



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

Thomas Galligani
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 143 Walnut Street

Case: HP25-000114

Applicant: Peter Quinn Architects

Owner: Walnut Street 141 Development, LLC

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



Front Elevation of the accessory structure at 141-143 Walnut St

HPC Meeting Date: March 3, 2026

The purpose of this 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. IMAGES OF PROPERTY / AREA

Context Map:



Principle Structure
141 Walnut:
John Ayre House

Subject Property:
Accessory Structure
at 143 Walnut St

Foss Park

Photos of the subject property:



Walnut-143 - Front Elevation



Walnut-143 - Right Side Elevation

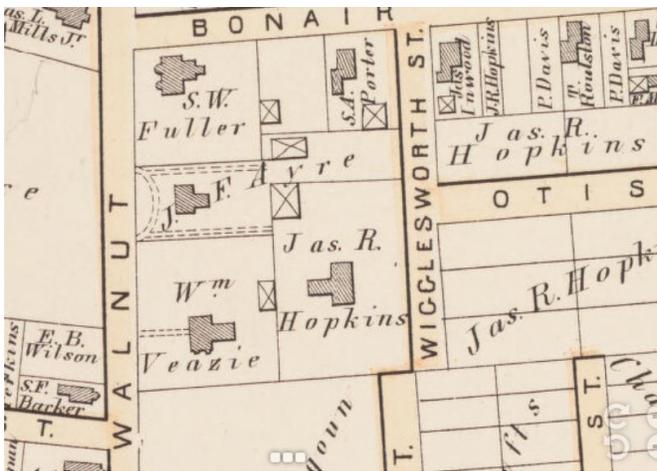


Walnut-143 - Left Side Elevation



Walnut-143 - Rear Elevation

II. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



Above: 1874 Hopkins Map

Historical Context:

143 Walnut Street is an accessory structure at the rear of a Local Historic District property also containing the John Ayer House at 141 Walnut Street. The principal structure was built around 1870 and is a Second Empire style home. According to historic maps and Somerville City Directories, the structure at 143 Walnut St. was built years after the home sometime between 1900 and 1907. On the 1874 Hopkins Map, John Ayre is listed as the owner of the property and there are several accessory structures near the location of what is known today as 143 Walnut Street.

143 Walnut Street is located in the Winter Hill neighborhood of Somerville in a portion of the neighborhood that had large residential homes owned by businessmen. Homes like the one at 141 Walnut within Winter Hill contrast with workers' housing built throughout other parts of the neighborhood. Once the need for housing increased and dense residential development began to spread throughout Somerville, smaller workers' housing like the structure at 143 Walnut Street began infilling. The structure at 143 Walnut St. was likely some sort of barn or carriage house originally. It was eventually converted into rental housing and was first listed as a residence in 1907.

In the 1876 Somerville City Directory, John Ayre is listed as owning the property at 143 Walnut and working in the area as a lumber dealer. He lived at 141 Walnut St. and was likely the original builder of 143 Walnut St.

**Ayer John F. agent, lumber, Cambridge, n. R. R.
Charlestown, house at Somerville**

Above: 1876 City Directory

George and Bertha Gunter purchased the property from Ayer and sold the property in 1907 to Somerville widow, Emily McGregor.

3294
463

Know all men by these presents

that we *George W. Gunter and Bertha J. Gunter his wife in her right,*
both of Somerville in the County of Middlesex and Commonwealth
of Massachusetts

in consideration of *one dollar and other valuable considerations*
paid by *Emily W. McGregor of said Somerville widow*

the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, do hereby give, grant, bargain, sell and convey unto the said *Emily W. Mc-*
Gregor her heirs and assigns a certain parcel of land situated in the
said Somerville and being a portion of lot numbered four (4) as shown
upon Plan A of Estate in Somerville Mass. belonging to Emily W.
McGregor Charles D. Elliot Engineer dated July 5, 1895 and recorded
with Middlesex Co. Dist. Deeds Book of Plans 117 Plan 31 said land
being bounded as follows: Beginning at a point on the northerly line
of Mc Gregor Avenue where the southeasterly boundary of the land con-
veyed to said Bertha J. Gunter by this grantee by deed recorded with
said deeds book 3272 page 525 intersects said line thence running
northeasterly along land of this grantee to a corner about ten and
5/10 (10 5/10) feet thence turning at a right angle and running north-
westerly along land of owners unknown twelve (12) feet thence turn-
ing at a right angle and running southwesterly to the northerly line
of Mc Gregor Avenue thence turning and running southeasterly along
the said northerly line of Mc Gregor Avenue to the point of beginning

Gunter & a
to
Mc Gregor.
A

Above: 1907 Deed

David McGregor, Emily’s husband, was a leather worker. According to the 1880 Federal Census, David and Emily McGregor were listed as residents of the property beginning in 1880. McGregor Avenue, which the front façade of 143 Walnut St. faces, was named after this family. After David’s death, Emily McGregor became the owner of the property from 141-143 Walnut Street.

