

# FORM B – BUILDING

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

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

73-A-4, 73-A-5

Boston  
North

1141

Town SOMERVILLE

Place (neighborhood or village) Prospect Hill

Address 14-16 Aldersey Street

Historic Name Elizabeth S. and Steven (Stephen) Fenno

Uses: Present two-family residential

Original one or two-family residential

Date of Construction 1869-1871

Source subdivision plan/map/visual

Style/Form Second Empire

Architect/Builder unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation brick

Wall/Trim wood clapboard/wood trim

Roof slate

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures none

Major Alterations (with dates) glazed entrance porch

Condition very good

Moved ☒ no ☐ yes Date n/a

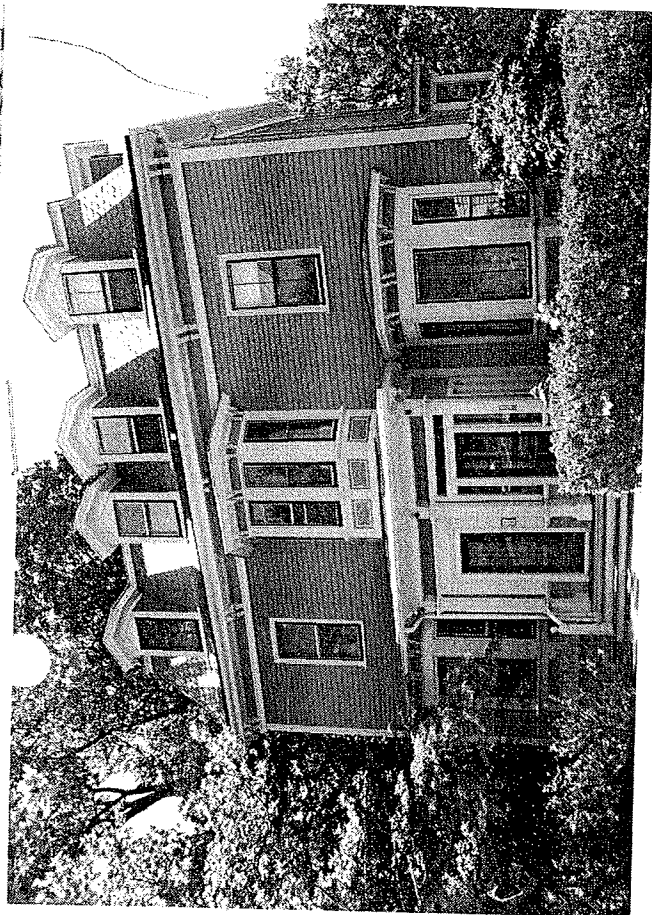
Acreage 5583 sf + 5372 sf = 10,955 sf.

Setting South side of Aldersey Street near Vinal Avenue, in a late nineteenth century residential neighborhood of predominately large former single-family dwellings (many converted to multiple units), opposite one of the oldest houses on Prospect Hill. Steeply sloping lot. Low privet hedge in front at sidewalk edge. Driveway on east or left side of house with large shade tree at end.

Recorded by Gretchen G. Schuler

Organization Somerville Historic Preservation Commission

(month / year) May 2002



SEE ATTACHED MAP

## BUILDING FORM

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

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION ☐ see continuation sheet

