

**FORM B – BUILDING**

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

72-320-1

Billerica

299

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

Town Chelmsford  
 Place (neighborhood or village) Chelmsford Center



54 Westford Street  
 Name Wilson Kimball House  
 Present residence, 1 family  
 Original residence, 1 family  
 Construction 1887-8  
 Lowell Weekly Journal  
 "Our Annual" progress notes  
 Builder Colonial Revival  
 Almon. W. Holt, builder  
 Material: clapboard

Foundation main: small, cut granite blocks  
 rear: rough granite blocks

Wall/Trim

Roof hip style; slate

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures none

Major Alterations (with dates)

1912  
 1939  
 See attached sheet

Condition good

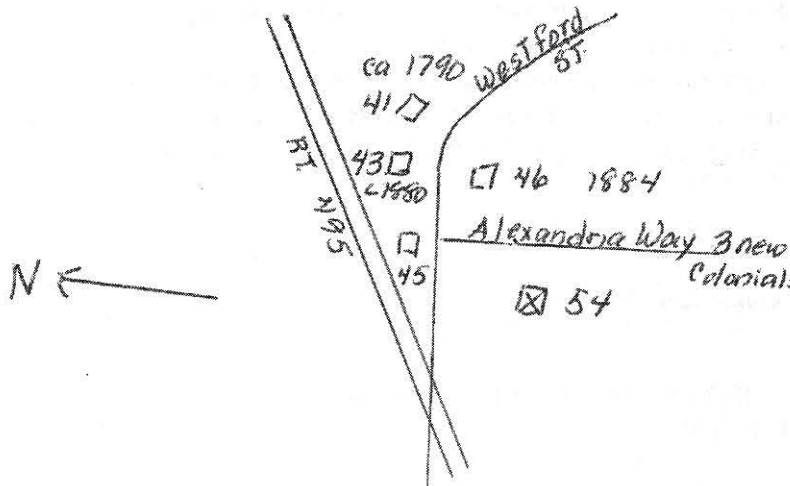
Moved  no  yes Date

Acreage 1.52 acres

Setting The house is set high on a hill overlooking Westford St. & Rt. 495. A new development of houses has been built to the left of this property.

**Sketch Map**

Draw a map showing the building's location in relation to the nearest cross streets and/or major natural features. Show all buildings between inventoried building and nearest intersection or natural feature. Label streets including route numbers, if any. Circle and number the inventoried building. Indicate north.



Recorded by Jane B. Drury

Organization for Chelmsford Historical Commission

Date (month / year) February 2006

## BUILDING FORM

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION see continuation sheet

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

The Colonial Revival residence at 54 Westford St. is very similar in architecture to the original architecture of 45 Westford St., across the street, built 10 years later.

### HISTORICAL NARRATIVE see continuation sheet

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.

Wilson Kimball purchased the land at 54 Westford in 1884 from the Perham family. On November 4, 1887 workmen were busy putting in foundations on houses on Acton Road, and "similar work is in progress on Mr. Kimball's lot on Westford street, near H. S. Perham's premises." By January 6, 1888 "good progress has been made upon Mr. Kimball's dwelling" at 54 Westford Street. During the first week in August of that year Mr. Wilson Kimball of Lowell and family moved "into his fine new residence on the Westford road." The house was a double one, and the Kimballs shared it with their son Frank and his wife. Mr. Wilson Kimball had been born in Alton N.H. in 1826. Early in life he moved to Lowell, where for 26 years he had charge of the repair shop for the Merrimack Manufacturing Co. He was an employee of the Lowell Machine Shop when the family moved to Chelmsford, and he remained with that company for 29 years. He was a man devotedly attached to his home life. In his business relations, while most lenient and considerate of others, he exacted the utmost and punctuality of himself. The house was not insulated, and in 1900 the Wilson Kimball family moved back to Lowell for the winter. Following the death of his wife in 1901, Wilson Kimball moved back to Lowell with his daughter-in-law & son. They soon moved to Newton, where he was in poor health for more than a year and confined to his son's house for the last months of his life. He died in December 1904.

