Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Beacon Hill Historic District

AND/OR COMMON
Beacon Hill

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Boston
__ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
8th

STATE
Massachusetts

CODE
25

COUNTY
Suffolk

CODE
025

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
X DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
__BUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	XX COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	X BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	X PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	__YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	XX YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
multiple, adm. by Beacon Hill Architectural Commission

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Boston
__ VICINITY OF

STATE
Massachusetts

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

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

STREET & NUMBER
Somerset Street

CITY, TOWN
Boston

STATE
Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
check individual properties

DATE

__FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
X GOOD	__RUINS	X ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Despite the late 18th century flavor of Beacon Hill, with the exception of the State House, no building dates from that century. The first period of activity began with the election of Jefferson and ended with the War of 1812. Bulfinch is the central figure in this period.

Hale's Property Map of 1814 illustrates the situation. The original concept had been confused by the influx of row houses. Along with the freestanding buildings there are strips of row houses along Mount Vernon, Walnut, Chestnut, and Beacon Streets. The variety and types of houses are greater from this time than later periods.

The first and most obvious are the single mansion houses on Mt. Vernon, Chestnut and Beacon Streets. Only two of these, 85 Mt. Vernon and 45 Beacon Street, survive intact. They are both by Bulfinch and are superb examples of the kind of house the Proprietors originally envisaged for the whole district. While there is nothing "rural" about either one, they are conceived as free-standing entities and required open space on either side to achieve their full effect. They are of particular interest for our purposes, for they employ the bow front in what is essentially a row house, for the first time on the Hill. This form, which remains of minor importance during the 1820's, will emerge suddenly as an important motif in the early thirties.

Next there is the architect-designed town or row house and in this category Bulfinch once again established the model with two groups--the block on the north side of Mt. Vernon above Walnut and the three Swan houses, 13-17 Chestnut Street. Of the former group only 55 and parts of 57 and 53 remain. Number 55, the end of a block, was oriented toward a side yard as were 49 and 57. (This is a novel treatment also found in some single houses of the period--25 Joy Street, 29A Chestnut and several houses on upper Pinckney.) Both rows exhibit the familiar Bulfinch vocabulary here applied to a design which presumably could be repeated over and over, side by side. Though not as fine, they are close in style to his famed design for the long-destroyed I-4 Park Street. The Chestnut Street row suffers from an irregularity in the placement of the doors, unless a fourth house was projected to the east.

Upper Pinckney Street presents a case by itself. Its proximity to the even more rapidly developing community to the north really made it a part of that development, and with the exception of a pair of houses at 47 and 49, there was little here of any architectural pretention. Buildings hatched diagonally on Hale's Property Map are of wooden construction, and vestiges of several of these remain today. Since most of the North Slope was built over with tenements in the later 19th century, it is fortunate to have this one remnant still revealing the pleasantly haphazard character the whole district must have had.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
X 1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1795 BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Boston's Beacon Hill Historic District, laid out and developed in 1795-1808 with architectural standards established by the noted architect Charles Bulfinch, is one of the finest and least-altered examples of a large Early Republican or Federal Period urban area in the United States. Still nearly 90% residential in character, Beacon Hill's hundreds of Adamesque-Federal style three-and-four-story brick row houses are little-altered on the exterior and there are very few intrusions.

The famous people who lived on Beacon Hill are numerous. Among the more outstanding were William Dean Howell, Louisa May and her father Bronson Alcott, William Prescott, John S. Copley, Louise Imogen Guiney, Francis Parkman, Alice Brown, and Ellery Sedgivick. Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightengale, was married in this section and the weddings of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow were also performed in a home on Beacon Hill.

History

In 1790 Boston's Beacon Hill was a steep and rugged eminence about twice the present height and still a wilderness of rocks and brambles. In 1791 Dr. John Joy commissioned the Boston architect Charles Bulfinch to design a house in the pasture land, which turned out to be the first of a succession of celebrated Beacon Hill houses. In 1795 Boston purchased "Hancock's pastures" as the site of the projected new State capitol. Built in 1795-97, designed by Bulfinch, and located north of the Boston Common on the slope of Beacon Hill, the new Massachusetts State House led to the residential development of the Beacon Hill slopes west to the State capitol.

In 1795 the Mount Vernon Proprietors, a group of aristocratic Bostonian real-estate speculators, acquired this pasture land to the west of the State House and used a grid pattern to lay out a street system for their project. The two plans surviving from these years show that the Proprietors' original conception of the development was far different from the form it later took, for both propose relatively wide lots, obviously intended for freestanding houses with side yards. Charles Bulfinch's scheme provided for an extremely large open square, reflecting the kind of city-planning he had admired during his travels in England. It is interesting that the idea of the creation of Charles Street must have existed this early, for the seven lots in the lower portion of the plan are oriented in that direction.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown, The Architecture of American, A Social and Cultural History (Boston and Toronto, 1961).
Walter H. Kilham, Boston After Bulfinch, An Account of Its Architecture, 1800-1900 (Cambridge, 1948).
Harold Kirker, The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch (Cambridge, 1969).
Charles A. Place, Charles Bulfinch, Architect and Citizen (Boston and New York, 1925).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 105 acres

