

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS) (Type all entries complete applicable sections)

STATE: Massachusetts
COUNTY: Middlesex
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

1. NAME

COMMON: "Elmwood"

AND/OR HISTORIC: "Elmwood," James Russell Lowell Home, Oliver-Gerry-Lowell House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 33 Elmwood Avenue

CITY OR TOWN: Cambridge CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Eighth

STATE: Massachusetts CODE: 025 COUNTY: Middlesex CODE: 017

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
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 type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: (See Continuation Sheet)  
President and Fellows of Harvard College

STREET AND NUMBER: Office of Government and Community Affairs  
Massachusetts Hall, Harvard College

CITY OR TOWN: Cambridge 02138 STATE: Massachusetts CODE: 025

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

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

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Cambridge 02141 STATE: Massachusetts CODE: 025

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge:  
Report Four - Old Cambridge

DATE OF SURVEY: published 1973     Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Cambridge Historical Commission

STREET AND NUMBER: City Hall Annex, 57 Inman Street

CITY OR TOWN: Cambridge 02139 STATE: Massachusetts CODE: 025

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

"Elmwood" was built by Thomas Oliver c. 1767. The house and its farm-estate, covering some 100 acres, then lay distinctly apart from the village of Cambridge and, until 1754, had been considered part of neighboring Watertown. Oliver's house was idyllically situated with wide fields and pastures around it and a commanding view of the Charles River and the extensive salt marshes along its winding course. Today, some 2.6 acres of the original "Elmwood" grounds remain intact, bordered on the north and east by residential property and on the southwest by a major traffic artery, Fresh Pond Parkway. Another portion of the original estate, located immediately northwest of "Elmwood," is now maintained as Lowell Park, a public open space.

Mid-Georgian in style, "Elmwood" is a large, 3-story, frame and clapboard structure with brick-lined walls. Its low-pitched hipped roof, broken by two interior chimneys, is surrounded by a balustrade set above a heavy modillioned cornice. Windows on the first and second floor were all originally 6/6 double-hung sash topped by molded cornices; during the 19th century, the first floor windows in the forward bays of the side elevations (front parlor and dining room) were replaced by french doors. Third story windows are foreshortened to 9 lights, a typical feature in houses of the period. The main entrance, set in the center of the 5-bay southeast facade, is flanked by Tuscan pilasters carrying a classic entablature with a boldly projecting cornice. The second floor window above the entrance is set in a wide surround indented in 3 stages and flanked by Ionic pilasters. Both surround and pilasters are set on a socle and surmounted by a full entablature and a dentilled, triangular cornice.

Several additions have been made to the main block of the house. At the rear of the northwest corner is a frame and clapboard service ell, consisting of a small, 1-story unit with a low-pitched gable roof and a larger 1½-story, gambrel roofed unit. A 1-story porch now runs along the northeast side of the house; its flat roof, supported by Doric columns on high panelled plinths, is surrounded by a balustrade set above a modillioned cornice. A 1-story frame and clapboard library wing was added at the southwest corner of the house late in the 19th century; its flat roof, broken by a single chimney, is again surrounded by a balustrade above a modillioned cornice. In the angle formed by the wing and the southwest side of the house is an L-shaped terrace bordered by a balustrade with pineapple finials.

The interior of "Elmwood," which follows a 4-room, center hall plan, was heavily Victorianized during the 19th century, but was returned to its 18th century character after it was acquired by Harvard in 1962. The center hall, divided into front and rear portions connected by a round-headed arch with a panelled door, has a panelled dado and a heavy cornice. The main staircase, a quarter-turn with landing, has a carved newel and hand-turned balusters in 3 alternating patterns. The dining room, to the right (north-east) of the hall, retains its original interior shutters and panelled fireplace wall. Doors on either side of the fireplace originally led to the kitchen behind; that on the right remains in use but that on the left was

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

(Continued)

**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1767; 1819-1891

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 type="checkbox"/> Art            | <input checked="" 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

Erected on its present site in Cambridge, Massachusetts, c. 1767, "Elmwood" is a good though altered example of the Mid-Georgian, 3-story frame house as constructed in New England. More significantly, the building was the birthplace (1819) and life-long home of scholar, linguist, editor and poet James Russell Lowell. Its value is enhanced by its association with two other historic figures. "Elmwood" was built by Lieutenant Governor Thomas Oliver, last of the royal appointees in Massachusetts, and was his home until 1774. From 1787 until 1813, the property was the home of Elbridge Gerry, merchant, diplomat, signer of the Declaration of Independence, Governor of Massachusetts, and Vice-President of the United States.

"Elmwood" remained a private home until 1962, when it was given to Harvard College. It is now the residence of the College's president and is not open to visitors.

