

Belmont Hill

The Belmont Hill section of town is located to the northwest of Belmont Center. It is bounded roughly by Concord Avenue to the south, Clifton Street and Clairemont Road to the east and Marsh Street to the west while extending north nearly to Rt. 2. The area has historically attracted some of the town's most substantial dwellings, set on large estate-like parcels of land. Belmont Hill was developed gradually beginning in the 19th century. Several significant brick Georgian Revival mansions were constructed by the Atkins family in the early 20th century. The Belmont Hill Company laid out a series of nine subdivisions in various sections of Belmont Hill beginning in 1920 and construction continued into the latter 20th century. Due to its extended period of development Belmont Hill displays a wide range of architectural styles ranging from early Federal and Second Empire houses to Colonial, English Revival and International Style dwellings.

Originally known as Wellington Hill in the 19th century, what is now Belmont Hill consisted of several farms, pastures, orchards and fields. Winthrop Ward Chenery built his Highland Stock Farm at Concord Avenue and Somerset Street in 1850 and he later added a one-half mile race track for thoroughbred race horses on the north side of Concord Avenue. The only house that survives from the Highland Stock Farm is the dwelling at 741 Concord Avenue, although it has been altered in the 20th century.

J. Varnum Fletcher, one of the town's original selectmen and a wholesale beef merchant in Boston, also had a farm on the hill in the late 19th century; he lived at 519 Pleasant Street. Both the Federal-style house at 95 Clifton Street and the mansard-roofed house at 1 Fletcher Road (formerly 86 Clifton Street) were located on his farm and likely housed farm workers. Today, these remain two of the oldest houses on Belmont Hill.



95 Clifton Street



1 Fletcher Road

In the 1860s Henry Clarke, a paper manufacturer, constructed Holiday Farm including an Italian Villa-style house that once stood on the site of the present 567 Concord Avenue, with terraced gardens and greenhouses. Although the mansion is long gone, two of the 19th century farm buildings survive – 96 Somerset Street, that served as housing for the farm workers and 97 Somerset Street, a former milkhouse. Holiday Farm was purchased by Edwin F. Atkins, a wealthy sugar broker, in 1891.

Among the landmarks on Belmont Hill are three brick mansions with associations with the Atkins family. In 1918, Edwin F. Atkins, Jr., had the brick Georgian Revival mansion at 567 Concord Avenue built on the site of the Holiday Farm Mansion. His wife, the former Mary Shepley Coolidge, had familial ties to a number of important architects of the day. Her father was Boston architect Charles A. Coolidge. The house was designed by Henry Richardson Shepley, son of Coolidge's business partner George Shepley and the grandson of famed Boston architect H.H. Richardson.



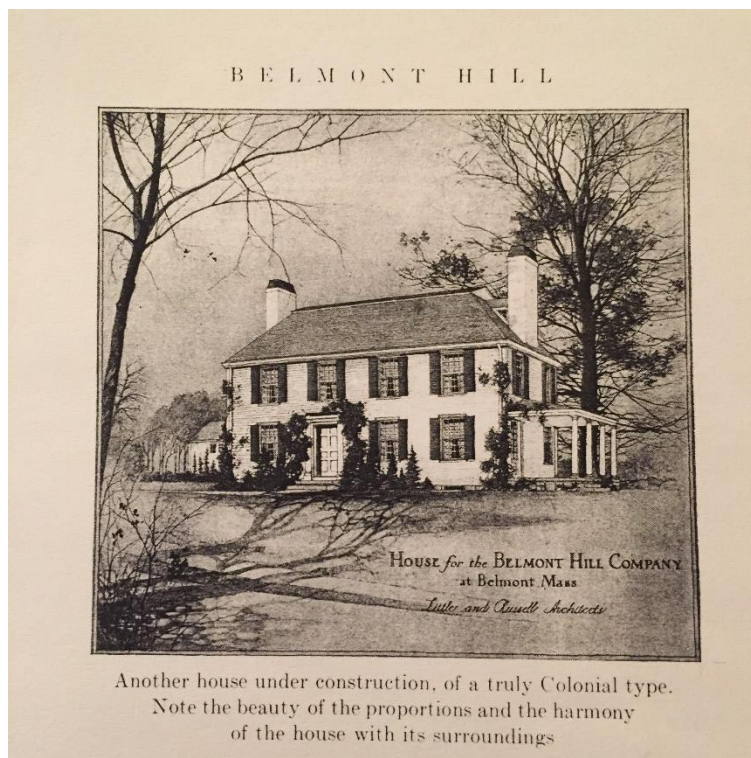
567 Concord Avenue

In 1925 Edwin F. Atkins's daughter Helen and her husband, William H. Claflin, Jr., built their own brick Colonial at 531 Concord Avenue. It was designed by Boston architect R. Clipston Sturgis. Behind the house is a single-story brick building that was filled with wall-to-wall display cases where Claflin displayed archeological and ethnographic objects from around the world. After his death in 1982, the majority of Claflin's collection was donated to Harvard's Peabody Museum.



