

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name G. H. Bent Company Factory

other names/site number Bent's Cookie Factory

2. Location

street & number 7 Pleasant Street not for publication

city or town Milton vicinity

state Massachusetts code MA county Norfolk code 021 zip code 02186

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination
☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property
☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant
☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Judith B. McDonough
Signature of certifying official/Title Judith B. McDonough, Executive Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission, State Historic Preservation Officer

1/4/2000
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the
National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register
☐ removed from the
National Register
☐ other (explain):

for
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Edson H. Beall

2/10/00

G. H. Bent Company Factory
Name of Property

Norfolk County, Massachusetts
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

(Check only one box)

☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	building
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
1	3	objects
3	3	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite

walls wood clapboard

roof other: tar and gravel

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

G. H. Bent Company Factory

Name of Property

Norfolk County, Massachusetts

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Industry _____

Commerce _____

Architecture _____

Period of Significance

1892-1949 _____

Significant Dates

N/A _____

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Architect/Builder

unknown _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

G. H. Bent Company Factory
Name of Property

Norfolk County, Massachusetts
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References See continuation sheet.

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 19	329260	4678840
Zone	Easting	Northing
2.		
Zone	Easting	Northing

3.		
Zone	Easting	Northing
4.		
Zone	Easting	Northing
— See continuation sheet		

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kathleen Kelly Broomer, Preservation Consultant, with Betsy Friedberg, NR Director, MHC, and James F. Pierotti, Director of Operations, G. H. Bent Company

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date January 2000

street & number 220 Morrissey Boulevard telephone (617) 727-8470

city or town Boston state MA zip code 02125

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name G. H. Bent Company

street & number 7 Pleasant Street telephone (617) 698-5945

city or town Milton state MA zip code 02186

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503. NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018

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G. H. Bent Company Factory
Milton (Norfolk Co.), MA

Narrative Description

The G. H. Bent Company Factory (7 Pleasant Street, Milton, MHC #26) is a wood-frame industrial building constructed in 1892. The factory faces the intersection of Pleasant Street and Randolph Avenue (Route 28) in a closely settled residential area. A masonry water trough for horses still occupies the north corner of the intersection, directly across the street from (west of) the factory. The slope of the factory property inclines from west to east, and the factory is built into the grade. The façade of the building is set back approximately twenty feet from Pleasant Street.

Immediately north of the factory is a right-of-way that functions as the driveway and a parking area for the factory. A garage building, shown on the town's assessors' maps, once occupied the eastern end of the right-of-way behind the cracker factory. This garage was demolished about 1995, and the **garage site** is still visible in the asphalt pavement of the driveway. For the purpose of this nomination, the garage location is a contributing site. North of the nominated property on Pleasant Street is a ca. 1920s vacant store building, which once housed a neighborhood market and has been closed for fifty years. East of (behind) the property is a wooded area near the town's former landfill. Closed in 1998, the landfill was created from open land and filled-in quarries. A golf course is scheduled to be constructed on a portion of the landfill site. On a separate lot immediately south of the nominated property is the former residence of George H. Bent (672 Randolph Avenue, not inventoried), a corner of which extends within five feet of the southernmost wall of the factory. The house is not included in the nomination.

Exterior

The factory building is roughly rectangular in massing, and includes two side projections or wings, a loading platform, and an attached rear shed. The **main block**, which measures approximately forty feet by sixty feet, is four bays across and about six bays deep. It rises two stories from a raised basement, displaying three full floors on the façade. The foundation and basement are constructed of granite that was quarried nearby. Six-inch cedar clapboard siding is original, having been restored in 1993 when imitation brick cladding, installed in 1948, was removed. At the time of the restoration, the clapboards were painted their original light gray color and the window shutters, which date to 1924 and possibly earlier, were reinstalled. The low-pitched hipped roof is tar and gravel. There are two brick interior chimneys: a short square chimney at the south (side) elevation and a taller, rectangular chimney near the east (rear) wall.

An important feature of the main block is the retail shop, which occupies its original space on the ground-floor level at the southwestern corner of the building. Display windows in the second and fourth bays on the façade (west elevation) flank the store entry. The wood door in this entry has glazed sixteen-light sash in the upper half and is original. A shed-roofed hood on brackets originally shielded this entry; the hood and brackets were removed by 1924. The display windows now contain fixed single-light sash with safety glass.

Many other windows on the main block contain 6/6 wood sash, though two stair hall windows on the north (side) elevation have six lights only. Some windows, on the upper levels of the façade in particular, contain 1/1 sash with snap-in muntins. Additional entries on the main block include a narrow, overhead shipping door (replaced in 1960) on the ground floor façade next to the retail space. Another entry, in the third bay of the south (side) elevation, was created in 1921 from a former window opening when the company G. H. Bent Company built the adjacent brick oven wing (see

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G. H. Bent Company Factory
Milton (Norfolk Co.), MA

below). This entry, located on the first (upper) floor, now has a porch and stair constructed of pressure-treated lumber leading to the ground and a shed-roofed hood on plain wood supports. It was used as the shop entrance until 1995, and is now only used as a secondary means of egress. On the north (side) elevation is another overhead shipping door, located at the loading platform, which was constructed of concrete block in the late 1930s. This wood door is divided into twelve panels, and the six glazed panels in the upper half of the door contain fixed lights.

The **wood-frame lateral wing** on the south (side elevation) toward the rear of the building is present in an 1893 photograph of the factory and appears to be original. This wing, which measures about twenty-five feet by thirty-five feet, is one story, five bays by three bays, with clapboard siding, a shed roof, a small brick chimney, and the same granite block foundation seen at the main block. Windows on this wing contain 6/6 wood sash. Two windows flank an entry on the south wall, which is about five feet from the rear of the former Bent house on the adjacent property. The entry contains a five-paneled wood door. Historically, brick Dutch ovens were present on the rear wall of this wing. The ovens were built into sand banks, which would retain the oven heat for weeks. The brick ovens at this location were removed in the 1940s and the rear wall of this wing is now finished in concrete block.

Directly in front (west) of the wood-frame lateral wing is a one-story, two-bay by one-bay, **brick oven addition** with a shallow-pitched gable roof and a concrete foundation. Built in 1921, this brick oven addition, which measures sixteen feet by twelve feet, was gutted of bricks in 1947 and converted to use as a cookie storage room. At that time, a pair of windows was added to the façade elevation of this wing. These windows contain multi-light metal hopper sash; there is no sash at the basement level. This addition retains three star-shaped iron tie rods on the south wall and a small brick interior chimney at the southeast corner.

Spanning the width of the east (rear) elevation of the factory is an **attached wood-frame storage shed**, accessible from both inside and outside the factory. The one-story shed, which measures forty feet square, has a shallow-pitched gable roof of asphalt shingle and exterior cladding that consists of vertical boards and tarpaper. Remnants of the imitation brick siding installed on the factory in 1948 are still visible in the gable end. The shed was used for the storage of fagots, or bundles of oak twigs that were gathered from the woods behind the factory to fuel the Dutch brick ovens from 1891 to ca. 1947. Connecting the storage shed with the main block is the 1930s **loading area**, which is on the north (side) elevation. The loading dock extends beyond the main block to a full-height, single-bay, rear extension with a shed roof. This extension displays brick walls on the first floor and vertical-board siding above.

