



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

GEORGE J. PROAKIS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

**STEP 2: DETERMINATION OF PREFERABLY PRESERVED
STAFF REPORT**

Site: 187 Central Street

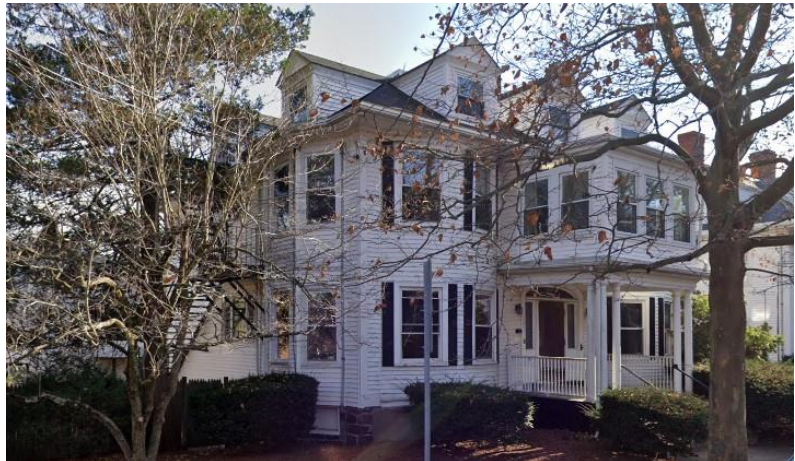
Case: HPC.DMO 2021.08

Applicant: Nora, LLC

Owner: same as applicant

Proposal: *Demolish principal structure.*

HPC Meeting Date: April 26, 2021



The purpose of a staff report is to provide the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) with additional information and professional assessments regarding properties that are proposed for demolition. These assessments are based on the criteria allowed for consideration by the HPC in accordance with the Demolition Review Ordinance (DRO). A Staff Report is not a determination/decision nor does it constitute authorization in any form.

I. SUMMARY OF MARCH 16, 2021 MEETING

At their regular public meeting on March 16, 2021, the HPC voted the structure at **187 Central Street** to be “Historically Significant”. Due to this determination, **187 Central Street** moved on to the second step in the demolition review process, which calls for the HPC to determine whether or not the building should be “Preferably Preserved”. A determination of “preferably preserved” does not permanently halt demolition of a structure, but the 12-month demolition delay will be invoked.

II. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Preservation Planning endeavors to provide as comprehensive a research effort as possible in preparation for hearings on Historic Significance. Please refer to such reports for each case as a refresher of the historical and architectural information uncovered and/or as a supplement to any additional historic or architectural information provided in a Preferably Preserved report. Regarding **187 Central Street**, please refer to the March 16, 2021 historic significance report for historical and architectural information.

III. FINDINGS

The HPC must make one of the following determinations and state their findings:

a. Preferably Preserved

For a determination of *preferably preserved*, the HPC must make the following finding:

- *That the demolition of the building at **187 Central Street** would be detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City.*

If the HPC makes the above finding in the affirmative or the negative, the HPC must state their reasons why they take either position.

b. Not Preferably Preserved

For a determination of *NOT preferably preserved*, the HPC must state their reasons why they take their position.

c. Not Preferably Preserved with Conditions

For a determination of *NOT preferably preserved with Conditions*, in addition to their findings, the HPC may add any or all of the following conditions to their determination:

- *That the applicant is required to provide one or more of the following to the Planning Division (Preservation Planning) prior to demolition:*

- 1. photographic documentation of the building to be demolished;*
- 2. architectural renderings of the building to be demolished;*
- 3. identification of materials for salvage of material; and/or,*
- 4. a plan for installation of historic or interpretive signage at or near the site.*

VI. VOTE

When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the structure at **187 Central Street** is or is not “preferably preserved” (adopt findings).

THE FOLLOWING REPORT FROM MARCH 16, 2021 IS PROVIDED AS A REVIEW OF
THE HISTORIC AND ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PROPERTY.



