

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	MDF.118
Historic Name:	Medford City Hall
Common Name:	
Address:	85 George P. Hassett Dr
City/Town:	Medford
Village/Neighborhood:	Medford Square;
Local No:	107;
Year Constructed:	1937
Architectural Style(s):	Colonial Revival;
Architect(s):	Dyer, Michael A. Company; Keiliher, John J.; Works Progress Administration;
Use(s):	City Hall;
Significance:	Architecture; Community Planning; Politics Government;
Area(s):	MDF.AO
Designation(s):	
Building Materials:	Roof: Sheet Metal; Synthetic Other; Wall: Brick; Cast Iron; Limestone; Metal, Undetermined; Stone, Cut; Foundation: Granite; Stone, Cut;
Demolished	No



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

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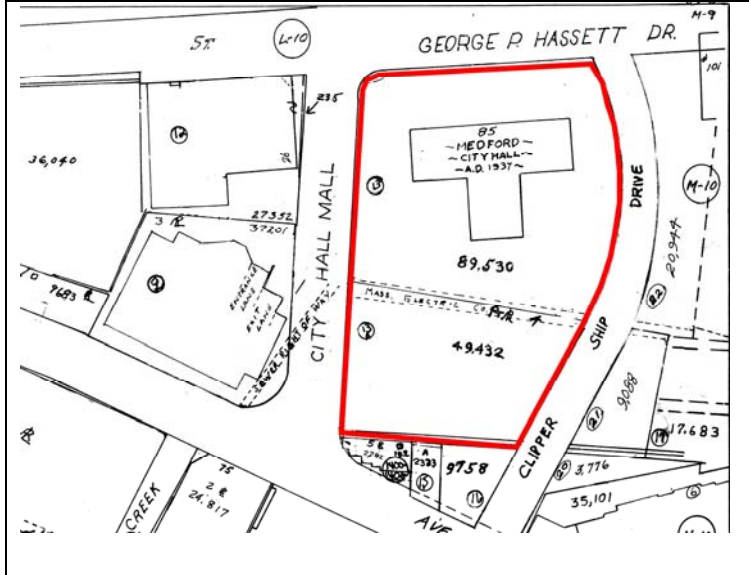
FORM B – BUILDING

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

Photograph



Locus Map (North is up)



Recorded by: Zachary Violette with Jennifer B. Doherty
Organization: Medford Historical Commission
Date (month / year): January 2015

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

M-09-13

Boston
North

MDF.AO

MDF.118

Town/City: Medford

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

Address: 85 George Hassett Drive

Historic Name: Medford City Hall

Uses: Present: City Hall

Original: City Hall

Date of Construction: 1937

Source: Short & Stanley-Brown

Style/Form: Colonial Revival

Architect/Builder: Michael A. Dyer

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Granite

Wall/Trim: Brick/Limestone

Roof: Membrane

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
None

Major Alterations (with dates):
None

Condition: Good

Moved: no ☒ yes ☐ **Date:**

Acreage: 89,530 Sq. Ft.

Setting: Just outside a dense townscape, this freestanding building is surrounded by parking lots. A small landscaped plaza separates the building from the Salem Street sidewalk.

RECEIVED
SEP 25 2015

MASS. HIST. COMM.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

85 GEORGE HASSETT DR

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

AO

MDF.118

☒ 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 features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

Medford City Hall is a T-shaped structure, with a three-story 180 foot wide main block facing Salem Street and a rear wing extending 130 feet to the south. The building is executed in an elaborate though conservative Colonial Revival style. The building's first story is ashlar limestone, while its upper floors and trim are of water-struck red brick with rusticated corner pilasters of limestone. The 18-bay Salem Street elevation is composed of regularly-spaced 12/12 windows. On the first floor these are capped by limestone lintels. On the second floor, a rubbed brick header is accentuated by a limestone keystone. The rubbed brick headers on the third floor omit these keystones. The building has a modest modillion cornice, which wraps around all four sides of the main block and onto the rear extension. The building's nearly-flat roof is surrounded by a classical balustrade.

