



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

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 325 Alewife Brook Parkway

Case: HPC.DMO 2023.07

Applicant: Robert DiPierro

Owner: William N. Doucette, Trustee
of 325 Alewife Realty Trust

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

HPC Meeting Date: May 2, 2023



Top: Front elevation

Bottom, left: Left elevation

Bottom, middle: Right elevation

Bottom, right: Rear 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: 325 Alewife Brook Parkway is a one-story commercial building located in West Somerville. Alewife Brook Parkway is largely dominated by two and a half and two $\frac{3}{4}$ -story residential structures on the east side and a park and recreational space to the west.

West Somerville, located at the extreme western end of the city, is roughly bounded by Medford (north); Curtis, Holland, and Elmwood Streets (east); and Alewife Brook, which forms the boundary with Arlington (west). The Alewife brook and parkway that defines the extreme western edge of Somerville were named for a fish. Alewives are a kind of herring that come to Massachusetts coastal ponds and rivers to spawn in the spring.

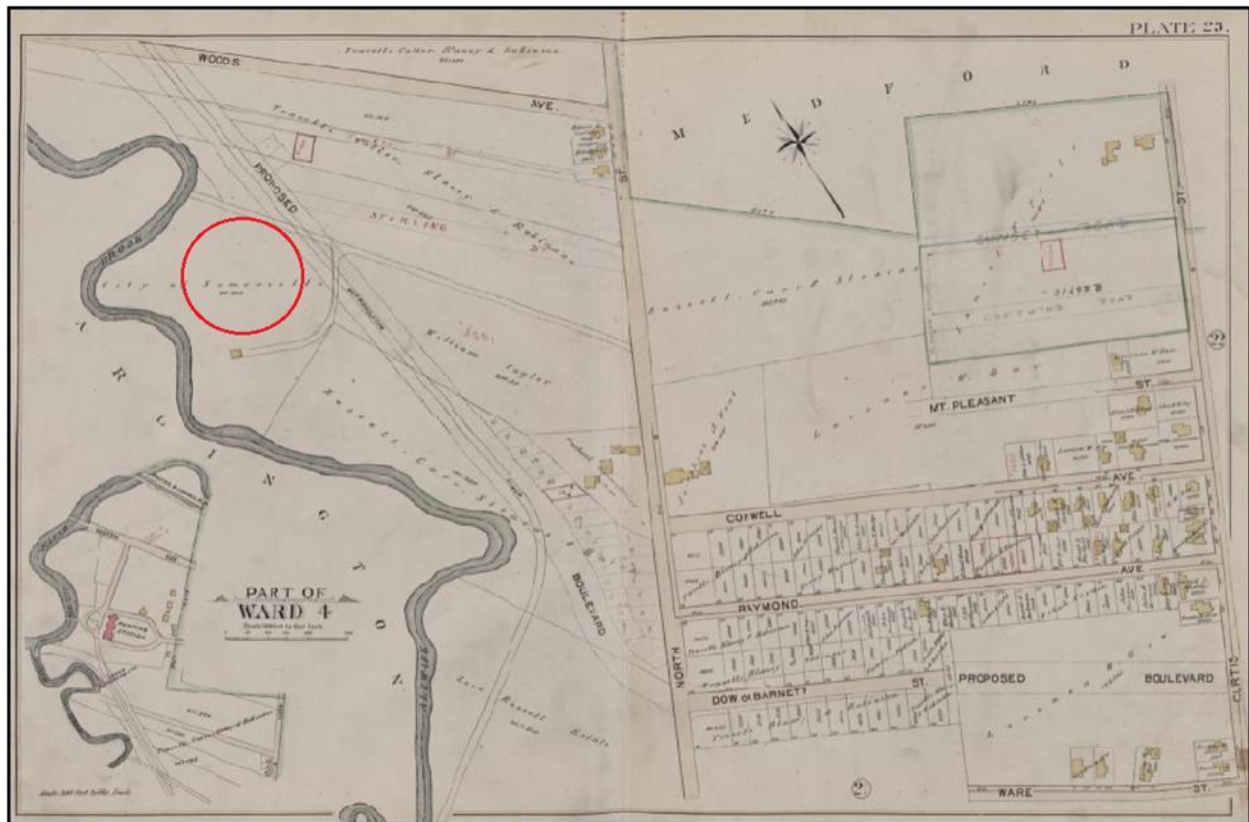
During the 18th and 19th centuries, the flat topography lent itself to farming and dairying. Increased residential development took place beginning in the late 19th century, due to better transportation linkages and greater land pressures. Rail improvements included connecting the Lexington and Arlington Branch Railroad to the Boston and Lowell in 1870, and extension of electric street railways beyond Davis Square in the 1890s. Major street improvements included the construction of Holland Street (1867) and Powderhouse Boulevard (1899).



