



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

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 17 Allen Street

Case: HPC.DMO 2021.32

Applicant: 13-17 Allen St, LLC

Owner: Saul A. Rivera

Legal Ad: *Demolish principal structure.*

HPC Meeting Date: December 14th, 2021

Top: Front elevation

Bottom, left: Left elevation

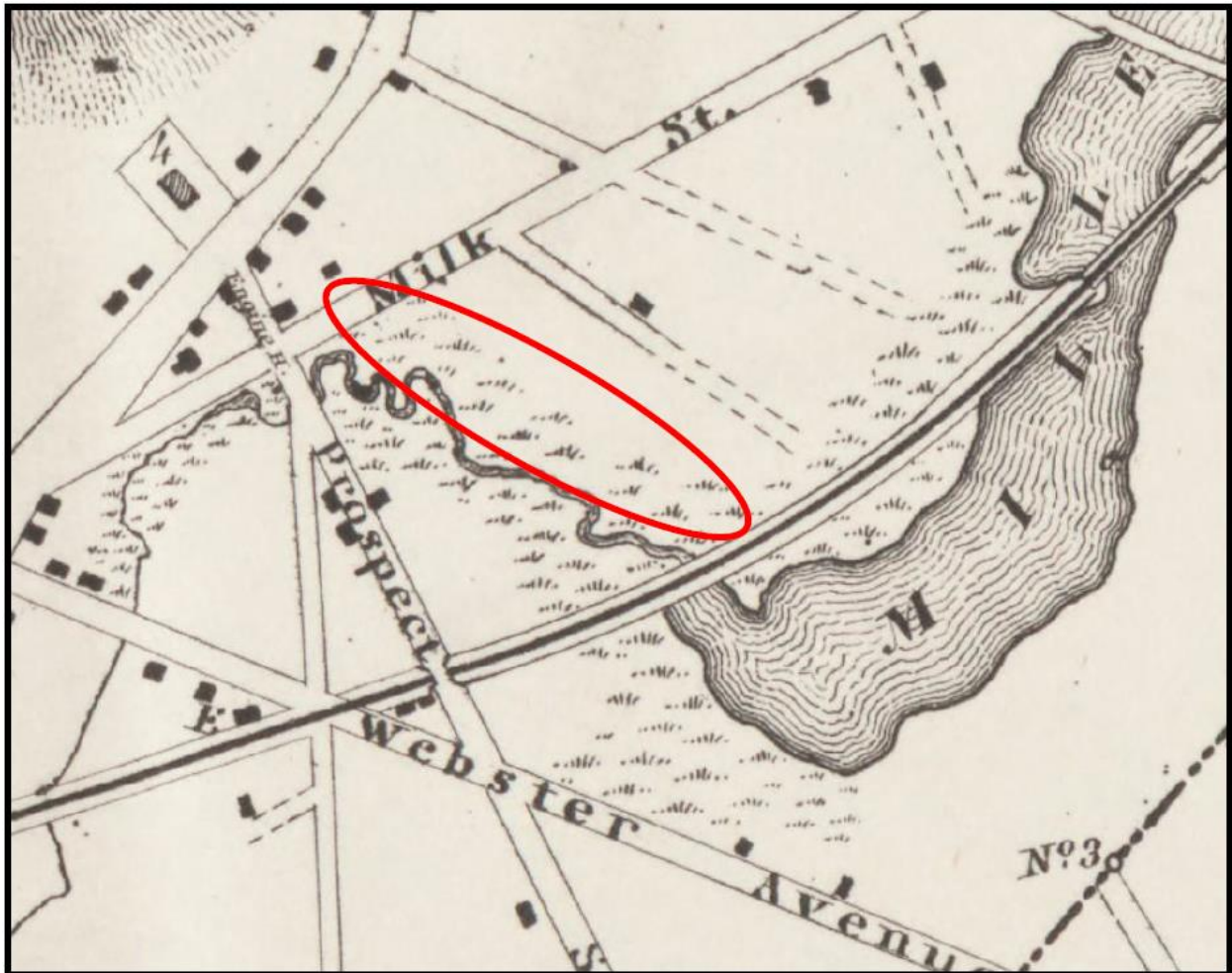
Bottom, middle: Rear elevation

Bottom, Right: Right elevation



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 17 Allen Street today.



