

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Long Wharf and Custom House Block other names/site number

2. Location

street & number foot of State Street, east of Atlantic Avenue city, town Boston state Massachusetts code MA county Suffolk code 025 zip code 02109

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes checkboxes for private/public ownership and building/district/site/structure/object categories.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: entered in the National Register. determined eligible for the National Register. determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register. other, (explain:) Boundary Definition

Signature of the Keeper and Date of Action 3/20/91

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Transportation/water-related
Commerce/warehouse
Commerce/specialty stores
Government/custom house

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Transportation/water-related
Commerce/business
Commerce/professional
Commerce/restaurant

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

No style (wharf)
Greek Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation not visible
walls granite
brick
roof slate
other bulkheads: granite

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Long Wharf is located at the foot of State Street (originally King Street) east of Atlantic Avenue on the waterfront of Boston, Massachusetts. The wharf was built over a long period of time and changed shape frequently. Its location at the base of King Street allowed direct access to the commercial center of Boston: it originally provided docking facilities for fifty ships and by the end of the 18th century Long Wharf was pre-eminent among Boston's 80 wharves (photo 1).

Henry Deering suggested a wharf at the site in 1707; permission to construct the wharf was finally granted in 1710 to a group of men (headed by Captain Oliver Noyes) by the Selectmen of Boston as a partial solution to the deteriorated condition of the Barricado (a 2200 foot defensive wall/wharf of stone and wood piles that encircled the harbor); Noyes proposed that the wharf extend from the base of King Street, across the flats and two hundred feet beyond the remaining "islands" of the Barricado (map #1). The area of the wharf would consist of a 30 foot wide public way on the south side and a four foot passage on the north. In between, private lots owned by proprietors were reserved for warehouses and stores. The wharf was divided into two divisions, west and east, each proprietor receiving a lot of 40 x 20 in the west and 24 1/2 x 20 in the east. Warehouses were built in clusters with north-south passages between them. Dimensions for the warehouses were predetermined to provide uniformity--each had a height of 21 1/2 feet, and a roof pitch of 5 feet. A sixteen foot north-south gap in the wharf was planned, which although covered over, would allow small boats to pass through. The eastern-most end was kept for the town for fortifications. Two cisterns, or dry wells, are mentioned in the Town Book of 1713 and would have been located on either side of the wharf. Building proceeded quickly: by 1711 warehouses on the wharf had already appeared. One reason for the rapidity perhaps was the easy availability of fill for the wharf from the fire of 1711 that destroyed much of upper King St. By 1715 the last 600 feet were done--a Divisional Deed of 1715 suggests that the total length was 1586 feet, and the width 54 feet. Actual construction methods are unknown, although recent archaeological excavations and records suggest crib construction.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Commerce

Transportation

Period of Significance

c. 1710-1855

Significant Dates

1710

c. 1830

c. 1848

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Oliver Noyes (?)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Long Wharf, located at the foot of State Street in Boston, MA, commemorates the early mercantile history of the United States. From the construction of Long Wharf in 1710-21 until 1756, Boston was the largest colonial American port and was surpassed by only New York and Philadelphia during the rest of the eighteenth century. Long Wharf was the nucleus of Boston's maritime trade--by the end of the eighteenth century it reigned pre-eminent amongst Boston's 80 wharves, handling both international and coastal trade. The importance of Long Wharf to the town of Boston can be seen in a stanza from one of Oliver Wendell Holmes' poems:

"Strong right arm of Boston, stretched out o'er the bay,
May the winds waft the wealth of all nations to thee,
And thy dividends flow like the waves of the sea".

Two buildings, the Custom House Block and the Chart House, help the wharf maintain its historic character today. The Custom House Block dates from 1848 and provides an example of the monumental granite structures that lined Boston's docks during the zenith of its commercial prosperity; the Chart House, dating from the 1830's with perhaps some colonial sections, provides an example of the earlier form of warehouses on the wharf.

As is the nature of a utilitarian site, Long Wharf was in constant change, reflecting the prosperity and priorities of American shipping and trade. Although these changes have altered the shape and the use of Long Wharf, the portion that remains and the buildings on it retain a strong commemorative value. Long Wharf played an active role in American history from colonial times through the nineteenth century. As sea trade was the economic basis for the colonies and the new nation, Long Wharf's position as the pre-eminent wharf in a major port makes it especially significant.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Boston Redevelopment Authority. "Long Wharf" (brochure describing master plan). N.p., n.d.

