

FORM B - BUILDING

NR 3/5/80

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston

In Area no. <i>U, NR, BY</i>	Form no. <u>141-B-3</u>
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4. Map. Draw sketch of building location in relation to nearest cross streets and other buildings. Indicate north.

*16 CLAREMONT ST SOUTH AND EAST ELEVATIONS*

City Worcester

Address 16 & 18 Claremont Street

Historic Name Norcross Brothers Houses

Present use institutional

Present owner The Bible Speaks

Address 40 Kemble Street  
Lenox, Ma. 01240

ca. 1878

Source map of 1878

Style Queen Anne

Architect unknown

Exterior wall fabric brown sandstone

Outbuildings (describe) none

Other features nearly identical floor plans  
and elevations, porte-cochere (#16),  
decorative slate work (#18) see reverse #9

Altered no Date \_\_\_\_\_

Moved no Date \_\_\_\_\_

Lot size: Assessors' Book 6, p.36  
Lots 21 & 22 44,899 sq. ft.

One acre or less \_\_\_\_\_ Over one acre x

Approximate frontage 260'

Approximate distance of building from street

20'

6. Recorded by W. & M. Seaman  
B.R. Pfeiffer

Organization Worc. Heritage Pres. Soc.

Date December 1977

(over)

7. Original owner (if known) Orlando Norcross (#16); James Norcross (#18)

Original use residences

Subsequent uses (if any) and dates institutional (present)

8. Themes (check as many as applicable)

Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recreation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/>	Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Architectural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/>	Science/ invention	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Arts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social/ humanitarian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Military	<input type="checkbox"/>	Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	Political	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Community development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

9. Historical significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

Shown on the 1878 Map of Worcester, the James and Orlando Norcross Houses are perhaps Worcester's earliest examples of Queen Anne style architecture. Identical in plan and massing, the houses stand as near mirror images of each other. Both buildings are constructed of rock-faced sandstone, laid in a broken course of squared blocks, and are two and one-half stories high with a dormered attic above the top storey. Both houses have asymmetrical facades consisting of a central entry flanked by tri-partite windows on one side and a rounded corner bay rising to a dormered turret on the other side. Principal differences between the houses are that the James Norcross House (#18 Claremont) retains decorative slate tiling set in a checkered pattern on its gables and has a porch which terminates in a curved roof supported by a single massive bracket, while the Orlando Norcross House (#16 Claremont) has a porch which extends eastward to become a porte-cochere. Both buildings share the same arrangement of gables, dormers and chimneys. Interiors of the two houses contain a great variety of wood paneling (mostly original to 1878-1880 and made of oak), stained glass, art tiles and decorated window and door surrounds. The interior of the James Norcross House appears to have been the more elaborate from the beginning, with an especially fine oak-paneled stair-hall. The large corner lot on which the houses stand originally contained a stone stable (now demolished) which the Norcrosses shared.

Built for the nationally famous Norcross Brothers, builders, 16 and 18 Claremont Street were influential in the introduction of the Queen Anne style to Worcester. Soon after the houses were built, buildings of similar plan and elevation began to be designed by such diverse local architects as Stephen Earle (47 Harvard Street, 1879) and J.B. Woodworth (21 Oread Street, 1880 - Form 141-0).

(cont.)

10. Bibliography and/or references (such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.)

The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, vol. XXXII, no.2, May 1973, pp. 104-113 ("O.W. Norcross, Richardson's Master Builder")  
Proceedings of the Worcester Society of Antiquity, vol. XXI, 1905, p.36.  
Worcester Magazine, April 1902, p.141 (O.W. Norcross); Oct. 1903, P.113-117 (James Norcross)  
 Nutt, C. History of Worcester, vol. IV, pp.633-634 (James A. Norcross); pp.635-636 (Orlando W. Norcross)

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Worcester	Form No: 141-B-3
Property Name: Norcross Brothers Houses	

*wor 1111 112*

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

9.

The Norcross Brothers (James Atkinson and Orlando W.) were born in Maine in 1831 and 1839 respectively, the sons of a carpenter/builder, Jesse Springer Norcross. In 1843 the Norcross family moved to Salem, Massachusetts, near which the brothers founded Norcross Brothers, builders, in 1864 following the return of Orlando Norcross from the Civil War. By 1868 the Norcrosses were settled in Worcester, where in 1869-1870 the firm built old Worcester High School (now demolished) from plans by Henry Hobson Richardson of Boston, prior to his subsequent fame. This contact seems to have resulted in the Norcross Brothers receiving most of the construction contracts for Richardson's most famous buildings, of which Trinity Church is the best known. It is thought that the firm and its ingenuity in masonry construction was partially responsible for the development of Richardson's unique Romanesque style, and indirectly for the popularity which heavy masonry achieved during the late nineteenth century. For more detailed information regarding the Norcross Brothers, see "O.W. Norcross, Richardson's Master Builder" in The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians (May 1973) and individual biographies of James and Orlando Norcross in Charles Nutt's History of Worcester and Its People (cited in Bibliography). In addition to the Norcrosses' work for H.H. Richardson, the firm worked with many of the most prominent architects of its day, including McKim, Mead & White; Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge (successors to H.H. Richardson); Peabody & Stearns; and others. Among the many well known buildings built by the Norcross Brothers are the New York Public Library, the Rhode Island State House, the remodeling of the White House carried out under Theodore Roosevelt, the Allegheny County Courthouse (Pittsburgh) and (in Worcester) the State Mutual Building (340 Main Street) and the Worcester City Hall.

The architect of the Norcross Houses is at present unknown; the firm's contact with many prominent architects, as well as its maintenance of an architectural staff, makes an attribution of the houses' design impossible. Nonetheless, the buildings remain as two of the finest of their style in Worcester.



*18 CLAREMONT STREET (WOR 1112)  
SOUTH AND EAST ELEVATIONS*

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Worcester Multiple Property Submission Assessor's Map Excerpt