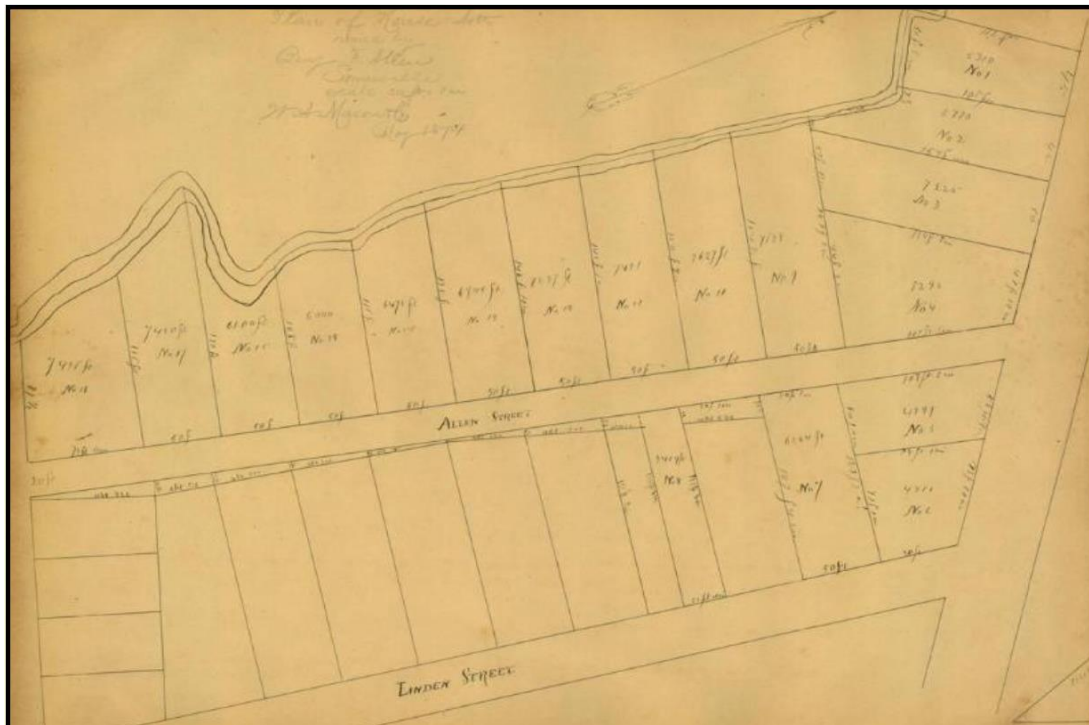
Allen Street was named for Hiram Allen who established a ropewalk (a rope-making factory) in this location in 1839. A ropewalk is a long, narrow building or long, narrow expanse of ground where ropes were made for the shipping industry. Rope was made from hemp and, as hemp fibers are short, countless 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



