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LENOX

**Going its Own Way
The Young Neighborhood in a Volatile Housing Market
Phase Two, 1917-1929**



Newton Square and Lenox from Newton Hill, 1916

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The land of the McFarlands, Hammonds, and Chamberlains, once having exceeded a hundred acres, in agricultural use for nearly two centuries, was by the middle of the second decade of the 20th century well on its way to be becoming a modern urban neighborhood. By the end of 1915 some 92 houses were standing or still under construction, including the renovated former Hammond house on Morningside Road and the old McFarland-Chamberlain farmhouse, which had also been modernized for contemporary urban living, and which now bore the address 830 Pleasant Street. In its May, 1916 issue, *Worcester Magazine*, always supportive, called Lenox “the masterpiece in real estate development” and proclaimed its success “monumental.”

There were, however, indications that all might not be quite so rosy in the heralded new residential district. The number of building permits issued by the city for new home construction in Lenox, which had reached a high of thirty in 1913, fell sharply to only three in 1916, the year of the *Worcester Magazine* tribute, and in 1917 there were none. Only a single permit was issued each year in 1918, 1919, and 1920, such that by 1920 only three houses had been built in Lenox over a span of four years.¹ Thus, new home construction had come nearly to a halt in the development, and the brakes had been applied in 1916, the very year the grand success of Lenox had been proclaimed in the Board of Trade publication.

Home construction also slowed elsewhere in the city during this period, but not nearly as severely as it did in Lenox. Citywide, permits for construction of new single- or two-family dwell-

Average yearly building permits issued for single and two-family house construction

	Citywide	Lenox
1911-1915	363	18
1917-1919*	266	0.67

* Citywide data not available for 1916 or 1920

ings, the housing types most relevant to Lenox, declined by 27 percent between the first half of the decade and the second, compared with a 96 percent drop in Lenox. Regarding the citywide decline, there are several possible factors. One is that supply may have gotten ahead of demand, leading to a slowdown in new housing construction to give demand time to catch up. Between 1910 and 1915, new home construction had outpaced population

growth by a considerable margin: an 18 percent gain in residential dwellings compared with an 11.4 percent increase in the population. During the second half of the decade, the city’s population

¹ The three were 38 Chamberlain Parkway in 1918; 45 South Lenox in 1919; and 34 South Lenox in 1920. Aside from new home construction, other building permits were issued for the area, mainly for garages to accommodate the rapidly growing number of automobiles, or for alterations and additions to existing homes, many of them for “sleeping porches,” a popular trend of the day involving enclosed rooms with windows on three sides to provide cross-ventilation on hot summer nights before air conditioning.

and its stock of housing grew at about the same pace, just over ten percent, which, by current standards was very rapid.²

Other factors possibly causing the citywide decline in housing construction include the nation's entry into the World War late in 1917, the severe round of inflation which occurred between 1915 and 1920, and the influenza epidemic of 1918. As to the war in Europe, 1918, the year following U.S. entry and the year of greatest burden was by far the slowest of the period in local housing construction.³ It seems likely that some families would have put off building and moving until the war ended and the men and women who served had returned safely. The same case can be made for the influenza epidemic of 1918, which struck Worcester in September and continued into 1919, leaving more than 900 dead, and some 7,000 cases recorded by the Department of Public Health.⁴ Some families that had been thinking of purchasing a new home might have put off such matters in response to illness or death of one or more family members from the flu.

As for inflation, consumer price data from *MeasuringWorth.com* show that prices rose only 5.7% between 1910 and 1915, barely one percent per year, but in 1916 surged by 9.2 percent, then increased between eleven and twenty-one percent each of the next four years, with the result that prices more than doubled between 1915 and 1920.⁵ The inflation of 1916-20 was the worst since a three-year spike in prices during the Civil War, and undoubtedly caused numerous and serious dislocations in the economy in Worcester and elsewhere.⁶ It seems safe to assume that under such circumstances some potential buyers of new homes would have decided to wait to see what would happen next and to determine whether their personal finances would still be able to handle the investment required

These circumstances of the times may say something about the general slowdown in local housing construction, and this brief review is intended to help frame the context of the early years of the Lenox development, but such factors can not explain the near halt that occurred in Lenox. Here, the slowdown looked more like a cliff than a downhill slide. Property owners found

² Housing stock data are from the "Wealth of Worcester" page in annual editions of the City Directory. By *dwelling*s was meant buildings containing one or more habitable units of housing. Thus, a three-decker counted as one dwelling, as did a single-family house. Changes from year to year amounted to the *net* increase or decrease in dwellings, comprised of the difference between additions resulting from construction and subtractions arising from demolition, whether resulting from fire, dilapidation, or simply standing in the way when the land was needed for an alternate use, such as new roads, schools, playgrounds, or other public buildings or spaces. Measured by the count of dwellings, regardless of units, growth of the city's supply of housing slowed during the second half of the decade to a net gain of 1,701, an increase of about 10.3 percent, or about the same as the population gain.

³ Another possible reason was the influenza epidemic of 1918, which struck Worcester in September and ran well into 1919. A total of 923 deaths resulted from more than 7000 cases recorded by the City Department of Public Health between October, 1918, when flu records began being kept, and March 31, 1919 (City Documents, Reports of the Department of Public Health, 1918 and 1919). It is not hard to imagine that some families considering a new home might have put off such matters in response to illness or death of one or more family members from the flu. Such conjecture is, of course, unmeasurable, as is true of the consequences of the war.

⁴ *City Documents*, 1918 and 1919.

⁵ Samuel H. Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar amount, 1774 to present," *Measuring Worth*, 2011. URL: www.measuringworth.com/UScompare/

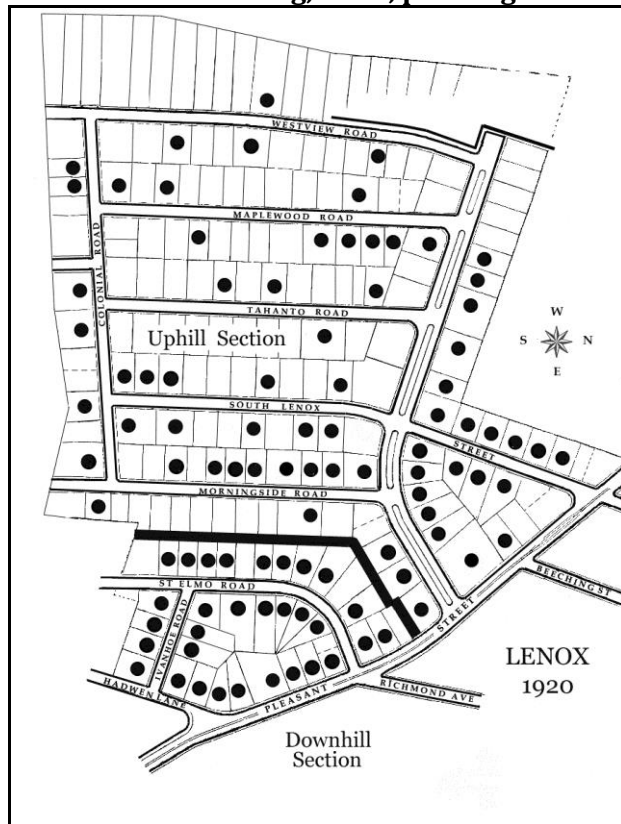
⁶ By comparison, the most rapid inflation over a five-year period in recent times was that of 1977-1982 when prices increased by about 60 percent (from *MeasuringWorth.com*).

themselves invested in a residential development that did not appear to be continuing to develop. By analogy, it was like being on a train which had slowed to a crawl well short of the station, with nothing more than rumor and speculation among the passengers as to why. Lenox was implicitly in a competition with other comparable housing developments that were then in progress in, or convenient to, the city, particularly on its west and north sides, and supply may have gotten ahead of demand, at least in the short run. The *Worcester Magazine* article in 1916, "The New Homes of Worcester," had listed and described nineteen developments planned or in progress, most of them in Worcester, a few in adjacent towns. Although Lenox had been described there as one of the most outstanding and successful of them, in reality the premier development of the O'Connell Real Estate Company was showing signs of weakness in the race to attract the limited number of upper-middle-income buyers seeking new homes.

