



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: August 28, 2025

To: Members and Alternates of the Historical Commission

From: Eric Hill, Survey Director

Re: Case D-1753: 73 Kirkland Street (1923), Nuzum-Poor House

An application to demolish the single-family house at 73 Kirkland Street was received on July 30, 2025. The owner, Martin Cafasso of Cafasso Design Group, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for September 4, 2025.



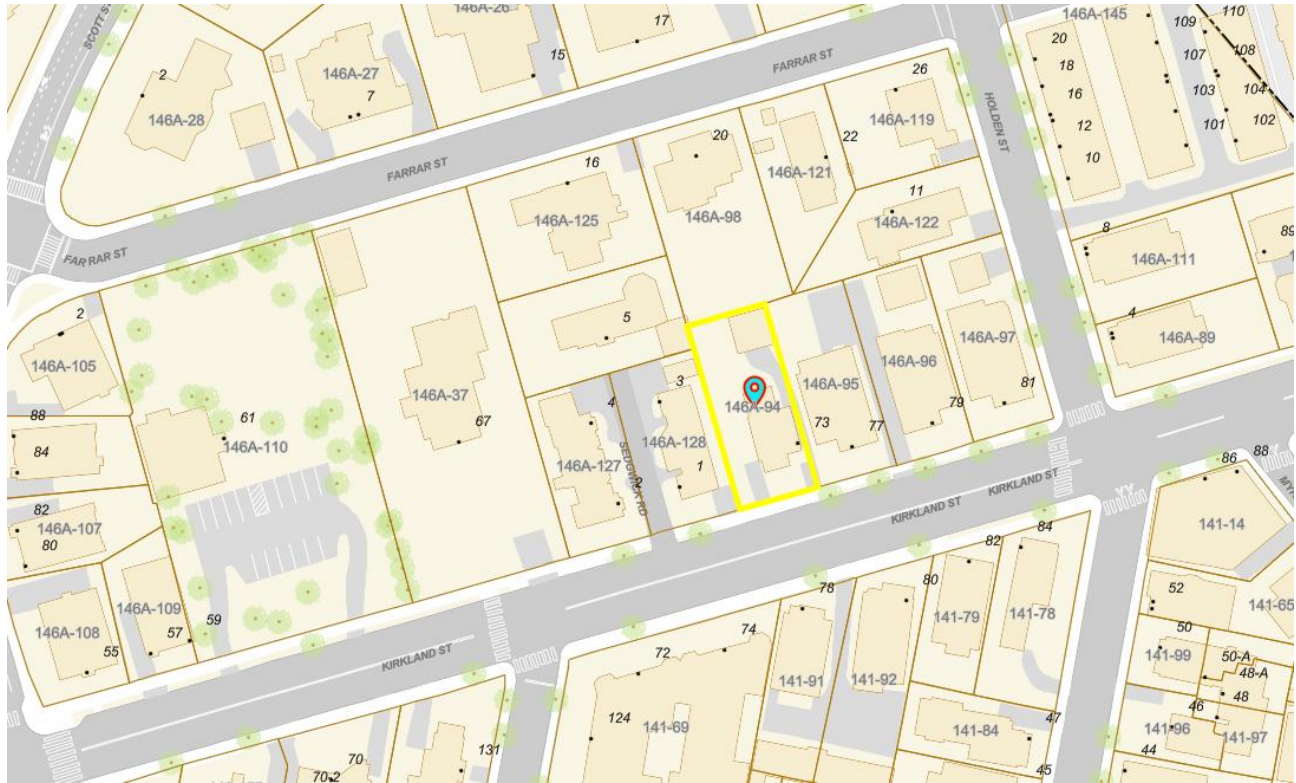
73 Kirkland Street

CHC staff photo, March 2025

### **Current Conditions and Zoning:**

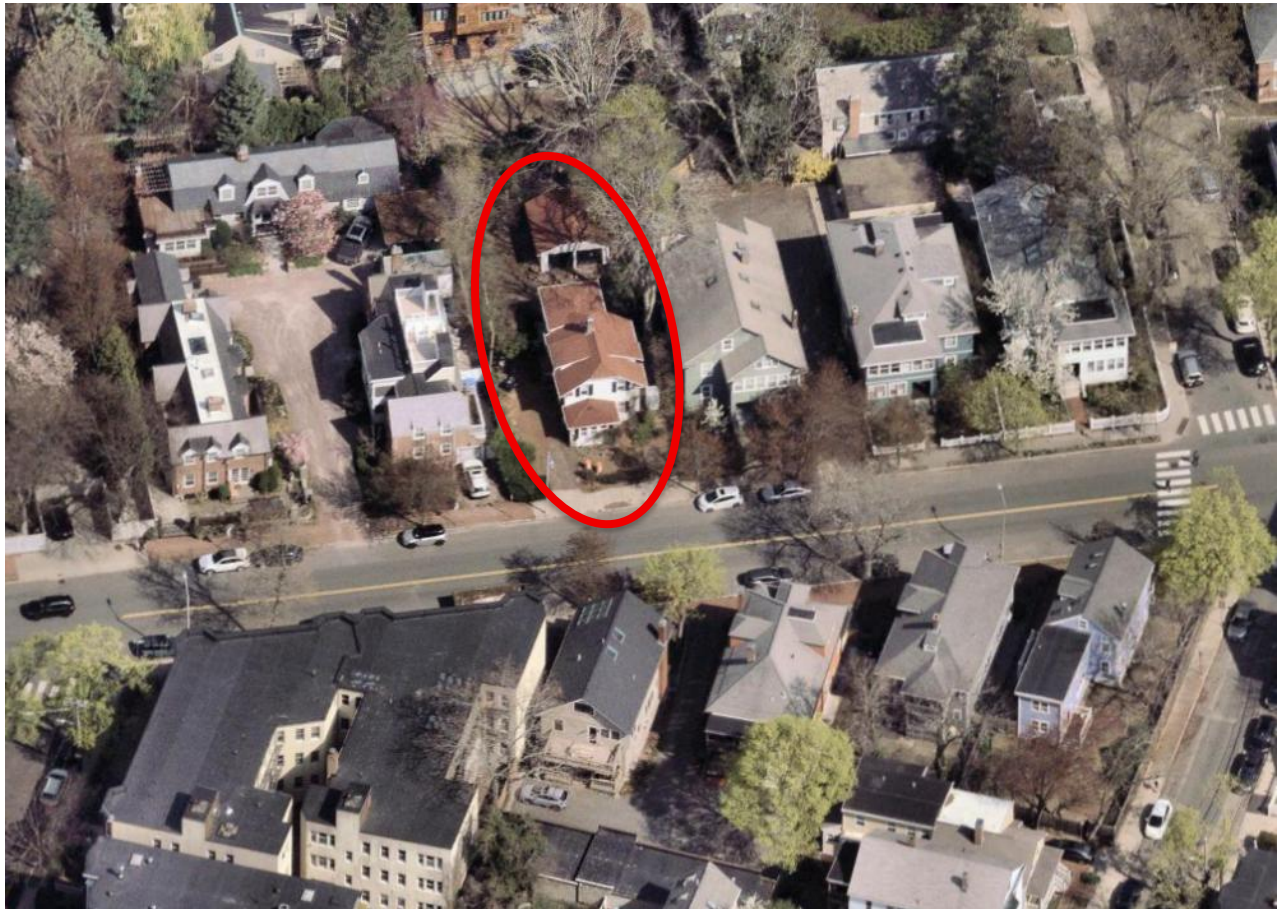
The house at 73 Kirkland Street occupies a 5,756 square-foot lot (146/94) on the north side of Kirkland Street, mid-block between Irving and Holden streets. The single-family house is a two-story frame building on a shallow foundation, that appears to be concrete. There is also a detached garage (1923) at the rear of the lot, which is not visible from Kirkland Street and has been deemed not significant for the demolition review process. The assessed value of the land and building, according to the Assessing Database, was \$1,614,600; \$222,900 for the building, and \$1,391,700 for the land.





