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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Nix's Mate Daybeacon

other names/site number Nix's Mate channel marker or day mark

2. Location

street & number Nubble Channel, The Narrows, Boston Harbor not for publication

city or town Boston vicinity

state Massachusetts code MA county Suffolk code 025 zip code n/a

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Patsy Friedberg National Register Director 12/4/03
Signature of certifying official/Title Cara H. Metz, State Historic Preservation Officer Date
Massachusetts Historical Commission

State of Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Jack Manti
Signature of certifying official/Title: Captain, US Coast Guard, Federal Preservation Officer, Chief, Office of Civil Engineering Date

State or Federal agency and bureau; Department of Homeland Security, US Coast Guard

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beall 3/18/04

Nix's Mate
Name of Property

Suffolk, MA
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing Noncontributing

_____ building

_____ sites

_____ 1 _____ structures

_____ objects

_____ 1 _____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce: Federal aid to navigation

Transportation

Maritime History

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation: Federal aid to navigation

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite blocks

walls mortise and tenon framing; wood sheathing;

slate shingles and exterior concrete cladding

roof _____

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Section Number 7 Page 1

Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA

Description

The Nix's Mate Daybeacon or channel marker (Figs.1 & 2) is a Federal Aid to Navigation situated atop Nix's Mate, a former island now reduced to a low, one-acre rocky shoal. The purpose of this navigational aid is to warn vessels of one of the most dangerous shoals in the harbor. The Nix's Mate Daybeacon is located at the outer limits of Boston Harbor near the convergence of three major channels including: President Road (the main ship channel) to the north, Broad Sound Channel to the northeast and the Narrows to the northwest. In addition, Nix's Mate is separated from Gallop's Island, 1500 feet to the southwest, by Nubble's Channel. Nix's Mate is surrounded by four islands including: Long Island to the southwest. Deer Island (now connected to the town of Winthrop) to the northwest, Lovell Island, to the northwest as well as Gallop's Island to the southwest.

The Nix's Mate Daybeacon is one of Boston Harbor's most iconic landmarks by virtue of its diminutive scale and distinctive form (Fig.3). Composed of a rectangular granite block base or platform which is surmounted by a truncated, wooden eight-sided pyramid encased in a thin coating of concrete, the Nix's Mate Daybeacon represents a form of navigational aid that is apparently unique within coastal New England, if not the entire eastern seaboard. Boston Marine Society records indicate that portions of the granite base date to construction projects sponsored by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the United States Government, in 1805 and 1834, respectively. In 1841, the structure's wooden pyramidal component burned after being struck by lightning, and was subsequently rebuilt. The wooden pyramid received a thin, protective coating between World Wars I and II.

The exterior walls of the daybeacon's man-made base are composed of ten courses of large granite blocks brought to the island by the Commonwealth and the United States Government during the

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first four decades of the nineteenth century. The interior of the base consists of stone, gravel, and soil fill. The base measures approximately 67 feet by 32 feet and rises to a height of 16 feet. Access to the octagonal pyramid is provided by a granite block stairway at the south side of the base.

Surmounting the granite base is a wooden and cement structure in the shape of a truncated, octagonal pyramid. Each side of the octagonal structure measures 7'6" at a point approximately 3 feet from the bottom of the structure. The sides of the structure narrow as they approach the top of the structure. The daybeacon's six inch cement outer layer is painted black at the top and bottom with a white center band.

The pyramid's hollow interior contains a mortise and tenon structure which is supported by cross-members extending from a center column. Interior walls are sheathed with narrow wooden boards and slate shingles. Evidently, the wooden elements of the present daybeacon date to the pyramidal structure's rebuilding following a fire caused by lightning in July, 1841. Postcard views of this sentinel dating to the early 1900s indicate that the structure's slate shingle sheathing was painted black. Although Boston Harbor historian Edward Rowe Snow dates the application of the cement covering to the World War I era, a sketch of the Nix's Mate Aid to Navigation in a newspaper article dated August 1, 1927, indicates that the pyramidal structure was still covered with slate shingles.

Nix's Mate Daybeacon: Current Conditions

Years of exposure to ocean storms and vandalism has taken its toll on the Nix's Mate Daybeacon's structure. According to Nathaniel B. Shurtleff in Topographical and Historical Description of Boston (1890) " Nix's Mate was a once very respectable island, as far as size is concerned." Eighteenth and early nineteenth century maps of Boston Harbor indicate that the twelve-acre island was characterized by a distinctive, inverted S-shape. Erosion has reduced the island to little more than shoals. The shoals beneath the channel marker, in turn, are

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threatened by erosion. Nix's Mate, like most Boston harbor islands, was composed of boulder clay, not of solid rock and as a result was much easier prey for the waves than are the rock islands at the entrance of the harbor. The most serious problem is the loss of infill at the site which has caused the daybeacon to list approximately 20 degrees. The southeast corner of the granite block base has suffered the worst erosion with the ground level several feet below the top of the granite blocks (Figs.4 & 5). The fill material located within the walls of the stone base are in danger of completely washing away due to the loosening of the granite blocks.

