

# 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:** 17 Beston Street

**Historic Name:** The John Deignan House

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

Original: Single Family Dwelling House

**Date of Construction:** c. 1866

**Source:** town property form

**Style/Form:** farmhouse

**Architect/Builder:**

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: Brick with fieldstone below ground, concrete cinder blocks used under sunporch

Wall/Trim: Clapboard

Roof: Asphalt

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**

**Major Alterations (with dates):**

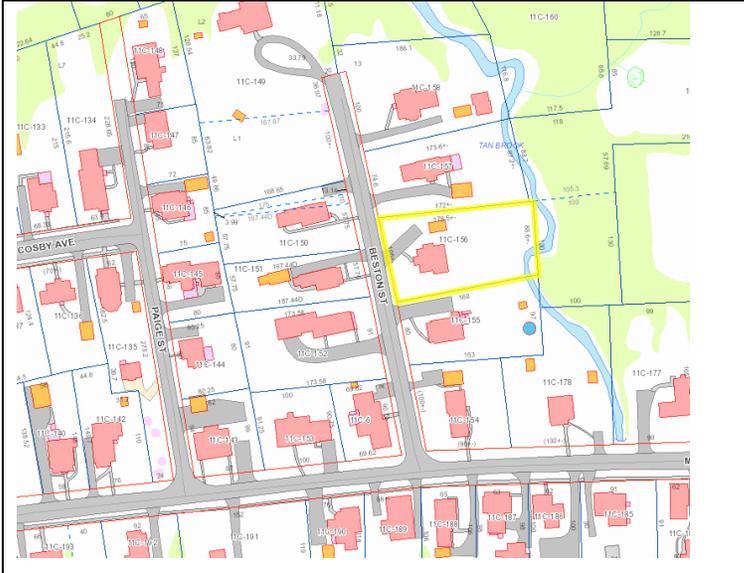
**Condition:** good

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

**Acreage:** 0.41 acres

**Setting:** rural college town

## Locus Map



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

**Organization:** LSHD

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

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

AMHERST

15 BESTON 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.*

*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.*

A one-and-half story, rectangular farmhouse with gabled ends on the north and west sides. The front entrance facing the street is an extended, gable-ended portico featuring only the front door and a small window to the right of the door. The only other feature of the façade consists of two windows, one on each side of the door.

The house's original chimney is not visible; a metal replacement chimney appears on the southwest end of the building. A side entrance, capped by a small open portico, exists on the northern side of the building. Windows in the gables must provide light into the second floor.

Personal observation of the current owner: Stuart Lerner has noted interior brick walls found under clapboard which he ascribes to a construction type to hold the day's heat into the evening.

The Lerner's remodeled parts of the house (cellar headroom and a glass-enclosed addition facing south. In 1990 they added a free-standing shed to the north.

[Note: Inventory Form B title above right incorrectly identifies this as 15 Beston. It is 17 Beston.]

## 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.*

Horace Henderson constructed Beston Street (year unknown) along the property division between his land to the west side of Beston and Sweetser land on the east. Beston Street may have possibly linked Henderson's farm with McClellan Street, but the street is not named until the 1886-7 Directory. It does not appear in the 1879 Directory and may have been a driveway from McClellan to the house at end, now 44 Beston.

Beston runs from north to south, terminating on the southern end at McClellan and consists of lower-lying land, which drains down from McClellan and becomes swampy during heavy rainfalls.

Beston Street's first residents were mostly Irish immigrant families of modest means. John Deignan, born c.1819 and died in 1899 "of old age," was an Irish immigrant laborer who had been living on McClellan) bought 1 acre 22 rods for \$1,000. with buildings (house

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and out building) on October 12, 1868 from Horace Henderson (255/384) who had bought it from Sweetser (see 784/489 for train of early ownership).

Henry Burt, a grocery merchant in town purchased the property from Deignan in an auction sale in 1871 (288/303-4) which was legally contested until John and Bridget Deignan settled on December 29, 1873 (308/105). The Deignans may have continued to live at this address during that interval.

