



Report
Neutaconkanut Hill Park
Historic Resources Survey
Providence, Rhode Island

Survey and National Register
Eligibility Evaluation

June 17, 2022

PAL No. 4277

Submitted to:

Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy
and
Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
150 Benefit Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

The Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy (NHC) and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) have engaged The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL) to undertake a historic resources survey and National Register of Historic Places (National Register) evaluation of eligibility of Neutaconkanut Hill Park in Providence, Rhode Island. The survey and eligibility evaluation (the project) is funded in part by the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, under a Certified Local Government Grant to the City of Providence, administered by the RIHPHC.

Neutaconkanut Hill Park (Figures 1–3) occupies 88 acres west of Plainfield Street in Providence, Rhode Island, and is bordered on the west by the town of Johnston. Most of the park is hilly and rocky wooded uplands at an elevation of 292 feet (ft) above sea level, where the high ground provides a commanding view of the city of Providence to the northeast.

The project was completed by PAL staff members Virginia H. Adams, senior architectural historian/project manager; Joseph N. Waller Jr., senior archaeologist; Gretchen Pineo, architectural historian; and Jill Chin, associate architectural historian.

Methodology

Consultation

PAL contacted tribal representatives of the descendant Indian peoples who inhabited the Moshassuck lands of the Narragansett and nearby Sowams lands of the Pokanoket or Wampanoag Indians. PAL sent email messages about the project to, and requested traditional tribal information about Neutaconkanut Hill from, the Narragansett Indian Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) John

Brown III,¹ Narragansett Indian Deputy THPO Cora Peirce, Tomaquag Indian Museum Executive Director Lorén Spears, Mashapaug Nahaganset Chief Raymond Two Hawks Watson, and Mashapaug Nahaganset tribal historian Jacqueline Runs Strong McKinney requesting any traditional tribal information on that they might be willing to share. PAL also contacted John McNiff of the National Park Service, Providence, at the recommendation of Lorén Spears.

Site Visit

On March 10, 2022, a PAL architectural historian and an archaeologist conducted a walkover survey of Neutaconkanut Hill with members of the NHC and the Mashapaug Nahaganset Indian Tribe, who responded to PAL's email and requested to meet and consult. At the request of the Mashapaug Nahagansett Tribe during the initial site visit, PAL conducted a second site visit and walkover with the Mashapaug Nahaganset and Pokanoket Indian tribes on March 26, 2022. High-resolution photographs were taken of historic and non-historic aboveground resources, which were marked on a base map, and of natural resources and views from specific vantage points in the park. Field notes were taken to record information about these resources.

Research and Assessment of Existing Documentation

This project and report represent the beginning of a third effort to list Neutaconkanut Hill Park (the park) in the National Register. Two previous efforts were undertaken in 1976 and 1991. In 1976, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission (RIHPC, now RIHPHC) evaluated the park as eligible for listing under Criterion A in the areas of Exploration and Settlement and Entertainment/Recreation. However, no National Register documentation was prepared at that time. In 1991, Lucinda A. Brockaway of Past Designs prepared a draft National Register nomination for the park as a related listing to the *Designed Landscapes of Rhode Island, 1638–Present* Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF). However, the MPDF was not completed, and the park was not listed in the National Register.

PAL reviewed files of information from NHC founder Elli Panichas and consultant Mike Cassidy, to plan the survey and prepare this report. PAL staff also examined historical maps and atlases, Providence and Johnston histories and state reports about the park; and online repositories, including those maintained by the Library of Congress, the Rhode Island State Library, the Johnston Historical Society, and HathiTrust and Archive.org. Early twentieth-century issues of newspapers, including the *Providence Journal* and *Providence Evening Bulletin*, were accessed through GenealogyBank.com and Newspapers.com. PAL used the archival research to develop a historic context for the development of the park within the surrounding Providence's Olneyville and Silver Lake neighborhoods.

PAL also reviewed the results of a 2010 archaeological assessment it completed for the then-proposed trail and landscape improvements in the park. At that time, several pieces of quartz chipping debris

¹ Only representatives of the Narragansett Indian Tribal Historic Preservation Office did not respond to PAL's request for information.

(lithic waste material generated during Native American chipped-stone tool manufacture) were found eroding from some of the trails. In 2013, Rhode Island College (RIC) Department of Anthropology Professor Dr. E. Pierre Morenon applied to the RIHPHC for a permit and RIC conducted a limited Phase I site identification archaeological investigation of “the Meadow” in the northwest corner of the park. The RIHPHC issued a permit, and RIC conducted the survey. However, the RIHPHC never received an archaeological report about the investigations. Professor Morenon has since retired; the results of the survey are unknown (Ives, personal communication 2022); and requests to the then-principal archaeologist for information have not been answered.

National Register Criteria

PAL used the criteria established for evaluating the significance of historic properties to review the information compiled from the site visit and background research to evaluate the eligibility of the park’s resources for listing in the National Register. The National Park Service has established four criteria for listing significant cultural properties in the National Register (36 CFR 60 Part 4). The criteria are broadly defined to include the wide range of properties that are significant in “American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture.” The quality of significance may be present in “districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and

- A. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose component may lack individual distinction; or
- D. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.”

To be determined eligible for listing in the National Register, a traditional cultural property must meet at least one of these criteria and is associated with “cultural practices or beliefs of a living community that (a) are rooted in that community's history, and (b) are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community” (NPS 1992).

Results

Site and Setting

Neutaconkanut Hill Park occupies 88 acres in Providence at the border of Cranston and Johnston on the northwest side of Plainfield Street incorporating Neutaconkanut Hill. The park is bounded by residential properties and Killingly Street to the north, the Johnston-Providence border to the west and south, and Plainfield Street to the east. The park’s microenvironments are varied and include forested woodlands mostly populated by oak, beech, and birch with large rock outcrops (Photo 1), Neutaconkanut Spring and Brook (Photo 2), the upland Hidden Swamp (Photo 3), and large rock outcrops and ravines (Photo 4). The hill’s varied environs support a variety of wildlife. From the crest

of the hill, the high ground provides an impressive view of Providence (Photo 5) and the former Narragansett Indian lands surrounding the Great Salt Cove and Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket rivers from the Pawtucket (Central) falls to the head of Narragansett Bay below.

An ashlar stone wall and steps system built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) (1935–1938) winds throughout the park and articulates its natural and historical features. The micaceous slate rock used for the WPA project was extracted from surficial outcrops, and quarry features and remnant tailings exist along the upland trails. A ski slope and tow line were built on the east slope of the hill in the mid-1930s. The lower ground at the foot of the hill along Plainfield Street includes baseball fields (1935–1960), a swimming pool (1963–1970), basketball courts (2002), a skate park (2006), and a recreation center building (1993). Providence relies on water from the park area and a series of past and recent culverts, collection basins, and lines are in western sections of the park.

Archaeological Resources

Neutaconkanut Hill Park is between the Woonasquatucket River to the north and the Pocasset River west of Providence's Olneyville and Silver Lake neighborhoods. The Woonasquatucket River flows past the Ochee Springs Soapstone Quarry (archaeological site RI 231). The quarry, north-northwest of the foot of Neutaconkanut Hill, was a significant source of raw material for stone bowl manufacture ca. 3,600 to 2,800 years ago. The quarry and the margins of the Woonasquatucket and Pocasset rivers and Mashapaug Pond around Neutaconkanut Hill are lands with a long history of pre-contact Narragansett Indian settlement, hunting, fishing, and gathering from at least 7,000 to 450 years ago. Other known archaeological sites in and around the park include small hunting camps, larger habitations, resource acquisition and processing camps, and stone bowl manufacturing sites. Neutaconkanut Hill and Park are recorded as archaeological site RI-RI 690, discussed below.

Aboveground Resources²

Neutaconkanut Hill Park is a cohesive historic landscape area that constitutes a potential historic district.

General Characteristics

Neutaconkanut Hill Park contains recreational fields and facilities (generally along the north and east sides of the park), walking trails through dense successional growth forest in the hilly sections, boardwalks through marshy lands, and a variety of historic resources (Table 1). The summit of the slope is open meadow ringed by successional growth forest and provides views across residential neighborhoods toward downtown Providence (see Photo 5). A system of dry-laid **Stone Walls** (Photo 6) extends throughout the park, and these walls are visible remnants of the seventeenth- to nineteenth-century agricultural landscape. The recreational area developed at different times from 1937 to 2006 encompasses a playground, basketball court, two baseball fields, skate park, toboggan hill, and a

² Neutaconkanut Hill Park is described below as a historic district, and the recommendations on the National Register contributing and non-contributing assignments are presented in Table 1.

former ski slope. The park's main entrance on Plainfield Street provides access to an asphalt-paved parking lot north of the Neutaconkanut Hill Park Recreation Center. An ashlar granite, open-sided **Bus Shelter** (Photo 7) is on the west side of Plainfield Street, north of the Plainfield Street entrance, and consists of open, wide arched walls resting on a concrete pad and supporting an asphalt, shingle-clad, hip roof. A secondary entrance off Killingly Street terminates at a parking lot between the two baseball fields (Baseball Fields 1 and 2). Two **Trail Kiosks** (Photo 8) are west of the skate park and north of the baseball field, and are composed of wood posts supporting a Plexiglas enclosed bulletin board, sheltered by a metal overhang.

