

Cornelia Bush Gordon House

Draft Report on the Proposal for Designation as an Individual Landmark

(21-LANDMARK-0002)



**Metro Historic Landmarks and
Preservation Districts Commission**

February 26, 2021

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Case Information

Individual Landmark

As defined by the Louisville Metro Code of Ordinances (LMCO) 32.250, an Individual Landmark is “a structure or site, including prehistoric and historic archaeological sites, designated as a local historic landmark by the Commission as provided in this subchapter or by action prior to the effect of this subchapter. A landmark structure or site is one of significant importance to the city, the Commonwealth, or the nation and which represents irreplaceable distinctive architectural features or historical associations that represent the historic character of the city, the Commonwealth, or the nation.”

21-LANDMARK-0002

This case was initiated by a request from the property owner, Robin Amsbary, to conduct a review of the complex for designation consideration. With the revised Landmarks Ordinance effective on August 8, 2019, the processing of this request is now subject to the Individual Designation requirements in LMCO Section 32.260(J) through 32.260(R).

Property Description

Location and Key Elements

The Cornelia Bush Gordon House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. It is located at 308 Kenwood Hill Road in Louisville, Kentucky. The property is situated on the north side of Kenwood Hill at the corner of Kenwood Hill Road and Possum Path, which runs along the western and southern boundaries of the property (**Figure 1**). Locally designated Individual Landmark Little Loomhouse is located four lots to the east of the property. The National Register-listed Sam Stone Bush House/The Kenwood (Pending Individual Landmark Designation 21-LANDMARK-0001) is located two lots west of the property, and the National Register-listed Cornelia Bush House is located to the east on E. Kenwood Drive (**Figure 2**). The Gordon House is comprised of one parcel totaling 0.8335 acres. There is a single residential building, a modern carport, and a shed on the parcel. However, the requested Individual Landmark designation boundary does not include the entire parcel (see **Boundary Justification**).



Figure 1. Aerial view of the House with a purple dot showing the location (LOJIC).

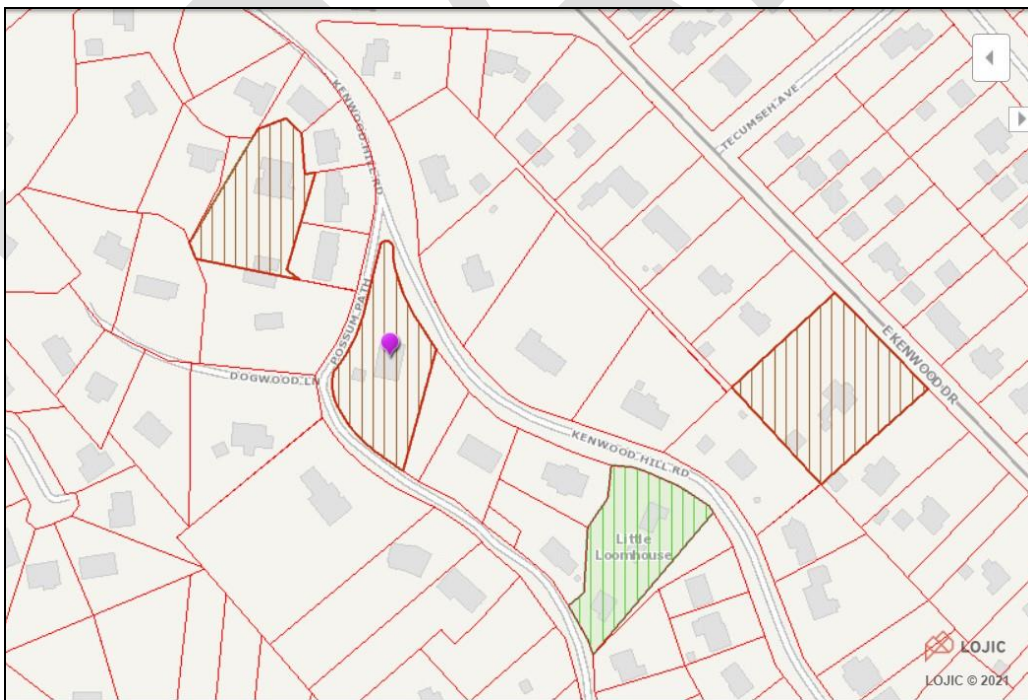


Figure 2. Map of the House (purple dot) showing the location of Individual Landmark (green hashing) and National Register-listed properties (brown hashing) (LOJIC).

Building Description

According to the National Register nomination, “The Cornelia Gordon House was built in two sections. The front section, ca. 1875, was a one-story double pile frame structure with an open, central dog trot, and a hipped roof, which set up on cedar posts. The front porch, rear section and board-and-batten siding were added in 1894. The porch is a Colonial Revival style porch with a gabled roof supported by slender classical columns” (Allgeier 1981). The main roof is clad in asphalt shingles, and the walls are clad in wood board and batten siding. The house no longer sits on cedar posts, but rather a concrete block foundation and basement, with a garage entrance from Possum Path on the western side of the house. The front yard features a stone retaining wall.

