

REPORT ON THE NEWPORT SPRING SITE:
ITS HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

48 SPRING STREET

PREPARED BY
THE NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PREPARED FOR:
THE NEWPORT SPRING LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE
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Cover: Spring Street site, circa 1935.

Left: Detail of Ezra Stiles' 1758 map of Newport, Redwood Library Collection

THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

Newport, Rhode Island was founded in 1639 by nine families who fled religious persecution in the Massachusetts Bay Colony and came to the southern end of Aquidneck Island via Providence and Portsmouth. A freshwater spring, noted in early reports, came to the surface in the area that would become the first center of the settlement.

The spring no longer surfaces, but its location has long been presumed to be at the corner of Spring and Barney Streets, on the grounds of a long standing gas station. In his “Memoir of Rhode Island” (1832), Henry Bull IV describes the settlement of Newport around the spring. A footnote indicates that the spring site “has recently been covered by the erection of a stable on the land of the heirs of Edward Hazard on Spring street, at the foot of Barney.”

When the final owner of the gas station, Mr. Neil Coffey, made his desire to retire known to the community, a group of private citizens came together to purchase the site to save it from further development. This report seeks to document the history of use of the site and surrounding area as groundwork for decisions to be made regarding the future disposition of the property. It is the stated intention of the purchasers, known as the Newport Spring Leadership Committee (NSLC), to recommend a new use for the site that preserves it as undeveloped space and honors the historical status of the particular site as well as the important history of the City of Newport.

This report includes a description of the site and its adjacent lots as found today; a history of the site including maps and photographs (the earliest map is dated 1712); a chronological discussion of the use of the land and its owners; and finally some conclusions about the cultural integrity of the location and its value, both symbolic and actual, for the citizens of Newport today.

STUDY AREA

The Coffey’s Gas Station site is located in Lot 230, Plat 17 on a piece of property bounded by Spring Street, Courthouse Street and Touro Street. The property has sold gas since the 1920s. Currently this property can be seen to be three separate parcels: the Coffey’s gas station site (south lot), the north lot, separated from the gas station by Hozier Street., which most recently housed Jey’s detailing shop, and the parcel on which One Courthouse Square sits.

Over the centuries, these lots have been together and separate, and the Coffey’s gas station site itself has been periodically divided in two by the recurring/disappearing Spring Lane. For a time, Spring Lane ran as a western continuation of Barney Street, separating the lot into north and south parcels. Most recently, One Courthouse Square is a separate lot, and both the north and south parcels to the east were owned by Neil Coffey. Only the south lot has been purchased by the NSLG. We will refer to that lot in this report as the Spring site or as Coffey’s.

Adjacent sites host the Colony House (1740), the Newport County Court House (1926), and One Courthouse Square, formerly the Short Line Bus Station (1932) and currently an office building. To the north of the second lot is the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (1696), one of Newport’s oldest standing structures. The general location of this group of buildings is at the top (east) of Washington Square, separated from the Square itself by Court House Street and the Colony House building.

This site falls within the City’s Historic District and is under the purview of the City’s Historic District Commission.

SOURCES, METHODS AND AUTHORS

Ruth S. Taylor is the Executive Director of the Newport Historical Society; Bertram Lippincott is the Society's Research Librarian; Elizabeth Warburton is an architectural historian who is employed at the RI State Historic Preservation Office, but who performed this work as an independent contractor; Jennifer Robinson is the Associate Curator of Photography at the NHS; Mathew DeLaire is the Society's Executive Assistant.

Mr. Lippincott assembled Land Evidence and other data to create a time line of ownership for the Spring Site and adjacent properties, and also researched individual owners. Ms. Robinson did the photo research and assembled the maps and atlases. Ms. Warburton crafted the sections on the description of the site and existing conditions. Ms. Taylor assembled and wrote the rest of the text. Mr. DeLaire arranged the text and photographs to create this report.

Sources Consulted

Newport City Hall

- Land Evidence Records
- Probate Records
- Tax Assessor's Records

Newport Historical Society Collections (photograph and manuscript)

The Colonial Records of the Colony of Rhode Island by John Russell Bartlett (Providence 1856)

Documentary History of Rhode Island by Howard M. Chapin (Providence 1919)

The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island by Antionette Downing and Vincent Scully

"Memoir of Rhode Island" by Henry Bull (IV) 1832 et. seq.

"Newport Begins" by Lloyd Robson. Newport Historical Society Bulletin #113 (January 1964) et. seq.

Newport Historic District House Surveys 1970, 1988

Newport Town Meeting Records

Newport Town Council Records

Newport Colonial Land Evidence Records

Newport Colonial Probate Records

Newport City Directories 1856-1970

Newport City Atlases

Newport Daily News archives

Society of Colonial Dames Inventory of Colonial Buildings ca. 1930-1960 (used as the framework for
The Architectural Heritage of Newport by Downing and Scully)

Obituary Collection

Published Genealogies: Hazard, Easton, Coggeshall, Bull, Barney

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Aquidneck Island was the territory of the Narragansett Tribe of Native Americans when it was first encountered by European settlers in the 1630s. With the help of (and perhaps the insistence of) Providence's Roger Williams, the Island was purchased from the Narragansett sachems Conanicus and Miantonomi. What the English settlers found on their arrival was not an empty wilderness. Native people had been in the area for thousands of years, and had established sophisticated land management and fishing practices. Current evidence points to the existence of a large summer settlement in what is now downtown Newport, and the presence of the freshwater spring at the location we are discussing was certainly a factor in Native use. Archeological work done in the yard of Touro Synagogue some years ago indicates the presence of a Native American lithics manufacturing site. By the time of the arrival of the first English settlers, native populations had been significantly damaged by European disease brought to the region by the first settlers to the region 20 years earlier.

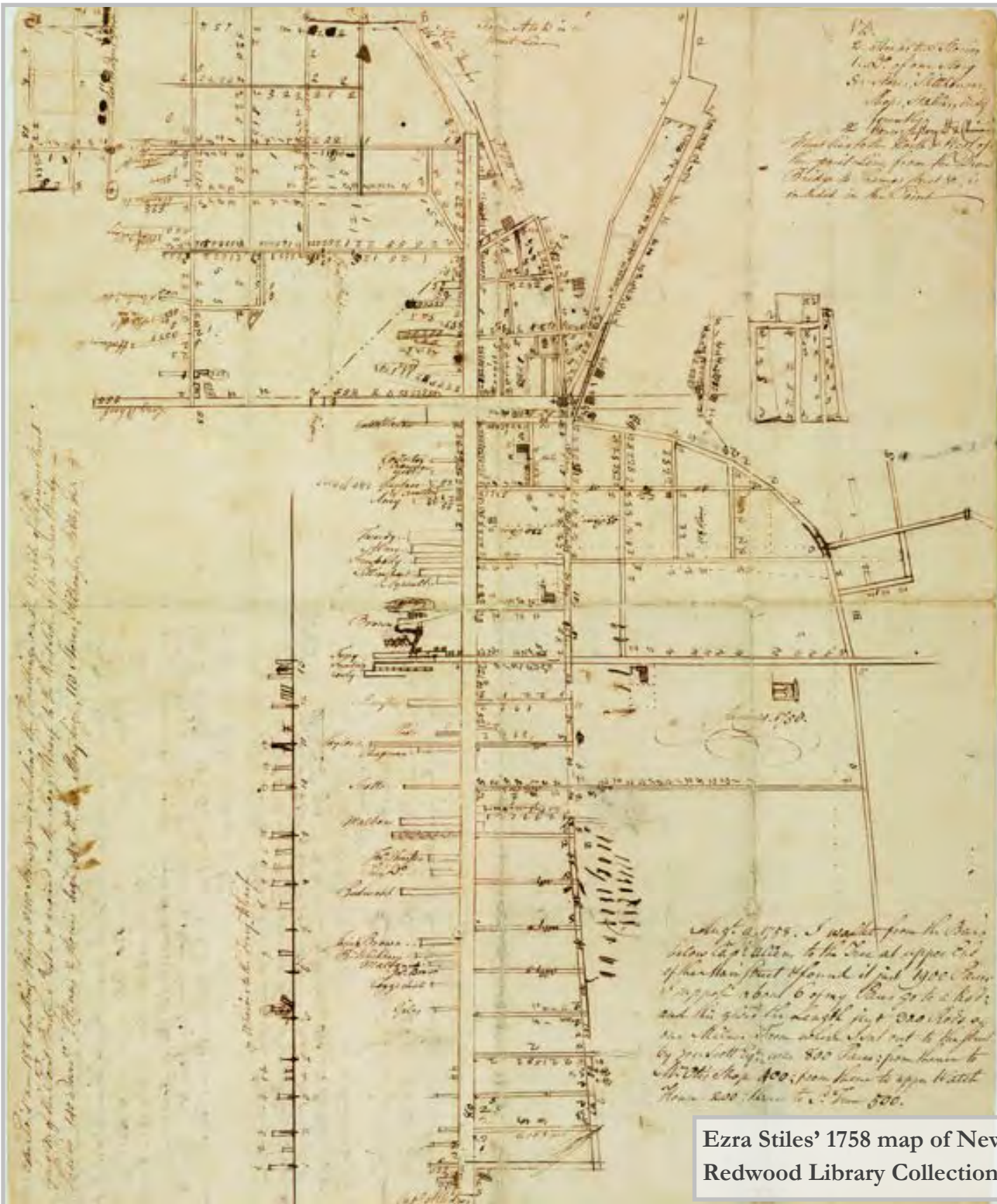
The Coffey's gas station/Newport Spring site first appears visually in the record on the Mumford Map of Newport, drawn in 1712, where it is one block square. It is in the original settled center of Newport, and is still surrounded by some of the oldest extant buildings, several of which date to the 17th century. While the spring itself is not indicated, the likely location of the original spring can be presumed on this map by the corner of Spring Street and Spring Court (later Spring Lane).

The site's original owner may have been John Coggeshall, an original founder of Newport, as the first known recorded owner is Joshua Coggeshall (1623-1689), his son. The property was the site of domestic use for the next 200 years. It was owned by two generations of the Marchant family, who appear to have lived on Cape Cod while owning this property, and a dwelling, in the center of Newport, during the late 17th and early 18th centuries, then by other Newport families through the late 18th c. In 1797, the land was passed from the estate of Peleg Barker to his daughter and son-in-law in a deed using the language "the same lane where the town spring is."

The surrounding properties were covered with a dense settlement of homes and small businesses. David Williams, Newport clockmaker, lived and worked here, as did Giles Hozier (brewer). The families worshipped in the rich traditions of diverse religions which made Newport distinctive. Baptist, Seventh-Day Baptist, Quaker, Jew, Congregationalist, and Church of England denominations all had representatives here. Indeed, their churches and meeting houses were all within a few moments' walk. Many still stand today.

During 17th and 18th centuries, while the land use was basically domestic, a public function was also fulfilled. The site, which is the point from which the One Mile Corner marker is measured, was likely seen as the center of town. While we do not know when the spring was no longer available at the surface, the underground river that runs down Barney Street toward the harbor has continuously been a source of fresh water. Almost every existing lot on Barney Street includes a cistern underneath the structure or buried in the yard – and a photograph from as late as 1874 shows a well on the spring site. It is likely that the cisterns served more than private uses – horses needed to be watered, and stored water was essential to the community in this wooden city as a way to fight inevitable fires. In addition, the placement of the Touro Synagogue may have been influenced in part by the need for running water for the associated mikvah, or ritual bath. Although the location of the original mikvah is not known, a 19th century mikvah sits under a current residence on Barney street.

It might not be surprising that when industry grew at this location it was transportation related. A branch of the Hazard family opened a livery stable on the site in the mid-19th century. Livery stables operated on the site into the 1930s, and the first gas station appears to have been added in the 1920s. A gas station was operating here by the Colonial Beacon Oil Company in the 1940s, and it is at this time that the plaque marking the site of the town spring was also placed. The site remained in service to the automobile under a number of owners, and selling gasoline from a variety of companies, until sold by the Coffeys in 2015.



Ezra Stiles' 1758 map of Newport, Redwood Library Collection.

DESCRIPTION/ EXISTING CONDITIONS

The following is an architectural description and existing conditions assessment for the former automobile service station located at 48 Touro Street, in Newport, RI. The building is abutted to a 2-story, brick structure used as a lawyer's office on the north elevation. The building occupies Newport Plat 17 Lot 228. The building, along with a triangular lot of open space (17/230) previously used for gas service to the south, occupies the center of a busy square which is neatly bounded by Hozier Street to the north, Spring Street to the east, Touro Street to the south, and Court House Street to the west.

A gas station structure was built in on this site in the 1920s; the extant building was built or altered c. 1942. The service station was operated by the Hassard family, George B. Gold and later the Gold family until 1985, when it was purchased by Neil F. Coffey, a former employee of Gold's. The business was closed in 2015 upon Coffey's retirement.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The building at 48 Touro Street is a 1-story, concrete, flat roof service station with 3-garage bays and a corner office. The building is typical of the "oblong-box" style of service station popular in the mid-20th century. Its architectural features are in good condition, with minor areas of superficial loss.

REPRESENTATIVE PHOTOS

Below: Three-quarter view of primary, south façade and east elevation.





Above: Three-quarter view of primary, south façade and west elevation.

Below: North elevation with adjoining commercial building on the left.





Above: Streetscape view facing northeast, with planters bordering the property.



Below: Workspace interior.



Above: Office interior.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The building at 48 Touro Street is a 1-story, 5-bay, rectangular plan, south-facing service station with a 2-story, 3-bay-by-5-bay commercial addition on its rear, north elevation. The service station building sits on a concrete foundation and has concrete walls clad in brick veneer on three elevations and a flat, tar and gravel roof with a later, asphalt-shingle parapet with vinyl trim on the façade and east elevation.

The primary, south façade is composed of three glazed aluminum garage bays on the western end, a glazed, single-leaf aluminum door with transom providing pedestrian access to the interior, and a trapezoidal corner office that turns onto the east elevation. The façade is clad in brick veneer in a running bond on piers that divide the garage bays and flank the principal, pedestrian entrance. The entrance bay projects slightly and sits below a cross-gable, which is trimmed in vinyl, on the parapet. The parapet is located approximately one foot above the garage bays and other windows and doors, creating a wide band below that provides space for signage. The office includes single pane, fixed aluminum-sash windows that wrap around onto the east elevation of the building; the brick veneer continues below the windows, with an imitation rowlock-course creating a sill. Additional features on the façade include oval, concrete slabs at the base of the piers dividing the garage bays, further defining each bay.

The east elevation, facing Spring Street, is fully clad in the brick veneer introduced on the façade and punctuated by two windows and one door. A paneled door with single-light transom above leads to a customer restroom and is flanked by 1/1 double hung wood sash windows. The window to the left of the door includes wire-mesh safety glass and narrow, metal bars across the sash. Two slightly raised piers, each 1-brick wide, provide the only disruption to the otherwise smooth veneer.

The north elevation is almost completely masked by the commercial building adjacent, which at 2-stories tall towers over the service station; however, a single bay in the northwestern corner of the building remains unobscured. This section of the north elevation has concrete walls, with the building's original flat roof design visible and emphasized with two narrow bands along the roofline.

One fixed, triple-track aluminum-sash window is introduced, and this design repeats on the west elevation. Like the office windows on the façade, an imitation rowlock-course in brick veneer has been applied to create a sill.

The west elevation is similar in arrangement to the north elevation, with three windows of the same materials and configuration arranged symmetrically above brick veneer, which runs the entire length of the elevation and is topped with the same imitation rowlock-course. A narrow, recessed band in the concrete walls runs the length of the elevation above the windows, adding a modest, yet modern ornamental touch. Two bands along the flat roofline, as seen on the west elevation, extend until they join with the parapet on the façade.

The interior of the building is utilitarian and industrial. The three garage bays on the south façade open into a large, rectangular workspace with concrete walls and floors and exposed pipes. The center bay includes a deep mechanic's trench carved out of the concrete floor. The north wall includes metal shelving units and a freestanding sink.

The space is brightly lit by virtue of the glazed garage bays and additional windows on the north and west elevations and includes supplemental hanging fluorescent-light fixtures. An interior, glazed aluminum frame door provides interior access to the office that composes the southeast corner of the building. The office has laminate or asbestos tile floors, wood paneled walls, and drop ceilings. A metal door provides access to a second restroom, accessible only from the interior.

Below: Detail of the eastern facade.



The property's gas pumps have been removed. However, the lot to the south retains its boundaries and integrity and is identifiable as a former gasoline filling station. The lot is roughly triangular, with the former gas pump island extant. A 20th century streetlight on a concrete base and narrow, 1-bay-square attendant's shed with gable roof sit on the island.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Overall, the service station building is in good condition and retains its character-defining features and the majority of its original elements. Some superficial areas of damage or loss exist, but the property has integrity of location, setting, most materials, feeling, and association.