Locus map

Cambridge GIS



March 2025

Nearmap.com



The zoning is Residence C-1, a multi-family housing district, which was amended in February 2025. Current C-1 zoning allows for four-stories (45 feet) as-of-right without the need for a special permit, with the ability to go up to six-stories (74 feet) on lots larger than 5,000 square feet, as so long as 20% of the residential units or unit square footage in the building are inclusionary (income-restricted affordable housing). The zoning requires a minimum 10-foot front yard setback and a minimum 5-foot setback for side and rear yards for residential use. There is no requirement for number of units.

The front of the house is set back from the sidewalk by approximately 17'-6", with side yard setbacks of about 19'-1" on the west side and 7'-9" on the east. There are two curb cuts at Kirkland Street. The house is located along a stretch of the street that is dominated by two-family, three-family, and multi-family properties, largely constructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The exterior condition of 73 Kirkland Street is good, with some minor rot and deterioration visible from the street. The Assessing Department lists the interior condition as "very poor", though the residence appears to not be in a state of neglect or decay.

The owner proposes to demolish the existing house and garage and build a three-story, four-family structure filling out much of the lot. The project is allowed as-of-right under the current zoning.



73 Kirkland Street, east elevation and garage

CHC staff photo, March 2025

### **Architectural Description:**

The Craftsman Style house at 73 Kirkland Street is a rare example of a prefabricated kit house in Cambridge. The house is two stories tall with its main entrance oriented towards the side yard. The

house sits upon a low foundation and is clad with wood clapboard siding with squared corner boards and trim.

The gable end of the roof oriented to the street is clipped at the end providing a unique jerkinhead detail. The roofline is broken by shed original shed dormers on the side elevations with broad, overhanging eaves. The roof is covered with red asphalt shingles. A brick chimney extends from the peak of the roof in the middle of the house. A heavily bracketed canopy protects the entrance from the weather. The multi-light door appears to be original. The shutters appear to be original and feature a pine tree motif in the upper panels. All the original windows have been replaced with vinyl one-over-one double-hung windows.

The landscaping is overgrown and largely obscures the hipped-roof front porch and east elevation. Two driveways with curb cuts extend off Kirkland Street and are surfaced with crushed stone.



Typical window detail, original shutters and flower box

Permit records show that in 1935 the detached garage was moved back on the lot to accommodate a two-story rear addition with an open piazza. It is unclear when the front porch was enclosed, but it likely dates to 1935 when the home was last updated.



