



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 an 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 Cummings' Guest House

other names/site number "110"

2. Location

street & number 110 Portland Ave N/A not for publication

city or town Old Orchard Beach N/A vicinity

state Maine code ME county York code 031 zip code 04064

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.)

James S. [Signature] 6/11/04
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Maine Historic Preservation Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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] 7/28/04
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(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	
1		buildings
		sites
		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

None

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC / Hotel

DOMESTIC / Single dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC / Single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Weatherboard

roof Asphalt

other _____

Narrative Description

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

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE / Black

ENTERTAINMENT / RECREATION

Period of Significance

1923 -1954

Significant Dates

1923

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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

Bibliography

(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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

CUMMINGS' GUEST HOUSE
Name of Property

YORK COUNTY, MAINE
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1/2 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	9	3	8	8	8	5	2	4	8	1	9	0	8	9
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Zone Easting Northing

3

1	9													
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Zone Easting Northing

2

1	9													
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4

1	9													
---	---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

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 CHRISTI A. MITCHELL, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

organization MAINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION date 13 April 2004

street & number 55 CAPITOL STREET, STATION 65 telephone (207) 287-2132

city or town AUGUSTA state ME zip code 04333 -0065

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

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 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.

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DESCRIPTION

The Cummings' Guest House is a two-story, wood-framed structure located on a quiet residential street about one-half mile northeast of the center of Old Orchard Beach Maine. Built c. 1870, this Victoria-era house is vernacular rather than stylistically distinctive. This is due in part to its origins as a simple suburban farm house, however, some of the earmarks of its earlier Italianate style were lost when it underwent a significant remodeling and became an hostelry. As initially built, the subject property contained a two-story, gable-fronted, rectangular-massed house with a shed roof front porch. Situated to the north was a similarly massed, one-and-one-half story small barn on a high foundation. The two structures were joined by an ell with its own small porch. In about 1923 the space between the two buildings was filled-in with a two story addition covered by a roof than ran perpendicular to the earlier front gabled roofs. The front porch was extended over the entire length of the facade and helped to unify the structure. The structure is clad in wooden weather boards and roofed with light gray asphalt shingles. A low brick chimney is located high on the northern plane of the southern gable roof. The structure sits on a flat, residential lot, surrounded by a nicely trimmed lawn dotted with forsythia, apple trees, and sumac. A small, one-room wood-framed shed is positioned on the edge of the property to the northwest of the guesthouse.

The front porch dominates the facade of the east facing structure. The porch is divided into two sections: to the south of the central door the porch is fully enclosed and lined with seven modern one-over one aluminum sash window. To the north of the door the porch roof rests on tapered, four sided columns which rest on a clapboarded, solid railing. Vertical board siding conceals the high porch foundation. Behind the porch, but obscured from view, are two entrance doors, and four two-over-two wooden sash windows, two of which are grouped together at the center of the facade. Above the low pitched, hipped porch roof, are the six window bays of the second floor. Each window contains a two over two sash set in plain window frames. The southernmost pair of windows are set asymmetrically under the gable roof of the original farmhouse: a third window is positioned in the attic directly under the roof's peak. The middle pair of windows are positioned under the eaves of the connector roof. The northern pair of windows are set at a slightly lower elevation under the gable roof of the former barn. The roof has a wide over hang and dark painted frieze. The corners of the building are marked with cornice returns over narrow corner boards.

A narrow, one-story, shed-roof addition stretches across the northern two-thirds of the rear elevation. This three-bay bump-out contains another small enclosed porch and a laundry room, and a rear door accessed by a two-run wooden ramp. To the south of the addition is a tripartite picture window. As with the front of the house, six windows are distributed across the second floor, and a seventh window is in the attic. The south and north elevations contain a mixture of two-over- two wooden sash windows and wooden one-over-one replacement windows placed at random positions on the first and second floors, as

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necessitated by interior function. On the north side of the building is a small, gable roofed entrance to the basement. The foundation of the structure is concrete, and on all sides but the front the foundation level is indicated by a shift from clapboard siding to painted wooden shingles.

The interior of the guest house is divided into guest rooms, public common areas, and work spaces. On the first floor is a large living room that was utilized for dining and indoor activities on rainy days. To the north and south of the living room are a pair of straight-run staircases, each with a turned Victorian newel post. In the far northern end of the house are two guest rooms, now joined into a single larger suite (The northeastern room traditionally contained a piano and was referred to as the 'piano room' when it was not used as a guest room). To the west of the living room, in the center of the house is the kitchen, a full bathroom, the back porch and laundry room, and in the southwest corner is another suite of guest rooms. One of these two rooms has a built-in china cabinet and linen drawers, which indicate its earlier use as the farm house's dining room. On the second floor, seven additional guestrooms and two bathrooms open off a central corridor that runs the length of the building. Each room retains its numbered door and keyed lock. On the second floor, the large windows are characteristically placed less than one foot above floor level.

