

LIGHTHOUSES OF MASSACHUSETTS
THEMATIC GROUP NOMINATION

LIGHTHOUSE INFORMATION FORM

NUMBER 29

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
80 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116

PHOTOGRAPH KEY

L.L. Fox, MHC, 1980

HISTORIC NAME: Newburyport Harbor Light

TOWN: Newburyport

LOCATION: Northern Blvd., Plum Island

COUNTY: Essex CODE: 009

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: 6th

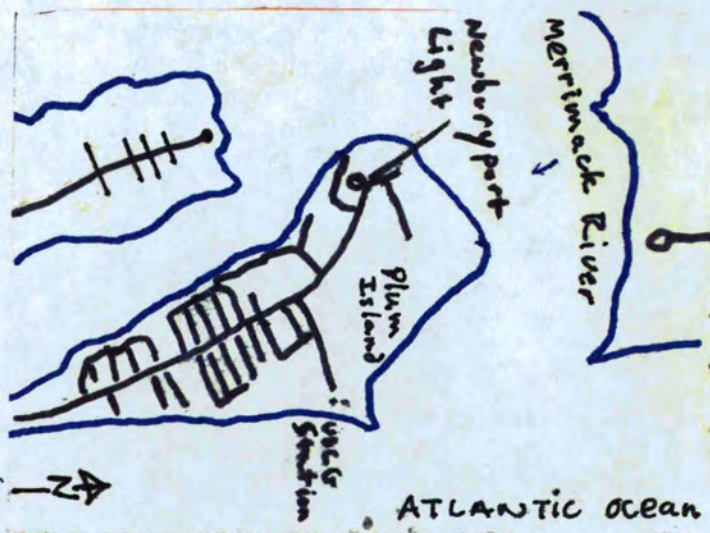
LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Essex County Registry of Deeds (Act of
Cession, Commonwealth of MA to U.S., 1790)

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nomination is confined to the light
itself.

SKETCH MAP



LAT./LONG.: 42°48'58" 70°49'10"W

UTM COORDINATE: 19/351/600/4741/600

USGS QUADRANGLE: BOSTON, MA; NH; CT; RI; ME

SCALE: 1:250,000

ACREAGE: .3 acres

OWNER(S): U.S. Coast Guard (light only;
remainder of property disposed of in

1951 to U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)
408 Atlantic Avenue, Boston 02210
STATUS: _____

Active/Unmanned

RECORDED BY: L. Fox/N. Salzman

ORGANIZATION: MHC

DATE: July 9, 1981

The lighthouse (dating from 1788, rebuilt in 1898, altered ca. 1980 - see Chronological History) and the keeper's house remain as original elements. Because the house is no longer owned by the Coast Guard and because their original elements. Because the house is no longer owned by the Coast Guard and because their original relationship has been obscured by later infill, only the light is included in the nomination.

Exterior: The 50' white shingled tower is cylindrical, with a black cast-iron lens room and roof.

Shingles: Each exterior shingle reveals 5", and seems to have a random width.

Foundation: The original wood foundation was replaced by cement to reinforce the structure. Access is gained into the tower by stepping directly up to the door frame.

Door: There are presently two doors: the first, a storm door, is a single plywood board, and the second is a four-panel wooden door with a round brass handle. Both doors are painted grey. There is a segmental hood over the second door with copper flashing and 3" x 5" fixed panes.

Interior: The cement floor of the tower has a radius of 7' 2". The interior walls are brick, covered with wooden diagonal sheathing, which is 3" rough sawn pine with exposed cut nails and a 1 3/4" lathing. The lower level of the tower (about 8 feet) has been sheathed with large plywood boards.

Walls: The walls appear to have covered at one time by plaster but it has since been removed and the diagonal lath revealed. It is now being resheathed with 4' x 8' plywood.

Staircase: A full staircase built into the exterior wall has thirty wooden steps and a wooden balustrade that ascend to a wooden landing. The railing and balusters are of polished molded wood, probably hand-carved. Each step has a simple moulding under the riser. The steps, all painted grey, have been reinforced on the underside by slender aluminum straps running from the bottom of the step to the railing.

Window: The only window in the tower is located on the first landing, in the lamp room. It measures 28" x 42" to the sill, and projects outwards with the cant of the tower. This window is set in 3 1/2" at the bottom and 6 1/4" at the top. The casing is 43 1/2".

Lamp Room: A cupboard with no door is located inside the lamp room. It measures 13 1/2" x 38" x 82". A ten tread boxed wooden ladder rises directly to the lens room, and it has rounded ends, and each step is 7 3/4" x 1 1/4" x 25" wide.

Lens Room: Access to the octagonal lens room is gained through a wooden trap door. The floor is wood planks, but the walls on the interior and exterior are iron, and the room itself is round. The diameter of the lens room is about 85". The iron wall rises 42" to the windows. Of the eight window panes, the one to the northwest has been blacked out (toward the town of Newburyport). Each pane is 36" high, 32" wide on the curve of the wall, and 48" across diagonally. The mullions are 3" x 1 1/2".