Mary E. Bachelder purchased the property in 1901, and for the next 6 years the house was apparently rented out. Frank P. Brown and his wife Mary came in 1907. A widow Knox also lived here at this time. Frank Brown was a farmer but died in August 1911 and his widow and son, Frank H. Batchelder, sold it the following year to Reuben Dunsford. The property remained in the Dunsford family for forty two years.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES see continuation sheet

Assessors' records: building inspector's records

Street directories

Middlesex North District Registry of Deeds: Bk. 167, pg. 410; Estelle S. Perham to Wilson Kimball, 5/29/1884

Lowell Weekly Journal: Nov. 4, 1887; Jan. 6, 1888; Aug. 3, 1888; Oct. 25, 1900

Lowell Morning Courier: Dec. 12, 1904

Lowell Courier-Citizen: Oct. 17, 1912; Dec. 1, 1912; Mar. 7, 1913; June 15, 1913

Lowell Sun: May 20, 2005; Boston Globe: May 2005; MIT Tech Talk: May 11, 2005

Chelmsford Newsweekly: Jan. 6, 1977; June 6, 1977

Baptist paper "Our Annual", progress notes, 1887

Nancy Clark conversation: Jan. 27, 1979; Apr. 3, 1979; Sept. 2, 2005

Bradford Emerson conversation: Sept. 2, 2003

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

# INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Town  
CHELMSFORD

Property Address  
54 WESTFORD ST.

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

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## History

At that same time a cabin owned by the Dunsfords that stood in woods, also in the path of Rt. 495, was moved and attached to the rear of the house at 26 Dalton Rd. The Dunsfords' gardener's house was moved to 61 Westford St., where in 2006 it is a small red house set back among trees.



↑ 26 Dalton Rd



61 Westford St.

Four months before Gwendoline's marriage her mother, Mary Jane, died at age 41. Reuben Dunsford, Sr. died in 1935, age 58, and the property went to his eldest son, Bevan.

Meanwhile, Bevan had married Doris Cook. It was he who had the house finally insulated. In 1939 Doris went Williamsburg and "fell in love with its architecture." After her return home, many changes were made to change any Victorian architectural elements to Colonial Revival. This included replacing the all the long windows to 8 over 8 panes. Remnants of the wallpaper put on in 1939 remain in the downstairs hallway. The old kitchen sink and pump were probably removed at this time. The hall became Classical Revival in style and pillars placed between the hallway and the living room. Bevan died in 1949, and five years later the property was sold to Lincoln & Nancy Clark.

Lincoln Clark, Jr. and Nancy Parker met as children growing up in Lowell. They were married in 1941 after he had graduated from Harvard and taken his first job connected with defense work. During W.W.II he joined the Navy and worked on top-secret radar installations at MIT, Princeton University & Bell Labs. By the time the Clarks purchased 54 Westford Street, Lincoln was the associate director and eventually director of reactor operations at the Nuclear Reactor Laboratory of MIT. He retired in 1988. He and Nancy raised four children here: Lincoln III, Allan, Constance, and Nancy.

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## History

Reuben Dunsford and later his son Bevan made several architectural changes to 54 Westford Street. Reuben soon converted it from a two family to a one family house. By the middle of October 1912 "extensive alterations and improvements" were being made to both the interior and exterior of the house, but at the end of the same month a fire broke out in the partitions shortly before 5 PM. The house was still undergoing a thorough overhauling and remodeling, "and as Mr. Dunsford and Mr. E. Wade Douglas, the contractor in charge, were about to leave the building for the night, Mr. Douglas detected an unusual roaring sound near the main chimney and investigation showed that the woodwork in the partition surrounding it was on fire from the cellar to the second floor. Knowing the construction of the house and how to best get at the trouble, Mr. Douglas was prompt to act and with the aid of several pails of water and the use of hand chemicals, soon had the fire under control. Given five minutes more start, the building would have been destroyed. The steam plant by which the house is heated was being used to dry out the plastering and a defective chimney is thought to have been responsible for the fire's start. The house stands on a considerable elevation and had the fire gone beyond control, considerable property would have been greatly endangered." A game room with shellacked gum-wood walls was added to the right side of the house, and the walls of the dining room were also covered with gum wood walls, which a later owner painted over. By March 1913 Reuben Dunsford and family were "occupying their recently completed home in Westford St. For several months the house" had "been undergoing extensive interior changes and improvements."

