



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

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

Site: 115 Thurston Street

Case: HPC.DMO 2021.14

Applicant: 115 Thurston St., LLC c/o Elan Sassoon

Owner: 115 Thurston St., LLC c/o Elan Sassoon

Proposal: *Demolish principal structure.*

HPC Meeting Date: May 18, 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. CONCESSION OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The applicant for 115 Thurston Street has conceded that the subject property is historically significant. Pursuant to Section 7-28(c)(7) of the Demolition Review Ordinance allows for applicants to waive the determination of significance and reads "An applicant, when submitting the required documents for an initial determination per subsection (e)(2), may voluntarily select to waive initial determination. If the initial determination is waived, the building shall immediately be determined to be a significant building, without further action from the commission, and shall be scheduled for a final determination per subsection (f)(2) of this section." Due to this admission, 115 Thurston Street moves on to the second step in the demolition review process, which calls for the HPC to determine whether or not the buildings should be "Preferably Preserved". A determination of "preferably preserved" does not permanently halt demolition of a building.

II. BUILDING UNDER CONSIDERATION

115 Thurston Street is approximately the second parcel located on the South tercile of Thurston Street and Broadway Street, just referred to as “Broadway”, it was originally Broad Way and became “Broadway” over time. 115 Thurston is a flat roofed triple decker built between 1919 and 1924 in the Winter Hill area. The property consists of a multi-family dwelling structure, surrounded by multi-family residences and commercial buildings. The majority of structures on Thurston are flat roofed triple decker structures and front gabled detached houses.

