

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

1. Name

historic Fisherville Historic and Archeological District

and/or common

2. Location

street & number William Reynolds Road _____ not for publication

city, town Exeter _____ vicinity of _____ congressional district #2-Rep. Ed. Beard

state Rhode Island code 44 county Washington code 009

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
			<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Vera Muller Mary C. Sullivan Robert Hempstead

street & number Wm. Reynolds Road 207 Maplewood Dr. Box 532B-R.R.1
Exeter East Greenwich Exeter

city, town _____ vicinity of _____ state Rhode Island

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Exeter Town Hall

street & number Victory Highway

city, town Exeter state Rhode Island

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title "Broadbrush Archeological Survey has this property been determined eligible? _____ yes no
of Exeter, R.I."

date 1978 _____ federal _____ state _____ county _____ local

depository for survey records Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

city, town Providence state Rhode Island

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ruins	___ altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Fisherville Historic and Archeological District is situated along the banks of Fisherville Brook in Exeter, Rhode Island, a predominantly rural town in the south-central portion of the state. The proposed district is crossed by William Reynolds Road and stretches along both sides of the brook for approximately 600 yards. It contains three standing dwelling houses (figure 2, #1,8,31); the ruins of several houses (figure 2, #6,25, and 28) and outbuildings (figure 2, #14,15,16,22,24,26,29,32,9, and 12), the remains of early nineteenth-century saw and gristmills (figure 2, #11 and 20); and a cemetery from the late eighteenth century (#23)--all clustered about the ruins of the Fisherville Factory (figure 2, #3,7,11,12, 17, and 18), a mill that manufactured jeans and check flannel as well as warp, yarn, and twine during the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century. A total of 32 structures and archeological features are located within the district, as well as evidence of prehistoric occupation on a sandy terrace north of the stream.

The textile mill was the lowest of four mills located along one mile of Sodom and Fisherville Brooks in the nineteenth century, and was closely related to the others through common ownership during a portion of this period. It took its name from Schuyler Fisher, a mid-century owner. Containing approximately 22 acres, the district includes portions of several parcels formerly associated with the mill community. The property is currently under the private ownership of three separate parties.

The mill and associated buildings were first identified in 1978 during a Broadbrush Archeological Survey of the Town¹ of Exeter conducted by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. The survey focused on secondary literature and historic maps of Exeter and field confirmation of rural mill and schoolhouse sites. In 1979, this site was revisited and a survey team conducted additional research in pertinent land evidence records and secondary literature to establish a site chronology. The complex was also mapped and limited archeological testing at several of the sites was undertaken.

The buildings and archeological remains were found to be in fair to good condition. Excavation indicated little or no subsurface disturbance to the sites, suggesting a high degree of archeological integrity and good potential for locating intact subsurface features and deposits of cultural material. No immediate threat to preservation of the sites within the proposed district exists, nor is there any threat foreseeable in the immediate future.

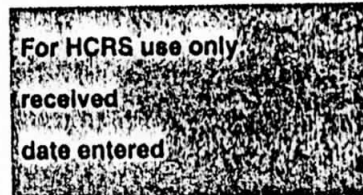
Built between 1826 and 1836, the mill was erected on the site of one of the first gristmills in this portion of Exeter, which operated prior to

(See Continuation Sheet #1).

¹Virginia Adams, "Broadbrush Archeological Survey of Exeter, R.I.", RIHPC, Providence, R.I., 1978

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Continuation sheet 1

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1795.² A transfer of the property in 1826 indicated the presence of the gristmill as well as a sawmill to the west (#10). The deed included a dwelling house (possible #8) and the cemetery (#23), referred to as the Chapman and Peckham Burying Ground.³

Fisher owned the mill from 1848 to 1857, selling that year to the Hall family his interests in the Fisherville Factory, the Sodom Factory (located 1 mile to the west on Sodom Brook), and the Lawton mill,⁴ a textile manufactory about one mile to the north on Fisherville Brook. The complex contained the factory, several houses, a store, and a boarding house. The mill and possibly the boardinghouse were destroyed by fire in 1873, and never rebuilt.⁵ By 1895, only two dwelling houses (#1,8) remained. Fisher was an unsuccessful Temperance Party candidate for the office of Lieutenant Governor in Rhode Island's 1852 election, and a local historian has written that members of the Cold Water Army worked in his mill as well as the others on Sodom and Fisherville Brooks in the 1870s. An octagonal house was reported to have been built by the Temperance group in Fisherville, but no foundation resembling such a structure has been located.⁶

Surviving structures within the district include an abandoned early nineteenth-century house (#1) with fine interior Greek Revival details. The house is 2½ stories tall on the street side, and 1½ stories on the rear, because it is built into sloping ground. A late eighteenth-or early nineteenth-century center-chimney house (#8), slightly modified on the exterior in the front door area and in the front windows, and a modern twentieth-century house (#31) are also located in the district.