Historical Background

"Elmwood" was built c. 1767 by Thomas Oliver, scion of a family which owned large estates in the West Indies. Oliver's personal fortune, inherited from his grandfather and great uncle, freed him from the cares of business and he did not accept a public office until 1774, when Thomas Hutchinson, Royal Governor of Massachusetts, recommended him to the Crown for appointment as Lieutenant Governor.

The time was one of crisis in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, for George III had decided that the Governor's Council, previously named by the colonial legislature with the approval of the Governor, would henceforth be appointed by the Crown upon recommendation of the Governor. The political body thus created was called the "Mandamus Council" and Oliver as Lieutenant Governor was its presiding officer. Already aroused by this abridgement of rights enjoyed under Massachusetts' royal charter of 1691, the colonists were further angered by the dismissal of the legislature on June 17, 1774, and the removal of provincial stores of gunpowder from Charlestown and two field-pieces from Cambridge by order of General Thomas Gage, the military governor, on September 1, 1774.

On the morning of September 2, Oliver received word that a large body of people from several towns in Middlesex County were on their way to Cambridge. He went out to meet the throng on the Cambridge common and

(Continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Final Report of the Boston National Historic Sites Commission (transmitted to Congress March 14, 1962).  
 Hale, E. E. James Russell Lowell and His Friends (1899).  
 Malone, Dumas, Ed. Dictionary of American Biography (volumes VII, XI).  
 Reed, Christopher. "The March Up Tory Row," Harvard Magazine, September, 1974.  
 Scudder, H. E. James Russell Lowell (1901).

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	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
SE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
SW	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	

UTM 19.323910.4693440

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 44

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: Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by Charles W. Snell, Historian, 12/1/67

ORGANIZATION: Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service DATE: 1/8/75

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L Street NW.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: D.C. CODE: 011

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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 \_\_\_\_\_

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation Dec 24, 1968 date

(NATIONAL HISTORIC BOUNDARY MONUMENTS)

Date 7-2-75

ATTEST:

Chief, Int. & Arch. Surveys

Boundary 7/3/75  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Director, OAHPS date

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4. Owner of Property: (1)

"Elmwood"

Lowell Park - Metropolitan District Commission  
20 Somerset Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

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7. Description: (1)

"Elmwood"

blocked off when the kitchen was modernized in the early 1960's. On the left side of the hall are double parlors separated by a central chimney and flanking panelled double doors. During the 19th century, these doors were altered from square to round-arched shape; they have now been restored to their original shape but enlarged to allow easier circulation between the two parlors. A doorway at the southwest corner of the rear parlor gives access to the library wing.

Immediately to the north of the house are two frame and clapboard, gable roofed outbuildings. Both consist of 2-story central units with smaller 1 or 1½-story units at either side. The house and outbuildings are painted in their traditional colors; yellow with white trim, and are well maintained.

Boundary

The Landmark designation for "Elmwood" includes the house, outbuildings, and land owned by Harvard College and the adjacent Lowell Park, owned by the Metropolitan District Commission; the latter property is included in the designation because of both its value to the setting of the Landmark and its historical association with the house as part of the original "Elmwood" estate; specific boundaries, shown in red on the attached copy from the Sanborn Atlas of Cambridge (1972), are described as follows: beginning at the intersection of the western curblineline of Elmwood Avenue and the northern curblineline of Fresh Pond Parkway; thence, northwesterly along said northern curblineline to its intersection with the southern curblineline of Brattle Street; thence, easterly along said southern curblineline to the western line of residential property at 202 Brattle Street; thence, southerly along said western line and the western line of property with frontage numbered at 200 Brattle Street, in sections of 211.25 feet and 38.17 feet; thence, northeasterly and southeasterly along the southern lines of property at 200 Brattle Street, 192 Brattle Street, and 15 Elmwood Avenue, in sections of 247.20 feet and 223.50 feet, to the western curblineline of Elmwood Avenue; thence, along said western curblineline to the point of beginning.

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8. Statement of Significance: (1)

"Elmwood"

learned that a report had spread to the effect that British regulars were on the march from Boston. In his capacity as Lieutenant Governor, Oliver rushed into Boston to confer with General Gage and on his return was able to report that no troops had been ordered out and that none would be.

Oliver's trip into Boston and his conversation with Gage possibly prevented the beginning of war; otherwise, bloodshed might have occurred at Cambridge more than 7 months before Lexington and Concord. As it was, the infuriated crowd was bent on getting some immediate action and followed Oliver to his home, where they demanded that he resign from the Council. He later reported that the house "was surrounded by three or four thousand people, and one-quarter part in arms." Under such compulsion, the Lieutenant Governor had no choice but to renounce his "seat at the Council Board...in conformity to the commands of the body of the County now convened.