The exterior of the cracker factory was renovated in 1994. At that time, imitation brick siding, installed in 1948, was removed, revealing the light gray paint color that was present since at least 1944, when the Pierotti family acquired the building. Local tradition holds that the factory always was painted light gray. Safety glass was installed in the display windows of the retail shop. Other improvements have been made to the site since 1995 to enhance the appearance of the property and improve accessibility. A small area in front of the building, formerly a three-car parking lot, has been enclosed with a wooden picket fence to create a courtyard, planted with shrubs and flowers and lit by two contemporary **lampposts**. A handicapped-accessible ramp leads from the courtyard at ground level to a mahogany deck built at the entrance to the retail shop. The ramp is appropriately scaled to the historic factory and does not compromise the historic

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G. H. Bent Company Factory
Milton (Norfolk Co.), MA

architectural integrity of the building. A new (1999) **standing sign** (white with dark lettering) has been installed on the lawn southwest of the factory. Near this standing sign is a **granite pier** (late 19th century?), which forms the northernmost end of a granite wall extending from the former Bent residence at 672 Randolph Avenue to the edge of the factory lot. For the purpose of this nomination, the granite pier is a contributing object, and the standing sign and two lampposts are noncontributing objects by virtue of their recent vintage.

Interior

The interior is divided into four principal areas: the retail shop, shipping and receiving, the bakery, and storage. The **retail shop** occupies its original ground-floor location. Closed for over eighty years, the shop was reopened December 9, 1995. For most of the 20th century, the shop area was used for the storage of bakery supplies. Before the shop was reopened as a retail space, the horizontal beadboard walls were painted and a new hardwood floor was installed. A coal-burning stove that had been located in the store was removed in 1946, but the chimney and thimble remain. A wood-clad walk-in refrigerator, which is at least sixty years old, was once located in the shop area. This refrigerator was disassembled and rebuilt in the ground floor area of the adjacent kitchen, which is behind the retail shop. A Federal Case Freezer, which also is at least sixty years old, is located here as well. There is new quarry tile on the floor, and in January 1997 a drop ceiling with florescent lighting was installed.

Shipping and receiving activities are located adjacent to the store on the ground level, as indicated by the overhead exterior doors on the west (façade) and north (side) elevations. A stair running along the inside north wall of the factory leads to the **bakery** on the first (upper level) floor. There are two surviving Dutch ovens located in the easterly end of the building. Original wood-paneled walls in the bakery are painted white, as are the brick Dutch ovens. Floors on this level are mostly the original hardwood. The same hardwood floors and painted wood-panel walls survive on the top floor, which is used for **storage** of primarily paper goods. The space is unheated and is not air-conditioned. A new HVAC system was installed in November 1995 in the balance of the factory, but its presence does not compromise the integrity of this industrial building. The factory had a water-run elevator that was deemed unsafe and was replaced in 1995 with a vertical hydraulic conveyor (elevator). The mechanism for the water-run elevator survives on the top floor of the factory.

Archaeological Description

While no prehistoric sites are recorded on the property, sites may be present. Eight prehistoric sites are recorded in the general area (within one mile). One site, the Massachusetts Hornfels Braintree Slate Quarry is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Environmental characteristics of the property also represent several locational criteria (slope, drainage, distance to wetlands) that are favorable indicators for many types of prehistoric sites. The property is well drained and moderately inclines from west to east with the factory built into grade. Freshwater wetlands are also present approximately 1000 feet or slightly more to the south. Given the above information, the size of the property (2.79 acres) and the extent of historic landuse in the area, a moderate potential exists for the recovery of prehistoric resources on the factory property.

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**G. H. Bent Company Factory
Milton (Norfolk Co.), MA**

A high potential exists for the recovery of historic archaeological resources on the nominated property. Filled granite quarries are known to exist in the vicinity including quarries in the wooded area behind the factory on the nominated property. Granite remaining in the quarries may contain scars associated with the actual mining process of granite from the quarries. Quarry pits may also contain actual equipment and/or structural evidence of mounting platforms used during quarrying activities. Structural evidence may also exist from transportation facilities used to remove granite from the quarries. Evidence from outbuildings used for manufacturing activities or to store equipment, tools and explosives may also be present on the property. Structural evidence from a two car garage, demolished in 1993, may also survive. Archaeological evidence from refuse areas associated with the factory or quarrying activities may also exist.

(end)

8. Statement of Significance

The **G. H. Bent Company Factory, 7 Pleasant Street, Milton** (MHC #26), is an important survival of the town's late 19th-century industrial development. George Bent incorporated his water cracker manufacturing business in 1891. Ninety years before, Bent's grandfather, Josiah Bent, also of Milton, launched what is believed to have been the first manufacture of water crackers in the nation. The water cracker is the crisp, dry ship's biscuit commonly known as hard tack. By the turn of the 20th century, the National Biscuit Company conglomerate had absorbed the business established by Josiah Bent, and phased out its Milton operations in 1926. This left the G. H. Bent Company as the sole successor in Milton of the water cracker business founded by Josiah Bent in 1801. While the architect and builder of the G. H. Bent Company building have not been determined, the factory is one of few intact industrial buildings remaining in Milton, and is particularly noteworthy for the continuation of its original use for over a century. Retaining integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, the G. H. Bent Company Factory meets Criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places and is significant on the local level.

Situated in the Neponset River valley, Milton is an affluent suburban town bordered by Boston on the north, Quincy on the east and south, Randolph on the south, and Canton on the west. The Neponset River defines the town's northern border. Randolph Avenue, a segment of the regional artery known as Route 28, passes through the geographic center of town, from Milton Village on the Neponset River south to the town's Quincy border. The G. H. Bent Company Factory is located at the Randolph Avenue intersection with Pleasant Street, approximately three-quarters of a mile southeast of Milton Town Hall.

Milton was settled in 1634 as part of the town of Dorchester. The Neponset tribe of Massachusetts Indians, which had occupied the area during the Contact period (1500-1620), called the settlement Unquityquisset. In 1662, Unquityquisset was incorporated as the town of Milton. Though Milton was principally an agricultural community for over a century, industry was present in the town from the late 17th century onward, particularly on the Neponset River, the major source for local waterpower. The town's industrial base expanded from powder and fulling mills in the late 17th century to the manufacture of gunpowder, paper, and chocolate, among other small-scale industries, by the third quarter of the 18th century.

