where they were never far from the city, the site of their professional and civic responsibilities. The advent of widespread use of the automobile allowed easy integration of these important facets of their lives.

Although her husband is more particularly associated with the Wakefield property, the estate was actually purchased by Mary Chew Miller, William Davis Miller's wife. She acquired title to the land on August 25, 1928.¹⁸ Reputed to have come to Rhode Island from New York as a young woman, Mrs. Miller is not a well-researched figure. Her significant family inheritance enabled her and Mr. Miller to commission Albert Harkness to design their country home. It is believed that she was the one with the financial resources that provided her family a lifestyle of privilege.¹⁹

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Deed research indicates that Mrs. Miller bought the land from the estate of Mary Robinson, who had died in 1915. The Robinsons are an old and large landholding family in the Wakefield area. In the 1870s and 1880s, George Robinson inherited and acquired considerable acreage in the vicinity of Sugarloaf Hill, and most of it remained in the possession of various descendants until the 1930s. In the late nineteenth century, the Robinson farm included a two-and-a-half-story Second Empire house and a large, mansard-roof carriage house.²⁰ Originally the residence of George Robinson (Mary's husband), it passed into the hands of Dr. Rowland Robinson, who served as town physician.

Other than the architect, the personality most closely identified with Albert Harkness' 1934 country seat in Wakefield is his patron, William Davis Miller. Miller, a banker by profession, was typical of men of his taste, wealth, and inclinations who created "suburban" homes of grand scale and substance during the 1920s and 1930s. Many of these estates were located in South County at this time, capitalizing on their proximity to the summer colonization of the South Kingstown and Narragansett shore, which grew in popularity in the early twentieth century. The siting of the estate in the village of Wakefield gave Miller the chance to pursue his fascination with the history of that region of Rhode Island. Indeed, Wakefield was the location for a number of houses of the scale and cost of Miller's.

William Davis Miller was born in Providence on November 5, 1887, to Augustus and Elizabeth LeMoine Miller. His early years were spent in Providence where his father was mayor from 1902 to 1905. Miller graduated from Hope Street High School and then from Brown University in 1909. Subsequently, he matriculated at the School of Law, Harvard University. In 1917, Miller entered the United States Naval Reserve and was on active duty for two years, retiring after World War I with the rank of lieutenant commander. During World War II he was recalled and served in Naval Communications with the rank of commander at Norfolk, Virginia. Commander Miller, as he enjoyed being called, became a prominent Rhode Island citizen, consistently involved in the affairs of his community. Among the many civic responsibilities he undertook was service as president of the Providence Public Library, trustee of Brown University, and president of the Rhode Island Historical Society.²¹ Antiquarian interests led to his contribution to the literature of local history through numerous publications, including at least two regional standards, The Silversmiths of Little Rest, and The Narragansett Planters. His curiosity was particularly focused on the history of the South Kingstown area in which Wakefield is situated. Miller's mother, Elizabeth LeMoine Davis Miller, was descended from several colonial settlers of the South County area, including the Potter and Davis families.

The relationship between patron Miller and architect Albert Harkness began long before the two joined forces to create a country estate.²²

(See Continuation Sheet #10)

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They had known each other during their childhoods in Providence and, only being a year apart in age, attended Brown University together. Miller and Harkness also belonged to the same social clubs, notably the Agawam Hunt in East Providence and the Dunes Club nearby in Narragansett, and moved in similar social circles. The two participated together in another building project, that of the Smith Hill branch of the Providence Public Library, designed by Albert Harkness while Miller was president of that institution.

The Millers' former home on the corner of Main Street and Belmont Avenue in Wakefield is now owned by the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Lodge 1899. The lodge purchased the estate in 1953 from Salvatore J.P. Turco, who himself had acquired the house from Mary Chew Miller only one month prior to turning it over to the Elks. The reason for the sale of the property to Turco in 1953 is unknown; Commander Miller lived for six more years, until he died in 1959.²³

