**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

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

**STATE:** Massachusetts

**COUNTY:** Bristol

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### 1. NAME

**COMMON:** Custom House, New Bedford

**AND/OR HISTORIC:**

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### 2. LOCATION

**STREET AND NUMBER:** Southwest corner of Second and Williams Streets

**CITY OR TOWN:** New Bedford

**STATE:** Massachusetts

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### 3. CLASSIFICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>OWNERSHIP</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Public Acquisition:</td>
<td>Yes: Restricted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>In Process:</td>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Being Considered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Preservation work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td></td>
<td>in progress</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**PRESENT USE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agricultural</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Transportation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>Private Residence</td>
<td>Other (Specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>Scientific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

**OWNER'S NAME:** United States Government, General Service Administration

**STREET AND NUMBER:**

**CITY OR TOWN:** Washington

**STATE:** D. C.

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### 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

**COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:**

**STREET AND NUMBER:**

**CITY OR TOWN:** New Bedford

**STATE:** Massachusetts

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### 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

**TITLE OF SURVEY:** Historic American Buildings Survey (6 photos, 1961) (7 data pages, 1961)

**DATE OF SURVEY:**

**DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:**

**STREET AND NUMBER:**

**CITY OR TOWN:** Washington

**STATE:** D. C.
The New Bedford Custom House is an oblong-shaped two-story granite ashlar building with a hipped roof. The structure is five bays long and three-bays deep. The east (main) elevation is dominated by a three-bay wide giant portico comprised of four giant Greek Doric columns and two pilasters which support a pediment. The four corners of the main structure are treated as giant pilasters. The columns, pilasters, cornice, water table, and belting course on the level with the second-story windows are all of tooled granite and form a distinct contrast with the rock-faced blocks of granite that form the main walls. Windows and doors have flat arches and the windows are decorated by exterior shutters.

A square cupola, possibly added around 1850, which was once located between the four chimneys that rise from the center of the hipped roof, has been removed and the parapet rail originally located between the stacks has been reconstructed. The exterior otherwise appears to be, unaltered. The structure has a groined vault ceiling and the staircase to the second floor is of solid stone, the upper part being cantilevered out from the wall with the steps interlocking. The building is used as a custom house and post office. The Custom House is in excellent condition and open to visitors.
**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)** 1834-36

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE** (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- □ Aboriginal
- □ Historic
- □ Agriculture
- □ Architecture
- □ Art
- □ Commerce
- □ Communications
- □ Conservation
- □ Education
- □ Engineering
- □ Industry
- □ Invention
- □ Landscape
- □ Literature
- □ Military
- □ Music
- □ Political
- □ Religious
- □ Science
- □ Sculpture
- □ Social
- □ Urban Planning
- □ Other (Specify)

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Designed by the noted architect Robert Mills and erected in 1834-36, the New Bedford Custom House is a powerful essay in granite of a small public building executed in the Greek Revival style. The design is a particularly interesting illustration of the creative use of Greek precedent; for although the whole effect is recognizably "Greek Doric" it is gained by all sorts of non-Greek means. Molding profiles are changed, triglyphs and mutules omitted, and richness and power are obtained by a carefully studied use of stone textures and the variation of rock-faced and tooled granite. The New Bedford Custom House is the largest, most elaborate, and probably the finest of the series of four granite Greek Revival custom houses that Mills designed for the New England States in the period 1834-36.

**History**

Robert Mills prepared the designs for four modest-sized granite Greek Revival Custom Houses for the New England States. Three of them, - at Middletown, Connecticut (1834), at New London, Connecticut (1835), and at Newburyport, Massachusetts, (1834-35), are almost identical, and the New Bedford structure is the largest and most elaborate, architecturally, of this group. The custom house at New Bedford was authorized by an Act of Congress on July 3, 1832. The site for the building was purchased on April 22, 1833, for the sum of $4,900. Construction, supervised by Seth H. Ingalls, began in 1834 and the structure was completed in 1836. Cost of construction, exclusive of the site, was $25,500. The New Bedford Custom House still serves its original function as a custom house and also as a post office.

The New Bedford Custom House has also been attributed to Russell Warren, a prominent New Bedford architect. If he is proven to be the designer then he should also receive credit for the other three very similar custom houses erected at Middletown and New London, Connecticut, and also at Newburyport, Massachusetts.


A History of Public Buildings Under the Control of the Treasury Department (Washington, 1901), 280-1.


John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown; The Architecture of America, a Social and Cultural History (Boston & Toronto, 1961), 95.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORNER</th>
<th>LATITUDE</th>
<th>LONGITUDE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NW</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>41° 38' 07&quot;</td>
<td>70° 55' 30&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>41° 38' 07&quot;</td>
<td>70° 55' 30&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>41° 38' 07&quot;</td>
<td>70° 55' 30&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 8,000 square feet

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Charles W. Snell, Survey Historian

ORGANIZATION: Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service.

DATE: 6/29/70

801 19th Street, N. W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: D. C.

12. STATE LIASON 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 [ ]

Date ____________________________

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

DATE ____________________________

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

DATE ____________________________