



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

Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

KRISTENNA CHASE, *PRESERVATION PLANNER*
SARAH WHITE, *PLANNER & PRESERVATION PLANNER*

Case #: HPC 2018.072
Date: September 25, 2018

Recommendation: Preferably Preserved

PRESERVATION STAFF REPORT
for
Determination of Preferably Preserved

Site: 71 Bow Street
Historic Name: *Cities Service Refining Co. Fuel Station*
Case: HPC 2018.073
Applicant Name: Scott Zink
Owner Name: Rose G. Pisari
Date of Application: July 3, 2018
Recommendation:

c. 1925 structure: **Preferably Preserved**

Petition: Applicant seeks to demolish a single-story auto garage and one, multi-family Italianate period residential structure.



HPC Hearing Date: September 25, 2018

I. MEETING SUMMARY: *Determination of Significance*

On Tuesday, August 21, 2018, the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) voted unanimously to determine the c. 1925 Colonial-revival *Cities Service Refining Co. Fuel Station* structure to be historically 'Significant' because the building, per Section 2.17.B of the Demolition Review Ordinance 2003-05, is "at least 50 years old, and is / or has been determined by the Commission to be a significant building or structure.."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In addition to the information provided in the staff report regarding the historic significance of this property, further information pertaining to the history of this property is included at the end of this staff report. Additional information includes:

- MACRIS file on 71 Bow Street.

II. PREFERABLY PRESERVED

If the Commission determines that the demolition of the significant building or structure would be detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City, such building or structure shall be considered a preferably preserved building or structure. (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 4.2.d)

Staff finds that the structure should be preferably preserved based on the following criteria:

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.

Staff finds that the c.1925 structure at 71 Bow Street should be preferably preserved based on its importance to the architectural, economic, and social heritage of the City. This structure is one of the few remaining visual reminders of the early automobile history of the City, and one of the earlier gas stations constructed in Somerville. Gas station architecture during the early days of the automobile culture became a specialty in its own right, as explored in *The Gas Station in America*¹. The Colonial Revival style of the 71 Bow Street building, with its brick façade, arched front door, hip roof, and symmetrically-placed windows on the front façade, presents one of these early gas station designs.

The additional information found in the Form B on this building further underscores the importance of this structure to the City and to automotive history:

“The early 20th century introduced automobile traffic to Union Square, and vehicular circulation has significantly influenced the subsequent development of the area. The construction of Route 28 at the east end of the district linked the area to Cambridge and Medford. The Commercial District has several significant auto-related buildings, including an early gas station constructed in Somerville, the **Cities Service Refining Co. Fuel Station...**”



¹ Jakle, John A. & Sculle, Keith S. *The Gas Station in America*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore & London, 1994.

A determination regarding if the demolition of the subject building is detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City should consider the following:

How does this building or structure compose or reflect features which contribute to the heritage of the City?

- a) ***What is the remaining integrity of the structure? The National Park Service defines integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance.***

This c.1925 building retains an excellent amount of architectural integrity including the following:

- centered, arch-topped front door
- symmetrical window patterning across the front façade
- brick façade
- hip roof
- broken pediment under the frieze on the front façade

See attached MACRIS form for a summary of the historic architectural features of this structure.

- b) ***What is the level (local, state, national) of significance?***

Staff finds this structure to be important locally as it is one of the earliest gas station buildings constructed in the City. Its façade remains in an excellent state of preservation and retains a significant amount of original material and design.

The importance of this building to the community is further underscored in that it has been specifically called out in the Union Square Neighborhood Plan as being required to be preserved *in situ* or moved to another location in Union Square in order for any redevelopment to happen on this property.

Staff finds that this structure is important on a state and national level as well with regard to its place in the arc of gas station architecture (see earlier reference to publication on this subject).

- c) ***What is the visibility of the structure with regard to public interest (Section 2.17.B.ii) if demolition were to occur?***

- The c.1925 structure is clearly visible from Bow Street/

- d) ***What is the scarcity or frequency of this type of resource in the City?***

- No other gas station structures of this nature exist in the City.

Upon a consideration of the above criteria is the demolition of the subject building detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City?

