

# FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

520-00842-177

East  
Brookfield

STU.296  
STU.297

**Town/City:** Sturbridge

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

## Photograph



**Address:** 177 Podunk Road

**Historic Name:** Nichols Family House and Davis Family Barn

**Uses:** Present: Single Family Dwelling

Original: Single Family Dwelling & Agricultural

**Date of Construction:** Prior to 1851

**Source:** Building form, 1851 Deed

**Style/Form:** Colonial with later alterations

**Architect/Builder:** Unknown

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: Stone

Wall/Trim: Clapboard/Wood

Roof: Asphalt Shingle

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**

Barn (one story with loft)

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

Replacement windows (date unknown)

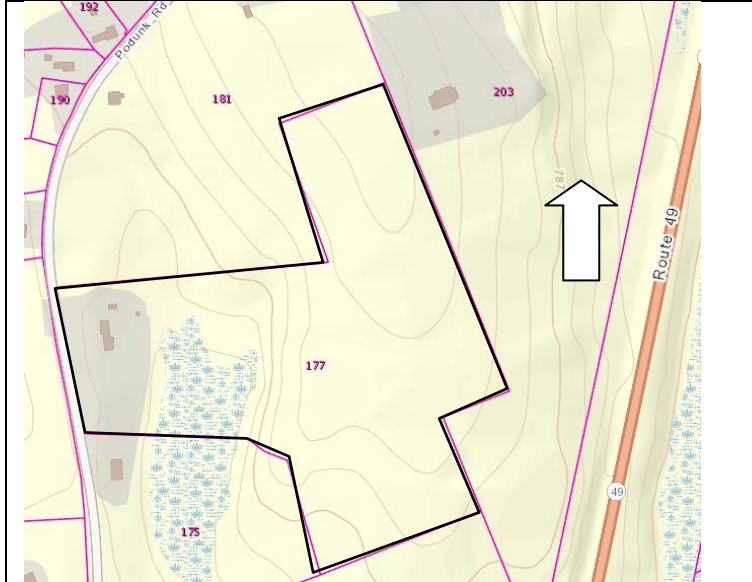
**Condition:** Appears good

**Moved:** no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

**Acreage:** 16.78 acres

**Setting:** Large, irregularly shaped parcel, mostly land. Off of Route 49, near the intersection of Podunk with the Ladd Road Extension. Building's main façade faces west.

## Locus Map



**Recorded by:** Shannon Walsh, PVPC

**Organization:** Sturbridge Historical Commission

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

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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 Nichols Family House and Davis Family Barn, at 177 Podunk Road, provide an example of mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century residential and agricultural development in this section of Sturbridge. The single family dwelling is one and a half stories high and five bays wide by two bays deep with a north/south aligned rectangular plan and a five bay by two bay side wing. The foundation is stone and the exterior is wood clapboard and vertically aligned wood paneling (on the wing), with wood trim. Windows appear to be replacements and are generally 6/6. The roof for the residence and the roof for the wing are both side gable and asphalt shingle, and both roof forms slope down to form "saltbox" rooflines over the eastern facing rear elevations, with a slight eave overhang. An off centered chimney, interior chimney is present at the roof ridge.

The western facing façade of the main residence has two, first story 6/6 windows on either side of the main entry (four total). The entry, accessed by a stone slab, is comprised of a paneled door and paneled sidelights, each with three upper divided lights. The northern side elevation has two first story 6/6 windows and two second story 6/6 windows, set within the gable.

The north/south aligned one story side wing has a 6/6 window at the northwestern corner and a secondary entrance with what appears to be a newer, paneled door. Other fenestrations include three, arched garage bays. The southern side elevation of the wing has two, first story 6/6 windows and an upper window with four divided lights set within the gable. This perspective allows the best view of the "saltbox" style roofline, typical of earlier homes with an added rear addition.<sup>1</sup>

The Davis Family Barn faces west, is one story with a loft, and has a front gambrel, asphalt shingle roof. It is three bays wide by five bays deep. First story windows are 4/4 and there is a transom with divided lights over the entry doors. A hayloft door is visible on the upper western facing façade, within the gambrel, and there is a cupola on the roof ridge.

