

The statewide advocate for Rhode Island's historic places



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Preserve Rhode Island Releases New Findings on Stone Enders, an Architectural Style Unique to Rhode Island

Lists the “Crown Jewel” of Stone Enders for Sale as Private Home

Preserve Rhode Island, the state-wide nonprofit committed to preserving Rhode Island’s historic places for future generations, unveiled a new study on Stone Enders, an early colonial architectural style unique to Rhode Island. The new research was undertaken as part of their work in rehabilitating the historic Valentine Whitman House (c.1696) back into a private residence. With the rehabilitation now complete, Preserve RI listed the property for sale with Residential Properties at \$539.9 thousand last week. A historic easement, overseen by Preserve RI, will be put on the property, permanently protecting the architectural integrity of the house.

New Research Findings

When Preserve RI acquired the Valentine Whitman House from the town of Lincoln in 2021, they knew the property was a rare example of early colonial architecture known as a “Stone Ender”. To better understand this architectural style, Preserve RI undertook a literature search and preliminary field study of this unique piece of Rhode Island history and culture.

Stone Enders are some of the earliest structures built by English colonists in Rhode Island in what is known as the “First Period” (1630-1725). Their unique characteristic is one side of the building is made of stone, containing a massive fireplace and chimney, while the other three sides are made of wood.

With few building records from the 17th century, it’s impossible to tell how many Stone Enders were built. Our field study suggests that as many as 59 potential stone enders predating 1740 survived into the 19th and 20th centuries. Many of those have been demolished over the centuries, and two were moved from their original locations. **It was commonly thought that as few as 9 Stone Enders were left intact in Rhode Island, but our research confirms that at least 14 Stone Enders remain standing in some form, and there may be as many as 24.**

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More research needs to be done on the remaining homes to confirm if they are indeed Stone Enders.

Stone Enders were predominantly built in Rhode Island with less than one dozen occurring in the surrounding area of Massachusetts and Connecticut. Today only one confirmed stone ender survives outside of Rhode Island.

While the earliest settlers left little documentation, the prevalence of Stone Enders in Rhode Island is almost certainly related to the abundance of stone, lumber and native sources of lime, as well as the likely geographic origins of the settlers and builders in Rhode Island.

The building techniques used to create Rhode Island's Stone Enders were brought to New England by builders from the English areas of Sussex and Wales. Stone Enders as a building type originated by applying English building traditions and practices, modified based on the availability of local natural resources of stone and lime.

Most Stone Enders in Rhode Island were built with two rooms—side-by-side (one story) or up/down (two stories). The Valentine Whitman House is rare in its size and scale, originally built with 4 rooms on each of its two floors.

Limestone was the essential ingredient for the mortar needed to build the massive chimneys that characterize Stone Enders. In the northern part of the state, limestone occurs naturally and in abundant deposits—the first quarries in the colonies were established in Rhode Island as early as the 1660s to create building materials such as mortar, plaster and whitewash. Along the coast, refuse piles of shells left by Native Americans provided the oyster shells needed to make shell mortar. The natural lime in the north was much more durable than the shell mortar used in the southern part of the state, and may be why more survived in the northern part of the state.

Valentine Whitman: The Crown Jewel of Stone Enders

The Valentine Whitman Jr. House, located on Great Road in Lincoln, is a rare survivor of a Stone Ender that is still intact. It is one of only two confirmed 17th century Rhode Island Stone Enders that escaped enlargement, restoration, or significant post-1850 alterations. The durability of the materials and minimal alterations are remarkable. While Valentine Whitman sustained substantial interior changes in the early 19th century, these alterations did not interfere with the earliest and most important architectural features of the building: its massive timber framing and “stone end”.

Built for the only son of a prominent landowner and one of Rhode Island's first colonists, the Valentine Whitman Jr. House is exceptional also in its size, scale, craftsmanship and decorative detail. Considered the highest expression of the Stone Ender building type, its large scale relative to other known Stone Enders, and the extensive decorative chamfering found throughout the structural posts and beams in the house, indicate the wealth of the Whitman family.

The Town of Lincoln transferred ownership of the Valentine Whitman House to Preserve RI in July 2021. Extensive repair and rehabilitation work costing nearly \$600 thousand was completed this month .

The Town of Lincoln had sought ideas for a sustainable future of this former house museum. Without a significant endowment or revenue streams, and faced with a declining volunteer group that ran the museum and the need for substantial investment to stabilize the property, the town turned to Preserve RI for help. Several business models were explored before deciding that transitioning to a private residence made the most sense. "Our philosophy is to return historic properties back into productive use, which ensures they are valued and properly maintained. The sale also allows Preserve RI to recoup our investment so we can take on more projects like this in the future", said Valerie Talmage, Executive Director of Preserve RI.

The Valentine Whitman House is Preserve RI's most ambitious Revolving Fund project to date, requiring extensive work to every part of the house. Some of the bigger repairs include:

- A new wood shake roof, restored windows, and new and reused cedar shingles on the sidewalls.
- All new electrical, plumbing and HVAC systems.
- A custom-designed kitchen, renovated and additional bathrooms, and laundry were created for 21st Century comforts.
- Original wood floors and plaster walls restored and repaired.

Heritage Restoration, Inc., a premier contractor specializing in old and historic buildings, undertook the rehabilitation project for Preserve Rhode Island.

Preserve RI is grateful for funding for this project made possible through The 1772 Foundation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Ocean State Charities and the sponsorship of Beacon Hill Pole Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution.

About Preserve Rhode Island

Preserve Rhode Island is Rhode Island's statewide advocate for historic places. The 65-year-old nonprofit provides guidance for local preservation groups, finds productive and adaptive reuses for threatened buildings, advocates for the revitalization of historic places to stimulate local economies and engages the community through public programs at Lippitt House Museum.

To view the full report visit [Stone Ender Report \(preserveri.org\)](http://preserveri.org)

Images of Valentine Whitman House are available on request.

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