Circulation through the park is via a **System of Trails** and historic roads.³ The six trails are generally dirt walking paths with composite **Boardwalks** (see Photo 10) built over damp areas and narrow wood **Bridges** over running water. Several trails have stone steps built by the WPA in 1935–1938. An asphalt-paved road, **Circle Road** laid out in ca. 1892, historically provided vehicular access to the summit of Neutaconkanut Hill for visitors and for maintenance, but the summit is now only accessible by foot. Circle Road extends south from Legion Memorial Drive through the center of the park and curves northwest, terminating at Jacqueline Drive.

Contributing and Non-Contributing Park Resources

A total of 32 historic and non-historic resources were recorded during the site visit (see Table 1). All contributing resources and representative non-contributing resources are described below in an approximately clockwise direction, beginning with the recreational area at the northeast corner.

Two baseball fields are at the northeast corner of the park. **Baseball Field 2** (Photo 12) was constructed ca. 1960 and is at the northern boundary of the park along Killingly Street. Two concrete block buildings (Photo 13), constructed ca. 1990–2000, are used for storage, as a press box, and as a concession stand, are south of Baseball Field 2 to the west of a parking lot. Southeast of the concrete block buildings is **Baseball Field 1** (Photo 14), which was built by the WPA. The baseball field opens to the northeast, along the WPA-built ashlar **Stone Bleachers** (Photo 15) west of this field. A two-story, concrete block and wood **Press Box** (see Photo 14) with a shed roof is behind home base.

Table 1. Neutaconkanut Hill Park Resources.

Name	Assessor Number	Type	Date	Contributing Status	Photo No(s).
System of Stone Walls	Multi	Structure	17 th –19 th centuries	C	6
Bus Shelter	111-94	Structure	Ca. 1920	C	7
Trail Kiosks	111-94	Object	21 st century	NC	8
System of Trails	Multi	Structure	Ca. 1935; Rehabilitated 2008	C	9, 10, 19, 23, 24, 25
Boardwalks and Bridges	111-19	Structure	21 st century	NC	10, 11
Baseball Field 2	111-94	Site	Ca. 1960	NC	12

³ The park's trail map (see Figure 2) shows six trails. North to south, these are the Pinnacle Trail, Pond Trail, Hickory Trail, The Shortcut, Monument Loop, and the Blueberry Trail.

Name	Assessor Number	Type	Date	Contributing Status	Photo No(s).
Concession Stand	111-94	Building	Ca. 1990	NC	13
Stone Bleachers	111-94	Structure	1935–1938	C	15
Baseball Field 1	111-3	Site	1935–1938	C	14
Press Box	111-94	Building	1995	NC	
Basketball Court	111-94	Structure	Ca. 2002	NC	7
Playground	111-94	Structure	Ca. 2003	NC	7
Skate Park	111-94	Structure	2006	NC	8, 17
Recreation Center	111-92	Building	1993	NC	16
Pool	111-92	Structure	1963–1970	NC	
Toboggan Slope	111-94	Site	N/A	C	17
Ski Slope	111-94	Site	N/A	C	18
WPA Path	111-94	Structure	1935–1938	C	19
WPA Steps	111-94	Structure	1935–1938	C	19
Circle Road	111-94	Structure	Ca. 1892	C	20
Bandstand Foundation	111-94	Structure	Ca. 1900	C	21
Hilltop Meadow	111-94	Site	N/A	C	22
Granite Benches	111-94	Object	21 st century	NC	22
Stone Lined Channels	Multi	Structure	1935–1938	C	23
Pinnacle Overlook Boardwalk	111-1	Structure	21 st century	NC	24
Shortcut Bridge	111-20	Structure	21 st century	NC	26
King Monument	111-16	Object	1905	C	27
Great Stone Stairs	111-17	Structure	1935–1938	C	28
Gate Posts	111-18	Object	Late 19 th – early 20 th centuries	C	29
Boundary Wall	111-18	Structure	Late 19 th -early 20 th centuries	C	29
Borden/King Homestead Ruins	111-18	Site	Ca. 1735–1955	C	30
Borden Family Cemetery	111-16	Site	1800–1834	C	31

C: Contributing to a potential National Register District

NC: Non-contributing to a potential National Register District

The **Recreation Center** (Photo 16) built in 1993 is a two-story, concrete block building with masonry courses along Plainfield Street. The **Pool** constructed between 1963 and 1970 is immediately west of the building and is surrounded by a concrete deck enclosed by a chain-link fence and has recreation equipment to the north. South of Baseball Field 1 along Plainfield Street is the **Basketball Court** (see Photo 7) built ca. 2002; the **Playground** (see Photo 7) built ca. 2003 is to the southwest. The concrete **Skate Park** (Photo 17 and see Photo 8) constructed in 2006 is west of the Playground and just northwest of a large parking lot. A series of concrete paths skirt the greenspace north of the parking lot and connect the skate park, playground, and basketball court.

West of the Skate Park is the **Toboggan Slope** (Photo 17), with the former **Ski Slope** (Photo 18) to the north. Remnants of the tow rope system remain extant in the woods near the ski slope. An ashlar

granite wall in front of the bleachers extends south and encompasses a set of granite steps that leads to the concrete paved **WPA Path** (Photo 19) that undulates in a generally northern direction. The WPA Path terminates at the concrete **WPA Steps** (Photo 19) that lead west to **Circle Road** (Photo 20). West of this road is a set of roughly laid fieldstone steps that extends northwest past the fieldstone **Bandstand Foundation** (Photo 21) east of the hilltop meadow. The **Hilltop Meadow** (Photo 22) is an open field surrounded by mature foliage. Six modern **Granite Benches** (see Photo 22) are at the northwest corner of the meadow and are arranged in a roughly semicircular pattern.

The **System of Trails** (Photos 23, 24, 25 and see Photos 9, 10, and 19) winds through the park and extends to the edges of the north, west, and south boundaries (see Figure 2). The trails mainly travel on the woodland landscape dirt ground surface through deciduous trees, with small sections of gravel on high traffic areas of the trail. Rock outcroppings are scattered throughout the west and southern areas of the park on points of higher elevation. The Pinnacle Trail begins at the trailhead kiosk south of the Skate Park and passes above the Toboggan Slope, through the Ski Slope, turns west onto the WPA Path, continues along Circle Road skirting the meadow, and diverges into a clockwise route and a counterclockwise route. The counterclockwise route passes over two **Boardwalks** over marshy areas near the eastern boundary of the park. The boardwalks were constructed in the early twenty-first century and consist of PVC decking with dimensional lumber spans. The Pinnacle Trail crosses a small wood bridge over one of several **Stone-Lined Channels** (see Photo 23) built by the WPA on the east slope of the hill to aid in draining damp spots on the hill. The clockwise route of Pinnacle Trail skirts the eastern boundary of the park and crosses the **Pinnacle Overlook Boardwalk** (see Photo 24), an L-shaped wood deck on wood piers with a simple wood railing and wood benches set into the slope.

A pair of dilapidated and rusted early 1970s' Chevrolet Camaros (see Photo 25) are east of the Pinnacle Trail at the intersection of the Monument Loop Trail and the Shortcut Trail. The Shortcut Trail, beginning at the western end of Circle Road and traveling south through the middle of the park, connects the two routes of the Pinnacle Trail. The **Shortcut Bridge** (Photo 26) travels over a small stream south of the junk cars and consists of PVC decking and dimensional lumber span.

The Pinnacle Trail transitions into the Monument Loop Trail at the clockwise and counterclockwise routes' southern ends. The Monument Loop Trail extends southeast and passes the **King Monument** (Photo 27), an octagonal granite monument with inscriptions on four sides on a stepped base topped with a sloped capital that was erected in 1905. The King Monument is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence with ball-shaped finials at each corner and an iron "K" motif centered on the north and east sides. The Pond Trail extends in a general easterly direction past King Pond and ascends the **Great Stone Stairs** (Photo 28), dry-laid fieldstone steps constructed 1935–1938 by the WPA.

A pair of granite **Gate Posts** (Photo 29) is set on a slight angle on the west side of Plainfield Street across from its intersection with Farmington Avenue. A **Boundary Wall** (see Photo 29) composed of rusticated concrete blocks extends from each of the gate posts and runs parallel to Plainfield Road.

