



**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:	23 Cleveland Street
Case:	HPC 2015.020
Applicant Name:	23 Cleveland LLC
Date of Application:	May 21, 2015
Recommendation:	Significant
Hearing Date:	June 16, 2015

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**I. Historical Association**

*Historical Context:*

In 1843, George Brastow (who became Somerville's first mayor in 1872-1873) commissioned surveyor Alexander Wadsworth to lay out a residential area on the southern slope of Spring Hill.

This area is also the site of the Round House (1856) located at 36 Atherton Street and designed by local inventor Enoch Robinson.,

Built in 1869-1870, during the first administration of President Ulysses S. Grant, 23 Cleveland Street provides physical evidence documenting the second wave of house construction occurring on the south slope of Spring Hill during 1865-1873. Completed on the eve of Somerville's incorporation as a City (1872), the modest scale of this house was typical of many houses built in Somerville around 1870.

This section of Cleveland Street was originally part of Elm Place. The street was renamed in 1908 when the new Cleveland Street was put through from Central Street. Elm Place is one of the original streets platted by Alexander Wadsworth.

This one-and-one-half story to two-story workers cottage is one of the earliest buildings on Cleveland Street/Elm Place. It is set on an ample lot. The 1874 Hopkins atlas indicates that the house is owned by John Nichols, wharfinger. A wharfinger is someone who owns or supervises the running of a wharf or group of wharves. Nichols's house is located on Central Street with a large stable or barn lying across the end of Elm Place thus ending the street running perpendicular to Harvard Street.



According to the 1876 and 1881 City Directories, the house was occupied by a painter, John R. Mills. By 1884, the house is attributed by the Hopkins Atlas and the City Directory to the ownership of a dyer at the Middlesex Bleachery, Richard Barlow. He is known to be at this address through 1895. He was also known to have been a member of the Bay State Fraternity where he was Vice President of the Somerville Lodge No.1 in 1884. The Bay State Fraternity was a mutual aid society.

1895 Bromley shows Josephine Williams as the owner of the house on Elm Place/Cleveland Street. At this time the streetscape almost fully developed although the street has yet to be cut through to Central Street

The 1903 Directory lists a salesman, John W. MacDonald as the head of household at this address. MacDonald is mentioned in the City Reports as a member of the Common Council for Ward 2 in 1887, 1888 and 1897.

In 1909, William St. G. Little, resident of the soon to be renamed Cleveland Street at number 23 commented to the Board of Aldermen regarding the installation of a utility pole in front of his house and in 1911 on the taking of some of his land for the construction of the street.

#### *Architectural Description:*

23 Cleveland Street is a 1 and ½ story on the east side rising to 2 stories on the west workers cottage with the gables toward the side lot lines. The front porch extends the across the central portion of the building with a central entry door located at the original west edge of the building. The siding and windows are all vinyl, probably replaced in the late 1990s when the porch was rebuilt.

The original house was probably a two room over two room 1 ½ story workers cottage with a slate foundation. A 2-story addition was constructed on the west side adding a 3<sup>rd</sup> bedroom to the building and a small bathroom. This is evidenced in the brick and slate rubble foundation. The rear shed portion of the house was also probably constructed at different times as the lower shed roof shows a flatter profile and stronger connection to the taller 2-story section of the main roof. The larger rear shed roof over what was probably the dining area sags. A smaller shed is attached to the west side.

A circa 1922 2-car cement block garage is located in the northeast corner of the lot.

#### *Summary:*

23 Cleveland Street is a workers cottage from early in the third quarter of the nineteenth century constructed on the development planned by George A. Brastow, real estate developer and first mayor of the City of Somerville (1872-1874). The house is typical of a workers cottage in size, massing and form.

#### **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 23 Cleveland Street 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 its association with workers and the Middlesex Bleachery as well as the early development by George Brastow of Spring Hill, and John Nichols, Boston wharfinger.

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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 23 Cleveland Street begins circa 1870 with its construction on the Brastow development for workers housing on land owned by John Nichols and continues into the present day as the use of this structure remains consistent.

### ***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.*

### **Location:**

The subject structure is located across from the Carr School. An earlier school building had been on that same site during the period that 23 Cleveland Street was constructed. The location has not been altered and the dwelling is sited on its original location at the southwest corner of the lot.

### **Design:**

While the building has evolved over time to reach its present configuration, the original form, and massing is clearly evident. The pattern of fenestration has not been altered. Remaining architectural features are few but include the shallow eaves on the primary facade; however, working class cottages often did not include much detail. Doors, windows and roof materials have been replaced, but the building retains integrity of design due to the simple form and massing.

### **Materials:**

The materials that compose this structure are predominantly wood with flint and brick foundations while asphalt shingles were added to the roof at a later period, as were vinyl siding and windows.

### **Alterations:**

The major alterations to the house were completed by 1900. An addition shown on 1925 Sanborn is no longer in evidence. These alterations, with the exception of the vinyl materials, have been a part of the building for over a century and are part of the architectural character of the building.

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

The subject structure retains a moderate level of historical and architectural integrity due to the likely c. 1870 date of construction; retention of simple form, massing, fenestration patterns; and as part of the early development of Spring Hill.

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

The house is one of the smallest in the neighborhood and the street since much of the development on the street occurred after 1910 when Cleveland Street connected Elm Place to Central Street and the Nichols estate was subdivided.