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

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT

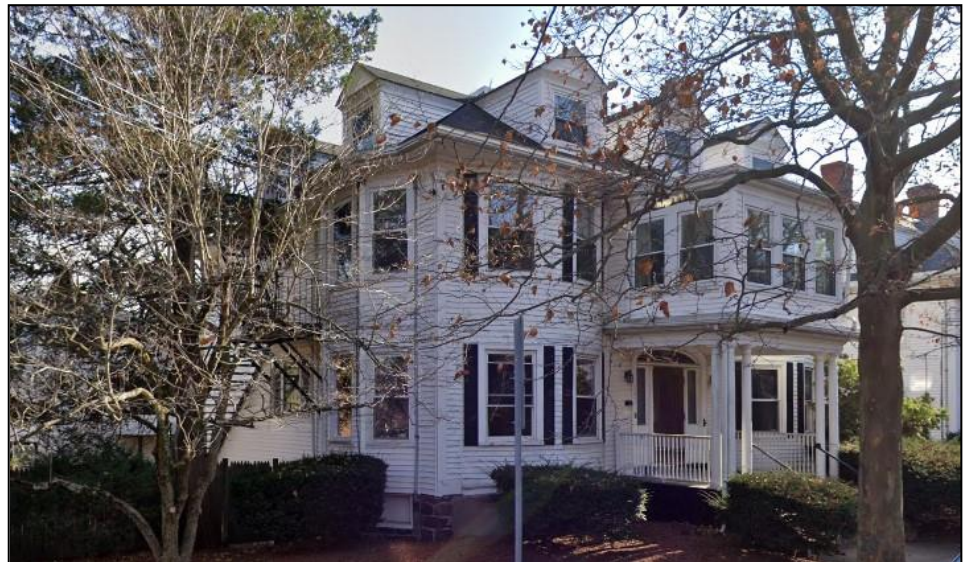
Site: 187 Central Street

Case: HPC.DMO 2021.08

Applicant: Nora, LLC
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HPC Meeting Date: March
16, 2021



Above: 187 Central Street, from left front

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I. IMAGES OF PROPERTY / AREA

Below: Aerial view of 187 Central and area. See below photo for building identification.



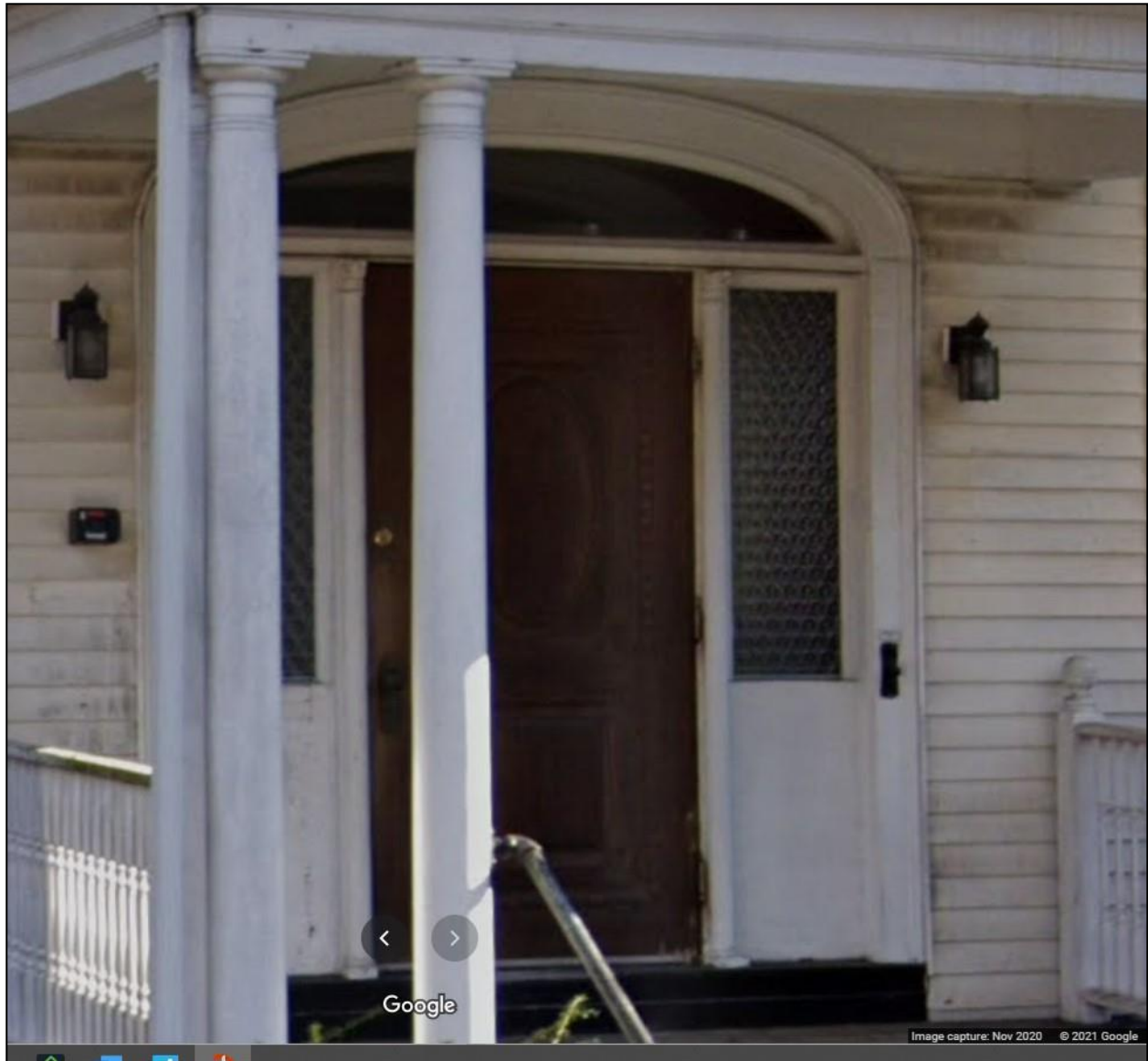
Below: 187 Central Street, from right front



