STATE: Rhode Island
COUNTY: Providence

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(TYPE ALL ENTRIES - COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS)

1. NAME
   COMMON:
   Foster Center Historic District
   AND/OR HISTORIC:
   "Foster Centre"

2. LOCATION
   STREET AND NUMBER:
   See Continuation Sheet 1
   CITY OR TOWN: Foster
   STATE: Rhode Island
   CODE: 44
   COUNTY: Providence
   CODE: 007

3. CLASSIFICATION
   CATEGORY
   (Check One)
   District
   Site
   Object
   Building
   Structure
   AND/OR HISTORIC
   "Poster Centre"

   OWNERSHIP
   Public
   Private
   Both

   PUBLIC ACQUISITION
   Public Acquisition:
   In Process
   Being Considered

   STATUS
   Occupied
   Unoccupied
   Preservation work in progress

   ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
   Yes:
   Restricted
   Unrestricted
   No

   PRESENT USE
   (Check One or More as Appropriate)
   Agricultural
   Commercial
   Educational
   Entertainment
   Government
   Industrial
   Military
   Park
   Private Residence
   Religious
   Transportation
   Other (Specify)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY
   OWNER'S NAME:
   multiple

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
   COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
   Town Clerk's Office
   STREET AND NUMBER:
   South Killingly Road
   CITY OR TOWN: Foster
   STATE: Rhode Island
   CODE: 02825
   COUNTY: 007

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
   TITLE OF SURVEY:
   Statewide Survey
   DATE OF SURVEY:
   1969 and 1973
   DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
   Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission
   STREET AND NUMBER:
   52 Power Street
   CITY OR TOWN: Providence
   STATE: Rhode Island
   CODE: 02906
   COUNTY: 007
Foster Center Historic District is a small cluster of houses, public buildings, and other structures cohesively related through their common history and through their embodiment of a common vernacular architectural tradition. The District includes most of the hamlet of "Foster Centre," a social and commercial focus for the surrounding area from the mid-eighteenth century onward and the seat of Foster's town government from its incorporation in 1781.

The town of Foster grew up on land purchased from the Narragansett Indians in 1662 by William Vaughan of Newport, Zachariah Rhodes of Pawtuxet, and Robert Westcott of Warwick, in the name of the Westconnaug Company. Other influential Newport men soon joined the Company.

The land to the north of this Westconnaug Purchase was owned by the Providence Proprietors. Inevitably, as purchasers began to survey and claim these western lands after the conclusion of King Philip's War in 1677, land-right disputes arose between the two companies. Following the satisfactory resolution of these disputes in 1708, three successive drawings for 150-acre lots were held to apportion the 32,000 acres of Westconnaug.

The growth of roads in Foster is indicative of early settlement concentrations. Plainfield Pike, four miles to the south of the Historic District, was in use as early as 1709 and was established as a legal highway by act of the General Assembly in 1711. In 1720 a road was laid out through Westconnaug running from the land of the Providence Proprietors south and west to Killingly, Connecticut. It was beside this Killingly Road that the first town pound in Foster (at that time a part of Scituate) was erected in 1732. This stone-walled pound, forty-eight feet square with a heavy lintel hewn of Foster granite and a brook "big enough to fish in" running through its southwest corner, is in surprisingly good condition today. It marks the southwestern bound of the Foster Center Historic District.

About 650 feet to the northeast along the Killingly Road stands the Hammond House, built by Stephen Colegrove in 1756 on land he had purchased one year earlier. Colegrove's house was very likely the first built in Foster Center and is known by the name of its fourth owner, tavern-keeper Thomas Hammond, who bought house, barn, and one-hundred-acre farm in 1767. Today the Hammond House stands out more for its historic associations than for its architecture. It was originally a generously-proportioned gable-roofed house with five-bay facade, center chimney, and five-room floor plan. Changes in the

(See Continuation Sheet - 1)
The Foster Center Historic District is significant for its long history as a focus of community life in western Rhode Island. The local convenience of the Center was first indicated in 1732 when Scituate erected its town pound beside the Killingly Road. Thomas Hammond operated his tavern as early as 1770 and at least one other tavern had opened by 1800. Welcome Rood's Tavern also served as the Center's first general store from the early 1800's until the end of the century. Reuben Hammond ran a thriving blacksmith business in the Center from 1825 onward as did Job Randall nearly a century later.

The Center has always been the seat of Foster's government. The first town meeting, November 19, 1781, was held in Thomas Hammond's tavern, as were many of the early meetings. After 1801 Town Meetings were held in the Baptist Meeting House; they are still held there today. Until 1904 the Town Clerk's Office was located in the home of each subsequent Town Clerk. The Welcome Rood Tavern may have housed this office twice: probably from 1796 to 1803 when Nehemiah Angell was Town Clerk, and definitely in the 1870's when George Phillips held the office.

The Town House is a visible reminder of the Center's dual importance as a civic and religious center. Its shared occupancy for almost all of the 19th century embodies a continuing spirit of cooperation between civil and religious interests in town. For example, the church's first Elder, John Hammond, was also appointed the Town of Foster's first pound keeper.

