

FORM B – BUILDING

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

9-26A

Lexington

LEX.555

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

Town/City: Lexington

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
South Lexington

Photograph



View from NE.

Address: 26 Blossom Street

Historic Name: Underwood – Smith House

Uses: Present: single family residential

Original: single family residential

Date of Construction: 1720 - 1760

Source: archival sources, deeds, visual assessment

Style/Form: Second Period

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood clapboard/wood

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
none

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Interior alterations

Attached barn adapted for domestic use (kitchen)

Multiple additions

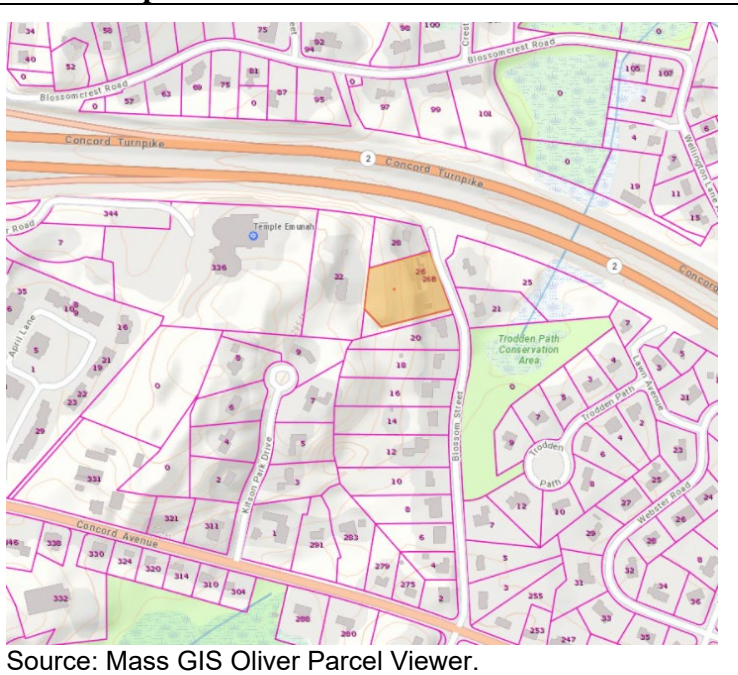
Condition: fair

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 1.50

Setting: The property is located on a major thoroughfare built out with closely-spaced houses from a broad period of development.

Locus Map



Source: Mass GIS Oliver Parcel Viewer.

Recorded by: Kathryn Grover, Walter R. Wheeler & Neil Larson
Neil Larson & Associates

Organization: Lexington Historical Commission

Date: July / 2021

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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:

Based on field work by Walter R. Wheeler & Neil Larson

The Underwood – Smith House is a small two-story wood frame single dwelling with a gable roof raised in the rear to cover a lean-to. Its main, street façade contains four bays on the first floor with an off-center entrance and two windows in the upper story. The fenestration pattern has been altered, in particular, the door is not in an original location; there are a series of alterations that render evidence of early construction history ambiguous. A chimney is located in the northern side of the two-room plan. It has fireboxes in the front room and in the lean-to. There is no evidence of a chimney on the southern side or near the center. It is possible that the house was constructed in two stages; the roof is a single build. Most of the interior finishes in this house have been removed during the course of the past century. This leaves the framing as the principal means by which to contextualize the initial construction period for the house. Dendrochronology would provide useful information. Based upon the style of builder's marks and details of the framing, supported by documentary history, the initial construction period for this house is estimated to be in the Second Period somewhere between 1720 and 1760.

The basement is excavated only under the oldest part of the house and may not extend as far as the southern wall of that portion of the dwelling. There are two sets of stairs. One leads to the surface from an opening on the west wall immediately to the south of the chimney base; another is located in the center of the north wall. The former presently rises within the lean-to. The latter is covered by a bulkhead door and gives access to the outside yard. It is not presently clear which was constructed first. The chimney base, like the chimney above it, dates to the early 19th century, and did not have a fireplace at the basement level. The present chimney mass is not integrated into the adjacent stone foundation, another indication that it is of later date. There is, however, no indication of the former location a chimney base or bases in the stonework of the foundation. Two possibilities present themselves: either the original chimney was located in one of the two center bays (the house consists of four structural bays) and its base was removed when the chimney was replaced in the late-18th or early 19th century, or the chimney was supported on the earth contained within the unexcavated portion of the foundation, at the south end of the house. Precedent for this treatment is known in the late 17th and early 18th centuries: the Bowne house in Flushing, Queens (1669) and the Mabee house in Rotterdam, Schenectady County (1705), both in New York and dated via dendrochronology, each have this feature.

