

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

16-177

Marion

MRN.L

MRN.171

Town/City: Marion

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Marion Village

Address: 75 Water Street

Historic Name: James Walker Austin House

Uses: Present: Residential

Original: Residential

Date of Construction: 1885

Source: Deed research

Style/Form: Queen Anne

Architect/Builder: William Gibbons Preston

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Concrete

Wall/Trim: Wood shingle / Wood

Roof: Asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
None

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Changes to north and south elevations (after 1938)

Condition: Excellent

Moved: no yes **Date:**

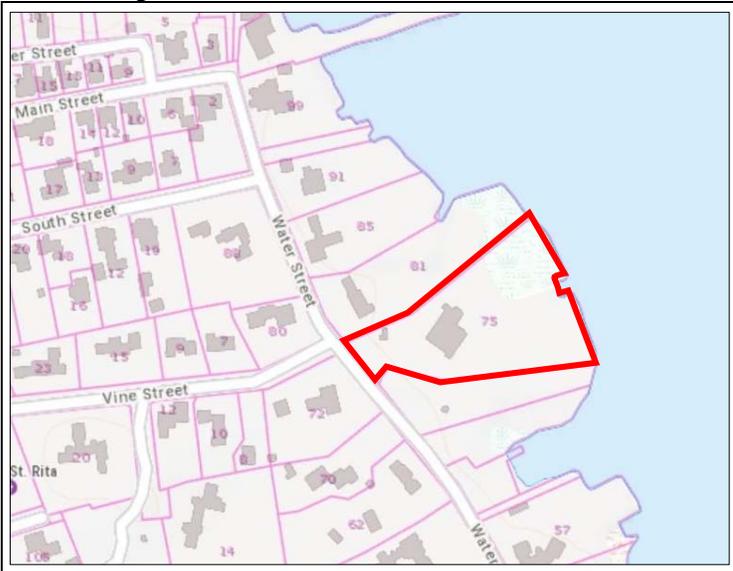
Acreage: 2.08

Setting: Homogeneous residential neighborhood of predominately high-style Shingle Style and Queen Anne houses, principally developed in the late 19th – early 20th centuries. Surrounded mostly by large, wood-frame, single-family houses on generous lots. Borders a rocky shoreline along Sippican Harbor.

Photograph



Locus Map



Recorded by: Lynn Smiledge

Organization: Marion Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): January 2022

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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.

75 Water Street occupies a large, wedge-shaped, waterfront property on the western shore of Sippican Harbor. The house faces compass northwest (called "north" for convenience in this description) and is positioned in the western half of the parcel. It is surrounded by a sweeping expanse of manicured lawn that extends east to the shoreline. Mature trees are clustered between the house and Water Street and at the northern property boundary. Low shrubs and foundation plantings surround the house. A shallow grass terrace with curved corners along the west and south elevations of the house is retained by granite blocks and boulders. The property is bordered along Water Street by a low rubble-stone wall incorporating a circular stone moon gate at the southeast corner of the parcel. Three concrete docks reach into the harbor along the property's extensive shoreline, which is retained by a stone seawall.

The building is a two-and-one-half-story, wood-frame house with an L-shaped plan, asymmetrical massing, a complex roof plan of intersecting gables, and a hexagonal tower at the southwest corner. Constructed ca. 1888 in the Queen Anne style, it retains the majority of its original character-defining features despite significant alterations made to the north and west elevations. These changes were likely made after the house sustained significant damage during the 1938 hurricane (see the pre-1938 image below). An enclosed one-story porch wraps the south and east elevations. The house rests on a concrete foundation. The walls are clad in painted wood shingles finished with contrasting wood trim. The roof is surfaced with asphalt shingles. Corbelled brick chimneys rise from the intersection of the tower and gable wall at the southwest corner of the house, the north slope of the main gable at the north elevation, and the west slope of the cross gable at the west elevation.

