

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

## 1. Name of Property

historic name: Potter-Peckham Farm

other name/site number: Kingston Hill Farm (preferred)

## 2. Location

street & number: 549 Old North Road

not for publication: N/A

city/town: South Kingstown vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Washington code: 009 zip code: 02881

## 3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Buildings

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>4</u>	<u>      </u>	buildings
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	sites
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	structures
<u>      </u>	<u>      </u>	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Property name Kingston Hill Farm, Washington County, Rhode Island

**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Frederick C. Williamson  
Signature of certifying official

10 March 1993  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ entered in the National Register  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
  - \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
  - \_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register
  - \_\_\_ removed from the National Register
  - \_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_
- Signature of Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

Historic: DOMESTIC  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE

Current: DOMESTIC  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE

Sub: single dwel., sec. structures storage, agric. flds., animal storage, processing

Sub: single dwelling storage

Property name Kingston Hill Farm, Washington County, Rhode Island

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification:

EARLY REPUBLIC  
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/  
Colonial Revival

Other Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: foundation STONE/granite roof ASPHALT  
walls WOOD/shingle other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): \_\_\_\_\_

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE  
AGRICULTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period(s) of Significance: c.1810-c.1941 \_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates: c.1810 c.1914 \_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person(s): N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation: N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder: \_\_\_\_\_ Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

Property name Kingston Hill Farm, Washington County, Rhode Island

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property: 20 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing		
	A	<u>19</u>	<u>290360</u>	<u>4597170</u>	B	<u>19</u>	<u>290410</u>	<u>4595990</u>
	C	<u>19</u>	<u>290180</u>	<u>4595910</u>	D	<u>19</u>	<u>289710</u>	<u>4596150</u>
	E	<u>19</u>	<u>290040</u>	<u>4597250</u>				

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description:  See continuation sheet.

The nominated property occupies Town of South Kingstown Assessor's Plat 16-4, Lot and is approximately twenty (20) acres in size.

Boundary Justification:  See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes the buildings and fields retaining an historical integrity and identity since the periods of significance. The remaining portions of the historical farm have been divided and subdivided and now are either overgrown, wooded or suburban house lots.

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title: Richard C. Youngken; Pamela Kennedy & Walter Nebiker

Organization: Newport Collaborative; R.I. Hist. Pres. Comm. Date: July 1990

Street & Number: 14 Pelham St.; 150 Benefit St. Telephone: 401-846-9583; 277-2678

City or Town: Newport; Providence State: R.I. ZIP: 02840; 02903

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### Description

The Kingston Hill Farm is a complex of farmhouse, outbuildings, fields, stone walls, and cemetery (see map). The farm is set on the east side of North Road in a still rural section of South Kingstown. The cluster of farm buildings is located roughly at the center of the square 20-acre parcel and is set at the end of a long driveway lined by stone walls. Large, open fields, bordered by stone walls and tree lines surround the farm buildings. The inventory below describes the individual elements of the farm; all elements are contributing.

Potter-Peckham House (c. 1810, c. 1914): A wood-frame, gable-roof, shingled 1½-story house, which faces south. The Potter-Peckham House began as a typical 5-bay, 5-room plan, center-entrance, center-chimney house, set on a stone foundation; additions have been made to the east and west ends and an ell has been added to the north side. The house is now 9 bays long and 3 bays wide, with three separate entrances, each screened by latticework, and 6/6 window sash. The c. 1810 house is still visible in the house plan, which is dominated by a large stone chimney with three fireplace openings. A small tight, 3-run stair is tucked between the chimney and the center door. Large rooms are set on each side of the chimney. Three small rooms run across the back (the corner rooms have been divided). This older section of the house has large, plain Georgian mantels, wide pine floor boards, and boxed corner posts.

The additions are simply finished. The kitchen ell (which appears to date from the mid-19th century) is divided into two rooms and has a separate entrance.

Seed Barn, Map #1 (1920s): A large, 2-level, gambrel-roof barn, wood framed and shingled, set on a rubblestone foundation. The barn is 12 bays long, 4 bays wide; windows have 6/6 sash.

The southern four-bay section of the barn has a slightly higher foundation and roof, and may have been constructed as an addition to the longer northern end. It houses an early 20th-century seed-sorting machine (see photo). Standing a full two stories high, it is a "Clipper Cleaner," manufactured by A.T. Ferrell of Saginaw, Michigan.

The north section of the barn is open to the weather on the first level of its west side; evidently, this section of the barn sheltered livestock; the upper level is partitioned by horizontal-board walls into small seed storage rooms with 4-panel doors.

