

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED MAY 13 1980

DATE ENTERED

JUN 16 1980

**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

Charles Playhouse

Fifth Universalist Church

AND/OR COMMON

Charles Playhouse (use for publication)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

74-78 Warrenton Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts

VICINITY OF

CODE

025

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

8th

COUNTY

Suffolk

CODE

025

3 CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY**
 DISTRICT
 BUILDING(S)
 STRUCTURE
 SITE
 OBJECT
OWNERSHIP
 PUBLIC
 PRIVATE
 BOTH
 PUBLIC ACQUISITION
 IN PROCESS
 BEING CONSIDERED
STATUS
 OCCUPIED
 UNOCCUPIED
 WORK IN PROGRESS
 ACCESSIBLE
 YES: RESTRICTED
 YES: UNRESTRICTED
 NO
PRESENT USE
 AGRICULTURE
 COMMERCIAL
 EDUCATIONAL
 ENTERTAINMENT
 GOVERNMENT
 INDUSTRIAL
 MILITARY
 MUSEUM
 PARK
 PRIVATE RESIDENCE
 RELIGIOUS
 SCIENTIFIC
 TRANSPORTATION
 OTHER:
4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Charles Playhouse Realty Company

STREET & NUMBER

74-78 Warrenton Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts 02116

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Suffolk County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Pemberton Square

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts 02110

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Inventory of the Historic Assets of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

DATE

January 1978

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Massachusetts Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Boston

 STATE
 Massachusetts 02108

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

- EXCELLENT
- GOOD
- FAIR
- DETERIORATED
- RUINS
- UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

- UNALTERED
- ALTERED

CHECK ONE

- ORIGINAL SITE
- MOVED
- DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Charles Playhouse is located within the Boston Theatre District, south of the Boston Common (NR). It is adjacent to Bay Village, a residential neighborhood dating from the same period, the 1830's. The Theatre District area is characterized by mixed residential, commercial and entertainment uses.

The Charles Playhouse was built as the Fifth Universalist Church between 1838 and 1839. It is rectangular in plan, seventy-five feet long and sixty-six feet wide. The shorter end fronts Warrenton Street (southeast) without a setback. It is two stories high, set on a raised basement and enclosed by a ridge roof. Built of red brick in the Greek Revival temple form with columns in antis, the basement level granite substructure contained income producing commercial space. A wide granite stringcourse runs across the width of the main facade separating the lower commercial part from the ecclesiastical function of the building. This band also serves as a lintel to granite posts defining entrances and store windows and capping the corner piers. The basement level rises twelve feet above street level and serves as a platform to the well proportioned classic temple above it.

The upper part of the facade exhibits four giant paired antae on piers with Doric capitals framing two Ionic columns. Three small-paned two tiered windows separated by gracefully carved anthemion panels are placed between the two inner antae and the columns. The plain entablature and unadorned frieze are topped by a pediment with a lunette.

The flanks of the building contain five symmetrically organized window bays. The basement window and two story church windows are capped by plain granite lintels. A simple cornice consists of a molded brick band and frame corona.

The building originally contained 156 pews seating about one thousand people. The interior has been altered repeatedly, and no decorative elements recall the building's ecclesiastical past. The original placement of lights and the form and placement of the granite basement entrances are clearly visible and still perform their originally intended function. At present, the upper structure houses the main playhouse. Box office, lobby space and a small stage occupy the street level and basement premises.

Alterations to the main facade include addition of a theatre marquee, changes to the doorways and windows on the basement, reglazing of the upper windows and filling in the lunette with a ventilator. Alterations to the lateral flanks include boarding of all windows and conversion of two windows to entrances. Certain air handling mechanical systems as presently arranged are intrusions.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES 1838-39 BUILDER/ARCHITECT: Asher Benjamin

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Charles Playhouse possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials and workmanship. It is of exceptional architectural significance as one of only three churches in Boston designed by Asher Benjamin (1733-1845) and as the only remaining example of the Greek Revival style. Additionally, it was the first permanent home built by the Fifth Universalist Society.

