FORM B - BUILDING

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

Photograph



Locus Map (north at top)



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

Neil Larson & Associates

Organization: Lexington Historical Commission

Date: July / 2021

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

22-39 Lexington E LEX.227

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LHD 3/23/1966

Town/City: Lexington

 $\textbf{Place:} \ (neighborhood \ or \ village):$

East Lexington

Address: 837 Massachusetts Avenue

Historic Name: Thomas & Elizabeth Fessenden House

Bowman's Tavern

Uses: Present: single family residential

Original: single family residential

Date of Construction: ca. 1770

Source: archival sources, deeds, visual assessment

Style/Form: Second Period/2-sty center-chimney block

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood clapboard/wood

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

none

Major Alterations (with dates):

Extensive ext. & int. renovations, 1988

Condition: fair

Moved: no ⊠ yes □ Date:

Acreage: approx. 0.40

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

development.

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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 for	rm.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Based on fieldwork by Walter R. Wheeler & Neil Larson, 2021

Historical analysis indicates that the house likely was built for Thomas Fesseden (1741-1804), and the year of his marriage Elizabeth Apthorp in 1770 has been selected as the estimated time of construction. The two-story wood frame single dwelling (now a duplex) has a gable roof and originated as a hall-parlor center-chimney plan. The exterior of the house has been thoroughly renovated with new wall materials, doors and windows. The five-bay front façade is organizationally intact with a center entrance with sidelights and a hipped-roof porch. A shallow box cornice is separate from the second-story window heads, probably by the loss of a frieze board. The center chimney was removed and replaced with two smaller brick stacks divided by stairs for each of the two living units. Gable ends contain single windows centered on each of the three stories. A two-story cross-gable kitchen wing is appended to the south side of the rear of the house; it was later lengthened. A doorway is located on the wing's south elevation. A one-story shed roof wing was added across the rear of the rear wall in 1988.

Only the south half of this house was accessible, together with the entirety of the basement. Portions of the base for a central chimney survive in the basement. The east half of the support—which would have arched to an analogous support at the west—survives and contains, at its south end, recesses with wooden shelves built into them. This is a common feature, with many variants, found in Lexington and surrounding areas. Much of the framing for the first floor is of sawn coniferous (pine or hemlock) wood, and probably represents mid-19th century work. The frame of the superstructure of the house is largely hewn, is pegged at the corners, and has diagonal up-bracing at the first and second floor levels. Secondary members are sawn. Marriage marks, in the form of large Roman numerals executed with a race knife, were used at each major joint.

An unusual feature of the house is the orientation of the summer beam, seen in the south parlor. It is oriented east-west, and so would not have engaged with the central chimney mass. This appears to be common in later Second Period houses. The orientation of the north parlor summer beam is seen in photographs taken during renovation of the house in 1988 to be of the same east-west orientation, resulting in a single-pile structure comprised of six parallel bents. The framing of the wing that extends to the east from the south half of the house has joists following this same orientation. The wing had brick nogging in its exterior walls; this feature was removed in 1988 during the course of renovations. The exterior of the main block of the house was covered with horizontal sheathing boards, revealed during the course of work undertaken in 1988, at which time the exterior sheathing of the house was entirely removed.

Little of the original plan of the house presently remains, although most of the structural components of the building are intact. Similarly, the majority of interior finishes date to the late-20th century. At the time of the 1988 renovation, a ca. 1800-1820 mantle and chair rail survived in the north parlor; whether they were retained as part of the renovated house is not presently known. A map created in 1855, when the property associated with the house was subdivided, depicts the roofscape of the house, including a hipped north end, a feature that no longer survives. The gable-roofed two-story wing that is attached to the back of the house is documented to have been constructed previously to that date by this same document.

The attic of this house was inaccessible at the time of our visit. From photographs taken in 1988, it appears that the framing of the main block of the house consists of principal rafters and common purlins supporting vertical roof boards.

