

## Milk Place/Somerville Avenue

### Historic Context

#### Introduction:

The purpose of this document is to present historic context for the five buildings – 4, 9, & 10 Milk Place, 258 Somerville Avenue and 264-268 Somerville Avenue which shared a common lot in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At this writing (2014) the last of the five buildings – 4 Milk Place – is scheduled for demolition. The other four buildings were demolished between 1957 and the 1980s.

The building at 4 Milk Place was the subject of an individual inventory form prepared by Public Archaeological Laboratory in June 2010 (SMV.402). That inventory form provides limited background material on the other four buildings. This narrative is intended to bring together additional deed, directory and Census research to better understand the relationships between the five buildings and the people who occupied them over the years.

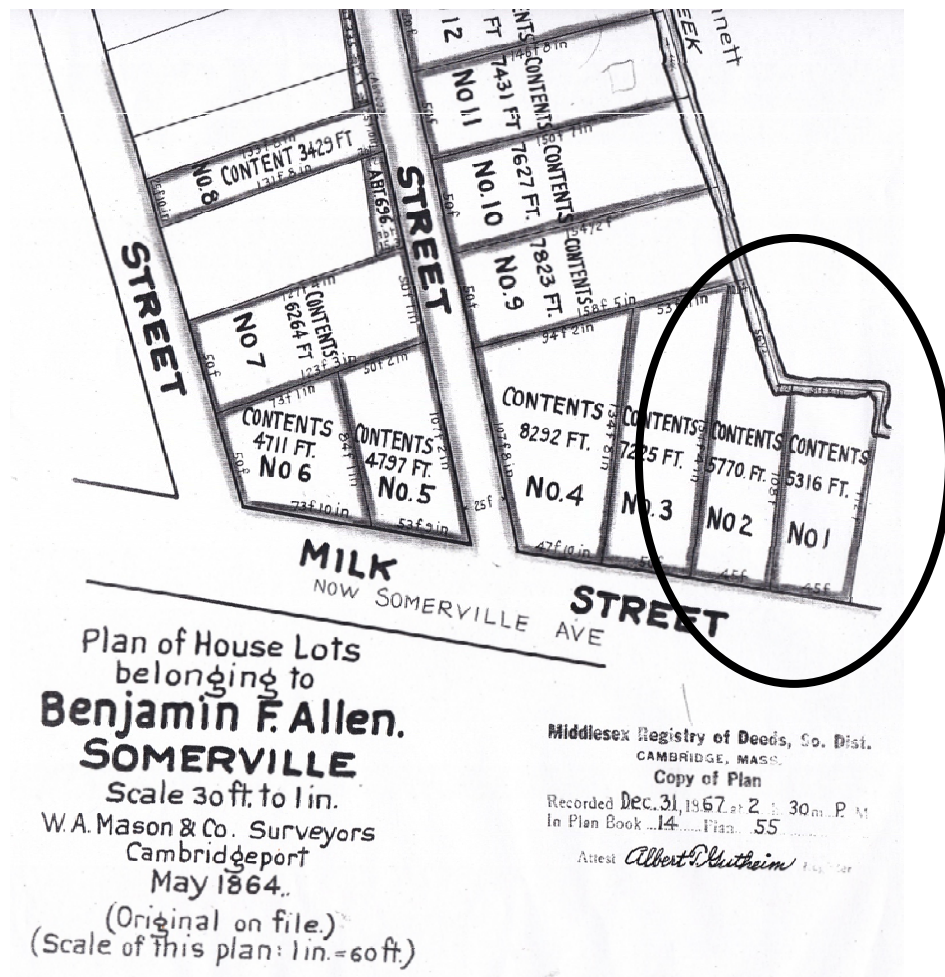
#### Historical Background:

By about 1846 brickyards owned by Hazeltine, Bennett, Wyatt, Clark and others occupied much of what is now the southeastern corner of Union Square. The Fitchburg Railroad line was constructed in 1836. The 1852 Draper map show the area around the north end of the Miller's River, near what later became Milk Place, as undeveloped marshland. Prior to 1860, New Hampshire native Hiram Allen owned and operated a rope walk east of Prospect Street, powered by Miller's River which was raised by a dam. It is believed that the ropewalk was located near the current site of Allen Street, which runs north-south from Somerville Avenue to the railroad right-of-way east of Milk Place.