The front façade, or north elevation, of the building features a gabled porch supported by slender classical columns. The cornice line is situated along the porch roof and main house roof on three of the four elevations. The cornice is wide and layered. The front door frame is eared with denticulated molding at the top. The door is multi-paned and has a transom with a sunburst motif. There are two window openings on either side of the door. All windows are 6/6 double hung vinyl windows with denticulated lintels. A simple balustrade surrounds the porch and wooden stairs lead down to the ground (**Figure 3**, **Figure 4**, and **Figure 5**).



Figure 3. Front façade, or north elevation, looking south.



Figure 4. Front façade details, looking south-southwest.

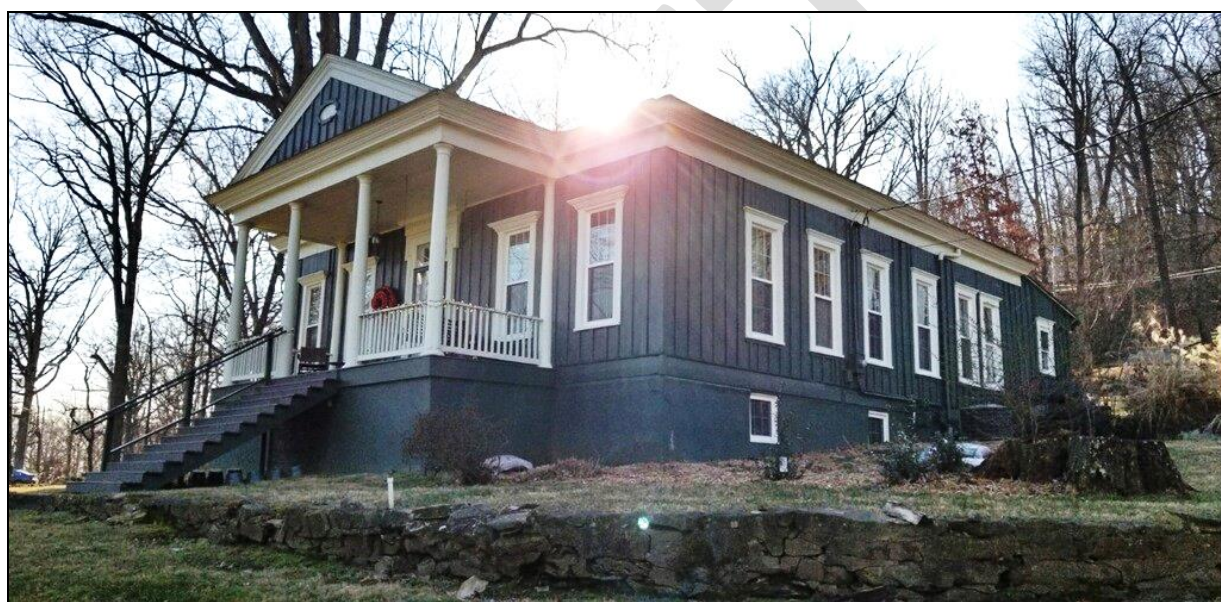


Figure 5. North and west elevations, looking southeast.

The east and west elevations of the house are very similar (**Figure 6** and **Figure 7**). Both side elevations are mostly comprised of 6/6 double hung vinyl windows. The west elevation contains six of these while the east elevation only contains four. The added casement basement windows and garage entry are located on the west elevation while the east elevation contains a ½-lite pedestrian door toward the rear. A short, brick chimney extends up from the center of the house and a second, taller brick chimney extends up from the east side of the house.



Figure 6. The west elevation, looking east.



Figure 7. East elevation, looking west.

The south, or rear, elevation has a shed roof addition across the entire façade. The ½-lite pedestrian door is located on the west side of the elevation and is flanked by two 6/6 double hung vinyl windows that are shorter. There are four more 6/6 double hung vinyl windows located to the east that are the same size as the other windows on the home (**Figure 8**).



Figure 8. Rear (south) elevation, looking north.

Historic Context

History of the Cornelia Bush Gordon House

According to the National Register nomination, “The history of the Cornelia Gordon House is closely related to the history of Kenwood Hill itself, known in the nineteenth century as ‘Cox’s Knob’ and to the Cherokee Indians as ‘Sunshine Hill.’ In 1860, Benoni Figg purchased 125 acres of land, including Cox’s Knob from John A. Shrader. Figg had a rock quarrying business on the hill from which he supplied rock for roadbuilding in southern Jefferson County. The Little Loomhouse cabin was built in 1870 as an office and caretaker’s quarters for Figg’s operation. It is located three lots up Kenwood Hill from the Cornelia Gordon House. In 1876, Charles Gheens, son-in-law to Figg, gained title to the property and used the Loomhouse as a summer house” (Allgeier 1981). It was around this time that the front, dog trot portion of the Cornelia Bush Gordon House is believed to have been constructed as a summer house for the Gheens’ friends and family.