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END NOTES

1. The date of construction of the tank is unknown. A 1928 plat of the property does not identify the building as a component of the landscape. There is, however, also no evidence that the tank was built at the time of the main house, garage, and monk's walk. (Plat of Robinson/Miller Property, Deed Book 45, p. 371. Town of South Kingstown Tax Assessor's Office.)
2. A set of architect Albert Harkness' plans, elevations, specifications, and landscape design for the property, plus dated revisions, was discovered at the site in late 1984. The Rhode Island Historical Society Library, Graphics Collection, also has architectural drawings relating to this commission.
3. Architect's plans and drawings are in the possession of Lisa Fiore, Hopkins Lane, Peacedale, Rhode Island. These drawings have no pagination.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. The first floor plan, shown on a continuation sheet, identifies the rooms as specified by the architect. Because the property is currently owned by an Elks Lodge, most of the interior spaces are now used for club assembly rooms and no longer have discrete functions, except for bathrooms and the coat room. Original plans for the residence are dated April, 1934, and are labeled as being drawn by the firm of Albert Harknes.
8. Jordy and Monkhouse, Buildings on Paper, p. 76.
9. Elevation sketches dated June 6, 1934, are in the possession of Lisa Fiore.
10. Architect's drawings are in the possession of Lisa Fiore.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.

(See Continuation Sheet #12)

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14. Ibid.
15. Jordy and Monkhouse, Buildings on Paper, p. 216.
16. Biographical information appears in Harkness' obituary, The Providence Journal, 6 January 1981, p. C-2.
17. Jordy and Monkhouse, Buildings on Paper, p. 32.
18. South Kingstown Land Records, Deed Book 45, p. 370.
19. Genealogical records of the Miller family (compiled by Marjorie Schunke) at the Pettaquamscutt Historical Society. Also personal interview with Mrs. Schunke conducted by Margot Ammidown, 16 November 1984.
20. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Historic and Architectural Resources of South Kingstown: A Preliminary Report, 1984, p. 88. The main house was demolished to make way for the new Miller residence. The barn has also been destroyed, probably at the same time as the house.
21. Obituary of William Davis Miller and records of the Miller family compiled by Marjorie Schunke.
22. From notations on the drawings and plans for the development of the property, it is apparent that Commander Miller, and not his wife, dealt with Harkness. Some sketches are dated to signify when they had received the approval of Miller.
23. Records of the Miller family compiled by Marjorie Schunke.

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Continuation sheet 13

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Page 2

Comstock, Charles. A History of South Kingston. Forward by William Davis Miller. Kingston, R.I.: privately printed, 1934 (reprint of 1806 volume).

Harkness, Albert. Obit. Providence Journal, January 6, 1981.

Harkness, Albert. Plans, drawings, elevations and specifications for the Mrs. William Davis Miller House, Wakefield. Providence, Rhode Island. Dated variously from 1934-1937. Now in the possession of Lisa Fiore, Hopkins Lane, Peacedale, Rhode Island.

Jordy, William H. and Christopher P. Monkhouse. Buildings on Paper: Rhode Island Architectural Drawings 1825-1945. Providence, R.I.: Rhode Island School of Design, 1982.

Miller, William Davis. Genealogical file (compiled by Marjorie Schunke). Pettaquamscutt Historical Society, South Kingstown, R.I., (n.d.).

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. Historic and Architectural Resources of South Kingston, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report. Providence, R.I.: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1984

Rhode Island Historical Society. Graphics Collection. Harkness archives, architectural drawings, 1918-1973.

Schünke, Marjorie. Personal interview (by Margot Ammidown). Pettaquamscutt Historical Society, November 16, 1984.

South Kingstown, Rhode Island. Tax Assessor's Office. File for Lot 137, 56-3.

South Kingstown, Rhode Island. Town Clerk's Office. Deeds. Land Evidence Books 22, 30, 45, 74.

South Kingstown, Rhode Island. Town Clerk's Office. Plats. Land Evidence Book 45, p. 371.

