

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-8-5

Boston
North

Town/City: Medford

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

Photograph



Address: 18 Wedgemere Road

Historic Name: John J and Harriet E Crowe House

Uses: Present: single-family residential

Original: single-family residential

Date of Construction: 1920-1927

Source: deeds, maps

Style/Form: Colonial/ bungalow

Architect/Builder: possibly James Wallace

Exterior Material:

Foundation: rusticated concrete block

Wall/Trim: vinyl/ wood

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: none

Major Alterations (*with dates*): Siding, sash and door, recent decades.

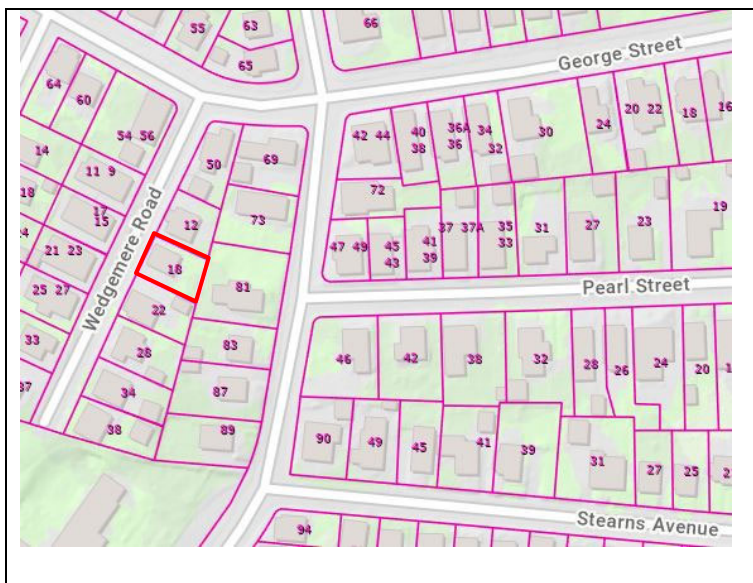
Condition: fair

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 0.08 acre

Setting: Dense mix of late-19th through early 20th century residential use.

Locus Map (*north is up*)



Recorded by: John D. Clemson

Organization: Medford Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): April 2024

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

18 WEDGEMERE ROAD

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220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

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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 Crowe house, built between 1920 and 1927, is an example of a bungalow cottage. The origins of the bungalow are not clear but are thought to have emerged from the colonial experiences of northern Europeans during the 19th century, when native dwellings were adopted by colonizers in Southeast Asia and brought back to the homeland.¹ The type became popular in America nationwide at the turn of the 20th century and is generally associated with the Craftsman style. However this example retains Colonial Revival elements that were also commonly applied to the bungalow form. Bungalows are generally story-and-a-half buildings but in New England the form was often expanded into two stories, reflected in the nomenclature "bungalow cottage." The subject example is massed in a near cube with dimensions of 22 feet wide by 24 feet deep under a high side gable. The front roof slope descends to cover a deep engaged front porch into a pitch that breaks at the inner edge of the porch and lands at the first-story plate at the porch's front edge. This has the effect of diminishing the perceived height of the two-story building, giving it the ground-hugging profile that is a defining feature of bungalow design. The first story is expanded by a shallow rectangular bay filling the rear pile on the right (south) side and the second story by a broad shed dormer in front. The house's square footprint and entry sequence on the left side suggest it has a foursquare plan comprised of four equal spaces on the first floor: entry hall and kitchen in the left side and living/ dining on the right; the dining rooms suggested by the bay on that side.

Although the house has been covered in vinyl siding details of the porch and other trim survive and remain visible. The porch is supported by square columns, with moldings that read as capitals and bases, which sit on a solid parapet. The wood front cornice moldings, molded side rake boards with returns and edge-molded casings also survive. Although the right half of the porch was enclosed during the 20th century with jalousied windows, the original porch posts were retained. There is a strong possibility that original finishes survive beneath recent coverings. This period house is part of a well-preserved short dead end street that was developed as a whole during the early 20th century after the land was subdivided in 1919.

