

FORM A - AREA

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

Assessor's Sheets USGS Quad Area Letter Form Numbers in
Are

72, 79, 66

Boston N.
Maynard

AJ

783-799, 1000-
1015



rs
on

Town Lexington

Place (neighborhood or village)

Name of Area Meagherville

Present Use Residential/Conservation

Construction Dates of Period 1891-present

Overall Condition Fair

Major Intrusions and Alterations Route 128
constructed through western portion in 1949-50

Acreage apx. 138 A.

Recorded by Nancy S. Seasholes

Organization Lexington Historical Commission

Date (month/year) January 1998

See attached sketch maps

AREA FORM

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION *see continuation sheet*

Describe architectural, structural and landscape features and evaluate in terms of other areas within the community

What remains of the original 260-acre area known as Meagherville, or Lexington Heights, in northwest Lexington is today approximately 138 acres east of Route 128. A small section of about 11½ acres is located north of the bikepath (formerly the railroad tracks) along the west end of Valley Road but the major part of Meagherville—about 126½ acres—is south of the bikepath/tracks (see sketch map #1). Meagherville today includes both residential neighborhoods in the vicinity of Reed Street and along Valley Road as well as the 86-acre town-owned Meagherville conservation land. The Meagherville area slopes west and is cut by two streams—North Lexington (formerly Farley) Brook in the northern section and Kiln Brook in the southern—, both draining into the Tophet Swamp, most of which is now on the west side of Route 128. Much of Meagherville is thus low-lying land with residential areas on the more elevated parts.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE *see continuation sheet*

Explain historical development of the area. Discuss how this relates to the historical development of the community.

In August 1891 Mark C. Meagher, then a Chicago resident, purchased the 260-acre Elm Hill Farm off Bedford Street in northwest Lexington. The farm had belonged to the Reed family since the early 18th century. In the third quarter of the 19th century it had been owned by Hammond Reed, a prominent citizen who lived in the center of town and leased the farm. Reed had sold the farm in 1883 to a John Stimson of Boston and it was Stimson's son Alfred who sold it to Meagher.

Meagher planned to make a financial killing by selling the land as a residential development. He named the area Lexington Heights, laid out paper streets, and subdivided the resulting 93 blocks into tiny lots, generally 25 feet wide and 100 feet deep, making a total of 2814 lots (see sketch map #2). To attract buyers, he "boomed" (advertised) the lots in Boston papers and organized free rail excursions for prospective purchasers from the city. These excursions were held on Saturdays and Sundays, the participants usually disembarking in Lexington Center and conveyed from there to Lexington Heights by horse-drawn barge. The excursions were initially quite successful—on October 13, 1891, the *Lexington Minute-man* reported that 150 people had come out to Lexington Heights the preceding Saturday, 75 lots had been sold,

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES *see continuation sheet*

Clippings book. "1891-2." Scrapbook of late 1940s-early 1950s clippings from *Lexington Minute-man*. In possession of Nancy S. Seasholes, Lexington, Mass.

Hinkle, Alice. "Meagherville: They came in search of 'a piece of America'." *Lexington Minute-man*, 19 June, 1980. *Lexington Minute-man*, 13 October 1891, 20 October 1891, 6 November 1891, 29 July 1892.

Lexington Town Reports. for 1895. 118.

Sileo, Thomas P. "Many swindles, the biggest Meagherville." *Lexington Minuteman*, 22 February, 1996.

———. *Historical Guide to Open Space in Lexington*. Lexington, Mass.: Thomas P. Sileo, 1995. 55-64.

Recommended as a National Register District. *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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

Town
Lexington

Property Address
Meagherville

Area(s) Form No.

AJ

783-799,
1000-1015

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

The houses in the residential sections are mixture of late 19th-/early 20th-century and post-World War II but, in contrast to many other neighborhoods in Lexington with such a mix, the more recent houses predominate (see sketch map #1), a reflection of the failed late 19th-century real estate development (see Historical Narrative). The earlier houses range in style from Second Empire through Queen Anne to Craftsman (see data sheet). Examples are the Second Empire cottage at 68 Ward St. (MHC #795; see area photo), which appears to have been built in the 1870s but was actually built in the 1890s, an example of what a city purchaser chose when moving to the country; the Queen Anne farmhouse with attached barn at 42 Ward St. (MHC #1000; see photo); the brick Craftsman house at 38 Ward St. (MHC #1001; see photo); and the bungalow at 9 Ward St. (MHC #1006; see photo). Also in contrast to many other neighborhoods in Lexington, Meagherville has a sense of isolation and in some parts seems almost rural. The latter is particularly true along Valley Road, which is poorly paved and, for a long stretch, has almost no houses. (A greatly altered Italianate farmhouse that was on the Reed farm still exists at 34 Valley Rd. [MHC #1011; see photo]). Several other streets are unpaved and the woods, which are quite dense, are immediately adjacent to the last houses on Earl, Ward, Centre, Reed, and Avon streets. Most of the houses are quite modest and many of the earlier ones are in only fair condition and/or have been sided.

