



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT

Site: 360 Mystic Avenue
Case: HPC 12.116

Applicant Name: Richard Berg
Applicant Address: 100 Fellsway West

Date of Application: 11/4/2012
Staff Recommendation: Significant
Date of Public Hearing: 11/18/2012

I. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

Architectural Description: This late 19th century industrial complex consists of several attached wood-frame and brick structures and a square, brick chimney stack. All wood sections are covered in vinyl siding. The main factory on Mystic Avenue has 4-stories with a shallow-pitched gable-roof. It is a wooden structure with predominantly 6/6 wood sash windows, a brick first floor with segmental arch openings, and a central elevator tower. While the building was noted in 1980 as being in good condition, a recent site visit showed the complex has not been well-maintained. Gutters and fascia are falling. Original 6/6 window sash is broken and in a few cases missing. Water damage is clearly evident. See accompanying attachments regarding structural condition and the Memorandum of Agreement for 356 Mystic Avenue



Carole Zellie stated in “**Beyond the Neck**” that “the manufacturing process was arranged so that the cleanest area for finishing and varnishing was on the top floor of the three story wood building, with cabinet work on the second and first floors, and sawing and planing in the basement. Attached to the main building were one and two story lumber sheds, a dry house and a brick boiler house.”

Over the years several additions and alterations were made. The 1895 Bromley map was unavailable for comparison. The 1900 map shows a complex shape based around 4-story main block. This has been added to in the 1920s, 1940s and 1970s. Structurally, one can see variations in the roof-line as well as subtle alterations in the wall plane beneath the vinyl that indicate where the structure has been altered.

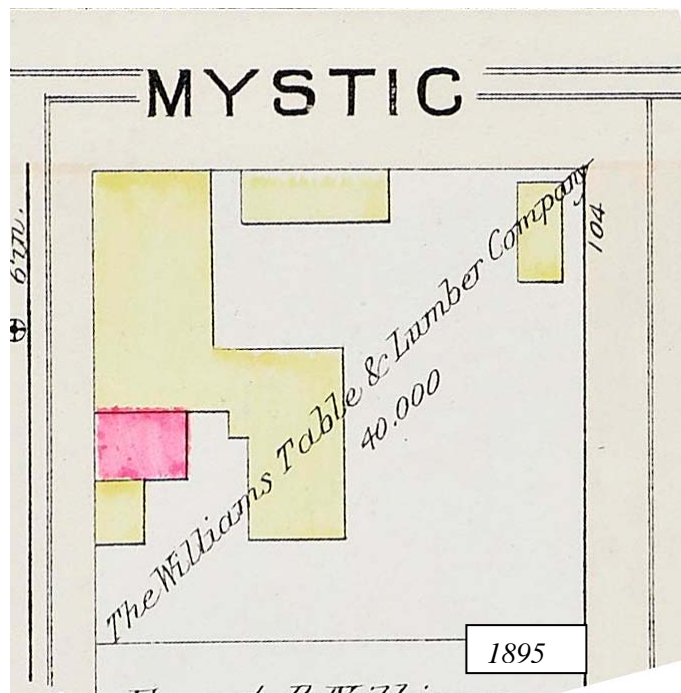
Historical Description: One result of the City's rapid development between 1872 and 1900 was a significant growth in the building industries that furnished the newly built residences and offices. According to Zellie, many of these companies relocated to Somerville from Boston in the 1880s and 1890s. By 1928, the furniture industry was making \$1.4 million dollars in Somerville alone, according to the Somerville Journal, up 450% from 1923.



Charles W. Lyman and Paulinus F. Williams formed the C. W. Lyman & Company, manufacturers of a wide range of tables as can be seen from this advertisement in the City Directory of 1887.



However, by 1894, Paulinus Williams had taken over the company, renamed it and diversified its products to include lumber; store and office furnishings; mantels and beds, in addition to tables. According to Zellie, the firm appears to have survived only until about 1900.



In 1922, the Cabel Upholstering Company constructed a 3-car garage on the site according to Somerville Building Permits. The paste-up on the 1925 Sanborn shows that the Berry & Co. Furniture Warehouse replaced the Cabel Office Furniture Company.

