

History of the Old Stone Walls  
at Nipper Maher Park

MSI  
12/24/2019

- 1634 General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony granted a 500 acre farm along the north side of the Charles River between Stony Brook (Weston line) and the Waltham Plain (near Moody Street) to John Oldham. This was the first large land grant in colonial Watertown (Waltham was then part of colonial Watertown). Oldham had come to Plymouth in 1623. Having disagreements with Plymouth's Pilgrim leadership, he was banished in 1624, became a fur trader, but was then reconciled with the Plymouth settlers by 1628. In that year he acted as custodian of Thomas Morton (of Merry-Mount fame) when Morton was forcibly returned to England. In England, Oldham obtained from John Gorges a land grant for an area encompassing most of today's Charlestown, Cambridge, and Somerville. In any event, he became a freeman of the town of Watertown in 1631, and became active in town government (Nelson, p. 38). The 500 acre farm grant may have been in compensation for giving up the grant from Gorges (Sanderson, p. 16). Watertown did not recognize the grant until 1647, at which time it was laid out by town surveyors (Sanderson, p. 16). In the meantime, Oldham had been killed by native Americans while on a trading expedition near Block Island in 1636. This incident triggered the Pequot War of 1637, the first military action between the New England settlers and the native tribes. After Oldham's death, the farm was transferred to Matthew Craddock of London to whom Oldham was indebted. It then passed to Thomas Mayhew and finally to Richard Dummer in 1659 (Sanderson, p. 16, also deed MLR book 2, page 275). The Oldham Grant is sometimes referred to as "Mr. Dummer's Farm".
- 1661 Richard Dummer to Richard Gale, north (or east) half of Oldham farm (MLR b.2, p.275). Over the next century and a half, many members of the Gale family lived and farmed along South Street, which existed before the end of the 1600s (Sanderson, p. 22) and was referred to as "Gales Lane" in early town records (Lane, p. 18). One of the Gale houses was built by a Jacob Gale (fifth generation descendent of Richard's according to Sanderson, p. 101) in 1798 on Main Street at the end of South Street, and sold to Nathaniel P. Banks in 1855. Banks was Waltham's most famous mid-nineteenth century citizen: a governor of Massachusetts, congressman, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and Civil War general. Banks lived in this house the rest of his life, and the Gale-Banks House is still standing at 935 Main Street.
- 1825 David Townsend (for estate of Alpheus Gale) to Samuel Gale (MLR b.263, p.20). This Samuel Gale appears to have been Alpheus' oldest son, born in 1799 (Vital Records). Alpheus was the brother of Jacob, who built the house Nathaniel Banks bought, and a fifth generation descendent of Richard's (Sanderson, p. 101).
- 1831 Samuel Gale to Jacob Farwell (MLR b.302, p.259). According to Lane, the house Farwell occupied was previously occupied by a Samuel Gale (Lane, p. 19), and the deed says "with buildings thereon". However, this Samuel Gale must have been Alpheus'

father, and Nelson (p. 93) says that Samuel (the father) built this house and a nearby house on the other side of South Street, which became the town's poor farm (now demolished). In 1828 the town bought 100 acres of land from Alpheus (must have been his estate) on the east side of South Street for the poor farm and Mt. Feak Cemetery. The direct tax roll of 1798 (Waltham Sentinel, June 12, 1856) confirms the house was occupied by Anna, mother of Alpheus (Nelson, p. 93), owned by Alpheus and Jacob (brothers), and occupied in 1856 by Jacob Farwell. Since Samuel (Alpheus father) died in 1793, the house was possibly built prior to 1793. This house still stands at 117 South Street. The MACRIS form says the house was built around 1830, after Farwell bought the property, but it is possible that at least parts of the house were built by Samuel Gale and date back to the late 1700s.

