Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries – complete applicable sections)

STATE: Massachusetts
COUNTY: Suffolk
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY NUMBER | DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON:

AND/OR HISTORIC: Samuel Gridley and Julia Ward Howe House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 13 Chestnut Street

CITY OR TOWN: Boston

STATE: Massachusetts | CODE | COUNTY: Suffolk | CODE

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP		STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
☐ District ☒ Building ☐ Site ☐ Structure ☐ Object	☐ Public ☒ Private ☐ Both	Public Acquisition: ☐ In Process ☐ Being Considered	☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Preservation work in progress	Yes: ☐ Restricted ☐ Unrestricted ☒ No

PRESENT USE *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

☐ Agricultural	☐ Government	☐ Park	☐ Transportation	☐ Comments
☐ Commercial	☐ Industrial	☒ Private Residence	☐ Other *(Specify)*	
☐ Educational	☐ Military	☐ Religious		
☐ Entertainment	☐ Museum	☐ Scientific		

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: Reverend Palfrey Perkins

STREET AND NUMBER: 13 Chestnut Street

CITY OR TOWN: Boston | STATE: Massachusetts 02108 | CODE

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Suffolk County Courthouse, Registry of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER: Pemberton Square

CITY OR TOWN: Boston | STATE: Massachusetts | CODE

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: None

DATE OF SURVEY: ☐ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: | STATE: | CODE

STATE: | COUNTY: | FOR NPS USE ONLY ENTRY NUMBER DATE

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	☐ Excellent	☒ Good	☐ Fair	☐ Deteriorated	☐ Ruins	☐ Unexposed
	(Check One)		(Check One)			
	☐ Altered	☒ Unaltered	☐ Moved	☒ Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL *(if known)* PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

No. 13 Chestnut Street on Beacon Hill is a three-bay four-story brick structure with a Georgian doorway, arched window recessess on the first story, and wrought-iron balconies on the second. It is one of the so-called "Swan houses"--13, 15, and 17 Chestnut--long controversial because of their alleged but unproved attribution to Charles Bulfinch. Harold Kirker seems finally to have resolved the issue, stating that "Bulfinch's connection with the Swan houses ... is undoubted even if undocumented."[1]

These houses were built in 1804 and 1805 by Hepsibah Swan, whose husband had amassed a fortune in pre-Revolutionary France, as wedding presents for each of her three daughters. Mrs. Swan, Kirker writes, "was one of the Mount Vernon Proprietors and therefore expected to build a mansion house on the former Copley lands in the manner of Harrison Gray Otis and Jonathan Mason. But she was also an eccentric who chose to live year round in the country, and in her large lot in Chestnut Street she constructed not a great proprietary house but three row dwellings ...." Each cost $8,000. The first, No. 13, became the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Turner Sargent in 1806, long remained in the Sargent family, and was later the home of John Singer Sargent.

Charles A. Place describes the interiors of the Swan houses so: "thirty-inch dados, fireplaces and mantels on good lines, and graceful staircases winding in an ellipse and lit with an oval skylight."[2] No. 13 has white marble mantles in the second-floor parlors, though evidence is lacking to date these prior to 1810. The parlors are connected by arched double doors. When Place wrote in the 1920s, he described the interiors of all three houses as "exceptionally well preserved." This certainly remains true of No. 13, the decor and atmosphere of which seems to have changed scarcely at all since the days of the Howes and the Radical Club a century ago. No. 15 and No. 17 are said to have been considerably altered in the last 50 years, however, there being such major additions as elevators. With respect to No. 13, Kirker is incorrect in stating that "the interiors of the Swan houses have been altered by conversion to apartments since Place studied them," for it remains a single-family residence, the present owner a retired pastor of King's Chapel.

[1]Harold Kirker, The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch (Cambridge, 1969), p. 201.

[2]Charles A. Place, Charles Bulfinch, Architect and Citizen (Boston and New York, 1925), p. 179.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD *(Check One or More as Appropriate)*

- ☐ Pre-Columbian
- ☐ 15th Century
- ☐ 16th Century
- ☐ 17th Century
- ☐ 18th Century
- ☒ 19th Century
- ☐ 20th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) *(If Applicable and Known)* 1863-1866

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

- ☐ Aboriginol
- ☐ Prehistoric
- ☐ Historic
- ☐ Agriculture
- ☒ Architecture
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Commerce
- ☐ Communications
- ☐ Conservation
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Engineering
- ☐ Industry
- ☐ Invention
- ☐ Landscape Architecture
- ☐ Literature
- ☐ Military
- ☐ Music
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Religion/Philosophy
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Sculpture
- ☒ Social/Humanitarian
- ☐ Theater
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Urban Planning
- ☐ Other *(Specify)* _____

