

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

9A 23

Georgetown

GEO.101

Town/City: Georgetown

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

Photograph



View from W

Address: 126 Elm Street

Historic Name: Benjamin & Anna Low House

Uses: Present: residence

Original: residence

Date of Construction: ca. 1832

Source: historic maps, vital records

Style/Form: Federal

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood clapboard (added)

Roof: asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Garage/shop

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Dormers added, ell enlarged and exterior renovated, ca. 1955

Condition: fair

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 0.72 acre

Setting: This property is on the west side of Elm Street diagonally across from the intersection of Elm and Brook Streets on a lot with mature hardwoods. 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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☒ 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 Benjamin & Anna Low House is a story-and-a-half wood frame dwelling with a gable roof and wood clapboard siding built c. 1832. It is situated at the north side of a three-quarter-acre lot on the east side of Elm Street. A large lawn extends east and south of the house; the parcel is framed by tree lines and abuts woods on the east. A driveway on the south side of the house connects the street to a garage at the rear of the house.

The house is a smaller version of the two-story, single-pile houses with chimneys on their back walls that are concentrated at the north end of Elm Street, most of which are attributed to housewrights Joseph and John Kimball. In this way it is also similar to the story-and-a-half house at 98 Elm Street. The five-bay front façade has a center entrance within what appears to be a Colonial Revival-style architrave consistent with the rest of the façade, which was renovated with the addition of wall dormers and new siding. (It is possible that a projecting entrance characteristic of this Elm Street type was removed at this time.) End walls contain a single window in each story, as do the other houses, and the rear chimneys are visible in aerial images, even though they now flank a shed dormer raised in the roof on the rear. The existing six-over-six sash may be original. The siding appears to have been replaced during the 20th-century renovation.

The front half of a long one-story kitchen ell attached to the south side of the rear wall was raised to two-stories, and a one-story addition has been made to the east end of the ell. East of the house is a large wood frame outbuilding with a front gable roof. There is a vehicle door on the front (west) side and four window bays on the side walls. It is not a historic building.

The Benjamin & Anna Low House is a distinctive example of early 19th-century domestic architecture on Elm Street, and it is an important variant of the single-pile, rear-chimney house form that developed in the neighborhood. The property is a contributing feature 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 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 1686.¹ 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 yeare." 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 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

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

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

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

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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 Nelson family lands reached southward is not clear from the 1800 village map. Probably by about 1832 it belonged to the family of longtime resident Benjamin Low (1807-93). The 1838 village map labels the house "J. G. Low," which was certainly Benjamin's brother Jonathan Gove Low (born 1804). The Low brothers—Benjamin, Joseph Perley, and Jonathan Gove Low—were the sons of Joseph S. Low, born in Essex, Massachusetts, and Apphia Perley, the daughter of Benjamin Perley, who moved from Essex County to Dunbarton, New Hampshire in 1791. The brothers were all born there, and by 1832 at least Benjamin had returned to Rowley. In that year he married Anna S. Sargent of New London, New Hampshire.

Jonathan G. Low must have conveyed the property to his brother before 1850 when the census enumerated Benjamin Low in the Elm Street neighborhood and Jonathan elsewhere. In 1850 Benjamin was employed as a currier with property worth \$1050; his wife, Amy S. (Anna) and four children rounded out the household. By 1860 the couple's daughter Sarah was a schoolteacher, their son Charles was a shoemaker, and their son Benjamin P. Low was a shoe cutter.

Local historian Edwin Hill states that Benjamin Low was among eleven "principal tanners and curriers" in Georgetown. The tanning business began in Georgetown about 1780 when Benjamin Adams set up a tannery on Central Street, and by 1839 there were nine "tan-houses" in Georgetown. These nine businesses, combined with six in Rowley, tanned 11,600 hides worth \$43,400 in that year and employed thirty-one people.³ In a single year, John Kimball, who had bought the Adams tannery in 1825, tanned and curried four thousand South American horsehides.⁴ Unlike some tanners, Low was also a currier, and according to historian Henry Mighill Nelson "worked in his own shop for many years."⁵ Though not labeled as a shop, Low's shop might have been one of two buildings on this lot that he is shown as owning on the 1872 and 1884 village maps.

Benjamin Low Sr. died in 1893 and his son Benjamin P. remained at 126 Elm Street, through about 1915, when he moved to Danvers. By 1933 Clarence Robert Poole was living at the property and remained there at least through 1942. Poole, born in 1886 in Georgetown, was the son of shoemaker and railroad station agent William H. Poole, who lived with his family at 140 Elm Street; in the mid-1910s both William and Clarence worked at F. W. Baker and Company, the prosperous shoe factory on Central Street. By 1954 the carpenter Alton L. Cooke owned 126 Elm Street. By 1978 the house was owned by George F. and Lorraine F. Melanson, who sold it that year to current owner Richard F. Zapf.⁶

³ Gage, *History of Rowley*, 402-3.

⁴ 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), 844.

⁵ Nelson, "Georgetown History," 844.

⁶ Lorraine H. Melanson to George F. Melanson, 18 December 1975, SED 6205:587; Melanson to Richard F. Zapf, 28 July 1978, SED 6498:306.

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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.

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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 Benjamin & Anna Low House is a distinctive example of early 19th-century domestic architecture on Elm Street, and it is an important variant of the single-pile, rear-chimney house form that developed in the neighborhood. The property is a contributing feature of the Elm Street historic district.

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View from NW



View from SW

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View from SW



Aerial view from NW