

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	CON.186
Historic Name:	Robbins, Caesar House
Common Name:	Garrison, Jack - Hutchinson, Peter House
Address:	324 Bedford St
City/Town:	Concord
Village/Neighborhood:	Concord Center
Local No:	I8-898
Year Constructed:	c 1780
Architect(s):	Robbins, Caesar
Architectural Style(s):	Colonial Revival; No style
Use(s):	Single Family Dwelling House
Significance:	Architecture; Ethnic Heritage; Literature; Social History
Area(s):	
Designation(s):	
Building Materials(s):	Roof: Asphalt Shingle Wall: Wood; Wood Clapboard; Wood Shingle Foundation: Brick; Concrete Cinderblock



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

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FORM B – BUILDING

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

Photograph



Topographic or Assessor's Map



Recorded by: A. Forbes
Organization: for The Drinking Gourd Project
Date (month / year): August 2010

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

Map I-8; 0898

Maynard

CON.186, 1840

Town: CONCORD

Place: (*neighborhood or village*)

Address: 324 Bedford Street

Historic Name: Caesar Robbins House/
Peter Hutchinson House
Uses: Present: single-family residence

Original: single- or double-family residence

Date of Construction: late 18th century

Source: Lemire; architectural evidence

Style/Form: center-chimney, side-gabled cottage

Architect/Builder: Caesar Robbins (attrib.)

Exterior Material:

Foundation: brick and concrete block

Wall/Trim: wood shingle over clapboard

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
ca. 1930 garage

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Late 19th-century: center chimney replaced with smaller chimney, front vestibule added. Mid-20th C.: rear addition with west side sun porch and entry; some window sash replacement. 1970: exterior chimney added on west end.

Condition: good

Moved: no | | yes | X | **Date** ca. 1872

Acreage: .4 acre

Setting: South side of Bedford Street just east of Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, close to road in area of primarily late-19th century houses. Two small mid-20th C. houses opposite; long driveway and brook just west.

RECEIVED

AUG 31 2010

MASS. HIST. COMM.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

CONCORD

324 Bedford Street

Area(s) Form No.

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

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

Both scholars and local historians have long placed the construction of this little house to the late 18th century – a date that is consistent with its extremely well-preserved timber frame and with some of the finishes still in place on the interior, although less so with its overall form. The major timbers are hewn pine; the sawn 3 x 4" oak joists are tapered at the ends, resting in butt-cog mortises. Hand forged "T"-headed nails secure the wide floor boards on the second floor as well as the dado boards on the walls of the first floor. It is commonly understood that the building's first owner was Caesar Robbins, and that he probably constructed the building himself. Although as yet no evidence has been found that he was a trained housewright, it is known that he was an accomplished woodsman. He may thus have had some of the skills and the tools to at least fell, cut and hew the framing timbers.

As noted on the 1991 inventory form, the house is a rare and well preserved example of a one room deep, five-bay, side-gabled cottage, and would be architecturally significant for that reason alone, since in most communities the majority of houses of that once-common type have been either demolished or expanded into larger buildings. Here it is also significant as an early "story and a half" house, built with a low kneewall above the first story that provides headroom for living space under the sloping roof. (Several story-and-a-half cottages of the higher, fully-developed early 19th century type, with a larger expanse of wall above the first-story windows, exist in the greater Concord area. The low proportions of this one are more characteristic of the early years of this building form).

Elise Lemire in *Black Walden*, surmises that the building may have begun as a single-cell, one-room house that was expanded in about 1813 to accommodate a second generation of the Robbins/Garrison family. The symmetry of the building, however, with identically-sized rooms to either side of the central chimney bay, and the consistency of the framing in both halves, both suggest that it had a two-room plan from the start. The house may have had a rear ell or leanto before it was moved to Bedford Street in the winter of 1870-71.

In the process of the relocation to Bedford Street the large center chimney serving fireplaces in both of the first floor rooms was removed and replaced with the narrower, single-flue brick chimney seen today. The dimensions of the original chimney base are clear in the first floor framing, where later floor joists now fill the void left when the chimney was removed. The foundation under much of the house consists of re-used bricks that appear to be of late 18th-century vintage, and may have come from the original chimney. In the process of the chimney removal the main stairway and front lobby entrance were reconfigured, although clear evidence of the location of the original front stairs remains on both floors.

While the 2/1 window sash and their vertical-board shutters date to the 20th century, on the interior some of the window openings retain their Federal band moldings. One early 6-light sash with mortise-and-tenoned, pegged joinery was reused in the appended front entrance vestibule. The width of this sash matches the width of the window openings of the main house, and it would fit precisely as a lower or upper sash in a double-hung, 6/6 configuration. Other interior features dating from the Federal period include corner and chimney posts covered with beaded casings, and a simple dado of two wide boards surmounted by a chair rail molded with a half-round molding and narrow fillet.

