

80000574

FORM B - BUILDING

In Area no.	Form no.
	44-B

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston

1. Town Worcester

Address 100 Barber Avenue

Name John Woodman Higgins Armory
Museum

Present use commercial offices and
museum

Present owner Trustees of John
Woodman Higgins Armory
Museum

3. Description:

Date 1930

Source see Bibliography - reverse

Style elements of International Style

Architect Joseph D. Leland of Boston

Exterior wall fabric steel and glass

Outbuildings (describe) none
over-sized rivets used

Other features as decoration, neo-
classical entry, applied decorative
medallions of steel at cornice,

angled entry bay surmounted at the
cornice by a mock suit of armor, th
corporate symbol of Worcester Pressed Steel Co.

Altered no Date _____

Moved no Date _____

5. Lot size: Assessors' Book 22, p.7
Lots 1A, 1B 12,562 sq.ft.

One acre or less Over one acre _____

Approximate frontage 100'

Approximate distance of building from street
10'

6. Recorded by B.R. Pfeiffer

Organization Worc. Heritage Pres. Soc

Date March 1978

- 2. Photo (3x3" or 3x5")
Staple to left side of form
Photo number _____

- 4. Map. Draw sketch of building location
in relation to nearest cross streets and
other buildings. Indicate north.

UTM: 19/269240/4686380

(over)

7. Original owner (if known) Worcester Pressed Steel Company
 Original use offices and museum
 Subsequent uses (if any) and dates same

8. Themes (check as many as applicable)

Aboriginal	_____	Conservation	_____	Recreation	_____
Agricultural	_____	Education	_____	Religion	_____
Architectural	<u>X</u>	Exploration/ settlement	_____	Science/ invention	_____
The Arts	<u>X</u>	Industry	<u>X</u>	Social/ humanitarian	_____
Commerce	_____	Military	_____	Transportation	_____
Communication	_____	Political	_____		
Community development	_____				

9. Historical significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

The Higgins Armory consists of an "L" plan building of four-storey height built in 1930 for the Worcester Pressed Steel Company, whose president was John Woodman Higgins. Of steel frame construction, the Higgins Armory is believed to have been the first building in the United States to have an exterior constructed entirely of steel and glass. At the time of the building's construction there existed widespread doubts about the safety of a steel exterior; the most prominent fear being that the expansion and contraction of the steel would shatter the many glass windows. Despite fears, the building was opened on January 12, 1931, at which time the offices of the Worcester Pressed Steel Company occupied the lower two floors, while the John Woodman Higgins Armory Museum occupied the top two floors.

The origins of the Armory Museum trace back to the childhood of John Woodman Higgins, the son of Milton Higgins, a prominent local industrialist and educator. Having shown a high degree of inventiveness early in his life, John Higgins became interested in the manufacture of steel. In 1902 Higgins and his father bought the Worcester Ferrule & Manufacturing Company which became the Worcester Pressed Steel Company. In 1905 the company moved from Main Street where Barber Avenue where Higgins developed a variety of stamping processes to replace earlier methods of casting steel. During World War I the company shifted from the manufacture of bicycle and automobile parts to the production of weapons. Varying its production from time to time, the company remained in existence until the 1970s.

(cont.)

10. Bibliography and/or references (such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.)

Worcester Historical Society. Educational File, Higgins Museum.
Sunday Telegram, 11/16/1930, Section 5, p.1 (description of building nearing completion)

"Craftsmanship in Steel: The John Woodman Higgins Armory in Worcester."
 The Newcomen Society in America. Princeton University Press, 1956.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Worcester	Form No: 44-B
Property Name: Higgins Armory	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

9. While Higgins was developing his interest in the modern manufacture of steel parts, he became increasingly interested in past metal work, particularly in suits of armor. Later, upon the advice of Bashford Dean who developed the armory collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Higgins purchased eight suits of armor from the collection of George Jay Gould, a purchase which formed the core of Higgins' early collection. In 1927 Higgins made an extensive trip to Europe both to visit armory collections and to buy items for his own collection. By 1928 Higgins' collection had outgrown the space available in his home at 80 William Street and the plan to open a public museum was formed.

In 1929-1930 Joseph Leland, a Boston architect, was hired to design a combined office-museum building in which both the collection of armor and modern manufactured products could be displayed. Higgins intended the museum "to comprise an historical library and a collection of objects illustrating the progress of the art of metal working from its earliest beginnings to the present time." A strong advocate of improved industrial design, Higgins intended that visitors to the museum have direct access to the company's manufacturing plant and to exhibit modern objects which would "inspire industrial craftsmen." Higgins was also active in encouraging fine arts museums to exhibit well-designed everyday objects.

Somewhat in contrast to the modernity of Higgins' ideas about industrial design, the museum's interior is constructed of stone and plaster forming high pointed-arch vaults, based on "Prinz Eugen's castle in Hohenwerfen, Austria" from which part of the collection had come. Continued acquisition has made the Higgins Armory collection one of the largest private collections in the world, containing more than 157 suits of armor and 4,000 related objects.

