

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

BEAUPORT (Sleeper-McCann House)

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Beauport

Other Name/Site Number: Sleeper-McCann House; Little Beauport; Sleeper, Henry Davis, House

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 75 Eastern Point Boulevard

Not for publication: __

City/Town: Gloucester

Vicinity: __

State: MA

County: Essex

Code: 009

Zip Code: 01930

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: __

Public-State: __

Public-Federal: __

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: __

Site: __

Structure: __

Object: __

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

4

__

__

__

4

Noncontributing

2 buildings

__ sites

__ structures

__ objects

2 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ Entered in the National Register
- ___ Determined eligible for the National Register
- ___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
- ___ Removed from the National Register
- ___ Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic

Sub: Single Dwelling

Current: Recreation and Culture

Sub: Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: LATE VICTORIAN: Shingle Style

Materials:

Foundation: Stone, Concrete

Walls: Stone, Brick, Wood Shingle

Roof: Wood Shingle

Other: Brick (Chimneys)

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Located on Cape Ann in Massachusetts, Beauport is a large two-story Shingle-style house perched on a rocky ledge overlooking Gloucester Harbor. Henry Davis Sleeper (1878-1934), a nationally-noted antiquarian, collector, and interior decorator, began Beauport in 1907 and expanded it repeatedly. In consultation with Sleeper, local architect Halfdan M. Hanson (1884-1952) drew up the plans. By the end of his life, Sleeper had enlarged Beauport to fifty-six rooms and filled it with a lifetime collection of American architectural salvage, period furniture, glassware, prints, books, tole, Chinese export porcelain, clocks, flags, ceramics, hooked rugs, lighting devices, pewter, scrimshaw, shipcarving, silhouettes, textiles, tinware, tools, toys, wall coverings, wooden ware, wrought iron, and other collectibles, in distinctive arrangements, within period and theme rooms. Beauport and the smaller contributing buildings, a gatehouse, tool shed, and garage also built by Sleeper, are situated on a single lot.

The house borders Gloucester Harbor to the west and the service buildings, connected by brick walls, front on Eastern Point Boulevard, a private road to the east.¹ In 1929 Sleeper purchased a triangular section of a vacant lot fronting directly opposite Beauport on Eastern Point Boulevard. The subsequent owners of Beauport, Charles and Helena Woolworth McCann, preserved Sleeper's house and collections. Their children donated Beauport to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) in 1942. SPNEA converted the gatehouse to an entrance booth and the empty lot across Eastern Point Boulevard to parking and, in 1956, erected the single noncontributing building, a caretaker's house. In the 1990s SPNEA adapted the tool shed for public restrooms and began restoring the grounds and gardens to Sleeper's specifications. Today Beauport is operated as a seasonal house museum, open to the public during the spring, summer, and fall. The house and outbuildings, the distinctive interior spaces and settings designed by Sleeper, and the important collections all remain remarkably intact.

Beauport is on Boston's "North Shore," in the Eastern Point section of Gloucester, a summer resort community at the tip of a peninsula that separates Gloucester Harbor from the Atlantic Ocean. Sleeper borrowed the name for his house from Samuel Champlain, who in 1604 mapped Gloucester Harbor and named it "le Beau Port," or Handsome Harbor. Beauport features spectacular views of the mouth of the harbor and beyond, including the Boston skyline twenty-five miles to the southwest. Eastern Point was established as a privately-owned subdivision in 1887 and over the next three decades became a popular summer resort. The immediate neighborhood is still comprised of large single-family "cottages," some, like Beauport, on relatively small lots. Much of the neighborhood is built directly upon granite outcrops, which protrude above the surface of the lawns in many places. One unfortunate change in the neighborhood occurred in the winter of 2000-2001, when the Caroline Sinkler house ("Wrong Roof") immediately to the south of Beauport burned to the ground.

The Beauport lot slopes downward from Eastern Point Boulevard, dropping fifteen feet in elevation from the tree-lined street to the rocky ledge that juts above the water. The primarily T-shaped house occupies the northern two-thirds of the western half of the lot. The longest axis of the building runs north-south, optimizing western exposures and views of Gloucester Harbor. A secondary axis runs east-west at the northern end of the house, extending living spaces out

¹The Beauport lot is aligned to the harbor, not compass directions. The "north" façade actually faces north-northeast. Directions have been simplified throughout this narrative.

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towards the harbor and (primarily) service spaces toward the street. The northern house wall extends to within inches of the adjoining property, which is screened by a high stone wall. A terrace and gardens wrap the house on its western and southern sides, again maximizing exposures to the sun and Gloucester Harbor and creating outdoor "rooms," terraces with balustrades. The main front entrance is located in the middle of the eastern façade, in a recessed courtyard bay. Three later wings extended Beauport across the lawn to the east, the only remaining free space on the small lot.

Expanded and renovated over the course of three decades, Beauport is irregular in shape and massing, creating picturesque vignettes rather than a single encompassing view. The house is generally two stories (although there is one third-story room, a bathroom above the Byron Room), with crawl spaces and a partial basement below. The design emphasizes a pleasing sequence of exterior details and interior rooms rather than clear overall exterior massing.

The exterior of Beauport changed repeatedly during the period of significance. Early photographs and Halfdan Hanson's architectural drawings show that Beauport began as a wood-framed, L-shaped, Shingle-style house, covered with stucco on the first story and shingled walls on the second. The steeply-pitched, cross-gabled, shingle roof, punctuated at irregular intervals by gabled roof dormers, flowed down over the second story and out onto several first-story shed extensions. Shed-roof extensions also served as awnings over some second-story windows. Under Sleeper's direction, the stucco and most of the shingle was engulfed in new wings of brick, stone, and shingle. In 1913 Sleeper reinforced the stone foundation with concrete and covered most of the remaining stucco with brick veneer.

The current appearance of Beauport is the cumulative result of the many changes made by Sleeper from 1907 to 1934. Two of the later wings terminate in round towers, and numerous one- and two-story window bays project from the walls. The building's exterior walls, virtually unchanged since Sleeper's death, are primarily brick in English bond, irregularly-coursed uncut fieldstone, and coursed brown shingle. The coursed wood shingle roof is a maze of intersecting planes and forms; segments could be identified variously as gabled, cross-gabled, shed, jerkin, and gable-on-hip. The dormers are both roof and wall, of varying sizes, and primarily gabled or hip on gable. The roof is further articulated with a turret, cupola, Gothic dovecote, weathervanes, and six brick chimneys in varying styles with clay or brick chimneypots. A decorative roof balustrade tops the Indian Room Porch. The northern end of the house has a central skylit well that provides light to several interior rooms.

Beauport has an equally wide variety of porches, bays, and windows designed to maximize sunlight and harbor views. The main east and south entrances both have Gothic-arched entrance porches. The south and west façades feature banks of windows, projecting balconies, and a cloister. On the first story, these include (from south to north) the South Gallery, Sun Porch, China Passage, Cloister, and the Golden Step Room, with its long diamond-paned window which drops into the wall below. The second story features smaller, more intimate spaces, such as the balconies and window seats in the Strawberry Hill Room, Music Room, Indian Room, and Mariner's Room, as well as the three-sided Indian Room Porch and the shaded open porch of the North Gallery. The southern exposures of the eastern wings have large rectangular bays, configured as cozy window seats in the Franklin Game Room and the Linebrook Parish Room, and a sunny wall of windows in the Belfry Chamber. The east-facing window seat of the Cogswell Room shares its view of the entrance courtyard with a balcony in the Strawberry Hill

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Room above. The many window frames in Beauport are fixed and casement, single, grouped, or banded, and include Palladian, Gothic, bullseye, or fanlight designs. The windows feature multiple small panes set in rectangular and diamond patterns.