Upon consideration of the information presented above, the information contained in the attached document, along with information provided in the staff report concerning determination of historic significance, Staff finds that the demolition of the c.1925 building at 71 Bow Street would be detrimental to the City.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the information provided and an assessment of the building, Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission finds the c.1925 structure at 71 Bow Street to be **PREFERABLY PRESERVED**.

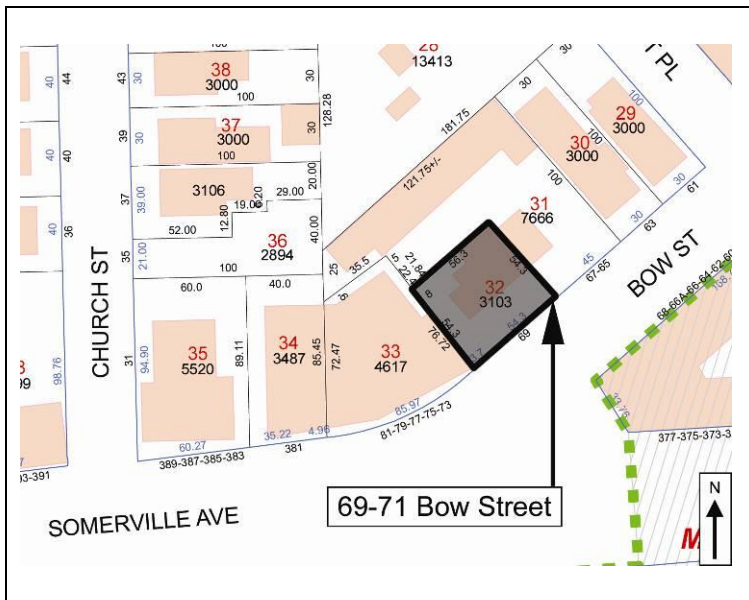
FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Photograph



Topographic or Assessor's Map



Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

63-C-32

Boston
North

SMV.G

SMV.776

Town Somerville

Place Union Square

Address 69-71 Bow Street

Historic Name Cities Service Refining Co. Fuel Station

Uses Present: Commercial

Original: Commercial

Date of Construction ca. 1925

Source City Directories

Style/Form Colonial Revival

Architect/Builder Unknown

Exterior Material

Foundation: Concrete

Wall/Trim: Painted brick

Roof: Wood shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures None

Major Alterations None

Condition Fair - Good

Moved ☒ no ☐ yes **Date**

Acreage 3,103 S.F.

Setting Edge of urban commercial area.

Recorded by Laura Kline, Melissa Antonelli, Quinn R. Stuart

Organization: PAL

Date June 2010

BUILDING FORM

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION X *see continuation sheet*

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE X *see continuation sheet*

Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES X *see continuation sheet*

 Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

69-71 Bow Street

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Cities Service Refining Co. Fuel Station at 69-71 Bow Street is a diminutive one-story brick Colonial Revival-style structure. It sits several feet back from the west side of Bow Street, near the intersection with Somerville Avenue, and faces southeast. The entire lot is paved and enclosed by a chain-link fence. A larger two-story concrete-block building with a clapboard façade, a flat roof, and an oversize truck garage bay abuts the building on the northeast. A long rectangular multi-bay garage is located to the northwest at the rear of the adjacent lot.

The ca. 1925 building has a concrete foundation, white-painted brick walls, and a slate hip roof with a square cupola. Its square footprint measures approximately 12 feet by 12 feet. The broken frieze beneath the slightly projecting eaves features a triglyph motif, and decorative brickwork is arranged to simulate raised panels above the windows and doors. The cupola is topped by a slate pyramidal roof and a weathervane.