By late 1920 a total of 98 houses dotted the landscape of Lenox, plus the residence of Judge Chamberlain and his sisters at 830 Pleasant Street. This was a bit less than half of the total number that eventually would stand (202). Some parts of the district were developing more rapidly than others. In the *downhill* section, consisting of the loop formed by St. Elmo, Ivanhoe, Hadwen Lane, and Pleasant Street below number 828, the completion ratio was 89 percent: 31 houses standing on 35 lots. Most of what was going to happen in this area had already happened. In the uphill section, on the other hand, the "build out" rate to date was only about 40 percent: 66 houses of an eventual total of 167.⁷

Thus, the development stall was concentrated in the uphill section, where the houses built thus far were considerably larger and more expensive than were those of the Saint Elmo area. Estimated building costs recorded on building permits show an average cost-to-build of single-family houses in the uphill section at \$6,359,

4.1 Houses Standing, 1920, per Bldg Permits



⁷ Including the substantially renovated house at 16 Morningside.

compared with \$4,700 in the downhill section.⁸ Moreover, the uphill section was far larger, encompassing more than 80 percent of the entire development.

This slow progress in the uphill section may have been seen as a sign that Lenox was not turning into quite the highly desirable and prestigious residential district that had been sought by the developer, by the civic boosters at the Board of Trade, or, perhaps most importantly, by the people who had bought lots, built homes, and moved into the neighborhood. Presumably, the new property owners had responded to the promise of Lenox of a modern new residential district of high value, quality, and prestige, as had been promoted so persuasively in the advertising and in the extensive and favorable press bestowed upon the development. By 1920 some might have been concerned that their expectations might not be realized.

By this time, and regardless of the appearance of a flagging development, the O'Connell Real Estate Company had shifted into the final phase of its Lenox operation, the end-game wherein the purpose was to get extricated financially and legally, taking whatever gains were to be made and moving on to other projects. Having sold most of the buildable lots, Thomas O'Connell had made most of the money that was to be made in Lenox and was turning his attentions increasingly to new development projects elsewhere in the city, notably the "Maplewood" development off Burncoat Street (another name lost to time) and a small, upscale project on the site of the former Highland Military Academy on Salisbury Street. This is not to say that O'Connell no longer cared about Lenox or the people residing there. To the contrary, if obituary notices are to be believed, he was recognized for his "old school" approach to the delivery of quality services with inordinate attention to the cares and concerns of his clients.⁹ But for him, Lenox was by this time mostly in the past. It was no longer a development in progress as much as it was a neighborhood that had not yet grown to full capacity.

Thomas and his sister-in-law, Philomene O'Connell, still maintained a substantial financial interest in Lenox, however. In 1920 they were charged on the books of the assessing department with 20.5 acres in Lenox, valued for tax purposes at \$20,500, or \$1,000 per acre. The resulting tax levy that year was \$545.31, at \$26.60 per thousand (city, county, and state shares combined).¹⁰ While not presenting an immediate crisis, these taxes, recurring annually, constituted a matter of some financial significance, a burden the O'Connells would want to find ways to abate as soon as possible. Very little of the land for which they were charged was in the form of buildable lots. Most of it consisted of the steep terrain along the downhill side of Westview Road and the end of Chamberlain Parkway, and the rights-of-way which had not yet become public ways, including the sidewalks and median strips, as well as the dirt roadways. As of 1920, only South Lenox Street and the lower portion of Chamberlain Parkway had been turned over to the city for paving and

⁸ The difference is greater if houses on Westview Road are excluded, where typically smaller and less costly than those found elsewhere on the hill. For the 53 single-family houses on the other streets of the uphill section the average cost was \$6,561; for the four on Westview by 1916 the average was \$3,675.

⁹ *Worcester Daily Telegram*, July 15, 1942; *Worcester Evening Gazette*, July 14, 1942, p.1.

¹⁰ Worcester House Directory, 1920, Real Estate Record. The tax bill was divided by the three taxing entities into \$466.58 to the city, \$22.76 to the county, and \$55.97 to the state. The valuation average of \$1,000 per acre was only a fraction of the going rate for buildable and service-ready lots. (As a share of the "consumer bundle," or the budget of the average household, this compares to more than \$14,000 in 2008.)

conversion to public ways.¹¹ The O'Connells needed to get the other streets converted to public ways as well, and the sooner the better, but the city could handle only so much of the workload of street construction each year so they had to wait their turns for each street.

Only a small number of buildable lots remained in the ownership of the O'Connells. The great majority of the house lots in Lenox that were still vacant were owned now by individual purchasers, about sixty of them, most of whom held only one lot in the development and resided elsewhere. Presumably, most of these owners intended – or once had intended - to build on their lots at some point in the future and had put the idea on hold during the building lull. Some of these owners may also have purchased on speculation, intending to sell their lots once prices had risen sufficiently. Actual price data are not available, but in view of the slow pace of development it seems safe to conclude that prices had not been rising, and more likely had fallen, at least in constant, or non-inflated, dollars. Among the exceptions to the norm of single-lot ownership was the Honorable Arthur P. Rugg, Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, and his wife, who owned five adjacent lots at the top of the hill on the east side of Tahanto Road. Another was John Legg, of 28 South Lenox Street, who owned a cluster of lots near the upper end of the Tahanto-Maplewood block, having frontage on both streets.

The deeds of transfer of ownership of lots in Lenox, which placed various restrictions on the building plans of the property owners, including those imposed on the O'Connells by the Chamberlain and Hammond transfers, contained no language requiring owners to build a home within any specified period of time. Such a proviso, usually invoking a one-year time limit, had been present in the deeds of conveyance written by John W. Wetherell when he sold lots along the streets running through his farm around Newton Square. The omission of such a stipulation may have made it easier for the O'Connells to sell the lots in Lenox, but it also may have made it easier for buyers to hesitate in uncertain times, and it clearly enabled speculators to buy-and-hold. When the general slowdown in housing construction occurred in the late 1910s, and when unknown factors converged to put greater pressure on Lenox than was the case throughout the city, there was nothing in the sales agreements to offset or mitigate the tendency. Whether such agreements would have been honored under the circumstances, or whether they could have been enforced, if necessary to try, is not clear. Such a provision in the deeds, however, might at least have exerted some pressure against the “wait-and-see” attitude when the situation arose.

A demographic perspective from the 1920 Census

By using the individual and household listings of the U.S. census of 1920, one can take a “virtual tour” of the resident population of an area such as Lenox at that point in time, which (month, 1920). Census entries provide the name, age, gender, and relationship of each person to the identified head of the household, as well as the occupation, student status, and state or country where each person was born, and the birthplace of, and primary language spoken by, each parent. The census of that year did not include data on household incomes, so the principal indicator of socio-economic status has to be the occupations of heads of household and, to a limited extent, other adults in the households. From the nationality data, supplemented by a look at surnames, families can be parsed into

¹¹ Worcester City Documents, annual reports of the Commissioner of Streets, 1918-1920.

groupings along ethnic or nationality lines, recognizing, of course, the approximate nature of such derivations.

A total of 89 households were identified as residents of Lenox in that census. The data therein describe a community of comparatively affluent households, consisting mostly of families, though far from uniformly “nuclear” in composition, and having wide variation in the ages of the adults, in numbers of children, and in the presence of parents or in-laws of the householders. Most of the householders, usually males, were engaged in occupations of generally middle to upper-middle status on the social and economic scale: entrepreneurs, business managers, and professionals, with a few others, such as salesmen. They were not, on the whole, the elite movers and shakers of the city, but they appeared to be clearly of its upper middle class.

As to nationality groupings, about two-thirds of the eighty-nine households can be classified as “Yankees,” defined as persons of apparently English surnames, most of them born in the United States (usually locally), with parents born in the U.S. or England. Second most prevalent were families of Irish origin, wherein either of the householders, or either or both of their parents, was born in Ireland. Fifteen families can be classified as Irish (or Irish-American), about 17 percent of the neighborhood. Families of Russian origin, all or virtually all of whom were Jewish, made up the third most prevalent group - eight families, about nine percent of the neighborhood. Other nationalities included two families each of Scottish, Swedish, and French-Canadian background. Based on surname estimates, the owners of lots that were still vacant appear to have been somewhat more Yankee than were the residents. Aside from a small number with Irish surnames, almost all of the owners listed in the 1920 House Directory had names of a distinctly “Anglo” nature.¹²

To the extent that Lenox was, or was perceived to be, a predominantly Yankee middle-class neighborhood, this might have contributed to the slowdown in its development in the late 1910s. Over the past quarter-century or so, the rapid growth of Worcester’s population had consisted largely of immigrants from places like Italy, Russia, Poland, Lithuania, and French-speaking Canada, as well as Syria, Armenia, and other lands far from Great Britain, both geographically and culturally. By the turn of the century, England, Ireland, and Scotland had become the sources of a much reduced share of the city’s newcomers. As Worcester’s middle class expanded in step with the overall growth of the city, its reservoir of English (or Scottish) stock was destined to approach its limits in due time. By 1920 the rising middle class was already becoming less English and more “other” than it had been in the past. Thus, if Lenox or other new developments on the city’s west side were perceived as “Yankee neighborhoods,” it may have been that they were threatened with lack of sufficient demand because there weren’t enough middle class Yankees to go around.