Throughout the house, the interior finishes reflect over seventy years of continual use. The kitchen was modernized in the 1970s, however the bathrooms retain their fixtures, linoleum and textured plaster from the 1920s. The guestrooms contain period wall paper from the 1920s through the 1950s, hardwood floors and plain trim around the doors and windows. Many of the doors have decorative 19th century hardware. On the first floor, the original living room ceiling has been concealed behind a drop ceiling and most of the pine floors have been covered with wall-to-wall carpet. Due to the slightly differing heights of the original two structures, the second floor is gradually stepped down across the length of the corridor.

In 1923 the Cummings' family converted their home into a seasonal guest house, and in the 1960s one of the family members again began living in the house year round. As he aged, modifications were made to the structure, including enclosing the southern half of the porch, adding the ramp to the rear entrance, and modernizing the kitchen. However, the structure continued to provide rooms to long time summer guests until 1993. Although some of these more 'modern' changes have diminished the earlier character of the building, they occurred in conjunction with its seventy-year use as a guest house, and thus should be seen as part of the continuing evolution of the structure's significance.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Cummings' Guest House is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its local significance under Criterion A as an example of a type of lodging that catered to African American tourists in the years before they were guaranteed equal access to eating and sleeping accommodations by law. Its significance is enhanced by the renown of some of its famous African American guests, who stayed at the Guest House while performing in the seaside resort town of Old Orchard Beach.

In 1917 Rosvell (Rose) Shurtleff Emerson Cummings and Charles Edward Cummings Jr. moved from Massachusetts to Old Orchard Beach Maine, where they bought a small farmhouse at 110 Portland Street and became the towns only black residents. The family eventually had five daughters and two sons, which Charles supported in part by working as a porter out of Union Station in Portland. The early family history is not well documented, however initially the family kept a few animals in the barn on their suburban lot which was just a few blocks from the beach and thriving waterfront.¹ Between 1917 and 1924 the Cummings family appears to have lived in the tourist community year round, however records indicate that in later years they sometimes spent only summers in Old Orchard Beach (OOB), and lived either in Portland, Maine or Winchester, Massachusetts in the winters.² Whether by chance or design in 1923, the family remodeled their farmhouse and opened their doors to African American travelers: a enterprise that was to bring them business for the next 70 years.

Old Orchard Beach was one of a string of seaside resorts in Maine that became popular at the end of the 19th century, and became increasingly accessibly via rail and then automobile in the early 20th century. Along with the requisite grand hotels, sandy beaches, eateries and amusements, Old Orchard Beach became known for its extensive pier and boardwalk, which at one point in time stretched 1800 feet into the water and featured its own miniature passenger rail line along its length. Although the pier was rebuilt numerous times due to storm damage, one of its biggest attractions was the Casino, a popular nightclub, which featured all of the Jazz and Swing greats of the era. From the late 1800s to the present day, Old Orchard Beach has drawn travelers from throughout the East Coast and Canada, and in the 1920s and 1930s its scale was almost unrivaled.

¹Oral interview with Maud Cummings, March 2004. Maud remembers having a cow and chickens on the property when she was young.

²The Portland Directory contains a listing for Charles and Rose at 933 b (or a) Congress Street, right around the corner from Union Station from 1924 to 1933. These listings are not necessarily accurate however: in 1930 the couple divorced, but the directory continues to list Rose at that address until 1933. In the 1939 OOB Directory Rose and the children are ascribed a winter address of Winchester, Mass. According to Ann Cummings Searcy, some years the children would attend school in Massachusetts.

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"[T]here are 102 hotels in Old Orchard Beach, ranging from palatial hostelries giving complete service and luxury, to those moderate priced and not serving meals. There are about 6,000 rooms available for visitors, which include cottages that cater to transients, giving to Old Orchard Beach the second largest capacity of any beach resort except Atlantic City on the Atlantic Coast...There are twenty eating places not connected with hotels." (H.A. Manning Co., 1934, p.428.)

Rose Cummings kept a leather bound guest register in which the names and addresses of all her guests and their length of stay were recorded. The first guest arrived in 1923 and the last left in September of 1993. Hundreds of names appear in the register, some of which reoccur year after year for several decades, and the addresses range from Oklahoma and Minnesota to Washington DC, New York City and the Boston suburbs. And yet, the Cummings Guest House was never mentioned in the vast amount of promotional materials for Old Orchard Beach. It was never listed in *Manning's* town directory or the Maine Register under Hotel, Guest House or Boardinghouse. Indeed, no formal name has been found for the hostelry which is referred to by family and members of the community as a boarding house or guest house, or simply as '110,' a reference to its address.³ Booked solid from May to September for decades on end, the Cummings Guest House is one of a number of facilities in Maine that catered to African American tourists via a network that relied initially on word of mouth and personal references, and eventually propagated through specialized touring guides.

