

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

84 Warren Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

GEO.316

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 SW.

Locus Map (north at top)



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

20-30

Georgetown

GEO.316

Setting: Open area containing two cemeteries, two churches and a park on the boundary with the Town of Newbury.

Town/City: Georgetown

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Byfield Parish

Address: 84 Warren Street

Historic Name: Fourth Byfield Parish Church

Uses: Present: single family residential

Original: religious property

Date of Construction: 1931

Source: deeds & visual assessment

Style/Form: Colonial Revival

Architect/Builder: George M. Champney

Exterior Material:

Foundation: brick

Wall/Trim: brick

Roof: slate shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

None

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Interior converted into a residence,

Condition: good

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 0.29 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 Byfield Parish Church, completed in 1931, was built on the site of three previous churches, the earliest of which dated to 1702. The previous church, built in 1833, had been destroyed by fire. The design of the Colonial Revival-style brick edifice represents a departure from the wood churches that preceded it as well as traditional New England meetinghouse architecture. The building seems to be sourced more in historic models found in the South, particularly with its squat brick tower. The three-story tower is square in plan and contains an arched opening with a recessed doorway surmounted by a large arched window and an oculus in the upper stories. The sides continue the fenestration pattern except with the first levels containing oculi rather than arched entrances. A wood frame belfry with louvered arched openings is mounted on the top with a vase finial at the apex of a flattened hipped roof. Four large rectangular windows with 20-over-15 wood sash are evenly spaced across each side wall. A wide brick chimney has been added to the exterior of the rear wall suggesting a fireplace has replaced the altar inside. Otherwise, there are no outward appearances to indicate the church now functions as a residence.

The church is sited within a historic cemetery with burials in yards on the sides and rear; the largest number of stones are in a large section northeast of the church and in the Town of Newbury. When the church sold the property in 1987, the building was subdivided from the cemetery on a parcel not much larger than its footprint. The lot was enlarged in 1993 when Jackman Road was rerouted (see below).

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Byfield Parish Church at 84 Warren Street was built in 1930-31 and is the fourth meetinghouse to occupy the site. The congregation dates to 1701, when sixteen families in the east part of Rowley near Newbury were set off with West Newbury families as a parish separate from the Rowley First Parish. The church body is the oldest in what is now Georgetown. Some accounts state that the first meetinghouse was built in 1702, but no record of it has survived; it is said to have been razed by 1746 to make way for a new wood frame church 56 by 45 feet with a steeple, a spire, and a weathervane. This church burned in 1833, and it was replaced by a new meetinghouse six feet longer than the 1746 church. The 1833 church was used for almost a century. In March 1930 it was struck by lightning and burned to the ground, and the current brick structure was nearly complete by July 1931.¹ (See depictions of these churches below.)

The architect for the building was George M. Champney, partner in the Boston office of Derby, Barnes & Champney. Mostly known for the design of large residences in the Colonial Revival style, the firm also had schools, libraries and church remodeling to its credit. Champney seems to have been more of an interior specialist. He was the son of the painter Edwin G. Champney, who worked with John LaFarge on the decoration of Trinity Church in Boston and probably on other projects coming out of the office of H.H. Richardson. His grandfather and namesake was the librarian of the Woburn Library, one of Richardson's signature works. George M. Champney was residing in Bedford in the 1920s and 1930s with his wife and family. Any prior association with Georgetown and the Byfield Parish Church is not yet known. Church records have not been searched for plans and correspondence related to the design and construction of the building. As the second and third churches were constructed of wood and destroyed by fire, perhaps brick was favored as an alternative material.

The congregation of Byfield Parish Church was notable on several scores. One of its founders was Mehetable Sewall Moody, who died at the age of 38 in 1702, the year the church was founded. Born in Newbury, she was the daughter of Henry Sewall Jr.

¹ See Joseph N. Dummer, *A Brief History of the Byfield Congregational Church and Parish from 1702 to 1888* (Salem, MA: Observer Book and Job Print, 1888), 8, 13-14; John Louis Ewell, *The Story of Byfield: A New England Parish* (Boston: George E. Littlefield, 1904), 1-2, 71, 109; Ingham, "Byfield Parish Will Inspect New Meeting House Tomorrow."

