1. NAME: Historic - Point Judith Lighthouse
Common - Point Judith Light Station

2. LOCATION
1470 Ocean Road
Narragansett, Rhode Island
Washington County

3. CLASSIFICATION

Category - building(s), structure
Ownership - public
Accessible - yes, restricted
Present Use - government, transportation, other: active lighthouse

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

U.S. Government, Department of Transportation
First U.S. Coast Guard District Headquarters
150 Causeway Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02114

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

Town Clerk's Office
Narragansett Town Hall
25 Fifth Avenue
Narragansett, Rhode Island 02882

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

Historic American Engineering Record
Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites in Rhode Island, 1978

Historic American Engineering Record
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

7. DESCRIPTION

Condition: good / altered / original site

Point Judith Light occupies a 4-3/4-acre site at the southern tip of Point Judith at one of the most exposed and

dangerous spots on the east coast. Located on the western side of the entrance to Narragansett Bay a few yards to the west of the Point Judith Coast Guard Station, the active light continues to be an important signal for vessels traveling between New York and New England.

Although the first light was established at Point Judith in 1810, the present tower dates from 1857 and is the third one on the site. An octagonal granite block battered structure, 24 feet wide at the base and 13 feet at the top, it stands 51 feet tall. The bottom half is painted white while the top is brown. Four window openings pierce the tower walls; one each at the first, third, fourth, and fifth floor levels. Originally, each opening contained a single sash with six panes of glass, but they have been replaced with small fixed glass blocks. A stone arch, taken from the second tower to be built on the site, is embedded in the east wall above the first floor window opening. Inscribed on it is the name of the second tower's founder, William Ellery, and 1816, it date of construction.

The ten-sided lantern, painted black, is covered with cast iron panels on the bottom half and large sheets of rectangular glass above, and is topped with a spherical ventilator with a lightning rod spike. An iron balustrade surrounds the gallery deck. Added to the tower in 1869 to replace an earlier one, the lantern, is the same style as those used on the lights at Conimicut, Hog Island Shoal, and Warwick Neck.

An iron door on the west side opens on to a granite stepped spiral stairway leading to the lantern. The 24,000-candle-power, fourth-order light which is 65 feet above sea level, has a range of 16 miles. The occulting white light shows three eclipses every fifteen seconds.

Two other buildings on the site are associated with the light. A gable roofed, one-story brick oil house to the east of the tower was built in 1917 for storage of flammable liquids. A brick, one-story, hipped-roof fog signal building constructed in 1923, houses the horn's air compressor. The horn itself, which gives one blast every fifteen seconds, is located along the outside of the building at the water's edge. The tower is in good condition, but the two smaller buildings are in only fair condition. Paint is peeling off the oil house and the cement walls of the fog signal building are spalling.

8. SIGNIFICANCE

Period: 1800-1899, 1900- Specific Dates: 1857, 1867

Established as the third lighthouse in Rhode Island, Point Judith light has served continually since 1810 as the primary navigational aid for all shipping entering Narragansett Bay, as well as an important mark for vessels on Block Island Sound. As such, it has played an important role in the state's maritime economy by assisting early coastal freighters, whaling and merchant ships, fishing vessels, passenger steamers, as well as modern cargo ships and oil tankers, to the major ports of Newport, Providence, and Fall River, and to the smaller towns along the bay. The light is also significant as the site of the first radio beacon to be established at a Rhode Island light.

The site was acquired in 1809 and the light was established the following year. The first tower, a crude wooden structure that stood for only five years, was destroyed by a storm on September 17, 1815. A second tower, 35 feet high and made of rough stone coated with cement, was built the next year. This in turn was replaced in 1857 by the present tower along with a separate brick keeper's dwelling, connected to the tower by an enclosed walkway.

Although the light is an important mark on the Rhode Island coast, much of the station's historical significance also relates to the operation of its fog signal, and later, to a radio beacon. The first fog signal, a Daboll's trumpet sounded by a Wilcox hot-air engine, was established in 1867. Because of problems with its sound being lost in the noise of the surf off-shore, it was replaced in 1872 by two first class steam whistles. The earlier signal was kept as a spare in case of a failure with the new one.

The amount of time needed to operate and maintain the fog signal required the hiring of an assistant keeper in 1874. During the following year, the signal operated a total of 777-1/2 hours.

On November 11, 1931, the first radio beacon at a Rhode Island light was established at Point Judith. This marked an important event in the history of the state's lighthouses that would have a far-reaching effect on the system of aids to navigation. With the help of a radio beacon, ships could for the first time navigate at night and in the fog without the assistance of a light or a fog horn.

In addition to the light, a number of other structures were built on the station grounds during the last half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Most of these no longer survive. The largest was a nine-room, one-and-a-half-story brick keeper's dwelling connected to the tower by a short enclosed gallery. Built in 1857, it was torn down in 1954. A second dwelling, constructed in 1874 for an assistant keeper who was needed to operate the fog signal, has been torn down as well. Also no longer standing is a one-story, clapboarded fog signal building, constructed to the south of the tower in 1872 to house the whistle's steam engine and boiler, and a 1931 wood frame radio beacon house. Finally, the beacon's two 60-foot radio towers were taken down in 1974 because they were unsafe.

Although a U. S. Life-Saving Station was established in 1876 only about 50 yards to the east of the light, there was little interaction between the station's crew and the light keepers. The Life-Saving Service and the Lighthouse Service were administered separately until 1939, at which time the Lighthouse Service jointed the U.S. Coast Guard. The Life-Saving Service joined the Coast Guard in 1915, at which time the Point Judith Life-Saving Station was renamed Point Judith Coast Guard Station.

The light was automated in 1954 and the keeper's dwelling was torn down shortly thereafter. Since then the light and a fog signal have been maintained by personnel from the Coast Guard station.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage:
Quadrangle name: Narragansett Pier, RI
Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000
UTM References: A 19 292390 4581590

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated property includes part, but not all, of plat 17, lot 164. The lot is shared between the Point Judith Coast Guard Station and the Light Station, but is not divided by the maps of the Narragansett Town Assessor. Nominated here is the Light Station and its immediate surroundings.

Level of Significance:
SHPO ~~FPO~~ Certification: Frederick C. Williamson

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Period of Significance: The period of significance extends from 1857, when the lighthouse was constructed, to 1931, when the radio beacon, a significant alteration, was installed.

Level of Significance: State

POINT JUDITH LIGHT HOUSE
NARRAGANSETT, RHODE ISLAND

