

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

10B 58

Georgetown

GEO.74

Town/City: Georgetown

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Elm Street Area

Photograph



View from W

Address: 14 Chestnut Street

Historic Name: Nathaniel and Eunice Morse House

Uses: Present: residence

Original: residence

Date of Construction: ca. 1830

Source: historic maps

Style/Form: Federal

Architect/Builder: Joseph & John Kimball,
probable builders

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood clapboard (replacement)

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
None

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Rear ell enlarged, late 19th century
Siding, windows, doors & trim replaced, ca. 2003

Condition: fair

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 0.63 acre

Setting: The house on this property sits on a lot with no trees on the east side of Chestnut Street near a mixed commercial-residential district.

Locus Map



Recorded by: Kathryn Grover and Neil Larson

Organization: Georgetown Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): January 2010

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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.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

The Nathaniel and Eunice Morse House is a two-story wood frame dwelling with a hipped roof and wood clapboard siding. It is located on a 0.63-acre lot on the east side of Chestnut Street. Sited on the south side of the parcel, there is an open, mown area on the north side of the lot where there once was another house.

The two-story house has a three-bay front façade with an entrance on the left side set within sidelights and an elliptical-arch transom. The center window on the second story has been walled over, probably recently, when the exterior was renovated with new siding, windows and trim, including the entrance (the architrave appears to be original). The low-pitched hipped roof is similar to those found throughout the Elm Street neighborhood, and the original one-room-deep plan likely originated with a chimney on the rear wall, although there is no evidence of it on the exterior presently. These design features suggest that the house is one of a group of buildings built by housewrights Joseph and John Kimball, who at the time lived nearby on Elm Street.

The house would have had a small kitchen wing on the rear, which later was enlarged to the existing two-story mass on the rear of the house. The recent renovation has removed any evidence of the original dimensions or the stages of the alteration; however, the footprint of the house is depicted with an L shape on the 1872 map and a square in 1884, which may have been the period in which the expansion occurred. A story-and-a-half sun room appended to the east end of the house represents a more appropriate scale for the original rear ell, and may be either a remnant of the old house or a new addition altogether.

The Nathaniel and Eunice Morse House is an early and distinctive example of Federal-period domestic architecture in the Elm Street neighborhood, and although its historic exterior materials and design features have been entirely replaced, still evinces the form and architectural character of the original house. As a rare example of a "half-house" designed in the Kimball brothers' style, it is an important component of the Elm Street historic district.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

According to Georgetown maps, Chestnut Street was opened from East Main Street to Elm Street between 1830 and 1838. It was probably there by 1835, the year Jeremiah Nelson (1805-42) is said to have introduced "steam as a motive of power" to Georgetown industrial enterprise.¹ The street was probably opened to permit wagons more direct access to the tanneries that were arrayed along this short street from its creation; the land on which Chestnut Street and its buildings stand was earlier the back yards, in effect, of houses on the east side of Elm Street.

By 1800, according to a map showing the town center at that time, various branches of the Nelson family owned large tracts embracing both sides of Elm and Chestnut Street and both sides of Main Street in this section. All of these branches descended from Thomas Nelson (1615-about 1648), who was among the twenty families who had come to the New World in the winter of 1638 with the Puritan cleric Ezekiel Rogers (1590-166). With Rogers most of these families settled at Rowley, incorporated in 1639.

¹ Henry M. Nelson, "Town of Georgetown History," in *History of Essex County, Massachusetts, with Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men*, ed. D. Hamilton Hurd (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Co., 1888), 1:844, 846.

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Five members of the Nelson family—four descended from Thomas Nelson's son Sergeant Thomas Nelson(1638-1712) and the fifth from the immigrant's son Philip (1636-91)—owned the land around Elm Street and the contiguous section of East Main Streets. Three were the sons of Thomas's grandson Solomon Nelson (1703-81) and Mercy Chaplin—Amos (1736-1806), Asa (1739-1815), and Solomon Jr. (1742-1821). Another, Nathaniel Nelson (1767-1853) was the son of Solomon Nelson Jr., and the fifth, Aaron Nelson (1740-1804), was the great-grandson of Philip Nelson. Nathaniel Nelson's parcel extended from the 1767 church along the east side of Elm Street. Local histories state that Nathaniel's father Solomon had built a house for him on this tract just south of the church in 1797.² Indeed, the 1798 Federal Direct Tax schedules for Rowley show that Solomon owned two houses at that time. By 1800 he had given one to Nathaniel and owned another two, one at the southwestern side of the junction of Elm and East Main Streets and the other east of these, now 144 East Main Street, which became the home of Nathaniel's brother Stephen Mighill Nelson (1770-1855). Jeremiah was Stephen M. Nelson's son.

