



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

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INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 76 Curtis Street

Case: HPC.DMO 2022.29

Applicant: Anthony Seretakis

Owner: Same as Applicant

Legal Ad: *The Applicant seeks to demolish a principal and accessory structure constructed a minimum of 75 years ago.*

HPC Meeting Date: October 06, 2022

Top: Front elevation of primary residence

Bottom, left: Left elevation of primary residence

Bottom, middle: Rear elevation of primary residence

Bottom, right: Right elevation of primary residence





Above, left: Front elevation of the garage

Above, middle left: Rear elevation of the garage

Above, middle right: Left elevation of the garage

Above, right: Right elevation of the garage

The purpose of a staff report is to provide the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) with additional information and professional assessments regarding properties that are proposed for demolition. These assessments are based on the criteria allowed for consideration by the HPC in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (DRO). A Staff Report is not a determination/decision, nor does it constitute authorization in any form.

I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Historical Context: 76 Curtis St is located within the Teele Square neighborhood. Teele Square, like the rest of West Somerville, was largely undeveloped until the end of the 19th century. Unlike most of the rest of Somerville, the area comprising West Somerville was relatively flat and for most of the 18th and 19th centuries it was used for farming and dairying.

Teele Square developed around the site of the early 19th century homestead of Jonathan Teele, for whom the square is named. In 1867 Holland Street was extended from Davis Square and the irregular intersection that it created when it met Broadway became the nucleus of a commercial center in West Somerville.

As buildable land in the other parts of Somerville became scarcer, and as streetcar and trolley service became more available, many of the large landowners and farmers in West Somerville sold their property for residential development. In 1885 the West End Street Railway car shop was constructed at the western extreme of Broadway at Alewife Brook Parkway and by 1900 maps show most of the area around Teele Square platted, but only a few houses built.

Curtis Street was originally a rangeway, and not used as a street until the mid-nineteenth century. The builder of this house was Lorenzo W Dow, a farmer. Subsequent builders in the area were in non-agricultural occupations, as the area changed from a farming area to a suburban area.

The earliest maps accessed to-date, the 1874 Hopkins, Plate L, provides visual support to the statements taken from the Form A above: this area of Somerville was sparsely populated. Most of the land in this area at that time was divided between large estate holdings and smaller areas platted into housing lots for the purpose of speculative real estate development.



Above: 1874, Plate L Hopkins Map, indicating location of Lorenzo Dow's property holdings

Plate L shows that the land currently occupied by 76 Curtis Street was owned by a Lorenzo W Dow and is part of a larger lot under Dow's ownership. Speculative real estate development was in full swing in Somerville during this time.

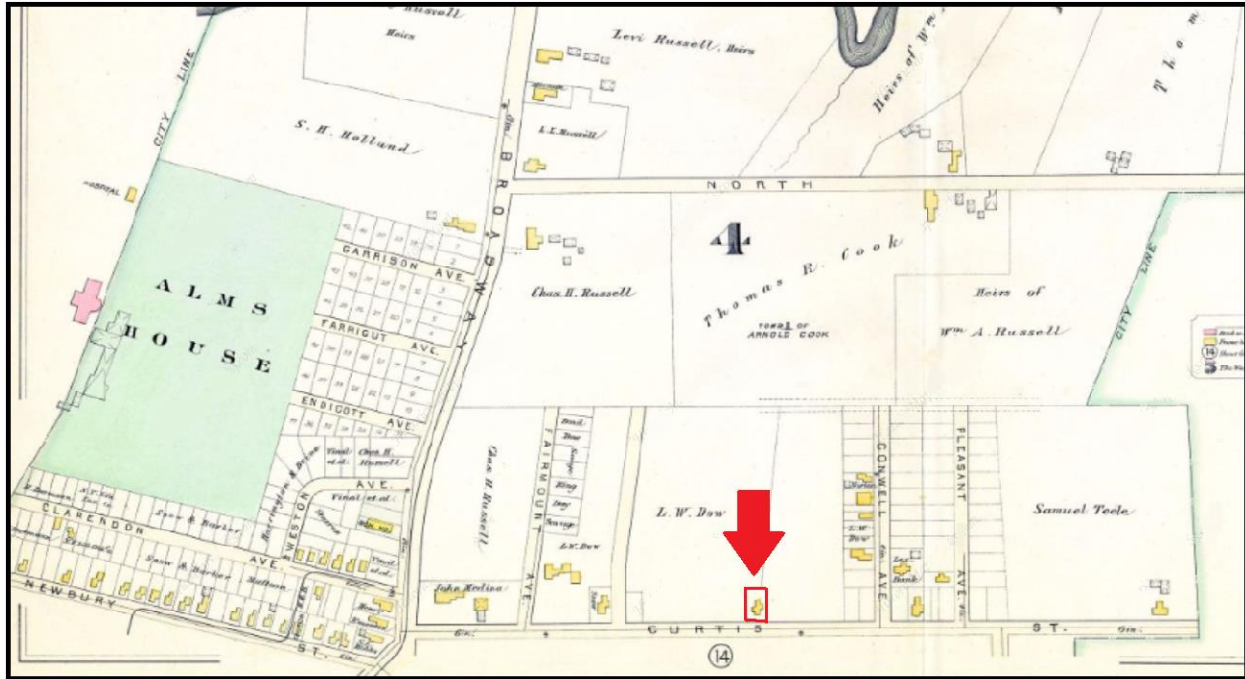
Lorenzo Dow was a farmer who owned land between Teele Square and Clarendon Hill. Beginning in 1852 he began purchasing land until he owned the land between Fairmount Avenue and Professor's Row; 11 acres of farmland in total. His home on Fairmount Avenue was the third building constructed on Clarendon Hill and is visible on the 1852 Draper Map.

