**COMMON:** Massachusetts General Hospital

**STATE:** Massachusetts

**COUNTY:** Suffolk

**STREET AND NUMBER:** Fruit Street

**CITY OR TOWN:** Boston

**STATE CODE COUNTY:** Massachusetts Suffolk

### 3. CLASSIFICATION

<table>
<thead>
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<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>OWNERSHIP</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Building</td>
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<td>Unoccupied</td>
<td>Restricted</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Preservation work in progress</td>
<td>Unrestricted</td>
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<tr>
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<td>In Process</td>
<td>Other (Specify)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>Preservation work in progress</td>
<td>Other (Specify)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

**OWNER'S NAME:** Massachusetts General Hospital

**STREET AND NUMBER:** 45 Milk Street

**CITY OR TOWN:** Boston

**STATE:** Massachusetts

### 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

**COURTHOUSE, Registry of Deeds, ETC:** Registry of Deeds, Suffolk County

**STREET AND NUMBER:** Pemberton Square

**CITY OR TOWN:** Boston

**STATE:** Massachusetts

### 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

**TITLE OF SURVEY:** Historic American Buildings Survey (3 photos)

**DATE OF SURVEY:** 1941

**DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:** Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

**STREET AND NUMBER:** Washington 20540

**STATE:** D.C.
### DESCRIPTION

<table>
<thead>
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<th>CONDITION</th>
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<th>□ Good</th>
<th>□ Fair</th>
<th>□ Deteriorated</th>
<th>□ Ruins</th>
<th>□ Unexposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Altered</td>
<td>□ Unaltered</td>
<td></td>
<td>□ Moved</td>
<td>□ Original Site</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

Built of granite in coursed ashlar, the Massachusetts General Hospital is a long oblong structure, two stories over elevated rusticated basement, with a central projecting and pedimented giant Ionic portico, two wings, and a hipped roof. Above the pediment of the south portico rises a square attic story, with corner chimneys and crowned with a large saucer dome.

A description of the hospital, written in 1824, follows:

"This edifice is 163 feet in length, and 94 in its greatest breadth, having a portico of eight Ionic columns in front [on the south elevation]. It is built of white Chelmsford granite, wrought with uncommon labour, the columns and their capitals being of the same material. In the centre of the two principal stories are the rooms appropriated to the superintendent, the apothecary, and other officers of the institution. Above these is the operating theatre, lighted from the dome, and fitted up with semicircular seats for spectators. Beneath is the kitchen with its various appendages, the bathing room, wash room, laundry, &c. The stair-cases and floorings of the entries are of stone. The whole house is supplied with heat by air-flues from furnaces in the cellar, and with water by pipes and a forcing pump. Various modern improvements in domestic economy, conducive to cleanliness and comfort are introduced, together with such auxiliary apparatus for the sick as is found useful in the management of their diseases. The wings of the buildings, in the different stories, are divided into wards and sick rooms, which are fitted up in the neatest and best manner. The number of beds contained in them for patients is at present about a hundred..."

In 1844-46 the two original wings, each five bays long, were doubled in size by the addition of five-bay long extensions, constructed on the main axis, to their east and west ends. Built of granite and in the same Classical Revival style as the Bulfinch Hospital, the added wings made no significant change in the original design of the south (main) facade. The interior of the original hospital, however, was also modernized in 1844-46 and almost nothing original (prior to 1846) remains excepting the two stair halls with their fine cantilevered stone stairways.

The Bulfinch Building today is located in the center of a great hospital complex that presses in heavily upon it from every side. Huge modern hospital buildings now surround the original structure. The Bulfinch Building is in excellent condition, now largely used for clinical research, and portions of the structure are open to visitors.
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
(The Either Dome portion of Massachusetts General Hospital was declared eligible for the Registry of National Historic Landmarks in 1965, under Theme XX, Scientific Discoveries and Inventions).