The **Borden/King Homestead Ruins** (Photo 30) are at the southeast corner of the park near the convergence of Plainfield Street and Silver Lake Avenue. The ruins are associated with the residential

and agricultural occupation of the east slope of Neutaconkanut Hill by the Borden and King families beginning in the mid-seventeenth century and continuing into the twentieth century (see *European Settlement* below). The ruins consist of fieldstone and parged foundations of multiple buildings (two houses, a barn, and what may be a cooper's shop) and a fieldstone-lined well. The ruins are covered by fallen trees and debris. South of the Borden/King Homestead ruins is the **Borden Family Cemetery** (Photo 31), which contains seven marked graves, presumably those of individuals related to the Borden family, dating to 1800–1834. One grave has a granite marker that has been broken horizontally in two; four have slate markers; and two are marked with rough fieldstones. All the graves have footstones. The granite marker, with a dedication in memory of Simon Fraley, is a rectangular slab with a bas-relief urn in the center of an oval, and above the inscription are swags of bas-relief holly leaves. The slate markers have rounded tympanums and shoulders, with incised urns in the tympanum and daisy wheels in the shoulders. Three of the markers were likely carved by the same person or by the same shop, because the urns and daisy wheels are stylistically identical. The slate marker for William Borden (d. 1821) appears to have a thistle carved into the tympanum and may have been produced by a different carver.

Historical Context

Neutaconkanut Hill is a prominent fixture on the Providence landscape and is the city's highest point. For Native Americans, the hill commanded a view over the rich fertile lands and fishing and hunting grounds surrounding the Great Salt Cove, Mashapaug Pond, the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket rivers, and the Providence and Seekonk rivers at the head of Narragansett Bay in what is now northern Rhode Island. The margins of these waterbodies were ideal settings for farming and horticulture, resource processing, short- and long-term settlement, and burial.

Neutaconkanut or “Notquonckanet” is first mentioned in Narragansett Indian sachems Canonicus and Miantonomo's March 1637 confirmation deed of Providence to Roger Williams (Bartlett 1856:18) and is a “Mountain, two or three miles S.W. from Providence” (Parsons 1861:18). The true meaning of Neutaconkanut is unknown, but some have proposed that it means “home of squirrels” (Rotondo et al. 1971:2) or the “shortbounds” of the Mashapaug, Neutaconkanut, and Pawtucket Indian lands (Tooker 1897) or is an English corruption of an Algonquin Indian word (Rider 1904:209).

Neutaconkanut, in all of its varied phonetic spellings in historical documents, is the northwest boundary of Canonicus and Miantonomo's Providence land grant to Roger Williams in 1636. Neutaconkanut Hill is also near the early seventeenth-century Narragansett Indian village of Maushapogue (Mashapaug), which was at the pond that still bears this name (Rider 1904:171). Oral tribal histories describe that from that location the Narragansett sachems spread their arms showing Roger Williams the limits of the Providence Land Grant (Two Hawks Watson and McNiff, personal communications 2022).

Pre-Contact Period in the Providence Land Grant and Vicinity

The temporal periods for what is now southern New England are identifiable by specific artifact types, patterns of land and resource use, and occasionally by other social indicators such as burial

practices. The following is an overview of the cultural history of this area in general, with specific information about the area of the Providence Land Grant and its vicinity.

Mobile hunters and foragers that archaeologists refer to as PaleoIndians arrived in southern New England following the retreat of glacial ice during the **PaleoIndian Period (circa [ca.] 12,500–10,000 years Before Present [B.P.])**. Narragansett Indian oral history tells about a history that extends back more than 30,000 years, and archaeologists debate the timing of the initial colonization of the Eastern Seaboard following the discovery of cultural strata and artifacts beneath PaleoIndian occupations in South Carolina, Virginia, and Pennsylvania (Adovasio et al. 1990; Anderson et al. 2013; Goodyear 2005; Goodyear and Sain 2018; Haynes 2015; Lothrop et al. 2016; Macphail and McAvoy 2008; Marshall 2001) and perhaps from the now submerged Atlantic continental shelf (Stanford and Bradley 2012). Although the now-inundated coastal plain might have been occupied during the PaleoIndian Period, no evidence for such early sites is currently known in New England.

The earliest *archaeological* evidence for human occupation in southern New England is at the “Sands of the Blackstone” site in nearby Uxbridge, Massachusetts, that was radiocarbon dated at $11,990 \pm 60$ B.P. (Leveillee 2016). Although PaleoIndian artifacts are rare in northern Rhode Island, single PaleoIndian artifacts or small PaleoIndian archaeological occupations are known from the Twin Rivers Site (RI 165) in Lincoln at the border with Smithfield (Fowler 1952:8); the Bravo (RI 2443) and Crossroads (RI 2773) sites in North Smithfield; the Abbott Run (RI 1746) and Pine Swamp (RI 2767) sites in Cumberland; and Site RI 2431 in East Providence. The few recovered PaleoIndian artifacts from sites recorded in the lower Blackstone and upper Narragansett Bay drainage areas suggest Native peoples were familiar with the Providence landscape that included Neutaconkanut Hill.

The **Archaic Period (10,000–3000 B.P.)** was a time of increased familiarization and expanded settlement of southern New England’s woodlands. In general, Archaic Period peoples had a primarily hunting and gathering subsistence economy with a settlement pattern characterized by seasonal relocations within circumscribed territories (Dincauze 1975). Archaeologists have divided the Archaic Period into Early, Middle, and Late subperiods. **Early Archaic Period (10,000–8000 B.P.)** occupations are commonly known from bifurcate-base projectile point recoveries, although archaeological data from Connecticut and Massachusetts indicate some Early Archaic peoples produced quartz “microcores” and “microliths” for use in composite tools (see Forrest 1999; Jones and Forrest 2003; Robinson 1992). Early archaic mobility, degrees of sedentism, lithic preferences, sophistication in domestic structures (pit houses), and micro-blade technology differed from those of the PaleoIndians, and there was a shift from relying on hunting and collecting to procuring and processing a wider range of seeds, nuts, plants, and animals.

Although Early Archaic archaeological sites are rare in Rhode Island, bifurcate-base projectile points were recovered from the Twin River Site in Lincoln (Fowler 1952); the Butler Hospital Site (RI 929) in Providence (RIHPHC site files); the Abbott Run Site in Cumberland; and the Sevenmile River West Site in nearby Attleboro, Massachusetts (Waller 2021).

Middle Archaic Period (8000–5000 B.P.) sites are more common in Rhode Island than sites dating to earlier periods, and Native American occupations reflect a diversified subsistence strategy that included hunting, foraging, fishing, shellfishing, and communal seasonal gatherings to harvest anadromous fish. Site locations include semi-permanent base camps and seasonal upland and riverine camps. Middle Archaic Neville, Neville-Variant, Stark, and Merrimack style projectile points are most often made from locally or regionally available lithic materials (e.g. quartzite, rhyolite, argillite, and Attleboro Red Felsite), which demonstrates an increased familiarity with the local landscape and its resources. Archaeologists have recovered Neville and Neville-like projectile points from near Neutaconkanut Hill at the Northshore (RI 935B), Lusi (RI 1221), and RI 1940 sites in Providence; the Walker Point Bluff (RI 653) and Bullock Cove (RI 1725) sites in East Providence; and Site RI 2317, the Millers River East (RI 2801), and the Pine Swamp and Pine Swamp Quarry (RI 2752) sites in Cumberland. Middle Archaic Stark points were also recovered from the Field's Point (RI 693) and Old Maid's Cove (RI 1944) sites in Providence; the Jones Pond Shell Heap Site (RI 230) in East Providence; and the Monastery Site (RI 1720) in Cumberland.

The **Late Archaic Period (5000–3000 B.P.)** included the Laurentian, Small Stemmed, and Susquehanna cultural traditions. The Laurentian tradition is the earliest of the three and included use of ground-stone woodworking tools, ground slate points and knives, ulus, simple bannerstones, and broad-bladed and side-notched Vosburg, Otter Creek, and Brewerton type projectile points (Ritchie 1980:79). Laurentian tradition sites and occupations are often smaller than those of the later Small Stemmed and Susquehanna cultural traditions, contain fewer artifacts, and have a narrower range of tool types. Small Stemmed tradition occupations are identified by Squibnocket Stemmed, Squibnocket Triangle, Wading River, and other small or narrow stemmed projectile points. The Small Stemmed settlement system included large base camps along well-drained stream, pond, and wetland margins and small resource acquisition and processing sites (McBride 1984; Waller and Leveillee 2002).

Laurentian and Small Stemmed tradition materials have been recovered from the Field's Point, Old Maid's Cove, Boldwater Point (RI 1777), Carpenter's Point (RI 935A), and RI 1940 sites in Providence. Small Stemmed tradition materials have been recovered from the Old State House (RI 692) and Site RI 1941 in Providence; the Walker Point Bluff, Fram North (RI 932), Bullock Cove, and Site RI 1862 in East Providence; the Ambrose Street Site (RI 2573) in North Providence; the Simmons Lower Reservoir (RI 2207), Lost Brook Site (RI 2432), and RI 2619 in Johnston; and from various locations in Cumberland. The density of Late Archaic sites and the reliance on local lithic materials such as quartz, quartzite, and Narraganset Bay argillite indicate Native American populations were firmly settled on the lands surrounding Neutaconkanut Hill by 5000 B.P.