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and Jane Dummer Sewall of Newbury and the younger sister of Samuel Sewall, the well-known colonial diarist who came to Newbury from England in 1661, when he was nine years old. A 1671 Harvard College graduate, Sewall was judge of the Superior Court of Judicature, the highest court in provincial Massachusetts, from 1693 and named its chief justice in 1717. Sewall was one of nine judges appointed to try those accused of witchcraft in Salem, a role he later recanted. In 1700 he wrote *The Selling of Joseph*, a pamphlet widely regarded as one of the first antislavery screeds published in the American colonies. That a meetinghouse stood on the site in 1702 is attested by an entry in Sewall's diary, written on the day of his sister Mehetable's funeral on 11 August 1702. Sewall wrote that after the funeral he traveled "about a mile or more to the Burying place. . . . Our dear sister, Mehetable is the first buried in this new Burying place, a Barly-earish, pure Sand, just behind the Meeting-house Went to Jno Smith's and took the Acknowledgement of the Deed for the Land of the Meeting-house and Burying place."²

Sewall lived in Boston, but he sometimes came to Byfield for Sunday sermons, and he often sent sermons from Boston to be repeated in Byfield. Another sister, Ann, married William Longfellow, a direct ancestor of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; his poem "The Village Blacksmith" was dedicated to William and Ann's son Stephen Longfellow of Byfield Parish.

At least part of the Byfield Parish congregation was inclined to oppose slavery from an early point. By 1780, if not slightly earlier, one of the church deacons, Benjamin Colman, took pastor Moses Parsons to task for the fact that Parsons enslaved three persons. Colman declared slaveholding to be "so gross a violation of the divine laws" that he formally charged Parsons at a church meeting with "the wicked practice of man stealing" in December 1780. Colman alleged that Parsons had tried to sell one of his enslaved people, Violet, for a "large sum of money." The congregation supported its minister and suspended Colman from its fellowship, but, according to one account, the controversy may have impelled Parsons to manumit the three people. Violet, who had been part of Parson's family since the 1740s, declined to accept her freedom. She is said to have stated to Parsons, "You have had the best of me, and you and yours must have the worst. Where am I to go in sickness or old age. No master, your slave I am, and always will be, and I will belong to your children when you are gone, and by you and them I mean to be cared for." Parsons died in 1783, and Violet remained in Byfield parish with his family until she died when she was nearly 90 years old. The date of her death is unclear, but she is buried in the Parsons tomb in the Byfield Parish Cemetery.³ In October 1785 Colman was restored to the church contingent upon his avowal that he had "urged his arguments against the slavery of the Africans with excessive vehemence and asperity."⁴ In the nineteenth century, the congregation inaugurated a "monthly concert for the enslaved" in 1839, and some congregants were particularly noted for their abolitionism: a member of the Stickney family cited only as "Major Stickney" was "a warm abolitionist," according to one historian, "and Deacon [Green] Wildes always rode in the Jim Crow car as long as it was kept up for the colored people." After the Rev. William Lee lectured in support of abolitionism at the Byfield church in September 1841, one account notes, "a riot broke out, and Mr. Lee made his escape under the circular of a lady sympathizer, from clouds of missiles, eggs, etc., thrown at him. The church shortly after appointed an investigating committee, but no direct evidence of any church member being engaged in the riot, was found." A resolution declaring that slavery was "a sin against God. A violation of the laws of our nature contrary to the Christian religion and the laws of God" and proposing to bar enslavers from "pulpit or communion." failed in September of the following year, but an attenuated version passed shortly afterward.⁵ Formal resolutions opposing slavery were not common among American churches in these years.

The land on which Byfield Parish Church is supposed to have been deeded to the church by Jonathan Smith, but it was not recorded, and the original document was destroyed by fire, probably in the 1833 fire that destroyed the second meetinghouse. Sewall's account of taking "the Acknowledgement of the Deed" is the only proof of its existence. The earliest deed on record is one for 21 acres from Jonathan Harriman to "the inhabitants of Newbury and Rowley Byfield Parish" in 1711. In 1734 John Dummer of Newbury gave the parish seven acres between his family's Fatherland Farm and the parsonage, and other deeds

² Sewall quoted in Ewell, *Story of Byfield*, 71.