Right: 115 Thurston Street



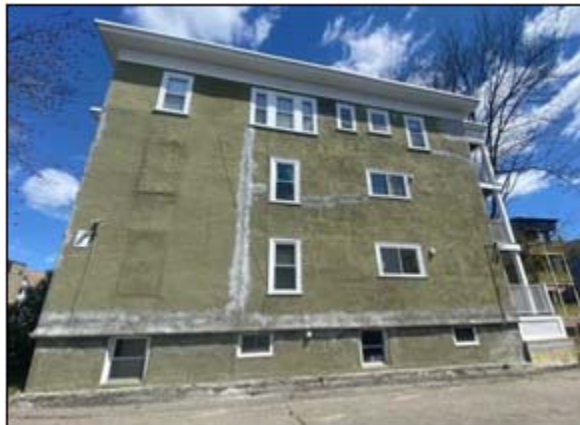
Right: Left Elevation



Right: Rear Elevation



Right: Right Elevation





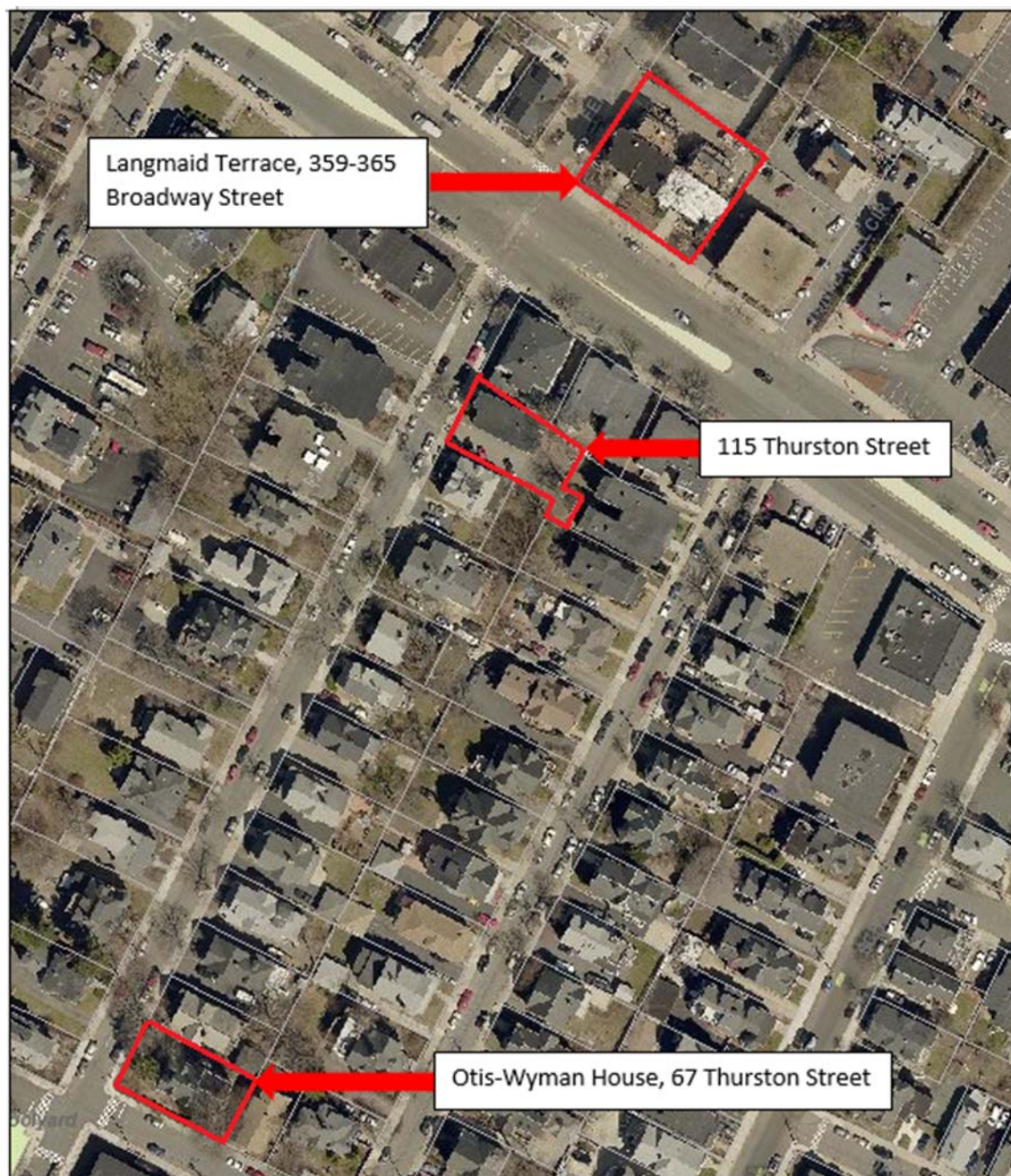
III. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Historical Context: The current structure at 115 Thurston Street is typical of late 19th century and early 20th century residential construction in Somerville. The late 19th Century saw a population increase that created a housing shortage. As such, the early 19th Century saw a construction boom of apartment houses. 115 Thurston St was built as part of this construction boom of multi-family structures. Prior to 1920, the structure known today as 115 Thurston had not been built. The current structure and land were originally part of a larger estate that is later subdivided in to multiple lots on the north end of the block. Bromley and Sanborn maps do not show the house or land subdivided to include this address and structure through 1905. Up to 1920 the address for the estate is 358 Broadway Street. Some of the below described key historic information about the property relates to the ownership of the land prior to the construction of the building itself.

Two national register structures are located along Broadway and Thurston in close proximity of 115 Thurston Street. The Otis-Wyman House is located at 67 Thurston Street, constructed in 1883. Langmaid Terrace, constructed in 1892-1893, is located across the street from 115 Thurston ST at 359-365 Broadway St. These two structures, taken with 115 Thurston Street assist in creating the physical

narrative for the structure at and history of the neighborhood. These buildings are a physical record of the large estates being built by wealthy businessmen that moved in to the area to build their estates closer to the growing commercial areas, and the subsequent growth of speculative properties developed with multi-family structures to support a booming population. In the history of 358 Broadway and the Otis-Wyman we can see the purchase of land by local businessmen who built estates close the commercial and transit thoroughfare of Broadway. The later subdivision and construction of 115 Thurston Street with the Langmaid Terrace building are evident of the population boom and speculative development occurring Somerville in the late 19th Century.