During the summer months of the late 19th century to early 20th century, Kenwood Hill “was the playground for Louisville’s elite to escape the heat of the city and retreat to the often elaborate cabins that dotted the wooded terrain of Kenwood Hill. The social columns of the local newspaper were teeming daily with news of the happenings on the Hill” (Buzan n.d.). In 1890, Charles Gheens sold the Gordon House property and the Loomhouse property to the Kenwood Park Residential Company, of which he was an officer. Sam Stone Bush, secretary of the company, in turn purchased several parcels of land from the company, including these specific lots. At the same time, Louisville Mayor Charles Jacob purchased 300 acres of Burnt Knob for the city’s largest park, Jacob’s Park, which is now Iroquois Park. Thus, the Fourth Street streetcar line was extended down Third Street, past Churchill Downs, to the entrance of this new park. By 1897, Senning’s Park was another entertainment center at the corner of Kenwood Avenue and New Cut Road near Jacob’s Park (Buzan and McCandless 2007). These developments certainly helped the popularity of Kenwood Hill as a summer retreat.

Sam Stone Bush was responsible for the remodeling of the Loomhouse, which included the addition of board-and-batten siding, as well as construction of Wisteria Cabin and Tophouse to be used as summer rentals. In 1898, Etta Hast, a well-known artist, maintained a summer residence on Kenwood Hill in the renovated caretaker’s cottage. Etta hosted annual art festivals for local writers, artists, and educators, and also included others who had summer cabins in the area. Kindergarten teachers and composers, Mildred and Patty Hill had a summer log home on Possum Path and regularly attended these festivals along with poet Madison Cawein, poet Young Allison, and educator Reuben Post Halleck. The Hill Sisters are best known for writing the song “Happy Birthday” (Buzan n.d.; Buzan and McCandless 2007).

Other prominent Louisvillans followed suit and built summer cabins on Kenwood Hill, which were referred to as the “Kenwood Colony.” In a 1900 article, the *Courier-Journal* featured photos of some of these cabins as well as lengthy descriptions (**Figure 9**). Dr. William Cheatham and his family owned one of the largest and most ornate cabins on the hill. They also built a second cabin on their property for their son’s use. Unfortunately, all buildings burned down in 1907 with a reported loss of \$10,000-\$15,000, which is approximately \$400,000 today (*Courier-*

Journal 1907). Described as “quaint” and “vine-hidden,” the cabin of Dr. Ap Morgan Vance was built higher on Kenwood Hill than that of Dr. Cheatham. Nearby, the Hill Family’s property contained two cabins built circa 1893 “of the regulation old-time log cabin fashion of rooms and a wide passage between which leads to a front porch” (*Courier-Journal* 1900). In 1900, Mrs. Alma Bergman, a wealthy widow, had constructed one of the largest log houses on the hill near Taylor Boulevard. According to the *Courier-Journal*, “This house suggests summer and window comfort... It is an ideal country mansion. ... As a log ‘mansion-house’ Mrs. Bergman’s stands alone in this section of the country” (*Courier-Journal* 1900).



Figure 9. July 1, 1900 *Courier-Journal* photographs of Kenwood Hill Cabins (*Courier-Journal* 1900).

Notable Kenwood Hill resident Sam Stone Bush was responsible for the construction of his own home at 230 Kenwood Hill Road, construction of 316 Kenwood Drive for his mother, and the remodeling and additions of 308 Kenwood Hill Road for his sister, Cornelia Gordon, and her husband, Fulton Gordon. All this construction and remodeling was complete by 1894 (Allgeier 1981). It is believed that Louisville architect William J. Dodd was involved in the remodel as he was commissioned by Sam Stone Bush to construct his and his mother’s houses at the same time. He was a good family friend as well. No primary resources have been found to date to support

this claim; however, Sam Stone Bush's grandchildren who lived in the Cornelia Bush Gordon House knew it to be true (Buzan and McCandless 2007).

Cornelia "Nellie" Bush Gordon was born circa 1868 to Sam and Cornelia (Wheat) Bush. Sam Stone Bush, Sr. was a notable Kentucky attorney, and Cornelia was the first woman elected to public office in Kentucky, state librarian. On April 16, 1887, Cornelia married Fulton Gordon, a businessman. Together, the couple had a daughter named Cornelia (**Figure 10**). On April 30, 1895, Fulton murdered Cornelia "Nellie" and her supposed lover Archibald Dixon Brown, son of then Governor John Y. Brown. Their daughter was raised by her biological aunt Mary (Bush) Berry of Frankfort. The property was then passed on to Cornelia's nephew and Sam's son, George Bush and his wife Grace (**Figure 11**) (Buzan and McCandless 2007). The couple had two children, George Allen and Carolyn, who were raised in the home (**Figure 12**). George was president of Kentucky Wood Products Co. George and Grace were in the society section of the newspaper frequently for their parties, including Derby parties. They were also featured in a newspaper ad from 1926 for Engelhard Coffee (**Figure 13**). In 1935, the couple hired architect E.T. Hutchings to add two bathrooms to the home (*Courier-Journal* 1935).



Figure 10. Circa 1892 photograph of Cornelia "Nellie" Bush Gordon and her daughter Cornelia (Buzan and McCandless 2007).



Figure 11. Undated photograph of George and Grace Bush on the left and Anne and Monroe Bush on the right (Buzan and McCandless 2007).



Figure 12. Undated photograph of George Bush with Carolyn and George on the front porch steps (Buzan and McCandless 2007).

