

FORM B – BUILDING

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

Photograph



Locus Map (*north is up; this map shows the entire cemetery, a detail of the site is on continuation sheet 3*)



Recorded by: John D. Clemson

Organization: Medford Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): April 2020

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

G 04

Boston
North

MDF.
MDF.

Town/City: Medford

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

Address: 0 Winthrop Street

Historic Name: Oak Grove Cemetery Service Building and Caretaker's Quarters

Uses: Present: storage garage and office

Original: storage garage and office

Date of Construction: ca. 1941

Source: assessor

Style/Form: Tudor/ gable block with wings

Architect/Builder: Ralph E. Watrous

Exterior Material:

Foundation: granite random ashlar

Wall/Trim: granite random ashlar/ cast stone

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: Caretaker's quarters

Major Alterations (*with dates*): Likely re-roof, door replacement, recent decades.

Condition: Good

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 81.91 acres

Setting: Part of a large rural cemetery surrounded by a densely settled early 20th century residential neighborhood.

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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:

The Oak Grove Cemetery Service Building is sited just inside the northernmost of three main gates to the cemetery located near the northern terminus of Playstead Road on its west side (a fourth gate is located further north on Winthrop Street and the cemetery's main entrance, in the form of a monumental stair limited to pedestrian circulation, is located between; the cemetery's address is 0 Winthrop Street according to assessor's records). Circumstantial evidence discussed below in the narrative suggests a construction date of 1941, which is consistent with the physical appearance and style of the building. This attractive and large building has high-quality masonry finishes and displays nominal characteristics of the Tudor Revival style popular at the time of its construction and appropriate for its funerary setting.

The service building is a large, rectangular gabled structure housing four large garage bays in its south-facing main façade. Flanking gabled wings, set back from the plane of the main façade and in line with the rear elevation, serve as office or storage space. The left wing is fully enclosed with the exception of a basement-level entrance in the front-facing elevation reached by a concrete parallel stairwell set into a bulkhead. Instead of a domestic door there is a narrow garage opening with an overhead articulated door. The right wing is accessed by two domestic doors arranged in a regular pattern on the front-facing elevation and a third opening in the forward bay, of two, in the right side elevation. The front-facing doors have half sidelights. Directly behind the service building is a south-facing open shed constructed of matching materials and width dimension. Between the two buildings is a narrow court defined by pillared gates at either end that are extensions of the main side walls of each. Large pintles are mounted on the insides of the pillars, indicating there were once heavy gates that have disappeared. However the right-side pillar at the west entrance to the court is badly damaged and partially collapsed. A small manufactured, wood garden shed of recent vintage has been placed near the east-facing side elevation of the Service Building. The locus map detail on continuation sheet 3 and photographs depict the configuration of each building in relation to each other and the court.

The service building retains considerable original building fabric. The entire structure is constructed of granite blocks laid up in a random ashlar pattern. The end walls terminate at the top in gabled parapets with gabled coping stones. At either end of the ridge is a vertical massing element: on the left it terminates in a chimney and on the right in an open belfry with a bell mounted in a full-arched opening capped by a copper finial with a weathervane. The window and door openings are framed in granite casings with protruding ears at the sills and lintels and quoining between. The windows are placed at a deep reveal with canted edges. The building is abundantly lit by casement windows arranged in a regular and symmetrical pattern on the wing faces and side elevations. Most are paired casements but the broader openings in the face of the left wing hold quadruple casements with operating center bays and stationary flankers. All of these windows are rolled steel casements, each with two columns and four rows of lights. The quadruple casements in the face of the left wing are held in place by riveted steel mullions. Rolled steel windows became popular in commercial and institutional applications beginning in the 1890s when the technology was developed to inexpensively create thin, light and fireproof steel components by shaping stock steel rods with a series of rollers. During the first half of the 20th century use of this material expanded into domestic settings. It lent itself to the prevailing Art Deco, Art Moderne and International styles, but it can also be observed in traditional styles, particularly Tudor, as is the case here, which often called for broad, horizontal banks of windows which lent themselves to steel construction. These windows remain in good condition and are a character-defining feature of the building.¹ Losses to the building are limited to the domestic doors in the right wing, which have been replaced, and the gutter and leader system, which are currently aluminum replacements of likely original copper painted white (originally verdigris). The garage doors have also recently been replaced by aluminum or fiberglass articulated units.