To reiterate, some of the below described key historic information about the property relates to the ownership of the land prior to the construction of the building itself.

Records show that John R. Poor, a Boston mustard and spice manufacturer of Stickney and Poor, bought the block containing what is now 115 Thurston Street from real estate speculator, Samuel Chamberlain by 1874.

John R. Poor, along with Rufus Stickney were the owners of Stickney and Poor Spice Company. The Stickney and Poor Company was originally created by Rufus Stickney's father. The company was located on the corner of Cambridge & Spice Street, in Sullivan Square. Stickney & Poor is the oldest spice milling company in the United States and is still operating¹. In 2015, it celebrated its 200th birthday.

Stickney purchased an estate close to Poor, as well as other vast real estate holdings on Winter Hill, just off Broadway. Stickney Avenue, between School and Marshall, is named after him. In 1883, John R Poor and his business partner, Rufus Stickney, entered a new plat. Here they created large lots intended for businessmen. These lots were largely bought by businessmen who built Queen Anne and Colonial Revival houses.

Right: 1874 Bromley Map.
John R Poor property
highlighted.

On this block, Poor built two residential structures with two outbuildings on a large acreage. These structures are not today's 115 Thurston St. The 1874 Bromley map of the area depicts John R. Poor owning all but 6 lots of land for the entirety of the block marked by Broadway Street to the north and Evergreen Avenue to the South, Thurston Street to the West and Dartmouth Street to the East. City directories and maps depict him as the owner of the land and two buildings at 358 Broadway Street between 1874 and 1881.



Per the City Directory for 1883, the property that now contains 115 Thurston was briefly owned by Herbert E. Dennett, a physician and inventor. Dennett holds several patents for various inventions including, a self-setting

¹ The Somerville Times, <https://www.thesomervilletimes.com/archives/34035>

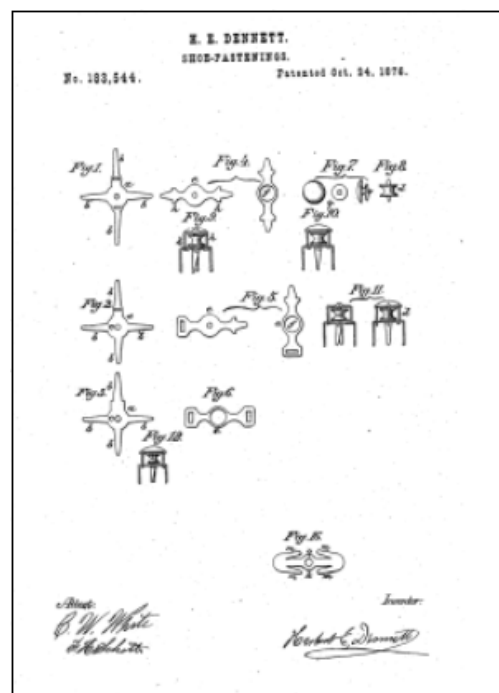
tamp, lacing hooks with guide rollers to ease with lacing boots, dental tools, and a dental compound for preventing pain.

Dennehy John, laborer, n. Hinckley
Dennehy Michael, h. Bonair
Dennett Alexander H. paper-hanger, h. 54 Concord av.
Dennett Herbert E. physician (583 Tremont, B.), h. 358 Broadway
Dennett Nathaniel, supt. Somerville Water Works, office Prospect, cor. Somerville av. h. 2 Emerson
Dennett Robert O. h. 54 Concord av.
Dennett Theodore D. machinist Union Glass Co., Web-

