

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

23 Nelson Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

GEO.255

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

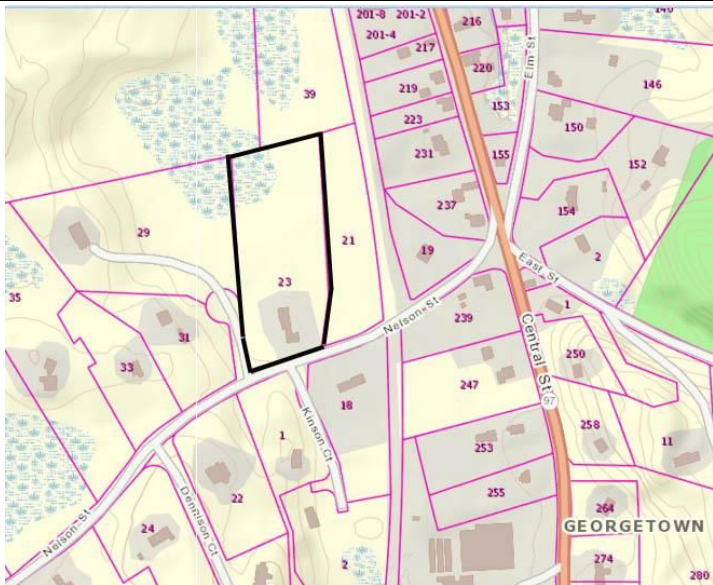
FORM B – BUILDING

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

Photograph



View from SE.



Source: Mass GIS Oliver Parcel Viewer

Recorded by: Kathryn Grover & Neil Larson
Organization: Town of Georgetown Historical Commission
Date: June 2017

Locus Map (north at top)

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

9A-6

Georgetown

GEO.255

Setting: The house is located just west of a major crossroads and railroad depot in South Georgetown where the densely developed highway (Central St.) begins to open up into farmland.

Town/City: Georgetown

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

Address: 23 Nelson Street

Historic Name: Adams-Shute House & Barn

Uses: Present: single family residential

Original: single family residential

Date of Construction: ca. 1760

Source: deeds & visual assessment

Style/Form: Federal

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood clapboards

Roof: asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Barn (attached)

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

House renovated or rebuilt, ca. 1810

Condition: excellent

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 3.73 acres

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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:

History suggests that the Adams-Shute House was built about 1760, although it contains features that associate it with early nineteenth-century design. It is a two-story wood timber-frame dwelling located on the northerly side of Nelson Street just west of its intersection with Central Street and the railroad in South Georgetown. A massive center chimney reflects an interior three-room, hall-parlor-kitchen plan typical of eighteenth-century New England domestic architecture. (An interior inspection needs to be made to determine the presence of original woodwork and finishes.) The front façade is bilaterally symmetrical with a center entrance aligned with the chimney and flanked by two tiers of windows. Original doors and windows were replaced sometime in the early nineteenth century when a Classical entablature was constructed along the roof edge. (More intensive examination is needed to firmly establish the construction history of the house.) Typical of the form, the gable ends contain two windows on each story with single attic windows centered in the gables. The east end also contains a doorway. A sun porch with a sleeping porch above was added to the west end probably after the turn of the twentieth century. A two-story cross-gable kitchen ell is appended to the rear of the house; the second story probably an addition to an original wing. Connected to this is a one-story back house, apparently enlarged and renovated, that links the house to a barn, which looks to be nineteenth century in scale and proportions (connecting the house with outbuildings was a practice introduced in the early nineteenth century). The story-and-a-half barn has central wagon doors on each side and domestic windows on the upper story suggesting that area has been converted to living space.