Between 1853 and 1854 the house, barn, and 11 acres for which then-owner Peter Hutchinson was taxed rose considerably in value, from \$275 to \$400, suggesting that he upgraded the building(s) substantially at that time. Such a date would be consistent with some vernacular Greek Revival features of the house including the 4-panel interior doors with applied moldings, ceramic doorknobs and two-knuckled cast-iron hinges. The property value rose again, by another 50 dollars, in 1855. Some exterior details, such as the wide cornerboards and the boxed, overhanging front eaves with gable-end returns projecting several inches beyond the end walls, may represent

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renovations of the same time, or possibly of the 1870s. The four-paneled front door (its two upper panels later replaced with glazing) is of a type just coming into fashion in the late 1850s, and either Peter Hutchinson or the next owners may have installed that door. The clapboarded, gable-roofed front vestibule (later shingled along with the rest of the house) is assumed to have been added after the house was moved.

One outbuilding, a deteriorated, pyramid-roofed two-car **garage** (CON.1840) of about 1930, stands behind the house. The square building rests on a concrete slab, is sided with a combination of wood clapboards and shingles, and has an asphalt-shingle roof. The two wood garage doors are overhead panel-and-glass replacements probably installed in the 1950s or 1960s. There is a 9-light over 2-panel door of about the same date in the clapboarded south side of the building, and each side wall has a 6/6 window.

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.

This form updates and expands upon the Form B written in June 1991 by Anne Forbes with research by Bunny Black.

A detailed architectural inspection of this house and a body of recent research have provided a wealth of new information about the building, its owners, and occupants. In addition, since the 1990s a number of publications about Concord's black history and anti-slavery movement have established a context in which the Robbins House has risen to a prominent position. Elise Lemire's 2009 *Black Walden: Slavery and its Aftermath in Concord, Massachusetts* chronicles Concord's African American families of the late 18th- and early 19th centuries and the roles they played both at the local level and in the broader history of the region. A few years earlier, Sandra Petruilionis placed Concord's active antislavery movement in both a local and regional context in her 2006 *To Set this World Right: the Antislavery Movement in Thoreau's Concord*. Our understanding of historic resources associated with slavery and the anti-slavery movement across Massachusetts has also been greatly advanced by the documentation for the 2005 Multiple Properties National Register listing for the Underground Railroad in Massachusetts, 1783-1865, written by Kathryn Grover and Neil Larson with the assistance of the Massachusetts Historical Commission staff. As a result, in the light of new findings, the place of the Caesar Robbins House in the history of Concord and the broader region has gained both greater importance and deeper significance.

Background and context

By the time the Revolutionary War began, Concord had long been an affluent rural town, where several of the wealthier families owned slaves. Even before slavery officially ended in Massachusetts in 1783, some of those slaves had become free, and by 1761 one of them, John Jack, was living independently in a small cabin north of the town center near the rich meadows along the Concord River. While some former slaves remained as servants in the households of their masters through the 1780s and 1790s, at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century several others moved to small dwellings they built on the fringes of the populated area of the town center. The cabins, shacks, and (as evidenced by the Caesar Robbins House) at least one solidly-built timber frame dwelling, were located primarily in two locations. The largest number of buildings were erected south of the center village in Walden Woods near Walden Pond. By 1822 several little houses of former slaves or their descendants were clustered there along the road to Lincoln. Only two or at most three dwellings, including John Jack's, were built north of the center, placed close together on the path that led to the Great Meadows on the south side of the Concord River and to the Great Field on the higher ground above them. However, due to the large size of the families there, over the course of three generations many more people lived most of their lives in the northern cluster. A few fugitive slaves from other states were also living in Concord by 1800, boarding with farm families where they worked as handymen, or living in the two small neighborhoods of freed local slaves.

The little dwellings built by former Concord slaves and their families between 1760 and 1825 deteriorated over time, and many of them, both in Walden Woods and on the Great Field, stood on land that belonged to others. Today every one of the houses in Walden Woods is gone – having fallen or burned down, or been taken down by white landowners. The only known early-19th century house in the southwest part of town belonging to a former slave,

Continuation sheet 2

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Thomas Dugan, had also disappeared by 1875. (See CON. 282, 212 Williams Road for a reference to the Dugan property). Only the Caesar Robbins House remains, quite likely saved from inevitable demolition by one of Concord's most powerful personalities, John S. Keyes, Esq., and by Irish immigrants Bartholomew and Margaret Barry, who in the early 1870s moved it to the present location on Bedford Street.

