

Final Report Belmont Historic Resources Survey 2014-2016

Prepared for the Belmont Historical Commission and the Community Preservation Committee and Funded by the Community Preservation Act

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FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 2013, Belmont Town Meeting approved the use of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to update and expand the survey of historic properties originally completed in the early 1980s. The project was overseen by the Historic District Commission (HDC) in their role as the Belmont Historical Commission (HC). Lisa Mausolf of Reading, Massachusetts was hired in January 2014 as consultant for the project. The project budget and scope provided for the preparation of 200 historic survey forms as well as a web component related to historic properties in Belmont.

The historic survey project is based on the methodologies of the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC), who maintain a state-wide record of historic properties. The Belmont survey focused on identifying properties for which new or updated inventory forms were needed, particularly under-represented building types including commercial buildings, modern-era architecture, significant pre-1900 buildings that were not previously inventoried, and buildings in areas with a distinctive shared historic association and character. MHC building or area forms were used to document new information, resulting in new forms for 130 historic buildings and 70 new forms for buildings that had been previously inventoried in the 1980s. These completed forms will be used by the HDC as they update the list of unprotected historic buildings and consider a range of future options for additional preservation measures.

The historic resources survey is the foundation of other preservation strategies and provides the data to identify and analyze the most important historic resources in Belmont that are integral to the town's historic character and identity. Once these properties are identified, the HDC and others can explore a spectrum of preservation tools to retain and enhance the most important historic resources, such as local historic districts, neighborhood conservation districts, National Register listings, etc. While this project made considerable advances in the body of knowledge regarding Belmont's extant historic properties, updating the Town's historic survey needs to be done on an on-going basis. Equally important are other efforts that help increase public understanding and appreciation of historic resources. The project component that expands the HDC website with new information on local architectural styles and distinctive character areas is an important step in this process. Other recommendations include building a Town Historic Resources GIS Database, integrating historic resources information into the Assessor's web page, and continuing to work with the Belmont Historical Society, Belmont Story Project, local realtors, and other groups, to enhance knowledge about Belmont's rich history.

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Belmont established an Historic District Commission (HDC) in 1972. The HDC is appointed by the Board of Selectmen and is charged with reviewing specific types of changes to architectural features within the Town of Belmont's local historic districts. In addition to its design review authority in the historic districts, the HDC is also charged with identifying and evaluating historic resources throughout the town in its role as the Belmont Historical Commission (HC). It also nominates properties to the National Register of Historic Places.

In the spring of 2013 Belmont Town Meeting approved the use of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to update and expand the survey of historic properties in Belmont completed in the early 1980s. In their role as Belmont's Historical Commission, the HDC supervised the survey project. In January 2014, the Town hired Lisa Mausolf of Reading, Massachusetts as the project consultant.

Historic resource surveys are the foundation for all subsequent preservation planning. The information gathered provides a summary of the physical characteristics that define the historic architecture and evolution of a community and should be the basis for all future preservation efforts. Survey work might be followed up with other preservation strategies including listing properties on the National Register of Historic Places, and the designation of local historic districts and/or neighborhood conservation districts. In other cases, inventory work might provide useful information that could be incorporated into stabilization/ rehabilitation or restoration efforts or in securing preservation restrictions to protect noteworthy properties. Good inventory work is also critical to inform Demolition Delay ordinances and other preservation measures.

The completion of the 2014-2016 Survey Project is a good juncture at which to examine the overall state of documentation and preservation planning in Belmont. Prior to the current project, the last concerted historic resources survey effort took place over thirty years ago. In the late 1970s a few survey forms were prepared by students from Boston University. In 1982 the Town contracted with the Preservation Studies Program at Boston University to prepare a comprehensive architectural and historic survey of the town of Belmont. Today, that survey effort still provides some useful information but is badly in need of update. Survey forms used by the Massachusetts Historic Commission (MHC) have changed and much more detail is now required. The earlier forms provide little information concerning original owners and contexts and many of the properties have seen alteration. In addition, many buildings that we consider significant today were not included.

