



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:	26-28 Prospect Street
Case:	2014.042
Applicant Name:	City of Somerville
Date of Application:	June 19, 2014 HPC received: June 19, 2014
Recommendation:	Significant
Hearing Date:	July 15, 2014

I. Historical Association

Architectural Description: From the Form B

Possessing a T-shaped form, 26-28 Prospect Street is an Italianate double house. Rising two stories from a brick foundation to a gable roof, this wood frame building's original clapboards are covered with cement fiber shingles. The main block measures six-bays-by-two bays, while the two-story rear ell measures two-bays-by-two-bays. Paired and recessed entrances are in evidence at the center of the main facade. A short flight of concrete replacement steps leads to the entrance's original double doors. The entrances' side walls are enlivened by long rectangular panels with raised moldings, these doors exhibit simple vertical and horizontal wooden surrounds. The doors are pierced by pairs of tall, rectangular, arched glass panes that surmount solid wooden panels. Above the outline of the former door hood that looks like it might have been in the form of an elongated pediment supported by brackets. Pairs of standard size windows are located on either side of the paired entrances. In general, windows are standard size and contain 2/2 double-hung wood sash. Ranged across the main facade's second story are six standard size windows. On the eastern halves of the side walls, generously proportioned polygonal bays project from the wall surface. The side walls culminate in a gable with return eaves.

Historical Description: From the Form B

26-28 was built c.1858-1870. This dwelling is a remnant of the old Clark Bennett estate that was begun before 1852. Clark Bennett was an important mid-nineteenth century Somerville businessman and local political figure who is credited with helping to implement several major civic improvements, including the installation of an "excellent sewerage system", the "widening and grading of Somerville Avenue" and the "abatement (or filling in) of the Miller's River". 26-28 Bennett Street represents one of his secondary or rental properties that stand just to the north of the site of the old Bennett House.



Extant by at least the early 1850s, the main Bennett House is shown on the 1874 Somerville Atlas as an F-shaped building with an attached barn and two free-standing stables that stood just to the south of 30 Prospect Street. A meandering tributary of the Miller's River circumscribed the northern and eastern boundaries of the property. The river separated Charlestown and eastern Somerville from Cambridge. Interestingly Bennett reportedly played a role in filling in the Miller's River and related streams and marshes during the late nineteenth century. To the south of Bennett's estate were the tracks of the Fitchburg area, as well as industrial concerns, such as the Union Glass Company and Boynton Packing Company.

The eldest of nine children, Clark Bennett was born in Londonderry, Vermont November 3, 1810. His ancestors were among the early settlers of Groton, MA. His grandfather David Bennett was an early enlistee in the Continental Army, serving in the siege of Boston in 1775-1776. The possibility remains that Clark Bennett's move to Somerville in 1831 at age twenty-one was influenced by family stories about his grandfather's role in the American Revolution-particularly if his grandfather was part of the encampment on Winter, Central and Prospect Hills during the early days of the American Revolution. At the time Clark Bennett settled in Somerville, the community was still ten years away from becoming a town independent of Charlestown. From 1831 until 1856, Bennett apparently prospered in Somerville brick manufacturing, despite the fact that he was not listed among Somerville's brick manufacturers in the 1850 Federal Manufacturing census.

Brick-making commenced in Salem as early as 1629 and was the first brickyard operation in the English colonies. Medford, MA had brick manufactories beginning in 1647 and by the eighteenth century had become a leading center of this industry in the Boston area Cambridge had a brick manufactory as early as 1660, while Somerville's brickyards did not appear until at least the late 1820s. Somerville's brick manufactories were located near the old Middlesex Canal, (completed during the early 1800s) adjacent to the Medford Turnpike (now Mystic Avenue) and Broadway. After 1856, Clark Bennett became an insurance agent According to an advertisement on page 13 of the Somerville Directory, Bennett's business encompassed "Risks taken in the following offices: Middlesex Mutual, Holyoke Mutual, Traders and Mechanics Mutual and Central Mutual."

Mr. Bennett was also active in town government, earning a reputation as a man of accomplishments within the realm of Miller's River in-fill, expansion of the town's sewerage system into West Somerville, improvements to Milk Row (later Somerville Avenue), and the construction of public parks (probably Central Park atop Central Hill). Bennett served eleven years on the School Committee, part of the time as its chairman and three years on the Board of Aldermen. In 1868, Somerville's Bennett School was named in his honor.

Bennett built 26-28 Prospect Street and an identical house to the north (demolished) after his retirement from brick making in 1856, apparently as income-producing rental properties. By 1895, a U-shaped Street called Bennett curved around the Bennett's former buildings. By that time, 26-28 Prospect Street had passed from the Bennett heirs to a Lucy E. Wright.