The present chimney, with its closed-up firebox facing the lean-to (west) side, is composed of 18th century and early 19th century bricks measuring 7 ½" x 3 ¾" x 1 ½" and 8" x 4" x 1 ¾" in size. The construction of the chimney must be contemporary with or post-date the construction of the lean-to; a post which supports a beam in the lean-to is fitted snug against the surface of the chimney and appears to have been installed previous to the laying of the brick. The firebox of the first-floor fireplace has Rumford proportions, indicating a late-18th century date of construction at the earliest, but as noted above, the presence of early-19th century bricks in the chimney mass indicates that it was rebuilt at that time. The north face of the chimney mass has an unusual, curved surface; this is an indication that room was being made for a passage on the north of the chimney. There is no partition in that location at present, but older plans of the house—executed previous to alterations undertaken by the present owner—indicate a partition with a door in this location. A much smaller firebox is located on the second floor, directly above the first-floor fireplace. There is no present indication in the basement of the former existence of a chimney in the southern half of the house.

The members of the superstructure of the original portion of the house are oak, and all components are riven or hewn. Much of the wood used in the construction of the house is of irregular form, perhaps indicating either a scarcity of available material or a necessary economy in building.

A brace was formerly attached to the post where the front door is presently located, indicating that the principal entrance had been located elsewhere. Much of the framing of the first-floor platform was replaced in the late 19th century, particularly at the north end of the house, which incorporates subflooring with beaded edges. Additional replacements have been inserted during the 20th century. The current owners have replaced, in kind, a number of the structural components of the frame, which had been compromised either by having been cut into or by insect predation or rot. Although originally covered with casings or

Continuation sheet 1

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buried within walls or ceilings, much of the framing of the superstructure of the house is presently exposed, also the result of alterations undertaken by the current owners.

Posts at the second-floor level are splayed (aka "gunstock") at their tops and join to the top plate with what is presumed to be the standard English tying joint, although the visible portions of these joints are presently insufficient to confirm this. An unusual feature of the framing that is visible is the lack of intermediary tie beams into which the base of rafters are typically tenoned; instead, the bases of the rafters are pegged into the upper surface of the top plate, possibly using a step-lap. Another example of this variant has been documented by Jack Sobon, in a Goshen, Massachusetts, barn that predated 1812 (Sobon, *Historic American Timber Joinery*, 2004: 11). Both second floor rooms within the front portion of the house formerly had ceilings supported by a total of five bents. The interior beam in the north room has been removed. The sides of the beams, or ties, retain evidence for the secondary beams that once framed into them, and which were oriented north-south. All of these secondary beams have been removed.

Large diagonal up-braces are a visible feature of the second-floor exterior walls of the oldest portion of the house. Up-braces are located in both the exterior walls and within the central east-west partition, although some have been removed to accommodate new doors and changes to the fenestration. Builder's marks on the frame are visible on the outside face of the west wall of the oldest portion of the house, within the lean-to. These consist of marriage marks of a large size, scribed with a race knife. Broad compass marks accompany some of the scribed marks. The frame appears to have been filled with brick nogging; however little of this currently remains, and it is not possible to determine its original extent. A small area of nogging survives in the west wall of the first period frame; it is visible within the enclosure for the stairs to the basement. Brick nogging measures 8" x 4" x 1 1/2", with some variation; these dimensions are similar to those of the brick used for the construction of the upper portions of the chimney in the north rooms of the house, as well as at the basement level of the same feature.

At the second-floor level, a stair enclosure is located in the southwest corner of the southern room. It may have extended to the first floor, but no definitive evidence for this was found. At any rate, this cannot be the original location of a stair leading to the attic; the interior of the second-floor stair enclosure retains whitewashed beams and a post, and an indication of the former location of beams that were removed to install the stairs to the attic and which lack whitewashing in their remaining pockets. The stairs remain in place, although the attic floor—and the beams that once supported it—have all been removed. That the structural elements in the southwest corner of the southern room were all whitewashed—including a corner post, diagonal bracing and wall studs—is evidence that they were left exposed at an early period, before the installation of the stair. This is either an indication that the southern chamber remained unfinished initially, was used for storage, or that the original level of interior of finish was quite modest.

The original roof consists of principal rafters and common purlins; rafters are forked at their apexes and pegged. There is no ridge pole proper, rather a purlin attached to the top of the west range of rafters serves this purpose.