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In 1801, Josiah Bent (1771-1836), a Milton farmer, began manufacturing water crackers, the ship's biscuit commonly known as hard tack. Establishment of a number of bakeries in Milton early in the 19th century has been attributed partly to the extensive coastwise trade present at Milton Village on the Neponset River, then the center of the town's commercial activity. Navigation on the Neponset reached its peak in 1833, when seventy-four vessels sailed up the river to unload cargo at Lower Mills landing. [MHC Reconnaissance Survey Report]

The water cracker developed by Josiah Bent was a crisp dry biscuit made of clear spring water and fine-ground wheat flour, without salt or shortening. A number of clear water springs reportedly existed in the area of the factory in the early 19th century. Milton also had a gristmill, located on the Neponset Falls, which provided fine quality wheat flour. Though Bent did not invent the food known as crackers, he coined the popular term "cracker," a reference to the crackling sound his biscuits made as they cooled after removal from the oven. Known for their durability, Bent's water crackers were sealed in wooden kegs and stored in a ship's hold, to be broken out, sometimes years later, and rendered edible after a soaking in water. According to the *History of Milton*, Bent was the first to manufacture water crackers in the nation. [Teale]

Unlike other industries operating in Milton by the end of the Federal period (1775-1830), among them paper, saw, and cotton mills and the chocolate factory, a bakery did not need the waterpower afforded by a location on the Neponset River. Josiah Bent started his cracker manufacturing business in the kitchen of his home (demolished) on Highland Street, approximately two miles south of Milton Village. This site is located in the vicinity of the present 373 or 375 Highland Street, near the intersection of Randolph Avenue, about one-third of a mile south of the present G. H. Bent Company building at 7 Pleasant Street. In the early history of the company, Josiah Bent's wife and children made crackers in small quantities, baking them in a Dutch oven built into one side of the kitchen fireplace. Bent traveled from town to town by horse, selling the crackers from saddlebags. He also sold the crackers to ship merchants in Boston, and reportedly supplied the U. S. Navy with crackers during the War of 1812.

Demand for the crackers caused Josiah Bent to expand his business in 1827 into a two-story, wood-frame factory, which he had built to the north of his house. The factory had two Dutch ovens at the back of the building, which were built into a sandbank. The sand could retain the oven heat for weeks. A small room at the front of the factory served as a retail shop for the crackers. The factory burned in 1909, and a multiple-unit residential building at **371 Highland Street** (early 20th century, MHC #50) was built on the foundation. In 1826, Josiah Bent sold the business to Deacon Samuel Adams, the husband of his daughter, Mary Ann Bent. [MHC inventory form, 371 Highland Street] Following his retirement from the cracker business in 1830, Josiah Bent served one term as a representative in the state legislature. He died in 1836. [Dictionary of American Biography, vol. I]

Samuel Adams carried on the Highland Street business under the name of Bent & Company until 1837. During that time, he worked in partnership with Samuel T. Bent, who may have been a son of Josiah Bent. From 1837 until his retirement in 1871, Adams was the sole proprietor of the factory. The Adamses resided in a Federal-period house at **307 Highland Street** (ca. 1800, MHC #42), north of the factory and west of the later G. H. Bent Company Building on Pleasant Street. After installing a hand-turned cracker-cutting machine in the factory sometime between 1838 and 1840, Adams has able to expand the factory's product line. New products included two kinds of pilot bread (common or water pilot, and extra

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pilot, a sponge cracker), two kinds of oyster crackers (water oyster and sponge oyster), soda crackers, milk biscuits, wine crackers, sugar crackers, lemon crackers, and both thick and thin graham crackers. [Allison, *The N. B. C.*, p. 7] These products were baked in the same Dutch ovens in which the water crackers were baked.

Bent water crackers were widely available during the 19th century. They were stocked at the fur trading post of Bent's Old Fort (1833-1834, now a National Historic Site), located on the Arkansas River near the town of La Junta in southeastern Colorado. Brothers Charles Bent and William Bent, distant cousins of the Bent family of Milton, established this trading post on the Santa Fe Trail in partnership with Ceran St. Vrain. All three men were natives of St. Louis, Missouri. Until 1849, the fort was the frontier trading hub of the American Southwest. A National Park Service brochure describes the trading post as the most important port of call and depot during the 1830s and 1840s between Independence, Missouri and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Bent's water crackers also were supplied to the Union Army during the Civil War.

Upon his retirement from the cracker business in 1871, Samuel Adams leased the company to Horatio Webster, Samuel T. Bent, John A. Shaw, William H. Balkam, and George A. Fletcher for a period of five years. The lease was renewed for another five years, but Adams died before the end of the second term. By his will, the business passed to George A. Fletcher, a nephew, and Granville Young. [Allison, *The N. B. C.*, p. 8] Fletcher and Young sold the company and the real estate to the New York Biscuit Company. In 1898, the New York Biscuit company became one of several companies consolidated to form the National Biscuit Company. [Allison, *The N. B. C.*, p. 8] The Highland Street factory burned down in 1909, at which point the National Biscuit Company opened a new plant on Eliot Street in Milton Village, on the Neponset River. There, the company employed one hundred workers to make the crackers by hand.

When National Biscuit Company phased out its operations at the Eliot Street factory in 1926, the **G. H. Bent Company Factory, 7 Pleasant Street** (MHC #26) was left as the sole successor in Milton to the cracker manufacturing business founded by Josiah Bent in 1801. The G. H. Bent Company has its roots in the late 19th century. In 1884, George H. Bent, a grandson of Josiah Bent, and his wife, Edna, purchased from Granville and Julia Young a parcel of land at the corner of Pleasant Street and Randolph Avenue. There, they built their house, now known as **672 Randolph Avenue** (not inventoried). In 1891, they incorporated G. H. Bent & Company, and the following year had the present factory building constructed immediately to the north of their house.

Manufacture of the Bent water crackers has continued at the Pleasant Street factory for over a century, using the same recipe developed in 1801. Historically, Josiah Bent used brick Dutch ovens to bake his water crackers. Ninety years later, George Bent installed three large brick Dutch ovens in the Pleasant Street factory, built into the back (east) wall of the building. The ovens were heated internally with hot fires that were then removed; sandbanks around the ovens would retain the normal oven temperature for weeks. For baking, "flash heat" was created by igniting bundles of oak twigs directly in the ovens. These bundles, or fagots, were gathered by local boys, then stored in the shed at the rear of the factory. The boys, who were paid ten cents per bundle, gathered the twigs from the wooded area behind the factory. The heat generated by the large ovens, in addition to the seasonal summer heat, caused the owners to close the factory each year from June 1 to October 1. The brick Dutch ovens are no longer used; the company now bakes in a gas-fired rotating oven installed in 1947.

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The process of manufacturing Bent's water crackers has changed little since the early 19th century. Most of the "moulding" (kneading) and cutting of dough, and the packing of the crackers, is still done by hand. A hand-turned cracker cutting machine, similar to the one Samuel Adams installed in the late 1830s in Josiah Bent's Highland Street factory, is used at the G. H. Bent Company today. After removal of the crackers from the ovens, each cracker was wiped on a sheepskin before being packed [Allison, *The N. B. C.*], a method that is still employed at G. H. Bent Company today.

