

7-10-73

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Hon. William Cohen

STATE: Maine	
COUNTY: Washington	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	MAY 22 1973

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

APB
2/19
N 100 1020
618300

1. NAME

COMMON:
The Mansion House

AND/OR HISTORIC:
(General John Brewer House)

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
U. S. Route #1

CITY OR TOWN:
Robbinston

STATE Maine	CODE 23	COUNTY: Washington	CODE 029
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3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No at this time
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <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 (Specify) <input type="checkbox"/> Comments

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Mr. & Mrs. Frank Didisheim

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Robbinston

STATE:
Maine

CODE:
23

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
Washington County Registry of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Machias

STATE:
Maine

CODE:
Washington

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
None

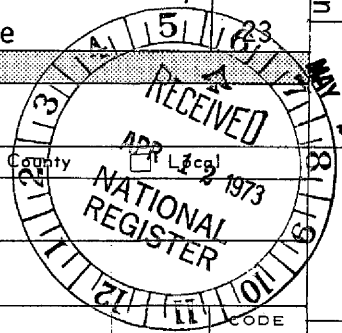
DATE OF SURVEY:

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:



STATE: Maine

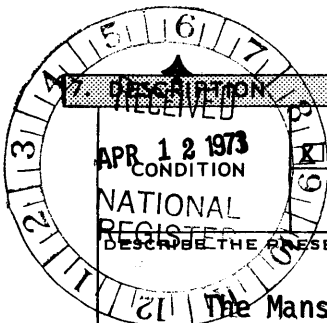
COUNTY: Washington

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS



RECEIVED
APR 12 1973
CONDITION
NATIONAL
REGISTER

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent		<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed	
<input type="checkbox"/> Altered		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Basically Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Mansion House is a two story, wooden framed, clapboarded building built on a foundation of reddish granite blocks which enclose a full, dry cellar. The house itself consists of a rectangular main section, about 48 ft. X 40 ft., and an ell, slightly offset from the main section, of about 40 ft. X 30 ft. On its eastern side, overlooking the river and the bay, the main section has an open board piazza of about 30 ft. X 10 ft. 6 inches, with steps descending to the front lawn. The piazza is covered by a roof at the height of the second story, supported by four finely fluted Ionic columns. On the south side of the main section, there are well designed bay windows on both stories. A glass enclosed cupola, from which there is a striking view on the river and the bay as well as on the Mansion House property, dominates the main section from above its gabled roof and attic over the second story. The rectangular ell is of the same design as the main section, and of the same height but has a roof of greater pitch so that its attic is very spacious. There is a difference in floor level of two short steps between the two sections at both the ground floor and second story levels. Two tall brick chimneys in the main section flank the cupola, and there is a lower chimney serving the ell.

On the ground floor, the main section has four spacious living rooms grouped around a unique double staircase and a wide hall of great elegance. The front door, at the eastern or bay end of the hall has beautifully proportioned fan lights and side lights and opens directly on the piazza. At the opposite end of the hall, a doorway surmounted by a louvred fan, with louvred panels on either side, leads to a vestibule where a door, smaller than the door to the piazza but gracefully designed, with a light hood at the exterior, opens on to a grassy terrace and the driveway. The vestibule has two coat closets, under either side of the double staircase, the southern of these having been recently converted into a hidden cellar staircase to give access from the interior of the house to the cellar during the winter months. Three of the living rooms (the "drawing room", the "study" and the "sitting room") have large fireplaces with the original Adam mantels, the fourth (the "music room") originally had one which was closed when the heating system was installed. The second story of the main section has three large bedrooms each with its fireplace and well designed mantelpiece, two smaller bedrooms and two bathrooms. The ground floor of the ell consists of an unusually large dining room, running the entire width of the house, and a spacious kitchen and pantry. The dining room opens out to the music room in the main section, and on its northern side, to the kitchen. The dining room originally had a fireplace which has been bricked in, and has a door to the terrace on the driveway. The kitchen has a "pass through" to one of the two large closets in the dining room, and a large built-in wood-box. The second floor of the ell has two large bedrooms, two smaller bedrooms and a large bathroom which was probably originally a bedroom. These rooms are disposed on either side of a hallway which, at its northern end, has access to staircases to the attic and kitchen, and at its southern end, enlarges into a closeted area that leads to the main

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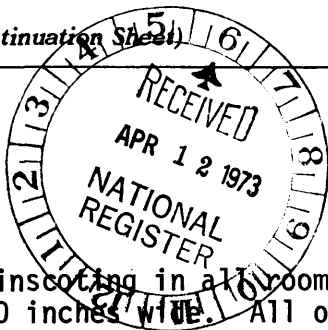
(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

7. DESCRIPTION

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section of the house.