At the beginning of the building boom in West Somerville during the 1870s, he began to subdivide his land, constructing streets and buildings. This was a typical activity in which farmers in West Somerville, turned in to entrepreneurs engaged in land speculation. As part of the development of his lands, Lorenzo constructed the residence at 76 Curtis Street. The Lorenzo family resided at their residence at 13 Fairmount Avenue, acting as absentee landlords to their other properties.

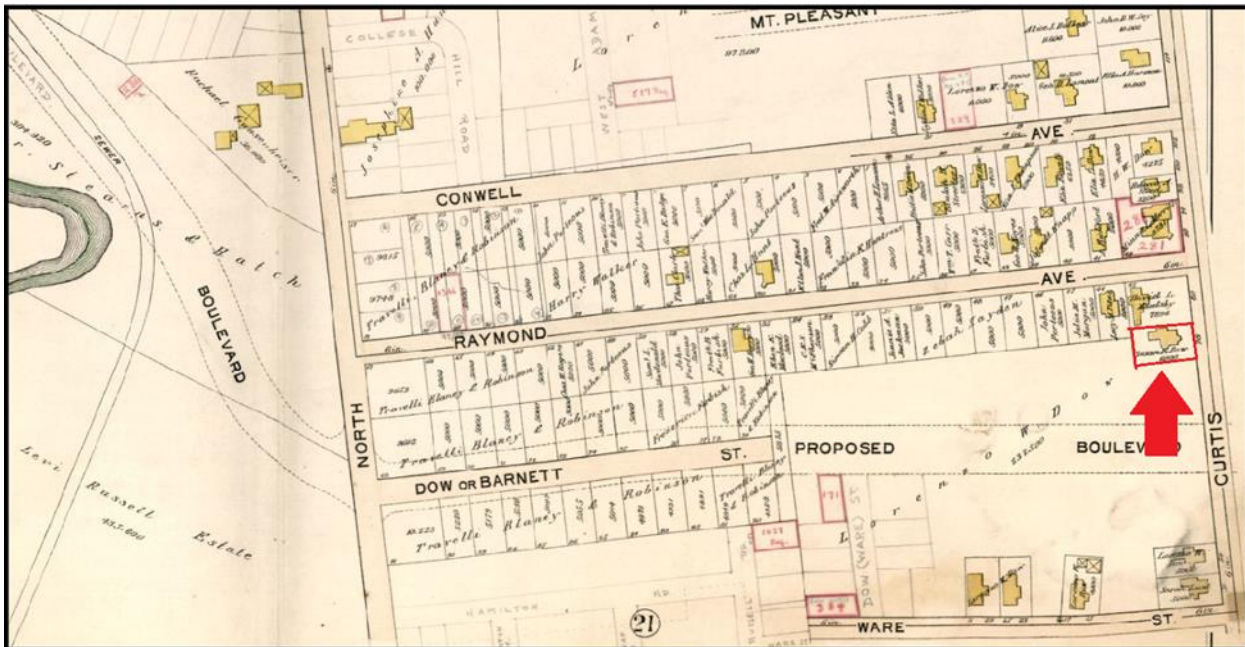
The 1884 Hopkins map (below) shows the very beginning of the subdivision of the Dow farmlands and the structure at 76 Curtis Street for the first time.



Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, January 6, 1912



Above: 1884 Hopkins Map, Plate 15, specifying location of 76 Curtis St.



Above: 1895 Bromley Map, Plate 23, specifying location of 76 Curtis St.

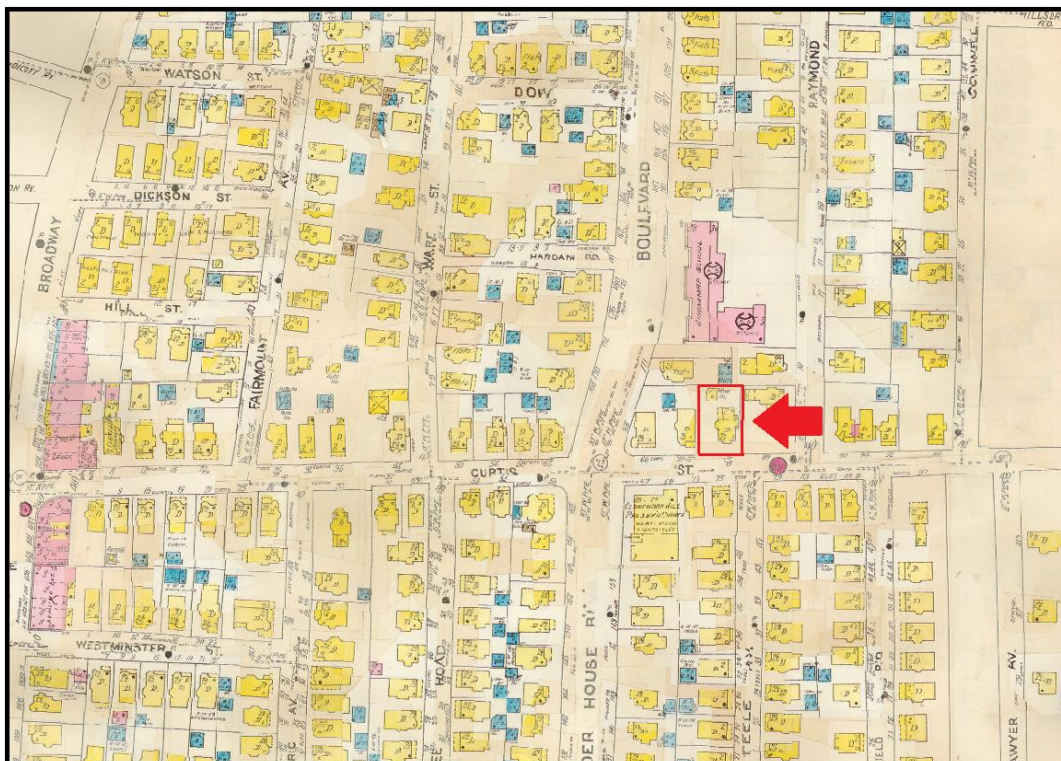
The 1895 Bromley Map shows that the farmland along Clarendon Hill has largely been subdivided into smaller plots. Most of these plots are empty, only the properties closest to Curtis Street have had buildings constructed. The map also shows, in pencil, plots that were newly subdivided, and the proposed Dow Street (Ware St). These later updates to the map show the speed at which the development in West Somerville was progressing that such edits were added later.

By 1895, 76 Curtis Street is now listed as owned by Susan E Dow, Lorenzo's wife. It is unknown why the property was listed under his wife's name at a time when it was uncommon for women to own property,

especially when married. Looking at the other subdivided lots owned by the Dow family a couple of the properties are listed as owned by Susan, while the other properties remain under Lorenzo's name.



