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

TOM GALLIGANI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 165 Sycamore Street

Case: HP26-000084

Applicant: Richard G. DiGirolamo

Owner: 374 Broadway/165 Sycamore Realty LLC

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

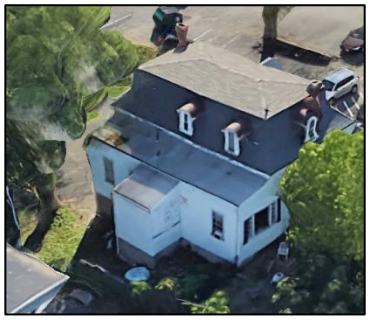


Google Imaging

HPC Meeting Date: November 17, 2026



Google Imaging



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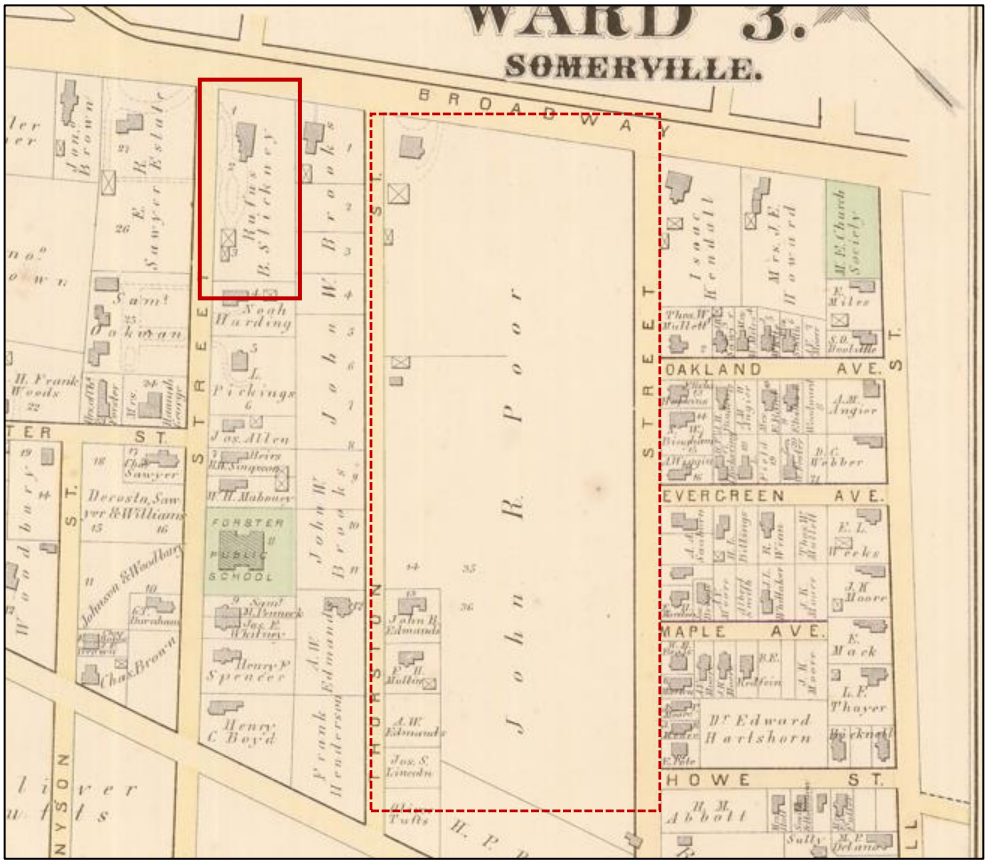
Top: *Front elevation*
Bottom, left*: Left elevation*
Bottom, middle: *Rear elevation*
Bottom, right: *Right elevation*

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: 165 Sycamore is a Colonial Revival style cottage. Sycamore Street is made up of a diverse mix of building and architectural styles, mainly residential.