Belmont has relatively few National Register listings for a community with such a rich architectural heritage. Properties currently on the Register include the former Railroad Station (now the Lions Club) and the Railroad Bridge at Concord Avenue. The Abraham Hill House at 388 Pleasant Street was placed on the Register as part of a First Period Multiple Property, multi-

town nomination. The McLean Hospital District was nominated in 2002 and encompasses over seventy resources including buildings, structures, foundations and landscapes. The Metropolitan State Hospital District was nominated to the National Register in 1993 and includes properties in Waltham, Lexington, and Belmont. The area that falls within the town of Belmont consists of open space that is part of the expanded Beaver Brook Reservation.

The house at 90 Somerset Street (also known as Red Top) is notable as the town's only National Historic Landmark, a designation reserved for nationally-significant properties and a step above the National Register in terms of both integrity and significance (there are only 256 in the state). It was designated in 1971 for its association with writer William Dean Howells. The Shingle Style house was designed by his brother-in-law William Mead, a partner in the noted architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White.

The Pleasant Street Historic District is listed on the National Register and with 75 properties is also the largest of Belmont's three local historic districts. It is notable for its intact residential structures dating from the 18th to the mid-20th century and also includes the Town Hall, the former high school/Town Hall Annex (now the Homer Municipal Building) and the former Underwood Library (now the School Administration Building). The Common Street Local Historic District encompasses three resources – the Railroad Bridge, the War Memorial and Wellington Station. The Richardson Farm Local Historic District was established in 2013 and includes the historic buildings and landscape features of two properties, located at 306 and 336 Washington Street. The district includes more than 10 acres of actively farmed land – the Richardson Farm has been in cultivation since 1634. The land is also protected by an agricultural preservation restriction held by the Belmont Land Trust.

There are also several properties in town, with preservation restrictions or agreements by which the Historic District Commission reviews proposed changes. These include the former Belmont Center Fire Station, the former Waverley Square Fire Station and the McLean District.



Former Waverley Square Fire Station

METHODOLOGY

Survey Objectives

The specific goals of the 2014-2016 Historic Resources Survey Project were as follows:

- 1. To add to the existing 1982 survey and fill in gaps in the information and understanding about Belmont's historic resources through revisions to selected existing survey forms and the preparation of new inventory forms for under-represented resources.
- 2. To identify contexts for National Register of Historic Places evaluation and to apply National Register criteria to all resources identified in the survey.
- 3. To prepare a list of individual properties and/or districts that are recommended for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places and to identify areas with shared historic association and character.
- 4. To integrate information on Belmont's historic resources into a format accessible to the public on the Town's website.
- 5. To provide recommendations to the Belmont HC to enhance and expand community awareness and appreciation for cultural resources and recommendations for additional preservation tools.

The focus of the project was on Belmont's historic buildings, as opposed to the broader umbrella of historic/cultural resources which also includes archaeology, landscapes, objects, and sites. This project also did not attempt to update existing survey forms for properties in the Town's three local historic districts.



W.F. Homer House (Belmont Woman's Club)

Assessment of Previous Research

In 1982 the Town contracted with the Boston University Preservation Studies Program to provide a comprehensive architectural and historic survey in the town. That survey project included the preparation of approximately 90 forms covering neighborhoods, developments, areas, and streetscapes and about 300 forms focusing primarily on individual buildings. After the completion of the survey, a book entitled *Belmont: The Architecture and Development of the Town of Homes* was published in 1984 to bring together the information gathered in the survey regarding the town's historical and architectural development and present it in a format that was more user friendly and available to all. Since the early 1980s there have been very few additions to the survey. These additions include two bridge forms (late 1980s), a survey form for the Our Lady of Mercy Church complex (2005) and a limited number of updates of earlier forms (such as a new form for the Benton Branch Library).

