

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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NATIONAL
REGISTER

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name James Parker House

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number R.R. 1, Box 30 Center Road

N/A not for publication

city, town Shirley

N/A vicinity

state Massachusetts code 025 county Middlesex

code 017 zip code 01464

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

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

Category of Property

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
	<u> </u> sites
	<u> </u> structures
	<u> </u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Valerie Ann Talmage
Signature of certifying official

Jan. 15, 1988
Date

Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission;

State or Federal agency and bureau State Historic Preservation Officer

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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):

Entered in the
National Register

2-25-88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use James Parker House, Shirley, Massachusetts

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwelling

Agriculture

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

New England Colonial

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls wood

roof wood

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The James Parker House is located in Shirley, Massachusetts, a rural town in Middlesex County, just outside the region's most intense suburban development. The house sits on a large wooded property, 187 acres along Spruce Swamp Brook, and this prosperous farming enterprise once included a cider press, hop house, and barn. Today, the nominated property, the eighteenth-century James Parker House and its surrounding ten acres of fields, is the historic core of the property, a well-preserved New England Colonial house. Its exceptional interest comes from its beginning as a small settlers house and its subsequent expansion to the familiar, large New England center chimney house.

Valley Farm is situated on the slope of a valley some 500 feet from the west side of Center Road and one mile south of the Shirley Center Historic District (NR pending), overlooking fields, forests, and wetlands traversed by a brook. The eastern gable end of the house becomes visible from the dirt access road at some distance as it descends into the valley, between a wide field on the right and forest on the left. An 18th-century town road originally ran right through the farmyard, leading eventually to a lumber mill and shoddy mill, the earliest local industrial activity, at a dam on the Catacunemaug River near the other end of the property. The structure of this road is still clearly visible beyond the house. The present dirt road leading down into the valley to the house represents a relocation of that segment of the town road, and was the topic of much dispute in 1780 (Parker diary). It was discontinued as a town road in the 1970s. The greatest change in the general appearance of the surrounding valley has been the gradual disappearance of the open fields and orchards and the take-over by second growth forest cover. Thus less than 10 acres of fields remain, and 177 acres are now forest and wetlands. The entire property is in the process of being made into a permanent family conservation trust.

The perspective view of the James Parker House (photo No. 1) reveals a handsome two-story 18th century New England Colonial farmhouse, with center chimney piercing the wood shingled roof in front of the ridge pole. Its south-facing facade consists of six bays of irregular size on the ground floor level and four bays on the upper floor. The two westernmost bays turn

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Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1James Parker House
Shirley, Massachusetts

southwest at an angle of 20 degrees, creating an unusual roof overhang above. The James Parker House is a composite of an early-18th-century, single story house and a late-18th-century, two story house that incorporated about two thirds of the original house within it but at a changed angle. A long three bay porch, formerly enclosed as a utility shed, projects forward at right angle to the main house, largely concealing the surviving portion of the one story cottage. The original front door of the cottage, approached from a massive granite sill, forms a secondary entrance through the end of the porch. The main entrance, forming the focus of the south facade, reveals the original raised panel door, approached likewise across a large granite sill.

The eastern elevation consists of three wide bays of 6/9 window sashes topped by molded cornice lintels. An unusual architectural feature is a coupling of two ground floor windows with an extra window between, the whole unified by carrying a single cornice lintel across all three. Viewed from the west, the house (photo No. 2) rises from a steep 20 foot terraced slope and overlooks a drystone pond (1941) on a brook. Here the original settler's cottage is the dominant feature with its steep wood shingled roof, two ground floor 6/6 windows, and a similar gable window. Behind the projecting cottage rises the gable end of the main house itself, but facing some 20 degrees more to the south. A small 4-light window at the second floor level and a 4/4 attic window in the gable form the only openings. The open porch forms an extension of this grouping to the south while to the north at the rear of the main house, the side of a one-room ell (19th century) with a 6/9 window is visible. The rear, north facade (photos No. 3 and 4) again shows the three distinct elements of the house: the back wall of the early house with its original door and steep roof, the main house with two 6/9 second floor windows and three below, and the single room ell in between.