Jacob Farwell was one of Waltham's foremost citizens during the middle 1800s. He was the foreman of Governor Gore's estate in Waltham for 20 years, until the governor's death. He also served in the War of 1812 and received a 160 acre bounty for his service. After Gore's death, Farwell bought the Gale farm land and lived in the old Gale house for the rest of his life. During this period, he also bought the Central House stagecoach inn, which stood where the Waltham Public Library now stands, and converted it into an imposing Greek Revival building and one of the largest hotels in Waltham (Waltham Sentinel May 4, 1866). His daughter, Augusta, who was born in the house at 117 South Street, married Francis Buttrick, who later owned one of Waltham's largest lumber mills, and became one of Waltham's wealthiest land owners. Buttrick also served as a town selectman for several years and was a founder of the Waltham Co-operative Bank. It was through a bequest in Buttrick's will that the front half of the current Waltham Public Library was built in 1915, and still inscribed on the front of the library are the words "Bequest of Francis Buttrick".

1875 Map shows land owned by Mrs. F.P. Farwell

1893 Francis P. Farwell to William and Cornelius Bradstreet (MLR b.2192, p.109). The Bradstreets used the land to build a private bicycle track, which was called Waltham Bicycle Park. W.D. Bradstreet was the park's manager (Boston Journal, September 27, 1893 – he was also the manager of the Park Theater [Music Hall] according to Nathan Warren in Hurd's History of Middlesex Co, p. 718). The track was made of concrete by Charles F. Duffy of Warner and Jenkins of Philadelphia, and the owners cleared themselves in the first year of operation by taxing the wheelmen for use of the track (Worcester Daily Spy, August 16, 1894). The track officially opened on Memorial Day, 1893, with 15,000 people in attendance (Boston Daily Advertiser, May 31, 1893). The grand stands could seat 9,000 (Klein). It was the premier bicycle racing track in Massachusetts. In the 1890s, bicycle racing and touring were the most popular sports in America, and it opened up the world of outdoor activities to both men and women. Waltham was also the home of Charles Metz's Waltham Manufacturing Company, which produced around 100,000 bicycles between 1893 and 1902, including some of the fastest on the tracks. Metz also encouraged bicycle racing as a way to advertise his products. However, as the 1900s progressed, motorcycles and automobiles started to enter the transportation field, and baseball and football became more popular in the sports area

(Green). In 1901 the company running the Memorial Day and Labor Day bicycle races, the largest of the year, switched to a different track over failed lease negotiations (Boston Herald, March 3, 1901), and Bradstreet sold off the track.

- 1902 William Bradstreet to Sadie E. Ellis, mentions a mortgage owed to Francis Perinilia Farwell (MLR b.2972, p.335).
- 1903 Charles Knight and Sadie Knight (nee Ellis) to City of Waltham (MLR b.3037, p.462) and Taking by City of Waltham for Bicycle Park (MLR b.3037, p.461). Boundaries of park match those shown on Sanderson Ward Map (city engineer's atlas page) from early 1900s, and deeds and map refer to a stone wall running along western side of park to a corner and then along northern side. The park continued to be used for bicycle races for a while, but more and more for baseball and football. In 1909 the Waltham High School Athletics Association requested control of the park, but the park commission retained control (Boston Journal, May 20, 1909).
- 1917 During America's participation in World War I, Bicycle Park was taken over for the duration as an army recruiting camp called Camp Banks.
- 1965 Name changed from Waltham Bicycle Park to Nipper Maher Park. Joseph "Nipper" Maher managed Waltham City Club's semi-pro barn storming baseball team from 1927 to 1951, during the heyday of baseball. He then established Waltham's Little League program. In addition, he was a Waltham city councilor from 1951 to 1970 (Boston Herald, July 23, 1979).

It appears that the wall segments forming an angle at the northwest corner of the park are the remains of the stone walls mentioned in the deeds and shown on the maps. They demarcate part of the boundaries of the original, historic Oldham Grant from 1634, as surveyed and laid out in 1647, as well as the farm owned by Jacob Farwell in the 1800s. In 1903 they became part of the boundary of Bicycle Park and then Nipper Maher Park. It also seems likely that the large concrete blocks along the path between the woods and the fields within the park may be from the original grandstand for the bicycle track.

