

History of the Leland Home and Surrounding Area

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May 2021

The Leland Home and Architect Henry W. Hartwell

The Leland Home for Women is the only existing historic structure on the west side of Newton Street, north of the river. The purchase of this land and the construction of the house in 1891, specifically as a home for elderly women, was made possible by a bequest from the estate of Mrs. Hannah C. Leland (*Daily Free Press*, January 6, 1892). Hannah's husband was a rich New York merchant, and the Leland Estate (possibly, originally, a summer estate) was located farther down Newton Street where the Maristhill Nursing Home is now. There were a number of such large estates in Waltham in the early and mid-1800s, such as the Gore Estate and the Lyman Estate.

The architect of the Leland Home was noted Waltham resident Henry W. Hartwell. Although he resided in Waltham for most of his adult life, Henry Walker Hartwell was born in Boston in 1833. He was educated at the Lawrence Academy in Groton, but had no college education. After working under other architects for five years, he began his own practice in Boston in 1856, the year he designed the Miller Block on Waltham Common (now called the Central Block) for his father in law. The firm of Hartwell and Richardson was established in 1881, when William Cummings Richardson joined Hartwell in his practice. Richardson was more than twenty years younger than Hartwell. In 1895, James Driver joined the firm, which continued as Hartwell, Richardson and Driver until Hartwell's death in 1919.

Hartwell and his firm were very popular architects for suburban Boston buildings, including both private residences for the wealthy as well as commercial and public buildings. Although not trendsetters, the buildings they produced were considered to be well designed and constructed, as well as up to date in the accepted styles of the day. In the over 60 years of his practice, Hartwell's architectural styles included Italianate, Queen Anne, Shingle, Colonial Revival, and Georgian Revival. Although there was no professional relationship between the two Richardsons, Hartwell and Richardson's designs were greatly influenced by the preeminent architect of the day, H.H. Richardson, especially in the 1880s and 1890s.

Although Hartwell's many buildings could be found all around the suburban Boston area, including the 1881 Belmont Town Hall and the old Exeter Street Theater in Boston, Waltham contained an especially large number. Some of the buildings constructed in Waltham associated with Henry W. Hartwell (not all still standing), in addition to the Leland Home, included

- Central Block (opposite City Hall on Main Street)
- Buttrick Block (now RTN Building)
- Music Hall (next to RTN Building)
- Old Fitchburg Railroad Station (demolished)
- Old Waltham Police Station on Lexington Street (now housing Waltham Museum)
- Waltham Armory

- Old Thomas Hill School (oldest part of Stanley Senior Center)
- Lyman Estate Renovations
- Nathan Warren House (whose recent demolition spurred adoption of Delayed Demolition Ordinance)

History of the Surrounding East Main Street Area

(Construction dates, historic names, and architectural styles of individual houses have not yet been certified by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, unless the property is listed in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS))

The Leland Home is located in one of the most historic parts of Waltham. Waltham was initially settled during the 1600s as an outlying part of Watertown (established 1630), and was not incorporated as a separate town until 1738. The East Main Street area, where the home is located, was important in Waltham's history from the beginning.

Main Street

Main Street, known in colonial and early Federal times as the “Great Country Road”, “Country Road”, “County Road” or “Sudbury Road”, followed a route which long predated European settlement as the major Indian trail going inland west from the Boston coastal area. It was along this path, past here, that John Oldham led the first settlers of Wethersfield and the Connecticut River valley in 1634, and that Reverend Thomas Hooker and his followers traveled on their way to settle the Hartford area in 1635. John Oldham originally came from England to the Plymouth colony in the 1620s, but did not fit in and soon left to become an independent Indian trader. He eventually settled in Watertown, became a representative from Watertown to the colonial legislature, and, in 1635, was given the first large land grant in the Waltham area, located on the Charles River near where Mount Feake Cemetery now stands. He died in 1636, having been attacked by Indians on a trading vessel near Block Island. His death sparked the Pequot War of 1637, the first major conflict between the Indians and the English colonists in New England.

