



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: 14 Kent Court
Case: HPC 2015.004
Applicant Name: Shangzhe Xuyu

Date of Application: January 5, 2015
Recommendation: Preferably Preserved

Determined Significant February 17, 2015
Hearing Date: March 17, 2015



I. Meeting Summary: Determination of Significance

On Tuesday, February 17, 2015, the Historic Preservation Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to determine the c. 1874 dwelling at 14 Kent Court 'Significant' because the building, per Section 2.17.B of the Demolition Review Ordinance 2003-05, is "at least 50 years old, and is or has been determined by the Commission to be a significant building or structure after a finding that the building or structure is both:

- i. "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 of Massachusetts, and
- ii. "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, and therefore it is in the public interest to be preserved or rehabilitated rather than to be demolished."

According to *Criteria 2.17.B*, listed above, historic map and directory research identifies the structure as c.1874. The dwelling at 14 Kent Court is not present on the 1852 Draper Map of Somerville but can be seen on the 1858 Walling Map of the region.

In accordance with *Criteria (i)*, listed above, the subject building is found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to the c.1874 construction date which illustrates continued working class development of the area; simple form and massing including the rear ell; and retaining the side fenestration pattern that illustrates one bay. This building is a mid-

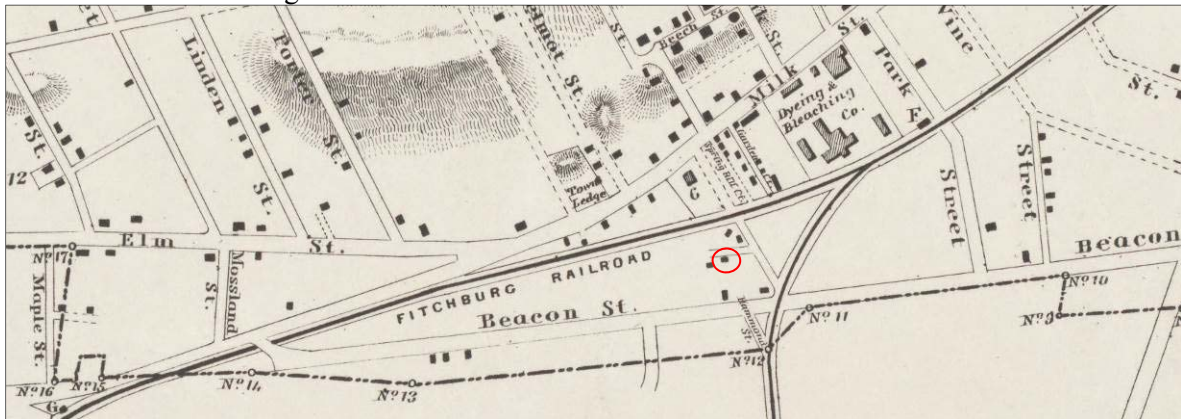
nineteenth century example of working class housing and is part of a collection of housing associated with the early development and industry of Somerville.

In accordance with *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the subject dwelling is found historically and architecturally significant as a representative of mid-19th century working class housing stock due to the remaining integrity of the structure with regard to original form, massing, and visible side fenestration patterns. In addition, due to the location of the structure within a small collection of buildings that represent the same cultural context, this dwelling is significant within the context of the group of buildings which, together, represent the early development and industry of Somerville.

II. Additional Information

Additional Research:

- Kent Street connected Beacon Street with Somerville Avenue, then Milk Row, as early as 1813. The first passenger railroad station in Somerville opened in 1835 and in 1842, the Kent Street Station opened near the Harvard Branch railway spur. Nearby, Kent Court developed near the Fitchburg Railroad tracks before the Civil War.



1852 Draper map with 18 Kent Court circled in red

- According to the 1858 Walling map, a small collection of mid nineteenth century structures along this portion of Kent Street and Kent Court appears to remain existent. Located near the Bleachery, these dwellings likely housed employees of the Bleachery, later industries that located in the immediate area, or the railroad. 45 Kent Street, a two-family, is identified as c.1830-1840 by the short eaves and windows. Another dwelling located at 6 Kent Court is identified as c.1750 and moved to its present location from Somerville Avenue. This structure has a gambrel roof, a five-bay façade that is one room deep and a rear lean-to. Several dwellings with raised basements along Kent Court appear similar to the workers cottages located near the brickyards, such as Clyde Street. Raised basements were often useful



1858 Walling map with Kent Street and Kent Court circled in red

for cooking or for use as a shop. Another similarity is having three bays on the primary facade and the one room of depth for the main massing. This type of structure was small, inexpensive, easy to construct and often used in marshy areas where excavating a cellar was not practical.

- No new information has been found about the residents of the building.
- Building permit files from Inspectional Services provide minimal information. In 1989, a permit was granted to install vinyl siding.

