

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

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Photograph



Locus Map



Recorded by: Joshua Dorin

Organization: Wellesley Historical Commission

Date (month / year): August 2014

Town/City: Wellesley

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

Address: 28 Cameron Street

Historic Name: Hunnewell Elementary School

Uses: Present: Elementary School (K-5)

Original: Elementary School (K-6)

Date of Construction: 1937-38

Source: Wellesley Townsman

Style/Form: Colonial Revival

Architect/Builder:

1938 Building:

(architect) J. Williams Beal and Sons

(builder) Klayman Construction Company

1957 Addition:

(architect) Bastille Halsey Associates

(builder) Whalen & Dumais

Exterior Material (of 1938 schoolhouse):

Foundation: Concrete (with brick veneer)

Wall/Trim: Water-struck brick

Roof: Asphalt Shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

None

Major Alterations (with dates):

Additions in 1956-57 and 1995 (see below)

Condition: Good

Moved: no |x| **yes** | | **Date:**

Acreage: 242,451 sq. ft. (5.57 acres)

Setting: Located on the eastern side of Cameron Street approximately 650 feet south of Washington Street

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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.

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.

The original portion of the Hunnewell Elementary School was constructed in 1937-38 and consists of a one-story 'U-shaped' brick structure of Colonial Revival style. Its general design was intended to complement the residential development that occurred in Wellesley during the 1920s and 1930s (as were the other six elementary schools constructed in the town between 1923 and 1935: Hardy, Kingsbury, Sprague, Brown, Perrin, and Warren).

Near the southwestern end of the original school building is the former main entrance, which consists of a single door (non-original) set within a large portico. The portico itself is composed of four square wooden columns of the Roman Doric order on which a full entablature and large broken triangular pediment rest. Other notable features of the portico include square dentil molding on the horizontal and raking cornices of the pediment, as well as four square pilasters attached to the façade of the schoolhouse at the rear of the portico.

To the left (northwest) of the original main entrance is a large gymnasium with several unique architectural features, including an oculus window at its gable end and six large segmental arched windows (three each on the western and eastern façades) topped with through-cornice parapet gables, which are each capped with limestone scrolls and lateral copper flashing.

On the opposite (southwest) side of the original main entrance is original kindergarten entrance, which consists of a single arched door (original) set within a detailed limestone frame. Adjacent to this entrance is another oculus window. (The incorporation of such windows in the elementary school may not be unrelated to their prevalence within the 1938 Wellesley High School building, whose design was completed prior to that of the Hunnewell School.)

The crowning feature of the Hunnewell School is an octagonal wooden cupola that rests on a square wooden platform atop the gabled roof in line with the main entrance. It is topped with an octagonal metal dome and a weathervane.

When the Hunnewell School first opened, it consisted of six classrooms (one each for grades 1 thru 6) as well as a kindergarten classroom that was entirely separate from the rest of the school. The configuration and use of this interior space has not changed significantly. Furthermore, much of the original woodwork and detailing also remains largely intact. (See photos below.)

There is no basement in the 1938 building with the exception of a small boiler room where the rear wing meets the main section of the original schoolhouse. An unfinished attic is also accessible from this location.

In 1956-57, an additional six classrooms were constructed to the northeast of the original schoolhouse and connected to it by a narrow wing housing the principal's office, a teachers' room, and the nurse's office. At that time, a second kindergarten classroom was built at the southwestern end of the original schoolhouse adjacent to the other kindergarten.

Three more classrooms and a library were added in 1995 at the western end of the 1957 wing. Around that same time, two "temporary" modular classrooms were constructed at the southeastern end of the original 1938 building and remain in use two decades later.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--

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.

Built in 1938, the Hunnewell Elementary School on Cameron Street is the third schoolhouse of that name to have stood in Wellesley. It is the only one of those, however, located on that site. The original Hunnewell School was constructed sixty-eight years earlier, in 1870, on the triangular parcel of land bounded by Central Street, Weston Road, and Cross Street that had served as the school grounds for the 'West' school district of Needham (which included the entire western half of what is now Wellesley) since around 1840.

This 1870 schoolhouse took its name from Horatio Hollis Hunnewell (1810-1902), Wellesley's main benefactor who, along with several other prominent citizens, had given \$10,000 to aid in the construction of two new schoolhouses in the villages of Wellesley and Grantville (now Wellesley Square and Wellesley Hills, respectively).

This three-story school building, which housed both the primary and grammar levels for the West district and the high school for all of what would become Wellesley, was occupied until 1892 when the second Hunnewell School was constructed on the same grounds. At that time, the first Hunnewell School was moved to the edge of the Wellesley College campus at the southwest corner of Central Street and Weston Road, converted into a dormitory, and renamed Fiske Cottage. This was done in honor of Charlotte Matilda (Morse) Fiske, the widow of Joseph Norton Fiske, a wealthy Boston banker, and a close friend of Pauline Durant, the widow of the College's founder, Henry Fowle Durant, who had provided a generous donation so that the College could acquire the former schoolhouse. (This building, now known as Fiske House, is still used by the College.)

By the 1920s, the second Hunnewell School – which only housed the primary and grammar grades – was no longer conducive for educational purposes. Central Street, which had been a relatively quiet residential roadway when this schoolhouse was constructed, was now the site of a bustling shopping district and was one of Wellesley's most congested roadways. This area was just too noisy and dangerous. In addition, the wooden building was woefully outdated and was a serious fire-hazard.

But the safety of schoolchildren was actually a secondary concern to the severe overcrowding within the classrooms of Hunnewell School. In fact, Town officials had been calling for a larger schoolhouse as early as 1919, but due to the drastic increase in the student population throughout Wellesley (which led to the construction of Hardy, Kingsbury, Sprague, Brown, Perrin, and Warren Elementary Schools between 1923 and 1935), replacing the Hunnewell School with a new schoolhouse had to wait.

The first specific plans to construct a new Hunnewell School were raised in 1935, when a Boston University Professor, Herbert C. Blair, published a scathing report on the state and condition of Wellesley's school buildings. The Town immediately responded to Blair's criticisms of the Hunnewell School at the 1935 Annual Town Meeting by voting to form a Committee on School Site to determine a new site for the Hunnewell School. There was, however, only one suitable option given that the area around Wellesley Square was almost entirely developed by that point in time: the former Simons Estate, a large tract of land bounded by Washington Street, Cameron Street, Brook Street, and Fuller Brook Park.

(Eleven years earlier, in 1924, the Town had purchased this property following the death of the widow of Stephen Blanchard Simons. The townspeople, however, were unable to decide how to use it. Instead, they boarded up the mansion, which sat on the current site of the rear parking lot of the Wellesley Free Library, and let the entire property fall into disrepair with the exception of a large barn that the Parks Department used to store its trucks and snow removal equipment. Despite the abandoned mansion serving as an eyesore in the heart of Wellesley, it was not torn down until 1946.)

It was at the southwestern end of this property that the Committee on School Site recommended carving out a small section for the site of the third Hunnewell School. The Town responded at the Annual Town Meeting in March 1937 by appropriating \$125,000 for the construction of this new schoolhouse and forming a building committee consisting of W. Warren Jump, Carl E. Anderson, Louis Harvey, Edward T. Kilmain, and Paul W. Norton. Soon thereafter, this group commissioned the nationally renowned Boston architectural firm of J. Williams Beal and Sons – whose work includes at least five structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places – to design the new Hunnewell School.

Construction on the new elementary school began in July 1937 and was completed in May 1938.