The center entrance on the three-bay facade (southeast) elevation consists of a replacement metal rectangular door set within a simple wood surround with a fanlight infilled by a wood panel. Two-over-two double-hung wood-frame windows above louvered vents fill the rectangular openings on either side of the entrance. A similar window is located in the east bay of the southeast elevation, and a secondary entrance has replaced the original window opening in the west bay.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

History of Union Square Area (taken from MHC Inventory Form SMV.G)

Union Square is the oldest and largest commercial district in Somerville, and its growth is tied to the residential and commercial growth of the City. Since the 17th century, the district has been the site of commercial establishments serving travellers and tradespeople. Transportation improvements in the early part of the 19th century enabled further development in the area to support the rapidly growing population. Following the Civil War, local entrepreneurs established lucrative businesses in the Square and constructed numerous ambitious buildings. By the early 20th century, Union Square was a critical hub for automobile traffic, and it continued to develop commercially, adding auto-related enterprises to the mix. Today Union Square is one of two major commercial centers in Somerville, along with Davis Square, consisting primarily of locally owned restaurants, shops, and professional offices.

The three main streets that form Union Square—Somerville Avenue, Bow Street, and Washington Street—were originally 17th- and 18th-century trade routes used by farmers in Somerville and the surrounding area to transport products, mostly dairy and produce, to markets in Charlestown and Boston. The sandy soils deposited by the nearby Miller's and Mystic Rivers gave the area its first name, Sandpit Square. Charlestown Lane (later Milk Row and now Somerville Avenue) carried farm products across bridges or to ferries to Boston. Bow Street was originally built around a marsh that was later filled, and Somerville Avenue was extended over the former wetland (Zellie and Stott 1990:122). In addition to farming and dairying, early local industries included brickyards and quarrying sites near the marshes.

Commercial and residential development in and around Union Square grew with the expansion of the railroad service. In 1835, the Boston and Lowell Railroad opened the first passenger railroad station in Somerville on the south side of Washington Street. This station was joined by the Kent Street station of the Fitchburg Railroad in 1842. In 1845 horsecar service was established between Union Square and Harvard Square in Cambridge along Kirkland and Washington Streets. Additions to the streetcar line provided residents of the Union Square area with easy commuting service to Boston.

In 1842 Somerville, which was originally included in the 1630 Charlestown grant, became an independent town and its population began to increase steadily. Between 1842 and 1850, the population tripled to reach a total of 3,540 people. Growth continued throughout the 1850s and 1860s as the area's job opportunities attracted many immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Canada. Small factories and meat packing plants built alongside the railroads created new development centers.

Continuation sheet 1

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

SOMERVILLE

69-71 Bow Street

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As the population increased and industrial production grew, developers gradually filled in the Miller's River and covered it with vast railroad yards, roads, residential development, and industrial space. Manufacturing grew rapidly, with such enterprises as the American Tube Works Company, established in 1851 on Somerville Avenue west of Union Square (American Tube Works Company Complex), and the Union Glass Company, founded in 1854 between Webster and Prospect streets just south of the Square (not extant). Later nearby industries included wood-working shops, ice businesses, and carriage factories.

Union Square developed as a center of commerce for the numerous industries and residences surrounding the junction of the area's three major thoroughfares. The Robert A. Vinal House at 15 Union Square (SMV.690) is the sole survivor of the earliest residential-scale development in Union Square. Vinal, a grain dealer operating in the Square, built the ca. 1845 house that was later converted to commercial use. The building adjacent to it, constructed ca. 1850 (not extant), was known as The Oasis and served as a grocery store and local meeting place.

Vinal eventually became a leading figure in Somerville politics and owned and sold off for development many acres of land in the Prospect Hill neighborhood north of Union Square. In 1852, he built the first large multi-purpose building in the Square, Franklin Hall (not extant). The building stood on the current site of 92 Union Square and housed a post office, grain and grocery store, and meeting and entertainment hall. Somerville firemen erected a flagpole in the Square the following year, and subsequently the area was known as Liberty Pole Square. During the Civil War, the Square served as a recruitment center, thus acquiring its current name.

