**Form 10-300**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places**
Inventory - Nomination Form

*(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)*

1. **Name**
   - Common: Covell (William King, III) House
   - And/or Historic: Sanford (Milton H.) House; Villa Edna; Villa Marina

2. **Location**
   - Street and Number: 72 Washington Street
   - City or Town: Newport
   - State: Rhode Island, 02840

3. **Classification**
   - Category (Check One)
     - District: Building [x], Site, Object
     - Site: Building [x], Structure, Object
     - Object: [x]
   - Ownership
     - Public: [x], Private: [ ]
     - Both: [ ]
   - Access to the Public
     - Occupied: [x], Unoccupied: [ ]
     - Preservation work in progress: [x], No: [ ]
   - Present Use (Check One or More as Appropriate)
     - Agricultural: [ ]
     - Government: [x]
     - Park: [ ]
     - Transportation: [ ]
     - Communication: [ ]
     - Commercial: [ ]
     - Industrial: [ ]
     - Private Residence: [x]
     - Educational: [ ]
     - Military: [ ]
     - Religious: [ ]
     - Other (Specify): [ ]
     - Enrichment: [ ]
     - Museum: [ ]
     - Scientific: [ ]

4. **Owner of Property**
   - Owner Name: William King Covell, III
   - State and Number: 72 Washington Street
   - City or Town: Newport
   - State: Rhode Island, 02840

5. **Location of Legal Description**
   - Courthouse, Registry of Deeds, Etc.
     - City Hall
     - Broadway
     - Newport
   - State: Rhode Island, 02840
   - Approximate Acreage of nominated property: Less than one acre

6. **Representation in Existing Surveys**
   - Title of survey: [ ]
   - Date of survey: Federal [ ] State [ ] County [ ] Local [ ]
   - Depository for survey records: [ ]
   - Street and Number: [ ]
   - City or Town: [ ]
   - State: [ ]
   - Code: [ ]
Designed by the Boston firm of Fehrmer and Emerson, and built in 1870 by A. A. Low and Company as a summer house for N. H. Sanford, "Villa Edna," as it was then called, was described at the time of construction as "the most elaborately finished house ever built in Newport." Rather severe on its exterior, the two-and-one-half-story house, capped by an angular mansard roof flaring at the eaves, rests on a granite and brick foundation. Light strips of horizontal and vertical boarding are laid flat against the clapboarded walls, to suggest wooden structural articulation—part of the "stick style" vocabulary appearing about this time. The cubical mass of the main block is broken slightly by an off-center, projecting, low mansard-roofed entrance tower that, with the main entrance placed in a side of the tower, serves to disguise the old, basic four-room-and-central-hall plan. A wide, one-story piazza with a slightly pitched roof extends around three sides of the house and butts against the entrance tower. It lightens and dissipates the effect of mass and creates an open woodenness of character in spite of the mansard roof ballooning above.

Exterior decoration is extremely simple for the period. Fenestration is limited to single or grouped windows of various sizes, glazed with large panes, some of which bear subtly etched or stained designs. The removal of the original louvred exterior shutters (still stored within the house) has further augmented the plainness of the walls. The double-leaf main entrance is also unadorned. Almost the only decorative elements on the exterior are the bracketed dormers above the street façade which are provided with wooden railed balconies reminiscent of Swiss chalets.

Basically of a traditional, four-room plan, the interior is arranged around a central hall. A double parlour opens off the hall to the south, and a dining room to the north. A maid's room and a pantry, with its dumbwaiter to the original kitchen in the basement, adjoin the dining room. Without a hint on the exterior, a dramatic, 35-foot-high stairway tower rises the full three stories in the front of the house, and is decorated with heavy ornamental carved stairway railings and ornate projecting wooden balconies on the upper stories.

In contrast to the building's exterior, its interior decoration is extremely lavish and remains fully intact. The floors throughout are of oak, cherry, hard pine, maple and black walnut, laid in a different pattern in each room. Many of the original metal gas lighting fixtures remain in place, although they are now electrified. The principal rooms retain their richly-carved mantels, surmounted by heavy mirrors, and their wainscoting. The woodwork of the parlours is of butternut with ebony trim and panels of mottlewood from the root of the butternut tree. The dining room has similar trim, but of black walnut.

(See Continuation Sheet.)
7. Description.

The walls of most of the rooms and many of the ceilings still display their original colors (primarily terra-cotta, blue or green) and are richly stencilled in stylized floral motifs of pastel shades, quite similar to the designs published in the mid-nineteenth century by Owen Jones.

