

Baldwin, Maria, House  
196 Prospect Street  
Cambridge  
Middlesex County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1086

HABS  
MASS,  
9-CAMB,  
40 -

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MARIA BALDWIN HOUSE

HABS No. MA-1086

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MASS,  
9-CAMB,  
40-

Location: 196 Prospect Street, Cambridge, Middlesex County,  
Massachusetts

Present Owner  
and Occupant: Georgia Georgilas

Present Use: Residence

Significance: Maria Louise Baldwin, one of the most distinguished black educators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, lived here from 1892-1922.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of construction: circa 1840s
2. Alterations and additions: A garage was added in the 1920s or 1930s. The front doors were replaced in the 1920s or 1930s. A northern chimney was removed and the treads on the stairs at the front of the house were replaced at an unknown date. The house was originally sheathed in clapboards.

- B. Historical Context: Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1856, Maria Louise Baldwin spent most of her life in that college town. She received her early education in Cambridge, graduating from high school in 1874 and from the Cambridge Teachers' Training School in 1875.

Inability to find employment in the area sent Baldwin to Chestertown, Maryland to begin her teaching career. As the result of pressure from the black community, the Cambridge School Committee later offered Baldwin a position as a primary grade teacher, where she was assigned to the staff of the Agassiz Grammar School near Harvard University. Her career at the Agassiz School won her national distinction and recognition in the field of education. When a new and larger building was erected in 1916, Baldwin was appointed Master of the school, becoming one of two women in the Cambridge School System and the only black in New England to hold such a position. In her position as master, Baldwin supervised twelve teachers, all of whom were white, and a student body of 500, the overwhelming majority of which were also white. Her career at the Agassiz School lasted approximately four decades, during which time she acquired a strong and respected reputation as an extremely able and accomplished administrator. Maria Baldwin's distinguished career at the school provided a nationally known example of the abilities of black women educators.

Baldwin's interests extended beyond the classroom into the community. For many years she was president of the League of Women for Community Service, a group of prominent black women from the greater Boston area, a member of the council of the Robert Gould Shaw House Association, the Boston Ethical Society, and the Twentieth Century Club of Boston. As secretary of the Boston Banneker Club, a scholarly literary society organized in 1875, she often held meetings at her home in Cambridge. She also brought black students attending Harvard into her home for weekly reading lessons.

A forceful and effective lecturer, Baldwin was frequently asked to appear before national audiences. She appeared most often before teachers' associations in New England and in cities along the east coast, speaking on a broad variety of topics.

Baldwin continued to lecture, involve herself in community activities, teach and administer the Agassiz School until her death in January, 1922. The tributes paid to her at that time are testimony to the high esteem in which she was held. The 1922 class of the Agassiz School dedicated a memorial tablet to her. The school's auditorium was named Baldwin Hall, and a scholarship was established in her name. Later, the League of Women for Community Service formally dedicated the Maria L. Baldwin Memorial Library in Boston (1923), and a dormitory at Howard University in Washington, D.C. was named after her in 1950.

Maria Baldwin was one of the most outstanding women of her day. Primarily an educator, she was also involved with numerous civic and scholarly efforts, and was noted for her outstanding oratorical ability.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement: The Maria Baldwin House is a "T"-plan Greek Revival double house of the 1840s to which ells have been added. The oldest core consists of a rectangular front section of two stories in height with an original kitchen ell centered on its rear east wall, forming the stem of the "T." The kitchen ell is also of two stories but each one is slightly shorter than the corresponding one in the main block.
- B. Description of Exterior:
  1. Foundations: pressed brick
  2. Walls: shingled; main (north) facade has six bays; both ends are two-bayed.

3. Perch: An Ionic portico is set in front of the double entrance. It is one-half bay deep, two bays in length, and approached via a double set of straight run stairs of six risers each. Flanking the stairways and running up the center between the stairways are low solid railings constructed of wood. At the foot of the outer railings are two square wooden posts which terminate in rounded tops. Wooden picket railings are set into these posts; the railings extend horizontally into the rising solid railings. In addition, a cylindrical wooden handrail runs between each of the two posts and the outer columns of the portico.
  4. Chimneys: two; one on the southern end of the house and one rising through the ridge of the kitchen roof
  5. Openings:
    - a. Doors: The front doors of both halves of the entrance are multipaned oak and fitted with aluminum combination doors. Each door is set in plain jambs and flanked by five paned sidelights which in turn are flanked by pilasters.
    - b. Windows: The facade has six evenly spaced windows across the second story, while at the first floor there are two windows on either side of the double entrances. The end walls of the front section have two windows at each story, arranged symmetrically about the center line of the wall, including windows at the attic and two four pane lights in the basement wall. All the windows in the oldest core of the house have two-over-two sliding sash except the first floor windows of the south half of the building which have two-over-one sash.
  8. Roof:
    - a. Shape, covering: gable; gray slate tiles
    - b. Cornice: At the roofline of the facade and extending around all four sides of the front section is an undecorated entablature surmounted by a boxed cornice. Its presence on the gable ends combined with the boxed eaves of the gable give the effect of a pediment to each end wall. The kitchen ell has an undecorated fascia surmounting a boxed cornice at its eaves on the north and south walls only.
- D. Site:
1. General setting and orientation: The main facade of the Baldwin faces north toward Prospect Street.

2. Outbuilding: Attached to the rear wall of the kitchen ell and with its facade flush to the line of the rear wall of the ell is a one-story concrete block garage which occupies the entire rear yard of #194. Its front is on "rock-faced" blocks rising to a low, three-stepped parapet, of a type popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Centered in this wall is a large opening containing three wooden doors, each with a nine pane light. The side and rear walls are of plain concrete block, except for the corners where slightly darker blocks have been laid in such a way as to resemble quoining. Two six pane metal windows exist on the south wall, arranged symmetrically along the center of that wall. The main sources of light for the garage are two multipaned, hipped metal skylights set on the flat tar and gravel roof.

PART III. SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Baldwin, Maria, House. National Historic Landmark Nomination Form, 1976.

Prepared and transmitted by: Holly K. Chamberlain, Historian  
HABS  
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