### 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.*

This general area in the northern part of Sturbridge, may be what was referred to as "one of the first settlements in town, being a little prior to the year 1730."<sup>2</sup> The Sturbridge assessor's database lists 1748 as the construction date for this building, noted here as this potential earlier date warrants further research and the building's architectural form appears to have some detailing from the Colonial Period (generally 1675-1775) with later alterations.<sup>3</sup> By 1765, the Sturbridge population had reached 899, with additional growth to 1,374 residents by 1776, so if the residence was originally constructed around the mid-eighteenth century, it would be representative of the early growth and development of Sturbridge.<sup>4</sup> A 1984 Reconnaissance Survey by the Massachusetts Historical Commission did not note any residential buildings surviving from the Colonial Period.<sup>5</sup>

Preliminary deed research for this building has connected it back to prior to 1851, with farmer Jerome Nichols (possibly born 1827), granting ownership at that time to Merrick Nichols (ca. 1822-1901), who also farmed the land and is shown as the owner on an 1857 map.<sup>6 7 8</sup> (Figure 1) Merrick and his wife, Cornelia, (1827-1859) were married in 1847.<sup>9</sup> The 1865 census shows

<sup>1</sup> Virginia S. McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> George Davis, *A Historical Sketch of Sturbridge and Southbridge*, West Brookfield: Power Press of O.S. Cooke and Co., 1856. p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> <https://archive.org/stream/historicalsketch00davisgeo#page/n9/mode/2up/search/Nichols>, accessed 2017.

<sup>4</sup> "177 Podunk Road," *Sturbridge, Mass. Vision Government Solutions*, <http://gis.vgsi.com/sturbridgema/Parcel.aspx?Pid=3061>, accessed 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Massachusetts Historical Commission. "MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Sturbridge." 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Nichols, Jerome." *Massachusetts State Census, 1855*, *Ancestry.com*

<sup>8</sup> Book 470 Page 623 plus another tract of land, separate deed (with buildings), *Masslandrecords.com*

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multiple members of the Nichols family, presumably related, who had also settled in this part of Sturbridge.<sup>10</sup> (Figures 1, 2, and 3) By 1870, Merrick is noted to work in a shoe shop and blacksmith Samuel N. Davis (1820-1879) was owner and resident of this property.<sup>11</sup> (Figure 2)

In 1881, Samuel's son, and farmer Oliver F. Davis (born ca. 1856) became the property owner, with the site described as 48 acres of land and buildings.<sup>12</sup> A map from during the time period of Oliver's ownership provides evidence of a barn. (Figure 3)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

"177 Podunk Road," *Sturbridge, Mass, Vision Government Solutions*, <http://gis.vgsi.com/sturbridgema/Parcel.aspx?Pid=3061>, accessed 2017.

*Ancestry.com* (see footnotes)

Davis, George. *A Historical Sketch of Sturbridge and Southbridge*, West Brookfield: Power Press of O.S. Cooke and Co., 1856. p. 22. <https://archive.org/stream/historicalsextract00davisgeo#page/n9/mode/2up/search/Nichols>, accessed 2017.

*FindaGrave.com*

*Masslandrecords.com* (see footnotes)

*Masslandrecords.com*. Related information: Merrick Nichols to Nelson H. Delano 1865 Book 697, Page 500 (land with buildings) and Nelson H. Delano to Samuel H N Davis(1817-1879) April 3, 1867 Book 740 Page 589 (land with buildings, 48 acres)

Massachusetts Historical Commission. "MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Sturbridge." 1984.