Exterior wall decorations abound. Buff-colored half-timbering is set in brick and exposed along with hewn brackets and beams (mainly in the entrance courtyard). Carved wooden heads are decorative corbels for jettied second-story walls, beams, and porch roofs. Sleeper reportedly salvaged some of these from French buildings destroyed in the First World War. Decorative wooden shutters, some painted white, flank numerous windows and contrast with the dark brick and shingle walls. These shutters have small decorative cutouts of roses, thistles, and shamrocks, emblems, respectively, of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Beauport has its own unique architectural style, borrowing from Shingle, Queen Anne, Colonial, and various European revival styles, but it has the greatest affinity with the massing, plan, and detailing of Shingle style. Henry Davis Sleeper was quite familiar with Shingle style, which came to maturity in the work of Boston area architects in the 1880s.² J. Henry Sleeper, his father, commissioned Boston architect Arthur Little to build the family a summer house in Marblehead, and the resulting Shingle-style house (1888-1889) was one of Little's most successful. Beauport was built as a replacement for the Marblehead house, which the Sleeper family sold in 1902. In a letter to neighbor A. Piatt Andrew, reprinted in *Beauport Chronicle*, Sleeper indicated anxiety over a 1908 visit to Beauport by Arthur Little and his wife.³ However, Arthur Little expressed great admiration for Sleeper's designs and encouraged him to continue. Certainly the Shingle style was popular for high-end housing in New England seaside resorts of the period, such as Eastern Point.

Shingle-style elements of Beauport include its fluid exterior lines and interior floor plan, general horizontality, fieldstone foundation, and massive shingle roof which flows downward over the porches and walls. Sleeper muted this effect somewhat by replacing the first-story stucco walls and some of the second-story shingle walls with brick veneer, but enhanced it by adding fieldstone towers and wings. The multi-paned casement windows, often grouped together, and the occasional Palladian window are also consistent with Shingle style. The Norman Book Tower and several Gothic-arched windows and doorways are distinctive Sleeper additions. Sleeper filled the interior with architectural salvage from Colonial houses, but the overall effect of Beauport, at least on the exterior, is closest to Shingle.

The complex exterior footprint and massing of Beauport is a product of the labyrinthine interior plan. Interior circulation is sequenced, with rooms accessed from other rooms rather than by linear hallways; the only true linear hallway is that which serves the isolated second-floor compound of sleeping rooms for domestic servants. The two-story China Trade Room divides the second-floor family rooms into two separate clusters that are not interconnected. The complicated plan, a product of the house's progressive construction, is intentional, its leisurely approach fitting for a summer house. The layout allows the visitor to linger over the arrangements in each room, to experience the contrasts between rooms, and to be open to

²The definitive study of the Shingle style is Vincent J. Scully, Jr., *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style: Architectural Theory and Design from Downing to the Origins of Wright* (1955; Rev. ed., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971). Though of a later date than that usually assigned to Shingle style, the house most closely aligns with that style's characteristics.

³Henry Davis Sleeper, *Beauport Chronicle: The Intimate Letters of Henry Davis Sleeper to Abram Piatt Andrew, Jr., 1906-1915*, edited by E. Parker Hayden, Jr. and Andrew L. Gray (Boston: SPNEA, 1991), 28.

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surprise and discovery.

The rooms at Beauport are relatively small but multipurpose. Rather than a large central dining room, the first floor contains several rooms designed for socializing which can also function as dining areas for small gatherings: the Green Dining Room, Franklin Game Room, Linebrook Parish Room, and Octagon Room. The larger Golden Step Room, Pembroke Room, and Mariner's Room (on the second floor), which seat larger groups, are similarly dual-functioned. Second-floor rooms are primarily sitting rooms and bedrooms, each bedroom with its own closet and private bath in a suite arrangement: the Strawberry Hill Room, Indian Room, and Byron Room. The Blue Willow and Shelley Rooms share a bath, as do the Nelson Room and Belfry Chamber, and, on the first floor, the Chapel Chamber and Little Lady Room. Seven separate stairways connect the first and second floors, including a circular staircase from the Belfry Chamber down to the Linebrook Parish Room, where the entrance is concealed in a wall panel. Most rooms have radiators concealed behind panels or screens. Although the heating system was drained after a boiler fire in 1947 and is no longer functional, it is still mostly in place.

Service areas of the house are situated away from the water views. They moved northward and somewhat eastward as Sleeper periodically converted them into family rooms. The large Pembroke Room or Pine Kitchen, added onto the northeast corner of the house in 1917, is the ironic exception to this trend, a showpiece room in the middle of the servant's wing. Above the kitchen, Sleeper added a second-floor suite, a shared bathroom and five small bedrooms for domestic servants, accessible by a single staircase. By 1934 the downstairs service areas—a kitchen, pantry, glass pantry, and laundry—were at the center of the north end of Beauport, between the Pembroke Room and Golden Step Room. Although used today for office or storage space, these areas have remained largely unchanged since Sleeper's days and may be at least partially restored and interpreted in the future.

Much of the public appeal of Beauport comes from its period and theme rooms, each room having its own name and focus, many incorporating architectural salvage. The three descriptive books written about Beauport have not focused on the building's exterior, but rather on describing each of these rooms in turn.⁴ The tone for Beauport was set in 1907, when Henry Sleeper and A. Piatt Andrew discovered the William Cogswell House (1730) in nearby Essex, Massachusetts, dilapidated but filled with eighteenth-century paneling. Sleeper bought the paneling and reused it in four rooms at the core of his new house in Gloucester, including the Green Dining Room, Stair Hall, and the entry hall named in its honor.

The Stair Hall or Central Hall, while not the large hall one might expect at the center of a Shingle seaside house, is an important circulation hub. Sleeper had the room paneled with salvaged interior window shutters, topped with Chinese arabesque wallpaper. Two objects dominate this room filled with books and Americana. A tall cast-iron stove, in the shape of George Washington clad in a toga and mounted on a pedestal, is framed in a wall niche. Across the hall, Sleeper installed a salvaged Connecticut Valley doorway, fitted with shelves and backed with frosted glass, the bullseyes in the sidelight and fanlight frames replaced by Sandwich cup-plates. This unit displays 130 pieces of brown and amber glass backlit by a second-story skylight, its

⁴ Samuel Chamberlain and Paul Hollister, *Beauport at Gloucester: The Most Fascinating House in America* (New York: Hastings House, 1951); William B. and Elizabeth Clay Blanford, *Beauport Impressions: An Introduction to Its Collections* (Boston: SPNEA, 1965); and Nancy Curtis and Richard C. Nylander, eds., *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House* (Boston: SPNEA, 1990).

