



Westerly's Witness

www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.org

January-February 2016

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Babcock-Smith House Museum Liaison Edward A. Fazio	

NEW DATE

January 31, 2016 - 2:00 P.M.

Members Only event!

A Potluck Dinner

and Research Sharing Afternoon

You are invited to our winter potluck dinner. Please bring an appetizer, entrée, side dish, or dessert.

Beverages (coffee, tea, water, cider, and wine) will be provided.

We have a few members speaking about their research, so it should be a very interesting afternoon.

Please contact Pamela Scott by email or phone with your choice, and to let us know you plan to attend.

Email: whsprograms@gmail.com or phone (401)-741-8705.

Looking forward to a wonderful afternoon!

See you then!

Calendar of Events



Feb 21, Sunday 2:00 P.M. Tony Nunes and Simon Holt, from the United Theater, present "The United Theater Project: History, Renovation, and Future"



March 6, Sunday, 2:00 P.M. Joseph Coduri, author of *Rhode Island Railroad Depots*, will talk about the rich heritage which railroads played in the economic and social

history of our state. Using images from his post card collection, Joe provides his audience with a nostalgic and visual ride along Rhode Island railroads.

Sponsored by the Babcock-Smith House Museum.



March 13, Sunday, 2:00 P.M. Robert Webb of Charter Oak Scanning presents "Save Your Memories Day". Bring 20 of your own photographs to be scanned for free

during his presentation of preserving your memories.

**Programs are held in the carriage house of the Babcock-Smith House Museum
124 Granite Street
Westerly, RI**

Free Admission

to Westerly Historical Society Members and Members of the Babcock-Smith House Museum.
Admission for Non-Members: \$5.00

Memberships Available at:
<http://westerlyhistoricalsociety.org/membership/>

Editor's Notes

Ann L. Smith

Every American generation faces a defining moment that, when it happens, leaves one indelible mark of history on us. Whether it was the attack on Pearl Harbor, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, or the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, each of us clearly remembers where we were and what we were doing at the moment these events unfolded.

There are other, perhaps less important and hopefully happier events that, as they occur and even before they are over, leave us with the sense that we have been part of something historic. If we are lucky, years later these events will be documented by some local historian somewhere, so that a little piece of who we were is recorded for posterity.

As for Westerly, Rhode Island, we are blessed to have many talented local historians who have regaled us over the years with their retelling of the events that have made us who we are. People like Gloria Russell and Tom O'Connell (and others) have taken the time to memorialize our defining moments, often with superb flair and elegance. It might be that the account of what life was like at Moore's mill or the story of the "Human Fly" are only mildly entertaining, but the things we write about seem to us to be unusual enough and noteworthy enough to be recalled by our future generations.

I am reminded of the foreword to the little volume, *Pawcatuck River Steamboats*, (published in 1932 by the Westerly Historical Society) where the author Everett Barns writes, "Since then, years of contact...and personal observation afford the opportunity to record facts and figures that we hope may prove to be of historical interest to 'our children, our children's children, and so on—and so on.'" The fact is every historian hopes that his or her work will be worthy enough to be remembered by future generations. One can only wonder though, if people like Everett Barns could have ever known just what treasures their works would prove to be.

Here in Westerly, our little corner of Rhode Island made history this month with the attention it has brought on a little hero by the name of Dorian Murray. Eight-year-old Dorian has been battling alveolar rhabdomyosarcoma, a rare pediatric cancer, since the age of four. His wish to become famous has come true thanks to social media and an outpouring of love and prayers by supporters near and far. Earlier this month, a crowd of over 3,000 rallied at Misquamicut beach to pose for an aerial photograph

and video. (The proceeds from the sale of the video will be donated to Dorian and his family.)

In the days before the video was shot by aerial drone, Dorian's family had no idea if the number of supporters would be few or many; neither did the people who were planning to attend, and neither did I. The spectacle that met Dorian's supporters as they rounded their cars onto Atlantic Avenue was nothing short of amazing. The fact that so many cared so much to band together in this one act of kindness seemed "historic" to say the least. Folks waited in line to take their places as human "letters" that spelled #D-STRONG as seen from the sky. The weather was nippy and overcast, but people's spirits were bright.

