

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

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| 20/A/7 & 8 | Boston North | | SMV.1359 |
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Town/City: Somerville

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Davis Square

Address: 204 Morrison Avenue

Historic Name: Austin-Smith House

Uses: Present: Single-family residence

Original: Single-family residence

Date of Construction: 1871

Source: deeds

Style/Form: Italianate

Architect/Builder: Thomas Beath, builder

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Brick

Wall/Trim: Aluminum Siding/Wood

Roof: Asphalt Shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

ca. 1880 shed/garage

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

ca. 1890 – rear addition

ca. 1900-1910 – porches and rear attached shed

ca. 1960 – aluminum siding, removal of north porch

Condition: fair (due to siding)

Moved: no yes **Date:**

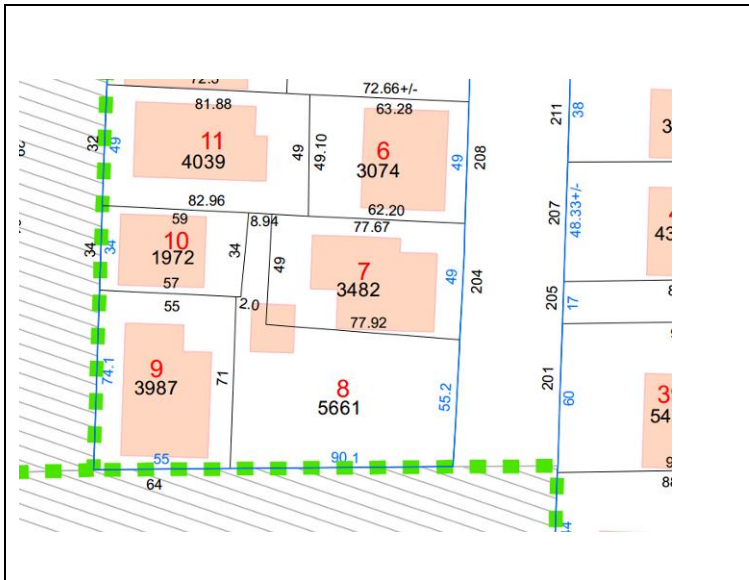
Acreage: 0.21 acre

Setting: west side of Morrison, near Grove Street in late 19th century residential neighborhood in West Somerville

Photograph



Locus Map



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization:

Date (*month / year*): May 2014

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

204 MORRISON AVE.

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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:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

Constructed in 1871, 204 Morrison Avenue is a 2 ½-story, 2 x 2-bay, gablefront Italianate dwelling with what was originally an L-shaped form, altered slightly by the addition of a rear wing ca. 1890. The house is set on a brick foundation and is currently clad in ca. 1960 aluminum siding although character-defining features such as paired brackets at the eaves, cornice returns and raised panels below the bay windows remain exposed. Any cornerboards which once may have existed were removed or covered by the siding. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles and a brick chimney rises from the ridge.

The sidehall façade entry is fronted by concrete steps and contains a modern wooden door with a four-part lunette window over four recessed panels with an exterior storm door. There is an original raised horizontal panel above the front door. The entrance is sheltered by a single-bay porch consisting of two posts with capitals supporting a flat roof with overhanging eaves. There is a low, turned balustrade on either side of the entrance; the north side has a glass and wood enclosure to act as a windblock. The front porch is not depicted on the 1900 Sanborn map but is delineated on the 1934 map. To the south of the entrance is a two-story, three-sided original bay window which is virtually intact. Both levels have a decorative cornice under the projecting eaves and raised panels below the windows. The base of the bay window has three horizontal openings filled with lattice work. The windows are also original – with wooden double-hung two-over-two windows on the front face, flanked by more slender 1/1 sash. All of the windows are fitted with exterior metal storm windows. Additional fenestration on the façade includes a single off-center 2/2 window above the entrance and another 2/2 window at the top of the gable.

The south elevation of the house is two bays deep with a single-story, three-sided bay window toward the rear. This bay window repeats the trim and detailing of the front, two-story bay window with the exception that it rests on a concrete-faced base. The north wall of the main house block is without openings. Projecting to the north from the rear of the main block is a smaller two-story ell of equal height. Facing the street, the east wall has two irregularly spaced windows on the first floor and a single window centered on the second floor. The front of the foundation has been covered with concrete and the first floor was previously fronted by a single-story porch (Sanborn map). The north gable end of the ell is trimmed with projecting eaves ending in cornice returns and paired brackets that match the main, front gable.

