LIGHTHOUSES OF MASSACHUSETTS
THEMATIC GROUP NOMINATION

LIGHTHOUSE INFORMATION FORM

NUMBER 32

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
80 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116

See National Register form listed 3/26/80

PHOTOGRAPH KEY

SKETCH MAP

HISTORIC NAME: Palmer Island Light Station

TOWN: New Bedford

LOCATION: New Bedford Harbor

COUNTY: Bristol CODE: 005

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Refer to National Register nomination.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

LAT./LONG.: N/A

UTM COORDINATE: 19/340/800/4609/800

USGS QUADRANGLE: Prov.,RI.,Mass., Conn.

SCALE: 1:250,000

ACREAGE:

OWNER(S):

STATUS:

RECORDED BY: J. Wilson/R. Batt /Anne Tait

ORGANIZATION: Army Corps of Engineers

DATE: 1979 /1986

LIGHTHOUSES OF MASSACHUSETTS
THEMATIC GROUP NOMINATION

Palmer Island Light Station, New Bedford

Historical Description: Built between June 9 and September 22, 1849 by Charles M. Pierce, Masonry, under contract to the Superintendent of Lights, at a cost of $1951. Though original specified to be octagonal, the tower appears to have always been circular in plan, as it is today. Pertinent dimensions are as follows: (U.S. Coast Guard RG-26(a)).

Foundation - 3 ft. high rubble masonry
Tower - Rubble masonry 24 ft high with 18 ft. 4 inch diameter and 3 ft. thick walls at base, and 10 ft. diameter and 18 inch thick walls at top (Exhs. A-D).
Floor - Brick
Stairs - Three flights of wooden stairs spiraling the inner face of the wall, and an upper flight of iron steps.
Entry - Two 6 ft. 10 in. X 3 ft. doors.
Windows - Three 19 in. X 21 1/2 in. windows of twelve 8 in. X 6 in. lights (Exhs. A-D).
Lantern - Deck - 10 ft. diameter, of copper sheathed wood with iron railing, and tower access via scuffle.
Lantern - Specified as octagonal, iron with 6 plate glass lights of 24 in. X 15 in. on each face; 4 ft. X 2 ft. copper sheathed door in ventilator in dome top 15 in. high X 12 in. diameter with 2 ft. X 1 ft. copper sheathed vane above. The light may have been fueled by whale oil produced at this time, and was probably of the fixed white form noted in 1889.
Note - The 9 sided lantern now present (1979) may be original.
Lightning Rod - On tower exterior, from ledge to 1 ft. above vane on lantern.

A keeper's dwelling was built, and other buildings constructed on the island in later years. Their history and present condition are assessed in the attached Archaeological Reconnaissance Report. Various alterations were made to the structure during its use (U.S. Coast Guard RG 26(b)).

1857: The lenses of the light were replaced.
1863: A new "lantern" was installed. This may refer to either a new lamp in the structure, or replacement of the supposed octagonal lantern described above, with the 9 sided one now on the structure (Exhs. A-D). As noted above, the lantern may have not been built in octagonal form as described in the original construction specifications. By 1931, the lantern had a single large pane of glass in each face, measuring 36 in. X 28 in. X 1/4 in., rather than the small panes of mid 19th century form. The ventilator was in the parapet. Lantern door has dimensions of 6 ft. 8 in. X 2 ft. 8 in. located on tower's N side.
1883: The iron hand rail on the dike to the tower was renewed (Exhs. A-D). If the island's form on Deer's map 1871 is accurate (see Archaeological Reconnaissance, attached) this dike may not have been built until after 1871.
By 1889: The light is a fixed white type.
5/31/1900: A fog bell was installed in a frame pyramidal tower adjoining the island end of the dike (Exh. A). New stairs and deck were built.
1902: A frame covered way was built on the dike (Exh. B). The 1900 bell tower was apparently destroyed by storms or removed at about this time.

By 1929:(New Bedford Standard Times) A frame bell tower on a concrete platform was attached to the lighthouse side opposite the dike. Access was provided by a small door and two rung ladder in the lighthouse (Exhs. C & D). The bell was mechanically rung at 10 second intervals and hung in an upper window of the tower. It was 3 ft. 4 in. diameter X 2 ft. 6 in. high, weighed 1160 lbs. and was made by Henry McShane in 1901. tHough a vestibule remained, the covered way on the dike was gone by this time (Exh. C). A revolving red light may have replaced the fixed white one by this time, to be replaced by a fixed green one during the tenure of Captain Arthur Small.

By 1931: The following additional features are noted as existing by this time (U.S. Coast Guard RG-26(c)).
In Lantern: A fixed light with green shade (replacing the revolving one noted above), of 870 candle power operated off a kerosene mantle of 1-1/4 in. diameter. The drum had 4 panels of 5 elements each with 5 upper and 3 lower prisms in each panel, all mounted on an iron pedestal. Focal plane was at 35.66 ft. m.s.l. and the light was classified as 5th order.
Tower: Contains a closet with shelves, for spare lamp parts. Tower is whitewashed.

1941: The lighthouse was automated to operate from Butler's Flat Lighthouse.

1962: Purchased by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

1966: Vandals set fire to the building, gutting the interior. The bell tower may have been destroyed on this date or some time after 1939.

Present Condition:

Tower - Intact in 1849 form with pre 1929 concrete base at bell tower (Exhs. E-K).

Stairs - Charred ends of supports are present in notches within the interior masonry (Exh. F).

Floor - Sand covered, concrete post in center probably stair support 1900 (Exh. G).

Entry - Doors missing, evidence at door frame and roof of former covered way are visible around doorway. (Exh. E). Entry to bell tower site remains, with rungs (Exhs. G, I, and J).