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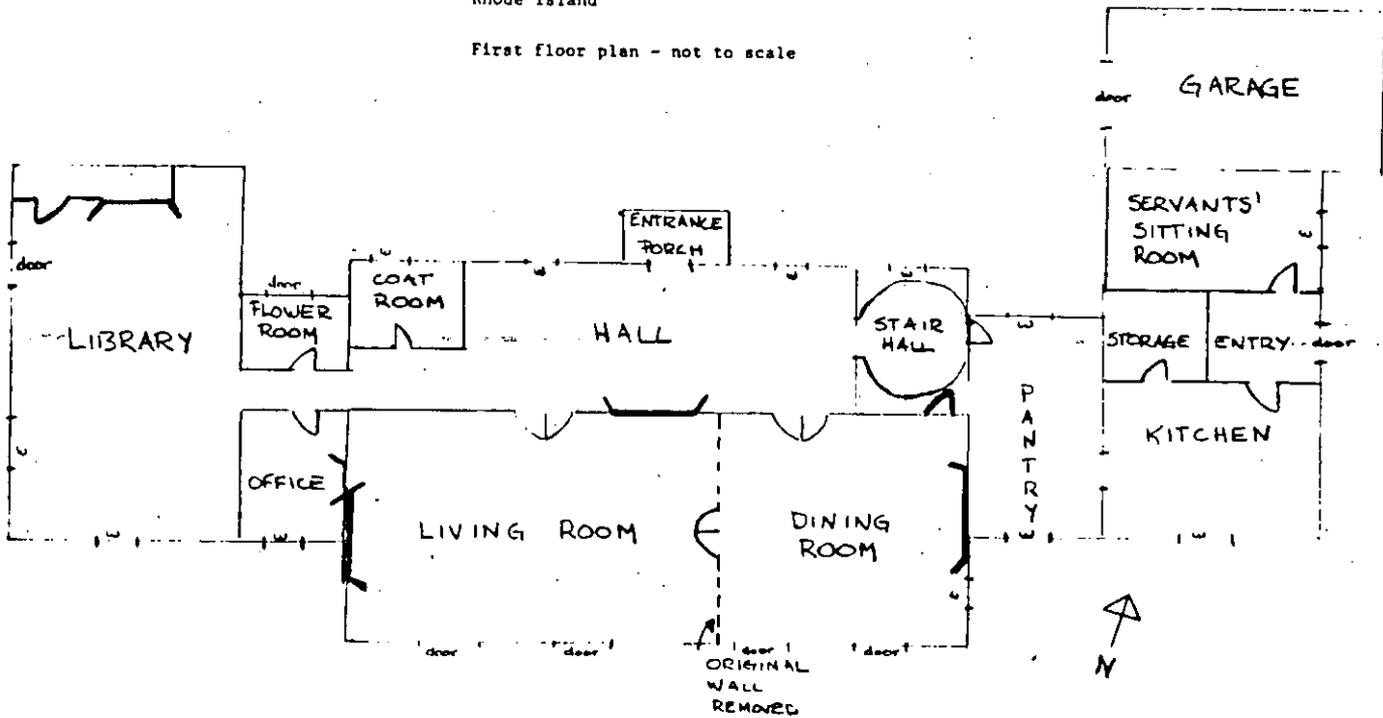
Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

Mrs. William Davis Miller House
130 Main Street
Wakefield, South Kingston
Rhode Island

