



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:	170 School Street	
Case:	HPC 2013.043	
Applicant Name:	Edward Dottoli with Richard DiGirolamo, Agent for Cortez Investments, LLC	
Date of Application:	July 3, 2013	HPC received: July 22, 2013
Recommendation:	Determination of Not Significant	
Hearing Date:	August 20, 2013	

I. Historical Association

Architectural Description: This single-story industrial building has a granite foundation visible along the northern slope of School Street. The foundation is parged along the driveway of the neighboring building. A modern door with small staggered windows can be seen near the corner of Richdale Avenue. There are 3 casement or sliding glass windows, flanked by red shutters along the main façade. The School Street and Richdale Avenue elevations are faced with vertical battens, while the driveway side has clapboard. A tall frieze extends the width of the building punctuated by small horizontal panels and the business signage "Electric Plumbing Heating."



The building's roof is flat with a pitch down Richdale Avenue. A concrete block addition is located behind the building along Richdale Avenue. It has a door with a fan-shaped window in it and seven small openings, two containing room air-conditioners. The driveway along Richdale leads to yet another concrete block addition with a loading dock and pedestrian door and a small porch. The wheel stop at the base of the loading dock is carved granite, resembling a fallen tree.

Historical Description: The 1900 Sanborn Atlas shows four storefronts located here. By the 1933 Sanborn, the building was one large L-shaped hall. According to "Hartman's Who's Who in Occult, Psychic and Spiritual Realms ..." the Church of Higher Spiritualism was located at 174



School Street by 1925. The President and Pastor was a Mrs. Jennie E. Armstrong who lived at 39 Partridge Street through 1940. No further information was found regarding this particular spiritualist church or its President.

In 1948, a Building Permit was given to J Daniels to raze a defective wood frame and to replace the exterior walls. The 1950 Sanborn indicates that the building had become a paper box factory and the concrete block addition against Richdale Avenue was in place. The 1945 Boston Phone Book lists the Handy Card and Paper Company at 170 School Street where they stayed until a 1959 when it relocated around the corner at 250-252 Pearl Street. A Building Permit was issued to the Versatile Packing Company who also did repairs in 1968.

Architect: Unknown

Context/Evolution: The building is located on the outskirts of Gilman Square heading toward City Hall. Gilman Square developed after the Civil War with a stop on the Boston and Lowell Line. Its major existing buildings were constructed between 1891 and 1928 and were 3-4 stories in height. According to the 1990 PAL survey, several of these buildings had fraternal halls located on the upper floors. By the 1960s, the neighborhood was in decline.

According to Wikipedia “**Spiritualism** is a religion postulating the belief that spirits of the dead residing in the spirit world have both the ability and the inclination to communicate with the living.

“Spiritualism developed and reached its peak growth in membership from the 1840s to the 1920s, especially in English-speaking countries. By 1897, it was said to have more than eight million followers in the United States and Europe, mostly drawn from the middle and upper classes.”

Somerville had other box and paper companies such the Agar/ International Paper Company/ MaxPac and the Consolidated Box Company, known for its candy boxes and picture puzzles.

Summary: The building has been altered several times since it was originally constructed and has served very different purposes.

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 170-174 School 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 not found **importantly associated with people, events or history** because nothing is known about the Church and its congregation. The Handy Card and Paper Company had some local prominence as a major employer and for other reasons that have nothing to do with the actual type of business at its later location of 250-252 Pearl Street.

II. Historical and Architectural Significance

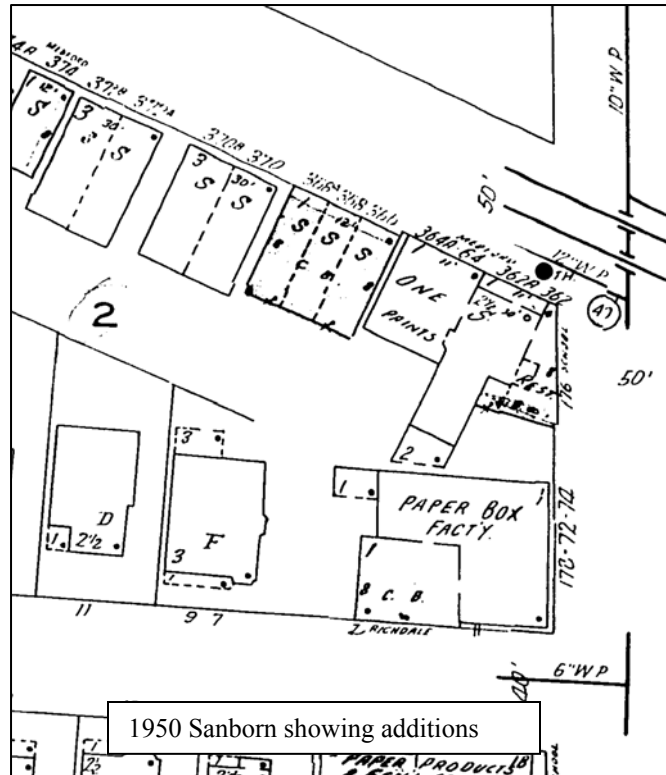
The findings for historical and/or architectural significance of a historic property address the period, style, method of building construction and association with a reputed architect or builder of the subject property, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B).

The period of significance for 170-174 School Street begins in the mid-1920s through 1940 with the building's use as a Spiritualist hall. However, little is known about the church or its leaders. The building has been altered numerous times to meet changing uses as a box and card company and recently as an electrical, plumbing and heating contractor's office.

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. It is located on the outskirts of a commercial square next to residential properties.
- b. Design: The building is flat-roofed with a utilitarian industrial character.
- c. Materials: Granite, clapboard, beadboard, concrete block, and other materials are used.
- d. Alterations: The 1933 Sanborn shows a single story I-shaped wood building labeled 'Hall'. Building Permits note an alteration to the rear of the structure (door) in 1945 and again in 1948 when the wood frame was razed and the exterior walls replaced. The 1950 Sanborn shows a single story concrete block addition on Richdale and a small one story addition on the rear. In 1954 the front and sides of the building were faced with wood



shingles and 4 windows added to the front. Building Permits note that extensive repairs were made due to fire damage in 1959 and smaller repairs were undertaken in 1968. Stairs were replaced in 1989 and new walls installed in 1991.

Evaluation of Integrity:

Does the subject parcel represent a distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction? The parcel is clearly distinguishable from the neighboring building due to its low construction at the edge of a neighborhood of 2 ½-story and 3-story wood frame houses.

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? The building is a vernacular industrial style found primarily in the suburbs.

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 170-174 School Street historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is not found historically and architecturally significant because the building has had numerous alterations of a late 20th century vernacular nature that are not complimentary to the residential neighborhood in which it is found since then and does not convey any particular significance.

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 1925, 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 NOT find 170-174 School 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 NOT find 170-174 School Street historically and architecturally significant.**

View from Richdale Avenue