Construction Picks Up

By May, 1921, it had been nearly a year since the last building permit for new home construction in Lenox, and only three houses had been built there during the past five years. On

¹² Every third name from a list of about sixty owners of unbuilt lots, from the City Directory of 1920: Adams, Cooper, Gallagher, Kendall, Thompson, Russell, Wright, Hall, Campbell, Harris, Matthews, Sawyer, Doten, Janes, Lucke, Winslow, Legg, Pike, Davidson, and Kidder.

May 16, property owner Nellie J. McSweeney was granted a permit to have a home built in the newly popular Dutch Colonial style at 8 Maplewood Road. A week later, builder-reseller Francis J. Faucher took out permits to build nearly identical, houses at 40 and 42 Chamberlain Parkway, then in July secured another for 12 Tahanto Road, all three in the Dutch Colonial style. By the end of the “building year” (October-September), eight permits had been issued for new homes in Lenox, and it appeared that a second phase in the area’s development had begun. Another eight permits issued in building year 1922 kept the resurgence going, but in the following year only three were issued and the threat of another slowdown loomed. Citywide, no such slowdown was occurring, as will be seen. All twenty-two houses built in Lenox during this three-year period were located in the uphill

4.2 Building Permits for New Construction in Lenox, 1918–1923

Seq. No	Permit Date	Num.	Street	Owner	Builder	Type	Rptd Cost
	est. early						
96	1918	38	Chamberlain	unknown	Unknown	S	unknown
97	Jun-17-1919	45	South Lenox	Harry Posner	J. L. Hayward	2F	\$18,000
98	Jul-08-1920	34	South Lenox	Jacob Budish	Budish & Levy	S	\$12,000
99	May-16-1921	8	Maplewood	Nellie J. McSweeney	C. O'Sullivan	S	\$5,500
100	May-25-1921	40	Chamberlain	Francis J. Faucher	Francis J. Faucher	S	\$10,000
101	May-25-1921	42	Chamberlain	Francis J. Faucher	Francis J. Faucher	S	\$10,000
102	Jul-07-1921	12	Tahanto	Francis J. Faucher	Francis J. Faucher	S	\$10,000
103	Jul-25-1921	7	Morningside (#1)	Margaret E. Doon	John D. O'Brien	S	\$10,000
104	Aug-02-1921	20	Tahanto	Sarah E. Meiselman	Owner	S	\$8,000
105	Aug-26-1921	38	South Lenox	Eli Leavitt	Eli Leavitt	2F	\$10,000
106	Aug-29-1921	19	Tahanto	Berta Budush	Louis Budish	2F	\$9,000
107	Oct-08-1921	33	Westview	Merl F. Underwood	Owner	S	\$6,500
108	Oct-13-1921	30	Maplewood	Kelleher Bros Co.	Kelleher Bros Co.	S	\$5,500
109	Oct-18-1921	13	Westview	James J. Gallagher	James J. Gallagher	S	\$6,500
110	Oct-18-1921	15	Westview	James J. Gallagher	James J. Gallagher	S	\$6,500
111	Oct-27-1921	15	Tahanto	Samuel Waxler	Frank Lamson	2F	\$12,000
112	Dec-20-1921	1-3	Tahanto	Jacob Kreisfeld	Owner	2F	\$12,000
113	Mar-17-1922	51	South Lenox	Louis Budish	Louis Budish	S	\$8,500
114	Jun-07-1922	42	South Lenox	Eli Leavitt	Eli Leavitt	2F	\$12,000
115	Nov-08-1922	55	South Lenox	Adele Massad	Anthony Massad	2F	\$12,000
116	Dec-05-1922	24	Maplewood (#26)	Ernest Brockway	L. O. Irish	S	\$7,000
117	Jul-24-1923	25	Westview	Jennie G Hayward	Charles Hayward	S	\$3,000

* No building permit could be found for 38 Chamberlain Parkway. City and House Directories show it first occupied in 1919 by a family which was renting that year and in 1920, and owning it in 1922.

portion of the development, bringing the total standing there to eighty-eight, a little over half of the eventual total of 167 lots. Sixteen of the twenty-two were single-family homes, and six were in the

two-family format. Streets seeing the most development were Tahanto with six, South Lenox with five, and Westview with four new structures erected.

The slowdown of 1922-23 continued well into 1924. Not until August of that year did a nine-month hiatus in building permits for the area come to an end when George Gleason took one out to build 46 Chamberlain Parkway. Three more permits followed in September, then another thirteen in building year 1925, and seven more in 1926. In 1927 there were only two, and after that new house construction in Lenox once again came to a halt. The permit issued July 26, 1927 to Bertha Reiseroff to build at 26 St. Elmo Road was the first and only one during the 1920s for a new home in the downhill section, and it was the last permit issued for all of Lenox until 1930.

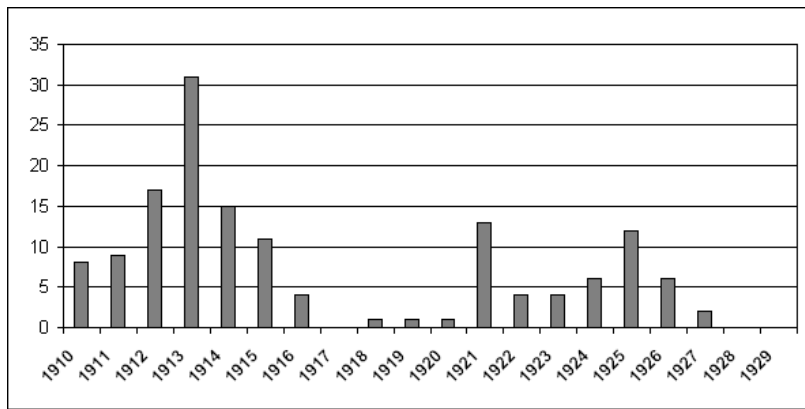
4.3 Building Permits for New Home Construction in Lenox, 1924-1927

Seq. No	Permit Date	Num.	Street	Owner	Builder	Type	Rptd Cost
118	Oct-01-1923	4	South Lenox (#2)	Louis J. Cartier	Bylund Bros.	S	\$7,000
119	Nov-15-1923	21	Tahanto	Alex Goldstein	Harry Woolhouse	S	\$10,000
120	Aug-15-1924	46	Chamberlain	George Gleason	L. O. Irish	S	\$8,000
121	Sep-19-1924	34	Morningside (#16*)	Aaron Laskoff	Philip Sokol	2F	\$12,000
122	Sep-19-1924	42	Morningside (#20)	Aaron Laskoff	Philip Sokol	2F	\$12,000
123	Sep-23-1924	30	South Lenox	Samuel Grace	Nathan Nore	S	\$20,000
124	Nov-28-1924	8	Tahanto	Anna Goland	Joseph Goland	2F	\$12,000
125	Nov-28-1924	10	Tahanto	Anna Goland	Joseph Goland	2F	\$12,000
126	Unk-1925	31	Maplewood	Harry Coonen	Harry Coonen	S	unknown
127	Apr-14-1925	43	South Lenox	Anna Goland	Joseph Goland	2F	\$16,000
128	Apr-14-1925	54	South Lenox	Anna Goland	Joseph Goland	2F	\$16,000
129	Apr-22-1925	22	Colonial	Mary L Ghize	George D. Ghize	2F	\$12,000
130	May-01-1925	5	Colonial (#3)	Frank J. Yates	Frank J. Yates	2F	\$14,000
131	May-18-1925	24	Tahanto	Harry S Coonen	Harry S Coonen	2F	\$11,500
132	May-18-1925	26	Tahanto	Harry S Coonen	Harry S Coonen	2F	\$11,500
133	May-25-1925	26	Maplewood	Arthur G Webber	owner	S	\$6,500
134	Jun-19-1925	29	Maplewood	Harry S Coonen	Harry S Coonen	2F	\$12,000
135	Aug-10-1925	16	Tahanto (#18)	Anna Goland	Joseph Goland	2F	\$10,000
136	Sep-29-1925	17	Westview	Russell Gibbs	owner	S	\$3,500
137	Oct-08-1925	35	South Lenox	Mrs Rose Weinstein	Samuel Proctor	S	\$13,000
138	Mar-27-1926	21	Chamberlain	Samuel Waxler	Alfred Schonning	S	\$14,000
139	May-04-1926	57	Morningside (#29)	Delaney & Robertson	owner	S	\$10,000
140	May-05-1926	50	South Lenox	Solomon Lofman	owner	2F	\$12,000
141	May-17-1926	28	Tahanto	Marie L Ghize	George D. Ghize	2F	\$17,000
142	Jun-30-1926	21	Morningside (#9)	Michael Santoro	Harold Beaudette	S	\$7,500
143	Jul-01-1926	23	Colonial	Max Levitsky	Louis Nestor	S	\$7,500
144	Mar-17-1927	24	Colonial	P W Wood Lumber Co	Wilfred Ratte	2F	\$12,000
145	Jul-26-1927	26	St Elmo	Bertha Reiseroff	Harold Johnson	S	\$8,000

