

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: 44 Beston Street

Historic Name: John Beston, Jr., House

Uses: Present: Single Family Dwelling House

Original: Single Family Dwelling House

Date of Construction: c. 1865

Source: Town property form

Style/Form: Cape/farmhouse

Architect/Builder: John Beston, Jr.

Exterior Material:

Foundation: brick with fieldstone below grade

Wall/Trim: Clapboard

Roof: Asphalt and metal

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Major Alterations (with dates):

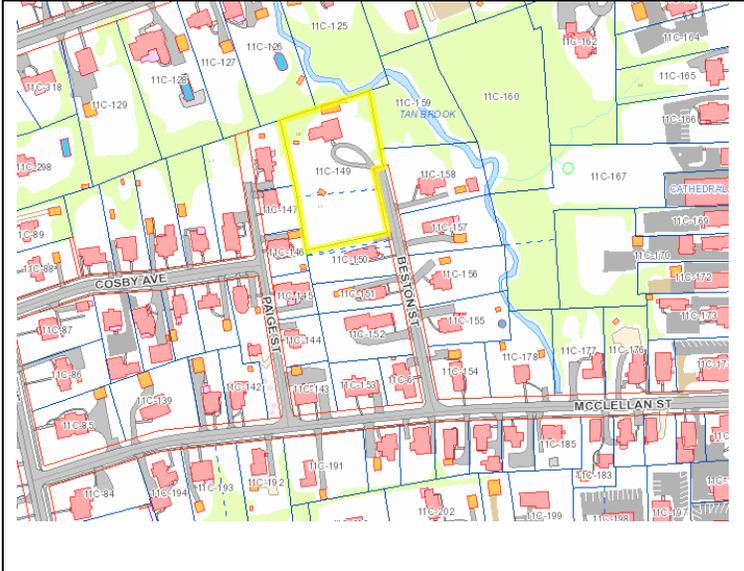
Condition: fair

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 0.97 acres

Setting: rural college town

Locus Map



Recorded by: Elizabeth Gouin and Maurianne Adams

Organization: LSHD

Date (month / year): September 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.

The main rectangular mass of the house is single story with two dormers piercing the roof, allowing light into the second floor. The front door is centered with two windows, one on each side flanking the door. A chimney anchors the building at its center. The asphalt roof currently has solar panels between the dormers. A small extension with a large bay window appears on the western side of the building; a small skylight is in the roof and a second entrance also leads into this extension. A covered porch extends the length of the façade, including this western extension. The porch features square columns with decorative, neoclassical-inspired bracket, a short wall (a few feet high, encloses the lower half of the porch, with an opening in the center for the front door. A long-narrow second extension exists on the western side and contains all of the water facilities (probably added when town water became accessible to Beston Street). The extension has a crawl-space but no basement, an open well and old shower, an entry oriented on the left and a single window on the right; this extension is roofed in metal.

The house is located at the north-west end of the Beston Street cul-de-sac, set back slightly with trees surrounding the property. The property includes a large field to the south of the house, mainly wetlands from the higher topography of McClellan Street draining down through the back yards of 14, 20 and 26 into the wetland field at 44, and ultimately Tan Brook, which borders this property to the north. In 2005, the owner Gabor Lukacs placed solar panels on the roof and in the yard, and during that period planted a number of fruit trees, created a community garden for families on Beston and McClellan Streets, built hen houses for a dozen chickens and several out-buildings for his bicycle center.

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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. The area to the east was owned by Luke Sweetser, a merchant and farmer raising cattle near the current high school. Sweetser was interested in the land to provide access to water for his cattle at Tan Brook, which runs parallel to Beston St. to the east and midway between Beston St and current day East Pleasant St.

