

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

55-198-9	Billerica		
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Town/City: Chelmsford

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): East Chelmsford

Photograph



Address: 29 Gorham Street

Historic Name: Robert and Martha Barris House

Uses: Present: Two-family dwelling

Original: Single-family dwelling

Date of Construction: ca. 1900

Source: City directory, census, stylistic features

Style/Form: Queen Anne

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Cut stone (granite); Uncut stone

Wall/Trim: Wood clapboards; Wood

Roof: Slate shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: None. (N.B. Carriage house that was constructed contemporary with the house is now part of 3 Riverneck Road, lot 55-198-10)

Major Alterations (*with dates*): Porch enclosure/addition Ca. 2010

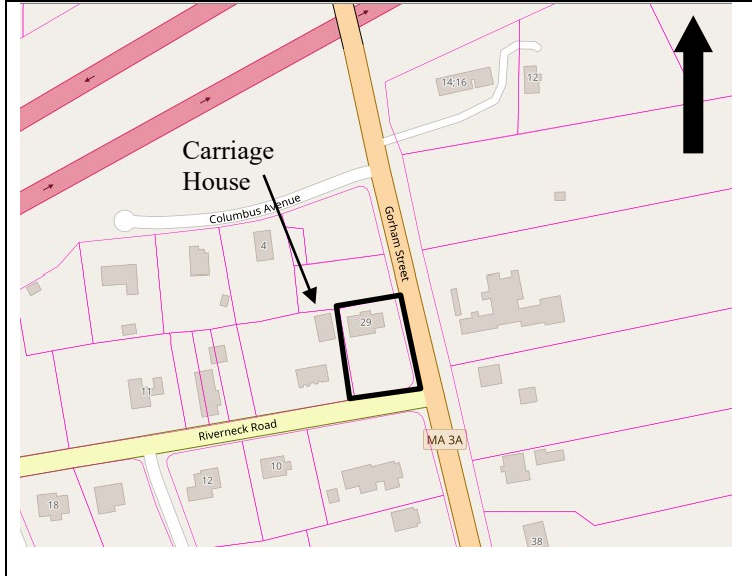
Condition: Poor (Historic integrity high; fire damaged)

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 0.27

Setting: Located on a suburban street at edge of interstate highway right-of-way. Houses to north, east, and west date from early 20th century to mid-20th century and are located near road frontage.

Locus Map



Recorded by: Stacy Spies, Historic Preservation Consultant

Date: February 21, 2020

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

CHELMSFORD

29 GORHAM ST

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220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

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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 Barris House is located at the north end of its lot with a shallow front yard and a dry-laid stone wall separating the east façade from the concrete sidewalk along Gorham Street. An asphalt-paved driveway leads from Gorham Street past the south elevation of the house and is separated from the house by a narrow strip of lawn. A grassy lawn fills the lot between the house and Riverneck Road. Mature shrubs, evergreen trees, and deciduous trees line the north lot line. (Note: a carriage house that shares stylistic features with the house is located immediately behind the house. The carriage house location is now on an adjacent lot, the lot lines having been redrawn since construction.)

The Barris House consists of a 1 1/2-story front-gabled main block with 2-story cross-gabled projections at the west end of the side (north and south) elevations. A 2-story lateral ell with a gable roof extends from the rear (west) elevation. This ell was expanded one bay to the south and, it appears, a porch was enclosed, during the early 21st century. The house's sophisticated detailing indicates the efforts of an experienced builder or architect.

The main block has a front-gabled roof with gable-end cornice returns and overhanging eaves. (Photo 2) Renaissance Revival-style compound brackets are located beneath the eaves on all elevations. The building is sheathed with wood clapboards with a flared kick course between the first and second floors. The gable peaks feature shingled imbrication. Windows throughout the house appear to be 1/1 vinyl replacements with flat wood surrounds and a molded cap. The surrounds retain the hooks for the original storm windows. Screw-on vinyl shutters are located throughout the house. The high foundation is ashlar granite on the east and south elevations and uncut stone on the north and west elevations.