In 1664 this Main Street route became part of the Boston Post Road system, established by King Charles II to better unite his American colonies. It was the primary inland connection between Boston and other major English settlements west and south. Today, U.S. highway 20 closely follows this route. In 1772 regular long distance stagecoach service was started on the Boston Post Road between Boston and New York, but even before this the Great Country Road was the major commercial link between Boston and nearby agricultural towns to the west. By 1750 there were only about a dozen houses along the Great Country Road through all of Waltham, but by 1765 there were already six taverns along this stretch of the road to service its many teamsters and travelers.

Some of the many travelers of note who have passed by here include the two spies that General Gage sent out from Boston in the spring of 1775 to determine the best route for the British forces to follow in their raid on Concord, which led to the Battles of Lexington and Concord, and the start of the Revolutionary War. In the winter of 1775-1776, Henry Knox brought the cannons captured at Fort Ticonderoga through Waltham on their way to Dorchester Heights – leading to the evacuation of Boston by the British. In 1789 George Washington traveled through Waltham on his grand tour as the first President of the United States, and in 1797 John Adams traveled through Waltham on his way to be inaugurated as the second President of the United States.

During the late 1700s and early 1800s, the stretch of Main Street between Newton Street and Linden Street had the highest concentration of taverns, stores, and blacksmith shops along the Great Country Road in Waltham, and had begun to coalesce into an incipient town center. However, with the phenomenal success of the Boston Manufacturing Company's textile mill in the early 1800s, on the Charles River where present day Moody Street crosses the river, the town center was drawn farther west to the Moody Street area. This mill, the first in the country to include both water powered spinning and weaving under one roof, marked the true beginning of the industrial system in America and the start of major industrial development in Waltham.

The Fitchburg Railroad reached Waltham from Boston (via Cambridge) in 1843. It was acquired by the Boston and Maine Railroad in 1900 and by the MBTA in 1976. Although there is no longer a passenger stop on the line here, there originally was a stop called Beaver Brook Station where the railroad crossed Main Street at a grade crossing. The present highway truss bridge over the railroad was not built until 1936, at which time Main Street was probably straightened. The original alignment of Main Street apparently still exists in the diagonal driveway into Waltham Lumber on the west side of the tracks, which continues over a grade crossing to the portion of Massasoit Street (previously part of Main Street) running along Main Street on the east side of the tracks. The depot was on the south side of the grade crossing. Having relatively easy access to Boston promoted the development of the area in the mid and late 1800s for Boston based as well as local professionals.

Beaver Brook, which crosses under Main Street just beyond the railroad tracks, is now buried in a culvert from Main Street all the way to the Charles River, which it enters next to the Newton Street Bridge.

This stretch of Main Street has one house from the 1790s and a number of impressive houses from the mid and late 1800s.

Selected Houses on Main Street:

411 Main St. (now Kirsch Insurance Agency), Hager-Mead House, 1795, Georgian, on National Register of Historic Places

418 Main St., George W. Chamberlain House, 1850-1854, Italianate, on National Register of Historic Places

426 Main St. (now part of Eden Vale condominiums), Francis Blanchard House, 1850-1854, Italianate, on National Register of Historic Places

436 Main St. (now part of Eden Vale Condominiums), Lyman Reed House, 1844-1845, Greek Revival (Temple-Front), on National Register of Historic Places

446 Main St., Charles P. Nutting House, 1900, Colonial Revival, on National Register of Historic Places

494 Main Street, Stanley Senior Center/Dr. Thomas Hill School/Heard Street School, 1880

504-506 Main Street, George Miller House (behind restaurant storefront, a.k.a. Frost House), c. 1844, Greek Revival

Side Streets off Main Street

Pleasant Street

Pleasant Street is one of the oldest streets in Waltham. In the 1660s, while Waltham was still part of the original Watertown lands, Pleasant Street was laid out as part of the trail system used for moving the Watertown cattle herds between the village center and summer pasture lands in the woods farther west. The alignment of Pleasant Street, near Main Street, appears to follow along a boundary line from the original colonial land grants of 1634-1640 (Beaver Brook Plowlands), which may be why it does not leave Main Street at a right angle.

