

FORM B – BUILDING

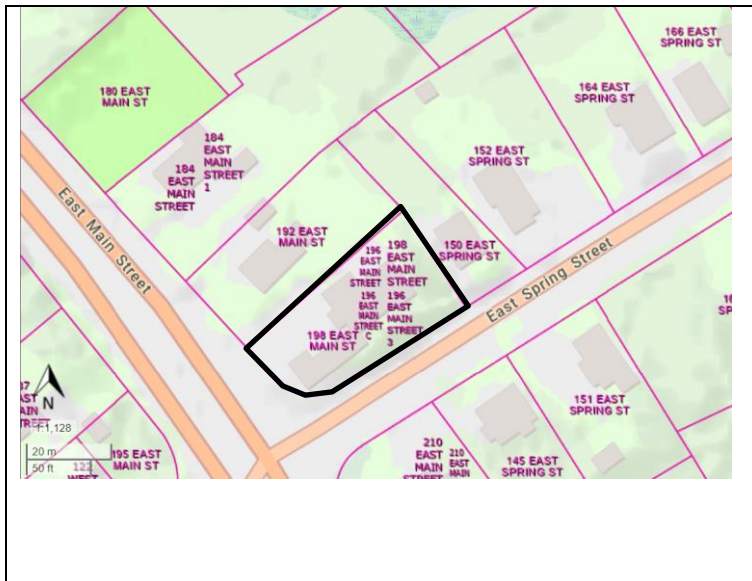
MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Photograph



View looking east from East Main Street.

Locus Map



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

D5/ 6/ 22/ /

Blue Hills

AVO.33
AVO.34

Town/City: Avon

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):

Address: 196 East Main St.

Historic Name: Nathaniel Littlefield House

Uses: Present: Multiple Family Dwelling

Original: Single Family Dwelling

Date of Construction: ca. 1808

Source: Deed

Style/Form: Federal

Architect/Builder: Not Known

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Not visible

Wall/Trim: Vinyl Siding / Vinyl Trim

Roof: Asphalt Shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: Small commercial building (ca. 1970)

Major Alterations (*with dates*): Vinyl siding; Replacement vinyl sash windows (late 20th C or early 21st C); Entry porch enclosed or added.

Condition: Fair

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 0.26

Setting: Located at a busy intersection along the four-lane, divided Route 28. Surrounding buildings are 2-story frame dwellings constructed during the 18th-20th centuries. The Harrison Boulevard connector to Highway 24 is located immediately southwest of the house.

Recorded by: Stacy Spies

Organization: Avon Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): December 2022

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

AVON

196 EAST MAIN ST

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.

Located on a level, corner lot, the house is oriented to the west toward East Main Street. An asphalt-paved parking area fills the front and side (north) yards. An ashlar retaining wall is located along the south (East Spring Street) lot line. A short run of three cut stone steps leads from East Spring Street to the property. The 2-story frame house is capped with a hipped roof with a overhanging eaves. Slender brick interior chimneys rise from the north and south roof slopes. The house is five bays wide and three bays deep (some windows appear to have been enclosed or removed.) A 2-story projection (perhaps a former porch) with a shallow front-gabled roof is centered on the façade. The projection's first story is enclosed with a metal storm door and large slider windows; the projection's second story contains one large slider window. One cut stone step leads to the entrance. A 1- and 2-story perpendicular ell extends from the center of the east (rear) elevation. The ell contains 1/1 sash windows and a deck constructed of pressure-treated dimensional lumber. Windows throughout the house are vinyl-frame replacements.

A small 1-story brick commercial building (ca. 1970, AVO.34) is located at the southwest corner of the lot. The flat roof features a mansard pent roof. Multi-light bow windows flank the façade's center entrance. Similar bow windows are located on the north and south elevations. The commercial building is attached to the house via a 1-story frame ell and small shed-roof porch. The ell is covered with vertical board and batten.

Although altered with replacement windows and vinyl siding, the Federal house at 196 East Main Street is a survivor amid the dramatic changes this intersection has undergone over the last 120 years. Once part of a row of Federal and Greek Revival houses, the building's setting has been dramatically altered as a result of the late 19th century road realignment and the 1930 construction of Route 28. Several Littlefield family buildings were moved or demolished during the construction of Harrison Boulevard and the widening of the East Spring Street / East Main Street intersection for truck traffic.

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.

