

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS 2:
REPRESENTATIVE DISTINCTIVE AREAS

Belmont Center

Belmont Center is historically significant as the town's civic center and is also one of three active commercial hubs in the community. Architecturally speaking, it has notable structures in a variety of styles, illustrating the evolution of tastes from the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries. It includes the structures on Concord Avenue east of Pleasant Street as well as the commercial buildings on Leonard Street, south of Alexander Avenue. Some of this area, though not all, is included in two historic districts – the Pleasant Street Historic District and the Common Street Local Historic District.

Historically, much of the land that comprises Belmont Center today was settled by Roger Wellington in 1636. In the early 19th century the beginnings of the town center developed at the cross roads of the Concord Turnpike (now Concord Avenue) and the Colonial Watertown Road (now Pleasant Street).

The arrival of the Fitchburg Railroad in 1843 connected Belmont with Boston and a small commercial district developed around the railroad station that was originally located on the site of the present Municipal Light Building. After the first station burned, the Wellington Station building we know today (originally built as a private school) was moved to the site and served as the rail station from 1851 to 1879.



Wellington Station, built 1840 (moved to present site in 1980)

The former Belmont Railroad Station at 1 Common Street, owned by the Lions Club since 1956, was built by the Boston and Maine Railroad in 1908 following the elimination of the grade crossing at Belmont Center and the construction of the stone-arched bridge to carry the elevated tracks. Both the station and the bridge are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Belmont Railroad Station (now the Lions Club) and Railroad Bridge

The first religious congregation in Belmont, the First Church Belmont, was formed in 1856 and played a prominent role in the incorporation of the Town in 1859. The first church building, a wood-framed meeting house with spire, was completed in 1857 and was located near the site of the present Post Office (405 Concord Avenue). The first meeting house proved structurally unsound and was in frequent need of repairs. Its location next to the increasingly busy Railroad was also less than ideal. In 1890 a new church, designed by the firm of Hartwell and Richardson, was constructed across the road (the present 404 Concord Avenue). It is now known as the First Church in Belmont, Unitarian Universalist.



First Church in Belmont, Unitarian Universalist

In the years that followed civic buildings were constructed in close proximity. In 1881 the present town hall was built, replacing an earlier town hall on School Street. The brick Queen Anne-style building with elaborate terra cotta ornament was designed by Boston architect Henry W. Hartwell. In addition to offices, the town hall also included space for the fire engines and later jail cells. After it was chartered in 1885, the Belmont Savings Bank also had a room here for many years.



Belmont Town Hall

A new high school was built south of the Town Hall in 1897 on the site of the historic Wellington Tavern. It was designed by an MIT-educated architect, Eleazer Homer, who had formerly worked as a draftsman for the firm of Hartwell & Richardson. Homer was also the grandson of Joseph Wellington, one of Belmont's founders. The building served as a high school for twenty years and was used briefly as an elementary school. The Homer Building, as it is now known, has served as the Town Hall Annex since 1937.



Homer Building

The first town library was constructed north of the Town Hall in 1902, designed by prominent Boston architect William Ralph Emerson. The brick Classical Revival structure was a gift of Henry O. Underwood. Since the construction of the town library on Concord Avenue in 1965, it has been utilized by the School Department.



Postcard view of Underwood Memorial Library (now School Department)

In the decades that followed, the civic center was reinforced by the construction of the Police Station (1930) and Municipal Light Department (1934), both on Concord Avenue.



Police Station



Municipal Light Department

Previous to the construction of the new building in 1930, the Police had been housed in the basement of the Town Hall. Local architect, H. Thaxter Underwood was the architect of the Georgian Revival building. The Municipal Light Department next door was built in two phases. The substation was built in 1925, designed by Francis Galaher. The two-story Georgian Revival office structure dates to 1934 and was built on the site of the former Adams Store, one of the first commercial buildings in Belmont Center. It was designed by architect George Robinson who also designed the Winters Block in Cushing Square. The Municipal Light Department office was one of the first in Massachusetts to be subsidized by the Federal government's Public Works Administration (PWA) program. Both the Police Station and Municipal Light Building, though not part of the Pleasant Street Historic District, contribute significantly to the character of the municipal center.

