

# 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 36

Georgetown

GEO.9

**Town/City:** Georgetown

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

## Photograph



View from E

**Address:** 13 Elm Street

**Historic Name:** Rev. Isaac & Sarah Braman House  
Old South Church Parsonage

**Uses:** Present: residence

Original: residence

**Date of Construction:** ca. 1835

**Source:** historic maps

**Style/Form:** Greek Revival

**Architect/Builder:** Joseph & John Kimball, possible  
builders

## Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone, parged

Wall/Trim: wood clapboard siding

Roof: asphalt shingle

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**  
Garage, non-historic

## Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Rear additions (20<sup>th</sup>-century)  
Front entrance vestibule added (20<sup>th</sup> century)

**Condition:** good

**Moved:** no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

**Acreage:** 0.41 acre

**Setting:** This property is on the west side of Elm Street near its intersection with East Main Street (Route 133) on 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

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

13 ELM STREET

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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 Rev. Isaac & Sarah Braman House is a two-story wood frame dwelling with wood clapboard siding and a gable roof. It is situated on a less-than-half-acre lot that appears to have been partitioned from Benjamin and Apphia Winter's property adjoining it to the south (17 Elm St.). The house is centered on the 112 ft. street frontage, amid a small landscaped yard. A two-car garage has been added in the southeast corner of the lot near the street.

The shallow plan of the house associates it with the other single-pile rear chimney houses on the street, although in this case, the house has a gable rather than a hipped roof, two window bays rather than one on the end walls, and chimneys at the ends of the roof ridge rather than on the back wall. The narrow space between the end wall windows suggests that the house was built for stove heating rather than with fireplaces, which would have been an option when the house was built in 1835. The five-bay front façade contains a projecting center entrance within a plainly-styled trabeated architrave. The corners of the house lack Greek Revival pilasters and the cornice above the second-story windows is plain, both reflecting the persistence of the Federal taste.

Three extensions are attached to the rear of the building: a two-story ell with a low-pitched gable roof perpendicular to the south side of the house, a two-story shed roof wing on the north side, and a one-story shed attached to the west wall of the wing. The precise sequence of these sections is unknown.

The Rev. Isaac & Sarah Braman House is a distinctive example of Greek Revival period domestic architecture in the town and shows the slow transition from Federal-style taste along Elm Street. It is a strong contributing component of the Elm Street streetscape and 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.*

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 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.<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

<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.

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

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1638 with the Puritan cleric Ezekiel Rogers (1590-1666). With Rogers most of these families settled at Rowley, incorporated in 1639.

The house at 13 Elm Street is southwest of the site of the First Congregational Church, which stood on a roughly triangular lot in the intersection of Elm and East Main Street. Solomon Nelson Jr. (1742-1821) conveyed the land to the parish in 1769. The church, it is said, was built "all in one day" in the same year and was enlarged about 1797, when the Reverend Isaac Braman became the church's second pastor; he replaced the Reverend James Chandler, who had served the congregation from 1732 to his death in 1789. The first parsonage for the church was on East Main Street west of the church site. When Chandler departed, the church languished with no pastor for eight years; its membership fell to only twelve males and theological discord prevailed. Under Braman, the church was renewed and the congregation began to grow once again.<sup>3</sup>

Isaac Braman was born in Norton, Massachusetts, in July 1770 and graduated from Harvard in 1794. He then studied for the ministry with the Rev. Pitt Clark of his native town and the Rev. Jason Haven of Dedham, Massachusetts. Braman was the last of more than sixty ministers whom the Georgetown congregation invited on trial; he accepted the church's invitation to become its settled minister and was ordained in Rowley in June 1797. A detailed biographical sketch by Apphia Horner Howard, who lived next door to Braman (probably in the Benjamin & Apphia Winter house at 17 Elm Street) "in such a close neighborhood that the two families could speak across the small separating yards," described him and the area:

Punctually at 2 o'clock every Monday afternoon Mr. Braman, in long flowing gown, left the side door of his house, crossed the yards and appeared at the side door of our house for an informal call on my mother. . . . His reticent manner was the result of a shy and sensitive temperament. Those who knew him well found beneath it a fund of wit, humor, appreciation, and all engaging attributes, while his sarcasm, when he considered it merited, was of a fine and keen quality. It obtained for him in college the name of "Razor". . . . He walked in the safe and beaten paths of the fathers of the church. He disliked controversy. He did not favor speculation. His answer to questions from those who had project their imagination beyond the written word was, "The Scriptures are silent upon those points."<sup>4</sup>

The 1830 map of "New Rowley" shows Braman living on Andover Street and may have lived there until his first wife, Hannah Palmer, died in 1835; his marriage two years later to Sarah Balch, daughter of wealthy Newburyport merchant John Balch, may account for his move to Elm Street. He died in 1858, having served as the church's pastor for sixty-one years. His widow lived there at least to 1884 and probably until she died in 1893. By 1904 13 Elm was occupied by the motorman Benjamin Dresser, the son of the shoemaker Benjamin F. Dresser; he was born in 1863. Dresser, who later operated the street railway, lived at 13 Elm until at least as late as 1933. It is possible that he and his wife shared the house in the early 1900s with the A. C. Hall, who managed a shoe bottoming shop in the 1880s and lived somewhere on Elm Street; by 1914, at any rate, Hall's widow Sarah and son Ralph Eugene Hall were living with Benjamin Dresser, his brother-in-law, at 13 Elm.

Who owned the house after the Dressers is not yet known. In 1962 Leland Lowell occupied the house, and in 1980 he and his wife Frances sold the property to Jonathan R. and Rita L. Harris, who still own it.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Gage, *History of Rowley*, 31-33; 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: 821; Apphia Horner Howard, "Rev. Isaac Braman," in Hurd, *History of Essex County*, 1:859-61.

<sup>4</sup> Howard, "Rev. Isaac Braman," 860. Andrew Horner, Apphia's Horner Howard's father, is enumerated in the 1840 Georgetown census five houses from Benjamin Winter at 17 Elm and immediately after George Moody, who lived across the street at 12 Elm; in 1850 the Horners are enumerated immediately after Braman. Apphia's middle name was "Winter," and presumably the two families had kin in common and may at that time have occupied the same house. Howard stated that she lived next to Braman "in his later years," from her birth, and there is no doubt that Braman lived at 13 Elm when he was old. She was born in 1832, so she would have moved out when she married the Boston dentist Alva Howard in 1854. However, Howard stated that Braman's house was "a large mile" from his church and that he had a farm of about forty acres; she must have been referring to the Andover Street property.

<sup>5</sup> Leland W. & Frances Lowell to Jonathan R. & Rita L. Harris, 31 March 1980, SED 6690:31.

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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.

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.*

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View from NE



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View from SE



Aerial view from NE