The house is sited near the front of its minimal residential lot landscaped with open lawn, natural ground cover and foundation plantings. The lot is enclosed by a split-rail fence open near the frontage and higher and solid to either side toward the rear. A narrow asphalt drive fills the right side yard. A concrete walk leads to a wood stoop that leads to the open portion of the porch.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Crowe House was part of a large subdivision undertaken by Citizens Realty Trust known as "Knollwood," recorded in 1919. The land on which the subdivision was laid out had been, for the second half of the 19th century, a private estate owned by members of the Stearns family. George Luther Stearns (1809 – 1867) owned a large estate bordering the Royall-Tidd Estate to the north, the location of College Avenue to the east, the Boston and Main Railroad right-of-way to the south, and parcels owned by George Osgood and Joseph Manning to the west. The property and main estate house were depicted in maps and photographs reproduced below. The land was undeveloped until after 1900 as it remained the home of Stearns' widow, Mary E. Stearns, until her death in 1901. Stearns was a successful local merchant who established a chandlery, linseed oil and lead pipe manufactory that supplied the local ship building industry. By 1860 he had accumulated a fortune of \$60,000, a considerable sum for the time.² He and his wife, a niece of Lydia Maria Child, were ardent abolitionists. Stearns is notable for having served as a principal financier of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry and even supplied firearms for the endeavor. During the Civil War, with the rank of Major, he was engaged for the recruitment of 'Colored' troops in Tennessee and was credited with having staffed the company of Robert Gould Shaw.³

¹ Clay Lancaster, *The American Bungalow, 1880-1930* (Dover, 1985) ch. 1.

² 1860 Federal Census.

³ Charles Erdman Heller, "In Advance of Fate: A Biography of George Luther Stearns, 1809-1867 (Jan. 1, 1985). *Doctoral Dissertations Available from Proquest*. Paper AA18509553; see also: ____, *Portrait of an Abolitionist, A Biography of George Luther Stearns, 1809-1867*

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

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Area(s) Form No.

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In June of 1919 the Stearns Estate was acquired by John C Harrington from William H Brown, trustee under the will of Mary E Stearns. Consideration was not specified but Harrington immediately gave a mortgage to the estate of \$26,000 due in 5 years at 6%. Grantee John Cleigh Harrington (1891-1981) was a principal, with his father, Medford furniture store proprietor Thomas William Harrington (1857-1923), and Joel G Knapp of Dorchester in Citizens Realty Trust, a real estate development company. Thomas Harrington was a native of Massachusetts whose parents were natives of Ireland. He worked as a furniture dealer ca. 1900 but by 1920 listed his occupation as developer, real estate. According to an account of his funeral "Of late years he did much real estate development work and opened up the Stearns Estate and other tracts of land in the Medford Hillside district..."⁴ The following month Citizens Realty Trust filed a subdivision of the Stearns Estate reproduced below. Citizens Realty Trust regularly advertised house lots in both Marblehead at "Ocean Park" (MAR.BJ) and "Crabtree Estates" in the Wollaston section of Quincy. An advertisement marketing Knollwood in Medford was published in August of 1919 proclaiming "

Near Tufts College. Now is the time to select a lot for a home from this fine old estate. Its shade and fruit trees make the land very attractive, as well as its proximity to both steam and electric cars. Knollwood is situated in a beautiful part of Medford. It is eleven minutes from North Station and thirteen minutes from Sullivan Square. Buy now and own your own home! An early selection gives you a most desirable lot, ranging from \$300 and upwards, with easy terms...Citizens Realty Trust Co., 294 Washington St., Boston.⁵

The subject property, described as lot 3, was acquired by James Wallace of Roxbury, later of Arlington, from Citizens Realty Trust in 1920. Wallace (born ca 1881) was a native of Scotland who resided in Arlington at 74 Winter Street in 1930 and 1940 with the occupation of superintendent, building construction. Circumstances suggest he built the subject house and others in the Knollwood subdivision.⁶

In 1927 the property was acquired by Harriet E Crowe, the wife of John J Crowe, from short-term intervening owner George E Sweetland of Wollaston, who owned the property for five months. The Crowe family, including John (1893-1960) a streetcar operator and later bus driver, Harriet Edna Crowe (1891-1946) and their daughter Irene M Crowe Cowan (born 1931) resided at the subject property, as well as Irene's husband Kenneth J Cowan, until 1959. Subsequent owners included James J and Lyla P Flynn (1959-1966), Diane T and John J Powers (1966-1971) and Patrick J and Johanna Crowley (1971-2017), who sold to the current owners of record.⁷

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)

(Greenwood Press, 1996); Benjamin Quarles, *Allies For Freedom* (Da Capo Press, 2001) p. 15; William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *John Brown* (George W. Jacobs & Co., 1909) pp. 208-210).

