

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Life Saving Station at Narragansett Pier

AND/OR COMMON

Coast Guard House

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

40 Ocean Road

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Narragansett

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2 - Edward Beard

STATE

Rhode Island

VICINITY OF  
CODE

44

COUNTY

Washington

CODE

009

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

### CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

### OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

### STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

### PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

George Mansour

STREET & NUMBER

21 Vernon Street

CITY, TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island 02903

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Washington County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

1693 Kingstown Road

CITY, TOWN

West Kingston

STATE

Rhode Island

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		DATE _____

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

The Coast Guard House was a U. S. life saving station from the time of its construction in 1888 until 1946. It stands on the shore side of Ocean Road within fifty feet of the water's edge. The original part of the building is an oblong block with semi-circular north end, built of coursed rock-faced granite ashlar. A steep slate roof, semi-conical over the apsidal section, terminates in a gable parapet at the south end. This gable contains a large arch-shaped stone with an anchor carved in relief, the only decorative embellishment of the building. From the exterior, this appears to be a tall one and one half story structure, but inside the space is divided into two full floors with a garret above.

Extensive additions were made to this block when the building was converted into a restaurant and cocktail lounge in the early 1960's. A flat-roofed, L-shaped dining room and kitchen wing was built along the east and south sides of the original structure. Its southwestern end is faced with random-coursed artificial stone veneer; the remainder is of concrete block, with sliding casement windows, and vertical tongue-and-groove boards sheathing the upper half of the walls. This addition is one-story tall, except for a two-story section at the center of the eastern wing. Two smaller, one-story, flat-roofed additions, a vestibule and a utility room, were added to the west and north sides of the building. They are both faced with the same artificial stone veneer used on the dining room wing.

The first floor of the original section served as a boathouse. It was reached through four arched openings: one in the west wall and three more springing from four short columns of rock-faced masonry at the apsidal end of the building. The floor sloped downward toward this arcade and contained runways for the boats, which were brought in from the road through the west arch and slid out into the water through the arcade.

The boathouse is now used as a cocktail lounge. Two tall wooden columns about a foot in diameter stand in the center of the room, supporting the massive wooden beams of the second floor, and an unornamented granite chimney breast with fireplace projects slightly into the room from the east wall. A new, level floor has been built over the sloping one. The west arch has been filled in, and a wooden quarter-turn staircase has been constructed in the southwest corner of the room. The westernmost arch of the arcade has been partly closed up and glazed with sliding casement windows, while the center arch contains a door leading to the utility room addition and the easternmost arch opens into the dining room and kitchen wing. Doorways have been cut through the south and west walls of the old boathouse, the former opening into the dining room and the latter into the new vestibule.

(see continuation sheet #1)

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A bar has been built in the northwest corner of the lounge, and the arch columns have been boxed in and the walls partially covered with wooden paneling.

The second story was originally reached by an exterior flight of stone steps cantilevered out from the east wall. This stairway, now partly encased in wood, rises from within the dining room addition to a small rectangular hall. To the left (west), up a short flight of steps, is the room that served as the station crew's living quarters. At one time closets for the mens' belongings were arranged around the curved north end of the room, but they have been removed. A small closet has been built in the southwest corner, and two lavatories have been added in the southeast corner. Between them the new wooden staircase descends to the first floor. Three large walls in the south wall open out onto a shallow stone balcony with iron railing (one of the windows is now in one of the lavatories). The window openings have been partly filled in to accommodate smaller sashes. A cabinet has been built across the wall where the chimney rises, perhaps obscuring a fireplace. The garret can be reached through a trapdoor in the ceiling at the north end of the room.

From the east end of the second floor hallway, a door provides access to a roof deck over the southern part of the dining room addition, while another door opens into a two room apartment in the two-story section of the dining room addition.

In August of 1975 a fire severely damaged the south end of the second floor, burned through the garret, and destroyed part of the roof. This damage is being repaired so the restaurant can be reopened in May, 1976. The owner hopes to retain as much of the original fabric as possible.