The white painted wainscoting in a 16 rooms on the ground floor is made of a single pine board, 30 inches wide. All ornamentation, cruciform doors and Adam mantels are of late 18th century design. The kitchen contains one of the few pieces of furniture known to have been in the original house, a long, very wide table made of one pine board, which bears on its underside the carved name of the first owner. (Two early Empire banquet tables in the dining room are also original pieces.) The flooring of the entire ground floor of the main section of the house is of the original wide pine boards which have recently been sanded.

The driveway sweeps in from the road, giving access to the door at the western end of the hall, the kitchen door which has a large stoop and steps, and the barn, and doubles back around a grassed oval at the center of which is a tall flagpole dominating the approach to the house. On the far side of the driveway oval is an old granite hitching post. It is possible that originally, the driveway circled the house to its eastern or bay side, with access to the interior not only through the front door on the bay side, but also through a side door, also with fan light, on the south side; then re-joining the main road through the woods beyond the barn. The south door opens into a vestibule which, in turn, leads to the two large rooms (drawing room and lounge) which flank it.

The barn is shingled and painted white, except for its eastern side, facing the bay and the river and sheltered by several tall old spruces, which is not painted but covered with weathered shingles.

The one clue to the year in which the house was built is the date "1785" engraved on one of the panes of the fan light above the front door. The frame of the house as well as of the barn is of hand hewn beams, with cut nails used throughout. Many architectural features and details of construction indicate that ship's carpenters worked at the construction of the house. Among these are inner shutters that slide into the walls in the ground floor rooms of the main section, the louvred fan above the doorway between the main hall and the vestibule next to it, and the two beautiful and distinguished staircases rising from the wide hall to the landing with window, a few steps below the second story.

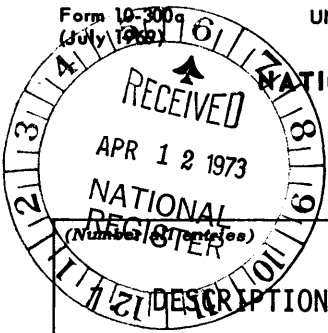
The entire property, now variably estimated at 11 to 14 acres, lies between the road and the shore. It is bordered on the road for its full length by a magnificent hedge of ancient, tall arbor vitae. The lawn in front of the house sweeps down to the shore. Directly in front of the house

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DESCRIPTION

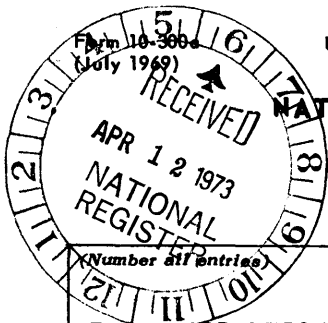
3

is a wide, semicircular gravelly beach, connected at low tide with a picturesque red granite rock which is isolated at high tide and on which can still be seen old timbers which doubtless were part of ways used in ship-building by the house's original owner, General Brewer, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The house is about 50 to 60 ft. above mean sea level, and commands a spectacular view up the St. Croix River and across the bay to the New Brunswick shore, Deer Island and other Canadian islands at the foot of the bay. The legend is that the cupola above the roof of the house was used during the war of 1812 to keep a look out for British ships entering the bay, and it is indeed a fine vantage point from which to follow all navigation. At the northern end of the beach is a large and lofty boathouse whose date of construction is unknown but which is certainly not contemporary with the house itself. Beyond the boathouse, the shoreline consists of high, red granite cliffs, heavily wooded with old evergreens. At the northern extremity of the cliffs, on a bluff jutting out into the river is a large log cabin with veranda, erected in the 1920's, which has a sweeping view across the bay and up the St. Croix River to Dochet's Island and beyond.