Mrs. George Bush, whose summer home on Kenwood Hill is shown here, has served Penden-
nis Coffee to her family for many years. She knows by experience
that no other coffee would be
acceptable at her table.
Coffee must truly be good in or-
der to maintain itself as the
cheering cup of every morning,
year in and year out.

Improve your Coffee

this easy way!

All Engelhard Coffees have
been awarded the Good
Housekeeping seal of ap-
proval. This is your guaran-
tee of a superior product.

Make the Engelhard home test at our expense
right in your own kitchen, without cost or obliga-
tion. It is so easy and convincing, if you are try-
ing to find the perfect cup of coffee. Send the
coupon below.

Flourner Turner Director
A. Engelhard Sons Co., Incorporated,
Louisville, Ky.

Please furnish me with the services checked
below; for making the Engelhard Home Test:

☐ Free Sample
Boxes Coffee

☐ Free Booklet

We will send you six samples of
coffee for you to test out. Then you
will know which coffee suits you
best.

This book tells you all about coffee
and how to best make it.

Name

Address

C-11

Figure 13. 1926 ad for Engelhard Coffee (*Courier-Journal* 1926).

During the early 20th century, development on and around Kenwood Hill was primarily confined to summer houses as well as a few year-round homes. Real development in the area began at the end of the 1930s when the Kenwood Park Residence Company sold building sites in an area they named Kenwood Village and Southlawn (**Figure 14**). The Bush Family was at the helm of this company, which became a vital force in the development of the South End of Louisville. The Bush Family houses became lots in this subdivision. After World War II, Kenwood Heights, Iroquois View, and Kenwood Manor subdivisions were developed on the north and west sides of Kenwood Hill. Father and son, T.G. and William Eckles built 400 homes in Kenwood Heights and Iroquois Aces. In the 1960s, they began developing Kenwood Estates near the summit of the Hill while another builder, Robert Thieneman, was developing Kenwood Terrace subdivision on the southern side of Kenwood Hill. By the end of the 1960s, the residential character of Kenwood Hill and the surrounding area was well established. While much of this development saw the demolition of the summer homes on the hill, the Cornelia Bush Gordon House remained in the Bush family, which is what saved it. This house and the Little Loomhouse cabins are the last remaining summer homes on Kenwood Hill. In 1950, Leuna and Dr. Pat Lyddan purchased the house from the Bush family. After Leuna's death in 1999, the house was used as a rental property until current owner, Robin Amsbary, purchased it in 2004 (Buzan and McCandless 2007).