On May 30, 1873, this property was transferred to Richard Mather, a professor at Amherst College (308/421-2). But the 1873 Amherst Directory and the Beers map show Patrick Ward in residence there. By deed dated March 1, 1884, Mather then sold the property to Patrick and Marcella Ward (386/45. Patrick Ward (b. 1841 according to the 1900 Census, with different dates at later Census) emigrated from Ireland in 1870, and his wife Marcella had emigrated from Ireland a year earlier. Patrick worked at the Dickinson estate.

The 1900 Census shows Patrick and Marcella Ward (Head and wife) with three boarders: John Mager (Irish brother-in-law who worked as a stamper at the hat shop), Margeret Ahearn (Massachusetts born niece-in-law of Irish parentage who worked as a stitcher at the Hat Shop) and James Moynihan (a student, Massachusetts born of Irish parentage). By the 1910 Census, Patrick is living on his "own income" (wife Marcella has none), and boarders are John McGee (another Irish brother-in-law who worked at the Hat Factory as a laborer) and James Moynihan, now working at the Pocketbook Factory.

The 1920 Census shows Marcella at age 84 as head of household - presumably a widow - with Jeremiah Ward (a laborer, also known as Jerry Ward, whose connection to Marcella Ward, although almost illegible in Census handwriting, appears to read "son adopted" and Jeremiah's wife, Jennie. The Neenans are listed in the 1919 Directory as living in the Beston Street house as boarders.

The house and double-lot -- that is, 17 Beston and the lot that was to become 15 Beston -- continued to belong to Marcella Ward until September 20, 1922, when Marcella Ward's Will arranged for a private sale of her real and personal estate to Jennie Neenan, wife of Jeremiah J. Neenan, for \$1277. (784/489). The Deed refers to the entire property conveyed to Patrick and Marcella Ward by Richard H. Mather in 1884 (386/45), so the subsequent division of the property into what are now #15 and #17 was the work of the Neenans in 1950. The 1930 Census shows Jeremiah and Jennie having taken the Ward name, as Head and wife, and he had by then become a janitor at the College. But the

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1940 Census lists them again with the Neenan name, and Jeremiah a carpenter for a building contractor.

In 1950, Jennie Neenan sold to Erwin W. and Helen A. Pettyjohn (1072/3227) “a portion of the premises conveyed to this grantor” by Marcella Ward’s Will in 1922; Jeremiah Neenan co-signed the Deed. The description makes it look like the southerly portion (which later became 15 Beston): “southerly by land believed to be owned by one Goodwin and land believed to be owned by one Britt and/or one Brown.” The property at 17 Beston - that is, the northerly section of the original property -- was sold by Jeremiah Neenan (also known as Jerry Ward) to Erwin and Helen (Bias) Pettyjohn on January 1, 1958 (1266/107).

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. [See #44 Historical Narrative for the family line from the Joseph A. Bias family to the intermarriage of the Biases with the Pettyjohns. See #15 Historical Narrative for the account of the house from Tillson Court moved by Erwin Pettyjohn to what is now #15.] The two houses must have been rentals, in that Erwin and Helen Pettyjohn continue to live and conduct Erwin’s business from the Bias family home at #44 Beston.

Erwin Pettyjohn, who had been trained by his father Samuel 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.

17 Beston was sold by the Pettyjohns to Catherine Iselin in 1977 (1960/115), who with her husband Stuart Lerner (2334/036 on March 9, 1983) are the current owners.

This property is bounded on the westerly side by Beston Street and, like all others on the westerly side, is bounded to the east by Tan Brook, a year-round stream 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

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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 Tan Brook served the north edge of the West Village for waste-water outflow, a reason for the more modest development of the neighborhood know by the Irish epithet, "the Curragh," a small boat or vessel. Downstream, Tan Brook flows into the UMass pond at its northern end and flows west through Hadley, until it empties into the Connecticut River.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

Census

Amherst Directories

Deeds

"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.