

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

## 1. Name of Property

historic name: Wakefield Historic District

other name/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

street & number: Main Street, High Street, Wright Avenue

not for publication: N/A

city/town: South Kingstown vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Washington code: 009 zip code: 02879

## 3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private/public-local

Category of Property: District

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>53</u>	<u>28</u>	buildings
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	objects
<u>53</u>	<u>28</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Property name Wakefield H. D., Washington County, South Kingstown, RI

**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

See continuation sheet.

*Frederick C. Williamson*  
Signature of certifying official

4/9/96  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

_____	entered in the National Register	_____	_____
_____	See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
_____	determined eligible for the	_____	_____
_____	National Register	_____	_____
_____	See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
_____	determined not eligible for the	_____	_____
_____	National Register	_____	_____
_____	removed from the National Register	_____	_____
_____	other (explain): _____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
	Signature of Keeper		Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic:	<u>DOMESTIC</u>	Sub:	<u>Single-family dwelling</u>
	<u>COMMERCE/TRADE</u>		<u>Specialty store</u>
	<u>INDUSTRY</u>		<u>Manufacturing facility</u>
Current:	<u>COMMERCE/TRADE</u>	Sub:	<u>Specialty Store</u>
	<u>COMMERCE/TRADE</u>		<u>Professional</u>
	<u>INDUSTRY</u>		<u>Manufacturing facility</u>

Property name

Wakefield H. D., Washington County, South Kingstown, RI

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification:

Greek Revival

Queen Anne

Commercial Style

Other Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: foundation STONE

roof

ASPHALT

walls

WOOD, Weatherboard

other

BRICK

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

INDUSTRY

Period(s) of Significance: c. 1820-c. 1930

Significant Dates: N/A

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: \_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property: Approximately 40 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
A	<u>19</u>	<u>290580</u>	<u>4590020</u>	B	<u>19</u>	<u>291390</u>	<u>4590580</u>
C	<u>19</u>	<u>291460</u>	<u>4590180</u>	D	<u>19</u>	<u>290690</u>	<u>4589700</u>

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description:  See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification:  See continuation sheet.

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title: Clifford M. Renshaw, A.I.A.

Organization: Consultant Date: 5/24/95

Street & Number: 580 Ten Rod Road Telephone: 401-294-6538

City or Town: North Kingstown State: RI ZIP: 02852

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### Description

The Wakefield Historic District encompasses most of what had become the most prominent commercial settlement in the town of South Kingstown by the end of the 19th century. The district runs generally northeast/southwest along Main Street (part of the historic "Post Road" which was laid out in the early 19th century connecting Boston and New York). Here Main Street runs roughly parallel to the Saugatucket River which it crosses just south of the river's stone dam built before 1850 at the river's falls line. The Saugatucket had been a source of water power for small-scale milling operations since the 18th century, and it supported substantial textile milling by the mid-19th century. The river was navigable to this point, and it once provided limited transportation south to Point Judith Pond and to the Block Island Sound beyond. However, through its period of significance, the most significant transportation features of the district were the Post Road and the Narragansett Pier Railroad, which was run through the village in 1876, connecting it to the New York, Providence and Boston Railroad at West Kingston, Rhode Island.

What one sees in the Wakefield Historic District today is an interesting juxtaposition of a linear village, fairly typical for rural Rhode Island, with early to mid-19th-century residential, commercial, and mill structures, over which has been laid a more urban, late 19th-century downtown, undoubtedly a result of increased commercial development around the turn of the century that was fostered by the railroad.

The historical core of the district is at the spot where Main Street crosses the Saugatucket just south of its stone dam near High Street which enters from the north. Much of the mid-19th-century character of the district is retained here. North of the bridge, abutting the dam, are a pair of simple masonry mill structures at 1 High Street (a 1-story, rectangular brick building built before 1870) and 399 High Street (a handsome, 2-story stone structure built by Gideon Reynolds about 1866). With its tall, wooden belfry (a recent restoration) serving as a village landmark, the 3-story stone Wakefield Mill, built by Gideon Reynolds about 1867, stands nearby on the opposite side of High Street. This handsome stone textile mill, which is part of a small complex of late 19th- and early 20th-century structures, was and is the most significant industrial structure in the Wakefield Historic District.

To the south of the bridge are a group of important 19th-century business buildings. The 2-story Sylvester Robinson Store (433 Main Street) was built in 1846 and is one of the more handsome and best preserved wood

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framed Greek Revival commercial structures in the state. Interestingly, Robinson built his store immediately adjacent to his home at 445 Main Street, a 2-story, hipped roof, Greek Revival structure with a monitor roof and small entry portico that was built about 1831. It also still stands in well-preserved condition. Across the street, a rather severe, 2-story stone building at 331 Main Street was built about 1850 as the Wakefield Bank, and a larger, much altered commercial block next door (immediately adjacent to the bridge at 422 Main Street) was built for the Wakefield Institution for Savings. A 2-story, clapboard Greek Revival building with a distinctive elliptical window in its gable end that is visible at the end of the alley between these two structures is reported to have been built as a bank by Robinson and was probably moved to make room for construction of the larger structure that now fronts on Main Street.

The mid-19th-century character of the village is also largely retained on the north side of the bridge where stand a 1 1/2-story, vernacular commercial structure at 396 Main Street, built before 1862 as a dry goods store by William Kenyon, a 1-story, late-Federal house built by Daniel Burdick about 1820, and a 2-story, 5-bay wide Greek Revival dwelling at 390 Main Street, built by William Robinson about 1845. On the lot immediately north of the bridge a group of late 20th-century 1-story, wood sided commercial structures placed in an asphalt parking lot are a relatively innocuous intrusion on the early character of the district.

To the northeast and southwest of the bridge, Main Street runs up hill at a moderate grade. To the northeast, where commercial development in the late 19th and early 20th century was focused in proximity to the Narragansett Pier Railroad, the density of structures increases and the buildings are almost all set with their storefronts directly on the street's edge giving the area a distinct turn-of-the-century commercial character.

On the east side of Main Street, Kenyon's Department Store at 344 Main Street was built in 1891 by the descendants of William Kenyon who had established his dry goods store just down the street. It is characteristic of the development of Wakefield at this time that when businesses were established or expanded, they gravitated toward the railroad. With some significant early 20th-century alteration, Kenyon's is primarily a 2 1/2-story, Queen Anne wood shingle structure. It is now listed individually on the National Register.

Whereas the streetscape of structures on the east side of Main Street at this commercial center is of relatively small, wood framed vernacular

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structures, that on the west side of the street is more urban and more substantial. Opposite Kenyon's, the Bell Block at 345 Main Street is a 3-story, flat roofed, yellow brick mixed-use business block that was built in 1899. It is a particularly fine example of the turn-of-the-century Commercial Style and stands today as the most ambitious commercial structure in Wakefield. Attached to this building to the south is the 3 1/2-story, mansard roofed Sheldon Block. First built by the Sheldon family as a furniture store in 1875 on a site south of the Saugatucket Bridge, it was moved to this site and raised up a story in 1899 when family decided to expand their operations. A wide, copper clad oriel added to the facade of the structure at this time establishes an architectural relationship to the adjacent Bell Block which is itself articulated by a series of copper clad oriels at the second floor level.