The small house was significantly enlarged in 1797. Located on the west, the original house was oriented to the southwest, and was apparently a center entry, hall and parlor house, with garret under its gable roof. A large new house was added to the east, incorporating the eastern room on the first floor, but reoriented more directly to the south. In spite of this unusual form, the new house retains a traditional center chimney house plan. Characteristic is the small lobby entry with a three run open string stair backing onto a large chimney stack. The three primary rooms on the first floor cluster around this common source of heat. The west room preserves many features of the original house including a low ceiling, measuring six feet eight inches, and horizontal board wainscoting. Also on the west are small unheated rooms, including the western tier of the original house, and the

continued

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Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

James Parker House
Shirley, Massachusetts

rear, north west room of the new house. Two larger rooms with fireplaces in the new house follow the traditional plan, one to the east of the entry, and a rear room along the north wall. The second floor of the new house is subdivided into six rooms, the front two heated by the center chimney. To the west is the garret of the original house.

The external appearance of the house essentially maintains that of the 18th century. The 19th century provided the addition of the diminutive rear ell. The wood shingling of all roofs has been retained. Much of the clapboarding is original and painted yellow as recorded in Parker's diary in 1840. The only significant 20th-century change is in the appearance of the three bay porch. Originally a shed and carriage house, its west face had been entirely boarded in and its east face enclosed with flat arches containing wide double doors. In 1933, the walls were removed, retaining the entire original roof structure, pegged posts, and diagonal braces. The original well with its circular sandstone cover is still visible on the porch floor, but is now used as a gray water soak-away. Until 1932, the house faced a large three-level barn to the south; only the foundations indicate its outline. With the above-described utility shed, these formed three sides of a square farmyard. Beyond the barn along the farm road a cider mill was built into the hillside with a second barn on the opposite side of the road. The cider mill has been replicated in part with an open woodshed of similar shape and on the same foundation (1979). The barn had been restored in 1940, but burned down two years later. Still further along the road, a hop kiln existed in the 19th century. There is no record of when it disappeared, probably in the 1920s.

continued

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James Parker House
Shirley, Massachusetts

Archaeology

While no prehistoric sites are currently recorded on the property, it is highly likely that sites are present. The physical characteristics of the property, several well drained knolls and terraces along Spruce Swamp would have made this an attractive area for native settlement and subsistence activities. Given the large size of the parcel, limited historical development, and the physical characteristics of the area, it is highly probable that sites are present. Any surviving sites would be important in documentary patterns of prehistoric occupation within the town which at present are poorly understood.

There is also a high potential for significant historic archaeological sites within the property. Archaeological survey and testing could help to define the location of several outbuildings no longer extant, as well as the structure and content of occupation related features (trash pits, privies, wells). Analysis of these remains could document and detail the evolution of the family farmstead over 1 1/2-centuries. These remains would also help define the changing social, cultural and economic characteristics of those who occupied the house and the town of Shirley during the 18th and 19th centuries.

8. Statement of Significance James Parker House, Shirley, Massachusetts

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locallyApplicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ DCriteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

AgricultureArchitectureCommunity Planning and Development

Period of Significance

1715-1921

Significant Dates

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The James Parker House in Shirley, Massachusetts is a property of 10 acres surrounding a well-preserved, eighteenth-century residence of New England center-chimney form. Built in two phases early in the century and greatly expanded in 1797, the architectural interest of the house is its merging of two house types. Just as the house changed in form, so too did the functioning farm, as a settlement era homestead, rented to a tenant, and as a prosperous farm early in the nineteenth century. The property retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling, and meets criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places on the local level.

The area, now Shirley, was originally part of the large town of Groton, granted in 1655. This western portion, separated from the settlement core by the Nashua River, was too distant for early settlement. By 1747, however, 33 men petitioned for local autonomy, and the District of Shirley was established in 1753, taking its name from the Royal Governor. The next year a meetinghouse was built near the town's geographic center, forming the town's institutional focus, and subsequently became the village center, designated as the Shirley Center Local Historic District in 1973 (NR Pending). Valley Farm is located about one mile south of this village on Center Road.

