



August 1, 2014

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Kate Matison William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Vice Chair Massachusetts Historical Commission
Southborough Historical Commission
Town House
17 Common Street
Southborough, MA 01772

RE: Joseph Burnett Estate, 84 Main Street

Dear Ms. Matison:

At the request of the Southborough Historical Commission, staff of the Massachusetts Historical Commission have evaluated the Joseph Burnett Estate, 84 Main Street, Southborough (SBR.21), for its eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Our evaluation was based on the inventory form for the property on file with MHC, as well as current photographs submitted by your commission.

It is the opinion of the MHC staff that the Joseph Burnett Estate is eligible for listing, fulfilling Criteria A, B, and C of the National Register at the local level. The Burnett Estate is historically significant for its associations with the development of Southborough in the second half of the 19th century and as an example of a lavish country estate. It is architecturally significant for its well-preserved Second Empire-style mansion and associated outbuildings, set within an intact landscaped setting. It is also significant for its associations with Joseph Burnett, the town's major benefactor and arguably most influential citizen in the 19th century. The Burnett Estate also stands in an area of other estates, institutional and residential buildings along Main Street, potentially eligible as a National Register district. The Joseph Burnett Estate includes a mansion house, barn, and other outbuildings on just under five acres in a parklike setting south of Main Street, on the edge of Stony Brook and the Wachusett Aqueduct and at the edge of Southborough's town center.

The estate was the home of Joseph Burnett, one of the most influential citizens of Southborough in the 19th century, and his family for several generations. Burnett was the founder of Burnett's Flavoring, a manufacturer of extracts based in Boston, through which he amassed a large fortune in the 1840s. He purchased the property on Main Street in Southborough in 1847 and shortly after his marriage to Josephine Cutter of Boston in 1848, began construction of a house that would be their country estate.

The first building erected here was the stone shop building, which was said to serve as headquarters for the building crew working on the mansion. The mansion house was completed in 1849 but substantially rebuilt in the late 1850s or 1860s, at which time its high slate mansard roof was added and its present Second Empire-style appearance achieved. The building is constructed of local stone in a mix of colors, trimmed with wood modillions and brackets. The house has a complex form with several wings and appendages, including a square tower with a

The mansion interior retains a number of fine details, including staircases and rails, paneling, cornice moldings, mantels, doors and hardware, and window and door trim.

Other buildings remaining on the property include the abovementioned stone shop (1848), built of stone with a slate gable roof; a rare but deteriorated Gothic Revival-style summer house or bungalow (ca. 1850), one story in height, with board and batten siding and a steeply pointed-arched dormer, which was moved from its original location on the bank of the brook to a site closer to the shop (the relocation occurred in the 1890s, around the same time the brook was channelized as part of the development of the Boston water-supply system); and a wood-frame, mansard-roofed carriage house/stable (ca. 1870), with a stone-walled paddock. The property is served by a curved drive leading from its entry on Main Street, and there are sweeping lawns as well as areas of specimen trees. A low stone wall surrounds the property.

Joseph Burnett was highly influential in the development of Southborough in the 19th century. He was responsible for bringing one of the first herds of Jersey cattle to the U.S., to his property in Southborough, known in the 1860s as Deerfoot Farm. Burnett was a prime force behind bringing the Agricultural Branch Railroad through Southborough; he was a founder of St. Mark's Episcopal parish (first services held in the upstairs room of the stone shop, which served as a chapel; St. Mark's Church opened nearby in 1863) and donor of its rectory and parish hall, a founder of St. Mark's School (established 1865 on land in Southborough's center that he purchased and donated), benefactor of the Fay School (1866), and chairman of the building fund to replace the Town Hall after it burned in 1869. In 1871, Burnett turned management of Deerfoot Farm, with lands extending well beyond the 5 acres of the mansion estate (approximately 500 acres south of Stony Brook), to his son. Deerfoot Farm was a significant supplier of dairy and pork products for Boston markets. While Burnett continued involvement with the Burnett Extract Company, he also worked on developing his gentleman's estate, adding specimen trees (some of which survive), and building a large carriage house and stable for his horses and carriages. After Burnett's death in 1894, his sons took over the farming activities as well as the Burnett Extract Company. The property remained in the Burnett family until the 1940s.

I am enclosing some information about the National Register program. Please note that a nomination for individual listing of the Burnett estate could not move forward without a letter in support of listing from the property owner. Should that support be obtained and a nomination be submitted, MHC staff would review the nomination and, once it is considered complete, schedule it for consideration by the State Review Board of the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Because of the strong interest in the National Register program across the state, the process of listing completed nominations in the National Register generally takes at least eighteen months to two years.

If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Betsy Friedberg

Betsy Friedberg
National Register Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission