



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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September 28, 2018

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Charles Sullivan

Re: **Case D-1494: 5-7 Fresh Pond Lane, by The 5 Fresh Pond Lane Nominee Trust c/o James J. Rafferty, Esq.** Demolish house (1922).

Case D-1495: 36 Larch Road, by The Thirty-Six Larch Rd. Realty Trust c/o James J. Rafferty, Esq. Remove house (1751) and relocate to 5-7 Fresh Pond Lane

Applications to raze the house at 5 Fresh Pond Lane and relocate the house now at 36 Larch Road to that site were received on September 11, 2018.¹ A public hearing was scheduled for October 4.

Site

Both houses are located in the 1915 Larchwood subdivision adjoining 22 Larch Road, a house known as “The Larches.”

The Sophia Moshier house at 5 Fresh Pond Lane is a brick structure constructed in 1922 on the east side Fresh Pond Lane about 100’ north of the corner of Brattle Street. It is sited on an 10,205 square-foot lot in a Residential A-1 district (Map 250/Parcel 141). This district allows only detached single-family residences. The allowable FAR is 0.5 and the height limit is 35, with a minimum lot area per dwelling unit of 6,000 square feet. The assessed value of the property, according to the assessor's database, is \$1,871,000, with \$841,200 attributable to the house. The house contains 3,620 square feet on 2½ floors, and the assessors rate its condition as “good very good.”

The Ebenezer Wyeth house at 36 Larch Road is a frame house constructed in 1751 and moved to this site in 1915. It is located on the west side of Larch Road about 350’ north of the corner of Brattle Street. It is sited on an 11,486 square-foot lot in the same Residential A-1 district (Map 250/Parcel 223). The assessed value of the property is \$1,488,200, with \$573,300 attributable to the house. The house contains 2,067 square feet on two floors, and the assessors rate its condition as “average.”

Both properties adjoin 22 Larch Road, the owner of which, through different entities, also owns the properties at 16 and 20 Larchwood Drive. The former contains a garden shed and the foundations of a greenhouse; the latter, a single-family house built in 1919 and added to in 1994.