Windows - Lower window, on S side is bricked closed (Exh. H). No window frames remain (Exh. F).

Lantern - Iron frame remains, slightly displaced; roofing and ventilator gone (Exhs. E, F, I, and K). Floor of tower is littered with 3/8 in. thick broken glass, probably from lantern windows; doorway is bricked shut (Exh I); platform gone, railing has slid down tower sides (Exhs. E, H, I and K).

Dike - Made of rubble stone with quarried block upper course, island end washed away (Exhs. E, I and K). Bases of iron railing visible, railing fragments remain in water in water to either side of the dike.

Statement of Significance

The significance of Palmer Island LIght lies in two factors, its historic association and its architecture.

At the time of the light's construction, New Bedford was the major home port of the world's whaling fleet, supplying nearly 50% of the American oil supply. This prosperity was probably a major impetus for the lighthouse construction.

The whaling industry collapsed during the second half of the century, but considerable commercial and fishing traffic continued to operate out of the harbor through out the late 19th and 20th century. The light was kept during nor nearly 100 years, through several major storms, including a gale which damaged the plank walk from the keeper's house to the tower on September 8, 1869, and the 1938 hurricane which destroyed the keeeper's house. The keeper, Captain Arthur A. Small, was injured and his wife was drowned while attempting to reach the light.

An 1851 representation of the lighthouse is a prominent feature of the seal of the City of New Bedford (Fig. 3 of attached Archaeological Report).

The remaining features of the lighthouse are primarily those which date from its original construction in 1849, as the 1966 fire destroyed the wooden additions and modifications of the late 19th and early 20th century.

The tower, itself, has only been modified by the bricking of one window and the parapet door and cutting of the early 20th century bell tower door. Remains of the latter feature also include the concrete platform which supported it.

The iron lantern frame and parapet railing appear to date from at least 1863, and possibly from 1849.

The dike, though damaged, is substantially as built in the 19th century, with most of the railings remaining in broken condition nearby.

The hurricane damaged and fire gutted condition of the structure, though destroying much evidence of the 20th century interior and light mechanism, provides potential from restoration of the structure to any of the earlier periods of operation. As records of the structure appear to be fairly complete, a fairly accurate reconstruction to 19th century condition may be possible. The City of New Bedford has expressed strong interest in acquiring the property with the intention of performing such a restoration as a major component of a proposed park on Palmer's Island.

As one of the few early 19th century lighthouses remaining in the United States, this structure is representative of its type. Its present overall appearance suggests the 1849 form, due to loss of later additions. Further, the lighthouse has important historical associations as an important local feature of the local "made" landscape, reflected by its appearance on the city seal and in numerous photo essays in local newspapers. Because of these factors, Palmer's Island Light appears eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The potential restoration of the structure to operating condition would provide the modern visitor with a highly visible link to New Bedford's maritime past.

LIGHTHOUSES OF MASSACHUSETTS
THEMATIC GROUP NOMINATION

Form No 10-300a (Rev 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC: Palmer Island Light Station

AND/OR COMMON:

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: _____ _NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Twelfth

CITY, TOWN: New Bedford X VICINITY OF

COUNTY: Bristol CODE: 005

STATE: Massachusetts CODE: 25

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
_DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	_OCCUPIED	_AGRICULTURE	_MUSEUM
_BUILDING(S)	_PRIVATE	X UNOCCUPIED	_COMMERCIAL	_PARK
X STRUCTURE	_BOTH	_WORK IN PROGRESS	_EDUCATIONAL	_PRIVATE RESIDENCE
_SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	_ENTERTAINMENT	_RELIGIOUS
_OBJECT	_IN PROCESS	_YES RESTRICTED	_GOVERNMENT	_SCIENTIFIC
	_BEING CONSIDERED	X YES UNRESTRICTED	_INDUSTRIAL	_TRANSPORTATION
		_NO	_MILITARY	X OTHER None

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS (If applicable): New England Division, U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers

STREET & NUMBER: 424 Trapelo Road

CITY TOWN: Waltham _____ VICINITY OF

STATE: Massachusetts 02154

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Bristol County Registry of Deeds, Southern District

STREET & NUMBER: 25 North Sixth Street, (Deed to U.S. dtd 14 March 1849, Bk 25 Pg. 10

CITY, TOWN: New Bedford

STATE: Massachusetts 02740

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE: Map of Palmer's Island Light Station

DATE: March 1977

X FEDERAL _STATE _COUNTY _LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: New England Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Real Estate

CITY TOWN: Waltham

STATE: Massachusetts

...RIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
_EXCELLENT	X_DETERIORATED	X_UNALTERED	X_ORIGINAL SITE
_GOOD	_RUINS	_ALTERED	_MOVED DATE_____
_FAIR	_UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Historical Description: Built between 9 June and 22 September, 1849 by Charles . Pierce, Masonry, under contract to the Superintendent of Lights, at a cost of 1951. Though originally specified to be octagonal, the tower appears to have lways been circular in plan, as it is today. Pertinent dimensions are as follows: U.S. Coast Guard RG-26(a)).

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8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES Built: 1849 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Charles M. Pierce

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of Palmer Island Light lies in two factors, its historic association and its architecture.

At the time of the light's construction, New Bedford was the major home port of the world's whaling fleet, supplying nearly 50% of the American oil supply. This prosperity was probably a major impetus for the lighthouse construction.

