

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 FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

R. H. Stearns Building

AND/OR COMMON

Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 140 Tremont Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

9th

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE

025

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

The Stearns Company

STREET & NUMBER

84 State Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts 02109

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Suffolk County Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Pemberton Square

CITY, TOWN

Boston

MASSACHUSETTS

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Inventory of the Historic Assets of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

DATE

July 1979

FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL ☐DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Massachusetts Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Boston

MA 02108

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

—EXCELLENT
—GOOD
—FAIR

—DETERIORATED
—RUINS
—UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

—UNALTERED
X—ALTERED

CHECK ONE

X—ORIGINAL SITE
—MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The R.H. Stearns building is located in Boston's mercantile district at the intersection of Tremont Street and Temple Place. The building is adjacent to historic Boston Common (NR) and is in proximity to the Washington Street retail district, the Beacon Hill (NR) residential district and Boston's theatre district.

The R.H. Stearns Department Store, an example of restrained Beaux Arts classical style, was erected in 1909 as a ten story building with a high ornamental parapet. In the late twenties, an additional floor was added behind the parapet walls. This three bay by twelve bay, free standing, flat roofed, steel frame structure is faced in limestone, granite and brick. The two dressed facades facing Tremont Street and Temple Place are primarily limestone. The major entrance to the store faces the Boston Common with an additional entrance at the center of the building along Temple Place. The facades are divided into three sections consisting of a two story base, a central and an upper section.

The Tremont Street facade (northwest) is three bays wide stressing a vertical organization of fenestration beginning with the elaborate storefront and culminating in round arched windows visually connecting the ninth and tenth floors. At base section, in the street level two full height display windows flank each side of the main entrance. A cast iron marquee detailed in Beaux Arts tradition overhangs the main entrance. Bronze letters, affixed to the marquee, identify R.H. Stearns and Company. A handsomely detailed projecting balcony, supported on decorative brackets, covers the entrance at the level of the second story windows. The windows, both double bay, double hung, and encased in cast iron, are accented with carved stone work on either side, and balustrades below.

A projecting cornice, beneath which the R.H. Stearns logo is affixed, separates the base from the sixth story central section. In this central section, a three-double bay window pattern is regularly maintained. A similar, though more elaborate cornice sets off the top portion of the building. At the top level windows are full height and arched with carved keystones to provide a magnificent view of the Common, Beacon Hill, and Back Bay. A decorative balcony adorns the middle bay. Above the arched ninth floor windows a projecting and handsomely detailed cornice supports a balustraded parapet.

The Temple Place facade (southwest) is twelve bays wide with the five westernmost bays projecting slightly and detailed like the Tremont Street facade. A similarly articulated marquee identifies the pedestrian entrance in the sixth bay. A service entrance is located at the rear of the facade.

The remaining two elevations do not have street exposure and are treated simply. The southeast elevation abuts another building for five stories; the upper five stories are faced with buff brick and contain regularly spaced rectangular window openings. The northeast elevation is also faced with buff brick with the exception of its northernmost bay which is faced with limestone. It continues the vertical fenestration pattern culminating in a round arch of the facade but lacks the detail.

The exterior of the Stearns Building remains unaltered with three minor exceptions: the loss of the bronze spread eagle flagpole finial which was donated by R.H. Stearns to the U.S. Navy for the original masthead of the USS Massachusetts, the removal of the glass canopies which originally adorned the Tremont Street entrance marquee, and the replacement of 1/1 sash with 2/2.

The building interior was designed for retail use with wide open sales areas. The ground floor sales area was originally most refined in its ornamentation and furnishing with detailed plasterwork and cabinetry. The interior has been constantly changed during the building's use as a department store, as sales departments and tastes changed. The original interior detailing has been removed except for the ground floor display windows and some areas of ornamental ceiling work.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

☐ PREHISTORIC	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	☐ COMMUNITY PLANNING	☐ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	☐ RELIGION
☐ 1400-1499	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	☐ CONSERVATION	☐ LAW	☐ SCIENCE
☐ 1500-1599	☐ AGRICULTURE	☐ ECONOMICS	☐ LITERATURE	☐ SCULPTURE
☐ 1600-1699	☒ ARCHITECTURE	☐ EDUCATION	☐ MILITARY	☐ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
☐ 1700-1799	☐ ART	☐ ENGINEERING	☐ MUSIC	☐ THEATER
☐ 1800-1899	☒ COMMERCE	☐ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	☐ PHILOSOPHY	☐ TRANSPORTATION
☒ 1900-	☐ COMMUNICATIONS	☐ INDUSTRY	☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	☐ OTHER (SPECIFY)
		☐ INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1909

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Parker, Thomas & Rice, architects
Wells Bros. Co., builder

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The R.H. Stearns Building, which retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials and workmanship, is significant for its role in the social and cultural history of Boston, as a significant example of the work of Parker, Thomas and Rice, and as an important example of turn of the century restrained Beaux Arts classical commercial buildings.