Above: 1883 Somerville City Directory listing for Herbert E. Dennett

Dengler, Valentine. (See Connell and Dengler.)					
Deniaud Patrice. (See Dauché and Deniaud.)					
Denis, Arthur. (See Quinet and Denis.)					
Denison, Elias B. (See Brown, Denison, and Brown.)					
Denison, W. O., et al. (See Magruder, George C. W., assignor.)					
Deen, Clayton, Philadelphia, Pa. Warp-linking machine.	288,032	Nov. 6	306	87	25 560
Dennett Harvesting Machine Company. (See Bullock, Joseph P., assignor.)					
Dennett Harvesting Machine Company. (See Young, Charles M., assignor.)					
Dennett, Herbert E., Somerville, Mass. Self setting tamp for blasting	282,061	July 31	2172	596	24 402
Dennis, Harner, Brooklyn, assignor to himself and A. Webster, New York, N. Y. Gas engine	290,632	Dec. 18	1509	439	25 1182
Denney, Samuel L., Strasburg, assignor of one-fourth to I. L. Landis, Lancaster, Pa. Car-doot fastener	281,240	July 17	1135	312	24 214
Denney, William H., Lancaster, Pa. Machine for milling links for engines	271,431	Jan. 30	1995	{ 575 } { 576 }	{ 23 } { 400 }
Dennie, Benjamin. (See Barrett, James, assignor.)					
Dennie, Charles H. (See Kauffer and Serson, assignors.)					
Dennis Cash Carrier Company. (See Coram, George B. and J. C., assignors.)					
Dennis Cash Carrier Company. (See Thussell, Earl A., assignor.)					
Dennis, Charles A. (See Dennis, Theodore A., assignor.)					
Dennis, Clara E. (See Dennis, James W., assignor.)					
Dennis, Henry J., Hastings, Minn. Step-ladder	273,474	Mar. 6	304	82	23 885
Dennis, J. Nelson, et al. (See Dennis, John, assignor.)					
Dennis, James W., assignor to C. E. Dennis, Cincinnati, Ohio. Electro-medical appliance	285,977	Oct. 2	247	70	25 47
Dennis, John, et al. (See Coram, John C., assignor.)					
Dennis, John, assignor to himself, J. C. and G. B. Coram and J. N. Dennis, Lowell, Mass.					

Above: US Patent for Self-Setting Tamp by Herbert E. Dennett



Right: US Patent US183544A by Herbert E. Dennett

By 1884, the Bromley map shows Charles Powers as the owner of 358 Broadway (the land that becomes 115 Thurston St.). The map also shows that a few lots have had residential structures built upon them and all of the land has been platted for building lots. Also, Dartmouth Street has been laid out. Charles Powers was a grain-dealer, owner of Powers & Company, and Treasurer for the East Somerville Baptist Church².



Above: 1884 Bromley Map. Charles Powers property highlighted

The newly platted lots are listed as part of the Rufus Stickney Trustee. Staff was unable to find information on if this Trustee was still associated with John R. Poor and a result of the plat they had created. This Trustee owns most of the four blocks between Thurston and School Streets, and Medford Street and Broadway.

In 1902 the Somerville City Directory state Irvine A. Whitcomb as owning and living at the property alone. Irvine A. Whitcomb was the Co-Owner and Treasurer of Raymond & Whitcomb, a travel company which managed railroad excursions in the United States, Canada, and Europe with offices at 296 Washington³. Irvine Whitcomb was also an important community figure, donating significantly to local churches within Somerville.

Below: 1902 Somerville City Directory listing for Irvine A. Whitcomb

- “ George H. clerk, F. R. R. div. h. 51 Hancock, W. S.
- “ Harriet A. widow of Oliver, h. 77 Munroe
- “ Irvine A. treas. and mngr. 296 Wash. B. h. 358 B'way
- “ Ralph B. taxidermist's appren. B. b. 54 Paulina, W. S.
- “ Seth H. carpet cleaner, and nurse, h. 59 Summer
- “ Wilbur A. clerk, B. h. 360 Highland ave. W. S.