Bent's water crackers were believed to have therapeutic properties, and were used to treat dyspepsia, or indigestion. They were good for a baby's teething, and were touted as an after-dinner incentive to assist digestion. An advertising slogan from about 1910 noted their suitability for individuals with weak stomachs. Bent water crackers were distributed widely and in the early 20th century could be found on major railways in the United States. Cruise ships also served Bent products. Advertisements painted on the company's delivery trucks, as shown in a photograph of the factory dated 1924, indicate that Bent's also made baked beans and brown bread at that time. It was the cracker production, however, that brought the company its national reputation. From the 1920s through the 1940s, Bent water crackers could be found in hotels, stores, and restaurants. Brass stencil plates now decorate the retail store at the G. H. Bent factory; these plates were once used to stencil the names and destinations of shipping crates of water crackers. They included the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York City; the Hotel Biltmore, New York City; the Hotel Commodore, New York City; Chesapeake Steamship Company, Baltimore; the Great Northern Railway Company, Seattle; S. S. Pierce Company, Boston; R. H. Macy & Company, New York City; the May Department Stores Company, Los Angeles; Keebler-Weyl Baking Company, Philadelphia; and Sunshine Biscuits Inc., St. Louis.

George H. Bent was actively involved in the ownership and operation of his cracker factory for roughly twenty years. By 1914, C. A. Griggs, a close associate of Bent, had taken over as the owner and manager of the business. [Bent, *History of the Bent Water Cracker*] Griggs had been associated with the company since the early 1890s. There was another transition in the company's ownership by the early 1920s, at which point the business was known as G. H. Bent Company. A 1921 Notice of Sale for the building, which is framed and displayed in the retail shop, notes that Percy L. Draper was then president of the corporation, and John C. Gerald was treasurer. Gerald remained involved in the business until the 1940s.

Arthur S. Pierotti (b. 1890) purchased the G. H. Bent Company in 1944. Pierotti, a native of Everett, owned a bottling operation in Natick before acquiring the cracker factory in Milton. He commuted to Milton from his residence in Wellesley. [Interview with James Pierotti] In 1947, Pierotti installed the factory's rotating ovens. Under his direction, the Bent factory became associated with cookie production in the mid-1940s. The same year the rotating ovens were installed, Pierotti had the 1921 brick oven addition on the south side of the building gutted of bricks and converted to use as a cookie storage room.

G. H. Bent Company was a vendor to the United States armed forces during and after World War II. During the war, the U. S. Army purchased water crackers (hardtack) for their troop ships. The Milton factory was known locally as "The Cracker Factory" until the mid-1940s, when the U. S. Navy entered into a contract with the company for cookie shipments. Consequently, cookie production overtook cracker production at the factory. Local residents of more recent

(continued)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 5

**G. H. Bent Company Factory
Milton (Norfolk Co.), MA**

generations refer to the factory as "The Broken Cookie Factory," a reference to the cookie pieces available for sale in Milton after the perfect cookies were shipped to the Navy.

In the late 1960s, the company added common crackers to its product line. Often confused with the water cracker, the common cracker is richer, slightly sweeter, and more crumbly than water crackers, with dough that contains yeast, shortening, and sugar. This dough yields common crackers (shaped in medium-sized rounds), pilot crackers (shaped in large perforated oblongs), and oyster crackers. [Fitzgerald, "The uncommon cracker story"]

Arthur S. Pierotti served as president of the company until 1984. The company remains in the Pierotti family today, under the direction of Gene Pierotti and James Pierotti, son and grandson, respectively, of Arthur S. Pierotti. G. H. Bent Company distributes its water crackers through dealerships in the United States, South America, Europe, and Asia. The company also produces an extensive line of cookies, date and nut breads, raisin and soda breads, and other products. In the cracker line, G. H. Bent Company currently produces water, common, and pilot crackers. The factory turns out about 18,000 crackers and 4,800 cookies a day. [Wisnia, "Milk and crackers"] The ground-floor retail shop, re-opened in 1995, sells homestyle cookies and breads along with cakes and brownies. The shop also has coffee, sandwiches, soups, salads, and delicatessen provisions for sale. Crackers are still sold in the shop, though broken crackers or cookies are not an integral part of the business. In keeping with its association for supplying hardtack to troops during the Civil War, today the G. H. Bent Company is a cracker purveyor to several Civil War re-enactments throughout the southern United States.

The G. H. Bent Company is one of the longest continuously operated businesses in the town of Milton. Another is the Thatcher Farm Dairy, which has been run by the Manning family since 1891. [Wisnia]

Archaeological Significance

Since patterns of prehistoric occupation in Milton are poorly understood, any surviving sites could be significant. Prehistoric sites in this area can contribute information towards a better understanding of the settlement and subsistence relationships between sites located on major riverine drainages like the Neponset River, major ponds such as Ponkapoag Pond and interior upland tributary streams in these areas, including the nominated locale. Prehistoric sites in this area can also help better understand the local role and significance of regionally important sites including the Massachusetts Hornfels Braintree Slate Quarry located near the district and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The location of this site in the general area (within one mile) of the nominated property also indicated the potential for studies relating to Native American lithic technologies, including quarrying activities, and possibly exchange.

Historic archaeological resources described above have the potential to provide detailed information relating to the town's 19th century industrial development that was characterized largely by granite quarrying until the late 19th century when a more diversified industrial base developed. Filled granite quarries on the nominated property may contain information relating to the types of mining technologies in use at the quarries, the transport of granite from the quarries and the conditions of workers at the quarries. Detailed analysis of the fills from quarries may also contribute information

(continued)

United States Department of the Interior
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Continuation Sheet

Section number 8/9 Page 6/1

G. H. Bent Company Factory
Milton (Norfolk Co.), MA

relating to the social, cultural and economic composition of the town since the area was used as a landfill prior to construction of the factory. Occupational related features, especially trash areas may also be present on the property containing evidence of production activities at the Bent Factory. This information might include bakery equipment, packaging and evidence from worker's activities.

(end)

9. Major Bibliographical References

- Allison, Werner S. "When crackers are made by hand – and have been for one hundred and sixteen years. The story of a unique institution." *The National Biscuit Company Magazine*. (New York, New York) July 1917.
- Bent, George H. "History of the Bent Water Cracker 1801-1914. Manufactured by G. H. Bent Company, Milton, Mass." Information sheet distributed with crackers, 1914.
- Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, Colorado*. Brochure published by National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior. 1984.
- Fitzgerald, Vicki. "The uncommon cracker story." *The (Quincy) Patriot Ledger*. June 4, 1997, Food section, p. 19ff.
- Johnson, Allen, ed. *Dictionary of American Biography*. Vol. I (entry for Josiah Bent). NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964.
- Loughran, William J. "Yes, Virginia, there's still a common cracker." *Yankee Magazine*, January 1971.
- MHC Inventory Forms: G. H. Bent Company, 7 Pleasant Street (MHC #26); Samuel Adams House, 307 Highland Street (MHC #42); and 371 Highland Street (MHC #50). Prepared by William J. Loughran, Milton Historical Commission, 1978.
- MHC Reconnaissance Survey Report for Milton. May 1981.
- Teele. *History of Milton*. 1887.
- Wisnia, Saul. "Milk and crackers and history. Family operators of a venerable dairy and a bakery keep tradition alive." *Boston Sunday Globe*. February 11, 1996, South Weekly section, p.1.
- Interviews with Gene Pierotti, President, and James Pierotti, Director of Operations, G. H. Bent Company, July 23, 1999.