Portions of original or early straight-run stair stringers are preserved on the walls of the enclosure of the stairs leading to the basement. These could not have been installed in this location previous to the construction of the lean-to. The stair rail, newel and balusters of the main staircase are of a recent date and were installed by the present owners.

Few examples of early hardware survive in the house at present. Exceptions are the two pintled strap hinges with spade ends that support the molded board door connecting the two second floor rooms.

A present owner indicated the former location of a cupboard in the west wall of the south side of the main block of the house, which she removed. This was located in the wall between the main block and the lean-to. She also indicated the former location of a door in the south end of that same wall. The locations of both are indicated in the sketch plan by dashed lines.

A previous owner, Vilunya Diskin, detailed work undertaken during her ownership when the house was offered for sale. This included remodeling of the second-floor bathroom (1977), the master bedroom (1980), and the kitchen (1991-92).

The house was purchased by the present owner in 1999. In addition to the alterations noted previously, exterior alterations undertaken since that time include changes to the fenestration on the south wall of the house and removal of a one-story enclosed porch on that side of the dwelling. Alterations to what may have originally been a carriage barn, located immediately to the south and connected to the house by a hyphen have also been undertaken. Additional structures have also been constructed on the property.

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Researched and written by Kathryn Grover

The house now numbered 26 Blossom Street was built after 10 March 1718/19 on 40 acres Thomas Underwood (1655-1742/43) of Lexington deeded to his son Joseph.¹ The early history of the Underwood family in Massachusetts is confused in both family and local genealogies, but it appears that Thomas Underwood may have been the son of the immigrant Thomas who came to the New World about 1660; the other branches of the Lexington family came first to Hingham in the 1630s. The birth and death dates of son Joseph are not known, and nothing has so far been learned about his life in Lexington.²

In February 1760 Joseph Underwood sold twelve acres of woodland and pasture land with "one Mansion House" to Josiah Smith of Waltham.³ The deed cites two of the same abutters as the 1718/19 deed. This Joseph Underwood was likely the son of earlier grantee Joseph Underwood and probably the man who died in late April of the same year. Josiah Smith (1724-84) was the son of Joseph Smith (born 1677) and Mary Richard (1680-1765) and had married Sarah Francis at Medford in 1750; after her death he married Hannah Brown of Waltham, in 1758. He served Lexington as a selectman for five years between 1771 and 1777 and as assessor for five years between 1770 and 1780. After Josiah Smith's death the property passed to his eldest son Josiah Smith Jr. (1753-1826) who like his father had served in the Revolution (the son at Ticonderoga); in 1777 he married Polly Barber, the daughter of a captain in the British Army.

Josiah Smith Jr. is listed in Lexington census from 1790 to 1820, and in 1823 he sold all of his South Lexington real estate to his son Elias Smith (1792-1878) for \$1500.⁴ The first tract was described as the 6-acre "hill pasture" on the west side of Blossom Street with a house, a shop, and a shed; across the road was a 29-acre lot with a barn standing on it. Elias Smith had married Harriet Hastings in 1819, and he is listed in his own household in the 1830 and 1840 Lexington censuses. In 1850 he was 58 years old, owned \$5,000 in real property, and lived with his wife Harriet, their sons Everett Elias (born 1827) and Albert Bradford (born 1829), and a New Hampshire-born teenage boarder. The agricultural census schedules for 1850 credit Elias Smith with 40 improved acres and a farm worth \$4000; his older brother Josiah Smith (born 1789) had 35 acres in all, and both had more cattle than most: Elias Smith had five dairy cows and three other cattle, while Josiah owned seven milk cows.

In 1855 both Elias Smith and his son Albert B. were living on the farm with George E. Whittum, the daughter of Elias's daughter Sarah, and an Irish immigrant farm worker. In 1860 the farm was valued at \$5,000 in the population schedules and \$4,000 in the agricultural schedules. Whittum was still part of the household, while Elias's sons Everett E. and A. Bradford were enumerated next to them, Everett described as a farm worker. In 1870 Elias and Harriet Smith lived in the house with widowed daughter Sarah Whittum and her son George, by then a hotel clerk, and the 1875 Lexington map attaches Elias Smith's name to the house on this site.

