

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



1. Name

historic Foster-Bigelow House

and/or common Beebe Estate (preferred)

2. Location

street & number 235 West Foster Street not for publication

city, town Melrose vicinity of congressional district Seventh

state Massachusetts code 025 county Middlesex code 017

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name City of Melrose

street & number Cambridge Street

city, town Melrose vicinity of state Massachusetts

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Middlesex County Registry of Deeds

street & number Cambridge Street

city, town Cambridge state Massachusetts

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Inventory of the Historic Assets of the Commonwealth
title has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date 1977 federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Massachusetts Historical Commission

city, town Boston state Massachusetts

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent
☐ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☒ unaltered
☐ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Beebe House, an early Greek Revival period estate, stands on one and three-quarter acres of land situated at the head of a major intersection in downtown Melrose. The excellently conceived and commanding design of the building takes maximum advantage of its large, open site, being set well back from the property lines on all sides.

The large, nearly cubical building is two stories high, sheathed in clapboards, with a high hip roof and tall thin end chimneys paired at either side. The unusual pattern of ornamentation witnesses the transitional nature of the building's period of construction.

The house has a five bay facade with 6 over 6 windows -- taller on the first floor, smaller and close to the eaves on the second floor -- and a center doorway. This entrance is emphasized by a sturdy portico with fluted Doric columns, high flat entablature, and pedimented roof. The doorway itself has sidelights (now blocked in) and a glazed transom. Excepting this striking element, the visual focus of the Beebe House is not the facade, with its narrow flat corner boards, fascia, and window surrounds. The eye is drawn first to the portico and then upward to a superbly enriched roofline.

A low openwork balustrade with an "X" pattern runs along the base of the roof. An acroteria motif in a scroll and anthemion pattern ornaments the corners and center panel of each side of the balustrade. The most dominant element, however, is the central cupola. The large cylinder shape sits on a polygonal base and consists of six fluted Ionic columns supporting an entablature which is delicately embellished with carved wreaths, dentils, anthemion antefix, and a central urn-capped finial. Within this frame is a low balustrade and six 2 over 2 windows.

Attached to the west side of the house is a small, one-story, hip-roofed addition; at the rear is a large 2-story wing with a hip roof. Behind the house is a large barn from the Colonial Revival period. This structure has a steeply pitched gambrel roof, cross-gambrel on the facade, hipped dormers, and a small polygonal lantern.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1828 Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Beebe Estate represents an early achievement in the Greek Revival style. It was built by an internationally prominent merchant as a summer house and was subsequently occupied by a number of influential area businessmen. The building thus meets criteria B and C of the National Register of Historic Places.

In the early nineteenth century Melrose (then North Malden) was a pleasant farming community about seven miles north of Boston. William Foster of Boston was impressed by the natural beauty of the area and in 1828 purchased a substantial acreage near the center of town. On this site he built the lovely home now known as the Beebe Estate.

Foster (1772-1863) was born into a Boston merchant family. At an early age he was sent to Europe to act as his father's representative in Spain and France. Foster served in Napoleon's army, participated in many events of the French Revolution, and at one time was president of a branch of the Jacobin Club, a political group which exerted profound influence on the progress of the French Revolution. Of major importance to the American textile industry was Foster's trip back to the United States in 1793, when he smuggled in three Merino sheep--the first ever introduced to this country. This important breed of sheep was valued for its fine wool, and Spain and France prohibited its export in an effort to retain their countries' economic advantage.

Foster returned permanently to Boston in 1807 with his wife and two children, building a winter home on Beacon Hill and later (1828) this summer home in Melrose. Foster remained active as a commission merchant but also participated actively in local politics (as a political writer and a state senator) and frequently was called into court to translate writings from French, Spanish, and Italian.

About 1842, after his wife's death, Foster sold the Melrose house to William Harlow, also a Boston businessman. Mr. Harlow was connected with the steam railroad business, and it was while he was living in this house (1845) that the Boston & Maine railroad tracks were laid through Melrose, a portion adjoining his land.

