



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
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*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT**

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Site: 4 Milk Place  
Case: HPC 2014.041  
Applicant Name: City of Somerville  
  
Date of Application: June 19, 2014  
Recommendation: Not Significant  
Hearing Date: July 15, 2014



4 Milk Place, PAL  
(photo 2010)

**I. Historical Association**

Context/Evolution: The following is predominantly from the 2010 PAL survey form.

*By about 1846, brickyards owned by Hazeltine, Bennett, Wyatt, Clark, and others occupied much of the territory south of the Fitchburg railroad line, constructed in 1836, and a small piece of land to the north (SHS 1902). The 1852 Draper map and a United States Coast Guard map from the same year show the area around the north end of the Miller's River, near Milk Place, as undeveloped marshland. Prior to 1860, New Hampshire native Hiram Allen owned and operated a rope walk east of Prospect Street, furnished with water power from Miller's River, which was raised by a dam at that location (SHS 1902). Presumably the rope walk 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.*

*Following the Civil War, the Union Square area evolved into a large commercial center for a rapidly growing community. Somerville incorporated as a city in 1872, and between 1870 and 1915, its population increased six-fold. The Square's concentration of commercial enterprises served the employees and residents of the factories and industries that developed along the rail lines and rivers east of the Square. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Union Square area was also a central point for streetcar and rail transport serving the many people living in Somerville and commuting to jobs in Boston (Zellie and Stott 1990:122).*

*In 1872, the Cities of Cambridge and Somerville established a board of commissioners to devise a plan for draining and abating the public nuisance caused by the municipal and industrial waste in the Miller's River. The commission's final report, issued the same year, recommended that the City of Somerville construct a main sewer that would drain into the Mystic River in Charlestown*



and fill with clean gravel “all the channel, flats, and basins of Miller’s River” (Quincy et al. 1872:9). The filling of the river basin began by July 1873, and by 1874, a map of the area shows that only the narrow portion of the river running from Prospect Street to the railroad tracks remained, along the southern edge of Bonner’s property (Anon. 1873, Hopkins 1874).

By 1884, no trace of the Miller’s River remained, and more local real estate owners were attempting to develop the no-longer-marshy lands along its banks as a residential neighborhood. Allen Street is lined along both sides with houses built in the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Historical Description: The following is predominantly from the 2010 PAL survey form.

The Benjamin Allen House at 4 Milk Place is located at the edge of a primarily industrial landscape in the southeastern corner of the Union Square area. Prior to 1933, Milk Place was not depicted on any maps as a physical road. The 1933 Sanborn Map is the first to display “Milk St. Pl.,” and it is also the first to display the five buildings on five separate lots. All five of the buildings were still in their original locations on the 1950 Sanborn map. By 1989, the two houses at 9 and 10 Milk Place, southwest of 4 Milk Place, had been demolished (EDR 2009). Beginning in the 1920s, the land surrounding the house to the west, south, and east evolved rapidly into an industrial area occupied by scrap metal yards and a used automobile parts business.

Benjamin Allen, a merchant from New Hampshire likely related to Hiram, owned a large piece of land between Somerville Avenue (then called Milk Row) and the river, including the site of 4 Milk Place, from 1849 to 1860, when he sold the property to John Craig with buildings on it. Craig sold the developed land in 1868 to James Stanley, who in turn sold it to George Bonner in 1871. Directories show that Bonner did not live in Somerville, although he still owned the property in 1884. The 1880 Census lists a George Bonner, born ca. 1837 in Maine, as a farm laborer and widower living in Watertown, Massachusetts, who may have been the Bonner indicated on the 1874 map. Milk Place currently bisects this lot vertically, and the house at 4 Milk Place is presumed to be one of the five buildings shown on the 1874 Hopkins map. None of the other buildings remain extant.

Bonner likely purchased the Somerville properties for rental income, taking advantage of the growing numbers of working-class people needing housing in the area. In 1888, the Clark Bennett land southwest of Bonner’s property was further subdivided and Bennett Street was laid out. Between 1884 and 1895, Bonner sold his properties to Mrs. George H. Simonds, who also appears to have used the house as a rental property.