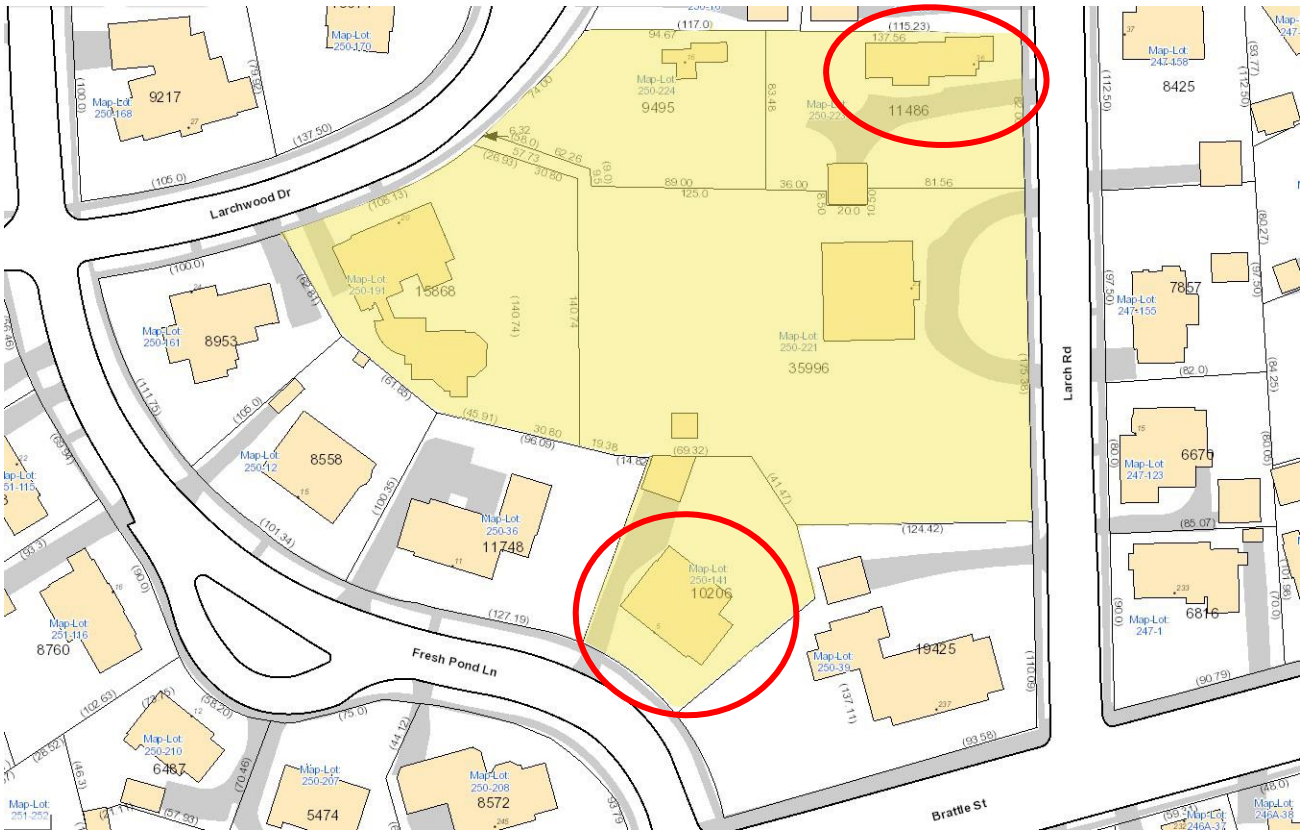
The setting of both structures is a planned garden suburb laid out in 1915 and built up through the mid-1920s. Larch Road forms the eastern border of Larchwood, which is characterized by winding streets and large frame or brick houses typically exhibiting some version of the Georgian Revival Style. The suburb was laid out around The Larches and 36 Larch Road, pre-existing buildings that were relocated to free up land for development. Larchwood demonstrates remarkable consistency of scale and character, and the quality of its architecture is consistently high for the period.

¹ The address on the former house is 5, but the assessors list it as 7 Fresh Pond Lane.



Larchwood Neighborhood

Cambridge GIS



5 Fresh Pond Lane (circled, bottom) and 36 Larch Road (top), with contiguous properties associated with 22 Larch Road (shaded)
Cambridge Assessors



5 Fresh Pond Lane (circled, bottom) and 36 Larch Road (top)

Arcview, Cambridge GIS

Larchwood

The history of Larchwood was described in *Building Old Cambridge: Architecture and Development*, pp 238-244:

Ebenezer Wyeth bought the eastern half [of the former John Stratton farm] in 1751 and built a farmhouse that survives at 36 Larch Road. His son Jacob, who graduated from Harvard in 1792, married Elizabeth, a daughter of Nathaniel Jarvis, and established the Fresh Pond Hotel in 1796 on eight acres purchased from his father. Their son Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth developed the ice harvesting business on Fresh Pond. ...

The Ebenezer Wyeth farm became the nucleus of the last estate assembled on Brattle Street. When Wyeth died in 1799, his 16-acre homestead contained a dwelling, a cider mill, and a barn. The buildings and 5¼ acres near the intersection of Brattle and Mt. Auburn streets passed to his son Ebenezer who sold the place to Jonathan Hastings (probably the postmaster of Boston) in 1801. In 1804–5 Hastings started building a large house that incorporated the Wyeth farmhouse as an ell, but in 1808 he sold the unfinished project to William Gray of Salem, who was reputed to be the richest man in America and its largest ship owner. Salem was in decline even before the

embargoes of 1807–12, and Gray was one of many North Shore merchants who relocated to Boston about this time. His new summer place was conveniently close to that of Governor Gerry, who also hailed from Essex County and with whom he served as



Part of the John Chipman Gray estate in 1886, showing the Larches in its original location with the Wyeth house attached as an ell.

lieutenant governor. Gray called his Federal mansion “The Larches” after a stand of deciduous conifers nearby. Fresh Pond Lane, which was shaded by many fine trees and offered the most attractive approach to Fresh Pond, ran just west of the house.