The house is sited in the center of the street frontage of a deep 3.73-acre lot created when its associated farm was subdivided in the late twentieth century. Yards are maintained in the vicinity of the house with a driveway entering on the southeast side of the house. The majority of the parcel behind the house is in the process of reforestation.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Abraham Adams (1715-71) probably built the house at 23 Nelson Street when he married his second wife, Sarah Foster, in 1760. Adams was the great-grandson of the immigrant Robert Adams and the son of Captain Abraham Adams (1676-1763), whose homestead, known as Highfields, was in Byfield Parish. Abraham Adams, like his better-documented son Captain Benjamin Adams, or "Tanner Adams" (1746-1821), was a tanner, and in the 1740s he had worked in Methuen and lived in that town with his first wife, Mary Coleman of Newbury, and their five children. Mary Coleman Adams died 16 May 1752 in Newbury, either on the same day or ten days after the triplets she bore died.¹ In 1760 Abraham Adams married Sarah Foster in Rowley, and he lived in this South Georgetown house for the rest of his life. Adams family genealogist Andrew Adams identified this house as the Shute place, and it is so identified on the 1872 and 1884 maps of Georgetown because of its later association with William H. Shute and his family.

Between 1742 and 1756 Abraham Adams acquired five large tracts in Rowley, all of them apparently in the West Parish (now Georgetown), and it is difficult to determine from descriptions in deeds on which of these parcels the 23 Nelson house was built. His father Abraham had sold him two lots of 14 acres combined in 1742, when son Abraham was living in Methuen, and for the enormous sum of three thousand pounds he bought 67 acres with a house, barn, and orchard on it from Job Tyler in 1747; perhaps he was then planning to move his family to this house in Rowley West Parish.² The loss of his wife and three children

¹ Andrew N. Adams, *A Genealogical History of Robert Adams of Newbury, Mass., and His Descendants*, 1635-1900 (Rutland, VT: by the author, 1900), 12, states that Mary Adams and her triplets died the same day, but Newbury vital records list the triplets' death as 6 May 1752 and Mary Adams's death as 16 May.

² Abraham Adams, Newbury, to Abraham Adams, Methuen, 24 November 1742, SECD 90:160; Job Tyler, Rowley, to Abraham Adams, Methuen, 20 October 1747, SECD 91:178; Nathaniel Mighill to Abraham Adams, 25 March 1748, SECD 98:77; Peter Moors and Peter Moors Jr. to Abraham Adams, 9 October 1756, SECD 108:159. All told Adams spent 4390 pounds for these four tracts.

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and his subsequent remarriage may turned him toward building a new house, but just 11 years later he hung himself in the house's entry after "his mind became unsound."³ What became of his widow is unclear, and who occupied the house afterward is not yet known. In 1809 Abraham's son Benjamin (1741-1821) sold the 22 acres "with a dwelling house and barn, and a currying shop situated thereon" to his son Benjamin 3d (1773-1852), and this latter man is the "B. Adams" whose name is attached to the house on the 1830 Georgetown map.⁴ At Benjamin 3d's death the 23 Nelson Street property passed to his youngest son George Washington Adams (1815/16-1897), who appears to have been living in this neighborhood by 1855. The census shows him as a 39-year-old farmer living with his wife Sarah and a boarding shoemaker's family. By 1860 G. W. Adams, his wife Sarah, and their infant son Charles P. Adams were in the household.

In late December 1863 G. W. Adams sold nine acres, "the mansion house of my late father, Benjamin Adams," and its barn and outbuildings to Martha Chaplin Shute for \$2500.⁵ Adams then moved to a small house at 253 Central Street (GEO.228) that he bought from his brother Abraham's widow, Ruth, that same year. The daughter of Eliphalet Chaplin and Martha Spofford, Martha Shute had been born in this neighborhood in 1806 and in 1832 married William M. Shute, a native of Concord, New Hampshire. The couple settled in Montgomery, Alabama, where their first three children were born, and by 1838 Shute had returned North and become a hat and fur dealer on Washington Street in Boston. One newspaper advertisement claimed that Shute had "the largest retail stock" of furs in New England and "the oldest house in the trade in Boston." By 1850 the couple was living in Roxbury with their six children, Martha, Sarah, Judson, Mary, Clara, and Williamina.

The Shutes may initially have acquired 23 Nelson Street as a summer home; William Shute had had heart disease for many years and died shortly after retiring in 1870.⁶ The 1880 census shows his widow Martha with a domestic servant in this neighborhood, and the 1880 agricultural census shows her with 33 acres, 13 of them improved, no livestock, and \$225 in grass, hay, potatoes, and apples; in 1879 she had paid \$240 for 24 weeks of hired farm labor.