The R.H. Stearns Building was designed in 1908-1909. Its architects, Parker, Thomas and Rice, were recognized by contemporary critics as being among Boston's most skillful designers of the early 1900's.

J. Harleston Parker (1873-1930) F.A.I.A., a graduate of Harvard College, studied architecture at M.I.T. and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. On his return to Boston in 1900 he began architectural practice in partnership with Douglas H. Thomas (1872-1915), F.A.I.A., a Johns Hopkins graduate who also trained at M.I.T. and at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. In 1907 (after the design of the Fenway Studios), Arthur Wallace Rice (1869-1938), F.A.I.A., joined the firm, and it was under the name of Parker, Thomas and Rice that most of their well known commissions were executed, chiefly in Boston and in Baltimore.

The firm's major Boston works include the R.H. Stearns Department Store, the 1921 John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Building, the Harvard Club, the Tennis and Racquet Club, and a number of downtown elevator office buildings. Although their work demonstrates an ability to work comfortably in a variety of styles, a marked preference for Neo-classical and Renaissance Revival styles is evident.¹

As noted in the Architectural Record of August 1913, "the store for the R.H. Stearns & Co., is scrupulously simple in its general appearance, and both economical in the amount of ornamentation, and reticent in its effect....one detects the possible influence of a desire on the part of the store owner to be solid and unpretentious but none the less smart-like a good old Boston family."²

The building is an excellent example of restrained Beaux Arts classicism, popular in commercial buildings at the turn of the century. The structural framework and the interior purpose of the R.H. Stearns Building reveals a similar quality in the choice of materials and design. Built with reinforced concrete and structural steel, the building was exemplary of the most current technology. The ceiling detailed in rosettes of terra cotta and plaster, was equipped with one of the first sprinkler systems utilized in the City of Boston.

The R.H. Stearns Store was a special refinement in retailing in American history, and as such has played an important role in the cultural history of Boston. The American department store is largely a product of the years from 1860 to 1910, with several factors besides the example of Bon Marche particularly important in its development. Increased urban population meant that large numbers of people lived within comparatively small areas and were easily able to reach almost any place in town via improved mass transportation systems. Horse-drawn trolleys, charging a reasonable fare, carried many potential customers from every section of town to the point of sale. Also, the lowering of the price

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Notes on the Works of Parker, Thomas, and Rice of Boston and Baltimore,"

Architectural Record, Volume XXXIV, No. 11, August 1913.

Parker, J. Harleston; Thomas, Douglas H; and Rice, Arthur W., Original Plans & Drawings for R. H. Stears, Co., 1908.

Withey, Henry F. and Elise Kathburn, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased), Los Angeles, New Age, 1956.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

~~ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED~~ ~~NOT VERIFIED~~

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 11,106 square feet

QUADRANGLE NAME Boston South

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1"=24,000'

UTM REFERENCES

A 19 330100 4691100

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please refer to the attached map.

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

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Candace Jenkins, National Register Editor

ORGANIZATION

Massachusetts Historical Commission

STREET & NUMBER

294 Washington St.

CITY OR TOWN

Boston

Judith McDonough, Boston Landmarks Comm
Robert Yelton, Bay Consulting Group

DATE

December 1979

TELEPHONE

617-727-8470

STATE

Massachusetts 02108

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

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

Patricia L. Wesbrook

4/14/80

TITLE Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: *Patricia L. Wesbrook*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

6/16/80

DATE

6/12/80

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED MAY 13 1980

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JUN 16 1980

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

8

PAGE

1

of paper beginning about 1830 afforded merchants economical and widely circulated advertising. More available capital during the Industrial Revolution, low taxes, and cheap labor to build and staff stores also contributed to the rise of the department store in America. These factors, together with an improved standard of living and a demand for more and better goods, encouraged many small merchants to create more efficient distribution systems by expanding their operations. When all of these factors came into focus in the late 1860's and early 1870's, the department store had a firm foot hold in America. Although the term "department store" isn't recorded in the language until 1887, when a New York establishment advertised itself as H.H. Heyn's Department Store, the idea of separate departments in stores can be found in print at least 40 years earlier.³

Jordan Marsh, just a block from R.H. Stearns, was the first to develop the department store concept totally. Eban Jordan, in partnership with Benjamin Marsh, opened a wholesale jobbing business at 129 Milk Street in 1851. This was the origin of the present retail business, one which is known for having introduced numerous innovations in the field.