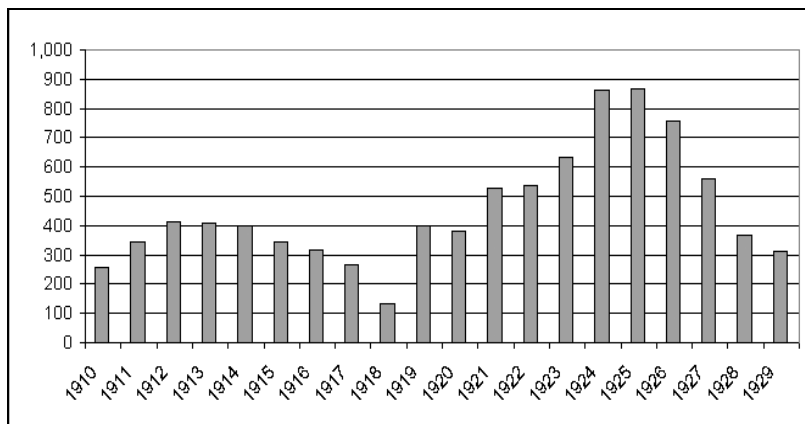
* The new 16 Morningside (later 34) caused the previous number 16 to become number 18 (now number 40).

Upon the construction of these homes, a total of 145 now stood in Lenox, 72 percent of the eventual total of 202 residential lots. The fifty new dwellings constructed since 1916, comprising the second phase of the development, amounted to a little more than half the number that had been built during the first phase, 1910-16.

4.4 Building Permits for Houses in Lenox 1910-1929



4.5 Building Permits for Single and Two-Family Houses City of Worcester, 1910-1929



Source, both charts: City Documents, Reports of the Department of Public Buildings, various years For additional data on citywide building permits, as well as real estate valuations and tax levies, see Supplement 5-A.

The sluggish pace of new home construction in Lenox was not evident citywide. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 compare building permits issued in Lenox with those for one- and two-family houses citywide during the period of interest here, 1910 through 1929. For the city as a whole, only permits for one- and two-family houses are included, and Lenox counts have been reconfigured to match the city’s fiscal year (at the time) of December 1 through November 30.

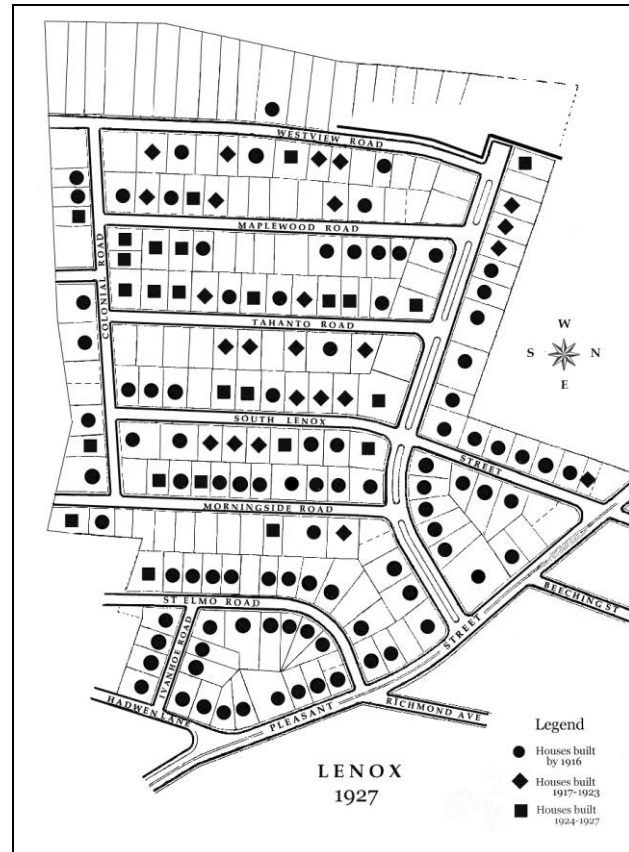
After a lull in home construction in 1918, the number of permits issued rose sharply in 1919 and continued rising afterward, peaking in 1924 and 1925, before a long decline set in which would carry into the Depression of the 1930s. Lenox clearly did not keep pace with the citywide pattern after 1915, even though it still had more than enough vacant, “improved,” ready-to-build lots to do so. By the end of the 1920s, the area was only slightly more than two-thirds completed – 84 percent downhill and 68 percent uphill.

Patterns of Vacancy and Development

Some, but not all, of the clusters of properties that had been vacant at the beginning of the decade had become developed by 1927. The east side of upper Tahanto Road, still owned by Chief Justice Arthur P. Rugg, remained vacant except for a single lot which had been sold for the building of number 21 in 1923. A substantial swath of land, consisting of eight lots, four on each side of the road, totaling about 300 feet of frontage on each side, remained vacant in the middle section of Maplewood Road. The steep downhill sides of Westview and Morningside were still largely vacant, and in both cases it would be several decades before much would happen to alter those landscapes.

Of the nine supposedly “prestige” corner lots along Chamberlain Parkway or lower South Lenox Street which had been vacant at the end of the first phase of building, three had houses standing in 1927, leaving six still vacant. Substantial single-family residences in the colonial revival style, both in brick, had been erected on the two remaining corners of Chamberlain and South Lenox, and, as had been the case a dozen years earlier on the west-bound side of the parkway, both were built facing South Lenox rather than Chamberlain. On the remaining lot on the parkway at the corner of Tahanto now stood a home built of stucco with a red tile roof. Still vacant were the two corner lots on Pleasant Street at South Lenox, and on Chamberlain Parkway at the southeast corner of Morningside, the southwest corner of Tahanto, and both corners between Maplewood and Westview.

4.6 Houses Standing in 1927, per Bldg Permits



The upper end of the Tahanto-Maplewood block, which had long been almost completely vacant, despite its prominent views in all directions, finally became developed during the mid-1920s, and six of the seven houses erected there were in the two-family format. Back in 1910, insurance agent Lester V. Bailey had purchased from the O’Connells a cluster of contiguous lots comprising some 37,500 square feet (not including the lots facing Colonial Road). In 1914 Bailey sold the parcel to John Legg, of 28 South Lenox, who sold one lot in 1916 to John Farnum (for the construction of a single-family home at 27 Maplewood), and then held the remaining lots for nearly a decade, taking no development action, before selling them back to Lester Bailey in 1923.¹³ Bailey then sold the five-lot parcel again in 1925, constituting the fifth ownership transfer of the property

¹³ Worcester District Registry of Deeds, 2314:212

since it was part of Fred Hammond's hay field. This time the buyer was Harry S. Coonen, who then set about the task of getting houses built on the site.¹⁴

Coonen hired builder George D. Ghize to construct two-family houses in the apartment-over style on lots which became 24 and 26 Tahanto and 29 Maplewood. He also had a one story Craftsman-style home built at 31 Maplewood. After settlement of a suit filed by Ghize for non-payment (\$17,300 for the erection of three two-family houses, in May, 1926),¹⁵ Coonen then sold the three properties and they became occupied soon thereafter. Similar two-family structures were also built at 28 Tahanto and 22 Colonial Road by George Ghize, on land purchased from people who had bought lots years earlier from O'Connell, and the P. W. Wood Lumber Company built another at 24 Colonial. Thus, six two-family houses and one single-family filled out the upper end of the Tahanto-Maplewood block.

Soon after construction was complete, Harry Coonen sold all three of his two-family houses to property manager Malcolm K. Smith, who rented them out. This meant, of course, buildings in the area lacking owner-occupants, something that had been very rare, if seen at all before in Lenox. Such absentee management of rental property clearly was not in the spirit of the original marketing of the development, and it almost surely was not what the early buyers had expected or wanted to see. No explicit restrictions regarding the practice, however, had been written into the property deeds at sale to prevent it.

