

# Medford Neighborhood Overviews

## FULTON HEIGHTS

The Fulton Heights neighborhood is located in the northeast corner of the city of Medford. It is bounded on the south and west by The Fellsway West (Rt. 28), on the east by the Malden town line, and on the north by the Middlesex Fells reservation. The southern half of the neighborhood is located on the side of a steep hillside that has its base at the Fellsway West; the northern half occupies an upland plateau. All of this section was originally part of the Charleston Woodlots north of Gov. Matthew Craddock's 17<sup>th</sup>-century plantation, which was the origin of European settlement in Medford. Fulton Heights remained essentially undeveloped (and wooded) into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

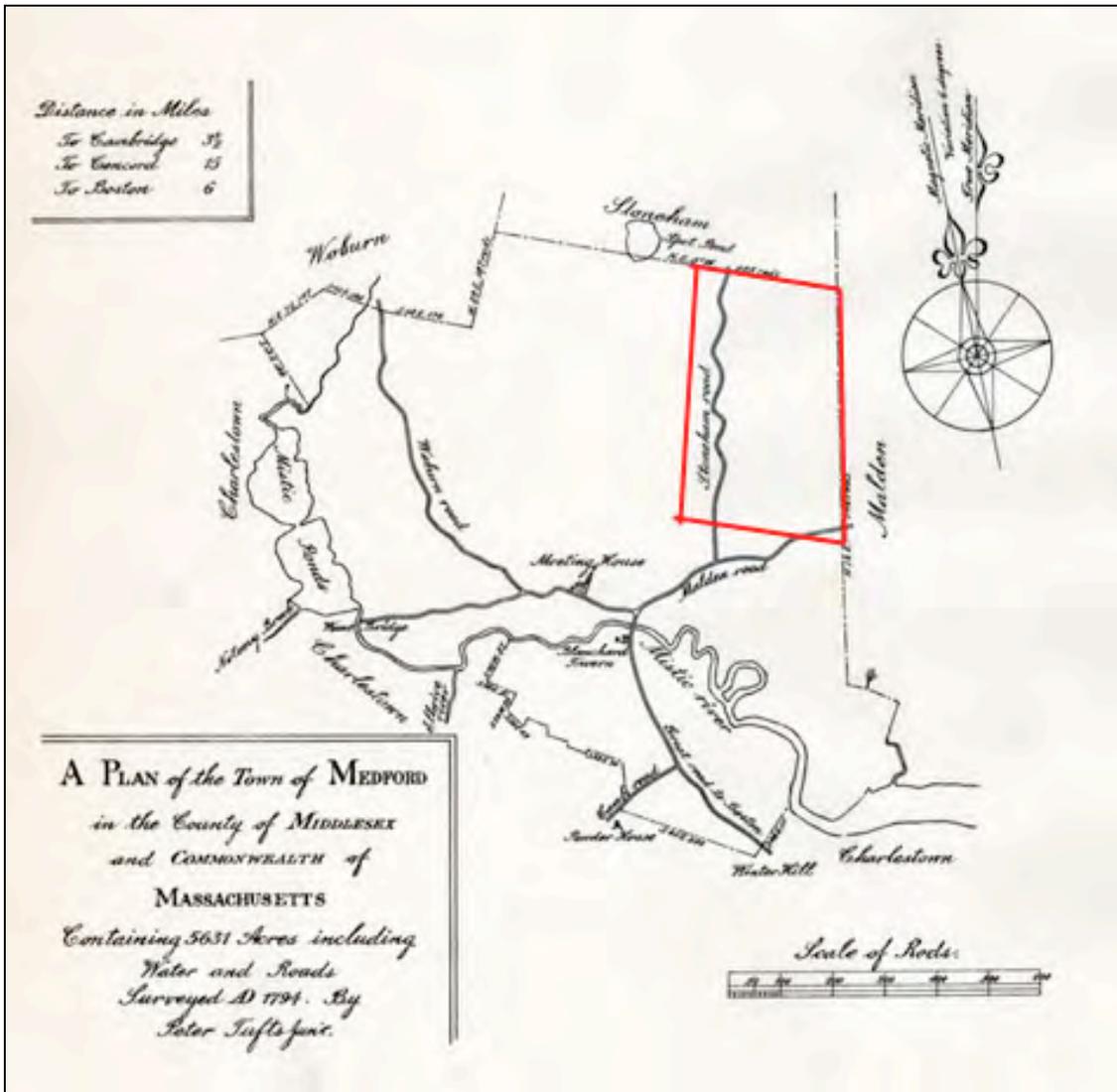


Fig.1: Map of Mendon, 1794. Fulton Heights is outlined in upper right with Fulton Street depicted within.

