

## 347 Beacon Street, Boston

Reprinted from <https://backbayhouses.org/347-beacon/>



*347 Beacon (2013)*

347 Beacon was designed by architect [John H. Besarick](#) and built in 1884-1885 by J. H. Kelley, mason, and Samuel M. Chesley, carpenter, as the home of James Wheaton Converse and his wife, Emeline (Coolidge) Converse. James Converse is shown as the owner on the original building permit application, dated August 4, 1884. James Converse had purchased the land on which 347 Beacon was built on March 18, 1884, from Dr. John Homer Dix.



345-347 Beacon (ca. 1885); Soule Photograph Company, courtesy of Historic New England

Click here for an index to the deeds for [347 Beacon](#); click here for [more information on the land at 343-345-347 Beacon](#); and click here for [further information about all of the land between the south side of Beacon and Alley 417, from Exeter to Fairfield.](#)

On May 19, 1885, as 347

Beacon was nearing completion the *Boston Evening Transcript* reported that "on Beacon street, at the corner of Fairfield, is a new house which commands attention even in this section containing so many handsome residences. It is being built by Mr. J. H. Besarick for Mr. J. W. Converse. It is in the Romanesque style of architecture, is four stories in height, and is built of brick, with richly-carved freestone trimmings, the first story of the two bays at the front being entirely of freestone. At the left of the entrance hall is a large reception room; at the right of the hall are the drawing room, library and dining-room. The walls and ceilings of the large square hall in the centre of the house are all finished in wood, mahogany being used for the first floor and cherry for the upper stories."



*347 Beacon (ca. 1942), photograph by Bainbridge Bunting, courtesy of The Gleason Partnership*

By the 1885-1886 winter season, James and Emeline (Coolidge) Converse had made 347 Beacon their home. They previously had lived at 43 West Newton St. They also maintained a home in Swampscott.

The Converses may have anticipated moving to their new home more quickly, inasmuch as they were listed at both 43 West Newton St. and 347 Beacon in the 1885 Blue Book. The construction apparently took longer, however, and on May 10, 1885, the *Boston Globe* reported that 347 Beacon "will be completed this fall. This probably is to be one of the finest houses on the Back Bay."

James Converse was a shoe, boot, and leather merchant. He served as president of the Boston Rubber Shoe Company, of which his brother, Elisha Slade Converse, was the treasurer and chief buying and selling agent. James Converse also was president of the Mechanics National Bank for fifty years, and of the Boston Land Company.

James and Emeline Converse were joined at 347 Beacon by their son-in-law and daughter, Isaac William Chick and Emma Maria (Converse) Chick, who previously had lived with them at 43 West Newton. Isaac Chick was president of John H. Pray & Company, dealers in carpets, rugs, wallpaper, and furniture.

Emeline Converse died in October of 1891 and James Converse died in August of 1894. In his will, James Converse left 347 Beacon to his daughter, Emma Chick, and it remained the Chicks' home.



*347 Beacon (2013)*

Emma Chick died in July of 1907. In her will, she left 347 Beacon to her husband and two surviving children, Mabel Chick and William Converse Chick. On June 7, 1909, Mabel and William Chick transferred their interests to their father.

Isaac Chick and his two children continued to live at 347 Beacon. He remarried in April of 1912 to Jennie Elizabeth (Hall) Billard, the widow of Herman Merriman Billard. After their marriage, they lived at 347 Beacon and also maintained a home in Swampscott. Elizabeth Billard's daughter, Mary Elizabeth Billard, lived with them.

Mabel Chick married in January of 1914 to James Owen Foss, an accountant. After their marriage, they lived at 226 Bay State Road. William Chick, an investment banker and later successor to his father as president of John H. Pray & Co., married in April of 1914 to Ruth Agnes French. After their marriage, they moved to Brookline; by 1917 they were living at [317 Commonwealth](#). Mary Billard married in April of 1921 to Ambrose Ely Chambers; after their marriage, they lived in Cambridge.

Isaac Chick died in March of 1929, and 347 Beacon was inherited by Emma (Chick) Foss and William C. Chick. Jennie (Hall) Billard Chick continued to live at 347 Beacon during part of the year through about 1935, but spent her winters at the Maryland Apartments at [512 Beacon](#), and her summers in Swampscott. The house was not listed in the 1936-1937 Blue Book, and was shown as vacant in the 1935-1939 City Directories.



*347 Beacon. Fairfield and Alley 417 façades (2013)*

In 1938, it was proposed that a private club with a liquor license be located at 347 Beacon. No formal application was filed but the proposal was withdrawn in November of 1938 after strong opposition from the neighbors.

On December 22, 1939, 347 Beacon was acquired from William Chick and Mabel (Chick) Foss by Human Engineering Laboratory, Inc., founded that year by Johnson O'Connor and his wife, architect [Eleanor \(Manning\) O'Connor](#), who lived at [381 Beacon](#). The Human Engineering Laboratory were pioneers in aptitude testing and motivational research.

It continued to own and occupy 347 Beacon in 2019.