1852 Draper Map showing no buildings on site of Milk Place (circled)

In 1864 Benjamin F. Allen of Somerville laid out a series of eighteen house lots (Middlesex County Registry of Deeds Plan Book 14, Plan 55). These included including ten lots on the west side of Allen Street extending back to Miller's Creek and between Charlestown Street and Milk Street (later Somerville Avenue), as well as two lots on the east side of Allen Street and six lots on the south side of Milk Street. Two of these latter lots –no. 1 and 2 -would later become Milk Place. Benjamin F. Allen was born in New Hampshire about 1814. He was a clothing merchant with a store on Washington Street in Boston. He lived in Somerville at the corner of Boston and Washington Streets (later 8 Boston Street – no longer extant). Late in life he was quite active in real estate.



Portion of Plan of Lots belonging to Benjamin Allen, 1864.

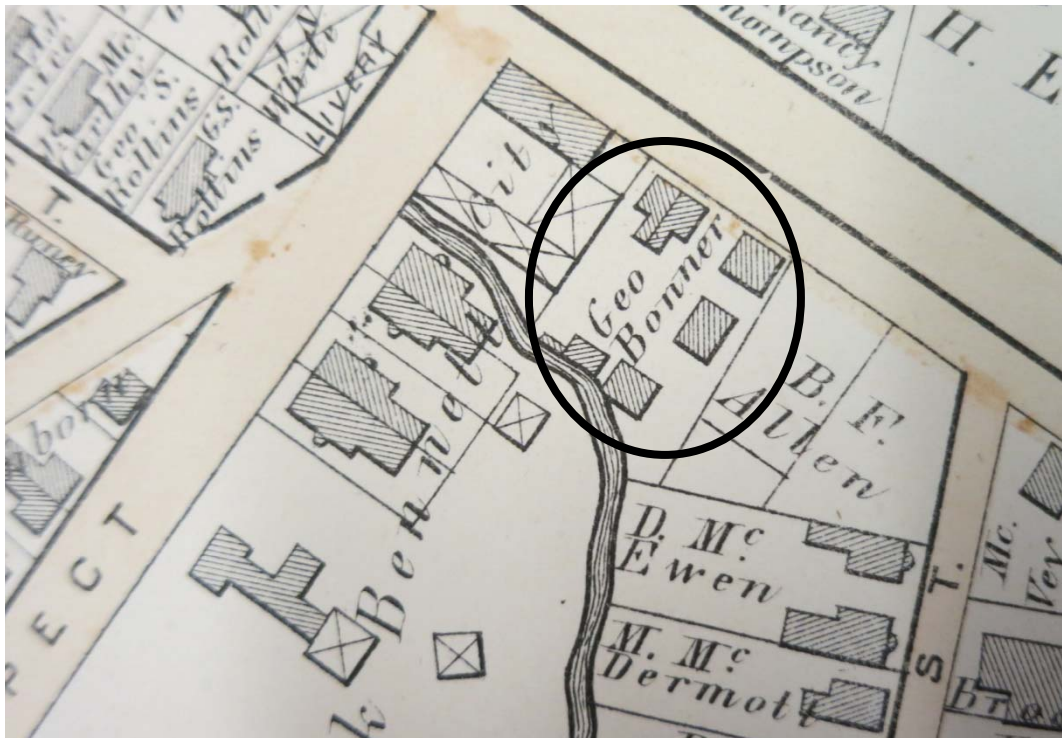
Note: Lots No. 1 and 2 (circled) later became Milk Place, 258 and 264-268 Somerville Ave.

Source: Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, Plan Book 14, Plan 55.

On July 30, 1864 Allen sold grain merchant Robert A. Vinal (also one of the largest property owners in town) four lots in the new subdivision – 2, 10, 11, & 13 – for \$969.38 (Book 932, Page 161). Lot 2, containing 5,770 SF, would later become 258 Somerville Ave., 4 Milk Place and 10 Milk Place while the other lots were located on the west side of Allen Street. Vinal lived on Walnut Street. On October 8, 1872 Vinal sold the property with buildings to George C. Bonner for \$1,731 (Book 1239, Page 341).