Another case of multiple development in the two-family format was that of Joseph and Anna Goland, who purchased five lots from various owners and erected two-family homes on each of them in 1924 and 1925. The first two were nearly identical structures adjacent to each other at 8 and 10 Tahanto Road, differing only cosmetically, mainly in the brick ground floor of number 8 and the stucco first floor of number 10. The other three Goland structures were essentially the same design - a blend of colonial revival and classical styling with distinctive and eye-catching two-storey columns, at 16 Tahanto, and at 43 and 54 South Lenox. The Golands also purchased and resided at 19 Tahanto while construction of the five houses was underway, and afterward sold it and moved elsewhere.

The five two-family houses built by the Golands plus the six built at the crest of the hill added up to eleven constructed within a period of about two years, mostly in 1926. There were also eleven other two-family houses erected during the 1920s, most of them by owners who resided in them for at least a short time, and in some cases for many years, with tenants in the second units. Seven two-families were built between 1921 and 1923, and fifteen more were added in the decade's second "mini-surge" of 1924-1927, the total of twenty-two amounting to nearly half of the fifty houses built in Lenox during the 1920s. During the first phase, 1910-1916, there had been seventeen, only seven of which were located in the uphill section of the development. Thus, the percentage of two-family houses built in the uphill section climbed from 11 percent in the first phase (seven of a total of sixty-four) and to 45 percent in the second. Non-resident ownership of houses also rose sharply - from virtually non-existent in the first phase to half of the two-family houses of the 1920s. That is, of the twenty-two two-family houses built in the 1920s, eleven of them went into service with no owner-

¹⁴ Worcester District Registry of Deeds, 2370:32

¹⁵ Worcester District Registry of Deeds, 2397:149 (the lien), and 2403:543 (the discharge).

occupant, both units being rented (or for rent). Fully occupied, this amounted to thirty-three rentals out of forty-four habitable units of housing. Thus, assuming owner-occupancy of the twenty-eight single-family houses built during the second phase, the net result was thirty-nine owner-occupied and thirty-three rental units added.

In all likelihood, this shift toward two-family houses, and especially absentee-owned rentals, was not to the liking of the early buyers, who had anticipated a different kind of neighborhood. Another facet of the issue contributing further to the dissatisfaction of early buyers concerned the form, or structural style, of most of the two-family houses that were being erected. The majority of them, probably more than two-thirds, were built in the “apartment-over” form, wherein one unit occupies the first floor and the other the second, with one or both dividing the attic space, which often provides considerable floor space, compromised to varying degrees by the sloping walls reflecting roof design.¹⁶

The point here is not that there is anything inherently wrong with two-family houses, or with the apartment-over format, but that the new trend toward two-families was not what the original buyers had wanted or expected to see. During this era there existed a measure of disdain for the three-decker housing type among at least a portion, and likely a substantial portion, of the commercial and social elite of the city. This attitude had been evident in a decisive manner in the July, 1912 issue of *Worcester Magazine*, in an article entitled “The Cure for the Three-Decker”:

A Committee on Housing... [of the Board of Trade]... which includes in its membership, architects, builders, bankers and many other public-spirited citizens, has this matter in charge and is endeavoring to work out a plan which will effectively rid us of that nuisance in every American city, and menace to life and health – the modern three-decker.

This unambiguously hostile comment regarding three-deckers served as the introduction to the full text of a paper prepared and delivered by the President of the Worcester County Institution for Savings, Alfred L. Aiken, at a city planning conference that year in Boston.¹⁷ Mr. Aiken was anything but subtle in his remarks:

*I am not sure as to the origin of the ‘three-decker but from its prevalence in Worcester I suspect that we are the responsible parents; at any rate, I think that our city has suffered more than any other from its construction. No one, with an observing eye can fail to notice the tier upon tier of these monotonous, unattractive houses that rise on the hill sides, on either side of the railroad tracks, as one passes through the city.*¹⁸

¹⁶ The ambivalence here regarding how many apartment-overs there were is due to the difficulty in some cases in determining from a street-level view how the house is organized. Sometimes it is obvious, but in others not. It is possible that some designs intentionally tried to mask the apartment-over format, perhaps for reasons suggested in the text which follows. Also, there may have been in some cases more complex space-sharing arrangements in the basic apartment-over format, such as the first unit having part of the second floor or the attic, and the second floor unit having all or part of the attic space.

¹⁷ *Worcester Magazine*, July, 1912, pp. 194-195.

¹⁸ The prescription for the problem offered by the President of W.C.I.S. called for modest “cottage” style homes, affordable by the established working man or working family. This idea was taken another step four years later by the highly successful and esteemed Worcester builder, Orlando Norcross, writing in *Worcester Magazine* in 1916. The title and sub-title of the three-page piece convey its essence: “Country Homes for the Wage Earner: A Plan to

Undoubtedly there was some attitudinal carryover to the two-family built in in the apartment-over form – in effect, the “two-decker” – a smaller and perhaps, to the detractors, slightly less odious sibling of the three decker. If three apartments stacked on top of each other was considered bad form, two was at least questionable. Symbolic of the distinction between the two types of two-family house, the term “tenement” was commonly used on building permit forms when the apartment-over format was to be built, while the more acceptable “double-house” was used for the side-by-side type.

Assuming this use of the term on a permit form reflected common usage, “tenement” was not what the suburbanizing members of the middle and upper strata of the community wanted to hear in connection with their new residential district. It was not so much that tenements were intrinsically bad; it was that their suburban ideal was a place of home ownership – detached single-family residences occupied by their owners, with a few double houses here and there for members of the extended family. Tenements implied renters, and there were, in this view, other places for renters to live. While there is no way to know what percentage of the city’s population actually held such views, the anti-three-decker crowd was most likely in the minority, but its power and influence in local politics, including matters of zoning and land use, exceeded its numbers. It was comprised mainly of the social and economic elite of the community.

The distinction between the apartment-over and the side-by-side “double house” was also an important element in the city’s new zoning ordinance and master plan, which were enacted on the last day of 1924.¹⁹ The new zoning map divided the city into geographic districts, each of which would allow certain uses and types of built structures while excluding others.²⁰ Residential areas were divided into three categories. The most exclusive classification, known as *Residence A*, was applied only to a bit over two percent of the land in the city that was designated as residential. *Residence C* was the least exclusive of the three, encompassing most of the predominantly multi-family housing neighborhoods and the mixed-use areas of the city where larger apartment houses were occasionally to be found. *Residence B* fell between the others, restricting development to single- and two-family homes, and it encompassed by far the largest classification in land area, being the designation of more than 60 percent of the developed or developable land of the city.²¹

Both *A* and *B* districts excluded houses designed for more than two households, as well as all industrial and virtually all commercial uses. The key difference between *A* and *B* turned on the distinction between the side-by-side, double-house, format, which was allowed in both *A* and *B*

Provide the Home-Loving Workingman an Opportunity to Own a Modest Estate Away From the Congested Tenement Districts of a City – Suggested by One Who Has Made Building Construction a Life Work.”

¹⁹ See Supplement 4-X for more on the zoning and master planning process and the ordinance that resulted.

²⁰ Unfortunately, our search for a copy of the zoning map proved unsuccessful.

²¹ The districting plan presented by the Planning Board called for 60.45 percent of total city acreage to be *Residence B* (14,680 acres) with only 2.2 percent *Residence A* (541 acres), and 9.45 percent *Residence C* (2,323 acres).

zones, and the apartment-over, or “two-decker,” format which was allowed in *B* districts but not in the more restrictive *A* districts.²²

Proponents of the new zoning approach to land use control in Worcester were seeking to create lines of separation between the higher density, more crowded, more “urban” sections of the city and the lower density neighborhoods of the new suburban-style that were springing up on the outskirts of the city, especially its west and north sides. Their vision of the ideal residential environment featured single-family houses on larger lots, set farther back from the street, with grass, flowers, shrubs, and trees. They looked to zoning in part to screen out higher density forms of housing, and in Worcester the principal target was, of course, the dreaded three-decker.

Despite the background of antipathy toward three-deckers, and by inference two-deckers, the language of the deeds of property transfer in Lenox had not precluded construction of two-family houses in the apartment-over, two-decker, style. Consequently, by 1924, as the districting plan for the new ordinance was winding its way through the process leading to its adoption, there were, judging by external appearance and a little guesswork, about eight-to-ten houses in this style already standing in Lenox, split about evenly between the uphill and downhill sections. Thus, to at least an extent, the area already had the appearance of the new *Residence B* format.