While the 1982 survey did succeed in providing coverage for resources all over the town, by today's standards the survey products from that period are lacking in a number of ways. Although the existing area forms typically provide a useful summary of the historical significance of a given concentration of historic resources, they universally lack data sheets which provide a summary index list of all the resources in the given area. At a minimum, data sheets should record addresses, dates of construction, architectural styles and historic names if known. These 1982 area forms also have very few photos and the photos that are included rarely illustrate the relationship of the individual components of the area to each other and to their setting. As part of the 1982 survey hundreds of buildings contained in these areas were given form numbers although no individual form was ever completed. Cursory inspection of the individual forms prepared in 1982 suggests an overall lack of information concerning original owners, later residents, architect/builders and other useful historic context. The inventory forms were completed by a group of graduate students and the quality of the inventory forms vary somewhat by author. Also, thirty years ago the focus of the survey was largely on resources from the late 18th, 19th and very early 20th century. As a result, there are a number of contexts and resource types such as 20th century commercial structures and mid-20th century residences that were not adequately captured in the previous survey efforts.



Strand Theatre Block (now Studio Cinema)

Criteria for Survey Selection

The 2014-2016 Historic Resources Survey has considered the full range of historic buildings that exist in Belmont in terms of period, theme, property type, and architectural form and style, from the period of the first colonial European presence to circa 1960. The survey includes both representative (vernacular) and outstanding, high-style examples of the building forms, types and styles that are present in the town. In determining what to survey, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between "old" and "historic". In order for a property to be significant and a candidate for the survey, it must retain historic integrity and be important for its association with noteworthy people, historic or archaeological information. Integrity is defined as the ability of a property to visually convey its historic associations through location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

Specific research goals or areas of investigation identified by the Belmont HC included commercial buildings, buildings of the modern era, significant pre-1900 buildings that were not previously inventoried and areas that have shared historic association and character and are thus candidates for local historic districts or neighborhood conservation districts. Identification of unprotected historic buildings that are potential candidates for demo delay was also a priority, as the current list is based on the 1982 inventory. Existing inventory forms for buildings on the demo delay list were evaluated for completeness and for the existence of any substantial alterations that had been made to the property since they were inventoried in 1982.

After extensive field work/windshield surveys, examining building permits, maps and with input from HC members, the consultant compiled a list of over six hundred potential properties that might be inventoried. The list was then prepared with the understanding that it was not possible to produce an exhaustive list but that priorities needed to be established for survey efforts. Available funds limited the number of buildings that could be surveyed as part of the current project to 200 – to be divided between properties that had never been surveyed and properties on the demo delay list that had survey forms needing updating. Working with a subcommittee of the HC, the properties were reviewed and ranked 1, 2, or 3 based on the property's apparent historic or architectural significance and integrity and in the case of pre-existing inventory forms, the need for revisions/corrections.

- Properties that had not previously been surveyed that represent excellent or distinctive examples of a type, style, or historical period with a corresponding high level of historical integrity were given a ranking of "1". A "1" ranking was also given to those properties that were previously surveyed in 1982 and were on the demo delay list but had incomplete survey forms or incorrect data, or had been considerably altered since 1982.
- Properties that were ranked "2" were still considered to be good examples of a given type, style or historical period and/or had existing forms that would benefit from some expansion.

Properties ranked "3" were viewed as less significant either due to less distinguished characteristics or diminished historical integrity but still contribute to an understanding of Belmont's history. (For the complete list see Appendix B.) It should be noted that in limited cases, in the course of doing the research and preparing the survey forms, it became apparent that some properties that had been ranked "1" should have been ranked at a lower level.

Survey Procedures and Forms of Products Created

The survey utilized standard Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) survey procedures. With few exceptions, new properties were inventoried using individual inventory forms (MHC Form B). As part of the 2014-2016 project, approximately 130 inventory forms were prepared for significant properties not previously surveyed and about seventy new forms were generated for those properties with insufficient older forms. For list of properties inventoried, see Appendix A.

Two sets of inventory forms with original photographs have been produced – one for the town and one for the MHC. Once they have been processed by the MHC, the inventory forms will be made available on the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) at http://mhc-macris.net/. This database includes information on historic resources throughout the Commonwealth. All of the properties that have been previously surveyed in Belmont are already available through this website.