As for Dorian himself, no one knows how his story will end. Those of us who are buoyed by faith have not given up on this courageous child. No matter what happens, I would like to think that people in the years to come will write about Dorian's story too, as a record of how we came together as a town to care for one brave (and now famous) little boy.

~ ~ ~

In this issue we bring you the story of the World War II Victory Ship *SS Westerly Victory* launched on October 31, 1944. One of 531 "Victory" ships built during the war, the *SS Westerly Victory* was christened in the presence of Westerly Councilman Arthur M. Cottrell, and Mrs. John J. (Barbara A.) Ferguson, sponsor of the event.

Our other feature draws you into the writings of Julia Abby Smith Rogers. This prolific poetess (1819-1900) was the youngest sibling of Orlando Smith (1814-1859) and lived at the Babcock-Smith House prior to and following her marriage to Captain Henry Hammond Rogers. Julia Rogers was fond of writing poetry in the quatrain style and filled more than a small stack of composition notebooks with her verses. Thanks to the diligent protection of the Babcock-Smith House Museum docents, these books have been preserved in excellent condition to this day. The Westerly Historical Society wishes to thank the BSH museum docents for their willingness to share these valuable artifacts with us. We hope you enjoy our glimpse into the profound thoughts of Julia A. Smith Rogers.



THE SS WESTERLY VICTORY

By Ann L. Smith

The officers and men of the Merchant Marine, by their devotion to duty in the face of enemy action, as well as natural dangers of the sea, have brought us the tools to finish the job. Their contribution to final victory will be long remembered.

--General Dwight D. Eisenhower on National Maritime Day, 1945

We are well aware of the two steamer tugs named “Westerly” and “Westerly II” that served the Pawcatuck River in the late 1800s. There have even been a couple of pleasure craft that have carried the name “Westerleigh” or some variation thereof. But how many of us know that there once was a World War II “Victory” ship named after our own beloved town?

The number of ships in America’s merchant fleet had been declining steadily in the twenty years following World War I. The passage of the *Merchant Marine Act* in 1936 was meant to fortify America’s merchant fleet, including its cargo and passenger ships. World War II provided the impetus to intensify those efforts eventually leading to a ship-building program that produced 5,500 vessels. Among them were 2,710 mass-produced ships known as “Liberty” ships.

German U-Boat activity in the Atlantic Ocean was historically costly for the U.S. and British fleets. The German submarines prowled the shipping lanes and Germany used the U-Boat (Unterseeboot) to its great advantage to isolate Great Britain from much of its food, oil, and raw materials during World War I. When the United States entered World War II in December, 1941, its merchant fleet had grown thanks to the *Merchant Marine Act*, but the number of merchant ships sunk began to outpace the number of Liberty ships being built. Several days before the outbreak of World War II, German U-Boats were already on the prowl against supply ships. Britain instituted its convoys as it had in World War I because these had been successful in limiting their losses some twenty years earlier.

The Liberty ships, however, proved to be too slow and too small to carry the tons of supplies the United States and her allies would need to win the war. In 1943, the United States began a new ship-building program. These new ships would be faster, larger, and able to carry cargo long after the war was finished. These were the Victory ships. The Victory ships were

fourteen feet longer at 455 feet (139 m), six feet wider at 62 feet (19 m), and drawing one foot more at 28 feet (7.6 m) loaded. To make them less vulnerable to U-boat attacks, Victory ships reached top speeds of 15 to 17 knots, four to six knots faster than the Liberty ships, and had a longer range. The extra speed was achieved through improved engines such as the Lentz type reciprocating steam engines, steam turbines, or Diesel engines, variously putting out between 6,000 and 8,500 horsepower. Most used steam turbines, which had been in short supply earlier in the war and reserved for warships. Another improvement was electrically powered auxiliary equipment, rather than steam-driven machinery. To prevent hull fracture that dogged some Liberty ships, the spacing between frames was widened six inches to 36 inches (914 mm), making the ships less stiff.

