

## 31 Ocean Street, Dorchester, MA 02124

Research and Report by Vicki Rugo  
Dorchester Historical Society  
December 20, 2020



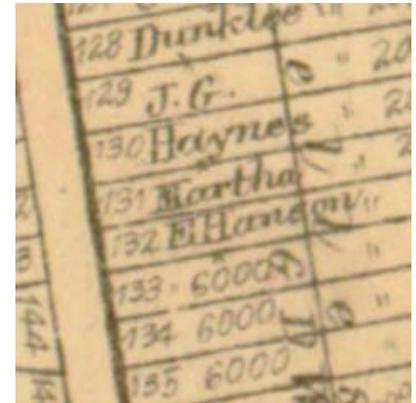
### **Questions Asked:**

- Did an architect design the house? If so, who was it and what is known about him/her?
- Who was the builder?
- How could we locate the plans for the house?

The neighborhood now known as Ashmont Hill had its origins in 1870, when George Derby Welles, who was 26 years old and living in Paris, inherited extensive landholdings in this area from his grandfather's estate. Welles engaged attorney Edward Ingersoll Browne to be his representative, with the responsibility and authority to manage the sale of his property. Browne in turn hired the engineer and surveyor H. W. Wilson to draw up a plot plan of house lots and streets to begin the process of selling the land. Deeds to Ashmont Hill properties to this day include the original lot number(s) and a reference to "Plan No. 1 of Geo. D. Welles....dated May 1, 1871 by Henry W. Wilson, Engineer and Surveyor...." in the description of the property.

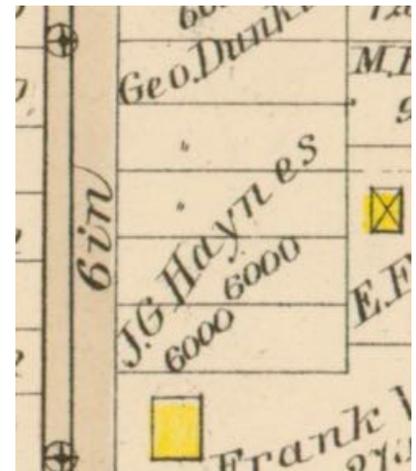
### The Property and the House (47 Ocean Street)

In May of 1872, George Derby Welles granted lots 129 and 130 on Ocean Street to James G. Haynes. Like the majority of the lots laid out in the 1871 Wilson Plan, these lots each measured 40 by 150 feet, for a total of 6000 square feet. (1872 atlas, right)



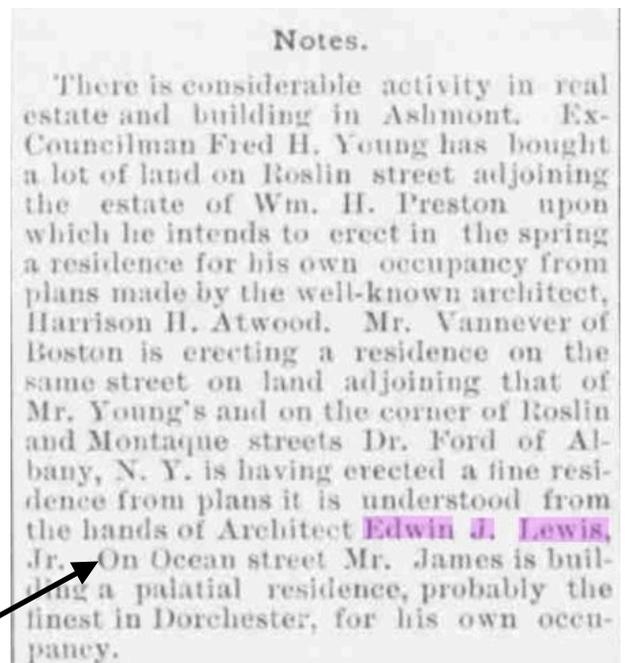
Haynes was in the business of buying and selling real estate; he also provided financing for other buyers. In fact, when Welles granted the adjacent lots 131 and 132 to Martha E. Hanson in July of 1872, Haynes gave her a mortgage on the property.

