

Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard

Map: 56 Parcel: 25

Reading

69

Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Town: North Reading, MA

Place (neighborhood or village) Old Salem Road
(Chestnut Street east of Haverhill Street)

Address 56 Chestnut Street

Historic Name James Harris Farmstead

Use: Present Private Residence

Original Farm house

Date of Construction c. 1870-1875

Source 1870 No. Reading Property Valuation & 1875 Map

Style/Form Italianate/Mansard

Architect/Builder Undetermined

Exterior Material

Foundation Field stone

Wall Wood Shingles

Roof Asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures Low, one-story gable-roofed structure of undetermined age now used as a garage to the rear of the house.

Major Alterations (with dates) One-and-one-half story and one-story rear addition added at undetermined dates.

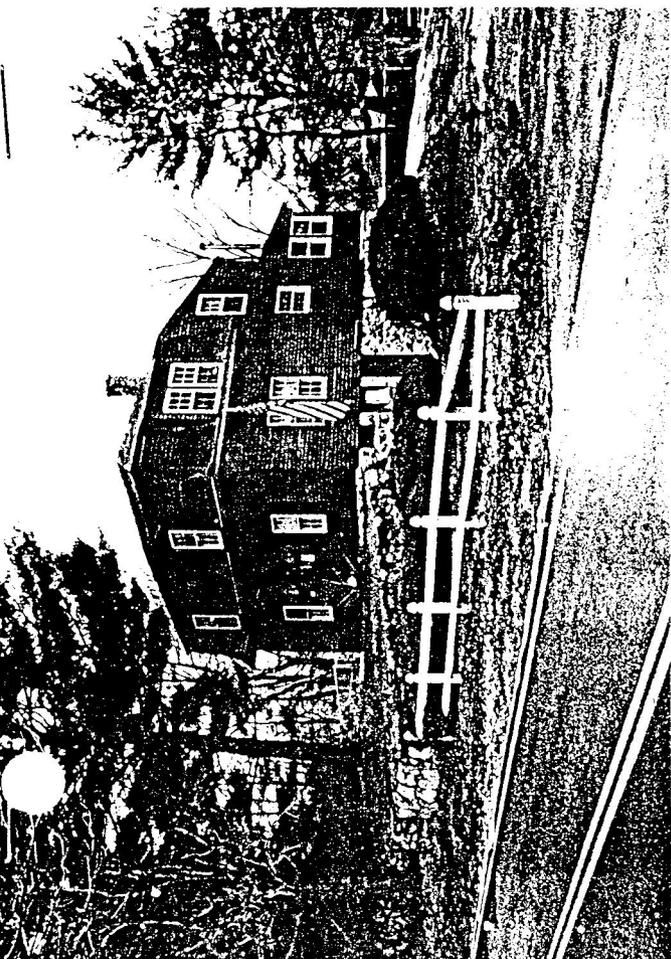
Condition Good

Moved yes no

Acreage 2.29 acres

Setting Situated on a fir tree-shaded rise above the bend in

Chestnut Street. Particularly noteworthy is a field stone retaining wall that is in evidence along the Chestnut Street and driveway sides of the house lot. The basement wall on the driveway side is contiguous with the retaining wall and composed of the same materials. A curving driveway extends from the street to the rear of the house.



Recorded by Edward W. Gordon
Organization North Reading Historical Commission

Date(month/day/year) 17/10/2001

BUILDING FORM

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION *see continuation sheet*

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

Situated on a wooded rise and accessed via a sweeping, curved driveway, 56 Chestnut Street is a rare North Reading example of an Italianate cottage. The house's relatively ample, wooded lot continues to convey a still-rural appearance despite the presence of modern suburban houses across the street. The mansard roof made its first appearance in the Boston area in 1847 at the Deacon Mansion (demolished) at West Concord and Washington Streets in the South End. This double-pitched roof that originated in late seventeenth century France was revived during the mid nineteenth century in Napoleon III's Paris. This distinctive roof type is more typically associated with urban architecture of the 1850s and 1860s. By the time 56 Chestnut Street was built, during the early 1870s, the style was already beginning to fall out of favor and by the early 1880s had disappeared almost entirely from the scene. It is not clear as to why a mansard, or in this case, a hip-on-mansard roof would be used to enclose the home of a farmer.

