

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

63-12	Boston North		BLM.760
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Town/City: Belmont

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

Address: 665 Concord Avenue

Historic Name: William and Johanna Harris House

Uses: Present: single family dwelling

Original: single family dwelling

Date of Construction: 1961

Source: building permit

Style/Form: Contemporary

Architect/Builder: Walter Pierce, architect
Pinerock Corp, (Edward Green), builder
Ed Diehl, architect (1979 addition)

Photograph



Assessor's Photo

Exterior Material:

Foundation: concrete

Wall/Trim: vertical boards, wood

Roof: tar and gravel

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
none

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

1969- addition

1979- addition

Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 0.41 acre

Setting: mixed residential neighborhood near Belmont Hill School

Locus Map



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Belmont Historic District Commission

Date (*month / year*):

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BELMONT

665 CONCORD AVENUE

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

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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.

Largely screened by vertical board fences along the road and in front of the house, 665 Concord Avenue is a Contemporary-style dwelling designed by Walter Pierce in 1961. Like his smaller, earlier pioneering homes at Peacock Farms in Lexington, the minimalist house is sheathed in stained vertical boards and capped by asymmetrical, low pitched gable roofs with overhanging eaves and exposed beams, and an open floor plan. Large expanses of glass include fixed windows under the eaves, casement windows and plate glass walls that blur the boundaries between inside and outside. A large paved area fronts the house, with a two-car garage to the west linked by a connector to the house to the east. The area to the rear of the house is wooded and the house is designed to blend into the surrounding landscape.

This is the only known Walter Pierce-designed house in the town of Belmont and one of his few documented designs outside the town of Lexington. It is also important as a representative example of the range of Modernist designs built in Belmont at the mid-20th Century.

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.

Town building records indicate that a building permit was granted to Pinerock Corporation of Newton (Edward Green, President) in September 1961. The architect of the dwelling was Walter Pierce. The property was subsequently sold by Pinerock Corporation to William and Johanna Harris of Winchester in 1961. The Harrises owned the house until 2002 (Book 59345, Page 148). Dr. William H. Harris (b. 1927) is a noted orthopaedic surgeon specializing in total hip replacement. He served as chief of Arthroplasty Service in the department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the Massachusetts General Hospital from 1974 to 2004.

Belmont Building Permits indicate that the house was designed by architect Walter Pierce of Lexington. Walter Pierce (1920-2013) graduated from the Virginia Polytechnic Institute in 1941 and graduated from what is now the MIT School of Architecture after the war. The architect Carl Koch who designed the Modernist Houses on Snake Hill in Belmont was an instructor of his at MIT. Pierce traveled in Europe on a Fulbright Scholarship and worked for a time in Copenhagen before opening an architectural firm with fellow MIT graduate Danforth Compton in Cambridge. The two men designed the first houses at Peacock Farm in Lexington in the early 1950s. The Contemporary split level "Peacock Farm" design was replicated dozens of times in Lexington, often for young academic/professional families. It also appeared in *Better Homes and Gardens* in May 1960. Houses based on the design were built in other locations in Massachusetts including Wayland, Newton and Lincoln (five in Brown's Wood subdivision) as well as around the country.

After Compton died in 1955, Pierce practiced alone for almost a decade. The Harris House was built during this period, for a couple that fit the young academic profile of many of his commissions. In a 2011 interview, Pierce noted that he did a lot of custom home designs for affluent, well-educated clients. In Pierce's words these included "two big houses up on the coast" in New Hampshire, a house in Arizona in the desert and custom houses in the Boston area (Janovitz 2011). In 1964 Pierce started a new firm (Pierce Pierce & Kramer) that designed public schools and research buildings including the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole and moved away from residential designs. Pierce was elected an AIA fellow in 1969.

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- Yardley, William. "Walter Pierce, Modernist Architect, Dies at 93", *New York Times*, March 16, 2013