



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

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PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

Site: 27 Allen Street

Case: HPC.DMO 2021.03

Applicant: 19-27 Allen Street, LLC

Owner: Jean Martelli

Proposal: *Demolish principal structure.*

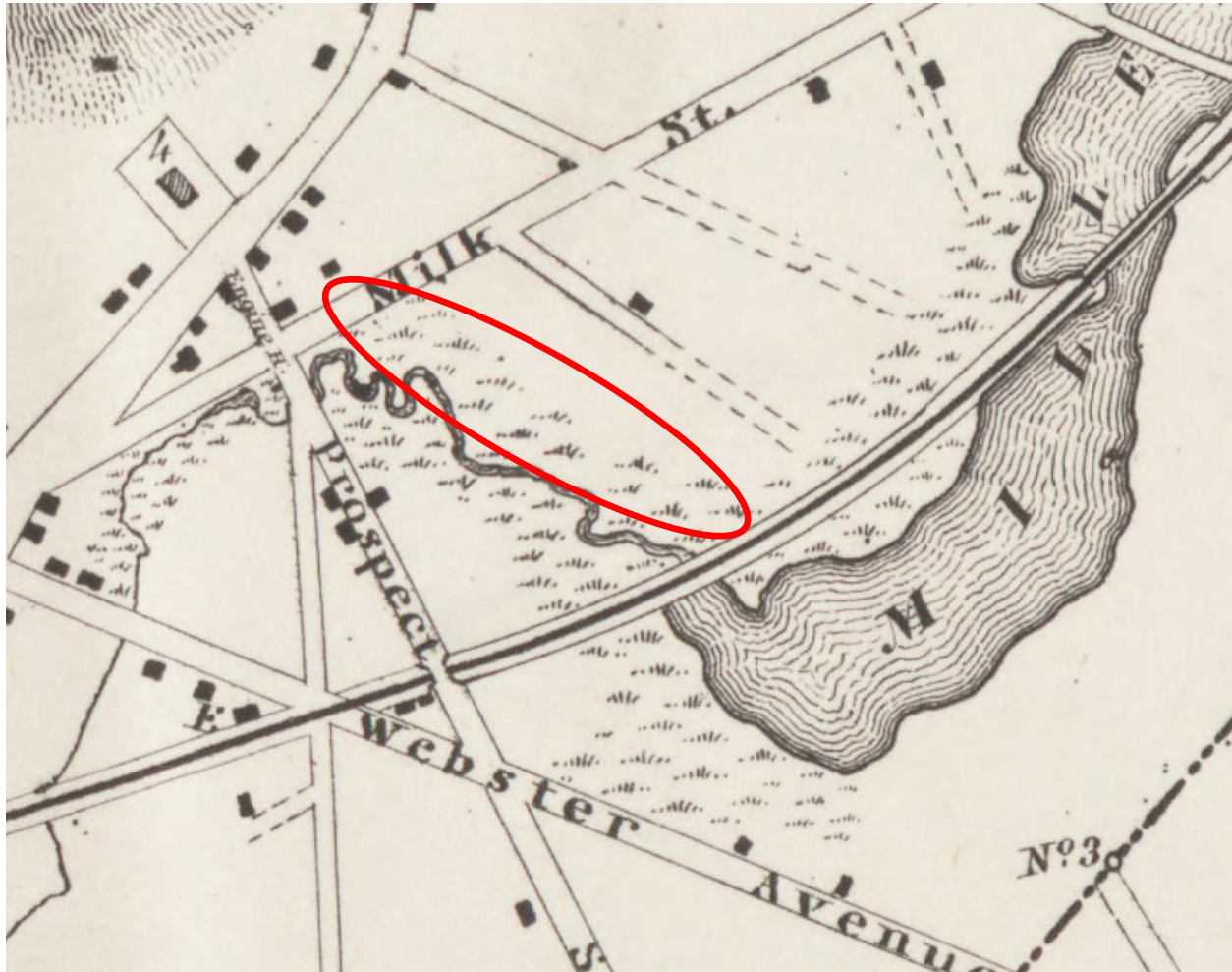
HPC Meeting Date: February 16, 2021



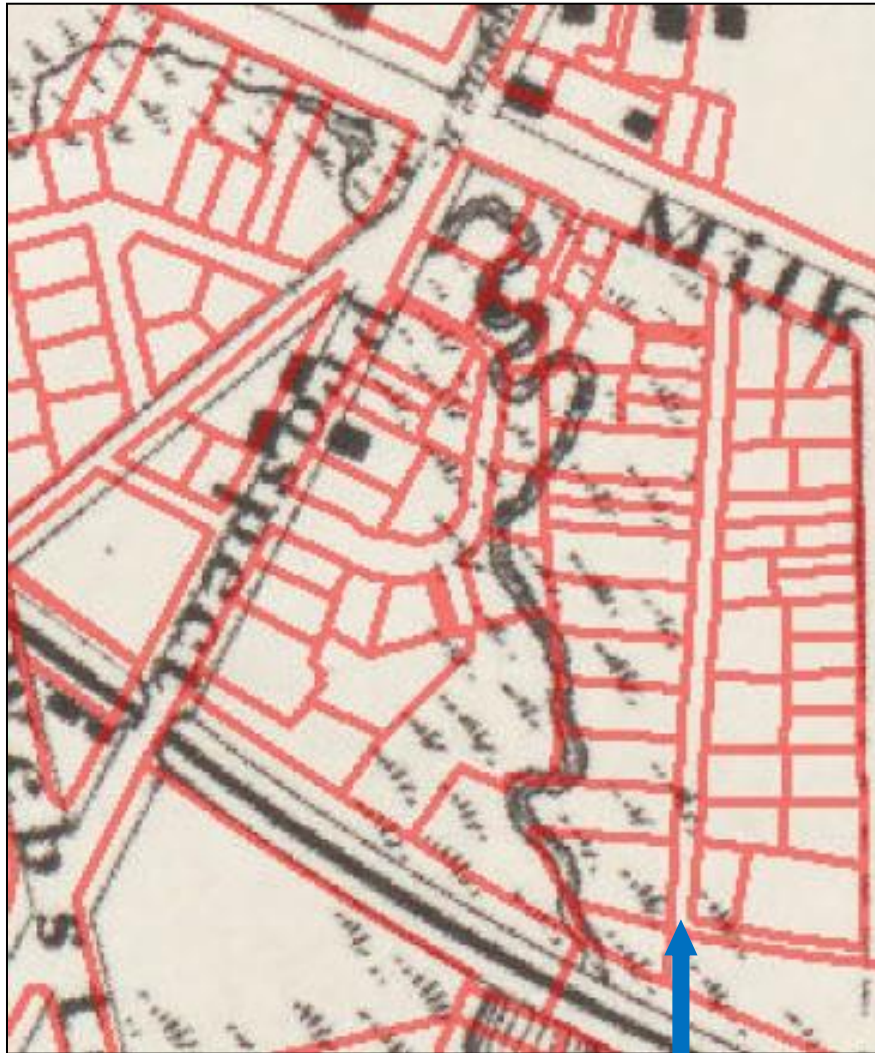


I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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 today’s Allen Street.