Henderson's 80 acre farm was the former Lyman/Borland farm to the north of Beston St. Sweetser sold him 4 acres 116 rods, now the east side of Beston Street (198/235) on Nov 8, 1860, bound to the west and south by Leavitt Hallock (the developer who later sold land to Emeline Williams, see 14 Beston Street), to the east by Sweetser, and to the north by the farm. Henderson put in Beston St on his west boundary. The east boundary was along Tan Brook, reserving Sweetser's dam rights.

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 19th century in 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 20th 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. It runs above ground as the eastern boundary for the homes on the east side of Beston Street. Until the arrival of piped sewerage, the brook served the north edge of the West Village for

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waste-water outflow. Downstream, Tan Brook waters the UMass pond and flows west through Hadley, until it empties into the Connecticut River.

McClellan Street had been planned as early as 1854, probably for access to the farm to the north at that time owned by Borland. The future Beston Street may have been a farm lane from McClellan Street north to the Lyman/Boland/Henderson farm, but the Walling map shows only the brook, no roads or building in the area, and neither farm lane nor McClellan Street are corroborated by the 1873 Beers maps. The 1886 Burleigh picture maps shows what must be Beston Street going through to Fearing Street, but the placement of buildings now in the area suggest that the map does not well represent it.

Beston is a one-block cul-de-sac, from McClellan St at the south, north until it terminates in the wooded area at Tan Brook to the north, with #44 as the western terminus and #31 the terminus to the east. Recent residents of Beston Street worked together as a community to set a bench at the northern end of the cul-de-sac, dig out the Japanese knotweed that had overgrown many of their properties along the western side of Beston and share a vegetable garden and eggs from the chickens that located on wetlands to the immediate south of #44. Beston runs due north (and downhill) from McClellan and consists of lower-lying land which becomes swampy during heavy rainfalls.

The west side of what becomes Beston Street was developed on 399 sq. rods of land (about 2.5 acres) acquired by Emeline S. Williams from Leavitt Hallock's larger development on August 17, 1863, for \$459.69, with a mortgage for the full amount to be paid off by 1868. (Deed Book, 214/p. 30) Access to a roadway to be built by Horace Henderson on the east side of the 399 sq. rod parcel was promised for all lots, presumably providing access from McClellan to the Henderson farm to the north. Emeline Williams's 399 rod parcel eventually became the present lots for 14, 20, 26, and 44 Beston Street as well as the corner house at 51 McClellan.

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After the death of her husband Edward Williams in 1865, Emeline sold off properties on the south end of Beston (see descriptions for 51 McClellan and 14, 20 and 26 Beston), but kept the northerly lot until 3/22/1869, when she sold a $\frac{3}{4}$ acre lot at the north-west end of Beston Street (north $\frac{3}{5}$ of 11C Lot 149), 115 rods, for \$260 to John Beston, Jr., an Irish carpenter and builder (263/325). In 1880, John Beston Jr. bought the remainder of the lot between his property and that of Christopher McLaughlin (to the south) for \$1 from Emeline Williams, who had by that time remarried and signed the deed as Mrs. James L. Norton.

Beston Street's first residents were mostly Irish immigrant families of modest means. The 1869 Amherst Directory shows a John Beston [Sr.], laborer and farmer, with a house on Northampton St. and his son John Beston, Jr., carpenter, with a house on McClellan Street. (There was no official designation for Beston St at that time.) John Beston Jr. appears as carpenter and builder on McClellan in the 1873 and 1879 Amherst Directories. The 1880 census shows a John Beston, Jr., carpenter, born in Ireland, age 38, living with his wife Mary (also Irish) age 36, with five daughters - Katie, 12; Mary, 10; Amy E., 8; Nellie A., 6; Anna, 4; and one son John, 2. Records in the special collections of the Jones Library show that John Beston, Jr. had become a self-employed carpenter and builder, purchasing building materials in July 1880, and by 1883 with his own shop on Pleasant Street. He was the general contractor for Old Chapel on the MAC campus (New Chapel at the time).