Newburyport Harbor Light is located at the north end of Northern Boulevard, on Plum Island. The island lies in Ipswich Bay, due east from the original towns in Newbury (part now called Newburyport), Ipswich, and Rowley. It is about 9 miles long from north to south, and one mile from east to west. The northern end, on which the lighthouse is located, is the south shore of the mouth of the Merrimac River. Looking west from this point is Newburyport Harbor with its two Range Lights (#30). The light is set in slightly from the beach, though within walking distance. It was constructed on sandy but firm ground, and thereby protected from the continuously changing shoreline.

Vents: Four uncovered round vents are located at mid-point on every other wall around the lens room. An iron half door leads to the balcony. An automatic plastic lens stands in the center of the lens room on a 45' high cylinder.

Balcony: A microwave radar system has been attached to the railing, which in turn operates a closed-circuit television. This unique and efficient fully automated TV allows the Merrimack River Coast Guard Station to closely monitor activity in the channel. The balcony is sheathed with lead and covered by asphalt square to insure safe footing. 41" high iron posts support two 2 1/4" bands of iron railing 10 1/2" above the balcony. There are 24" between posts, which are each topped with an iron knob. Astragals holding the panes of glass in place are beveled, 1" wide.

Roof: The eight segments of the conical roof are topped by a large ball-shaped vent that originally permitted smoke to escape. A lightning rod is fixed at the peak of the roof.

1788 - Two small wooden lighthouses were built at the entrance of the Merrimac River on Plum Island. This marked the eleventh lighthouse built in the U.S. They were moved quite often, "sometimes considerable distances", because of the shifting sands and water of the channel.

1790 - The lighthouses were ceded to the federal government.

1856 - New Fresnel lenses were installed.

1864 - A "Bug Light" in the nearby channel was moved due to land shifting.

1867 - One of the two lights was moved 90' to make a new channel.

1869 - The lighthouses were moved one third of a mile northeast as close to the channel as possible. Apparently, the sands had shifted to such an extent that the lights were too far inland and were difficult to see from the ocean approach.

1870 - The Lighthouse Board decided that these lights were of great importance and should have stronger lamps installed and should as well be rebuilt of sturdier materials.

1874 - The towers were moved 75' to the south. (From 1874 through 1908 there were more than one hundred shipwrecks on the near Plum Island.)

1881 - Charles I. Pettengill of Plum Island inherited the land on which the lighthouses were located, claiming the lighthouses were thereby on private property. A land battle was begun which was not settled until 1887. The decision by former U.S. Attorney General George P. Sanger, stated that the land had in fact been ceded to the United States in 1790 and that Pettengill had no legal title to it.

1887 - Lard oil lamps in the front light were replaced by mineral oil lamps for greater illumination and less maintenance. A stone tower was begun to replace one of the two wooden lights, but it was never completed.

1890 - The channels shifted extensively and construction was halted on the stone tower. Jetties were built to stop the channel from changing direction and shape.

1898 - The jetties proved successful and the present white conical tower was built apparently incorporating parts of the one of the original 1788 towers.

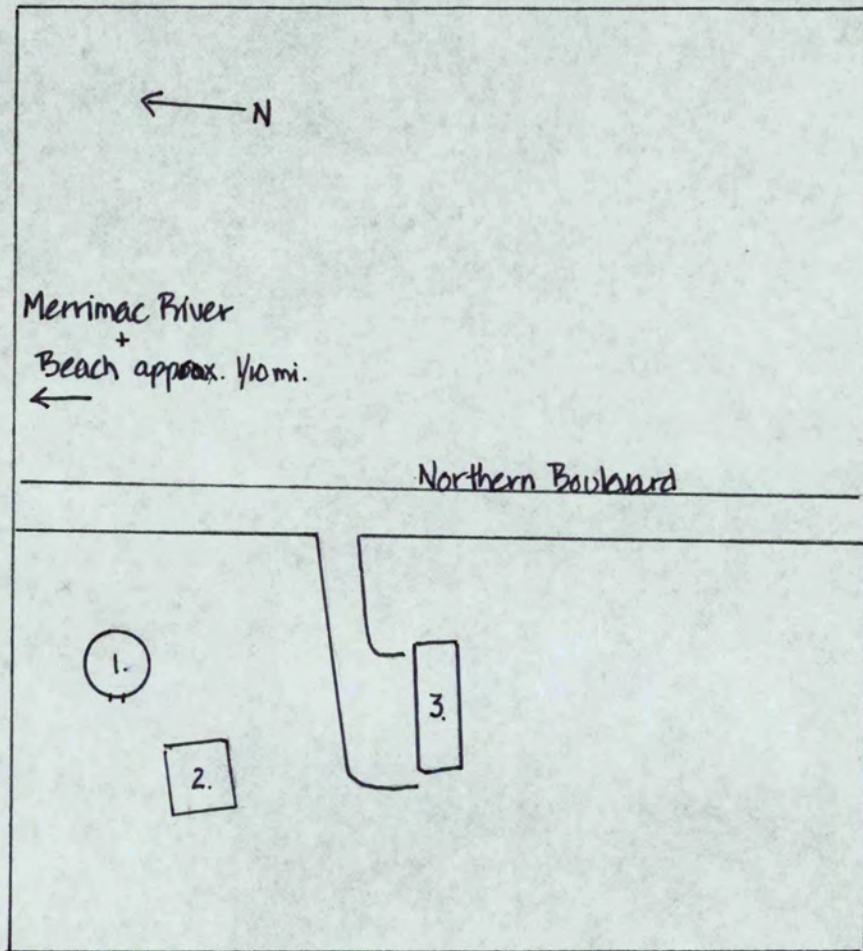
1917 - Channel had shifted direction completely by this time, and small range lights were added on the north side of the Merrimack River to aid navigators during the 1920's. During Prohibition, more than twenty thousand bottles of bootleg whiskey were confiscated in this immediate area.