Above: 1900 Sanborn Map, Sheet 4, specifying the location of 76 Curtis St.

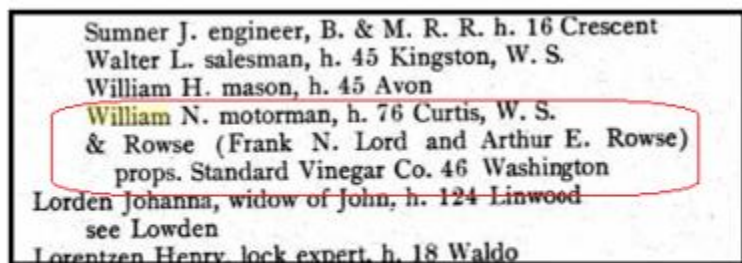


Above: 1933-34 Sanborn Map, Sheet 220, specifying the location of 76 Curtis St

By 1925, all lots on Clarendon Hill have been developed. A grammar school has been built to meet the need to educate the children of the growing population. Clarendon Hill Presbyterian Church is constructed across the street on Curtis to provide a place of worship for the growing community.

This is also the first time the wood-frame garage at 76 Curtis St appears on a map. It was likely built as a carriage-house or barn. From this, we know that between 1900 and 1925 the current wood frame garage was built.

Staff was unable to locate deed records for this time; so, it is unclear who of the listed residents after 1895 rented living space or if the Dow family sold 76 Curtis Street. The first listed residents of 76 Curtis Street are the Bickford and Lord families. The Bickford family is listed as residing at 76 Curtis Street between 1890 and 1898. Moses Bickford lived there with his wife, Ambrosene, and their two children: Ella and Frank. Moses and Frank both worked as carpenters. Living with the Bickfords was their son-in-law Gardner C. Lord, who was married to Ella. Between 1890 and 1898, four individuals with the last name 'Lord' lived at the property. The exact familial relationships were not discovered during research. Gardner and Charles G Lord both worked as hairdressers, while William N Lord worked as a motorman for the Standard Vinegar Company. The Standard Vinegar Company became today's Veryfine¹ brand of juice drinks. In



Above: Excerpt from 1898 Somerville City Directory



Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, June 3, 1956

1930, Rowse, who owned the factory, moved his vinegar factory from Somerville to Littleton, MA to be closer to the apple orchards on which his vinegar production depended. The Veryfine brand was added to his product line in 1919 when he marketed pasteurized apple juice. Interestingly, the City Directories list the proprietors of the Standard Vinegar Co., Frank N Lord and Arthur E Rowse, in the entry for William Lord. Staff was unable to determine if the Lords of 76 Curtis Street were related to Frank N Lord.

Between 1890 and 1910, 76 Curtis was home to individuals who worked on the railways, streets, and trolleys that were part of the building boom in West Somerville. The building boom of West Somerville created jobs in construction and engineering. These individuals included Robert Gee who worked as a brakeman, Willis A Trim as a Switchman, Henry C Fay, Jr. as a steam gauge maker, and Chester Smith as a machinist.

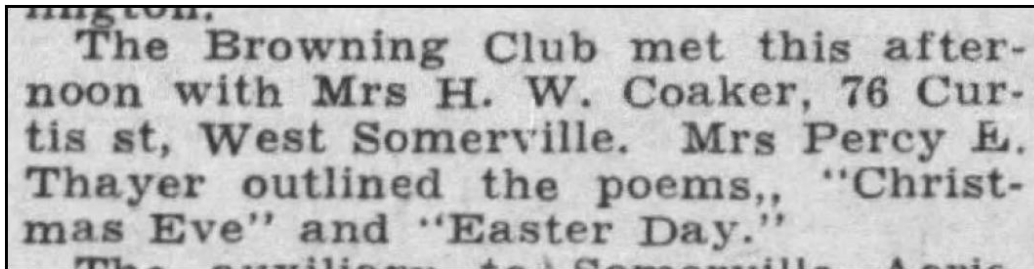
Between 1912 and 1940, various members of the Coaker family resided at 76 Curtis Street. Given that the date the Somerville City Directories first begin listing 76 Curtis as the home of the Coakers coincides with the year Lorenzo Dow passed away, it is likely that they bought the property from

¹ By Source (WP:NFCC#4), Fair use, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=50930520>

the Dow family after his death in 1912. The Coaker family consisted of Herbert W Coaker, his wife, Lottie and their four children: Lucille, Anna, George, and Catherine. Herbert owned a wholesale provision business in Boston. The children either went to school or worked; Lucille was a student, George worked various jobs including as a notary and a salesman, Anna was a nurse, and Catherine worked as a clerk after she left school.

