

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

58-8	Boston North	AU	BLM.460
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Town/City: Belmont

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Snake Hill Road

Address: 68 Snake Hill Road

Historic Name: Lincoln & Allison Gordon House

Uses: Present: single family dwelling

Original: single family dwelling

Date of Construction: 1940

Source: building permit

Style/Form: International Style

Architect/Builder: Carl Koch, architect;
Tobiason Brothers, builders

Exterior Material:

Foundation: concrete block

Wall/Trim: vertical boards

Roof: tar and gravel; rolled roofing

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
carport (1967)

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

1946 – garage under house and large addition

1980 – addition (Don Freeman, architect)

1999 – new windows in original bedroom wing

2002 – small additions including entrance canopy

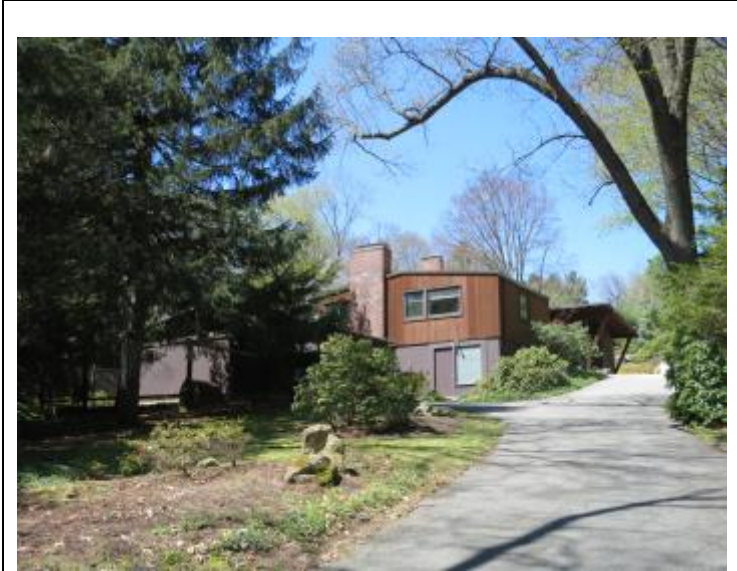
Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 19,599 SF

Setting: clearing on wooded hillside

Photograph



Locus Map (north at top)



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Belmont Historic District Commission

Date (*month / year*): April 2016

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BELMONT

68 SNAKE HILL ROAD

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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 top of the development, 68 Snake Hill Road was constructed in 1940 and was one of the five houses constructed in the first phase of construction on Snake Hill Road. The house was greatly expanded over the years including a large front addition constructed in 1946 and other alterations dating to 1980. As originally designed the house was two-stories in height and rectangular in plan. There was a peaked roof over the north part of the house and the south portion consisted of an open second story sunporch. Large glass windows faced southeast and there were two entries capped by cantilevered overhangs. There is little left of the original design. The sunporch area is now two-stories in height, capped by a peaked roof with a sloped roof extending to the northeast.

In 1946 a two-story addition was added to the east of (in front of) the original block. It is sheathed in vertical boards over a concrete lower level and is capped by a low gable roof with a large brick exterior chimney on the east façade. A modern canopy on simple supports was added to the north elevation of the original house in 2002

A small carport constructed in 1967 is located in front of the house. The buildings are designed to blend into the surrounding landscape, screened by trees and informal landscaping.

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.

In March 1940 Edward Hartshorne and Carl Koch petitioned for approval of a ten lot subdivision and a winding road to be laid out off Pleasant Street through a seven acre parcel of land that they had purchased from Ernest J. Corrigan. Corrigan had bought the land in 1928 from George V. Fletcher. As reported in the *Belmont Citizen* on May 31, 1940, the planned community was the joint venture of five individuals – two Harvard instructors and three graduates. They were Carl Koch, architect and designer of the community; Dr. Edward Hartshorne and Dr. A. Lincoln Gordon, instructors at Harvard; lawyer Gardner Cushman and Harry B. Wissmann. The street was originally to be called “Witsend Road”. It was renamed Snake Hill Road in October 1940. Originally the abutters owned and maintained their own boiler house and kept the street clear of ice and snow with a system of underground pipes (Betts 2012: 249-250).

Albert Carl Koch Jr. (1912-1998) received his Master of Architecture from the Harvard School of Design in 1937 and studied under Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus founder. Koch traveled to Sweden on a fellowship in 1938 and was fascinated by the Swedes’ use of fabrication. With a goal of building houses that were less expensive but still fully functional and pleasant homes, Koch’s first project upon returning to the United States was a community housing project called Snake Hill. Koch initially developed the project as a way to design an inexpensive home for himself and his family. The house at 77 Snake Hill Road (Lot 6) was one of five houses constructed as part of the first phase of construction and was the architect’s own home. The first five houses - #68, 69, 77, 83 & 89 were constructed in 1940 and were all designed by Carl Koch. In 1946 *Progressive Architecture* declared “the original five houses at Snake Hill designed by Carl Koch constitute one of the best known and most significant groups of contemporary houses in the world”.

