



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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February 27, 2016

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Charles Sullivan

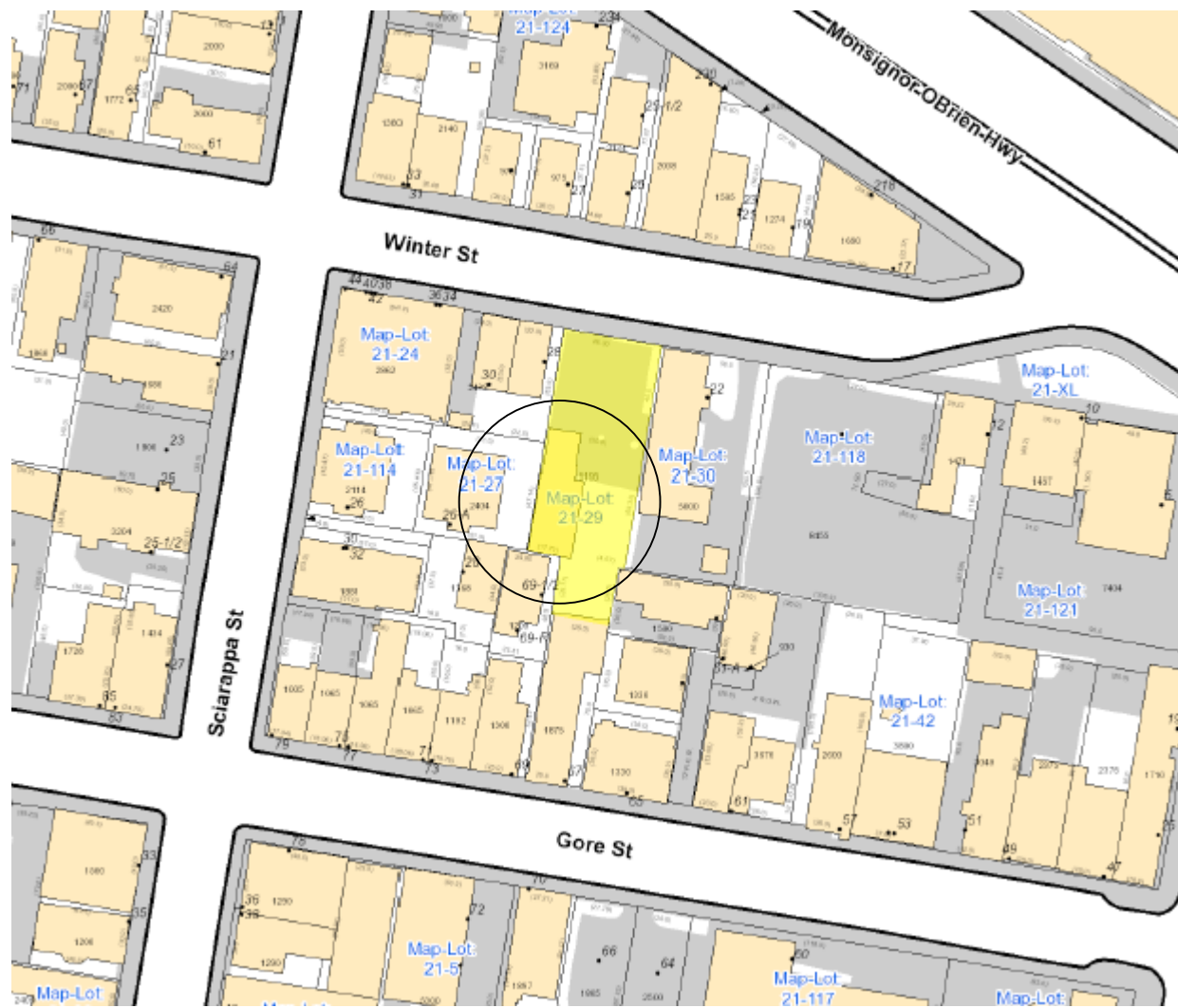
Re: D-1389: 24 Winter Street (Thomas Leighton Jr. house)

An application to demolish the house at 21 Sciarappa Street was received on February 9, 2016. The applicants, Richard J. and Diane M. Vendetti, were notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for March 3.