Curiously, the Victory ships were commonly outfitted with Babcock and Wilcox water-tube boilers or “non-explosive” boilers as they were called when first patented in the 1800s. Stephen Babcock was a native of Westerly RI and had been acquainted with his eventual business partner, George Babcock, since childhood when Babcock’s family moved here. A book written by the two partners in 1875, called *Steam: Its Generation and Use*, outlining the requirements for design or construction of a perfect steam boiler, showed their understanding and insight of the basic principles of what it takes to make a durable and efficient steam generator. The standards they put forth represent best practices even today, and their book has become one of the longest continuously published texts of its kind.

In all a total of 531 Victory ships were built among seven shipyards in the United States. Thirty-four of these were named for allied countries, 218 were named for American cities and towns, and 150 were christened after the names of colleges and universities. The rest of the ships were named for miscellaneous entities. All of the Victory ships were built in shipyards along the west coast with the exception of the Bethlehem-Fairfield shipyard of Fairfield, Maryland. It was there that the *SS Westerly Victory* was launched on October 31, 1944.

The Westerly Historical Society archives is home to a number of photographs commemorating the
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THE SS WESTERLY VICTORY

(Continued from previous page)

launching of the *SS Westerly Victory*. Archivist Janice B. Tunney writes that Arthur B. Cottrell is pictured in the photo shown below. With him is most likely Barbara A. Ferguson (a.k.a. Mrs. John Ferguson) who sponsored the event. (The custom at the time was for women to identify themselves as "Mrs." followed by their husband's name. This was particularly useful in when the "Mr." was a person of some prominence or high standing within the community. In the case of the Fergusons, John J. Ferguson was a prominent attorney in Westerly and served at the town solicitor for a time.)



WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES

Shown below is a photo of the *SS Westerly Victory* on her maiden voyage.



WESTERLY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES

The Victory ships formed a critical maritime link during World War II. These carriers served honorably in both the Atlantic and the Pacific theaters of war. Ninety-seven of the Victory ships were fitted out as troop carriers; the others carried food, fuel, ammunition, material, and supplies. After the war, many of the ships remained in service, ferrying troops home and helping rebuild ravaged Europe, the South Pacific, and Asia. Victory ships were recalled to war service during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, and some were modified as support ships for the burgeoning American space program in the 1960s.

The *SS Westerly Victory* was sold to Safmarine in 1947 and named *Morgenster*. She was renamed *South African Venture* in 1961, renamed *S A Venture* in 1966, then sold to International Export Lines and named *Hong Kong Weaver* in 1969. The *SS Westerly Victory* was eventually scrapped in Taiwan in 1972.

By February, 1945, the excitement of the trip to Fairfield, Maryland had died down and the town council passed a resolution (shown below) to donate the photographs of the event to the Westerly Historical Society. We welcome our readers' thoughts and comments, especially if you have information regarding the identities of the people in our photo. Please write to us at whstreasurer@gmail.com.

At a Regular Meeting of the Town Council of Westerly, R. I. held February 5, A. D. 1945 at 9:30 o'clock A.M.

Thomas F. Lenihan, J. Howard Ferguson, John L. Monti, Maurice L. Leing, Arthur M. Cottrell, Jr., Wells R. Fowler and Charles Liguore, all members present.

* * * * *

RESOLVED: That the Council Clerk be and he is hereby directed to present to the Westerly Historical Society, on behalf of the Town Council, a set of the photographs taken at the launching of the 7th Victory Ship, the S. S. "Westerly Victory", at Fairfield, Maryland, sponsored by Mrs. John Ferguson on October 31, 1944, and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Council Clerk transmit an attested copy of this resolution to Mr. Harvey Perry, President of the Westerly Historical Society.

* * * * *

VOTED: To adjourn to the call of the President of the Council

Attest: Charles R. Oppy

Council Clerk.

A true copy.

Attest:

Charles R. Oppy
Council Clerk.

