

# FORM A - AREA

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

Assessor's Sheets

USGS Quad

Area  
Letter

Form  
Numbers in  
Area

R076 005

Newton

BF

WLT.1194-  
1197

**Town/City:** Waltham

**Place:** (neighborhood or village):

**Name of Area:** Chester Avenue Area

**Present Use:** Residential

**Construction Date or Period:** c.1912-1918

**Overall Condition:** Fair

**Major Intrusions and Alterations:** Siding and sash altered on most buildings

**Acreage:** .7 acres

**Recorded By:** Zachary Violette

**Organization:** Consultant, Waltham Historical Commission

**Date (month/year):** September 2021

## Photograph



Chester Avenue looking east from Adams Street showing (L-R), 4-8, 12-16, 18-20 Chester Avenue. Photo by Zachary Violette March 2021.

## Locus Map (North is up)



# INVENTORY FORM A CONTINUATION SHEET

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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.*

Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

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

The Chester Avenue Area occupies a rectangular plot at the northeast corner of Adams Street and Chester Avenue on the South Side of Waltham. It consists of four buildings, three identical four-unit tenements on Chester Avenue and a related two-family house on Adams Street.

The Chester Avenue buildings --- **John and Isabel Harwood Tenement, 4 - 8 Chester Avenue (c.1912) WLT.1195, Alfred A. Miche Tenement, 12 - 16 Chester Avenue (c.1912) WLT.1196, Alfred A. Miche Tenement, 18 - 20 Chester Avenue (c.1912) WLT.1197** --- are two-story, wood-frame, rectangular blocks in a classical idiom. They each have a footprint of 63 feet along Chester Avenue and are 33 feet in depth. They rise from high fieldstone foundations to a low hip roof. The front elevations are marked by stacked, canted bays, which flank the centered entrance. These bays are topped with gables, forming a cutaway. The rear of each building is augmented with sheds. Entrance to each is reached up a wide set of concrete steps with fieldstone piers. (removed on 4-8 Chester Avenue). These give access to a front porch that spans the area between the two bays. At the rear of each building stacked porches provide secondary circulation. These are augmented by enclosed sheds.

While the buildings at 4-8 and 12-16 Chester Avenue have had their surface materials changed and their porches rebuilt, 18-20 Chester Avenue appears to retain much of its original appearance. The front porch is set on a lattice skirt and has a closed, shingled balustrade onto which square posts are placed (12-16 Chester Avenue had Tuscan columns in this location until recently). These support a cornice of medallions and dentils. A secondary porch, supported on thin Tuscan columns with modern square balusters, is placed on the roof of the porch. The building is clad in wood shingle. The line between the first and second stories is marked by a belt course and flared shingles. Windows have simple wooden backband architraves. The building is topped by a cornice of medallions and dentils. Each of the cutaways has a cottage window with a diamond sash. All of the other window openings in this building, as well as its twins, have vinyl 1/1 sash windows. The other two buildings are clad in vinyl siding, and most trim has been obscured. The residing of 12-16 Chester Avenue occurred within the last three years. It retained a good deal of integrity up until that date.

Behind 4-8 Chester Avenue is **John and Isabel Harwood Two Family, 218 - 220 Adams Street (c.1912) WLT.1194** a distinct but related building. Rising from a poured concrete foundation, the building has a rectangular footprint. It rises two stories to a low hip roof. This roof deeply overhangs, providing the roof for the stacked, canted bay located in the second pile on the south elevation. Entrance to the building is reached through a set of poured concrete steps. That rises to a porch that spans approximately half the front of the building. This has a closed balustrade, likely originally singled, with square piers supporting pointed arch openings. A secondary porch now of PVC turned posts and square balustrade is set on the roof of this porch. The building is now clad in vinyl clapboards and aluminum panning obscures most trim. This building was likely originally clad in wood shingle and was likely similar in appearance to the Chester Avenue buildings.

The rear of 12-16 and 18-20 Chester Avenue buildings is marked by a four-bay garage. Built of textured concrete blocks these structures have a high hip roof and wooden vehicle doors. They are reached by driveways that run between the two buildings. A single-bay, wood-frame garage is set on the corner of Adams Street and Chester Avenue. Set on a foundation of concrete blocks, this structure has a high pyramidal hip roof. This is set in a paved parking area that occupies the intersection of the two streets. A two-bay garage, also with a pyramidal hip roof, is set behind the Adams Street two-family.

The Chester Avenue area is a small development of contemporaneous buildings, harmonizing its scale, massing, footprint, materials, and detailing. Of particular note is the relationship between the two-family house on Adams Street and the larger, four-unit buildings on Chester Avenue.

