

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

Massachusetts Historical Society

AND/OR COMMON

Massachusetts Historical Society

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBFR

1154 Boylston Street

__ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Boston

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Ninth

STATE

Massachusetts

__ VICINITY OF
CODE

025

COUNTY

Suffolk

CODE

025

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

Massachusetts Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

1154 Boylston Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

__ VICINITY OF

Massachusetts

STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Suffolk Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Suffolk County Court House, Somerset Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

__ FEDERAL __ STATE __ COUNTY __ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The present (seventh) home of the Massachusetts Historical Society is a building constructed for it in 1899 at the southeastern corner of Boylston Street (the Society is numbered 1154 Boylston) and the Fenway in Boston, Massachusetts. The building covers all of the lot except a narrow strip of lawn along its western edge. Because of its siting only the north (front) and west elevations of the building are visible from the street. To the north, east, and south of the Society are apartment, educational, and commercial buildings. To the west lie the Back Bay Fens, originally a tidal marsh but successfully altered by Frederick Law Olmsted in the late 19th century and incorporated in Boston's municipal park system.

Edmund M. Wheelwright, a Boston architect, designed the Society's three-story headquarters in Georgian Revival style, using granite ashlar for the first floor and yellow brick with granite detail for the second and third. The corner bays of the front elevation are bowed. At the center of the elevation are a one-story open porch with iron-railed balcony above and a granite-railed balcony at the third floor level; the french doors serving both balconies are set in one vertical frame of quoins topped by a semi-circular arch with impost blocks and keystone. The line of the flat roof is marked by a cornice with rosettes and dentil band and a railing with alternating panelled and balustraded sections. Other decorative elements include fluted Ionic pilasters, square-headed and round-arched windows with keystones, inset panels (on the curved bays) with rosettes and floral swags, and floral-patterned iron balconies at the second floor windows.

The interior of the building complements the Georgian Revival style of the exterior. The lobby, finished largely in marble, features a vaulted ceiling, Doric columns, and panelled doorways capped by bracketed cornices. The main stairway, also of marble with an iron railing, rises from the rear (south) of the lobby. The first floor reading rooms and major offices and exhibit areas on the second floor are appropriately panelled in dark wood. Library stacks and work areas are located in portions of the second floor, the third floor, and in an addition constructed at the rear of the main building in 1971; the latter is not visible because of the location of adjacent buildings.

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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" 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	1791-Society 1899-Building	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Edmund M. Wheelwright
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Massachusetts Historical Society, founded in 1791, is the oldest institution of its kind in the United States. From its earliest days, the Society has been pre-eminent in the collection, preservation, and publication of historical material and, in particular, of manuscript items. The Society's collections now include private papers, rare books, maps, prints, drawings, portraits, and museum objects ranging from Paul Revere silver to the epaulets worn by George Washington at Yorktown; the total of individual items is in the millions. The present (seventh) building occupied by the Massachusetts Historical Society is a three-story brick and granite structure in Georgian Revival style, completed in 1899. The building is open to the public from 9 to 4:45, Monday through Friday except holidays.

Historical Background

The Massachusetts Historical Society owes its inception largely to the foresight of the Reverend Jeremy Belknap. Early in the 1780's, Belknap had begun to write a history of New Hampshire, and that undertaking awakened him to the need for preserving historical records. Accordingly, he met with some friends on August 26, 1790, and discussed the creation of an historical society. Belknap on the following day wrote a "Plan of an Antiquarian Society." About five months later, on January 24, 1791, "The Historical Society" was established. When incorporated in 1794, its present name was assumed.

Even before the Society was organized, Belknap had begun collecting manuscripts and records. He persuaded Paul Revere to write an account of his ride, acquired manuscripts collected by Jonathan Trumbull, of Connecticut, and chose various manuscripts and books of the late John Hancock. He planned to acquire the papers of Samuel Adams, but, unfortunately, Belknap preceded Adams to the grave. Nevertheless, before he died in 1798, Belknap had laid a sound basis for the Society to grow upon.

As the Society's historical collections have grown, the Society has constantly presented much of its material to the public in its publications. Within the first year of its history, the Society published the initial issue of its Collections, on January 6, 1792. Since then, the published Collections have been steadily enriched. Furthermore, the Society has issued innumerable other volumes, thus making much of its material readily available to scholars and other interested individuals. Among the significant items now in process of publication are the personal papers of John Adams.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Riley, Stephen T. The Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, 1959).

Whitehill, Walter Muir. Independent Historical Societies (Boston, 1962).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 1/4 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	19	327810	4690140	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the national historic landmark designation for the Massachusetts Historical Society are those of the property occupied by the Society's current headquarters, located at 1154 Boylston Street in Boston, Massachusetts. It should be noted that the national significance which the landmark designation recognizes lies to a greater extent in the age of the Society and the quality and range of its collections than in its relation to this particular building. Specific boundary

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES (cont'd)

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form

prepared by S. Sydney Bradford, Historian 7/27/65

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

12/6/75

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1100 L Street NW

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington

D.C. 20240

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

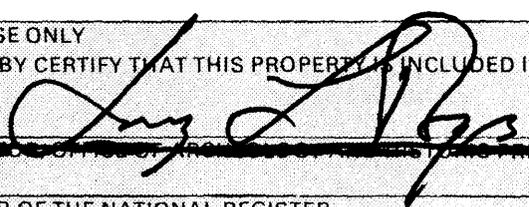
N/A National Historic Landmark

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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



DATE

9/8/83

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK)

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Massachusetts Historical
CONTINUATION SHEET Society ITEM NUMBER #8 PAGE #2

In the course of its long history, the Massachusetts Historical Society has had several homes. Until 1872, it occupied a number of different rented quarters, but in that year erected a building for itself on Tremont Street. There the Society remained until March 9, 1899, when it held its first meeting in its present home, a three-story Georgian Revival building designed by Boston architect Edmund M. Wheelwright. A rear addition (not visible because of its siting) was constructed for library stacks in 1971. The Society is open to the public from 9 to 4:45, Monday through Friday except holidays; the majority of visitors come to do research or to attend special exhibits presented in the second floor galleries.

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Massachusetts Historical
CONTINUATION SHEET Society ITEM NUMBER #10 PAGE #2

lines (shown in red on the accompanying sketch map), are defined as follows:
bounded northerly by Boylston Street 120 feet more or less; easterly by the property
of the Berklee College of Music in sections of 120 and 50 feet more or less; southerly
by the property of the Boston Conservatory of Music 130 feet more or less; and
westerly by the Fenway 90 feet more or less.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Boston, Massachusetts

sketch map - not to scale

National Historic Landmark
Boundary

