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St. Mary's Episcopal Church: Architectural History and
Preservation Possibilities

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St. Mary's Episcopal Church: Architectural History and Preservation Possibilities

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Acknowledgements

As I write this, I am daunted by the surreal thought that both my thesis and my time at RWU are drawing to completion. There are countless people who have helped me reach this point and deserve my thanks. To my advisor, Philip Marshall, thank you for all the sage wisdom you provided over the last four years- particularly during my time spent on this project. To the community of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, thank you for welcoming my research and for preserving a building that has proven to be a fascinating subject. And, of course, to my mother, thank you for everything, including listening to me rant and rave about architectural styles. I doubt I'll ever run out of things to say about the Gothic Revival, so it's very thoughtful of you to pretend to care!

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Preface	v
Part 1: Historical Narrative	1
Chapter 1: Historical Context	2
Chapter 2: Establishment of the Parish	7
Chapter 3: St. Mary's Architecture	12
Part 2: Research Narrative	23
Chapter 4: Archives Consulted	24
Chapter 5: Uses of this Report	36
Chapter 6: National Register Process	40
Conclusion	48
Appendix I: Photos	50
Appendix II: Index of Contacts	62
Bibliography	63

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the architectural and historical significance of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. It comprises two major sections: a historical narrative and a research narrative. Thus, it is meant to illuminate the history of St. Mary's and to guide future research. The historical narrative contains information regarding the context into which the church was built, the founding of the parish, the construction of the church building, and selected significant changes. The research narrative contains a list of archives consulted, suggestions of uses for the information obtained, and a description of the necessary steps to list St. Mary's in the National Register of Historic Places.

Preface

The long-established parish community of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, stewards a remarkable architectural treasure. The community's 1847-1849 church building remains well-maintained with the highest degree of integrity (Fig. 1). Its fine state of preservation is, no doubt, owed to the continued use of the structure. Though there is no question that the community hopes to continue maintenance of the structure, questions have arisen regarding the best means to achieve that end.

This project was initiated with the one particular goal of stewardship in mind. A preliminary interest has been expressed in listing the building in the National Register of Historic Places. To do so, it is necessary to have concrete knowledge and evidence of the building's historical significance.

This document includes two sections. The first is a narrative architectural history of St. Mary's Church. This narrative is intended to form the basis of an eventual nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The second section discusses the research process from which this document took shape. The explanation of research methods and objectives provided is meant to aid future scholars researching the history of the building. Though the history compiled within is substantial, there is always more information waiting to be found.

Part 1: Historical Narrative

Chapter 1: Historical Context

Introduction

This chapter provides contextualizing information regarding the moment in history at which St. Mary's Episcopal Church was constructed. To fully comprehend the significance of the building, it is necessary to understand its role within a greater historical narrative. Though the information in this chapter does not relate specifically to the archival research of the church building, it is essential to any scholar of its history.

Social Context

During the era of foundation for St. Mary's Church, Portsmouth could best be characterized as a rural farming settlement. The 1840 census of the town reveals a total population of 1,833. This figure can be compared with the population count from the statewide census of 1755. The 1755 census recorded a population of 1,363 in Portsmouth.¹ The modest change in population over the course of a century displays the rural character of the town. A large sector of the population (491 people) identified agriculture as their trade in 1840, speaking to the agricultural base of the local economy.²

In regards to religion, the Quaker Friends Society was one of Portsmouth's earliest establishments. The purchase of the first Quaker meetinghouse occurred in 1692. By 1700, the Quaker community had moved to a newly constructed meetinghouse. The community grew large

¹ John T. Pierce, Sr., *Historical Tracts of the Town of Portsmouth* (Portsmouth: Hamilton Printing Company, 1991), 61.

² James E. Garman, *A History of Portsmouth, Rhode Island* (Newport: Franklin Printing House, 1978), 24.

enough that in 1784, the Friends Society established a school in Portsmouth. It was subsequently moved to Providence, where it continues to exist as the Moses Brown School. The end of the 18th century also saw the first convergence of the Methodist community in Portsmouth. There is record of this congregation's meetinghouse existing as early as 1806. By 1821, the Rhode Island Union Society (which would later organize under the name "Christian Church") was incorporated.³

Increasing religious diversity eventually led to the incorporation of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the town of Portsmouth. The earliest Episcopal parish in Portsmouth was St. Paul's Church. This building was constructed in 1834. The establishment of this Protestant Episcopal Society exemplifies the growth in religious diversity that characterized Portsmouth during this era. St. Mary's Church would be the second Episcopal parish established in the town, marking the growth of a sect newly introduced to the locality.

This relation to religious history can be considered a key element of the historical significance of St. Mary's Church. The diversification of Portsmouth speaks to the circumstances of its founding. Two early landholders in the area, John Clarke and William Coddington, came to Rhode Island after exile from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. This exile was the result of sympathy with religious dissenters. Considering this history, it is not surprising that the 1638 Portsmouth Compact established the town as a secular government, thus ensuring religious

³ Ibid., 9-23.

freedom for its citizens.⁴ The narrative of religious diversity, which comprises the establishment of St. Mary's, expresses the values set out upon the founding of Portsmouth.

Architectural Context

The early architecture and settlement patterns of Portsmouth have been described as “the customary New England settlement pattern”⁵ The architectural environment of Portsmouth was characterized by modest houses on multi-acre lots of land. These houses, typically of wood frame with shingle or clapboard cladding, exemplify the rural architecture of New England. The greatest stylistic variety was seen in ecclesiastical architecture. For example, the 1838 Methodist Church building displays the features of the Greek Revival in its classically-inspired proportions. St. Paul's Episcopal Church utilizes Gothic Revival detailing in its pointed-arched windows and doors. The church retains a modest air, however, through its wooden cladding.⁶

Like these precedents, St. Mary's Church has an unpretentious rural character afforded by its small size. However, it differs from earlier local ecclesiastical architecture in its use of stone masonry. It also displays a markedly greater connection to its European inspiration than either the Episcopal Church or St. Paul's Church. Thus, St. Mary's can be regarded as a step away from an architecture rooted in the New England landscape. Indeed, mere decades after the establishment of the parish, an influx of new architectural styles would occur in Portsmouth. This influx of styles was due to an increase in the amount of summer visitors to the town. In

⁴ *Historic and Architectural Resources of Portsmouth, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1979), 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

constructing their summer cottages, these temporary residents expressed the ornately decorative architectural styles of the era. The St. Mary's Church building may be viewed as a stepping stone in this stylistic shift.⁷

The Cambridge Camden Society

Most of this chapter has focused on the local context surrounding the construction of St. Mary's Church. However, it is worth noting that the emergence of the Cambridge Camden society in England during the 1830s had a profound effect on the ecclesiastical architecture of the mid-nineteenth century. A number of undergraduate students in Cambridge originated the group based on a mutual interest in Gothic ecclesiastical architecture. The Society sought to revive the values of the Gothic period, a time which was believed to be characterized by spiritual purity. To this end, the group published pamphlets and journals encouraging the resurrection of Gothic architecture among Anglican church-builders. Their pervasive influence impacted the designs of Anglican churches in Britain and Episcopal churches in the United States.⁸

The document that best exemplifies the views of the Society is the pamphlet *A Few Words to Church-Builders*. Published in 1841, this pamphlet codifies the architectural characteristics promoted by the Cambridge Camden Society. Close reading of the text reveals certain influences upon the architecture of St. Mary's. For example, the pamphlet states that the two most essential elements of a church are a well-defined nave and chancel. These two elements are clearly present in St. Mary's, and the chancel is clearly differentiated as being the site of religious ceremony,

⁷ Ibid., 10-11.

⁸ James F. White, *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1962), 25-29.

separated and elevated from the more public nave. The pamphlet also designates stone as the most desirable building material for a church. Particular emphasis is placed on the use of local stone. An east-west orientation (as seen in St. Mary's) is noted in the publication to be preferable. The placement of the pulpit at St. Mary's, on the south side of the nave arch, also is in congruence with the suggestions of the Society.⁹

Having noted these similarities, the influence of the Cambridge Camden Society on the architecture of St. Mary's is indisputable. The St. Mary's Church building can be considered among the finest exemplification of the values of the Society. Because the Society was a prevailing cultural influence of the time, it is an important part of the context surrounding the construction of the church. This influence also contributes to the significance of the architecture itself: the building may be read as a testament to the Society that shaped mid-nineteenth century ecclesiastical buildings.

⁹ *A Few Words to Church-Builders* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1841), 5-22.

Chapter 2: Establishment of the Parish

Introduction

The events leading to the construction of St. Mary's Church constitute an integral aspect of its significance. The parish owes its existence to a significant figure in local history, Sarah Gibbs. The generosity of this single patron set off a chain of events that would bring a nationally known architect to Portsmouth. However, the establishment of the parish should not be viewed as a mere prerequisite for later architectural developments. These events are historical in and of themselves, and contribute significantly to the history of Portsmouth as a whole.

Sarah Gibbs

The most instrumental figure in the founding of St. Mary's parish was Sarah Gibbs. Ms. Gibbs was a devout follower of the Episcopal faith and a notable member of Portsmouth society. Her family had owned property in Portsmouth since 1796. This property included the estate Oakland Farm, which bordered the land upon which St. Mary's Church would be built. The Gibbs family enjoyed a great amount of wealth, as the merchant George Gibbs was the proprietor of a successful Newport commercial firm called Gibbs & Channing.¹⁰

In 1814, William Ellery Channing (the cousin of Sarah Gibbs) married Ruth Gibbs (the sister of Sarah Gibbs).¹¹ Channing was a well-known minister both in the United States and abroad. In fact, he was considered one of the instrumental figures in the foundation of Unitarian

¹⁰ James E. Garman, *Gentlemen's Farm of Portsmouth, RI* (Portsmouth: Hamilton Printing, 2003), 66.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

Christianity.¹² He was also admired in liberal intellectual circles: he was a prolific writer interested in reform causes such as abolition. Channing's full-time place of residence was Boston, but after his marriage Oakland Farm was frequently utilized as a family retreat. Use of the estate was not limited to Channing and his wife; Sarah Gibbs also spent considerable time there. By 1826, an agreement of life tenancy at Oakland Farm had been established for Sarah Gibbs. Upon her cousin's death in 1842, she became the primary tenant of the estate.¹³

It is certain that many prominent members of the Gibbs family were well-known in the locality. However one may argue that, no other family member had as much of a tangible impact on the built environment as Sarah Gibbs did. The patronage of Sarah Gibbs initially led to the establishment of the Church of the Holy Cross, located in Middletown. With the intention of creating a chapel for public prayer and worship, Ms. Gibbs donated \$2,000 towards the construction of the Church of the Holy Cross. This donation occurred around the year 1844, and this earlier church was consecrated in October of 1845. It was highly praised by Bishop John P. K. Henshaw for its design. The design was the work of architect Richard Upjohn, whose involvement in the construction of St. Mary's will be fully explored in Chapter 3.¹⁴

Ms. Gibbs would soon turn her attention to a location closer to her home at Oakland Farm. At the same time that the Church of the Holy Cross was being constructed, a new Episcopal community

¹² Amy Kittelstrom, *The Religion of Democracy: Seven Liberals and the American Moral Tradition* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 102.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

¹⁴ *A Brief History of St. Mary's Church, South Portsmouth, & the Holy Cross Chapel, Middletown, Rhode Island, 1843-1916* (Boston: The Merrymount Press, 1916), 4-7.

was growing in Portsmouth. This community, which began as a small group, would become the parish of St. Mary's Episcopal Church.