Leonard Street was laid out from Moore Street to Pleasant Street in 1890. Belmont's first central fire station was built on Leonard Street in 1899. The two-story brick building with attached pyramid-roofed hose-drying tower was designed for the town by Herbert D. Hale. With its bold paneled piers, stepped parapet, corbel cornice and rusticated first floor, it exercises a strong presence amongst the surrounding lower commercial structures. The building was sold by the town in 2006 and is now in commercial use but is protected by a preservation easement.



Former Belmont Center Fire Station

Most of the remaining buildings on Leonard Street are commercial and date to the 20th century. The wood-frame building at 46-48 Leonard Street appears to be the oldest surviving shop building on the street. It was built ca. 1890, shortly after the street was laid out. The original owners were the Perault family who were house painters.



46-48 Leonard Street

A former barn at the corner of Leonard Street and Alexander Avenue (90 Leonard Street) was converted into shops and offices.



90 Leonard Street

Constructed in 1899, the Masonic Block (also known as the Tudor Block or Olive's Block) was the first substantial building erected in the commercial district. The distinctive half-timbered structure was located on the lower end of Leonard Street, just east of the High School (Homer Building) and was also designed by Eleazar Homer. It was built by a group of prominent local families who sought to add to the beauty of the Town Center and housed a series of stores as well as the post office, telephone exchange and a bank. The building was razed in 1968 and the Belmont Savings Bank now occupies the site.



Masonic Block



Belmont Savings Bank, 2 Leonard Street

The west side of Leonard Street saw the gradual construction of additional one-story stores in the early 1920s while the east side of the street was not developed commercially until Wellington Farm was sold in 1925. Notable on the east side of the street are the elegant gable-roofed brick Colonial Revival blocks of stores constructed by local realtor and developer Albert Locatelli.

During the 1920s Locatelli built and operated a chain of motion picture theaters including the Capitol in Arlington and the Central and Ball Square Theaters in Somerville. In the 1930s he began building shopping areas that combined urban shops with suburban settings and architecture. The Leonard Street buildings were developed in stages in 1936, 1941 and 1952.

He built similar units in Winchester and later Dedham. The buildings were designed by Boston architect John Edmund Kelley.

Filene's Department Stores opened a store at 75 Leonard Street in 1941. In 1944, Filene's was the first department store to have merchandise delivered by helicopter from the company's warehouse in Cambridge. After additions in 1956 and 1978, in September 2006 the Filene's was converted into a Macy's by then-owner Federated Department Stores. The store finally closed in 2013 and was one of the last "Main Street" department stores in the Macy's inventory. The space at 75 Leonard is currently (2016) being renovated for a new tenant.

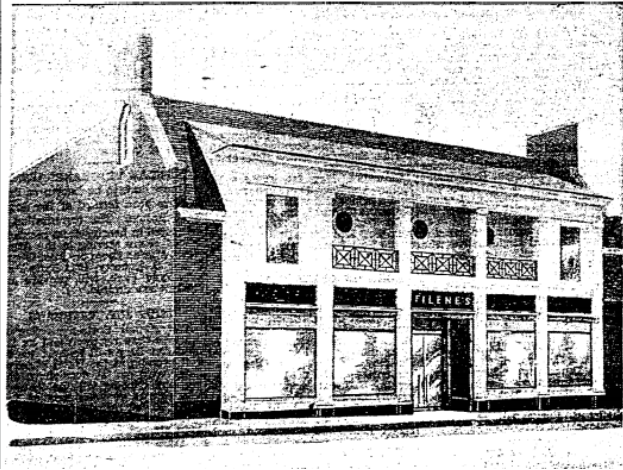


65-89 Leonard Street



Detail, 67 Leonard Street

***Filene's New Branch Shop in Belmont
to Open This Saturday With Local Staff***



Boston Globe, April 27, 1941



Work on 75 Leonard Street (2016)