



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

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ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION  
*HISTORIC PRESERVATION*

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**STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE**  
**STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 635 Somerville Ave

**Case:** HPC.ALT 2022-35

**Applicant:** Mai Lou

**Owner:** 635 Somerville Avenue LLC

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

**HPC Meeting Date:** October 6, 2022

*Top: Front elevation*  
*Bottom, left: Left elevation*  
*Bottom, right: Right elevation*



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:** 635 Somerville Ave. is a three-story residential structure. While Somerville Avenue is dominated by one- and two-story commercial structures, there are many wood-framed triple-decker and gable-roofed structures found throughout the length of this street.

Somerville Ave was originally known as Charlestown Lane and then later Milk Row (and, subsequently, Milk Street) before being given its current name. The name Milk Row derives from the use of this route by Middlesex County dairymen to transport milk from Middlesex County farms to Boston. Milk Row, throughout the 19th century, was a main thoroughfare from Union Square to Porter Square in Cambridge. From Washington Street and Union Square, this route initially connected with present-day Elm Street, and ran north to Medford. Milk Row was the site of Somerville's earliest industries. The Middlesex Bleachery and Dye Works which began operation in 1821 was located at Bleachery Row and Milk Row. The American Tube Works was situated at Park and Somerville Avenue in 1858. In 1842 the Fitchburg Railroad ran its tracks South of Milk Row, with a passenger station at Kent Street. The earlier (1835) Boston and Lowell had a station at the corner of Washington and Somerville Avenues.

The early industries of the Middlesex Dye and Bleachery Company (1801) and the American Tube Works (1852) established the development of the area and by the 1870s the farmland had been converted to manufacturing and food processing establishments. With this substantial industrial growth came the need for workers' housing.

While Somerville Avenue was sparsely developed in 1852, by the mid to late 19th century, this corridor is substantially subdivided and moderately developed. Commercial and residential growth related to Union Square is historically tied to the expansion of the railroad service, beginning in 1835 with the opening of the first passenger railroad station on Washington Street. As Union Square continued to grow and expand, development continued to fill empty land toward the west down the Somerville Avenue corridor.

While some of the parcels on the same block as the subject property had been developed by 1852, nothing was built on this property until slightly later. The 1874 and 1884 Hopkins maps both show an outbuilding on this property in approximately the same place as the current structure. At some point between 1874 and 1884 the subject property was merged with a portion of what is now 619-627 Somerville Ave to form a reverse-L shaped lot with two principal structures on it and two or three



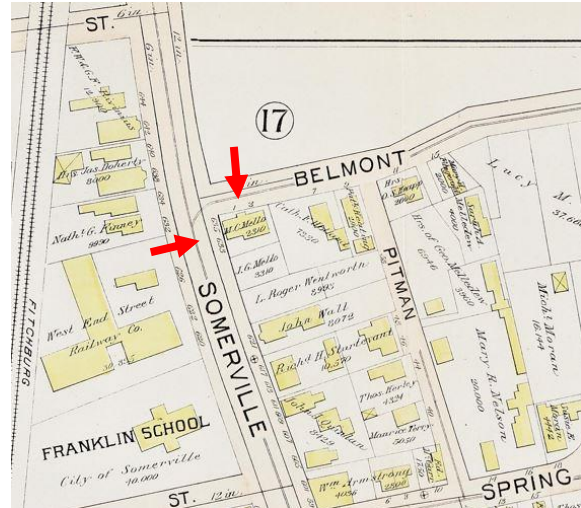
1874 Hopkins map, plate 40-41



outbuildings. The property was owned by Hugh Carney. No records have been found for anyone living at this address during this period.

The first records of anyone living at 633 or 635 Somerville Ave come in 1894, when George Green and George R. Green are listed as living at 633 Somerville Ave; Mrs. G. L. Flemming is also listed as being associated with a “variety store” at 635 Somerville Ave. It is likely that the current structure had been built by this time, giving an approximate build date of c.1885 - c.1894.

The 1895 Bromley map is the first to show a building with a similar footprint and in a similar location as the building that is currently there. Also noticeable on this map is the name change from Milk Street to the present-day Somerville Avenue. This indicates that sometime between 1874 and 1895 the street was renamed from Milk St to Somerville Ave, and the properties on this end of the block were replatted, resulting in the creation of the lot boundaries for this property that have remained consistent to today. The property also changed hands at least once during that time period, as the new owner is listed as “M. C. Mello”. Hugh Carney, the previous owner, does not appear to own land in the immediate area any longer. No record of a person with the last name “Mello” living at this property has been found.



Above: 1895 Bromley, plate 9

The 1895 Bromley map shows this property as having at least two addresses (633 and 635 Somerville Ave) which is also reflected in city directory records from that time. City directories show 633 Somerville Ave as having a series of residents, few of whom appear to be associated with the building for more than a short period of time. The table of occupants known to live at 633 or 635 Somerville Ave is shown below, along with their occupation (if known) and which address they were associated with.