Description of Information Gathered for Properties

The survey forms include information found in Belmont histories, directories, historical maps and atlases including Sanborn insurance maps as well as U.S. Census records, and deeds at the Middlesex County Register of Deeds in Cambridge. Local sources included Building Department records at Town Hall, the *Belmont Bulletin*, the *Belmont Courier*, and files on specific properties and persons at the Claflin Room at Belmont Public Library. For each property every attempt was made to include information on original owners, builders (where possible) and subsequent owners and tenants including occupations, age, etc. The inventory forms also chronicle changes to the building including alterations and additions where discernible and/or where the information was found in Building Department records. Where historic photographs were available, these were appended to the form on continuation sheets. National architectural journals, publications, the archives of the *Boston Globe*, Ancestry.com and other websites provided additional background material.

NATIONAL REGISTER FINDINGS

Overview

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. It was authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and is administered by the National Park Service. The National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support efforts to identify, evaluate and protect the country's historic and archeological resources. These cultural resources may include sites, objects, landscapes, structures or natural features with a significant ethnographic association. Resources that retain integrity may be nominated for significance on a local, state, or national level. (See https://www.nps.gov/nR/ for more information on the National Register).

Given the many significant historic resources in the town of Belmont, the number of properties listed on the National Register is surprisingly small. Properties currently listed on the Register include the former Railroad Station (now the Lions Club) and Railroad Bridge at Concord Avenue, the Abraham Hill House at 388 Pleasant Street (included in a First Period Multiple Property, multi-town nomination), the McLean Hospital District, the Metropolitan State Hospital District, the William Dean Howells House at 90 Somerset Street and the Pleasant Street Historic District. A few examples of buildings that many consider community landmarks but which have never been nominated to the National Register include the Samuel O. Mead House at 346 Concord Avenue (behind the Library), the First Church (Unitarian Universalist), Benton Library, and Waverley Hall on Church Street.

There are many properties in Belmont that are potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Resources may be nominated to the National Register for their historic significance, their architectural significance or a combination of the two.

Under Criterion A, properties can be nominated for associations "with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history". The National Register guidelines identify over 25 known areas of significance. Examples of some of the historic contexts/themes which were critical in shaping Belmont include the following:

- Agriculture (including Market Gardening)
- Architecture
- Art (highlighting the community's long tradition of artists)
- Community Planning and Development (including Suburbanization and Suburban Growth)
- Landscape Architecture
- Health/Medicine (Metropolitan State Hospital and McLean Hospital)
- Social History
- Transportation (Turnpikes, Railroad, Streetcar, etc.)

Under Criterion B, nominated properties can be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. Due to its proximity to the Boston area and in particular Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Belmont has had many significant individuals in residence over the years. The list is exhaustive and includes Nobel Prize winners, politicians, business people, artists, architects, musicians, writers, scientists, economists, scholars, sports figures and media types. Nominating a property based on its associations with a significant person generally requires that a.) there is no other more appropriate site or building directly associated with his or her productive life and b.) the property retains integrity from the period of its significant historic associations. Documentation must also make clear how the nominated property represents an individual's significant contributions.

Under Criterion C, properties are eligible if they "embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction". Architecturally speaking, there are dozens of properties in Belmont that could be listed on the National Register. There are excellent examples of many architectural styles that retain integrity and include buildings erected by local carpenters, architects such as H. Thaxter Underwood, Giles Smith and Victor Wigglesworth, and buildings that were built by pattern books or purchased designs. The works of prominent Boston area architects are numerous including Hartwell & Richardson, Henry Shepley Richardson, Newhall & Blevens, Kelley & Graves, Edward T. P. Graham, Arland Dirlam and Royal Barry Wills. There are also a number of buildings that represent the work of a master (including but not limited to Carl Koch, Walter Gropius of The Architects Collaborative, and Eleanor Raymond).

Under Criterion D, properties may also be listed if they "have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history". Criterion D is usually used for archaeological resources. Because the 2014-2016 project did not include archaeological survey, resources potentially eligible under Criterion D were not evaluated at this time.