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. Some ropewalks were constructed with no side walls and only a roof. Other ropewalks were long, narrow strips of land with no structure on them at all. It was the long, narrow expanse of land that was needed to construct the great lengths of rope.



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 27 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.

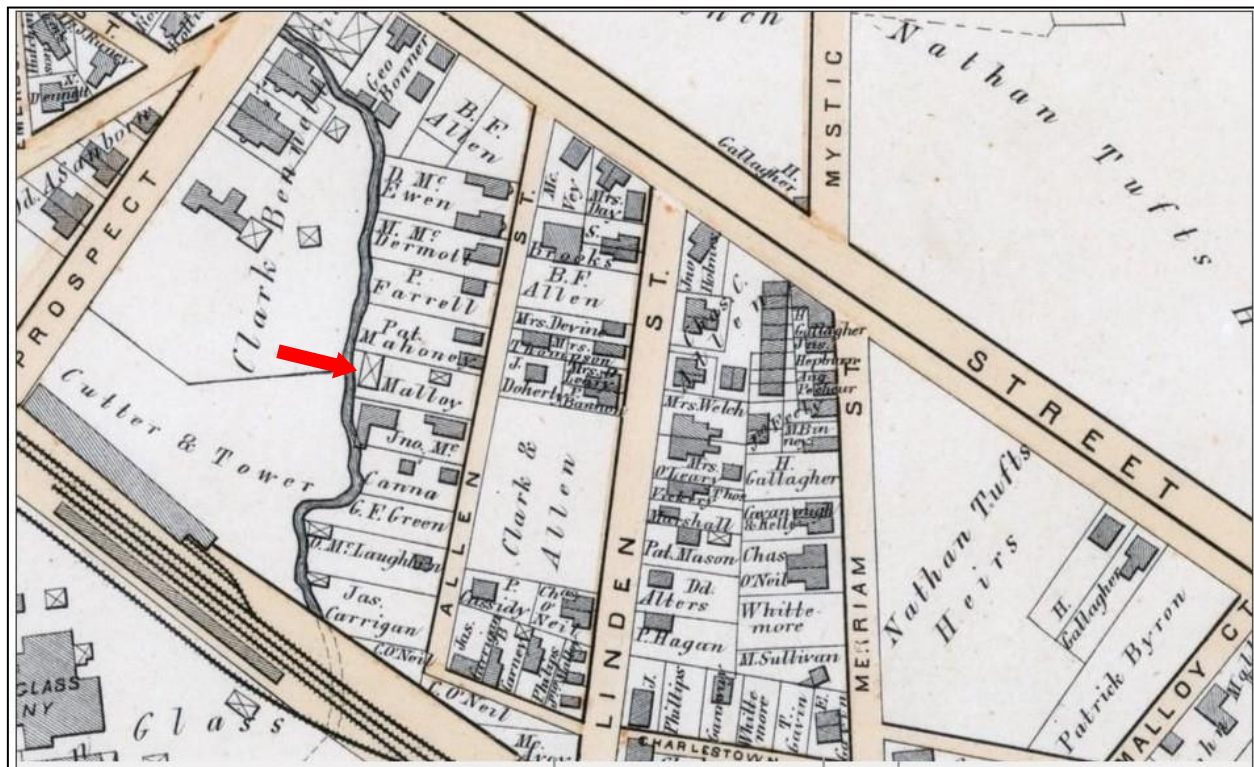
¹ Source: Digital Commonwealth <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:5h73s7984> photo c.1930



