**NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK.theme:** Science and Invention

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

**(Type all entries complete applicable sections)**

1. **NAME**
   - **COMMON:** Asa Gray House
   - **AND/OR HISTORIC:** Asa Gray House

2. **LOCATION**
   - **STREET AND NUMBER:** 88 Garden Street (corner of Madison Street)
   - **CITY OR TOWN:** Cambridge
   - **CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:** Eighth
   - **STATE:** Massachusetts
   - **CODE:** 025
   - **COUNTY:** Middlesex
     - **CODE:** 017

3. **CLASSIFICATION**

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<th>OWNERSHIP</th>
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<table>
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4. **OWNER OF PROPERTY**
   - **OWNER'S NAME:** Mr. and Mrs. Gardner Cox
   - **STREET AND NUMBER:** 88 Garden Street
   - **CITY OR TOWN:** Cambridge
     - **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:** East Cambridge
     - **STATE:** Massachusetts
       - **CODE:** 025

6. **REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**
   - **TITLE OF SURVEY:** Historic American Buildings Survey
   - **DATE OF SURVEY:** 1969
     - ☒ Federal
     - ☐ State
     - ☐ County
     - ☐ Local
   - **DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:** Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress
     - **STREET AND NUMBER:** 10 First Street SE.
     - **CITY OR TOWN:** Washington
       - **STATE:** D.C.
         - **CODE:** 011

**SEE INSTRUCTIONS**
The Asa Gray House, designed by Ithiel Town, was erected in 1810 at the corner of Garden and Lincoln Streets, Cambridge, on the grounds of Harvard College's Botanic Gardens. The house, then consisting of a rectangular main block approximately 40 by 36 feet and a side wing approximately 24 feet square, was attached to a conservatory, also designed by Town. Though additions and minor alterations have been made to the house, the exteriors of the main block and the wing remain essentially as they were when constructed. Moved in 1910, the Asa Gray House now stands facing northeast at 88 Garden Street, corner of Madison Street, Cambridge.

Two stories in height, the house is set on a foundation consisting of squared granite blocks in the front and rubble masonry in the rear. The front elevation of the main block is covered with flush siding and carries fluted Ionic pilasters at each corner; the remainder of the building is covered with 4" clapboards. A dentiled cornice surrounds the main block; above this is a balustrade in which solid panels alternate with turned balusters. The hipped roof, covered with asbestos shingles, is broken by two interior chimneys. Windows in the main block are 6/6 sash; those in the wing are 6/9 on the first floor, 3/3 on the second.

Small porches cover center entrances on the front facades of both the main block and the wing. That on the main block replaces the original porch in this location but was built before the house was moved. Rectangular in shape, it is reached by five risers; square corner posts with beveled edges support a dentiled cornice and the porch roof. The wing entrance was originally reached by a single stone step but was glassed-in with a small porch about 1920.

At the rear of the wing (southwest) are two small additions of uncertain date. A covered walkway, erected in 1928, connects these additions with a larger and once separate structure further to the rear. Originally a wooden shed with gabled roof, this structure was brought to its present location when the house was moved. In 1924, it was enlarged, raised in height, and converted to a detached living room; a garage and furnace room were added to its southwestern end at the same time.

The interior of the Asa Gray House follows a standard four-room, center hall plan. The hall, containing both front and back stairs, is divided into two sections by a single door surmounted by a fanlight. The interior of the wing contains one large room on the first floor and four smaller rooms on the second. A significant feature of the former, which served as Gray's study, is the vertical museum cabinets, 17" deep and 12" or 24" wide, which line the southeastern wall. Interior decoration in the house consists primarily of simple cornice moldings, flared moldings around windows and doors, and paneled 2-wing shutters in the window reveals; fireplaces have simple wooden mantels with reeded surrounds or flanking Tuscan half-columns.
This commodious two-story frame house, the earliest known work of the noted architect Ithiel Town, was built in 1810, the year in which its most famous occupant, Asa Gray, was born. Gray, who lived in the house from 1842 until his death in 1888, made outstanding contributions to the science of botany; he published the first complete books on North American flora, adopting the natural system of plant classification, and was one of America's leading defenders of Darwin's theory of evolution.

Moved to its present location in 1910, the Asa Gray House is used as a private residence and is not open to the public.

History

The Asa Gray House was built in 1810 by the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture as the home of zoologist William Dandridge Peck. The earliest known work of Ithiel Town, it then stood at the corner of Garden and Linnaean Streets, Cambridge, in Harvard College's Botanic Garden. Occupants after Peck included botanist Thomas Nuttall and Harvard Presidents James Walker and Jared Sparks. Asa Gray moved to the house in 1842 when he became Massachusetts Professor of Natural History at Harvard and lived there until his death in 1888. In 1910, the Asa Gray House was purchased by Alien H. Cox and moved to its present location at 88 Garden Street (corner of Madison Street).

