

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

18 Nelson Avenue

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

GEO.247

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

## FORM B – BUILDING

Source: Mass GIS Oliver Parcel Viewer

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

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

**Organization:** Town of Georgetown Historical Commission

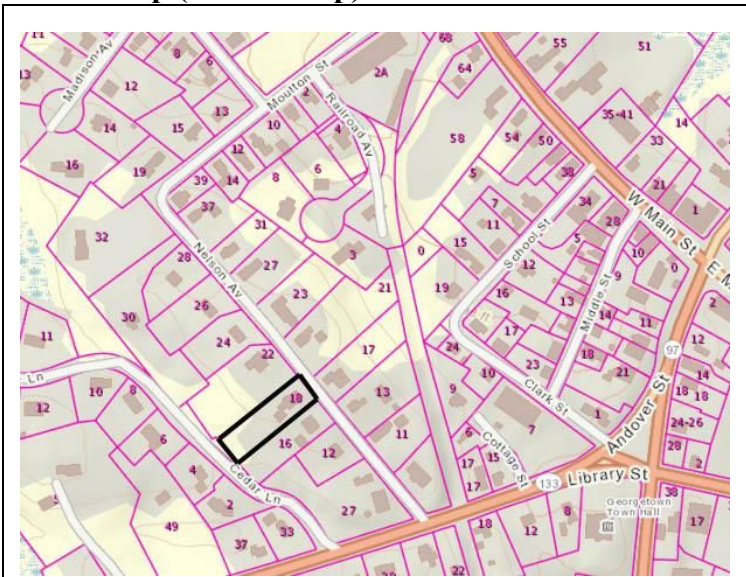
**Date:** June 2017

### Photograph



View from SE.

### Locus Map (north at top)



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

6C-90

Georgetown

GEO.247

**Setting:** Residential neighborhood developed in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century adjacent to commercial area of town center.

**Town/City:** Georgetown

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*):  
Georgetown Center

**Address:** 18 Nelson Avenue

**Historic Name:** Edwin C. & Almira Spofford House

**Uses:** Present: single family residential  
Original: single family residential

**Date of Construction:** ca. 1879

**Source:** deeds & visual assessment

**Style/Form:** Italianate

**Architect/Builder:** unknown

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: brick

Wall/Trim: vinyl clapboards

Roof: asphalt shingles

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**  
Domestic barn (attached)

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):  
Front piazza enclosed, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century  
Vinyl siding added, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century

**Condition:** fair

**Moved:** no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

**Acreage:** 0.43 acre

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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.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

The Edwin C. and Almira Spofford House, built about 1879, is a two-story, wood frame single dwelling with a front gable roof and a side-passage plan. Designed in a modest interpretation of the Italianate style, the two-bay front facade is distinguished by Classical entablatures with deep soffits along the roof edges to short returns at the base of the gables and an off-center doorway concealed within a full-front piazza that wraps around on the north west side terminating at a cross-gable pavilion; the piazza was later enclosed with kneewalls and windows. Entablatures with deep soffits follow the eaves along the side walls. The front section of the northwest side is blank to correspond with the interior stairs running up that wall. The cross-gable pavilion is one bay wide and separates the main part of the house from the service wing in the rear. The southeast side contains two windows, one each for the principal rooms on that side; a bay window occupies the rear window space on the first story. A two-story rear kitchen ell is recessed back from the southeast wall and is fronted by a porch. The porch connects to a story-and-a-half wood frame domestic barn with a front gable façade containing wagon and mow doors; the wagon door now closes with an overhead door. The house is situated in the center of the frontage with a driveway entering the southeast side terminating in front of the barn. An open yard behind the house extends to the rear of the parcel.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The houses on Nelson Avenue were built on land once belonging to Nathaniel Nelson (1767-1853), the son of Solomon Nelson Jr. (1742-1821) and his wife Elizabeth Mighill Nelson (1742-77). He was descended from English immigrant Thomas Nelson, whose sons Philip (1636-91) and Thomas (1638-1712) both have descendants in Georgetown. Philip's son Joseph (1682-1744) was the first of this surname to settle in Georgetown. Nathaniel descended from Philip's brother Thomas. He had two children with Sarah Chaplin, his first wife—Sally (1800-1869), who married housewright John Kimball of Georgetown, and Mary (1803-55), who married John's older brother Joseph Kimball, also a housewright. After Sally Chaplin Nelson's death in 1828 Nathaniel Nelson married Mary A. Spofford of Boxford, and they had one child, Elisabeth Spofford Jones (1830-1902), who in 1851 married New Hampshire native and Georgetown attorney Jeremiah Pingree Jones (1819-92). By then Nathaniel Nelson appears to have moved from Elm Street to the house at 27 Andover Street (GEO.23), built in 1815 at the northwestern corner of what is now Nelson Avenue. The 1850 census enumerated Nelson in this latter neighborhood as a farmer with real estate valued at \$17,140 and a household containing his wife Mary (with \$4000 of real estate), his yet-unmarried daughter Elisabeth, and six boarders, three men of Irish descent and one man of African descent. After Nelson's death the widowed Mary Nelson lived here with her then-married daughter Elisabeth, her son-in-law Jeremiah P. Jones, the Joneses' young daughters Mary and Elisabeth, an Irish-born domestic servant, and two boarders.

