

FORM A - AREA

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



see attached map

Assessor's Sheets USGS Quad Area Letter Form Numbers in

0071000306

Boston N.

AI

782

Town Lexington

Place (neighborhood or village)

Name of Area Lexington Gardens

Present Use Retail nursery

Construction Dates or Period 1935-present

Overall Condition Good

Major Intrusions and Alterations

Acreage 11.5 A.

Recorded by Nancy S. Seasholes

Organization Lexington Historical Commission

Date (month/year) February 1998

AREA FORM

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION ☐ *see continuation sheet*

Describe architectural, structural and landscape features and evaluate in terms of other areas within the community

Lexington Gardens is one of the few remaining open areas in Lexington that is still devoted to agricultural use; other examples are the Busa Farm on Lowell St. and Wilson Farm on Pleasant St. In the case of Lexington Gardens, however, the land is no longer farmed but is used for retail greenhouses. The northern part of the property is almost completely covered with a large one-story clapboarded retail store, a series of interconnected greenhouses, and rows of outdoor plant tables (see sketch map). At the north end of this complex is a large two-story, hip-roofed barn (MHC #782) with a center gable and a huge off-center brick chimney. It is clad with aluminum siding, roofed with asphalt shingles, and has a 2½-story gambrel-roofed rear addition. The south end of the property is open and occupied by nursery beds and dirt piles.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE ☐ *see continuation sheet*

Explain historical development of the area. Discuss how this relates to the historical development of the community.

Lexington Gardens has evolved from a farm that raised market vegetables to the present retail operation. In 1935 when John and Anna Millican lost their farm at 9 Burlington St. (MHC #742) through a mortgage foreclosure, they were able to acquire the 11-acre parcel across from it at 93 Hancock St. The property was then owned by Lexington Botanic Garden, Inc., which had been started in 1930 by Stephen F. Hamblin, a professor of botany at Harvard, as a place "to grow, test, and display all hardy herbaceous plants." (It is not clear from deeds just when Lexington Botanic Garden, Inc. had acquired the property; a quitclaim to the organization is recorded in 1935 and it evidently continued to own an interest in the land until the Millicans had paid off their mortgage.) Until 1949 Hamblin continued to raise perennials on the hill behind what is now Lexington Gardens and Diamond Middle School, and his seed beds are still visible there. The Millicans raised market vegetables—carrots, beets, cabbage, peppers, and squash—on the flat land below, selling them to First National in Somerville. During World War II they also began to raise chickens and built the existing barn with the large chimney as a hen house. Chickens were discontinued after about five years because they were not very profitable, but in the meantime the Millicans had begun to raise small garden plants, such as pansies and sweet william, which they sold wholesale to Woolworths. The wholesale plant operation was originally called Lexington Botanical Gardens and its greenhouses soon supplanted the fields of the market garden farm. In the early 1940s, however, "Botanical" was dropped from the name and it became just "Lexington Gardens." The Millicans also began to sell a few plants retail, at first casually and then from a small shed at the end of one greenhouse. Then in the early 1960s, because of the increased price of heating oil, the entire business was changed from wholesale to retail. In 1971 Pepperidge Farms, which wanted to go into the garden business and had canvassed the entire country for a property, selected Lexington Gardens and purchased it. They owned it until 1983 when it was acquired by its present owner, Fred Hess.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES ☐ *see continuation sheet*

Lexington (Mass.) Botanic Garden, Inc. *Lexington Leaflets* 9 (1939): 2-3; 19 (1949): 45-46.

Middlesex Registry of Deeds. Deeds. Cambridge, MA. 6234: 248.

Harold Millican, personal communication 1998.

Whipple, S. Lawrence. Oral history interview with John and Harold Millican, 30 April 1996. In possession of S.

Lawrence Whipple, Lexington, MA. Tape.