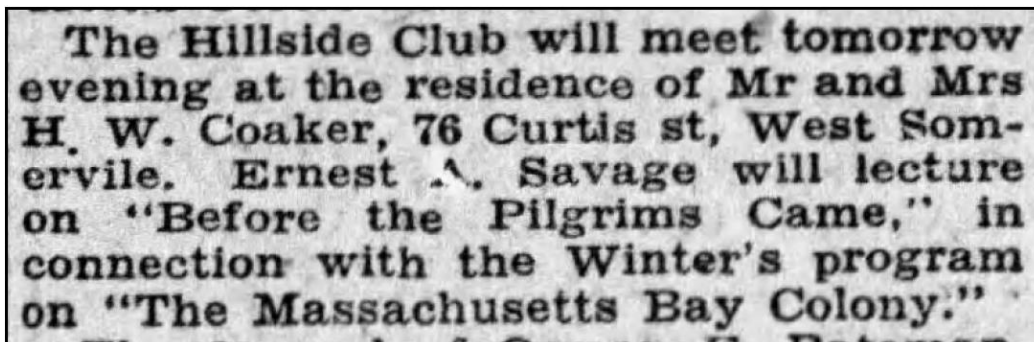
Herbert and Lottie Coaker were involved in their community. Herbert was a member of the John Abbot Lodge A.F. & A.M., the Orient Council, Royal Arch Chapter of Somerville, and the Aleppo Temple. These organizations were fraternal charitable organizations. During the 1800s and early 1900s, Freemasonry and fraternal organizations in general, grew dramatically within the United States. This growth was a reaction to the lack of social services provided by the government. Masonic Lodges and fraternal organizations founded hospitals, orphanages, and homes for women and the elderly.

Lottie Coaker hosted events for the Browning Club and the Hillside Club at their home. Mimicking the rise of the fraternal organizations was the rise of social clubs in the 1800s and 1900s. These organizations mainly consisted of middle-class white women and focused on charity and on self-improvement through discussions of history and literature. Social clubs would conduct fundraisers and meet to discuss books and hear lectures. In multiple Boston Globe excerpts, we can see notices of upcoming meetings of the Hillside Club and Browning Club hosted by the Coakers where poems would be read, and lectures given on historical events.



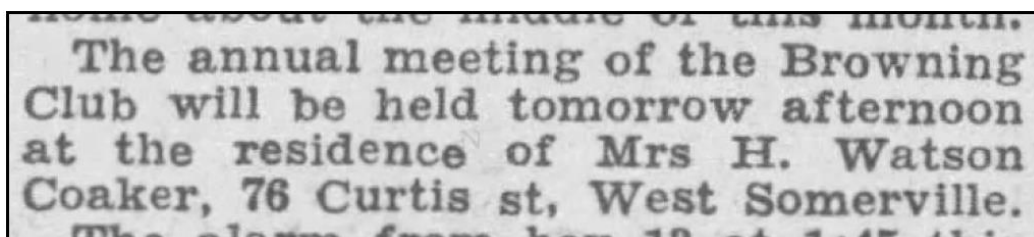
The Browning Club met this afternoon with Mrs H. W. Coaker, 76 Curtis st, West Somerville. Mrs Percy E. Thayer outlined the poems,, "Christmas Eve" and "Easter Day."

Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, November 13, 1931



The Hillside Club will meet tomorrow evening at the residence of Mr and Mrs H. W. Coaker, 76 Curtis st, West Somerville. Ernest A. Savage will lecture on "Before the Pilgrims Came," in connection with the Winter's program on "The Massachusetts Bay Colony."

Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, November 25, 1929



The annual meeting of the Browning Club will be held tomorrow afternoon at the residence of Mrs H. Watson Coaker, 76 Curtis st, West Somerville.

Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, April 9, 1931

Further research resulted in the following information on the tenants or owners over the decades at 76 Curtis Street. The names that have been found show the property was inhabited by working-class individuals. The experiences of these residents are representative of the development of West Somerville; from a farmer turned entrepreneur during the building boom, the workers engaged in the industries of the trolley cars and railways that brought that building boom, and the engagement of the middle class in social and charitable organizations. A list of all residents is provided below.

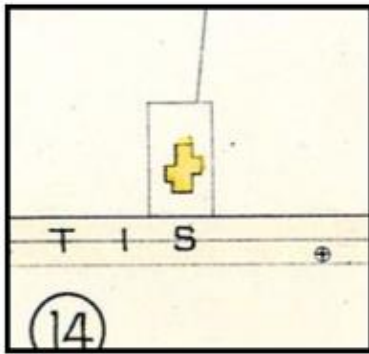
Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation	Relationship	Residency Type
Angell, Frank J	1904 - 1905	Student	Unknown	B
Bartlett, Frank S	1901 - 1902	Salesman	N/A	H
Bickford, Ambrosene	1890 - 1892		Wife of Moses P Bickford, Mother-in-Law to Gardener C Lord	Bds
Bickford, Ella	1890 - 1892		Daughter of Moses & Ambrosene Bickford / Wife of Gardner C Lord	Bds
Bickford, Frank W.	1890 - 1898	Carpenter	Son of Moses & Ambrosene Bickford	Bds
Bickford, Moses P	1890 - 1892	Carpenter	Head of Household, Father-in-Law to Gardner C Lord	Bds
Chase, Aaron F	1894 - 1895	Bricklayer		H
Coaker, Anna W	1918 - 1933	Nurse	Daughter of H Watson & Lottie Coaker	R
Coaker, Catherine C	1924 - 1929	Clerk	Daughter of H Watson & Lottie Coaker	R
Coaker, Herbert Watson	1912 - 1933	Provisions / Wholesale Beef	Head of Household	H
Coaker, George W	1918 - 1940	Notary, Student, Sales	Son of H Watson & Lottie Coaker	R
Coaker, Lottie E	1924 - 1933		Wife of H Watson Coaker	H
Coaker, Lucille H	1915 - 1920	Student	Daughter of H Watson & Lottie Coaker	B
Danforth, Samuel S	1907 - 1911	Neckwear	Unknown	H
Fay, Henry C Jr	1900	Steam Gauge Maker	Unknown	H
Gee, Robert	1904	Brakeman	Unknown	H
Lord, Charles G	1890 - 1892	Hairdresser	Unknown	B
Lord, Gardner C	1892	Hairdresser	Head of Household	Bds
Lord, Samuel J	1898		Unknown	B
Lord, William N	1898	Motorman	Unknown	H
Raspe, Elizabeth P	1904 - 1905	Widow	Unknown	H
Raspe, Otto S	1904 - 1905	Student	Unknown	B
Smith, Chester	1890 - 1891	Machinist	Unknown	B
Smith, Hiram W	1905	Pastor	Unknown	H
Smith, Stella A	1905	Teacher	Unknown	B
Stone, Frank A	1902	Letter Carrier	Unknown	H
Trim, Willis A	1897 - 1898	Switchman	Unknown	B
Valentine, William E	1909 - 1911	Clerk	Unknown	H

II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

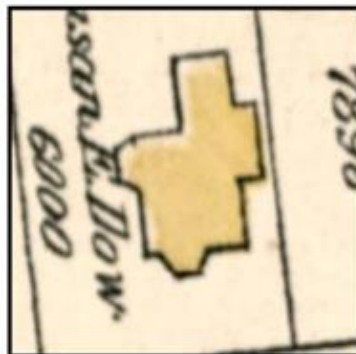
Please see the section immediately below which discusses location, design, materials and any alterations as the same information would be written here, just in longer form.

The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.

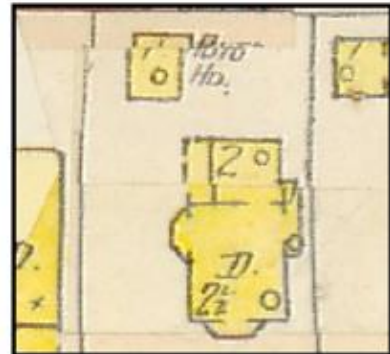
Comparing the historic map with satellite images of the current property we can determine the degree to which the structure has been altered.