#### References:

- Green, Amy, Charles River Museum of Industry & Innovation, "The Bicycle Craze, Waltham's Contributions to the Fastest Wheels on Earth", <https://www.charlesrivermuseum.org/the-bicycle-craze-walthams-contributions>
- Hurd, D. Hamilton, The History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts, Vol. III, Lewis Co. Philadelphia, 1890.
- Klein, Christopher, Hub Trotter, "When Waltham Was the Hub of Cycling", <http://hubtrotter.blogspot.com/2009/06/when-waltham-was-hub-of-cycling.html>

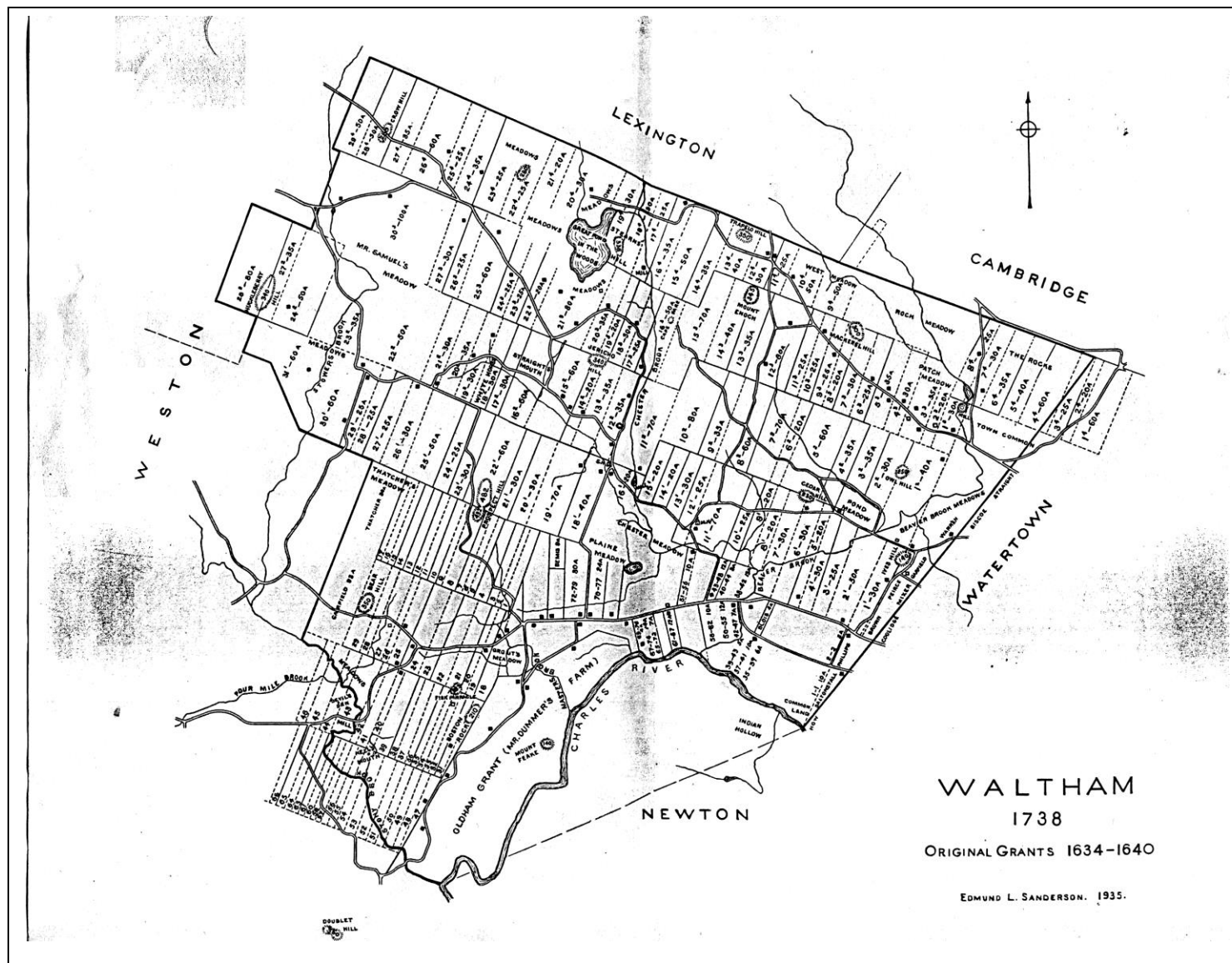
Lane, Ellen E., "Weston Street and Thereabouts", Publication No. 1, Waltham Historical Society, 1919.

Nelson, Charles A., Waltham Past and Present; and its Industries, 1879.