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

When he married Julia Ward in 1843, Samuel Gridley Howe had "already achieved an international reputation as a great humanitarian" for his leadership in a variety of reform movements, but especially "for his pioneer efforts in educating the blind and the deaf-blind." Horace Mann had declared, for instance, that he would have rather have built up Howe's Perkins Institution for the Blind "than have written Hamlet." Though only 23 years old and 19 years Samuel's junior, Julia Ward Howe quickly immersed herself in an enormous variety of reform causes. Most important, perhaps, was the key role she and her husband played in Boston Abolitionist circles for nearly 2 decades. During the years immediately after attainment of that goal, 1863-1866, the Howes resided at No. 13 Chestnut Street. This is historically the most significant of the extant houses in which they lived; it is also of considerable architectural significance, being one of the Bulfinch "Swan houses," and much the least altered of the three.

It was in 1863, the year the Howes moved to Chestnut Street, that Julia wrote her enormously popular "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and in 1865 that Samuel assumed leadership of the Massachusetts Board of State Charities, the first institution of its kind in America, where he established precedents widely accepted for decades thereafter. He continued to head the Perkins Institution until shortly before his death--a tenure of 44 years--and his other reform and humanitarian interests were probably unequalled in scope. Robert Bremner, the authority on American philanthropy, has aptly characterized him as "a latter day Benjamin Rush."

Samuel died in 1876, but Julia carried on in his tradition for more than 35 years longer, the Nestor of female reformers in America. She was particularly active in the suffrage, peace, and prison reform movements, and frequently addressed groups such as the Boston Radical Club, which met for years in her one-time home at No. 13 Chestnut Street. The influence of both Howes persisted long after they had passed on--through the many organizations upon which they had impressed their spirit--and a joint biography published in 1911, the year after Julia's death, bears what may be the most appropriate of titles: Two Noble Lives.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Cary, T. G., Memoir of Thomas Handasyd Perkins (Boston, 1856).

Howe, Julia Ward, Reminiscences, 1819-1899 (Boston & New York, 1899).

Jones, J. L., "Samuel Gridley Howe," Charities Review, December 1897.

Richards, Laura E., and Maud Howe Elliot, Julia Ward Howe, 1819-1910 (Dunwoody, Georgia, 1970).

Smith, Page, Daughters of the Promised Land (Boston & Toronto, 1970).

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	°	'	"	°	'	"	42°	21 '	27 "	71 °	04 '	03 "
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"						
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"						
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"						

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: less than one acre.

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: Robert C. Post, Survey Historian

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

DATE: 8/16/73

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L Street, N.W.

CITY OR TOWN: Washington

STATE: D.C.

CODE:

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 _____

Title _____

Date _____

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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 _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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8. Significance (page 1) Julia Ward Howe House

Biography

Samuel Gridley Howe and Julia Ward were married in 1843 when Samuel was 42 and Julia 23. Julia outlived Samuel by nearly 36 years; yet, during their 33 years together, the Howes were one of the most remarkable couples in America. Samuel, a Harvard M. D. of 1824, was the preeminent champion of the physically handicapped for almost half a century. In 1831, he accepted a commission from the State of Massachusetts to direct its newly incorporated school for the blind, soon acknowledged as the most important institution of its kind in the country. Exceptionally sensitive to the plight of the handicapped, he was also a resourceful administrator and tireless fund raiser. In 1833, he persuaded the wealthy Boston merchant, Thomas Handasyd Perkins, to deed his mansion to the school, the name of which was subsequently changed from the New England Asylum for the Blind to the Perkins Institution. Howe soon attained worldwide fame for an accomplishment theretofore thought impossible--teaching a blind deaf-mute, Laura Bridgman, the use of language and a range of manual skills. Such was his reputation by 1841 that Horace Mann declared, "I would rather have built up the Blind Asylum than have written Hamlet."[1]

Two years later, Howe married the daughter of a prominent New York banker, bred to the lofty realms of Gotham society, who rather shocked her family by selecting Howe rather than some young scion of inherited wealth. Julia's marriage propelled her into a new world of philosophers, free-thinkers, and reformers. She spent long hours assisting her husband at the Perkins Institution, but also occupied herself increasingly in literary pursuits and reform causes, especially abolitionism. Together, the Howes edited an anti-slavery newspaper, The Commonwealth, and their South Boston residence, "Green Peace," became a gathering place for the likes of Theodore Parker, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, and William Lloyd Garrison. Samuel, "as impetuous in full-bearded middle age as in his Byronic youth,"[2] headed a Boston vigilante committee dedicated to preventing the return of fugitive slaves, and actively supported John Brown's Kansas crusade. Julia felt so strongly on the subject of civil rights for

[1]Laura E. Richards, ed., Letters and Journals of Samuel Gridley Howe (2 vols., Boston, 1906 & 1909), II, p. 107.