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

Figure 1: Walling, Henry Francis. "Map of Worcester County." Boston and New York: Wm. E. Baker & Co., 1857. *Library of Congress.org* <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3763w.la000320/>

Figure 2: Atlas of Worcester County, F. W. Beers & Co. 1870  
<https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:x059cb92c>

Figure 3: Richards, L.J. "Charlton-Sturbridge-Southbridge-Dudley Towns." *Topographical Atlas of the County of Worcester*, 1898. *HistoricMapWorks.com* (site). Accessed on-line October 2017.  
<http://www.historicmapworks.com/Atlas.php?cat=Maps&c=US&a=6717>

<sup>8</sup> "Nichols, Jerome." *Massachusetts State Census*, 1855. *Ancestry.com*

<sup>9</sup> "Merrick Nichols." *Massachusetts Town Marriage Records*, 1620-1850. *Ancestry.com*

<sup>10</sup> "Nichols, Merrick." *Massachusetts State Census*, 1865. *Ancestry.com*

<sup>11</sup> "Nichols, Merrick." *United States Federal Census*, 1870. *Ancestry.com*

<sup>12</sup> "Davis, Samuel." *United States Federal Census*, 1870. *Ancestry.com*; "Davis, Oliver F." *United States Federal Census*, 1880. *Ancestry.com*

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Photo 1: Western facing main façade, residence and wing



Photo 2: Western façade and southern side elevation

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Photo 3: Western façade and southern side elevation of the Barn

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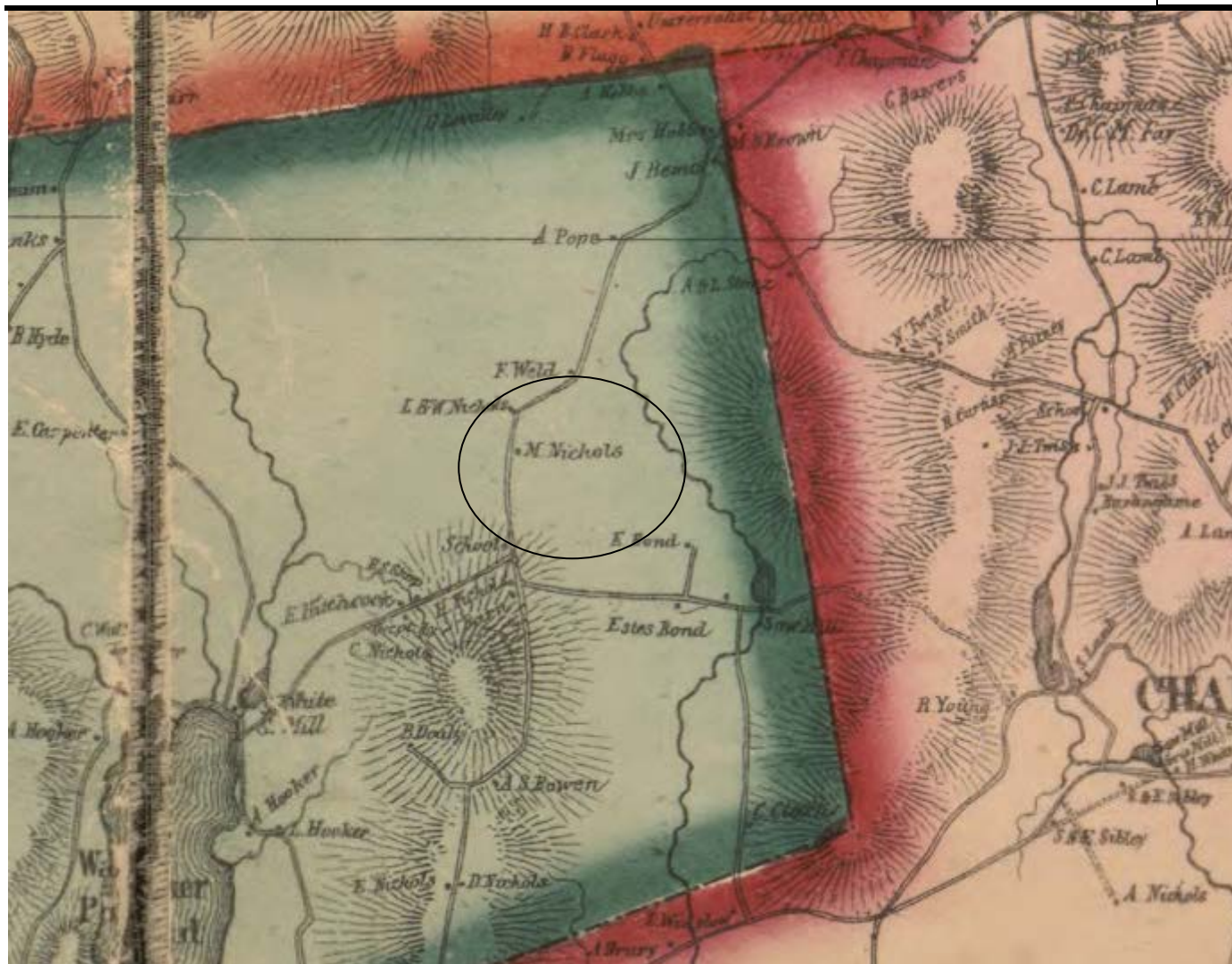


