



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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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: Significant
Hearing Date: February 17, 2015

I. Historical Association

Context: Kent Street connected Beacon Street with Somerville Avenue, then Milk Row, as early as 1813, according to *Beyond the Neck*. In 1835, the first passenger railroad station in Somerville opened and in 1842, the Kent Street Station opened near the Harvard Branch railway spur, which encouraged development of the southern slope of Spring Hill. Nearby, Kent Court developed near the Fitchburg Railroad tracks after the Civil War.

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. Being located near the Bleachery, these dwellings likely housed employees of the Bleachery as well industries that developed later along the railroad or within the immediate area.

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 for cooking or



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

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.

Architectural Description: The building is a 1½ story, single-family dwelling with a side-gable roof and an unidentifiable style. This building has a c.1874 construction date, which is consistent with later development of the area. The front façade has shallow eaves and was likely once three bays in width. The main massing appears to be one room deep, which is understood through the single-bay side profile. There is also a rear ell and shed at the rear of the property. Alterations include replacement windows and doors as well as modifications to the primary facade fenestration. The roof is asphalt shingles and the foundation is likely composed of brick.

14 Kent Court



Historical Description: The subject property is likely not illustrated on the 1852 Draper map (see below), due to the location of the subject building, which is set back from the street. The red circle on the Draper Map below is believed to be 18 Kent Court.



1852 Draper map with 18 Kent Court circled in red

The 1874 Hopkins Atlas (Plate J) lists Timothy Roach as the property owner while the 1876 directory lists Mrs. Roach as owner. The existing rear dwelling is also illustrated, but possibly not as a dwelling. The 1884 (Plate 9) Hopkins Atlas does not provide an owner; however, the directory lists Ellen Roach, widow of Timothy, at this addresses as well as John Roach, who works at the Middlesex Bleachery. The Bromley Atlas from 1895 (Plate 4) consistently locates the building within the center of the parcel, but slightly closer to the right side property line. This map also continues to illustrate Ellen Roach as owner and this parcel noted as 1740 square feet. Timothy Roche (change in spelling) is noted at this address through 1919.

The 1900 Sanborn map (Sheet 38) illustrates the structure more clearly as a “1½B” story building (B notes the raised basement of the structure) with a two-part single-story rear addition and a two-story rear building noted as a tenement. By 1925, Gaspar Sorrenti, laborer, is resident; however, by 1933, the Roche/Roache family has returned. By 1934, the Sanborn map (Vol. II, Sheet 264) notes that the entire building as one story and a basement; the tenement at the rear is parceled off with a separate address. The updated Sanborn map (1934-1950) does not illustrate any changes. Building permits were not found for this property. By 1955, the Hannigan family is located here; John is a chauffeur and candy maker while Elizabeth is a housewife. They reside at this location through 1965.

Summary: The subject building is c.1874 and is associated with earlier buildings that developed along Kent Court. The 1 1/2 single-family dwelling has a side-gable roof, an unidentifiable style, and once likely had a three-bay primary facade. There is a single-bay side profile and shallow eaves along the primary facade. The simple form and massing, including the rear ell, demonstrates this was working class housing. Most other features appear to have been removed. A small collection of mid nineteenth century structures is located along the south side of Kent Court; these buildings appear to relate to each other due to their location to each other, similar form and massing, and date of construction which refers to development of the area.

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 find 14 Kent Court 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.

Findings: 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.

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 14 Kent Court begins with the likely c.1874 date of construction as a modest single-family dwelling in an unknown style and continues into the present day as the use of this structure remains consistent.

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 evaluation of 1) Location, 2) Design, 3) Material, and 4) Alteration, as these qualities relate to the ability to convey significance.*

Location: The subject structure is located toward the end of Kent Court, next to Star Market and near Cambridge. The location has not been altered and the dwelling is sited in the center but slightly to the right side of the lot. The location of this dwelling, as well as others along Kent Court, illustrate an early to mid nineteenth century collection of housing associated with the early development and industry of Somerville.



Kent Court streetscape, photo 2014

Design: 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.

Materials: The materials that compose this structure are predominantly wood with a masonry foundation while asphalt shingles were added to the roof at a later period.

Alterations: Various modern materials have been added to the building over the years such as windows, doors, and roofing material. In addition, the building has had alterations to the window bays on the front facade and removal of a single-story window on the left side facade.

Evaluation of Integrity: The subject structure retains a moderate level of historical and architectural integrity due to the likely c. 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.

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 ***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, which assess the ability of the property to convey significance, Staff find 14 Kent Court historically or architecturally significant.

Findings: 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.

III. Recommendation

Recommendations are based on an analysis by Historic Preservation Staff of the permit application and required findings for the Demolition Review Ordinance, which requires archival and historical research, and an assessment of historical and architectural significance to be 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, c. 1874, 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 find 14 Kent Court 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.**

Findings: 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.

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 14 Kent Court historically or architecturally significant.**

Findings: 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.

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