

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only

received **OCT 27 1983**

date entered

## 1. Name

historic Captain Benjamin James House

and/or common Same

## 2. Location

street & number 301 Driftway

N/A not for publication

city, town Scituate

N/A vicinity of

state Massachusetts

code 025

county Plymouth

code 023

## 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 type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" 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
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Mr. Paul Quinn

street & number 301 Driftway P.O. Box 126

city, town Scituate

N/A vicinity of

state Massachusetts 02066

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Plymouth County Registry of Deeds

street & number Russell Street

city, town Plymouth

state Massachusetts

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Inventory of the Historic Assets  
title of the Commonwealth #354 has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date February, 1983  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Massachusetts Historical Commission

city, town Boston

state Massachusetts

## 7. Description

Captain Benjamin James House, Scituate, MA

### 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 early eighteenth century Captain Benjamin James House faces south towards the tidal flats of First Herring Brook and the North River. The house is situated at the top of a gentle knoll which rises northward from the tidal flats. To the south and east are undeveloped marshlands along the waterway which provide a dramatic panorama from the James House.

The house is situated approximately 130 feet south of the Driftway, a heavily travelled two-lane route, and is reached by an unpaved drive. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Driftway passed to the south of the James House so that its facade was visible from the road. Today, with the Driftway rerouted, its rear elevation faces the street. To the north of the Driftway, located at the edge of a landfull site is an undeveloped wooded hillside which is the last remnants of the Colman Hills, a major topographical feature of Scituate.

To the west of the property line approximately 60 feet is a small two-story house, built for the present owner's children, which is not considered to contribute to the historic character of the James House. It is unobtrusive in design and situated at a lower grade to preclude intrusion upon the major views of the James House from the tidal flats and the Driftway.

The nominated property consists of one acre of land and the early 18th century farmhouse. At present there are no original outbuildings on the site, although at one time a barn was located in the northern section of the property where the Driftway now stands.

The land surrounding the house is planted with grass and occasional flowering trees. Mature foundation plantings along the front and side elevations consists of low evergreen shrubs. To the rear of the house is a new brick patio framed by a low brick wall and picket fence. Lying to the east are tidal flats and undeveloped land, much of which is a protected conservation area. North of the property, development has occurred along the Driftway, primarily to the west, where there are several relatively recent retail and commercial structures.

Standing on a granite foundation, the Captain Benjamin James House is a center chimney dwelling that is L-shaped in plan. Its form is comprised of the original five-bay center entry 2½ story, rectangular block and a rear 1½ story lean-to addition built later in the 18th century. Other more recent additions include a small rectangular one-story shed placed to the rear of the east elevation in the 1960s and a full basement built in 1967.

The main portion of the dwelling has a simple ridge roof which extends in a lean-to form to the one-story height of the rear ell along the east elevation. A gabled end has been added to the north section of this ell and extends for half its length. The side shed also has a ridge roof which follows the lean-to form of the ell and is aligned with the plan of the adjacent ell roof.

Sheathed in cedar shingles, the house is simply trimmed with plain cornerboards and a similarly detailed cornice. Fenestration was originally 12/12 sash, except for the gable windows which were 8/12. All have been replaced with 1/1 double hung sash with interior muntin strips which follow the original 12/12 or 8/12 configuration.

The south elevation and principal facade is five bays wide with the entrance in the center bay. This entry is deeply set framed by a wide flat aschitrave and topped by a dentil course.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
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Continuation sheet Captain Benjamin James House Item number 7 Page 1

The door consists of wide weathered boards set on iron strap hinges and is probably original to the structure.

The east and west elevations which form the sides of the building are both quite similar in their configuration except that the eastern face is deeper due to the ell which is attached to it. Both, however, are two bays deep with a smaller single window centered in the gable.

The north elevation of the main block is two bays wide with two double-hung windows at both the first and second stories. These openings flank the central chimney bay of the south elevation.

The rear ell adjoins the main block directly east of the windows on the north elevation. The western face of this addition has an entrance in the southern bay with a small 4/4 window off-centered above it. Its north gabled end has an off-centered set of four casement windows set within a single frame. Of recent date, these windows have diamond-patterned interior muntin strips. A chimney smaller than that on the main block of the house is located on the east side of this extension.

The east shed addition has two 1/1 double-hung windows with 12/12 muntin strips in its south elevation and one window of the same size in its east elevation. Above this opening is a small 4/4 sash lite and to its north is the wide-board door mounted with iron strap hinges. The north elevation has no openings.

