

26-28 and 30 Prospect Street

Historic Context

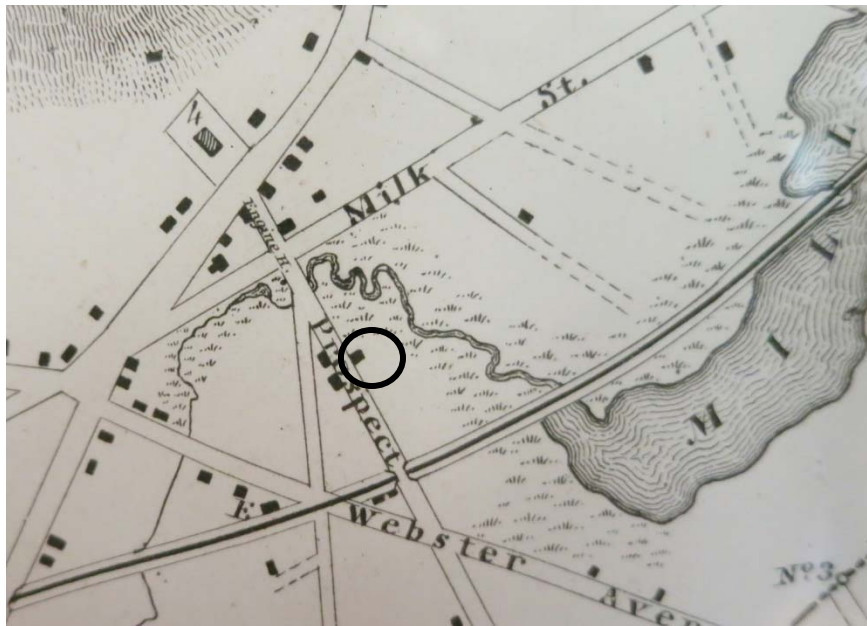
Introduction:

The purpose of this document is to present historic context for the buildings at 26-28 and 30 Prospect Street. It is intended to supplement previous inventory work conducted on the properties by Edward Gordon in 2005 (see SMV.1221 and SMV.1222). This narrative is intended to bring together additional deed, directory and Census research to better understand the use of the parcel and buildings and the occupants over the years.

Historical Background:

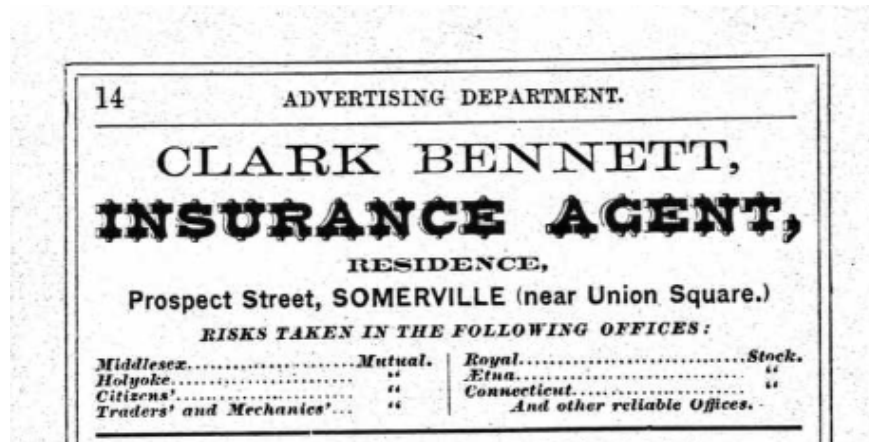
Deed research indicates that the land on which these buildings stand was part of a larger parcel sold by Amos Hazeltine to Clark Bennett in 1837 (Middlesex County Registry of Deeds Book 371, Page 69). The Fitchburg Railroad line had been constructed the previous year, encouraging development of the area.

Clark Bennett was born in Londonderry, Vermont in 1810. He married Hannah Whitman in Londonderry in February 1835 and moved to Somerville soon thereafter. Clark and Hannah Bennett had twelve children. The earliest available city directory indicates that in 1851 was a brickmaker, living on Prospect Street. The 1852 Draper map shows a house on the east side of Prospect Street near Milk Street (now Somerville Avenue) that is likely Bennett's house. The surrounding land is depicted as undeveloped marshland.