The center five bays of the Salem Street elevation contains the building's formal entrance, accentuated by a flat limestone facade. A shallow, balustrade-surrounded staircase rises to three segmental-arched portals. Above this, an engaged colonnade is inserted between the building's regularly-spaced windows. On the second floor, these are surrounded by limestone architraves, and protected by shallow cast iron balconies. The pilasters support a heavy entablature, which incorporates the building's main modillioned cornice. An empty pediment is placed atop the center three bays. A three-level tower of explicitly Colonial Revival design is located on the roof just behind the pediment. The first level contains a single arched, louvered opening surrounded by Doric pilasters. An arch-topped clock is placed on the second level. The top level of the tower is an octagonal cupola with small louvered arch windows surrounded by pilasters. A small gold dome surmounts the cupola.

The main block's narrow east and west flanks continue the main arrangement of the Salem Street elevation. On the first floor of each of these elevations a secondary entrance is placed in the center bay. These are capped by a broken-top segmental-arched pediment supported on corbels. In the center of this pediment a cartouche contains the city's seal. On the second level, a blank, arched-topped empty niche is located in the center bay. A large chimney rises in the southeast corner of the main block.

The building's rear extension continues the first floor's rustication and regularly-spaced 12/12 windows, as well as the modillioned cornice and classical balustrade. On the upper-level, two-story, arched-topped windows light the alderman's (now city council's) chamber that occupies the second and third floor of this appendage. A limestone swag, or festoon, is placed over each of these windows. The extension's rear roofline is broken by a pediment with an oculus.

On the interior, the main block is divided by a double-loaded corridor with the offices of various city offices on either side of it. A central rotunda, aligned with the main entrance, is placed at the crossing of the main block and extension. City offices are located behind the rotunda on the first floor. The rotunda is

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highly elaborated with travertine floors, a marble staircase with elaborate cast-iron railings. This leads to a second floor space with a coffered dome surrounded by marble Corinthian columns. This grand space acts as the entry to the alderman's chamber on the second and third floor of the extension. This rotunda is home to a bust of Gen. Samuel C. Lawrence, commissioned by the city and executed by sculptor Emilius Ciampa. Decades earlier, Lawrence, a former mayor and philanthropist, had offered to donate funds for the construction of a new city hall. The double-loaded corridors with city offices to both sides continue on each of the upper stories of the main block.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

The process of constructing a modern seat of Medford's municipal government took nearly 40 years. With the shift from town to city government in 1892, the Asher Benjamin-designed 1833 town hall in Medford Square began to be recognized as wholly inadequate, as municipal offices were spread throughout multiple buildings. At the turn of the century Gen. Samuel Lawrence offered to construct a new building for the city at his expense, but this offer was rejected. The old town hall was demolished, and foundations for a new building were built in 1916, but questions of political and fiscal improprieties halted that project. The history of that project is related in accounts of the privately-built City Building at 6 High Street (MED.XXX) that was eventually built on the site in 1925. Michael M. Dyer (b. 1864), a one-time mayor, had acted as contractor for the 1916 city hall project. He, along with then-mayor Michael Haines as well as project architect Elmer Smith were indicted in 1923 for corruption and bribery charges related to purported irregularities surrounding the project. Between the 1916 demolition of the old town hall and the construction of the present building in 1937, the city's offices were located in rented buildings in Medford Square: between 1916 and 1925 at 5 High Street (MDF.1106); and between 1925 and 1937 at 6 High Street (MDF.1107). In the intervening years Medford's population nearly doubled, and the needs of city government became increasingly complex. After the city hall site was sold to private parties in 1925, the city considered a number of sites for a new building. The two main contenders were a site at the corner of Governor's Avenue and High Street – then occupied by three Colonial-era houses – and this Salem Street site, which had formerly been the town's common. Settling on the latter site, the city needed to seek permission from the state legislature to build on the common site. This permission was granted in 1934.

The Great Depression provided the impetus needed to finally complete the project. Beginning in 1933 the federal government's Works Progress Administration allotted well over a billion dollars to support over 10,000 local public works projects across the nation. From this largess, Medford received \$168,000. This was added to a reserve fund of over \$200,000 that was left over from the former city hall project and the sale of the site of the 1916 project. Together, these funds paid a substantial portion of the estimated \$450,000 cost of this project. The WPA also provided technical and design assistance. At the same time, WPA funds also helped construct a new post office on Forest Street.