73 Kirkland Street. Entry, rear addition and garage.

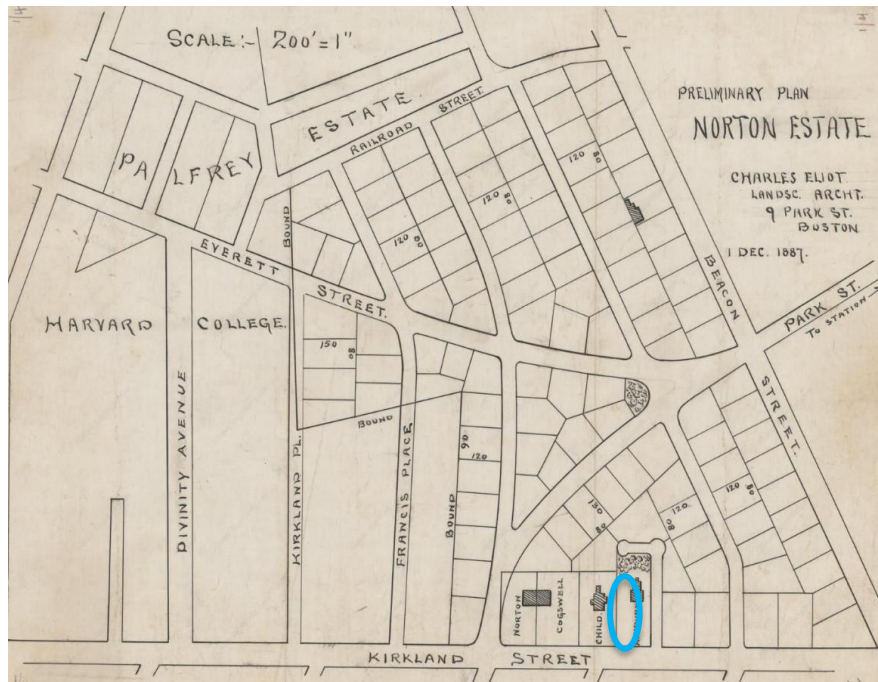


## Historical Context:

The Shady Hill neighborhood originated with 34½ acres of a Colonial-era estate that Hollis Professor of Divinity Henry Ware Sr. bought from Harvard University for \$10,000 in 1817. Catharine Eliot of Boston purchased Shady Hill from Ware in 1821 on the eve of her marriage to Andrews Norton, Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature.

Charles Eliot Norton assumed responsibility for Shady Hill after his father's death. The area north of Kirkland Street sat largely undeveloped besides the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Shady Hill Mansion (demolished 1955) at the current site of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

When Charles Eliot Norton undertook the development of Shady Hill in 1886, he chose his nephew, landscape architect Charles Eliot, to lay out the site, and sold lots on Irving and Scott streets to his colleagues on the Harvard faculty. After Norton died in 1908 there was little incentive to keep the remainder of Shady Hill intact. His heirs sold 4.8 acres west of the house to the Andover Theological School in 1909 and engaged George Howland Cox, a former member of the Cambridge Park Commission, to develop the remaining land around the house.



1887 Plan of Norton Estate by Charles Eliot. Location of 73 Kirkland Street circled.

Four platted house lots bounded by Kirkland, Farrar, and Holden streets owned by the Norton heirs sat undeveloped until the early 1920s when the lots were further subdivided from plans by engineer Henry F. Bryant in 1922.

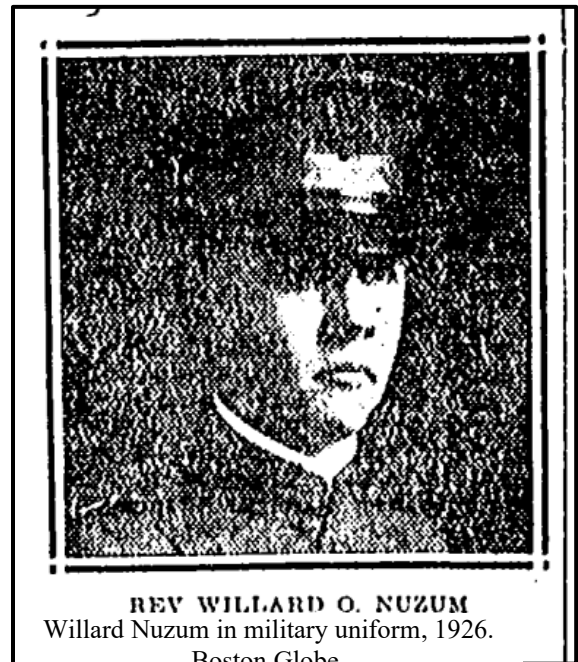


1916 (left) and 1930 (right) Bromley Atlas maps showing development of Norton Estate. 73 Kirkland Street, circled.

### 73 Kirkland Street Ownership:

The lot at 73 Kirkland Street was purchased in 1923 by Willard O. Nuzum, who that year pulled permits to erect a single-family home and detached garage. Mr. Nuzum, not a trained architect or builder, was listed on the permit as the owner and builder.