Harriet Hastings Smith died in 1876 and Elias two years later. A few months before his death Elias and his son A. Bradford signed an agreement in which son A. Bradford could acquire his father's farm for \$3500 as long as Elias was permitted to live for the rest of his life in the north end of the house, including the parlor and bedroom in the main house and being the "tenement" that George Whittum had earlier occupied. A. Bradford Smith was given a year from Elias's death to pay the stated purchase price, and he agreed to pay 6 percent interest on the money quarterly to his father and, if necessary for his comfort, some of the

¹ Thomas Underwood, Lexington, to Joseph Underwood, Lexington, 10 March 1718/19, MSD 19:163. This is the only recorded deed to a Joseph Underwood in Lexington between 1704 and 1726.

² He is apparently not the Joseph Underwood (1681-1761), often cited as the son of Joseph and Elizabeth Underwood, who moved to Westford probably by 1750 and died there. Howard J. Banker, *The Underwood Families of America* (New Era Printing Co., 1913), does not state that this Joseph ever lived in Lexington. It is possible that the Joseph Underwood who died in Westford in 1761 was actually the son of Thomas Underwood, not Joseph Underwood. A. Bradford Smith, "Kite End," *Proceedings of Lexington Historical Society* 2 (1900), 112-14, states that the house was "formerly owned by Joshua Underwood," but no recorded deeds were made to Joshua in Lexington between 1713 and 1727. Joshua Underwood, born in 1683, was a younger brother of Joseph (1681-1761) and lived in Sherborn. The March 1984 MHC inventory form for 26 Blossom cites a younger Joshua Underwood (1724-75), son of Joseph (1681-1761) but notes that the deed was too early to have been this Joshua Underwood. See also Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, from Its First Settlement to 1868* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 2:714-715, which may also contain errors.

³ Joseph Underwood, Lexington, to Josiah Smith, Waltham, 13 February 1760, MSD 57:353. This Joseph Underwood's estate was hopelessly mired in debt and still being probated in the early 1800s.

⁴ Josiah Smith to Elias Smith, 18 January 1823, MSD 246:362. Josiah Smith had earlier sold 3 acres bordering his land to son Elias in January 1816 for \$210 (MSD 221:437).

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principal sum. A. Bradford Smith also agreed to supply his father with a quart of milk a day, as much fruit from the farm as he wanted, wood for his fire and manure for his garden, stable room for a house and room for one carriage in the carriage house "next to the road." He also agreed to lay a new floor in the kitchen in that part of the house Elias deeded to him and to paint and paper the kitchen and sitting room. Elias died only three weeks after the agreement was executed, and in May 1878 his executor recorded a deed of Elias Smith's property to his son A. Bradford Smith. From this point forward the property was transferred in two parcels—the first being 6.5 acres (later 9 acres) on the west side of Blossom Street with the house and outbuildings, and the second being 37 acres with a barn and other buildings.⁵

A. Bradford Smith remained on the family farm until 1884, when he sold both parcels to Amos B. Harris of Everett for \$5,000; Harris sold it about a year later to John Bender for \$6250.⁶ Born in Bavaria in 1810, Bender came to the United States in 1834, married Martha Swan in Roxbury in 1839, and was a farmer living with his wife and son George C. in Hingham in 1860. Bender died in early May 1886, and his heirs sold the 26 Blossom Street parcels to the brothers George D. (1838-1902) and Lyman W. Estabrook (1829-92) for \$4050 in March 1887.⁷

George and Lyman Estabrook were the sons of Solomon W. Estabrook (1815-89), who is cited in some sources as the owner of the farm though no deed was recorded in his name. The son of Attai Estabrook (1769-1836) of Hollis, New Hampshire, and his wife Polly Pierce, Solomon Estabrook was living and farming in Lexington by 1870. The 1880 census shows son Lyman, a cattle dealer, and George, a farm worker, in their parents' household. Their mother, Elizabeth C. Blodgett Estabrook, died in 1881, and their father died in 1889. Lyman Estabrook died in 1892.

In October 1895 George D. Estabrook, his wife Emma S. Fowle Estabrook, and Lyman's widow Harriet sold the two parcels of 26 Blossom Street to Daniel Fuller Hutchinson (1845-1925) and his son Arthur (1870-1946).⁸ Hutchinson, born in Greenfield, New Hampshire, was working as a glazier in Lynn in 1869 when he married Mary Alice Fairfield, a native of Kennebunk Maine. He was a wholesale grocer in Somerville in 1880. And he was probably renting 26 Blossom Street when he acquired it, for the 1894 directory lists him on Blossom Street "near Allen." Both he and son Arthur F. were listed as market gardeners in the 1899 directory; the house is listed as located on "Blossom first from Concord Ave," and also there were sons Charles Albert (1875-1947) and Edwin Waldo Hutchinson (1878-1963) and daughter Alice May (1873-1956). Charles worked as a clerk in Boston, Edwin worked for his father, and Alice taught school. The 1900 census lists the Hutchinson as a farmer on Blossom Street with wife Mary A., sons Charles, Edwin, and Arthur, all farm hands, three other relatives, and five boarding farm workers, one of them probably a related to his wife, three from Russia and listed only by their first names, and one from Germany.