Earliest Years

In November of 1843, Rev. Francis Vinton of Trinity Church, Newport, invited Rev. Hobart Williams to come to Portsmouth. Rev. Williams accepted the invitation, thus leaving his post at St. Stephen's Church in Hartford, New York. Rev. Williams would become the first pastor of St. Mary's Parish. He was able to stay in Portsmouth through the winter months due to the hospitality of Ms. Gibbs, who invited him to stay in Oakland Park as a guest. Rev. Williams conducted the first services of St. Mary's parish are dated to the following month. As was written in a 1916 history of the parish, "On December 17, [1843,] the third Sunday in Advent, the morning and evening services of the church were first said by Mr. Williams before a small congregation, and, assisted by a few fellow-laborers, he entered upon the work of building up a new parish."¹⁵

At this time, no ecclesiastical building served as the home of this parish. Indeed during these early years, services were held in temporary wooden building described by Rev. Williams as a mere "shed."¹⁶

Donation of Land

After assisting in the establishment of the Church of the Holy Cross, Ms. Gibbs began planning to sponsor an institution with a greater range of functions. Her intention moved beyond creating

¹⁵ Ibid., 2-3

¹⁶ Ibid., 4.

a place for only prayer. Instead, she hoped to create a center of religious education. It was with this intention in mind that she purchased the land adjoining her Portsmouth Home (land formerly known as the “Potter Farm”).¹⁷

The deed recording Ms. Gibbs’ purchase of the Potter Farm is dated April 9, 1844 (Fig. 2). Several members of the Potter family are listed as the grantors of this deed: Rowse T. Potter, Mary S. Potter, Lydia. B. Potter, William T. Potter, David G. Anthony, Elizabeth S. Anthony, Levi Chase, and Mary P. Chase. These grantors sold the land to Ms. Gibbs for a sum of \$5,250. The deed describes the parcel being sold as 88 acres of land, with existing buildings standing upon it.¹⁸

During the same year, Ms. Gibbs donated the land to the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island through a deed of trust (Fig. 3). The language of this document reveals her aspirations to create a center of faith and education:

I am desirous to aid in the furtherance of the Gospel, and in the maintenance of the doctrine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, of the United States, as exhibited in the Book of Common Prayer, and for this object have purchased a tract of land in Portsmouth, in the County of Newport and State of Rhode Island, to furnish sites for a seminary and church, both or either as occasion may require; and means be obtained.¹⁹

In this deed, Ms. Gibbs named Bishop Henshaw and John Henry Gilliat the trustees of the property. The deed also states that buildings erected on the property must have the exclusive purpose of seminary, church, or other affiliation with the Protestant Episcopal Church. This deed

¹⁷ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁸ Deed of Sale from Potter Family to Sarah Gibbs, 9 April 1844, Newport County, Rhode Island, Deed Book 13, page 11. Town Clerk’s Office, Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

¹⁹ Deed of Sale from Sarah Gibbs to Trustees, 9 October 1844, Newport County, Rhode Island, Deed Book 13, page 33. Town Clerk’s Office, Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

is dated October 9, 1844.²⁰ The donation of land through this deed set the stage for the construction of the extant St. Mary's Church building. Services would continue to be held in a temporary building until 1849. Planning for construction, however, would begin much earlier.²¹

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Brief History of St. Mary's*, 10.

Chapter 3: St. Mary's Church Architecture

Introduction

The well-designed and remarkably preserved architecture of St. Mary's has a rich material history. The preceding chapters detail the context that produced the physical elements of the building. The following chapter will address the building itself, giving note to the construction process and significant elements. Of particular note is the involvement of famed architect Richard Upjohn. Though the building today retains its historic appearance, some significant elements added throughout its history will be briefly described in this chapter.

Involvement of Richard Upjohn

Richard Upjohn (1802-1878) was one of the foremost American architects in his time, and remains widely studied today. He was influential in the popularization of architectural styles associated with Romanticism. Most notably, he worked in the Italianate and Gothic Revival styles. Though he was born in England, he immigrated to the United States in 1829, and all of his commissions occurred in America.²² Though he was extremely prolific, he is best known for a select amount of designs. Trinity Church in New York City (1839-1846), for example, is considered to be his "first masterpiece" and one of the earliest successful manifestations of the Gothic revival in American ecclesiastical architecture.²³ Some of his most acclaimed domestic work was commissioned in the locality of St. Mary's. He is the architect of Kingscote in

²² Phoebe Stanton, "Richard Upjohn," in *Master Builders: A Guide to Famous American Architects*, ed. Diane Maddex (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1985), 40.

²³ Michael J. Lewis, *The Gothic Revival* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 88.

Newport (1839), a picturesque summer cottage. An example of his work in the Italianate style exists in Newport's Edward King House (1845-1847).²⁴

Upjohn is referred to as the architect of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in many secondary sources. However, these sources notably lack citation of primary documents supporting this assertion. Any argument of the building's architectural significance can be ameliorated by noting its connection to Upjohn. Several primary sources uncovered during the research process of this report substantiate Upjohn's role as the architect of St. Mary's.

Sarah Gibbs, Bishop Henshaw, and other figures involved in the founding of the parish were undoubtedly familiar with Upjohn. As previously noted, he had achieved considerable fame in his time. Furthermore, he had completed work in the locality. Though scholars today place emphasis on Upjohn's domestic designs in Newport, Ms. Gibbs and Bishop Henshaw were likely more intimately familiar with Upjohn's design for the Church of the Holy Cross in Middletown. Thus, Upjohn likely had an established positive relationship with the Episcopal community of Rhode Island. The earliest documentary evidence of his involvement with the St. Mary's project dates to July of 1847. This document, dated July 16, is a letter from Rev. Williams to Upjohn. The letter expresses Rev. Williams' wish to meet with Upjohn to discuss plans for St. Mary's. In this letter, Rev. Williams writes that the parish hopes to return to an early design proposed by Upjohn, rather than a more expensive recent design. The "old plan" referred to by Rev. Williams is said to be preferable due to its probable cost of less than \$4,000. Rev. Williams also expresses

²⁴ James L. Yarnall, *Newport Through its Architecture: A History of Styles from Postmedieval to Postmodern* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005), 216.

hope that the cost of rejecting Upjohn's more recent and expensive plan will not exceed \$50.²⁵ The content of this early letter suggests that Upjohn had already been engaged with the project for some time. The exact date of initial contact with Upjohn (regarding St. Mary's) is unknown, but it may be assumed to be prior to June of 1847.

Documents from the following months are telling in regards to the relationship between the parish community and their hired architect. These sources reveal an attitude tinged with impatience towards Upjohn. A letter dated August 28, 1847, written by Bishop Henshaw particularly exemplifies this impatience. "It is my purpose (God willing)," he writes, "to lay the cornerstone of St. Mary's on Thursday, September 2."²⁶

Bishop Henshaw did indeed manage to have the cornerstone laid on this date. A journal entry written by Henshaw on September 2, 1847, describes the event (Fig. 4). He also notes the architectural plans for the parish. "It is to be a stone church after a good design by Upjohn- to be built at the expense of Miss Sarah Gibbs on the Farm which she has given to the church," he writes.²⁷

Construction Process

Days after the cornerstone was laid, complications began to surface. A letter written on September 5, 1847, describes an architectural issue. In this document, James Mulchahey pleads

²⁵ Hobart Williams, letter to Richard Upjohn, 16 July 1847, in the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers, MSS 3115, Box 2, Folder 6, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

²⁶ John P. K. Henshaw, letter to Richard Upjohn, 28 August 1847, in the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers, MSS 3115, Box 2, Folder 6, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

²⁷ John P. K. Henshaw, journal entry, 2 September 1847, in the John P. K. Henshaw Papers, MSS 1133, Box 1, Folder 1, Rhode Island Historical Society.

for Upjohn to come immediately to the site. Referring to the plans for Ms. Gibbs to be buried beneath the chancel of the church, he writes, “The monument is very large, and may if placed in the chancel as contemplated require some alteration in the plan of the church.”²⁸ This alteration of the chancel was to persist as a concern, as evidenced by later documents.

Documentary evidence exists to verify the identities of two craftsmen engaged in the construction of St. Mary’s Church. One example is a letter dated September 9, 1847, and addressed to Ms. Gibbs (though it eventually found its way into the Richard Upjohn Papers at the New York Public Library). In this letter, Alexander MacGregor requests consideration to be hired as a stonemason for the church.²⁹ MacGregor wrote another letter on September 22, 1847, to Upjohn himself. To Upjohn, MacGregor writes, “I wished to offer myself as a candidate to build the same [church] having been breed a mason in Europe and aquainted [sic] with the business in all its details.” He mentions 18 years of employment at Fort Adams as supporting experience.³⁰

MacGregor was a Newport resident who had immigrated from Scotland. He worked as a stonemason and architect on several buildings in the locality. He is considered to be both the architect and builder of Perry Mill in Newport (1831-1835). He played a supervisory role in the construction of Fort Adams (1824-1857). There, MacGregor oversaw the construction of stone elements such as the outer garrisons and interior arcades.³¹ He is credited as the architect of two

²⁸James Mulchahey, letter to Richard Upjohn, 5 September 1847, in the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers, MSS 3115, Box 2, Folder 7, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

²⁹Alexander MacGregor, letter to Sarah Gibbs, 9 September 1847, in the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers, MSS 3115, Box 2, Folder 7, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

³⁰Alexander MacGregor, letter to Richard Upjohn, 22 September 1847, in the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers, MSS 3115, Box 2, Folder 7, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

³¹Yarnall, *Newport Through its Architecture*, 35-36.

Bellevue Avenue mansions in Newport. The first was Stone Villa (c. 1845, demolished 1957).³²

The second was Swanhurst (1851-1852).³³

A letter dating to October 12, 1847, comprises MacGregor's agreement to construct the building.

Of particular interest in this source are the three different costs he proposes:

I will erect the church at Portsmouth, R.I. - and complete all the masonry [sic] included in your specification furnishing all lime and cement [and] scaffolding and understanding you to furnish all the stone, sand and all the transporting of materials for the sum of \$2,350, or I will build the same meaking [sic] cellar only under the Chancell [sic] \$2,150 and if the Chancel is extended as proposed to meak a Chapple [sic] \$2,279.³⁴

MacGregor here reiterates Mulchahey's concerns regarding the chancel. MacGregor's uncertainty regarding exactly what his work would entail may suggest that the chancel was, indeed, altered to accommodate the burial of Ms. Gibbs. She was buried near the chancel according to her wishes upon her death in 1866.³⁵ The research for this thesis did not uncover any architectural plans or specifications for the building. Thus, the specific details of the alterations made to the chancel are unknown.

Attribution of the woodwork in the church can be achieved through study of other letters to Upjohn. On October 12, 1847, M. W. Spencer wrote to Upjohn agreeing to provide his services in woodworking at St. Mary's. This letter provides interesting details regarding Spencer's work. He was paid \$2,150, and utilized materials of spruce, pine and hemlock. Notably, Spencer refers to pine shingles as the roof material.³⁶ It is thus doubtful that the initial construction campaign

³² Ibid., 99.

³³ Ibid., 54.

³⁴ Alexander MacGregor, letter to Richard Upjohn, 12 October 1847, in the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers, MSS 3115, Box 2, Folder 7, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

³⁵ *Brief History of St. Mary's*, 12.

³⁶ M. W. Spencer, letter to Richard Upjohn, 12 October 1847, in the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers, MSS 3115, Box 2, Folder 8, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

resulted in the extant slate roof. Had such a change been made, letters concerning it would have likely been among Richard Upjohn's papers. Thus, the letter suggests that the slate roof is a rather later addition.

M. W. Spencer has not been studied and is not mentioned in any secondary sources. Thus, less information is known about him in comparison to MacGregor. Advertisements for his business in historical newspapers provide some information regarding his work. One such advertisement was placed in the *Newport Daily News* on August 15, 1857 (Fig. 5). According to this source, Spencer worked as a contractor and builder and was based out of Newport. His business was located on Thames Street. The advertisement states, "jobbing in all its branches executed in the neatest manner, and all orders faithfully attended to."³⁷

Further confirmation that both MacGregor and Spencer were hired can be found in a letter dating to October 28, 1847. This letter, written by Spencer to Upjohn, describes a meeting between the craftsmen and Ms. Gibbs. The purpose of the meeting was to review the required work for the construction of St. Mary's.³⁸ The knowledge of two specific craftsmen involved in the construction of St. Mary's represents a unique level of detail. This information allows for a particularly rich history to be known regarding this building's construction process.

Completion of the Church

Construction of the church would continue until 1849. The first service in the building would occur on June 17 of that year, despite the fact that it had not yet been consecrated. Following that

³⁷ Advertisement for M. W. Spencer, *Newport Daily News*, 15 August 1857.

³⁸ M. W. Spencer, letter to Richard Upjohn, 28 October 1847, in the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Box 2, Folder 9, New York Public Library.

date, the building would see continual use.³⁹ During the same year, final payments were made on the building. In a letter to Upjohn dated November 26, 1849, Rev. Williams describes an estimate provided by a bearer. Perhaps the estimate was higher than expected, as Rev. Williams requests for Upjohn to come to the church, citing his belief that the architect may be able to negotiate this cost.⁴⁰ The nature of the cost described by Rev. Williams is unknown. Rev. Williams wrote to Upjohn the following month, enclosing a payment of \$200 with the letter. This letter, dated December 21, 1849, includes one comment regarding the building itself: “The Church, I see, still leaks, very badly indeed.”⁴¹ Perhaps this problem led to the eventual installation of a slate roof.

It was not until 1852 that the building was consecrated. On May 20 of that year (Ascension Day), Bishop Henshaw visited the parish and consecrated the church. Bishop Henshaw’s journal entry from this day provides some insight into the construction costs (Fig. 6). “I consecrated St. Mary’s Ch., Portsmouth (a gift of faith [and] love from a pious and magnificent church [and] woman, Miss S. Gibbs, costing about \$11,000).”⁴² This cost is considerably greater than the figure of \$4,000 mentioned by Rev. Williams in 1847.

Ms. Gibbs died in the year 1866, and was buried near the chancel of St. Mary’s Church. Though she lived to see the parish grow into a large congregation, her dream of creating an educational center was not fulfilled. It is traditionally thought that her will stipulated that a sum of money

³⁹ *Brief History of St. Mary’s*, 10.