The conservation land, which is south of the residential area (see sketch maps #1 and #3), is composed of several vegetation zones. The higher eastern portion is a late successional pine-beech woods with Lexington's most abundant stand of beech. Old stone walls still mark the eastern and southern boundaries of the property as well as some internal divisions that undoubtedly date from the time when the land was farmed (see sketch map #3). The area near Kiln Brook is noted for its wildflowers. The brook flows west into the section of the Tophet Swamp that remains east of Route 128. Although most of the conservation land is woods or swamp, there are pockets of meadow grass and an old orchard, again remnants of the days when the land was a farm.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (continued)

the streets were plowed and ready to be graded, and two cellars were under construction. And on November 6 of that year the *Minute-man* recorded that 100 person had visited the site the previous Sunday.

Meagher's project seemed initially to be accepted by the town. This was the period when both the Meriam and Munroe hills neighborhoods were also being developed, but both of those were high-style areas with large houses designed to appeal to middle- and upper middle-class residents. No other Lexington development at that time had such tiny lots clearly intended for working-class buyers as was the case with Meagher's. His advertising circulars, for example, claimed that two factories—a shoe and a rubber—were to be built within 10 minutes' walk from Lexington Heights. (The only other development in Lexington with tiny lots aimed at working-class occupants was the Carville Avenue area in East Lexington, which was not laid out and promoted until the turn of the century when an electric trolley line began to operate on Massachusetts Avenue.) After the first Saturday excursion to Lexington Heights in October 1891 the *Minute-man* commented that the participants were "a very respectable set of people, and in no way an objectionable element, as was feared by some of our more conservative citizens. . ." The *Minute-man* did go on to say, however, that they hoped Meagher's enterprise would not turn out as had a similar, and unsuccessful, speculative venture in Arlington Heights.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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

Town
Lexington

Property Address
Meagherville

Area(s) Form No.

AJ

783-799,
1000-1015

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (continued)

By 1892, however, the town's attitude seems to have changed. In July the *Minute-man* reported that although the 45 excursionists who had visited Lexington Heights on a recent Sunday were "an orderly company and no occasion was given for offense," it was only to be expected that nearby residents would be "annoyed by the class of people who are attracted to this tract of land and, should they settle on it, [would] make uncongenial neighbors." The paper added, "We may deprecate [*sic*] the misfortune which makes Lexington the scene of real estate schemes and speculations . . ." F. O. Vaille, who lived in a large house now at 27-29 Vaille Ave. (MHC #767) not far from Lexington Heights, had sued Meagher for disturbing the Sabbath. Meagher was acquitted because it could not be proved that he was present at any of the excursions, but his agent was found guilty of doing business on Sunday. When Meagher would not promise to end the excursions, he was fined \$200. By 1895, when the assessors noted approvingly, in a reference to neighborhoods like Meriam and Munroe hills, that "Lexington is being filled with a very desirable class of people, who are anxious to embrace the opportunity of locating beyond the line of electric cars," they added that "the so-called 'land booms' are different in character," for land in Lexington Heights had been purchased by "representatives of 'all kingdoms and tribes on earth'."

Sale of the lots was successful—300 were sold by 1895 and 700 by 1902. The lots were purchased on the installment plan, the owner receiving title when the last installment was paid. Under the circumstances, the assessors felt it was not fair to assess the lots for the full purchase price, so the tax on each was only about a dollar. Not many houses were built on these lots, however. The 1898 map shows 13 houses on Ward St., one on Earl St., and two on what is now Centre St., most of which are still standing (see sketch map #1), and the 1906 map shows no additional houses. And not a single house was built solely on one of the tiny lots Meagher had laid out—all were on larger lots formed by combining some of the original ones (see sketch map #1). Although Meagher did eventually sell almost every lot, the purchasers soon discovered that he had no intention of laying out most of the streets or of providing water or gas to the lots. Furthermore, many learned that their lots were in the Tophet Swamp! As a result, most buyers abandoned their land and did not pay the taxes on it.