Site Visit:

Site visits illustrate that the subject structure is one of several small residential structures, located on Kent Street and Kent Court, which share the same historic context. The subject dwelling is within a close proximity to these dwellings and, together, these structures illustrate a period in Somerville that has been predominantly lost, other than a few interspersed dwellings along Somerville Avenue.



Corner of Kent Street and Kent Court, 2013.

This streetscape illustrates an early period in the historical context and development of the City.

Comparable Structures:

There are a number of single-family dwellings with a modest 1½ story massing located throughout the City. While there are comparable dwellings located along Kent Court, some of these have a high foundation and some have an slightly earlier construction date. Comparable structures within the City and this general neighborhood include:

- 25 Clyde Street (LHD)
- 342 Lowell Street (LHD)
- 60 Linden Avenue (LHD)
- 27 Dane Avenue
- 80 Properzi Way
- 8 Mount Pleasant (NR)



Top: 25 Clyde Street (1860); 342 Lowell Street (1861); 60 Linden Avenue (1861),
 Bottom: 27 Dane Avenue (c.1874); 80 Properzi Way (c.1850), 8 Mount Pleasant (1850)

Predominant differences between the comparable dwellings and the subject dwelling are the number of windows, the level of architectural integrity, and the heights of the brick foundation orientation to the street. These comparable dwellings have construction date between 1850 and 1874. Most of the comparable structures have similar size and massing, a center-hall entry, and a similar fenestration pattern.

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:

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

The subject structure, pre-1874, is a 1½ story gable-end dwelling in a simplified Greek Revival style as can be seen by the roof pitch. The original form, massing (including rear ell), and single-bay side fenestration pattern is clearly evident. 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. In addition, it is part of a small collection of mid nineteenth century structures along this portion of Kent Street and Kent Court that retain, at minimum, a moderate degree of historical significance and architectural integrity. While the subject dwelling has some alteration, the nineteenth century historical context is clearly represented.

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

The subject structure retains a moderate level of historical and architectural integrity due to the pre-1874 date of construction; retention of simple form, massing, side fenestration patterns; and as part of a small collection of mid nineteenth century working class housing that represents the early development and industry of Somerville.

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

With the population growth spurred by the industries located along transportation lines such as the railroads. This neighborhood is in close proximity to the Middlesex Bleachery, a coffin factory, the American Tube Works, the Daniel E. Chase Distillery and the Lowell Railroad Line. It was a major center of employment for immigrants. Along with the nearby housing on Kent Street and the base of Spring Hill, as a group, these houses show an aspect of local working class history. The subject dwelling is found historically and architecturally significant as a representative of mid-19th century working class housing stock due to the remaining integrity of the structure with regard to original form, massing, and visible side fenestration patterns. In addition, due to the location of the structure within a small collection of structures that represent the same cultural context, this dwelling is significant within the context of the group of buildings which, together, represent the early development and industry of Somerville.

- c) *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 along Kent Court; a dead end street one would not expect much activity, however Kent Court is a major cut through for pedestrians avoiding a long section of Beacon Street on their way to shops and restaurants further down Beacon Street.

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

Dwellings from this time period and of this level of architectural integrity are extremely rare within the City and likely within the surrounding communities as well. While there are other working class neighborhoods in the City such Duck Village, Allen Street, Horace Street and Hinckley/Magoun, the houses are generally of a more recent era.

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 Significant due to important associations with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City per *criteria (i)* listed above, due to the pre-1874 construction date and Directory information which illustrates the continuous working class development of the area; the simple form and massing including the rear ell; and the retention of the side fenestration pattern that illustrates one bay configuration. This building is a mid-nineteenth century example of working class housing and is part of a collection of housing associated with the early development and industry of Somerville.

The Commission found the subject building Significant per *Criteria (ii)*, listed above, the subject dwelling is found historically and architecturally significant as a representative of mid-19th century working class housing stock, due to the remaining integrity of the structure with regard to original form, massing, and visible side fenestration patterns. In addition, due to the location of the structure within a small collection of buildings that represent the same cultural context, this dwelling is significant within the context of the group of buildings which, together, represent the early development and industry of Somerville.

The side-gable orientation, size, date of construction, and context of associated structures raise this building to a higher level of significance and integrity than other buildings in a similar condition. Therefore, Staff finds the potential demolition of 14 Kent Court 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.

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 level of integrity, its association as an intact example of working class housing, and as part of a mid-nineteenth century collection of buildings, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 14 Kent Court Preferably Preserved.**

If the Historic Preservation Commission determines the structure is Preferably Preserved, the Building Inspector may issue a demolition permit at any time, upon receipt of written advice from the Commission that there is no reasonable likelihood that either the owner or some other person



14 Kent Court outlined in black.