

KnowHow #6

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE FROM THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Historic Properties Inventory Forms

1. What is an MHC inventory form?

Massachusetts Historical Commission inventory forms are the primary means for recording information on historic and archaeological resources in the Commonwealth. The forms are designed to record information on the location, appearance, and condition of these resources. They also allow the recording of information on the history of the resources, including their uses and the people and activities associated with them over time. Finally, inventory forms provide an evaluation of the significance of resources relative to similar properties and sites in a local or statewide context. Current photographs are attached to the forms, which also include a map showing the location of the resource.

2. Are there different types of inventory forms?

Yes. The MHC has developed standard inventory forms for ten categories of cultural resources: buildings, structures, objects, bridges, areas, parks and landscape features, burial grounds, streetscapes, historic archaeological sites, and prehistoric archaeological sites.

3. Who fills out MHC inventory forms?

Most inventory forms are completed by local historical commissions or by professional historic survey consultants working for local historical commissions. Inventory forms also are completed by municipal planning and community development offices and by local historic district commissions. Avocational and professional archaeologists complete inventory forms for historic and prehistoric archaeological sites. State and federal agencies complete inventory forms for historic properties under their ownership or properties that may be affected by their activities. Planners for both public and private projects subject to state or federal licensing, funding, or permitting may prepare inventory forms for historic properties potentially affected by the project. Historic preservation organizations, local historical societies, property owners, and other individuals and groups all regularly submit inventory forms for historic properties to the MHC.

4. Where are these inventory forms kept?

The Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth, also known as the statewide inventory, is a public record and therefore available for public use at the MHC office. Information on an estimated quarter-million historic properties is included in these files. The historic properties inventory forms are arranged by town and indexed by street address. In addition to the inventory forms, the statewide inventory files include information recorded on maps, in reports, and on computer database files.

Within local government, local historical commissions maintain a duplicate set of inventory forms, with original photographs, for their respective communities. Photocopies of local inventory forms often are available for public use at municipal libraries, offices, town halls, or other local repositories. Contact your local historical commission for more information on the location and availability of forms in your city or town. Remember that the MHC receives inventory information from many sources statewide, and may have forms and other materials not included in local files. Only forms on file with the MHC, however, are considered part of the Inventory of Historic and Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealth.

5. Can users search for specific information in the statewide inventory?

Yes. The MHC has developed a computer database, the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), that has significantly improved a user's ability to locate information in MHC's inventory files. MHC staff is able to search the historic properties database for a wide variety of attributes or combination of attributes, including (to name just a few) historic name, date of construction, architect's name, architectural style, historic use, or building material. Researchers can then use the resulting database reports to locate more detailed information on the inventory forms.

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6. In what other ways are inventory forms used and who uses them?

Inventory forms are the foundation of municipal historic preservation efforts, and local historical commissions should keep other local government boards and officials aware of the availability of the inventory as a planning tool. Local inventories support the establishment of specific historic preservation tools, such as local historic districts and demolition review measures, and aid in their administration. Information from inventory forms finds its way into local classrooms, walking tours, historic marker programs, local comprehensive plans, and publications. Through their use, inventory forms help to raise public appreciation for and understanding of historic properties and sites.

Inventory forms also are the fundamental research and planning document supporting the MHC's efforts to evaluate and protect cultural resources. At the MHC, project planners and MHC staff consult the inventory files to determine whether historic resources are present in a project area and, if so, to assess the potential impacts of projects on historic resources. MHC staff also uses the inventory to determine whether historic properties are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; information from the inventory can be the basis for preparing a National Register nomination. Historians, students, property owners, realtors, and journalists are among the users who consult inventory forms regularly at the MHC. Location scouts even use the inventory to find possible settings for film and television shoots!

7. Does completing an inventory form place a property in the State or National Registers of Historic Places?

No. The inventory form is simply a record of information on a historic property. It does not give a property any official historic designation. Properties are listed in the State Register of Historic Places only when they have received one of several historic designations established under local, state, or federal law. A list of these designations is available from the MHC. Properties are listed in the National Register of Historic Places through a multiple step nomination process

administered by the MHC and the National Park Service. For further information, see MHC's *Know How #3: What You Need to Know About Listing in the National Register*.

8. Does inclusion in the statewide inventory place any restrictions on a property or its use?

No. However, inventory forms may be used to implement various locally adopted historic preservation mechanisms. Local demolition review, site plan and design review, and zoning overlays may cite the local inventory as a basis for identifying properties that are subject to the provisions of the ordinance or bylaw.

9. Where can I get inventory forms or help in preparing an inventory form?

First contact your local historical commission or the MHC to determine whether an inventory form has already been completed for the property in question. If not, ask your local historical commission for assistance in completing a form. Detailed instructions for completing all inventory forms are included in MHC's *Historic Properties Survey Manual*, on file with your local historical commission, and also available from the State Bookstore (617) 727-2834. Blank inventory forms and instructions for completing specific forms are available from the MHC.

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