(end)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1

**G. H. Bent Company Factory
Milton (Norfolk Co.), MA**

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is shown on the accompanying detail of the Town of Milton assessors' map. The boundary encompasses the factory lot (9,340 square feet) plus the adjacent right-of-way (9,100 square feet). Currently the right-of-way is used as a driveway for the factory. The right-of-way also provides access to a land-locked, wooded parcel southeast of the factory building, also owned by the G. H. Bent Company. This wooded parcel is not included in the nominated property.

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the area most closely associated with the daily operations and management of the G. H. Bent Company factory.

(end)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

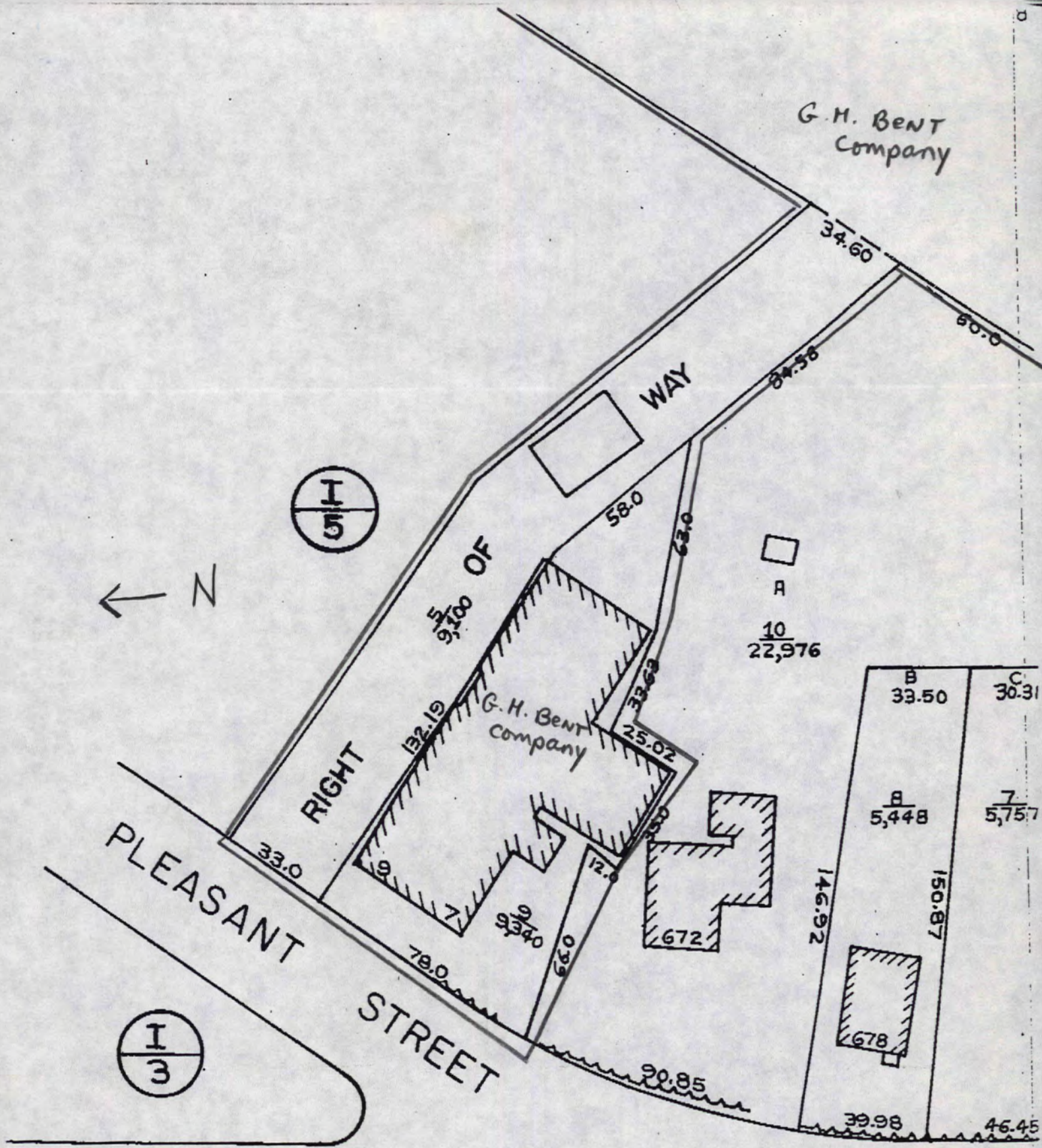
Section number photos Page 1

**G. H. Bent Company Factory
Milton (Norfolk Co.), MA**

Photographs

1. View of main building from Randolph Avenue, camera facing E. November 1997 (James E. Pierotti photo)
2. Bent factory, June 1893, facing NE (photographer unknown)
3. Bent factory, August 15, 1924, facing NE (photographer unknown)
4. Bent factory and transport, August 15, 1924, facing E (photographer unknown)
5. North elevation, July 1999, facing SE (Broomer photo)
6. Rear elevation with storage shed, July 1999, facing W (Broomer photo)
7. Original Dutch oven, no longer used, July 1999, facing W (Broomer photo)

(end)



RANDOLPH
O 664

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Bent, G.H., Company Factory
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Norfolk

DATE RECEIVED: 1/11/00 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/24/00
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 2/09/00 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/25/00
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 00000075

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 2/10/00 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



G.H. BENT Company
7 Pleasant Street
Milton

James F. Pierotti November 1997
Milton

1 of 47

Left Center view of Building
From Randolph Avenue



G.H. BENT & CO

G.H. BENT & CO
STRICTLY HAND MADE
COLD WATER CRACKERS.
MILTON, MASS.

