

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

Boston Light

AND/OR COMMON

Boston Light

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Little Brewster Island, Massachusetts Bay

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Boston

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Eighth

VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE  
025

COUNTY  
Suffolk

CODE  
025

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input checked="" 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	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER Lighthouse

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Unites States Coast Guard, First Coast Guard District

STREET & NUMBER

1400 Custom House

CITY, TOWN

Boston

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE  
Massachusetts

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Suffolk County Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Suffolk County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE  
Massachusetts

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historically Famous Lighthouses

DATE

1957 (publication date)

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

United States Coast Guard

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" 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

Boston Light is located at the southeastern tip of Little Brewster Island some 2 miles east of Boston in Massachusetts Bay. The island is approximately 800 feet long (east-west) and has a maximum width of 250 feet. The lighthouse, a white-painted, tapering tower, rises from the island's highest point, some 18 feet above sea level, to a height of 89 feet. The structure is built of rubble stone, brick, and granite and is lined with brick. A 96-step spiral iron staircase gives access to two iron-railed decks and the glass and iron lantern at its top. The entrance to the lighthouse, located on the north (landward) side is covered by a one-story, one-room stone structure which also serves as a museum area.

The Boston Light went into operation on September 14, 1716. Accidental fires in 1720 and 1751 caused considerable damage to the interior of the structure but in each case it was quickly repaired and put back in service. During 1774-76 the lighthouse was held by the British forces occupying Boston. It remained in operation until July, 1775, when American raiding parties twice set it on fire (at that time it was encased in oaken staves covered with wood shingles). When the British withdrew from Boston in March, 1776, they planted a time-charge at the lighthouse; the resulting explosion destroyed the top of the structure. The light was then abandoned until 1783 when the Massachusetts legislature authorized its reconstruction. The builders apparently followed the original plans and incorporated the remaining sections of the 1716 structure in the new tower.

In 1809, following the appearance of dangerous cracks, six heavy iron bands (three are now visible) were placed around the lighthouse to strengthen it. The spiral iron staircase was erected in the tower in 1844 and in 1859 the structure's height was increased from its original 75 to the present 89 feet. Since that time no major structural changes have been made.

The reconstructed lighthouse was first illuminated with oil lamps as its predecessor had been; sixteen such lamps were in use at the top of the tower in 1789. These were replaced in 1811 with Argand lamps, a greatly improved oil-burning system employing a hollow circular wick in a glass chimney, the whole mounted on a revolving base. The efficiency of the lighthouse was further improved with the subsequent introduction of the Fresnel lens system, based on a central bull's-eye lens surrounded by concentric prismatic rings, and the use of electricity for the light source. In 1945 Boston Light's beam was rated at 100,000 candlepower. The present equipment, installed in 1962, consists of a 1,500 watt bulb at the center of a twelve-sided Fresnel lens. The beam, flashed for 7/10ths of a second, once every 10 seconds, is rated at 2-million candlepower and visible for 16 miles.

The operation of Boston Light is supported by several other structures on Little Brewster Island. At the base of the tower on the south (seaward) side is a second one-story, one-room stone structure which houses a diesel generator for emergency power and the air compressor for the foghorn mounted outside. On the lee (north) side of the island is the one-story wooden rain shed; its hip roof collects rainwater, channeling it into a 20,000-gallon tank inside. Further to the west is the 1½-story frame and clapboard house occupied by the lighthouse crew of two, sometimes three men. Twin concrete and steel piers are located at the western (lower) end of the island; a marine railway between them runs from the shore to a wooden boathouse. All of the structures are regularly maintained and appear to be in good condition.

## 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1716, 1783

BUILDER/ARCHITECT not known

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The site of the Boston Light, on the southeastern tip of Little Brewster Island in Massachusetts Bay, has been used for that purpose longer than any other lighthouse site in the United States. The original Boston Light, the first lighthouse in the country, operated from 1716 until 1776, when it was exploded by the British forces evacuating Boston. The present stone and brick tower, incorporating portions of the original, was completed in 1783.

The original Boston Light was erected by the Province of Massachusetts Bay, the present structure by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The light was ceded to the Federal Government in 1790 and was operated by the U.S. Lighthouse Service until 1939 when it was transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard. Visitors are welcome at Little Brewster Island during day-light hours but are not allowed to climb the tower.

### Historical Background

Following a successful campaign begun by Boston merchants in 1713, the Province of Massachusetts Bay authorized the construction of the first lighthouse in America on Little Brewster Island in Massachusetts Bay. Completed at a cost of L 2,385:17:8, the structure was placed in operation on September 14, 1716. At the request of the first lighthouse keeper, in 1719 Massachusetts provided a cannon which could be used as a warning signal during heavy fogs; the first such signal in the country, it was not replaced until 1851. Accidental fires damaged the interior of the lighthouse in 1720 (started by drippings from the oil lamp) and again in 1751, but in both cases it was quickly returned to service.

With the outbreak of the American Revolution, Boston Light became a military objective. The British command at Boston had taken over control of the lighthouse in 1774 and kept it in operation until early July, 1775, when an American raiding party succeeded in setting it on fire. The British stationed Marines on Little Brewster Island and began repairs of the damaged structure. However, on July 31, a 300-man party, under orders from General Washington, stormed the island and again fired the lighthouse. They were forced to retreat but left the lighthouse totally unserviceable. Before the British withdrew from Boston the following March, they planted a time-charge in the tower which completely destroyed its upper portion.

Boston Light remained abandoned until 1783 when the Commonwealth of Massachusetts authorized its reconstruction. The builders apparently followed the original plans and incorporated the remaining sections of the earlier tower in the new structure. The Commonwealth operated the tower until 1790, when control was ceded to the Federal Government (U.S. Lighthouse Service).

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Adamson, Hans C. Keeper of the Lights (New York, 1955).  
 Putnam, George R. Lighthouses and Lightships of the United States (Boston, 1933).  
 Snow, Edward R. Famous Lighthouses of America (New York, 1955).

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3.5 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	34,42,2,0	4,6,8,7,71,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Boundary of the National Historic Landmark designation for the Boston Light is the shoreline of Little Brewster Island on which the historic structure is located.

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 Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by S. Sydney Bradford, Historian.

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street N.W.

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

5/13/63

DATE

7/28/75

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

STATE

District of Columbia

# 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 N/A National Historic Landmark

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
 ATTEST: *[Signature]*

DATE

DATE

12/7/77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

((NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS))

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CONTINUATION SHEET Boston Light ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

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During the War of 1812 the light was dimmed to reduce its usefulness to enemy ships; a similar practice was followed during World War I. In 1939 the United States Coast Guard assumed control of Boston Light. The light was completely extinguished during World War II (1941 - July 1945), but has been in continuous operation since that time. Though few structural changes have been made in the Boston Light since 1783, its illuminating equipment has steadily improved. The present system, installed in 1962, produces a 2-million candlepower beam visible for 16 miles.