



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 13 Allen Street

Case: HPC.DMO 2021.01

Applicant: K&K Development

Owner: same as applicant

Proposal: *Demolish principal structure.*

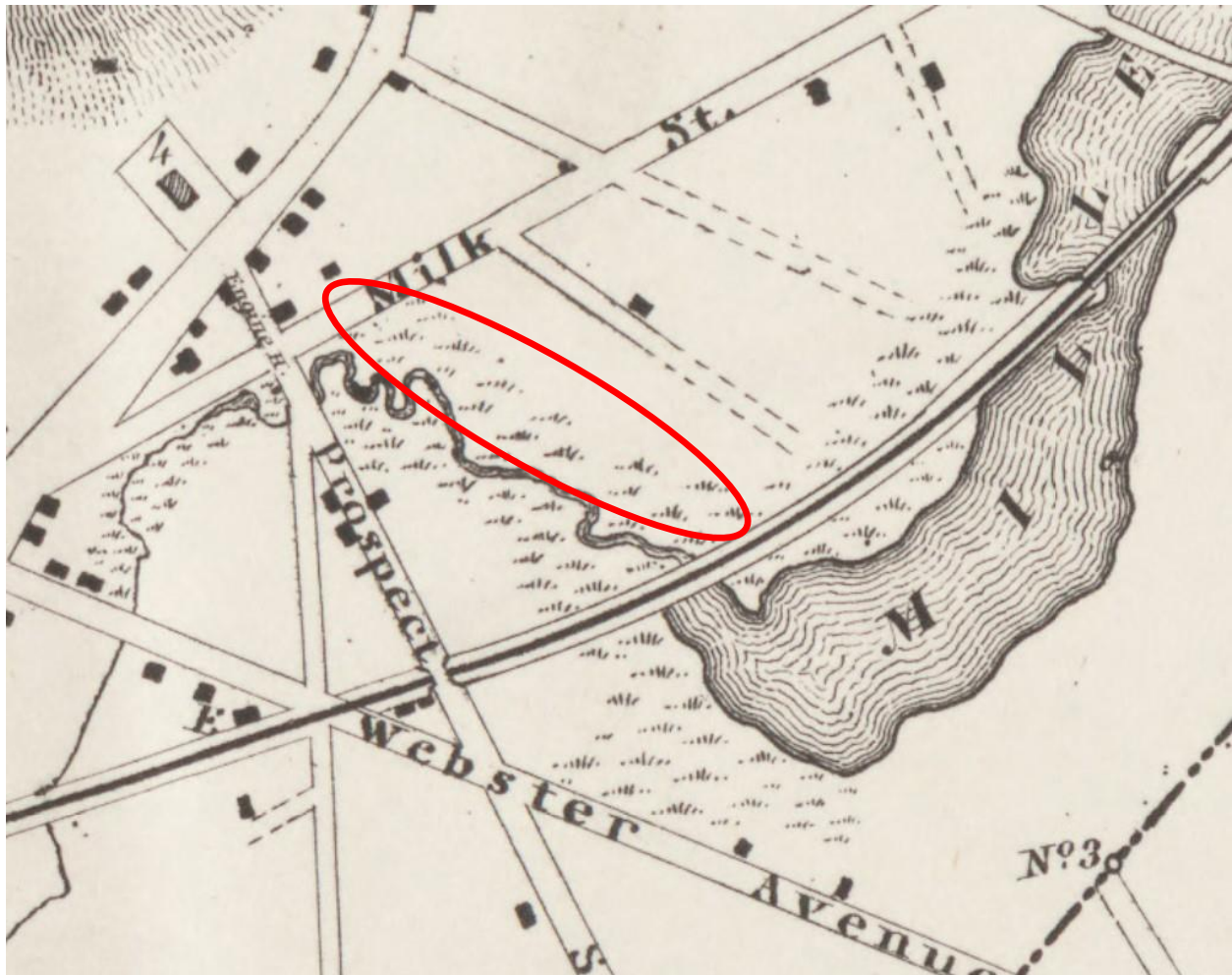
HPC Meeting Date: February 16, 2021



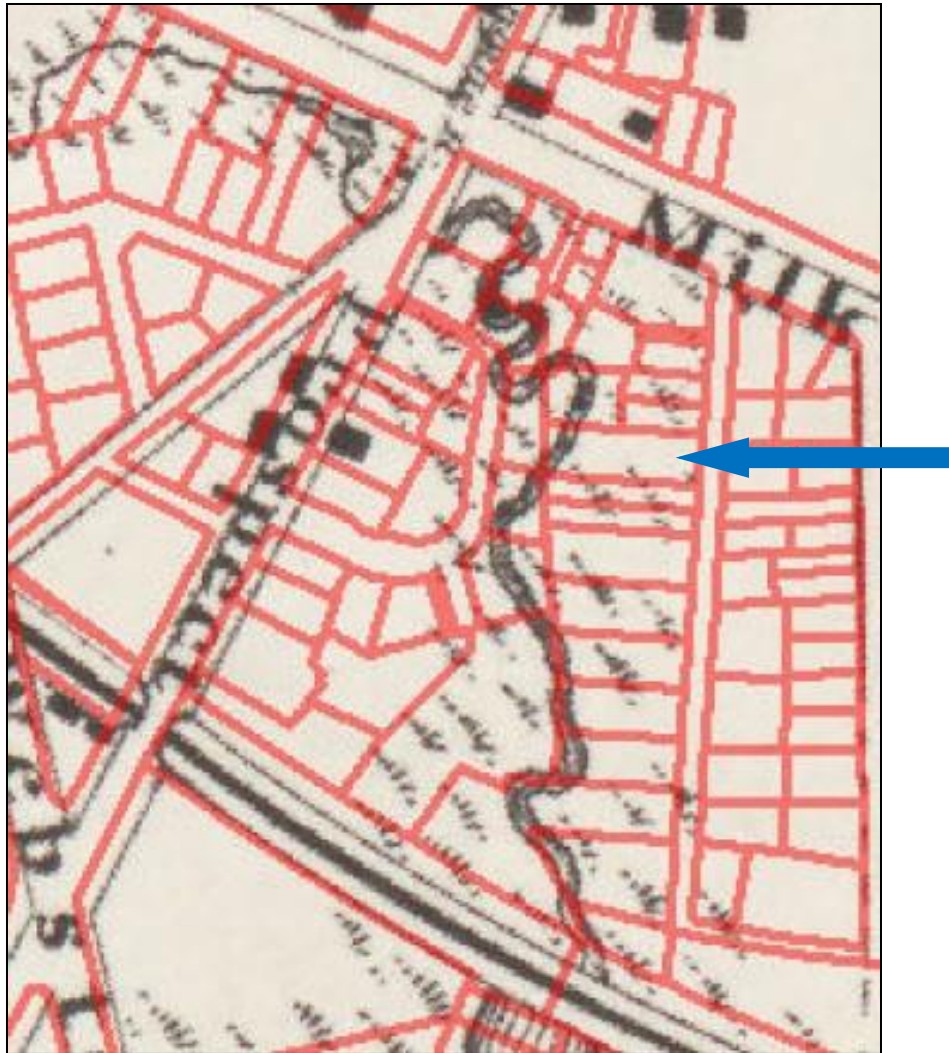


I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Historical Context: The earliest available map of this area is the 1852 Draper. As seen on the close-up image of this map below, black forms represent buildings. The area where Allen Street is today can be found immediately to the right of the “S” curves in the Miller River. Note the absence of both a street and structures, but note the flora indicated along the riverbanks by the multiple line marks. This was wet, marshy area. Today’s Allen Street area is noted in red.



This same portion of the 1852 Draper map below has been overlaid with 21st century parcel lines for context. Note the use of the name “Milk [Street]”. This street is now known as Somerville Avenue. The blue arrow indicates 13 Allen Street today.



