

FORM B - BUILDING

AREA	FORM NO. 325
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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
80 BOYLSTON STREET, BOSTON, MA 02116

PHOTO: (3x3" or 3x5", black & white)
staple to left side of form

Photo number _____

SKETCH MAP

Show property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or geographical features. Indicate all buildings between inventoried property and nearest intersection. Indicate north.

Recorded by Betsy Friedberg
Organization Mass. Historical Commission
Date July, 1985

North Adams Quadrangle
UTM reference: 18/655860/4726680
(Staple additional sheets here)

Town North Adams MRA

Address 932 South Church Street

Historic Name Charles Browne House

Use: Present residence

Original residence

DESCRIPTION:

Date 1869

Source Family History

Style Italianate

Architect Unknown

Exterior wall fabric Clapboard

Outbuildings Garage

Major alterations (with dates) Wooden porch posts replaced with wrought iron. small porch added on east side (20th century)

Moved No Date N/A

Approx. acreage 2 1/3 acres

Setting The house is located on a small wooded lot at the base of the Hoosac Mt. Range. A mixture of scattered residences, industries, and commercial properties are located nearby.

OCT 25 1985

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.)

The Charles Browne house is a simple example of an important regional variation of the Italianate design, which was popular in North Adams after the Civil War. The shallow hipped roof, brackets and polygonal side-bay window are characteristic of the style, as well as the three-bay main facade, side-placed entryway sheltered by small porch, and essentially square plan.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.)

This building is historically significant as the home of Charles A. Browne, a noted local inventor who made several important contributions to the construction of the Hoosac Tunnel (NR 1973). Browne's home, which he built in 1869, was constructed not far from the west portal. As an inventor, Browne's most important work was the perfection and manufacture of an electric blasting cap fuse, a device that proved invaluable to safe and efficient construction where explosives were required.

Born in the Town of Adams in 1842, Browne worked at various jobs before he began his first association with the work on the Hoosac Tunnel in 1863. At that time, he worked for Holbrook & Hawkins, the mason contractors who supplied the brick. Apparently, through this connection, he next worked in Maryland for the U.S. Blasting Oil Company in the construction of a railroad. These jobs must have provided him with experience in working with explosives, for by the late 1860s, he was in New York City trying to perfect an electric fuse.

The problem that most concerned him was to devise an electric fuse that could operate in the damp conditions of the Hoosac Tunnel. While working on various jobs associated with the tunnel, he continued to experiment on developing a safe, efficient electric fuse. In 1869, while experimenting with fulminate of copper, there was an accidental explosion that eventually cost Browne his eyesight. Browne obtained, in 1870, a patent for an electric fuse. His brother, Isaac, described the device in (continue

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES (name of publication, author, date and publisher)

Record of Deeds, Adams, MA

"Charles A. Browne and Brother," paper written by Isaac S. Browne, 1928

United State Patents, Patent Numbers 108,324; 125,558; 128,945; 151,004; 152,790; 158,672.

Material in possession of Miss Ruth Browne, North Adams, MA.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: North Adams	Form No: 325
Property Name: Charles Browne House	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

Historical Significance

the following manner:

"Two insulated wires, terminating in the chamber of a small wooden plug, were separated at their points about one sixteenth of an inch. In this chamber was deposited a few grains of fulminate of copper, held in place by a small pasteboard disc. This plug was then inserted in an outer shell, containing the bursting charge. If intended for a high explosive, like Nitro Glycerine, fulminate of mercury was used, while for powder ignition a less powerful powder was employed, usually a chlorate of potash preparation."

Fulminate of copper was sensitive to electrical influences, and deteriorated with age. Charles Browne developed a priming that avoided these difficulties,

With the patent obtained, Charles and Isaac established a firm, Charles A. Browne and Brother, to manufacture the device. They constructed a small factory across from Charles Browne's house around 1870. (The factory is at 949-953 Church St., but is extensively altered and no longer retains integrity.) The contractors in charge of the Hoosac Tunnel construction became the Brownes' best customers. Thus, it was not coincidental that the factory, and Browne's house, were located near the road to the west portal of the tunnel.

The fuse was only one of several patents Browne obtained while he was without full use of his sight. Patents were also secured for the following items: Box for seidlitz-powders (January 9, 1872); Electrical Condensor (May 19, 1874); Explosive Compound (July 7, 1874). In addition, Browne is credited with developing special tools for work on the tunnel.