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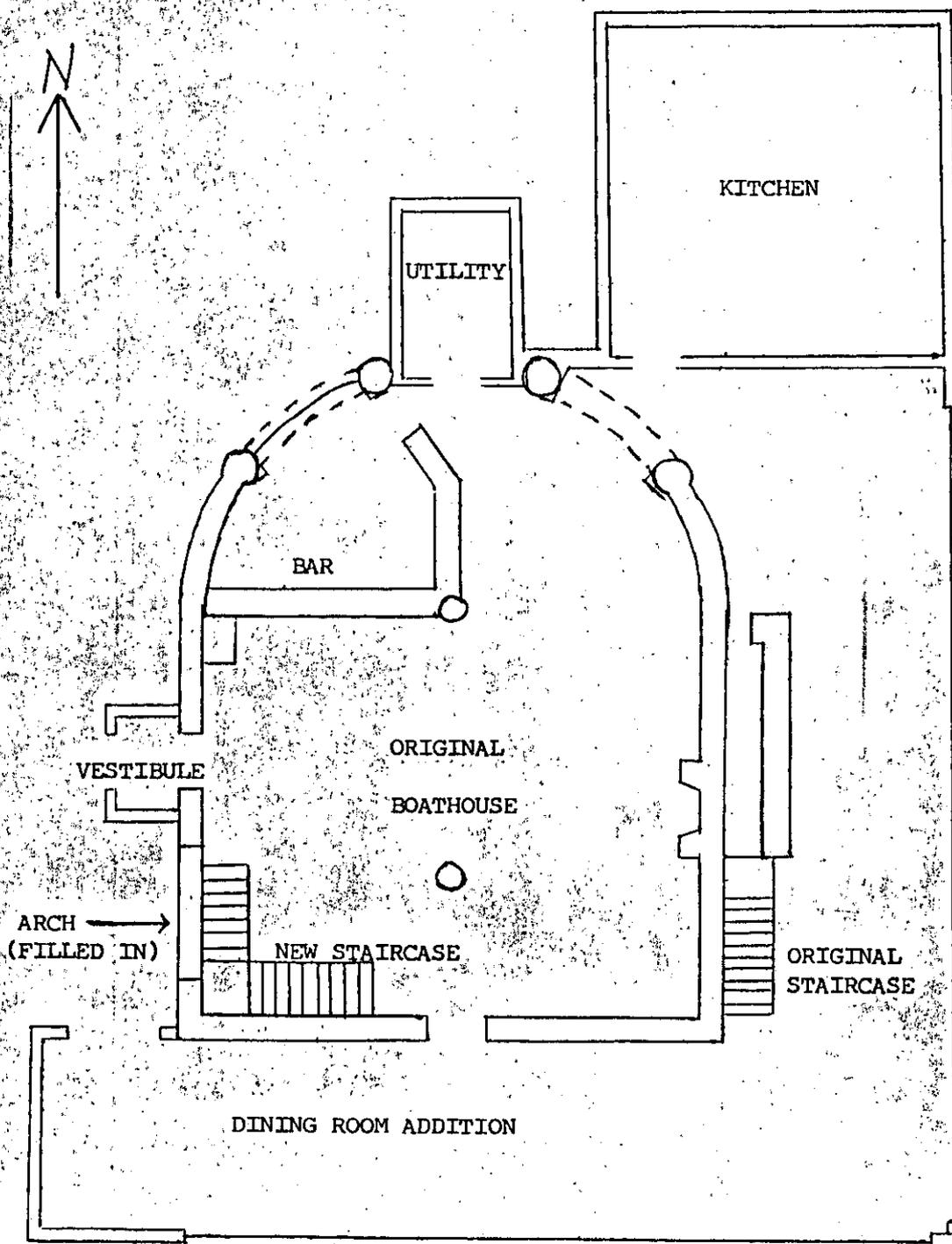
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# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1888

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

McKim, Mead and White

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Life Saving Station at Narragansett Pier was established in the early 1870's as part of a U. S. Life Saving Service expansion program. The Life Saving Service had been founded in 1848 as a volunteer organization responsible for patrolling the New Jersey and Long Island coasts. This volunteer system proved to be unsatisfactory, however, and in 1871 Congress reorganized the Service. Operations were extended to include the New England coast, and full-time crews were hired to man all stations.

