



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

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT

Site: 16 Chester Place Garage
Case: HPC 2015.075
Applicant Name: Matthew Atterbury & Margaret Carkeet
Date of Application: October 17, 2014
Recommendation: Significant
Hearing Date: November 18, 2014

I. Historical Association

Historical Context: As car ownership grew late 1910s and 20s, so did shelter for garages. concrete block garages throughout the City erected during this period. Numerous prefabricated metal garages were also installed. ones appear at first glance to be wood due to the shaped panels.

Historical Context: Located on a side street just Square, Chester Place was platted and between 1884 and 1895. The 1895 Bromley that 16 Chester Place was used as income-property for Chester W. Kingsley, a Cambridge resident and political personage.

Architectural Description: The building is a small prefabricated steel garage installed on site in 1920 per building permit records by F. Forbes. Such buildings were widely available and were distributed through catalogs. It is not known who the manufacturer was of this particular garage. There are no maker's marks. See the *Invention and Technology* reprint at end of document for an overview of this type of structure.

Summary: The structure is a small prefabricated garage installed circa 1920 in the rear yard of a circa 1890 house outside of Davis Square. These structures were common although not as frequent as the concrete block garages.



during the
Most of the
were

The metal
clapboard

out Davis
developed
Atlas shows
producing

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 **do not** find the garage at 16 Chester Place 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 not found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City. The owner is not known for any particular association with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City and no known events important to the City occurred in the garage at 16 Chester Place.

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 16 Chester Place begins with the house's construction at some time between 1884 and 1895. It is a typical house of the era. The garage is also of a common type sold through Sears and other catalogs throughout the U.S. Modern versions are still available.

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 garage has not been moved.
- b. Design: The design is utilitarian and constructed for ease of assembly.
- c. Materials: The garage is metal.
- d. Alterations: There are no known alterations.

Evaluation of Integrity: The building has integrity as a circa 1920 prefabricated metal garage, emblematic of the growth of the adoption of the automobile as the main means of transportation.

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

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?

No, the parcel will not be affected by the removal of an outbuilding. The house and its neighbors form the streetscape not the small structures at the rear property line.

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 do not find the garage at 16 Chester Place historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is not found historically and architecturally significant. The garage is not designed by a known manufacturer.

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 1920, 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.

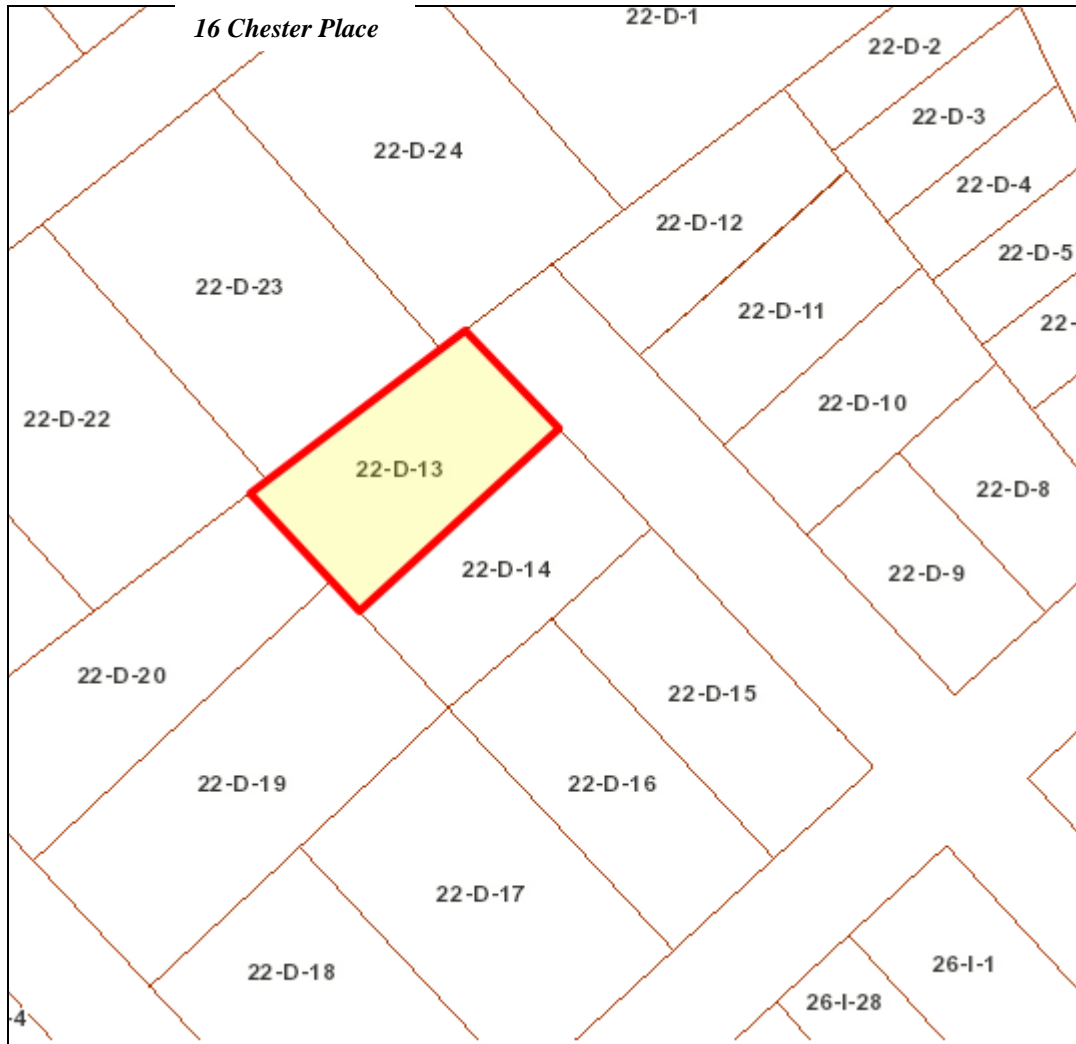
(a) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlasses, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do not find the garage at 16 Chester Place 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 not found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City. The owner is not known for any particular association with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City and no known events important to the City occurred in the garage at 16 Chester Place

