

Edwin Freeman Bowker Collection

Cambridge Historical Commission
831 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Mass. 02139

Collection ID: CHC030

Provenance: Gift of Margaret Bernier, October 2017

Dates: 1886-1919

Extent: Five boxes containing approximately 140 folders and two flat files containing approximately 90 tracings, schematic drawings and plans.

Processing and finding aid by: Kathleen M. Fox

Access: Collection is available for research under the CHC rules of use

Collection Description:

This collection is composed of five boxes and two flat files containing Edwin F. Bowker's professional correspondence as a civil engineer and surveyor. Included are surveyor's notes and records, draft sketches, manual calculations, notes on markers, drawings, plans, transcripts regarding property boundaries from deeds, and correspondence from mid-1886 through 1919.

Many of the tracings are manual copies of the previous surveying work of W. A. Mason (some as early as 1805). Many of the notes regarding properties refer to having been taken from "Cade's Book." George L. Cade was Superintendent of Streets in Cambridge from 1864-1876ⁱ. The collection also includes an 1861 City map (condition poor) and an engraved map of 1852 by O. Pelton (condition good).

Biography:

Edwin Freeman Bowker (1840-1924) was born in Boston, the son of Freeman and Sarah Batchelder [Bowles] Bowker.

From his obituary in the *Cambridge Chronicle*, June 14, 1924:

"...He graduated from the English high School in 1856 when he was awarded a Franklin Medal for efficiency. He learned his profession of civil engineering from Professor Henck, of the firm of Whitwell and Henck, civil engineers, with offices at 41 State Street, Boston. Mr. Bowker worked for the firm and did the surveying for Boston's first horse-car railroad. This included track-laying in Jamaica Plain and Dorchester and double-tracking along the side of Boston Common terminating at the burying ground near Park Street Church. In the early [18]60's Mr. Bowker was one of the engineers engaged in surveying the battleground at Antietam which called for much horseback riding. Before this work was completed he suffered an attack of hay fever and was obliged to return North

He then entered the employ of the Cambridge Street Department under J. G. Chase, the first City Engineer of Cambridge. He left the city employ in 1872 and has since been engaged in his profession on his own account. Among his larger operations was the laying out of St. Paul's cemetery, East Arlington. In early manhood Mr. Bowker joined Joseph Warren Lodge, F. & A. M., of Boston."

He married Jane H. Wellington in 1872. In 1905 he became associated with the civil engineering firm of Dana Perkins. He was an enthusiastic musician who played the viola "In addition to his professional work as a Civil Engineer and Surveyor he had extensive land holdings in Cambridge and the surrounding towns. He died at home (129 Austin Street, Cambridge) of Bright's disease on June 11, 1924 and is buried in the Cambridge Cemetery."

For more on Bowker see the CHC Vertical files – Architects -- Bowker.

Processing and Arrangement Notes:

The collection is part of Bowker's papers found by the donor in a sale, and does not represent his entire professional correspondence. It consists of approximately 480 items filed both in folders and flat files.

The bulk of Bowker's actual surveys were acquired by a dealer and put up for sale on eBay. A few of these plans have been acquired by CHC staff and are included in this collection, housed in the flat files.

The original order of the collection was lost before it came to the Historical Commission. Hence it has been arranged by (1) street and (2) by property owner's name. All the items have been entered into a spreadsheet which identifies the following information when known: street, street number, description, owner, document date, original surveyor, page/book references from the Registry of Deeds, the folder or flat file currently housing the item, the "Cade Book" reference, and notes. Nearly all the documents relate to Cambridge properties; the few located in other towns are clearly marked.

The spreadsheet of all items in this collection can be found in the internal CHC shared drive under: CHC Library and Archives/Finding Aids/Bowker Collection/Inventory_Bowker.xlsx

Additional Materials: A folder in Box #1 contains a flyer from the Joseph Warren Lodge to which Bowker belonged, correspondence re: the "John Reed" lot in Lexington, MA, and excerpts of deeds from 1804-1806 regarding "Lot #30" on an unidentified street.

Scope and Content:

Series I and II are housed in 5 archival cartons. Other materials are housed in the CHC flat files and searchable in the Bowker spreadsheet.

Series I

Maps, plans, transcripts of deeds, surveyor's calculations, etc. These are filed alpha *by property owner's name* as they were when the series was received.

Box 1: Abbott - Fraser. Approx. 57 items

Box 2: Gerrish – O'Hara. Approx. 42 items

Box 3: Page – Winslow. Approx. 40 items

Series II

Maps, plans, transcripts of deeds, surveyor's calculations, etc. These are filed by alpha *by street*, as they were when the collection was received. Several streets may be in each folder. Folders are numbered for reference on Excel spreadsheet.

Box 4: Cambridge Street to Cogswell Place, folders 1-21

Box 5: Columbia Street –to State Street, folders 22-50

ⁱ *Cambridge Chronicle* February 28, 1880

ⁱⁱ *Cambridge Chronicle*, May 18, 1901