



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: 350 Medford Street, aka Reid, Murdoch & Company Warehouse
Case: HPC 2014.031
Applicant Name: City of Somerville
Date of Application: May 27, 2014
Hearing Date: June 18, 2014
Recommendation: Significant



350 Medford Street, PAL (photo 2013)

I. Historical Association

Context: The following is from the 1990 MHC survey form B.

Gilman Square is a small concentration of late 19th century commercial, fraternal, and industrial buildings located on the north side of Central Hill adjacent to the railroad. The area developed between the 1880s and 1920s. Several key buildings have been demolished, diminishing the cohesive character of the square, but three commercial blocks and two industrial complexes remain.

Historical Description: The following is from the 1990 MHC survey form B.

The Reid and Murdoch Warehouse was constructed around 1929. The Reid and Murdoch Company wholesale grocers from Chicago, is listed in City directories as both a retail and who sale grocery company. The company had been operating in New England for five years and leasing space prior to their decision to establish their own distribution center for Monarch brand food products, hence the lion's head, Monarch's emblem, at the entrance. The company was attracted to the 50,000 square foot parcel of land by the Industrial Development Department of the Boston & Maine Railroad. The IDD encouraged the sale and development of land abutting the railroad to promising industries to stimulate railroad use. Reid and Murdoch Co. also manufactured peanut butter and cocoa on the premise. The late 1920s was an era when many

grocery companies were expanding their warehouse and distribution facilities. Although not anywhere near the scale of the First National and A&P, Reid and Murdoch made use of Somerville's metropolitan location and the site's proximity to railroad transportation.

Architectural Description: The following is from the 1990 MHC survey form B.

This building is a well-detailed, three-story brick factory building (steel frame). The structure has a flat roof and parapet with a simple concrete coping. Projecting brick piers with corbel led capitals and decorative concrete panels divide the building into regular bays. Each bay has two concrete decorative panels and two fifteen-light steel sash per floor with continuous cornet lintels and sills. The Medford Street facade has Deco detailed concrete finials centered over each bay. The entrance has an elaborate concrete entablature with arched moulding with a lion head and flanking finials; round windows are located on either side of the entrance. The second and third floors above the entrance have center windows with flanking lancet windows. A one-story brick loading block projects from the south side facade while a two-story masonry addition is located on the north side.

According to PAL, Inc., in a February 2014 report, **the Reid & Murdoch Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.**

The Reid, Murdoch & Company Warehouse is significant at the local level under Criterion A and C in the areas of industry and architecture. Under Criterion A, the property is one of several large wholesale grocery firms that operated in Somerville and were a substantial component of the city's early twentieth-century economic activity. Reid, Murdoch & Company was a Chicago-based wholesale firm that also sold foods at the retail level under the Monarch brand. The company built their general offices in Chicago in 1914 and constructed a system of factories and warehouses throughout the country. They established a warehouse at Medford Street in 1929 to take advantage of its proximity to the Boston area food market and for the use of the adjacent Boston & Maine Railroad line. Under Criterion C, the property is a well-preserved example of early-twentieth-century industrial architecture that is demonstrative of period approaches to warehousing and loft engineering and also incorporates subtle elements of Art Deco design.



350 Medford Street, primary and south side façades (photo 2014)

Summary: *Gilman Square developed between the 1880s and 1920s as a small concentration of late 19th century commercial, fraternal, and industrial buildings. Three commercial blocks and*

two industrial complexes remain, including the Reid & Murdoch Building. Constructed in 1929, the company was attracted to the land for its proximity to the railroad. The structure is significant at the local level, in the areas of industry and architecture, and is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.



*Top: Reid & Murdoch Bldg, north and west façades
Bottom: Front entry with Monarch emblem, a lion head*



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, Staff find 350 Medford Street 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 found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to an association with the industry and growth of Gilman Square in the late 1920s, the Reid & Murdoch Company, and the retention of Art Deco details on a large scale industrial warehouse.

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 350 Medford Street begins with the c. 1929 date of construction as an Art Deco industrial warehouse and ended with the change in use of the warehouse from industrial to office.

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 subject structure is located along Medford Street, just north of City Hall in Gilman Square. The location has not been altered and the structure is sited at the front of the lot. A single-story loading dock is located on the south side while a two story addition is located on the north side.
- b. Design:* The original form, massing, fenestration, and architectural detail are still evident, but the masonry and stone is significantly deteriorated. The building has a steel frame with a masonry exterior and wood floors, though the first floor is concrete.
- c. Materials:* The materials that compose this structure are steel, brick, stone, and wood, with a flat roof, possibly of rubber.
- d. Alterations:* The building has additions on either side of the building as well as various loading dock additions at the rear, adjacent the railroad. These additions do not affect the architectural quality of the Medford Street facade.
- e. Existing Conditions:* A site visit to the building with the Sr. Building Inspector and the Fire Chief illustrate that the building has a steel structure that appears intact, but the masonry exterior is in a very deteriorated condition, including the parapet. Many of the stone lintels and parapet details are cracked, there are fisher cracks and various sized holes in the masonry walls due to frost heaving. There is fire damage in multiple areas as well as ongoing roof leaks, but the extent of the damage is unknown. This site visit led Staff to understand that the steel frame may not be deficient, but the masonry walls are in bad condition.

Evaluation of Integrity:

The subject structure retains a high level of of historical and architectural integrity due to an association with the industry and growth of Gilman Square in the late 1920s, the Reid & Murdoch Company, and the retention of Art Deco details on a large scale industrial warehouse. However, the existing conditions point toward a failing integrity of the exterior

facade, which speaks to the architectural integrity of the structure. While the building retains its historical significance, the quality of the remaining features as a whole is minimal. The lion head, archway, and circular windows are the only remaining architectural features that remain predominantly intact.

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 350 Medford Street historically or architecturally significant.

The subject dwelling is found historically and architecturally significant as a representative of 1920s industrial growth of Gilman Square and due to the remaining Art Deco architectural detail of the structure with regard to original form, massing, fenestration pattern, and inlaid stone detail. In addition, due to the location of the structure within a collection of structures that represent the same cultural context, this structure is significant within the context of the group of buildings which, together, retain the historic development of Gilman Square, a small concentration of late 19th century commercial, fraternal, and industrial buildings.

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, c. 1929, 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/atlasses, 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 350 Medford Street 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.**

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 350 Medford Street historically or architecturally significant.**



350 Medford Street