⁴⁰ Hobart Williams, letter to Richard Upjohn, 26 November 1849, in the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers, MSS 3115, Box 2, Folder 9, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

⁴¹ Hobart Williams, letter to Richard Upjohn, 21 December 1849, in the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers, MSS 3115, Box 2, Folder 11, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

⁴² John P. K. Henshaw, journal entry, 20 May 1852, in the John P. K. Henshaw Papers, MSS 1133, Box 1, Folder 1, Rhode Island Historical Society.

would be left to the parish for the construction of a seminary. However, her will could not be found upon her death. Her estate was thus distributed according to law.⁴³ Later that decade, St. Mary's Church was established as a corporation. This motion was enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island in January of 1868.⁴⁴

Later Changes

The primary focus of this thesis is the initial design and construction process of St. Mary's. However, many of its significant features originated later in the building's history. One example that contributes to the historical significance (as opposed to the architectural significance) of the church is its association with the Vanderbilt family. In 1886, the estate Oakland Farm was sold into the Vanderbilt family. It would remain in their hands until 1946. Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt spent a great amount of time at Oakland Farm.⁴⁵ In 1907, Alfred Gwynne donated \$10,000 to St. Mary's Church. A *New York Times* article detailing this donation (Fig. 7) emphasizes the particular affection his wife held for the parish: "She is a regular attendant at its services when she is at the farm in the Summer."⁴⁶ The son of Alfred Gwynne was William Henry Vanderbilt III. William Henry served on the board of trustees for St. Mary's parish, and continued his father's legacy of donating to the parish. In April of 1927, he donated nearly two acres of land to the parish (Fig. 8).⁴⁷ The original parish house would be constructed on this land. These acts of

⁴³ *Brief History of St. Mary's*, 13.

⁴⁴ Act of Rhode Island State Assembly, January 1868, Rhode Island Episcopal Church Papers, Special Collections, the University of Rhode Island Libraries.

⁴⁵ Garman, *Gentlemen's Farms*, 68-87.

⁴⁶ "Vanderbilt Gives \$10,000," *The New York Times*, 3 December 1907.

⁴⁷ Deed of Sale from William H. Vanderbilt to Trustees, 28 October 1927, Newport County, Rhode Island, Deed Book 33B, page 192. Town Clerk's Office, Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

patronage are clearly documented in archival sources. It should also be noted that conversations with members of the St. Mary's community revealed a belief that the rood screen presently installed in the church was a donation from Mrs. Alfred G. Vanderbilt. Though no documentation was found regarding this donation, the rood screen may serve as a physical manifestation of the family's interest in the parish. The known documentation is certainly sufficient to establish a strong connection between the Vanderbilts and the parish. This connection to historical figures of national significance supplements the historical importance of St. Mary's.

The stained glass windows of St. Mary's are, quite rightly, a point of pride for the parish community. There are fifteen windows total in the building. They contribute greatly to the aesthetic quality of the church. The earliest extant windows are on the south (pulpit) side of the building. The earliest, donated in honor of Phebe Lawton, depicts the Virgin Mary and is dated to c. 1870. Two more were added c. 1872. One of these was donated to honor Thankful Gifford and her son Jeremiah, and depicts Christ as the good shepherd. The other window from this date was donated in memory of Howard Carnell Peterson, who died in August of 1872. This window depicts the Madonna and Child. Peterson's family was from the area of Philadelphia, and published *Peterson's Magazine*. This publication was a major rival of *Godey's*. The latest window on the south side was donated c. 1885 by Rev. Daniel Odell. This window depicts an angel, and was given in memory of his twin sister, Hannah Odell.⁴⁸

The windows on the north (epistle) side of the building were likely added c. 1913. Edith Abercrombie Miller Tuckerman donated these windows in memory of various members of the

⁴⁸ Marilyn Curtis, *Bibliography of St. Mary's Stained Glass*, 2017.

Gibbs and Tuckerman families.⁴⁹ Designed by the artist Frederic Crowninshield, these may be considered the most valuable windows in the church. Crowninshield was known as a writer, muralist, and designer of stained glass. He spent time teaching at the school of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. Scholars Gertrude de G. Wilmers and Julie L. Sloan place special emphasis on Crowninshield's work at St. Mary's in their book *Frederic Crowninshield: A Renaissance Man in the Gilded Age*. They identify these works as Crowninshield's final documented stained glass project. Though their book references 1913 as a likely date for these windows, it is acknowledged that they may have been added as early as 1907. In addition to the windows on the north side of the building, Crowninshield also designed the two narthex windows. Thus, these almost certainly date to the same time as the windows in the north wall.⁵⁰

The next window added at St. Mary's was the altar window, which depicts the Ascension. This window dates to c. 1914. Its design is a product of the British firm Heaton, Butler, and Bayne. This firm operated through the American manufacturing agent Gorham. It was donated by the Perry family. It has been suggested that the adjacent window (in the south wall of the altar) depicting St. John the Evangelist is a gift of the same donor. Perhaps the amount donated for the Ascension window provided a surplus, which was spent on the second window. Considering this theory, it is possible that the St. John the Evangelist window also dates to c. 1914 and may also be a design of Heaton, Butler, and Bayne.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Gertrude de G. Wilmers and Julie L. Sloan, *Frederic Crowninshield: A Renaissance Man in the Gilded Age* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 164-165.

⁵¹ Curtis, *Bibliography*.

Two recently added windows are in the west wall, flanking the bridal door of the church. These windows were donated in 1973 and designed by the Willett Studio. These were a gift of Margaret Cary Tuckerman Kauffman, in memory of members of the Tuckerman family. In the same wall is the diamond-shaped light above the bridal door. No information regarding the donation or manufacturing of this window is known presently.⁵²

⁵² Ibid.

Part 2: Research Narrative

Chapter 4: Archives Consulted

Introduction

For the purposes of this project, both primary archival documents and published secondary sources were utilized. Through the synthesis of information gathered from these sources, the preceding historical narrative took shape. Access to these sources was granted by a number of private and public archives in Rhode Island and New York. To inform readers, future researchers, and those interested in the archival research process, a description of the research process has been constructed. This narrative will focus on the various archival repositories accessed, giving descriptions of their contents and scope.

Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library at Columbia University

The Avery Library at Columbia University contains collections focusing on architecture, fine arts, and allied fields. Its collection of archives and drawings contains over one million items.⁵³

The most relevant archival collection held at Columbia (for the purposes of this report) is the Upjohn Collection of Architectural Drawings. This collection contains materials relating to the designs of Richard Upjohn, Richard Michell Upjohn (his son), and Hobart Upjohn (his grandson). The materials range in date from 1827 to 1910.⁵⁴

⁵³ “Collections and History,” Columbia University Libraries, accessed 21 March 2017, <http://library.columbia.edu/locations/avery/about.html>.

⁵⁴ “The Upjohn Collection of Architectural Drawings,” Columbia University Libraries Archival Collections, accessed 21 March 2017, http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd_3460571/.

The collection contains a panoply of Upjohn's drawings. For the purpose of researching St. Mary's Episcopal Church, the drawings relating to any projects in Rhode Island were requested. However, none of these drawings depicted designs the St. Mary's building.

Due to the lack of relevant material in the collection of local projects, some drawings labelled as "miscellaneous" and "unidentified" were also viewed. Likewise, none of these materials depicted St. Mary's Church. Due to time and scheduling constraints, it is unclear whether the materials viewed comprise the entire collection of "unidentified" drawings. At present, however, there is no indication that any materials pertaining to St. Mary's are present in the collection at Avery. Thus, this collection could be a subject of some further study by future researchers. Nonetheless, the documentary archival evidence connecting the church to Upjohn is strong enough to substantiate his role in the design. Though the existence of drawn materials would supplement the proof of Upjohn's involvement, it is not altogether necessary for the creation of a National Register nomination.

The Upjohn Collection of Architectural drawings is accessible by appointment. Scheduling can be conducted via e-mail to the Avery Library. Because only a small number of appointments are scheduled daily, the archival staff is available to assist with viewing and retrieving documents. There is no specific paging schedule for materials. Though the Avery Library was visited in-person for this report, it is also possible to request digital copies of certain materials from the archival staff. In this case, contact with the staff via e-mail is necessary (see Appendix II).

New York Public Library

The New York Public Library (NYPL) is a renowned research institution. Its Stephen A. Schwarzman Building (often described as its “main branch”) houses a vast array of archival resources. The collections housed at this branch focus mainly on the humanities and social sciences.⁵⁵

The key NYPL resources used in the creation of this report were the Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers. Held within the Manuscripts and Archives Division, these papers provide information on the architectural practice of Upjohn and his son. The papers relating to Upjohn’s unaccompanied work date from 1839-1850. He was assisted in practice by his son after 1850. There are three major divisions of the information in the collection: the Upjohn architectural firms, the Upjohn family papers, and drawings.⁵⁶

For the purpose of this thesis, the division of the collection relating to the Upjohn architectural firms was utilized. The most useful items consulted were articles of personal correspondence. Several letters pertaining to the commission of St. Mary’s Episcopal Church are held in this collection. Dating from 1847 and 1849, these letters were sent to Upjohn by various members of the St. Mary’s community.

⁵⁵ “About the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building,” New York Public Library, accessed 21 March 2017, <https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/schwarzman>.

⁵⁶ “Richard Upjohn and Richard Michell Upjohn Papers,” New York Public Library, accessed 21 March 2017, <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3115#overview>.

These letters represent the most substantial evidence confirming Upjohn's involvement with the construction of the church. Such unequivocal evidence is of the utmost necessity for a National Register nomination.

It should also be noted that other documents were consulted from the NYPL collection. The collection contains Upjohn's articles of Copartnership, which were viewed. These documents proved to contain no references to St. Mary's Church. Additionally, several folders of documents relating to various projects located in Rhode Island are held within the collection. Unfortunately, St. Mary's is not among the local projects described in these papers.

All of the resources held by the NYPL are freely accessible to the public. A prior appointment, which can be arranged through the library's website, is necessary. To access these collections, a visitor must also apply for a temporary library card. This process can be completed quickly at the library immediately prior to visiting the collection. When planning a visit, one may request materials to be withdrawn ahead of time, or materials may be requested at the library's scheduled paging times.

Newport Historical Society

The Newport Historical Society (NHS) lists the collection and maintenance of artifacts as one of its main goals, and thus is an important resource for researching the history of the city of Newport.⁵⁷ For the purposes of research St. Mary's, however, the NHS Collections were not of utility and thus not consulted. Contact with the staff of the NHS library determined that no

⁵⁷ "About the NHS," Newport Historical Society, accessed 22 March 2017, <http://newporthistory.org/about/history-of-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/>.

unique archival sources are held within the library's collection. Though sources regarding the Gibbs family are held at the NHS, none of these are specific to Sarah Gibbs. The main resource pertaining to the family, as referenced by the staff, is a genealogical account held also by the Rhode Island Historical Society.

The library of the NHS is accessible by prior appointment. Assistance by staff is available during an appointment, and prior contact can allow for relevant materials to be gathered, so that a researcher may immediately begin work upon arrival. The scope of the collection includes documents, books, objects, and photographs. Overall, the vast collection has tens of thousands of items.⁵⁸

Newport Public Library

The Newport Public Library has a designated room for materials pertaining to local history. Considering its location within the city of Newport, little of the material focuses on the surroundings towns (such as Portsmouth). However, one resource that was consulted was the online database of historical newspapers available through the public library. In particular, the archives of the Newport Mercury and Newport Daily News were searched. Notably, the newspaper advertisement placed by M. W. Spencer was found through the Newport Public Library.

The library is accessible to the public, and no membership is necessary to view the materials in the local history room. The books held within this room are not circulating, and thus only

⁵⁸ "Visiting the Resource Center," Newport Historical Society, accessed 22 March 2017, <http://newporthistory.org/collections-resources/resource-center/>.

available for consultation within the room itself. Computers in the local history room provide access to databases of historic newspapers.

Portsmouth Historical Society

To determine the utility of collections at the Portsmouth Historical Society, it was necessary to engage with Portsmouth Town Historian James Garman. Contact with Mr. Garman determined that the resources relating to St. Mary's held at the Historical Society are relatively few. Those resources that are held in their collection are also found elsewhere. Though some maps (such as the 1860 map of Portsmouth) are held by the Society, these were viewed at the Rhode Island Historical Society Library. The Historical Society also holds the 1916 pamphlet *A Brief History of St. Mary's Church, South Portsmouth, and Holy Cross Chapel, Middletown, Rhode Island*. This source is located at the Redwood Library and Rhode Island Historical Society Library as well. It was viewed at the Rhode Island Historical Society Library. Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, research at the Portsmouth Historical Society was not necessary.

Portsmouth Public Library

The Public Library of Portsmouth, RI, is home to the town's "Local History Center." This dedicated section of the library contains secondary sources with a variety of publication dates. The resources at the Portsmouth Library are freely and easily accessible. Though many of the local history materials are held in glass cases, which are locked, the staff is helpful. Assistance is provided in retrieving materials in locked cases, as well as other archival materials that are in storage.

Most useful at this library were sources that conveyed a general history of the Town of Portsmouth. One unique source to this library is the book *Historical Tracts of the Town of Portsmouth*. Written by John T. Pierce, Sr., it serves as a suitable primer on the overall history of Portsmouth. Though very little of its contents were specifically applicable to the history of St. Mary's Church, its description of the change over time in Portsmouth's population provides valuable contextual information for the period during which St. Mary's parish was established.