In 1950 the former Lexington Heights area was cut apart when Route 128 was constructed through it (see sketch map #2). Then, in 1951 the town assessor decided to put back into taxation the vacant land in what became known as Meagherville. To do so was a massive project which involved tracing the titles of almost 900 tax delinquent lots. It was carried out with federal funding and by November 1951 Lexington had already put 478 lots back into taxation. The town soon obtained title to 51 acres of former Meagher land west of 128 and 84 acres east of it. The former area became the Tophet Swamp conservation area and the latter what is today the Meagherville Conservation Property.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES (continued)

- Stadley, George W. & Co. *Atlas of the Towns of Watertown, Belmont, Arlington and Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts*. Boston: George W. Stadley & Co., 1898.
- Walker, George H. & Co. *Atlas of Middlesex County, Massachusetts*. Boston: George H. Walker & Co., 1906.
- Worthen, Edwin B. *A Calendar History of Lexington, Massachusetts, 1620-1946*. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Savings Ban 1946. 94.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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

Town
Lexington

Property Address
Meagerville
Area(s) Form No.

AJ	1000, 1001
----	------------



Roll #2, Negative #32
42 Ward Street



Roll #2, Negative #33
38 Ward Street

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Town
Lexington

Property Address
Meagherville

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

Area(s) Form No.

AJ	1006, 1011
----	------------



Roll #3, Negative #3
9 Ward St.