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light intensified by a mirror in the pantry beyond. Paul Hollister, who as a boy knew Sleeper and who co-authored the first book on Beauport, described Sleeper's use of light in the Central Hall and other rooms without southern exposures:

Beauport is basically an inner-directed house, its sequence of rooms conceived internally, like a series of stage sets. Windows are shaped and spaced as part of a different decorative scheme for each room. Except for rooms on the sunny south and harbor sides, Beauport has few windows that invite the water-bright light. Many are veiled with blinds, draperies, or window shades drawn to reveal painted designs. Other interior windows and glazed doorways spread precious daylight from room to room in the seventeenth-century Dutch manner. Several windows are designed specifically for displays of colored glass. Windows that became blocked by later alterations to the house now hold mirrors that increase the apparent size of small rooms.⁵

Sleeper and Hanson together found creative ways to diffuse light throughout Beauport's rooms.

The largest and most well-known of the Beauport rooms may be the Pine Kitchen or Pembroke Room, which Sleeper added in 1917. It incorporates woodwork, including doors and ceiling beams, from the Barker House (c. 1650) in Pembroke, Massachusetts. Sleeper's maternal grandmother was a Barker, and the family traced its ancestry back to the builders of the house. The wide kitchen floorboards are from another demolished Colonial house, the Dillaway House in Boston's North End. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Colonial kitchen has represented nostalgic American values of hearth and home. As early as the "sanitary fairs" of the Civil War era, reproductions of the Colonial kitchen had been a decorative conceit, most prominently at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876. The Pembroke Room is packed with pine furniture, handmade cooking pots and utensils, and serving ware, including a huge collection of redware pottery displayed in two large cabinets. Most of the furniture was vintage Colonial, but Sleeper also commissioned Gloucester cabinetmaker Frederick Poole to construct several pieces. Furniture from the Pembroke Room was featured in Russell Hawes Kettell's book *The Pine Furniture of Early New England*, and Sleeper designed pine kitchen re-creations for a number of his clients.

Sleeper added the Octagon Room, or the Souvenir de France, in 1920-21, after his return from France where he worked with A. Piatt Andrew for the American Field Service. Its unique decorating scheme shows Sleeper at his most daring and successful. The room's color contrast is striking, aubergine walls offering a dark background for vivid tiger maple furniture, a red-lacquer screen, red glass, books bound in red morocco leather with gold titles, and a large collection of red nineteenth-century French toleware. Sleeper commissioned an octagonal table and rug for the center of the room. A portrait of Lafayette ties the room both to Sleeper's experiences in the First World War, and to the French support for the American Revolution, which helped end America's colonial status.

Each of the rooms of Beauport has its own special appeal. Sleeper arrived at the color scheme of the Green Dining Room (1907) through rudimentary paint analysis, scraping pieces of salvaged woodwork down to their earliest discernible paint layers and establishing his own palette of "colonial" colors, in contrast to the standard white of some Colonial Revival purists of the time.

⁵Paul Hollister, "Beauport," pp. 19-25 in Curtis and Nylander, eds., *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House* (Boston: SPNEA, 1990), 20.

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The Norman-style Book Tower (1911), one of several two-story rooms, is a circular library with a dramatic central well, dominated by a Revolutionary War flag. The Franklin Game Room (1917) contains a Franklin bust, Franklin stove, and other Americana, as well as a collection of antique games. The Golden Step Room (1921) is a striking contrast with its octagonal neighbor, white walls and ceiling the backdrop for green furniture and glassware as well as elaborately-detailed ship models, all lit by a huge diamond-paned window which slides down into the wall, letting in waves of the harbor's light and air. The Mariner's Room (1925) features nautical instruments, carved figures, and an 1835 whaler's journal, all complemented by a representation of the wealth that the ships brought to New England, a massive main-entrance doorway salvaged from a house in Newport, Rhode Island.

Beauport has several two-story rooms, the most dramatic being the China Trade Room. It began life in 1908 as a vaulted medieval hall, dark and book-lined. In 1923, Sleeper acquired several large rolls of hand-painted Chinese wallpaper which Philadelphian Robert Morris, signer of the Declaration of Independence, had imported in the 1780s but never used. The designs illustrate the cultivation of rice and the manufacture of porcelain. Sleeper completely reworked the hall, filling it with light and replacing the carved balconies with gilded fretwork screens. He erected a large pagoda with a game table along one wall, and filled the room with low Chinese tables and benches.

When the McCanns bought Beauport, they so valued Sleeper's arrangements that they changed very little on the interior, not even the arrangement of most of the individual pieces. Mrs. McCann did add some pieces from her own collections at several places. Some of her extensive collection of Chinese Export porcelain remains in a cabinet in the Cogswell Room, although most was given to the Boston Museum of Fine Art and the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The most significant change to Beauport occurred in the China Trade Room. The McCanns hired a New York firm, French & Co., to redecorate the room for more traditional entertaining. The wallpaper and gilded balconies were left untouched, but the rest of the room was emptied, the pagoda carted away. The decorator added an eighteenth-century English fireplace mantel of carved marble and suspended an enormous Waterford crystal chandelier from the middle of the ceiling. Chinese Chippendale furniture replaced the low benches, making the room more formal than Sleeper's conception. The SPNEA interprets most of Beauport as it was in 1934, upon Sleeper's death, but the China Trade Room remains as the McCanns altered it and is the most visible sign of their occupancy.

Changes to the exterior of Beauport also have been minimal, but some were required to preserve the property. Water infiltration has been a continuing problem, given Beauport's piecemeal construction, complicated roofline and exposure to coastal rains, wind, and fog. In 1939-1942, the McCann family altered the southerly roof over the bulkhead to redirect runoff and prevent water from entering the basement. Despite this, early SPNEA caretakers repeatedly reported standing water in the basement. Early on, SPNEA used sump pumps to remove the water. More recently, SPNEA launched other projects to correct the sources of the drainage problems, including redesigning the roof around the Belfry Tower in 1954, and an extensive 1990 project which included foundation work, gutter restoration, and other measures. After a partial reroofing in 1971, SPNEA in 1984 completely restored the earlier wood shingle roof, rebuilding the chimneys (except for the Pembroke Room) above the roof line. SPNEA has also repainted the exterior, conducting two photomicrograph paint-analysis studies in the last five years.

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Three of the original four outbuildings erected by Sleeper remain on the property along Eastern Point Road, connected by a brick wall. From south to north, they are a cupolaed gate house and tool shed, both one story, and a two-story, two-car garage with a chauffeur's quarters above. The gate house and tool shed have been restored on the exterior and remodeled on the interior to serve as a ticket sales office and restrooms, respectively. The garage is used for storage.

A fourth building, a one-story, one-car garage directly north of the first, was moved to West Gloucester in 1956 and does not contribute. At that time, SPNEA bought a Weyerhaeuser prefabricated G-T-S Panel House and installed it at Beauport as a caretaker's quarters. Placed next to the end of the northeast wing, it blocks one of the doors and a window in the Franklin Game Room. Because it was added after Sleeper's death and after the period of significance, this building is non-contributing. It may be of local significance, however, as a well-documented prefabricated post-World War II home approaching fifty years old.

As in most historic properties, the grounds of Beauport are probably more changed than any other part, due to the constant growth and decay of plant life. Beauport's landscape became overgrown during Sleeper's final years and was partially refurbished by the McCanns when they acquired the property. In 1943, shortly after giving Beauport to the SPNEA, the McCann family (who retained lifetime access in exchange for annual endowments) had the landscaping radically repaired and upgraded. SPNEA maintained this landscaping until the 1990s, when it commissioned two comprehensive studies of the historic landscape of Sleeper's era. It continues to implement elements from these historic landscape plans.