This relatively urbane line of structures extends south to the Henry Barber Block, a 2-story commercial block at 365 Main Street, and to the north to the 2-story Clark Block at 315-317 Main Street. Use of similar yellow brick in the construction of both of these structures provides architectural continuity to the streetscape.

Several structures within this commercial core break from the predominant patterns and provide visual interest. These would include a small row of 1-story shops with Art Deco detailing at 357-361 Main Street, a Classical Revival brick and limestone building set back from the street on a grassy lot at 336 Main Street that was built as a bank by the Wakefield Trust Company in 1927, and an early 20th-century diner, now used as a shop, at 329 Main Street.

The Narragansett Pier Railroad crossed Main Street at the north end of this commercial core, just north of where Robinson Street now enters from the east, but almost no physical evidence of the railroad remains today. A nondescript, mid-20th-century commercial structure, probably once an automobile filling station, stands at the northeast corner of the Robinson Street intersection in the approximate location of the old passenger depot. At the north side of the abandoned railroad right-of-way is the much-altered Wakefield Branch building at 297 Main Street, which was built in 1882 as the "Wakefield Branch" of the J. C. Tucker Company, a lumber and building supply company in nearby Narragansett Pier. This site was chosen undoubtedly because of its adjacency to the railroad for the transportation services it offered.

The district continues to the top of the hill where Main Street turns east. Here a cluster of mid-19th-century houses and the Wakefield Baptist

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Church (1852) with its tall white spire serve as a visual terminus to the district. Although it was significantly but sympathetically altered in 1891 and then again in 1950, the original church building was designed by Thomas Tafft, one of Rhode Island's most prominent architects, in the mid-19th century. The houses here include the Nathaniel Armstrong House (c. 1840) at 235 Main Street, a 2-story 5-bay wide Greek Revival dwelling that is similar in type to several other houses scattered through the district, and the John Armstrong house (c. 1860) at 225 Main Street, a handsome Gothic Revival house. The Armstrongs were brothers who ran the C. H. Armstrong and Sons Carriage Works, one of the earliest manufacturing establishments in Wakefield which operated nearby, probably from the much-altered building at 245 Main Street that now serves as an automobile showroom. This group of houses represents the extent of village development to the north before 1870. Beyond the district, Main Street is now lined with relatively uniform rows of once residential (although now generally in commercial use) structures on modest lots that were built mostly in the last quarter of the 19th century.

To the southwest of the old village center at the Saugatucket Bridge, the district is more varied in character. It extends through a short stretch of now mostly commercial structures, both from the 19th and 20th centuries, to the Larchwood Inn, a large, architectural distinguished Federal-period structure at 521 Main Street that has significant historical ties to the village. Set well back from the street on an impressively landscaped lawn, the 3-story, hipped-roof inn with its rooftop balustrade and colonnaded 1-story porch was built in 1831 as a 5-bay wide, 2-story house by James Robinson, an owner of a nearby woolen mill. It was enlarged to its present 3-story high 8-bay wide form by Stephen and Susan Wright who acquired the property about 1850 upon their return to Wakefield from California where they made a fortune during the Gold Rush. Stephen Wright also purchased the woolen mill and became a leader in Wakefield's business community. The property was converted into an inn in 1925, and it has been a center of social, business, and civic life in Wakefield from that date until the present.

A somewhat suburban character of the district at this end is established by a number of well-preserved, mid- to late 19th-century residences that line Main Street adjacent to the Larchwood. These include the C. H. Hazard House, a nicely detailed, 5-bay wide, Greek Revival dwelling at 500 Main Street; the Holly House Annex to the Larchwood Inn, a 2-story Queen Anne house at 522 Main Street, and the Watson House (c. 1860), a particularly fine, 2-story Italianate villa at 546 Main Street.



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As Main Street continues southwest from the Larchwood Inn beyond the district, the character of the area becomes more that of country estates. Although there are several mid-19th-century structures still standing on the street beyond the district, as well as some important early 20th-century country houses, the architectural and historical ties of these properties to Wakefield village during its period of significance are fairly limited.

### INVENTORY OF CONTRIBUTING AND NON-CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES

#### MAIN STREET

- 219 House (before 1895): A 2 1/2-story, Queen Anne house with a multi-gable and hipped roof with dormers. A wrap-around porch shelters the front entrance.
- 225 John H. Armstrong House (before 1862): A mid-19th-century, 1 1/2-story Gothic cottage. The gable ends of its steep roof and gable roofed front dormer are trimmed with serpentine bargeboards. The house is L-shaped in plan with a formerly open front porch (now partially enclosed) and a rear ell. Narrow, paired second floor windows are round-headed; a first front window bay is triangular in plan. This house was one of a group of three owned by the Armstrong family which marked the eastern end of Wakefield village in the 1860's.
- 235 Nathaniel C. Armstrong House (c. 1830's): This 2-story, 5-bay wide, Greek Revival house sits on a corner lot at River Street across from what in the 19th century was the J. and N. C. Armstrong Carriage Works where the first carriages in town were built. The house is trimmed with a substantial entablature cornice and paneled cornerboards; triangular attic windows are framed by the pediment treatment at the gable ends of the main roof. A wide, late 19th-century Eastlake porch protects the central front entrance.
- 236 Wakefield Baptist Church (1852 et seq, Thomas Tefft, Architect): The main portion of this church was designed by Thomas Tefft and built to replace an earlier church on this site. This tall, 1-story frame structure is capped by a gable roof with sawn brackets along the eaves. A square tower with a louvered, hexagonal belfry and tower projects from the west end. Tall, narrow round-headed

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windows light the interior. An entrance wing, similar in detailing to the main body of the church, was added to the north side in 1891 when the interior pulpit was relocated to the south. A large rear addition housing an assembly and recreation room was added in 1950.

- 245 (N) Former C. H. Armstrong and Sons Carriage Works, now South County Motors, (before 1870): Portions of this much altered, 2-story frame and concrete block structure may date from the 19th century when the Armstrong family operated a carriage manufacturing concern at this location.
- 249-255 Stores (before 1895): A 2-story, hipped roof rectangular structure with a 6-bay wide front facade with a pair of simple shop fronts on the ground floor. The symmetrical street facade is embellished with a low-pitched center dormer with a half-round window.
- 250 House (after 1895): A 2-story, simple Stick Style dwelling with a cross-gable roof, which was probably built as a parsonage for the Wakefield Baptist Church. The gable ends are trimmed with plain king's post trusses; a wrap around porch shelters the front entrance.
- 257 (N) Store (mid-20th century): A long, rectangular, low pitch gable roofed concrete block structure with a symmetrical brick "false front" facade with plate glass show windows.
- 265 Store (early 20th century): A 2-story, hipped roof rectangular commercial and residential structure of frame construction. The first floor is treated as a single store front with large plate glass windows on either side of a central entrance. This building may have been built by Samuel Siskind for a men's clothing store.
- 269-271 (N) Stores (mid-20th century): A 1-story, flat roofed structure built to house two shops. Large plate glass store fronts with artificial stone base walls frame a central, recessed entrance.
- 297 Formerly Wakefield Branch Company (c. 1892 et seq): A much altered, 2-story, flat roofed brick commercial building with a late 20th-century store front and extensive additions to sides and rear. Although a store is reported to have existed on this site since 1866, this structure was built to house the "Wakefield Branch" of the J. C. Tucker Company, a hardware and building supply company established in nearby Narragansett Pier. The former

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Narragansett Pier Railroad right-of-way runs adjacent to this property.

