



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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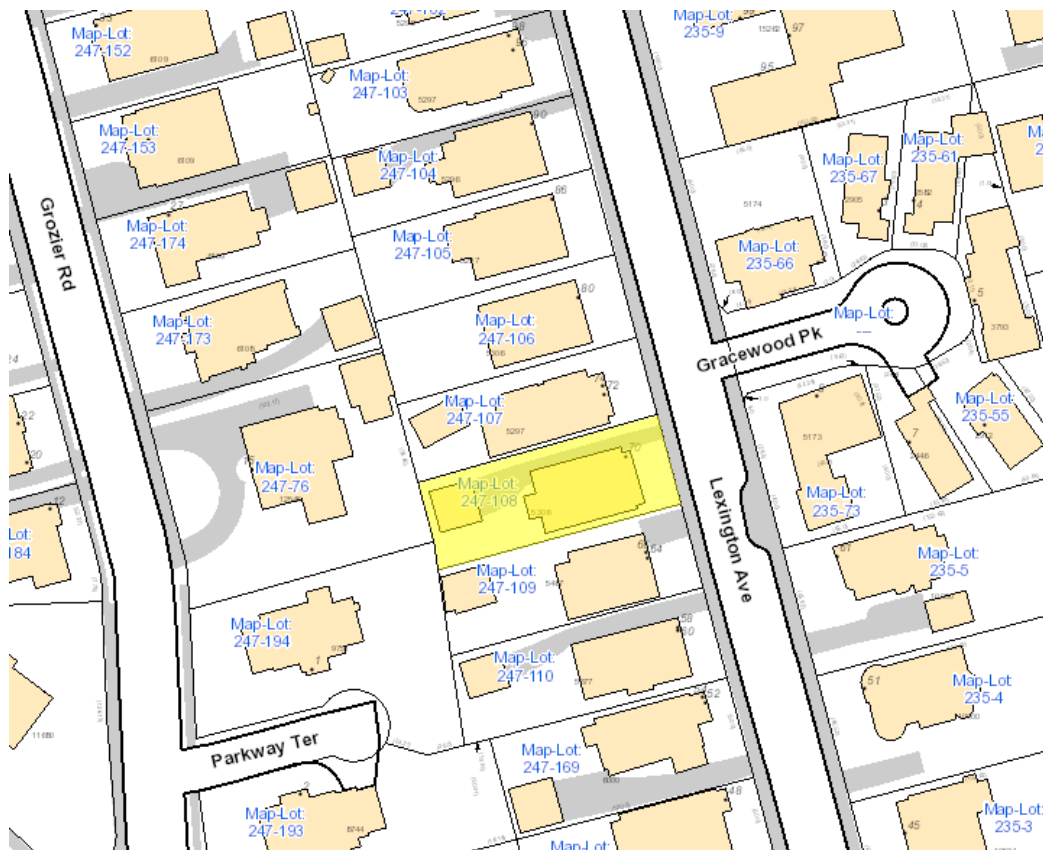
Date: September 28, 2020

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Eric Hill, Survey Director

Re: D-1557: 68-70 Lexington Avenue, John L. Malcolm Triple-Decker (1913)

An application for demolition of the house at 68-70 Lexington Avenue was received on September 2, 2020. The owners, Gregory Scott Burd and Francesca Gino were notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for October 1, 2020.



68-70 Lexington Avenue (highlighted in yellow).

Cambridge GIS, Sept. 2020

Site

The structure is located on the west side of Lexington Avenue mid-block between Brattle Street and Huron Avenue. The three-story triple-decker frame house sits on a stone foundation. The 2020 assessed value for the land and building is \$1,982,100.

The structure is sited on a 5,306 square-foot lot in a Residence B zoning district. The zoning allows one and two-family construction with an FAR of 0.5 and a height limit of 35 feet. A driveway is located at the north side of the property terminating at a detached garage.

The owner is a resident of the neighborhood, living next door at 72 Lexington Avenue. His house was constructed in 2013 after the previous house at 72-74 Lexington (a twin to 68-70 Lexington) was destroyed by fire. The applicants propose to demolish the existing structure and replace it with a two-story dwelling, designed in a similar style to his home next-door. They also intend to remove the rear garage structure and replace it with a surface parking spot, if required by zoning.



68-70 Lexington Avenue, CHC Photograph 09-2020.

Architectural Description

The house at 68-70 Lexington Avenue is a 3 ½ -story triple-decker on a stone foundation. The eclectic home, built in 1913, is a blending of architectural styles, namely Queen Anne for its asymmetrical façade and dominant front-facing gable cantilevered over the stories below. The home also displays shingle siding which continuously runs along the various bays and projections, representing the Shingle style.

The house features a prominent gambrel roof with shed dormers on both sides. A projecting porch runs along the full length of the front of the home, supported by fluted square columns. Two front doors are located on the front façade with oval lights. A two-story octagonal bay is located at the façade on the first and second floors.



68-70 Lexington Avenue, front porch and door detail. CHC photo, 2020.

At the third floor, a shingled oriel window is located above the two-story octagonal bay below, terminating at the gambrel roofline above and flared eaves below. An inset porch on the third story behind an arched opening has been enclosed with a window grid slightly behind the wall plane. At the half-story above, a double-hung window is sited centrally at the gable end.



68-70 Lexington Avenue, fenestration and third floor detail. CHC photo, 2020.

At the south side elevation, a two-story octagonal bay extends between the first and second floors, ending at the roof eave. A small shingled oriel window at first floor of the north side elevation replicates the oriel seen on the façade. At the rear elevation, three small wood-frame decks are centrally located, and not visible from the street.



68-70 Lexington Avenue, rear decks. Image from real estate listing 2020.

A two-car detached garage is located at the rear of the lot at the end of the asphalt paved driveway. The garage was built in 1930 and is constructed of rusticated concrete blocks. A shallow hipped roof rises above the square garage structure with overhanging eaves.

Alterations at the property have been limited. Replacement windows in varied light configurations, material and color have been added to the home, but appear to match the historical openings. A building permit from 1992 for the replacing of the porches likely coincides with the removal of the detailed balusters on the second and third floors as well as the replacement of the shingled first floor porch. The porch steps appear to have been re-oriented at that time, from the front to side. The front yard is presently enclosed by a small wooden fence.



Detached concrete block garage at rear yard. Image from real estate listing 2020.

History

Lexington Avenue is named after the town of the same name. The street was laid out in 1872 from Brattle Street to what is now Fresh Pond Parkway.

The land that later became Lexington Avenue was once acreage that Joshua Coolidge purchased in 1816, which stretched from Brattle Street to Fresh Pond. In 1832, he divided the property between his sons Joshua Jr. and Josiah, the latter acquired his brother's share in 1839. Josiah Coolidge sold the property in 1870 to developers Person Davis, T. Alfred Taylor, and Reuben Demmon, who surveyed the property that same year. They platted a subdivision the next year which ignored the natural topography, creating thirty-five large house lots, mostly 100 feet wide along two parallel streets that became Lake View and Lexington avenues.

In 1873, developers Stephen Niles and Lewis Rice of Boston laid out the west side of Lexington Avenue and enlarged the grid to Hawthorne Ave (renamed Grozier Road). As the opposite sides of Lexington Avenue between Brattle and Huron originated in different estates, they developed differently. Davis and Taylor's lots on their east side of Lexington, platted in 1871 were 15,000 square foot lots like those seen on Lake View; while the west side of the street, platted and stalled due to the Panic of 1873, developed more slowly.

Between 1873 and 1894, just one house had been built on the west side of Lexington Avenue, #30 (1886). In 1894, with the beginning of streetcar service along Huron Avenue, construction began to boom just north of Brattle Street. By 1903, three additional dwellings were constructed on the west side of Lexington Avenue, with the east side filling in with some larger lots conveyed to smaller house lots, along with the fire station constructed at #167 (1893).

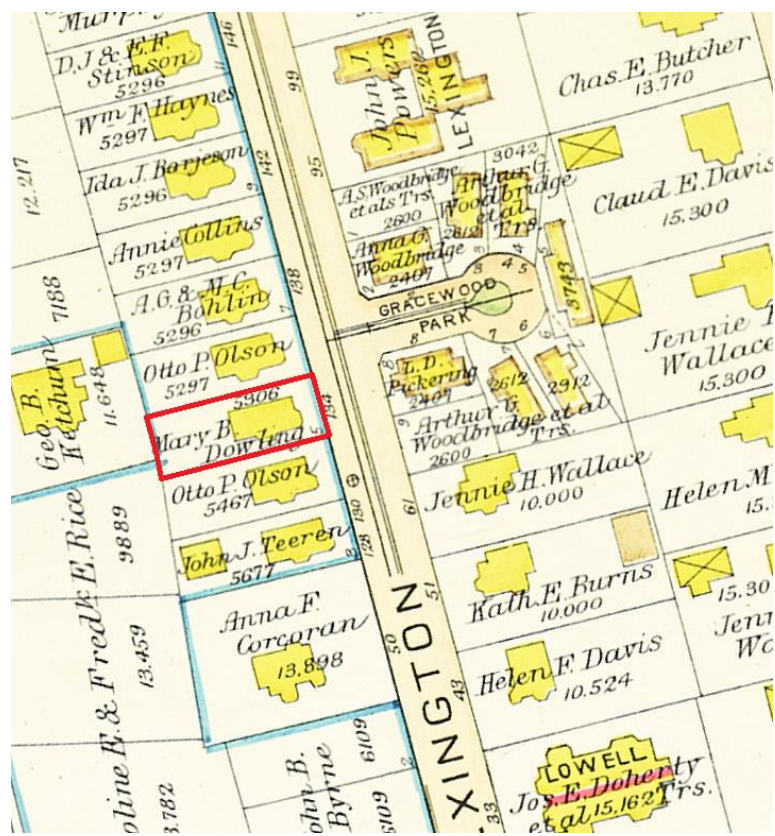


Lexington Avenue, even side, south facing. CHC photo 2009.

The character of Lexington Avenue shifted from a single-family neighborhood to a denser, multi-family area with the infill construction of apartment houses and duplexes in the 20th century. The Lowell, a high-style triple-decker was constructed at 33 Lexington Avenue in 1900, and in 1911, the stucco apartment building named the Lexington was built at #95-99. Seeing this shift in desired housing in the neighborhood, builder John L. Malcolm re-platted the old Niles and Rice subdivision on the west side of Lexington Avenue into narrow, 5,000 square foot lots. Malcolm, owner and builder, hired architect Elmer Buckley in 1912 to design sixteen gambrel-roofed duplexes and triple-deckers on the newly platted lots, creating an extremely cohesive collection of housing, the likes not seen elsewhere in Cambridge.



1903 Bromley Map showing Lexington Street area under development.
 Note: L.F. Rice & E.M. Niles listed as owners of most properties west of Lexington.



1916 Bromley Map with 68-70 Lexington Avenue (outlined in red).

After the collection of houses were built, they were sold by John Malcolm to buyers. 68-70 Lexington (then numbered 134) was purchased by Mary B. Dowling, a widow, who resided in Allston at the time, who rented out the three units. Ms. Dowling later moved in with her son, Edward S. Dowling, who resided at 21 Rockwell Street. Edward Dowling worked as the armorer at the Cambridge Armory on Massachusetts Avenue between 1901 and 1939.

The home was purchased by Thomas H. Brundage by 1919, who lived in one unit and rented the other two to various tenants. Thomas Brundage was listed as a furniture maker in directories and as a foreman by 1925. No reference can be located as to where Mr. Brundage was employed. In 1943, the Cambridge Victory Garden Committee awarded Mrs. T. H. Brundage one of the first nine victory garden plots at Huron and Fresh Pond Parkway, listing 70 Lexington as her home address.

By 1968, the property was owned by Harriet T. Provine, a research technician at Massachusetts General Hospital. She lived in one unit and appears to have rented the other units, like Thomas Brundage. She appears to have owned the property until 2020.



1969 image of 68-70 Lexington Avenue, CHC Survey Photo.



68-70 Lexington (left) and 72 Lexington (right), CHC Photograph 1984. Note: 72 Lexington since demolished.

Significance and Recommendation

The house at 68-70 Lexington Avenue is significant for its architecture as an eclectic 3 ½ -story triple decker, contributing to the streetscape of duplexes and triple-deckers owned and built by John L. Malcolm. The house is also significant for its associations with the suburban style growth of West Cambridge following the completion of the trolley line at Huron Avenue. It is the staff recommendation that the structure be found significant for these reasons.

The house is in excellent condition and could be rehabilitated. The applicants will explain their reasons for the requested demolition and construction of a smaller structure in its place. That presentation, as well as any public testimony should be heard before making any further determinations.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services Commissioner
Gregory Scott Burd & Francesca Gino, owners