



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE**  
**MAYOR**

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION*

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**DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT**

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Site:	249 Highland Avenue
Case:	HPC 2017.072
Applicant Name:	Cheung Kwan Yu
Date of Application:	August 16, 2017
Recommendation:	Significant
Hearing Date:	September 26, 2017

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**I. Historical Association**

**Historical Context:** Highland Avenue ran through to Central Street by 1852 and was lengthened incrementally. As of 1874, the road was penciled in from Cherry Street to Grove Street and finally put through the Tufts Brickyards to Davis Square by 1874. The 1874 Hopkins map shows the plat at 249 Highland Avenue attributed to the ownership of the heirs of R.F. Stearns. It was not built upon until the early 1890s.

The house is primarily associated with Sam Walter Foss, prominent writer, poet and Somerville librarian. His wife and family lived at 249 Highland Avenue from 1893-1939. Foss himself died in 1911 at the age of 53. His poetry was much loved and has been quoted by such eminent people as Eleanor Roosevelt. His words can be found on walls at Epcot Center in Orlando Florida, the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, and many other locations.



His son, Saxton Foss, a former reporter, died from wounds received in the World War I battle of Belleau Wood and died from his injuries in 1918. The park along Broadway in Somerville was renamed from Broadway Park to the current Foss Park in his honor.

Staff research also shows that the social editor of the Somerville Journal, May F. Pillsbury, resided with the Foss family on Highland Avenue from at least 1920 through 1930. May Pillsbury was also a charter member of the Heptorean Club, a local organization which, along with other accomplishments, was instrumental in the development of the Prospect Hill Park.

See the chart at the end of this staff report for a complete listing of residents and owners of 249 Highland Avenue as found in deeds, directories, building permits, and maps.

**Architectural Description:** There have been few changes to the building since it was constructed as evidenced in the Bromley and Sanborn maps. See below.

The house is a Queen Anne style 2 1/2 –story home with a square turret set at 45° to the main body of the building. Its footprint shows that it was similar to several houses constructed at that time on Highland Avenue and Hudson Street. Unfortunately most of them have their original detailing hidden behind various modern sidings of asbestos, aluminum or vinyl. Alternate houses along Highland Avenue have been altered in favor of small commercial storefronts. The Foss house is unusual in this group due to its inset front porch.

*Summary:* The Foss family and friends lived at 249 Highland Avenue for nearly 50 years. They were important to the life of the city and were involved in many aspects of its cultural development. The house is one of a group of similar houses on Hudson Street and Highland Avenue. Unfortunately many of the Highland Avenue homes have lost their ground floors to commercial storefronts.

### **Findings on Historical Association**

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) **importantly associated with people, events or history** or (b) historically or architecturally significant (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (b) are at the end of the next section.*

**(a)** In accordance with the historic information obtained from *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlasses, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, such as *Somerville Past and Present*, Staff find 249 Highland Avenue to be 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.

The subject building is found importantly associated with the Sam Walter Foss and family and friends for specific contributions to the cultural history of the City as well as associations with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to the Queen Anne Style architecture prevalent at that time.

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## **II. Historical and 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 (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B).*

The period of significance for 249 Highland Avenue begins with its construction *ca.* 1890 as a typical Queen Anne style residence through to the present day. The building is also particularly significant as the home of the Foss family from 1890-1939.

### ***Integrity***

*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.*

- a. **Location:** The house is located on a major local arterial in a group of similar buildings, many of which have *ca.* 1910-1920 storefronts added to them.
- b. **Design:** The house is a Queen Anne style house with a diagonal square tower.
- c. **Materials:** The building is wood-framed with asbestos siding and asphalt roof shingles.
- d. **Alterations:** The building has few alterations. These are primarily to the skin of the building. Asbestos shingles overlay the original wood shingles. The roof has asphalt shingles. The front door and windows, the porch posts and railings are all replacements.

*Evaluation of Integrity:* The building retains its integrity of form, massing, and location. It is likely that the original details will be found beneath the applied asbestos shingles. The house is within a group of similarly massed and scaled buildings.

### **Findings for Historical and Architectural Significance**

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) **historically or architecturally significant** (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (a) can be found at the end of the previous section.*

**(b)** In accordance with the *Finding on Historical and Architectural Significance*, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, which assess the ability of the property to convey significance, Staff find 249 Highland Avenue historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant due to its building style – Queen Anne, emblematic of the period in which it was constructed and as one of several similarly designed buildings within the neighborhood.