1852 Draper map – circled building is likely Clark Bennett's house.

In 1856 after working twenty five years as a brickmaker, Clark Bennett changed his occupation to insurance agent. Initially, he worked in an office in Boston. He lived in a house at 34 Prospect Street (no longer extant).

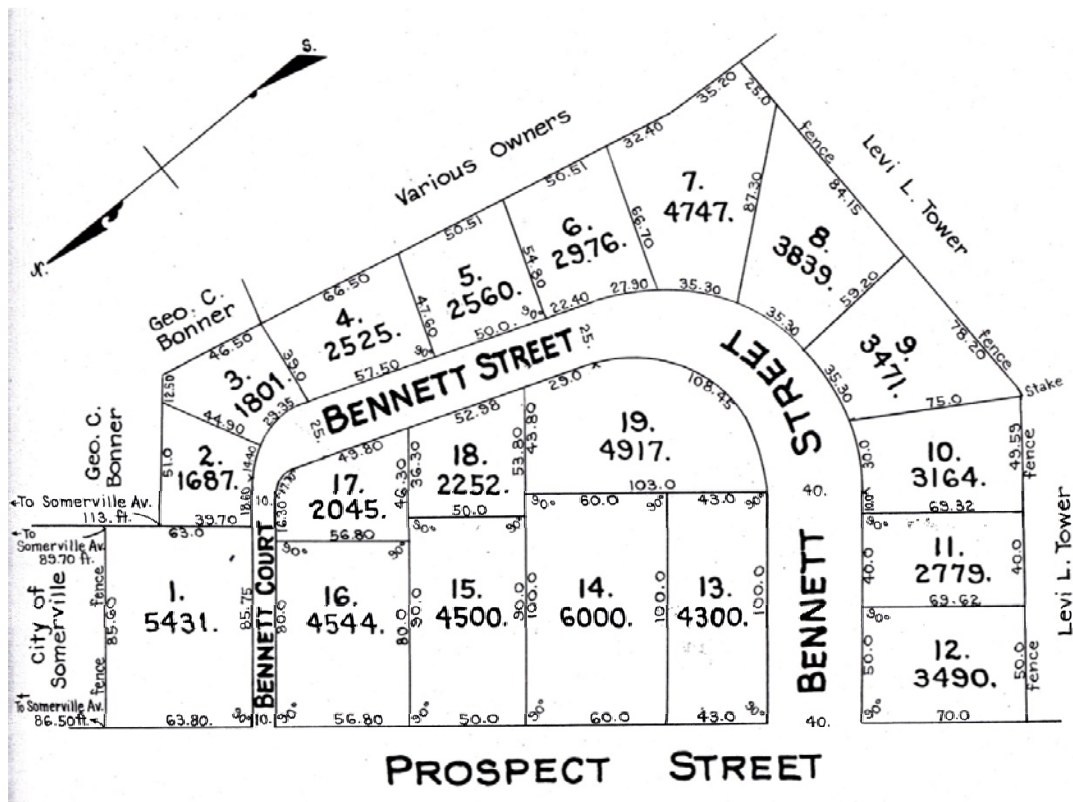


Source: 1875 Somerville directory

Bennett was prominent in town affairs. He served on the School Committee for eleven years, including chairman for several years, served three years on the Board of Aldermen and was also town treasurer. In 1868 Somerville's Bennett School, at the corner of Joy and Poplar Streets, was named in his honor. He was also involved in the filling in of Miller's Creek in 1873, the expansion of the town's sewer system into West Somerville, improvements to Milk Row (later Somerville Avenue) and the construction of public parks. Clark Bennett was also a strong abolitionist and a friend of Wilson, Garrison, Phillips, and Sumner (*Historic Leaves*, vol. 6, April 1907-Jan. 1908). Bennett was also "a large operator in real estate" and owned property in Union Square, Prospect Street, Broadway, Spring Hill, in Cambridge, and in New York (*Somerville Journal*, Jan. 14, 1882).