³ Dummer, *Brief History*, 25-26.

⁴ Dummer, *Brief History*, 25-26; *Memoir of Theophilus Parsons, Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts; with Notices of Some of his Contemporaries. By His Son, Theophilus Parsons* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1859), 7, 16-19. Theophilus Parsons was the grandson of Moses Parsons. Colman's letters to the congregational and to others who enslaved or sold people within it are reprinted in Joshua Coffin, *A Sketch of the History of Newbury, Newburyport, and West Newbury, from 1635 to 1845* (Boston: Samuel G. Drake, 1845), 324-50.

⁵ Ewell, *Story of Byfield*, 225-26; Dummer, *Brief History*, 46.

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conveyed modest acreage to the parish in 1736 and 1764. In 1788 pastor Elijah Parish deeded back to the Newbury residents of Byfield Parish land set aside for the pastor for a woodlot.⁶ Over the years, the church's ministerial fund has provided mortgages to Byfield Parish residents: David Jewett used ministerial funds to support his ownership and occupancy of 48 Warren Street (GEO.308), and he owed that fund \$533.44 at his death in 1853. Ella Frances Goodwin took out a \$400 mortgage from the "Byfield Ministerial Fund" for 58 Warren Street (GEO.311) in 1915.⁷

Byfield Parish Church moved to a new building at 132 Jackman Street in 1987, and in 1993 the church sold 84 Warren Street to Howard D. Hill with covenants banning any exterior alteration and any use except as a single-family dwelling. Hill owned 84 Warren Street until 2004. Current owner Brian J. Gressler acquired the building in 2009.⁸

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Southern Essex County Registry of Deeds website, salemdeeds.com.

FIGURES

⁶ Jonathan Harriman et ux et al to inhabitants of Newbury & Rowley Byfield Parish, 2 May 1711, SECD 24:167; John Dummer, Newbury, to Newbury and Rowley Byfield Parish, 27 March 1734, SECD 66:16; Moses Hale, Newbury, to Abraham Adams and Samuel Dickinson of Byfield precinct in behalf of inhabitants of the precinct, 3 March 1736/37, SECD 78:125; Benjamin Coleman, Newbury, to Joseph Gerrish Jr. and David Pearson, committee for the Parish of Byfield, 26 May 1764, SECD 119:6; Elijah Parish, Rowley, to inhabitants of Newbury part of the parish of Byfield, 11 April 1788, SECD 162:137

⁷ David Jewett to Maximillian Jewett, 23 May 1853, SECD 482:192, cites the mortgage, and Jewett's probate records document the debt. See also Ella Frances Goodwin to Byfield Ministerial Fund of the Newbury part of Byfield Parish, 28 October 1915, SECD 2313:269

⁸ Byfield Parish Church to Howard D. Hill, 16 December 1993, SECD 12336:140; Linda Nielsen, trustee Trust of Linda Nielsen, to Brian J. Gressler, Wakefield MA, 25 November 2009, SECD 29098:113. See also Affidavit, Lee C. Craig, treasurer and de-facto church historian, Byfield Parish Church, 12 December 1993, SECD 12336:145, and Declaration of Restrictive Covenants Concerning Old Byfield Church Building, 12 December 1993, SECD 12336:134.

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BUILT IN 1746.
BURNED MARCH 1, 1833.

Woodcut image of the second Byfield Parish Churches. From Joseph N. Dummer, *A Brief History of the Byfield Congregational Church and Parish* (1888).

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Woodcut view of the third Byfield Parish Church. From Joseph N. Dummer, *A Brief History of the Byfield Congregational Church and Parish* (1888).

