



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

THOMAS F. GALLIGANI, JR.
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 234 Pearl Street

Case: HPC.DMO 2023.03

Applicant: Barros Properties LLC

Owner: Stuart Pitchel, Trustee of
234 Pearl Street 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: 234 Pearl Street is a two and ½ story building located within the Winter Hill neighborhood. Pearl Street consists of a mixture of two ½ and three-story residential structures and a mix of commercial buildings.

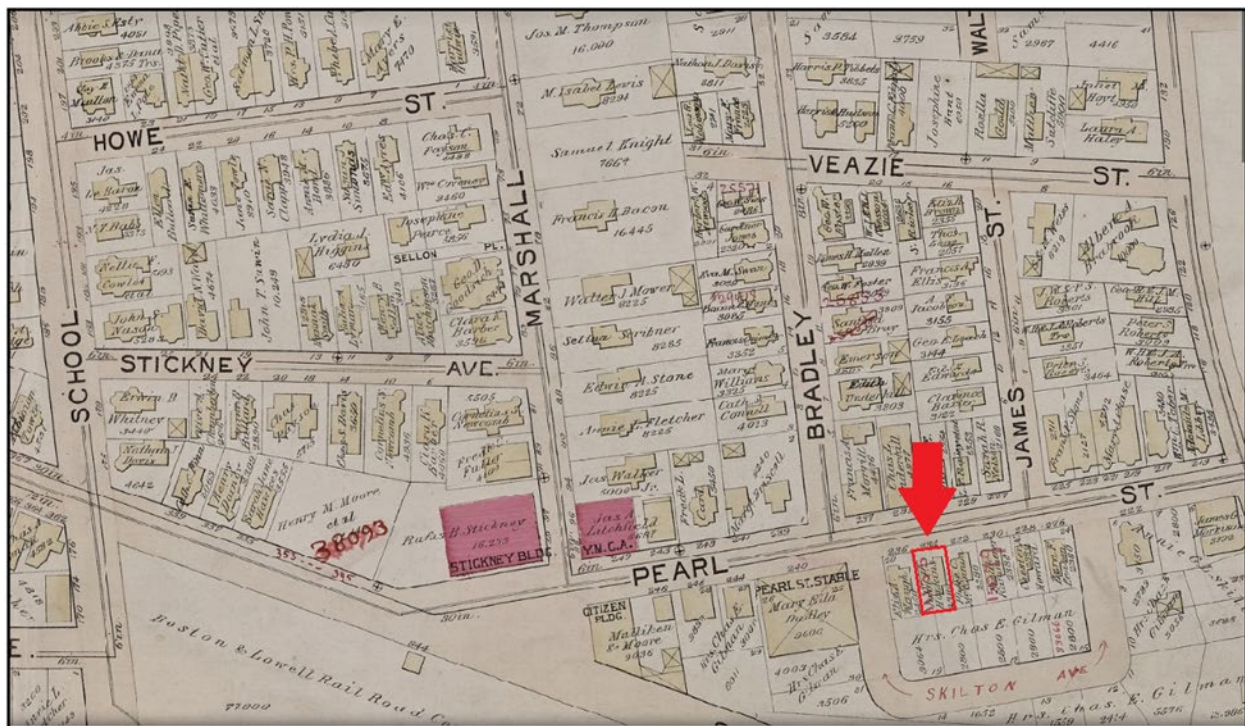
The Boston and Lowell railroad bisected East Somerville in 1835, with a Washington Street station constructed near Joy Street. The passenger station of the Boston and Main Railroad extension was opened at the eastern edge of East Somerville in 1842, near Sullivan Square, and the resulting compact residential building pattern was partially attributable to the opening of the station. At least two land speculators laid out streets near the station. The narrow house lots were intended for sale to the businessmen who commuted daily between Somerville and Boston or Charlestown. In 1845, Charles Pierce laid out 69 lots between Pearl, Perkins, Franklin, and Pinckney Streets. A plan of the Pierce land by surveyors Felton and Parker noted that the new residential area was only "1090 feet from the depot," trumpeting the easy connection to the station. This early subdivision activity was all concentrated between the Charlestown line and Cross Street; farther west, the farmland between Cross and Walnut was generally unbuilt until after the Civil War. Many new streets, however, were speculatively entered in plan books, but not built up until a decade or more later.