The whaling industry collapsed during the second half of the century, but considerable commercial and fishing traffic continued to operate out of the harbor throughout the late 19th and 20th century. The light was kept burning for nearly 100 years, through several major storms, including a gale which damaged the plank walk from the keeper's house to the tower on September 8, 1869, and the 1938 hurricane which destroyed the keeper's house. The keeper, Captain Arthur A. Small, was injured and his wife was drowned while attempting to reach the light.

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The remaining features of the lighthouse are primarily those which date from its original construction in 1849, as the 1966 fire destroyed the wooden additions and modifications of the late 19th and early 20th century.

The tower, itself, has only been modified by the bricking of one window and the parapet door and cutting of the early 20th century bell tower door. Remains of the latter feature also include the concrete platform which supported it.

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As one of the few surviving early 19th century lighthouses remaining in the United States, this structure is representative of its type. Its present overall appearance suggests the 1849 form, due to loss of later additions. Further, the lighthouse has important historical associations as an important local feature of the local "made" landscape, reflected by its appearance on the city seal and in numerous photo essays in local newspapers. Because of these factors, Palmer's Island Light appears eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The potential restoration of the structure to operating condition would provide the modern visitor with a highly visible link to New Bedford's maritime past.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"New Bedford Standard - Times" library & microfilm (photographs)

U.S. Coast Guard RG-26
a. 1849 Construction Contract
b. Alterations to Palmer's Island Light
c. 1931 Description of Palmer's Island Light

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 Acre

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A		3,4,0,9,0,0	4,6,0,9,8,0,0
B			
C			
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

As shown in red on map, being Exhibit M of attached Archaeological Report, entitled "Map of New Bedford - Fairhaven Barrier," dated April 1963.

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
John S. Wilson, Division Archaeologist and Robert L. Batt, Realty Specialist

ORGANIZATION
New England Division, U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers

DATE
29 October 1979

STREET & NUMBER
424 Trapelo Road

TELEPHONE
(617) 894-2400 (X345)

CITY OR TOWN
Waltham

STATE
Massachusetts

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES ✓ NO ___ NONE ___

Peter W. Forbes
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is ___National ___State ___Local

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

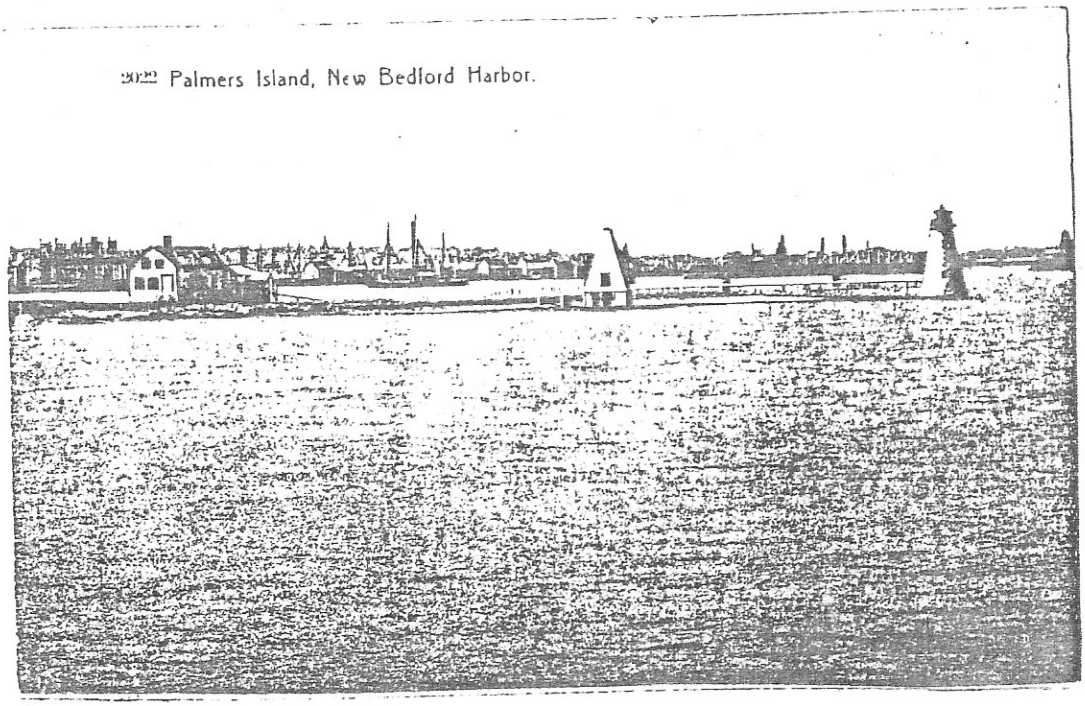
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

