

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

William Monroe Trotter House

AND/OR COMMON

William Monroe Trotter House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

97 Sawyer Avenue

\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Dorchester

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Ninth

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE

25

COUNTY

Suffolk

CODE

025

**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"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

John W. and Irene N. Prantis

STREET & NUMBER

97 Sawyer Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Dorchester

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Registry of Deeds, Suffolk County Courthouse

Book 2595, pp. 601-602

Book 3358, pp. 10-11

STREET & NUMBER

Pemberton Square

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

None Known

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 William Monroe Trotter House is a rectangular plan, balloon frame house of the late 1880's or 1890's. The house is set on a foundation of coursed rubble granite, and is covered by a high gabled roof of asphalt shingle. The first floor of the house is covered with imitation brick siding, made of asphalt. Above the first floor is a moulding on all sides of the house, which provides the base for an outward curving section of the second-story wall (a detail popular in Shingle style houses of the 1880's and 1890's). Above this strip the house is covered with imitation shingles, also made of asphalt. All trim is painted white. The house has one chimney which rises through the roof's ridge at a point slightly north of the center of the building.

The south gable end of the structure is the facade. Attached to it is a two-bay wide by one-bay deep porch, which covers the entire width of the facade. The porch is set on brick posts, concealed by lattices, and has a stairway slightly west of center on its western bay. At the first floor the porch is supported by square wooden posts which have beveled corners above the railing level, and solid curved brackets at their tops. Set in between the posts are railings of square wooden balusters set into wooden upper and lower rails (two inches by four inches approximately). On either side of the stairway the railings terminate with square wooden posts having turned tops with ball finials. An iron handrail extends from each of these posts to the base of the stairway at the sidewalk. Set into the wooden support posts of the porch are wooden lintels surmounted by a boxed cornice and wooden gutter, all supporting a low sloping roof of asphalt shingles (which rises from south to north). At the first floor, the facade has a door on its western half and a two over one sliding sash window on its eastern half arranged symmetrically about the center line. There are two windows in corresponding positions on the second floor, the western one being covered by a two over two pane wooden storm window. Throughout the house all windows are set in frames with moulded outer edges. All windows, unless stated otherwise, are of two over one double hung sash; all first floor windows have aluminum combination windows. The facade entrance has an oak door with glazed upper half and a solid, paneled lower half. It is protected by an aluminum combination door. There is one set of six over one windows centered in the gable.

The east side of the house has one window at each story in its southern half (and centered within that half) and a half hexagonal two-story bay window on its northern half. The bay window is set on a foundation of coursed, rubble granite and has one window on each side of both stories. It is covered by a flat tarred roof. The whole length of the east wall is capped by an undecorated box cornice and wooden gutter. The west wall of the house is slightly longer than the east, due to a two story ell at the rear. Two windows are set in the northern half of this wall, occurring at both stories; set slightly south of center at the floor level of the second story, and cutting through the outward curve of the wall, is a square

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	Afro-American History
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES William Monroe Trotter (1872-1934) BUILDER/ARCHITECT Not Known  
Residency (1899-1909)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

William Monroe Trotter was one of the few Americans of national prominence who actively and consistently spoke out against the ever-rising tide of American racism during the first decade of the twentieth century. Although his adult life was one of protest against inequality and injustice, Trotter is best remembered for his steadfast opposition to the accommodationist, Booker T. Washington. Washington was accepted and promoted by most whites as the national black leader of the time because his philosophy concerning the status of black people in America supported segregationist views. Thus, Trotter and other radical leaders believed that their efforts should be directed against Washington in order to achieve racial equality.

BIOGRAPHY

William Monroe Trotter, born April 7, 1872, was raised in the black elite society of Boston. Ever anxious to prove the capabilities of blacks, Trotter excelled in his studies at school. He gained the admiration of his peers who elected him president of their senior class. After serving a year as a shipping clerk, Trotter entered Harvard University where he studied under such notable figures as George Herbert Palmer, George Santayama, William James and Albert Bushnell Hart. Trotter was the first black elected to Phi Beta Kappa at Harvard and graduated in 1895 Magna Cum Laude.

At a time when Trotter was preparing to embark upon a career in real estate and a comfortable life in Boston's upper-class Afro-American society, blacks throughout the country were rapidly being relegated to the bottom of a caste system. Reconstruction had been compromised and failed. By 1877 conservative whites had "restored" the South, but had not completely eliminated blacks from politics. Thus, the 1890's witnessed a resurgence of violence and racial animosity designed to disfranchise blacks. The Supreme Court sanctioned the process of making blacks second-class citizens in its infamous decision Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). Violence and intimidation rose sharply. During this period Booker T. Washington was propelled to national prominence because he spread the doctrine that blacks should forego political involvement, while concentrating on economic development through "industrial" training.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Aptheker, Herbert, editor. A Documentary History of the Negro People of the United States. Vol. 11. New York: The Citadel Press, 1964.