Bennett built several buildings just to the north of his home at 34 Prospect Street for income-producing purposes. Identical side-gabled Italianate-style dwellings were constructed at 20-22 Prospect Street (no longer extant) and 26-28 Prospect Street. Deed records indicate that in October 1871 Bennett received a \$5,000 mortgage from the Holyoke Fire Insurance Company which may have funded the construction of the two buildings (Book 1182, Page 130). The earliest known tenant of 26 Prospect Street is Thomas Cadwallader who was living here at the time of the 1880 Census. Born in New Brunswick about 1840 he worked as an organ tuner in Boston and lived here with his wife and son, his father-in-law, Robert Drummond, mother-in-law, and brother-in-law. The tenant occupying 28 Prospect in 1880 was Jason Gilpatrick, age 36, a Maine carpenter who lived here with his wife and two daughters. Also living at #28 was the family of Charles Preston, who came from Vermont and worked as a clerk in the pork factory. Preston lived here with his wife, infant daughter, mother and mother-in-law.

Clark Bennett died in 1882 and that same year his heirs, including widow Hannah Bennett, filed a plan to lay out a series of lots on a U-shaped street to be known as Bennett Court/Bennett Street (Plan Book 54, Plan 42). The plan appears to include a number of lots which already had buildings although they are not noted on the plan. While residential construction was concentrated on the Prospect Street frontage, industrial and storage buildings were constructed on the lots east of Bennett Street.



Bennett subdivision, 1882

Lot 16 = 26-28 Prospect; Lot 15 = 30 & 32 Prospect; Lot 14 = 34 Prospect

Source: Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, Plan Book 54, Plan 42

The building at 26-28 Prospect Street was acquired by S. Adams Clark in 1891. Born about 1837, he lived at 11 Clark Street and worked as a box maker and later on the wharf. The building continued to serve as a rental property and over the years the tenants changed frequently. The residents were also ethnically diverse, although Irish and later Italian families predominate.

In 1900 the tenants of 26 Prospect Street included William Saidler, a 34 year old widower who lived with his two children and mother and worked as a clerk. Also living at 26 Prospect was the family of Harry Fisher, a 29 year old Russian immigrant who worked at a gentleman's furnishings store and lived here with his wife and daughter. By the time of the 1903 City Directory, the double house at 26-28 Prospect was the residence of Arthur O'Keefe, laborer; Harry Fisher; Thomas Spinney, tower man for the B & M Railroad and Mrs. Albert Tyler. In 1907 ownership passed to George Clark, son of S. Adams Clark (Book 3321, Page 464).

By 1910 the tenants at 26-28 Prospect included Mrs. Ellen O'Keefe (widow of Arthur), Charles Grush, a teamster, and father and son glassmakers William McDonough, Sr. and Jr. Mary Cunningham, widow of Thomas, a blacksmith, was also living here. At the time of the 1920 Census, the tenants of #26 included Joseph Francis who worked for the rubber company and Ellen Cassidy while Alymer Lean and Joseph Murray rented units at #28. Later In 1920 the building was acquired by Erasmo Ventura and his wife Erasmina (Book 4391, Page 264). Erasmo was born in Italy in 1878 and came to this country about 1910. He worked as a soap maker and lived here with his wife and five children. In 1930 they shared 26 Prospect with two tenants, Antonio Freeman, and his daughter. The other half of the house, 28 Prospect, was rented to Edward West, a glass cutter of German descent who paid \$25/month in rent. He shared his unit with his wife, daughter, and three boarders. Also living at 28 Prospect but paying just \$18/month were Frank Volturno, his wife and son.

In 1940 the Ventura family continued to occupy a portion of 26 Prospect, while renting out part to Frank Spinosa, his wife and young son. Frank was born in Italy and worked in a meat packing plant. Although Erasmo died in 1943, his widow continued to own the building until 1963. In 1950 26 Prospect was occupied by Mrs. Ventura and by Andrew Napoli. The other half of the house was rented to Joseph Texeira and John Yeo, a millworker. In 1960 laborer Jeremiah O'Reagan lived at 26 Prospect with his large family while William Dugan, a fireman, and Mario Marchetti, a driver, occupied #28.

