

# 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 31

Georgetown

GEO.94

**Town/City:** Georgetown

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

## Photograph



View from NE

## Locus Map



**Address:** 91 Elm Street

**Historic Name:** Nelson Shoe Shop

**Uses:** Present: residence

Original: shoe factory

**Date of Construction:** ca. 1850

**Source:** historic maps, local history

**Style/Form:** Classical Revival

**Architect/Builder:** unknown

### Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood clapboards

Roof: asphalt shingle

### Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

None

### Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Converted to residence ca. 1940

**Condition:** good

**Moved:** no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

**Acreage:** 0.13 acre

**Setting:** This house is on the west side of Elm Street on a lot with mature hardwoods and softwoods. Elm Street is primarily residential.

**Recorded by:** Kathryn Grover and Neil Larson

**Organization:** Georgetown Historical Commission

**Date** (*month / year*): January 2010

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

GEORGETOWN

91 ELM STREET

## MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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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 Nelson Shoe Shop is a two-story wood frame building with a gable roof. It is located on a small, 0.13-acre lot on the west side of Elm Street north of where Brook Street intersects. The parcel is wooded with large evergreens screening the building from the road. A driveway is located on the north side of the lot, with a parking area in the rear.

All four walls of the building have the ample evenly-spaced fenestration of a factory building with five bays on the front and rear and three on the ends. Doorways are located on front and rear facades. Design embellishments are absent save for a restrained cornice with short returns across the gable ends. The exterior siding is unpainted on the front (east) side, which it likely how such work buildings looked in the period. The six-over-six replacement window sash resembles what originally existed.

The Nelson Shoe Shop is architecturally and historically significant as a rare surviving example of a shoe work building that once was common on Elm Street. Built ca. 1850 during Georgetown's shoe manufacturing heyday, the building illustrates the simple, functional design and construction of these buildings, which went up rapidly to meet the increasing labor demands of the decentralized industry. Its association with documented shoemakers on Elm Street, the Nelsons, Tenneys and Harrimans, the building is an important local landmark. Its conversion into a dwelling has not compromised its historic appearance.

### 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 yeare." 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.<sup>2</sup>

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, but by 1880 the tract on which this property is sited belonged to Sylvanus Nelson (1803-82). The first Nelson to own the land in this section of Elm Street was

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Benjamin F. Arrington, ed., *Municipal History of Essex County in Massachusetts* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1922), 146.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Gage, *The History of Rowley* (Boston: Ferdinand Andrews, 1840), 31-32, 320, 324, 326, 329.

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Joseph Nelson (1682-1744), the grandson of the immigrant Thomas Nelson and son of Philip Nelson (1636-91). According to local historian Henry Mighill Nelson, Joseph Nelson was the "first of this name to settle in Georgetown."<sup>3</sup> The property passed to Joseph's son Aaron (1740-1804) and from Aaron to his sons Joseph (1769-1856) and Jonathan (1772-1852) and then to Joseph's son Charles (1803-74) and Jonathan's son Sylvanus (1803-82).

In June 1880 Sylvanus Nelson sold this property as part of a five-acre tract with buildings to the shoe manufacturers Milton Grenville Tenney (born 1837) and his father George Jewett Tenney. (1808-97), whose wife Susan was Sylvanus's sister. George Tenney was the son of the boot and shoe maker Amos Jewett Tenney (1777-1840), descendant of an old Rowley family. Amos Tenney's father Richard, and by the 1820s his son George, 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.<sup>4</sup> By the 1890s more than one hundred people worked in Tenney's factory; in addition, Tenney employed "a large number outside," meaning that he was still using the putting-out system to manufacture shoes at the same time that he used the factory system.<sup>5</sup> When Milton Tenney joined the business after 1860 its name changed to George J. Tenney & Son.

George Tenney lived at 38 Elm Street from about 1830 to 1872, and Milton Tenney did not live on Elm Street after, probably, 1861, when he married Augusta Emily Noyes in Boston. It appears that the house originated as a work building related to the Nelsons' and Tenneys' shoemaking businesses. A resident family is not clearly identified with the place. Judging only by the order of census enumeration it is possible that the family of George Lewis Mighill lived there; he is shown with no real property in the 1870 census. Mighill was born in Georgetown in 1840 and was a shoemaker. He appears to have lived in this section of Elm Street in 1860 and 1870 but moved to Rowley by 1880.

Exactly when the building became solely a dwelling is hard to determine. In 1890 Milton Tenney sold the property to Horace E. Harriman, who lived at 91 and later 94 Elm Street. The Harriman family could have continued to use it in their shoemaking enterprise until they sold it to George F. Melanson in the late 1930s. Melanson sold it in 1950 to J. Harvey Eldridge, and Eldridge in turn sold it five years later to Otto C. and Virginia Smith. Otto Smith's father William was a wood heeler in a Lynn shoe shop in 1930. In 1972 the Smiths sold 91 Elm Street to current owners Bradford C. and Linda K. Perry.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 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: 812.

<sup>4</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission Reconnaissance Survey Report, Georgetown, September 1985; the source of the year that Tenney began making these boots is not stated.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Van Buren Perley, *History and Genealogy of the Perley Family* (Salem: by the author, 1906), 2: 81.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvanus Nelson to Milton G. and George J. Tenney, 15 June 1880; Milton G. Tenney to Horace E. Harriman, 23 October 1890, SED 1294:337; Mary C. Harriman to Horace E. Harriman Heirs, 16 November 1935; Fred H. Harriman et al. to George F. Melanson, SED 3737:52; Melanson to J. Harvey Eldridge, 1950, 3759:512; Eldridge to Otto C. and Virginia Smith, 1955, SED 4234:553; Smiths to Bradford C. and Linda K. Perry, 27 November 1972, SED 5928:197.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

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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.

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.

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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 Nelson Shoe Shop is architecturally and historically significant as a rare surviving example of a shoe work building that once was common on Elm Street. Built ca. 1850 during Georgetown's shoe manufacturing heyday, the building illustrates the simple, functional design and construction of these buildings, which went up rapidly to meet the increasing labor demands of the decentralized industry. Its association with documented shoemakers on Elm Street, the Nelsons, Tenneys and Harrimans, the building is an important local landmark. Its conversion into a dwelling has not compromised its historic appearance.



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View from SE