South, primary façade:

- Walls: Significant areas of loss of brick veneer, particularly to the left of the westernmost garage bay and near pedestrian door.
- Doors and Windows: The garage door in the center bay has been replaced in-kind with an aluminum, glazed door; the original doors are 12-pane and the new door in the center bay is 8-pane. Surface abrasions to oval concrete slabs that divide garage bays. Office windows intact and aluminum sash in good condition.
- Parapet: Asphalt-shingles are deteriorated with several areas of loss.
- Trim: Good condition with minor areas of paint failure.

East elevation:

- Walls: Minor areas of loss of brick veneer. Efflorescence below office windows. Rusting to applied gas meter.
- Doors and Windows: Good condition, with mismatched pebble glass panes.
- Parapet: Asphalt-shingles are deteriorated with several areas of loss.
- Trim: Good condition with only minor areas of paint failure.

North (rear) elevation [visible bay only]:

- Walls: Significant paint failure, diagonal and step-cracks, and rusting pipe protruding from interior wall; these issues should be addressed to prevent water infiltration into the interior.
- Window: Intact with aluminum sash in good condition.

West elevation:

- Walls: Good condition with minor paint failure and minor loss of brick veneer.
- Windows: Intact with aluminum sash in good condition.

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

As one of the most ubiquitous American building types, the automobile service/gasoline filling station is easy to overlook; however, the unassuming service station represents major shifts in 20th century marketing strategies and consumerism and alludes to the mythos of roadside America.

The service station at 48 Touro Street is a good example of the “oblong-box” style of service/gas station with an office that became popular in the 1930s onward, as corporations began to emphasize the sale of automobile accessories and repair work in addition to the sale of gasoline. The building layout, with garage bays and a corner office, and particularly the separate restrooms for men and women with the men’s room accessible via the interior office and the women’s room accessible only from the building exterior are character-defining features of the type.

Most important to service station design at midcentury is the concept of “place-product packaging,” which allowed a corporation to standardize its architectural form and synthesize its building shapes into its brand; this allowed corporations to use its buildings as advertisements for the services and goods within. A recent interview with former owner Neil F. Coffey indicates that this service station was an Esso station, before becoming a Texaco and a Citgo. The station at 48 Touro Street is architecturally comparable to other Esso stations of the period. And, as seen on the Esso matchbook to the right, the Esso brand became pervasive in all types of advertising for the services at this building.

An interesting side-note derives from a 1953 advertisement in the *Newport Daily News*, in which proprietor Geo. B. Gold offers for sale triple-track aluminum windows similar to those found on the north and west elevations of this building.

After the 1960s, attempts to domesticize service station design led to the new construction or additions of features and details that mimicked local domestic architecture. The parapet addition to this station may represent this shift away from modernism; as the building’s most major change, the asphalt-shingle parapet is incompatible with the original design and significantly distracts from a visual understanding of the service station as a modern building.

Overall, the service station at 48 Touro Street is an intact, good example of an oblong-box type of early-20th century service station.

Right: Cover of an Esso promotional matchbook.



HISTORY: 1639 TO C.1850



Mumford Map, 1712.

The site can be seen as a plot at what is now the intersection of Spring Street and Touro.

POCASSET. On the 28th of the 2d, 1639. It is agreed. By us whose hands are underwritten, to propagate a Plantation in the midst of the Island or elsewhere ...

PRESENT. Wm. Coddington, Judge,

*Nicholas Easton, John Coggeshall, William Brenton, Elders
John Clarke, Jeremy Clarke, Thomas Hazard, Henry Bull
William Dyre, Cl'k,*

16th, 3d, 1639. It is agreed and ordered, that the Plantation now begun at this South west end of the Island, shall be called Newport; and that all the landes lying Northward and Eastward from the said Towne towards Pocasset, for the space of five miles, and so cross from sea to sea, with all ye landes Southward and Westward, bounded with the maine sea, together with the small Islands and the grass of Cunnunnegott, is appointed for the accommodation of ye said Towne...

It is ordered, that the Towne shall be built upon both sides of the spring, and by the sea-side, Southward.

Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, 1639.

The historic downtown of Newport that is centered on the spring is a tangible representation of the founding philosophy of Rhode Island as a whole, as expressed in our Charter of 1663. The commitment of Rhode Island’s earliest settlers to tolerance of all religious beliefs was exceptional for its time and perhaps even for today. The Charter, which advertised this tolerance to the world, also made clear that the settlers here believed that by tolerating each other’s religious beliefs, encouraging freedom of religion, and creating a separation between Church and State, they would also foster a community that would thrive economically.

This was demonstrably true, as Newport became one of the five wealthiest Colonial cities over time. It was also true that religious dissidents from European nations came here and found a home, and the ability to be economic and civic participants in this new kind of community. In Newport’s earliest days, there was little distinction between economic and residential spaces – people generally worked where they lived. There is good evidence that residences filled this neighborhood with some density throughout the late 17th and 18th centuries. The oldest known residential structures on their original sites in Newport are all within striking distance of the spring site, including the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (1696-today) and the Mayes-Nichols House (1673 -today, converted to a tavern before 1687, and now the White Horse). Additional early homes, including the Henry Bull House (1639-1912), the Easton House, and others were demolished in the 19th and early 20th centuries; note the presence of the names of the founders of Newport.

The Spring site was a home plot like many others, and was owned by Newport families and also by Massachusetts merchants purchasing property. As was not uncommon over the ages, the Marchant family of Mass. bought the land, but ultimately came here to settle.



Top: Mumford map highlight.
Bottom: Current plat map featuring the site.

Early owners of the south (Coffeys' gas station) plot include (see appendices for a more complete list):

Joshua Coggeshall (1623-1688). Son of John Coggeshall (1601- 1647). John Coggeshall was one of the original English settlers of Rhode Island, coming first to Portsmouth after being banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony due to his support for dissident preacher Anne Hutchinson. He was, in 1639, among several families to leave Portsmouth and found Newport, serving for a brief time as the President of the united towns of Portsmouth, Newport, Providence and Warwick in the period before the Charter of 1663 created the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

Henry Marchant (1741-1796). Several members of the Marchant family, who originally lived on Martha's Vineyard, owned this property before 1783. Henry practiced law in Rhode Island and also owned farmland in South Kingstown. After the American Revolution he was appointed the first judge of the US District Court for the Rhode Island.

Peleg Barker (1716-1794). Barkers were prominent in Newport and Middletown in the late 18th century, Peleg was a merchant, politician and town clerk.

Eunice Dunbar. Eunice Barker Dunbar inherited the land from her father. At the time that Robert and Eunice Dunbar inherit the site, it is divided into two lots, divided by Spring Lane.

The site and its surrounding area was home to iconic Newport families and activities. In addition to those listed above, the lot to the northwest (One Courthouse Square) was owned by Quaker John Hadwen and wife Elizabeth Barney in the late 18th century, Their extended family, who all lived in the neighborhood, including Giles Hozier, brewer, David Williams, clockmaker, and Obadiah Williams, carriage maker.



1874 McKim portfolio photo of the spring site; note the well.

A ring of houses of worship demonstrate Newport's profound religious tolerance and the proximity of congregations and churches around the town center, which remained generally free of religious architecture. The town center that developed to the west of the spring site, called the Parade, and now Washington Square, is anchored by the Colony House (1739, Richard Munday) and the Brick Market (1762, Peter Harrison).

Religious buildings adjacent to the Spring site today include:

Great Friends Meeting House (1699). Quakers were welcome in Rhode Island even as they were being tortured and executed in neighboring colonies. The Meeting House stands at the corner of Marlborough Street and Marcus Wheatland Boulevard. Home to Newport's Quaker community and annually to a meeting of all of New England's Quakers, this structure sits three blocks from the spring.

First Baptist Church. Many of Newport's original settlers were Baptists, and Newport's First Baptist congregation was led in the 17th century by Dr. John Clarke, original settler and the individual who likely wrote, and certainly obtained, Rhode Island's precedent-setting "lively experiment" Charter in 1663. A meeting house was built in this location in 1737, but is no longer standing. The descendent congregation, now known as the United Baptist Church, worships at 30 Spring Street, in a structure built in 1846.

The Seventh Day Baptist Meeting House. This 1730 structure originally sat at the corner of Spring and Barney Streets. Originally home to a congregation with roots in the 17th century, during the Civil War it housed the Shiloh Baptist congregation, which was primarily African-American.

Trinity Church. While New England's original settlers came here with antipathy to the Church of England, Newport's tolerance in religious matters extended even to these former adversaries. Anglicans settlers, joined by Protestant Huguenots, formed a congregation as early as the 1690s. Beautiful Trinity Church was designed by Newport's Richard Munday, who also created the Seventh Day Baptist Meeting house and the Colony House on Washington Square, and was built in 1726.

