

STATE:
Massachusetts

COUNTY:
Essex

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:
Nathaniel Bowditch House

AND/OR HISTORIC:
Nathaniel Bowditch House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
9 North Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Salem

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:
Sixth

STATE:
Massachusetts

CODE: 025

COUNTY:
Essex

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"/> Public <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious		
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
City of Salem, Office of the Mayor

STREET AND NUMBER:
City Hall, 93 Washington Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Salem

STATE:
Massachusetts

CODE:
025

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
Essex Registry of Deeds, Southern District

STREET AND NUMBER:
32 Federal Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Salem

STATE:
Massachusetts

CODE:
025

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
None

DATE OF SURVEY:
 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:
Salem

STATE:
Massachusetts

CODE:
025

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Nathaniel Bowditch House was constructed early in the 19th century on Essex Street in Salem, Massachusetts; it was moved to its present location at 9 North Street, Salem, c. 1945 to prevent its demolition in a street-widening project. A frame and clapboard structure in the Federal style, the house consists of a 3-story main block with a low hipped roof and a 2½-story rear ell with a half-gambrel roof, both on a low stone foundation.

The outstanding exterior feature of the Bowditch House is the "frontispiece" entrance in the center of its five-bay front (east) facade. This entrance is flanked by engaged Corinthian columns which support a full entablature. The doorway itself, reached by 3 risers and recessed behind paneled reveals, is flanked by vertical lights above paneled insets and topped by a four-light transom. Windows throughout the house are 6/6 sash with louvered blinds. Brackets set beneath the first-floor-front windows support flower boxes during the spring and summer months.

The interior of the Bowditch House follows a standard four-room, center hall plan. Original fabric includes simple moldings around windows and doors, cornice moldings, shutters in the parlor and dining room, and some fireplaces.

When moved, the Bowditch House was badly deteriorated and required major repair of walls and floors, removal of post-Bowditch partitions, and replacement of window lights, doors, and the roof. Despite the extensive work done, the exterior appearance of the house remains essentially as it was when constructed (with the exception of the original roof balustrade, removed at an unknown date and not replaced). The interior has been altered somewhat--primarily through the removal of some fireplaces and decorative detail--and its original character is further obscured by its office furnishings.

Just south of the Bowditch House across a narrow lawn is the "Witch House", a 17th century structure, also owned by the City of Salem and operated as a museum. Immediately north of the Bowditch House is a side-street, Eaton Place. That portion of the Bowditch property behind the main house between Eaton Place and the north side of the ell has been hard-topped to provide a parking area.

Boundary

The Landmark designation for the Bowditch House includes the building itself and approximately one-tenth acre of land; boundaries are outlined in red on the attached plat map, recorded in the Essex Registry of Deeds, Southern District (Book 3585, Page 340), describing property conveyed by Historic Salem, Inc. to the City of Salem on January 38, 1948.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1811-1823**

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Science	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	_____
<input 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

This 3-story frame house was, from 1811 until 1823, the home of Nathaniel Bowditch, one of the most interesting scientific figures in American history. The extraordinarily keen and analytical mind of this Salem man produced great advances in navigation and brought continental mathematics to America.

Bowditch probably set a record for discovering errors in a published work when he uncovered 8,000 in The Practical Navigator, a manual of navigation written by Englishman John Hamilton Moore. Among the most grievous errors Moore made in compiling his work was the citation of the year 1800 as a leap year--a mistake which resulted in several sea disasters. Thus, it is obvious why Bowditch's The New American Practical Navigator, which appeared in 1802, rapidly supplanted the earlier British work as the standard manual for seamen the world over.

This house, which Bowditch occupied longer than any other of his Salem residences, was constructed on Essex Street early in the 19th century and moved to its present location, 9 North Street, c. 1945. Now owned by the City of Salem and used as offices by the Park, Police, and Street Departments, the house is open to visitors by appointment. Except for the absence of the rooftop balustrade, the exterior of the house retains its original appearance.

