

THEME: Arts and Sciences  
 SUBTHEME: Painting and Sculpture

Form 10-300  
 (Rev. 6-72)

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS  
 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

STATE: Rhode Island
COUNTY: Washington
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
 (NATIONAL HISTORIC INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM  
 LANDMARKS)

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

1. NAME

COMMON: Gilbert Stuart Birthplace
AND/OR HISTORIC: Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 815 Gilbert Stuart Road			
CITY OR TOWN: Saunderstown		CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:	
STATE Rhode Island	CODE 02874	COUNTY: Washington	CODE 009

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure 	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress 	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No 
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment 	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum 	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific 	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ 

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Gilbert Stuart Memorial, Inc.		
STREET AND NUMBER: Gilbert Stuart Road		
CITY OR TOWN: Saunderstown	STATE: Rhode Island	CODE 44

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: North Kingstown Town Hall		
STREET AND NUMBER: Boston Neck Road		
CITY OR TOWN: North Kingstown	STATE: Rhode Island	CODE 44

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: None known			
DATE OF SURVEY: <input type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local			
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:			
STREET AND NUMBER:			
CITY OR TOWN:	STATE:	CODE	

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

The environment that young Gilbert Stuart knew as home two centuries ago, remains relatively unchanged and removed from modern intrusions. The woodland and river-fed streams surrounding the house are quite undisturbed by man-made development. The original Stuart house, with a working replica of its water wheel and millstone for grinding snuff have been carefully preserved by local efforts.

Only a few yards from the house, on the opposite side of the stream is a one room grist mill, built in 1757 while Gilbert Stuart was an infant. Its water wheel shared the waterfall's power with the snuff mill wheel and the grist mill is so close to the Stuart house that for a long time the two were connected by a wooden covered passageway which spanned the stream in between. The only major contemporary elements in the environment are the caretaker's cottage (a remodeled carriage house), and a small parking lot near the road. The house, grist mill and grounds are open to the public six days per week.

The gambrel roofed, clapboarded Stuart Birthplace, today painted dark red, was built sometime prior to 1751. It was built into a hill, on the fall line beside the waterfall which propels the mill's water wheel, and therefore, the land to the north of the house is higher, and the entrance to the north side of the house is on the second story.

The snuff mill, with its operating millstone, and a large kitchen occupy the first or ground floor, which has two entrances on the south side of the building. As you enter the house on the north, at the second floor level, the northeast bedroom, where Gilbert Stuart is believed to have been born, is immediately to the left, and beyond it on the east side is another bedroom. One large room occupies the entire west side of the second story.

The house was restored during the 1930's under the direction of Norman M. Isham, and since then the Gilbert Stuart Memorial, Inc. has maintained it as a simple mid-eighteenth century dwelling with wooden planked floors, simply paneled fireplaces and cupboards, exposed beams and members and white plaster walls throughout the interior. The rooms are filled with furnishings appropriate to the period and the Stuart family. Unfortunately all the items associated with Gilbert Stuart and the few pieces of his work that the association owned were stolen five years ago and have not been recovered.

The grist mill next door is a plain wooden, one room building, with a large stone chimney and a deep stone basement. The mill stone and water wheel are extant but presently do not function.

(continued)

**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century            |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1755-1761

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal     | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric    | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture    | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce       | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation   |   |  | _____                                    |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Gilbert Stuart, perhaps the most famous American portrait painter, was born and spent his early childhood in this tranquil spot at the junction of the Mattatoxet stream and the Pattaquamscott tidal river in southern Rhode Island. The gambrel roofed house was built between two streams, beside a waterfall which propelled the waterwheel on the east side of the house. On the ground floor of this building, in 1751, the artist's father began what was possibly the first snuff mill in America, while his family lived in the stories above. December 3, 1755 Gilbert Stuart was born in this house and he lived here until 1761, when his father sold his share of the unsuccessful snuff producing venture and moved his family to Newport.

BIOGRAPHY

Stuart, at an early age, showed his artistic talent. The young Stuart's ability in drawing induced a Scotch artist, Cosmo Alexander, to take on the youth as a protege, and the two subsequently travelled to South Carolina and then to Scotland. Alexander's death in Scotland stranded Stuart, who eventually managed to return to Rhode Island, wearing little more than rags. Nevertheless, Stuart immediately resumed painting, hiring a blacksmith to pose for him. In spite of some success in attracting commissions, the artist wanted to go to England to study and in the spring of 1775 he sailed from Boston.

Once in Great Britain, Stuart remained abroad for almost twenty years, where he achieved fame as a portrait painter. After arriving in England, Stuart was aided by an old Newport friend, but within about four years he had entered the studio of Benjamin West, the expatriate American painter and benefactor of young American artists who studied in London. Although Stuart lived with West for almost four years, the young artist apparently gained more from West's important social contacts than from any painting instruction by the older man. Whereas West delighted in mammoth historical subjects, which Stuart said West painted by the acre, Stuart concentrated on portraits. His portraits, moreover reflected his own inherent skill and keenness, Stuart evidently being as uninfluenced by other artists of current note as he was by West.

