



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

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED STAFF REPORT

Site: 10 Emerson Street
Case: HPC 2016.004
Applicant Name: 10 Emerson LLC
Date of Application: January 25, 2016
Date of Significance: February 16, 2016
Recommendation: Preferably Preserved
Hearing Date: March 15, 2016



**A determination of Preferably Preserved begins a nine month Demolition Delay.*

I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance

On Tuesday, February 16, 2016, the Historic Preservation Commission, in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), made a determination that 10 Emerson Street is Significant. Per Section 2.17.B, this decision is found on the following criteria:

Section 2.17.B - The structure is at least 50 years old;

and

(i) *The structure is 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;*

and / or

(ii) *The structure is historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of building construction, or association with a reputed architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures.*

According to *Criteria 2.17.B*, listed above, historic map and directory research identifies the structure as c. 1869. The dwelling at 10 Emerson Street is not clear to have been present on the 1868 Walling Map of Boston and Vicinity.

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the Commission found the subject building importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to its association with popular architectural trends within the working-classes and the early residential development of Union Square during the third quarter of the 19th Century. The period of significance for 10 Emerson Street begins around 1869 as the home of a cabinet maker and continues through at least 1965 as home to members of the working class, a consistent use of the structure. Its location on the central corner of the neighborhood is the key to perception and integrity of the district. Any alteration of massing and form will distort the proportions of the remaining buildings on the street.

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the Commission also found the subject building historically and architecturally significant due to its place within a group of similarly important buildings currently under consideration as part of the proposed Union Square Local Historic District. The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant as an intact representative of 19th century working-class housing stock and represents some of the earliest residential development of Union Square. The building's ownership by Frank W. Kaan, City Solicitor in the early 20th century of particular interest.

II. Additional Information

Additional Research:

- Beyond ownership of the property, no particular connection was found between Frank W. Kaan and 10 Emerson Street. Frank W. Kaan never lived at 10 Emerson Street. He lived at both 12 Pleasant Avenue (1895 City Directory and 1900 census) and 133 Sycamore Street from 1902 per deed. He served on the Common Council and the General Court; he was the City Solicitor from 1897 to 1930. At the time of his death at age 99, he had been the oldest living graduate of the Harvard Law School.

KAAN, Frank Warton, lawyer; b. Medford, Mass., Sept. 11, 1861; s. George and Marie (Warton) Kaan; father a Hungarian, mother an Austrian; pub. schs., Somerville, Mass.: A.B., Harvard, 1883, A.M., 1888, LL.B., 1888; m. Bertha M. Woodberry, of Cambridge, Mass., Oct. 6, 1898. Practiced law in Boston, since Feb. 2, 1887; dir. Somerville Trust Co.; mem. Common Council, Somerville, 1893-4; mem. Mass. Ho. of Rep., 1895-6; city solicitor, Somerville, since 1897. Ex-pres. Somerville Bar Assn., Harvard Club of Somerville; mem. Bar Assn. City of Boston, Middlesex Bar Assn., Boston Chamber of Commerce. Sec. and dir. Home for Aged Women, Boston; treas. Somerville Playgrounds Assn. Republican. Unitarian. Mason. Clubs: Exchange, Twentieth Century, Harvard (all of Boston); Central (Somerville). Recreations: amateur gardening, reading. Home: Somerville, Mass. Office: 50 State St., Boston, Mass.

from the 1916 "Who's Who in New England"

- Frank W. Kaan's stamp appears on 2 of the photos of workers housing taken by amateur photographer, Eugene H. Jones: 23 & 25 Dane Street (c. 1913-1914) and Dane Street looking southwesterly (c. 1913-1914). Kaan is not known to have any particular association with these buildings. These pictures may date to the raising of railroad crossing to a height that would allow fully loaded trains to pass beneath between 1904 and 1915, from at-grade to a bridge. The construction of this embankment required the houses along Dane Street to be razed or moved. Because several of the buildings in these photos were located close to the railway, the photos may have been taken to document the street before the alteration.

- Deed research also revealed the agreements with the owners affected by the raising of Emerson, Everett, and Newton Streets and Webster Avenue to cross the railroad above grade and allow free passage of loaded railroad cars beneath the bridge.
- Deed and Probate research clarified the recent link between the O'Connell family and the Casey Family. In 1963 Mary T. O'Connell left her estate to her son Jeremiah J. O'Connell and his wife Catherine E. She later married to Thomas M. Casey and granted him part ownership in 1971.

Comparable Structures:

There are a number of single-family dwellings with a modest 1½ story massing located throughout the City. Intact neighborhoods of workers cottages from the third quarter of the 19th century are not common. Districts

Comparable structures within the City include:

- 25 Clyde Street (LHD)
- 342 Lowell Street (LHD)
- 27 Dane Avenue
- 80 Properzi Way
- 37 Fisk Avenue
- 31 Richardson Street

Predominant differences between the comparable dwellings and the subject dwelling are orientations toward the street, heights of basements, and the shapes and sizes of the eaves. They were all constructed for workers and inhabited by families for generations. For the most part they are well-maintained and retain much of their original character. Properzi Way, Dane Avenue and Fisk Avenue are locating in existing neighborhoods of workers housing of earlier and later dates than the Mystic Avenue structures.