CAESAR ROBBINS ownership (ca. 1780s to 1822)

This little house, in spite of its relocation from its original site, is highly significant as the home, and most likely the handiwork, of **Caesar Robbins** (1745/46-1822), who had been a slave in a Concord, or possibly an Acton, household. The name of the family in which he served has not been positively identified. While Edward Jarvis, in his 1882 "Houses and people in Concord, 1810 to 1820" stated that Caesar's master was Dea. Simon Hunt, Elise Lemire suggests that he may have had a strong connection to the household of Lt. Humphrey Barrett, a member of one branch of the original Concord Barrett family. The circumstances under which Caesar Robbins gained his freedom also have not been confirmed, but since he enlisted in the Continental Army in 1776, he may have become free during the war or shortly afterward. It is believed that he may have built his house as early as 1779-1780 (see below), but an alternate theory suggests that he may in fact have lived in Boston around that time. The Federal Population Census of 1790, however, places him in Concord, as the head of a household of six people. The U.S. Direct Tax Census of 1798 indicates that he was one of only two former Concord slaves in town to own land at that time, when he was taxed for a small house and two acres of land.

Caesar Robbins apparently built his house very near to John Jack's, at the edge of the lane running east from the present Monument Street along the mid-18th century fence between Concord's Great Meadows and the Great Field. The Great Field, which occupied higher ground than the river meadows, had been valuable tillage land, held by proprietors and overseen by the Town since the 17th century. With the extensive clearing of farmland throughout Concord by the middle of the 18th century, however, the agricultural importance of the Great Field had diminished, and its fertility had become greatly depleted by over a century of farming. In 1778, the proprietorship of what was left of the Great Field was dissolved, and henceforth the remaining proprietors' lots within it were privately owned land. Several of the old lots came into the hands of one of Concord's largest landowners, Lt. Humphrey Barrett, whose adjoining homestead farm was located at 140 Monument Street. (See MHC Area Form N: 111-155 Monument Street.) His piece of the former Great Field would have been of little agricultural value to him, and, about twenty years after John Jack had first purchased a lot at the Field's south edge in 1761, Barrett allowed Caesar Robbins to settle on his land. According to Lemire, the year was 1779. If that date is correct, the building of Caesar's little house, which apparently quickly followed Barrett's permission, would have coincided closely with his marriage to Catherine ("Cate") Boaz in December of that year.

It is not entirely clear whether Caesar Robbins was married twice or three times. In the 1770s there were at least three slaves in town called Caesar, the most popular slave name in Concord. In 1769 the Rev. William Emerson officiated at the marriage of Phyllis, a pregnant slave in his own family, to a nearby Concord slave named Caesar. Married slaves usually lived apart, and Phyllis remained in the Emerson-Bliss household until her death, which occurred shortly after her child was born. Both the mother and child, also named Phyllis, were owned by the Rev. Emerson's mother-in-law, the widow Phoebe Walker Bliss. Lemire has conjectured that a major reason why Caesar Robbins built his house off the east side of Monument Street at a site almost directly opposite the Emerson House (the "Old Manse" at 269 Monument Street, NHL 1966; CON.347) was to be near the child who remained with the extended Emerson household.

There is more information about Caesar's second marriage, to Cate Boaz in 1779. Cate (1755/56-1806) was formerly the wife of Samuel Potter's slave, Boston. Caesar and Cate had at least three children: Susan, Peter (1792-1855), and Mary, who died in 1804. Cate died in 1806, and in 1807 Caesar married Rose Bay. Together they had a son, Thomas (1809-1856), who grew up to be a carpenter. In 1800 there were nine people in the Robbins household, by far the largest of the six black households recorded in Concord that year.

While recorded information about early 19th-century African-American residents in rural Massachusetts is scant, more written material exists in Concord about former slaves and their descendants than in most towns. Here, several local historians, diarists, and a few notable authors of the time made at least passing references that shed

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some light on the lives of the people who lived on the fringes of mainstream white society. Some valuable accounts even crept into the memoirs written about the influential men who belonged to the Social Circle in Concord – an elite men's club founded in 1782. The 1856 memoir written by Nathan Brooks about Lt. Humphrey Barrett, for instance, incorporates lengthy anecdotes about Caesar Robbins and his woodcutting in Barrett's woodlot – an area that he worked in so extensively that it was universally referred to as "Caesar's Woods."

Caesar Robbins seems to have been something of a mentor to Concord's black residents, and was also respected by his white neighbors. In fact, for at least four years between 1815 and 1820, the town Overseers of the Poor considered him sufficiently responsible and "suitably qualified" to care for members of the Town's small indigent population in his own household. In a striking example of early free African Americans taking care of their brethren, in 1815, 1817, 1818 and 1819 Caesar bid on and received payment from the local taxpayers for the care of a fellow former slave, Case(y) Feen.