In 1911, James Remick, a carpenter, lived in the house at 4 Milk Place. The following year, William F. Haley, a harnessmaker, was listed at this address. Mrs. Maud H. Haley, presumably William’s wife, still lived there in 1915, but she was gone by 1918, as there was no listing for 4 Milk Place in that year’s Directory. Daniel F. O’Leary, a driver, and his wife Josephine relocated to the house from Franklin Street in Somerville in 1924 and lived there through at least 1930. The City issued a building permit to the property owner in 1926, B. Sprague, to raise the house up and add a cellar beneath it. Domenico Ricci, a laborer, and his wife Marie succeeded the O’Learys around 1933 and lived there until at least 1940. Members of the Ricci family continued to occupy the house through at least 1970, with their son, Ralph, listed in the 1945 Phone Book, Sandy A. Ricci listed in 1956, Dominic Ricci in 1960 and 1965, and Mrs. Dominic Ricci in 1970.

Architectural Description: The following is predominantly from the 2010 PAL survey form.



4 Milk Place, primary, right and left side façades

*The Benjamin Allen House at 4 Milk Place is a one-and-one-half-story, end-gable structure constructed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ca. 1870. It is set close to the east side of the street, south of the intersection with Somerville Avenue. Milk Place is not defined in the landscape except for a curb cut. A gravel parking area surrounds the north and east sides of the house, and a solid fence runs along the east side of the lot.*

*The three-bay by three-bay, wood-frame, north-facing house has an ornamental concrete block foundation that dates to the 1926 addition of a cellar, vinyl siding, and an asphalt-shingled roof. A narrow entablature runs below the slightly overhanging eaves in the gable. A brick chimney rises from the ridge line.*

*The main entrance in the west bay of the facade (north) elevation is set within a simple rectangular vinyl surround with a modern panel door. Stairs extend directly onto the gravel driveway, and a secondary porch is located on the south (rear) elevation.*

*Fenestration consists of one-over-one, double-hung vinyl replacement windows with narrow wood trim. Two octagonal single-pane windows are located in the north bay of the first and attic stories of the west elevation.*

### **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 4 Milk Place 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 associated with the broad architectural, cultural, and economic history of the City due to the modest massing and form of a workers cottage, the long-term association as an income producing property, and due to the relationship of the parcel with the drainage and abating of the Miller's River.

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## 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 4 Milk Place begins with the c. 1870 date of construction as modest working-class housing 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 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 visible from Somerville Avenue, but located along Milk Place. The location has not been altered, but the structure appears to have been raised due to the concrete block foundation. By 1933, a total of five structures were located on Milk Place; the subject structure is the only one still existent.
- b. **Design:** The original form, massing, and components of the original fenestration pattern are still evident. The three-bay primary façade is still understood, but the side elevations have been altered with regard to window placement and size. An entablature is still evident beneath the eaves and a brick chimney is located at the ridge.
- c. **Materials:** The materials that compose this structure are predominantly wood with a concrete foundation and a shallow-pitched asphalt shingled roof.
- d. **Alterations:** The windows and doors have been replaced with vinyl. The structure was raised, but possibly also moved, and the fenestration on both side elevations has been altered. The form and massing remain intact as well as the primary façade fenestration pattern.

### ***Evaluation of Integrity:***

The subject structure retains a low level of integrity due to the raised foundation or altered location. In addition, while the form and massing remain intact, and the three-bay primary façade, the structure does not display original fabric. In addition, this structure was once part of a collection of late nineteenth century income-producing buildings. The demolition of these four buildings removed the historic context to which this structure is directly associated.

### 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 do not find 4 Milk Place historically or architecturally significant.

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### 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. 1870, 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 do not find 4 Milk Place 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 do not find 4 Milk Place historically or architecturally significant.

*4 Milk Place*