Asher Benjamin was one of America's most famous and influential early architects. Two of his Boston churches built in the Federal style survive: the Charles Street Meeting House (NR) 1804 and the Old West Church (NR) 1806 on Cambridge Street. Benjamin's influence on the physical aspect of the New England landscape -- and subsequently on the American hinterland -- is incalculable. Through his builder's guides and architectural handbooks published continuously from 1794 until 1841, he taught and inspired countless country housewrights and self-taught carpenters to build graceful white wooden churches and stately classic frame houses, as well as urban brick townhouses and churches of a uniquely American style. His architectural pattern books, the first published in this country, spread both the Federal and the later Greek Revival modes across the young Republic.

The design of the Charles Playhouse Building is a slight adaptation of Benjamin's plan for a church in Plates LVIII and LIX appearing in his Builder's Guide or Complete System of Architecture, Boston, 1838. The major innovation concerns the addition of street level stores, a requirement of the client, the congregation of Rev. Otis A. Skinner. This granite structure literally put the meetinghouse on the solid base of an anticipated \$800 per annum rental income.

Organized in Boston in 1836, the Fifth Universalist Society for several years worshipped in the Great Hall of Bulfinch's Boylston Market (1809), which was located on the corner of Washington and Boylston Streets. Because of the magnetic personality and popularity of the pastor, Rev. Otis A. Skinner, membership increased so dramatically that larger quarters became necessary. Land was purchased in the newly developing part of the city south of the Common in July 1838 for \$7,600, and a new meeting house was erected at a cost of \$29,000. Numerous contemporary accounts describe the dedication services of January 30, 1839. The Trumpet is particularly admiring: "The House thus dedicated is beautiful....The location is a very good one, the building of the House and of a few elegant brick buildings in the neighborhood has affected an astonishing alteration in the appearance of the street at that point. The house is of brick, with a granite front for the basement. In the basement, which is very commodious, there are two large and elegant stores, besides a very convenient vestry for the Society's use. The front of the building strikes every beholder as being unusually neat and pleasing...."

The Rev. Otis A. Skinner stayed with his congregation, among the largest in Boston, until April 1857 when he moved to Elgin, Illinois. He subsequently became president of Lombard University in Galesburg, Illinois and died in 1861 at the age of 54. An able orator, author of numerous religious papers and books, he was also for many years a member

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Andrews, Wayne. Architecture, Ambition and Americans. New York, 1964.
 Boston Post, February 6, 1839.
 Boston Transcript, February 6, 1839.
 Hamlin, Talbot. Greek Revival Architecture in America. New York, 1944.
 Pierson, William H., Jr. American Buildings and Their Architects, The Colonial and Neo-Classical Styles. Vol. 1. New York, 1970.

UTM NOT VERIFIED
ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 5,396 sq. ft.

QUADRANGLE NAME Boston South QUADRANGLE SCALE 1"=24,000'

UTM REFERENCES

| | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|---------------|------------------|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | <u>19</u> | <u>329800</u> | <u>461901430</u> | B | | | |
| | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING | | ZONE | EASTING | NORTHING |
| C | | | | D | | | |
| E | | | | F | | | |
| G | | | | H | | | |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please refer to the attached BRA map. The boundaries are delineated in red.

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

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| | | | |
| | | | |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

by Mary Van Meter

| | | |
|-----------------|--|---|
| NAME / TITLE | Candace Jenkins, National Register Coordinator | Judith McDonough Boston Landmarks Comm |
| ORGANIZATION | Massachusetts Historical Commission | DATE February 1980 |
| STREET & NUMBER | 294 Washington Street | 617 TELEPHONE 727-8470 |
| CITY OR TOWN | Boston | STATE Massachusetts 02108 |

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE 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 Peterson R. Weslowski 4/14/80

TITLE Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission DATE

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER | |
| <u>[Signature]</u> KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER | DATE <u>6/16/80</u> |
| ATTEST: <u>Patrick Andrews</u> CHIEF OF REGISTRATION | DATE <u>6/10/80</u> |

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED MAY 13 1980
DATE ENTERED JUN 16 1980

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8,9 PAGE 1

8) Significance-continued

of the Boston School Committee. Tufts University remembers him for his help in raising \$100,000 for the establishment of the College.