Sanderson, Edmund L., Waltham as a Precinct of Watertown and as a Town 1630-1884, Waltham Historical Society, 1936.

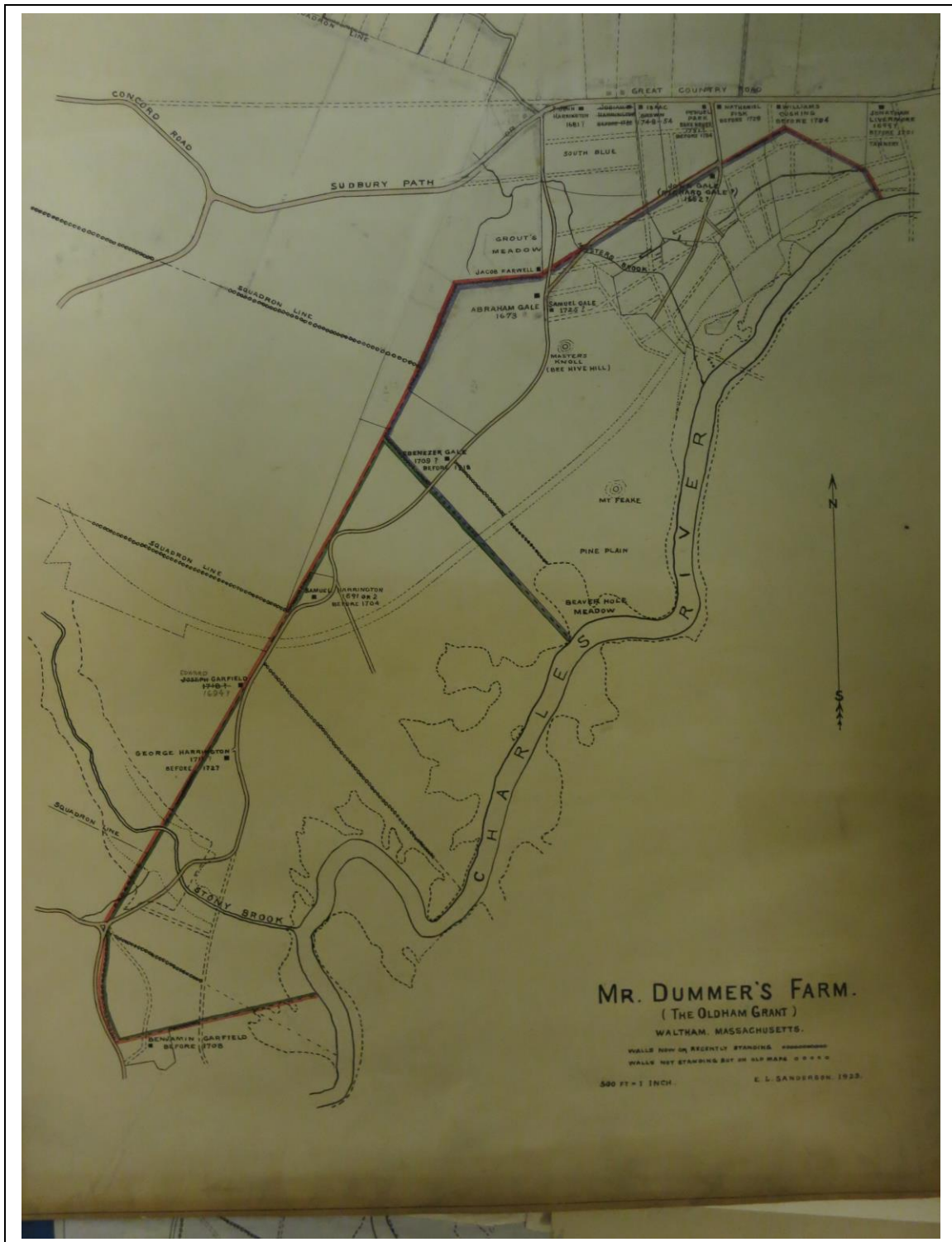


*Stone wall at corner of Nipper Maher children's playground and neighbors on Boynton Street.*

