

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 46

Georgetown

GEO.85

Town/City: Georgetown

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

Photograph



View from NW

Address: 38 Elm Street

Historic Name: George Tenney Tenant House

Uses: Present: residence

Original: residence

Date of Construction: ca. 1830

Source: town maps

Style/Form: Greek Revival

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: vinyl clapboard siding

Roof: asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
none

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Front raised to 2 stories, ca. 1870

Ell added, ca. 1870

Windows replaced

Condition: fair

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 0.47 acre

Setting: This property is on the east side of Elm Street and borders marshland on its southeast border. 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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GEORGETOWN

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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 George Tenney Tenant House is a two-story wood-frame single dwelling. It is situated on a half-acre lot on the east side of Elm Street south of where Chestnut Street intersects. The house faces south with an end wall oriented to Elm Street. It is centered within a landscaped parcel with outbuildings in the rear. The property is ringed with mature trees.

The house originally was a smaller one-story dwelling and was, perhaps not as wide as its present five-bay façade. (This is suggested by the placement of the chimneys.) The front façade was elevated to two stories in ca. 1870; the center entrance is contained in a shallow vestibule. A one-story kitchen ell was added to the west end of the house in the same era. These dramatic changes were made when the house was sold to its then tenant, Ira Tyler.

The George Tenney Tenant House is notable in the Elm Street context because it represents the dwelling of a working family amid the much larger and architecturally distinctive homes of more prosperous people. Its ownership by one of the towns successful shoe producers is significant. Built before 1830, the house is one of the earlier buildings on the street and reflects the investment shoe manufacturers were making in real estate and housing. It is a contributing component of 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 1686.¹ 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 year." 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 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.

It is likely that some member of the Nelson family owned the land on which 38 Elm Street was sited, but the 1800 map of land division in the village does not extend sufficiently far south to determine which one. The 1830 Georgetown map labels this house "C. S. Tenney," for Charles Spofford Tenney, who was born in Rowley in 1802. His brother George Jewett Tenney (1808-97) appears as the owner in 1838. The 1856 map identifies the owner as F. Tenney, but no person of that name has been found. It

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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is probably a typographical error. The modest house evidently was a tenant dwelling for workers employed by the Tenneys in their shoemaking business.

Charles S. and George J. Tenney were sons of the boot and shoe maker Amos Jewett Tenney (1777-1840), descendant of an old Rowley family; his ancestor Thomas Tenney came with Rogers in 1638. Amos Tenney's father, Richard, and by the 1820s his son, George Jewett Tenney, were among Georgetown's early shoemakers, and in 1811 Amos Tenney began to produce the "Georgetown heavy boot and brogan," renowned nationally as the "standard" heavy boot; it was made continuously for more than 50 years.³ Local historian Henry M. Nelson described the family's beginnings in the industry:

There were cordwainers from an early day who had their patrons, and going from house to house would, in the corner of the farmer's kitchen, make the shoes needed for the family. . . . Richard Tenney and his son, Amos J. Tenney, began early at their home on Tenney Street. . . . Amos J. Tenney and his son, George J., built at the corner the dwelling-house and factory in 1829, which were burned in the first extensive fire in 1874. The boots made by the Tenneys soon became generally known in the boot and shoe towns of the State as a standard make both in style and quality, and the firm became known as a leading firm in the business centres of the country.⁴

As a boot and shoe manufacturing town, Georgetown was far eclipsed by many Essex County towns—chiefly Lynn, the largest producer of footwear in the commonwealth, as well as Haverhill and Marblehead. But an industrial census mandated by the state found that in the year previous Rowley (of which Georgetown was part until 1838) made more boots---32,600 pair---than any other place in the county. The town also made 300,250 pair of shoes, according to this survey, employed 518 men and 192 women, and produced footwear with an estimated value of \$315,360. It is clear that most of this production took place in what soon became Georgetown: according to an 1888 local history, twenty-seven shoe shops operated in Georgetown at the time and produced boots and shoes worth \$221,900, or roughly 70 percent of the estimated value of footwear in Rowley as a whole. By the 1830s Georgetown was both larger than Rowley and much more focused on industrial development; Rowley remained by and large agricultural.⁵