Figure 1: 1857 Map showing Merrick Nichols property

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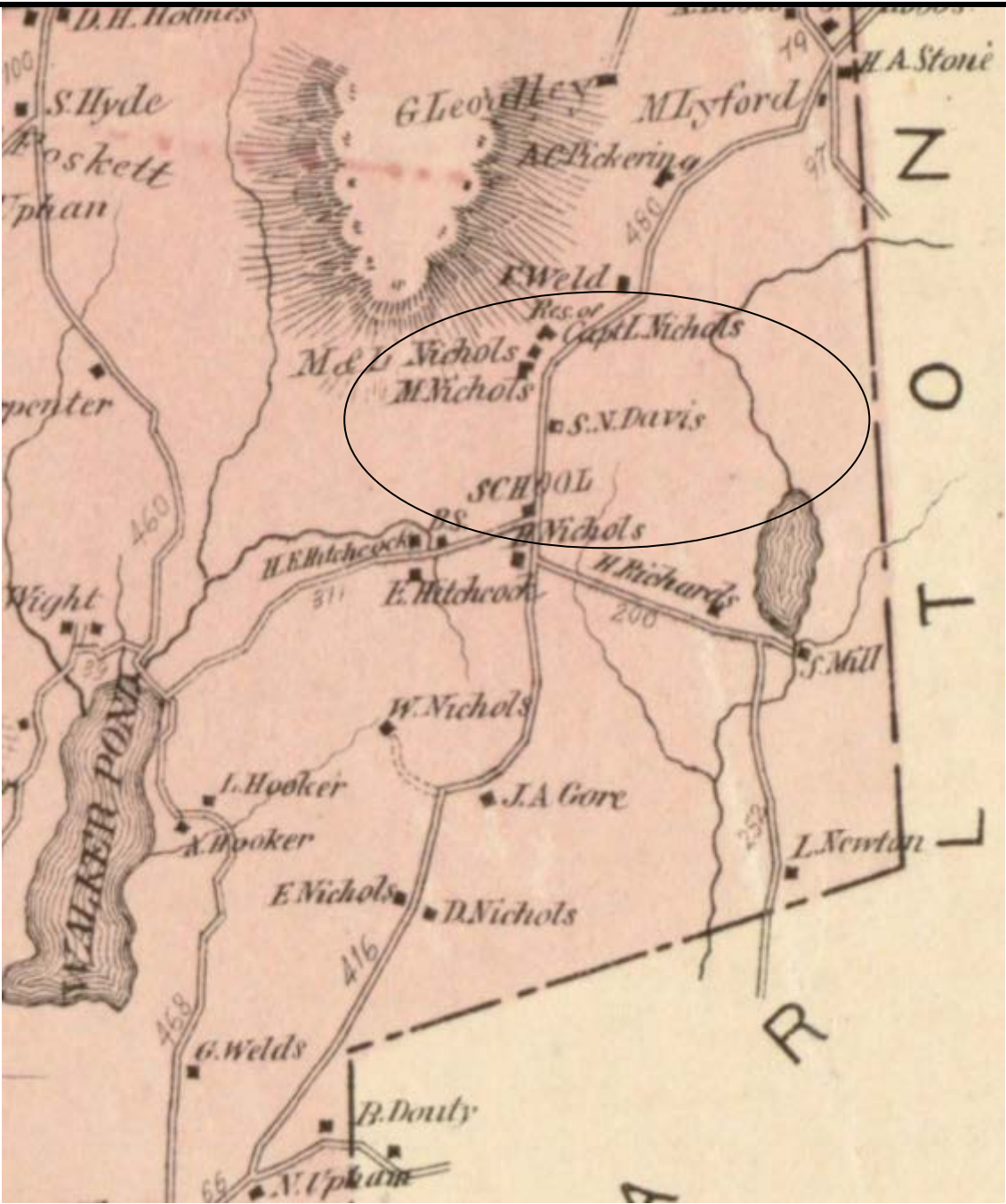