The house remains virtually unaltered. Several of the ceilings on the first floor have been panelled, but the original stencilling remains intact behind this covering; and several of the bedrooms on the upper floors were panelled in the latter part of the nineteenth century. There has been a minimum of interior repainting, and that which has been done has duplicated the original colors and patterns. The basement, which is a full story in height at the rear of the house, and the second story are now used as apartments.
Built in 1870, the Covell house is one of the earliest works of the Boston architect, William Ralph Emerson, who is well-known for his later "shingle style" houses of the 1880's on Mount Desert Island in Maine and in the Boston and North Shore areas in Massachusetts. Working in conjunction with the German-born architect Carl Fehmer during a brief partnership, Emerson designed the Covell house in an early "stick style," with the internal construction allowed by the balloon frame expressed on the clapboarded exterior walls, although—much simplified—the house is stylistically tied to the earlier, academic traditions of mansard houses which, however, were more opulent and less skeletal.

This house was given prominence in an exhibition of Emerson's work at the Fogg Art Museum of Harvard University in 1969 and in the accompanying catalogue. The great importance of this house today lies in its unparalleled interiors of carved woods, original furnishings, and rich stencils which can be seen in unspoilt condition and arrangement. It is one of the very few structures which still fully retains these early stencils of abstracted and linear floral motifs, such as were widely circulated in Owen Jones' Grammar of Ornament in the mid-nineteenth century. Although the paint has begun to deteriorate in a few spots, there has been a minimum of repainting, and that which has been done has duplicated the original colors and designs.

Quite recently, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (having extended its interests and its properties into the Victorian era) has taken particular interest in this house, which it may wish and be able (through arrangements with the present owner and occupant) to acquire, to maintain and restore as a notably intact house-museum.
9. **MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**


10. **GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES</th>
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<tr>
<td>DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY</td>
<td>LATITUDE</td>
<td>DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY</td>
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<td>CORNER</td>
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<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
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LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

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11. **FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: Clifford M. Renshaw, III, Consultant

ORGANIZATION: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE: Sept. 15, 1971

STREET AND NUMBER: State House, 90 Smith Street

CITY OR TOWN: Providence

STATE: Rhode Island, 02903

12. **STATE LIASISON 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 [x] State [ ] Local [ ]

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

DATE

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

DATE
**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**  
**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**  
**Rhode Island**  
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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| STREET AND NUMBER: | 72 Washington Street |
| --- |
| CITY OR TOWN: Newport |
| STATE: Rhode Island |

**PHOTO REFERENCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHOTO CREDIT: B. Christopher Bene</th>
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<tr>
<td>DATE OF PHOTO: January, 1972</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEGATIVE FILED AT: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, State House, 90 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island, 02903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**IDENTIFICATION**

Describe view, direction, etc.

Detail of dining-room, showing chimneypiece and ceiling stencilling.
GEOGRAPHICAL COORDINATES
Latitude: 41° 29' 38.54" N
Longitude: 72° 19' 17.91" W
1. NAME

COMMON: Covell (William King, III) House
AND/OR HISTORIC: Sanford (Milton H.) House, Villa Edna, Villa Marina

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 72 Washington Street
CITY OR TOWN: Newport
STATE: Rhode Island

3. MAP REFERENCE

SOURCE: U. S. Geological Survey
SCALE: 1: 24,000
DATE: 1957

4. REQUIREMENTS

TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS
1. Property boundaries where required.
2. North arrow.
3. Latitude and longitude reference.
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COMMON: Covell (William K., III) House
AND/OR HISTORIC: Sanford (Milton H.) House; Villa Edna; Villa Marina

2. LOCATION
STREET AND NUMBER: 72 Washington Street
CITY OR TOWN: Newport
STATE: Rhode Island
CODE: RI
COUNTY: Newport
CODE: 005

3. PHOTO REFERENCE
PHOTO CREDIT: B. Christopher Bene
DATE OF PHOTO: January, 1972
NEGATIVE FILED AT: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, State House, 90 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island, 02903

4. IDENTIFICATION
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.: Exterior (harbour-side) from the south-west.
1. **NAME**

**COMMON:** Covell (William King, III) House

**AND/OR HISTORIC:** Sanford (Milton H.) House; Villa Edna; Villa Marina

2. **LOCATION**

**STREET AND NUMBER:**

72 Washington Street

**CITY OR TOWN:**

Newport

**STATE:**

Rhode Island

3. **PHOTO REFERENCE**

**PHOTO CREDIT:** B. Christopher Bene

**DATE OF PHOTO:** January, 1971

**NEGATIVE FILED AT:** Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, State House, 90 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island, 02903

4. **IDENTIFICATION**

**DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.:**

Exterior from the south-east, showing central projection of stair-hall in east façade.
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

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

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4. **IDENTIFICATION**
   - DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.: View showing upper portion of stair-hall, with balconies, stencilled wall decoration, torchères, panelled ceiling.
# NAME

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# IDENTIFICATION

**DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.:**

First-floor hall, looking east and showing beginning of stairway at left centre.