Former Belmont Railroad Station (now the Lions Club)

Potentially Eligible National Register Individual Properties

The following individual properties inventoried or updated as part of the 2014-2016 project are potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. It should be noted that interior integrity is not known nor is it usually a consideration for National Register eligibility. Before proceeding with actual listing, written determinations of eligibility should be obtained from the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

351 Belmont Street	Payson Park Congregational Church
291 Brighton Street	Thaddeus Frost House
24 Cedar Road	Emory F. Chaffee House
35 Cedar Road	M.A. Frazar House
41 Cedar Road	Roger Taft House
200 Common Street	Ticknor-Farnham House
325 Common Street	Col. Christopher Grant House
404 Concord Avenue	First Unitarian Church
34 Cushing Avenue	Fred Garmon House
89 Fletcher Road	Henry B. Jackson House
19 Hawthorne Street	Charles Barney House
20 Highland Road	E. Leon Chaffee House
105 Juniper Road	Theodore T. Miller House
105 Juniper Road 18 Oak Avenue	Theodore T. Miller House John L. Goss House
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18 Oak Avenue	John L. Goss House
18 Oak Avenue 38 Oakley Road	John L. Goss House James McArdle House
18 Oak Avenue 38 Oakley Road 48 Oakley Road	John L. Goss House James McArdle House James McArdle House
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 18 Oak Avenue 38 Oakley Road 48 Oakley Road 58-60 Oakley Road 210-212 Payson Road 69 Pinehurst Road 307 Pleasant Street 	John L. Goss House James McArdle House James McArdle House Everett Benton Two-Family Reed Two-Family Clarence Howlett House Henry Frost House
 18 Oak Avenue 38 Oakley Road 48 Oakley Road 58-60 Oakley Road 210-212 Payson Road 69 Pinehurst Road 307 Pleasant Street 90 School Street 	John L. Goss House James McArdle House James McArdle House Everett Benton Two-Family Reed Two-Family Clarence Howlett House Henry Frost House Wilbert Bartlett House

Potentially Eligible National Register Historic Districts

There are also many buildings throughout Belmont that could be eligible as part of a National Register District. Although it was outside the parameters of this project to propose specific boundaries, the following areas should be considered in the future as potential historic districts, including further work to define specific boundaries:

Belmont Park	Goden Street, Myrtle Street, Oak Street, School Street
Clark Hill	Blake Street, Clark Street, Clover Street, Kilburn Street, etc.
Colonial Terrace	The five homes on Colonial Terrace
Payson Park	Cushing Avenue, Oak Avenue, Oakley Road, Willow Street, etc.
Snake Hill Road	The eight homes on Snake Hill Road



Colonial Terrace

RECOMMENDATIONS

Potential Local Historic Districts or Neighborhood Conservation Districts

Within Belmont there are a number of areas with distinctive historic architectural character that contributes greatly to the town's sense of place. In some of these distinctive areas, architectural or visual cohesion is achieved by the fact that the homes were built over a relatively short time span by the same builder. In other areas, the unique character comes from a fairly uniform streetscape that is the result of similar massing, setback, building height and materials even though the architectural styles are more varied.

The HDC currently oversees three local historic districts ranging in size from two residences to over 75 buildings. There are clearly other areas that would benefit from some level of design review as protection from inappropriate new construction and development. In some cases, these areas may also be eligible for National Register listing. Among the areas worthy of consideration are Belmont Park, Clark Hill, Colonial Terrace, Payson Park, Snake Hill Road, and Walnut Hill. Other noteworthy areas include sections of Belmont Hill such as the Village Hill area and Tyler Road area as well as the Tobey Road area. If there is sufficient neighborhood support, it may be appropriate to establish study committees in these areas to determine the level of interest, particular threats to the neighborhoods and potential boundaries.

Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCD) provide communities with an additional regulatory tool for preserving the character of neighborhoods and unique areas from inappropriate development. The NCD is typically more flexible than the traditional local historic district and focuses on massing, scale of buildings, siting and orientation rather than very specific architectural details such as materials, etc. Cambridge, in particular, has had great success using NCDs. It adopted its NCD ordinance in 1983 and currently has four districts.