In the 1908 and 1909 Somerville City Directory, John M. MacDonald is listed as living at 143 Walnut. According to Census data, MacDonald was single at the time and worked in sales.

Henry V. Chamberlin is listed as living at 143 Walnut Street in the 1910, 1912, and 1913 Somerville City Directory. His occupation is listed as Superintendent, and he is listed as a renter at this time in the Federal Census.

Bartlett
 “ Daisy M bds 47 Madison
 “ Edna B Mrs nurse b 143 Walnut

Above: 1915 Somerville City Directory

Edna B. Bartlett is listed as a resident of 143 Walnut Street in 1915, according to the Somerville City Directory and her occupation is listed as a nurse.

William L. Phelps is listed as a resident of 143 Walnut Street in 1915 as well. He is listed in the 1920 Census as a proprietor in a periodical store.

In 1917, Charles E. Philbrick is listed as a resident of 143 Walnut Street. His occupation in the 1910 Federal Census is listed as a locomotive engineer.

According to a U.S. World War I Registration card, Chester Otto Sanborn and his wife Ruth Eloise Sanborn were residents at 143 Walnut Street from 1917-1918.

Charles K. Stearns lived at 143 Walnut beginning in 1919. In the 1920 Federal Census, Charles Stearns is listed as living at 143 Walnut with his wife Adeline and son Howard. Charles and Howard Stearns are listed as salesmen at a meat house.

143 Walnut Street was rented throughout the early 20th century until it was eventually unoccupied, with windows and doors boarded up, as the structure exist today.

III. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Please see the section 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.

143 Walnut Street

The period of relevance for the subject property starts between 1900 and 1907. The structure is a 1 ½-story, front-gabled roof structure, with shingled siding, a steep roof pitch ,and was likely a carriage house or early garage.

a. Location: The house is in its original location and was likely built on-site.

Design: 143 Walnut Street is a 1 ½-story, gable-fronted structure. Main massing presents a shallow eave with minor irregularities and projections.

Front Elevation

First Story:

- Large multi- panel garage door system with recessed vertical detailing.

Second Story:

- Two evenly spaced boarded up windows
- Moderate eave overhang, boxed without brackets
- Front gabled roof with a steep pitch

Right Elevation

First Story:

- asymmetrical boarded up window and door opening

Second Story:

- moderate eave overhang
- asymmetrical shed dormer

Left Elevation

First Story:

- moderate eave overhang
- no windows or doors

Second Story:

- steep pitched gable roof

Rear Elevation

First Story:

- three evenly spaced rectangular openings boarded up; were likely windows

Second Story:

- moderate eave overhang, boxed without brackets
- steep pitched gable roof
- symmetrical fenestration beneath gable
- double hung wood sash windows

b. Materials:

- *Main massing:* Wood Shingle siding over wood frame on upper ½ story; wood covering window and door area; asphalt shingles on roof; concrete masonry on main massing and foundation.

- c. *Alterations:* The structure at 143 Walnut St. was likely a carriage house, barn, or early garage originally. The carriage doors were likely adapted for automobiles at some point. Differences in materiality indicate a portion of the original structure was converted into residential at some point prior to 1907. Windows and doors have the boarded up and the roof appears to have been replaced.

Evaluation of Integrity of 143 Walnut 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 forms and massing, but use and materiality have changed significantly.

IV. 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.

Residential Structure

- . The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the ACCESSORY STRUCTURE at 143 Walnut Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
- . The HPC must specifically state why the ACCESORY STRUCTURE at 143 Walnut 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 ACCESSORY STRUCTURE at 143 Walnut Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the ACCESSORY STRUCTURE at 143 Walnut Street 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.

V. VOTE

1. When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the ACCESSORY STRUCTURE at 143 Walnut Street is or is not “historically significant”.