

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	SBR.20
Historic Name:	Sears, Joshua Montgomery House
Common Name:	
Address:	1 Sears Rd
City/Town:	Southborough
Village/Neighborhood:	Southborough
Local No:	53-6
Year Constructed:	c 1885
Architect(s):	Olmsted, Frederick Law
Architectural Style(s):	Colonial Revival; Queen Anne
Use(s):	Agricultural; Dairy; Multiple Family Dwelling House; Poultry Farm; Secondary Dwelling House; Single Family Dwelling House
Significance:	Agriculture; Architecture; Art; Landscape Architecture; Recreation
Area(s):	SBR.A: Main Street Area
Designation(s):	
Building Materials(s):	Roof: Asphalt Shingle Wall: Wood Shingle; Wood



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

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FORM B - BUILDING

Assessor's number

USGS Quad

Area(s)

Form Number

Massachusetts Historical Commission
 Massachusetts Archives Building
 220 Morrissey Boulevard
 Boston, MA 02125

53-6

Marlborough

A

21



Southborough

Neighborhood or village)

Southborough Center

1 Sears Road

(formerly 7 Sears Road)

Name J. Montgomery Sears House

Present dwelling

Original dwelling

Construction ca. 1885

assessor's records; visual assessment

m Queen Anne/Colonial Revival

Architect/Builder unknown

Frederick Law Olmsted (landscape)

Exterior Material:

Foundation (not visible)

Wall/Trim wood shingle

Roof asphalt

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures none

Major Alterations (with dates) Conservatory

added, 1994-95. (see text.)

Condition excellent

Moved [x]no [] yes Date N/A

Acreage five acres

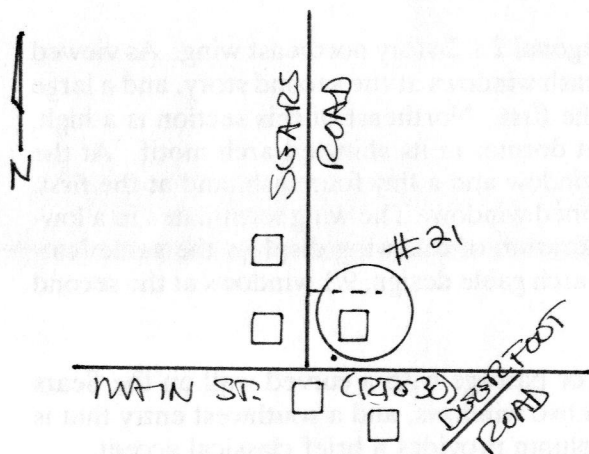
Setting On large lot at corner of Main and Sears.

Mixed residential area of large houses, 18th-20thC.

Much development stands on former Sears land.

Sketch Map

Draw a map of the area indicating properties within it. Number each property for which individual inventory forms have been completed. Label streets, including route numbers, if any. Attach a separate sheet if space is not sufficient here. Indicate north.



Recorded by Forbes/Schuler, consultants

RECEIVED

Organization Southborough Historical Commission

Date 03 2000 January, 2000

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION [x] *see continuation sheet*

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

The Sears House is the earliest, as well as one of the largest and most extravagant of Southborough's sizable group of summer estate properties of the 1880s through the early 1900s. It is a sprawling 2 1/2-story shingled mansion displaying elements of the Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, and Shingle Styles. The building consists of a large 2 1/2-story side-gabled main block facing west toward Sears Road, a two-bay, two-story southeast rear wing, a long diagonally-positioned northeast wing, and, attached to the latter by a one-story curve-fronted section, a one-story side-gabled north extension, apparently built as a carriage house. Abutting the east (rear) elevation are two large one-story polygonal conservatories. The southwest conservatory, which features bands of 9-over-1-sash windows, appears to be part of the original house; the northeast one, ringed with large panels of single-pane glass, is apparently a recent addition.