Boston Society of Architects, ed. Architecture Boston. Barre, Ma.: Barre Publishing, 1976.

Bower, Beth Anne, et al. Long Wharf: Archaeological Testing of Parcel D-10. Occasional Publications in Archaeology and History, no. 3. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Commission, May 1984.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Boston Landmarks Commission
Massachusetts Historical Commission

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property + 3 acres

UTM References

A 19 331240 4691560
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at the intersection of the outer line of the southern bulkhead of Long Wharf and a line of convenience parallel to and 40 feet west of the west wall of the brick warehouse known as the Chart House;

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the National Historic Landmark for Long Wharf and the Custom House Block have been drawn to include that portion of Long Wharf which still retains its visual identity when viewed from the waters of Boston Harbor and to enclose the two surviving buildings historically associated with the wharf.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Polly A. Matherly and Marie A. Frank
 organization Heritage Studies, Inc. date June 29, 1989
 street & number 20 Seminary Avenue telephone (609) 466-9606
 city or town Hopewell state N.J. zip code 08525

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wharf to its 1820 configuration: the 1900 bulkhead would be demolished to expose the 18th and 19th century granite bulkheads. The wharf is currently an irregular rectangle, extending approximately 640 feet into the harbor and about 280 feet wide (map #5). The southern side has a set-in dock and is actively used by excursion boats and water taxis; the northern side is used as a parking lot. The surface of the wharf is concrete and asphalt covered.

Archaeology: Archaeological investigations of the landward area (i.e. west of Atlantic Avenue) are limited but show that portions of the wharf do survive west of the shoreline. 1984 investigations revealed what appear to be log construction remains of the 1763 expansion of the wharf twelve feet below the surface. Borings also show 1826 sections of the wharf at seven feet below the surface (under Commerce Street). Beneath the concrete and wood decking lie the 18th and 19th century granite bulkheads. In the absence of full archaeological investigations it is impossible to state how much of the historic structure may survive under fill and later construction. None of the colonial wharf remains are visible.

The Custom House Block: The grandest of Long Wharf's warehouses was the Greek Revival Custom House Block, completed in 1848 (photo #2). It consists of a five-story center section with a truncated hipped roof and four-story wings with gabled roofs broken on the rear (north) slope by massive dormers. The irregularly shaped building is 225 feet long, 80 feet wide at the eastern end and 60 feet wide at the western end. The front (south) elevation is faced with massive granite blocks; the end and rear elevations are brick (photos #1 & #6). Noteworthy on the south side are the cyclopiian granite piers on the first floor (photos #3 & #4) and the large entrance arch placed on the left side of the center section (photo #5). The building originally contained fourteen stores; however, five (#71 through 75 Long Wharf) were removed from the eastern end in 1865 when freight sheds were constructed (the five stores were later re-erected in Cambridgeport as a bank). Each store was three bays wide and all had deep dry cellars which were surrounded by a coffer dam of sheet piling and clay. The windows, originally 6/6, were set in simple granite surrounds. In the 1870's or 80's Peabody and Stearn were responsible for alterations to the north side: gabled dormers were added at roof level (photo #6). Also, at an unknown date, the polygonal cupola in the center of the roof (which appears in late 19th century prints) disappeared and was never replaced. A one-story roof-top addition to the west appears to date from the present century and extends the depth of the building (photos #1, #3 & #6). The third store from the west has been refaced on the first and second stories and double hung single-pane sash windows have been inserted

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(photos #2 & #3). The Custom House Block remained in commercial use until the 1970's when it was renovated for shops and offices on the ground floor and apartments above. Roof decks for the apartments were cut into the south slope of each store and are visible from certain angles of the wharf (photos #1 & #4). Original granite blocks set within the entrance arch were removed and replaced by glass infill for a lobby area (photo #5).