Beauport has remained remarkably unaltered since the death of Henry Davis Sleeper in 1934. The McCann family made significant changes only to the China Trade Room. Otherwise, Sleeper's interior arrangements are virtually intact, as proven by the various inventories and historic interior photographs. SPNEA interprets the house today as it looked upon Sleeper's death in 1934, with the exception of the China Trade Room, which preserves the McCann alterations. The repairs completed by SPNEA in the years since it acquired Beauport in 1942 have been carefully researched, planned to preserve the envelope and soften the marks of intervening years where possible. All of these considerations give the property integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
 Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A X B C X D

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria: 1 and 4

NHL Theme(s):

III. Expressing Cultural Values
 2. Visual and Performing Arts
 5. Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Urban Design

Areas of Significance: Architecture, Art

Period(s) of Significance: 1907-1942

Significant Dates: 1907, 1911, 1912, 1917, 1920-21, 1923, 1925, 1929, 1934, 1942

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder: Sleeper, Henry Davis
 Hanson, Halfdan M.

Historic Contexts: XVI. Architecture
 L. Shingle Style

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Beauport, the Sleeper-McCann House in Gloucester, Massachusetts, is a remarkable architectural achievement. Built by self-taught designer Henry Davis Sleeper (1878-1934) and local builder-architect Halfdan M. Hanson (1884-1952), Beauport began as a summer house for leisure pursuits and entertaining, and gradually developed into a design showcase that attracted national coverage and acclaim. Beauport launched Sleeper's career as a designer of period and theme rooms for wealthy East Coast clients and Hollywood stars, and as a recognized expert on Americana, influential in the development of Henry Francis du Pont's Winterthur and other museum programs. Beauport is nationally significant as an important early collection of American antiques in distinctive arrangements housed within a unique architectural setting. Beauport influenced the appreciation, collection, and interpretation of American material culture, as well as the practice of interior design. Beauport is also significant for its influence on American architecture, both in the preservation of historic architectural elements and in the

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development of twentieth-century architectural practice. As critic Reginald Townsend observed, “This house is paramount perhaps as a composition. Its creator is more than a mere collector. He is more than an antiquarian. He is at heart an artist.”⁶

Henry Davis Sleeper was born on March 27, 1878, in Boston, to a family of successful businessmen. His grandfather, Jacob Sleeper (1809-1889), made a fortune in real estate and became a philanthropist; he was one of the three founders of Boston University. Jacob’s son, Major Jacob Henry Sleeper (1839-1891), was a hero of the Civil War and successfully continued his father’s real estate and clothing businesses. In 1867 Major Sleeper married Maria Westcott (1836-1917). Jacob Henry Sleeper commissioned Boston architect Arthur Little to build a house in Marblehead, Massachusetts, and the family summered at this Shingle-style residence from 1889 until its sale in 1902. Henry Davis Sleeper had two older brothers, Jacob Sleeper (1869-1930), U.S. State Department official in South America and Switzerland, and Stephen Westcott Sleeper (1874-1956), who built a prosperous business in real estate and trusts.⁷

Plagued by poor health as a child, Henry (“Harry”) Davis Sleeper may have been taught at home by tutors.⁸ Apparently he had a natural aptitude for design; his nephew recounted the family story that young Harry built an elaborate model of a Japanese garden on the billiard table at Marblehead. Harry may have gained his collecting skills and antiquarian knowledge on outings with his mother to shop for antiques. In 1926, Sleeper presented one of his most valuable collections, a set of twenty-three silver items made by Paul Revere (each piece with a clear provenance), to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, as a memorial to his mother.⁹ The pieces had occupied a cabinet in the Paul Revere Room at Beauport.

A. Piatt Andrew, Jr. (1873-1936), first introduced Harry Sleeper to Eastern Point in 1906; Andrew had designed and built his own house, “Red Roof,” there in 1902. A Harvard economist and later Director of the Mint, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, and U. S. Representative for fifteen years, Andrew was the first to sign the Beauport Guestbook in 1907. Both life-long bachelors and close friends, they shared many interests. Sixty of Sleeper’s personal letters to Andrew, covering his first decade at Beauport, have survived and been published as *Beauport Chronicle*.¹⁰ These, along with his correspondence to Halfdan Hanson, provide the most extensive written record available of Sleeper’s thoughts.

Sleeper and his Eastern Point neighbors were leading members of “Dabsville,” a social, artistic, and intellectual colony that flourished in the first third of the twentieth century, that both shaped and publicized Beauport.¹¹ Between Sleeper and Andrew lived Caroline Sinkler (1860-1949), a

⁶Reginald T. Townsend, “An Adventure in Americana: Beauport—The Residence of Henry D. Sleeper, Esq., at Gloucester, Mass.,” *Country Life* (February 1929): Cover, 30, 34-42; quote on p. 35.

⁷Biographical details and many of the dates in this narrative are primarily from Philip A. Hayden, “Henry Davis Sleeper and Beauport: A Chronology,” pp. 102-105 in Curtis and Nylander, *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*. Unlike some earlier accounts of Beauport, Hayden’s extensive research is clearly documented from primary sources, copies of which Hayden placed in the SPNEA Archives.

⁸No record is known of Sleeper receiving a formal education. Although the inventory of Beauport completed after Sleeper’s death indicated the presence of twelve trunks of family and business papers, including diplomas, these have not been found subsequently, and researchers have not turned up attendance records for Sleeper at any schools or universities.

⁹“A Gift of Paul Revere Silver,” *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* (April 1926): 26-28.

¹⁰Sleeper, *Beauport Chronicle*. The introduction and appendix to this book are also excellent sources of reliable biographical information.

¹¹“Dabsville” was a playful nickname based on the initials of the friends: D for Davidge, A for Andrew, B for Beaux, and S for

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Southern heiress and arts patron who wintered in her adopted city of Philadelphia; for her summers, she purchased the cottage next to Red Roof in 1905 and teasingly named it “Wrong Roof.” Joanna Stewart Davidge (c.1860-1931) proprietor of a New York finishing school, built “Piers Lane” in 1902-1903 and summered there until 1929, even after marrying British Egyptologist David Randall-MacIver in 1911 and moving to Italy. Cecelia Beaux (1855-1942), the acclaimed portrait painter, built her cottage “Green Alley” on Eastern Point in 1905. Two other members of the Eastern Point social circle built elaborate homes across the harbor in West Gloucester: actor and entrepreneur Leslie Buswell (“Stillington Hall”) and inventor John Hayes Hammond, Jr. (“Hammond Castle,” now a museum). Although she did not reside in Gloucester, the most acclaimed member of the circle was frequent guest Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840-1924). Gardner was a New York heiress and arts patron whose winter home and art collection in Boston, which she began in 1902, is now the art museum named after her. Sleeper built Beauport to entertain these friends; in turn, they provided him with inspiration and support, were some of his earliest clients, and helped him secure other decorating commissions and further publicity.