The 1906 Lexington map marks the house and the property on the east side of Blossom Street, incorrectly, as "P. F. Hutchinson," and in 1910 the Hutchinson household was similarly large. Daniel and Mary Hutchinson shared the house with son Charles, a wholesale produce shipping clerk, Edwin and his wife Edith M. Cox (a native of Camden, Maine, whom he married in 1902), Mary A. Hutchinson's sister Sarah, who had been part of the household since at least 1880, and four boarding servants, three of them men from Russia-Poland and one a maid. The 1913 directory lists Daniel and Edwin as market gardeners and florists and Arthur as a market gardener; Charles, still working in Boston, and Alice, still teaching, boarded with their father.

By 1918 Daniel Hutchinson and his wife moved to Allston or Brighton, and in the 1920 and 1930 censuses Arthur Hutchinson is listed on Blossom Street with his wife Clara (born in New Hampshire in 1871) and their daughter Doris; his brother Edwin is listed next to him with his wife and mother-in-law in a separate household. Both were wholesale florists by 1934; in 1942 Arthur was still farming at what was then 169 Blossom Street, while Edwin was still a wholesale florist living and working at 135, now 26, Blossom Street.

⁵ Agreement, 20 March 1878, between Elias Smith and A. Bradford Smith, MSD 1476:389; Lorenzo Marrett, Cambridge, executor will Elias Smith, to A. Bradford Smith, 10 May 1878, MSD 1476:390.

⁶ Smith, "Kite End," 114, stated that when he sold it the farm had been in his family for 124 years (1760). See Albert B. Smith to Amos B. Harris, Everett, 28 May 1884, MSD 1668:127; Amos B. Harris, Everett, to John Bender, 8 May 1885, MSD 1703:199.

⁷ David H. and Louisa B. Daniels, Boston, and George C. Bender. Lexington, to George D. Estabrook and Lyman W. Estabrook, 25 March 1887, MSD 1809:58. A. Bradford Smith held a \$1500 mortgage on the property; see MSD 1809:587.

⁸ George D. and Emma S. Estabrook and Harriet K. Estabrook to Daniel F. Hutchinson and Arthur F. Hutchinson, 31 October 1895, MSD 81:2318. See also George D. Estabrook and Lyman W. Estabrook to Baxter E. Perry, 12 September 1887, MSD 1815:435, and Baxter E. Perry, Medford, to Emma C. Estabrook and Harriet K. Estabrook, 12 September 1887, MSD 1815:436. In 1900 George Estabrook was a janitor living with his wife Emma in another part of town; after his death Emma boarded first at 470 Massachusetts Avenue and then, by 1913, at 10 Muzzey Street.

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In March 1946 Arthur Hutchinson, by then living much of the year in St. Petersburg, Florida, sold his interest in the property on the west side of Blossom Street to his brother Edwin, and in October of the same year Edwin Hutchinson petitioned the state land court to determine and register the boundaries between his brother's former home at 169 Blossom Street, which he sold the next month to William H. and Effie S. Lyon, and his own.⁹ Arthur Hutchinson died in St. Petersburg in 1946, and Edwin may have remained at 26 Blossom Street until he died in 1963. After it became registered land, 26 Blossom Street's deed history between 1946 and 1974 is unclear. In June 1974 Frederick W. and Patricia E. Frey sold 26 Blossom Street and its lot and an undeveloped lot south of it to Martin and Wilma E. Diskin of Cambridge.¹⁰ Wilma (later Vilunya) Diskin sold the property in September 1999 to Sarah A. Forrester and Ricardo C. Dumont, who placed their shares of the property in separate trusts that were the owners of record in 2021.¹¹

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⁹ Arthur F. Hutchinson, Lexington and St. Petersburg FL, to Edwin W. Hutchinson, 11 March 1946, 6949:458; Commonwealth of Massachusetts Land Court, 22 October 1946, MSD 7050:392; Affidavit, Edwin W. Hutchinson, 13 November 1946, MSD 7059:257; Edwin W. Hutchinson to William H. and Effie S. Lyon, 13 November 1946, MSD 7059:257; Commonwealth of Massachusetts Land Court, 28 March 1947, MSD 7192:449.

