

FORM B – BUILDING

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

13/38 2268

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

Town/City: Lexington

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):

Photograph



East (front façade) and north (right side) elevations

Address: 5 Sylvia Street

Historic Name:

Uses: Present: residential

Original: residential

Date of Construction: ca. 1880-98

Source: historic maps, style

Style/Form: Victorian eclectic

Architect/Builder:

Exterior Material:

Foundation: granite

Wall/Trim: vinyl siding and trim

Roof: asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:
None

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Artificial siding and fenestration (L 20th c), rear shed dormer (20th c)

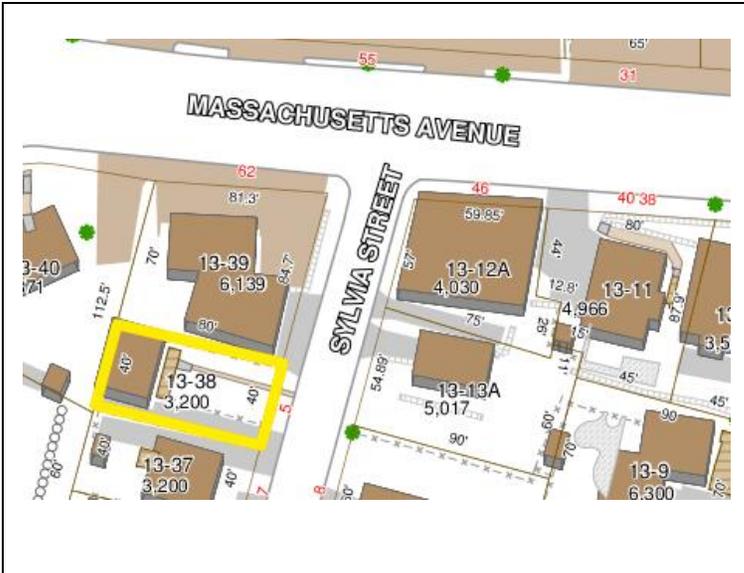
Condition: poor-fair

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: 0.07 (sic)

Setting: Located on a residential side street, close to the main thoroughfare of Massachusetts Avenue, near the Arlington town line. Dense hillside neighborhood with buildings of varying size and scale and predominantly early to mid-20th c construction.

Locus Map



Recorded by: Wendy Frontiero

Organization: Lexington Historical Commission

Date (*month / year*): September 2015

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

LEXINGTON

5 SYLVIA STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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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.

Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

5 Sylvia Street occupies a small, narrow lot near the corner of Massachusetts Avenue. The building is set on the rear property line, with narrow side setbacks and long front yard, maintained mostly in lawn with scattered shrubs. A chain link fence surrounds the perimeter of the front lawn. A long paved driveway extends down the south (left) side of the property, between the street and the house. The street slopes up steeply from Mass. Ave., but the lot is terraced with a poured concrete retaining wall along the north (right) side of the level driveway. The front yard slopes up gently from the street to the house.

The rectangular building rises 2 ½ stories from a stone foundation to a steeply pitched, side gable roof with no returns and a slender chimney centered on the front slope, near the ridge line. Walls are sheathed in vinyl. Windows typically have 1/1 double hung sash. A narrow, one-story, hip roofed addition wraps around the east (façade) and south (left side) elevations. A modern wood deck with square wood balusters at the railing extends most of the length of the front façade.

The front facade (east elevation) has two entrances set at the outer ends of the one-story appendage, each with a single-leaf door. A small double hung window is set between the southern entrance and the driveway corner of the building. A wood stairway leads from the northern doorway to the front lawn. Set asymmetrically in between the entrances is a triplet of casement windows. The second story of the façade contains a symmetrical pair of widely spaced windows, surmounted by two narrow flush dormers, each with a steeply gabled roof and a single window.

The north (right side) elevation contains a four-panel, modern bow window at the first story, two symmetrical windows on the second story, and one centered in the half story. The south (left side) elevation has no fenestration in the first story projection, one offset window on the second floor, and one centered in the half story. The irregular west (rear) elevation contains four 1/1 windows of varied sizes; its long, shed roofed dormer displays an offset pair of glider windows.

5 Sylvia Street is a modest example of vernacular residential development in Lexington. It is notable for its deep front setback, vertical proportions, and gabled façade dormers. It has lost significant historic integrity through the application of vinyl siding, loss of original trim, and altered fenestration.

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.

The small grid of streets bordered by Massachusetts Avenue, Hibbert Street, Taft Avenue, and Bowker Street represents an early area of suburban infill in East Lexington, near the Arlington town line. Immediately south of Taft Avenue is Liberty Heights (LEX.Q), a hilltop subdivision laid out by Brookline developer Jacob W. Wilbur in 1909 and developed in the teens and twenties. The growth of both these neighborhoods followed the arrival of the electric street railway on Massachusetts Avenue in 1899 and was directed at working class residents.

In the area adjacent to Massachusetts Avenue known as Dexter Hillside, Hibbert and Sylvia streets, which straddle the Lexington/Arlington line, were laid out, platted, and partially developed by 1898. The only other evidence of development here at that time is the L-shaped beginning of Charles and Cherry streets, where ten house lots were laid out but vacant. By 1927, both Charles and Bowker streets extended from Massachusetts Avenue to Taft Avenue, and the western ends of Cherry Street, Stevens (then Cary) Road, and Camden (then Smythe) Street pushed a few lots eastward from Charles. Development was gradual through the 1920s and 30s and was virtually complete, with the full network of present streets, by 1950.

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The Dexter Hillside development was conceived by Nathan Dexter Canterbury (1837-1912), who in 1895 began development of a large farm previously owned by Micajah Locke. A resident of Weymouth, Canterbury was a shoe and boot manufacturer, founded the East Weymouth Savings Bank and two Weymouth newspapers, and served as a state representative. Streets were given the middle names of Canterbury and his family. As reported by a local newspaper,

“Dexter Hillside’ attracted many Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who moved from densely populated areas of Boston to what was then a suburban outpost. In 1916, an Orthodox synagogue, Temple B’nai Jacob, was built on the Lexington section of Sylvia Street. It served members for three decades and closed after younger generations of early residents moved from the neighborhood, ending its unique Jewish identity.” (*Arlington Advocate*, May 2, 2011)

The house at 5 Sylvia Street first appears on the 1898 map, under the name of B. F. Bacon, who also owned the adjacent house on the left. The town directory for the following year contains a Bert F. and Sylvia Bacon. Mr. Bacon was a blacksmith with his business on Sylvia Street and a house on Massachusetts Avenue, near Sylvia. In 1906, today’s 5 and 7 Sylvia Street were owned by S. C. Bennett; no information is presently known about this individual. Further research might reveal historical connections between the two buildings.

The first known occupants of 5 Sylvia Street, in 1922, were Frederick Lundergan, a plasterer, and his wife Rose. In 1936, the building was occupied by John McCarron, who worked in a lab, and his wife Eileen. Subsequent residents were mostly members of the Carpenter family. They included Robert F. Carpenter, who worked in a “navy yard” (presumably the Charlestown navy yard), and his wife Virginia (1945, 1955, and, for Virginia only, 1965), and Robert Jr., who was in the Army (1955). Accompanying the Carpenters were Robert L. Bailey, a salvager, and his wife Lois G. (1955); and John J. Quinn, an “attendant”, and his wife Bertha (1965).

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES



South (left side) and east (façade) elevations



West (rear) elevation

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South (left side) and east (façade) elevations



West (rear) elevation