Touro Synagogue. Like the Quakers, the Jews of the 17th and 18th centuries found refuge in Rhode Island and particularly in Newport. Early arrivals in the mid-17th century came from the Caribbean, where Spanish and Portuguese Jews fled to following their expulsion from their home countries.

Forbidden in many places from conducting trade, in Newport, they were allowed to conduct business, and became, like the Quakers, prosperous merchants. Touro Synagogue, built within blocks of the town center in 1763, was designed by noted architect Peter Harrison.

It is notable that in a map created for the British in 1777, the named structures are almost entirely houses of worship from a variety of denominations.



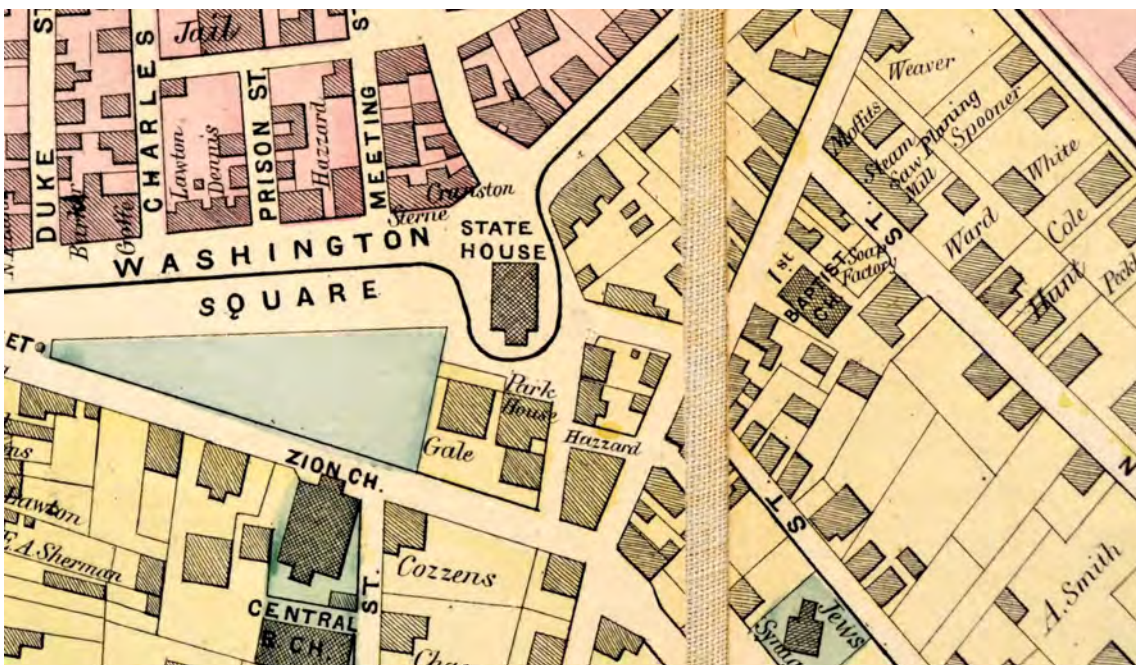
HISTORY: 1850 TO 2015

In the mid-19th century the site began to have a focused commercial presence. Edward Hassard was a Connecticut relation of the Newport Hazards who established livery stables at the intersection of Spring Street, Spring Lane, and Park Street in 1854. The family operated the stables which served the still lively downtown of Newport including the State House (Old Colony House) and the Park House Hotel on Washington Square. The family operated livery stables on the site into the first decades of the 20th century. Stables or livery stables also were sited on Barney Street and in the surrounding area at this time.

Service to horses was enhanced by service to the automobile by at least 1925, when Horace Hassard operated a gas station on the site. By 1940, the site was leased to the Colonial Beacon Oil company, who likely constructed the existing garage structure shortly thereafter. In 1958 George and Barbara Gold purchased the site and the gas station, from which they sold ESSO gas. In 1971, Spring Lane was officially abandoned by the City of Newport.

The site continued to be operated as a gas station after being purchased by Neil Coffey in 1985, offering both gas and garage services. In the early 2000s, the north garage building was turned into an art gallery (Station 29) which operated for several years. Most recently, the north building has been used for a car detailing business. Today it is vacant.

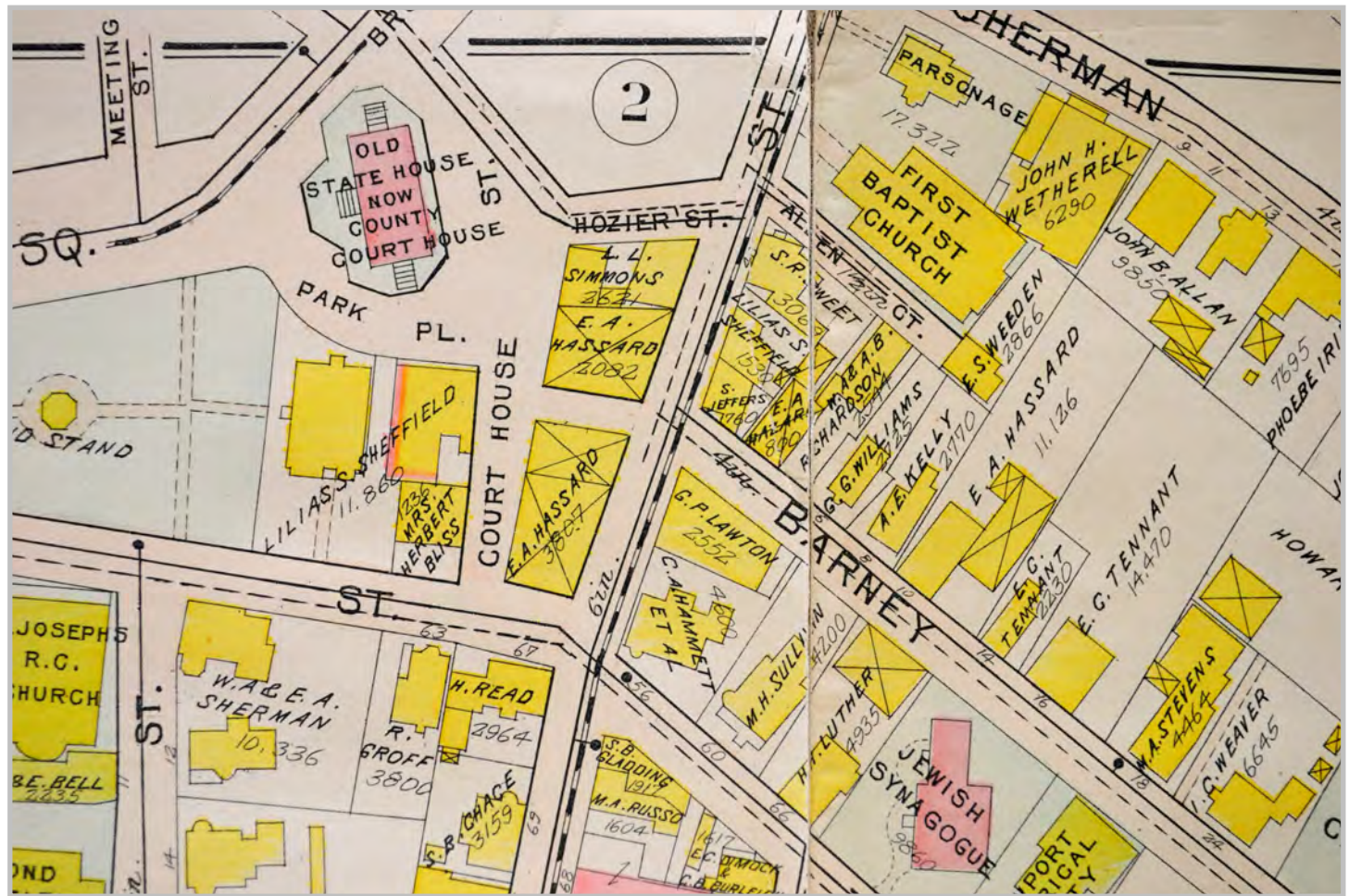
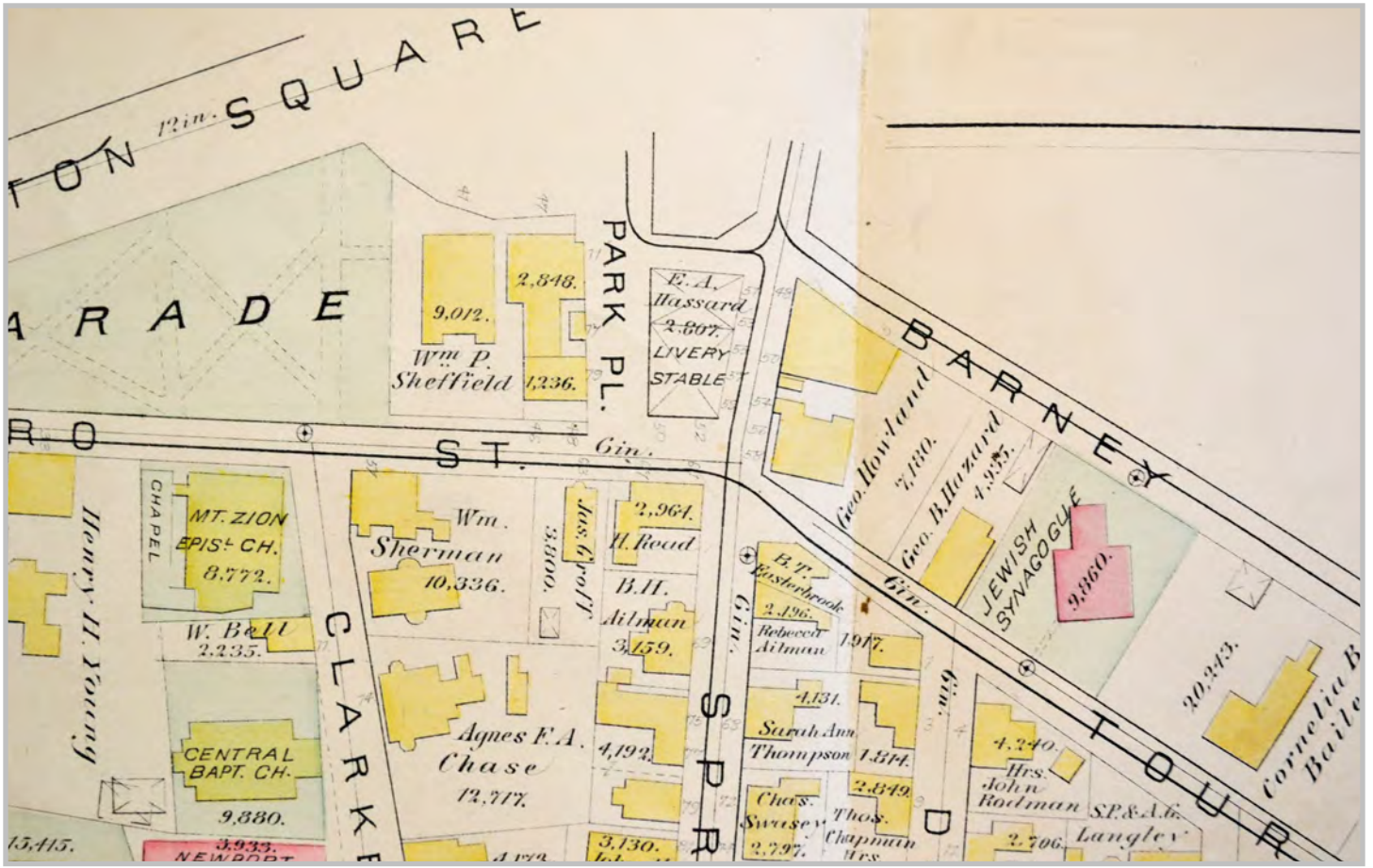
On the adjacent site now holding One Courthouse Square, transportation uses were also central to its 20th century life. In 1925 William Henry Vanderbilt bought the site to house The Short Line Bus Co., which was surely served by the new gas service next door. Vanderbilt was the son of Alfred G. Vanderbilt of the Breakers and Oakland Farm, and served as Governor of Rhode Island from 1938-1940. The existing building was built for the bus company in 1942; the site served as the Short Line bus stop through the 1960s, when the station was moved to Broadway to the site now occupied by the Newport Police Department.



