

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

520-00335-248
520-00335-251

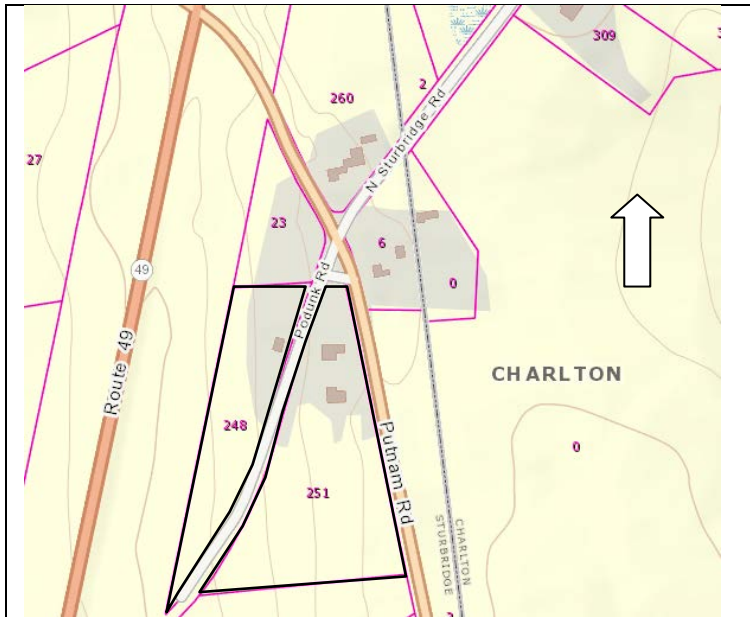
East
Brookfield

STU.298
STU.299
STU.300

Photograph



Locus Map



Town/City: Sturbridge

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Podunk

Address: 248 and 251 Podunk Road

Historic Name: Jonas Bemis/Silverberg Family Farm

Uses: Present: Single Family Dwelling

Original: Single Family Dwelling, Agricultural

Date of Construction: by mid-19th century with later alterations

Source: 1850 Census, 1857 Map, 1865 Deed

Style/Form: Colonial with later alterations

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Stone

Wall/Trim: Wood Shingle/Wood

Roof: Asphalt Shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Barn (possibly by 1898)

Garage and Shed (prior to 1952)

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Several later alterations, dates unknown

Condition: Fairly good as a whole, especially surrounding landscape and barn

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 4.1 acres

Setting: Residence and barn on a large, triangular shaped parcel at a dead end section of Podunk Road, near the intersection of Podunk and Putnam Roads and just off of Route 49. Parcel across the street contains functionally related outbuildings (garage and shed). Main residence faces west.

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 Jonas Bemis/Silverberg Family Farm, at 248 and 251 Podunk Road, is an example of mid nineteenth century (or earlier) residential and agricultural development along what would become Podunk Road in Sturbridge. The single family dwelling is approximately five bays wide by four bays deep with an L shaped plan. It has a stone foundation, a wood shingle exterior and wood trim, and a cross gable, asphalt shingle roof. A brick interior chimney and stone exterior chimney are present on the western facing section of the building. Windows are a mix of grid patterns but most appear to be older, if not original and generally have wood sills and lintels.

The western facing, one and a half story section, has a north/south aligned rectangular plan. The entry is accessed by two levels of stone steps with frontage to include a stone retaining wall. A porch with wood shingled half walls and slender, round support columns, extends the length of the main façade. There is a central entry, topped with a transom with six divided lights and flanked by two 6/6 windows on either side. Two gabled dormers, topped with pediments, each have single 2/2 windows. A gabled dormer, near the northwestern section of the roof ridge, is also the side gable of the east/west aligned two and a half story section of the residence. There is a semicircle window in this dormer as well. The southern side elevation of this section of the building has three 6/6 double hung windows as well as an exterior stone chimney.

The east/west aligned two and a half story section has a mix of double hung 6/6 and 2/2 windows with wood sills and lintels on the northern facing elevation, as well as a single, oval window on the second story. The steeply pitched, gabled roof has a minimal eave overhang. This perspective of the northern elevation allows for a view of the flared roof of the western facing section, which slopes down over the first story porch.