The area directly around the house has many well spaced great old trees, mostly pines, ash, maples, elms, all certainly centenarians. Of these, one elm, in back of the driveway, is undoubtedly one of the largest in Eastern Maine. The property is limited to the south by a large creek. Another smaller one on the northern side, known as Smuggler's Creek, winds through a flowered swale to the beach. An old shingled ice house, made of hand hewn timbers, on the bank above this creek, and within easy access to the kitchen door, had to be removed during the past summer as it has disintegrated with disuse. Beyond Smuggler's Creek are three spacious fields, planted in fruit trees, bordered and separated from each other by a dense growth of birch, hemlock, spruce and wild cherry. One has access to the log cabin on the cliffs at the northern extremity of the property through the woods which close off the largest of these fields. One of the distinctive features of the property is that it combines, in a relatively small acreage, an old and spacious park like lawn, a beach and picturesque rocky shore line, heavily wooded areas, creeks, meadows and fields at various elevations. There is no doubt that the site was originally selected to combine all these features, together with the splendid view over river and bay and the ready access to salt water as well as the abundance of fresh water.

North of the house, separated from it by 15 ft. is the wood shingled barn, about 53 ft. X 31 ft., whose axis is parallel to that of the house and which lies at the end of the driveway. The high ceiled barn has a very spacious hayloft or attic, and a wood shed under its flooring. It was doubt-

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7. DESCRIPTION

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less part of the original construction. The original horsestalls were done away with, probably in the first years of this century. It is probable that the barn was originally connected to the house by a closed passageway as on the barn side of the kitchen, a now blocked door and a long sheltering hood still exist. The barn also has a blocked door opposite the corresponding door in the kitchen.

The exterior shutters throughout, on both sections of the house, originally dark green, have recently been painted a classic light grey. Otherwise, the entire exterior of the house, including the chimneys, is white, with a greenish grey roof.

It is probable that the columned piazza or portico at the front of the house was added in the 1860's, its owner at that time, James Shepard Pike having married a Southern belle who, no doubt, was inspired in its design by the traditional mansions on the Potomac. It has been referred to as the "Mt. Vernon of the St. Croix", as reported in Guy Murchie's "St. Croix, The Sentinel River".

No other structural alterations have been made in the house since its construction except for the probable construction of the bay windows on the south side, which give a fine view on the sweep of lawn, the fields in that direction and the shore and woods beyond, the addition of bathrooms in the 19th century, (two in the main section, one in the ell - a large lavatory off the study on the main floor may have been part of the original design), and the interior staircase built last year through one of the hall closets to the cellar. The electrification of the house, the addition of heating, plumbing, storm windows etc. to make the house habitable were accomplished without altering its main features.

The largest of the living room, the drawing room with its wide bay window, is furnished with important antiques of distinction, mostly of the time of construction of the house. Many of these pieces are not only unusually distinguished of design but also have historical significance. Among others are a McIntyre chair having belonged to John Hancock, a Seymour desk, an American drum table, several other fine American tables as well as early French tables and chairs, two fine chairs coming down from the Conant and Kingsbury families, forebears of the present owner. Other important period pieces on the main floor are Chippendale chairs and bench in the hall which has, as does the drawing room around its mantelpiece, beautiful Waterford crystal sconces. Upstairs, there are a great number of fascinating and unique pieces ranging from the 15th to the 19th centuries. The study on the main floor houses an important collection of stone, bronze and terra cotta sculpture of high and classical antiquity. The walls are throughout the house adorned with interesting and significant paintings, drawings, illuminat-

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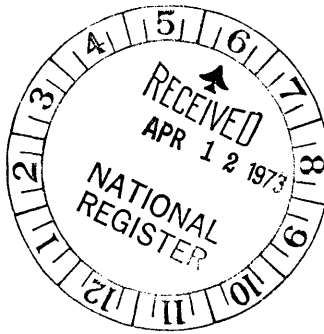
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7. DESCRIPTION

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ed manuscripts and engravings which add to the lustre and beauty of each room and are in keeping with their design and the historical associations of the house.



SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1785

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | <u>Early history of the settlement and development of this border region.</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

The Mansion House can be considered a great and lasting monument to the enterprise, prosperity and importance in this nation's national and international development of the shipbuilding industry on the American shore of Passamaquoddy Bay. Shipbuilding was the leading occupation and the principal factor in the settlement and development of this region during the latter part of the 18th and the first part of the 19th century. This, in turn, led to rapid advances in lumbering and other industries in the St. Croix region, and provided a great part of the schooner fleet which launched the United States as a great mercantile nation and furthered commerce and communication between this shore and all points of the world. It also cemented cooperation between entrepreneurs on the Canadian and American shores of the St. Croix River and helped develop friendly, profitable and peaceful relations (on both economic, social and political levels) between the nationals of the two countries.