Because there is so little documentary evidence concerning the family and the establishment, oral interviews with family members have provided much of the history of the family business.⁴ According to Ann Searcy, the youngest child of Rose and Charles Cummings (b. 1927), it was her mother's idea to start the guest house.

That is when she opened up a guest house out in Old Orchard. They did not care to take colored people then. So my mother opened up that guest home for the colored people. Maids, chauffeurs, writers, musicians. And anyone. (Salt, 3-16-2003/c1-R/040)

My mother from Old Orchard Beach wanted to start a home for colored people. The term was colored. My mother wanted a guest house for chauffeurs and maids that perhaps had never had a chance to have a vacation. So she did start that home to give them a chance to have a beautiful

³When asked about the name of the facility Maud Cummings did not recall the business ever having a name. Her younger sister, Ann Cummings Searcy, states that her mother opened a 'guest house,' rather than a 'tourist home' or 'boarding house.' As no ephemera could be found that provided a specific name, Cumming's Guest House has been adopted for this nomination.

⁴ Maud Cummings Smith was interviewed 3 Marcy 2004 in conjunction with this research, as was Valerie Cunningham, on 9 April 2004. Ann Cummings Searcy was interviewed by Kerry Seed in March 16, 2002 as part of a project with the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies, Portland Maine.

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vacation in Old Orchard Beach, Maine. Many of them had never even hardly heard of Old Orchard Beach, Maine. (Salt, 3-16-2003/c2-R/006.)

Ann further described how her mother outfitted the guest rooms:

So..she did not even have one closet, one closet in any of the bedrooms. She did not like the thought of closets possibly having bugs. She built, or had built, just one, like a counter high up in the air with hooks on it for people to hang their clothes on and had even some drapes over these closet type of panels and she was able to keep a nice clean house." (Salt, 3-16-2003/c1-R/040.)

The entire family worked together to prepare and serve breakfast and evening meal each day, and pack picnic lunches for the daily excursions to the beach or the pier.

My mother was such a very good cook. She would feed all those folks all those delicious meals . And by the time they would get ready to go back home, they'd go to Porteus [a department store] to buy new clothes. They couldn't fit in the clothes they had come in. They had been busy...all the popcorn and custard down town. [She cooked] southern fried chicken , [she] made lobster salad, just about a nice dinner with mashed potatoes and gravy and just about every thing that was very tasteful." (Salt, 3-16-2002/c1-R/378.)

Meals were served in the dining room (now the living room), after which guests would move to the spacious front porch to catch the ocean breeze, play cards or visit. Most families would stay for at least a week, and sometimes several generations in a family would overlap visits. When the eleven rooms were filled with guests, Rose and her children would sleep on the back porch, or squeeze into the shed at night. One account suggests that the house rules were strict and included terms that limited smoking to the out doors, a plain ban on alcohol, and the admonishment to return shortly after events ended at the Pier or be locked out of the house. (Lemley, 1993).

As the only establishment in Old Orchard Beach that offered accommodations for African Americans the Cummings guest house often received visits from musicians who played at the Casino from the late 1920s to the early 1950s. Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Harry Carney, Count Bassie and Lionel Hampton were all visitors to the Cumming's place, some stopping in just to rest before shows, while others such as Harry Carney and his family, returned to stay year after year. Duke Ellington and his band used the piano room at the guest house for practice when they were in town. Over the years Ellington became very friendly with some of the Cummings children, at one point even inviting Ann Cummings to sing with his band at the Pier. It was not only musicians that found their way to 110 Portland Street, the famous were welcomed along with writers and academics, domestics and porters, teachers and laborers, so long as they were known to the family or accompanied by a recommendation from a previous guest.

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According to historian Valerie Cunningham, the Cummings guest house was one of several similar establishments along the coast of Maine. With the rise of the automobile age, tourists of all colors took to the road. While the hotels and motels in Maine were not officially segregated by color, there was a great reluctance in many places to rent rooms to African Americans. In Old Orchard Beach, according to E. Edward Cummings, "[The hotels] wouldn't say we don't take black people, or Negroes. It was just understood." (Lemley, 1993). Much of this discrimination was hush-hush, but one blatant incident made the newspapers in 1962 when an African American actress performing with a touring company at the Ogunquit Playhouse was refused accommodations at seven local hotels. After the initial report, this led one innkeeper to proclaim proudly his prejudicial intent not to provide rooms for African Americans in a letter to the editor. After several further news articles, the State Attorney Generals office investigated the event, but later declined to pursue court action, stating that the State's anti-discrimination laws had not been breached!⁵

For African American tourists, who took to the road in their automobiles, a trip up the coast or into the mountains was not a casual jaunt: they could not be assured of finding accommodations, restaurants, gas stations, or other services along the way that would entertain their business. This was by no means a local Maine issue.

