Form 10-300

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
(NATIONAL HISTORIC INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM LANDMARKS)
(Type all entries – complete applicable sections)

1. NAME
   COMMON: Vernon House
   AND/OR HISTORIC: Vernon House

2. LOCATION
   STREET AND NUMBER: 46 Clarke Street
   CITY OR TOWN: Newport
   STATE: Rhode Island
   CODE: 44

3. CLASSIFICATION
   CATEGORY (Check One)
   [ ] District [x] Building [ ] Site [x] Structure [ ] Object
   OWNERSHIP
   [ ] Public [ ] Private [x] Both
   [ ] In Process
   [ ] Being Considered
   [x] Public Acquisition:
   [ ] Occupied [ ] Unoccupied
   [ ] Preservation work in progress
   ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
   [x] Yes: [ ] Restricted [ ] Unrestricted
   [ ] No
   PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)
   [ ] Agricultural [ ] Industrial [ ] Military [ ] Religious
   [ ] Commercial [ ] Educational [ ] Entertainment [ ] Private Residence
   [ ] Transportation [ ] Other (Specify)
   [ ] Comments

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY
   OWNER'S NAME: Mrs. Quinto Maganini
   STREET AND NUMBER: "Montrose" Calhoun Drive
   CITY OR TOWN: Greenwich
   STATE: Rhode Island
   CODE: 44

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
   COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
   Newport City Hall
   STREET AND NUMBER: Washington Square
   CITY OR TOWN: Newport
   STATE: Rhode Island
   CODE: 44

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS:
   TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Buildings Survey (3 photos)
   DATE OF SURVEY: 1937 [x] Federal [ ] State [ ] County [ ] Local
   DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
   Division of Prints and Photographs
   STREET AND NUMBER: Library of Congress/Annex
   CITY OR TOWN: Washington
   STATE: D.C.
   CODE: 11
### 7. DESCRIPTION

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<th>Good</th>
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<table>
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**DESCRIPTION**

The Vernon House is a two story frame building with a low hipped roof surmounted by a balustraded walk. The three dormers on the front facade are topped by segmental pediments; the two dormers on each end have triangular pediments and the three on the rear have triangular pediments on the ends and a segmental one in the center. The exterior walls are given a rusticated woodblock treatment sanded during painting to achieve a roughcast effect simulating ashlar masonry. The scoring is handled to create the effect of flat arches above the lower windows and doors. A wooden beltcourse is also provided to complete the very successful illusion of a stone building. The doorway is framed by a well proportioned full Doric cornice and frieze, supported by square plain Doric pilasters. The rear door has a similar frontispiece, smaller in scale with a large round-headed window above which lights the stairlanding.

The interior, as altered in 1759, has the typical Georgian floor plan of a central hall with two rooms opening off either side on each floor. The wide hall is wainscoted with fielded paneling and has a molded cornice. An elliptical arch resting on large consoles is decorated with foliate insets in the spandrels. It serves as a frame for the graceful curve of the stair's banister with its elaborately twisted balusters.

When the house was enlarged by Bowler he installed paneled mantel breasts and wainscoted all four walls of the north parlor as well as a dentiled cornice and a two story overmantel with broken scroll pediment. The proportions of the overmantel are too large for the room and it seems to have been brought from another house. The dining room in the northeast corner is also wainscoted with fielded paneling and has a deep molded cornice.

In 1937, frescos of a Chinese character were discovered under the wall paneling in the northwest room. They were painted directly on smooth plaster, above the lower part painted to simulated wood paneling of the bolection type. Molding, stiles, and rails were carefully depicted, then marbled, with panel faces reserved for pictorial scenes. These panels are rare scenes which indicate a knowledge of the cycle of Buddhist Hell and Chinese court punishments. Upstairs in the northwest room another original painting of a West Indies scene was found behind the mantel breast in 1879 during repairs. It was removed and subsequently disappeared.

The window on the stair landing is a single round-headed opening with side paneling to simulate a Palladian window. The upper hall itself has a modillioned cornice and paneled wainscoting. The upper rooms have exposed summer beams, encased in paneling. In a similar manner the plates (supports for the roof) are exposed and given a narrow molding to act as the room cornices.

**BOUNDARY**

The Vernon House is located at the northeast corner of the intersection...
of Clarke and Mary Streets, enclosed by a fence on a low stone wall which defines the boundary, beginning at the northwest corner on Clarke Street, the line runs east along the south boundary of the adjoining property (currently owned by Juliette Mary Giard) to the northeast corner at the property line, then south along the rear or west boundaries of the properties on Spring Street, (currently owned by Clyde W. Tartar and Edward B. Ward), to the north curb of Mary Street, then west along Mary Street to the east curb of Clarke Street, then north on Clarke Street to the point of beginning, as described in the deed registered on January 22, 1965 in the Newport City Hall.
Vernon House, Newport, Rhode Island, is one of the city's most interesting buildings representing two periods of style. In the older section of the house, unusual wall murals were discovered which depict Chinese scenes of the Buddhist cycle. These probably date from the second quarter of the eighteenth century but this section itself dates from around the turn of the century. In 1759 a hall and rooms to the south were added to bring the building to its present appearance of a two story frame Georgian mansion, rusticated and sanded to imitate ashlar masonry with a wide classic doorway, modillioned and dentiled cornice, and a low hipped roof with flat balustraded deck. As completed the house exhibits the most academic proportions of any colonial house still standing in Newport. The Newport architect, Peter Harrison, designer of the Redwood Library and Brick Market, is often mentioned in connection with the Vernon House. Its horizontality and the impression of mass created by the heavy rustication hint at a Renaissance palazzo, creating an imposing colonial residence of great dignity and importance.

