



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

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**SUMMER RETREAT:
WESTERLY'S RAM POINT LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER**

An early-20th-century summer estate in Avondale has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture in Westerly. Edward F. Sanderson, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced that the National Park Service has added Ram Point 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 ca. 1903 for Dr. John Whitridge Williams, Ram Point is an excellent example of a Colonial Revival-style summer estate, with a commodious main house and several secondary structures, such as a boathouse and dock.

The estate takes its name from the Ram Point peninsula which juts northward into the lower Pawcatuck River estuary, immediately west of Babcock Cove and to the north of Watch Hill Road. Much of the 6.27-acre property is wooded, but there are clearings for lawn and garden near the house. Buildings include the summer house, carriage house, boathouse with marine railway, dock, play house, well house, and garden potting shed, all built ca. 1903. The entrance to the estate is marked by two fieldstone piers, and the curving entry drive is flanked by London plane trees and sycamore maples.

The original owner of Ram Point, John Whitridge Williams (1866-1931), was a noted physician and educator who is recognized as the founder and leader of academic obstetrics in the United States. He served as a professor in obstetrics at Johns Hopkins University and as obstetrician-in-charge at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. In 1903, Williams published *Obstetrics* which became the leading text in the field, with 25 editions published in the early-to-mid-twentieth century.

The design of Ram Point is attributed to Baltimore architect Douglas H. Thomas, Jr. (1872-1915), a cousin of Dr. Williams. Thomas also designed a nearby summer home (Metacomet) for Williams's sister, Mary Cushing Williams Howard, and her husband, Dr. William Travis Howard, Jr., around the same time that Ram Point was constructed. Douglas H. Thomas, Jr. was educated at Johns Hopkins University, MIT, and the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, fitting into the wave of young, well-educated American architects who received a Parisian experience in the arts after training at developing programs in the United States. Based in

Baltimore, Thomas formed a partnership in 1900 with J. Harleston Parker of Boston, creating the firm Parker & Thomas, with offices in both cities.

At Ram Point, Thomas created a comfortable estate for John Whitridge Williams and his family. Buildings were sited with attention to the property's natural features and topography, as well as in consideration of their use. The estate's orientation toward the water is evident in the design of the main house, whose front door faces the Pawcatuck River. The main house has a relatively open floor plan, with first-floor public rooms that flow together and feature water views. With its gambrel roof, symmetrical façade, wood-shingle siding, and ample porches, the Colonial Revival-style house conveys simplicity and lasting good taste.

For many years, Ram Point provided the Williams family a place to enjoy idyllic summer retreats from urban life in Baltimore. They particularly enjoyed boating, taking advantage of the site's location on a protected cove in the Pawcatuck River estuary, within a short distance of Little Narragansett Bay, Fishers Island Sound, and the Atlantic Ocean.

John Whitridge Williams died in 1931, and his heirs sold Ram Point to Marjorie Buffum Taylor in 1934. The property was sold to the present owners, Cynthia and Thomas Sculco, in 1982. The Sculcos have maintained Ram Point's main house, its appurtenances, and its overall setting to reflect the 1903 design.

The National Register nomination for Ram Point was prepared by preservation consultant Richard C. Youngken and RIHPHC architectural historian Joanna Doherty. RIHPHC's Executive Director Edward Sanderson commented, "A century ago, Rhode Island's shore was highly valued as an ideal summer vacation setting. This is still true today, further enhanced by well-preserved historic houses and estates like Ram Point."

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.

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