

FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

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

Q-10-9	Boston North		
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Town/City: Medford

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): Brickyards / Mystic Park

Photograph



Address: 142-148 Mystic Avenue

Historic Name: Medford Auto Parts

Uses: Present: one-part commercial

Original: one-part commercial

Date of Construction: 1949

Source: maps

Style/Form: NA/ rectangular block

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation: not visible

Wall/Trim: brick and concrete block

Roof: not visible behind a parapet

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: none visible

Major Alterations (*with dates*): Rear additions, 1961; window opening enclosure, recent decades.

Condition: Fair

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 2.02 acres

Setting: Dense mix of 20th century automobile-centric commercial uses.

Locus Map (*north is up*)



Recorded by: John D. Clemson

Organization: Medford Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): April 2023

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MEDFORD

142-148 MYSTIC AVENUE

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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.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Medford Auto Parts, built in 1949 and partially expanded in 1961, is a generally utilitarian one-part commercial block constructed of concrete block with a decorative brick façade. The one-part block is characterized by single use in a single story that can house more than one shop: "the one-part commercial block is a simple box with a decorated façade and thoroughly urban in its overtones. The type appears to have been developed during the mid-19th century and soon became a common feature in towns and cities."¹ One-part commercial blocks are also referred to as "taxpayer blocks" because they were often quickly and inexpensively constructed by real estate developers to cover land-holding expenses while they waited for economic conditions to allow them to develop parcels for a higher use. Many taxpayer blocks became permanent fixtures in the landscape, however, when development plans failed to come to fruition.

Medford Auto Parts has a flat roof behind a parapet and is single story but with a high stud height consistent with its quasi-industrial automotive use. The building's current dimensions, the result of at least two rear additions, are 68 feet wide by 122 feet deep. Its common-bond brick façade is elaborated with an entrance pavilion filling the right (south) quadrant of the façade. This pavilion consists in a high entrance opening and flanking windows supported by a band course of soldier brick. Between the opening and windows are brick mullions. Although the entrance has been filled with concrete block the flanking windows retain what may be original glass block lights. What appears to be a lower window wall to the left has also been blocked with vertical matchboard. The south-facing elevation, opening onto a large open paved area used to store automobiles, is enlivened by three garage openings in the first, fifth and sixth of a total of seven bays and domestic doors flanked by windows in the fourth and seventh. The north elevation has a variety of low and high hopper windows, several of which have been blocked.

The blocks lining Mystic Avenue between the intersection with Main Street to the north and the Somerville line to the south is lined with large-scale commercial properties, most of an auto-centric nature, including automobile dealerships and repair facilities. Although several of the large, "big-box" buildings lining this corridor are sited at deep setbacks, many, including the subject, are paradoxically placed near the frontage in the manner of earlier pedestrian oriented commercial zones. This may be a holdover from the early 20th century, when many of the properties on the east side of Mystic Avenue were planned. Many earlier buildings on smaller lots survive on the west side, developed long before while the east side remained a wetland, but are rapidly disappearing.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The ownership history of this parcel, which remained in the condition of a wetland until the early 20th century, being described as "salt marshland" in deeds through 1919, has been traced to the 1850s. An 1853 deed identified the former owner as Phineas Capen (1792-1851). Between 1853 and 1874 the property was held by Capen's widow Cylene S Capen or her creditors, who included Boston merchant John Parsons and Samuel S Spear of Worcester. Between 1874 and 1919 the land was held by Daniel W Lawrence, who acquired it from short-term owners Silas F and Lucy D Wild. Daniel Warren Lawrence (1830-1921) was a son of Medford rum distillery owner Daniel Lawrence (1797-1879) and Elizabeth (Crocker) and the elder brother of prominent Medford citizen and first mayor of the city, Samuel Crocker Lawrence (1832-1911). Both of the younger Lawrences were Civil War veterans and became heavily involved in the distillery, which remained active until 1905. Both owned extensive real estate in the city and were active philanthropists, particularly with the hospital that bears their name (see MDF.AO, Medford Square East, and MDF.AM, Lawrence Memorial Hospital). During his period of ownership Daniel W Lawrence conveyed the section of the property lining the river bank to the city, which later came under the control of the MDC, which established the Mystic River Reservation, currently the location of the Mystic Valley Parkway, or Route 16, and US Interstate 93.²

¹ Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street, A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Alta Mira Press, updated edition, 2000) p. 57

² MCSRD 653:269 (1853); 677:444 (1854); 825:8 (1859); 963:488 (1866); 1288:402 (1873); 1295:329 (1874); 1310:1 (1874).