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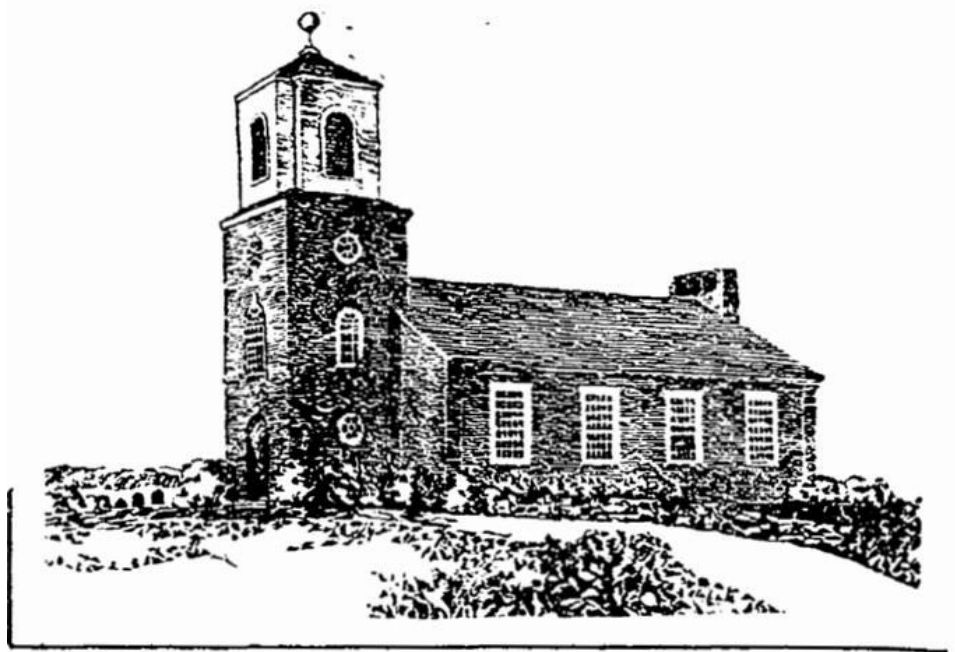
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NEW BYFIELD MEETING HOUSE



Fourth and extant meeting house. *Boston Herald*, 27 July 1931.

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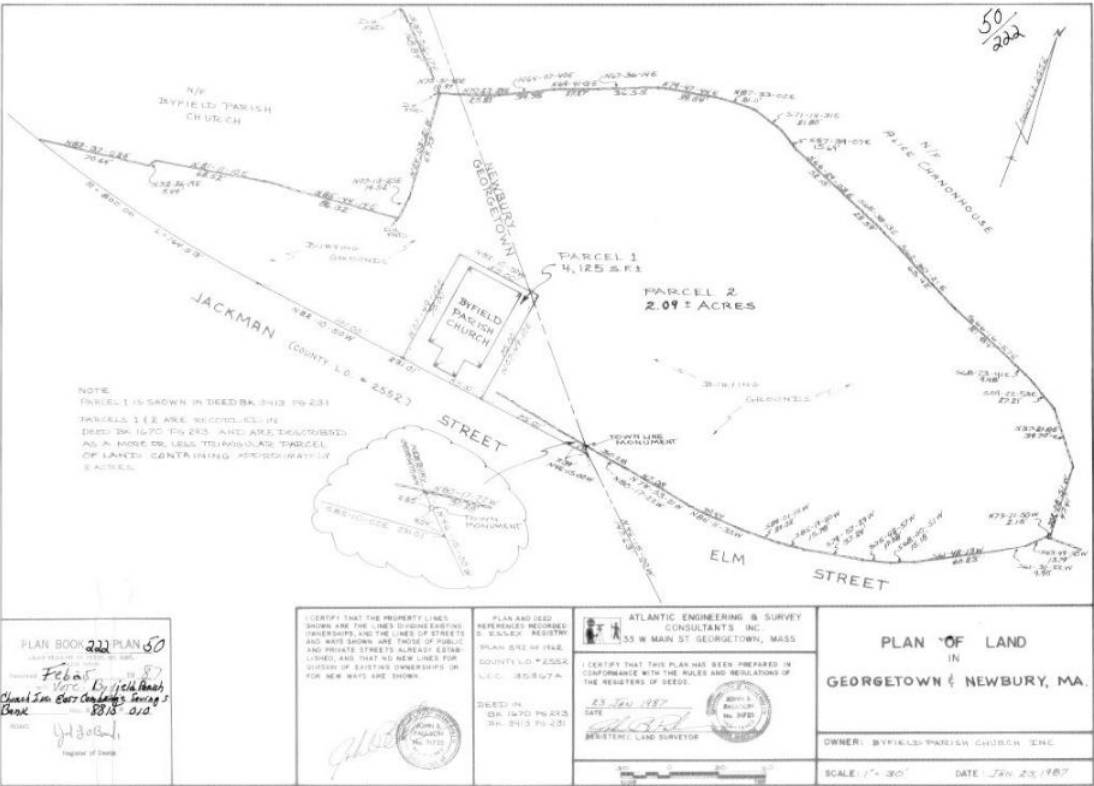
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"Plan of Land in Georgetown & Newbury, MA," 23 January 1987, SECP 222:50.

