

FORM B – BUILDING

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

Town/City: Amherst

Place: (*neighborhood or village*):
Lincoln-Sunset National Register District

Address: 180 Lincoln Avenue

Historic Name: Clarence E. Gordon House

Uses: Present: Single-Family Residence

Original: Single-Family Residence

Date of Construction: 1914

Source: Information from present owner

Style/Form: American Foursquare

Architect/Builder: Henry A. Hollis, carpenter

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Brick

Wall/Trim: Wood Clapboard/ Wood

Roof: Asphalt Shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:

Major Alterations (*with dates*):

Condition: Excellent

Moved: no yes **Date:**

Acreage: .45 acre

Setting: Residential

Photograph



Locus Map



Recorded by: Steve Bloom

Organization: LHDSC

Date (*month / year*): September 2015

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

AMHERST

180 Lincoln Avenue

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125

E

AMH.164

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.

The Gordon house is an interesting example of a somewhat hybrid style. The floor plan is clearly an American Foursquare, and the interior oak details are in the arts-and-crafts style. And yet the architect (or builder) added certain touches--such as a gable roof (foursquares typically have hipped roofs), some exterior ornamentation on the south eaves, and bay windows--that recall more of a Victorian flavor.

The house has some subtle, and not-so-subtle, design quirks, such as the pronounced "kink" in the rear gable on the south side, a mis-match of window sizes on either side of the fireplace in the master bath, and an odd ceiling drop in the living room. These might have been mistakes by a builder who had a drinking problem: during some renovation work, Bob Helgesen reports that he discovered a cache of more than 20 empty whisky bottles that had been hidden in an interior wall.

The kitchen was extensively re-designed by the Helgesens, who extended the room by enclosing part of the rear porch, re-arranging the appliances, and building the counter extensions.

On the second floor, what was perhaps a nursery room off of the master bedroom was converted by the Helgesens into a large second bathroom.

The roof was originally cedar shakes, then a slate roof was added on top of the shakes. When the slate roof began to deteriorate, the Helgesens had the roof layers removed and a new roof with standard shingles installed. No gutters were installed on the house because Bob Helgesen's father died from a fall from a ladder whilst cleaning out gutters on the family home.

Beyond these renovations and repainting, the house is unchanged since it was built.

Notable Features

- Triple front porch columns
- Oak interior floors and trim (never painted)
- Oak pocket doors
- Original push-button light switches (would have been very "modern" at time of construction as centralized electricity was still relatively new. Electrical outlets were probably installed later, since electrical appliances came along some time after electric lights did.)
- Square-turned spindles and newel-posts (less common than regular lathe-turned spindles because more labor-intensive to make)
- Servant stairway (servants were common in early 20th-century. Unclear if the Gordon's would have had live-in servants, but there are two small finished rooms on third floor that could have served this purpose)
- Fireplaces on both floors: living room and master bedroom (both functional)

The house is a modest example with full length 2/2 double-hung windows. Gable end to the street, it has a side entry with a prominent, one-story polygonal bay spanning half of the façade and a porch with clustered Doric columns on brick pedestals that continues across the other half of the façade. The south elevation contains a two-story cutaway bay and an exterior brick chimney. The slate roof and brick foundation are typical on Lincoln Avenue.

****SELECTED TO NATIONAL REGISTER DISTRICT (2/22/1993)****

Continuation sheet 1

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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 1910, Clarence E. Gordon, a professor of zoology and geology at the Massachusetts Agricultural College (forerunner of the University of Massachusetts), and his wife Ethel, purchased lot 20 of the original Stockbridge and Wescott tract from Herbert T. Cowles and Harriet K. Westcott. The Gordons hired local carpenter Henry A. Hollis to build their house, an American Foursquare by floor plan, with arts-and-crafts elements within. Construction was completed in 1914. Aside from updates to kitchen and bathrooms, the house retains all original interior and exterior details, such as triple front porch columns, quarter-sawn oak front door, oak trim throughout, oak staircase bench, and pocket doors.

Dr. Gordon was born February 15, 1876 in Clinton, MA. He enrolled at Mass Agricultural College in September of 1897 and completed his BS in 1901. He took graduate studies at Columbia University (MS in 1905 and Ph.D in 1911). Dr. Gordon was professor of zoology and geology at the Agricultural School from 1906 to 1946. There are still unusual rocks around the grounds that were collected by Dr. Gordon. After Dr. Gordon died in 1951, his wife Ethel continued to live in the house until her death in 1969.

Stephen and Judith Nissenbaum purchased the house on July 2, 1969. Dr. Nissenbaum was a professor of history at UMass and an authority on the Civil War.

In August 1978, the Nissenbaums sold the house to John and Kathy Grillo. John Grillo was a noted abstract expressionist painter and a professor of art at UMass. In 1990, he retired and moved to Cape Cod. His works are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others. A retrospective show of Grillo's work was held at the Herter Art Gallery on the UMass campus. He died in 2104, at the age of 97.

Robert and Diane Helgesen bought the house in 1990. Dr. Helgesen was Professor of Entomology at UMass and also served as dean of the College of Food and Natural Resources and interim vice-chancellor for outreach. The current owners, Stephen Braun, a medical writer, and Susan Redditt, a professor of education, bought the house in 2000.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Amherst History Museum house tour brochure, 2014.

Maps: 1873 Beers Atlas, 1886 Bird's-Eye View, 1916.

Amherst Street Lists.

Amherst City Directories.

Hampshire County Registry of Deeds: Book 635/390-391, Cowles & Westcott to Gordon, lot 20. Thanks to Ed Wilfert for deed research.

National Register of Historic Places, Registration Form, Lincoln-Sunset Historic District, Amherst, section 7, p. 13.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Form B (1988), online in the MACRIS database.

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