



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

STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE
STAFF REPORT



Site: 256 Elm Street

Case: HPC.DMO 2021.23

Applicant: Welch Liles

Owner: AP Davis Square Plaza, LLC

Legal Ad: *Demolish principal structure*

HPC Meeting Date: October 19, 2021

Top: Front elevation

Top, middle: Left elevation

Bottom, middle: Rear elevation

Bottom: Right elevation

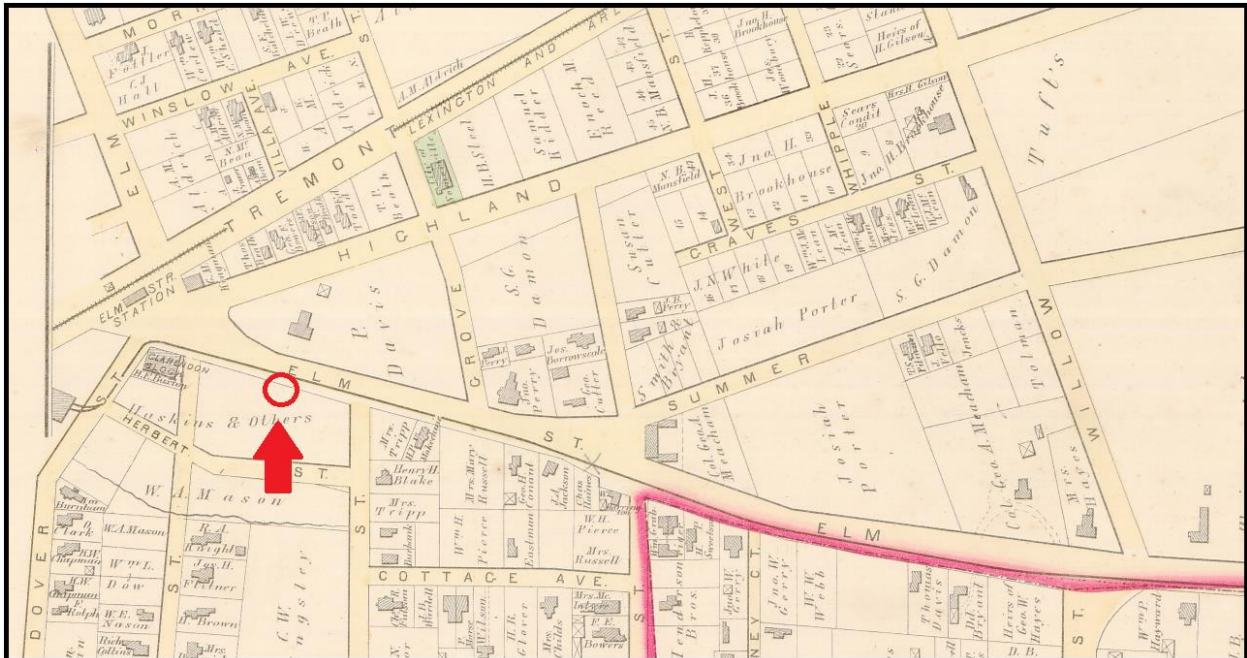


I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Historical Context: 256 Elm Street is a two-story brick commercial structure. Elm St is dominated by two- and three-story commercial structures predominantly built in the late 18th Century to early 19th Century.

Davis Square (at the intersection of Holland Street, Highland Avenue, Elm Street, College Avenue) grew rapidly as a residential and commercial area after the Civil War. Much of the site of present-day Davis Square was once a part of the ten-acre estate of Person Davis (1819-1894). Davis, a grain dealer with Davis and Taylor, moved to Somerville in 1850 and built a house on the intersection of Elm, Grove, and Morrison. A portion of Davis' land can be seen opposite of the future site of 256 Elm in the 1874 Hopkins Map.

In the 18th Century, before the western section of Somerville was developed only Elm Street, a continuation of Milk Row (now known as Somerville Avenue), ran near the location of present-day Davis Square. Elm connected to Medford and brought traders and farmers from the northern markets.