(See Cont. Sheet # 2).

²Cole, J.R., History of Washington and Kent Counties, R.I., (NY: 1889), p. 671. The gristmill was built by John Chapman, whose grave is one of 19 marked graves in the cemetery located in the district (#23).

³Land Evidence Records, Exeter, R.I. Timothy R. Peckham to Elder John Gardner, 18 Feb 1826, (9:497).

⁴Land Evidence Records, Exeter, R.I. Schuyler Fisher and Co. to Dutie J. Hall, 3 June 1857, 14:494. The Lawton Mill is pending nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

⁵J.R. Cole, History of Washington and Kent Counties, R.I., (New York: 1889) p. 672.

⁶F.P. Simister, A Short History of Exeter, R.I. (Exeter: Exeter Bicentennial Commission, 1978), pp. 80-81.

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Relation of the Site to its Environment

The proposed district lies along the banks and on the flat terraces above Fisherville Brook, approximately 8/10 of a mile above its junction with Queen's River. Of six textile mills on Sodom and Fisherville Brooks in the nineteenth century, it is the lowest in elevation, located at the end of a length of Sodom and Fisherville Brooks that drops nearly 100 feet in one mile. Within the district, the glacial till soils are composed of unstratified gravel, silt, and clay. Most of the area is a young second-growth forest of mixed soft and hardwoods including white pine, oak, and maple. Much of the land within the district, as well as surrounding land, was undoubtedly clear of timber during its occupation, and probably remained so into the early twentieth century. Only in the fairly recent past has agriculture ceased to play a large role in the economy of this area, with the surrounding land now heavily wooded and sparsely settled.

Archeological Information

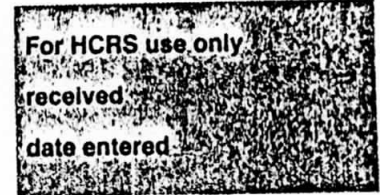
Limited archeological testing was undertaken at ten locations within the proposed district. 50 centimeters X 50 centimeters test pits were excavated in and around the mill building, dwelling house, and outbuilding sites yielding domestic artifacts, hardware, and construction debris dating from the early and mid-nineteenth century. Test pits #4 and 4A, placed in a flat, open area southeast of the mill, indicated this area had been filled with soil and building rubble containing late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century artifacts (#19). The filling at this area probably occurred during the construction of the textile factory, and may contain rubble from the gristmill that must have stood nearby. The remains of a tailrace (#20), emerging from the eastern edge of the filled-in area, might be from the gristmill and suggest its location beneath the fill or beneath the terrace along the road.

On information from a landowner that he found prehistoric projectile points in his garden, two test pits (TP #9 and 10) were placed on a flat terrace east of the mill complex (#30). Test Pit 9 yielded a quartz core in disturbed topsoil at a depth of 10 centimeters to 20 centimeters below the surface, and a single quartz flake was recovered from a depth of 50 centimeters to 60 centimeters. A second test pit (#10) placed 20 feet west was sterile of artifacts. As no diagnostic artifacts were recovered, a cultural affiliation of the material could not be made at this time. However, the absence of disturbance other than plowing or gardening in this area increases the possibility that prehistoric cultural materials capable of yielding valuable information can be recovered.

(See continuation sheet #3).

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Inventory of contributing features and structures
(see figure 2)

1. Abandoned house (early nineteenth century).
2. Privy
3. Former mill dam, dry-laid fieldstone and earth (partially destroyed by new road bridge).
4. Earth terrace, dry-laid fieldstone retaining walls.
5. Well, stone-lined.
6. House foundation (half cellar)
7. Headrace to mill.
8. Occupied house (early nineteenth century).
9. Foundation in earth and stone terrace.
10. Remains of earth and fieldstone dam.
11. Fisherville mill foundation, dry-laid dressed stone.
12. Building foundation, dry-laid, dressed stone.
13. Rectangular depression.
14. Building foundation in earth bank, dry-laid fieldstone.
15. Building foundation, dry-laid fieldstone, and earth and stone terrace.
16. Building foundation, dry-laid fieldstone.
17. Tailrace from wheelpit, covered with large granite slabs.
18. Tailrace, open.
19. Open field area, earth gravel, and building rubble fill containing mid-nineteenth century cultural material.
20. Possible tailrace from earlier gristmill buried beneath terrace or fill.
21. Mounded earth bank.
22. Small, dry-laid fieldstone enclosure (2 meter X 2 meter).
23. Historical cemetery No. 25, late eighteenth-early nineteenth century.
24. Building foundation, dry-laid fieldstone.
25. House foundation, dry-laid fieldstone.
26. Building foundation, dry-laid fieldstone.
27. Well, stone-lined.
28. House foundation, dry-laid fieldstone.
29. Building foundation, dry-laid fieldstone.
30. Location of prehistoric cultural material.
32. Barn foundation, dry-laid fieldstone.