Sleeper’s architect for Beauport was Halfdan M. Hanson (1884-1952). Born in Norway, he came to America as an infant. His father, Henry H. Hanson, worked as a ship rigger in Gloucester, constructed ship models, and trained his children in handicrafts. His mother, Maren S. Evanson, worked as a domestic.¹² Halfdan (“Dick”) Hanson began his career as a carpenter and woodworker, taking architectural courses by correspondence. Working out of an office he built in his home in East Gloucester, Hanson undertook Beauport as his first large project. More commissions followed, and in 1912 he opened an office in Gloucester, employing four draftsmen. He designed houses primarily for the resort communities around Gloucester, making “a specialty of summer residences.”¹³ His best-known public commission is the Church of Our Lady of Good Voyage (1914-1915) in Gloucester. Drafted in the First World War, Hanson designed bases and railroad transport systems for large artillery, working from an office in Washington, D.C. In 1921, on suggestion from Harry Sleeper, he moved to Denver for the climate and treatment for tuberculosis. He returned to Gloucester in 1931, but his impaired health increasingly limited the amount of work that he was able to undertake in his final years. Throughout most of his career, he continued to work on Beauport and other collaborative projects with Sleeper; their long friendship and admiration for each other’s work is evident from the letters that survive in the Hanson papers.

Sleeper purchased the land for Beauport from the owner of the neighboring property, the massive Colonial Arms Hotel, in 1907. Sleeper hired Halfdan Hanson, and the two began work on his twenty-six-room “cottage.” That same fall, Sleeper purchased his first large pieces of architectural salvage, the paneling from the abandoned William Cogswell House in Essex, Massachusetts. As Sleeper’s house was going up that winter, the adjoining Colonial Arms burned down in a mysterious, spectacular fire, on New Year’s Day 1908, never to be rebuilt. In

Sinkler and Sleeper. For a full history of the colony, see Joseph E. Garland, *Eastern Point: A Nautical, Rustical, and More or Less Sociable Chronicle of Gloucester’s Outer Shield and Inner Sanctum, 1606-1990* (Revised and updated; Beverly, MA: Commonwealth Editions, 1999), 296.

¹²Phyllis Ray, “Biographical Sketch,” from the Guide to the Papers of Halfdan M. Hanson, SPNEA Archives, Boston. The material in this paragraph comes from her account and various letters and documents in the Hanson collection. Ray was Hanson’s daughter; while in Denver, he built her a large dollhouse, complete with Queen Anne, Tudor, and Chippendale period rooms. See “Famous Architect in Denver Builds Daughter’s Doll Home: Born in Norway, Quickly Found Fame in America, But, Waging Continual Fight Against Disease, Finds Pleasure in Love-Labor,” *Denver Post*, 3 June 1924, pp. 1,11.

¹³“H. M. Hanson,” *The City of Gloucester, Massachusetts: Its Interests and Industries* (Gloucester: Board of Trade, 1916), 79.

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the summer of 1908, Sleeper moved into Beauport, with his mother a frequent guest. Current Beauport rooms which date from the initial construction include the Cogswell Room, Green Dining Room, China Passage, Cloister, Blue Willow Room, Strawberry Hill Room, Nelson Room, and Byron Room, as well as several others which were later converted or rebuilt. The first changes to Beauport, in 1909, included the addition of exterior shutters. The next year, Hanson drew up more plans, which resulted in the 1911 addition of the southeast wing: the Book Tower, Shelley Room, and Pineapple Room.¹⁴ Although Sleeper still called his cottage "Little Beauport," as the house grew the adjective became a bit ironic, and eventually the name was shortened to "Beauport."

During the next two decades, Sleeper continued expanding Beauport. In 1911 he purchased an additional eighteen feet of land to the north of Beauport, part of the site of the Colonial Arms Hotel, which allowed future expansion in that direction. The next year, he added the east-central wing: the Linebrook Parish Room, the Chapel Chamber, and the Belfry Chamber. In 1913, Sleeper put the brick veneer on Beauport. The next major addition came in 1917, with the completion of the northeast wing: the Pembroke Room, Franklin Game Room, and the second-floor maid quarters.

Beauport's stature increased through the public recognition that Harry Sleeper received for his work during the First World War. His experiences made a lasting impression and prompted a redesign of Beauport. A. Piatt Andrew left Eastern Point for France in 1914, volunteering as an ambulance driver and organizing the ambulance corps into the American Field Service (AFS). In 1915 Harry Sleeper supported his friend's work by becoming the American Representative and major U.S. fundraiser for the AFS. Sleeper traveled to France to direct the Paris office from 1918 to 1919. After the war, France awarded both men the Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Honor. In a eulogy printed in the Gloucester and Boston newspapers, Andrew recognized Sleeper's work for the AFS:

Frail in body, and without any experience as an organizer, he undertook almost singlehandedly at first . . . the work of collecting funds, and enlisting volunteers for this organization throughout the length and breadth of the United States. As early as 1915, he began to open offices in the larger cities, to organize committees in schools and colleges, in clubs and churches, in business houses and trade organization[s]. . . . He pursued this arduous effort with such unflagging faith that before America had reached the great decision of 1917, nearly \$3,000,000 had been collected, and about 2500 young men had joined the American Field Service in France. This was a glorious and memorable achievement, which helped in the saving of countless thousands of lives.¹⁵

Sleeper memorialized his experience with the AFS and the great love he felt for France in his designs for the Octagon Room, which he nicknamed "Souvenir de France." Through its portrait of Lafayette, the Octagon Room acknowledged a century-and-a-half of cooperation between France and the American Republic, an important Beauport theme.

¹⁴This building chronology is primarily from Philip A. Hayden, "Henry Davis Sleeper and Beauport: A Chronology," pp. 102-105 in Curtis and Nylander, *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*, as well as two substantive earlier accounts corrected and edited by Hayden: Paul Hollister, "The Building of Beauport, 1907-1924," *American Art Journal* (winter 1981): 69-89; and Wendy Fronterio, "The Architectural Evolution of Beauport," undated typescript (both in the SPNEA Archives).

¹⁵A. Piatt Andrew, "Col. Andrew Pays Tribute to Late Henry Sleeper," *Gloucester Daily Times*, n.d. (clipping in SPNEA Archives, presumably late September 1934). After the war, Andrew reorganized the AFS into a scholarship program; it continues today as an international student exchange.

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Subsequent additions expanded Beauport to the northwest: the previously mentioned Octagon Room, the Golden Step Room, and the Indian Room in 1923, and the Mariner's Room and the North Gallery in 1925. Two major remodelings resulted in the completion of the China Trade Room in 1923 and the Stair Hall in 1929. Sleeper initiated no major changes in the 1930s, although planning apparently continued. Halfdan Hanson wrote to the McCanns in 1935 that Sleeper had been planning to add a "lovely small chapel to the South Gallery end" of Beauport.¹⁶

The building of Beauport placed a considerable strain on Sleeper's slim inheritance and business income. He financed the building largely through an ongoing series of mortgages, beginning with a \$10,000 mortgage in 1907. Unfortunate market investments further depleted his resources, and at his death in 1934, the estate was deep in debt. Sleeper's brother Stephen was forced to put Beauport up for sale. Numerous people were interested in buying, most planning to dismantle Beauport for its collections. In 1935 Helena Woolworth McCann (1878-1938), the "Five-and-Ten Heiress" and a noted collector, and her husband Charles Edward Francis McCann (1877-1941) purchased Beauport and its collections. The McCanns sold a few pieces from Beauport and installed some of their own collections, but most of Beauport remained intact. Besides the already detailed changes to the China Trade Room, they converted a nook in the Indian Room into a bathroom, and added a landing float in the harbor (which was expensive to maintain and later sold by SPNEA). Although Henry du Pont supported changes to the China Trade Room, he urged the McCanns to preserve the remainder of the house as Sleeper had left it: "Naturally the moment you take the things out of this house, or change them about, the value of the collection does not exist, as really the arrangement is 90%. I have no feeling whatsoever about the [C]hinese room . . . but the rest of the house really is a succession of fascinating pictures and color schemes."¹⁷ The McCanns, though, had already made their own commitment to preserving Beauport intact, and their children confirmed that commitment by presenting Beauport to the SPNEA in 1942.