[2]Robert H. Bremner, American Philanthropy (Chicago & London, 1960), p. 73.

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8. Significance (page 2) Julia Ward Howe House

Blacks that she told Frederick Douglass, "I cannot see how anyone can pretend that there is the same urgency in giving the ballot to women as to the Negro."[3] In later years, she took considerable pride in having "had the honor of pleading for the slave when he was a slave."

After moving from Green Peace (which is now demolished), the Howes lived in various Boston homes, the most significant of those extant being No. 13 Chestnut, their residence between 1863 and 1866. During these years, Samuel continued to direct the Perkins Institution--as he did for 44 years, until very shortly before his death in 1876. As for Julia, just after moving to No. 13 Chestnut she made a trip to Washington with her husband, who was pursuing an investigation for the Freedmen's Inquiry Commission. One night, while staying at an army encampment but unable to sleep, she composed a poem set to the rolling cadence of "John Brown's Body." She called it "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and it subsequently brought down upon her a shower of honors, public and private, that "have seldom been equaled in the career of any other American woman."[4]

More significant in terms of long-range impact were the enormous variety of causes the couple took up during the period they resided on Chestnut. Samuel served on the Sanitary Commission, supported his friend Mann in his fight for adequate public schools, promoted the oral method of teaching the deaf, made significant innovations as director of the Massachusetts School for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Youth, stood beside Dorothea Dix in her campaign for humanitarian care of the insane, spoke out for prison reform as a partisan of the "Pennsylvania System," and, beginning in 1865, headed the Massachusetts Board of State Charities, the pioneer institution of its kind in America. Precedents Howe established were adhered to until well into the 20th century.

Samuel Gridley Howe, says Dr. F. H. Hedge, "was never the hero of his own tale."[5] Nonetheless, he was a humanitarian of great importance, especially for his work with the handicapped. Robert H. Bremner has nicely characterized Howe as "a latter-day Benjamin Rush in the multiplicity of his interests, in his love of liberty, aptitude for controversy, and unquenchable optimism." Though a man of "international reputation" in his own

[3]Alma Lutz, Susan B. Anthony: Rebel, Crusader, Humanitarian (Boston, 1959), p. 163.

[4]Margarita S. Gerry, in Dictionary of American Biography, IX, p. 292.

[5]Quoted in Julia Ward Howe, Memoir of Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe (Boston, 1876), p. 95.

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time,[6] his popular repute was subsequently overshadowed by that of his wife--an injustice perhaps, though she too was a reformer of major significance. There is only a small proportion of poetic license in Margarita S. Gerry's contention that during the last third of the 19th century "No movement or 'cause' in which women were interested, from suffrage, to pure milk for babies, could be launched without her."

Julia was a truly phenomenal organizer, becoming the first president of the New England Woman Suffrage Association, a pivotal figure in the American Woman's Suffrage Association, and first president of the American Branch of the Woman's International Peace Association. She presented countless lectures on reform--to the Massachusetts General Court, to the School of Philosophy at Concord, to the Boston Radical Club--the successor to the Transcendental Club, which for many years met in the Howes' former home at No. 13 Chestnut.[7] Page Smith points out that through the 1890s and even past the turn of the century, reform-minded women of Boston looked for their leadership to "the now ancient but still charming Julia Ward Howe."

Julia died in 1910 at 92, but as is the case with her husband, her influence continued in "the operation of the organizations which she was instrumental in founding and impressing with her spirit." A joint biography published in 1911, while quite evidently a work of filialpietism, bears perhaps the most apt of all possible titles: Two Noble Lives.[8]

[6]Gerald N. Grob and Robert N. Beck, eds., American Ideas (New York, 1963), I, p. 395.

[7]Mary Elizabeth Sargent, Sketches and Reminiscences of the Radical Club of Chestnut Street, Boston (Boston, 1880), passim.

[8]The author, Laura E. Richards, was one of the Howes' daughters.