

Warren and James R. Whitney Farm

Whitney Station
59 Whitney Street

Town	Sherborn
Area	L
USGS Quad	Medfield
Assessor's Sheets	2/126
Form #s in Area	380 house, 381 barn, 382 barn #2, 383 shed, 914 silo
Photographs	Roll 7
Current Use	Residential/agricultural
Construction Dates	ca. 1850
Overall Condition	Good
Alterations	House burned and rebuilt, 1907
Acreage	35
Recorded by	Sanford Johnson, April 1999

X Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Whitney Farm at 59 Whitney Street is a 35 acre agricultural landscape with buildings constructed in the early 20th century. The complex consists of a house, two large barns (**#381**, **#382**) shed, (**#383**) and a silo (**#914**). The farm is located on a flat piece of land on the town's western edge near the Ashland town line. While the property is surrounded by low wooded hills, the cleared area currently used for planting corn and hay is quite level. The driveway is lined by a broken allee of trees. The large tract is south of Whitney Street, roughly triangular in shape with the house and barns located approximately at the western edge.

The principal structure is the large east-facing, gable-front residence designed with elements of the Victorian Eclectic style(**#380**). The three by five-bay plan rises two and one-half stories with a secondary entry on the north side elevation and an ell attached to the rear (west). A dormer on the south slope and three chimneys mark the roofline. The main barn (**#381**) is a gable-front building located south of the house and parallel to it. The plan of the barn is enlarged by a one-story addition to the rear that elongates the building to the west. Fenestration in the barn and addition is regularly spaced along the lower parts of the side walls in a manner indicative of housing for cows. Four metal ventilators are spaced evenly along the roofs of the barn and the addition.

Smaller outbuildings are south and east of the main barn. These consist of the secondary barn (**#382**), an equipment shed and an enclosed storage building (**#383**). These are wood framed buildings of one story. A metal silo (**#914**) with a hemispherical roof stands between the barn and sheds and lends a strong agricultural sensibility to the area. Crop stubble and farm machinery are evident among the different buildings.

Buildings in the Whitney Farm complex are sited at the western side of the property at the base of a wooded hill, providing an open and flat frontage between the house and road. Land is used primarily for growing corn, with a significant part planted in grass. It is one of the larger agricultural operations in Sherborn with a great deal of open space. A photo from 1907 indicates that the farm continues to resemble its historic appearance

despite having lost some buildings to fire in that year, according to local residents. The former Boston and Albany Railroad (Conrail) passes a quarter-mile to the east of the farm. A residential subdivision is up the hill and behind (west of) the farm in the town of Ashland and can be seen from the Whitney Farm. The farm is comparable in size to others in the town located at **190 Maple Street**** and at **32 and 46 Pleasant Street****.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Members of the Whitney family occupied this part of Sherborn in the mid 1700s according to prior research, however settlement in the area remained sparse around the Whitney Farm into the 1850s, according to the 1856 Walling map of Middlesex County. At that time, W. and J. R. Whitney were the owners, probably the brothers Warren and James R, children of Isaac and Sally Whitney. Warren and James continued to occupy the farm until at least 1880 at which time they owned the house, 2 barns, (one of which is likely to be the existing main barn), 3 store houses and a secondary "railroad" dwelling, located near the Milford Branch of the Boston and Albany Railroad. Agricultural production involved the husbandry of 6 cows, 2 horses and 6 swine. It is probable that the Whitneys grew corn and similar crops in addition to raising livestock.

The Milford Branch Railroad was built between Milford and Framingham, Massachusetts in 1845 to connect with the Boston and Worcester Railroad (later Boston and Albany, then New York Central, now Conrail) at Framingham, a growing rail-hub. The railroad right of way passed east of the Whitney farmhouse and across the family's property as seen on the 1857 map of Maple and Whitney Streets by surveyor William F. Ellis. Whitney Station does not appear on historic maps until 1874. The house at **50 Whitney Street**** may be a former station-related structure adapted for use as a residence. The 1880 tax valuation lists an "RR Dwelling House" under ownership of James R. Whitney which may have been a boarding house for rail workers or simply a house adjacent to the tracks. The 1889 Walker map reflects the existence of a boot shop, railroad station and a quarry in the vicinity of the farm.

Warren and James R. Whitney continued to own the farm until between 1874 and 1889, according to historic maps of those years. In the 1880 town valuations, James is recorded as the owner of the house, barns and some livestock. He may have been responsible for operating the granite quarry to the west of the farm in the town of Ashland that is recorded in the Morse History of Sherborn. It was located on the site of the current subdivision on the hillside behind the farm. A second quarry was located east of the house and provided foundation stones for at least one barn in the neighborhood, according to local historians. No mention of a quarry occurs on maps other than in 1889, indicating the short life spans of the quarries.

James' son Frank owned a larger herd of cows kept on the property but no buildings. By the time of the 1889 Walker map, however, Frank had acquired ownership of the buildings from his father which he retained into the 1920s. By 1900, he had built three hen houses for 200 fowls in addition to the other 5 outbuildings he inherited from his father. The number of fowls increased to 400 in 1922, reflecting an increase in poultry farming common in the region at this time. Mr. Whitney was appointed sealer of weights and measures in 1913. An early 20th century fire that claimed the house is described in [The History of Sherborn](#) and by local residents. The house was rebuilt and seems to have altered the appearance of the farm very little.

