

# FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

11-520

Salem

BEV.  
A

BEV.432,

NRDIS 7/5/1984

**Town/City:** Beverly

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*):  
Downtown

**Address:** 15 Hale Street

**Historic Name:** Central Fire Station and Signal Tower

**Uses:** Present: fire station

Original: fire station

**Date of Construction:** 1949-50

**Source:** City of Beverly; *Beverly Evening Times*

**Style/Form:** Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Modern

**Architect/Builder:** *Somes, Griswold, Boyden, Wylde & Ames*, architect; *Pitman & Brown Co.*, builder

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: concrete

Wall/Trim: brick with concrete trim

Roof: tar and gravel

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**  
none

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

Vehicle bay doors (late 20<sup>th</sup> century?)

**Condition:** fair

**Moved:** no  yes  **Date:**

**Acreage:** 0.347 acres

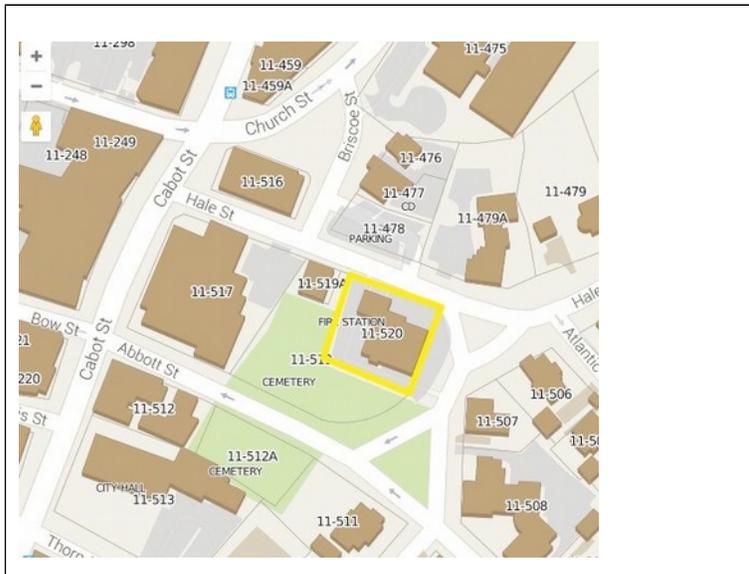
**Setting:** Facing Monument Square, between Hale and Abbott Streets and between the downtown commercial district (to the west) and residential development (to the east)—Ancient Burial Ground wraps around the south side and back of the parcel.

Photograph



East (façade) and north elevations

Locus Map (north at top)



**Recorded by:** Wendy Frontiero and Pamela Hartford

**Organization:** Beverly Historic District Commission

**Date** (*month / year*): September 2016

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

BEVERLY

15 HALE STREET

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.  
*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

Central Fire Station and Signal Tower occupies a small, flat, nearly square parcel of land that is bordered on the north and east by paved streets and on the south and west by the Ancient Burial Ground (BEV>800). The building faces east towards two small, triangular green spaces and an X-shaped roadway between Hale and Abbott streets that comprise Monument Square. The smaller of the triangular parks is located near the intersection of Hale Street and Atlantic Avenue; the other is adjacent to Abbott Street. The latter space contains a prominent Civil War memorial (BEV.904) and mature trees. Three substantial houses constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century face the east side of Monument Square (BEV.149, 150, 151; BEV.E). (For convenience of terminology, the building is assumed to face east, although it more accurately faces southeast.)

The building is approximately centered on its lot, with modest setbacks on all sides. Asphalt pavement covers the setbacks on all sides. A metal picket fence lines the parcel on the south and west, where it borders the burial ground. The building consists of a large rectangular main block with a variety of projections on the sides (the main fire station) and a small rectangular ell (originally a signal tower) extending from the northwest (back right) corner.

Central Fire Station rises two stories from a concrete foundation and below-grade basement to a flat roof. Exterior walls are clad with brick and trimmed with concrete at the tops of the walls and around the door and window openings. The brick pattern consists of running bond with a row of Flemish bond, accented by a dark header, at every fourth course. Windows are typically rectangular openings with shaped concrete sills, no lintels, and a column of four horizontal window panes with Hope steel sash. Window openings are characteristically taller on the first floor than on the second. The symmetrical façade contains four vehicle bays with modern roll-up garage doors on the first story, surmounted by four window bays on the second story. The vehicle bays are framed by a molded concrete surround with beveled panels; the words "CENTRAL FIRE STATION" incised in the frieze band and colored in red. The façade's second story windows include two typical window openings in the center; wider windows in the outer bays have a column of horizontal sash flanked by narrow 4-pane sidelights.

