

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

13/30/4	Nashua South		CLM.323
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Town/City: Chelmsford

Place: (*neighborhood or village*): North Chelmsford

Photograph



Address: 45 Adams Street

Historic Name: Varney Field House

Uses: Present: Sport and Recreation Facility

Original: Sport and Recreation Facility

Date of Construction: 1935

Source: Chelmsford Town Meeting Records

Style/Form: no style

Architect/Builder: WPA

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: brick and wood clapboard/stone and wood

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
none

Major Alterations (*with dates*):
2016 renovation

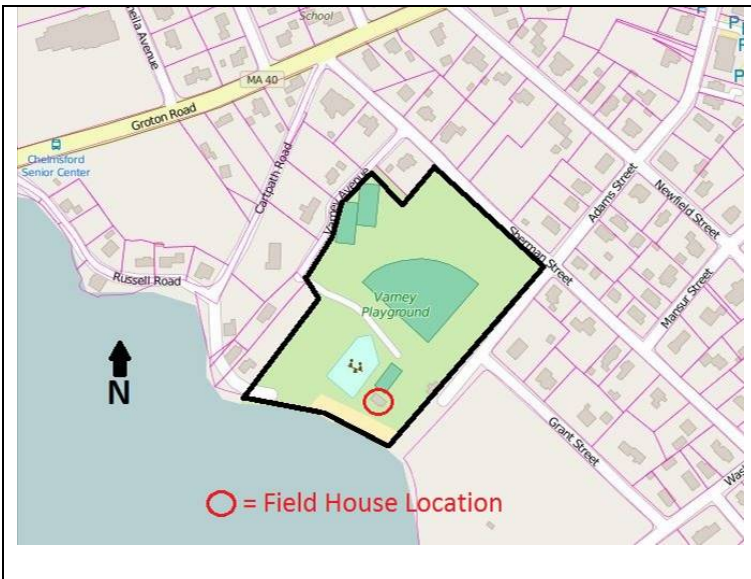
Condition: Poor

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 6.79 A

Setting: The field house is located within the Varney Playground recreation area of North Chelmsford. The site includes a baseball field, tennis and basketball courts, and a playground. The field house faces Freeman Lake at the south end of the parcel.

Locus Map



Recorded by: Linda V. Prescott, Jennifer Burden

Organization: Chelmsford Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): June 2016

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

Varney Playground is located at the west corner of Adams and Sherman streets in North Chelmsford, approximately two blocks southwest of Vinal Square. The field house is the only building within the Varney Playground site. Other areas of the park include a baseball field that encompasses most of the site, two tennis courts on the northwest side of the parcel, a basketball court at the south end of the parcel, a playground with modern equipment also at the south end, and the Varney Playground arch near the field house.

Renovation of the site and field house was underway during the site visit on May 9, 2016. At this date the windows and door of the field house had been removed and the openings were currently secured with plywood. The one-story field house with basement has a granite block foundation, brick walls with stone trim, and a side gable asphalt-shingled roof. The corners of the building are trimmed with stone quoins. An external brick chimney with a granite base is located on the west wall. The side gable roof has wide overhanging eaves on all four sides. A one-bay eave projection on the primary (north) façade shelters the entry door. The primary façade is symmetrically divided into three bays with the center entry flanked by window openings. The first story of the rear (south) wall is two bays wide with window openings in each bay. The basement level of this wall is four bays wide with door openings on the outer bays that led to restrooms and window openings in the inner bays. The gable ends of the east and west walls are clad in painted wood clapboard. These walls are two bays deep with window openings in the bays.

The building is an example of WPA-era architecture that because of current renovation work retains historic integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

In 1926 Dr. Fred Varney, M.D. of North Chelmsford purchased approximately seven acres of land then valued at \$4000 along the edge of Crystal Lake (now known as Freeman Lake) and granted the land to the Town of Chelmsford for a playground and recreation area. Dr. Varney (born 1861 in Maine, died June 8, 1944) in 1894 transitioned into the medical practice of the late Dr. Nathan B. Edwards at 6 Edwards Place. He acquired land from Clara Adams in 1899, built his own home and doctor's office at 34 Middlesex Street (CLM.139) in 1901, and from 1918 to 1920 practiced medicine across the street at 35 Middlesex Street (CLM.83). In 1906 Dr. Varney was appointed to a clean water committee for North Chelmsford and in 1915 he was a member of the Board of Health. Dr. Varney's interest in the community's health led to his donation for the creation of the playground.

Over the next several years, the Town developed the largely swampy land into a recreational area with funding from the Emergency Relief Association (ERA) and later the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Annual Town reports record the process of the playground development. The Town Report in 1934 notes that the playground was then graded for a baseball diamond and two tennis courts. In 1935 the Town added approximately 300' of sandy beach on the north edge of Crystal Lake and had completed construction of the tennis courts. Later in 1935 construction of the field house building began. In 1939 walkways and brick stairs were added to access the field house and ornamental trees were planted on the site. Also in this year the Town developed plans to erect an entrance to the playground in honor of Dr. Varney. By 1941 the granite block entry was completed and plans were made to install bronze plaques on the entry in memory of Dr. Edwards, who was very involved with the affairs of North Chelmsford during the mid-nineteenth century; no evidence of these plaques, however, has been discovered. Work continued on the creation of the playground until the outbreak of World War II.

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Enjoyment of the Varney Playground continues partially to strong community support. The Varney Playground Association has been instrumental in the organization of playground activities, sport leagues, and social and fundraising events. In 2015 a Master Plan was created for Varney Playground using community input that includes maintenance plans, renovation of the basketball and tennis courts, additional parking options, and better use of the field house.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Chelmsford Historical Commission. *History of Chelmsford 1910 – 1970*. Chelmsford Historical Commission, Chelmsford, MA. 2011.

Chelmsford Town Meeting and Annual Reports.

Genealogical research, including U.S. and Massachusetts census records; birth, marriage, and death records; and city directory records from ancestry.com.



Rear of field house, facing southeast. May 2016.

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Baseball field, facing southwest. May 2016.



Playground equipment, facing northeast. May 2016.

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Field house building, facing west. Photograph taken by Fred Merriam, Chelmsford Historical Society, June 2016.