

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Wadsworth-Longfellow House

AND/OR COMMON

Wadsworth-Longfellow House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

487 Congress Street

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Portland

— VICINITY OF

1st

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Maine

023

Cumberland

005

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

— DISTRICT

— PUBLIC

☒ OCCUPIED

— AGRICULTURE

☒ MUSEUM☒ BUILDING(S)☒ PRIVATE

— UNOCCUPIED

— COMMERCIAL

— PARK

— STRUCTURE

— BOTH

— WORK IN PROGRESS

— EDUCATIONAL

— PRIVATE RESIDENCE

— SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

— ENTERTAINMENT

— RELIGIOUS

— OBJECT

— IN PROCESS

☒ YES: RESTRICTED

— GOVERNMENT

— SCIENTIFIC

— BEING CONSIDERED

— YES: UNRESTRICTED

— INDUSTRIAL

— TRANSPORTATION

— NO

— MILITARY

— OTHER.

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Maine Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

485 Congress Street

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Portland

— VICINITY OF

Maine

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Cumberland County Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Portland

Maine

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey (ME-2)

DATE

1936

☒ FEDERAL — STATE — COUNTY — LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress, Division of Prints and Photographs

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Washington

D.C.

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

The Wadsworth-Longfellow House is located on a small, almost rectangular lot on the northern side of Congress Street (number 483-487) in Portland, Maine. When completed, the building offered a nearly unrestricted view of Portland Harbor to the southeast and Back Cove to the north. Since that time, however, the surrounding area has become the central business district of modern Portland, and the original view is now blocked by large-scale commercial buildings. The house stands near the southwest corner of the lot, separated from Congress Street by a cast-iron fence and a brick courtyard. A brick walkway to the east of the house leads to the library/headquarters of the Maine Historical Society, located on the northern (rear) portion of the same lot. The latter building--of brick, 2-stories high, with Colonial Revival detailing--was dedicated in 1907.

General Peleg Wadsworth acquired a 1-1/2-acre lot at Portland in 1784 and immediately constructed a barn at its northern (rear) edge and a 2-1/2-story, gable-roofed store at its southeastern corner. The following year Wadsworth began construction near the southwestern corner of the lot of what was to be the first brick building in town, with walls 16 inches thick. Construction was delayed when the first shipment of brick, sent to Portland from Philadelphia, was found to contain only enough material to complete the first story of the house. When finished in 1786 (following the arrival of a second shipment of brick), the house was a 2-story Flemish bond structure with a high gabled roof broken at either end by twin interior chimneys. Decorative details were limited to a belt course between the first and second floors on the front (south) elevation and brick segmental arches above the windows. The interior followed a center hall plan with four rooms on each floor. The parlor, located at the southwest corner of the building, was then the largest reception room in Portland.

Stephen Longfellow moved into the house with his family in 1807 and made several changes in it the following year. General Wadsworth's chamber, at the northwest corner of the first floor, became the dining room, and the original dining room, at the southeast corner, became Longfellow's law office. The adjacent store was demolished and a one-story brick addition, known to the family as the "Little Room," was constructed at the eastern side of the house to serve as an entrance and waiting area for the office. When Longfellow moved his practice to other quarters about 1828, the office was furnished as a living room and the "Little Room" was converted into a china closet.

Sometime in 1814, the kitchen chimney overheated, starting a fire which destroyed much of the attic and gabled roof. Since his family had nearly outgrown the house by that date, Longfellow removed the undamaged portions of the old roof and the next year added a third story in running bond under a hipped roof. The original chimneys were extended but no fireplaces were created for the five bedrooms in the new story. The one-story porch which covers the main entrance to the house--a triangular pediment supported by Doric columns--may also date from this period. A second porch on the rear of the house, also of uncertain date, has been bricked in and now serves as a gift shop.

