

# FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

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**Town/City:** Amherst

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*): Amherst, Lincoln sunset Historic District

## Photograph



**Address:** 24 North Prospect Street

**Historic Name:** Mary M. Robison House

**Uses:** Present: single-family dwelling  
Original: single-family dwelling

**Date of Construction:** 1884/1885

**Source:** Contract at Jones Library

**Style/Form:** Queen Anne with Stick Style detail

**Architect/Builder:** R. F. Putnam, architect; John Beston, Jr, builder

**Exterior Material:**  
Foundation: Brick

Wall/Trim: Wood clapboard / wood

Roof: Slate

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:** Small garden shed (modern) at rear of property

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

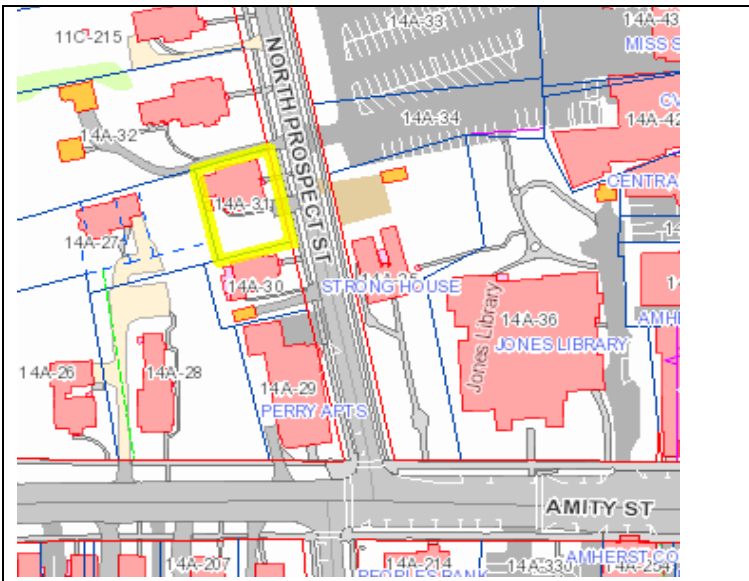
**Condition:** Excellent

**Moved:** no  yes  **Date:**

**Acreage:** .17 acres

**Setting:** Near downtown, on a residential street. The house is on a small lot with a side yard to the south. The barn and parking area of the Strong House (Amherst History Museum) are across the street.

## Locus Map



**Recorded by:** Susannah Fabing

**Organization:** LHDSC

**Date** (*month / year*): 2016

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

AMHERST

24 NORTH PLEASANT ST

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

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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.*

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

This two-story house with attic, one of Roswell Field Putnam's earliest, is a Queen Anne with "Stick Style" elements, such as flat wooden battens that divide the clapboard into sections, expressing the underlying structure. The L-shaped plan consists of a hip-roofed primary block, joined by a front-gabled ell on the northeast with a divided lunette window at the top. A similar window occurs at the top of the shallow projecting bay on the south side. Triangular panels with sunburst designs fill the corners of the gables, and inventive decorative brackets support the roof at the corners. The elaborate enclosed front porch, divided into three bays topped with fanlights, was probably modified and glazed at a later date. The double window in the east facade at first-floor level sports a decoratively bracketed lintel and small, shingled shed roof. Windows on the second floor have upper sashes bordered by small rectangular panes, while those in the main rooms of the first floor are two-over-one. There is a triangular window made up of small square panes in the gable on the north facade. A one-story extension exists to the west of the main block of the house; it probably originally housed the kitchen.

This property is part of the Prospect-Gaylord Historic District, which was designated a National Register Historic District on 4 February 1993.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

John Emerson Strong built a house in 1825 on land lying at what is today the NW corner of Amity and N. Prospect streets (much later the site of The Perry). The 1833 map shows a lane running west of this house, north and then east about where Cowles Lane lies today. At mid-century, Lewis Delano owned the J.E. Strong house, and Osmyn Baker bought Dr. Rufus Cowles's farm, which occupied the area to its north. Delano and Baker decided to put in a new road east of the J.E. Strong/Delano house, which became North Prospect Street. Initially, it reached north only to Cowles Lane, but Leavitt Hallock, to whom Baker sold much of the Cowles farm property north of Cowles Lane, completed the street. The first houses were erected in 1855-1860 around the intersection with Cowles Lane.

Melvina Swanzer Lessey (widow of the builder C.W. Lessey) bought the  $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre property on the NW corner of Amity and N. Prospect from Levi Stockbridge in 1880. She died on 24 May 1884. The Lesseys had been close to the Robison family, although there is no immediately evident family tie. In the 1870 US census, three members of the Robison family—Sarah [sic] and two children, Mary and William—were living with the Lesseys. Mary A. Robison, probably the same person as Sarah, a widow born in England, was named executrix of Mrs. Lessey's estate and guardian of the Lesseys' children, George and Flora. A contract in the Jones Library file on John Beston, Jr., between Beston and Mary A. Robison, enjoins Beston "to build and finish, under direction of Architect R.F. Putnam," a dwelling "on the lot owned by the Lessey Estate, situated on North Prospect Street in Amherst" according to the plans for the building dated Sept. 19, 1884, and specifications of the same date. For this, the builder (Beston) was to receive payment of \$3800, of which \$800 was to be paid when the first floor joists were on. The 1885 tax record for Mrs. C. W. Lessey's Estate includes a "new house N. Prospect" at a valuation of \$3500.

Mary A. Robison (1819-1902) is shown living at #4 (today's #24) N. Prospect in Amherst City directories from 1896 onward. The 1896 Directory also shows the Lesseys' daughter, Flora Lessey, living at 4 N. Prospect (summers). Flora was a teacher and lived/worked in Woburn, presumably during the school year. In the 1900 US Census Mary A., her son and daughter, a servant and a student lodger occupy the house. Her daughter, Mary M. Robison (b. 1858), a librarian earlier in her life, lived there alone with one servant in the 1910 U.S. Census, added a boarder in 1920, and was still living there in the 1930 U.S. Census (with one servant) and the 1932 City Directory.

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Roswell Putnam designed two other houses in Amherst around the same time that share with this home a mix of Queen Anne and "Stick Style" features: 27 N. Prospect (1883/84), built for B. H. and Mary Williams (torn down in 1950 to become a parking lot for Louis' Market [old photo in Jones Library Special Collections]), and 320 N. Pleasant Street (1885; AMH.188), designed for James White. The proposed LHD also includes an exemplary Stick Style house at 43 Sunset Avenue (AMH.143). Other Stick Style buildings are found along Main Street.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Contract between John Beston, Jr. and Mary Robison concerning construction of the house, in John Beston, Jr. folder, Special Collections, Jones Library, Amherst.

Hampshire County Registry of Deeds, Book 354/199, Levi Stockbridge to Melvina Lessey, 1 April 1880 (this lot and other land to Amity Street); 488/53-54, Flora and George Lessey to Myra I. Morehouse, 29 June 1926. Thanks to Ed Wilfert for deed research

Town of Amherst tax records for Mrs. C. W. Lessey's Estate, 1885, Special Collections, Jones Library, Amherst.

Amherst City Directories, 1896-1932

Woburn, MA City Directories, 1895 and 1897, on ancestry.com, for Flora Lessey

U.S. Federal Census of Amherst, MA, 1870, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930

Research by local historian Ed Wilfert; private communication, 2014

National Register of Historic Places, Registration Form, Prospect Gaylord Historic District, Amherst (1992), Section 8, p. 14.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Form B (1988), online in the MACRIS database.