56 Chestnut is situated on a rise overlooking a great bend in Chestnut Street. Composed of a one-story, three-bay-by-one-bay main block, this cottage-scale house is enclosed by a substantial, asphalt-shingle sheathed hip-on-mansard roof. A full basement is in evidence on the west side of the main block. Here, a high field stone basement is pierced by a small window and a cellar door. Rising from the back of the house is a two-story shed-roofed addition and a one-story shed-roofed enclosed porch addition.

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.

56 Chestnut Street has significant historical associations with North Reading's late nineteenth century shoe industry. Built c. 1870-1875, this house was the residence of farmer James Z. and Tryphemia Harris and their son (?) Charles S. Harris, shoemaker, from the early 1870s until as late as the mid 1930s. Charles S. Harris is listed as a shoemaker as late as 1906. By that time, shoe making as a cottage industry was at least thirty years past its prime in North Reading and in Massachusetts in general. Boot and shoe making was an important facet of the local economy by 1820. Between the 1830s and the Civil War, "shoemaking was largely responsible for the growth of North Reading. By 1850 there was a shop attached or placed by the side of nearly every dwelling house in the precinct." Indeed, Walter Muir Whitehill and Norman Kotker note in Massachusetts, A Pictorial History, that by 1850 "the most important industry in the state was the manufacture of boots and shoes, with Lynn, the greatest center, turning out more than nine million pair in a year." This trade suffered irreversible damage with the onset of the Civil War and the loss of southern markets. After the war, the town experienced a decline in population as a result of this reversal of fortune within the shoe industry. In 1860, North Reading had a population of 1,230. By 1895, the town had a population of 835. The town's declining population was one of the most marked of any in Middlesex County.

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
Valuation of Real and Personal Estates, Town of North Reading: 1870; 1890; 1910; 1920; 1930
Eaton, Chester W., & Warren Eaton, eds. Proceedings of the 250th Anniversary of the Ancient Town of N.R.
Le Page, Samuel M. A History of North Reading, Tercentenary Ed., 1944
Whitehill, Walter Muir and Kotker, Norman, Massachusetts: a Pictorial History (1976)

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

Community:

Form No:

Massachusetts Historical Commission

North Reading

Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth
of Massachusetts, Boston

Name: 56 Chestnut Street

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

Architectural Description

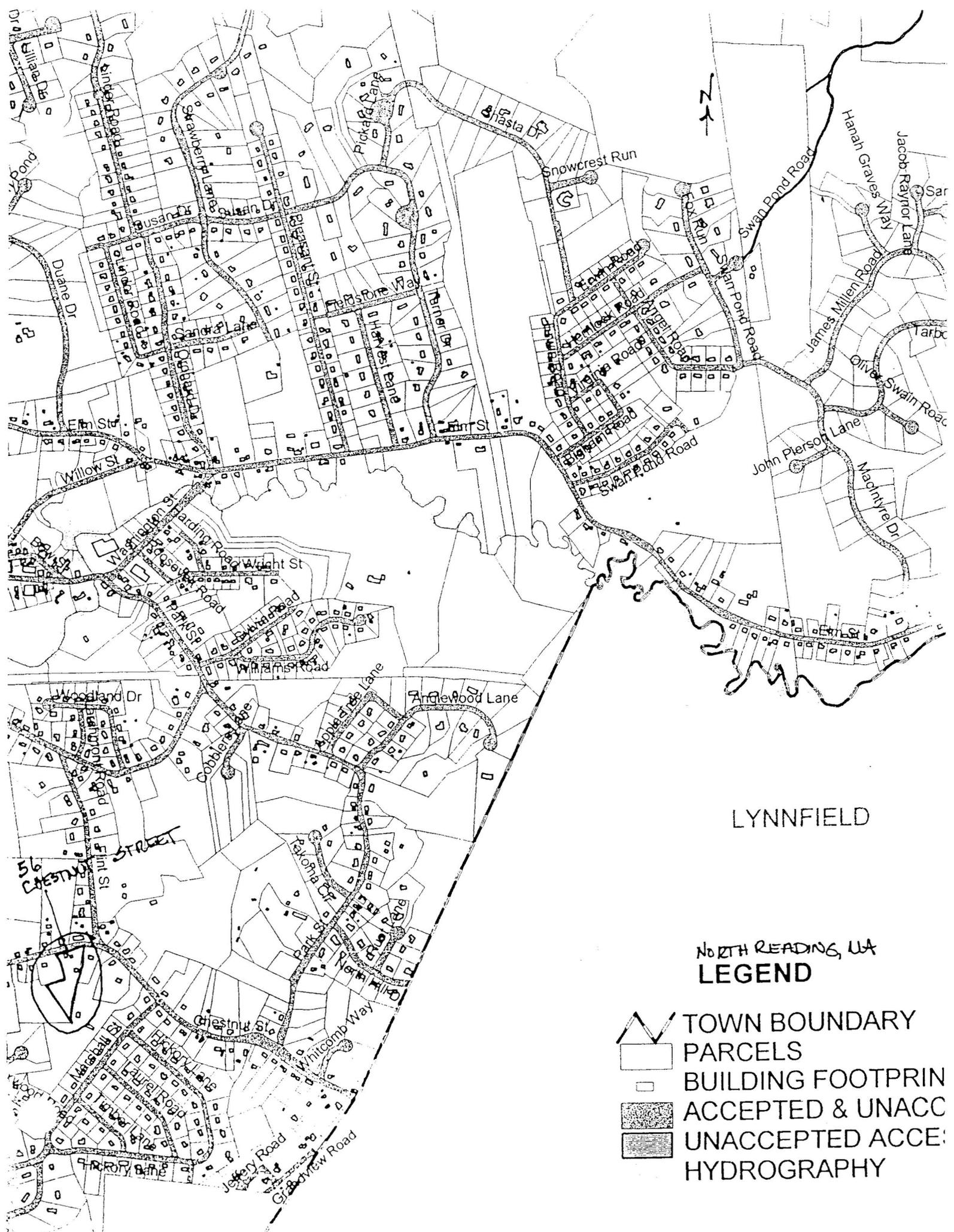
The main block's center entrance is sheltered by a saw-cut bracketed Italianate hood and is flanked by standard-size windows containing 2/2 wood sash. The mansard roof's north elevation exhibits a pair of shed-roofed dormer windows while its east and west elevations exhibit shed-roofed dormers containing double windows.

Historical Narrative

That Charles S. Harris was able to remain in business during the late nineteenth century may have to do with the exceptional quality of his product or the fact that the family had a farm to rely on for income.

56 Chestnut Street is not mentioned in the 1870 Valuation of North Reading Real Estate but is indicated on the 1875 Atlas of Middlesex County, labeled "Mrs. Harris." By 1890, the Harris property encompassed a house worth an estimated \$425, a barn worth \$50 as well as a four-acre North Field and a three-acre Cow Pasture. By 1910, the estate of Tryphemia Harris encompassed the house (\$400), Barn (\$70), the four-acre house lot (\$250), four-acre North Field (\$180) and three-acre Cow Pasture (\$200) for a total of 19 acres. The total estimated worth of the Harris property was \$1,070. The shop and shed of Charles S. and James Z. Harris is listed separately with a value of \$25 and \$40, respectively. By 1930, James Z. Harris is listed as the owner of 56 Chestnut Street. By that time, the property had been reduced in size from 19 to 7.5 acres. The house had been assigned a value of \$600 while "other buildings" are listed with a value of \$150. The Harris land was worth an estimated \$800. James Z. Harris lived here until at least 1936.

By 1966, this house was occupied by Madeline W. Walker and Michael A. Walker, engineer.



LYNNFIELD

NORTH READING, MA
LEGEND

-  TOWN BOUNDARY
-  PARCELS
-  BUILDING FOOTPRINT
-  ACCEPTED & UNACC
-  UNACCEPTED ACCE
-  HYDROGRAPHY

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

Community
North Reading

Property Address
56 Chestnut Street

AREA:

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

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

The Typhemia Harris House qualifies as a rare local example of a mid-nineteenth century Italianate Mansard farmstead. In addition to agrarian pursuits conducted on the premises, members of the Harris family were engaged in shoemaking as late as the early 1900s, thirty-to-forty years after this trade began to decline as a significant factor in the local economy.