

# Frost & Raymond

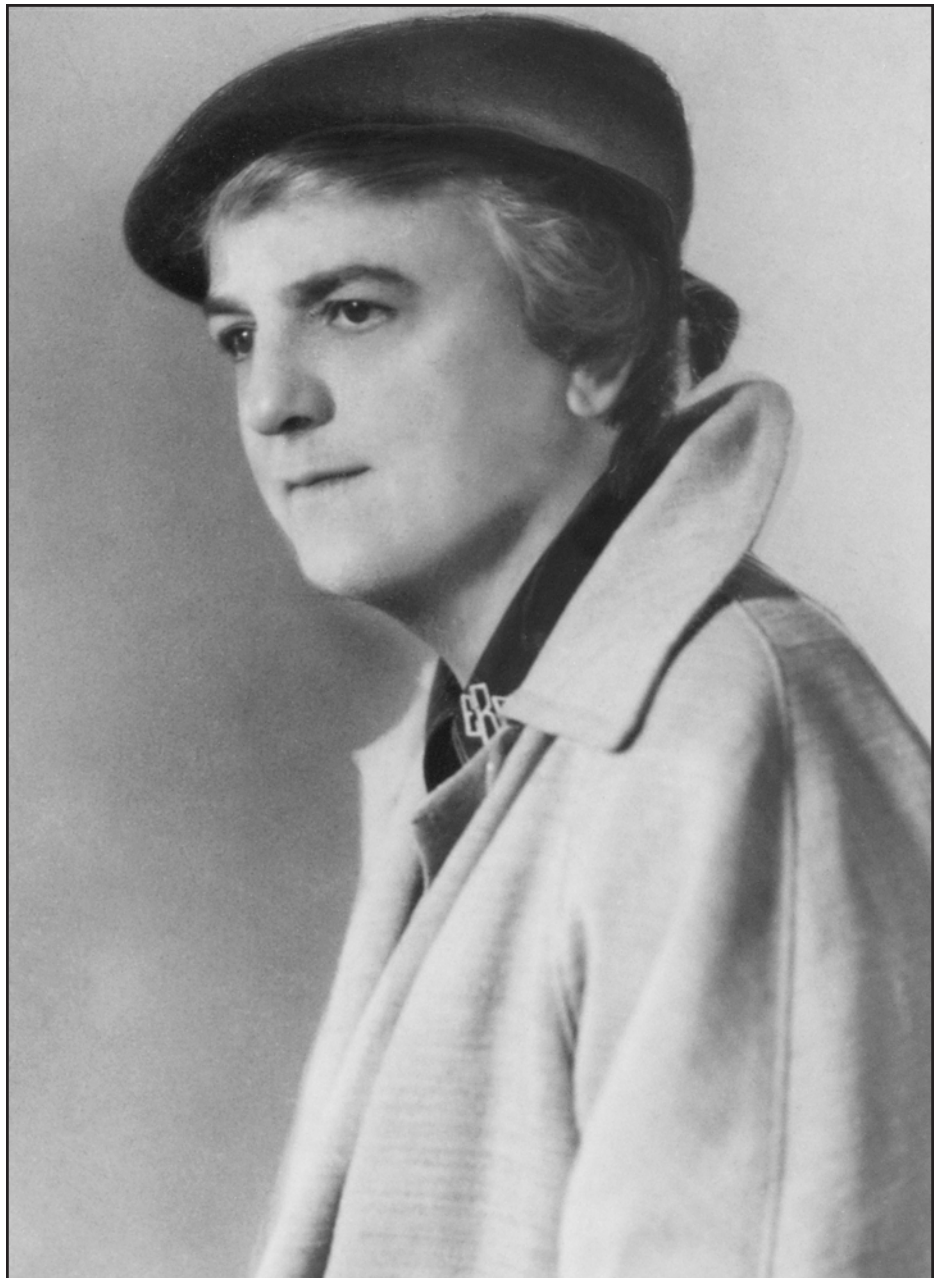
## Suburbia and the Single-Family House of the 1920s

Nancy Gruskin

“Building homes for other people appeals to me so much more than building and taking care of one for myself,” wrote Boston architect Eleanor Raymond (1887–1989) to her fellow Wellesley College alumnae in 1919. Raymond (figure 1) was born in Cambridge in 1887. A 1909 graduate of Wellesley College, she became interested in gardening and landscape architecture after completing her undergraduate education.

