

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

15 – 15A	Marion, MA		MRN.43
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Town/City: Marion

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Gifford's Corner

Photograph



Address: 678 Mill Street

Historic Name: James and Elizabeth Wittet House

Uses: Present: Single Family Dwelling

Original: Single Family Dwelling

Date of Construction: Early 19th century

Source: Visual, title

Style/Form: No style/ half Cape

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Cut granite

Wall/Trim: Vinyl / vinyl

Roof: Asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: None

Major Alterations (*with dates*): Porch added to ell (late 19th century); siding, windows replaced (date unknown)

Condition: Fair

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 0.17 acres

Setting: On Mill Street, a historic route between Sippican Wharf Village and Mattapoisett. Surrounding buildings are a mix of later 19th and early/mid-20th century single family houses.

Locus Map (*North is Up*)



Recorded by: Jennifer B. Doherty

Organization: Marion Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): March, 2021

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MARION

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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.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

The James and Elizabeth Wittet House is an early 19th century house that has been modified over the years. Sited on the east side of Mill Street, the house faces northwest across the street. It appears to have been a half-Cape in plan originally, two bays wide and two piles deep. A large gabled wall dormer covers the front face of the roof, providing additional living space in the half-story and suggests a mid-century picturesque embellishment. The rear roof extends down to cover what appears to be a leanto space across the rear of the house. An ell extends from this leanto on the east side of the house. One-and-a-half stories tall with a side-gable roof, the ell features a porch with Queen Anne style detailing across the front, and a gabled wall dormer on the front roof face.

Sitting on a cut granite foundation, the Wittet House is covered in vinyl siding and has an asphalt shingle roof. The windows have been replaced with vinyl 1/1 sash. Entry doors are located in the east bay of the façade, on the façade of the ell, and in a gabled enclosed entry porch on the rear pile of the west elevation. The porch on the ell is a quite elaborate Queen Anne feature. The main roof of the ell extends down to cover the porch, and the north side wall is enclosed. The porch features a large arch in the center between two posts. The posts, as well as the walls of the house at the ends of the porch, are accented by square knee brackets with a square crossbar. Aside from the porch on the ell, there is no other trim or elaboration on the building.

The Wittet House fills most of its small lot, so much so that it is accessed by a driveway to the east of the lot, over 340 Converse Road. A low granite block wall marks the front property line, while a wood stockade privacy fence extends from the west elevation, wrapping around the side and rear property lines on that side.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Mill Street has served as a historic route of travel between Sippican Village and Mattapoisett and has been shown on maps as early as 1794. By the mid-19th century, a small neighborhood had developed south of Mill Street's intersection with Converse and Parlowtown roads; in 1855, three houses stood in the area. Later in the 19th century, the neighborhood acquired the name Gifford's Corner, named for Edward W. Gifford whose house was located in the area south of Gifford's Corner Road. Around the turn of the century, Azorean and Cape Verdean immigrants moved into or built houses in the neighborhood, expanding the residential node. Many of the men worked as laborers, particularly gardeners on Marion's numerous private estates. Today, descendants of these families still live in the area. The area has never had a strong commercial or industrial component, evident in the landscape today, compose mainly of single family dwellings. For additional information on the development of Gifford's Corner, see MRN.XXX.

The James and Elizabeth Wittet House was likely constructed in the early 19th century, but its visual appearance and difficulty researching deeds make it hard to determine an exact date of construction. The assessor lists a 1780 date of construction, but this cannot be confirmed without interior investigation, which was not completed for this work. The house was standing by 1855, when it was marked on the map of Marion as the residence of "J. Wittet." James Wittet (1799-1872), a sailmaker, purchased at least two parcels of land from Blankinship family members in the second quarter of the 19th century. The first, from Job Blankinship in 1838, has unclear boundaries, although its deed does mention that it is on the east side of the road leading from Sippican to Mattapoisett, later known as Mill Street.¹ This deed also notes that the property being transferred includes buildings, suggesting that Wittet may not have built the subject house. The second deed, from John B. Blankinship in 1849, appears to be a swap of land between Blankinship and Wittet.² The deed describes a parcel of land matching boundaries given in later deeds, noting that it is land that had been enclosed by a fence by Wittet. The deed states that Blankinship is transferring the enclosed land to Wittet, while Wittet is returning to Blankinship all the land (with boundaries not described) that is

¹ PCRD 200:207, 1838

² PCRD 232:213, 1849

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not enclosed. Because the first deed mentions buildings, it is possible Job Blankinship built the house, or owned it before the Wittets, but overall the deeds are unclear on the house's early history. Wittet and his wife Elizabeth (1813-1893) were married in 1830 and were recorded in the 1850 census with their five daughters and one son, James T. Wittet.³ Both men were working as sailmakers.