The house continued to make news in the local paper three months later, when a clerk for the Chelmsford Center grocery store "was severely bruised and shaken in a runaway accident about 6 o'clock. In coming down the steep drive-way at the Dunsford place ..... the horse became unmanageable, the wagon striking his heels. Mr. Seeton attempted to turn into Bridge street. The sharp turn caused the wagon seat to slip and he was thrown headforemost into the roadway ..... The horse continued its run up Bridge street, and after knocking corner boards off" two residences, was caught in a garden. No damage was done to the horse, harness or wagon. Mr. Seeton was severely scraped and bruised but suffered no broken bones.

Reuben Dunsford, treasurer of the Insulated Wire Company of Lowell, was well able to afford the above architectural changes in the house. He and his wife Mary Jane (Jeannie) raised seven children here; William Bevan, who was the oldest, worked in manufacturing. Another son, Brian, died young, during the 1920s. Donald became a lawyer and moved to High Street. Harold (Harry) became a paper hanger, but little is known about Reuben, Jr. Gwendoline married Elmer Hill in 1922 in the enclosed porch on the right side of the house. Her father had a house built for them on his property as a wedding present. This stood in path of Rt. 495 and in 1959 was moved to 26 Dalton Rd.



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## Alterations

built as a 2 family residence - owner shared with son & family  
remodeled to 1 family house by Reuben Dunsford (1912-39)

1911 - present pool room on right side of house, added by Dunsfords  
date given by daughter Gwendolyn, but Reuben Dunsford didn't purchase house until May 1912

Oct. 1912 - March 1913 - "extensive interior changes and improvements" requiring the inhabitants to move out temporarily. A fire occurred here during end of Nov. 1912, probably starting in chimney.  
front entrance portico & left side porch - columns changed from thin Victorian type to heavy, plain

1939/40 - features altered to more Williamsburg type  
all windows: changed from long & thin to 6/6 panes

Aug. 19, 1989 - new deck on left side of house finished  
side porch removed: did run length of side of the house  
granite step: now hidden by the deck, but still in front of the only left side entrance.

Sept. 1995 - 2<sup>nd</sup> floor bedroom & bath alterations

### Unknown dates

porch, right side of house, added - before 1922 when Gwendolyn Dunsford married there  
dormer removed - 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, over front entrance, after 1912  
widow's walk removed - 1911-1912?? Roof became pointed.  
rear addition, including area behind main house & garage

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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CHELMSFORD

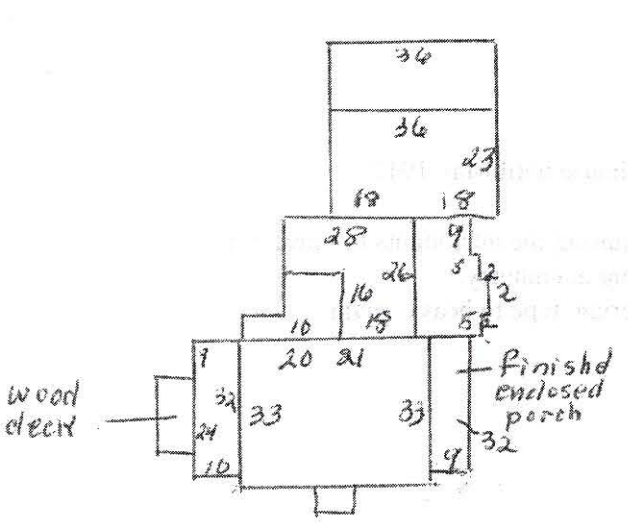
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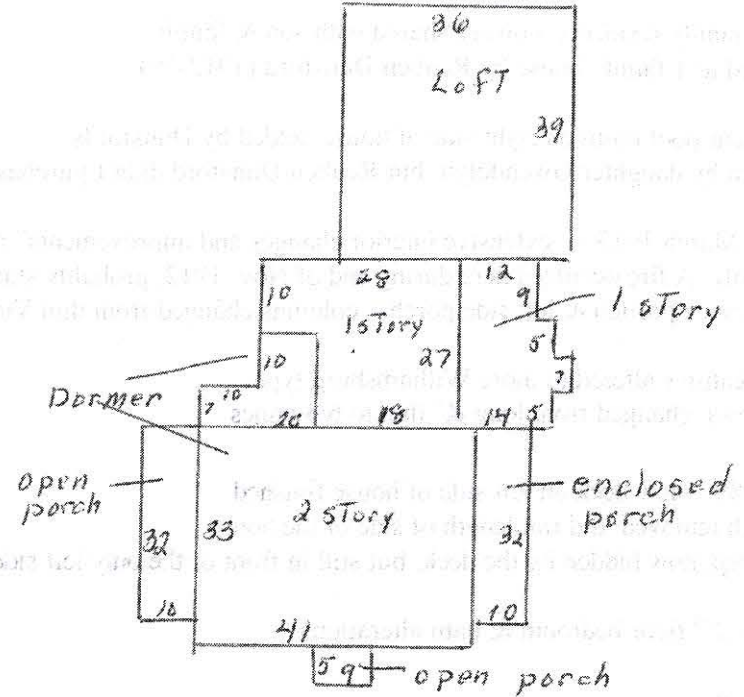
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Assessors' Records