Judging by the position of Pen Brook on early village maps, Chestnut Street was on the tract owned by Nathaniel Nelson, whose longtime home was at 8 Elm Street. Nathaniel, his father Solomon Nelson Jr., his uncle Asa Nelson, his brother Jeremiah (1768-1838) and his son William were (1810-89) all owned and operated tanneries. "The most important and extensive early mechanical industry established in this town was that of tanning and currying, the annual production of leather being quite large," local historian Edwin Hill wrote in 1878. A statistical survey mandated by the state in 1837 found sixteen tanneries in Rowley, nine of which were in the Georgetown section of the town, that processed \$43,400 of leather from 11,600 hides and employed thirty-one people.³

The local tanning industry is believed to have been initiated by Captain Benjamin Adams on Central Street, just west of Elm, in 1780. According to local historian Henry Mighill Nelson, Deacon Solomon Nelson (his uncle) trained "most of the young men who learned this trade in New Rowley from 1810 to 1830." Nelson added, "The privileges of the apprentice were to dress for himself two dozen calf-skins, one-half dozen sides of leather, and as many sheep-skins as the apprentice pleased." He noted too that some of these tanners used locally supplied hides:

An extensive business in the slaughtering of cattle was carried on in town early in the present century and during the war with England. This was conducted principally by Deacon Solomon Nelson and his cousin, Nathaniel Nelson. Drovers of fifty or more head were often purchased at one time. Cattle were frequently bought of Governor Colby, of New Hampshire. The deacon was also State inspector of beef. The cellar floor under his house has at times been completely covered with barrels of beef awaiting shipment. The hides were converted into leather, and both industries carried on simultaneously.⁴

Nelson stated that Jeremiah Nelson, who served his apprenticeship under his first cousin Deacon Solmon Nelson, began a tannery "near the meetinghouse" about 1824-25.⁵ He added that Nathaniel Nelson moved buildings, apparently including a house, from another part of town to Chestnut Street to use in his tannery business, but he neither dated the move nor specified the Chestnut Street location of the buildings. Thus whether 14 Chestnut was one of these moved buildings is not known.

The 1830 map shows 14 Chestnut as the property of N. N. Morse, or Nathaniel N. Morse, whose family owned it until at least 1889. Morse is shown in the 1830 Georgetown census in this area with an adult female and three males in his household. A Born in Danbury, New Hampshire, about 1799, Morse was a tanner and currier; Nelson stated that he had "a [tan]yard nearby" the one Nathaniel Nelson operated on Chestnut Street. The 1856 village map shows an unlabeled building just north of Morse's house and one labeled tannery further north, which was probably Nelson's. By 1825 Morse had married Eunice Emmons Shepard, born about 1809 in Barre, Vermont, and had moved to Massachusetts. By 1830 the family was residing in Georgetown

² "Map of Centre of Georgetown in 1800," in Sidney Perley, "Centre of Georgetown in the Year 1800," *Essex Antiquarian* 2, 7 (July 1898), 101, based on the manuscript map "Georgetown 1800," 1996.07.01, Georgetown Historical Society. This map shows only a northern section of Elm Street and does not show how far south Nathaniel Nelson's tract extended. On the west side of Elm Street Aaron Nelson's tract abutted Solomon Nelson's on the south, but again the map does not reveal how far it extended southward. Perley, "Centre of Georgetown," 105, asserts the probability that Solomon Nelson Jr. built 8 Elm Street for his son.

³ See Gage, *History of Rowley*, 402-3, and Blanche Evans Hazard, *The Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts before 1875* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 210, which notes that these statistics were gathered and published by John Warner Barber in *Historical Collections of Every Town in Massachusetts* (Worcester: Dorr, Howland and Co., 1839), 66, 201.

⁴ Nelson, "Georgetown History," 844-45.