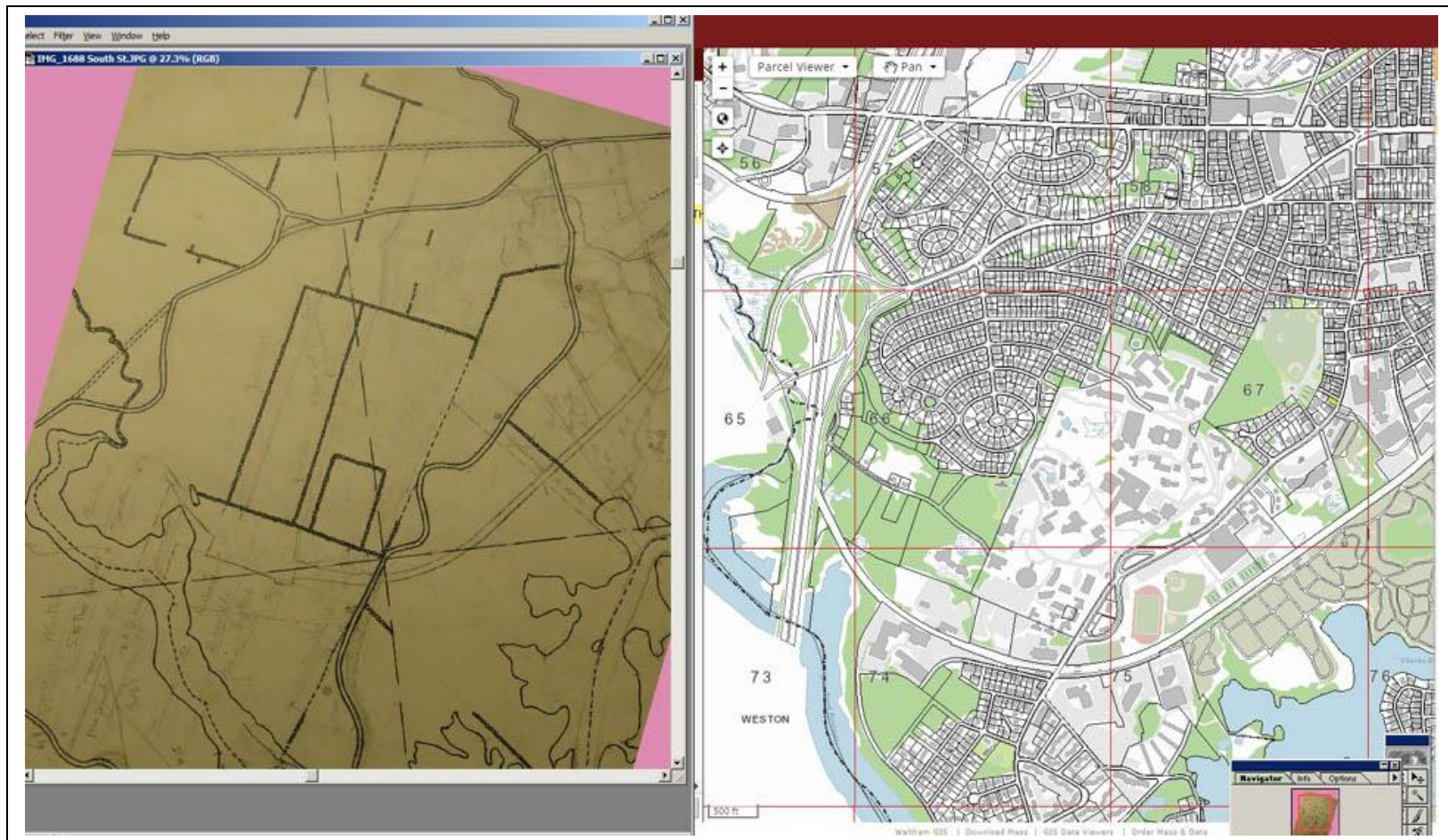


*Map of Waltham in 1738 showing land grants (Sanderson)*



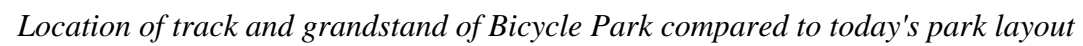


*Oldham Land Grant from 1634 by E.L. Sanderson*



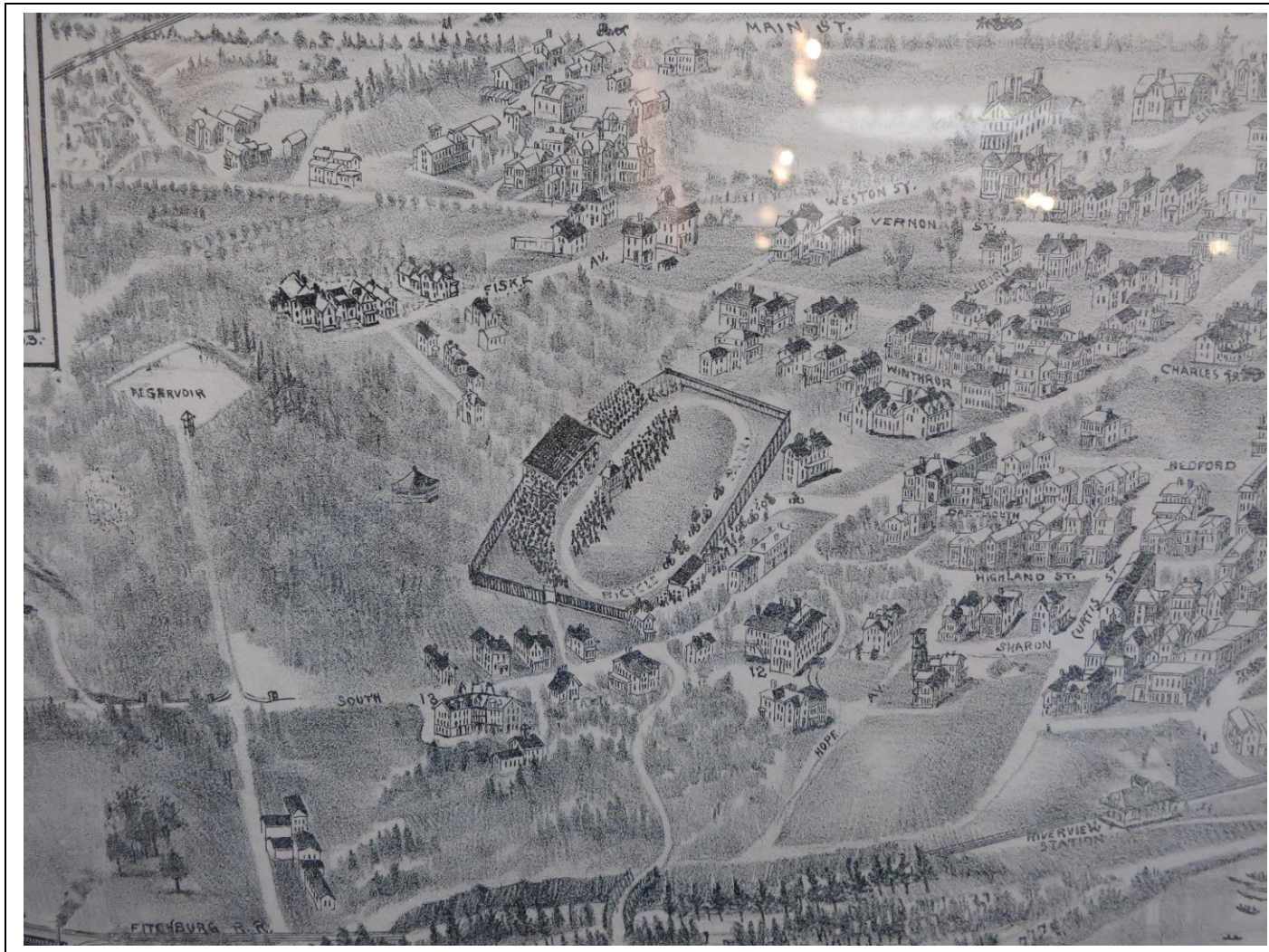
*Early stone walls still existing about 1900 and today's property lines.*





*Location of track and grandstand of Bicycle Park compared to today's park layout*





1898 Birdseye View of Waltham showing Bicycle Park grandstand at foot of wooded slope (Waltham Public Library)





*Bicycle Park as Camp Banks in 1917 ( from historic photo in News Tribune of November 11, 1987- Brad Bigham Collection, Waltham Historical Society). Note house behind right.*



*Same area today at north end of park. Note house behind right.*