Dripps Map, 1859. Shows the Hassard property.



Views of the corner including the Curtis Livery both c.1910s.



Newport Atlases from 1883 (top) and 1907.

PLANS AND COMMUNITY PLANNING 1912 – TODAY

The Spring site and its adjacencies have been the focus of some attention as Newporters have thought about and planned for the City's development in the 20th and 21st centuries. Around 1942, when the existing garage building and Shortline Bus buildings were built, a marker was placed at the presumed spring site. Before this time, the site probably received little attention, as the spring no longer came to the surface here, and had not for some time. Citizens groups have played a role in advising City government throughout, and the City's unusual beauty and iconic, if little-known history attracted the attention of some illustrious planners and thinkers.

In 1912, Frederick Law Olmstead prepared a report for the improvement of Newport after being approached by the "Newport Improvement Association." Olmstead suggests that Newport's "distinction as an agreeable place of residence forms the main basis of its prosperity," and cites the air, scenery and climate as assets. This sense of Newport as a timeless and lovely place, rather than as a bustling commercial city, were common in the early 20th century. Olmstead seeks in his report to encourage harmonious development and to ease traffic congestion, which was already an issue. He is also concerned about the placement of a new railroad station. In the area of our focus here, he suggests easing traffic between Bellevue Avenue and the waterfront by "remov[ing] the old stables and other buildings between Spring, Touro and Court House streets" and widening both Touro and Barney Street to make the two into an east-west thoroughfare.

In 1926, one section of a Report of the Joint Committee on City Planning focuses on the "Relief of Congestion in Washington Square." The report notes that cars from all directions are funneled into the Square itself and that congestion of "motor traffic" and parking are both issues. In this report, it is suggested that parking should be banned in the Square itself and a lot created behind the new courthouse and old statehouse — on the property subject to this report — by the removal of "objectionable or superannuated buildings." It is interesting to note that this report also suggests removing the street between the Colony House and Courthouse and creating more of a sense of a pedestrian friendly 'Civic Center.' Both reports suggest the creation of a new waterfront road to relieve congestion on Thames Street and the historic downtown. The construction of America's Cup avenue decades later did not in the end relieve these issues.

In the 1980s Newport created a Comprehensive Land Use plan using a Citizen's Advisory Committee, which lead to the creation of the Foundation for Newport, which continued a tradition of citizen's groups that goes back to the Newport Improvement Association of 1912. A primary interest of the Foundation for Newport was the traffic downtown and on the waterfront, and development on the waterfront. The Foundation worked with architect William Warner to produce the so-called W/T/G report (Warner, Todd, Gaffney), which focused on the realignment of the Pell Bridge off ramp and beautification of the waterfront.

In the late 20th and early 21st century, a great deal of attention from citizen's groups, non-profit entities and the City have been focused on Washington Square, inspired in part by the filming of *Amistad*, which recreated a more historic appearance in the Square for the film. The Newport Historical Society entered into shared stewardship relationships with the City and the State to open two historic buildings to public uses — the Brick Market and the Old Colony House — and to work with others to restore and repair

them. A group of citizens, lead by Lilly Dick, were assembled to work with the City to make and implement a plan to rehabilitate and restore a more historic appearance to Washington Square.

Washington Square Roots (WSR), another citizen group, came together initially to work with the business community to support year-round liveliness and activity in the Square; this group most notably helped revitalize a small July 4th ceremony that had been celebrated since 1826 and create a larger event which has become a tradition in the City.

In the fall of 2012, WSR convened a charrette, lead by community planner Dan Burden, to brainstorm ideas to improve Washington Square. Over 250 people participated. The broad objectives that emerged from an initial planning session indicated that 100 years after Olmstead’s report, traffic remains a problem for vehicles and pedestrians. What has changed, is that the Olmstead-era focus on a enjoyment of the scenic beauty of the City’s streets — while still part of the story — has shifted a bit towards a desire to also enhance economic activity and community development. The charrette lead to recommendations in four areas:

- Reconnect Washington Square to the waterfront and surrounding areas
- Improve traffic flow to and around the Square
- Enhance the daily Washington Square experience
- Promote year-round events and activities

Among the many items that emerged from the two-day activity was an idea to create a park at the end of Spring Street to extend the public space of Washington Square to the east. This was considered desirable as part of a traffic calming activity, to create a more substantial public space, and to recognize the City’s history at the site of the original spring.



Above: Construction of gas station showing old livery building on Barney Street, 1920s.