William Gray made several significant additions to the property, including a large piece of the John Stratton Jr. farm west of Fresh Pond Lane that he acquired in 1816 through foreclosure after Elbridge Gerry’s death. In 1851 his son, John Chipman Gray, purchased 3½ acres behind the house that he filled with ornamental gardens and greenhouses. Professor John Chipman Gray, a law professor at Harvard and a founding partner of the Boston firm of Ropes & Gray, inherited the estate in 1881 on the death of his uncle of the same name. Gray also used the Larches as a

summer retreat, but in 1882 he sold the greenhouses and the land west of Fresh Pond Lane to Sarah Dee, whose son Thomas established a nursery there.

In 1883 Frederick Fish laid out Larch Road along the fence separating Gray’s land from the old Jonas Wyeth farm, and three suburban houses soon appeared on the east side of the street. Gray took steps to prevent encroachments and bought some nearby lots to protect his privacy. Three years later he changed his mind and planned a new street parallel to Brattle that he named after his son Roland. Gray sold some land to Fish in 1889, but nothing more was built until 71 and 77 Larch Road went up in 1895.

The street pattern changed dramatically with the construction of Fresh Pond Parkway from Mt. Auburn Street to Huron Avenue in 1900 and the creation of Larchwood in 1915. Charles Eliot and the Cambridge park commissioners envisioned the parkway as early as 1894. They hoped to incorporate Fresh Pond Lane as it then existed, but this would have meant following Mt. Auburn Street with its busy trolley tracks. Instead, the Metropolitan Park Commission constructed a new road that crossed the Elmwood estate, the old Wyeth farm, and the Gray place to join Fresh Pond Lane at Huron Avenue. The parkway ended there until 1930, when the Metropolitan District Commission extended it to Concord Avenue and a connection with the Mystic Valley system via Alewife Brook Parkway. Route 2 was completed in 1934, but traffic did not really flood the parkway until the completion of Gerry’s Landing Road, the Eliot Bridge, and Memorial Drive Extension in 1951. ...

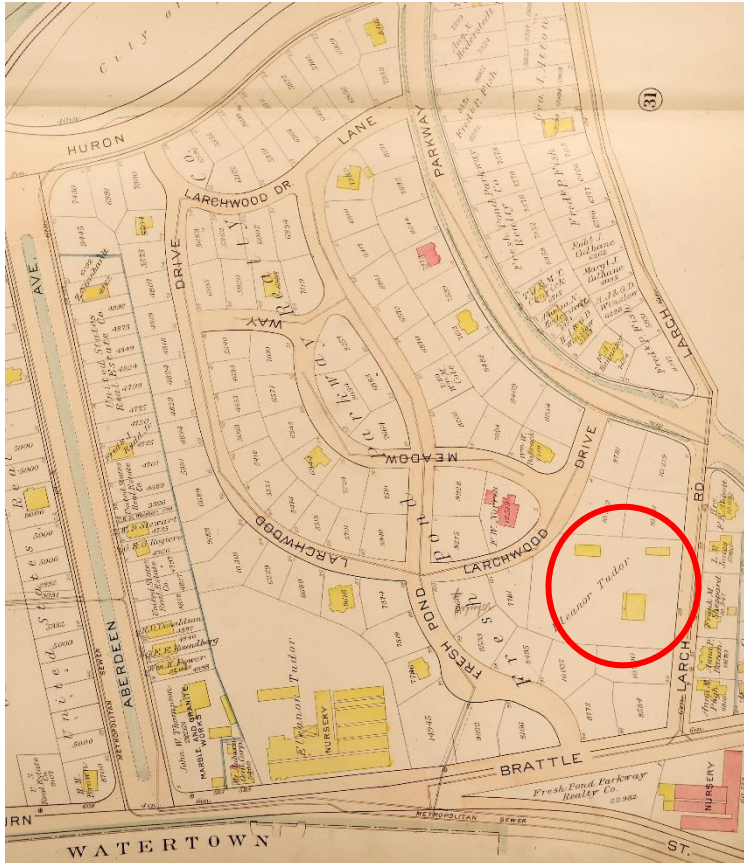
Gray's 23-acre estate was the last undeveloped tract on Brattle Street. After his death in 1915 its disposition was the subject of much conjecture; it had been in the same family since 1808 and had desirable frontage on Brattle Street, Fresh Pond Parkway, and Huron Avenue. In 1916 Roland Gray and Eleanor Gray Tudor sold the property to Boston realtor J. Murray Howe with the usual restrictions concerning use, setbacks from the street, and the value of future dwellings. Howe immediately resold it to Forris Norris, a Cambridge developer who had just purchased part of the Coolidge farm south of Mt. Auburn Street. The heirs moved the mansion from Brattle Street to Larch Road where it became a residence for Eleanor and her husband, Boston attorney Henry Tudor. The 1751 Wyeth farmhouse, which had been attached to the house as an ell, became a separate residence for Roland.