In July of 1881, Hanson sold her two lots to Haynes, so that he now owned four contiguous lots on Ocean Street. (1884 atlas, right.) Then, in October 1892, Haynes made two grants to Emma James et ux. The first was lot 129 and the northerly half of lot 130, and the second was lot 131 and the southerly half of lot 130, thus reconfiguring the three original lots of 6000 sf each into two lots of 9000 sf each. (Many of the original lots were modified in similar fashion, often through complicated and cumulative real estate transactions like this one, to provide larger sites on which to build houses.)



While the purpose of this report is to document the history of the carriage house at 31 Ocean Street, the history of the house itself is useful in putting the carriage house in context.

No building permit, architectural plans, building inspector's completion report, or newspaper notices could be located to tell us what architect George and Emma James engaged to design their home to the desired level of grandeur. (The Notes article, right, was in the *Dorchester Beacon*, November 25, 1893. It was found in a search for information about the architect Edwin J. Lewis, Jr.; the note about "Mr. James" was a lucky bonus.) However, it is clear that whoever it was knew how to create a house with presence. The exterior is notable for its complex geometry, ornate carving and woodwork, generous wrap-around porch or "piazzas," and massive roof with set-in balconies. The interior has spacious public rooms on the first floor, a grand entry hall,



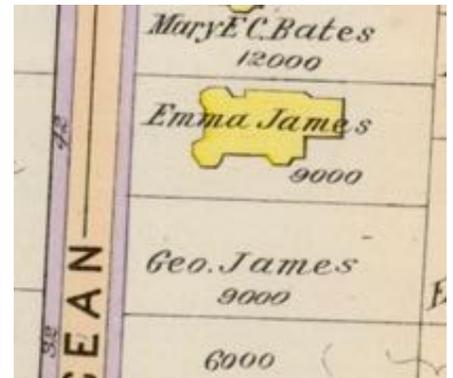
and a monumental front staircase with a large and elaborate stained glass window. Six bedrooms on the second floor plus extensive servants' quarters on the third floor could accommodate a large household.



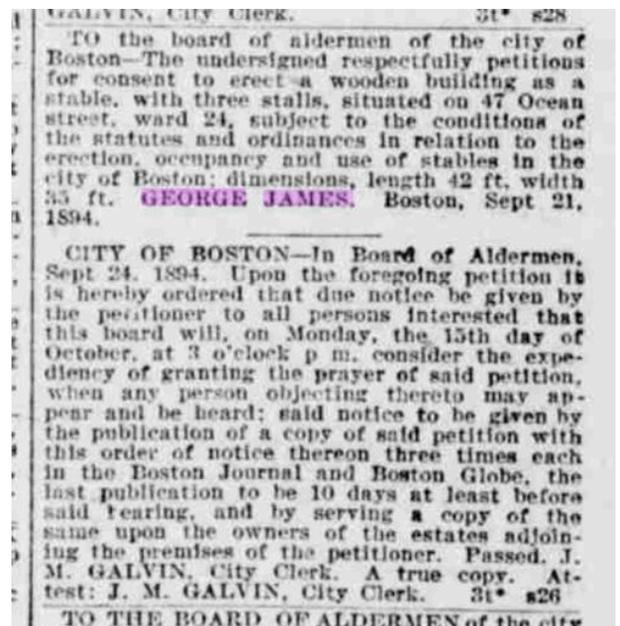
Despite there being no documentary proof of the completion date for the house, the cartouche at the corner says 1894, and the 1894 insurance atlas (right) shows the house in place... although not the carriage house. The small size of the “4” at the end of the date suggests that that number was added once it was certain that 1894 would be the actual date.

### The Carriage House (31 Ocean Street)

Again no documentation has been found to indicate who designed and built the carriage house or when. However, based on the scale and attention to exterior detail of the building, it could well have been the same architect and builder as the house. And the likely completion date is also 1894, based on two documents that were very much of their time.