Willard Otto Nuzum (1871-1963) was born in Viroqua, Vernon County, Wisconsin, and graduated from the University of Wisconsin before receiving his doctorate in Theology at Boston University in 1910. After serving as a Methodist pastor in various communities in the Midwest, Willard served congregations in Pawtucket (1908-1912), Willimantic (1913-1915), and New Bedford (1916-1917). During WWI, Reverend Nuzum served as a U.S. Army chaplain at St. Nazaire, France (1918-1919). When he returned to the United States he began his longest tenure at the Trinity Methodist Church in East Cambridge. Nuzum and his family remained in Cambridge until 1935, briefly serving pastorates in Ipswich and Lynn, before retiring to Orlando, Florida, where he died in 1963.



According to city directories Reverend Nuzum remained in Trinity's rectory at 260 Cambridge Street. He and his family apparently never resided at 73 Kirkland Street. Early tenants included George S. Forbes, Assistant Professor of Chemistry at Harvard, John Dawson, an attorney, and Amos P. Wood, a druggist with a pharmacy nearby in Somerville. In 1944 Nuzum sold the property to William and Dorothy Sudbey, who later deeded the property to their son, William K. Sudbey. In 1976 the building was purchased by Riva Poor, who owned the property until her trust sold it to the current owner, Martin Cafasso.

Riva Poor was a self-proclaimed "Professional Problem-Solver" and management consultant who in the early 1970s advocated for what became known as the "4-40", the 4-day, 40-hour work week. Her book, *4 Days, 40 Hours: Reporting a Revolution in Work and Leisure*, was one of the earliest to re-imagine the American workweek.



Riva Poor, photographed for 1979 article.



**Gordon-Van Tine  
Homes**

COPYRIGHT 1920, GORDON-VAN TINE CO., DAVENPORT, IOWA

**Gordon-Van Tine Co. Davenport, Iowa.**





Page 62



Home No. 539. Material Furnished Either Ready Cut or Not Ready Cut

## A Good Looking and Inexpensive Home

For Prices on This Home See First Page. Read Pages 9 to 11 for Full Description of Materials.

### Second Grade Specifications Save You \$111.10

Deduct the above amount from the regular price on this house if you are willing to buy it with the following changes from regular specifications: 6 to 2 Star A Star Red Cedar Shingles instead of 5 to 2 Clear; plain square edge casings for doors and windows instead of Craftsman design; all subflooring and kitchen case omitted.

**T**HOUGH you are not going to build an expensive house, you like to feel that you are building a house that will give you a lifetime of service, if you should not care to build again. So we bid you look carefully for what you want. We know that nowhere can you find a more pleasing and practical design than this, at so small a cost. It is a remarkably attractive home, in which we have paid particular attention to the exterior design. We are pleased because it offers you numerous unusual features that are rarely found in any but costly houses. It is original, distinctive and good-looking wherever placed. The unique roof treatment combines well with the style of living porch at the side, and still provides for ceilings 7 foot 11 inches from the floor, which of course assures good circulation. The placing of the porch offers seclusion and comfort otherwise impossible, for it need serve only as an outdoor room, since the hooded stoop at the front shelters the entrance. The roof extending over the living room windows connects these two in a friendly fashion.

The architect has improved the appearance of this design by running the siding clear to the grade line—exposing the foundation would destroy the present pleasing effect.

The entrance brings one into the reception hall. Here there is a broad open stairway and in the rear a convenient coat closet. And don't overlook the fact that just back of it is its exact duplicate opening into the kitchen. It is hard to say which will give you the most service.

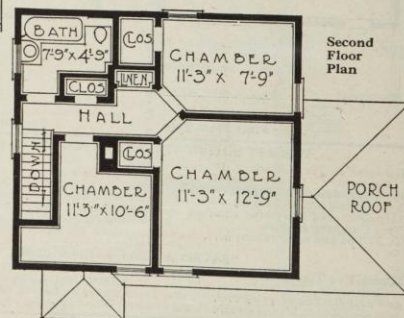
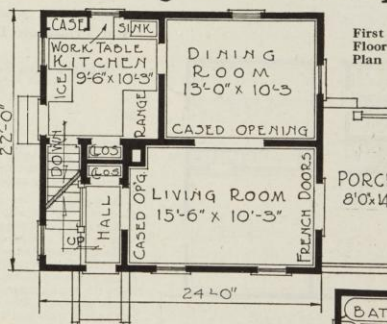
From the reception hall you have a view through the cased opening, across the living room, and then through the French doors onto the porch. Since there is a window just at the foot of the stairs this is an unusually light and airy living room, from which the dining room opens. This is nearly square, of the size most desired in the modern house.

