

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Albro Mill

AND/OR COMMON Lawton's Mill (preferred name)

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER Ten Rod Road (State Route 102)

CITY, TOWN Exeter VICINITY OF #2 -- Hon. Edward Beard

STATE Rhode Island CODE 44 COUNTY Washington CODE 009

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER Stable; Abandoned

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Multiple; see continuation sheet 5

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN STATE VICINITY OF

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Exeter Town Hall

STREET & NUMBER Victory Highway

CITY, TOWN Exeter STATE Rhode Island

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

determined eligible

TITLE Rhode Island Statewide Survey--Exeter Broadbrush Survey

DATE 1976  FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN Providence STATE Rhode Island

# DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Lawton's Mill property lies in a hollow in the gently rolling terrain of rural south-central Rhode Island. It is situated north of Ten Rod Road (State Route 102, also called Victory Highway) and east of Fisherville Brook, which is the western branch of Queen's River, a tributary of the Pawcatuck River. It includes an early nineteenth-century mill with a large early twentieth-century structure added to the rear, a dwelling probably constructed in the eighteenth century, a nineteenth-century barn enlarged in the early twentieth century, an early twentieth-century greenhouse, and a small shed,\* together with the dam and waterways associated with the mill and a mill site on the south side of Ten Rod Road. The parcel north of Ten Rod Road containing these buildings, approximately five acres in area, has long been a part of larger properties, among them mill lots or farms ranging in size from fifteen to fifty-five acres, and it was absorbed in the early twentieth century into a 747.8-acre estate which has since been divided. The parcel nominated herein, however, is probably roughly coextensive with the mill lot "measuring five acres more or less" purchased in 1799 by Samuel Bissell, who may have initiated construction of the first factory on the site.

The mill, which stands approximately five feet from the northern edge of Ten Rod Road, is a two-story, rectangular, wood-frame structure with a basement of uncoursed fieldstone masonry. The site slopes so that the basement is a full story above ground level on the west side of the building, while the first story is only slightly above grade on the east side. Three bays wide across the front and six bays deep on each side, the mill has clapboard-sheathed walls and a gable roof with clerestory monitor. The center bay of the facade contains two double-leaf doors, one at each the first and second-story levels, flanked by two-story paneled pilasters, and a wide, single-leaf sliding door is located at the rear end of the east side. Windows are double hung with 8-over-8 lights at basement level, 12-over-12 and 12-over-6 at first-floor level, and 5-over-5 at clerestory level. The building, originally used as a cotton mill and later as a shingle, sash and blind, and planing mill, has been abandoned for many years and has deteriorated considerably. Some windows are broken or entirely missing, and in places the clapboards have fallen off the walls and the boards underneath have pulled loose from the frame.

At the rear of the mill, a dilapidated one-story wheelhouse connects to a one- and two-story, L-shaped, wood-frame structure with gable and hip roofs and shingle-clad walls. This addition, constructed in 1915, is almost as large as the mill and is in good repair. A new overshot wheel of steel was installed in the wheel pit at the time the newer building was erected, but it is now gone. However, the main horizontal shaft, the iron perimeter gear, the bearings and guide on

see continuation sheet 1

\*also, an ice house on the western edge of the pond

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both sides of the wheel pit, the transfer gear to the large pulley, and sections of the spokes and rims remain, together with shafts, pulleys, and clutches in the 1915 building (this wheel never provided power for the old mill).

Approximately 400 feet north-northwest of the mill, Fisherville Brook is dammed to form a mill pond that covers an area of about three acres. At the south end of the pond, water falls over a dam into a square pool with stone retaining walls, then flows from this pool through a breach in the southern wall, creating a second waterfall. These stone walls were probably the foundation of a now-destroyed mill built over the stream (according to old deeds, the mill lot contained a water-powered sawmill above the "factory"--the mill currently being nominated--and a grist mill "in the ten rod highway," south of the present paved right of way of Ten Rod Road). The stream from the pond through this supposed mill site runs west of, not to, the existing mill. Water for the "factory" runs from an intake above the mill pond dam through a tunnel and an open trench into a wooden flume. The flume has been rebuilt several times; the present one is an open, rectangular wooden conduit (now partly rotted away) supported by concrete piers, built in 1915 to carry water around the mill addition to the wheelhouse. A stone-lined tailrace runs from the wheelhouse around the north and west sides of the mill, carrying the water under Ten Rod Road, where it rejoins the stream that flows from the mill dam.