Nov. 2005



April 15, 1971



Sept. 4, 2005  
Left side



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CHELMSFORD

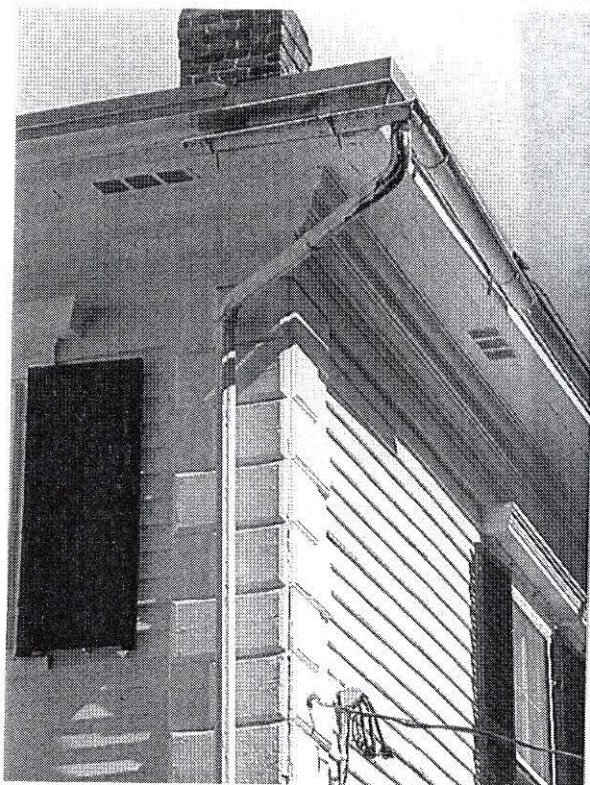
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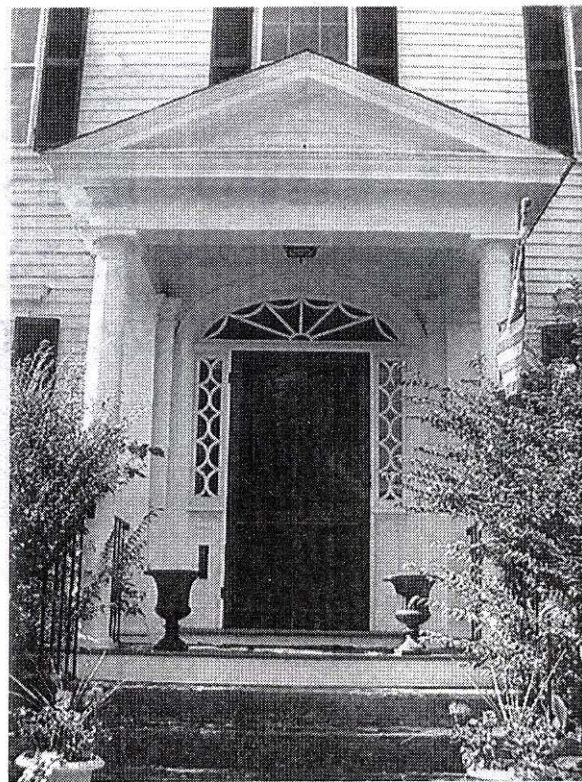
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Alterations

*Sept. 4, 2005*



*main house*



*Front entrance*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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CHELMSFORD

