



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE**  
**MAYOR**

**MICHAEL F. GLAVIN**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT**

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Site:	640 Mystic Avenue
Case:	HPC 2015.085
Applicant Name:	Jai Singh Khalsa
Date of Application:	December 12, 2015
Recommendation:	Significant
Hearing Date:	January 26, 2015

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**I. Historical Association**

*Historical Context:*

Somerville was still predominantly rural with factories springing up along the waterways and rail corridors. Irish immigrants were still supplying the largest group of unskilled labor. The house was built on land owned by the Boston Bottle Works circa 1870 to house its workers.

The Bottle Works manufactured a variety of products of which the most prominent today are electrical insulators. The company was managed by Samuel Oakman who patented several modifications of the insulators and other inventions related to the use of electricity and refrigeration. The insulators have become collectable items. Numerous images and information regarding this aspect of Samuel Oakman's output are readily findable on the internet. See [http://www.nia.org/history\\_and\\_guide/chapters/Vol\\_1-6\\_New\\_England\\_Manufacturers.pdf](http://www.nia.org/history_and_guide/chapters/Vol_1-6_New_England_Manufacturers.pdf) starting on the third page for a short history of the Boston Bottle Works.



Census information reveals that most of the glass workers in Somerville were of Irish extraction. In 1880, of the 113 people listed as working in the glass industry and living in Somerville, 85 of them were from Ireland. Men and youths as young as 12 years old formed the work force in the 1870s and 1880s with a large number of jobs ranging in skill from packers to glass cutters.

See table at end of Report for information on the known or possible residents of 640 Mystic Avenue. Due to the vagueness of addresses and the inability to find the owners listed on the maps as residents of the City, it can be assumed that the houses were probably rental property until the 1890s. The 1895 Bromley indicates that Patrick

McLaughlin, vegetable and produce peddler owned 640 Mystic Avenue. In 1905 Patrick McLaughlin applied for a license to “cry goods in the streets” of Somerville from the Board of Aldermen.

#### *Evolution of Site:*

The 1874 Hopkins map shows four houses along Mystic Avenue under the ownership of the Boston Bottle Works. These were intended to house workers of the Bottle Works as can be seen in the occupations of the few tenants that can be found in searchable 1873 and 1876 City Directories on line. By 1895 the houses were in private ownership. From census and directory information, the houses were occupied by workers throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century until at least 1965 with jobs such as mechanic, electrician and sanitary worker. Families stayed in residence for decades. In the 1960s, I-93 was extended through Somerville and into Boston. This construction project covered the remaining shoreline of the Mystic River and obliterated any possible remaining portions of the factory.

#### *Architectural Description:*

The house is a 1½ story workers cottage with the end gable facing the street. It is a typical high basement cottage with an enclosed front porch spanning the width of the house. There is a central chimney and a shed roof addition on the rear. On the west side, modern French doors and porch were added as well as an additional chimney.

#### *Summary:*

640 Mystic Avenue is the last in a group of four houses that appear on the 1874 Hopkins map in association with the Boston Bottle Works. It has a high basement and simple detailing typical of the buildings constructed for workers. It has been home to the McLaughlin family in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from at least 1895 through 1940. The men dealt in produce.

The Boston Bottle Works made numerous utilitarian glass bottles and containers but are now known for their electric insulators for which Samuel Oakman, agent, received numerous patents for the manufacture of insulators among other inventions.

#### **Findings on Historical Association**

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) **importantly associated with people, events or history** or (b) historically or architecturally significant (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (b) are at the end of the next section.*

**(a)** In accordance with the historic information obtained from *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlas, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, such as *Somerville Past and Present*, Staff find 640 Mystic Avenue to be importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth.

The subject building is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to an association with the Boston Bottle Works, Irish immigration and employment, and the type of housing typical for the working classes.

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## **II. Historical and Architectural Significance**

*The findings for historical and/or architectural significance of a historic property address the period, style, method of building construction and association with a reputed architect or builder of the subject property, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B).*

The period of significance for 640 Mystic Avenue begins with its construction as workers housing for the Boston Bottle Works and continues as housing for people of a similar class throughout the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### ***Integrity***

*The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.*

- a. **Location:** The building has not been moved.
- b. **Design:** The design is a simple gable end building with minimal detailing and with the exception of the added side chimney typical of its period. The building has a high basement typical of workers cottages in areas of high water table and near brick yards. The enclosed front porch has likely been replaced and is unlikely to be the original design.
- c. **Materials:** The building is wood frame with asbestos siding covering the original wood clapboard. The foundation is brick.
- d. **Alterations:** The building has asbestos siding, a modern windows, an enclosed front porch, side entry replacing a window and an added chimney on the west side. The barn was torn down in 1964 by Warren Clement.