The Chart House: The Chart House (or Gardiner Building) lies west of the Custom House Block (photo #1). It is a good example of what the smaller, more typical, warehouses on the wharf were like (photo #7). An exact date is unknown--it is possible that the building was built in two sections: the two eastern stores in 1763 and the western store in 1830. The building's 3 and 1/2 stories rise from a rectangular plan 40 x 80 feet; the exterior walls are brick laid in common bond and it has a gable roof of slate. Used as a warehouse originally, it is divided into three stores, each three bays wide. On the south side, each store has a large doorway at the center bay with a smaller door in one of the side bays. Two parallel rows of nine windows each illuminate the second and third stories of the building. All openings have granite lintels and the windows, 6/6 sashed, have granite sills and are flanked by plain shutters. Iron tie rods capped by star bolts are visible at points on the first floor level and eastern end of the second floor. On the north side the three bay division continues. However, openings large enough for loading have been inserted directly above the large doorway of the central bays; these openings are hung with double leaf doors, each with twelve-pane panels in the top half (photo #8). The fenestration pattern on the north side also differs from the south. The western-most store has two 6/6 sashed windows flanking the central door on the ground floor and one 6/6 sashed window on the third floor (directly above double-leafed opening and central door). The two following stores have a total of seven 6/6 sashed windows each: two flanking the central door, two flanking the double-leafed opening, and three on the third floor. There are three interior chimneys with simple corbelled caps. The Chart House was rehabilitated in 1973 by Anderson Notter Associates and converted to a restaurant--the interior was substantially altered at that time: portions of floors and party walls between the stores have been removed. Interior brick walls appear to have been sandblasted so it is hard to tell how much of the interior remains intact. On the exterior, a large louvered vent has been inserted on the southwest corner of the roof--it runs the length of the first store; a snow guard has been placed above the second two stores (photos #7 & #9). A louvered vent has also been inserted on the upper portion of the north side of the roof; it extends the length of the first store and is approximately 4' wide (photo #8).

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For all photographs:

1. Name of property: Long Wharf
2. City/State: Boston, MA
3. Photographer: Constance M. Greiff
4. Date: November, 1985
5. Negatives located at: Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, NPS

- #1. General view northeast - Chart House left, Custom House Block right
- #2. View northeast - front elevation of Custom House Block
- #3. Custom House Block - detail, western portion of south (front) elevation
- #4. Custom House Block - detail, eastern portion of south (front) elevation
- #5. Custom House Block - detail, main entrance at center of south elevation
- #6. View southeast - rear of Custom House Block
- #7. View northeast - Chart House
- #8. View southeast - rear of Chart House
- #9. General view northwest showing landward setting of the Landmark, Chart House and Custom House Block at right (east)

List of Maps

- #1. Long Wharf, 1708. Source: G. R. Payson
- #2. "A View of the Town of Boston..." 1768; Paul Revere. Source: B.A. Bower
- #3. "The Town of Boston in New England by John Bonner, 1722." Source: W. M. Whitehill
- #4. Quincy Market superimposed over waterfront. Source: B.A. Bower
- #5. Sketch map.

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Historical Background:

Long Wharf: Acting upon the suggestion of Henry Deering in 1707, the Selectmen of Boston granted permission to a private group of men (headed by Capt. Oliver Noyes) for the construction of a wharf at the base of King St. The wharf was seen as a partial solution to the deteriorated condition of the Barricado (constructed 1673), which had served the dual purpose of a defensive wall and wharf for Boston. Noyes' wharf would extend 1/2 mile into the harbor (200 feet beyond the Barricado) and it came to be known as "Long Wharf." Early maps show that it was by far the most ambitious undertaking on Boston's waterfront (see map #1).

Long Wharf was an immediate success. Its site at the base of King Street allowed direct access to the intersection of King and Cornhill Streets (now State and Washington Streets.) which was the heart of town. Its extreme length allowed ships to dock and unload directly into warehouses without the use of lighters or boats. With its site and its length, the wharf soon became central to the commercial concerns of Boston--goods could be easily and quickly brought into town. It is no accident that the financial district of Boston was concentrated at the head of Long Wharf.

It should also be noted that because the wharf served not only the private merchants but also the public, the public could buy directly from the warehouses and stores on the wharf. Thus the wharf functioned as a marketplace as well as a dock long before Boston's Faneuil Hall (Quincy Market) was built in the 1820's.

