

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

31 Nelson Avenue

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

GEO.251

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

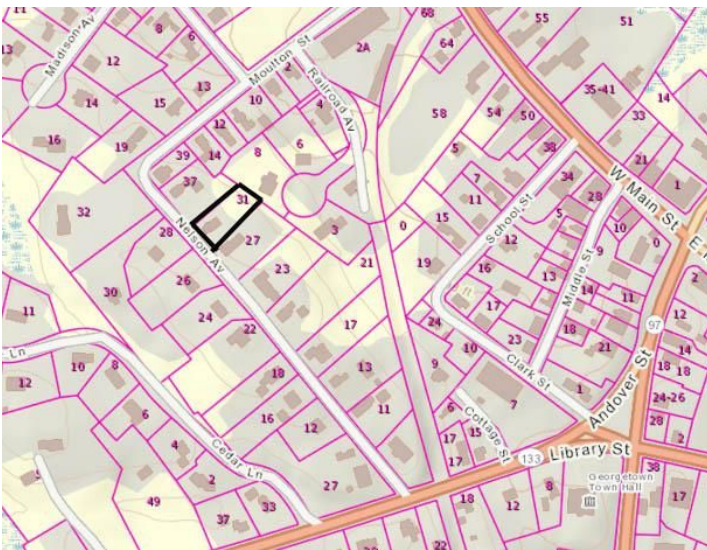
Date: June 2017

Photograph



View from south.

Locus Map (north at top)



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

6C-105

Georgetown

GEO.251

Setting: Residential neighborhood developed in the 19th century adjacent to commercial area of town center.

Town/City: Georgetown

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

Address: 31 Nelson Avenue

Historic Name: John & Hannah Munroe House

Uses: Present: single family residential

Original: single family residential

Date of Construction: ca. 1895

Source: deeds & visual assessment

Style/Form: Classical Revival

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: brick

Wall/Trim: wood clapboards

Roof: asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
None

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Addition on NW side, late 20th century
Doors and window sash replaced

Condition: good

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 0.26 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 John and Hannah Munroe House, built about 1895, is a story-and-a-half, wood frame single dwelling with a front-gable roof and its entrance turned away from the street. The two-bay front facade is fully fenestrated with Classical features distinguishing the gable and corners. The entrance is contained in a vestibule on the southeast side of the house tucked into a corner formed by a story-and-a-half cross-gable pavilion, two bays wide, positioned at the rear of the plan and in front of the kitchen ell. The vestibule probably is a later addition replacing what had been an open porch spanning the space between the front façade and the pavilion. A similar porch fronting the kitchen at the backside of pavilion is extant and enclosed, in which a separate entrance into the kitchen is located. A smaller cross-gable pavilion is located on the northwest side wall. It appears consistent in materials to the house except for its concrete block foundation.

The house is situated in the center of its narrow street frontage set back behind a small yard. A driveway enters the southerly corner of the lot and runs past the house. A large yard occupies 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.

Nelson himself began selling lots on the east side of Nelson Avenue in 1849, while shoe manufacturer Daniel Moulton and Jeremiah and Elisabeth Jones had begun developing the far end of Nelson Avenue, at Moulton Street, about 1875. The 1872 map of Georgetown Center show dentist Alvah H. and Apphia Horner Howard with a large lot at what was then the northern extent of Nelson Avenue (21 Nelson Ave., GEO.248); by 1884 the portion on the east side between the Howard property and that of James Carleton near the Moulton Street intersection remained undeveloped.

In June 1895, Elisabeth Jones sold a lot of land on the east side of Nelson Avenue to Hannah F. J. Munroe for \$240.¹ The deed stated that the parcel was part of the land that had once belonged to her father Nathaniel Nelson, and that William S. Horner, who had lived at 13 Nelson Avenue since about 1850, reserved the right to cultivate and gather crops he had grown that year on the land. The south side of the lot bordered on one sold to Frank A. Palmer in 1886 (27 Nelson Ave., GEO.250), and the north side bordered land Jones and her husband Jeremiah had sold to James Carleton in 1876 (37 Nelson Ave., GEO.252). In 1883

¹ Elisabeth S. Jones to Hannah F. J. Munroe, 26 June 1895, SECD 1451:157.

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Hannah Munroe had bought a lot on what is now Munroe Street, just to the northeast of this one, from Daniel Moulton, and they appear to have lived in this house until building a new house at 31 Nelson Avenue.

Hannah J. F. Sherburne Munroe was the wife of John Munroe, a sole leather cutter she married in 1873. Born in Boston in 1842, Munroe had served as a musician in Company K of the 2d Massachusetts Infantry Regiment for the entire war, from the time the regiment was formed in May 1861 until it was discharged in July 1865; it was involved in the battles at Winchester, Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and many other lesser-known engagements. The 1900 census shows Munroe as a clerk at the U.S. Custom House in Boston, no doubt a position he acquired on the record of his war service. He and Hannah had one daughter, Grace Estelle Munroe, born in 1880.

By 1910 the three Munroes shared 31 Nelson Avenue with Hannah's mother Edna Sherburne, then 85 years old, and her brother Wendell, who worked as a shoe factory laster. John Munroe died in September 1918, and in 1920 31 Nelson Avenue was occupied by his widow Hannah, daughter Grace, and brother-in-law Wendell Sherburne; the three were still living together in the house in 1930, the year Hannah Munroe died. Wendell Sherburne died in 1938. Grace Munroe remained at 31 Nelson Avenue until she died in 1954, which ended more than a half-century of ownership by her and her family. In 1962 the executor of her will sold the property to Richard H. Ford, and the property changed hands relatively often afterward. Current owners Peter E. and Diane J. Davis bought it in 2013.²

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MAPS

"Map of New Rowley Surveyed and Drawn by Philander Anderson 1830." Georgetown Historical Society.

² Robert F. Metcalf, executor will Grace E. Munroe, to Richard H. Ford, West Newbury MA, 15 August 1962, SECD 4967:64; Marjorie O. Voltero to Peter E. and Diane J. Davis, 31 Nelson Avenue, 15 November 2013, SECD 32958:190.

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Map of Georgetown. 1856. In Walling. H. F. *A Topographical Map Essex County Massachusetts*. Boston: Smith and Morley, 1856.

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PHOTOGRAPHS (all photos by Neil Larson, 2017)



View from west.

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

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**

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Statement of Significance by Neil Larson

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

The John and Hannah Munroe House, built about 1895, 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 a representative example of domestic architecture reflecting cottage dwelling designs published earlier in the century, particularly its entrance into the center of the plan from a side wall. Distinctive features include Classically inspired roof-edge decoration and cross-gable pavilions on both sides adding space to the plan and asymmetrical interest to the exterior. The house was built for shoe worker John Munroe and his family, which lived there until 1954.