Above: 1874, Plate M, Hopkins Map, specifying the approximate current location of 325 Alewife Brook Parkway.

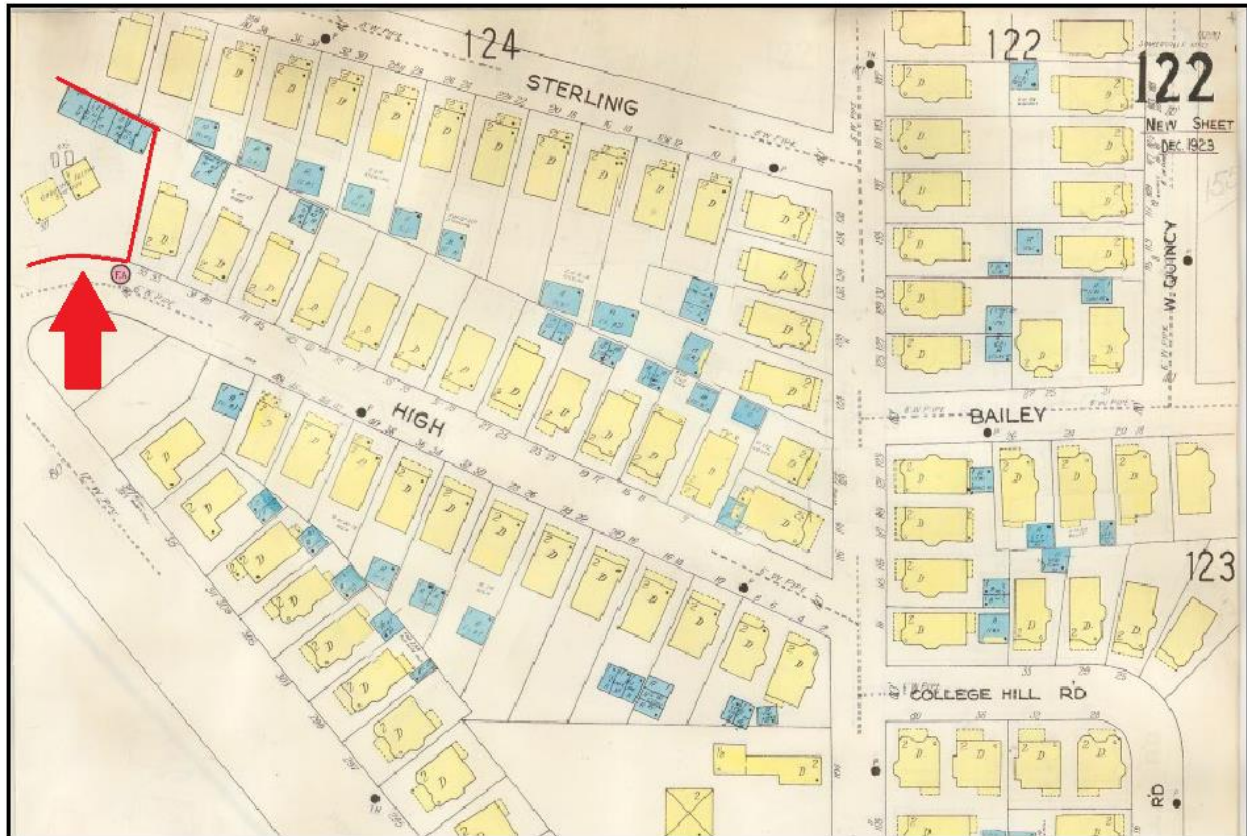
By the mid-1870s, the land between North Street and Alewife Brook was divided into the substantial parcels owned by the Cooks', Russell's and Rich's. The location that is now 325 Alewife Brook Parkway was located on the Cook's and Rich's parcels. The meandering path of Alewife Brook resulted in highly irregular western boundaries for these parcels. North Street was one of Somerville's seventeenth century north-south rangeways that extended westward from East Somerville to Alewife Brook. These country roads linked major traffic arteries with interior farms. By 1895, the Russell tract was still quite extensive, containing nearly 305,000 square feet. At that time, the Russell family still owned a share of this tract along with members of the Carr, Stearns and Hatch families.