The earliest identified occupants of these post-Bennett years buildings are listed in the 1903 Somerville City Directory. At that time the double house at 26-28 Prospect Street was the residence of Arthur O'Keefe, laborer; Harry Fisher, clerk in a men's furnishings shop; Thomas M. Spinney, "Tower man, Boston and Maine Railroad." and Mrs. Albert Tyler.

A glance at the list of 26-28 Prospect Street's occupants for the period of 1903 to 1940 reveals a lack of long-term tenants. In fact, the turn-over in tenants was fairly high from one decade to the next (with the

noteworthy exception of the Italian families who settled here during the 1930s and 1940s). Many of the tenants worked for the gritty industrial concerns located on the south side of the old Fitchburg Railroad tracks in Ward II. Occupations associated with the tenants of the former Bennett -owned buildings during the first four decades of the twentieth century included: soap worker, glass cutter, barrel maker and blacksmith. The glass workers who lived here during the first quarter of the twentieth century were almost certainly employed by the nearby Union Glass Company. Founded in 1854, the Union Glass Company remained in operation until 1924, long after the last of the other Boston-area firms had folded or relocated to another part of the region. By 1910, the occupants of **26-28 Prospect Street** included: Mrs. Ellen O' Keefe, widow of Arthur O' Keefe, and Charles A. Grush, teamster as well as father and son glass makers William J. Mc Donough, Sr. and Jr., Thomas J. Cunningham, blacksmith was also one of the tenants in this double house. By 1920, the roster of occupants included: Teresa and William P. Carroll, painter, and Mrs. Hannah Dawson at number 26; Joseph T. Murray, lab worker, and Mrs. Annie M. Irving at number 28.

At the beginning of the Great Depression, the unit **numbered 26** was occupied by Erasma and Erasmo Ventura, soap-worker, while Mrs. Agatha M. Hood is listed at **number 28**, along with Elizabeth A. and Edward J. West, glass cutter.

By 1940, several Italian families lived at 26-28 Prospect Street Listed here at the beginning of World War II were: Mary T. and Frank A. Spinosa, lab worker, as well as the Venturas (**number 26**), while **number 28** housed Angelina and Salvatore Lang, barber, and Margaret and Angelo S. Barber, retired.

Architect: Unknown

Context/Evolution: From the Form B

26-28 and 30 Prospect Street are surrounded on three sides by asphalt paved areas containing old radiators and other types of salvageable vintage fixtures that await purchase by the owner's customers. Despite the changes to their surrounding area, the Italianate double house at 26-28 and the Queen Anne vernacular dwelling at 30 Prospect Street are survivors from the periods of 1858-1870 and 1885-1894, respectively. In terms of scale, form and materials, 26-28 and 30 Prospect Street relate to the cluster of modest mid-nineteenth century dwellings located on the west side of Prospect Street at Emerson / Everett Streets. Originally there was a much more seamless expanse of houses extending eastward from Emerson / Everett Streets to these Prospect Street dwellings that now appear adrift in parking lots and low-rise mid-twentieth century concrete and brick commercial buildings.

Summary: 26-28 Prospect Street was constructed as rental property by prominent City figure, Clark Bennett and served as a home for workers and their families throughout the last half of the 19th century through the middle of the 20th century.

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 find 26-28 Bennett 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 its associations with Clark Bennett and his family, and with workers housing on the edge of the Union Square and the industrial uses of the surrounding area, particularly the glass and meat packing industries of Somerville and Cambridge.

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 26-28 Prospect Street begins in the 1850s and runs through to at least the 1960s.

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 building has not been moved. The neighborhood has changed substantially from semi-rural to urban and industrial.
- b. Design:* Despite the cement fiber siding, the building retains its form and many Italianate details.
- c. Materials:* The building has cement fiber siding and may have clapboard and other details beneath. It retains its original windows.
- d. Alterations:* The building has cement fiber siding. Concrete replacement front steps at 26-28. Door hood at 26-28 removed at un-determined date.

Evaluation of Integrity: On the whole the building is not as much altered as its neighborhood as changed around it.

Does the subject parcel represent a distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction?

The house is a typical center hall entry vernacular Italianate style two-family home. Its distinction lies mostly on its visibility separate from the light industrial landscape that surrounds it.

Does the subject parcel represent an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or region due to its singular physical characteristics or landscape?

This building has been a familiar landmark on the entry to Union Square due to its color (light green), and its lack of maintenance (do not enter fire department signage) along from its singularity in the light industrial landscape.

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 26-28 Prospect Street historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant due to its architectural integrity as an Italianate style house.

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, circa 1850-1870, 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 find 26-28 Prospect 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 26-28 Prospect Street historically and architecturally significant.**

