

# FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

## Photograph



## Locus Map



**Recorded by:** Shannon Walsh, PVPC

**Organization:** Sturbridge Historical Commission

**Date (month / year):** April 2017

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

415-02328-572

Southbridge

STU.E

STU.151  
STU.152

**Town/City:** Sturbridge

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*): Fiskdale

**Address:** 572 Main Street

**Historic Name:** Otis Block

**Uses:** Present: Commercial Block "Blackington Bldg"

Original: Commercial Block/Meeting Hall

**Date of Construction:** ca. 1874-1880

**Source:** Helen G. Holley (1973), sign on building

**Style/Form:** Gothic Revival

**Architect/Builder:** Unknown

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: Brick

Wall/Trim: Brick/Wood, Aluminum

Roof: Slate

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**

Small one story commercial building (ca. 1900)

Previously was a fire house (ca. mid-nineteenth century)

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

Windows and Doors (dates unknown)

**Condition:** Fair (windows and doors) to Good

**Moved:** no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

**Acreage:** .25 acres

**Setting:** Rectangular shaped lot, building faces south along the Main Street, (Route 20) business corridor in Fiskdale. Located near the intersection of Main Street and Bates Court.

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☒ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

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

The Otis Block, at 572 Main Street, is a late nineteenth century, Gothic Revival style commercial block which provides evidence of the local residential and commercial growth and development in Fiskdale during that time period. It is fifteen bays wide by two bays deep and two and a half stories high with a three story square tower. The foundation is brick, and the exterior is brick with wood and aluminum trim, and the roof, which is both side gable and hipped, is slate with copper flashing and metal finials on the peaks of the tower and a cupola. There are also overhanging eaves and brick corbels. An exterior brick chimney is centered on the western elevation and visible at the roof ridge. In general, windows and doors are replacements of the originals.

The main, southern facing façade along Main Street has four, first story recessed entrances (each with newer doors with nine upper divided lights) and a more prominent recessed entry (with fifteen divided lights and sidelights) at the base of the tower, framed by a gothic arch. Six, first story windows, to the west of the tower entrance, are each divided into 36 lights. Four first story windows, to the east of the tower entrance, are each divided into 24 lights. On the second story, there are three, paired sets of tall windows, each recessed and topped with a brick, gothic style arch and a herringbone pattern between the lintels and arch. The upper third of each of these windows is divided into 12 lights, and the lower two thirds are divided into 18 lights. Typical of Gothic Revival style, the brick wall surface extends into the front gable peaks without interruption. The roof is predominantly side gabled, particularly on the western elevation. There are three cross gable peaks on the southern façade, west of the tower, and a hipped section with a gabled dormer and circular window with four divided lights to the east of the tower. The three story tower is square with a steep, pyramid roof with flared eaves and topped with a finial. The tower has paired, narrow, 6/6 windows, framed with gothic arches on the second story, and paired windows, each with 12 divided lights, on the third story, framed by stucco and half timbering details. There is also a square, louvered cupola, set on a diagonal and raised from the roof ridge. It has a steeply pitched pyramidal shaped roof, also highlighted with a finial.

The eastern elevation has a large, divided light window on the first story, towards the southeastern corner, with the upper third covered. Concrete steps lead to a double door entry, which may be original. The second story on this elevation has paired windows, similar to the second story windows on the southern facing façade.

A mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century, one story commercial building shares the parcel and is situated in close proximity to the western elevation of the Otis Block. It is two bays wide with a brick foundation, clapboard exterior, and a front gable, asphalt shingle roof with overhanging eaves. Steps lead to an off-centered entry towards the southeastern corner and there is a single window to the west of the entry on this façade. Other than venting in the gable, there are no other fenestrations on the main façade.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Discuss the 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.*

Brothers Henry Fiske (1795-1845) and Josiah J. Fiske (1785-1838) built "the first factory and laid the foundation of the village that bears their name."<sup>1</sup> When James C. Fisk (1825-1885) took over management in 1859, he revitalized the area to become "a model village" when he "tore down the old mills and built new ones; put in new machinery, remodeled the [corporation] houses" and made the village of Fiskdale into "as pretty, healthy, and successful a factory village as can be found; with its large and well-built mills, comfortable and neat houses, well-kept yards, and large farms."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton Hurd ed., *History of Worcester County* ("Sturbridge, Levi Chase), 1899. *Archive.org* Accessed on-line July 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/historyofworcest01hurdd#page/n275/mode/2up/search/Sturbridge> (Possible reference to property, page 109)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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By the late nineteenth century, this stretch along Main Street had developed into a commercial center, in support of the Fiskdale Mills workers and village residents. The building known as the Otis Block, was erected by the Fiskdale Mills company between 1874-1880. It contained mixed use commercial services on the first story and an event space known as Otis Hall on the second story, which was used for community religious and social events. The significance of the name Otis, as well as the architect and builder of this Gothic Revival building are both currently unknown. There is a possible 1874 reference which mentions that "the new halls of the Fiskdale block were to be dedicated...by a promenade concert and ball."<sup>3</sup>

In 1875, around the time of the building's construction, the mills were known to "employ 342 hands, running 27,168 spindles and 664 looms, using about 3,000 bales of cotton per annum and producing 160,000 yards 64 by 64 print cloths per month, which finds a ready market."<sup>4</sup>

The late nineteenth century was a period of prosperity and growth in Fiskdale, and the area had developed into a self-sustaining village with shops and services for residents. Along with the Otis Block (P.C. Hooker Druggist, A.M.D. Le Clair Market), there was also the Fiskdale Drugstore; Paul Bonner, Hair Dresser; S. Callahan, General Store; M. Mallahy Dry Goods and Groceries; Fiskdale House, A. Webster Proprietor; and St. Ann's Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup>

Through the early twentieth century, the building continued to be used for social events in Fiskdale, and in 1902, a newspaper article noted that village residents were planning to attend a chicken pie supper and sale of fancy articles, as well as a performance by the Fiskdale Brass Band to be held in Otis Hall, hosted by the ladies society of the Fiskdale Baptist Church.<sup>6</sup>

The building was later known as the Blackington Building. By the twenty-first century, it maintains a commercial presence along this stretch of Main Street in Fiskdale.

The one-story, front gabled commercial building, to the west of the Otis Block building, was formerly a fire house for the Fiskdale Mills fire engine.<sup>7</sup> It later served as a commercial building and in the 1970s housed a leather shop.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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*Archive.org* (see footnotes)

*FindaGrave.com*

*Genealogybank.com* (see footnotes)

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<sup>3</sup> "Sturbridge." *Worcester Palladium*, December 25, 1875. *Genealogybank.com*

<sup>4</sup> "Sturbridge." *Worcester Palladium* July 31, 1875. *Genealogybank.com*

<sup>5</sup> Unknown author, Sturbridge and Fiskdale, Massachusetts, 1892. *State Library of Massachusetts*, (site). Accessed July 2017, <http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/116152>

<sup>6</sup> "Southbridge." *Worcester Daily Spy*, April 3, 1902. *Genealogybank.com*

<sup>7</sup> Helen G. Holley, "572 Main Street," (MHC Inventory Form #STU.152), 1973. <http://mhc-macris.net/Details.aspx?MhclId=STU.151>, accessed December 2017.