### ***Evaluation of Integrity:***

The alterations have not affected the essential form and character of the house. The building has all the hallmarks of a workers cottage in size, shape and materials. The high basement form is a frequent characteristic of such buildings in Somerville and Cambridge.

*Does the subject parcel represent a distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction?*

The house is one of four in a row constructed for glassworkers in the early 1870s. As such it has minimal detailing and elaboration. According to the various maps and atlases, these houses were the only buildings on this stretch of road until the 1920s when a gas station was constructed near the town line with Medford. Since their construction in the early 1870s through the Second World War, these four houses dominated this stretch of what is now Mystic Avenue. In the late 1940s, veterans' housing was constructed in the former Mystic Quarry belonging to the politically prominent Fisk family to the east.

*Does the subject parcel represent an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or region due to its singular physical characteristics or landscape?*

The location along a major artery calls attention to this distinctive grouping of workers cottages with their diminutive size, lack of detail and the front porches oriented toward the Mystic River. These buildings are distinguished by their marked difference from the modern post-war and late 20<sup>th</sup> century housing to the east and the commercial automotive-oriented structures to the west.

### **Findings for Historical and Architectural Significance**

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) **historically or architecturally significant** (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (a) can be found at the end of the previous section.*

**(b)** In accordance with the *Finding on Historical and Architectural Significance*, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect or builder, either by itself

or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, which assess the ability of the property to convey significance, Staff find 640 Mystic Avenue historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant due to its form as a high basement workers cottage from the early 1870s within a group of similar buildings associated with the Boston Bottle Works, Samuel Oakman, inventor and Irish immigration.

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### III. Recommendation

*Recommendations are based upon an analysis by Historic Preservation Staff of the permit application and the required findings for the Demolition Review Ordinance, which requires archival and historical research, and an assessment of historical and architectural significance, conducted prior to the public meeting for a Determination of Significance. This report may be revised or updated with a new recommendation and/or findings based upon additional information provided to Staff or through further research.*

*For a Determination of Significance, the structure must be either (A) listed on the National Register or (B) at least 50 years old.*

(A) The structure is NOT listed on or within an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor is the structure the subject of a pending application for listing on the National Register.

**OR**

(B) The structure, circa 1874, is at least 50 years old.

**AND**

*For a Determination of Significance under (B), the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) historically or architecturally significant.*

- (a) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlasses, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 640 Mystic Avenue importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth.**

The subject building is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to an association with the Boston Bottle Works, Irish immigration and employment, and the type of housing typical for the working classes.

