

# FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

10A 30

Georgetown

GEO.12

**Town/City:** Georgetown

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

## Photograph



View from SE

**Address:** 81 Elm Street

**Historic Name:** Joseph Nelson House

**Uses:** Present: residence

Original: residence

**Date of Construction:** ca.1738 – ca. 1747

**Source:** Nelson (1888)

**Style/Form:** Colonial

**Architect/Builder:** unknown

## Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood clapboard

Roof: asphalt shingle

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**  
barn

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup>-century additions and alterations

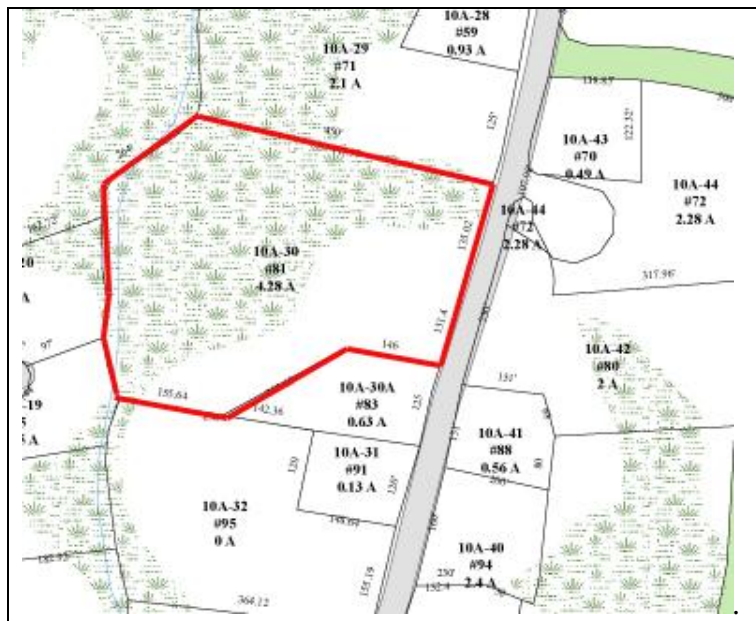
**Condition:** good

**Moved:** no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

**Acreage:** 4.28 acres

**Setting:** This property is set slightly back from the west side of Elm Street. The house, unlike most others on Elm Street, faces south, and a barn facing the road stands slightly southwest of the house. Elm street is primarily residential.

## Locus Map



**Recorded by:** Kathryn Grover and Neil Larson

**Organization:** Georgetown Historical Commission

**Date** (*month / year*): January 2010

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GEORGETOWN

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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 house Joseph Nelson House is reputedly one of the oldest domestic buildings in the town, with its earliest section constructed sometime between ca. 1738 and ca. 1747. It was once the homestead for a farm of which 4.28 acres remain associated with the house. The two-story, wood-frame dwelling is located in the southeast corner of the polygonal parcel near a recently subdivided house lot. The site is on an elevated plateau above a wooded wetland that comprises the northwest section of the property. The immediate area around the house is also thickly wooded. A mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century barn is located south of the house.

The front façade of the house faces south with the east end of its gable roof facing the street. Window spacing and placement of the center chimney indicates that the east end of the building is the original section with a three-bay front façade having its entrance on the left side in front of the chimney, in the manner of 18<sup>th</sup>-century “half-houses.” At some later point, probably still in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a two-story addition was made to the west end of the first house to balance the plan and front façade and positioning the brick chimney in the center. The spacing between the now central entrance and the two added bays of windows is quite extended compared to the original fenestration leaving a significant blank space, which may have once contained windows or suggest that more than two stages of expansion occurred. The east gable end has a single windows centered on the first, second and attic stories. A two-story kitchen ell on the rear (north) side of the house was added in the early 1800s, with various shed-roof appendages coming still later. The front entrance has neither sidelights nor transom and is set within a simple architrave with a Federal-style entablature. Most windows contain six-over-six sash.

The story-and-a-half barn is of an agricultural scale with a vehicle entrance with hanging track door centered on its east gable end. It is sided with vertical wood boards.

The Joseph Nelson House is individually significant in both architectural and historical contexts. With an early-18<sup>th</sup>-century settlement dwelling at its core, the house is an important surviving example of First Period architecture in Massachusetts. With its later additions, the house reflects the changing lifestyle and tastes of a prosperous family. The story of Joseph Nelson and his kin is significant in the history of Georgetown.