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McAlester, Virginia S. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

Figures 1 and 2: Unknown author, Sturbridge and Fiskdale, Massachusetts, 1892. *State Library of Massachusetts*, (site). Accessed July 2017, <http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/116152>

Figure 3: L. J. Richards & Co. "Charlton & Dudley & Southbridge & Sturbridge." Plate 021, *New Topographical Atlas of Worcester County Massachusetts*. 1898. *Ward Maps LLC* (site). Accessed July 2017, <http://www.wardmaps.com/viewasset.php?aid=12391>

Figure 4: Photo from around 2014 of the second commercial building on the property. *Google.com/maps*, <https://www.google.com/maps/place/572+Main+St,+Fiskdale,+MA+01518/@42.1161378,-72.1143364,3a,50.9y,346.72h,92.71t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1s5V91aET4gam1hZ8MIDtgw!2e0!7i13312!8i6656!4m5!3m4!1s0x89e6a319c554a46f:0x3f58450d865ebbdcl8m2!3d42.11637!4d-72.114193>, accessed December 2017.



Photo 1: Main, southern facing façade

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Photo 2: Closer perspective, southern façade second story windows



Photo 3: Eastern facing side elevation



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Photo 4: Eastern elevation, closer perspective of the double doors



Photo 5: Eastern elevation second story windows and surround



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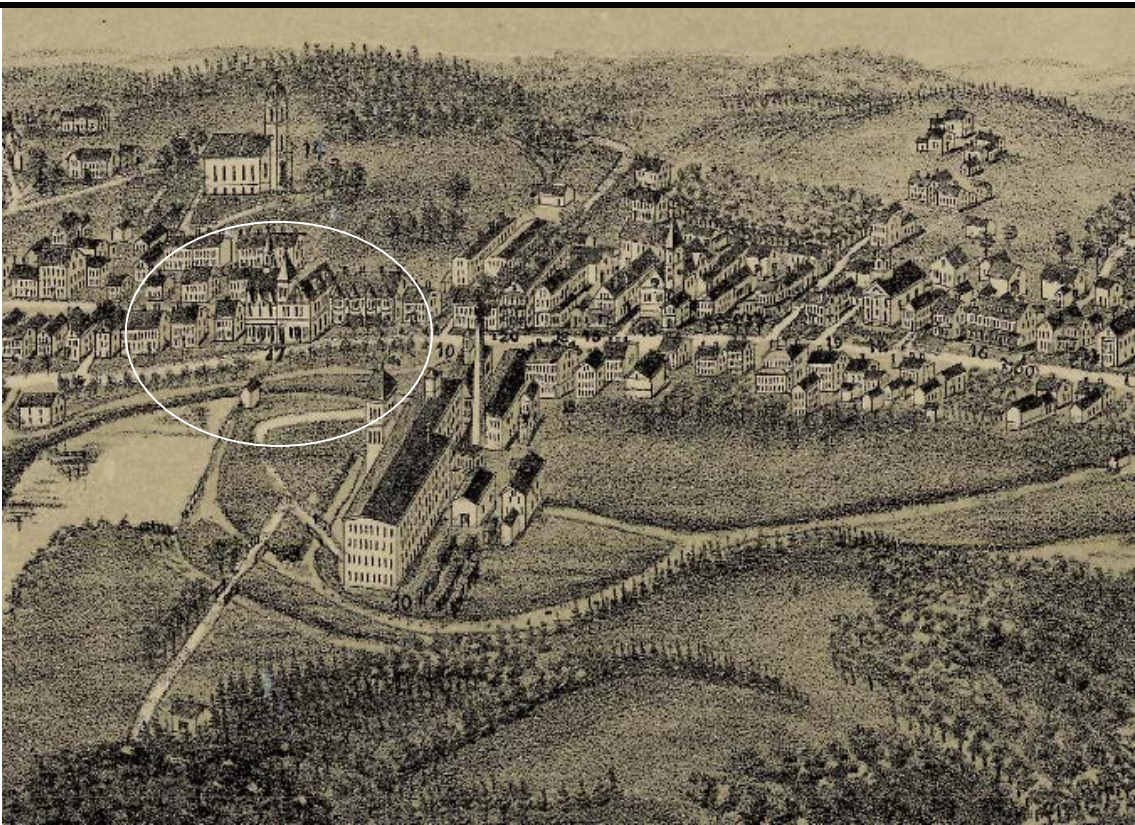


