



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: October 30, 2020
To: Cambridge Historical Commission
From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: D-1563: 25 Jackson Street (1874)

An application to demolish the two-family house at 25 Jackson Street was received on October 13, 2020. The applicant, 25 Jackson Street, LLC, c/o DND Homes, LLC, was notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for November 5, 2020.



25 Jackson Street, CHC staff photo 2020

Architectural Description

The house at 25 Jackson Street is a two-story workers cottage on a parged brick foundation. The front entrance is centered on the south facing façade. The house is covered with yellow aluminum siding and faux stone veneer on the first floor of the front elevation. The windows appear to be vinyl 1-over-1 replacement units. A two-story ell extends to the north of the main block. The house measures approximately 23 feet in height. The front elevation is three bays wide with symmetrically placed windows. The street-facing elevation has a large picture window, added in the mid-twentieth century. The north elevation of the ell also has four symmetrically-placed windows. The cornice returns on the gable ends have been boxed in on the street side but are still open on the north side of the ell. Two brick chimneys are located on the north side of the gable roof of the main block of the house. One story rear additions, a garage, and a shed are visible in an aerial photo.



East side of 25 Jackson St., Nearmap aerial view, 2019

North Cambridge workers cottages of this kind were typically on high brick foundations but this one appears artificially low to the ground, probably due to a change in the grade of the street and lot when sewer lines were added to the street.

The original window pattern was 2-over-2 double hung sash. The original windows are visible in the CHC survey photograph from 1970 (plus the addition of a picture window). Any evidence of the original corner boards, water table, and window trim are covered up by the artificial siding but the gable end returns are a clue to its original Italianate style.



25 Jackson Street, CHC survey photo, 1970

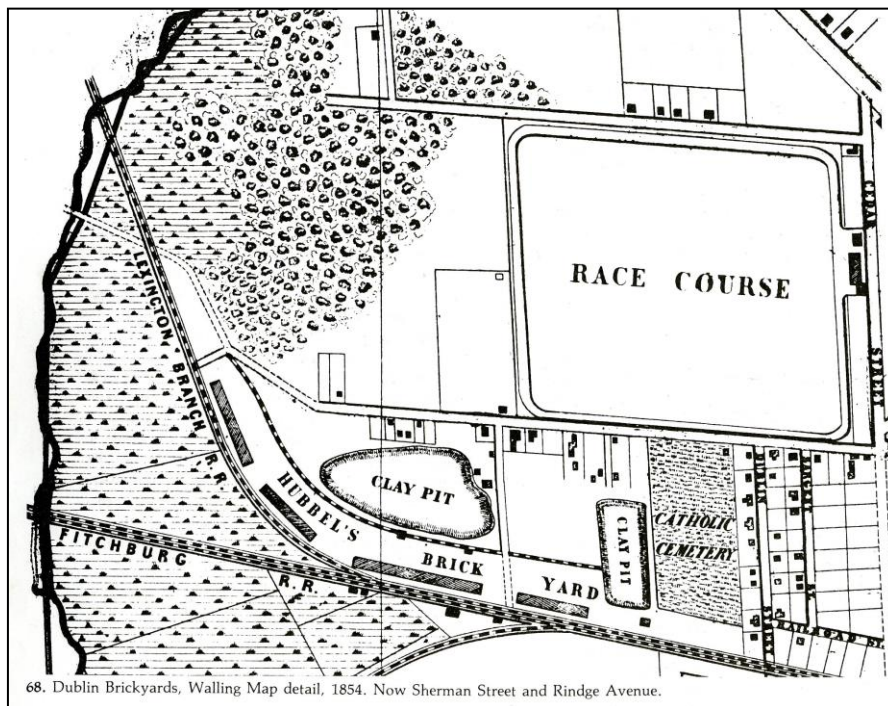


North side of 25 Jackson Street, CHC staff photo, 2020

History

The 1842 extension of the Charlestown Branch Railroad from Miller's River to Fresh and Spy Ponds opened up North Cambridge for the brick industry and for suburban development. Several subdivisions were platted in the 1840s and early 1850s by owners of the brickyards to accommodate the mostly-Irish worker population.