The national importance of Beauport in the areas of American material culture, interior design, historic preservation, and architecture can be documented through its exposure in national publications. The first national article on Beauport appeared in *House Beautiful* in 1916, with follow-up articles on its collections of tole (1924) and Americana (1925).¹⁸ In 1924 *The Architect* published six full-page plates of Beauport exteriors and interiors. During Sleeper's later career, when he worked steadily as an interior decorator, other recognition of Beauport came from *House and Garden* (1926), *The Antiquarian* (1930), *Country Life* (1929, two articles in 1934, and a posthumous article in 1935), and *Antiques* (1934). One odd measure of Sleeper's growing stature as a media celebrity was a 1930 *Saturday Evening Post* advertisement. It pictured "collector and connoisseur" Sleeper, along with actor Gary Cooper, journalist Alexander Woollcott, and adventurer Richard Halliburton, in an ad headlined "Chase and Sanborn's Dated Coffee served in the homes of each of these surprisingly domestic *well known bachelors*."¹⁹ The most significant notice, though, was the *Country Life* cover article of February 1929, which included specially-commissioned sketches and paintings of Beauport. Editor Reginald T. Townsend praised Beauport highly, acknowledging the crowds that Beauport attracted even then:

Who can estimate the far-reaching influence that such a house will have upon the taste of a nation?

¹⁶ Halfdan M. Hanson to Charles E. F. McCann, 12 November 1935, Papers of Halfdan M. Hanson, SPNEA Archives.

¹⁷ Henry F. du Pont to Mrs. Charles E. F. McCann, quoted in Wendy Fronterio.

¹⁸ See the bibliography for a list of the most important of these articles.

¹⁹ Chase and Sanborn's Dated Coffee, *Saturday Evening Post*, 15 March 1930, pp. 62-63.

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Anywhere from ten to forty people drop in to visit Beauport each day during the summer, and each one of them, unless he be a dull clod, carries away some of the beauty and tranquility and contentment that this house contains.²⁰

Besides these periodical notices, Nancy McClelland featured Beauport and Sleeper's work in three books, beginning with her important *Historic Wallpapers* (1924). The articles continued after Sleeper's death; most recently, Beauport has been featured in *The New York Times* and *Boston Globe*; in periodicals such as *Architectural Digest*, *Colonial Homes*, *Country Living*, and *Design Times*; and on television: PBS's *Pride of Place* and A & E's *America's Castles*.

Beauport has national significance for its influence on the appreciation, collection, and interpretation of American material culture, as well as the practice of interior design. During the time he built Beauport, Sleeper was active professionally and began to gain recognition and respect for his general "antiquarian" and design accomplishments. In 1911, he served on the second board of directors of SPNEA and began its first museum collection. The next year he filed the first museum director's report for the SPNEA annual report.²¹ In 1913 he served as a founding board member for the SPNEA's Shirley-Eustis House Association and contributed items to SPNEA's first exhibition, "The Colonial Parlor." Besides the SPNEA exhibit and his gift of the Paul Revere silver, Sleeper loaned items to two other early Boston shows featuring American collectibles: an exhibit by the Copley Society (1911) and the Loan Exhibition of Early American Furniture and Decorative Crafts (1925). He served as Vice President of the Essex Institute in Salem (1931-1933) and was a trustee of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Beauport is an important link in the development of the museum period room approach to the interpretation of American decorative arts, previously the domain of collectors and antiquarians.²² In 1906, the year before Sleeper began Beauport, the first major museum wing dedicated to American decorative arts opened: Pendleton House at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. The following year, George Francis Dow debuted some of the first American period rooms mounted anywhere, at the Essex Institute in Salem, Massachusetts. Sleeper was certainly aware of this movement. Biographer Paul Hollister, who as a boy knew Sleeper, remembered him remarking, years before, "Mightn't it be fun to have a house in which each room could recapture some of the spirit of a specific mood or phase or 'period' of our American life from the time of Plymouth down through the Revolution and the early Republic?"²³ Sleeper realized this ambition in Beauport, beginning in 1907.

Perhaps the clearest measure of Beauport and Sleeper's importance in this movement came in 1934, just before his death, when the American Institute of Architects selected him (along with Richard T. Halsey, founder of the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art) as one of

²⁰Reginald T. Townsend, "An Adventure in Americana: Beauport—The Residence of Henry D. Sleeper, Esq., at Gloucester, Mass., *Country Life* (February 1929): Cover, 30, 34-42 (quote on p. 42).

²¹Henry Davis Sleeper, "Report of the Director of the Museum," *Old Time New England Serial* #7 (3.2; July 1912): 10-12. Other details of Sleeper's ties with the SPNEA recounted in this paragraph are documented in the various early issues of this journal.

²²Antiquarian Ben: Perly Poore (1820-1887) remodeled a Colonial house into the sprawling Indian Hill (1860-1887) in nearby West Newbury, Massachusetts, and filled it with collections of American memorabilia and material culture. Indian Hill is often cited as an influence on Beauport, although no evidence has been found to show that Sleeper visited it before beginning Beauport. Later given to SPNEA, Indian Hill was mostly destroyed by fire in the 1960s. Poore always placed a colon after his first name.

²³Chamberlain and Hollister, *Beauport at Gloucester*, 2. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York did not mount its first major display of American decorative arts until 1909 (as part of the Hudson-Fulton Celebration); its American Wing opened in 1924.

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six honorary members. The citation recognized Sleeper's work at Beauport:

Henry Sleeper, who in his noted collection of early American furniture and decoration has accumulated an invaluable record of the art and culture of the early republic, has preserved from loss and destruction numerous priceless examples of the work of the first American artists and craftsmen, and has provided an enduring basis for future study and research in the field.²⁴

The AIA perceived Beauport not just as important for preserving and interpreting the history of American architecture, but more widely for all of its collections of material culture.

Beauport was a showcase for Sleeper's work as an interior designer, and he was commissioned by a number of well-known and wealthy clients. Sleeper's guestbook shows us how visible Beauport was; among those who signed the first volume were SPNEA founder William Sumner Appleton, architect Ralph Adams Cram, decorator Elsie de Wolfe, Henry F. du Pont, Child Hassam, DuBose Heyward, Henry James, Paul Manship, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and John Singer Sargent. The second volume of the guestbook has disappeared, but other reported visitors to Beauport during Sleeper's life include Ethel Barrymore, Stephen Vincent Benet, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Helen Hayes, Eleanor Roosevelt, and King Gustave of Sweden. Their visits brought attention to Beauport and garnered further connections for Sleeper among the intellectual, artistic, and financial elite.