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Between 1919 and 1934 the property was owned by David W Davis, Jr (born 1876), a native of Cambridge who worked as a barrel dealer, cattle dealer and later farmed in Reading after ca 1920. There is no evidence he made any improvements to the subject property, evidently holding it in the manner of an investment. In 1934 he sold it to Elizabeth and Esther Tankel of Medford, the wives of Simon and Joseph M Tankel, respectively. They immediately mortgaged the property back to Davis for \$6,500 due in 7 years at 4%, suggesting it was unimproved at the time. Massachusetts native Simon Tankel (1902-1941) was a son of Waltham junk dealer Max Tankel (born 1870), a native of Prussia who immigrated in 1891 with his wife Rose, a native of Zagare, Lithuania (married 1890 in Lithuania). Both were described as members of the "Hebrew" race and native speakers of Yiddish in various documents. With his brother-in-law Joseph Martin Tankel (1903-1979), a native of Liachowitz, Russian Poland, Simon Tankel established Medford Auto Parts, Inc, at the subject property shortly after purchasing it (Joseph Tankel was married to Esther Tankel, a sister of Simon Tankel; presumably somehow related, a precise genealogy has not been undertaken).³

The 1936 and 1950 Sanborn maps depict uses at this site while under the ownership of the Tankels. In 1936 the mostly open parcel was labeled "auto junk yard" with a large shed ("auto parts") and "office," neither extant. By 1950 the forward section of the present commercial building, constructed of concrete with a brick face and a roof with a wood apron and steel joists had been completed. Again the open yard was labeled "auto junk yard." The maps have been reproduced below. Records of the Medford Building Inspector demonstrate that the main storefront on Mystic Avenue was built in 1949. The building was described as a 64' wide by 46' deep "sales and stockroom" building estimated to cost \$12,000. In 1961 Medford Auto Parts was granted a permit to build a 61.7' x 32.8' "...addition to existing building for office & storage of auto parts" to cost \$8,000. The existing building with approximate dimensions of 68' wide by 122' deep evidently underwent a second addition that was not documented in city records or the records have been lost. A fire damaged building was demolished in 1966, evidently the wood-frame office depicted in 1936 and 1950.

The builder identified in the 1949 original build was J Maggiore & Sons. Giuseppe (Joseph) Maggiore (1875-1961) and his son Anthony (1909-1998) were both natives of Mineo, province of Catania, Italy, immigrating in 1921. In 1930 both were living at 87 Medford Street (MDF.1812) with the occupation mason, contracting, but no other attributions are listed in Macris. The 1961 addition was built by Scaldini, Inc.

In November of 1942 Medford Auto Parts was awarded a War Production Board Award of Merit "for their efficient work in processing thousands of old jalopies, separating the various metals needed in war industries and shipping them to steel mills and other reclamation plants."⁴ Since 1981 the property has been owned by members of the Cosentino and Matrondola families. Signage identifies the building as David's Auto Collision Center. This means that like many of the properties lining Mystic Avenue, the subject has remained in auto-centric use since its initial development during the early 20th century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Maps and atlases:

- 1855 H.F. Walling. "Map of Medford...."
- 1875 F. W. Beers, *County Atlas of Middlesex, Massachusetts*.
- 1880 O. H. Bailey [Bird's Eye View of] Medford.
- 1889 Geo. H. Walker & Co., *Atlas of Middlesex County, Massachusetts*.
- 1898 Geo. W. Stadly & Co., *Atlas of the City of Medford....*
- 1900 Geo. W. Stadly & Co., *Atlas of Middlesex County, Massachusetts, Volume 1*.
- 1892, 1897, 1903, 1910, 1936, 1936-1950 Sanborn Insurance Atlases.