² Somerville, Past and Present, p. 282

³ Historic Homes and Places and Genealogical and Personal Memoirs, Volume 3, p. 1,329

Right: Residence of
Irvine A. Whitcomb,
358 Broadway

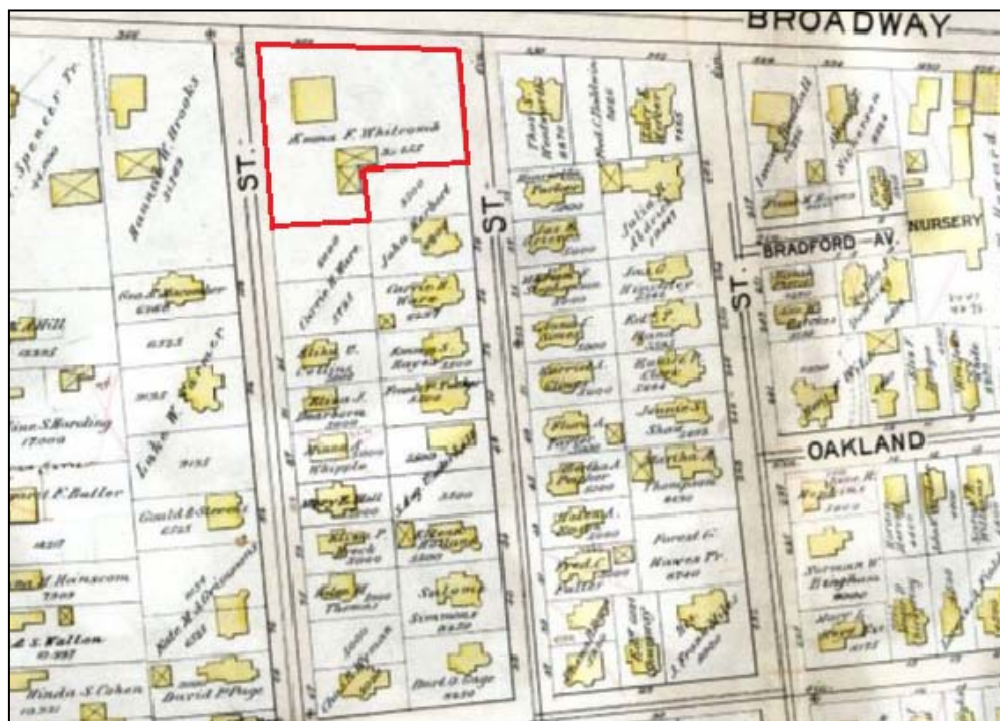


From the 1895 Bromley Map, it appears that the Whitcombs demolish the two structures built by John R Poor and construct two larger structures in the center of the lot facing Broadway. Above is an image of the two structures of the Whitcomb estate at 358 Broadway. This house is still on the same lot. It has been moved forward on the lot. It sits on a new foundation, and has been heavily altered. But, you can tell from the deep cove and the heavy bracketing, that it matches that of this earlier photo.

umer	see Whittaker
lway	WHITCHER Chauncey G asst eng State House B h 167 Lowell
1	Isabelle wid Charles b 167 Lo- well
s 14	WHITCOMB Emma F wid Irvine A h 358 Broadway
lion	Fred E ex mess B h 24 1/2 Lin- den av
shall	Harold L clk b 147 Albion
h 36	Harriet A wid Oliver W b 77 Munroe
s 47	Harvey E architect h 19 Crocker John elec helper h 25 Mystic av

What is interesting is that the 1895 Bromley Map states that Irvine's wife, Emma, is the owner of the estate. Further confusing the timeline of ownership and residency at the parcel is that Emma does not become a listed resident of the estate until 1908 after Irvine's death in 1907.

