



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: February 26, 2016
To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: Case D-1390: 40 Cottage Street, Newell House (1839)

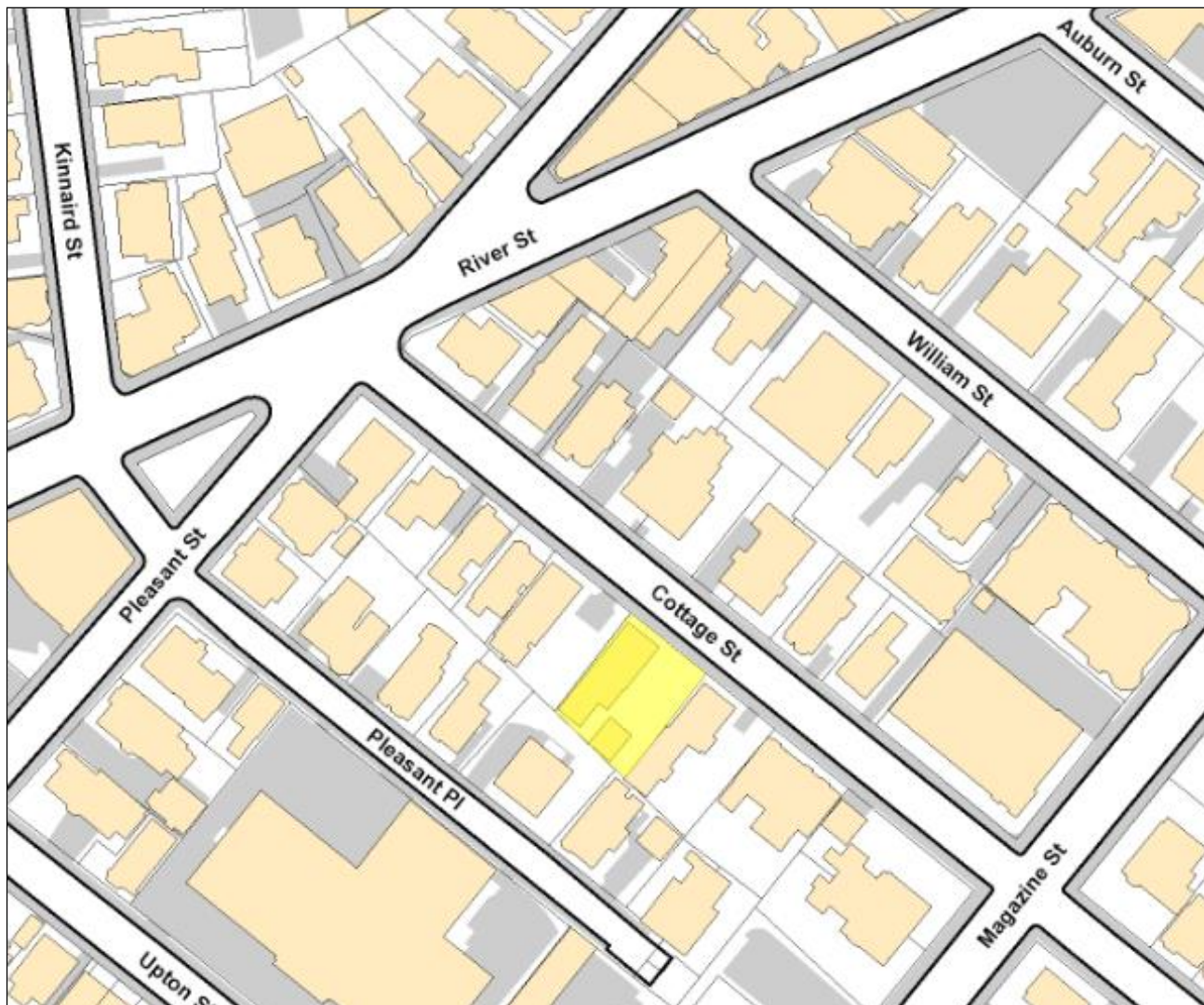
A complete application to demolish the house at 40 Cottage Street was received on February 9, 2016. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for March 3, 2016.