The first settler associated with the farm was William Farwell, born in Groton in 1688, and a member of the first generations to settle west of the Nashua River. He is attributed as the builder of the oldest portion of the house, presumably as he reached maturity and marriageable age, after 1715. The house he constructed is in a small form increasingly being associated with the early settlement phase of Massachusetts town formation: single story with garret under a gable roof housing a simple hall and parlor plan. At least three other houses of related form from the same period are recorded in the town's inventory, as well as examples later expanded. In 1766, as he entered old age, Farwell sold "40 acres and a dwelling" to James Parker.

☒ See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References James Parker House, Shirley, Massachusetts

Bolton, Ethel. Shirley Uplands and Intervales, 1914.

Chandler, Seth. History of the Town of Shirley from its Settlement to 1882, 1983.

Parker, James. Diary. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA.

Reconnaissance Survey Town Report, Massachusetts Historical Commission, 1980.

Schuler, Gretchen. Shirley Narrative History. Typescript, 1986.

☐ See continuation sheet

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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State historic preservation office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Specify repository:

Massachusetts Historical Commission

Inventory of Historic Assets #74

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 10 acres

Quad- Shirley

Scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	9	2	8	1	8	2	0	4	7	1	5	3	7	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting

Northing

C

1	9	2	8	1	5	9	0	4	7	1	5	0	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

B

1	9	2	8	1	8	6	0	4	7	1	5	0	4	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting

Northing

D

1	9	2	8	1	6	8	0	4	7	1	5	3	7	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property included in the nomination is the ten acres surrounding the James Parker House. See attached assessors map.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Only these ten acres remain as fields, their use during the period of significance; the remainder of the 187 acres associated with the house is primarily secondary growth and therefore excluded from the nomination.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Claire Dempsey/MHC with Herman H. Field/ FAIA, AICP

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission

date September 1987

street & number 80 Boylston Street

telephone (617) 727-8470

city or town Boston

state Massachusetts zip code 02116

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 1James Parker House
Shirley, Massachusetts

James Parker was born in Groton in 1744, the fifth generation of a family that came to the town in 1660. He married Sarah Dickerson and together they had ten children. Parker apparently did not occupy the house with his family, however, preferring to rent the small property to tenants William Farr and Levi Farnsworth until 1796. At that time he notes in his diary, "Old Richardson moved out of my house" and the next year, "I strip my old house I raised a new part a fine day had 10 hands" (quoted in Bolton 1914: 209). Parker's "new part" was an addition significantly larger than the existing house, and the additive method he employed contrasts with better known New England models.

Parker rejected more common solutions to such expansion: raising a second story, adding tiers of rooms to the side or rear, or transforming the original house into an ell for a much larger house. He retained the existing house and built a larger house that straddles it, rising higher, and extending deeper, to nearly surround it. Parker was unwilling to abandon the small house completely when he erected the newer house type, a larger house of two stories under a gable roof with rooms clustered around a center chimney. The house he built includes many elements of the newer form, but altered to accommodate his particular situation: he changed the orientation of the house to the new roadway. The interior corresponds to the model form, and the exterior emulates it in its regularly spaced openings and centrally located door. But the angled facade, the overhanging roof, and the first floor paired windows mark it as his unique solution. Students of vernacular architecture focus much of their efforts on the development of sequences of local building traditions, and the Parker House provides a view of that process in the conceptualization of one home owner.

Dating the other elements of Parker's farmstead is more difficult. A large barn opposite the house, and the woodshed ell that extends in front of the house formed an enclosed farmyard. Further along the road a cider press was available for the processing of his orchard crops. In 1802, in response to the popularity of hops, Parker constructed a kiln and hop house. The same year at fifty-eight he turned over the running of the farm to his oldest son James, then thirty-one, and moved to a house in the center village.

continued

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Section number 8 Page 2

James Parker House
Shirley, Massachusetts

Three generations of Parkers continued to work the farm. James Jr. married Ruth Harkness shortly after taking over the farm. They had three children, and the farm was inherited by oldest son Thomas at James Jr.'s death in 1853. Thomas had married Nancy Crossman, in 1839, and their children Emerson and Pamela saw the decline of the farm. Both died unmarried, and Pamela ended her life in eccentric seclusion and poverty in 1921. Ten years later, in 1932, the semi-derelict property was acquired by its present owner, Herman Field. At that time, the property contained approximately 110 acres, with additional parcels added by Field. During Field's ownership the neglected house has been sensitively repaired and retains significant portions of both exterior and interior finish.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEETParker, James, House
Middlesex County
MASSACHUSETTS

