

**FORM B – BUILDING**

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

Town  C  119

Place (neighborhood or village)

Address 36 Hancock Street

Historic Name Hancock-Clarke House

Uses: Present Museum

Original Dwelling

Date of Construction 1736-1737

Source Dendrochronology 2007

Style/Form Georgian

Architect/Builder

Exterior Material: Wood

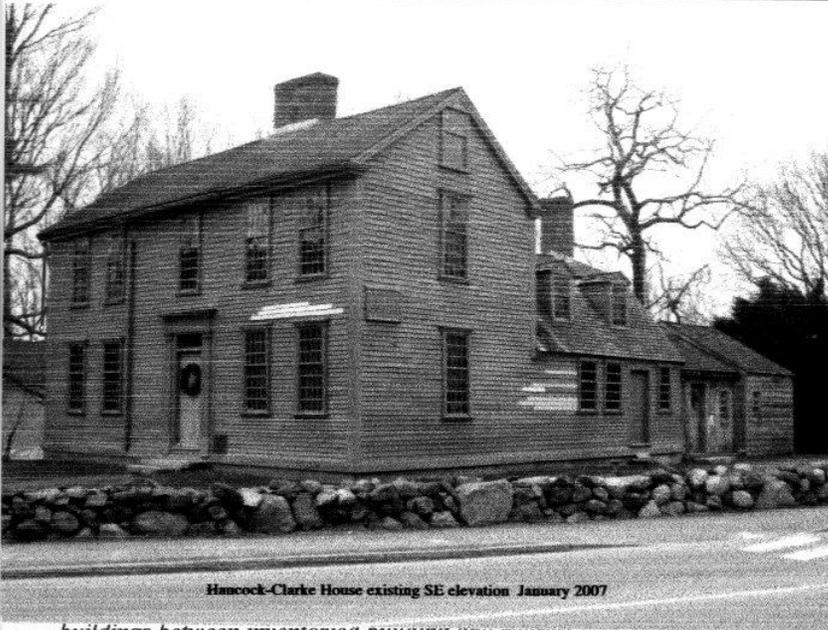
Foundation Concrete with partial granite facing

Wall/Trim Wood

Roof Asbestos cement on south part, cedar shingles on north part

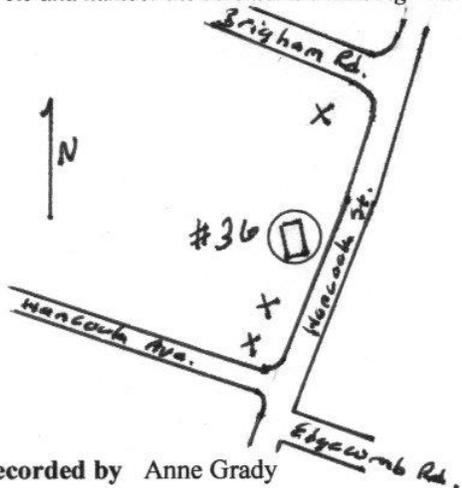
Outbuildings/Secondary Structures Mid 19<sup>th</sup> C. barn

**Photograph**



Hancock-Clarke House existing SE elevation January 2007

Draw a map showing the location of the building between inventoried building and nearest intersection or natural feature. Label streets including route numbers, if any. Circle and number the inventoried building. Indicate north.



**Major Alterations (with dates)**

Kitchen fireplace rebuilt, c. 1850;  
 Reception and exhibit area built north of the ell in 1775.  
 Asbestos cement shingles installed 1930; removed from ell in 1979 and replaced with cedar shingles.

Condition Fair

Moved  no  yes Date 1896; 1974

Acreage 0.72 acres

Setting Residential street of relatively level grade. Many surrounding houses date from the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the street was the most fashionable in Lexington.

Recorded by Anne Grady

Organization Lexington Historical Society

Date (month / year) July 2007

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

## 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 Hancock-Clarke House, set on an angle to Hancock Street facing south, includes two historic sections built just a year apart. The south part of the Hancock-Clarke House, built in 1736, is two-and-one-half stories in height with a central chimney, a gabled roof and a slightly asymmetrical plan. The north part, built in 1737, is an ell two stories in height with a chimney at the north end, a gambrel roof and a second floor that is thirteen-and-one-half inches lower than that of the south part. An addition, built to the north of the ell in 1975 after the house was moved back to its original site, includes a reception area and exhibit space and in the cellar a library and archival and curatorial storage. The new construction reproduced two earlier sheds shown in a mid-nineteenth century painting.

The south part of the house, reflecting its early Georgian origins, has a classical frontispiece with a flat entablature decorated with a dentil course and side pilasters; vertically aligned windows with molded caps; a modest classical cornice at the eaves and plain corner boards. The ell lacks exterior decorative features. There are four dormer windows in the ell's roof and irregularly spaced windows in the walls below. The exterior walls of the house retain early clapboards, distinguished by their skived ends and narrow weathers, in a number of places. When the house was moved the first time in 1896, among the repairs undertaken by the Lexington Historical Society was the installation of the current windows with 9/12 lights in the south part of the building and windows with similar panes of glass in windows of irregular size.

### 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 Hancock-Clarke House was built by Rev. John Hancock, the Town's minister, just 23 years after Lexington separated from Cambridge. Rev. Hancock, whose pastorate spanned 53 years, was a well-respected and influential member of the clergy in the region. He was the father of two ministers, two minister's wives, and the wealthy Boston merchant, Thomas Hancock. Rev. Hancock was succeeded as minister in Lexington and owner of the house by Rev. Jonas Clarke, who served in Lexington for 50 years.