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Wagon Shed/Tack Room, Map #2 (early or mid-20th century): A 1-story, gable-roof wood-frame shingled shed; the northern half serves as vehicle storage, the southern half is a tack room. The long east side has three small square fixed windows. The west side has three vehicle bays, with overhead garage doors (a later alteration), a pedestrian door, and a single window with 6/6 sash.

Shed/Pen, Map #3 (early 20th century?): A small wooden utility shed with a gable roof and a single door. The shed is set at the corner of a pen surrounded by a wood fence.

Cemetery: A rectangular plot, outlined by stone walls, located at the southern boundary of the farm. Only a single stone (Ann Potter, 1797) is readable. At the east wall is a cobblestone obelisk constructed by the Daughters of the American Revolution to commemorate the Revolutionary War service of Major Ebenezer Adams (1732-1799).

Fields/Garden/Orchard/Stone Walls (dates unknown): Dry-laid stone walls outline parts of the perimeter of the Potter-Peckham House and divide the farm acreage into outdoor spaces as well. Walls line the western (roadside) bound and sections of the north and south bounds. Walls line both sides of the long driveway to the house from North Road. Further walls separate the southwest quadrant of the farm, known as the "south fields." The northwest quadrant is divided by walls into the "north field," in the northwest corner, the farmyard, and a large garden area known as "Jemima's Garden," for Jemima Wilkinson, an eighteenth-century evangelist who, with her followers, lived on the property briefly in an earlier house, no longer extant. The eastern half of the farm is also divided by long stone walls. Many of the walls are now set within tree lines, mostly large elms and maples; the drive is lined by large rhododendrons. A small orchard (about 30 trees) is set in the south field, along North Road. A natural spring behind the house has been dug out.

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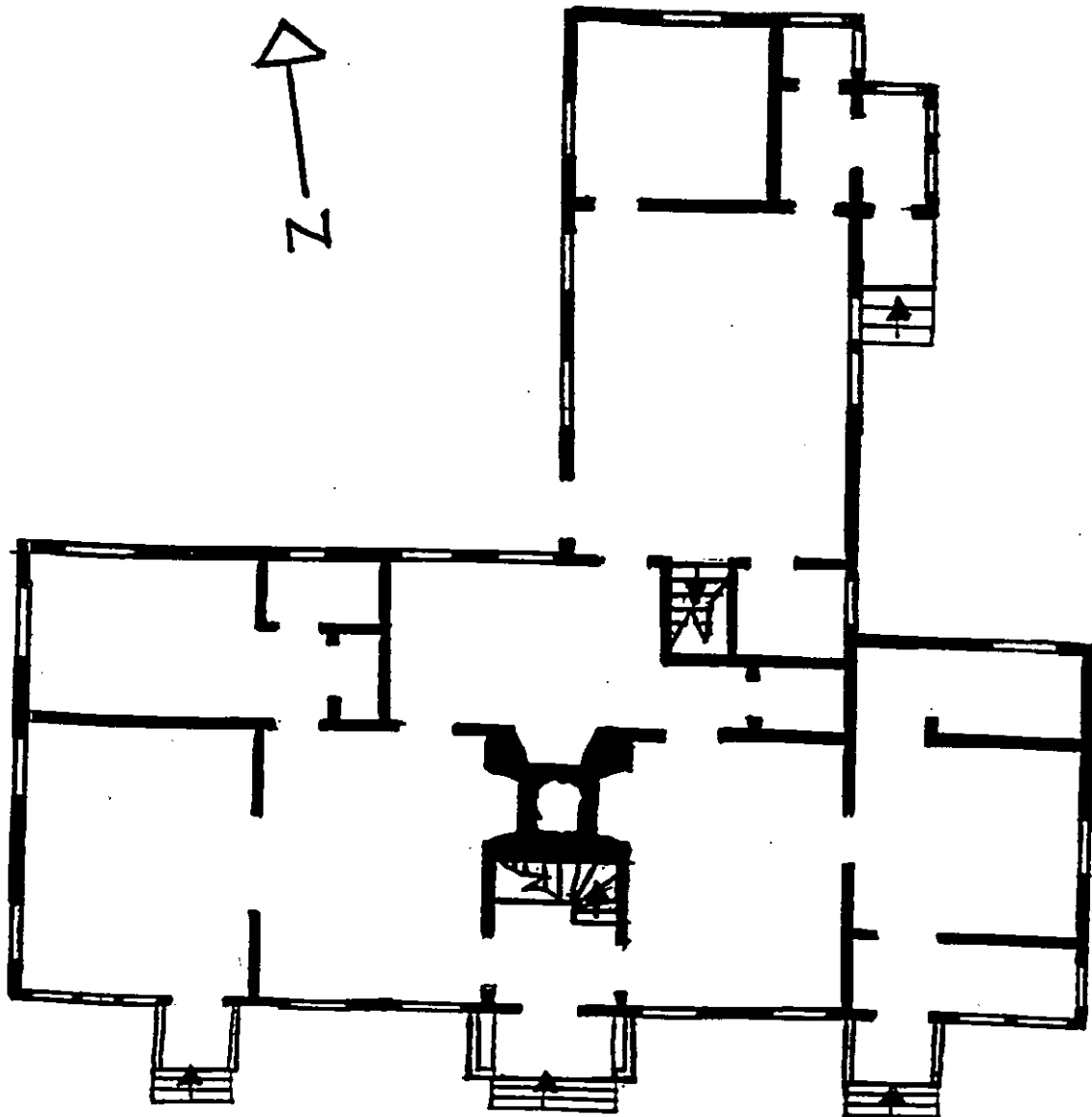
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POTTER-PECKHAM HOUSE  
KINGSTON HILL FARM  
549 OLD NORTH ROAD  
SOUTH KINGSTOWN, RHODE ISLAND