In 1916, Raymond enrolled at the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture for Women. The school was then just a year old, having been formed by Harvard University architecture professor Henry Atherton Frost (1883–1952) in 1915 when a colleague persuaded Frost to give evening drafting lessons to an alumna of Radcliffe College. The Cambridge School provided women with a unique opportunity to receive academic training in architecture in an all-female environment. But the school’s curriculum, which focused solely on the study of domestic design and gardens, reflected prevailing gender biases and effectively confined graduates to residential work. And yet, as Raymond’s message to her classmates suggests, the Cambridge School created professional opportunities unimaginable to previous generations of American women.<sup>1</sup>

After graduation in 1919, Raymond became a partner in Frost’s firm.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, little is known of their working relationship. One can safely assume, however, that given Frost’s significant teaching commitments, Raymond oversaw the firm’s commissions and daily



Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School

FIGURE 1. Eleanor Raymond

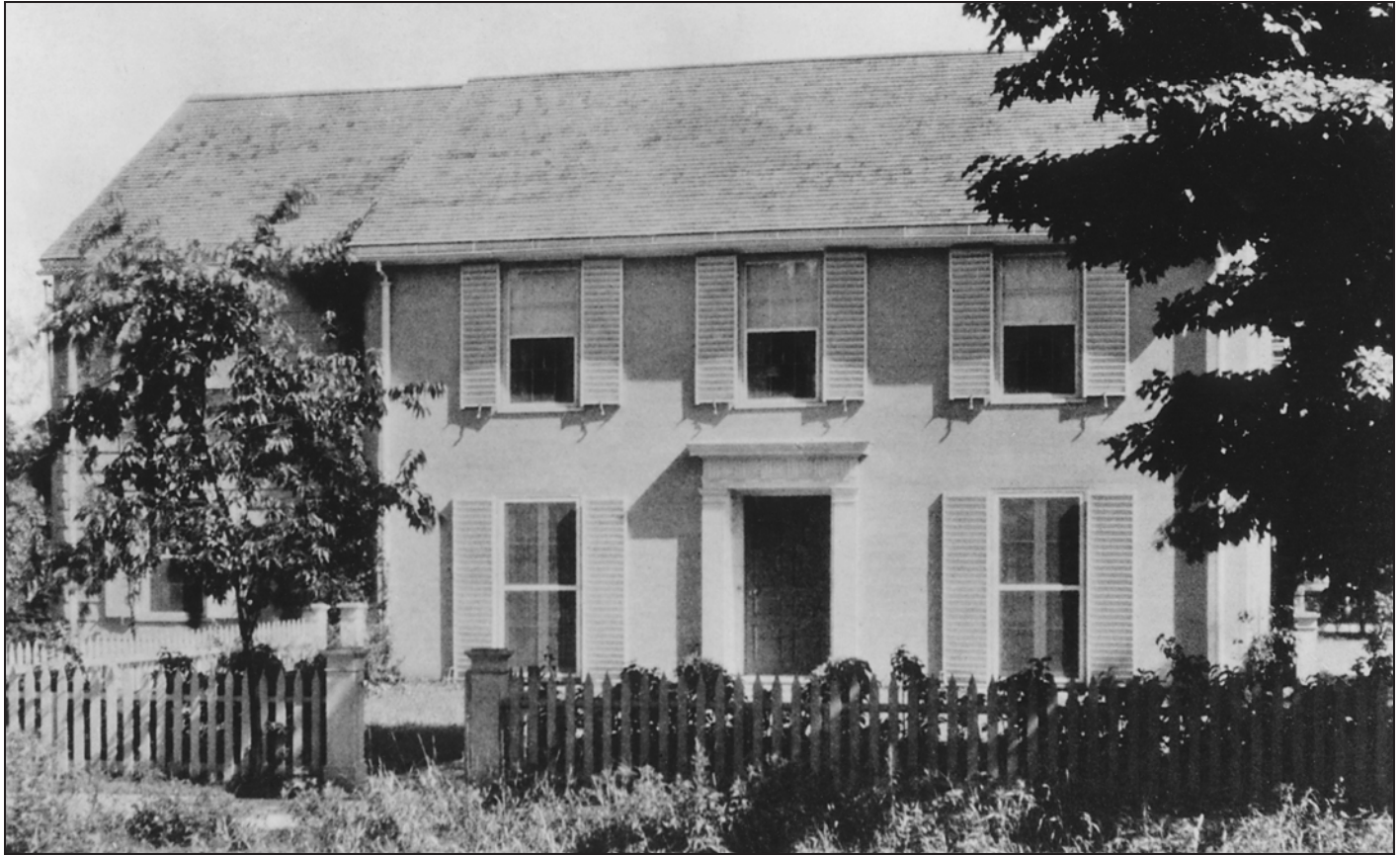


FIGURE 2. Entrance façade of James H. Cleaves house, 10 Lawrence Street, Winchester, 1921, designed by Frost and Raymond. Illustrated in *House Beautiful*, November 1922.

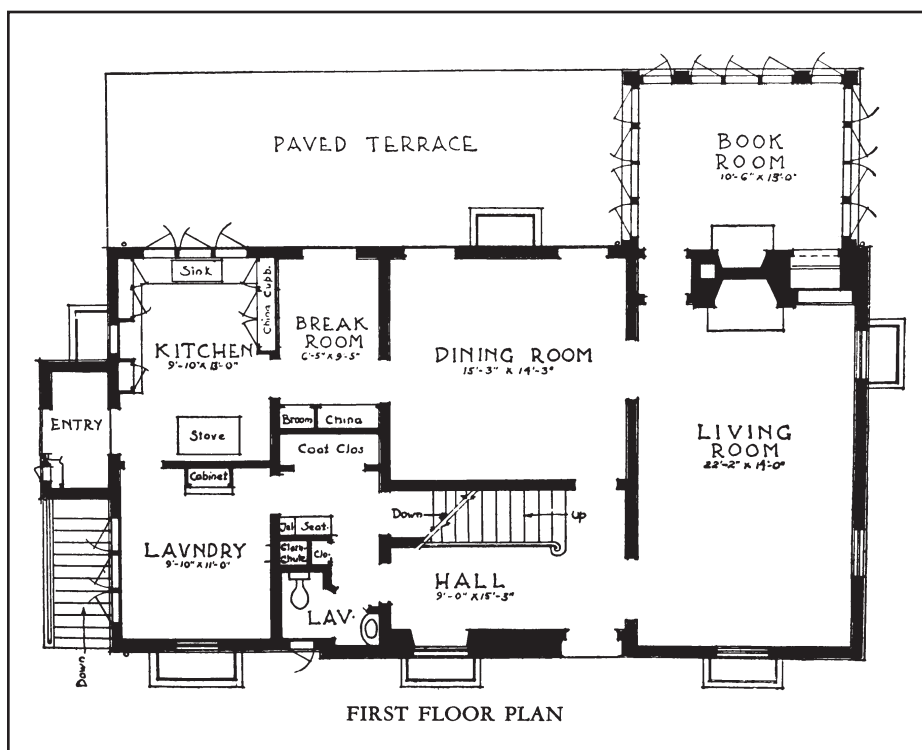


FIGURE 3. First-floor plan of the Cleaves house. From *House Beautiful*, November 1922.