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	19	330 090	469 167 0
B	19	330 060	469 132 0
C	19	329 117 0	469 105 0
D	19	329 210	469 164 0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

E 19 329960 4691780

Beginning at the intersection of the easterly edge of Embankment Road and Beacon Street, the landmark boundary continues in a northeasterly direction along Embankment Road to Pickney Street, then east along the north curb of Pickney Street along a modern apartment house complex, then north along the east property line of this complex to Revere Street, then west along the south curb of Revere Street

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 Patricia Heintzelman, Architectural Historian, Landmark Review Project
original form prepared by Charles Snell, 1970

ORGANIZATION: Historic Sites Survey
DATE: 10/9/75
STREET & NUMBER: 1100 L Street NW.
TELEPHONE:
CITY OR TOWN: Washington
STATE: D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL ___

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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 DATE

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

GPO 892-453

Secondly, there is a group of pairs of houses which were treated as single compositions, thereby gaining symmetry and monumentality. This treatment (which remains current in the later periods), may be regarded in this case as a sort of compromise between the free single, and the row house types. Some had side yards, while others were joined to their immediate neighbors in a row. Of these several remain--6 and 8 Chestnut, 54 and 55 Beacon, 87 and 89 Mt. Vernon, and on a lesser scale, 47 and 49 Pinckney, 21 and 23 Joy Street and 8 and 10 Joy Street (the latter two pairs in a much altered condition). Eighty-seven Mt. Vernon and its now missing twin 89, again by Bulfinch, in their original form presented an imposing facade eight bays wide to the street. The recessed arches and the small windows of the ground floor, the very tall windows of the second floor, and their diminution in the upper floors, as well as the refined details are all highly typical of the ruling style he set for the period.

Fifty-four and 55 Beacon are perhaps the best-known examples of the double type. The attenuated Adamesque forms of the pair mark them as distinctively Late Colonial, but they have a personal flavor which is quite unique.

Some generalizations concerning the style can be formulated. The prevailing height with few exceptions is four stories, the top floor generally being quite low with "one over one" windows. In almost all of the larger houses the basement or ground floor is separated from the upper part of the building by a band of brick or stone, and frequently recessed arches frame the windows below the band. The Adamesque-Late Colonial decorative details--porticos, pilasters, cornices, and so forth are usually of wood, though a form of brownstone or granite is occasionally used for window lintels and brick cornices with a dentil motif are sometimes substituted for wooden ones. The front doorways, at least in the surviving examples, were predominately flat-headed rather than round, one notable exception being the fine pair of arched doorways at 54 and 55 Beacon. Lintels were in the form of a flat arch, often having a single or double keystone with voussoirs scored on the surface. The brickwork of the facades was almost universally of rough reddish-orange brick laid in a Flemish bond resulting in a pleasing textural quality notably lacking in later periods.

By 1819 the difficulties caused by the War of 1812 began to lessen and building again began. The main area of activity was now the southwestern portion, Lower Chestnut and Beacon Streets, the south end of West Cedar, and Acorn Streets. The style of ornamentation was an adaptation of late Colonial or Georgian as modified by the current classical or Greek Revival interest. The Flemish bond of the earlier period disappeared almost entirely in favor of a somewhat darker, though still slightly rough brick, laid in regular courses with narrower joints. Wooden external decorative details tend to disappear. The elaborately carved wooden cornice is almost universally replaced by a slightly projecting brick cornice with a dentil motif formed by alternately projecting "headers." The light projecting portico gives way most frequently to recessed entries framed with an arch. When columns are used at an entrance they are often of stone as at 33-34 Beacon--and usually of more classical proportions. On the whole, granite was used more than before or later, this tendency culminating in 1829 in the extremely handsome row at 70-76 Beacon. Though their all-granite facades are obviously exceptional, these relatively small houses, in their distinction, balance and restraint, serve as an epitome of the achievement of the 20's.

After the financial panic of 1829, building did not resume until the early 30's, and the style had changed in several important respects. First the bowed front facade, heretofore largely confined to Beacon Street, and there in symmetrical compositions with the doors placed together, was now widely adopted for row houses. Secondly, the decorative details turned rather abruptly from the modified Late Colonial to the new repertory of Greek-inspired motifs which Asher Benjamin presented in his books from the late 20's onward.

The center of activity moved to Louisburg Square and lower Pinckney Street which, though planned in the 20's did not begin to develop until 1834. There was also much building near the State House on the old Hancock and Joy property, just recently opened for development. And a last vestige of the Proprietors' original scheme, several large vacant mansion house lots on Mt. Vernon, was soon covered over.

The basic trends of the decade will have emerged from the above discussion--the new importance of the bowed front, the impact of the Greek Revival, and the trend toward larger houses. One significant innovation remains to be mentioned--the introduction during the decade, of deep-red, smooth-surface pressed brick for the facing of the facades. This was laid with very fine joints of dark mortar, the result being an extremely precise and almost textureless plane.

