

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED

**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 Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion; Benning Wentworth Mansion

AND/OR COMMON

Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER Little Harbor Road

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Portsmouth

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1st

STATE

New Hampshire

CODE

033

COUNTY

Rockingham

CODE

015

**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  MUSEUM  
 COMMERCIAL  PARK  
 EDUCATIONAL  PRIVATE RESIDENCE  
 ENTERTAINMENT  RELIGIOUS  
 GOVERNMENT  SCIENTIFIC  
 INDUSTRIAL  TRANSPORTATION  
 MILITARY  OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME State of New Hampshire, Division of Parks

STREET & NUMBER

State House Annex

CITY, TOWN

Concord

VICINITY OF

STATE

New Hampshire

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, Registry of Deeds, ETC. Rockingham County Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

County Court House

CITY, TOWN

Exeter

STATE

New Hampshire

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1958

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress, Division of Prints and Photographs

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion stands near the water's edge at the end of Little Harbor Road (off Route 1-A), about 2 miles southeast of the center of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The rambling, 40-room house is fronted by a rolling lawn and nearly surrounded by lilac hedges, said to be the offshoots of the first lilacs brought to America, planted here by Benning Wentworth. At the rear of the house are the remains of the wooden dock used by Wentworth and a stone-lined boat slip constructed during the J. Templeman Coolidge's ownership of the property. To the west of the mansion is a U-shaped carriage shed complex (frame and clapboard, 1 1/2-story, gabled roof with jerkinhead dormers) which also appears to date from the early years of the Coolidge ownership (1883-1954). A boathouse and pool erected for the Coolidge's southeast of the mansion have recently been demolished.

Six acres of the original colonial estate assembled by Benning Wentworth at Little Harbor are still associated with the mansion. An adjacent portion of that estate, about 20 acres of wooded land, is currently leased to the New Hampshire Division of Parks, which now administers the mansion. Four residences have been constructed on portions of the original estate in the vicinity of the mansion, two to the west and two to the southeast. These buildings constitute the only immediate intrusions on the historic setting of the mansion and are screened from it in varying degrees by mature trees and shrubs.

The mansion, a frame and clapboard building, consists of three main sections in a roughly H-shaped arrangement, each two stories high with an attic under a gabled roof, and a one-story wing attached to the rear (north) of the western leg of the H. Windows vary, including 4/4, 6/6, 9/9, and 12/12-pane sash and are flanked by paneled shutters. Simple molded cornices were apparently added to all the windows when the last major section of the mansion was constructed (1750). The huge cellar, which extends under all but the latest (1916) section of the house, once contained stalls for 30 horses.

The oldest portion of the mansion, the western leg of the H, was constructed c. 1695 as a "saltbox" fisherman's cottage, containing a keepingroom, chamber, borning room, pantry, and summer kitchen on the ground floor; the second story loft, originally unfinished, was improved by Wentworth and used as a nursery. Period features in this portion of the mansion include wide board floors with hard wood pegs, corner posts, hewn wooden wall brackets, rawhide latchstrings, hand-planed wall sheathing, a mammoth brick fireplace with beehive oven and ash pit, and a second story smoke closet for meat.

The cottage was enlarged in 1730 (1725 according to some sources) by the addition of a rear (eastern) ell containing a dining room on the first floor and bedrooms on the second. Much of the work on the ell is attributed to local shipwrights, including paneled fireplace walls, gunstock posts, supporting knee beams, weighted doors which close automatically, and rolling floors crowned in the middle.

(Continued)

# 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input 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 c. 1695, 1730, 1750 BUILDER/ARCHITECT not known

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This rambling, roughly H-shaped frame and clapboard building was the home and official headquarters of Benning Wentworth, who in 1741 was appointed by King George II as Royal Governor of the Province of New Hampshire. Wentworth held that position for 26 years, the longest term of any of America's colonial governors. Constructed in three stages (c. 1695, 1730, and 1750), the house provides an interesting example of the development of colonial architectural styles. The chimneypiece in Governor Wentworth's Council Chamber, located in the 1750 wing, is cited by some authorities as the most elaborate such structure carved in the American colonies.

The mansion remained in the Wentworth family until 1816. The last private owner, J. Templeman Coolidge, acquired the building and adjacent land in 1883 as a summer residence; an artist by profession, he restored the house and made some stylistically appropriate additions to it, the latter in 1916. In 1954, Coolidge's widow donated the building, now known as the Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion, to the State of New Hampshire. The house has been put in excellent condition but is relatively unfurnished. Administered by the New Hampshire Division of Parks, it is open to the public daily from Memorial Day through mid-October.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The original section of the Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion, now comprising its western portion, was constructed c. 1695 as a "saltbox" fisherman's cottage. The building was enlarged in 1730 (1725 according to some sources) by the addition of an eastern ell, now the central section of the house. The mansion received a larger and more pretentious addition, the present eastern wing, in 1750 after it was inherited by Benning Wentworth.