At the first floor of the east façade, a hipped-roof projection contains a bay window at the south end and a porch at the north end; the second floor contains two window bays. The projecting bay and porch feature a robust fascia surmounted by two courses of molding, a dentil molding, and a box cornice. (Photo 3) A similar course delineates the second floor of the façade from the gable peak. Alternating rows of square and octagonal wood shingles fill the gable peak and end with a row of sawtooth shingles that flare over the top of molding course. (Photo 4) A dressed, cut-granite step leads from the concrete walk to the wood porch stairs. The porch is enclosed on two sides by balustrades with turned spindles and is supported by chamfered posts with graceful curved spandrels. The posts' upright boards are set at an obtuse angle to mimic the three-sided projection of the porch roof. The porch shelters a large paneled wood door with a light in the top half and an Eastlake-style metal doorknob and escutcheon. (Photo 5) An Eastlake-style doorbell and escutcheon are located on the molding at the south edge of the entablature. (Photo 6) The entablature features a broken transom with leaded stained-glass sidelights and transom; the corner lights appear to be large single lights of stained glass. The porch floor is constructed of tongue-and-groove wood boards.

The south elevation contains a single bay at the first floor of the main block and a single bay of paired windows in both stories of the cross-gabled projection. (Photo 7) The first floor of the projection contains a cutaway bay window with jigsawed wood brackets and turned wood pendants. The projection's gable peak features a shingle pattern similar to that located on the façade but has a simple fascia instead of a compound molding course. (Photo 8)

The north elevation does not contain any windows at the first floor of the main block. (Photo 9) The cross-gabled projection contains a window at the second floor and modern French doors at the first floor. The east elevation of the projection contains one window in the first and second floors. The projection's gable peak features a shingle pattern similar to that located on the façade but has a simple fascia instead of a compound molding course. The rear ell contains a single window at the second floor and a window and French door at the first floor. A late 20th C wood deck is located along the rear half of the elevation.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

CHELMSFORD

29 GORHAM ST

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220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--

A recent addition is located at the southwest corner of the house. (Photo 10) The two-story addition rests on a cut stone foundation and features a row of four windows on the first and second floors of the south elevation. The west elevation contains an entrance covered by a small porch. A clapboard-clad projection centered on the elevation contains a chimney. Care has been taken in the construction of the addition to mimic the brackets used the original house, to echo the kick in the clapboards between stories, and to face the foundation with cut stone.

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 Robert and Martha Barris house was likely constructed circa 1900 and was owned and occupied by three generations of the Barris family until 1983. Robert Barris (1853-1937)¹ and Martha J. Barris (1855-1940)² were both born in Ireland; Martha arrived in the United States in 1860 and Robert arrived in 1868 or 1870. The couple was married in 1876 and had eleven children. Robert Barris worked as an independent harness maker with a shop at 1021 Central Street in Lowell.

Between 1879 and 1883, Robert Barris purchased three acres of land at the intersection of Gorham Street, Riverneck Road and Boston Road.³ In 1891, Robert Barris subdivided the acreage into twenty building lots.⁴ The house at 29 Gorham Street was constructed on lot 20. At the time of the 1900 census, the Barris family was living at 29 Gorham Street with seven of their children.

From 1937 until 1968,⁵ the house was owned by Robert and Martha's son, Robert Wade Barris, Sr. (1889-1974)⁶ and his wife, Lydia Shedd Barris (1892-1965).⁷ The couple was married in 1916 and had ten children. Robert Wade Barris, Sr. worked as a self-employed house carpenter and contractor. In the 1950s he worked as a "Fireman" at Northern Textiles of Lowell, Inc. Barris served as Chelmsford Selectman from 1925 to 1928.

From 1968 to 1983, the property was owned by Robert and Lydia's son, Robert Wade Barris, Jr. and his wife, Helen.⁸ Robert Wade Barris (1923-2014)⁹ was a graduate of Massachusetts Maritime Academy. He served as a lieutenant in the Navy and as a second assistant engineer in the Merchant Marines in World War II. He married Helen Vidito (1925-1980)¹⁰ in 1950.

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¹ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/93939948>. Accessed Feb. 13, 2020.

² <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/93940076/martha-j-barris>. Accessed Feb. 13, 2020.

³ Middlesex North Deed Book 135, p. 386, Book 148, p. 504, and Book 159, p. 42.

⁴ Middlesex North Plan Book 60, Plan 91.

⁵ Middlesex North Deed Book 896, p. 390.

⁶ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/18177176/robert-wade-barris>. Accessed Feb. 13, 2020.

⁷ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/18177174/lydia-helen-barris>. Accessed Feb. 13, 2020.

⁸ Essex South Deed Book 1871, p. 109 and Book 2575, p. 183.