Portsmouth Town Clerk's Office

Located in the Town Hall of Portsmouth, the Town Clerk's Office holds property records dating back to the 17th century. The property records of the St. Mary's Church building and land are excellent sources of information. For example, the office holds the record of the initial donation of land by Sarah Gibbs (as well as later donations of land made by the Vanderbilt family). These documents are valuable in that they substantiate the connection between the parish and the historically significant Gibbs and Vanderbilt families. Because ownership of the church building has not changed throughout its history, there are relatively few deeds pertaining to the building. Nonetheless, those that exist are crucial archival sources for the purpose of creating a written history.

The Town Clerk's Office is easily accessible to the public. The land records are held in a highly organized room. Any researcher with a basic knowledge of the organization of land evidence may easily locate the records using the digital catalog. Newer records (from the 1940s onwards) have been digitized, and can be viewed on a computer in the office. Most records relating to St. Mary's Church are older, however, and thus must be viewed in the physical deed books.

Redwood Library and Athenaeum

The Redwood Library is not only a repository of information for researchers, but also a historical treasure in and of itself: it is America's oldest lending library and oldest continually used library building. Since 1747, the library has acquired materials for its collection of published books, as well as primary documents for its special collections.⁵⁹

Contact with reference staff at the Redwood Library established that no particularly unique resources pertaining to St. Mary's Church, Sarah Gibbs, or Richard Upjohn are present in their collections. Thus, the library was not visited during the course of research for this project. However, a copy of the aforementioned 1916 pamphlet describing the history of St. Mary's Parish and the Church of the Holy Cross in Middletown is held by Redwood Library. It is obtainable through the interlibrary loan process; research staff at the Redwood Library are able to digitally scan the pamphlet in its entirety and deliver it via e-mail to researchers.

Rhode Island Historical Society Library

The Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS) curates several museums, historic houses, and land parcels throughout the state of Rhode Island. The organization seeks to "explore topics of timeless relevance and current public interest and benefit."⁶⁰ In the process of creating this report, their research center was of great use. The collection held at this library includes

⁵⁹ "General Information," Redwood Library and Athenaeum, accessed 20 April 2017, <http://www.redwoodlibrary.org/general-information>.

⁶⁰ "Mission Statement," Rhode Island Historical Society, accessed 20 April 2017 <http://www.rihs.org/about-us/mission-statement/>.

thousands of manuscripts, books, and photographs. The library is located in the historic College Hill neighborhood of Providence, RI.⁶¹

For the purposes of researching the original St. Mary's Church building, several items in the RIHS Library collection were consulted. The library holds an impressive collection of manuscripts, including the papers of Henry Marchant and of Bishop P. K. Henshaw. In Marchant's papers, four letters from Sarah Gibbs can be found. These letters range in date from 1827 to 1829. Considering these dates, it can be noted that the correspondence predates the establishment of St. Mary's parish and thus is not germane to this project. Upon examination, the letters prove to contain information pertaining only to real estate business between Gibbs and Marchant. They were not referenced in the historical narrative of the church.

The papers of Bishop Henshaw were the most revealing documents in the manuscript collection. Bishop Henshaw's papers include his own writings (primarily speeches), official documents (relating to his appointment to the position of Bishop), incoming and outgoing letters, and two journals. Of these materials, the journals contained the most information pertaining to St. Mary's Episcopal Church.

The most comprehensive resource from the print collection of the RIHS Library was a copy of the aforementioned pamphlet delineating the founding and history of St. Mary's parish and the Church of the Holy Cross in Middletown. This 1916 secondary source may be requested for viewing at any of the scheduled paging times of the RIHS library.

⁶¹ "Before You Visit," Rhode Island Historical Society, accessed 20 April 2017, <http://www.rihs.org/library/before-you-visit/>.

The RIHS also holds a considerable number of historic maps, which may be of interest to historians studying St Mary's. Several of these were viewed during research. These include an 1849 map by Charles E. Hammett (Fig. 9), an 1850 map by Henry F. Walling (Fig. 10), an 1860 map by M. Dripps (Fig. 11), and an 1870 atlas by D. G. Beers (Fig. 12). Though these maps did not provide any new information, they are of interest for contextualizing St. Mary's in Portsmouth. The presence of the church on the 1849 map also confirms the completion of its construction in that year.

Roger Williams University Libraries

Though the libraries at Roger Williams University do not contain any special or archival collections relating to the history of St. Mary's, it should be noted that several useful secondary sources are held by the university. These sources include the book *Richard Upjohn: Architect and Churchman*, by the architect's descendant Everand Upjohn. The appendix of this book contains a list of architectural works by Upjohn, among which St. Mary's Episcopal Church is included. Other secondary sources held at RWU provide general information on the historical background on the Gothic Revival period of American architecture.

Two other secondary sources held in the university libraries pertain specifically to Portsmouth history. *A Brief History of Portsmouth, Rhode Island* by James E. Garman contains contextual information useful for understanding the church's history. *Gentlemen's Farms of Portsmouth, Rhode Island* contains a chapter focusing on Oakland Farm, the estate of Sarah Gibbs (later owned by the Vanderbilt family).

The university libraries also participate in the inter-library loan system, allowing users to access important resources held in worldwide collections.

St. Mary's Parish Resources

The value of the sources held by the parish of St. Mary's Episcopal Church itself should not be underestimated. The parish holds important documents and has strength in its community's vested interest in preserving the original church building.

The collection of historic photographs that is owned by the parish is extremely impressive. Photographs and drawings from a range of historical eras provide clear documentation of the building's architectural integrity.

Recent documents created for the church by architectural firms provide additional insight to the physical fabric of the structure. These include the Master Plan completed by the Newport Collaborative Architects in 2001 and the Existing Conditions Report of the building's roof prepared by NewPort Architecture in 2017. The latter report has an admirable bibliography of sources pertaining to the history of the building and grounds.

One important intangible asset of St. Mary's parish is the involvement of community members. The value which the community places on preservation is a significant strength. It is because of this community strength that compilations of various historical facts have been created, most notably by parishioner Marilyn Curtis. The research she has compiled on the graves, windows, and historical figures relating to St. Mary's is provides excellent research material.

A lack of organization hinders access to the information held by the parish. Though the parish believes to have archival records pertaining to the stained glass in the building, these records have been misplaced and remained unfound throughout the process of research for this report. Future researchers would benefit from seeking these sources and recording the information therein.

The University of Rhode Island Libraries

The Rhode Island Episcopal Church Records Collection is held at the University of Rhode Island (URI). This collection includes documents from parishes throughout the state. There are a considerable amount of records pertaining to St. Mary's. These include newspaper articles, schedules of events, and photographs. Perhaps the most unique source in this collection is a bound copy of trustee meeting minutes. This document includes a brief history of the parish (which is very similar in content to the 1916 pamphlet *A Brief History of St. Mary's Church, South Portsmouth, and Holy Cross Chapel, Middletown, Rhode Island*) and meeting minutes from the 1910s through 1930s. Much of the information found in the meeting minutes is not referenced in any other sources.

It is not necessary to make a prior appointment to view the special collections at URI. Any person conducting scholarly research is welcome to view the collection. Accessibility is limited to business hours on weekdays. Collections staff members were responsive via email and helpful in determining the utility of sources held by URI. However, because no finding aid exists for the collection of Episcopal Church records, a researcher must devote a considerable amount of time to sorting through documents to find relevant sources.

Chapter 5: Uses of this Report

Introduction

From its inception, this report was intended to play a part in the nomination of the St. Mary's Church building to the National Register of Historic Places. The information contained in the historical narrative may serve as a basis for the statement of significance required in this nomination. This statement is only one part of a lengthy process (for a full description of the nomination process, see Chapter 6). Understandably, the parish community is currently unsure of whether or not the nomination process will be initiated in the near future. Considering this uncertainty, it is worth noting that the information contained in this report has many practical uses besides the creation of a nomination to the National Register.

Uses of Information

For the purposes of fundraising, the preceding historical narrative may have great use. Those who are already a part of the parish community may already feel inclined to contribute towards any fundraising efforts. However, emphasizing the absolute historic and architectural significance of the building may engender even more feelings of generosity within the community. Furthermore, there are many preservation-minded individuals who would be inclined to contribute to the preservation of such a significant structure. A lack of familiarity with the St. Mary's parish (and a lack of knowledge of the building's importance) may hinder such individuals from contributing. Initiating fundraising campaigns which emphasize the

architectural and historical significance of the building will increase outreach to local preservationists.

An additional aspect of the fundraising process is grant-writing. Many grants exist to assist in the preservation of historic church buildings. Featuring the most important historical and architectural features of St. Mary's Church would allow grant applications prepared for the building to truly stand out.

To help plan and organize objectives for future fundraising, it is recommended that the parish considers preparation of a preservation plan. Such a plan would encompass the preservation of the entire church building. Such a document may be considered an abbreviated version of a historic structure report. In particular, preservation plans place less focus on compiling historical research or documenting a building's existing conditions. This report's attribution of the building to Richard Upjohn and affirmation of its significance should provide momentum for future preservation efforts. The creation of a plan can ensure that this momentum does not fade by establishing accountability to specific preservation goals.⁶²

The historical narrative section of this report could also be used as the basis for a panoply of community programming. This information opens the possibility of educational programs for the parish or local community. For instance, collaboration with Portsmouth organizations (such as the Portsmouth Historical Society or Portsmouth Public Library) could facilitate the planning of an event that would raise awareness of St. Mary's rich cultural heritage, which may be recognized by the greater local community.

⁶² Dominique M. Hawkins, *Historic Structure Reports and Preservation Plans: A Preparation Guide* (Trenton: New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, 2007), 4-5.

The list of archival repositories and bibliography contained within this document could be essential resources for future researchers. Any individual who chooses to pursue further research on the building or grounds of St. Mary's in the future could use these resource lists to identify key archives worth visiting (or perhaps more importantly, archives with a lack of information that do not need to be visited).

Furthermore, should it be decided that the space of St. Mary's parish house is insufficient for holding the archival sources currently in the hands of the parish, this document could prove invaluable. Should the parish choose to move its archival materials to another repository, the list included here identifies several locations that may accept archival materials as donations.

Sharing this report, particularly its sources of information, with the public is imperative for the realization of another possible benefit. Often, those outside of the preservation and archival fields do not realize the importance of vernacular sources of history. Everyday documents, such as journals and letters, may prove invaluable in many types of historical research. Sadly, because the essentiality of these sources is unrecognized by many, these documents are often discarded. Were more members of the public to become aware that these sources deserve conservation, many documents could escape destruction. Thus, sharing the information held in this report could bring to light new sources of information about the history of St. Mary's Church. It is not unlikely that those who hold older documents revealing parish history may step forward upon becoming familiar with this report (and they may hope to contribute their sources to an archival repository mentioned in Chapter 4). Even intangible oral histories are important to record.

Fostering an attitude of appreciation for local and vernacular histories could increase the available pool of historical information about the parish.

Chapter 6: National Register Process

Introduction

The 1847 building and historic landscape of St. Mary's Episcopal Church doubtlessly have a place on the National Register of Historic Places. The research comprising this thesis was conducted with the eventual outcome of nomination in mind. However, further steps are necessary to complete a nomination that would do justice to this significant piece of Portsmouth history. Many people outside of the historic preservation field are intimidated by the process of nomination to the National Register. This chapter will explain the steps that can be taken to complete a nomination (for which no education in preservation is strictly necessary) and the enormous benefits of listing on the National Register.

Property Eligibility

Eligibility of a property for the National Register of Historic Places is determined by the concept of historic integrity as well as four criteria considerations which account for a property's local, statewide, or national historic significance. For a property to be eligible, according to the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC), the property must possess historic integrity and meet at least one of the four criteria considerations.⁶³

This definition of eligibility may seem to be filled with jargon. However, deconstruction of the elements of eligibility reveals the simplicity of the requirements. The essential component of a

⁶³ "National Register: Questions and Answers," Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, accessed 8 March 2017, <http://www.preservation.ri.gov/register/q-and-a.php>.

property's integrity is defined as "an accurate and authentic sense of its past."⁶⁴ In simpler terms, an eligible property should not have seen architectural changes that alter its historic aesthetic beyond recognizability. It should also contain a large amount of original material, so that any visitor can discern the property's age. St. Mary's Church certainly meets these standards of integrity. Though not all architectural components are original material, most are of an age that ensures their historic significance. The church building appears almost identical to its original appearance: comparison of historic photos with current photos reveals this plainly. Thus, the criteria of integrity is clearly met by St. Mary's Church.