A slightly off-center, rectangular stair tower divides the north (right side) elevation into two parts. This narrow tower rises nearly a full story above the main block; its interior stairway is lit by an elongated window with horizontal steel sash, at the base of which is a concrete panel marking the date of the building's construction and commemorating the previous fire station on the site. (The text reads "1949 / THE ORIGINAL CENTRAL / FIRE STATION BUILT ON / THIS SITE IN 1884" and surrounds an incised image of the 1884 building.) Three window bays are located to the east of the tower and two to the west. The main, public entrance to the building is located to the west of the tower. Its recessed opening is framed by a wide concrete surround with beveled panels; the words "BEVERLY FIRE DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS" are incised in the frieze band and colored in red. A single leaf door is surrounded by steel sidelights and transom. Mounted in each of the angled sides of the entrance recess is a decorative vertical grille with the initials B, F, and D within separate concentric squares. The grilles were originally illuminated.

The asymmetrical south (left side) elevation features three window bays towards the front of the building and a square exterior chimney, which is set slightly off-center. Towards the back of this elevation is a two-story, L-shaped projection, which contains a pedestrian door and roll-up metal door on the first floor and a balcony with a steel railing on the second floor. A tall window with six horizontal lights is centered in the second story of the projection, above the pedestrian door.

The rear elevation has three vehicle bays with modern roll-up doors on the first floor. Four window bays are symmetrically arrayed above, each containing a column of horizontal sash flanked by narrow 4-pane sidelights. The two-story, rear corner ell (signal tower) is slightly lower than the main block, with varied fenestration. Its east elevation features one window bay; the

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north elevation has three regular bays on the second story and four grouped window openings on the first floor. The ell's west elevation contains two widely spaced bays, including a narrow pedestrian door at the first floor. Its two-bay south elevation comprises a vehicle bay with a roll-up door and a pedestrian entrance at the first floor, and two windows centered above them on the second story.

Remarkably intact, Central Fire Station is a fine and unusual local example of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century modern architecture in Beverly, although it suffers from poor maintenance. The major alteration is the replacement of the vehicle bay doors: a 1950 photograph shows each door comprised of a 2 by 4 grid of solid panels at the base and a 4 by 4 grid of glazed panes above. The Central Fire Station's design is notable for its lively massing, unusual brickwork pattern, steel window sash, decorative concrete enframements around the main vehicular and pedestrian entrances, stylish public entrance, and the integral plaque commemorating its architectural predecessor.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

The present Central Fire Station replaced the original, Romanesque style Central Fire Station, which was built in 1884-85 and occupied a similar footprint on the same site. Beverly's firefighters began to organize privately in 1774. Two decades later, in 1795, the town's first engine house was built; it was located at the back of Israel Thorndike's house (now City Hall) on Cabot Street. Eleven new firehouses followed between 1798 and 1873. The Victorian-era fire station on this site, built at a cost of \$25,000, was in disrepair by the mid-1940s. In 1946, the mayor appointed a special commission to study the feasibility of renovating the existing station; in 1947 the commission recommended constructing a new building. In addition to housing fire-fighting equipment and personnel, the new facility also incorporated a signal building with a state-of-the-art fire alarm system, which had been advocated by the city electrician for many years. The architect for the building was the Boston firm of Somes, Griswold, Boyden, Wylde & Ames; partner W. Lincoln Boyden was a Beverly resident and was responsible for the station's design. The station was built by Pitman & Brown Co. of Salem.

Construction of the new Central Fire Station proceeded in stages from 1948 through 1950, at a total cost of \$320,000. The substantial hose tower of the original building was demolished in 1948, and the new signal tower building on its site (forming the northwest ell of the present building) was completed in January of 1949. The signal tower structure contained an office and garage for the city electrician on the first floor, and switchboards and alarm panels on the second floor. The main part of the old fire station was demolished in the spring of 1949, and the replacement building was completed in the spring of 1950. Its main block (facing Monument Square) was designed to accommodate seven pieces of equipment. It featured a cellar with storage and mechanical equipment; offices for the chief and deputy chief; an office of fire prevention; a combination recreation/class room; and dormitories (with televisions) and a full kitchen on the second floor.

The new Central Fire Station and Signal Tower was dedicated with great fanfare in April of 1950. A dinner was held in the building for nearly 300 state, city, and fire officials from throughout the North Shore, and more than 6,000 people toured the building at an open house the following day. A multi-page special supplement to the *Beverly Evening Times* reported extensively on the history, design, and construction of the new facility, emphasizing its "ultra-modern" features throughout.

