



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: 204 Morrison Ave, shed/garage
Case: HPC 2014.047
Applicant Name: Linde & Ronald Dynneson
Date of Application: June 23, 2014
Recommendation: Significant
Hearing Date: July 15, 2014



I. Historical Association

Context/Evolution: The following is an excerpt from a recently completed survey form by Lisa Mausolf.

The house at 204 Morrison Avenue is a key component in a varied streetscape of late 19th century wood-frame residences which includes gable-front Italianate dwellings, mansard roofed cottages and Stick Style and Queen Anne variants. The combination of these dwellings illustrates the development of the neighborhood in a relatively short time span, fueled by improved transportation access.

Historical Description: The following is an excerpt from a recently completed survey form by Lisa Mausolf.

The construction of this house reflects the speculative development of Morrison Avenue in the early 1870s following the introduction of railroad commuter service to Boston and Cambridge via the Lexington and Arlington Branch Railroad in 1870-1. The land on which this house stands was part of a larger parcel of 36,400 square feet sold by Nathaniel Morrison of Somerville and Ransom F. Evans of Boston to Thomas P. Beath of Boston in April 1871 for \$2,912 (MCSRD Book 1154, Page 295). The parcel of land encompassed the present 204-222 Morrison Avenue, 64 Grove Street and 18-34 Winslow Street. Thomas Beath apparently developed the land and built the present 204 Morrison Avenue. Deed records indicate that Beath sold a number of properties on Morrison, Highland, Winslow, Grove and Chester between 1870 and 1876. Thomas Beath had left Somerville by the time of the 1875 directory. Deed records include a number of transactions sold by his estate beginning in January 1876. James Edward Beath is last listed in the 1877 directory.

In January 1872 what is now 204 Morrison Avenue, including both land and buildings, was sold by Thomas Beath to Maria L. Austin, wife of Edward P. Austin for \$3,642 (MCSR Book 1195, Page 152). E.P. Austin is shown as the owner of the house on the 1874 Hopkins map of Somerville. (T.P. Beath is shown on the 1874 map as owning the vacant land to the west fronting Winslow Avenue.) Edward P. Austin is listed as living in a house on Morrison near Elm (later Grove Street) in the 1873 Somerville directory (in 1871 he was boarding at M.H. Morse's house on Elm Street). Austin worked as an astronomer at the Harvard observatory in Cambridge. He lived at what is now 204 Morrison Avenue only a short time. By the time of the 1875 directory he is listed as a Professor of Astronomy at Harvard and was boarding at 19 Everett Street in Cambridge.

In 1881 the property was conveyed by Maria L. Austin and her husband to Corinne Smith, wife of Josiah Smith (MCSR Book 1563, Page 358). Josiah Smith was a native of Wilmot, New Hampshire and married his wife, the former Correna Keay, in Gilford in 1863. They lived in Boston for the first ten years of their marriage; he began working in a Boston market when he was about twenty years old. They may have rented the house before purchasing it in 1881. In 1880 Josiah Smith, age 38, was living on Morrison Avenue with his wife Corinne, age 36, and two sons – Frederick, age 10, and Charles, age 8. The 1887 directory lists Josiah Smith as a provisions dealer working at 42 North Street in Boston and living at 72 Morrison (later renumbered 204 Morrison).

The Smith family rented out 204 Morrison Avenue (then 72 Morrison) for several years from about 1899 to 1901 and lived around the corner in a house they also owned at 64 Grove Street. The U.S. Census indicates that in 1900 the house at 204 Morrison was rented to Hollis Milleson, a 39 year old artist, his wife and two daughters. Hollis Milleson (1861-1953) was born in Indiana and worked primarily in oil. Also living with him was his 50 year old cousin, Royal H. Milleson and his wife. Born in Ohio, Royal Milleson (1849-1936) was also an artist and apparently the more accomplished of the two. He initially worked as a journeyman printer which led him to cartooning and sketching for newspapers, later turning to painting. He had moved to Boston in 1895 and took formal art lessons with George Morse of Melrose. Royal Milleson is still listed as living at 204 Morrison in the 1901 directory although at about this time he established himself in Chicago (Scanlan Fine Arts).

By 1905 the Smiths were again occupying 204 Morrison Avenue. Josiah Smith died suddenly on December 31, 1905 at the age of 63 at the relief hospital in Haymarket Square in Boston. He was stricken on his way home from work with cerebral hemorrhage. His obituary indicates that Josiah Smith was a member of the Elm Council Royal Arcanum, the Middlesex Lodge of the New England Order of Protection of Somerville and was also a member of the West Somerville Baptist Church (Somerville Reporter, Jan. 5, 1906).