1951 - The Coast Guard disposed of 363' x 265.5' of land as excess, including the keeper's dwelling, the garage, and the oil house. Only the land immediately surrounding the tower was retained.

1972 - The 4000 candlepower Fourth Order Fresnel electric light was visible for twelve miles.

1981 - A fully automatic plastic lens replaced the Fresnel lens. Within the past two years or so, the interior plastic walls of the tower were stripped to reveal exposed lapstrake. The floor was torn up and cement filled in (foundation was strengthened).

The Newburyport Harbor Light possesses integrity of (general) location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship as well as important associations with the development of aids to navigation in Massachusetts. Located at the mouth of Merrimack River, it is the site of the eleventh lighthouse built in the U.S., a site which has been continuously maintained despite the major problems of shifting sands and channels which have necessitated short moves for the light several times. Additionally, the present light, which was constructed in 1898, is believed to incorporate elements of one of the original 1788 twin lights, giving it some claim to the title of oldest extant light in the state. Despite alteration of the remainder of the complex, the light tower itself meets criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places on the state level as well as survey criteria 2a.



Newburyport Harbor Light
Plum Island

1. Tower
2. Dwelling
3. Modern Garage

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received MAY 4 1987
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 2 of 4

Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

Name Lighthouses of Massachusetts TR
State MASSACHUSETTS

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

1. Minot's Ledge Light

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melrose Byers 6/15/87

Attest

2. Nauset Beach Light

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melrose Byers 6/15/87

Attest

3. Ned Point Light

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melrose Byers 6/15/87

Attest

4. Newburyport Harbor Light

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melrose Byers 6/15/87

Attest

5. Newburyport Harbor Front Range Light

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melrose Byers 6/15/87

Attest

6. Nobska Point Light Station

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melrose Byers 6/15/87

Attest

7. Race Point Light Station

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melrose Byers 6/15/87

Attest

8. Sankaty Head Light

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melrose Byers 6/15/87

Attest

9. Scituate Light

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melrose Byers 6/15/87

Attest

10. Straightsmouth Island Light

Entered in the
National Register

for Keeper Melrose Byers 6/15/87

Attest

87001485

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Newburyport Harbor Light (Lighthouses of Massachusetts TR)
Essex County
MASSACHUSETTS

Working No. 4/28/87
Fed. Reg. Date: 2/2/88
Date Due: 6/18/87
Action: ACCEPT 6-15-87
 RETURN
 REJECT
Federal Agency: USCG-DOT

Entered in the
National Register

- resubmission
- nomination by person or local government
- owner objection
- appeal

Substantive Review: sample request appeal NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria _____
Reviewer _____
Discipline _____
Date _____
_____ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: _____ technical corrections cited below
_____ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? yes no

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input 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

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- alterations/integrity
- dates
- boundary selection

8. Significance

Period _____ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates _____ Builder/Architect _____

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*) _____

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- applicable criteria
- justification of areas checked
- relating significance to the resource
- context
- relationship of integrity to significance
- justification of exception
- other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

UTM References _____

Verbal boundary description and justification _____

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national ____ state ____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature _____

title _____ date _____

13. Other

- Maps
- Photographs
- Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

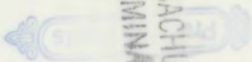
Signed _____ Date _____ Phone: _____



NEWBURYPORT HARBOR LIGHT
NEWBURYPORT, MA # 30

PHOTO #1 OF 1

LIGHTHOUSES OF MASSACHUSETTS
THEMATIC GROUP NOMINATION



E

Please refer to the map in the
Multiple Property Cover Sheet
for this property

Multiple Property Cover Sheet Reference Number: 64000282