Above: 1874, Plate H, Hopkins Map, specifying the approximate location of 234 Pearl Street.

Charles E. Gilman, who served as town clerk and later city clerk between 1842 and 1886, was one of the major landholders in the area prior to the subdivision of large tracts for residential development. The 1874 Hopkins Map shows him as the owner of the land that later became 234 Pearl Street.

After 1846 many of the new residents of East Somerville, particularly those along Mt. Pleasant, Mt. Vernon and Pearl Streets, were Boston businessmen. However, new Somerville industries attracted laborers, and in the 1860s and 1870s the factories adjacent to Washington Street spawned numerous blocks of workers' houses. The greatest period of residential development occurred between 1875 and 1885, as apartment rows and two-family tenements were constructed throughout the area by speculators. Among the subdivisions intended for workers' houses was that platted by Charles Tufts in 1873. Ruby, Eglantine, Jasper and Pearl Streets were laid out, but Pearl and Jasper were the only streets built up. Houses on these carefully named streets were of the standard 2 ½ story, gable-roofed variety favored for cheap, quick construction.



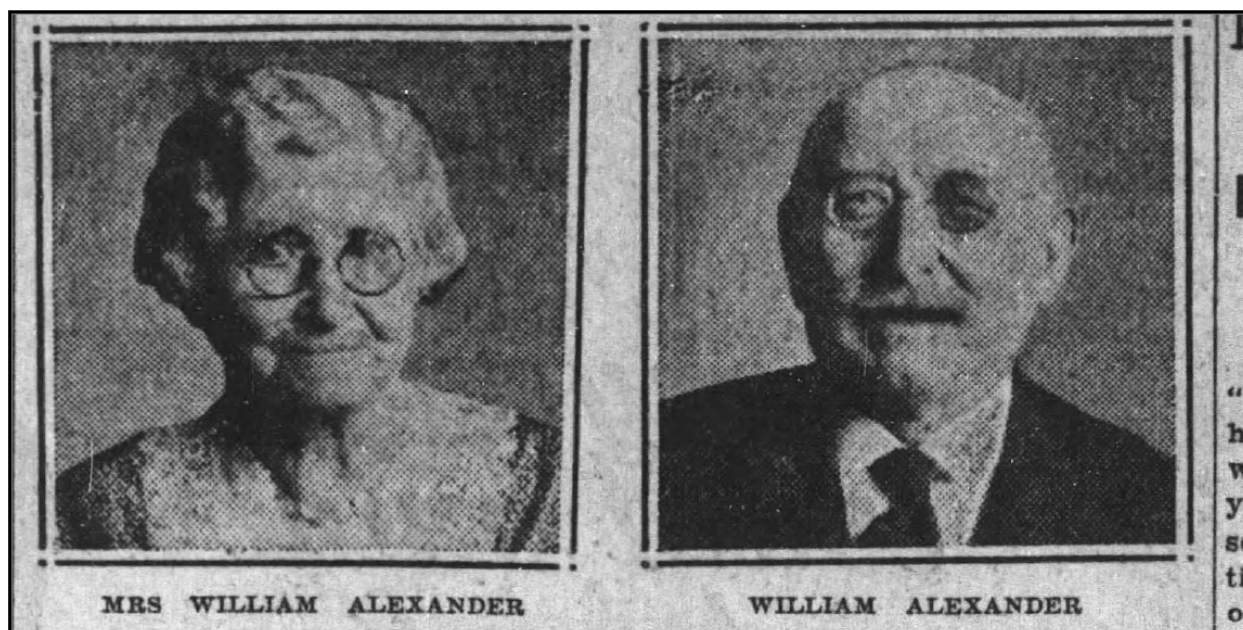
Above: 1895, Plate 2, Bromley Map, specifying location of 234 Pearl Street.

