

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Massachusetts	
COUNTY: Suffolk	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON: \_\_\_\_\_

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
"Red Top" (William Dean Howells House)

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
90 Somerset Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
Belmont

STATE: Massachusetts      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_      COUNTY: Suffolk      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP		STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Public <input type="checkbox"/>	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/>	Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes:
Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/>	Private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	In Process <input type="checkbox"/>	Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/>	Restricted <input type="checkbox"/>
Object <input type="checkbox"/>	Both <input type="checkbox"/>	Being Considered <input type="checkbox"/>	Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/>	Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/>
				No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)				
Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/>	Government <input type="checkbox"/>	Park <input type="checkbox"/>	Transportation <input type="checkbox"/>	Comments <input type="checkbox"/>
Commercial <input type="checkbox"/>	Industrial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Specify) <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Educational <input type="checkbox"/>	Military <input type="checkbox"/>	Religious <input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____
Entertainment <input type="checkbox"/>	Museum <input type="checkbox"/>	Scientific <input type="checkbox"/>	_____	_____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNERS NAME:  
Mrs. Samuel Beatty

STREET AND NUMBER:  
90 Somerset Street

CITY OR TOWN: Belmont      STATE: Massachusetts      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Registry of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Suffolk County Building

CITY OR TOWN: Cambridge      STATE: Massachusetts      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1 1/2 acres

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF SURVEY: Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: \_\_\_\_\_

STREET AND NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY OR TOWN: \_\_\_\_\_      STATE: \_\_\_\_\_      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
COUNTY: \_\_\_\_\_  
ENTRY NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fair <input type="checkbox"/>	Deteriorated <input type="checkbox"/>	Ruins <input type="checkbox"/>	Unexposed <input type="checkbox"/>
INTEGRITY	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	Altered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Unaltered <input type="checkbox"/>		Moved <input type="checkbox"/>	Original Site <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

"Red Top" is a two-and-a-half-story house faced with brick and stucco. There are two tall interior chimneys. The multiform front (east) elevation has a gable roof, in the end of which are set two windows in a shallow single-story projection. A two-story porch under a cross gable extends toward the south, while a long single-story porch extends toward the north. The doorway is in this single-story porch. South of the door is a projection with one double window on its first floor, and on its second floor a double window and a small single window, each under a separate gable.

On the south elevation, the porch at the southeast corner is glazed on the first floor and open on the second. West of the porch are three windows on the first floor and one double window on the second floor. On the north elevation, the single-story porch extends beyond the house. On the rear (west) elevation there are two ells, the northernmost of which houses the kitchen and pantry, while the other is a garage. The ground falls off toward the west, hence the garage is below the level of the first floor.

The doorway opens into a central stair hall. To the south is a parlor with a wood mantle ornamented with rectangular panels. At the southwest corner of the house is a study with bookshelves and a wooden mantle, beside which is an "inglenook" used by Mark Twain and other guests. Over the doorway is painted the Shakespearian quotation, "From Venice as far as Belmont." This room opens onto the glazed porch, in which are ivy plants said to have been planted by William Dean Howells. At the northern end of the house is the dining room, the walls of which are paneled to the ceiling. A mirror is set in the paneling above the wooden mantle.

On the second floor, there are four bedrooms grouped around a central hall. The attic contains three rooms.

The most apparent exterior change made to the house since Howells' time is the replacement of the shingle siding at the second and third floor levels with stucco. Other modifications include the addition of the garage and the rebuilding of the more southern chimney. In the study, the mottoes which decorated the frieze have been painted over with the exception of the "Venice" motto mentioned above, and the ornamentation removed from the ceiling. Two cottages have been built west of the house and are rented out by the present owner, Mrs. Samuel Beatty. All the alterations were made prior to 1938, when Mrs. Beatty began her residency. Despite the changes, "Red Top" still possesses a substantial degree of integrity.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

Pre-Columbian <input type="checkbox"/>	16th Century <input type="checkbox"/>	18th Century <input type="checkbox"/>	20th Century <input type="checkbox"/>
15th Century <input type="checkbox"/>	17th Century <input type="checkbox"/>	19th Century <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1878-1882**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

Aboriginal <input type="checkbox"/>	Education <input type="checkbox"/>	Political <input type="checkbox"/>	Urban Planning <input type="checkbox"/>
Prehistoric <input type="checkbox"/>	Engineering <input type="checkbox"/>	Religion/Philosophy <input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Specify) <input type="checkbox"/>
Historic <input type="checkbox"/>	Industry <input type="checkbox"/>	Science <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Agriculture <input type="checkbox"/>	Invention <input type="checkbox"/>	Sculpture <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Art <input type="checkbox"/>	Landscape <input type="checkbox"/>	Social/Humanitarian <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Commerce <input type="checkbox"/>	Architecture <input type="checkbox"/>	Theater <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Communications <input type="checkbox"/>	Literature <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Transportation <input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Conservation <input type="checkbox"/>	Military <input type="checkbox"/>		_____
	Music <input type="checkbox"/>		_____

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (Include Personages, Dates, Events, Etc.)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

For twenty years at the turn of the century, William Dean Howells was America's foremost literary critic. He set the standards by which the writers of the time were measured. He suffered a swift decline because he was unable to understand the full flowering of the "realism" in American literature for which he himself was chiefly responsible. But this does not deny the tremendous creativity expressed in his vision. Although he wrote some very fine novels, Howells' greatest impact was in the literary climate he formulated in the United States and the direction he set toward a more mature national literary tradition.

