FORM H PARKS AND LANDSCAPES

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

Assessor's Number	USGS Quad	Area(s)	Form Number
11-482	Salem	BEV.A	BEV.901, 968-971~~XX~~

NRDIS 7/5/1984

Town/City: Beverly

Place: downtown

Address or Location: 31 Essex Street

Name: Beverly Common

Ownership: *Public* *Private*

Type of Landscape *(check one):*

___ park
X green/common
___ garden
___ boulevard/parkway
___other *(specify):*
___ farm land
___ mine/quarry
___ training field

Date or Period: 1705; 1915; 1996

Source: Engineering Department plans
Beverly Historical Society files

Landscape Architect: Peter Torre Associates, Revere (1996)

Location of Plans: Beverly Department of Public Works and Engineering

Alterations/Intrusions *(with dates):*
1915 design
1996 redesign (see historic narrative)

Acreage 2.70 acres

Setting: Abutting the Central Business District, bounded by three major roads, Hale, Essex and Dane Streets, and adjacent to the Beverly Public Library, Montserrat College of Art, and Central Cemetery

Recorded by: Pamela Hartford and Wendy Frontiero

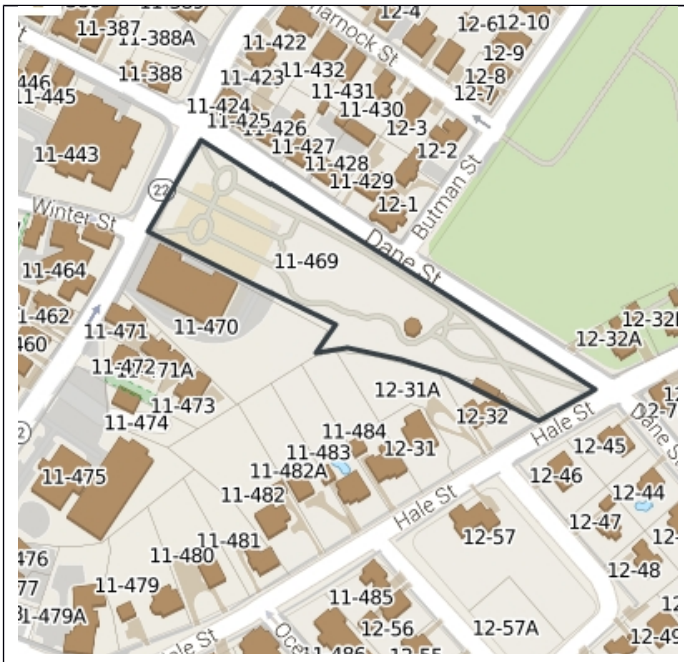
Organization: Beverly Historic District Commission

Date: September 2016

Photograph

Photo 1. View looking east into Common from Essex Street

Locus Map (north is up)



Follow Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey Manual instructions for completing this form.

☐ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

VISUAL/DESIGN ASSESSMENT

The Beverly Common, 31 Essex Street (1705; BEV.901) is a prominent and well cared for open space in the historic center of Beverly. It consists of a narrow stretch of two and three quarter acres level land, which runs lengthwise parallel to Dane Street, bordered on the northwest by Essex Street, and on the southeast by Hale Street. Public sidewalks surround the Common on Essex, Dane and Hale Streets. Its southwestern boundary is defined by the rising slope of Watch Hill, and by the flat parcel on which the Hardie School, 23 Essex Street (1898; BEV.420, NRDIS 7/5/1984) (now Montserrat College of Art), stands. The land currently associated with the Hardie School was historically part of the Common. (See Map 2). For purposes of this survey, all references to the Common assume the inclusion of this parcel within its bounds,

Directly across Essex Street from the Common, to the northeast, is the Beverly Public Library, 30 Essex Street (1913; BEV.108, NRDIS 7/5/2984) Late nineteenth century houses line Dane Street (BEV.192, .412, .413, .414, .415, .83 and .421) across from the Common between Essex and Butman Streets, and from Butman to Hale Streets along Dane is the Central Cemetery, 60 Hale Streetr (1790; BEV.804) enclosed by a wrought iron fence (Photo 2). On Hale Street across from the Common is an early twentieth century house that faces Dane Street.