Ancestry.com: see footnotes

Charles Brooks and James M. Usher, *History of the Town of Medford, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, From its First Settlement in 1630 to 1855; Revised, Enlarged and Brought Down to 1885* (Rand, Avery & Co., 1886)

Middlesex County South Registry of Deeds, in notes as MCSRD book:page (date).

³ MCSRD 4243:519 (1919); 5893:345 (1934); Ancestry.com: vital records, birth, marriage; 1900-1950 Federal Census, inclusive; WWI Draft Registration Card (Davis); US Immigration Index, Declaration of Intention (Max and Joseph Tankel); WWII Draft Registration Card (Joseph Tankel).

⁴ *Boston Daily Globe*, Nov. 18, 1942, p. 9, "4 Auto Salvagers of Area Win WPB Merit Award."

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FIGURES



1855 Walling map of Medford depicting the subject property in the ownership of George Adams indicated by a red arrow. According to the chain of title the property was owned by Phineas Capen prior to 1853. Note that much of the land on the east side of Mystic Avenue, here labeled "Middlesex Turnpike," remains an open wetland. North is up.

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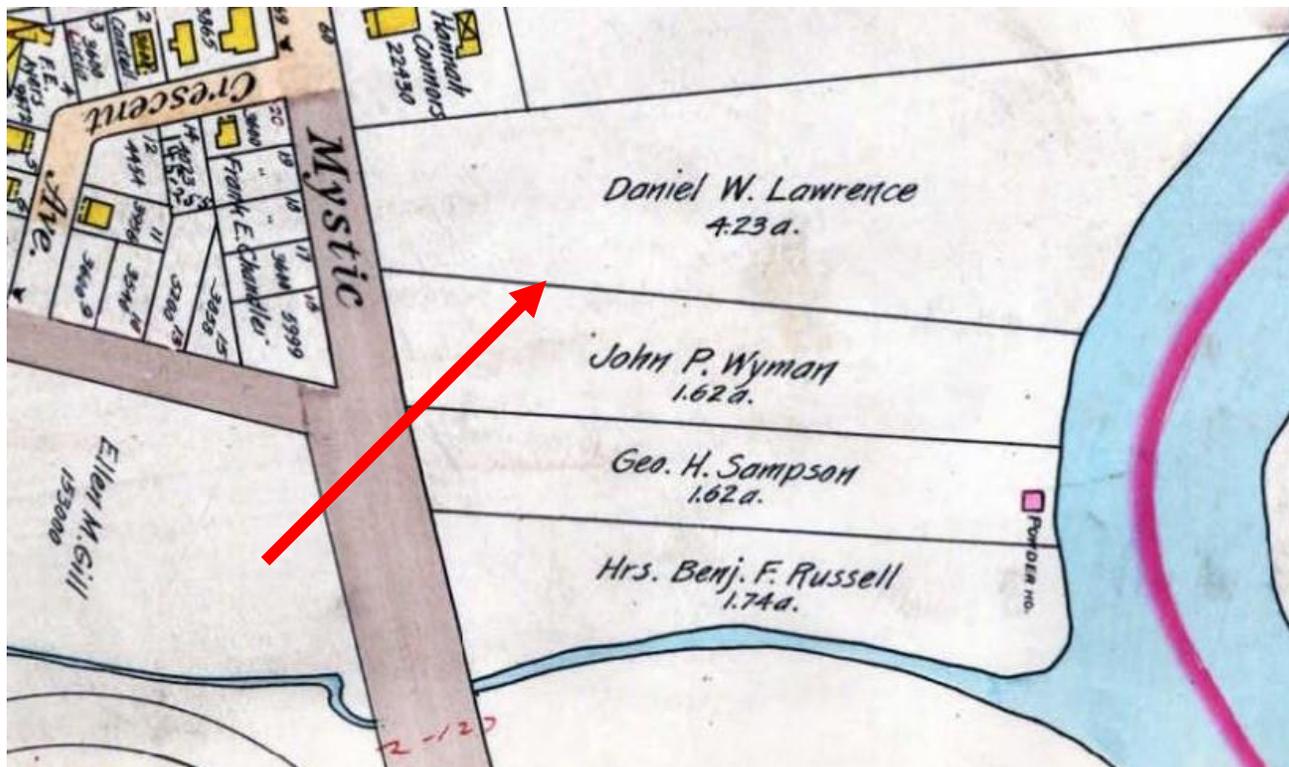
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1875 Beers county atlas depicting the property, indicated by a red arrow, in the ownership of Silas F Wild, who only owned it for a single year.