About eighty feet northeast of the mill, on the crest of a low hill, stands a one-and-one-half-story, wood-frame, gambrel-roofed house with central stone chimney and shingle-covered walls. Facing south onto Ten Rod Road, it is three bays wide and two bays deep. The main entrance, centered in the facade and articulated with thin, pilaster-like strips and a simple entablature, contains a single-leaf door flanked by narrow sidelights. The windows have splayed-lintel caps and are 6-over-6 except those in the dormers, which are 3-over-6. This house is undoubtedly the dwelling occupied by Caleb A. Bissell and Thomas A. Lawton, successive owners of this property who were responsible for building the mill and leasing it for use as a cotton factory.

The property also includes a small wooden shed northwest of the house, a glass and steel-frame greenhouse with attached wooden shed east of the house, and a barn. The latter is a long, narrow, wooden structure with gable roof and shingle-clad walls set close to the road. It is now used for stabling horses.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES \_\_\_\_\_ BUILDER/ARCHITECT \_\_\_\_\_

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Lawton's Mill is one of the few small, early nineteenth-century rural textile mills remaining in Rhode Island. A rare survivor of a once-common building type, it illustrates a significant phase in the growth and evolution of the textile industry.

The success of Samuel Slater's water-powered spinning mill at Pawtucket, R.I., opened in 1790, had a tremendous impact on ambitious businessmen and aspiring entrepreneurs across the nation. A rush to invest in textile manufacturing started in the last years of the eighteenth century and continued through the early years of the nineteenth, stimulated by the Embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812. Investors came from no single socio-economic group but were remarkably diverse: established merchants and mercantile firms attempting to secure and expand their fortunes; owners of riverfront property seeking to exploit their lands' potential for development; tradesmen, artisans, and farmers hoping to achieve a level of prosperity unattainable in their original professions. At first the industry was characterized by a multiplicity of small factories, many of which specialized in only one aspect of textile production. Clustered along larger rivers and scattered through the countryside on smaller streams, these mills were owned and operated by numerous individuals and partnerships. As time passed, however, consolidations of operations and ownership occurred, and by the late nineteenth century the industry was dominated by powerful corporations, many of which were controlled by family groups. Such corporations generally owned several large factories or mill complexes--usually located in central cities or in densely settled outlying mill villages--which were often equipped to handle several steps in the production of textile goods. The smaller, specialized mills in the hinterlands owned by individuals or partnerships with modest resources found it impossible to compete with these big concerns, and practically all of them were driven out of business. Eventually most of the structures that had housed them were destroyed, except those which had been adapted to new uses.

Lawton's Mill is an excellent example of one of these small country manufactories, miraculously saved from destruction. As early as 1703 Ten Rod Road had been laid out from the harbor at Wickford to eastern Connecticut, and the advantages of the site

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where the road crossed Fisherville Brook had attracted an early settler of Exeter: A dwelling, a sawmill, and a grist mill had been erected on the property by 1768. These buildings were still standing, together with another dwelling and a blacksmith shop, when Samuel Bissell of North Kingstown purchased the property in 1799. The date of construction of the present mill is open to conjecture. According to secondary sources, a snuff mill built here by Samuel Bissell in 1795 was converted into a cotton mill by G. Palmer, Jr. and Allen Bissell in 1825; that mill burned down about 1830 and a new one was constructed by T. A. Lawton. This story is not borne out by Exeter land records, however. A deed executed in 1819 refers to "a new mill partly built" standing on the property, and in 1823 Caleb A. Bissell and Gershom Palmer, Jr. signed an agreement for building and leasing a mill on this lot, though the present mill is larger than the "twenty four feet squair" stipulated in the agreement. The property contained a fulling mill when Thomas Albrow purchased it from Caleb A. Bissell in 1831, which, interpreted in the light of other evidence, makes it unlikely that a destructive fire occurred at that time. There are records of agreements for repairs and improvements to the "factory," which may indicate that the building was fire-damaged and was extensively renovated in 1831 and 1832. Albrow's grandson Thomas A. Lawton acquired the mill property in 1832 and held it until his death in 1870. Though Lawton himself referred to this as his "Albrow Mill estate," nineteenth-century maps and history books call the site "Lawton's Mill" or "Lawtonville".