JAN 25 1988

Working No. _____
Fed. Reg. Date: 2-7-89
Date Due: 2/25/88 - 3/10/88
Action: ☒ ACCEPT 2-25-88
☐ RETURN
☐ REJECT
Federal Agency: _____Entered in the
National Register

- ☐
- resubmission
-
- ☐
- nomination by person or local government
-
- ☐
- owner objection
-
- ☐
- appeal

Substantive Review: ☐ sample ☐ request ☐ appeal ☐ NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria _____
Reviewer _____
Discipline _____
Date _____
_____ see continuation sheetNomination returned for: _____ technical corrections cited below
_____ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

7. Description

Condition

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ excellent | ☐ deteriorated |
| ☐ good | ☐ ruins |
| ☐ fair | ☐ unexposed |

Check one

- ☐
- unaltered
-
- ☐
- altered

Check one

- ☐
- original site
-
- ☐
- moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- ☐
- summary paragraph
-
- ☐
- completeness
-
- ☐
- clarity
-
- ☐
- alterations/integrity
-
- ☐
- dates
-
- ☐
- boundary selection

8. Significance

Period Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- ☐ summary paragraph
- ☐ completeness
- ☐ clarity
- ☐ applicable criteria
- ☐ justification of areas checked
- ☐ relating significance to the resource
- ☐ context
- ☐ relationship of integrity to significance
- ☐ justification of exception
- ☐ other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

UTM References _____

Verbal boundary description and justification _____

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national ____ state ____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title

date

13. Other

- ☐ Maps
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

Signed _____ Date _____ Phone: _____



James Parker House, Valley Farm
RR 1 Box 30 Center Road
Shirley, MA 01464

H. Field, May 1986
negative at above

Photo No. 1 of 4
view: east and south facades



James Parker House, Valley Farm
RR1 Box 30 Center Road
Shirley, MA 01464

H. Field, May 1986
negative at above

Photo No. 2 of 4
view: western facade

2



James Parker House, Valley Farm
RR 1 Box 30 Center Road
Shirley, MA 01464

H. Field, May 1986
negative at same

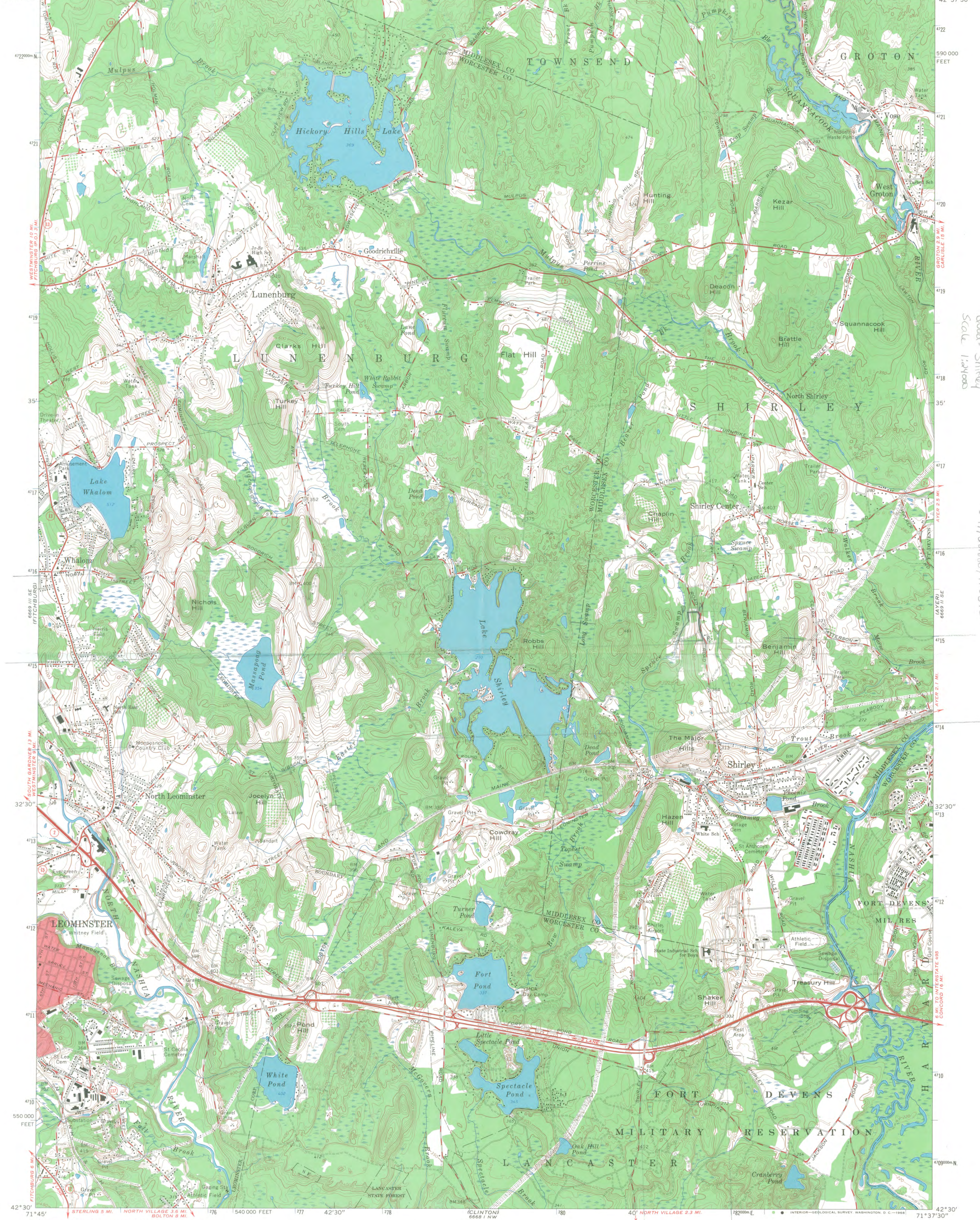
Photo No. 3 of 4
view: north facade &
west facade