Historical Background

Bowditch developed his inherently keen, analytical mind largely through his own efforts. Born on March 26, 1773, of a family who had followed the sea for generations, the young Bowditch received some schooling in Salem, Massachusetts, but when twelve he became an apprentice to a ship's chandler. Although he could study only after work, the youth did not forsake his interest in mathematics. Within a year, he had compiled a notebook on navigation. With borrowed books and amazing dedication, Bowditch continued to study as energetically as most boys of his age played. So impressed were two of his older friends with his zeal and ability, that in 1791 they secured permission for him to use the volumes in Salem's Philosophical Library Company. Bowditch devoured the treasures he found there. Indicative of his intellectual discipline is the fact that when only eighteen he copied all of the mathematical papers he found in the Transactions of the Royal Society of London. By the age of twenty-one, he had

(Continued)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bowditch, Nathaniel. The New American Practical Navigator (1802).
 Bowditch, Nathaniel Ingersoll. Memoir of Nathaniel Bowditch (2nd ed.,
 Boston, 1840).
 Berry, Robert E. Yankee Stargazer, The Life of Nathaniel Bowditch (New
 York, 1941).
 Struck, Dirk J. Yankee Science in the Making (New York, 1963).

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			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
NW	° ' "	° ' "	°	'	"
NE	° ' "	° ' "	°	'	"
SE	° ' "	° ' "	°	'	"
SW	° ' "	° ' "	°	'	"

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: .10+

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by S. Sydney Bradford, Historian, 12/18/63

ORGANIZATION: Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service DATE: 12/23/74

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L Street NW.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: D.C. 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

Name N/A

National Historic Landmark

Title _____

Date (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) mark: July 12, 1969 date

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) Registry Code: 7-2-75 date

ATTEST: Charles Lewis Chief, Hist. & Arch. Surveys

Boundary Map: 7/3/75 date

Keeper of the National Register: [Signature] date

Director, OAHPS

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

((NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS))

(Continuation Sheet)

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8. Statement of Significance: (1) Nathaniel Bowditch House

read, after teaching himself Latin, Sir Isaac Newton's Principia, even discovering an error in it. Moreover, with a French dictionary in one hand and a Bible in another, he had learned French.

In 1795, the youth, slight and already gray-haired, turned to the sea. For the next nine years, Bowditch sailed over the globe, first as ship's clerk, then as supercargo, and on his last voyage (November 1802-December 1803) as captain of the Putnam, which he and three others owned. On all of his voyages, Bowditch continued his studies, especially those concerned with navigation.

It was during the period from 1795 to 1802 that Bowditch produced one of the most remarkable scientific books ever published in America. By July 1799, he had already published two revisions of John Hamilton Moore's error-laden The Practical Navigator and then decided to prepare a new book. Three years later, in 1802, his New American Practical Navigator appeared. Some 274 pages in length, the manual contained navigational aids, tide tables, astronomical tables, the duties of officers and a textbook on navigation. The material for teaching navigation constituted a remarkable innovation, and it probably stemmed from Bowditch's attempts to teach geometry to sailors while on his various voyages. In a short time, the book achieved outstanding popularity. And as a sea captain later wrote, one after 1802 went to sea with a "Testament, a Bowditch, a quadrant, a chest of sea clothes, and a mother's blessing." Bowditch prepared revisions for subsequent editions of the Navigator during his life and, although somewhat altered, the book remains in general use today.

Although the Practical Navigator was Bowditch's great work, he accomplished additional noteworthy achievements in science. His study of the Weston, Connecticut, meteor of 1867 received applause here and in Europe. Aside from that investigation and numerous other scientific papers, Bowditch's translation of LaPlace's Mecanique Celeste is of especial interest. From at least the time of his last voyage in 1802-1803 until his death, the scientist labored over translating the Frenchman's great work on mathematics and theoretical astronomy. The job was a stupendous one, and when the first four volumes of the translation appeared, each contained over a thousand pages. Death cut short Bowditch's work on LaPlace's last volume, which remains untranslated.

Bowditch enjoyed more than just success in science. Although his first wife, Elizabeth Boardman, died in the same year they were married, 1798, he and his second wife, Mary Ingersoll, whom he married in October, 1800, had a happy marriage. Bowditch was the first insurance actuary in this country. He was appointed president of the Essex Fire and Marine Insurance Company in 1804 and remained in that position until 1823, when he moved to Boston to become president and actuary for another firm. Bowditch died on the afternoon of March 16, 1838.

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