It may have been a foregone conclusion that Lenox would receive the *B* designation, and in fact that is what happened, along with all the other developing areas along the south side of Pleasant Street between Newton Square and Tatnuck. In effect, the zoning plan of 1924 underscored the fact that the Pleasant Street corridor, especially its south side, was not among the most elite, restrictive neighborhoods of the city. That distinction had been bestowed upon only a small land area, including Stephen Salisbury III’s “Bancroft Heights” development of the early 1900s (consisting mainly of Massachusetts Avenue and Regent Street), and additional acreage to the north and east, totaling just over two percent of all city land zoned residential. Early buyers and occupants of Lenox, had they known about the zoning ordinance that was to follow a decade or so later, probably would have thought they were buying into an *A* district. Despite its significance for the long-term growth of the city, the 1924 zoning ordinance does not appear to have had any discernible causal effect on what was built or not built in Lenox, including the numbers and types of two-family homes.

It is presumed here that the predominantly Yankee elite of the first phase of Lenox did not care for the rise of the two-family house, especially in the apartment-over format, or for the sharp rise in rental tenancy associated with it, especially absentee-ownership. But this was by no means a “chicken-or-egg” dilemma. The trend of the 1920s toward two-family houses in Lenox did not cause the reduced demand for houses in the development by the upper-middle class Yankees who were its main early target audience. The weakness of demand for new houses occurred first; it then made possible the shift toward the two-family. As was stated earlier, there just didn’t seem to be enough Yankees to go around, especially in the context of so much formerly agricultural land on the city’s west side being developed at about the same time. The demand for house lots in Lenox having been so weak since 1916, a fact scarcely altered by the minor and brief surge of the early 1920s, the excess supply of buildable lots began to have its effects and one of them was the sudden

²² Specified in the ordinance: *City Document 79*, appendix, pp. 960-962.

rise in two-family houses. It was more a matter of filling a vacuum than of one approach to housing pushing out another.

Automobiles and Street Improvements

An important part of the story of Lenox in the 1920s, as was true of other neighborhoods as well, was the rise of the automobile, with its implications for the physical nature, uses, and costs of city streets. It has been estimated that by 1920 there were some 8.13 million automobiles in the U.S., one for every thirteen persons, or about two vehicles for every five households nationwide.²³ The dissemination of the automobile, according to the same source, was far greater in urban than in rural areas in the early years, and ownership rates were, understandably, much higher among the more affluent segments of the population. With both of these factors favoring the residents of Lenox, it seems safe to assume that by 1930 there were probably as many automobiles as households in the neighborhood, and possibly a few more, accounting for early examples of multiple auto ownership. Most of the homes of Lenox with suitable terrain had garages by the late 1920s.²⁴

With the rapid increase in the use of personal automobiles, replacing primarily the earlier walks down to the trolley, came greater concern for and attention to the matter of the quality of public roadways. From the drivers' perspective, the need was for improved streets for driving, meaning expensive pavement and drainage systems. In Lenox and other developing areas of Worcester, the first step toward solution of the problem of inadequate streets for automobiles was for them to become public ways, owned and managed by the City. Prior to their being taken into the public domain by the City, the streets in the neighborhood were still owned by the O'Connell Real Estate Company - part of the acreage on which the O'Connells as owners had to pay a tax each year. Beginning with South Lenox Street in 1917-18, the City took by eminent domain an easement "over and through" the various streets of the neighborhood "for the purpose of laying out, locating, establishing, constructing, and maintaining" them as public streets of the city²⁵. These improvements involved paving the streets in the format known as *bituminous macadam*, which amounted to a bed of six-or-more inches of gravel, in layers of varying sizes, topped by a layer of gravel embedded in bitumin, a highly viscous, tarlike petroleum based substance. Compared with the old dirt or loosely packed gravel streets, which became dusty when dry and often muddy when wet, these new surfaces represented a great improvement in the driveability of neighborhood streets for its mobile residents. They also came at substantial cost to the property owners.

From the annual reports of the Street Commissioner, included in *City Documents*, various years, the dates, linear feet of pavement, and cost of the paving of most of the streets of the neighborhood can be found.²⁶ In a reflection of the great inflation of the late 1910s discussed earlier, the per-foot

²³ Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.105.

²⁴ Garages can be easily be traced through building permits, for demolitions as well as new construction, but the data were not considered necessary for the present purpose.

²⁵ Various ordinances establishing the takings for public use relative to each of the streets of the area.

²⁶ Street pavings in Lenox from City Documents, various fiscal years: South Lenox Street, from Pleasant to Colonial: 1560 feet of bituminous macadam, \$1006.57 in FY1916 and \$4100.98 in FY1917; Chamberlain Parkway, Pleasant to South Lenox: 591.7 feet of bituminous macadam, \$2634.03 in FY1917 and \$212.85 in FY1918; Chamberlain Parkway, South Lenox to Westview: 867.2 feet of bituminous macadam, \$4921.44 in FY1920;

cost of the bituminous macadam paving increased from \$3.27 per foot for South Lenox in 1917-18, to \$10.00 per foot for Maplewood Road in 1927-28.

To allay the costs of these improvements, and in line with the common policy of levying special taxes to account for the enhanced values of properties arising from such actions, the City placed “betterment assessments” on the owner of each adjoining property, the levies taking the form of a lien on the property until paid in full. For Maplewood Road, as an example, by vote of the Board of Aldermen on October 24, 1927, betterment assessments were levied on each of twenty-four property owners along the road. Included were the properties at the ends of the street whose addresses were on Chamberlain Parkway or Colonial Road, thus accounting for their frontages along Maplewood. The costs amounted to \$2.986 per linear foot of frontage. Although the city was owed approximately twice that amount, based on levies on both sides of the streets, the total nevertheless amounted to only about sixty percent of the budgeted cost listed in the report of the Commissioner. This proportion, however, was well above the norm for betterment assessments in Worcester, as was noted in the report of the consultants regarding the zoning ordinance of 1924.²⁷ Thus, the city was absorbing a substantial portion of the cost of converting private roads into paved, public streets, even in affluent areas such as Lenox.

For Sarah H. Scott at 13 Maplewood, with 100 feet of frontage, this amounted to a levy of \$298.61, which equates to approximately \$3,740 in 2009 by the Consumer Price Index method, and \$7,330 as a burden on the budget of the average “consumer unit.”²⁸ By whatever method one chooses, the assessments clearly amounted to a substantial sum. For Sarah Scott it came to nearly a year’s tax levy on her property (which for 1928 was \$317.52, based on a combined city-county-state tax rate of \$29.40 per thousand dollars of valuation, on property valued at \$10,800). In some cases, the payments on these special assessments were not completed for many years, as can be seen in various property deeds

Tahanto Road, Chamberlain to Colonial: 989.15 feet of bituminous macadam, \$3884.26 in FY1920; Morningside Road, Chamberlain to Colonial: 872.63 feet of bituminous macadam, \$4598.34 in FY1922; Maplewood Road, Chamberlain to Colonial: 1108.31 feet of bituminous macadam, \$2115.87 in FY1927 and \$8970.44 in FY1928; and St. Elmo Road, Pleasant southerly, 817.31 feet of asphalt macadam, \$7767.48 FY1928. Listings for Westview, Colonial, and Ivanhoe Roads could not be found. The practice of identifying street pavings in this manner stopped in the early 1930s. There were also expenditures for the linking of Morningside from Colonial to Rhodes Road which came up the hill from Hadwen Road, and expenditures for repairs to some of the streets in Lenox in FY1925. The careful reader of these data (if any) would notice that the cost per-foot for paving Chamberlain Parkway were higher than for the other streets, but not twice as high, as might be expected from the fact that there are two lanes. This is because each of the lanes on the parkway is narrower than are the other streets of the neighborhood. Also, City Documents were not found for FY1919 or FY1921.

²⁷ Technical Advisory Corporation, *A City Plan for Worcester, Mass.*, November 30, 1924. From Chapter 21, “Betterment Assessments,” page 138: “It is significant that during 1921, out of \$23,402.16 paid in land damages for street improvements plus \$108,651.80 spent in new street construction in Worcester, only \$18,591 was returned in betterment assessments.” That amounts to a return rate of 14 percent. The consultants report then continued to make the same observation regarding expenditures and assessments for parks and playgrounds and for new sidewalks and repairs.

