

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

53-85-F	Boston North	BC	BLM.764
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Town/City: Belmont

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

Address: 27 Dorset Road

Historic Name: Prentice & Cynthia Downes House

Uses: Present: single family dwelling
Original: single family dwelling

Date of Construction: 1938

Source: building permit

Style/Form: English Revival

Architect/Builder: Royal Barry Wills, architect

Exterior Material:

Foundation: concrete

Wall/Trim: stucco/wood

Roof: wood shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
none

Major Alterations (*with dates*):
1986 – attached garage addition

Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 13,337 SF

Setting: neighborhood of similar early 20th century dwellings on small, landscaped lots near Concord Turnpike

Photograph



Locus Map (north at top)



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Belmont Historic District Commission

Date (*month / year*): November 2014

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BELMONT

27 DORSET ROAD

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.

Located at the north end of Dorset Road and the corner of Frontage Road, 27 Dorset Road is a modest English Revival-style dwelling constructed in 1938 and designed by well-known Boston architect, Royal Barry Wills. The rambling dwelling has a 1 ½-story, side-gabled core with half-timbered façade with a sunporch attached to the south end and a lower wood shingled section with L-shaped plan extending to the north. The cottage-inspired fenestration includes small-paned double-hung windows and casements with diamond panes or small squares of glass. As built in 1938 the house included a single car garage underneath the house. A 1986 addition attached another two-car garage to the north side of the house. It is clad in live edge wood siding.

The informally landscaped lot includes wooded buffers to the north and south of the house. A flagstone walk leads to the front door and a low stone wall frames a patio area in front of the entrance.

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 house is located within the "Belmont Hill Village" subdivision which consisted of thirty-six residences all built between 1935 and 1939 under the supervision of August Johnson Associates. Belmont Hill Village was the fourth of nine areas in Belmont developed by the Belmont Hill Company. It was developed after the Concord Turnpike was built in 1934.

All of the lots in the Belmont Hill Village subdivision were about ¼ acre – smaller than the earlier developed areas. Deed restrictions controlled the type of development which could occur. Construction was limited to single-family dwelling houses with a garage permitted accommodating not more than two cars. The houses were to be setback from the road at least twenty-five feet and the designs had to be approved by the Belmont Hill Village Trust. Lastly, the houses had to cost at least \$7,000 to construct. The Village Hill Trust received a building permit for this lot (Lot 34) in 1938. The architect of the house was Royal Barry Wills and the builder was Carl Swanson of Natick. Wills designed several other houses in the subdivision including 25 & 35 Ross Road and 43 Village Hill Road.

The house was sold by August Johnson Associates to Cynthia Sargent Downes, wife of Prentice Downes, in 1941 (Book 6505, Page 456). L. Kenneth and Aza Blunt purchased it in 1945 (Book 6835, Page 516). Kenneth Blunt died in 1950 and Mrs. Blunt later remarried Daniel Rogers. She continued to own the house until 1972. The house was owned by Matthew and Ardemis Matteosian from 1984 to 2013.

The house was designed for Johnson and Trenholm by Royal Barry Wills (1895-1962). Royal Barry Wills grew up in Melrose and graduated from MIT in 1918. After working as a design engineer with the Turner Construction Company from 1919 to 1925, Wills opened an architectural office in Boston in 1925 which he maintained until his death in 1962. His office specialized in small house design including traditional two-story, central hall houses and two-story, garrison houses but became especially well known for their Cape Cod cottages. As seen here, Wills also designed a lesser number of Tudor Revival/English Revival homes. Of the 130+ properties currently listed in the Massachusetts Historical Commission MACRIS database, about a dozen appear to be variations on the English Revival. These include 55 Blake Road in Brookline (1930), the Fitzpatrick Estate at 159 Saddle Hill in Hopkinton (1922); and a number of homes in Newton: 60 Beacon Street (1930); 199 Dorset Road (1929); 33 Gate House Road (1927); 11 Sagamore Road (1929); 24 Sagamore Road (1928); and 62 Sheffield Road (1931) and 197 South Street in Reading (1931) (Mausolf 2009). In Belmont other English Revival designs by Wills include 35 Ross Road (1938). He also designed Cape Cod houses such as 24 and 25 Ross Road (also in the Belmont Hill Village subdivision).

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Wills's simple designs met with considerable success. Between 1935 and 1942 he won awards in more than two dozen design competitions including those sponsored by *Pencil Points*, *House Beautiful*, *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Ladies' Home Journal*. In 1938 *Life* magazine selected him as one of eight architects (four modern and four traditional) to prepare home designs for families in four income categories. In the category for families with \$5,000 to \$6,000 income, Wills's traditional design competed against a modern design by Frank Lloyd Wright. The selected family in the article chose the Wills house over the Wright design and subsequently the home was built in Edina, Minnesota. In the 1940s Royal Barry Wills wrote three books on architecture that were widely read and publicized in both the popular and professional architectural press. By 1946 over a half million copies of his books had been sold and *Life* Magazine declared him the nation's most popular architectural author. Royal Barry Wills went on to win a number of national contests and was also featured in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He received a Certificate of Honor from the Massachusetts State Association of Architects in 1949 and a fellowship in the American Institute of Architects in 1954 (Ibid).

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

- Belmont: The Architecture and Development of the Town of Homes*. Prepared for the Belmont Historic District Commission, 1984.
- Belmont Directories, various years.
- Betts, Richard B. *The Streets of Belmont and How they Were Named (2nd edition)*. Belmont: Belmont Historical Society, 2012.
- Flynn, Kay. Area form for Belmont Hill Village (BLM.BC), 1982.
- Massachusetts Historical Commission. MACRIS database.
- Mausolf, Lisa. Inventory form for 197 South Street, Reading, Mass. (REA.439), 2009.
- Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, Cambridge, MA
- Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1915, 1922, 1931, 1949.
- Town of Belmont, Building Department records
- U.S. Census, various dates.