

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	AUG 22 1979
DATE ENTERED	OCT 30 1979

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

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC WENTWORTH-GARDNER AND TOBIAS LEAR HOUSES

AND/OR COMMON  
WENTWORTH-GARDNER AND TOBIAS LEAR HOUSES

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
~~Corner~~ Mechanic and Gardner Streets

CITY, TOWN Portsmouth VICINITY OF  
NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 1

STATE New Hampshire 03801 CODE 33 COUNTY Rockingham CODE 015

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input 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 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
	<input type="checkbox"/> 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  
The Wentworth-Gardner and Tobias Lear Houses Association

STREET & NUMBER  
PO Box 568, 177 Mechanic Street

CITY, TOWN Portsmouth VICINITY OF  
STATE New Hampshire 03801

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Rockingham County Registry of Deeds, Rockingham County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER  
Hampton Road

CITY, TOWN Exeter STATE New Hampshire 03853

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
Wentworth-Gardner House only:  
National Historic Landmark

DATE  
November 24, 1968  FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS  
National Park Service, US Department of the Interior

CITY, TOWN Washington, STATE District of Columbia

## 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

#### 1. The Wentworth-Gardner House, 177 Mechanic Street; 1760, Late Georgian Style

The Wentworth-Gardner House faces Portsmouth's waterfront. It was built in 1760 by Mark Hunking Wentworth, affluent and influential merchant, as a wedding present for his son Thomas. This two and a half story Late Georgian style residence is characteristic of an 18th century New England housetype which is extremely similar to Westover, in Virginia, and derives from English precedents. Although modelled after a masonry prototype, the Wentworth-Gardner House is frame with a front face of rusticated matched boards in imitation of masonry and its corners are embellished with wooden quoins. The remaining walls and rear ell are clapboarded.

Dominating the five-bay front (east) elevation is a reproduction frontispiece framing the fifteen-panel door and rectangular transom light. Fluted Corinthian pilasters on panelled pedestals support a broken swansneck pediment which is exquisitely molded and features modillions, dentils, and a gilded pineapple finial. This door treatment replaces one of late 19th century vintage removed during the 1916-1918 restoration undertaken by then-owner Wallace Nutting.

Windows are 9/9 sash. Those on the first story feature triangular pediments. Both first and second story window sills are molded.

A modillion cornice enhances the eaves of the hip roof whose surface is punctuated by two interior chimneys and a set of three pedimented dormers on front and rear slopes. In each case the central dormer is segmentally pedimented while those flanking it are triangular.

The interior is one of the most elaborate in 18th century New England architecture and is based on a formal Georgian floor plan of full center hall flanked by two rooms on each side. The richness and delicacy of the woodwork is extraordinary and is believed to have required eighteen months to execute.

The entry hall has panelled wainscoting and is enriched by a modillion cornice with leaf and tongue molding and denticulation. The door surrounds are richly molded and detailed with dentils and corner rosettes. The entry is separated from the stair hall by a graceful elliptical arch with decorative wooden block "keystone" and panelled soffit.

The open-string staircase is of exceptional beauty. Step ends are panelled and underscored with elaborate scroll brackets. Its elegant balustrade is comprised of alternating turned, twisted, and fluted spindles carrying a painted handrail and terminates at an exquisitely carved newel post. A round-headed window in the rear (west) wall lights the landing.

The upstairs hall is extraordinary for its complete academic Georgian treatment. It is detailed with fluted pilasters with Scamozzi capitals supporting an entablature featuring a molded architrave, pulvinated frieze, and modillion cornice.

See Continuation Sheet 1

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CONTINUATION SHEET 1

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DESCRIPTION (Continued)

Each room has a fireplace faced with tiles and flanked by fluted Corinthian pilasters. In the southeast parlor is the most elaborate; it has an elaborately festooned frieze and molded mantle shelf with denticular cornice. The walls where fireplaces are located are panelled. Other features include panelled folding window shutters and molded ceiling cornice.

The kitchen, in the northeast portion of the house, has a very wide fireplace which retains its trammel and lug-pole. There is a chimney-jack in the flue, windmill device intended to turn a roasting spit in the fireplace below.