Allen Street was named for Hiram Allen who established a ropewalk (a rope-making factory) in this location in 1839. A ropewalk is a long, narrow building or long, narrow expanse of ground where ropes were made for the shipping industry. Rope was made from hemp and, as hemp fibers are short, countless numbers of them must be strung together to create the significant lengths of rope necessary for ships. Hence the necessity for a long building or long expanse of land near a body of water to make rope. Ropewalks were common through the 19th century in American communities near seaports and navigable rivers not only because the industry they served was close by, but also because much of the machinery used in the ropewalks was tidal powered.

The photo¹ below of the former ropewalk in the Charlestown, MA Navy Yard shows what these long, narrow buildings could look like:

¹ Source: Digital Commonwealth <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:5h73s7984> photo c.1930

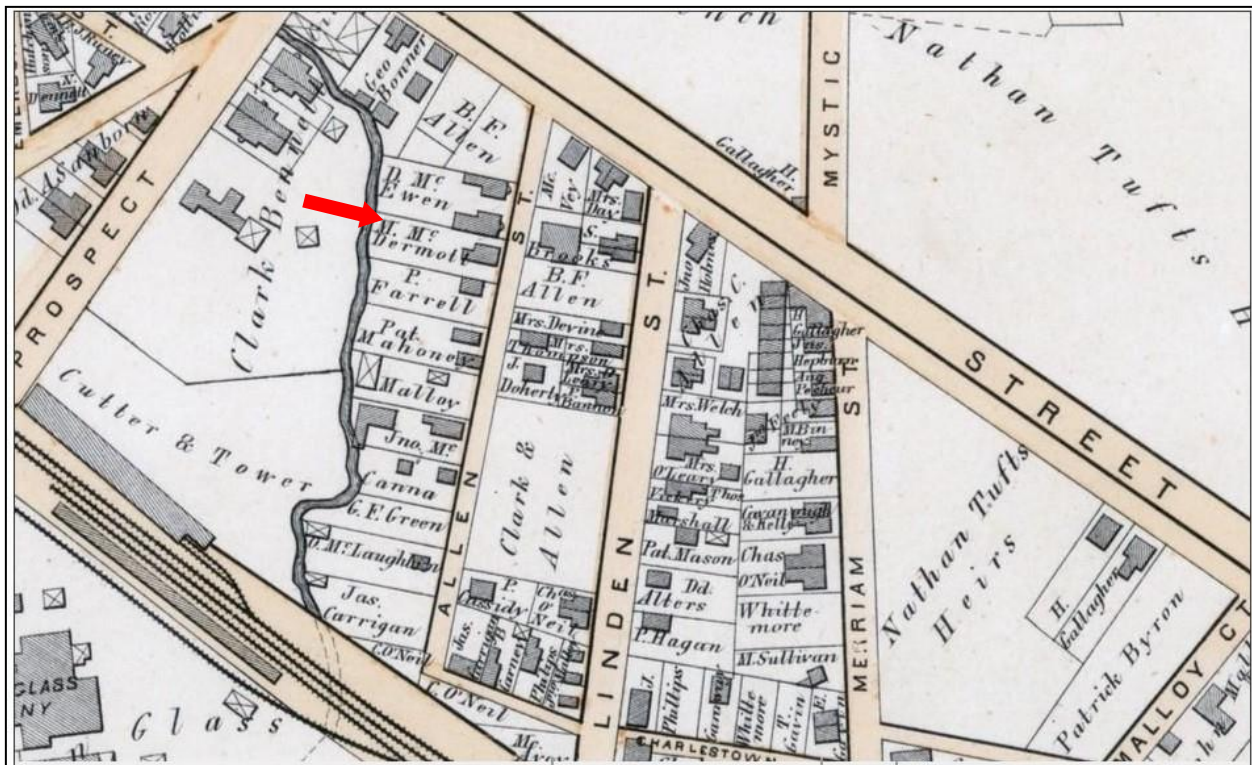


Allen Street, located in the Cobble Hill section of Somerville, was once a marshy area abutting the Miller River. Allen Street runs parallel to a filled-in portion of the Miller River. In fact, a portion of the Miller River flowed directly behind the rear property line of 13 Allen Street. This can be seen in several of the historic maps, starting with the 1852 Draper map with modern parcel overlays. On the 1873 private survey plan below showing building plots prepared for Benjamin Allen, the triple lines drawn along the top of the survey represent a portion of the Miller River seen in the earlier 1852 Draper map. This private survey is a rare find.