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## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

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

Annexed from Newton in 1849, the development of the South Side of Waltham, particularly the area west of Moody Street, was inextricably linked to the formation of the American (later Waltham) Watch Company. In 1854 the Waltham Improvement Company, a corporate forerunner of the watch company, purchased a 160- acre tract of land known as the Bemis Estate. The company, which pioneered the American production of timepieces, constructed a large factory along the banks of the Charles River. The remainder of the estate was laid out with gridded streets with regular house lots. Using a plan drawn by the Charlestown civil engineers Thomas Doane and John Doane, Jr. the subdivision called for lots 25 feet in width and generally between 120 and 150 feet in depth.<sup>1</sup> On some of these parcels, most of which were combined over the subsequent decades, the company would develop houses for workers, many of which were sold to those employees shortly after their construction. In other cases, the company traded at low prices lots to individuals, generally associated with the enterprise, who quickly erected houses on those parcels. It offered loans and other incentives to its employees to build homes in the area. The company invested heavily in the neighborhood, building parks across from its extensive factory along Crescent Street, which helped to spur development on the surrounding blocks further. The area attracted widespread notice in the nineteenth century for the commodious housing conditions found there, in part a reflection of the company's control over the land. As one later observer noted of the watch company's employees, whose skills tended to be in high demand: "The operatives were of a class of men who did not care to be denizens of boarding-houses, but aspired to own and live in their own homes. They bought land of the Company and erected separate independent houses on ample lots and thus took the first steps to establish an individual community, unsurpassed in the country."<sup>2</sup> One sociological study of the area in 1888 went so far as to call the watch company neighborhood as a "model city." It noted that one-fourth of all married workers in the watch factory were homeowners (190 out of 729) and that this percentage was on the increase. The author of that study, a prominent progressive journalist and *New York Times* editor named John Swinton (1829-1901) forcefully described the neighborhood as "the most beautiful manufacturing village in the country." The houses, which were valued between \$2000 and \$5000, and "nothing could be more noteworthy than the contrasts between them and the tenement houses of New York, in which myriad of families cluster." The company's policy, Swinton asserted, "induced every man in the factory to become the owner of his own house ... while doing this it has refrained from interfering in the slightest with the spirit of independence which out to be the pride of every American citizen." "All this," he concluded, "is greatly to the advantage of the employees, who are now owners of nearly the whole place ... the chief value of agreeable and wholesome surrounding was their moral influence on the workplace."<sup>3</sup> The pragmatic yet nearly utopian manner in which the area was developed meant the watch company neighborhood formed a distinctive landscape. The quality of worker housing here offered a noteworthy contrast to that found in lower-wage and lower-skill enterprises, such as the much more modest tenements of the Boston Manufacturing Company on the other side of the Charles River in Waltham, which that company built, owned, and controlled well into the twentieth century.

This area consists of a number of buildings of the type that made the Watch Company neighborhood noteworthy. The Area stands not on the Watch Company subdivision, but on a tract of the estate of Benjamin F. Reed, which until its division in 1890, consisted of a large house, carriage house, and other outbuildings facing Moody Street, with property extending all the way to Adams Street, adjoining the rear yards of houses on Orange Street.<sup>4</sup> Sale of the lots began as early as 1891, and parcels were sold on the condition that no buildings be erected closer than 15 feet from Chester Street; that no building be used as anything other than a private dwelling; that private dwellings should cost not less than \$2500, or \$3500 if used as a two-family house; that no house should be occupied by more than two families; and that no intoxicating liquors be sold on the property. While at least four buildings had been built on the north side of Chester Avenue by 1900, many more parcels remained vacant and property of the Reed estate at that date.

While there were six houses on the north side of Chester Street by 1911, the lots closest to Adams Street, encompassing the subject area, remained vacant by that point. Reed died in 1905 and controlled the vacant lots passed to his estate, of which Hollis E. Demmen was the trustee. The 12,040 square foot parcel -- lots one through six on the 1890 plan -- at the corner of

<sup>1</sup> "Plan of Lands owned by the American Watch Company, formerly Waltham Improvement Company in Waltham" ... October 1854. Thomas Doane and John Doane Jr, Civil Engineers and Surveyors. Original on file. (Copy in three sections) June 20, 1944. MSRD Plan Book 11, Page 49. MSRD TIF copies with MHC

<sup>2</sup> Nathan Warren "The Development of Waltham's South Side" *Publications of the Waltham Historical Society* Vol 1 (1919), 57-58

<sup>3</sup> John Swinton *A Model Factory in A Model City: A Social Study* New York: Brown, Green, and Adams, 1888: 13, 16

<sup>4</sup> MSRD Plan Book 64, Page 39

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Adams and Chester Street was sold in March of 1912 to John and Isabel Harwood for \$2200.<sup>5</sup> The couple arranged for a \$6000 mortgage on the property from Waltham Savings Bank immediately after their purchase.<sup>6</sup> This likely financed the construction of two buildings on the land, the four-unit building at 4-8 Chester Avenue, and a smaller two-family house on the rear of the lot at 218 Adams Street.