On August 12, 1936 Mayor John J. Irwin laid the cornerstone for the new building. A time capsule was placed in this cornerstone containing documents related to the building's construction, as well as copies of the *Medford Mercury* and the *Medford Historical Record*. Responsibility for designing the building was placed in Medford architect Michael A. Dyer.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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The 1936 project was significantly less fraught than the one two decades earlier. John J. Keiliher served as the contractor. Construction was briefly halted by a strike when non-union steelworks were employed on the project. Still, the building was completed in less than a year. It was dedicated with an elaborate program on September 11, 1937. Architect Dyer, as well as a number of former mayors, were prominently featured at the ceremony, which was attended by state, local, and federal officials as well as over 500 citizens. The building was praised as being the "last word" in the construction and arrangement of municipal buildings.

The building has served as Medford's seat of government since that time. While there have been few structural alterations to the building, its setting has drastically changed. While the route of the 1959 I-93 corridor was shifted eastward to avoid demolishing the then comparatively new structure, the highway's location immediately to the east of the building required the reconfiguration of a number of streets. The route of Salem Street in front of City Hall was modified, moving it to the north providing a large parking apron for a building which had previously been built close to the street line. This reconfigured street was named George Hassett Drive. Clipper Ship Drive and City Hall Mall were added to the east and west side of the building, respectively. These changes, along with the removal of adjoining rail lines and the demolition of surrounding buildings as part of an urban renewal project, obliterated the remaining portions of Medford Common and gave City Hall, once an urban building, the appearance of a freestanding suburban building encircled by parking.

Michael A. Dyer, Architect

Michael A. Dyer (1886 – 1954) was a local Medford architect and the son of prominent local contractor and one-time mayor Michael M. Dyer (see above). The elder Dyer was an Irish immigrant, while the younger Dyer was born in Malden. It is unclear where Dyer got his architectural training, but he began as a partner of J. D. Leland and Co., working there for two years before starting his own firm. Dyer, operating as the M. A. Dyer Co., was active throughout eastern Massachusetts during the middle of the 20th century. The firm designed a number of public buildings, Lynn City Hall and Auditorium (1948, LYN.9), Webster City Hall (1928, WEB.114), Woburn City Hall (1930, WOB.16), elementary schools in Marlborough (1930-31, MRB.88 and MRB.89), and a health center in Quincy (1950, QUI.147). Many of Dyer's buildings are done in the Classical Revival style, similar to his other well-known Medford design, the Dyer Building at 30 Salem Street (MDF.101). The three city halls mentioned above are similar in design, displaying a central pedimented pavilion on a rectangular brick building ornamented with Classical details in limestone. Dyer also served as the chief architect of the U.S. Housing Board during World War I, overseeing the \$100,000,000 spent by the organization during that time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

C.W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown. *Public Buildings: A Survey of Architecture of Projects Constructed by Federal and Other Governmental Bodies Between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the Assistance of the Public Works Administration* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939), 5.

"Medford Common As City Hall Site: Legislative Committee to Hold Hearing on Bill," *Boston Daily Globe*, Apr 23, 1924, 9A

"Cornerstone Is Laid By Medford Mayor: \$450,000 City Hall Work Finally Started," *Daily Boston Globe*, Aug 13, 1936, 7.

"New Medford Post Office and City Hall Will Be Formally Dedicated Next Month," *Daily Boston Globe*, Aug 28, 1937, 3.

"U. S. and City Officials Attend Formal Dedication of New City Hall in Medford," *Daily Boston Globe*, Sep

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MEDFORD

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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Area(s) Form No.

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12, 1937, B10

"Bust of Gen. Lawrence Completed For Medford City Hall Rotunda," *Daily Boston Globe*, May 1, 1938, 44.



