



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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MAYOR

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT

Site: 197 Washington Street
Case: HPC 2012.134
Applicant: Anthony Cota

Date of Application: December 14, 2012
Recommendation: Significant
Hearing Date: January 15, 2013

HPC received: December 17, 2012

I. Historical Association

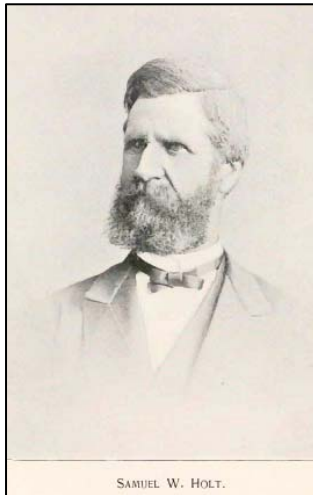
Architectural Description:

The subject property, c. 1860, is a 2½ story, single-family dwelling of the Italianate style that was converted for use as a funeral parlor as early as 1933. This structure was potentially three bays wide upon construction with a chimney at the east end and a deep front setback. A full cornice return is still visible at each gable end and an antennae is currently located on the roof. Remains of the Italianate style are illustrated by the centered gable on the primary façade, widely overhanging eaves supported by double brackets, and the square form of the cupola. The building has several additions; one is located along the entire front façade and a small wing has been added to both the east and west ends. Additionally, an eight foot dormer, constructed in the 1950s, is located on the rear plane of the roof with two windows and one door. Currently, a concrete foundation supports the front and side additions and is the only visible foundation material. The building is sheathed in synthetic siding with replacement bay and casement windows as well as replacement doors.

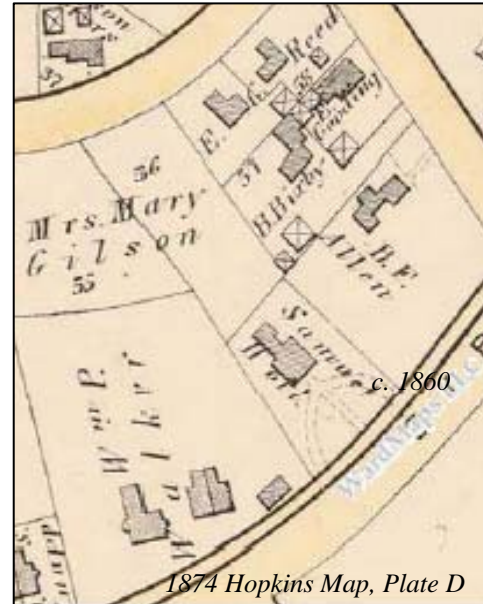


Historical Description:

The subject structure is not located on the 1852 Draper Map, the 1857 Coastal Map of New England, or the 1858 Walling Map of Boston and Vicinity. The 1860 Walling Map of Boston and Vicinity does illustrate a structure at this location; however, the exact structure is unclear.



The 1869 directory lists Samuel W. Holt, a truckman (or one who hauls materials and products), with a house on Washington near Boston. While the directory of 1873 does not list Samuel Holt as a resident, there is an S. W. Holt listed as a steward of the Methodist Episcopal Church on Webster Avenue. The 1874 Hopkins map, Plate D, illustrates the subject building, owned by Samuel Holt, with a rear ell, or addition, centrally located on the rear façade. This map also demonstrates that



the semi-circular driveway was already existent, along with the center path.

The 1876 directory lists Samuel Holt as a teamster (alternate term for truckman) who works on India Street in Boston, with a house on Washington. He is also listed as a trustee and Treasurer of Trustees for the 1st Methodist Episcopal Church on Bow Street. As discussed in *Somerville Past and Present*, Samuel Holt was born in Vermont and came to Boston in 1845 where he worked in the grocery business and learned the trade of paper-hanging; Holt then worked as a teamster in various parts of Boston, up until his retirement in 1895. In 1884 and 1885, Holt served on the Common Council, a predecessor to the Board of Alderman, as well as on the Board of Alderman from 1886-1887.

The 1884 Hopkins Map, Plate 4, lists Mary Holt as the owner, but Samuel still resides here as well as Charles, their son. The Holt family owns and resides here until 1905, at which time William E. Plumer is the new resident. Plumer has a hardware store, W.E.Plumer and Company at 52 Union Square, where he sells hardware, cutlery, and tools. By 1919, Plumer sells the store to Frank Alden, who renames the establishment The Plummer Hardware Company, and Plumer is listed as a salesman. Plumer and his wife, Mary, live in the subject dwelling until the 1940s, at which time, Anthony Cota, a funeral director, takes ownership of the property.