*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 house is typical of workers housing but is located in an area that changed around it. It is noteworthy for its diminutive size but does not stand out in a street with many 3-deckers and the 1898 brick Carr Schoolhouse.

### **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 23 Cleveland Street historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant due to its integrity as a workers cottage, which is clearly visible in its scale, massing, form, and its association with the Middlesex Bleachery.

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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 1870, 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/atlas, 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 23 Cleveland Street 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.**

Staff found the subject building importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to its association with workers and the Middlesex Bleachery as well as the early development by George Brastow of Spring Hill, and John Nichols, Boston wharfinger.

**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 23 Cleveland Street historically and architecturally significant.**

Staff found the subject building historically and architecturally significant due to its integrity as a workers cottage, which is clearly visible in its scale, massing, form, and its association with the Middlesex Bleachery, John Nichols, and the Brastow development.



23 Cleveland Street  
Assessors Map



Brastow Development

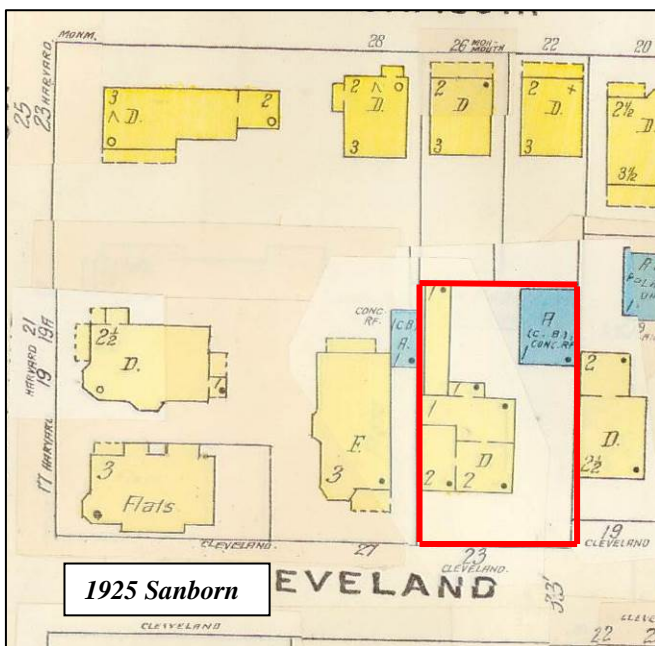
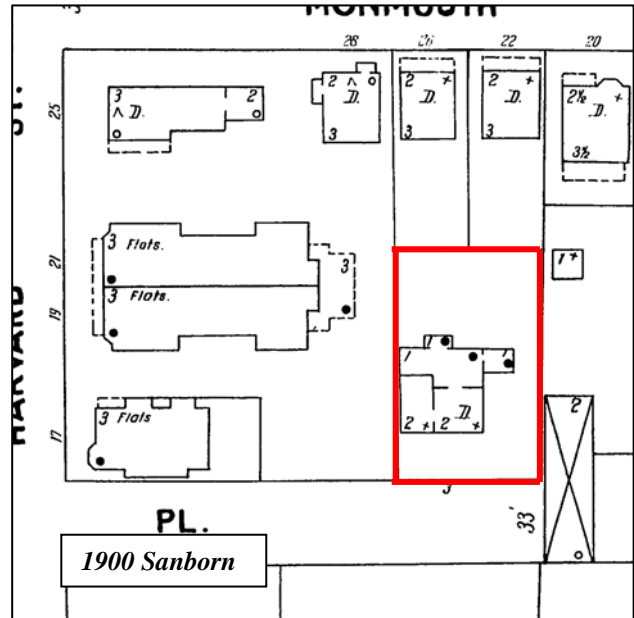
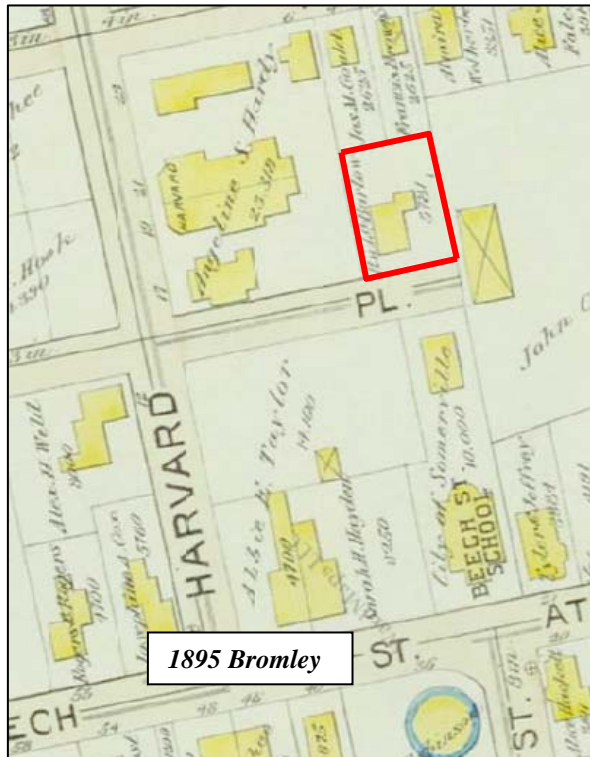
SPRING HILL IN 1852



1874 Hopkins



1884 Hopkins







23 Cleveland Street - May 2015