Medford City Hall soon after completion. From Short and Stanley-Brown, 5.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

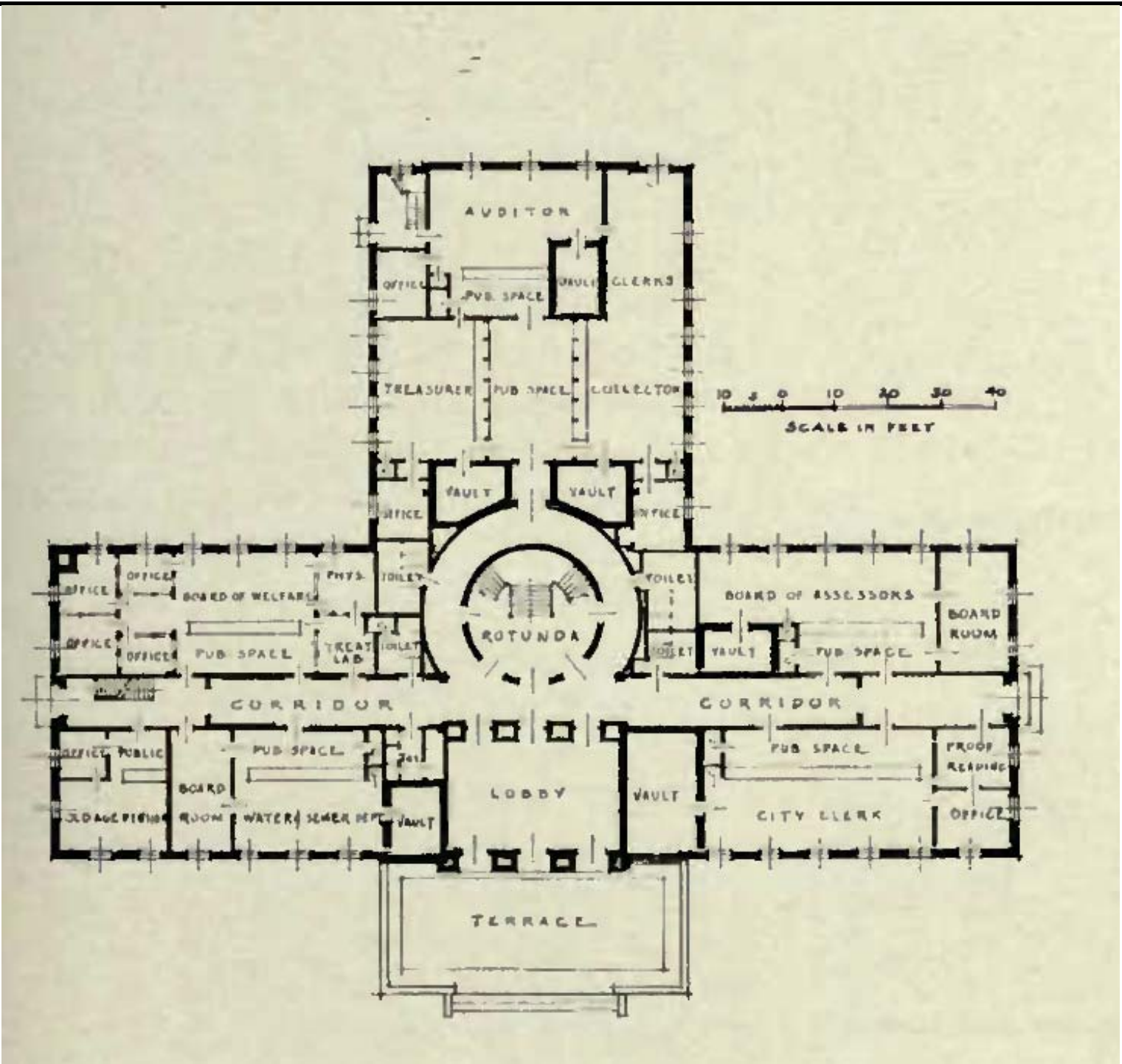
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First floor plan, Medford City Hall. From Short and Stanley-Brown, 5.

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National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- ☒ Individually eligible ☐ Eligible **only** in a historic district
- ☐ Contributing to a potential historic district ☐ Potential historic district

Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Statement of Significance by Zachary J Violette

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

Medford City Hall is eligible for individual listing as an example of an important public building resulting from Depression-era Works Progress Administration funding under criteria A and C at the local level. A dignified and elaborate example of the Georgian Revival style, it was designed by prominent Medford architect Michael M. Dyer. It represents the modernization of Medford's city government in the early years of the twentieth century and is an important landmark of the civic spirit of this era. While the surrounding landscape has been altered, the building is exceptionally well-preserved and retains integrity of workmanship, design, materials, association, location and feeling.

FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston

MDF.118

In Area no.

Form no.

107118

City Medford

Address 85 Geo. P. Hassett Drive

Name City Hall

Present use Municipal offices

Present owner City of Medford

Description:

Date 1936-37

Source plans

Style Colonial Revival

Architect M.A. Dyer Co., Architects of Boston

Exterior wall fabric red brick

Outbuildings (describe)

Other features 3-story, t-plan building with a balustraded, flat roof.

5-bay gabled central entrance pavilion

Altered _____ Date _____

Moved _____ Date _____

5. Lot size:

One acre or less _____ Over one acre ☒ X

Approximate frontage 150'

Approximate distance of building from street 50'

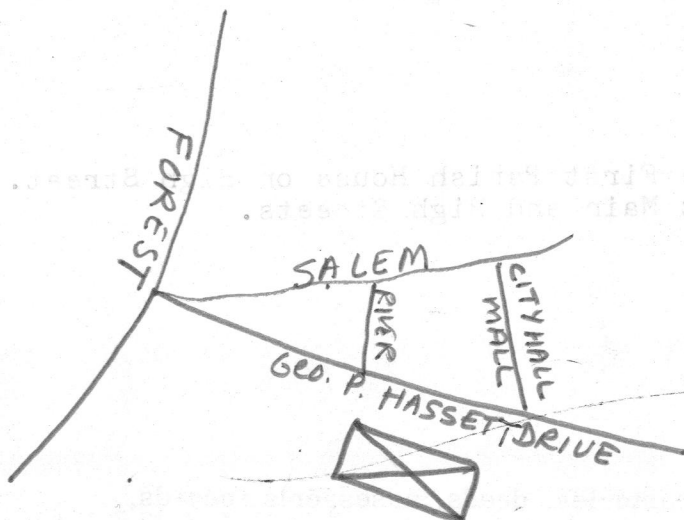
6. Recorded by Harriet White

Organization MAPC

Date 8/1/78



4. Map. Draw sketch of building location in relation to nearest cross streets and other buildings. Indicate north.



7. Original owner (if known) City of Medford

Original use City Hall

Subsequent uses (if any) and dates _____

8. Themes (check as many as applicable)

Aboriginal	_____	Conservation	_____	Recreation	_____
Agricultural	_____	Education	_____	Religion	_____
Architectural	_____	Exploration/	_____	Science/	_____
The Arts	_____	settlement	_____	invention	_____
Commerce	_____	Industry	_____	Social/	_____
Communication	_____	Military	_____	humanitarian	_____
Community development	_____	Political	<u>X</u>	Transportation	_____

9. Historical significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

W.P.A. Project. Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works
Project # Mass. 1062-R. *Cont \$484,944* Cost: \$1,811,811.

Exterior plaque reads, " Medford's first Town Hall meetings were held in private homes. Later in meeting houses until a Town Hall was erected in 1833. That building was partially burned and rebuilt in 1835 and 1850 and remodelled in 1893 to accomodate the new City Government. It was razed in 1916 and from that date offices were leased until the completion of this building in 1937."

*orig Town Hall in 1st Par. Hse - High St
2nd City Hall 1835 - Main & High Sts*

The original Town Hall was in the First Parish House on High Street.
The second City Hall was built at Main and High Streets.

10. Bibliography and/or references (such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.)

dedic. of MCH

9/11/37 - booklet (32 pp)

Dedication Booklet of Medford City Hall 9/11/37 (32 pages)

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, Boston

MDF.118

Community: Medford	Form No:
Property Name: City Hall	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

Other features:

....with Corinthian pilasters and ornate wrought iron balconets. Triple segmental arched entrance portal. Emphasis is the the limestone 1st story. The second and third stories are brick. 12/12 windows with flat brick arches and keystones. Elaborate cornice with dentils and modillions.

Octagonal cupola with clock and round headed, divided sash windows. Gold, saucer-like dome and gold finial.

The building is set back on a slightly raised plaza.

Other Colonial Revival motifs include oculus windows with keystones, swags, niches and a broken pediment frontispiece supported by consoles above the subsidiary side entrance.