Non-contributing structure

31. Twentieth century house.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Fisherville Historic and Archeological District is a good example of a common feature of nineteenth century, rural Rhode Island and southeastern New England: the small textile mill and its associated housing. Fisherville differs radically from larger and later mill communities that were established in unsettled areas and erected on an orderly plan, creating from the wild forest a physically structured and orderly community; instead, Fisherville grew in unstructured fashion around an eighteenth-century gristmill, sawmill, and farmstead, eventually becoming the second largest mill community in eastern Exeter. Unlike other communities in which mill operation and occupation continued into the twentieth century, Fisherville underwent no further growth or alteration after the loss of the mill, instead losing its occupants and buildings until only 2 dwelling houses of the original 5 remained in 1895. The absence of any industrial or domestic activity at the site since the 1870s assured the preservation of the mill, housing, and outbuilding foundations in a good state of repair. The mill foundation and wheelpit are in particularly good condition, allowing measurement of the waterwheel and calculations of its power potential. The mill foundation, containing a series of window wells for ground floor windows, allows a fairly good idea of the mill's appearance in regard to window and door openings, and possibly the location of work areas and machinery. This is especially helpful since so few wood-framed mill buildings from the early years of the textile industry survive in Rhode Island.

Fisherville is also significant because it is the only one of the small, rural textile mills examined in Exeter to date that clearly housed some of its workers in a boardinghouse. Employing between 20 and 30 employees, most over the age of 16, it was one of the larger mill communities in town during the mid-nineteenth century.¹ This is atypical of the small "Rhode Island System" mill which usually employed entire families or women and children to work in the mills. It is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the mill operated only 10 or 11 months per year.² Many questions are raised by these facts: did employees leave the village for the time the mill was not operating and return to farms at parents or relatives? Or did they stay, and if so how did they subsist during this period without income? Archeological evidence may provide some answers by revealing the remains of craft workshops or a seasonal bias to cultural material related to the boardinghouse.

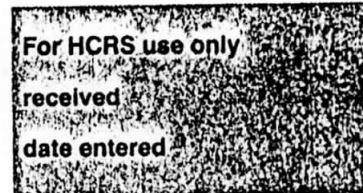
(See Cont. Sheet #4).

¹United States Census, Exeter, Washington County, Rhode Island, Schedule of Manufacture, 1850, 1870.

²Ibid.

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Given the limited documentary record, only through archeological investigation can the expansion and decline of the community be determined. Initial occupation and abandonment of sites as well as definition of the type of population occupying particular structures could be examined archeologically.

As the home of Schuyler Fisher during his candidacy under the Temperance Party for Lieutenant Governor in 1852, Fisherville and the surrounding communities were probably subjected to Temperance reform agitation. It is reported that most mill employees in the Sodom-Fisherville Brook mills were in fact members of the Cold Water Army. Recently, several anthropologists and historians have argued that these and other reforms were instituted by mill owners and social reformers as a means of combatting preindustrial social and work habits. The population would be converted into responsible citizens capable of enduring the long hours of repetitive work and accepting the ideas of obedience, temperance, and frugality as a means to self improvement in the spiritual, social, and economic spheres.³ Fisherville, in its well-preserved and unthreatened state, provides an excellent opportunity for the archeological examination of the impacts of this reform movement, as well as other topics of social and economic variability.

Summary

The Fisherville Historic and Archeological District represents a rural textile mill village at the mid-nineteenth century, containing 32 structures and archeological features. Documents suggest Fisherville may have been a unique mill village in Exeter because it housed workers in a boarding-house and was the home of Schuyler Fisher, mill owner and member of the Temperance party. The district provides the opportunity for the study of the growth and decline of a small textile community and the economic and cultural impacts of a social reform movement as well as economic change. The good state of preservation of the various features and relative absence of twentieth-century development assure a high degree of archeological integrity and research potential.

³Anthony C. Wallace, Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution (New York: 1978), passim; E.P. Thompson, The making of the English Working Class, (New York: 1963), passim.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Adams, Virginia, "Broadbrush Archeological Survey of Exeter, R.I." manuscript at Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence, R.I., 1978.