The Garrison family. Like her father, Caesar's daughter Susan (d. 1841) was also highly regarded by the townspeople, and received social or charitable visits from some of Concord's most prominent 19th-century women. She also played a role in Concord's antislavery movement, as did her husband, Jack Garrison.

Jack Garrison (1768/9-1860, referred to in some later records as John Garrison, Sr.) was a fugitive or self-emancipated slave from New Jersey, where he had taken the last name of his master. He was in Concord by 1810, working at odd jobs and as a farm laborer. Although upon her marriage to Jack Garrison in 1812 Concord vital records list Susan's last name as Middleton, Jack's 1860 death certificate records his wife's maiden name as Susan Robbins. While there has been some question as to whether the Garrisons lived in the Caesar Robbins House or in another one beside it, recent research indicates that they shared the house with her parents for a number of years. Lemire cites an agreement signed in the year of the Garrisons marriage by Humphrey Barrett, who continued to own about thirteen acres of land around the house, in which he granted permission to Jack and Susan to live in part of the house and make use of the land. In a deed of 1823 Barrett gave Susan and her family the right to occupy the east half of the house for the rest of her life. Although they later moved to an abandoned windmill atop a nearby hill (see CON.502, 78 Monument Street,) the Garrisons were apparently still living at the old Robbins House, set far back from the road, when their neighbor Martha Prescott, and soon members of the Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society, paid the well-remembered visits at which Susan Garrison served them tea and cookies. On April 2, 1836 Martha Prescott wrote in her diary "Went to Mrs. Garrison's. A delightful day, but bad walking." (Wilson 127.) Susan Garrison herself was a member of the Society, which was founded in the fall of 1837 after the well-known abolitionist sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimke paid an inspirational visit to Concord. Two months later, she hosted a meeting of the society in her home.

Jack Garrison, one of the few former slaves of whom a photograph was made, later became something of an icon for Concord's antislavery movement, when, a few years after his death at the age of 91 in 1860, a carte de visite with his image was circulated by the local abolitionists.

PETER ROBBINS ownership (1823 – 1831; 1834 – 1836)

Caesar Robbins died in 1822 at the age of 76. At the time of his death he no longer owned the house he had built, and it is likely that its ownership had long since reverted to Humphrey Barrett for the payment of debts. A year after Caesar's death, however, for \$260 his eldest son **Peter Robbins** (1792-1855), managed to buy back not only the house, barn and five acres, but also an adjoining 8-acre parcel of pasture and woodland. (It was in the 1823 purchase deed that Humphrey Barrett ensured the right of the Garrisons to stay in the east half of the house.) For the next several years, Peter was taxed for what by the 1830s was called the Peter Robbins Farm. But his debts mounted, and by 1832 the property is shown under the ownership of the man who was soon to win a court judgment against him, Daniel Shattuck, Esquire. Shattuck was nearly the wealthiest man in Concord, and like Lt. Barrett he was a real-estate investor in addition to his other occupations. He was owner of a prosperous store on Monument Square, a founder of the local insurance company and the two Concord banks, and was principal trustee of the company that developed the Milldam in the late 1820s and early 1830s. (See CON.298, 48 Monument Square). Although Peter Robbins signed over the property to him in August of 1833, like Humphrey Barrett had done before him, Shattuck allowed the African-American occupants of his land to remain there as both farmers and residents.

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Tax records show that Peter Robbins had reacquired his farm by 1834. In that year he was taxed for 15 acres, a barn, and two houses, rather than one. It is not clear whether in this case "two houses" refers to two buildings or a double house containing two households. If there was a second dwelling, neither its date nor the time it may have stood on the property is known. (Edward Jarvis, in his manuscript "Houses and People in Concord, 1810 to 1820", also mentioned that in that decade there were two one-story houses on the fields above the meadows and recalled that Jack Garrison lived in one of them. However, neither Jack Garrison nor his son John is listed as owning any real estate until John appears on the 1840 tax list as the owner of a house and two acres of land – probably the old converted windmill on what became known as "Garrison Hill," now Windmill Hill.)

Whatever the ownership was, and whatever buildings were standing on the small Robbins Farm during the second generation of its occupation, Peter Robbins soon lost the property completely, probably again for the non-payment of debts. By 1838 Daniel Shattuck was assessed for two-thirds of the farm, and by 1840 he owned the whole thing, having also obtained Susan and Jack Garrison's rights to the house.

Peter Robbins and his family may have been the occupants of the house who best exemplified the widespread poverty among Concord's 19th-century black citizens, although the Garrisons and later the Hutchinsons experienced it as well. Peter married Fatima Oliver of Acton in 1824, but she successfully sued him for divorce in 1837. While the court ruled that she be awarded her dower rights, including the use of the west room of the house, it is not known whether she remained in residence there or if she might have lived in the small second house for a short time. Fatima's stated reason for the divorce was adultery. In about 1832 Peter and one of Fatima's relatives, Almira Oliver, had the first of eleven illegitimate children, several of whom died very young.