Following the Civil War, both Union and Davis Squares evolved into larger commercial centers of a rapidly growing community. In 1872, Somerville incorporated as a city, and between 1870 and 1915, its population increased six-fold. Several local entrepreneurs capitalized on the growing markets and established themselves in Union Square. In 1869, shoe dealer Phillip Eberle and three other local businessmen built the Masonic Block (later called Somerville Union Hall, not extant) at the prominent corner of Somerville Avenue and Washington Street. Like most of the subsequent blocks constructed nearby, the Masonic Block housed commercial space on the ground floor (in this case, an apothecary and Eberle's shoe shop) and a variety of professional offices, as well as meeting rooms for fraternal organizations on the upper floors. Eberle's success led to other development ventures in the Square, including the ambitious Eberle Building at 31-34 Union Square (SMV.762) (1884).

Local realtor Ira Hill financed the construction of several commercial structures in Union Square, including the Pythian Block and Hotel Warren (both built 1872 on the north side of the Square, not extant), the Hill Building at 38 Union Square (SMV.773) (1874), the Colson Block (1890, not extant), and the Stone Building at 61 Union Square (SMV.763) (1888). Hill also platted Summit Avenue on Prospect Hill into large lots intended for spacious homes. He often collaborated with builder-designer Thomas B. Blaikie from Nova Scotia. The construction of these buildings created a cohesive commercial district of high-style architecture incorporating red brick with granite sills and trim, dark bands of contrasting brick, and patterned slate roofs trimmed with ornamental iron work (Zellie and Stott 1990:121-122).

Many businesses that later branched out to other locations in the City, particularly local financial and institutional entities, initially located their primary offices in Union Square. The Somerville Co-operative Bank, chartered in 1880, the Somerville Savings Bank, incorporated in 1885, and the Somerville National Bank, established in 1892, all had central offices in the Stone Building at the end of the 19th century (Samuels 1897:446-451). Frederic W. Stone, the son of the carriage maker after whom the building was named, was a clerk and treasurer for the savings bank for 43 years, as well as a director of the national bank.

The Square's commercial buildings also housed meeting halls on the upper floors for the numerous social and fraternal organizations that flourished in the latter part of the 19th century. The influx of immigrants to the neighborhood increased the popularity of such groups, a tradition brought over from Europe. Organizations like the Masons and the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows (IOOF) constructed buildings and elaborate halls in many cities, and a single organization often had multiple chapters, or lodges, meeting in different parts of a city. The first Masonic lodge formed in Somerville met in various buildings in Union Square from about 1857 to 1888, including the Masonic Block (Samuels 1897:378-383). Several IOOF lodges met in the Odd Fellows Hall over the Hotel Warren and later in the Stone Building (Samuels 1897:385-393).

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The Square's concentration of commercial enterprises served the employees and residents of the factories and industries that developed along the rail lines and rivers east of the Square. At the turn of the 20th century, the Union Square area was also a central point for streetcar and rail transport serving the many people living in Somerville and commuting to jobs in Boston (Zellie and Stott 1990:122). Somerville began a period of great expansion around 1900, in both population and construction activities. The town's population grew from 40,152 in 1890 to 77,236 in 1910. Almost half of Somerville's residential construction occurred between 1890 and 1900. The building trades flourished, as evidenced by the large numbers of such industries listed in the City directories: building tradesmen, lumberyards, woodworking shops (coffins, picture frames, tables, museum cases, furniture), brass foundries, makers of architectural hardware, window shades, and tinware. Several Somerville investors built multi-unit rowhouses and apartment hotels in Union Square to accommodate the influx of residents. Generally these buildings included storefronts on the ground floor to produce additional income, like the Patrick Rafferty Block and Rowhouse at 318-322 and 318R Somerville Avenue (SMV.1341 and SMV.1342), both built ca. 1880; the Hannah J. Allen Building at 210 Washington Street (SMV.1337), built 1890; and the Edward J. Llewellyn Building at 216 Somerville Avenue (SMV.1338), built 1896.

Religious buildings serving the area around Union Square are primarily located outside the Commercial District on the periphery of the Square. However, in 1875, an Episcopal congregation raised money to construct Saint Thomas Episcopal Church at 300 Somerville Avenue (SMV.1340), only a few buildings away from the Square intersection. The Gothic Revival building has been greatly altered at the street level, but it has recently returned to its original use as a church, serving both the Hispanic and Haitian communities.