Lawton's Mill, erected sometime between 1819 and 1832, represents the efforts made by men of limited means to capitalize on the opportunities offered by the textile boom of the early nineteenth century. The entries pertaining to the mill in the Exeter land records provide insight into an important and fascinating period in Rhode Island industrial history. The mill, never operated by its successive owners, was leased out to at least six individuals or groups of partners between 1823 and 1855, all of them either minor manufacturers or men from other fields trying to establish themselves in the industry. Their ventures were highly speculative, and the fact that successive leases often began before the term of the previous one had expired illustrates the precariousness of these operations. The documents associated with Lawton's Mill give a vivid impression of the eagerness and optimism that accompanied the genesis and early development of the textile industry, and the excitement and anticipation spawned by the Industrial Revolution. Partnerships were formed, leases were negotiated, businesses

see continuation sheet 4

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failed, and deals were broken as everyone hustled to get a share of the profits.

Various specialized cotton-manufacturing operations--fulling, finishing, warp-yarn spinning--were carried on at Lawton's Mill until 1849 at least, and perhaps for some years thereafter. By 1870, however, the building had been converted to a sash and blind factory and a shingle and planing mill. The ascendancy of the large textile-manufacturing empires had made cotton production unprofitable here, but fortunately the structure was preserved by its adaptation to a new use. In 1912, it was purchased by Russell Grinnell of Providence and it became part of a vast gentlemen's farm and country estate which remained intact until 1949.

Lawton's Mill is an important historical artifact. The large mill complexes of Rhode Island's cities and mill villages stand as monuments to the rise of the industrial empires assembled by the Browns, the Spragues, the Knights, and others. In like manner, Lawton's Mill memorializes the role of small investors and manufacturers in the early, highly competitive years of the textile-manufacturing industry. Its status as one of the last examples of its type, and as the last remaining mill in Exeter, makes its preservation an issue of vital concern.

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Item 4: Owner of Property

Section north of Ten Rod Road: William D. Warner  
Victory Highway  
Exeter, Rhode Island 02822

Section south of Ten Rod Road: Oliver Joslin  
Victory Highway  
Exeter, Rhode Island 02822

Item 10: Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary runs northerly from the north side of Ten Rod Road along the western bank of Fisherville Brook up to and including the mill dam, then continues northerly, easterly, and southerly around the shore of and including the mill pond. It then runs easterly from the mill dam in a straight line roughly parallel to Ten Rod Road a distance of 525 feet more or less until it meets a fence, then southerly along the fence to the north side of Ten Rod Road, then westerly along the northern edge of Ten Rod Road to a point opposite a stone wall south of the road, then across the road and southerly along the stone wall a distance of fifty feet more or less, then westerly in a straight line to encompass the confluence of the mill tailrace and Fisherville Brook to a point on the ridge of a rocky bank, then northerly along the ridge of the rocky bank to Ten Rod Road, and across Ten Rod Road to the point of beginning on the north side.

### 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Cole, J. R., History of Washington and Kent Counties, R. I. (New York: 1889), pp. 670, 672-673.  
 Historic American Engineering Record, Rhode Island: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (Washington:1978), p. 87.  
 Hoag, Wade & Company, History of the State of Rhode Island (Philadelphia: 1878), p. 131.  
 Land Evidence Books (unpublished), Exeter Town Clerk's office.

### 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY about 8 acres

QUADRANGLE NAME Slocum

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,9 2,8,5,6,3,0 4,6,0,6,5,3,0

B 1,9 2,8,5,8,3,0 4,6,0,6,5,2,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C 1,9 2,8,5,8,3,0 4,6,0,6,1,1,0

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

E         

F         

G         

H         

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet 5

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

### 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Robert O. Jones, Jr., Historic Preservation Planner

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

September 1979

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

(401) 277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

### 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE X

LOCAL   

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Robert O. Jones, Jr.*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