According to available Building Permits, during 1933 and 1946, members of the Scarpa or Scarpo family made some alterations to the building. According to one of the current trustees of the property, Richard Berg, there was an addition to part of the building in the 1940s. This section of the building, known as 356 Mystic Avenue, shows evidence of several alterations. One section of the floor is ½-story lower than the major portion and may be part of the original complex which is partially overlaid by a higher floor and roof. One wall has interior windows that have been closed in.

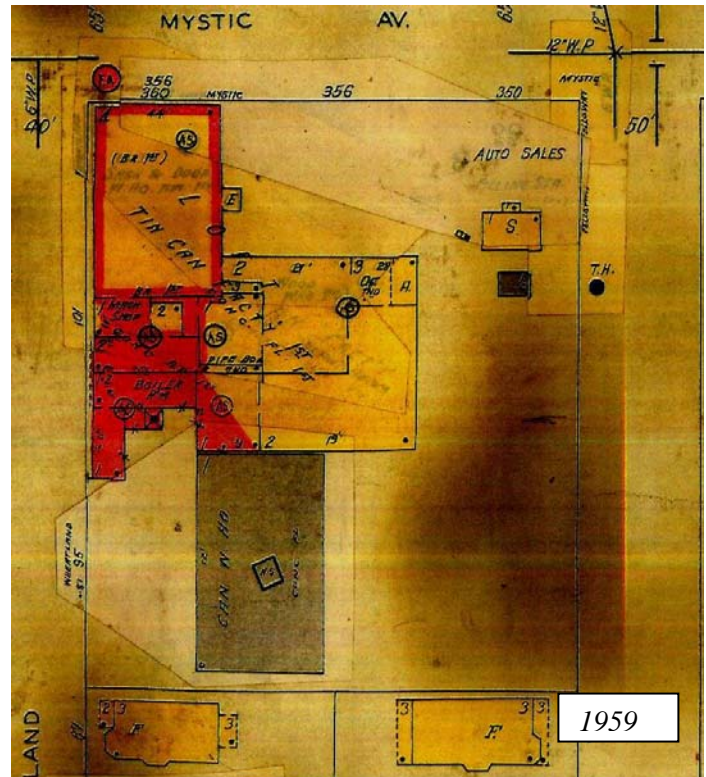
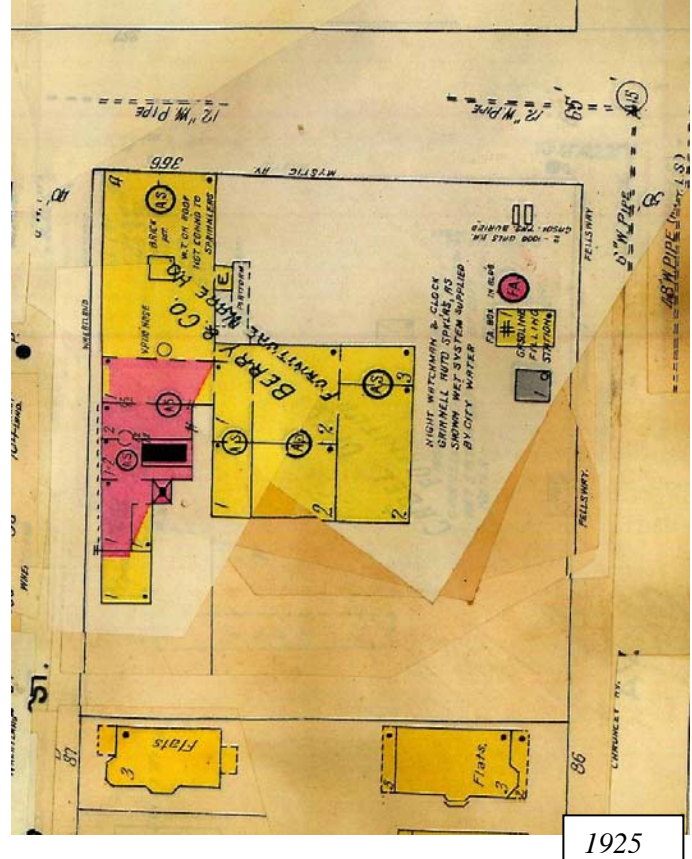
In April of 1950, a Building Permit was given to the Eagle Can Company to construct a steel building to be used for storage use only. The 1938-1959 Sanborn Atlas shows the structure was used as a tin can factory and warehouse overlaying a tin can factory and a sash and door warehouse. This map also shows the metal storage building, indicating that the use was post-1950. The Eagle Can Company owned the property through 1965 when it was sold to the Craig Corporation.