Architecturally the Foster Center Historic District is important not for any unusual flourishes or refinements, but rather for its continued and clear development of a local style over a period of approximately 150 years. This style is characterized by good proportions, simplicity of line, and careful craftsmanship worked in the local materials of Foster-cut wood and stone.

(See Continuation Sheet - 3)
7. Description

Killingly Road, and Foster Center Road. This is a very plain clapboarded two-and-a-half-story house with a one-story ell to the west (formerly a grain shed) and a pair of ells set at right angles to each other to the east. This pair of ells are the earliest sections of the house, probably dating from the closing decades of the eighteenth century. They may have been built by Nehemiah Angell, an early tavern keeper in town who served as Town Clerk from 1796 to 1803. Rood purchased the house from Angell in the early 1800s and thereafter built the main two-and-a-half story section of the house to serve as a tavern and general store.

Incorporated in this section is a fascinating second-story chamber designed specifically for Hamilton Lodge #15 of Freemasons, who occupied it in 1825. The room had a barrel-vaulted ceiling whose plaster arch and exposed framing are still visible in the attic above a later flat ceiling. The walls above chair-rail level are decorated with stencilled patterns typical of the early and middle 1800s: willow trees alternating with compass-point motifs, a central heart with leaves growing from it, and a cornice of stylized daisies. Similar stencilling was found in a downstairs room but had deteriorated beyond hope of restoration.

Other houses in the Foster Center Historic District noteworthy as much for their historical associations as for their architecture are the Ely Aylsworth House and the Dr. Mowry Arnold House. Aylsworth, another early tavern keeper and an active real estate broker, purchased his five-bay central chimney colonial house in 1824. It served as post office in 1851 and currently houses the Foster Police Headquarters and the Town Council Chamber. Twentieth-century changes have altered the house extensively. The Mowry Arnold House, a much-enlarged early-19th-century "cape," was purchased in 1830 by Dr. Mowry Arnold, practitioner of medicine in Foster for sixty years, as well as school commissioner for forty-six years and town treasurer for twenty-three years. The Arnold farm straddles the path of old Foster Center Road, with house on one side and contemporaneous barn on the other.

The Town Meeting House is the outstanding public building in Foster Center. It was built in 1796 to house the Second Baptist Church in Foster, which had seceded from the First Baptist Church in 1780 under the leadership of Elder John Hammond (brother to tavern-keeper Thomas). In 1801 the congregation permitted the building to be used for the Town (See Continuation Sheet - 3)
7. Description

Meeting, a usage which led the church to deed the building to the Town in 1822, provided that the Town would maintain it and allow its continued use as a place of Christian worship. The Town House, as it subsequently became known, is still used for the annual financial town meeting. It is a large gable-roofed clapboarded building two stories high and five bays wide with a central flat-headed double door. It is set at the top of Howard Hill facing west. The interior architectural treatment, with simple pews on three sides and second-story gallery, is typical of rural Rhode Island church building during this period.

The Baptists eventually built another church in the Center in 1882. This is a good example of a vernacular adaptation of Greek Revival architectural forms and is at once surprising and typical of rural Rhode Island in its very retardataire stylistic usage.

The Foster Center Public Library, originally a one-room schoolhouse built sometime before 1847, also follows the simple lines and gable-end orientation of Greek Revival tradition. Closed in 1952 when a regional school system was instituted, the building was restored and re-opened as the town library in 1957. Two well-executed unobtrusive modern additions (1964 and 1970) have permitted its continued growth.

The Town Clerk's Office (built in 1904), the small wood-shed Jail (built c. 1910), and the Baptist Church parsonage (built c. 1882 and now a private residence) are other small public buildings stylistically derivative from the Greek Revival period.

8. Significance

The District's unique significance, however, is greater than the sum of these diverse elements. It is the preservation of a living sense of the past. Time has dealt kindly with Foster Center. Some alterations to individual buildings have inevitably occurred. A few nondescript twentieth century houses have been built within the District. But the Center maintains its basic historic and architectural integrity.

The area has not been closed in from its surrounding vistas of woods, hills, and fields. Those structures which have been built since Foster Center's most populous days of the 1820's are very much a logical extension of earlier local ar-

(See Continuation Sheet -4)
8. Significance

Architectural traditions and have been carefully placed in relation to pre-existent roads and structures. There are few discordant notes in the District, little to call attention to the tremendous span of years and of history that its twenty-odd structures reflect. The 1904 Town Clerk's Office blends equally well with the pre-1847 School House, the 1796 Town House, and the 1756 Hammond House.

Foster Center Historic District preserves in itself a unified portrait of, and to some extent the quality of life in, a rural Rhode Island town of 150 years ago. The hamlet of Foster Center exists in relation to the land much as it always has. It is an unspoiled phenomenon of increasing scarcity in our age of encroaching metropolis.

9. Bibliography

Henshall, Helen Bemis: Foster (Typewritten manuscript in Foster Center Library, c. 1962).

The Hinterlander, Bulletin of the Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society (Rhode Island, various issues 1957 to the present).

Howard, Daniel: History of the Town House (Handwritten manuscript owned by Helen Henshall, 1826).