In September of 1912 Demmen sold the remaining parcels, a 26,400 square foot tract that consisted of lots seven through 14 on 1890 plan to Alfred A. Miche.<sup>7</sup> Miche immediately arranged for two mortgages of \$4600 from the Waltham Savings Bank.<sup>8</sup> That transaction likely paid for the construction of an additional two, four-unit tenements on Chester Avenue, nearly identical to those built by Harwood earlier in the year. This was 18 Chester Avenue, built on lots 11 through 14; and 12-16 Chester Avenue, built on lots 7-10. Miche was born in Switzerland and immigrated in 1907. He was an employee of the Waltham Watch Company, where he worked as an adjuster, at the time of the 1910 US Census.<sup>9</sup> Miche lived on Highland Avenue, and later Sterling Road, with his wife Rose, in this period.

At the time of the 1920 census, which depicts the Area shortly after its completion, the neighborhood consisted of a mix of white-collar professionals as well as upper-level employees of the watch factory. The unit at 218 Adams Street was occupied by Albert Olney, credit manager at the electric company, who lived there with his wife. The other unit was rented to James Considine, an Irish-born salesman at a laundry. No listing for 4 Chester Avenue was found in that document. One unit at 12 Chester Avenue was home to Anna Smythe, a widow who worked as an adjuster at the watch factory. She lived with her sister, brother-in-law, and nephew. One unit at 18 Chester Avenue was rented to Joseph Wambolt, a machinist at the watch factory. He lived with his wife and young son. The other unit was home to Raymond Scriber, an optometrist, who lived with this wife and daughter. Curiously, John Harwood, who owned 4 Chester Avenue and 218 Adams Street in this period is listed as living at 16 Chester Avenue. While the census notes he was the other occupant of that property, deeds indicated it was still owned by Miche in that period. Harwood was an assistant foreman at the watch factory. He lived here with his wife. The unit at 12 Chester Avenue was home to three small households. All of the heads of the household there were employees of the watch factory, including another assistant foreman, a watchmaker, and a bookkeeper.<sup>10</sup>

Harwood and Miche owned their properties in the neighborhood for at least a decade after their construction. The Adams Street two-family and 4 Chester Avenue were sold by Harwood in 1922 to Edith Potter (nee Hodgkins).<sup>11</sup> The wife of Frank Potter, a bicycle salesman who lived on Crescent Street, would own those properties for 30 years. The Miche property was subdivided into two parcels. 12 Chester Avenue was sold to Mary Hudson in the 1930s. Miche would retain ownership of 16-18 Chester Avenue until 1944 when it was sold to Robert and Dorthy Lang.<sup>12</sup>

Except for the replacement of surface materials on three of the four buildings, the Area retains a good deal of integrity.

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Waltham MA. City of Waltham Building Department. Building Permit Records

Waltham Poll/Voting/Street Lists.

### Maps

<sup>5</sup> MSRD 3678:44, 1912

<sup>6</sup> MSRD 3678:45, 1912

<sup>7</sup> MSRD 3726:494, 1912

<sup>8</sup> MSRD 3726:495-97, 1912

<sup>9</sup> 1910 Census

<sup>10</sup> 1920 US Census

<sup>11</sup> MSRD 4519:578, 1922

<sup>12</sup> MSRD 6783:462, 1944

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*Map Sources: WHC: Waltham Historical Commission; DC: Digital Commonwealth; LOC: Library of Congress; NYPL: New York Public Library*

1831 Hales Map of Waltham (WHC)  
1831 Hales Map of Newton- Waltham Section (WHC)  
1854 E.M. Woodford Village of Waltham Map (DC)  
1856 Walling Map of Middlesex County (LOC)  
1867 Map of Middlesex County (NYPL)  
1875 Map of Town of Waltham (DC)  
1877 Birds' Eye View, O.H. Bailey (LOC)  
1883 Bird's Eye View (DC)  
1886 J.B. Beers Map of the City of Waltham (LOC)  
1886 Map of Middlesex County (WHC)  
1892 Sanborn Map (LOC)  
1897 Sanborn Map (LOC)  
1898 Bird's Eye View, O.H. Bailey (LOC)  
1900 Atlas of Middlesex County (WHC)  
1903 Sanborn Map (LOC)  
1911 Sanborn Map (LOC)  
1918 Sanborn Map (LOC)  
1918 City Engineers Atlas (WHC)  
1923 City Engineers Atlas (WHC)  
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1956 City Engineers Atlas (WHC)