The interior plan is that of a traditional center chimney house. The entrance hall has a tight stairway in front of the chimney which leads to a full second story. To the left, right and rear of the entrance and chimney are the three major rooms. A second stair was added in the east rear portion of the main block. The chimney has three fireplaces on each story. The rear room's large fireplace includes a domed beehive oven. The rear ell also has a double fireplace with a large cooking hearth, since this place served initially as a summer kitchen. Several interior partitions have been removed or relocated in recent years. The raised field paneling and fireplace mantels from the front rooms have been removed to install insulation materials and are in storage for eventual replacement.

Alterations to the building exterior have been minimal. The roof has been replaced and is in need of replacement again. The windows were replaced by new double-hung 1/1 wood sash with interior 12/12 muntin strips. From a distance, the visual impact of this change is minimal. The one-story shed addition (c 1970) is compatible in design and proportions with the historic structure and does not intrude upon its major facade elements.

# 8. Significance Captain Benjamin James House, Scituate, MA

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1700-1720  
early 18th century      **Builder/Architect** unknown

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Captain Benjamin James House possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship and has associations with the 17th century development of Scituate and with the town's efforts to eliminate the dreaded smallpox disease in the 18th century. The house is a fine example of the community's early architecture and thus meets criteria A and c of the National Register of Historic Places.

The early history of Scituate dates from c 1626 when a group of Englishmen commonly referred to today as the "Men of Kent" established a settlement here. The natural protection of the four cliffs overlooking the Atlantic Ocean made it relatively safe from attack, and the North River provided access to the extensive pine and oak forests of the interior; thus, here was a safe and convenient location to start a shipbuilding industry and establish a center for coastal trade.

The homes of the earliest settlers were primarily on Kent Street, the Main north/ south axis west of the waterfront. By 1639, the colony had become the most populous in the area, with development extending around the central hills and west to Greenbush and southward to the North River. The original Driftway was laid out in the 1620s as the east/west route which connected Kent Street to Greenbush, where several early mills were located.

The land on which the Captain Benjamin James House was built was part of the parcel originally granted to John Hanmer, one of the Men of Kent. Hanmer's land lying to the southwest of Kent Street was the most remote from the original Kent Street settlement. Not until after King Philips War in 1675 did the areas beyond the original settlement become safe for development. Expansion along the North River which lay to the south was then quick to occur and houses began to be built which were larger and more permanent than earlier structures.

The proximity of John Hanmer's property to the tidal flats of First Herring Brook and the North River made it extremely valuable. The marsh hay was prized as forage for cattle and livestock since the hilly, stony soils of the interior were difficult to farm. In its siting and location, this site reflects the location of early agricultural development in Scituate and the importance of the tidal driftway to the livelihood and sustenance of the early community.

The vernacular character of this farmhouse illustrates the simple lifestyle of its early inhabitants and the limited economy of the early settlement. It is thus not surprising that shipbuilding and fishing soon surpassed agriculture as the town's major industries, given the difficulties that the geography and topography presented for farming.

The land on which the house sits was passed from John Hanmer to John Otis of Hingham in 1653. Local historical accounts date the building to 1691, however, an analysis of architectural features combined with an understanding that rural houses were generally conservative in design, suggest an early 18th century date. About 1734, title to the house passed to Captain Benjamin James (1711-1788). James was a descendant of John James of

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Daughters of the American Revolution, Chief Justice Cushing Chapter, Old Scituate; DAR, Scituate, 1921.  
 Deane, Samuel, History of Scituate, MA: James Loring, Boston, 1831.  
 Merritt, Joseph Foster, Old Time Anecdotes of the North River and South Shore; Rockland

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1 acre  
 Quadrangle name Scituate, MA Quadrangle scale 1:25,000

UTM References

A	<u>19</u>	<u>356040</u>	<u>4670690</u>	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary corresponds to the attached Assessor's Map of Scituate, Sheet #53, Parcel 53-3-1. The boundaries include Lot A, the house and surrounding open land which together comprise 42,310 square feet (a small portion of the original 18th century lot.) To the north

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kathryn Kubie, Preservation Planner with Margo B. Webber  
 organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date September 1983  
 street & number 294 Washington Street telephone (617) 727-8470  
 city or town Boston state Massachusetts 02108

# 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Peter H. Westbrook 10/19/83  
 State Historic Preservation Officer  
 title Massachusetts Historical Commission date

**For NPS use only**

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

Melores Byers  
 Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the National Register date 11/29/83

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief of Registration

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date entered

Continuation sheet Captain Benjamin James House Item number 8

Page 1

Dedham who came to Scituate in 1640. A captain in the local militia, James lived here with his bride Marcy until later building the James "mansion" on what was then Stockbridge's Road in Greenbush, at which time the older house was abandoned. The Scituate farm at that time was a 100-acre parcel and was owned jointly by Captain James and Benjamin Stockbridge. Little is known about Captain James other than his occupation and abandonment of this house. Though perhaps not a leading citizen of Scituate during his lifetime, his farm illustrates the typical way of life of the average settler and farmer in the first two centuries of Scituate's development.