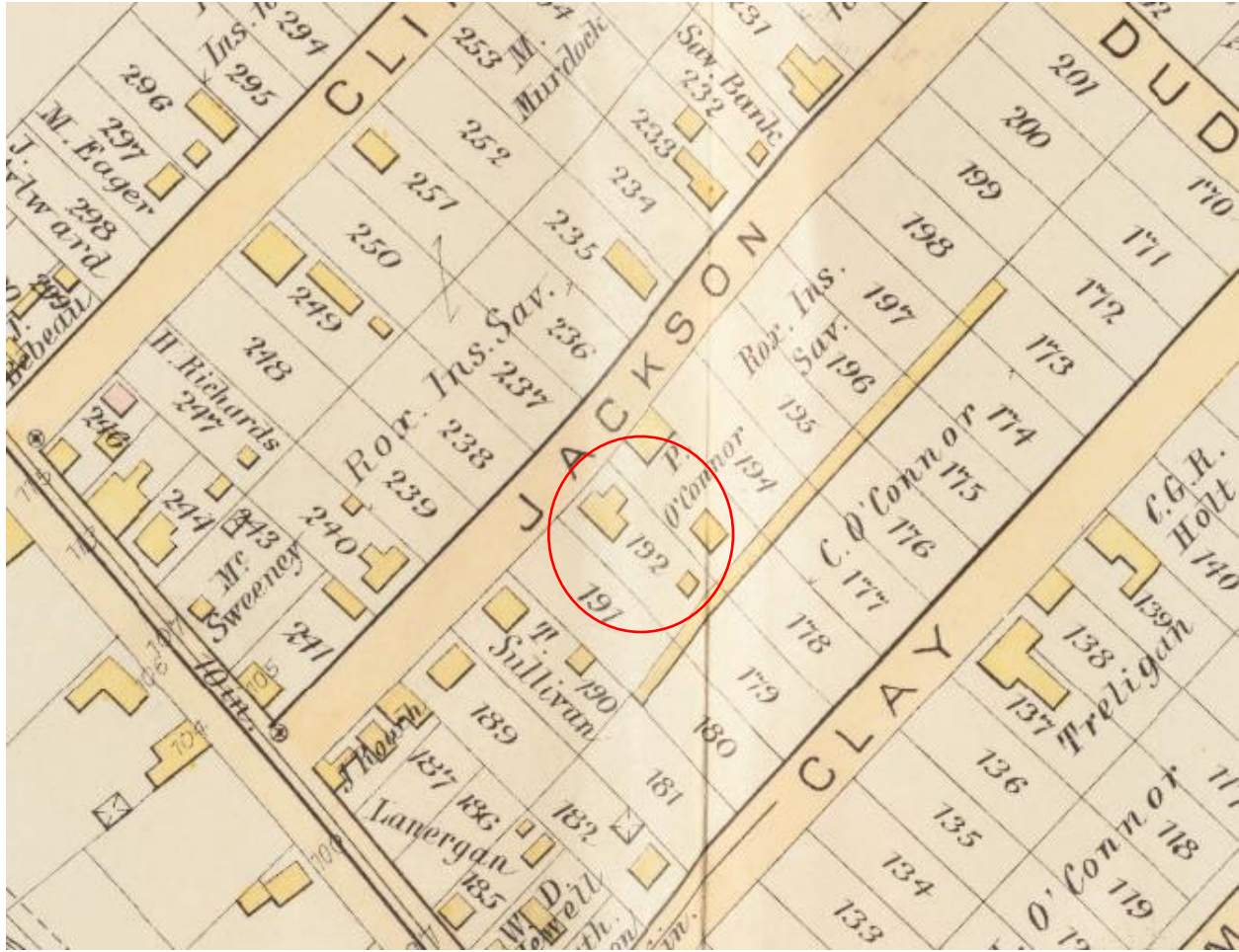
By the mid-1850s most available land near the brickyards on Kidder's Lane (now Rindge Avenue) had been platted for residential development. The only remaining large parcel was the Race Course, fifty acres of flat land west of Cedar Street bounded by Harvey Street on the north and Rindge Avenue on the south. Opened in 1837, the Race Course operated on a seasonal basis during the 1840s, catering to cattle drovers and Cambridge traders and hosting a variety of racing events, the most popular being horse trotting, which was a competition of the horses' endurance not just their speed. Transportation via omnibus was available from Harvard Square.