This section of the cemetery includes a roughly contemporary second building sited closer to and facing Playstead Road, numbered 236. This is an entirely domestic building in appearance that matches multiple neighboring examples that line the east side of Playstead Road. Circumstantial evidence of a heating system replacement in 1933 suggests it was built prior to this date, which is consistent with its style and form. It is an example of Dutch Colonial design, with a center entrance in a three-

¹ Sharon C. Park, AIA, "The Repair and Thermal Upgrading of Historic Steel Windows," *The Preservation of Historic Architecture, The U.S. Governments Official Guidelines for Preserving Historic Homes* (U.S. Department of the Interior, Lyons Press, 2004) pp. 121-122.

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bay façade with an enclosed, flat-roofed side porch to the left. The Dutch Colonial type is characterized by a side gambrel roof with broad shed dormers in the lower slopes of both the façade and rear elevations. Like many examples, this building is actually a gable-block with pent roofs and applied eaves on each side that produce a mock gambrel. Other details include the small porch supported by brackets that shelters the center entrance. The windows are arranged in a regular and symmetrical pattern but the flanking windows of the façade and side porch are arranged in continuous banks of two and five, respectively. A second-level entrance above the side porch suggests it was originally surrounded by a balustrade. Although the building has lost considerable detail to a vinyl siding and sash application, it sits on a distinctive exposed foundation of smooth river stone with quoined granite-block corners. It is also sited in an unusual manner on a steep rise retained by a continuation of the high random ashlar and granite block wall that forms a continuation with the cemetery frontage to the north. A monumental split, two-run stair set into a reveal leads between a pair of pillars surmounted by broad urns to the front walk of this house. The landscaping forms a continuation of the cemetery, with open lawns punctuated by mature trees. The hill behind the house and barn is largely wooded.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The history of the establishment of Oak Grove Cemetery is recounted in MDF.801, beginning in the mid-1850s and continuing, through expansion, through to the present. The large approximately 22-acre parcel to the south of the original cemetery which houses the site of the subject buildings was subsequently acquired by the city in 1873 from Edward Brooks (1793-1878) in order to provide space for expansion.²

Evidence of the construction of the Oak Grove Service Building includes a sum of \$4,000 allocated from the "cemetery walls" to the "Oak Grove Service Building" allocated in September of 1941 by the Board of Aldermen, suggesting it was built at about this time. This was confirmed by correspondence of the Trustees of Cemeteries dated January of 1941: "Our old wooden buildings are in very bad condition and we are liable to have serious trouble with them. We believe there is a WPA project prepared for these and would like to see them started this year." An unreferenced newspaper account published in July of 1941, likely in the *Medford Transcript* or *Mercury*, identified the architect as Ralph E. Watrous, an employee of the City Engineer's office, who was also credited with the Municipal Garage and World War memorial at Oak Grove Cemetery. This account verified that a federal grant of \$28,526 to pay for labor costs, matched by \$14,000 from the city for materials, paid for the new Service Building. The new building was to be 113 by 36 feet, single story, and contain an employee's service room, blacksmith shop, a place for storage of miscellaneous equipment, and public bathrooms. Materials were specified to be cement with granite ashlar facing, trim of cast stone and a slate roof. Its architecture was described as "English design," a characterization which is commonly also known by the term "Tudor." The building was to include an outdoor storage yard 85 by 30 feet "enclosed by a corresponding wall which will conceal any material, etc., from the public view." All of this description is consistent with the present building. Circumstantial evidence suggests the nearby caretaker's house dates to late 1920s to early 1930s. Minutes of the Board of Alderman record re-allocations of \$325 to pay for a heating system in the caretaker's quarters in 1933.³

Ralph E. Watrous, architect

Very little information regarding the career of Ralph E. Watrous (1888 – Dec. 8, 1969) is available.⁴ A native of Connecticut, he had settled in Wakefield at 63 Greenwood Avenue by 1920. In 1940 he was living at 130B Auburn Street in Medford, but had left the profession of architecture, managing the payroll of a pipe company. At the time of his death he was living in Stoneham. With his wife, Frieda, he had three daughters and one son.⁵ The only reference to another commission was for a house in Bradley Park, Meriden, Connecticut, in 1918 costing \$5,000.⁶

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Mass GIS Online Mapping Tool (OLIVER): http://maps.massgis.state.ma.us/map_ol/oliver.php

² *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, Vol. 32 (The Society, 1878) p. 353; Brooks/ Usher, p. 342.

³ This information was made available through the research efforts of Dee Morris and comes from the Medford Public Library's vertical file on local history.

⁴ *Boston Daily Globe*, Dec. 10, 1969, p. 44.

⁵ 1920, 1940 Federal Census

⁶ *The American Contractor* (F.W. Dodge, 1918) p. 49.

