

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 66

Georgetown

GEO.6, 38,
113

Town/City: Georgetown

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

Photograph



View from SE

Address: 108 East Main Street

Historic Name: Brocklebank-Nelson-Beecher House
Old Hill Schoolhouse, Merrill shoe shop

Uses: Present: historical society

Original: residence

Date of Construction: 1670, 1754, 1767 [house, GEO.6];
1828 [school, GEO.38]; ca 1850 [shoe shop] [GEO.113]

Source: local histories

Style/Form: Colonial

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone, brick

Wall/Trim: wood clapboard

Roof: wood shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
schoolhouse, shoe shop

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

none

Condition: good

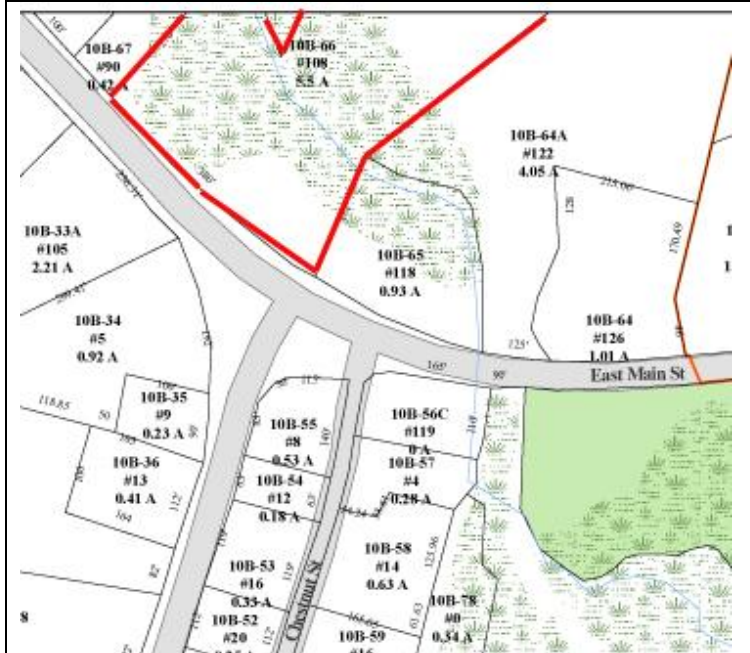
Moved: no ☐ yes ☒ school & shop moved

Date: 1984

Acreage: 5.5 acres

Setting: This property is on the north side of East Main Street just west of its intersection with Elm Street. The area is mixed residential and commercial.

Locus Map



Recorded by: Kathryn Grover and Neil Larson

Organization: Georgetown Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): January 2010

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

108 East Main Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

	GEO.6, 38, 113
--	-------------------

☒ 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 Brocklebank-Nelson-Beecher House is a two-story wood frame house with wood clapboard siding and a gambrel roof. The house, which now functions as a historical society museum, is located on the north side of East Main Street where Elm Street intersects on the south. The house is situated in a clearing at the roadside. The Penn Brook courses directly behind (north of) the house; the rest of the 5.50-acre property forested.

The construction history of the house begins in 1670 when Samuel Brocklebank is believed to have built a dwelling on the property. Parts of this house are reputed to be contained within the present building, although this is not evident from the exterior. (A full conditions assessment is needed to sort out the details of this history.) The existing two-story, gambrel-roof, center-chimney house appears to have been built by Solomon Nelson, Jr. after he acquired the property in 1767. Its symmetrical five-bay front façade displays no evidence of having been built in stages; the center entrance is contained in a small one-story pavilion, which—if original—could be the model for projecting entrances on Elm Street houses built generations later. End walls contain but window bay, another persistent feature in local architecture. The windows contain nine-over-six wood sash, which are early 19th-century additions. First-story windows are ornamented with cornices.

A large two-story kitchen ell with a brick foundation was added to the west side of the rear of the house in a later stage; its west wall was built in line with the gambrel end of the house. The basement is elevated substantially above grade on the west side. It has a gable roof and smaller windows. An entrance is located on the east side of the ell within a small courtyard formed by the rear wall of the main section of the house on the south and story-and-a-half ell attached perpendicularly to the northeast corner of the kitchen. The later ell, a service building, is mounted on a stone basement exposed at grade on the north and east sides. The rear (north) facades of the ells are sided with wood shingles.

