

FORM B – BUILDING

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

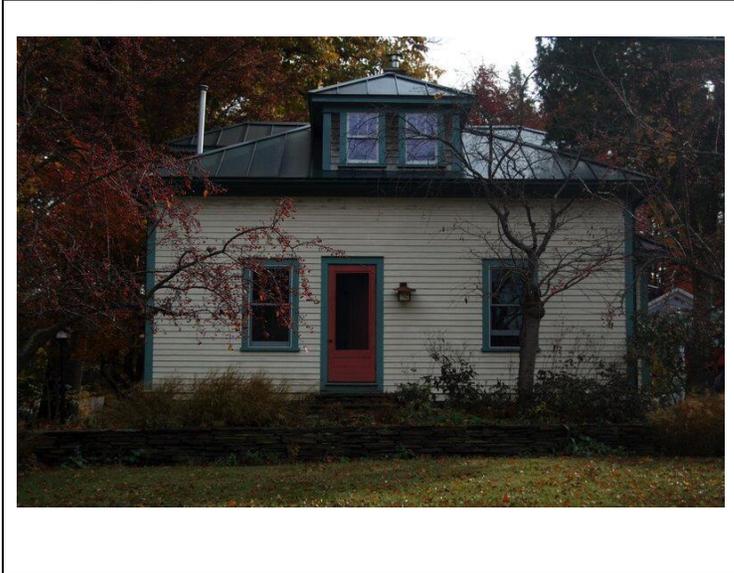
Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

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Town/City: Amherst

Place: Amherst

Photograph



Address: 76 Fearing Street

Historic Name: Emil & Charlotte Abramson House

Uses: Present: Single-Family Residence

Original: Single-Family Residence

Date of Construction: 1926

Source: HRL; Amherst directory

Style/Form: Cottage/Foursquare/Vernacular

Architect/Builder: N/A

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Ashlar pressed concrete blocks

Wall/Trim: Wooden clapboards

Roof: Raised seam enamel steel

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: Garage; shed far rear garden

Major Alterations: Raised deck for primary entrance to rear only (2007); roof material replacement (date unknown)

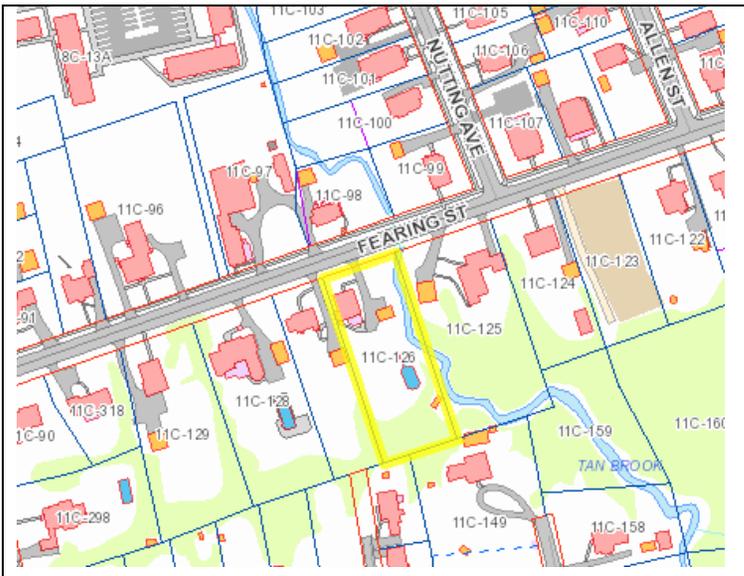
Condition: N/A

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: .72 acre

Setting: Rustic, wooded lot on the west bank of Tan Brook, with wetlands to the rear. Faces a tree-lined street in a neighborhood of more traditional-styled, single-family Vernacular houses, about ¼ mile from the University of Massachusetts.