305 Store (late 20th century): One-story, gable-roof, rectangular  
(N) concrete block building with one service bay and an adjacent plate glass store front.

rear Health Care Assistance (late 20th century): A 1-story, flat roofed  
305 concrete block structure with a steeply pitched rear addition.  
(N) This structure which houses a health care facility is set behind the buildings on Main Street, almost at the edge of the Saugatucket River. This appears to be a renovation of an earlier structure.

311- Clark Block (c. 1910): An early 20th-century, 2-story, yellow  
317 brick commercial block with a flat roof. The building is articulated into 4 bays with plate glass shop fronts on ground level; a narrow center bay provides an entrance to offices on the floor above.

318 Store (early 20th century): This 1-story, flat roofed structure of simple Art Deco design sits diagonally on its corner lot and was probably built as an auto service station. Simple vertical piers articulate the front facade of this stucco structure into 3 bays; one of the piers retains a spherical finial on top. The central and left-hand bay have rolling garage doors, the right-hand bay is treated with a simple wood and glass store front.

322 Store (before 1895): A simple, 1-story almost square structure with a tall gable roof and wide plate glass store front with recessed central entrance. This building formerly the Daniel Griffen Drug Store.

325 Store (before 1895): This wood frame, 2-story, Queen Anne commercial structure is capped by a hipped roof. Cross-gable dormers on the street front are embellished with simple sawn decoration. The building formerly housed a men's furnishing store on the ground floor and a barber shop above.

326 Griffen Block/now Saywell's (before 1895): A 2-story, 4-bay wide, clapboarded Queen Anne commercial building with cross-gable dormer at the center of its front facade. The attic dormer is treated with decorative siding shingles and bracketed roof eaves. A bracketed cornice caps what was formerly a pair of store fronts on

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the ground floor. In 1895 this structure housed the village post office.

- 327 (N) Hera Gallery (early/mid-20th century): A plain, 1-story, gable roofed structure which formerly housed a garage and taxi service. It is presently used as an art gallery.
- 328 Store (before 1895): A small 2-story, clapboarded commercial building with a low-pitched gable roof. Fishscale shingles decorate the gable end which faces the street. There is a single plate glass store front with a recessed entrance to the side which also provides access to the floor above.
- 329 Former Whiting's Diner (c. 1920's): This former diner, which now houses a clothing store, is of the trolley or electric streetcar type which was popular between about 1919-1932. The diner is characterized by its metal siding, curved roof, and horizontal band of windows. A larger, flat roofed brick addition is attached to the rear.
- 330 Store (before 1895): A 2-story, 4-bay wide, hipped roof, wood frame commercial structure with a plate glass store front and recessed entrance on the ground floor.
- 333 (N) Stores (early 20th century): A pair of flat roofed brick shops with simple plate glass store fronts.
- 336 Formerly Washington Trust Company (1927): A 2-story, red brick, neo-Classical former bank building set back from the street on a small grassy lot. A shallow but monumental pedimented limestone portico with Ionic columns frames the front entrance. Tall round-topped windows along the sides are framed by limestone facing pilasters. This was once the site of the Wakefield public school.
- 344 Kenyon's Department Store (1891, Charles Chase, Engineer; enlarged 1899, 1924): This 2 1/2-story, wood-shingle, Queen Anne commercial block was completed in 1891 from designs by Charles Chase, a Providence engineer. The main body of the structure, now surrounded with additions dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is capped by a gable-on-hip roof with a front gable dormer. The upper gables, front and rear, are filled with elliptical fanlight windows; the lower front gable dormer is embellished by wood brackets supporting a wood panel in-fill.

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Corner brackets and jig-sawn rafter ends ornament overhanging roof eaves. A 1-story plate glass store front at ground level dates from 1924.

Kenyon's Department Store was founded by William Kenyon in the 1860's in a building still standing at 396 Main Street. This newer store was built by Kenyon's son, Orrin. Now listed individually on the National Register, Kenyon's remains under the operation and ownership of the Kenyon family.

345 Bell Block (1899): Built in 1899, this 3-story, flat roofed, yellow brick commercial structure is composed of a pair of shop front bays on both sides of a narrow central entrance that provides access to the floors above. On the second floor, copper-clad bay windows serving interior offices project above the plate glass store fronts below. Fenestration at the third floor level, which originally housed a spacious assembly hall, is more simply treated. Appropriately located at the center of the commercial district, the Bell Block is one of the most substantial commercial blocks in the Wakefield district.

349 Sheldon Block (c. 1875, moved/enlarged 1899): Built about 1875 on the west side of the Saugatucket River bridge, the Sheldon Block was originally a simple, 3-story, rectangular commercial structure with a mansard roof. It was moved in 1899 to be more centrally located within Wakefield's business district and a new ground floor shop with plate glass store front was inserted below the structure. At that time a decorative, 2-story tall copper-clad window bay was added to the center of this facade above the new store front. The structure has housed the Sheldon Furniture Company for almost 120 years.

355 Store (before 1895): This is a 2-story, flat roofed, wood-shingle commercial structure with a symmetrical street front facade composed of a pair of projecting angled bays framing a pair of entrances at the center. It appears that there may have originally been a third floor level to the structure that is now missing.

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- 390 William Robinson House (c. 1845): A 2 1/2-story, 5-bay wide Greek Revival clapboard house with a gable roof and small center brick chimney. This handsome building is treated with an entablature cornice and pilaster cornerboards; similar detailing frames the central front entrance. The gable ends of the house are treated as pediments with semi-elliptical fanlight windows. This former residence is now used for offices.
- 396 Former Kenyon Store (before 1862): This is a simple, 1 1/2-story frame structure with a gable roof, set with its end to the street, and an adjacent truncated, 2-story square tower. A deeply projecting shed roof canopy covers a wide street level store front with plate glass window bays on either side of its main entrance. Early maps record that W. C. Kenyon operated a dry goods store here by 1862. The Kenyon family continued to operate this business until 1932, even though they erected a larger department store nearby at 344 Main Street in 1891.
- 399 Mill Warehouse (1866): A 2-story, granite structure with a low-pitched gable roof sited along Main Street on the east bank of the Saugatucket River adjacent to the bridge and dam. A mid-20th-century, 1-story, automobile showroom with large plate glass windows extends from the south front of the structure and abuts the sidewalk. This building, erected about 1866 to replace an earlier mill at this site which burned in 1865, served as a weave house annex to the Wakefield Mill on High Street. An original front tower is now missing.
- 400- River's Edge Shopping Center (late 20th century): A group of 3  
408 wood-sided, gable-roofed commercial structures surrounded by a  
(N) paved parking lot. This was the site of the former Wakefield Hotel.
- 422 Bank Block (1889, altered 1924): This 2-story, flat roofed commercial building on the west bank of the Saugatucket River was originally 3 stories tall. Built by Partelow and Bullock and James W. Brown for the Wakefield Institution for Savings, it originally housed stores and banking space on the first floor, offices on the second, and an assembly hall on the third level. The third floor and the structure's original hipped roof with dormers was lost to fire in 1924. In its present form, the building is composed of an almost continuous plate glass store front on the ground floor with miscellaneous hung windows and vinyl siding on the floor above. Its original Queen Anne design is only vaguely perceived.

