

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

10A 43

Georgetown

GEO.91

Town/City: Georgetown

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

Photograph



View from SW

Address: 70 Elm Street

Historic Name: Benjamin S. Pickett - Gilman Perley House

Uses: Present: residence

Original: residence

Date of Construction: ca. 1800

Source: historic maps

Style/Form: Federal

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood shingle siding

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
garage

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Wood shingle siding added

Condition: fair

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 0.49 acres

Setting: This property is set back from the east side of Elm Street on a lot with mature softwoods. 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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☒ 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 Benjamin S. Pickett - Gilman Perley House is one of the oldest houses on Elm Street. It is one of four dwellings depicted on the 1810 map of the town, the other three occupied by Nelsons. Reputedly built in the 18th century (perhaps as a fourth Nelson residence), the complexity and asymmetry of the front (south) façade indicates that it was constructed in a number of segments, and it does not share many similarities with neighboring houses built in the Federal Period. A more detailed inspection of the house is needed before settling on a more precise construction history.

Once part of a larger farmstead, the house is now situated on a half-acre lot on the east side of Elm Street; an access road leading to the Georgetown Elementary School now forms the north boundary of the lot. The two-story, wood-frame dwelling is located on the north side of the lot with a driveway, parking area and garage located on the south side. The property is mowed but is heavily laden with mature trees that screen the house from the road.

The front façade of the house faces south with the west end of its gable roof facing the street. Window spacing and placement of two doors and chimneys indicates that building was constructed in at least two stages. Each has an entrance now contained within porches; windows on the east side are larger than those on the west side. The gable ends have two bays of windows, although those on the east end have been altered. The rear (north) façade has a random array of windows and a shallow two-story pavilion at the northwest corner. Original siding and trim is concealed by later wood shingle siding; window sash appears to be largely of the six-over-six variety, probably 19th-century in origin.

A one-story wood frame garage is sited at the end of a wide paved driveway south of the house. It has a front gable roof, vertical wood board siding and two vehicle bays.

The Benjamin S. Pickett - Gilman Perley House is a distinctive example of 19th-century domestic architecture in Georgetown. It is one of the oldest houses on Elm Street with design features that suggest it may have been built earlier than its assigned date of ca. 1800. A more detailed inspection and assessment is needed to determine its construction history.

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

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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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.

The extent to which the Nelson lands reached southward is not clear from the 1800 village map, so whether the lot on which 70 Elm is sited was Nelson property is not yet known. The 1810 map of the village shows the house labeled "B. S. Pickett," for Benjamin Scudder Pickett. However, Pickett is not shown in Rowley in the 1798 Direct Tax, which would have included him if he had owned property at that time. In 1810 Pickett's house was one of only four houses on Elm Street, the other three being homes owned by members of the Nelson family.

Benjamin S. Pickett was born in March 1777 in Marblehead and had settled in Rowley by 1798, when he married Sally Bridges. The couple had ten children between 1798 and 1822. Pickett was probably living on Andover Street in 1850; at that time his household included his wife and two apparently unrelated young women; his son John lived next door to him.³ He had left the house at 80 Elm Street by 1838 when it was occupied by Gilman Perley (1801-86), who had married Pickett's daughter Mary in 1826. Perley worked from at least 1850 to 1880 as a peddler, most often if not always of bread; the 1880 census stated that he was a "dealer in bread & on road."

Gilman Perley was descended from the Welsh immigrant Allan Perley, who emigrated to Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1638 and died in Ipswich in 1674. His father Benjamin, born in Boxford, moved to Dunbarton, New Hampshire, in 1791. Gilman was born there ten years later.⁴ His first cousin, Apphia Ann Perley, married Lewis A. Merrill of 35 Elm, his aunt Apphia Perley married Joseph Low of 126 Elm Street, and a very distant relation, Haskell Perley, lived at 104 Elm Street.

By 1860 Perley's estate was valued at \$2500, and he lived at 70 Elm Street with his wife. Mary Pickett Gilman died in 1878, and the next year Perley married Susan S. Felch Meader, who had been born in Sandwich, New Hampshire, and lived in Epping, New Hampshire. It was the second marriage for both. In 1883 assessor's records he is shown as owning a horse, buggy, a barn, and two-thirds of a house. Gilman died in 1884, and Susan Meader Perley died in 1894.

By 1900 the Edward A. Meader, born in Massachusetts in 1850, occupied 70 Elm; Gilman Perley's second wife was perhaps his sister-in-law. His wife Anne Beane Meader, born in New Hampshire in 1852, was a shoe stitcher, and the couple's sons Frank E. and William B. worked in the same industry. By 1914 Edward Meader lived in Haverhill but used 70 Elm as his summer home. Frank E. Meader, born about 1873 in Epping, New Hampshire, and was the son of Edward and Anne (or Arianna) Meader. In 1894 he married Grace J. Cook, who died the next year. By 1920 Edward Meader had died and his widow continued to occupy the property until at least 1930. Assessor's records for 1933 show the Meaders' daughter Olive and her husband Eugene Paquette, a New Hampshire-born shoe stitcher, living at 70 Elm. Olive Paquette probably owned the house with her brother Frank, who is shown in assessor's records as the owner in 1958. In 1990 Paul Meader, for the estate of Frank M. Meader, sold the property to current owners Louis C. and Carol A. Dispenza.⁵

³ 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), states that in 1825 Benjamin S. Pickett razed the Wallingford house, built in 1760 on Andover Street and that his son John lived in a new house on the site.

⁴ Martin Van Buren Perley, *History and Genealogy of the Perley Family* (Salem: by the author, 1906), 2: 460-61, 468. Caleb Stark, *History of the Town of Dunbarton, Merrimack County, New-Hampshire* (Concord: G. Parker Lyon, 1860), 254, notes that Gilman's father died when he was "very old" trying to put out a fire in his attic.

⁵ Paul Meader to Louis C. and Carol A. Dispenza, 12 March 1990, SED 10369:353.

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- Biographical Review, Containing Life Sketches of Leading Citizens of Essex County, Massachusetts*. Boston: Boston Biographical Review Publishing Co., 1897.
- Bureau of the Census. United States Census, 1790-1930.
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- Gage, Thomas. *The History of Rowley, Anciently Including Bradford, Boxford, and Georgetown, from the Year 1639 to the Present Time*. Boston: F. Andrews, 1840.
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- Resident and Business Directory of Groveland and Georgetown, Mass., for 1885-1886*. Needham, MA: Local Directory Publishing Co., 1885.

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.
- Atlas of Essex County*. Philadelphia: D. G. Beers and Co., 1872). Plates 59 and 61.
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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 Benjamin S. Pickett - Gilman Perley House is a distinctive example of 19th-century domestic architecture in Georgetown. It is one of the oldest houses on Elm Street with design features that suggest it may have been built earlier than its assigned date of ca. 1800. A more detailed inspection and assessment is needed to determine its construction history.

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View from NW

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View from NE



Aerial view from S