

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

153; 11C-67	Mt. Toby	E	AMH.149
-------------	----------	---	---------

Photograph



Town/City: Amherst

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Amherst Center

Address: 17 Elm Street

Historic Name: Henry Van Roekel House

Uses: Present: Single-Family Residence (rental)

Original: Single-Family Residence

Date of Construction: c. 1948

Source: City Directories

Style/Form: Colonial Revival/ Cape Cod

Architect/Builder:

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Concrete

Wall/Trim: Wooden Clapboard/wood

Roof: Slate

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: attached one-bay garage, contemporary with house

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Condition: Good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 0.26 acre

Setting: This is one of only two houses on a short residential street between Lincoln and Sunset avenues.

Locus Map



Recorded by: Danping Wang/Suzannah Fabing

Organization: LHDSC

Date (*month / year*): November 2015

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

AMHERST

17 Elm Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125

E

AMH.149

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 side-gabled Colonial Revival Cape Cod Cottage is related to #146 Sunset Avenue and #104 Shays Street in type rather than detail. All are Colonial Revival one-story variants, but this example, with a centered chimney, five-bay façade, and simple flat engaged pilasters supporting a narrow entablature (similar to #146 Sunset), is a careful reproduction of its Colonial Cottage antecedents.

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.

Elm Street did not appear on the 1886 Bird's Eye View of Amherst. It is listed in City Directories, but with the annotation that there were no houses on it, through 1942. This house first appears in the 1948 Directory, as the home of Henry J. Van Roekel (1901-1982) and his wife Tena (1900-1982). He was named Chief of Laboratory in the Department of Veterinary Sciences at the Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1926, then departed for study elsewhere. He returned as Professor of Veterinary Science at the University of Massachusetts from 1929 to 1965. His specialty was the diseases of birds. A contemporary described him as "one of the giants in North America in the early development of knowledge of avian disease." The Van Roekels sold the house in 1971, after he retired, and moved to Pella, Iowa.

The land on which the house stands is the westerly portion of two tracts belonging to James B. Paige (see AMH.169), one acquired from Stockbridge and Westcott in 1891 and the other from Kate, Mary and Amy Beston in 1895 (for the Bestons, see AMH.170). Paige's widow sold this plot to the Van Roekels in 1939.

Because of its recent date, this house should be classed as an intrusion into the proposed Local Historic District, although it is a careful replication of a classic New England house type. Writing in the *Amherst Record* in 1946, W.R. Brown commented,

"There has [sic] probably been more changes in the architectural style of houses built in Amherst during the past fifteen to twenty years than during the previous seventy-five....we are now in another period. Much, if not most of the changes in style of Amherst houses has been due to the activities of the Colonial Construction Company of South Deerfield of which William Gass, Senior, was the prime mover.

This concern built fifty-two houses in Amherst, most of them similar in type yet no two are alike. More than half of them are "Cape-Codish". That is, gable-roofed, with very little overhang of eaves, and no cornice at the ends. A striking and appropriate feature of all the Gass houses is the big topped, usually central, chimney. In the old brick oven and fire-place heating days, big chimneys were necessary. Now they are made big only where they are conspicuous. That is, from the roof up, thereby adding an air of antiquity to the buildings.

The Gass houses and those of a similar type made by other builders are low studded, averaging about seven feet and six inches, between floor and ceiling, and they are, when properly insulated, easy to heat and are designed to be run without servants to meet the exigencies of the times.

The Gass boys bought a lot of old houses from the Quabbin district which they took down and used the material in several Amherst buildings..."

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

AMHERST

17 Elm Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125

E

AMH.149

Brown would doubtless have classed this house as "Cape-Codish," part of the vogue in Amherst inspired by nostalgia for houses flooded when the Quabbin Reservoir was formed in the 1930s. No direct connection with William Gass or his sons has been established.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Amherst City Directories 1948 and following.

Amherst Historical Commission, Form B (1988), online in the MACRIS database.

Hampshire County Register of Deeds, Book 440/233 from Stockbridge and Westcott to James B. Paige, 20 March 1891; 476/4 from Beston sisters, 3 June 1895; 944/162 land from Ada M. Paige, widow of James B. Paige, to the Van Roekels, 29 June 1939; 1601/418 to Barbara M. McGarragh, 29 July 1971. Thanks to Ed Wilfert for deed research.

Biographical information on Henry van Roekel: University of Massachusetts Archives. Thanks to Anne L. Moore, Special Collections Librarian.

Brown, W.R., "Changing Style of Homes," *Amherst Record*, 4 March 1946. A clipping of this article is included in Volume III of the W.R. Brown scrapbooks, preserved in the Jones Library Special Collections, p. 18.