Locus Map



Recorded by: Gretchen G. Fox

Organization: LHDSC

Date: November 2015

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

AMHERST, MA

76 FEARING ST

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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.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

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

76 Fearing Street (formerly 22 Fearing Street) is a small Foursquare cottage designed without reference to a historical revival style. In its acknowledgement to function, it varies with its more traditional neighbors on this block, a catalog of the carpenters' plan books of the 1920s. In contrast with them it is almost ageless, depending for decoration on its permanent green enamel, raised-seam roof, and color of its clapboard and prominent framing boards. The cottage stands over the street on its uneven lot, with a ca. 30-foot frontal setback, slightly less than other houses on this side of Fearing Street. A low fieldstone wall supports a path to the four stairs leading west from the driveway to the front entrance, a panel door with a high row of four lights inset. A singularly simple, 28-foot wide elevation, its central, hip roof dormer marks the half-story. Flanked by two vertically paned 4/1 windows, evenly spaced on the facade, the front door is placed off-center to the east. This is the most arresting feature on the front elevation's expanse of clapboard, otherwise unbroken except for a single attached door lighting fixture on its right.

The hip roof is raised slightly across the rear to form a south facing gable roof, not visible from the front. The front elevation dormer is repeated on both east and west elevations, both visible from the street. Three vertically paned 4/1 windows are evenly spaced on the east side of the house, and three three-paned windows are set in the ashlar-faced concrete block foundation under them. The foundation is higher on this side because of the unevenness of the building site, the lot a slope from Tan Brook, which runs north about 80 feet east of the cottage to its culvert under Fearing Street on the property line.

A hip-roofed, double window bay extends one foot on the west side, matched by a second double window to its south. At the rear of the house a five-foot by eight-foot side-entry porch extends back to south-facing steps. Two Tuscan columns support its hip roof. The columns rest on a clapboard-covered wall resting on a frame foundation with lattice panels, five feet in height. The east elevation foundation is just tall enough to contain two windows matching those on the east side foundation. A corbelled chimney with metal pipe cap rises from the crest of the hip roof. A stovepipe chimney pierces the roof on the northeast side. Just in front of the brick chimney a small tube skylight has been installed.

A paved driveway on the east side of the house leads to a single bay garage with overhead door, the roof gabled to the west, with one 6/6 window in the northern wall. A tool shed stands in the far rear garden.

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.

In 1926, Dora Fearing sold Lots 13 and 60 contiguous feet of Lot 12 of the Fearing Extension, a housing subdivision of the greater part of the elaborately landscaped estate developed by her deceased husband, Henry D. Fearing. There were no building restrictions on the deed, as there were on a few others in this subdivision. The purchasers, Emil (a janitor at MAC) and Charlotte (a stenographer) Abramson both of Swedish descent, he a naturalized immigrant, built the house later that year. It was valued at \$6,000 in a contemporary news account. They were living there in 1927, according to the town directory, and, in 1930 shown there with their two children, Doris, age 4, and Charles, age 2. By 1931, however, Emil had died, Charlotte inheriting the house. In the 1940 Census, she is listed as a bank bookkeeper. She would live there with Doris and Charles until 1945, when she sold it to Fred and Eveline Sears.

Doris Abramson (1926-2007), a writer who became a pioneer in the study of African American theatre and taught in the Speech and Theatre Department at University of Massachusetts for 31 years, lived in this house for her entire childhood. Both parents were associated with UMass, as her mother eventually worked in the Treasurer's Office. Doris enrolled at MSC in 1942, but left for defense work in Long island. She returned to MSC in 1945, the year her family moved from Fearing Street, and later earned graduate degrees at Smith College and Columbia. Her Ph.D. dissertation became her 1969 book, *Negro Playwrights in the American Theater, 1925-1959*, which established her as an authority at a time when Black Studies was emerging in academia.

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At UMass she received the Distinguished Teaching Award and the Chancellor's Medal. She was the drama editor of the *Massachusetts Review* and was a frequent and highly praised director of plays on campus. In addition, she published widely, including two books of poetry, and was well known for her readings of Emily Dickinson (her CD still offered for sale at the Dickinson Homestead). The well-known bookstore in New Salem, she and her partner co-owned at the time of her death, The Common Reader, specialized in used and rare books, particularly those by women writers.