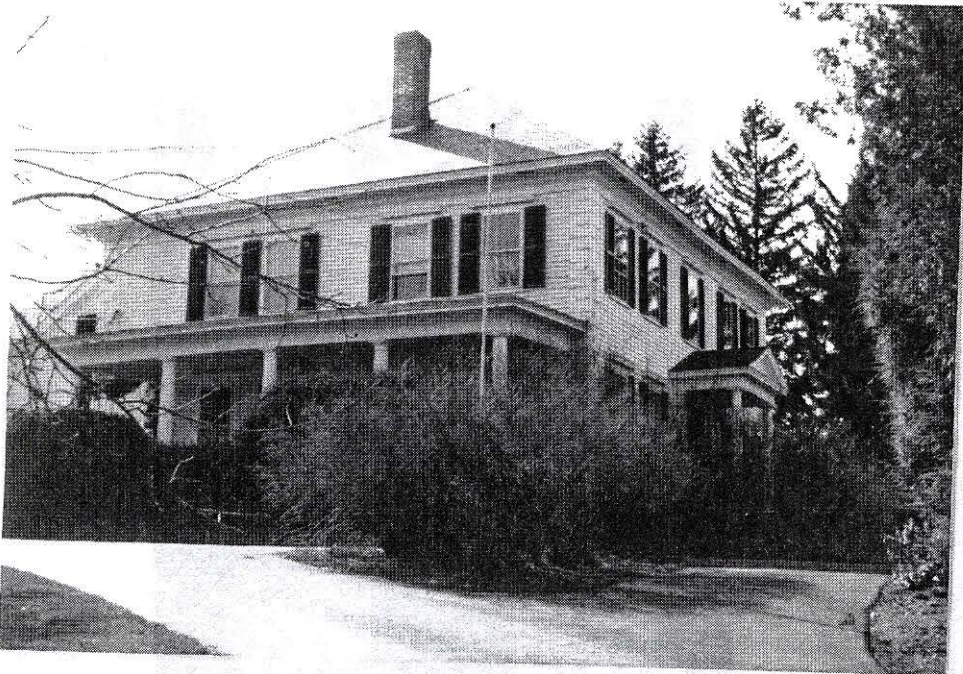
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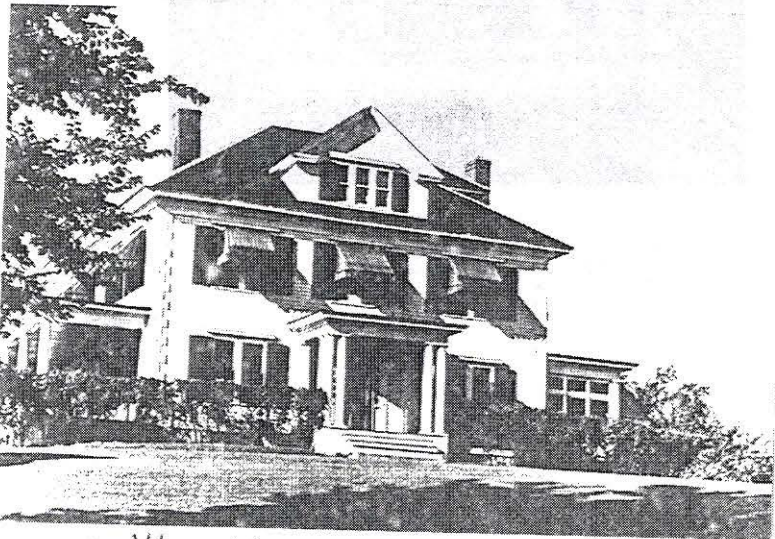
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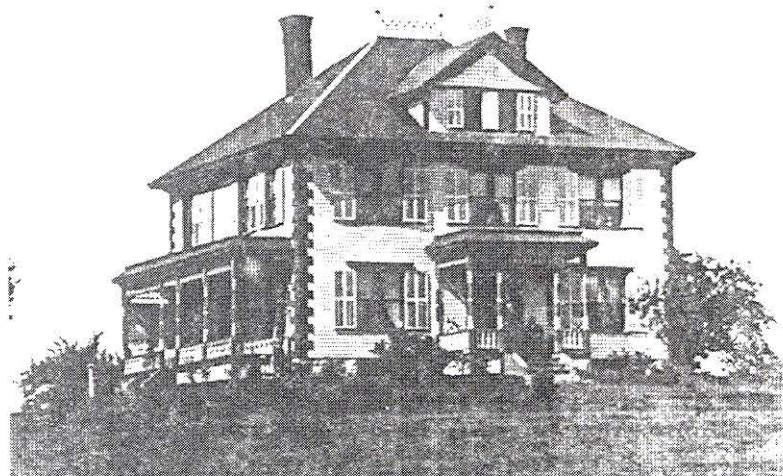
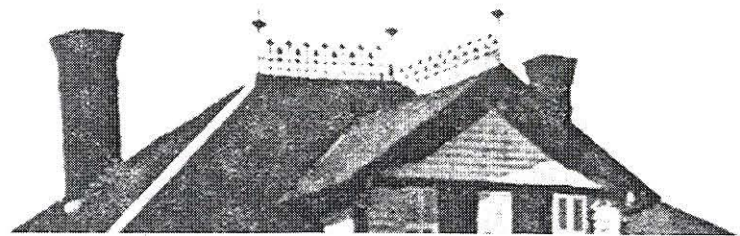
Alterations