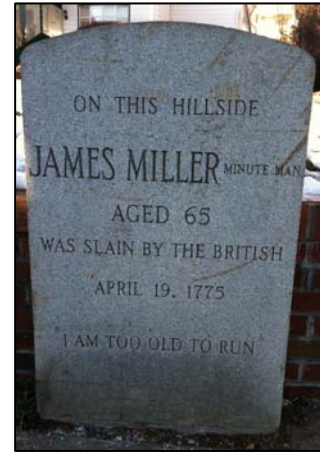
c. 1960

The property continues to be under the ownership of Cota, however, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Salvatore Agresti, a steamfitter, and his wife Harriet, also reside at the property.

Architect: The architect is unknown.

Context/Evolution:

A stone marker is located on the sidewalk directly in front of the subject structure states, "On this hillside, James Miller Minute Man, was slain by the British, April 19, 1775, 'I am too old to run.'" James Miller is reputed to have been slain as the British made their way around Prospect Hill to Charlestown, retreating from Lexington.



Prior to the mid nineteenth century, Prospect Hill and the surrounding area were predominantly agricultural. Merchants and Boston businessmen began to settle during the mid to late nineteenth century. By the 1860s and 1870s, subdivision plans began to shape the residential neighborhood existent today. In 1895, the original Charles G. Pope School is constructed on the corner of Boston and Washington streets and by 1933, the area is fully developed.

The 1874 Hopkins Map, Plate D, illustrates the subject structure with an ell that has a small right wing, which is centrally located on the rear façade. This footprint is consistent until 1900 (Sanborn, Sheet 92), at which time a front porch expanding across the entire façade is understood as well as a bay window on the right side façade. Additionally, the rear ell is two stories while the small wing is only one and another porch is located on the right side façade of the rear ell. The 1933 Sanborn (Sheet 31) illustrates a garage has been added to the rear of the lot and a building permit in 1949 for Anthony Cota is granted to construct a two-car concrete block garage. The eight foot dormer on the rear plane of the roof was permitted in 1953 and aluminum siding was installed in 1956. The front porch was removed in 1961 for the front addition and the east and west wings were permitted in 1984.

Summary: This Italianate subject structure predates many of the buildings in the immediate surrounding neighborhood. While various alterations and additions have modified the massing and fenestration pattern, and the chimney has been removed, there are some original windows extant and the site plan with the semicircular drive also remains. Additionally, Samuel Holt is Significant as a prominent member of Somerville society for several years as well as William Plumer, a thriving business owner from 1905 through 1919.

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) can be found 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 197 Washington 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 Samuel W. Holt, a member of the Common Council from 1884-85 and an Alderman from 1886-87. Additionally, the subject building is associated with the broad architectural, cultural, and social history of the City as this building predates many of the surrounding buildings and was constructed prior to when subdivision plans began to shape the residential neighborhood existent today.

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 197 Washington Street begins at the time of construction, c. 1860, which is prior too much of the residential neighborhood existent today. The period of significance extends into the 1930s, until the structure was converted to a different use, a funeral parlor, and significantly altered to suit this new use.

This building illustrates the Italianate style with a wood frame and is not found to be associated with a reputed architect or builder. The building is not located within a context of associated buildings or structures.

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 siting of the subject structure provides a deep front setback along Washington Street. The location of the structure has not been altered and the location of the existing semicircular drive is extant as early as 1874.
- b. Design: The current design of the buildings suggests that the original design would be three bays with a center hall interior plan that is two rooms deep. While all façades have been significantly modified by additions and changes to the fenestration as well as the removal of the chimney, the original intent of the design can still be inferred. Remaining architectural detail includes a full cornice return at both gable ends, the centered gable on the primary façade, widely overhanging eaves supported by double brackets, and the square form of the cupola.
- c. Materials: The materials that compose this dwelling are predominantly wood. Later materials added include synthetic siding, replacement windows and doors, and asphalt

shingles. Several massing details are still visible, such as the cupola and centered gable, as well as the brackets under the eaves.

- d. Alterations: This structure has undergone a number of alterations over the years. The most significant are the single-story additions on the front, right and left sides, which discourages an understanding of the original design of these façades. Windows, doors and a chimney have been removed, and a shed dormer on the rear roof plane has a door leading onto the roof of the rear addition.

Evaluation of Integrity:

Alterations and the removal of significant features have significantly modified the exterior appearance of this two-family dwelling over the years. While the center gable, cupola, and brackets are still visible, the extent of the alterations to each façade considerably reduces the remaining architectural integrity and historical value of the structure.

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 197 Washington Street historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is not found historically or architecturally significant due to the number and extent of changes to each façade.

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 1860, 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 197 Washington 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 do not find 197 Washington Street historically and architecturally significant.**

197 Washington Street

