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HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**WARWICK'S CEDAR HILL LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

A historic estate in the Cowesett neighborhood of Warwick has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture, art, and community development. Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added Cedar Hill to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. Built between 1871 and 1877, Cedar Hill is an extraordinarily well-preserved example of a large, luxurious country estate founded by a wealthy industrialist family.

Cedar Hill is located on a 27-acre hilltop parcel overlooking Greenwich Bay. The original carriageway winds uphill from Post Road and circles around the imposing 3½-story granite mansion with its hip-roofed porte-cochere and wrap-around porch. Consistent with the Gothic Revival style, the house has pointed-arch windows and ornate bargeboard trim. The remarkably intact interior boasts spacious rooms and extensive Late Victorian decorative woodwork, plasterwork, and painted finishes. The estate also features gardens, lawns, and wooded areas, as well as three significant outbuildings: an 1872 wood-frame carpenter's shop, a 1906 brick stable, and a ca. 1930 fire station.

On May 9, 1870, Alfred Reed, Jr. (1845-1895) and Elizabeth Ives Slater (1849-1917) were married, uniting two of Rhode Island's most powerful industrial families. Reed's father had made his fortune in the East India trade and in textile manufacturing, while Slater was a descendant of preeminent textile entrepreneur Samuel Slater. By 1871, construction of the couple's new country home was underway on Reed family land. A series of land transfers deeded the property solely to Mrs. Elizabeth Ives Slater Reed. Her father William S. Slater paid for Elizabeth and Alfred's very expensive new home.

Architect William R. Walker (1830-1905) oversaw the work of nearly four dozen artisans, craftsmen, and suppliers. The construction team included general contractor French, Mackenzie and Company of Providence, stone mason Raymond A. Rathbun of West Greenwich, and woodworker Nathaniel Elliot of Providence. With the bulk of the exterior and interior construction finished by 1874, additional interior finish work proceeded over the next three years. Among the notable firms responsible for the interior finishes were master wood carver

Charles Dowler of Providence and the Boston decorating house of W.J. McPherson & Co. (wall and ceiling stencils, as well as etched glass). By March 1877, the grand total cost for Cedar Hill added up to about \$136,000; today this would be more than \$3 million.

Cedar Hill's interior decor reflects the Victorian interest in the comforts of home, and a love of ornament. Typical decorations include painted wall and ceiling stencils, plaster ceiling medallions, ornate cornice moldings, stained or varnished woodwork, tile floors for primary hallways, hardwood floors topped with Oriental carpets for first floor rooms, and straw matting on bedroom floors. The extraordinary reception room showcases Egyptian-style decorative stenciling, mantelpiece, mirror, window cornices, furniture, and light fixtures. Cedar Hill was fitted out with the latest conveniences of the 1870s: indoor plumbing for multiple bathrooms, steam heating, and lighting fixtures fueled by naphtha gas. Other modern systems included electric bells and speaking tubes to summon servants, a burglar alarm, and fire protection.

In 1917, the property passed to Elizabeth's eldest daughter, Helen Slater Reed Allen (1872-1952). She installed electric lighting at the house in the 1920s and significantly expanded the size of the estate, acquiring pasturage, croplands, orchards, and woodlands, including several small farms and a gravel bank that provided the material for the estate's roads.

Helen's daughter, Anne "Nancy" Crawford Allen (1908-1997), put her own stamp on the estate. In 1931, she established the Cedar Hill Volunteer Fire Department and built a small fire station behind the main house. Nancy Allen was later recognized by the International Association of Fire Chiefs as the first woman Fire Chief. Married to Monterey L. Holst in 1940, she inherited the estate from her mother in 1952.

Nancy's daughter Anne Dietrich Holst is the fourth generation to reside at Cedar Hill. In 2004, Anne and business partners Wayne and Christine E. Cabral opened Cedar Hill to the public as the "Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum." In addition to special exhibits and programs, the museum preserves the house's original materials, finishes, and furnishings. The house remains a private residence, and the museum is open to visitors by appointment.

The National Register nomination for Cedar Hill was prepared by historic preservation consultant Kathryn J. Cavanaugh. RIHPHC's executive director Edward Sanderson commented, "Cedar Hill's well-preserved and exceptional architectural and decorative features make it one of the most elaborate historic mansions in the West Bay region."

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.