The Old Hill Schoolhouse was built in 1829 and functioned on its original site until 1905; it was moved to a site just west of the Brocklebank-Nelson-Beecher House in 1984 and it the only surviving one-room schoolhouse in the town. The one-story wood frame building has wood clapboard siding and a wood shingle roof. An entrance with transom is centered in the front (south) gable end. The gable ends and eaves are decorated with a slim cornice. Each of the other three sides has two windows containing six-over-six wood sashes.

The Merrill family shoe shop was moved to the museum site from 124 North Street in 1972. The shop was probably built by 1830, when according to local historian Benjamin Arrington “there was scarcely a farmhouse (or any other house) but that had in its back-yard a 12x12 foot shoe-shop. It was in these small shops that the countrywide known Georgetown boots and shoes were made until recent years, when they were manufactured in factories.”¹

The Brocklebank-Nelson-Beecher House is one of the oldest surviving houses in the town and may contain portions built in the 17th century. It is both architecturally and historically significant and is individually eligible for the National Register as well as a pivotal component of the Elm Street historic district. Both the schoolhouse and the Merrill shoe shop are rare survivals of building types once common throughout the town.

¹ Benjamin F. Arrington, ed., *Municipal History of Essex County in Massachusetts* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1922), 254.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

108 East Main Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

GEO.6, 38,
113**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.

East Main Street, now Massachusetts Route 133, is the earliest road in Georgetown and connects it to its parent Rowley to the east and Andover on the west. Beginning in the 1650s Rowley proprietors began to make land grants in the town's western reaches, the area that came to be known as Rowley second (or west) parish or New Rowley and ultimately Georgetown. In 1666-67, the town laid out three thousand acres in the area and granted John Spofford the job of penning "the young cattle of the towne" where they had "been herded this last yeare." Pen Brook is named for these pens, which stood east of Elm Street. In 1732 families in the area successfully petitioned to form the Second Church of Rowley (ultimately Georgetown's First 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.²

The land on which the two buildings at 108 East Main Street are sited belonged in 1660 to Samuel Brocklebank (1629-75), who according to one local history was among the men bringing cattle to New Rowley before Spofford settled in the area. Brocklebank, his widowed mother Jane, and his brother John were among the twenty families who had come to the New World in the winter of 1638 with the Puritan cleric Ezekiel Rogers (1590-166) and settled with him at Rowley. In 1660 Brocklebank was granted land in the west parish, and he is believed to have built the original house on this tract in 1670, two years after his marriage. According to local historian Benjamin Arrington, this house was built "on the exact spot where the present house stands, and it is believed that the original structure forms a part of the present house, which was built over it."³

Samuel Brocklebank lived in the house for only six years. In April 1676, during King Philip's War, Brocklebank commanded twelve Rowley men and joined a larger militia company that was ambushed and overcome by Indians in Sudbury. Most of the company, including Brocklebank and five other of the twelve Rowley militia members, were killed in the skirmish. Brocklebank's wife Hannah (last name unknown)⁴ remarried and moved to Newbury, and her son Samuel, born in 1653, lived in the house through at least 1685, and it remained in the Brocklebank family until 1754, when Dudley Tyler is said to have bought it and put it to use as the White Horse (or Dudley) Tavern. Born in Rowley in 1700, Dudley Tyler's great grandfather was the immigrant Job Tyler of Andover, and his mother was Margaret Bradstreet Tyler, the daughter of Dudley Bradstreet and granddaughter of Massachusetts Bay Colony governor Simon Bradstreet. Dudley Tyler was the first of many of that name in the family. Tyler left Georgetown for Haverhill in 1767, at which time Solomon Nelson Jr. (1742-1821) acquired the property.⁵ The present form and appearance of the house conforms to the construction methods and design taste of this period.