In contrast to the reputations of his parents and sister, Peter Robbins incurred considerable disapproval from Concord's upright citizenry for living with his mistress and for having both an estranged former wife and a large number of illegitimate children. Most of his family members were supported at least to some degree by the Town, but in fact, the names of all the families who lived in this house on the Great Field appear repeatedly as recipients of public support through the Concord Overseers of the Poor. Over several decades the taxpayers paid for their medical treatment, for their burials and funerals, for wood for their fires, and in the case of Fatima Robbins in particular, for many years of room and board in private homes. While Fatima and the Garrisons took up residence elsewhere in Concord and at least two of Peter's daughters eventually moved to Boston, with Daniel Shattuck's consent, Peter, Almira and some of their children remained on the farm for at least 10 to 15 years more. In the last years before Peter's death in 1855 the whole Robbins/Oliver family received substantial public support, the bulk of it from the town of Acton, which continued to assume responsibility for Almira Oliver and her children, and at times for Peter as well.

PETER HUTCHINSON ownership (ca. 1852 - ca. 1866)

After the property was taken by Daniel Shattuck, ten or fifteen years went by before the Robbins house and farm were reacquired by an African-American owner. The purchaser was **Peter Hutchinson** (1799-1882). He was related to the Robbinses through the Oliver family. There are conflicting reports about his birth, although it seems clear that he was born in Acton, not Concord. He may have been a nephew or cousin of Fatima Oliver Robbins; according to one recent theory he was her son, although were quite close in age. Unlike Peter Robbins, he was highly respected in town. He was legitimately married, to Nancy Dager, the mother of his six or seven children, and over his long life acquired great knowledge about Concord, its woods, fields, and wildlife, which he freely shared with his fellow townspeople. While his main occupation seems to have been butchering livestock, pigs in particular, he was known for many related skills. The 1871 memoir of George Barrett tells of a one-day sheep-shearing contest between the two men in which George sheared 62 sheep and Peter sheared 60. The author, J. Fay Barrett, called Peter Hutchinson "our colored townsman . . . the ablest common laborer I have ever known." (Barrett, in *Memoirs of the Social Circle, I*, 64).

Although a town directory recorded Peter Hutchinson as living on "the Great Field" as early as 1830, according to census information he and his family may have lived for some time across town in the Hubbardville section of Concord. In 1846 he owned one acre of land, and in 1847 he was assessed for a house on it. He owned no real estate in 1851, but in 1852 he was taxed for "the Robbins Place" with seven acres of land, suggesting that he and his family may have moved back to the farm around that time. The next year he owned a house and barn on an eleven-

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acre parcel that continued to form the main part of the farm through the 1850s and 1860s. Over the 1850s he led a hardworking life growing crops on the land, slaughtering livestock for other farmers, doing odd jobs, and cutting wood in the same woods where Caesar Robbins had worked so diligently a half-century earlier. During the decades when Hutchinson operated the old Robbins Farm, where by 1860 he was growing hay, peas, beans, potatoes, apples and assorted vegetables, the old lane leading from Monument Street to the former Great Field became known as Peter's Path and a nearby spring as Peter's Spring - names which linger today. The old woods, some of which were located on his own property and some on his neighbors' land, took on the name Peter Hutchinson's Woods.

Peter Hutchinson was also immortalized by the most famous of Concord's 19th-century authors in several works by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Both writers recognized that the experience of the Hutchinsons, Robbinses, and Garrisons who lived in relative isolation out on the former wasted land of the old Great Field was different from that of even Concord's poorer white farmers. "For in those lonely grounds the sun/ shines not as on the town", said Emerson, in his poem "Peter's Field." Thoreau, in the numerous observations about Peter Hutchinson scattered throughout his journals, marveled at the man's ingenuity and what can only be described as survival instinct: In December 1856 Thoreau described him as "Peter, the dexterous pig-butcher, . . . going to his solitary house on the edge of the Great Fields, carrying in the rain a piece of the pork he had slaughtered, with a string put through it. Often he carries home the head, which is less prized, taking his pay thus in kind, and these supplies do not come amiss to his outcast family."

Although some Concord writers stressed Peter Hutchinson's resourcefulness and independence, in the middle of the 19th century his family, like his predecessors', received repeated support from the town taxpayers, especially in the form of payment for their coffins and burials. Ironically, on occasion the Town also paid him for butchering animals on the Concord Poor Farm.