May 14, 1980

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

ATTEST: KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION



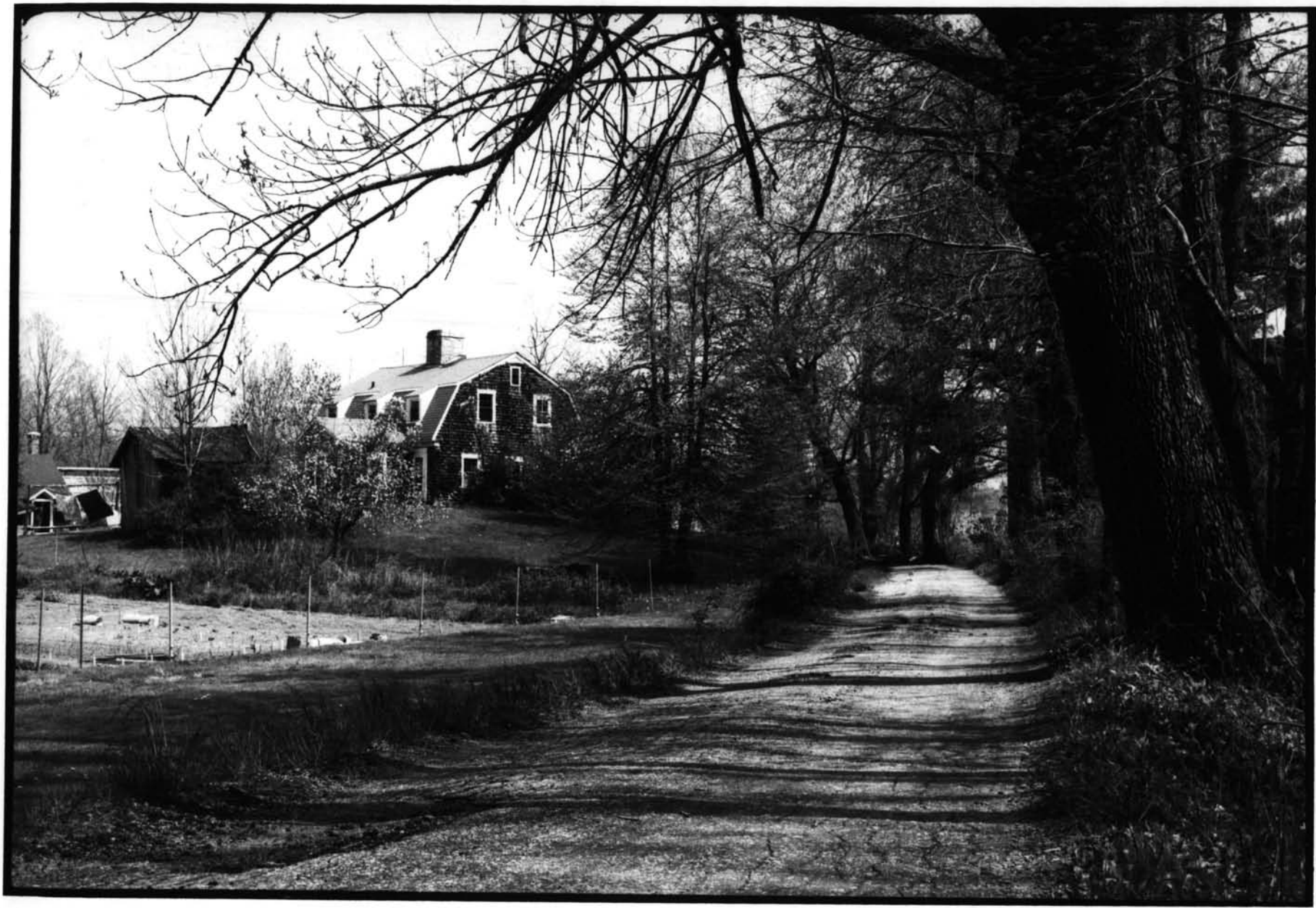


Lawton's Mill, Ten Rod Road  
Exeter, Rhode Island

Photographer: Robert O. Jones, Jr. May 1979

Negative filed at Rhode Island Historical  
Preservation Commission.

View of house from the south.