Attached to the rear (west) of the cross-gable is a two-story, hip-roofed addition which was added ca. 1890. Like the original house, it displays paired brackets at the cornice and is set on a brick foundation. The windows on this portion of the house are slightly larger than those on the original house block. They also contain 2/2 sash but the tops of the windows extend to the frieze. The north and west (rear) elevations are a single bay wide and a single-story, two-bay porch (now enclosed by screens) spans the south elevation with turned posts, turned balusters, and a beadboard ceiling. In addition to the door on the first floor of the south porch, there is a modern glass-and-panel door above accessing the makeshift enclosed deck above. Projecting from the west end of the addition is a single-story storage shed.

The interior of the house retains a number of original features including the front staircase's tapered octagonal newel post, turned balusters and railings. The front parlor has a decorative mantelpiece and plaster ceiling medallions. There are many original four-panel doors on the first floor and ornate door surrounds in the two parlors. The dining room includes a built-in cabinet but has simpler moldings. The kitchen which corresponds to the later addition, includes a pantry and beadboard wainscoting. Moldings on the second floor are somewhat simpler but original four-panel doors are also in evidence.

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The 104' x 90' (.21 acre), level corner lot is large for the neighborhood and is enclosed by a chain link fence. The house occupies the north half of the lot and is set back slightly from the street with a small area of lawn to the north. Concrete curbing and end posts run along the sidewalk in front of the house. An asphalt-paved driveway extends from the street along the south side of the house, terminating at a single-story, gable-roofed shed that is set with its broad side to the street. The building, which was constructed between 1874 and 1884 according to historic maps, was later converted to a garage. It is clad in wood clapboards with staggered butt wood shingles on either gable end. There are several original 6/6 wooden windows. The original front entrance to the shed was altered in the 20th century to accommodate the length of an automobile and a bump-out was added with vertical board double doors. The remainder of the lot to the south of the driveway consists of grass-covered lawn with a number of overgrown or ailing shrubs.

The house at 204 Morrison Avenue is a key component in a varied streetscape of late 19th century wood-frame residences which includes gablefront Italianate dwellings, mansard roofed cottages and Stick Style and Queen Anne variants. The combination of these dwellings illustrate the development of the neighborhood in a relatively short time span, fueled by improved transportation access.

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.

The construction of this house reflects the speculative development of Morrison Avenue in the early 1870s following the introduction of railroad commuter service to Boston and Cambridge via the Lexington and Arlington Branch Railroad in 1870-1. The land on which this house stands was part of a larger parcel of 36,400 square feet sold by Nathaniel Morrison of Somerville and Ransom F. Evans of Boston to Thomas P. Beath of Boston in April 1871 for \$2,912 (MCSR Book 1154, Page 295). The parcel of land encompassed the present 204-222 Morrison Avenue, 64 Grove Street and 18-34 Winslow Street. Nathaniel Morrison was the depot master of the Elm Street station and lived at what is now 197 Morrison Avenue (SMV.153) while Ransom Evans was a produce merchant at Faneuil Hall in Boston. The 1874 Somerville city directory lists Thomas Beath as a carpenter living on Highland, near Elm. A relative, James Beath, was a builder living on Morrison during the same period, at the corner of Clifton. Thomas Beath apparently developed the land and built the present 204 Morrison Avenue. Deed records indicate that Beath sold a number of properties on Morrison, Highland, Winslow, Grove and Chester between 1870 and 1876. Thomas Beath had left Somerville by the time of the 1875 directory. Deed records include a number of transactions sold by his estate beginning in January 1876. James Edward Beath is last listed in the 1877 directory.