The **Transitional Archaic Period (3600–2500 B.P.)** bridges the Late Archaic and Early Woodland periods. Transitional Archaic occupations are recognized by Susquehanna tradition cultural materials (e.g. Atlantic, Susquehanna/Watertown, and Orient Fishtail projectile points, soapstone bowls and fragments, and ground-stone tools). The Susquehanna tradition settlement pattern was coastal or riverine oriented with a subsistence base that included fish, nuts, and small- to medium-sized mammals (Pagoulatos 1988). Susquehanna tradition chipped-stone tools are often made from southern New England rhyolites, quartzite, and non-local cherts. Steatite (more commonly known as

soapstone) bowl manufacture and use began about 3600 B.P. and peaked between 3400 and 2900 B.P., before falling into disuse by the end of the Orient Phase ca. 2800 B.P. (Sassaman 1999). Soapstone outcrops include the Oaklawn Soapstone Quarry in Cranston, the Ochee Springs quarry near the foot of Neutaconkanut Hill in Johnston, and perhaps on Manton Avenue and at Site RI 2294 in Providence and Johnston, respectively (RIHPHC site files).

Transitional Archaic archaeological sites are common near steatite quarries and along rivers and on estuary margins. The Field's Point, Butler Hospital, Northshore, Boldwater Point, Red Slipper (RI 1877), and Homecroft (RI 1889) sites and Sites RI 1940 and RI 1944 in Providence all contain Transitional Archaic projectile points (RIHPHC site files). Soapstone bowls or bowl fragments were recovered from the Carpenter's Point Site in Providence, the Jones Pond Shell Heap and Hogpen Point Fort (RI 2278) sites in East Providence, Site RI 1955 in North Providence, and the Abbott Run Site in Cumberland.

The **Woodland Period (3000–450 B.P.)** involved a transition to a more sedentary way of life. Like the Archaic Period, and archaeologists have divided the Woodland Period into Early, Middle, and Late subperiods. Settlement intensified along Narragansett Bay, the Rhode Island coast, and the Bay islands as coastal inundation decreased and shorelines stabilized. **Early Woodland (3000–2000 B.P.)** sites indicate limited use of the uplands and more intensive occupation on the coast. Subsistence strategies included hunting, fishing, and perhaps horticulture (Crawford et al. 2019; George and Dewar 1999; Taché and Craig 2015). Early Woodland sites are not as numerous as Middle and especially Late Archaic sites, and only a few Early Woodland archaeological deposits are known in Providence (e.g., the Moses Brown School [RI 1704], Field's Point, and Old Maid's Cove sites).

Middle Woodland Period (2000–1000 B.P.) sites indicate a continued focus on coastal or riverine ecosystems with small hunting camps contrasting with larger habitations. Middle Woodland artifacts include Jack's Reef and Fox Creek type projectile points and rocker and dentate-stamped ceramics. Fox Creek projectile points have been recovered from the Carpenter's Point and Old Maid's Cove sites in Providence, and Middle Woodland archaeological features were excavated at the Red Slipper Site in Providence and the Walker Point Bluff Site in East Providence. Hornfels lithic chipping debris may be associated with a Middle Woodland occupation at the Dry Brook Site (RI 1909) in Johnston (RIHPHC site files).

Larger populations and decreased communal mobility contributed to the development of tribal territories and increasing social complexity by the **Late Woodland Period (1000–450 B.P.)** (Mulholland 1988). Late Woodland sites are common in coastal environments, around interior freshwater ponds and wetlands, and along large tributary streams and rivers. Occupations included special purpose sites (e.g., shell middens, hunting and processing camps, and lithic workshops), small domestic sites, and larger hamlets or villages. Late Woodland artifacts include triangular Madison and Levanna type projectile points and cord-wrapped, stick-impressed, and incised ceramics. Diagnostic Levanna projectile points, most often of quartz and argillite, and maize horticulture became more important during this period. Late Woodland Levanna triangles and/or clay pot sherds are known from the Old State House, Carpenter's Point, Boldwater Point, Red Slipper, and Old Maid's Cove sites in Providence; Site RI 2320 in Cumberland; and Site RI 70, Jones Pond Shell

Heap, and Kettle Point (RI 1731) sites in East Providence.

Contact and Post-Contact Period Settlement and Use of Neutaconkanut Hill

Native American settlement and subsistence patterns were disrupted beginning in the early sixteenth century by initial contact with European explorers and later sustained contact with English settlers. **Contact Period (450–300 B.P./A.D. 1500–1620)** Native American settlements were focused within traditional tribal territories that developed before and during the Late Woodland Period. Providence was within Pawtuxet Indian territory. The Pawtuxets were a subgroup of the larger Narragansett Indian tribe, who controlled most of the geopolitical boundaries of present-day Rhode Island in the early to mid-seventeenth century. At the time of first European settlement, the Narragansett hunted, gathered, and farmed. They planted corn in the spring and tended their fields in the summer. Small groups or individuals left their farmsteads, hamlets, and villages to avail themselves of seasonal resource abundances of fish, shellfish, and nuts.

Roger Williams established the first permanent settlement in Rhode Island in the spring of 1636 at the beginning of the **Post-Contact Period**. Born in London in 1603, Williams and his wife, Mary, immigrated to Boston when he accepted a position as assistant minister in Salem. Williams soon ran afoul of the Massachusetts Bay authorities for his “radical” views and teachings and was exiled from the colony. Williams relocated, settling at the headwaters of Narragansett Bay along the eastern bank of the Seekonk River, and began planting fields and building dwellings. The new settlement was on land claimed by Plymouth Colony, and Williams and his followers were once again forced to relocate, this time settling on the eastern shore of the Great Salt Cove at Moshassuck or the “Great Brook or Great Marshy Meadow” near the mouth of the Moshassuck River (as quoted in Rider 1904:173). Williams named his settlement “Providence” hoping “it might be ... a shelter for persons distressed for conscience” (as quoted in Federal Writers’ Project 1937:256).

Before settling in Providence, Williams negotiated a purchase or, more accurately, use of the land from the Narragansett sachems Canonicus and Miantonomo. A record of Canonicus and Miantonomo’s grant to Roger Williams, affirmed in March 1637 and witnessed by fellow Natives Sotassh and Assotemewit, reads as follows:

At Nanhiggansick, the 24th of the first month, commonly called March, in y^e second yeare of our plantation or planting at Mooshausick or Providence. Memorandum, that we Cannaunicus and Miantunomi, the two chief sachems of Nanhiggansick, having two years since sold vnto Roger Williams, y^e lands and meadowes vpon the two fresh rivers, called Mooshausick and Wanasqutucket, doe now by these presents, establish and confirme y^e bounds of those lands, from y^e river and fields at Pautuckqut, y^e great hill of Notquonckanet, on y^e northwest, and the town of Mausapogue on y^e west.

As also, in consideration of the many kindesses and services he hath continually done for us, both with our friends at Massachusetts, as also at Quinickicut and Apaum or Plymouth, we doe freely give unto him all that land from those rivers reaching to Pawtuxet river; as also the grass and meadowes upon y^e said Pawtuxet River (Bartlett 1856:18).

The deed affixes “Notquonckanet” (Neutaconkanut) Hill as the northwest corner of the Providence settlement area.

Mashapaug Nahaganset Indian Sachem Raymond Two Hawks Watson (2022 personal communication) describes the Moshassuck River as the traditional territorial boundary of the Narragansett and the Wampanoag (Pokanoket) Indian peoples and that when Williams first settled the area, the Mashapag, Neutaconkanut, and Pawtucket sachems voiced their concerns to Chief Sachem Canonicus. It was then that Canonicus sent Miantonomo to Providence and Neutaconkanut Hill to affirm the limits of the Providence land grant.

Repeated colonial encroachment on Native lands, cultural traditions, and rights in the mid-seventeenth century culminated with a Wampanoag Indian assault on the English settlement of Swansea, Massachusetts Bay, in June 1675. This attack marked the beginning of King Philip’s War (1675–1676), and hostilities soon spread throughout New England. In December 1675, the combined United Colony forces (Connecticut, Massachusetts Bay, and Plymouth) gathered at Cocumscussoc (Wickford) in present-day North Kingstown to assault the Narragansett, who had up to that time remained neutral in the conflict, at their fortified settlement within the Great Swamp for harboring Wampanoag Indian war refugees. There, colonial forces killed hundreds of men, women, and children and destroyed their village (Leach 1958). Angered by the attack, the great Narragansett sachem Canonchet, son of the Narragansett sachem Miantomomo, appeared at the outskirts of the Providence settlement in March 1676. After briefly talking with the aged Roger Williams, Canonchet and his warriors agreed to spare Williams but not Providence, and burned 54 houses and destroyed most of the town’s early records (Schultz and Tougas 1999). The English dealt the Narragansett another significant blow with the capture of Canonchet and his execution and murder at the hands of rival Mohegan sachem Oneco in April 1676. King Philip’s War eventually ended with Philip’s capture and death at the hands of Benjamin Church on August 12, 1676. The war greatly reduced the Native American population of northern Rhode Island and led to a surge in Euro-American settlement by the end of the seventeenth century. However, some Narragansett, Pokanoket, and members of other tribes continued to reside in small communities in some Providence neighborhoods surrounding Neutaconkanut Hill where their descendants continue to live today (Rubertone 2020).