The four criteria considerations regarding historic significance are as follows:

1. A property may be significant because it is associated with events or activities which have been important in our past. This may be an association with a specific single event, such as a military battle, or it may be an association with a theme or a trend, such as agriculture, which was important in a community's history.
2. A property may be significant because it has close association with a person who was important in the history of the nation, state, or local community.
3. A property may be significant for its design or physical characteristics. Such a property may embody in a special way the distinctive characteristics of a building type (such as schools, mills, houses), or of a method of construction (such as post-and-beam framing), or of an architectural period or style (such as Greek Revival). Some properties are significant because their architectural quality is high or because they are the work of a master architect or builder.
4. Properties may be significant because they have the potential to provide new information about our past (such as archaeological sites that may contain artifacts that will reveal important aspects of the lives of our ancestors).⁶⁵

The general areas of significance a property may have can thus be divided into four simple categories: significant events, significant figures, architectural significance, or archaeological significance. Only one of these four criteria need to be applicable to a building for it to be

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

considered eligible for the National Register. It is arguable, however, that St. Mary's Church meets two criteria.

Criteria Consideration #2 focuses on the association a property may have with important historical figures. These associations may be with people who were influential in local, state, or national history. The association St. Mary's Church has with Sarah Gibbs fulfills this criteria consideration due to Gibbs' importance in Portsmouth history. Furthermore, the association the parish has with many members of the Vanderbilt family strengthens its fulfillment of this criterion. Due to its connection to the Vanderbilt family, it may be argued that St. Mary's Church meets Criteria Consideration #2 on a national level as well as a local level.

Criteria Consideration #3 focuses on the architectural significance of a property. The high-quality character of the church building's architecture ensures its fulfillment of this criterion. The building exemplifies the typical features of an architectural style (Gothic Revival). Furthermore, it is certainly the work of a masterful architect. Richard Upjohn continues to have national renown as a quintessential architect of the ecclesiastical Gothic Revival. St. Mary's Church is a typical example of his style, and its excellent state of preservation allows it to continually convey Upjohn's vision.

It is imperative to note that ecclesiastical buildings that continue to be used for religious purposes are typically not considered for the National Register unless an exception is made.⁶⁶ However, it can be supposed that due to the extreme historical significance of St. Mary's Church,

⁶⁶ Ibid.

it could be considered eligible. Many of Upjohn's churches continue to be used for their original purpose, yet have achieved listing on the National Register.

Nomination Forms

Once it is determined that a property is eligible for the National Register, a nomination form must be completed. As the RIHPHC notes, completion of these forms is typically done by an expert. Consultants with a background in cultural heritage and preservation are typically engaged with to complete this form.

The nomination form for the National Register encompasses a variety of information. The name, location, and ownership of the property are specified first. A later section of the form containing more detailed geographic information enumerates the exact location and boundaries of the property. The form also requires specification of which historic resources on the property contribute to its significance. In the case of St. Mary's Church, the original church building is certainly a contributing element. However, the historic landscape may also be considered a significant element that should be nominated to the National Register. The function of the property (currently and historically) is also included on the form.

Information regarding the property's architecture must be listed on the form: its style and materials are essential information. Additionally, a narrative description of the property's appearance is required to give a fully developed idea of how the architecture (or landscape) is experienced. This can be supplemented with documentation in the form of maps, plans, drawings, and photos.

The section dedicated to the statement of significance requires determination of specific criteria for significance (out of the aforementioned four criteria) apply to the property. This section also includes a narrative statement of significance, focusing on the history of the property and the relevance of the selected criteria considerations. This thesis was written with this requirement in mind. The information presented in the historical narrative section can be used to create such a statement. The sources cited in this document can become a bibliography to be attached to the significance statement.

Though a consulting professional may complete the nomination form, it is crucial that the parish community is aware of its contents. In this way, it can be ensured that those who make future alterations to the building are cognizant of any impact they may have on the property's future possibility of being on the National Register.

Once completed, this form is submitted to RIHPHC. It is then reviewed by the commission's Review Board, composed of history and preservation professionals. Once this review occurs, a recommendation is made to the State Historic Preservation Officer, either to approve or disapprove the nomination. The approval of the State Historic Preservation Officer is the final confirmation needed to have the property listed on the National Register.⁶⁷

Benefits

Reading through this process, one may doubtlessly consider it to be lengthy and potentially aggravating. However, the benefits of listing a property justify the daunting listing process.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Some of the major incentives for listing a property are financial. Funding sources for preservation grants may consider favorably the property's listing in the National Register as an individual property. These grants may be used to conduct preservation work on listed properties. Grant opportunities could prove to be essential for work necessary to upkeep the physical fabric of the original church building.⁶⁸

If funds are needed to maintain the physical fabric of the original church building, donors may feel compelled to give to a building with historic significance acknowledged by the federal government. National Register listing also facilitates networking with preservation-minded individuals. Such individuals may take a greater interest in the building upon it being listed to the National Register, and could help to provide technical advice and other consultations. In some cases, government funding may not otherwise be available due to separation of church and state.

Chapter 5 notes that the information presented in the historical narrative of this report could supplement grant applications. However, many grants will not consider a building to be an eligible candidate unless it is listed on the National Register. One example is the National Fund for Sacred Places, a grant program that works in conjunction with the nonprofit National Trust for Historic Preservation. This fund requires grant candidates to be listed in the National Register.⁶⁹ Rhode Island's own Champlin Foundation also provides grants to houses of worship with the end goal of preserving historic integrity. Documents published by the Foundation indicate that the grant candidates viewed most favorably are those that are officially designated

⁶⁸ "National Register of Historic Places Program: Fundamentals," National Park Service, accessed 7 March 2017, https://www.nps.gov/nr/national_register_fundamentals.htm.

⁶⁹ "Eligibility Requirements," National Fund for Sacred Places, accessed 21 March 2017, <http://www.fundforsacredplaces.org/eligibility-requirements#.WNFX4hg-JsM>.

as historic.⁷⁰ Were St. Mary's Episcopal Church listed on the National Register (or determined eligible for listing by obtaining a "preliminary determination of eligibility" from the RIHPHC), these grants would become an available funding option.

Listing a property on the National Register does not unconditionally protect it from demolition. However, if any construction project for which federal funds will be used will affect the property, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation will be consulted. This process ensures that if National Register listed properties are going to be endangered by government actions, alternatives that do not affect the property will be fully considered. Typically, government actions that require demolition of a National Register listed property are seen as an absolute last resort due to this process.⁷¹

Being listed in the National Register does not restrict an owner's use of the property. It is common belief that once a property is listed on the National Register, owners will face reprimanding from the federal government when changing any physical aspect of the property. Frequently, owners considering nomination fear losing their freedom to make aesthetic alterations, such as exterior painting. This is untrue. Owners are not obligated to keep their property completely unchanged once it is listed. They may freely use or sell the property.⁷²

In fact, many active congregations in Rhode Island have church buildings listed in the National Register. Most recently, in 2013, the First Baptist Church of Tiverton was listed. Another recent

⁷⁰ "Grants to Churches or Houses of Worship," The Champlin Foundation, accessed 20 April 2017, http://www.champlinfoundations.org/images/Church-House_of_Worship_Policy.pdf.

⁷¹ "National Register of Historic Places Program: Fundamentals."

⁷² Ibid.

example of a listed church in Rhode Island is St. Mary's Church in Newport. This religious complex was listed in the National Register in 2008.⁷³

⁷³ "National Register: Rhode Island Properties," Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, accessed 20 April 2017, <http://www.preservation.ri.gov/register/riproperties.php>.

Conclusion

St. Mary's Episcopal Church is a remarkable highlight of Portsmouth's historic architecture. Its integral aesthetic qualities are only enhanced by the stalwart preservation of the building and its contextual landscape. Without a doubt, this structure is a viable candidate to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The historical narrative provided in this document provides sufficient evidence of architectural and historical importance for a National Register nomination. This research was held to rigorous academic standards. Though the research done for this report was extremely in-depth, it is always possible that more information lies in wait to be found. With the aid of the preceding research narrative, future scholars may continue to search archives for information that will supplement this historical narrative.

It should be noted that the landscape surrounding St. Mary's has just as much importance as the building itself. Thus, it may be desirable to include the landscape as part of the nomination to the National Register, along with the building. Were this (extremely advisable) action taken, it would be necessary to conduct further research. Information would need to be found to substantiate the landscape's significance.

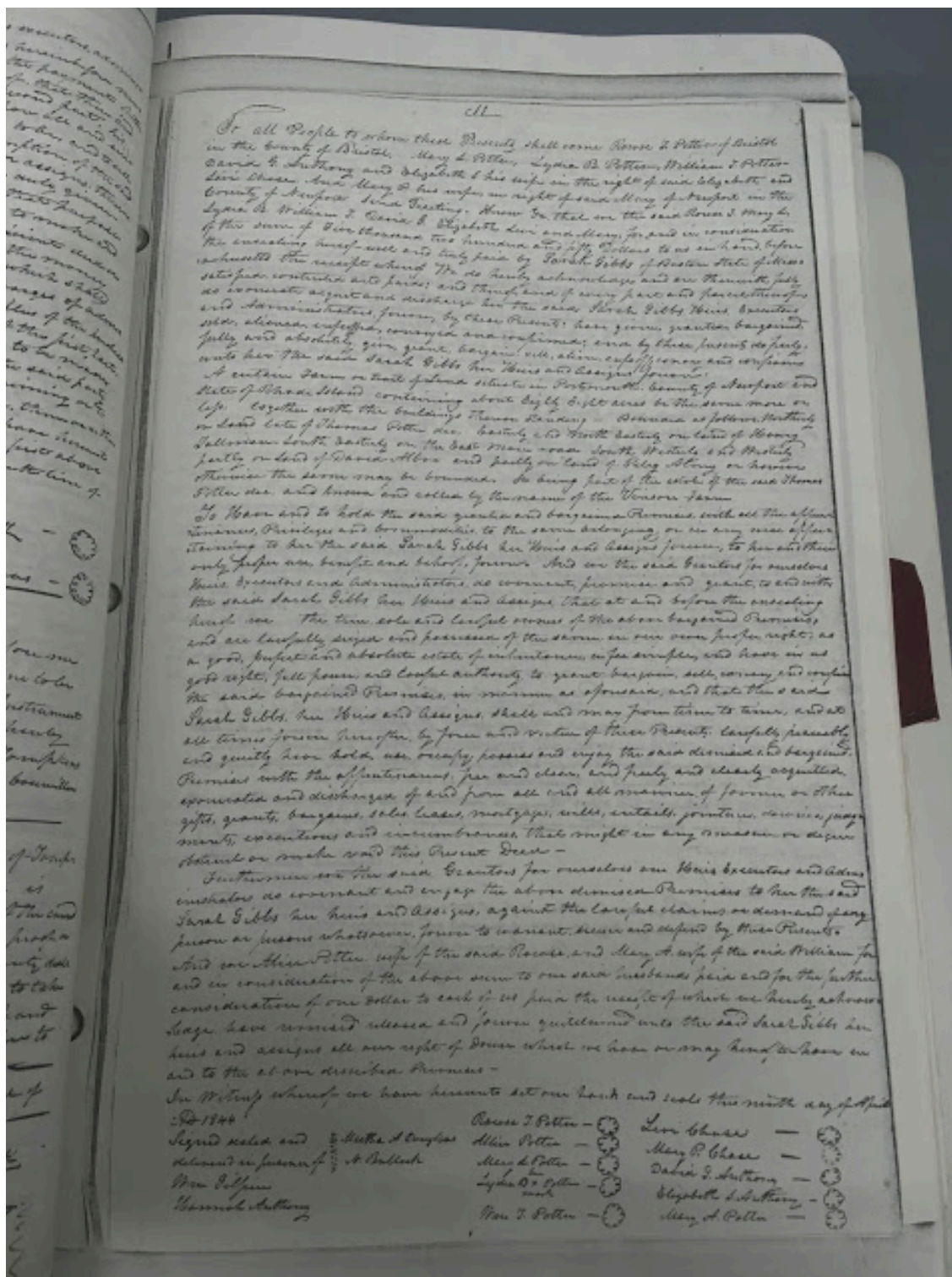
The experience of researching and writing this thesis has been extremely positive. The community of St. Mary's is admirable in its desire to protect the church building. This love of place is a valuable asset of the parish. Perhaps sharing the historical information contained in this

narrative will engender further affection for the church building. Such a result would assist in the future stewardship of a true architectural and historical gem.