The Larches on its original site, with the Wyeth farmhouse attached at right. Photo ca. 1890-95. HNE

Forris W. Norris (1885–1965), a Quebec native who worked as an insurance agent in Central Square before entering the real estate business, hired Pray, Hubbard & White, a Boston firm of landscape architects, to prepare plans for both Larchwood and Coolidge Hill.³⁴ Norris wanted “to make [the Gray estate] one of the ideal residential sections” of Cambridge (*Cambridge Chronicle*, May 22, 1915). He asked the landscape architects to design a garden suburb with winding streets and irregular lots that would preserve every possible tree and take advantage of the beautiful gardens and shrubbery. The *Chronicle* reported that:

studies were made of development at Forest Hills, Long Island, the Country Club district of Columbus, Ohio, the Lawrence Park estates of Toronto and some of the most noted garden city developments in England, among them Letchworth and Hampstead. (Oct. 2, 1915)



Larchwood and vicinity in 1916, showing the plan developed for the Fresh Pond Parkway Realty Company by Pray, Hubbard & White. The Larches and the Wyeth house are shown on their new site.

gardenlike setting with narrow, winding streets. Larchwood was unusual because it was completed entirely according to the original design. It also established precedents that were reflected at Gray Gardens (1922) and the second part of Coolidge Hill (1925).

The promotional material for Larchwood emphasized the visual interest of its curving streets, which met the roads bordering the development in such a way as to discourage through traffic. Before selling any lots, Norris graded the streets and installed underground telephone and electric service. He refused to sell to speculative builders and made prospective homeowners “pass a rigid investigation as to their personal standing” (*Chronicle*, Oct. 8, 1921). Plans had to be submitted to the landscape architects “to insure the maintenance of a high-grade harmonious development throughout the whole” (Fresh Pond Parkway Realty Co., 7).

In November 1915 the *Chronicle* reported that four houses were under way; these were 71 Fresh Pond Lane, 72 and 78 Fresh Pond Parkway, and 17 Larchwood Drive, all commissioned by Norris and designed by Greco to show some encouraging activity and a high standard of architecture. The most impressive was Norris’s own brick Georgian Revival on a corner lot. Most houses went up in the 1920s; on the three interior streets only one house, 63 Fresh Pond Lane (1939), was built after 1930. Larchwood was highly successful as a garden suburb, and its winding lanes full of shade trees still provide the quiet oasis envisioned by the promoters. The strength of their

The picturesque designs for Larchwood and Coolidge Hill contrast strongly with the ruler-straight streets of 19th century Cambridge.

Larchwood included one hundred house lots that varied in shape, size, and orientation, three gracefully curving streets with wide planting strips for trees, and several landscaped islands within the roadways. The intricate plan did have some precursors in Cambridge.

