

Cushing Square

Cushing Square is one of Belmont's three commercial centers and is located at the intersection of Common Street, Trapelo Road and Cushing Avenue in the south-central part of Belmont, near the Watertown line. The irregular lines of the roadways translate to oddly-shaped lots and buildings that give the neighborhood center a unique character. The commercial structures largely date to the early 20th century and include a wide range of styles including English Revival, Classical Revival and Colonial Revival examples. Some of the buildings reflect the architecture of nearby residential structures while others are examples of the simple commercial structures seen in many of Boston's streetcar suburbs.

Cushing Square developed in the early 20th century as a commercial center for the adjacent Payson Park residential neighborhood. Both Trapelo Road and Common Street were important historically – Trapelo Road (originally North Street) was the road to Waverley and Common Street was the principal way from Watertown to Belmont Center. However it was the arrival of the West End Street Railway in 1891, offering streetcar service from Waverley to Boston via Cambridge, that made the area what it is today. At that time each road was widened to 75 feet to accommodate center tracks.



Trapelo Road at Common Street

The commercial and social institutions that located in Cushing Square served the growing residential neighborhoods that developed in nearby Payson Park beginning in the 1890s. The earliest non-residential buildings at Cushing Square were the Payson Park Land Company's sales office at Cushing Avenue and Trapelo Road and C.F. Merrow's 1905 grocery store which stood near the southwest corner of Common Street and Trapelo Road. Neither of these survive although the Merrow store was later moved and incorporated into a home on Creeley Road.



C.F. Merrow Store, Common Street and Trapelo Road (no longer extant)

Constructed in 1913, the curved two-story block at 489-493 Common Street/102-104 Trapelo Road was the first substantial building erected in Cushing Square. Containing six stores, the distinctive Colonial Revival building was designed by local architect H. Thaxter Underwood and features wood-shingled gambrel fronts on the second floor above first floor storefronts set between brick piers. In the 1930s and 1940s the building was owned by the S.S. Pierce Company and contained a branch of the Boston grocery store chain. During the rubber shortage caused by World War II, the store used horse-drawn wagons to make deliveries rather than trucks.



489-493 Common Street/102-104 Trapelo Road

In the 1910s and 1920s Cushing Square saw the construction of a number of single-story “taxpayer” blocks along Trapelo Road and Common Street. In most cases they were erected by out-of-town developers who built a number of such commercial blocks along streetcar lines in the Boston suburbs during this period. Many of the buildings display cast concrete parapets and details in a Classical Revival theme.



93-95 Trapelo Road

Credit: American Jewish Historical Society



441-449 Common Street



Detail, 455 Common Street

In 1925 P.R. Winters opened Winters Hardware on the ground floor of a building he had built at 80-86 Trapelo Road. Four years later, a large addition was constructed to the east of the original building at 72-78 Trapelo Road. Like many residences being built in Belmont during the period, the Winters Block was designed in a Tudor Revival style with an exterior decorated by stucco, half-timbering and steeply-pitched gables projecting from the slate roof. The building was designed by local architect George Ernest Robinson (1888-1945) who also designed the Municipal Light Building. Robinson lived at 9 Horace Road in Belmont.



Winters Hardware, 80-86 Trapelo Road

Upon completion, the addition was described as “the most ornate practical and striking business block in Belmont”. In addition to the first floor stores, the building contained a 44’ x 44’ second floor space with stage, known as Payson Hall. The hall became a center for social and civic activity, hosting everything from dancing lessons to political gatherings.

Cushing Square also includes several commercial structures in the Colonial Revival style. The block of stores at 432-444 Common Street features a central building with cupola and brick end walls flanked by two slightly shorter wings with arched vents. It was erected in 1931 by Arthur T. Nelson, a prominent developer of commercial real estate in Greater Boston (Investment Realty Co.) who lived in Brookline. Early tenants included an Economy Grocery Store, Loud's Candies, Trapelo Hardware and Morgan Brothers Creamery.



432-444 Common Street

In 1935 the Harvard Trust Company constructed a Cushing Square branch office at 63 Trapelo Road. The bank already had branch offices in Belmont Center and Waverley. In order to make way for the new building Frederick Drew's two-family dwelling was moved to the corner of Horne and Williston Streets. The bank building was designed by architects Wadsworth & Smith (Giles Smith was a Belmont resident who also designed a number of buildings in town including the Winn Brook School). When work began in May 1935 the *Belmont Citizen* declared the structure "a departure from the conventional type of commercial or bank building...which may serve as a model for future construction along this section of Trapelo Road." The open house held in September 1935 drew nearly five thousand visitors.



63 Trapelo Road

Just as Belmont Center had Filene's, Cushing Square also had a branch of a Boston department store – Chandler's (later Conrad & Chandler's), constructed in 1948. The building later housed a Masonic Temple in the late 20th century and more recently has been rehabilitated for commercial and office use. Other chain stores that once occupied space in Cushing Square included A. & P. Super Markets, First National Stores, and Woolworth's.



448 Common Street