In addition to its economic importance, Long Wharf soon played a part in the military history of Boston. Victors from the Battle of Louisbourg landed there amidst gun salutes and cheering citizens in 1758. English troops landed there in 1770 to enforce the King's rights (which ultimately ended in the Boston Massacre). Wounded from the Battle of Bunker Hill, English and American, were brought back across the harbor to Long Wharf in June of 1775. The British evacuated Boston from Long Wharf in March 1776. In July 1776 the ship that brought word of the Declaration of Independence from Philadelphia landed at Long Wharf. John Adams sailed from it in Sensible to secure European financial and military support for the war. During the Revolution privateers and blockade runners sailed from Long Wharf and military stores were kept in its warehouses. During the War of 1812, Constitution ("Old Ironsides") docked at Long Wharf.

After the wars, trade resumed its dominant position on the wharf. The city of Boston achieved its acme of commercial prosperity in the decade beginning with the year 1844. Boston merchant houses thrived on the China and East Indies trade--silks, madras, and cashmere were speedily transported to Long Wharf warehouses on the sleek clipper ships designed by Donald McKay, Boston's premier designer and builder. Trade with Europe continued throughout this period; in fact, the first locomotive to arrive in America was brought from England and landed at Long Wharf in 1830.

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Ironically, the arrival of this machine signalled the demise of sea-trade based economies.

After the Civil War, trade declined in Boston and so did the importance of Long Wharf. The primary business of the wharf shifted from international trade to coastal trade and fishing. Atlantic Avenue was built to enlarge the waterfront just at the point when Boston's great maritime era was closing. Major fish dealers moved away in 1914 when the Fish Pier was completed in South Boston. Schooners and coastal steamers gradually disappeared.

Amidst the marine, economic, political, social and military history of the wharf, there is an interesting connection with American literature and painting. Nathaniel Hawthorne worked on Long Wharf as a measurer for the customs service from Jan. 11, 1839 through 1840. While there he recorded many images of daily life on Long Wharf and even some of its ghost stories; Hawthorne characterized the wharf with the statement that, "...Long Wharf is devoted to ponderous, evil-smelling, inelegant necessities of life..." (1). John Singleton Copley (1738-1815) spent part of his boyhood on Long Wharf: his mother operated a tobacco store on the wharf and the family lived above. Instead of being attracted to the romantic qualities of dock life, the sensitive Copley retreated from the harsh realities of his environment; rather than wander about the dock, Copley escaped to an empty room where he would draw on the walls.

"T" Wharf, projecting from the north side of Long Wharf and participating in much of the same early activity, became the center of the fishing industry in the late 19th century and a fashionable residence for artists in the early 20th century. It disintegrated in the 1960's and is no longer visible.

Custom House Block and Chart House: The Custom House Block (1848) was built during Boston's period of greatest mercantile prosperity; it is symbolic of the numerous Greek Revival granite commercial structures that arose on Boston's extensive dock area in the decades before 1861. Boston had an established tradition of dignified commercial structures that began with the India Wharf Stores in 1807. By the 1820's the use of granite in utilitarian buildings such as warehouses was not unusual. Advances in quarrying and cutting techniques enabled builders to procure huge blocks of granite, often large enough to become monolithic piers or columns. These large blocks gave the buildings simplified and massive elevations and initiated what can be called the "Granite School of Architecture". Ground-floor monolithic columns became almost universal as did austere, simplified detail. This "style" of architecture soon spread to other cities such as New York through the work of A.J. Davis and I. Towne. In Boston, the logical and powerful beauty imparted to warehouses by the use of granite caused more than one arriving European to exclaim in

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admiration. The characteristic motifs of the "Granite School" can be seen in the southern elevation of the Custom House Block (see photo 4). Although the architect of the Custom House Block is unknown, architects such as Alexander Parris and Isaiah Rogers did design some of the granite warehouses on the Boston waterfront; the involvement of major architects in waterfront construction further highlights the architectural value of these utilitarian buildings. The alterations to the northern elevation are noteworthy as an example of the the work of Peabody and Stearns--the animated roofline produced by the dormers is typical of the Victorian taste of the 1870's. Peabody and Stearns would later design Machinery Hall in the Court of Honor at the Columbian Exposition. The Custom House Block was leased to the government soon after construction.