The newspaper notice to the right appeared in the Boston Globe on September 28, 1894. In it George James requested permission from the Board of Alderman to erect a stable with three stalls. Such notices were required to be published three times in two newspapers before a hearing took place, and copies of the notice had to be delivered to “the estates adjoining the premises of the petitioner.”



No additional newspaper notices were found, but documents from the City Archives (see cover page, next page, and page 10ff) for a new petition suggest that permission was granted for the stable to be built, and it was completed by December. George James was now requesting permission to house one cow in the stable. (There is no mention of horses even through the stable was to have three stalls.) On another page of this petition, the word “proposed” is crossed out and reference is made simply to “a wooden building.” On still another page, an inspector states, “Stable built and all requirements are complied with,” with the date of April 12,

1895. A note at the bottom adds, “Apr. 13 — Sent permit for 3 horses and 1 cow.” The permit for the three horses was not located; perhaps it was implicit in the permission to erect the stable.

Based on these documents and the timing they suggest, it seems reasonable to say that the year of completion for 31 Ocean Street, the former stable, is 1894. The 1898 atlas (below) shows the carriage house and its sweeping driveway.



No. 1671 Pooled. Dec. 11, 1894.

**PETITION OF**

GEORGE JAMES

for leave to occupy a ~~proposed~~ wooden

building for one cow ~~horses~~

on Ocean St. lot adj. and So. of #47.

Ward 24

P. O. Address 47 Ocean St. Ashmont.

Vol. 5

Plate 25

Block \_\_\_\_\_

For plan see #1596.

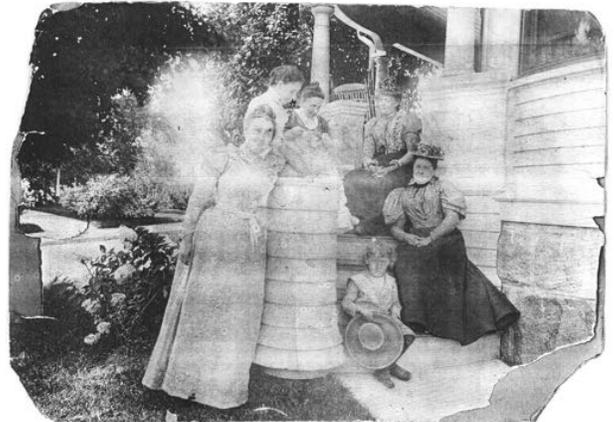
*Dec 13. 94*  
*Granted by Sup.*  
*Benjamin Rabbit*

### The Original Owners

George James was born in Vermont in 1821 where, in the 1850 Census, his occupation was Farmer as it was for the rest of his family. In 1850, he married Sarah Daggett (born 1832 in Vermont), with whom he had a daughter, Sarah Lillian (known as Lillian), who was born in 1850 in Vermont. Sarah died in 1861 in Vermont. George’s occupation then is not known, but when George and Emma Daggett (born in 1842 with the given name Emeline Arethusa, she was the late Sarah’s sister) were married in 1863, the certificate stated that he was a broker and shoe lathe manufacturer. In the 1880 Census, the James family lived on Woodbine Street in Roxbury. In addition to George and Emma, the household included Lillian, George and Emma’s daughter Rose, born in 1866, and a couple of boarders. George’s occupation was Leather Dealer.

George evidently prospered in the leather business, which was described in the City directories more specifically as “soles and leather.” He had offices and manufacturing facilities in the Leather District, on High Street and later on South Street. Another building where he had his business had a serious fire in 1899 in what the newspaper account called “the dreaded district on Summer st.” (The memory of the Great Fire of 1872 was still strong.) The business was both profitable and dangerous: George was very badly injured by shoe machinery in 1892.

The 1900 Census showed that the James household was fully utilizing the house—and no doubt the stable—on Ocean Street. The household included George, who was now 73; Emma, age 58; and Lillian, who was 50 and single. Also in the house were daughter Rose, her husband Charles Piper, and their two children, Raymond, age 8, and Margery, age 3. Plus a woman from Maine who was listed as a boarder, and two servants from Ireland who were sisters, ages 25 and 22. (Photo, c. 1895, from a private collection.)