Ca. 1855 and ca. 1880 renovations

Alterations to the house can be dated to approximately the time the property was subdivided. This work included removal of the original chimney mass, and two smaller chimneys were installed to vent flues for stoves and the one fireplace (located in the south parlor-noted during renovations in 1988) to the north and south of a new straight-run central staircase. Interior photographs taken in 1988 show four-panel doors, and simple baseboards and architraves. The firebox of the first-floor south parlor chimney was walled up at a later date, with a flue for a stove passing through the wall. A new entry consisting of sidelights with a solid panel door that had Greek Revival moldings was installed. The hipped roof front porch may have been constructed at this time, or during later renovations which introduced two-over-two sash to the house, perhaps c. 1880 or as late as c. 1910.

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1988 work

The house fell into disrepair and required extensive work by the time Vincent Cerbone purchased it in 1988. At that time, two-over-two double-hung sash were replaced by eight-over-eight sash in enlarged openings and the main entrance was reconfigured to have narrower sidelights. The wood deck of the front porch was removed and the columns supporting its roof were replaced. All interior finishes of the house were removed, and it was essentially reduced to its frame. Although its associated chimney was retained, the firebox that had been uncovered in the south parlor was taken down and rebuilt in roughly the same form. The first-floor boards were removed and installed on the second floor, and new material was installed at the first-floor level.

The 1988 work removed a one-story lean-to addition, which had been expanded in depth at its south end. A larger one-story wing took its place. An early-20th century two-bay garage of square plan with pyramidal roof located to the east of the house on a board-formed concrete foundation was in a poor state of repair and was demolished at about that time.

Mr. Cerbone was of the opinion that the rear wing constituted the earlier portion of the house. Although containing some early framing, it is hard to substantiate this, given the large percentage of replacement components that were introduced by him into the building. It is typical of people untrained in construction history to look at kitchen wings with their simpler and plainer (more primitive) construction features and finishes as being older when, in fact, they are contemporaneous with or, in many cases, later than the main house

It would be difficult to attribute an early-18th century date of construction to this house, based upon remaining evidence. Construction episodes dating to ca. 1800, ca. 1855, ca. 1880 and 1988 are discernable, however, and it may be that the earliest finishes that survived in 1988 represented a renovation to an earlier structure.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Researched and written by Kathryn Grover

The house now numbered 837 Massachusetts Avenue, once known as Bowman's Tavern, was built for Thomas Fessenden (1741-1804) probably around the time he married Elizabeth Apthorp in 1770. The Fessenden family had owned land in "Cambridge Farms" since 1713. The immigrant Nicholas Fessenden (1650-1718/19), who had come from England to Cambridge in 1674, owned more than thirty acres in Lexington, part of which he sold to his son Thomas (1684-1738), already living in Lexington, in 1716/17. The parcel had a house and a barn standing on it. 1 Thomas's son Thomas (1709-68) appears to have inherited this farm. He was a wheelwright, and at the time of his death he owned a "mansion house," a barn, and outbuildings on 140 acres, all of which, because he died intestate, the probate court settled on his eldest son, also Thomas Fessenden (1741-1804), known as Lieutenant for his long Revolutionary service.²

Lieutenant Thomas Fessenden was taxed on one dwelling in 1798, but when he died in 1804, his probate records document that three dwelling houses stood on his 150 acres. The "mansion house" was set off to his second wife Lucy Lee Fessenden (ca. 1754-1820) as part of her dower share. The rest of the real estate was apparently not divided until late April 1822, two years after Lucy L. Fessenden died. At that time, the four adult children of Thomas and Lucy Fessenden—the widowed Eleanor Fessenden Swan, William (who lived in New Hampshire), the widowed Betsey Apthorp Fessenden Viles, and son John, born in 1794—agreed that the real estate should be divided between Eleanor and John, with each paying cash to their two other siblings as their share. The appraisers listed eleven parcels, together embracing more than 72 acres, one gallery pew and a half floor pew in the meetinghouse "two houses attached to each other," a barn, outhouses, and a shed. John received "the two houses

