

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

STATE: <b>Massachusetts</b>	
COUNTY: <b>Suffolk</b>	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

1. NAME

COMMON:  
**First Harrison Gray Otis House**

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**141 Cambridge Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Boston**

STATE: **Massachusetts** CODE: COUNTY: **Suffolk** CODE:

3. CLASSIFICATION

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

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
**Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**141 Cambridge Street**

CITY OR TOWN: **Boston** STATE: **Massachusetts** CODE:

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Registry of Deeds, Suffolk County**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Pemberton Square**

CITY OR TOWN: **Boston** STATE: **Massachusetts** CODE:

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Historic American Buildings Survey (6 photos)**

DATE OF SURVEY: **1930's**  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Washington 20540**

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

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7. DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The First Harrison Gray Otis House is a tall oblong-shaped three-story brick structure with a low hip roof and a tall chimney at either end. The house is about 48 feet wide and 32 feet deep and is five bays wide and three bays deep. The walls are of brick laid in Flemish bond.

The main (south) facade is symmetrically disposed, with a door topped by a fanlight and flanked by sidelights in the center bay, a reconstructed Palladian window in the second story above the entrance, and with a reconstructed fanlight in the third story center bay. The existing semi-circular first story porch is scheduled to be removed. This feature was not included in the original design and represents an imaginary "reconstruction" that was added in 1916-20. The windows have lintels and sills of stone and are topped by flat winged arches with keystones. The second and third floor levels are marked by prominent stone belt courses and the increased height of the second story is achieved at the expense of the lower bedrooms in the third story. A reconstructed wood cornice decorated with cone-like ornaments extends around the house at the eaves.

The structure has a wide center hall with two rooms on either side. To the left, or west, of the hall is the large dining room and behind this, a small pantry and service stairway; to the right of the hall is a large front parlor and in the rear, a small office or study. A fine stairway in the hall leads to the second floor, which has a similar plan. The second floor hall is lighted by the large Palladian window located at either end. A large drawing room occupies the west side of the hall and two bedrooms are located on the east side. The third floor contains four more chambers.

The second-floor drawing room or salon, probably the finest room in the house, is of superb proportions and elegance. The room has a low dado and finely detailed cornice. The mantels have Adamesque friezes and the entablatures above the door are also in the Adam style. The wallpaper in this room is a 1960 reproduction of the original, including its colorful floral borders in two widths. Other rooms throughout the first two stories also have low dados, embrasured windows with interior shutters, and Adamesque mantels and details.

There is a brick kitchen ell about 18 by 18 feet in size located in the rear at the northwest corner. The ell is presently carried up the entire three stories, but evidence suggests that it was originally a single-story addition separated from the dining room by a pantry and service stairway.

The First Harrison Gray Otis House is in excellent condition and is open to visitors as a furnished historic house exhibit.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1795-96

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |  |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Designed by Charles Bulfinch and erected in 1795-96, the First Harrison Gray Otis House is the prototype of the distinguished series of five-bay wide three-story high brick Adamesque urban mansions that were built in New England during the Federal period. Its interiors also provide one of the earliest instances of the Adam influence in New England.

History

The noted lawyer-politician Harrison Gray Otis acquired the lot for this town house at the corner of Cambridge and Lynde Streets in 1793. Construction was underway by June 17, 1795 and the residence was completed in 1796. The house was assessed at \$8,000 in 1797. Charles Bulfinch based his plan for the Otis House on the William Bingham House in Philadelphia, which the architect had seen in 1789. The Bingham House, in turn, had been modeled after Manchester House in London. Otis lived in his new house until 1801, when he sold the property to Thomas Osborn.

The exterior of the Otis House underwent considerable alteration during the 19th century and was in poor condition when purchased in 1916 as headquarters for the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. Restoration, supervised by William Summer Appleton, began in 1916 and continued until 1920. A projecting one-story "storm porch" was removed from the front door and the existing central Palladian window in the second story and the fanlight in the third story were both reconstructed. On the basis of an 1834 woodcut, the existing projecting semi-circular porch was built in a conjectural manner on the front elevation. In 1926 Cambridge Street was widened and the house was moved back 40 feet on its original lot.

Further restoration work was accomplished under the direction of Abbott Lowell Cummings in 1960. The 19th century cornice of brick was removed and replaced by a carefully reconstructed copy of the original wood one. This replica was based on fragments of the original one, which its cone-like ornaments, had survived on the rear of the building. Later dormers were also removed from the roof and the large second-story withdrawing room was furnished with a meticulous copy of the original wallpaper.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Fiske Kimball, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic (New York, 1922), 208, 243, 249, 250, 257, 268.

Talbot F. Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America (New York, 1944), 92, XXII.

Great Georgian Houses of America (2 vols., New York, 1933-37).

Wayne Andrews, Architecture, Ambition, and Americans (New York, 1955), 98.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES				
CORNER	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	42°	21'	41"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"	71°	03'	57"
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"			
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1 acre

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: Charles W. Snell, Survey Historian

ORGANIZATION: Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service DATE: 7/14/70

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Significance: First Harrison Gray Otis House

The First Harrison Gray Otis House is now undergoing further restoration. These plans call for the removal of the 1916-20 reconstructed semi-circular porch to complete the restoration of the main facade to the original Bulfinch design and for the reproduction of additional wallpapers and early paint colors in the other principal rooms.

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9. Major Bibliographical References for the First Harrison Gray Otis House, Boston:

Charles A. Place, Charles Bulfinch, Architect and Citizen (Boston, 1925), 159-163.

Massachusetts, A Guide to Its Places and People (American Guide Series) (Boston, 1937), 83, 152.

Dorothy and Richard Pratt, A Guide to Early American Homes - North (New York, 1956), 5.

Henry-Russell Hitchcock, A Guide to Boston Architecture, 1637-1954 (New York, 1954), 5.

Walter H. Kilham, Boston After Bulfinch, An Account of Its Architecture, 1800-1900 (Cambridge, 1948), 11.

Christopher Tunnard and Henry H. Reed, American Skyline (Boston, 1955), 55.

Arnold Nicholson, American Houses in History (New York, 1965), 29-32.

Alan Gowans, Images of American Living (Philadelphia and New York, 1964), 208, 236.

Thomas E. Tallmadge, The Story of Architecture in America (New York, 1936), 63-64.

Harold Kirker, The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch (Cambridge, 1969), 118-124.

Abbott Lowell Cummings, "The First Harrison Gray Otis House in Boston, A Study in Pictorial Evidence," Old-Time New England Vol. LX, No. 3 (Winter 1970), 104-108.

"The First Harrison Gray Otis House, Boston, And Its Architect," Old-Time New England, Serial No. 124 (April, 1946).

Samuel Eliot Morison, Harrison Gray Otis (Boston, 1969).