In 1877, Howells and his wife began the construction of the house which they named "Red Top" at Belmont, Massachusetts. Designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White in which Mrs. Howells' brother was a partner, the house was occupied in 1878. While living at "Red Top" during the latter years of his editorship of the Atlantic Monthly, Howells entertained Mark Twain, James Russell Lowell, and other literary contemporaries. Works written during his Belmont residency included The Lady of Aroostook (1879) and A Modern Instance (1882)--two of his better-known works, as well as The Undiscovered Country (1880), A Fearful Responsibility (1881) and Dr. Breen's Practice (1881). Although he loved the rural charm of Belmont and the "lovely hilltops and gardened slopes" of which he wrote to his friends, Howells decided to move to Boston in 1882. Subsequently, "Red Top" was sold and passed through various ownerships.

Biography

William Dean Howells was born in 1837 at Martin's Ferry, Ohio, but he lived there only a short time before the family moved on. They lived in nearly a half dozen Ohio towns during his childhood because his father, William Cooper Howells, could not hold a journalism job or maintain any semblance of financial security for the family. They finally settled somewhat permanently in Columbus, where both father and son wrote for the Ohio State Journal. William Dean worked there from 1856 until 1861 except for periods of ill health.

( Continued )

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Brooks, Van Wyck, Howells: His Life and World. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1959. pp 128-29.  
 Howells, Mildred, William Dean Howells. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, Inc., 1928. Vol. I, p. 270.  
 Kunitz, Stanley J., and Haycraft, Howard, American Authors: 1600-1900. New York: H. W. Wilson Company, Inc., 1938. pp. 393-94.  
 Lynn, Kenneth S., William Dean Howells: an American Life. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanich Inc., 1971.  
 Wagenknecht, Edward, William Dean Howells: the Friendly Eye. New York; Oxford University Press, 1969.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN ONE ACRE		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "		°	'	"
NE	° ' "	° ' "		42	24	00
SE	° ' "	° ' "		71	10	45
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: **Robert S. Gamble, Historian, and Christopher Redburn, Assistant**

ORGANIZATION **Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation,** DATE **7/21/71**  
**Division of History, National Park Service .**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**801 - 19th Street, N.W.**

CITY OR TOWN: **Washington** STATE **D.C.** CODE

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Massachusetts	
COUNTY	
Suffolk	
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(Number all entries)

8. Significance: (1) "Red Top" (William Dean Howells House)

In 1860 he first published in the Atlantic Monthly a poem entitled "Andenken" and a volume of poetry with John Piatt called Poems of Two Friends. He was rewarded with a consulate job in Venice, Italy in 1861 for writing a campaign biography of Abraham Lincoln, and he spent the Civil War years in Europe. The job had few duties, and these years were spent primarily in study and writing. He gathered material for Modern Italian Poets (1887), wrote Venetian Life (1866), and was introduced to a wide range of European literature which enriched his perspective and provided a firm base for his later eminence as a literary critic. In 1862 he married Elinor Mead whom he had met previously in the United States.

Upon his return from Italy, Howells worked briefly for The Nation, but became assistant editor for The Atlantic Monthly in 1866, a post he held until 1871 when he became editor. He remained with The Atlantic until 1881. During these years he built his reputation as an author and critic. By 1870 he had made The Atlantic the most influential literary magazine in the country, encouraging the careers of practically every major writer of the period including Henry James, Mark Twain, Frank Norris, and Stephen Crane. His first published novel, Their Wedding Journey (1872) was widely read, and A Modern Instance (1882) gave him a national reputation as a fiction writer. He wrote prolifically for the rest of his life, sometimes turning out two novels a year as well as his columns and other short pieces. Working under the pressure of contractual agreements and financial needs, Howells produced much that is of poor quality, but when he was more careful he wrote such classics as The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885) and A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890). All of his nearly fifty novels were tremendously popular while he lived, and he became wealthy from their sale.

For about five years after he left The Atlantic Howells took no editorial position, but in 1886 began a column called "Editor's Study" for Harper's Monthly. He lived in Boston and New York until 1891 when he moved to New York permanently. He was editor of Cosmopolitan for a year before returning to Harper's with the "Editor's Easy Chair" column.

It was during his tenure at Harper's that Howells made his greatest impact on the American Literary scene. His torch was "realism," and he carried it against all foes, emphasizing again and again his view that literature should describe life as it actually exists, with all its flaws as well as the strong points. He inveighed against the romantic illusions that long dominated literature and was so successful that he himself was attacked for being blindly optimistic. In a sense Howells was defeated by a revolution he had started. He was eclipsed in the last ten years of his life by new, more daring writers who ridiculed his timidity and superficiality, his unwillingness to explore the full implications of realism. Late

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(Number all entries)

8. Significance: (2) "Red Top" (William Dean Howells House)

in life he wrote to Henry James, "I am comparatively a dead cult with my statues cut down and the grass growing over me in the pale moonlight." <sup>1</sup>

Howells was not the totally colorless man of the caricature, however. In recent years he and his legacy have experienced a revival which has attempted to point out the daring of his literary critique without denying its weaknesses. Understood in the context of his times, he was the commanding literary figure, involved as well in political causes such as women's suffrage and racial equality. He was a charter member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and its President until his death on May 11, 1920 in New York.

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1. quoted in Lynn, Kenneth S., William Dean Howells, an American Life, p.13.

9. Bibliography

- Brooks, Van Wyck. Howells: His Life and World. New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1959. pp. 128-29.
- Howells, Mildred. William Dean Howells. ~~XXXX New York xxx Garden City~~  
Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., Inc., 1928.  
Vol. I, p. 270.
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