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- 428 House (c. 1834): This handsome Greek Revival house with its gable end entrance facade is set facing a narrow alley between two street front buildings. With wide cornerboards and a tall cornice, the 3-bay wide facade is treated as a temple front; an elliptical window decorates the gable end pediment. It is reported that this building was built as a bank by Sylvester Robinson, a prominent local merchant. It was moved to this site before 1895, possibly to make room for the construction of the Bank Block at 442 Main Street.
- 430 Former Wakefield Bank (c. 1850): This rather severe 2-story, hipped roof, granite building may have been the first home of the Wakefield Bank, later known as the Bank of South County, the Wakefield National Bank, and the Wakefield Trust Company. Its street front is treated with a pair of plate glass window bays and a central entrance under a visor roof at ground floor level; regularly spaced segmental headed double-hung windows above light the floor above. In use for banking into the 20th century, the building now houses offices.
- 433 Sylvester Robinson Store (1846): This handsome, largely intact, 2-story Greek Revival commercial structure was built in 1846 by Sylvester Robinson, a prominent local business man who had previously built his house next door at 445 Main Street. This long, primarily rectangular clapboarded structure is covered by a low-pitched hipped roof with a bisecting gable roofed bay at mid length. The building is treated with a tall entablature cornice and wide pilaster cornerboards. Its street front retains its early 5-bay wide storefront with plate glass windows and a recessed central entrance.
- 445 Sylvester Robinson House (1831): A 2-story, 5-bay wide, Federal/Greek Revival clapboarded house with a monitor roof. A 1-story portico protects a central front entrance with sidelights. Wide cornerboards are treated as Ionic pilasters; a tall cornice is embellished with a dentil molding. This handsome house was built by Sylvester Robinson who first opened a store in Wakefield in 1821 and later built the store next door at 433 Main Street. Robinson was President of the Wakefield Bank across the street from 1841-67.
- 446 (N) Auto Service Building (mid-20th century): A 1- and 2-story, rectangular concrete block industrial-type building with a primarily plate glass store extension on the street front.

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- 458 Former Stables (?), now Mews Tavern, (before 1895): A 1 1/2-story, gable roof structure which may have been built before 1895 as a stable for the structure across the street. Although the front facade at ground level has been altered with newer siding and windows, the structure retains its earlier wood sash windows and decorative shingle siding on the floor above.
- 457- Former South County Bank (before 1870): This tall 3 1/2-story, 459 mansard roof structure is reported to have been built by Stephen Wright to be the South County Bank. Although the sides and rear of the original clapboarded structure remain largely intact, the street facade has been faced with brick and remodeled in a vaguely Colonial Revival style. A 1-story storefront addition extends from the east side.
- 460 Store (mid-/late 19th century): A simple, rectangular 2-story commercial/residential frame building with a low pitched gable roof oriented with its end to the street. The street front with its 2 doors framing a central plate glass window is probably a later alteration.
- 462- Auto Service Building (mid-20th century): A tall, 1-story, gable 466 roofed garage structure with two front service bays and a small (N) 0 office addition on the east side.
- 468 House (before 1895): This 2 1/2-story, gable roof house is set 6 above the banks of the Saugatucket River on a broad lawn behind commercial structures on Main Street. A window bay at first floor level extends from the gable end front; an open porch shelters the principal entrance on the east side.
- 471 Former "Belmont Cottage" (before 1870): A 3-story, hipped-roof 0 frame structure which houses apartments on the floors above a ground floor office. Its 3-bay wide facade is treated with projecting window bays on both sides at the second floor level. The ground floor entrance appears to be from a later remodeling. The structure is labeled in an 1895 map as "Belmont Cottage."
- 473 Stores (late 20th century): A 2-story, gable-roofed wood shingled (N) 0 and concrete block commercial building with contemporary plate glass fixed and casement windows.



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- 476 (N) 0 Store (late 20th century): A 2-story, hipped-roof commercial building with a plate glass store front and metal siding.
- 480 (N) 0 House (before 1895): A 2-story, vernacular Victorian gable roofed house with an open, wrap around porch on the street front and east side. The house appears on an 1895 map as belonging to Thomas A. Gardner who operated a real estate and insurance business here.
- 481 (N) 0 South County Veterinary Hospital (late 20th century): A contemporary-style, 2-story, gable-roofed structure almost "saltbox" in form with large plate glass windows.
- 484 (N) 0 M and M Oil Company (late 20th century): A 1-story, rectangular building with a gable-on-hip roof and clapboard siding set close to the street with a large paved parking area behind.
- 491 (N) 0 Former Auto Service Station (mid-20th century): This rather small, 1-story, gable roofed frame structure with a small rooftop cupola is now vacant and boarded up but appears to have been built as a auto service and filling station.
- 500 (N) 0 C. H. Hazard House (c. 1840): A well-preserved, 2-story, 5-bay wide, Greek Revival house with a pair of interior brick chimneys. A central entrance with sidelights is protected by a small portico. The house is treated as a temple form with an entablature cornice and stylized pilaster cornerboards. Semi-elliptical windows at the gable ends light the attic.
- 512 (N) 0 Wright House (before 1862): A mid-19th century, 1 1/2-story, cross-gabled roof house of vernacular Victorian style. The primary wing of the house is surrounded on 3 sides by an open porch; gable roof dormers project through the roof eaves at the sides and rear all of the house.
- 521 (N) 0 Larchwood Inn (c. 1831; remodeled c. 1850 and mid-20th century): A large, 3-story, 7-bay wide former residence with a panelled balustrade with lattice work concealing a hipped roof. An open 1-story porch extends across the front of the structure protecting a central entrance. The building is set well back from the road on a large landscaped lot.

Originally 2 stories tall and only 5 bays wide, the structure was built about 1831 as a residence for James Robinson, who owned

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the nearby Wakefield Mill with his brother William, and was named "The Larches." About 1850 the property was bought by Stephen and Susan Wright, former South Kingstown residents who had just returned from California where they made a fortune in land investments. The Wrights enlarged the house and transformed the property into an estate.

In 1925 George Phillips bought the estate and established the Larchwood Inn. Since that date a number of additions to the main structure have been built for several subsequent owners.

- 522 Harriet Watson House, now Holly House Annex to the Larchwood Inn (late 19th century): A 2-story, cross-gable-roofed Queen Anne house with a square tower set at the intersection of its gable roofs. The tower, which is capped by a curving hipped roof, shelters a second floor balcony and is supported above an open 1-story front porch.
- 546 Watson House (before 1862): A handsome, almost square, 2-story Italianate house set on a large landscaped lot. The symmetrical front facade is 3 bays wide with tall, narrow paired windows on the second floor above a wide 1-story piazza with carpenter work detailing which shelters a central entrance with sidelights. A deep bracketed cornice supports the structures's hipped roof.

### HIGH STREET

- 1 Mill Building (late 19th century): A 1-story, rectangular brick mill building with a very low pitch gable roof and full height basement level, set between High Street and the dam on the Saugatucket River. This structure was probably built as part of the Wakefield Mill complex in the late 19th century to replace an earlier building on the site.
- 10 Wakefield Mill (1867 et seq.): Built by Gideon Reynolds about 1867, the main building of this relatively modest mill complex is a 3-story, gable-roofed granite structure set with its gable end abutting High Street. Its roof-top wooden cupola is a recent reconstruction of the original which was damaged in the 1938 hurricane, and a flat-roofed brick tower to the north end of the front facade is an earlier addition.