Continuation sheet 2

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--

Unfortunately, Hunnewell School – like all the other elementary schools in Wellesley -- began suffering from overcrowding in the early 1950s. In fact, this problem became so severe that, for many years, entire classes were bused to the vacant Phillips Junior High School. Hunnewell, however, was relieved of this overcrowding in 1957 following the completion of a six-classroom addition as well as a new kindergarten, bringing the total numbers of classrooms to 14 – two each for grades K thru 6. (See Architectural Narrative.) But even this additional space did stave off overcrowding; Hunnewell School once again began busing some of its students to Phillips beginning in 1968.

Three decades later, in 1995, another increase in the student population led to the construction of three more classrooms and a library. Two (temporary) modular classrooms were also added during the mid-1990s. Both modular classrooms remain in use two decades later.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

- *Professional and Industrial History of Suffolk County, Massachusetts* by William Thomas Davis (1894)
- *Atlas of the Town of Wellesley, Massachusetts* by George W. Stadley & Co. (1897)
- *Boston Evening Transcript*: 10 February 1897
- *Life, Letters, and Diary of Horatio Hollis Hunnewell* (1906)
- *History of the Needham, Massachusetts: 1711-1911* by George Kuhn Clarke (1912)
- *Wellesley Townsman*: 19 December 1919; 10 December 1920; 16 March 1923; 27 June 1924; 1 February 1935; 29 November 1935; 28 February 1936; 26 March 1937; 9 April 1937; 23 July 1937; 27 May 1938; 3 June 1938; 2 September 1938; 6 April 1941; 24 January 1946; 12 September 1946; 2 September 1954; 15 November 1956; 26 September 1957; 29 August 1968
- *Report of the President, 1933-1934* by Wellesley College (1935)
- Online Database of the National Register of Historic Places [<http://www.nps.gov/nr/research>]
- Wellesley Annual Town Reports