In 1854 the property was sold to Liberty Bigelow (1815-1890), who had a very active life in the railway business. Bigelow established the first stage express between Boston and New York, was the first superintendent of the Sullivan and the Rutland Railroad lines in Vermont, and was superintendent of the much larger Fitchburg Railroad (a post he accepted the same year in which he purchased this house). Bigelow left the Fitchburg Railroad in 1857 to establish his own railroad express business in Boston. His company was later merged in Northern Express Ltd., which became known as one of the finest and most prosperous express companies on the continent, operating a U.S. to Canada line.

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Continuation sheet

Item number 8

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Bigelow also established the Chicago City Railway Co., a horse-drawn street railway system for the newly thriving city of Chicago, and first conceived the idea of running a system of railway coaches between the railroad stations and hotels in Chicago -- an idea which spread rapidly through the east coast.

Bigelow died in Melrose in 1890; his widow, Harriet, occupied the house until her death in 1898. Mrs. Bigelow was a strong supporter of a city hospital, and it was in this house that the Melrose Hospital Association was organized in 1893.

Mrs. Bigelow left her home to her daughter, Katherine, who was married to Decius Beebe, descendant of a wealthy family and a member of the leather house of Lucius Beebe and Sons of Boston. This firm had extensive interests and tanneries in New England and was well recognized throughout the trade. Decius was also active in local financial affairs as President of the Melrose National Bank, as trustee of the Melrose Savings Bank, and as a generous contributor to the Melrose Hospital. The Beebe family continued to occupy the estate until the last member died in 1963. In that year, the property was taken by the City of Melrose through eminent domain and turned over to the School Department for use as an administration building, a use which continues today.

In addition to its historical significance in commerce, transportation and industry the Beebe House also possesses considerable architectural significance. Retaining the traditional five bay center entry form of the Federal period, it is most notable for the sophistication of its roof detail which includes an elaborate cupola based on the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates. Research to date has not proven that this feature is original and it may date to a later period such as that of the Harlow occupancy in the 1840's. However, if this feature is original, it may represent its first use in the United States, and the house would assume a critical role in the history of American Architecture.

The Beebe Estate, having originated in 1828 as a summer house in the then rural community of North Malden, should be considered to possess potential for the presence of archaeological remains. Domestic refuse, indicative of foodways and social status, may exist on the property in a broadly cast or concentrated form. Archaeological features representing changes in landscaping and land use are also quite likely to be present. Both kinds of archaeological remains can be useful in understanding the physical development and social context of this small landscape.

9. Major Bibliographical References

New England Genealogical Society Report, October 1863.
Melrose Free Press -- September 25, 1915.
Goss, Elbridge H., History of Melrose (Melrose, 1902).

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 76,000 Sq. Ft. (1 3/4 acre)

Quadrangle name Boston North

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A 1 9 3 2 9 7 6 0 4 7 0 2 2 3 0
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

See attached sketch map

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Wendy Frontiero, Preservation Planner, with Orren L. Walsh, Chairman,
Melrose Historical Commission

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date December 17, 1980

street & number 294 Washington Street telephone 727-8470 (617)