Fulton Heights is named for its topography and its main artery, Fulton Street, which originates on Salem Street and terminates at Highland Avenue and continues as Woodland Avenue into Stoneham. This road is one of the oldest in Medford (Fig.1). In the automobile age, its importance as a thoroughfare was first eclipsed by the Fellsway West, later by Rt. 28 and, ultimately, by I-93. Highland Avenue, which linked Fulton Street to Malden, and Elm Street, linking Fulton and Forest streets, were in place by 1875, providing passage around the north end of what were still woodlots at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

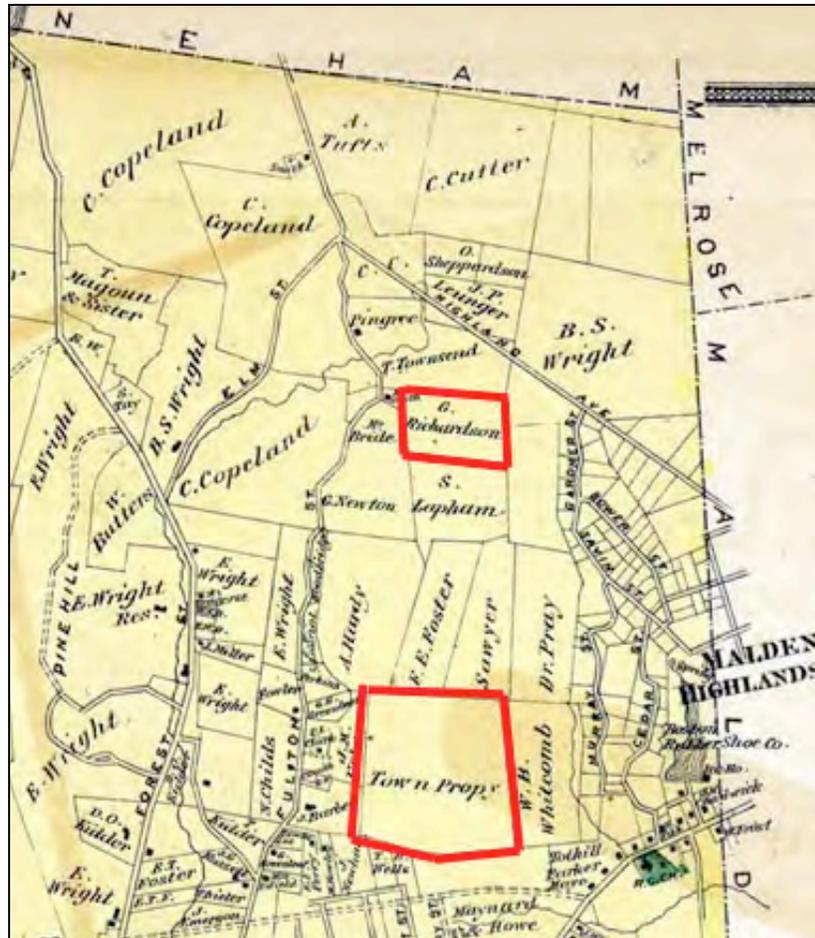


Fig.2: Detail of 1875 map of Medford showing Fulton Heights neighborhood. The parcel named “Town Propy” near bottom became Osgood Park (see Fig.3) And the one named “G. Richardson in center was platted as Highland Park

