

FORM B – BUILDING

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

3022 0 26

Weymouth

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BRA.17

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

Town/City: Braintree

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): East Braintree

Photograph



Address: 170 Commercial Street

Historic Name: Major Edmund Soper House

Uses: Present: Single Family Dwelling

Original: Single Family Dwelling

Date of Construction: 1772

Source: 1967 MHC Form B

Style/Form: Georgian

Architect/Builder: Major Edmund Soper

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Granite

Wall/Trim: Vinyl Siding, Brick

Roof: Asphalt Shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: Two-car garage: one-story with a pyramidal asphalt-shingle roof. The exterior is clad in red vinyl siding and has two roll-up garage doors on the north facade. Rear extension added in 2013.

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Brick veneer added (1949).

Demolition of a "shack and porch" (1958).

Exterior doors (east and west elevations) infilled; "rear porch" reinforced and aluminum windows and door installed; interior remodeling (1966).

Facade veneer removed and vinyl siding installed (1993).

Replacement windows (post-2000).

Asphalt shingle roof (multiple).

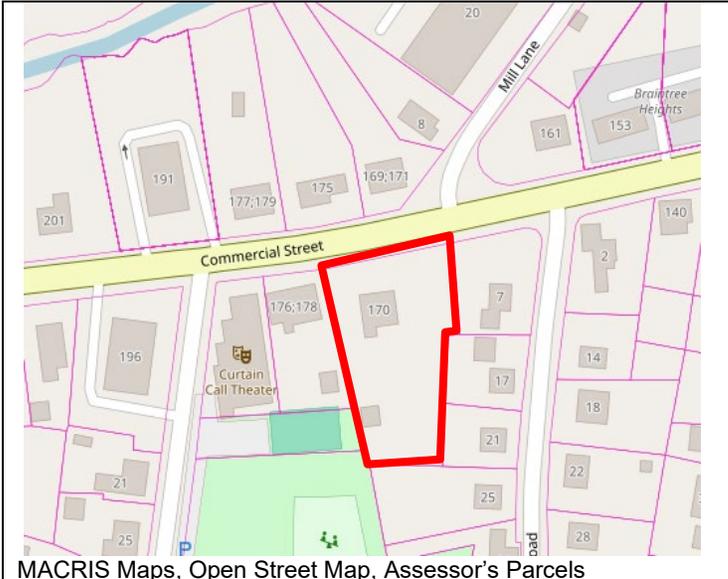
Condition: Fair

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 0.618 acres

Setting: Located along Commercial Street between Mill Lane and Faxon Street in a residential area of both single and multi-family residences constructed in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Locus Map



Recorded by: F. Evans, J. Greytok, & S. Olson, Easton Architects

Organization: Braintree Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): March 2024

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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.

In 1967, the Major Edmund Soper House was inventoried during a comprehensive survey conducted by the Braintree Historical Commission. The property was later evaluated in 2000 as part of a recommended Commercial Street Historic District and recommended as individually significant (BRA.S). This narrative updates and amends the description drafted in 1967. See earlier documentation for additional information.

The Major Edmund Soper House is situated on the south side of Commercial Street between Mill Lane and Faxon Street. The house faces north toward Commercial Street and the Monaquot River. Setback from the street, the building is surrounded by lawn, trees, and bushes. A low granite retaining wall (of both cut blocks and varying rubble) and hedges line the sidewalk. To the west of the building is a paved driveway leading to the rear of the property, where there is a two-car garage that is only partially visible from the public right-of-way.

The building is a 2-story, 4-bay deep main block with a rear ell extending from the southwest corner. The main block is generally square in plan and has a steeply pitched, ridge hip roof. The roof has two symmetrical brick chimneys on the east and west slopes near the ridge. Typical fenestration is 1/1 vinyl sash windows; the first-story windows have fixed single-lite transoms and rear windows have simulated divided lights. The north façade has five bays with a central main entrance. The façade is clad with vinyl siding and has plain corner boards and a shallow roof eave and a plain soffit. Nine windows spaced across the facade, one in each bay on each story. The primary entrance has a wood surround with fluted pilasters and topped with a simple entablature with a dentil band below, framing a modern storm door and obscured main door behind.

The east and west elevations are clad in brick veneer. The east elevation has four window bays and the west elevation has five bays. Both have infilled first-story openings at center with a small second-story window. An attached rear ell is visible at the west elevation. The 2-story ell is clad with red vinyl siding and has a shed roof. Each story has a 2-lite sliding or fixed window.