Native American Occupation and Use of Neutaconkanut Hill

Rhode Island archaeological site files record Neutaconkanut Hill and Park as archaeological site RI 690. At some time in the nineteenth century, a human effigy made from locally available graphite was recovered on the hill (Figure 4). This is an uncommon artifact class not associated with everyday activities. During a 2010 archaeological investigation, PAL observed several pieces of quartz chipping debris eroding from some of the trails at the park and concluded that Neutaconkanut had been “a focal point for pre-contact Native American hunters and collectors for several thousand years” (Leveillee 2010:2).

Although Neutaconkanut Hill and the park’s pre-contact archaeological content is poorly understood, state site files record five pre-contact sites within 0.5 miles of the hill and park and one site between 0.5 and 1 mile of the property. These sites include chipped-stone tool manufacturing, hunting, or

resource processing sites with small, low-density artifact clusters. As noted previously, the most significant of these is the Ochee Springs Soapstone Quarry (RI 231), which was listed in the National Register in 1978. However, as early as 1976, the RIHPC (now the RIHPHC) noted “numerous natural features associated with the hill as well as traditional stones which seem to indicate a strong probability of prehistoric habitation on or near the hill in the past” that included small valleys that offered protection from the elements and large rock outcrops that may have served as rockshelters (RIHPC 1976:2). Of particular importance was the “Canonicus Boulder” or “Indian Rock” immediately outside the southern boundary of the current park lands (Figure 5). The City of Providence blasted this prominent landscape feature after Hurricane Carol undermined its basal support in 1954, and the boulder became a threat to private property and lives below the boulder at the base of the hill. Despite being blasted, the fractured boulder remnants are still near the boulder’s original location outside the southeastern limits of the park.

European Settlement of Neutaconkanut Hill and Surrounding Area

In the mid-seventeenth century, much of the land comprising present-day Neutaconkanut Hill Park was owned by Quaker Richard Borden (1601–1671), who immigrated to New England from Kent, England, in 1635. Shortly after the Borden family arrived in Boston, they moved to Aquidneck Island in Rhode Island (Merolla 2019a). In 1659, Borden purchased 80 acres of land on the north slope of Neutaconkanut Hill, and two years later he bought an additional 60 acres.. At the time of his death, Borden owned 200 sheep, 100 lambs, 4 oxen, 21 beef cattle, 41 pigs, and enslaved five black individuals: a man, a woman, and three children (probably a family) (Merolla 2019a). Richard Borden’s estate passed to his son Thomas (1627–1675), who had purchased 60 acres on Neutaconkanut Hill in 1662 from Joseph Wise of Roxbury, Massachusetts (Merolla 2019a).

Over time, Thomas owned 390 acres of land on or near Neutaconkanut Hill and built a house in the Ochee Spring area of Johnston (north of Neutaconkanut Hill), where he lived with his wife, Mary, and their eight children (Merolla 2019a). During King Philip’s War, Thomas Borden, his family, and many other settlers left the Providence area for Aquidneck Island, where Thomas died and is buried. Mary Borden and her children returned to Providence in 1679, and Thomas’ land was evenly divided between his sons Richard, Joseph, and Mercy, whose families would continue to occupy the land until 1915, when it was sold to the Town of Johnston. Richard’s grandson William (1747–1824); his wife, Huldah Dyer (1747–1827); their sons Richard (1780–1824) and William (1778–1800); a man named Simon Fraley (1814–1834); and two unknown individuals are buried in the Borden Cemetery near the southeast edge of the park. Mercy’s daughter Mary (1720–1810) married Josiah King (1716–1800), and may have received part of her father’s extensive landholdings, likely including the original Borden houses on Plainfield Street, at the time of her marriage. The property continued through the King line until 1915 (Merolla 2019a).

The Borden and King branches of the family farmed the land on the hill. A tax document from 1779 enumerates William’s (Richard’s grandson’s) holdings: a dwelling house, small barn, cooper’s shop, corn crib, and 38 acres of land (18 wooded acres and 20 acres cleared for pasture or agriculture). Notably, and unusually for Johnston, William Borden cultivated half an acre of tobacco, which produced 500 pounds of leaves a year (Merolla 2019a).

By the early nineteenth century, William Borden's property had several buildings: a single-cell, gambrel-roof house with an attached barn, which was oriented parallel to Plainfield Street; a larger house northeast of the original Borden house consisting of a gambrel-roofed, Federal-style building oriented at an oblique angle to the street; and a side-gable barn built near the street edge, south of the original house, with an end wall facing the street. (Figures 6 and 7; Cady 1925–1965). The last generations of Kings to reside on the Neutaconkanut Hill property were John (1795–1832) and Lucretia Paine King (1791–1852) and their six children: Mary Borden (1821–1889), Ann Eliza (1823–1893), Henry Clay (1825–1903), John Allen (b. 1827), William Borden (1829–1907), and Abby (or Abbie) Allen (1831–1915), who would be the last member of the family to reside at the property (Find A Grave 2007b; Merolla 2019b).

The surrounding area remained largely agricultural into the mid-to-late nineteenth century, when speculative real estate developers attempted to plat out some early farms into residential neighborhoods, but their remoteness from downtown Providence made the enterprises generally unsuccessful (Woodward and Sanderson 1986:29). The Borden/King property at the foot of Neutaconkanut Hill remained agricultural and, in 1882, grapes were introduced to the farm after Henry Clay King had visited California (Cool 1953). By the end of the nineteenth century or the early twentieth century, the King property was bounded along Plainfield Street by a coursed rusticated concrete block wall and an iron gate supported by granite Gate Posts near the Borden/King buildings.

The nearby Olneyville and Silver Lake neighborhoods developed rapidly near the end of the nineteenth century as streetcar service extended into the area. The neighborhoods grew up around industrial nodes on the outskirts of Providence and were largely residential with commercial buildings housing services for mill workers and their families. Development spread west toward the vacant Neutaconkanut Hill, which, by 1895, was surrounded by residential neighborhoods on all sides (Figure 8; Everts and Richards 1895). The residences were generally multifamily houses constructed for Italian immigrant families (Woodward and Sanderson 1986:29).

Establishment of Neutaconkanut Hill Park

Efforts to create a system of parks in Providence began in 1883, when 200 Providence residents formed the Providence Public Parks Association. Initially founded to develop a metropolitan park system, the group's attentions first turned to rehabilitating the Providence Cove basin and surrounding promenade, which had turned into a polluted water body and, coupled with soot and sparks from hundreds of trains that rounded the cove daily, had rendered the Providence Cove park entirely unusable (RIHPHC 2001:48).

In 1892, the Providence Public Park Association proposed the acquisition of land on Neutaconkanut Hill for a public park. The rocky hill that provided expansive views of Providence was thought to be ideal for a rural park. In 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago introduced the City Beautiful movement, which promoted open space and architectural order, particularly in crowded, lower-income locations. The Providence Public Parks Association became a proponent of the City Beautiful movement and advocated for a network of landscaped green and open spaces that would extend through Providence and its adjacent suburbs. Parks were especially desirable in densely

occupied neighborhoods near mills to serve as open space to improve the health and conditions of residents. In 1898, the City of Providence began to annex part of the town of Johnston, including a portion of the Borden/King estate, putting the property in two towns.

In 1901, the Providence Public Park Association held a public hearing, where a cost estimate for the park was presented. Olneyville businessmen argued that Neutaconkanut Hill, with its proximity to the Olneyville mill district, was a logical place to establish a park. Mill workers had neither the time, nor the trolley fare, to get to Roger Williams Park created in 1871 in the south end of Providence. A secondary argument was that local mill workers went to Neutaconkanut Hill anyway, even though they were trespassing, so the hill was a logical place for a park (*Providence Evening Bulletin* 1901). The proposed budget included money to purchase 52 acres, including the William L. Smith estate (the former Deliverance Borden property; see below) to build an observatory and a casino (or recreation building); construct roads, walls, and fences; and establish a financial fund buffer in case of cost overruns. There was no opposition to the plan among those attending the hearing (*Providence News* 1901).

