

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received JUN 20 1983
date entered

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

1. Name

historic John B. Russwurm House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 238 Ocean Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Portland, N/A vicinity of ~~congressional district~~

state Maine code 23 county Cumberland code 005

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	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<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 Inga H. Hanna

street & number 238 Ocean Avenue

city, town Portland, _____ vicinity of _____ state Maine

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cumberland County Registry of Deeds

street & number

city, town Portland, _____ vicinity of _____ state Maine

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? N/A yes no

date _____ federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town _____ state _____

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The J. B. Russwurm House in Portland is an early nineteenth century, two-and-one-half story Federal house of a common Maine vernacular type. The main portion is one room deep and extends five bays along the facade. The centrally-located entrance-door has a later, Greek Revival surround with pilasters and side-lights. Abutting the southwest corner of the main portion, and extending perpendicularly to it, is a contemporary (?) one-and-one-half story Cape Cod ell, similarly clapboarded. Attached to the far gable end of the ell is a small clapboarded woodshed of 20th-century construction.

All windows are 6/6, and are probably contemporary with the door surround. The facade windows are shuttered.

In the south side of the ell, facing the dooryard, are two windows, a simple entrance, and a 20th-century garage door with space behind for two cars. Another door-yard entrance, this one with Federal surround, is located off-center in the south gable end of the main section.

All roof surfaces are asphalt-shingled, and two small chimneys rise from the west slope of the main section. The house has a granite and fieldstone foundation, and appears to be in excellent overall condition.

The interior contains a typical short front hall with a triple run staircase and small room behind. The woodwork in the front front room is Federal, while that of the left front room is Greek Revival. The rooms in the ell display simple Greek Revival detail.

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 type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) (journalism, black history)
<input type="checkbox"/> invention				

Specific dates c. 1810 **Builder/Architect**

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

No. 238 Ocean Avenue in Portland is the only surviving structure closely associated with John Brown Russwurm (1799–1851), who resided there intermittently in the period 1812–1827. Russwurm was this nation's second black college graduate, a founder and editor of America's first black newspaper, and one of the major black proponents of African colonization.

Russwurm was the son of a white Virginian planter and a slave-woman who worked on his father's Jamaican plantation. The elder Russwurm re-located in Portland as a merchant in 1812, bringing his son with him and introducing him with pride to Portland society. The younger Russwurm, who had had early schooling in Canada, attended Hebron Academy (a Maine preparatory school) in the early 1820's. Although his father had died in 1815, Russwurm continued to reside in the Portland house when not in school. The house had passed into the hands of William Hawes, a North Yarmouth mill owner who had married Susan Blanchard, Russwurm's stepmother, but the family continued to consider Russwurm an integral member.

With the financial help of Susan Blanchard and her husband, Russwurm attended Bowdoin College in Brunswick and matriculated in 1826, becoming the second black man in the nation to receive a college degree (Edward A. Jones had graduated from Amherst College eleven days earlier). Russwurm attended medical classes at college, joined the prestigious Atheneum Society, and was befriended by fellow student Nathaniel Hawthorne. Whether due to his own inhibitions or those of his fellow students, Russwurm was the only student in his class to live off-campus, boarding at the home of a blacksmith outside Brunswick. According to contemporaries, he frequently received visitors, including Hawthorne, but never returned the calls himself.

Russwurm moved to New York City in 1827 to found and co-edit Freedom's Journal, the nation's first black newspaper. The Journal supported both abolition and assimilation at a time when most white abolitionists favored black emigration. Russwurm is known to have been an emigrationist during his college years, a view he apparently suppressed while co-editor of the Journal. After becoming its sole editor, however, Russwurm gradually changed the paper's tone to favor emigration, for which action he was harshly criticized by contemporaries. Russwurm had come to believe that editorializing on negro citizenship in the United States was "a mere waste of words", and chose the path of emigration himself in 1829, joining the fledgling colony of Liberia.

Russwurm quickly gained prominence in Liberia, serving as Superintendent of Education and then Colonial Secretary, while simultaneously editing the Liberian Herald. In 1834 however, he left Liberia to accept the governorship of the neighboring colony of Las Palmas, under the jurisdiction of the Maryland Colonization Society. Russwurm was the first black governor of a black overseas colony. During his seventeen-year tenure, Russwurm introduced currency in place of barter, outlawed slavery, instituted education for females as well as males, and eventually merged his colony with the Republic of Liberia. He died at Las Palmas in 1851.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Elizabeth F. Chittenden, "John Brown Russwurm, 1799-1851", Downeast Magazine.
(date unknown)

Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc., Research Report
African Repository, December, 1851. p.357.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1/4

Quadrangle name Portland West

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	9	3	9	6	8	1	0	4	8	3	6	7	9	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Assessor's Map 140, Lot A31

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gregory K. Clancey, Architectural Historian

organization Me. Historic Preservation Commission date April, 1983

street & number State House Station 65 telephone (207) 289-2132

city or town Augusta state Maine

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

S.H.P.O.

date

5/20/83

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the
National Register

date

7/21/83

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration