

CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: April 27, 2023
To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Eric Hill, Survey Director
Re: Case D-1654: Sarah B. Waitt House, 51 Kelley Street (1866)

An application to demolish the house at 51 Kelley Street was received on April 11, 2023. The owner, Kent Christman, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for May 2023.

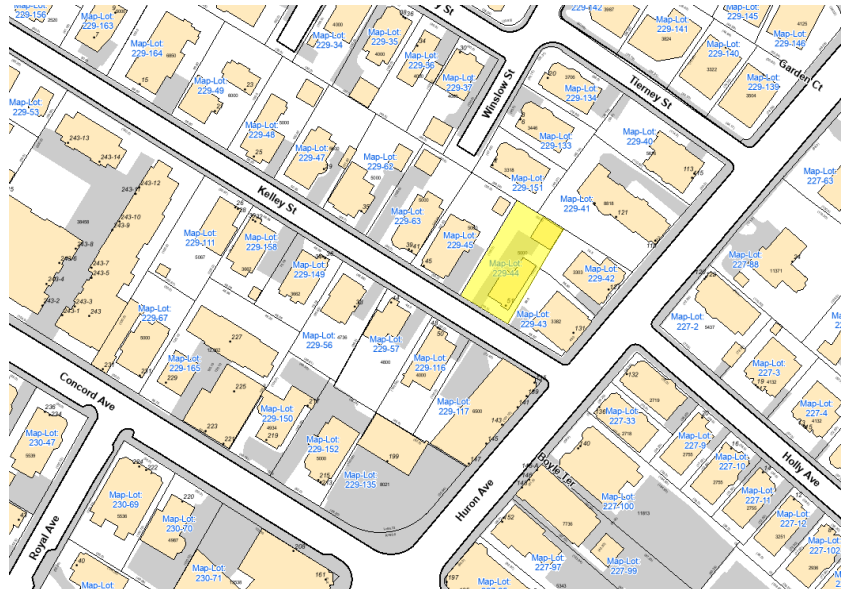


Current Conditions

The property at 51 Kelley Street comprises of a single-family house and a detached garage on a 5,000 square foot lot on the north side of the street, near the intersection with Huron Avenue. The zoning for the property is Residential C-1, which allows multi-family residential construction with a residential FAR allowance of 0.75 and a height limit of 35 feet.

The applicant proposes to demolish the existing dwelling replacing it with a new two-story single-family residence. The existing garage is not presently scheduled for demolition. The current condition of the building from the street is fair.

Kelley Street is lined with residential buildings with a wide range of construction dates and styles from vernacular workers cottages from the mid-19th century to Contemporary residences from the 21st century. On the north side of Kelley Street specifically, many Contemporary infill construction and substantial renovation projects have been completed in the early 21st century, significantly altering the streetscape of what was once a street lined by workers and middle-class cottages.