Lot 1 to the west (measuring 5,316 SF) was sold by Allen to John Craig on May 30, 1865 for \$1,300 (Book 951, Page 58). This land later became 264-266 Somerville Avenue and 9 Milk Place. Craig sold Lot 1 with buildings to James Stanley in October 1868 for \$3,000. In 1871 Stanley sold Lot 1 – including a “double dwelling house and stable” to George C. Bonner for \$3,300 (Book 1157, Page 525).

Under Bonner’s ownership what had been two separate lots were consolidated into one. The 1874 Hopkins map shows a total of five buildings on the land.



1874 Hopkins map showing Milk Place/Somerville Ave. parcel owned by Bonner

(just prior to filling in of Miller’s River)

It is likely that Bonner purchased the Somerville properties for rental income. George C. Bonner worked as a conductor on the Fitchburg Railroad. According to directories, he boarded on Bonner Place (later 20 Columbus Avenue) with family members. There is no evidence to suggest that he ever occupied any of the Milk Place/Somerville Avenue buildings. Following the Civil War, the Union Square area developed into a large commercial center for a rapidly growing community. Somerville incorporated as a city in 1872. Union Square, with its concentration of commercial entities, served the employees and residents of the factories and industries that were located along the rail lines and rivers east of the Square.

The property that Bonner bought quickly became more valuable. Shortly after Bonner purchased the two lots of land north of Miller's River, the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville established a board of commissioners to devise a plan for draining and dealing with the public nuisance caused by the municipal and industrial waste in the Miller's River. The filling of the river basin began prior to July 1873 and by 1874 only a narrow portion of the river remained, running from Prospect Street to the railroad tracks, along the southern edge of Bonner's two lots (PAL 2010).

The 1880 U.S. Census provides the earliest available information on the working class tenants of the five buildings. In 1880 258 Somerville Avenue was occupied by Richard Qualan, a 60 year old laborer who was born in Ireland and lived here with his wife Catherine. The unit at 264 Somerville was occupied by George Hughes, a 28 year old English born painter, his wife Nora and three young children. Living at 266 Somerville were Dennis Donney, an Irish-born laborer, his wife Mary and young son as well as James McNamee, a glass chimney maker, his wife Mary and young daughter. Three other families are listed as living on Milk Place – Edward Brixton, a 33 year old carriage painter, his wife and five children; Elisha Brown, a teamster from Maine who lived with his wife Mary and Patrick Teuhill, a 36 year old laborer from Ireland who lived with his wife Mary and son, David.



1884 Hopkins Map showing Bonner parcel



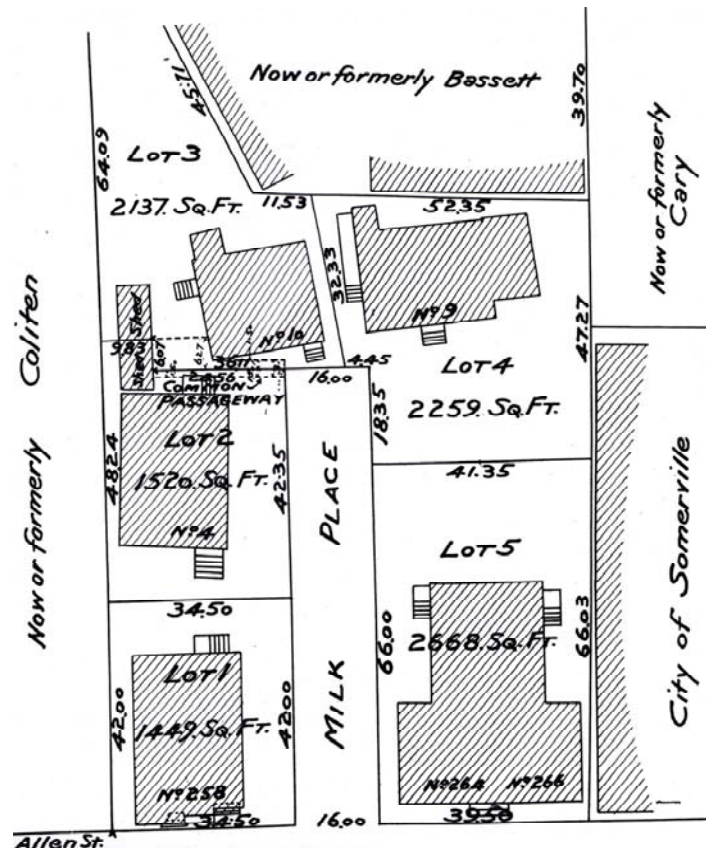
In February 1887 George C. Bonner sold the property to George H. Simonds of Boston (Book 1786, Page 3). George H. Simonds was a provision dealer in Boston. The 1880 Census indicates that he was born in Nova Scotia and lived with his wife Caroline and four children, Carrie, Mary, Hattie, and George on Columbus Avenue in Boston. Again, the five buildings he acquired in Somerville were clearly income-producing properties.