The façade (north elevation) at the main block is dominated by twin cross gables flanking a one-story, hip-roofed entrance bay. The entry has a deep entablature over paired Doric columns and walls of full-height, multi-light glazing. The house has deep molded cornices with eave returns, frieze boards, and a band course that delineates the first and second stories. Windows at the upper story are generally single, twelve-over-one, double-hung sash. The windows at the lower story include paired and triple 28-over-one and twelve-over-one double-hung sash. All of the window openings have molded surrounds and paneled blinds. The west elevation of the main block is distinguished by a bracketed canopy between floors at the three southern-most bays, an eyebrow window at the roof of the center bay, and the three-story hexagonal tower with roundel windows at the upper level and a hexagonal roof cap. The south and east elevations of the house could not be visually accessed during the site visit.

A shell driveway enters the property at the northwest corner of the parcel and terminates in a circular drive. The moon gate (**MRN.9xx**) that marks the southwest corner of the parcel is a local landmark (see historical narrative below).

75 Water Street is an excellent example of Queen Anne, the dominant style for domestic architecture in the United States between 1880 and 1900. Devised by a group of English architects and based on the visual vocabulary of late Medieval models, Queen Anne encompasses a wide range of architectural features from several stylistic traditions. The style gained popularity after being seen at the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876 and was disseminated by the country's leading architectural magazine and by pattern books and mail-order house plans. Identifying features of the Queen Anne style seen in this house include its asymmetrical massing, complex roof plan with cross gables, distinctive tower, and articulation with trim.

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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 Village of Marion, the commercial and residential center of the town, is set on the western shore of Sippican Harbor. The town has historically consisted of a northern portion, often referred to as the Old Landing, and a southern portion, known once as Wharf Village but more commonly referred to today as The Village or Marion Village. This house is located in the southernmost section of Marion Village near the waterfront, which before 1860 was largely uninhabited. Prior to that time Marion, like other coastal towns, was dependent on fishing, coastal shipping and related businesses such as the production of salt from sea water. Salt was a vital commodity for fisheries, and this section of Marion Village was the site of several salt works. Maritime industries were dominant in Marion until the mid-19th century, when the advent of rail service began to facilitate tourism. At the same time, new cultural and educational institutions endowed by the founder of Tabor Academy, Elizabeth P. Taber, dramatically enriched the community.

Affluent urban dwellers from cities like Boston and New York were now able to travel in comfort to seaside destinations like Marion. The town began to attract many notable political, literary, and art world figures seeking a genteel seaside respite. Initially visitors stayed at hotels or rented private houses, but as the end of the century neared and Marion became nationally known as a desirable vacation destination, wealthy individuals began to build their own permanent summer residences. This desirable waterfront area, once home to salt works, became the site of grand summer cottages. These imposing houses include an outstanding collection of Shingle Style residences and fine examples of the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles. Several of these residences were designed by prominent American architects including Charles A. Coolidge, James T. Kelley and William Gibbons Preston, who designed this house at 75 Water Street. Henry Hobson Richardson, the most celebrated American architect of the day, designed the first Shingle Style house in Marion. It was built in 1881 for the Reverend Percy Browne at 192 Front Street (1881, Rev. Percy Browne-Sidney Hosmer House, MRN. 211) just north of this waterfront neighborhood.

This house appears on the 1903 map with J.W. Austin shown as the owner. The earliest recorded conveyance found for the property was dated 1884, when Francis Austin of Boston purchased several tracts of land at the northernmost end of Water Street from James Luce of Cleveland. Francis Boylston Austin (1827-1887) was the son of William and Lucy Jones Austin (1802-1853) of Boston. William Austin (1778-1841) was a graduate of Harvard College and a prominent member of the Boston bar. His son Francis Austin lived in Charlestown and was a dealer in metal and hardware as well as an active player in the Boston real estate market. Shortly before his death in 1887, Francis sold this parcel of land to his brother, James Walker Austin (1829-1894). James Austin attended the Chauncy Hill School in Boston and received degrees from Harvard College and Harvard Law School. In 1851, the year that he earned his law degree, he left Boston for the Hawaiian Islands (aka Sandwich Islands) where he would establish his legal career. James Austin was immediately recruited by King Kamehameha as a legal advisor and went on to serve as district attorney. He was elected a member of the Hawaiian parliament three times, serving one term as speaker of the house. Austin was appointed a judge in the Hawaiian Supreme Court and eventually became chief justice. James Austin was married to Ariana Elizabeth Smith Sleeper (1829-1911) and the couple had five children. Austin returned to the United States mainland in 1872 and established a residence at 4 Arlington Street in Boston.