Little is presently known of the architecture firm that designed the Central Fire Station, which is listed as Somes, Griswold, Boyden, Wylde & Ames on the 1948 building permit. The office was also known as Putnam, Griswold, Wylde & Ames<sup>1</sup>; Somes, Griswold, Boyden, Wylde & Ames; and (most recently) Griswold, Boyden, Wylde & Ames. Three known buildings are attributed to Griswold, Boyden, Wylde & Ames: Hubbard Hall at the University of New Hampshire (1965), Charles Stratton Dana Greenhouses of Arnold Arboretum (1961), and a branch of the New England Merchants National Bank in Cambridge (1961). Shortly after its construction, the Cambridge bank was featured in the *Boston Globe* for its striking modern design, which included a folded concrete slab roof, warm natural materials, a drive-up teller window (reportedly the first such bank amenity), and landscaping by Sidney Shurcliff. The design of this bank branch was attributed specifically to partner Cecil Wylde, along with schools in Concord, Dover, and Needham, Mass.; a maintenance plant for the Cambridge water department and a water

<sup>1</sup> The "Putnam" in Putnam, Griswold, Wylde & Ames was William E. Putnam, Jr., who with his then-partner Allen Cox designed Centerville Hose House No. 4 (BEV.470 [updated]; see form).

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works building for Billerica; and many private residences (including the Murdock House in Beverly Cove in 1954). MACRIS contains three projects by Griswold, Boyden: a house in the Back Bay, an addition to the Sears Tower at Harvard Observatory, and a very traditional main library for the town of Dover, Mass.

Dana Somes (ca. 1886 – 1953) was member of the AIA, a director of the Boston Society of Architects, and chairman of Boston's Board of Zoning Adjustments. A graduate of Harvard College, he was also a veteran of World War I. Roger Griswold (1892 – 1973) likewise graduated from Harvard, after which he worked in Buenos Aires, served in the American Field Service in World War I (and subsequently the air force in World War II), and studied architecture at MIT. W. (Walter) Lincoln Boyden (1903-1989) graduated from Harvard College and Harvard's Graduate School of Design, and was a partner in the firm of Griswold, Boyden, Wylde & Ames from 1930-72. He lived in Beverly from at least 1945 – 51, and not surprisingly was principal designer of this fire station. Cecil Wylde (1904 – 94) received degrees from Harvard and from Cambridge University in England. He worked as a draftsman for Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch & Abbott in Boston and was an Olympic bronze medalist on the British ice hockey team in 1928.

The Central Fire Station is located within the Beverly Center National Register District (1984), but was not considered a contributing resource at that time because of its age.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

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*Boston Globe*, May 24, 1953. Obituary: "Dana Somes; Prominent architect, of Boston, Was 67".

\_\_\_\_\_. Apr 30, 1961. "Blueprints – An Architect Looks at Merchants Bank in Brighton", by John Ware Lincoln.

\_\_\_\_\_, Jul 11, 1989. Obituary: "W. Lincoln Boyden, Retired Boston Architect; at 85".

\_\_\_\_\_. Nov. 13, 1994. Obituary: "Cecil I. Wylde, 90; was architect medalist in the 1928 Olympics".

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## SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES



South and east (façade) elevations



West and south elevations



Public entrance on north elevation

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## National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible       Eligible **only** in a historic district  
 Contributing to a potential historic district       Potential historic district

Criteria:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**

Criteria Considerations:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**     **E**     **F**     **G**

Statement of Significance by Wendy Frontiero

*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

Serving as fire department headquarters since 1950, the Central Fire Station and Signal Tower is important as a major example of civic architecture in Beverly and as a significant development in Beverly's fire-fighting history. Remarkably intact and prominently situated, Central Fire Station is a fine and unusual local example of mid-20th century modern architecture in Beverly. The building's design is notable for its lively massing, unusual brickwork pattern, steel window sash, decorative concrete enframements around the main vehicular and pedestrian entrances, and a plaque commemorating its architectural predecessor. Retaining integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, the Central Fire Station and Signal Tower is recommended for listing in the National Register with significance at the local level.

The property is located within the Beverly Center National Register District (1984), but was not identified as a contributing resource at the time of the nomination because of its age. The property now meets the typical 50-year threshold of the National Register of Historic Places. If the existing nomination were to be amended to update the period of significance, this property should be considered a contributing resource.