Barn (prior to 1898)

The barn is to the south of the residence, with the main façade facing north. It has a stone foundation, a wood shingle exterior with wood trim, and a steeply pitched, front gable, asphalt shingle roof with overhanging eaves and a square, hipped roof cupola. A flat roof, side ell extends to the east, and there is a shed roof ell off of the southern elevation. Windows are generally 2/2 with wood sills and lintels. There are also circular windows on the northern facing ell and western elevation. The cupola windows are paired, 2/2 on all four sides. A large wood, paneled entry door on the northern elevation has upper glazing, with three windows, each divided into two lights.

Garage (prior to 1952)

The garage is across Podunk Road to the west. It is three bays wide by one bay deep and has a north/south aligned rectangular plan. The foundation is stone, the exterior is wood shingle, and the trim is wood. The asphalt shingle roof is side gabled and steeply pitched on the rear, with a more moderate slope and slightly flared eaves over the eastern facing façade. A small, gabled cupola with louvers is centered on the roof ridge. The three, paneled garage doors each have four lights. There is also a small, front gabled shed, with a wood shingle exterior, to the north of the garage.

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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.

The Sturbridge Assessor's Database lists 1650 as the construction date of this residence.¹ Further research is warranted to get a better determination of the construction date and, if evidence is found, which portions of the residence date back to the seventeenth century.

Farmer Jonas Bemis (1818-1901) was the property owner by 1850, documented as consisting of 140 acres of land.² (Figure 1) At the time, Bemis had two horses, ten milch cows, four working oxen, and seven swine.³ Jonas married his first wife, Caroline A. Farnum (1815-1867) in 1843.⁴

From the mid nineteenth to the early twentieth century, deed research shows that there are a variety of owners connected with this property. Later owners Abraham S. Marcy (1828-1898) and wife Mary Elisa Marcy (1829-1906) sold the property to Charles H. Damon (dates unknown) in 1865.⁵

Although not confirmed through initial deed research, an 1870 map and later census may connect farmer Moses Lyford (1817-1880) and his wife, Olive (born ca. 1819) to this property.⁶ (Figure 2) By 1898, an atlas as well as deed research indicates that H. J. Myer (possibly Henrietta Myer, dates unknown) is the owner.⁷ (Figure 3)

Farmer Frank C. Brown (1851-1914) owned the property and buildings by 1907.⁸ In 1921, his wife, Frances Amelia Brown (1859-1928) sold three tracts of land and related buildings to Gabriel O. Silverberg (1883-1976) and Vendla M. Silverberg (1885-1938), both formerly of Finland.⁹ This commenced two generations of the Silverberg family residing at this address for the majority of the twentieth and early twenty-first century.

By 1930, the site is described as the "Podunk District" and Gabriel is noted to be employed as a tool maker in the pressed steel industry.¹⁰ Their son, Axel G Silverberg (1916-2017) married May V. Silverberg (ca. 1917-1996) in 1940 and purchased the house and property from his father by the following year.¹¹ Axel was employed as a mason and "built many of the stone walls and fireplaces now found in Sturbridge."¹² May was executive secretary to the Sturbridge School's Superintendent of Union No. 61 for 20 years.¹³

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

"251 Podunk Road." *Vision Government Solutions*, <http://gis.vgsi.com/sturbridgema/Parcel.aspx?Pid=3028>, accessed October 2017

Ancestry.com (see footnotes)

Genealogybank.com (see footnotes)

Masslandrecords.com (see footnotes)

Figure 1: Walling, H.F. *Map of Worcester County*, Boston: Wm. E. Baker, 1857, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3763w.la000320/>

¹ "251 Podunk Road." *Vision Government Solutions*, <http://gis.vgsi.com/sturbridgema/Parcel.aspx?Pid=3028>, accessed October 2017.

