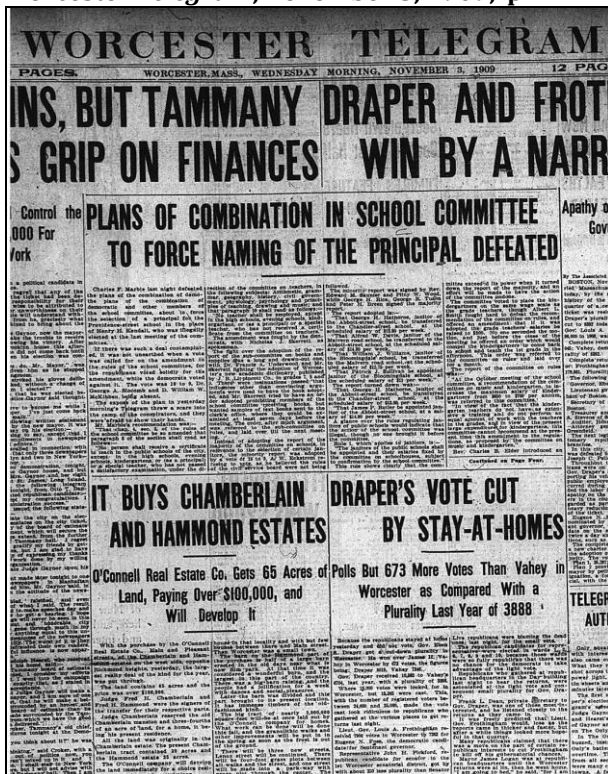


Introduction

The Announcement

In 1909, the sale of two adjacent farms on the suburbanizing west side of Worcester for residential development was front page news, even on a day focused on election coverage. Sandwiched between stories of elections in Boston and New York, the *Worcester Telegram* featured the purchase of the Chamberlain and Hammond farms on Pleasant Street, totaling 65 acres, by the O'Connell Real Estate Company in a two-column spread above the fold.

Worcester Telegram, November 3, 1909, p.1



Courtesy of Worcester Public Library

The text of the *Telegram* article, transcribed below (next page), begins this story of the development and evolution of Lenox, just as it signified the launch of the dramatic new residential development itself a little over a hundred years ago.

The writer looked back at the land over time - at its use as the home and farm of six generations of a family, descendants of early settlers of the town - but also forward to the dramatic plans for the area being revealed by the details of the land sale.

Although the story's prominent place in the day's news may have reflected the *Telegram's* belief in the importance of the planned development, it is also safe to assume that the O'Connell Real Estate Company had a lot to do with it. Soon thereafter began a series of advertisements for Lenox in both daily newspapers, and in *Worcester Magazine*, the monthly publication of the Board of Trade. The June, 1910 issue featured Lenox as the cover story, and used as its cover the "bird's eye view" painting that is also used for the cover of this history of Lenox.

The O'Connell Real Estate Company initiated the Lenox project with an unprecedented marketing effort. They commissioned the birds-eye artwork for the cover, by Woodbury & Company of Worcester, the design of the pavilion at the bottom of the parkway by a local architect, and photographs of men working at the site which were used in various advertisements.

The *Telegram* article in November, and even more so the *Worcester Magazine* story in June, read like elaborately crafted advertisements for the development. The O'Connells appeared to be setting a new standard for real estate marketing in Worcester.

Worcester Daily Telegram, November 3, 1909 (transcription)

It Buys Chamberlain and Hammond Estates O'Connell Real Estate Co. Gets 65 Acres of Land, Paying Over \$100,000, and Will Develop It

With the purchase by the O'Connell Real Estate Co., Main and Pleasant streets, of the Chamberlain and Hammond estates on the west side, opposite Richmond heights, yesterday, the largest realty deal of the kind for the year was put through.

The land contains 65 acres and the price was over \$100,000.

Judge Fred H. Chamberlain and Fred H. Hammond were the signers of the transfer for their respective parts.

Judge Chamberlain reserved the old Chamberlain mansion and three-fourths of an acre of land for a home, it being his present residence.

All the land was originally in the Chamberlain estate. The present Chamberlain tract contained 30 acres and the Hammond estate 35 acres.

The O'Connell company will develop the land immediately for a choice residential section with restrictions.

The land is situated on the south side of Pleasant street, and opposite Richmond heights, which was originally in the Chamberlain farm, and was sold to Willard Richmond many years ago.

The Chamberlain estate has been in the hands of the family over 200 years, being originally settled upon by Andrew McFarland, a great-grandfather of Judge Chamberlain's mother.

The present Chamberlain mansion, reserved by Judge Chamberlain, is between 175 and 200 years old, and at the time it was built was the only house in that locality and with but few houses between there and Main street. Then Worcester was a small town.