HISTORY

William Gibbs, a painter, owned a house on the site of the Vernon House in 1708 and evidence of the frame of the northern half indicates it belongs to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. The Gibbs-Gardner family owned the house until 1744. Two fragmentary deeds list Patrick Grant and Charles Bowler as subsequent owners. Bowler probably bought the house in 1753 when he became Collector of Revenue. In 1759 Bowler sold the property to his son, Metcalf, a successful merchant in the West India trade. Metcalf was active in local politics. Appointed as Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court in 1776, he retained the post for a year while doubling as a secret agent for the British Crown. In Stiles map of 1758 the house is shown as two stories with one chimney, half the size of today's house. When he bought the house, Metcalf added the present hall and rooms on the south, transforming the structure into its current appearance.

In 1773 Bowler sold the house to William Vernon, a successful merchant and ardent patriot. When the French arrived in Newport in 1780, General Rochambeau was quartered in the house.
The house remained in the Vernon family until 1872 when it was purchased at auction by Harwood Read. In 1912, the Charity Organization Society, in order to save Rochambeau's headquarters, bought the house and made a partial restoration of it. It served as the headquarters of the Family Service Society until 1966 when it was purchased by Mrs. Quinto Maganini, who uses it as a private residence.
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES
Downing, Antoinette F., Early Homes of Rhode Island, Richmond Va., 1937.
and Scully, Vincent J. Jr., The Architectural Heritage of

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES
DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORNER</th>
<th>LATITUDE</th>
<th>LONGITUDE</th>
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<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 3 acres

11. FORM PREPARED BY
NAME AND TITLE: Patricia Heintzelman, architectural historian. Landmark Review Project, original form prepared by Charles Snell, 1967
ORGANIZATION: Historic Sites Survey
STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L. Street, N.W.
CITY OR TOWN: Washington
STATE: D.C.

12. 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 [ ] Local [ ]

Name [NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS]

Title [NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS]

Date

13. NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

[NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS] Designated: [ ]

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date [ ]

ATTEST:

[ ]

Keeper of the National Register

Date [ ]

Director, C.1.1.1.1.
Built in 1758, the Vernon House is a good example of academically correct Late Georgian domestic architecture.

Constructed by Metcalf Bowler, who later became Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, the house was acquired by William Vernon, a wealthy merchant and shipowner, in 1773 and remained in the possession of the Vernon family until 1872. During the Revolution the Vernon House was headquarters for the French general, Count de Rochambeau, while his army was in Newport, July 1780 to June, 1781.

The Vernon House is a two-and-a-half story frame structure with a hipped roof that is surmounted by a captain's walk or balustrade. The three dormers on the five-bay front facade are topped by segmental pediments and the two dormers on each end have triangular pediments. The cornice is of the modillion and dentil type. The exterior walls are given a rusticated woodblock treatment; the central entrance has a flat pediment with frieze and is flanked by two Doric pilasters.

The house has usual Georgian floor plan of structure with two interior chimneys: two large rooms open off either side of the central hall on each floor. The wide hall is wainscoted and divided by a foliated, bracketed arch. The stairs, set far at the back, have twisted balusters, ramped wall paneling and rail, and a Palladian window at the landing. The north parlor (to the left of the hall) is paneled from floor to ceiling, the windows have paneled shutters and deep seats, and the mantel is crowned with a broken-scroll pediment. The paneling of the two outer walls of the room was removed and revealed curious wall paintings of several widely

(Continued)
NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS
SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

This sheet is to be used for giving additional information or comments, for more space for any item on the regular form, and for recording pertinent data from future studies, visitations, etc. Be brief, but use as many supplementary Sheets as necessary. When items are continued they should be listed, if possible, in numerical order of the items. All information given should be headed by the item number, its name, and the word (cont’d), as, Description and Importance (cont’d) . . .

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Rhode Island | NAME(S) OF SITE
-------------|----------------
             | Vernon House

8. References:


7. Continued:

differing styles, including a panel of flower paintings and several large panels of paintings showing a strong Chinese influence. Other rooms in the house also have fine paneling and some had paper hangings on the walls.

The Vernon House was used as the headquarters of the Family Service Society from 1912 to 1966. In fair condition, the structure is now being renovated and will be opened as a historic house museum.