² "Jonas Bemis." *U.S. Federal Census Non-population Schedule*. 1850. *Ancestry.com*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ "Jonas Bemis," *Massachusetts Town and Vital Records*, 1843. *Ancestry.com*

⁵ Book 699, Page 459, 1865. *Masslandrecords.com*

⁶ "Lyford, Moses." *United States Federal Census*, 1880. *Ancestry.com*

⁷ Book 1810, Page 579. 1905, *Masslandrecords.com*

⁸ Land and buildings from Henrietta I. Meyer to Frank C. Brown 1907, Book 1855, Page 221 Related *Plan of Frank C. Brown's Farm, Sturbridge, Mass, 1907*, Henry W. Gaskill, C.E. *Masslandrecords.com*

⁹ Book 2250 Page 246 *Masslandrecords.com*

¹⁰ "Gabriel O. Silverberg." *United States Census*, 1930. *Ancestry.com*

¹¹ "Axel Silverberg." *Worcester Telegram and Gazette*, October 24, 2017. *Genealogybank.com* Book 02815 Page 0384

¹² "Axel Silverberg." *Ibid.*

¹³ "May V. Clark Silverberg." *Worcester Telegram and Gazette*. April 7, 1996. *Genealogybank.com*

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

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

Figure 4: "Podunk Road." *Worcester County Registry of Deeds*, 1952, Book 191, Page 121, *Masslandrecords.com*



Photo 1: Western facing main façade



Photo 2: Western façade and southern side elevation

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Photo 3: Northern side elevation



Photo 4: Eastern rear and southern side elevations

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Photo 5: Northern front elevation of barn



Photo 6: Northern front façade and eastern side elevation of barn

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Photo 7: Eastern facing front elevation and southern side elevation of garage



Photo 8: Eastern facing outbuilding, north of garage

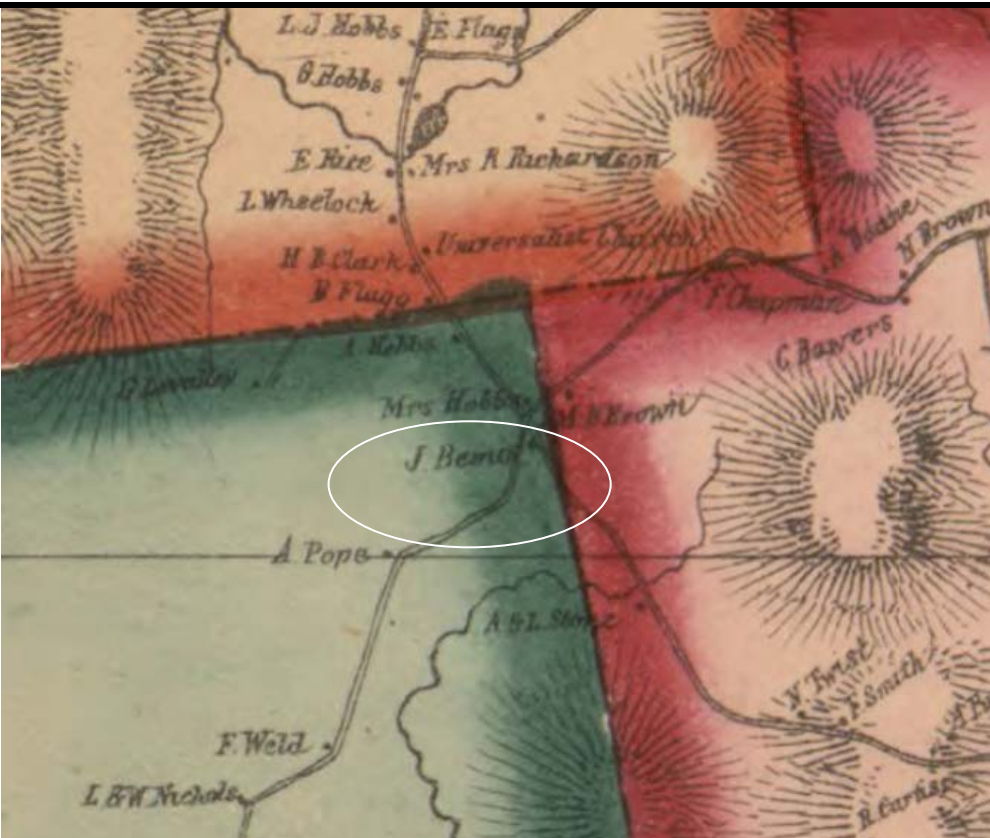


Figure 1: 1857 showing property of J. Bemis



Figure 2: 1870 Atlas (Moses Lyford (1816-1880))

