

Massachusetts Historical Commission

Map:42 Parcel: 36

Reading

124



Town: North Reading, MA

Place (neighborhood or village)

Old Town Farm

Address 207 Park Street

Historic Name Hezekiah Flint House /Old Town Farm

Use: Present Private residence

Original Farm house; poor farm by 1805

Date of Construction Third quarter of the 18th century

Source North Reading Assessing Data & Samuel Le Page

Style/Form Late Georgian/ rectangular

Architect/Builder Undetermined

Exterior Material

Foundation Granite block

Wall Clapboards

Roof Asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures Large garage to the east of the house was built around 1985.

Major Alterations (with dates) Updated via Greek Revival entrance surround c. 1840s.

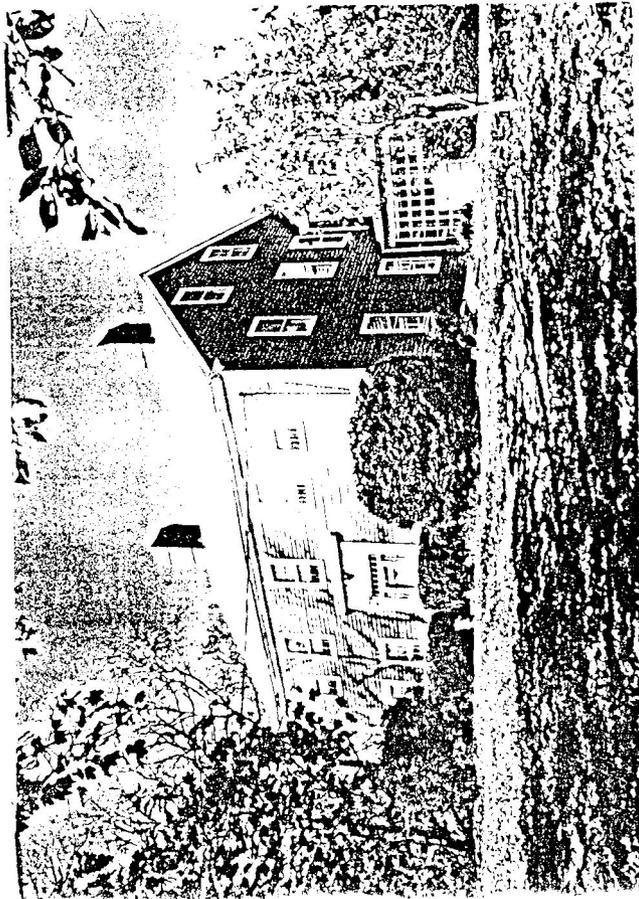
Condition Good

Moved yes no

Acreage 1.32 acres

Setting Prominently sited atop a rise overlooking the

Ipswich River and adjacent conservation wetlands. To the west of this property is the Park Street Cemetery. To the east of the property is modern suburban housing.



BUILDING FORM

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION *see continuation sheet*

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

Reportedly built during the third quarter of the eighteenth century, 207 Park Street has the appearance of a late Georgian clapboard-clad farm house. Situated on a tree-shaded rise, the house overlooks the Ipswich River and associated conservation wet lands. More immediately, the house presides over an ample lawn that sweeps down to Park Street. Still extant to the east of the house is a barn that has been adapted for reuse as a separate residence. To the west of the house is the c. 1730 Park Street Cemetery, the oldest burial place in the town. One of the most timeless vignettes in the town is the visual dialogue between the broad, distinctive west gable profile of 207 Park Street and the old markers and memorials of the cemetery's northeastern corner.

Measuring five-bays-by-three-bays, 207 Park Street rises two stories from a granite block basement to a broad, asphalt shingle-covered gable roof. Here, it is the proportions of the main block's "volume" that speak to late Georgian house forms. Narrow corner boards accent the edges of the house. At the center of the main facade, the front door is flanked by multi-pane side lights and is surmounted by a multi-pane transom. Flanking the sidelights and transom are Doric pilasters. A cornice-headed entablature surmounts the pilasters. In general, windows are standard-size and contain 6/6 wood sash. The second floor windows of the main facade are flush with the narrow fascia board. Brick chimneys at either end of the roof's ridge evidently replaced the original center chimney.

Projecting from the northeastern corner of the building is a two-story, one-bay-one-bay ell while two contiguous one-story ells project from the rear wall of the main block. To the east of the house is a

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE *see continuation sheet*

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.

Park Street is a very old thoroughfare that was the North Precinct of Reading's first east-west route. Dating back to the early 1700s, Park street in early records is referred to as the "Ten Rod Way." Various dates are given: 1763 (North Reading assessing data) and 1770 (Samuel LePage), 207 was built for Hezekiah Flint. In 1805, Flint's homestead became the town's alms house or poor farm. At that time, Hezekiah Flint sold this 180+acre property to the Town of Reading for \$5,000. Until 1853, Reading encompassed the parishes of Wakefield and North Reading as well as "the mother town." Under the stipulations of this transaction, Flint reserved the right "to remove all the cut wood and to cut enough lumber to build a barn."