Through most of the 1700s, Pleasant Street, then known as “The Way to the Meeting House” was the primary connection between Waltham’s incipient village center on the Great Country Road, between Newton and Linden streets, and the community’s only meetinghouse (church) located on Beaver Street (near the current day rotary). The parsonage of Waltham’s second settled minister, Reverend Jacob Cushing (built 1759), is still standing at 44 Pleasant Street. The parsonage of Waltham’s third settled minister, Reverend Samuel Ripley (built 1818), is also still standing on Pleasant Street at 49 Pleasant Street.

For many years, at the end of the 1700s and beginning of the 1800s, a tavern stood on the north east corner of Main and Pleasant Streets. At one time in its existence it was known as the “Bird Tavern” and was a very popular stop for stage coaches on the Boston Post Road. It was also the primary gathering point for the local militia, whose practice field was located nearby.

In 1775 during the “Lexington Alarm” or “Battles of Lexington and Concord” that began the American Revolution, the Waltham minutemen assembled here at the corner of Pleasant Street and Main Street. After assembling, the minutemen marched up Pleasant Street, past Reverend Cushing’s parsonage, to the meeting house, where they retrieved their arms, which had been hidden in the bell tower.

Selected Houses on Pleasant Street:

44 Pleasant St., Cushing Parsonage, 1759, Georgian/Italianate/Greek Revival

49 Pleasant St., Ripley Parsonage, 1818, Federal

Newton Street

Newton Street was first laid out in 1755 in order to connect local farmers with their land on both sides of the river; however, a bridge was not built over the river here until about 1762. It was the first bridge built over the river west of Watertown Square. Most of the houses on the east side of Newton Street were built between about 1830 and 1870.

Selected Houses on Newton Street:

12-14 Newton Street, 1856-1875, Victorian Eclectic

18 Newton Street, Isaac Field House, 1842-1854, Greek Revival/Italianate

21 Newton Street, The Leland Home, 1891, Colonial Revival

22 Newton Street, James A. Hunt House, c. 1855, Italianate

26-28 Newton Street, Lydia and George Emerson House, c. 1870, Second Empire

38 Newton Street, Ammi B. Stiles House, c. 1851, Greek Revival

42 Newton Street, Esther Nelson House, c. 1840, Vernacular

Central and Cross Streets

Shortly after the Boston Manufacturing Company (BMC) acquired the Bleachery site near Willow Street, in 1819, Patrick Tracy Jackson, the BMC's agent in Waltham, bought up, from many different land owners, most of the land along the north side of the river between the original mill site near Moody Street and Willow Street. He then promptly sold these lands to the BMC. This included about 25 acres between Elm Street and Newton Street, which extended from the river up to the house lots immediately along Main Street (about 350 feet south of Main Street). In 1827, Jackson reacquired the eastern part of this land for his private estate, and, in 1833 and 1834, George Miller acquired the land on both sides of the future Central and Jackson Streets, and laid out and developed those two streets. Cross Street was also laid out about this time. George Miller's father, Thomas Miller, had owned the land where Cross Street would later be located, along with the house lots on either side of it, for about 350 feet south from Main Street, since 1801. Most of the original houses along these streets were built in the 1830s and 1840s, and many of these still remain. Many of the original homeowners were professionals or

trades people, and, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Central Street formed a respectable residential core of a thriving industrial village.