☐ **Recommended as a National Register District.** *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

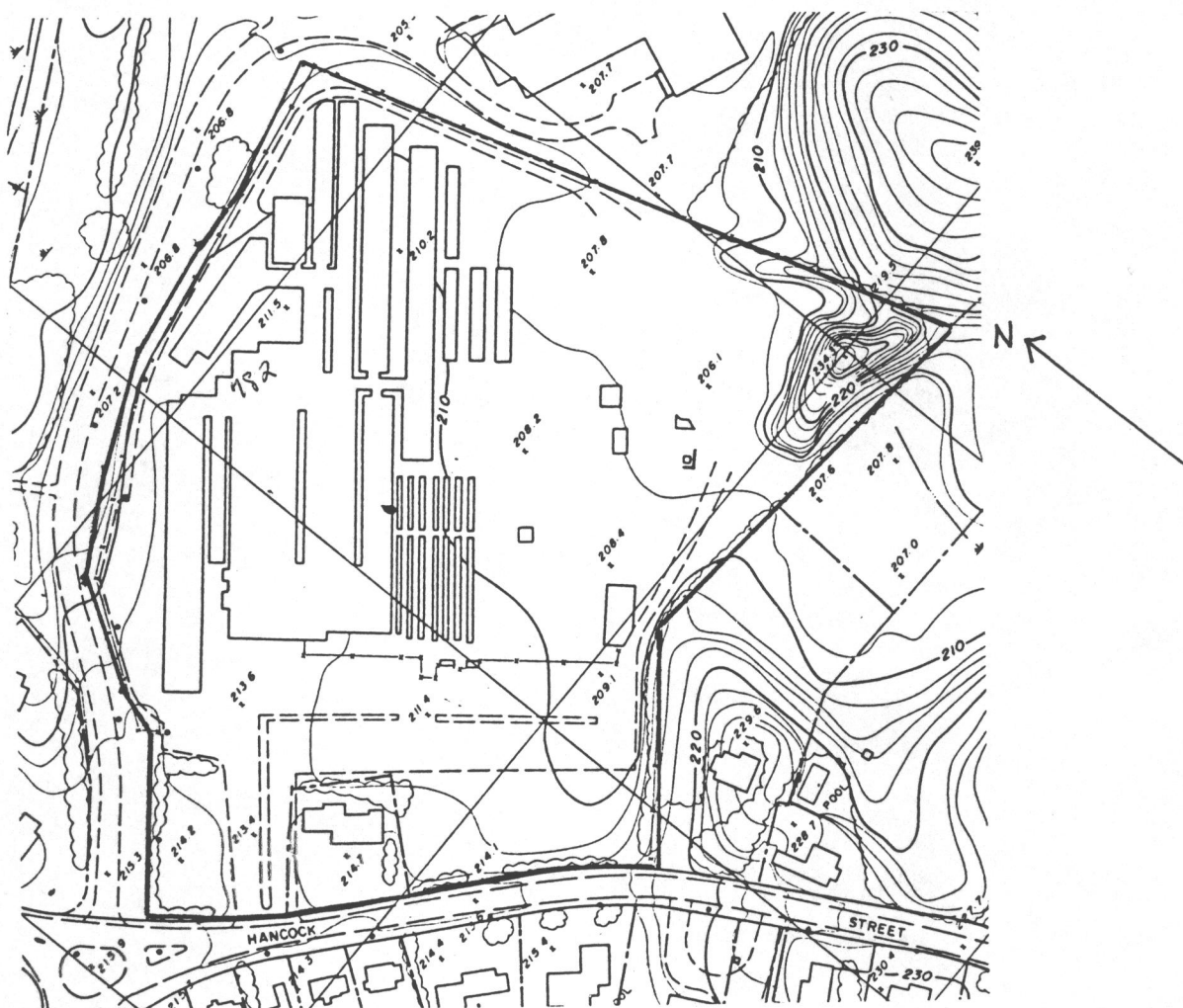
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Lexington Gardens

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Roll #17, Negative #7