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## **III. Recommendation**

*Recommendations are based upon an analysis by Historic Preservation Staff of the permit application and the required findings for the Demolition Review Ordinance, which requires archival and historical research, and an assessment of historical and architectural significance, conducted prior to the public meeting for a Determination of Significance. This report may be*

*revised or updated with a new recommendation and/or findings based upon additional information provided to Staff or through further research.*

*For a Determination of Significance, the structure must be either (A) listed on the National Register or (B) at least 50 years old.*

(A) The structure is NOT listed on or within an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor is the structure the subject of a pending application for listing on the National Register.

**OR**

(B) The structure, circa 1890, is at least 50 years old.

**AND**

*For a Determination of Significance under (B), the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) historically or architecturally significant.*

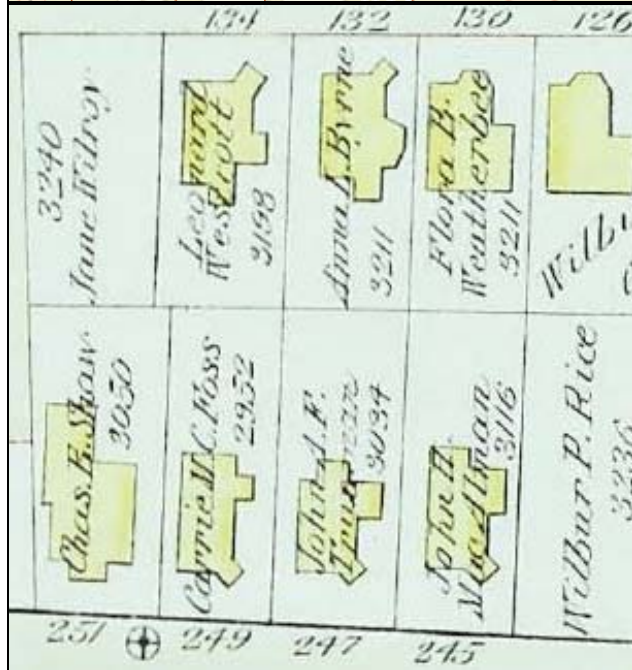
(a) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlas, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 249 Highland Avenue 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.**

The subject building is found importantly associated with the Sam Walter Foss and family and friends for specific contributions to the cultural history of the City as well as associations with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to the Queen Anne Style architecture prevalent at that time.

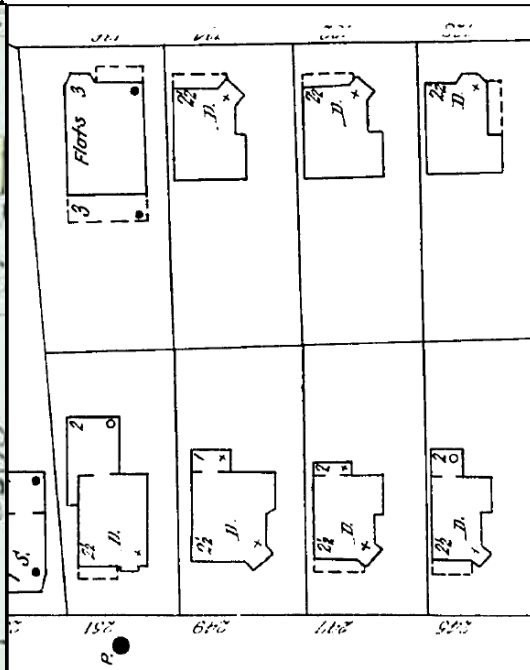
**OR**

(b) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical and Architectural Significance*, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, the ability to convey significance, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission find 249 Highland Avenue historically and architecturally significant.**

The subject building is found historically and architecturally significant due to its building style – Queen Anne, emblematic of the period in which it was constructed and as one of several similarly designed buildings within the neighborhood.