Above: Fig 1



Above: Fig 2



Above: Fig 3



Above: Fig 4



Above: Fig 5

Fig 1: 1884 Hopkins Map, close up of 76 Curtis St

- The 1884 Map shows that the primary structure has building projections on both the left and right elevations. No rear structure has yet been constructed on the lot.

Fig 2: 1895 Bromley Map, close-up of 76 Curtis St

- A bay has been added on the front elevation.
- It can be determined from this map that the projection on the left elevation is a bay.

Fig 3: 1925 Sanborn Map, close-up of 76 Curtis St

- The Sanborn Map shows that a porch was added to the left elevation behind the bay.
- The Sanborn Map identifies the projection on the right side of the building as one-story. This was likely a one-story porch prior to 1884.
- A carriage house or barn has been constructed. It has a simple rectangular footprint.

Fig 4 & 5: Satellite images of 76 Curtis St

- A covered porch has been added to the front elevation.
- The addition of a second-floor space above the first-floor porch on the left elevation transforming it into a covered porch.
- One-story addition on the rear.

1. **76 Curtis Street**

The period of relevance for the property starts c.1884

- a. Location: It is likely that both structures are in their original location and were built on-site.
- b. Design: The primary structure is a two and 1/3 story, wood framed, gable ended residence with a one-story projection on the right elevation which was likely once a porch prior to 1884, a bay and a covered porch on the left elevation, and a covered porch over the front entry (one door) with a one-story bay; mid to late 20th century iron railings and columns for the front porch; fenestration consists of one one-over-one, double-hung, replacement sash windows with simple surrounds, and on the second floor of the right elevation is a port window and farther towards the rear is either a horizontal sash window or casement windows; one-story rear addition; wood porch leading to a glass door with muntin pattern on the right elevation of the later rear addition; brick chimney.

The accessory structure is a one-story, wood frame, gable ended carriage house or barn with shingled projection connecting the front gable ends; vent between the gable vertex and the shingled projection; double bi-folding wood carriage doors with each panel containing a single one-over-one window (4 in total); fenestration on left and rear elevation includes three two-over-one fixed windows; wood door on the right elevation.

- c. Materials:
 - 1. *Main structure:* Vinyl clapboard; wood or aluminum replacement front door; mid-20th century iron porch railings and posts supporting front porch; wood porch on right elevation; concrete landing with wood posts and railings on the covered porch on the left elevation; one-over-one replacement windows (vinyl or metal); brick chimney stack; asphalt shingle roof.
 - 2. *Garage:* wood clapboard; wood windows; wood garage doors; asphalt shingle roof.
- d. Alterations: Rear addition; replacement windows and doors; second floor addition above left porch; addition of the porch on the front elevation; addition of wood porch on the right elevation; replacement vinyl siding; port window and casement or horizontal sash windows on right elevation; mid to late 20th century iron railings and columns.
- e. Evaluation of Integrity of 76 Curtis Street Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building largely retains the integrity of its original form. Alterations have occurred to this structure which obscure original architectural details; however, the original massing remains largely intact.

III. **FINDINGS**

For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (i) importantly associated with people, events or history and/or (ii) historically or architecturally significant. The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) must make these findings. The portions of the Demolition Review Ordinance (DRO) related to these findings are included below:

A. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not **each** of the STRUCTURES at 76 Curtis Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why **each** of the STRUCTURES at 76 Curtis Street does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “a”.

B. HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The findings for historical and/or architectural significance of a historic property address the period, style, method of building construction and association with a reputed architect or builder of the subject property, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, and therefore it is in the public interest to be preserved or rehabilitated rather than to be demolished.

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not **each** of the STRUCTURES at 76 Curtis Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why **each** of the STRUCTURES at 76 Curtis Street or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “b”.

If the HPC makes the above finding, the HPC must state their reasons why they take this position.

IV. VOTE

1. When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the **each** of the STRUCTURES at 76 Curtis Street is or is not “historically significant”.