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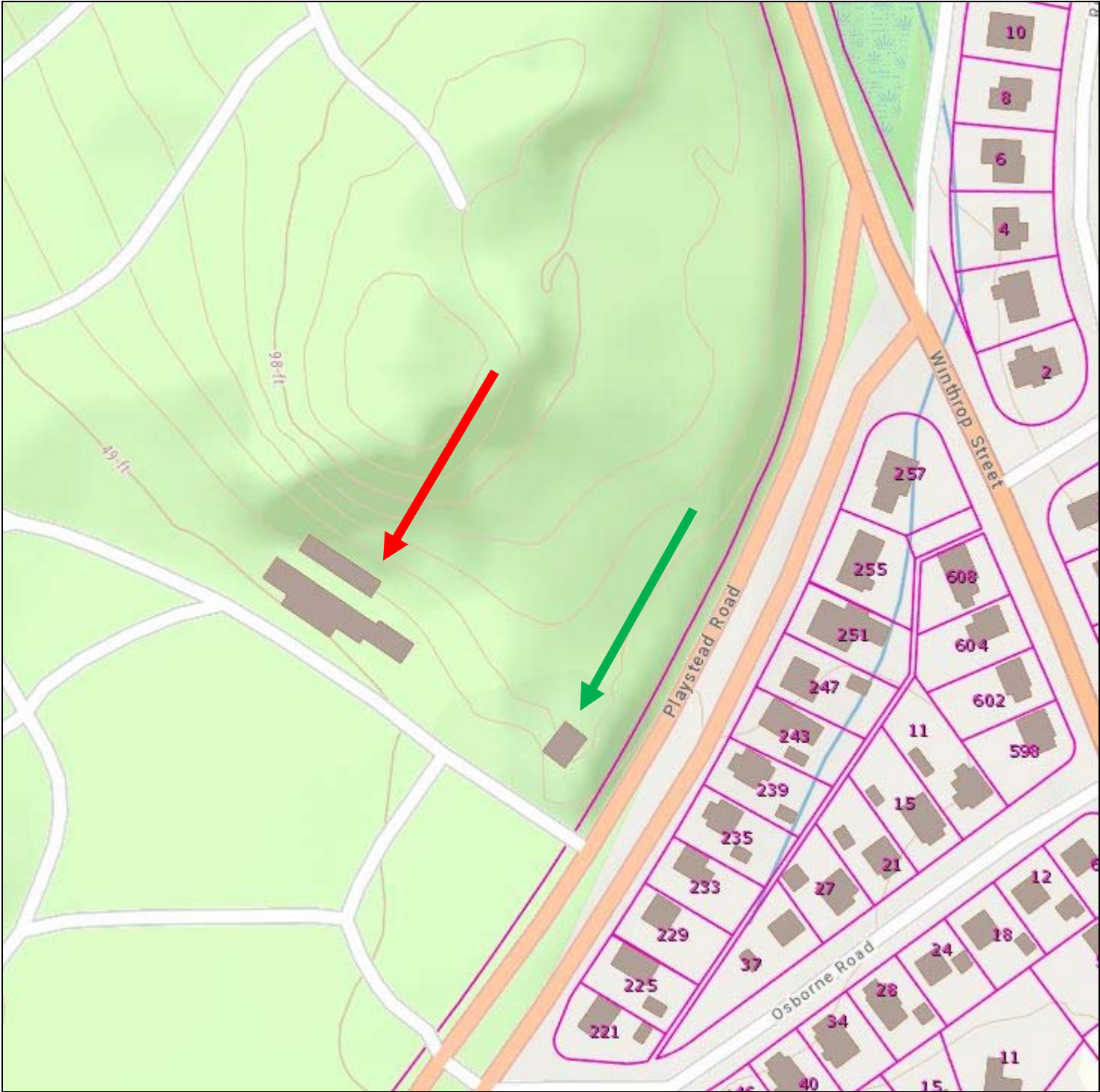
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Charles Brooks and James M. Usher, *History of the Town of Medford, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, From its First Settlement in 1630 to 1855; Revised, Enlarged and Brought Down to 1885* (Rand, Avery & Co., 1886).

MDF.801.



Mass. GIS (OLIVER) detail showing the service building complex on the left (west, red arrow) and the caretaker's quarters on the right (east, green arrow). The second wing at the right end of the service building does not exist and there is no evidence of a demolition at this location. Neither Sanborn nor local assessor's maps cover this site.

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View from SW.



Left (west) wing bulkhead, cellar entry and door.

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Rear shed from W.



Rear court with pillared gate from E.

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Detail of windows in the façade of the left (west) wing showing rolled steel casement windows, stone casings and mullions.



Detail of belfry and granite coping from E.



Caretaker's quarters from E showing Playstead Road frontage and wall.



View from S showing side and entry porches and river stone foundation.