

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

5-63	Boston North	B	BLM.787
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Town/City: Belmont

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Payson Park

Photograph



Address: 51 Oak Avenue

Historic Name: Robert Gray House

Uses: Present: single family dwelling

Original: single family dwelling

Date of Construction: 1910

Source: building permit

Style/Form: Colonial Revival

Architect/Builder: Nathan Douglas, architect

Exterior Material:

Foundation: stone

Wall/Trim: wood shingle, wood

Roof: asphalt shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
garage (1922)

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

1957 – roof over rear porch

1988 – dormer addition, rear

Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 6,270 SF

Setting: neighborhood of similar early 20th century dwellings on small, informally landscaped lots

Locus Map



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Belmont Historic District Commission

Date (*month / year*): November 2014

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BELMONT

51 OAK 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.

Dating to the early 20th century, the house at 51 Oak Avenue displays a mixture of Colonial Revival and Queen Anne style details. The 2 ½-story dwelling is clad in wood shingles and is capped by a steeply pitched hip roof with a modillion cornice and a hip dormer on each slope. The north third of the façade consists of a two-story, three-sided bay window. The remainder of the façade is fronted by a single-story porch supported by Ionic columns on pedestals. The varied fenestration includes double-hung windows with six lights or diamond panes in the upper sash and an oriel window on the first floor of the side elevations. Above the front porch a lunette topped glass-and-panel door accesses the upper level which is enclosed by a stick balustrade with balled newel posts matching that on the lower level.

A driveway extends along the south side of the house terminating at a two-car garage constructed of rusticated concrete blocks with a parapet front. According to Sanborn maps, the garage was constructed between 1922 and 1931.

This is one of a number of well-preserved wood shingled dwellings in the Payson Park neighborhood displaying the influence of the Colonial Revival, Queen Anne, Shingle and/or Craftsman styles.

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 Payson Park subdivision which occupies land that was originally part of J.P. Cushing's estate, "Bellmont". After Cushing's death in 1862, the estate was purchased by Samuel Payson who sold the property to the Payson Park Land Company in 1886. The former estate was developed in three stages between 1886 and 1920 by the trustees who included Costello Converse of Malden, William Faxon, Jr. of Cohasset and Andrew Reed of Belmont. Oak Avenue was laid out in 1889 and the houses on the street date from 1902 to 1928, fueled in large part by the arrival of the streetcar line along Belmont Street in 1898. The deeds for the Oak Avenue lots included restrictions that were in effect until 1912. These limited development to a single house and stable, prohibited the sale of liquor or offensive trade and required a setback of 25' from Oak Avenue.

In September 1908 this lot (Lot 36) was sold by the Payson Park Land Company to Emma Gray, a Cambridge widow (Book 3398, Page 189). In August 1910 Mrs. Gray deeded the property to her son, Robert (Book 3540, Page 311). In September 1910 Robert W. Gray of 18 Hilliard Street in Cambridge was given a building permit for a dwelling. It was designed by Cambridge architect Nathan Douglas. Douglas was born in Boston about 1860 and later went to New York where he graduated from the Brooklyn Institute. He returned to Cambridge to practice about 1901 and designed a number of structures in the Boston metropolitan area over the next 25 or so years.

In 1919 the house was sold by Robert Gray to Edith Mann Goodrich, wife of Lyman Goodrich. Frederick Roberts, a Somerville manufacturer, purchased the house in 1922 and added a garage, built by Jacob Kirris of Arlington. He died about 1925 but his widow Henriette was still living here in the early 1950s. Later owners included Dexter and Thelma Wesson from 1954 to 1984. The Wessons were married in 1937. He saw action in the D-day invasion of Normandy in the Battle of the Bulge. After the war, the couple moved to Belmont and raised their family. He was the vice president of Field Machinery Co. of Cambridge and was active in the Payson Park Congregational Church in Belmont. The Wessons moved to South Yarmouth in 1984 and sold the house to Pamela Rajpal. It has been owned by Shasmi and Pamela Rajpal since 2001 (Book 33976, Page 414).

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