After the departure of the Rev. Skinner, the Fifth Universalist Society had several other pastors until 1862 when it merged with another congregation and vacated the building. The church was bought by the Hebrew congregation Ohabei Shalom in February 1863 for \$15,000, a very low price no doubt due to the economic slump during the Civil War. It remained a synagogue until 1887 when the Young Women's Christian Association purchased it for \$27,500. In 1889 the building became the property of the Scotch Presbyterian Church. This was the building's last religious association.

Because of its location in Boston's spreading entertainment area, the house eventually hosted such dissimilar enterprises as a prohibition era speakeasy, the Rio Casino and Lido Venice nightclubs, the Boston Ballroom and offices of several of Boston's theatrical booking agents. The use of the building for other than its originally designed purposes is an early example of adaptive use without destroying the exterior. Since 1958 the Charles Playhouse has been in residence in the building producing classic as well as avant garde plays by its own residential company and also serving as stage to visiting theatrical groups.

9) Bibliography-continued

Suffolk County Deeds, Lib 437, f. 84; Lib. 823, f. 230; Lib. 1779, f. 408; & Lib. 1874, f. 121

Thayer, Rev. Thomas B. The Life, Labors and Character of Rev. Otis A. Skinner, D. C.
Boston, 1861.

The TRUMPET, Boston, August 25, 1838.

Van Meter, Mary. "Bay Village of the Church Street District," Proceedings of the Bostonian Society, Boston 1969.

_____. "A New Asher Benjamin Building in Boston," DRUMLIN Newsletter, January 1978, Vol. 3, no. 1.

_____. "A New Asher Benjamin Church in Boston," Journal, Society of Architectural Historians, October 1979.



Charles Playhouse
 78 Warrenton St. **MAY 13 1980**
 Boston, Ma.

Scale: 1" = 100'
 UTM References: 19/329800/4690430





MAY 13 1980

JUN 16 1980

Property Charles Playhouse

ref no 20000676

State ma - Suffolk

Working Number 5-13-80 1325

TECHNICAL

CONTROL

Photos 3

Maps 2

This building is of major architectural significance as only of only three churches in Boston designed by Asher Benjamin & the only one in the Greek Revival style. An innovation in the design is the original storefronts constructed on the first floor. Built in 1838-39 in brick, it was designed as the first permanent home of the Fifth Universalist Church. It has served a variety of religious and secular purposes and is now a playhouse.

HISTORIAN

accept
Patrick Andrew
6/10/80

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

ARCHEOLOGIST

OTHER

HAER

Inventory _____

Review _____

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

BRANCH CHIEF

KEEPER

National Register Write-up _____

Send-back _____

Entered JUN 16 1980

Federal Register Entry 2.3.81

Re-submit _____



VANITIES

THE CHARLES PLAYHOUSE

THE CHARLES PLAYHOUSE

THREE

CHARLES
PLAYHOUSE

ONE WAY

Charles Playhouse - Left flank

Suffolk Co. MA

View from south east

JUN 16 1980

Fifth Universalist Church
Charles Playhouse (use for publication)

74-78 Warrenton St., Boston, MA
Suffolk County

Photo by & Negative filed at
Mary Van Meter, 10 Byron St., Boston, MA
1978

#1 of 3

MAY 13 1980



VANITIES

THREE

CHARLES
PLAYHOUSE

THE CHARLES PLAYHOUSE

THE CHARLES PLAYHOUSE

Charles Playhouse - Main facade

Suffolk Co. ma
view from northeast

MAY 13 1980

#2 of 3

JUN 16 1980

Fifth Universalist Church
Charles Playhouse (Use for Publication)