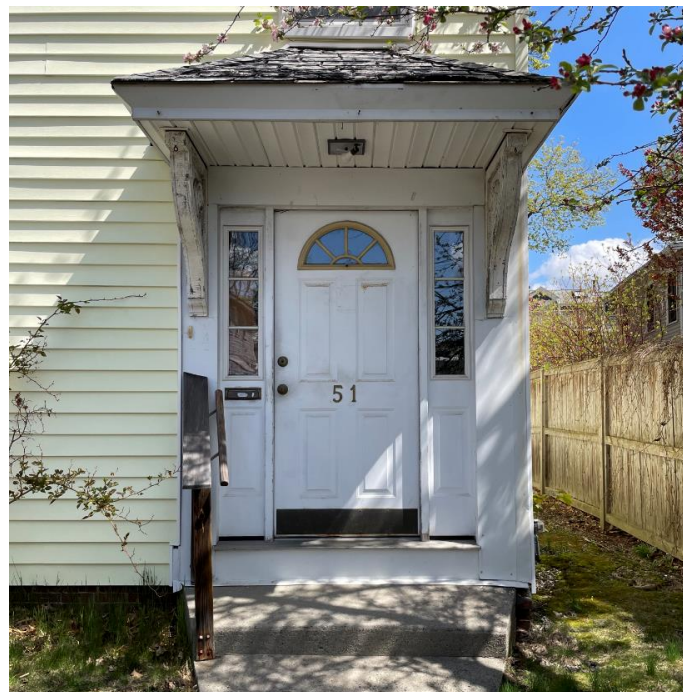


51 Kelley Street, Cambridge Assessor's Database, accessed April 21, 2023

Architectural Description

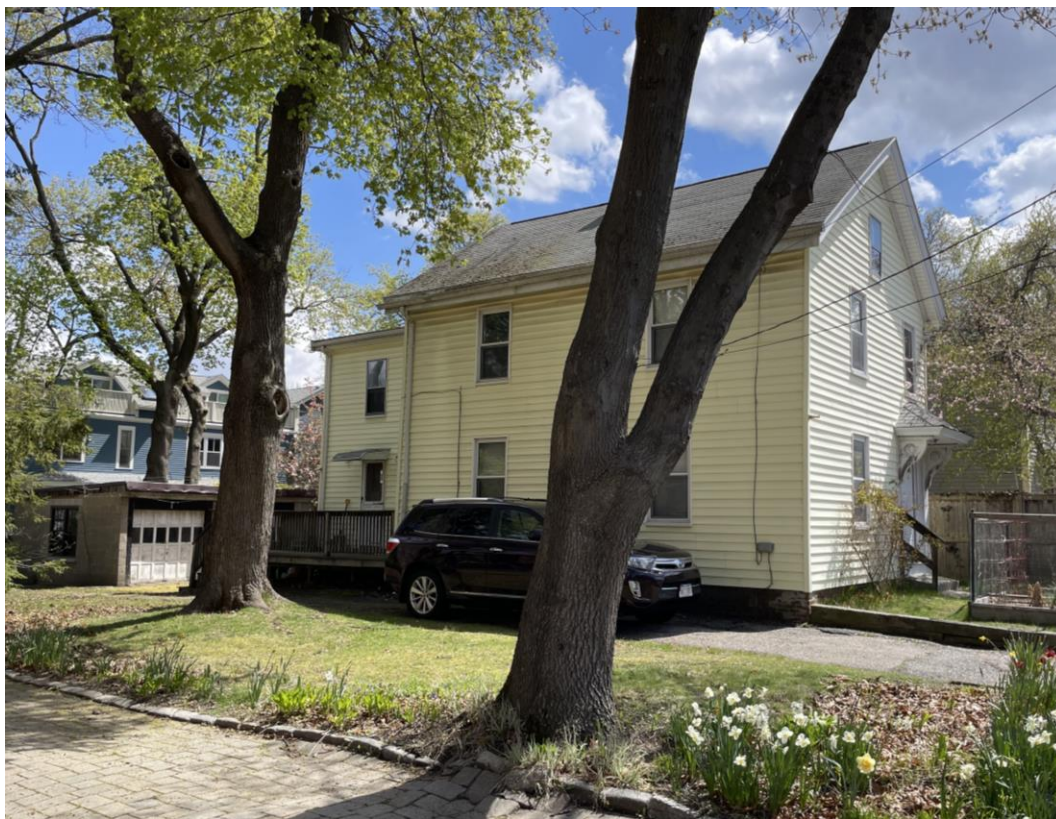
The house at 51 Kelley Street features characteristics of many workers cottages built in the brickyard subdivisions of north and west Cambridge in the mid-to-late 19th century. The 2 1/2-story house sits atop a brick foundation with its gable end facing the street. The house was clad with aluminum siding, which presently obscures any trim or applied detailing that may have been on the exterior historically.

The house is side hall in form with the entry sheltered by a large door hood with original bracketed supports. The façade is asymmetrical with windows aligned to interior programming. The eaves have been boxed and covered with later material. The roof is covered with asphalt shingle and is punctuated by a single, utilitarian chimney at the roof ridge at the center of the



Entry of 51 Kelley Street.

building. A two-story ell extends off the rear and has a flat roof. A two-car, concrete block garage sits towards the rear of the lot and is accessed by a driveway.



51 Kelley Street side elevation and garage, facing east.

History

Kelley Street was originally laid out in 1846 as an unnamed way running near parallel to Concord and Garden Streets. House lots were laid out by surveyor W. A. Mason for landowner Asa Murdock, a Cambridgeport merchant who was an early developer of the brickyard areas of Northwest Cambridge. Murdock's subdivisions were the first to incorporate lots for brickyard laborers, creating miniature villages where workers could create small enclaves of homes near their place of employment.



Kelley Street as unnamed road, depicted in 1854 Walling Map.

In 1859, the unnamed road was named Tuttle Street after the Tuttle family, who for years lived at the house at #45 Kelley Street and later owned and rented out #51 Kelley Street.