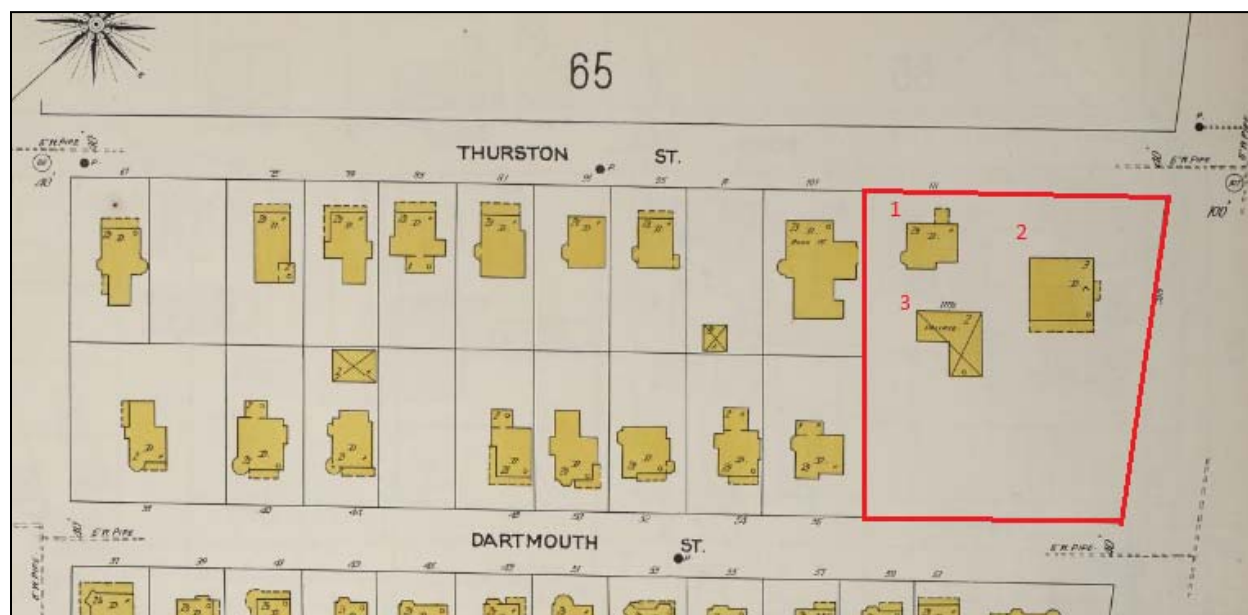
Left: 1908 Somerville City Directory listing for Emma F.
Whitcomb



Above: 1895 Bromley Map. Emma F. Whitcomb property highlighted

In 1900, the Sanborn and Bromley maps show that a third structure was built on the lot in what is currently 111 Thurston St. Based on the location and shape it is likely that this is the current structure at 111 Thurston Street. The 1900 Sanborn map for 358 Broadway Street states one of the three structures as a private residence and the other two buildings as dwelling units, each with 2.5 floors. These two dwelling structures appear to have been apartments starting under Emily Whitcomb's ownership. None of the structures on the lot are located at where the current structure of 115 Thurston Street will later occupy.

Below: 1900 Sanborn Map. 358 Broadway showing existence of a third structure



Somerville City Directories for 1919 then state Frank P Bruce owns the property. During this time the directories list as tenants for the property:

- William & Hattie C McCollon. Profession: Carpenter
- Jane Atkinson, widow of the Reverend Thomas Atkinson, who preached at the Union Square Presbyterian Church in 1894
- Ethel E & Arthur H Allavy. Profession: foreman.

In 1924, the City Directory begin to list 115 Thurston Street as an address separate from 358 Broadway. From this change we can determine that between 1919 and 1924 that 358 Broadway Street is subdivided and the current structure built.

By the late 1920s through the 1930s the City Directories have listed multiple homeowners and residents at 115 Thurston. The ownership and relation of these individuals to the structure and each other is unclear. Below is a complete table with all listed occupants for 115 Thurston St between 1924 and 1929.