In 1903, the City of Providence purchased 40 acres of William L. Smith's land west of Plainfield Street near the intersection of Plainfield Street and Sunset Avenue, then called Killingly Avenue (Cady 1957:203; Everts and Richards 1895; RIHPHC 2001:112). Shortly thereafter, the new park, known as Neutaconkanut Hill Park, was promoted as a key part of a proposed chain of parks in the Providence area to be similar to Boston's Emerald Necklace designed by Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. (1822–1903) with Charles Eliot (1859–1897), John Charles Olmsted (1852–1920), and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870–1957) in 1878–1895.

In 1905, Abby Allen King erected the stone King Monument on the hillside above the house s and outbuildings. She also had a Tudor Revival-style concrete observation tower constructed at the summit of the hill near the top of the ski slope (constructed by 1937). The tower was destroyed by a three-alarm fire in 1925 (Cool 1953; *Providence Journal* 1925).

In 1908, notable landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. was hired by the Providence Parks Association to help select park sites and create a development plan. Olmsted firm landscape architect Percy R. Jones (1860–1941) made several visits to Providence to provide advice about the parks and connecting parkways. Records of their visits and Providence Parks Association recorded are in the Olmsted Associates Records at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, and at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts (Olmsted Associates 1905–1908). In May 1908, a sketch plan of parcels for Neutaconkanut Hill Park was prepared by the Olmsted firm that was annotated with the location of Circle Road and the bandstand (Figure 9).

In a December 1908 trip report, Jones notes that the City of Providence then owned property at the corner of Plainfield Street and Sunset Avenue and another lot along Plainfield Street. Improvements to the new park included construction of a summer house on the brow of the hill; a road to the summit, likely today's Circle Road, which had been graded and macadamized; and a partially built path from Plainfield Street. Jones also suggested that the City purchase a block of land at the corner of the park area, owned by Phebe Smith, as a location for a playground; other lots to preserve the view from the

summit of the hill toward Providence; and land along Plainfield Street belonging to the King family and to Charles A. Brown described as “very charming with some handsome trees and ledges and include the most picturesque spots on the whole trail” (Jones 1908).

A November 1910 article in the *Providence Evening Bulletin* described residents’ requests for improvements to the park, including a playground and general athletic field, graded winding walks to the summit, and an additional entrance that resulted in the Providence City Council appropriated funding for a baseball diamond, cricket field, and a play area for young children. In 1910–1918, the City purchased an additional 37 acres for the park (Cady 1957:222). Concerts were held in the park at the bandstand with music performed by military bands and other group, such as one in 1911s (*Providence Evening Bulletin* 1911).

In 1915, Abby King bequeathed a 16-acre parcel, called King Park in honor of her brothers Henry Clay King and William Borden King, to the town of Johnston. The parcel extended from Plainfield Street up the side of the hill and encompassed a grove of trees, a vineyard, and a small structure she hoped to turn into a summer house (*Providence Evening Bulletin* 1908; Cool 1953). Initially, she had offered to sell it the land to the City of Providence, as it was adjacent to the Smith parcel that was owned by the City, but after the City refused to pay her asking price of two-and-a-half cents per foot, she was determined “to deed my land in such a way that the city of Providence will never get a foot of it” (*Providence Evening Bulletin* 1908). In 1915, King bequeathed a 3-acre parcel that encompassed the family residences and outbuildings to the City, with the provisions that King family friend Louise E. Blankenship would retain life tenancy and, if the property was to be sold or leased or if it was not used for park purposes, it would revert to the heirs of John King (Cool 1953; *Providence Journal* 1957; RIHPHC 2001:112). In 1919, when Providence annexed more of Johnston, the entire King estate was then in Providence (Cady 1957:222; Cool 1953; Woodward and Sanderson 1986:29).

In 1935–1938, the WPA projects in the park provided more recreational opportunities for local residents. The two baseball fields were constructed (one with a large set of Stone Bleachers), and Stone Steps and WPA Paths were constructed to improve circulation through the park. By 1937, the park encompassed a bowling green and club house, a small skating pond, likely King Pond, a Ski Slope, and a Toboggan Slope. The ski slope and toboggan slope were advertised throughout New England (*Providence Sunday Journal* 1945; *Rutland Daily Herald* 1937; Smith 1949; Weir 1937:97). The baseball fields were used by school teams and company-sponsored teams, predominantly those formed by Providence’s jewelry manufacturers. In 1956, a warm house (undetermined exact location) was adjacent to the ski slope (*Wilmington News Journal* 1956).

Louise E. Blankenship died in 1953, and the Borden/King estate was officially transferred to the City of Providence (*Providence Journal* 1953). In 1954, a brush fire on Neutaconkanut Hill threatened numerous houses surrounding the hill, including the Borden/King estate (*Providence Journal* 1954). A year later, the City of Providence demolished the estate’s buildings, despite recommendations from the City of Providence Historical Sites Committee and Providence historical architect and author John Hutchins Cady, to restore and reuse the buildings. The buildings were demolished by wrecking balls, and the debris was burned.

Beginning in the early 1970s, the public's use of Neutaconkanut Hill Park dwindled, and it became associated with crime and neglect. Stolen cars were brought to the hill and stripped of valuable parts, with the rest of the vehicles left behind. Two such cars remain on the hill (Retsinas 2013). Limited development occurred near the northeast edge of the property through the end of the twentieth century. The Pool was built at some time in 1963–1970, and the Recreation Center was built in 1993. Concession stands/press boxes for the baseball fields were built in the early 1990s, and these fields were reconfigured to accommodate a parking lot off Killingly Street (NETR 1963–2002). The remainder of the park remained largely overgrown and neglected until 2005, when the Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy (NHC) was founded to rehabilitate the park and protect and preserve its resources.

Through the efforts of the NHC and partner organizations, including the City of Providence Parks and Recreation Department and Providence College's Urban Action Program, the park has been revitalized. The Playground was built ca. 2003, the Skate Park was built in 2006, and the hiking trails were restored in 2008 (Retsinas 2013). The Granite Benches were installed in the meadow at the summit of the hill, where visitors have views of Providence.

Today, the park is once again a community resource that is significant to numerous groups in Providence, including the Mashapaug Nahaganset and Pokanoket tribes, local school groups who visit on field trips, and the surrounding community.

National Register Eligibility Evaluation

Neutaconkanut Hill Park possesses integrity of location, setting, association, feeling, workmanship, and materials. The park retains integrity of location, setting, and feeling because it remains on the north side of Plainfield Street, and the dense residential neighborhood that abutted the park on the south side of Plainfield Street remains extant. Residential areas along the northwest edge of the park established in the 1970s are not visible from the summit of the hill and do not detract from the park's integrity. The park continues to be associated with the history of the Borden and King families and with the recreational use of the site. The extant WPA-built ashlar stone resources remain extant, demonstrate integrity of workmanship and materials. Despite the loss of the Borden/King buildings and early twentieth-century structures at the summit of Neutaconkanut Hill, such as the King tower and the bandstand, the park retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance in the area of Entertainment/Recreation due to its association with the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century recreational use of Neutaconkanut Hill that continues to the present.

Neutaconkanut Hill Park is potentially eligible for listing in the National Register with significance at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of Entertainment/Recreation, Conservation, and Community Planning and Development as a local expression of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century parks movement that grew out of the late nineteenth-century City Beautiful movement and the development of the Providence Metropolitan Park system. Later alterations made by the WPA provided space for additional recreational activities, including skiing (which was advertised throughout New England) and bolstered the park's significance as a recreational destination. The proposed period of significance for the park begins ca. 1902 (when the park was

established) and ends in 1954 (when the Borden/King family buildings were demolished and the park had reached its current size). The hill was historically used for agriculture, as evidenced by the network of dry-laid, uncoursed stone walls extending through the park. However, the park does not retain sufficient integrity to convey significance under Criterion A in the area of Agriculture.

Neutaconkanut Hill Park is the second largest park in Providence, after Roger Williams Park. Like many of the parks in Rhode Island, particularly in Providence, Neutaconkanut Hill Park is wooded, with walking trails and natural stone outcrops. Several parks, such as Roger Williams Park in Providence and Jenks Park in Central Falls, historically had Colonial-era buildings which were used as museums (Rhode Island State Bureau of Information 1930:135–136). Although Borden/King Homestead buildings were suggested for such a use, they were demolished instead.

Neutaconkanut Hill Park may possess additional significance as a traditional cultural property that is eligible for listing in the National Register at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Native American and under Criterion D in the areas of Archeology: Prehistoric and Archeology: Historic – Aboriginal. Neutaconkanut Hill is a prominent natural feature in the Providence area, a place that archaeological evidence indicates and oral tribal histories report were areas of concentrated Narragansett (including the Mashapaug Nahagansett band) and Pokanoket Indian settlement, resource collection, and communal gatherings. Those who lived along the Great Salt Cove and Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket rivers in the shadows of the hill would have recognized and acknowledged it as a culturally significant place and their stories would have told of its creation. The hill may have served as a place of personal reflection, enlightenment, ceremony, and prayer for those who primarily resided in the valley below.