The practically square kitchen has a

FLOWER BOXES AS SHOWN, ARE A SPECIAL ADDED FEATURE OF THIS HOUSE WHICH ARE FURNISHED WITHOUT EXTRA CHARGE.

kitchen case, design "B", situated so that the work table comes just under the window. The sink has an equally advantageous position. The basement stairway enters the kitchen and is next to the outside door. This arrangement will often save the spotlessness of the kitchen floor. Plenty of room is provided in the basement as it extends under the entire house, and four cellar windows provide the light that is necessary. In the upstairs you have a good sized bath and linen closet, and the chambers are all pleasant and livable.

**PAINT**—Unless otherwise instructed, we will furnish cream paint for the body and white for trim.



For Plumbing, Heating, Lighting for This Home, See Last Pages of Book

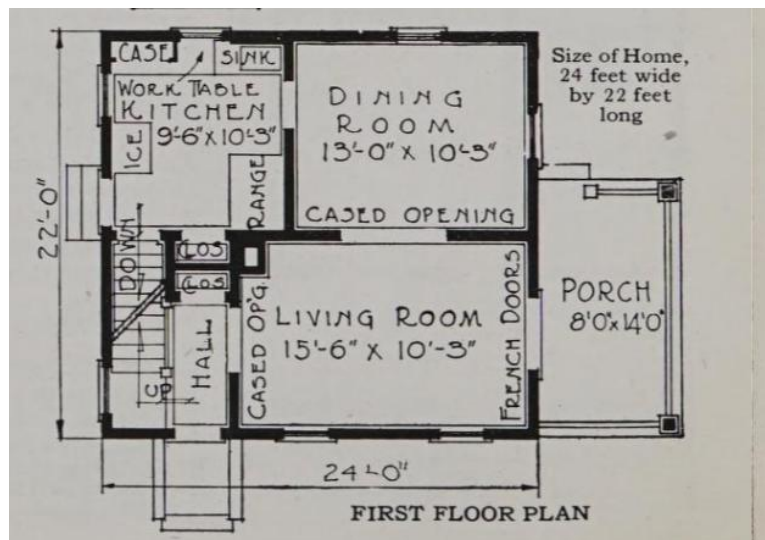




Drawing of Gordon-Van Tine, House No. 539 as included in 1921 catalogue.

The Nuzum-Poor house is one of the few known “kit” or “mail-order” homes in Cambridge. The residence at 73 Kirkland Street closely matches Home No. 539 in the Gordon-Van Tine Homes catalogue of 1921. Listed as “A Good Looking and Inexpensive Home”, the design and all materials were available for just \$1,896. The house kit even included flower boxes as a special added feature at no additional charge. These flower boxes and brackets remain on the house at 73 Kirkland Street.

Gordon-Van Tine offered their kit houses either Ready-Cut or as raw materials for the same price. Most owners probably preferred to have all lumber and materials labeled and pre-cut, ready for assembly when the kit was delivered to the site. It is possible that Willard Nuzum indeed built this house himself from the materials pre-cut and delivered to the property in 1923.



First floor plan of House No. 539 as included in 1921 catalogue.