Eventually, the granite block walls will collapse and the pyramidal structure will be washed out to sea. The exterior concrete of the daybeacon has spalled and cracked in a few areas (Fig.6). Within the structure, timber walls exhibit small areas of decay, with the concrete coating exposed behind remnants of wood sheathing and slate shingles. (Fig.7). The upper cross member supports are in good condition and still support the center column. The center column has suffered fire damage in the lower section, decreasing the cross-section area of the column by approximately 40%. The lower cross-member supports are no longer attached to the center column. The "settling" of the structure along with the fires set by vandals has forced the supports to push upwards.

(end)

Nix's Mate

Name of Property

Suffolk, MA

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

MARITIME HISTORY

Period of Significance

1834-1952

Significant Dates

1834, 1841

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

N/a

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Boston Marine Society

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Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA

Statement of Significance

Nix's Mate's historical significance within the annals of Massachusetts maritime history is inextricably bound to early 19th century efforts by the Boston Marine Society, Commonwealth of Massachusetts and later the United States government to create and improve the system of navigational aids marking the main shipping channel to Boston's inner harbor. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, federal and state government officials acknowledged the lobbying efforts of the Boston Marine Society, a charitable organization, by assuming responsibility for the identification and installation of harbor navigational aides. Heretofore efforts to improve the safety of Boston Harbor had been assumed by concerned citizens as well as the Society.

The Nix's Mate Daybeacon, by virtue of its Federalist period origins, symbolizes the watershed era in the history of coastal Massachusetts, New England, and indeed, the entire eastern seaboard of the United States. During this period (1783 to 1830), federal and state governments began to erect light houses, set out buoys and build daybeacons in an effort to insure that commercial activities and military maneuvers would not be impeded by adverse conditions in the new nation's key coastal waterways. In 1804, at the behest of the Boston Marine Society, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased the remnants of Nix's Mate Island and assumed responsibility for the construction of the first daybeacon on Nix's Mate Island. The Commonwealth, in turn, sold the island to the United States Government in 1830. The daybeacon assumed its present form after 1841 when the federal government rebuilt the daybeacon's wooden structure following a fire caused by lightning.

Additionally, the Nix's Mate Daybeacon symbolizes the colorful Colonial era history of its long-vanished host island. Chronicled by Samuel Adams Drake, M. F. Sweetser, Edward Rowe Snow and others, these harbor historians have imbued the Nix's Mate Daybeacon's distinctive form with historical associations linked

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to both the prominent and the obscure who have figured significantly in the saga of Nix's Mate Island's including: Puritan harbor pilots, pirates, sheep farmers and shipwrecked seafarers. The structure called the Nix's Mate Daybeacon satisfies criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places.

Nix's Mate Daybeacon is eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criteria A and C at the local level in the area of maritime history. It is eligible under Criteria A that addresses properties that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. Under this criterion, the day beacon possesses significant historical associations with the development of navigational aids in Boston Harbor, one of the busiest and most historically important shipping and boating areas in the nation. Nix's Mate Island served as an important landmark for mariners during the Colonial period. When, during the early nineteenth century, the surface of the island was near completely washed away, it became imperative to mark the area of the submerged shoal with a manmade structure to alert ships to the danger it presented. The initial attempt to erect a marker was made by the Boston Marine Society in 1805 after it had received funding for the project from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Established by a group of Boston sea captains in 1742 and chartered by the Royal Governor in 1754, the society is the oldest organization of its kind in the United States and counted among its missions the role of "making navigation more safe" for harbor pilots. The base of the current marker is built upon the remnants of structure that the society constructed. Federal involvement in the improvement of the marker at Nix's Mate began in the early 1830s when the government authorized the purchase of Nix's Mate Island and erected a permanent daybeacon there by 1834. The beacon has since served its important function of marking the dangerous shoal on which it is constructed.

Criteria C addresses properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. Under this criterion, the day beacon possesses significance as a rare historic permanent day marker. This unique type of unlit

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navigational aid is characterized by its prominent size and location, which made it readily visible during the daytime to ships entering and exiting Boston Harbor. While a variety of natural features and manmade structures have served as day marks, the most common form is the numbered board of distinctive shape and color used to delineate channels. Buoys and the distinctive paint schemes of lighthouses are also common day marks used in navigation. Relatively few markers like Nix's Mate Daybeacon were erected, and fewer still survive. It features a rectangular granite base that measures 67 x 37 feet and rises some 16 feet above the water. Atop the base is a pyramidal, wood frame structure with concrete walls painted black at the bottom and top and with a white band in the middle. The original wood frame beacon was damaged by fire caused by a lightning strike in 1841 and was reconstructed to its current general form that same year. Some time in the early twentieth century, the original slate shingle exterior of the beacon was covered with a six-inch coat of concrete. While the pyramidal structure is currently listing badly and the granite base shows signs of vandalism, the structure continues to maintain a significant physical presence in the harbor and represents an important local landmark for boaters in the harbor.

