

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**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 Chester Harding House

AND/OR COMMON
Chester Harding House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 16 Beacon Street

CITY, TOWN Boston VICINITY OF 8th
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE Massachusetts CODE 025 COUNTY Suffolk CODE 025

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES, RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES, UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Professional offices

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Boston Bar Association, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER
16 Beacon Street

CITY, TOWN Boston VICINITY OF STATE Massachusetts

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Suffolk Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER
Suffolk County Courthouse, Somerset Street

CITY, TOWN Boston STATE Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Inventory of Historic Assets

DATE in progress FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Massachusetts Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN Boston STATE Massachusetts

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 Chester Harding House stands on a nearly rectangular lot (No. 16) on the southeastern side of Beacon Street opposite the head of Bowdoin Street (which intersects Beacon at right angles) in Boston, Massachusetts. The house covers the entire lot with the exception of a small garden/courtyard at its rear (southeastern) edge. The lot is flanked by substantial office buildings dating from the early 20th century: Congregational House (14 Beacon Street) to the northeast and the Claflin Building (18 Beacon Street) to the southwest.

The Harding House is a brick row house, four stories high above a full basement, topped by a flat roof. It was constructed in Federal style by Thomas Fletcher in 1808 and was originally known as "Amory's Folly" (Amory was presumably the first owner) because of its size and pretentiousness. Exterior detailing included a one-story columned entry porch, flat arches above the windows (which decrease in size from the first to the fourth floor), and a dentilled cornice at the roof line. The triple square-headed windows on the first floor are a practical innovation which appeared in several Boston row houses of the period, providing maximum light for a one-window room. An arched opening (now bricked in) to the right (southwest) of the front entrance served a passageway leading to the rear of the house. The interior followed a side-hall plan with kitchen in the basement (a typical arrangement for houses on Boston's Beacon Hill), parlor and dining room on the first floor, and bedrooms above. Perhaps the most notable interior feature of the house was its oval flying staircase with graceful carved balusters and newel.

Several alterations were made in the house after the period of Chester Harding's residence there (1826-30), the most significant of them in 1885. At that time a new one-story, three-bay entry porch was constructed and the front elevation extended above it on the second and third floors. This rectangular addition carried a bay window on its lower level, two oriels with corbelled bases, and a dentilled cornice capped by an iron balustrade. During the 1920's the house became the property of the Unitarian Church Association, which adapted it for office use: some interior partitions were removed; institutional lighting fixtures were installed; windows were altered to provide emergency exits; and a metal fire escape was built on the front elevation.

In 1963 the Boston Bar Association renovated the Harding House for use as its headquarters with kitchen facilities and dining room in the basement, double reception room on the first floor, offices and conference rooms on the second and third floors, and a library on the fourth. Some structural repair was necessary and modern heating and electrical systems were installed. On the exterior, the third floor section of the 1885 addition (including the oriel windows) and the fire escape were removed; the remaining portion of the

(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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" 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 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 1808, 1826-30

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Thomas Fletcher

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This four-story brick building, located at 16 Beacon Street in Boston, Massachusetts was from 1826 to 1830 the home of Chester Harding. Though largely self-taught, Harding was one of America's most successful portrait painters in the four decades before his death in 1866. When he settled at Boston in the late 1820's, the popularity of his work amounted to a "Harding fever"--a term coined by Gilbert Stuart, whose own popularity the younger man temporarily eclipsed.

The Harding House, constructed in 1808 in Federal style, was substantially altered during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1963 the building was purchased by the Boston Bar Association and renovated for use as that organization's headquarters. Though interior spaces have not been returned to their original form, the period character of the house has been restored. The Harding House is not open to the public; however, interested visitors are admitted by appointment.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chester Harding was born at Conway, Massachusetts, on September 1, 1792 and, with almost no schooling, began work at the age of twelve. In 1806 his family moved to Madison County, New York, then unbroken wilderness. The youth enlisted as a drummer in the War of 1812 and almost died of dysentery at Sacketts Harbor. Discharged from the service, he obtained a contract to make drums for the army and, after the war, undertook general cabinet making at Caledonia, New York. There he was imprisoned for debt on the day of his marriage to Caroline Woodruff. On his release, Harding attempted unsuccessfully to operate a tavern. Threatened with a second prison sentence for debt, he fled the town, leaving his wife and new-born child, and traveled to Pittsburgh where he found work as a house-painter.

After returning secretly to Caledonia for his family, Harding opened a sign-painting shop at Pittsburgh. There he was visited by an itinerant portrait painter, whose example apparently convinced Harding that painting was the career for him. His first commissioned work, a portrait of a local baker, brought him only \$5, but when Harding subsequently moved to Paris, Kentucky,

(Continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See Continuation Sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	19	330090	4691340	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See Continuation Sheet)

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 staff historian, 1965

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 (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

Landmark Dec. 24, 1965
 Designated 89-665
 Boundary Certified:
 [Signature]
 APRIL 10, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

11/24/78

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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addition was finished with a broad cornice; and louvered blinds were hung at the windows above the first floor. While no attempt was made to return to the original arrangement of rooms, the period character of the interior was carefully restored. A number of original interior elements remain intact, including the flying staircase, cornices with egg and dart bands (first floor), fireplaces with carved mantels and flanking paired colonnettes (first and second floors), and molded door and window surrounds (all floors). Since the completion of the 1963 project, the building has been maintained in excellent condition.

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he raised his fee to \$25, then considered a large price. He next spent two months studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, then went to St. Louis where he spent fifteen successful months. After brief stays at Pittsfield and Northampton, Massachusetts, the artist moved on to Boston, where the demand for his work amounted to a "Harding fever"--a term coined by Gilbert Stuart, whose own popularity the younger man temporarily eclipsed. In six months Harding painted eighty portraits and acquired sufficient funds to allow him to travel abroad for an extended period.

Harding left his family at Northampton, Massachusetts, and sailed for England on August 1, 1823. After traveling through England and France, he opened a studio in London. There he enjoyed great success, painting royalty and the nobility. The journal he kept during this period is the record of a backwoodsman who, despite his lack of education and polished manners, became a social lion. Indeed, Harding was so charmed by British life that he decided to remain in England and sent for his family, a decision that proved to be a mistake both financially and socially. The Hardings sailed for Boston in 1826 and took a house there at 16 Beacon Street, where they lived for the next four years. In 1830 the family moved to Springfield, Massachusetts, their permanent home until Harding's death in 1866.

Harding's Beacon Street house had been constructed by Thomas Fletcher in 1808 and was originally known as "Amory's Folly" because of its size and pretentiousness. Though its Federal design was probably unchanged when the artist lived there, substantial alterations have been made since that time, most notably in 1885 when the front of the building was extended. In 1963 the Harding House was purchased by the Boston Bar Association and renovated for use as the organization's headquarters. Though the interior had already been adapted for office space, the Bar Association has taken care to restore the period character of the building. The Harding House is not open to the public, but interested visitors are admitted by appointment.

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Magazine (January, 1874).

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The boundaries of the national historic landmark designation for the Chester Harding House are those of the nearly rectangular city lot on which that building stands. The building covers the entire lot, with the exception of a small garden-courtyard at the rear edge. Specific lines are defined as follows: bounded northwesterly by the southeastern curblineline of Beacon Street 28 feet; northeasterly by No. 14 Beacon Street, the Congregational House, 85 feet; southeasterly by a rear portion of the Congregational House 25 feet; and southwesterly by Park Street Place and No. 18 Beacon Street, the Claflin Building, in sections of 20 and 65 feet respectively.