At the time of the 1900 Census, the house at 9 Milk Street Place was occupied by Bartlett Havican, a wool sorter who came from Ireland in 1885 and lived here with his wife Mary and four children. Living at 10 Milk Street Place were Richard Shalley, an Irish born upholsterer, his wife Mary and four children. Nathaniel Phillips, a 33 year old carpenter from Russia was living at 258 Somerville along with his wife Yetta, who operated a grocery store here. There does not appear to be listing for 4 Milk Street Place in the 1900 Census suggesting it may have been vacant. James Nolan who came from Ireland in 1882 was living at 264 Somerville Avenue in 1900. He was born in England and worked at the glass works.

In 1910 the Havican and Shalley families were still renting 9 and 10 Milk Place. The Shalley daughters worked at a bakery and a candy factory. James Remick, who was 69 and born in Massachusetts was living at #4 with his wife Flora and six children. He worked as a railroad carpenter. One of his sons was a vegetable peddler, another son worked as a coal teamster and a daughter was a saleslady at the 5 and 10 cent store. The tenant at 264 Somerville was Dennis Corcoran, an Irish laborer. Margaret Belt, a grocer, was living at 258 Somerville where she also apparently had her store.

Although George H. Simonds died in 1899 his children continued to own the Milk Place/Somerville Avenue property until 1916 when it was sold to Joseph Cohen of Somerville (Book 4111, Page 568). Joseph Cohen continued to rent out the five buildings. In 1920 Daniel O'Leary was the tenant at 4 Milk Place – he worked at the tube works. Richard Shalley's widow, Mary, was still living at 10 Milk and Robert Loury, an Irish laborer, was living at 9 Milk with his family. Arthur Knight, a truck driver, rented 258 Somerville and 264 Somerville was rented to David Hennessey, Margaret Caldwell, Margaret Kelly and William Dentremon.

In 1924 Joseph Cohen sold the parcel of land with five buildings to E. Beatrice Sprague of Malden who promptly subdivided the property into five separate parcels (see page 5). Four of the lots – Lot 1 (258 Somerville Avenue), Lot 2 (4 Milk Place), Lot 3 (10 Milk Place), and Lot 5 (264-266 Somerville Avenue) were sold to Benjamin Applebaum of Boston. The final lot, Lot 4 (9 Milk Place), was sold to James and Thomas Marchillo of Boston.



Subdivision of Sprague Property, Milk Place & Somerville Avenue, Aug. 21, 1924

Source: Middlesex Registry of Deeds, Plan Book 342, Plan 16

The property at 4 Milk Place was sold to Eva Cann and May Metz before being obtained by Maria and Domenico Ricci in 1931 (Book 555, Page 172). Domenico Ricci worked for the WPA at the time of the 1940 Census. Later directories list his occupation as clothworker (1950) and shoe worker (1960). Domenico died prior to 1965; Maria Ricci continued to own and occupy the property until 1975.