As others did, Hiram Allen's ropewalk ran on tidal power. It is believed that Allen Street itself may be the site of or parallel to the site of Hiram Allen's ropewalk.² In 1850, Hiram Allen's enterprise produced 14 tons of cordage. At that time he had 5 employees and one horse to help run the operation. By 1860, he had 12 employees. Allen's ropewalk was dismantled later in the 1860s as the demand for land for house lots grew.

The 1874 Hopkins map, Plate 7, created one year after Benjamin Allen's private survey, shows significant construction on the Allen Street parcels, including that of today's 13 Allen Street. At this time, we see that there is a residential structure on the 13 Allen Street lot and the property was owned by "M. McDermot".



Above: 1874 Hopkins Plate 7

The house shown on the 1874 Hopkins however, does not present the same shape as today's 13 Allen Street. Instead, the house form presented in 1874 extends from the front of the lot toward the rear with a smaller, left elevation rear addition. The house found at 13 Allen Street today extends horizontally across the lot.

There are a few possibilities to consider as to why the shape of the house today appears different to those on some of the earlier historic maps: 1.) the house has been rotated from its original orientation; 2.) the shape of the house was improperly depicted on the historic maps or; 3.) this is a much earlier house altogether. While #2 is possible it would be difficult for Staff to make a definitive finding in that regard. #1 and #3 seem to be the most likely. Each is discussed separately below.

² *Beyond the Neck*

Possibility #1: The house has been rotated to its current orientation and has been altered.

It is possible that this structure has been turned from its original orientation to what we see today or that it was extended in some other manner. The location of today's left addition on 13 Allen Street and the subservience of this addition to the main body of the structure lends potential credence to this possibility when comparing the outline of the structure on the 1874 Hopkins plate to today's house.

There is the problem, however, of the shape of today's left elevation addition, which appears, from the street view, as a shallow canted bay. The bay is not indicated on the left elevation of this structure on the 1874 map. Therefore, it is possible that this left elevation addition that we see today is new or an altered version of the original rear addition.

Today, the main body of the house facing the street is broad and reads more like what was originally a side elevation of the structure. This façade is much too broad for what would have been a gable-roofed structure in 1874; it lacks the proportion of a typical one-, two-, or three-bay wide house built in the 1860s or 1870s. Though there is the occasional outlier, builders constructing working -class housing like that found on Allen Street were consistent with their building orientation, form, width, depth, and overall massing.

Staff believes that the roofline of the structure has been changed from a gable to the current gambrel. It looks as though a low knee wall has been built in order to provide the height off of which the gambrel roof could be constructed. A comparison of 13 Allen to its right-abutting neighbor, 11 Allen, shows what Staff believes to be the original fascia line on the house. It is in a similar linear plane as the gable-fronted 11 Allen Street. This is illustrated below in comparison photos. In any event, 13 Allen Street has undergone considerable alteration.



Above: 13 Allen and 11 Allen

Below: Suspected original fascia line of a gable-roofed structure.



Possibility #2: The house is in its original location and orientation and is older than c.1874

Another house exists on Allen Street that lends veracity to this second theory. 42 Allen Street (see attached Form B from 1980) is still extant but its roofline has been altered. However, when the Form B for 42 Allen Street was written in 1980, 42 Allen Street retained its original gabled roof. See the black and white photos below.