When Neil Coffey indicated his desire to sell his property and put it on the market, a number of citizens and groups began to propose potential public uses for the Square. A “Charter Square” proposal was put forth by John Grosvenor of Northeast Collaborative Architects, in which the site would be used to celebrate the City’s history of religious tolerance and diversity. Other similar ideas were advanced but did not take hold to the point of assembling a team to purchase the property. In 2014 several citizens, including Lilly Dick, approached Ruth Taylor (an author of this document and Executive Director of the Newport Historical Society) to facilitate a meeting of stakeholders to determine if there was a public interest in keeping the site from further development. Abutters, city staff council members, state officials and other interested parties attended. The result of the meeting was the formation of the Newport Spring Leadership Committee, as the consensus of the room was that site should be purchased and removed from the commercial market, though no particular use was endorsed. At this point it was also noted that the site sits within Newport’s Historic District and any construction would require Historic District Commission approval. The NSLC went on to raise the money to purchase the south lot, and raised additional funds to take care of environmental remediation and to plan for the future disposition of the site. This report is fuel for that planning process.



Gas station when selling
ESSO gas, c. 1958

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

In the broadest possible terms, the Spring site has three areas of historical and cultural significance.

- As the center of the original settlement of Newport
- As the location of over a century and a half of activities related to transportation
- As a symbol of the origins, growth and success of Newport's early religious tolerance

The site's first significance in pre-history was as a source of fresh-water to inhabitants of Aquidneck Island. In the mid-17th century, it was the center of the European settlement of Newport. Very quickly, as the town grew into a thriving Colonial city, it became simply an appealing house site in the center of town, where a variety of owners lived and worked. The property was distinguished at all times by the presence of easily available fresh water.

The site developed a commercial focus from the mid-19th century into the 20th. Transportation-related business began with liveries and stables in the 1850s, and continued with the placement of the bus station and the gas station starting in the 1920s. This use continued until 2015 when Neil Coffey closed the gas station and sold the site to the NSLC, ending approximately 160 years of continued transportation service.

In the last hundred years, corresponding to the rise of the automobile, the site has been not only of service to the car, but also a place of at least occasional traffic congestion. The recent meeting hosted by Taylor indicated that the site in its current configuration was an issue for car traffic and pedestrians — it was not clear to either group how to successfully move through this intersection — and references to this issue appear in earlier planning sessions.

While the site spent most of its life without being particularly celebrated, and the small marker for the spring dates only to the 1940s, the desire to have the site reference Newport's history is part of a general movement to raise the visibility of Newport's important history, particularly the early history of religious tolerance and Colonial success. A current application to become a World Heritage site is before the National Park Service; this focuses on the early history of Newport and Providence. The proximity of the Spring site to John Clarke's descendant congregation, the Synagogue and other houses of worship has been cited as an advantage to this focus. Proposals to bring the spring to the surface, create a park, or a park with a monument, have all circulated. Often, these proposals have suggested, as both Olmstead and the 1926 Report do, removing existing buildings on the site to create open space.

Spring plaque dedication, 1941



But of course there are others ways to respect the history of this location as it is turned to some kind of public use, and these have also been expressed.

The discussions of this location and its adjacent sites over these past 100 years have reflected the changing uses of the site and also changing notions about community development. Preservation and planning efforts of the early 20th century focus on the sense of an illustrious but distant past, and the stately and quiet reflection on that past. This view, which has a tendency to minimize the crowded messiness of Newport's urban center from the earliest days forward, appears in the earliest reports and continues as a component of the discussion today.

The City's Comprehensive Land Use Policy contains in the introduction to its section on historic resources two relevant statements of principle. It recognizes that the protection of Newport's important cultural resources has environmental, economic and educational benefits for the City's population. But it additionally suggests that the relationship between the built environment and the "social contours" of the community are also worth preserving. The history of commercial use, and the built residue of that use, is "the product of human endeavor; it captures a cultural moment and mirrors the tastes, needs and activities of ordinary people. The evolution of land use patterns and neighborhood settlement establishes a broader context for preservation planning."

This property is in fact a repository of four centuries of use, and the remnants of the most recent use are also a reflection of that history. A continued life other than as a passive park, and a new life for the extant structure, would also evoke and salute these historical patterns, and should be considered. In any case, a decision to remove the existing historic building must, as a matter of best practice, await a decision about how to best use this site for community benefit. A demolition permit for this historic building will need to be obtained through the City's Historic District Commission; this application will likely require a justification.

The NSLC is committed to soliciting community input before making decisions about the final disposition of this important property. Many goals, some of them perhaps in conflict, will be under consideration as they do so. The participation of a broad section of the current Newport community, and an openness to a variety of proposals, will be essential to an outcome which reflects both our history, and our needs and values today.



Gas station
when selling
Humble gas,
c.1955

APPENDICES

List of Newport Spring Leadership Committee and Advisors

Land Evidence information about site use and owners

 Spring Site (Coffeys)

 Courthouse Square

Washington Square Roots Charrette Report (including lists of stakeholders and resources)

High Resolution Images

Newport Spring Leadership Committee (NSLC)

Lilly Dick

Tina Dolen

Thomas Goddard

Justin McLaughlin

Howard Newman

Steve Ostiguy

Frank Ray

Newport Spring Advisory Committee (NSAC)

Richard D'Addario, Esq.

Charles B. Allott, Esq.

Karen Benson

Liz Drayton

Rev. Paul Hansen

Helen Johnson

Laura Pedrick

Pieter Roos

Bea Ross

Ruth Taylor

Federico Santi

William Riccio

COFFEY'S GAS STATION COPY 12/27/15

Plat 17, Lot 230

1639 Newport established around the Town Spring. (RICR 1:88)

Newport was founded by nine settlers from Portsmouth in 1639. The town radiated out from the Town Spring at the intersection of Spring and Barney Streets. The area was occupied by residential and commercial buildings including the Henry Bull House (1639-1912) and homes of other Quaker and Baptist settlers.

1712 Mumford Map: 1 block (NHS)

Joshua Coggeshall (ref. Huxford Marchant will)

1743 Huxford Marchant to Henry Marchant by will. "Same dwelling house and lot I purchased of Joshua Coggeshall" (NTC 9:269; ref. LE 2:27)

1758 Ezra Stiles Map with detail (Downing & Scully)

1777 Blaskowitz Map: 2 developed blocks (Downing & Scully)

1783 Deed: Henry Marchant to Peleg Barker (LE 2:27)

Peleg Barker Esq. (1716-1794) was a merchant and politician. His property passed, in two lots, to his daughter Eunice Dunbar, divided by Spring Lane. Afterwards, ownership takes two different directions.

1794 Decease of Peleg Barker, ownership divides to two lots. Spring Lane created.

1797 Deed: Est. of Peleg Barker to Robert & Eunice (Barker) Dunbar (LE6:533 Coffey Lot)

1797 Deed: Est. of Peleg Barker to Robert & Eunice (Barker) Dunbar (LE6:533 Short Line Lot)

BOUNDED ON THE SOUTH BY "THE SAME LANE WHERE THE TOWN SPRING IS."

1797-1854

1854 Deed: Hannah Gale to Edward A. Hassard (LE 31:471)

The beginnings of a transportation hub. Edward A. Hassard was from a Putnam, Connecticut branch of the Newport Hazard family. He established livery stables at the intersection of Spring Street, Spring Lane and Park Street to serve the State Capitol in the Colony House as well as the Park House Hotel at Washington Square. Livery stables operated at this site by the Hassard family through the 1940s, when the Colonial Beacon Oil Company opened a gas station on the site.

1859 Dripps Map: 1 building

1870 Photo by McKim: Town Spring Well, ancient houses.

1876 Atlas: Edward A. Hassard, 2 sheds

1883 Atlas: Same

1893 Atlas: E.A. Hassard Est., 2 sheds

1907 Atlas: Same

1921 Atlas: Horace Hassard, 2 sheds

1925 Gasoline station established by Hassard (Directory)

1927 Nellie and Ruth Hassard (tax card)

1940 Lease to Colonial Beacon Oil Co. (LE 147:407) Garage built? Plaque installed?

1957 Nellie Hassard (tax card)

1958 George and Barbara Gold (tax card) ESSO?

1969 Newport Bridge opens- Farewell St. becomes a major out of town thoroughfare.

1971 SPRING LANE ABANDONED BY CITY COUNCIL, EASEMENT CREATED (tax card)

1972 George Gold died, willed to Barbara (tax card)

1973 Texaco Inc. (tax card)

1985 Texaco Refining and Marketing Inc. (tax card)

1985 Neill and Diane Coffey (tax card)

1995 Garage remodeled

2015 SOLD TO CHURCH COMMUNITY HOUSING (tax card)

SHORT LINE BUS STATION COPY 1/7/16

Plat 17, Lot 228

1712 Mumford Map: 1 block (NHS)

1758 Ezra Stiles Map: with detail (Downing & Scully)

1775 Mortgage: Israel Brayton to John Hadwen for \$400. Spanish dollars. (Col. LE 14:245)

1777 Blaskowitz Map: with detail (Downing & Scully)

1783 Deed: John Hadwen of Newport, merchant and wife Elizabeth [Barney] to Clothier Peirce of Dartmouth, yeoman for \$600. With dwelling house, bounded on the south by Henry Marchant. Reference to previous deed of Elizabeth, widow of Israel Brayton (lost).(LE 2:14)

*Comment: Properties bounded on North by Hozier St., East by Spring St., West by Court St. South by Coffey's Gas Station land. Occupied by dwelling houses and shops.