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## DATA SHEET

See Research Protocol	Name, Address, Date Assessor's Number MHC # Name, Address, Date Assessor's Number MHC # Style type/form features Materials (roofs assume asphalt unless noted) Notes on alterations Map and deed date and owner/builder
	<p><b>Alfred A. Miche Tenement, 12 - 16 Chester Avenue, c.1912 R076 005 0009</b>  <b>WLT.1196</b>                      Large hip roof block with cutaway bays</p> <p>Vinyl siding, trim obscured</p> <p>Built c.1912 by Miche on lots 7-10 of 1890 plan</p>
	<p><b>John and Isabel Harwood Two Family, 218 - 220 Adams Street, c.1912 R076 005 0011 001</b>  <b>WLT.1194</b>                      Classical Revival / two-family Rectangular block with low hip roof; bays under wide overhanging eaves. Gothic arch front porch                      Wall Material: Vinyl                      Vinyl siding and sash</p> <p>Built in rear yard of 4-8 Chester Ave. c. 1911-1918 by Harwood</p>
	<p><b>Alfred A. Miche Tenement, 18 - 20 Chester Avenue, c.1912 R076 005 0008</b>  <b>WLT.1197</b>                      Large hip roof block with cutaway bays</p> <p>Retains most surface materials</p> <p>Built c.1912 by Miche on lots 11-14 of 1890 plan</p>



John and Isabel Harwood Tenement, 4 - 8 Chester Avenue, c.1912

WLT.1195

Classical Revival / center entry    Large hip roof block with cutaway bays

Wall Material: Vinyl

Vinyl siding, most trim lost

Built c.1912 by Harwood on lots 1-6 of 1890 plan

R076 005 0010

PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 2. Chester Avenue looking east from Adams Street showing (L-R), 4-8, 12-16, 18-20 Chester Avenue. Photo by Zachary Violette March 2021.



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Figure 3. Adams Street looking east toward Chester Avenue showing garages at rear of 218 Adams Street (left) and 4-8 Chester Avenue (center)

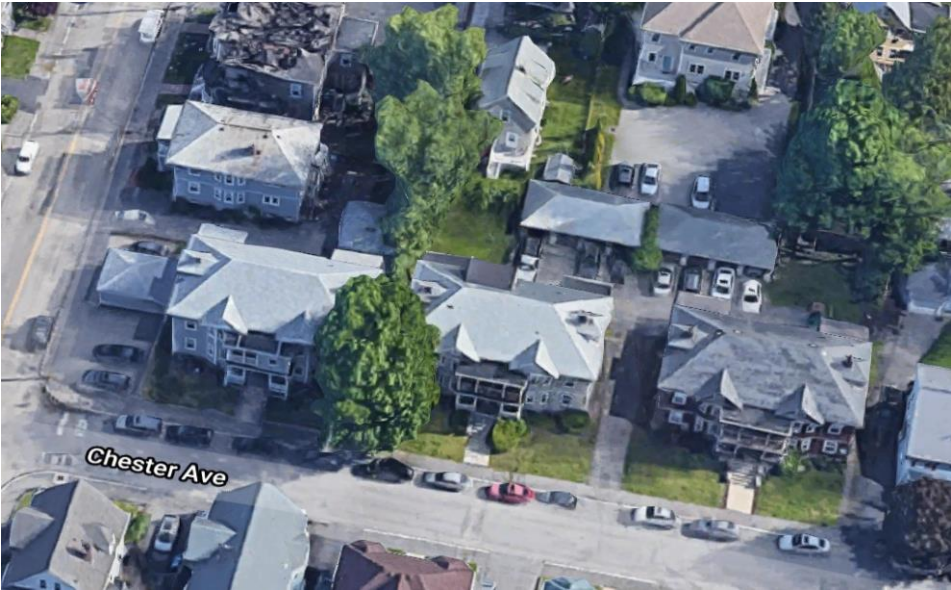


Figure 4. Google Maps Pictometry view of area (Google Maps)