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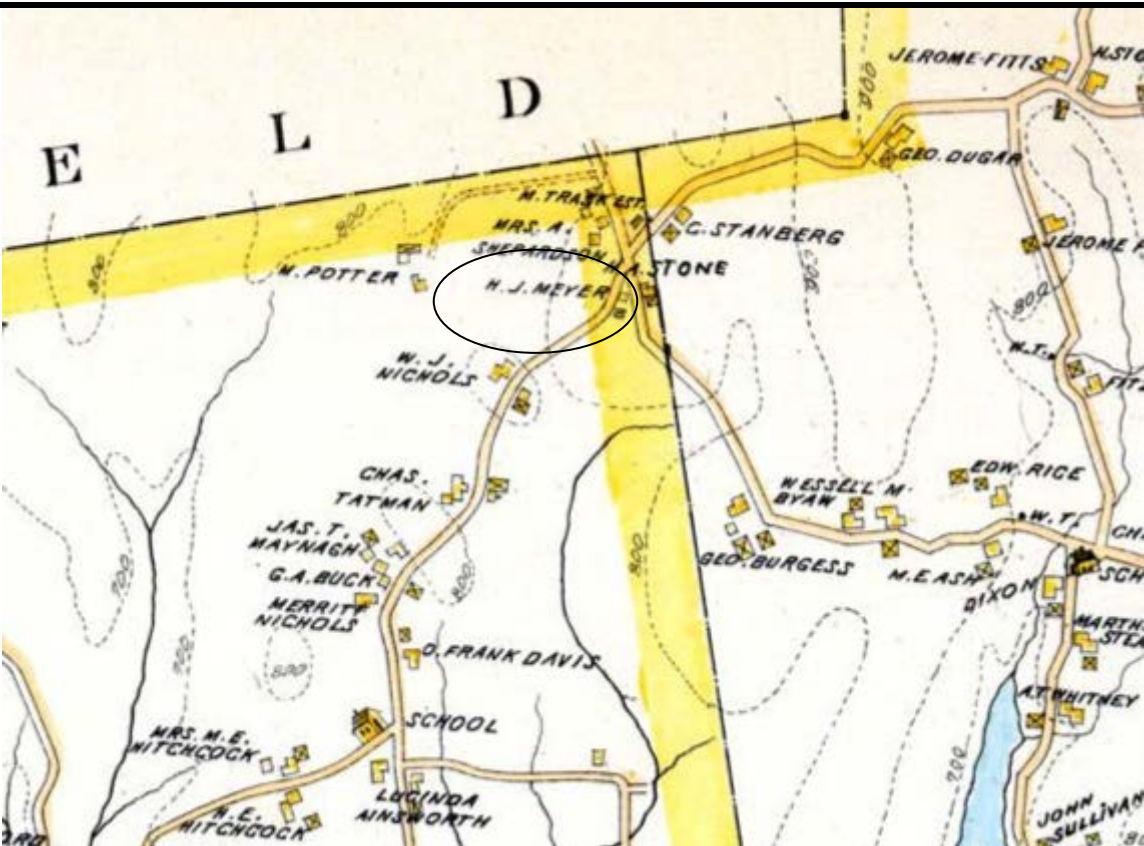


Figure 3: 1898 Atlas showing residence of possible owner Henrietta Myer, with residence and barn