The southwestern boundary edge of the Common along Watch Hill abuts 44 Hale Street, which includes an early nineteenth century house (not inventoried). The boundary is marked by a low stone wall that has collapsed for approximately twenty feet of its length, but as its condition improves to a better constructed vertical wall heading west, it is topped by a five foot high stockade fence. The stone wall and fence combination gives way to a five foot high cyclone fence as the property boundary between the Common and 44 Hale Street continues uphill among the boulders of Watch Hill (Photo 3). At the base of this hill, facing the Common, sits the Hardie School (Photo 4). The hill rises thirty feet above the level of the Common behind the school. The school parcel, while now privately owned, was originally city-owned property and historically part of the land defined as the Beverly Common.

Beverly Common consists primarily of high quality turf shaded by ornamental trees on the interior and by regularly spaced mature sugar maples that line the Dane Street sidewalk. The Common has three visually distinct areas, linked by well-graded, four-foot-wide stone dust paths edged in steel, all introduced as part of 1996 redesign.

A formal space has been created on the Essex Street end, framed by the Montserrat College of Art building and the Library. A broad brick Promenade (1996) directly on axis with the steps of the Library, leads to a Flagpole (1942) set in a circular space bordered by a low clipped yew hedge (Photo 5). The Flagpole, the visual focal point of the promenade, has a plaque commemorating its dedication in 1942 to war veterans by the school children of Beverly (Photo 11). On either side of the promenade are regularly spaced young elm trees, benches, and pole lampposts. Two elliptical shaped rose beds framed in low yew hedges are centered on either side of the Promenade. The Promenade is nine feet wide, laid with wire-cut, water struck bricks. The combination of various colored brick bands with varying patterns of brick laying demonstrates careful design with attention to scale and quality materials in this intimate setting (Photo 6).

The layout of the area specifically responds to the Classical Revival formality of the 1913 Library, creating a complementary setting and reinforcing the importance of the Library, while imbuing the Essex Street edge of the Common with dignity and civic pride. On the city lawn between the sidewalk and the street, near the Promenade entry, stands a sign announcing the Common and its historic date of inception (1705), as well as an elegant standing Clock (2014, Photo 12). The seventeen foot high Clock was installed in 2014 in tribute to Mayor Scanlon's eighteen years of service to Beverly. (Photo 14)

From either corner of the Common on Essex Street, stone dust paths lead diagonally to the elliptical rose beds, encircling them and intersecting with the promenade. (Photo 7) From the center of each ellipse, paths lead across the length of the Common, one running parallel to Dane Street, the other running along the Watch Hill edge. This path is lined with benches and curves between groups of ornamental trees, creating an informal edge to the center space of the Common (Photo 8). The central space

framed by these paths is predominantly open turf, with no obstructions from within the area to its focal point, a Bandstand (1996) set in the southeast corner of the large open lawn (Photo 9).

The Bandstand is an octagonal structure measuring nine feet on each side. Its steel frame columns are sheathed in pine board trim and set on concrete footings. The wood frame roof is covered with asphalt tiles, and the ceiling finish is 1" x 4" tongue and groove boards with a clear finish, inset with recessed can lighting. Under the fascia are 1" x 1" spindles, set six inches on center on rails, as are the balusters in the handrails. The floor is 1" x 4" painted wood decking.

Behind the Bandstand the two long paths intersect, forming a series of small spaces planted with ornamental shrubs and flowering trees. The paths converge and surround three tall cedar trees – one with three trunks, one with two trunks, and a single trunk specimen. This Cedar Stand (ca. 1700) provides the focal point for the Hale Street end of the Common (Photo 13).

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss history of use. Evaluate the historical associations of the landscape/park with the community.

The lower part of Watch Hill abutting Hale Street was deeded to Rev. John Hale (1636-1700), the first minister of Beverly' first parish, who arrived in 1665. The town provided a house for him on this site, near where the early nineteenth century house at 44 Hale now stands. In 1672, the first school house that doubled as a watch house was built on the northwest corner of the Common. It was subsequently moved, possibly surviving as Beverly Grammar School, 50 Essex Street (1706; BEV.445); NRIND/NRTRA 3/9/1990).