According to one local historian, about 1830 "there was scarcely a farmhouse (or any other house) but that had in its back-yard a 12x12 foot shoe-shop. It was in these small shops that the countrywide known Georgetown boots and shoes were made until recent years, when they were manufactured in factories."⁶ Nelson described the town's early industry:

The trade was largely with Baltimore, Norfolk and Charleston, as well as with New York City. At first goods were carried over the road to Boston in medium-sized wagons, but as the business became extensive, large baggage-wagons, drawn by six horses, were in use for carrying shoes, with a return load of West India goods for the several stores. After the opening of the Eastern Railroad boots and shoes were sometimes carted to Rowley, and shipped by rail from there. By 1840 thirty or more persons in the south part of the town had been, or were to some extent, engaged in the shoe industry.⁷

George J. Tenney may have been among the first Georgetown shoemakers to produce footwear for a market beyond the village and its immediate area. Tenney had little education and began making shoes at a young age. One biographer called him "the pioneer shoe manufacturer in Georgetown and vicinity," and his description of Tenney's career encapsulates the history of the industry as well.

³ Massachusetts Historical Commission Reconnaissance Survey Report, Georgetown, September 1985; the source of the year that Tenney began making these boots is not stated.

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), 1: 845.

⁵ See Gage, *History of Rowley*, 402-3; Nelson, "Town of Georgetown History," 835; and Blanche Evans Hazard, *The Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts before 1875* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 210, which notes that these statistics were gathered and published by John Warner Barber in *Historical Collections of Every Town in Massachusetts* (Worcester: Dorr, Howland and Co., 1839), 66, 201.

⁶ Arrington, *Municipal History*, 254.

⁷ Nelson, "Town of Georgetown History," 845.

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After a time, ambitious to advance, he began to manufacture ordinary footwear on a limited scale for the retail trade. This was when all the work was done by hand. When he had finished a sufficient quantity to make a team load, it was his custom to drive to Boston, sell his goods, and, when returning, to stop at Salem and purchase supplies. Having begun in this modest way, by rigid economy and steady application to business he became the most extensive manufacture of boots and shoes in Georgetown. Several large factories erected by him were devoted chiefly to the product on men's heavy footwear, which previous to the Civil War was sold mostly in the Southern States. These goods were later shipped direct to his agents, Gerney & Co., of St. Joseph, Mo., who in turn sent them further West by ox team. Boots of his make were the first kind to arrive in Denver, Col., after its settlement. He also shipped considerable heavy footwear, packed in hogsheads, to the West Indies.⁸

Over the course of Tenney's career the shoe industry made a slow and incremental transition from the so-called "ten footer" (a shoe shop ranging from ten to fourteen feet square) to the factory. Beginning about 1820 the "central shop" began to replace the ten-footers where as many as eight shoemakers (including journeymen and apprentices) made a shoe from start to finish. At the central shop the leather was cut and put out to men and women in the community to sew the "uppers" among other tasks; these domestic workers then sent the uppers back, and the central shop sent them out again with soles and thread to finish the shoe, which the central shop then gathered and marketed.⁹ According to industry historian William H. Mulligan Jr., the move from the central shop to the factory system took place in stages as various shoemaking processes were mechanized, and as late as 1870 this transition was still underway.¹⁰ Toward the end of Tenney's career more than one hundred people worked in this factory and "a large number outside" were also employed by him,¹¹ indicating that his business was itself partway between the central shop and the factory model. Still, it seems clear that mechanization had begun to affect the local industry as by 1855, when 595 men and women—115 fewer than in 1837—produced 350,000 pair of boots and shoes annually in Georgetown shoe shops. In both 1874 and 1885 Tenney's shoe factory was destroyed by fire,¹² but he rebuilt after both of them: by 1875 his was among nine shoe factories in operation in Georgetown and in 1885 among eleven.