Below: 187 Central Street, dormer caps



Below: 187 Central Street, front entry



Below: 187 Central Street, dormer caps

The images below are of the two right-abutting properties and are provided for comparison. Though built a few years apart from 187 Central, 183 Central (below, left) and 181 Central (below, right), are clearly of the Colonial Revival style. All three structures share similar massing, Colonial Revival details (rounded bays, grouped columns, dormered fronts, center entrances flanked by side lites). Specific detailing such as pilasters, swag motifs, and dentils vary among the houses. The three houses together present a strong Colonial Revival street wall.



183 Central Street



181 Central Street

III. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Historical Context: 187 Central Street is a Colonial Revival residential structure built c.1900. The subject property is one of a cluster of three Colonial Revival residences built between c.1890 and c.1900.

The Colonial Revival style enjoyed a lengthy period of popularity, beginning as early as 1880 and lasting until c.1950. The height of its popularity was roughly from 1920 until just after WWII (1945). This style, particularly in its earlier years, the period during which 187 Central was built, is characterized by a rich vocabulary and tended to present facades that were more detailed.

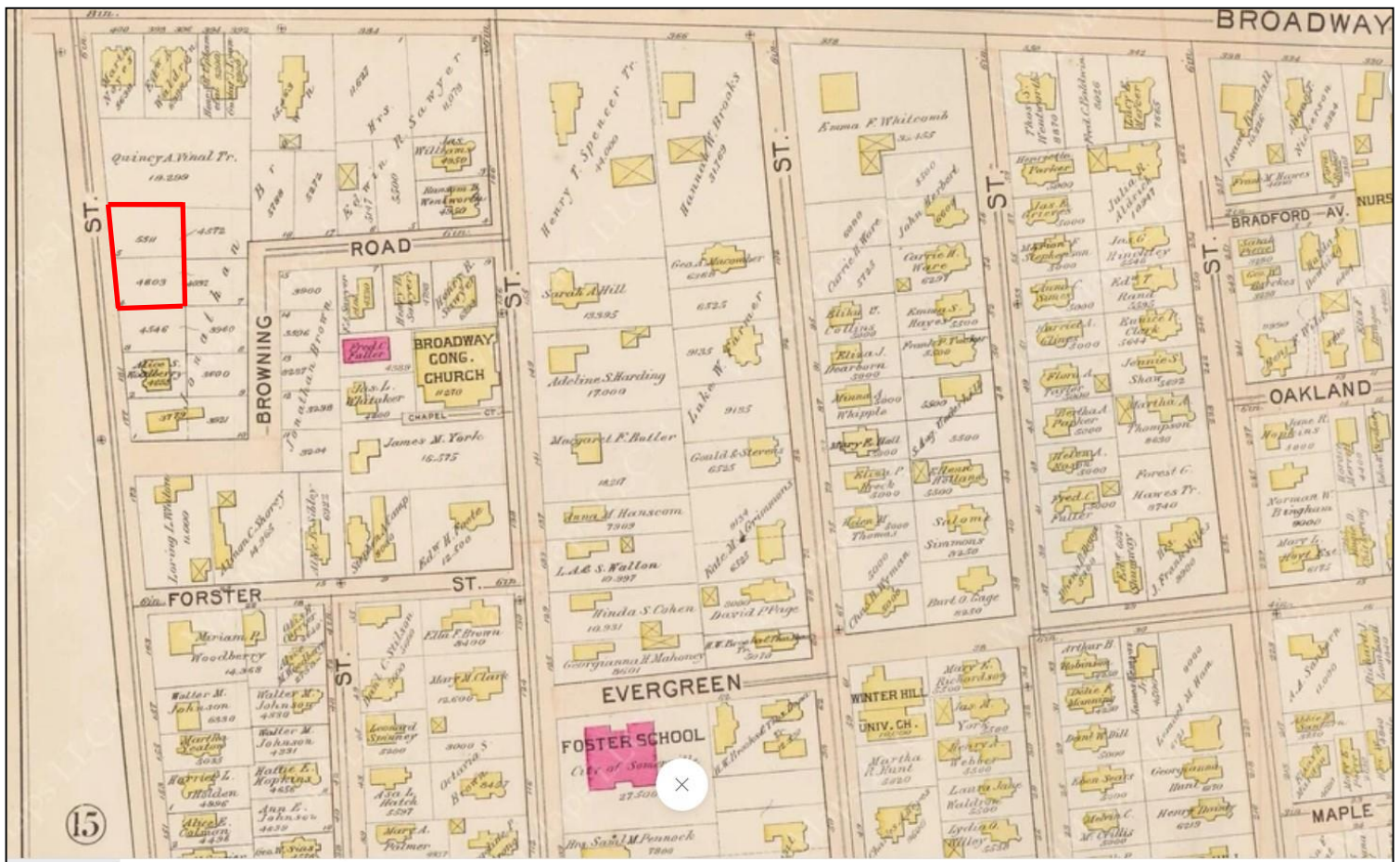
Overall, the Colonial Revival style takes myriad exterior elements from English and Dutch colonial buildings and blends them together. Original, period buildings did not incorporate such a vast multitude of architectural details into the exterior of one building. Exterior architectural details of the Colonial Revival building are often more exaggerated than in their original colonial-period form. The style is also known to incorporate post-colonial elements as well such as details from the Federal (c.1780-c.1820) and Greek Revival (c.1820-c.1860) periods.