Roll #1, Negative #19A
34 Valley Road

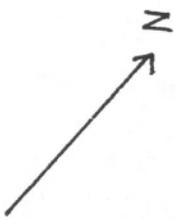
Sketch Map #1

Meagherville, Lexington

Area AJ, #783-799, 1000-1015

Source: Town of Lexington, Engineering Department

○ = house *not* on cement foundation, i.e., pre-1930





ORCHARD

BEECH

ELM

ASH

ASH

GARFIELD STREET

HARTFORD STREET

CENTRE STREET

SOUTH STREET

CENTRE

400

401

402

403

404

405

406

407

408

409

410

411

412

413

414

415

416

417

418

419

420

421

422

423

424

425

426

427

428

429

430

431

432

433

434

435

436

437

438

439

440

441

442

443

444

445

446

447

448

449

450

451

452

453

454

455

456

457

458

459

460

461

462

463

464

465

466

467

468

469

470

471

472

473

474

475

476

477

478

479

480

481

482

483

484

485

486

487

488

489

490

491

492

493

494

495

496

497

498

499

500

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

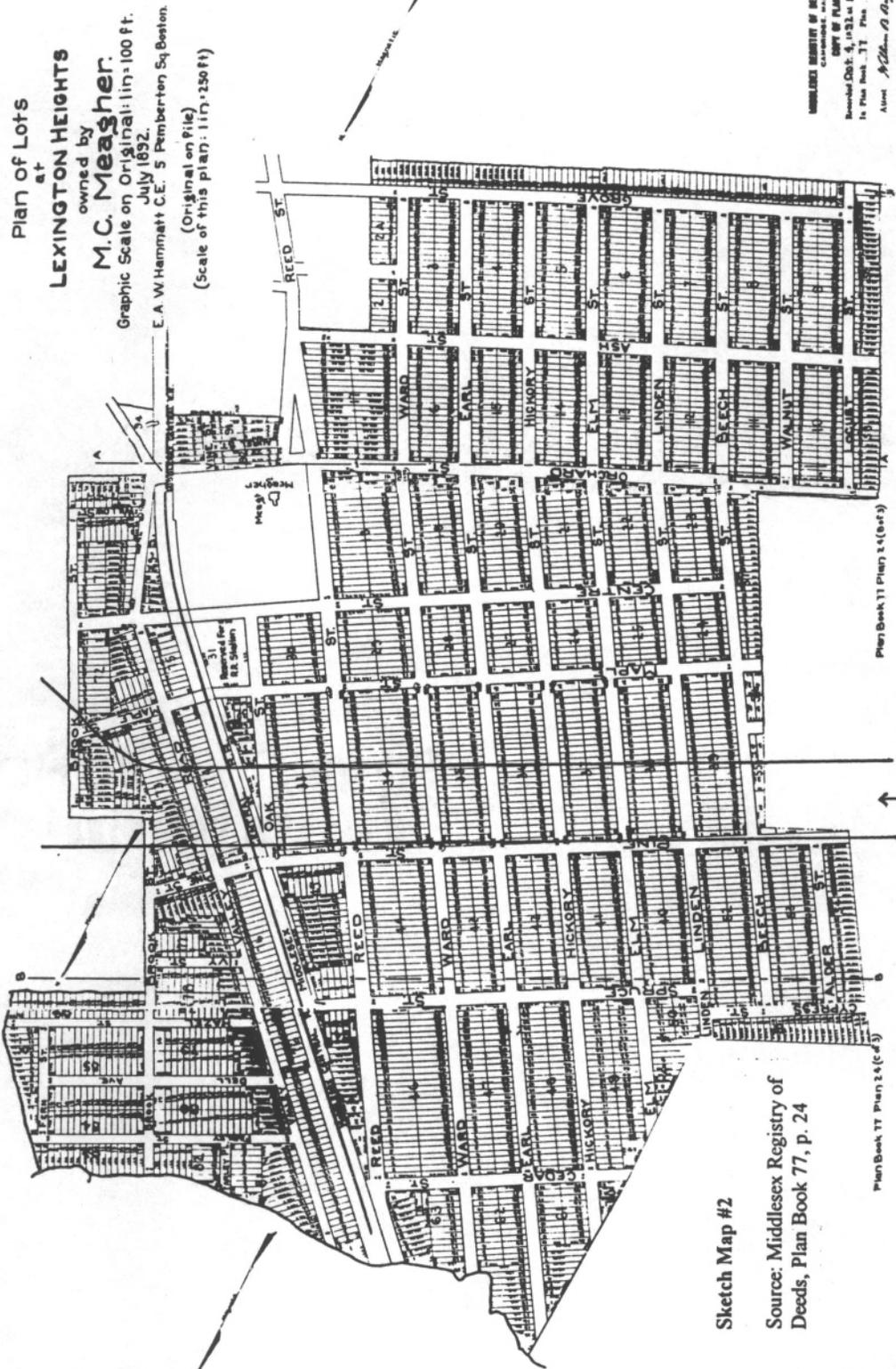
Town
Lexington

Property Address
Meagherville

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

Area(s) Form No.

AJ	783-799, 1000-1015
----	-----------------------



Sketch Map #2

Source: Middlesex Registry of Deeds, Plan Book 77, p. 24

ROUTE 129

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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