The body of the main massing of 42 Allen Street is wider and the depth shallower than the stereotypical vernacular Greek Revival and Italianate residential structures built for workers' housing that we are used to seeing throughout Somerville. Instead, due to its dimensions, 42 Allen Street, like 13 Allen Street, appears squattier than the typical houses built in the area, its street façade broad. 42 Allen Street is three window bays wide on the first and second story front façade and presents



Above: 42 Allen Street, 1980 photo.

a side hall entry on the right corner of the front façade. Additional, though grainier photos of 42 Allen Street (below) show the side elevations and a since-removed door hood. The main massing of the house was one bay deep. Rear additions had been added. The building still retained several original 6-over-6 windows

The Form B for 42 Allen Street states that it was one of the earliest houses built on Allen Street and suggests a built date of 1830-1840. If this built date is accurate, 42 Allen Street could pre-date even the existence of Hiram Allen's rope walk (1839). Yet, the 1852 Draper



Above: earlier photos of 42 Allen Street

map does not show any structures in the vicinity of Allen Street at that time, including the ropewalk.³ Given their stylistic similarities, it is distinctly possible that 13 Allen Street and 42 Allen Street were built around the same time.

Below is a side-by-side comparison of the main massing of 13 Allen Street and 42 Allen Street (1980 photo). The both the size and locations of the windows on the 13 Allen Street front façade have been altered, it is easy to see how, in an unaltered state, 13 Allen Street could have presented the same dimensions and proportions as 42 Allen Street.



Above, left: 13 Allen Street.



Above, right: 42 Allen Street, 1980 photo.

Though both now heavily altered, when comparing the side-by-side images of 13 Allen Street and 42 Allen Street *today*, that their rooflines have been altered and that knee walls have been added to increase the head room on the top floor becomes even more evident. See images below:



Above, left: 13 Allen Street today.



Above, right: 42 Allen Street today.

Red arrows in both images indicate original fascia lines, which are evident on both buildings.

³ Note that a ropewalk could be, but was not necessarily, a building; a ropewalk could also be just a long narrow stretch of land used to make the shipping ropes.

The 1884 Hopkins Plate 7 below shows that 13 Allen Street is now owned by John Mann. The shape of the house has also changed from an elongated front-to rear-of-lot rectangular form to more of the square that we see today. Perhaps the back portion of the house has been infilled. There is now also a barn/stable extant on the lot.