¹⁰ Frederick W. and Patricia E. Frey to Martin and Wilma E. Diskin, Cambridge, 13 June 1974, Document 523396

¹¹ Wilma E. Diskin to Sarah A. Forrester and Ricardo C. Dumont, 1 September 1999, 26 Blossom Street, Certificate 216090; Ricardo C. Dumont and Sarah A. Forrester, 24 January 2021, Certificate 276237. The 26 Blossom street house is shown as 135 Blossom on Lot D of "Plan of Land in Lexington," October 1946, LCP 20144A and on Lot D2 of "Subdivision Plan of Land in Lexington," June 1950, LCP 20144E.

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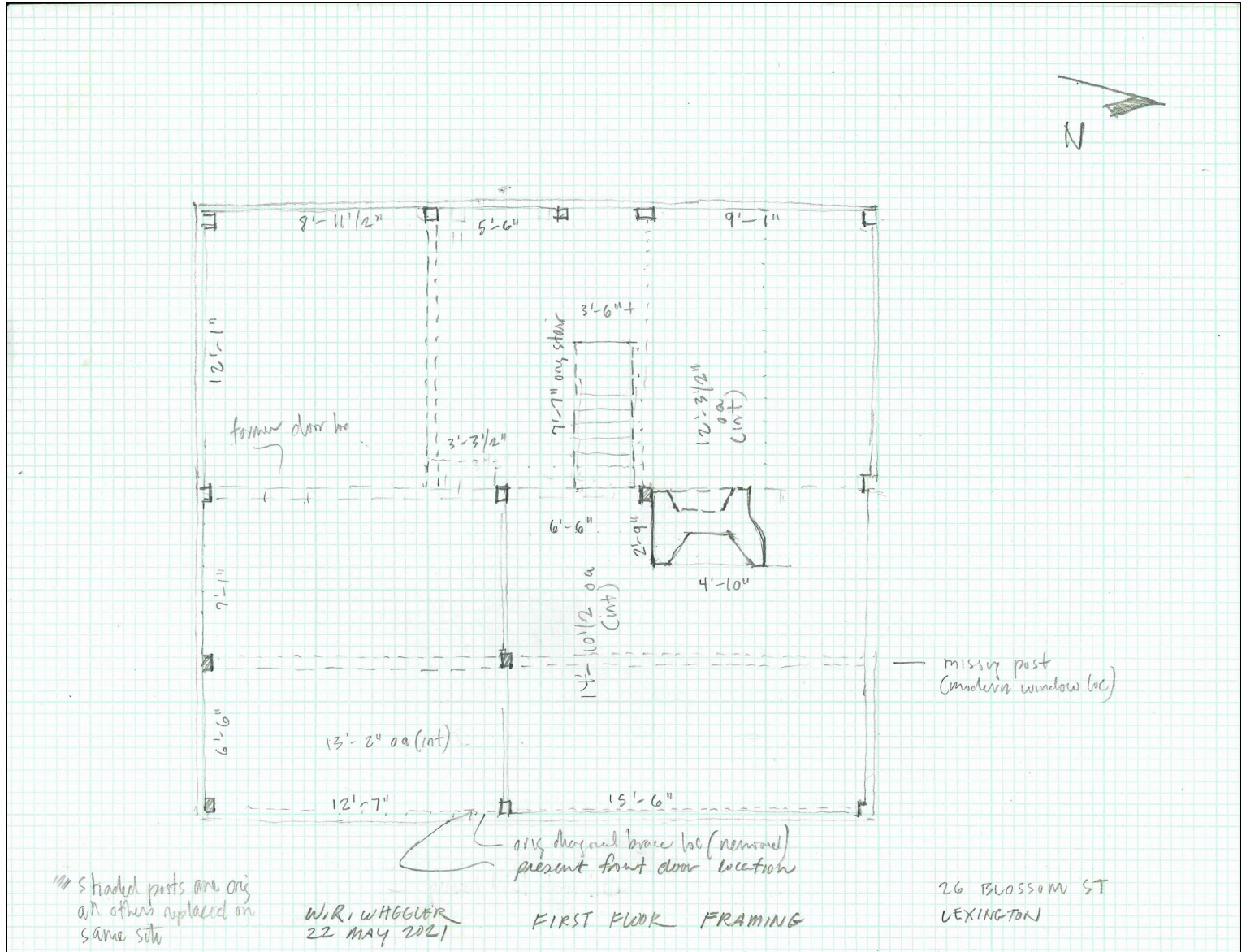
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FIGURES



First floor plan with field notes, Walter R. Wheeler, 2021.