*April 18, 1982*



*probably 1930s.*



*probably pre 1912  
copied from a  
glass slide*



54 Westford Street  
Middlesex North District Registry of Deeds

Compiled by J. Drury  
April 1975

Book 1261, page 348	6/15/1954	Doris Yeadon Dunsford to Lincoln Clark, Jr. & Nancy Parker Clark 1.94 acres, buildings thereon
Book 936, page 521	6/ 1/1939	Estate Reuben Dunsford to William Bevan & Doris Yeadon Dunsford \$15,000 4½ acres, buildings thereon
Book 487, page 472	5/27/1912	Mary Florence Brown to Reuben Dunsford, Lowell land, buildings thereon
Book 402, page 392	4/18/1907	Frank H. Batchelder to Mary Florence Brown 1/3 interest 5 acres, buildings thereon
Book 402, page 391	4/18/1907	Trustee, Estate Mary E. Batchelder, to Mary Florence Brown 2/3 interest 5 acres, buildings thereon
Book 335, page 577	10/31/1901	Wilson Kimball to Mary E. Bathcelder 5 acres, buildings thereon
Book 167, page 410	5/29/1884	Estelle S. Perham to Wilson Kimball, Lowell \$1300 5 acres land

## Lowell Weekly Journal

Nov. 4, 1887 - Workmen are busy putting in the foundations for Mr. Young's houses on the Acton road, Similar work is in progress on Mr. Kimball's lot on Westford street, near H.S. Perham's premises.

Jan. 6, 1888 - Building operations are by no means wholly suspended on account of cold weather. Carpenters are at work upon Mr. Soderberg's house on Acton street, and good progress has been made upon Mr. Kimball's dwelling on Westford street.

Aug. 3, 1888 - Mr. Wilson Kimball of Lowell moves into his fine new residence on the Westford road this week. Such accessions to our population are always welcome.

Thurs., Oct. 25, 1900 - Wilson W. Kimball and family of Westford street are about to remove to Lowell for the winter. (Lowell Daily Courier)

Lowell Morning Citizen  
Monday, December 12, 1904

### CHELMSFORD.

Wilson Kimball, for many years a resident of Chelmsford, died Friday evening, Dec. 9, at the home of his son, Frank E. Kimball, at 38 Bennington street, Newton Centre. Mr. Kimball had been in poor health for more than a year and for the last few months had been confined to the house. He was born at Alton, N. H. Feb. 28, 1826, removing to Lowell in early life, where for 26 years he had charge of the repair shop for the Merrimack Manufacturing company. Later he was engaged as overseer at the Lowell Machine shop, remaining with that company for 29 years. He became a resident of Chelmsford in 1888, erecting a handsome double residence upon Westford street, which he and his wife shared with his son's family. Upon the death of his wife in 1901 he returned to Lowell, where he made his home with his son and wife, removing with them to Newton about two years ago, at which time he gave up his position in the "Big shop" and retired from active service.