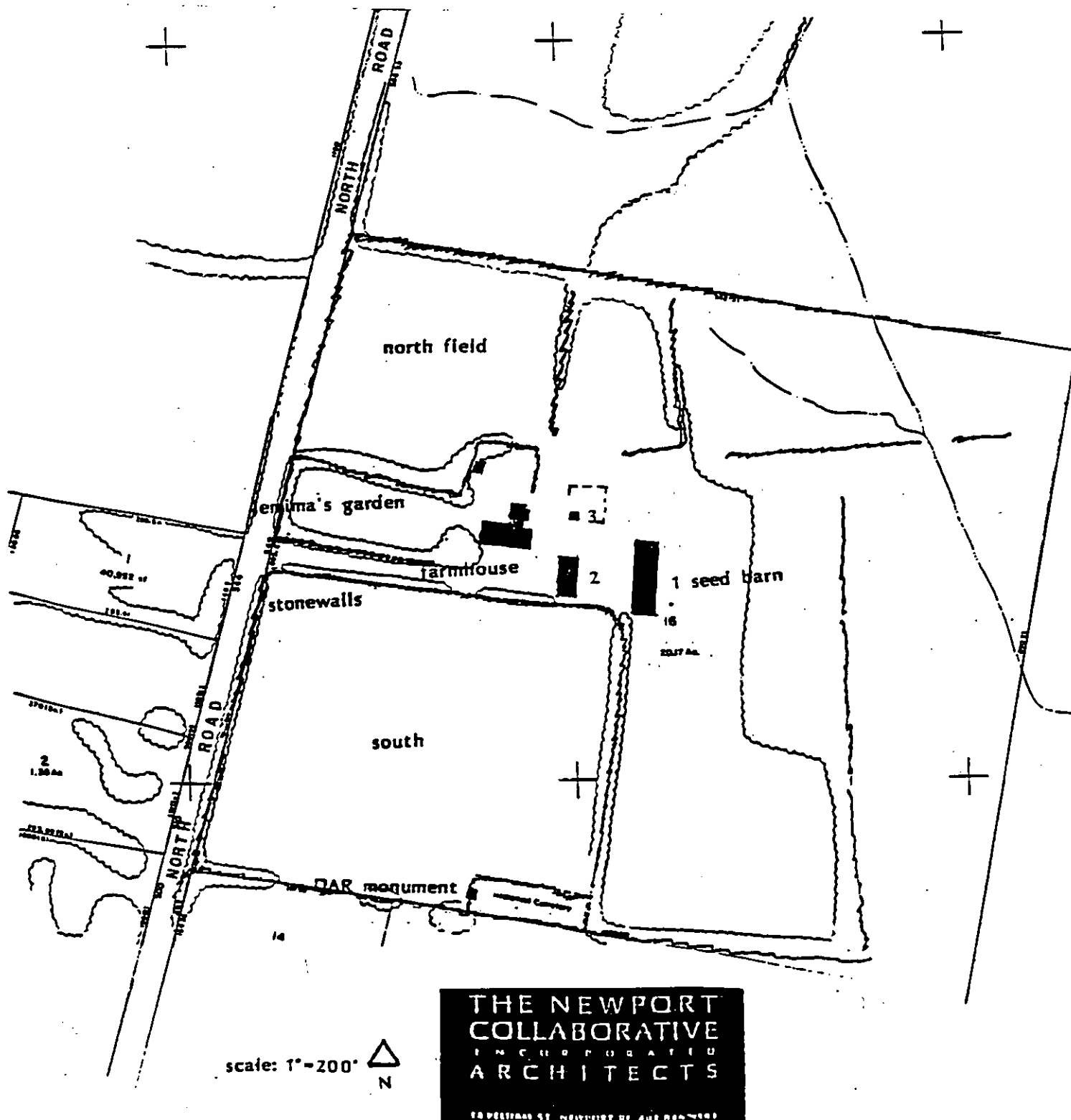
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### Photographs