Name	Year(s) of Residency	Occupation
Boardman, Joseph	1927	Salesman
Boardman, Susan	1927	
Caradonna, Helen R	1929	
Caradonna, Joseph	1929	Agent
Coyle, George N	1929	Coal Vender
Coyle, Mabel L	1929	
Dwelley, Anna	1924	Stenographer
Dwelley, Celia	1924	Stenographer
Gallant Rose	1924-1925	Stenographer
Hart, Catherine	1925	
Hart, Crawford	1925	Instructor
Kaye, Beatrice	1929	
Kaye, Kenneth	1929	Auto-Mechanic
Kaye, Myron	1929	Foreman
Manning, Francis E	1927	Dressmaker
Manning, Morton	1927	Carpenter
McKenna, Harriet	1927	Dressmaker
McLaughlin, Genevieve	1925	
McLaughlin, Philip	1925	
Murray, Esther	1924	Stenographer
Murray, Felix	1924	Glassmaker
Murray, Malvina	1924	
Smith, J Willard	1929	Auto-Mechanic

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 architectural description is addresses separately for each of the three residential structures.

1. 115 Thurston Street



The period of relevance for the house starts c.1924-1930

- a. Location: It is likely that this structure is in its original location and was built on-site.
- b. Design: The house is a flat roof, triple decker apartment condo. The property contains three open porches, one on each story of the front and rear elevations.
 - Flat roof with eaves with decorative cornice with dentil details
 - Concrete parged foundation. Foundation likely random ashlar masonry
 - Front Elevation
 - Left side entry hall
 - Wood steps from landing to pavement
 - Mid-late 20th century wooden railings on front steps and porches.
 - Fenestration consists of triple one-over-one, single or double-hung, replacement sash windows with simple surround.
 -
 - Right Elevation
 - Fenestration consists of single and triple one-over-one, single or double-hung, replacement sash windows with simple surround
 - One 20th-century horizontal slider window visible on both the first and second floor
 - Single hung and 20th-century horizontal slider basement windows visible at foundation level
 -
 - Left Elevation
 - Fenestration consists of single and triple one-over-one, single or double-hung, replacement sash windows with simple surround.
 - Entryway on ground floor with door

- Rear Elevation
 - Wood steps from landing to pavement
 - Mid-late 20th century wooden railings on front steps and porches.
 - Fenestration consists of single and triple one-over-one, single or double-hung, replacement sash windows with simple surround

c. Materials:

- Foundation: Concrete parging, likely over ashlar random masonry
- Windows: vinyl
- Entry door: modern. Wood (maybe fiberglass) with stained glass.
- Siding: Plaster over wood.
- Trim: vinyl covered
- Steps: wood with wood rails
- Roof: flat

- d. Alterations: Replacement windows. Plaster siding. Window openings on right elevation have been closed and stucco-ed over. Replacement one-over-one vinyl or aluminum windows throughout. Modern replacement door. Relocation and resizing of some window openings on right elevation. Inclusion of basement windows using horizontal sliding windows. Concrete parging of (what is likely) a brick foundation.

Evaluation of Integrity of 115 Thurston Street: Based on the observations of the building and a study of the historic maps, it is Staff's position that the building does not retain integrity of its original form. Alterations have occurred to this structure which obscures original details and architectural design.

IV. DETERMINATION

The HPC must determine one of the following for **the building at 115 Thurston Street**:

- a. That the building is Preferably Preserved.
- b. That the building is not Preferably Preserved.
- c. That the building is not Preferably Preserved *with Conditions*.

See the following section V "Findings" for guidance.

V. FINDINGS

a. Preferably Preserved

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

- *That the demolition of the building at **115 Thurston Street** would be detrimental to the architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social heritage of the City.*

If the HPC makes the above finding, the Commission must state their reasons why they take their position.

b. Not Preferably Preserved

If the HPC makes the above finding, the Commission must state their reasons why they take their position.

c. Not Preferably Preserved with Conditions

For a determination of **NOT preferably preserved with Conditions**, the HPC must make the following finding:

- *That the building at **115 Thurston Street** does not meet any of the criteria to be “preferably preserved.”. The HPC may add any or all of the following as conditions to this determination:*
 - 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.*

If the HPC makes the above finding, the HPC must state their reasons why they take this position.

VI. VOTE

When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the building at **115 Thurston Street** is or is not “preferably preserved”.