

MAY 15 1989

548

FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
80 BOYLSTON STREET
BOSTON, MA 02111

AREA	FORM NO.
F	603

Town SouthbridgeAddress Durfee Road

Historic Name George B. and Ruth D. Wells
House

Use: Present Mission HouseOriginal Residence

DESCRIPTION

Date 1932Source House Beautiful, Vol. #72, Oct. 1932Style International StyleArchitect Paul A. Wood, BostonExterior Wall Fabric BrickOutbuildings stable, extensively remodeled

(NC)

Major Alterations (with dates) none obviousCondition goodMoved no Date n/aAcreage about 6 acres

Setting Set on large grounds reached by
access road in wooded and open areas

Recorded by E. Woodford, ed. S. Ceccacci

Organization Southbridge Historical Com-
mission

Date May 1986

Photo (3"x3" or 3"x5", black and
white) indicate address of
property back of photo.
Staple to left side of form.

Sketch Map: Draw map showing property's location
in relation to nearest cross streets and/or
geographical features. Indicate all buildings
between inventoried property and nearest
intersection(s).
Indicate north

- Ⓐ 18/744 160/4660 760
- Ⓑ 18/744 160/4660 580
- Ⓒ 18/744 000/4660 580
- Ⓓ 18/744 000/4660 760

UTM REFERENCE see aboveUSGS QUADRANGLE Southbridge, Mass; Conn.SCALE 1:25,000

NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)

The George B. and Ruth D. Wells House is significant for its association with the town's early - 20th century real estate development on the town's rural outskirts and its important International style design. It meets National Register criteria A and C at the local level and retains integrity of setting, location, materials, workmanship, design, feeling, and association. The boundaries indicated on the attached assessors map are those of current ownership and are historically associated with the property.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.

Of major national significance, this house is probably one of the first International Style houses built on the east coast after Eleanor Raymond's "Raymond Spring Hill House" in Belmont, Massachusetts. Steel frame construction allows for ceiling-to-floor and wrap-around windows. The house is a series of block-like shapes designed as an integrated whole. Built with a solar orientation, all of the living spaces face east, south and west. The north side is designed for passageways, storage and utilitarian uses. The house was originally painted white in keeping with International Style houses in Europe, creating a strong contrast between the walls and the black steel casement windows. A 1933 House Beautiful article described the house which was equipped with air conditioning and "modern" conveniences, as "a modern house which causes the lay person at first to gasp at the audacity of its conception and then to revel in the simplicity of line, perfection of detail and charm of color which characterize it."

(See Continuation Sheet)

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.

George B. Wells (1902-1967) was the third generation of the Wells family to serve as president of the American Optical Company. Groomed from childhood to hold a management position in the company he, unlike his father, uncles and grandfather before him, was uncomfortable in his role. In 1949, still quite young, he resigned the presidency. As there was no other family member interested in the management of the company, his resignation ultimately resulted in outside control and major public ownership of the company. As a result of his decision, the company which had been entirely controlled by the Wells family since the early years of the 20th-century, was to be bought by outside interests in about 1953.

George Wells and Ruth Dyer were married in 1928. They raised three children. Ruth Wells became known in her own right for her long time intimate involvement in the operation of Old Sturbridge Village, an open air history museum founded in 1938 by the Wells family in Sturbridge.

Built on part of Cohasset Farm, a favorite rural retreat of George Wells' grandfather, George W. Wells, this house represents an early stage in the transition of this section of Southbridge from rural to suburban. During the 1940's nearby Jacobs Farm on Durfee Road was subdivided for suburban houses. Subdivision of the surrounding areas still continues today.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

House Beautiful, Vol. 72, October 1932.

House Beautiful, Vol. 73, October 1933.

Wells, Ruth Dyer. The Wells Family, Southbridge: privately printed, 1979.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Southbridge	Form No: F-603
Property Name: George B. & Ruth D. Wells House	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (cont'd)

George Burnham Wells was the grandson of Daniel H. Burnham of Chicago, a major American architect and planner. His father, Albert B. Wells, had also played a significant role in planning and designing the 1910 Lensdale Factory (form #A-216) for American Optical Company, an early use of reinforced concrete construction in an industrial building of unusually sleek modern design for its day. George and Ruth Wells traveled considerably in Europe and had, doubtless, seen original International Style buildings there. Upon returning to the United States, they had difficulty finding an architect (in New York and Boston) who was competent in the International Style until they learned of Paul A. Wood of Boston who was chosen to design the house.

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

Multiple Resource Area
Thematic GroupName Southbridge MRA
State Worcester County, MASSACHUSETTS

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

71. Tapin, Eugene, House

Entered in the
National Register

Keeper

Helene Byers 6/22/89

Attest _____

72. Tiffany--Leonard House

Entered in the
National Register

Keeper

Helene Byers 6/22/89

Attest _____

73. Twinehurst American Optical Company
NeighborhoodEntered in the
National Register

Keeper

Helene Byers 6/22/89

Attest _____

74. Upper Chapin Street Historic District

Entered in the
National Register

Keeper

Helene Byers 6/22/89

Attest _____

75. Vinton--Boardman Farmhouse

Entered in the
National Register

Keeper

Helene Byers 6/22/89

Attest _____

76. Vinton--Torrey House

Entered in the
National Register

Keeper

Helene Byers 6/22/89

Attest _____

77. Wells, George B. and Ruth D., House

Entered in the
National Register

Keeper

Helene Byers 6/22/89

Attest _____

78. Wells, H.C., Double House

Entered in the
National Register

Keeper

Helene Byers 6/22/89

Attest _____

79. Wells, John M., House

Entered in the
National Register

Keeper

Helene Byers 6/22/89

Attest _____

80. Wheeler, Albert H., House

Entered in the
National Register

Keeper

Helene Byers 6/22/89

Attest _____

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Wells, George B. and Ruth D., House
NAME:

MULTIPLE Southbridge MRA
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Worcester

DATE RECEIVED: 5/15/89 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 5/31/89
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 6/16/89 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 6/29/89
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 89000548

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 6/22/89 DATE Entered in the
National Register

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA _____
REVIEWER _____
DISCIPLINE _____
DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

CLASSIFICATION

___ count ___ resource type

STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

FUNCTION

___ historic ___ current

DESCRIPTION

___ architectural classification
___ materials
___ descriptive text

SIGNIFICANCE

Period Areas of Significance--Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

___ summary paragraph
___ completeness
___ clarity
___ applicable criteria
___ justification of areas checked
___ relating significance to the resource
___ context
___ relationship of integrity to significance
___ justification of exception
___ other

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

___ acreage ___ verbal boundary description
___ UTM's ___ boundary justification

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION/PRESENTATION

___ sketch maps ___ USGS maps ___ photographs ___ presentation

OTHER COMMENTS

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to

_____ Phone _____

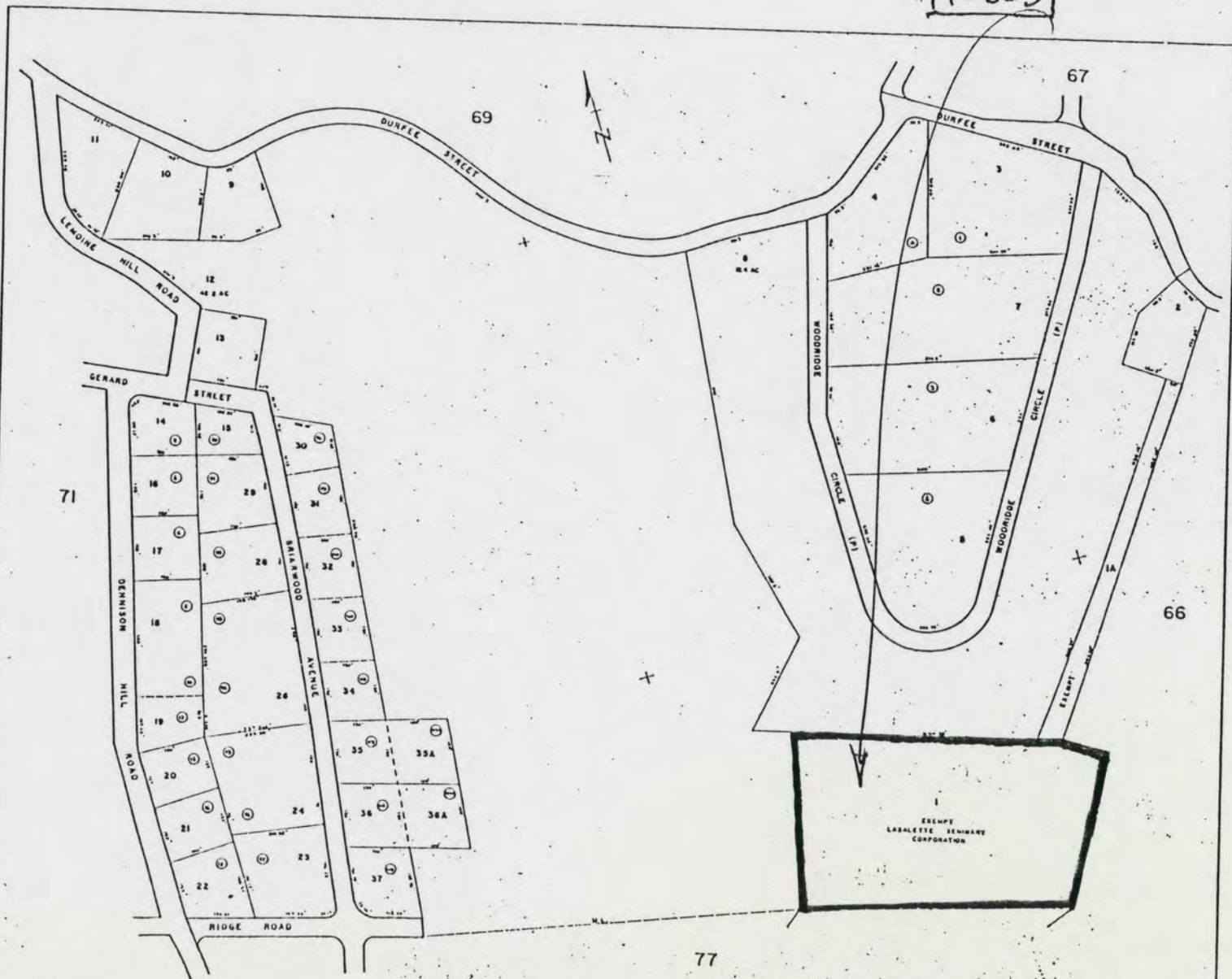
Signed _____ Date _____



Ruth D. and George B. Wells House, (F. 603)
Southbridge MA *MRA*
Ceccacci, 1986
Southbridge Historical Commission
Roll # 3.1
Dunfee Road

Off Durfee Street, Wells House

F-603



SOUTHBIDGE MASS
MRA

Please refer to the map in the
Multiple Property Cover Sheet
for this property

Multiple Property Cover Sheet Reference Number: 64000294