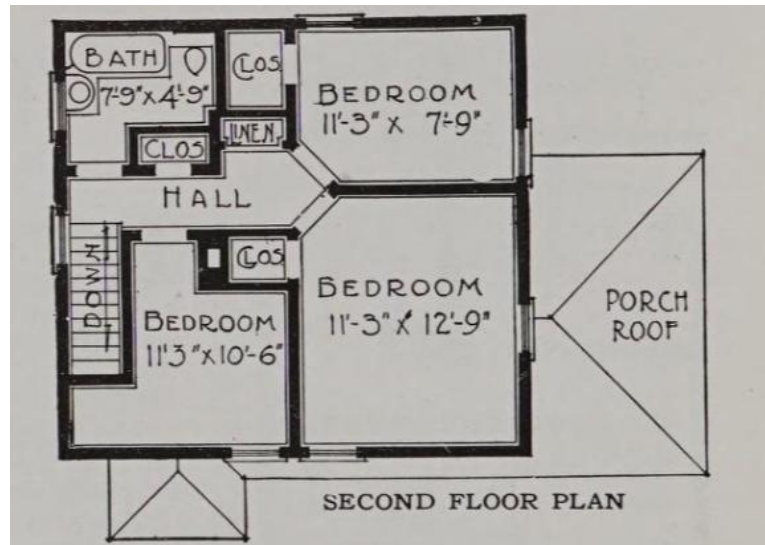
According to Historic New England,

*These so-called kit houses were exactly that—a pre-cut kit of house parts, ordered by catalog, shipped by rail, and trucked to the building site. A local builder or the owner assembled the house, using the materials, blueprint, and construction manual provided.*

*In addition to house models, companies offered the latest in building materials, lighting, kitchen and bathroom appliances, and plumbing and heating equipment to complete a home. House plans and models saved buyers time but allowed them to choose some of the frills to customize their homes.*

*The novelty of the kit house concept is straightforward, but their importance in the evolution of domestic architecture and residential neighborhoods is more complex. They embodied not only the latest industrial advances of the time, such as mass production, but also dramatic changes in the socioeconomic landscape of the nation.*

The Gordon-Van Tine Company was incorporated in 1907 as a subsidiary of the U.N. Roberts Lumber Company in Davenport, Iowa. The company was a supplier of house kits to Sears, Roebuck & Company from 1907 to 1912. In 1917, the company began fabricating Montgomery Ward's "Wardway" houses. From 1917 until the Great Depression, many house models were near-identical between the Gordon-Van Tine and Wardway catalogues. Home No. 539 at 73 Kirkland Street had a twin in the Montgomery Ward catalogue named "The Girard".