Figure 2: 1870 Atlas showing property of Samuel N. Davis

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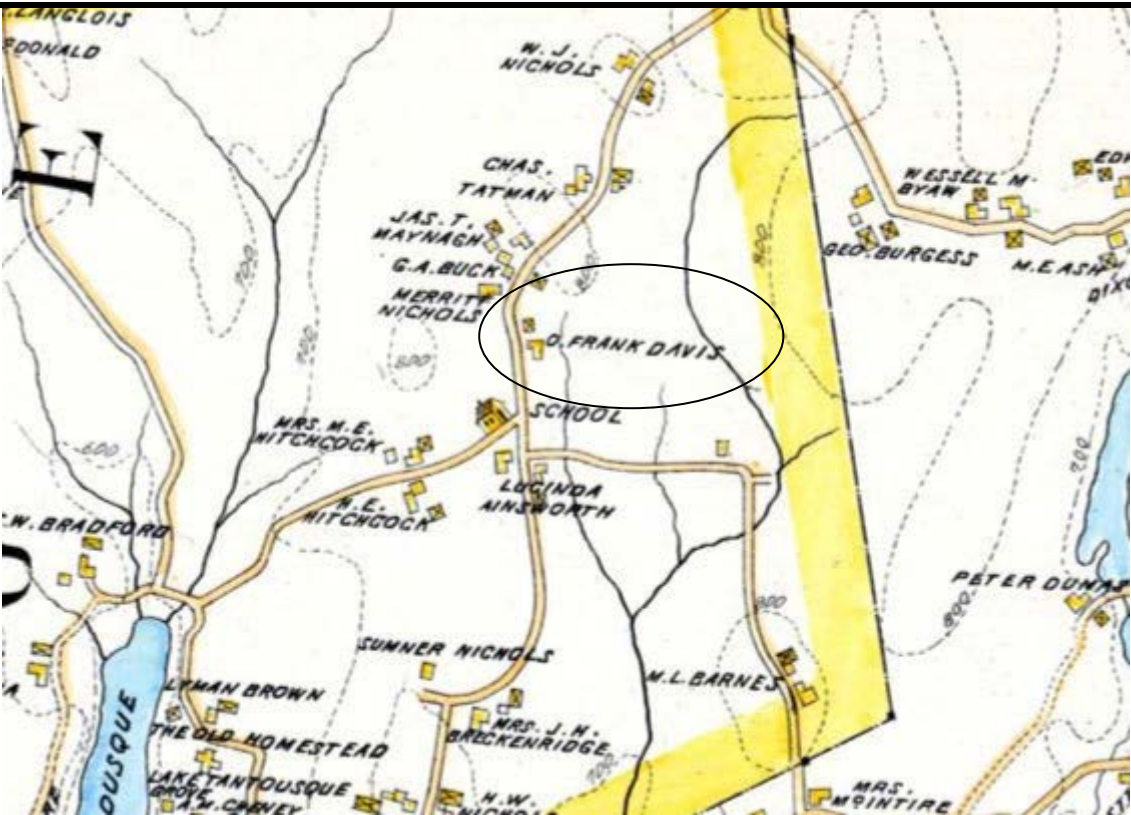


Figure 3: 1898 Atlas showing O. Frank Davis property (as well as documentation of barn)