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Attached to the mill to the south and set behind a small parking lot is a 1-story, 3-bay wide, gable roofed clapboard building that was constructed about 1845 as a mill superintendent's house for an earlier mill at this site.

At the rear of the mill are a boiler and engine house, probably built about 1867, and another addition which dates from the 1870's. Several large, 1-story additions were built to the rear and north side of the mill after 1922.

Although water-powered textile manufacturing had been in operation at this site since before 1850, this steam-powered mill was built to replace an earlier wooden structure damaged by fire. About 1875 it was purchased by Robert Rodman and incorporated into his extensive South County textile empire.

### WRIGHT AVENUE

- 19 Elisha Cross House (late 19th century): This substantial, 2 1/2-story, Queen Anne clapboard and shingle house has a cross-gambrel roof which pitches down on the south side to form the roof of an open entry porch. A 2-story, half-round window bay projects from the west end of the house facing the street. This house was built by Elisha and Frances Cross and originally stood across the street at the corner of the Larchwood Inn property that was then the home of Mrs. Cross's parents, Stephen and Susan Wright.

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## Photographs

3. Photographer: Clifford Renshaw, A.I.A.
4. Date: October 1995
5. Location of negative: Office of Clifford Renshaw, 580 Ten Rod Road, North Kingstown

(The above information pertains to all photographs)

6. Bell Block, 345 Main Street, view looking north
7. Photo #1
6. Clark Block, 315-317 Main Street, view looking west.
7. Photo #2
6. Kenyon's Department Store, 344 Main Street, view looking south
7. Photo #3
6. Griffen Block, 326 Main Street, view looking east
7. Photo #4
6. Wakefield Mill, 10 High Street, view looking northwest
7. Photo #5
6. Sylvester Robinson Store, 433 Main Street, view looking north
7. Photo #6
6. Sylvester Robinson House, 455 Main Street, view looking north
7. Photo #7
6. Larchwood Inn, 521 Main Street, view looking north
7. Photo #8
6. Church of the Ascension, 366 Main Street, view looking east
7. Photo #9
6. Nathaniel C. Armstrong House, 235 Main Street, and John H. Armstrong House, 225 Main Street, view looking northeast
7. Photo #10

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### Significance

The Wakefield Historic District is a fabric of well-preserved structures that was woven over almost two centuries of industrial, commercial and residential development. Several commercial operations in the district have remained in the same business use, and in some cases the same family ownership, for over one hundred years. During its period of significance, the district became the most important commercial center in the town of South Kingstown. Many of the structures standing in the district are fine examples of a variety of architectural styles which have been in fashion from the early 19th through the 20th centuries. Standing together these structures form an architectural group which is both visually distinctive and illustrative of the historical development of Wakefield. Although much of the built fabric of the Wakefield district is fairly typical of rural, regional centers in Rhode Island, the relatively urban commercial core of the village with its fairly solid row of 2- and 3-story frame and brick masonry business blocks is almost unique in southern Rhode Island. Only Westerly retains a similar turn-of-the-century "downtown" area. Because of these attributes, the Wakefield Historic District is significant as defined by National Register Criteria A and C.

The initial formation of the village of Wakefield was largely a consequence of its location along Old Post Road where it runs roughly parallel to the Saugatucket River (one of the larger and more steadily flowing rivers in South Kingstown) near its falls line. The village was established by the early-18th century when a grist mill, saw mill, and cording mill were built several hundred feet above the present dam, and a handful of houses were erected along Post Road. By 1765 a snuff mill had also been built. At this time village life centered to the south of the present district at Dockray Corner where the Willard Hazard Tavern stood and a stagecoach stop was established by 1745. Although the Hazard Tavern stood into this century, none of these structures from the 18th century remain today.

The character of the village we now see was significantly influenced by both the development of textile milling activities beginning in the early 19th century and by the construction of the Narragansett Pier Railroad which was put through in 1876. A cording mill was established in this vicinity about 1807 by Joseph Congdon. By 1820 this mill was acquired by James Robinson whose family expanded the operation over the next several decades. In 1831 Robinson built a 2-story house on a large property which now defines the south end of the district that he named "The Larches." This house was significantly enlarged in about 1850 by subsequent owners

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and early in this century was converted into the Larchwood Inn, a center of business and civic life in Wakefield that is still in operation.

In 1822, Sylvester Robinson moved to Wakefield from Westerly and built a store (no longer standing) and in 1831 he erected his handsome Federal/Greek Revival house at 445 Main Street. Sylvester Robinson was a locally prominent entrepreneur. It is reported that he established a bank, which later became the Wakefield Institution of Savings, in the Greek Revival house now standing down an alley at 428 Main Street. In 1846 Robinson built a new store, the handsome, well-preserved Greek Revival structure at 433 Main Street at the corner of High Street.

During the first half of the 19th century two churches were established in the district. The First Baptist Church of South Kingstown was started in 1829, and the Church of the Ascension, an Episcopal church, was built in 1840. Both of these structures were removed and replaced later in the 19th century with the handsome church buildings we see today at 236 Main Street and 366 Main Street. The stone dam which stands just north of the Main Street bridge was built about 1850, as were a pair of stone mill buildings on either side of the river which have since been replaced with later structures. About that time the stone building nearby at 430 Main Street was built for the Wakefield Bank, and by 1862 William Kenyon had established a dry goods store in the simple Victorian building nearby at 396 Main Street. In the years before the Civil War a number of handsome houses joined these industrial and commercial ventures in Wakefield. Several of these remain in well-preserved condition today. In addition to Sylvester Robinson's house at 445 Main Street are the Daniel Burdick House, a 5-bay wide Federal-period Cape at 380 Main Street, the neighboring William Robinson House at 390 Main Street, and several 5-bay wide, 2-story, Greek Revival houses including the William Robinson House (390 Main Street), the Nathaniel Armstrong House (235 Main Street), and the C. H. Hazard House (500 Main Street). Other houses in the district from the mid-19th century include the John Armstrong House, a Gothic Revival cottage with sawn bargeboards at 772 Main Street at the north end of the district, and a fine Italianate villa, the Watson House, at 546 Main Street at the south end.

The decades following the Civil War were a period of growth and prosperity for Wakefield which had become the commercial center and most populous settlement in South Kingstown by the turn of the century. In 1895 the village's population was 1,543. After passing through a number of ownerships, the former Robinson mill was purchased about 1862 by Gideon Reynolds who continued to manufacture cotton and wool fabric under the firm

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name the Wakefield Manufacturing Company. In 1867 an earlier wooden mill was damaged by fire so Reynolds built the substantial 3-story, granite, steam powered mill still standing at 10 High Street. In 1875 the property was purchased by Robert Rodman who incorporated it into his fairly extensive textile manufacturing "empire" which manufactured "Kentucky jeans" and "doeskins" fabrics at a number of sites throughout South County. By 1870 another manufacturing enterprise, the J. and N. C. Armstrong Carriage Works, had been established at the north end of the district. This firm, which manufactured the first carriages in South Kingstown, developed from the Armstrong family's wheelwright and blacksmith shops which stood on the banks of the Saugatucket at the north end of the district from before 1855. The auto showroom standing at 245 Main Street was probably built to house the carriage works in the late 19th century.

