

FORM B - BUILDING

NRI 2/25/71; NRDIS 2/25/1971;NRDIS 8/2/1984

Assessor's number  
12-10

USGS Quad  
Newburyport

Area(s)  
L,W,K

Form Number  
727

Massachusetts Historical Commission  
Massachusetts Archives Building



Newburyport  
(neighborhood or village)

25 Water Street

Name U.S. Customs House

Present Museum

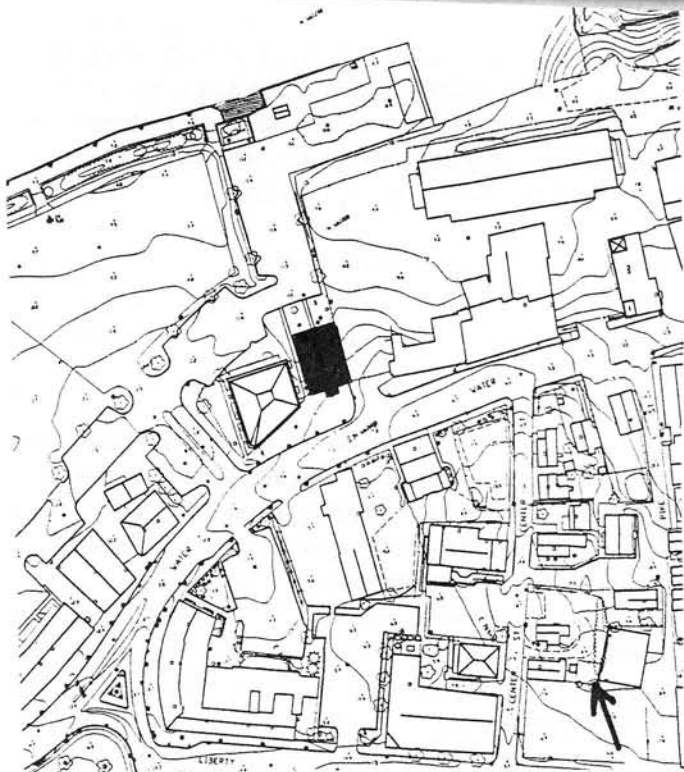
Original Customs House

Construction 1835

NR Nomination

Form Greek Revival

Architect/Builder Robert Mills



Exterior Material:

Foundation Granite

Wall/Trim Granite

Roof Asphalt Shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures

none

Major Alterations (with dates) 1872 - original windows replaced with 2/2 sash; 1972-5 - building restored for use as museum

Condition good

Moved  no  yes Date

Acreage 15719 SF

Setting mixed use area on waterfront, east of Market Square

Recorded by Lisa Mausolf

Organization Newburyport Historical Commission

Date (month/year) July 1999

## INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Town  
NewburyportProperty Address  
25 Water Street  
Area(s) Form No.Massachusetts Historical Commission  
Massachusetts Archives Building  
220 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

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| L,W | 727 |
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## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The building was sold by the U.S. government in 1913 to William E. Chase and William F. Lunt of the Chase and Lunt Insurance Company. Later owners included Michael and Daniel Cashman, the Custom Heel Co. of Newburyport, Edward F. Pierce and Frederick H. Tilton. During this period the building was used as storage including hay storage and as a heel factory. The building was acquired by Jacob Checkoway in 1935 and became a storehouse for junk and scrap metal. The building was taken by eminent domain in 1968. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 and restored between 1972 and 1975 according to plans by architects Perry, Dean, and Stuart of Boston. The Custom House Maritime Museum opened in the newly restored building on June 28, 1975. Inside the building displays many artifacts of the Newburyport Marine Society.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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 Irving, Ron. Unpublished research on Water Street.  
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 Sanborn Insurance Maps, Newburyport, 1888, 1894, 1906, 1914, 1924, 1946.  
 Stirgwort, Mary Jane. "Historical Buildings Survey and Inventory, Newburyport, Massachusetts: Narrative History",  
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 Wardwell, Anne R. "National Register Nomination for U.S. Custom House", 1970.  
 Withey, Henry F. & Elsie Rathburn Withey. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*. Los Angeles:  
 Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970.  
 Woodman, Betsy H. "A Customhouse for Newburyport (1834-1835), Architect Robert Mills (1781-1855)", Essex Institute  
 Historical Collections, July 1985.