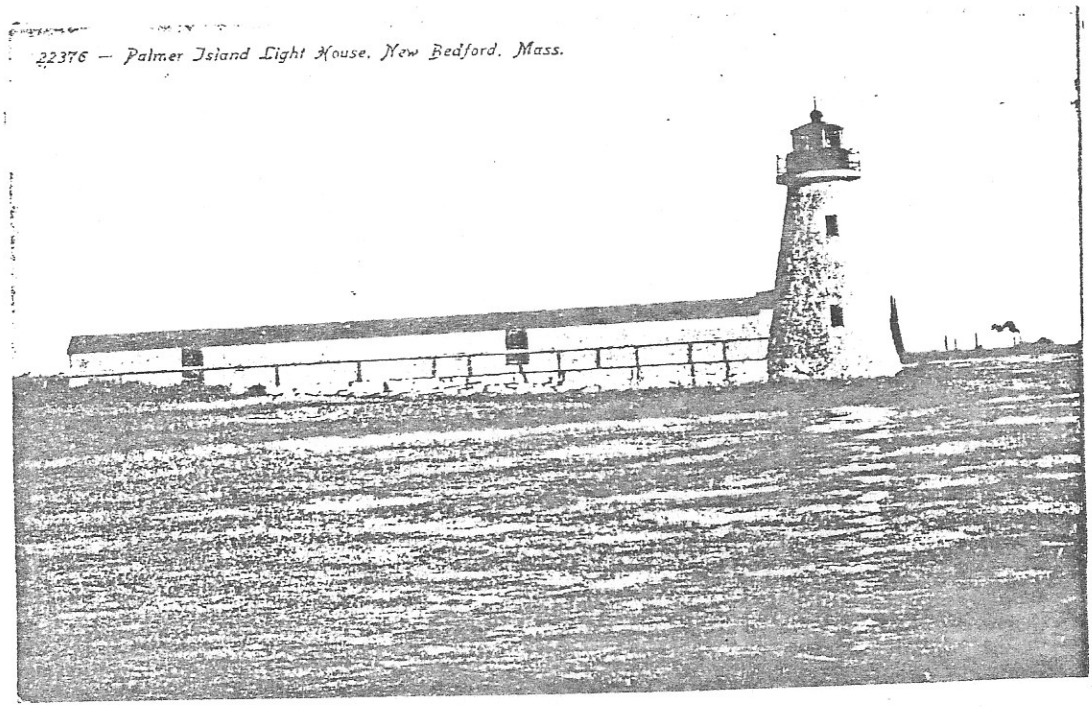
EXHIBITS

Exhibit	
A	Circa 1900 postcard showing lighthouse, bell tower and keeper's dwelling. View to NNW.
B	Circa 1902 postcard showing lighthouse with cover way. View to NNW.
C	Circa 1930 photograph showing lighthouse and bell tower. View to NNW.
D	Circa 1929 photograph showing lighthouse with bell tower and buildings on island. View to SW.
E	Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA. Photog. - James McDevitt, 12 Jun 79 View to west of lighthouse.
F	Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA. Photog. - James McDevitt, 12 Jun 79 View upward of lighthouse interior.
G	Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA. Photog. - Robert Batt, 12 Jun 79 View of lighthouse interior from east doorway.
H	Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA. Photog. - Robert Batt, 12 Jun 79 View of lighthouse interior from south window.
I	Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA. Photog. - James McDevitt, 12 Jun 79 View to SSW
J	Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA. Photog. - James McDevitt, 12 Jun 79 Interior view of bell tower hatchway.
K	Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA. Photog. - James McDevitt, 12 Jun 79 View to north of lighthouse and dike.
L	U.S.G.S. Quad. Sheet, 64 Sec., New Bedford North, MA.
M	U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers Real Estate Map, entitled "New Bedford - Fairhaven Barrier," dated Apr 63.



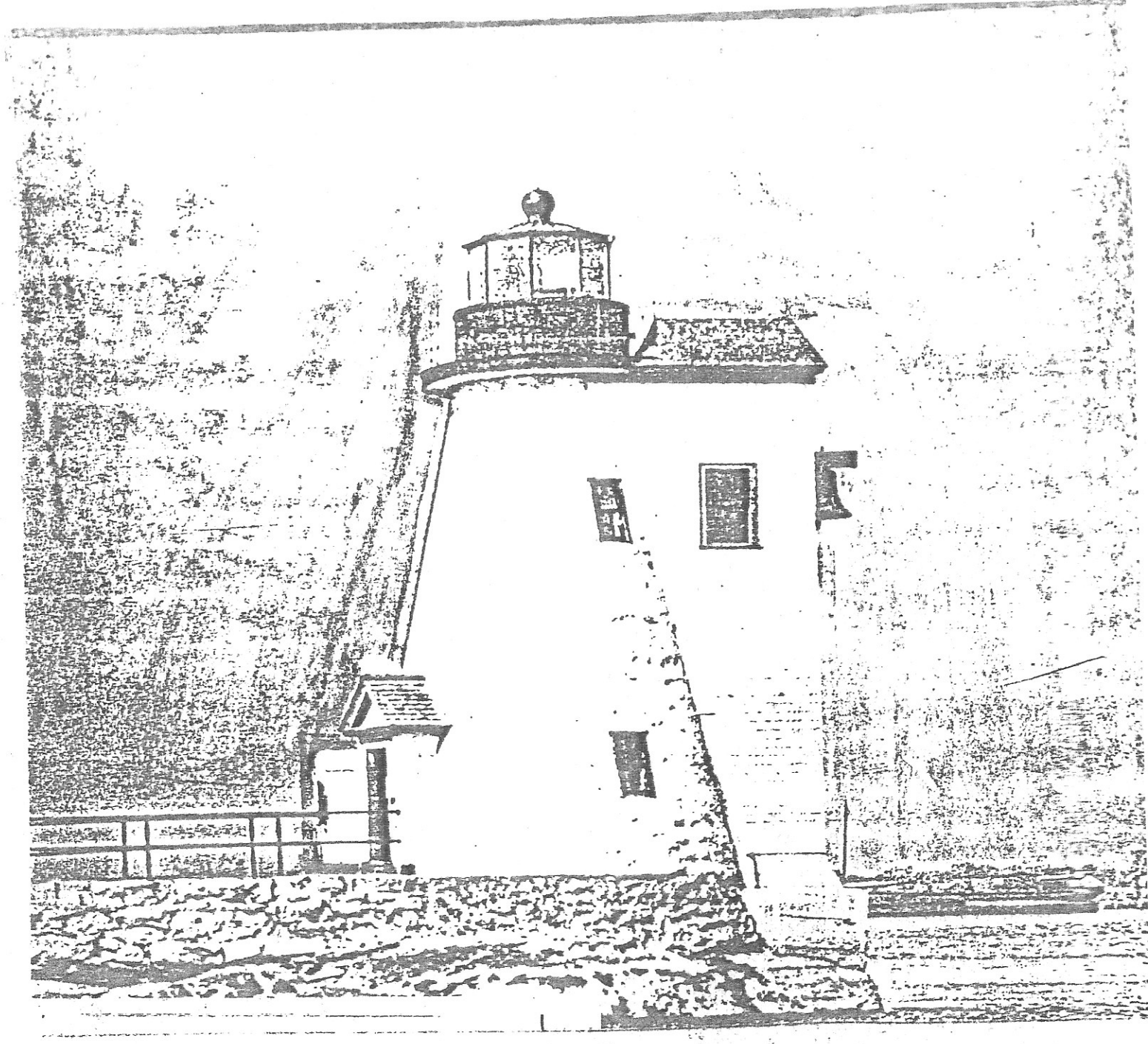
Circa 1900 postcard showing lighthouse, bell tower and keeper's dwelling. View to NNW.