Both the exceptional quality of the museum's collection and the uniqueness of the Armory Building as an example of early modern architecture warrant the listing of this property on the National Register of Historic Places, even though the building is slightly less than fifty years old.

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Inventory No.:	100-100
Inventory Name:	Higgins Library

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

While Higgins was developing his interest in the modern architecture of steel pipes, he became increasingly interested in past metal work particularly in suits of armor. Later, upon the advice of Bradford Dean who developed the armor collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Higgins purchased eight suits of armor from the collection of George F. Gould, a purchase which formed the core of Higgins' early collection. In 1927 Higgins made an extensive trip to Europe both to visit armor collections and to buy items for his own collection. By 1928 Higgins' collection had outgrown the space available in his home at 50 William Street and the plan to open a public museum was formed.

In 1929-1930 Joseph Leland, a Boston architect, was hired to design a combined office-museum building in which both the collection of armor and modern manufactured products could be displayed. Higgins intended the museum "to comprise an historical library and a collection of objects illustrating the progress of the art of metal working from its earliest beginnings to the present time." A strong advocate of improved industrial design, Higgins intended that visitors to the museum have direct access to the company's manufacturing plant and to exhibit modern objects which would "inspire industrial craftsmen." Higgins was also active in encouraging the arts program to exhibit well-designed everyday objects.

Somewhat in contrast to the modernity of Higgins' ideas about industrial design, the museum's interior is constructed of stone and plaster forming high pointed-arch vaults, based on "Prinz Eugen's castle in Hohenzwern, Austria" from which part of the collection had come. Continued acquisition has made the Higgins Library one of the largest private collections in the world, containing more than 157 suits of armor and 1,000 related objects.

Both the exceptional quality of the museum's collection and the uniqueness of the Army Building as an example of early modern architecture warrant the listing of this property on the National Register of Historic Places, even though the building is slightly less than fifty years old.

MAR 5 1980

Property Worcester Multiple Resource Area (Partial Inventory)

State MA (Worcester) Working Number 8.30.79.2060

TECHNICAL

CONTROL

Photos 383 + 13
Maps 2, 63

HISTORIAN

Call/Accept
Lightner
10.30.79

Excellent multiple resource nomination for the entire city of Worcester. Both the general description or statement of significance & the individual inventory sheets are well done. Each type of property included is well justified, & reasons are listed for not including others at this time (e.g. 3-deckers). ^{Down} opposition is high. Minor problems w/ some properties are listed on attached sheets.

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

Concur with Bruce's comments on 102-L-3, 116-CBD-11, 117-E, and 130-CBD-50 and 44. Integrity and/or boundaries need to be addressed specifically on individual forms. DOUBLE

ARCHEOLOGIST

116-CBD-11 - Destroyed, cannot be listed.
130-CBD-44 - I am not convinced this has lost integrity. See attached.
102-L-3 - Period of significance and categorization of 1 bldg need to be discussed with State.

OTHER

ACCEPT
MacDonald
2/28/80

With 3 exceptions all properties appear to me to meet the criteria and the forms are adequate. ~~Both~~ ^{both} technically and to determine significance. Although some of the forms did not contain strong statements of significance the resource categories were thoroughly discussed in the body of the nomination; therefore significance was established. VBDs were not necessary because

HAER

Inventory

Review

of the scale maps and clearly delineated boundaries. A ledge was missing on some properties but is now included after the 2/11/80 corrections.

The only properties that I do not recommend listing are

- ✓ 116-CBD-13 - destroyed by fire MD - 10 CBD-11
- 130-CBD-44 - does not retain integrity for individual eligibility

REVIEW UNIT CHIEF

- ✓ 102-L-3 I ~~do not~~ ^{am not} convinced about boundaries but believe they could be OK. ~~based~~ ^{based} on additional documentation submitted - I defer judgement.

Recommend listing all ^{now} properties ~~except~~ ^{except} these 3. Return 116-CBD-11 to State (not eligible); ~~to discuss further~~ ^{to discuss further} w/ NR staff + state. DOUBLE

BRANCH CHIEF 3/3/80

Return 102-L-3 to state for correction;
HOLD 130-CBD-44 for info from state

KEEPER

Staff conference 3/5/80 - agreed to action as noted below:
Accept with exception of 116-CBD-11 (official notification of fire & demo from State), 102-L-3 (returning to state for revision - also returning 116-CBD-11) and 130-CBD-44 (holding from state)

Soldner
3/5/80

National Register Write-up Send-back Entered MAR 5 1980
Federal Register Entry 2.3.81 Re-submit



MICHELIN

& R TIRE CO., INC.

The
The
The



JUN 1979

30 AUG 1979



JUN 1979

44-B

100 Barber Ave.
Higgins Armory Museum
East + north elev.
Worcester MRA, MA

5 1980

Please refer to the map in the
Multiple Property Cover Sheet
for this property

Multiple Property Cover Sheet Reference Number: 64000304