24 Winter Street

Cambridge Assessing Dept. photo



24 Winter Street

City of Cambridge GIS

### Site

The John Leighton Jr house is located on the south side of Winter Street between Sciarappa Street and Msgr. O'Brien Highway. Constructed in 1838, this 2½-story, single-family house is situated on a lot of 5,195 square feet in a C-1 district. This residential district allows single to multi-family dwellings with a .75 FAR limit, 35-foot height limit, and a density of 1,500 square feet per dwelling unit. The assessed value for the land and buildings (Map 21/Parcel 29), according to the online Assessor's database, was \$902,800: \$454,500 for the building, and the balance for the land.

The Leighton house sits toward the south end of a lot that is 46 feet wide and 127 feet deep. The house faces east, and the ell sits between the body of the house and the street. The front yard consists of a paved parking area that was once the site of another house.

The Leighton house is a contributing building in the Winter Street National Register District.

### Condition

From the exterior, the John Leighton Jr house appears to be in good condition; the Assessing Department rates it "very good." It has been recently painted, and the wood-shingled exterior

appear to be well maintained. There is a new deck in front of the house. The windows have been replaced with insulated units. The roof could not be seen from the street, nor could the foundation. No interior inspection has been made.

The applicant proposes to demolish the ell and replace it with a three-story, two-family dwelling that would share a wall with the Leighton house and cantilever over part of the parking area. The existing house does not conform to zoning setback requirements; it has virtually no side or rear setbacks. The owner has applied to the Board of Zoning Appeal for a Special Permit to allow construction of the addition.

### Description

The Thomas Leighton Jr. house was constructed in 1838. It is a center-entrance, five-bay, 2½-story Federal style house with a gable roof. The two-story ell has a flat roof. The main block of the house measures approximately 18' wide by 34' deep and the ell measures approximately 13' wide by 21' deep.

The Leighton house is a late example of a Georgian/Federal workers cottage with a "Type B", side-facing center-hall plan. These houses, which are only one room deep and have only two rooms per floor, originated in the 18th century and were constructed in East Cambridge from the 1820s until about 1840. Until about 1830 they were built with shallow hip roofs, but after that all were built with gabled roofs. Type B houses have center entrances set in five-bay façades, with the ells almost always placed behind the house and away from the street. Exterior details were very simple, with narrow corner boards, shallow eaves, and no projecting cornices on the gable ends. All of these elements survive on the Leighton house, although the front porch has been added.



24 Winter Street, 1980

CHC

## History

East Cambridge originated as a speculative real estate development at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A grid of streets was laid out on the salt-marsh island known as Lechmere's Point, and residential construction began near the top of the hill along Otis and Thorndike Streets. Early industry developed along the Miller's River, and the marshes to the south and west remained undeveloped until after the Civil War. Residential streets close to the factories, like Winter Street, filled with workers cottages, while managers and professionals lived on Otis and Thorndike streets.



Winter Street seen from the corner of Msgr. O'Brien Highway, 1925. The gabled house left of the telephone pole is the Thomas Leighton Sr. house at 22 Winter Street. CHC



Winter Street west of Sciarappa, ca. 1950

CHC

Much of the development of East Cambridge was undertaken by corporations and trusts, rather than individuals. Andrew Craigie, the speculator who conceived of East Cambridge and who secretly purchased much of the Lechmere estate, soon organized the Lechmere Point Corporation

as a means of attracting other investors. The expense of filling large tracts of marsh land and building streets and utilities was beyond the resources of most individuals, and companies such as the Canal Bridge Corporation and the Cambridge Wharf Company undertook these projects with varying success in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The New England Glass Works, founded in 1818, was East Cambridge's most important industry for more than fifty years. Master glassmaker Thomas Leighton was brought from England in 1826 to become superintendent. "When he decided to build a house he chose Winter Street and put up a characteristic two-and-a-half story worker's cottage [at 22 Winter].

Leighton, a gifted manager as well as an excellent chemist and craftsman, was able to guide the company through a steady expansion to maintain its prominent position in American glassmaking. He also made a heavy personal investment in the company and in East Cambridge. He lived near the factory at 22 Winter Street with his wife and eleven children, brought most of his sons into the business as glassworkers (and two as superintendents), and adopted an infant born in East Cambridge as his son. (*East Cambridge*, 177)