Appendix I: Photos



Figure 1: St. Mary's Episcopal Church, present day (Photograph by Don Heywood, from St. Mary's Episcopal Church website, 2011)



11

To all People to whom these Presents shall come Rosse & Potter of Smith
 in the County of Bristol. May & Potter, Lydia B. Potter, William & Potter
 Levi Chase, David & Anthony and Elizabeth & his wife in the right of said Elizabeth and
 County of Newport send greeting. Know Ye that on the said 9th day of May 1844
 of the sum of Five thousand two hundred and fifty Dollars to us in hand before
 the undersigned being well and truly paid by Sarah Gibbs of Bristol State of Rhode
 satisfactorily contained and paid; and though said of every part and parcel thereof
 as correct right and receipt for the said Sarah Gibbs her heirs executors
 and Administrators forever, by these Presents have given granted bargained
 sold aliened conveyed conveyed and confirmed; even by these presents do fully
 fully and absolutely give grant bargain sell alien convey confirm and confirm
 unto her the said Sarah Gibbs her heirs and assigns forever
 A certain Farm or tract of land situated in Portsmouth County of Newport and
 State of Rhode Island containing about Eighty Eight Acres to the more or
 less together with the building thereon bearing the name of the Potter Farm
 or lot of Thomas Potter dec. being a lot of the same name in the
 Gallatin South Easting on the East Main road South of the lot of Thomas
 Potter or lot of David Allen and partly on the lot of Peter Blin or lot of Thomas
 Potter dec. and known and called by the name of the Venson Farm
 To Have and to hold the said premises and bargained premises with all the appur-
 tenances Privileges and immunities to the same belonging or in any way apper-
 taining to her the said Sarah Gibbs her heirs and assigns forever to her and their
 only heirs and assigns forever. And we the said Grants for ourselves
 heirs executors and Administrators do covenant promise and grant to and with
 her the said Sarah Gibbs her heirs and assigns that at and before the executing
 hereof she the said Sarah Gibbs her heirs and assigns shall and lawfully possess
 and are lawfully seized and possessed of the same in our own proper right; as
 a good perfect and absolute estate of inheritance in fee simple and have in us
 the said bargained premises in manner as aforesaid; and that the said
 Sarah Gibbs her heirs and assigns shall and may from time to time and at
 all times forever hereafter by force and virtue of these Presents lawfully purchase
 and quietly hereof hold use occupy possess and enjoy the said premises and bargained
 premises with the appurtenances free and clear and fully and clearly acquitted
 exonerated and discharged of and from all and all manner of services or other
 gifts grants bargains sales leases mortgages wills entails jointures dower jointures
 mortgages mortgages and incumbrances that might in any manner or degree
 stand or make void this Present Deed -
 Furthermore we the said Grants for ourselves our heirs executors and Admin-
 istrators do covenant and enjoy the above demised premises to her the said
 Sarah Gibbs her heirs and assigns against the lawful claims or demands of any
 person or persons whatsoever forever to inarrant claim and defend by these Presents
 and in their Potter wife of the said Roscoe and May A. wife of the said William for
 and in consideration of the above sum to our said husbands paid and for the further
 consideration of our dollar to each of us paid the receipt of which we hereby acknowledge
 have received released and given yielded up unto the said Sarah Gibbs her
 heirs and assigns all our right of dower which we have or may have to have in
 and to the above demised premises -
 In Witness whereof we have hereunto set our hand and seal this ninth day of April
 1844

Signed sold and delivered in presence of Mrs. Blin Hannah Anthony	Rosse & Potter Lydia B. Potter William & Potter Levi Chase David & Anthony Elizabeth & his wife May A. Potter	Levi Chase May B. Chase David & Anthony Elizabeth & his wife May A. Potter
---	---	--

Figure 2: Deed of Sale from Potter Family to Sarah Gibbs, 9 April 1844, Newport County, Rhode Island, Deed Book 13, page 11. Town Clerk's Office, Portsmouth, Rhode Island (Author's own photograph).

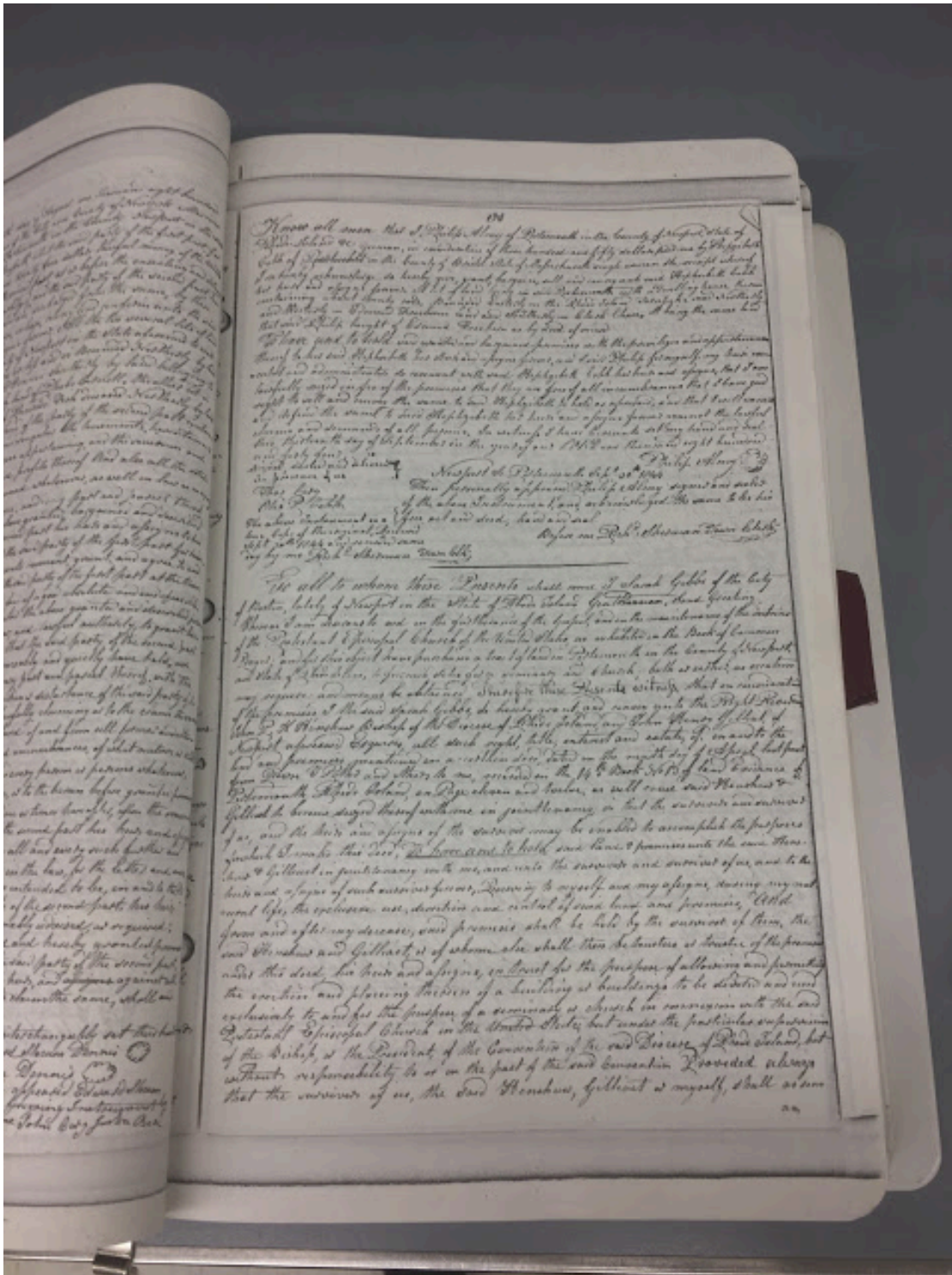


Figure 3: Deed of Sale from Sarah Gibbs to Trustees, 9 October 1844, Newport County, Rhode Island, Deed Book 13, page 33. Town Clerk's Office, Portsmouth, Rhode Island (Author's own photograph).

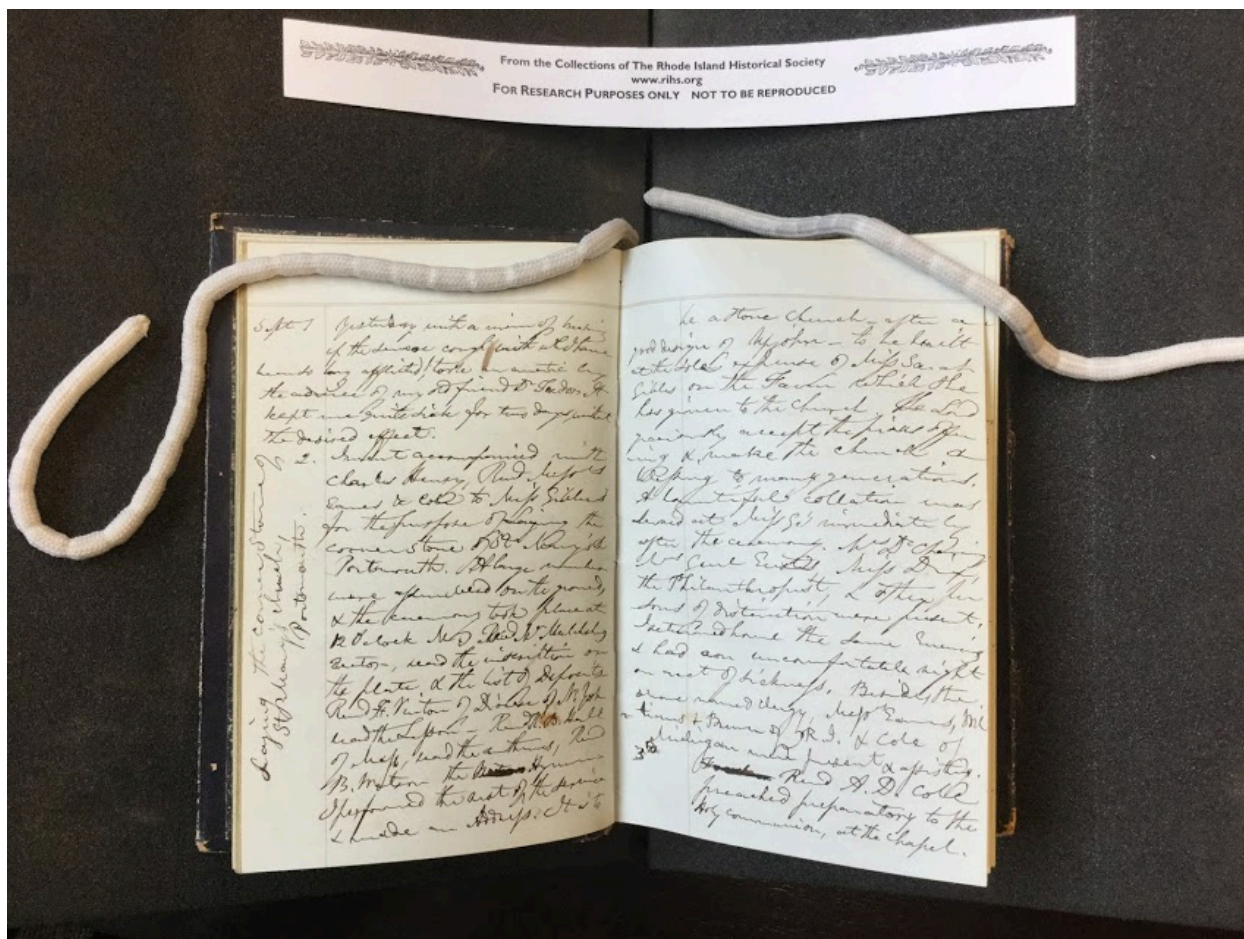


Figure 4: John P. K. Henshaw, journal entry, 2 September 1847, in the John P. K. Henshaw Papers, MSS 1133, Box 1, Folder 1, Rhode Island Historical Society (Author's own photograph).

Note: This photograph is used with permission and the understanding that it is for research purposes only. Inquiries regarding reproduction rights of the original document must be directed to the Rhode Island Historical Society.

M. W. SPENCER,
CONTRACTOR AND BUILDER,
On Sherman's wood and coal wharf, next north
Z. L. Hammonds, Thames st., Newport, R.I.
☐ Jobbing in all its branches executed in the
neatest manner, and all orders faithfully
attended to.

Figure 5: Advertisement for M. W. Spencer, *Newport Daily News*, 15 August 1857.