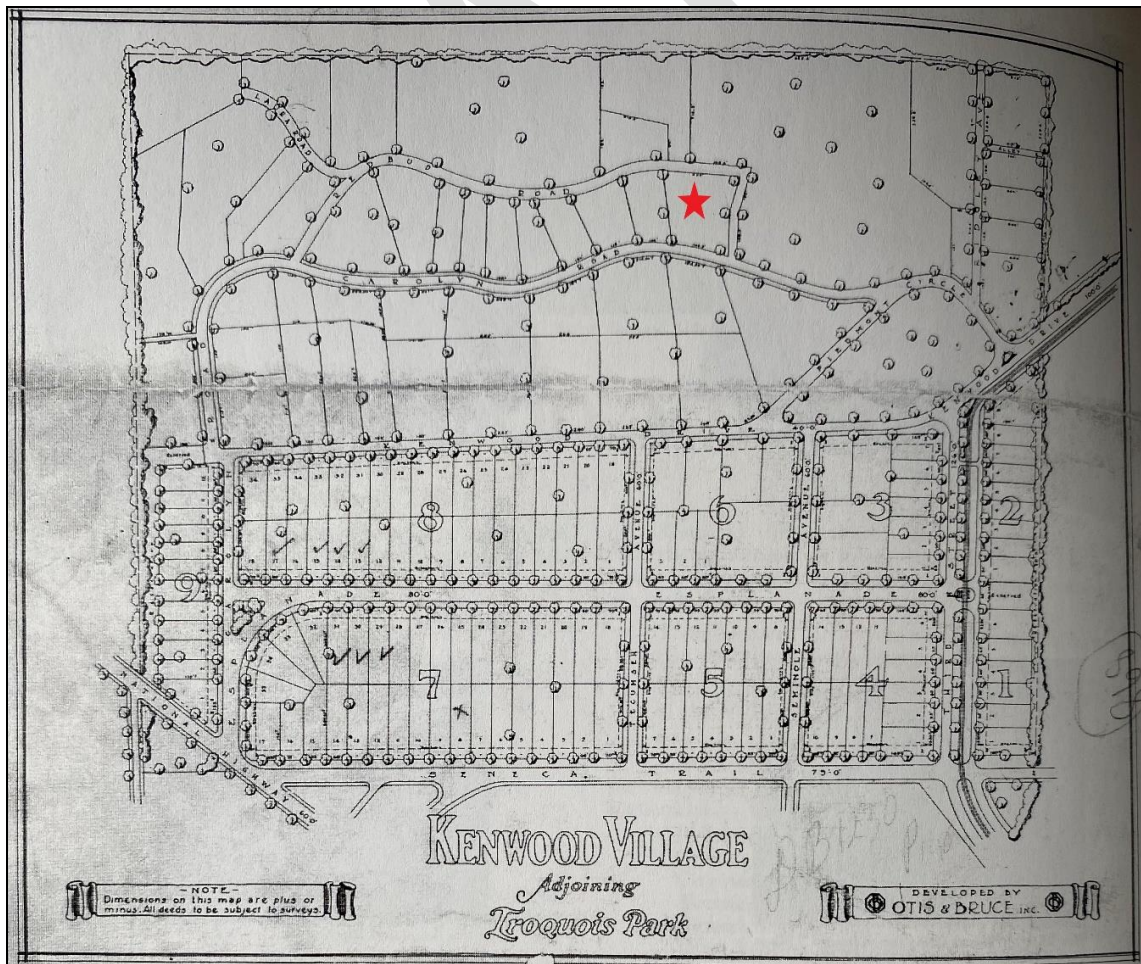


Figure 14. 1926 map of Kenwood Village—the red star shows the property on which the Cornelia Bush Gordon House sits (Buzan and McCandless 2007).

Colonial Revival Architecture

The Colonial Revival architectural style was one of the most frequently produced and long-lasting styles in America. There are numerous varieties of roof forms, materials, and design elements. The style was an effort to use the Federal and Georgian architecture of America's founding for design inspiration. This fervor to explore America's early architecture was generated partly by the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876 that celebrated the country's 100th birthday. The Colonial Revival architectural trend was promoted further by the Columbian Exposition of 1893, the world's fair held in Chicago. Similar to other revival architectural styles, the Colonial Revival style did not try to produce duplicates of earlier buildings but rather took certain design elements, such as fanlights, pediments, porches, dormers, front façade symmetry, multi-paned windows, and applied them to new buildings. These Colonial era design elements could be combined numerous ways that created many subtypes within the style. The most common examples of the style were built in the 1940s and 1950s usually featuring two stories, a side gabled or hipped roof, dormers, classically inspired door and window surrounds, and shutters (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission 2015; City of Roanoke 2008; McAlester 2015).

The photographs below are from Virginia Savage McAlester's *A Field Guide to American Houses*, in which she identifies 10 different subtypes of Colonial Revival architecture (**Figure 15** and **Figure 16**). The subtype relevant to the Cornelia Bush Gordon House, is the hipped roof with full-width porch. From the photographs below, the wide variety of Colonial Revival architecture is evident. However, what the homes have in common include hipped roofs, porches with classical columns, decorative entry ways, and other decorative detailing. The Cornelia Bush Gordon House contains similar elements to the houses in the photographs. The front porch of the house has a front gabled roof with classical columns. The cornice line is thick and layered, and the windows and doors contain decorative trim with dentil molding. The front entry door contains a decorative transom window with a sunburst theme. The Gordon House is not as ornate as some examples of Colonial Revival architecture but that speaks to its rural history. To date, no examples of Colonial Revival houses with board and batten siding have been found in Louisville. This makes the Gordon House unique as does its conversion from log dog trot to full house. A dog trot house had a central hallway that was exposed to the outside with one or two rooms located on either side (**Figure 17**). A symmetrical house form, the dog trot would have been relatively easy to convert to a Colonial Revival house as the design was also symmetrical on the front façade with a central entry door.

HIPPED ROOF WITH FULL-WIDTH PORCH

1. Galveston, Texas; ca. 1910. Lawrence House. On narrow urban lots a front-gabled roof occasionally replaces the more common hipped roof.
2. Dallas, Texas; ca. 1910. This early, two-ranked house with an off-center entrance is adapted from the simple four-square folk plan with a pyramidal roof. When embellished with a central dormer and front porch as seen here, this form is called American Four-Square. Compare with Figure 4, a narrower and more simply detailed American Four-Square.
3. Ashe County, North Carolina; ca. 1920. Livesy House. This example, like Figures 5, 6, and 7, has a centered entrance and a three-ranked facade, indicating the likelihood of a central-hall plan rather than the simple four-square plan seen in Figures 2 and 4.
4. Buffalo, New York; ca. 1900. Foster House. A simple, early two-ranked example; note the corner pilasters.
5. Union Springs, Alabama; ca. 1910. Note the elaborate pedimented entranceway moved to the front of the porch, rather than around the doorway as in Colonial examples. Less grand pediments are seen in Figures 2 and 3.
6. Winston-Salem, North Carolina; ca. 1910. Note the grouped columns on pedestals. This pattern of porch supports was uncommon before about 1900.
7. Brooklyn, New York; 1900. John J. Petit, architect. Paired windows and a front door with sidelights, but no fanlight, are common Revival details seen clearly in this example.
8. Buffalo, New York; ca. 1900. White House. An unusually elaborate example with roof and upper-porch balustrades, upper-story bay windows, and a heavily detailed cornice with a solid railing above.

