

National Historic Landmark

Documentation for:

George Perkins Marsh

Boyhood Home NHL

Woodstock, VT

Date of NHL Designation:

June 11, 1967

NRIS:

67000023

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM
(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Vermont
COUNTY: Windsor
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

1. NAME

COMMON: Marsh-Billings House

AND/OR HISTORIC: George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: 54 Elm Street (Vermont Route 12)

CITY OR TOWN: Woodstock CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: (at large)

STATE: Vermont CODE: 050 COUNTY: Windsor CODE: 027

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)
YES: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No			

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: M/M Laurance S. Rockefeller

STREET AND NUMBER: 30 Rockefeller Plaza, Room 5600

CITY OR TOWN: New York STATE: New York CODE: 036

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Town Clerk's Office

STREET AND NUMBER: 29 Central Street

CITY OR TOWN: Woodstock STATE: Vermont CODE: 050

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Architectural Survey of the Ottaqueechee Valley

DATE OF SURVEY: 1971 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Ottaqueechee Regional Planning and Development Commission

STREET AND NUMBER: 3 Central Street

CITY OR TOWN: Woodstock STATE: Vermont CODE: 050

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Vermont
COUNTY: Windsor
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE
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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

In 1805, Charles Marsh began construction at Woodstock, Vermont, of the house which would be the boyhood home of his son, George Perkins Marsh. Approximately 50 by 40 feet in size with a rear ell, the house had an east, five-bay front with central entrance and five-bay flanks with another central entrance on the south side. Two stories in height, it had a gabled roof with the ridge parallel to the front elevation.

The Marsh Home and the 246.6 acre farm of which it was the center were purchased in 1869 by Frederick Billings, who began immediately to alter the building. Billings added a large wing at the southeast corner, changed the fenestration to three front bays, and raised the height a full story by adding a mansard roof. In 1885 Billings employed architect Henry Hudson Holley to design further extensive additions and alterations; the house is now an excellent example of the latter's work.

In its present form, the Marsh Home, known locally as the Marsh-Billings House, is a large, rambling country mansion; 3-1/2 stories in height, it measures approximately 78 by 129 feet, excluding the porches. To all appearances, the house is a structure in the Queen Anne style of the 1880's, in which numerous gables and bay windows, off-sets, broad porches with lattice and spindle ornament, upper loggias, and tall chimneys with ornamental brickwork combine to create a highly irregular and picturesque effect. The only exterior elements of the house which appear to date from its original construction are portions of the brick masonry on the front and side elevations to a point above the second story window lintels.

The interiors of the house, which date entirely from 1869 or later, are notable for their fine craftsmanship. The reception room in the north-east corner is finished in mahogany. The dining room, on the north side beyond a cross hall, has a richly carved oak fireplace signed "I.K.," a built-in sideboard, oak panelled dado, and elaborate parquet flooring. The central hall has an oak panelled ceiling, staircase with spindle work balustrade, oak dado, and built-in hat stand. The music room, at the southeast corner of the house, has two fireplaces with Tiffany tiling and a high oak dado above which is heavily embossed wallpaper in imitation of tooled leather. The library, at the southwest corner, is finished in walnut with burlled veneers and ebonized trim. Stained glass windows in the music room and library are of excellent quality. The house retains many of its original lighting fixtures and quantities of furniture, paintings, and objets de virtue from the Billings period. The present owners have taken great care to preserve the interiors as they were c. 1885.

Included in the National Historic Landmark designation for the George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home are several subsidiary buildings and some 40 acres of land located on the lower slopes of Mt. Tom (representing only a portion of the extensive Woodstock estate assembled by Billings). With the exception of approximately one acre at the intersection of North and River Streets (see sketch map), this property is part of the

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

5. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1805, 1869, 1885

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | _____ |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Incorporated within this rambling 3-1/2 story brick house is the smaller 2-story house, begun in 1805, which was the boyhood home of George Perkins Marsh. A distinguished scholar in many fields and a dedicated public servant, Marsh is most significant as the author of Man and Nature or the Physical Geography as Modified by Human Behavior, published in 1864. Through his writing, Marsh opened up an area which had previously been of little concern--the preservation of man's natural environment--and provided the intellectual stimulus for the conservation movement in the United States. In brief, as David C. Coyle states in his book Conservation, "Marsh's volume(s) give a foretaste of practically all modern ideas about conservation."