Sleeper's work as an interior designer has been confirmed in seventeen commissions, including Beauport and his own townhouse at 90-90A Chestnut Street, Boston.²⁵ Of those seventeen, however, only Beauport and the Rev. and Mrs. George C. F. Bratenahl House in Gloucester, for which Sleeper completed the paneling, interior design, and furnishings, remain relatively intact. All the others have been altered, most significantly. At least one, the Caroline Sinkler house in Gloucester, has been destroyed, although another Sleeper commission for Sinkler, her house in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, "The Highlands," survives as a museum. One of Sleeper's earliest commissions was Huntland, the Thomas House in Middleburg, Virginia (1912, 1915), a collaboration with Halfdan Hanson and Henry C. Mercer, the noted antiquarian, collector, and tile maker. Others include Houndsmore Lodge, the Morrill House, in Gloucester (1920); the Bruce E. Merriman House in Providence, Rhode Island (1923); the Mabel Yates Howe House in West Manchester, Massachusetts (1924); Eagle's Nest, the F. Frazier Jelke House in Newport, Rhode Island (1924); Davenport House, the Paul Hollister House in New Rochelle, New York (1930); Indian Council Rock, the George F. Tyler House in Newtown, Pennsylvania (1932); and the R. T. Vanderbilt House in Green Farms, Connecticut. At the time of Sleeper's death, his best known commissions were for two California houses owned by motion picture actors: Nine Gables, the Johnny Mack Brown House in Hollywood (1930); and the Frederic March House in Beverly Hills (1934).

In a brief notice in the *Boston Evening Transcript* shortly after Sleeper's death, William Germain Dooley summed up Sleeper's importance to the field of interior design. Sleeper was:

²⁴ AIA Records, Washington, D.C., as quoted in Philip A. Hayden, "The Sleeper-McCann House: Beauport," SPNEA Archives, Boston. See also "Architect Honors Bestowed on 39," *New York Times*, 27 May 1934, p. 2.

²⁵ Hayden, "Sleeper Commissions," pp. 108-109 in Curtis and Nylander, eds., *Beauport: The Sleeper-McCann House*. Thirty-two commissions have been attributed to Sleeper. Hayden's documentation for each commission is carefully recorded in vols. 12 and 13 of his Beauport House Binders, SPNEA Archives, Boston. In addition to Hayden's list, Sidney Nichols Shurcliff recounts a hilarious story of his collaboration with Sleeper on the Edwards House in Beverly Farms, Massachusetts, in his privately printed memoir, *The Day It Rained Fish and Other Encounters of a Landscape Architect*, 1978.

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. . . Probably the country's best known interior decorator in the field of the early American interior. Long an expert in furniture of England and this country, his special interests were centered in later years on the pine furniture of the Pilgrim century, and his private collection of these pieces was said to be unexcelled by any similar group. . . . His death has removed a figure who had become almost legendary."²⁶

Sleeper's work was also highly admired by many of his colleagues in the field of interior design, including his contemporary Elsie de Wolf, who praised Sleeper in her autobiography, and modern designer Mario Buatta, who characterized Sleeper as "one of the first interior decorators as we know them today—a Renaissance man who did it all."²⁷

Apart from Beauport, two well-documented commissions, both for Henry Francis du Pont, are the most important examples of Sleeper's influence on the appreciation, collection, and interpretation of American material culture, and on the practice of interior design: Chestertown, in Southampton, New York, and Winterthur, in Winterthur, Delaware. The genesis of the Winterthur Museum, that great collection of American period rooms and center for the study of American material culture, came from a chance 1923 trip by Henry Francis du Pont to the homes of two New England collectors, Electra Havemeyer Webb and Henry Davis Sleeper. Three decades later, du Pont recalled the trip quite clearly:

The house at Winterthur, Delaware, my family's home where I was brought up, was furnished with miscellaneous foreign and American Empire pieces, predominantly of veneered mahogany, and these to me had seemed heavy and often lacking in grace. A visit to Mrs. Watson Webb's house in Shelburne, Vermont, in 1923, was therefore a revelation. This was the first early all American interior I had ever seen and it captivated me. . . . Seeing Harry Sleeper's house at Gloucester, Massachusetts, a few days later crystallized my desire to start collecting Americana on my own. In retrospect, I realize how important was this particular week in shaping the course of my life."²⁸

Du Pont decided to build Chestertown, "determined that his house on Long Island would be 'American' and he asked Sleeper to help him."²⁹ Du Pont hired Cross and Cross as architects and Sleeper as designer. They filled the house with American furniture, collectibles, and architectural details, including entire rooms from houses in Chestertown, Maryland. Du Pont was eager to learn Beauport's secrets from Sleeper and use them at Chestertown: "I find your lights are so delightfully arranged—so cleverly placed with always some definite effect in mind—that it makes me quite desperate about my perfectly conventional arrangements of lights."³⁰ Journalist and historian Elizabeth Stillinger characterized their relationship as mentor and pupil.

Du Pont was such an apt learner that Sleeper ultimately paid him the compliment of ranking Du Pont's gifts with his own: "I always think of you as one of my clients who has just as much energy and imagination in these matters as I have. I am pleased and flattered when you want my help, but between ourselves, I think you are about as capable as I am."³¹

²⁶ William Germain Dooley, *Boston Evening Transcript*, 29 September 1934.

²⁷ Elsie de Wolf, *After All* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), and Michael S. Durham, "Sleeper Awake: Mario Buatta Spends a Day at Beauport," ca. 1990, source unknown, copy in the SPNEA Museum files.

²⁸ Henry Francis du Pont (1880-1969), as quoted in Elizabeth Stillinger, *The Antiquers* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1980), 222.

²⁹ Clive Aslet, *The American Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 125-126.

³⁰ Henry Francis du Pont, as quoted in Jay Cantor, *Winterthur* (Expanded and updated; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 115.

³¹ Henry Davis Sleeper, letter to du Pont, 22 October 1926, as quoted in Stillinger, *The Antiquers*, 226.

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The Chestertown collaboration continued in 1927 at Winterthur when Henry Francis du Pont took control of the du Pont family home. Jay Cantor, Winterthur historian, compared the feel of the two houses: “The total effect of Beauport was an inspiration, enchanting and intimate, and totally at odds with the baronial atmosphere of Winterthur at that time.”³² Cantor sees Sleeper’s influence most clearly in du Pont’s highly symbolic period rooms, his purchase of architectural details, and even his color choices:

In subsequent purchases du Pont showed a marked preference for objects with historical meaning or symbolic imagery. The fact that he bought architectural details at the same time that he bought furniture also indicates the direction his installations would take. . . . While his choice of light woods may have been a rejection of his childhood surroundings, it was also clearly an echo of Sleeper’s decorating preferences; in fact, many of his mentor’s ideas were absorbed by du Pont and introduced into Chestertown House. Du Pont’s purchases in these years had much of the same homespun quality that characterized the furnishings of Beauport.³³

Sleeper and Beauport may have exerted another important influence on du Pont: the establishment of Winterthur as a public museum. Du Pont wrote to Sleeper in 1927, “Could you give me some idea of the manner in which Mrs. Jack Gardner’s house in Boston was left as a museum? And what provision was made in her will in this respect, if the house was left in trust? . . . I am thinking of doing something of the kind.”³⁴

Beauport was also significant as a model for the preservation and display of historic architectural elements. It fostered an appreciation and study of American architectural workmanship, a fact alluded to in the 1934 AIA citation. In the many articles written on Beauport, people saw formerly expendable architectural details, such as the Cogswell House paneling, Barker House woodwork, Dillaway House floorboards, and the Connecticut Valley and Newport doorways, as works of art worth preserving and reusing. *Country Life* recognized this significance in 1929:

Before the building of this house much of the old wainscoting of old New England houses was being burned for firewood or thrown away, especially in the case of minor, low-studded rooms. The adroitness of use and intimate character of these rooms have inspired many a visitor to search and save likewise.³⁵

Beauport did inspire others to preserve and reuse architectural details in functional contemporary settings. By extension, it also raised public support for preserving historic architectural detail still in place, contributing to the present historic preservation movement, which advocates saving historic architectural detail through restoration or rehabilitation of the entire building.