*Comment- John Hadwen was a Quaker merchant from England who married Elizabeth Barney of Newport (Barney Street, Barney House). This extended family included Giles Hozier, brewer of Hozier Street and the Colony House; David Williams, clockmaker (house now Fastnet Pub), brother Obadiah Williams, carriage maker and New York State migrant.

1785 Deed: Clothier Peirce of Dartmouth, yeoman, to Isaac Lawrence of Dartmouth, mariner, for L180. Bounded on the south by Peleg Barker. (LE 3:69)

1787 Deed: Isaac and Elizabeth Lawrence of Dartmouth to Thomas Brownell of Dartmouth, mariner for L180. Bounded on the south by Peleg Barker. (LE 4:323)

1798 Deed: Estate of Thomas Brownell by Edward Thurston Esq., Sheriff, at public auction, to John Shaw for \$416. Bounded on the south by Matthew Slocum, late of Peleg Barker. (LE 6:696)

*Comment- The above transactions reflect the depressed economy. Out of town (Dartmouth) investors flipping cheap properties.

1808 Deed: John Hadwen sold the FASTNET building to sons in law David and Obadiah Williams.

1812 Will: John Shaw of Newport, housewright, to daughters Mary and Mehitable Shaw, spinsters, dwelling house and workshop. Proved 1816 (PR 5:290)

1836 Deed: Mehitable and Mary Shaw of Newport, singlewomen, to [brother] William G. Shaw of North Kingstown, physician for \$1000. Under the will of our late father John Shaw. Bounded on the south by the heirs of Nicholas Easton. (LE 21:312)

1856 Deed: William G. Shaw of North Kingstown, physician, to William J. Gladding and Lewis L. Simmons, painters, for \$1205. Land with dwelling house and other buildings bounded on the south by the heirs of Nicholas Easton. (LE 33:332)

1859 Dripps Map: 4 buildings on two lots.

1870 McKim Photo showing ancient buildings.

1871 Deed: William J. Gladding to Lewis L. Simmons, land and buildings bounded on the south by heirs of Nicholas Easton. (LE 42:665)

1986 Richard and Elizabeth D'Addario (Tax Card)

1995 Richard D'Addario (Tax Card)

1876 Atlas: Lewis L. Simmons, 2 houses.

1883 Atlas: Same.

1893 Atlas: Same.

1907 Atlas: Same

1921 Atlas: L. L. Simmons, 3 buildings.

1925 William Vanderbilt establishes Short Line Bus Co. to introduce tourism and replace trolley lines.

*Comment: William Henry Vanderbilt was the son of Alfred G. Vanderbilt of The Breakers and Oakland Farm, Portsmouth. He served as Governor of RI 1938-1940. Gasoline sales introduced at Coffey's next door 1925.

1929 Mount Hope Bridge completed by private company headed by Vanderbilt.

1930 Deed: Mary Tracy and Lewis Simmons, Jr., heirs of Lewis Simmons, deceased, to William S. Sherman for \$10. and other considerations. (LE 124:272). Sherman was a dentist.

1930 Deed: William S. Sherman to William H. Vanderbilt (Tax Card)

1932 Short Lines Inc. (Tax Card). Site demolished, bus station built (1932 Directory advertisement).

1953 DeMaris Investment Co. (Tax Card)

1960s Short Line moved to Broadway bus station, now site of police station.

1969 Newport Restoration Foundation (Tax Card)

1971 Rhode Island Arts Foundation at Newport (Tax Card)

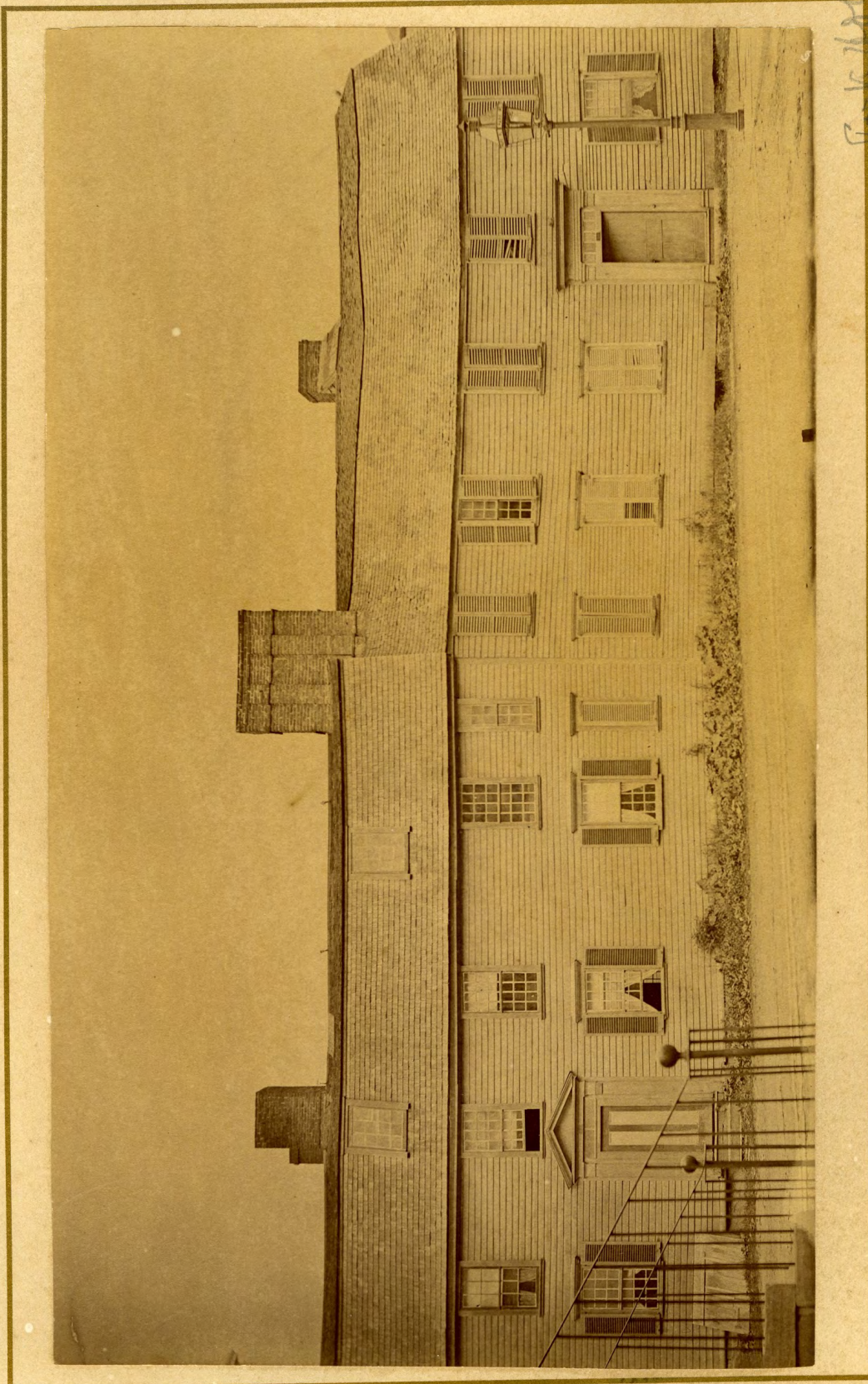
1977 Margaret M. Rhodes, trustee (Tax Card)

1986 LSA Gomez, trustee (Tax Card)

1986 Richard and Elizabeth D'Addario

1995 Richard D'Addario

Houses on Court House Street;
note Colony House railings
facing Park Place at foreground.



Custom House. Park Place.

x
Foot Hill
This side x

Corner of Hozier Street at Court House Street, showing one house replaced by a building with livery stable signage (right).



Same view, looking towards Touro Street, with livery stable signage replaced by a Texaco star.



Corner of Court House Street and Hozier Street;
note construction of early garage at right.



Demolition on the northern end of the future gas station site, looking towards Hozier Street.