The property's isolated location along the Driftway resulted in its role as a smallpox hospital during the epidemic of 1791-93. Deserted by the James family, the house was selected by the town as the site of a hospital for inoculation against the dreaded disease which occurred every 20 to 30 years in the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth colonies. Smallpox was commonly referred to as the "pestilence" and the house came to be known as the "Pest House."

Scituate acted innovatively by initiating a controversial immunization method of inoculating healthy people with pus taken from carriers of the disease. Despite the best efforts of the town's doctors, several families were infected and twelve people died. Compared to other communities and to the town's population of 2,862 at that time, the town's inoculation program was considered an enlightened and successful course of action.

The hospital continued in use for two years instead of the originally intended two months. Charred timbers remain as evidence of the charring by fire used to sterilize the house after its use as a hospital. The selectmen reportedly were indignant at having to restore the house to usable condition and then having to return it to the James heirs in far better condition than they had found it.

The house passed through the James family and to the South Scituate Savings Bank by the mid-19th century. In 1880 it was acquired by Phillip Gillis as a 17-acre parcel. The land was farmed and saltmarsh hay continued to be reaped for forage. The house has remained in the ownership of the Gillis family to the present day.

The Captain Benjamin James House is a typical vernacular First Period farmhouse and one of the oldest remaining buildings in Scituate. It derives its design from the English vernacular tradition as characterized by its rectangular plan, massive center chimney, exposed wood and masonry structural system and use of local building materials--oak timbers and cedar shingles.

The building retains an extensive amount of original fabric, both in the main block and rear ell. The main alterations to the house are replacement of the original windows, new door and window locations on the rear ell and the temporary removal of panelling, mantels and chair rails from the interior for the purposes of re-wiring and insulating the structure.

The house is typical of vernacular late 17th century construction in Scituate and the surrounding communities. Its importance lies in its retention of original architectural and structural detail and its relationship to the surrounding landscape of the tidal driftway.

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No subsurface archaeological testing has been conducted on the property and no references to wells, trash pits or privies have been located as part of this study. The land near the house is relatively undisturbed. Prehistoric Artifacts have reportedly been found to the east and south of the property. It may be considered that portions of the site not previously disturbed for parking or construction of the adjacent house might have the potential to yield archaeological information about prehistoric settlements in Scituate.

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date entered

Continuation sheet Captain Benjamin James House Item number 9 & 10

Page 1

9. Major Bibliographical References

Standard Publishing Company, Rockland, 1928.

Pratt, Harvey Hunter, The Early Planters of Scituate; Scituate Historical Society, Scituate, 1929.

Quinn, Paul, "A Short History of Scituate's 'Pest House,'" 1972.

10. Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

it is bounded by the Driftway, one of the earliest roads in the town and today a heavily-travelled route. To the east and south, just beyond a narrow road at the property's edge, is an area of undeveloped marshland adjoining the Simm's Boatyard along First Herring Brook. West of the property is a recently constructed two-story residence. The boundary is justified as a logical means of preserving the historic house and open space immediately surrounding it. Thus, the dramatic southeasterly view of the house set upon a knoll overlooking the tidal draft will be maintained.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

James, Capt. Benjamin, House  
Plymouth County  
MASSACHUSETTS

Working No. OCT 27 1983  
Fed. Reg. Date: 2-5-85  
Date Due: 11/24/83 - 12/11/83  
Action:  ACCEPT 11/29/83  
 RETURN  
 REJECT  
Federal Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Entered in the  
National Register

- resubmission
- nomination by person or local government
- owner objection
- appeal

Substantive Review:  sample  request  appeal  NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria \_\_\_\_\_  
Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_  
Discipline \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: \_\_\_\_\_ technical corrections cited below  
\_\_\_\_\_ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership Public Acquisition	Status Accessible	Present Use
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4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

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

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- alterations/integrity
- dates
- boundary selection

---

**8. Significance**

Period \_\_\_\_\_ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below \_\_\_\_\_

