

FORM A - AREA

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

13-34	Lowell	J	CLM.425 CLM.426 CLM.427
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Town/City: Chelmsford

Place (*neighborhood or village*): North Chelmsford

Photograph



View looking southwest along Gay Street from the intersection with Middlesex St. 1-7 Gay Street at right.

Name of Area: Gay Street Workers Housing

Present Use: Multiple-family residences

Construction Dates or Period: Ca. 1820-1840

Overall Condition: Good

Major Intrusions and Alterations: Vinyl siding, replacement windows.

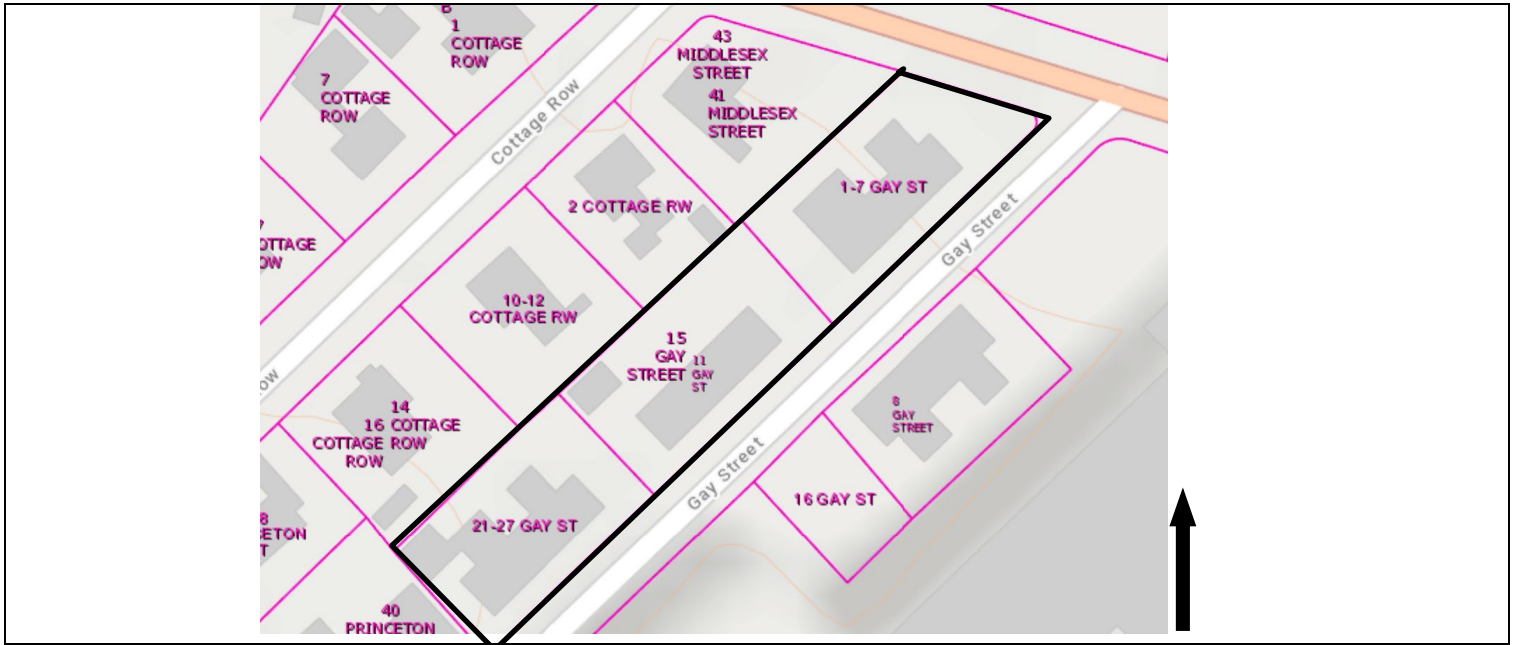
Acreage: 0.62

Recorded by: Stacy Spies, Historic Preservation Cons.

Organization: For Chelmsford Historical Commission

Date: March 2022

Locus Map



see continuation sheet

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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J

CLM.425
CLM.426
CLM.427

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, structural and landscape features and evaluate in terms of other areas within the community.

These three rowhouses are located in a neighborhood of one- and two-story residences located among large brick industrial buildings dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries. The buildings have shallow setbacks. The buildings are all two stories in height; 21-27 Gay Street has a steeper pitch and higher roof, while the other two buildings are similar in volume in spite of being constructed of different materials. All three buildings rest on cut granite slab foundations. The asphalt-shingled, side-gabled roofs have shallow eaves. The buildings are each ten bays wide and two bays deep and divided into four units. The units are defined by two pairs of doors at the third and eighth bays. A single window is located in each gable peak. Except where noted, the windows are all vinyl sash replacements.