Charles A. Browne and Brother had a special arrangement with the Laflin and Road Powder Co. by which they supplied blasting cap fuses exclusively to that firm. Exceptions were made only to the Hoosac Tunnel contractors and two other clients. This association ended in the early 1880s when Laflin and Rand took on another client and undersold the Brownes. When work on the tunnel was finished, the Browne brothers were unable to compete and went out of business.

In 1882, the factory and all its machinery was sold to A.C. Houghton, principal owner of the Arnold Print Works. It is not known what use they made of the building, although it was still used as a factory as late as 1929. With his business ended, Browne retired to manage his farm. He died in 1907, leaving the house to his son, William. William C. Browne was a noted local historian. This tradition has been carried on by his daughter, Miss Ruth Browne.

Criteria for Evaluation

The Charles A. Browne House, a well-preserved example of a regionally specific form of Italianate-style architecture, retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling, as well as association with a central figure in the development of the Hoosac Tunnel, inventor Charles Browne. The building thus fulfills Criteria A, B, and C of the National Register of Historic Places.

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

85003413

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Browne, Charles, House (North Adams MRA)
Bershire County
MASSACHUSETTS

SEP 12 1985

Working No. _____
Fed. Reg. Date: 2/3/87
Date Due: 10/10/85 — 10/27/85
Action: ACCEPT 10-25-85
____ RETURN _____
____ REJECT _____
Federal Agency: _____

Entered in the
National Register

- resubmission
- nomination by person or local government
- owner objection
- appeal

Substantive Review: sample request appeal NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria _____
Reviewer _____
Discipline _____
Date _____
_____ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: _____ technical corrections cited below
_____ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? yes no

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- alterations/integrity
- dates
- boundary selection

8. Significance

Period _____ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates _____ Builder/Architect _____

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- applicable criteria
- justification of areas checked
- relating significance to the resource
- context
- relationship of integrity to significance
- justification of exception
- other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