The Nix's Mate Daybeacon as a well known Boston Harbor landmark

Despite, or perhaps because of its small scale and distinctive form, the aid to navigation known as the Nix's Mate Daybeacon is one of Boston Harbor's best-known landmarks. In A Book of New England Legends and Folk Lore (1884), Samuel Adams Drake discusses the legend of "the submerged islet called Nix's Mate, over which a lonely obelisk rises out of flowing tides." Drake observes that "no spot within a wide range of the coast is the subject of more eager curiosity to sailors or landsmen, or of more exaggerated conjecture, precisely because to this day its true history remains an enigma." Ann Mackin in Mapping Boston, observes that "many islands crowd Boston Bay-called Massachusetts Bay in colonial times-and guard the entrance to Boston's inner harbor. The islands are a navigational hazard at night or in bad weather, but by day their familiar shapes herald the harbor to incoming vessels and serve as landmarks to guide the sailor."

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Nix's Mate Island originally possessed a distinctive bluff on its northern side which was an important topographical aid to navigation, near the entrance to Boston Harbor. By the early 19th century, the bluff known as North End Point, along with much of its island had been destroyed by the action of the sea, leaving little more than shoals and a partially submerged islet, with no prominent natural feature to warn sailors of the adjacent shoals.

Unlike the relatively numerous New England light houses built during the early 19th century, daybeacons or channel markers represent a rare type of aid to navigation. Less ephemeral than floating buoys, daybeacons seem to have evolved from painted rocks or numbered signs located near shoal-dotted waters. That elements of the Nix's Mate Daybeacon survive from the early-to mid 19th century is miraculous, indeed, given the marker's location in a part of the harbor that is exposed to the open ocean and extreme weather conditions. A fair amount of documentation on the evolution of the Nix's Mate Daybeacon exists to form an understanding of the degree to which its early-to-mid-19th century fabric is still extant.

Origins of the name Nix's Mate

The origin of the island's name is shrouded in myth. According to one popular legend set forth in the *Saturday Evening Gazette* dated September 21, 1890, "the mate of a certain Captain Nix (or Nicks) was executed upon it for killing his master and, that he, at the time of his death insisted upon his innocence, and told the hangman that in proof of this would be the island's destruction by the sea." This assertion is not based on fact as records dating back to as early as the 1630s indicate that no man in the colony was ever executed on Nix's Mate Island for murder or piracy.

According to M. F. Sweetser in *King's Handbook of Boston Harbor* (1888), "another form of the legend states that Nix was a freebooter who sailed into Boston in 1680, his ships well laden with treasures ravished from unarmed ships. Anchoring down the harbor, he and his mate went ashore on the island, on a dark night, buried several bags of coin; after which to keep the

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**Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA**

secret as close as possible, Nix murdered his companion, and buried him also." Deed transactions dating from the 1630s, however, provide evidence that the island was already referred to as Nick's Island.

The earliest reference to Nix's or Nicks Island dates to September 8, 1636 when the Massachusetts Colony Records state that "there is twelve acres of land granted to John Gallop, upon Nixes Island, to enjoy to him & his heirs forever, if the island be so much." The last part of this statement indicates that as early as the 1630s, the island suffered from the effects of erosion and was in danger of being washed out to sea.

John Gallop's ownership of Nix's Mate Island, 1636 -1649

John Gallop, settled in Dorchester as early as 1630, later moving to the North End to be closer to his business of piloting in Boston Harbor. According to Nathaniel Shurtleff, "Gallop was better acquainted with the harbor than any other man of his time." On September 4, 1633, Gallop safely piloted the three hundred ton ship *Griffin* into Boston harbor via a "new way, probably the Black Rock passage." Among the ship's passengers were Reverend John Cotton, Elder Thomas Leverett, and many others, "who afterwards proved to be some of the most desirable of the New England colonists." Gallop, a trusted associate of the Massachusetts Bay Colony's Governor, John Winthrop, reportedly "delivered sums of money and wither goats to the governor's friends." Indeed, their friendship resulted in Winthrop's granting Nix's Mate Island to Gallop as a result of his act of bravery off of Block Island in July, 1636. John Gallop, with his sons John and Samuel, and his boatmen, "heroically fought fourteen Indians, and rescued the body of his friend John Oldham, whom the savages had most cruelly murdered."

In addition to Nix's Mate Island, Gallop's properties at the time of his death in 1649 included his North End house and wharf, four acres of meadow land on Boston Harbor's Long Island, and Gallop's Island. No records are known to exist documenting the sale of Nix's Island by Gallop's heirs. Best evidence suggests that Gallop used Nix's Mate as a source of sustenance for his sheep.