The house was likely built shortly after James Austin's acquisition of the property from his brother in 1887; letters to one of his sons in 1888 attest to James' presence in Marion at the time. The house was designed by William Gibbons Preston (1842-1910) in the Queen Anne style. Preston was a prolific Boston-based architect who designed a variety of building types from institutional structures to country houses. Along with Henry Hobson Richardson, he was one of the first Americans to study architecture at Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Preston's Boston works include the Hotel Vendome, 160 Commonwealth Avenue (1871, BOS.3502), the Museum of Natural History, Boylston Street (1863, BOS.2639), the Chadwick Lead Works Building, 176-84 High Street (1887, BOS.1790), and numerous upscale residences in the Back Bay neighborhood. Preston summered in Marion and is credited with more than 20 projects in the town, although not all of these buildings have been officially attributed to him. They include the Marion Music Hall, 164 Front Street (1891, MRN.23), four houses on Water Street, and possibly the Marion Town House, 2 Spring Street (1875, Tabor Academy Recitation Building, MRN.59). Preston briefly owned (1885-1888) and made improvements to the Sippican Hotel (no longer extant). Preston's plans for 75 Water Street are held by the Art Department at the Boston Public Library.

The Austin family appears to have been very active in the summer community of Marion. They called the property "Edgewater" and letters from James and Ariana Austin to their son Walter describe many of the town's social events, some of which took

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place at their summer cottage. Judge Austin's time in Marion was brief as he died on a trip to England in 1894. Letters from Ariana Austin to her children show that she continued to summer in Marion until her death in 1911. The property passed to the children with final ownership held by the couple's daughter Edith (1873-1957). According to local lore, the moon gate (MRN.935) was built for Edith ca. 1922 as an entrance to her gardens. She was inspired by photographs of moon gates shared by her friend June Butler, who had married Parker Converse and honeymooned in China. Local stones were used to construct the circular gate and the elements on the cornice were obtained from China. In Chinese culture moon gates are thought to offer an auspicious welcome or fortune to those who pass through.

In 1960 the property was sold by Edith Austin's estate to John and Ruah MacNeil. John L. MacNeil (1898-1977) and his wife Ruah V. (DeWitt) MacNeil owned this property from 1960 until 1972. John MacNeil of Waltham was for many years a senior executive with the First National Stores, a chain of supermarkets. He started in the food business prior to World War I when he worked for the Connor Company, a predecessor of First National. He served in France during the first world war and was the director of military food procurement for the United States during World War II. The property was purchased by one of the couple's five daughters, Janice and her husband Louis J. Mendes in 1972. In 1983 Janice Mendes sold it to the current owners, William and M. Florel Holmes of Chappaqua, New York.

Deed Research

Date	Book-Page	Grantor	Grantee
02-27-1998	17646-0195	Florel Holmes Irrevocable Trust	Holmes Trust
06-02-1996	15464-278	M. Florel Holmes Trust	Florel Holmes Irrevocable Trust
06-22-1982	9883-16	William & M. Florel Holmes	M. Florel Holmes
09-22-1983	5463-48	Janice M. Mendes	William & M. Florel Holmes
12-08-1980	4924-168	Louis J. Mendes	Janice M. Mendes
12-27-1972	2893-148	John L. & Ruah V. MacNeil	Louis J. & Janice M. Mendes
10-14-1960	2810-27	Estate of Edith Austin	John L. & Ruah V. MacNeil
10-09-1886	536-100	Francis B. Austin	James W. Austin
07-19-1884	504-35	James Luce	Francis B. Austin

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 Francis B. Austin obituary, *Boston Evening Transcript*, Boston, MA, February 14, 1887.
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 "John L. MacNeil, 77, Leader in Food Business," *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA, September 2, 1975.