In 1684, the town voted to purchase land to enlarge the Common (Perley: 317) but it wasn't until March 13, 1705, that the town accepted two and three quarter acres of land owned by John Giles, Elizer Giles and John Wheeler in exchange for seven and one-half acres undivided Common land (17/110), with the stipulation that the land was to serve military exercises and to remain for the use by the public. This land, which then abutted John Hale's property and the common land of Watch Hill, is the current parcel. For the next sixty years, the land served both as a training ground, and as a schoolyard.

In 1716, Robert Hale (1668-1719), Rev. John Hale's son, who had been the schoolmaster for several years, gave the town 9 pounds to pay for a new school house on the town training ground. The Grammar School either replaced or improved upon the 1672 building. As Beverly's population expanded, the school was moved around to serve the various communities. By 1726, the school was rolled around town to four different areas so students could get instruction 3-4 months without having to get to town center. The schoolhouse was used off and on in different locations until several additional elementary schools were built in Beverly; it was retired to the training ground location in 1762.

The City's first powder and gun house (not extant) was built on the Common in 1767. It was built partly into the hillside on the south side of the Common, and surrounded by barberry bushes. It had a copper sheathed door and long slanting iron roof, often used as a slide by the local boys from the ridgepole to the ground.

In 1793, a new schoolhouse was built on the Common, replacing the Grammar School. Designed by Samuel McIntire, this building, which survives (not inventoried), was moved to 13 Prospect Street, to make way for the Hardie School, which was constructed in 1898 in its place. The plans for the McIntire schoolhouse are held at the Beverly Historical Society, which were vetted for authenticity by Abbott Cummings in the late 1960s. (See Carlman)

In May 1808, Jonathan Lovett, then commander of the third regiment of militia, initiated a subscription of money and labor for leveling the training ground, which was then uneven and encumbered with a large ledge of rocks. The leveling of the Common grew out of the 1808 Embargo, which threw many out of their accustomed employment. Some years after the leveling the Common, elms were planted along the streets and also along the Watch Hill edge of the property. In 1876 a split rail wood fence was built, surrounding the Common on the north, east and south sides; it was removed in 1895. From photographs taken at this time the Common appears as one large grassy field, entirely surrounded by a simple post and rail fence. A narrow opening between fence posts marks an entrance at the corner of Essex and Dane. The Dane streetscape is lined with mature elms, and the southeast area of the Common appears dense with trees. On November 16, 1891, the first Beverly - Salem high school football game was played on the Common.

Continuation sheet 2

A 1915 "Plan of the Common showing Proposed Improvements" by City Engineer A. L. Whitney shows two paths entering from the south and east corners on Hale Street. They meet just before the group of cedars, then diverge around the trees and reconnect, with one path following the perimeter along Dane Street, and the other path running parallel to the bottom of the Watch Hill slope. A third path bisects the Common on a diagonal, starting opposite Butman Street and crossing in a straight line to a point just east of the Hardie School.

Although the new Classical Revival Library was finished by 1913, Whitney's plan offers no entrance to the Common directly across Essex Street from the library. No fence is indicated in Whitney's plan: the Common appears bordered on all three street sides by a buffer strip of grass and evenly spaced trees.

On October 14, 1918, on the 250th anniversary of the incorporation of Beverly as a town, the schoolchildren gave a Flagpole that now stands near Essex Street. In the summer of 1942, the Flagpole was replaced and rededicated after it had been destroyed by lightning that year (Photo 7).

In 1967, a "Preliminary General Development Plan" was prepared for the Beverly Parks Commission by Shurcliff and Merrill. In this plan, a walkway meanders around the perimeter of the Common, and three distinct areas within the Common were designated as 1) a turf area, just west of the group of cedars; 2) a large oval shaped area surfaced in gravel to be used as an 'intensive play area;" 3) an area roughly rectangular and facing the Hardie School, covered in turf, labeled as an "open turf Common and field sports play area." Other amenities suggested by Shurcliff and Merrill included a 'children's amphitheatre,' set into the steep sloping area on the north slope of Watch Hill, to the east of the school building, and a toboggan run between the amphitheatre and the school. A 'commemorative fountain' was proposed with two alternate locations. At the time of this plan, the program for the Common suggests play areas for schoolchildren were prioritized over passive adult use.