As early as 1868, Frederick Law Olmsted had proposed a subdivision with a curving parkway for the Shady Hill estate, where Charles Eliot laid out the present curved streets in 1888. Similarly, Gardiner Hubbard’s 1889 plan for his estate comprised a gar-

vision is best demonstrated on Fresh Pond Parkway, where the houses are still desirable in spite of the constant high-speed traffic.



5 Fresh Pond Lane (circled, left) and 36 Larch Road (right)

Arcview, Cambridge GIS

36 Larch Road

The house at 36 Larch Road is a two-story frame structure with a hip roof built in 1751 and altered many times since. The footprint of the original part of the house measures 38' long and 16' deep. A hip-roofed cross gable added in 1934 contains the entrance, while a one-story addition of 1960 is attached to the east and north elevations. The fenestration pattern is irregular; windows have 6+6 sash throughout, except for the picture window by the front door.



36 Larch Road. Photo 2018.

CHC

As described above, 36 Larch Road was built in 1751 by Ebenezer Wyeth, whose farm ran from Brattle Street up to the shores of Fresh Pond. English Loyalists and West Indian planters built several mansions on Brattle Street farms closer to the village before the Revolution, and in 1804 Jonathan Hastings began to build a Federal Style mansion in front of the old farmhouse, which he incorporated as an ell. William Gray of Salem took over in 1808 and completed the project

Descriptions of the Wyeth farmhouse predating the move indicate that its south (now west) elevation was attached to the main house by a two-story connector about 12' long. As an ell, it contained the servant's rooms and two privies; the kitchen was in the cellar of the main house. The original central chimney was demolished during the move in 1915; Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow designed the renovation, which included a one-car garage addition to the east elevation.



36 Larch Road. The west (left) elevation was once attached to "The Larches." Photo 1980.

CHC.



36 Larch Road. Photo 1969.

CHC

After 1915 the Wyeth house functioned as the gardener's cottage until 1934, when Roland Gray wrote William Sumner Appleton, president of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, that he intended to have it remodeled as a residence for himself and that "most of the inside will be torn out." Boston architect Joseph Leland designed this renovation and a brick garage opposite the front door, and Gray lived there until his death in 1957. Another family member, Owen Tudor, applied for a variance in 1959 to construct a new room on the east elevation, but died two years later. Other family members occupied the house until fairly recent times.

5 Fresh Pond Lane

The house at 5 Fresh Pond Lane was built in 1922 for Sophia P. Moshier. It is a 2½-story red brick house with a slate roof designed in the Georgian Revival Style by Boston architect Roscoe B. Whitten. The five-bay design features a center entrance with a delicately-detailed portico. The trumpet-supported cornice, the wood frame of the sunporch, the three dormers, the keystones of the flat arches, and the trim are painted white, in contrast with the rare and distinctive Monk Bond pattern of the brick masonry.² The windows have what appears to be the original 6+6 sash, while the shutters on the first floor exhibit a pine tree cutout. The front door is flanked by leaded glass sidelights and a fanlight, while the portico is supported by slender Doric columns. All these features appear to be original and in good condition, if somewhat in need of paint. The brick two-car garage was built at the same time as the house.



5 Fresh Pond Lane. Photo 2018

CHC

² "This bond has two stretchers between every header with the headers centered over the perpend between the two stretchers in the course below ..." (Wikipedia).



5 Fresh Pond Lane. Photo 2018.

CHC

Sophia Moshier (1877-1947) was born in New Brunswick to an American father and a Canadian mother. Little is known about her life, but it appears that she never married. In 1907 she was living with her father and five siblings in Portland, Maine and working as a milliner. In the 1920 census she was recorded as a dressmaker, living on Powderhouse Boulevard in Somerville with two sisters and her father, Nathan, who was then 80 years old. Nathan (born 1832) was recorded as a farmer in Kennebec County, Maine in 1850; his later occupation cannot be determined. Sophia somehow amassed the resources to retain a noted architect and constructed 5 Fresh Pond Lane at an estimated

cost of \$17,000 in 1922. In the 1930 census her household contained a sister, a niece, and three roomers. This arrangement apparently could not be sustained, and by the end of the year she had moved into an apartment on Belmont Street in Watertown.

