



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

SARAH WHITE, MDS-HP  
ZONING PLANNER & PRESERVATION PLANNER

September 15, 2020  
Case: HPC.ALT 2020.22  
Site: 56 Bow Street

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**ALTERATION OF A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT PROPERTY**  
**STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 56 Bow Street

**Applicant Name:** Ashley Blum

**Owner Name:** same as applicant

**Petition:** *Remove second story front porch*

**HPC Hearing Date:** September 15, 2020



## **I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

- 1. Subject Property:** See the attached Form B for architectural descriptions and history of the property.
- 2. Proposal:** The Applicant proposes removing the second story open front porch. No details are provided regarding how the second-story porch door on the front façade would be addressed if the porch is to be removed.

## **II. FINDINGS**

The HPC must make findings based on the Historic District Ordinance (HDO) in compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40C, and associated Design Guidelines. The portion of the regulations that is applicable to the proposed alterations is discussed below.

### **A. REMOVE SECOND STORY FRONT PORCH**

Three portions of the Design Guidelines are applicable to this proposal and are noted below:

- **General Approach, item B**  
*Changes and additions to the property and its environment that have taken place over the course of time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected (LATER IMPORTANT FEATURES will be the term used hereafter to convey this concept).*
- **Section D. Porches, steps, trim and other exterior architectural elements**  
*Retain and repair porches and steps that are original or later important features, including such items as railings, balusters, columns, posts, brackets, roofs, ornamental ironwork and other important decorative items. If new pieces are needed, they should match as closely as possible the style, shape, scale and materials of the old. Avoid replacing wood posts and railings with metal ones, or wood porch decks with concrete.*
- **Section I. Removal of Later Additions and Alterations**
  - 1. Each property will be separately studied to determine if later additions and alterations can, or should be removed. It is not possible to provide a single general guideline.*
  - 2. Factors that will be considered include:*
    - a. compatibility with the original property's integrity in scale, materials and character;*
    - b. historic association with the property; and*
    - c. quality in the design and execution of the addition.*

**Preservation Planning Assessment**

The front entry porches appear to be later additions to this pre-1874 structure. Photographic evidence shows that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these porches, while remaining in their current location, have varied in overall detail but have remained consistent in size.

This 1923<sup>1</sup> image below of 56 Bow Street from Historic New England's collection shows the open double front porch but with thinner support columns and, rather than sporting balusters and top rail, this area is solid.



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<sup>1</sup> Date evident as written on photo negative and noted as such in Historic New England records.



This 1970s image to the left shows the change in the second story porch to being fully enclosed.

Current photos of the structure show that the porches have been changed yet again. The thinner support columns have been changed to single, thicker wrapped columns and the formerly enclosed second story porch has been opened, presenting an open baluster and top-bottom rail system. This received a Certificate of Appropriateness (CA) from the HPC as part of a larger project at this property in 2016.

In sum, the two-story front porches have been extant in varying styles but of the same size and in the same location for about 100 years if not longer. The HPC needs to consider if, according to **Section I. Removal of Later Additions and Alterations**, the porch meets any of criteria a, b, or c under this section.

Given the length of time that this architectural component has been extant on the building, the HPC must decide if this later architectural feature has become important to the integrity of this structure in its own right (**General Approach, item B**).

**Section D. Porches, steps, trim and other exterior architectural elements** states that these elements should be retained and repaired and restored, while the proposal is for complete removal of the second story porch.

Should the HPC determine that the second story porch may be removed the Commission must determine what should become of the second story door that leads to this porch, as the submitted plans offer no indication of how this area will be treated.

Preservation Planning contends that the door must be removed and a double-hung window installed in its place. This window would need to match the other two windows on the second story front façade in model, finish, and trims and be placed to provide the proper symmetry required of a three bay side entry hall gable-fronted house such as this. Clapboards will need to be pinched in and painted to match the rest of the façade.

In addition, should the HPC allow for the second story porch to be removed, the Commission should consider allowing the applicant to repair the existing first story porch in-kind (style and materials). In addition, the HPC will need to advise the applicant on the form the roof of the remaining first story porch should present: should it be flat? Slightly hipped? To what degree?

#### **HPC Determination:**

- The HPC must determine if the proposed project satisfies the applicable regulations (sections noted in the “FINDINGS” portion of this report.
- If the HPC allows for the second story porch to be removed, the HPC must provide specific conditions for treatment of the second story porch door, installation of windows and clapboarding, treatment of the roof of the remaining first story porch.
- The HPC must structure their motion to include their own specific findings on the proposed project.

### **III. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS**

Should the HPC decide to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness (CA), Preservation Planning suggests that the following conditions be added to any approvals.

**Depending on their determination, the HPC may need to add to this list of conditions during the meeting.**

1. All relevant permits shall be obtained from the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) prior to the start of work.
2. The applicant shall upload their Certificate of Appropriateness (CA) to ISD's permitting system.
3. Any changes made to this project shall be submitted in the form of a new application with accompanying documentation to Preservation Planning for review and approval by the HPC.
4. Work shall commence within one year of the date of approval for this Certificate. If work does not commence within one year, this Certificate shall expire. The applicant must then submit an application to the HPC requesting the re-issuance of the Certificate.
5. The Applicant shall contact Preservation Planning at [historic@somervillema.gov](mailto:historic@somervillema.gov) a minimum of 15 business days prior to final ISD sign-off so that Preservation Planning or their designee can confirm that the project was completed according to HPC approvals.

# Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

## Scanned Record Cover Page

<b>Inventory No:</b>	SMV.31
<b>Historic Name:</b>	Couch, Dr. - Arnold House
<b>Common Name:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>	56 Bow St
<b>City/Town:</b>	Somerville
<b>Village/Neighborhood:</b>	Prospect Hill
<b>Local No:</b>	
<b>Year Constructed:</b>	c 1874
<b>Architect(s):</b>	
<b>Architectural Style(s):</b>	No style
<b>Use(s):</b>	Nursing Home; Single Family Dwelling House
<b>Significance:</b>	Architecture; Health Medicine
<b>Area(s):</b>	SMV.A: Bow Street Historic District
<b>Designation(s):</b>	Nat'l Register District (03/26/1976); Local Historic District (03/11/1985)
<b>Building Materials(s):</b>	Wall: Asbestos Shingle; Wood



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](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)

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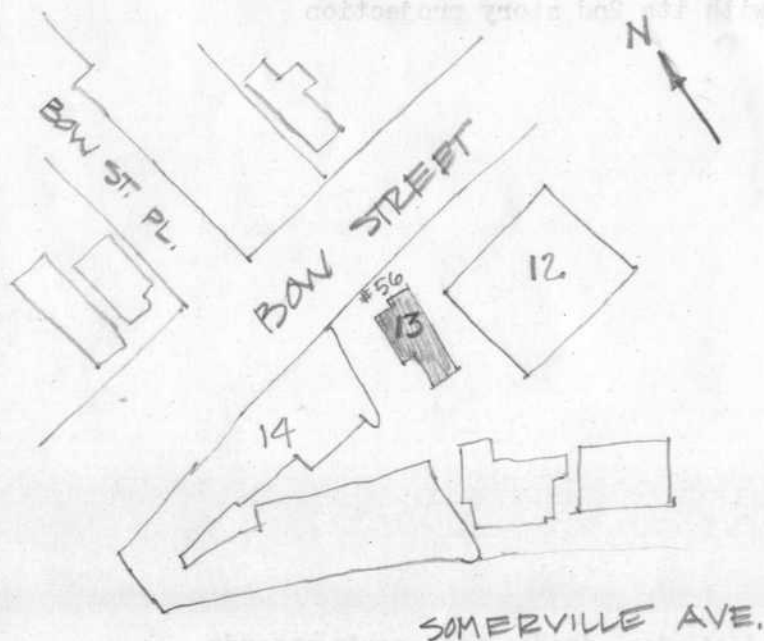


FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston



4. Map. Draw sketch of building location in relation to nearest cross streets and other buildings. Indicate north.



DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE  
USGS Quadrant \_\_\_\_\_

MHC Photo no. \_\_\_\_\_

RECEIVED  
JUL 1975

MASS. HIST. COMM.  
(over)

3/26/76 NR Bow Street H.D.

In Area no.

Form no.

(A)

31

1. Town Somerville

Address 56 Bow Street

Name Arnold Residence

Present use Residence

Present owner Mr. and Mrs. William D. Rafferty (Edith D.)

3. Description:

Date before 1874

Source 1874 map

Style worker's cottage. Italianate-Bracketed derivative

Architect unknown

Exterior wall fabric asbestos shingles  
orig.: clapboard

Outbuildings (describe) none

Other features roof  
side overhang, round gable window, side entry, front gable roof

Altered front entry added Date prob. 20th cent.

Moved \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

5. Lot size:

One acre or less X Over one acre \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate frontage 20' on Bow St.

Approximate distance of building from street  
15'

6. Recorded by Aron Faegre Lisette Ellis

Organization Somerville Historical Commission

Date 24 June 1975

7. Original owner (if known) Dr. Couch

Original use residence

Subsequent uses (if any) and dates rest home before present owner

8. Themes (check as many as applicable)

Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recreation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/>	Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Architectural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/>	Science/ invention	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Arts	<input type="checkbox"/>	Industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social/ humanitarian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/>	Military	<input type="checkbox"/>	Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	Political	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Community development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

9. Historical significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

#56 Bow Street is an example of a worker's cottage derived from the Italianate-Bracketed Manner. It is a simple side-hall front-gable cottage, devoid of embellishments at windows and corners, lacking even bracketed detail. This derivative style, with its "unembellished functionalism", made two concessions to current architectural fashion: the side overhang and pitch of roof, and the rounded gable window, both of which are Italianate details. This style was often found in worker's houses in the latter part of the 19th century. (The entire porch with its 2nd story projection is a later addition.) \*

10. Bibliography and/or references (such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.)

- \* Old Cambridge, Cambridge Historical Commission, M.I.T. Press Cambridge, Mass. 1973 p.100  
Hopkins, G.A., publisher, Atlas of the City of Somerville, 1874