The 1886-7, 1889-90, and 1896-7 Amherst Directories, identify Mary Beston as John Beston, Jr.'s widow with a house on Beston Street. Daughters Kate and Mary appear in the 1892-3 Amherst Directory as milliners boarding on Beston with their mother, Mrs Mary Beston, widow of John Beston, Jr. In 1895, Amy is listed as a dressmaker, while Mary and Kate appear to work together as milliners, living with Mrs Mary Beston whose home is listed "house foot Beston." Son John had by then moved "3-4 miles out."

The 1896 Amherst Directory lists "K. & M. Beston Millinery" (daughters Kate and Mary) living with mother Mary at the foot of Beston, and son John, now a

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farmer with a home on Northampton Road, married to a different Kate. It also lists Amy as a dressmaker with Powers & Beston at 12 South Prospect, although living at home ("foot of Beston) with her widowed mother and milliner sisters Kate and Mary. The 12 South Prospect address ties her to Mary E. Powers (a dressmaker born 1869 in Massachusetts of Irish parentage and the Head of household) and her slightly younger sister, born 1871, living with her and also a dressmaker. They were about the same age as Amy and are presumably co-workers in the Powers & Beston dressmaker business with the 12 South Prospect address.

Perhaps the partnership failed or Amy left to get married to a Powers. The 1910 Census shows Amy a milliner (as were Kate and Mary) but with the new surname Powers and two Powers children. In the 1896 Amherst Directory a David Powers appears for the first time, employed by John Mullen (a meat and provisions dealer on the Union block) and boarding on 26 Pleasant. His Death Certificate shows him born in Hadley son of Irish born James & Margaret Coffey Powers, a salesman and a meat cutter, working in Springfield, married in 1896 but deceased by 1909 of pulmonary tuberculosis, the year before Amy returns home with two children and a Powers surname. There is no evidence or whether or how David M. Powers was associated with the Powers sisters of Powers & Beston at 12 South Prospect.

John Beston, Jr., died between 1886-7 (Amherst Directory lists Mary as John's widow) and the Beston women (widow Mary and milliner daughters) a decade later moved to 44 Lincoln Avenue (1898-9, 1900 and 1903 Amherst Directories, confirmed by later 1910 and 1920 Census data. Mary Beston (John's widow) was head of household at 44 Lincoln Avenue, age 75 with unmarried daughters Katherine, Mary and Anna, age 42, 40 and 36, all milliners; daughter Amy Powers age 38 and two Powers grandchildren.

The same Directory and Census sources place Joseph Bias and his son David in a home on Beston Street. But the house at 44 Beston did not legally change hands until January 6, 1927, when the Beston heirs deeded the property to Joseph A. Bias, the first African American resident of Beston Street (832/341-

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2) for \$1 and other valuable considerations. This deed refers to the two parcels, the one being the $\frac{3}{4}$ acre lot conveyed by Emeline S. Williams to John Beston, Jr. in 1869 (263/325) and the second, the remaining piece conveyed in 1882 by Emeline S. [Williams] Norton (380/131) and by deed of Emeline S. Norton in 1894 (9466/598) to Kate Beston and others. This 1927 deed to Joseph A. Bias refers to the heirs as John Beston, Katherine, Mary and Anna Beston (unmarried) and Amy Beston, now Amy E. Powers.

Joseph A. Bias who purchased the Beston property in 1927 was part of a northern Black family associated with Amherst. While Mary was newly a widow and still on Beston St in 1886-7 (Amherst Directory) five single Bias men were laborers with a house (David) or boarding with him (David, Jr. and George) on South Pleasant and a Charles Bias is a cook at Hills Restaurant where he boards, joined by Henry Bias also a cook (1889-90), several wives by 1895 with houses on Triangle and Lessey. Their jobs by 1896-7 include labor and several janitorial positions, one at Chi Phi House.

