

# FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

62/71A [ ] [ ] [ ] 2226

**Town/City:** Lexington

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

## Photograph



Front (facade) and right side elevations

**Address:** 171 Grant Street

**Historic Name:** Paul and Cora Bowser Estate  
(Fair Oaks Farm)

**Uses:** Present: residential

Original: residential

**Date of Construction:** ca. 1931-34

**Source:** town and city directories

**Style/Form:** Colonial Revival

**Architect/Builder:**

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: not visible (brick?)

Wall/Trim: brick with wood trim

Roof: slate shingles

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**

None visible

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

Enclosure of vestibule and appendage at right rear corner

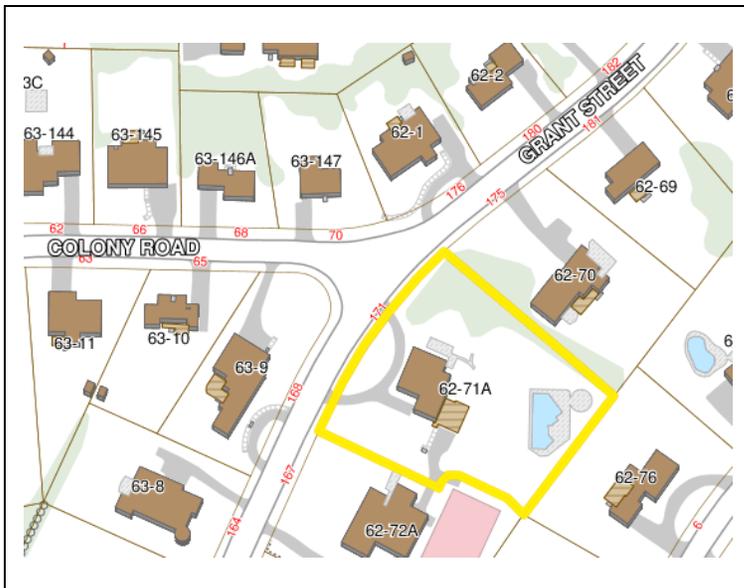
**Condition:** excellent

**Moved:** no  yes  **Date:**

**Acreage:** 1.25

**Setting:** Located on a major cross street, in a diverse residential neighborhood characterized by large lots and large-scale houses, mostly of late 20<sup>th</sup> century construction.

## Locus Map



**Recorded by:** Wendy Frontiero

**Organization:** Lexington Historical Commission

**Date** (*month / year*): September 2015

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

LEXINGTON

171 GRANT STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

	2226
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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.*

171 Grant Street occupies a sizeable lot on a main thoroughfare in eastern Lexington. Centered between its side property lines, the commanding house is set well back from the street, with a large back yard. Maintained chiefly in lawn, the land slopes up gently from the street in front of the house. A low brick retaining wall with a bluestone cap and low brick piers spans the street frontage and extends past the adjacent lots on either side of 171 Grant Street. A U-shaped paved driveway traverses the front yard, and large trees are scattered throughout the site. The building consists of a 2 ½ story main block with various appendages on each side.

The five by two bay main block measures approximately 50 by 30 feet, rising to a steeply pitched, side gable roof with interior end wall chimneys. The building is clad with brick and trimmed with a small molded cornice at the façade and raking eaves. Windows typically have 6/6 double hung sash with flared brick lintels, cast stone or limestone sills, and hinged, louvered wood shutters secured with S-shaped catches. The monumental façade contains a two-story high portico with a flat roof, paneled Tuscan piers, a high entablature, and geometric-design roof balustrade. The front wall of the house has five bays. Its center entrance has an arched opening, which encloses a 6-panel wood door, ¾ height leaded glass sidelights, a small semi-circular fanlight, and a semi-circular wood panel above. A large copper and glass lantern hangs from the ceiling at the entrance bay. Above the doorway is a paired window unit.

The asymmetrical right side elevation contains two windows on each floor, including the attic story. A one-story, flat roofed entry porch is set at the back corner of this elevation, featuring Tuscan posts, a molded entablature, and a triplet of modern casement windows. A small brick appendage extends beyond that entrance; it displays a large modern picture window.

The left side elevation is symmetrical, dominated by a large, one-story porch across the full width. It features a flat roof, Tuscan posts, a molded entablature, and screened openings. Two windows are set on each of the second and half stories.

Well preserved and well maintained, 171 Grant Street is an extraordinary example of high-style, traditional Colonial Revival design in Lexington, prominently located on a major thoroughfare. It is notable for its size and scale, academic detailing, monumental portico, and imposing setting.

## 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.*

Today's Grant Street is an accumulation of several roadways. The base of the street, between Massachusetts Avenue and Sheridan Street, appears between 1875 and 1889, when it provided convenient access to the Hayes estate on Meriam Hill. The short section between Sheridan and Hayes Lane appears between 1898 and 1906. The then-discontinuous stretch from Hayes Lane to Granny's Hill was established as part of Hayes Lane by 1853. Grant Street was extended between Granny's Hill and East Street between 1875 and 1898. By the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, only a few buildings clustered near the base of Grant Street, near the important intersection with Vine and Woburn streets; two buildings were located north of Vine Brook, near Granny's Hill, in 1875. North of Vine Brook, development along Grant Street was extremely sparse through the 19<sup>th</sup> and turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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Area(s) Form No.

	2226
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171 Grant Street appears to have been built for Paul F. Bowser, a sports promoter (1886-1960), and his wife Cora (d. 1957), who was a world champion woman wrestler before their marriage. Starting his career as a professional wrestler and a harness racehorse driver, Bowser was born in Pennsylvania, opened a wrestling school in Ohio in 1912, and moved to Boston in 1922. He was a nationally-known, high profile promoter from the 1930s through the 1950s, with an office in downtown Boston. In addition to his involvement with wrestling, Bowser was one of the original directors and president of the Bay State Harness Horse Racing and Breeding Association, which operated the Bay State Raceway in Foxborough. Residing in Cambridge in 1931, the Bowsers are identified at 171 Grant Street by 1934. The property was known as Fair Oaks Farm.

Bowser also owned a half-mile long horse track and numerous stables, which were located near his house between Grant Street and what is now Saddleclub Road. The racetrack and its grandstands had originally been built in 1864 on land belonging to Francis B. Hayes.

The 1940 census shows the childless couple as living alone at 171 Grant Street, but it appears that they had employees living in an adjacent house at 169 Grant Street: Jacob Henderson is identified there as manager of a private estate, his wife Mary has no occupation listed, and Dwight H. Baker is listed as a horse trainer on a private estate.

The Bowsers lived at this address at least through 1955. Cora Bowser died in 1957, and Paul Bowser was a resident of Cambridge when he died in 1960. By 1965, the house was occupied by George V. Badoian, who was in the real estate business, and his wife Victoria. Further research on the life and historical significance of Paul and Cora Bowser is recommended.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

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	2226
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**SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES**



Front (facade) elevation

	2226
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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 Wendy Frontiero  
*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

The Paul and Cora Bowser Estate (Fair Oaks Farm) is a well-preserved and intact example of a high-quality, upper middle class country estate in Lexington. It is significant for its associations with the development of Lexington as a fashionable suburb in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; for its connections with early 20<sup>th</sup> century sports history and with a regionally and nationally known sports promoter, Paul Bowser; and as an example of high-style Colonial Revival architecture in Lexington in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The property retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. It meets Criteria A and C of the National Register on the local and possibly state levels. Its period of significance is 1931-60.