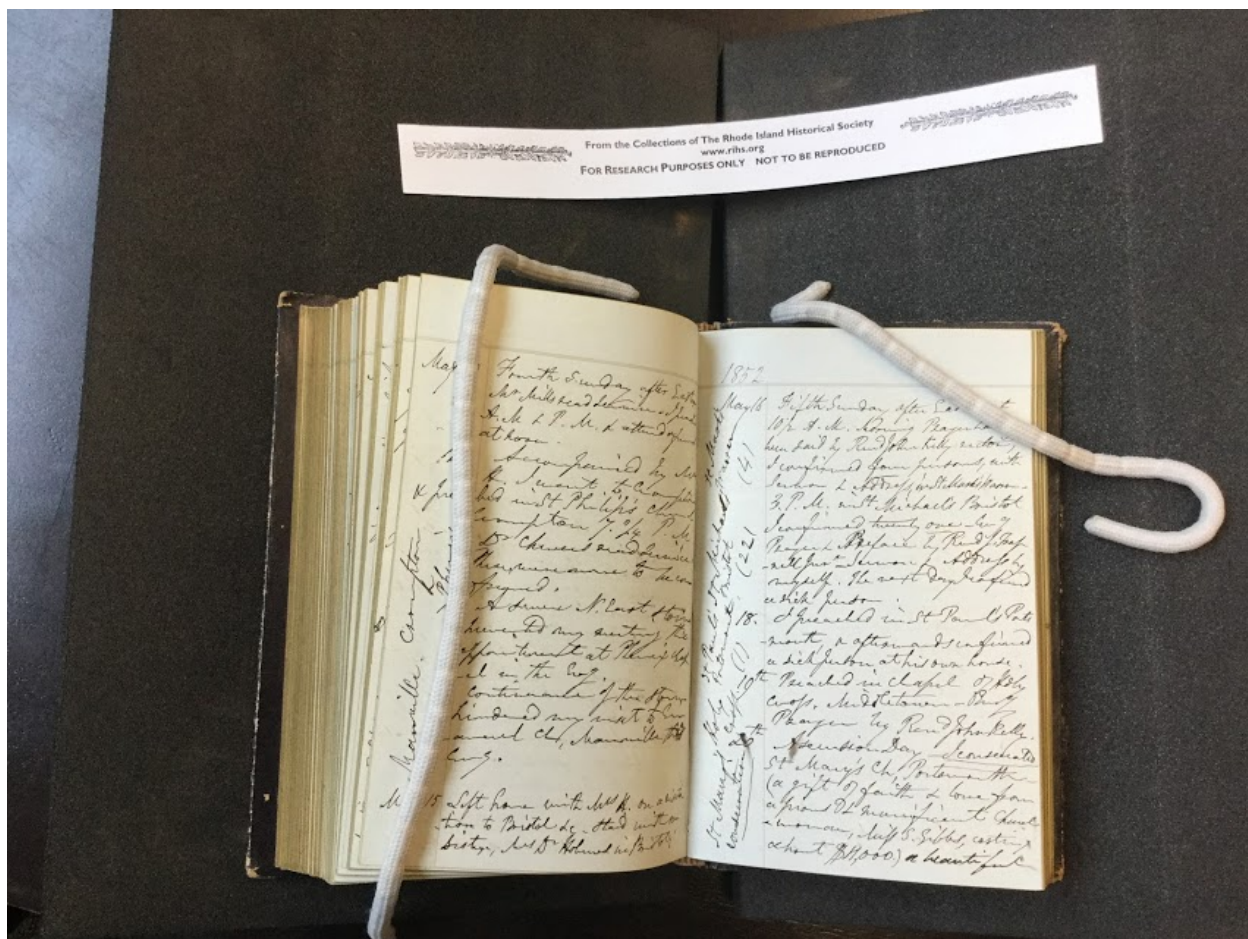


Figure 6: John P. K. Henshaw, journal entry, 20 May 1852, in the John P. K. Henshaw Papers, MSS 1133, Box 1, Folder 1, Rhode Island Historical Society (Author's own photograph).

Note: This photograph is used with permission and the understanding that it is for research purposes only. Inquiries regarding reproduction rights of the original document must be directed to the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Kyrle Bellew in the star part.

VANDERBILT GIVES \$10,000.

St. Mary's Church Receives a Donation from Its Near Neighbor.

Special to The New York Times.

NEWPORT, R. I., Dec. 2.—Alfred G. Vanderbilt has given \$10,000 to St. Mary's Protestant Episcopal Church of Portsmouth, one-half to be added to the endowment fund and the remainder to be used by the officials for the immediate or future needs of the parish.

St. Mary's Church adjoins Mr. Vanderbilt's Oakland Farm and has frequently been aided by Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt, the latter taking special interest in the church. She is a regular attendant at its services when she is at the farm in the Summer.

Mrs. Vanderbilt some time ago gave her grounds for a lawn fête for the benefit of the church, and contributed very largely to its success, inviting her friends to assist her in attending at the various booths and purchasing a large number of the articles offered for sale.

This is the second large gift which Mr. Vanderbilt has recently made to institutions in this vicinity, his donation of \$100,000 for a new building for the Newport Young Men's Christian Association as a memorial to his father having been announced about four weeks ago.

E. T. GATES LOSES HIS COLLIE

Figure 7: "Vanderbilt Gives \$10,000," *The New York Times*, 3 December 1907.

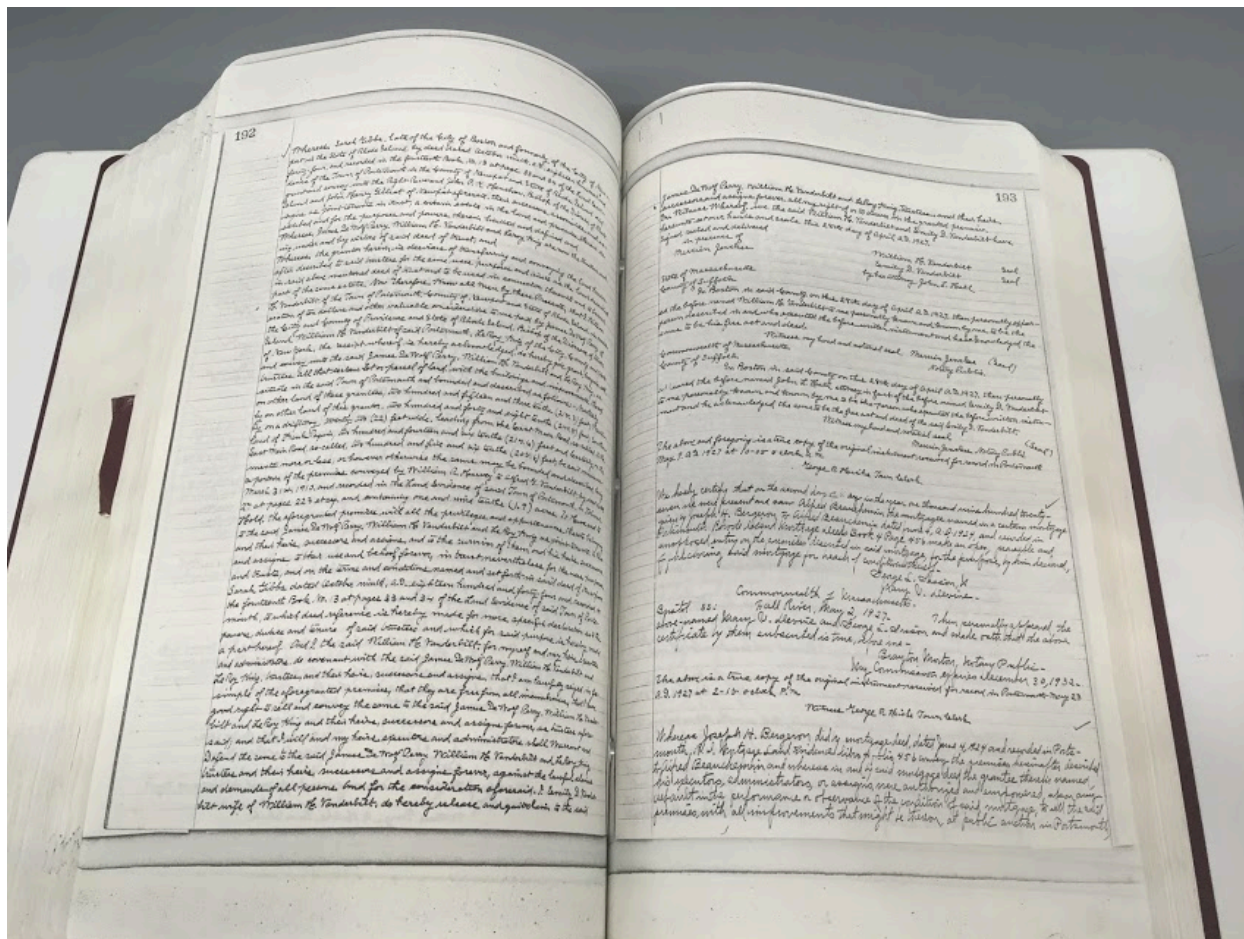


Figure 8: Deed of Sale from William H. Vanderbilt to Trustees, 28 October 1927, Newport County, Rhode Island, Deed Book 33B, page 192. Town Clerk’s Office, Portsmouth, Rhode Island (Author’s own photograph).

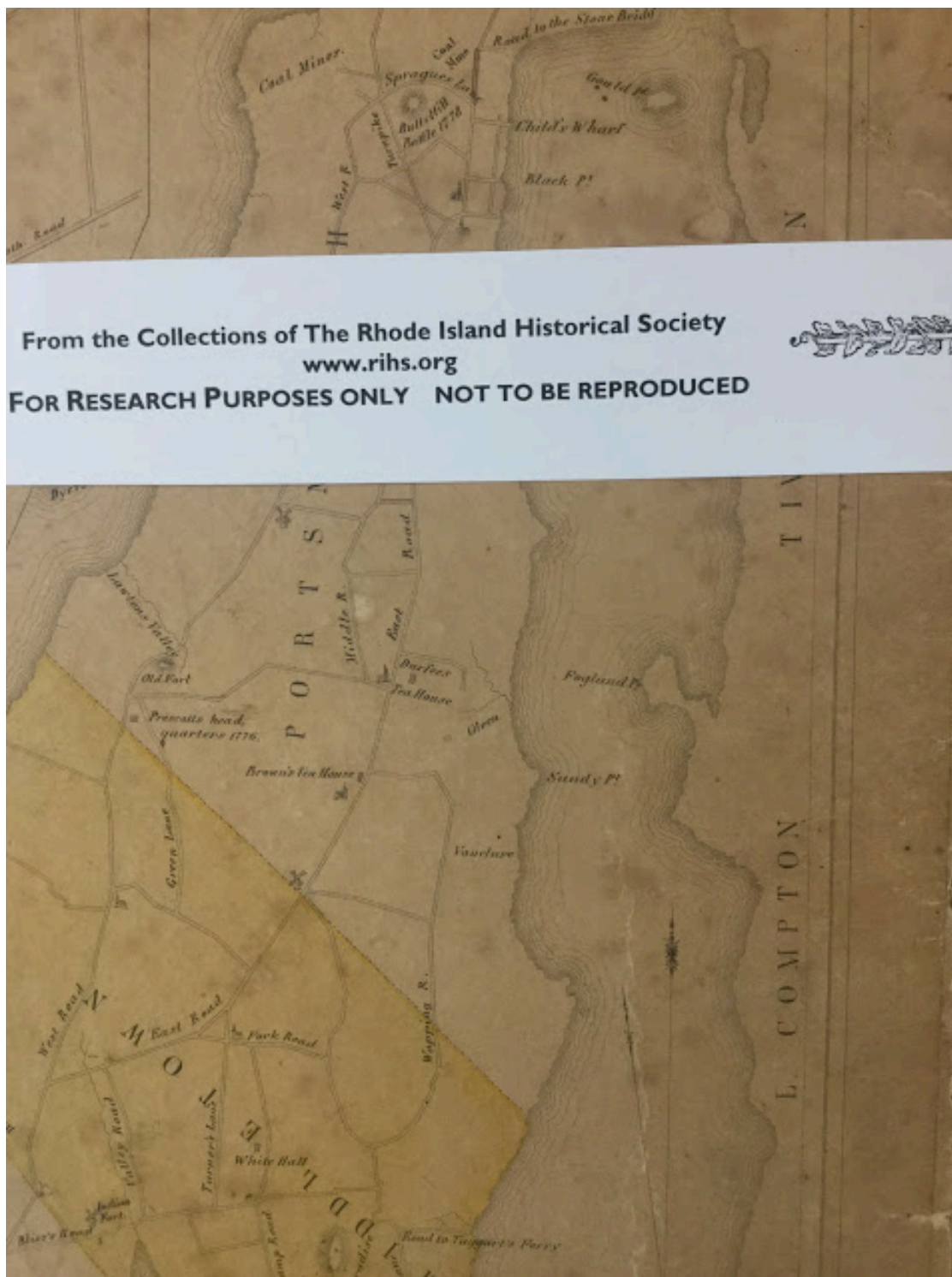


Figure 9: Charles E. Hammett, *Road Map of the Island of Rhode Island or Aquidneck*, 1849, in the Cartography Collection, Map #0016, Rhode Island Historical Society (Author's own photograph).

Note: This photograph is used with permission and the understanding that it is for research purposes only. Inquiries regarding reproduction rights of the original document must be directed to the Rhode Island Historical Society.

