

# 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:** Amherst Center

## Photograph



**Address:** 25 Beston Street

**Historic Name:** The Canavan House

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

Original: Single Family Dwelling House

**Date of Construction:** c. 1866-1868

**Source:** Tax assessment books, 1873 Beers map, and 1910 Sanborn map

**Style/Form:** farmhouse

**Architect/Builder:**

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: brick with fieldstone below grade, cinder blocks used on west extension

Wall/Trim: Vinyl

Roof: Asphalt

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:** garage

**Major Alterations (with dates):**

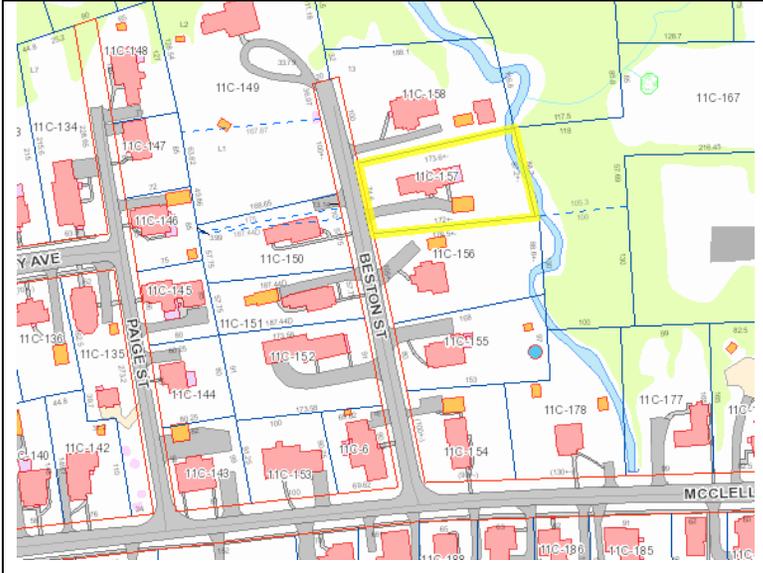
**Condition:** good

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

**Acreage:** 0.31 acres

**Setting:** rural college town

## Locus Map



**Recorded by:** E. Gouin, E. Wilfert, M. Adams

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

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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.*

Cape-style house with finished second-storey. The building is oriented 90 degrees to the street, with the façade facing south directly onto the driveway. The main massing has a centrally placed door with a window on either side of it. A small angled-roofed portico, supported by two small Doric columns, serves as covering to the door. A slender chimney rises from the center of building. Two shorter massings extend to the south and north sides. Windows are double hung, with a single mullion dividing the upper pane.

## 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.*

The area north of Beston Street was originally farmland owned successively by Theodore Lyman, John Borland and Horace Henderson, and to the east by Luke Sweetser, who was a merchant and farmer raising cattle near the current high school. Osmyn Baker sold a parcel to Luke Sweetser (June 5, 1854, 198/235), a local farmer who raised cattle and presumably wanted the water rights at Tan Brook. Sweetser was interested in the land to provide access to water for his cattle at Tan Brook.

Tan Brook is a year-round watercourse flowing through this and twelve other properties and bordering five others between McClellan Street and UMass, including lots on North Pleasant Street, Beston 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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. Downstream, Tan Brook waters the UMass pond and flows west through

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Hadley, until it empties into the Connecticut River. Tan Brook runs parallel and to the east of Beston St., midway between Beston St and current day East Pleasant St. Beston runs directly from McClellan and consists of lower-lying land, which drains down from McClellan and becomes swampy during heavy rainfalls.

Henderson's 80 acre farm extended from Pleasant Street to the Hadley line, north of current day Beston Street. Horace Henderson constructed Beston Street (year unknown) along the property division between his land on the west side and Sweetser's land on the east. Beston Street may have possibly linked Henderson's farm with McClellan Street, which may have already existed as early as 1854. The earlier history for the east side of the roadway places it as part of the Cows Farm, abutting the estate of H.D. Fearing to the north and east, and adjacent to Henderson's property to the west.

On November 8, 1860 Henderson bought 4 acre 116 rods from Luke Sweetser for \$826.37 with dam rights and road easement reserved for Sweetser (198/235). On Nov 15, 1866, Henderson sold 1 acre 2 rods lot back to Sweetser for \$250 and in November 1868, Sweetser sold the same lot to Patrick, Michael and Martin Canavan, for \$700. [257/153 is the number given in references from subsequent Deeds but the number is incorrect.] Beston Street's first residents were mostly Irish immigrant families of modest means.

The price difference suggests that Irish-born Patrick Canavan built a house on the property between 1866-68. The 1868 tax records assign a \$500 house and \$200 lot evaluation to Patrick Canavan, and the 1869 Amherst Directory gives McClellan as his address, there being no official Beston Street at that time. The MA Vital Records for 1869 show that Patrick Canavan, a widower, died November 23, 1869 of typhoid fever and is buried in Hadley, MA.

The house drawn roughly on the 1873 Beers map (and attributed wrongly to a Mr. Kennedy) is the correct location for the house currently numbered 25 house and the 1910 Sanborn map more accurately represents the Cape style of

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25 Beston. The drawing in the 1910 Sanborn map indicates that the initial John and Mary McGowan house was the Cape now numbered 25, both in its location and its footprint, whereas the drawing in the 1916 Sanborn map shows a second house with the footprint of #31 to the north of the Cape shown in 1910. This points to #25 as the older of the two houses.