First floor plan - not to scale



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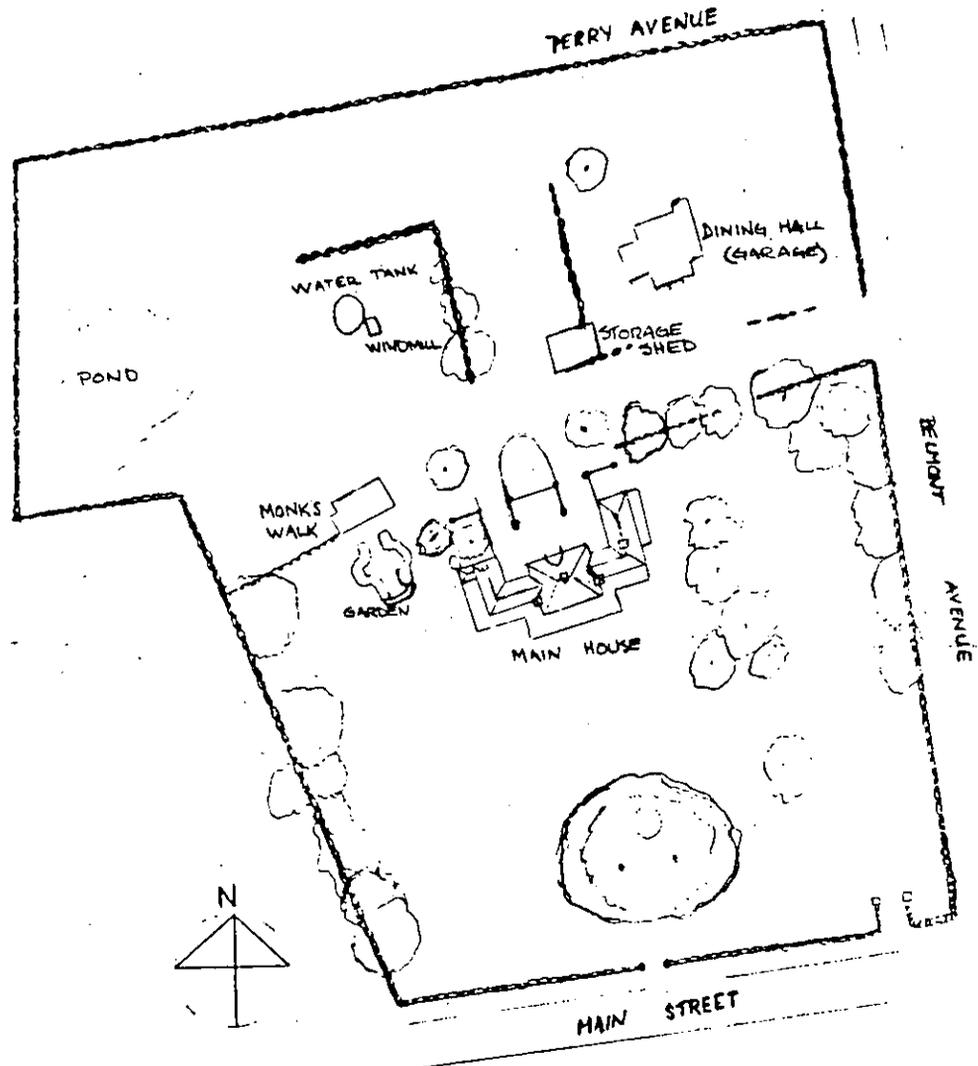
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Continuation sheet

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Mrs. William Davis Miller House
130 Main Street
Wakefield, South Kingston
Rhode Island

Sketch Plan - not to scale

9. Major Bibliographical References

Cole, J.R. History of Washington and Kent Counties, Rhode Island. Vol. I. New York: W.W. Preston & Co., 1889.

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 10.71 acres

Quadrangle name Kingston, R.I.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	9	2	9	0	5	0	0	4	5	9	0	2	5	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

B

1	9	2	9	0	2	5	0	4	5	9	0	2	5	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

C

1	9	2	9	0	5	0	0	4	5	8	9	9	2	0
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Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary for the Miller property coincides with that of South Kingstown's Tax Assessor's Map 56-3, lot 137. This boundary represents the limit of land historically associated with the property and includes

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries the resource and its setting.

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Karen L. Jessup/ Preservation Planner & Margot Ammidown/Research Historian

organization Preservation Consultant date December 7, 1984

street & number 223 Morris Avenue telephone 401-521-0486

city or town Providence state Rhode Island 02906

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title date

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller House
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Main house, south facade

#1



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller House
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Main house, west elevation

#3



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller House
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Main house, north elevation

#2



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller House
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Main house, east elevation

* 4



EXALTED RULER
DOUGLAS WILKINSON

ELK J. FORTMAN
ELK D. WATSON
SEC. C. CHERRY - P. PER
TR. H. BERRY
TLR. C. SMITH, JR.
SAC. J. HANDELBERG
CHAP. L. TETMAN
W. SMITH

← TRUSTEE →
1. G. BELLON
2. J. BORSINGI
3. C. SULLIVAN
4. J. WAGGARD

SEC. CHAIR



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller House
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Main house, entrance hall

#5



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller House
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Main house, circular stair hall

#6



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller Estate
130 Main Street
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Main house - first floor library #7



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller Estate
130 Main Street
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Main house - second floor bedroom

#8



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller Property
130 Main Street
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Phototaken by Karen Jessup
January 1985

South elevation - garage/dining hall

#9



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller House
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Combination windmill and water tower

#10



KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller House
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Monk's walk, looking south from garden