Known alterations to the building are documented in the 1967 form, Town of Braintree permit records, and historic photographs. Brick veneer was added in 1949 and an unspecified shack and porch were demolished in 1958. In 1966, side doors on the east and west elevations were infilled, structural work and installation of aluminum windows and a door was undertaken at a rear porch (likely the current rear ell), and interior bathroom and kitchen rooms were remodeled. The 1967 form noted a "rear west shed (dilapidated, now removed)." The extent of demolition connected to the 1966 permitted work is not known; the current rear ell has the same roof, footprint, and exterior materials as the ell shown in the 1967 photograph, although the windows have since been changed. In 1993, the facade's brick veneer was removed. The permit proposed to "repair siding and trim that exists behind the brick veneer" with no mention of vinyl cladding. Original exterior materials may still remain intact on the east, south, and west elevations. The building's 6/6 windows were replaced at an unknown date after 2000, when the building was photographed in the Commercial Street area survey (BRA.S). Historic photographs indicate that the building once had a full-width front porch, covered west entrance, roof balustrade, and window shutters (Figure 7).

The Major Edmund Soper House is an example of 18th century architecture in Braintree which features elements commonly found in simplified interpretations of Georgian style residential architecture. Georgian architecture, prominent in the colonies before the Revolutionary War, is categorized by features including a rectangular plan, side gable or hipped roof, denticulated cornice, central brick chimney, double hung windows, symmetrical façade, and centrally-located paneled door with surround. In the Northeast colonies, the hipped roof type (such as the subject building) was less common and typically found in high-style examples of the Georgian style. Although the Major Edmund Soper House does not exemplify the exterior materials or detailing of the style, it retains many original features including its form and façade rhythm.

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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.

This narrative amends the 1967 building form. See earlier documentation for additional details on the building's history.

According to previous documentation, the house at 170 Commercial Street was constructed in 1772 for Major Edmund Soper.¹ Maj. Soper died in 1776.² Maj. Soper's estate remained unsettled for over a decade following his death; in 1791, the estate was still in the hands of the administrator, Captain John Vinton.³ Eventually, the house passed to Maj. Soper's grandson, Henry J. Holbrook; map evidence shows he occupied the house in 1856 (Figure 1). Holbrook's daughter, Ellen (Holbrook) Stetson, lived in the house following Holbrook's death in 1878 and until her death in 1918 (Figures 2-5). Biographical summaries of these owners are included below.

Although establishing a chain of title through deed and probate records provides insight into each owner of a property, additional research into the building's known owners allows for a more comprehensive understanding of its potential historic significance—in addition to its age—through the social and economic contributions of its owner(s)/occupant(s) within the larger historic context of the town's development.

Major Edmund Soper (1731-1776) was born in Bridgewater to Edmund and Bettie Soper. He married twice: to Betty Fobes in 1754 and Eunice Curtis in 1756.⁴ In 1750, Maj. Soper moved from Bridgewater to the Ironworks district in East Braintree. He had a store on Mill Lane, located across the street from his house, and owned a large shipbuilding business on the Monatiquot.

Henry Jesse Holbrook (1795-1878), son of David Holbrook III (1747-1818) and Mehitable Soper (1757-1841), married Frances T. Seabury in 1826.⁵ Together they had four children: Ellen F. (1829-1918); Henry E. (1831-1869); Charles S. (1833-1914); and William Augustus (1839-1848). Census records indicate that Holbrook was a merchant; the 1870 census specifies that he was a dry goods dealer.⁶

Ellen (Holbrook) Stetson married her husband, Dr. Albert Everett Stetson (1826-1857), in 1852.⁷ Together they had two children: Franklin Holbrook (1853-1855) and Emma Louisa (1856-1911).⁸

This survey form was completed as part of an intensive-level survey of cultural and architectural resources in Braintree which concentrated on a pre-1870 period of study. Therefore, for this property only an overview of owners after 1870 is included. In 1913, Ellen F. (Holbrook) Stetson's conservator, Albert E. Avery, sold the property on her behalf to Hattie (Burtch) Kempl, wife of the Braintree druggist George R. Kempl. George Kempl died in 1934 and his widow sold the property in 1947 to John W. Harms. Harms sold it in 1954 to the educator Francis A. Romeo (1909-1996), a teacher and principal in Boston Public Schools from 1932 until retiring in 1976. He was a member of the Braintree Historical Society, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (S.P.N.E.A., now Historic New England) among other organizations. Romeo owned the house at the time of the 1967 survey and documentation.

