Form 10-300
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Typical entries - complete applicable sections)

1. NAME

COMMON: Hunter House

AND/OR HISTORIC: Hunter House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 54 Washington Street

CITY OR TOWN: Newport

STATE: Rhode Island

COUNTY: Newport

CODE: 005

3. CLASSIFICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>OWNERSHIP</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC</th>
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PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present Use</th>
<th>Owner Name</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preservation Society of Newport County</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Preservation Society of Newport County

STREET AND NUMBER: Washington Square

CITY OR TOWN: Newport

STATE: Rhode Island

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

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Historic American Building Survey (35 sheets, 6 photos)

DATE OF SURVEY: 1936-1937

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Division of Prints and Photographs

STREET AND NUMBER: Library of Congress/Annex

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: D.C.
The Hunter House is a large two-and-one-half story frame and clapboard structure with a balustraded gambrel roof. The house is of heavy stud construction with brick filled walls plastered over in true English half-timber. Oak horizontal strip lapped sheathing boards are laid over the half-timbering and covered with beaded strip lapped clapboards.

The rectangular windows are arranged symmetrically on the front (land) and end sides but the water facade has an asymmetrical arrangement of two windows to a floor north of the door and one south of the door. A round-headed window lights the stair landing above the segmented pediment of the door. Two dormers light the attic of the west side. All of the windows have heavily molded frames which give plasticity to the otherwise flat clapboarding of the exterior. The asymmetry of the windows supports the belief that the southern part of the house was added after 1758. The difference in the chimneys also supports the view that the house was constructed at two different times.

Ezra Stile's map of 1758 shows a house with only one chimney, and the original construction of the west facade as shown in an old stereoscopic view, had two unique segmental-headed stair landing windows and an off-center doorway, early in appearance. It is possible that James Sheffield built a house soon after 1719, and that Lt. Governor Wanton, rather than Nichols enlarged it, adding the southern part. The door as well as the detail of the interior paneling, however, dates about 1740 in style.

In 1870 when the building became a convalescent home, the doors were widened and the frame and pediments removed. That on the land side was lost but the elaborate segmental pediment was salvaged and nailed over the old west entry of the Dennis House, now St. John's Rectory. During the restoration this was returned to the house and installed above the Washington Street side instead of the waterfront as this is now the main entrance. The pediment is broken in the center with a pineapple ornament and richly foliated ends, almost in an exact copy of the doorway of the Colony House. Also in the 1870's a rear porch was added which caused the removal of the two segmental-headed stair landing windows. Only one of these has been replaced in the restoration.

The interior has a typical mid-eighteenth century floor plan of four rooms, two on either side of a wide central hall. The mahogany staircase in the center hall has richly carved balusters in a variety of twisted shapes, located behind a low elliptical dividing arch on consoles, similar in form to the Vernon House, another Newport national historic landmark.

Bolection paneling was used for all the woodwork of the Hunter House. Both the main parlor and the room above have the system of arched cupboards flanking the mantelpiece. The woodwork is beautifully executed. Corinthian pilasters subdivide the paneling and carved cherubs heads fill the spandrels of the cupboard arches. The large windows have interior shutters and deep window seats of mahogany. The cupboards and
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paneling in these parlors give evidence of being made for different places, as do the stairs and segmental stairlanding windows. It seems likely that Wanton installed some of the various parts and supervised the decoration soon after 1758.

The walls of the main parlor seem to have first been painted with a red tone with the woodwork of pilasters, baseboards, cupboards and window seat molding painted to simulate veined marble. The four cherubs in the spandrels were rosy cheeked, brown eyed and rainbow winged. Sometime later the paneling was painted yellow grey-green. Still later all the marbling and polychrome was painted over with a light stone color. The original interior designs were carefully restored after painstaking research with special craftsman brought in to complete the work. The southeast parlor has been restored in walnut graining and the southwest dining room in rose cedar graining. The other rooms were apricot or dark green.