The Chart House is more typical of the smaller brick construction of Boston's earlier waterfront structures. Unassuming and utilitarian in appearance, the Chart House represents the generic warehouses of the proprietors and private individuals that were such a necessity to everyday life on the wharf. Cargoes would have been stored in its cellars and then sold at its doorstep. Buildings much like it would have lined the north side of Long Wharf from its inception in 1710 (see map #2) until the nineteenth-century. In fact, the two eastern-most stores might actually date from colonial times; whereas the third store, datable to the 1830's, has been attributed to Isaiah Rogers.

The Custom House Block and Chart House are therefore silent reminders of the teeming activity and busy life that once prevailed on the wharf. Both buildings add a distinctive architectural character from two periods within Long Wharf's long history. **

(1) James R. Mellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 162.

** There are few original records or highly detailed information documenting the exact construction of the original Long Wharf. As a result, archaeological remnants of Long Wharf would be particularly valuable for documenting the original wharf and the methods used to construct it.

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Bibliographical References, cont.

Bridenbaugh, Carl. Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955. Reprint. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Bryant, John M. Boston's Granite Architecture 1810-1860. Dissertation, Boston University, 1972.

Bunting, W. H. Portrait of a Port: Boston 1852-1914. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.

Cushing, George M., Jr. Great Buildings of Boston: A Photographic Guide. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1982.

Flexner, James T. America's Old Masters: First Artists of the New World. New York: The Viking Press, 1939.

Forbes, Frank H., "The Old Boston Waterfront, 1840-50." In Days and Ways in Old Boston, edited by William S. Rossiter. Boston: R. H. Stearns and Company, 1915.

Hamlin, Talbot. Greek Revival Architecture in America. Oxford University Press, 1944. Reprint. New York: Dover, 1964.

Huxtable, Ada Louise. "Granite Wharf, Warehouse, Office Buildings, 1823-1872, Boston, Massachusetts." Progressive Architecture, June 1958, 117-18.

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Mellow, James R. Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. The Maritime History of Boston 1783-1860. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961.

Payson, Gilbert R. "Long Wharf and the Old Waterfront." Proceedings of the Bostonian Society (1926), 23-40.

Whitehill, Walter Muir. Boston--A Topographical History, 2nd. ed. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968.

Winsor, Justin, ed. Memorial History of Boston, 4 vols. Boston: James Osgood and Co., 1881-1883.

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Verbal Boundary Description cont.

thence, northerly along said line of convenience 180 feet to a point; thence; easterly along a second line of convenience drawn at a right angle to the first approximately 170 feet to the northern bulkhead of Long Wharf; thence easterly along the outer line of said northern bulkhead of Long Wharf (approximately 430 feet), southerly along the the outer line of the eastern bulkhead of Long Wharf (approximately 220 feet), and westerly along the outer line of the southern bulkhead of Long Wharf (approximately 580 feet) to the point of beginning.

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Boundary Justification cont.

The boundaries of the Landmark are, for the most part, based on the present outer lines of the Long Wharf bulkheads, which date from c. 1900. These are either coterminous with or enclose the lines of the mid-18th and late-19th century bulkheads of the wharf (map #5). A line of convenience has been used to define the western (landward) edge of the Landmark, excluding land that has been substantially affected by the recent construction of a hotel and other site improvements; another line of convenience excludes filled land at the northwestern corner of the Landmark.