The Tuttle patriarch, Moses Tuttle was born in Dover, New Hampshire and would later live in Maine with his wife Mary Merrow. Mary died unexpectedly in 1845. Many of his eldest children were dispersed near Newfield, Maine and lived with relatives. Two of these children, Charles Wesley Tuttle (1829-1881) and Horace Parnell Tuttle (1837-1923) would later become prominent astronomers with connections to the Harvard Observatory.

Moses and his youngest children relocated from Maine to Cambridge for a fresh start, and he married a widow, Lydia B. Waitt (Waite) in 1848. The family moved into present-day 45 Kelley Street. Moses and Lydia Waitt did not appear to have any children together, but Lydia adopted all of Moses and Mary's living children and treated them as her own. Lydia herself had a daughter from her first marriage, Sarah Waitt (1840-1892).

Moses would die of smallpox at 55 years old in 1859, and the house was maintained by Lydia with the help of her children Sarah Waitt and Freeman Tuttle (her stepson). Sarah Waitt would eventually work as a teacher, employed at the Dunster School located a block away from Tuttle Street on Concord Avenue near the intersection with Huron Avenue. The Dunster School was open from 1838 until it was demolished in 1928. In 1866, Sarah Waitt (who remained unmarried her entire life due to the requirement that teachers must be unmarried to teach in public schools) subdivided her family home and had the present house at 51 Kelley Street built. When not at the Dunster School nearby, Sarah remained the major caretaker of her mother, Lydia. Lydia died in 1884, leaving the two properties to Sarah.



1886 Hopkins Map showing 45 (25) Kelley and 51 (27) Kelley Street owned by S. B. Waitt.

Sarah Waitt remained teaching until her death in 1892, when she died at 52 years old of cancer. Her will, drafted that same year, bequeathed the house at 25 Tuttle Street (now 45 Kelley Street) to her brother Freeman Tuttle, and the house at 27 Tuttle Street (now 51 Kelley Street) to her brother Frank Tuttle. Neither brother paid taxes on the properties, and they were sold by the bank to private owners at the turn of the century.

The subject property was purchased by a Mary E. Carroll before selling again in 1902 to James Fegan, a machinist and wife, Celia V. Sallaway Fegan. The couple's daughter, Cecelia Frances Fegan (1884-1966) married John Henry Hurley (1872-1918) in 1917 and they made a home at 51 Kelley Street. The couple had one daughter, Mary Elizabeth Hurley (1917-1998), but tragically, John died a year later of a hemorrhaged gastric ulcer.

Working as a secretary, Cecelia remained at home with her daughter and would remarry in 1923, this time to her boss, George V Wattendorf (1869-1936), who worked as a real estate dealer. The couple maintained rental properties all over Cambridge and built the existing concrete garage in the rear yard of the subject property in 1933. Cecelia and George had a son, George Vincent Wattendorf (1926-1981). The couple appears to have rented the Tuttle Street house to working class families for the duration of their ownership. George Sr. died in 1936 and Cecelia died in 1966. Before her death, in 1944, Cecelia sold the Tuttle Street house to her daughter from her first marriage, Mary, who had married James O'Donnell.

Tuttle Street was be renamed Kelley Street in 1948 in honor of torpedoman, Robert C. Kelley, who was killed in action aboard the USS Destroyer Johnston, which sunk in the initial invasion of the Philippines in 1944. Robert was the son of Robert Kelley Sr., of 40 Sherman Street, a WWI veteran, and Katherine M. Kelley, who became President of the Gold Star Mothers of Massachusetts.

Mary sold the house (now addressed at 51 R. C. Kelley Street) to long-time tenants Joseph and Virginia O'Connor in 1973. Joseph died in

1977, and Virginia owned the property until her death in 2010. Her estate sold the property in 2012 for \$745,000 to Lyda Kuth and Kent Christman. Kent Christman became the sole-owner in 2018 and also owns the original Tuttle House next door at 45 Kelley Street.



51 Kelley Street, 1970. CHC Collections.

Significance

The Sarah B. Waitt House is a characteristic side-hall Italianate with intact architectural detailing in the Observatory Hill section of Cambridge. The property is significant as a relatively unaltered example of working-class housing constructed on the north side of Kelley Street. The house is also significant in the context of the broad social and economic history of the city for its association with the Tuttle and Fegan families.

cc: Peter McLaughlin, Inspectional Services
Kent Chrisman, Owner