In January 1872 what is now 204 Morrison Avenue, including both land and buildings, was sold by Thomas Beath to Maria L. Austin, wife of Edward P. Austin for \$3,642 (MCSR Book 1195, Page 152). E.P. Austin is shown as the owner of the house on the 1874 Hopkins map of Somerville. (T.P. Beath is shown on the 1874 map as owning the vacant land to the west fronting Winslow Avenue.) Edward P. Austin is listed as living in a house on Morrison near Elm (later Grove Street) in the 1873 Somerville directory (in 1871 he was boarding at M.H. Morse's house on Elm Street). Austin worked as an astronomer at the Harvard observatory in Cambridge. He lived at what is now 204 Morrison Avenue only a short time. By the time of the 1875 directory he is listed as a Professor of Astronomy at Harvard and was boarding at 19 Everett Street in Cambridge.

In 1881 the property was conveyed by Maria L. Austin and her husband to Corinne Smith, wife of Josiah Smith (MCSR Book 1563, Page 358). Josiah Smith was a native of Wilmot, New Hampshire and married his wife, the former Correna Keay, in Gilford in 1863. They lived in Boston for the first ten years of their marriage; he began working in a Boston market when he was about twenty years old. They may have rented the house before purchasing it in 1881. In 1880 Josiah Smith, age 38, was living on Morrison Avenue with his wife Corinne, age 36, and two sons – Frederick, age 10, and Charles, age 8. The 1887 directory lists Josiah Smith as a provisions dealer working at 42 North Street in Boston and living at 72 Morrison (later renumbered 204 Morrison).

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The Smith family rented out 204 Morrison Avenue (then 72 Morrison) for several years from about 1899 to 1901 and lived around the corner in a house they also owned at 64 Grove Street. The U.S. Census indicates that in 1900 the house at 204 Morrison was rented to Hollis Milleson, a 39 year old artist, his wife and two daughters. Hollis Milleson (1861-1953) was born in Indiana and worked primarily in oil. Also living with him was his 50 year old cousin, Royal H. Milleson and his wife. Born in Ohio, Royal Milleson (1849-1936) was also an artist and apparently the more accomplished of the two. He initially worked as a journeyman printer which led him to cartooning and sketching for newspapers, later turning to painting. He had moved to Boston in 1895 and took formal art lessons with George Morse of Melrose. Royal Milleson is still listed as living at 204 Morrison in the 1901 directory although at about this time he established himself in Chicago (Scanlan Fine Arts).

By 1905 the Smiths were again occupying 204 Morrison Avenue. Josiah Smith died suddenly on December 31, 1905 at the age of 63 at the relief hospital in Haymarket Square in Boston. He was stricken on his way home from work with cerebral hemorrhage. His obituary indicates that Josiah Smith was a member of the Elm Council Royal Arcanum, the Middlesex Lodge of the New England Order of Protection of Somerville and was also a member of the West Somerville Baptist Church (*Somerville Reporter*, Jan. 5, 1906).

Widow Corinne Smith continued to live here after her husband's death. At the time of the 1910 Census she was sharing the house with her two granddaughters, Ruth, age 16, and Florence, age 9. By 1919 Ruth Smith had married Walter Marden and Corinne Smith conveyed the property to her (MCSR Book 4291, Page 496). At the time the deed indicates that the property included 9,164 square feet of land. In 1920 the Census indicates that the couple was living here with Corinne Smith, Walter's mother, Ella Marden, Albert Evans, a brother-in-law, Florence Evans, a sister-in-law, and Clara Walton, an aunt-in-law. Walter Marden worked as the manager of the Oscar Lundgren Co. in Boston, a tapestry (upholstery) house. The 1930 and 1940 Censuses show that Walter and Ruth Marden occupied the house by themselves. Walter died on June 29, 1941.

After Ruth Marden's death the house was sold in 1942 by her estate to Fred Elwood MacEachern and his wife Lila (MCRD Book 6584, Page 171). Elwood MacEachern was a painter. Peter and Bride (Fitzpatrick) Mollahan purchased the house in 1955 (MCRD Book 8480, Page 368). Peter Mollahan worked as a machinist. Bride Mollahan died on May 10, 1972 and Peter on April 13, 1976. The property was later owned by their daughter, Virginia Mollahan, until her death on September 29, 2013 at the age of 85.

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- Somerville Journal*, Jan. 5, 1906 [obituary of Josiah Smith].
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- <http://www.scanlanfinearts.com/rmilleson.html> (information on Royal Milleson)

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