From the vantage of Neutaconkanut Hill, since-passed Narragansett scanned the horizon and watched the approach of friends, allies, adversaries, and enemies. In times of hostility, sentinels would watch the horizon and dispatch runners to the Neutaconkanut Indian village to warn their families of any impending enemy's approach.⁴ The steep climb up the eastern face of the hill was highly defensible, giving valuable time for women, children, and the aged to retreat to places of refuge or security in times of conflict. The large outcrops on the hill's crest and side slopes could have provided places of cover in hostile times and places of refuge from the elements during times of peace. The freshwater spring, Hidden Swamp, and the hill supported valuable fauna, flora, including those used for medicines, and other materials such as birch tree roots used to make war clubs (Two Hawks Watson, personal communication 2022).

Mashapaug Nahagansett tribal members have resumed having tribal powwows on Neutaconkanut Hill. During one recent event, the tribal drums resounded through the valley and drew visitors to the park (Sagamore Kill Rain Bland, personal communication 2022). This event may have figuratively and literally echoed one of the hill's historic uses. While recently visiting the blasted remains of the Canonicus Boulder outside the southeast corner of the park, Mashapaug Nahagansett and Pokanoket tribal members commented on its uniqueness. This uncommonly large, precariously balanced boulder

⁴ Chief Raymond Two Hawks Watson believes the Neutaconkanut Indian village was immediately west of the park lands in the vicinity of the "Reservoir" depicted on the Neutaconkanut Park trail map (see Figure 2).

on a culturally significant hill would have made it an easily recognizable and important gathering place. Furthermore, the boulder may have served as one of several “drum rocks” along the shores of Narragansett Bay that were used by the Narragansett to communicate over large distances. The Narragansett Indian Tribe of Charlestown, Rhode Island, hold and are sure to tell other interesting and compelling stories of Neutaconkanut’s importance and significance to Rhode Island’s first peoples.

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Photographs



Photo 1. Birch and beech woodland atop Neutaconkanut Hill, view east.



Photo 2. Neutaconkanut Brook, view west.



Photo 3. Hidden Swamp from Neutaconkanut Park, view southwest.



Photo 4. Representative stone outcrop in Neutaconkanut Park, view northwest.



Photo 5. City of Providence from Neutaconkanut Park bandstand foundation, view east.



Photo 6. System of stone walls, looking south.



Photo 7. (L to R) Playground, Basketball Court, and Bus Shelter, looking northwest.



Photo 8. Trail Kiosk and Skate Park, looking northwest.



Photo 9. System of Trails, looking south.



Photo 10. Boardwalk example, looking south.



Photo 11. Bridge example, looking northwest.



Photo 12. Baseball Field 2, looking northwest.



Photo 13. Concession Stand, looking southeast.



Photo 14. Baseball Field 1, showing Press Box, looking east.



Photo 15. Stone Bleachers, looking northwest.



Photo 16. Recreation Center, looking southwest.



Photo 17. (L to R) Skate Park and Toboggan Slope, looking east.



Photo 18. Former Ski Slope, looking west.



Photo 19. WPA Steps and Path, looking northeast.



Photo 20. Circle Road, looking north.



Photo 21. Bandstand Foundation, looking northwest.



Photo 22. Granite Benches and Hilltop Meadow, looking southwest.



Photo 23. Stone-Lined Channel, looking west.



Photo 24. Pinnacle Overlook Boardwalk, looking northeast.



Photo 25. Intersection of two trails showing remains of dumped vehicles.



Photo 26. Shortcut Bridge, looking southwest.



Photo 27. King Monument, looking southeast.



Photo 28. Great Stone Stairs, looking west.



Photo 29. Gate Posts and Boundary Wall, looking northwest.



Photo 30. Borden/King Homestead Ruins, looking northwest.



Photo 31. Borden Family Cemetery, looking east.

Figures

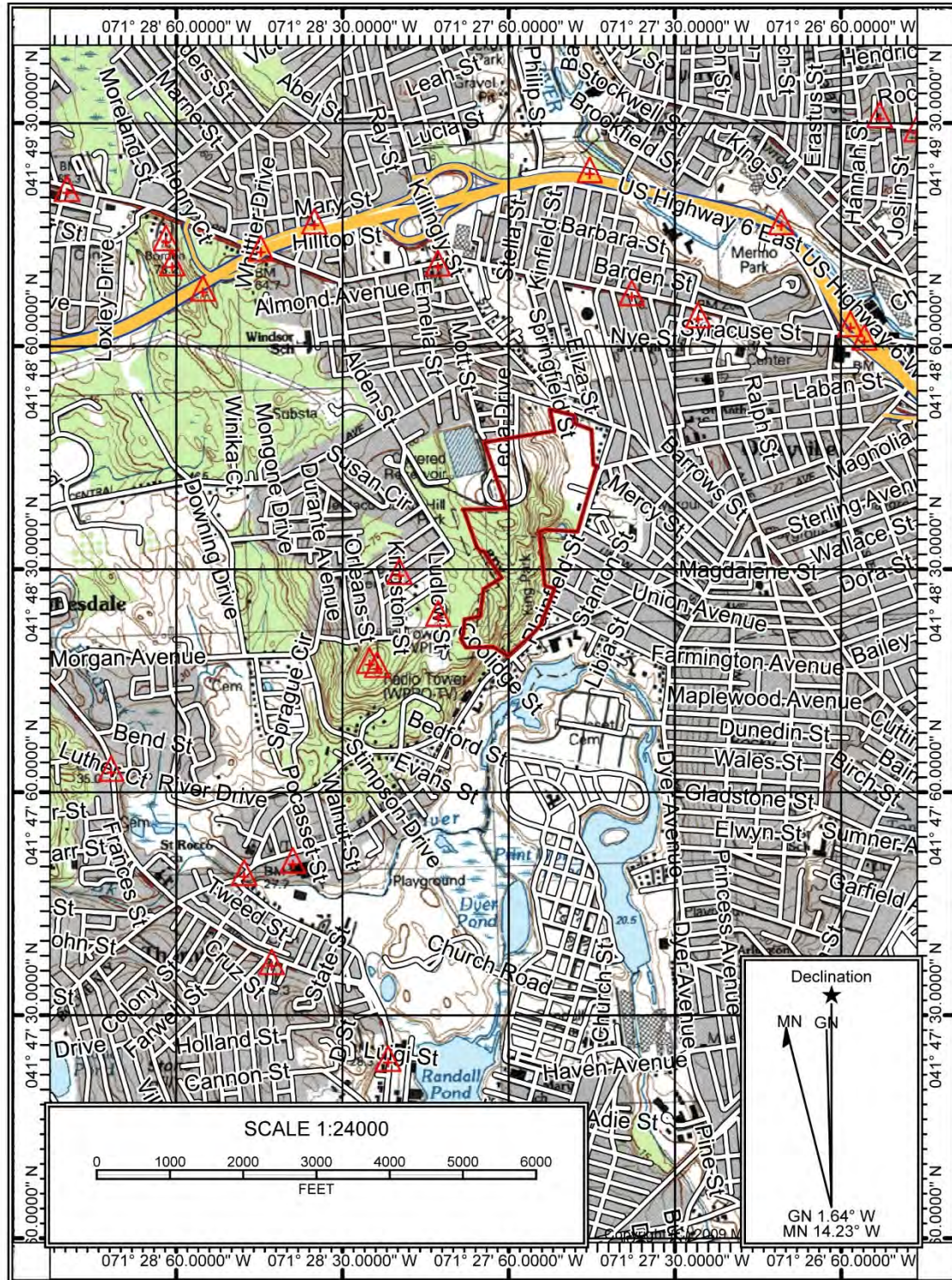


Figure 1. USGS map showing location of Neutaconkanut Hill Park.

