

FORM B – BUILDING

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

013-0017

Salem

WNH.124

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

Town/City: Wenham

Place:

Photograph



Façade (east) elevation.

Address: 55 Arbor Street

Historic Name: Robert and Dorothy Bliss House

Uses: Present: Single Family Residence

Original: Single Family Residence

Date of Construction: 1953

Source: Assessor; deed

Style/Form: Contemporary -- Mid-century Modern

Architect/Builder: not known

Exterior Material:

Foundation: Concrete; Stone, cut

Wall/Trim: Clapboard; stone; brick

Roof: Asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures: none

Major Alterations (with dates): none

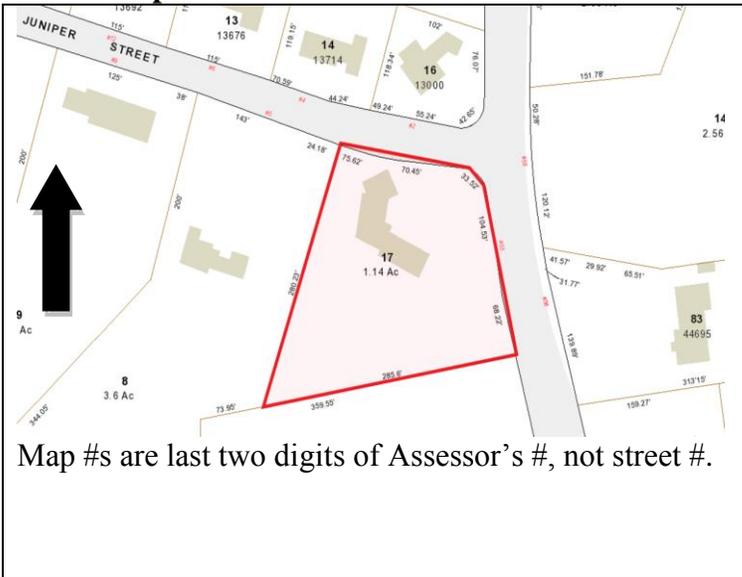
Condition: Very Good

Moved: no yes Date:

Acreage: 1.14 acres

Setting: Wooded, suburban residential development dating from the 19th century and early 20th centuries along Arbor Street. Mid-20th century residential development to the west and north along Juniper Street.

Locus Map



Map #s are last two digits of Assessor's #, not street #.

Recorded by: Stacy Spies and Wendy Frontiero

Organization: Wenham Historical Commission

Date: July 2017

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

WENHAM

55 ARBOR ST

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

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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.

The Bliss House faces east toward Arbor Street on a trapezoidal corner lot with Juniper Street at its northern boundary. The sloping parcel is maintained largely in lawn with scattered shrubs and mature trees. Separate paved driveways lead from Arbor Street as well as from Juniper Street. The house has an unusual J-shaped plan with a garage at the north end. The house is banked into a slope with the basement level fully accessible to the rear yard. The southeast corner of the house extends beyond the foundation and rests on piers.

The house rests on a poured concrete foundation and is formed of three rectangular blocks set at oblique angles to one another. The north block contains the garage, which is accessible from both driveways. The center block contains two entrances. The south block contains a third entrance on the north elevation. The house has a shallow gabled roof with asphalt shingles and wide, overhanging eaves. A wide stone-faced chimney rises from the north slope of the south block. On the façade (east) elevation, the house is sheathed with cut stone to the height of the windows. Above that, the house is sheathed in wide vertical boards with channeled edges. The secondary elevations are sheathed with only the vertical boards. The basement level of the rear elevation is clad with brick. One the façade, two of the exterior slab doors contain lights in the top half. The third door does not contain a light but is flanked by sidelights constructed of structural glass blocks. Located throughout the house are a variety of 1/1 sash and casement windows.

55 Arbor Street is an excellent example of contemporary design from the mid-20th century. The house is well-preserved and retains a high level of integrity. Of particular note is the building's unusual J-shaped plan and emphasis on the horizontal plane.

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 area that is now Juniper Street was part of the extensive property owned by E. Howard Doane and his brother-in-law Oscar Hosmer, an editor at the Boston Herald. Orchard Street, now named Juniper Street, had been proposed as early as 1918. In 1952, Robert Hall Bliss (1920-1987) and his wife Dorothy Bliss (1920-2013) purchased the lot at the southwest corner of Juniper Street and Arbor Street. (Essex South Deed Book 3882, Page 317) City directories indicate that the couple continued to live in Boston through 1954 but were living at 55 Arbor Street in 1955. Robert Bliss was employed as a mechanical engineer at United Shoe Machinery Company in Beverly. The property was sold in 1974. (Essex South Deed Book 6072, Page 412)

The Bliss house is representative of a small, but notable, trend in the suburban north shore after World War II away from traditional, Colonial Revival-style dwellings. A high number of these innovative designs were built for scientists and academics. The use of natural materials and colors and the horizontality of the design are representative of modern design of the mid-20th century. The well-executed Bliss house and its unusual J-shaped plan and banked design are especially well-suited to its sloping site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Boston city directories. 1949, 1950, 1954. Ancestry.com
Essex South Registry of Deeds.
Massachusetts Birth, Death, Marriage indices. Ancestry.com.
Massachusetts Probate records. Ancestry.com.
Wenham city directory. 1955. Ancestry.com
Wenham Tax Assessor records.

INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

WENHAM

55 ARBOR ST

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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 Stacy Spies and Wendy Frontiero
The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The Robert and Dorothy Bliss House at 55 Arbor Street is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A with significance at the local level as an excellent example of contemporary residential design in post-World War II suburban Boston. The Mid-Century Modern Bliss House is representative of a small, but notable, trend in the suburban north shore after World War II away from traditional, Colonial Revival-style dwellings. A high number of these innovative designs were built for scientists, engineers, and academics. The use of natural materials and colors and emphasis on the horizontal plane are representative of modern design of the mid-20th century.