

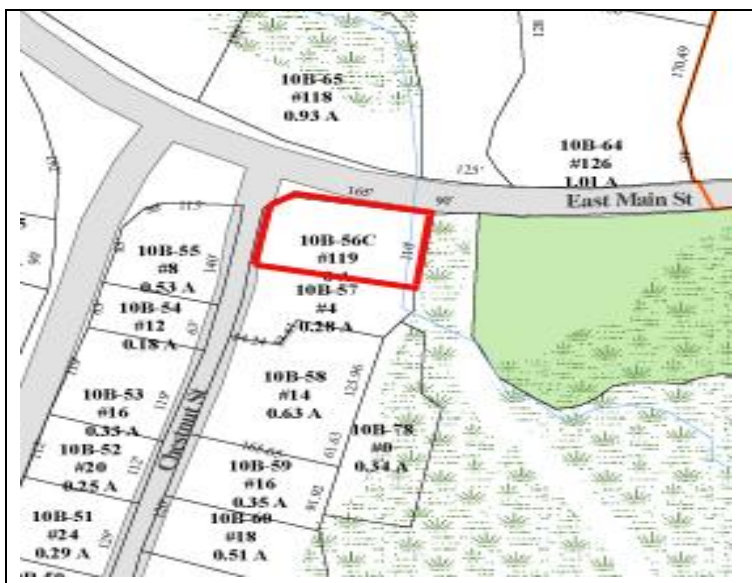
FORM B – BUILDING

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

Photograph



Locus Map



Recorded by: Kathryn Grover and Neil Larson
Organization: Georgetown Historical Commission
Date (month / year): January 2010

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

10B 56

Georgetown

GEO.118

Town/City: Georgetown

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): East Main-Elm Street Area

Address: 119 East Main Street

Historic Name: Nelson Tenement

Uses: Present: residence

Original: residence

Date of Construction: ca. 1870

Source: historic maps

Style/Form: Classical Revival

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood clapboard

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
None

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Renovated for two-family dwelling, ca. 1985

Condition: good

Moved: no ☐ yes ☒ possibly **Date:** ca. 1870

Acreage: approx. 0.50 acres

Setting: This property is at the southeast corner of the intersection of East Main and Chestnut Streets on a lot with mature hardwoods. The area is mixed commercial and residential.

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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 two-story wood frame house has wood clapboard siding and a gable roof. It is situated in the center of a half-acre lot bordered by East Main Street on the north, Chestnut Street on the west and Penn Brook on the east. The property is mostly characterized by mown lawn and ornamental plantings. A driveway and parking area is located on the north side of the house along East Main Street.

The size, form and ample fenestration of the dwelling reflects the design of mid- to late-19th-century shoe factories in the town, which supports the notion suggested by local histories that it was moved here from another location. Local histories note that Nathaniel Nelson, who owned this property and operated tanneries here at the turn of the 19th century, moved numerous buildings to the site. By 1872, when the building first appears on local maps, the tannery no longer functioned and buildings in the area were identified as tenements. The building does not appear to date much earlier than this, and was likely built as a multi-family dwelling. The north (East Main Street) façade has a single entrance and window groups at the corners leaving a blank wall space in the center, which suggests that a more complete and regular pattern of windows and doors was broken up in more recent alterations. The west gable end contains an entrance and bow window on the first story, recent additions, and four windows evenly-spaced windows on the second story, which are historic. Windows on the south wall are also in a regular pattern with paired units on the first story and single units on the second. A one-story wing is attached to the east end facing Penn Brook.

Whether built elsewhere as a factory and moved here or constructed on the site in c.1870 as a multiple dwelling, the house is a distinctive example of domestic architecture in the Elm Street context and is a contributing component of the 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.

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.¹

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

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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 east side of Elm Street probably to the east side of Chestnut Street; there it abutted a tract his father owned.²

The 119 East Main Street property was on the Nathaniel Nelson tract. It may have been moved to this site. Local historian Henry Mighill Nelson asserted that Nathaniel Nelson moved buildings from another part of town to Chestnut Street, just behind his house, to use in his tannery business, but he neither dated the move nor specified the Chestnut Street location of the buildings. It is possible that the building at 119 East Main Street was one of them, but the building does not appear on any village map before 1872. In that year it is labeled "Capt. Wm. Nelson," denoting Nathaniel's son William (1810-89). The 1884 map labels it and four buildings just to the south on Chestnut Street as tenements.

Both Nathaniel and William Nelson owned and operated tanneries, a significant local industry initiated by Captain Benjamin Adams on Central Street in 1780. At some unstated date soon after, according to Nelson's 1888 history, Nathaniel Nelson began a tannery "near the meetinghouse."³ By 1837 sixteen tanneries operated in Rowley, nine of which were in the Georgetown section of the town, processing \$43,400 of leather from 11,600 hides and employing thirty-one people. By that year Georgetown (incorporated the following year) was both larger than Rowley and much more focused on industrial development; Rowley remained by and large agricultural.⁴

By 1860 William Nelson is shown in the census as a farmer and thus had probably abandoned the tanning business. Who occupied the house from its construction or move to this site through the turn of the century is not known, but in 1900 119 East Main Street was occupied by the shoemaker James M. Morse and his family, who owned the property until 1985.

Born in Georgetown in 1859, Morse was the son of Colonius and Martha Downer Morse. Colonius Morse was also a shoemaker who came to Georgetown from Maine, probably in the late 1840s, and his wife was a native of West Newbury. By the mid-1880s the Colonius Morse family lived on Summer Street and James on Main Street, so James Morse may have been in this house by 1885. Morse had married in Georgetown in 1879 to Ella F. Banks of Groveland. By 1900 James was shoe factory heeler and by 1910 a nailer, but the 1914 town directory shows him as a farmer.

When James and Ella Banks Morse died is not clear, but in the mid-1910s the house was rented to the widow Florence G. Seaver, who worked as a shoe stitcher and remained at 119 East Main Street for several years. By 1930 119 East Main Street was occupied by James and Ella Morse's son Fred Munroe Morse, born in 1892. Morse worked as a hostler at the sale stable of Louis S. Adams, who lived at 9 Elm Street and ran the 5 Elm Street stable of his late father Josephus Adams. Morse continued in that trade at least through 1930 and lived at 119 East Main Street until he died, sometime after 1942. His widow Grace Johnson Morse left the house to three of her children, and in 1976 they transferred their title to Norma J. Morse. She sold 119 East Main Street to Alfred R. Van Swearingen and Nicholas E. Hurlin in 1985, after which time the house was divided into two condominium units.⁵

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 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Ruth F. (Morse) Bateman to Norma J. Morse, 1 March 1976, SED 6228:212; Oren Morse to Norma J. Morse, 23 March 1976, SED 6333:195; Frank C. Morse to Norma J. Morse, 26 August 1976, SED 6333:196; Norma J. Morse to Alfred R. Van Swearingen and Nicholas E. Hurlin, 24 August 1985, SED 7653:267.

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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.
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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.

Whether built elsewhere as a factory and moved here or constructed on the site in c.1870 as a multiple dwelling, the house is a distinctive example of domestic architecture in the Elm Street context and is a contributing component of the historic district.

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View from NW

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View from SE



Aerial view from N