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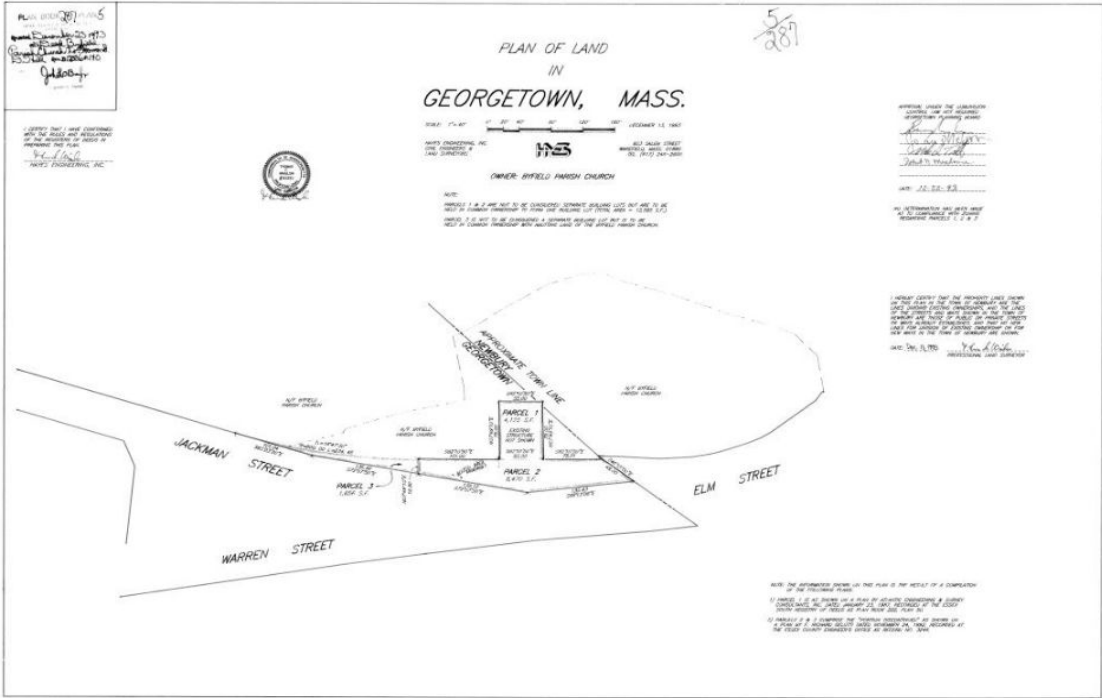
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“Plan of Land in Georgetown, Mass.,” 32 December 1993, SECP 287:5 show the former church building in relation to the Georgetown/Newbury town line.

PHOTOGRAPHS (all photos by Neil Larson, 2017)

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View from north.



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View from SW.

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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 fourth Byfield Parish Church, completed in 1931, is significant as a distinctive example of a Colonial Revival-style church edifice in Georgetown. Designed by Boston architect George N. Champney, the building is located on the site of the three previous Byfield Parish Churches, the first of which was erected in 1702. (The second and third churches burned.) Although it has functioned as a single-family residence since 1983, the church retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The property meets National Register criteria A and C for its architectural significance and its association with people and events important in Georgetown history.