All photographs:

Photographer: Richard C. Youngken

Date: July 1990

Location of negatives: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission  
150 Benefit Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Photo numbers and description of views:

1. Exterior of house, looking northwest.
2. Interior of east parlor, looking west.
3. Interior of dining room, looking southeast.
4. Exterior of house and farm buildings (shed and stable), looking southwest.
5. Exterior of shed and stable, looking south.
6. Exterior of stable, looking south.
7. Exterior of seed barn, looking southeast.
8. Exterior of seed barn, looking southwest.
9. Interior of seed barn, second-floor hall, and seed storage rooms, looking south.
10. Interior of seed barn, seed sorting machine.

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### Significance

The Kingston Hill Farm is a small but significant set of agricultural buildings and landscape features which document some important aspects of the history of farming in South Kingstown, including the development of grass seed as a major crop in the twentieth century. Both the farmhouse and the outbuildings are useful examples of early twentieth-century rural architecture. The Potter-Peckham House is an interesting example of the vernacular adaptation of an early nineteenth-century house to the architectural currents of the early twentieth century. The twentieth-century barns and sheds are useful examples of agricultural building types. The presence of the unusually rare seed mill on the property--no similar machine is known in the state--increases the significance of the farm. The buildings, fields, gardens, and walls of the Kingston Hill Farm, constitute a functional and visual whole, a diminutive rural landscape in an increasingly suburbanized town.

The land here was taken up in the seventeenth century and, by the 1730s was owned by members of the Potter family. The Potter holdings included about 500 acres. William Potter built a large house, The Abbey, in the mid-eighteenth century on the site of the present farmhouse. During his tenure here, William Potter became a disciple of Jemima Wilkinson, an evangelical preacher who had attracted a number of followers in southern Rhode Island. Wilkinson lived and preached at the house; a local tradition holds that Inscription Rock just north of Kingston Hill Farm was the site of her outdoor pulpit. Under Wilkinson's influence, Potter manumitted his slaves and in 1788 left the farm in 1788 for New Jerusalem, Pennsylvania, where he purchased land for Wilkinson's utopian community.

The abandoned farm was purchased in 1805 by Elisha Reynolds Potter (1764-1835), who already owned substantial holdings in South Kingstown. A state legislator and, later, U.S. Representative, Elisha Potter operated the farm with tenants; he himself lived in nearby Kingston Village. In 1809 he demolished The Abbey and had a small farmhouse constructed on the site. Now much changed, this tenant's house forms the core of the Potter-Peckham House. It is possible that some materials from The Abbey may have been used in the construction of the smaller house.

Potter's ownership illustrates some aspects of South Kingstown's agriculture in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Potter family had been part of a social and economic elite (sometimes called the Narragansett Planters) which reached its heyday in the eighteenth century. The leadership of a group of families in southern Rhode Island had been based on large landholdings, commercial connections to the city of Newport

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across the bay, and the availability of labor, indentured and slave as well as free; a substantial economy had been built in agricultural exports, especially livestock and dairy products. The Planters' dominance was in decline by the late eighteenth century, but large landholdings among descendants of Planters were still not uncommon in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Elisha Potter owned farms on Boston Neck, in North Kingstown, on Point Judith Neck, in Narragansett, as well as extensive holdings in Petersburg and Yates County, New York. His Homestead Farm, in Kingston Village, was 650 acres--for Rhode Island, an important piece of property. In addition, Potter owned the ferry privilege and freight boats running from South Ferry, Narragansett.

Potter's use of Kingston Hill Farm as a tenant operation is part of a common pattern. Even in the eighteenth century, tenants had been an important economic force in the southern part of the state. As historian Sidney James has noted, "Tenants were probably more important than records reveal" (Colonial Rhode Island, p.255). As a pattern of use tenancy persisted well into the nineteenth century in southern Rhode Island.

Although South Kingstown had several villages, large and small, and several industrial sites, the dominant economic activity during the early nineteenth century continued to be farming. The gravelly loam soil, generally fertile, was well adapted to both grazing and grain cultivation, and supported dairy farms and crops of barley, oats, rye, and especially Indian corn.