Specific dates \_\_\_\_\_ Builder/Architect \_\_\_\_\_

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*) \_\_\_\_\_

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- applicable criteria
- justification of areas checked
- relating significance to the resource
- context
- relationship of integrity to significance
- justification of exception
- other

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References \_\_\_\_\_

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Verbal boundary description and justification \_\_\_\_\_

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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**12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification**

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_\_ national      \_\_\_\_ state      \_\_\_\_ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

title \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

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**13. Other**

- Maps
- Photographs
- Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



Captain Benjamin James House

301 Driftway

Scituate, MA

Photo by: Margo Webber, March, 1983  
Neg. filed: 136 Ridge Ave., Newton

Photo 1 of 2

View looking northwest towards  
facade and east elevation.



Captain Benjamin James House  
301 Driftway  
Scituate, MA

Photo by: Margo Webber, March, 1983  
Neg. filed: 136 Ridge Ave., Newton

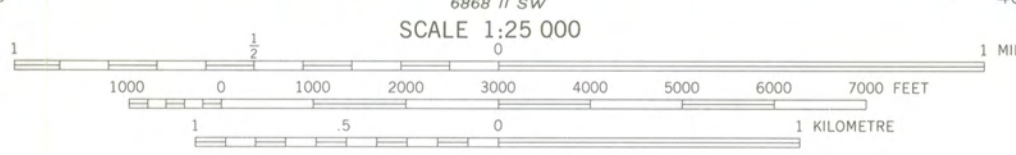
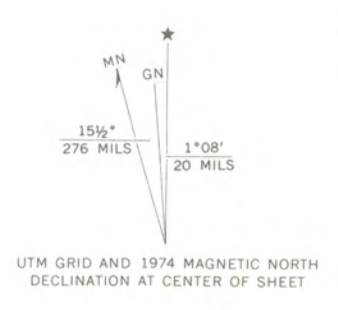
Photo 2 of 2  
View looking northeast towards  
facade and west elevation.





Captain Benjamin James House  
Scituate, MA  
UTM Reference:  
19 356040 4670690

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and Massachusetts Geodetic Survey  
Topography by planetable surveys 1935.  
Revised from aerial photographs taken 1973. Field checked 1974  
Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS 244 (1972) and  
1207 (1973). This information is not intended for navigational purposes  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Massachusetts coordinate system,  
mainland zone  
1000-metre Universal Transverse Mercator grid,  
zone 19



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929  
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER  
SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER  
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 6.8 FEET



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route

SCITUATE, MASS.  
N4207.5—W7037.5/7.5

1974

AMS 6868 II NW—SERIES V814

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST





June 1, 1983

Massachusetts Historical Commission  
294 Washington Street  
Boston, MA

Dear Ms. Jenkins:

The Scituate Historical Society is very pleased to approve the application for the Captain Benjamin James House built in 1691 and located at 301 Driftway in Scituate to be put on the National Register of Historic Places. It is most important that this house be protected by this designation because it is one of the oldest houses in Scituate. It also has a very interesting place in the history of Scituate.

The application is very complete in its description and describes in detail the historic features of the house and the intent of the new owner to restore the house to its original appearance as near as possible. This is particularly important to the future of this house and if the application is approved it should protect this historic property in the future.

We sincerely hope this application will receive your approval.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Laidlaw  
President



**MASSACHUSETTS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION**

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
Office of the Secretary of State**

294 Washington Street  
Boston, Massachusetts  
02108  
617-727-8470

**MICHAEL JOSEPH CONNOLLY**  
Secretary of State

October 19, 1983

Ms. Carol Shull, Chief  
National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
18th & C Streets, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed you will find the following nomination forms:

Edgartown - Edgartown Village Historic District (state)  
Framingham - Moses Ellis House (local)  
Great Barrington - Monument Mills (local)  
Peabody - John Southwick House (local)  
Scituate - Captain Benjamin James House (local)  
Stockbridge - Villa Virginia (local)  
Westfield - United States Whip Company Complex (national)

All have been voted eligible by the State Review Board and have been signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer. Owners were notified of pending State Review Board consideration 30-75 days before the meeting and were afforded the opportunity to comment. Comments received to date are attached to the nomination forms. Also included are the forms for Border City Mills (Fall River Multiple Resource Area) which had been returned to us for boundary justification and for Woodbridge Street Historic District, South Hadley, returned for technical corrections.

Sincerely,

*Candace Jenkins*

Candace Jenkins  
Preservation Planning Director  
Massachusetts Historical Commission

CJ/hi  
Enclosures