Colonial Revival roof forms are typically gabled, hipped, or gambrel with residential buildings presenting center-hall entries. Exterior treatments would be wood clapboard, wood shingle, or brick. As opposed to their true colonial counterparts, windows in the Colonial Revival have few lites (typically one-over-one) as opposed to the original 12-over-12, 9-over-6, or (the later Federal and Greek Revival) 6-over-6.

Historic map research indicates that this portion of Central Street was late to develop. The 1895 Bromley map shows that by the time 181 Central Street had been constructed, the rest of the odd side of Central Street running toward Broadway remained unbuilt, though the land had been platted into building parcels.

In 1895, Jonathan Brown owned most of the land on this block of Central Street as well as the house at the corner of Central Street and Browning Road and numerous house lots on Browning Road itself. Today's 181 Central Street was owned by Alice S. Woodberry who likely purchased the land from Jonathan Brown. The relevant portion of the 1895 Bromley map is shown below with the land that now contains 187 Central Street outlined in red.

Below: Portion of the 1895 Bromley map, plate 02

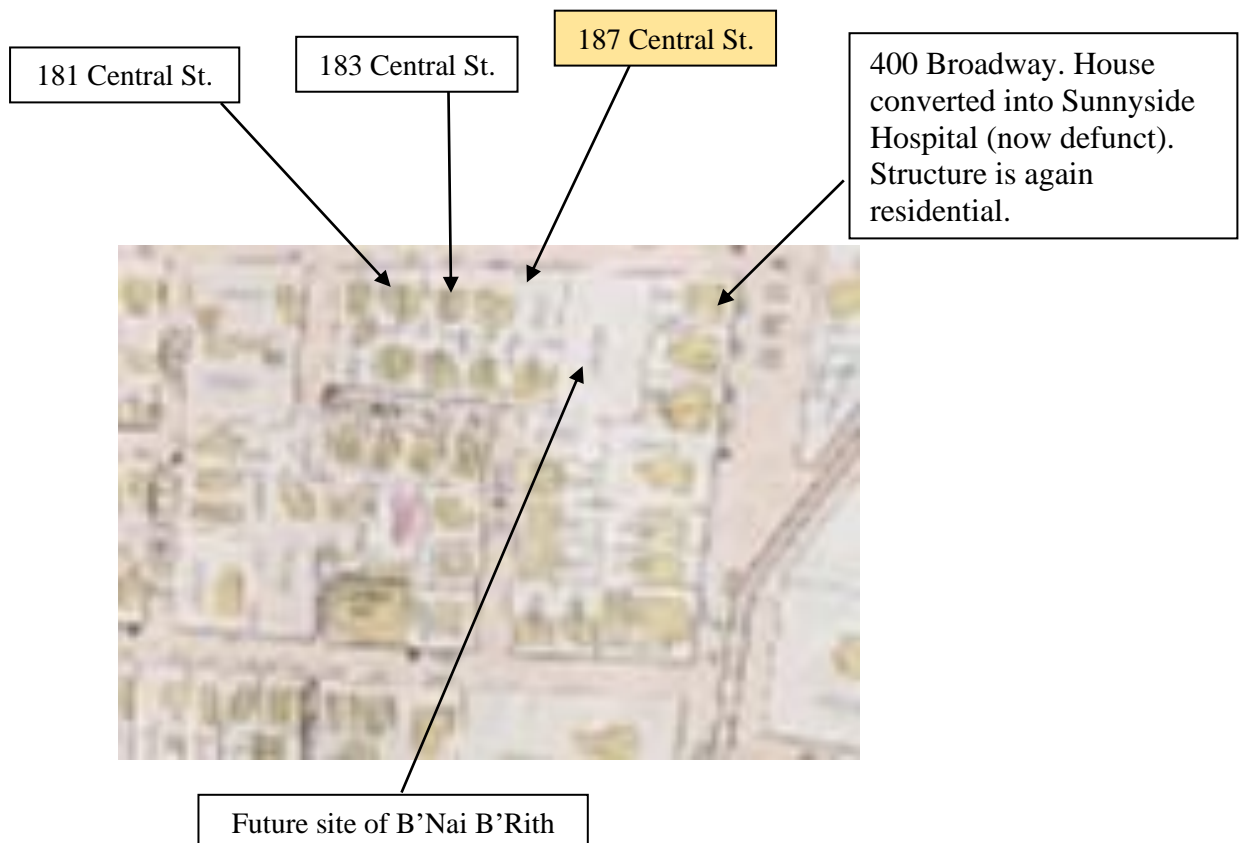


At some point after 1900, as evidenced by the 1900 Stadley map below, the land between 187 Central Street and the site that became the B'Nai B'Rith Synagogue was absorbed, in whole or in part, by 187 Central.