The 1895 Bromley Map is when we first see 234 Pearl Street as depicted on a map. The Bromley Map also lists John P Hopkins as the owner. The building was likely constructed between 1890 and 1891 under the ownership of G.B. Blanchard, as we have an advertisement in the Boston Globe in 1891 advertising new houses at 228, 230 and 234 Pearl for sale by G.B. Blanchard.



Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, May 17, 1891

John P Hopkins, a postal clerk, buys 234 Pearl St in 1892 according to the Somerville City Directories, and owns the property through 1911 when the Alexander Family buys the property. William Alexander and his wife Jessie buy the property and move in with their son, William Alexander Jr and his wife, Florence and their three children (later 5 children by 1920). William Alexander passed away in 1932, after which his wife, children, and grandchildren remain in the house until approximately 1933.



Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, June 28, 1929

The next residents of the property that Staff was able to find were Kenneth J and Lorrain MacKenzie who lived and owned the house in 1940. It is possible that during this time the Mackenzie's rented rooms or converted the property to two family building. Evidence for this is that the Schwartz Family is listed as owners in 1940 as well and the below advertisement for the property in 1939. The advertisement which lists the property for sale also notes that the buyer could convert the building to a two family.



Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, January 02, 1939



Above: 1934 Sanborn Map, Sheet 36, specifying the location of 234 Pearl Street.

Further research resulted in the following information on the tenants over the decades at 234 Pearl Street. The names that have been found show the property was inhabited by middle class individuals. A list of all residents is provided on the next page.

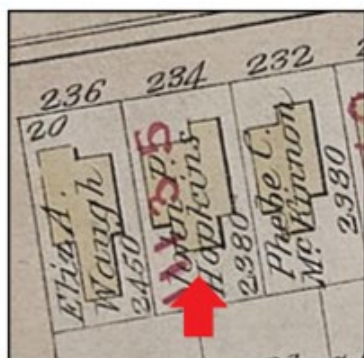
Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation	Relationship	Residency Type
Aleo, William	1919	Machinist	Head of household	H
Aleo, Florence	1919		Wife of William Aleo	
Aleo, William Jr	1919	Machinist	Son of William & Florence Aleo	
Alexander, Annie	1920 - 1933		Granddaughter of William & Jessie	
Alexander, Bruce L	1920 - 1933	Chauffeur	Grandson of William & Jessie	R
Alexander, Edward	1920 - 1933		Grandson of William & Jessie	
Alexander, Florence	1912 - 1933		Wife of William Alexander Jr	B
Alexander, George W	1920 - 1933	Chauffeur	Grandson of William & Jessie	R
Alexander, Jessie	1912 - 1933		Wife of William Alexander	
Alexander, Jessie	1920 - 1933		Granddaughter of William & Jessie	
Alexander, William	1912 - 1932	Machinist, Welder	Head of household, husband to Jessie	H
Alexander, William Jr	1912 - 1933	Machinist	Son of William & Jessie/Husband to Florence	B
Hopkins, John P	1892 - 1911	Postal Clerk		H
Linnehan, Catherine	1909			b
Linnehan, Dennis	1901 - 1902			b
MacKenzie, Kenneth J	1940			H
MacKenzie, Lorraine	1940			H
Schwartz, Ardeen J	1940	Machinist - Navy Yard	Head of household/Husband of Phernie	b
Schwartz, Edna B	1940	Student		R
Schwartz, Eleanora H	1940			R
Schwartz, Phernie I	1940		Wife of Ardeen J	b

II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

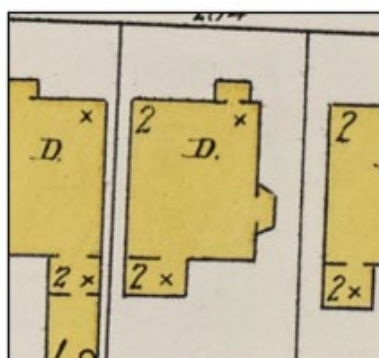
Please see the section immediately below which discusses location, design, materials, and any alterations as the same information would be written here, just in longer form.