Exhibit A



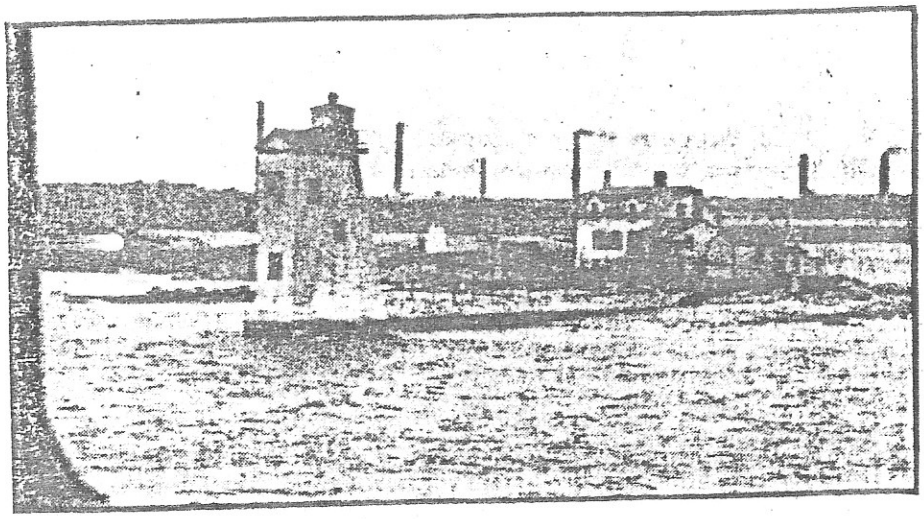
Circa 1902 postcard showing lighthouse with cover way. View to NNW

Exhibit B



Circa 1930 photograph showing lighthouse and bell tower. View to NNW

Exhibit C



In 1929, this photo was labeled "an unusual view of Palmers island in the foreground, with mills of New Bedford behind, taken from a Martha's Vineyard Bound steamer."

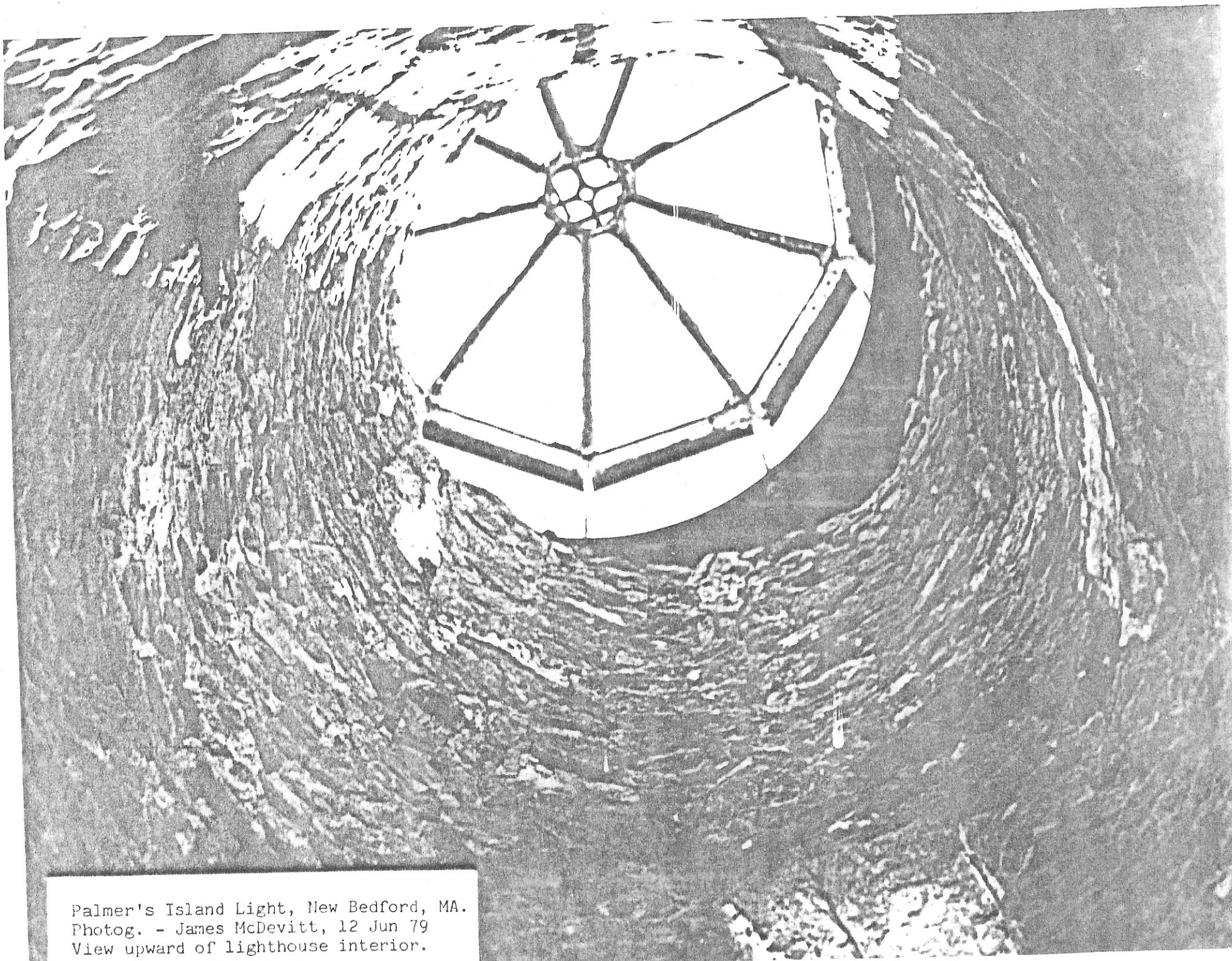
Cira 1929 photograph showing lighthouse with bell tower and buildings on island. View to SW