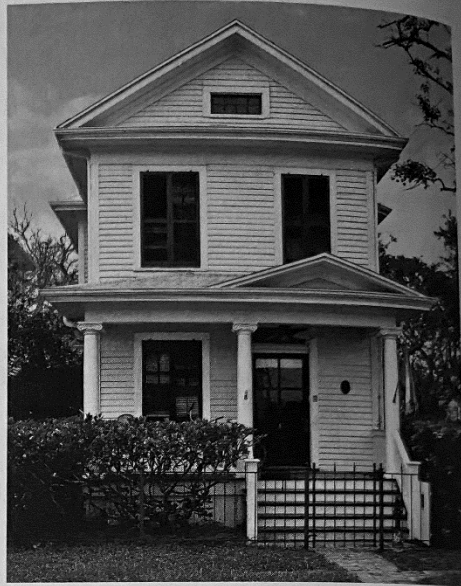


Figure 15. Examples of hipped roof with full-width porch (McAlester 2015).

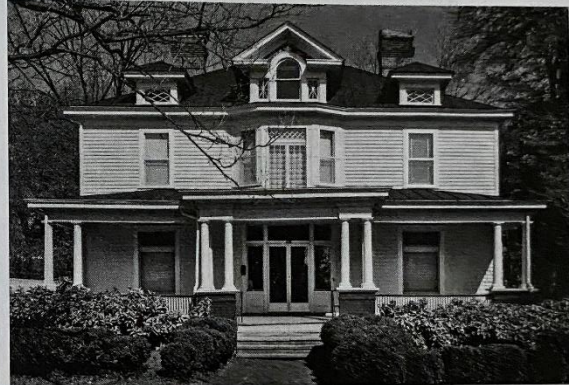


Figure 16. Examples of hipped roof with full-width porch (McAlester 2015).

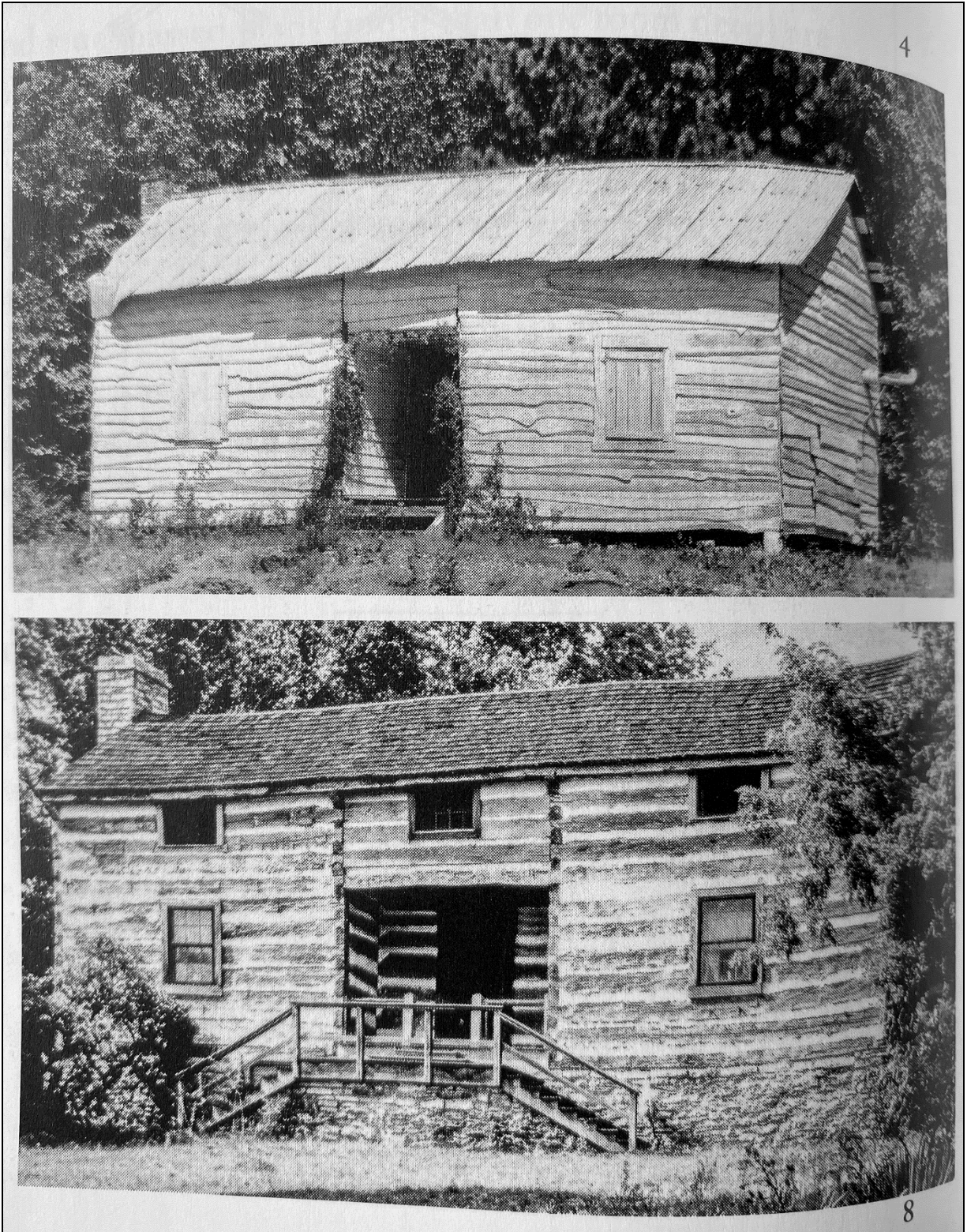


Figure 17. Examples of dog trot houses (McAlester 2015).