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

This large, three-story Second Empire two-family house is situated close to the sidewalk on the south side of Aldersey Street. The lot drops off steeply to the south so that the rear elevation is four stories with a full raised basement. The building, which is divided vertically and displays a symmetrical interior plan, consists of the main block with Mansard roof, projecting single story bays flanking the centered entrances and on each side elevation, an enclosed glazed entrance porch, and a second-story oriel surmounted on the roof of the porch. The building retains its wood clapboard siding and has a slate roof. Architectural trim includes corner posts, a water table, and molded bracketed cornices of the main roof as well as projecting bays. The three bays of the main façade consist of the centered entrances in the center bay and flanking projecting bays at the first story level and single windows at the second story level. The centered entrance has a separate entrance door for each of the two dwelling units – one with a glazed transom and side lights, the other with blind transom and side panels. The glazed entrance porch is divided into two with an interior wall and has a single glazed storm door accessing each side of the two-family. The entrance porch is carried by chamfered posts with brackets that have bulbous drop pendants. Over the entrance porch is a wide rectangular oriel with two windows on the front and a single narrow one-over-one on each side. The oriel and the single-story projecting bays have the same decorative treatment of paired brackets under the deep boxed eave overhang and a recessed panel under each window of the bays and oriel. Windows on the right side (#16) have two-over-two sash while those on the left side (#14) all have been replaced with one-over-one modern sash. There are four front-gabled roof dormers on the main façade and two on each of the side elevations. Dormers have boxed cornice with no returns and the same sash variation as described above. The building is two bays deep with a single-story projecting bay in the rear bay of each side elevation.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE ☒ 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.*

Prospect Hill, the highest Somerville area overlooking Boston, became a desirable place for merchants and Boston businessmen to settle from the mid-nineteenth century. Prior to that, the area was in agricultural use. From the 1840s some development occurred on Prospect Hill and by the late 1860s and early 1870s subdivision plans laid out by real estate investors and successful merchants shaped the residential neighborhoods of today. Aldersey Street was laid out in a plan of house lots drawn up by Quincy A. Vinal (1826-1904) in 1868. (Plan Book 15, Plan 64) The Plan, dated November 12, 1868, showed seven lots on the Plan of Building Lots in Somerville owned by Quincy A. Vinal. Aldersey Street ran from Walnut Street on the east to a long north-south strip of land on the west owned by the Heirs of Robert Vinal until 1869 when the strip became part of a plan of 104 building lots and the extension of Aldersey Street through to Vinal Avenue. (Plan Book 16B, Plan 67) This property was Lot #4 on the 1868 Plan with 10,955 square feet of land. Quincy Vinal had purchased the land in 1849 and lived from ca. 1850 at 9-11 Aldersey Street (MHC #1136) in one of the first houses built in the immediate neighborhood. His father, Robert Vinal had settled in Somerville in 1824 in the Bow Street area and owned large tracts of land on Prospect Hill. Quincy Vinal's brother, Robert A. Vinal, a prominent resident of Somerville also lived on the hill at the corner of Walnut and Aldersey streets in a property that no longer is extant. The street name, Aldersey, was a family name – the middle name of Robert A. Vinal, Jr. as well as his and Quincy Vinal's father.

## INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Town  
SOMERVILLEProperty Address  
14-16 ALDERSEY ST.

Area(s) Form No.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
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	1141
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This dwelling was not shown as a two-family until the 1895 map; however, it is possible that only row houses or more than two units were demonstrated as such on the earlier historic maps. It is known that it was a two-family by the 1890s according to City directories and the 1895 map. First known owner was "Mrs. Elizabeth S. Fenno", so named on the 1874 map and Stephen Fenno, according to a later deed. The Fennos were first listed at this address in the 1871-1872 City Directory and previously had been listed together at another address. Mrs. Elisabeth S. Fenno was listed as a physician or as a "hydropathic physician". Stephen Fenno was listed as a piano-forte maker. Other Fennos living in this house throughout the 1870s were Henry M. and Edward Fenno. No occupations were listed for these other two men. In type and style the house is similar to the first two houses built in this subdivision in 1869. The two other Second Empire houses are next door at 12 Aldersey Street and across the road at 17-19 Aldersey Street. In 1877 the property, including the full 10,955 square feet and buildings, was sold by Steven ["Stephen" in Directories and "Steven" in the deed] Fenno to William D. Jaynes of Somerville. In 1881 the house was sold by Jaynes to real estate investor, Benjamin J. Angell (d. 1886) of Attleborough. Angell's schedule of real estate in his probated will of 1886 included properties in Attleborough such as his homestead and others, a cottage in Falmouth, and a "House & barn & land Somerville" worth \$6500. Angell's daughter, Emma F. Angell Mills of Framingham inherited the property and held it until 1921 during which time it was rental property. It is known that one long term resident was Abby Hunt, a school teacher, who lived here from 1885 until 1904 at which time she moved across the street and boarded at 17 Aldersey Street.

