

# FORM F – STRUCTURE

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

20-567 Salem BEV.915

## Photograph



**Town/City:** Beverly

**Place** (*neighborhood or village*): Prospect Hill

**Address or Location:** Rear Madison Avenue

**Name:** Beverly Powder House

**Ownership:**  Public  Private

**Type of Structure** (*check one*):

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> boat or ship             | <input type="checkbox"/> pound                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> canal                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> powder house |
| <input type="checkbox"/> carousel                 | <input type="checkbox"/> street                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dam                      | <input type="checkbox"/> tower                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fort                     | <input type="checkbox"/> tunnel                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gate                     | <input type="checkbox"/> wall                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> kiln                     | <input type="checkbox"/> windmill                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lighthouse               |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other ( <i>specify</i> ) |  |

**Date of Construction:** 1808

**Source:** "Beverly Powder House Historic Structures Report." Adams & Smith LLC, 2018.

**Architect, Engineer or Designer:** Unknown

**Materials:** Brick

**Alterations** (*with dates*): None, apart from some replacement of deteriorated elements.

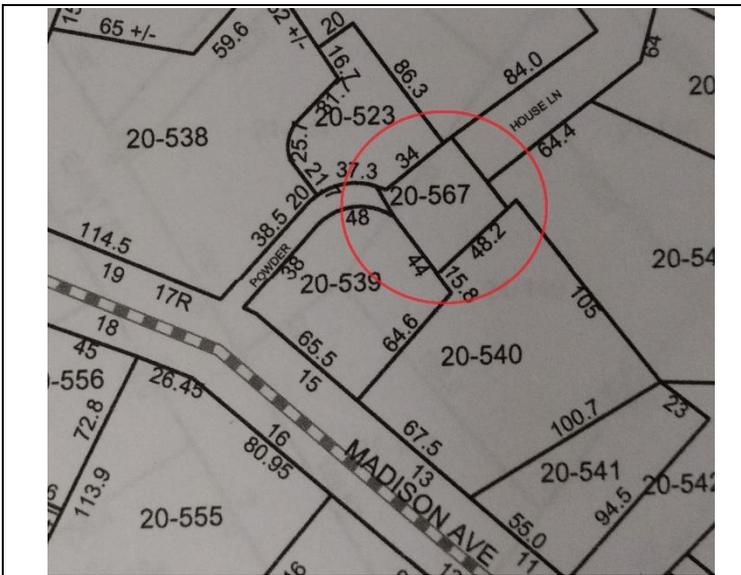
**Condition:** Good

**Moved:**  no  yes **Date:**

**Acreage:** 0.037

**Setting:** Hillside ("Powder Hill")

## Locus Map



**Recorded by:** Emily Hutchings

**Organization:** City of Beverly

**Date** (*month / year*): 7/2020

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

## DESIGN ASSESSMENT

*Describe important design features and evaluate in terms of other structures within the community.*

The Beverly Powder House is a typical example of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century powder house, and many features of its construction are found in other town powder houses in the region. Like many others, it was built in what was open pasture land on the outskirts of the center of Beverly, distant from houses that might be damaged by an accidental explosion. It is a single story structure, octagonal in plan, 17'-6" across and about 12'-6" from grade to the eaves. The foundations are large pieces of gray granite running the entire 6'-3" width of the facets of the octagon, over rubble stone that accommodates the irregularities of the ledge below. The walls are built of waterstruck red brick typically measuring 7-1/2" to 7-3/4" long, 3-5/8" to 3-3/4" wide, and 2" to 2-3/16" high. The walls are 4 wythes thick, with indirect air passages and ventilation holes that release humidity to the exterior to keep the interior dry. The exterior bricks forming the corners were specially cast to conform to the angle of the corner and are longer than the other bricks. 7-3/4" on the longer side, 3-3/4" to 4" on the shorter side, and 2-1/8" high. Horizontal mortar joints are typically 3/16" to 1/4" high, and head joints are 1/4" to 5/16" wide. The mortar joints on the interior faces appear somewhat wider, which may simply be a lack of tooling of the joints. The exterior is 51 courses, 10'-3-1/2", high from top of foundation, with one course hidden behind the wood fascia. The exterior and interior faces are laid up in a running bond, with a row of headers every 7<sup>th</sup> course. A single metal clad wood door with strap hinges that provides entry to the structure probably dates to the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the original door was probably similar. There are no windows. The original door was fitted with a rim lock based on evidence in the remaining door frame; since the 1890s at least photographs have shown the door secured with a long metal hasp bar and padlock. The brick walls are surmounted by a brick dome spanning the width of the interior chamber. Above it is an eight sided pyramidal roof on wood framing with a 12 in 12 pitch, originally finished with wood shingles and currently with asphalt shingles of an unknown date. Currently there is a modern 6x8 wood plate on top of the masonry, faced with a simple wood 2x8 fascia, spaced out about 3/4", with a crown molding under the bottom course of shingles. These elements are modern, but the original wood plate and trim were probably similar.