Fox, Stephen R. The Guardian of Boston, William Monroe Trotter. New York: Atheneum, 1971.

(continued)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A | 1 | 9 | | 3 | 2 | 9 | 19 | 9 | 0 | | 4 | 6 | 18 | 6 | 13 | 8 | 0 |

ZONE

EASTING

NORTHING

B

ZONE

EASTING

NORTHING

C

ZONE

EASTING

NORTHING

D

ZONE

EASTING

NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

William Monroe Trotter's House at 97 Sawyer Avenue is located beginning at the southeasterly corner thereof on Sawyer Avenue, thence running northeasterly eighty (80) feet to lot 19 thence northwesterly and along said lot 19 fifty (50) feet; thence southwesterly direction along lot 27 and eighty (80) feet to said Sawyer Avenue; thence southeasterly direction fifty (50) feet said Sawyer Avenue to point or place of origin and containing 4000 square feet of land, more or less.

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

Lynne Gomez Graves, Historical Projects Director

ORGANIZATION

Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation

DATE

3 February 1976

STREET & NUMBER

1420 N Street, Northwest

TELEPHONE

(202) 462-2519

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

# 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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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window of colored glass. Lighting the interior stairhall, this window is made up of a large square center pane, surrounded by four rectangular panes and four small square panes, one at each corner. Slightly south of center on the roof is a dormer with a window centered on its west wall. The dormer has a slightly projecting, high gable; the sides and gable of the dormer are covered with the same siding as the second floor.

The north (rear) wall of the house has an original ell occupying the western two thirds of its first and second stories. It is covered by a low, half-hip roof of asphalt shingle which joins to the main body of the house at the sill of the attic window. Only a small portion of the foundation of the house is visible on the north because of its higher ground level than the south. On the exposed part of the rear wall of the main body of the house are a bulkhead at ground level, one window at each story and one window centered in the gable. The ell has a wooden door on its western half; it is of four sunken panels set one above and three below a square pane of glass. In front of it is a wooden storm door. To the east of the door, slightly off center is a narrow two over one window. At the second story, slightly westward of the door is another window. There are no windows on the side walls (east and west) of the ell.

Set out from the ell on brick posts, is an open rectangular porch with wooden steps at east end, next to the wall of the ell. On the other sides of the porch are railings of the same type as the front porch railings. The posts of this railing are square and rise to the same height as those of the front porch, but without a roof to support. The post by the stairs rises only several inches above the railing.

Although the house has little decoration to suggest a construction date or to mark it with a particular style, its stair hall window, stone foundation, gabled roof, and curved second floor wall suggest its original appearance may have combined Shingle Style and Queen Anne details. Along the street the property has a coursed rubble retaining wall with square posts marking the stairway to the front porch and the driveway. The stonework of this wall suggests that it was built around the turn of the century.

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Trotter witnessed the deterioration of conditions for blacks in the South and the spread of what he perceived as racist attitudes into the North. He viewed Washington's apparent acquiescence to the rising tide of racism as a threat to himself and the race as a whole. Therefore, Trotter, sometime after 1900, became more militant over questions of race and less concerned over his own material comforts.

In March 1901, Trotter helped to organize the Boston Literary and Historical Association which served as a forum for militant political opinion expressed by such notables as W. E. B. DuBois, Oswald Garrison Villard and Charles Chesnutt. Trotter also joined the more politically oriented Massachusetts Racial Protective Association.

One of Trotter's greatest contributions to black protest came when he and his friend George Forbes founded The Guardian in 1901, a weekly newspaper that increasingly consumed the time and talents of Trotter. Most of his more virulent criticism was reserved for Booker T. Washington's accommodationist approach to race relations, at a time when blacks were witnessing a steady deterioration in their position in the South and across the nation as a whole. Trotter strenuously objected to what he perceived as Washington's overemphasis on industrial education and the relegation of black people to a state of serfdom. He believed that the franchise was a sacred right and an indispensable means for achieving power.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, a small group of blacks expressed serious doubt about the course proposed by Booker T. Washington. Two of the main figures of opposition were Trotter in Boston and W. E. B. DuBois in Atlanta.

Unlike DuBois, Trotter was the more forceful and persistent of the radicals as their opposition to Washington mounted. Trotter's approach was best exemplified in the confrontation which occurred in Boston on July 30, 1903. He proposed to use the occasion of a speech by Washington before the Boston Branch of the National Business League to ask him nine questions relating to his program and its results. As Trotter stood on a chair in an attempt to read his nine questions, he and his sister were arrested leaving Washington free to deliver his speech. The incident was quickly labeled the "Boston riot" and received widespread coverage.