Exhibit D



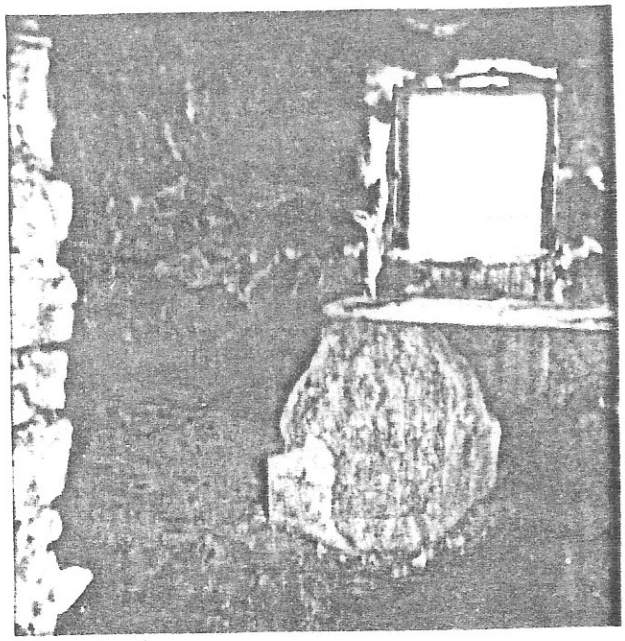
Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA.
Photog. - James McDevitt, 12 Jun 79
View to west of lighthouse.

Exhibit F



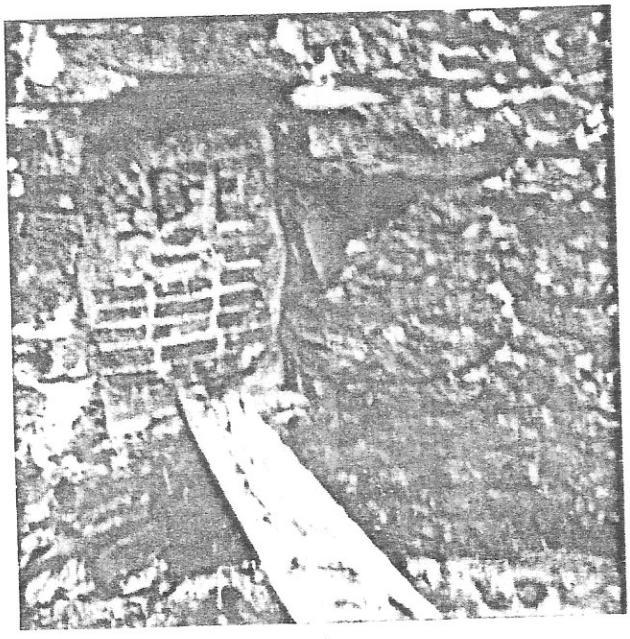
Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA.
Photog. - James McDevitt, 12 Jun 79
View upward of lighthouse interior.

Exhibit F



Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA.
Photog. - Robert Batt, 12 Jun 79 View
of lighthouse interior from east doorway.