The 1898-9 Directory is the first reference to Joseph A. Bias in Amherst and boarding on Beston Street, although the 1900 Census lists him with his family on Cottage Street (located to the east of Pleasant Street, several blocks to the east of Beston St.). The 1903 Directory has him with a house on Beston, with the 1908 Directory giving Joseph A. Bias's house address as 24 Beston, with boarders Joseph Bias (employed at Amherst College) and Mary Bias. The 1908 Directory has him janitor at 24 Beston (which became # 44 with the 1937 town-wide renumbering system) living with another Joseph Bias employed by Amherst College. By 1910, the Census shows that the Bias family is fully in residence at 24 (now 44) Beston: Mary A. Bias, age 56, head of household, born in Massachusetts, who does general housework "working out"; Lucy Ward, her sister, age 43, a waitress; Joseph A. Bias, her brother, age 32, a janitor for [a collegiate?] society; and three Ward children, 13, 9 and 6 at home. All list themselves or are listed as mulatto.

In 1927 Joseph (perhaps another Joseph who is a janitor) is listed by the Amherst Directory as living on Hazel Avenue, although the Deed from

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Katherine, Mary, Anna and John Beston and Amy E. Powers to Joseph A. Bias (832/341-2) is dated January 6, 1927. Joseph A. Bias is still a janitor and age 50. By 1936, his unmarried daughters Helen A. Bias and Margaret M. Bias, conveyed their inheritance through their father Joseph A. Bias, by then deceased, to their mother, Bessie Pettijohn Bias through a quitclaim covenant (911/218). Thus the Biases of Beston Street become intertwined with the Pettijohns of Paige St (see 39 Paige Historical Narrative). The 1940 Census shows Bessie Pettijohn, 48, an African American who moved north from Virginia, as the head of household at 44 Beston, employed as a cook and dietician for institutional and private clubs. It also lists daughter Helen A., 27, born in MA and living with her, employed in general housework for a private family. (Helen Amanda Bias later married Erwin Pettyjohn and together they bought other Beston properties, see 15 and 17 Beston Historical Narratives).

Erwin W. Pettyjohn was born about 1911 in Pine Grove, Northampton, MA (Ward 4) (1920 Census), the son of Samuel D. Pettyjohn of Virginia, and Mabel E. Pettyjohn of Connecticut, one of eight children ranging in age (in 1920) from 22 to 2, all of whom were Massachusetts born and who racially identified in Census reports a mulatto. His father owned his own business as a professional printer. Erwin Pettyjohn became the owner of Pettijohn Roofing and Construction Company, hired and trained black and white construction workers, and is known to have financially supported blacks and whites in becoming homeowners. Helen Pettyjohn worked at the Amherst Book Store until it was sold, when she joined the Shawmut Bank of Amherst.

The 1950 Amherst Directory places Alice Pettyjohn (later a music teacher on 35 Paige, which abuts 44 Beston to the west) at 44 Beston where Erwin W. and Helen A. Pettyjohn are then living. Erwin is listed as propriety of General Roofing Co, at 44 Beston.

On February 26, 1987, Bessie Pettijohn Bias (by then age 95) sold 44 Beston to Mary C. Jackson for \$155,000. (2922/82). Mary C. Jackson eventually owned three houses on Beston St - 44, 26 and 20. Mary C. Jackson is listed as co-owner with Deborah P. Clifford in 1987 (2992/33 and 3101/188). In 1996, 44

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Beston was bought by Jason T. Cary (4965/4) and in 1999, by Irene Abramms and Gabor Lukacs (5748/306). Gabor Lukacs added solar panels to the roof, planted fruit trees and fenced in a large chicken coop in the wetlands between 44 and 26 Beston, and developed a community vegetable garden for neighbors on Beston and McClellan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Census lists

Maps

Deeds

Tax valuations

Amherst Directories

“Ervin and Helen Pettyjohn (Beston Street)” in *African American historical sites - Amherst, MA* (1995, p. 10). In the AME Zion files at the Jones Library Special Collections.



Image from Town Property Card, date unknown