Ms. Moshier sold 5 Fresh Pond Lane to Fred H. Dow in 1930 for \$22,000. Dow made “extensive alterations and improvements” before he moved from his previous residence at 120 Avon Hill Street. Dow (1882-1956) was the owner of F.H. Dow Co., chocolate makers of Cambridgeport, and a vice president of the North Avenue Savings Bank. Dow remained in the house until his death, after which the property was sold to Harvard FAS Dean Robert A. Rotner in 1977.

The architect of 5 Fresh Pond Lane was Roscoe B. Whitten (1876-1935). Whitten was born in Boston to an American father and a Canadian mother. He grew up in Chelsea and East Boston and graduated from MIT’s architecture program with the class of 1898. He married a woman from Nova Scotia and his oldest child was born in Canada, where in 1902 he was practicing as an architect in Sydney, N.S. In 1910 he was enumerated as a resident of Winthrop, but the Canadian census of 1911 listed him as residing in Calgary, Alberta. He returned from Calgary in 1915, but his citizenship was somehow in question and he was finally admitted to citizenship in 1921. In 1920 he was living with his family in Melrose, where he apparently remained until he died in 1935.

Whitten had a notable career as an architect of apartment buildings and single-family homes. The 1910 census lists him as a draftsman for an architectural firm; in 1920 he was an architect with a real estate firm. At the latter date he was probably associated with Forris Norris, a Nova Scotia native and real estate man who was developing Coolidge Hill Road and Larchwood. Cambridge records credit Whitten with eight one, two and three-family houses on Coolidge Hill in 1917-22 and six houses in Larchwood in 1920-24. Whitten’s most important commissions, however, were three massive apartment buildings designed in 1924: Barrington Court at 987 Memorial Drive, The Larches at 240-44 Brattle Street and The Birches at 246-260 Brattle Street (the latter two in partnership with Henry W. Gore). Other Cambridge commissions included apartment buildings on Hancock and Harvard streets.

Whitten’s four other commissions in Larchwood provide a context for evaluating the significance of 5 Fresh Pond Lane. Three of them – 28 Meadow Way, 43 Larchwood Drive, and 74 Fresh Pond Parkway – were built on spec for the Fresh Pond Parkway Realty Co.; all three were valued at \$15,000. They were issued consecutively numbered building permits, meaning that all three had been on the boards in Whitten’s office at the same time.



28 Meadow Way (1920; BP #20387)



43 Larchwood Drive (1920; BP #20388)



74 Fresh Pond Parkway (1920; BP #20389)



74 Larchwood Drive (1923)

Whitten's last commission for a house in Larchwood was 74 Larchwood Drive, which was built for homeowner John G. Howard in 1923 at an estimated cost of \$13,000.



5 Fresh Pone Lane (1922)

Sophia Moshier's 1922 house, which was estimated to cost \$22,000, was the most expensive of the houses that Whitten designed at Larchwood. Architecturally, it is somewhat more elaborate than his work for the Fresh Pond Realty Company, and certainly on a par with Barrington Court – which was executed at a far larger scale.

Recommendations

Both 36 Larch Road and 5 Fresh Pond Lane are significant buildings in their own right for their architecture and associations with the history and development of the city. Further, both buildings in their current locations are significant contributing elements in their carefully crafted surroundings – 36 Larch Road as part of The Larches estate and 5 Fresh Pond Lane at the gateway to Larchwood, a tightly planned and carefully curated community.

I recommend that the Commission find 36 Larch Road and 5 Fresh Pond Lane significant for the reasons stated and take public testimony before determining whether they are preferably preserved in the context of the proponent's proposal.

cc: James Rafferty, Esq.