531 Concord Avenue

The house at 10 Juniper Road was built in 1913 for Ruth Hornblower when she married Robert W. Atkins. The Boston architectural firm of Chapman & Frazer designed the house while the grounds were designed by the Olmsted Brothers. Although the couple divorced, Mrs. Atkins remarried twice and continued to own the property until her death in 1970 at which time it was donated to the Massachusetts Audubon Society. The property includes 90 acres of land that house the Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary.



In 1913 a group of prominent local residents including Henry O. Underwood, J. Henry Fletcher and Robert W. Atkins formed the Belmont Hill Company in order to control development in the way they thought was best for the town. Their efforts at large lot development established the Hill as Belmont's prime single-family residential area and predated zoning which was not adopted until 1925. The involvement of landscape architect Loring Underwood insured that the lots would preserve the many natural features and that there were adequate setbacks. A large portion of the land on Belmont Hill that was originally the Highland Stock Farm became conservation land.

The Belmont Hill Company's first phase of development was located on the crown of Belmont Hill and was bounded by Prospect Street, Clifton Street, Rockmont Road and Clairemont Road. Thirty-five houses were built in this area between 1920 and 1932 in a range of styles, by a variety of architects and builders including Little & Russell, Stanley Parker, Stebbins & Walker, Philip Avery, Hugh MacDonald, Harry Demone, Edward Heenan, Harry Ramsey, Penn Varney, Louis St. Sauveur and others. In some cases, the houses were designed for specific owners; in others they were sold on speculation.



8 Fieldmont Road



32 Rockmont Road



191 Clifton Street

A second phase of construction by the Belmont Hill Company beginning in 1925 resulted in the construction of houses on 1/3 to 1 acre landscaped lots on Tyler Road and Fletcher Road.



41 Tyler Road



8 Tyler Road

The Juniper Road area was sold by the Belmont Hill Company to Henry Hornblower of Arlington. There is a significant set of plans for the “Juniper Hill” subdivision by the Olmsted Brothers. The following presentation plan is dated 1928 but there are plans as early as 1916 and others that are post-1928.



Drawing of 125 Juniper Road

Credit: National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site

Owing to the fact that this area was developed over a longer period, the architecture of the houses varies greatly, with examples ranging from the Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival to the Ranch. The Theodore Miller House at 105 Juniper Road is noteworthy as the work of Eleanor Raymond. Constructed in 1936, the house combines allusions to the Colonial Revival with box-like volumes of the International Style.



105 Juniper Road

Belmont Hill Village was the fourth of nine areas developed by the Belmont Hill Company and includes thirty-six residences built between 1935 and 1939 under the supervision of August Johnson Associates. It includes homes on Ross Road, Village Hill Road, and Dorset Road and was developed after the Concord Turnpike was built in 1934. Although the lots are smaller than other areas of Belmont Hill (approximately a quarter acre), many of the homes are still architect-designed. There are several houses designed by Royal Barry Wills including 27 Dorset Road, 24 Ross Road, 35 Ross Road and 43 Village Hill Road. Although Wills was perhaps best known for his Cape Cod and Colonial house designs, he was also conversant in the English Revival.



43 Village Hill Road

One of the most unusual homes in the Belmont Hill Village neighborhood is the house at 59 Village Hill Road. According to an article appearing in the *Belmont Citizen*, this house was one of seven model homes erected by Jordan Marsh Co. in suburban communities in 1935. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held simultaneously in the seven communities on Saturday morning, June 15, 1935. The Belmont ceremony was preceded by an automobile parade that started at Belmont Center. Selectman George McLaughlin turned over the first sod with a silver spade presented to him by Carroll Robinson of the Jordan Marsh Co. Also speaking was D. George Sullivan of the Federal Housing Administration.



59 Village Hill Road

Rutledge Road was the fifth area developed by the Belmont Hill Company and dates to 1937-1941. Almost all of the houses were designed in a Colonial Revival style. The last areas to be developed were Country Club Estates (1936+), Amherst and Wellesley Roads (1936-1962), Woodbine (1936+) and Hillcrest (1955-1978).

In addition to impressive single family residences, Belmont Hill is also home to two private schools – the Belmont Day School and the Belmont Hill School. The Day School was established in 1927 and purchased the 1928 A. Donham Owen House at 55 Day School Lane in 1933. The stone house has been greatly added onto over the years. The Belmont Hill School, a school for boys in grades 7 to 12, was founded in 1923 on land obtained from Robert Atkins and the Belmont Hill Company. It includes 32 acres of land on Belmont Hill.