

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

57-17	Boston North	AX	BLM.139 BLM.759
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Town/City: Belmont

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

Address: 531 Concord Avenue

Historic Name: William H. & Helen Claflin House

Uses: Present: single family dwelling

Original: single family dwelling

Date of Construction: 1925

Source: building permit

Style/Form: Georgian Revival

Architect/Builder: R. Clipston Sturgis, arch.
Samuel Alcock, bldr.

Exterior Material:

Foundation: not visible

Wall/Trim: brick

Roof: slate

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

museum building (1925) BLM.759

garage (1926)

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

1928 – addition to museum

2014 – move garage to new location, now detached

2015 – conservatory addition

Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 72,169 SF

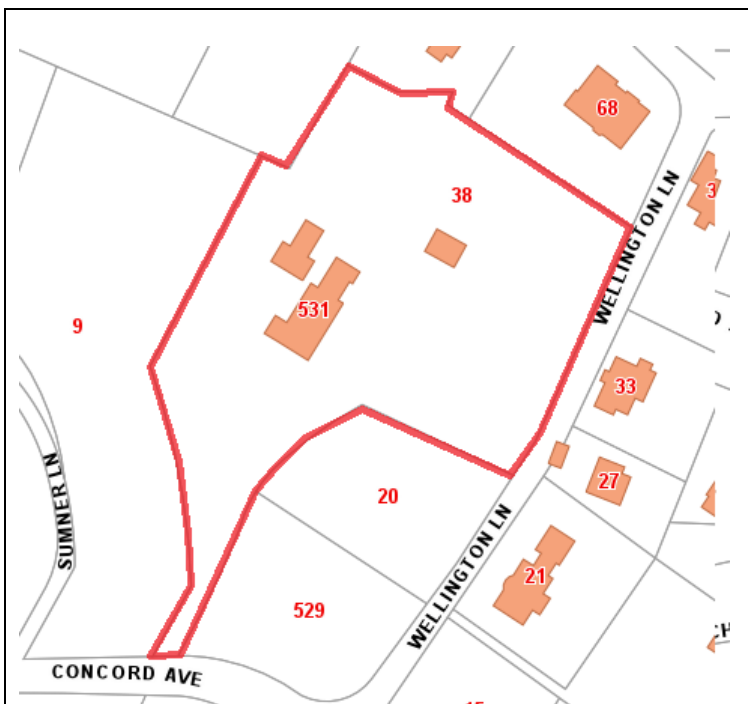
Setting: large estate on brow of Belmont Hill

Photograph



(Assessor's photo)

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

531 CONCORD AVENUE

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BLM.759

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.

Set atop Belmont Hill, the Claflin House (BLM.139) is an impressive Georgian Revival brick dwelling constructed in 1925. The large 2 ½-story dwelling has a symmetrical façade which is seven bays wide and is capped by a slate-covered gable roof with four brick end chimneys. The center entrance consists of a paneled door capped by a semicircular fanlight and flanked by pilasters with a broken pediment above. The rectangular window openings contain 12/12 sash on the first floor and 8/12 on the second with the exception of the tripartite window above the entrance. The three shed dormer windows contain 6/6 sash. In 1936 the configuration was altered slightly by adding one window to two of the dormers. A two-story, hip-roofed wing extends to the north.

Behind the house, the former Museum building (BLM.759) is a single-story brick building with a T-shaped plan. It achieved its present appearance in 1928. To the east of the house there is a three-car brick garage which was moved slightly to its currently location in 2014. It was constructed in 1926.

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.

This large brick house was constructed on land that Edwin Atkins gave to his daughter Helen Atkins Claflin in November 1920 (Book 4469, Page 33). William Henry Claflin, Jr. and Helen Atkins had married in 1917. In July 1925 William Claflin was granted a building permit to construct a 98' x 35' house with attached museum. The architect of the house was R. Clipston Sturgis and the builder was Samuel Alcock. In October 1926 Claflin applied for an additional permit to demolish the old Griswold House at 531 Concord Avenue. In 1926 a permit was also granted for the construction of a three-car garage, also designed by R.C. Sturgis. A 30' x 18' section was added to the museum in 1928; it was designed by Boston architect John R. Abbot.

William Henry Claflin Jr. (1893-1982) was born in Swampscott and graduated from Harvard College in 1915. In the business world he assumed the presidency of Soledad Sugar Company in Cuba in 1926 upon the death of his father-in-law, Edwin Atkins. He was also a prominent Boston financier and served as treasurer of Harvard University from 1938 to 1948 and was responsible for furthering Harvard's war effort in World War II as contracting officer with various governmental agencies. Claflin also served as president of the Boston Stock Exchange, was a trustee of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Mount Auburn Cemetery, the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary and State Street Bank. In his private life, Claflin was an avid explorer and visited more than 77 countries in his lifetime. He found his first arrowhead at the age of seven and from the 1910s through the late 1930s Claflin collected some 35,000 archeological and ethnographic objects from North and Central America, Europe, and the Mediterranean region. His holdings included 20,000 projectile points. He also collected fine paintings, historic signatures and old letters. He also participated in archaeological digs. Claflin took great care in cataloguing his acquisitions and exhibited and stored his extensive collection in a single-story building behind his house. The museum had wall-to-wall display cases and was modeled after Harvard's Peabody Museum. It was open by appointment and also hosted fifth grade classes from nearby public schools. After his death in 1982, the majority of Claflin's collection was donated to the Peabody.

After Helen Claflin's death the house was sold by her estate in 1991 to Richard Kobus (Book 216639, Page 61). He is a principal of Tsoi/Kobus & Associates, architects. In 2014 the three-car garage was moved slightly and the original parcel of land was subdivided. The house and 72,169 SF lot was sold to Alexis Borisy and Lia Meisinger in 2015. A conservatory was added at the rear of the house in 2015.

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The original architect of the house, R. Clipston Sturgis (1860-1951), graduated from Harvard in 1881. Upon graduation he entered the office of Sturgis and Brigham (his uncle was John Hubbard Sturgis). He partnered with William Robinson Cabot in the firm of Sturgis and Cabot from 1887 until 1895 after which time he continued in practice by himself until 1932. Sturgis was elected president of the American Institute of Architects in 1914. The MACRIS database includes 32 projects credited to R. Clipston Sturgis. The list includes several buildings for Perkins School for the Blind, schools, churches, monuments, and residences. Most similar to the Claflin House is the Dr. Edward Benedict House in Newton (NWT.4612) designed in 1925.

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Aerial view of property

Source: Bingmaps.com

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Main House

Source: *The Belmontian*, 2015

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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 Claflin House is primarily eligible for the National Register under Criterion C as a well-preserved example of early 20th century Georgian Revival estate architecture, designed by R. Clipston Sturgis. The property was unusual for incorporating a museum organized by William Henry Claflin Jr. The collection was donated to Harvard's Peabody Museum after Claflin's death in 1982 although the building survives. The property may also have significance under Criteria A and C.