²⁸ Samuel H. Williamson, “Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar amount, 1774 to present,” *Measuring Worth*, 2011. URL: www.measuringworth.com/UScompare/

Demographic Change

The same dynamic was at work in the matter of demographics. As must have been clear to all who noticed such things at the time, which was probably most people, the neighborhood changed considerably during the 1920s in terms of the national origins and religious makeup of its residents. This fact would be documented many years later in the results of the census of 1930.²⁹ The Yankee predominance in Lenox, so clearly evident in the census of 1920, had by 1930 given way to a more heterogeneous mix. The “old stock” population had fallen from about 70 percent in 1920 to about 37 percent a decade later. Although not quite a statistical majority, the largest group in the neighborhood in 1930 was Jewish families. Worcester’s Jewish population during this period moved in great numbers from its original “port-of-entry” neighborhood on Union Hill, near the commercial district along Water Street, to the west side, along Pleasant street. They were taking advantage of opportunities for newer, larger homes on more spacious lots, in a more prestigious location, with greater room to grow, than was the case on Union Hill.³⁰

Of the 172 households found in Lenox in the 1930 census, approximately seventy-seven, or 45 percent of the total, were identified as being *probably* Jewish, where attribution was based on Russian nationality or Hebrew (or Yiddish) given as the mother tongue of one or both parents. Most of the Jews of Worcester at this time had come from Russia or had parents born in Russia or, in a small number of cases, other countries in eastern or central Europe.³¹ More often than not, the Jewish heads of household and their spouses moving to Lenox, or to other sections of the west side, were first generation American-born, most of them from Massachusetts, their parents having come to America in the 1880s, 1890s, or early 1900s. In a symbolic reflection of this trend, this “second migration” of Worcester’s Jews, Congregation Beth Israeli purchased in 1925 the former residence of Willard Richmond at 835 Pleasant Street, demolished the house, and built a new synagogue. It was known as *Beth Israel* until about 1959 or 1960 when the name was changed to *Shaarai Torah Sons of Abraham*. In time it became known as *Shaarai Torah West*, reflecting its nominal relationship to the old Shaarai Torah (east) at 32 Providence Street.

The third largest group in Lenox in 1930 was the thirteen percent of households of Irish ancestry. There were more Irish households in 1930 than in 1920, although their share had fallen slightly - from 17 percent in 1920. The three major nationality groups, Jewish, Yankee, and Irish, accounting for 94 percent of the population, left a sprinkling of other groups to round out the neighborhood: two Armenian and two Syrian families, and one each of Swedish, French-Canadian, Polish, German, and Scottish origins. Compared with 1920, when the area was more than two-thirds Yankee, with a modest share of Irish, Lenox by 1930 had become a neighborhood whose

²⁹ The detailed, household-by-household, results of the census, with the names and addresses of all persons enumerated, are, by Federal law, not available for viewing until 72 years after the census is taken. Thus, the results of the census of 1930 were not available for viewing until 2002, and those the 1940 census not until 2012. Only “summary data,” providing counts of persons, households, etc., are made available to the public soon after the taking.

³⁰ Worcester Jewish Federation, “Jewish Population Study,” 1958.

³¹ Joseph Talamo, “A Preliminary Social Survey of the Jewish Population of Worcester: A Local Study of Immigration.” M.A. Thesis, Clark University, 1915, Clark University Library. Talamo’s estimate, based on his survey, was 94 percent of Worcester’s Jews having origins in Russia or Russian-held territories, such as eastern Poland or Lithuania.

largest identifiable group was Jewish, rather than Yankee. Some degree of the same pattern of ethnic transition had occurred throughout much of the Pleasant Street corridor of the city's west side.

After suffering a severe and unexpected decline in construction from 1916 through 1920, Lenox recovered during the 1920s, but at only about half the pace of the first phase of development. The fifty houses built between 1918 and 1927 amounted to barely over half the number built by 1916 (95), and they differed in several key respects: significantly more two-family structures; smaller physical size, on average, though not in all cases; and a sharp break in architectural styles reflecting trends seen in most parts of the country – more Colonial Revivals and an almost complete abandonment of the Prairie, Foursquare, and Craftsman styles which had dominated the earlier period.

For reasons not fully understood – and perhaps suitable for speculation – the largely Yankee owners of the great majority of the unbuilt lots by 1920 opted not to build and to sell instead. Most of the new buyers who then did have houses built were Jewish, or they were builders who sold completed homes to Jewish buyers. In the terminology of economics, it was a clear case of demand drying up among one demographic segment, then rising among another. Behind all this was the simple fact that Worcester's rising middle class by the 1920s was a great deal less Yankee than it had been when Lenox was first conceived, a result of changing patterns of immigration that had been in effect since the latter quarter of the 19th century.

Both the original, mostly Yankee, and the new, mostly Jewish, families of Lenox were well above Worcester's average in terms of affluence. Lenox clearly was a well-to-do neighborhood -- not in the upper echelon of wealthy areas but well above average. But it had failed to become the highly prestigious and sought-after district that had been so vigorously promoted by the O'Connell Real Estate Company, as was evident in its slow, halting, and ultimately incomplete development. As Lenox reached its "maturity" in the late 1920s, after two phases of development, the second coming to a close well ahead of the hard times ahead, it remained less than three-quarters filled.

Its originator and promoter, Thomas E. O'Connell had succeeded in his endeavor, having sold almost all of the "improved lots," and moved on to other developments, well on his way to becoming Worcester's premier residential real estate developer of the era. Lenox had become what it was to be, a mature neighborhood of generally large, mostly single-family homes of above-average value on larger-than-average lots, wherein dwelled families of above-average means, an increasing proportion of them being of the Jewish faith and ethnic identification. Lenox was now "just" a neighborhood, no longer a marketing entity, no longer the object of a skillful promotional campaign to sell a concept of residential excellence. What remained for Lenox was to weather the hard times of depression and war.

* * *

Some People of Lenox, Late 1920s ³²

George H. **Hill** served 35 years with the Worcester Police Department, 1893–1928, the last fifteen as Chief of Police. A twenty-year veteran, he was appointed Chief in March, 1913, and served in that capacity until 1928, when he retired from the department. He then became Manager of the Worcester County Safety Council and served in that capacity until his death in 1950. In 1913, Chief Hill, his wife, and five children moved into their new two-family at 17 Colonial Road, where he would reside the rest of his life.

It was during Hill's tenure as a police official, and especially as its chief, that the city transformed itself into the new age of the automobile, and it was under his leadership that the police department came into the motor age as well. Among the "many high marks" he was said to have achieved in his career were what the *Telegram* called "motorizing the department," including the introduction and extensive use of motorcycles, the establishment of the traffic division and the police garage, and the installation of traffic signals in the city. He was said to have been the first Worcester police officer to receive a public commendation from his chief, in 1896, for single-handedly capturing three burglars in the act. During his tenure as chief the department doubled in size, and under his leadership it modernized its uniforms and the arms carried by officers, reorganized the detective bureau, adopted a modern finger-printing system, established the police academy, installed pulmotors (respiratory devices) in police ambulances, and instigated the use of motorboats by police on Lake Quinsigamond.

Hill was also recognized as an athlete, and particularly as a baseball player, and was twice offered major league contracts but turned them down to remain in police work. From his obituary notice in the *Sunday Telegram*: "*In the 90's when the Police Department had an outstanding baseball team, he was captain and pitcher.... In a game with Holyoke police one year at the Oval, Hill went to the bat in the last of the ninth with two out and the bases filled. He hit a homer.*"

Chief Hill's concern with traffic and safety was reflected in his many years of service on the executive committee of the International Bureau of Traffic and as its president in 1923. Upon his retirement from the department in 1928 he was recruited to serve as the manager of the Chamber of Commerce sponsored Safety Council, in which position he remained until forced by illness to retire a few weeks before his death. His passing warranted top-of-the-front-page coverage with a photograph in the *Sunday Telegram* of April 30, 1950.

Newcomers to the neighborhood during the 1920s included numerous retail and wholesale proprietors and manufacturers of woolens and other clothing. One of them was Israel **Shack**, an immigrant from Russia in 1895, and founder of Shack's Clothes, which opened in downtown Worcester in 1905 and was in business for more than a century. In 1924, he moved with his wife Jennie and their seven children to 7 Chamberlain Parkway (now number 11). His wife having died in 1946, Mr. Shack resided there through the late 1950s, by which time the children had grown, leaving him alone in the comparatively large home. The well-known clothing store, aimed primarily

³² Photographs of people during this era are hard to find because it was after publication of Worcester Magazine or the four-volume set by Charles Nutt. Accordingly, this section is entirely in narrative form.

at men's apparel, was a fixture at 212 Front Street for 55 years before moving to Main Street in 1960. It was later relocated again, to 403 Main Street where it remained in operation until 2009. An outlet is still, as of this writing in 2011, in operation in Fitchburg.

Samuel **Marcus** immigrated from Russia in 1892 at the age of 21, first to New York for a few months, then to Boston where he remained for nine years, learning the furrier business. In 1900 he and his wife Anna, came to Worcester where he set up a small fur shop on Main Street under the name "S Marcus." Success soon led to the need for additional floor space and relocation of the business, then in 1908 he relocated again in an expansion of the business into women's clothing. The pattern repeated, such that in 1920 he leased the entire Knowles Building in the 500 block of Main Street, using three floors while sub-letting other space for offices and small stores. In 1921 the building was destroyed by what the Gazette called "the worst fire in the history of Worcester." He soon re-established the business at another location on Main Street, and in 1927 merged with the fur shop of his brother Sol under the name "Sol and S Marcus Co."