In 1848 Azel Noyes purchased the Kingston Hill Farm from Potter's son Thomas. Now reduced to 163 acres, the land was operated as a small general farm by Noyes, who was also a mathematics teacher at the nearby Kingston Academy and a land surveyor. This arrangement, a small holding supplementing the income of a craftsman or mechanic, is common for the region and period--the nearby Henry Eldred Farm (National Register, 1991), for example, supplemented a family's building and masonry business.

In 1914, the Kingston Hill Farm was purchased by Arthur Peckham (1815?-1962). A Noyes descendant, Peckham had held a partial ownership of the farm previously; a series of land transactions in the early twentieth century brought him to full ownership.

Peckham's career exemplifies several aspects of Rhode Island agriculture during its last half century of economic significance. Peckham had studied agricultural practices at the nearby land grant state college

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(now the University of Rhode Island and the location of the state agricultural experiment station). In 1909 Peckham began buying up unused former farm land in southern Rhode Island and eastern Connecticut; at one time he owned as much as 3,000 acres. The land was largely played out and many farms had been abandoned--the derelict farm of New England, with its empty house and its fields gone back to woods, was by the early twentieth century a literary and economic cliché which was firmly grounded in reality. Peckham acquired many such farms and used them to supply a timber business. He owned three portable sawmills which were moved as needed to wooded areas and which produced railroad ties, bridge timbers, and timber for boat construction.

With the development of southern Rhode Island as a location for summer houses in the 1920s, 30s, 40s, and 50s, and the area's increasingly suburbanized character, especially after World War II, Peckham sold off some of his acreage as house lots.

On his other farms he was instrumental in the development and growth of a specialty crop which is still an important factor in Rhode Island agriculture--the growing of grass for seed and turf. Peckham's crop was principally Rhode Island Bent (*Agrostis tenuis*), a native grass known colloquially as burden. Rhode Island farmers had used burden in the planting of their hayfields, not for the quality of its hay which was poor, but because it grew readily after the haycutting and would feed cattle in the harvested fields during the winter.

By the early twentieth century, Rhode Island Bent was marketed as a turf grass for lawns, fairways, and parks, but most of the American market was served by German sources. With the break in trade occasioned by World War I, New England sources filled some of the demand. Following the war, a small duty (2 cents per pound) was imposed on imported bent grass in an attempt to encourage domestic sources. In concert with a representative of the USDA, Peckham began harvesting Rhode Island Bent seed from abandoned fields and marketing it to mangers of golf courses directly and to seed wholesalers. In the early 1920s Peckham added Seaside Bent (*Agrostis maratima*) and Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) to his inventory. By 1927 much of his land was in production, and he was marketing his products aggressively.

And, despite a long running and acrimonious feud with some offices of the USDA over the quality and character of his products, Peckham was a success, selling both seed and stolons. His business operated into the 1940s when New England sources were gradually replaced by sources in the northwestern states.

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Grass products continue to be an important part of Rhode Island's agricultural production. The University of Rhode Island is a national center for the development and management of grass products. The state's major grass product is now turf rather than seed--in value, turf is the third largest crop harvested here (following nursery products and fuelwood).

It was during Peckham's ownership that Kingston Hill Farm assumed its present appearance. The simple tenant house built by Elisha Potter was enlarged and remodelled in the Colonial Revival mode. The largest of the outbuildings, the seed barn, was built (probably in the 1920s) to house the operations of the seed-sorting and packaging business. The presence here of the only known seed sorter from the state's early years as a producer of grass seed is especially significant. While the wagon shed and utility shed have undergone the changes normally expected in agricultural properties, the seed barn is remarkably well preserved, even to its division into seed rooms.

### Archeological Potential:

The Kingston Hill Farm may have significance under Criterion D. The land here has been occupied and farmed since at least the mid-eighteenth century, though the existing buildings are all later. It is possible that the site of an earlier house on the farm may yield information which will supplement our knowledge of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century agriculture and domestic arrangements. If the pattern of the farm complex--of fields, lots, walls, foundations, etc.--actually represents colonial and/or nineteenth-century usages which persisted into the twentieth century, the pattern may have archeological significance. Early twentieth-century photographs indicate additional outbuildings, probably destroyed in the hurricane of 1938. Their sites may in the future yield information about agricultural practices.

### Period of Significance:

The Period of Significance is defined as c. 1810, when the first (extant) building was constructed here. As the property is significant for its ability to illustrate aspects of 19th- and 20th-century agricultural practices (including tenancy, the use of a small holding to supplement a trade or profession, and, especially, the development of grass crops as a regional specialty), the Period of Significance extends through the years

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when these practices took place at Kingston Hill Farm. In the early 1940s, grass was no longer grown for seed at Kingston Hill Farm. It is possible that the Period of Significance may be earlier than c. 1810 if future archeological investigation demonstrates that elements of the farm illustrate 18th-century agricultural practices (see above).