3



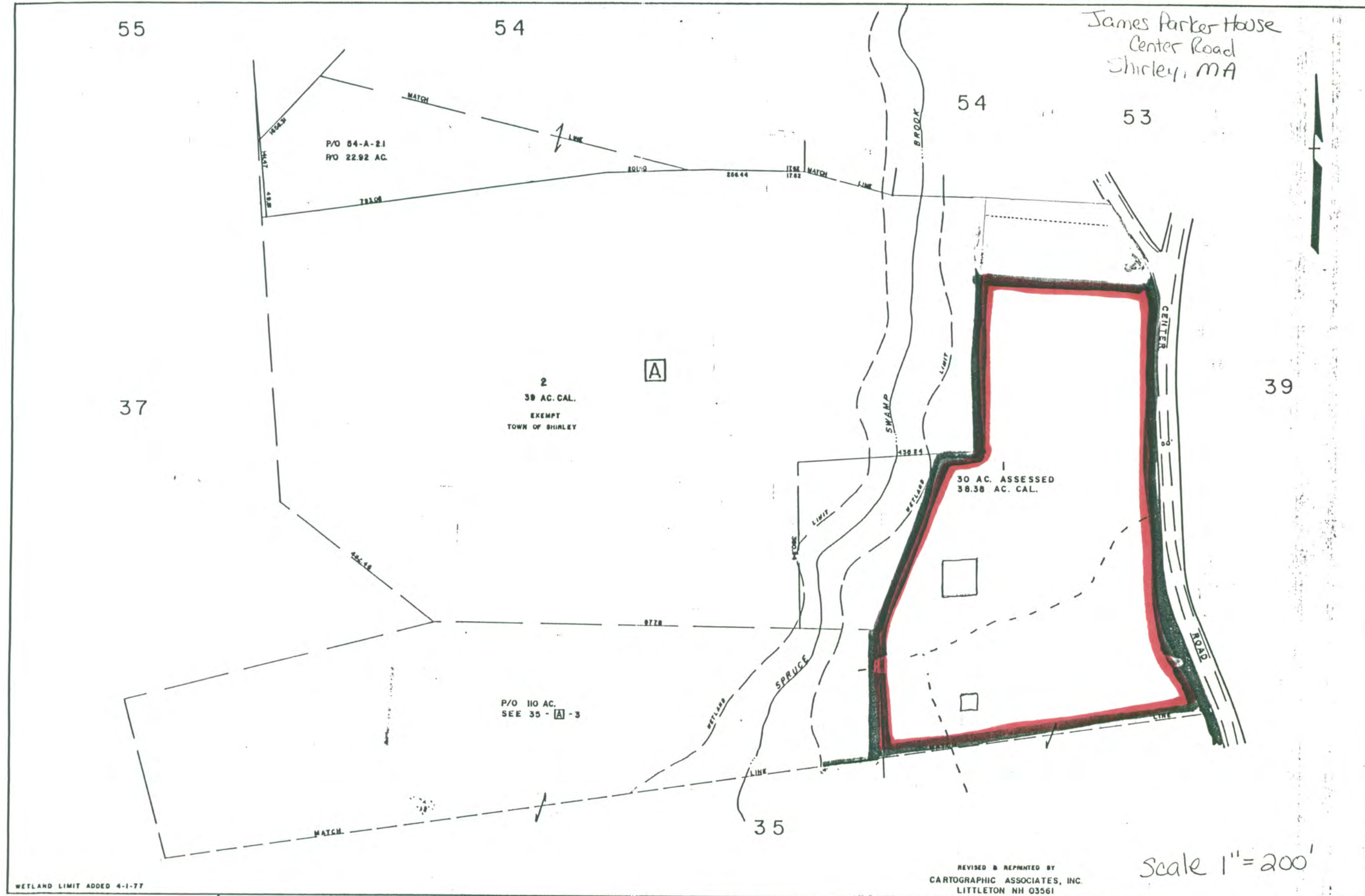
James Parker House, Valley Farm
RR 1 Box 30 Center Road
Shirley, MA 01464
H. Field, May 1986
negative at above