city or town Boston state Massachusetts

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

 national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission date

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

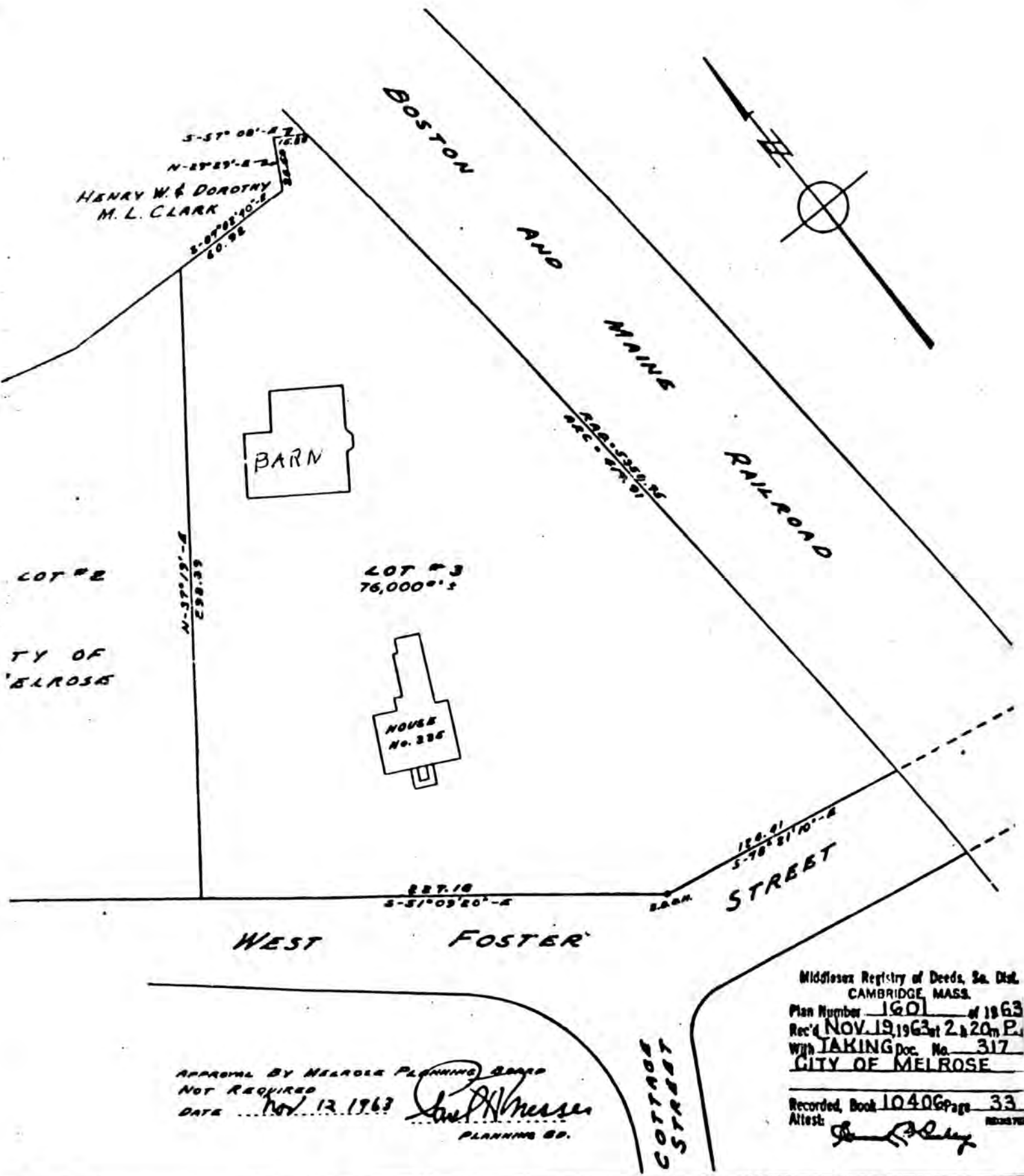
date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

