

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **SEP 30 1985**

date entered **OCT 31 1985**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Tower, Major Morton, House Number of Contributing Resources: 1
and/or common Same Number of Non-contributing Resources: 0

2. Location

street & number 486 Schetter Avenue N/A not for publication
city, town Coos Bay N/A vicinity of Fourth Congressional District
state Oregon code 41 county Coos code 011

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Alden and Cynthia Miller
street & number PO Box 1056
city, town North Bend N/A vicinity of state Oregon 97459

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Coos County Courthouse
street & number N/A
city, town Coquille state Oregon 97423

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Statewide Inventory of Historic Properties has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date 1976 federal state county local
depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office, 525 Trade ST. SE
city, town Salem state Oregon 97310

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site -main block of 1892
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date ell of 1869 moved to site in 1872 or, possibly, after 1888.
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Major Morton Tower House, combining a previously constructed 1869 residence and an 1892 "addition," exhibited a commonplace vernacular form with modest Stick & Eastlake style detailing. Later embellished with shingles on the upper half of the front elevation, the house nonetheless retains its original exterior form. Minor interior alterations date from 1972 when the property was adapted for rental housing. It was at this time also that a small non-contributing wood frame lean-to rear addition with wood deck was added to the 1869 ell.

The Major Morton Tower House was constructed in two episodes. The ell dating from 1869 was enlarged by a two-story main block in 1892. The small nucleus was originally constructed by Dr. Charles Tower in 1869 as his bachelor's quarters, doctor's office and drug store. It was a simple rectangular box with six-over-six windows, a steeply-pitched gabled roof and a lean-to shed off the east eave line. This 1869 house was moved one block north by Major Morton Tower to become the nucleus of his family residence. (Title search records show ownership of the subject acreage outside the Tower family prior to 1888, so the house may not have been moved onto the subject acreage before 1888.) In this historic relocation the orientation of the original Dr. Charles Tower House was changed so that the eave side, rather than the gable end, faced south to the street and the lean-to shed was placed off the east gable end. The property occupies Lots 3 through 6 of Block 33, Empire City (now Coos Bay), Coos County, Oregon, a parcel approximately 100 x 200 feet in size.

In 1892 Major Tower hired contractor Peter Loggie to construct a two-story addition to replace the lean-to shed on the east of the original one-story nucleus. This 1892 addition has two-over-two windows, some of which are paired side-by-side, but continues the horizontal shiplap siding and steep-pitched gabled roof form of the original 1869 structure. The two-story block has a two-story projecting, rectangular bay window asymmetrically placed on the front gable end an an offset, hip-roofed porch with elaborate machine cut scroll brackets and balusters emphasizing the front entry. The overall architectural expression of the 1892 block was to give the house an asymmetrical composition in keeping with the Stick style, but the house is a restrained and modest example of this style that typically was more varied, decoratively rich and exuberant. Of note was the fact that the contractor, Peter Loggie and Major Tower, saw fit to leave the six-over-six windows on the single story ell. The elements and characteristics of the Stick style found in the Tower House are:

Steeply pitched gable roofs.

Asymmetrical composition with a vertical emphasis of the main volume.

Double-hung sash windows in a projecting window bay.

Wood framed construction with shiplap siding.

Diagonal tongue and groove spandrel paneling in the window bay.

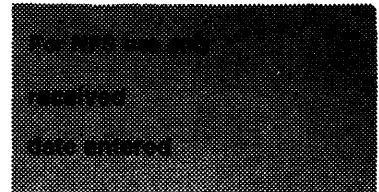
Fancy jig-sawn cut-out work on porch posts and railings.

Although reserved and rather modest, the house was described by Joseph Gaston in 1911 in his Cenetenial History of Oregon 1811-1911 as a "very fine residence." Certainly in the context of tiny Empire City on Coos Bay, it was a fine residence. A glass panel above the front door etched with the Tower initial ("T") is a memorable feature to long-time Coos Bay residents, but is no longer in place. The front door was a double leaf door.