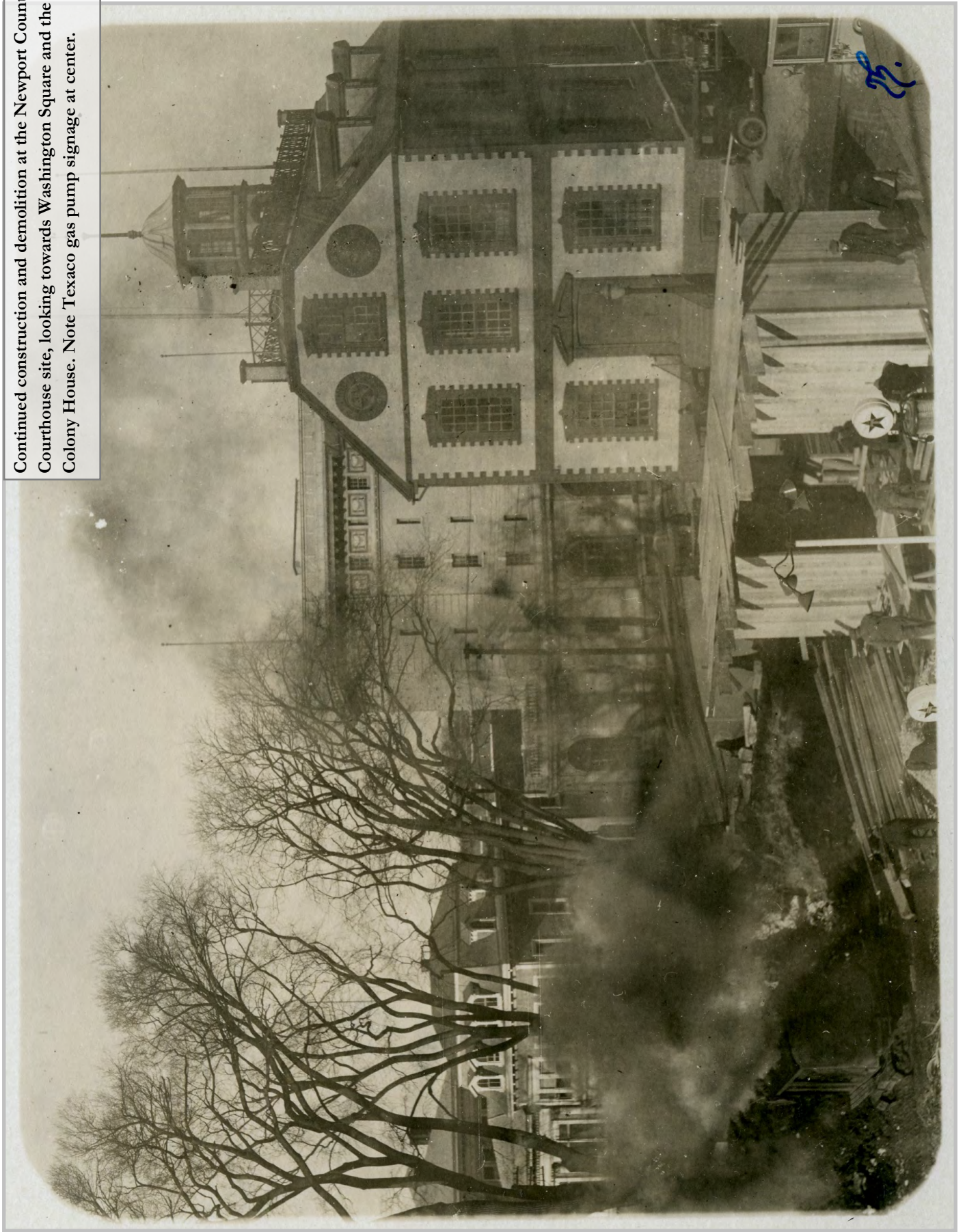
Demolition on the southern end of the future gas station site. Bliss House is located at left; Levi Gale House is to its right. Park House hotel has been demolished as well.



Overview of construction site, showing foundation of Newport County Courthouse being excavated at right.



Continued construction and demolition at the Newport County Courthouse site, looking towards Washington Square and the Colony House. Note Texaco gas pump signage at center.



View from Spring Street behind the Colony House. Note bus passing by Hozier Street, and luncheonette at center.



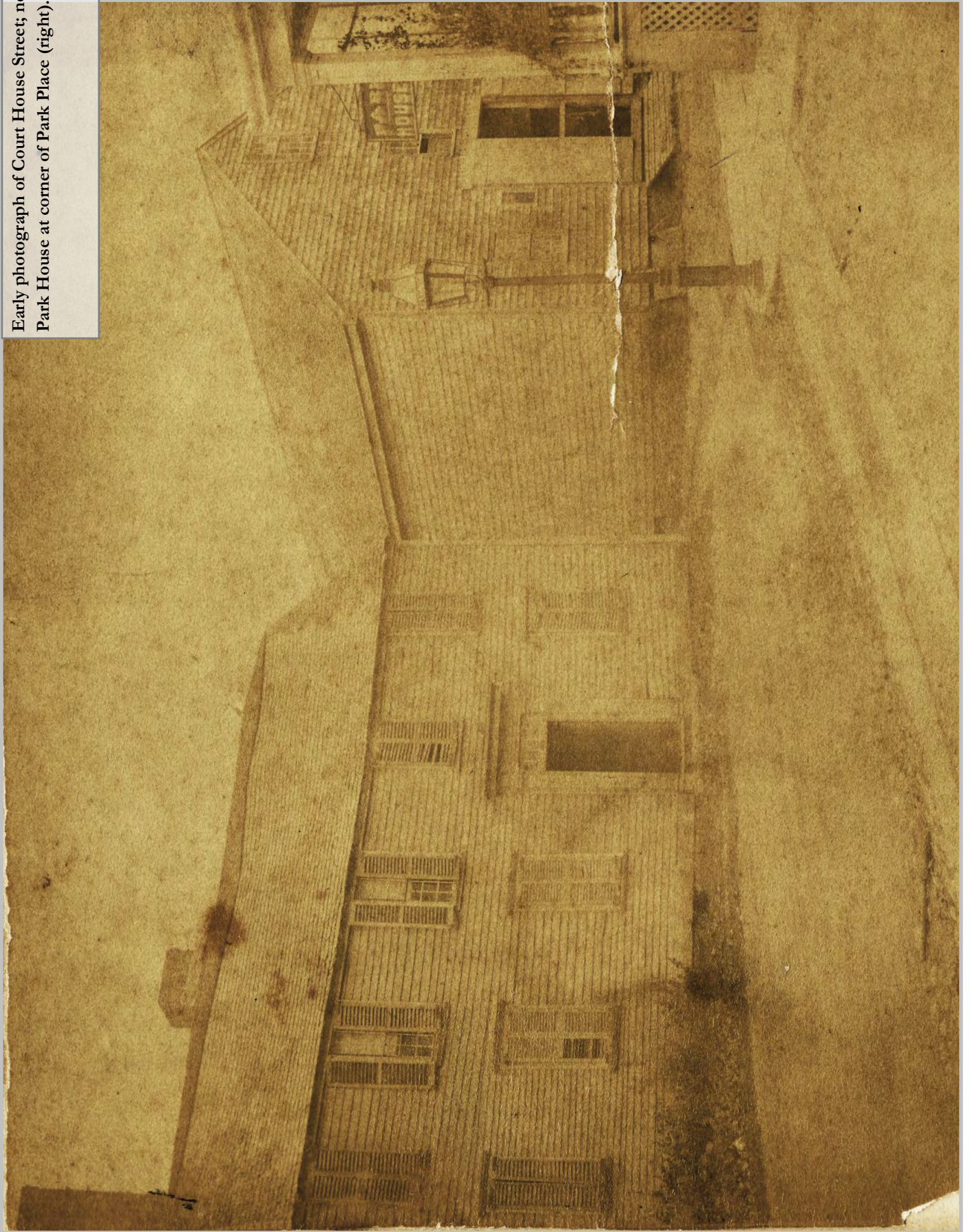
"Happy Motoring" with Humble gasoline, c. 1955.



Dedication of the Short Line Bus Terminal on Hozier Street. William H. Vanderbilt III and his wife, Anne Colby Vanderbilt, are standing at center. Newport Mayor Mortimer H. Sullivan is standing to the left of Mrs. Vanderbilt.



Early photograph of Court House Street; note
Park House at corner of Park Place (right).



Bliss House. Side faces Court
House Street; entrance faces
Touro Street.



“Simmons Building,” located on the future site of the Short Line Bus Terminal. Front faces Spring Street; side (with posters) faces Hozier Street.

