

Area O - Munroe Hill

Easy railroad access to Boston, as well as the clean air and pleasant scenery afforded by its hillside location made Munroe Hill (or the Mt. Vernon District as it was initially known) one of Lexington's most fashionable neighborhoods in the late 19th and early 20th century. Today, this elevated area west of Massachusetts Avenue retains its narrow, curving roads and approximately two dozen substantial homes dating to the late 19th and early 20th century on Percy Road, Bennington Road, Eliot Road, Pelham Road, Warren Street and Washington Street. Several impressive architectural designs have been added to the mix in recent years and manage to fit well in the context of the older residences. This area includes one property individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places - the Warren Sherburne House at 11 Percy Road. The area is located adjacent to the historic Munroe Tavern (see Area D).



Warren Sherburne House, 11 Percy Road

Formed in 1891, the Lexington Land Company was responsible for the development of Munroe Hill. Among its trustees were William H. Mason, a real estate broker with offices in Boston, and James S. Munroe, who was born at the old Munroe Tavern in 1824 and resided for his entire life in the immediate neighborhood of his birthplace. In his business life, Munroe initially was a hardware dealer in Boston and later operated paper mills in Bedford and South Lawrence. The Land Company began selling shares in 1892 and the largest shareholders were Warren Sherburne, Hiram Janvrin, John L. Norris, and James S. Munroe, men who already owned land in the adjacent Bloomfield Street neighborhood which had recently been developed. Lots ranging from 9,000 to 18,000 square feet were laid out along Warren, Washington, and Bennington Streets, as well as Percy Road (originally Mt. Vernon Street). Deed restrictions limited development to one house per lot, established a setback and set a minimum construction cost of \$3,500 per house.



20 & 24 Percy Road

Many of the original residents of Munroe Hill had first come to Lexington as summer guests, staying at local hotels including the Russell House and the Massachusetts House. The Russell House opened at the corner of Woburn Street and Massachusetts Avenue in 1882. The town was known for its healthful atmosphere which was considered invigorating and restorative.



8 Warren Street

The Munroe Hill area also benefitted from various amenities. It was served by the Munroe's Station railroad depot which was built before 1904 and was located adjacent to the tracks opposite Pelham Road (near the present Seasons Four at 1265 Massachusetts Avenue, adjacent to Tower Park). This small station was demolished in 1959. One of the earliest golf courses to be laid out in the Boston area, the Lexington Golf Club was organized in 1895 on the portion of the Munroe land not developed and extended to Marrett Road. Its club house was in the barn that stood behind the Munroe Tavern and the links were over Munroe Hill. The Golf Club remained here until 1900 when it relocated to Hill Street.

Unlike other late 19th century neighborhoods in Lexington, Mt. Vernon/Munroe Hill was not a speculative development. The houses reflected the latest architectural trends and many were probably designed by professional architects although only the identities of a few are known. The earliest residences constructed on Munroe Hill combined elements of the Queen Anne, Shingle and Colonial Revival styles.



45 Percy Road

In 1893 Warren Sherburne, a successful glass manufacturer, commissioned Boston architect Samuel D. Kelley to design a house for him on the east slope of Munroe Hill, overlooking Mass. Ave. (To prepare the site, Sherburne had an older house the Nathaniel Mulliken House - now 1361 Mass. Ave. - moved across the road to the James S. Munroe property). Kelly had previously designed the Sherburne family home on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston as well as other homes in the Back Bay. The design for 11 Percy Road, freely mixing the irregular massing popular in the Queen Anne with the decorative vocabulary of the emerging Colonial Revival, is typical of the best of the period. The large panes of curved glass seem to be almost boastful, given Sherburne's profession.

Built at about the same time, the exuberant Queen Anne house at 15 Percy Road was constructed by Warren Sherburne's son, Warren Racklyft Sherburne. Next door, 17 Percy Road also dates to the late 1890s.



15 Percy Road

A number of the houses built on Munroe Hill in the 1890s are examples of the Shingle Style, a style which found particular favor with wealthy east coasters who sought comfortable, fashionable dwellings away from the city for vacation retreats. It was a uniquely American style with roots in New England Colonial architecture and typically mixes rough cut shingles, left to weather naturally, with rubble and fieldstone. Unlike the Queen Anne, decorative detailing is used sparingly. Among the earliest and best Shingle Style dwellings on Munroe Hill is the house constructed at 14 Percy Road for Col. Charles Thornton, a resident of Cambridge who summered at the Russell House for several years. The house next door at 16 Percy Road was constructed for his sister.



14 Percy Road

Other Shingle Style dwellings include 20 & 24 Percy Road, 7 Bennington Road, and 4 Washington Street. The house at 20 Percy Road was constructed in 1896 by local builder Abram C. Washburn for Arthur Newell. Newell was president of the Fourth National Bank in Boston and died in 1912 onboard the Titanic. His two daughters who were traveling with him survived.

The only member of the Munroe family to live on Munroe Hill was Mrs. William Munroe, widow of James S. Munroe's son. Mrs. Munroe commissioned architect Henry Ball to design her Colonial Revival house at 12 Warren Street in 1897.



12 Warren Street

Colonial Revival houses with gambrel roofs found great popularity on Munroe Hill. Examples include houses at 5 Pelham Road (1896), 4 Bennington Road (1900), and 23 Eliot Road (1900). The latter was constructed for Charles Follen Garrison, the son of famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. Charles was named for Charles Follen, founding minister of the Follen Community Church who was a noted abolitionist and Unitarian minister and died in 1840. Two of W.L. Garrison's other sons also had homes on Munroe Hill. William, Jr. lived on Percy Road.



4 Bennington Road

Francis Jackson Garrison lived in the brick Georgian Revival dwelling with gambrel roof at 13 Pelham Road. This is one of two houses in the neighborhood (the other being 10 Eliot Road) designed by architect Lois Lilley Howe of Cambridge. Howe graduated from MIT in 1890 and was the second woman elected to the American Institute of Architects, the first woman fellow of the A.I.A. and the first woman elected to the Boston Society of Architects.



13 Pelham Road

The formal Georgian Revival house at 6 Eliot Road is one of the largest residential structures ever built in Lexington. The building designed by New York architect Oswald Hering and was constructed in 1907 for copper manufacturer Harry Fay at a cost of \$50,000. Photographs of the building were published in the national architectural publication, Brickbuilder. The mansion was later owned by Richard Engstrom, a chemist. Today it houses an Armenian School for Girls.



6 Eliot Road



The remaining buildings in the Munroe Hill area are an eclectic mix reflecting diverse 20th century styles. The house at 28 Percy Road dates to c.1920 and combines Craftsman and Colonial influences. The building at 4 Percy Road is a stuccoed Craftsman exhibiting similarities to the four structures at 69-83 Bedford Street in Lexington.



28 Percy Road

Mixed in are several Dutch Colonial dwellings. Several of the houses including 3 Eliot Road (1928) and 9 Warren Street (c.1930) exhibit elements of the Tudor Revival including half timbered details.



3 Eliot Road