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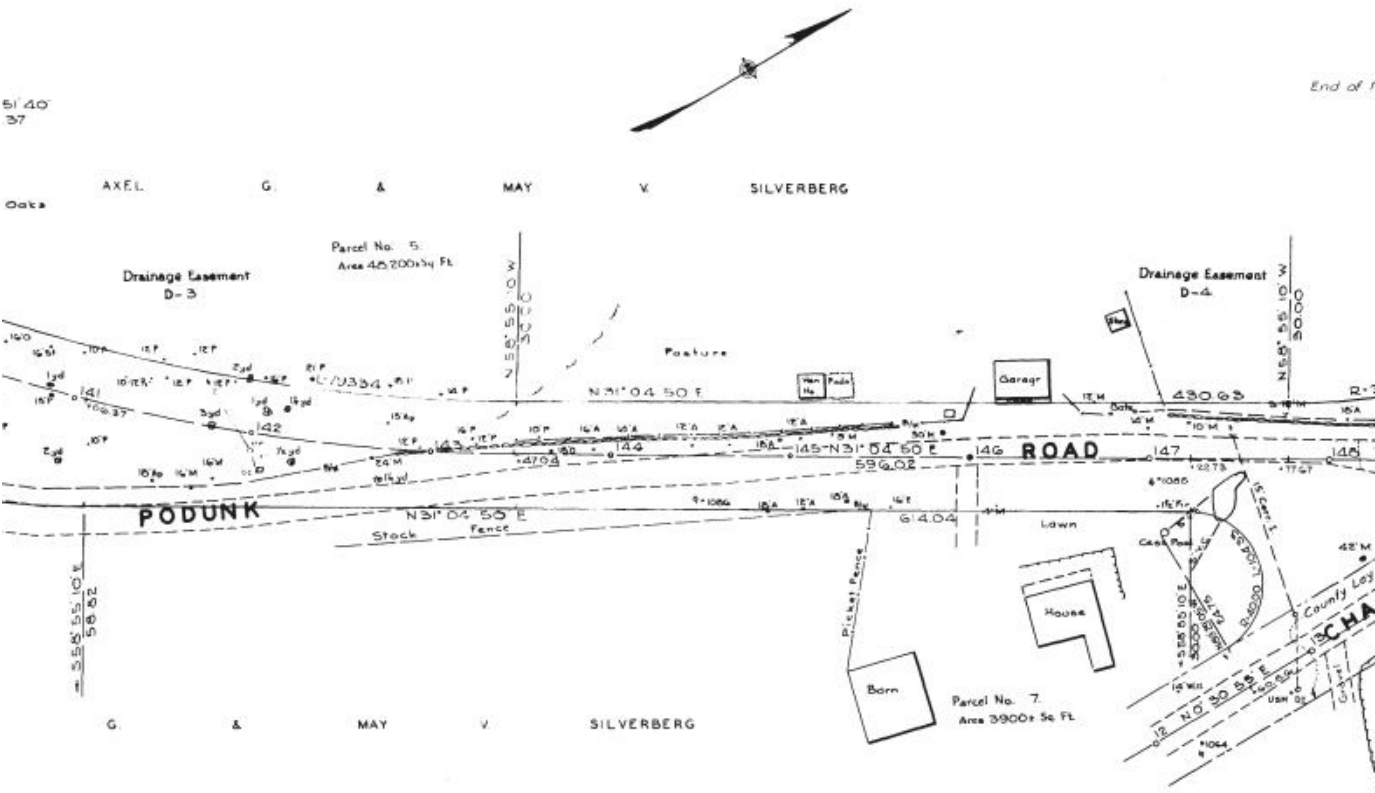


Figure 4: 1952 Land Plan of portion of Silverberg property, showing current out buildings

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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 Jonas Bemis House/Silverberg Family Farm, at 251 (and 248) Podunk Road, is recommended for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places with a period of significance from 1850 (or earlier) to 1967 (arbitrary fifty-year threshold) and significance on a local level.

This residence was constructed by the mid-nineteenth century, or possible much earlier, with later alterations. It meets National Register Criteria A in the category of Community Planning and Development, as, along with related outbuildings, it represents the early residential and agricultural growth in the Podunk area of Sturbridge and by the twenty-first century, continues to provide a sense of its early rural and agricultural landscape.

The buildings are further connected to the Social History of Sturbridge, as they are related to farmer Jonas Bemis (1818-1901) and a variety of later owners, and by the early twentieth century, to two generations of the Silverberg family.

The house is also significant under Criteria C for Architecture, as it is an interesting and harmonious blend of various styles due to alterations which have also achieved significance over time. An examination of the interior may lead to further character defining architectural details. The barn, constructed by at least the late nineteenth century, is utilitarian in nature but has some stylized details, including round windows, and is a good example of agricultural architecture.

In conclusion, the Jonas Bemis House/Silverberg Family Farm is eligible for National Register listing under both Criteria A and C, with local significance, as the buildings provide evidence of residential and agricultural growth and development and social history related to the Podunk area in Sturbridge, and, related to architecture, serve as examples of architectural style from the nineteenth century (or earlier) through the mid-twentieth century, to include later alterations which may have gained significance as well. Overall, the buildings and site retain a good degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.