*Top: 25 Clyde Street (1860); 342 Lowell Street (1861); 80 Properzi Way (c.1850).
Bottom: 27 Dane Avenue (c.1874); 37 Fisk Avenue (1866), 31 Richardson Street (c. 1850).*

III. Preferably Preserved

If the Commission determines that the demolition of the significant building or structure would be detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City, such building or structure shall be considered a preferably preserved building or structure. (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 4.2.d)

A determination regarding if the demolition of the subject building is detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City should consider the following:

- a) *How does this building or structure compose or reflect features which contribute to the heritage of the City?*

The form and massing of this single-family dwelling represents an increasingly rare residential building type within the City. The Emerson and Everett streetscape and surrounding neighborhood are predominantly composed of workers housing similar to the form and massing of the subject parcel, and together, the buildings that form this streetscape illustrate the suburbanization and industrialization of Union Square in the third quarter of the 19th century.

As industries developed in East Cambridge and Somerville along the rail and river corridors, housing for the workers also developed in close proximity to their places of work. Slaughter houses, glass factories, and furniture factories were located in close proximity with Union Square. These streets would have been undesirable to middle management and building owners who preferred to build above and away from the noise and pollution of their businesses on Somerville's many hills.

While many of the remaining industrial buildings are being adapted for reuse, the housing associated with the business are being demolished for larger structures. The destruction of the workers neighborhoods removes the context and the history of Somerville, a city proud of its connections with the working class forever.

- b) *What is the remaining integrity of the structure? The National Park Service defines integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance.*

The Commission found that integrity of this one-family dwelling is retained within the location and form, as well as integrity of design. The structure retains integrity of location through siting and orientation as well as through spatial relationships to other buildings along Emerson and Everett Streets. The building is an excellent example of workers' cottage that retains many of its original features including, but not limited to: window layout, gable ends with original trim molding, and 2-story rear ell. The main massing and form remains evident despite alterations to the siding, roofing and windows. The door surround on Everett Street indicates that it was once used as the main door. The front porch has been enclosed.

- c) *What is the level (local, state, national) of significance?*

Somerville prides itself on its working class heritage. The elimination of the historical evidence of this history belittles the importance of an entire class of people without whom the City as it is today would not exist. This closely built neighborhood developed at a time when much of Somerville was still fairly rural due to the industries located along the railroad nearby. Many businesses were still located in houses in Union Square. Midnite Convenient is the last remaining structure within the Square proper from this time period. A few business owners constructed large homes and began platting large house lots on Prospect Hill to the north of the Square.

The Commission found the subject building historically and architecturally significant due to its setting within a group of similarly important buildings currently under consideration as part of the proposed Union Square Local Historic District. The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant as an intact representative of 19th century working-class housing stock and represents some of the earliest residential development of Union Square. Intact workers housing within clear proximity of the industrial areas The building's ownership by Frank W. Kaan, City Solicitor in the early 20th century of particular interest.

- d) *What is the visibility of the structure with regard to public interest (Section 2.17.B.ii) if demolition were to occur?*

The subject parcel is highly visible at the corner of Emerson and Everett Streets and is located centrally in the neighborhood. While Emerson and Everett Streets are not heavily travelled by vehicular traffic, Emerson Street is a favorite pedestrian route from the bus stop on the south side of Union Square to the Inman Square and Lincoln Park neighborhoods.

- e) *What is the scarcity or frequency of this type of resource in the City?*

Workers housing set within a clear neighborhood of similar buildings is becoming increasingly rare as developers buy up the small houses suitable for single families with yards for the children to play in order to construct larger buildings that disrupt the context and proportions of these districts of pocket-sized homes.

Upon a consideration of the above criteria (a-e), is the demolition of the subject building detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City?

The Commission found the subject building importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to its association with popular architectural trends within the working-classes and the early residential development of Union Square during the third quarter of the 19th Century.

The Commission also found the subject building historically and architecturally significant due to its place within a group of similarly important buildings currently under consideration as part of the proposed Union Square Local Historic District. The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant as an intact representative of 19th century working-class housing stock and represents some of the earliest residential development of Union Square. The building's ownership by Frank W. Kaan, City Solicitor in the early 20th century of particular interest.

Significance is also due to the ability of the subject parcel to convey integrity regarding location and form as well as, to a moderate degree, design. The period of significance for 10 Emerson Street beginning around 1869 as the home of an immigrant cabinet maker continues through to at least 1965 as home to members of the working classes, a consistent use of the structure. Its location on the central corner of the neighborhood proposed for consideration as a Local Historic District is the key to perception and integrity of the district. Any alteration of massing and form will distort the proportions of the remaining buildings on the street. The additional information provided and consideration criteria (a-e) listed above convey that this type of dwelling is now becoming rare in many neighborhoods throughout the City, as is the associated streetscape, and has minimal architectural detail characteristic of the building type,. Therefore, Staff finds the potential demolition of 10 Emerson Street detrimental to the heritage of the City.

IV. 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 hearing for a Determination of Preferably Preserved. 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.

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In accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (2003-05), Section 4.D, Staff find the potential demolition of the subject structure detrimental to the heritage of the City, and consequently in the best interest of the public to preserve or rehabilitate. Therefore, due to the reasons noted above, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 10 Emerson Street Preferably Preserved.**

If the Historic Preservation Commission determines the structure is Preferably Preserved, the Building Inspector may issue a demolition permit at anytime, upon receipt of written advice from the Commission that there is no reasonable likelihood that either the owner or some other person or group is willing to purchase, preserve, rehabilitate or restore the subject building or structure (Ord. 2003-05, Section 4.5).



10 Emerson Street, aerial view



Street views of Emerson and Everett Streets



Photo of Dane Street looking south toward Washington Street prior to the raising of the bridge over the Fitchburg Railroad. The houses on the right were relocated to Village Terrace and demolished in 2013. Note the Frank W. Kaan stamp on photo surround. Photo: collection of the Somerville Public Library found on <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/>