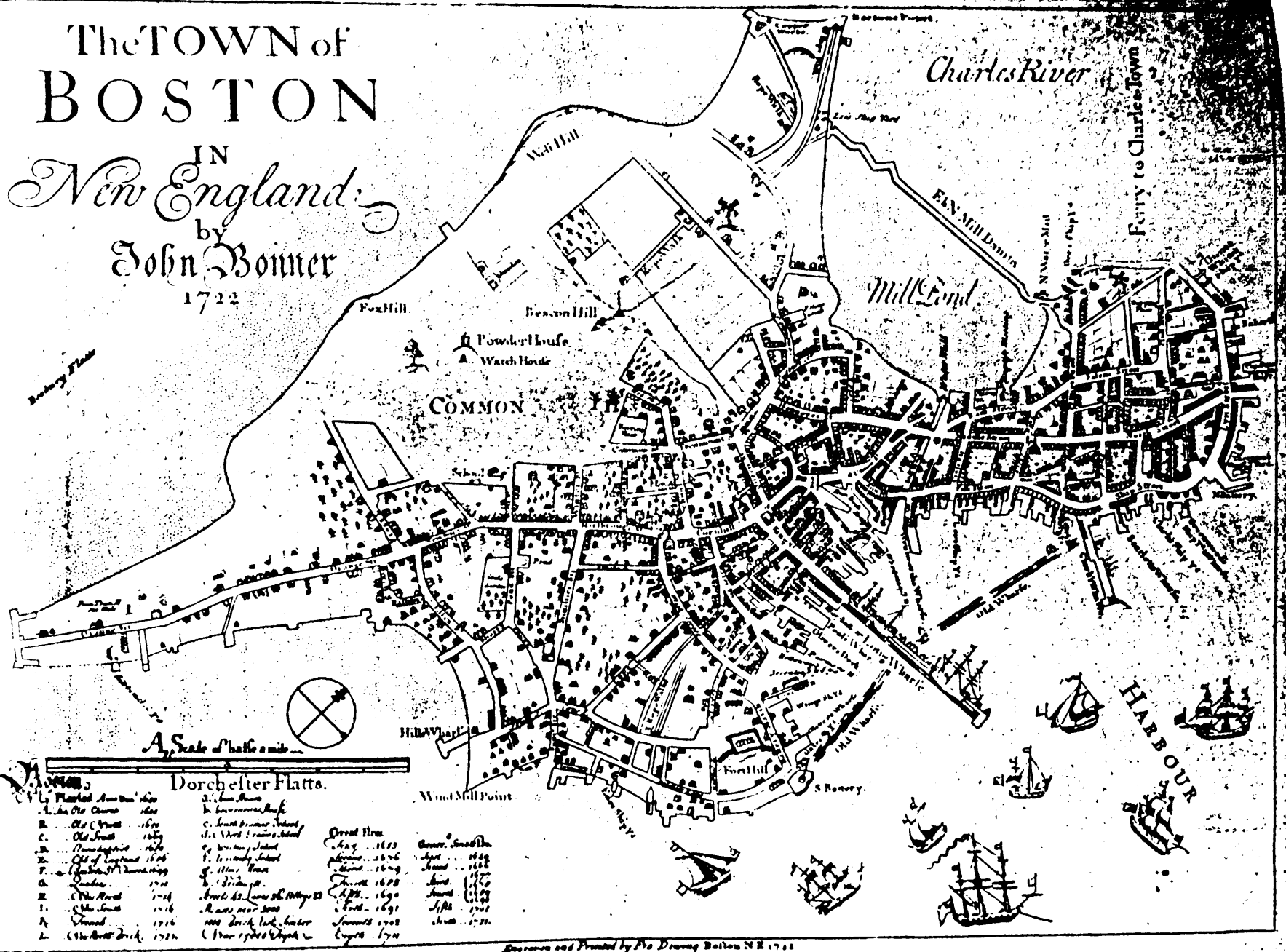
It should be noted that preliminary investigations, including a study carried out in 1984 for the Massachusetts Historical Commission (see Bibliography: Long Wharf: Archaeological Testing of Parcel D-10), suggest that additional portions of the historic Long Wharf may survive as archeological resources beneath filled land and later construction lying to the west of the Landmark. However, accurate identification of all buried remnants of Long Wharf would require extensive excavation along a corridor running roughly from Congress Street to the present shoreline, a distance of several city blocks. In the absence of detailed information on the exact location of such archeological resources, the area in which they might lie has been excluded from the boundaries of the Landmark.**

It should also be noted that the configuration of buildings at Long Wharf as shown on the U.S.G.S. map accompanying this nomination (Boston South Quadrangle, 7.5 minute series, 1970, photorevised 1979) is not accurate. The correct configuration is that shown in the accompanying sketch map.