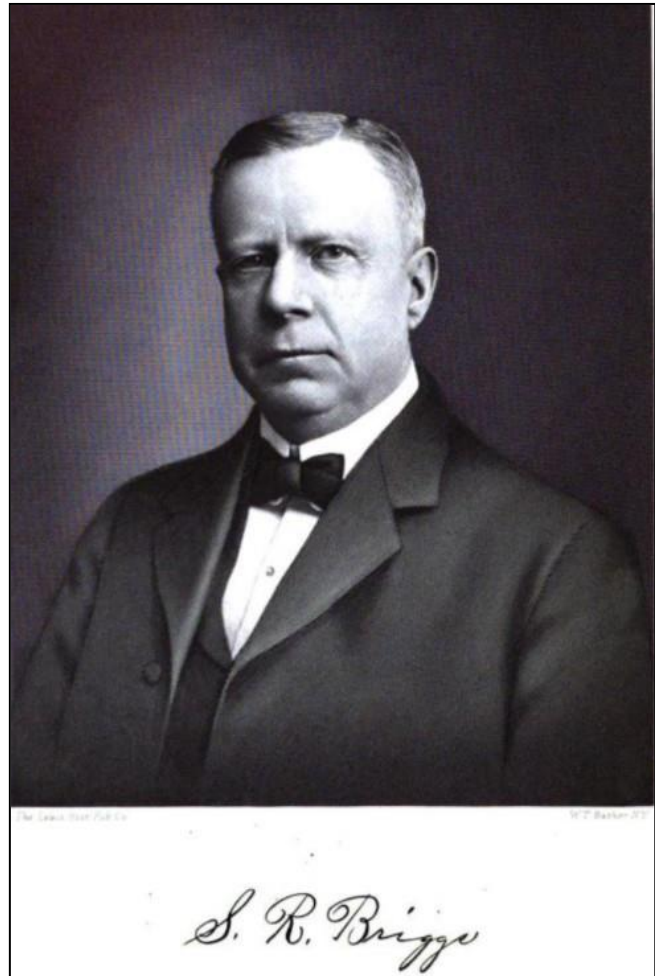
Below: Portion of the 1910 Stadley map



Below is a call-out of this portion of Central Street. Staff is aware of the poor quality of the enlarged image. However, the point is merely to illustrate that by 1900 all three of the Colonial Revival structures had been built and there remains additional land that was later absorbed, in whole or in part, by 187 Central Street.



Sylvester R. Briggs is the first owner of 187 Central Street uncovered in the historic research. Briggs came from a long line of successful tanners and dealers in animal hides in Freetown, MA where he was himself born. Though Briggs initially started out as a teacher, he eventually went into the family business, becoming a partner in the firm S. Briggs & Son with his father. Eventually the firm became known as S.R. Briggs & Co. with Sylvester remaining a partner in this hide and leather firm until 1891. From 1891 Briggs devoted his business career to banking and investments. The 1910 federal census, in fact, states his occupation as “broker”, referring to banking and investments.¹



The entry page from the 1910 federal census for numerous Central Street properties, including 187, is extremely faded in parts. A portion of the 1910 federal census with Briggs' entry appears below:

187	399	23	Briggs, S. Randall	head	M	W	46	WA	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts
			Porter, Lena Briggs	wife	F	W	37	MA	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts
			Porter, Randall E.	son	M	W	11	S	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts
			Porter, Katrine	daughter	F	W	4		Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts
			Briggs, Harriet L.	daughter	F	W	7	S	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts
			Julia O Neil	daughter	F	W	21	S	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts
			Carrie Child	daughter	F	W	12	S	Massachusetts	Massachusetts	Massachusetts

However, technology aids in the commercial genealogy program assist with such issues:

S Randall Briggs	Briggs, S. Randall	head
Lena Briggs Porter	Porter, Lena Briggs	wife
Randall E Porter	Porter, Randall E.	son
Katrine Porter	Porter, Katrine	daughter
Harriet L Briggs	Briggs, Harriet L.	daughter
Julia O Neil	Julia O Neil	daughter
Carrie Child	Carrie Child	daughter

¹ Cutler, William Richard, A.M. *Historic Homes and Places and Genealogical Memoirs Relating to the Families of Middlesex County, Massachusetts*. New York. 1905. p.1616-1617

This 1910 census shows that Sylvester Randall Briggs is the head of the household. By this time, his wife, Ellen P. Walker, had died, leaving him a widow. Living with Briggs (66) was one of his children, his daughter, Lena Briggs Porter (39) and her young children, Randall (11) and Katrine (4). The census states that Lena is married, but there is no mention of her husband living with them at 187 Central Street.

Briggs' unmarried sister, Harriet Briggs (71), also resided in the household as did two live-in servants, Julia O'Neil (27) who emigrated from Ireland, and Carrie Child (32) from Massachusetts. Harriet spent 10 years as a teacher and then worked as a cashier and bookkeeper for a religious organization and the family was heavily involved in the Unitarian Church.²

To be able to provide a home for so many family members and to have two live-in servants meant that Briggs was a man of means. Further evidence of this was the "grand tour" that his daughter and sister Harriet are recorded as having taken. A "grand tour" was an extended world tour taken by people of means during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A description of the tour was provided as follows:

They sailed from New York in the steamer "Grosser Hurfurst," of the North German Lloyd line, and visited Madeira, Gibraltar, Algiers, Malta, Athens, Constantinople, Smyrna and Ephesus, Beirut, Haifa and Mt. Carmel, taking an overland tri to Nazareth, Jaffa, Jerusalem, Jericho, the Jordan and Dead Sea, and returning visited Cairo, Naples and Rome.³

This is a trip that would have taken many months to complete. When contemplating the cost of the initial ship passage (and not in "steerage" class to be sure), the overland trips, accommodations, meals along with additional ship passage along the way, this was a very costly trip to make.

The same 1910 census provides further information: Briggs was a "broker" (recall the "banking and investments" in which he became involved after 1891), he was the owner of the house (as opposed to a renter) and he owned the home outright (it was free of a mortgage).

After Briggs' death, the trustees of his estate sold the property to Herbert F. and Dora Baker in 1921. Not much has been found of the Bakers in the historical record to-date save for their listing in the 1924 and 1925 City Directories for Central Street. In the 1925 directory he is listed as a manager (mgr.), but it is unclear in what industry he worked.

Below: 1924 City Directory listing for Central St.

*182	O'Neil James P
*183	Sanborn J Walter
*186	Sullivan John J
*187	Baker Herbert F
*188	Ellis Loran J
188	Fardy Stephen W
188	Toland James G
*192	Mills Alfred E phys
*192	Mills Richard A
194	Cassler Benjamin
*194	Oram Wm H
*196	Frizzell Sadie Mrs

Below: 1925 City Directory listing for Central St.

Baker Harry J (Vera M) shoe ctr h 368 Wash
Baker Harvey J clk 703 Bway res 33 Bay State av
Baker Hattie wid Elias L h 24 Sunset rd
Baker Herbert lab res 39 Mt Pleasant
Baker Herbert F (Ella L) bldr h 52 White
Baker Herbert F (Dora) mgr h 187 Central
Baker Hyman S hdw 703 Bway h at Bline
Baker Irving H (Jennie M) fore h 20 Grove
Baker Iva R sten res 97 Cedar
Baker Jacob (Bessie) h 33 Bay State av
Baker Jacob (Mary) shoe rpr h 65 Oak

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Below: 400 Broadway. This house served as the Sunnyside Hospital founded by Dr. Charles Dickerson of 187 Central Street. Originally his hospital was located on Main Street until he moved it across the street to 400 Broadway.



The 187 Central Street excerpt from the 1930 federal census appears below (using the zoom function will be necessary).