At a town meeting on May 3, 1984, there was a discussion about rehabilitating the Common. Beverly Main Streets submitted a proposal. Issues discussed concerned irrigation, sodding, curbing on Dane Street, appropriate lighting, furniture and historic plaques. Also discussed was the feasibility of moving the Powder House on Madison Ave (1808; BEV.915) to the Common.

Neither the Shurcliff and Merrill plan nor the Main Streets proposals were implemented. In 1996 the City sponsored a design competition that led to the transformation of the Common to its current configuration, with new path alignments, benches, formal Promenade and ornamental planting, and a Bandstand. On the 1996 plan, the existing paths that were to be removed to create the current circulation are those laid out by Whitney in 1915, suggesting that for most of the twentieth century, the Common remained a simple, open grassy area, with only the one path bisecting it diagonally. The winning design by Peter Torre Associates of Revere retained paths that enter from the two corners of the Common on Hale Street and intersect before the cedars. The island bed of cedar trees has persisted as a consistent focal point of the eastern end of the Common.

The cedar trees, which were noted as evergreens on both Whitney's and Shurcliff and Merrill's plans, were specifically identified by Torre (1996). From fifteen to twenty inches caliper, they are each over 60 feet tall. On maps depicting Beverly in both 1700 (Perley) and ca. 1800 (Berry), a "Cedar Stand' was noted in the vicinity of the easternmost end of the Common, in between two streams that existed before the laying out of streets. "Cedar Swamp" was also the name given to one of the seven common land areas of Beverly, and the one closest to the town center. This cedar tree (Chamaecypris thyoides), commonly known as Atlantic white cedar, grows in monocultures in fresh water boggy, peaty areas, with specimens growing close together. Cedar's decay resistance properties made it an important resource for construction of anything exposed to weathering, Due to their slow growth rate, cedars were not cultivated, so a naturally occurring cedar stand would have been a very valuable asset. Given the land had been taken by the town by 1705, the trees would have been much smaller and not worth harvesting, so they may be living relics of Beverly's early landscape.

Torre's plan remains true to its original design, including tree planting, except for some modifications to the formal hedges, and the omission of a gate that had been planned for the promenade entry on Essex Street. The Bandstand was designed by Connolly Planning, Design and Construction of Beverly as part of the 1996 renovation effort.

In 1999, the City sold the Hardie School parcel to Montserrat College of Art.