The Winter Hill section of Somerville is located in the north central section of the city and takes its name from one of the seven glacial drumlins that give Somerville its rugged topography. The main thoroughfares through Winter Hill are Broadway, a 17th century road which connected Charlestown to points west, and Medford Street, an early 19th century north/south road located along the 1835 Boston and Lowell (now Boston & Maine) railroad right of way. Winter Hill has three important commercial areas: the mid-19th century Gilman Square at the intersection of Medford, Pearl, and Marshall Streets; the late 19th century/early 20th century Magoun Square at the intersection of Medford Street and Broadway. Winter Hill also has two principal industrial areas located alone the B&M railroad right-of-way in the valley between Central Hill and Winter Hill. Winter Hill's development paralleled most of the rest of Somerville's growth: 17th and early 18th century farmstead's giving way to dense residential development in the mid- to late- 19th century. With the advent of the railroad in the 1840s and 1850s, factories and commercial areas developed first along the railroad and later along streetcar lines located on main thoroughfares such as Broadway.



1874 Hopkins Map

The structure at what is today known as 165 Sycamore appears on the 1874 Hopkins Map as being owned by a Rufus B. Stickney. This structure was once on the same lot as 374 Broadway, which has also submitted an application to go through the demolition review process. Throughout the historic maps the structures appear on the same lot.

Based on obituary records, Rufus Stickney was born in Medford and lived in Somerville for nearly 40 years. At 13, Rufus Stickney joined his father in working in spice manufacturing, and eventually founded Stickney

and Poor, with J.R. Poor. Their factory was in Charlestown. Stickney Avenue in Somerville is named after Rufus Stickney. Rufus Stickney died at his residence, which was then known as 169 Sycamore Street, and is now 374 Broadway.

Dartmouth, School, and Thurston Streets between Medford Street and Broadway were once considered a find residential district. Samuel Chamberlain entered a plat for the area as early as 1853. No houses were built, but John R. Poor and Rufus Stickney, partners in the mustard and spice firm of Stickney and Poor, established their own estates on portions of the plat. In 1883, Stickney and Poor entered a new plat of the same streets. The lots were large and intended for the construction of ample businessmen's homes, and by 1890, a fine collection of Queen Anne, Shingle Style, and Colonial Revival houses were constructed. This land area owned by Stickney and Poor (highlighted in the dotted square on the 1874 Hopkins Map above) was once known as the Stickney Subdivision, showing the influence of these businessmen in this time period. *(From Beyond the Neck)*

OBITUARY.

RUFUS B. STICKNEY.

Rufus B. Stickney, of the well-known firm of Stickney & Poor, spice manufacturers, died at his residence, No. 169 Sycamore street, Somerville, yesterday afternoon about 2 o'clock, of consumption. He had not been in good health for some time, although he was not confined to the house until recently.

Mr. Stickney was born in Medford in October, 1824, and when a boy his father moved to Charlestown. He received his education in the public schools, and at 13 entered his father's spice manufactory. He was very industrious and applied himself closely to his business. In 1846 he started in business for himself in South Boston. Two years later he formed a partnership with J. R. Poor of Danvers and erected the present factory in Cambridge street, Charlestown. Mr. Poor retired in 1887, although the firm name was not changed. The firm carried on a large business, and their spices are well-known all over the country. Mr. Stickney had lived in Somerville for nearly forty years, where he owned considerable property. He was largely identified with the work of the First Unitarian Church, of which he was a member. He was a widower, his second wife dying about eight years ago. He also buried a son and a daughter. An unmarried daughter and a brother, who is a clergyman in Connecticut, survive him. The funeral will take place at his late residence on Thursday afternoon at 2 o'clock.

Obituary, Boston Post

On the 1895 Bromley Map, 374 Broadway and its companion building, known today as 165 Sycamore Street are shown on the same lot. They are listed as being owned by Henry T. Spencer. It is likely that the property transferred ownership after Rufus B. Stickney died of tuberculosis in 1891. It is unclear what the purpose of the separate structure at 165 Sycamore was used for. Historic City Directories show Somerville Residents as living at Stickney and Poor's, but those references could mean at their factory in Charlestown. There are multiple tenants listed at 169 Sycamore after Rufus Stickney's death in 1891. The 1903 City Directory and census records show that George Pendergast, President of the Mutual Protection and Fire Insurance Company also resided at 374 Broadway before he died on June 5, 1915.