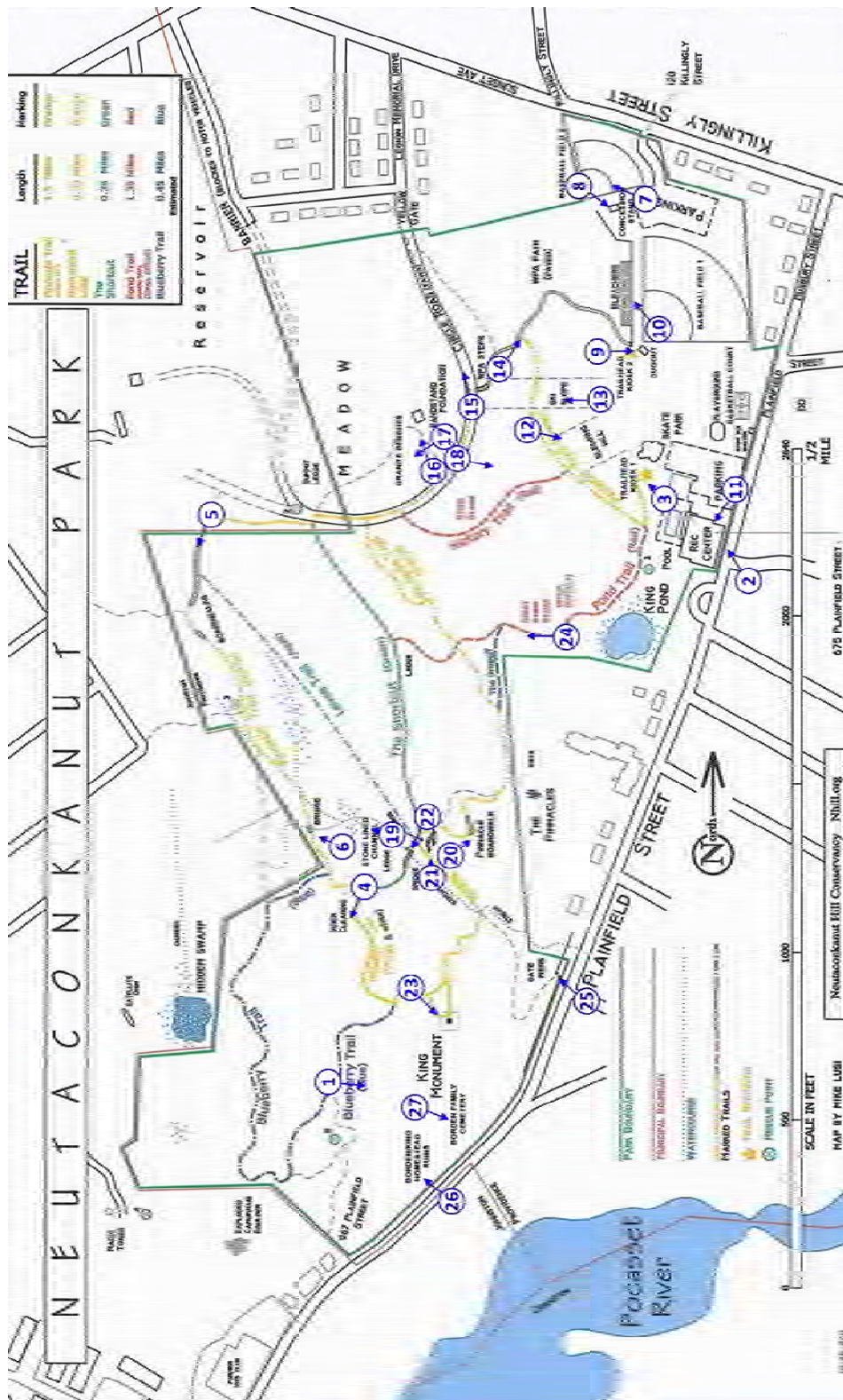


Figure 2. Park resources map and photo key (map courtesy Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy).

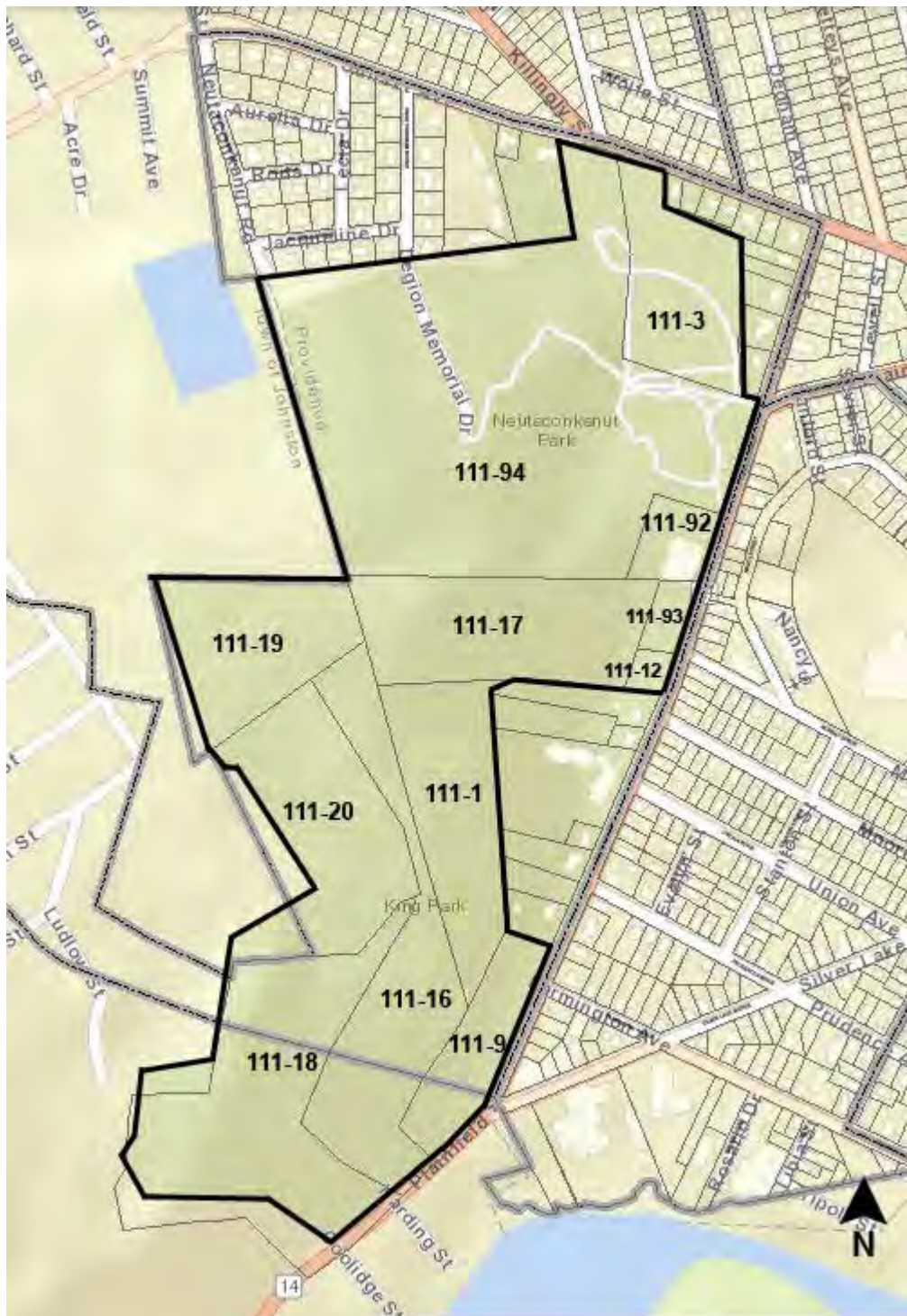
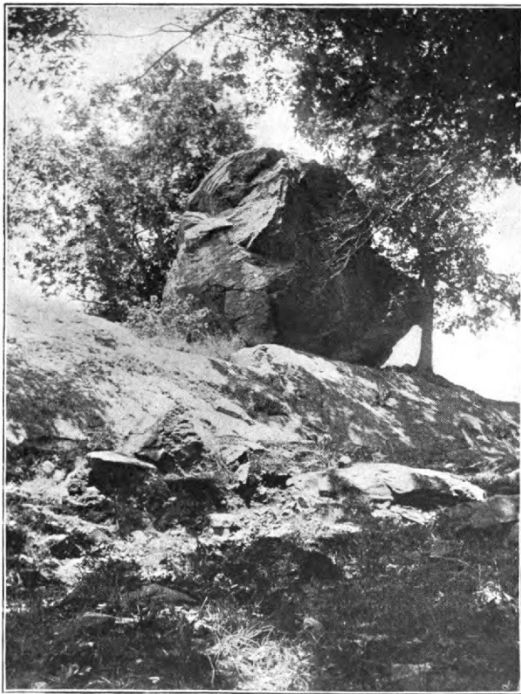


Figure 3. Providence Tax Assessor's Map, showing Neutaconkanut Hill Park, Neutaconkanut Hill Park.



Statue carved in graphite, 3½ inches tall, found at Neutaconkanut Hill, R. I.
Collection of Samuel W. King

Figure 4. Graphite effigy figurine from Neutaconkanut Hill (Chapin 1926:118).



THE "CANONICUS BOULDER" ON NOTAQWONCKANET.

Figure 5. Canonicus Boulder on Neutaconkanut Hill (Rider 1904).



Figure 6. Undated photograph of original Borden/King house with attached barn and free-standing barn (Cady 1925–1965).



Figure 7. Undated photograph of second Borden/King house (Cady 1925–1965).

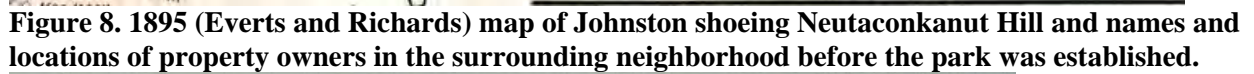


Figure 9. 1908 park site plan with annotations by Percy R. Jones (courtesy Frederick Law Olmsted NHS, Brookline, MA).