Brookline Preservation Commission Demolition Application Report

Address: 21 Cedar Road

Petitioner: Clifford Ciccarone

Building type: partial demolition of house and demolition of attached garage

National Register Listing (if applicable): n/a

Historical/Architectural Significance:

In a strong contrast to the revival-style houses in this neighborhood, the white stucco dwelling at 21 Cedar Road is entirely Modern in style. It was built in 1936 for F. Dennette Adams, a doctor, and his family. The plans came from the architectural firm of Royal Barry Wills, but are attributed to Hugh Stubbins, then a young architect fresh out of the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Contractor Vincent Cates of Melrose built the house.

One of the finest examples of early modernism in Brookline, the two-story dwelling has a flat roof and a concrete block foundation. The house is asymmetrically massed, roughly L-shaped in footprint. The entry, bearing only a flat hood for detailing, faces east toward the street. The entry is situated at the base of a double-height, projecting rounded bay defining the main entry hall. Its original garden elevation, facing south, appears to have been modified in the 1960s with the construction of an addition at the southwest corner. (cont.)

The house is obscured by a tall fence across the property's street frontage and is not clearly visible from the public way. Windows are a combination of steel and wood, and most are casements arranged in bands or "ribbons" that are characteristic of the International style. These windows are combined here with more traditional multi-light sash, such as the double-height rounded window lighting the entry hall.

The Laurel Road area is a fine example of residential development in Brookline in the 1930s. Two-thirds of the 61 houses in the subdivision were built from 1932 through 1939, providing a cross-section of architectural designs seen in Brookline's upper-middle class neighborhoods of the period. Most of the pre-World War II houses in the subdivision are Colonial Revival in style, though a small number of English Revival and French Eclectic houses are present, in addition to one notable Modern house. Most of the houses constructed after World War II are ranches executed in a traditional, rather than modern or Contemporary, style.

A majority of the houses dating to the pre-World War II period are 2 or 2½ stories with concrete foundations, slate roofs, and exterior walls of brick, wood shingle, or clapboard. Postwar houses tend to be one-story ranches with concrete foundations, asphalt shingle roofs, and exterior walls of brick veneer, wood shingle, or vertical board siding. On most properties, the garage is attached to the house. Until recently, this area was intact, with only two houses dating to the 1980s and the balance dating to 1955 or earlier. Building lots range in size from 16,000 square feet to nearly two acres, and most display mature landscaping. Two houses on Cedar Road were recently demolished to make way for new construction.

The only house in this subdivision that deviates from the revival styles prevailing in the late 1930s is the F. Denette Adams House, 21 Cedar Road (1936). The architecture listed on the building permit for the house is Royal Barry Wills. Wills was a traditionalist who popularized the Colonial Revival style and the Cape Cod cottage, and was nationally recognized as the preeminent architect of middle- and upper-middle-class suburban houses from the 1920s through the early 1960s. His earliest work in Brookline is seen in the Blake Park neighborhood. The Adams House, however, was designed at a time when architect Hugh Stubbins, Jr. (1912-2006) worked as a designer in the Wills firm; it is Stubbins who received principal credit for the design when it appeared in a book of modern houses published in 1940.

21 Cedar Rd
November 2014

East side with front entryway and side entry from attached garage

The house at 21 Cedar Road meets the following criteria for an initial determination of significance:

c. The building is associated with one or more significant historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the Town or Commonwealth; and

d. The building is historically or architecturally significant in terms of its period, style, method of construction, or its association with a significant architect or builder, either by itself or as part of a group of buildings.

The house retains its integrity in terms of its location setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association. It is an early and architecturally significant example of modernist residential design in Brookline.

View of the house from Cedar Rd

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Exerpted from Greg Goldin's obituary of Hugh Stubbins (1912-1994)

Hugh Stubbins, Jr., the Cambridge, Massachusetts, architect who died in 1994 at age 94, will best be remembered for the slant-topped Citicorp Center in midtown Manhattan. The slender, 914-foot tower was designed to snap the boredom of what Stubbins called "the new, slick, slab buildings that march up the avenues." Completed in 1978, Citicorp was clad in alternating bands of aluminum and glass and capped by a 160-foot-high roof pitched at 45 degrees. Its large public plaza—which provided enough airspace at ground level to build a new St. Peter's Lutheran Church—and unique three-story market energized the streetscape.

Citicorp exemplified a lifetime of achievement. Stubbins was born January 11, 1912, in Birmingham, Alabama, and graduated from the Georgia Institute of Technology in 1931. A nationally-ranked track star in college, a pulled hamstring kept him out of the Olympics. He received a master's from Harvard GSD in 1935, then worked for Royal Barry Wills & Associates, a firm that designed Cape Cod–style homes, although he pushed for Modernism. Walter Gropius invited Stubbins to teach at the GSD, where he remained for more than a decade. During that period he was best known for the Berlin Congress Hall, which got the nickname the "pregnant oyster" after the shape of the roof's concrete shell.

Over the next 50 years Stubbins's firm designed more than 800 buildings, many of which sported firsts and superlatives. Citicorp pioneered the use of a tuned-mass damper in tall buildings. Congress Hall was the largest effort at employing concrete shell technology at the time. And his last design, for Landmark Tower in Yokohama, mixed temple-like corners and modern engineering in a flexible skeleton meant to absorb earthquake shocks. "I think his personality was formed by the period," says The Stubbins Associates Director of Design C. Ron Ostberg, AIA, who joined the firm in 1984. "Coming out of the second World War there was a tremendous optimism that architects were going to build America. He was enthusiastic and he was self-confident.

Citicorp Center, NYC (above) and the Federal Reserve Building (1974-78) in Boston

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Dr. F. Dennette Adams was a consultant in medicine for the U.S. Army during and after World War II, editor of the journal *Physical Diagnosis*, and was on the senior consultant staff in general medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, where he worked for 55 years.

In 1960, then-owner Dr. Carter Rowe applied for a permit for kitchen renovations. It likely was at this time that the one-story wing with a rounded bay was added to the west side and a covered walkway built connecting the garage to the house.

The original floor plan of the house and photographs from c. 1940 were published in the book *Classic Modern Homes of the Thirties: 64 Designs by Neutra, Gropius, Breuer, Stone and Others* (1940) by James Ford, Katherine Morrow Ford. They can also be viewed on Google eBooks; see page 113 at:
http://books.google.com/books?id=yirDAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA113&lpg=PA113&dq=stubbins+hugh+brookline+adams&source=bl&ots=jas0QrFs8_&sig=JAJZ_p0ffBVmqAnVJHlk3Phgy0Y&hl=en&sa=X&ei=ZyJmVKPXCK-IsQTO8IDwAg&ved=0CDkQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=stubbins%20hugh%20brookline%20adams&f=false

detail of west side