Additional historical and architectural values are attached to the Marsh Boyhood Home as a result of its becoming the home of Frederick Billings. In 1869, Billings acquired the home and made extensive alterations then and later which have transformed it into an imposing residence in the Queen Anne style of the 1880's. Frederick Billings was a lawyer, railroad executive, and philanthropist. He was an original partner in the Northern Pacific Railroad, became its president in 1879, and financed its completion from Dakota to the Columbia River.

Maintained in excellent condition, the George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home is privately owned and not open to the public.

Historical Background

George Perkins Marsh was born in Woodstock, Vermont, in 1801 (his birthplace is no longer extant). Four years later, his father, the distinguished lawyer Charles Marsh, began construction of the house which was Marsh's boyhood home. Marsh entered Dartmouth College in 1816 and was graduated in 1820 with highest honors.

After teaching school for a time, Marsh turned to law and in 1825 was admitted to the Vermont bar. A member of the Whig party, he won election to Congress in 1834 and began a long and distinguished career of public service. President Taylor appointed him United States Minister to Turkey in 1849, and President Lincoln made him the first United States Minister to Italy, where he served with distinction for the remaining 22 years of his life.

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dana, Henry S., History of Woodstock, Vermont (Boston, 1889).
 Malone, Dumas, ed., Dictionary of American Biography (New York, 1943; 21 volumes).
 Marsh, Caroline Crane., The Life and Letters of George Perkins Marsh (Syracuse, 1888).
 Teagle, Rhoda. Woodstock Then and Now (Woodstock, 1957).

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY		O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES	
CORNER	U.T.M.		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE
NW	18.699980.4833930		Degrees	Degrees
NE	18.700380.4833850		Minutes	Minutes
SE	18.700220.4833800		Seconds	Seconds
SW	18.699700.4833860			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: c. 40 acres

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by John D. McDermott, Historian, 5/26/67

ORGANIZATION: Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service DATE: 12/9/74

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L Street NW

CITY OR TOWN: Washington 20240 STATE: District of Columbia CODE: 011

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Name _____

Title _____

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Date _____

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Designated: 6/11/67 date

Boundary Certified: 9-17-75 date

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Date _____

ATTEST: 9/25/75 date

Boundary Affirmed: 9/25/75 date

Director, OAMP

Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE	Vermont
COUNTY	Windsor
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

(Number all entries)

7. Description: (1) George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home

246.6 Marsh farm acquired by Billings in 1869 and is bordered along River and Elm Streets by a stone wall erected for Charles Marsh in 1815. The property was landscaped by R. M. Copeland immediately after Billings' purchase and still retains the character of a 19th century rural estate.

The Marsh Home stands amid rolling lawns some 50 yards above Elm Street (Vermont Route 12); though close to the highway, the building is effectively screened from it by mature hedges and trees. Southwest of the house is a sunken formal garden walled with coursed fieldstone. Beyond the garden is a two-story wooden belvedere in Swiss chalet style; built about 1869, it fronts two other structures, a greenhouse and a bowling alley (formerly also a greenhouse). North of the Marsh Home stands a 2-1/2 story wooden stable constructed about 1885. Further north is a shingled 1-1/2 story cottage, now used as a caretaker's residence. Beyond this relatively open area, the property is covered by mature forest broken by winding carriage lanes and bridle paths.

Boundaries of the National Historic Landmark: beginning at the intersection of the Woodstock Town Line with the mid-line of Elm Street (Vermont Route 12); thence running east, south and west in a curving line along the mid-line of Elm Street to its intersection with the mid-line of River Street; thence running west and south in a curving line along the mid-line of River Street to its intersection with the mid-line of North Street; thence running west-north-west along the mid-line of North Street for its first 100 feet and thereafter following the same line extended to its intersection with the Woodstock Town Line; thence running north-north-east along the Woodstock Town Line to the point of beginning.

The 1 1/2-story frame and clapboard house located at the intersection of North and River Streets is included in these boundaries for convenience in definition but does not contribute to the national significance of the landmark property.

STATE Vermont	
COUNTY Windsor	
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM
 (NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)
 (Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance: (1) George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home

Marsh formulated many of his ideas on the conservation problem during the 15 years he served in the House of Representatives. At the time that his first monumental work was published in 1864, with the Civil War drawing to a close and the final western push about to begin, the United States was in need of a land philosopher who could provide an agenda for land rescue and restoration. With the publication of Man and Nature or the Physical Geography as Modified by Human Behavior, Marsh became that philosopher, and his book became the intellectual bible of the Conservation Movement.

