

18 North Main Street



George H. Clark House

Form Nos.	86 house, 279 Carriage barn, 280 barn #2
Area	A,G
Town	Sherborn
Address	18 North Main Street [was no. 16 in 1981 survey]
Assessor's Map	11/27
USGS Map	Medfield
Historic Name	George H. Clark House
Uses: Original	Residence
Present	Vacant
Ownership, 1981	Dr. David and Carole Hand
" Original	George H. Clark
Constructed	House and Clark barn in 1853, barn #2 ca. 1965
Source	Middlesex County Registry of Deeds
Style/Form	Italian villa
Architect	Probably Alexander R. Esty
Ext. Wall Fabric	Clapboard
Outbuildings	Barn and stables
Alterations	Vinyl siding applied to shed walls ca. 1970's
Moved	No
Acreage	6.0 (originally 12) acres
Setting:	Adjacent to railroad, tracks and commercial district (north), residential (early-late 19th century) west

and south; situated on tree shaded lot with original semicircular driveway and cupola topped barn.

Recorded October 1981, by Edward W. Gordon
Updated 1999, by Sanford Johnson

Film Roll/Negative Roll 5

X Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. NRMRA/DIS 1/3/86

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

1981 Survey

Built ca. 1853, the George H. Clark House is as fine an example of a frame Italian villa as can be found anywhere in New England. It is the only residence of its type in Sherborn. Undoubtedly architect designed, its irregular plan, arcaded loggias, balconies and flat bracketed roof were apparently derived from A. J. Davis' mid 19th century pattern books, (e.g. The Architecture of Country Houses, published in 1850) Its plan and certain exterior elements closely resemble those of several Italianate Framingham houses designed by Alexander Rice Esty. (see Historical Significance)

The George H. Clark House is situated on a triangular lot of land bounded by railroad tracks to the north, a passageway to the southeast and North Main Street to the west. A commercial district is located to the north of this property. Pine Hill Cemetery is situated to the northeast. To the south and west are the 19th and early 20th century private homes and public buildings of Sherborn Center.

Roughly T-shaped in plan, this house rests on a granite block foundation and rises 2 1/2 stories to a flat roof which projects upon sawcut brackets. Its main facade (west) faces a semi-circular driveway and is partially hidden from North Main Street by tall trees. The principal feature of its main facade is a narrow projecting 2 1/2 story segment (one bay wide) and an arcaded loggia. The projecting segment, something of a modified Italianate "tower", displays long narrow windows which open to balconies - the second floor balcony is supported by scrolled brackets. Both balconies possess elegant turned balusters.

An arcaded loggia is nestled into the intersection of the projecting "tower" and the main block. Its classicized columns support elliptical arches. Access to the elliptical arched front door is gained via the loggias' tripartite arches. The front door is flanked by multi-pane sidelights.

A one story enclosed porch projects from the main block's south wall. It was probably originally open. Its columns and arches resemble those of the arcaded loggia.

A "string course" of horizontal boards separate the first and second floors. Among the most striking surface treatments are the square headed 6/6 windows' massive segmental headed surrounds. A pulvinated frieze appears beneath the eaves' brackets. Beneath the rear wall's eaves are three eyebrow windows which appear at intervals between the brackets.

A two story kitchen ell projects from the center of the rear wall. A three bay arcaded loggia projects from the ell's south wall. Abutting its east wall is a shed/garage which is swathed in vinyl siding.

On the southeast portion of the property is a picturesque cupola topped barn. Its walls are composed of flush boards. Its entrance and windows culminate in round arches. Its attic windows are also round headed and are fully enframed. Its wide bracketed gable roof display return eaves. It is similar in construction and surface treatments to the Amos Bigelow House's barn across the road at 15 North Main Street.

The George H. Clark House is currently vacant and in an advanced state of decay, badly in need of paint and repair, its arcaded loggia's floor boards are broken or missing. Several of its south porch's windows are broken leaving the house open to the elements. The continued existence of the George H. Clark House, Sherborn's most important architectural asset, is currently threatened by lack of use and maintenance.

1999 Update

The house and barn at 18 North Main Street experienced a period of decline from 1981 until 1998, but both are currently undergoing rehabilitation. Their structure, form and basic appearance remain as they were at the time of the 1981 survey.

