

**PPS RECORDS FOR
549 WAYLAND AVENUE
PLAT 86, LOT 409**

**BESSIE AND HARRY MARSHAK HOUSE
Built 1930-1931
Architect: Harry Marshak**

DESCRIPTION:

"A bizarre and complex asymmetrical dwelling constructed of regular and clinker bricks, with intersecting pantile-sheathed gable roofs covering a 2-1/2 story, L-shaped mass whose wings embrace a 1-story, truncated-corner vestibule block with a parapet and nearly flat hip roof surmounted by a stuccoed, shed-roofed bay. The main entrance, set in the truncated corner of the vestibule block, has a flaring "sunbonnet" hood on wrought-iron brackets. The vestibule parapet is ornamented with a pair of zig-zag Art Deco finials and a pair of planter urns set on steps rising up at the end adjacent to the frontal wing. A large, arched, multi-pane, first-story picture window in the end of the front wing is surrounded by brickwork in a stepped-pyramid pattern."

—Robert O. Jones, *The East Side, Providence: A Preliminary Survey*,
(1989), pp. 102-103.

A matching 2-car garage, built by 1937 but likely contemporary with the house, stands on the northeast corner of the lot: 1 story, brick (matching the house), flat roof with shingled hip projection over a double overhead garage door.

The house stands on a 4,744 sq.ft. lot on the east side of Wayland Avenue, south of Sessions Street. The lot has about 43.13 feet of frontage and measures 110 feet deep.

HISTORY:

This unique house was almost certainly designed by architect Harry Marshak, whose wife Bessie bought this property from Louis Fishbein in 1930; Mr. Fishbein is not recorded as ever having lived at this address, and the house itself is found in city tax records and directories as of 1931. Unfortunately, the Marshaks lost the house in 1932 after defaulting on their mortgage; Samuel Schechtman bought the house at public auction and held on to it for about a year, but never lived here. In 1933 Schechtman sold the house to Esther L. Blacher, wife of jewelry manufacturer Benjamin Blacher. The Blachers lived here until the early 1950s. Since 1956, the house has changed hands about five times. The current owners, Seth Kamen and Theresa King, bought the property in 2003.

DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT:¹

From Providence's founding in 1636 until well into the 19th century, the northeast part of the city was remote and relatively inaccessible, being several miles from the settled center of town and occupied by two large areas of wetlands known as the Cat Swamp and the Great Swamp. By 1800, a few roadways had been cut through the swamps to provide access to a handful of farmhouses and country estates, as well as to Swan Point and to nearby Pawtucket. Early streets included parts of today's Morris Avenue, Rochambeau Avenue, Sessions Street, and Cole Avenue. In the late 18th century, the land south of Sessions Street (then called Cat Swamp Lane) was divided between Richard Brown and Dexter Brown, who were both descended from some of Providence's first settlers. The property line between their two large farms was approximately where Wayland Avenue is today: Richard Brown's land extended east to include what is now the grounds of Butler Hospital, while Dexter Brown's land stretched west to Morris Avenue.

Beginning in the 1840s and 1850s, transportation improvements allowed easier access those parts of the East Side that had previously only been sparsely settled. As the city's population grew, particularly after the Civil War, the exponential demand for new housing induced many East Side property owners to subdivide their former farmlands and plat them for residential development. The introduction of municipal water and sewer services beginning in the late 19th century made these areas even more attractive, and the pace of development continued to increase until World War II.

Wayland Avenue first appears on city maps as of 1857, running south from Angell Street. By 1875 it had been extended northward to Sessions Street (then called Olney Street). Planning for the layout of other new streets in this area was apparently revisited several times over the next 60 years, as illustrated in city atlases in 1882, 1895, 1908, 1918, 1928, and 1937. During that time the future site of 549 Wayland was owned, in the mid to late 19th century, by various members of the Metcalfe family; and in the early 20th century by various members of the Cole family.

The future site of 549 Wayland Avenue was included within the Arthur W. Pierce Plat recorded in 1904. This plat, which ranged from Sessions Street south to Upton Avenue, contained no house lots at first (they were subdivided at a later date); it also bordered two large tracts on Cole Avenue that were used for recreational purposes well into the 1930s: the East Side Skating Club and the Hope High School Athletic Field. The east side of Wayland Avenue between Upton and Sessions Street was built out in the 1920s and 1930s; the house at 549 Wayland Avenue was one of three brick residences built side by side in an otherwise largely wood-frame environment.

¹ Jones, Robert O. *Historic and Architectural Resources of the East Side, Providence.* R.I. Historical Preservation Commission, 1989.

DESIGNATIONS

This house is neither listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor in a local historic district overlay zone designated by the City of Providence.

RECORDS (*All Records were found in Providence City Hall unless otherwise noted*).

Maps and Atlases (All in Archives unless otherwise noted)

1798: "A Map of Owners of Lots in Providence," compiled by Henry B. Chace in 1912: Plate VIII shows "Cat Swamp Lane to Swan Poynt or Neck Road," running eastward from Morris Avenue along the path of Sessions Street, and then turning northward along Cole Avenue to Rochambeau Avenue. (None of these street names were used in 1798.) The future alignment of Wayland Avenue appears to be consistent with the boundary line between two large farms: that of Richard Brown on the east, and of Dexter Brown on the west. Thus Richard Brown's farm appears to contain the future site of 549 Wayland Avenue.

1857: "Map of Providence," by H.F. Walling: Page B5 shows the former Cat Swamp Lane renamed "Olney Street" (which ran in a zig-zag line from today's Olney Street on the north edge of College Hill, along Morris Avenue, Sessions Street, and Cole Avenue to Rochambeau Avenue). The future site of 549 Wayland Avenue is within a large, unplatted, and undeveloped lot on the south side of Olney Street (now Sessions), west of Cole Avenue, owned by W. Metcalfe. The area is labeled "Laurel Hill" on this map.

1875: "Atlas of the City of Providence," by G.M. Hopkins Co., Vol. 1: Plate I shows the block bounded by Wayland Avenue, Olney Street (now Sessions), Cole Avenue, and Lincoln Avenue (a paper street, apparently intended to be extended westward from Cole to Wayland). The future site of 549 Wayland is within a large (77,767 sq.ft.), unplatted, vacant lot on the east side of the street, owned by Amelia F. Metcalfe.

1882: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co.: Plate 4 shows the block bounded by Wayland Avenue, Olney Street (now Sessions), Cole Avenue, and Lincoln Avenue (still a paper street). The future site of 549 Wayland is within a large (unspecified size), unplatted, vacant lot on the east side of the street, owned by A.F. Metcalfe.

1895: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by Everts & Richards: Plate 6 (pages 32-33) shows a much larger block bounded by Wayland, Olney (now Sessions), Cole, and President Avenues (Lincoln Avenue and several other paper cross streets to the south, shown in 1882, are now gone). Upton Avenue is also shown, but not yet extended east of Elmgrove Avenue. The future site of 549 Wayland is within a large (76,760 sq.ft.), unplatted, vacant lot on the east side of the street; the owner name is not indicated.

1902: Assessors Plat Maps: Plat 86 again shows a large block bounded by Wayland, Olney (now Sessions), Cole, and President Avenues. The future site of 549 Wayland is within Lot #2, on the east side of Wayland, measuring 78,078 sq.ft. (The remainder of

the block is Lot #1, measuring 344,081 sq.ft.). No buildings or owner names are shown on this map.

1904: "Plat of Land on Cypress Street and Wayland Avenue belonging to Arthur W. Pierce," surveyed and platted by Mark W. Schofield, October 1904, recorded in Plat Book 28, Page 27, copied on plat card #898. This plat is merely a large single lot (767,700 sq.ft) bounded by Cypress (now Sessions) Street on the north and Wayland Avenue on the west; there are no cross streets or house lots shown. (*Registry of Deeds*)

1908: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by L.J. Richards Co.: Plate 10 shows the block bounded by Wayland Avenue, Sessions Street, Cole Avenue, and Upton Avenue, divided into four large lots. (Upton Avenue was extended east from Elmgrove to Wayland sometime between 1902 and 1908.) A large lot of 87,997 sq.ft. occupies most of the east side of Wayland Avenue, owned by W.L. Cole; one house stands at the northwest corner of this lot, identified as 165 Sessions Street. The remainder of the lot is unplatted and undeveloped. The other three lots in the block are owned by the Hope High School Athletic Field and the Providence Co. Savings Bank.

1918: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co.: Plate 21 shows the block bounded by Wayland, Sessions, Cole, and Upton, with two interior streets intersecting at a 90-degree angle: Hurley Avenue, off of Sessions, and Clarendon Street, off of Cole. In the western half of the block, the house at 165 Sessions is shown; south of that, the future site of 549 Wayland lies within a large vacant lot of 26,250 sq.ft. owned by F. & J. Cole Trust; and further south are about half a dozen vacant house lots on Wayland owned by J.R. Freeman. In the eastern half of the block are several lots and buildings owned by the East Side Skating Club, and the Hope High School Athletic Field. This map references the Arthur Pierce Plat, but gives no plat card number. Water and sewer services are not yet available on Wayland north of Upton.

1926: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co.: Plate 21 shows the block bounded by Wayland, Sessions, Cole, and Upton Avenues, with two interior streets intersecting at a 90-degree angle: Hurley Avenue, off of Sessions, and Clarendon Street, off of Cole. In the western half of the block, the house at 165 Sessions is shown; south of that, the future site of 549 Wayland lies within a large vacant lot of 25,500 sq.ft. owned by J.L. Cole; and further south are about half a dozen houses on the east side of Wayland. In the eastern half of the block are several lots and buildings owned by the East Side Skating Club, and the Hope High School Athletic Field. Water and sewer lines are shown on Wayland between Upton and Sessions. The map references the Arthur Pierce Plat on plat card #898.

1937: "Atlas of the City of Providence" by G.M. Hopkins Co.: Plate 21 shows the house at 549 Wayland (with a garage), standing on a 4,744 sq.ft. lot owned by E.L. Blacher. This is one of three contiguous brick houses on a street otherwise built out with wood-frame houses. The entire east side of Wayland between Sessions and Upton is built out. The two interior streets in the block – Hurley and Clarendon – are no longer

shown; the eastern half of the block is occupied by the East Side Skating Club and the Hope High School Athletic Field. The map references the Arthur Pierce Plat on plat card #898.

Deeds (Registry of Deeds)

Deed Book 743, Page 57: On May 10, 1930, Jackson L. Cole of Washington, DC sold to Louis Fishbein of Providence, for \$10, a lot on the east side of Wayland Avenue with 172 feet of street frontage, measuring 110 feet deep. "Reserving unto this grantor and his heirs and assigns all rights in Clarendon Avenue, so called, as reserved in a deed from Washington L. Cole to Charles E. Dennis, June 27, 1907, Deed Book 488/Page 256." [Note: Clarendon Avenue was once proposed to extend westward from Cole Avenue toward Wayland Avenue; it is shown on early 20th century maps located east of the future site of 549 Wayland Avenue.]

Deed Book 743, Page 175: On July 18, 1930, Louis Fishbein of Providence sold to Bessie Marshak of Providence, for an undisclosed sum, a lot of land on the east side of Wayland Avenue with buildings and improvements thereon; the lot had 43.13 feet of street frontage and measuring 110 feet deep.

[Note: despite the reference to buildings on this deed, tax records indicate no assessment for buildings on this lot in 1930. While it's possible that Mr. Fishbein started construction of a house during the two months he owned the property, the house is so clearly architect-designed that it seems almost certain that Mr. Marshak should be credited with it. It's also possible that the Marshaks began construction after they acquired the property in 1930, but the first appearance of the house in tax records and city directories is in 1931.]

Deed Book 756, Page 257: On February 1, 1932, Max Seidman, holder of a mortgage bought from Isidor Schechtman on April 10, 1931, sold to Samuel Schechtman of Providence, for \$400, a tract of land with buildings and improvements on the east side of Wayland Avenue, located 286.26 feet south of Sessions Street, measuring 43.13 feet wide by 110 feet deep (4,743.5 sq.ft.). Isidor Schechtman had acquired the mortgage on this property from Harry and Bessie Marshak on October 20, 1930; the Marshaks defaulted, and the property was sold at public auction on February 1, 1932. This deed was re-recorded, with minor corrections, in DB 773/209 on September 29, 1933.

Intent to Build Records (Archives)

No records found for this property.

Tax Records (Archives)

Tax records are available from 1827 to the present. Prior to 1854, tax records were published in a book listing the property owner alphabetically by name, the total assessment for any real and personal property (without specifying where real estate was located), and the total tax due. Beginning in 1854, the city kept ledgers (organized

by property owner name) indicating the plat and lot number of any real estate and the assessed value and taxes therefor.

- 1930 Louis Fishbein of 178 Lippitt Street owned Plat 86, Lot 409; the lot was valued at \$1,900 for land and \$0 for buildings.
- 1931 Bessie Marshak of 549 Wayland Avenue owned Plat 86, lot 409; the lot was valued at \$1,900 for land and \$9,600 for buildings. [Harry Marshak of this address was assessed for personal property only.]

Directories (Archives)

Providence City Directories contain a street directory, noting all existing streets, and a residents' directory organized alphabetically by last name; these also included a house directory, listing residential buildings by street address, from 1892-1894 and again since 1937.

- 1930 Harry (Bessie) Marshak, architect, 36 Exchange Place, Room 511; home 32 Taft Avenue.
- 1931-1932 Harry (Bessie) Marshak, architect, 36 Exchange Place, Room 511; home 549 Wayland Avenue.
- 1933 Benjamin (Esther L.) Blacher, Blacher Bros. [jewelry manufacturer], 43 Sabin Street, 3rd floor; home 549 Wayland Avenue.
- Harry (Bessie) Marshak, architect, 36 Exchange Place, Room 511; home 172 Irving Avenue.

[Note: No Samuel Schechtman is listed as living in Providence, 1931-1933.]

Providence House Directories were published separately from the city directory, 1895-1937 (published biannually from 1901). These directories list all residential buildings by street address, indicating the names of all residents and often their occupations as well. No distinction is made between owners and tenants. House directories also contain a street directory. This directory is sometimes a year behind the city directory.

- 1931-1932 549 Wayland Avenue (first listing): Harry "Marchark," architect.
[Note his name is misspelled.]
- 1933-1934 549 Wayland Avenue: Benjamin Blacher, jeweler.

Assessor's Chain of Title Cards (Assessor's Office)

PLAT 86, LOT 409 - WAYLAND AVENUE

Providence County Savings Bank owned the property as of June 10, 1910.

East Side Skating Club owned the property as of May 1, 1913.

Dropped June 14, 1913.

Louis Fishbein owned the property as of June 16, 1930.

Bessie Marshak owned the property as of November 1930.

Samuel Schechtman owned the property as of March 1932.

Esther L. Blacher owned the property as of December 1933.

Benjamin Blacher and wife Esther L. Blacher owned the property as of February 1941.

Benjamin Blacher owned the property as of December 1951.

Nancy J. Shuster owned the property as of December 1, 1966. (Refers to Deed Book 1140/Page 172.)

Nancy Shuster and Winifred Galkin, trustees of the Trust of Nancy Shuster dated 2/26/82, owned the property as of March 1, 1982. (Ref. DB 1233/911.)

Nancy J. Shuster owned the property as of November 10, 1983. (Ref. DB 1250/151.)

Windsor M. Price, Jr. and wife Eileen W. Price owned the property as of May 21, 1987 (Ref. DB 1587/317.)

[Note: the current owners, Seth B. Kamen and Theresa K. King, are not listed on the chain of title card; nor are at least two other previous owners, David S. Pomerantz and Karen J. Rosen. The assessor's data base, checked on 1/10/06, lists Mr. Kamen and Ms. King as the current owners as of 2003.]

*Research compiled by Kathryn J. Cavanaugh
January 2006*