

# 91 North Main Street



*Benjamin Dowse House*

<b>Form Nos.</b>	108 house, 293 barn, 291 shop, 292 shed
<b>Area</b>	B,G
<b>Town</b>	Sherborn
<b>Address</b>	91 North Main Street
<b>Assessor's Map</b>	10/22
<b>USGS Map</b>	Framingham
<b>Historic Name</b>	Benjamin Dowse House
<b>Uses: Original</b>	Residence
<b>Present</b>	Residence
<b>Ownership, 1981</b>	William Gulliver
<b>" Original</b>	Benjamin Dowse
<b>Constructed</b>	Rear of house in 1814, main block in 1830, shop ca. 1865, shed and barn ca. 1900.
<b>Source</b>	Dowse Genealogy
<b>Style/Form</b>	Federal
<b>Architect</b>	
<b>Ext. Wall Fabric</b>	Clapboard
<b>Outbuildings</b>	Small barn, garage
<b>Alterations</b>	
<b>Moved</b>	No
<b>Acreage</b>	6.27 acres
<b>Setting:</b>	Situated on the edge of a gentle rise, its land slopes down to North Main Street.

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

**Film Roll/Negative** Roll 9

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

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

### 1981 Survey

This house is composed of a 2 1/2 story main block and rear ell. Black shutters elegantly contrast with light yellow clapboards. Its 5 bay main facade possesses one of Sherborn's most elegant Federalist entrances - its front door is flanked by narrow multi-paned sidelights and is crowned by an elliptical arch. This house's interior features 8 fire places, wideboard wainscoting with lapstrake type grooving, gun stock posts, and handsome carved molding.

### 1999 Update

The house at 91 North Main Street (**#108**) survives as it is described on the survey form completed in 1981. No changes have been carried out since that time other than the completion of the sun room, attached garage, patio, storage space and stone wall described as they were under construction in 1981.

Three outbuildings exist that might be related to historical processes of whip- making and agriculture formerly carried out on the property. The largest is immediately behind the house and served as a barn (**#293**). The one and one- half-story, side-gabled form is attached to house's western end. The exterior is clad in board and batten and the roof in asphalt shingles. Fixed 6-pane sash light the interior and transom lights are located above the two vehicle doors in the facade. The plan is expanded by a one-story addition to the west side wall.

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Southwest of the barn is a smaller outbuilding that may be the former whip shop (**#291**) reflected in tax valuations from 1865. It is a front-gabled, one and one-half-story form clad in board and batten siding. Two- over-two double-hung sash fill the window openings. Plain trim marks the eaves and corners. The lack of vehicle doors makes the impression the building is for human use rather than storage of vehicles or animals.

A third outbuilding, smaller than the others, is west of the house and barn (**#292**). It is a one-story, front-gabled shed with a wide window opening in the facade. A pass door is located in the south elevation. Like the former whip-shop, plain trim marks the eaves and openings. A small playhouse is adjacent to the shed.

## **HISTORICAL NARRATIVE**

### 1981 Survey

91 North Main Street was built in three stages - its rear ell was constructed ca. 1814 and subsequently enlarged while its main block dates to ca. 1830. It has significant historical associations with the whip making Dowse family and is one of eight Dowse's corner houses built for Dowse family members during the first half of the 19th century. Benjamin Dowse and his wife, Thankful Chamberlain, were its first owners. Benjamin Dowse "was one of three brothers who carried on in a trade related to their family's leather dressing. He was a whipmaker, as was his brother Joseph (106 North Main Street).

Benjamin Dowse was the grandson of the Eleazer Dowse who came to Sherborn at the time of the Battle of Bunker Hill. He married in 1813 and lived for a time in his grand fathers house on Everett St. The Dowses used the boggy lowland to the south of their Everett St. homestead for the digging of pits in which to soak hides. Benjamin had a shop on his North Main St. property in which he made 20-ft. whips entirely by hand. The whip business declined with the passing of the stagecoach but Dowse whips were braided in Sherborn as late as 1876.

In the 1850s Ben's brother Nathaniel (100 North Main St.) turned to the manufacture of shoes.

A previous house on this site belonged to William Rider Jr. He was a private tutor who moved to Natick in 1734.

Note: At the present time (1981) an extensive 2 story rear addition is being added to the ell and the driveway has been moved further to the south to make room for a large terrace.

### 1999 Update

In an effort to update the 1981 inventory form, owners submitted the following information:

The former owner of this land (before the current house was built) named William Rider was, in addition to a private tutor, a town clerk in Natick and in Sherborn, a surveyor and schoolmaster.

Outbuildings on the property in 1865 included a barn, and whip shop which may be the outbuildings described above (#s **291, 293**). The barn served as shelter for the produce of Mr. Dowse's 65 acres of mowing, tillage and pasture.

The shop was the site of manufacturing whips for stage coaches. Twenty-foot long whips were made here from the early 19th century until the advent of the railroad eliminated the need for coaches, around 1870. Benjamin Dowse, the owner from the early 1800s until around 1865, was also a farmer in addition to manufacturing whips. Benjamin's son William, who also lived in the house with his wife and children, is described as a whip maker in the 1855 and 1865 censuses. The shop is depicted in the 1874 Beers atlas in its current location and in 1875 tax valuations as the only outbuilding in addition to the barn.

A ten-footer shoe shop existed on the property until former owners demolished it in 1982.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY and REFERENCES**

### 1981 Survey

- Margaret Dowse Buntin's card file
- Anne C. Shaughnessy - A Guide to Sherborn, 1974
- Maps of 1788, 1857, 1875 and 1889

### 1999 Update

- 1856 Walling map; 1874 Beers map; 1889 Walker map
- 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, 1974
- History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts, Hurd
- 1855, 1865 state censuses
- Comments of owner, Patti Gulliver