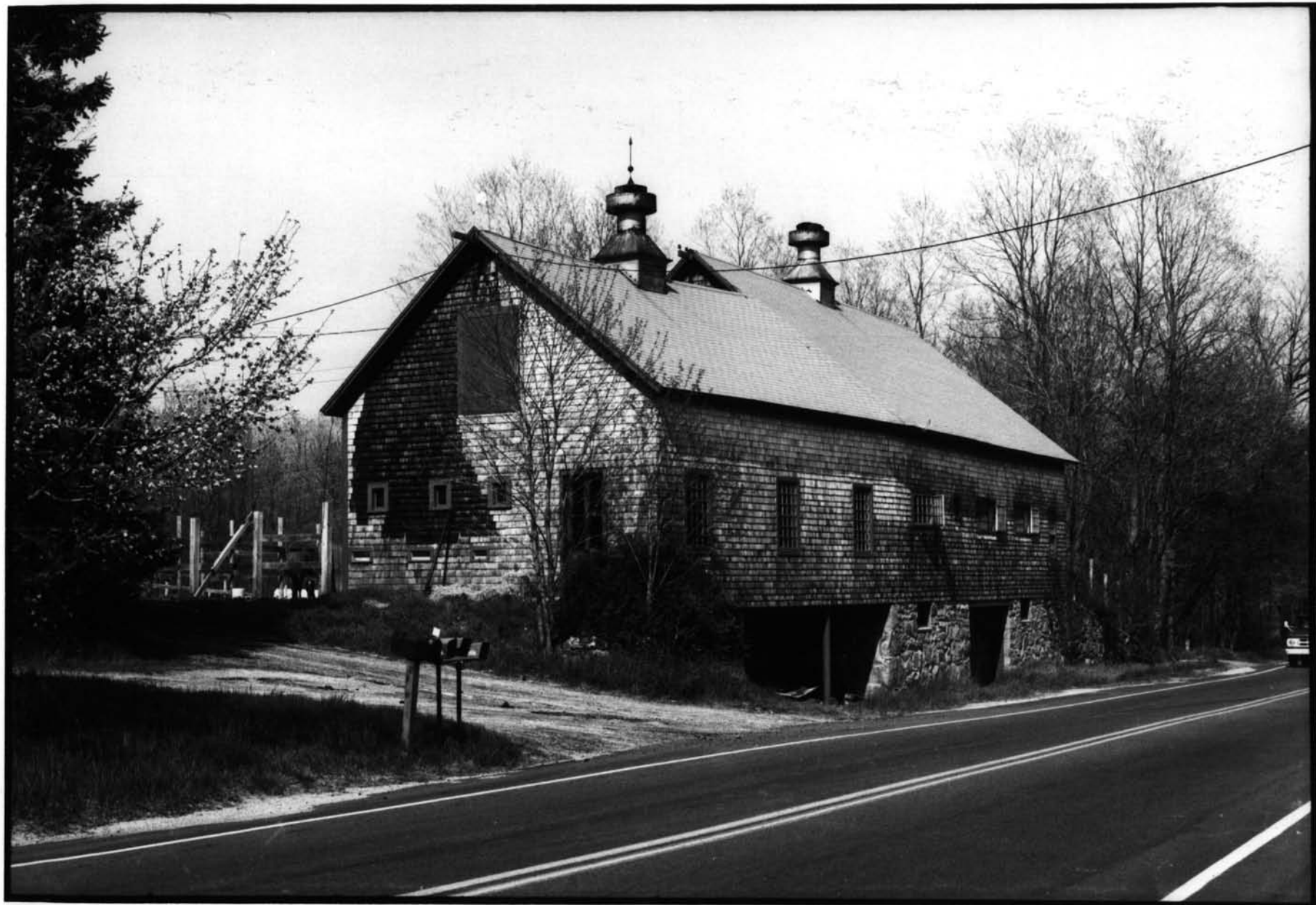
Lawton's Mill, Ten Rod Road  
Exeter, Rhode Island

Photographer: Robert O. Jones, Jr. May 1979

Negative filed at Rhode Island Historical  
Preservation Commission.

View of house from the northwest.





Lawton's Mill, Ten Rod Road  
Exeter, Rhode Island

Photographer: Robert O. Jones, Jr. May 1979

Negative filed at Rhode Island Historical  
Preservation Commission.

View of barn from the southwest.