⁵ Henry M. Nelson, "Town of Georgetown History," in *History of Essex County, Massachusetts, with Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men*, ed. D. Hamilton Hurd (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Co., 1888), 1:844.

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in a house depicted on Chestnut Street. Morse's sons John Gilman, aged twenty-five in 1850, and Charles, fifteen in that year, were both shoemakers. Also in the household that year was the widow Eunice Wood, a Georgetown native who died in 1863.

By 1860 Morse listed his occupation in the census as farmer, and he owned \$1500 in real property and \$300 in personal estate. His son John Gilman Morse, who married Martha Chaplin Buckminster of Georgetown in Boston in 1851, was living in the household with his wife and children, Bainbridge, born in 1858, and Mary, born in 1859. In 1866 Nathaniel Morse died, and by 1872 his widow Eunice and daughter Eunice were living at 14 Chestnut while his son, John, and his family were in a house (not extant) next door to the north. In 1883 Eunice Morse owned a house and a barn and John a house, according to assessor's records. Eunice Morse died in 1888 in Georgetown, and her son John died the following year. John Morse's widow Martha moved to Haverhill, where she died in 1903.

By 1910 the wood chopper Charles W. West, born in New Hampshire about 1878, was living at 14 Chestnut with his wife Lucinda, their four children, and two other families—the widow Harriet M. West and her son Ralph, probably his mother and brother, and the family of laborer Eugene F. Pillsbury. The 1914 directory shows Charles West at 14 Chestnut and Harriet at 8 Chestnut, where John Gilman Morse had earlier lived, with her sons Ralph and William. By 1916 Charles West's family had moved to Central Street (where Chester A. West and George A. West, saw mill workers and probably his brothers, had lived since 1910), while Harriet lived with her son Arthur at 119 East Main Street, a tenement at the head of Chestnut Street. Who next lived at 14 Chestnut is not clear until 1933, when assessor's records show John A. and Mary F. Dole, about whom nothing can be determined from censuses and vital statistics. The Doles were taxed for a house and henhouse.

By 1944 14 Chestnut was owned by the shoe factory cutter Clarence Robert Poole, born about 1886 in Georgetown, who spent part of his childhood in the home of his father William at 140 Elm Street. Both were shoe factory workers. Poole sold the house that year to Fairfax Hatch Jr., who had come to Georgetown from Warren, New Hampshire; his occupation is not known. Fairfax Hatch died in 1984, and in 1997 Frank E. Hatch and Barbara R. Prussman sold the property out of the family. Fourteen Chestnut was acquired by current owner Paul T. Berkland in 2003.⁶

⁶ Clarence R. Poole et ux. To Fairfax Hatch Jr. and Gertrude L. Hatch, 28 October 1944, SED 3389:60; Frank E. Hatch and Barbara R. Prussman to Dean and Heidi L. C. Dummer, 11 March 1997, SED 14010:352; Dummers to Paul T. and Noreen C. Berkland, 31 October 2003, SED 22013:521.

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MAPS

"Map of the Centre of Georgetown in 1800." In Perley, Sidney H., "Centre of Georgetown in the Year 1800." *The Essex Antiquarian: A Quarterly Magazine Devoted to the Biography, Genealogy, History, and Antiquities of Essex County, Massachusetts* 2, 7 (July 1898): 201.

Map of Georgetown in 1810 and 1840. In Gage, Thomas. *The History of Rowley, Anciently Including Bradford, Boxford, and Georgetown, from the Year 1639 to the Present Time*. Boston: F. Andrews, 1840. 320.

"Map of New Rowley Surveyed and Drawn by Philander Anderson 1830." Georgetown Historical Society.

Map of Georgetown. 1856. In Walling, H. F. *A Topographical Map Essex County Massachusetts*. Boston: Smith and Morley, 1856.

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[Delete this page if no Criteria Statement is prepared]

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 Neil Larson and Kathryn Grover

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

The Nathaniel and Eunice Morse House is an early and distinctive example of Federal-period domestic architecture in the Elm Street neighborhood, and although its historic exterior materials and design features have been entirely replaced, still evinces the form and architectural character of the original house. As a rare example of a "half-house" designed in the Kimball brothers' style, it is an important component of the Elm Street historic district.

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View from NW



View from SW

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View from NE



Aerial view from N