Figure 1: 1892 map showing the Otis Block, and the related Fiskdale Mills buildings



Figure 2: 1892 Rendering of the Otis Block



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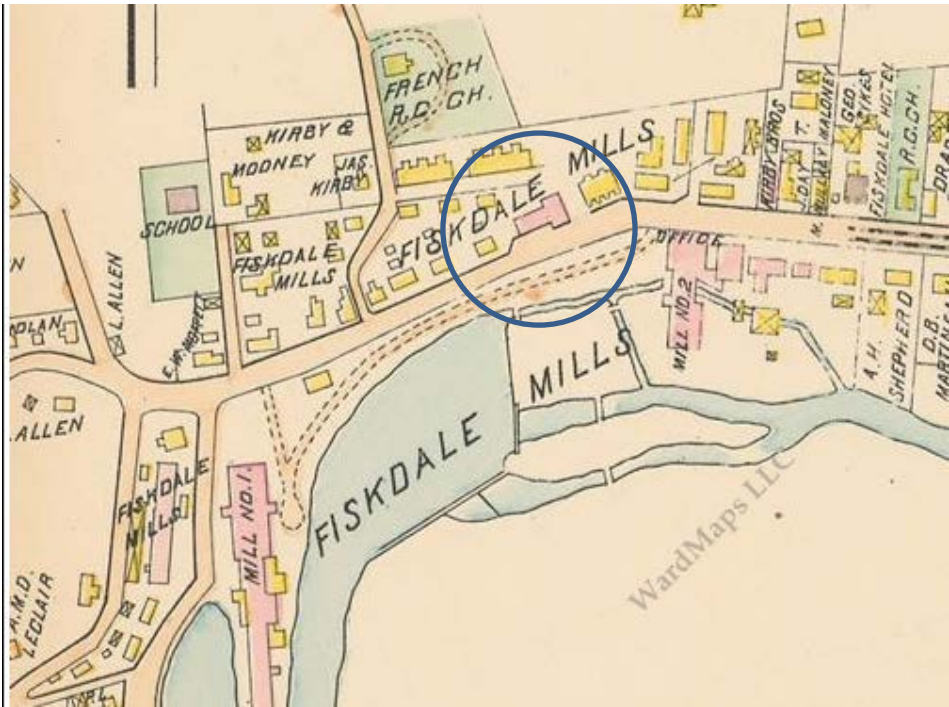


Figure 3: 1898 Map of Fiskdale showing Otis Block



Figure 4: Post-1898 Commercial Building, image taken around 2014



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## 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 Shannon Walsh, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

The Otis Block, at 572 Main Street in Fiskdale, is recommended for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places, with local significance and a period of significance from ca. 1874 through 1967 (arbitrary fifty year threshold).

This commercial block meets Criteria A, in the category of Community Planning and Development, as it was constructed along a main thoroughfare to support the needs of the growing village of Fiskdale, in Sturbridge. It is also connected to late nineteenth century Industry and Commerce as it relates to the history of the nearby Fiskdale Mills and contained shops on the lower levels such as a grocer and druggist. The building further relates to Social History as it was planned for mixed use to support the village and on the upper level, Otis Hall was a venue for religious and social gatherings.

The building is also a very interesting example of late nineteenth century Gothic Revival design, with high style detailing, making it eligible under Criteria C, for Architecture. In spite of alterations to windows and most doors, the essential character defining features of the form and massing, exterior, trim, and slate roof remain intact.

In conclusion, the Otis Block is eligible for National Register listing under both Criteria A and C, with a local level of significance, as it relates to Community Planning and Development, Industry, Commerce, and Social History in Fiskdale from the late nineteenth through late twentieth century and is also an interesting example of Gothic Revival style architecture. The building retains a good degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.