

Watson Funeral Home Collection

Cambridge Historical Commission
831 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Provenance: Donated by Kirk Higbee-Barzola, February 2004.

Collection ID: CHC059

Dates: 1847-1994

Extent: 1 flat box, 1 vertical file

Finding aid by: Initial inventory by Molly Alexander, February 13, 2004. Updated inventory and finding aid by Brittany Fox, November 2019.

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

Collection Description:

The Watson Funeral Home Collection consists of photographs, certificates, clippings and ephemera related to the Watson Funeral Home, a local 20th century business in Cambridge. The collection also possesses blueprints of the first and second floors of the funeral home when it was located at 11 Magazine Street. The blueprints were provided by Robert Reid, a local architect.

Historical Note:

Charles Burnett Watson (1895-1963) was born to David L. and Jennie P. Watson of Ellsworth Ave. in Cambridge. His first career was managing J. S. Waterman & Sons' Harvard Square location in Cambridge. He later graduated from the New England Institute of Anatomy, Sanitary Science, and Embalming. In 1926 he founded the Watson Funeral Home at 71 Pearl Street. Two years later, in 1928 he married Alice F. Morrell, also a Cambridge resident, and they moved to 277 Mt. Auburn Street. They would go on to have a daughter, Jannett W. Harnish.

In 1941 Watson relocated his funeral services to 11 Magazine Street, a Greek Revival house near Central Square. The building had once been situated at Franklin Street behind the current location of the First Baptist Church, but it was moved in 1847 by Frederick Clapp. It was once again relocated in 1898 to make room for 9 Magazine Street. Upon his purchase of the 17-room house, Watson equipped it with a repose room, a consultation room, a chapel with an electric organ, air conditioning, and a workroom with rubber floors and walls. Watson was accompanied in his move by Joseph T. Butler, George N. Guptill, and Guy H. Harnish. In 1947 the funeral home added stained glass windows to the chapel that depicted Christ in biblical scenes. Further improvements were conducted in 1954 when a parking lot was built.

In 1963 Watson died at the age of 67 and the funeral home was taken over by President Guy Harnish, Treasurer George Guptill, and Clerk Henry Boucher. The funeral home conducted services up until the 1990s.

Sources consulted:

“Watson Funeral Home.” *Cambridge Chronicle* 137, no. 7, February 17, 1983. (Printout available in collection)

Cambridge Tribune articles, December 4, 1926.

Cambridge Sentinel articles, May 17, 1941, July 20, 1946.

Cambridge Chronicle articles; August 29, 1946, August 12, 1954, October 17, 1963.

Related Materials:

Cambridge Historical Commission Survey Files, 9-79 Magazine Street (Franklin St-Chalk St), Cambridgeport.

Processing and Arrangement Notes:

For preservation purposes, the blueprints/floorplans have been removed from the main collection box and have been housed vertically in the flat files. Additionally, due to the fragile nature of the *Old Farmer's Almanac*, some of the loose pages have been placed in plastic sleeves.

Since the time of the collection's original donation, some items have been separated from the rest of the items and their current locations are unknown. The missing status of the records is reflected in the Scope and Content section. However, the CHC survey file cited in the Related Materials section has copy records of some of the items. These duplicates are reflected in the Scope and Content section.

Scope and Content:

This small collection does not require separated series to organize the informational content of the records. However, due to the dispersal of the records in multiple storage locations and the existence of missing statuses for some of the items, the inventory has been written to reflect the physical locations of the records.

Inventory:

Flat box

- *Old Farmer's Almanac*, 1868
- Letter from architect Robert Reid in envelope (architectural floorplans have been separated), 1940
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Funeral Establishment Registration Certificate duplicate, undated
- 2 matchbook covers advertising Watson Funeral Home, 1 color photocopy of matchbook cover
- 2 photocopies of drawing of 11 Magazine St. c. 1847

- Black & white portrait photograph, unnamed man in pinstripe suit, undated, 8'' X 10''
- Black & white portrait photograph, unnamed man with glasses, undated, (on mat) 9 3/4'' X 13''
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Board of Registration in Embalming, Embalmer Certificate, Charles B. Watson, 1920
- Large portrait photo of Charles B. Watson (undated), 16'' X 20''

Vertical files, CHC/F3

- Architectural floor plans, 1940

Unknown location of originals but copies available in Survey File

- 2 *Cambridge Sentinel* newspaper clippings, 1941
- 2 newspaper ads of invitation to inspect funeral home conversion at 11 Magazine St, ca. 1941
- "Congratulations" telegram from Dorothy and Roy of Melrose, Mass
- "Congratulations" telegram from Catherine E. McLaughlin, Cambridge undertaker, 1943
- 3 black & white photographs of 11 Magazine St., undated
- 2 black & white photographs of interior of 11 Magazine St., undated

Missing items

- 1 black & white photograph of caskets and group of people c. 1942 w/ id and handwritten story
- Envelope of 16 color photographs of Central Sq., c. 1994

Added Entries:

Undertakers and undertaking

Embalming

Funeral homes

(Cambridge, Mass.)

Central Square (Cambridge, Mass.)

Death care industry

Greek revival (Architecture)-- Remodeling for other use

Return to CHC Collections home:

<http://www.cambridgema.gov/historic/researchaids/archivalcollections>