

1574

FORM B - BUILDING

AUG 21 1989

AREA FORM NO.

L	53
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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
80 BOYLSTON STREET  
BOSTON, MA 02116

NATIONAL REGISTER

WALTHAM, MA MRA  
Town Waltham, Massachusetts

Address 169 Elm Street

Historic Name American Watch Tool

Company

Use Present industrial

Original industrial

DESCRIPTION

Date 1877, 1879, 1881, 1901, 1916

Source Sanderson - Waltham Industries

Style late 19th/early 20th c.  
industrial

Architect - unknown

Exterior Wall Fabric brick

Outbuildings - garage-NC

Major Alterations (with dates) mid-section added in 1881, front section added in 1901, north ell added 1916

Condition good

Moved - no Date n/a

Acreage 26,221 sq.ft. 0.60 69-4-1

Setting located in industrial area  
adjacent to railroad tracks, faces  
playing field.

Recorded by Edward W. Gordon

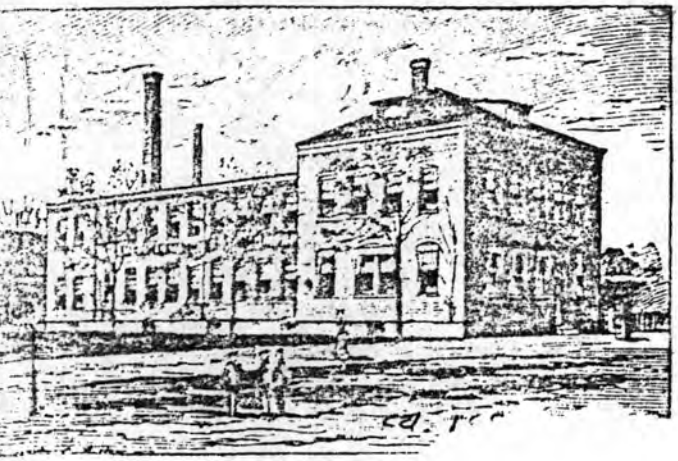
Organization Waltham Hist. Comm.

Date June, 1986

revised by C. Jenkins 3/88

Photo (3"x 3" or 3"x5", black and white) Indicate address of property on back of photo. Staple to left side of form.

Sketch Map: Draw map showing property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or geographical features. Indicate all buildings between inventoried property and nearest intersection(s). Indicate north



UTM REFERENCE 19/316 210 /4693 230

USGS QUADRANGLE NEWTON

SCALE 1:25,000

## NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)

The American Watch Tool Company possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and associations with Waltham's most important late-19th century industry. Founded in 1877, it was the first spin-off company from the American Waltham Watch Company. During the late-19th century, it was one of the most successful off-spring of the "Watch". It is also important as a well-preserved, small-scale industrial complex that has evolved from 1877-1916. It meets criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places.

## ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.

The American Watch Tool Company's four masonry components provide a unique opportunity to study the structural evolution of an industrial complex which has expanded over a forty year period (1877 -1916), to meet the needs of watch tool and automobile manufacturing concerns. All of the building's components are constructed of brick, and stand two stories tall. The large, rectangular, 7-bay x 7-bay segment adjacent to the street exhibits a main facade, with three regimental rows of 6-window bays (small square windows at basement level). These windows contain 6/6 wood sash with lintels, composed of two rows of header bricks. To the right of windows is an entrance way which is surmounted by an tall, multi-pane transom. This segment culminates in an angled brickwork cornice, and is enclosed by a flat roof. This section dates to 1901.

(cont)

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.

The American Watch Tool Company's roots may be traced back to the American Watch Company's (see form on 185-241 Crescent Street) financial difficulties brought on by the Civil War. Royal E. Robbins, American Watch Company treasurer and general manager, retained "The Watch's" full work force to manufacture a few lathes for watch repairer's use - this manufacturing side line produced independent lathe-manufacturers, as well as lathes. Several skilled machinists left the American Watch Company to found their own businesses. The American Watch Tool Company was the first such "spin-off" company from "The Watch."

In 1872, three A.W. Company employees - John Whitcomb, George Ballou and Henry Fisher, left the A. W. Company to form an independent watch tool manufacturing factory. John Whitcomb was born in Rutland, Vermont in 1832. From the age of 13 until his 28th year, he was a seaman on whaling expeditions. He began work at "The Watch" in 1863. George Ballou was born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, in 1846. At age 12, he began work as an apprentice machinist for Cole Brothers, manufacturers of fire engines and rifles for the U.S. government. After working for Brown and Sharpe Manufacturing Company in Providence, Rhode Island and the Buttonhole Machine Company in

(cont)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Maps/Atlases - 1874, 1881, 1883, 1886, 1898, 1900  
Waltham/Watertown Directories, early 20th century  
Sanderson, E.L., Waltham Industries, 1957  
Charles River Museum Files, Catalogue of American Watch Tool Company, 1884  
Waltham Free Press, December 18th, 1885  
Middlesex References - December 3, 1880, 1557:167

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, continued

firm to purchase property on Elm Street, and to eventually increase the facilities for doing mechanical work.