BOUNDARY

Although the wharf and gardens associated with the original Hunter House have long disappeared the house still maintains its vista on the waterfront. Part of the land to the south was sold to the City in 1972 but is included in the boundary as part of the original land, maintaining some historical perspective on its surroundings, beginning at the northwest corner at the shore of Narragansett Bay continuing east in a straight line until it becomes Elm Street, at the northeast corner, then south along the west curb of Washington Street to the land of the Old Colony Steamboat Company, then west along the property line of the Steamboat Company to Narragansett Bay, then north along the shore to the point of beginning as described in the deed of October 9, 1945.
Measured drawing of Hunter House from Downing and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640 to 1915*. 
The Nichols-Wanton-Hunter House is probably the best example of early Georgian domestic architecture of its kind in Rhode Island, and ranks high in comparison with early Georgian houses elsewhere. It was presumably built for Deputy Governor Jonathan Nichols, Jr., sometime between 1748-1754, but there is evidence that it is an enlargement of an earlier house built soon after 1719. The enlargement may have been made for Colonel Joseph Wanton, Jr., Deputy Governor from 1764-1767. Today the Hunter House is a spacious two-story frame and clapboard building with a balustraded gambrel roof. The interior has undergone careful restoration and its elaborate interior woodwork with painted ornament provides a rare and interesting documented survival of a colorful colonial interior.

HISTORY

In 1748 a lot was sold to Jonathan Nichols, a prosperous merchant, proprietor of the Whitehorse Tavern and owner of at least one privateer. The Stiles Map of 1758 shows a house with one chimney and a western facade different from the later stereoscopic view of J. Appley Williams done prior to the 1870's.

In 1756, Colonel Joseph Wanton, Jr., Deputy Governor from 1764-1767, bought the mansion house along with a wharf, warehouse, stables, and garden which once formed the entire complex. If the Stiles Map is correct and the house was enlarged after 1758, it probably took place during Wanton's ownership. Much of the interior woodwork seems to have been cut down from another house and might have been salvaged by Wanton from Malbone, his estate which burned in 1766.

During the Revolution Admiral de Ternay, First in Command of the French Navy, was quartered there. In 1786 it was sold to John Innes Clark and Joseph Nightengale, of Providence. The house changed hands two more times until 1805 when it was purchased by William R. Hunter, a lawyer. When Hunter went to Washington he attempted to sell the house, and his advertisement at this time indicates the wharf was gradually falling into disuse. Because of the low ebb of Newport shipping the house was not sold and he returned to it in 1844, remaining there until his death in 1849.

In 1859 The Old Colony Steamboat Company bought the house to use as a
boarding house. In the 1870's it was transformed into a convalescent home and at this time some damaging interior and exterior changes were made. These included the widening of the entrances, building a rear porch and removing the front and rear door frames.

In 1915 it was sold to the Sisters of St. Joseph and finally in 1945 to the Preservation Society of Newport County who restored the house to its original form through careful research. The Hunter House is operated today as a house museum.
MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Downing, Antoinette F., Early Homes of Rhode Island, Richmond, VA., 1937.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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<th>CORNER</th>
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APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 2 acres

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

STATE: CODE COUNTY: CODE
STATE: CODE COUNTY: CODE
STATE: CODE COUNTY: CODE
STATE: CODE COUNTY: CODE


ORGANIZATION Historic Sites Survey

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L. Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: D.C.

12. STATE LIABILITY 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 ____________________________ (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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

Landmark Name __________________

Date ____________________________ (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

ATTEST:

Date ____________________________ (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)
# Form 10-301

**State:** Rhode Island  
**County:** Newport  
**For NPS Use Only**

## Property Map Form

**Type all entries - attach to or enclose with map**

### 1. Name

**Common:** Hunter House  
**And/or Historic:** Hunter House

### 2. Location

**Street and Number:** 54 Washington Street  
**City or Town:** Newport  
**State:** Rhode Island  
**Code:** 44  
**County:** Newport  
**Code:** 005

### 3. Map Reference

**Source:** U.S.G.S. 7.5' Series, Newport Quadrangle  
**Scale:** 1:24000  
**Date:** 1957 photorevised 1970

### 4. Requirements

**To be included on all maps:**
1. Property boundaries where required.
2. North arrow.
3. Latitude and longitude reference.