1898 Stadly city atlas depicting the holdings of Daniel W Lawrence indicated by a red arrow.

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1900 Stadly county atlas depicting the property, indicated by a red arrow, after the riverbank was acquired by the MDC.

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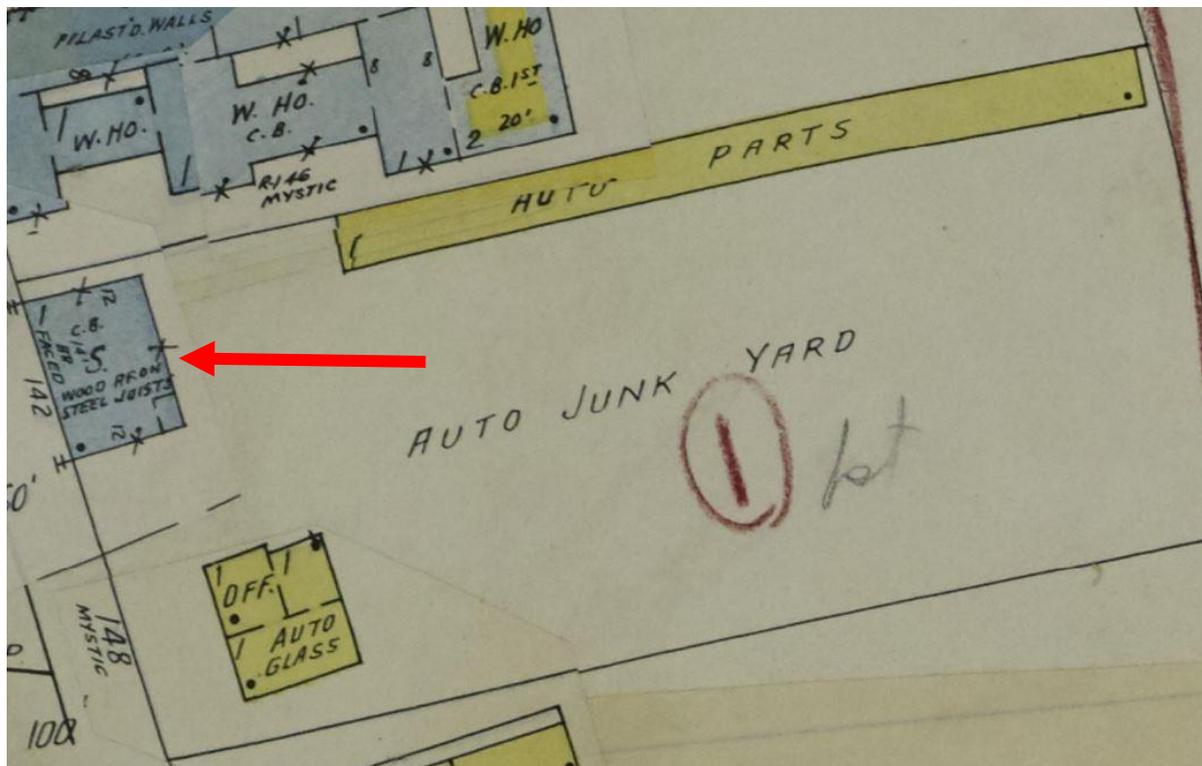
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1936 Sanborn map depicting the property labeled "auto junk yard" with two wood-frame buildings since demolished.



1950 Sanborn map depicting the property with part of the subject building. The large garage on the right was demolished in 1979 (records of the city Building Inspector).

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South-facing side elevation from S.



Right (south) bay of the west-facing façade showing the original entrance pavilion from W.