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

By 1855 land traditionally used to provide firewood for Medford households began to be transferred to real estate speculators. A number of large parcels in the northwest corner of the Heights were owned by either Charles Copeland or his son, Charles S. Copeland, confectioners living in Stoneham. Other landowners were C. Cutter, A. Tufts, whose identities are unknown and may have lived in other towns, Elbridge Holmes, a Medford dealer in provisions, and Eleazer Davis, for whom no occupation

is listed. Merchant Samuel Lapham controlled a fair amount of land in the Heights, as did ship joiner George Richardson, lumber dealer Francis E. Foster, fancy goods merchant William B. Whitcomb, and the estate of Unitarian minister, David Osgood . The first homesteads were spread along Fulton Street, with a concentration developing at the base of the hill in East Medford. Nathan Childs name is associated with a lot at the south end of the street; he was recorded as a farmer in the 1850 census. Amos Newton had a farm at the top of the hill that he probably worked with George H. Newton, a relative. Only a few other settlers are depicted on the 1855 map.

Little change occurred in the 20 years between the 1855 and 1875 maps (Fig.2). Highland Avenue and Elm Street had been platted and a few more homesteads had appeared along Fulton Street. The street plan for the Malden Highlands development spilled over the east town boundary (this development was never realized and most of the land it covers was later ceded to Malden). The only other notable change was that the David Osgood’s daughters had conveyed his wood lot to the town for the benefit of the public library.

### Fulton Heights Neighborhood in 1898

Two residential subdivisions were platted in the 1890s. The larger and more noteworthy of the two was named Osgood Park, as the 50-or-so-acre plot had been long owned by the Osgood family, which later deeded it to the town. By 1898 the parcel was indicated as owned by the heirs of S.K. Abbott and had been laid out with serpentine hillside roads and numerous, large lots (Fig.3) The map has footprints for three houses that represent the early architectural phase of the development. One of them appears to survive: a small Queen Anne-style cottage with corner tower oriented to the view (Fig.4). The Craftsman bungalow is the predominant house type in the development indicating that construction did not begin in earnest until after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Figs.4&5).



Fig.3: Detail of Osgood Park development, 1898.



Fig.4: Fells Ave., north side at Watervale Rd. Queen Anne-style cottage (ca.1895) on right; Craftsman bungalow (ca.1910) on left replaced a house depicted on lot in 1898.



Fig.5: Fells Ave. south of Murray Hill Rd. View of Craftsman bungalows common to development; vista of Boston skyline in background.

The second subdivision detailed on the 1898 is named Highland Park (Fig.6). The map registers the owner as Anthony B. Palmer, a carriage maker born in England and living on Clifton Street in Medford Square. The lot had belonged to ship joiner George Richardson in 1875. James Howe, another England-born carriage maker who lived in East Medford, owned a lot between Highland Park and Fulton Street. The parcel contains a rocky hillock that failed to be developed and today constitutes a park. (The relationship between the two carriage makers is unknown. The map shows other turn-of-the-century real estate speculators picking up lots in the area, such as Samuel C. Lawrence, who had assembled numerous farm lots on the hillside above Medford Square and created new residential subdivisions. Frank E. Chandler was acting similarly in West Medford, and is particularly known for the subdivision of the Wyman Farm at Winthrop Square. The merchant Samuel Lapham was another figure associated with large tracts of land in the city.