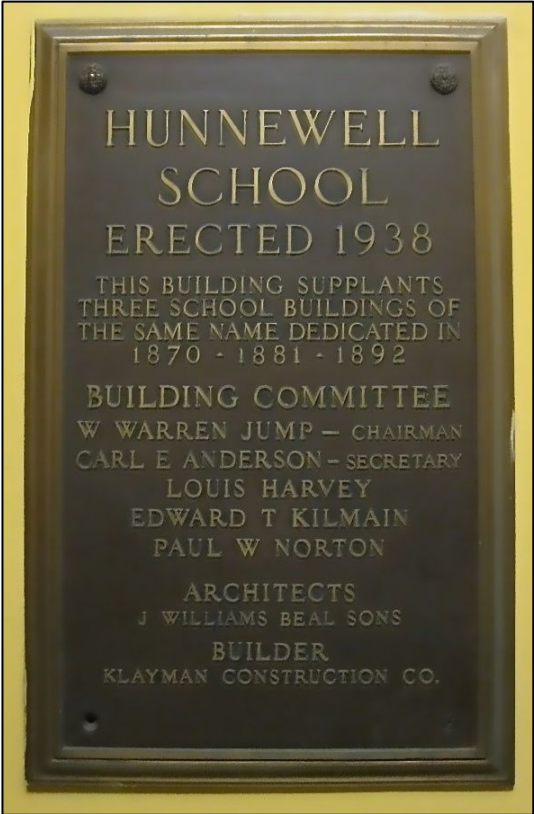
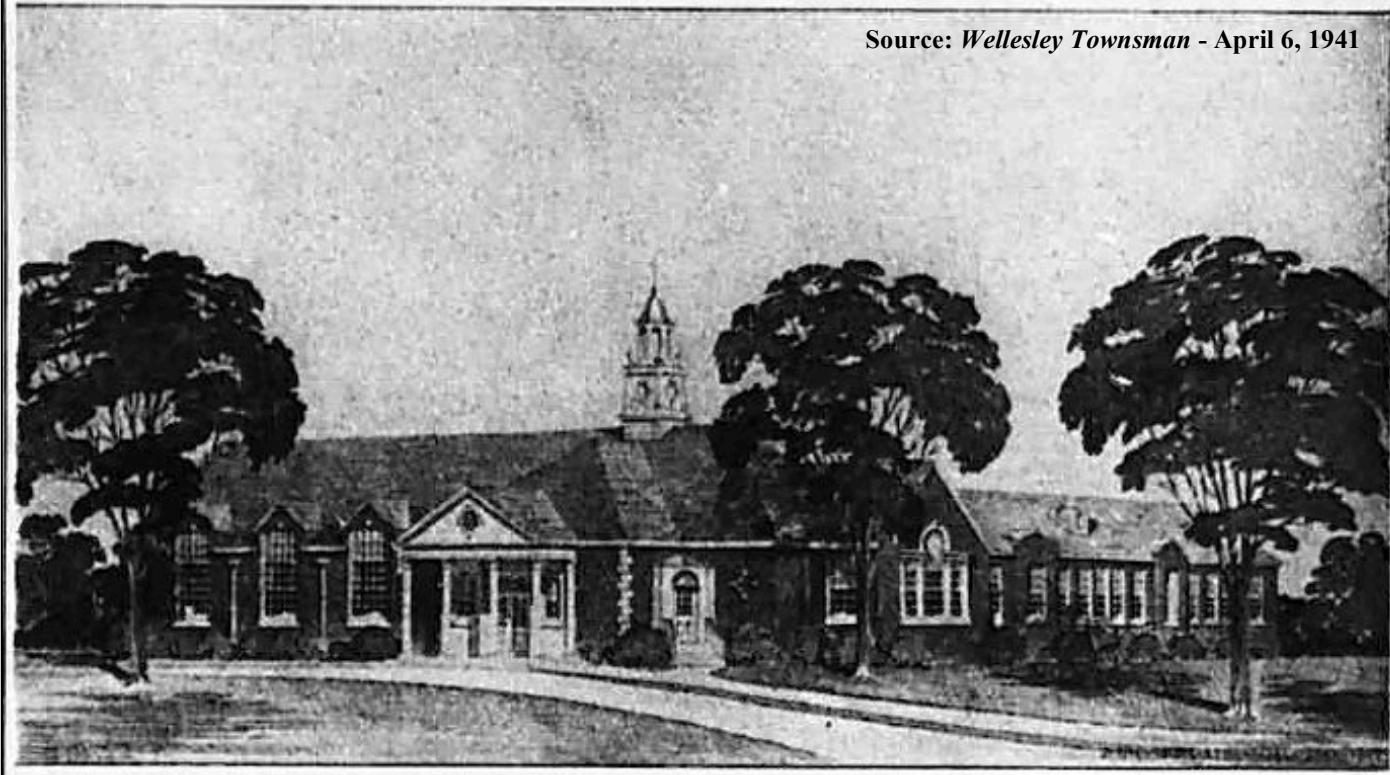
INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



Plaque (with typo – the 1938 Hunnewell School is the third, not the fourth, schoolhouse of the same name)

Original main entrance

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



Gymnasium
(north of original
main entrance)



INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



Original kindergarten entrance in 1938 building



Southern façade of original 1938 kindergarten classroom
(1957 kindergarten addition is visible to the left)



Rear of school showing 1938 building and mid-1990s modular classrooms
(1957 addition is visible at the far right)