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.

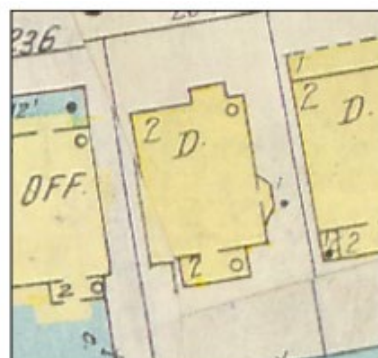
Comparing the historic map with satellite images of the current property we can determine the degree to which the structure has been altered.



Above: Fig 1



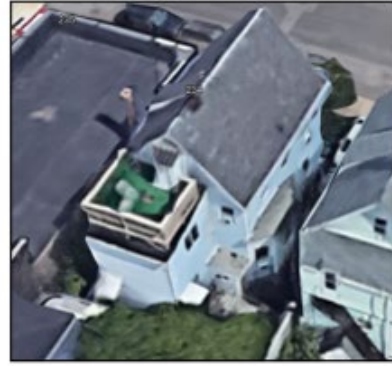
Above: Fig 2



Above: Fig 3



Above: Fig 4



Above: Fig 5

Fig 1: 1895 Bromley Map, close-up of 234 Pearl Street

- Front extension towards the left of front elevation.
- Centered extension on rear.

Fig 3: 1900 Sanborn Map, close-up of 234 Pearl Street

- A bay on the left elevation is now depicted.
- Rear extension now shown to the right on the rear. This may indicate an alteration but more likely represents inaccurate depiction of the location in either the Sanborn or Bromley maps.
- Two stories throughout.

Fig 3: 1934 Sanborn Map, close-up of 234 Pearl Street

- Rear extension shown as centered again.

Fig 4: Satellite image of 234 Pearl Street

- Shed dormer on left.
- Hooded portico entrance.

Fig 5: Satellite image of 234 Pearl Street

- Porch top balcony on rear extension.
- Rear lean to positioned between rear extension and main massing.

1. 234 Pearl Street

The period of relevance for the property starts c.1891

- a. Location: The structure is in the original location and was built on-site.
- b. Design: The primary structure is two and ½ stories, wood framed, with gable roof; wood clapboard, two story box bay on left side of the front; hooded portico entryway on right side of front elevation; concrete steps with wood rails leading to portico landing; two entry doors; fenestration on the front elevation includes one one-over-one double-hung sash windows; decorative shutters flanking windows on front elevation; brick chimney; shed dormer on left elevation; fenestration on the left elevation is one-over-one double-hung sash windows; and one square fixed or pivot window; entryway on rear portion of building that extends out; concrete or stone steps with mid to late 20th century iron railing leading up to a porch with entry on left elevation towards rear; canted bay on left elevation; lean-to behind the one story bay; door and horizontal rolling window on lean-to; fenestration on right elevation consists of one-over-one double-hung sash windows.

- c. Materials: Wood clapboard; wood or aluminum replacement front doors; wood porticos; concrete steps on front elevation; concrete or stone steps and porch in rear; metal railings; brick chimney stack; asphalt shingle roof; concrete foundation.
- d. Alterations: Rooftop porch; concrete front steps; concrete or stone porch and steps in rear; mid-to late 20th century iron railings; shed dormer; lean-to in rear; replacement windows and doors; decorative shutters; asphalt shingles.
- e. Evaluation of Integrity of 234 Pearl 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; however, they minimally obscure 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 234 Pearl Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 234 Pearl 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 the STRUCTURE at 234 Pearl Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 234 Pearl 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 STRUCTURE at 234 Pearl Street is or is not “historically significant”.