Recommendations for Enhancing Public Understanding and Awareness of Historic Resources

Build an Interactive Historic Resources Database Using GIS

The Town should build a data base which combines results from the Historic Surveys with photos and maps in a GIS format.

Integrate Information of Historic Resources into Assessor's Web Site

The Town should consider adding information from the Historic Surveys to the Assessor's web page. This might include correcting erroneous dates of construction where better information is available and indications as to whether a property is in a local historic district or covered by the Demolition Delay Bylaw.

Continue to Work with Local Realtors

The HDC includes representation from a local realtor. The HDC should also continue to work with local realtors to ensure that new property owners are aware of the existence of local historic districts and the Demolition Delay Bylaw.

Continue to Work with the Belmont Historical Society and Other Local Groups

The HDC/HC should continue to work with the Belmont Historical Society on projects that enhance the public's awareness of the town's history and historic resources. One such program, the Belmont Story Project, is an audio archive of local oral histories and family memories recorded by the Belmont Media Center (https://soundcloud.com/belmont-story-project).

Continue to Build the HDC Web Page

The HDC should continue to expand the HDC Web Page with information to inform and engage the public. In addition to the sections of Architectural Styles and Selected Distinctive Areas of town, this could include information on additional neighborhoods, preservation tools, selected research topics, historic maps, etc.

Recommendations for Future Work

Inventorying Properties Associated with Significant Individuals

While it is nearly impossible to inventory the residences of all of Belmont's significant residents, additional efforts should be made to establish linkages between buildings and persons. The book, *Who's Who in Belmont*, edited by Samuel Dowse Robbins (1972) does highlight many of these individuals, listing their accomplishments and place of residence. An emphasis should obviously be placed on residences of long duration or where the residence was part of the productive career of the individual (studio, etc.). Properties with brief associations to prominent individuals are less significant.

Update Inventory Forms for Properties in the Historic Districts

This project did not attempt to examine or revise the inventory forms that have been previously prepared for the Pleasant Street Historic District. Cursory review suggests that the existing forms are lacking in many details considered standard for forms today. The preparation of new, updated forms that include all the information available regarding history and alterations would be extremely beneficial to the HDC in their review of applications for additions or modifications of properties located within the historic district.

Update Inventory Forms for Municipal Properties

All municipal properties fifty years or older should have up-to-date survey forms to inform planning and capital projects. This would include the Police Station, Light Department, Fieldhouse, Library, High School, etc. Many of these properties, particularly the Police Station and Light Department, are significant for their architectural association.

Continue Survey Work in Distinctive Areas

Throughout Belmont there are many clusters of historic dwellings with shared historic character and associations. Unfortunately, it was outside the limits of this survey to inventory all of these areas. Among the areas which should be surveyed in the future are structures in the Walnut Hill area (Hillcrest Road and Fairmont Street), Stone Road, Orchard Circle and the Tobey Road areas.

Document Under-represented Cultural Resources

Because a priority was placed on historic buildings, other types of cultural resources including landscapes, objects, and archeological sites were not evaluated as part of this project. The

inventory form for the Belmont Cemetery should be updated as should other significant landscapes and sites. Belmont, along with neighboring Watertown, is one of the oldest Armenian communities in the country. Armenians began immigrating to the area in significant numbers in the 1890s. Documenting the ethnographic resources of this community including sites, structures, landscapes, and objects would be a meaningful future project.

Encourage the Preparation of Additional National Register Listings

The HDC should encourage the preparation of additional National Register nominations for eligible properties within the town. The National Register can be a useful tool in elevating properties in local consciousness and in attracting attention to endangered resources. While listing on the National Register does not prevent a property from being demolished it can trigger important tools for preservation including eligibility for federal historic tax credits, preservation easements, and reviews of federal undertakings through Section 106.



Oak Street, Belmont Park

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- Historic New England, Boston. Including photographs, Eleanor Raymond photographic collection and Royal Barry Wills Archives.