The main house is a tall, four- by two-bay block, with the shingled wall of the second story flaring slightly out over the first. A large gabled dormer occupies the center of the front roof slope, flanked by a pair of smaller hip-roofed dormers. The main dormer sets a theme for other parts of the house in its use of contrasting-colored shingle to define an arched shape on the face of the gable. The facade has four large windows at the second story, and at the first, a center entry with a paired 15-over-2-sash window to its south, and a shallow 15/2 bay window, with tall 6/1's in the side, to its north. All windows retain their louvered wood shutters, some of them paired. A high dentiled frieze above the bay window emphasizes the slight asymmetry of the window design. The windows of the second story facade are a 15/2-sash in the center, and paired, narrow 6-over-1-sash in the outer bays. The main entry has a large door with a square light over three panels, set under a small elliptical fanlight, the whole sheltered by a wide, molded arch. Surrounding the entry is a pair of unfluted pilasters, supporting a frieze and a dentiled cornice. A pair of heavy shingled stair parapets project forward on either side of the entry.

The north gable end of the main house has a polygonal bay window at the first story, three windows at the second, and two windows at attic level, with an additional window high under the gable peak. The south end of the house, clearly meant to be viewed from a distance from Main Street, is dominated by the tall face of the exterior red-brick chimney rising a full two stories to the shingled second story, then re-emerging through the south end of the roof ridge. The lower portion of the chimney is accented further by a two-story-high wooden trellis with an arched top. A 15/1 window occupies the first-story wall on either side of the chimney; at the second, a paired 15/1 is situated east of the chimney, a single one to the west. Extending east from the rear of this portion of the house is a wing of two more bays, apparently housing a loggia or large sunroom at the first story. Two large segmental-arched, double-leaf glass entries occupy each exterior face of this wing.

One of the most dramatic features of this house is the long diagonal 2 1/2-story northeast wing. As viewed from Sears Road, its inner wall is occupied by three 9-over-1-sash windows at the second story, and a large Palladian window, with a small 6-pane window beside it, at the first. Northeast of this section is a high, wide projecting bay topped with a gable that echoes the front dormer in its shingled-arch motif. At the second story this very asymmetrical bay has a 9-over-1-sash window and a tiny four sash, and at the first, another tiny window with eight panes beside a tall oval, keystone window. The wing terminates in a low-sweeping roof at the northeast end. The rear (southeast) elevation of this wing displays the same "cat-slide" roof line as the northwest side, and repeats the shingled-arch gable design, 9/1 windows at the second story, and a vertically-oriented oval window at the first.

Abutting the end of the wing is a three-bay, one-story room or passage with a curved wall on the Sears Road side. At its end is a 1 1/2-story side-gabled section with two windows, and a southwest entry that is recessed under the corner of the roof, where a short Ionic column provides a brief classical accent.

[x] Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, a completed National Register Criteria Statement form is attached.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Community

Property

Southborough

1 Sears Road

Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Building
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Area(s)
A

Form No.
21 *20*

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION, cont.

While this property has lost some elements of the landscaped surround designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1889, both entries of the former curved front drive are still marked by square granite posts in the long stone wall that lines Sears Road. The tree-lined drive that led east from Sears Road north of the house is still there, marked by a line of tall weeping spruce trees along the south side. A greenhouse that once stood between the drive and the north entry to the front drive has been demolished, as has Mrs. Sears' artist's studio, which stood somewhere near the house.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE [x] *see continuation sheet*

Explain history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

The Sears country mansion, situated at a prominent intersection just west of Southborough center, is one of the most visible reminders of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century era when the town was a fashionable location for wealthy city-dwellers to visit for the spring, summer, or fall, and to practice "gentleman-farming" on a lavish scale. Most of these part-time residents were either Southborough natives or had close connections with Southborough families. In this case, the man who by the age of 21 was Boston's largest taxpayer, and according to some sources, "the richest man in Massachusetts" (Washburn), **Joshua Montgomery Sears**, had married Sarah Choate (1858-1935), the daughter of eminent Boston attorney Charles F. Choate, Sr. in 1877. (Sarah Choate Sears was thus also the sister of two of Southborough's most prominent citizens, Charles F. Choate, Jr., and Edward C. Choate. (See Form #25, 43 Main Street).

J. M. Sears (1855-1905) had inherited a fortune at the age of two from his father, Joshua Montgomery Sears, Sr., who was reputed to have been the wealthiest man in New England at one time as a result of profits from the West Indies shipping trade. The elder J. M. Sears had left his money in trust for his son, and it had grown into an even greater fortune through heavy investment in Boston real estate.