Statement of Significance

Historic Significance

The Cornelia Bush Gordon House is historically and architecturally significant for its association with the development of Kenwood Hill as well as its early Colonial Revival architectural style. During the summer months of the late 19th century to early 20th century, Kenwood Hill “was the playground for Louisville’s elite to escape the heat of the city and retreat to the often elaborate cabins that dotted the wooded terrain of Kenwood Hill. The social columns of the local newspaper were teeming daily with news of the happenings on the Hill” (Buzan n.d.). This cottage was used as a summer cottage from ca. 1875 to 1894 when it underwent rehabilitation to convert it to a year-round home for members of the Bush Family, Cornelia Bush Gordon and her husband Fulton Gordon. The Bush family was a vital force in the development of the south end of Louisville. The dog trot cabin was converted into a Colonial Revival style house with board and batten siding. The House remains a symbol of the development of Kenwood Hill, which was unique in the city of Louisville. It is also one of the rare examples of a Colonial Revival house clad in board and batten siding, which seems a nod to its rural origins. Therefore, this house is important to the architectural history of Louisville.

Archaeological Significance

The Cornelia Bush Gordon House has potential to contain archaeological resources. Although the lot is rather small the remnants of domestic outbuildings and artifact middens associated with domestic activities are likely present on the property, as has been demonstrated by excavations conducted at similar properties throughout Jefferson County (Bader 1997; DiBlasi 1997; Slider 1998; Stallings and Stallings 1999; Stottman 2000; Stottman 2001; Stottman and Watts-Roy 1995; Stottman et al. 2004).

Integrity Assessment

As defined by the LMCO 32.250, integrity is “The authenticity of a structure or site’s historic integrity evidenced by survival of physical characteristics that existed during the structure or site’s historic or prehistoric period. To retain historic integrity a site must possess some of the following aspects: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association.” Note that the integrity as applied by the Landmarks Ordinance is for the exterior of the structure since that is the extent of regulation if designated.

The Cornelia Bush Gordon House retains its integrity in **location** and **association** to support the historic significance of the structure as it relates to its association with the history of Kenwood Hill. The site has not changed much since the Bush Family sold it in 1950. The complex retains its integrity in **feeling** and **setting**. Comparing the 1926 subdivision map to a LOJIC map (**Figure 14** and **Figure 1**), the changes that have occurred around the property are evident. The lot size has changed over time and there is a great deal of infill construction from the developments. However, these changes are not so drastic to say the complex has lost its integrity in **feeling** and **setting**.

The Cornelia Bush Gordon House retains a high level of integrity in *design, materials, and workmanship* to support the historic significance of the structure as it relates to the history of Kenwood Hill. The House has had some alteration on the exterior including the foundation change, basement, and garage entry on the east elevation. However, these changes occurred historically and have helped preserve the home. The 1926 coffee ad (**Figure 13**) shows the house with the solid foundation. There are also vinyl replacement windows on the entire building that changed the muntin configuration from 4/4 to 6/6, but these changes are in keeping with the overall design of the building. Thus, the building retains a high level of integrity.

Designation Criteria Analysis

In consideration of a potential designation of an Individual Landmark, LMCO 32.250 defines an Individual Landmark structure or site as “one of significant importance to the city, the Commonwealth, or the nation and which represents irreplaceable distinctive architectural features or historical associations that represent the historic character of the city, the Commonwealth, or the nation.”

In accordance with LMCO 32.260(O), considering the designation of any area, site, or structure in Louisville Metro as an Individual Landmark, the Commission shall apply the following criteria with respect to such structure, site, or area. An Individual Landmark shall possess sufficient integrity to meet criterion (a) and one or more of the other criteria (b) through (e).

A) Its character, interest, or value as part of the development or heritage of the city, the Commonwealth, or the United States.

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, development on and around Kenwood Hill was primarily confined to summer houses as well as a few year-round homes. The ca. 1875 dog trot portion of the Cornelia Bush Gordon House was one of the earliest summer houses built on the hill. In 1894 it was converted to a year-round house and designed in the Colonial Revival architectural style. The 1930s through the 1960s saw a lot of development on Kenwood Hill. While much of this development saw the demolition of the summer homes on the hill, the Cornelia Bush Gordon House remained in the Bush family, which is what saved it. This house and the Little Loomhouse cabins are the last remaining summer homes on Kenwood Hill. Thus, the Cornelia Bush Gordon House is important to the development and heritage of Louisville.

B) Its location as a site of a significant historic event.

There are no singularly significant historic events that give the site its historic significance.

C) Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city, the commonwealth, or the nation.

In consideration of significance associated with a person or persons, the evaluation relates to whether an individual’s period of significant contribution or productivity occurred while residing or occupying a building, structure, or site. While noteworthy people are associated with the building, that is not why the building is significant.

D) Its embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen; or its embodiment of a significant architectural innovation; or its identification as the work of an architect, landscape architect, or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city, the Commonwealth, or the nation.