1895 (Bromley)



1925 (Sanborn)



2022 (Google Maps)

Name	Years	Occupation	Relationship	Address
Fleming, Mrs. G. L.	1894	variety stores		635
Green, George	1894	carpenter		633
Green, George R.	1894	florist		633
Hambro, Louis	1895	variety stores		635
Turner, Edward	1896	grocer		635
White, James J.	1896	butcher		633
Cosman, Wentworth	1897	carpenter		633
Hall, Esther A.	1897	grocer		635
O'Neil, Annie	1897 - 1898	dressmaker		633
Shanney, Thomas	1898 - 1910	car conductor, sometimes grocer	Husband to Mary	633 & 635
Louis, Lotlow	1899	variety stores		635
Matthews, Max	1899	overall mnfr.		633
Jones, Robert F.	1900	R.R. employee		633
Kelley, Lena E	1900		Boarder with Thomas & Mary Shanney	635
Meserve, Emma	1900	widow		633
Meserve, Mrs. Emma	1900			633
Shanney, Mary	1900 - 1910	grocer	Wife to Thomas	633 & 635
Shanney, Mary E	1900 - 1910		Daughter of Thomas & Mary	635
Cahill, Thomas	1900-1910	clerk; later stationary engineer in hotel	Nephew of Thomas & Mary	635
Thurston, Frederick L.	1900	machinist		633
Whalen, Patrick	1901	labroer		633
DeFranco, D.	1902			633
Pines, David	1902			633
Cunningham, Charles H	1904-1905	tinsmith, 51 Union Sq		633
Callahan, Albert J	1908	shipper		633
Guazzoloca, Louis	1910	tmstr		633
Hildred, Reginald D	1910	mach S W W		633
White, M I	1911-1912	grocer		635
Gruber, Philip and Sarah	1916-1917	grocer		633 & 635
Marino, Antonio (Mary)	1918 - 1920			633
Merino, Annie	1920		Daughter of Anthony & Marianna	633
Merino, Anthony	1920	machine "blisher" at shoe factory	Son of Anthony & Marianna	633
Merino, Antonio	1920	cabinet maker	Husband to Marianna	633
Merino, Josephine	1920		Daughter of Anthony & Marianna	633
Merino, Marianna	1920		Wife to Antonio	633
Merino, Marie	1920		Daughter of Anthony & Marianna	633
Merino, Mary	1920	stitcher at bleackery	Daughter of Anthony & Marianna	633

While 633 Somerville Ave appears to be used almost exclusively as a residence (possibly with occasional commercial activities happening inside the residence), 635 Somerville Ave appears to be much more strongly associated with commercial activity. Between 1894 and 1900, various people appear to be running variety stores/groceries at this property, and it is not until the federal Census in 1900 that 635 Somerville Ave is unambiguously being used as a residence by the Shanney family (Mary, Thomas, Mary E, and nephew Thomas Cahill) and a boarder (Lena E Kelley).

Regardless of which specific address individuals are associated with, both 633 and 635 Somerville Ave clearly refer to the same building.

## **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.***

The period of relevance for the house starts between 1875-1894.

- a. **Location:** The building appears to be in its original location.
- b. **Design:** Roof is flat with deep eave. Covered and partially-enclosed front entries. Three recessed front entry doors with wood steps leading thereto. Two brick chimney stacks in center of house. Two-story (likely originally three-story) polygonal bay window on Somerville Ave façade; Three-story polygonal bay on left elevation (Belmont Ave façade) Rear of appears devoid of windows. Cadence of first story windows on Belmont Street elevation have been altered from original. Second- and third-story windows on Belmont St elevation are symmetrically aligned. Belmont Street elevation shows entry door toward the rear and an entry door on the rear portion of the bay. Basement windows of different styles throughout.  
  
Right elevation shows a long three-story jog situated roughly half-way down the façade. The Third story has been cantilevered out as well. In the jog, four one-over-one windows are uniformly placed across the façade and they are aligned across all stories.
- c. **Materials:** Painted brick foundation. Foundation appears to be parged on right elevation., Vinal siding. rubber or asphalt main roof. Asphalt shingles on front porch roof. Metal front railings flanking wood steps. Windows vinyl or aluminum. Some windows are one-over-one while others are horizontally-sliding casement. Entry doors vary from wood to fiberglass/vinyl.
- d. **Alterations:** Roof extended and cantilevered on right elevation; replacement windows; replacement front doors; new doorways cut in left elevation; new front entry(ies) added; front porch added and later enclosed; parging of portion of foundation. Original window openings on first story of Belmont Street elevation have been closed and new window openings created that are out-of-cadence with the window rhythm of this façade.
- e. **Evaluation of Integrity of 635 Somerville Ave:** Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building retains the integrity of its original form, with additions. Original 3-story right elevation bay is also retained.

### **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 the STRUCTURE at 635 Somerville Ave meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 635 Somerville Ave 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 the STRUCTURE at 635 Somerville Ave meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 635 Somerville Ave does 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 STRUCTURE at 635 Somerville Ave is or is not “historically significant”.