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The original owners of this house were A. Lincoln Gordon (1913-2009) and his wife Allison (Book 6409, Page 20). They had married in 1937 and bought this house in 1940. The house design incorporates Koch's belief in open and flexible interior planning. Expensive millwork is non-existent. In the Gordon House, the stairway is enclosed by simple studs and square posts. The design also reflects the specific wishes of the owner; in this case the owner wanted an upstairs study, removed from the general living area. A dressing room was designed so that it might be converted into a baby's room. There is also a maid's room. The cost of the two-story home was \$7,650.

Gordon earned a doctorate at Oxford, was a Rhodes Scholar and was a Harvard professor for many years teaching business and international affairs. He served on the War Production Board during World War II and after the war served in Paris and London as an administrator of the Marshall Plan for European recovery after the war. Dr. Gordon served as U.S. Ambassador to Brazil from 1961 to 1966. The Gordons sold this house in 1966. The following year he became President of Johns Hopkins University and served in that position until 1971.

Ernest May purchased the house in 1966 and retained ownership until 1980. Dr. Ernest May (1928-2009) had joined Harvard in 1954 and was a distinguished historian of world wars, intelligence, and international relations. The property was owned by Harold and Rosalind Davidson from 1980 to 1988 when it was purchased by Jane Minasian and J. Grant Monahan, the present owners.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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- New York Times*, Dec. 21, 2009 [obituary of Lincoln Gordon].
- Robbins, Samuel Dowse, ed. *Who's Who in Belmont*. Belmont: Belmont Historical Society, 1972.
- "3 New Houses at...Snake Hill, Belmont, Mass.", *Progressive Architecture*, October 1946.
- Town of Belmont, Building Department Files.
- Washington Post*, June 11, 2009 [obituary of Ernest May].
- Williams, Judy. Area form (BLM.AU) for Snake Hill Road, November 1982.

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Bing Maps View looking west (original part of house at top)

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Gordon House, 1941 (looking north)

Source: *Architectural Forum*, June 1941

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Original Floor Plan

Source: *Architectural Forum*, June 1941

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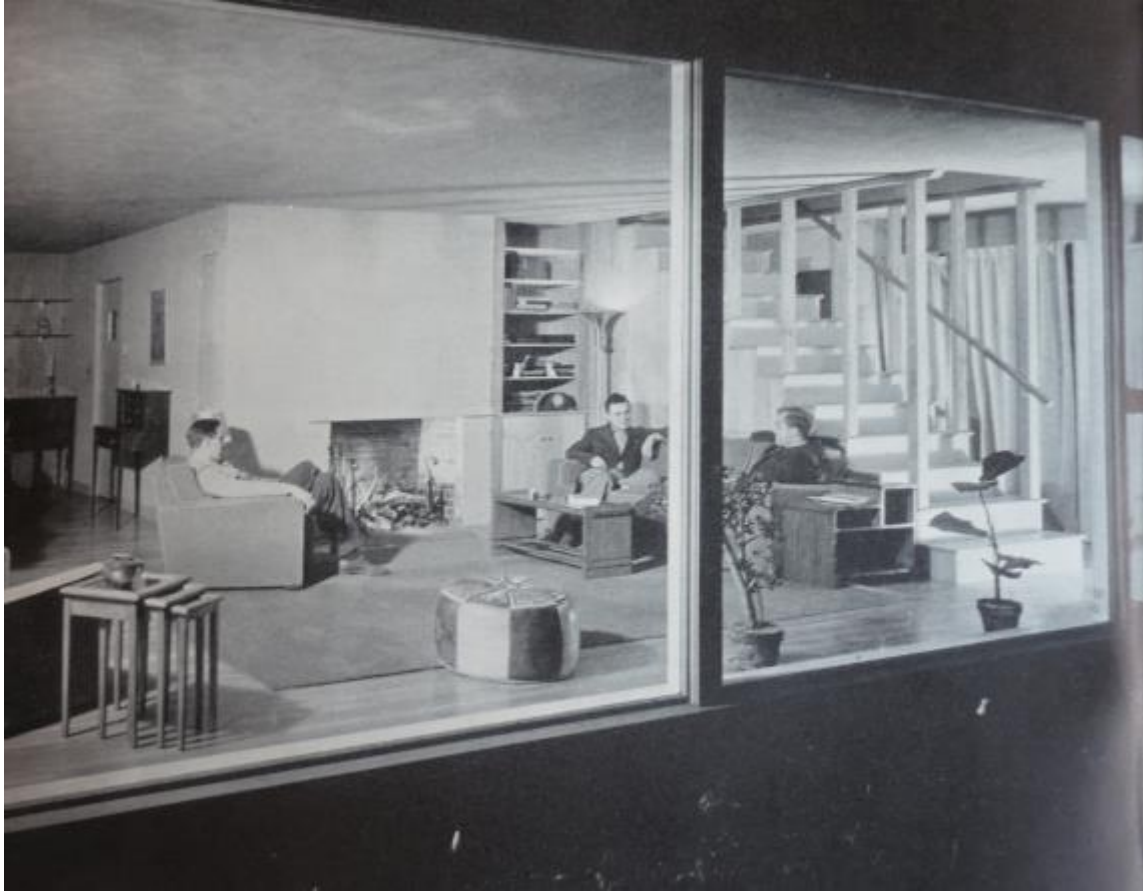
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Looking into lower level dining/living space

