

FORM B – BUILDING

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

24-59-A

Boston
North

AC

BLM.223

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

Town/City: Belmont

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Belmont Center

Address: 404 Concord Avenue

Historic Name: First Unitarian Church

Uses: Present: religious

Original: religious

Date of Construction: 1890

Source: church history

Style/Form: Richardsonian Romanesque

Architect/Builder: Hartwell & Richardson

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: fieldstone, stucco, brick

Roof: slate, asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

none

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

2004 – new parish hall and classrooms replaces previous
1924 addition

Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

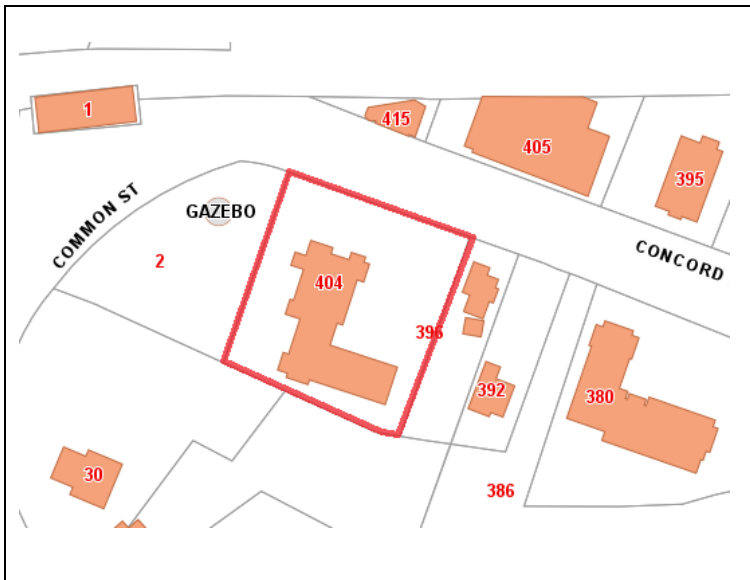
Acreage: 47,801 SF

Setting: corner of Common Street, busy intersection,
adjacent to common

Photograph



Locus Map (north at top)



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Belmont Historic District Commission

Date (*month / year*): July 2014

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BELMONT

404 CONCORD AVENUE

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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.

Constructed in 1890 according to designs by prominent architects Hartwell and Richardson, the First Church Belmont is an excellent example of the Romanesque Revival style. The rough fieldstone base incorporates several arched openings which are hallmarks of the style. The upper level of the asymmetrical structure is covered in cement and includes sections of varying heights capped by gable, hip and conical red slate roofs. The focal point of the design is the tall square corner tower which rises from the northwest corner and houses the town clock. The tower is capped by a pyramid roof with projecting eaves supported by pairs of brackets and the walls are punctuated by long arched vent openings. On the rest of the church the cement walls are punctuated by small, deeply recessed windows often arranged in groups. Installed in the east wall of the church is a large semicircular leaded glass "Pilgrim" window designed by Will H. Low of Tiffany studios.

Extending at right angles to the rear of the church is a two-story parish hall and classroom addition constructed in 2004 on the site of the previous 1924 parish hall. The contemporary structure is simple and does not compete with or detract from the historic church. Facing the parking lot, the north façade displays a recessed concrete portico on the first floor with a second floor that is wood shingled with casement windows aligned with the bays below. The steeply-pitched roof is punctuated by four large glazed gable dormers.

To the west of the church is a large grassy common and the historic Wellington Hill Station.

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 First Church Belmont was formed in 1856 and is significant as the first religious congregation in Belmont and also for its role in Belmont's incorporation as a town. In 1856 Samuel O. Mead, David Mack, and Samuel P. Hammat organized the parish committee of the Belmont Congregational Society which met for a year above Adams General Store with services led by visiting ministers. 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 building was dedicated on October 28, 1857, predating the founding of the town in 1859. The first town meeting was held in the vestry as were others until the Town Hall-High School was built in 1867.

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 1888 it was decided to build a new church across the road. Land was purchased from J. Varnum Fletcher and the architectural firm of Hartwell and Richardson was hired. The prominent Boston firm was already known to the town - Henry W. Hartwell had previously designed the Belmont Town Hall (BLM.178) in 1881 and the firm had also designed the nearby Henry Underwood House, 100 Common Street (BLM.64) in 1885. In 1889 the Selectmen voted to place a clock in the new church and an E. Howard Watch and Company clock was installed in 1890. Ironically, the old church was destroyed by fire in 1890 and services were held in the Town Hall until the new church was completed later that year. The new church was dedicated on April 9, 1890. The church incorporates a memorial window by Will H. Low of the Tiffany Studio, dedicated to Elisha Atkins (d. 1888). It was commissioned by Edwin F. Atkins, the chairman of the Parish committee, in memory of his father. The window was dedicated on April 12, 1890.

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In 1924 a parish house was added to accommodate the Sunday School. It was designed by William Cox (this building was removed in 2004 to make way for a new parish house). In 1928 the name of the congregation was changed from the Belmont Congregational Society to The First Church in Belmont. In 1948 the Waverley Unitarian Society closed and merged with First Church. In 2004 a new Parish Hall and Religious Education Wing was constructed replacing the previous 1924 addition. It was designed by the Boston architectural firm of Robert Olson & Associates.

The church was designed by the noted architectural firm of Hartwell and Richardson which was established in 1881. Henry Walker Hartwell (1833-1919) was born in Boston and educated at Lawrence Academy in Groton. He had no formal architectural education but trained under Boston architects Joseph and C.H. Hammatt Billings starting in 1851. By 1856 he had opened his own architectural practice. In 1881 Hartwell joined with William Cummings Richardson (1854-1935) to form Hartwell and Richardson. Richardson was born in Concord, New Hampshire and studied architecture at MIT from 1873-5. The partnership lasted for almost forty years. Richardson was primarily responsible for design while Hartwell oversaw construction. Most of their work was in the greater Boston area and included residential, commercial and institutional buildings in the Queen Anne, Shingle Style, Colonial Revival and Richardsonian Romanesque. The MACRIS database includes over 100 listings associated with Hartwell and Richardson, including eighteen churches. Most of the other churches are stone structures in the Romanesque Revival style. None of them resemble First Church Belmont.

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North façade of 2004 Parish Hall and Classroom addition



West elevation of 2004 Parish Hall and Classroom addition

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National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible Eligible **only** in a historic district
 Contributing to a potential historic district Potential historic district

Criteria: **A** **B** **C** **D**

Criteria Considerations: **A** **B** **C** **D** **E** **F** **G**

Statement of Significance by _____ Lisa Mausolf _____
The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The First Unitarian Church at 404 Concord Avenue is eligible for the National Register with significance under Criterion C, Architecture, as a good example of the Romanesque style, rare for Belmont, and as the work of the prominent architectural firm of Hartwell and Richardson. Characteristic of the style, the rambling fieldstone building incorporates character-defining arched openings and a tall, square corner tower capped by a pyramid roof. Despite the replacement of the 1924 parish house with a new 2004 parish hall, the original building retains a high level of integrity.