



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

THOMAS F. GALLIGANI, JR.  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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

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**Site:** 181 Pearl Street

**Case:** HP23-000029

**Applicant:** 181 Pearl Street LLC

**Owner:** Same as Applicant

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

**HPC Meeting Date:** November 21, 2023

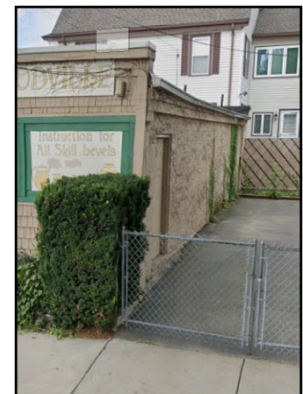


*Top: Front elevation*

*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.

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## **I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION**

***Historical Context:*** 181 Pearl Street is a one-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.

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.

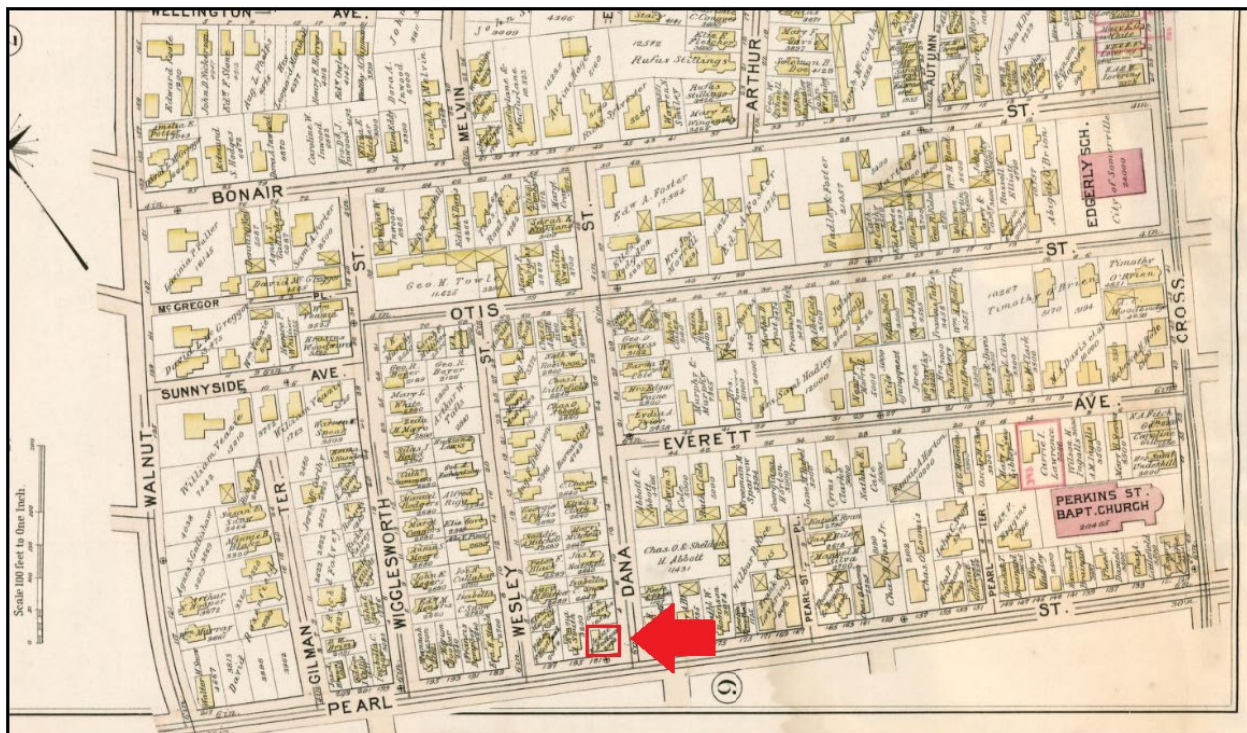
(Continued on next page.)





Above: 1874, Plate H, Hopkins Map, specifying the general location of 181 Pearl St.

In 1874, the lot that would become 181 Pearl Street was part of a larger lot belonging to Charles Tufts. We can see from the 1874 Hopkins Map, depicted above, that Dana Street and McGrath Highway have not yet been constructed.



Above: 1895 Bromley Map, Plate 11, specifying location of 181 Pearl St.