[illegible]

9

were a hospital laundress and hospital cook (presumably Sunnyside). In addition to the Dickermans, three other occupants were also immigrants: two from Canada and one from Scotland. All non-family members are listed as "lodgers"; they paid for their room. The time of the census, 1930, was also just at the start of the Great Depression. It was not uncommon for numerous people to live under one roof for economic purposes.

The 1940 census shows that the Dickermans have had a third child, son Allan (6 yrs). There is now a total of 16 people living at 187 Central Street. Most of the non-family members are full nurses working at a "private hospital", likely Sunnyside. In addition, there is a laborer and a maid working in a private home. Mrs. Dickerman is a nurse at Sunnyside Hospital where Dr. Dickerman is adactor.

It is worth noting that this census has an education component, asking the highest level of schooling each occupant has had. Dr. Dickerman completed college, his wife, high school. All of the nurses and the laborer completed through the 8th grade only.

Below: 1940 census entry for 187 Central Street (Zoom function required).

Year B.	Age	Sex	Race	Marital Status	Household Data	Name	Relation	Personal Description	Education	Place of Birth	Residence, April 1, 1906										Persons 14 Years Old and Over—Employment Status																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																												
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Dr. Dickerman was also a Master Mason-level member of the Masons Freedom Lodge in Somerville. A recount of a 1946 Lodge meeting at the home of Dr. Dickerman can be found here:
<http://www.masonicgenealogy.com/MediaWiki/index.php?title=Freedom2>

Lastly, from a general interest standpoint, the following online article from 2005 recounts locals' memories of the Dickermans and experiences at Sunnyside Hospital.

The Somerville News Blog

"Somerville's Most Widely Read Newspaper!" 699 Broadway, Somerville MA 02144 news@thesomervillenews.com

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March 02, 2005

Winter Hill's Sunnyside Hospital remembers

by Julia C. Reischel

A woman's question of where she was born was answered by a number of readers after this paper published her e-mail inquiry Feb. 2 on the front page.

It is likely that Elaine Shelton, a West Palm Beach, Fla., resident who grew up here, was born November 1941 at the Sunnyside Hospital at 400 Broadway.

Shelton, who could not find her birth certificate after last fall's devastating hurricanes caused water damage to her Florida house, turned to The Somerville News to figure out where she had been born.

Shelton spent her early childhood on Pearl St. and her mother, Anna May Hyland, still lives in Massachusetts. Hyland couldn't remember the name of the little hospital where she had given birth to her daughter.

Hyland did recall that Shelton was born in "a hospital which was a large home on a corner" and that "it was NOT the Somerville Hospital."

Information about the Sunnyside Hospital, which was a Winter Hill institution for the first part of the 20th century, matches Hyland's memories of the hospital where Shelton was born.

Founded by Dr. Charles Dickerman in 1920, the Sunnyside Hospital was originally a home for "elderly persons and invalids." According to a May 4, 1928 Somerville Journal article, Sunnyside Hospital was first located at 6 Main St. in Winter Hill.

Soon, Sunnyside became the neighborhood's main medical facility.

"It soon outgrew its quarters," the Journal said, "and in June 1925, the hospital was moved almost across the street to 400 Broadway, Winter Hill, where it is now located."

This location is at the corner of Broadway and Central St. in Winter Hill, a location that matches Hyland's memories of Shelton's birthplace. 400 Broadway was built in 1920 and was quite spacious, with 24 rooms and eight full bathrooms.

When Sunnyside Hospital moved in, it became a model medical institution. According to the Somerville Journal, it had "first-class equipment, including oil burner, electric refrigeration, gas incinerators, latest laundry machinery, and model delivery and operating rooms."

The move from Main St. to Broadway allowed the hospital to increase its bed capacity from 15 to 35. In 1928, Sunnyside was expanding rapidly. The Journal reported that it had just purchased the Baker estate at 187 Central Ave., which it planned to convert into a nurses' home that would be equipped with reception rooms, a music room, and a library where nurses could relax while off duty. Dr. Dickerman's wife, a Mrs. Minnie R. Dickerman, was the superintendent of the nurses.

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Shelton's inquiry in The Somerville News sparked many responses from Somerville natives who remembered the Sunnyside Hospital in Winter Hill.

"I had so many people email me," said Shelton.

Louis R. Franklin, an 81-year-old real estate broker who grew up on Heath St., both emailed and called Shelton to tell her his memories of Sunnyside.

"A lot of people were born in that house," Franklin said.

Franklin said that he was delivered on July 22, 1923 by Dr. Dickerman, whose name he remembered as Downey. Franklin was born at 132 Heath St. and lived there until 1933. He remembers the area as a working-class neighborhood.

"The only time a doctor saw you was when you were born," said Franklin, who remembered the Sunnyside hospital but never was treated there. "It was an apartment house, just 4-8 units, a small neighborhood thing."