⁴ MCSRD 4263:429-430 (1919); 4402:565 (1920); Ancestry.com: 1910 Federal Census; 1900, 1909, 1918 Medford city directories; *Boston Daily Globe*, Jul. 3, 1923, p. 12, "Funeral of Thomas W. Harrington, Widely Known Real Estate Man of Medford."

⁵ *Boston Daily Globe*, Aug. 17, 1919, p. 36, display advertisement.

⁶ MCSRD 4402:565 (1920); Ancestry.com: 1930, 1940 Federal Census.

⁷ MCSRD 5095:122 (1927); 5156:192 (1927); 6339:577 (1939); 7476:474-475 (1949); 9288:66 (1958); 9476:21 (1959); 11133:92 (1966); 12051:518 (1971); 12068:93 (1971); 31844:55 (2000); 68956:51 (2017); 70409:233 (2017); Ancestry.com: 1930-1950 Federal Census, inclusive; Find-a-Grave index, John J Crowe.

Continuation sheet 2

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

18 WEDGEMERE ROAD

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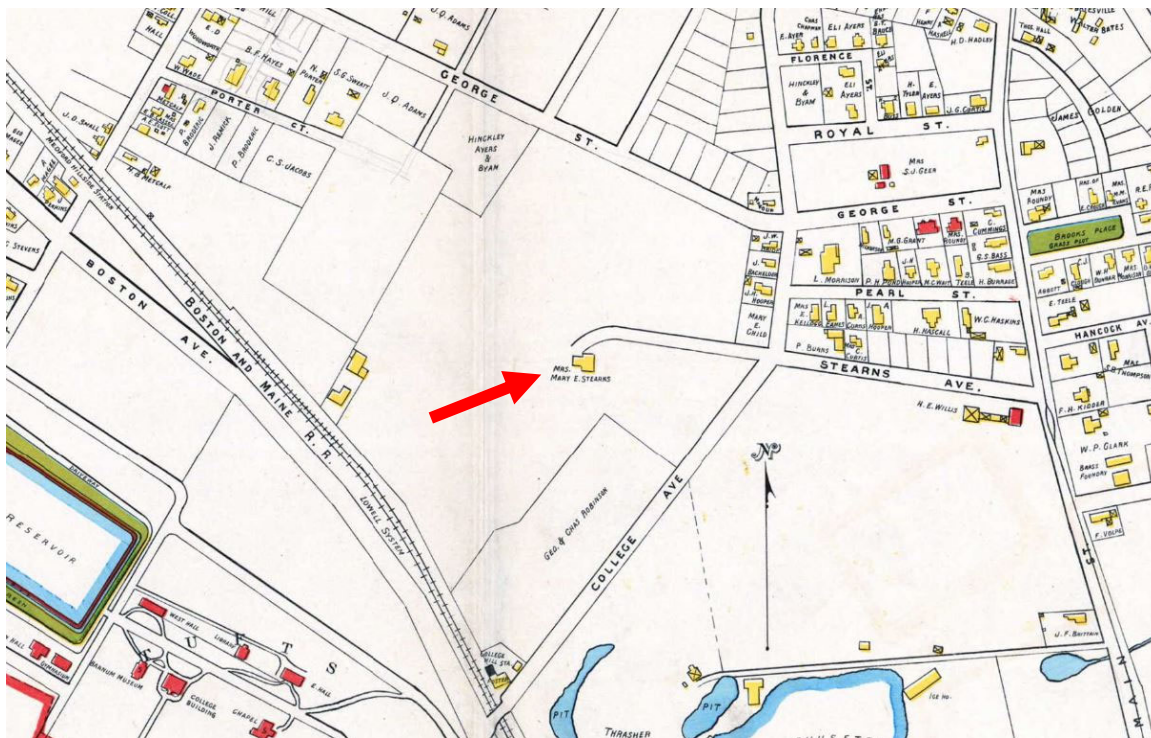
Area(s) Form No.

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



1855 Walling Medford map depicting the GL Stearns Estate indicated by a red arrow. North is up.



1889 Walker county atlas depicting the Stearns Estate labeled "Mrs. Mary E. Stearns" indicated by a red arrow.

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Area(s) Form No.

