

FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

16-1-Z	Boston North	C, H	BLM.27
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Town/City: Belmont

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Cushing Square

Address: 421 Common Street

Historic Name: Belmont Methodist Church

Uses: Present: church

Original: church

Date of Construction: 1922-1939 (see text)

Source: building permits, church history

Style/Form: Gothic Revival

Architect/Builder: Woodbury & Stuart (1921);
Arland A. Dirlam (1938)

Exterior Material:

Foundation: concrete

Wall/Trim: fieldstone, wood

Roof: slate

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
none

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

1922- first floor social hall built

1926- first floor of church built

1938- upper stories built, structure finally completed

Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

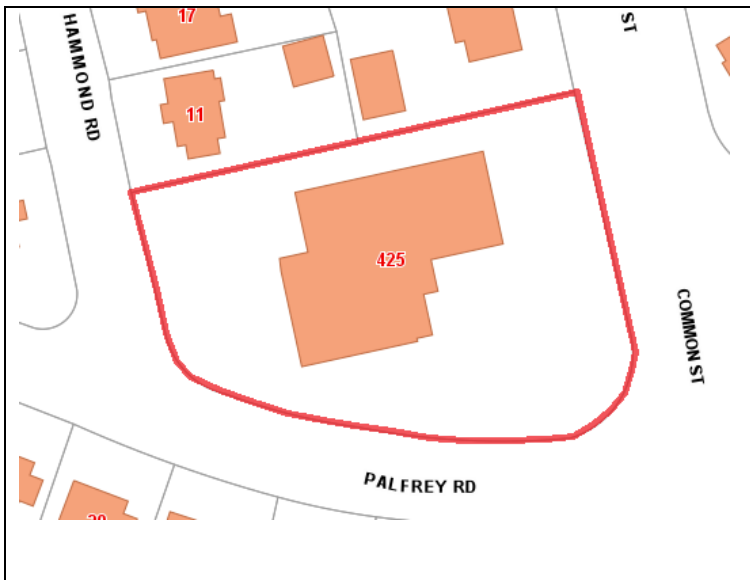
Acreage: 11,388 SF

Setting: residential neighborhood

Photograph



Locus Map (north at top)



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Belmont Historic District Commission

Date (*month / year*): October 2014

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BELMONT

421 COMMON STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

Located at the corner of Common and Palfrey Streets, the Belmont Methodist Church is an impressive early 20th century Gothic Revival style church constructed of ashlar stone with stone trim including beltcourses and bold label molds capping the pointed arch and rectangular openings. Other typical details of the style include buttresses with stone weatherings and crenellation. The church's gabled east façade is dominated by a large pointed arch opening filled with stained glass and intersecting, curvilinear tracery and flanked by stone buttresses. The principal entrance consists of a pair of oak doors with iron strapwork at the base of the square tower which is located midway on the church's south elevation, facing the street and fronting the three-story education building that is attached and offset to the southwest. Like the church this building is also constructed of stone except for the rear elevation which is brick.

The church is set above the level of the road with a mortared fieldstone wall along the sidewalk and stone steps with bronze railings. The church also owns Imler House, next door at 417 Common Street. The 2 ½-story, side-gabled Colonial Revival brick-veneered dwelling was constructed ca. 1925 and displays a five bay façade with arched first floor openings and a two-story pedimented central portico.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

The Belmont Methodist Episcopal Church was officially organized on May 1, 1921 under the leadership of Rev. D. Joseph Imler. In June 1921 the Church purchased a parcel of land that had been part of the Palfrey Estate for the construction of a church. The land comprised 32,397 square feet with a frontage of 118' on Common Street and Hammond Street and 173' frontage on Palfrey Road. The land included the Palfrey mansion. General John C. Palfrey (1833-1906), a military engineer in the Civil War and a textile manufacturer, had constructed the 18-room mansion as a summer home in 1880. He resided in Cambridge for most of the year but died in Belmont in 1906.

Boston architects Woodbury & Stuart (Daniel Howard Woodbury & George P. Stuart) were hired and plans were drawn for the church which was to be built in several stages. Ground was broken on October 1, 1922 for a 50' x 105' in-ground structure that was basically an auditorium with a seating capacity of 450. This original structure is today the church's social hall. The structure was dedicated on March 4, 1923 with Bishop E.H. Hughes of Washington, D.C. officiating.

The next portion of the building to be built housed the religious school and a fundraising campaign raised \$58,000 for that purpose. Work on the excavation and foundation began in 1926 while the plans were completed. As it turned out the building could not be completed with the money raised so only the first floor was constructed. For more than ten years, the church held its services in the one-story, largely underground, flat-topped building that was intended to be the lower floor and foundation of the proposed church.

It was not until 1938 that funds were raised to complete the church above the 1921 and 1926 sections. The cornerstone was laid on June 19, 1938. The completed church was dedicated on February 5, 1939. Arland A. Dirlam (1905-1979) is listed as the architect for the 1938 construction; it is not clear if he developed new plans or if the original 1921 design was utilized. Dirlam studied civil engineering at Tufts and obtained a master's degree from Harvard University's Graduate School of Design in 1929. He was best known as an ecclesiastical architect and designed dozens of churches throughout New England.

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In 1964 the church purchased the adjacent house at 417 Common Street for related church activity purposes. It was named "Imler House" after the church's founding and 38-year minister, Rev. D. Joseph Imler, who left the church in 1959 for a new post. Imler died in 1962. The house was originally constructed ca. 1925 for Daniel F. Duris, who worked in the real estate field in Boston.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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