The barn on the Hammond part of the purchase is half of a large barn erected in the old days near what is now Elm park. At that time it was considered a wonderful barn, and the largest in this part of the country. There was a big barn raising, and the people had a jollification for a week with dancing and social pleasures.

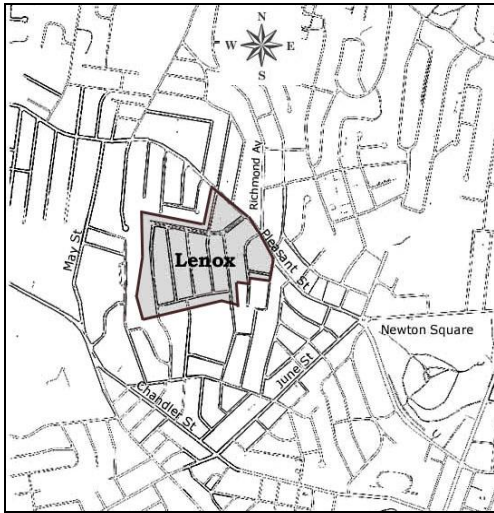
Later the barn was divided and this part brought to its present location. It has immense timbers of the old-fashioned kind.

The big tract of nearly 3,000,000 square feet will be at once laid out by the O'Connell company for homes. What work can be done will be done this fall, and the granolithic walks and other improvements will be put in the spring as soon as the frost is out of the ground.

There will be three new streets. Lenox street will be continued. There will be four-foot grass plots between all walks and the street, and one street will be made into a park-way with grass plot through the center. The land will be graded according to profile to be estimated by the city engineer's office.

The grass plots will be laid out in shrubbery and trees. All houses will be built 30 feet from the street, no house for more than two families, and all the other usual residence restrictions will be imposed. No three-deckers will be allowed.

The preliminary work will be started at once. On the tract is a large gravel knoll that the city once tried to buy, and which will materially aid in the development of the tract at less cost.



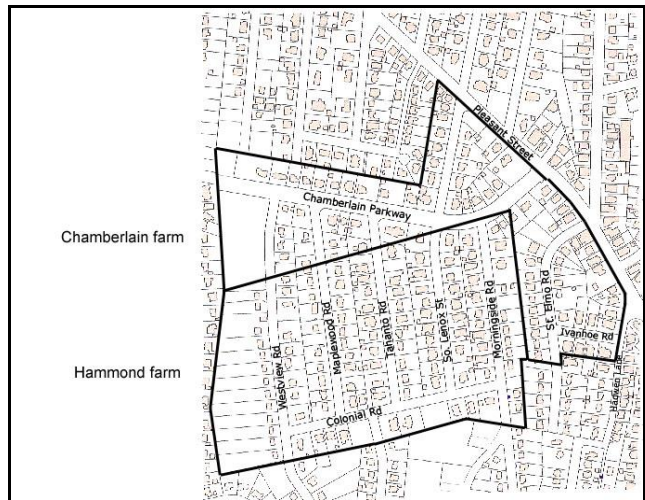
The name *Lenox* was not used in the *Telegram* article, which suggests that the final decision regarding the name had not yet been made. There was already a street called *Lenox*, on the other side of Pleasant Street in Richmond Heights, and the plan called for that street to extend into the new development as *South Lenox Street*.

In terms of today's streets, the 65-acre tract began at the intersection of Hadwen Lane and Pleasant Street, then, moving clockwise, ran south along Hadwen and zig-zagged along a path south of Colonial Road to the backyard lines between Westview and South Flagg Streets, then northerly to Chamberlain Parkway, easterly along the parkway, then out South Lenox to Pleasant Street and back to Hadwen Lane.

The site consisted of a hill with steep slopes on three sides, rising about 200 feet from its lowest elevation at Hadwen and Pleasant to a little over 730 feet at its peak. The slopes were steep enough on the western and eastern sides to present a stiff challenge to the site designer, and probably limit development in those areas. The easterly slope presented a mid-level tier wide enough for a street and hillside development between the upper and a lower slope, where Saint Elmo Road would be sited. There were clumps of trees in a few locations and an orchard along the easterly slope, near today's Morningside Road, but the hill was mostly bald, in agricultural use. The farm was described in Nutt's history of Worcester as "hay fields and orchards."¹

Judge Chamberlain and his brother and two sisters owned about thirty acres, a little less than half of the tract, and their land had frontage along Pleasant Street from Hadwen Lane to what would become South Lenox Street, a distance of about a quarter of a mile. The Hammond portion of the tract, nearly 36 acres, was more or less rectangular in shape, ranging across the top of the hill. It ran from the steep slope on the easterly side to the steep slope at the western end of the property, and had no

Approximate Boundaries of Chamberlain and Hammond Farms



This map was made by superimposing an outline of the two parcels taken from the 1896 Atlas of Worcester, on a map made in the 1970s. It should be taken as generally indicative, rather than perfectly accurate, in its depiction of the locations of the two farms. (A few buildings constructed in recent decades do not appear, but this is unimportant for the intended purpose.)