## 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 local histories, aside from the road (now Massachusetts Route 133) connecting Georgetown to its parent Rowley to the east and Andover on the west, Elm Street is one of the oldest streets in Georgetown, having been opened to “public travel” about 1686.<sup>1</sup> At that time between ten and twenty families lived in what was known as Rowley second (or west) parish or New Rowley. Beginning in the 1650s Rowley proprietors began to make land grants in the town’s western reaches; in 1666-67, the town laid out three thousand acres in the area and granted John Spofford the job of penning cattle “the young cattle of the towne” where they had “been herded this last year.” Pen Brook is named for these pens, which stood west of Elm Street. In 1732 families in the area successfully petitioned to form the Second Church of Rowley (ultimately Georgetown’s First

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Benjamin F. Arrington, ed., *Municipal History of Essex County in Massachusetts* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1922), 146.

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Congregational Church) and built a second meetinghouse at the junction of Elm and East Main Streets in 1769. In 1838 the General Court of Massachusetts incorporated Georgetown, which embraced most of the second parish.<sup>2</sup>

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.

The extent to which the Nelson lands reached southward is not clear from the 1800 village map, but it is clear that the tract on the west side of Elm Street owned at the time by Aaron Nelson (1740-1804) extended at least as far as this property and probably at least as far south as the south side of what is now Brook Street. Unlike many of the other landowning Nelsons, who descended from the immigrant Thomas's son Thomas (1638-1712), Aaron Nelson was the great grandson of Thomas's son Philip (1636-91). Aaron's grandfather Joseph (1682-1744) was, according to local historian Henry Mighill Nelson, the "first of this name to settle in Georgetown."<sup>3</sup> After Aaron Nelson's death his land appears to have been divided among his children, in particular Joseph (1769-1856) and Jonathan (1772-1852), and when they died, what remained then passed to Joseph's son Charles (1803-74) and Jonathan's son Sylvanus (1803-82).

The house at 81 Elm Street was one of at least two Nelson family houses on Elm Street that appear on the 1798 Federal Direct Tax list for Rowley. According to Nelson's 1888 historical account, a house was built on the site "before 1747" by Joseph Nelson but does not specify which Joseph, Joseph Sr. (1682-1744) or Joseph Jr. (1709-69), Aaron Nelson's father. Another account asserts a dwelling was built by the elder Joseph and that he "probably spent the last of his days with his son Joseph, to whom he gave the house and about thirty acres of land." If this statement is accurate, some portion of the existing house may have been built before 1744.<sup>4</sup>

The 1810 map of Georgetown village show that the "heirs of A. Nelson" (Aaron Nelson died in 1804) owned the house, and by 1830 the house is labeled "J. Nelson," probably for Aaron's son, Jonathan Nelson (1772-1852), because by 1856 the house belonged to Sylvanus Nelson, his son, an unmarried farmer who lived there until he died in 1882. Because he had no heirs, the 81 Elm property was then sold out of the family.

The 1884 map labeled the house as "S. Nelson" even though Sylvanus Nelson had died two years earlier. By the time of Sylvanus's death the property was owned and occupied by the farmer Luther P. Tidd, who was born in Lunenburg, Massachusetts; his parents were Samuel C. and Ruth Mighill Tidd, the Mighill family being one of the oldest in Georgetown. Tidd was living in Georgetown by 1845, when the record of his marriage to the widow Soviah Baker Richardson of Georgetown states his occupation as shoemaker. Tidd's first wife died in 1850, and in that year he married Sarah M. Nelson, the daughter of Thomas and Susanna March Nelson; Thomas was the son of Asa Nelson (1739-1815) and descended from the Thomas Nelson branch of the family. She died in 1873, and by 1880 Tidd had married a third time, to Elizabeth Treadwell Chaplin, a widow; this was also her third marriage. He was then a farmer. Tidd died in 1892, and by the time his wife Elizabeth died in 1910 she was living on Maple Street.

In 1892, the year he died, Luther Tidd conveyed the property to Abbie E. Peabody, who died in Boston in 1900. The property was then sold to Daniel P. Bond, born in Corinth, Vermont, about 1850. Bond was a papermaker and later a farmer. In 1877 in Georgetown he married Nellie C. Harvey, the daughter of Solomon H. and Mary A. Perley Harvey, who died in Middleton, Massachusetts, in 1884. In 1910 Bond was living at 81 Elm with his housekeeper Emma E. Chaplin. In 1920 assessor's records show Bond owning thirteen cows, "3 young," a bull, two barns, one on the "S. Nelson place," the house on the S. Nelson place," a carriage house, and a shop.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Gage, *The History of Rowley* (Boston: Ferdinand Andrews, 1840), 31-32, 320, 324, 326, 329.

<sup>3</sup> Henry M. Nelson, "Town of Georgetown History," in D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of Essex County, Massachusetts, with Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Co., 1888), 1: 812.