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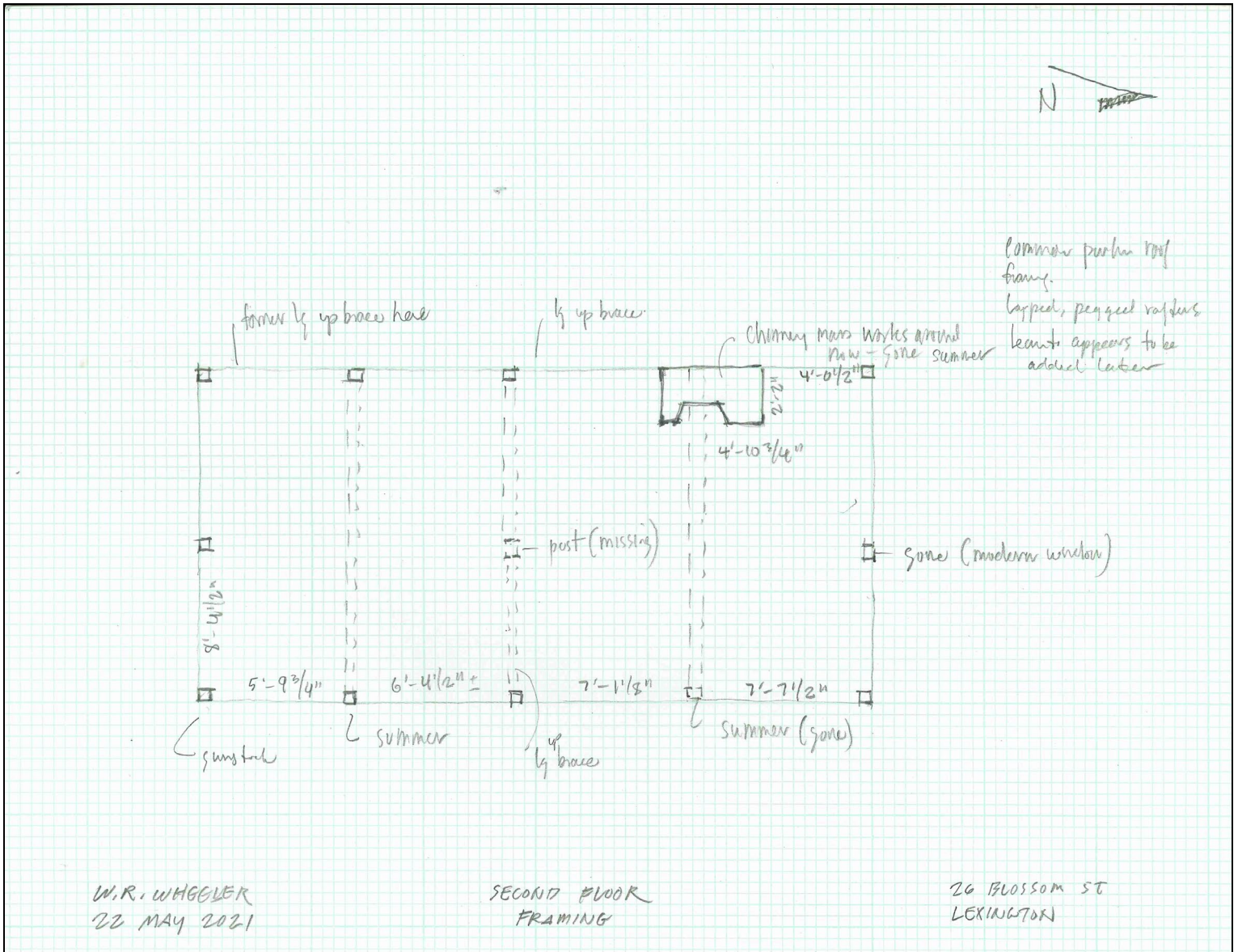
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Second floor plan with field notes, Walter R. Wheeler, 2021.

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Historic photo, ca. 1970.