*12



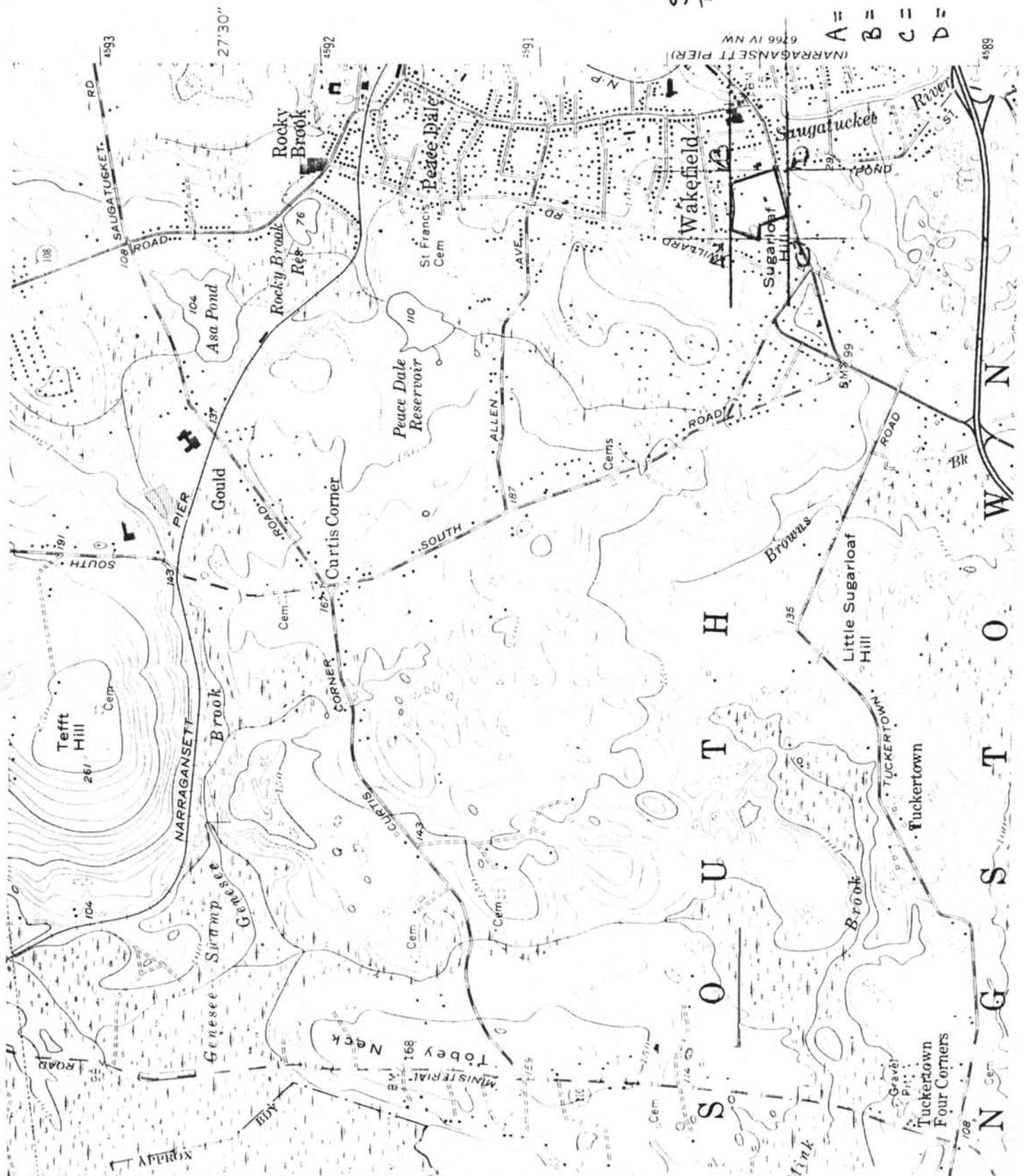
KAREN L. JESSUP
PRESERVATION PLANNER
223 Morris Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02906

Mrs. William Davis Miller House
Wakefield, Rhode Island

Photo taken by Warren Jagger Studio
December 1984

Monk's walk, north and west elevations

11



MRS. WILLIAM DAVIS
 MILLER HOUSE
 130 Main Street
 WAKEFIELD
 SOUTH KINGSTON
 RHODE ISLAND



N	E	N
A = 19	290500	4540 250
B = 14	290250	4590 25
C = 14	290500	4589 92
D = 19	290750	4589 92

(NARRAGANSETT PIER)
 6766 IV NW

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