Widow Corinne Smith continued to live here after her husband's death. At the time of the 1910 Census she was sharing the house with her two granddaughters, Ruth, age 16, and Florence, age 9. By 1919 Ruth Smith had married Walter Marden and Corinne Smith conveyed the property to her (MCSR Book 4291, Page 496). At the time the deed indicates that the property included 9,164 square feet of land. In 1920 the Census indicates that the couple was living here with Corinne Smith, Walter's mother, Ella Marden, Albert Evans, a brother-in-law, Florence Evans, a sister-in-law, and Clara Walton, an aunt-in-law. Walter Marden worked as the manager of the Oscar Lundgren Co. in Boston, a tapestry (upholstery) house. The 1930 and 1940 Censuses show that Walter and Ruth Marden occupied the house by themselves. Walter died on June 29, 1941.

After Ruth Marden's death the house was sold in 1942 by her estate to Fred Elwood MacEachern and his wife Lila (MCRD Book 6584, Page 171). Elwood MacEachern was a painter. Peter and Bride (Fitzpatrick) Mollahan purchased the house in 1955 (MCRD Book 8480, Page 368). Peter Mollahan worked as a machinist. Bride Mollahan died on May 10, 1972 and Peter on April 13, 1976. The property was later owned by their daughter, Virginia Mollahan, until her death on September 29, 2013 at the age of 85.

Architectural Description: The following is an excerpt from a recently completed survey form by Lisa Mausolf.

The 104' x 90' (.21 acre), level corner lot is large for the neighborhood and is enclosed by a chain link fence. The house occupies the north half of the lot and is set back slightly from the street with a small area of lawn to the north. Concrete curbing and end posts run along the sidewalk in front of the house. An asphalt-paved driveway extends from the street along the south side of the house, terminating at a single-story, gable-roofed shed that is set with its broad side to the street.

The building, which was constructed between 1874 and 1884 according to historic maps, was later converted to a garage. It is clad in wood clapboards with staggered butt wood shingles on either gable end. There are several original 6/6 wooden windows. The original front entrance to the shed was altered in the 20th century to accommodate the length of an automobile and a bump-out was added with vertical board double doors. The remainder of the lot to the south of the driveway consists of grass-covered lawn with a number of overgrown or ailing shrubs.



*204 Morrison Avenue,
garage/barn*

Summary:

The Morrison Avenue streetscape and neighborhood developed in a relatively short time span, fueled by improved transportation access. The shed/garage is not identified with a particular owner of the property, but was likely constructed c. 1880. The style is likely Italianate, but the existing conditions are poor; however, original features, such as windows and exterior sheathing, do still exist.

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 the shed/garage at 204 Morrison Avenue 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.

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 the shed/garage at 204 Morrison Avenue begins at the time of construction, c.1880, and ends when this structure was altered to accommodate a large vehicle.

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 c.1880 shed/garage is consistent with the original location at the rear of the lot. This structure is associated with the dwelling located at 204 Morrison Avenue but not a specific occupant.
- b. Design: The existing conditions of the structure are poor, but the style is likely Italianate and original features, such as windows and exterior sheathing do still exist. While the building has both a front and rear addition, the original massing is still understood.
- c. Materials: Wood is the predominant material that composes this shed/garage structure and two original windows still exist on the front and side façades. The structure is sheathed in clapboards with staggered butt wood shingles on either end beneath the gable. The roofing material is asphalt shingles.
- d. Alterations: Aside from the front and rear additions, the structure retains the original form, massing, construction materials and a majority of the fenestration pattern is still clear.

Evaluation of Integrity:

Although the existing conditions are poor, the original materials are still present, including wood 6/6 windows. Additions have modified the front and rear façades, but the form and massing are still clear. The building still retains a moderate level of integrity, due to the retention of original materials, but the existing conditions are poor. If the building continues not to be used, the integrity will continue to deteriorate along with the structure itself.

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 the shed/garage at 204 Morrison Avenue historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant due to the remaining architectural detail and due to the shared context, as a group of buildings, with 204 Morrison Avenue.

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.1880, 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 do not find the shed/garage at 204 Morrison Avenue 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 the shed/garage at 204 Morrison Avenue historically or architecturally significant.

204 Morrison Avenue