¹ Nicholas Fessenden, Cambridge, to Thomas Fessenden, Lexington, 22 March 1716/17, MSD 18:397. In 1713 Thomas Cutler Jr. sold Thomas Fessenden, Nicholas's son, 33 acres of the former Dr. Cooke farm in Cambridge Farms, which was bounded on the east by the land of Nicholas Fessenden (10 March 1713, MSD 16:237); no deed has been located in which Nicholas Fessenden acquired a Lexington parcel, however. In 1743 Thomas's son Thomas Fessenden (1709-65) and Ebenezer Smith leased, possibly to purchase, two parcels with a house and barn from Lexington physician Ebenezer Perry (MSD 44:199), and in 1750 Thomas Cutler and his son and namesake sold to this Thomas Fessenden forty acres bordering land of other Fessendens and Samuel Winship, who had married Nicholas's daughter Jane in 1711 (MSD 49:154). This Cutler piece may have been in North Lexington.

² Thomas Fessenden was a member of Parker's Lexington company in April 1775, a clerk of John Bridge's Lexington company when it served at Roxbury in March 1776, a lieutenant "for William Diamond" in the "first campaign" of 1775, in the second "twelve-month" campaign to New York and in the twelfth campaign "to take Burgoyne." See Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, from Its First Settlement to 1868* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 1:426-27, 429

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attached to each other," valued at \$990, as well as the barn, outbuildings, and all or part of four of the parcels. On 1 July 1822 John Fessenden, then living in Cambridge but soon to move to Deerfield in western Massachusetts, sold all that he had received in the division of his father's estate—described in the deed as the 29-acre "farm in Lexington" and its buildings on both sides of the County Road and an 18-acre parcel either adjacent to it or nearby—for \$4000 to Francis Bowman Jr., who had been one of the three appraisers of his estate earlier that year.³

Born in 1792, Francis Bowman Jr. was the son of Francis Bowman (1752-1825) and Susanna Chamberlain Bowman; his ancestors had owned land in Lexington since the late 1710s. On 18 February 1821 Francis Jr. married Almira Wellington, and his purchase of the property later known as Bowman Tavern took place the next year. One deed documents that by March 1822 he was operating a store, possibly in a building he inherited from his father; he apparently transferred this store to the Bowman Tayern property. Local historian Albert Bryant Jr. stated of the Fessenden property Bowman acquired:

Soon after taking possession of the Fessenden estate he built a large barn on W side of house, and, connecting the house and barn by a shed, opened a public house; but the inconvenient arrangements and the lack of room in the house proved a hindrance to success. He also erected a building on the east side of the house about one hundred feet in length and one and one-half stories in height. Part of the building was used for storage, and part was finished and occupied as a grocery store. It was first kept by a Mr. Jewett, for two or three years, who sold out to William Clapp, brother-in-law to Bowman. This store was burned about 1832.4

By August 1830 Francis Bowman Jr. had moved to Cambridge to begin a lumber business, and he sold the tavern property, a barn, store, and shed with 15 acres of the farm to Hannah S. Folsom of Boston for \$4900. The deed states that Samuel B. Spear was then occupying the tavern and had permission to do so until 1 April 1832; Spear left Lexington about that time for Townsend, where he ran an inn. In November of the same year, because Folsom was about to remarry, she placed the Lexington property and numerous parcels and dwellings she owned in Boston and Rhode Island in the hands of a trustee, Boston "broker" Asa Adams, and in early January 1831 she sold the East Lexington tavern and its 15 acres to Adams. No deed has been located in which Adams sold the property, but in late March 1832 the 15-acre property with the "Tavern-house, Barn, Store. Sheds and all other buildings thereon" was offered for sale in Boston newspapers. Who acquired it, if anyone, at the time, has not been learned, but by 1840 Bowman Tavern had become the property of Nathaniel Flint (1805-74). 6 Local histories state that Bowman Tavern ceased to operate in 1843 (its last keeper, Lemuel Lakin, died that year) and was thereafter a private dwelling, Historian Edward P. Bliss noted that Bowman Tayern "had a good share of custom. In the busy season forty horses were put up."7