In 1916, Samuel and Anna moved with their three children to 16 Chamberlain Parkway. Samuel died of a heart attack on June 4, 1936, age 65. In his death notice, on the front page of the *Gazette* that afternoon, Marcus was described as "one of the better known Main street merchants, a man of many charities and a silent but effective worker in the interests of all Jewish activities." His widow Anna remained in the home on Chamberlain Parkway until about 1945. Their son Saul, who was manager of the store at the time of Samuel's death, continued in that capacity for many years, and the store was in existence on Main Street as late as 1987.

Nicholas J. **Smith**, who had immigrated from Ireland in 1882 as a child, acquired two skillsets growing up in Worcester which would define a major part of his life: one, the trade of the steam-fitter, involving the design, construction, and maintenance of steam pipe systems for residential and industrial uses; and two, the ways of the military in the tradition of the militia. In the Massachusetts Militia, he rose to the rank of Captain, and missed by a single vote election to the position of commanding officer of the state's artillery battalion.

About 1906, Nicholas married Mary J. Quinn, and between 1907 and 1916 they had three daughters – Alice, Helen, and Mary. Residing previously on Oread Street, Nicholas and Mary purchased Lenox lot number 80 in 1915, had a house built, and took up residence in their new home at 10 St. Elmo Road. In 1916, he launched the N. J. Smith Company, Heating and Ventilation Engineers, with offices on Bartlett Street downtown (eliminated by the Galleria about 1971).

In October, 1918, Nicholas fell victim to the influenza epidemic that was devastating the city, eventually claiming nearly a thousand lives. His obituary notice in the *Evening Gazette* was located on page one, above the fold, with a photograph and a column length of about ten inches. This was a clear indication that he had gained considerable respect in Worcester for his military and business achievements. Regarding his profession, it stated that in addition to the practical aspects of his work in steam and ventilation systems, he "...possessed an unusual knowledge of the theoretical side so that his services were in great demand" and that he had "built up a lucrative business."

The 1920 census found his widow Mary residing at 10 St. Elmo with her three daughters, ages 13, 12, and four, and she having no occupation of her own. Also in the household were her elderly parents, plus four of Mary's siblings – three sisters and a brother, ages 35 through 52. Three of them were single, one being a widow, and three were employed - as a teamster, a corset maker, and a bookkeeper. At age eighty, her father was still working as a card maker in a clothing shop. Aside from the passing of her parents, the extended family of Mary J. Smith remained intact in the home for another third of a century. The census of 1930 listed Mary as a hairdresser in a "beauty parlor" and her two older daughters as stenographers, with the two sisters remaining in the home still working as corset maker and bookkeeper. Mary's sisters remained with them until about 1950, then either moved elsewhere or died. She and two of her daughters, Alice and Mary, both single, remained at 10 St. Elmo until 1956, after which they relocated to Lovell Street. Mary is believed to have died about 1962, and her two daughters shared an apartment on Lovell Street into the 1970s.

In 1922, Jacob and Fannie **Talamo**, Jewish immigrants from Russian-occupied Poland in 1882, with four of their five grown children, purchased and moved into a newly-built two-family house at 15 Tahanto Road. Jacob, 53, was the proprietor of the Empire Woolen Company at 86 Winter Street and had been so for a good many years. The family previously had been residing on Chesterfield Road in the Tatnuck area, and before that on Providence Street. After four years in number 15, they sold it and moved across the street into 16 Tahanto as renters. In 1929, the Talamos moved again, this time to 6 Tahanto Road, their third residence on the same street, and again as renters rather than owners.³³ They remained there only till 1933 before relocating to Howland Terrace..

Joseph, the oldest son, born in 1894, received bachelor's and master's degrees at Clark, and a law degree at Harvard in 1918. After a year's active service in the Navy, he returned to Worcester and established a law practice, and a few years later was joined by his younger brother Abbee, with whom he practiced for many years as Talamo and Talamo. Already an adult by the time his parents moved to Lenox, he never resided there, but a brief overview of his life is of interest here..

His master's thesis at Clark, in the geography department, 1915, was entitled "A Preliminary Social Survey of the Jewish Population of Worcester: A Local Study of Immigration." This study remains today a valued document in the written history of the Jewish population of Worcester. At his death in January, 1970, the *Telegram and Gazette* noted that while a student at Clark he had taught English to immigrants at night, and that he was a linguist, "able to speak and read eight languages."³⁴ It also noted that during World War II Talamo was active in several organizations in support of the war effort, serving as first vice president of the USO, as chairman of the Executive

³³ According to the 1930 census their rent was \$100 per month at 6 Tahanto , the CPI equivalent of \$1,280 , and \$2,680 as a proportionate share of the average household's budget in 2009 (based on dollar value comparisons by MeasuringWorth.com) Of 45 rental units counted in the census in Lenox, the average monthly rent was \$65.42 (2009 equivalent: \$840). The Talamos were one of six families paying \$100 or more, but it should be noted that they were renting a large single-family house, while most rentals were for second units.

³⁴ *Worcester Telegram and Gazette*, January 21, 1970, p.30.

Committee to Defend America by Defending the Allies, and as vice chairman of the Fight for Freedom Committee.

Jacob **Budish** was born in 1883 in Russia, immigrated to the U.S. in 1904 and became a naturalized citizen in 1913. After moving to Worcester from Boston shortly after 1910, he and fellow immigrant Samuel Kaplan formed a partnership in the produce business, known as Budish & Kaplan Co., of which Jacob was the treasurer and in which he remained active for many years, retiring about 1956. He and his wife Rebecca, also an immigrant from Russia, and their three daughters purchased a lot and had a home built at 34 South Lenox Street in 1920 by his brother, Louis, a home builder. They also bought a lot on Tahanto, had a two-family house built on it as number 19, in 1921, and sold it to homebuilders Joseph and Anna Goland. The Budish family resided at 34 South Lenox until the mid-1930s when they acquired land from the owners of 21 Chamberlain Parkway and had number 23 Chamberlain constructed. They still retained ownership of the property on South Lenox while renting it out, until possession was taken by W.C.I.S. in 1940. The home at 23 Chamberlain was owned in the name of their daughter, Nahama, and both Jacob and Rebecca lived there the remainder of their lives. Jacob died January 29, 1960.

Cornelius and Mary (Ryan) **Maher**, both born in Ireland and immigrating separately in the early 1850s, were married with four children in Worcester by the taking of the census of 1870. He was a boot crimper in the early years, but by the mid-1890s had established a real estate practice in the city with an office in the Walker building downtown. In 1900, of the ten children born to Mary, seven were surviving adults. One of the four sons worked on a regular basis with his father in the realty firm, Cornelius Maher and Sons, and the others did so on-and-off over the years. After residing on Southbridge, Oxford, and Queen Streets at various times, and possibly other locations as well, the family moved to 3 Mann Street about 1905. Cornelius died in 1913 and Mary passed away two years later.

The youngest of their offspring, Cornelius Leo (not a junior), was born in 1881 and married Julia Agnes Sullivan. He worked in a variety of occupations over the years, including managing a liquor establishment in his younger years and working in various managerial and real estate entrepreneurial positions, sometimes but irregularly in the family real estate firm in which his brother John was the constant presence. Cornelius and Julia had six sons, who are listed here with their approximate years of birth (from their ages in the 1930 census), because many of them were well known in the city throughout the 20th century: Cornelius Leo Maher, Jr., 1911; John W., 1913; William, 1914; Thomas, 1916; Edward C., 1919; and Robert, 1921. The family moved into the two-family at 8 Hadwen Lane about 1915 (the other unit bearing the address 1 Ivanhoe), and there would be at least one member of the family residing in the house until 2002, a run of some 87 years, the last there being Robert.

During World War II three of the brothers served in the military – Cornelius and Edward in the U.S. Army and Robert in the Navy. Most of the six later worked in real estate, including the family firm, but in some cases with other firms. Thomas and Robert were the principals in Maher Associates, which maintained offices at 340 Main Street for many years in the late 20th century, its last

listing in the city directory, with only Thomas still there, being in 2002. Perhaps the most widely known and influential of the brothers, Edward was an attorney, a partner in the firm of Maher, McCann, and Talcott. He was also President of Home Federal Savings and Loan Association, and Chairman of the Worcester Redevelopment Authority during its most dynamic era of the 1970s. In the latter capacity he sat at the center of political storms concerning downtown revitalization and the Galleria, as well as the civic center, now known as the DCU Center.

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