

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED DEC 24 1980
DATE ENTERED *Approved* FEB 23 1981

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Dorchester Heights
AND/OR COMMON
Dorchester Heights National Historic Site

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Thomas Park
CITY, TOWN
South Boston
STATE
Massachusetts

--- VICINITY OF
9th
COUNTY
Suffolk

--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
025

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)
National Park Service, North Atlantic Region
STREET & NUMBER
15 State Street
CITY, TOWN
Boston,
STATE
Massachusetts 02109

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Suffolk Registry of Deeds
STREET & NUMBER
Suffolk County Court House
CITY, TOWN
Boston
STATE
Massachusetts 02109

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, Volume VI
DATE
1964
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
CITY, TOWN
Washington, DC

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

STATE

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

The Dorchester Heights Monument occupies the summit of the elliptical-shaped Thomas Park in South Boston. The park is 5.43 acres and is bounded in a more or less circular fashion on the north, west, and south by the street known as Thomas Park. The South Boston High School is adjacent to the park on the east side.

The tower was completed in 1901 by the Boston firm of Peabody and Stearns after they had secured the commission from the City of Boston in an architectural competition held in 1898.* It was designed in the Georgian Colonial Revival Style which was at that time coming into favor and popularity in this country. The tower is constructed of brick and stone masonry, faced on the exterior with white Georgian marble. The design was inspired by the towers of 18th-century churches in the vicinity, but with proportional changes necessitated by the use of masonry.

The structure stands just over 100 feet high rising in three stages from a marble plinth ringed with an iron picket fence. The walls are three feet thick at the base, reducing slightly as they rise. The first stage of the tower is a plain shaft about 57 feet high and 19 feet, 4 inches square. The arches on the east and west faces contain a large memorial tablet (west) and the entrance to the tower (east). Small vertically slit windows are located on the axis of each face, and are aligned to the interior staircase. Near the top of each face, a doorway with architrave and cornice opens onto a narrow balustraded balcony cantilevered from the tower on scrolled brackets. The top of the first stage terminates in a cornice above which is a balustrade running between stubby pedestals surmounted by ball-and-obelisk finials.

The second stage, a square belfry about 17 feet high, contains on each face an unembellished arched opening. These openings were apparently at first left plain, and later filled with wooden casings containing doors and fanlights. Above the second stage cornice, a parapet runs between pedestals embellished with chubby urn finials.

The third stage above the belfry, begins as a circular drum, and then becomes an octagonal arcaded cupola (which is 15 feet, 10 inches high to the cornice) above an encircling belt molding. Above the cupola, a domed roof supports a spire rising 17 feet, 3 inches above the cornice topped by a weathervane.

Inside, a metal stairway rises along the tower walls to the first platform, which lies at the elevation of the balconies. From here, an iron helical stairway rises to the top of the first stage, emerging in a cylindrical weather enclosure. There is no permanent access to the cupola.

The interior walls of the first stage are constructed of red brick laid in common bond with tan mortar. The thickness of the wall reduces by one ^{width} of brick at the first platform level. In the second stage, the brick is a buff color to match the color of the stone. The interior of the drum of the third stage is red brick with a plaster coating. The interior of the cupola appears to be finished with the same marble as the exterior.

*As built, it may have differed slightly from their winning design. An early illustration which may have been the architect's rendering shows a slightly different podium, with stairs to the north and south as well as west, and a balustrade, rather than a parapet surmounting the second stage of the tower.

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The tower cost about \$23,000 to build exclusive of base and encircling iron fence. The steps, which probably included the entire base as it now stands, were built in 1902 for slightly over \$7,000. The iron fencing was added in 1906 for \$1,000.

Subsequent modifications to the tower include an enclosed chamber, now mostly destroyed, within the ground story of the tower. In the 1950's or 60's the National Park Service installed vertical and horizontal tie rods in the second and third stages to try and arrest movement and cracking of the upper structure. Concrete structured members appear to have been installed beneath the second platform for a similar purpose, again most probably within recent years.

The landscaping of Thomas Park took place during the mid-nineteenth century. In 1847, the citizens of South Boston petitioned the City of Boston for improved services and suggested the construction of a reservoir on Dorchester Heights. Previously, South Boston's water supply had been provided by wells. In 1849, however, water began to be brought from the Cochituate River to reservoirs in various parts of the City. In this same year, Dorchester Heights was cut down and a reservoir built on the eastern half of ellipse, the rest being set aside as a park. The reservoir occupied approximately the same area as the South Boston High School that currently stands on this location.

It measured 370 feet across and 260 feet long, 20 feet deep, and held about 7,508,246 gallons of water.¹

The portion of the hill not occupied by the reservoir (western half of the ellipse), was graded and developed into a park that was called Thomas Park after General John Thomas who commanded the troops at Dorchester Heights.

It was soon beautified with grass plots, gravel walks, shade trees, and enclosed with an iron fence.²

Paths were laid out on its surface axially from the monument and approaches were made to it from the street at various places. A carriage road encircled the park atop the hill. The high banks were later seeded and trees were planted on top and around the base of the enclosure. An iron fence was also erected level with the street that surrounded the park.

¹John Toomey, History of South Boston, 1901, page 159

²Ibid.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1776, 1901

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Peabody and Stearns

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Dorchester Heights National Historic Site commemorates the fortification by General Washington and his army which forced the British evacuation of Boston on March 17, 1776. The event was the first great American victory of the Revolution and served to inspire hope and confidence in the leadership and capabilities of the Continental Army.

Realizing that possession of this piece of high ground (which provided a commanding view of Boston, Charlestown, and the Boston Harbor) would render untenable continued British occupation of Boston, Washington first occupied and fortified the hill during the night of March 4, 1776. Faced by an American force that eventually numbered 4,000, and was supported by 59 cannons brought down from Fort Ticonderoga, the British General William Howe determined that further occupation of the city was imprudent and judiciously removed his army of 11,000 men from Boston.

The Dorchester Heights Monument, a 100-foot tower designed by the Boston firm of Peabody and Stearns and dedicated in 1902, marks this site where the American fortifications were constructed. While the tower constitutes a monument to Revolutionary War events, it also stands in its own right as a monument of Georgian Colonial Revival Architecture; a style inspired by nationalistic sentiment and used to recall specific patriotic landmarks. Robert Swain Peabody and John G. Stearns were pioneers in the study and design of this style (especially in the form of towers), and Peabody, from the first, was acknowledged as its leading exponent. Several additional Peabody designed towers still mark the Boston skyline.

Thomas Park is significant as the first parcel of land in South Boston set aside by the city for public purposes. Though modified, it continues to reflect its original Victorian design in the basic configuration and layout of its walks.

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Schweinfurth, J.A. "Robert Swain Peabody - Tower Builder 1845-1917."
The American Architect CXXX, No. 2504, September 6, 1926.

Simons, Thomas C. History of South Boston. Arno Press reprint, 1974. (First
printed 1857 in Boston by David Clapp.)

S.P.N.E.A., Preservation Plan, March 1976, Highland Park - High Point Observatory
Thomas Park - Dorchester Heights Memorial Tower.

Toomey, John. History of South Boston. Boston:John Toomey, 1901

