

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

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NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 38). Mark each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Olson House

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number East Side of Hathorn Point Road N/A not for publication

city or town South Cushing  vicinity

state Maine code ME county Knox code 013 zip code 04563

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

E. S. [Signature] 9/3/93  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper [Signature] Date of Action 8-31-95

OLSON HOUSE  
Name of Property

National Register of KNOX, ME  
Historic Places County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/Museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival  
Italianate

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Granite  
walls Wood/Weatherboard  
roof Wood/Shingle  
other One Story Kitchen/Woodshed wing

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1939-1968  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1939  
1948  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Wyeth, Andrew  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

OLSON HOUSE  
Name of Property

KNOX, MAINE  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 19 478410 4869655  
Zone Easting Northing

2         

3           
Zone Easting Northing

4         

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kirk F. Mohney, Architectural Historian

organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date July, 1993

street & number 55 Capitol Street, Station #65 telephone 207/287-2132

city or town Augusta, state Maine zip code 04333-0065

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Farnsworth Museum

street & number P. O. Box 466 telephone 207/596-6457

city or town Rockland, state Maine zip code 04841-0466

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

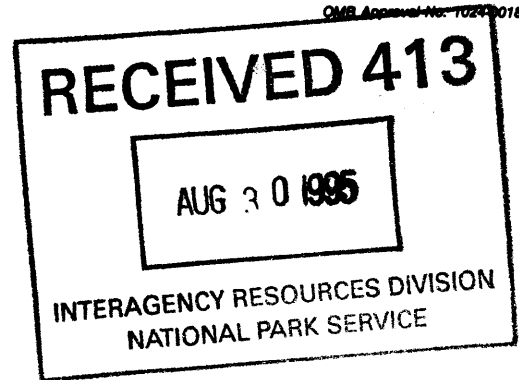
**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

OLSON HOUSE

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The Olson House is a tall two-and-a-half story, five bay frame dwelling which is covered by a steeply pitched gable roof. It has a recessed one-story, two-part wing projecting from the northeast corner which is composed of the kitchen and wood shed. The house, which is sheathed principally in weatherboards and rests on a granite block foundation, stands on a rise of land near the end of Hathorn Point Road with a view south to Maple Juice Cove and the St. George River.

Facing south, the symmetrically composed front elevation consists of a central entry with a recessed four-panel door flanked by narrow sidelights, the whole of which is framed by a hooded surround. A pair of six-over-six windows with hoods are located on either side of the entry and five are positioned on the second story. The narrow cornice extends to short gable end returns. A pair of gabled dormers with two-over-two windows punctuate the roof about a third of the way in from each end. Behind them at the ridge line, two small brick chimneys further enhance the vertical proportions of the house. The kitchen wing, whose diminutive scale is exacerbated by the magnitude of the main block, features two doors widely separated by a single six-over-six window. The door nearest the west end is flanked by sidelights and a hood which matches those on the main block. This hood is also used above the window and the vertical board east door which leads into the wood shed. A brick flue rises through the ridge of the roof. There is a single square window on the south side of the wood shed, which is sheathed entirely in wood shingles.

The west gable end contains six double-hung windows, two on each story. Those on the first story are asymmetrically placed whereas the others are equally spaced. On the opposite gable peak and one each on the lower levels forward of the kitchen wing. A pair of small six-over-six windows are also located on the east end of the wood shed, the wall of which is covered in weatherboards rather than wood shingles. The building's rear elevation presents a long wall surface interrupted by a variety of window and door openings and the change in siding material on the wood shed. There are six symmetrically placed windows on the main block, three windows and a door in the kitchen wing, and a door, window, and vent in the wood shed.

Like the exterior, the interior of the Olson House is modestly detailed. Its main block is organized around a central hall containing the steep open string stair with its Greek Revival style turned newel post and balusters. Four panel doors open off the hall into a pair of front rooms and a single large room at the rear. Door and window surrounds in the front rooms of the first story have built-up lintels but are otherwise flat. Two doors lead from the rear room, one through a pantry with cupboards and shelves and the other into a narrow hall behind the kitchen door. There are several small rooms on both the second and third story with plaster over lath walls and

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ceilings, a finish which remains throughout the house with the exception of one replacement wallboard ceiling on the first floor.

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A weathered nineteenth century farmhouse whose rural setting remains largely undisturbed, the Olson House has achieved significance in the history of American art by virtue of its association with the work of Andrew Wyeth. For nearly thirty years, from 1939-1968, Wyeth depicted the house, its immediate environment, and its occupants Christina and Alvaro Olson in a series of drawings, watercolors, and tempera paintings including one of the most widely recognized images of the twentieth century: "Christina's World". Thus, in its inspirational role for Wyeth, the house is eligible for nomination to the Register under criteria A and B. Furthermore, criteria consideration G applies since the period of significance extends to less than fifty years.