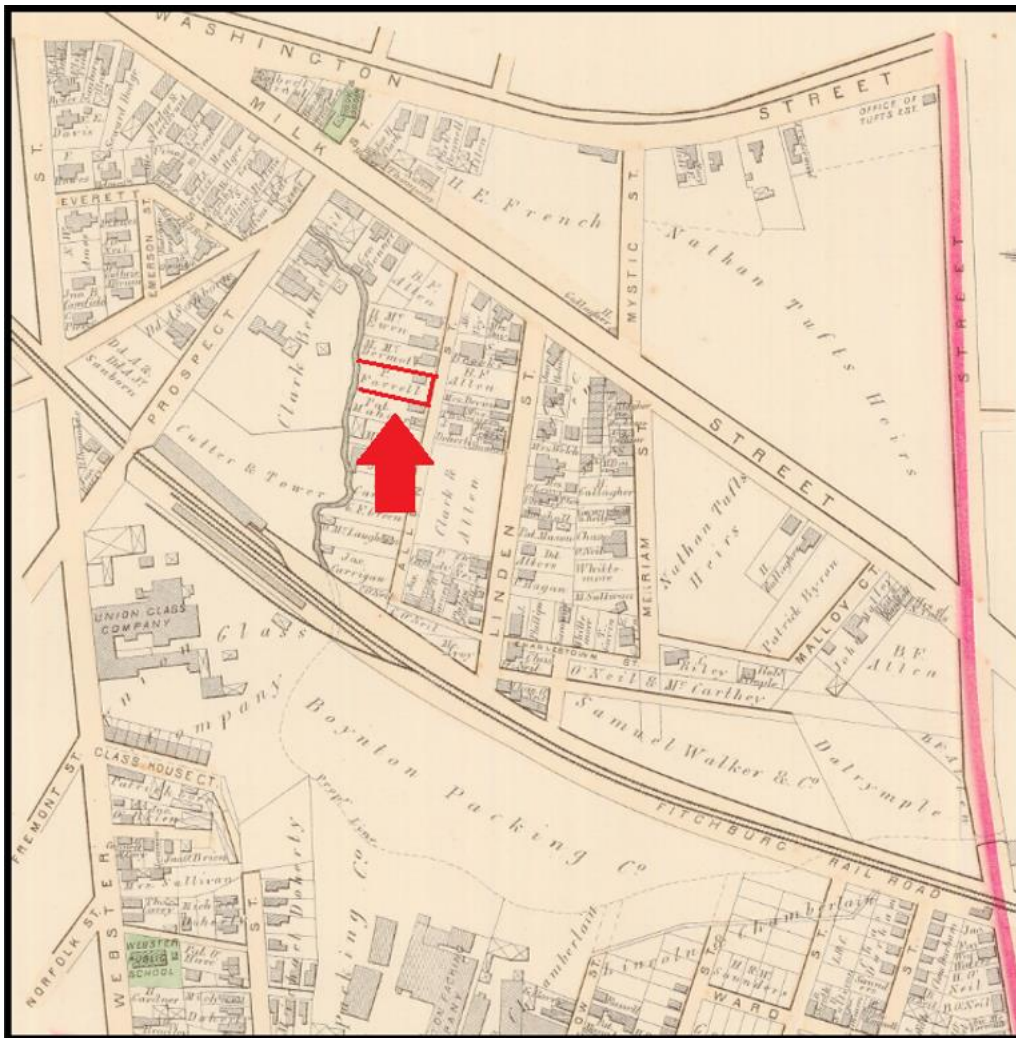
Allen Street, located in the Cobble Hill section of Somerville, was once a marshy area abutting the Miller River. Allen Street runs parallel to a filled-in portion of the Miller River. In fact, a portion of the Miller River flowed directly behind the rear property line of 13 Allen Street. This can be 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 represents 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. 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.

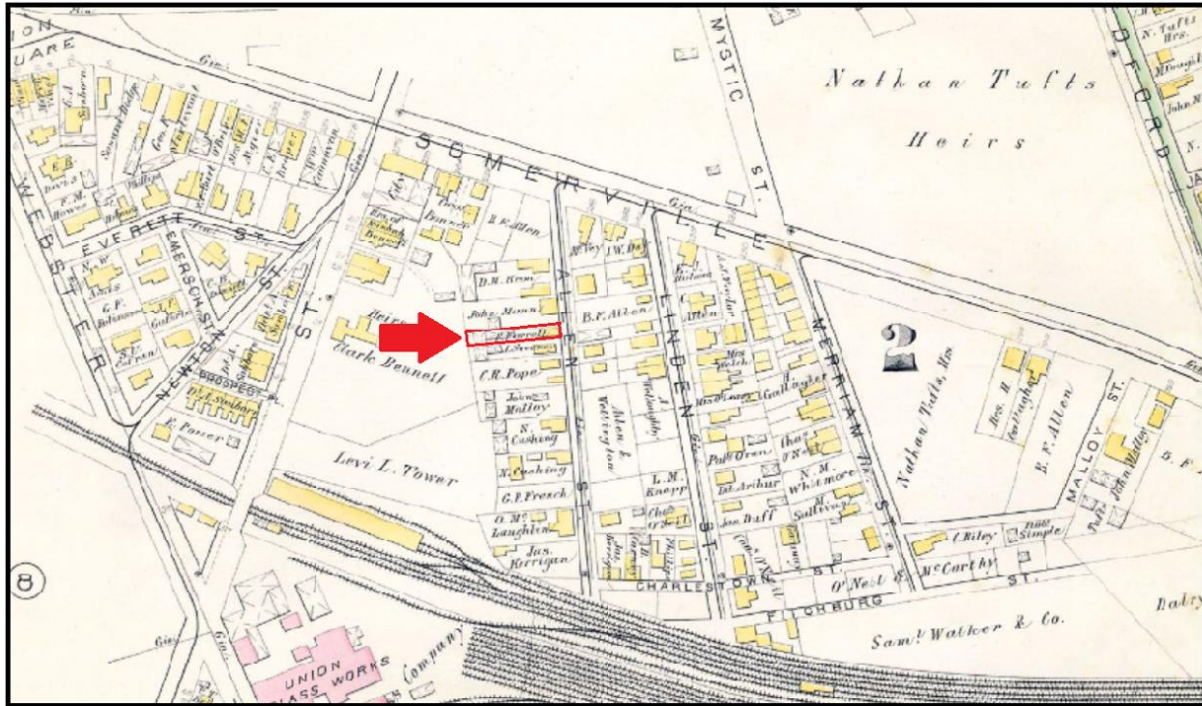
The 1874 Hopkins map, Plate 7, created one year after Benjamin Allen's private survey, shows significant construction on the Allen Street parcels, including that of today's 17 Allen Street. At this time, we see that there is a residential structure on the 17 Allen Street lot and the property was owned by "P. Farrell".

