

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received

MAR 3 1982

date entered

APR 1 1982

**1. Name**

historic Davis Mills House

and/or common Same

**2. Location**

street & number 945 Central Avenue

N/A not for publication

city, town Needham

N/A vicinity of

congressional district 9th

state Massachusetts

code 025

county Norfolk

code 021

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Dr. Richard E. Toran and Sally A. Toran

street & number 945 Central Avenue

city, town Needham

N/A vicinity of

state Massachusetts 02192

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Norfolk County Registry of Deeds

street & number High Street

city, town Dedham

state Massachusetts

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Inventory of the Historic Assets  
Of the Commonwealth

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1977

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

Massachusetts Historical Commission

city, town Boston

state Massachusetts

## 7. Description

NEEDHAM: Davis-Mills House, 954 Central Street

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Davis Mills House sits proudly on a three-acre site on a sloping hillside overlooking Needham's old town center, now Townsend Green. Surrounding the house are lawns, fields, and gardens. Two unattached buildings -- a barn and a more modern garage -- also stand nearby.

The Mills House was built in 1834, and is a good local example of the late Federal style. The wood frame house is 2½ stories high with a gable roof and five bay facade. Detailing the double cube composition are twin rear wall chimneys, six over six window sash, and a delicate center entrance on the facade. This entry is composed of two slender undecorated pilasters topped with a high, dentillated frieze and projecting cornice, all containing narrow half-height sidelights and a six-panelled door. Extending west (to the rear) from the main block is the original kitchen ell, 2½ stories high with a gable roof. To this wing was added in 1916 an additional 2½ story ell, which now contains a more modern kitchen and work area. Several unobtrusive changes have been made to these rear wings, among them a bay window, dormer windows, and two secondary entrances.

The main block of the house has a parlor on either side of the front door and bedrooms above. One of the most notable interior features is a circular stairway which rises steeply to the second floor. Although somewhat cramped, the use of this motif does add a good deal of style to a "country house," and reflects a sophisticated turn of mind on the part of a country builder.

The Mills House has been well preserved by its successive owners and is in excellent physical condition.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below					
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention				

**Specific dates** 1834 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Davis Mills House possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship and is important in the history of Needham for several reasons. The Architectural quality of its vernacular design, a visually striking site, and identification with the locally prominent Mills family over several centuries, meet Criteria B and C of the National Register of Historic Places.

The Davis Mills House stands on the easterly slope of North Hill and overlooks the original center of the town. The site was originally reserved as ministerial land and required a series of acts passed by the General Court to release this property for sale.

Members of the Mills family were among the earliest in the area, at one time known as "Mills country." Samuel Mills was a landholder as early as 1674, before the purchase of the land from representatives of the Massachusetts tribe in 1680. Later generations served as surveyors of highways, town incorporators, Minutemen, militiamen, and businessmen. Davis Collins Mills (1800–1865), who built this house in 1834, was a sixth-generation descendant of the first Samuel Mills, and proved no exception to the family tradition of civic interest. Davis was the ninth member of his family to serve as selectman and also served as an assessor. At the time this building was constructed, Davis's uncle, two brothers, and a sister also lived in the neighborhood.

Davis Mills was a victualler, or butcher, and he operated a slaughter house in the original barn behind his house. His two brothers ran glue shops, and he supplied them with the raw material of their trade. The intersection of Central and Great Plain Avenues, near which all of the Mills houses stood, is still known as Dog Corner, a name acquired in the mid-nineteenth century because of the number of hounds kept by the Mills brothers, all hunting men.

Davis Mills bought the site from the First Parish in 1833, with the curious restriction "that he build a house within three years on the premises as large as the one built by Israel Whitney in the neighborhood." Israel Whitney's house, built in 1831, still stands next door, inviting comparison. The unusual delicacy of the doorway and interior circular stairway are perhaps other effects of this competition for attention.

Assessor's records show that the house was built between the spring of 1834 and the spring of 1835, when the completed house was assessed at \$725. Davis Mills was married in April of 1834, and moved into the house with his new bride. After the death of Mills in 1865, his son, Davis C. Mills, Jr., continued to occupy the house and carry on the family business on site. The building remained in the Mills family until the death of Davis Mills' widow in 1891. Its excellent state of preservation is a tribute to a succession of sympathetic owners.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Jones, Frederick Old Houses, Needham, MA., Needham, 1953  
 Clarke, George K. History of Needham, Boston, 1912.