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Nix's Mate Daybeacon
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According to Nathaniel Shurtleff, Nix's Mate Island once had enough acreage "to answer for pasturage ground." Pasturage was a common use for Boston harbor islands as well as remote peninsulas extending into the harbor from the main land (i.e. Pullen's Point in Winthrop, Dorchester Neck (later South Boston) and Columbia Point in Dorchester).

Of Pirates and Pasturage: Nix's Mate's ownership and usage: 1670 to 1770

During the 1650s and 1660s, Nix's Mate Island was owned by Edward Tyng. A member of Boston's landed gentry, not a merchant, Tyng was an heir to a vast real estate empire encompassing considerable landholdings in northeastern Middlesex County. The town of Tyngsborough was named in honor of his family. On August 16, 1669, Tyng sold the island to a Joseph Rock. In 1683, Rock deeded three quarters of the island to Edward Bromfield for six pounds. Around the time of Bromfield's purchase, Nix's Mate Island became associated with piracy.

While colorful, unsubstantiated stories abound suggesting that Nix's Mate Island contained pirate's buried treasure, there is more evidence of the island's late 17th and early 18th century use as a place to display the lifeless bodies of pirates as a warning to would-be criminals. Additionally, the island gained notoriety as a place for pirate interments.

M. F. Sweetser observes that "for upwards of a century, Massachusetts Bay was infested with freebooters who plundered passing vessels at will, and were sure of a short shrift and stern retribution when caught." Pirate hangings conducted near the low tide mark of coastal and island beaches had a long history, dating back centuries in England "to stress the fact that their crimes had been committed within the jurisdiction of the Lord High Admiral.... Above the tide line, the civil courts took over." In Under the Black Flag David Cordingly notes that "on the east coast of America pirates were executed at Charleston, South Carolina, at Williamsburg in Virginia, and at Newport, Rhode Island, but it was at Boston that the seamen would have seen most evidence of pirate hanging." Regarding executed

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pirates in general and William Fly in particular, an article in the *Boston News-Letter* dated July 14, 1726 notes that "their Bodies were carried in a small boat, to a small Island called Nick's Mate...where the above said Fly was hung up in Irons, as a Spectacle for the Warning of others, especially Seafaring men; the other two were buried there."

Samuel Adams Drake observed that "following the repulsive custom of erecting the public gibbet at the entrance to a town or a village, where the stark bodies of condemned malefactors were the first objects seen by all who passed in or out, it was usual to hang in chains condemned pirates at the entrance to a port, to signal a like warning to those who followed the sea as their highway... It followed that the stranger who passed underneath one of these ensigns of terror could have no doubt that he had entered a Christian land, since the administration of justice according to its most civilized forms confronted him upon its very threshold."

After the 1720s, Nix's Mate's returned to its traditional use as pasturage rather than as a show case for executed pirates. In 1735, the *New England Courant* carried an advertisement of sixteen lines for Nix's Mate as a place suitable for grazing. A James Gardner's ownership of the island may have commenced shortly after the appearance of the *Courant's* advertisement.

Nix's Mate during the ownership of Adam and Thomas Knox, 1761-1805.

James Gardner sold Nix's Mate to Adam Knox on May 30, 1761 and remained under the control of the Knox family until 1805. On September 13, 1805, Adam's son Thomas Knox sold "a certain small island called by the Name of Nick's mate together with all the flats, beach and Stones thereon" to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for \$400.

Like the island's first owner, harbor pilot John Gallop, Thomas Knox had an intimate knowledge of Boston harbor, serving as the keeper of Boston Light from 1783 until 1811. Built as early as 1716, Boston light had provided a guiding beacon at the entrance

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to Boston harbor until it was destroyed by the British during the American Revolution. Reconstructed in 1783, Boston Light was acquired by the federal government in 1791. Like the reconstruction of Boston Light, the initial construction of Nix's Mate Daybeacon by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1805 is indicative of the new role assumed by government regarding the installation and maintenance of navigational aids in coastal waters.

The Boston Marine Society and its role as an advocate for Boston harbor navigational aides during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

The Boston Marine Society was founded by Boston captains on June 1, 1742. Originally called The Fellowship Club, the group's membership was limited to "those who then or in the past had commanded vessels."

In 1754, the Fellowship Club received a charter from the Royal Governor enabling the group to "make navigation more safe " and to relieve members of their families in poverty or other "adverse accidents in life." In 1809, the Society changed its name officially to the Boston Marine Society.

The Nix's Mate Daybeacon owes its existence to the charitable mission of the Boston Marine Society. The earliest known recorded discussion regarding the need for a "monument" to alert sailors to the shoals was in 1803, at the regular meeting of the Boston Marine Society. The construction of a channel marker or "monument" on Nix's Mate in 1805 was part the Boston Marine Society's mission to make Boston Harbor more safe for mariners and their vessels.