The last member of Peter Hutchinson's immediate family died in 1869, and by 1870 he had moved to George Barrett's farm at 612 Barretts Mill Road (CON.257), where he was then boarding and working as a farmhand. By 1880 he was living in rented quarters on Bedford Street, very near the present site of his relocated house. Living with him was the only other member of his family left in Concord, his 31 year-old grandson Willie Bisbee. Shortly afterward he moved to 341 Virginia Road (NR-IND 2004) where he died of consumption in January 1882, in the farmhouse where Thoreau was born.

BARRY family ownership (1871 - ca. 1940)

Sometime in the mid-1860s Daniel Shattuck seems to have reacquired the farm which by then was called the Peter Hutchinson Place. Shattuck died in 1867, and when his executor auctioned off his real estate in December 1868, the property, then 13 acres with the house and barn, was purchased by **John S. Keyes** and his wife Martha.

Keyes apparently wanted the Hutchinson land, but not the house. In November 1870, Irish-American immigrants **Bartholomew** and **Margaret Barry** purchased a small house lot on Bedford Street for \$70, and over the winter (the most popular time for house-moving in Concord) the house was moved there. In February 1871 Keyes provided the Barrys with a \$200 mortgage on both the house and the Bedford Street lot. The Barrys, who lived for a few years in Waltham, renovated the building, and in Keyes' opinion, "much improved it and the street by it."

Although the exact original site of the Robbins House is not known for certain, the building's relocation may also have been associated with the building of the Middlesex Central Railroad, which in 1871-72 was extended west to Concord from Bedford, terminating at the north edge of the town center just east of Lowell Road. (See CON.926). The new rail line sliced through the section of the old Great Field that had included the Robbins/Hutchinson Farm. The Keyes family may have foreseen that the railroad offered a new potential for the old farm. A good portion of the property consisted of woods, and young trees were growing up on the former fields and pastures. In the late 19th century the Keyeses acquired other old woodlots adjoining the farm, the railroad, and their own property on Monument Street. After J.S. Keyes' death, in 1917 his son Prescott and other family members founded a small lumber company which they named, in striking tribute to the Robbins Farm's last resident, the Peter Hutchinson Company. The partnership owned and operated 55 acres of woodland that included several old woodlots in addition to the Robbins Farm. From 1917 to 1926 the company dealt in the cutting and sale of firewood, taking advantage of a new demand for firewood

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

CONCORD

324 Bedford Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

CON.186; 1840

caused by a coal shortage during the First World War. Undoubtedly, it also utilized both the shipping capacity of the railroad, and felled numerous trees that three generations of African American woodcutters had left on the land.

For several years the Barrys apparently rented out the house. Between 1886 and 1892 they settled permanently in Concord, and for the rest of their lives they occupied the old Robbins House at its Bedford Street location in the midst of one of Concord's late-19th-century Irish-American neighborhoods. Both Bartholomew and Margaret Barry died in 1903. The house was owned for the next several decades by their daughter **Mary Barry**. Mary was a dressmaker by profession, but in the 1920s and 1930s she also worked part-time as the local police matron.

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CON.186; 1840



Garage, ca. 1930

CON.1840



324 Bedford Street in ca. 1937

Concord Free Public Library

CON.186; 1840



324 Bedford Street: facade



324 Bedford Street: upper story kneewall and original floor

CON.186; 1840



324 Bedford Street: Cased corner post, chair rail, dado, and baseboard

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

Community Property Address
CONCORD 324 BEDFORD STREET

Area(s) Form No.

	CON.186; 1840
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National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

☒ Individually eligible ☐ Eligible **only** in a historic district

☐ Contributing to a potential historic district ☐ Potential historic district

Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations: ☐ A ☒ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Statement of Significance by Anne Forbes, 2010

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The Caesar Robbins House is eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C as Concord's only remaining dwelling built for, and probably by, a former local slave, and as one of only a few that survive in eastern Massachusetts. In its potential to impart information through its structure and finish, it may also fulfill Criterion D. Through its connection with Jack Garrison, it may also be eligible for inclusion under the Multiple Property Listing for The Underground Railroad in Massachusetts 1783-1865, fulfilling the registration requirements for Property Type 3 – properties where fugitives lived in Massachusetts.

The house was the home of four interconnected African-American families over nearly a century, from the early years of the emancipation of slaves in Massachusetts through the late 1860s. The lives they led illustrate many aspects of the early black experience in New England, exemplifying trends that extended beyond the local to the regional level. Caesar Robbins had been a slave in a local household and served as a Private during the Revolutionary War, forging an independent life at the edge of the Great Meadows and Field after he gained his freedom. Jack Garrison was a fugitive slave from New Jersey who prior to the Civil War became a figurehead for the local antislavery movement, and his wife Susan (Robbins) hosted meetings of the Concord Female Antislavery Society in the little house. Peter Hutchinson gained the respect and approbation of his fellow townsmen for the many traits that helped him rise above the meager existence of most of the other black citizens of Concord in the middle years of the 19th century – ingenuity, a capacity for hard work, and highly developed skills in butchering and livestock management. On the other hand, the circumstances of Peter Robbins and his large family that included an estranged former wife and a longtime mistress, tell a story of poverty that lies outside the text of much that has been written about Concord's gentler society.