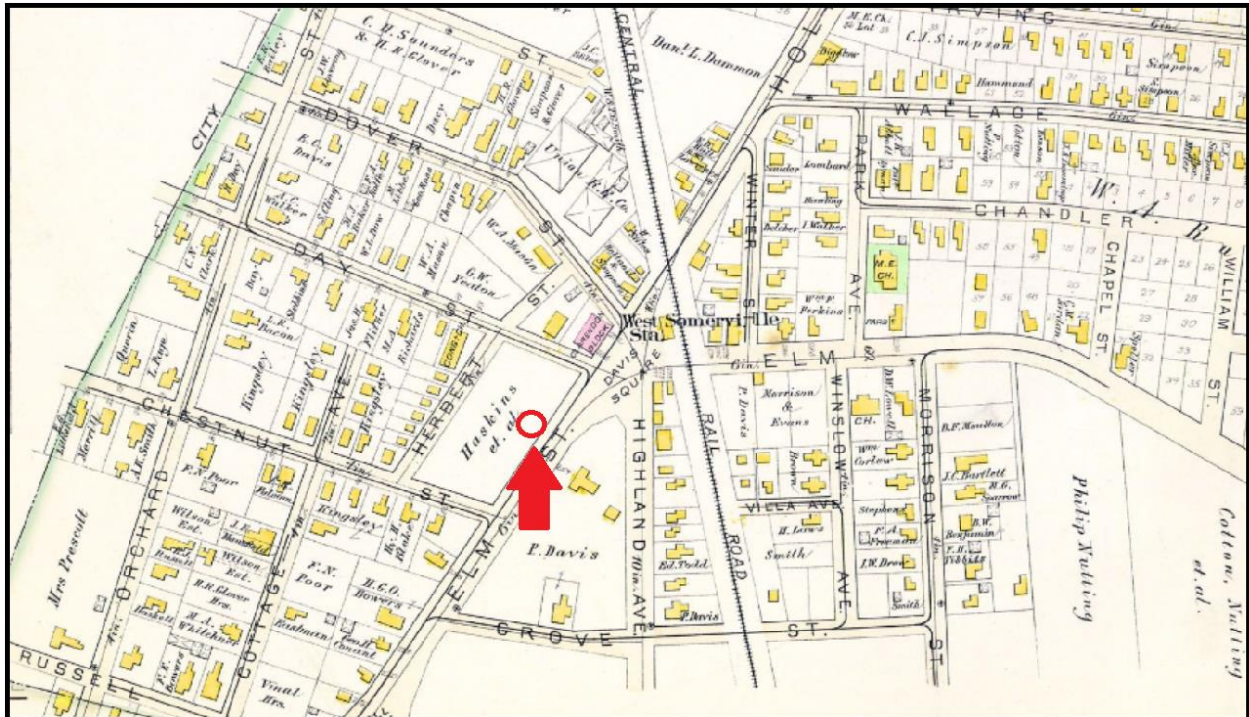
Above: 1874 Hopkins Map, Plates 44&45, indicating approximate location of 256 Elm Street

With the growth of Somerville's transportation between 1870 and 1880, its commercial industries expanded. In 1870, the Lexington and Arlington Branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad reached Davis Square, providing convenient transportation, and opening the area to full-scale development. Several industries subsequently moved to Davis Square. Electric streetcar service was introduced in 1889, bringing inexpensive transportation to the western sections of the city, and stimulating the growth of Davis Square. By 1880, a substantial collection of commercial buildings housed the area's many realtors, insurance agents, stores and shops.

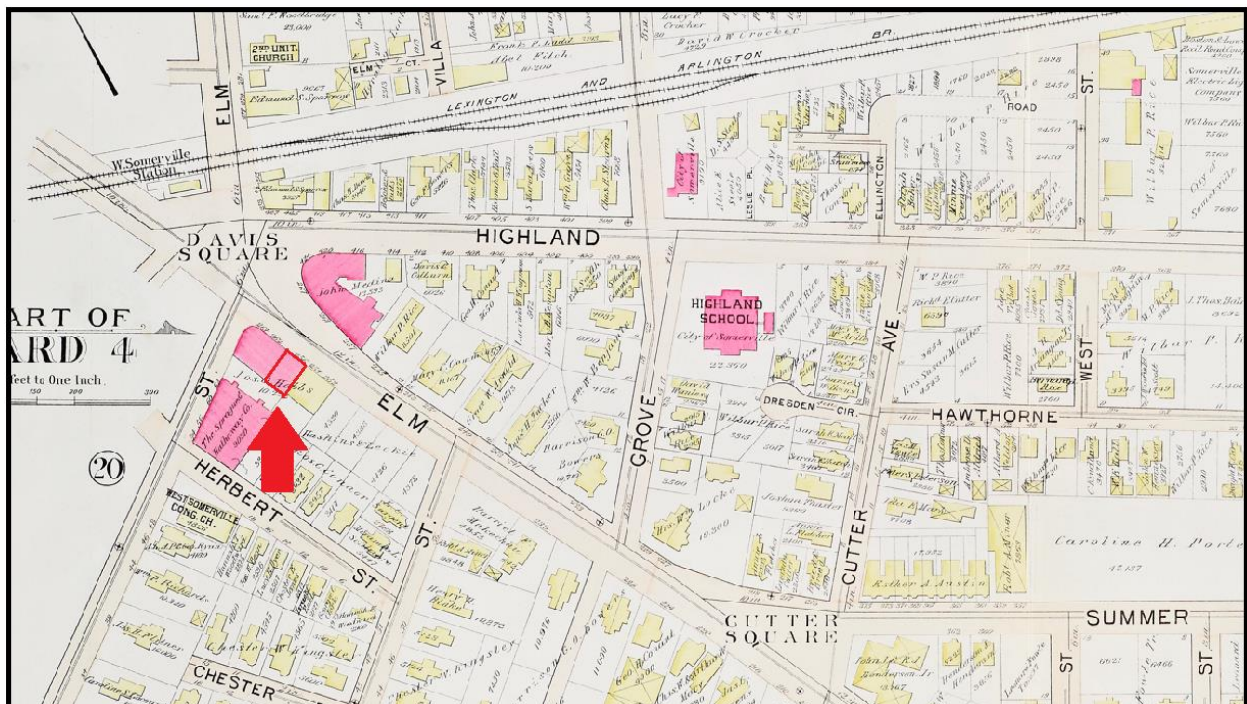
Davis Square became one of the largest retail and light manufacturing districts in Somerville and became recognized as the center of trade in the general area once known as West Somerville.

Between 1874 and 1888 the land that 256 Elm St will later occupy is owned by Haskins and Others, later referred to as Haskins et. al. No information has been discovered regarding this owner.

The 1884 Hopkins Map depicts the growth of residential development after the construction of the Lowell and Arlington Branch Railroad through Davis Square in 1870. The railroad, coupled with streetcars, made Somerville a desirable location for speculators and residents.

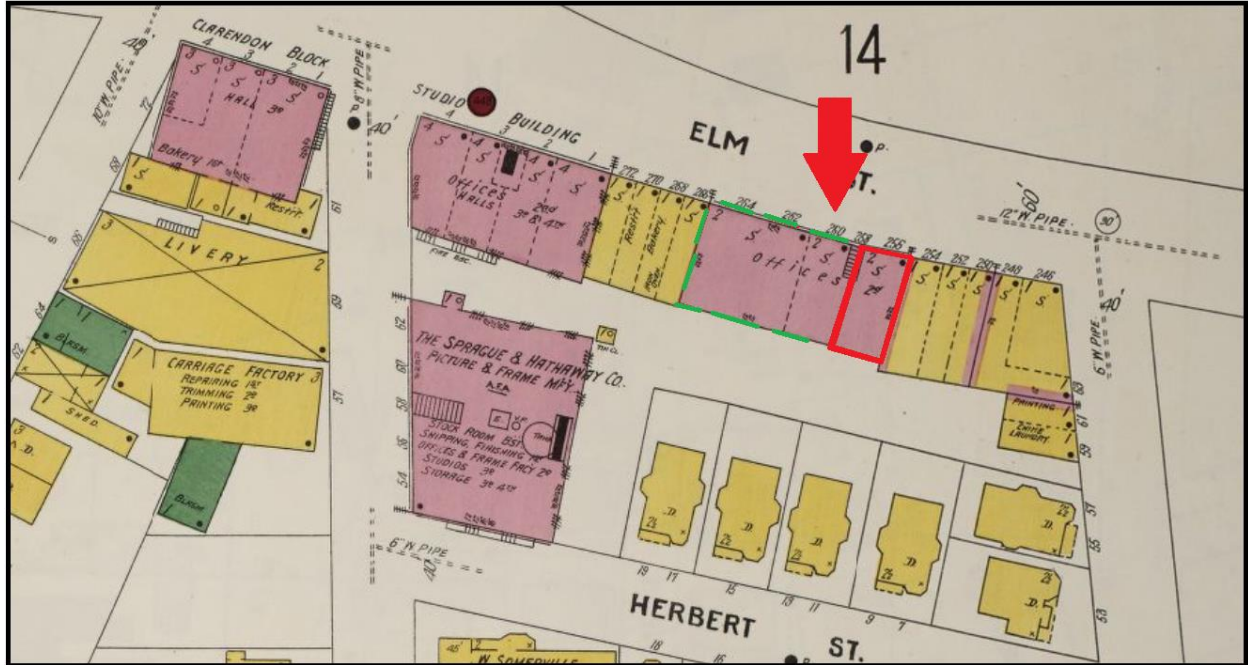


Above: 1884 Hopkins Map, Plate 14, indicating approximate location of 256 Elm Street