---

## Property Photograph Form

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

### 1. Name

**Common:** Hunter House  
**And/or Historic:** Hunter House

### 2. Location

**Street and Number:** 54 Washington Street  
**City or Town:** Newport  
**State:** Rhode Island  
**Code:** 44  
**County:** Newport  
**Code:** 005

### 3. Photo Reference

**Photo Credit:** Patricia Heintzelman  
**Date of Photo:** October 1974  
**Negative Filed At:** Historic Sites Survey, NPS

### 4. Identification

**Describe View, Direction, Etc.:** View of first floor stair hall
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Property Photograph Form

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

1. Name
   Common: Hunter House
   And/or Historic: Hunter House

2. Location
   Street and Number: 54 Washington Street
   City or Town: Newport
   State: Rhode Island
   Code: 44
   County: Newport
   Code: 005

3. Photo Reference
   Photo Credit: Patricia Heintzelman
   Date of Photo: October 1974
   Negative Filed At: Historic Sites Survey, NPS

4. Description View, Direction, Etc.
   Interior view: northeast or main parlor
1. NAME

COMMON: Hunter House
AND/OR HISTORIC: Hunter House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 54 Washington Street
CITY OR TOWN: Newport
STATE: Rhode Island
CODE: 44
COUNTY: Newport
CODE: 005

3. PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT: Patricia Heintzelman
DATE OF PHOTO: October 1974
NEGATIVE FILED AT: Historic Sites Survey, NPS

4. IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.

West or water side of Hunter House
**Erected in 1743, the Nichols-Wanton-Hunter House is an excellent example of an Early Georgian frame residence; it is also the finest example of Early Georgian domestic architecture in Rhode Island.**

Constructed by Deputy Governor Jonathan Nichols, Jr., a wealthy Newport merchant, the house was acquired in 1754 by Joseph Wanton, Jr., who also served as Deputy Governor of Rhode Island. A Loyalist, Wanton fled to New York City during the Revolution and his house was confiscated. The structure became the quarters of the ailing Admiral de Ternay, commander of the French fleet that arrived in Newport in 1780, who died there. William Hunter, a lawyer and Assistant Secretary of State, was the owner of the house for two decades early in the 19th century.

The Hunter House is a spacious two-story frame clapboarded structure with a balustraded gambrel roof. The walls are brick lined. The Early Georgian exterior, with its heavily molded window caps and projecting cornice, is severe in appearance except for the broken segmental pediment over the central doorway on the street (east) front. The structure has two interior chimneys and the usual Georgian floor plan of the four room type, with two rooms on either side of the central hall on each floor. The stairway in the wide hall has curved and ramped rails and carved twisted balusters. The house contains six rooms wainscoted from floor to ceiling with raised or bolection paneling on all.

![Pediment](https://example.com/pediment.png)

This pediment, which is almost an exact copy of the pediment on the main (west) facade of the Old State (Colony) House in Newport, was originally located on the rear or waterfront facade of the Hunter House.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

See page 3.

**REPORTS AND STUDIES**

(Historic American Building Survey: (35 sheets, 1936)
(6 photos, 1937).

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

1. Received
2. Attached
3. Condition: Excellent

**PRESENT USE**

Museum

**DATE OF VISIT**

Sept. 18, 1967

**DATE**

Nov. 27, 1967

**SIGNATURE**

Charles W. Snell

**HISTORIAN**

13.

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*DRY MOUNT ON AN 8 X 10 SHEET OF FAIRLY HEAVY PAPER. IDENTIFY BY VIEW AND NAME OF THE SITE, DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH, AND NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER. GIVE LOCATION OF NEGATIVE. IF ATTACHED, ENCLOSE IN PROPER NEGATIVE ENVELOPES.

*IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS NEEDED USE SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET, 10-317a, AND REFER TO ITEM NUMBER*
UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  

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 Supplement 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, 6. Description and Importance (cont'd)...

Page 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>NAME(S) OF SITE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>Nichols-Wanton-Hunter House</td>
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</table>

7. Continued:

four walls. The two northeast parlors (one up and one down) also have Corinthian pilasters set on high pedestals and fireplaces with Dutch tiles around them and arched shell cupboards on either side. The large square-headed windows have interior shutters and deep window seats of mahogany.

Condition

The house changed hands many times during the 19th century and was used as a boarding house, a convalescent home, and convent. The most important changes to the house were made in the 1870's, when the front and rear entrances were widened, a rear porch was added, and the front and rear pediments over the doorways were removed. Adding the porch also made it necessary to remove the rear (west) segmental-headed stair landing window. The house was acquired by the Preservation Society of Newport County in 1945 and has since been completely restored. The original broken segmental pediment has been salvaged from another house where it had been placed, and set on the street front of the Hunter House. The rear porch has been removed and the rear segmental-headed landing window and a similar pedimented door have been reconstructed. Maintained in excellent condition and furnished with 18th century pieces, the Hunter House is open to visitors.
UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS
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