During the second half of the 19th century, the two churches in the district erected architecturally distinguished new structures, both of which remain well preserved today. About 1852 the Italianate Wakefield Baptist Church was designed by Thomas Tefft, perhaps Rhode Island's most prominent 19th-century architect. The church was enlarged and altered in a sympathetic style in 1891. The Church of the Ascension was built in a Gothic Revival style reminiscent of an English country chapel in 1883 at 366 Main Street. This building was reportedly built from the granite blocks of an old mill at nearby Rocky Brook that had just been destroyed by fire.

It was during this late 19th-century period that Wakefield developed into the leading commercial district in South Kingstown, largely as a result of the construction of the Narragansett Pier Railroad that was put through the village in 1876. This short spur of a railroad was built to connect nearby Narragansett Pier, a developing summer resort at the mouth of Narragansett Bay, with the Boston, Providence, and New York Railroad in West Kingston. Largely supported by the Hazard family, owners of an extensive textile mill in nearby Peace Dale, the railroad provided transportation links both to open coastal waters and to the main East Coast railway corridor.

Although almost no physical evidence now remains of the railroad within the district, its location crossing Main Street just north of Robinson Street fostered the direction and scale of commercial development in the late 19th century. Whereas the commercial structures of the village at the mid-19th century clustered around the Saugatucket Bridge, the more substantial business blocks at the turn of the century were built further northeast on Main Street in proximity to the railroad.

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In 1891 the Queen Anne structure at 344 Main Street was built for Kenyon's Department Store to expand the family's dry goods operations which had been started by William A. Kenyon in 1857. Riding the wave of Wakefield's commercial prosperity, Kenyon's was enlarged considerably in the 1920's. It remains in business today under the ownership of the family who established it over 130 years ago, and it has been listed individually on the National Register.

The Bell Block, a handsome 3-story yellow brick commercial block with decorative copper-clad oriel windows, which is one of the most ambitious commercial structure in town, was built at 345 Main Street in 1899. In that same year, an older, 2-story store that had been built by the Sheldon Furniture Company in 1875 at a site south of the bridge, was moved to the lot next to the Bell Block so it could remain at the center of commercial activities. At the same time an additional story was added, and the structure was architecturally updated with a copper-clad oriel similar to its new neighbor. Several other commercial blocks were built by the first decade of the century to form an almost continuous row of structures with a markedly urban character along the west side of Main Street.

By the turn of the century commercial activities in Wakefield had expanded to the point that most new residential construction was concentrated outside of the district, although there are at least two handsome Queen Anne houses in the district at 522 Main Street and 19 Wright Avenue. Substantial houses were built adjacent to the district on Kenyon Avenue and Highland Avenue. Additional residential construction beyond the perimeter of the district on Columbia Street, High Street, and Kingstown Road now linked Wakefield as part of an almost continuous development with other nearby early mill settlements at Peace Dale and Rocky Brook.

Although the late 19th century represented the primary period of development for Wakefield, there have been some subsequent additions and changes during the 20th century. In 1927 the substantial neo-Classical Washington Trust Company was built near the center of town at 336 Main Street on the site of the old Wakefield School. Probably about the same time the metal and glass trolley-style Whiting's Diner was built (or moved to its site) across the street at 329 Main Street. In 1925, "The Larches" at 521 Main Street, which until that time had been maintained as a private residence, was purchased and converted into an inn. From that date until the present the Larchwood Inn has been a focus for business and civic social affairs in the Wakefield community.



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As is typical of most villages in the late 20th century age of the automobile, a number of earlier structures have given way to parking lots, service stations, and other automobile-related businesses. Fortunately, these removals and alterations to the streetscape are concentrated toward the northern and southern ends of the district, and the architectural fabric of the village which has been woven over almost two centuries remains substantially intact.

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### Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

The boundary encompasses the following lots, all in the Town of South Kingstown:

Map 57-1, Lots 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 48, 49

Map 57-4, Lots 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 225

Map 56-3, Lots 3, 4, 6, 7, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45,  
46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 55, 56, 57, 101, 102, 103, 104,  
105, 106, 123, 124

The district boundary contains the historical commercial and industrial center of the village of Wakefield that developed in generally linear form from the early 18th through the 19th centuries. The district includes the contiguous properties along Main Street (part of the old Post Road), an adjacent complex of mill buildings on High Street, and a house on Wright Avenue.

The northeast end of the district is defined by a cluster of mid-19th-century houses and a church which form a visual terminus as Main Street turns to run toward the east. These structures represent the extent of the village development before about 1870. The properties beyond the district here are not particularly representative of the development of the village of Wakefield but rather of the construction which began to join together multiple small villages in the Town of South Kingstown at the end of the 19th century.

The southwest extent of the district is defined by the Larchwood Inn and a number of adjacent mid-19th-century residences. The Inn, an architecturally distinguished structure, has had strong ties to the Wakefield village from 1831 when it was built as a residence by a local textile mill owner, through the 20th century when the Inn was converted to commercial use and became a focus of business and civic life for the community. Although there are residential structures of significance to the west of this boundary, they are more representative of the development of the area for rural country estates than the development of Wakefield village.



# |

Wakefield Historic District  
Washington County  
South Kingtown, R.I.  
Photo # 1 of 10



BODY'S UNLIMITED

ICHIBAN KARATE STUDIO

WAKEFIELD BRANCH  
FUEL CO.  
789-3084

SALES  
SERVICE  
INSTALLATION

#2

Wakefield Historic District  
Washington County  
South Kingstown, R.I.  
Photo #2 of 10



KENYON'S

SALE  
SALE  
SALE

SALE  
SALE  
SALE



#3

Waterfield Historic District  
Washington County  
South Kingstown, R.I.  
Photo # 3 of 10