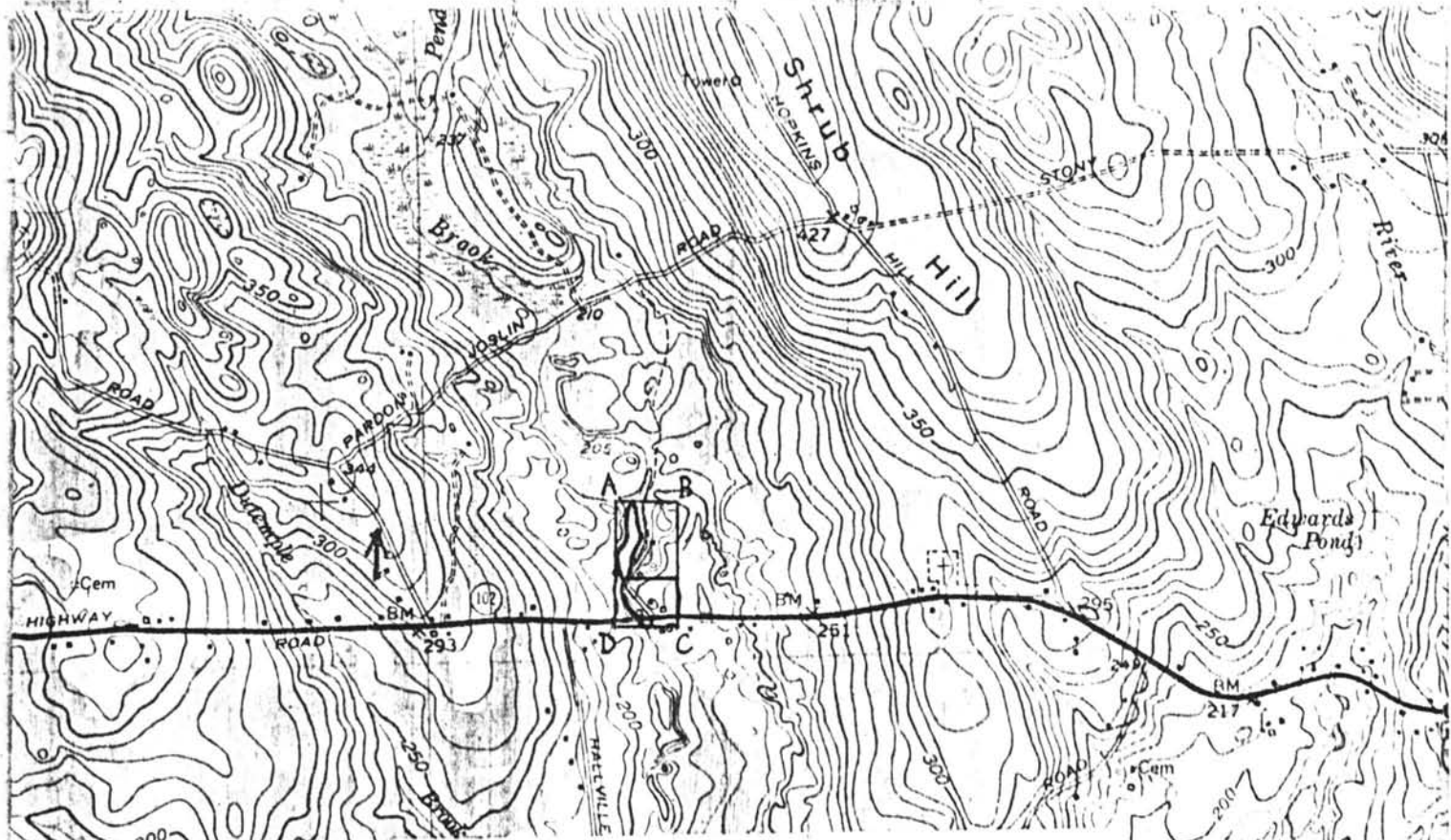


Lawton's Mill, Ten Rod Road  
Exeter, Rhode Island

Photographer: Robert O. Jones, Jr. May 1979

Negative filed at Rhode Island Historical  
Preservation Commission.

View of mill pond dam from the south.



Lawton's Mill  
Exeter, R. I.

A	19	285630	4606530
B	19	285830	4606520
C	19	285830	4606110
D	19	285620	4606100