Born in Antrim, New Hampshire, Nathaniel Flint was listed in this neighborhood in the 1840 census in a household of seven persons. He and his wife Hannah (1819-52) had four children—George, Caroline, Esther, and William Wallace—between 1840 and 1850. The 1850 census lists Nathaniel Flint as a yeoman with \$5,000 in real property in a household with his wife, three of their children (William was born later that year), and a boarding carpenter and his wife. In 1855, three years after his wife's death, Nathaniel Flint lived at 837 Massachusetts Avenue with his four children and Abby Crane, probably a domestic servant.

In June that year Flint, who was planning to "move to the West immediately," subdivided his East Lexington property and advertised its auction sale, to take place on 2 July. "This property consists of the house, with about 23,000 feet of land, 17 eligible building lots of from 10 to 20,000 feet each all bordering upon the main road, or upon spacious and commodious streets,

³ John Fessenden. Cambridge, to Francis Bowman Jr., 1 July 1822, MSD 258:279.

⁴ Albert W. Bryant Jr., "Lexington Sixty Years Ago," Proceedings of Lexington Historical Society (Lexington: Lexington Historical Society, 1900), 2:39-41. The deed mentioning Bowman's store as an abutting property is Joseph Robinson, Lexington, to Francis Bowman Jr. 6 March 1822, MSD 258:277.

⁵ Boston Post, 30 March 1832, 3; Boston Daily Advertiser, 4 April 1832, 3. Who placed the advertisement is not indicated.

⁶ In January 1833 Francis Bowman, then living in Cambridge, sold Eli Robbins of Lexington a quarter-acre lot with its "privileges and appurtenances" that bordered his own land in Lexington for \$200 (MSD 371:393), and Robbins sold this parcel to Nathaniel Flint in July 1836 (MSD 371:394) for \$450. No building is mentioned. The only other deed to Nathaniel Flint before 1840, when the census clearly lists him in this neighborhood, is from the Middlesex County deputy sheriff for a 61-square-rod lot with a house on it that he acquired at auction for \$280; see John Sparrell, deputy sheriff Middlesex County, to Nathaniel Flint, 6 July 1839, MSD 385:396.

⁷ Edward P. Bliss, "The Old Taverns of Lexington," Lexington Historical Society: Papers Relating to the History of the Town Read by Some of Its Members 1 (1889): 73-74, 83. Bliss stated the "landlords" of Bowman Tavern to have been "Bowman, Brown, Spear, Wyman, and Lemuel Lakin and that the owners after it became a private residence as "Flint, Fields, and "the last landlord," James W. Coburn. Neither Coburn nor Fields are included in the chain of title, however.

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and three lots of cultivating land, containing from 2 to 2 ½ acres each," the advertisement stated. "The estate is that formerly well known as the Bowman Tavern Property." The house was described as two stories, ten rooms, "some of them large and high posted," and the lot offering "a full share of those large and ornamental trees for which the village of East Lexington is so justly famed." The advertisement noted that an "ample and convenient street" had been laid out through the farm, which "has always borne as heavy crops as any in the town." Flint advertised his household goods, grass, and manure for sale two days after the auction.⁸