Fred G. Sears, Jr. (b. 1902), UMass class of 1923, played violin for an orchestra in Dalton, Massachusetts and later helped found the MAC Sophomore Quintet, part of the "Citizen's Day" program on June 10, 1917 and many other MAC occasions. The 1924 class yearbook has this to say:

"PERHAPS in all the history of M.A.C. no one musical organization has done so much for the College music, played together so long, nor set so high a standard, as the quintet of the class of 1923. It was really a courageous undertaking for a group of sophomores to plan and carry out successfully from the very beginning, so significant an enterprise. So firmly established and competent had this organization become, that in 1921 at the Fiftieth Anniversary of the graduation from the College of its first class, the music on the more important occasions, including Commencement Day, was furnished by the quintet."

The 1948 street directory lists Fred's occupation as assistant manager of the University Store, UMass. His wife Eveline L. Sears (b. 1903, Worthington) worked at the Elk Bureau of Old Age Assistance that same year. According to the 1940 Census, they lived with their three children: Jane (11), Richard (10), and Nancy (8) and Eveline's mother, Jennie Litchfield (b. 1870), in Worthington before moving to 76 Fearing Street in 1945.

Eveline L. Sears was a pioneer in the senior community of Amherst. A social worker in the Welfare Department beginning in 1943, she retired in 1952 and became the first full-time Director of Welfare in Amherst. A founding member of the Amherst Council on Aging (serving from 1967-1987), she helped develop the Senior Center, which opened in 1968. The Senior Center gives two senior volunteers the annual "Senior Activist Award" in her honor. She was also president of the Western Massachusetts Association of Councils on Aging. The Sears moved to the area in 1945, living in Worthington and Northampton before Amherst. They lived at 76 Fearing Street from 1945 to 1965. Eveline had three children and eight grandchildren.

Tan Brook is a year-round watercourse flowing through this and 12 other properties and bordering five others between McClellan Street and the University of Massachusetts, including lots on North Pleasant Street, Boston Street, Fearing Street, and Nutting Avenue, as well as wooded lots west of North Pleasant Street. Its name derives from the tanneries, which once flanked the stream during the early nineteenth century, the area of which is now part of Kendrick Park. The brook's sources lie to the north and east, and were piped underground in the twentieth century, through the school grounds between Strong and Triangle Streets, beneath the East Pleasant Street commercial district, continuing under Kendrick Park and along McClellan Street. Until the arrival of piped sewerage, the brook served the north edge of the West Village for waste-water outflow, a reason for the more modest development of the neighborhood known by the Irish epithet, "the Curragh," a small boat or vessel. Downstream, Tan Brook waters the UMass pond and flows west through Hadley, until it empties into the Connecticut River.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Amherst assessor's records

Amherst directories 1930 -1945, 1948

"Doris Abramson" obituary, *Boston Globe*, Jan, 10, 2008

"Doris Abramson" obituary, Doris Abramson Papers, UMass W.E.B. DuBois Library, SCUA.
HLR

Mastronet (violin makers forum): <http://www.maestronet.com/forum/index.php?/user/665-fubbi2/?tab=posts>

Public doc. 31. 55th Annual Report of the Hatch Experiment Station of the Mass Agricultural College for the fiscal year ending November 30, 1917 (Feb 1918), pgs. 9, 15, 21. Wright and Potter Printing Co., Boston.

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Special Collections and University Archives: <http://scua.library.umass.edu/umarmot/sears-fred-coleman-1866/>

UMass Yearbook, Class of 1924: <http://www.e-yearbook.com/sp/eybb?school=931&year=1924&startpage=177&highlight=1>

U.S. Census 1930, 1940

“Record Amount of Building in Amherst,” unidentified newspaper (*Springfield Republican?*), 15 January 1927. A clipping of this story is pasted into Vol. 2 of the Mrs. C. J. Fawcett scrapbooks, p. 6. They are housed in the Jones Library Special Collections.