74-78 Warrenton St., Boston, MA
Suffolk County

Photo by & Negative filed at: 1978
Mary Van Meter, 10 Byron St., Boston, MA



**SMASH NEW YORK HIT
VANITIES**

THE CHARLES PLAYHOUSE

**CHARLES
PLAYHOUSE**

**TOW ZONE
NO-PARKING
LOADING
ZONE**

Suffolk Co. Ma
(Charles Playhouse) - oblique view Southerly
direction. Small house on left with pitched
roof is Lyndeboro Place in Bay Village, 1838.

JUN 16 1980

MAY 13 1980

Fifth Universalist Church
Charles Playhouse (use for publication)

74-78 Warrenton St., Boston, MA
Suffolk County

Photo by and Negative filed at:
Mary Van Meter, 10 Byron St., Boston, MA
1978

#3 of 3

Charles Playhouse
78 Warren St.
Boston, Ma.

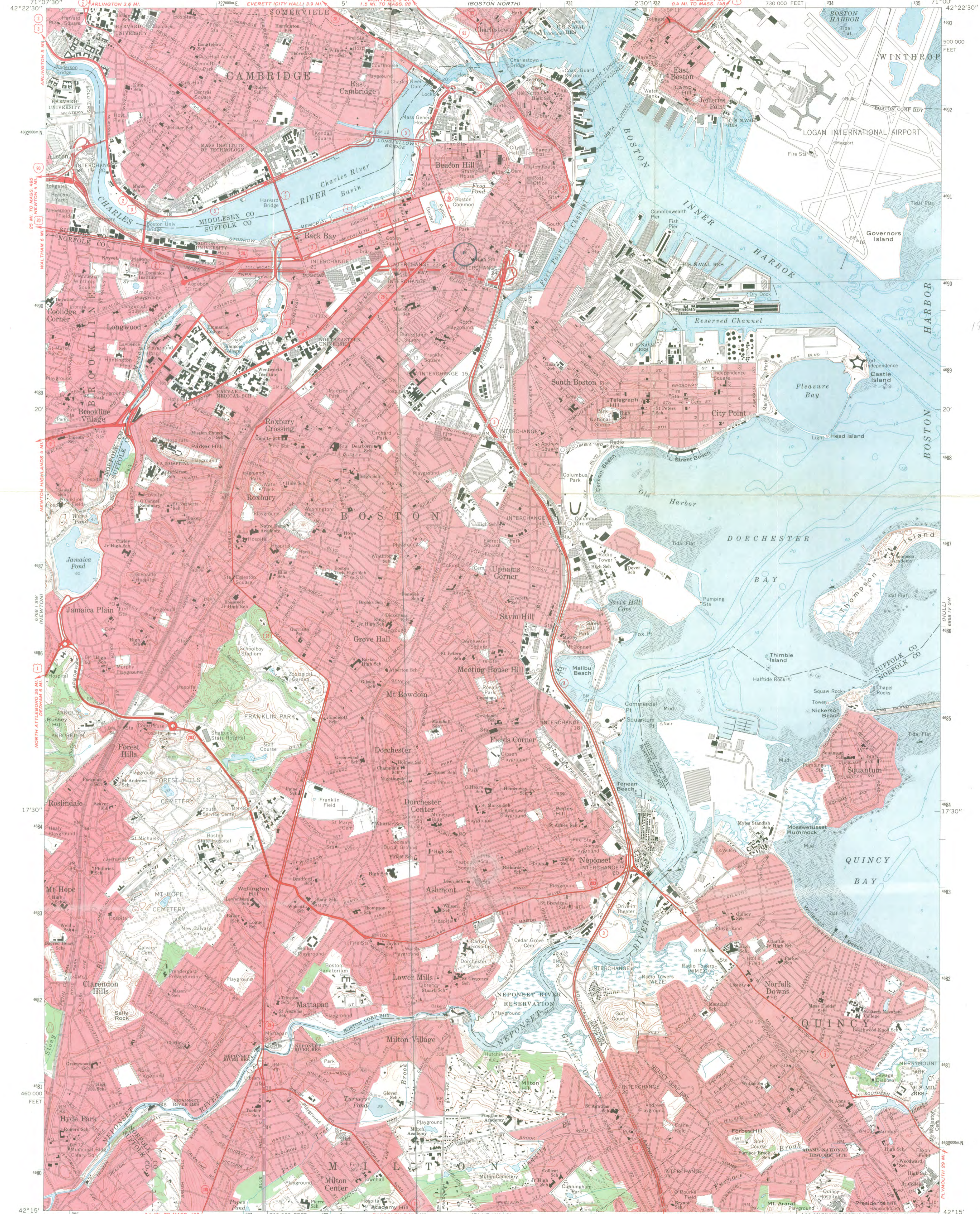


UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Scale: 1"=24,000'
UTM References: 19/329800/4690430

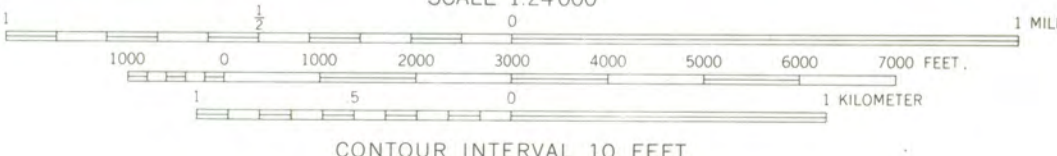
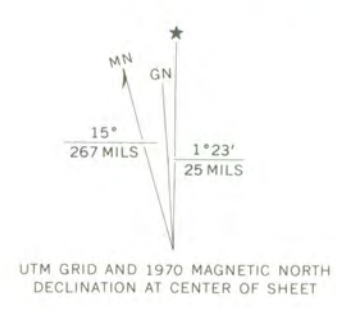
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

BOSTON SOUTH QUADRANGLE
MASSACHUSETTS
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



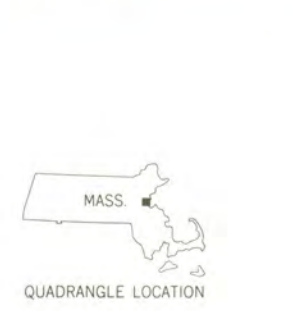
17 329 800 4690 430

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and Massachusetts Geodetic Survey
Topography by planetair surveys 1943. Revised from
aerial photographs taken 1969. Field checked 1970
Selected hydrographic data compiled from USC&GS Charts 246
and 248 (1971). This information is not intended for navigational
purposes
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on Massachusetts coordinate system,
mainland zone
1,000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
zone 19, shown in blue
Boundaries in tidewater areas from information supplied
by Massachusetts Department of Public Works
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER
SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 9.5 FEET

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20242
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, hard surface
Secondary highway, hard surface
Unimproved road
Interstate Route
U.S. Route
State Route
Light-duty road, hard or improved surface

BOSTON SOUTH, MASS.
N4215—W7100/7.5
1970
AMS 6768 1 SE—SERIES V814



JUN 16 1980

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE MASSACHUSETTS

Date Entered JUN 16 1980

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Location</u> |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Colburn, Sarah Foster, House | Cambridge Middlesex County |
| Charles Playhouse | Boston Suffolk County |
| All Saint's Church | Boston Suffolk County |
| Stearns, R. H., Building | Boston Suffolk County |
| Grafton Inn | Grafton Worcester County |

Also Notified

Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Honorable Paul Tsongas
Honorable Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr.
Honorable Brian J. Donnally
Honorable John J. Moakley
Honorable Joseph D. Early

State Historic Preservation Officer
Mrs. Patricia L. Weslowski
Executive Director, Massachusetts
Historical Commission
294 Washington Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

NR

Byers/mjd

6/27/80

For further information, please call the National Register at (202)343-6401.