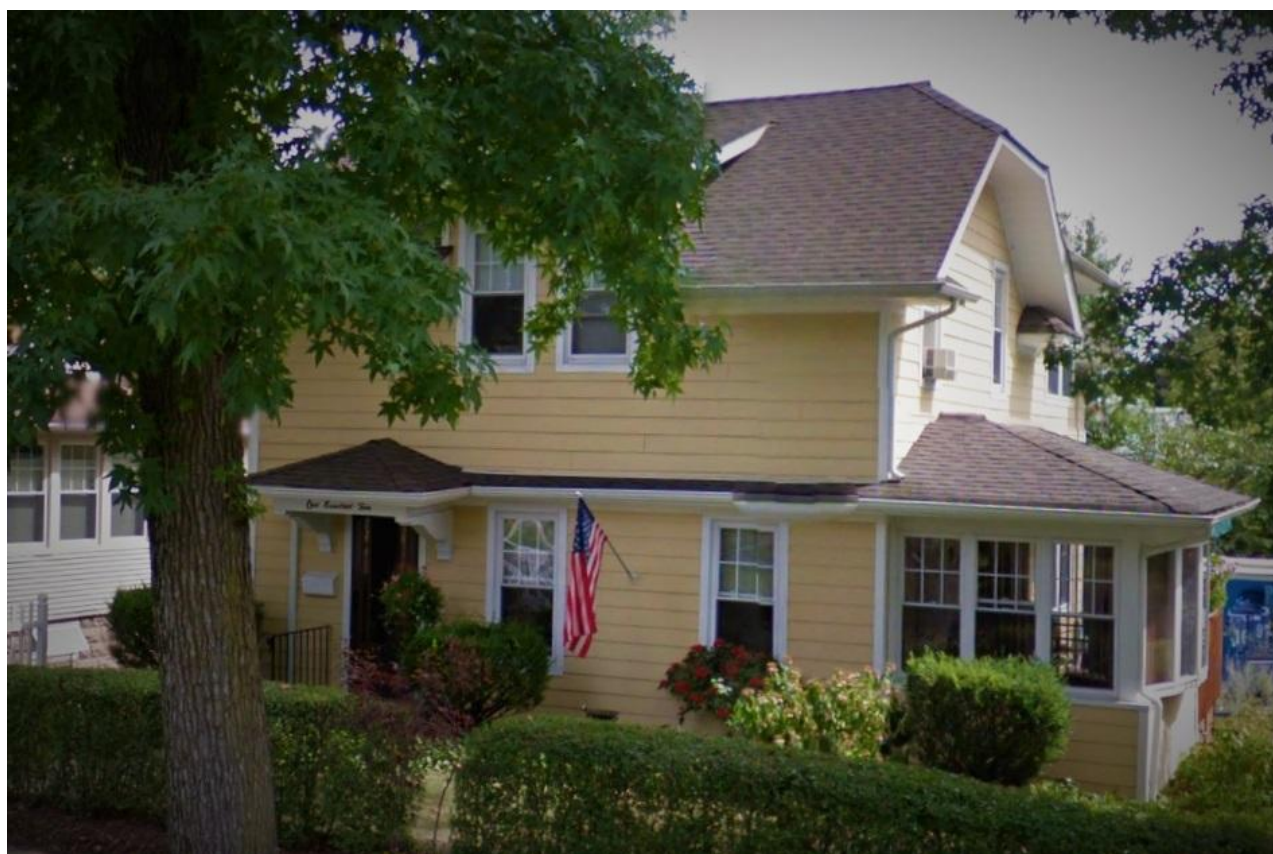


Second floor plan of House No. 539 as included in 1921 catalogue.





Gordon-Van Tine #539 houses in Viennes (above) and Chatham, New Jersey (below) [Oklahoma Houses By Mail](#)





Gordon-Van Tine began to offer in-house mortgages in 1924 to attract customers, but ceased in 1931, a casualty of the Great Depression. Montgomery-Ward terminated its kit house division during the Depression, delivering a financial blow to the firm. The company suspended operations during World War II and closed in 1947.

After WWII other firms offered kit houses. Among the most successful was Techbuilt, founded by Cambridge-based architect Carl Koch in the early 1950s<sup>1</sup>. First offered in 1953, the Techbuilt house was a low-cost, semi-factory-built Modern house whose construction was based on a consistent four-foot module for all major building components such as wall, floor and roof panels, all which were delivered by truck and assembled on-site in a matter of days. A well-preserved example of a Techbuilt House and detached garage can be found at 23 Lexington Avenue in West Cambridge.

Other pre-fab houses erected in Cambridge included a General Houses steel-paneled home on Coolidge Hill (1935) and at least one house by Deck Associates (formed by two former employees of Koch, William Berkes and Robert Brownell). No other houses by Gordon Van Tine, Sears, Roebuck, or Montgomery Ward have been recorded in Cambridge.

### Recommendation

The Nuzum-Poor House at 73 Kirkland Street is significant as a rare example of a prefabricated kit house built during the inter-war period. The Gordon-Van Tine design 539 provided a high-quality house at an inexpensive cost to owner Reverend Willard O. Nuzum. The Craftsman Style is not well represented in Cambridge, and the characteristic features of this home designed in the Midwest are rare in New England.

Staff recommends that the Commission hear testimony from the public and review the plans for the redevelopment before making a further determination.

cc: Peter McLaughlin, Inspectional Services  
Martin Cafasso, Cafasso Design Group

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<sup>1</sup> Coincidentally, Techbuilt was the first commercial tenant of the Harriet Jacobs house at 17 Story Street.