The historic occupation of the property on which the Olson House stands begins with the granting in 1743 of a 100 acre tract of land to Alexander Hathorn of Salem, Massachusetts. Similar grants were made to Alexander's brothers Samuel and William; presumably adjacent lots. Tradition holds that the three settlers erected log cabins at the point of land which subsequently became known as Hathorn's Point. In the late eighteenth century Capt. Samuel Hathorn II (c. 1750-1820), the son of Alexander (not Samuel) Hathorn is said to have replaced his father's dwelling with a two-story, hip roofed frame house. The property subsequently descended to Samuel's son, Capt. Aaron Hathorn who occupied it until his death in 1859. Thereafter, it was sold out of the family, but was reacquired by Aaron Hathorn's son, Capt. Samuel Hathorn, IV (1822-1892) in 1865. Hathorn lived here with his wife Tryphena and their daughter Kate and, according to family tradition, upon his retirement in 1871 he replaced the hip roof on the house his grandfather erected with the present gabled one. This is said to have been done in order to accommodate rooms for summer boarders. The "Hathorn House" hotel first appears in the Maine Register in 1876, and it continued to be listed until 1921-22 with John Olson as proprietor after Hathorn's death.

In the chronology outlined above, the present house, with the exception of its gabled upper story, has been presumed to be the one built by Samuel Hathorn II in the late 1700s. If this is the case, the eighteenth century structure must have been subjected to a radical remodeling on both the exterior and interior in the mid nineteenth century. This statement is supported by a number of existing architectural features including the detailing of the main entrance and windows as well as the modest Greek Revival style interior trim of the stair and window and door surrounds, as well as the conspicuous absence of fireplaces. It is entirely possible that Samuel Hathorn IV carried out this remodeling campaign at the time he is thought to have raised the roof - if he did not erect an entirely new house. On the other hand, some of these modifications may have been made by Aaron Hathorn, prior to his death in 1859. In any event, the house as we view it today is certainly not the building that would have been put up in the late 1700s, with or without its hip roof.

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In the winter of 1892, a young sailor named John Olson is said to have come ashore (presumably on or near Hathorn Point), as a result of an early freeze on the St. George River. Here he met Kate Hathorn and her recently widowed mother. John Olson and Kate Hathorn were subsequently married and they remained at the Hathorn house until they died. Their two oldest children, Christina (1893-1968) and Alvaro (1894-1967) inherited the property in 1929.

The legends associated with this house are further augmented by the Wyeth family story of how, on the first day they met in 1939, Betsy James introduced Andrew Wyeth (whom she would marry ten months later) to Christina and Alvaro Olson. Crippled in childhood by a disease which increasingly immobilized her, Christina Olson became the subject of numerous Wyeth studies, watercolors, and temperas including "Christina Olson" (1947), "Geraniums" (1960), "Wood Stove" (1962), and the most famous: "Christina's World" (1948). Her importance to Wyeth's art in this period made her, in the words of one critic "... the most famous model in modern American art" (Corn, p. 38). Her brother Alvaro was portrayed in "Oil Lamp" (1945), but his subsequent unwillingness to pose forced Wyeth to depict the life of this fisherman-turned-farmer through the objects associated with him as in "Egg Scale" (1950) and "Hay Ledge" (1957). Wyeth's large and significant body of work at the Olson House has a consistent theme which transcends the portraiture of Christina and Alvaro; a theme which embraces their environment. As he once observed:

... the Olsons and Christina really were, to me, symbols of New England and Maine and ancient Maine, witchcraft, all sorts of things like that. That's what really got me into the Olsons' environment. I just couldn't stay away from there. I did other pictures while I knew them, but I'd always seem to gravitate back to the house.... It was Maine.

The house itself occupies a central place in much of Wyeth's work at Olsons, as he noted in a 1975 interview when he remarked that "There are more studies for the portraits of the house than practically for anything else" (Hoving, p. 154). Wyeth's determination to create accurate representations of the house is explained by his belief that the building would not last, and the detail of such works as "Weather Side" (1965) in which he counted and studied each of the clapboards illustrates his intense interest.

The most famous of Wyeth's paintings is "Christina's World" which now hangs in the Museum of Modern Art. Completed in 1948, it depicts Christina in a landscape devoid of everything but three buildings which comprised the Olson farm. The popularity and wide recognition of this image is striking; a fact underscored by its presence on a wall opposite a Van Gogh in Stanley Kubrick's movie of the Arthur C. Clarke novel 2001: A Space Odyssey, and its



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OLSON HOUSE

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reproduction above Christina's obituary in the January 29, 1968, edition of the New York Times.

Andrew Wyeth (1917- ) is a member of one of this country's most artistically talented families. The son of Newell Converse Wyeth, who achieved fame primarily as an illustrator of children's books, Andrew is one of several Wyeth children - and grandchildren - whose artistic ability has gained wide fame. Andrew Wyeth is clearly the most renowned of the family. He is the recipient of numerous awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1963), and is the subject of several major publications and exhibition catalogues, as well as hundreds of articles and reviews. Wyeth has achieved an immense popular following, a factor which some authors have blamed for the criticism which has been leveled at his work. This negative view at times "...gives us a picture of Wyeth as a kind of modern primitive, an untraveled and unschooled artist whose paintings bear no relationship to twentieth-century institutions and thought," while "at other times Wyeth is hailed as the 'people's painter,' the hero-artist of agrarian America" (Corn, p. 93). Despite this criticism, Wyeth is recognized in Modern American Painting as the carrier of the banner of the American Scene painters, among whom are counted Thomas Hart Benton and Edward Hopper.