Nathaniel Nelson himself sold the first house lots, on the east side of what became Nelson Avenue, in the late 1840s, but the west side of the street remained undeveloped until about 1875, when various of his heirs began to sell lots to the north of Nelson's Andover Street home. The first lot sold on the west side, in 1866, was the site of 22 Nelson Avenue. The next was the lot on which 18 Nelson Street was built. By June 1879, when Edwin C. Spofford took out a mortgage on the lot, a house was standing on the property, and deeds state that Spofford occupied 18 Nelson Avenue as a homestead.<sup>1</sup>

Born in 1817 in Georgetown, Edwin Colman Spofford was the son of Eliphalet and Sarah Palmer Spofford. In 1840 he married Almira Daniels, a native of Sanbornton, New Hampshire, then living in Georgetown, and the 1850 census shows the couple in a household with their two young daughters, Catherine Sarah (Kate) and Hannah Braman. Also in the household were Augusta M. Spofford (possibly Edward's sister) and Spofford's widowed mother Sarah. Edwin Spofford was a shoecutter, and by 1860

<sup>1</sup> The deed from Nelson heirs to Spofford has not been located. See Edwin C. Spofford to Abbie W. Marsh, 14 June 1879, SECD 1018:191, and Abbie W. Marsh to Edwin C. Spofford, June 1879, SECD 1058:10.

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daughter Kate was working as a milliner. In March 1864 she married Zepheron Byron (sometimes Biron), a member of Company L of the First Regiment Massachusetts Heavy Artillery who had enlisted in February 1862. Byron returned to his regiment and was wounded on the first day of the battle at Spotsylvania Courthouse on 19 May 1864; he died eleven days later. In 1865 his widow Kate Spofford Biron was working in a shoe shop and living with her parents and sister Hannah; in 1879 she married again, to New York native George W. DeGroff.

The 1870 census appears to show the Spofford family renting part of a two-family house in this neighborhood, and the 1880 census enumeration indicates that the family was living at 18 Nelson Street. Spofford was a sole leather cutter, and he and his wife had granddaughters Nellie and Emma living with them. The 1884 map attaches "E. C. Spofford" to the 18 Nelson Avenue house.

In 1897 Edwin Spofford died at the age of 80, and his will had left his widow Almira his entire estate except for \$100, which he left to his daughter Kate DeGroff (his other daughter, Hannah, had died in 1879). The 1900 census shows Almira Spofford, Kate DeGroff, and Almira Spofford's brother-in-law Sumner Spofford in the household. In 1901 Almira Spofford deeded 18 Nelson Avenue to her daughter Kate, and by 1910 she was living at the Home for Aged People on North Street. She died there in July of the same year; the record of her death attributed its cause to "exhaustion from bed sores together with weight of years."

In 1918 Kate DeGroff sold 18 Nelson Avenue to Charles B. Atwood, a Brookfield, Maine, native then living in Guilford, Vermont, and his son Carroll Eugene Atwood, then working for the Singer Sewing Machine Company and living in the Philippines.<sup>2</sup> The 1920 census shows the Atwoods in the house with Charles's wife Julia, a Canadian who emigrated in 1880. At that time Carroll Atwood was a public school teacher, but later that same year he and his wife Marion returned overseas. His father, a clergyman, was boarding on West Main Street in 1925 when he died in Georgetown. Son Carroll, who had been living in Bombay earlier in the year, sold 18 Nelson Avenue in August that year to Harry A. Benjamin of Lynn.<sup>3</sup>

Born in Greenfield, Massachusetts, about 1872, Harry Abel Benjamin was a shoe worker living in Lynn by 1896. In 1909 he married Mary F. White Caverly, a New Hampshire native; both had been married before and divorced. The 1930 census shows Benjamin, a shoe factory edge trimmer, and his wife at 18 Nelson Avenue, as do the 1932 and 1940 directories. He died on 24 December 1940, and in April 1946 his widow Mary sold the property to Philip J. and Edna P. Driscoll. Current owners Frank E. and Margaret L. Phillips acquired 18 Nelson Avenue in 1953.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kate S. DeGroff, Haverhill MA, to Charles B. Atwood, Guilford VT, and Carroll E. Atwood, Manila Philippines, 1 March 1918, SECD 2386:493.

<sup>3</sup> Carroll E. Atwood, Manila Philippines and temporarily Georgetown, to Charles B. Atwood, 22 July 1920, SECD 2458:326; Charles B. Atwood to Carroll E. Atwood, Bombay India, 28 April 1925, SECD 2636:489; Carroll E. Atwood, Manila Philippines and temporarily Georgetown, to Charles B. Atwood, 22 July 1920, SECD 2458:326; Carroll E. Atwood to Harry A. Benjamin, Lynn MA, 24 August 1925, SECD 2650:443.

<sup>4</sup> Mary F. Benjamin, executor will Harry A. Benjamin, to Phillip J. and Edna P. Driscoll, 25 April 1946, SECD 3454:320; Mary F. Benjamin, executor will Harry A. Benjamin, to Phillip J. and Edna P. Driscoll, 25 April 1946, SECD 3454:320.

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## MAPS

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## PHOTOGRAPHS (all photos by Neil Larson, 2017)



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View from east.



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---------

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View from north.



Aerial view from south. Source: bing.com/maps.

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## 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

*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

The Edwin C. and Almira Spofford House, built about 1879, appears to be eligible for the National Register under criteria A and C as a contributing component of a historic district in Georgetown Center, the boundaries of which are yet to be determined. It is an essentially intact example of domestic architecture designed in a modest interpretation of the Italianate style in Georgetown. The house was built for shoe cutter Edwin C. Spofford and his family. The location and quality of the house reflects the material success and reputable status enjoyed by independent shoemakers ha in Georgetown.