The interior has a wood floor on 3x3 sleepers laid on gravel and rubble fill, with 1-3/4" thick planks 9" to 14" wide. The planks are fastened to the sleepers with roughly square wood pegs. The walls originally had vertical board linings secured to horizontal wood nailing strips built into the masonry; remnants of the lining remain adjacent to the door. The locations of the nailing strips indicate that the wood lining extended the full height of the interior brick walls. This woodwork was installed as a spark preventative measure to cover any exposed brick, and it was assembled with wood pegs to avoid protruding nails that might cause sparks if struck by a metal object, such as a metal container or shoe nail. Regulations of the period required the removal of shoes prior to entry. Wooden shelves probably lined the walls, sized to accommodate standard powder kegs, similar to the surviving shelving in the Marblehead powder house. The brick dome ceiling has layers of mortar parging and paint, indicating that there was not a wooden ceiling, and a cement plaster at the base of the dome filled the transitions from the dome to the wood lining of the octagon. The surviving plaster shows the imprint of the tops the sheathing boards that terminated at the base of the dome. There is no evidence in the brickwork of any pockets that would have held the ends of beams if there had originally been a wood ceiling.

The exterior shows evidence of paint and parging on the brick, and late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century photographs show that the Powder House was white for much of its history. Examination in the field finds remnants of white paint over a cementitious white parging, and it is known that the building was repainted as part of repair work in 1928. Based on the earliest photograph, the exterior had been parged and possibly also painted over the parging by the later 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whether a parging was used when it was originally constructed is not known.

The roof had asphalt shingles installed in 1928; these have been replaced at least once since then, and the roof framing and decking has been extensively repaired. It is clear from older photographs, however, that it was originally a wood shingle roof, and the wood shingles appear to have been installed with any flashing hidden under the shingles and the field shingles simply

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butted at the hips. The plain wood spire appears to be old, if not original. It seems proportionally smaller than the spire in historic photographs, which could be the result of decay at the top or inaccurate replacement. While there is no extant evidence, it may have supported a lightning rod.<sup>1</sup>

An extensive renovation in 2020 restored the brick masonry and the metal clad door and rebuilt the wood shingle roof. On the interior, the wood floor was reconstructed, original wood paneling around the door was reinstalled, and the wood lining was recreated on two sides for interpretive purposes. The exterior was seeded to recall the original pasture.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Explain the history of the structure and how it relates to the development of the community.*

The first location the Town of Beverly used to store gunpowder was a special powder room built into the basement of the second meeting house in Beverly. The meeting house was built in 1682, while the powder room was built into the basement in 1727 after the Town determined there was a need for a communal powder storage structure to safely secure gunpowder and shot for residents and the local militia. At the time, the meeting house was considered the safest place for the powder room due to the fact that no fire was allowed in the building. However, the powder was not placed in the building without concern – the congregation left the meeting house whenever a thunderstorm occurred. When the Town established a need for a greater space to store gunpowder, a powder house was built on the south side of the Common in 1767. Although this powder house is mentioned in historical accounts, no archaeological evidence of its remains, nor record of its exact location, has been found.