operations. The printed announcement of their partnership stated that the firm would specialize in “the private house, including its gardens, interior decoration, and furnishings.” By taking this course, Frost and Raymond stood to capitalize from the middle-class housing boom of the 1920s. The number of newly constructed, single-family houses in suburban America nearly tripled between 1920 and 1922, reaching a peak in 1925.<sup>3</sup>

Winchester, like many metropolitan suburbs of the post-World War I era, experienced significant growth in the 1920s. Between 1920 and 1929, the town’s population increased just over twenty-one percent, and the number of single-family houses in Winchester rose from 2,091 to 2,967.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Winchester prospered. According to a 1984 study of Boston’s suburbs, Winchester climbed from the thirty-seventh position in 1890 to the fifth position in 1940 on the list of most affluent communities in metropolitan Boston.<sup>5</sup>





The house Frost and Raymond designed at 10 Lawrence Street for Winchester salesman James H. Cleaves reflects these statistics (figure 2). Although the house encompasses only 1400 square feet, it cost over \$21,000 to build in 1921, approximately seven times the national average cost of a new home that year.<sup>6</sup>

The Cleaves house, which has served as a parsonage for the nearby First Baptist Church of Winchester since 1959, typified the smaller American house of the 1920s. The waning reliance on domestic servants, due in part to a government curtailment of European immigration in 1924, and the ready availability of labor-saving technologies such as vacuum cleaners, clothes washers, and central heating, changed domestic planning between the wars. The new interest in efficiency is reflected in the first floor plan of the Cleaves house (figure 3). An entrance hall separates the living and service wings of the house. A door at the left end of the hall leads to a small lavatory, a coat closet, and a laundry room. As originally designed, the laundry room accommodated a washing machine and an electric mangle and was planned to convert easily into a maid's room, should the need arise.

The kitchen adjoining the laundry room received particular attention from Frost and Raymond (figure 4). In an article written for *House Beautiful* magazine in 1992, Cambridge School alumna Rose Greely highlighted the kitchen's ergonomic design:

Looking beyond the breakfast room, the old-fashioned housekeeper will at first be struck by the small size of the kitchen. But one by one, its conveniences will press upon her notice, until she realizes that nothing is lacking, that on the contrary, everything is so compactly planned that the cook's labor is cut in half. She will be impressed by the sink,

**FIGURE 4. (top)** The kitchen was compactly planned and designed to provide a comfortable workspace for the cook. From *House Beautiful*, November 1922.



**FIGURE 5. (bottom)** The breakfast room included a door that opened onto a terrace. From *House Beautiful*, November 1922.