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### Major Bibliographical References

Pettaquamscutt Historical Society Collection, Photographs and other documents in the Peckham vertical files, Kingston, RI.

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Historic and Architectural Resources of South Kingstown, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report, Providence, RI, 1984.

Wells, Rev. J. Hagadorn, Kingston Annals, Reminiscences of Little Rest, Kingston, RI, January 28, 1897.

Patten, David, "Our Rhode Island; Story of Old Farm and Changes There," in the Providence Journal, Providence, RI, date unknown c 1955.

Erhardt, John G., Jr., The Arthur N. Peckham Farm formerly the Azel Noyes Farm formerly the Judge Wm. Potter Farm and formerly the Home of Jemima Wilkinson; June 7, 1949, a manuscript.



Kingston Hill Farm/Potter- Peckham Farm  
Washington County  
South Kingstown





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Kingston Hill Farm/Potter-Peckham Farm  
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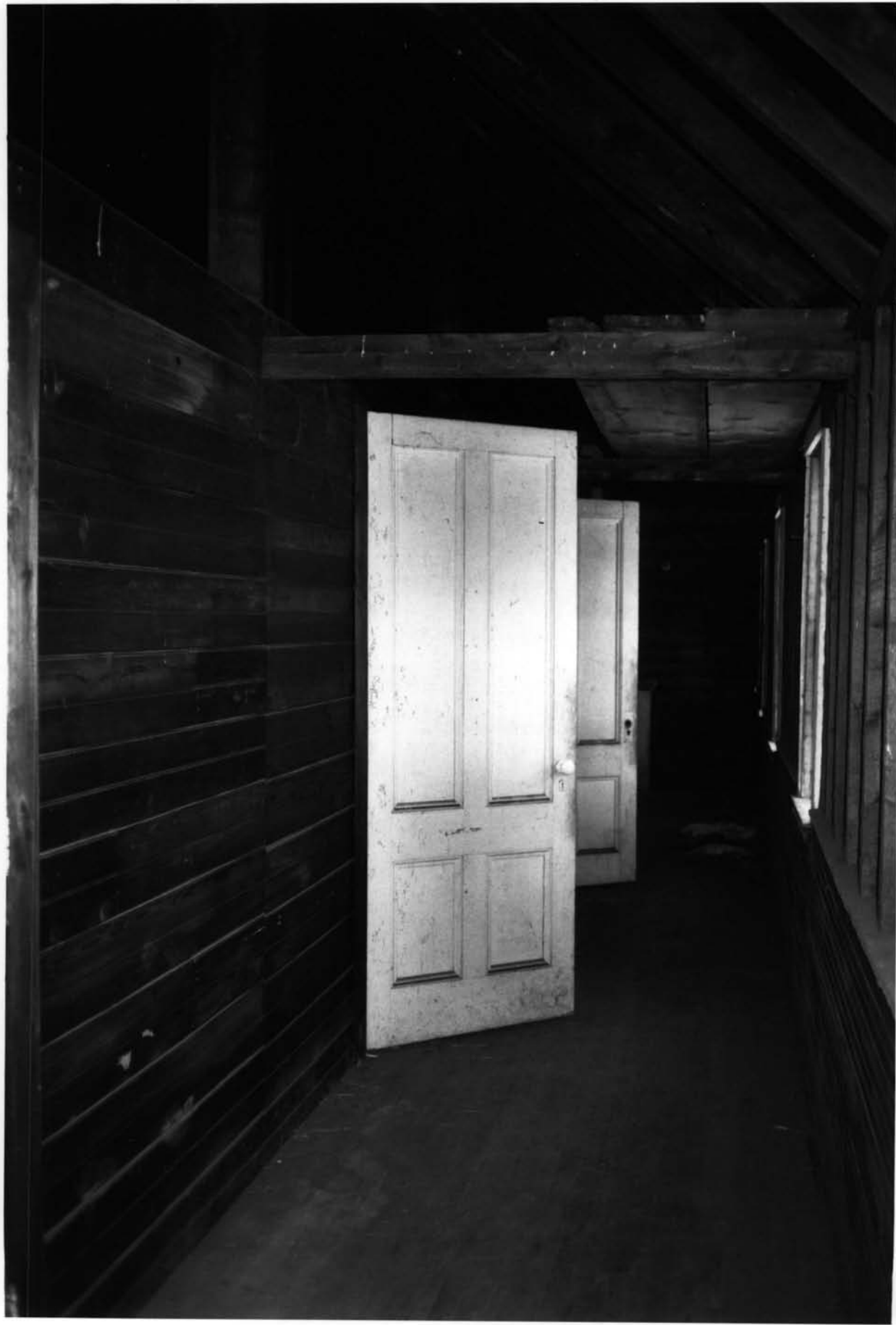
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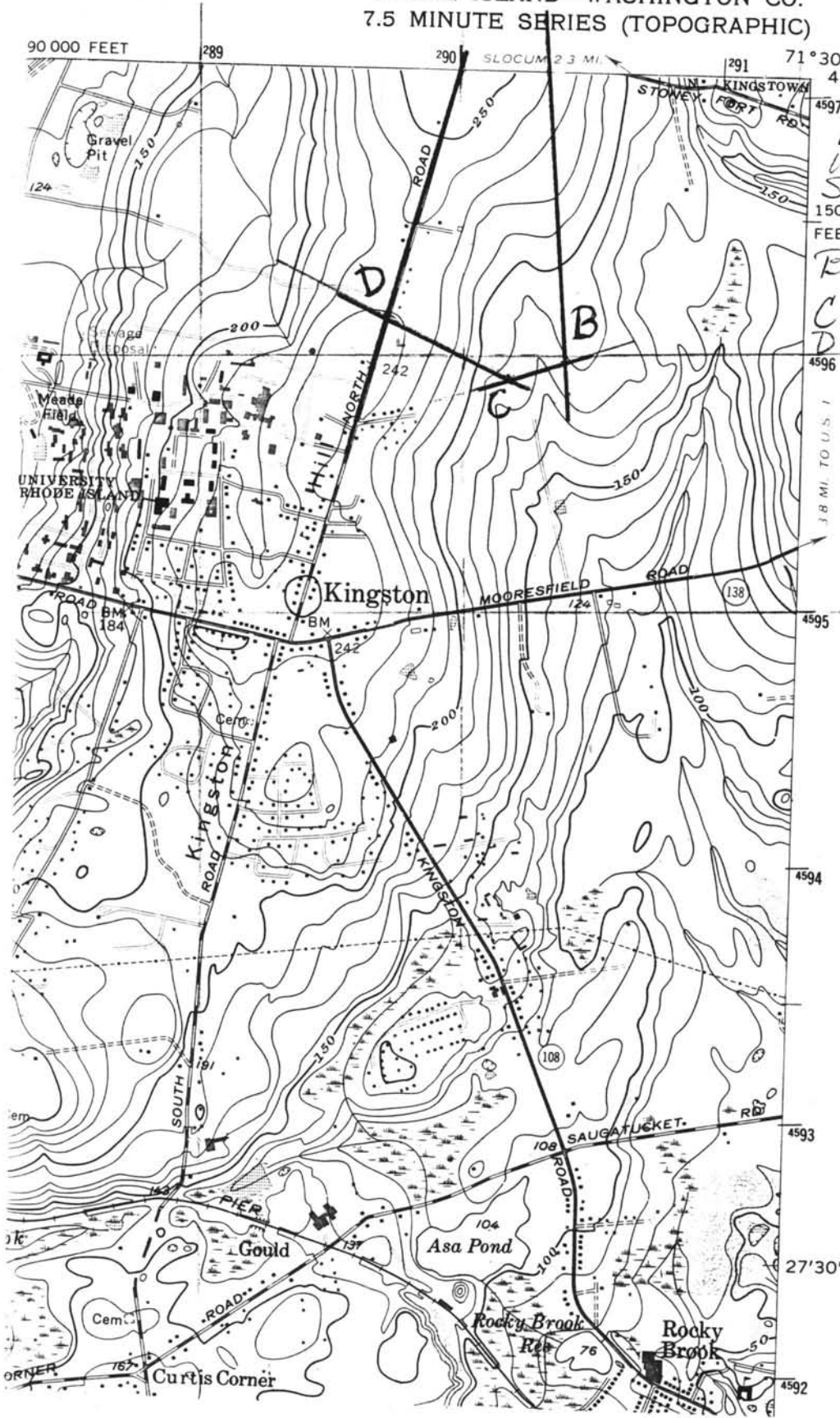




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Washington County  
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KINGSTON QUADRANGLE  
 RHODE ISLAND—WASHINGTON CO.  
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