Site and Current Conditions

The single-family house at 40 Cottage Street is located on the south side of Cottage Street, between Pearl and River streets. It is a 1½-story house situated on a 4,836 square-foot lot. The lot is located in a Residence C zoning district, which allows single to multi-family dwellings with a 0.6 FAR limit, 35-foot height limit, and a density of 1,800 square feet per dwelling unit. The assessed value for the land and building (Map 104/Parcel 92), according to the Cambridge Assessor's property database, was \$1,011,500.

The existing conditions of the site include a 7' front setback, consistent with many other buildings on the street, a slightly more than 3' setback on the west side, a 3-5' rear setback, and a generous side yard on the east of 34.5'. The houses on either side also share this advantageous arrangement to one side of the lot with the resulting large side yards. An existing curb cut is located at the center of frontage and a small garage is located at the rear, but is not considered significant. The neighboring structures in this block include a number of other one and two family houses built in the Greek Revival style in the late 1830s and 1840s.

The existing house is in very good condition. It has been well maintained. An array of solar panels has been installed on the southeast-facing dormer of the main block of the house. The Board of Zoning Appeal granted a variance in 2014 for renovations and additions to the house that would include a new dormer, an addition to the ell, and some window changes. The non-conforming setbacks of the existing house require that new construction either conform to zoning regulations or that relief be granted to continue the non-conformities. The current proposal is to demolish the entire house and the garage and construct two 2-story town houses in an L-shaped configuration with two at grade parking spaces in front of the rear unit.



Cambridge GIS map of 40 Cottage St (highlighted in yellow) and vicinity

Description

The Newell House is a 1½-story single-family frame house oriented gable end to the street. The three-bay side hall house was executed in the Greek Revival style with a broad gable, a temple front porch with four Doric columns, symmetrically placed 6-over-6 windows, a combination of flush board and clapboard siding, wide pilasters, and sidelights flanking the front door.

The main block of the house measures 23' wide by 28' deep. The 2-story ell extends another 34' to the rear of the lot and measures 16' wide. The existing house consists of approximately 2,284 square feet of living space (per assessment) not counting any finished space in the basement. Each of the proposed new townhouses is proposed to contain 1,400 square feet of floor area.

The house retains most of its original architectural features. One exception is the front porch deck and stairs, which were reconstructed in concrete in the twentieth century.



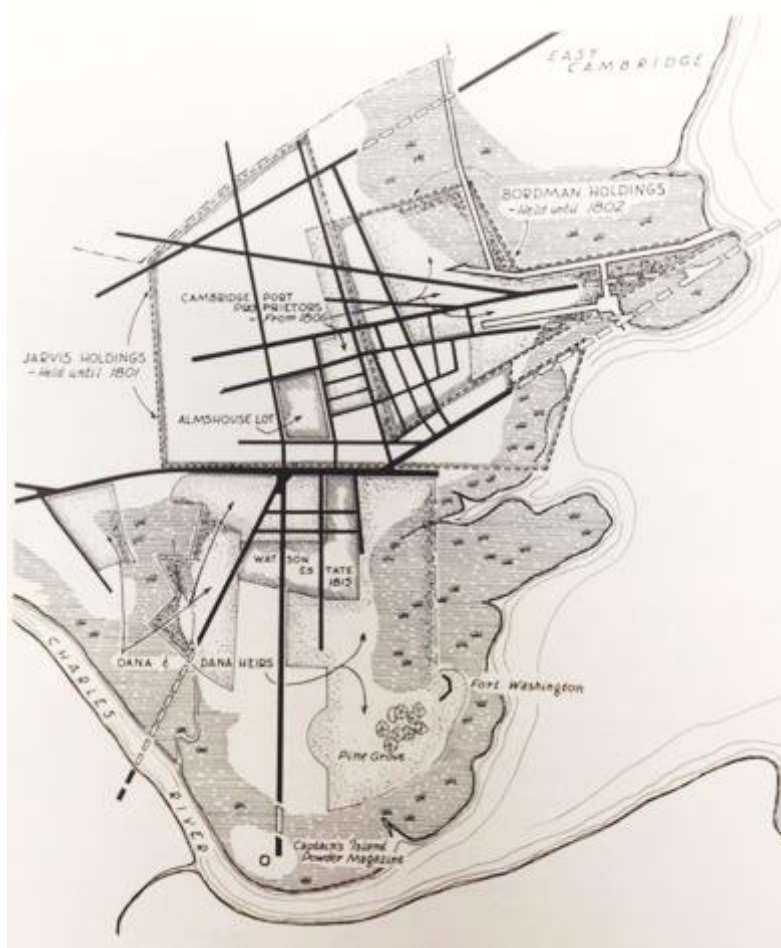
40 Cottage Street, CHC staff photo, 2016