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Although Trotter maintained that he had not gone to the meeting for purposes of disruption, he ably accomplished his major goal of directing national attention to the fact that there were some blacks who disagreed with Washington and his program. Trotter's sentence of thirty days in jail encouraged DuBois to join forces with him.

After the "riot," Trotter formed the Boston Suffrage League. The League was expanded into the New England Suffrage League as blacks from other areas joined. The aim of the group was to place before the American people wrongs against the claims of blacks. Trotter was elected president. He pressed for anti-lynching legislation, the expenditure of one hundred-twenty million dollars a year on southern schools until 1925, the elimination of segregation on interstate carriers and the enforcement of the Fifteenth Amendment.

In 1905 DuBois sent invitations to selected black leaders which launched the Niagara Movement to advocate political, economical and social progress for black Americans. The Movement was short-lived, however, it served to formalize the split with Booker T. Washington. DuBois said that it was Trotter who put the backbone in the platform of the organization.

The most enduring and successful protest organization was founded after the 1908 Springfield, Illinois riot with the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. Trotter was invited to attend the initial meeting, however, he did not join the organization because of his skepticism of a white-dominated group. He remained on the periphery of the NAACP to lend his support only on his terms.

During this period Trotter was devoting more and more time to his paper and less to his business. He lost the property which his father had left to him as well as his home in Dorchester at 97 Sawyer Avenue. As he moved from genteel affluence to poverty, he even lost his old friends. Nevertheless, Trotter remained in the forefront of the movement.

As a political activist Trotter believed that political power resulted from the exercise of the franchise. His actions were based upon the belief that blacks should remain politically independent, voting as a block to swing close elections to the candidates who offered the most to black people. Although Trotter praised Theodore Roosevelt for appointing a black man collector of customs for the Port of Charleston, he later strongly opposed Roosevelt for

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his inaction concerning the problems of black people. Trotter was horrified and outraged at the way Roosevelt handled the Brownsville incident of 1906 in which black soldiers were summarily dismissed from the armed service without honor. Anxious to defeat both Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, Trotter turned to the Democrats in 1907 in the belief that it was better to vote for a known enemy than false friends.

During Woodrow Wilson's races for governor of New Jersey and later, for President, Trotter and his National Independent Political League (NIPL) endorsed Wilson. With DuBois' endorsement in The Crisis, Wilson managed to draw a considerable number of black votes from the Republican party. Later Trotter was appalled by the President's sanction of segregation in federal offices in Washington.

Concerned over the course of events in Washington, Trotter and the NIPL drafted a petition signed by 20,000 people from 36 states to present to Wilson. In November of 1913, Trotter, Ida Wells-Barnett, William Sinclair, among others, were granted a meeting with the President. Wilson received them politely but did not commit himself. A year passed with no effort on the part of the Administration to improve the plight of blacks. On November 14, 1914, Trotter again had a meeting with Wilson in which no commitment to change was made.

Trotter's remaining years were anti-climatic. He actively protested against the showing of Thomas Dixon's The Birth of a Nation. He failed to attend the Amenia Conference when invited by Joel Spingarn in 1916, although he endorsed the idea of a gathering of black leaders.

Trotter continued to publish The Guardian and to rally to the cause of black people, particularly black soldiers during World War I. He maintained that blacks would fight better in war if they could anticipate better treatment in peace. When the War ended, Trotter, inspite of a State Department ban against blacks going to Europe for the Peace Conference, managed to get to Paris where he pleaded the cause of people of color before the nations of the world. He protested the failure to include a clause on racial justice in the Peace Treaty. He did an excellent job in educating the French, however, he received no response from President Wilson or the newly created League of Nations.



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Trotter sailed home to return to what James Weldon Johnson and the media described as the "Red Summer" in 1919 as whites took up arms against blacks in cities throughout the nation. Trotter pleaded before the Lodge Senate Committee holding hearings on the Peace Treaty to include a clause relating to racial justice. Neither the racial justice clause nor the treaty were accepted by the Senate.

During the 1920's Trotter gave his support to the Dyer's Anti-Lynching Bill in 1922, but spoke out against Garvey's Back-To-Africa Movement. As late as 1933 he petitioned Franklin D. Roosevelt to end segregation in the District of Columbia.

Tired, distraught and burdened by the times and his own years of protest, Trotter died in April 1934. Thus came to an end the life of a black man and an outstanding American who lived his entire life in the American revolutionary tradition of protest against injustice-- wherever it was found. His life is exemplary of his desire to bridge the gap between the ideals of the nation and its practices which compromised the rights of black Americans. William Monroe Trotter never ceased to view the country from the perspective of its founding documents of freedom and equality for all men.

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Meier, August. Negro Protest Thought in America, 1800-1915. Ann Arbor: Ann Paperbacks, 1968.

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