Rev. Clarke was a leading patriot minister well known and respected by the leaders of the Revolutionary cause. With an interest in the process of human government, grounded in his religion, and with his strong support of justice for the colonies, Rev. Clarke shaped Lexington's response to the unjust measures meted out by the Crown. The resolutions he wrote for Lexington and his published writings on behalf of Liberty were described by Edward Everett as having "few equals and no superiors."

Because of Rev. Clarke's leadership, the Hancock-Clarke House was often the site of consultations among patriots. The house was a short distance from the Lexington Green, where the British troops and the Lexington Minute-men confronted each other on April 19, 1775. Patriot leaders, Samuel Adams and John Hancock (Rev. Hancock's grandson) had been staying with

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

Chandler, Sarah. "Remembrances of the Hancock-Clarke House," 1897. Lexington Historical Society (LHS) Archives

Clarke, The Rev. Jonas. "Almanac Diaries" Vol. II (1766-1778), Vol. IV (1788-1796), Vol. V (1797-1805). LHS Archives.

Grady, Anne A. and Deane Rykerson, "Preservation Report: The Hancock-Clarke House, Lexington, Massachusetts." Rykerson Architecture, June 2007.

Mascarene, John. "A Dissertation on the Rev. Jonas Clarke's Seat at Lexington." C. 1794-1805. LHS Archives.

Whipple, H. Lawrence. . *The Hancock-Clarke House, Parsonage and Home*. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Historical Society, 1984.

Worthen, Edwin B., Jr. "A Study of the Hancock-Clarke House Site." 1966. LHS Archives.

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.* The Hancock-Clarke House became a National Historic Landmark in July 1971.

# INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Town  
LEXINGTON

Property Address  
36 HANCOCK ST.

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

Area(s) Form No.

C	119
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## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE continued

Rev. Clarke for several weeks for their safety. It was to the Hancock-Clarke House that Paul Revere and Thomas Dawes came on the night of April 18, 1775 to warn that Hancock and Adams their arrest might be imminent.

Rev. Clarke's role in recording the battle and promoting the memory of it further reinforced the importance of the site. Because of its associations with the beginning of the Revolution, the Hancock-Clarke House was revered and preserved by subsequent owners, beginning with Rev. Clarke's two unmarried daughters, who lived on in the house until their deaths in 1843 and 1844. Though the house was sold out of the family, the memory of its association with the Revolution continued to grow. Nineteenth century owners received visitors interested in the dwelling's history, including thousands of visitors who came at the time of the Centennial celebration in Lexington in 1875. Published accounts and descriptions of the house and illustrations of it appeared with increasing frequency.

It was only in the 1890s, when the then owner wanted to demolish the house to extend her lawn that, despite its historical associations, the house was threatened. In 1896, the Lexington Historical Society stepped in to save the building by purchasing it, moving it across the street and restoring it. Apparently every Lexington family along with many outside donors contributed to the cost of these actions.

The saving of the Hancock-Clarke House by the Lexington Historical Society and the opening of it as a museum the following year was only the fourth time in Massachusetts that a local group saved an historic building and opened it as a house museum. The reason why the Lexington Historical Society saved the house was articulated in the organization's meeting minutes in 1904. It was to be "a new shrine for the eager pilgrim, a new altar whereon thousands who make this pilgrimage may pledge themselves to the service of a genuine patriotism." In 1964, the status of the house as an icon of the American Revolution was reinforced when the Daughters of the American Revolution chose to replicate the parlor bedroom where Hancock and Adams stayed to represent Massachusetts in their museum in Washington, DC.

The Lexington Historical Society has been the steward of property since 1896. In 1974, after the original site was bequeathed to the Society, the organization moved the house back across Hancock Street to its original location. Conceived as a Bicentennial project, the move and the construction of a visitors' center and archival and curatorial space allowed the Society to better serve the public and interpret the site where already by the 1960s a million people had visited. The changing ideas of the interpretation of historic properties and of evolving house museum installations can be traced in the rich written and visual record of the house kept by the Society. Similarly evolving ideas of restoration, repair and preservation are documented in the building itself and in the Lexington Historical Society's records.

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## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION *continued*

The exterior features of the design of the south part of the house mirror the simple elegance of the interior rooms where paneled fireplace walls, cornice moldings, beam cases, staircase decoration, and paneled doors of Georgian design remain virtually unchanged for the original construction. Three of the four rooms remained unpainted until 1897, when they received a single coat of a translucent finish.

The ell, modest in treatment in keeping with its utilitarian functions, is also well preserved, though the kitchen fireplace was rebuilt in the mid nineteenth century. The ell retains walls of feather-edged sheathing, an original secondary staircase, and many original doors and other fittings.

Though there are several earlier houses in Lexington, two of which, the Munroe and Buckman Taverns, are also owned by the Lexington Historical Society, all, except the Hancock-Clarke House, have been modified over time. The Hancock-Clarke House, when built as the house of the Town's minister, Rev. John Hancock, was undoubtedly the finest and most sophisticated dwelling in Lexington. Rev. Hancock is thought to have received financial support and design advice from his son, Thomas, a wealthy Boston merchant who was building his own celebrated mansion on Beacon Hill at the time. The house compares favorably with other house of the 1730s, like the Durant-Kendrick House in Newton, that were built by men whose urban connections gave them access to the new Georgian architectural ideals at a time when those ideals were just beginning to spread to rural areas. What distinguishes the Hancock-Clarke House among surviving eighteenth century houses in Massachusetts is the fact that it survived without significant change over time.