A further addition was constructed in the 1970s to link a new brick building on Fellsway West to the older factory building as a second means of egress. This section has a flat roof and 1/1 windows. It contains a series of rooms that have been used as office and living space as well a storage for the church located in 100 Fellsway West.

In 1980, according to Industrial Historian, Peter Stott, the building was used by a Quality Mop and Brush Manufacturing Co. According to Mr. Berg, they were fourth floor tenants, along with American Chemical on the second and third floors to the Electro Sales Company who currently occupy the ground floor level. Recent uses of the 4-story building complex have included, among many others: an electric motor company, an antiques store, art studios, and a futon factory. A church serving Spanish-speaking congregation, as well as other businesses, is located in the modern brick building on Fellsway West.

Context/Evolution of Structure or Parcel: As can be seen from the Atlases the building has evolved over time, from the initial 1887 core to numerous alterations, especially to the one and two story

lumber sheds and a dry house which has been recently removed due to structural issues and to allow for the construction of the new housing and office units. Throughout all the alterations the essential factory building has remained constant with only an elevator added to the east side of the building.



In 2009, 356 Mystic Avenue, the 2-story lumber drying shed was determined to be significant and preferably preserved and Memorandum of Agreement was reached to stabilize the main structures for rehabilitation in Phase II. An extensive review process was undertaken.

See addenda for minutes of previous HPC Meetings regarding this site, the Memorandum of Agreement as well as the structural engineers' reports concerning the physical rather than the architectural integrity of the buildings.

Summary: This building on the corner of Wheatland Street and Mystic Avenue has had a factory of one sort or another for over 100 years meeting the needs of Somerville residents and others. Structural engineers have noted that the building is in poor condition despite the Memorandum of Agreement to stabilize the building in readiness for Phase II rehabilitation. The building is a landmark despite its condition.

II. FINDINGS ON CRITERIA FOR DEMOLITION

The structure must be either (1) listed on the National Register or (2) at least 50 years old.

(1) The structure is listed on or within an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places, n / or is the structure the subject of a pending application for listing on the National Register.

(2) The structure, circa 1887, is at least 50 years old.

The structure must be found either (1) importantly associated or (2) significant.

(1) In accordance with historic map, directory, and voting list research, and through an examination of resources that explore the history of the City, such as *Somerville Past and Present* and *Somerville Beyond the Neck*, Staff do find 360 Mystic 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. This building is mentioned in *Somerville Beyond the Neck*, has been determined to be eligible for the National Register by Fitch & Hollister, Public Archaeology Laboratory as meeting criteria C as the most intact example of a wood frame factory construction from the late 19th century in Somerville.

(2) Upon an evaluation of both the historic 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, degree of alteration, and scarcity or frequency, Staff do find 360 Mystic Avenue to be historically or architecturally significant.

Evaluation Criteria to Determine Significance

1. Period of Significance: *As the integrity of a building or structure is evaluated as it relates to the period of greatest significance, the period of greatest significance must first be determined.* The period of significance for the furniture factory/ tin can factory runs from 1887 through its incarnation as a can factory in the 1950s.
2. Integrity: *The subject property must possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant. "Sufficient" integrity is determined by examining the degree of overall change in appearance, based on the number of "detrimental" or "critical" (irreversible) changes.*