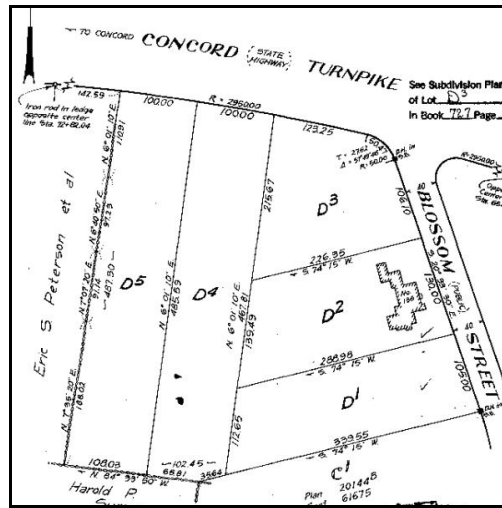
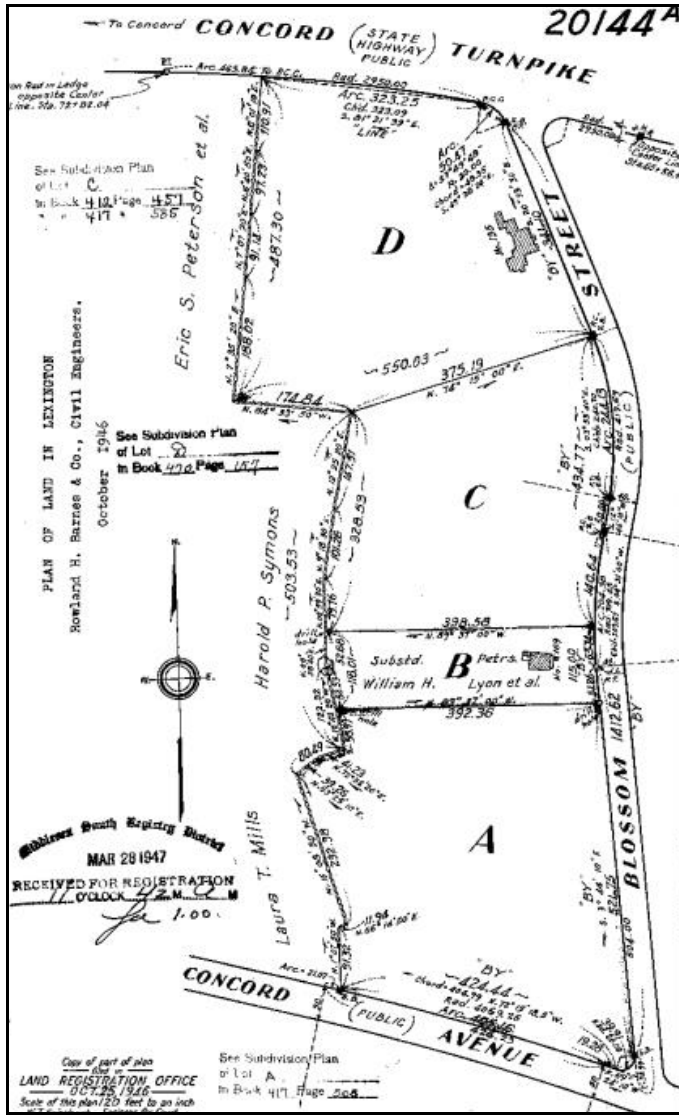


Real estate photo, ca. 1999.

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Land Court Plan 20144A (1946) shows 26 Blossom (formerly 135) on Lot D and 169 Blossom on Lot B; the 1950 subdivision of Lot D (LCP 20144E) placed the 26 Blossom Street house on LotD2 and conveyed it thereafter with Lot D1.

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PHOTOGRAPHS (credit Walter R, Wheeler, 2021)



View of south end of house. Hyphen at left has a timber frame.



Detail of original clapboards found under vinyl siding.

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Rear (west) elevation showing stages of lean-to expansion.



Former attached barn renovated for kitchen on first floor.

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Added wing, south side.



Added wing (right) and studio on site of barn.

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View north along lean-to dormer to outbuilding.



Basement looking north. Chimney base on left and north stairs in background.

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Basement stairs to lean-to. Chimney base on right.

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Remnants of earlier stair alongside basement stairs.

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First floor beams and flooring from basement.



First floor, front room, north side looking north.

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First floor fireplace and chimney.

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First floor, front room, south side looking east to front wall and entrance.



First floor, in lean-to south side looking north.

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Second floor fireplace and chimney showing studs for lean-to partition.

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Second floor, studs and bracing for wall between front room and lean-to, Chimney on right.



Second floor, SE corner showing gunstock post, girts, rafter and purlin.

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Second floor, NE room, showing roof framing.



Box stair in corner of SE room

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Second floor, lean-to, interior partition showing framing. Original roof followed rafter in end wall of front room (upper right) to beam below windows. The pitch was later raised to a plate above the windows and a shed dormer raised the roof even more.

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New stair in lean-to.