(See Continuation Sheet #5).

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 27 Acres (approx.)

Quadrangle name Slocum

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

1	9
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2	8	6	5	3	0
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4	6	0	4	3	2	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

1	9
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2	8	6	4	0	0
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4	6	0	4	0	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

1	9
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2	8	5	9	9	0
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4	6	0	4	2	7	0
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D

1	9
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2	8	6	0	6	0
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4	6	0	4	6	6	0
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E

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary of the Fisherville Historic and Archeological District was drawn to include all archeological sites. Their associated features and

(See Continuation Sheet # 6).

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Myron O. Stachiw, Archeological Consultant

organization R.I. Historical Preservation Comm. date March 1980

street & number 17 Forest Street.

telephone 401-751-9633

city or town Providence

state Rhode Island

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Frederick Williamson

July 10, 1980

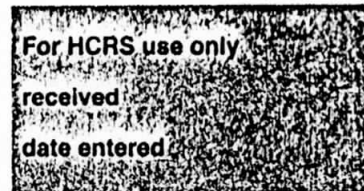
title

date

For HCRS use only I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	date
Keeper of the National Register	date
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	date

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Continuation sheet 5

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Cole, J.R. History of Washington and Kent Counties, R.I., (New York, 1889), p. 671.

Land Evidence Records (Unpublished), Exeter, Town clerk's office.

Simister, F.P., A Short History of Exeter, R.I. (Exeter: 1978), pp. 80-81.

Thompson, E.P. The Making of the English Working Class, (New York: 1963), passim.

United States Census, 1850, 1870, Exeter, Washington County, Rhode Island, Schedule of Manufactures

Wallace, Anthony F.C., Rockdale: The Growth of An American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution, (New York; 1978), passim.

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structures that relate to the milling activities. The boundary was drawn to leave at least 25 feet of space on all sides of a site or structure or Fisherville Brook and follow current property lines, natural boundaries, walls, and fences as well as arbitrarily chosen lines along poorly defined boundaries. (see figures 1 and 2).

Only a portion of the large estate of the Fisher family, heirs to the manufacturer, has been included. The southwestern boundary surrounding the abandoned Sullivan house is based on the existing property line and follows the perimeter of a cleared field, thus corresponding to legal and topographic factors. The southeastern boundary is established on the line where the original Fisher estate was partitioned in the early 20th century, and is designed to include all related archeological sites as well as the confluence of the tailrace with the brook.

At a point 25 feet from the western shore of Fisherville Brook and 25 feet north of the northernmost dam, the Fisherville Historic and Archeological District boundary begins, proceeding southeast 400 feet along the edge of a former millpond to a point on Wm. Reynolds Road, then southwest 300 feet along road, then crossing road and southeast 610 feet, then northeast 350 feet to a point in the middle of Fisherville Brook, then southeast 600 feet, then northeast 450 feet to a point on Wm. Reynolds Road, then northwest 1150 feet along Wm. Reynolds Road, then north-northeast 100 feet, then west 450 feet to a point 25 feet west of Fisherville Brook, then north-northeast 275 feet along Fisherville Brook, then west 50 feet, across Fisherville Brook to point of origin.



Fisherville Historic and Archeological District
Exeter, Rhode Island

Photographer: Myron Stachiw
Date: August 1979

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation
Commission

Nineteenth century house.
(figure 2, #8)

Photo #3.



Fisherville Historic and Archeological District
Exeter, Rhode Island

Photographer: Myron Stachiw
Date: August 1979

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation
Commission

Early nineteenth century house
(figure 2 #1)

Photo #2.