At some undertermined later date, perhaps the 1940s, the elaborate scrolls and balusters on the porch were removed and courses of imbricated fish scale and diamond pattern shingles were added to the principal facade of the main block. The remaining six-over-six windows in the ell were changed to two-over-two windows with new head moldings to match the windows in the main block.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet MAJOR MORTON TOWER HOUSE Item number 7 Page 2

Photographs of the interior of the house dating from the early 1900s show the house was furnished with elaborately-patterned wallpapers on both the walls and ceilings. The one-story ell of the house was long used as a keeping room, or library/dining room with fireplace and a kitchen. The two-story block contained the more formal living room and four bedrooms. In the 1940s the first floor of the house was paneled over the original wall coverings. The house remained relatively intact under family ownership until 1972, when the house and the furnishings, some of which dated from the Federal period, were sold by the heirs. After 1972 the house became a rental property. A Federally-funded CETA project created a lean-to addition to the north (rear) of the house off the original 1869 single-story nucleus and to the west of the two-story block. The non-historic addition is not visible from the public right-of-way.

The house was rescued by the present owners from deterioration. The present owners intend to restore the house to its historic appearance to the extent possible, based on historic photographs and surviving historic fabric. Original wall and ceiling coverings are believed to exist under the 1940s paneling. Templates for the original six-over-six windows survive in the Tower-Flanagan House, one block to the south. The etched transom light and doors from the main entrance survive, and the entrance and porches can be restored. The owners also have considered restoring the entry hall fireplace.

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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1892-1914 **Builder/Architect** Peter Loggie, Builder (1892)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Major Morton Tower House, located at 486 Schetter Avenue, Coos Bay, Coos County, Oregon, is composed of two houses. One, constructed in 1869, belonged to Dr. Charles Tower, first physician in the Coos Bay area. It once served as his bachelor's quarters, doctor's office, and drug store. He gave the building to his brother, Morton, who eventually relocated it to the nominated acreage and constructed on one end an 1892 vernacular block which exhibited Stick and Eastlake style detailing. Having been altered through time, the wood-frame, shiplap-sided building nonetheless exhibits its essential architectural character and is significant primarily under criterion "b" for its association with Major Morton Tower (1840-1914), Massachusetts native, Civil War hero, Coos Bay collector of Customs, and civilian employe of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers who participated in early survey efforts aimed at Coos Bay harbor improvements. The earlier portion, although altered, is noteworthy under criterion "c," as it is believed to be the oldest continually occupied Euro-American settler's dwelling on the southern Oregon coast. Also contributing to the cultural significance of the house is the fact that it is understood to have served as an unofficial Customs house, for lack of an official office, during Morton Tower's tenure as chief collector of Customs from 1902 onward. Tower occupied the house until his death in 1914. Thereafter, his heirs held the property until 1972. The historic period of significance precisely corresponds to Major Tower's documented use of the property.

The Morton Tower House is a companion by association and proximity to the Tower-Flanagan House (1872), located on Nemark Avenue a block to the south, a property listed in the National Register in 1984. The Tower-Flanagan House was built for Major Tower's brother, pioneer Coos Bay area physician, Dr. Charles Tower. It is Dr. Tower's original quarters and medical office of 1869 which makes up a wing of the Morton Tower House.

Dr. Charles Tower, born in 1842 in New Hampshire, was a pioneer physician who practiced in the Coos Bay area from 1870 until his death in 1920. Dr. Tower was educated at Harvard and studied medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York and Harvard Medical School. A Union veteran of the Civil War, Dr. Tower came to Coos Bay in 1868 in ill health to be with his sister, Ella, the wife of pioneer coal mining entrepreneur Stillman S. Mann. Near death after an arduous sea passage around Cape Horn, Dr. Tower was carried ashore with tuberculosis contracted from exposure during the Civil War. On the southern Oregon coast, Dr. Tower miraculously recovered his health. Attributing his recovery to the climate, he was fond of saying: "There is iron in our water. There is healing in our pines." He completed his medical training at Willamette Medical School in Salem, Oregon. In 1869 he began construction of a single-story, gable-roofed building with a lean-to shed as his bachelor's quarters, office and drug store in what was the distinct settlement of Empire but is now part of Coos Bay. In 1872, Dr. Tower met Miss Minnie Burrell, the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Burrell of San Francisco, on a business trip. Miss Burrell was studying to be an opera singer. Miss Burrell subsequently came to the Coos Bay area for a visit. The two young people canoed on Coos Bay and rode on horseback between Empire and Libby. Dr. Tower, an ardent booster of the virtues of the Coos Bay area, persuaded Miss Burrell to marry him and commenced construction of a new and larger house on his property in Empire more befitting his aristocratic wife-to-be. They married several months

