

Wellesley Historical Commission Plaques

General Information

One of the most important ways in which the Wellesley Historical Commission (WHC) promotes awareness of the Town's history is through its plaque program.

The original WHC plaque program was conducted in conjunction with the National Bicentennial and Town Centennial celebrations in 1976 and 1981, respectively. At the time, plaques were placed on almost all of the houses and buildings in Wellesley that were constructed before the Town's incorporation in 1881.

In 2014, the WHC extended the cutoff date for the plaques to 1914, thus permitting the placement of plaques on all houses and buildings in Wellesley constructed 100 or more years ago. This cutoff date will advance each year through 2019.

The plaques are decorative markers only and impose no restrictions on the property owner.

The WHC plaque program is largely funded through a grant received in 2015 from the Wellesley Community Preservation Committee. This grant covers the research and administrative costs associated with the plaque program, as well as half of the plaque manufacturing fee. The homeowner expense for each plaque is therefore reduced from over \$150 to only \$25.

How to Request a WHC Plaque

If you believe your house or building qualifies for a plaque under the new expanded program, please contact Joshua Dorin of the WHC at plaques@wellesleyhistoricalcommission.org. The WHC will then research the construction date using the below process, and contact you to confirm your eligibility.

How the Year of Construction is Determined

Determining the year of construction for any older house or building is complicated by the fact that building permits were not required in Wellesley until the early 1920s.

Once a plaque is requested, the WHC follows the below three-step process to determine the year of construction:

- i) Conduct a complete deed search on the property using the Norfolk County Registry of Deeds online database (<http://www.norfolkresearch.org>)
- ii) Check the Annual Town Reports to find out when the house first appears in the assessment records
- iii) Consult other sources (Wellesley Townsman archives, maps, reliable genealogies, etc.) as cross-references

One complication of this method is that the assessment information is not as of January 1st or December 31st of a given year. Rather, it is as of May 1st (prior to and including 1910) and April 1st (after 1910). A house therefore could have been constructed in the summer or fall, but would not appear in the Annual Town Reports until the following year. In the absence of additional information regarding the construction of the house, we adopt a conservative approach and use the latter year.

The WHC interprets the year of construction as the year initial construction was completed. Subsequent modifications, though often of historical interest, are not indicated on the plaque.

The date determined by the WHC may be different from the so-called 'public record' date that appears within the Town Assessor's records as well as on real estate listing sheets. The public record dates are frequently estimates, and are therefore often inconsistent with the historical record.

Please contact Joshua Dorin of the WHC at plaques@wellesleyhistoricalcommission.org if you have any additional information regarding the year of construction of your house or have any questions regarding the WHC plaque program.

How to Order a Plaque

The cost of each plaque is \$25 (excluding installation fees). If you approve of the year of construction determined by the WHC, please send i) a \$25 check **payable to the Wellesley Historical Commission** and ii) a signed copy of the order form to:

WHC Plaque Program
c/o Joshua Dorin
22 Standish Road
Wellesley, MA 02481

Production of the plaques should take six to eight weeks. The WHC will contact you to arrange to install or drop off the plaque depending on your preference. An additional \$25 fee will be charged should you opt for the installation of the plaque by the WHC. This additional fee is to be paid at the time of installation.

The only condition regarding the placement of the plaque is that it must be visible from a public way (if possible).