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 East Main Street and both sides of Elm and Chestnut Streets in this section. All of these branches descended from Thomas Nelson (1615-about 1648), whose family, like the Brocklebanks, had come to Massachusetts Bay Colony with Ezekiel Rogers. 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, among them Solomon Jr. Local histories state that Solomon built a house for his son Nathaniel on this tract, what is now 8 Elm Street.⁶ 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 three, one being the Brocklebank house, another across East

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

³ Arrington, *Municipal History*, 247.

⁴ Our Family Genealogy Pages website, <http://www.richardpyoung.org/getperson.php?personID=I728&tree=Hogan01>, has Hannah's last name as Rolfe but does not cite a previous marriage.

⁵ Willard Irving Tyler Brigham, *The Tyler Genealogy: The Descendants of Job Tyler of Andover, Massachusetts, 1619-1700*. Plainfield, NJ: Cornelius B. Tyler, and Tylerville, CT: Rollin U. Tyler, 1907 and 1912), 1: 76-77.

⁶ "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.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

108 East Main Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

	GEO.6, 38, 113
--	-------------------

Main Street on the southwest side of its intersection with Elm Street, and the third east of these, now 144 East Main Street, which became the home of Nathaniel's brother Stephen Mighill Nelson (1770-1855).

Arrington asserted that Solomon Nelson Jr. also ran a tavern at 108 East Main Street but does not state for how long.⁷ By 1810 Nelson had passed the house to his son Paul (1775-1857), who is shown as the owner on the 1810, 1830, and 1838 village maps. Paul Nelson married Sally Adams (1780-1856), whose father Benjamin was Georgetown's earliest tanner and a large landowner in the area surrounding the intersection of Elm, Central, and Nelson Streets. The Nelsons had no children, and their 1850 household included only the couple and two apparently unrelated women, probably both of them domestic servants.

Paul Nelson died in 1857, and the next year the Reverend Charles Beecher bought the property. The son of the famed Presbyterian cleric Lyman Beecher (1775-1863) and brother of Henry Ward Beecher (1813-87) and Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-96), Beecher was born in Litchfield, Connecticut, in 1815, Charles Beecher graduated from Bowdoin College in 1834 and then went to Lane Theological Seminary in Ohio, of which his father had become president in 1832. The seminary is best known for sponsoring a series of debates on slavery in 1834 that compelled its trustees (in Lyman Beecher's absence) to ban the school's antislavery society. The debates impelled a group of professors and students, including the abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld, to leave the institution. Many went to Oberlin College, by then interracial and committed to equal education. Whether Charles Beecher took part in any of these debates is not yet known, and the "Lane Rebels," as they were called, view his father's efforts to quiet the dispute as an endorsement of the trustees' decision.

Beecher was pastor at a Fort Wayne, Indiana, Presbyterian church from 1844 to 1851 and then accepted a pastorate at the strongly abolitionist First Free Presbyterian Church in Newark, New Jersey. There, in 1851, he preached a sermon advocating defiance of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, and also published several antislavery tracts.⁸ While Beecher served in Newark the church was expelled from the Presbyterian Synod for its unorthodoxy and became a Congregational Church

In 1857 Beecher came to Georgetown as a "colleague pastor" to the Reverend Isaac Braman (1770-1858), who lived at 13 Elm Street and died in 1858; Braman's widow continued to occupy this "Old South Parsonage" until at least the mid-1880s. At Beecher's installation in November of that year, his sister's husband, the Rev. Calvin Stowe, offered a sermon. It has not yet been determined if Beecher preached against slavery in Georgetown, though it seems likely that he did, and it was probably because of him that the house gained its Underground Railroad reputation. In the cellar of the house is a compartment that can only be reached through loose floorboards above. However, its use to conceal fugitives and Beecher's asserted activity on their behalf has not been documented.