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 do not find the garage at 16 Chester Place historically and architecturally significant.**

The subject building is not found historically and architecturally significant. The garage is not designed by a known manufacturer.



THE TIN GARAGE

Harry Matthei [1]

Summer 1997 | Volume 13, Issue 1

Antiquarians say, “the more there were, the fewer there are.” By 1927 fifteen million Model T Fords had been built, and to shelter these tin lizzies, thousands of tin garages were bolted, screwed, and banged together in back yards from Cape Cod to Puget Sound. Not many T’s are still around, and even fewer tin garages. Some of them, built carelessly or cheaply, just rusted to pieces and collapsed. Most of them outlived their usefulness. As the auto industry matured, cars grew wider and longer until by 1940 most tin garages couldn’t hold them. As a result, thousands were claimed in World War II scrap drives. Yet even today, if you look closely in older neighborhoods and rural communities, you’ll see the rare survivor, usually recycled as a storage shed. You can recognize it by its corrugated steel roof or its pressed-steel imitation clapboard siding—and by its inevitable rust.

Tin garages were the first mass-produced, prefabricated buildings spawned by the booming twentieth-century steel industry. The granddaddy of the Quonset hut, the tin garage flourished from about 1910 to the mid-1930s as the auto industry kept pouring out endless streams of cars. Galvanized (zinc-coated) strip steel had been rolled into corrugated sheets for roofing and siding even before the turn of the century, and roofs made from the steel supposedly “neither rusted

nor rotted.” They were versatile, easy to install, and almost indestructible. And the cost of steel dropped nearly as fast as its production soared: from eleven million tons in 1900 to forty-six million tons by 1920.

By the end of World War I, farmers, shopkeepers, and even blue-collar workers could afford to buy cars. But once they bought one, where would they keep it? You couldn’t just let your major investment stand out in the rain, especially since it might very well have no roof of its own. Of course, farmers had their barns, and rich folks had carriage houses. Then, with the post-World War I rush to suburbia and single-family tract housing, a new architectural phenomenon appeared: the garage—a word borrowed from the French *garer* (to shelter) that sounded much more sophisticated than shed.

As early as 1908 Sears, Roebuck had begun selling precut do-it-yourself wooden garages. Then in its 1916 Modern Homes catalogue appeared an all-steel nine-by-twelve-foot fireproof “portable garage,” including two-by-four-inch lumber for the sills, internal steel bracing, nuts, bolts, wire-reinforced glass windows, for \$62.75. The catalogue asserted that “two handy men can bolt garage together in a few hours.” (On the same page a 15-by-21-foot three-room house, “complete with floor,” was offered for \$226.)

By 1925 Sears was selling both single and double garages with names drawn from America’s glorious naval history: Monitor, Merrimac, and Ironsides. Prices had nearly doubled: The cheapest sold for \$119, at a time when a Model T could be had for \$290. The catalogue proudly announced that these latest garages were made of “guaranteed new ‘open-hearth’ steel.” The designers had taken care to duplicate traditional wooden construction features—recessed door panels, for example—in pressed steel. It was fine to be modern, but not too modern.

In one decade, from 1910 to 1920, the ratio of cars to citizens in the United States had rocketed from roughly one per two hundred to one per thirteen. Suddenly cars were everywhere. So were tin garages, but unlike the cars, they soon disappeared. During the 1920s home builders began offering wooden garages as optional extras. After a while almost every new house featured at least a carport and more often a fully attached garage, frequently a double, with space enough for bicycles and lawn mowers. The garage as outbuilding fell out of fashion. Sears, Roebuck abandoned the garage business in 1939. Today tin garages have all but disappeared, along with the Model T’s and Marmons, Stanleys, and Reos they were built to shelter.

Published on *Invention and Technology* <http://www.innovationgateway.org/print/85932> accessed 11/10/2015

