

FORM B – BUILDING

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

17/184	Reading		403
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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
 MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
 220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
 BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Town: Reading

Place: (*neighborhood or village*) Downtown

Photograph



Address: 581-591 Main Street

Historic Name: Grant Block

Uses: Present: commercial

Original: commercial

Date of Construction: 1927

Source: *At Wood End*

Style/Form: Classical Revival Commercial

Architect/Builder: unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation:

Wall/Trim: concrete, brick

Roof: tar & gravel

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
none

Major Alterations (*with dates*):
date unknown? – remodeling of storefronts

Condition: good

Moved: no | x | yes | | **Date** _____

Acreage: 0.22 acre

Setting: mixed downtown area

Topographic or Assessor's Map



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Reading Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): December 2009

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INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

READING

581-591 Main Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

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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.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

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

Located at the southeast corner of Main and Haven Streets, the Grant Block is one of the most intact and highly decorated single-story commercial blocks in the downtown. The Main Street façade incorporates a variety of Classical Revival cast concrete ornament including a smooth central panel decorated by a central medallion draped with flowing swags, as well as closed balustrade panels interrupted by blocks with foliate swags. Four concrete urns survive - two at each end of the central panel and two at the angled corner entrance at the north end of the building. There is a dentil cornice, also of cast concrete, and concrete paneled pilasters separate the storefronts with egg-and-dart moldings at the top.

The original storefront windows have been replaced by modern windows set in anodized aluminum frames with matching doors. Due to the slope of the lot, the size of the bulkhead areas below the windows is graduated with the greatest areas under the windows at the south end of the building. The original bulkheads have been replaced by yellow brick.

The Haven Street elevation is constructed of red brick. Several former display windows closest to Main Street have been filled with brick. The storefronts to the east have been remodeled with the same anodized aluminum display windows visible on the façade.

A similar, single-story, concrete Classical Revival commercial block was formerly located on the south side of Haven Street (155) opposite Sanborn Street but was torn down in the 1980s.

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.

The land on which this block of four stores (originally 181 Main Street) stands was occupied for many years by the Willis House. As was the case in several other locations in the downtown, the house was moved from the site to accommodate a new commercial block. Although known as the Willis house, the dwelling was originally owned by the Phelps family. It was relocated to Elliott St. in 1926 and this block of stores was built soon thereafter by out-of-town interests. When completed, the building had five shops on Main Street and four on Haven Street.

The block of stores was purchased by local dentist and real estate magnate, Dr. M.E. Brande, in 1931 as an investment opportunity. According to his 1941 obituary, in 1918 Dr. Brande gave up his Boston office and opened an office in Reading. In 1929 he sold the practice in order to devote himself to real estate. This was one of a number of commercial blocks that Dr. Brande was involved with in the downtown. Among the others he had constructed are 68 Haven Street (1924), the Reading Theater on Main Street (1924; no longer extant), and the Reading Motor Mart at 506 Main Street (1929).

In 1931 the tenants of the building included Reading Battery Co., Bacon's Lunch, Malden & Melrose Gas Light Co., the Reading Furniture Exchange, Richard's Jewelry Store, Joseph Middleton's toggery house, and a plumbing supply shop. In 1932 the block was sold by Brande to Ethel Grant and since that time has been known as the Grant Block. Dr. Ethel Grant was also a dentist in Reading and apparently saw this as an investment opportunity. She died in 1943 after practicing for twenty five years. In her will she left the town \$90,000 to erect a drinking foundation, a sprinkler fountain for children or a swimming pool. The outdoor pool (no longer extant) was finally built behind the high school in 1963.

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (continued)

In 1936-7 the block was occupied by a fruit store, the Theatre Diner, a cleaning establishment, and the offices of the Malden-Melrose Gas and Electric Company. In 1943 the tenants included McCann's Ice Cream on the north end, the diner, the Stoneham Den House and Kelly Tires. The corner shop was later occupied by Reading Vacuum and now houses Twin Seafood. Pizza World has been here for many years.

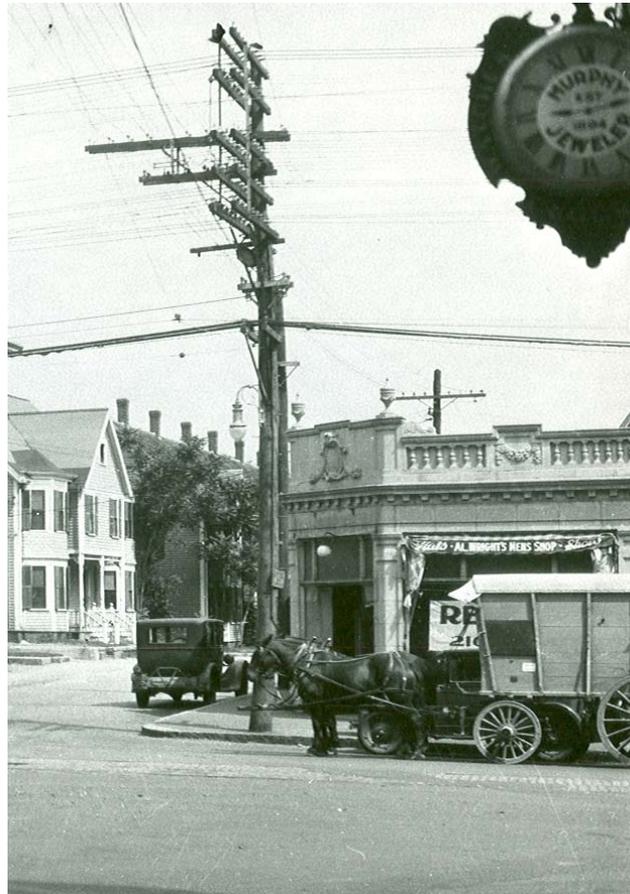
BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Reading Chronicle, July 23, 1926; May 1, 1931; Oct. 31, 1941.

Reading Directories, various dates.

Reading 350th Book Committee. *At Wood End – Reading, Massachusetts 1644-1994, A Pictorial History*, 1994.

Town of Reading. *Valuation of Real and Personal Estates*, various dates.



Source: Reading Historical Commission