Above: 1895 Bromley Map, Plate 18, specifying location of 256 Elm Street

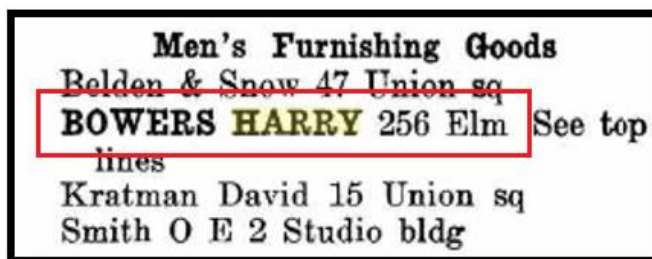
The 1895 Bromley Map (above) is where we first see the structure at 256 Elm Street constructed. The site is part of a block of brick structures along Elm Street containing numerous storefronts. Jos. O. Hobbs (Joseph O Hobbs) is the first listed owner of 256 Elm Street. From City Directories we know he lived at 34 Highland Ave, and owned a real estate company called Real Est. David Sq.



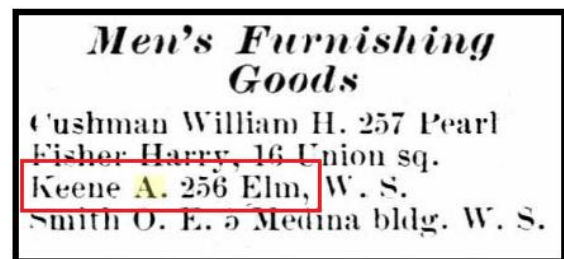
Above: 1900 Sanborn Map, Plate 12, specifying location of 256 Elm Street. The historic location is identified with solid red lines. Location of 256 Elm St today includes the historic parcel parcels denoted with green dashed lines.

The 1900 Sanborn Map shows details of what businesses were located along Elm Street, mainly listed as 'Offices'. Using the City Directories, we know that the primary business type for 256 Elm Street between 1898 and 1929 were businesses catering to men's clothing. Staff has only been able to discover three businesses associated with 256 Elm. These are listed below.

Name	Year(s) of Residency	Business Type
Bowers, Harry	1913-1914	Men's Outfitting
Keene, A	1898-1907	Men's Furnishing Goods
Gorin's (Gorin, Nehemiah)	1929	Dr Good's - Retail



Above: 1914 Somerville City Directory



Above: 1906 Somerville City Directory

The site under review today is listed under 256 Elm Street. Today this address encompasses several other shops under other addresses. It appears that the main address 256 Elm Street roughly includes the storefronts for 256 Elm through 264 Elm Street.

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. 256 Elm Street

The period of relevance for the structure starts c.1898-1930

- a. Location: It is likely that this structure is in its original location and was built on-site.
- b. Design: The structure is a flat roof, brick commercial building. The property contains multiple storefronts three open porches, one on each floor of the rear elevation.
 - Front Elevation
 - Symmetric double entryway doors flanked by first story bays with hood
 - Brick and concrete steps from landing to pavement
 - Fenestration consists of 14 fixed single windows on the second floor and large aluminum or steel commercial store front windows on the first floor.
 - Late 20th century glass storefronts separated by brick wall
 - Glass entryways setback from sidewalk
 - Right Elevation
 - Two stories towards Elm Street
 - One story in rear
 - Fenestration consists of three single pane square windows on second floor. On the first floor- eight large, half circle windows with doorways with surrounding glass panes to fill in the arch. Arched glass entryways and windows accented by brick arches.
 - Attached wood storage shed with door
 - Left Elevation
 - Fenestration consists of three glass panes separated by mullions.
 - Glass door
 - Rear Elevation
 - Fenestration consists of four single glass panes.

- Glass door with glass transom above

c. Materials:

- Foundation: Concrete foundation,
- Windows: Aluminum or steel
- Entry doors: modern. Glass
- Siding: Brick
- Roof: Flat

d. Alterations: Front elevation has largely been redesigned- likely in the 1970s or 1980s to include the second-floor window design and darker brick. Replacement windows and doors throughout. Arched windows on right elevation likely a later design.

e. Evaluation of Integrity of 256 Elm 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, but not design. Alterations have occurred to this structure which obscures original details and architectural design.

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 COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE at 256 Elm Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE at 256 Elm 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 COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE at 256 Elm Street meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE at 256 Elm 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 COMMERCIAL STRUCTURE at 256 Elm Street is or is not “historically significant”.