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	☐ ARCHITECTURE	☐ EDUCATION	☐ MILITARY	☐ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
☐ 1700-1799	☐ ART	☐ ENGINEERING	☐ MUSIC	☐ THEATER
☒ 1800-1899	☐ COMMERCE	☐ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	☐ PHILOSOPHY	☐ TRANSPORTATION
☐ 1900-	☐ COMMUNICATIONS	☐ INDUSTRY	☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	☐ OTHER (SPECIFY)
		☐ INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1785, 1807-1843 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Peleg Wadsworth

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Wadsworth-Longfellow House, a 3-story, 17-room brick building located in Portland, Maine, was the family residence and boyhood home of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who was regarded in his day as the America's greatest poet and is still accounted a major figure in 19th century American literature. Longfellow was brought to the house in 1807, at the age of eight months, and lived there continuously until 1822 when he entered Bowdoin College. He continued to regard the Portland house as his home until the time of his second marriage in 1843--when he began his residence at the Craigie House (now the Longfellow National Historic Site) at Cambridge, Massachusetts--and regularly visited his family there until his death in 1882. Among the works the poet is known to have written at the Wadsworth-Longfellow House are "The Battle of Lovell's Pond" (1820, his first published work), "The Spirit of Poetry" (1825), portions of Hyperion (1839), "The Rainy Day" (1841), and "Changed" (1858).

When constructed by the poet's maternal grandfather, General Peleg Wadsworth, in 1785-86, the Wadsworth-Longfellow House was 2-stories high with a gabled roof. The poet's father, Stephen Longfellow, made minor changes in the house in 1808 and raised it one story and added the present hipped roof in 1815. A small Doric porch was added to the front elevation of the house at an unknown date. The last member of the family to live in the house was Anne Longfellow Pierce, the poet's younger sister; in 1901 she donated the building to the Maine Historical Society with the stipulations that it be maintained as a memorial to the Wadsworth and Longfellow families and that the Society construct a library-headquarters at the rear of the same lot. The house remains in excellent condition and retains its original furnishings and memorabilia of the two families. It is open to the public Monday through Friday (9:30 - 4:30) from June through September.

The Wadsworth-Longfellow House was constructed in 1785-86 by General Peleg Wadsworth, who had come to Portland, Maine, from Duxbury, Massachusetts, after the Revolutionary War. Graduated from Harvard in 1769, Wadsworth was active in the Massachusetts militia from the beginning of the war, rising to the rank of adjutant and then brigadier general. In 1775, as an engineer under the orders of Brigadier-General John Thomas, he laid out the American lines at Roxbury and Dorchester Heights. He was second in command of the ill-fated expedition sent to the Penobscot by Massachusetts in the summer of 1799, and was subsequently in command of the eastern department on the coast of Maine. Wadsworth was captured at his headquarters at Camden by a British raiding party in February, 1781, and imprisoned in Fort George at Castine, where he made an adventurous escape four months later.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dictionary of American Biography, volumes XI and XIX.

Longfellow, Samuel. Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (New York, 1886).

Maine Historical Society. The Wadsworth-Longfellow House: Its History and Its Occupants (Portland, 1969).

Works Progress Administration, American Guide Series. Maine: A Guide "Down East" (Boston, 1937).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A | 1 | 9 | 3 | 9 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 0 |
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
D | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the national historic landmark designation for the Wadsworth-Longfellow House are those of Lot 14, numbered 483-487 Congress Street, owned by the Maine Historical Society and occupied by the Wadsworth-Longfellow House and the Society's library/headquarters. Specific lines are defined as follows: beginning at the intersection of the western line of Lot 18, owned by the Portland Savings Bank (479-481 Congress Street), and the northern curbline of Congress Street; thence, westerly

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 Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by Charles W. Snell, Historian, 10/20/67

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

12/4/75

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1100 L Street NW.

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington

D.C.

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

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

3/4/77

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

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The Wadsworth-Longfellow House and its grounds are now in excellent condition. Repairs have been made as necessary and modern electrical and heating systems have been installed but full-scale restoration of the building has not been necessary. The furnishings are largely original and two of the third floor rooms contain exhibits of personal memorabilia of the Wadsworth and Longfellow families.