Selected Houses on Central Street:

10 Central Street, Lawton Estate Outbuilding, 1839-1854, Federal Vernacular

25 Central Street, James McVay House, 1837-1846, Greek Revival

27 Central Street, 1875-1886, Victorian Eclectic

31 Central Street, Holbrook-Palmer House, 1843-1845, Greek Revival/Italianate

35-37 Central Street, John E. Olcott House, 1839, Federal Brick, on National Register of Historic Places

40 Central Street, Swedish Congregational Church, 1894-1895

54 Central Street, William Livermore House, 1844, Greek Revival

Selected Houses on Cross Street:

9-11 Cross Street, 1831-1854, Federal Vernacular

14-16 Cross Street, 1898, Colonial Revival

15 Cross Street, 1831-1854, Federal/Greek Revival Vernacular

18-20 Cross Street, 1870-1875, Second Empire

21 Cross Street, 1831-1849, Greek Revival

23 Cross Street, 1831-1844, Vernacular

25 Cross Street, Charles J. Linder House, c. 1901, Victorian Eclectic

26 Cross Street, c. 1890, Vernacular

27 Cross Street, Amos Libby House, c. 1845, Greek Revival

31 Cross Street, Oliver Libby House, c. 1845, Greek Revival

28 Cross Street, 1886-1892, Vernacular

32-34 Cross Street, 1839-1854, Federal/Victorian Vernacular

36-38 Cross Street, 1847-1854, Federal/Victorian Vernacular

Heard Street

In the mid 1820s, Waltham's Second Religious Society, which had separated from the First Religious Society five years earlier, itself then split into Unitarian and Trinitarian factions. In 1826, the Trinitarian faction (variously referred to as the First or Second Congregational Society or First Trinitarian Congregational Society) built a meeting house for itself on Main Street where the Stanley Senior Center now stands, opposite Lyman Street. This was the forerunner of the Trinity Church at 730 Main Street. As early as 1834 a recognized passageway existed connecting the southern end of the church's land with Central Street. In 1845 the passageway was 186 feet long and 14 feet wide at its southern end and 28 feet wide at its northern end. In 1847 George Miller bought a 20 foot wide strip of the church's land, which extended his holdings through to Main Street. As part of the purchase of church land, the church laid out what became Heard Street and required Miller to standardize the width of the street all the way to Central Street at 20 feet. By 1886, the municipality had done the same for the southern end of the street, which was already out of Miller's hands. Later, the street became known as Church Avenue, then Hurd Street (named for a family owning land nearby), and finally Heard Street. Some of the houses on Heard Street are from the 1840s, and one might be much earlier, though moved from elsewhere.

Selected Houses on Heard Street:

13-15 Heard Street, 1889-1891, Colonial Revival

19 Heard Street, Hathaway Auto Repair Shop (site of former blacksmith shop), c. 1920,
Utilitarian Brick

23 Heard Street, Samuel Townsend Bake Shop, c. 1800, Vernacular

29 Heard Street, Richard Holbrook Cottages, c. 1844, Greek Revival, on National Register of
Historic Places

33 Heard Street, 1875-1886, Victorian Eclectic

Townsend Street

Townsend Street contains an exemplary, unified collection of modest, yet characteristic, middle class Victorian houses, except for the two on the Main Street corners and the one four houses down on the right hand side (No. 19 Townsend Street). The shape and massing of this house appears to be much more like a Georgian/Federal period house and probably dates from around 1790. It originally stood nearby on Main Street and was occupied in the early 1800s by Samuel Townsend, Waltham's first post master. It was then owned by Reverend Sewell Harding, the first minister of the Trinitarian Congregational Church, and two subsequent ministers of the

church. It then became the home of George H. Maynard, Waltham's only recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, awarded for his heroic actions during the Civil War. It was moved from Main Street to Townsend Street when that street was built by Silas Barton in the early 1890s.

Selected Houses on Townsend Street:

19 Townsend Street, Townsend-Harding-Maynard House, c. 1790, Georgian

Sources of Information

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