

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

18-54	Boston North	O	BLM.769
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Town/City: Belmont

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

Address: 20 Highland Road

Historic Name: E. Leon Chaffee House

Uses: Present: single family dwelling

Original: single family dwelling

Date of Construction: 1915

Source: building permit

Style/Form: Eclectic

Architect/Builder: Victor Wigglesworth

Exterior Material:

Foundation: concrete

Wall/Trim: wood shingles

Roof: asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
garage (1931)

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

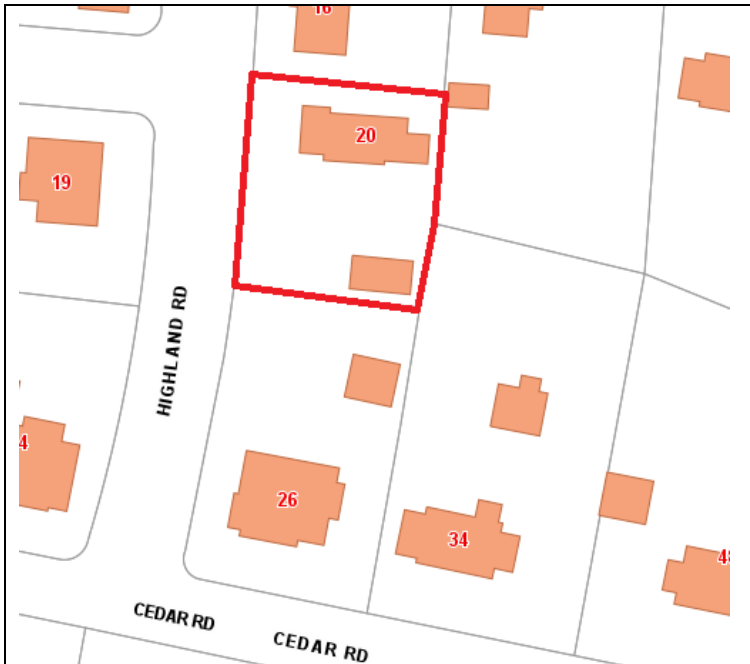
Acreage: 10,486SF

Setting: neighborhood of distinctive single family dwellings dating to early 20th century, many architect designed.

Photograph



Locus Map (north at top)



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Belmont Historic District Commission

Date (*month / year*): December 2014

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BELMONT

20 HIGHLAND ROAD

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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BLM.769

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.

Like many of the houses in the Walnut Hill neighborhood, 20 Highland Road is a distinctive, architect-designed early 20th century residence. The two-story, wood-shingled dwelling defies a stylistic label. It is capped by a hipped/gambrel roof which is punctuated by multiple shed dormers. On the narrow end facing the street the roof extends to shelter a porch (enclosed in the 1950s) with the overhang supported by large curved braces. The entrance is centered on the south elevation and is sheltered by a smaller overhang with smaller brackets. The predominant window is a double-hung sash – 6/9 on the first floor and 6/6 above. The windows are grouped in sets of three on the first floor and are used individually and in pairs above.

The informally landscaped yard gives the house the sense of an English cottage and a winding path leads to the front door. To the south of the house is a one-car garage capped by a hip roof, constructed in 1931.

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.

According to town records, a building permit was issued for this house in April 1915. The owner was Emory Leon Chaffee who had purchased the land (lot 10) from Ruth Chenery in 1914 (Middlesex County Book 3858, Page 504; Plan Book 192, Plan 13). The architect was Victor Wigglesworth and the builder was M.L. Card.

Emory Chaffee (1885-1975) was a physicist. He received degrees from MIT in 1907 and from Harvard in 1908 and 1911. He began teaching at Harvard in 1911 and remained there until 1953. He was best known for his work with vacuum tubes and radio engineering. Emory Leon Chaffee married his first wife Marie in 1913. His parents, Emory F. and Belle Chaffee, lived in a house (also designed by Victor Wigglesworth) at 24 Cedar Road (BLM.48) that was built in 1913.

Emory and Marie Chaffee apparently divorced about 1923 and Mrs. Chaffee continued to live here until about 1929 when the house was sold to Dr. Norman Swett, a dentist, and his wife Muriel (Book 5354, Page 587). A garage was constructed for the Swetts in 1931 by local builder Sam Alcock. The house was purchased by Frank and Hallette Davis in 1949 (Book 7443, Page 27). It was sold by Hallette Davis in 2000 to Richard McFarland who still owns it today.

The designer of the house, Victor Hugo Wigglesworth (1885-1958), was born in Hyde Park in 1885. Nothing is known about his educational background other than the 1940 Census indicates that the highest level of schooling he received was the first year of high school. In 1910 he was living with his mother in Chelsea and the local directory lists him as an architect. He and his brother Charles appear to briefly formed a partnership and are credited with the design of several Colonial Revival buildings in Chelsea including buildings on Bellingham Square and the Chelsea Day Nursery. He married Mary Winthrop Shackford on May 25, 1916 and they lived in a house he designed at 4 Colonial Terrace in Belmont that year.

In addition to Colonial Terrace, Wigglesworth also designed other dwellings in Belmont including 24 Cedar Road (1913), a Prairie Style dwelling, a house for his own use at 214 Common Street (1922, no longer extant), another across the street (217 Common Street, no longer extant) and several houses nearby on Slade Street including 223-225 Slade Street, 234 Slade Street, 256 Slade Street, and another house for himself at 21 Knox Road (no longer extant). Many of the buildings he designed were of concrete, fireproof construction. Examples of his work were published in a number of early 20th century journals including *Carpentry and Building*, *The Builder's Journal* and *Concrete*. In 1929 Wigglesworth was awarded a patent for a tie for binding spaced walls together. The Common and Slade Street houses are credited to Bates & Wigglesworth, Architects and Engineers. Nothing is known about his partner.

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It appears that Wigglesworth did not always primarily work as an architect. Draft records indicate that in 1917 he was chief draftsman for the John H. Hammond Jr. Cruft factory in Cambridge and at the time of World War II he was an engineer for Fay Spofford and Thorndike in Boston. Wigglesworth was still living in Belmont in 1955 but died in Newburgh, New York in 1958.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Ancestry.com

Belmont: The Architecture and Development of the Town of Homes. Prepared for the Belmont Historic District Commission, 1984.

Betts, Richard B. *The Streets of Belmont and How they Were Named (2nd edition).* Belmont: Belmont Historical Society, 2012.

Lucas, Nora. Area Form for Walnut Hill (BLM.O), 1982.

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Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, Cambridge, MA

Robbins, Samuel Dowse. *Who's Who in Belmont.* Belmont: 1972.

Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1915, 1922, 1931, 1949.

Town of Belmont, Building Department files.

U.S. Census, various dates.

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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 house at 20 Highland Road appears to be eligible for the National Register as part of a potential Walnut Hill historic district (the boundaries of such have not been defined). It is significant locally under Criterion C as a unique example of early 20th century eclectic domestic design by local architect Victor Wigglesworth. It is one of a number of distinctive dwellings, many architect-designed, in the Walnut Hill neighborhood which was subdivided in 1910 and developed between 1910 and the early 1930s.