Material from files of the Needham Historical Society

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 3 acres

Quadrangle name Natick

Quadrangle scale 1:25,000

UMT References

A 

1	9	3	1	4	3	4	0	4	6	8	4	0	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing					

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing					

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing					

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing					

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing					

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing					

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing					

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Easterly and southeasterly by Central Ave., 262 ft., southwesterly by land now or formerly of John N. Day, 430.77 ft., again southwesterly by land now or formerly of Marion A. Beckonert, 213.58 ft.; northerly by land now or formerly by Babson Institute, 228.60 ft.; northeasterly by said Babson Institute, Book 4882, page 630, Norfolk County Registry of Deeds.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Wendy Frontiero, Preservation Planner, w/ Needham Historical Commission

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date April, 1980

street & number 294 Washington Street telephone (617) 727-8470

city or town Boston state Massachusetts 02108

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Peter L. Weslowski

title Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission date 2/17/82

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Silvana Byers

Entered in the National Register

date 4/1/82

Keeper of the National Register

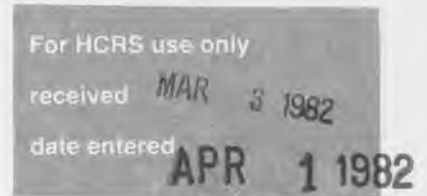
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

2

Historic archaeological resources in the form of artifacts and features are likely to exist on the Davis Mills House property. Archaeological features document changes in the use of land and the configuration of structures, information generally unavailable from written sources. Artifacts can indicate the range of domestic activities which occurred at the site and on occasion, the network of trade which brought goods to the particular status group who occupied the property.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

EVALUATION / RETURN SHEET

Property: Mills, Davis, House  
State, County: MA, Norfolk  
Federal Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Working No. 3/3/82-591  
Fed. Reg. Date: 2.1.83  
Date Due: 4-1-82 / 4-17-82  
Action:  ACCEPT 4/1/82  
 RETURN \_\_\_\_\_  
 REJECT \_\_\_\_\_  
photos 3  
maps 1

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 sheet

Nomination returned for:  technical corrections cited below  
 substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

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

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## **8. Significance**

Period \_\_\_\_\_ Area 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

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## **9. Major Bibliographical References**

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## **10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

UNIT References

Verbal boundary description and justification

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## **11. Form Prepared By**

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## **12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification**

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_\_\_ national \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

Site \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

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## **13. Other**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Maps
- \_\_\_\_\_ Photographs
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: 202 272-3504

Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet



1834

R10-7-79

KENNETH E. WATSON  
142 HILLCREST RD.  
NEEDHAM, MA 02192

# Davis Mills House

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH



### NAME

HISTORIC

Davis Mills House

AND/OR COMMON

same



### LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Needham

— VICINITY OF

COUNTY Norfolk

STATE Mass.



### PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT

Kenneth Watson

DATE OF PHOTO

1979

NEGATIVE FILED AT

142 Hillcrest Rd., Needham



### IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

East facade

PHOTO NO

MAR 3 1982

1



R10-4-79

KENNETH E. WATSON  
142 HILLCREST RD.  
NEEDHAM, MA 02192

Davis Mills House  
Needham, Mass.

South Facade

Photo #2

NEEDHAM, MA  
Davis Mills House

South facade  
Photo by Kenneth Watson  
Negative filed with  
photographer, 142  
Hillcrest Rd, Needham  
Photo 2 of 3