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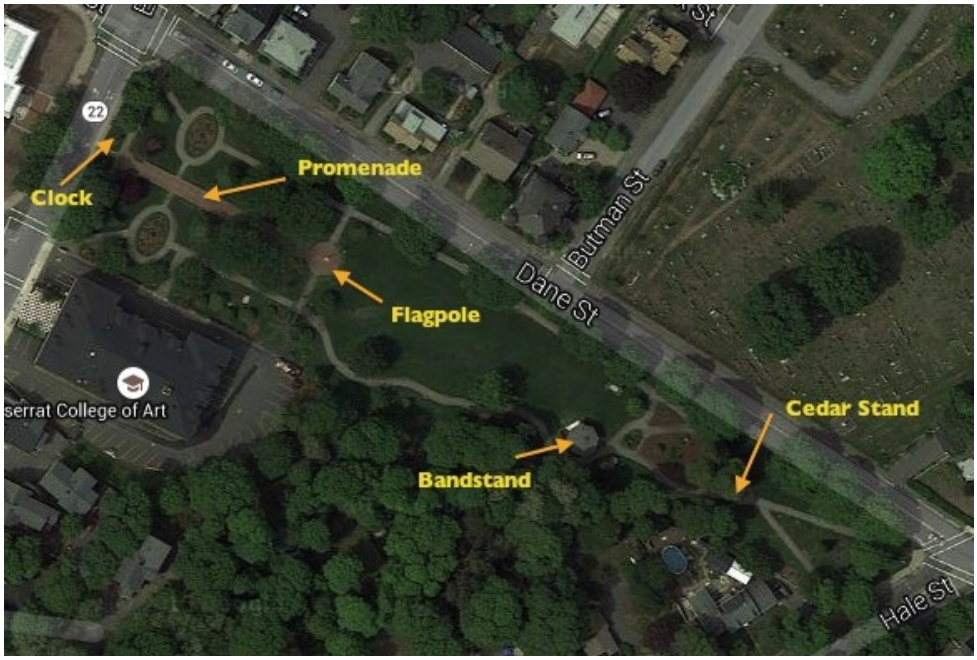
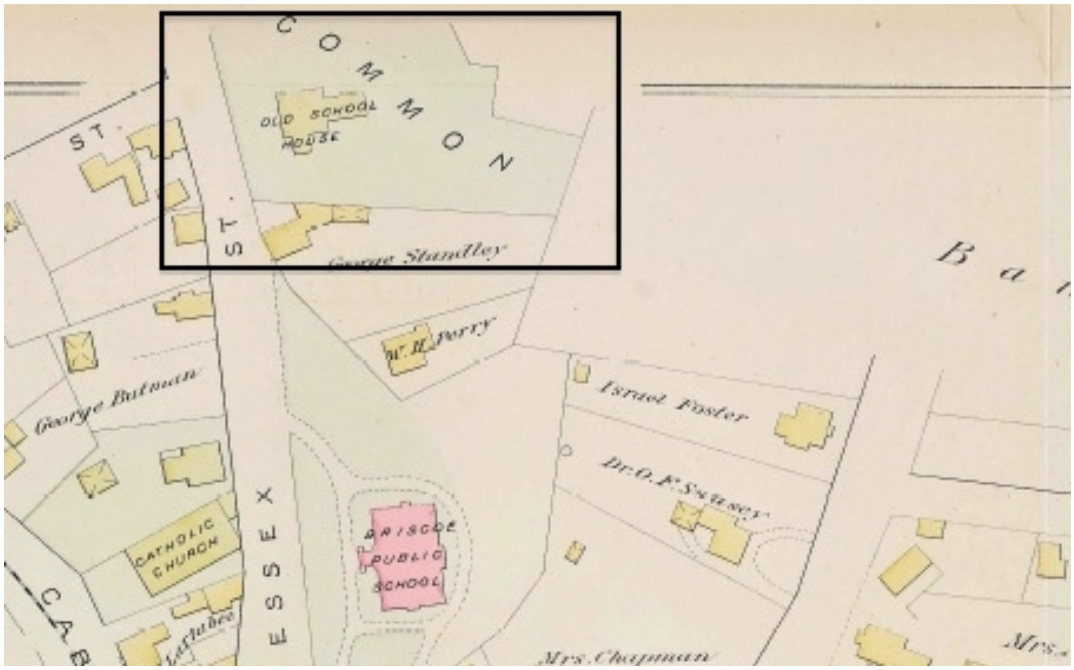
DATA SHEET

MHC#	Parcel ID	Street Address	Name	Date
BEV.901	11-469	31 Essex St	Beverly Common	1705
NA	11-469	31 Essex St	Cedar Stand	Ca. 1700
BEV.968	11-469	31 Essex St	Flagpole	1942
BEV.969	11-469	31 Essex St	Bandstand	1996
BEV.970	11-469	31 Essex St	Promenade	1996
BEV.971	11-469	31 Essex St	Clock	2014

SKETCH MAP (north is up) (Source: Google maps aerial view 2016)



Map 2
Hopkins, 1880. Map showing historic extent of Common parcel, including school. (north is up)



SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES

Photo 2. View along Dane St. to Essex St. Iron fence of Central Cemetery on far right

Photo 3. Fences/walls along Watch Hill boundary.

Photo 4. View from Dane Street: Watch Hill center, Hardie School on right, Bandstand on left.

Photo 5. Promenade and Flagpole looking toward Library.

Photo 6. Paving detail of Promenade

Photo 7. Stone dust path circulation at rose beds.

Photo 8. Path along base of Watch Hill, looking toward Hale St.

Photo 9. Bandstand, 1996.

Photo 10. Common central open space, viewed from Dane St sidewalk. Location of yew shrubs (center & far right, in front of Hardie School) mark location of former diagonal path bisecting the Common, prior to1996.

Photo 11. Commemorative plaque on Flagpole.

Photo 12. Commemorative plaque on Clock.

Photo 13. sHardie School, now Montserrat College of Art.

Photo 14. Clock at Essex Street entry at Promenade.

Photo 15. Red Cedar Stand at intersection of paths entering from Hale St.