Beginning around 1800, John Foster Williams, a member of the Society, commanded America's first revenue cutter, the predecessor to the Coast Guard. Among Williams' accomplishments was the delineation of an accurate chart for Cape Cod Bay. Of particular concern to the Society was the appointment of pilots to see to the safe passage of vessels in and out of the port. Additionally, the construction of lighthouses, and placement of

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buoys and markers was accomplished by the Boston Marine Society during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Indeed, Society lobbying efforts fueled President George Washington's resolve to build a network of lighthouses along the Atlantic coast. In 1789, as president, "Washington urged the first United States Congress to pass legislation taking control of all coastal lighthouses." Under pressure from the president "congress made lighthouses a priority and, in one of its first official acts, created the United States Lighthouse Service." This organization took full responsibility for the nation's navigational aids until 1939.

William A. Baker noted in A History of the Boston Marine Society that "To present day mariners proceeding from the sea to Boston's inner harbor through well-marked channels, the buoys, daybeacons, and lighthouses seem commonplace and are taken for granted. Until 1797 however, there were but four buoys in Massachusetts waters; these were located off the mouth of the Merrimac River. The masters and pilots of vessels entering Boston Harbor had to depend upon the bearings of prominent landmarks to keep them clear of various ledges and shoals". As early as 1783, the Boston Marine Society successfully petitioned to rebuild the lighthouse at the entrance to Boston Harbor. In August, 1792, the Society designated a Committee of five to communicate with Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, requesting that a buoy or buoys be placed at Harding Rocks located about 1.5 miles off shore. On December 6, 1796, General Benjamin Lincoln, Collector of the Port, requested the Society's aid in placing buoys in and around Boston Harbor and a committee of five was subsequently appointed to consider the best location for buoys, as well as the numbers of buoys required, details of their construction, probable cost, etc. In 1797, Congress appropriated \$1600 for sixteen buoys to be placed in and near the harbor of Boston. Constructed of 5-foot wooden staves bound with iron hoops, these first buoys were in the form of a truncated cone and were moored with the larger end up. Not surprisingly, these wooden buoys deteriorated quickly, and the need for strong and more durable beacons became evident. Perhaps it is not farfetched to surmise that the truncated pyramidal structure of Nix's Mate Daybeacon evolved from the early buoys' truncated conical forms.

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On December 6, 1803, the Boston Maritime Society's Nix's Mate Committee reported to the Congress of the United States regarding the dangerous conditions at an "Island called Nix's Mate". Appealing to Congress' concern for the "Commercial prosperity of the United States", the committee recommended that certain improvements be made to the island. The committee noted that the former island known as Nix's Mate " is now reduced to a small heap of sand with a few Rods of the original surface continually decreasing and undermined by Sea and surrounded by a body of Rocks which originally the foundation and now extending on all sides more than half a mile into the Channels, this Island serves as a landmark to all Vessels coming in through Broad Sound & ships passing through the main channel must necessarily go very near it. To preserve the remnant of this Island from total destruction is the object of this representation."

The committee advocated that a "sufficiently strong Stone Wall " should be constructed round the remains of said Island and for placing thereon a Beacon." The committee noted the willingness of Nix's Mate's owner, Thomas Knox "to cede said Island to the United States" for the purposes of erecting such a wall. The committee noted that if the island was allowed to deteriorate any further, no buoys or beacons could be effectively placed in the area to warn sailors of the shoals.

The Role of the Commonwealth in the early history of the Nix's Mate Daybeacon (1804 to 1830)

Although the Congress of the United States declined to act on the Boston Marine Society's request for the government's assistance with preserving the island, the Senate of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was more receptive to financing the construction of the stone wall on Nix's Mate. On June 22, 1804 the Senate authorized "a sum not exceeding three thousand dollars" to be issued to the Treasurer of the Boston Marine Society to cover the costs of the construction project. The next day, the Governor and Council appointed Ozias Goodwin "to superintend the building of a Stone Wall to secure the island called Nicks Mate." During the spring of 1805 the Society's committee made a site visit to Nix's Mate, recommending that " a strong stone wall must be built

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Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA

around the remains of the same, sixty feet by thirty, not less than fifteen feet high, and to average six feet thick." The dimensions of the present rectangular base possess measurements that are similar to those of the early 19th century stone wall. The Boston Marine Society recommended that "inclosing what earth was above the high water mark, with a stone wall 64 feet long, 31 feet wide, 16 high and 6 feet thick, secured at the corners with copper staples in such a manner as they think will make the whole work permanent and useful." Furthermore, the Society advised that "a column be set at middle of the stone basement--which column is 32 feet above the Wall etc."

The possibility remains that some of the present base's stone materials were part of Nix's Mate's stone wall that was completed in 1805-1806. While the stone wall was being constructed, the Commonwealth paid Thomas Knox \$400 "a certain small island known and called by the name of Nick's mate together with all the flats, beach and stones thereon". "The veteran pilot (Thomas) Knox is credited in a *Boston Gazette* article dated July 8, 1841 with laying out the first buoys in Boston Harbor in 1804. The article implies that there was a link between the installation of aides to navigation in Boston Harbor and the erection of the beacon on Half Way Rock, off Marblehead in 1804.