The 1885 directory shows Martha C. Shute on Nelson Street near the South Georgetown depot. She died in 1895, but the house remained in the family until 1958. Son Judson Shute and his family probably used the house as a summer place. He worked as a broker in Boston, and his daughters Katharine Hamer Shute (1862-1939) and Mary Chaplin Shute (1871-1954) were both public school teachers. By 1910 Shute and his two daughters and their cousins, Laura E. and Elizabeth M. Richardson, occupied a house on Walnut Avenue in Boston, and after Judson's death in 1911 the four women continued to live together. All were schoolteachers, and by 1934 Mary Chaplin Shute was a professor at the Teachers College of the City of Boston, later Boston State College and ultimately merged with University of Massachusetts Boston in 1982. Katharine Shute had retired by 1934, and she died in 1939.

In 1958 Elizabeth M. Richardson sold 23 Nelson Street to Warren A. and Agnes M. Abbott of Needham, who in turn sold it in 1969. In 1997 William P. Hileman and Pamela Millett acquired the property, and they subdivided it in 2004 when they sold the house and 3.73 acres to current owners Timothy S. Knicker and Kara L. Peters.⁷

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

³ Adams, *Genealogical History*, 12.

⁴ Benjamin Adams Jr., Rowley, to Benjamin Adams 3d, Rowley, 20 May 1809, SECD 191:57. According to several local histories and genealogies, Benjamin Adams Jr. built the so-called "Temperance" house near his 23 Nelson Street birthplace for himself and his family; it is said to have been the first house in Georgetown to be painted white. See Adams, *Genealogical History*, 28-29, and M.V. B. Perley, comp., *History and Genealogy of the Perley Family* (Salem, MA: by the compiler, 1906), 175.

⁵ George W. Adams to Martha Chaplin Shute, 28 December 1863, SECD 660:284

⁶ "Death of a Citizen," *Boston Journal*, 3 March 1870, 2. An advertisement for the firm Wm. M. Shute & Son appears in the *Manchester* (NH) *Daily Mirror*, 25 November 1863, 3.

⁷ Elizabeth M. Richardson, Boston, to Warren A. and Agnes N. Abbott, Needham MA, 26 September 1958, SECD 4501:101; Agnes N. Abbott to John T. and Mary F. Riordan, 20 January 1969, SECD 5586:785; John T. and Mary F. Riordan to William P. Hileman and Pamela M. Millett, 9 July 1997, SECD 14203:330; William P. Hileman and Pamela M. Millett, 23 Nelson Street, to Timothy S. Knicker and Kara L. Peters, 23 Nelson Street, December 2004, SECD 23703:565. The 23 Nelson Street property is Lot 1 on "Plan of Land at 21/23 Nelson Street in Georgetown, Massachusetts, Prepared for William P. and Pamela M. Hileman, 23 Nelson Street," 12 November 2004, SECP 382:46.

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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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PHOTOGRAPHS (all photos by Neil Larson, 2017)



View from east.

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View from south.



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View from SW.



View from west

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**

Follow Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey Manual instructions for completing this form.

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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 Adams-Shute House and Barn, built between about 1760 and 1810, appears to be eligible for the National Register under criteria A and C. Built as early as about 1760 and renovated in the early nineteenth century, the two-story center chimney house is a distinctive example of eighteenth-century domestic architecture in Georgetown. Also during the nineteenth century, the house was expanded with the addition of a barn connected to the house by small outbuildings. This was a practice popular in northern Massachusetts and New Hampshire beginning after the Revolutionary War. The house retains iconic characteristics of the New England center-chimney house as it evolved in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century into a large, commodious building. A pedimented entrance is an eighteenth-century feature, while the Classical entablature with returns ornamenting the eaves is characteristic of the nineteenth century. A more intensive examination of the house is needed to understand its construction history better, but the house is significant no matter what is discovered. It has preserved relatively intact and with enough integrity to associate it with its period of significance. Built by the Adams family who settled in South Georgetown in the mid-eighteenth century, it was the centerpiece of a farm and Georgetown's first tannery. Later in the nineteenth century, it served as the home of the Shute family and remained in their ownership for nearly a century.