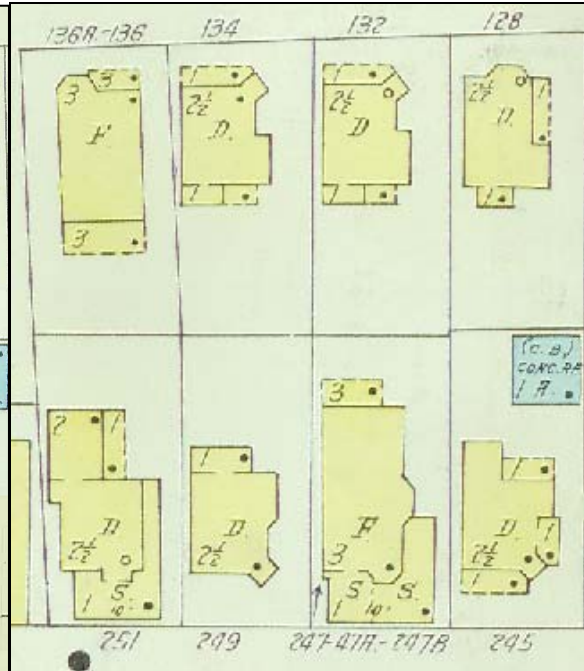
1895 Bromley Plate 16



1900 Sanborn Plate 31



1925 Sanborn Plate 31



1958 Sanborn Plate 248



Sam Walter Foss



Saxton Conant Foss

Family/ House Number	LOCATION	O/R	NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	PLACE OF BIRTH	Immigration Year	SOURCE	NOTES
	Lot 18 on corrected plan entitled land of the heirs of Mrs. Sarah White Stearns, surveyed by Alonzo Lewis, 1847 which corrected plan made by Charles A Pearson, 1885 and recorded in Plan Book 45, Plan 44.		<i>heirs of Mrs. Sarah White Stearns</i>					1885 Plan book 45, Plan 44	
		O	John E. Durgin					1890 Deed 1949/361	Joseph F. Wilson
		O	Ernest S Farr					1890 Deed 1965/286	John E. Durgin
		O	Carrie M. Conant Foss					1890 Deed 1983/514	Ernest S Farr
	249 Highland Avenue		Charles E Shaw		Painter			1892 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mrs. James Shannon					1892 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Henry W Conant		Clergy, ME Church			1893 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Henry W Conant		Clergy, ME Church			1894 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Editor			1894 City Directory	
	<b>249 Highland Avenue</b>	O	<b>Carrie M C Foss</b>					<b>1895 Bromley Atlas</b>	
	249 Highland Avenue		Henry W Conant		Clergy, ME Church			1895 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Journalist			1895 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Henry W Conant		Clergy, ME Church			1896 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Henry W Conant		Clergy, ME Church			1897 City Directory	





<i>Family/ House Number</i>	<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>O/R</i>	<i>NAME</i>	<i>AGE</i>	<i>OCCUPATION</i>	<i>PLACE OF BIRTH</i>	<i>Immigration Year</i>	<i>SOURCE</i>	<i>NOTES</i>
	249 Highland Avenue		Henry W Conant		Clergy, ME Church			1897 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Journalist			1897 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Henry W Conant		Clergy, ME Church			1898 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Journalist			1898 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Henry W Conant		Clergy, ME Church			1899 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Henry W Conant		Clergy, ME Church			1899 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Librarian			1899 City Directory	
54/77	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M C Foss (wife)	44		Connecticut		1900 US Census	
54/77	249 Highland Avenue		Louise Erickson (lodger)	Un kn own	Dressmaker	Sweden	187 0	1900 US Census	
54/77	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss (daughter)	7		Massachuse tts		1900 US Census	
54/77	249 Highland Avenue	O	<b>Sam W Foss (head)</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>Librarian, Public Library</b>	<b>New Hampshire</b>		<b>1900 US Census</b>	
54/77	249 Highland Avenue		Saxton C Foss	11		Massachuse tts		1900 US Census	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Librarian			1901 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Librarian			1902 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Librarian			1903 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Librarian, Public Library			1905 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Librarian			1906 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Saxton C Foss		Student			1907 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Sam Walter Foss		Librarian, Public Library			1909 City Directory	