Since the first recorded European settlement of Braintree, the town's economy centered around industry with the establishment of the first grist mill in 1640 and the first iron works on the Monatiquot River in 1653. While most individual homesteads had farms, the crops that were cultivated were intended for subsistence rather than the large-scale production of crops intended for

¹ Architectural Heritage, Inc. and Braintree Historical Society, "Major Edmund Soper House," MHC Form B BRA.17 (Feb. 1967), <https://mhc-macris.net/details?mhcid=bra.17>, accessed May 1, 2024.

² Edmund Soper Hunt, *Weymouth Ways and Weymouth People: Reminiscences* (Boston, Massachusetts: 1907), 231.

³ John Adams Vinton, *The Vinton Memorial Comprising a Genealogy of the Descendants of John Vinton of Lynn, 1648* (Boston, Massachusetts: S.K. Whipple and Co., 1858), 183-184.

⁴ Findagrave.com Memorial #42229634, accessed May 1, 2024; Bridgewater Town Records, in Massachusetts, U.S., Town and Vital Records, 1620-1988 (ancestry.com)

⁵ Familysearch.org Person #KCFS-Z17, accessed May 1, 2024.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau (1850), *United States Census, 1850*; U.S. Census Bureau (1860), *United States Census, 1860*; and U.S. Census Bureau (1870), *United States Census, 1870*, retrieved from familysearch.org.

⁷ Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Notices of Graduates of Yale College* (New Haven, Connecticut: 1913), 354.

⁸ Familysearch.org Person #LRVY-7SZ, accessed May 1, 2024.

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market sale. The waterpower of the Monaquot River, which supplied power to the town's earliest industries, continued to support the growth of existing and new industries during the Colonial Period (1675-1775). Milling, shipbuilding, textile, shoe, and other manufacturing industries established along the river and, eventually, the railroad, continued to develop during the Federal Period (1776-1820) and throughout the Early Industrial Period (1821-1870). The town's economy, like its population, also continued to grow, due to improvements to infrastructure and transportation routes within Braintree and between the town and the surrounding municipalities. This trend continued throughout the Early Industrial Period (1821-1870), during which time settlement continued expanding from East Braintree to South Braintree, notably around the Monaquot. During the latter decades of the Colonial Period and throughout the Federal Period, Washington and Commercial Streets became two of the primary thoroughfares that traversed the town of Braintree. The importance of these thoroughfares is especially evident when examining settlement patterns, which tended to concentrate around those two major streets.

The Major Edmund Soper House is an example of late 18th century Georgian style architecture in Braintree that has undergone alterations since it was first constructed. The building is not a high-style representation of Georgian residential architecture; however, elements of the property can still contribute to a broader sense of the town's history. The building was constructed during an important period in the town's growth and elements such as its location, building materials, style, and the occupations of its residents can contribute to an understanding of development and population growth during that time period. The building's location along Commercial Street reflects the settlement patterns of the town's earliest residents, whose homesteads were concentrated along major roadways. As Commercial Street ran parallel to the Monaquot River, much of its early settlement included a mix of industrial, commercial, and residential buildings; individuals and families who settled in this area were most likely connected to the industrial economy of Braintree. Similar to many of Braintree's oldest houses and homesteads, the Major Edmund Soper House remained within the Holbrook family for multiple generations. Additionally, the proximity of Major Soper's house to his manufacturing businesses along the Monaquot River is also representative of a general pattern of individual settlement near places of work. This settlement trend is also prevalent among individuals in the boot and shoemaking industry—especially smaller businesses and shops—and along the Monaquot River, where many major industries, in addition to those related to shipbuilding and shipping, were located.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION



Figure 1 - 1832 Map of Braintree Mass.



Figure 2 - 1856 Map of the Town of Braintree, Norfolk County, Mass.

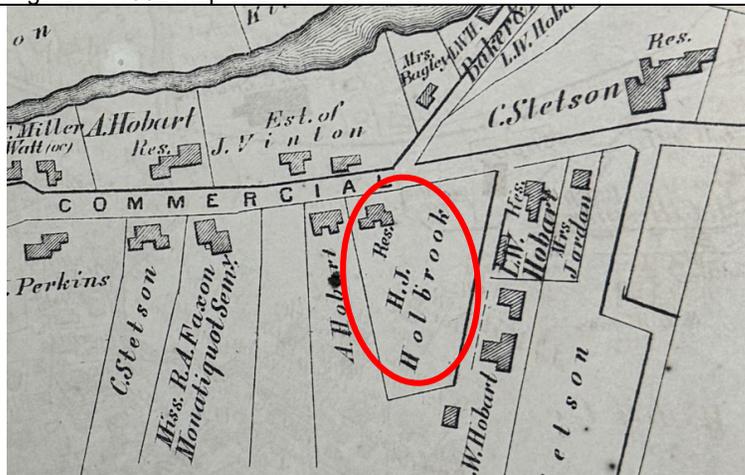


Figure 3 - 1876 East Braintree Map.