The one and one-half-story, front-gabled carriage barn (#279) in the side yard is sheathed in board and batten siding. A pyramidal hip-roofed cupola with finial articulates the roof. Gable returns, deep eaves and brackets ornament the exterior of the building. Windows are 6/6 double-hung, round-headed sash and match the shape of the principal vehicle entry and the pass door in the facade. The barn is being repaired, along with the house.

A metal clad barn was built in the back yard in the mid 1960s. It is a Butler-type building, prefabricated of corrugated aluminum without ornament. It is a gable-front form with a low-pitched roof that houses equestrian event facilities and horse stalls. (#280)

The house and barns are very near the former Penn Central Railroad tracks, whose predecessor, the Framingham and Mansfield, took a piece of land as its right of way from George Clark in 1870. The 1874 Beers map and the 1931 plan of Main Street by County Commissioners both show the prominent semi-circular driveway that was removed during the current construction project. A cut granite retaining wall, re-set and repaired ca. 2005, separates the front yard from the street.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

1981 Survey

For many years this picturesque residence was the home of George H. Clark (1814- 1913). He was the manager and later owner of the old Joseph Sanger Store in Sherborn Center. Its design was apparently derived from illustrations and descriptions of "Italian villas" in A. J. Downing's pattern books, (published during the 1840's and 1850's). Its architect was undoubtedly Alexander Rice Esty (1826-1881) of Framingham. He is best known for his Gothic Boston - area churches (built during the 1850's - 70's).

George H. Clark was born November 3, 1814. He was the oldest son of Alpheus and Nancy Leland Clark. He was the great, great grandson of Arthur Clark who came to Sherborn from Concord in 1715-18. Arthur married Hannah Morse and "settled on her patrimonial estate on the east side of Farm Lake." By 1782 George's grandfather, Deacon William Clark (1753-1846) had settled on Edward's Plain.

The Clark homestead was located to the south of Form no. 84 North Main Street. William was a Revolutionary War soldier, selectman and son-in-law of Hon. Daniel Whitney, a prominent late 18th century Sherborn magistrate and politician (see form on 41 North Main Street). About 1800 William started a store and tavern on his North Main Street property. Clarks operated this store for 100 years - it passed from George's father, Alpheus, to his younger brother, Charles Augustus (born 1829). It is Charles, rather than George, who is mentioned in state and local histories. In addition to eventually owning two stores, Charles greatly augmented his family's land holdings.

George H. Clark became the manager of the old Joseph Sanger store about 1850 - at that time Jeremiah Hawes bought it from Joseph's son Elbridge Sanger. This 2 story hip roof frame structure had been built ca. 1805 on the site of the present Dowse Memorial Building's south lawn. Its most distinctive feature was its 7 arched front porch. Located in the heart of Sherborn Center and containing a Post Office as well as a store, it was an important local gathering place. Clark sold produce, hay and grain as well as dry goods - gloves, hosiery, boots, shoes, "summer stuffs" and "ready made clothing". The store was purchased by George's brother, Charles, in 1888 and George continued to serve as the store's manager. He inherited or bought it at some point in the early 1890's. He is listed as the store's owner on 1896 assessors records.

George H. Clark married Sylvia A. Howard at an undetermined date. Their place of marriage and his wife's family background have yet to be determined. Charles T. Clark, the first of their five children was born in 1856. About 1853 he built a stylish residence at 18 North Main Street, just to the north of his store. A Middlesex County deed dated August 14, 1852, states that Elbridge Sanger granted Clark twelve and two quarters acres of land which "had formerly been a part of the Homestead Estate of Joseph Sanger". He paid Sanger \$1,425. The Sanger estate included land on either side of North Main Street from the present railroad tracks to the Central Burying Ground. Sanger's domain encompassed a stately Federal house, store, 18th century tavern and barns.