In 1836 George J. Tenney married Susan Nelson, the daughter of Jonathan and Hannah March Nelson; Jonathan Nelson (1772-1852) was the son of Aaron Nelson (1740-1804), who owned a large tract on the west side of Elm Street. By 1850 Tenney was forty-four years old and relatively prosperous; the value of his estate was estimated at nine thousand dollars in that year's census. His son Milton Grenville Tenney, born in 1837, had joined the business, thereupon named George J. Tenney & Son.

The tenants of this house are not fully documented, but from the 1850 census it possibly was Catherine L. Proctor, a widow 65 years of age, who was enumerated between Silas Hawley (32 Elm St.) and Lewis A. Merrill (35 Elm St.), with Asa Bradstreet (42 Elm St.) recorded next. Proctor's daughter, Mary E., age 30, and grandson, Charles S., age 17, a shoemaker, comprised the rest of the household. In 1860 the same position on the census schedule was occupied by day laborer Ira Tyler, his wife, Harriet, and four children. He was a tenant and his 20-year-old daughter, Abbie, was employed as a boot trimmer. Ten years later, the census identifies Tyler as owning the house, which also is indicated on the 1872 map. His wife had died in 1867, and daughter Abbie was "keeping house." Ira was working as a bootmaker and his son, Nelson, was identified as a shoemaker.

Ira Stickney Tyler was born in 1811 in Boxford, Tyler was the son of Joseph Stickney and Hannah Nelson Tyler; born in 1773 in Rowley, she was the granddaughter of Joseph Nelson 2d (1709-69), first cousin of Jonathan Nelson, and second cousin of George Tenney's wife Susan. In 1836 Ira Tyler married Harriet Esney, and in 1840 they lived in Topsfield and by 1850 in Georgetown. In 1880 he lived with his unmarried daughter Abby Augusta Tyler and a boarding shoe stitcher. Ira Tyler died in 1883, and Abby died three years later of cancer at the age of forty-five.

⁸ *Biographical Review, Containing Life Sketches of Leading Citizens of Essex County, Massachusetts* (Boston: Boston Biographical Review Publishing Co., 1897), 437.

⁹ Hazard, *Boot and Shoe Industry*, 8-9, 42, 44.

¹⁰ William H. Mulligan Jr., e-mail to Kathryn Grover, 9 December 2009.

¹¹ Martin Van Buren Perley, *History and Genealogy of the Perley Family* (Salem: by the author, 1906), 2: 81.

¹² The 1874 fire began in Tenney's stable (he was no longer on Elm Street), and destroyed his house and shoe factory, and damaged a store he also owned; the 1885 fire destroyed Tenney's new house, built of brick, as well as the business block on Main Street that contained his shoe factory along with the A. B. Noyes' shoe factory, two banks, a law office, and the post office. See Nelson, "Town of Georgetown History," 854.

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By 1900 38 Elm Street was occupied by the day laborer Roscoe Hayes and his wife Eunice Woodman Smith Haynes, both born in Maine. They had married in Lawrence in 1886. Assessor's records from 1902 show that they owned a house, barn, a carriage house, a horse, and a buggy. By 1905 Roscoe Haynes had died, and Eunice Haynes remained at 38 Elm through at least 1933, when she was eighty-three years old. By 1945 Kenneth L. and Ruth Poole lived at this address. Kenneth Poole's father, the expressman William Nelson Poole, lived next door at 42 Elm Street, and in the 1930s his brother Harold Nelson Poole lived across the street at 35 Elm Street. The property is now owned by Robert A. Nunan.

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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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[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 George Tenney Tenant House is notable in the Elm Street context because it represents the dwelling of a working family amid the much larger and architecturally distinctive homes of more prosperous people. Its ownership by one of the towns successful shoe producers is significant. Built before 1830, the house is one of the earlier buildings on the street and reflects the investment shoe manufacturers were making in real estate and housing. It is a contributing component of the historic district.

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View from NE

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View from SE



Aerial view from SW