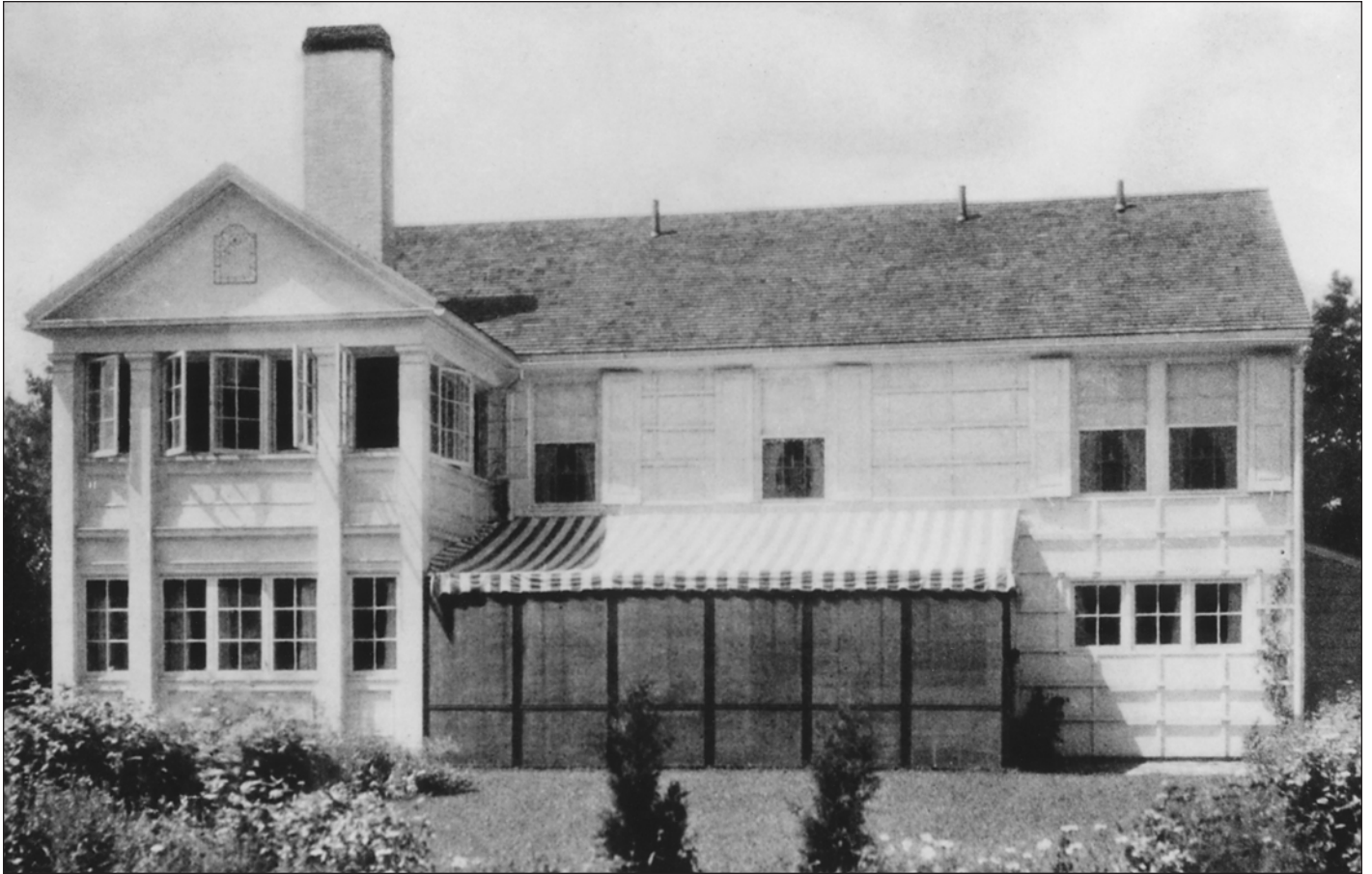


FIGURE 8. The garden façade includes an ell with the sunroom on the first floor and sleeping porch on the second floor. An awning covers the terrace. From *House Beautiful*, November 1922.

On the second floor (figure 7), a bedroom and dressing room for the owners of the house are arranged within the footprint of the downstairs living room. The master suite includes a sleeping porch. Three additional bedrooms and a bathroom complete the second floor.

In its symmetry, massing, and exterior detail, the Cleaves house was inspired by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century domestic architecture. On the street side, the demarcation between the service wing and the living wing is denoted by a slight setback of the former (figure 2). The two wings were further differentiated through the use of materials—originally, the living wing was finished with flat tongue and grooved siding and the service wing was clad in wood shingles. An austere



FIGURE 9. Rachel Raymond house, Belmont, 1931, designed by Eleanor Raymond.

Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Harvard Design School

entranceway framed by pilasters and a classical entablature adds a vertical element to the otherwise horizontal façade, as do the elongated windows of the first floor. On the garden side, the visual effect is more three-dimensional (figure 8). The first-floor book room and the second-floor sleeping porch form an ell that borrows vocabulary from Greek Revival architecture of the 1830s and 1840s.