On 22 July 1856 Nathaniel Flint sold 837 Massachusetts Avenue to Eliza Ann Pons of Cambridge for \$1500, and she sold it a little more than a year later to Flint's son George for \$1000. If Nathaniel Flint went West, he was back in Lexington by 1860, when as his son's guardian (George was then twenty years old), he sold 837 Massachusetts Avenue and part of its lot to John Goodridge for \$1000. Goodridge took out a mortgage with Nathaniel Flint and defaulted by November 1866. Flint again advertised the property—described as a two-story house on 0.25 acre—for auction sale and sold it to his son George. The 1870 census shows Nathaniel Flint as owning \$10,000 in real property (he also owned a house and land on Massachusetts Avenue and Curve Street, to the south) and living with his adult children George, a painter with \$1000 in real property, William W., and Esther. In 1871 Esther married blacksmith Henry Phelps Webber, and according to historian Edward Bliss the Webbers were living in the house in the late 1880s.

In 1873 George Flint mortgaged the 837 Massachusetts Avenue property, and the next year his father Nathaniel died. The 1880 census shows George Flint was boarding elsewhere in town, and he may have been renting the house or already have defaulted on the mortgage of it. The mortgage was assigned to Hiram Osborn of Waltham, who sold the property to Daniel W. Williams, also of Waltham. Williams conveyed it back to Osborn the same day (to avoid the appearance of an assignee conveying the property to himself), and about two years later Osborn sold 837 Massachusetts Avenue to Edwin S. Spaulding for \$950.¹¹ Spaulding's family owned it for nearly forty years.

Edwin Sumner Spaulding (1841-1904) was born in Dracut and was the son of Addison Spaulding and Nancy Kimball. By 1850, though his parents were still alive, he was living in the home of Lexington farmer Charles Harrington (1799-1873) and his wife Sarah Wade Harrington (1810-87), who had no children; he was part of their household through at least 1865. In March 1870 Spaulding married Clara A. Norton in Belmont, New York. His father Addison's 1873 will named four children and named son Edwin his executor; he left Edwin a feather bed, two large silver spoons, and half of his silver teaspoons. In the same year Charles Harrington's will named Spaulding, "who has lived with me from his boyhood," his executor, administrator of a trust for his widow, and owned of his real property after his wife's death. In 1874 Edwin Spaulding and his wife Clara had a son, Charles Harrington Spaulding, and by 1880, judging by neighbors enumerated in the census, they were probably living at 1009 Massachusetts Avenue, Charles Harrington's house (LEX.244). Spaulding's name is on 1009 Massachusetts Avenue on the 1875 map and on both properties on the 1905 map; the 1900 census suggests that he continued to live at 1009 Massachusetts Avenue and rented 837 Massachusetts Avenue, probably to his sister Esther Webber. 12

After Edwin Spaulding's death the 837 Massachusetts Avenue property passed to his son and only child Charles H., who in December 1920 sold it and its lot to Charles A. Stewart of Newton. The parcel changed twice more before April 1925, when John W. and Annie S. McLearn of Boston acquired it. ¹³ John Welton McLearn was born in Nova Scotia in 1866 and emigrated to Boston in 1892. In 1900 he and his wife Annie were living in Lynn, where he worked as an express driver, and by 1920 McLearn was an express company foreman living in Boston with his wife and their daughter Mary Louise. The 1930 census lists the family

⁸ "Peremptory Land Sale at East Lexington," *Boston Courier*, 21 June 1855, 3. The house is depicted on Lot 9 of on "Plan of the Bowman Tavern Estate in East Lexington Owned by Nathaniel Flint, esq," June 1855, Plan Book 9-B, Plan 64, not currently viewable on the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds website.

⁹ Nathaniel Flint, guardian of George Flint, Lexington, to John Goodridge, 13 September 1860, MSD 847:108; "Mortgagee's Sale in East Lexington," *Waltham Free Press*, 21 September 1866; Nathaniel Flint to George Flint, 3 November 1866, MSD 992:103.

