

# FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

059-008	Cotuit	E	12
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Town Barnstable

Place (*neighborhood or village*) Marstons Mills

## Photograph



Northeast elevation

Address 229 River Road

Historic Name David Higgins Watch Shop

Uses: Present Residence

Original Blacksmith's shop

Date of Construction Before 1903, probably 19<sup>th</sup> century

Source Reid Higgins, great-grandson of shopkeeper

Style/Form Vernacular

Architect/Builder Unknown

Exterior Material: Clapboard painted barn red on façade; unpainted cedar shingles on all other elevations.

Foundation Poured concrete

Wall/Trim Wood

Roof Asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures  
None

Major Alterations (*with dates*)

Carriage house addition – date unknown

Moved back 15 feet from street, new foundation – 1986

Renovated, four rooms added – 1986

New roof - 2000

Condition Much altered

Moved  No  Yes Date 1903-1911

Acreage 0.88 acre

Setting Near village center at corner of River Road and Lovells Lane.

## Sketch Map



Recorded by Dr. James Gould, Holly Hobart

Organization Marstons Mills Historical Society,  
Barnstable Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*) July, 2007

**MM E-12****229 River Road, Marstons Mills, Barnstable, Massachusetts****BUILDING FORM****ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION** *see continuation sheet**Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

The house is a modern vernacular style of one and a half stories. Facing the street is a facade of five bays, which encloses the original carriage shed that measures about 12 x 24 feet. The roof is topped by a louvered square cupola with a weather vane. The front entrance in the center of the façade is enclosed by a small porch. Extending perpendicularly to the rear is a gabled ell containing the dining room. This ell is the original watch shop, about 12 x 13 feet, from which additions have been extended on east and west sides under shed roofs. In 1986 the whole building was moved back from the street about 15 feet and placed on a poured concrete foundation, with a full basement below, and separate entrance on the side. An open porch extends off the south side.

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE** *see continuation sheet**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 oldest part of the building may date back into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was originally located on the William Marston property, and appears there in a photo taken about 1900. It is said to have been used as a blacksmith's shop. It was bought by Dr. James Higgins as a place for his father, David Higgins (1831-1911), to set up his watch shop. David, born in Nova Scotia, learned his trade with Waltham Watch Co. (1850-1852), but went to sea on his father's schooner (1852-1860), then served in the Civil War before following the watchmaking trade. After the war he set up shop in Meridian, Mississippi, then moved up the Mississippi River to Missouri, Chicago, and Redwing, Minnesota. During the boom of watchmaking in Providence, he worked there for a decade (1892-1892), then in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and finally in Marstons Mills, where his father was the country doctor.

In 1913, this 12 x 13 gabled shed was moved half a mile west on River Road to the junction of Lovells Lane by Dr. James Higgins. At the end of that year, Higgins gave the building to Charlotte (Huefner) Gross (1865-1948) (Deed 327-133), whose husband, a bank employee, had been killed in New York by a trolley car, leaving her with two boys. Mrs. Gross was married in 1915 to the neighbor across the street, Gideon Lovell (1857-1953), a licensed practitioner of herbal medicine who worked on an estate in Osterville and did carpentry. Lovell was legendary for walking long distances: he showed up for work at Daniel Brothers Builders in Osterville, complained his feet hurt, then walked home. He would walk to the blacksmith's shop in Cotuit to be sure it was open, then walk home to fetch his horse to be shod.

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

Barnstable County Registry of Deeds, Deeds 12648-156, 5265-302, 2974-238, 2879-77, 2375-153, 1302-442, 1141-125, 660-19, 327-133, 313-412.

Town of Barnstable Building Department, Permits 29795, 49597.

"Autobiographical Memoirs of J. Haydn Higgins, M.D", Typed mss.

Genealogy: "Descendants of Richard Higgins", p. 14, Typed mss.

Interview with David Higgins's great-grandson Reid Higgins, August 17, 2007.

Lovell stories: Interviews with Francis Rennie of Cotuit and Wilbur Cushing of Marstons Mills, July, 2007.

Interviews with Harold M. Roper, July 6 and July 19, 2007.

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

**INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET**

Town

Property Address

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**Historical Narrative, cont'd**

Mrs. Gross found a job as housekeeper on the estate where Lovell worked. Lovell is probably responsible for the first enlargement of the house. He is said to have moved a 24 x 12 foot carriage house from the Lovell property across the street, and added the shed-roofed rooms to east and west of the watch shop.

Lovell died in a nursing home in Hyannis in 1953 at the age of 93. Charlotte had died in 1948 and left the property to her son Frank. In 1961 he sold it to W. Clayton Ryder of Glenbrook, CT (Deed1141-125). Four years later, Ryder sold it to Angela (Kearsley, nee Tricone) Steare (Deed1302-442). In 1976, Angela, who died the following year of cancer at age 49, sold it to John M. Newkirk, Jr. of Yarmouth (Deed 2879-77), who in turn sold it to Angela's daughter, Norma R. Martin and her husband George (Deed 2974-238). The Martins sold it to the current owner, Harold M. Roper, in 1979 (Deed 5265-302).

In 1986, Roper had Craig Condinho move the building back from the street 15 feet and place it on a poured concrete foundation. The house was then renovated on plans of architect Tim Heywood, adding four rooms to make a 24 x 42 foot plan (Permit 29795). Roper put on a new roof in 2000 (Permit 49597).

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**Barnstable County Registry of Deeds****Chain of Ownership**

2874-238      **George R. and Norma R. Martin to Harold M. Roper**  
 8/29/1979

2879-77      **John M. Newkirk, Jr. to George R. and Norma R. Martin**  
 1/16/1979

2375-153      **Angela C. Steare, formerly Angela C. Kearsley, of Pittsfield, VT, to John M. Newkirk, Jr., of Yarmouth,**  
 7/26/1976      **MA**

1302-442      **W. Clayton Ryder to Angela C. Steare**  
 6/10/1965

1141-125      **Frank C. Gross to W. Clayton Ryder of Glenbrook, CT**  
 6/19/1961

660-19      **Charlotte R. Lovell, formerly Charlotte H. Gross, wife of Gideon Lovell, to her son, Frank C. Gross**  
 11/4/1944

327-133      **James Haydn Higgins and Grace G. Higgins of Barnstable to Charlotte R. Gross, "...land with the**  
 12/24/1913      **buildings thereon..."**

*This is the first mention of buildings, indicating that the building might have been moved to the property in 1912-1913.*

313-412      **Robert E. Cammett and Elizabeth H. Cammett to J. Haydn Higgins, "...a certain piece of land...", no**  
 6/27/1912      **mention of buildings.**

"Commencing on the Southerly side of the bridge that crosses the Marstons Mills river near the dwelling of Geo. O. Goodspeed at the South-easterly corner of said road and river, thence Southerly by the said Mill river to lands of Geo. A. York, thence Easterly by an old fence and land of said York to the road leading from Marstons Mills to Newtown; thence Northerly and Westerly by said road to the first-mentioned bound."

*This is the description carried by all of the deeds for this parcel.*

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**Sign on David Higgins's Watch Shop, 1903-1911,  
currently in possession  
of great-great grandson Chris Higgins.**