UTM References _____

Verbal boundary description and justification _____

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

_____ national _____ state _____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title _____ date _____

13. Other

- Maps
- Photographs
- Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

Signed _____ Date _____ Phone: _____

Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet

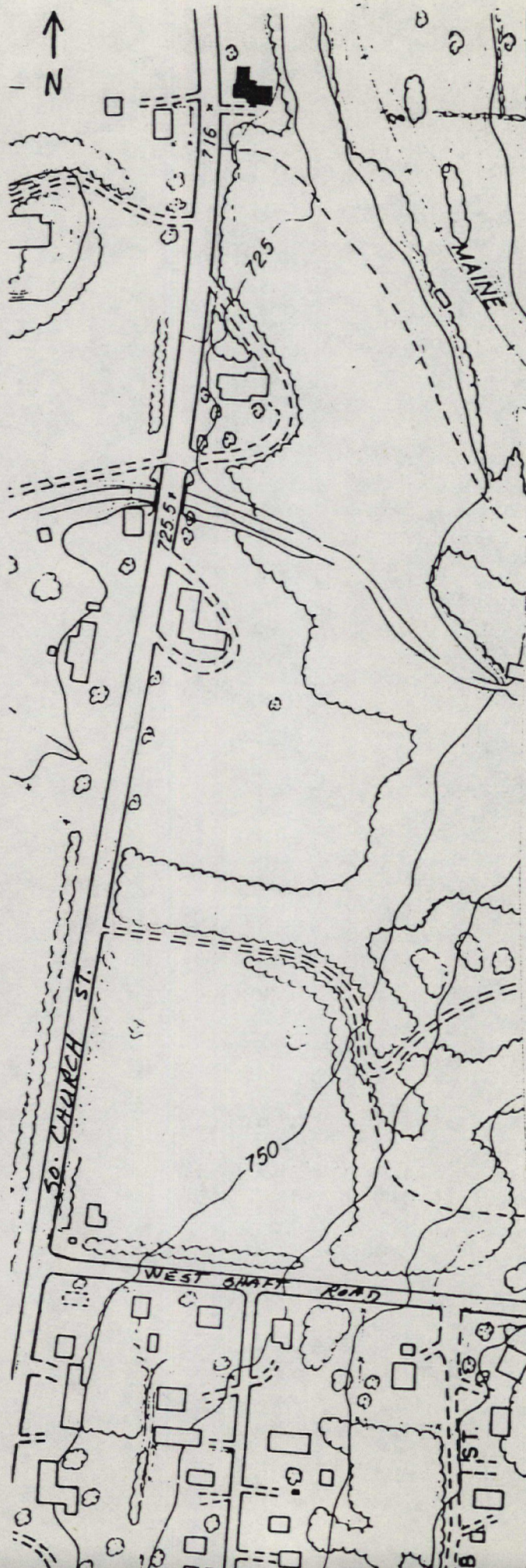


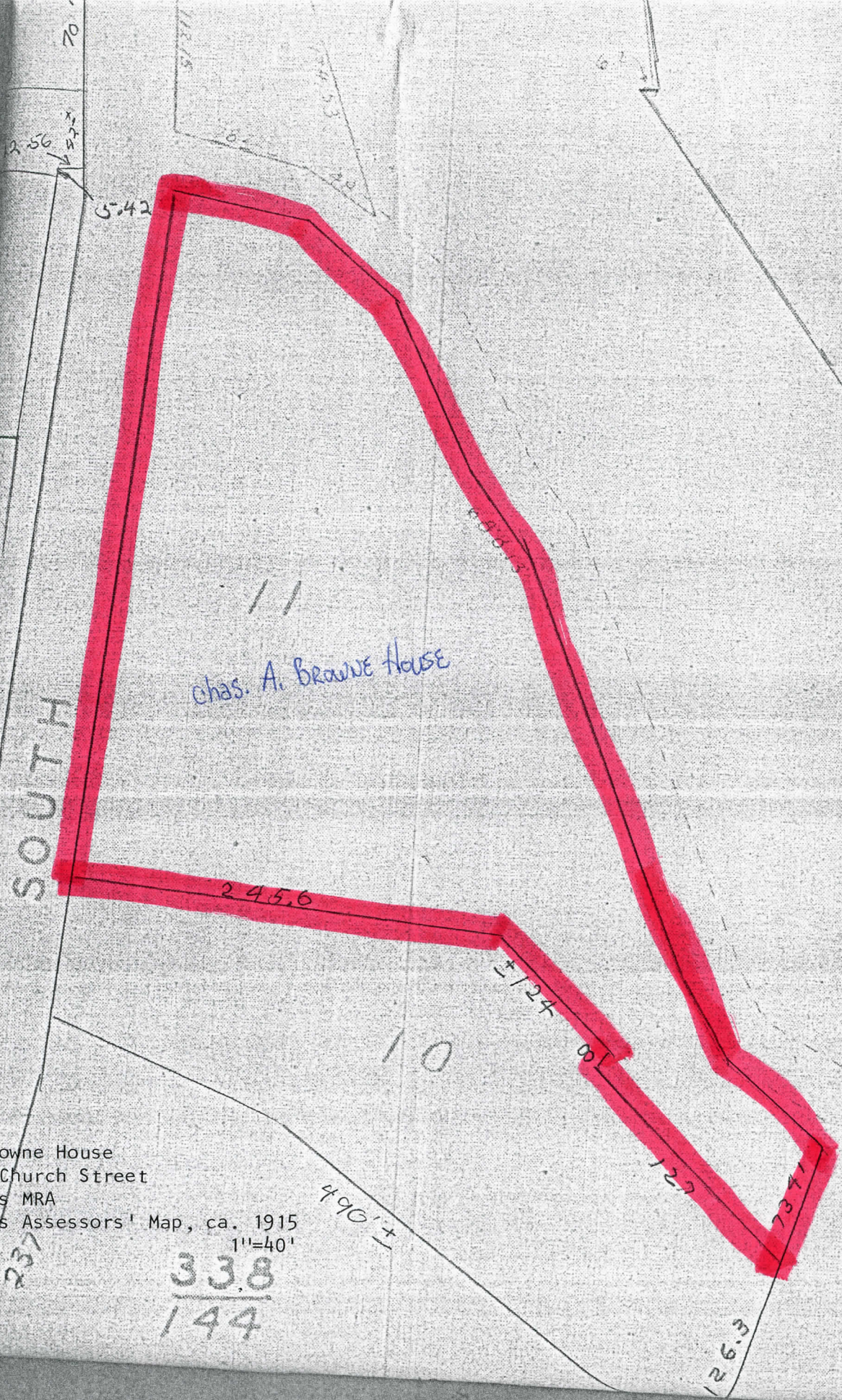
11
27
25K

C.A,Browne House
932 South Church St.
North Adams, Mass.
Southwest view.
Photo by R.Reed, 1983.
Negative at NAHC

Charles Browne House
932 South Church Street
North Adams, Mass.
North Adams MRA

Sketch Map





Charles Browne House
 932 South Church Street
 North Adams MRA
 North Adams Assessors' Map, ca. 1915

1"=40'

33.8
 144

237

490'±

26.3

372.613

SOUTH

CHAS. A. BROWNE HOUSE

245.6

E 124

127

73.71

5.42

256

70

10

62

57.77

55.42

8

23

5