In recent years the property has been used for various commercial uses, including a funeral home and a youth religious organization. It is unclear based on the historical evidence, when the property stopped being used as a residential structure.



1895 Bromley Map

ADVERTISEMENTS. 31

STICKNEY & POOR,

Importers and Manufacturers of

Mustards, Spices, Extracts, &c.

205 & 207 STATE STREET,

BOSTON.

Stickel William, bds. 737 Somerville ave.

STICKNEY RUFUS B., spice mnfr. (207 State, B., and 50 Camb., Chas'n), h. Sycamore, c. Broadway (see page 31)

Stickney R. H. Mrs., h. Sycamore, c. Broadway

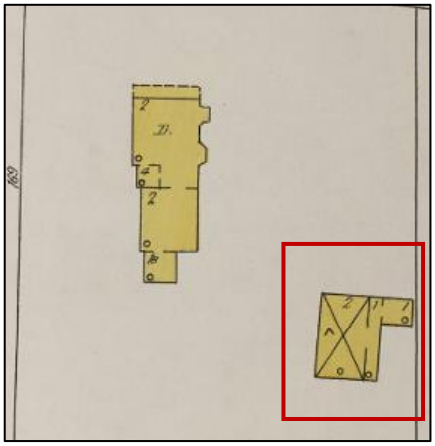
Stiles Mary E. Miss, teacher, Forster grammar school, b.

1889 City Directory

PENDERGAST—At Elliot Hospital, Boston, June 3, suddenly, George Henry, husband of Ella Worth Pendergast. Funeral from his late residence, 374 Broadway, Somerville, Saturday, June 5, at 2 p m. Relatives and friends are invited to attend.

Boston Evening Globe

Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation	Relationship	Residency Type
Rufus B. Stickney	1883-1891 (approx.)	Spice Manufacturer	Head	Owner
Susie Stickney	1892	Widow of Rufus B Stickney		Boarder
Margaret A. Chapman	1890-1891			
Luther G. Dearborn	1895-1899	Coffee Roaster	Head	Boarder
Luther G. Dearborn Jr	1895-1899	Tufts Student		Boarder
Jo Winslow King	1900-1901 (approx.)	Teacher		Boarder
George Pendergast	1903-1915	Insurance President	Head	Owner



1900 Sanborn Map



Google Aerial Image

II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

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.

1. 165 Sycamore

The period of relevance for the house starts c.1853-1874

a. *Location:* This structure is in its original location. The building was constructed on-site sometime between 1853 and 1874. The historic maps have some discrepancies in building orientation.

b. *Design:* The house is a colonial-revival style cottage.

- Front Elevation (facing Sycamore)

- First Floor
  - One six over one window
  - One six over six window
  - Door with modern storm door
  - Bay window with divided panes
  - Front covered patio
- Second Floor
  - Dormer with casement window

- Left Elevation
  - First Story
    - One window with shutters
    - Bay window (on addition)
  - Second Story
    - Curved dormer
- Rear Elevation
  - First Story
    - Three double hung windows
    - Rear addition
  - Second Story
    - Two curved roof dormers with windows
- Right Elevation
  - First Story
    - Three double hung windows
  - Second Story
    - Dormer with four double hung windows
- Basement
  - One window on basement level

c. *Materials:*

- Foundation: Concrete
- Windows: Likely aluminum
- Entry door: Modern with storm door
- Siding: Aluminum siding, brick siding
- Trim: Wood & likely aluminum
- Roof: Mansard roof with brick chimney. Asphalt shingles

d. *Alterations:* Modern replacement of doors and windows on all elevations.

e. *Evaluation of Integrity of* **165 Sycamore**: Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building retains some of the integrity of its original form. Alterations and additions have occurred to this structure which obscure some original details; however, the original massing and key architectural details such as the mansard roof remain 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.

Residential Structure

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the STRUCTURE at 165 Sycamore meets any of the criteria stated above.

2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 165 Sycamore 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 of 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.

Residential Structure

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the STRUCTURE at 165 Sycamore meets any of the criteria stated above.

2. The HPC must specifically state why the STRUCTURE at 165 Sycamore 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 165 Sycamore is or is not "historically significant".