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During the decade of the 40's, the last remaining lots were developed. Many of the buildings from this period are indistinguishable from those of the preceding decade. A few minor distinctions emerge such as a continued emphasis on height. The increased value of land also caused the division of land into narrower lots.

The houses of the 40's are the final product of the continually developing style begun in 1800. At the end of the decade a gradual change appears, denying the traditions of the first half of the century based on the revival of styles and grouped together under the general term of Victorian. The large brownstone houses at 70 and 72 Mt. Vernon, designed by Richard Upjohn in 1847 are an example of the blending of revival styles.

Beacon Hill remains today a cohesive architectural unit, predominately residential and only slightly intruded upon by the commercial activity of Charles Street.

According to a private agreement, each of the proprietors was to build himself a mansion along the highest ridge (Mount Vernon Street) of Beacon Hill, thus setting a standard for the subsequent architectural development of the project, which was to consist of large detached houses set in spacious gardens. Bulfinch, one of the original proprietors, also served as architect for the project. As it turned out, of the proprietors, only Harrison Gray Otis, Jonathan Mason, and Bulfinch fulfilled their mansion obligation. In 1800-02 Bulfinch designed and built large houses for Mason (now demolished) and the house at 85 Mount Vernon Street for Otis. In 1804-06 he also erected a large double house at 87-89 Mount Vernon Street for himself as his part of the agreement. The original architectural standards, however, were broken in 1803-04 when two other owners built a total of nine row houses, also designed by Bulfinch, at 43-49 and 51-57 Mount Vernon Street. Set nearly flush with the sidewalk and erected for speculative purposes, these tall brick row houses served as the prototype of the type of structure that was actually to dominate the future development of Beacon Hill.

The next major piece of planning was an obvious one and came in 1809. George (West Cedar) Street, a part of the old North Slope village, was extended to Chestnut Street and the made land between it and the new Charles Street was subdivided. It is surprising to find the old concept of wide lots still applied at this date despite the actual building which had intervened.

The final phases of the development of the plan came in the 1820's, when the clearly urban character of the area had been established. The row or town house with no possible provision for adjoining stables was now accepted as the ruling form, and the most successful plans to date were evolved for the as yet undivided areas. In 1822 Spruce Street, which gives the middle of Chestnut Street access to the Common--and which had in fact existed for some time--was officially recognized. The next year, 1823, a particularly clever solution was devised for the hitherto empty western end of the block bounded by Chestnut, Mt. Vernon, Walnut and West Cedar Streets. Willow and Acorn Streets were created and the division of the lots on them provided for fairly large houses on Mt. Vernon Street, medium-sized ones on Chestnut and quite small ones on Acorn Street.

The next and final piece of planning completed the Hill as we know it, the creation of the Louisburg Square area. During the course of the years, Pinckney Street was automatically extended straight down to the river, and had been connected to the North Slope by two streets running north and south

between Anderson and West Cedar Streets. The western end of the block formed by Pinckney, Mt. Vernon, Joy and West Cedar Streets was also still vacant, and in 1826 the Proprietors decided to develop it. The plan was drawn by a surveyor, S. P. Fuller. It is unlikely that the conception was entirely his. He was no doubt working under the direction of the Proprietors, who may have solicited advice from one of the local architects. Bulfinch was in Washington at this point, and since he makes no reference to it in the testimony cited above, his name must be ruled out as a direct participant in the planning. Nonetheless, the original idea of an open square on the Hill was his, and his Franklin Place building provided a concrete example, so he is at least its indirect ancestor.

Though Louisburg Square was not yet built up, its plan may be considered the immediate parent of the now virtually destroyed and little mentioned, but extremely handsome Pemberton Square of 1835. And from this it is not far to the notably enlightened planning of the South End in 1850. Thus we have seen in 30 years a complete revolution in the concept of what the Hill was to be--from a spacious semisuburban affair to a completely urban district. The Louisburg Square project actually created more house lots than the entire Bulfinch plan would have provided.

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John W. Reps, The Making of Urban America, A History of City Planning in the United States (Princeton, 1965).
Christopher Tunnard and Henry H. Reed, American Skyline (Boston, 1955).
Weinhardt, Carl J. Jr., The Domestic Architecture of Beacon Hill, 1800-1850, Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Bostonian Society Annual Meeting, 1958, Boston 1973.

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to Embankment Road, continuing northeast along the east edge of Embankment Road, around the circle to the rear property lines of buildings on Cambridge Street, then east along this line to Bowdoin Street, then south along the west edge of Bowdoin Street to Derne Street, the west along the north curb of Derne Street to Hancock Street, then south along the west curb of Hancock Street to Mt. Vernon Street, then west along the north curb of Mt. Vernon Street, to the western boundary of the State House, then south along this boundary to Beacon Street, then west along the north curb of Beacon Street to the point of beginning.

A small separate adjacent parcel including two buildings is located on the north side of Cambridge Street between Joy and Hancock. The boundary consists of the city lots for the estates 131 and 141 Cambridge Street and 12-16 Lynde Street (Old West Church and Harrison Gray Otis House).

The Beacon Hill District of Boston

HISTORIC DISTRICT BOUNDARIES