



FORM B - BUILDING

AREA	FORM NO.
	24-13

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
294 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON, MA 02108



Location Belmont
Address 50 Common Street
Historic Name Lyman Underwood House

Present residence
Original residence

DESCRIPTION:
pre 1853
Source 1853 Belmont Map by Frost

Style Italianate
Architect NA
Exterior wall fabric stucco
Outbuildings cottage and Barn (Form 24-12)

Major alterations (with dates) 1978 Kitchen added

Moved NA Date _____

Approx. acreage 3.78 acres
Setting in grassy sloping estate,
back from road accessed by long,
curving drive

Show property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or geographical features. Indicate all buildings between inventoried property and nearest intersection. Indicate north.

See attached

Recorded by Nora Lucas
Organization Boston University
Date November 1982

(Staple additional sheets here)

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.)

50 Common Street (BEL-82-14-12A, 14A, and 16A) is significant as a rare, high style example of the Italianate Style in Belmont, and meets Criterion C of the National Register.

It is a "T"-shaped cross gable plan, with a smaller gable wing parallel to main house at the west side. It is finished in stucco, and delicate drop pendants hang from brackets at eaves throughout. A flat-roofed, bracketed octagonal cuopola with square windows tops the house. A wooden veranda running on three sides (around the stem of the "T") (CONTINUED)

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.)

The house is significant for its illustration of an important phase of Belmont's history, the 19th-century estate development of the town, as well as for its association with the Underwood family, Belmont civic leaders who also made important contributions to the fields of food canning and bacteriology, photography, and lanscape architecture. It therefore meets Criterion A of the National Register.

The house is most closely associated with Lyman Underwood, a talented scientist and naturalist who is remembered for his contributions to the food canning industry, public health, and photography. Lyman Underwood lived in 50 Common Street from his marriage in 1887 to Ida Cushing, until his death in 1929.

Lyman was the brother of H.O. Underwood, under whose guidance the family food canning industry flourished, and of noted landscape architect Loring Underwood. Lyman Underwood preferred science and photography to the business operations of the family venture. His talent in science, however, was of more help to the business than any potential financial acumen.

With MIT Professor Samuel Prescott, he researched and discovered a method of food sterilization sorely needed by the canning industry to prevent foods from spoiling after canning. The two men are recognized for introducing the science of bacteriology to food canning.

Lyman lectured at MIT from 1900 to 1929 on bacteriology and other sciences including wildlife. He discovered a method of destroying mosquito larvae, (CONTINUED)

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES (name of publication, author, date and publisher)

Dickey, Thomas, Wm. 'Lyman Underwood's Forgotten Photographs'; Americana Magazine, September/October 1975, pp. 24-9.

Robbins, Samuel Dowse, Who's Who in Belmont, Belmont Historical Society, 1972.
Building department records and permits.

Underwood Folder, Belmont Memorial Library, Belmont Room.

1853 Frost Map
1875 Beers Atlas
1898 Stadley Atlas
1922 Sanborn Atlas

Architectural Significance Continued

is trimmed with iron work.

On the grounds of 50 Common Street is "The Laundry" (BEL-82-14-13A), an early 20th century cottage probably built by Lyman Underwood. It is a small, square, gable-roofed house, surfaced with stained wood shingles, with a central enclosed gable portico.

Historical Significance Continued

thus rescuing Belmont and Cambridge from a severe malaria mosquito invasion in 1902. He was consequently made chairman of the Belmont Board of Health.

Lyman Underwood successfully experimented with the technique of hand coloring and painting slides, which he used in illustrating his lectures. A recent exhibition of his black and white photography at the Belmont Memorial Library (1975) was traveled nationally.

The house has remained in the family, lived in by subsequent generations. His granddaughter, Helen Underwood Baker lives there today with her husband, William H. Baker.

The house may have been built by Samuel O. Mead, who owned most of the property now referred to as the Underwood Estate, and is known to have built the gatehouse for 50 Common Street, 76 Common Street (Form 24-11). The 1875 map of Belmont, however, notes a Foster house at about this location, although little is known about the Foster family, it is conjectured that they may have rented the house from Mead.