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FROM THE MEDFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION OF GLASS PLATES

REPRINTED 1976



Stearns House, Jun 4, 1899.

Medford Public Library collection.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

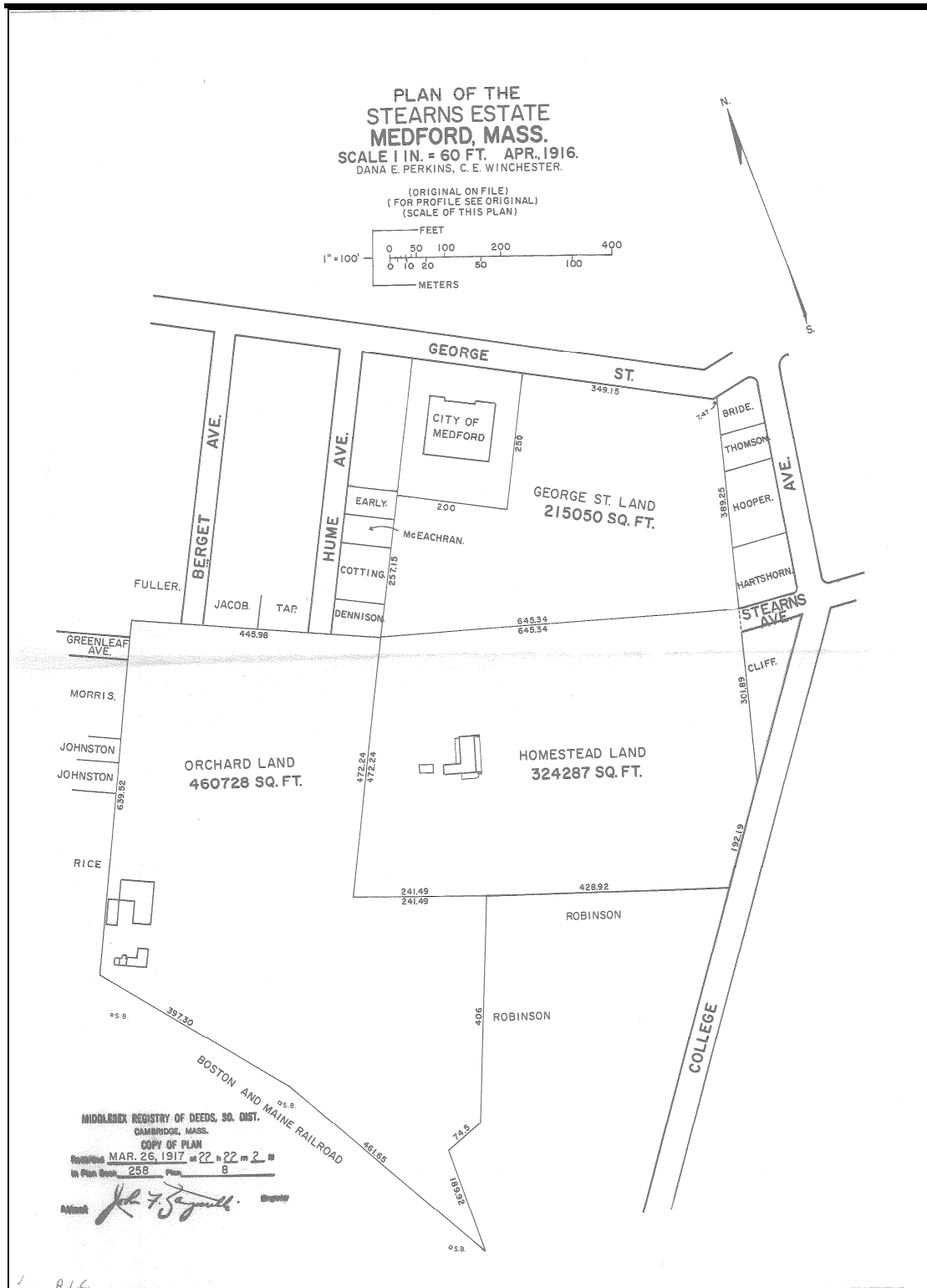
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Area(s) Form No.

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MCSR Plan 258:8 (1916) depicting the Stearns Estate prepared in preparation for sale. Note the depiction of the Stearns House and a second house on the property at the southwest corner of the "orchard land."