Source: *Architectural Forum*, June 1941

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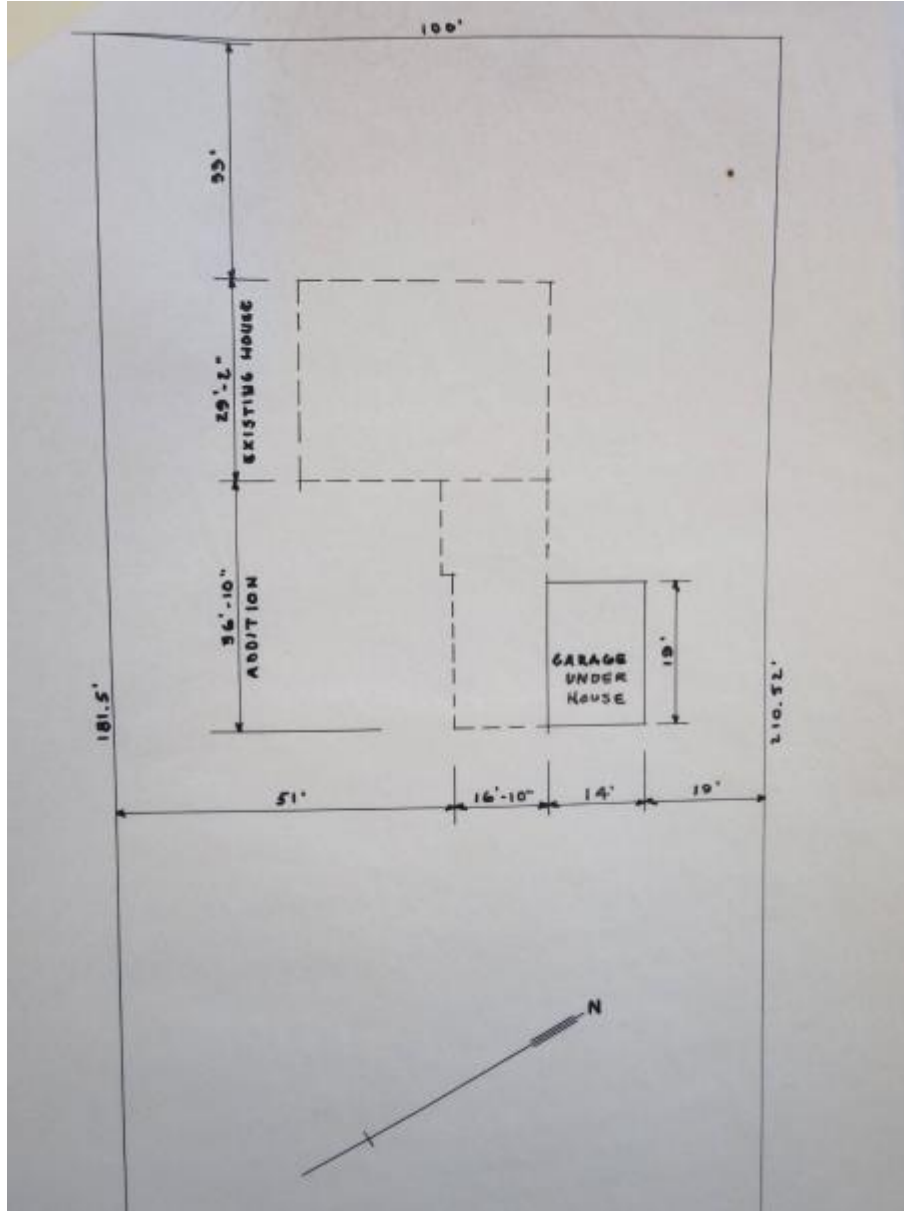
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1946 Plan showing front addition

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2002 Additions

Source: Belmont Building Department

