

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

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

HISTORIC

BOSTON ATHENAEUM

AND/OR COMMON

Boston Athenaeum

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

10 1/2 Beacon Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Boston

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Eighth

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 Library**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Proprietors of the Boston Athenaeum

STREET & NUMBER

10 1/2 Beacon Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

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

Suffolk Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Suffolk County Court House, Somerset Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Inventory of Historic Assets

DATE

in progress

☒☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Massachusetts Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT
☒ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Boston Athenaeum occupies an irregularly-shaped city lot on the southern side of Beacon Street (numbered at 10 1/2 Beacon) just east of its intersection with Bowdoin Street. Although there are no grounds associated with the building, its rear windows overlook the Granary Burial Ground, one of the oldest and most historic cemeteries in Boston. The Athenaeum has received regular maintenance and, while its support systems (plumbing, wiring, etc.) are not the most modern, the building appears to be in good structural condition.

The design for the original portion of the Athenaeum, the third home of the organization, is the result of a competition won by Edward Clark Cabot. Construction of the brown freestone building was begun in 1847 and completed two years later. The facade, modeled on a Palladian palace, gives the impression of a large-scaled, two-story building though there are three floors on the interior. A balustrade supported on low posts with inset panels masks two wells below the facade containing windows for a basement and sub-basement. The entrance, elaborate double doors topped by an intricate iron fan, is flanked by piers carrying a semi-circular arch with egg and dart band and Corinthian key-stone; above the arch is a modillioned cornice. On the first facade level rusticated piers alternate with blind arches containing square-headed windows, the whole topped by a belt course. On the second level Corinthian pilasters divide blind arches containing tall windows with pedimented caps. A full entablature with dentil band and a paneled parapet mark the original roof line.

Perhaps the outstanding interior feature of the Athenaeum was the Sumner staircase, named in honor of Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, who served on the building committee. The massive structure--it took up nearly a quarter of the interior--was modeled on the Bernini staircase in the Vatican, which Senator Sumner greatly admired. Unfortunately, the need for additional space for the Athenaeum's growing collections forced its removal in 1888. A smaller staircase, one more functional in design, was installed at the western end of the building, and an elevator was added at the northwest corner at a later date.

The need for additional space led to the enlargement of the Athenaeum in 1913-14. The two-story Renaissance Revival addition was designed by Henry Bigelow with the assistance of his partner, Philip Wadsworth. The major elements of the new section are tall windows--square-headed on the first level, round-arched on the second--divided by Corinthian pilasters carrying a full entablature with dentil band; a belt course marks the fifth floor level. The front elevation of the addition is set back from the original roof line, giving the appearance of a taller, complementary building constructed immediately behind the old Athenaeum. No major alterations have been made since 1913-14; interior painting and modernization of support systems are projected for the near future.

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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" 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	1807; 1847; 1913-14	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Edward Clark Cabot-1847 Henry Bigelow-1913-14, and Philip Wadsworth
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Boston Athenaeum is the largest and most influential of the early proprietary libraries still extant in the United States. Founded by private individuals in 1807, long before the rise of the free public library, the Athenaeum remains a leading cultural institution in Boston and a research center for scholars throughout the nation. The Athenaeum's present home, located at 10 1/2 Beacon Street, is a brown freestone structure modeled after a Palladian palace. The original three stories were begun in 1847 and two stories were added in 1913-14. While the general public is not encouraged to visit the Athenaeum, researchers or persons with a particular interest in the building are accommodated.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Boston Athenaeum grew out of an earlier organization, the Anthology Club, founded in 1804. The Club established an Anthology Reading-room and Library which, in 1807, became the Athenaeum. The new organization received the support of prominent individuals, who contributed both books and funds, and by 1820 had acquired some 20,000 volumes. Despite the Athenaeum's private nature (the number of its proprietors--or shareholders--is fixed by its charter), its liberal administration quickly made the organization a leading cultural institution in Boston, one intended to serve both the scholar and the general reader. In addition the Athenaeum served as the city's first art gallery, assembling a collection which later formed the nucleus of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts.

Today the Athenaeum views itself primarily as a humanities library, emphasizing American and English literature, history and biography, and fine and decorative arts. In addition to 1049 proprietors and 1500 cardholders (who pay an annual entrance fee), as many as 10,000 independent researchers make use of the institution's resources each year.

The Athenaeum's collections now total more than 600,000 items. Included in the printed works are numerous rare items, among them large parts of the personal libraries of George Washington and John Quincy Adams. The collection of early pamphlets and tracts, which run into the tens of thousands, is of unquestioned value to the student of American history. The Athenaeum also possesses unusually strong newspaper collections and owns more Confederate imprints than any other institution in the United States.

Since its founding the Athenaeum has had several homes. It was first located on Congress Street, then in a house on Pearl Street, and finally in its present

(continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Whitehall, Walter Muir. A Boston Athenaeum Anthology, 1807-1972 (1973).
----- Independent Historical Societies, (1962).
Winsor, Justin, ed. Memorial History of Boston (4 volumes, 1881).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A 19 330140 4691360
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
C

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the national historic landmark designation for the Boston Athenaeum are those of the irregularly shaped city lot, numbered at 10 1/2 Beacon Street, which the building occupies. Specific lines (shown in red on the accompanying sketch map) are defined as follows: bounded northwesterly by Beacon Street 122 feet; northeasterly by the Craft Building at 8 Beacon Street 70 feet; southeasterly by an office building at 6 Beacon Street 50 feet; southwesterly by the Granary Burial Ground 35 feet; southeasterly by the Granary Burial Ground in sections of 15 and 48 feet; and southwesterly again by the Congregational House at 14 Beacon Street 100 feet.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by S. Sydney Bradford, Historian, 7/27/65

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

1/23/76

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington, D.C.

STATE

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET The Athenaeum ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

building at 10 1/2 Beacon Street. The latter structure was begun in 1847, completed in 1849, and enlarged in 1913-14. The three lower stories are built of brown freestone with a facade modeled after a Palladian palace; the Renaissance Revival style of the two stories which were added complements the design of the original.