The City of Somerville purchased a portion of the Philemon Russell Farm at the intersection of Broadway and North Street by the City of Somerville at the turn-of-the-twentieth century. As you can see on the 1895 Bromley Map the approximate location of what is now 325 Alewife was part of the land bought by Somerville. At some point, around the turn-of-the-twentieth century, Alewife Brook was engineered to follow a less meandering, more regular course.



Above: 1895, Plate 23, Bromley Map, specifying location of 325 Alewife Brook Parkway.

By 1900 the land in West Somerville had been fully platted and increasing numbers of plots had been built upon as the population from East Somerville came west to look for cheaper housing. The residential development of the part of West Somerville bordered by Alewife Brook Parkway, Sterling Street, North Street and Broadway occurred during the 1910s and 1920s. Alewife Brook Parkway provided a physical link with the last extensive residential development that occurred at the western edge of Somerville during the late 1920s. House construction in this western most section of the City was encouraged by improved bus transportation and more wide spread automobile ownership by the 1920s.



Above: 1925 Sanborn Map, Sheet 122, specifying the location of 325 Alewife Brook Parkway.

It is in the 1925 Sanborn map that a structure is first depicted at 325 Alewife. The original structures are two wood framed structures and one concrete block building used to house cars. The two wood buildings appear to both be a part of a gas station. One building is indicated on the map as having no walls – likely where the pumps were located. The other building is indicated as solid on the Sanborn Map and likely where the business operations were located. Next to the enclosed building were the gas tanks.

By the 1934 Sanborn Map the current structure has been constructed. The Sanborn Map states that the building is now of tile construction and is a simple rectangular structure with four gas tanks located closer to the parkway. The current structure reflects the trend of standardization of gas stations in the 1930s. In the 1920s gas stations were designed to be respectable works of architecture and reflected the eclecticism of the numerous architectural styles common of the decade. By the 1930s gas companies began to streamline the appearance of the gas station to be simple boxes with sharp lines utilizing glass and porcelain enamel tile surfaces. The architecture utilized flat roofs, straight lines, and squared corners. This move to simplified and streamlined architecture was in response to the increased use of automobiles and the concept of speed and the open road. This design is reflected in the design of the 325 Alewife Brook Parkway with its simple oblong shape, straight lines, and large glass panes.

The first listed individual that Staff was able to discover who was associated with the gas station was that of Thomas F Brown. Thomas Brown was listed in the 1929 Somerville City Directory as the President-Treasurer of 325 Alewife in 1929. This is followed by Eleanor and Frederick Lowell in 1933 who are listed in the Business Directories for Somerville under 'Automobile Repairing'.



Above: 1934 Sanborn Map, Sheet 216, specifying the location of 325 Alewife Brook Parkway.

After the Lowell's the Directories list Albert and Lillian as owning the property and operating it as a branch of Esso, a gas company owned by Exxon Mobil.

ESSO DISPLAY FIRST PRIZE FOR SOMERVILLE

For exhibiting the most attractive window display of Esso motor oil in New England at their filling station, 325 Alewife Brook Parkway, Somerville, Mrs Lillian McGrath and her son, Albert F. McGrath have received checks of \$50 for winning the New England award and \$10 as the district award.

The display, which was enhanced with a large model of the liner Queen Mary, attracted hundreds to the filling station of which the mother and son are the proprietors. Mrs McGrath sent pictures of the window display to the Esso Company, and the judges selected it as the most outstanding in New England. Mayor Leslie E. Knox and members of the Somerville City Government this afternoon called at the filling station to view the display.

Right: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, April 16 1937,

Further research resulted in the following information on the tenants at 325 Alewife Brook Parkway. A list of all owners/workers is provided on the next page.