Beginning with the first Police Headquarters constructed in 1874 at 50 Bow Street (in the adjacent Bow Street Historic District), municipal activities in Somerville concentrated in and around the densely developed Union Square. Three major public buildings are located within the Union Square Commercial District: the Fire Station at 92 Union Square (SMV.67) (1903), the second Somerville Police Headquarters at 66-70 Union Square (SMV.764) (1932), and the Somerville Main Branch of the U.S. Post Office at 237 Washington Street (SMV.10) (NR listed, 1935-36).

The early 20th century introduced automobile traffic to Union Square, and vehicular circulation has significantly influenced the subsequent development of the area. The construction of Route 28 at the east end of the district linked the area to Cambridge and Medford. The Commercial District has several significant auto-related buildings, including an early gas station constructed in Somerville, the Cities Service Refining Co. Fuel Station at 69 Bow Street (SMV.776) (ca. 1925). Auto repair shops appeared as early as 1914 (the Union Square Garage at 267-271 Somerville Avenue, SMV.772) and continued to be built into the 1930s (Barnes & Walsh Co. at 224 Somerville Avenue, SMV.776). The 1927 Northern Artery Filling Station at 181 Somerville Avenue (SMV.771) marks the beginning of a proliferation in the establishment of independent gas stations, separate from private garage facilities, throughout the country and signifies how entrenched automobile use had become.

After the 1920s, building construction in Somerville slowed dramatically, the result of a general decrease in fortunes that preceded the Depression years. Business owners in the Union Square area began building smaller brick stores like the J. A. Bremner and Co. Building at 344-346 Somerville Avenue (SMV.769) (1910). Fires destroyed some of the earlier wood-frame buildings in the area, but newer development replaced most of the 19th-century buildings that are no longer extant. More modern lower structures replaced several prominent historic buildings in the Square, such as the Hurley Building at 20-29 Union Square (SMV.761) built in 1932 on the site of the Masonic Block. The Union Building at 16 Union Square (SMV.760), built in 1922, replaced a group of older domestic structures on the prime site with a small-scale commercial block. Development also extended down the main artery of Somerville Avenue, where the three-story commercial and apartment block at 218-222 Somerville Avenue (SMV.765) was constructed ca. 1926. The scarcities of the 1930s also prompted many owners of real estate in the Square to "lop off" the upper stories of taller buildings to reduce their property taxes, as occurred at the Hill Building (Rezoning Union Square 2009).

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The City's population expanded through 1930, and industrialization continued to increase through that date. Directories from 1930 list 145 manufacturing establishments in Somerville, 75% of which had been in existence in 1900. Meat processing remained the City's leading industry. The population declined through 1940, but peaked again during World War II, when many employees of the Ford Motors Plant, built in 1926 in what is now Assembly Square, lived in Somerville. Other industries located nearer to Union Square included the A&P Company food distribution complex on Fitchburg Street, the Fresh Pond Ice Company on Washington Street, and the James A. Kiley Wagon Shop at Linwood and Fitchburg Streets (all outside the district). The Ford plant closed in 1958, along with many of the larger meat packing businesses, and the City's population declined in the following years through 2000. At the end of the 20th century, telecommunications and high-tech industries appeared, bringing new job opportunities and a related influx of new residents. More recent changes within Union Square include the creation in the 1980s of a pedestrian plaza across the portion of Washington Street between the 1932 Police Headquarters and the 1903 Fire Station. In addition, the police and fire activities were relocated in the mid-1980s to a new public safety complex housed in a rehabilitated MBTA Bus Garage at 208-220 Washington Street (SMV.676) (1926).

History of 69-71 Bow Street

The Cities Service Refining Co. Fuel Station at 69-71 Bow Street, constructed ca. 1925, is an example of the wave of automobile-related construction that occurred in the Union Square area during the early part of the 20th century. Prior to the Civil War, development in the area remained concentrated around the intersection of Somerville Avenue and Washington Street. The 1852 Draper map shows very few buildings in the vicinity of Bow Street's intersection with Somerville Avenue. Beginning with the construction of the Masonic Block in 1869 at Union Square to the east (not extant), local businessmen transformed the area from a relatively busy mid-19th-century crossroads location to one of the primary commercial districts in the City. As the City's population and employment opportunities increased, development gradually spread along Somerville Avenue to the west of the Square. Between 1850 and 1890, the number of residents grew dramatically from 3,540 to 40,152.

