



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

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT

Site: 53 Josephine Avenue
Case: HPC 2015.038
Applicant Name: Randall Conrad & Christine Dall
Date of Application: June 29, 2015
Recommendation: Significant
Hearing Date: July 21, 2015

I. Historical Association

Historical Context: From various Form Bs, Deed and other documents.

Somerville's population grew by a half in the decade of the 1890s as extensive areas were platted and developed with new residences. In West Somerville former brickyards were built up into a suburb of two-family homes with ready commuting access to Boston via the Arlington and Lexington Branch Railroad.

Nathan and Francis Tufts, heirs to the Tufts brickyard and members of an old Somerville family, subdivided a portion of their family's farm and brickyard land in 1891 as "Powderhouse Farm." They also donated a portion of 18th century quarry land around the ca. 1702 Powderhouse for a City Park. The Tufts College and West Somerville areas were becoming fully "suburbanized" as the streetcar reached areas previously used as farmland. The Tufts residential subdivision of "Powderhouse Farm" was built up as an attractive enclave of two family houses, and the area was well-advertised as a desirable place to live ..., the houses ... were often photographed by real estate salesmen.

Characteristically, houses in the area are fairly uniform gambrel or gable-roofed Colonial Revival two-family structures, often with decorative oriels or turned millwork.

53 Josephine was constructed on Lot 57 of on a plan entitled "Land in Somerville, Mass." belonging to W. A. Rice, dated July 1, 1899, Charles D. Elliot, C.E., recorded with the Middlesex South District



Registry of Deeds in Book of Plans 123, Plan 13. Houses with no addresses were constructed by various developers from 1895 onward. H. McGray was responsible for 19 houses given building permits in 1904.



Josephine Avenue circa 1910



Evolution of Site:

Architectural Description: 53 Josephine is typical of the houses in the neighborhood. It is a 2-½ story 2-family gambrel-roofed side-hall-entry house. It has lost its second floor porch sometime

in the last century and recently the top floor in a fire. It has wood shingles and a variation on the Palladian style window typical of early 20th century Colonial Revival homes.

Summary: 53 Josephine is a house typical of the early 20th century development pattern of West Somerville as seen in the maps. While the Josephine Avenue and the neighborhood was platted and buildings were beginning to go up as can be seen in the 1900 Sanborn, it was fully built out by 1925.

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/atlasses, 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 53 Josephine 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 not found importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events due to its lack of particular distinction. It is however typical of the houses on the street and is therefore part of the broad the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City. It is likely that the owners of the house were of the same socio-economic and cultural groups as their neighbors.

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 **53 Josephine Avenue** begins with its construction circa 1904 as the building does not appear on the 1900 Sanborn or the 1900 Stadley Atlases.

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 house has not been moved. It is set among several similar blocks of houses in the early 20th century suburbs of West Somerville.
- b. **Design:** The design is a typical 2-family house of the period with a gambrel roof and a second floor front porch (removed). Windows and doors at the entry have strong lintels. A decorative console graces the corner under the eave.
- c. **Materials:** The materials are predominantly wood with shingle siding. The roof is no longer visible.

- d. Alterations: It's design has been interrupted by the removal of the second floor front porch and the alteration

Evaluation of Integrity: The building retains some of its architectural integrity through its essential massing and is clearly constructed in the same manner as the other houses on the street. However, structurally, a lot has gone due to fire in the upper story last fall and the difficulties of the very hard winter last year.

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?

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 53 Josephine Avenue historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant due to its consistency of form and massing in the streetscape despite serious structural damage. It was clearly constructed at the same time as the other houses on the street and is a major part of the continuity of the streetscape.

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 1900, 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 not find 53 Josephine Avenue importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or but do find it associated 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 one or more historic persons or events due to its lack of particular distinction. It is however typical of the houses on the street and is therefore part of the broad the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City. It is likely that the owners of the house were of the same socio-economic and cultural groups as their neighbors.

OR

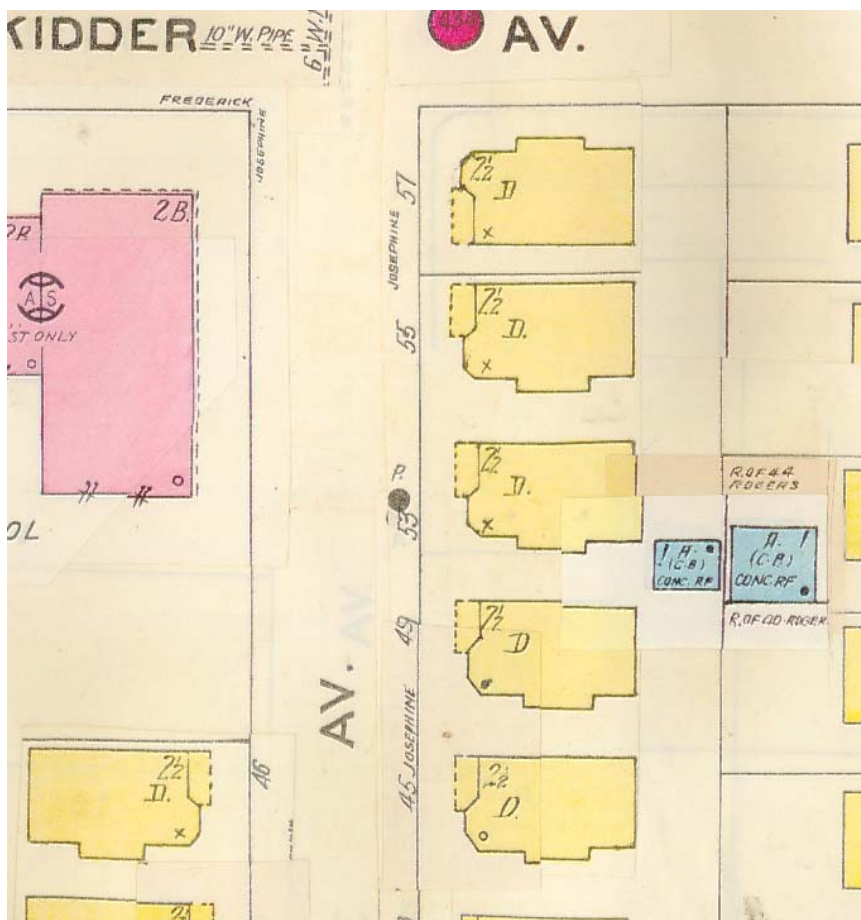
(b) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical and Architectural Significance*, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, the ability to convey significance, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 53 Josephine Avenue historically and architecturally significant.**

The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant due to its consistency of form and massing in the streetscape despite serious structural damage. It was clearly constructed at the same time as the other houses on the street and is a major part of the continuity of the streetscape.





1900 Stadley Atlas



1925 Sanborn