Over the years the Wentworth-Gardner House has undergone a number of alterations. When Wallace Nutting purchased the structure in 1916, he began to restore it to its original condition. This involved the removal of a bay window in the kitchen, replacement of the frontispiece, and exposing the original boarding on the front face which had been obscured by a layer of clapboards. Mr. Nutting was able to locate, purchase, and replace the original balusters of the staircase which had been installed in another Portsmouth residence.

2. Tobias Lear House, Hunking Street; Circa 1750, Georgian Style.

The Lear House adjoins the Wentworth-Gardner Mansion and shares many of its most evident characteristics. Two-and-a-half-stories tall, it has clapboard siding, center hall plan, interior chimneys, and hip roof with similarly pedimented dormers. The Tobias Lear House, however, is much simpler in design. The three-bay front facade features a panelled door framed by pilasters carrying a triangular pediment. Nine over six double-hung sash windows have simply molded surrounds. This structure is characterized by its simple, straight-forward design.

This simplicity is also evident in the building's interior, which, unfortunately, has received little attention since its furnishings were removed during the Second World War. The front hall has painted wooden flooring and an unembellished molded ceiling cornice. The staircase features a fluted rectangular newel post and turned balusters.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input 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 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 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

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

1. The Wentworth-Gardner House not only exemplifies elaborate Georgian styling in New England, but plays an important role in American architectural history. It is a continuation of the British detached house-type which had emerged a half-century earlier and was successfully transplanted in the South and then New England. Southern examples, particularly Westover, demonstrate a heavy reliance on British-produced components and a much closer affiliation with the mother country.

In mid-18th century Portsmouth, however, there were no imports. No matter how British the structure's design, it was executed by native carvers whose skill and knowledge of their craft was extraordinary.

The structure's decidedly English precedents contrast sharply with the native woodworkers who produced it. In this way it symbolically reflects a paradox inherent in late-colonial New England society.

The Wentworth-Gardner House was sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1918. Their original intention had been to remove the structure to New York City for display there, but it was later decided to preserve the house on its original site. For a number of years it was administered by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. In 1940 the mansion was acquired by the Wentworth-Gardner & Tobias Lear Houses Association and is operated by them as a house museum. Although this organization has done much to procure appropriate furnishings for the house, it is not as finely appointed as it was during the years of the Metropolitan's proprietorship.

2. The Tobias Lear House demonstrates a much less academic interpretation of the Georgian idiom. It incorporates the massing, floor plan, and roof treatment representative of the style without any of the intricate details often associated with high-style examples.

The house was constructed around 1750 by Capt. Tobias Lear, a ship master and ship builder. His son, (Colonel) Tobias Lear, was born there in 1760 and later became private secretary to President Washington. Washington visited the house during his Eastern tour in 1789. Lear was very close to the President's family and had, for his second and third wives, nieces of Martha Washington.

After the house passed out of the Lear family in 1861, it was owned by Jeremiah Falvey and James D. Flynn. Falvey's daughter sold the structure to Wallace Nutting in 1917. After ownership by another private owner, it was acquired by the Society

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

"National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings Nomination"; Charles W. Snell, October 31, 1967.

Letter from Wallace Nutting to Joseph Downs dated October 27, 1932 (On file at the NH Historic Preservation Office).

William Pierson, American Buildings and Their Architects, Vol. 1.

Hugh Morrison, Early American Architecture (New York, 1952).

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY one

QUADRANGLE NAME Portsmouth, NH-Me. QUADRANGLE SCALE 7.5

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 9	3 5 7 4 8 10	4 7 7 0 3 4 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

An approximate half-block area, comprising the northeastern part of land extending along Mechanic Street between Hunking Street on the southeast and Gardner Street on the northwest. Wentworth-Gardner: Plot Map #7, Lot #62; Tobias-Lear: Plot Map #7 Lot #67

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Robert E. McLaughlin, President, and Dr. Dorothy M. Vaughan

ORGANIZATION

The Wentworth-Gardner, Tobias Lear Houses Association

DATE

September 16, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

Box 568

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Portsmouth

STATE

New Hampshire

**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

TITLE Commissioner, NH Dept. of Resources & Economic Development  
NH State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

12/16/77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

10-30-79

ATTEST:

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

10/30/79

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CONTINUATION SHEET

2

ITEM NUMBER

8

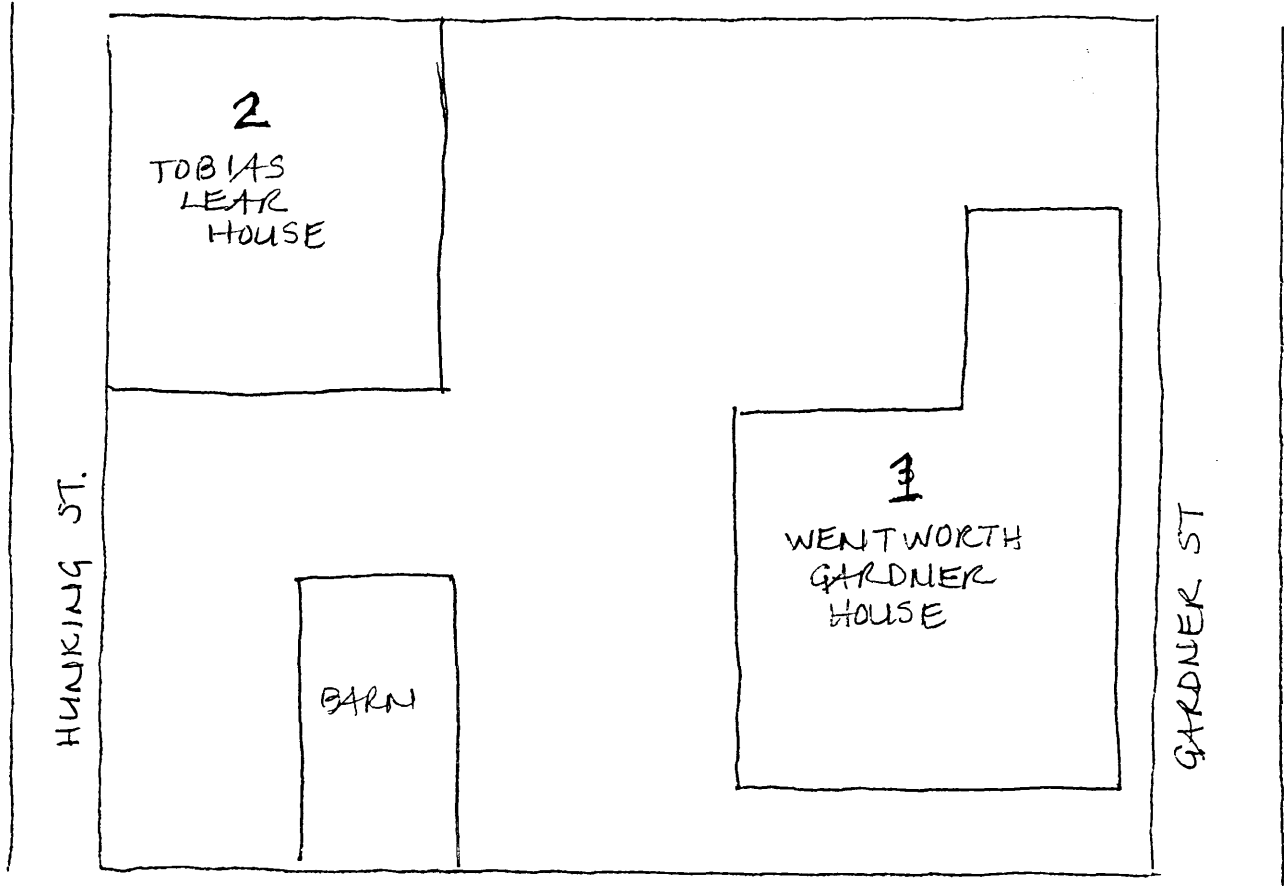
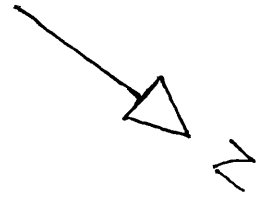
PAGE

2

SIGNIFICANCE (Continued)

for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, which turned it over to the Wentworth-Gardner & Tobias Lear Houses Association in 1940. The house was open to the public until the war, when it was closed to visitors. Since that time, it has not been refurnished and is shown by appointment only.

Together these structures represent two traditions of Georgian architecture in America; one a high-style aspiration after British precedents, and the other a more simple, vernacular rendering. Their close proximity to one another underscores this contrast and contributes to the spectrum of Portsmouth's built environment.



MECHANIC STREET

TIDAL HARBOR