Exhibit G

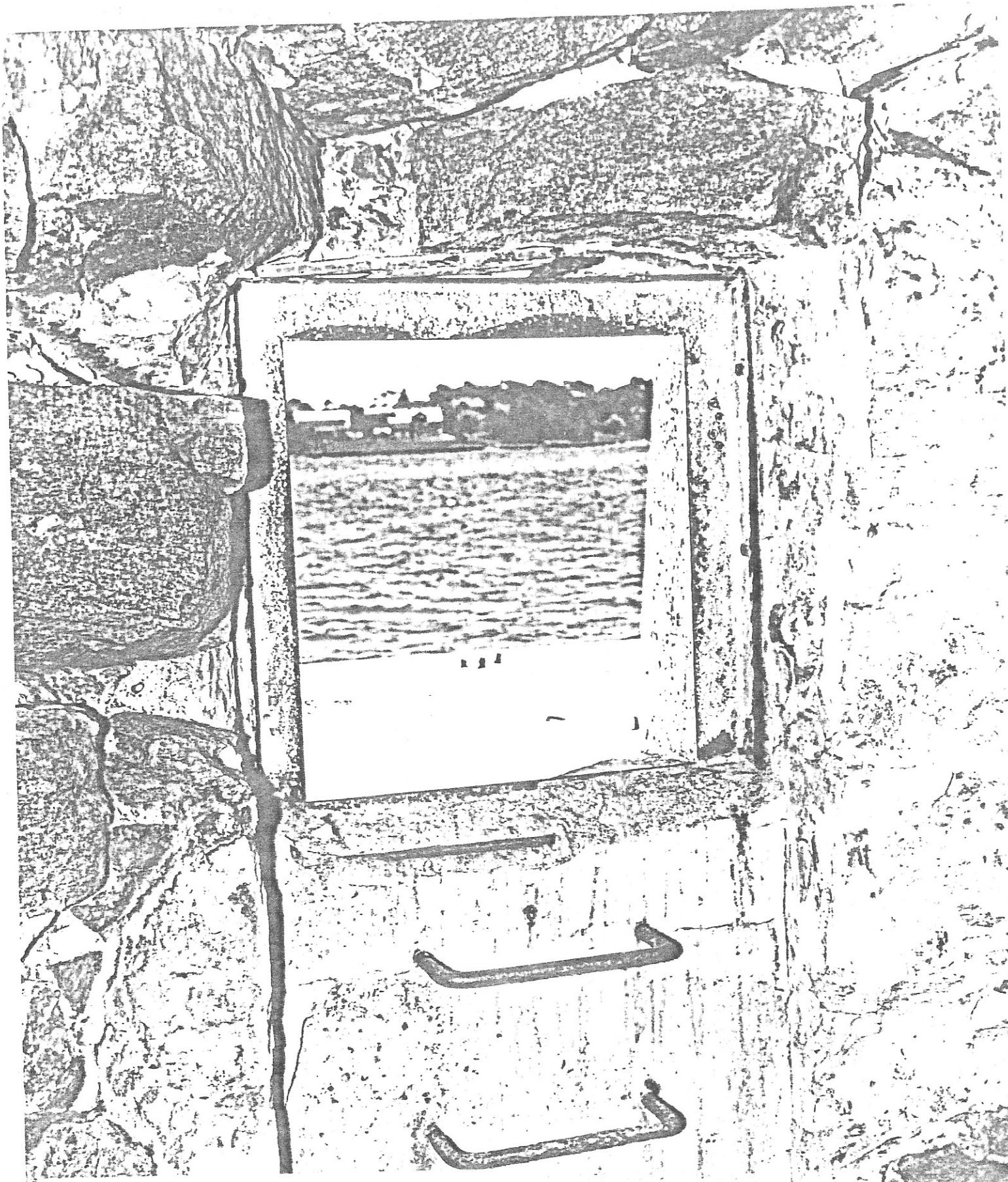


Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA.
Photog. - Robert Batt, 12 Jun 79 View
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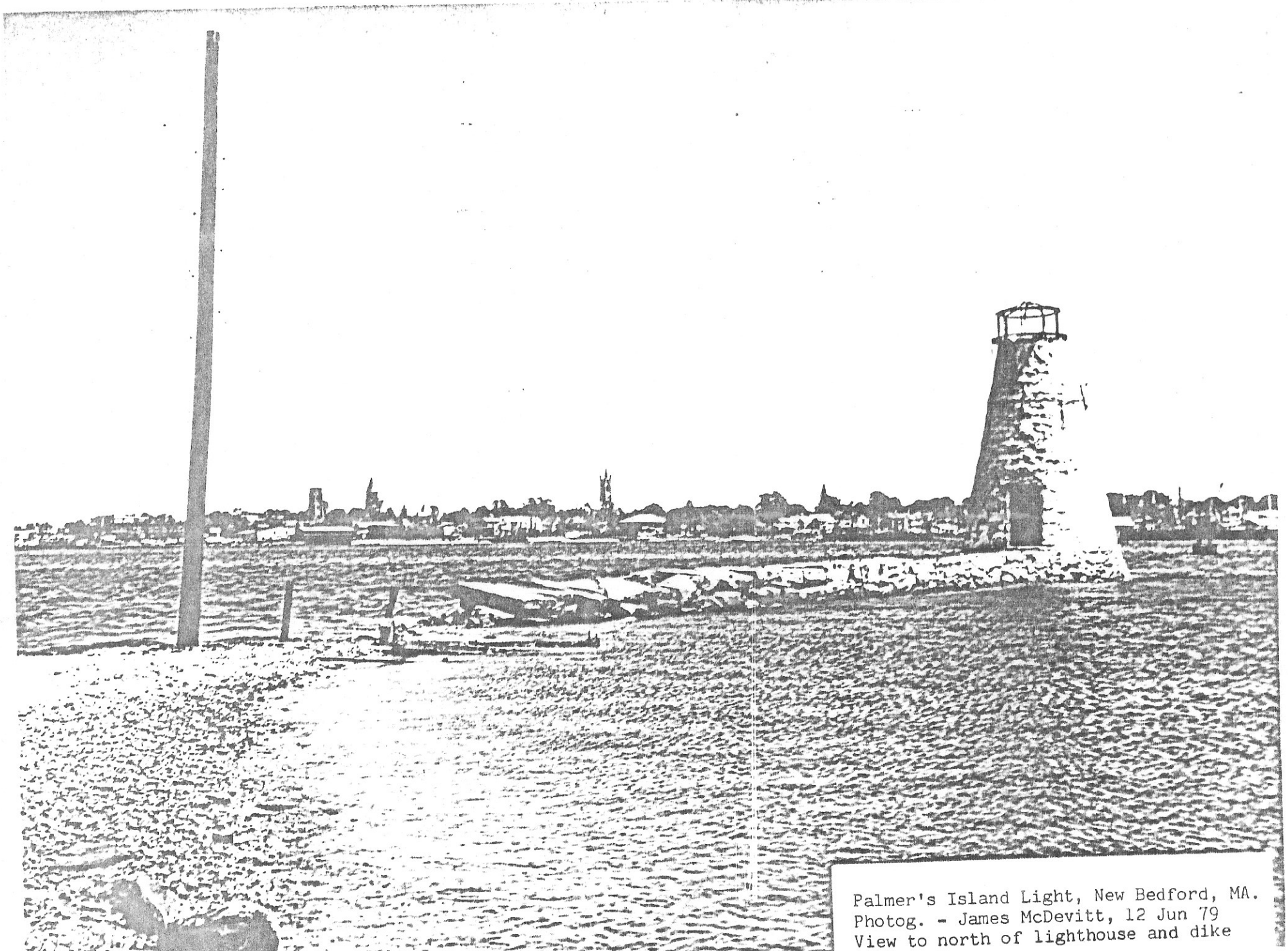


Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA.
Photog. - James McDevitt, 12 Jun 79
View to SSW

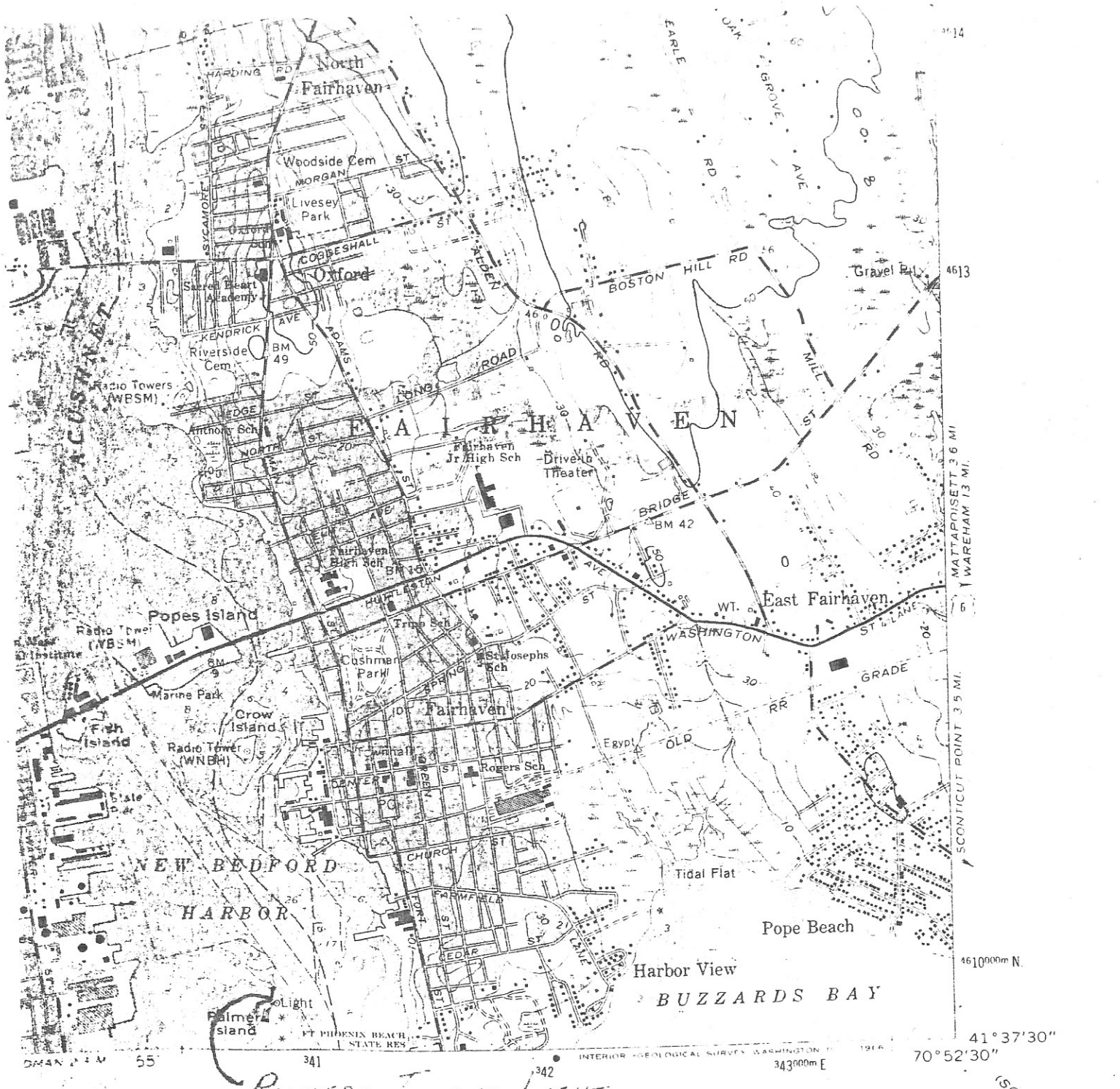


Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA.
Photog. - James McDevitt, 12 Jun 79
Interior view of bell tower hatchway.

Exhibit J



Palmer's Island Light, New Bedford, MA.
Photog. - James McDevitt, 12 Jun 79
View to north of lighthouse and dike



PALMERS ISLAND LIGHT

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty ——— Light duty - - -

Medium duty — — — Unimproved dirt - - -

Interstate Route U. S. Route State Route

QUADRANGLE LOCATION

NEW BEDFORD NORTH, MASS.

N41 37.5 -W70 52.5

1964

AMS 6867 III NW SI

U.S.G.S. Quad. Sheet, 64
New Bedford North, MA.

Exhibit L