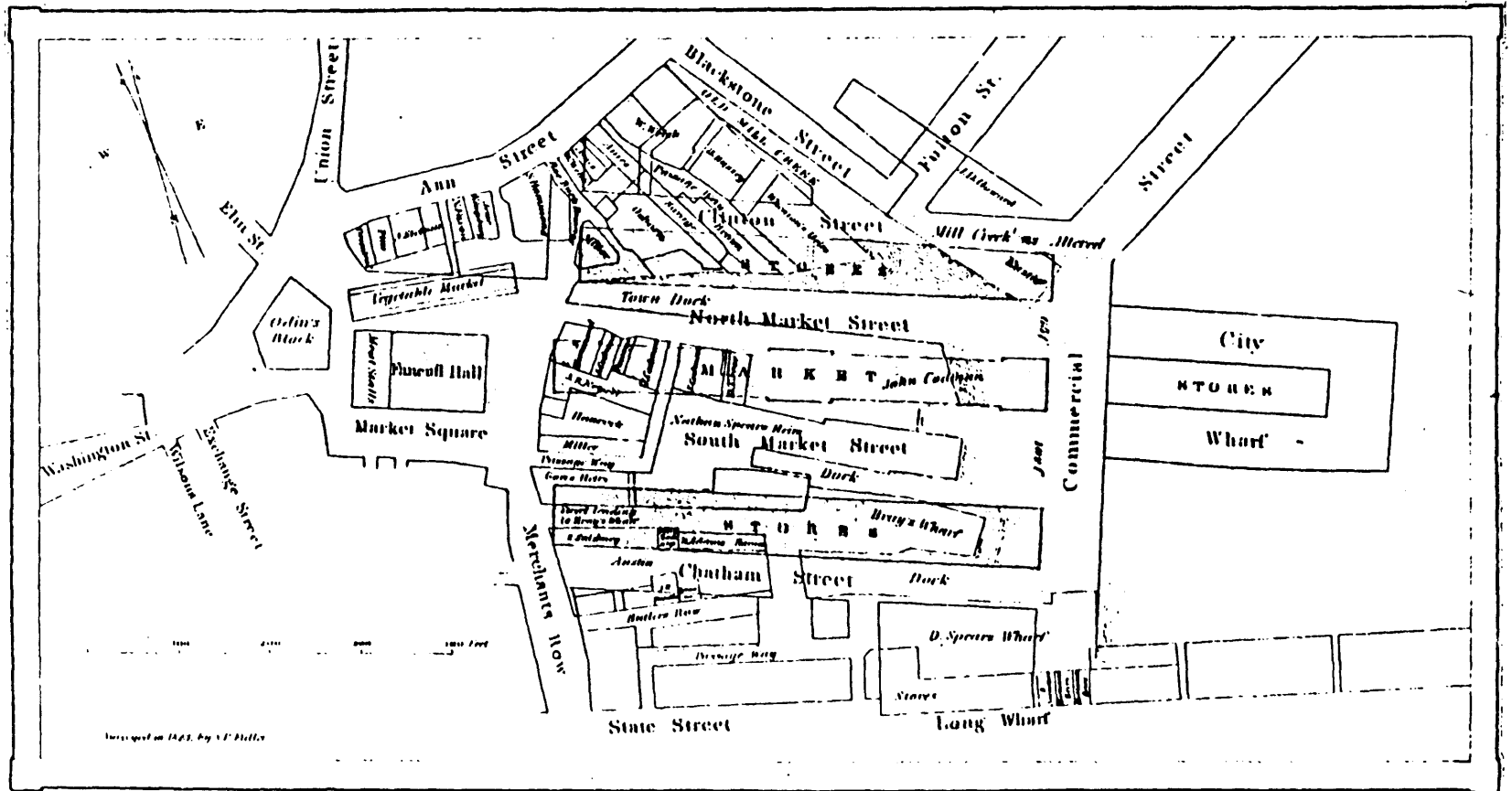
** If any intact elements of Long Wharf are found to the west of the proposed boundary, they should be considered for inclusion in the Landmark designation.