However, by 1895, Dana Street has been constructed. We know from the Business Directories a business was operating at the site in 1893. Additionally, the land has been subdivided and developed by this time with 181 Pearl sitting on the corner of Pearl Street and Dana Street. Dana Street runs perpendicular to Pearl Street, bisecting it between Wesley and Cross Streets. The 1895 Bromley Map shows an L shaped structure on the lot belonging to Jessie E Hudson, a Canadian immigrant.



*Above: 1900 Sanborn Map, Sheet 37, specifying the location of 181 Pearl St.*

By 1900, 181 Pearl Street has a wood frame, square structure which matches the footprint of the current structure. Jessie and her husband, Lawrence G Hudson, lived on Chetwynd Road at the time of owning this property. It appears that they rented this space out to businesses given that the City Business Directories list this address for various businesses between 1893 and 1933.



*Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe October 30, 1923*

Using the 1900 Sanborn Map we can also see that the interior has been subdivided into two separate spaces with the following addresses shown; 181 Pearl St, 183 Pearl St. The unit at what was then identified as 181 Pearl Street is further demarcated into two shop spaces.

Despite the change in footprint Staff believes that the structure shown in the 1895 Bromley Map and the structure depicted in the 1900 Sanborn Map are the same building, albeit with an addition. The owner listed in 1895 is the wife of one of the owners of a business run from the structure between 1893 through 1903, as well as City Directory listings showing businesses located in the structure from 1893 through 1933. Further potential evidence of the addition to the 1895 structure can also be seen in modern aerial photos. In aerial photographs lines on the roof appear to show the original 'L' shaped structure (see below). A further line on the roof potentially shows the demarcation of what was 183 Pearl Street (see below).

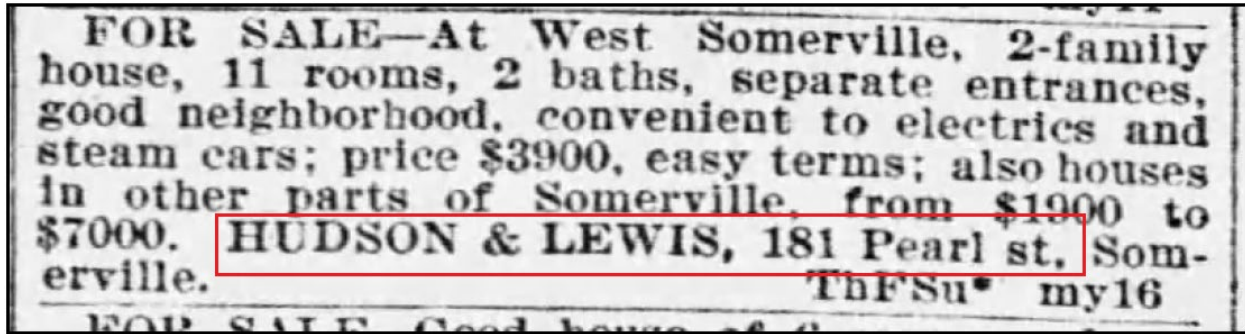


*Above: 2022 Satellite Images of 181 Pearl St*



*Above: Satellite Images of 181 Pearl St. Red line demarcating lines in roof potentially showing the addition to the 1895 structure. Blue line showing where the division with 183 Pearl Street occurred in the structure.*

The Somerville Business Directories list 181 Pearl St and 183 Pearl St, and later 183a Pearl St, under the following business categories; Laundries, Fish & Oyster, Shoe Repairs, Pharmacists, Real Estate Agents, Hardware stores, and Bakers. L.G. Hudson, husband of Jessie Hudson, the owner listed in 1895, ran a carpentry and builders' company called Hudson & Lewis with a partner named Stephen H Lewis between 1893 and 1894. In 1897, Hudson appears to have taken sole ownership of the company and ran the company between 1897 and 1903. In 1901 he opened a second business here, working as a real estate agent.