Mr. Kimball was a man devotedly attached to his home life, and in his business relations, while most lenient and considerate of others, he exacted the utmost promptness and punctuality of himself. He was a member and liberal supporter of the Baptist church. He leaves one son, Frank E. Kimball, a Boston business man. Services were held at the house in Newton yesterday afternoon and prayers will be held at the Edson chapel, Lowell, at 1 p.m. today. Burial will be in the family lot in the Edson cemetery.

Lowell Courier-Citizen

Oct. 17, 1912 - Extensive alterations and improvements, both to the interior and exterior are being made at the Dunsford place in Westford street.

Dec. 1, 1912 - A fire was discovered in the partitions of the residence of Reuben Dunsford on Westford street shortly before 5 o'clock Saturday afternoon and was the occasion of an alarm which caused the residents of the village to turn out "en masses." The house is at present undergoing a thorough overhauling and remodelling and as Mr. Dunsford and Mr. E. Wade Douglas, the contractor in charge, were about to leave the building for the night, Mr. Douglas detected an unusual roaring sound near the main chimney and investigation showed that the woodwork in the partition surrounding it was on fire from the cellar to the second floor. Knowing the construction of the house and how to best get at the trouble, Mr. Douglas was prompt to act and with the aid of several pails of water and the use of hand chemicals, soon had the fire under control. Given five minutes more start, the building would have been destroyed. The steam plant by which the house is heated was being used to dry out the plastering and a defective chimney is thought to have been responsible for the fire's start. The house stands on a considerable elevation and had the fire gone beyond control, considerable property would have been greatly endangered. The sounding of the alarm again emphasized the need of having the key to the church centrally and definitely located and easily to be obtained at any and all times. It is a matter upon which action should not be delayed.

March 7, 1913 - Reuben Dunsford and family are occupying their recently completed home in Westford street. For several months the house, known as the Kimball place, has been undergoing extensive interior changes and improvements.

June 15, 1913 - George M. Seeton, clerk for E.T. Adams, was severely bruised and shaken in a runaway accident about 6 o'clock on Friday evening. In coming down the steep driveway at the Dunsford place in Westford street, the horse became unmanageable, the wagon striking his heels. Finding that he could not control the animal and fearing least he cause injury to others by continuing through the village, Mr. Seeton attempted to turn into Bridge street. The sharp turn caused the wagon seat to slip and he was thrown headforemost into the roadway. He was quickly given assistance, and while severely scraped and bruised, it was found that he had luckily escaped without broken bones, and will probably be able to resume his work at the store within a few days. The horse continued its run up Bridge street, and after knocking corner boards off on the Hindler and Smith residences, was caught by H.E. Ellis in his garden. No damage was done to the horse, harness or wagon.

**Nancy Clark**, 54 Westford Rd., telephone conversation Sept. 2, 2005

Arnold Perham [ b. 1892] told her that when he was a young fellow he delivered milk to a Widow Knox, who lived at 54 Westford St. [J.B.D. did not find her in street directories]

At one time it was a two family house

Lincoln Clark put on a deck on the left side of the house. The side porch ran all the way along the side of the house and there was a granite step, which he left there. It is now hidden by the deck but is still in front of the only left side entrance. There are 6 entrances in all to house

The deck work was finished Aug. 19, 1989.

Gwendolyn Dunsford Hill (the only daughter) showed Nancy where the house originally ended, before the Dunsfords added the pool room in 1911.

1939 Mrs. Doris Dunsford went to Williamsburg, where she became a fan of Williamsburg architecture.

Some of the 1939 wallpaper, which Doris had put on then, is still in the hall.

The Victorian style house was altered to be more Williamsburg style

All windows were changed: from long, skinny windows to 8/8 panes.

Big disastrous fire: see Lowell Courier Citizen, Decd. 1, 1912

Uncle Harry Dunsford was a paper hanger

**Brad Emerson**, telephone conversation, Sept. 2, 2005

Three Dunsford buildings were in the path of Rt. 495 and moved:

- 1) gardener's cottage: moved to Westford St. Is little red house, 1<sup>st</sup> house after Rt. 495
- 2) Hill house went around the corner on to Dalton Rd. by the Thorstensens to 26 Dalton Rd.
- 3) little small camp in woods was moved by the Thorstensens and attached to rear of 26 Dalton.  
It is probably still there.





54 Westford Street

7/24/2006 F. Merriam