The house at 9 Milk Place (originally a stable) was still owned by James Marchillo in 1960. He worked as a maintenance worker, traffic light fixer and fire alarm repairer and lived here with his wife Louise. The last listing for 9 Milk Place appears in the 1966 List of Residents. It is not known when the building was removed.

Mary Flynn, a waitress, owned 10 Milk Place in 1940. Mary Lomax was living here in 1957, which was the last year the address appears in the List of Residents.

Mrs. Jesse Penney owned 258 Somerville in 1940 and operated a variety store here. She was still living here and operating the store in 1950.

The double house at 264-268 Somerville Avenue had many residents over the years. Charles Bean, Gertrude Miller and Grace Boback were living here in 1950. John Clancy, Edward Dwyer and Arthur Barber were the occupants in 1960. John Clancy, a laborer, and Mary Clancy, a factory worker, were still here in 1970. The other residents were John Dwyer, a sign painter and Henry Loly, who worked for the city.

### Building Description

With the exception of the frame, little, if any, historic fabric survives at 4 Milk Place. The exterior of the building is sheathed in vinyl siding and nearly all of the window openings have been covered with boards. The windows are modern vinyl replacement 1/1 double-hung units with two 20<sup>th</sup> century octagonal fixed windows lighting the front stairs. The house is set on a rusticated concrete block foundation which dates to the 1920s. The rear deck is of modern construction as are the front stairs. Both the front and rear doors are metal, modern "six-panel" units.

The interior finishes are all late 20<sup>th</sup> century and include carpet, linoleum and tile on the floors, paneling on the walls, textured ceilings, and hollow core doors. The door frames are simple. The steep front stairs utilize simple boards for balusters. A hatch in the closet of the front bedroom provides limited access to the attic.

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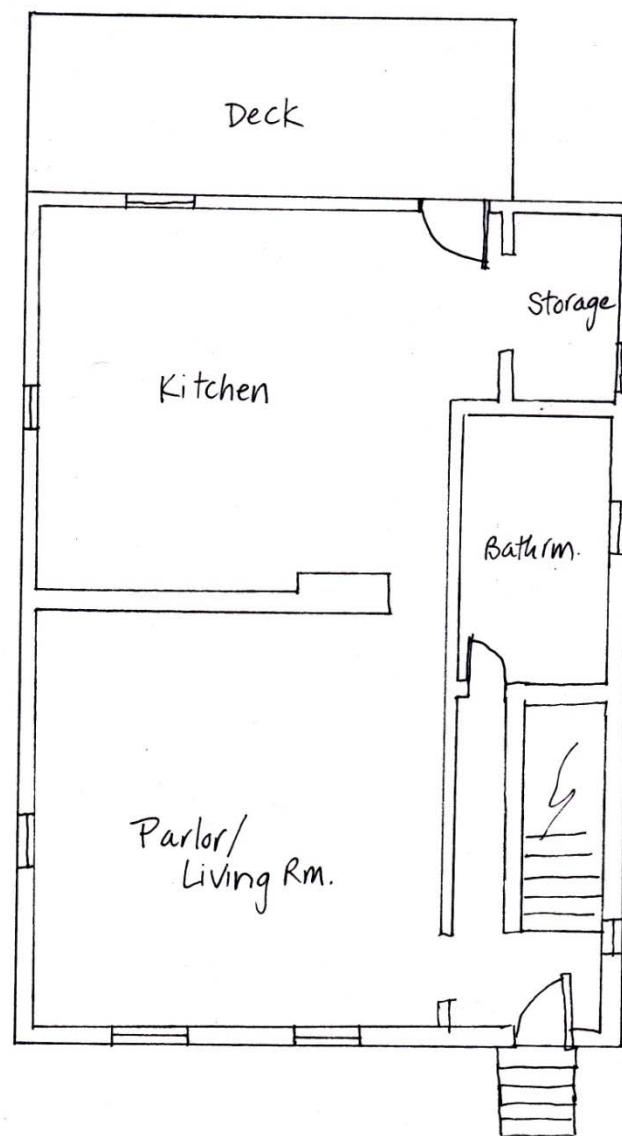
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Sketch Plan  
4 Milk Place  
(First Floor)



Sketch Plan  
4 Milk Place  
(Second Floor)