The one acre 2 rod lot passed from the heirs of Patrick Canavan to his son, Michael Canavan, for \$400 on Jan 31, 1874 (308/270). Michael and wife Bridget Canavan sold the property to Michael McGrath a year later, on 5/18/1875 for \$800 (318/33) (McGrath wanted water rights to the east, since the parcel included both sides of Tan Brook) and McGrath then sold the remaining  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre to the west of Tan Brook to Michael Canavan's wife Bridget Canavan on March 18, 1881 for the same price [361/333]. The McGrath to Canavan deed pencils in at the top, that Beston is " a new street near McClellan."

Michael Canavan died March 23, 1892, age 46 and on November 10, 1892 his widow, Bridget Canavan, sold the  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre parcel and house to Mary Galligan for \$1100 (454/299). Mary Galligan had been living across the street with her sister Kate at 20 Beston St. in the house on the McClaughlin double lot, which Kate and her husband Dennis E. Linnehan then divided for sale to Terrance McGowan. (See historical narratives for 20 and 26 Beston.)

While Kate Galligan and her husband Dennis Linnehan stayed at 20 Beston, Kate's sister, Mary Galligan (1863-1937), who had married Irish-born John J. McGowan (1862-1922) on January 14, 1892, bought the lot across and moved across the street to what is now 25 Beston.

Street numbers, not assigned until 1938-9 (many but not all street and house addresses appear in an annotated 1937-8 street listing at the Jones Library Special Collections), varied more than usual on Beston Street and it is challenging to assign with certainty which of the McGowan clan lived in specific Beston Street houses during this period. Family relationships are uncertain, many members of the family have the same given names (Mary,

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John), middle initials are not always recorded in Amherst Directories or census reports, and neither directories nor census reports give street addresses when they list family members living under the same roof.

It has not been possible to establish with confidence, beyond the visual evidence of the rough drawings on the 1873 Beers map and the 1910 and 1916 Sanborn maps, that John and Mary McGowan moved into the house that is now 25 Beston, and not into the house that is now 31 Beston. It is however clear from tax evaluations that in 1910 there was only the one house on this property (located by the 1910 Beers map where the Cape at #25 Beston sits) and by 1911 there were two houses. Tax valuations in 1909 show John McGowan at 25 Beston assessed \$350 for a house and \$125 for a building lot of 107 rods. The 1910 assessment is for one house only.

But the 1911 valuation has the one house assessed at \$350 and a second house also assessed for \$350. The 1910 Directory gives John McGowan's address as 11 (become 25) Beston and the 1912 Directory places him at 15 (now 31) Beston, the address with which this branch of the McGowan family (John, Mary, the twins Agnes and Mary were subsequently identified). The 1911 and 1912 Directories reinforce the evidence that by 1912 the John, Mary, Agnes & Mary McGowans had moved from the smaller #25 into the considerably larger farmhouse at #31 Beston, the house with which their family became closely associated in later years.

The 1919 Directory shows Charles Cleveland, a plumber, living at the smaller house at 25 Beston, presumably renting a workshop which had shown up as a small out building in the 1910 Sanford map prior to the appearance of the #31 footprint in the 1916 Sanford map.

The 1927 tax valuation records show that John McGowan has tax assessments for both 25 (house, shop and land) and 31 (house, barn, garage, land) Beston. It is also noteworthy that in 1927, the twins Agnes and Mary still were living in 31 Beston but owned 18 McClellan (house, barn, sheds and land) as well as having inherited 20 Beston from their uncle Terrance McGowan.

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25 Beston sits on the southern portion of the 1 acre 2 rods lot purchased by Canavan and passed down as described above. It is not clear when the division between the two parts of the property took place officially. In 1933, the entire property (#31 and #25) was transferred to the twins, Agnes and Mary A. (885/154) by their mother, Mary G. McGowan, who died in 1937, age 74. Evidence of some understood boundary dividing 31 and 25 Beston is dated October 1950 (1099/376) with the Sacco's occupying 25 Beston. But the explicit evidence of the division line between what are now two properties associated with 31 and 25 Beston does not appear until the plan for 31 Beston prepared for daughter Mary A. McGowan in 1972. That plan lays out the division of land for 25 Beston as established fact, in that it notes that the house and property to the south (25 Beston) is outside the McGowan property at #31 and belongs to George J. and Helen M. Sacco.

There is no evidence whether or to whom #25 was rented between 1911 (when John and Mary McGowan and their twins presumably moved to 31 Beston) and 1950, when the Sacco's names appear on the property.

George J. & Helen M. Sacco were deeded the house (1079/376) and lived at 25 Beston until the house was bought by Mary C. Jackson on 8/14/1984 (2484/34). In 1994 the property passed to Claudia A. and Peter S. Brown (4544/20; in 1996 to Mary Fletcher (5004/67); and in 2003 to Susan S. Thomas and Deborah Shea (7227/260).

**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

Beers and Sanborn maps  
Census data  
Amherst Directories

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