



William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

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**SECRETARY GALVIN PRESENTS 2017 HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD
TO THE U.S. CUSTOMS HOUSE IN BARNSTABLE**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin, Chairman of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, announces the selection of the U. S. Customs House in Barnstable to receive a 2017 Massachusetts Historical Commission Historic Preservation Award.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is proud to recognize the extraordinary accomplishments of this year’s awardees,” Secretary Galvin said. “The projects the Commission is recognizing this year are particularly diverse and represent the many creative ways that significant historic resources are being preserved across the Commonwealth. This project is Barnstable’s tribute to the Customs Service and the United States Coast Guard.”

The U.S. Customs House in Barnstable was erected in 1855, but its history dates back to the Revolutionary War. After Independence, the port of Barnstable became the seventh United States Customs District and administrative center under the supervision of first collector General Joseph Otis. Customs activities took place in the collector’s home until the mid-19th century, when congressional funds were secured to erect an official customs house. The port of Barnstable remained one of the busiest ports in Massachusetts until the Cape Cod Canal opened in 1913, after which the Customs House’s first floor became a post office and its second floor became a museum displaying the collection of local historian Donald G. Trayser. The post office operated until 1958, when its space was turned over to the town of Barnstable to expand the museum. In 2005, the museum was repurposed for its current use as the Coast Guard Heritage Museum.

Designed by the first Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury Ammi B. Young, the

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State House, Room 337, Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Customs House was touted as Cape Cod's first fireproof building, breaking with traditional wood-framed construction. The fireproof design came as a mandate from the U.S. government for all new government buildings, including houses, post offices, and courthouses. Young pioneered the use of iron and designed an advanced cast-iron structural system with iron decorative elements for a more fire-resistant and stable structure. Using this system, Young then designed the square-plan, two-story, red-brick Customs House. Built in the Italian Renaissance Revival style, the Customs House features dentillated brick molding, a truncated hipped roof, and cast-iron detailing.

Prior to rehabilitation, the building was in fair condition for its age but there were significant areas of deterioration, including the wood windows, exterior masonry, and cast-iron details. The building retained a few of the original wood windows, with the rest being replacements from the 1913 renovation. Both the original and replacement windows were highly deteriorated, with paint failure and missing sash and frame components. The cast-iron molding details of the window surrounds were also in poor condition.

In 2013, the town received a matching grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission's Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund, and the rehabilitation began. The original blueprints and specifications, obtained from the National Archives and the Barnstable Historical Commission, allowed for the restoration to reflect accurately the original intent and design. Referencing these documents for guidance, all sash were removed, their paint carefully stripped, the sash repaired or partially replaced, and repainted. The glass was reinstalled and reglazed, and all hardware was cleaned and polished. The cast-iron molding details around the perimeter of the windows were repaired, primed, and painted. The original cast-iron balcony located on the second floor of the main façade was in fair condition, but the paint had faded and the connections to the brick masonry were deteriorated and in danger of failure. The entire balcony was removed and sandblasted, the metal was repaired and then painted to match the original color. The balcony's masonry connections were replaced with stainless-steel elements set into the brick. The brick masonry was in variable condition, with the lower half in good condition but the upper half in poor shape due to insensitive paint treatment. The restoration team determined that the best course of action was to remove the paint, repoint and repair damaged bricks and mortar, and then repaint with a more breathable paint treatment.

Customs operations have a history in Barnstable that extends back more than 200 years. The careful restoration of the exterior of the 1855 Customs House guarantees the building's architectural integrity into the future.

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This is the 39th year of MHC's Preservation Awards program. Projects are considered annually for awards in the categories of Rehabilitation and Restoration, Adaptive Reuse, Education and Outreach, Archaeology, Stewardship, and Landscape Preservation. Individuals are considered in the categories of Individual Lifetime Achievement and Local Preservationist. Secretary Galvin serves as the chair of the 17-member Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Secretary Galvin will present the awards at an afternoon ceremony on November 2, 2017, at the Massachusetts Archives Building at 220 Morrissey Blvd., Dorchester. The U. S. Custom House in Barnstable is one of 11 projects being honored.

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