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Settling at Portland in 1784, Wadsworth served as selectman, represented his district in Congress for 14 years (1792-1806), and was chairman of a commission to consider the separation of the district of Maine from Massachusetts. Soon after retiring from Congress, Wadsworth moved to a 7,800-acre estate in Oxford County (granted him in 1790 as a result of his military service), where he devoted himself to farming, lumbering, and civic affairs. He played a major role in the incorporation of the town of Hiram and the spacious house he built there, known as "Wadsworth Hall", served as church, court, school, and muster place for the community. The general retained title to the Portland house until his death in 1829, when it was bequeathed to his daughters Zilpah and Lucia.

Stephen Longfellow married Zilpah Wadsworth at the Wadsworth-Longfellow House in 1804 and the couple returned there to live in 1807; their second child, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, was then eight months old. Stephen Longfellow had graduated from Harvard in 1798 and then studied law in Portland under Salmon Chase. He was admitted to the bar in 1801 and by 1807 had become one of the leading lawyers in the District of Maine. A Federalist in politics, he was a member of the Massachusetts legislature in 1814 and 1815, attended the Hartford Convention in 1814, and represented the new State of Maine in Congress for one term (1823-25). He was a founder (1822) and later president (1834) of the Maine Historical Society. Longfellow was also an overseer (1811-17) and trustee (1817-36) of Bowdoin College. He died at the Wadsworth-Longfellow House in 1849; his wife died there two years later. Lucia Wadsworth, who shared the house with the Longfellows, survived until 1864.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow lived at the Wadsworth-Longfellow House from 1807 until 1822, when he entered Bowdoin College as a sophomore. He graduated in 1825, spent the fall and winter at home studying law with his father, and in 1826 began a three-year period of study in Europe. On his return he became Professor of Modern Languages and Librarian at Bowdoin College. He resigned that position in 1835 and traveled to Germany for further study. Mary Potter Longfellow, whom he had married in 1831, died in Rotterdam that November. Longfellow returned to the United States in October, 1836, and became Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard. Despite his extended absences, he continued to regard the Portland house as his home until 1843, when he married Frances Appleton and moved into the Craigie House (now the Longfellow National Historic Site) at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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Longfellow left the Harvard faculty in 1854 to devote his full energies to poetry. The wide popularity of his works--Voices of the Night (1839), Ballads and Other Poems (1841), Evangeline (1847), Hiawatha (1855), The Courtship of Miles Standish (1857), Tales of a Wayside Inn (1863), and others--earned him a contemporary reputation as America's greatest poet. He received honorary degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge in 1868, and by 1900 his verses had been published in 12 languages. After his death at Craigie House on March 24, 1882, a memorial to him was erected in the Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey (he is the only American so honored). Though the reaction to Longfellow's work has been less favorable in the present century--critics frequently deplore his heavy-handed didacticism and describe him as a simple hearthside rhymers--he must still be accounted a major figure in 19th century American literature.

The last member of the family to occupy the Wadsworth-Longfellow House was Anne Longfellow Pierce, the poet's younger sister. Widowed in 1835, only three years after her marriage, she returned to her parents' home and lived there until her death in 1901. Under the terms of her will, the Wadsworth-Longfellow House and its contents were given to the Maine Historical Society on condition that the building be maintained as a memorial to the two families and that the Society locate its library/headquarters at the rear of it on the same lot. The latter structure was dedicated on the centennial of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's birthday, February 27, 1907. Thorough restoration of the Wadsworth-Longfellow House was not necessary, though some major repairs have been made in recent years. The building is now in excellent condition and is open to the public Monday through Friday (9:30 - 4:30) from June through September. An admission fee is charged.

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along said northern curbline, 65 feet more or less, to its intersection with the eastern line of Lot 17, occupied by a business block (487-1/2-497 Congress Street); thence, northerly by said eastern line and the lines of business blocks and a parking area on Lots 11, 12, and 13 on Brown Street, 237.5 feet more or less, to the southern line of Lot 21, occupied by a business block at the rear of 34-36 Preble Street; thence, easterly by said southern line, 67 feet more or less, to the western line of Lot 23; thence, southerly by the western line of lots 23 and 24, numbered at 10-18 and 20-22 Preble Street, and of Lot 18 at 470-481 Congress Street, 240 feet more or less, to the point of beginning.

Note: The Maine Historical Society's library/headquarters does not contribute to the national significance of the landmark house.