The 1874 Atlas shows 8 vacant lots on the west side of Benefit Street (later Elm Street), extending from the Charles River to a pond at the bend in Benefit Street. The American Watch Tool Company would be built on the seventh and eighth lots. By 1886, this factory is shown as roughly L-shaped in configuration. Oddly, the 1898 Bird's-eye-view map shows this company with its U-shaped addition (see the Second row of insets, lower left hand corner of the 1898 map).

In any event, land was purchased on the Watertown Branch of the Fitchburg Railway and a two-storied brick building was completed in 1877. Mr. Webster subsequently introduced a line of machines for the manufacture of watches, based on those in the Waltham factory, but with improvements. The size of the Elm Street plant was increased in 1879 and 1882. During the early 1880's, about fifty men were employed - almost all of them were highly skilled in machine, tool and diemaking.

The American Watch Tool Company played a significant role in the development of other watch tool companies, most notably, Benedict and Burnham's Waterbury Watch Company. Mr. Webster was selected by this company to design and superintend the construction of the Waterbury building. Waltham's premier architect, Henry W. Hartwell, was the Waterbury factory's architect.

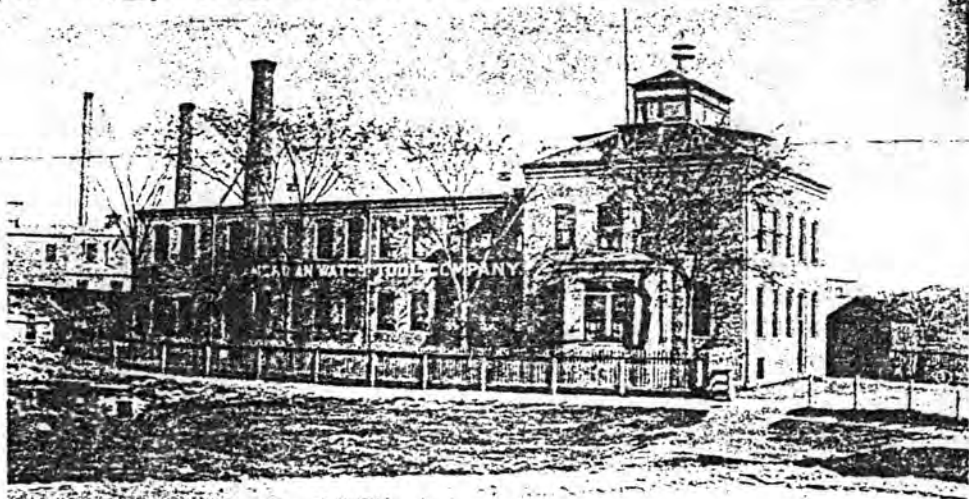
During the 1880's, the American Watch Tool Company produced "pinion cutters, staff-turning-lathes, epicycloidal machines, punches and dies, milling machines and slide spindle lathes"

In 1898, Silas A. Barton succeeded Mr. Whitcomb as general manager. Born in Ware, Massachusetts in 1846, Mr. Barton came to Waltham in 1890. He was the founder of the Lynn Electric Light Company in 1882.

In 1901, an addition was made to the front of the factory, obscuring the early 1880's hip-roof and cupola-crowned section. This addition brought the front of the factory to the street-line. The early 1900's were a turbulent decade for the American Watch Tool Company with the firm fading-out, and then making a dramatic eleventh-hour "comeback". In September, 1902, the Loop-Lock Machine Company, makers of shoe machinery, obtained control of "The Watch" tool business, and carried it on until February 15, 1904.

Officials of the Metz Company, automobile manufacturers, obtained control of the American Watch Tool Company during the 1910's (Evidently the saw tooth roof addition was added in 1916, before the Metz takeover). During the second decade of the 20th-century, the Metz company was the largest automobile manufacturer outside Detroit. By 1950, the Belgian Spinning Company owned this property.

