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Secretary of the Commonwealth

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BARN HOUSE, CHILMARK, APPROVED FOR NOMINATION TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin is pleased to announce that the Massachusetts Historical Commission approved the Barn House in Chilmark for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places at its September 14, 2011, meeting. The nomination will be submitted to the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in Washington, DC, for final consideration and designation.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is dedicated to preserving the Commonwealth’s rich historic, architectural, archaeological, and cultural resources,” Secretary Galvin said. “Inclusion of Barn House in the National Register will help to preserve this reflection of Martha’s Vineyard’s heritage.”

The Barn House property, 451 South Road, includes a main house built ca. 1690, a 1786 English-style barn, open fields, extensive stone walls, and a number of small cabins. The main house, a 1 ½-story, post-and-beam dwelling, is one of Martha’s Vineyard’s oldest houses. The building is an example of vernacular domestic architecture from the earliest days of English settlement on the western end of the island, while the barn, fields, and stone walls recall the island’s agricultural past, when sheep farming was one of the inhabitants’ principal occupations. In addition, the property reflects the island’s growing identity, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as a summer retreat. In 1919, Chilmark Associates purchased the property for a communal summer residence—a use that continues to the present—and began to build small cabins on the property. Many of Chilmark Associates’ founders were social activists, and they created their seasonal residence on a new model that differed greatly from the ordinary summer estate. The barn was the center of the group’s life and provided a place for communal meals, evening discussions, and occasional theatrics. Members engaged in gardening and were expected, along with guests, to spend some time each day doing chores. “Barn House” was officially adopted as the property’s name in 1927, and Chilmark Associates grew as friends and family members were added. With few exceptions, the original members returned to Barn House every summer throughout their lives.

Barn House is one of 7 historic resources around the Commonwealth approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places by the Massachusetts Historical Commission at this meeting.

Secretary Galvin serves as Chairman of the 17-member board, which meets regularly and considers historic resources eligible for the National Register four times a year.

The National Register is the nation’s official listing of significant historic resources. In Massachusetts, there are over 70,000 properties listed in the National Register. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has been administering the National Register of Historic Places program in Massachusetts since 1966.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer and the State Archaeologist. It was established in 1963 to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth. Visit our website to learn more about the Commission’s programs (www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc).

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