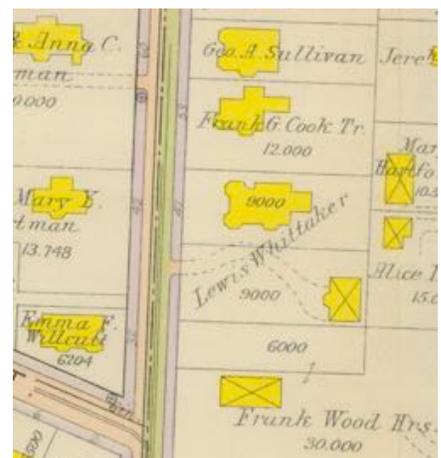
George died in May of 1902 at age 75. His death certificate indicates that he had had heart problems and also “senility.”

The James/Piper family was still on Ocean Street for the 1910 Census, with the widowed Emma; Charles and Rose Piper and their two children, now ages 18 and 13; Emma’s stepdaughter Lillian, who had been married for 9 years (but no sign of her husband); and the same two Irish servants who had been there ten years before.

Emma died in October 1910, age 69, of “acute dilatation of the heart (3 mos)” and with “ulcer in stomach 6 years” as a contributing factor. The Pipers moved to Brackett Street in East Milton.

### Subsequent Owners

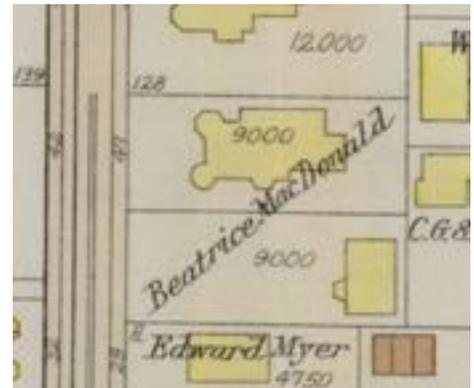
Emma James’s heirs sold the house and carriage house, lots 129, 130 and 131, to Lewis Whitaker in January 1912. (1918 atlas, right) Whitaker was 81 years old at the time; he lived in the house with his wife and daughter. He had been in the tallow manufacturing business, from which he had retired a number of years previously. Based on the number of Registry transactions found, it appears that he was also involved in real estate; based on many newspaper articles, he was also very enthusiastic about



horse racing and owned a succession of horses. Although his name appears on the 1918 atlas, Whitaker died in May of 1918. According to the annual Residents Lists, his wife and daughter continued to live in the house, and may have taken in boarders, through 1922, but no one is listed at the address in 1923. Mrs. Whitaker moved to 75 Ocean Street, where she died in 1927.



In March 1923, Marion Elwell, Whitaker's daughter and the trustee of his estate, sold lot 131 and the northerly half of lot 130 (the house) to Beatrice MacDonald. The following year she sold MacDonald the other half of the property, lot 131 and the southerly half of lot 130. (1933 atlas, right) Beatrice MacDonald operated the MacDonald Convalescent Home in the house until 1957, when she sold all of the property to Marion Greene, who continued the business. Greene in turn sold all the property to Marjorie Langway and Marguerite Munster in 1963.



Miss Langway and Miss Munster continued the retirement home business, renaming it the Beatrice Catherine Rest Home. They lived in the house, as had the previous owners. They parked their cars, and sometimes a boat, in the first floor of the carriage house. In 1967, they requested a variance from the City of Boston to create living space on the second floor for their own occupancy, in order to provide more living space for employees in the house. The necessary variances were approved in 1968 with the proviso that the top floor (attic) space "should not be used for habitation."

In 1986, Miss Langway and Miss Munster decided to close the rest home and retire, as they were getting older and the regulations for such businesses were getting increasingly onerous. They put the house (but not the carriage house) on the market. The house was purchased in December 1986 by two couples who lived across the street from the house, who intended to operate a bed-and-breakfast, which they called the Emma James House, in the building. The Emma James House was in operation until the end of 1992, when it was sold to the TEEN Trust, acting on behalf of Casa Myrna Vasquez.

Miss Langway and Miss Munster continued to live in the carriage house at 31 Ocean Street. Miss Munster died in 1997. Miss Langway continued to teach nursing at Bunker Hill Community College, which she had done for many years. She lived in the carriage house until her death in 2013.

On December 3, 2013, Mary Ellen Hopewell, Miss Langway's niece and the representative of her estate, sold 31 Ocean Street, the whole of lot 131 and the southerly half of lot 130, to Nancy Anderson. Nancy immediately undertook the transformation of the space into an exceptional single-family home that George and Emma James would have found eminently acceptable.

### **Is it possible to locate original plans for the carriage house?**

The City archives did not yield any documentation beyond the permit for the cow and horses in the barn. Rolls of plans and drawings are stored and in post-COVID times could be explored, but the sad reality is that many of these types of documents have been lost or destroyed over time.

### **A Note about Terminology**

Stable? Barn? Carriage house? The newspaper notice and documentation from the City called the building at 31 Ocean Street a stable, a practical term used specifically in reference to the housing of horses. The Building Department in 1967 called it a two-car garage in one place and a barn in another. These days, this building, and the 13 others like it remaining in the neighborhood, tend to be referred to as carriage houses, a grander, more aspirational term. Many had some finished space, along with a hay loft, on the second floor; many were thoughtfully designed to reflect the architectural character of the houses they accompanied. Whether carriages were kept in any of them isn't certain, but they all housed horses, as remnants of manure pits have attested.

### **Sources**

Boston Public Library: Boston Residents Lists

City of Boston Building Permits via ScerIS

Suffolk County Registry of Deeds

City of Boston Archives

Dorchester Historical Society/Dorchester Atheneum for insurance maps

FamilySearch genealogical website for deed indexes, directories, newspaper clippings

My Heritage genealogical website for US Census, newspaper clippings

[ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) genealogical website for vital statistics, newspaper clippings

Photo of Lewis Whitaker from *The Driving Clubs of Greater Boston*. Edited and Compiled by John W. Linnehan and Edward E. Cogswell. (1914), 136-137, 245. <https://archive.org/details/drivingclubsofgr1914linn/page/n6/mode/2up?q=whitaker>

The Bromley insurance atlases that are included (in snippets) in this report may be found online. The plate letter/number is for the specific map in the collection for each year.

1874

*Atlas of the County of Suffolk, Massachusetts, Vol. 3rd including South Boston and Dorchester.*  
Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins & Co., 1874

[Dorchester, 1874](#)

Plate Q

1884

*Atlas of the County of Suffolk, Massachusetts, Vol. 3rd including South Boston and Dorchester*  
Philadelphia: Geo. W. & Walter S. Bromley, 1884

[Dorchester, 1884](#)

Plate N

1894

*Atlas of the City of Boston: Volume 5: Dorchester, Mass.* George W. and Walter S. Bromley  
Philadelphia: Bromley, 1894

[Dorchester, 1894](#)

Plate 27

1898

*Atlas of the City of Boston, Vol. 5. Dorchester, Mass.* George W. and Walter S. Bromley.  
Philadelphia, G. W. Bromley & Co., 1898

[Dorchester, 1898](#)

Plate 27

1918

*Atlas of the City of Boston: Dorchester.* George W. and Walter S. Bromley.  
Philadelphia: G. W. Bromley & Co., 1918

[Dorchester, 1918](#)

Plate 27

1933

*Atlas of the City of Boston: Dorchester.* George W. and Walter S. Bromley  
Philadelphia: G. W. Bromley & Co., 1933

[Dorchester, 1933](#)

Plate 27

#### 47/31 Ocean Street Ownership History

<b>Date</b>	<b>Book.Page</b>	<b>Grantor (Seller) and (Grantee) Buyer</b>
May 8, 1872	1105.219 (p438 on web)	George Derby Welles granted lots 129 and 130 on Ocean Street, on Plan No. 1...dated May 1, 1871, to James G. Haynes
July 19, 1872	1117.20	George Derby Welles granted lots 131 and 132 on Ocean Street to Martha E. Hanson
July 1, 1881	1529.537	Martha E. Hanson granted lots 131 and 132 to James G. Haynes
October 13, 1892	2088.609	James G. Haynes granted lot 129 and the northerly part of lot 130 to Emma A. James, wife of George James.
October 13, 1892	2008.612	James G. Haynes to George James being all of lot 131 and the southerly half of lot 130
Jan 27, 1912	3607.151	The heirs of Emeline James confirm sale to Lewis Whitaker
Jan 31, 1912	3607.150	Arthur Crosbie, trustee, to Lewis Whitaker, lots 129, 130 and 131
March 31, 1923	4454.387	Marion H. Elwell trustee under the will of Lewis Whitaker grant to Beatrice MacDonal the whole of lot no 129 and the northerly half of lot no 130
April 10, 1924	4564.161	Marion H. Elwell trustee under the will of Lewis Whitaker grant to Beatrice MacDonald the whole of lot no 131 and the southerly half of lot no 130
April 11, 1957	7227.231	Beatrice Mac Donald to Marion Greene, being the same premises (two parcels) conveyed to me by deed from Marion H. Elwell, Trustee under the will of Lewis Whitaker dated April 10, 1924...and recorded with said Suffolk Deeds 4564.161
April 30, 1963	7739.413	Marion Greene to Langway and Munster, the parcels made up of lot 129 and the northern half of 130 and the parcel made up of lot 131 and the southerly half of lot no 120.
December 9, 1963	7803.478	Changes ownership from tenants in common to joint tenants
December 29, 1986	13253.162	Marjorie J. Langway and Marguerite I .Munster to Katharine Bishop and Frances Kayser Rugo, lot 129 and the northerly half of lot 130, containing 9000 square feet of land
December 31, 1992	17962	Rugo/Bishop to TEEN Trust of 47 Ocean Street, being lot 129 and the northerly half of low 130
December 3, 2013	52430.221	Mary Ellen Hopewell, Personal Representative of the Estate of Marjorie J. Langway, to Nancy Anderson, 31 Ocean Street, the whole of lot 131 and the southerly half of lot 130

No. **1671** Petrol. Dec. 11, 1894.

**PETITION OF**  
**GEORGE JAMES**  
 for leave to occupy a ~~wooden~~ **wooden**  
 building for **one cow**  
 on **Ocean St. lot adj. and So. of #47.**  
 Ward **24**  
 P. O. Address **47 Ocean St. Ashmont.**  
 Vol. **5**  
 Plate **25**  
 Book  
 For plan see #1596.

*Dec 13. 94  
 Granted by check.  
 George James*

To the Board of Health  
 of the City of Boston:

*The undersigned respectfully petitions for permission to occupy a proposed wooden building as a stable for one cow, situated on Ocean St. lot adj. and So. of #47, Ward 24, subject to the conditions of the statutes and ordinances in relation to the erection and occupancy of stables in the City of Boston.*

*George James  
 47 Ocean St  
 Ashmont*

Vol. *5*  
 Plate *25*

*In plan see # 1596*

### REQUIREMENTS:

- The stable must be erected and complete in all its appointments.
- The manure pit must be constructed of brick or stone laid in cement, and so situated as to allow the manure to be loaded inside the stable.
- The ventilating, lighting, and draining of the stable must be satisfactory to this Board.
- The erection of the stable must be begun within ninety days from the date hereof (if not already erected), and prosecuted to completion.
- The position of the stable to be in accordance with the plan on file in this office.

*1596 3/4  
 1671 3/6  
 1689*

No. **1671** Date, **Dec. 13** 1894.

Name, **Geo. James,, 47 Ocean St. Dor.**

Material, **Wood** No. of horses, **1 cow.**

Location, **47 Ocean St.** Ward **24**

*Stable built and all requirements are complied with.*

*Apr. 13. Sent permit for April 12. 95. Kellogg  
 3 horses + 1 cow*

A few newspaper articles give a glimpse of some of the social and cultural activities that the Jameses enjoyed.

**REYNOLDS—CHURCH.**

Society well Represented and Ceremony Impressive.

One of the most brilliant Easter weddings in Dorchester district was that of Miss Emma Louise Church and Dr. Wilbur A. Reynolds, which took place at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. **George James** on Ocean street Wednesday evening.

To the measures of the wedding march the bridal party entered the spacious parlors, where the ceremony was performed by Rev. Robert F. Codman of All Saints' Episcopal church, in the presence of a large number of friends.

The bride presented an exceedingly charming appearance in a gown of white duchess satin, cut high in the neck, with veil and orange blossoms, and carrying a large bunch of white bride roses.

The maid of honor wore a white brocade silk and carried a bouquet of English violets. The bridesmaid wore a pretty pink slip and carried roses of the same color.

The bride was attended by Miss M. E. Hill and little Miss Gladys Hazel C. Crosby acted as bridesmaid.

The best man was Mr. Edward V. Reynolds of Gardner, Mass., and Master Carl Reynolds officiated as groomsmen. The ushers were Mr. Thomas R. Lothian, Mr. Charles Pierce, Mr. E. C. Durgin, and Mr. Nelson Marvin.

Immediately after the ceremony the newly wedded couple received the good wishes and congratulations of a perfect host of friends. They were assisted in receiving by Mr. and Mrs. James, the aunt and uncle of the bride. The large house presented a beautiful appearance with its decorations of palms, potted plants and flowers. Music was furnished throughout the evening.

The young couple received a large number of very beautiful and costly gifts. After an extended trip Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds will be at home to their many friends at No. 220 Washington street.

on Monday.

**CHOCORUA.**

**CHOCORUA, N. H., July 24**—Chocorua is maintaining its reputation of former years as one of the most popular places for summer vacations on the east side of the mountain. Every room at the Chocorua house is taken and guests are arriving every day.

Among the recent arrivals at the cottage community is Miss A. M. Dickey, one of the teachers of the Boston normal school.

Among those at the Chocorua house are Mr James A. Page, one of Boston's oldest schoolmasters, and Mrs. Page. Mr Page has spent his summer at Chocorua for a great many years.

Tennis is one of the popular amusements among the cottagers on the hill. A few of those who are expert with the racket are Alfred Hubbard, Mrs Stone, Mrs Marina Haskins, Miss Mary Hubbard, Boston, and Mr and Mrs Mary Sargent of Haverhill, Mass.

Mr Piper and a party of friends from Dorchester made a fine catch of bass and pickerel on Monday.

Mr Harry Sargent and father of Haverhill caught a very fine string of 50 trout and pickerel on Monday.

Among those who may be seen any fine morning taking a spin on their wheels are: Mrs C. P. Wainwright, Master Scott Wainwright and Mrs Davis of Boston, and Mr P. B. Lothian and Harry H. Butler of Dorchester, Mass.

A party of 12 drove from Chocorua to Wonalancett Falls on Tuesday. Among the number were Mr and Mrs Charles R. Piper, Mrs George James, Mrs Robert Crosbie, Miss Gladys Crosby, Mr and Mrs J. M. Hill, Miss M. E. Hill, Miss Bessie Hill, Miss Ida Berry and Miss Flora Thrasher.

Miss M. H. Buckingham, Miss S. W. Brooks of Boston and Miss Tiffany of Cambridge, went to Fabyan's and Mt Washington on Sunday.