During his decades-long relationship with the Olsons, Wyeth was granted unrestricted access to the house, and in fact was given a room to work in on the third story. This assimilation into the household was a highly significant factor in his work; an approach which he similarly used at the Kuerners Farm in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. Unlike his father, Wyeth does not maintain a formal studio. As he stated in an interview for Two Worlds of Andrew Wyeth (1978):

All I need is just the room and an easel and the environment where I am painting. I don't like the tradition of the big studio, the mystic *salon* that becomes some sort of affected heart of creativity where you have afternoon teas to show off your new work that is draped and then dramatically unveiled. This I abhor. It is wholly antithetical to my feeling of creativity. I need to be casual, almost sloppy. I need my drawings just around, strewn around. After the Olsons died, the people who went down there to clean out the place found a lot of stuff of mine that I'd forgotten I'd even left there. The drawings were like old pieces of conversations or thoughts, still hanging in the air.

When the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art mounted its 1976 exhibition of Wyeth's work, it notably chose to title it: "Two Worlds of Andrew Wyeth: Keurners and Olsons." Not surprisingly, this approach to assessing the artist focussed on these two very important but quite different bodies of work. More recent assessments of Wyeth continue to underscore their

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importance. In his chapter on Andrew Wyeth in the Wyeth family retrospective entitled An American Vision: Three Generations of Wyeth Art (1987), Thomas Hoving emphasizes that:

Throughout his entire career, Wyeth has been deeply influenced by two localities and a handful of people. One locality is the famous farm in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, owned by the late Karl Keurner, one of the people who particularly fascinated him. The other place is, of course, the Olson property in Maine where he was inspired to create his most famous painting, "Christina's World," the image of another human being who intrigued him in aesthetic and human terms.

For Wyeth, the life force of Christina and Alvaro Olson vanished from the house after their deaths two months apart from each other. His last work there, titled "End of Olsons" (1969) (which looks out over the roofline of the ell from the upper story of the main block), was done after they had died. In a subsequent interview, Wyeth remarked that:

When they were alive, and I was up there working on other pictures like "Seed Corn" (1948) with the window open, I could hear their voices carrying right up that chimney and I could listen to their conversations. And the way the chimney bulged at the top due to the masonry giving way seemed to me to be like an ear listening. Of course, it wasn't listening to me, I was listening to it, but just the same, it had that feeling for me. That's the real meaning of the picture. To me, a picture will really contain those remembrances, those voices, those faces, those conversations (Hoving, p. 158).

Following Christina's death, the contents of the house were disposed of at auction, but the property remained unsold and unoccupied until 1972. At that time movie producer and avid Wyeth collector Joseph E. Levine purchased the house and remaining twenty-two acres of land. Levine made several repairs to the house (including replacement and "weathering" of many clapboards) as well as introducing stencilled decoration to the hall floor and one first floor room. He briefly opened the house as a museum containing Wyeth works from his personal collection, but it was subsequently left vacant. In 1986 the property was acquired by John and Lee Adams Sculley. They presented the house alone on two acres of land to the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland in 1991. The barn and field which are depicted in "Christina's World" are still undisturbed although they are, unfortunately, no longer part of the museum's property, and have been fenced off from it.

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An American Vision: Three Generations of Wyeth Art. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. 1987.

Corn, Wanda M. The Art of Andrew Wyeth. Greenwich, Connecticut: Published for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco by the New York Graphic Society, Ltd. 1973.

Hoving, Thomas. Two Worlds of Andrew Wyeth: A Conversation with Andrew Wyeth. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1978.

Kasper, Janice. "The Olson House." Typescript research report. c. 1992.

Meyer, Susan E. "Editorial: Random Thoughts on the Most Famous Painter in America," American Artist, No. 41. Pages 6-7. February, 1977.

Modern American Painting. Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books. 1970.

Obituary of Christina Olson. New York Times. January 29, 1968, Page 31, Column 2.

Wyeth Betsy James. Christina's World: Paintings and Prestudies of Andrew Wyeth. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982.

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OLSON HOUSE

KNOX COUNTY

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**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The nominated property occupies the Town of Cushing Tax Map 5, Lot 45.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundary embraces the two acre parcel of property conveyed to the Farnsworth Museum on which stands the Olson House. This is the remainder of the historically-related property now associated with the house, the balance of it having been subdivided in the 1980s. Although the field and barn so famously depicted in "Christina's World" appear today much as they did in 1948, the present owner has erected a fence along the boundary line at the road and in front of the house (see map). As a result, the visual integrity of the landscape has been significantly changed.

Olson House  
South Cushing  
Knox County, ME

Sketch map showing location of  
recent fence separating the  
house from the barn and meadow  
depicted in "Christina's World".

