



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Determination of Historic Significance
Staff Report

For Historic Resource Projects Funded through the Community Preservation Act (CPA)

To be determined eligible for Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding, an historic resource must either be listed on the Massachusetts State Register of Historic Places or be determined "significant in the history, archaeology, architecture of culture" of Somerville by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). This report provides a recommendation to the HPC through an analysis of the adopted "Guidelines for a Determination of Historic Significance."

Site:	31-33 Union Square, Phillip Eberle Building
Case:	HPC 2015-061
Applicant Name:	Arram Realty Trust
Date of Application:	September 10, 2015
Recommendation:	Significant
Hearing Date:	September 15, 2015

**** NB: All photos appear in the Addendum to this report. ****

1. Date of Construction

From the June, 2010 survey Form B: The building was constructed in 1884 and financed by local businessman, Phillip Eberle.

2. Cultural or Historic Association

This building was recommended for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010.

Local businessman Phillip Eberle financed the construction of the Eberle Building at 31-34 Union Square shortly before 1884. Eberle was born in Germany in 1833, where he first learned the shoemaking trade, and arrived in New York about 1851. After working for some time in Boston and Cambridge, he moved to Somerville in 1857 and opened a boot and shoe

store on Somerville Avenue opposite the Bleachery office (further west of Union Square). He lived at 47 Columbus Avenue in nearby Prospect Hill (Samuels 1897:525-526). Eberle watched the area evolve into a prosperous commercial district over the next decade, and in 1869 he joined other local businessmen and invested in the construction of the Masonic Building in Union Square (demolished, now the Hurley Building at 20-29 Union Square, SMV.761). He relocated his shoe store to the ground floor of the large commercial block, where it remained until the adjacent Eberle Building went up. Between 1869 and 1891, the addition of five other ambitious multi-level masonry commercial buildings dramatically changed the appearance of the Square. The Eberle Building is the best preserved of the three that remain from this period (the other two are the Hill Building at 38 Union Square, SMV.773, and the Stone Building at 61 Union Square, SMV.763).

Like many other large commercial buildings of the late 19th century, the Eberle Building accommodated a spacious meeting room on the third floor. During the 1880s and 1890s, several social organizations, including the Odd Fellows, the Equitable Aid Union, and the Order of the Golden Grail, met in Eberle Hall. These clubs flourished in American cities during this era primarily because they served as important social networks for recent immigrants like Eberle. The Hall remained in use as a meeting space at least through 1940, although Directory listings indicate that the upper floors may have been subdivided. Other 20th-century commercial tenants located on the upper floors of the Eberle Building included realtors, insurance agents, dentists, and hairdressers. The Modern Furniture Co., Inc. occupied commercial space on the ground floor (31 Union Square) from 1940 through at least 1961; the business does not appear in the 1965 City Phone Book. Another furniture store, Elegant Furniture, is presently located at this address (2010). The Backer Hardware Co. was located in the adjacent shop (33 Union Square) from ca. 1950 through at least 1971. This space has been subdivided and, as of 2010, it was occupied by a performance studio space and a tailor. As of September, 2015, the building is unoccupied and is awaiting interior build-outs to accommodate a new tenant on the first floor.

3. Architectural / Design Quality:

The Eberle Building embodies distinctive characteristics of a type, period, and method of construction; represents a distinguishable entity; and represents an established and highly-visible feature of the neighborhood and City within the urban landscape.

From the 2010 Form B

The Eberle Building at 31 – 33½ Union Square is a very ornate and well-preserved three-story brick commercial building on the west side of Union Square. It sits at the sidewalk on the south side of Somerville Avenue, one lot in from the Square, and faces north. The building occupies the majority of its approximately 6900 square-foot lot and has a polygonal footprint with approximately 64 feet of street frontage, two parallel side walls measuring approximately 87 feet long on the west and 65 feet long on the east, and a 69-foot-long rear wall. A narrow four-story frame building rising slightly lower in height abuts it to the west; and a one-story flat-roof commercial block abuts it to the east.

The building has a brick and granite foundation, dark red brick walls, and a flat roof. Queen Anne-style ornamentation is concentrated only on the façade (north) elevation. The elaborate brick cornice is corbelled with an arch and cross pattern. Projecting double-height brick pilasters articulate each of the five window bays on the upper stories, provide structural support for the large window openings, and emphasize the building's verticality. Sawtooth brick banding adorns the wall surface between the second- and third-floor windows, and a brownstone string course projects above the brick dentilled storefront cornice at the ground-floor level.