General John Brewer, builder and original occupant of the Mansion House, became one of the most active shipbuilders on this shore, also functioning as postmaster of Robbinston, far more populous and busy at that time than it is now, and as Brigadier General of the Washington County militia, among other public posts. His shipbuilding activities were temporarily suspended during the War of 1812 when he was the American officer who accepted the surrender of the British forces in Machias, but they were carried on after the war by General Brewer and his son, John N. M. Brewer, who built ships on the Canadian shore as well as at Robbinston. According to Harold A. Davis, a historian of the St. Croix region, "John N. M. Brewer had made a grand show in his fine old Mansion House, and had kept a coach and four, but although he launched more than one hundred vessels, he died (in 1854) a comparatively poor man". According to James Shepard Pike (who eventually purchased the Mansion House and used it as his summer home), this was the usual fate of shipbuilders. Pike reported that those who fared better financially owed their good fortune to other activities such as lumbering. John N. M. Brewer and his fellow townsman, Joshua Briggs, operated during this period both in Robbinston and in St. Andrews, New Brunswick.

It is interesting to note that General Brewer, who was a leading Fed-

(See Continuation Sheet)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Davis, Harold A. An International Community on the St. Croix. Orono, Maine: University Press, University of Maine, 1950.

Murchie, Guy. Saint Croix, The Sentinel River. New York: Duel, Sloan and Pearce, 1947. (Contains photographs of interior and exterior of Mansion House).

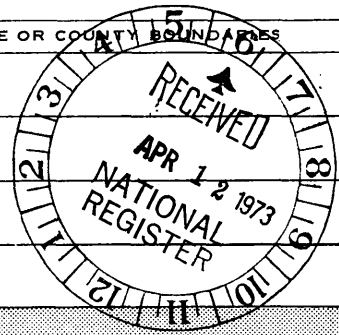
10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		45 ° 05' 10"	67 ° 06' 45"	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **One Acre**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE



11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Frank Didisheim

ORGANIZATION: _____ DATE: _____

STREET AND NUMBER:
The Mansion House

CITY OR TOWN: **Robbinston** STATE: **Maine** CODE: **23**

12 STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name: James H. Mundy
 Title: State Liaison Officer
 Date: April 10, 1973

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

Robert H. Utley
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 5/22/73

ATTEST:
A Bradford
 Keeper of The National Register
 Date: 5/18/73

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

eralist, and who, at the outbreak of the War of 1812 was Robbinston post-master, was charged with having permitted British officers to inspect the mails and to forward documents to Fredericton, and to have seized the despatches announcing the Declaration of War and sent the information to St. John and Halifax.

It is reported that the father of James Shepard Pike who apparently was in business relations with the Brewers "fell out of his boat near General Brewers and drowned". Pike was widely known as a journalist, diplomat and politician. As a young man, he had edited the Calais Gazette and Advertiser. He became a leader in the anti-slavery wing of the Whig Party, wrote political dispatches from Washington for the Boston Atlas and the Portland Courier, and in 1850 joined the staff of the New York Tribune as Washington correspondent and eventually associate editor. During the Civil War, he was sent by President Lincoln to the Hague as United States Minister to the Netherlands, serving there with distinction for five years of trying times in American diplomacy. On his return from the Hague in 1864, he bought the Mansion House and furnished it with much fine furniture brought from Europe. He lived there, continuing his writing and his political activities until his death, an outstanding and respected citizen of the St. Croix region. He is considered as one of the most vocal and effective advocates of freedom for the slaves and as one of the leaders in the founding of the Republican Party. He entertained at the Mansion House such notables as Charles A. Dana, Horace Greeley and Salmon P. Chase. It is a common legend that many of the original planks of the Republican Party were hammered out on the Mansion House piazza by members of this distinguished group.

The Mansion House property was acquired in 1920 by Professor Vladimir and Mrs. Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch of New York, and was used as a summer home by them, and later by their daughter and her husband, until 1970, when the house was winterized for year round liveability. This work, it must be stressed in no way changed the appearance of the house.

Dr. Simkhovitch, professor of Economic History at Columbia University, was author of "Toward the Understanding of Jesus", "Hay and History" and other works; also a distinguished art collector and horticulturist. Mrs. Simkhovitch, founder of the social settlement, Greenwich House, in New York, a leader in housing and other social problems, also was author of many books, including "Neighborhood", "Here is God's Plenty".