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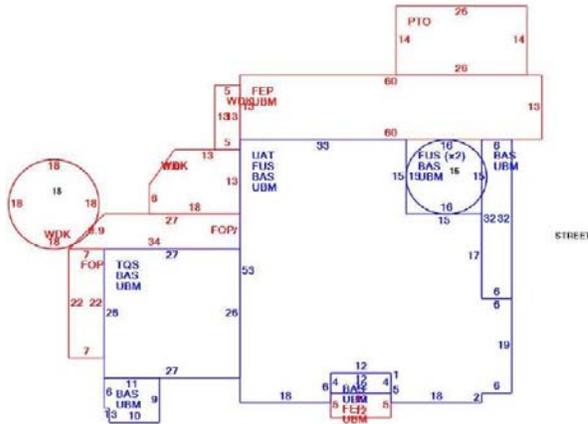
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Assessor's card plan



Moon gate at southwest corner of property. (MRN.935)

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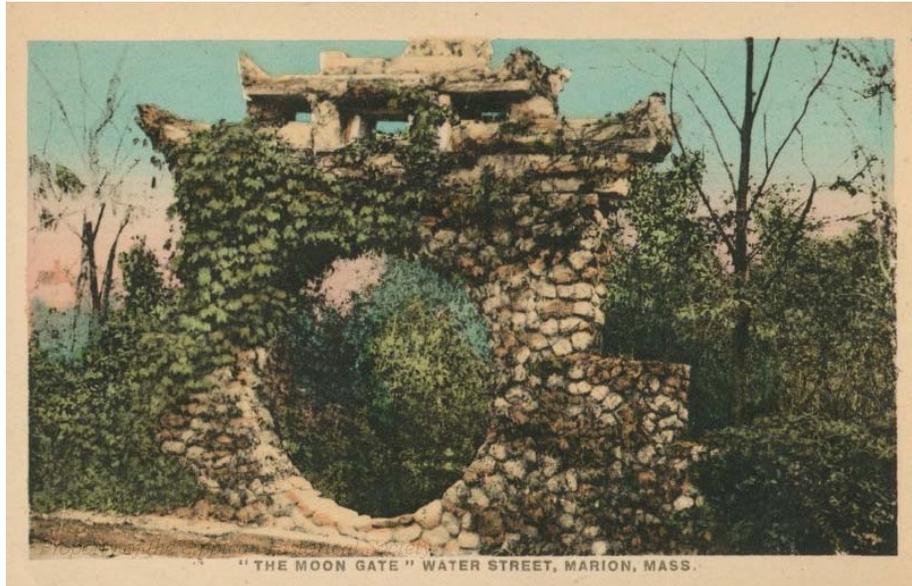
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Postcard ca. 1920s. Courtesy of Sippican Historical Society.



75 Water Street prior to the 1938 hurricane. Postcard image courtesy of the Sippican Historical Society.

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Additionally, the early 19th century residence at 60 Water Street (MRN.169) was originally owned by Captain Henry M. Allen, one of the pioneers of Marion's salt-making industry.

Under Criterion C, the area is recommended as eligible at the local, and possibly the state, level in the area of Architecture for its outstanding and exceptionally well-preserved collection of high-style houses on generous lots which date from the late 19th through the early 20th century. The area includes distinguished examples of the Queen Anne, Shingle Style, and Colonial Revival styles, several of which were designed by prominent American architects including Charles A. Coolidge, James T. Kelley and William Gibbons Preston. The only non-residential building in the area is the Craftsman-style, Charles A. Coolidge-designed Sippican Tennis Club at 20 Holmes Street (MRN.157).

The resources here retain substantial integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, design, feeling, and association. The district would likely meet Criteria A at the local level and Criterion C at the local, and possibly state level, with areas of significance in architecture and social history.