<sup>4</sup> Research of D. W. Weymouth, [http://www.weymouthtech.com/genealogy/ps34/ps34\\_002.htm](http://www.weymouthtech.com/genealogy/ps34/ps34_002.htm) states as well that this house was "owned and occupied by Sylvanus Nelson, his [Joseph Jr.'s] great-great grandson in 1867. This property was located on Elm St., near Nelson St. in what became Georgetown. This house was owned by Daniel Bond in 1913 and passed to Mrs. J. H. Heathcock of Lowell (a niece) in 1932."

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Bond was still living in the house in 1930, and his date of death is not yet known. According to one genealogy, Bond transferred title to the house to his niece, Mrs. J. H. Heathcock of Lowell, in 1932.<sup>5</sup> In 1955 the property was acquired by Frederick and Hilda N. True, who sold it in 2002 to Lois Erickson; a year later, as trustee of the Elm Street Realty Trust, Erickson sold it to the current owners, Anthony S. and Mary P. Pruszenski.<sup>6</sup>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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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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"Georgetown, Mass. 1887." Drawn and Published by George E. Norris, Brockton, Massachusetts. Troy, NY: Burleigh Lithographic Establishment, 1887."

<sup>5</sup> Weymouth website.

<sup>6</sup> Luther P. Tidd to Abbie E. Peabody, 31 March 1892, SED 1341:41; ? to Hilda N. True, 30 November 1955, SED 4229:21; True to Lois Erickson, 17 July 2002, SED 19728:381; Erickson to Anthony S. and Mary P. Pruszenski, 15 August 2003, SED 21538:544.

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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 Joseph Nelson House is individually significant in both architectural and historical contexts. With an early-18<sup>th</sup>-century settlement dwelling at its core, the house is an important surviving example of First Period architecture in Massachusetts. With its later additions, the house reflects the changing lifestyle and tastes of a prosperous family. The story of Joseph Nelson and his kin is significant in the history of Georgetown.



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View from SE



View from E



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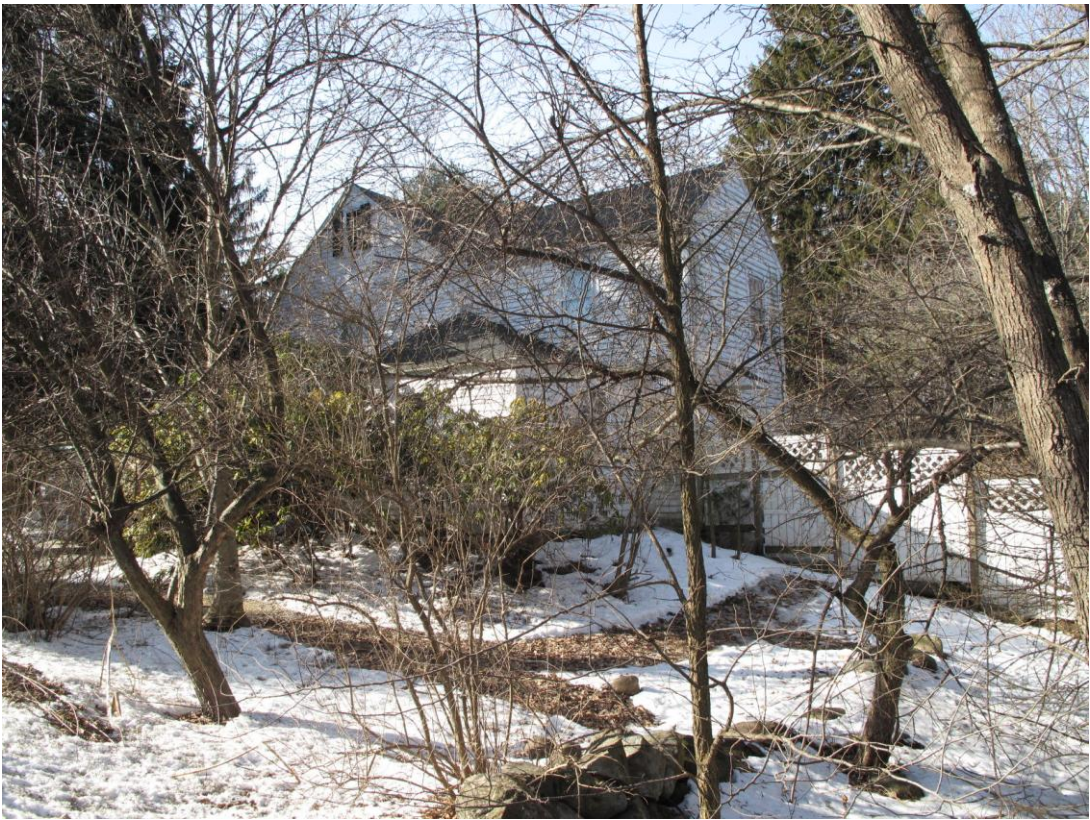
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View from NE



View from SE



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Aerial view from E