- Detrimental changes include:
 1. *New, relocated or removed chimney* – The smokestack still exists.
 2. *Rebuilt foundation* – The brick foundation is still visible
 3. *Modern porch* – There are no porches.
 4. *Original windows changed at a later but still historical date; modern windows in original frames; original windows intact but extra windows added; change in shape or size of openings* – Most of the 6/6 wood sash are intact but in poor to fair condition. The ground floor windows have been bricked in but retain their granite sills and configuration.
 5. *Original doors changed at a later but still historical date; modern doors in original frames; original doors intact but extra doors added; change in shape or size of openings* – Doors have been altered but the openings have been retained.
 6. *Synthetic siding* – Aluminum siding installed over the original wood siding.
 7. *Removal of outbuildings* – Altered portion of the building with the address of 356 Mystic Avenue has been removed after a Memorandum of Agreement was reached to stabilize the main structure in readiness for a rehabilitation of the factory building in Phase II of the development. Other buildings shown on the earliest maps have not existed since the early 1900s and are not part of the present public perception of the building or its uses.
 8. *Recent change of location* – The building has not been moved.
 9. *Isolation from its original context (loss of historical setting)* – The building is set against a major arterial and next to an early 20th century residential neighborhood of 3-deckers. A new building with some industrial character was constructed on another portion of the site.

Summary: While some alterations have occurred over time, much of the building remains and is clearly a wood frame factory building of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It is the only wood framed mill building left in the City of Somerville.

- *Critical changes are irreversible, greatly alter the structure, and/or destroy more significant features.* The removal of the much altered lumber storage shed area destroyed some of the context for the building. The decision to allow its removal was predicated on the main part of the building to be stabilized for rehabilitation before the section was demolished.

Whether a change is in fact critical to the integrity and further negates the historical value depends on:

1. *The degree of the structure's significance* – This building is mentioned in Somerville Beyond the Neck, has been determined to be eligible for the National Register by Fitch & Hollister, Public Archaeology Laboratory as meeting criteria C as the most intact example of a wood frame factory construction from the late 19th century in Somerville. The building is significant for its role in the furniture industry spurred by the growth in population and a new middle class who needed inexpensive but fashionable furniture and as a center of employment.
2. *The proportion of significant features remaining* – The main portion of the building with a characteristic roofline, and fenestration pattern of a mill building still exists along with the smoke stake and brick portions of the factory.

3. *If the significance was primarily dependent on the architecture* – Architecturally the building is significant as the last remaining wood frame mill building. Many of the alterations are reversible.

4. *The appropriateness of the changes* – Most of the changes to the building are caused by generations of neglect and a refusal to spend money on the needed extensive repairs. The section of the building demolished was structurally unsound. Other changes such as siding and bricked windows can be undone.

Summary: Most of the changes over the years to the building can be reversed such as the siding and windows. Enough documentation of the existing fabric shows that missing and damaged materials can be replaced in kind.

3. Degree of Alteration: *Building evaluations shall discuss the degree of detrimental or critical change to the building, and their effect on the architectural significance. A building should not be classified as historic if distinguishing features are removed or concealed, rendering the building less exemplary of a given style or period of architecture. While some alterations to the building and complex have occurred, 360 Mystic Avenue can still be seen as the type of structure that it is. The building still retains its essential character. Many alterations can be undone and reversed.*
4. Scarcity or Frequency: *Scarcity shall be determined by knowledge of similar remaining structures, whether in type or style. If the subject structure is the only example, or of a few remaining examples of its kind, determinations regarding significance and integrity would be less severe than for resources that occur frequently. This is the only known wood mill building of this era. Other factory buildings are either of brick or a composite of brick and wood or from a later period.*

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are based upon a historic and architectural analysis by Historic Preservation Staff of the application based upon the required findings of the Somerville Demolition Ordinance, and is based only upon archival and historical research, and a historical and architectural evaluation of significance conducted prior to the public hearing for a Determination of Significance. This report may be revised or updated with new recommendations or findings based upon additional information provided to the Historic Preservation Staff or through more in depth research conducted during the public hearing process.