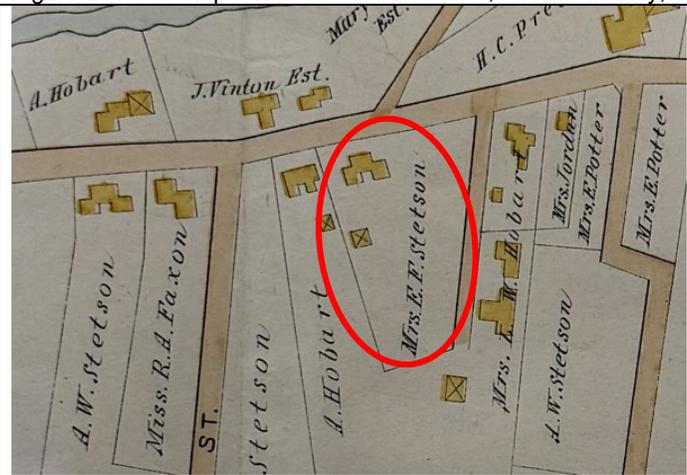


Figure 4 - 1888 East Braintree Map.

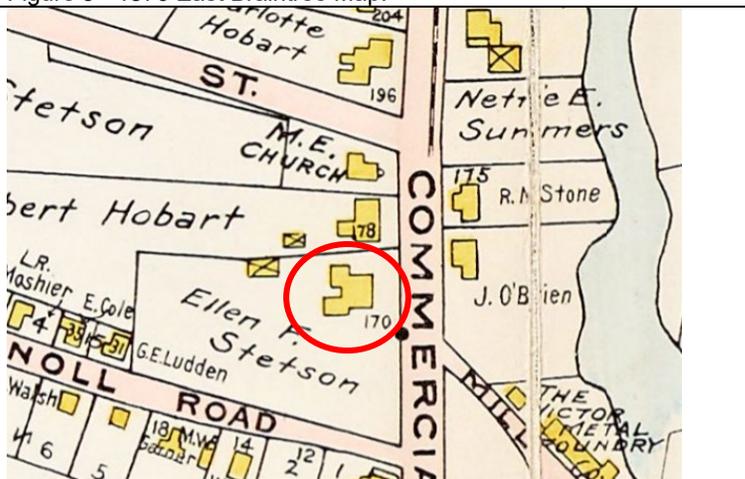


Figure 5 - 1909 Atlas of the towns of Braintree and Weymouth, Norfolk County, Mass.

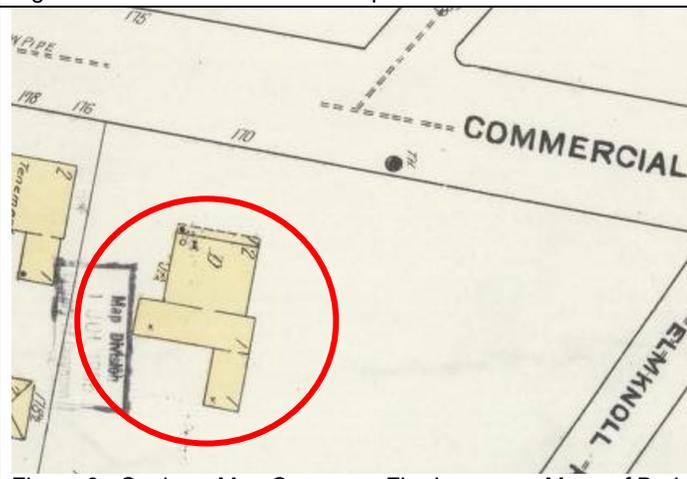


Figure 6 - Sanborn Map Company, Fire Insurance Maps of Braintree (1919).

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Figure 7 - Braintree Historical Society, 100s Houses #101-163, #134 Commercial St. (Soper House). #134-A (n.d.)



Figure 8 - Braintree Historical Society, 100s Houses #101-163, #134 Commercial St. (Soper House). #134-B (n.d.)



Figure 9 - Braintree Historical Society, 100s Houses #101-163, #134 Commercial St. (Soper House). #134-C (1989)

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ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS



170 Commercial Street, north façade.



170 Commercial Street, west elevation.



170 Commercial Street, garage.