History

The settlement of Cambridgeport was made possible by the construction of the West Boston Bridge in 1793. Prior to that time, there were only three houses in Cambridge east of Quincy Street, and the area south of present Massachusetts Avenue was completely unpopulated. Most of Cambridgeport was controlled by two landowners, William Jarvis and Francis Dana, while the rest - and all of East Cambridge - fell to Andrew Craigie.

William Jarvis, a speculator, acquired most of Cambridgeport north of present Massachusetts Avenue. Francis Dana, a descendant of an old Cambridge family, controlled not only land along Dana Hill but also most of Cambridgeport south of Massachusetts Avenue. Jarvis and Dana worked with the Proprietors of the West Boston Bridge to lay out Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street, but did not otherwise develop a master plan for the area. The only substantial estate south of Massachusetts that was not owned by Francis Dana belonged to William Watson and included an L-shaped parcel of land between Western Avenue and Brookline Street.

William Watson was a glazier who lived near Harvard Square. According to one source, he received this tract as "compensation for maintaining an aged colored woman, formerly a slave, called Venus Whittemore; although by some defect in the written obligations, she finally became a public charge and died in the almshouse May 4, 1825, aged 107" (Paige, 681). The title to this land, which ran between Pearl and Brookline Streets from Massachusetts Avenue to Valentine Street, and along William



and Cottage Streets to Pleasant Street, has not been searched but may have originated with Samuel Whittemore (1693-1784), the previous owner of Watson's house in Harvard Square and a possible former slave owner of Venus Whittemore.

Cottage Street, which was part of the Watson Estate, was laid out in 1816, five years after the opening of the River Street bridge, but didn't see development for another twenty years. The first house on this block was no. 24 at the corner of Magazine Street, which was constructed in 1838. This was soon followed by two Greek Revival cottages at 40 and 44 Cottage Street in 1839. Most of the street was built up between the late 1840-1870, with a few infill three deckers around the turn of the twentieth century. The street was home to the Cottage Street Methodist Episcopal

Chapel from 1872 to approximately 1888, when the congregation built a larger church on Magazine Street (Grace Methodist Episcopal Church).

In May 1839 architect William Hovey and housewright Leonard Markham purchased a parcel of land on Cottage Street measuring 126' wide by 83' deep from Abraham A. Watson and others. They quickly designed and built two houses (40 and 44 Cottage Street) and sold them later that year to Andrew H. Newell and William Page, respectively. Hovey & Markham collaborated on 40, 44, and 48 Cottage Street as well as several other houses on nearby Green and William streets.

Andrew Newell, a Boston merchant, purchased the house just weeks before marrying Martha Valentine. They remained in Cambridge for a number of years and started a family before relocating to Brookline. They sold the house in 1845 to George Minnott.

Through the years, no. 40 was owned and occupied by a number of prominent Cantabrigians. Francis Hardy purchased the property in 1868. He had risen through the ranks at Henry Thayer & Co. and became its owner until falling ill in 1896. Georgiana Robinson, wife of shoe stain manufacturer Fred O. Robinson, was active in the community including as the president of the W.C.T.U., and member of the women's auxiliaries to the Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., and the Margaret Fuller House.



40 Cottage Street (left) and 44 Cottage Street (right), CHC staff photo, 2016

Significance

The Newell House is an excellent example of the Greek Revival temple front style of house representing a phase of rapid development in the Cambridgeport neighborhood, which was quickly growing and industrializing in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is flanked by other houses of similar age and style. Both individually and as a group, these houses positively contribute to the historic character of the street and larger neighborhood.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, ISD
Roy Russell, Jr. and Robin Chase
Mark Boyes-Watson, Architect