9. Major Bibliographical References

See attached sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 0.5 acres

Quadrangle name Empire, Oregon

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	0	3	9	6	8	0	0	4	8	0	5	1	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

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D

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Verbal boundary description and justification The Major Morton Tower House occupies Lots 3, 4, 5 and 6, inclusive, Block 33, Empire City (now Coos Bay), Coos County, Oregon, and is approximately 100 by 200 feet in size.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state None code county code

state None code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Steve Clay

organization Samuels & Clay, AIA Architects date March 15, 1985

street & number 375 N. 4th Street telephone (503) 269-5555

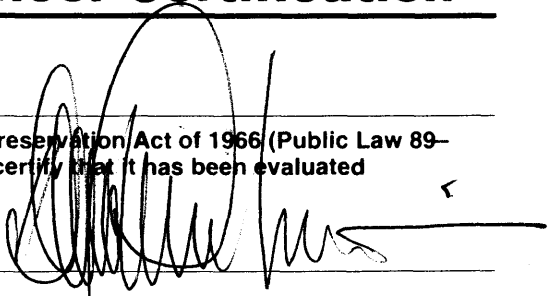
city or town Coss Bay state Oregon 97420

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.

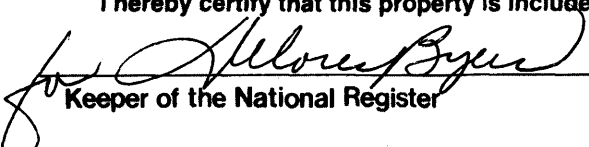
State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer date September 25, 1985

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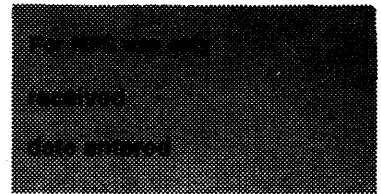
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the National Register date 10-31-85


Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet MAJOR MORTON TOWER HOUSE Item number 8 Page 2

later in San Francisco in 1872. The new house, in the Rural Gothic style, displaced the old bachelor's quarters on Dr. Tower's property. It was not long occupied by Dr. and Mrs. Tower, however. In 1874 the Towers moved to nearby Marshfield, the community which later became Coos Bay.

Major Morton Tower, born February 23, 1840 in Massachusetts, was a hero of the Civil War and a significant figure in the development of the Port of Coos Bay. He enlisted April 17, 1861 in the Fourth Battalion of Rifles of the Massachusetts Militia and re-enlisted July 16, 1861 in the 13th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry as the Sergeant of his Company. During his time of service he was wounded at the second Battle of Bull Run and at the Battle of Fredricksburg. Promoted to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant, 1st Lieutenant and later Captain of his Company, he was taken prisoner at the Battle of Gettysburg July 1, 1863. Tower's regiment was largely killed or captured as the Union Army maneuvered for high ground on that first day of the battle, and Tower was one of several thousand Union soldiers taken prisoner. Tower was confined to the notorious Confederate Libby Prison, a converted brick warehouse with a tin roof, in Richmond, Virginia. He was one of 109 men who tunneled their way underground through a fireplace hearth to escape. Tower was one of only 53 who eluded the bloodhounds in the swamps and succeeded in reaching the Union line. Tower and other Libby Prison escapees were received and decorated in Washington, D. C. by President Lincoln as war heroes. Tower afterwards was fond of giving the story of his trip down the Potomac by riverboat to Washington to be decorated. The Libby Prison escapees were celebrating boisterously and were asked to quiet down, but upon being informed that the men were escapees from Libby Prison the riverboat captain exclaimed: "Make all the damned noise you please!"

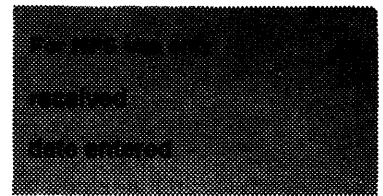
Morton Tower was honorably discharged September 30, 1864, in a physically disabled condition as a brevetted Major. On February 23, 1869, Major Tower married Miss Anna Loudon, born in England, who had immigrated with her family to Boston in 1850. Major Tower and his wife and their son Morton L., born February 5, 1870, in Boston, booked passage to the West Coast around Cape Horn and settled in Empire in 1872. Dr. Charles Tower gave his brother his former bachelor's quarters, office, drug store, for a residence. Major Tower moved this structure one block north to its present site, where it became the nucleus of Major Tower's two-story, Stick style residence and the subject of this nomination. Major Tower's family fitted snugly into the former bachelor's quarters. A new attic window appeared in the gable end, indicating use of the attic space.