The house also fulfills the requirements of Criteria Consideration B. While the building is known to have been moved in the early 1870s, relocation itself was common in the history of the region's smallest cottages, an occurrence frequent enough to be considered an associated characteristic of this building type. In the case of the Robbins House, removal from the edge of the meadows and Great Field along the Concord River to Bedford Street may in fact have saved the building from loss through weathering, deterioration, or demolition for the building of the Middlesex Central Railroad.

Given its humble origin and its relocation under Irish-American owners in the 1870s, the highly intact state of preservation of the house is all the more remarkable. Although the original chimney and hearths are no longer extant, the interior finish and the hewn timber frame, nearly all of which survives, have much to tell about the methods and building practices of African-Americans in the years after the Revolutionary War. The house retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.



r's number

USGS Quad

Area(s)

Form Number

8-898

CONCORD

186

Town CONCORDPlace (neighborhood or village) SEB BBedford Street PO. CONCORDAddress 324 Bedford StreetHistoric Name Caesar Robbins HousePeter Hutchinson HouseUses: Present dwellingOriginal dwellingDate of Construction ca. 1780'sSource WheelerStyle/Form Late Georgian
cottageArchitect/Builder Caesar Robbins
(builder)

Exterior Material:

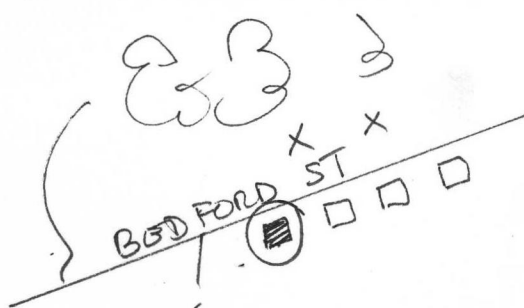
Foundation brickWall/Trim wood shingleRoof asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures

garageMajor Alterations (with dates) 20th C.siding changed, exter. chimney on W.
end, rear ell and entry-bay extension,
W. end; windows replaced with 2/1'sCondition good/fairMoved ☐ no ☐ yes Date 1871-2Acreage less than one acreSetting Adjacent to three 19th-C.houses. Close to road, east of brook,opposite pair of small mid-20thcentury houses.

Sketch Map

Draw a map of the area indicating properties within it. Number each property for which individual inventory forms have been completed. Label streets including route numbers, if any. Attach a separate sheet if space is not sufficient here. Indicate North.



A. Forbes

research by Bunny Black

Recorded by A. Forbes
Organization research by Bunny Black
for Concord Hist. CommissionDate (month/day/year) June, 1991

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION ☐ *see continuation sheet*

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

#324 is significant as an example of a house-type rare in Concord today--the 1-story five-bay, one-room-deep cottage of the eighteenth century. In spite of an addition at the west end, the house is still true to the form. It has a central chimney and a pitch-roofed vestibule or "porch." The door itself is a 2-light glass-and-panel type characteristic of the third quarter of the nineteenth century; the windows are new 2-over-1-sash (as were the ones they replaced). The house trim includes wide cornerboards, a boxed front cornice with returns and a slight roof overhang at the gable ends.

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.

This house is extremely significant as both the residence, and probably the handwork, of one of Concord's former slaves. It was built by Caesar Robbins, who was freed along with several others as a result of a series of 1780's court decisions declaring slavery unconstitutional in Massachusetts. He had formerly belonged to Simon Hunt, and when he became free he built this house southeast of the Concord River on the edge of the Great Meadows, eking out a living as a woodsman. The Great Meadows and Fields in the northeast part of town and Walden Woods in the southeast became "neighborhoods" for Concord's black population, which numbered 29 in 1790. The first cabin in this vicinity was probably the one put up by John Jack when he bought his freedom from the widow Barron in 1761.

The house may have passed to Caesar's son, Peter Robbins. By 1852 it belonged to another black man, Peter Hutchinson. Like Robbins, he was well-respected in town, and well-known for his hard work. He, too, chopped wood, and also slaughtered pigs and did other jobs for farmers or households in town. J. Fay Barrett, writing in 1871 refers to him as "our colored townsman....the ablest common laborer I have ever known." His name was immortalized by Emerson in the title of one of his poems, "Peter's Field," in which he describes the meadows near the site of this little house. (Cont.)

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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.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Community

Property

CON. 186

CONCORDRobbins/Hutchinson
House

Massachusetts Historical Commission
80 Boylston Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

Area(s) Form No.

186

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, cont.