Biography

Born of parents of English and Scotch-Irish background in Sanquoit, New York, in 1810, Gray acquired an interest in botany as a youth. Then, while attending a small medical college, he read The Edinburgh Encyclopaedia's lengthy article on botany during the winter of 1827-28. That article greatly stimulated his botanical interest, especially as it said that much needed to be done in North American botany. Gray's medical studies furthered his appreciation of botany, and before his graduation in 1831 he had already begun to collect plants. An established botanist, John Torrey of New York, learned of the young doctor's botanical work and asked Gray if he would like to be his assistant. Gray assented, and medicine lost a promising adherent.
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Gray, Jane Loring. Letters of Asa Gray (Boston, 1894), 2 volumes.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Degrees Minutes Seconds Degrees Minutes Seconds

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 0.32

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

STATE: CODE COUNTY

STATE: CODE COUNTY

STATE: CODE COUNTY

STATE: CODE COUNTY

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by S. Sydney Bradford, Historian, 3/17/64

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey

1100 L Street NW.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: D.C.

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

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Date

Landmark Designated: Jan 12, 1976

(INSRIPTION)

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Chief, Nat. Hist.

Archeol. Survey

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

(INSRIPTION)

Director, OAR

Date
7. Description: (1) Asa Gray House

The Asa Gray House stands close to the street on a roughly rectangular lot. The ample rear yard, screened from the street on two sides by the house and additions, has mature trees and shrubs and an arbor at its western corner. Both the house and grounds are in fair condition; the building itself needs repainting and some of the exterior woodwork appears to be decaying.

Boundary

Beginning at the intersection of the eastern sideline of Madison Street and the southern sideline of Garden Street; thence, along the southern sideline of Garden Street, 88.30 feet more or less, to the northwestern sideline of the property at 84 Garden Street, now or formerly owned by Katherine M. Day; thence, southwesterly along the line of said property, 134.72 feet more or less, to its intersection with the northeastern sideline of property at 7 Garden Terrace, now or formerly owned by W. A. and J. B. Johnston; thence northwesterly along the line of said property, 97.15 feet more or less, to its intersection with the eastern sideline of Madison Street, 135 feet more or less, to the point of beginning.
Asa Gray House

Gray made rapid progress in his new profession. Largely influenced by recent European developments in botany, Gray boldly adopted the natural system of classification. Briefly, this system sought to establish the relationship of plants according to the similarity of their various parts. He thus rejected the long-used Linnaean system, which identified plants by the number of stamens and styles that each had. In 1836, he published his first book, Elements of Botany. Two years later, in conjunction with Torrey, Gray published the first part of the Flora of North America. This volume, plus the succeeding volumes, gave America its most notable compendium of known plants in the travelled areas of the continent. In the same year that the first volume of the Flora appeared, 1838, Gray accepted a teaching position at the University of Michigan. Fortunately for him, the university sent him abroad for a year, where he visited botanists and botanical collections. While in England he met Darwin, but discerned no greatness in the British botanist at that time.

In 1842, three years after his return to America, Gray, then thirty-two, became Massachusetts Professor of Natural History at Harvard College, a position he held for forty-five years. Gray was not an inspiring teacher. Indeed, each student knew his routine, even to the point of knowing when and for what Gray would call on him. In Gray's early days at Harvard, some of his students enlivened classes by setting off firecrackers in the room.

Gray's years at Harvard witnessed his rise to eminence in botany. As expedition after expedition sent new specimens to Cambridge, Gray and his assistants classified them and gave them names. At the same time, Gray produced many books. His two-volume work, The Genera of the Plants of the United States, published in 1849, was a brilliant achievement. The work contained plates of plants by Isaac Sprague, which remain models of effective plant illustration, and descriptions of those plants by Gray. In 1858, he published How Plants Grow, a volume that sent many a child into the fields to collect plants. In addition, Gray established an acquaintance, by correspondence if by no other means, with as many American and European colleagues as possible and, in an unusually cooperative manner, readily shared his knowledge with them.

Perhaps Gray's most original contribution to the science of botany was his discovery of the relationship between the flora of eastern North America and east Asia, demonstrated in his Statistics of the Flora of the Northern United States, published in 1856. This discovery led to the rise of a new aspect of botanical study, plant geography.

Gray, in addition to his notable botanical work, ably served science in general when he led the defense in America of Darwin's bitterly attacked Origin of Species. Admirably equipped to do so because of his scientific standing, his personal leadership in his field, and his well-known religious feeling, Gray, who admired Darwin's willingness to acknowledge questions about...
8. Statement of Significance: (2)

Asa Gray House


Because of his defense of Darwin, as well as because of his own work in botany, Gray remains one of America's notable scientists. His death on January 30, 1888, ended a chapter in our Country's scientific history that was rich in accomplishment and humanity.