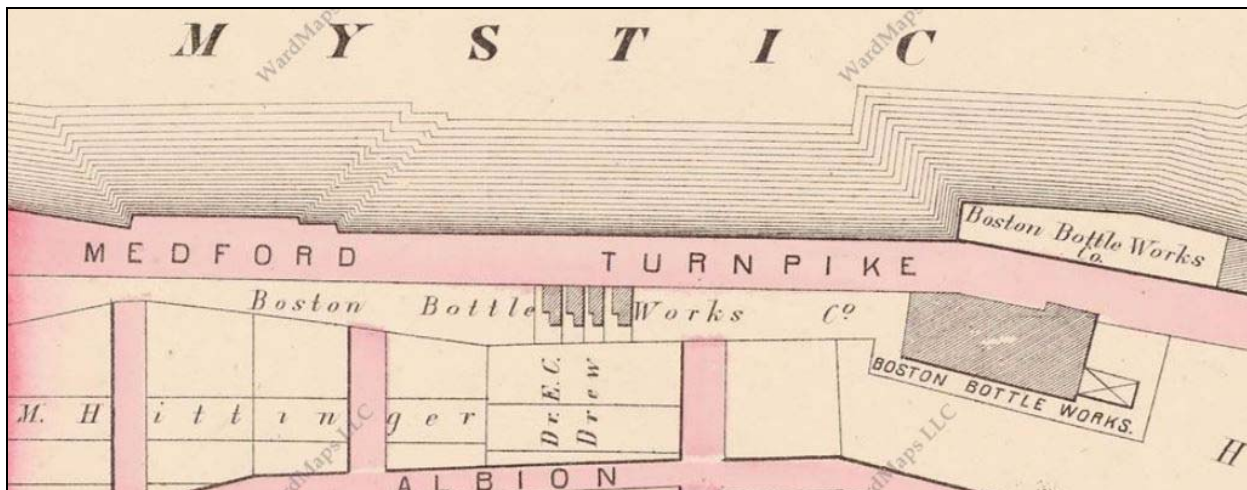
**OR**

- (b) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical and Architectural Significance*, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, the ability to convey significance, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 640 Mystic Avenue historically and architecturally significant.**

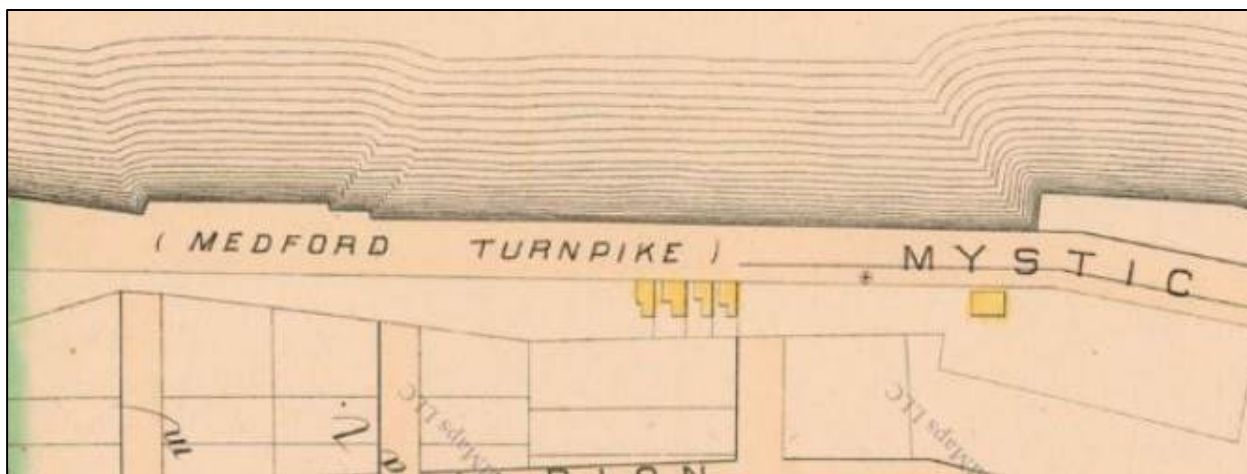
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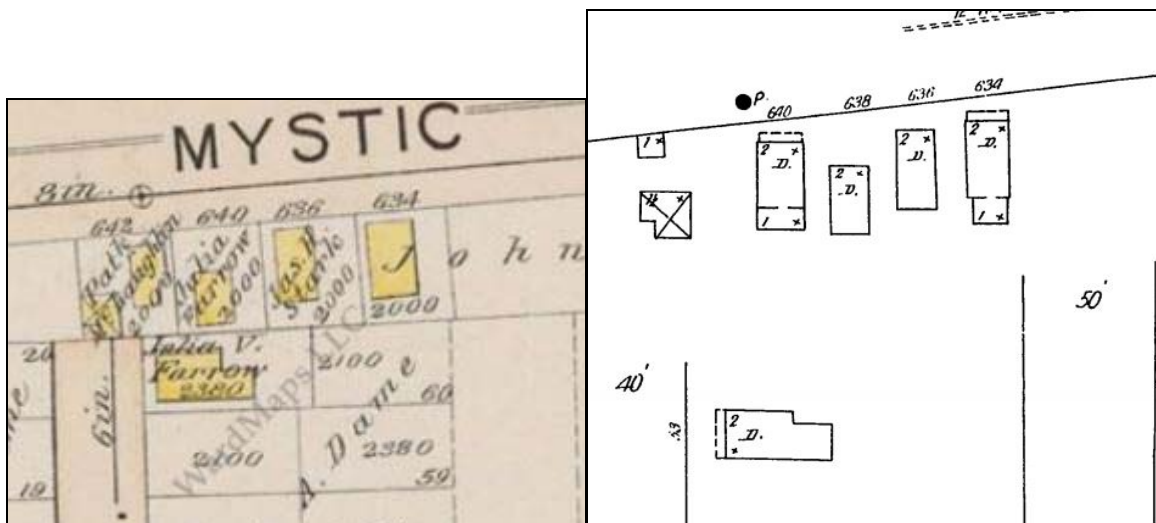