The northwesterly portion of Clark's property abutted land owned by William H. Mellen. A William H. Mellen appears in Framingham records as "the executor of various estates". In 1865, Mellen hired Framingham architect Alexander Rice Esty to design a house at 848 Central Street, Framingham - a residence which exhibits a strong resemblance to Sherborn's Clark House. Its irregular plan, elliptical arched entrance, pulvinated frieze beneath the eaves and placement of the front porch echo those of the Clark House. In addition, another designed Framingham residence, the Moses Ellis House at 291 Pleasant St. (1866) displays surface treatments similar to those of Clark's domicile. Clark's architect apparently derived this houses plan and details from the pattern books of the landscape architect A. J. Downing (including Cottage Residences and The Architecture of Country Houses, published in 1842 and 1850, respectively.) In the latter, Downing notes that an Italian Villa, erected in "the cheap lumber districts, may be substantially built of wood for about \$3,800."

Alexander Rice Esty (1826-1881), a native and life long resident of Framingham, Mass. was apparently hired by George H. Clark to provide a design of an Italian villa similar to those illustrated in Downing's works. He received his training from the Boston architects Richard Bond and Gridley J. F. Bryant during the 1840's. It was in Framingham, however, that Esty produced his earliest important structures. In 1848 he remodeled the Hollis Evangelical Church in the Gothic style and designed South Framingham's Baptist Church (1854). His earliest known residence is the Greek Revival/Italianate transitional David Fiske House (1848-49) at 21 Salem End Lane. Best known as a Boston area church architect, his more important commissions include Emmanuel Church on Newbury Street, Boston (1861), Church of Our Savior in Brookline (1866) and Harvard Church, Cambridge (1877). It appears that Mr. Esty's original plan for the interiors of the Congressional Library in Washington, D.C. (1880), was used by the architectural firm of Smithmeyer and Pelz. Alexander Rice Esty died of stomach cancer in 1881.

George H. Clark lived at 18 North Main Street until his death in 1913 at the age of 99. His estate, in 1913, was in excess of \$25,000 and included a "Dwelling House" valued at \$3,000, "house lot" at \$550, "barns and other buildings" at \$900, "mowing and tillage" at \$450, a "Chapel lot" at \$50, and a "Chapel dwelling" at \$650. The Chapel building was a small structure situated on the south side of Zion's Lane (no longer extant). Labeled "George Clark's Shop" on an 1875 map, it apparently housed a Zionist Congregation during the early 1900's.

George Clark's daughter, Abbie Clark, resided here until her death in 1962 at age 104. In recent years the Pearman and Hand families have owned this property. Together with its landscaping and picturesque cupola-topped barn, the George H. Clark house provides a glimpse of life on an estate of a well-to-do late 19th century country "merchant" (Clark is referred to as a merchant in this property's 1852 deed.) Architecturally, this Italian villa represents an unusual departure from the frame Greek Revival temple form dwelling which enjoyed widespread popularity in Sherborn and New England during the 1840's and 1850's. It is also significant as a house of a Sherborn family which had played a significant role in the commercial and political life of the town since the early 18th century. Finally, this house is almost certainly the work of Alexander Rice Esty of Framingham. As such it provides significant insights into the earliest and least known phase of his distinguished architectural career.

1999 Update

George Clark's success in business is recorded in town valuations for the year 1880 wherein he is noted as the owner of horses, carriages, two houses with barns and over six acres of land in Sherborn Center, a store and \$3000 at interest. By 1900, he had three houses and would amass \$25,000 by the time of his death in 1913.

George Clark's daughter Abbie subsequently occupied the house, apparently by herself, until her death at the age of 104 in 1962. She was taxed in 1922 for ownership of hen houses, indicating the presence of chickens, but no other livestock is recorded. Her name appears in the resident directory of 1931 and on the plan made by the county commissioners to widen Main Street in the same year. By 1925, the barn is referred to in the tax valuations as a garage, suggesting Ms. Clark's ownership of an automobile. The Italianate style barn on the property was constructed as a carriage house, of which it contained two in 1880, and one in 1900. Two horses were also noted in the tax valuations but no livestock or other draft animals occupied the building.

Owners subsequent to Abbie Clark were Eleanor and Warren Pearman who constructed a large metal clad barn in the back of the lot adjacent to the railroad tracks in the mid 1960s. The barn is used to board horses and the grounds are the site of equestrian activities.

The house is one of Sherborn's most significant for its quality of design and for its association with a successful member of a locally prominent family.

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