Detail of the Walling map of 1854, showing the location of the race course, later subdivided for residential development.

As the suburban population of North Cambridge grew, the Race Course area came increasingly under pressure for reuse. The flat land of the course was perfectly suited for residential development, and in 1855 owners Kidder and Reed divided the parcel into 275 house lots, the largest residential subdivision in North Cambridge. Five new north-south streets were created between Harvey Street and Rindge Avenue. From east to west, they were Reed, Montgomery, Clay, Jackson, and Clifton streets.

The house lots were first marketed to middle-class Irish in Boston and Charlestown, and half the lots were soon sold, but only three of the buyers built houses on their lots. Kidder & Reed found a much more receptive market when they redirected sales toward Cambridge brickyard laborers. The areas closest to the brickyards were the first to be developed. The interior streets, such as Clay and Jackson streets, remained sparsely populated until after the Civil War. A number of houses were built along Dudley Street (then Belmont Street) when it was put through in 1870, but the Panic of 1873 abruptly terminated residential construction in the area. Another building boom occurred in the 1890s, when an influx of French Canadians arrived to work in the brickyards and other nearby industries.



Hopkins atlas, Plate 7, 1886. 25 Jackson is located on lot 192. A rope walk owned by the abutting property owner, C. O'Connor [sic], is visible behind the shed of 25 Jackson Street. This ropewalk extended the width of eight lots.

Jackson Street was part of Kidder and Reed's subdivision laid out in uniform 6000 square foot (50 x 120) lots. By 1886, the majority of the lots in this block are still undeveloped.

John and Margaret Hughes (also spelled Hews and Hughs) purchased lot 192 of the Kidder & Reed subdivision from Samuel G. Reed by 1874. Tax records indicate that they had begun construction of a house that year. John worked as a teamster. John and Margaret immigrated from Ireland before 1855. They had nine children, all born in Massachusetts. John died in 1879 of consumption (tuberculosis). Margaret raised the children in the house and died in 1895. Her children inherited the house and her unmarried daughters resided there until 1920.

The Hughes family sold the house around 1920-1921 to Luigi and Luigina (Louisa) Tagliafico. Luigi was born in Lerma, Italy in 1879 and immigrated before WWI. He was a laborer employed by the New England Brick Co. The house was subsequently sold to a number of other Italian families including Camillo and Grace Torre, Carlo & Maria Pesce, and Joseph Mazza. Joseph Mazza sold the house in 1965 to Manuel & Oleva Garcia who sold it in 1973 to Lorraine and Ronald Hirtle. The Hirtle family owned the house until this year, when it was sold to the 25 Jackson Street, LLC. Ronald Hirtle was born in Cambridge in 1929. He was employed at Harvard University in 1972, and he died in 1985.

Significance and Recommendation

The Hughes-Hirtle House at 25 Jackson Street is an example of the vernacular North Cambridge workers cottage once so prevalent in the Race Course neighborhood. It is significant in terms of Chapter 2.78.080 of the Municipal Code, for its important associations with the architectural and social history of the city including its associations with immigrant families of Irish and Italian heritage. Many of the house's inhabitants were indeed laborers, making this a true worker's cottage. It is not a high-style or architect-designed home, but it is consistent with the vernacular type and working-class history of the neighborhood.

The proposed new construction should be evaluated and public testimony heard before making a further determination.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services
25 Jackson Street, LLC
Dan Anderson, architect