*Above: Excerpt from The Boston Globe, May 17, 1895*

Further research resulted in the following information on the tenants over the decades at 181 Pearl Street. A list of all businesses is provided below.

| Name                            | Year(s) of Occupancy | Business Type                         |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Chase, Marshall I               | 1914                 | Fish and Oysters                      |
| Conway, R.W. MRs.               | 1897                 | Milliners                             |
| Covey, .L.                      | 1907                 | Bakers                                |
| Crocker, P.C.                   | 1912-1913            | Fish and Oysters                      |
| Dangora, Patricio               | 1924-1925            | Shoe Repairers                        |
| Hayden, Leah Miss               | 1895                 | Nurse                                 |
| Holt, Edward S                  | 1915                 | Boot and Shoe Makers                  |
| Hudson, L.G.                    | 1897-1903            | Builders, Real Estate Agent, Hardware |
| Hudson, L.G. & Lewis, Stephen H | 1893-1894            | Carpenters and Builders               |
| Hum, George                     | 1904                 | Laundry                               |
| Lee, Jim                        | 1933                 | Laundries                             |
| Lee, Sing                       | 1905-1906            | Lee Laundry                           |
| Smith, Daniel W                 | 1911                 | Fish and Oysters                      |
| Smith, Willis E                 | 1905-1910            | Fish and Oysters                      |
| Tarr, George E                  | 1924                 | Druggists                             |

## **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.

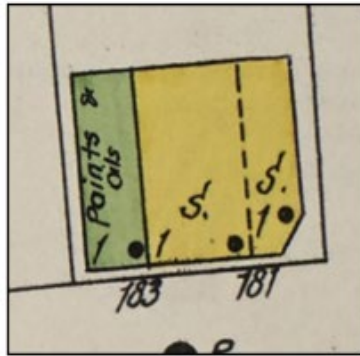
*The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation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

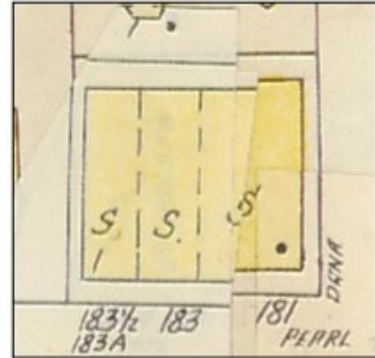




Above: Fig 1



Above: Fig 2



Above: Fig 3



Above: Fig 4



Above: Fig 5

Fig 1: 1895 Bromley Map, close-up of 181 Pearl St

- L Shaped structure on the lot.

Fig 2: 1900 Sanborn Map, close-up of 181 Pearl St

- What is likely an addition changes the footprint of the structure to a square, with a flat corner at the corner of Dana and Pearl.
- Wood framed structure.
- Demarcated into two separate portions with the unit at what was then 181 segmented into two portions.
- The green of 183 Pearl was used in Sanborn Maps to indicate specialty hazardous risks for manufacturing and warehouses. The Sanborn Map for this year lists the business as Oil and paints. Oil paints were toxic to breathe up until a few decades ago. The green color and the lack of the 'S' indicates this was used as a warehouse or for manufacturing and was not a store. The 'S' in Sanborn Maps indicates a store.

Fig 3: 1938 - 1959 Sanborn Map, close-up of 181 Pearl St

- All three portions of the building have an 'S' indicating each part was now a store.

Fig 4&amp;5: Satellite images of 181 Pearl St

- Satellite images show that other than the roof overhanging the inset corner entrance in the image, the massing remains intact.

## 1. **181 Pearl Street**

The period of relevance for the property starts c.1893

- a. Location: The structure is in the original location and built on-site.
- b. Design: The primary structure is one story, wood framed, flat roofed commercial structure; with entryway from the corner on Dana and Pearl Streets; the front (side facing Pearl St) has a horizontal slat wood garage door in the center flanked on either side by a set of windows, each with two, fixed glass panes separated by a thick mullion. A wood sign runs under the eave advertising 'MUDVILLE'; on the right side (facing Dana Street) are two sets of windows. One set has two fixed windows separated by a thick mullion. The second set has the same dimensions of the other windows facing Dana and Pearl; however, they have been boarded up with wood painted to state the services of the former business; the rear elevation (opposite of Pearl St) has a wood or aluminum door that leads into the building; the left elevation (opposite Dana St) has no windows or doors.
- c. Materials: Wood shingle; vinyl or aluminum and glass front replacement door; wood or aluminum rear door; replacement windows; and metal exhaust or fan.
- d. Alterations: Replacement windows and doors; boarding of windows on right elevation; early addition to corner creating a square structure; installation of garage door on Pearl St.
- e. Evaluation of Integrity of 181 Pearl St: 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; obscuring 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 181 Pearl St meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 181 Pearl St 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 181 Pearl St meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 181 Pearl St 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 181 Pearl St is or is not “historically significant”.