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 27 Allen Street. At this time, we see that there is a residential structure on the 27 Allen Street lot and the property was owned by “Malloy”. At this time, no residential structures were extant on the lot, only two barns/stables.

² *Beyond the Neck*



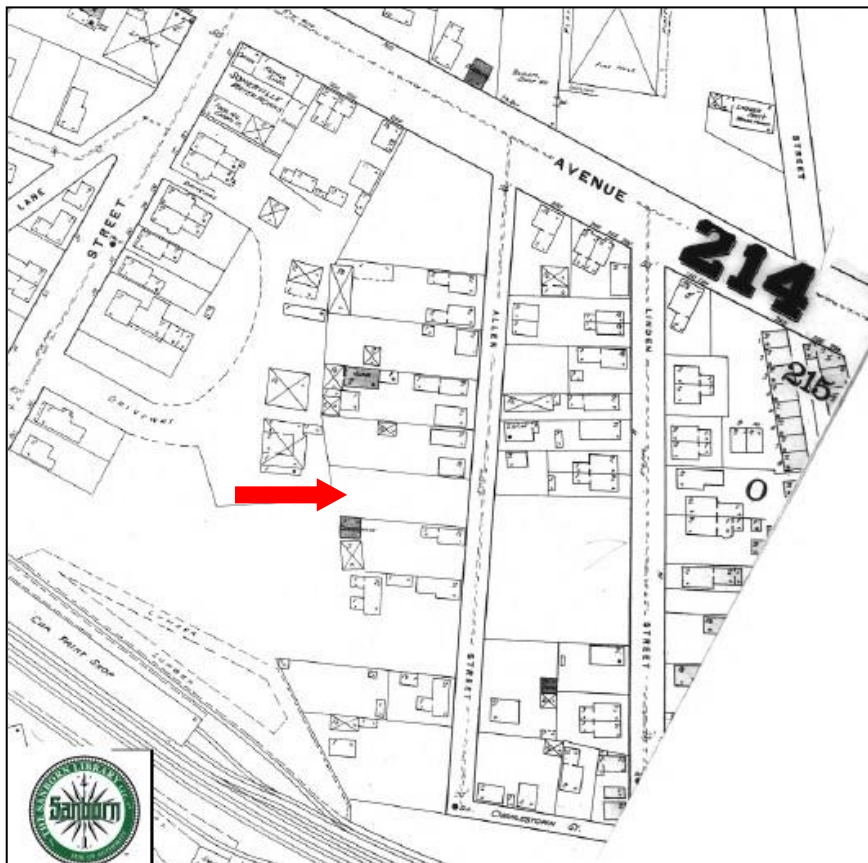
Above: 1874 Hopkins Plate 7

The 1884 Hopkins Plate 7 below shows that 27 Allen Street still owned by John Malloy, but that an additional barn/stable has been added to the property for a total of three such structures.



The 1860s through the 1880s showed a significant Irish³ 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.