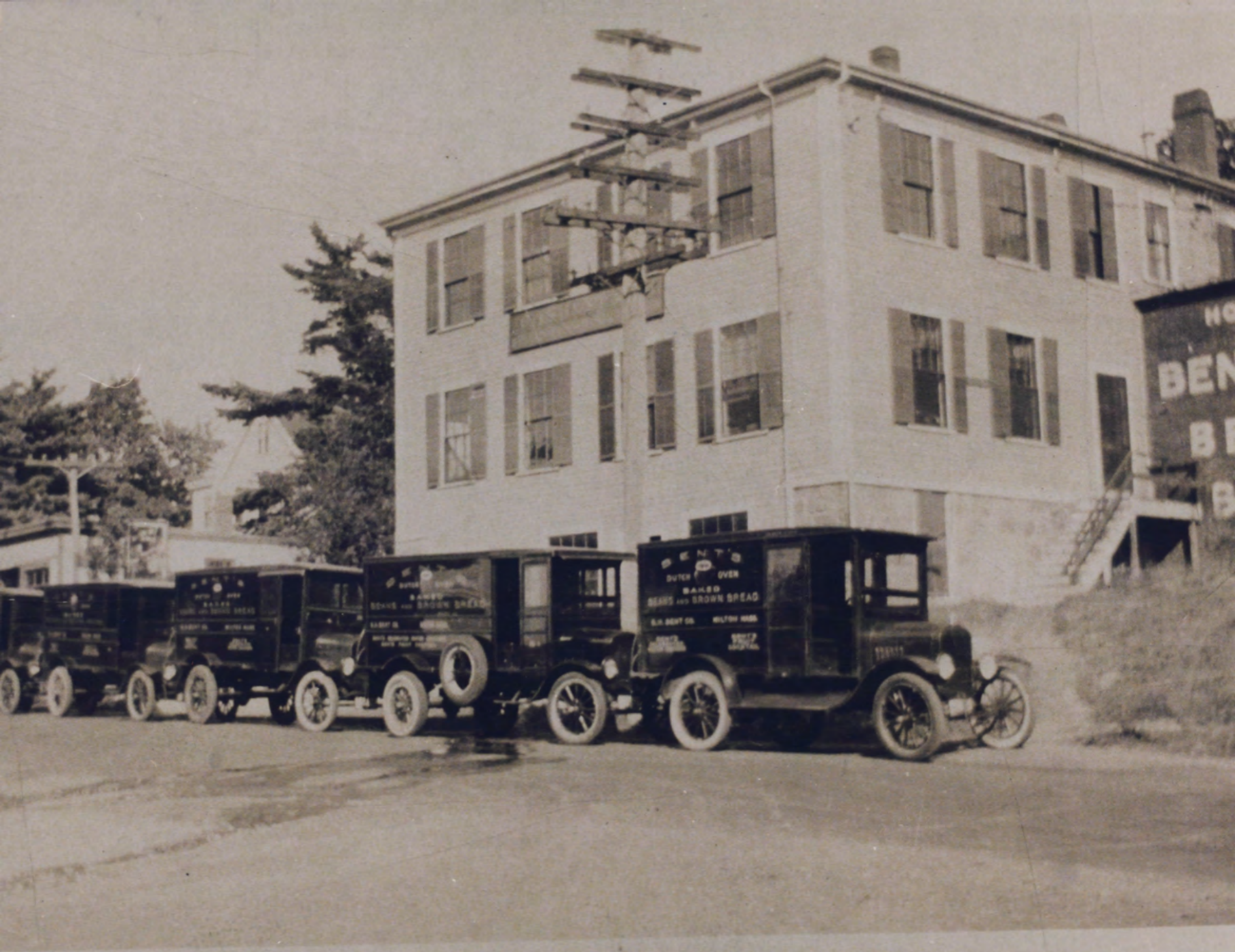
LONG GRASS
STAND AT ALL
MILTON, MASS.
JULY 2ND 1891

G. H. BENT Company
7 Pleasant Street
Milton

photographer unknown
June 1893

PRESTIGE 101 N 00 83
-050-050 010 010 0 095

20F 7

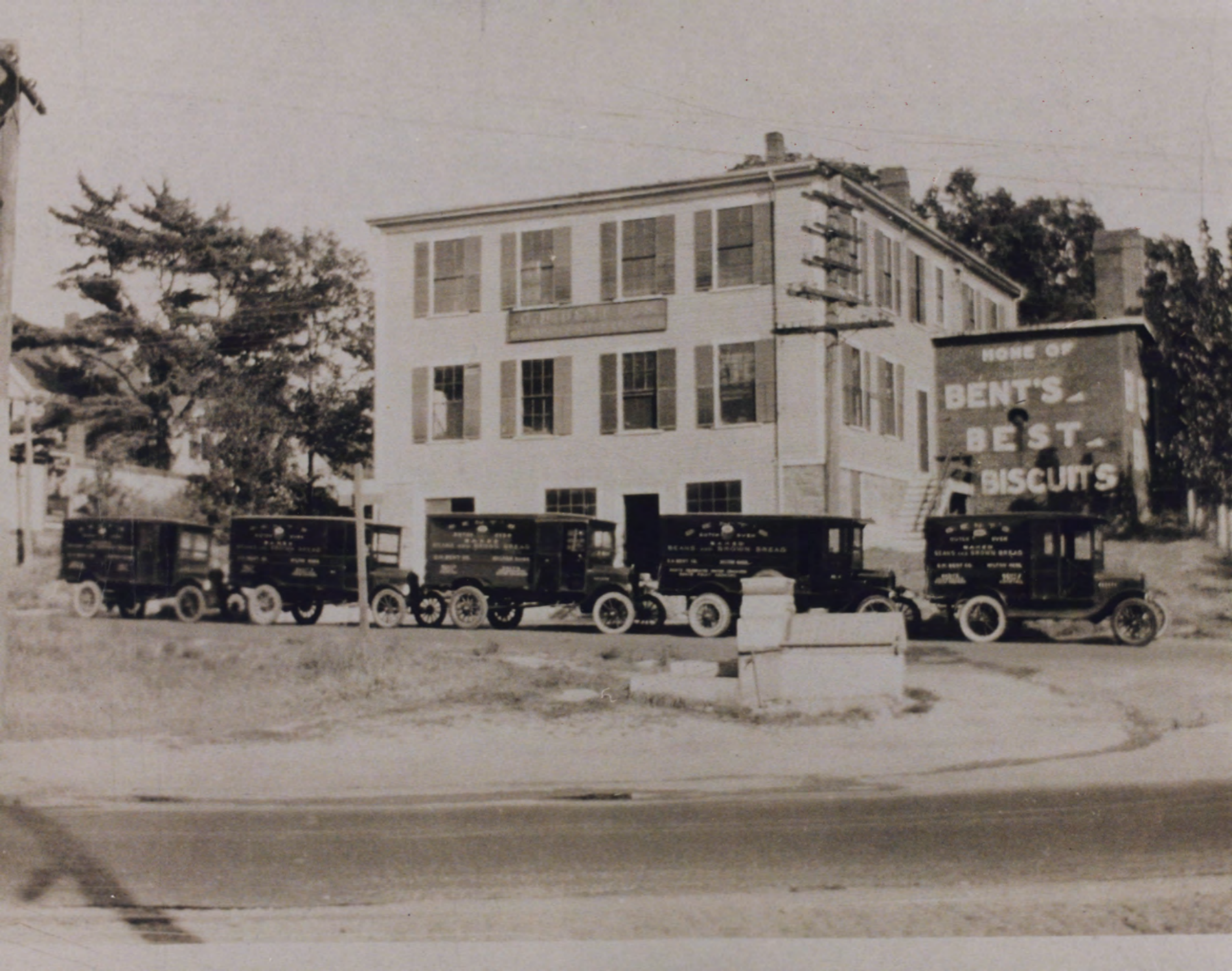


G.H. BENT Company
7 Pleasant Street
Milton

photographer unknown
August 15, 1924

PRESTIGE 101 N 00 81
-050-040 000 010 0 101

3 OF 7



G H BENT Company
7 Pleasant Street
Milton

photographer unknown
August 15, 1924

PRESTIGE 101 N 00 33
-050-020 010-010 0 093

4 OF 7



G. H. BE
MANUFACT
Of Cold Water Crack



G. H. Bent Company Factory
7 Pleasant Street
Milton, MA

Photo: July 1999 (K. K. Broome)