If Stuart developed his own style, there is little doubt that West's backing aided Stuart's rise to a position of prominence as a portraitist  
(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Gilbert Stuart, Portraitist of the Young Republic, 1755-1828. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1967.  
 Cahill, Holger, and Barr, Alfred H., Jr., Art in America.  
 Flexner, James Thomas, The Light of Distant Skies, 1760-1835. New York; 1954.  
Gilbert Stuart, A Great Life in Brief. New York, 1955.  
 Neuhaus, Eugen, The History and Ideas of American Art. Stanford, California, 1931.  
 Tuckerman, Henry T., Book of the Artists. New York, 1867.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		UTM <sup>0</sup> 19.295960.459917	° ' "	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **2.18 acres**

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: **Blanche Higgins Schroer, Historian, Landmark Review Project;**  
**No Original Report**

ORGANIZATION: **Historic Sites Survey** DATE: **Sept. 25, 1974**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**1100 L Street, NW.**

CITY OR TOWN: **Washington** STATE: **District of Columbia** CODE: **11**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)  
 Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) \_\_\_\_\_

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) Landmark Designated: **Dec. 21, 1965**  
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) Sundry Certified: **6-23-75**  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief, Hist. & Arch. Surveys  
 Keeper of The National Register  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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

(NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARKS)

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE Rhode Island	
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7. Description: (1)

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

BOUNDARIES

Local historians believe that the Stuarts originally owned approximately three acres of land around their house. Since there is no documentation to verify the exact limits of their property, I have used the dimensions of Lot #9 on the enclosed plat map #38 as the landmark boundaries. This 2.18 acre section includes the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace, the nearby grist mill, the caretaker's cottage (non-historic) and a small parking lot, as well as a visually protective portion of the streams, pond and woodland. The Gilbert Stuart Memorial, Inc. who own and maintain the property, have acquired twenty acres surrounding the landmark during the past forty years and they plan to keep and increase this area as a protective buffer zone around the Stuart Birthplace.

The boundary of the landmark is that of lot #9, plat 21 as shown in red on the accompanying map #38. Beginning at a point on the north side of Gilbert Stuart Road 510 feet west of where the road makes a right angle, 270.3 feet north, then west 132.44 feet and across the mill creek, thence continuing 48 feet, thence southwest 224.90 feet, thence south 265.83 feet to the north side of Gilbert Stuart Road, thence 310 feet along the north side of the road to the point of beginning.

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(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Statement of Significance: (1) Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

in Great Britain. As a result, by 1782 Stuart enjoyed such a handsome business, that he rented a luxurious home in London and lived in a lavish fashion. He painted very rapidly, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, John S. Copley, his old mentor West, and innumerable other prominent people sat for him. An even more exact indication of Stuart's success is that his price for a portrait quickly rose from five to thirty guineas.

Stuart's zest for living equalled his artistic talent. Because of his gay life in London, the painter by 1788 had acquired such debts that he had to move to Ireland in order to escape imprisonment. As before, he painted furiously, occasionally having six sitters on a single day, and lived as he had in London. Within five years debt again forced a move, this time to America.

Although Stuart's financial straits influenced his return to America in 1792, the painter's desire to paint George Washington also stimulated Stuart to leave Ireland. Stuart was to paint three life portraits of Washington, the first of which was done in 1794. Although Stuart had never been overawed by any previous famous sitter, he apparently was by Washington, and his first portrait of the general has a stiffness in it. A full-length portrait then followed, but it was only with the "Athenaeum Portrait" of the general that Stuart caught the inner spirit of Washington. Stuart never completed the painting, realizing that he could not improve on the spontaneity of the moment as Washington had sat before him, and this portrait has become the most famous of all of the paintings of Washington. Even in Stuart's day the excellence of the painting was appreciated, and Stuart, who always needed money, unabashedly made copy after copy of it, referring to the copies as his "hundred-dollar bills."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, he produced so many copies that they came to be little more than superficial renderings of the subject.

Stuart is just as interesting as a person as he is as an artist. He had a warm personality and a sharp mind. Proud and witty, he once retorted to Samuel Johnson's inquiry as to where he had learned to speak English so well by saying that it was not from Johnson's dictionary; and when an actor fell asleep as he sat for Stuart, the incensed painter gave the sitter ass's ears in the portrait. Primarily concerned with character in a sitter, Stuart once groaned about his art, "What a damned business is that of portrait painter. You bring him a potato and expect he will paint you a peach."<sup>2</sup> Stuart also hugely enjoyed talking, and following

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in James Thomas Flexner, Gilbert Stuart, A Great Life in Brief (New York, 1955), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Eugen Neuhaus, The History and Ideals of American Art (Stanford, California, 1931), pp. 37-38.

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8. Statement of Significance: (2)

Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

a rare visit to church after moving to Boston in 1805 the painter remarked:  
"I do not like the idea of a man getting up in a box and having all the  
conversation to himself. . . ." <sup>3</sup> After settling in Boston, Stuart continued  
to paint almost until the day he died, July 9, 1828.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Flexner, Stuart, p. 182.