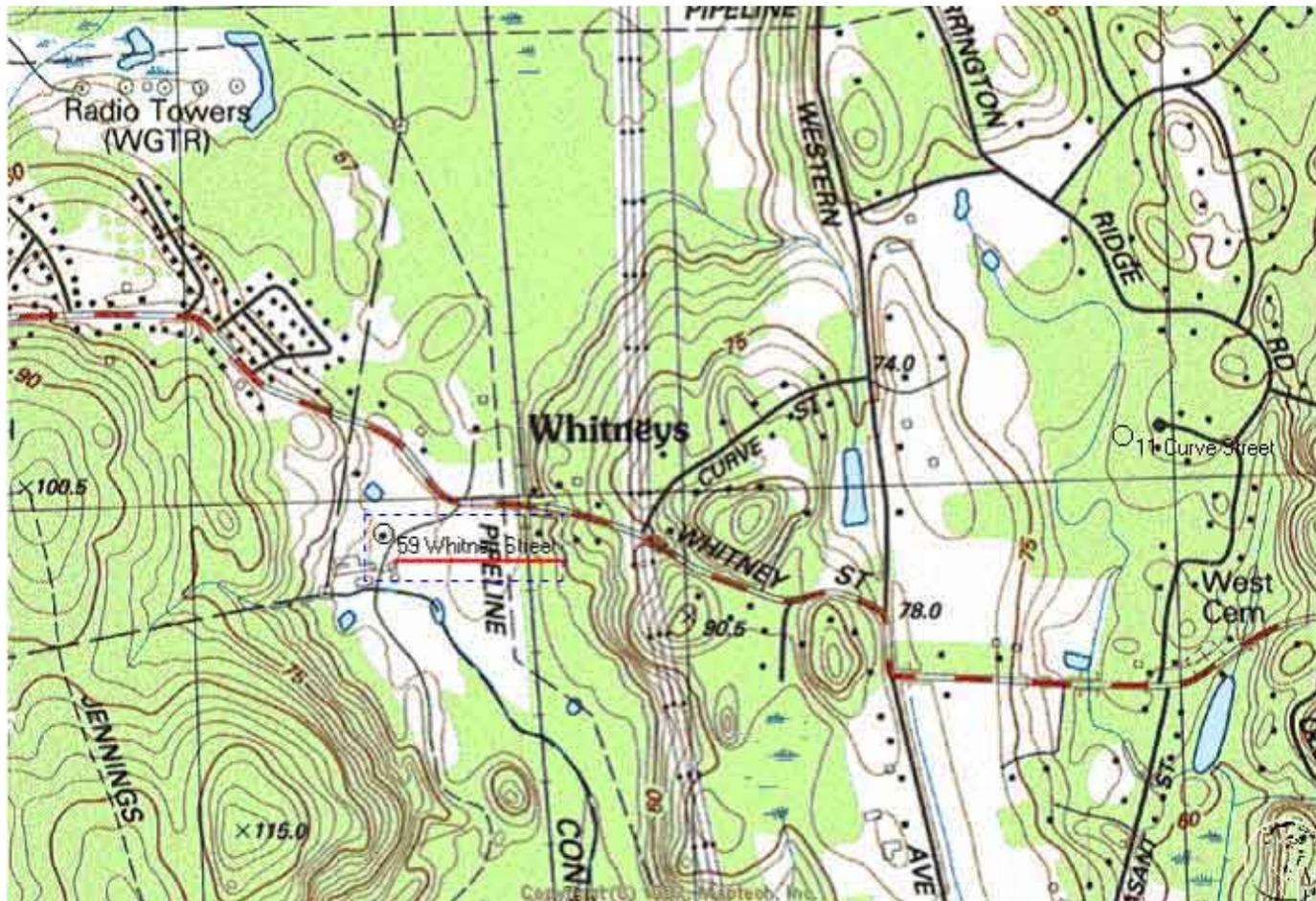
The farm passed out of the Whitney family by 1931, eventually to come under ownership of the Leopold Schiavi family, in whose possession it remains. The Schiavis raised a dairy herd from the 1940s until the 1980s when it was no longer profitable and turned to planting hay and corn.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1830 series map; 1856 Walling map; 1874 Beers map; 1889 Walker map; 1939 WPA map of Sherborn
- Resident directories, 1897, 1913, 1917, 1930-31
- Conversation with Betsy Johnson 12/98
- Tax valuations
- [Vital Records of Sherborn, Massachusetts to 1850](#)

- Anne C. Shaughnessy - The History of Sherborn and A Guide to Sherborn
- Hurd - History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts
- Historic photo, ca. 1907, Files of Sherborn Historical Society

Sketch Map:



Area Data Sheet

MHC	Street	Property Name	Date	Style	Type / Status	NR Elig
380	59 Whitney St.	Whitney House	ca. 1907	Victorian Eclectic	New L-scape form	Yes
381	59 Whitney St.	Main Barn	ca. 1870	No style	Area	
382	59 Whitney St.	Secondary Barn	ca. 1900	No style	Area	
383	59 Whitney St.	Shed	ca. 1900	No style	Area	
914	59 Whitney St.	Silo	ca. 1920	N/A	Area	