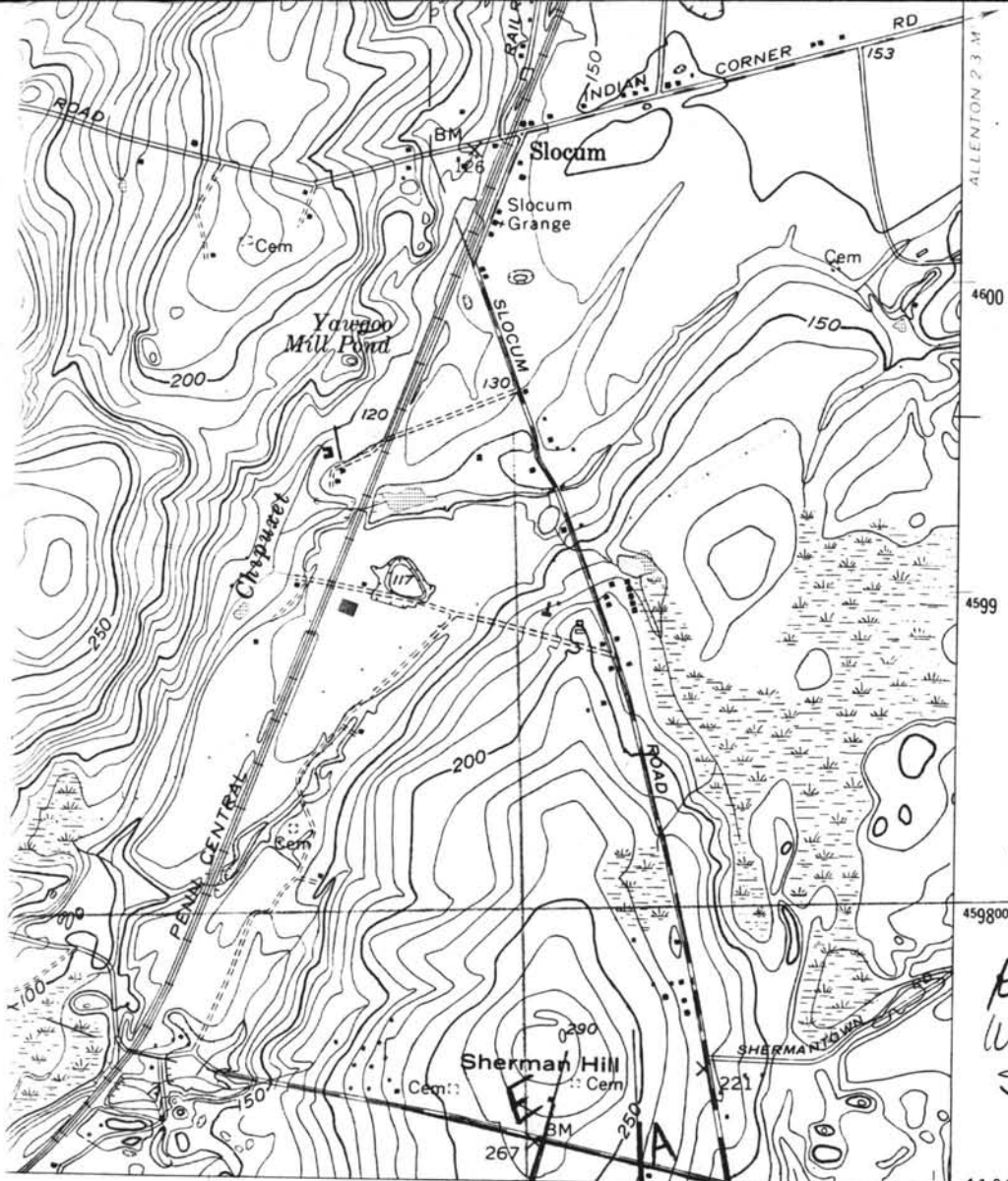
6767 III SW  
 (WICKFORD)



Kingston Hill Farm  
 Washington County  
 South Kingston, RI

- B 19-290410-4595990
- C 19-290180-4595910
- D 19-289710-4596150

(Kingston Quad)



*(Slocum Quad)*

*Kingston Hill Farm  
Washington County  
South Kingstown, RI*

*A 19-290360-459717*

*19-290040-459725*

● INTERIOR GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA—1989  
KINGSTON 1.5 MI. 290000m. E. MOORESFIELD 1.4 MI.

41° 30'  
71° 30' E  
5765 IV NW  
(NARRAGANSETT  
PIER)

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty		Light-duty	
Medium-duty		Unimproved dirt	
		State Route	



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

**SLOCUM, R. I.**  
41071-E5-TF-024  
PHOTOINSPECTED 1975  
1955  
PHOTOREVISED 1970  
DMA 6667 II SE—SERIES V815

