

FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

58-6	Boston North	AU	BLM.456
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Town/City: Belmont

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

Address: 89 Snake Hill Road

Historic Name: Harry & Sally Wissmann 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 wood boards

Roof: asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
carport (1963)

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

1947 – original open porch receives roof and is enclosed

Condition: good

Moved: no yes **Date:**

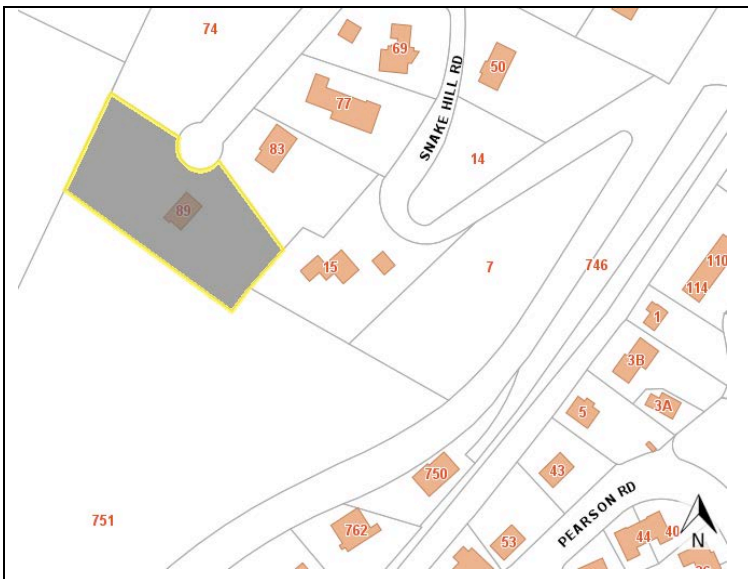
Acreage: 40,335 SF

Setting: Contemporary dwellings on steep hillside setting with views of Boston

Photograph



Locus Map



Recorded by: Lisa Mausolf

Organization: Belmont Historic District Commission

Date (*month / year*): April 2016

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BELMONT

89 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 end of Snake Hill Road and at the top of the hill, the Wissman House is one of five houses designed by Carl Koch as part of the Snake Hill Development in 1940. The house is notable for its relative lack of alteration or addition, no doubt encouraged by the fact that it has been owned by one family since its construction. The two-story house is rectangular in plan and measures approximately 30' x 27'. Attached to the northeast is a two-story section measuring 12' x 21'. This was originally a single-story with an open porch above. In 1947 a roof was put on the porch and it was enclosed with glass and screens. The house is set on a concrete block foundation and is clad in vertical boards with asphalt shingles covering the low pitch gable roof and no decorative detailing. Larger windows on the northwest elevation are designed to maximize views.

To the east of the house is a simple carport constructed in 1963 and measuring 12 x 24'. It has only one wall at the rear and open sides with the angled roof supported by simple posts resting on poured concrete bases.

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).

Carl Koch (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 Snake Hill, a community housing project. Koch initially developed the project as a way to design an inexpensive home for himself and his family. The first five houses - #68, 69, 77, 83 & 89 were constructed in 1940 and were all designed by Carl Koch. Koch lived at #77. 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".

Koch believed that open and flexible interior planning was the key to meeting the individual requirements of owners economically. Complicated details and expensive millwork were eliminated to the greatest degree possible and commonplace materials were utilized. The original owners of this house were Harry and Sally Wissmann who bought the property in 1940 (Book 6441, Page 521). The Wissmans presented Koch with a number of requirements based on their years of apartment living. They sought a compact plan, a small apartment-type kitchen and comparatively small windows in the bedroom. The living room and dining room were located on the upper level to take advantage of the view with a study, kitchen and sun porch also on the level. The house was designed with two bedrooms and a heater/laundry room on the lower level as well as a single car garage under the sunporch. The cost of the original house was \$7,570 (*Architectural Forum* 1941). In 1947 the sunporch was covered and enclosed. In 1963 a separate carport was constructed northwest of the house.

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Harry B. Wissmann (1908-1994) was hired by Dr. Arthur D. Little in 1931 and was the first MBA to be hired by the company. During his long career at Arthur D. Little, Wissman penned a wide range of significant analyses including Grocery Manufacturing in the United States (1968) and "The Impact of Nationwide Catastrophic Health Insurance", published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in October 1975. The property is still owned by family members today.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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Arthur D. Little, Inc. Centennial: 1886-1986 [information on Harry Wissmann]

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Town of Belmont, Building Department Files.