An innate naturalist, Marsh objected to the wanton destruction of natural resources on the same philosophic grounds as Thoreau. He was "forest born," and he once wrote in his youth that "the trees, the flowers, the wild animals were to me persons not things." Through the use of historical examples, Marsh demonstrated in his study that Americans, acting under the myth of superabundance, were carelessly destroying their forest, woodlands, and other gifts of nature, much as the ancient and classical countries of the Mediterranean had done. He predicted that man in the 19th century would share the fate of fallen ancient empires, unless he was prepared to act as a moral instead of a destructive agent. Marsh was not a negativist, however. He called for such positive remedial steps as the planning of windfalls to protect the soil, the preservation of forests to aid in water conservation, and an end to the destruction of wildlife.

Undoubtedly influenced by the practical work of Frederick Law Olmsted, Marsh, in a second revised edition of his book, published in 1874, added a section discussing the public park idea. He asserted that because of the rapid deterioration of the northern cities from the blight of industrialization, "Some easily accessible region of American soil [should] remain as far as possible in its primitive condition . . . A garden of recreation for the lovers of nature and an asylum where indigenous trees . . . plants . . . [and] beasts may dwell and perpetuate their kinds."

George Perkins Marsh died in 1882, not living to see his ideas translated into action.

The second significant resident of the Marsh Home, Frederick Billings, was born on September 27, 1823, at Royalton, Vermont. Graduating from the State University at Burlington, he studied law for two years. When the gold fever struck, he moved to California; instead of mining, however, he opened a law office, from which he made considerable money when the inevitable demand for legal arbitration occurred. His law firm soon became the leading one in San Francisco.

After returning from a trip to Europe, Billings attempted to resume his San Francisco law practice. Ill health prevented him from doing so and, in

(continued)

STATE	
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

**(NATIONAL HISTORIC INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM
LANDMARKS)**

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance: (2) George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home

1869, he purchased the Marsh estate in Woodstock. Over the next 20 years, and after 1885 with the assistance of architect Henry Hudson Holley, Billings made extensive alterations which transformed the house into an imposing residence in the Queen Anne style.

Billings became interested in railroads in 1866 on a trip to the Pacific Northwest. He became one of the 12 original partners in the Northern Pacific Railroad Company. The company operated with great success until the panic of 1873. After gaining its presidency, Billings reorganized the unstable firm and financed the completion of the road from Dakota to the Columbia River.

In 1881, Billings was forced from the presidency during a series of complicated intra-company power maneuvers with fellow railroad magnate Henry Villard, under whom the road was completed. However, as Villard readily admitted in his Memoirs, the credit for making the completion possible belonged to Billings.

His career as a railroad executive finished, Billings devoted the last 9 years of his life to philanthropy. The University of Vermont, Amherst College, and the Congregational Church of Woodstock, among others, benefited from his generosity. Billings died in Woodstock on September 30, 1890.

The Marsh Home is now owned by Laurance S. Rockefeller and his wife, Mary French Rockefeller, a direct descendant of Billings; used as a vacation home, the house is not open to the public.



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM**

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph)

STATE Vermont	
COUNTY Windsor	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1. NAME

COMMON: Marsh-Billings House
AND/OR HISTORIC: George Perkins Marsh Boyhood Home

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
54 Elm Street (Vermont Route 12)
CITY OR TOWN:
Woodstock
STATE: Vermont CODE 050 COUNTY: Windsor CODE 037

3. PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT: Polly M. Rettig, Landmark Review Project
DATE OF PHOTO: September 1974
NEGATIVE FILED AT: Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service
1100 L Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20240

4. IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.
Front and side elevations of Marsh Home taken from northeast.



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PHOTO CREDIT: Polly M. Rettig, Landmark Review Project
DATE OF PHOTO: September 1974
NEGATIVE FILED AT: Historic Sites Survey, NPS, Washington, D.C. 20240

4. IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.
Rear and side elevations of Marsh Home taken from southwest.



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CITY OR TOWN:
Woodstock

STATE: Vermont	CODE 050	COUNTY: Windsor	CODE 027
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3. PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT: Polly M. Rettig, Landmark Review Project, NPS
DATE OF PHOTO: September 1974
NEGATIVE FILED AT: Historic Sites Survey, NPS, Washington, D.C. 20240

4. IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.
View from southwest, foreground---greenhouse and belvedere,
background--Marsh Home.