The 1874 Hopkins Map is reflective of the rapid development that took place within Ward 2 after the Civil War.



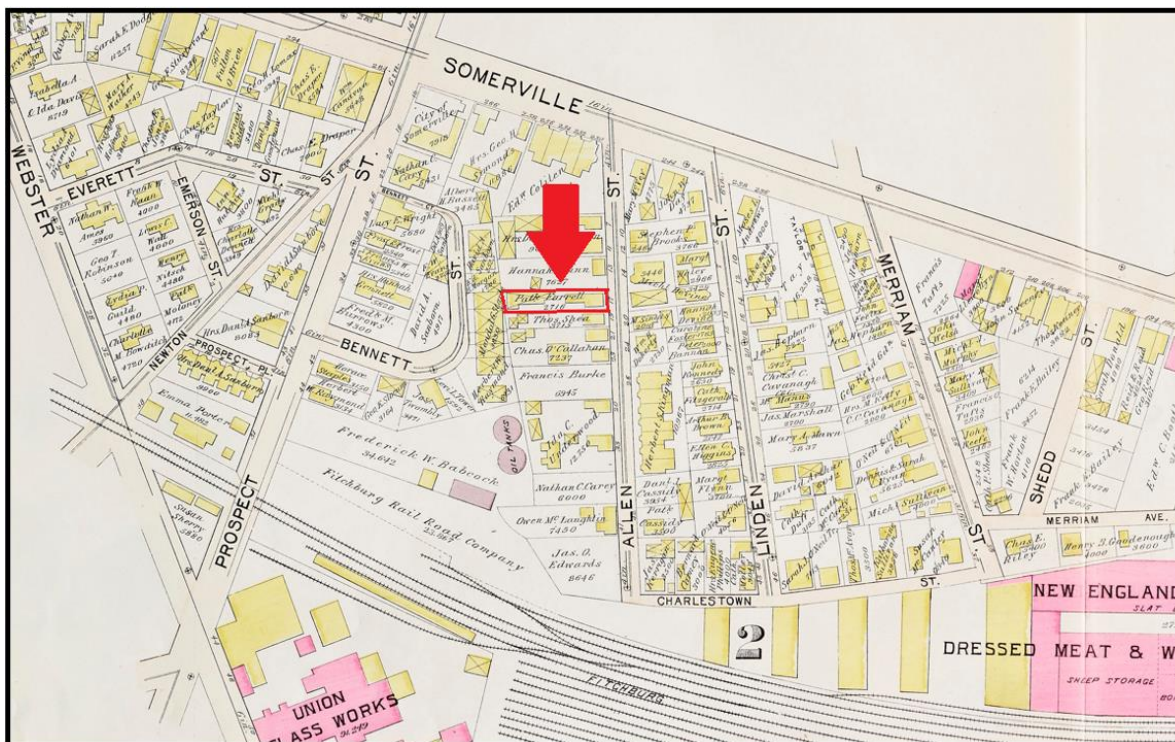
Above: 1874 Bromley Map, specifying location of 17 Allen St

By 1884 we can see on the Hopkins Map for that year the growth of the commercial industries that were integral to the development of the area and of Somerville. The Union Glass Company, soap factories, banks, and the railroad yards are constructed within close proximity of Allen St. Additionally, we can see the drastic increase in the number of railroad tracks through the area, an indication of the industrial growth of the area.