⁹ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/139182783/robert-wade-barris>. Accessed Feb. 13, 2020.

¹⁰ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/18177173/helen-ruth-barris>. Accessed Feb. 13, 2020.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

CHELMSFORD

29 GORHAM ST

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220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

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SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES



Photo 2. East Façade.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

CHELMSFORD

29 GORHAM ST

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



Photo 3.
Detail.
Porch.



Photo 4. Detail. East façade.

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CHELMSFORD

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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
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Area(s) Form No.

--	--



Photo 5. Detail. Door.



Photo 6. Detail. Doorbell.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

CHELMSFORD

29 GORHAM ST

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
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Area(s) Form No.

--	--



Photo 7. South elevation. Recent addition is located to left of cross-gabled projection and contains rows of four grouped windows.



Photo 8. Detail. South elevation projection.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

CHELMSFORD

29 GORHAM ST

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



Photo 9. North elevation.



Photo 10. Recent addition at rear. West and south elevations. View looking northeast.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

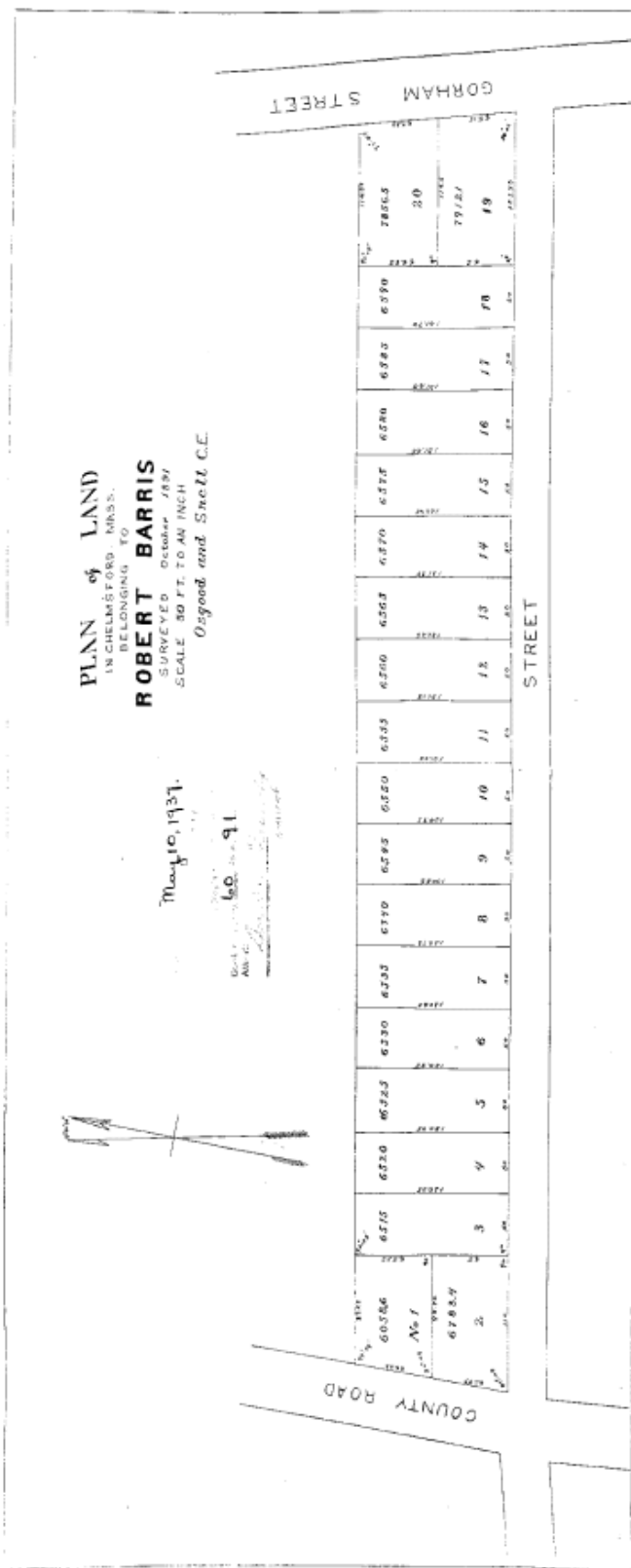
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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
 220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



1891 Plan. Filed in 1937 as Middlesex North Plan Book 60, Plan 91.