In about 1880, Mr. and Mrs. Sears began buying what was eventually to become the largest privately-owned farm of its time in Southborough--nearly 450 acres of land in the west central and north part of town. By the 1890s Montgomery Sears, as he was known, had acquired five old farms, complete with houses and outbuildings, as well as several more residences along Main Street adjoining his mansion. His Wolfpen Farm stretched north along both sides of Sears Road nearly to the Marlborough border, and was largely pieced together from the former farms of Eber Fay, Nathan Johnson, and Elijah Crouch. (See Area Form O: Wolfpen Farm). A gentleman farmer in the truest sense, Mr. Sears maintained a prize herd of over 40 cows that at the turn of the century was rivaled only by that of the Burnett family's Deerfoot Farm and the herd at the next farm to the west, his father-in-law's Chestnut Hill Farm. In about 1898 he also became the only sheep farmer in Southborough, with a flock of 76 sheep. His other livestock included a dozen goats and pigs, 250 fowl, and ten horses.

While the farm animals were grazed and housed largely at the old Fay and Johnson Farms, the focus around the Sears residence itself was somewhat different. Like Joseph Burnett, Montgomery Sears was interested in horticulture, and built both a large conservatory as part of his house, and a greenhouse at the foot of his carriage drive on Sears Road. An artist's studio (demolished) was also built near the house for Mrs. Sears. Among the other Sears buildings that are no longer standing were a free-standing billiard building and a porter's lodge.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Community

Property

Southborough

1 Sears Road

Massachusetts Historical Commission
 Massachusetts Archives Building
 220 Morrissey Boulevard
 Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Area(s)
 A

Form No.
 21 *20*

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, cont.

It is likely that the taste of **Sarah Choate Sears** is reflected in this house as much as that of her husband. She was a major social figure in Boston society, a well-known patron of the arts, and a significant artist in her own right. When the Sears enlarged their Boston residence at 12 Arlington Street by joining it to the house at 1 Commonwealth Avenue in 1893, it was largely to accommodate Sarah Sears' growing art collection. She redesigned the entire second floor of the Commonwealth Ave. house for a palatial music room in the combined building, where she hosted concerts by such luminaries as pianist Ignace Paderewski and violinist Fritz Kreisler. Today there is little record of whether notable visitors to the Sears' Southborough home were entertained in the same manner, but it is likely that at least one of the rooms in this house was designed for a music room.

Before her marriage Mrs. Sears studied at Cowles Art School and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and became widely known as a photographer, painter, and silversmith. She was a founding member of the Boston Society of Arts and Crafts, and a leader in the New England Arts and Crafts movement. Over the years, she won many medals for her watercolors at world expositions in Chicago (1893), Paris (1900), Buffalo (1901), Charleston (1904), and St. Louis (1904). She studied photography with F. Holland Day, with whom she campaigned for a major photography exhibition at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and for a national photography association. A one-person show of her platinum photographs was held at the Boston Camera Club in 1899. Several of her photographs, including two of her only daughter, Helen, are in the collection of the Fogg Art Museum of Harvard University.

The Sears were well acquainted with painter John Singer Sargent. One of his most famous paintings is his 1895 portrait of Helen Sears, which is now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Helen was six years old when the painting was done. Sargent sketched her again when she was 17; that drawing is reproduced in Sargent Portrait Drawings.

In 1913, Helen Sears (1889-1966), married James Donald Cameron Bradley of New Jersey, and her mother, by then a widow, presented them with a wedding gift of a new house on 45 acres at 60 Sears Road (Form #93, NR-Ind. 1999). James Bradley (1883-1928), like his father-in-law, however, died at a young age, and by 1928, Helen was a widow, as well. When Sarah Choate Sears died in 1935, **Helen Sears Bradley** inherited the house at 1 Sears Road, along with much of both the Sears and Choate real estate in Southborough. She used the house for furniture storage from the 1930s until the 1950s, when it was sold out of the family.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES [] *see continuation sheet*

Maps and Atlases: 1898 (JM Sears: summer residence); 1937 WPA maps.

Amory, Cleveland. The Proper Bostonians. New York: EP Dutton, 1947.

Bunting, Bainbridge. Houses of Boston's Back Bay. Cambridge: the Belknap Press, 1967.

