

FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
294 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON, MA 02108

AREA B	FORM NO. 5-3
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Town Belmont

Address 23 Oak Avenue

Historic Name Cushing Farmhouse

Use: Present Single family dwelli

Original Same

DESCRIPTION:

Date 1837

Source Cushing file--Belmont Room
Cushing diaries--Boston
Athenaeum

Style Greek Revival

Architect See Architectural Signifi

Exterior wall fabric Clapboard

Outbuildings _____

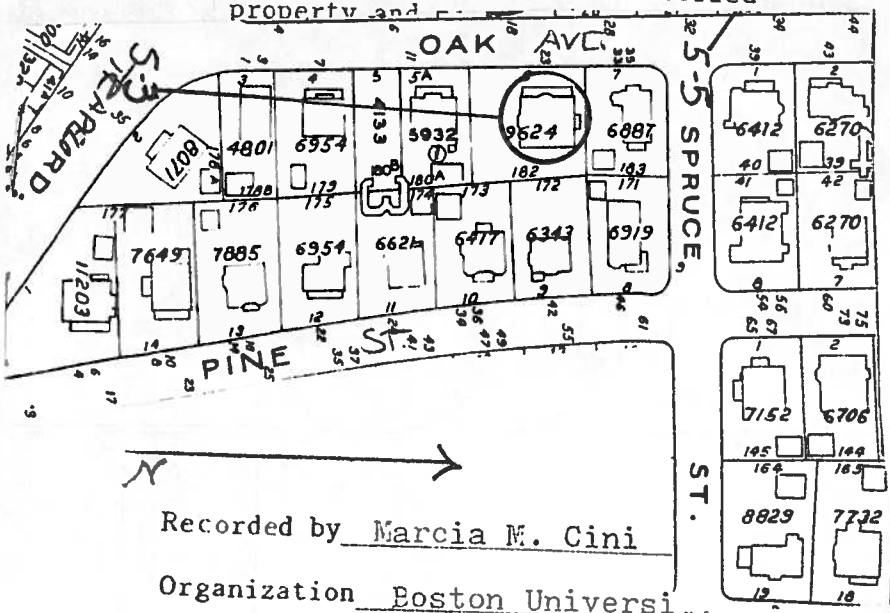
Major alterations (with dates) Front porch, 2 story projecting bay on

south facade and probably dormers
(likely 1902-04 when moved)
Moved Yes Date 1902-04

Approx. acreage 9624 sq. ft.

Setting Regularly set back on a
casually landscaped generous lot
in an early section of Payson Par

Show property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or geographical features. Indicate all buildings between inventoried property and _____



Recorded by Marcia M. Cini

Organization Boston Universi

Date September 1982

(Staple additional sheets here)

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.)

The Cushing Farmhouse's current appearance reflects architectural significance from two periods, the 1837 Greek Revival era when it was built and the 1902-04 period when it was moved. Its broadly gabled roof-line with flushboard siding in the gable only, heavy squared-off lines, center entry and orientation (not gable end to the street) make it an unusual interpretation of the Greek Revival in Belmont. Notable interior features include original shutters in the front rooms, second floor columns leading to a small study over the front entry, and two Federal fireplaces likely to be from the "cottage" built on the property by

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.)

The historical significance of the Cushing Farmhouse as the only building surviving from the "Bellmont" Estate for which the town was named (See Payson Park Form B) is great enough to merit its inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. As the caretaker's cottage, it was important to the extensively landscaped complex (1840-49), predates the "Bellmont" mansion itself and may well have been designed by Asher Benjamin.

The arrival of the streetcar line along Belmont Street (1898), on which the farmhouse stood, and the opening up of the Payson Park subdivision on most of the estate property provided the impetus for the moving of the house to a double Oak Avenue parcel by the Brooks family c. 1903. Many persons lived in the house during the long tenancy of the Brooks'.

At one point it was the home of Cordelia MacDonald, the first actress to play Little Eva in "Uncle Tom's Cabin". For the past 26 years it has been owned by architect David Johnson and his family.

The house clearly derives its major historical significance from its origins. However, its current location is a reflection of a locally common land use pattern, the moving and reuse of early houses in conformance with suburban subdivision practices, which thus obscures previous 19th century uses. The Cushing Farmhouse meets Criteria A and B of the National Register.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES (name of publication, author, date and publisher)

- Betts, Richard. The Streets of Belmont and How They Were Named. Cushing Family File. Belmont Room, Belmont Public Library.
- Cushing Diaries. Boston Athenaeum.
- Johnson, Barbara. Interview, September, 1982.
- Payson Park brochure.

Cushing Farmhouse--Architectural Significance

John Perkins Cushing as precursor to the "Bellmont" mansion itself.

The current owners of the house feel these fireplaces lend support to the possibility that the house was designed by Asher Benjamin. It is believed that Benjamin, a friend of John P. Cushing's and architect of "Bellmont", was working on an experimental central heating system during this period. The presence of just two small fireplaces to heat such a large house could be explained if Benjamin had in fact tested his design in this building while he was working on the estate.

Shortly after the establishment of Payson Park, the house was moved back from Belmont Street to a large double lot on Oak Avenue. In order to make it stylistically compatible with its new neighbors, the following changes were made:

- 1). a two story bay on the south gable end added
- 2). a new Colonial Revival entry and porch (which extended the full width of the façade when built)
- 3). new windows and
- 4). multiple interior changes, especially in the kitchen area

A brick room on the rear shows in early photographs but no longer exist. Those photographs, unfortunately, have not allowed a final determination to be made about the originality of the two front dormers or the current yellow and white paint color scheme. It is clear, however, that an early Payson Park family found this Greek Revival house eminently suitable to its new Colonial Revival neighborhood.