*FROM: E.L. Sanderson - Waltham Industries 1951*



AMERICAN WATCH TOOL COMPANY. 1891

### ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE, continued

To the rear of the 1901 segment are two structures - the mid-section dates to 1881, the long rear segment was built in 1887. The mid-section's main facade is presently obscured by the 1901 addition. Its 4-bay, side-wall features standard size windows with multi-pane sash and lintels composed of two rows of header bricks. This segment culminates in an angled brickwork cornice, and is enclosed by a slate shingle hip-roof - still intact is the hip-roof's rectangular, hip-roofed cupola. To the rear of the middle segment is a long rectangular structure (12 bays) with a projecting 1-bay x 1-bay stairwell at the 9th bay. This segment culminates in an angled brickwork cornice and is enclosed by a flat roof. Projecting from the rear segment's side wall, is a low, 1-story, cinder-block addition.

Also noteworthy is that addition which extends from the north wall. Its most unusual feature is the saw-tooth-roof, which is designed to be glazed toward the north, providing strong, even light to the work space below. A much more extensive saw-tooth-roof encloses the old Metz auto factory at Sey on Street. The 1916 addition is characterized by planar brick surfaces with openings limited to a large delivery entrance on the Elm Street wall. Its roof is topped by four saw "teeth".

### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, continued

Chelsea, Massachusetts, he began work at the American Watch Company in 1869.

Henry N. Fisher (see form on 120 Crescent Street) was born in New Hampshire in 1844. He was severely wounded in the battle of Antietam in September, 1862. Mr. Fisher figured prominently in the business, political and social affairs of late 19th/early 20th-century Waltham. In addition to acting in an advisory capacity to Ballou, Whitney and Company, he was a foreman of the American Watch Company's escapement department, mayor of Waltham, president of Waltham National Bank, etc..

In 1874, Mr. Ballou returned to the American Watch Company. The Waltham Shop, which he had been instrumental in starting, was carried on by Whitney and Fisher under the name of J. E. Whitcomb and Company. This firm exhibited their watchmaker's lathes to great acclaim at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. More importantly, Ambrose Webster joined this company on November 1, 1876; and the name American Watch Tool Company was taken.

Born in Southbridge, Massachusetts in 1832, Mr. Webster was "the first trained machinist to be hired by the watch factory". He had been trained at the Springfield, Massachusetts arsenal, coming to Waltham in 1857. Webster rose to the rank of Assistant Superintendent at "The Watch". He designed and built many machines for watch manufacturing. He is credited as "the first to design and build a pinion or gear cutting machine with automatic indexing of the work." Ambrose Webster brought the American Watch Tool Company the capital which enabled the

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

AUG 21 1989

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

Name Waltham MRA  
State Middlesex County, MASSACHUSETTS

Nomination/Type of Review	Date/Signature
Cover <i>Substantive Review</i>	Keeper <u>151</u> <u>9/28/89</u>
1. American Waltham Watch Company entered in the Historic District National Register	Keeper <u>Alvina Byers</u> <u>9/28/89</u> Attest _____
2. American Watch Tool Company entered in the National Register	Keeper <u>Alvina Byers</u> <u>9/28/89</u> Attest _____
3. Andrews, Joseph, House Entered in the National Register	Keeper <u>Alvina Byers</u> <u>9/28/89</u> Attest _____
4. Baker, Charles, House Entered in the National Register	Keeper <u>Alvina Byers</u> <u>9/28/89</u> Attest _____
5. Baker, Charles, Property Entered in the National Register	Keeper <u>Alvina Byers</u> <u>9/28/89</u> Attest _____
6. Banks, E. Sybill, House Entered in the National Register	Keeper <u>Alvina Byers</u> <u>9/28/89</u> Attest _____
<i>Substantive Review</i> 7. Barnes, Thomas, House <b>DOE/OWNER OBJECTION</b>	Keeper <u>Eligible Beth Sarge</u> <u>9/28/89</u> Attest _____
8. Beard, Josiah, House entered in the National Register	Keeper <u>Alvina Byers</u> <u>9/28/89</u> Attest _____
<i>Substantive Review</i> 9. Beth Eden Baptist Church	Keeper <u>Beth Sarge</u> <u>9/28/89</u> Attest _____
10. Boston Manufacturing Company Housing (380--410 River St.) Entered in the National Register	Keeper <u>Alvina Byers</u> <u>9/28/89</u> Attest _____

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY American Watch Tool Company  
NAME:

MULTIPLE Waltham MRA  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Middlesex

DATE RECEIVED: 8/21/89 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 9/05/89  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 9/21/89 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/05/89  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 89001574

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 9/28/89 DATE Entered in the  
National Register

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_  
REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_  
DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

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CLASSIFICATION

count       resource type

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STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

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FUNCTION

historic       current

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DESCRIPTION

architectural classification  
 materials  
 descriptive text

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SIGNIFICANCE

Period      Areas of Significance--Check and justify below

Specific dates      Builder/Architect  
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

summary paragraph  
 completeness  
 clarity  
 applicable criteria  
 justification of areas checked  
 relating significance to the resource  
 context  
 relationship of integrity to significance  
 justification of exception  
 other