Julia Abby Smith Rogers – Poetess Extraordinaire

By Ann L. Smith

Julia Abby Smith was the youngest of eight children born to Shubael Smith and Sarah Raymond. She was born on April 7, 1919. Her brother, Orlando Smith, was five years her senior and the first member of the Smith family to inhabit the Babcock-Smith House on Granite Street in Westerly. She married Henry Hammond Rogers at the age of 31 and together they had a son Edward Raymond Rogers who died in his infancy. Julia and Henry lived out their 38-year marriage in New London, Connecticut. Upon Henry's passing in 1889, Julia A. Rogers moved back to the Orlando Smith homestead where she had lived for a time as a young woman before her marriage.

Julia A. Rogers was a prolific writer of poetry all of her adult life. Her books were created on simple composition paper and were each numbered and dated. At first glance, the casual observer is struck by the careful, tidy, penmanship written smartly in black fountain ink replete with flourishes and ornamental details. When left open on a table or sideboard, these books lend character and charm to the décor of the Babcock-Smith House Museum, but the docents at the museum have removed them occasionally from public view. These treasures are mostly hidden during the high tourist season because even gentle handling over time can cause irreparable damage to their beauty and value.

The second thing one notices about Julia Rogers's notebooks is the pervasive influence of sacred scripture in nearly every line of her poetry. The writings are astonishingly spiritual to the point where one wonders about the author's background and upbringing. For example, were all nineteenth-century women as God-fearing as Julia Rogers? Was the ability to compose poetic verses with eloquence and such extraordinarily fluent vocabulary a skill all students mastered before leaving school?

Not only does every line of these notebooks indicate a deep understanding of Christian theology, the continuous references to scriptural themes indicate that the author had read and memorized much of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. In other words, Julia Rogers's writings went beyond simply preaching the glory of God; the constant use of biblical imagery shows that the writer lived and breathed her beloved Bible.

Consider these lines written in March, 1884,

in the style of the psalmist David

*Trust, adore and praise Him ever,
Ye who share his quenching power.
From His love let nothing sever,
Let grace to ripe perfection flower.*

or these lines which recall the second chapter of Paul's *Letter to the Philippians* and the 45th chapter of the *Book of Isaiah*

*Till Thy glory fill the earth,
Every knee in worship bow,
Every heart true homage pay,
Off'rings bring with filial vow.*

Julia Rogers's topics occasionally strayed to the more mundane, such as in her writings about the frivolity of fashion or the uselessness of pride. No matter what the topic, Julia Rogers's moral code was evident throughout her work. Her wit lent a form of humor to her musings, however, which shows that she was not always of a serious mind. Shown here is an excerpt from her quatrains mocking the high fashion styles of the day.

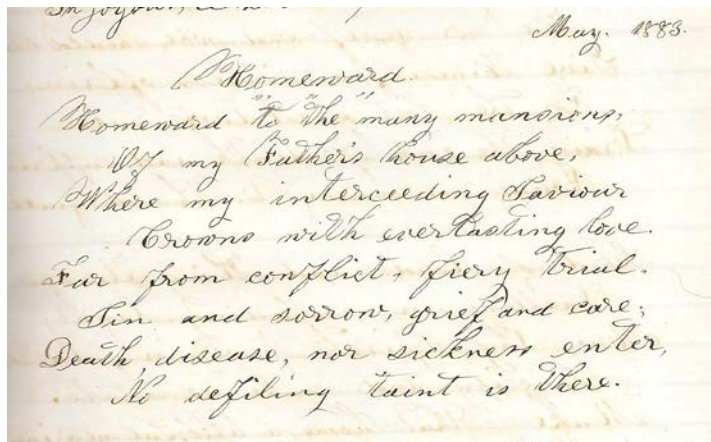
*The dress-trimming mania has reached
such a pass,
There's no telling where 'twill end to
multitudes, alas!
To lie, sit or stand, is to rend or crush
it somewhere,
But other ills, incidental; to name,
we'd forbear.*

*From one to six flounces; one may
nowadays see,
Of woollen dress fabric, however thick,
it may be;
Divers seem battling their wits, taxing
at large,
Who the most trimming can wear, at
costliest, charge.*

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Julia Abby Smith Rogers – Poetess Extraordinaire

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"HOMEWARD" BY JULIA A. SMITH ROGERS

As the years passed, age took its toll on the beautiful cursive style seen in the earlier notebooks. Julia's penmanship deteriorated somewhat but her mental acuity remained sharp until her death. She even penned her own epitaph which was read aloud at her funeral.