Writing about the Cleaves house in 1928, art historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., saw the potential of its design as a way to break through the “impasse” of traditionalism that typified American architecture of the period. According to Hitchcock, who would later co-author *The International Style*, a book that introduced European modernism

to an American audience, the wooden latticework on the garden façade of the house was “as modern as Oud’s wire grilles on his houses at the Hoek van Holland.”<sup>9</sup> Hitchcock may have overemphasized the aesthetic similarities between the Cleaves house and the work of European modernists such as J. J. P. Oud, most likely in an effort to advance the cause of modern architecture. But he correctly gauged the conservative taste of New England clients. Generally unwilling to embrace the concept of houses as “machines for living,” most New Englanders preferred to live in Capes, Colonials, and Tudors.

Raymond, however, exhibited a great interest in European modernism. She and her partner, Ethel Power, sought out the work of Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and

other European modernists during a trip to Europe in 1930. The following year, Raymond designed a Bauhaus-inspired house in Belmont for her sister Rachel Raymond (figure 9).

Yet the Cleaves house proved to be a more representative work in Raymond’s oeuvre. The period details of the house, its compact plan, and Raymond’s attention to the needs of the single family and the single-family housekeeper were understandably of immense appeal to upper middle-class families searching for modern conveniences in a comfortably familiar form.

(Nancy Gruskin, a resident of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is an architectural historian and a lawyer.)

## NOTES

1. For more biographical information on Raymond, see Doris Cole, *Eleanor Raymond, Architect* (Philadelphia: Art Alliance Press, 1981); Nancy Gruskin, *Building Context: The Personal and Professional Life of Eleanor Raymond, Architect (1887–1989)* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1997); and Nancy Gruskin, “Designing Woman: Writing about Eleanor Raymond,” in *Singular Women: Writing the Artist*, eds. Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
2. The firm of Frost & Raymond continued until 1935, when Raymond opened her own practice in Boston.
3. See Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989); George Soule, *The Economic History of the United States: Prosperity Decade, From War to Depression (1917–1929)* (New York: Rinehart, 1947); and Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
4. Bruce Winchester Stone, *History of Winchester, Massachusetts* (Winchester, Mass.: Town of Winchester, 1975), p. 40.
5. Matthew Edel, Elliott D. Sclar, and Daniel Luna, *Shaky Palaces: Homeowning and Social Mobility in Boston’s Suburbanization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 357.
6. See Preston William Slosson, *The Great Crusade and After, 1914–1928* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 141, and Wright, *Building the Dream*, p. 195.

7. Rose Greely, “A Small House of Distinction,” *House Beautiful* 52 (November 1922), p. 423. See also “House for James H. Cleaves, Winchester, Massachusetts,” *The Architectural Record* 66 (November 1929), pp. 442–443; “House of James H. Cleaves, Esq., Winchester, Massachusetts,” *The Architectural Forum* (January 1927), pp. 95–96; and Ethel Power, *The Smaller American House* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1927).

Raymond’s life partner, Ethel Power (1881–1969), was the editor of *House Beautiful* magazine when the Cleaves house was featured in the publication. The two women met in 1915 through their volunteer work as Massachusetts suffragettes, and they enrolled together at the Cambridge School. Power’s tenure at *House Beautiful* provided Raymond (and the firm of Frost & Raymond) with invaluable publicity. From the early 1920s until 1934, when the magazine’s editorial offices moved to New York City and Power resigned in order to stay with Raymond in Boston, Raymond’s work was featured at least twice a year in the magazine.

8. The wall separating the kitchen from the breakfast room has since been removed, creating an expanded kitchen.
9. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., “Four Harvard Architects,” 2 *The Hound & Horn* (September 1928), p. 45. Hoek van Holland (literally, “Corner of Holland”) is a town in South Holland in the Netherlands. Dutch architect J.J.P. Oud designed low-cost workers’ housing in Hoek van Holland in the mid 1920s.

Number 6, 2005

THE ARCHITECTS OF WINCHESTER,  
MASSACHUSETTS

Published by the



WINCHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

15 High Street  
P.O. Box 127  
Winchester, MA 01890

[www.winchesterhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.winchesterhistoricalsociety.org)

EDITOR  
Maureen Meister

GRAPHICS  
LMY Studio, Inc.