Williams, Judy. Area form (BLM.AU) for Snake Hill Road, November 1982.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

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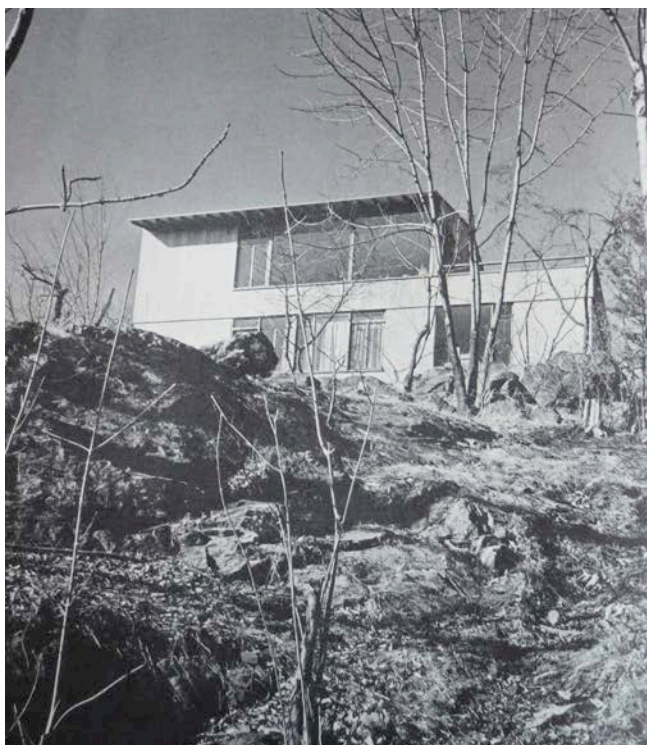
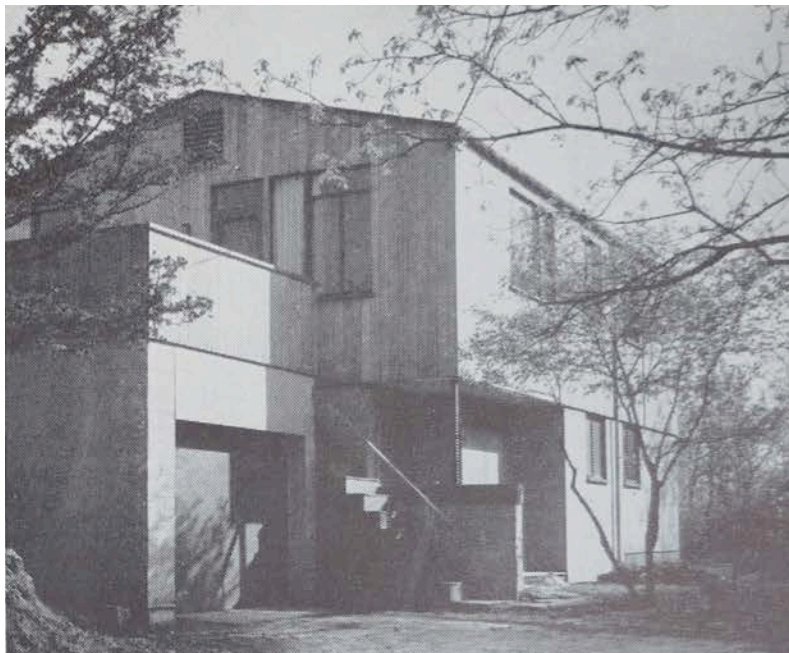
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Source: *Architectural Forum*, June 1941

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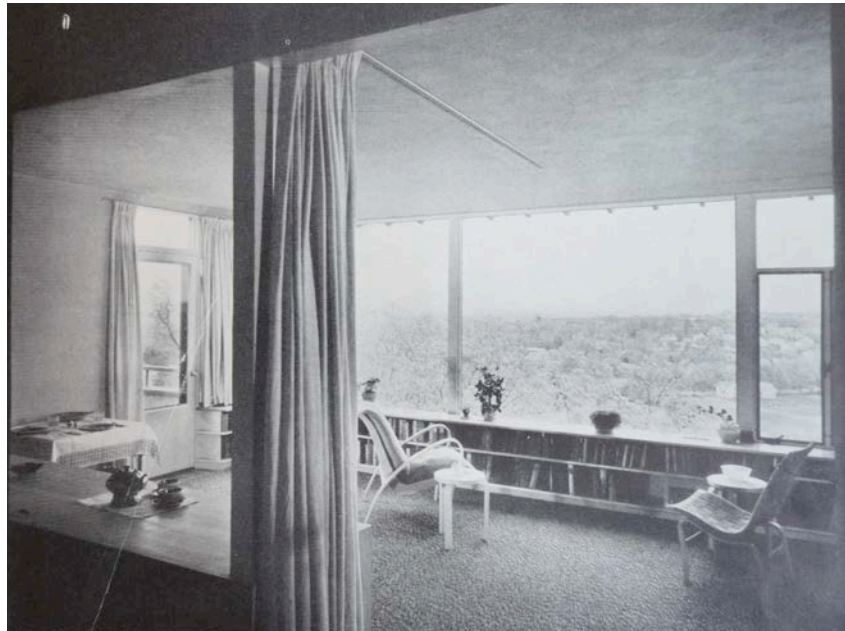
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View from Living Room/Dining Room