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

acreage       verbal boundary description  
 UTM's       boundary justification

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ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION/PRESENTATION

sketch maps       USGS maps       photographs       presentation

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OTHER COMMENTS

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



American Watch Tool

east elevation

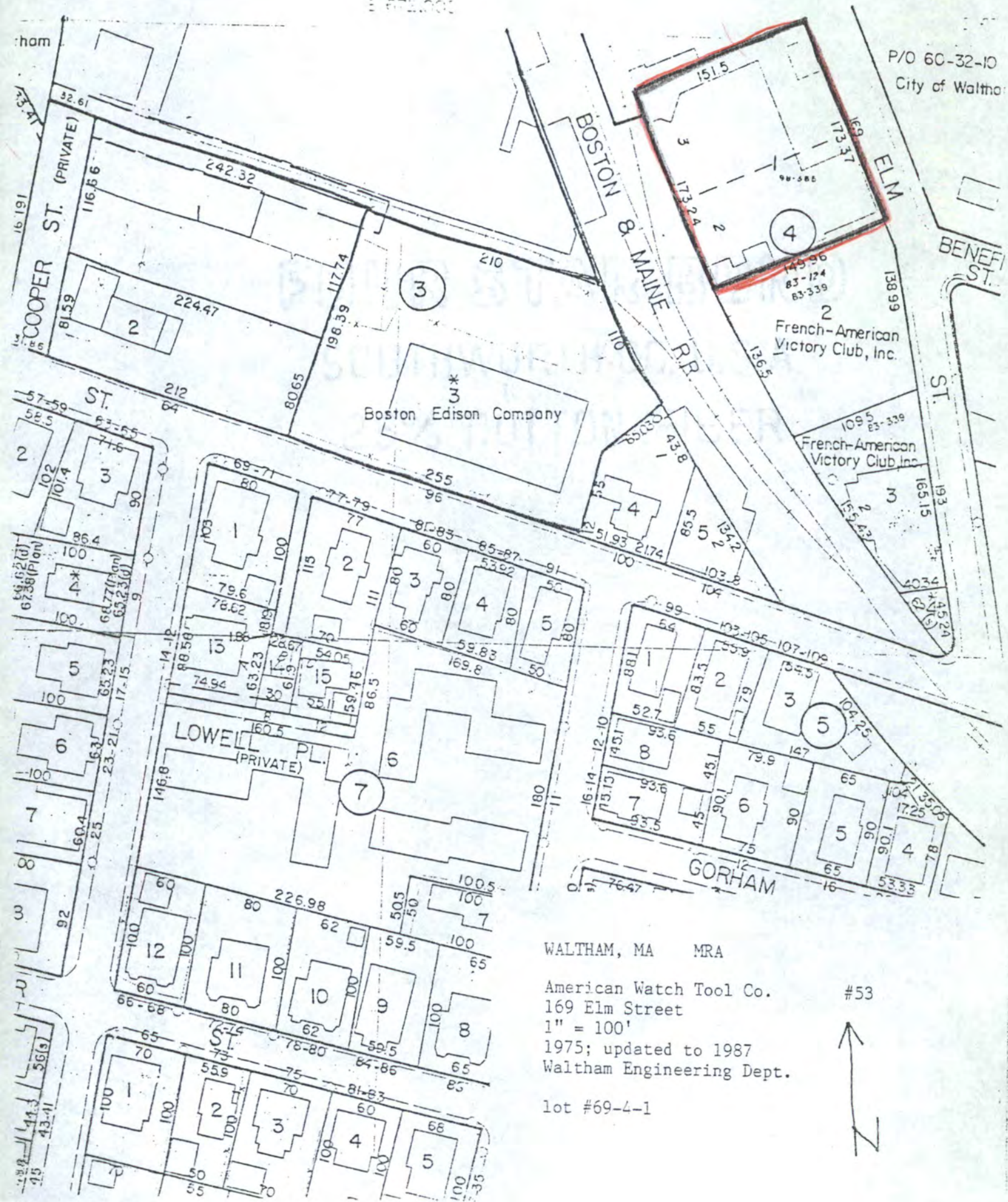
Waltham <sup>MA</sup> MRA

MHC #53

169 Elm St.

1 672,000

P/O 60-32-10  
City of Waltham



WALTHAM, MA MRA

American Watch Tool Co.  
169 Elm Street  
1" = 100'  
1975; updated to 1987  
Waltham Engineering Dept.

lot #69-4-1

#53



Please refer to the map in the  
Multiple Property Cover Sheet  
for this property

Multiple Property Cover Sheet Reference Number: 64000301