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



(Top) Eastern end of 1957 addition

(Middle) Current main entrance where 1957 addition meets 1938 building

(Bottom) Northern side of 1957 addition



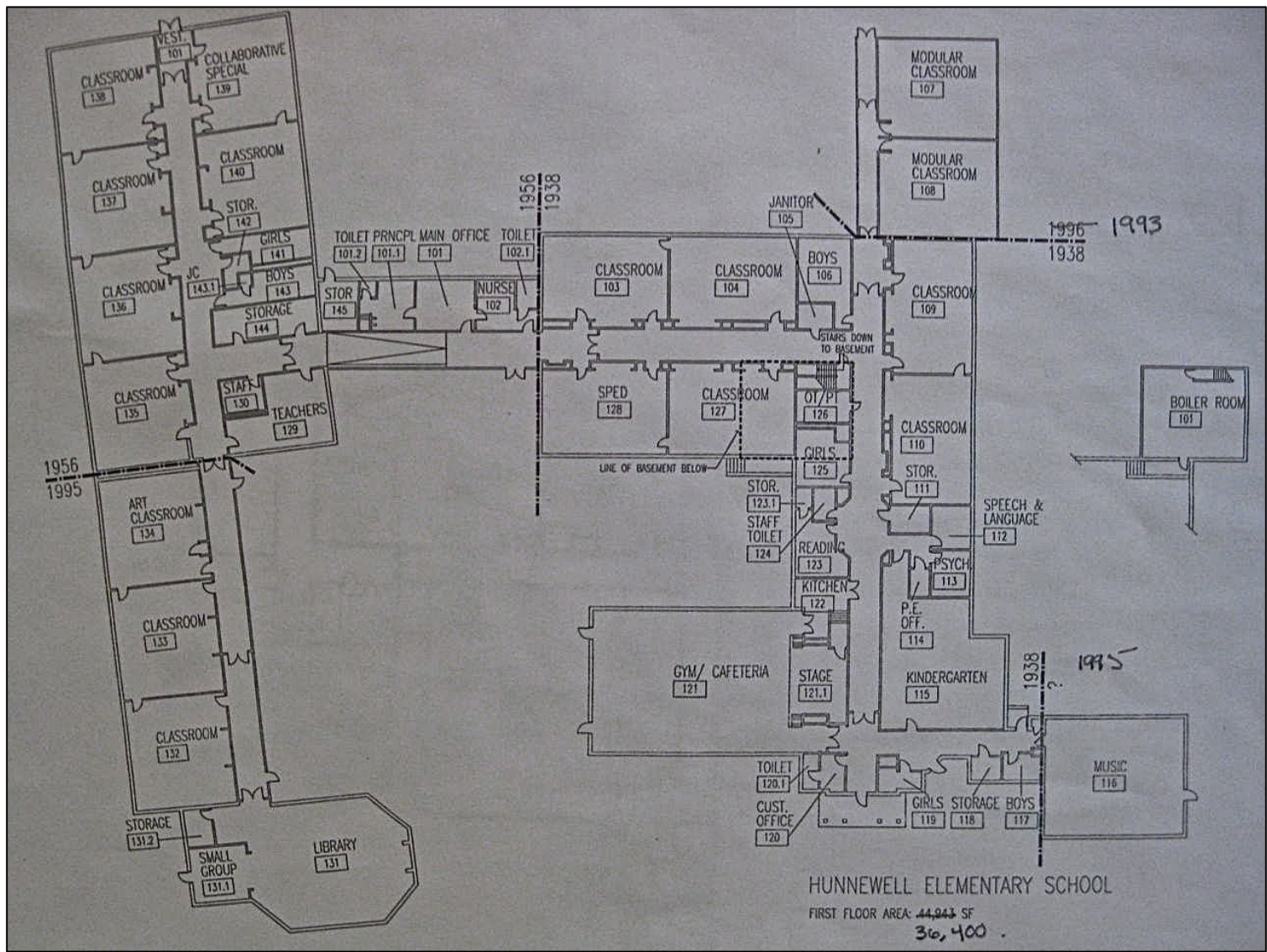
INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s)

Form No.



Floorplan of Hunnewell Elementary School in 2014
(Note that several of the dates shown are incorrect.)