## Maps

- Atlas of Essex County, Massachusetts*. Philadelphia: D.B. Beers & Co., 1872.  
*Atlas of Essex County, Massachusetts*. Boston: George H. Walker, 1884.  
 Beck & Paul. *City of Newburyport*. Framingham, Mass.: Bigelow and Hazen, 1880.  
*Plan of Newburyport*. Philadelphia: H. McIntyre, 1851.  
 Sanborn Insurance Maps. Massachusetts State Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

## BUILDING FORM (25 Water Street)

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of the building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

A stark and austere example of the Greek Revival style conceived in stone, the Newburyport Custom House was constructed in 1834-5 according to plans by prominent national architect, Robert Mills. The two-story building is elevated on a raised foundation with its pediment end facing Water Street. The exterior walls consist of large blocks of rough, quarry-dressed granite. Contrasting against the rough texture of the walls are corner pilasters, a water table and a simple Tuscan entablature constructed of smooth, dressed granite blocks. Projecting from the center of the three-bay facade is a single-story polished granite portico supported by bold Tuscan Doric granite columns with an entablature that echoes that of the main building. Centered between the first and second story facade windows are unadorned rectangular granite panels, polished and recessed in two stages. The recessed window openings are unadorned except for simple stone sills and contain 2/2 sash installed in 1872, replacing original sashes with smaller panes of glass. The side elevations each measure three bays deep and are without ornament. The rear elevation displays a discontinuous cornice with the date 1835 inscribed in a pediment stone. The basement entrance is unadorned.

### HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Describe the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

The U.S. Custom House in Newburyport was built in 1834-5, one of five such port facilities constructed in Massachusetts. The Custom House is one of two buildings in the state designed by Robert Mills (1781-1855), one of the first architects of international reputation born and trained in America. In 1836, Mills was appointed by President Andrew Jackson to the office of "Architect and Engineer" to take care of Federal work. In this office, Mill prepared plans for the Treasury (1836), the Old Post Office (1839) and the Patent Office (1839) in Washington, D.C. Mills also served as the designer of the Washington Monument.

The federal collection of duties on merchandise imported through Newburyport was begun in 1789, following the adoption of the U.S. Constitution. Prior to the construction of the Custom House, the customs were first collected in offices in a building on State Street that was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1811, and later in the Phenix Building at 18-26 State Street (MHC#2203). In 1833 the U.S. Government purchased land on Water Street, near the foot of State Street. The cornerstone of the building was laid on October 24, 1835. As originally constructed, the customhouse had its own slip and from ships tied up here the goods for customs duty would have been brought into the building. The slip and wharves were filled between 1869 and 1872 when the City Railroad was laid out through the waterfront. An observation platform on the roof originally provided a view of the harbor and an elevated space for weather reporting.

The custom house building was renovated in 1872 at which time a new roof was installed and the original windows were replaced with 2/2 sash. A hall was opened through the lower story and black-and-white marble flooring was installed in the first-floor corridor and second floor vestibule. The upper story of the building which had not been used for many years was renovated for the offices of the Assessor and of the Collector of Internal Revenue.

Receipts gathered at the port reached a peak in 1875 and 1876 when more than \$100,000 was collected annually, largely in duties on sugar and molasses imported from the West India by the firm of Bayley and Sons (in what is now 65 Water Street, MHC#399). The firm dissolved in 1877 and after that time the principal revenues were derived from imports of soft coal, an occasional cargo of molasses or tea. The volume of maritime trade handled through Newburyport declined steadily in the late 19th century. The collection of duties at the Custom House ended in 1910 although flags flew as weather signals from the Custom House until about 1920.

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attached a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*