Photo No. 4 of 4
view: north facade of house
with ell



JAMES PARKER HOUSE
SHIRLEY, MA
MAP # 1 of 2

James Parker House
Center Road
Shirley, MA



FOR TAX PURPOSES ONLY
NOT TO BE USED FOR CONVEYANCE
PREPARED BY
GENERAL MAPPING INC.
Troy, N.Y. 12180

LEGEND	
PROPERTY LINE	---
WETLAND LIMIT LINE	---
BOUNDARY OF TOWN OF SHIRLEY	---
WETLAND	---
WETLAND - 10' WIDE	---
WETLAND - 20' WIDE	---
WETLAND - 30' WIDE	---
WETLAND - 40' WIDE	---
WETLAND - 50' WIDE	---
WETLAND - 60' WIDE	---
WETLAND - 70' WIDE	---
WETLAND - 80' WIDE	---
WETLAND - 90' WIDE	---
WETLAND - 100' WIDE	---

REVISIONS	
1	GENERAL MAPPING INC. 12-31-78
2	GENERAL MAPPING INC. 12-31-78
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17	GENERAL MAPPING INC. 12-31-78
18	GENERAL MAPPING INC. 12-31-78
19	GENERAL MAPPING INC. 12-31-78
20	GENERAL MAPPING INC. 12-31-78

TOWN OF SHIRLEY
BOARD OF ASSESSORS
SHIRLEY, MASS.

MAP NO. 38

DATE, AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY: 4-27-79 DATE, MAP: 8-1-79
PHOTO NO: 12-84 SCALE: 1" = 200'

Revised To
January 1, 1987



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Office of the Secretary of State
Michael Joseph Connolly, Secretary

Massachusetts Historical Commission

Valerie A. Talmage

Executive Director

State Historic Preservation Officer

January 19, 1988

Carol Shull
National Register of Historic Places
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed you will find the nomination forms for the following properties:

Chester, Chester Center Historic District, Skyline Trail

Needham, Israel Whitney House, 963 Central Avenue

Shirley, James Parker House, R.R. 1, Box 39 Center Road

They have been voted eligible by the State Review Board and have been signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer. Owners were notified of pending State Review Board consideration 30-75 days before the meeting and were afforded the opportunity to comment. No comments have been received to date.

Sincerely,

Betsy Friedberg
Betsy Friedberg
National Register Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission

BF/es

Enclosure

JA 25