1874 Hopkins Plate I detail

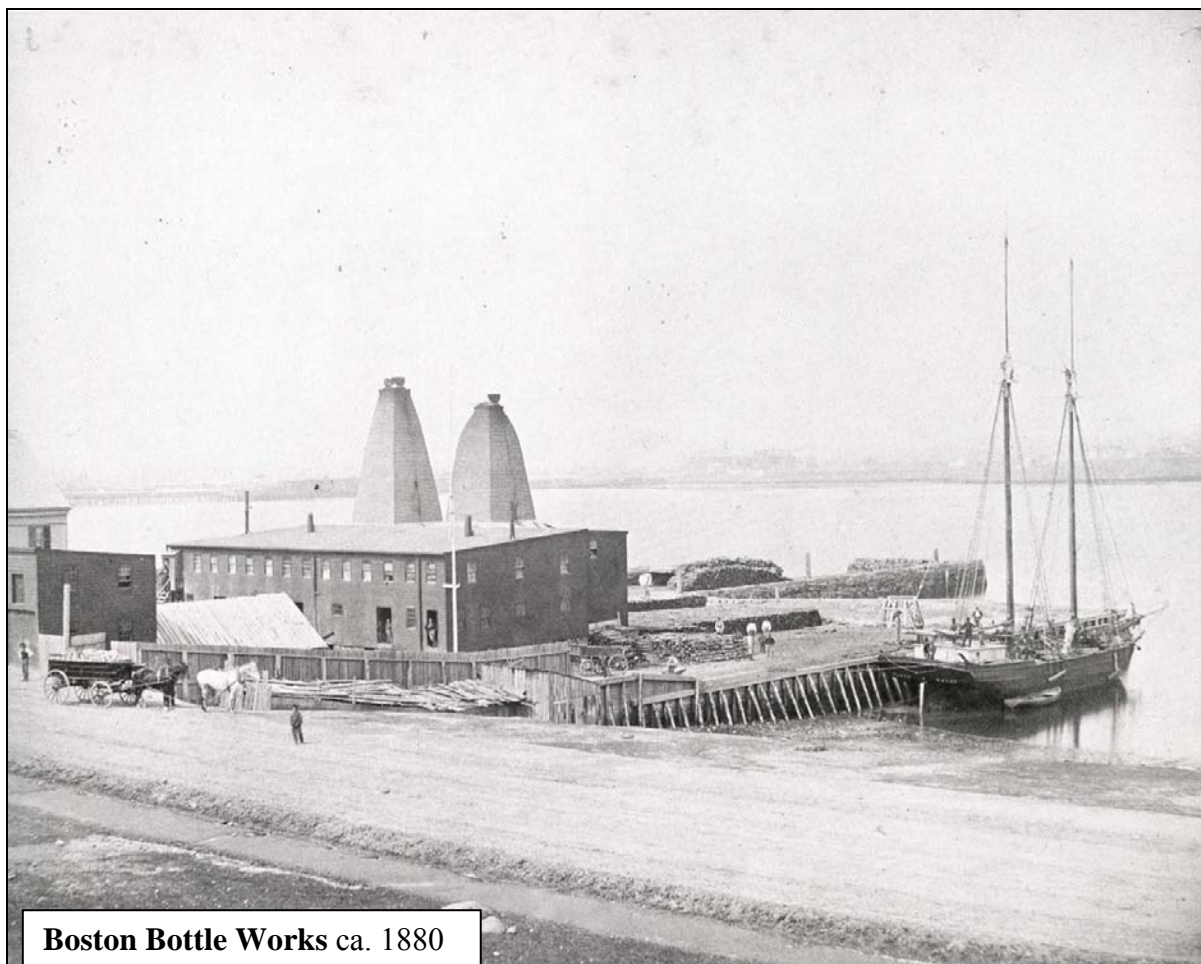


1884 Hopkins Plate 11 detail

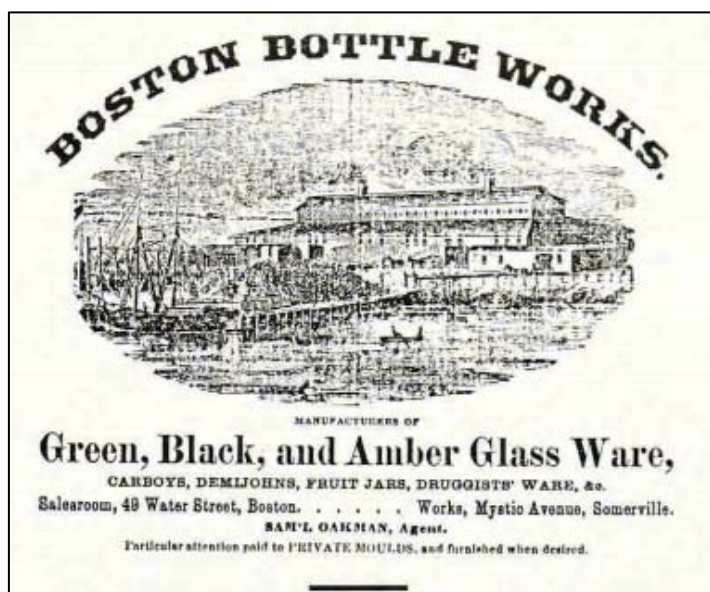


1895 Bromley Plate 12

1900 Sanborn Plate



Boston Bottle Works ca. 1880









Year	Resident	Age	Place of Birth	Occupation	Relation	Address
1873	Felix Carter			Engineer, Boston Glass Works		hse on Mystic n. Boston Glass Works
1876	George W. Felton			Glass Packer, Glass Works		hse on Mystic n. Glass Works
1876	Jacob Felton			Glass Packer, Glass Works		hse on Mystic n. Glass Works
1876	John Reed			Laborer		hse on Mystic n. Glass Works
1884	Mrs. Mary Brogan	54	New Brunswick			hse on Mystic n. Medford Line
1884	James W. Brogan	19	New Brunswick	Teamster		bds Mrs. Brogan's Mystic
1900	Patrick McLaughlin	53	Ireland	Vegetable Peddler	Head	640 Mystic Avenue
1900	Anne McLaughlin		Ireland		Wife	640 Mystic Avenue
1900	Patrick J. McLaughlin		Scotland	Vegetable Peddler	Son	640 Mystic Avenue
1900	Elizabeth A. McLaughlin	21	Massachusetts		Daughter	640 Mystic Avenue
1910	Patrick McLaughlin	63	Ireland	Vegetable Peddler	Head	640 Mystic Avenue
1910	Elizabeth A. McLaughlin	27	Massachusetts	Bookkeeper	Daughter	640 Mystic Avenue