Wentworth was born at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on July 24, 1696. He was fifth in his class at Harvard--rank was then determined by the social status of one's family--and graduated in 1715. An active interest in politics came naturally to the young man; his father, John Wentworth, served as Lieutenant-Governor of New Hampshire from 1717 to 1730 and was acting governor for the last five years of his term. Associated in a family mercantile business in Portsmouth, Wentworth represented his town for several years in the provincial Assembly and in 1734 became a king's councillor. Wentworth made the last of several trips to England in 1741,

(Continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 6 acres

### UTM REFERENCES

A 19 358410 4768920  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B                 
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C               

D               

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the national historic landmark designation for the Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion are those of the irregularly-shaped, 6-acre parcel owned by the New Hampshire Division of Parks, lying on the north side of Little Harbor Road in Portsmouth; specific lines are shown in red on the accompanying sketch map (based on a survey prepared for the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development).

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Polly M. Rettig, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by Charles W. Snell, Historian, 10/26/67

ORGANIZATION Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service DATE July 1975

STREET & NUMBER 1100 L Street NW. TELEPHONE 202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN Washington STATE D.C. 20240

## 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 N/A National Historic Landmark

TITLE

DATE

### FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE 4/26/79

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: Bill Lebowich

DATE 1/25/79

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion

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The last and most elegant of the three major sections of the mansion, forming the eastern leg of the H, was constructed in 1750 after Benning Wentworth inherited the property and contains rooms designed to accommodate his official life as Royal Governor of New Hampshire. A paneled doorway flanked by pilasters carrying a triangular pediment gives access to a combined entry hall/waiting room. A short flight of stairs with turned balusters and carved rail leads up to Governor Wentworth's parlor (south side of the hall), a formal room with paneled fireplace wall and wainscotting and a molded cornice; the fireplace is faced with Italian marble; the original wallpaper, a French pattern in red and gold, has faded but is still in good condition. Adjacent to the parlor are the Governor's office and a clerk's room with a windowed closet giving a view of the waiting room.

To the north of the waiting room and at the same level with it is the Governor's Council Chamber featuring paneled wainscotting, cased beams, a heavy molded cornice, and paneled buffets at the southwest and northwest corners (see photograph 3). The chimneypiece, said to have taken a ship's master carpenter thirteen months to complete, is believed to be the most elaborate such structure carved in the American colonies; its decorative elements include marble facing, flanking consoles with female relief figures, floral swags, scroll brackets, shell and Tudor rose medallions, and bands of cable, dentil, and egg and dart molding. At the rear (north) of the Council Chamber are the billiard room and two adjoining cardrooms, again with paneled wainscotting and cased beams. On the second floor of the 1750 wing are the Governor's bedroom with adjoining dressing and servant's room and several smaller bedrooms. Part of what is now finished attic space (at the southern end of the wing) was originally an open deck where Governor Wentworth sunned himself in an attempt to relieve the pain of his gout.

J. Templeman Coolidge, who acquired the Wentworth Mansion in 1883, made necessary repairs, installed modern kitchen equipment, and in 1916 added the one-story western wing containing two additional bedrooms and two baths. The New Hampshire Division of Parks acquired the house from Coolidge's widow in 1954 and in 1966 carried out a complete restoration of it. The 1916 wing was converted for use as a caretaker's residence and public restrooms were created in a former shed attached to the c. 1695 section. New sills were installed and other structural members were strengthened. The brick chimneys, located in the c. 1695 and 1750 sections, were essentially rebuilt. With the exception of electrical wiring, now concealed, modern fixtures were removed from all three major sections of the house and the building was repainted after research determined its original colors. The mansion is now in excellent condition but remains relatively unfurnished.

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Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion

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returning with a commission from George II naming him Royal Governor of New Hampshire. In all, Wentworth held that office for 26 years, longer than any other governor in the American colonies.

Wentworth's years as governor were marked by frequent conflict with the New Hampshire Assembly. He was determined to uphold the prerogatives of royal authority and opposed any attempt by that body to encroach on his powers. The Governor prevented New Hampshire sending delegates to the Stamp Act Congress (1765) by proroguing the Assembly so that none could be selected. New Hampshire citizens made several attempts to remove Wentworth from office, charging that he had too many relatives in office and favored them with grants of choice land, that he abused the office of surveyor of the king's woods, and that he had grown rich by charging fees in connection with land grants and by reserving a portion of each grant for himself. Finally aging and discouraged, Wentworth received permission to resign in 1767 and was succeeded by his nephew, John Wentworth II.

The former governor retired to his estate at Little Harbor outside Portsmouth where he died in 1770. His widow, Martha Hilton Wentworth, whom he had married in 1760, remarried in 1771 and continued to live at Little Harbor with her second husband, Captain Michael Wentworth (not a direct relation of Benning). On Mrs. Wentworth's death in 1804, the estate was willed to her daughter, Martha, in whose ownership it remained until 1816, when it became the property of Charles Cushing.