Source: *Architectural Forum*, June 1941

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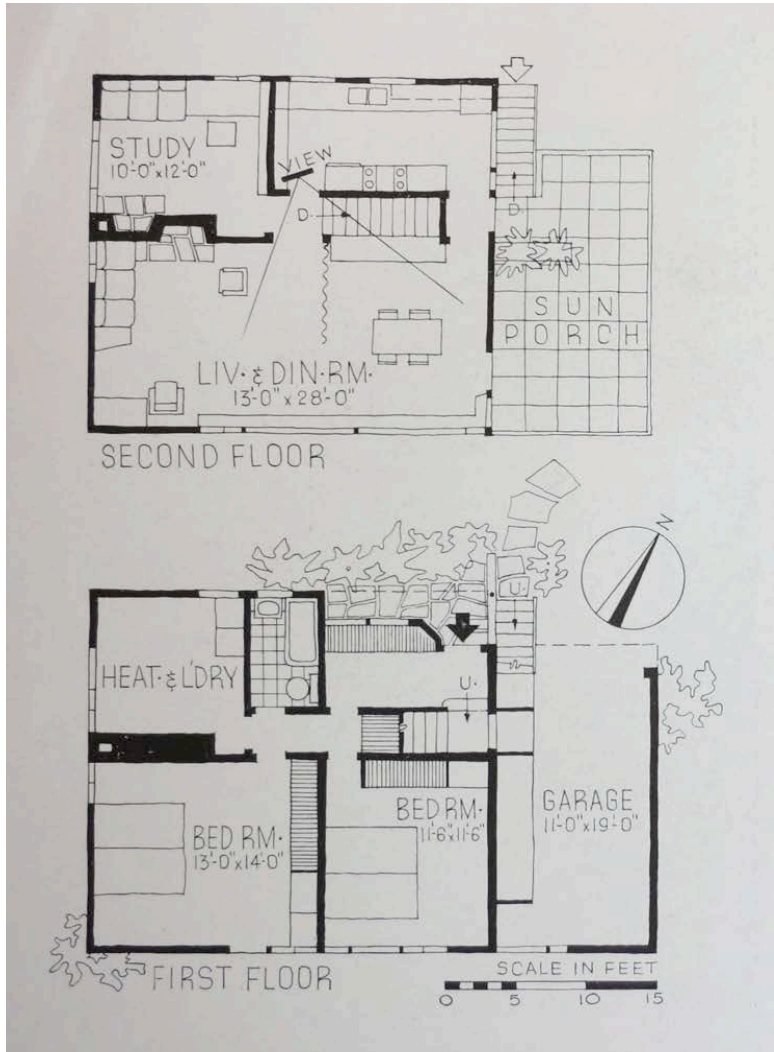
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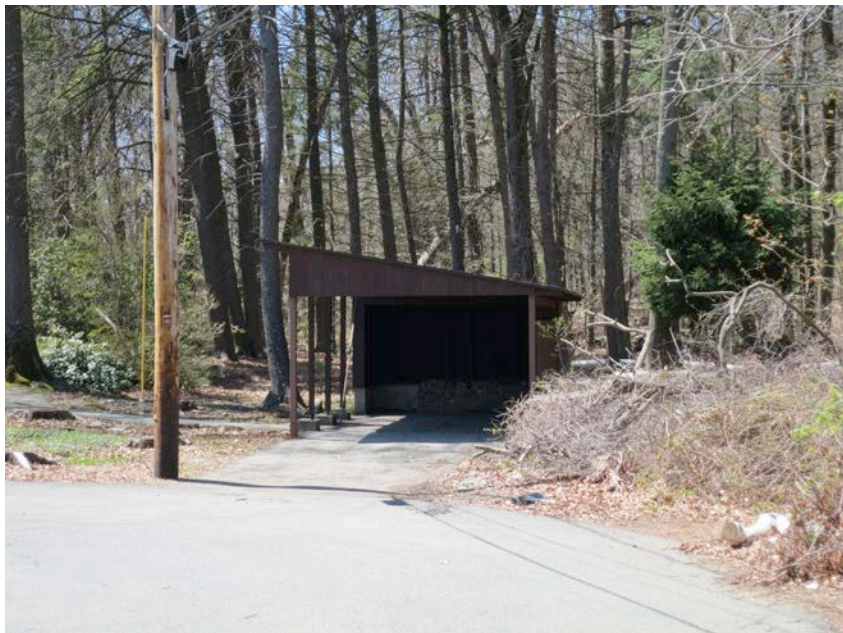
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View looking SW at house (left) and carport (right)



Carport (1963)