196 East Main Street was likely constructed circa 1808 for Nathaniel Littlefield, Jr. who purchased approximately 90 acres on the east side of East Main Street in that year.¹ The Littlefield land holdings on the east and west sides of East Main Street near Spring Street were extensive; Nathaniel Littlefield Jr. and his father, Nathaniel Littlefield, Sr., had also purchased 58 acres of land nearby in the 1790s.² Nathaniel Littlefield, Sr.'s residence was located on the west side of East Main Street. In 1790, Nathaniel Littlefield, Jr. (1753-1833)³ married and Rebekah Tucker (1764-1842).⁴ In her 1921 book, *The Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts before 1875*, Blanche Evans Hazard described at length the Littlefield shoe manufacturing business:

The Littlefield brothers... began their work as entrepreneurs in the shoe manufacture and trade a little before 1815. There were four of them, Nathaniel, James, Isaac, and Darius.⁵ They divided the duties of capitalists, manufacturers, and salesmen between them. Mr. Darius Littlefield used to drive into Boston Monday and stay until Wednesday, and again on Thursday and stay until Saturday... Mr. James Littlefield was a travelling

¹ Norfolk County Registry of Deeds Book 31, p. 75.

² Norfolk County Registry of Deeds Book 31, p. 73.

³ Findagrave.com Memorial #70192240. Accessed September 13, 2022.

⁴ Findagrave.com Memorial #70192201. Accessed September 13, 2022.

⁵ Hazard, *The Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry...*, 1921, footnote 2 citing conversation with Josephine Varnum.

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salesman...He had Philadelphia and Virginia trade, and sold brogans to the far south, even to New Orleans, and over in Cuba... They had, like many other entrepreneurs in the shoe business then, a grocery store. Mr. Darius Littlefield was taken into the firm in 1821. By 1822 he had got an appointment as postmaster, for, as he naively confessed in later years, his New Orleans mail was heavy and as postmaster he could frank his own mail. [Darius Littlefield served as postmaster until 1840.]

By having the grocery store where his goods, bought at wholesale, could be paid out at retail prices to his domestic [shoe] workers, or on orders from other manufacturers, he got rid of paying wages in cash. Mr. Nathaniel Littlefield moved to Randolph... [but kept] up his share of financial interest in the East Stoughton shoe where his brother Darius was in charge...In 1845 the firm of Littlefield Brothers failed in East Stoughton on account of their loss of the earlier well-organized market for brogans for slaves, as well as on account of their uncollected bills [, which was exacerbated by the Panic of 1837.] ...

During the years ...the Littlefield firm was flourishing, from 1815 until at least 1837, the domestic workers came from miles around to the central shop to "take out" work; women got boot legs to side up and cord; men got boots to last and bottom for their own work, and straps to stick, tops and counters to sew on for their children's work. All the members of the family...would be found working on boots...Rows of bench wagons stood along the fence before the Littlefield shoe shop many times a week..."⁶

After Nathaniel Littlefield's death, his son Darius Littlefield (1798-1888),⁷ settled the estate, which included several properties at this crossroads, including 196 East Main Street.⁸ (The 1858 map notes "D. Littlefield as the owner of 196 East Main Street, as well as two houses on the west side of East Main Street). Darius Littlefield married Lydia Howard (1800-1847)⁹ in 1821 and married Julia Tucker (1814-1859)¹⁰ in 1849.

In the 1870s, Darius and Lydia Littlefield's son, Isaac Littlefield, lived here with his wife, Emily Thayer Littlefield, whom he had married in 1868, and the extended Darius Littlefield family. Isaac Littlefield (1831-1898) worked as a grocer. At his death, Isaac's sister, Celia A. Littlefield inherited the house. Census records indicate that Celia Littlefield worked as a music teacher. In 1909, ownership of the house was transferred to Josephine Varnum, Darius Littlefield's granddaughter.¹¹ Josephine Varnum (1854-1918)¹² was the East Stoughton postmistress and operated a candy and sundries store on East Main Street (perhaps in her uncle Isaac Littlefield's former store.) The property was sold out of the Littlefield family in 1920.¹³

Lowell and Lucy Gray owned the house from 1944 until 1971.¹⁴ Lowell Gray worked as a salesman, according to census records. The 1947 city directory lists the couple as employed by "Linny's Colonial Coffee Cup."

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Sherman, G.A. *Atlas of Norfolk County*. New York: Comstock & Cline, 1876.

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Walling, Henry Francis. *Map of Norfolk County, Mass*. Boston: Smith & Bumstead, 1858.



View looking east from East Main Street. Ca. 1970 commercial building at right.



View looking northwest from East Spring Street toward the south elevations of the main block and ell.