Town
Lexington

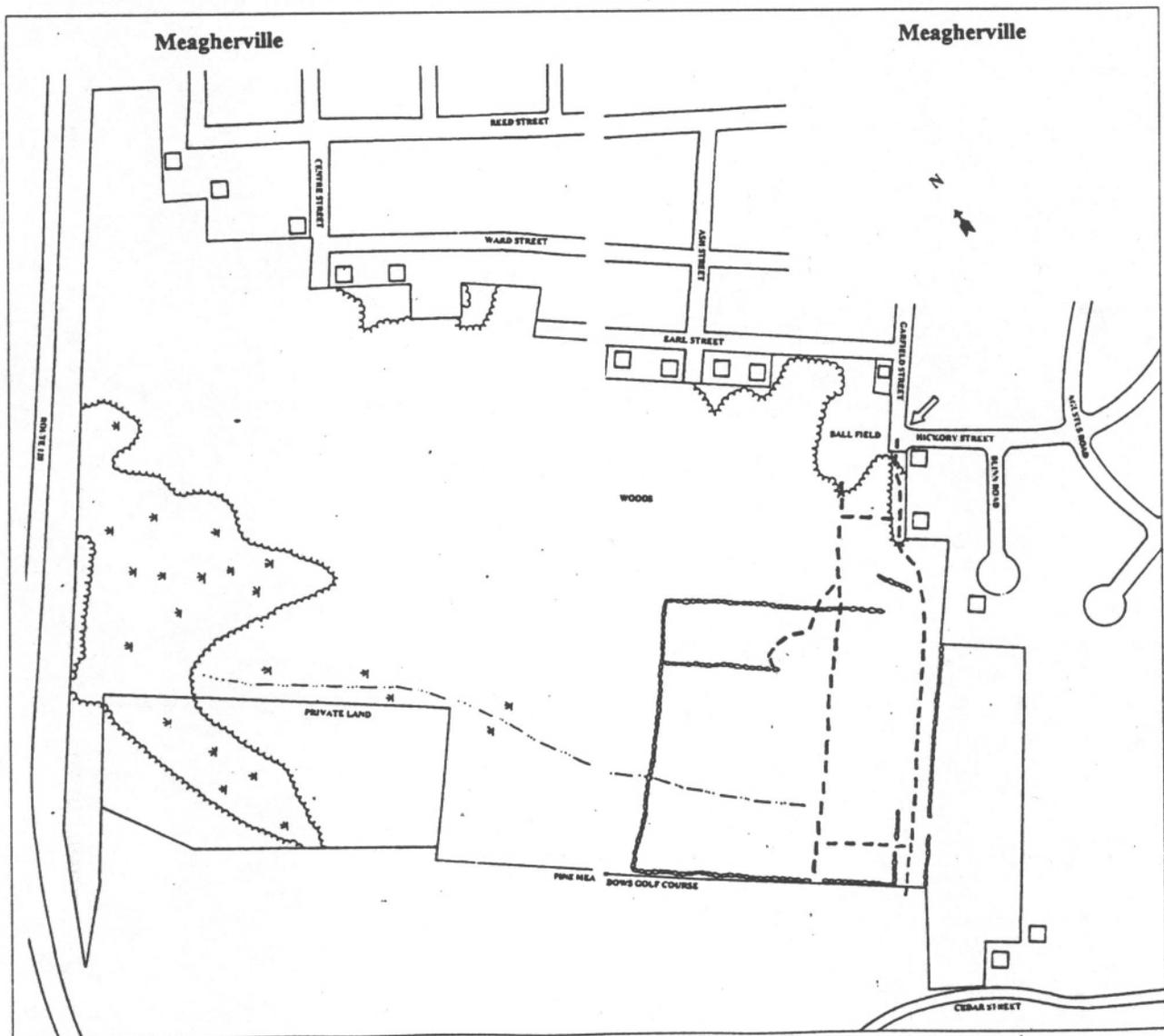
Property Address
Meagherville
Area(s) Form No.

AJ	783-799, 1000-1015
----	-----------------------

Sketch Map #3

Meagherville Conservation Property

Source: Sileo, *Guide to Open Space*, 56-57



INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Town
Lexington

Property Address
Meagherville

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

Area(s) Form No.

AJ	783-799, 1000-1015
----	-----------------------

MEAGHERVILLE AREA DATA SHEET

Street address	MHC #	Style	Date
118 Reed St.	783	Colonial Revival	post 1906
128 Reed St.	784	Dutch Colonial Revival	post 1906
153 Reed St.	785	Bungalow	post 1906
159 Reed St.	786	Bungalow	post 1906
20 Avon St.	787	Colonial Revival	post 1906
17 Avon St.	788	Dutch Colonial Revival	post 1906
12 Avon St.	789	Colonial Revival	post 1906
33 Center St.	790	Colonial Revival	post 1906
10 Center St.	791	Queen Anne	1891-98
82 Ward St.	792	Queen Anne	1891-98
74 Ward St.	793	Queen Anne	1891-98
70 Ward St.	794	Queen Anne	1891-98
68 Ward St.	795	Second Empire	1891-98
63 Ward St.	796	Bungalow	post 1906
59 Ward St.	797	Bungalow	post 1906
51 Ward St.	798	Bungalow	post 1906
42 Ward St.	1000	Queen Anne (w. attached barn)	1891-98
38 Ward St.	1001	Craftsman (brick)	post 1906
37 Ward St.	1002	Queen Anne	1891-98
25 Ward St.	1003	Queen Anne	1891-98
20 Ward St.	1004	Queen Anne	1891-98
10 Ward St.	1005	Colonial Revival	post 1906
9 Ward St.	1006	Craftsman	post 1906
4 Ward St.	1007	4-square	post 1906
40 Earl St.	799	Queen Anne	1891-98
40 Garfield St.	1008	4-square (stuccoed)	post 1906
22 Garfield St.	1009	Workers housing?	post 1906
19 Garfield St.	1010	No style	post 1906
34 Valley Rd.	1011	Italianate	before 1875
48 Valley Rd.	1012	No style	post 1906
62 Valley Rd.	1013	Colonial Revival	post 1906
67 Valley Rd.	1014	No style	post 1906
100 Myrtle St.	1015	Queen Anne	post 1906