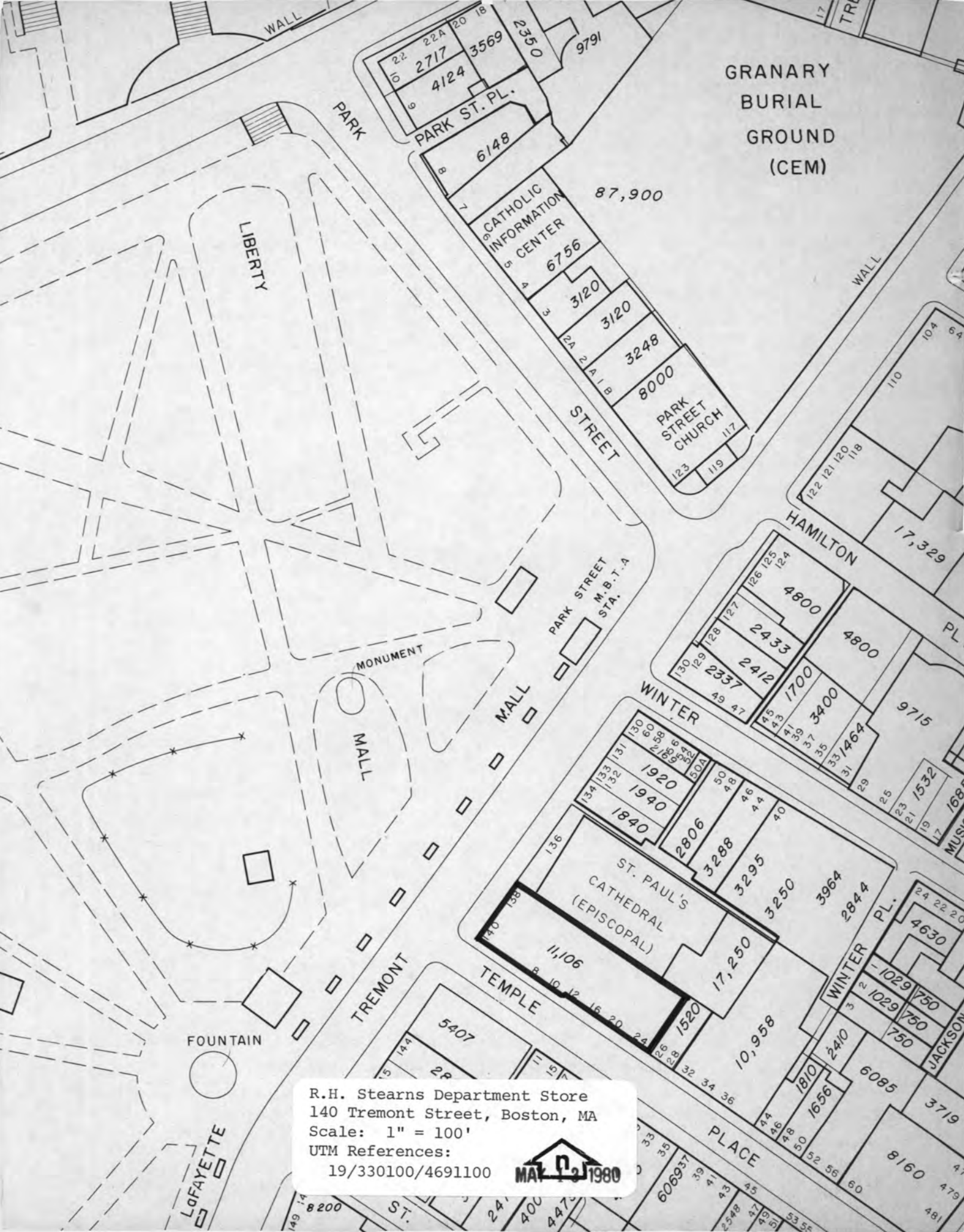
William Filene opened his first retail store in 1851, and subsequently he operated a number of small dry goods stores in and around Boston. In 1890, Filene leased 445-447 Washington Street (Boston, MA) creating a space believed to be the largest of the time devoted exclusively to women's ready-to-wear and accessories.

Founded in 1847 and known from the onset as a prestigious and exclusive store, R.H. Stearns and Co. established traditions of etiquette, style, and selective merchandising throughout the Boston community. While similar to Jordan Marsh in origins and concept, R.H. Stearns carved out a market niche by catering to the carriage trade. Boston, at the turn of the century, was a bustling commercial center where those who attained wealth were not always sure about the "correct" way to spend their money. R.H. Stearns was successful in part because the market had confidence that items for sale in the store had been preselected for their "correctness". The 1909 building was perfectly matched to this concept; advertising the store's understated elegance across the Common to Boston's influential citizens living in Back Bay and on Beacon Hill.