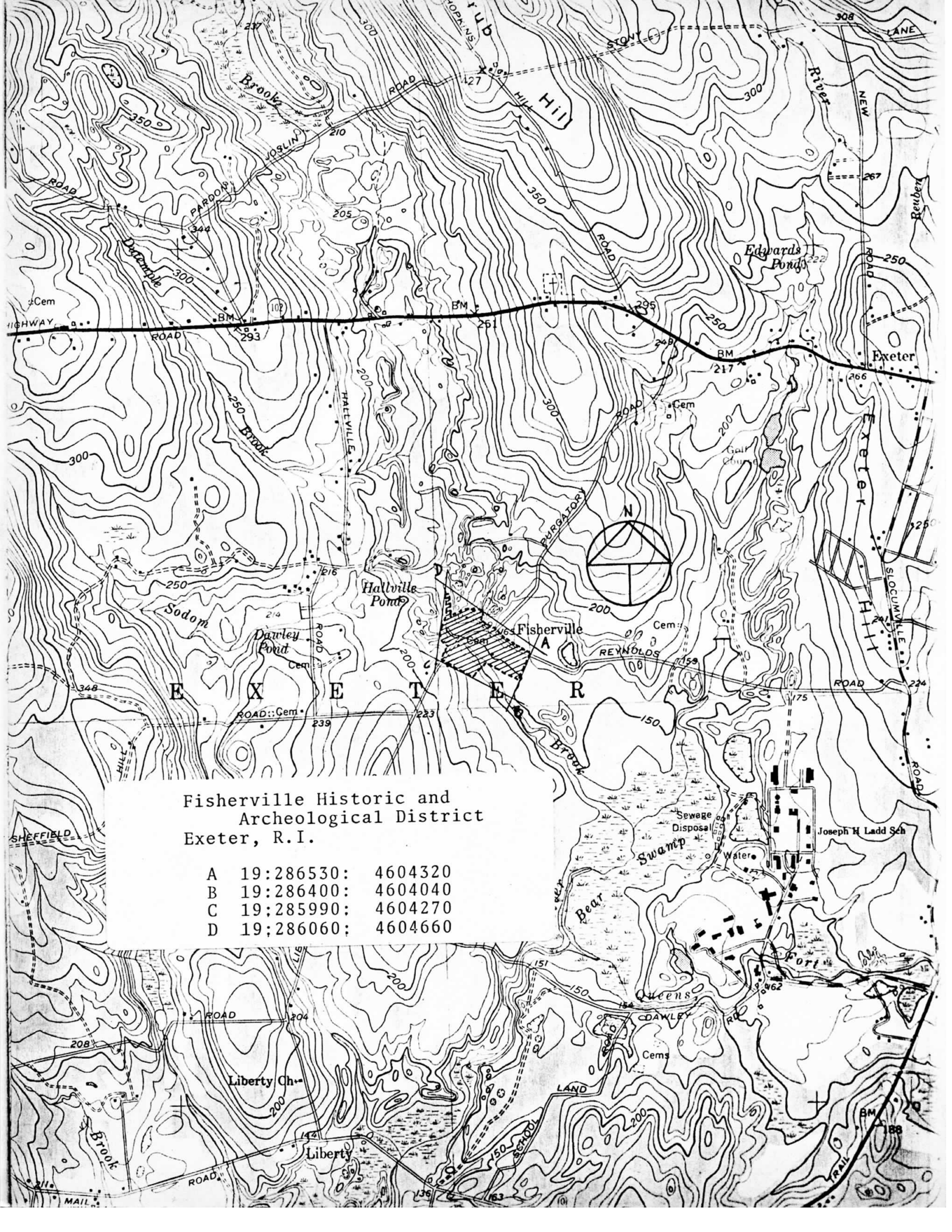
Fisherville Historic and Archeological District
Exeter, Rhode Island

Photographer: Myron Stachiw
Date: August 1979

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation
Commission

Fisherville Mill. Wheelpit. View northwest
(figure 2, #11)

Photo #1.



Fisherville Historic and
Archeological District
Exeter, R.I.

A	19:286530:	4604320
B	19:286400:	4604040
C	19:285990:	4604270
D	19:286060:	4604660



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

HISTORICAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Old State House
150 Benefit Street
Providence, R.I. 02903
(401) 277-2678

January 21, 1981

Town Clerk Evelyn M. Greene
Exeter Town Hall
Victory Highway
Exeter, Rhode Island 02822

Dear Ms. Greene:

The Preservation Commission is pleased to inform you that Fisherville Historic and Archeological District, William Reynolds Road, Exeter was entered in the National Register of Historic Places December 5, 1980. I am enclosing the town's copy of this nomination for you to keep.

Included also are folders explaining the purpose and scope of the National Register of Historic Places and the Grant-in-Aid Program, for which this property is now eligible.

Entry of a property on the National Register also makes it eligible for the provisions of the Tax Reform Act of 1976 (PL 94-455, Section 2124) if the property is used for commercial or income-producing purposes. The Tax Reform Act provides tax incentives for certified rehabilitation of commercially-used certified historic properties and tax disincentives in the case of detrimental alteration or demolition of a certified historic property.

If you have any questions concerning the National Register, or the Tax Reform Act, please feel free to contact Mrs. Ancelin Lynch, National Register Coordinator, at the Commission office. Questions concerning Grant-in-Aid should be directed to Mrs. Patricia Sheehan, Chief of Grant Services.

Sincerely yours,

Frederick C. Williamson
State Historic Preservation Officer

/aa

Enclosures