The TOWN of BOSTON

IN
New England
by
John Bowler
1722



Map #3

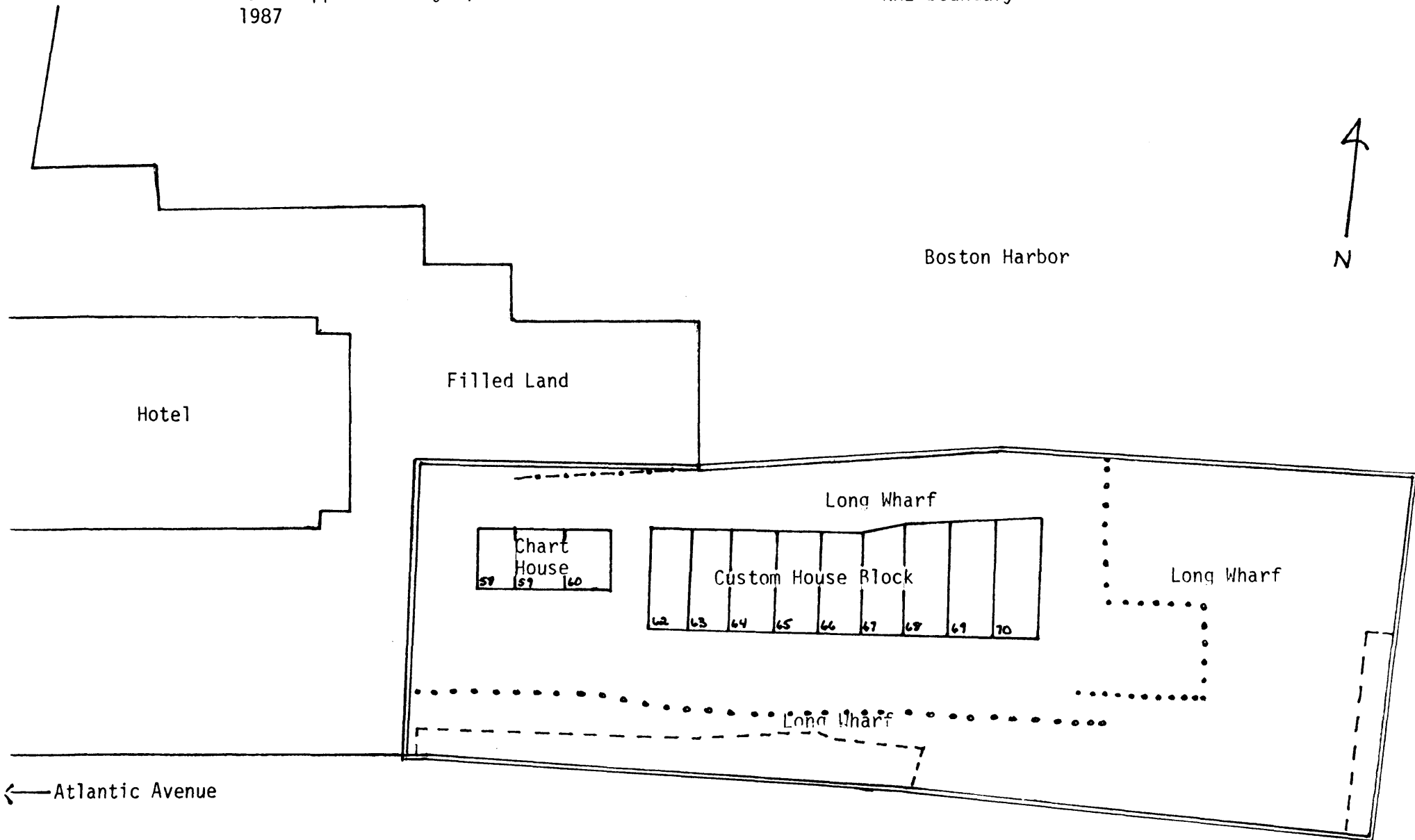


GROUND PLAN OF THE MARKET HOUSE, ERECTED IN 1826, AND OF THE SPACE INCLUDED IN THE IMPROVEMENT.

Map #4

LONG WHARF AND CUSTOM HOUSE BLOCK
Boston, Massachusetts
National Historic Landmark Boundaries
Scale approximately 1/4 inch to 20 feet
1987

Approx. line of bulkhead c. 1780
Approx. line of bulkhead c. 1820 -----
NHL boundary



Map #5