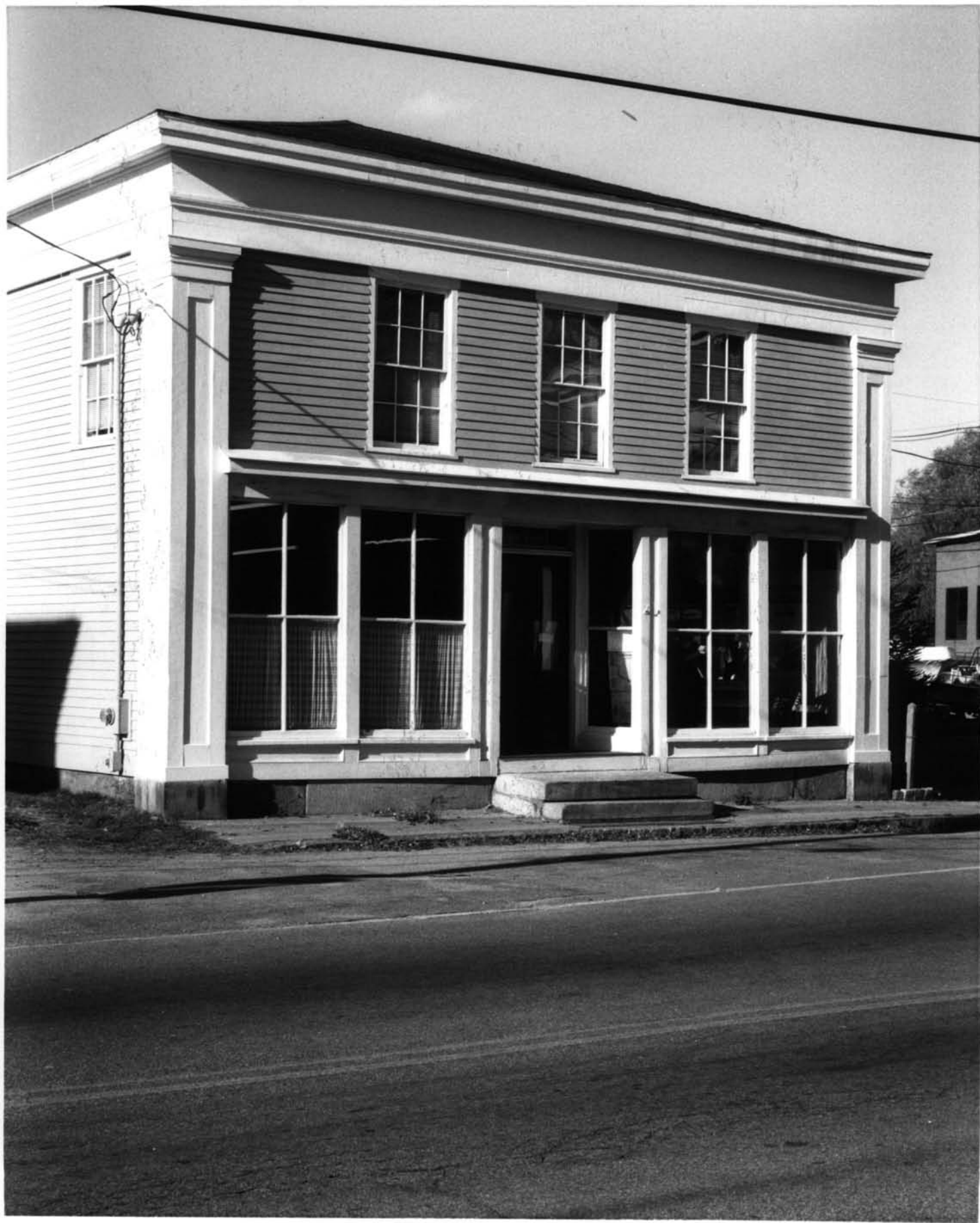
Wakefield Historic District  
Washington County  
South Kingstown, R.I.  
Photo #4 of 10

#4



#5

Wakefield Historic District  
Washington County  
South Kingstown, R.I.  
Photo #5 of 10



#6

Wakefield Historic District  
Washington County  
South Kingstown, R.I.  
Photo # 6 of 10