In 1863 members of Beecher's Georgetown congregation presented a petition to an Ecclesiastical Council of the Congregational Church complaining of their pastor's views. "It seems to us that several doctrines preached by our pastor are not in accordance with the faith once delivered to the saints, and held generally by the churches of New-England," the petition stated. "The points on which we have special difficulty are the doctrines of the pre-existence of the human soul, of the Atonement, of the state of souls after death, and Divine Sorrow." A *Boston Journal* account of Beecher's two-day hearing in Georgetown reported that the petitioners, according to a Boston Journal report on Beecher's two-day hearing, claimed that the church was divided on the subject, that "a want of interest in preaching" existed, and that the general dispute about Beecher's sermons had hurt "the welfare of the church."⁹

The church council adjudged that Beecher's "lengthy and carefully written argument" defending his position convinced its members that "he does not preach the faith of this church and of the churches of our order in New-England, but doctrines instead that are vitally and fundamentally erroneous." Beecher did not believe that "the Fall of Adam" predestined humanity to a sinful state or that the threat of future punishment in the absence of atonement for that state was in effect exaggerated by God "to affect men." In Beecher's view God had "an angelic nature," and the council asserted that "by the manner of teaching that God suffers and sorrows over the sins of our race he presents to us a God deficient in the nature and imperfect and finite in his blessedness." By a vote of sixteen to six the council advised ending "the pastoral relation" between Beecher and Georgetown's

⁷ Arrington, *Municipal History*, 247, wrote that the tavern, while Tyler and the Nelsons owned it, "had a sign bearing the picture of an English officer on horseback, supposed to be that of General James Wolfe, who was killed in the battle of Quebec. This sign is still in existence. It has in it a bullet-hole, about which there are a number of traditions. One says it was made by some patriot marching past on his way to battle for independence in 1775, who took this way of showing his hatred toward England and everything English."

⁸ See Antislavery Literature website, <http://antislavery.eserver.org/religious/beecherdutyofdisobedience/>.

⁹ "The Trial of Rev. Charles Beecher: He is Convicted of Heresy," *Boston Journal*, 23 July 1863, reprinted in *New York Times*, 26 July 1893.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

108 East Main Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

	GEO.6, 38, 113
--	-------------------

First Congregational Church and ordered that his connection to the church in general be severed so as to save "the entire Church, and the community, from the utter indifference, not to say contempt, that must be engendered towards creeds and covenants, by such an example as his course has offered." Among the six who refused to censure Beecher was his brother Edward, then a pastor in Galesburg, Illinois.

The outcome of the Beecher's trial did not end his tenure in Georgetown; he was pastor at the First Congregational Church until 1870 and then left for Florida to work with Harriet Beecher and Calvin Stowe among freed people in Florida. He was the state superintendent of public instruction in Florida from 1871 to 1873. Beecher returned to Georgetown often to visit his daughter Mary, who had married the shoe manufacturer George W. Noyes in 1870, and he died in Georgetown in 1900.

By 1872 108 East Main Street had been acquired by the farmer Melvin Gardner Spofford. Born in Groveland in 1832, Spofford was a stable keeper at the time of his marriage in Georgetown in 1861 to the widow Maria Perley Floyd. In 1870 he was in his father Gardner's household. By 1900 the Spoffords lived at this address with their son Melvin, born in 1866, also a farmer. Melvin Spofford died that year, and his widow and son remained in the house probably until 1931, when Everett Augustus Spaulding, a Brocklebank descendant, acquired the property.¹⁰ Spaulding, born in 1892 in Georgetown, was the son of the shoe trimmer Arthur A. Spaulding and Ida Morse, whose father Colonius lived nearby on East Main Street, and he was part of a large extended family that lived for the most part along Tenney Street. Everett Spaulding apparently grew up at 3 Tenney Street, and his uncle Charles C. Spaulding, also a farmer, lived either next door or across the street, and another uncle, Wilbur, was nearby.

Everett Spaulding's grandfather Alfred was a shoemaker in 1880 and later a retail fur dealer. His uncle Wilbur was a farmer in 1900 but had become an antique dealer by 1910. Everett began his career doing odd jobs and by 1917 was working as a chauffeur in Dorchester; he was single, and his draft registration record states that he was "physically unfit." He may have worked for his uncle Wilbur, and by 1930 he listed himself as an antique dealer in the federal census.