Major Tower worked as a civilian for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers on the earliest of surveys for harbor entrance improvements in the 1870s. He served as deputy collector of Customs from the 1870s and in 1902 became the Collector of Customs, an important and influential position in the growing Port of Coos Bay. He served as the chief officer for the 1880 U. S. Census Bureau in Coos County which produced an inventory of everyone in the county.

During his tenure as collector of Customs, apparently, Major Tower's house became the Customs house for lack of an office. According to an interview with Janie Tower, a Tower descendent, accommodations were not otherwise available, so the Tower residence became a center of activity relative to the commerce of the area.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet MAJOR MORTON TOWER HOUSE Item number 8 Page 3

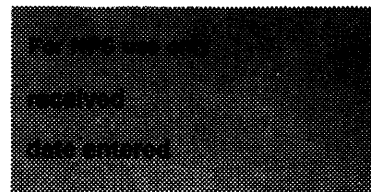
Major Tower's son, Morton L. Tower, studied engineering in San Francisco and returned to Coos Bay in 1891 to serve as the inspecting engineer for construction of the North Jetty, which his father had promoted. Morton L. Tower as a junior and senior engineer for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, was in charge of a number of early Oregon river studies, dredging projects, and jetty constructions and coastal fortifications on the Coquille, Tillamook and Coos (Bay), and the Columbia, Umpqua and Siuslaw Rivers, and also the northern California coast prior to World War I. Morton L. Tower was killed while overseeing the jetty construction in Eureka, California. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers had a tugboat named the Major Tower which towed jetty rock from Coos River to the North Jetty construction project about 1912. Major Morton Tower and his son Morton L. Tower thus both were directly associated with the early development of the Port of Coos Bay.

After Major Tower's death in 1914, the house continued with all its original furnishings in the family until 1972, when it was sold by heirs. Some of the original furnishings included pieces dating from the Federal period. Several European bronze sculptures which decorated the entrance hall are now in the Coos Bay Public Library. An unusually comprehensive series of interior views of the house, both the 1869 volume and the main block of 1892, documents the Towers' decor of the period 1900-1910 and will serve as the basis for proposed interior restoration.

Some historical accounts give 1873 or 1874 as the date of Major Tower's settlement in Empire, but the date 1872 seems to correlate best with accounts of Dr. Charles Tower's marriage in 1872 and Dr. Tower's subsequent relocation to Marshfield in 1874. A title search of the subject property indicates that the title to the property was held in the name of Major Tower's wife Anna from 1888 onward. It is possible that Dr. Tower's original dwelling was not moved to the subject acreage until 1888, as title to the property did not reside with Anna Tower prior to 1888. Whether the early nucleus of Morton Tower's house was sited on its present location in 1872 or in 1888, thus may be open to question based on deed records, but it was in 1892 that Major Tower contracted to build the main, two-story block.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet MAJOR MORTON TOWER HOUSE Item number 9 Page 1

Beckham, Stephen Dow. Notes of Interviews with Gwenedde Tower Maple, Beckham Diaries. McMinnville, Oregon.

Dodge, Orvil, Pioneer History of Coos and Curry Counties. Salem, Oregon. Capitol Printing, 1898.

Gaston, Joseph. Centennial History of Oregon, 1811-1911. Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912. p. 758.

Larsell, Olof. The Doctor in Oregon - A Medical History.

The Oregonian. November 7, 1948. Portland, Oregon.

Peterson, Emil R., A Century of Coos and Curry. Portland, Oregon: Binfords & Mort, 1952. p. 577.

The Empire Builder. "M. Tower Home is one of Empire's Oldest Dwellings." (Centennial Edition) August 20, 1959. Coos Bay (Empire), Oregon.

Marshfield Sun. Obituary of Major Tower. November 5, 1914.

Coos Bay Times. Obituary of Major Tower. November 4, 1914.

Coos Bay Harbor. Obituary of Major Tower. November 2, 1914.

Telephone Interview, March 14, 1985, with Janie Tower about Major Morton Tower and his home.