Nix's Mate, both the island and the channel marker, figures but little within the annals of Boston Harbor's history between the time of the Commonwealth's purchase of the island from Thomas Knox in 1805 and the island's sale to the United States Government in 1832. In 1810, the General Court passed an act "to protect the monument and to prevent the removal of rocks, sand, clay or gravel from the island under a penalty now in force." At that time, in addition to the column-topped stonewall marker, "a black buoy numbered 9" was located at the edge of the shoal "as a warning to mariners, and a guide to a change of course to a southeasterly direction through the Narrows." In 1816, the Boston Marine Society was alerted to the fact that "certain persons were found taking Ballast or Stones from said place (Nix's Mate)." The Society warned that the thieves would be "prosecuted as the Law directs." The presence of a marker on Nix's Mate is indicated on Alexander Wadsworth's map of Boston Harbor dated 1817. The John

(continued)

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA

G. Hale's Map of 1830, shows a marker that, despite the diminutive scale of its delineation, clearly depicts a small vertical form atop a rectangular component at the northeastern-most tip of shoals extending eastward from Long Island. The records of the Boston Maritime Society indicate that the marker on Nix's Mate was a stone wall until the early 1830s. At a trustee meeting on December 6, 1831 an offer to construct a "monument" on Nix's Mate was voiced publicly for the first time. It was voted "that a petition be presented to Congress for appropriations of seven hundred and fifty dollars, for completing the Spindle on Minots Ledge and one thousand dollars for building the monument on Nix's Mate with stone."

Ownership of Nix's Mate by the United States Government, 1830 to the Present

At a quarterly meeting held on February 4, 1832, reference was made to the United States' acquisition of Nix's Mate two years earlier (a search of Suffolk County grantee listings did not yield the federal government's deed of purchase from the Commonwealth).

The use of the term monument in Boston Maritime Society records suggests that the trustees intended a relatively sophisticated architectural statement to mark the shoals at Nix's Mate. Does the daybeacon's timeless, pyramidal form reflect Jacksonian America's rising interest in Egyptian design? Was the daybeacon's design a conscious effort to evoke eternal Egypt in a manner similar to Solomon Willard's granite obelisk (1825-1842) commemorating the Battle of Bunker Hill? The answers to these questions are not entirely clear. In the case of the monument at Nix's Mate, design intentions were almost certainly predicated on the practical realities of location and site rather than an interest in up-to-date historicism. Apparently, a pyramid atop a high rectangular stone base was deemed distinctive and permanent enough to alert mariners to the dangers of the shoals. Indeed, a pyramidal form has been associated with this site for over 160 years.

(continued)

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Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA

Best evidence suggests that the present daybeacon's base is composed primarily of granite blocks dating from the federal government's mid-1830s construction of a platform or base for the "monument" along with stones that were part of the 1805-1806 wall erected under the supervision of the Boston Marine Society. The possibility remains that the base's materials came from the famous quarries of Quincy, Massachusetts. Beginning in 1825, granite was hauled from the quarries to a wharf on the Neponset River for shipment to various construction project sites in and around Boston Harbor, including George's Island. Situated just to the southwest of Nix's Mate, construction work on the island's granite Fort Warren began in 1834, shortly after the federal government's work on the channel marker at Nix's Mate.

The Nix's Mate daybeacon's wooden interior structure apparently contains elements dating from its rebuilding during the 1840s. In early July, 1841, lightning struck the daybeacon that had been erected by the federal government during the mid 1830s. According to an article in the *Boston Gazette* dated July 8, 1841 "the monument or beacon on Nix's Mate, between Long Island and Gallup's Island...was struck by lightning on Wednesday afternoon or night, and considerably injured, being completely split open. It is also much blackened with smoke and was probably set on fire, which was extinguished by the rain. This monument is of wood, of course, and is a conspicuous object in passing up or down the harbor."

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Nix's Mate Daybeacon had become a popular subject for artists intent on emphasizing the more picturesque, idiosyncratic aspects of Boston Harbor. The "conspicuous object" described in the July 8, 1841 *Boston Gazette* article was sketched for guidebook illustrations and newspaper articles, photographed for post cards and appears in a late 19th century oil painting in the collection of the Boston Marine Society entitled "Sloop off Nix's Mate." During the 1880s, M. F. Sweetser in *King's Handbooks of Boston* (Fig. 8) described the fabled channel marker as an "ominous looking beacon", "it is a massive piece of copper-riveted masonry 40 feet square and 12 feet high (with stairs on one side), upon whose top stands a black wooden pyramid, 20 feet high. A curving shoal runs

(continued)

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Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA

half a mile south-westward from the Nix's Mate beacon, and would be the most dangerous point in the Bay, were it not for the high black pyramid."