Neg: G. H. Bent Company
North (side) elevation

5 OF 7



G.H. Bent Company Factory

7 Pleasant Street

Milton, MA

Photo: July 1999 (K.K. Browner)

Neg: G.H. Bent Company

East (rear) elevation w/ attached storage shed

6 of 7



GH Bent Company Factory

7 Pleasant Street

Milton MA

Photo: July 1999 (KK Broomer)

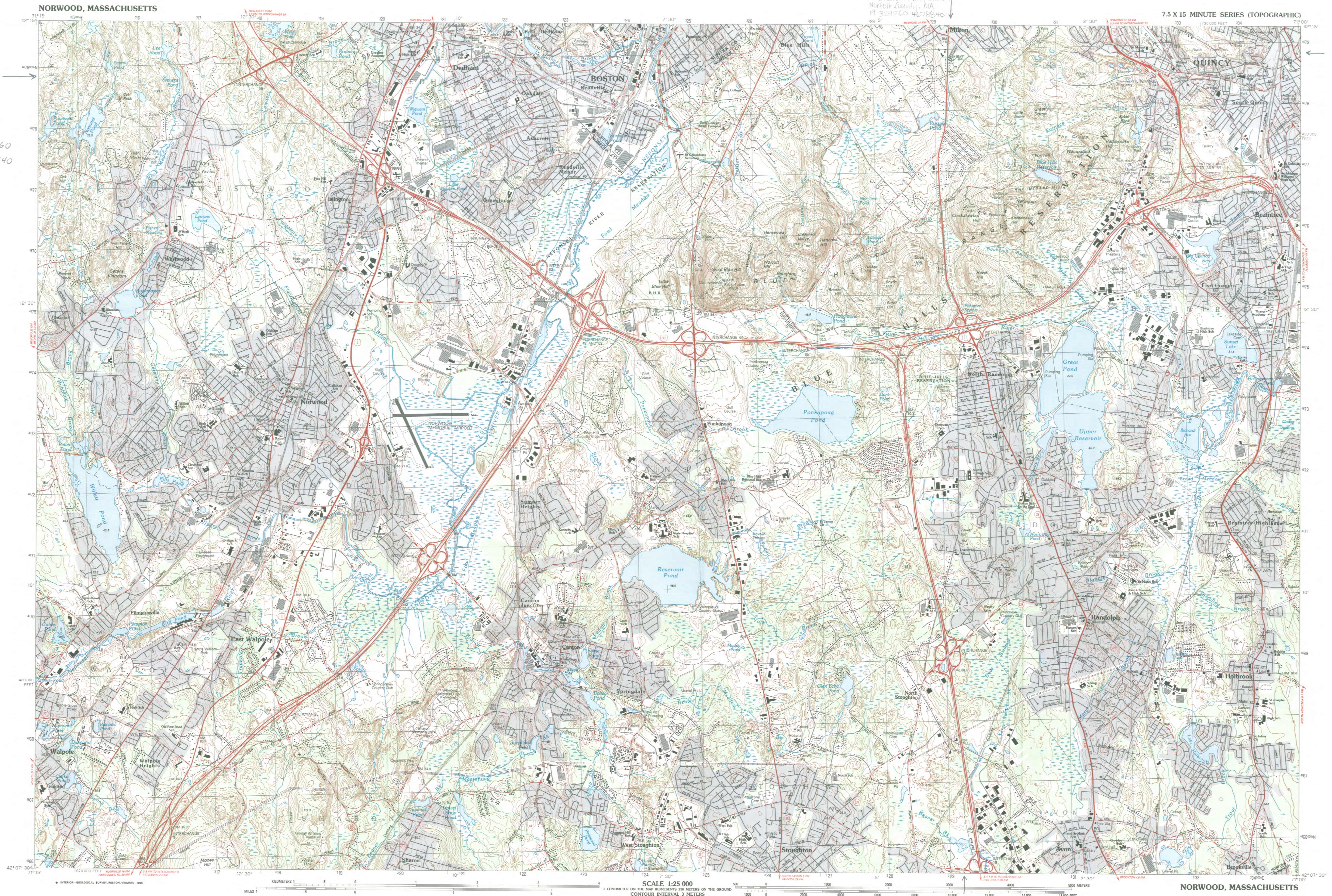
Neg: GH Bent Company

One of original Dutch ovens (no longer used)
East wall of 1st (upper level) floor

7 of 7

ZONE 19
E 329 260
N 4678 840

G. H. Bent Company Factory
77 Wood Street, Milton
Norfolk County, MA
329 260 # 4678 840



Norwood

MASSACHUSETTS

G. H. Bent Company Factory
77 WOOD STREET, MILTON, MA

1:25 000-scale metric
topographic map



7.5 X 15 MINUTE QUADRANGLE
SHOWING

- Contours and elevations in meters
- Highways, roads and other manmade structures
- Water features
- Woodland areas
- Geographic names



GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

1985

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
in cooperation with Massachusetts Department
of Public Works

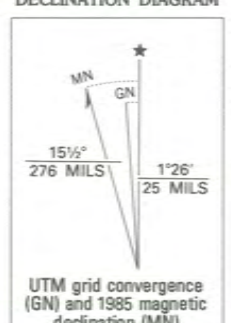
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and Commonwealth of
Massachusetts agencies

Compiled by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
taken 1978. Field checked 1979. Map edited 1985
Supersedes Norwood and Blue Hills 1:25,000-scale
maps dated 1970 and 1971.

Projection and 1000-meter grid: Universal
Transverse Mercator, zone 19
10,000-foot grid ticks based on Massachusetts coordinate
system, mainland zone. 1927 North American Datum
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983
move the projection lines 6 meters south and
41 meters west as shown by dashed corner ticks
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of
the National or State reservations shown on this map

CONTOUR INTERVAL 3 METERS
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
CONTROL ELEVATIONS SHOWN TO THE NEAREST 0.1 METER
OTHER ELEVATIONS SHOWN TO THE NEAREST 0.3 METER

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS

CONVERSION TABLE		DECLINATION DIAGRAM	ADJOINING MAPS
Meters	Feet		1 2 3
2	5.280		4 5
4	10.561		6 7
6	15.842		8
8	21.123		
10	26.404		
12	31.685		
14	36.966		
16	42.247		
18	47.528		
To convert meters to feet multiply by 3.2808		UTM grid convergence (0.8 m per 1000 m) declination (M) 6 meters of map Diagram is approximate	1 Framingham 2 Boston South 3 Hull 4 Medfield 5 Weymouth 6 Franklin 7 Brockton 8 Whitman
To convert feet to meters multiply by 0.3048			