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

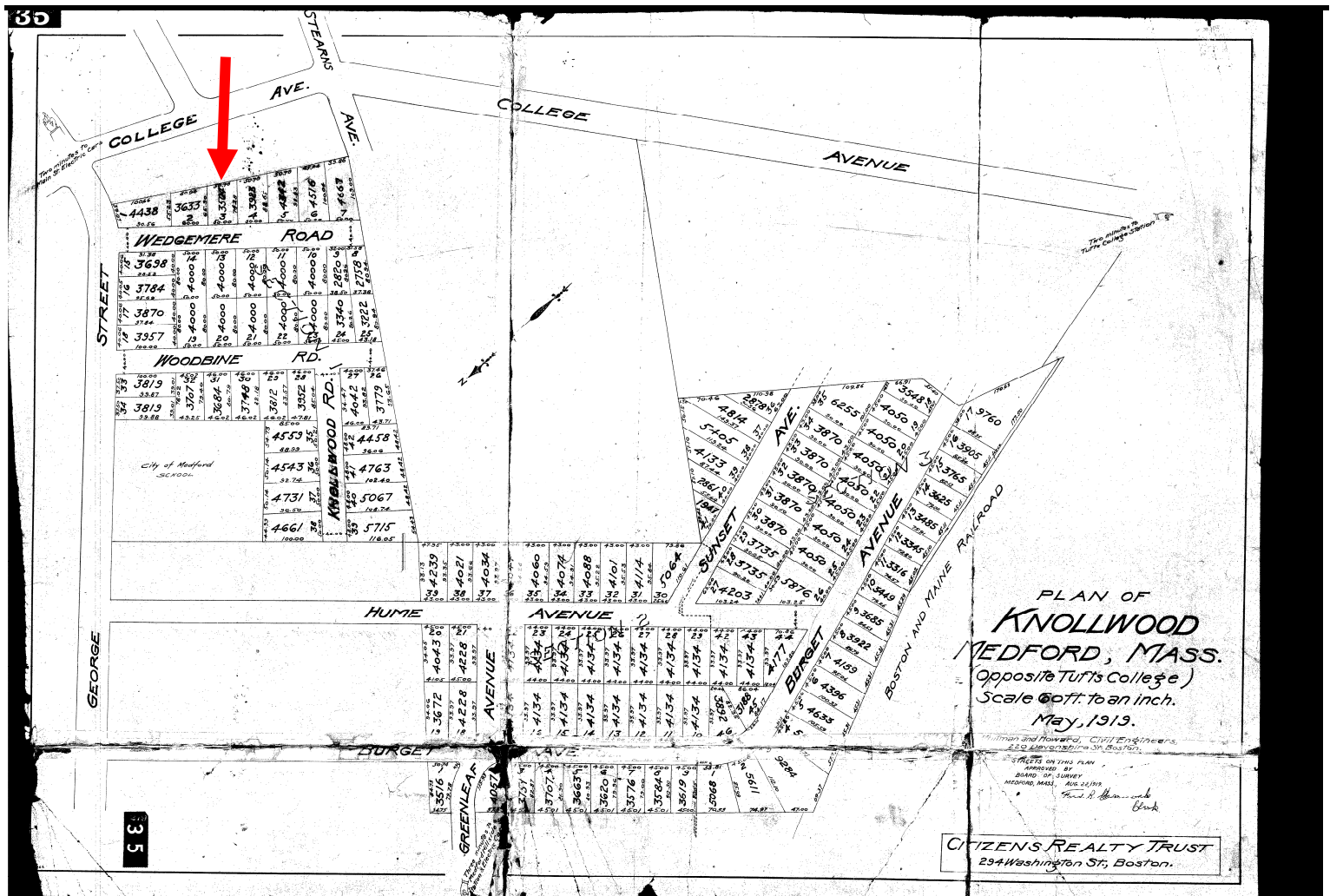
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MCSR Plan 279:35 (1919) depicting the subdivision of the Stearns Estate by Citizens Realty Trust known as "Knollwood." Note that north is lower left. The subject property is indicated by a red arrow. The open land filling the east side of College Avenue was never platted or developed and is part of Tufts University athletic facilities.

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Area(s)

Form No.



1936 Sanborn map detail showing the buildout of the Knollwood subdivision. The subject property indicated by a red arrow, north is upper left.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

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