Thomas Leighton house, 22 Winter Street, ca. 1870

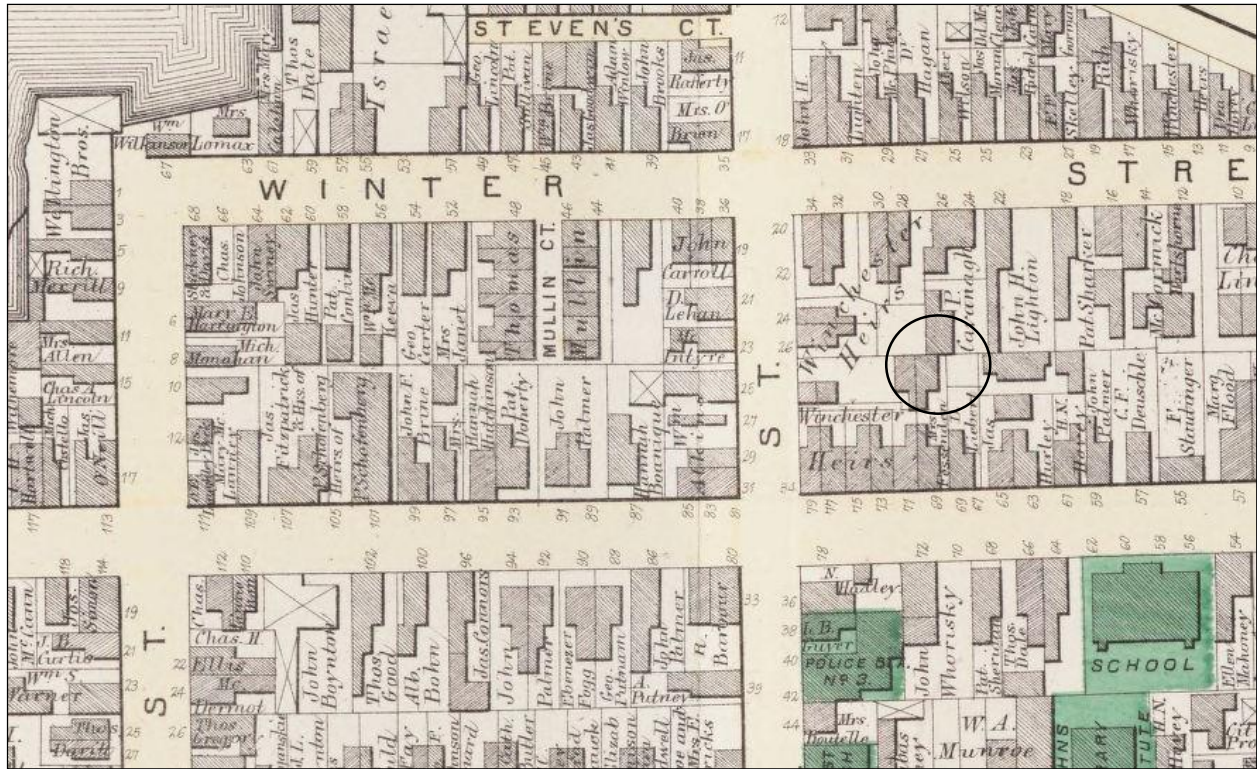
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Leighton served as superintendent until his death in 1849 and was succeeded by his son Henry, who continued in the same position until 1858. Thomas Leighton's son John, who also became superintendent, inherited both 22 and 24 Winter Street and lived there with his wife Jane until he died in 1879. She survived him and continued living at 22 Winter Street. The family finally sold the property after her death in 1889.

Thomas Leighton acquired the lot next door at 24 Winter in 1835 and sold it to his son Thomas Leighton Jr. in 1838. Thomas was assessed at the end of the year for an unfinished house that was a smaller copy of his father's. The house was built at the back of the lot so that another

house could be built in front of it. This house, 26 Winter Street, appears on an 1854 map of Cambridge, but it was demolished in 1946 and little is known of its appearance.

John Leighton sold both 24 and 26 Winter to Patrick Cavanaugh, a laborer, about 1870. The house at 24 passed to Thomas Quinn, a letter carrier, about 1877, and to Antonio Carbone, a machine operator, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Carbone family remained in possession at least through the 1960s.



1873 Hopkins Atlas of Cambridge

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Thomas Leighton house, 22 Winter Street, 2016

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Thomas Leighton Jr. house, 24 Winter Street, 2016

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### Significance and Recommendation

The Thomas Leighton Jr. house at 24 Winter Street is significant as a representative example of an early nineteenth-century center-entrance house, a characteristic house type in the East Cambridge neighborhood, and for its associations with the family of Thomas Leighton and his descendants.

I recommend that the Commission review the applicant's proposal and hear public testimony from the neighborhood before making a further determination.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services Commissioner  
Richard J. and Diane M. Vendetti