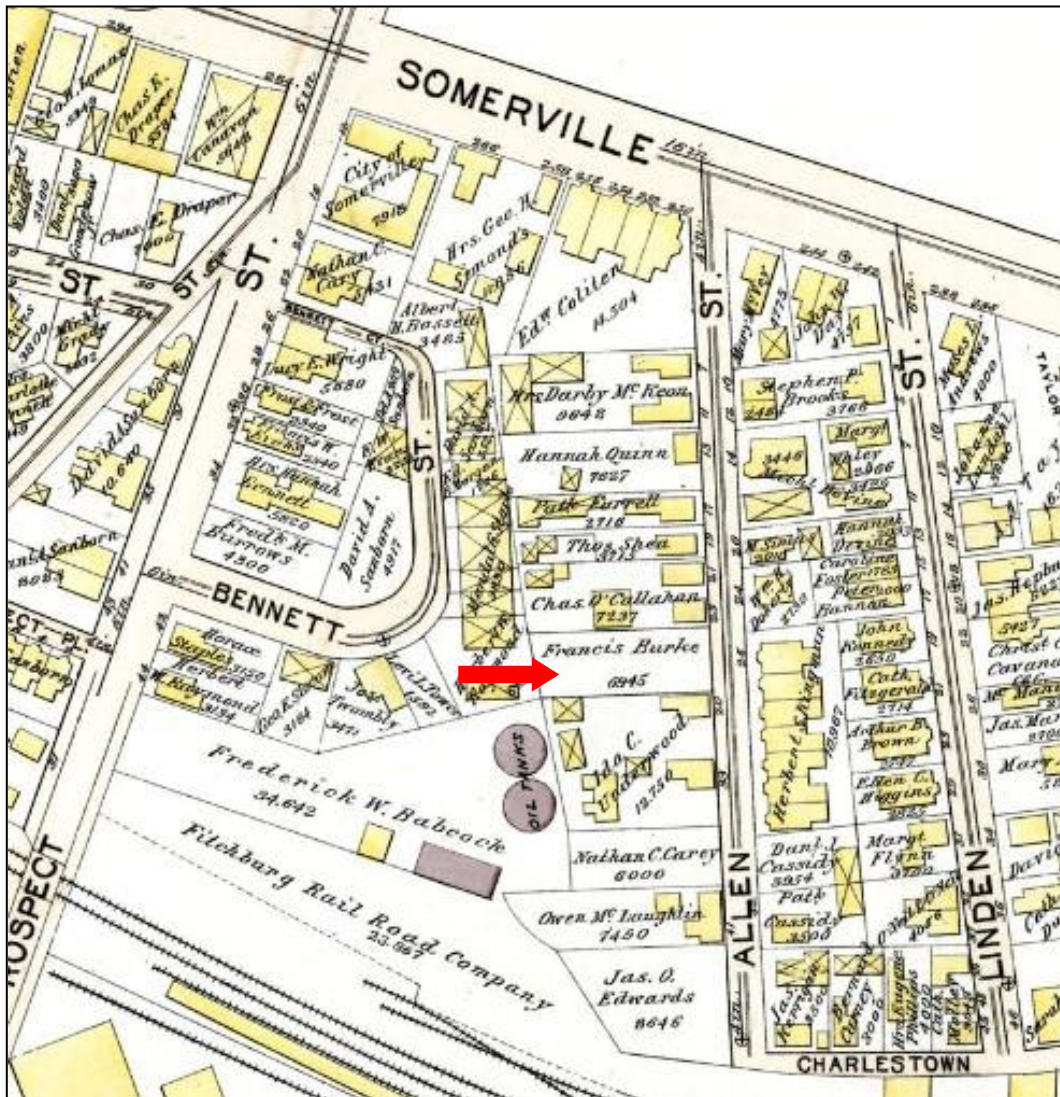
Interestingly, the 1888 Sanborn map shows the 27 Allen Street parcel devoid of any structures,



By 1895, 27Allen Street is owned by Francis Burke. Yet the property remains devoid of any buildings still. To-date, there is no indication as to why the barn/stables on the property were removed.

³ Individuals with names such as McDermott, Keon, Malloy, Kerrigan, Laughlin, are shown as landowners during these times.

Below: The 1895 Bromley Plate 7



The Somerville Assessor's database shows the extant structure at 27 Allen Street as built in 1890. However, as we all know, assessing databases are notoriously inaccurate. Based on the historic map evidence, it does not appear likely that the structure at 27 Allen Street was built in 1890, since the parcel was devoid of any, let alone residential structures as of 1895. Later maps have yet to be found available.

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 is post-1895.

- a. Location: It is presumed that the structure is in its original location
- b. Design: Two-story gable-fronted residential structure running “shotgun” down the lot. Open rear porches
- c. Materials:
 - Foundation: Brick
 - Windows: one-over-one double-hung vinyl or aluminum. Location of many window openings changed; window sizes changed.
 - Siding: vinyl.
 - Trim: vinyl.
 - Steps: undetermined.
 - Roof: asphalt shingles.
 - Rear open porches: wood/pressure-treated wood
- d. Alterations: It appears that the form and massing of the building may be the same as when originally constructed. However, other than the vinyl siding, trim, replacement windows and change of window locations, it is difficult to determine what this building originally looked like in terms of the details of its facades.

Evaluation of Integrity: The building likely retains integrity of form and massing.

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 27 Allen Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the structure at 27 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 27 Allen Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the structure at 27 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 27Allen 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.

27 Allen Street - Front Elevation#



27 Allen Street - Right Elevation



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27 Allen Street - Left Elevation#

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27 Allen Street - Rear Elevation#

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