EPITAPH

BENEATH THIS MONUMENTAL STONE,
RESTS A MORTAL'S DUST.

WHOSE SOUL BY JESUS' BLOOD

REDEEMED

DWELLS WITH THE SAINTED JUST.

I ASK NOT FAME TO HITHER COME

AND WREATH HER LAURELS FAIR:

ENOUGH TO GRAVE UPON THIS

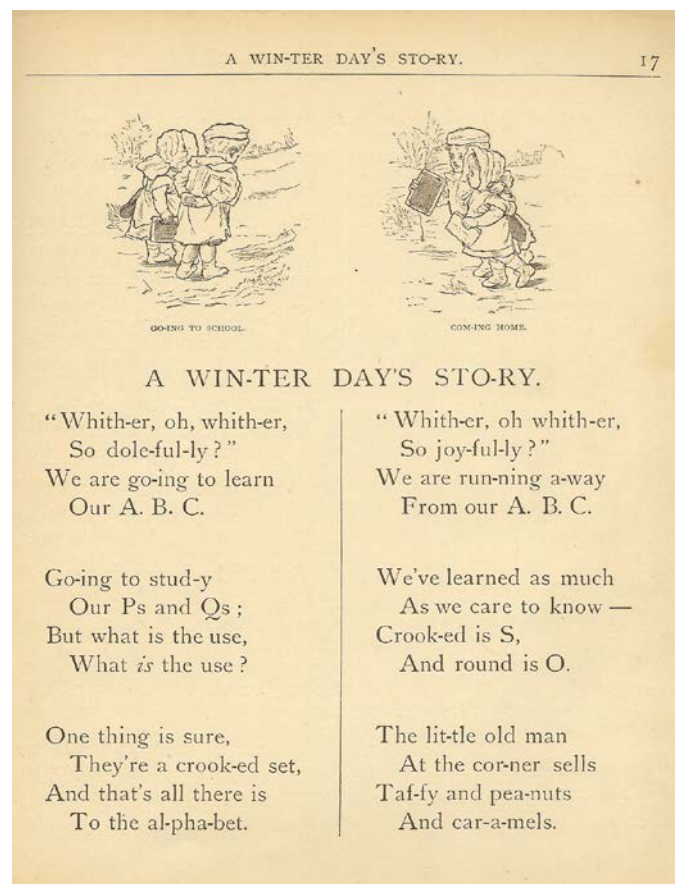
STONE,

"A CHRISTIAN'S DUST LIES HERE."

Julia Abby Smith Rogers lived for ten years after the death of her husband Henry and died on her 81st birthday, April 7, 1900. She is buried in River Bend Cemetery, Westerly. Her poetry has been lovingly preserved within the Babcock-Smith House Museum as a permanent remembrance of the prolific poetess who continues to enrich the lives of all who read her work to this day.

JUST FOR FUN

This reprint from Babyland (1881) shown here is from my personal collection – Ann L. Smith



SUMMER RETREAT: WESTERLY'S RAM POINT LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER

Sarah Zurier

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission

An early-20th-century summer estate in Avondale has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture in Westerly. Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added Ram Point to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. Built ca. 1903 for Dr. John Whitridge Williams, Ram Point is an excellent example of a Colonial Revival-style summer estate, with a commodious main house and several secondary structures, such as a boathouse and dock.

The estate takes its name from the Ram Point peninsula which juts northward into the lower Pawcatuck River estuary, immediately west of Babcock Cove and to the north of Watch Hill Road. Much of the 6.27-acre property is wooded, but there are clearings for lawn and garden near the house. Buildings include the summer house, carriage house, boathouse with marine railway, dock, play house, well house, and garden potting shed, all built ca. 1903. The entrance to the estate is marked by two fieldstone piers, and the curving entry drive is flanked by London plane trees and sycamore maples.