Ladies of the Foster Center Fire Auxiliary: Foster, R.I. (Foster, 1963).

Matthews, Margery: Notes on Foster History (personal compilation in her possession).

Old Home Day at Foster Centre, R. I., 1st Observance (Foster, September 15, 1904).

Smith, Howard Bucklin: The Westconnaug Purchase (Manuscript read before the Western Rhode Island Civic Historical Society, 1947).

Walker, Cyrus: The History of Scituate, R.I. (Handwritten manuscript in North Scituate Town Clerk's Office, c. 1900).

Maps

Davenport, Isaac (with corrections and additions by Theodore Foster): Plan of the Town of Foster by Conjecture from the Best Information (Foster, June 20, 1799). Hand-drawn map in Rhode Island Historical Society Manuscripts, Vol. VII.

Foster, Town of: Plat 9 and Plat 20 (Town Clerk's Office, Foster Center).

Matteson, George E.: Foster, R. I. (Hope, Rhode Island, 1971). Plan of the Town of Foster by Conjecture (Foster, Rhode Island October 2, 1781). Hand-drawn map in Rhode Island Historical
9. Bibliography

Society Manuscripts, Vol. VII.
Walling, Henry F.: Map of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations (New York, 1855 and 1862).

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Historic American Buildings Survey RI-38
1958 Federal
Library of Congress
Independence Avenue and 1st Street, S.E.
Washington District of Columbia
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**APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:** 42 acres

### LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

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### STATE: Rhode Island

**ADDRESS:**

52 Power Street, Providence

**STATE:** Rhode Island

**CODE:** 02906

**DATE:** April 1, 1974

### STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

- National [ ]
- State [X]
- Local [ ]

**Name:**

State Historic Preservation Officer

**Title:**

**Date:** APR 12 1974

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

**Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation:**

**ATTEST:**

Keeper of The National Register
1. NAME

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STREET AND NUMBER

see Continuation Sheet #1

3. PHOTO REFERENCE

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4. IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.

View of front facade of the Town Meeting House.
1. NAME
   COMMON: Foster Center Historic District
   AND/OR HISTORIC: Foster Centre
   NUMERIC CODE (Assigned by NPS): 

2. LOCATION
   STATE: Rhode Island
   COUNTY: Providence
   TOWN: Foster

   STREET AND NUMBER: see Continuation Sheet #1

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   DATE: March, 1974
   NEGATIVE FILED AT: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission, 52 Power St., Providence, R.I.

4. IDENTIFICATION
   DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.: View of the barn of the Dr. Mowry Arnold farm.
1. NAME

COMMON: Foster Center Historic District
AND/OR HISTORIC: Foster Centre
NUMERIC CODE (Assigned by NPS):

2. LOCATION

STATE: Rhode Island
COUNTY: Providence
TOWN: Foster

STREET AND NUMBER: see Continuation Sheet #1

3. PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT: Ancelin V. Lynch
DATE: March, 1974
NEGATIVE FILED AT R.I. Historical Preservation Commission, 52 Power St., Providence, R.I.

4. IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.

View of the exterior of the Thomas Hammond House, from the northeast.
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

*(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph)*

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| STREET AND NUMBER | see Continuation Sheet #1 |

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<td>View of the Foster Town Pound.</td>
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1. **NAME**
   - **COMMON**: Foster Center Historic District
   - **AND/OR HISTORIC**: Foster Centre

2. **LOCATION**
   - **STATE**: Rhode Island
   - **COUNTY**: Providence
   - **TOWN**: Foster

3. **PHOTO REFERENCE**
   - **PHOTO CREDIT**: Ancelin V. Lynch
   - **DATE**: March 1974

4. **IDENTIFICATION**
   - **DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.**
     View of Foster Center Public Library, showing the "Hemlock Schoolhouse" core, and modern addition.
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Boundary of district: 

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS and USC&GS
Topography by planetary surveys 1942-1943
Revised 1955
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on Rhode Island coordinate system
1,000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
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**PROPERTY MAP FORM**

_Type all entries - attach to or enclose with map_

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**STATE:** Rhode Island

**COUNTY:** Providence
Foster Center Historic District
Selective Inventory

**Key to District Map**

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<td>Town Pound, 1732</td>
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<td>Thomas Hammond House, 1756</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Foster Town Jail, c. 1910 (moved)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Town Clerk's Office--&quot;Benjamin Eddy Building,&quot; 1904</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Foster Center Baptist Church, 1882</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Welcome Rood Tavern, c. 1780; main section c. 1820</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Job Randall's Blacksmith Shop, c. 1901</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Baptist Parsonage, c. 1882</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Foster Center Public Library--&quot;Hemlock School,&quot; before 1847</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Ely Aylsworth House, c. 1780</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Town House--&quot;Baptist Meeting House,&quot; 1796</td>
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<td>Hopkins House, c. 1800</td>
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<td>Dr. Mowry Arnold House, c. 1800</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Arnold Farm Barn, c. 1830</td>
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FOSTER CENTER HISTORIC DISTRICT
Foster, Providence County, Rhode Island

Boundary

Scale: One inch equals approximately 200 feet

R. I. Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
April 1995