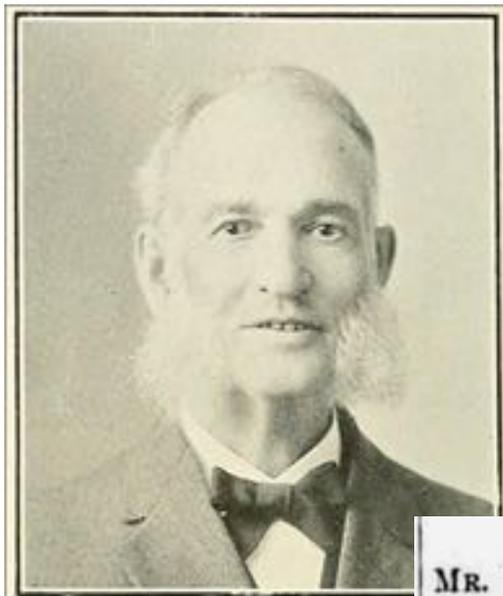
At the Chocorua house—Miss S E Haskins, Miss Martha W Haskins, R B Adams, T B Lothian, George T Holden, Boston; Mr and Mrs Charles R. Piper, Miss Morrison, Mrs **George James**, Mrs Robert Crosbie, Miss Gladys Crosby, Mr and Mrs J M Hill, Miss Mary E Hill, Miss Bessie Hill, Miss Lillian James, Miss Flora Thrasher, Dorchester; Frank White, Bradbury Butler, Mr and Mrs Haverhill.

**MUSICAL DORCHESTER.**

A very enjoyable musicale was given Sunday evening at the home of Mr. Hiram Wilde, 882 Adams street, Mrs. Martha Dana Shepard, Mrs. Dudley Talbot and Miss Mabel Dadmun assisting. Mrs. Shepard rendered several selections in her usual felicitous manner. Mrs. Talbot, Miss Dadmun and Mr. Wilde sang from "The Messiah," "The Creation" and "Stabat Mater," to the acceptance of the listeners, among whom were Mr. and Mrs. Fred Mott, Mrs. John Talbot, Mr. and Mrs. Hall, Mr. and Mrs. **George James** and many others familiar in musical circles.

The Dorchester Symphony society.

Tallow manufacturing must have provided Lewis Whitaker with the means to invest in real estate and horses, as these newspaper articles suggest. Gentlemen's driving clubs were a popular form of sport and competition the latter part of the 19th century.



formation of the association.

**EASY FOR MARECHEALE.**  
 Lewis Whitaker of Roxbury is of the opinion that it will be better not to campaign his great trotting colt, Marecheale, 2:18 $\frac{1}{4}$ , in his four-year-old form, but intends to allow "Long Shot" Cox to work him easily with now and then a race to keep his hand in, as it were. Marecheale was a close second in 2:09 $\frac{3}{4}$  at Lexington, Ky., last Fall.

*Boston, June 20, 1880.*

MR. WELLS:

*Dear Sir:*—Allow me to say a few words in favor of your Rubber Horse-shoe Pads after giving them a trial of a year or more. I am thoroughly convinced they are the best thing I have ever seen for tender feet. I have used them for corns, Quarter Cracks and contracted feet, and in every case they gave perfect satisfaction. I have entirely cured corns on two horses with them, and for a snow shoe Pad in winter they are unequalled. I will cheerfully answer any questions in reference to them.

Yours respectfully

**LEWIS WHITAKER.**

Dudley St., Ward 20, Boston.

Final papers have just been placed to record at the Suffolk registry of deeds, transferring from the owner, Lewis Whitaker, to James F. Morse, two parcels in Roxbury, situated on Norfolk av, Kemble st and Girard st. The larger parcel, numbered 62 to 64 Norfolk av, near the corner of Kemble st, comprises a brick and frame building, two frame stables and some 8000 square feet of land, the whole valued by the assessors at \$8500, of which \$5200 is on the land.

The other parcel included in the transfer from Mr Whitaker to Mr Morse consists of a tract of some 14,981 square feet of land, situated on the corner of Kemble and Girard sts, having a taxed value of \$6900. This will be improved by the new owner for investment. The terms of sale were private.

Herbert S. Frost has sold for Lewis Whitaker the estate at 16 Clapp street, Dorchester, to Matthew Dalton, who buys for a home and investment on private terms. There is a frame house and 8094 square feet of land, all assessed for \$5400.