Gilbert Ribeiro, the Constable of the City of Somerville, remembered the Sunnyside hospital from when he had his appendix out there in 1945. "It was a big gray three-decker," Ribeiro said. "It's still the same color. It was a hard place to find—it didn't even have a sign."

Ribeiro said that Dr. Dickerman came to his house on a Sunday when he was nine years old to investigate his high fever. The doctor diagnosed appendicitis, he said.

"They drove me right up there and operated on me that Sunday," said Gilbert. Though Shelton did not know the name of Sunnyside, she did know some of the details about her birth. She said the delivery cost about \$95, and that her father was short five dollars when it came time to pay the bill.

"Dr. Dickerman said, 'This is my baby until I get that \$5,'" said Shelton. "My mother wasn't too happy about that."

Today, 400 Broadway remains standing as an apartment building of 4 to 8 units. It was recently sold in October of 2004 and is now undergoing renovations.

Posted at 01:29 PM in [Julia Reischel](#), [News](#) | [Permalink](#)

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i too was born there*.. my mother;s dr was dr downey who had an office on winter hill somerville and dr sape??? who had an office on highland ave when we went back to somerville to visit relatives my mother pointed out dr downey's new office building we had gone to cataldo funeral home my mother also said that it was once fisher school of business?? *1942 we had moved to reading as my father built a house via GI loan

Posted by: joanne corbett | [August 12, 2009 at 11:46 AM](#)



This is very interesting to me as the referenced artical published in the Somerville Journal on May 4, 1928 is the very day that I was born in the Sunnyside Hospital. I have never visited my birthplace but this could materialize in the near future for nostalgic purposes only. Shortly after this time frame, the nation experianced the great depression and most births took place in people's homes due to monetary considerations, where my only sibling was born on May 28, 1932.

Posted by: Ken | [June 27, 2011 at 05:15 PM](#)



I just read an article written by Julia C. Reischel regarding the Sunnyside Hospital. The piece referenced an article written on May 4, 1928, which is the exact date that I was born in The Sunnyside Hospital and the physician was a Doctor Weeks. I would be interested in knowing more about Winter Hill and Doctor Weeks and his immediate family and if there is a dovetail to today's news. This was 83 years ago but it certainly has some interest to me and maybe others born at that time. Ken Lewis

Posted by: Ken Lewis | [June 29, 2011 at 12:13 PM](#)

The comments to this entry are closed.

IV. 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 begins between 1895 - 1900

- a. Location: The structure is in its original location.
- b. Design: Center-entry, 2 ½-story Colonial Revival with two-story half-round. Two-story polygonal bay also visible on right and left elevations. Hip roof with deep overhang. Three prominent single dormers on the front elevation. Left and right front dormers present gabled cap while middle dormer presents stylized scrolled broken pediment (the raking cornice is left open at the apex). Five additional gabled dormers distributed among the right, left, and rear rooflines.

Open, covered portico leads to entry door. Wood rails and turned balusters present at the left and right boundaries of the wood portico decking. Right and left three-pillar clusters with Doric capitals support the portico roof. Area atop portico roof is a later enclosure.

Center panel and glass entry door flanked by paneled and glass side lites. Elongated fan light with trim molding atop door. Half-round pilasters with detailed capitals are positioned between the lites and the entry door. There appears to be a period doorbell or entry bell pull to the right of the right side lite. Front knob appears period.

Dentil molding below roofline of portico. Molded trim on under same. Dentil molding under eave of main body.

Non-functioning, fixed shutters flank windows on front façade of main body only. No shutters on side elevations, second story enclosure or dormers.
- c. Materials: Clapboard siding, stone front steps with metal rails; asphalt shingling on roof; cut stone foundation that has been thickly parged with concrete in some locations; wood decking on front portico; appear to be wood rails and balusters flanking the front portico; wood door; glass side lites; wood pilasters with capital details flanking front door; glass fan light over front door; window material unknown; brick chimney stack; wood detailing (such as dentils, cornices, dormer caps). There appears to be some vinyl siding at least on the later enclosure atop the portico roof.
- d. Alterations: Glass in front entry side lites appears replaced; replacement windows but still in one-over-one period configuration; some windows on the right elevation have been closed up and clapboarded over; ribbon window installed on second story right

elevation; second story area above front entry has been enclosed to create interior space. Possible vinyl siding in some areas (see “materials” above).

Evaluation of Integrity: 187 Central Street retains integrity of location, original form and massing, Colonial Revival architectural style and architectural details.

V. 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.

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the structure at 187 Central Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the structure at 187 Central Street does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “i”.

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.

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the structure at 187 Central Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the structure at 187 Central Street does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “ii”.

VI. VOTE

When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the structure at 187 Central Street is or is not “historically significant”.