In 1805, Reading's Poor Farm was officially called the house of industry. Poorhouses or Poor Farms were tax-supported residential institutions to which people were required to go if they could not support themselves. According to Donna Potter Phillips in "Poorhouses in America" (2002, Web site), Poor Farms "were started as a method of providing less expensive (to the tax payers) alternatives to what we would now call 'welfare' but was called 'outdoor relief' in those days." Typically, communities in Massachusetts and elsewhere in New England appointed an Overseer of the Poor (or committee of Overseers) who interviewed persons requesting assistance or intervened in the case of persons found begging in public, directing them to the Poor Farm (not to be confused with a debtors prison). According to local historian Edward J. Leary, "it was where idle, loitering persons wasted and misspent their time." Along with the truly indigent, this building housed the mentally ill and itinerant men known as tramps. The tramps or drifters roamed the country side, paying for their lodging by performing chores such as chopping wood, shoveling snow, raking leaves, etc. Local men were hired to serve as "keepers of the poor farm," sometimes performing this service as their civic duty free of charge or receiving a small annual stipend in return for insuring that these unfortunate people had food and shelter.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES *see continuation sheet*

North Reading Maps/Atlases: 1795,1831,1857,1875,1889,1906; Town of North Reading Street List, 1966
North Reading Directories (Wakefield): 1896-97;1905;1907;1911-12; 1919-20;1931-1932;1941
Leary, Edmund J., North Reading, Exerpts at Random, 1969, p.10
Massachusetts Historical Commission North Reading Reconnaissance Survey, c. 1980.
Valuation of Real and Personal Estates, Town of North Reading: 1870;1890;1910;1920;1930
Poor Farms web site, Donna Potter Phillips, "'Poor Houses in America'"

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125

Community: North Reading, MA	Form No:
Property Name: 207 Park Street	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION continued

barn that was adapted for residential purposes at an undetermined date. This barn does not appear to be the most substantial of the two barns shown in a c. late nineteenth century photograph included in Leary's history of the town but rather the smaller barn, partially visible behind the more substantial barn (note: according to local historical commission member Patricia Romeo, the current "barn" is actually a garage built in 1985). A third barn which appears to have been attached to the house's northeast ell is no longer extant. The surviving barn/residence measures four-bays-by-two-bays. One-and-one-half stories in height, this building is devoid of windows at its first floor's north and south elevations. Wide double doors topped by a tall attic window are in evidence at the west gable. An extensive dormer pierced by four standard-size windows containing 6/6 wood sash are in evidence at the south elevation. near the center of the gable roof's ridge is a small square belvedere with louvered openings.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE continued

In addition to sheltering persons at the margins of society, the poor farm provided the town's more fortunate citizens with the equivalent of a community center or gathering place. The local Dancing Academy held its sessions "in the upper part of the house in the spacious hall or assembly room." In 1871, "the average cost of support of each pauper per year for fifteen years was \$102.70; the average cost of support of each pauper per week was \$1.98.

207 Park Street served as a poor house until as late as the mid-1920s. In 1875, Robert M. Campbell of Main Street served as the "keeper of the town farm." Judging by Campbell's property valuation, he was not one of the more affluent men in the town who could afford to provide pro bono service to the town. In 1870, Campbell's Main Street property, including a house and barn was valued at \$645. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the North Reading property valuations do not list the the Town Farm, making it difficult, if not impossible to determine the value of this tract over time or fluctuations in the number of acres associated with this property.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Community:

Form No:

Massachusetts Historical Commission

North Reading

Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth
of Massachusetts, Boston

Name: 207 Park Street

Indicate each item on inventory form, which is being continued below.

Historical Narrative

By 1890, a Cyrus Ayer was associated with the Town Farm. Ayer owned no property in the town and had a total poll tax of \$2.00 in 1890. He was evidently the farm's keeper and almost certainly received a small salary for his efforts.

The 1906 Atlas of Middlesex County shows three buildings on the premises labeled "Town Farm" including the house and two barns (see vintage but undated photograph of the Town Farm on page 10 of Edmund J. Leary's North Reading Exerpts at Random (1969). In 1925, Walter S. Emerson is listed as "keeper, Town Farm." Like Ayer, Emerson owned no property in the town and evidently lived on the poor farm premises. Interestingly, he is listed in 1910 with not even a poll tax associated with his name but does not appear in property valuations for 1920 or 1930. According to the North Reading Bicentennial Committee's report *The Second Parish* (1975), The Town of North Reading took over the "House of Industry" when it was incorporated as a separate town in 1853, maintaining it until 1918 when other arrangements were made for the needy." Undoubtedly the Town Farm would have provided a welcome safety net for the poor of the community during the Depression era of the 1930s.

The poor house was converted to a single family residence at an undetermined date. From at least the mid-1960s until the present, 207 Park Street has been owned by Joan and C. Whitney Crawford, insurance broker (1966).



READING

NORTH READING, MA

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

Community
North Reading

Property Address
207 Park Street

Area(s)

Form No.

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 Edward W. Gordon Preservation Consultant
Consultant

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here

Possessing Late Georgian form and Greek Revival entrance enframements this house was built around 1770 as a farm house for Hezekiah Flint. This property's most historically significant period of use occurred between 1805 and c.1925, when this property served the town as its poor farm. Providing shelter for the indigent, ill and mentally disturbed, North Reading also occasionally served as a kind of community center where a dancing academy conducted classes in the second floor rooms of the building.