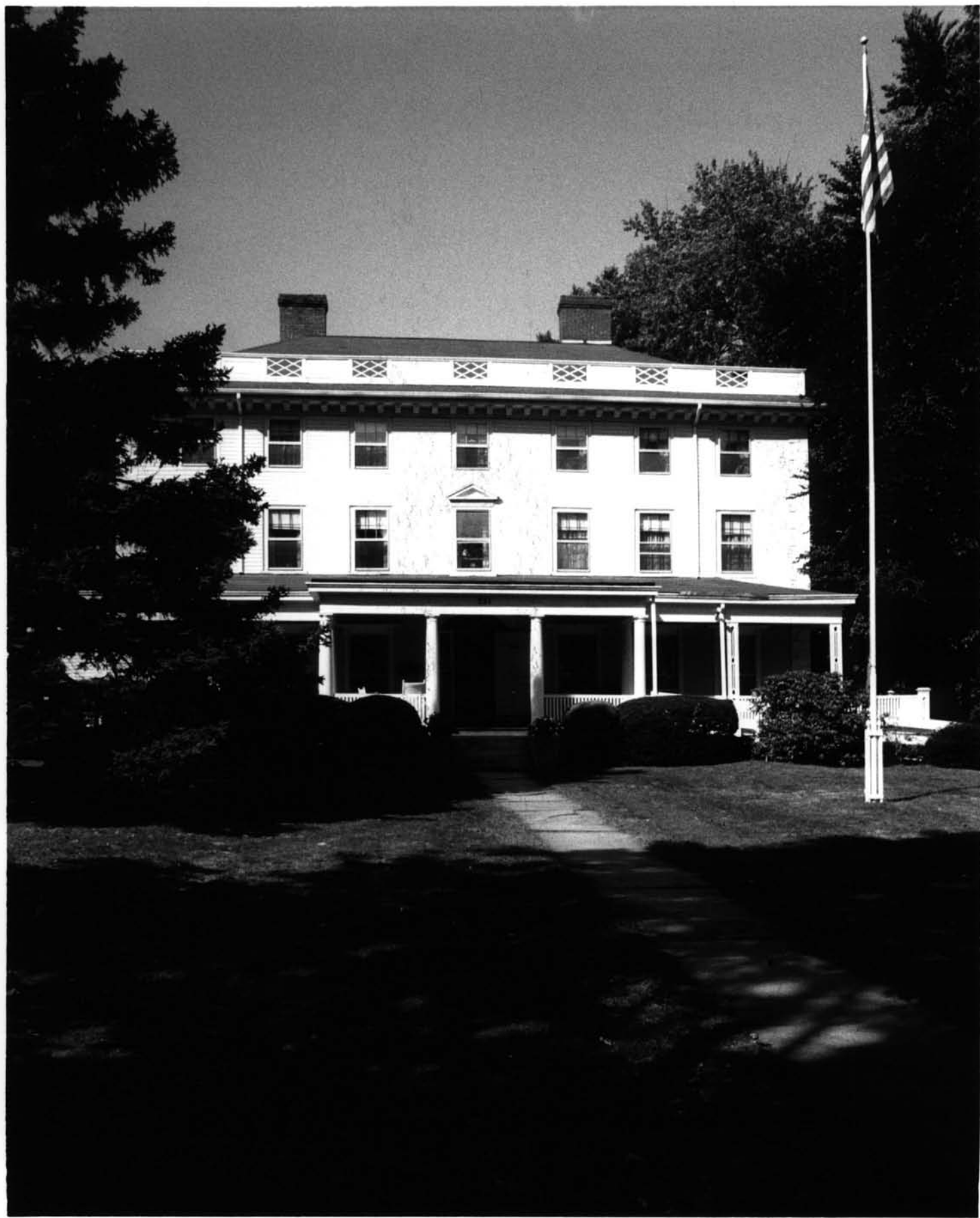




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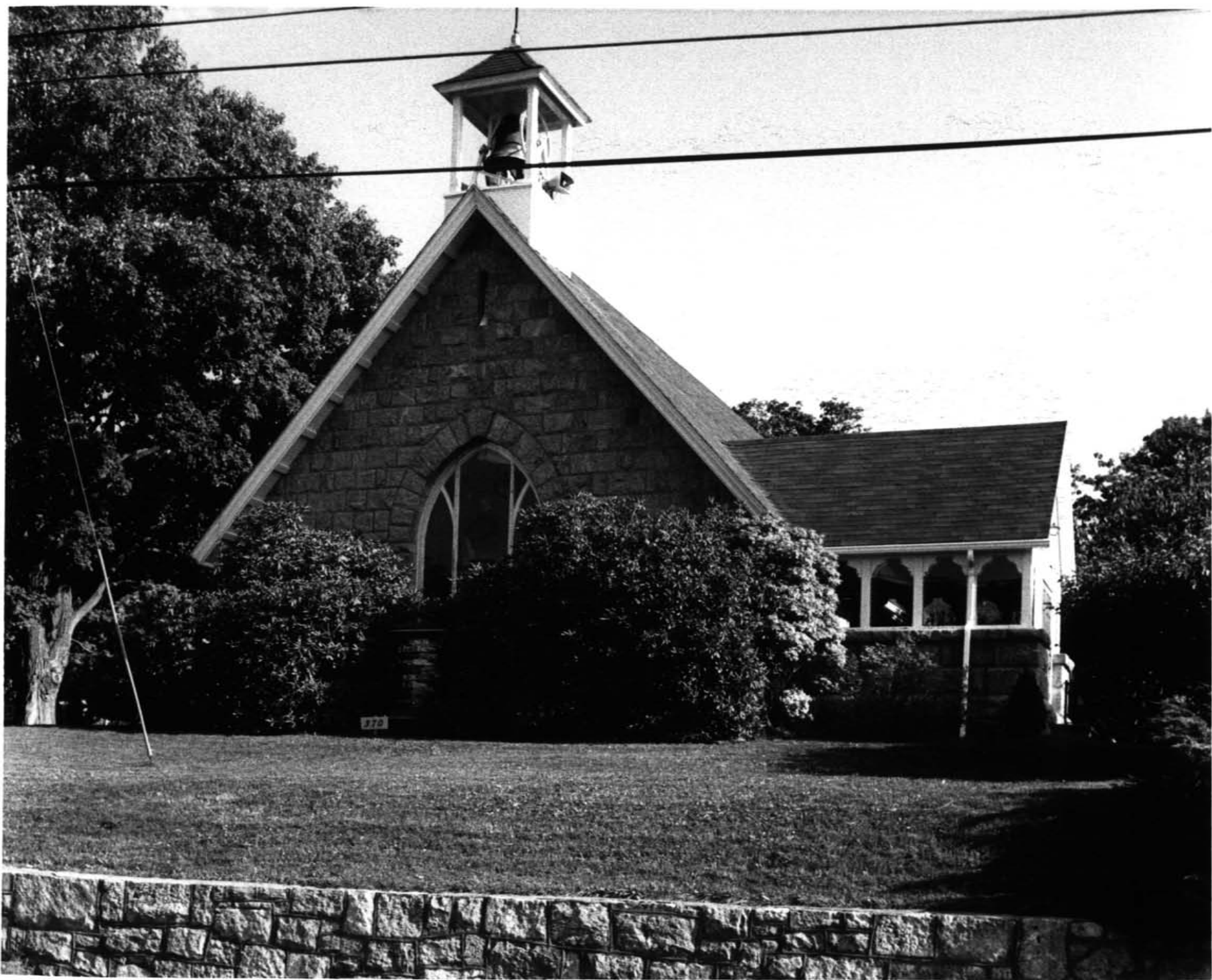
Wakefield Historic District  
Washington County  
South Kingstown, R. I.

Photo #7 of 10



#8

Wakefield Historic District  
Washington County  
South Kingstown, R.I.  
Photo # 8 of 10



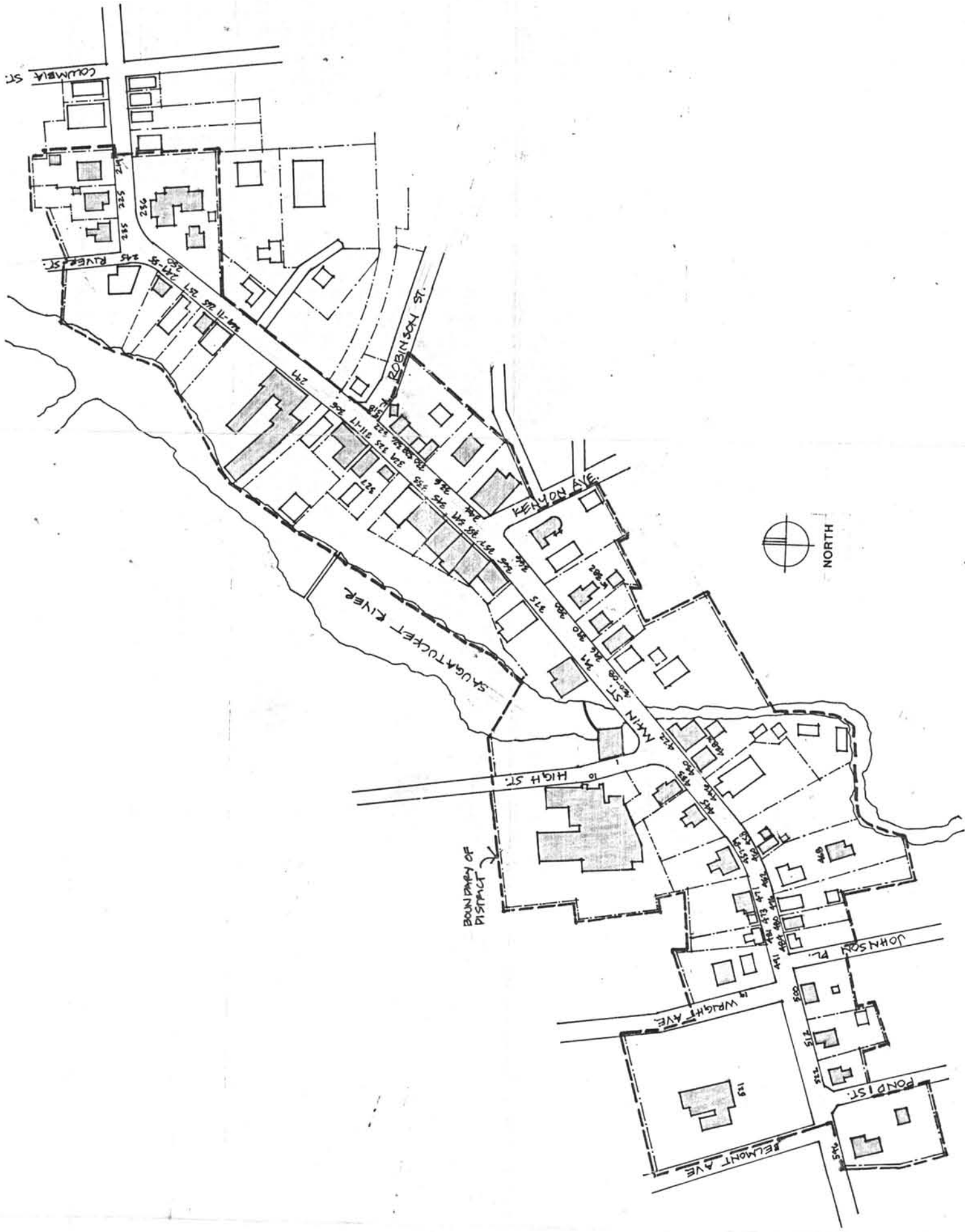
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Wakefield Historic District  
Washington County  
South Kingstown, R.I.  
Photo #9 of 10



#10

Wakefield Historic District  
Washington County  
South Kingtown, R.I.  
Photo # 10 of 10



**WAKEFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT**  
**South Kingstown, Rhode Island**

(NOT TO SCALE)

**KEY**

- ▒ CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURE
- NON-CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURE

PREPARED BY: CLIFFORD M. BENSHTAW, AIA  
 MAY, 1995