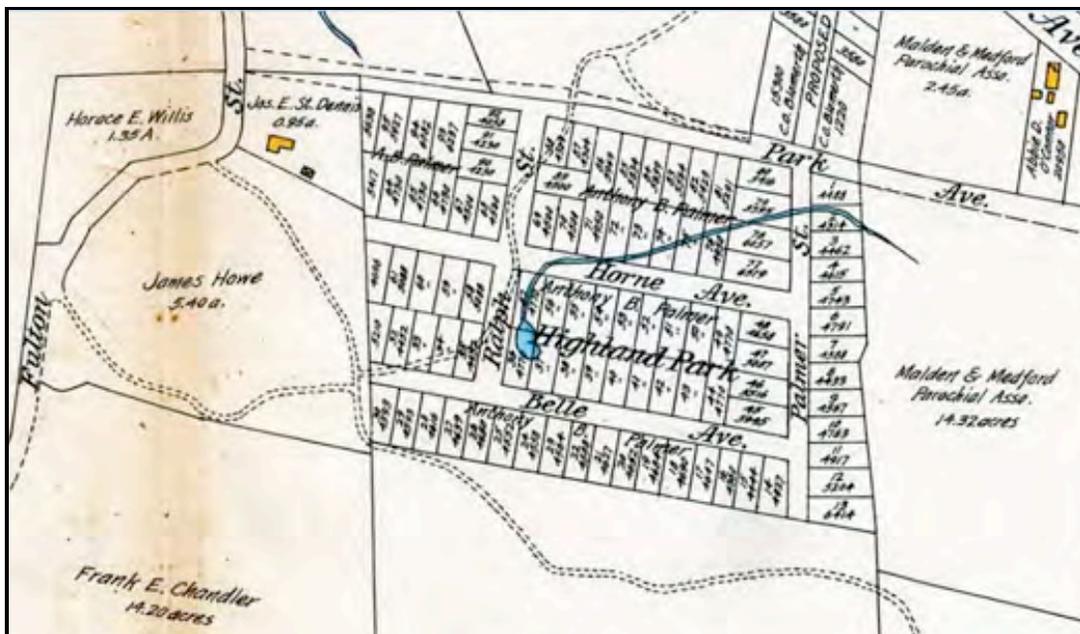


Fig.6: Detail of 1898 map of Medford.

Highland Park was even slower than Osgood Park to develop. There are no turn-of-the century houses and only a few Craftsman cottages (Fig.7). The development is now characterized by Post WWII Cape Cods and Garrisons. A third subdivision was laid out along two streets (Arlington and Rand streets) perpendicular and south of Winslow Avenue. The groups of small lots on these streets were distributed among a number of owners, such as Irish stone amson Thomas Boland, Irish contractor Patrick H. Byron, gardener Charles F. Cunningham, Sarah Brackett, perhaps the wife of Stoneham shoe manufacturer William Brqackett, and the City of Medford. The streets remain paper streets with the actual site composed of an escarpment.



Fig.7: Belle Ave., south side west of Cleveland St. Craftsman Cottage on right built ca. 1910, Cape Cod on left built ca. 1950.

The lone dwelling depicted on Fulton Street at the top of the map was occupied by Medford letter carrier Joseph E. St. Dennis and his family. Other Fulton Street households enumerated in the 1900 census were supported by a dressmaker, store sales clerk, janitor (public library), milkman, rubber boot maker (the Boston Rubber Shoe Company is shown just outside the city in Malden Heights), scenic painter, laborer working on city's gypsy moth project, nurse, and store cashier. At least 12 households were counted. Eight families were living on Highland Avenue with household members working as a poultry dealer, motorman, city laborer, print works labrers, worker at Boston Steel and Iron Works, cigar maker, and expressman.

Charles O. Blomerth owned a large parcel on the north side of Highland Avenue that overlapped into Malden. He came from Sweden in 1857 and was naturalized in 1864; his first appearance in the census was in 1880 when he was living in Everett and working as a paper carrier. He married Anna M. Fernald in 1873. They were living in Medford with their eight children in 1900; Charles O. Blomerth, then 64 years of age, was recorded as having no occupation. The 1898 map depicts two

brick buildings on the Blomerths' property representing the two very eccentric two-story houses still extant (Fig.8).



Fig.8: Blomerth House, Maurice St., ca. 1890.

### Fulton Heights Neighborhood in 1930

Fulton Heights built up rapidly during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in response to the tremendous growth in population experienced in the city. By 1930 more than half of the neighborhood's nearly 2000 lots contained houses. The topography and isolation of Fulton Heights did not lend itself to large-scale development of multi-family dwellings as was happening in East Medford and Wellington, and the diminished value of the real estate gave people of lesser means the opportunity to own—even build—their own homes. Local histories contain accounts of hardscrabble urban personalities carving out their homesteads in the rugged terrain. They also have popularized the story of George A. McCormack, who is credited with making it possible for working-class families to own a home in the suburbs. McCormack apparently took over the Highland Park subdivision. The existence of McCormack Avenue south of Winslow Avenue suggests he had something to do with another 220 lot subdivision plan there, which was filed with the Land Court in 1917. Nearly every large tract delineated on the 1900 Medford map was platted by 1930. In 1915 Samuel C. Lawrence's 55.75-acre parcel between Fulton and Elm streets was laid out with streets named for past Massachusetts governors, such as Russell, Ames, Gaston and Foss. It was originally known as Lawrence Park. The completion of the Fellsway surely had a role in its development. George McCormack is said to have been involved in this development as well (Fig.9). A subdivision plan creating 89 lots on Bailey, Scott & Taft streets was filed in 1911 by transit worker Jim Bartlett, who built houses for himself and his family as well as a number for speculation.



