

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Captain R. B. Forbes House

AND/OR COMMON

Captain R. B. Forbes House, American China Trade Museum

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

215 Adams Street

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Milton

___ VICINITY OF

11th

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE

25

COUNTY

Norfolk

CODE

021

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Museum of the American China Trade

STREET & NUMBER

215 Adams Street

CITY, TOWN

Milton

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Norfolk Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Dedham

STATE

Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

none

DATE

___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

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

Built in the Greek Revival style, the house was constructed according to plans provided by the Boston architect, Isaiah Rogers (1800-1865). A document recently discovered in the house indicates that Forbes paid Rogers \$52.50 for the plans. Captain Forbes took a personal hand in its design and construction, and the house, therefore, shows many traces of the nautical interest of its builder. Situated on a turf terrace at the summit of Milton Hill, it was built four-square with solid brick walls 18" thick, sheathed by ship's lap lathing. Its timbers were pre-cut in Maine, brought by coastal schooner to the Milton River and hauled up Milton Hill by ox team to be erected on the site. Originally, light was admitted to a half upper story through port holes surrounded with Ionic wreathes. A circular staircase similar to that in a lighthouse leads to the top floor which is surmounted by a large octagonal cupola enabling the captain's mother and sister to watch for ships entering and leaving Boston Harbor.

Changes to the house were made by the architectural firm of Peabody and Stearns in 1882-3 under the direction of the Captain's son, James Murray Forbes. At this time the roof was raised four feet, and the port holes were replaced by regular sash windows. The addition of a rear ell provided pantry and service quarters on the main floor and a large dressing room on the second floor. Several of the original "dove-gray" marble fire places on the main floor were replaced by the present mid-Victorian wooden mantels. A large screened-in porch was added off the library.

The interior of the house had been little altered except for modern additions of heating and plumbing. The original billiard room is now an exhibition area for papers of the Forbes and related families and for paintings of the China coast. Opposite this room is the Chinese Room, a parlor furnished with Chinese export pieces. The upstairs rooms retain furnishings original to the family but plans are underway to remove this and use the additional area for exhibition of the increasing collections of objects of the American China trade.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1833

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Isaiah Rogers

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

A thriving trade with China formed one of the mainstays of the American shipping industry in the 19th century. Robert Bennet Forbes established himself as one of Boston's leading China merchants and his house, now a museum of the American China trade, vividly recalls Forbes' career.

History

Forbes was born into a mercantile family and became a merchant-sailor early in life. He joined his uncle's trading firm when he was 13 years old and was captain of a vessel by age 21. Late in the 1820's, young Forbes assumed responsibilities for his uncles' firm in China. He quickly succeeded, both to their and his benefit. Upon his return to Boston he married Rose Green Smith on January 20, 1834. The Panic of 1837 seriously hurt his business, which caused him to return to China to regain his financial position. In 1839 he became head of the great China firm of Russell and Company, his uncles' concern having merged with it, in China. During the Opium War his business boomed because the Chinese refused to allow British merchants to continue their trading operations. Forbes in 1849 became the head of Russell and Company and led the concern in subsequent years.

The China trade did not keep Forbes from engaging in many other activities. He owned or had interests in numerous merchant ships; and was an early advocate of steam-driven and iron-hulled vessels. Moreover, he sailed as a sport. A very humane person, he promoted aid to Ireland during the great famine, urged the development of coastal life saving facilities, and supported homes for sailors. During the Civil War, he constructed some ships for the Union at his own expense. Forbes also wrote a great deal, authoring several interesting volumes.

The house was built in 1833 on land purchased in 1816 by John M. Forbes (1771-1831). Forbes was a friend and classmate of John Quincy Adams, and after serving as Consul in northern Europe, became Charge d'Affaires in Buenos Aires when Adams was Secretary of State. The present house, which replaced an earlier building, was built by Captain Forbes, his younger brother, John M., and sisters, for their mother, Margaret Perkins Forbes, whose brothers, James and Thomas Perkins had founded the Boston-China Trade. This was the first of many China Trade associations with the house.

9 MAJOR BIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Notes and personal interview with Crosby Forbes, Chairman of Board of Trustees, American China Trade Museum

Talbot Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture In America (New York, 1944).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A 19 329790 4680830
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

D
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Robert Bennet Forbes house is bounded on the north by Adams Street, on the east by Churchill's Lane, on the south by the residential property at 77 Churchill's Lane and the estate at 144 Randolph Avenue, and on the west by the eastern edge of the estate at 144 Randolph Avenue and the adjacent property on Adams Street (now also owned by the American China Trade Museum). Included in this boundary are the stable and other outbuildings that belong with the historic house. A replica of a log cabin does not contribute to the national

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

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

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.

Landmark
 Designated: 11/24/78
 date

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)
 Boundary Certified: 11/24/78
 date

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Patricia Heintzelman

DATE 11/24/78

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

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It was intended to be a memorial to Captain Forbes' elder brother, who while managing Perkins' interests, was drowned in a typhoon off Macao in 1829. Mrs. Forbes lived here until her death in 1854 after which her two unmarried daughters continued to live in it until 1865. In that year it was sold to John M. Forbes, who rented it to another China Trade merchant, Edward Cunningham, who had just returned from China. In 1871 the Captain's son, James Murray Forbes, having served his time with Russell and Company in China, returned to marry the granddaughter of Nathaniel Bowditch. Mrs. Bowditch bought the house and presented it to them as a wedding present. From 1871 until his death in 1937, James Murray Forbes continued to use the house as a country residence. The house then passed to his daughter, Mary Bowditch Forbes, who lived here until her death in 1961, after which it passed to the present Board of Trustees, who operate it as a museum of American trade with China.

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significance of the landmark.