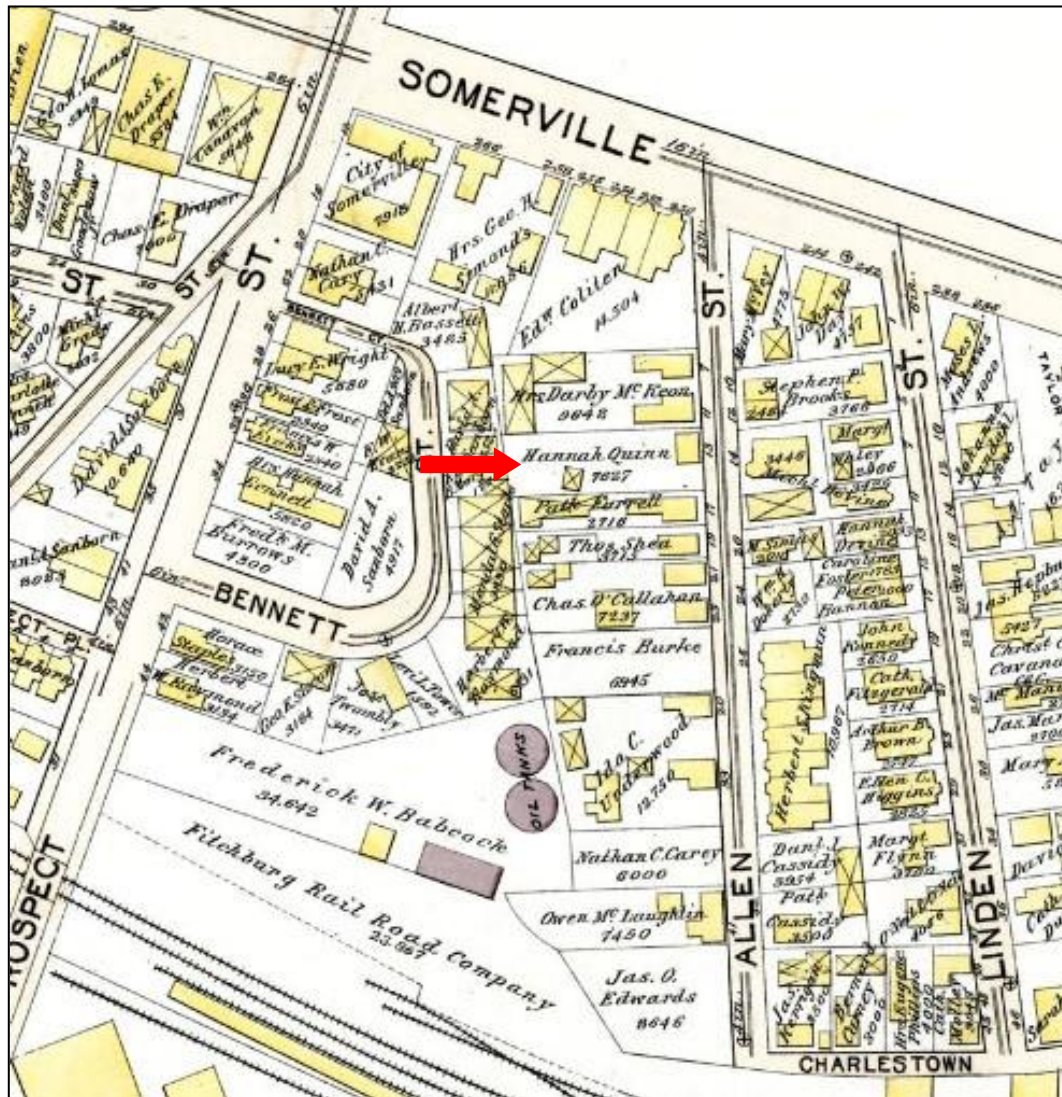


The 1860s through the 1880s showed a significant Irish⁴ presence on Allen Street. Individuals were employed in the glassblowing, meatpacking, and rope making industries while others worked as general laborers. Teamsters and railroad workers rounded out the varying industries in which residents were employed. With slaughterhouses and the meatpacking industry just steps away, the unhealthy air and putrid smells from the animal industry would have made this area very unpleasant to live in during the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

By 1895, 13 Allen Street is owned by Hanna Quinn. The house and barn/stable remain extant. Allen Street, Linden Street, Merriman Street and Bennet Street (now Court) have been considerably built up by this time with residential structures, mostly for working-class occupants. The 1895 Bromley Plate 7 shows the significant increase in density that has taken place since the 1852 Draper map was published.

⁴ Individuals with names such as McDermott, Keon, Malloy, Kerrigan, Laughlin, are shown as landowners during these times.

Below: The 1895 Bromley Plate 7



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.

The period of relevance for the house starts c.1830 - 1874

- a. Location: It is presumed that the structure is on its original parcel but the building itself may have been turned to its current orientation.
- b. Design: Currently, the main body of the house is three non-standard bays wide.
 - Right side entry hall. Replacement door, replacement door hood, replacement hood brackets.
 - The gambrel roof presents its broad side to Allen Street. "Porkchop-style" returns on the left and right elevations of the gambrel roof. Two flat-roofed dormers face Allen Street.
 - A single-story addition with a canted bay form is extant at the left of the main body of the house.
 - A single brick chimney stack is located at the back corner of the left elevation of the main body of the house.
 - Front façade first floor windows are casement or sliders. Front façade second story windows are replacement one-over-one. Front façade windows on single-story addition are one-over-one. A one-over-one double window is visible on the second floor of the left elevation on the main massing.
 - Concrete block foundation under single story addition. Some brick foundation visible on part of the addition and main massing. Concrete-coated foundation is visible on the main massing.
 - Concrete front steps.
 - A concrete-topped, low brick wall runs $\frac{3}{4}$ of the length of the frontage of the house.
- c. Materials:
 - Foundation: Concrete block, brick, concrete-coated. See above.
 - Windows: vinyl or aluminum.
 - Siding: Front façade main body: shingles, wood or asphalt. Front façade additional shingles, wood or asphalt. Right and left sides main massing: elevation: vinyl.
 - Trim: vinyl, possibly Azek or similar or wood at gambrel roofline.
 - Steps: concrete. See above.
 - Front wall: concrete-topped brick. See above.
 - Roof: asphalt shingles.
- d. Alterations: Numerous. Front steps. Replacement windows. Siding. Relocation and resizing of windows (original windows removed). Original window and door trim removed. Possible turning of building. Trim. Dormers are later additions. Change in roofline from gable to gambrel. Original chimney stacks removed. Rear addition removed. Side addition added.