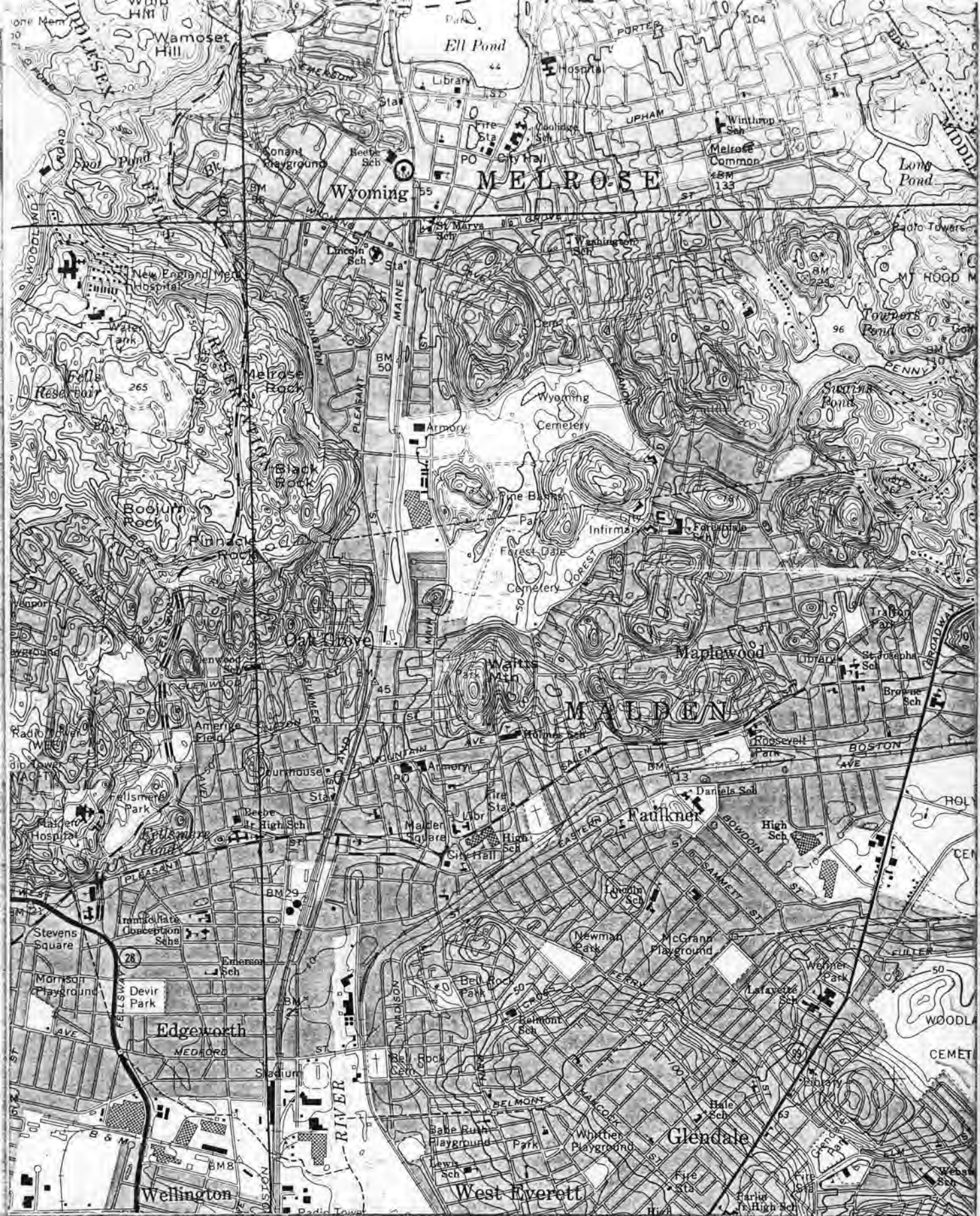
Chief of Registration



APPROVAL BY MELROSE PLANNING BOARD
 NOT REQUIRED
 DATE NOV 13 1963 *John H. Messer*
 PLANNING Bd.

Middlesex Registry of Deeds, So. Dist.
 CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
 Plan Number 1601 of 1963
 Rec'd NOV 19 1963 at 2:20 PM
 With TAKING doc. No. 317
 CITY OF MELROSE
 Recorded, Book 10406 Page 33
 Attest: *John H. Messer*

Beebe House
 MELROSE, MA





1. Beebe Estate, south and west elevations. (Photographer: Orrin L. Walsh, 1979)



2. Beebe Estate, view from the south. (Photographer: Orrin L. Walsh, 1979)