Above: 1888 Bromley Map, specifying location of 17 Allen St

By 1895, the area around Allen St has been platted into lots and further streets have been laid around the commercial buildings in the area. The development of row housing is also evident along Tremont. These structures were needed to provide additional low-cost housing for workers of the nearby factories.



Above: 1895 Bromley Map, specifying location of 17 Allen St

The first owner of 17 Allen St was Patrick Farrell. City Directories, along with the Hopkins and Bromley Maps state Patrick Farrell as the owner, from 1874 through 1902. Patrick Farrell was born in Ireland in 1840 and came to Somerville in 1861. While in Somerville Patrick worked as a soap dealer and grease collector. Patrick's son, James, and one of their tenants, Patrick Duffy, also worked as grease collectors.

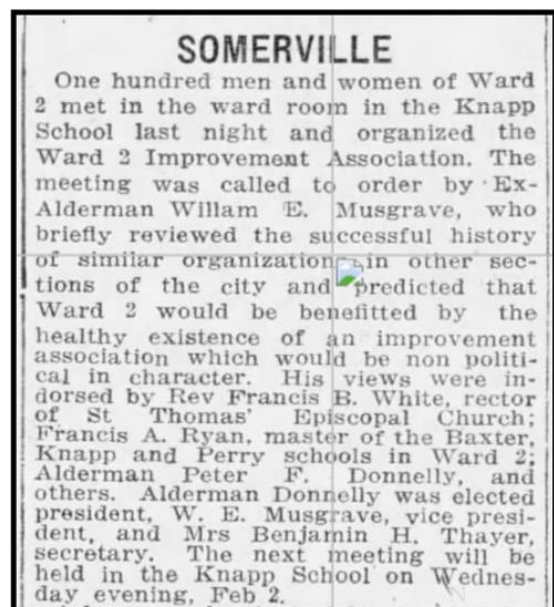
The property is largely a single-family home, with a few boarders supplying supplemental income to the owning family. The Farrell family owned the home through 1918.

The property is then sold to Peter F Donnelly, a barrel dealer. Peter is the child of immigrant parents from Scotland and Ireland and a veteran of World War I. Peter becomes the Ward 2 Alderman. During his time as Alderman, Peter spearheads the effort for a WWI monument to be built in Union Square and helped create the Ward 2 Improvement Association in 1921. Peter then sold the property to James McCullen in 1920.

James McCullen owned 17 Allen Street from 1920 through 1927. James and his wife are both the children of English and Irish immigrants and James worked as a clerk. Further information on who owned the property after 1927 was not found.



Above: The Boston Globe Excerpt, September 7, 1920

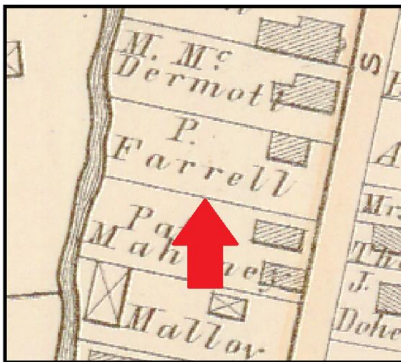


Right: The Boston Globe Excerpt, January 20, 1921

This property was rented by a variety of working-class families throughout the 20th century. Other tenants included service and factory workers as well as teachers.

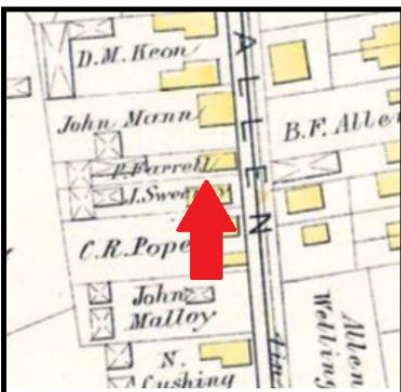
A list of all residents for 17 Allen Street and their professions is provided below.

Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation
Clark, William	1890	Laborer
Crouse, James	1900	
Donnelly, Annie	1918-1920	
Donnelly, Peter F.	1918-1920	Barrel dealer/ Ward 2 Alderman
Duffy, Patrick	1903-1909	Teamster, Grease collector
Farrell, Ellen	1894-1901	Dressmaker
Farrell, James H	1896-1912	Grease collector
Farrell, Mary	1905-1916	
Farrell, Patrick	1892-1902	Soap dealer, Grease collector
Farrell, Robert Patrick	1916-1918	Driver
Kane, James	1890	Laborer
McCullen, Elizabeth	1920-1927	
McCullen, James W.	1920-1927	Clerk



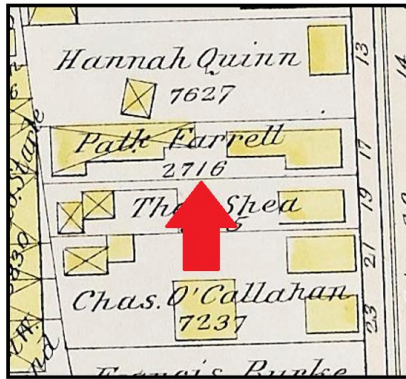
In 1874 the residence at 17 Allen St was a small rectangular structure on the left property line.

Left: Close-up of 1874 Hopkins Map, indicating 17 Allen



The 1888 Hopkins Map shows that the lot has been subdivided in to two lots. On what is now 17 Allen St, two structures have been constructed towards the rear of the property. Likely barns or carriage houses.

Left: Close-up of 1884 Hopkins Map, indicating 17 Allen



The 1895 Bromley Map depicts an addition added to the rear of the residential structure. The two structures in the rear have been merged and an addition has been placed on the front.

Left: Close-up of 1895 Bromley Map, indicating 17 Allen



Current Satellite images show that the rear structures have since been demolished.

A front entryway has either been added or enclosed on the front of the property since 1895.

Left: Close-up 2021 GIS image, indicating 17 Allen

(Continued on next page.)

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.

1. 17 Allen St

The period of relevance for the house starts c.1874-1927

- a. Location: It is likely that this structure is in its original location and was built on-site.
- b. Design: The house is a front gable roof, wood-framed building.
 - Front Elevation
 - Asymmetric enclosed entryway with gable roof
 - Entry door on right side of enclosed porch. Set of jalousie windows on left and right elevations
 - Brick steps from landing to pavement
 - Fenestration consists of one-over-one single or double-hung, replacement sash windows on all three floors. Each window is flanked by faux shutters. A set of awning windows are on either side of the enclosed entryway
 - Right Elevation
 - Fenestration consists of one-over-one single or double-hung, replacement sash windows on all three floors. Each window is flanked by faux shutters.
 - Brick chimney towards rear
 - The rear portion of the property juts out on the third floor, encasing the brick chimney
 - Left Elevation
 - Fenestration consists of one-over-one single or double-hung, replacement sash windows on all three floors
 - An engaged iron ladder leads from the first to the third floor
 - The rear portion of the property juts out on the third floor
 - Three story brick chimney stack
 - Rear Elevation
 - Rear addition is taller than the roofline of the main massing
 - Fenestration consists of one-over-one single or double-hung, replacement sash windows on all three floors
 - Wood porches and stairs leading from the second floor

- Aluminum or vinyl door leading on to the second-floor porch, and another aluminum or vinyl door on the first floor
- c. Materials:
- Foundation: Concrete. Brick facing extant at front of enclosed entry. The concrete foundation on the main massing at least is likely parged over brick.
 - Windows: Aluminum or vinyl
 - Entry door: modern. Aluminum (maybe fiberglass) with one-over-one window
 - Siding: Wood or vinyl clapboard
 - Steps: brick in the front and wood in the rear
 - Roof: Gable
- d. Alterations: Replacement windows. Extension of the third floor in the rear to overhang the first and second floor to the left and right. The rear addition roofline has been increased to be higher than that of the main massing and the third floor has been extended toward the left property line, likely done in the mid-late 20th century. The chimney is a later alteration. One-over-one vinyl or aluminum windows throughout. Modern replacement doors. Vinyl siding.
- e. Evaluation of Integrity of 17 Allen Street Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building does retain integrity of its original form. Minimal alterations have occurred to this structure, partially obscuring the original details; however, the original massing and architectural design is evident.

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 RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE at 17 Allen Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE at 17 Allen 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.

Residential Structure

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE at 17 Allen Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE at 17 Allen Street 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 RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE at 17 Allen Street is or is not “historically significant”.