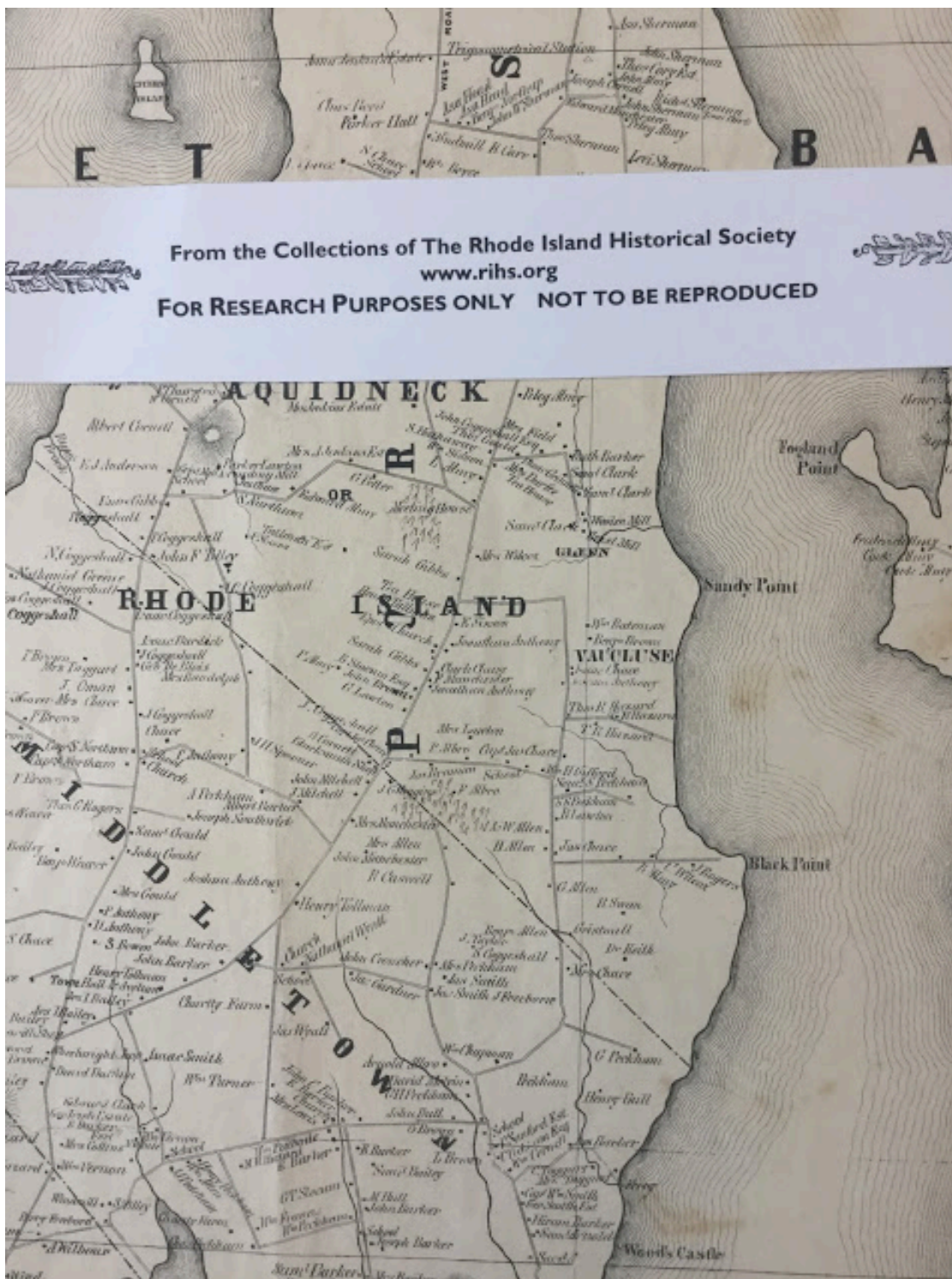


Figure 10: Henry Walling, *Map of Newport County, Rhode Island* 1850, in the Cartography Collection, Map #0187, Rhode Island Historical Society (Author's own photograph).

Note: This photograph is used with permission and the understanding that it is for research purposes only. Inquiries regarding reproduction rights of the original document must be directed to the Rhode Island Historical Society.

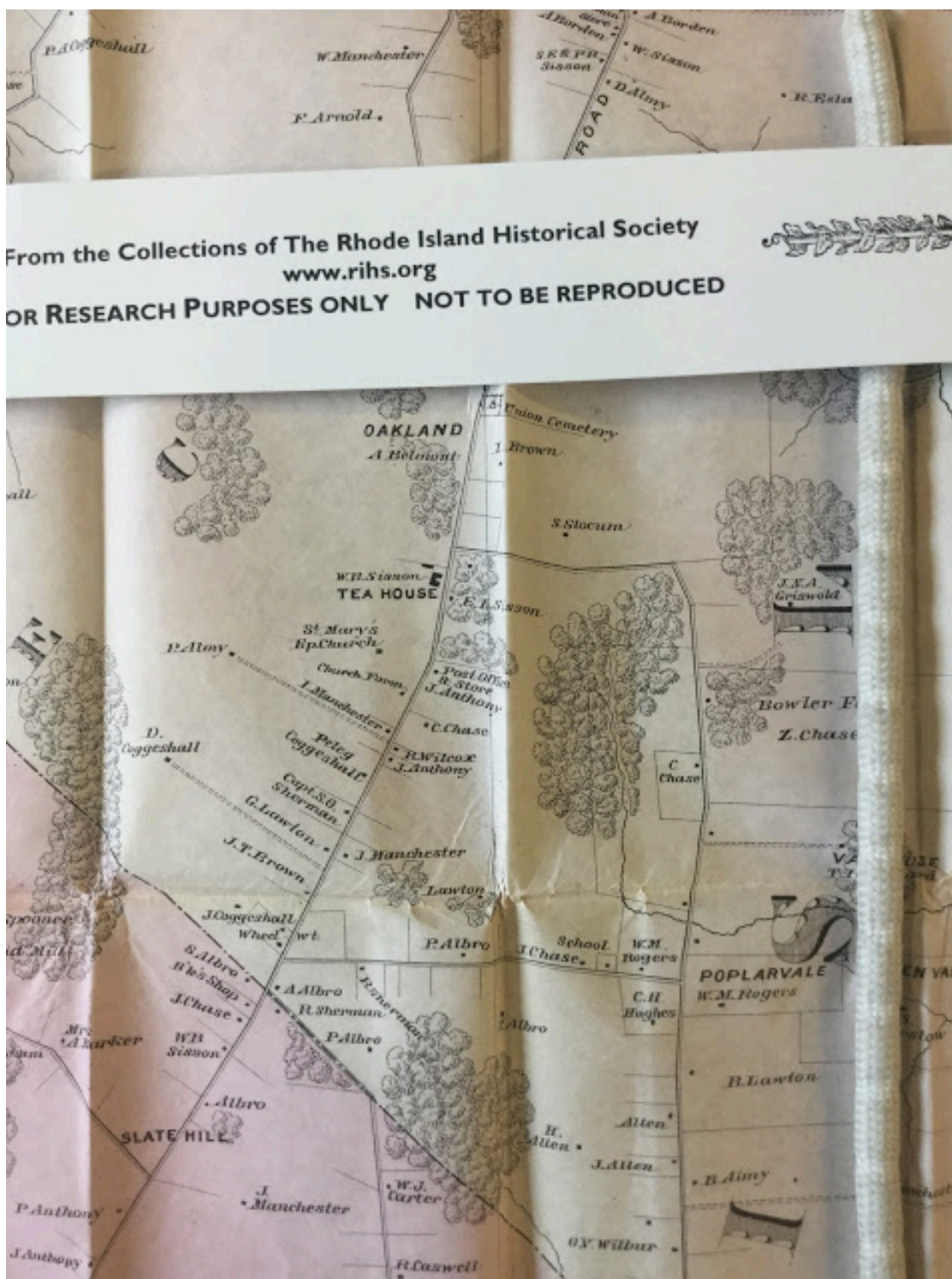


Figure 11: M. Dripps, *Map of Newport & Vicinity or Rhode Island*, 1860, in the Cartography Collection, Map #1080, Rhode Island Historical Society (Author's own photograph).

Note: This photograph is used with permission and the understanding that it is for research purposes only. Inquiries regarding reproduction rights of the original document must be directed to the Rhode Island Historical Society.

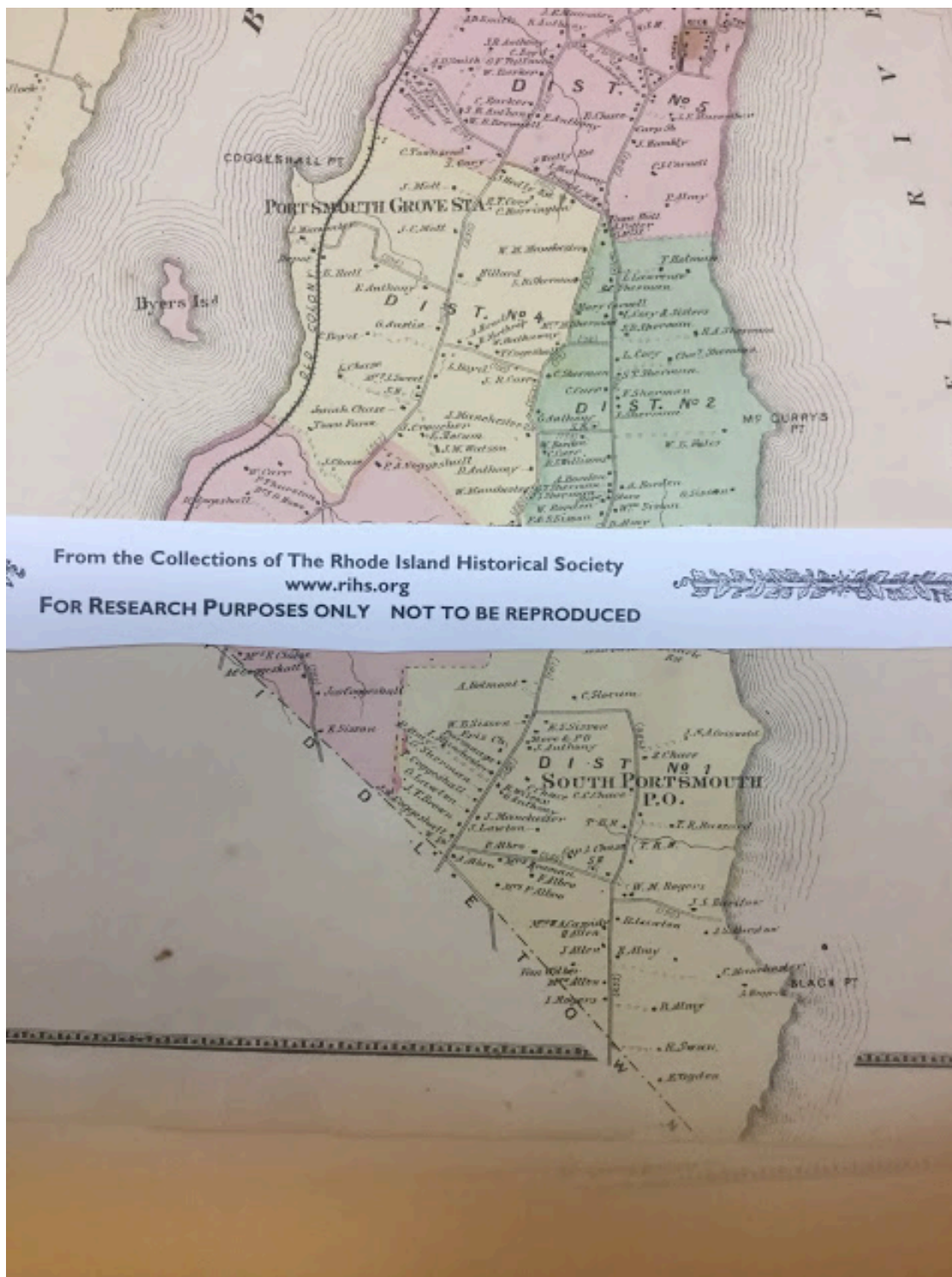


Figure 12: D. G. Beers, *Atlas of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, 1870, in the Cartography Collection, Map #2078, Rhode Island Historical Society (Author's own photograph).

Note: This photograph is used with permission and the understanding that it is for research purposes only. Inquiries regarding reproduction rights of the original document must be directed to the Rhode Island Historical Society.

Appendix II: Index of Contacts

Table 1: Contacts at Archival Repositories

Repository	Contact Name	Contact Title	E-mail Address
Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library at Columbia University	Drawings and Archives Division	N/A	avery-drawings@library.columbia.edu
Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library at Columbia University	Shelley Hayreh	Archivist	sh2309@columbia.edu
Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library at Columbia University	Pamela Casey	Archivist	pfc2108@columbia.edu
New York Public Library	Manuscripts and Archives Division	N/A	manuscripts@nypl.org
Newport Historical Society	Bert Lippincott	Librarian and Genealogist	blippincott@newporthistorical.org
Portsmouth Historical Society	Jim Garman	Town Historian	jimgarman@cox.net
Redwood Library and Athenaeum	Timothy Rohe	Archivist and Special Collections Librarian	trohe@redwoodlibrary.org
Rhode Island Historical Society Library	Reference Staff	N/A	reference@rihs.org
The University of Rhode Island Libraries	Mark Dionne	Archivist	mdionne@uri.edu

Table 2: Individual Experts

Contact Name	Expertise	E-mail Address
Alexandra Allardt	Materials conservation	alex@artcareresources.com
Joanna Doherty	National Register (RIHPHC)	joanna.doherty@preservation.ri.gov
Jim Donahue	Stained glass	nesg478@yahoo.com
Lisa Long Feldmann	Stained glass	lfeldmann@isgm.org
Julie Sloan	Stained glass (Frederic Crowninshield)	sloan16@msn.com

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Deed of Sale from William H. Vanderbilt to Trustees. 28 October 1927. Newport County, Rhode

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