Evaluation of Integrity: Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that there is little architectural integrity left to the building.

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** (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B, i-ii). 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

2003-05, Section 2.17.B, i

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 13 Allen Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the structure at 13 Allen Street does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “i”.

B. HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

2003-05, Section 2.17.B, ii

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 13 Allen Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the structure at 13 Allen Street does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “ii”.

IV. VOTE

When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the structure at 13 Allen Street is or is not “historically significant”.

The HPC must vote on the historic significance of the structure AND the HPC must vote to accept their findings.

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	SMV.369
Historic Name:	
Common Name:	
Address:	42 Allen St
City/Town:	Somerville
Village/Neighborhood:	Ward Two - Cobble Hill
Local No:	
Year Constructed:	r 1835
Architect(s):	
Architectural Style(s):	No style
Use(s):	Multiple Family Dwelling House
Significance:	Architecture
Area(s):	
Designation(s):	
Building Materials(s):	Roof: Asphalt Shingle Wall: Synthetic Other; Wood Foundation: Concrete Unspecified



The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has converted this paper record to digital format as part of ongoing projects to scan records of the Inventory of Historic Assets of the Commonwealth and National Register of Historic Places nominations for Massachusetts. Efforts are ongoing and not all inventory or National Register records related to this resource may be available in digital format at this time.

The MACRIS database and scanned files are highly dynamic; new information is added daily and both database records and related scanned files may be updated as new information is incorporated into MHC files. Users should note that there may be a considerable lag time between the receipt of new or updated records by MHC and the appearance of related information in MACRIS. Users should also note that not all source materials for the MACRIS database are made available as scanned images. Users may consult the records, files and maps available in MHC's public research area at its offices at the State Archives Building, 220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, open M-F, 9-5.

Users of this digital material acknowledge that they have read and understood the MACRIS Information and Disclaimer (<http://mhc-macris.net/macrisdisclaimer.htm>)

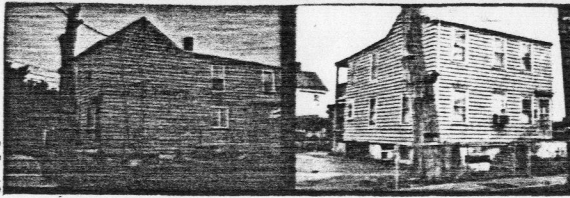
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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

This file was accessed on: Monday, February 15, 2021 at 1:17: PM

FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL C
294 Washington Street, Bos



Area	Form no.
Ward II	369

Roll 34: 2,3

Somerville

42 Allen St.

ic Name

original residence

resent residence

ship: ☐ Private individual
Private organization

Public

Original owner

PTION:

Date ca. 1830-50

Source stylistic analysis

Style Federal

Architect

Exterior wall fabric replacement

Outbuildings

Major alterations (with dates) siding,
windows

Moved Date

Approx. acreage

Setting

Recorded by Mary Bennett/C.Z.

Organization Landscape Research

Date 10/80

location in relation to nearest
cross streets and other buildings
or geographical features.
Indicate north.

(Staple additional sheets here)

Date

10/80

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within community)

This house is of significance because it was one of the first built on Allen Street, probably ca. 1830-40.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community)

Allen Street crossed the marshlands of the Miller's River in the vicinity of Allen's ropewalk (rope factory), owned by Hiram Allen. Housing in this area was entirely for workers in the nearby industries.

DESCRIPTION:

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Hopkins, G.M. Atlas of the City of Somerville, 1874.