Congress authorized the construction of two stations in Rhode Island, one at Narragansett Pier and one on Block Island. The first Pier station, a wooden frame structure, was built at the north end of the town bathing beach and was completed by 1873, the same year the Block Island station was built on the island's western shore. Choice of the Block Island site was undoubtedly influenced by the large number of shipwrecks which occurred on or near the island. Narragansett Pier, though far less dangerous than Block Island, did have a number of treacherous rocks, ledges, and shoals near the shore, a factor which probably led to its designation as a life saving station site.

Other stations were subsequently built in Rhode Island: at Point Judith in 1875-76, New Shoreham in 1876, Watch Hill in 1878, and Brenton Point in 1884-85. In 1888 new buildings were erected at Narragansett, Point Judith, and New Shoreham. The second (present) Pier station, designed by the prominent New York firm of McKim, Mead, and White, was built on a new site just south of the Casino Towers. Stations were also built at Quonochontaug in 1891, Sandy Point in 1898-99, and Green Hill in 1911-12.

In 1915 the Life Saving Service was merged with the Revenue Cutter Service to form the U. S. Coast Guard. At first the new organization maintained all the Life Saving Service stations, relocating some and replacing others with newer structures, but in the late 1920's it began to consolidate operations. One by one the stations were abandoned, including the one at Narragansett, now popularly referred to as the Coast Guard House. Today the Coast Guard maintains three stations in Rhode Island, all built in the 1930's. Of the abandoned Life Saving Service stations, the Narragansett Coast Guard House is the oldest one still standing.

(see continuation sheet #2)

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To an extent, the Coast Guard House is noteworthy as an isolated structure. Seven years after its completion, it was brought to national attention by Russell Sturgis, the eminent nineteenth-century architect and critic. He admired the building's simplicity and lack of academicism, and considered it a good example of the "simple and living architecture...independent of the past" that contemporary architects should be trying to create. Such recognition was flattering, but the Coast Guard House was never to become a landmark in the development of modern American architecture. Its lasting significance is more limited in scope, and is due in large part to its relationship to other buildings.

Along with the Towers (a remnant of the old Casino and already a National Register property) and a few neighboring Victorian structures, the Coast Guard House forms a historic focus for the town center of Narragansett. Before the turn of the century, the Pier was a fashionable resort for business and political figures from all over the United States. Ocean Road and adjacent streets were lined with large, handsome hotels and summer "cottages," some mansard-roofed and bracketed, some in the Shingle Style. Fires, hurricanes, and urban renewal have diminished this architectural heritage and the Coast Guard House is one of the few surviving structures which provides continuity with the past.

Its physical proximity and architectural similarity to the Towers makes it especially important. Designed a few years after the Towers' completion by the same architectural firm, it repeats the same forms and materials and was surely meant to be a companion piece. Though altered, the Coast Guard House still complements the Towers, making it a key element of the town's aesthetic and historic fabric.

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Historical Records Survey, Inventory of Federal Archives in the States,  
(Providence: 1938), series 3: Treasury Department, number 38:  
Rhode Island, pp. 14-167.

Sturgis, Russell, Great American Architects Series #1 - The Work  
of McKim, Mead and White, (New York: May 1895), pp. 81-2.

Whiting, John D., Storm Fighters, (Indianapolis: 1927), pp. 57-65.





Life Saving Station at Narragansett Pier

Narragansett, RI

Robert O. Jones

October 1975

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

View of Life Saving Station (1888) showing its relationship to the Towers of the old Narragansett Casino (1883-85), facing north.

photo number 1



Life Saving Station at Narragansett Pier

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View of Life Saving Station from third floor of  
the Towers, facing southeast.

photo number 2



Narragansett Pier, R. I.

FIG. 72.—LIFE-SAVING STATION.

Life Saving Station at Narragansett Pier

Narragansett, RI

Photographer unknown

1895

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

Old view of the Life Saving Station from Great American Architects Series #1 -- The Work of McKim, Mead and White, facing northeast.

photo number 3