The last private owner of the Wentworth property, J. Templeman Coolidge, acquired it as a summer residence in 1883. A prominent Boston artist, Coolidge restored the house and made stylistically appropriate additions to it in 1916. Coolidge's first wife was the daughter of noted historian Francis Parkman, who was a frequent summer guest at Little Harbor before his death in 1893 and may have written portions of his last work there (A Half Century of Conflict, published in 1892). Coolidge died in 1946 and eight years later his widow donated the Little Harbor house, now known as the Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion, to the State of New Hampshire. An extensive project in 1966 returned the house to excellent condition with each section restored to the approximate date of its construction. Though a few period pieces have been placed in the mansion, it is largely unfurnished. The house and immediate grounds are open to the public from 10 to 5 daily, Memorial Day through mid-October.

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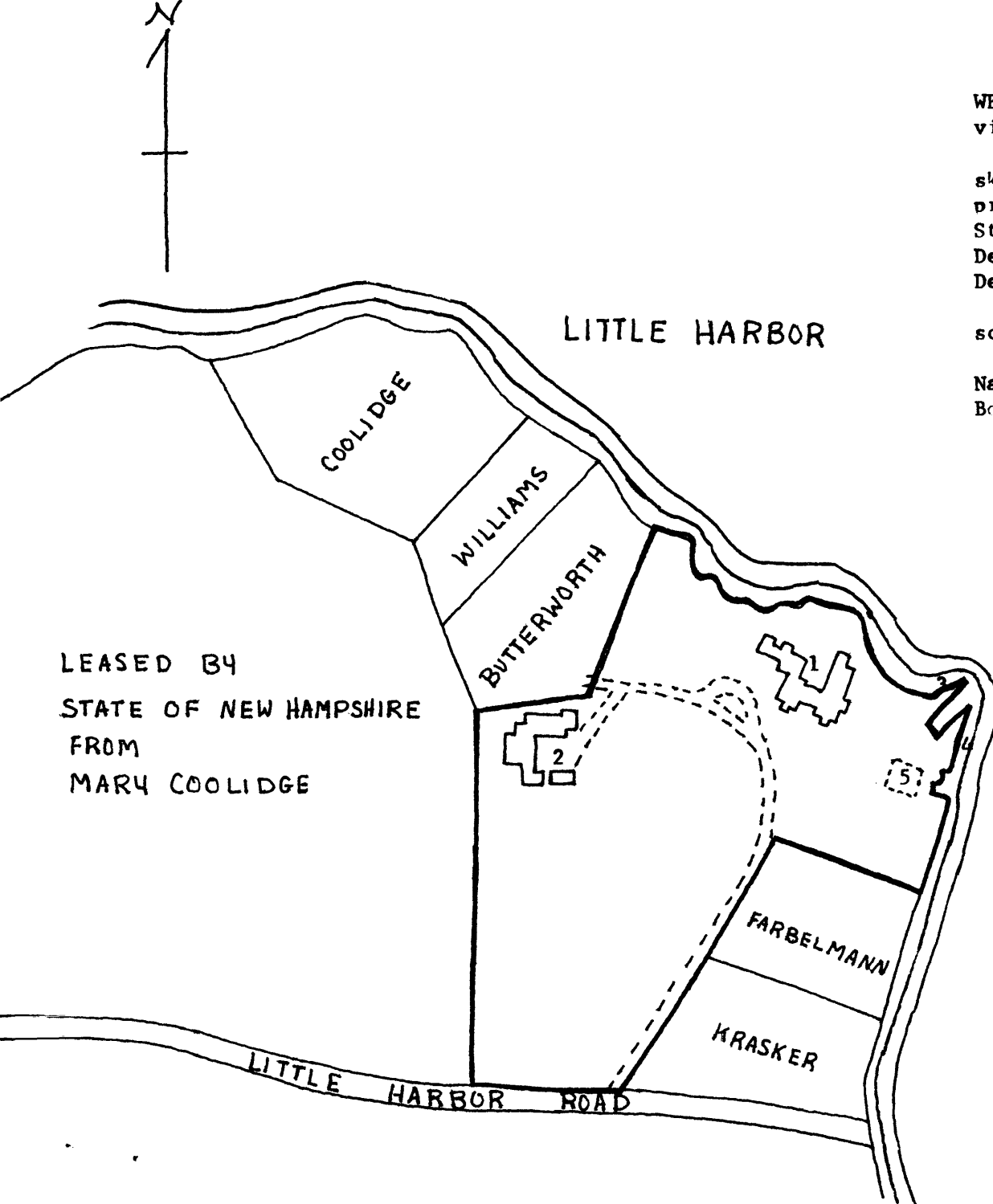
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WENTWORTH-COOLIDGE MANSION  
vic. Portsmouth, New Hampshire

sketch map based on survey  
prepared for  
State of New Hampshire,  
Department of Resources and Economic  
Development

scale: 1" = 200'

National Historic Landmark  
Boundary 



LEASED BY  
STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE  
FROM  
MARY COOLIDGE

1. Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion
2. Carriage shed/stable complex
3. Wentworth landing
4. Coolidge landing
5. Site of Coolidge boathouse and pool