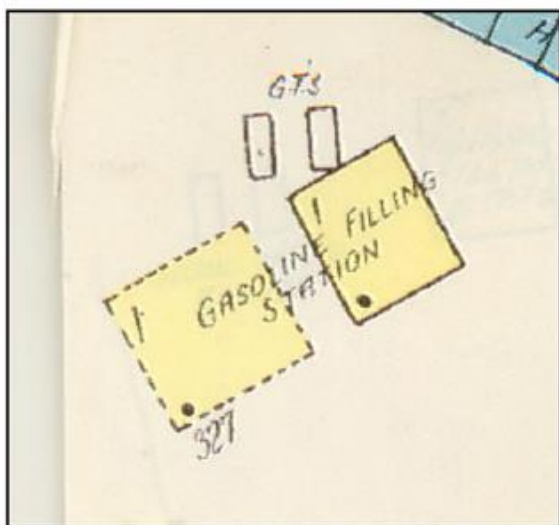
Name	Year(s) of employment	Occupation/Business	Relationship
Brown, Thomas F	1929	President-Treasurer @ 325 Alewife	
Lowell, Eleanor S	1933	Automobile Repairing	Wife of Frederick Lowell
Lowell, Frederick W	1933	Automobile Repairing	Husband of Eleanor Lowell
McGrath, Albert F	1937	Esso Filling Station	Son of Lillian McGrath
McGrath, Lillian	1937	Esso Filling Station	Mother of Albert F McGrath

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.

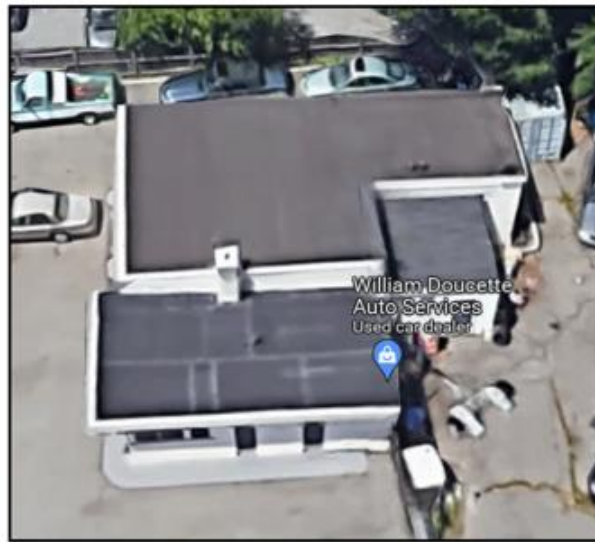
Comparing the historic map with satellite images of the current property we can determine the degree to which the structure has been altered.



Above: Fig 1



Above: Fig 2



Above: Fig 3

Fig 1: 1925 Sanborn Map, close-up of 325 Alewife Brook Parkway

- Two one-story wood framed rectangular structures
- One structure is indicated as having no walls, this may have been where gas was pumped.
- Two gas tanks to the left of the walled structure.

Fig 2: 1934 Sanborn Map, close-up of 325 Alewife Brook Parkway

- Now only one rectangular structure exists.
- Building construction is now classified as a 'tile building'.
- Four gasoline tanks are in front of the building.

Fig 3: Satellite image of 325 Alewife Brook Parkway

- Rear addition towards the left.
- Later lean-to on rear between the rear of original structure and left addition.

1. **325 Alewife Brook Parkway**

The period of relevance for the property starts c.1934

- Location: The structure is in the original location and was built on-site.
- Design: The primary structure is one story, masonry building with flat roof on the left and an inward pitched roof on the right; concrete and pre-fab wood exterior, concrete chimney, two roll-up garage doors; asymmetrical entrance with glass door towards the right entryway; glass front door; three fixed windows along roof line with two sets of windows below; on the right elevation the asymmetric windows along the roofline continues, with another set of windows and one one-over-one, double-hung sash window below; two aluminum or wood doors both with a fixed window above; one aluminum or wood door on the lean-to and one six-over-one double hung sash window on lean-to; on the rear elevation

there is one double-hung sash window on the lean-to; on the left elevation are three sets of horizontal rolling windows.

- c. **Materials:** Prefab wood; concrete block; concrete chimney stack; wood stairway; asphalt shingle roof; aluminum doors.
- d. **Alterations:** Rear addition; rear lean-to; concrete block exterior; prefab vertical wood exterior; wood stairs; aluminum and glass garage doors; replacement windows and doors.
- e. **Evaluation of Integrity of 325 Alewife Brook Parkway** 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 that obscure most of the original architectural details; 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 the STRUCTURE at 325 Alewife Brook Parkway meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 325 Alewife Brook Parkway 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 325 Alewife Brook Parkway meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 325 Alewife Brook Parkway 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 325 Alewife Brook Parkway is or is not “historically significant”.