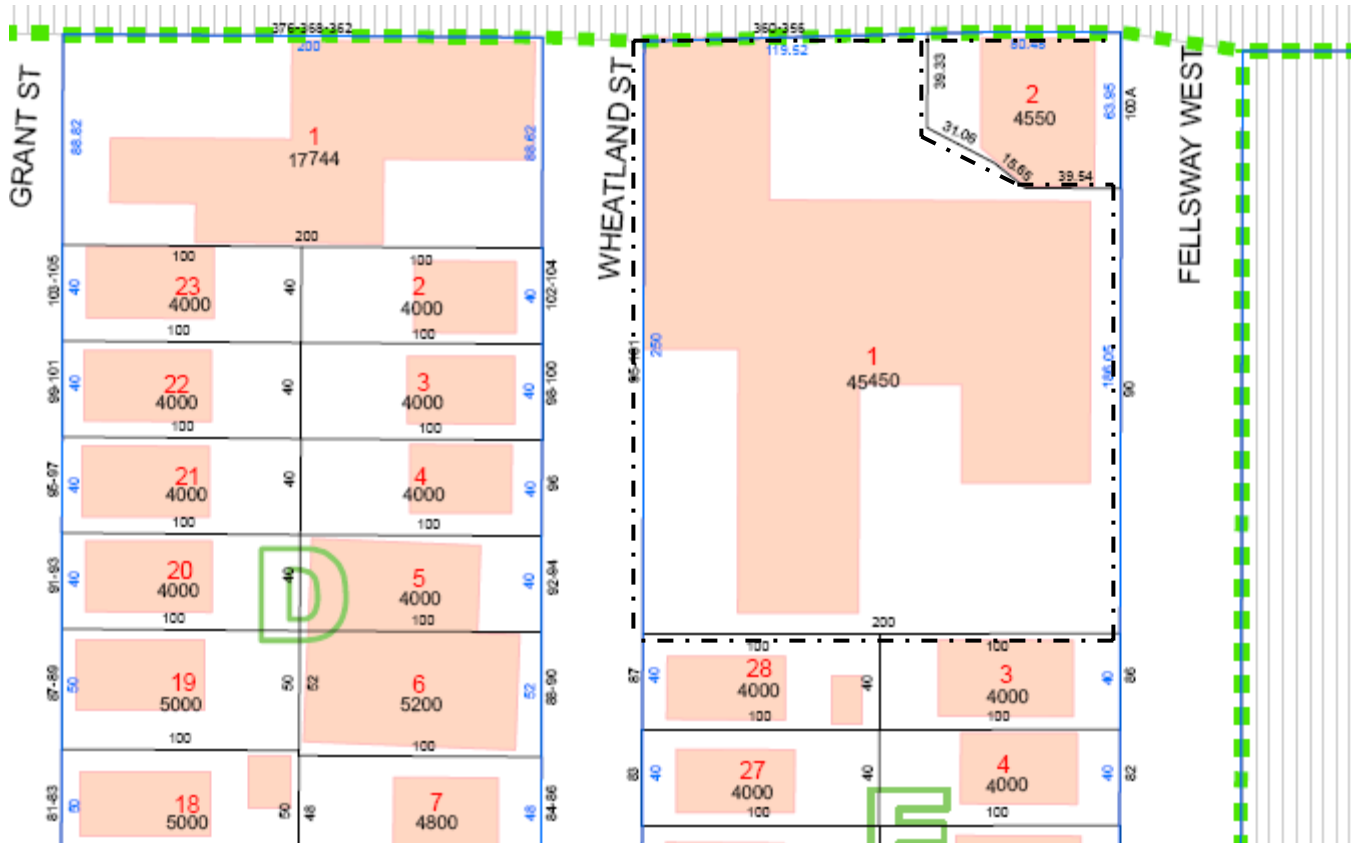
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- The structure is NOT listed on or within an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor is the structure the subject of a pending application for listing on the National Register.
- + The structure, circa 1887, is at least 50 years old.

The structure must be found either importantly associated or significant.

- In accordance with historic map, directory, and voting list research, and through an examination of resources that explore the history of the City, such as *Somerville Past and Present* and *Somerville Beyond the Neck*, **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission find 360 Mystic 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.**

- Upon an evaluation of both the historic 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, degree of alteration, and scarcity or frequency, **Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission find 360 Mystic Avenue to be historically or architecturally significant.**



360 Mystic Avenue