Determining the date of the concrete sheathing's application to the Daybeacon is problematic due to the fact that United States Coast Guard files only date to the late 1960s. Although Edward Rowe Snow notes that the daybeacon acquired its six-inch concrete coating "around the time of World War I", best evidence indicates that the pyramid's dark slate shingle sheathing remained exposed to the elements until at least the late 1920s (Figs 9 & 10). A sketch of the daybeacon entitled "Nix's Mate Today" in the collection of the Bostonian Society which accompanies a newspaper article dated August 1, 1927, clearly indicates that the slate shingles had yet to be obscured by concrete (Fig.11).

Although the shoals and shallows of Boston Harbor are currently well marked by a system of buoys, Nix's Mate remains relevant as a navigational aid in Boston Harbor. A familiar sight to recreational boaters, preservationists, and harbor activists, the Nix's Mate Daybeacon is routinely used by small boaters as a fixed structure to determine their location. Broken down boaters frequently seek help by telling the coast guard that they were near "that black and white structure" off of Deer Island. An image of the structure even serves as the logo for the Friends of the Boston Harbor Islands, a non-profit organization whose mission is to educate the public about natural and man-made aspects of the islands and to advocate for the preservation of buildings, structures and sites associated with these islands. Against all odds, the Nix's Mate Daybeacon has survived storms, vandalism and periodic neglect to provide evidence of early 19th- to mid-19th century efforts by the Boston Marine Society, Commonwealth of Massachusetts and United States Government to insure the safety of mariners in Boston Harbor.

(end)

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Section Number 9 Page 1

Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 9 Page 2

Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA

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Waldrup

(end)

Nix's Mate
Name of Property

Suffolk, MA
County, State

10. Geographical Data

Acres of Property less than one acre

UTM References See continuation sheet.

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1.	19	339760	4688280	3.			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2.				4.			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

— See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Edward Gordon, consultant, with Betsy Friedberg, NR Director, MHC

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date February 2003

street & number 220 Morrissey Boulevard telephone 617-727-8470

city or town Boston state MA zip code 02125

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name United States Government/ U.S. Coast Guard

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1

Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Listing

The Daybeacon's area of 67 x 32 feet are the actual dimensions of the structure, that rests upon a one-acre shoal in Boston Harbor. The boundary is the mean low-tide mark of the shoal.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is the historical setting traditionally associated to the Daybeacon.

(end)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Nix's Mate Daybeacon
Boston (Suffolk), MA

Section number photo Page

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographer: Edward Gordon, December 2002
Negatives with photographer.

1. Southeast corner of Nix's Mate, looking northwest
2. Closeup of stone steps at northwest corner of granite block platform
3. Detail: stone steps at southwest corner
4. Wave action on east face of platform
5. South face of platform
6. Close up view of tower
7. Looking north, Boston skyline at left
8. Looking north, Deer Island at right
9. East face, looking west
10. Detail of stone stairs at southwest corner of granite block platform
11. Nix's Mate
12. Looking east
13. Looking northeast
14. Pyramidal day marker, note lean to northwest
15. Nix's Mate

(end)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Nix's Mate Daybeacon
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Suffolk

DATE RECEIVED: 2/04/04 DATE OF PENDING LIST:
DATE OF 16TH DAY: DATE OF 45TH DAY: 3/19/04
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 04000189

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 3/18/04 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in the
National Register**

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



Boston Harbor

Nix's mate

Roll: 16543

FR: 15A

Southeast corner
looking northwest

(1)



Nix's Math

Dec. 2002

Roll: 16543

FR: 8A

Close-up of stone
steps at north
west corner of
granite block
platform

(2)



Boston Harbor

Hix's Mate

Dec 2002

Roll: 16543

FR: 10A

Detail: stone steps
at south west corner.

(3)



Postmaster

Mix & Mate

Dec 2002

Roll: 16543

Fr: 25A

(4)

Place action on east
face of platform



Nix's Mats

Dec. 2002

Roll: 16543

PR: 13A

South face of
platform

(5)



Boston Harbor Nix's Mate

Dec 2002

Roll: ~~155~~ 16543

FR: 4A

(6)



Boston Harbor

Hix's Mati

Dec. 2002

Roll: 16544

FRS: 16A + 17A

Looking north
w/ Deer Island
facility at right

(8)



Boston Harbor

Nix's Mate
Dec. 2002

Roll: 165-13
FR: Z1A

EAST FACE of
Nix's Mate
Looking west

(9)



Boston Harbor Nix's Mate

Dec. 2002

Roll: 16544

FRS: 20A

Detail of flight 4
stone stairs at
southwest corner
of granite block
platform

(10)



Boston
Harbor

Hix's Mate
Dec. 2002

Roll: 16544

FR: 13A

(11)



Boston Harbor

Nix's Mate

Dec 2002

Roll: 16544

Frs 32A, 33A

Looking east

(12)



Boston Harbor

Hix's Mats

Dec. 2002

Roll: 16544

FPS: 28A + 29A

(13)

looking northwest



Boston Harbor

Nix's Mate Dec. 2002

Row: 16544

FR: 15A

(14)

Note lack of pyramidal
stage marker to
the northwest



Boston
Harbor

Hix's Mats
Dec. 2002

Roll: 16543

FR: 9A

15

C.M.