"Roads were open to all motorists, but the facilities that lined them were not. African Americans who could afford to purchase a car declared the automobile was a way to avoid the ignominy of the Jim Crow car on the railroads. As George Schuyler declared in 1930, "...Negroes who can do so purchase an automobile as soon as possible in order to be free of discomfort, discrimination, segregation, and insult." But, in practice, the discriminatory policies of hotels, tourist cabins, and other lodgings made highway travel difficult, and tarnished the "freedom" of the open road. African Americans responded by creating African American holiday resorts such as Idelwild, Michigan, and by creating guides to help travelers negotiate their way through the racially charged American terrain." (America on the Move Exhibition, National Museum of American History).

Word of guest houses, boarding houses and motels that invited patronage regardless of color spread in African American circles, and facilities such as the Cummings Guest House developed a loyal following. In addition to the house in Old Orchard Beach, there was a similar guest house in Kittery, run by the Sinclair family, and a small resort known as the Jewell Inn in York Beach that had a lodge with a diningroom, juke box, and dance floor as well as tourist cabins. When all the established facilities were full an informal network of African American residents was activated to lodge unexpected guests in spare bedrooms throughout the state. (In Old Orchard Beach, the Clarence Roberts family, which arrived between 1920 and 1930, would sometimes be called on to board overflow guests.) Eventually tourist

⁵A series of newspaper articles chronicling this event are gathered together in the research files of Shoshana Hoose, Anchor of the Soul Collection, Box 1, at the University of Southern Maine.

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guides for African Americans were created to help facilitate their travels. The 1946 The Negro Motorist Green-Book included a listing for tourist homes in Augusta, Gardiner and Bangor, and one hotel and two tourist homes in Portland. The Cummings Guest House, which had been in business for 23 years already, probably had no need to advertise!

Rose Cummings died in 1959, but her children continued to operate the hostelry for the next 33 years, although after the mid-sixties they ceased to serve meals. After Civil Rights legislation was passed in Maine in 1971 the call for facilities such as the Cummings Guest House was reduced, at least in theory⁶. Tradition paved the path to 110 Portland Street for several generations of returning guests, who were now old friends rather than simply patrons. In September of 1993 the last guests signed the register and the doors to the guest house closed. Ten years later, the remaining children of Rose and Charles Cummings sold the property: the new owner was a summer guest during her childhood. Plans are underway for a careful restoration of the front porch and the interior guest rooms.

⁶ 5 M.R.S.A. sec. 4591 (2002).

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The Negro Motorist Green-Book. Prepared in cooperation with the United States Travel Bureau. (New York: Victor H. Green), 1946. Reference information courtesy of the Rev. Warren Arthur Evans Special Collection at the L. Douglas Wilder Library, Virginia Union University, Richmond, Virginia.

Old Orchard Beach Historical Society. Old Orchard Then and Now. [Old Orchard Beach, Maine], July 1978.

"Rose Cummings." Obituary. *Biddeford-Saco Journal*, September 30, 1959. (Biddeford, Maine), p. 2. Copy on file at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine.

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Maps

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Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 'Old Orchard'. July 1922. On file (microfilm) at the Maine State Library, Augusta, Maine.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 'Old Orchard'. November 1929. On file (microfilm) at the Maine State Library, Augusta, Maine.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 'Old Orchard'. November 1929, reprinted 1940, corrected [to] 1944. On file (microfilm) at the Maine State Library, Augusta, Maine.

Archival Sources

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SALT Institute for Documentary Studies. Audio Archives. Portland, Maine. Kerry Seed and Ann Searcy, audio tape 3-16-2003 c1-R and c2-R.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Tax Map 104/1/6 .5 acre

The nominated property is fully described by the Town of Old Orchard Beach tax map number 104 / 1/ 6.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The house lot described above contains the structure and the land historically associated with the Cummings Guest House at 110 Portland Street in Old Orchard Beach, Maine.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1 of 3
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
3 March 2004
East facade; facing west.

Photograph 2 of 3
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
3 March 2004
South and east elevations; facing northwest.

Photograph 3 of 3
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
3 March 2004
Interior, second floor corridor, facing south.