¹ First quote by Charles Nutt, p.144. A topographical map of the site showing two-foot contours, from an outdated version of the City of Worcester's Geographic Information System, is available in the Image Catalog (item no. 2).

street frontage. Access to the property had been secured by a right of passage deeded in perpetuity by the parents of Judge Chamberlain in the 1860s.² Valuations placed on the properties by the city for tax purposes reflected the difference street frontage can make. In 1910, the Hammond property was valued at \$5,300, or about \$150 per acre. The Chamberlain property, slightly smaller in land area but with frontage on Pleasant Street, was valued at \$15,000, or \$500 per acre, more than three times the square foot rate of the Hammond land.³

The O'Connell Real Estate Company was a partnership of brothers Cornelius and Thomas E. O'Connell. Sons of Irish immigrants in Lewiston, Maine, the brothers had moved with their families to Massachusetts in the early 1900s, settling in or near Boston. Cornelius, the older of the two by nine years, moved with his wife Philomene and their six children, ages twenty-one through seven,⁴ to Watertown. Already having experience in real estate, he opened an office in Boston. Thomas, who had served as City Clerk in Lewiston for a few years, came with his wife Margaret and their six children and worked with his brother, beginning what would become his life's profession. In 1907, Thomas and his family came to Worcester, and the brothers opened a second office of the O'Connell Real Estate Company at 2 Pleasant Street, a prime location downtown.

Lenox was to be their third residential development project in Worcester. In 1905 they had launched a 170-lot development off Belmont Street, known then (if no longer) as *Lakemont*, consisting of Caroline and Gates Avenues, and Frank, Dustin, Rena, and Wigwam Streets. In 1908 the brothers followed with the *Hillside* development, consisting of approximately 175 lots in the hilly terrain off the north side of Pleasant Street between Moreland and Flagg Streets. In both of these developments, sales of lots and construction of houses were proceeding, with neither project yet nearing completion, when the announcement of Lenox was made late in 1909.

The O'Connell brothers were making strong moves in rapid succession, newcomers asserting themselves as major players in the city's rapid expansion outward into the remaining agricultural lands within its borders. They apparently were also making a good impression in the eyes of the elite of the city. An article in a Worcester newspaper in March, probably reflecting points suggested by the O'Connells, if not using their exact prose, said that Judge Chamberlain had been reluctant to sell but had been persuaded to do so by his agreement with the O'Connells' aims and objectives for the development.⁵

Many overtures had been made to Judge Chamberlain to name his price on the property, but on account of his personal desire that the refined character of this West side neighborhood should be permanent, these opportunities to sell were not entertained. The O'Connell Company succeeded in its efforts to acquire this large tract of land because the former owners were satisfied that the purchasers were a strong, progressive, local concern, ed [illegible] with the city's best real estate interests. Their decision was further influenced by the fact that the O'Connell Real Estate Company's policy and purposes are radically different from those of the ordinary real estate operators who take no civic pride in their properties and whose cheap and usually sensational methods attract a questionable class of purchasers who buy and build

² Registry of Deeds, Book 759, Page 357, Feb-19-1867, rec. Feb-05-1868.

³ Worcester House Directory, Real Estate Record, 1910. Building values are not included in either case.

⁴ U. S. Census of 1910, Watertown, Ma.

⁵ Printed copy failed to identify which newspaper, and only the month and year were given (March, 1910). A search for the article in the newspaper microfilm collection of the Worcester Public Library proved unsuccessful.

without restrictions, thus changing the character of a neighborhood and depreciating the value of adjoining property.

This suggests the important relationship a public spirited and enterprising real estate concern holds to the city's growth and attractiveness.

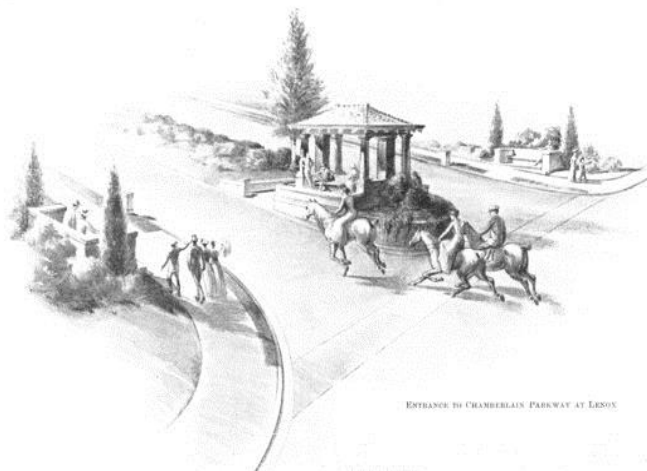
The O'Connells' development plans which had convinced Judge Chamberlain were outlined in the same newspaper article but they were described in greater detail in the *Worcester Magazine* cover story in the June issue.