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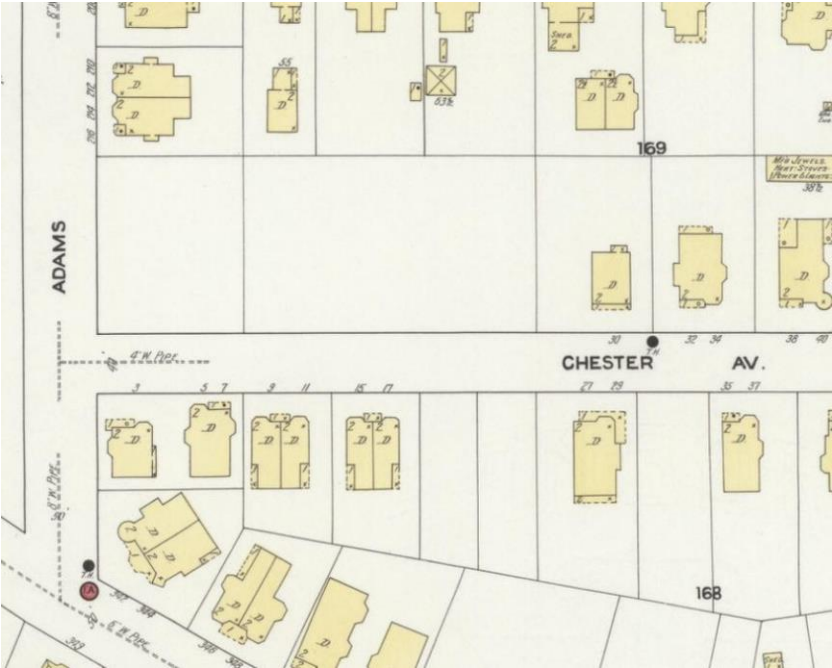


Figure 5. 1911 Sanborn Map before the construction of the subject buildings

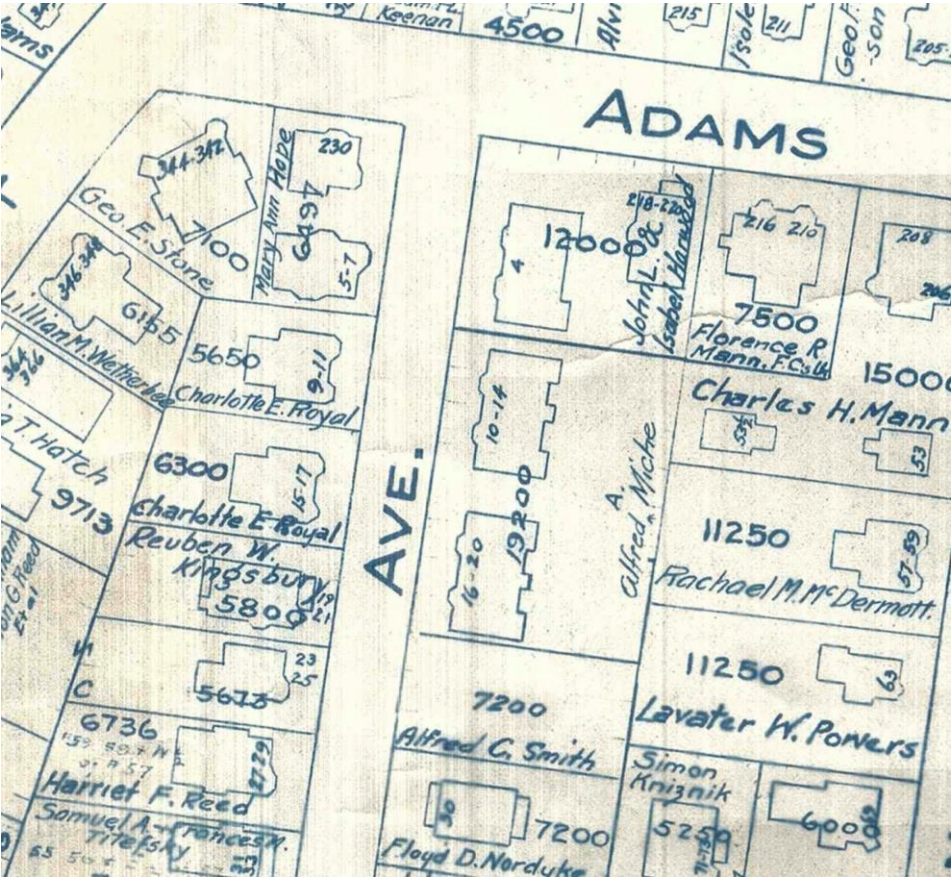


Figure 6. 1918 City Engineer's Atlas showing subject buildings completed and their original owners identified