While the house may have been built as a two family, proof of two families living here began in the 1890s as noted above. In the early 1900s tenants were Herbert G. Etheridge (14 Aldersey) who worked as an auditor for the Boston & Maine Railroad, and Milton H. Plummer who worked at the apothecary in Union Square and lived at 16 Aldersey for a short time followed by Arthur F. Hart, carpenter, who stayed for at least ten years. The property was purchased by husband and wife, Fred M. Howe and Elizabeth B. Howe, in 1921. In 1924 Elizabeth B. Howe was listed at 16 Aldersey Street, and Fred M. Howe was listed at 4 Church Street and by 1930 the City Directory listed Elizabeth B. Howe as the widow of Frederick Howe. A deed of 1926 listed Elizabeth Howe as the sole owner of the property. The building lot and house were not divided into two separate lots with one unit on each lot until 1946 when a plan of land was recorded showing a "Duplex Dwelling" on Lot 4A of 5372 square feet (16 Aldersey Street) and Lot 4B of 5583 square feet (14 Aldersey Street). As in many other local properties this house, particularly the rental units were home to middle class residents and skilled laborers in the 1910s to 1930s, a druggist and carpenter as mentioned above and a telegraph operator and a machinist.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

☐ see continuation sheet

Landscape Research. Beyond the Neck. Cambridge: MA 1982.

Middlesex South Registry of Deeds: Deeds and Plan 1938 of 1946 included in Deed Book 7075, Page 173.

Somerville City Directories. 1871-72 through 1930.

Somerville Public Library: Local History Room, Vertical Biography Files.

## Maps:

Bromley, George. Atlas of the City of Somerville. Philadelphia, 1895.

Hopkins, G.M. and Co. Atlas of the City of Somerville, Massachusetts. Philadelphia, 1874.

Hopkins, G.M. and Co. Atlas of the City of Somerville, Massachusetts. Philadelphia, 1884.

Middlesex Registry of Deeds, So. Dist. Cambridge, MA. Plan of Building Lots in Somerville owned by Quincy A.

Vinal, Nov. 12, 1868. Plan Book 15, Plan 64, Plan Book 16A, Plan 67.

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Community    Property Address  
SOMERVILLE    14-16 ALDERSEY ST.

Area(s)    Form No. 1141

## National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- ☒ Individually eligible      ☐ Eligible **only** in a historic district  
☒ Contributing to a potential historic district      ☐ Potential historic district

Criteria:    ☒ A    ☐ B    ☒ C    ☐ D

Criteria Considerations:    ☐ A    ☐ B    ☐ C    ☐ D    ☐ E    ☐ F    ☐ G

Statement of Significance by Gretchen G. Schuler

*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

The Elizabeth S. and Stephen Fenno House is eligible for listing in the National Register as one of the first houses built in the 1868 subdivision laid out by Quincy A. Vinal. The house is a well preserved example of the popular Second Empire Style of the early 1870s when the house was built, and as a two-family dwelling vertically split by the 1890s if not from the time of construction. It is representative of the development of Prospect Hill as a late nineteenth century neighborhood for businessmen and professionals as well as craftsmen.

14-16 Aldersey Street



City of  
**Somerville**  
Massachusetts



**Assessors Map**

- Parcel Boundary
- Block Boundary
- Assessor Map Boundary
- Water Body
- Building
- Railroad ROW

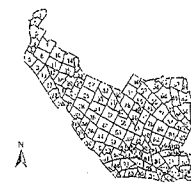
- Lot Dimensions
- Lot Number
- Square Footage
- Frontage Dimension
- Street Address



January 3, 2001

Source: Right-of-way and building footprints developed from Boston Edison Company data, 1995. Parcel data derived from assessor map by Camp Dresser & McKee, 1999.

NOTE: The data represented on these maps indicate distances and oriented locations of substantial boundaries in the City of Somerville. They are NOT survey data and should not be treated as such.



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