That the O'Connell Real Estate Company have appreciated their opportunity at "Lenox" is shown by the character and scope of the improvements included in their plans, which will necessitate the expenditure of over sixty thousand dollars. They will undertake to make the Chamberlain parkway one of the finest thoroughfares in Worcester. In the centre of this parkway, which will be eighty feet wide when completed, will be grass plots twenty feet in width, set with shade trees, shrubs and flowers. Then on each side comes a drive twenty feet in width and then a granolithic walk, also five feet wide. All the other streets will be fifty feet wide, with grass plots between the granolithic walks and gutters. All these streets enter the parkway.

The contract for the granolithic work alone calls for an expenditure of over thirty thousand dollars.... Other development work includes all the city conveniences, water, sewers, gas and electric lights. The lots are of large size and are sold under sufficient restriction to insure the best class of dwellings.

An illustration, also provided by the O'Connells, deployed a bit of Victorian imagery in its description of "the attractive entrance to Chamberlain parkway," another clever piece in their marketing scheme.

Accompanying this article is an illustration showing the attractive entrance to Chamberlain parkway, designed by a Worcester architect, Mr. Charles H. Lincoln. In the centre of this parkway will be a shelter of cement construction with a "rough cast" exterior. The roof will be of cypress rafters, finished to antique stain, and the covering will be of red mission tile. With comfortable cement seats on each side and a background of trees and shrubs to complete the effectiveness of the artistic scheme, this gateway will be a revelation of the modern treatment of the approach to homes of refinement, being, as it is, the first of its kind in Worcester.



From *The Worcester Magazine Illustrated*, June, 1910, p. 178

As if there hadn't already been an impressive enough marketing of Lenox in the press, in ads, and in the *Worcester Magazine* story, the O'Connells found yet another way to put the name Lenox in front of the public. The location of their office in the Rogers building enabled them to post a sign overlooking one of the busiest intersections in downtown Worcester – Main Street where Pleasant and Front Streets cross. This photograph, taken in 1910, shows the prominence of the name *Lenox*, as well as the O'Connell Real Estate Company.



From the collections of Worcester Historical Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts

Main Street at Pleasant and Front Streets, 1910



detail of full image (left)

From the E. B. Luce Collection, Worcester Historical Museum
 This image is also the wallpaper in the lobby of the Museum on Elm Street (as of 2015).

As was noted in the *Telegram* article, Probate Judge Frederick H. Chamberlain and his siblings were descendants on their mother's side of the original settlers of the land. They were the sixth generation in the line descended from Andrew McFarland and his wife Rebecca, who settled there about 1729. The McFarland-Chamberlain family, and their farm are the subjects of Part One. The house on the property was described in the *Telegram* article as a "mansion," between 175 and 200 years old at the time of the sale. While the term *mansion* might have been a bit of an exaggeration, at least the site of the present house, probably its foundation, and possibly a portion of the house, likely dates to the McFarlands' settlement on the land about 1729. Part One also includes an account of the circumstances by which the Hammond family came to own a 36-acre section of the land which had originally been part of the McFarland property.

Part Two outlines the urban growth and development of Worcester's west side during the period preceding the creation of Lenox. It is essentially the story of the making of the Newton Square area, which took place almost entirely by the conversion of the agricultural land of a single owner between

about 1870 and 1910. The significance of the urbanization of this area is that it established the parameters of the likely course of development in the area of the Chamberlain and Hammond farms, and beyond there extending to Tatnuck village. In effect, it initiated and set the tone and style for the urban transformation that was to yield the neighborhood of Lenox.

The next three parts tell the story of Lenox itself: first, Chapter 3, as a land development enterprise – a business venture - of the O’Connell Real Estate Company; then in Chapter 4 as a young neighborhood becoming what it was to become in fact, as opposed to what had been planned and intended for it; and finally, in Chapter 5, as a mature neighborhood enduring the hard times of the Depression and World War II, and realizing a mild resurgence of growth in the post-war years.

The study ends in the 1960s as Lenox crosses the fifty-year threshold, marking the half-way point of its first century as one of Worcester’s distinguished residential neighborhoods.

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