

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

THEME: Architecture

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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DATE ENTERED

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Isaac Royall House

AND/OR COMMON

Isaac Royall House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER 15 George Street

CITY, TOWN

Medford

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

7th

STATE

Massachusetts

— VICINITY OF

CODE

25

COUNTY

Middlesex

CODE

017

**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"/> 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                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE      | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT                 | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS                    | <input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> NO                         | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:               |

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Royall House Association

STREET &amp; NUMBER

15 George Street

CITY, TOWN

Medford

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, MIDDLESEX REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Middlesex Registry of Deeds--South

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

STATE

Massachusetts

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey (12 Photos; 11 sheets,  
6 photos of slave quarter)

DATE

1940, 41, 61; 1934-35

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress/Annex Division of Prints and Photographs

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

# 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 nucleus of the large Royall mansion was a seventeenth-century house, two-and-a-half stories high but only one room deep. Isaac Royall bought the house in 1732 and remodeled it between 1733-37. During this time the height was raised to a full three stories and the present eastern facade completed. The design of this facade utilizes elements of early Georgian style which were popular in the 1730's. Perhaps because wooden construction was less expensive or because a carpenter was more readily available than a mason, or both, he had the original brick surface recased with clapboarding. The angles were given wooden quoins and the windows received elaborately molded frames connected by spandrel panels to form continuous vertical strips. A modillioned cornice was placed under the roof eave and the entrance was given emphasis with an enframing of rusticated wood under Doric pilasters. A separate brick building to house slaves and other outbuildings was also erected.

Royall's son, Isaac, Jr., inherited the house on his father's death in 1739 and between 1747 and 1750 again remodeled. The present Georgian west facade was thus completed at this time, and the house as it stands today consists of a great three-story mass with a low-pitch gabled roof, three wood facades and one brick end wall.

The west facade has rusticated wood siding and giant Doric pilasters at the corners, a treatment that may have been suggested by the Shirley-Eustis House, built just at this time at Roxbury, only six miles away. Royall evidently desired even greater architectural richness than that of the Shirley House, for he added angular pediments over his first and second floor windows and an elaborate central doorway topped by a modillioned segmental pediment and flanked by Ionic pilasters.

These features reflect, in a provincial manner, the increased grandeur of high Georgian style. In both the east and west facade an additive, somewhat awkward handling of the forms reflect the interpretation of a local craftsman in contrast to the Shirley-Eustis House which illustrates a greater sophistication in its design.

The main interior rooms of the Royall House were either built anew or redecorated in the Georgian style at the time of the 1747-50 enlargement, giving Colonel Royall, Jr., a chance to emulate the standard set by the now demolished Thomas Hancock House, which had been built in Boston in 1737-40. The central entrance hall of the Royall House was divided midway by a paneled elliptical arch resting on scrolled capitals. The stair, with its double-spiraled newel, twisted balusters, and paneled and scrolled step ends, followed the Hancock house example, and in the two main rooms the detail of the woodwork is so nearly identical to that of two main rooms in the Hancock House, done by William Moore in 1745-46, that it is most probable that they were done by the same hand.

(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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION              | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY               | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> ART                     | <input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING            | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC                  | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER             |  |
| <input 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 1733-37, 1747-50

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built about 1692 and remodeled in 1733-37 and again in 1747-50, the Isaac Royall House is an outstanding example of a seventeenth-century house transformed into a Georgian residence. The east and west facades, each done in a different stage of remodeling, are of particular architectural interest as representations of the phase of Georgian style current during their construction. Although a less than academic interpretation by some local carpenter-builder, the two facades present an interesting study in the development of Georgian architecture. The interiors are also of an especially high quality.

## HISTORY

The Isaac Royall House is one-half-mile south of Medford Square, facing Main Street below the Mystic River. The estate was owned originally by the Winthrop family, granted to them in 1631. It was purchased from them by Elizabeth Lidgett, who gave it to her son Charles. He, however, was a follower of Andros, and was ordered to leave the province with the unpopular governor.

Lieutenant-governor John Usher, brother-in-law of Colonel Lidgett, came into possession of the house through the entanglement of its owners lawsuits.

The original nucleus of the present large Royall House was a brick dwelling two-and-a-half stories high and one room deep, erected about 1692. This structure was first enlarged by John Usher, who lived there until 1726. Colonel Isaac Royall, a wealthy merchant of Antigua, purchased the property in 1732. Royall brought twenty-seven slaves with him from the West Indies and built a separate structure of brick to house them. Between 1733 and 1736, he extensively remodeled the house in the Georgian style. The height was raised to full three stories and the present east facade was completed at this time. The plans for this remodeling are said to have been drawn in Antigua from a nobleman's house which Royall admired.

Royall's son, Isaac, Jr., inherited the house on his father's death in 1739 and between 1747 and 1750 remodeled the west facade. Royall, Jr, held the office of selectman for a long time, first in Charlestown and then in Medford. He was also a member of the Provincial Governor's Council for 22 years. Although not an avowed Tory, like many owners of property, he feared the failure of rebellion and fled to Halifax. From there he went on to England where he died of smallpox in Kensington in 1781. Soon after he left, his estate in Medford

(Continued)



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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

Both the west parlor and the great marble chamber above it are fully paneled with applied pilasters, Doric below and Corinthian in the bedroom. The columns in the bedroom are painted to imitate colored marble which creates a rich elegant effect. Both rooms have interior end fireplaces, but an appearance of awkward projection in the room is avoided by the use of alcoves on either side of the fireplace, with elliptical arches, window seats, and paneled folding shutters. The bedroom fireplace is framed by an eared architrave, with a single panel of unusual size above, but lacks a mantel shelf. Three rows of Dutch tiles adorn the sides of the fireplace recess; the living room fireplace has not only these, but an additional row framing the opening.

The house has received expert treatment in recent years in relation to the restoration of interior paint colors, draperies and wallpapers.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

was placed in charge of Dr. Simon Tufts, a neighbor and friend, who served as his agent and was faced with the difficult problems in trying to operate the huge farm. After Bunker Hill and while the siege of Boston lasted, the house was the headquarters of Colonel John Stark.

After the government took possession of the property it was returned to the Royall heirs in 1790. They in turn sold it to a syndicate. In 1810 Jacob Tidd came into possession of the estate which remained in his family for fifty-one years. The house was rented by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1896, and acquired by the Isaac Royall House Association in 1908.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Kimball, Fiske, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the  
Early Republic, New York, 1922.

Morrison, Hugh, Early American Architecture, New York, 1952.

Northend, Mary H., Historic Houses of New England, Boston, 1914.

Pierson, William H. Jr., American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial  
and Neo-Classical Period, Garden City, N. Y., 1970.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

The Isaac Royall House boundary is drawn to include its present lot with slave quarters and a park to the east which was part of the original land, now deeded to the city as a public park but still visually part of the whole. It will revert to the Royall House Association should the city no longer wish to maintain it as a park. Beginning at the southeast corner at the intersection of Main and George Streets, the boundary continues north along the west curb of Main Street to the south boundary of the adjoining property on the north, then west along this property line to the eastern boundary of adjoining properties on the west which face College Avenue, then south along this line to George Street, then east along the north curb of George Street to the point of beginning.