The influence of Sleeper and Beauport has been clearly demonstrated in material culture, interior design, and historic preservation, but Beauport also has influenced American architectural practice. Beauport is SPNEA’s most-visited house museum, owing in part to its location in a summer resort area. But many of the people who tour Beauport are repeat visitors. Part of Beauport’s special appeal may be its unique status as a unified work of architecture made of

³²Cantor, *Winterthur*, 115.

³³*Ibid.*, 116-117.

³⁴Henry Francis du Pont, as quoted in Cantor, *Winterthur*, 115. Du Pont opened Winterthur to the public in 1951.

³⁵Reginald T. Townsend, “An Adventure in Americana: Beauport—The Residence of Henry D. Sleeper, Esq., at Gloucester, Mass.,” *Country Life* (February 1929): Cover, 30, 34-42; quote on p. 42.

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seemingly disparate parts. Like Gardner's and du Pont's houses, Beauport is part of the twentieth-century trend which saw collectors turning distinctive houses into cultural institutions which would survive them. In its design, the significance of Beauport for art and architecture is interrelated.

Several critics have remarked on Beauport's special status as an architectural assemblage, somewhat similar to the Gardner and du Pont houses, but more clearly a work where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. An editor at *Antiques* remarked, in a note on Sleeper's death:

Mr. Sleeper was, I think, primarily a creative artist and secondarily an antiquary. Appreciating the quality and character of ancient things and preferring to employ them in his decorative arrangements, he yet was never enslaved by the letter of period design. Instead, he rifled the past to achieve new and often entrancing modern harmonies. His really extraordinary genius in this respect was most perfectly illustrated in his own home, which he literally *assembled* during a period of years.³⁶

Half a century later, architect, teacher, and writer Robert A. M. Stern came to the same conclusions about Beauport as a singular work of architectural achievement. Stern noted a similar concern in the development of the techniques of collage by sculptors and artists contemporaneous with Sleeper:

This was to be not a museum of old rooms but a work of architectural synthesis, in which the past was seen as the springboard for a highly original work of art. At the same time that Braque and Picasso were developing their technique of collage, using artifacts of everyday life to create two- and three-dimensional works on canvas of great plastic and narrative complexity, Sleeper proceeded to develop similar techniques on the architectural level. For Sleeper, architecture was but the canvas for an assemblage of precious objects that were not only inherently beautiful but also rich in historic association.³⁷

Beauport thus can be seen as fitting into the wider traditions of twentieth-century art, as a unique assemblage or collage, expressed in the medium of architecture.

Perhaps the strongest appreciation of the architectural influence of Beauport comes in *Pride of Place*, where Stern compared Beauport with other highly individualistic American houses, including Thomas Jefferson's Monticello (NHL, 1960), George Washington Vanderbilt's Biltmore (NHL, 1963), Isabella Stewart Gardner's Fenway Court, and William Randolph Hearst's San Simeon (NHL, 1976). Beauport, Stern wrote, "more directly picked up on Jefferson's notion of the house as a personal vision and repository of national culture." In designing Beauport, "Sleeper's goal was as much aesthetic as it was cultural." Beauport was a unique artistic creation, its many disparate elements given new order and meaning by their specific arrangement:

If Monticello is a temple dedicated to the continent, Beauport can be seen as an architectural biography of preindustrial America seen through the filter of one man's psyche, an idiosyncratic and individualistic assemblage of objects, furniture, and even whole rooms that reflects Sleeper's hyper-aestheticism and his highly personal interpretation of early American history.³⁸

³⁶“Three Well-Know Antiquaries,” *Antiques* (December 1934): 232. Italics original.

³⁷Robert A. M. Stern, *Pride of Place: Building the American Dream* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 94.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 94-95.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**Unpublished Materials³⁹**

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Hanson, Halfdan, M. Halfdan Hanson Papers. SPNEA Archives, Boston. Besides Hanson's Beauport drawings, SPNEA has the rest of his papers, including drawings of projects for 102 sites (often multiple drawings for each site) and seven manuscript boxes of correspondence. These papers have been fully catalogued and indexed.

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³⁹In preparation for this nomination, a comprehensive finding aid was compiled for Beauport, which lists all the materials in the SPNEA collections. Available in the SPNEA Archives, the Beauport Finding Aid briefly records and locates primarily unpublished resources and is 135 pages long. This page lists only the most significant of those. Other SPNEA resources include almost 500 loose photographs, eleven postcards, five photograph albums, two dozen research binders, and 382 file folders, as well as numerous letters, wills, legal documents, obituaries, newspaper clippings, appraisals, inventories, paint analyses, pamphlets, blueprints, slides, transparencies, negatives, watercolors, and videotapes.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

Previously Listed in the National Register.

Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.

Designated a National Historic Landmark.

Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #

Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State Agency

Federal Agency

Local Government

University

Other (Specify Repository): SPNEA Library and Archives, Otis House, 141 Cambridge Street,
Boston MA 02114

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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Acreage of Property: .75 acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	19	363740	4716530

Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property is one lot and a contiguous portion of another, bounded on the west by Gloucester Harbor and on the east by Eastern Point Boulevard. The third parcel is directly across Eastern Point Boulevard from Beauport. The original lot is Lot D-1 on the plan filed with Certificate of Title #351, Essex South District Registry of Deeds (This is a subdivision of Lot D, as shown on the plan filed with certificate of Title #286.). The second parcel, an eighteen-foot wide strip north of the original parcel, is Lot D-3 on the plan by Aspinwall and Lincoln, 3 October 1911, filed with Certificate of Title #917. The third parcel, situated across Eastern Point Boulevard and currently the parking lot, is Lot A on plan "Land at Eastern Point," 18 July 1929.

Boundary Justification:

The current boundaries of the property were established by Henry Davis Sleeper in 1929 (with the purchase of the third parcel, directly across Eastern Point Boulevard from Beauport) and remained unchanged until his death. These boundaries include the house, its outbuildings and grounds, and the parking lot. These boundaries continued unchanged in 1935 when the property passed from the ownership of Sleeper's estate to Charles and Helena McCann, and in 1942 when the property was given to SPNEA by the McCann heirs: Constance McCann Betts, Helena Woolworth Guest, and Frasier W. McCann. These boundaries have remained constant from 1929 until the present.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

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DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK ON
MAY 27, 2003