Around 1806-7 the Town determined that the 1767 powder house was located too close to the center of town, and planned to build a new powder house in a more remote location. The Beverly Powder House was built in 1808 on land owned by Nathan Dane. On June 23, 1809, Nathan Dane sold the hilltop parcel of land around the new Powder House to the Town. The Town paid thirty dollars to Mr. Dane and ten cents to Polly Dane, Nathan Dane's wife, for the square parcel about 1700 square feet in size, plus a "convenient cartway, not to be fenced" in a 12-foot wide right of way down the hill to Essex Street. Additionally, the deed included a term prohibiting the land from being used for anything other than a powder house.

As rifles and bullets replaced flintlock muskets and powder horns in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Powder House was no longer used to store gunpowder and shot. An undated photo – although thought to show prior to 1893 – shows the land around the Powder House as undeveloped. However, in the 1880s and 1890s the Prospect Hill Realty Trust subdivided and began to develop the land as housing; the lots surrounding the Powder House were all developed by the 1920s. The Powder House had begun to deteriorate by that time, but in 1927 the Board of Aldermen agreed to allow the Beverly Historical Society to assume the maintenance of the building. In 1928, the Beverly Historical Society repaired the building, including repainting the exterior and replacing the wood shingle roof with red asbestos shingles. Since the 1928 repairs, there is evidence that some repairs were completed in the 1970s, including the rebuilding of the roof with some new rafters, plates, and decking, and the reshingling of the roof with asphalt shingles.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Adams & Smith LLC. 2018. "Beverly Powder House Historic Structures Report."

Brown, Ed. 2013. "Beverly Powder House: A Well-Regulated Militia." Beverly Historical Commission.

Essex County Registry of Deeds. "Deed of Sale from Nathan Dane to the Town of Beverly, June 23, 1809." Book 186, page 280.

Meeting Notes for the Beverly Historical Society, 13 July 1927, 11 January 1928, 11 April 1928, 11 July 1928.

Stone, Edwin M. 1843. *History of Beverly*. Boston, James Munroe and Company, page 247, 318

<sup>1</sup> Text is based on the "Beverly Powder House Historic Structures Report" by Adams & Smith LLC (2018)

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**HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS**



Earliest known photograph, before 1893 (?) (Beverly Historical Society)

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Powder House and site before development of Madison Street, date unknown