¹⁰ Waltham Sentinel, 29 August 1873, 2, published Nathaniel Flint's 21 August notice that is wife Diantha, whom he had married in Rochester, Vermont, in February 1856, had been "wholly regardless" of her marriage vows and had "entirely and willfully deserted" him five years earlier.
¹¹ Hiram Osborn to Daniel W. Williams, Waltham, 11 December 1882, MSD 1619:297; Daniel W. Williams, Waltham, to Hiram Osborn, Waltham, 11 December 1882, MSD 1619:300; Hiram Osborn, Waltham, to Edwin S. Spaulding, 12 November 1884, MSD 1686:256.

¹² Spaulding also owned a house diagonally across the street from 837 Massachusetts Ave. and a lot on Locust Ave. in 1905.

¹³ Charles H. Spaulding to Charles A. Stewart, Newton, 1 December 1920, MSD 4409:3; Charles A. Stewart, Newton, to Harvey S. Bacon, trustee, 10 May 1921, MSD 4545:296; Harvey S. Bacon, trustee, to Harold M. and Amy Deed, 21 August 1922, MSD 4545:297; Harold M. and Amy Deed to John W. and Annie S. McLearn, Boston, 15 April 1925, MSD 4832:531.

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at 837 Massachusetts Avenue, and directories record them there through 1934. In 1939 the McLearns sold the property to Louise M. Baker, who sold it a little more than two years later to Gaetano and Audrey L. Buttaro of Somerville.¹⁴

Gaetano Buttaro (1904-57) was born in Caserta, Italy, near Naples, and emigrated with his parents and siblings from Naples to Boston in 1911. In 1920 the family lived in Somerville, where his father Ralph and older brother Cosmo were shoe shop workers and he worked in a ladder factory. By 1940 Buttaro had become a purchasing agent for National Casket Company of Boston, a position he held until his death. He married Audrey Muriel Langill (1912-90) between 1930 and 1934, and the couple had two sons, David and Alan, by 1940. Son Philip was born in 1946. Audrey Buttaro worked for some years as a bookkeeper in the Lexington public school system. In 1987 she sold 837 Massachusetts Avenue to Vincent Cerbone, who split the dwelling into the two-unit Bowman Tavern Condominium, making an extensive renovation. He sold one unit to Roland W. Gubisch in 1989, and deeded the other to himself. Gubisch deeded Unit A to Claudia J. Wilson, the owner of record in 2021, in 2001. Craig R. Sandler, owner in 2021 of the second unit, acquired it in 2013.¹⁵

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¹⁴ John W. and Annie S. McLearn to Louise M. Baker, 29 March 1939, MSD 6282:37; Louise M. Baker to Gaetano and Audrey L. Buttaro, Somerville, 5 August 1941, MSD 6530:373.

¹⁵ Audrey L. Buttaro to Vincent Cerbone, 11 December 1987, MSD 18751:5; Master Deed of Bowman Tavern Condominium, 30 June 1988, MSD 19206:134; Vincent Cerbone to Roland W. Gubisch, 30 March 1989, MSD 19731:430; Roland W. Gubisch to Claudia J. Wilson, Unit A, 837 Massachussetts Avenue, 21 March 2001, MSD 32534:511; Marc J. and Elise Randazzo to Craig R. and Marth Sandler, 837 Massachusetts Avenue, Unit B, 25 June 2013, MSD 62109:570. See also "Bowman Tavern Condominium, 837 Massachusetts Avenue," 22 June 1988, recorded with the master deed.