Fig.9: Parkway Rd., west of Aquavia Rd.



Fig.10: Sarah Bradley Fulton Elementary School, Fulton St., ca. 1915.

As in other parts of the city, the rapid growth necessitated an expansion in services. Sarah Bradley Fulton, a local Revolutionary War figure, was the name for a new school on the street that also bears her name (Fig.10). A second school, built later, was named for the botanist George Edward Davenport, who was one of the people behind the conservation of the neighboring Middlesex Fells. Another of Medford's distinctive brick firehouses was erected at the intersection of Fulton Street and Winslow Avenue where a small center had developed with a couple of stores (Fig.11). It was in the same area that the Fulton Heights Community Baptist congregation built a new church in 1927 (Fig.12).

#### Fulton Heights Neighborhood after 1930

Because of the number of available building lots there in 1945, the Fulton Heights neighborhood contains the largest amount of post-World War II development in Medford. And because nearly all of

the neighborhood had been previously subdivided and platted, no planned residential community emerged in that period. However, most pre-existing subdivisions now contain the characteristic Cape Cods and Garrisons of that architectural era, many of them grouped in rows where vacant lots could be assembled in sequence (Figs. 13&14). The Garrison house type, with its definitive overhanging second story and three-bay front façade has been found to be popular in other city neighborhoods, particularly in the Brooks Estate. The Cape Cods pictured below are distinctive in that they were designed with two-story rear facades to provide more second-story space than the conventional one-story type with dormers. The brick-veneered front façade shown in the Palmer Avenue view reflects the common use of brick exteriors on houses in Samuel C. Lawrence's earlier development in Lawrence Park in Medford Square. Still, brick—a more expensive material—is not as prominent a feature in Fulton Heights.



Fig. 11 (above): Fulton Heights Fire Station, Fulton St. & Winslow Ave., ca. 1930.



Fig. 12 (right): Fulton Heights Community Baptist Church, Fulton St., 1927.

The Fulton Heights neighborhood came closer to building out by 1965 when the current city zoning map was first printed. At that time the entire neighborhood was in a single-family residential zone. When the map was last revised in 1993 a large area in the center of the neighborhood between McCormack Avenue and the Malden town line was still undeveloped. Why this remained open for so long is unknown, but within the last decade, the entire tract has been platted and filled with houses along Tamar Road and other intersectors. A smaller parcel on the hillside below Fulton Spring Road (very near the site of the spring) is also shown to have been developed since 1993. The only other open space depicted on the map represents James P. Carr Park located east of Fulton Street and north of Winslow Avenue.

The construction of I-93 along the western side of the neighborhood did not obliterate historic buildings as happened in neighborhoods farther south. The highway intensified the barrier between Fulton Heights and Medford Square that the Fellsway already had created. As in other places where the dominant exterior material is wood, many houses have been altered with the application of new synthetic sidings, and original wood windows are being systematically replaced with new insulated units following the popular trends of energy conservation and home improvement.



Fig.12: Haines St., north side west of Gaston St.



Fig.13: Palmer Ave., west side north of Belle Ave.



Fig.14: Aerial view of Fulton Heights, neighborhood outlined in yellow, major development plots outlined in red.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SURVEY: Fulton Heights Neighborhood

- Survey all surviving buildings depicted on 1900 map on B Forms (approx. 20 properties)

*This date represents the end of the “settlement” period of the neighborhood, which was the last in the city to develop.*

- Survey Osgood Park subdivision on an area form (approx. 250 properties)

*This is a distinctive planned subdivision.*