The Cornelia Bush Gordon House is architecturally significant for its physical evolution from summer cottage to year-round residence as well as its early Colonial Revival architectural style. It is one of two remaining cottages left on Kenwood Hill, the other being the Little Loomhouse, a locally designated Individual Landmark. There are no other such cottages in the city of Louisville, nor are there any other board and batten Colonial Revival residences in the city. This house is unique to the city of Louisville. Thus, it is the embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

The house does not represent a significant architectural innovation.

While there is Bush Family oral history that says the house was remodeled by William J. Dodd, there are currently no primary sources to corroborate. Thus, the house is not identified as the work of an architect, landscape architect, or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city, the Commonwealth, or the nation.

E) Its historic significance is based on its association with an underrepresented history within the city, the Commonwealth, or the nation and broadens our understanding of these underrepresented histories.

In consideration of significance associated with underrepresented histories, the evaluation relates to inclusion and telling a comprehensive history. The house does not appear to be associated with underrepresented histories.

Boundary Justification

The property proposed for designation is located at 308 Kenwood Hill Road. According to the Jefferson County Property Valuation Administrator (PVA), the property (parcel number 062E00430001) contains a total 0.8335 acres of land. However, the proposed boundaries for the Cornelia Bush Gordon House Individual Landmark designation area do not include the total parcel. The owner requested designation boundaries are represented on the LOJIC map below (**Figure 18**). The designation boundary is outlined in black and includes the residential building and the stone wall in the front. It does not include the remainder of the parcel.

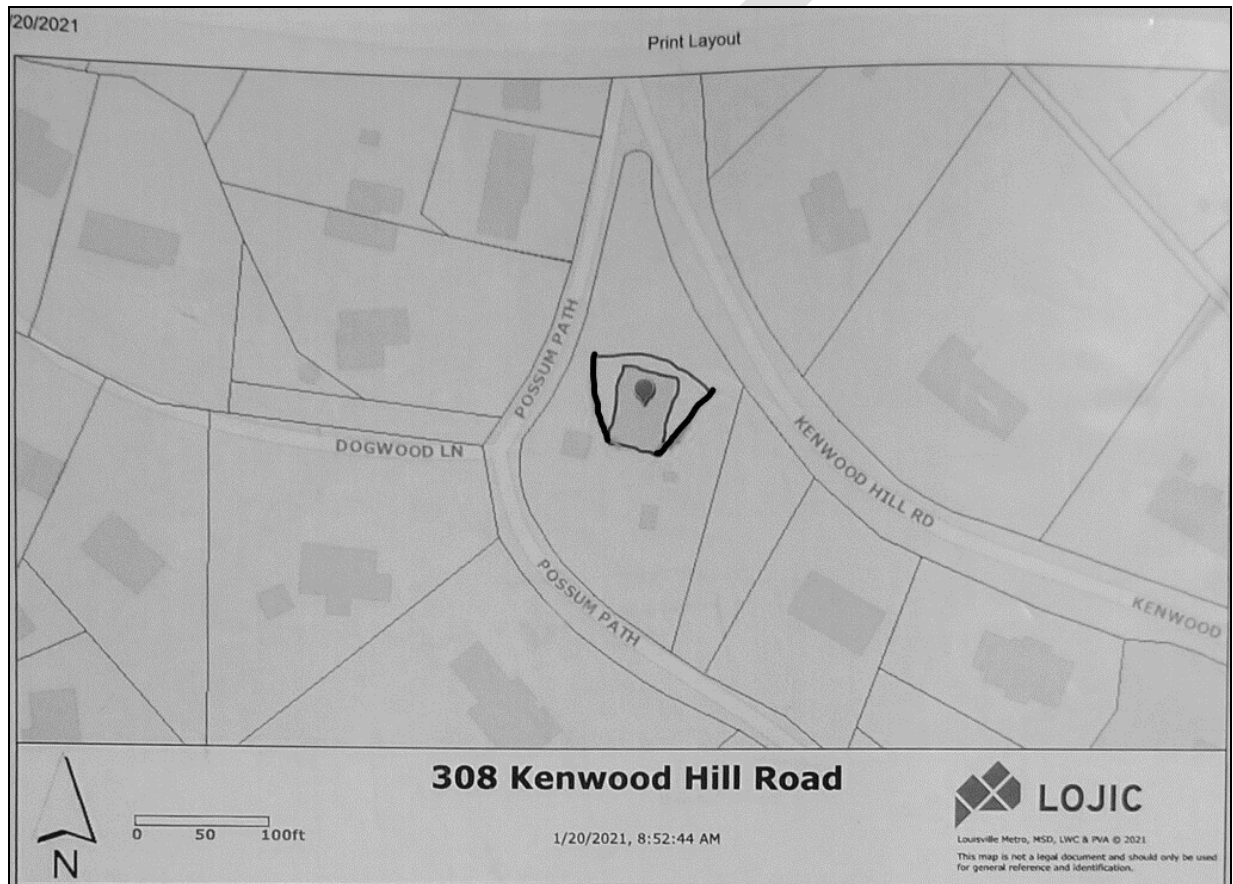


Figure 18. LOJIC map showing location of the designation boundary for the Cornelia Bush Gordon House in black.

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