The original owner of Ram Point, John Whitridge Williams (1866-1931), was a noted physician and educator who is recognized as the founder and leader of academic obstetrics in the United States. He served as a professor in obstetrics at Johns Hopkins University and as obstetrician-in-charge at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. In 1903, Williams published *Obstetrics* which became the leading text in the field, with 25 editions published in the early-to-mid-twentieth century.

The design of Ram Point is attributed to Baltimore architect Douglas H. Thomas, Jr. (1872-1915), a cousin of Dr. Williams. Thomas also designed a nearby summer home (Metacomet) for Williams's sister, Mary Cushing Williams Howard, and her husband, Dr. William Travis Howard, Jr., around the same time that Ram Point was constructed. Douglas H. Thomas, Jr. was educated at Johns Hopkins University, MIT, and the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, fitting into the wave of young, well-educated American architects who

received a Parisian experience in the arts after training at developing programs in the United States. Based in Baltimore, Thomas formed a partnership in 1900 with J. Harleston Parker of Boston, creating the firm Parker & Thomas, with offices in both cities.

At Ram Point, Thomas created a comfortable estate for John Whitridge Williams and his family. Buildings were sited with attention to the property's natural features and topography, as well as in consideration of their use. The estate's orientation toward the water is evident in the design of the main house, whose front door faces the Pawcatuck River. The main house has a relatively open floor plan, with first-floor public rooms that flow together and feature water views. With its gambrel roof, symmetrical façade, wood-shingle siding, and ample porches, the Colonial Revival-style house conveys simplicity and lasting good taste.

For many years, Ram Point provided the Williams family a place to enjoy idyllic summer retreats from urban life in Baltimore. They particularly enjoyed boating, taking advantage of the site's location on a protected cove in the Pawcatuck River estuary, within a short distance of Little Narragansett Bay, Fishers Island Sound, and the Atlantic Ocean.

John Whitridge Williams died in 1931, and his heirs sold Ram Point to Marjorie Buffum Taylor in 1934. The property was sold to the present owners, Cynthia and Thomas Sculco, in 1982. The Sculcos have maintained Ram Point's main house, its appurtenances, and its overall setting to reflect the 1903 design.

The National Register nomination for Ram Point was prepared by preservation consultant Richard C. Youngken and RIHPHC architectural historian Joanna Doherty. RIHPHC's Executive Director Edward Sanderson commented, "A century ago, Rhode Island's shore was highly valued as an ideal summer vacation setting. This is still true today, further enhanced by well-preserved historic houses and estates like Ram Point."

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property

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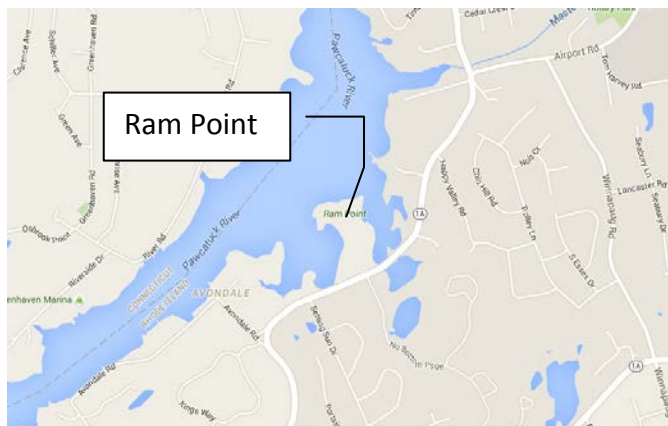
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED
The Westerly Historical Society
P.O. Box 91
Westerly, RI 02891



WESTERLY'S RAM POINT LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER

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listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.



GOOGLE MAPS



PHOTO: RI HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

For more information about the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission visit www.preservation.ri.gov or write to:

*Old State House 150 Benefit Street
Providence, RI 02903*