Designed by Charles Bulfinch in 1817 and erected by Alexander Parris in 1818-23, Massachusetts General Hospital is a superb example of a public building built in the Classical Revival style. Massachusetts General Hospital is also a major and rare example of an early 19th century large city hospital.

Although nearly doubled in size by the addition of matching wings in 1844-46, the exterior of the south (front) facade of the original center section of the existing structure, now known as the Bulfinch Pavilion has been preserved virtually unaltered. The interior of the hospital, however, has been greatly reworked and very little of the 1818-23 work remains.

History

On August 20, 1810 Doctors James Jackson and John C. Warren sent a circular letter to "a number of respectable gentlemen" of Boston pointing out the need for "a hospital for the reception of lunatics and other sick persons." Subsequently these functions were separated, with the insane confined in McLean Asylum (1816-18) in Charlestown and the sick receiving treatment in Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston's West End, on the bank of the Charles River. In February, 1811 a charter for the hospital was granted by the State legislature but the War of 1812 intervened, preventing further progress. In December, 1816 and early 1817, however, the sum of $107,000 was quickly subscribed to build a general hospital. In December, 1816 the noted Boston architect Charles Bulfinch was sent to the middle Atlantic States to study the construction and administration of city hospitals in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. In his report of March 15, 1817, the architect wrote:

"At the present I recommend that no wards of the infirmary should contain more than 20 patients, and that a larger number than usual of small rooms should be provided for the sick who wish to be retired. I am sensible that this may lead to the necessity of employing a greater number of nurses, but it will, in my opinion, be much more agreeable to the domestic habits of our people, to the feelings of the sick and of their friends."
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

**LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY**

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<th>CORNER</th>
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<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
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<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
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**LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES**

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<tr>
<td>Degrees Minutes Seconds</td>
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</table>

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1 acres

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>STATE</td>
<td>CODE</td>
<td>COUNTY</td>
<td>CODE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**STREET AND NUMBER:** 601 19th Street, N.W.

**CITY OR TOWN:** Washington

**STATE:** D.C.

**DATE:** 6/19/70

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 ____________________________
8. Significance

The building must consist as usual, of a centre & wings; it will be a subject of your consideration, whether the centre shall be first erected, with rooms for the keeper, nurses and a few sick, or whether the wings shall be first undertaken; the state of the funds must influence your determination."

On November 3, 1817 the building committee offered a $100 "reward for a plan of a hospital," the design to be governed by a Resolve of the General Court that the building be "of stone, and of that kind called granite," hammer and fitted in the state prison in Charlestown. On January 25, 1818 the plan submitted by Bulfinch was accepted, "with slight modifications." The construction, supervised by Alexander Parris, began on July 4, 1818 and the center and east wing were occupied on September 3, 1821. The west wing and portico were completed in 1823 and the hospital then had a capacity of 73 beds. The total cost of construction was only $70,000 - a sum reflecting the low cost of stonework done at the state prison by convict labor.

As in all his architectural commissions, Bulfinch creatively used well known architectural formations and, in the case of the General Hospital, produced a structure designed in the mature Classical Revival style. His design for the hospital may have been based on Plate 15 of John Soane's Designs in Architecture (London, 1776) and also on Robert Adam's Edinburgh Registry Office. The concept of a clinical amphitheater under the dome was probably derived from the Pennsylvania Hospital, completed in 1805, which Bulfinch visited on his trip of 1816.

In 1844-46 Massachusetts General Hospital was nearly doubled in size by the addition of two five-bay-long granite wings, built on the main axis and in the Classical Revival style, to the east and west ends of the original structure. Designed by George Perkins, the new wings contained large wards with central fireplaces on each floor. Most of the interior of the original Bulfinch Pavilion was also heavily revised during the 1844-46 revision and further interior changes have been made since that date.
9. Major Bibliographical References for Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston:


Joseph E. Garland, Every Man Our Neighbor: A Brief History of the Massachusetts General Hospital, 1811-1961 (Boston, 1961).