<i>Family/ House Number</i>	<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>O/R</i>	<i>NAME</i>	<i>AGE</i>	<i>OCCUPATION</i>	<i>PLACE OF BIRTH</i>	<i>Immigration Year</i>	<i>SOURCE</i>	<i>NOTES</i>
	249 Highland Avenue		Saxton C Foss		Student			1909 City Directory	
71/108	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M C Foss (wife)	52		Connecticut		1910 US Census	
71/108	249 Highland Avenue	O	<b>Sam W Foss (head)</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>Librarian, Public Library</b>	<b>New Hampshire</b>		<b>1910 US Census</b>	
71/108	249 Highland Avenue		Saxton C Foss	21		Massachusetts		1910 US Census	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M Foss		Widow			1911 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Saxton C Foss		Student			1911 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M Foss		Widow			1912 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M Foss		Widow			1913 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Clerk (52 Webster Ave)			1913 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mildred B Hayes		Teacher, High School			1913 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1914 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1915 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Saxton C Foss		Reporter			1915 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M Foss		Widow			1916 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1916 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Saxton C Foss		Reporter			1916 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M C Foss		Widow			1917 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1917 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Saxton C Foss		Reporter			1917 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M Foss		Widow			1918 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1918 City Directory	

<i>Family/ House Number</i>	<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>O/R</i>	<i>NAME</i>	<i>AGE</i>	<i>OCCUPATION</i>	<i>PLACE OF BIRTH</i>	<i>Immigration Year</i>	<i>SOURCE</i>	<i>NOTES</i>
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M Foss		Widow			1919 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1919 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M C Foss		Widow			1920 City Directory	
<b>50/80</b>	249 Highland Avenue	<b>O</b>	<b>Carrie M C Foss (head)</b>	<b>65</b>		<b>Connecticut</b>		<b>1920 US Census</b>	
50/80	249 Highland Avenue		Florence Cutter (boarder)	72		Massachusetts		1920 US Census	
50/80	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss (daughter)	25	Stenographer	Massachusetts		1920 US Census	
50/80	249 Highland Avenue		May F Pillsbury	49	Newspaper Editorials	Massachusetts		1920 US Census	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M C Foss		Widow			1924 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1924 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M Foss		Widow			1925 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1925 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M Foss		Widow			1927 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1927 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M Foss		Widow			1929 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1929 City Directory	
<b>222/476</b>	249 Highland Avenue	<b>O</b>	<b>Carrie M. Foss (head)</b>	<b>75</b>				<b>1930 US Census</b>	
222/476	249 Highland Avenue		May F. Pillsbury (lodger)	59	Editor, paper			1930 US Census	
222/476	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L. Foss (daughter)	37	Steno, paint manufacturer			1930 US Census	
	249 Highland Avenue		Carrie M Foss		Widow			1933 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		Mary L Foss		Stenographer			1933 City Directory	

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	249 Highland Avenue	O	Mary Lillian Foss					1934 Deed 5821/93	Carrie M Conant Foss and Mary Lillian Foss
	249 Highland Avenue	O	John J Lyons & Helen C Lyons					1939 Deed 6342/484	Mary Lillian Foss
	249 Highland Avenue		Helen S Lyons (wife)					1940 City Directory	
	249 Highland Avenue		John J Lyons		Proprietor of Lyons Motor Tune Up Service			1940 City Directory	
42	249 Highland Avenue	O	John J Lyons (head)	30	Manager of Gas Station			1940 US Census	
42	249 Highland Avenue		Helen S Lyons (wife)	32				1940 US Census	
42	249 Highland Avenue		John J Lyons (son)	2				1940 US Census	
42	249 Highland Avenue		Thomas F Lyons	0				1940 US Census	
	249 Highland Avenue		J Lyons					1950-1-230 Building Permit - Remove present roof & apply asphalt shingles	
	249 Highland Avenue	O	Daniel D. Lyons & Theresa H. Risley					1972 Deed 12347/545	John J Lyons & Helen C Lyons
	249 Highland Avenue		Lyons					1979-2-702 Building Permit - Strip roof-reroof with asphalt shingles	
	249 Highland Avenue	O	David P. Deveney & Sheila Pyne Ferrara					2012 Deed 59605/157	Daniel D. Lyons & Theresa H. Risley
	249 Highland Avenue		Cheung K Yu					2012 Deed 60249/177	David P. Deveney & Sheila Pyne Ferrara

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	249 Highland Avenue	O	Cheung K Yu et al					2013 Deed 62787/477	Cheung K Yu