The wood and glass storefronts on the Eberle Building are completely intact and well-maintained. They consist of multi-paned transom windows over larger divided plate-glass windows. The surrounds have paneled bases and half-round piers with flared capitals and beaded turnings. Three asymmetrically positioned entrances with multi-paned transoms are recessed between the windows. (HPC Staff emphasis)

The fenestration on the upper stories consists of oversize, segmentally arched openings with shouldered brick lintels and flat granite sills. The lintels have brownstone tabs and keystones. The second-floor openings contain pairs of rectangular plateglass windows above metal-framed awning sash. Metal panels with incised floral patterns fill the arched spandrel above the windows. The third-floor openings have the same ornamental spandrels at the top, but the larger rectangular windows have been replaced with vertical board panels.

The upper stories of the east side elevation are visible from Union Square because the Eberle Building towers over most of the surrounding buildings. Narrow rectangular windows light the third floor, and an exterior brick chimney rises close to the rear of the building. The west side and rear elevations are not easily visible from the street.

4. Integrity

The National Park Service (NPS) defines **historic integrity** as follows:

***Historic integrity** is the authenticity of a property's historic identity, evidence by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property's prehistoric or historic period.*

Historic integrity is the composite of seven qualities:

1. *Location*
2. *Design*
3. *Setting*
4. *Materials*
5. *Workmanship*
6. *Feeling*
7. *Association*

Historic integrity enables a property to illustrate significant aspects of its past. For this reason, it is an important qualification for National Register listing. Not only must a property resemble its historic appearance, but it must also retain physical materials, design features, and aspects of construction dating from the period when it attained significance. The integrity of archaeological resources is generally based on the degree to which remaining evidence can provide important information. All

seven qualities do not need to be present for eligibility as long as the overall sense of past time and place is evident. (HPC Staff emphasis)

Regarding the integrity of 31-33 Union Square from the Form B:

The Eberle Building at 31-33 ½ Union Square is recommended as eligible for individual listing in the National Register under Criteria A and C at the local level in the areas of Community Planning and Development and Architecture. Under Criterion A the building possesses significance as one of the few surviving examples of 19th-century commercial architecture in Union Square. It is one of seven multi-level brick commercial blocks built in the Square between 1869 and 1891, a period of rapid commercial and residential expansion in the area that resulted from improvements in transportation along the streetcar lines and an increase in the number of industries located around the Square.

The Eberle Building is the best-preserved of the three blocks that remain in the Square. As such, it possesses significant associations with the physical growth and design of the area. Erected by the German businessman Philip Eberle, the building is also an example of the significant contributions of immigrants to the area's late 19th-century development. The Eberle Building is also significant under Criterion C as an intact example of a Queen Anne-style commercial building. The facade features Classical proportions, brick cladding, an elaborate cornice, arched windows, and prominent brick shoulder lintels with granite tabs and keystones. In addition, the intact late 19th-century storefronts exhibit intricate wood window and door surrounds and multi-paned lights.

The Eberle Building also contributes to the Union Square Commercial District potential historic district.

ADDENDUM

Fig. 1: Front facade



Fig. 2: Front façade



Fig. 3: Historic storefront view



Fig. 4: Storefront close-up

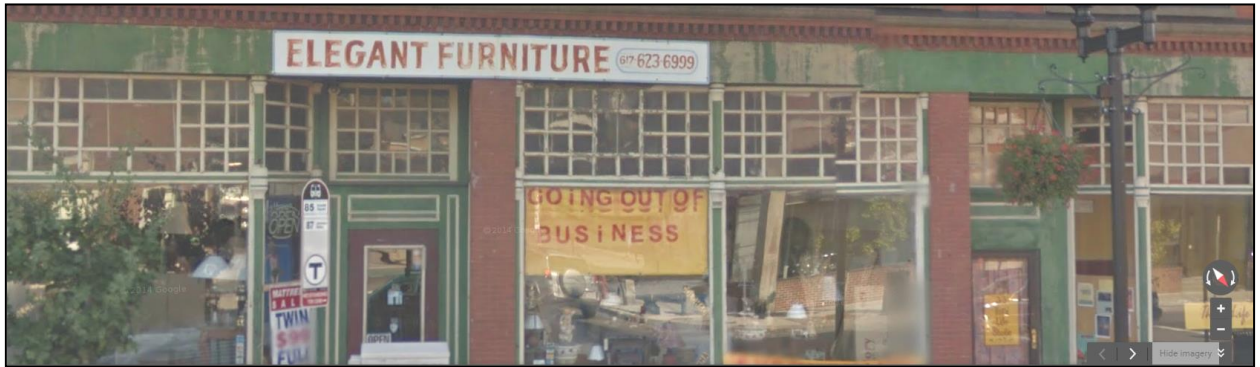


Fig. 5: Upper two stories



Fig. 6: Close-up of top story