1-7 Gay Street (CLM.425) (ca. 1820) is constructed of brick laid in a pattern of 11 rows of stretchers alternating with a row of headers. Windows are articulated with granite lintels and sills. Here, the entry doors are constructed of paneled wood that contain four panels beneath two small lights. The entrances are sheltered with shallow-pitched front-gabled porches supported by square-section wood posts. These porches appear to be mid-20th century replacements; photographic evidence indicates that that, at one time, the entrances featured jigsaw brackets like those that remain at 21-27 Gay St.¹ Two one-story frame ells extend from the rear (northwest) elevation. The ells both contain a secondary entrance with a bracketed shelter (ca. 1915) and three windows.

11-17 Gay Street (CLM.426) (ca. 1820) is a frame building covered with vinyl siding. The entrances are sheltered with shallow-pitched front-gabled porches supported by square-section wood posts. These porches appear to be mid-20th century replacements or additions. A side-gabled frame garage with two bays of side-hung wood vehicle doors is located at the south end of the lot.

21-27 Gay Street (CLM.427) (ca. 1840) is a frame building covered with vinyl siding and shutters. Three interior brick chimneys pierce the east roof slope near the roof ridge. 21-27 Gay Street retains a few early, wood-sash windows: centered over the entrances and in the gable peaks. The entrances are sheltered with shallow-pitched front-gabled roofs supported by jigsaw brackets with drop pendants, likely dating from circa 1860s. While the doors are recent metal replacements, delicate wood transoms of four lights each surmount the doorways. Two one-story frame ells extend from the rear (northwest) elevation. The ells contain a secondary entrance with a bracketed shelter (ca. 1915) and three windows. A front-gabled garage constructed of concrete block is located at the south end of the lot.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Explain historical development of the area. Discuss how this relates to the historical development of the community.

In 1832, Ira Gay purchased a machine shop and blast furnace that had been owned by General Shepherd Leach, thus establishing what would become the Silver & Gay Company. In 1838, Ira's brother, Ziba, purchased additional land and water rights from that company.² The Gay brothers' factory created machinery for woolen mills, of which there were many in North Chelmsford and Lowell. These three rowhouse buildings on Gay Street were owned by the company and used as housing for employees. In 1841, Ziba Gay sold one half of the company to Harvey Silver. In 1857, Ziba Gay, Jr. took over his father's interest in the company.³

¹ *Images of America: Chelmsford*: 68.

² Middlesex South Registry of Deeds Book 332, p. 130.

³ Waters: 668-669.

INVENTORY FORM A CONTINUATION SHEET

CHELMSFORD

GAY ST WORKERS HOUSING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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The 1834 deed did not reference specific buildings included in the sale; it is unclear whether the rowhouses on Gay Street were included in that purchase. However, given the buildings' appearances, it seems likely that 1-7 Gay Street was constructed in the early 19th century (pre-1832) and 21-27 Gay Street was constructed in the mid-19th century. Alterations to the buildings have removed stylistic details that might provide further clues as to their date. All three buildings were present at the time of the 1856 map.

In 1898, George C. Moore purchased the factory and operated it under the name of The North Chelmsford Machine & Supply Company, which manufactured leather belting, leather comb aprons, brushes, and general mill supplies. In 1917, the current production included: automatic ball winders, yarn quillers, jack spooling machines, reels, wool scouring machinery, wool openers, leather belting, roll covering leather for worsted, jute, and flax mills. "This shop was one of the first, if not the first in America to manufacture worsted yarn machinery."⁴

In 1920, the three houses were sold to the United States Worsted Company, which owned them for eleven years.⁵ In 1931, the buildings were sold individually to private owners.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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AREA DATA SHEET

Assessor's #	MHC #		Street Address	Construction Date	Style	Acreage
13/ 34/ 2/ /	CLM.425	Silver & Gay Workers Housing	1-7 Gay St.	Ca. 1820	No Style	0.22
13/ 34/ 5 /11- -13-15-17	CLM.426	Silver & Gay Workers Housing	11-17 Gay St.	Ca. 1820	No Style	0.20
13/ 34/ 7/ /	CLM.427	Silver & Gay Workers Housing	21-27Gay St.	Ca. 1840	No Style	0.20

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION – See next page

⁴ Waters: 669.

⁵ Middlesex North Registry of Deeds Book 622, p. 13 and Book 810. p. 31.

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View looking south at rear of 1-7 Gay St.



View looking north at 11-17 Gay St (L) and 1-7 Gay St (R).



Garage. 11-17 Gay St.



View looking north along Gay St. 21-27 Gay Street at L.



Detail. Entrance of 21-27 Gay St.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Atlas for Lowell, Mass. (includes North Chelmsford.) Plate 74.