RECEIVED

MAR 21 2002

MASS. HIST. COMM



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

SENATOR ROBERT E. TRAVAGLINI

SUFFOLK AND MIDDLESEX
DISTRICT
ROOM 511
TEL: (617) 722-1634
FAX: (617) 722-1076

SENATE MAJORITY WHIP

March 18, 2002

Ms. Cara Metz, Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Blvd.
Dorchester, MA 02125

Dear Director,

I am writing to you in full support of the application submitted by Edward W. Gordon on behalf on the National Register Nomination for the Nix's Mate Daybeacon, located in Boston Harbor.

Nix's Mate has a major historical significance within the Massachusetts maritime community and Unlike the relatively numerous New England light houses built during the early nineteenth century, daybeacons or channel markers represent a rare type of aid to navigation. Because most daybeacons evolved from painted rocks or numbered signs, it is even more special that Nix's Mate has survived through the centuries.

I strongly support Nix's Mate National register Nomination, which is of important historical significance to the residents of Boston and the North Shore, and ask for your favorable consideration. If you have any questions relative to this application, please contact me any time.

Sincerely,



ROBERT E. TRAVAGLINI
Senate Majority Whip

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

2100 Second Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20593-0001
Staff Symbol: G-SEC-3
Phone: (202) 267-6034
Fax: (202) 267-4219

16475
DEC 2 2003



Mr. Michael Flaherty, President
Boston County Council
1 City Hall Plaza, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02201

Dear Mr. Flaherty:

The United States Coast Guard (USCG) has determined that Nix's Mate Day Beacon located in Suffolk County, MA is eligible as a historic property for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Enclosure (1) is our nomination proposal of Nix's Mate Day Beacon to the NRHP. As part of this nomination process, we are seeking your comments.

This is our official notice to you that we have submitted an individual NRHP nomination for Nix's Mate Day Beacon to your State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) for review and approval. This action is being performed pursuant to the authorities contained in Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and the National Park Service regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part, 60.9(c).

Please provide any comments within 45 days from the date your office receives this letter. If we receive no response from your office within 45 days, we will assume you have no comments. Thank you in advance for your assistance in this matter. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Kebby Kelley at (202) 267-6034.

Sincerely,

JAY MANIK
Captain, U.S. Coast Guard
Federal Preservation Officer
Chief, Office of Civil Engineering
By direction

Enclosure: (1) Nomination Package for Nix's Mate Day Beacon

Copy: Mr. Richard Ferrino, Friends of Boston Harbor Islands (w/o encl)
Mr. Don Klima, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (w/o encl)

E C . I S U E (2)



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Massachusetts Historical Commission

December 5, 2003

Capt. Jay Manik
United States Coast Guard
Federal Preservation Officer
Chief, Office of Civil Engineering
2100 Second Street, SW
Washington, DC 20593-0001

Re: Nix's Mate Day Beacon, Boston Harbor

Dear Capt. Manik:

Enclosed please find a signed copy of the National Register nomination for Nix's Mate, approved by the Massachusetts SHPO, prior to the Coast Guard's submission to the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination was reviewed at the Commission and found satisfactory for submission.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Philip Bergen".

Philip Bergen
Preservation Planner
Massachusetts Historical Commission

Enclosure: Nix's Mate National Register nomination forms

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

2100 Second Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20593-0001
Staff Symbol: G-SEC-3
Phone: (202) 267-6034
Fax: (202) 267-4219
Email: kkelley@comdt.uscg.mil



16475
JAN 30 2004

MEMORANDUM

From: *Jay Manik*
Jay Manik, CAPT
COMDT (G-SEC)

Reply to: COMDT (G-SEC-3)
Attn of: Ms. Kebby Kelley
(202) 267-6034

To: Ms. Carol Shull, Keeper of National Register
National Park Service

Subj: NOMINATION OF NIX'S MATE DAYBEACON IN BOSTON, MA, TO THE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES (NRHP)

1. In accordance with Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) is providing an individual NRHP nomination form (enclosure (1)) for the Nix's Mate Daybeacon in Boston, MA, for your approval. Based upon the information contained in the nomination, the USCG has determined that Nix's Mate Daybeacon is eligible for the NRHP.
2. Comments from the appropriate local official were solicited (enclosure (2)). However, no comments were received.
3. If you require any additional information, please feel free to contact Ms. Kebby Kelley at (202) 267-6034.

#

Enclosures: (1) Nomination Package Nix's Mate Daybeacon
(2) Letter to Local Official

Copy: Ms. Judith B. McDonough, MA State Historic Preservation Officer (w/encls)
Don Klima, ACHP; Dwight Picaithley, NPS (w/o encls)