1910	Patrick J. Gallagher	31	Massachusetts	Carpenter	Nephew	640 Mystic Avenue
1920	Patrick McLaughlin	73	Ireland	Vegetable Peddler	Head	640 Mystic Avenue
1920	Patrick J. McLaughlin	50	Massachusetts	Vegetable Peddler	Nephew	640 Mystic Avenue
1920	Rebecca E. F. McLaughlin	48	Massachusetts	Bookkeeper	D-I-L	640 Mystic Avenue
1930	Patrick J. McLaughlin	60	Irish Free State	Vegetable Peddler	Head	640 Mystic Avenue
1930	Rebecca E. F. McLaughlin	58	Irish Free State	Homemaker	Wife	640 Mystic Avenue
1940	Rebecca E. F. McLaughlin	69	Northern Ireland	Attendant	Head	640 Mystic Avenue
1940	Elizabeth House	73	Northern Ireland		Sister	640 Mystic Avenue
1945	John O'Connell	71		Retired		640 Mystic Avenue
1945	John W. O'Connell	48		Defense		640 Mystic Avenue
1950	Warren J. Clement	30		Mailer		640 Mystic Avenue
1950	Mary M. Clement	31		Housewife		640 Mystic Avenue
1955	Warren J. Clement	35		Mailer		640 Mystic Avenue
1955	Mary M. Clement	36		Housewife		640 Mystic Avenue
1960	Warren J. Clement	40		Mailer		640 Mystic Avenue
1960	Mary M. Clement	41		Housewife		640 Mystic Avenue
1965	Warren J. Clement	45		Mailer		640 Mystic Avenue
1965	Mary M. Clement	46		Housewife		640 Mystic Avenue