MAR 3 1982



R10-11-79

KENNETH E. WATSON  
142 HILLCREST RD.  
NEEDHAM, MA 02192

Davis Mills House  
Needham, Mass.  
Front Entry  
Photo

NEEDHAM, MA  
Davis Mills House

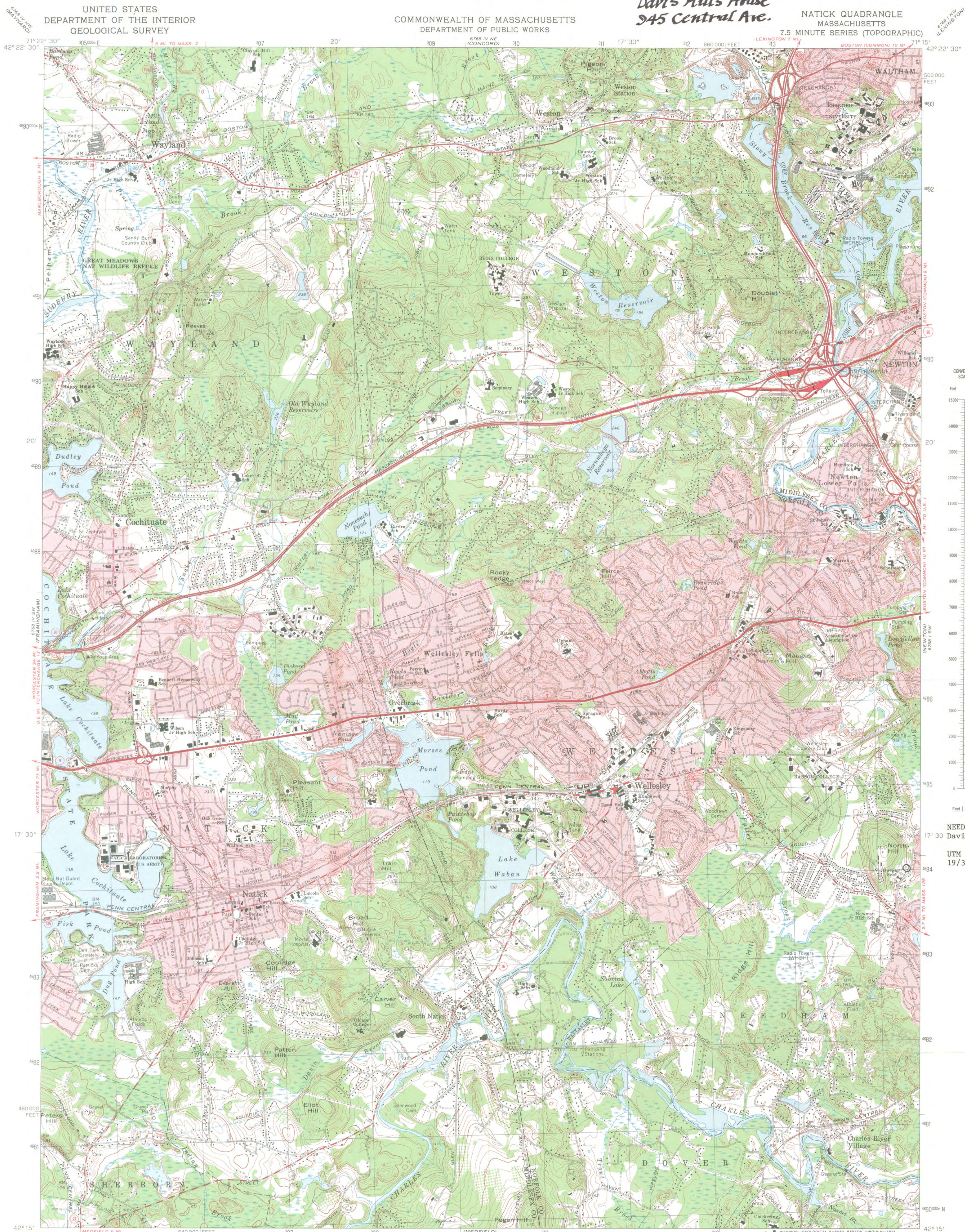
Front entry  
Photo by Kenneth Watson

1979

Negative filed with  
photographer at  
142 Hillcrest Rd,  
Needham

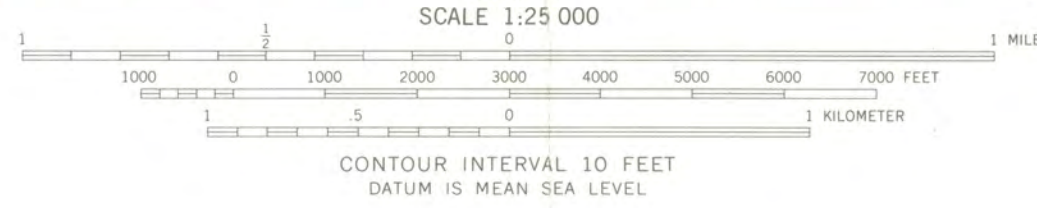
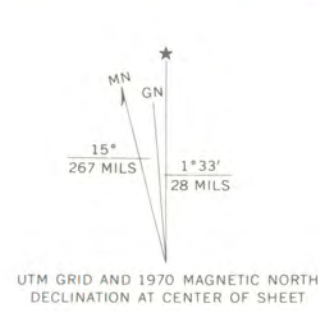
Photo 3 of 3

MAR 3 1982



NEEDHAM, MA  
Davis Mills House  
UTM Reference:  
19/314340/468400

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, USC&GS and Massachusetts Geodetic Survey  
Topography by planetable surveys 1940-1941  
Revised from aerial photographs taken 1969. Field checked 1970  
Polyconic projection, 1927 North American datum  
10,000 foot grid based on Massachusetts coordinate system,  
mainland zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid,  
zone 19  
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

NATICK, MASS.  
N4215-W7115/7.5  
1970

AMS 6768 IV SE-SERIES V814



ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

STATE MASSACHUSETTS

Date Entered    APRIL 1, 1982

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
Felton, Nathaniel, Houses	Peabody Essex County
Belcher-Rowe House	Milton Norfolk County
<u>Mills, Davis, House</u>	Needham Norfolk County
Old South Union Church	Weymouth Norfolk County

Notified

Honorable Edward M. Kennedy  
Honorable Paul E. Tsongas  
Honorable Nicholas Mavroules  
Honorable Brian J. Donnelly  
Honorable John Joseph Moakley  
Honorable Gerry E. Studds

State Historic Preservation Officer  
Mrs. Patricia L. Weslowski  
Executive Director, Massachusetts  
Historical Commission  
294 Washington Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, NPS  
North Atlantic Regional Office, NPS