Meyer, MB, and Acton, D., et al. Inspiring Reform: Boston's Arts and Crafts Movement, Wellesley: Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, 1997.

Noble, Richard. Fences of Stone: a History of Southborough, MA. Portsmouth, NH: Peter Randall, 1990.

Ransom, David, et al. National Register Nomination: 60 Sears Road, Southborough. Mass. Historical Commission, 1999.

Town of Southborough: Tax Valuations, various dates.

Uhlman, Helen C. Correspondence with Southborough Historical Commission, 2/14/2000.

Washburn, Robert M. Charles F. Choate, Jr. Obituary, Washburn's Washington Weekly, 12/5/1927.



Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Community
Southborough

Property Address
1 Sears Road

Area(s)

Form No(s).
20 *20*

National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

☒ Individually eligible ☐ Eligible only in a historic district
☐ Contributing to a potential historic district ☐ Potential historic district

Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Statement of Significance by Forbes/Schuler, Consultants
The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The Sears House is eligible for the National Register individually at the local level under Criterion A for its association with the prominent J. Montgomery Sears of Boston and Southborough and his wife, artist and Arts and Crafts promoter Sarah Choate Sears. The property also meets Criterion C for its well preserved Queen Anne architecture displaying influences of the Colonial Revival and Shingle Styles, as well. For the above reasons, it would also be eligible as part of a small district, with the Sears farm manager's house at 4 Sears Road, composed of the remaining adjacent Sears houses. In addition, it would qualify under both criteria as a contributing part of a National Register district encompassing the historic residential and institutional center of Southborough.

The property retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, setting and association.

Pl South
v02-111

20



Southborough
Street address 7 Sears Rd
ne
original & present dwelling
Present owner E. Stephens
Open to public no
c. 1900 Style Col. Rwr.
Source of date H.D.S.C. report
Architect

Architectural reason for inventorying:

Rotate house

OR part of Area #

3. CONDITION Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated Moved Altered Added Apts

4. DESCRIPTION

FOUNDATION/BASEMENT: High Regular Low Material

WALL COVER: Wood Shingle Brick Stone Other

ROOF: Ridge Gambrel Flat Hip Mansard
Tower Cupola Dormer windows Balustrade Grillwork

CHIMNEYS: 1 2 3 4 Center End Interior Irregular Cluster Elaborate

STORIES: 1 2 3 4 ATTACHMENTS: Wings Ell Shed

PORCHES: 1 2 3 4 PORTICO Balcony

FACADE: Gable end: Front/side Ornament

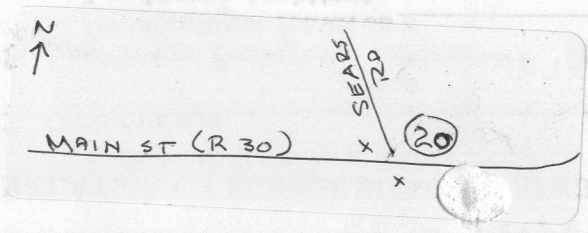
Entrance: Side Front: Center Side Details:

Windows: Spacing: Regular Irregular Identical Varied 15/

Corners: Plain Pilasters Quoins Cornerboards

5. Indicate location of building in relation to nearest cross streets and other buildings

6. Footage of structure from street
Property has feet frontage on street



Recorder

For

Photo # 8-9 Date 1971

SEE REVERSE SIDE

RELATION OF SURROUNDING STRUCTURE

1. Outbuildings _____
2. Landscape Features: Agriculture Open Wooded Garden: Formal/Informal
Predominant features _____
Landscape architect _____
3. Neighboring Structures
Style: Colonial Federal Greek Revival Gothic Revival Italian Villa Lombard Rom.
Venetian Gothic Mansard Richardsonian Modern _____
- Use: Residential Commercial Religious Conditions: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated

GIVE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC IMPORTANCE OF SITE (Refer and elaborate on theme circled on front of form)

Built about 1900 it was once the summer estate of J. Montgomery Sears. The splendid lilac hedge along the road is possibly second only to The Arnold Arboretum collection ①

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND/OR REFERENCE

① HDSC Report 1972

RESTRICTIONS

Original Owner: _____
Deed Information: Book Number _____ Page _____, _____ Registry of Deeds