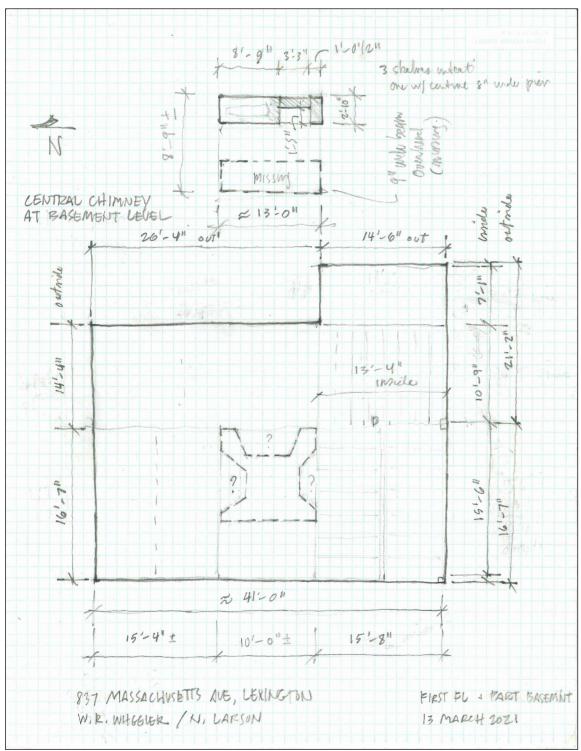
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FIGURES

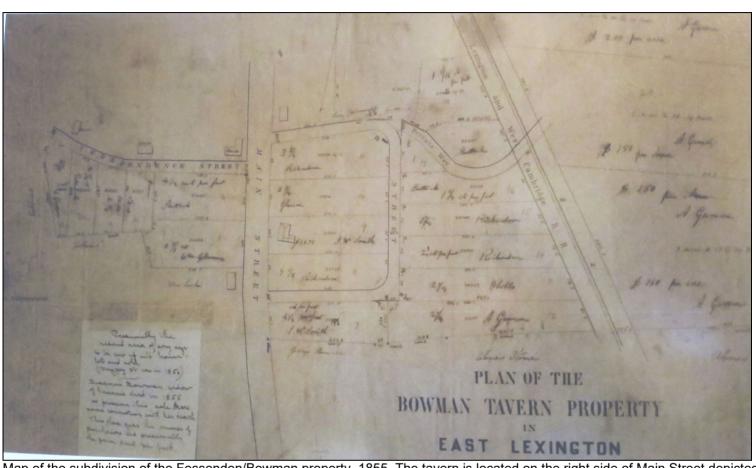


Schematic first floor plan with field notes, Walter R. Wheeler, 2021.

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Map of the subdivision of the Fessenden/Bowman property, 1855. The tavern is located on the right side of Main Street depicted with an L-plan with a hipped north end. Owner's collection.



View of house before renovation in 1988. Owner's collection.

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View from SE, ca. 1988. Owner's collection.



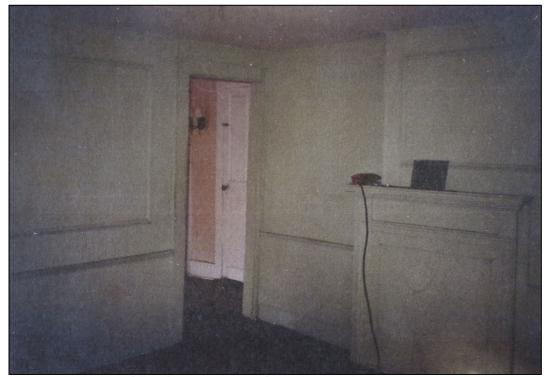
View from east. Owner's collection.

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South parlor looking north before renovation. Owner's collection.



North parlor looking SE before renovation. Owner's collection.

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South parlor looking north during renovation. Owner's collection.



Looking south from north parlor during renovation. Owner's collection.

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View from SW during renovation. Owner's collection.



Detail of front wall showing renovation of window openings. Owner's collection.

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View of wing from SE during renovation. Owner's collection.



Roof framing. Owner's collection.

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PHOTOGRAPHS (Credit Walter R. Wheeler, 2021)



View from NW.



View from south

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View from NE.



First floor, south parlor looking west.

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First floor, entry lobby looking north.



First floor, kitchen wing looking north.

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First floor, partition beam between south parlor and wing.



Second floor, south chamber looking south.

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Basement, floor beams in ceiling.



Basement, remains of arched brick support for center chimney.