Richard H. Stearns was born in Ashburnham, MA in 1824. He was educated in district schools and at Phillips Academy, Andover, after which he taught school. In 1846, Stearns moved to Boston and worked in the store of C.C. Burr. A little more than a year later he began business for himself, opening a small store under the old Adams House on Washington Street. This was the beginning of the business in which the founder took a vital interest until his death in his 85th year.

In 1977, R.H. Stearns Company closed its Boston store. The building has been purchased and is being rehabilitated for use as housing for the elderly.

1. Whithey, Henry F. and Elise Kathburn, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased), Los Angeles: New Age, 1956.
2. "Notes on the Works of Parker, Thomas and Rice of Boston and Baltimore" Architectural Record, Volume XXXIV, Number II, August, 1913.
3. Hendrickson, Robert. The Grand Emporium, Stein and Day, New York, 1979, pp. 30-33.



GRANARY
BURIAL
GROUND
(CEM)

87,900

CATHOLIC
INFORMATION
CENTER

6756

3120

3120

3248

8000

PARK
STREET
CHURCH

HAMILTON

4800

4800

9715

WINTER

1920

1940

1840

ST. PAUL'S
CATHEDRAL
(EPISCOPAL)

11,106

TEMPLE

5407

FOUNTAIN

R.H. Stearns Department Store
140 Tremont Street, Boston, MA

Scale: 1" = 100'

UTM References:

19/330100/4691100



JUN 16 1980

Property

Stearns, R. H. Building

State

ma-Suffolk

Working Number

*5-13-80 1327**ru/ no 80000671*

TECHNICAL

CONTROL

Photos

2

Maps

*2**Boston*

Built in 1909 by the noted arch. firm of Parker, Thomas, & Rice, this building is eligible **HISTORIAN**
 for architecture as a restrained example of Beaux arts classical commercial architecture. *accept*
 The building is also eligible for commerce for its role in the social/cultural history of Boston - *Patrick Andrews*
 as one of Boston's earliest and finest department stores it set styles and catered to the well-to-do.
 This 12 story, three bay by twelve bay bldg. is steel framed and limestone faced. *6/12/80*

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 _____



Stearns, R. H. Bldg.
R. H. STEARNS CO. BLDG.

140 Tremont St.

Boston, Ma.

Suffolk Co.

Photo by: George DuBois, 1979

Negative filed at: George Macomber Co.

89 Brighton Ave.

Boston, Ma.

View of Tremont St. facade from west.

#102

JUN 16 1980

MAY 13 1980



Stearns, R. H., Bldg.

R. H. STEARNS CO. BLDG.

140 Tremont St. *Suffolk co.* MAY 13 1980
Boston, Ma.

Photo by: George DuBois, 1979

Negative filed at: George Macomber Co.

JUN 16 1980 89 Brighton Ave.
Boston, Ma.

Oblique view of Tremont St. & Temple
Pl. facades from southwest.

#2012



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS, USC&GS, and Massachusetts Geodetic Survey

Topography by planetable 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

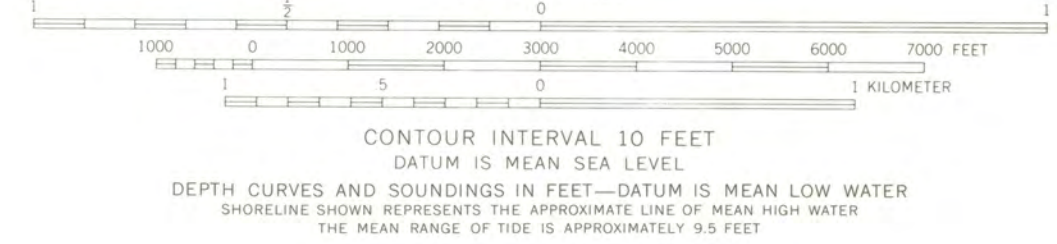
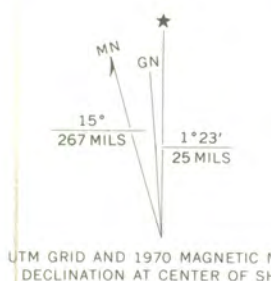
1,000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,

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



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
Interstate Route
U.S. Route
State Route
Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Unimproved road
Interstate Route
U.S. Route
State Route

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



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.