A few days after his resignation, Oliver left "Elmwood" with his family and household goods. During the siege of Boston, he became civil governor of the town. [With the British evacuation of March, 1776, Oliver went to Halifax and then to England, where he lived comfortably off the income of his holdings in the West Indies until his death in 1815.] By order of the Committee of Safety on July 20, 1775, Oliver's Cambridge property was made ready for use as a hospital by the Continental Army. After Washington's forces left Cambridge, "Elmwood" was confiscated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and sold in 1779 to Andrew Cabot, a member of a Salem family that was active and successful in privateering.

The second significant resident of the house was Elbridge Gerry. Born at Marblehead, Massachusetts, in 1744 and graduated from Harvard College in 1762, Gerry was an early advocate of American independence, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and a delegate to the Continental Congress (1776-81, 1782-85). In January, 1786, Gerry married Ann Thompson, the daughter of a New York merchant; at the same time he retired from business with a comfortable fortune invested in government securities and real estate and, in May, 1787, purchased "Elmwood".

Gerry was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787; however, he refused to sign the finished document, charging that it was "full of vices" and would not guarantee the people's liberty, and unsuccessfully opposed its ratification by Massachusetts. Nevertheless, he was elected to the House of Representatives in 1789, where he became a supporter of the Constitution and strongly backed the financial measures of Hamilton. In 1793, he retired from Congress to cultivate his farm, some 100 acres associated with "Elmwood", and to educate his young family of 7 children. In 1797, President John Adams appointed Gerry to the ill-fated diplomatic mission to France that ended in the "X-Y-Z Affair".

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*Form is in error there were two Andrew Oliver's (father & son). Father of whom the nomination speaks died in 1774 while still Lt. Gov. of Mass. It was the son who fled to England*

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8. Statement of Significance: (2)

"Elmwood"

Gerry returned to Massachusetts in 1798, where he was criticized by the Federalists for his role in the French mission but endorsed by the Republicans. He was nominated for governor in 1800 and, after a succession of defeats, was elected in 1810 and again in 1811. It was during his second term that Gerry's name became a part of the American political vocabulary. The Governor's plan for redistricting Massachusetts, intended to allow Republicans to retain control of the state, was signed on February 11, 1812. It produced one electoral district so oddly shaped that a Federalist caricatured it as a salamander. By combining Gerry and salamander, he coined the term "gerrymander".

Gerry failed of re-election in 1812, but was nominated for the Vice-Presidency of the United States on the ticket with James Madison and elected to that office. Vice-President Gerry took his oath of office at "Elmwood" on March 4, 1813. He died in Washington, D.C. on November 23, 1814.

Gerry's family remained at "Elmwood" until 1818, when the house and approximately 10 acres of land were sold to the Rev. Charles Lowell, pastor of the West Congregational Church in Boston (the remainder of the property was withheld or disposed of separately). Rev. Lowell's son, James Russell Lowell, was born at "Elmwood" on February 22, 1819, and, except for the years he spent abroad in travel and in diplomatic posts, resided there until his death on August 12, 1891.

James Russell Lowell was a New England Brahmin of distinguished lineage, a scholar, linguist, poet, and professor at Harvard, but he was also a reformer and a practical editor. As first editor of the Atlantic Monthly (1857-61), while still Smith Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard (1856-72), he exerted a great influence on American literature during the "flowering of New England" when Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Holmes, and others were at their height. His influence continued during his co-editorship of the North American Review (1864-72).

Lowell's verse polemic, The Biglow Papers, directed against the Mexican War, was followed by prose protests in other causes that he espoused. His "Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration, July 21, 1865" is perhaps his best poetry, although his "Fable for Critics" is widely read and appreciated. He spared not one, including himself: "Here's Lowell who's striving Parnassus to climb with a whole bale of isms tied together with rhyme."

Lowell's literary achievement was matched by his personal success as a diplomat. In gratitude for his support at the Republican convention of 1876, President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed Lowell Minister to Spain (1877-80) and the Ambassador to the Court of St. James (1880-85). In England, where he had already received honorary degrees from Oxford (1873) and Cambridge (1874), Lowell was a popular speaker on notable cultural occasions. He also served as president of the Wordsworth Society, succeeding Matthew Arnold, with whom he is often compared in his idealism and social criticism.

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8. Statement of Significance: (3)

"Elmwood"

Lowell's attachment for the place of his birth was strong and never ended. It shows up repeatedly in his prolific writings, which provide a wealth of material relating to the house itself during his lifetime. Writing in 1873 from Paris to Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who was then staying at "Elmwood" in his absence, Lowell reflected upon his partiality toward the place:

"It is a pleasant old house, isn't it? Doesn't elbow one, as it were. It will made a frightful conservative of you before you know it. I was born a Tory and will die so. Don't get too used to it. I often wish I had not grown into it so. I am not happy anywhere else."

In 1962, Harvard College acquired "Elmwood" by bequest from A. Kingsley Porter, who purchased the house from Lowell's heirs. Used for several years as the home of Harvard's Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, "Elmwood" is now the residence of the College's president.