In 1925 Spaulding began a reproduction furniture making business that became known as Spaulding Colonial Reproductions. He made furniture in the style of the early national period and sometimes modeled pieces after the work of Newburyport cabinetmaker Joseph Short (1771-1819). Spaulding's factory was at 118 East Main Street, and he used Adams Hall at 5 Elm Street as his showroom for sixty years. Local historian Jane Field called the manufacture of colonial reproductions "perhaps Georgetown's most distinctive industry" and cited five other local shops making "fine reproductions."¹¹

In 1975 the Brocklebank-Nelson-Beecher house was acquired by the Georgetown Historical Society and has since served as its headquarters and museum.

The schoolhouse on the 108 East Main Street lot, moved to this site in 1984, predates the incorporation of Georgetown by ten years. The school building, "Old Hill School / School #3," was built in 1828 on the south side of Andover Street near West Street and is shown on the 1830 town map as "School No. 6."¹² The school remained in use in its original location until June 1905, when it and the town's other district schools closed permanently, their students transferring to the newly built Central School in September that year. It is today the only extant one-room schoolhouse in Georgetown.

The Merrill shoe shop once stood at 124 North Street and was donated to the Georgetown Historical Society in 1969. Exactly when the shop was built and by whom is not yet known, but it may once have been part of the property of Edward Arthur Merrill (1866-1905, and sometimes shown as Arthur Edward Merrill), whose family lived at 130 North Street in the mid-1920s. Merrill was a shoe factory stock fitter and later foreman and the son of bootmaker George W. Merrill and grandson of Moses Merrill (1805-79), who lived at 222 East Main Street in Georgetown's Marlborough section. Edward Arthur Merrill was part of the eighth generation of descendants of the immigrant Nathaniel Merrill (possibly 1601-55), who with his brother John was one of the earliest settlers of Newbury, Massachusetts, in 1635. Moses Merrill's great-grandfather Thomas (1702-74) was the first of this branch of the family to settle in what became Georgetown and is said to have lived "about half a mile below the old

¹⁰ Spaulding's birth record shows his name as Alfred A., but all later records show it as Everett.

¹¹ Jane Field, *A Brief History of Georgetown Massachusetts 1838-1963* (1963; rev. ed. Georgetown: Georgetown Historical Commission, 1988), 36-37.

¹² Massachusetts Historical Commission Form B for 108 East Main Street, June 1990, identifies the building's site and name but does not indicate why its plaque calls it School #3.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

108 East Main Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

	GEO.6, 38, 113
--	-------------------

meetinghouse" in a 1730s saltbox house he acquired from Joseph Nelson near the East Main-Tenney Streets intersection.¹³ Moses's grandfather Thomas (1737-1820) lived in this homestead, which remained in the family until 1898 and was torn down in 1905. Thomas Merrill is said to have been the first boot and shoemaker in Georgetown to have made footwear for use outside the family.¹⁴ When Byron and Sue Merrill donated the shoe shop to the historical society, it was moved to the Witham house on Jewett Street, then the Georgetown Historical Society's headquarters, and in the 1970s was moved next to the society's new site, the Brocklebank house.

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¹³ Samuel Merrill, *A Merrill Memorial: An Account of the Descendants of Nathaniel Merrill, An Early Settler of Newbury, Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA, 1917-28), 196.

¹⁴ 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), 1:845.

[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 Brocklebank-Nelson-Beecher House is one of the oldest surviving houses in the town and may contain portions built in the 17th century. It is both architecturally and historically significant and is individually eligible for the National Register as well as a pivotal component of the Elm Street historic district. Both the schoolhouse and the Merrill shoe shop are rare survivals of building types once common throughout the town.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

108 East Main Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s)	Form No.
	GEO.6, 38, 113



Brocklebank House from E



Brocklebank House from NW

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

108 East Main Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

	GEO.6, 38, 113
--	-------------------



Shoe shop from S



Schoolhouse from SE

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

108 East Main Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s)	Form No.
	GEO.6, 38, 113



Schoolhouse from S



View from W

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

108 East Main Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

	GEO.6, 38, 113
--	-------------------



Aerial view from S