

# FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

**Town/City:** Amherst

**Place:** Amherst

## Photograph



**Address:** 77 McClellan Street

**Historic Name:** Genalvyn & Nora Pettyjohn Marse House

**Uses:** Present: Single Family Dwelling House

Original: Single Family Dwelling House

**Date of Construction:** Before 1886, possibly "by 1861"  
1896

**Source:** tax valuations

**Style/Form:** Victorian Vernacular

**Architect/Builder:**

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: Brick with fieldstone likely below ground

Wall/Trim: Wood clapboard

Roof: Asphalt Shingle

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:** a frame shed

**Major Alterations (with dates):**

Addition 1977-78

**Condition:** Good

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

**Acreage:** .23 acres

**Setting:** Rural college town

## Locus Map



**Recorded by:** E. Wilfert; M. Adams, P. Schneider

**Organization:** LHDSC

**Date (month / year):** April 2017

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

AMHERST

77 McCLELLAN ST

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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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.*

Gable-facing New England farmhouse with porch along façade. Porch brackets feature scroll-work – indentations at capital. Alternating, rustic shingles appear in gable. Two-and-a-half-stories; attic is unfinished. The downstairs bedroom was added by Mrs. DaCosta in 1977-8. The roof was still slate in 1980 but leaked and how to be changed to asphalt shingle in 1985. Plain pine boards are used throughout the interior.

## 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.*

On March 20, 1859 [134/55] and March 19, 1860 [192/225], Thomas Haley (sometimes spelled Healey) bought two lots at the northwest corner of Leavitt Hallock land, a total of 10 1/4 acres (the present area north of McClellan St, west of Paige St, and crossing Lincoln Ave to the west). He built a house by 1861 and that house was most likely 77 McClellan, although it first appears on the 1886 map, at the corner of McClellan and Paige, in the shape of the front two stories and back one storey kitchen distinctive to 77 McClellan. There is no house on the map between this house and the large house on the corner of McClellan and Lincoln facing onto Lincoln. Haley sold three acres just south of this house to Mary Slattery, who married Thomas McLaughlin and lived at what is now 87 McClellan St. The McLaughlins had a second house built east of theirs (now #81) and Haley's widow, Catherine and her son John had another house built in 1896-7, which they rented out to William A. Flebut and family, in residence between 1898 and 1927. Haley was married to Kate Slattery.

#77 was the original farmhouse on the street (informant Pat Schneider from Susan ["Mrs Dee"] DaCosta) and was bought by Genalvin Marse and his wife, Nora (Pettijohn) from John A. Haley's heirs Mary A. Rourke and Thomas H. Healey (aka Haley) on June 4, 1928 [846/339]. Genalvin C. Marse, a driver, was listed in the 1921 Amherst Directory as a laborer; the 1920 Census has him and his wife Nora Pettyjohn boarding with the Goodwins; by 1927-8, they had their own home on McClellan, confirmed by the 1930 Census. In the 1940 Census, they are living in Roanoke, VA. Interesting, the Census reporter for Amherst lists them both as White (and had listed the Pettyjohns as Mulatto), whereas the 1940 Census reporter in Roanoke, VA, lists them both as Black. Nora Pettyjohn came from an African American family, originally from Virginia, that lived on Paige.

By 1937 the Marses had moved to Roanoke, Va. and sold the property to Ruth T. Jenkins, an African American woman active in the AME Zion Church of Amherst, who lived out her life at 77 McClellan and was cared for in her last years by Susan Jones Bethea (later known as Mrs. Dee, also active in AME Zion) to whom she willed the property [1021/533] on August 16, 1947 in a carefully worded statement "that the said Susan Jones Bethea was living with the said Ruth T. Jenkins in the latter's house at 77 McClellan," that she had paid rent, that she cared for Ruth Jenkins in sickness and health, that she covered house taxes when Ruth Jenkins was unable to do so, that she conducted herself in a decent and considerate well. Ruth Jenkins stipulates that she has been so completely satisfied that the house, land, and house contents will pass to Susan Jones Bethea. Mrs. Bethea had earlier acquired a small lot at the north end of the property from the Cosbys.

The present occupant, Pat Schneider, reports that 77 McClellan was one of the larger farmhouses on the street and that when they took up the linoleum under the carpeting, they found padding of African American newspapers from the 1940s. She had heard from Ruby James, an African American resident of Amherst, that "water wagons" went up and down McClellan Street when it was a "dirt road" to spray water and keep the dust down. She adds that Mrs. Dee raised chickens in the back yard and sold fried chicken while working as a child and elder caretaker for families who lived on Lincoln Avenue.

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Later known as "Mrs Dee", Susan [Stamps] Jones DaCosta was born in 1905 in North Carolina, the daughter of a farmer and oyster-man who was also church deacon. She moved to Cambridge, MA, where she joined the Rush AME Zion Church and married Rev. L.C. Jones. Rev. and Mrs. Jones moved to Amherst in 1933, when Rev Jones pastured the AME Zion Church of Amherst from 1933-1938, where she would have known Ruth Jenkins.

Mrs. Dee sold 77 McClellan to the present owners, Peter and Pat Schneider, on June 9, 1980 [2165/103] and the house became the center for Amherst Writers and Artists, now an international organization with an archive in the Jones Special Collections. Between 1981 and 2004, there were seven workstations in the basement, a person employed by the organization living on the second floor, 12 workshops for low-income women in housing workshops in five towns locally, and a training program that reached over 1,000 persons in the writing workshop method advanced by Amherst Writers and Artists.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

U.S.Census 1860: William Slattery family

Maps: H. F. Walling, 1860; F.W. Beers, 1873.

Amherst Deeds, Book/Page: 184/55-6; 192/225-6 (L.Hallock to Thos. Haley); 488/321-2 (Kate Haley to Sarah E. Prince, Lincoln Ave); 492/81-2 (Kate Haley to son John); 842/79-80 (John Healy/Haley to Jennie E. Curley, future Cosby Ave) 846/339, John Healy estate to Genalvin Marse. 925/537-8, Marse to Jenkins; 1021/533 to Bethea; 973/197 Cosby to Beatha; 2165/103 to P. & P. Schneider.

Amherst Valuations: 1860, 1861; 1896-1898, 1900-1908.

Patricia Schneider, *Wake Up laughing*, chapter 33 describes Susan DaCosta's acquiring ownership of 77 McClellan and the sale of it in 1980 to Peter and Pat Schneider.

Mss letter from Pat Schneider (May 12, 2016) with information on 77 McClellan ("personal communication") from personal observation and from Mrs. DaCosta

*A history of Goodwin Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Amherst Massachusetts (1825-2007)* in AME Zion clippings folder at Jones Library Special Collection. Appendix A has interview with Mrs. DaCosta.