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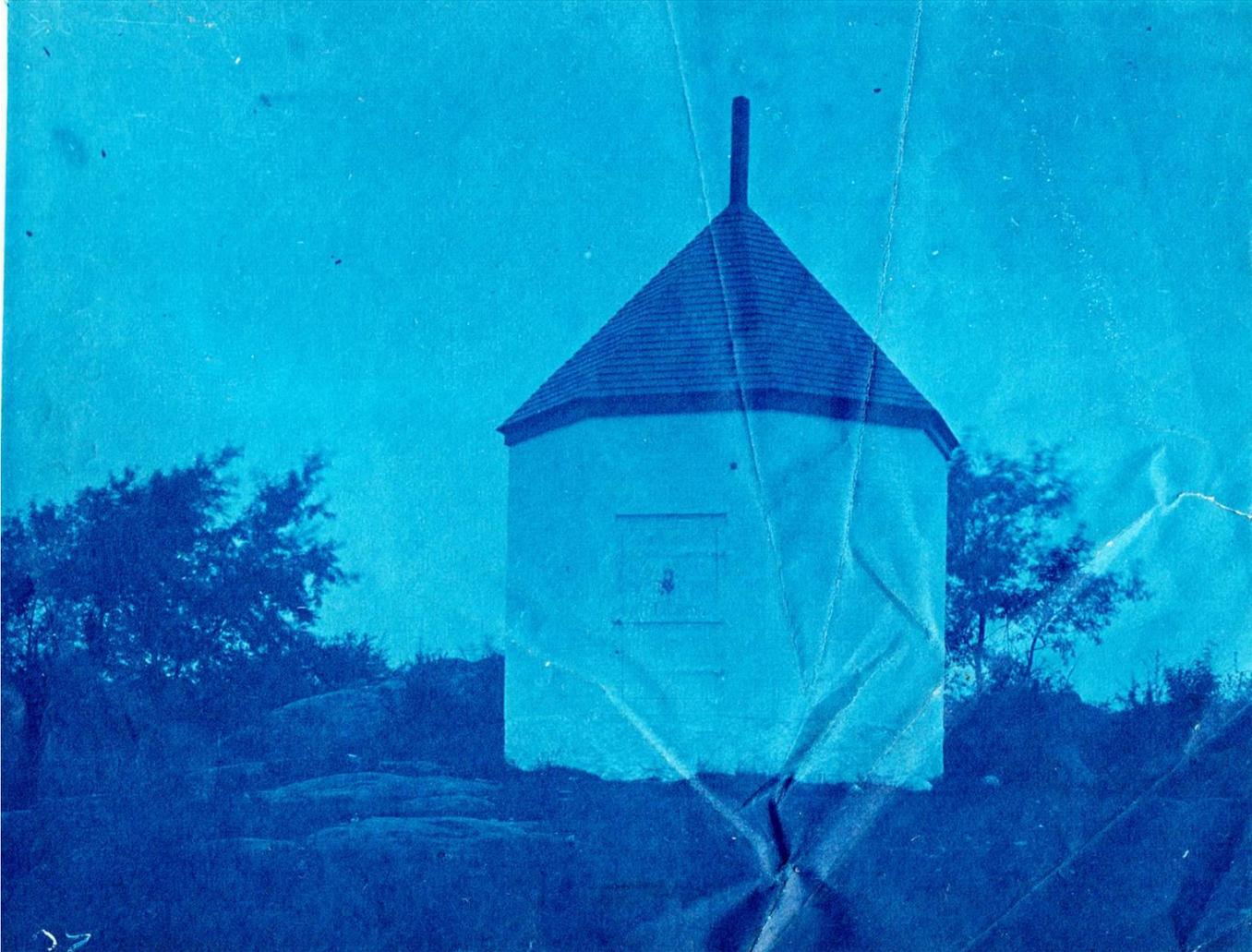
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Cyanotype photograph, date unknown (Beverly Historical Society)

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Powder House 1907 (Beverly Historical Society)

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Powder House c. 1907

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HABS survey photo, Frank O. Branzetti photographer, May 1941

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**2018 PHOTOGRAPHS**



Southeast view (Adams & Smith LLC, 2018)



Southwest view (Adams & Smith LLC, 2018)

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Face 1 (Adams & Smith LLC, 2018)



Interior with door (Adams & Smith LLC, 2018)

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Southeast view (Adams & Smith, July 2020)



Southwest view (Adams & Smith July 2020)

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Entrance door (Adams & Smith July 2020)



Interior (Adams & Smith July 2020)

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Interior western section of dome (Adams & Smith LLC, 2018)



Interior eastern section of dome (Adams & Smith LLC, 2018)

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Restored dome and wall paneling (Adams & Smith July 2020)

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**National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form**

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible       Eligible **only** in a historic district
- Contributing to a potential historic district       Potential historic district

Criteria:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**

Criteria Considerations:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**     **E**     **F**     **G**

Statement of Significance by Emily Hutchings

*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

The Beverly Powder House serves as an important aspect and reminder of Beverly’s Colonial and Federal era and early United States military history. The building appears to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C, at a local level in terms of association with Beverly’s military history, and in architecture. Under Criterion A, the Beverly Powder House is associated with Beverly’s military history, particularly in terms of the events leading up to and during the War of 1812. Under Criterion C, the Powder House is an embodiment of the style of architecture used to construct powder houses in the Federal Period, is the only extant octagonal-sided powder house found in New England, and one of the few in New England retaining elements of its original wood interior.