A well-known local story tells of a sheep-shearing contest between Peter Hutchinson and George Barrett. (See #612 Barrett's Mill Road.) They sheared all day, and it was only after the sun went down that George Barrett pulled ahead, eventually shearing 62 sheep to Hutchinson's 60.

The building was bought by **Bartholomew Barry** sometime between 1856 and 1871, who moved it to its present location close to the road on Bedford Street, according to Wheeler, in 1872. It was occupied through the turn of the century by him and his family. After he died his only daughter **Mary Barry** continued to live here until at least 1937. She is listed first as a dressmaker, and by the 1920's as the matron of the police department.

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Jarvis.

Original yellow form: Eligibility file
 Copies: Inventory form
 Town file(w/corresp.)
 Macris
 NR director _____

Community: Concord

MHC OPINION: ELIGIBILITY FOR NATIONAL REGISTER

Date Received: 8/31/2010

Date Reviewed: 9/15/2010

Type: X Individual

 District (Attach map indicating boundaries)

Name: Caesar Robbins House

Inventory Form: CON.186

Address: 324 Bedford Street

Requested by: Drinking Gourd Project

Action: Honor ITC

 Grant

 R & C

 Other: Planning

Agency:

Staff in charge of Review:

INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

 X Eligible

 Eligible, also in district

 Eligible only in district

 Ineligible

 More information needed

DISTRICTS

 Eligible

 Ineligible

 More information needed

CRITERIA:

 X A

 X B

 X C

 D

LEVEL:

 X Local

 ? State

 National

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE by Betsy Friedberg

The Caesar Robbins House is a rare survivor, an example of a small, modest cottage built on the outskirts of the town of Concord by and for former slaves. Its original owner, Caesar Robbins, a former slave, likely built the house himself ca. 1780, as he was known to be an accomplished woodsman. The house is a 1 ½ story timber-frame structure, one room deep, five bays wide, with a low kneewall above the first story and a side-gabled roof. Some interior features reflected the house's origins in the late 19th century remain on the interior, including a two-board dado with molded chair rail.

The house's original location was north of the town center and Monument Square. A small cluster of modest dwellings is known to have stood in and around the location of the Great Field. A second area of small houses was located in Walden Woods. Both areas were on the fringe of town and were known to have been settled by former slaves. The Caesar House is the only known survivor of these simple structures.

The house remained in the Robbins family or their collateral relations for the first three quarters of the 19th century. By 1812, Caesar's daughter Susan was married to Jack Garrison, a former slave, and they hosted visits of the Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society in this house. The owner in the mid 19th century, Peter Hutchinson, a distant relative of the Robbinses, was well known throughout Concord for his butchering skills and was immortalized in the journals of Henry David Thoreau and in Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem "Peter's Field." Shortly after the property was purchased by John Keyes in 1868, he sold the house itself to Irish-American immigrants Bartholomew and Margaret Barry, who relocated the building to Bedford Street ca. 1870.

At the time of the move, the large central chimney was removed and a single flue installed; the present brick foundation may be built of bricks reused from the original chimney. At some time in the mid to late 19th century, the main stair and the building's entry hall were reworked. Vernacular Greek Revival-style features added in the mid 19th century, likely shortly after the move, include wide cornerboards and overhanging eaves with gable-end returns. A sun porch and exterior chimney are mid 20th century additions, and the garage dates to the 1930s.

It is the opinion of the MHC staff that in its present location, the Caesar Robbins House retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The building is a rare survivor, a modest but substantial house built in the late 18th century by African American former slaves in Concord. As such, it is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criteria A, B, and C for its historic and architectural significance as a well-preserved, modest house built by and for former slaves, for its associations with Caesar Robbins, the Robbins family, and Peter Hutchinson, and for its associations with the development and social history of Concord. The property is significant at the local level and, potentially, at the state level as well.

It is our understanding that, in order to preserve it, the house may be relocated to a new site along Monument Street, close to its original location. Moved buildings are generally ineligible for listing in the National Register except under exceptional circumstances, if it meets Criterion Consideration B. According to National Register guidelines, under Criterion Consideration B, "a property removed from its original or historically significant location can be eligible if it is significant primarily for architectural value or it is the surviving property most importantly associated with a historic person or event" (National Register Bulletin, "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," p. 29).

MHC can reevaluate the Caesar Robbins House once it has been relocated to a new, permanent location. As a building that is a rare survivor, built by and for former slaves and apparently the only remaining house associated with Caesar Robbins and his family, and as a house that was moved historically, it is quite likely that a relocated Caesar Robbins House moved close to its original location will meet Criterion Consideration B and continue to be eligible once it is moved. In order to reevaluate it after its move, we will need a new site plan, as well as photos of the exterior elevations of the property on its new site, and photos of its historic interior features, again after the move has occurred.