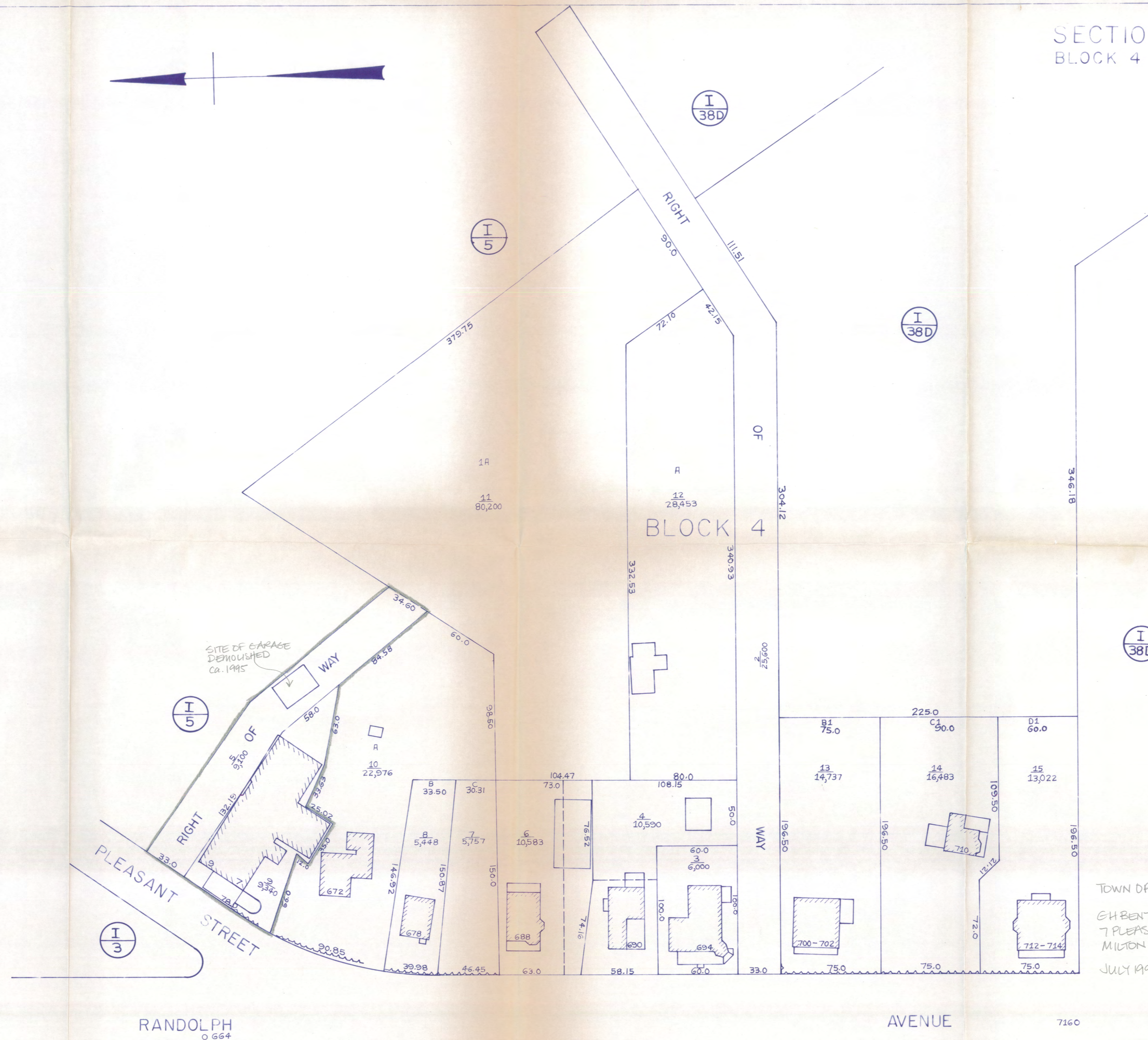
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092

Topographic Map Symbols

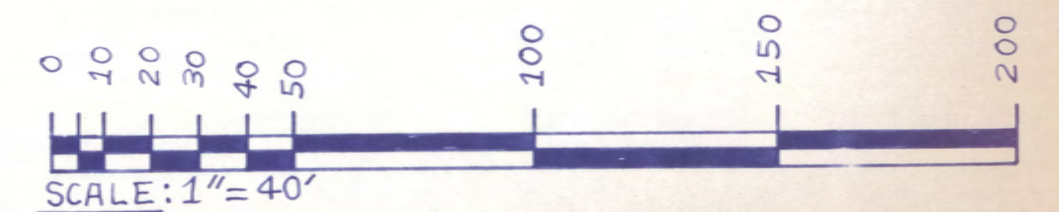
Primary highway, hard surface	.....
Secondary highway, hard surface	.....
Light-duty road, hard or improved surface	.....
Unimproved road, trail	.....
Road marker: intersection, U. S. State	.....
Railroad: standard gage, narrow gage	.....
Bridge: drawbridge	.....
Footbridge: overpass, underpass	.....
Bath area: only selected bathed buildings shown	.....
House, barn, church, school, large structure	.....
Boundary:	.....
National, with monument	.....
State	.....
County, parish	.....
Civil township, precinct, district	.....
Incorporated city, village, town	.....
National or State reservation, small	.....
Land grant with monument; found section corner	.....
U. S. public lands survey: range, township, section	.....
Range, township, section line: location approximate	.....
Fence or field line	.....
Power transmission line, located tower	.....
Dam; dam with lock	.....
Cemetery, grave	.....
Campground, picnic area, U. S. location monument	.....
Windmill; water well; spring	.....
Mine shaft; prospect; adit or cave	.....
Control: horizontal station; vertical station; spot elevation	.....
Contours: index; intermediate; supplementary; depression	.....
Distorted surface: strip mine, levee, sand	.....
Bathymetric contours: index, intermediate	.....
Perennial lake and stream; intermittent lake and stream	.....
Rapids, large and small; falls, large and small	.....
Submerged marsh; marsh, swamp	.....
Land subject to controlled inundation; woodland	.....
Orchard; vineyard	.....

A pamphlet describing topographic maps is available on request

SECTION I
BLOCK 4



TOWN OF MILTON ASSESSOR'S MAP
CH BENT COMPANY FACTORY
7 PLEASANT STREET
MILTON MA
JULY 1999





The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Massachusetts Historical Commission

January 6, 2000

Ms. Carol Shull
National Register of Historic Places
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Mail Stop 2280, Suite 400
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the following nomination form:

G.H. Bent Cookie Company, 7 Pleasant St., Milton (Norfolk Co.), MA

The nomination has been voted eligible by the State Review Board and has been signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer. The owners of the property were notified of pending State Review Board consideration 30 to 45 days before the meeting and were afforded the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Betsy Friedberg".

Betsy Friedberg
National Register Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission

enclosure

cc: James F. Pierotti, G.H. Bent Company
Frances Westerbeke, Chair, Milton Historical Commission
Richard Neely, Milton Board of Selectmen
Kathleen Kelly Broome, Preservation Consultant
Bernard Lynch, Planning Board

220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125 • (617) 727-8470

Fax: (617) 727-5128 • TDD: 1-800-392-6090

www.state.ma.us/sec/mhc