In 1863/1865, James Wittet sold a square parcel of land roughly 145' by 145' to Frances M. Briggs, wife of Rufus F. Briggs.⁴ Larger than the present-day lot, this square lot would be referenced in later deeds, for the subject property and surrounding properties, as the "Briggs houselot." In 1868, Rufus F. Briggs added to his houselot with the acquisition of a much larger lot encompassing present-day 682 Mill Street and a large portion of 340 Converse Road (see Figure 1).⁵ Briggs (1834-1905), a blacksmith, and his wife Frances M. *Harper* Briggs (1816-1890) were recorded at the house alone when the 1870 census was taken.⁶ In 1880, they were joined by boarder Charles Norton, a sailor. Following Frances M. Briggs' death in 1890, her husband remarried, to Jane E. Latham (1854-1905). The couple were recorded together in the 1900 census, and Briggs was marked at the Wittet House on the 1903 map.

In 1906, Briggs' estate sold the houselot and larger parcel to Manuel T. Brazil.⁷ Brazil (187-1945) and his wife Lucy C. Brazil (1881-1921) were Azorean.⁸ They were recorded in the 1910 census with their five children; in both the 1910 and 1920 census, the family was listed as white. Manuel T. Brazil was working as a teamer, while Lucy C. Brazil was a laundress.⁹ The family was still together in 1920, but now four of the children were adults. Manuel T. Brazil and two of his sons were working as laborers; a third was a carpenter; and a fourth was a gardener on a private estate. A few years after his initial purchase of the Wittet House, Manuel T. Brazil conveyed its ownership to his wife.¹⁰ Following her death, the Brazil family did not retain the property; instead, it was conveyed by her estate to Philip J. and Margarida V. Rose.¹¹ Through all these conveyances, the property retained its larger size. The assessor dates the house at 682 Mill Street to 1910, and it appears to be marked on the 1936 USGS map. The properties were not split until the 1950s.

Philip Jose Rose (ca. 1885-1953) was a native of Cape Verde, arriving in the United States in 1900. He and his wife, Margarida (sometimes Margaret) *Valles* Rose, had one adopted daughter, Mary V. Rose. The three were recorded on Mill Street in the 1930 census, with Philip J. Rose working as a gardener at a private estate. In 1940, the family was joined by Philip J. Rose's brother, Manuel, who was unemployed. In both censuses, the family was recorded as "negro." In 1944, Philip J. Rose began operation of a package store near his house, which he operated until his death several years later. Shortly before Philip J. Rose's death, the Roses conveyed the present lot of 678 Mill Street only to their daughter, Mary V. Rose, now known as Mary V. Santiago after her marriage to Maurice Santiago.¹² The Santiagos owned the property for a few years before conveying it to Rozinha P. Ramos of Foxborough in 1959; however, they may not have been living at the house, as the 1966 street directory lists the house as the residence of Robert and Rose M. Pittsley. The house has had several owners through the late 20th century.¹³

³ Ancestry.com: Find-A-Grave; Massachusetts, US, Town and Vital Records, 1620-1988; US Federal Census of Population for 1850.

⁴ PCRD 326:117, 1863/1865

⁵ PCRD 919:570, 1868/1905

⁶ Ancestry.com: Find-A-Grave; US Federal Census of Population for 1870, 1880, 1900.

⁷ PCRD 937:298, 1906

⁸ Ancestry.com: Find-A-Grave; Marion city directory for 1916; US Federal Census of Population for 1910, 1920.

⁹ There are some confusing records relating to the Brazils from the 1910s. A later deed indicates that the Brazils divorced in 1914, while the 1916 directory lists Lucy C. Brazil as a widow. However, the two are buried together, and Lucy C. Brazil is listed as Manuel T. Brazil's wife on their headstone.

¹⁰ PCRD 1032:112, 1909; PCRD 1032:113, 1909

¹¹ PCRD 1446:231, 1923; PCRD 1445:230, 1923

¹² PCRD 2282:221, 1953

¹³ PCRD 2730:326, 1959; PCRD 4063:190, 1975; PCRD 39380:252, 2010

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1903 L. J. Richards & Co, *New Topographic Atlas of Surveys of Plymouth County ... Massachusetts*

1908, 1921, 1933 Sanborn Insurance Atlases.

Ancestry.com: see footnotes

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"Gordon, Edward W. "MRN.43 – James Wittet-R. Briggs House," Massachusetts Historical Commission Building Inventory Form.

For the Sippican Historical Society, March, 1998.

Leonard, Mary Hall. *Mattapoissett and Old Rochester, Massachusetts.* New York, NY: The Grafton Press, 1907.

"Philip J. Rose," *The Standard-Times*, July 7, 1953.

Plymouth County Registry of Deeds (PCRD): see footnotes, book:page, date signed/date recorded if notably different, otherwise only date recorded

Vital Records of Rochester, MA to the end of the year 1849



The façade and west elevation of the James and Elizabeth Wittet House.

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Figure 1: The late 19th and early 20th century bounds of the James and Elizabeth Wittet House property are still visible on Marion's public GIS website. They included the lots labeled 15A and 15B, as well as the triangular portion of land created by the dashed line to the east of the two lots, part of present-day 340 Converse Road.