The small lot at 69-71 Bow Street remained vacant through the 1890s as buildings sprung up around it. By 1895, the property, owned by Emma A. Fox or Cox, had two small buildings on it, housing a bakery at 71 Bow Street and a laundry at 69 Bow Street. A large feed building occupied the adjacent lot to the northeast, and several sheds and hen houses lined the rear of the property. By 1924, a large auto repair shop owned by the Metropolitan Motor Service Company replaced the feed building at 65 Bow Street, the laundry appears to have been demolished, and the bakery building was vacant. The next year, a new listing for 69 Bow Street appears in the City Directory under Thomas A. Dewire Jr., selling oil between the Motor Service Company and a vacant store, indicating a 1925 construction date for the current fuel station building at 69 Bow Street. The following year, the address is listed under Cities Service Refining Co. and there is no listing for the former shop building at 71 Bow Street. The 1933-34 Sanborn map shows the tiny filling station with two gas tanks in front of it, the large auto repair shop next door, and the 10-stall garage at the rear. By 1940, the oil company sold the filling station to Frank C. McNeill, who operated it through at least 1961 when it is listed in the City Directory as Frank C. MacNeill [sic] & Son. A vacant lot replaced the repair shop on the 1950 Sanborn map. By 1967, Paul's Garage occupied the building at 69 Bow Street, but by 1971 that business had moved to Cambridge. The larger building currently attached to the northeast side of the former filling station dates to ca. 1980 and houses an auto repair shop. The former filling station is currently used as an office for an auto glass company.

As automobile traffic along the major roadways in Somerville increased, auto repair garages and gas stations increased in number. Although automobile-related listings proliferated in Somerville City Directories from 1905 on, very few filling stations were individually listed until the late 1920s. Prior to the 1930s, gasoline service was generally supplied at the numerous storage garages that existed throughout the City, like the Metropolitan Motor Service Company at 65 Bow Street. In 1927 four filling stations are listed, and by 1929 the number had grown to fourteen. Oil entrepreneur Henry Latham Doherty established the Cities Service Company in 1910 as a supplier to public utilities that soon entered the oil refining business (Citgo Company History). The building at 69-71 Bow Street has been identified by some sources as a Jenney Gas Station, although no mention of Jenney is found at this address in the City Directories through 1940 (Zellie 1990:125). The Jenney Manufacturing Company, a major Boston-area supplier of auto oil and gasoline by 1920, merged with Cities Service ca. 1965, about the same time that the latter company instituted its now-famous Citgo branding.

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The Cities Service Refining Co. Fuel Station is a typical example of ca. 1920s filling station architecture in New England. After 1920, the major oil companies invested heavily in neighborhood “service stations”, typically located on prominent corner lots in and around central business districts. Before 1930, these stations were designed consciously to blend into the surrounding neighborhoods. Typical neighborhood stations resembled small houses, the most popular styles being the hip-roof cottage like the one at 69-71 Bow Street. Residential detached garages built during this era also commonly employed the small house form (Reed and Hardwicke 2002:29). Many of these buildings were prefabricated with a variety of architectural adornments such as pilasters or entablatures. Often companies used the appearance of their service stations to establish their brand identity, with identical stations matched to particular regions. New England oil companies like the Jenney Manufacturing Company and the Beacon Oil Company developed distinctive Colonial Revival cottage prototypes for their chains, which likely influenced the design of the Cities Service filling station on Bow Street (Jakle 1994:137-141).

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PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph 1.
View of southeast and southwest elevations looking north from the intersection of Bow Street and Somerville Avenue. The adjacent ca. 1980 building is on the right.



Photograph 2.
Detail of southeast and southwest elevations looking north from the intersection of Bow Street and Somerville Avenue.

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Photograph 3.

View of southeast and southwest elevations looking north from the intersection of Bow Street and Somerville Avenue, showing building's position on lot.