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



Main corridor of 1938 building
looking towards original main entrance



Rear part of main corridor of 1938 building
viewed from inside current main entrance

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

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Original woodwork within 1938 building (clockwise from top left): window in kindergarten classroom, interior windows in main corridor, kindergarten entrance, and stage in gymnasium

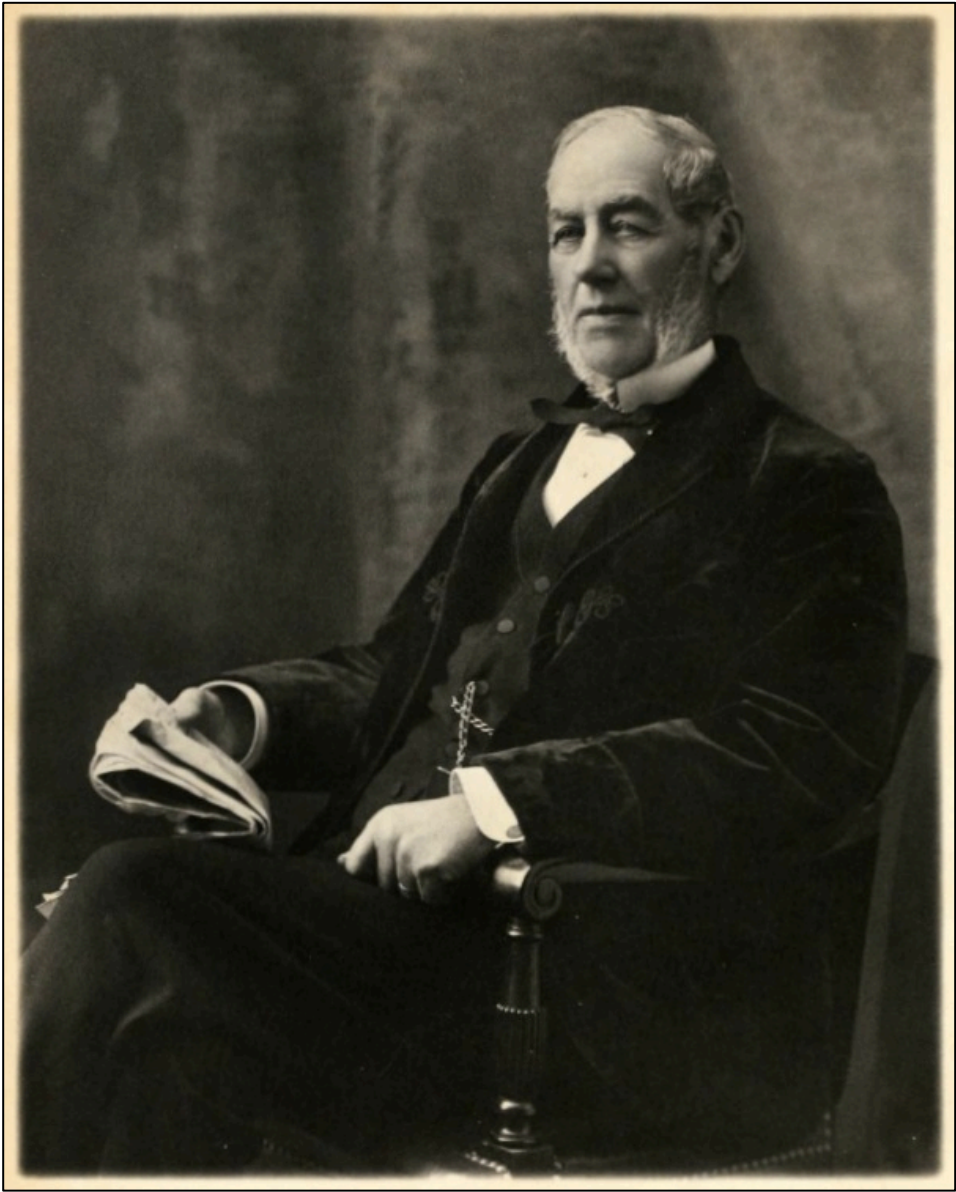
INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

TOWN Wellesley ADDRESS 28 Cameron Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

--	--



Horatio Hollis Hunnewell (1810 – 1902)
Source: Life, Letters, and Diary of Horatio Hollis Hunnewell (1906)