The building was owned by James and Margaret Kiley from 1963 to 1987. James Kiley was a barrel dealer. The house at 26-28 Prospect was purchased by Francis Fahey in 1987 who has used it largely for storage since that time.

30 Prospect Street

The Queen Anne style, gablefront dwelling at 30 Prospect was constructed after the land was subdivided by Clark Bennett's heirs in 1882. On June 30, 1888 Josiah Bennett, executor of Hannah Bennett's estate, sold a parcel of land (Lot 15 and part of Lot 14 on the 1882 plan) to James W. Connor for \$1,170 (Book 1860, Page 380). James Connor was a carpenter and sold the property to Alexander J. Macdonald, also a carpenter, in September (Book 1872, Page 273). It is not known if Connor or Macdonald actually built the house but in 1891 Macdonald sold a 2,340 SF lot and house to John and Annie Frost (Book 2058, Page 31). John Frost worked as a motorman on the elevated railway. He lived here with his Irish born wife Margaret and their daughter and also rented space to Charlotte Jackson a widow from Scotland who lived here with a 14 year old daughter Blanche, who worked at a candy factory. The Frosts sold the house (described as part of lot 15) in 1906 to Michael Hegarty. Hegarty was born in Ireland and worked as a carpenter for the railway. At the time of the 1910 Census, he was living here with his wife Annie, 19 year old son Thomas who worked at the rubber factory, 18 year old son William who worked at the wool factory, and three younger siblings. The Hegartys also had a lodger, Otis Fulton, who worked as a motorman for the electric railway.

In 1919 the house at 30 Prospect was purchased by Angelo Barber (Book 4263, Page 491). The 1920 Census indicates that Barber (originally Barbieri) was then 55 and had come to this country from Italy in the late 19th century. He worked as a barrel dealer and lived here with his six children between the ages of 3 and 21. The 1930 Census shows Angelo and Margaret Barber living here with their children - Mildred, Arthur, Vincent, and Irene - as well as Irene's husband John Burlingame. Mildred worked at the candy factory; Arthur and John both worked as drivers for the trucking company. At the time of the 1940 Census, the Barbers occupied the house with their sons William, Arthur, and Vincent. In 1957 the house was transferred from William J. Barber to his sister Mildred and her husband Richard Fahey (Book 9345, Page 317). Richard Fahey worked as a longshoreman and the Faheys raised nine children here. In 1960 the house was occupied by the Fahey family and also Louis Domings and Elwyn Murray. Richard Fahey died in 1976 and Francis Fahey acquired the house from his mother in 1977. Mildred Fahey passed away in 1987. The sale of the property to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority brought to an end over 90 years of ownership by members of the same family.

Notes on Building Interiors

From the exterior, the house at 26-28 Prospect Street is a 2 ½-story, side-gabled Italianate double house although the interior and archival research suggest that it has consisted of four units since construction. Each half of the house has a sidehall floor plan with the front door opening into an entrance hall with staircase mounted against the common wall. The front room is, as one would expect, the most formal and was historically a parlor. Behind, it was another public room with bay window. There was a small bedroom beyond/under the stairs and a kitchen with pantry and small chamber which later became a bathroom to the rear. The plan on the second floor was basically the same with an additional bedroom over the front stairs. Three small bedroom chambers are located in each attic. In terms of decorative finishes, marble mantels were originally located in each of the four front rooms facing the street and these “best” rooms also have circular plaster ceiling medallions which served as a point of support for chandeliers. Today, only one mantel, in poor condition, survives on the first floor of #26 Prospect. Covered fireplaces document the later conversion to coal heat. The first floor unit at 26 Prospect is also notable for its ornate woodwork including entablature lintels over all windows and doors; the same moldings are also visible in the adjacent room with the bay window and in the front stairhall. The surrounds in all of the other rooms are plain and without embellishment. As the house was never owner-occupied, the reason for including more ornate surrounds in only one portion of the house is not clear.

Other features which defy explanation but are worthy of note include the removal of the original staircases in the basement and their reconstruction in the opposite direction. Visible on the common wall are the markings of the original staircases. Also visible in the attic of #26 Prospect is a carpenter’s mark on a timber although limited inspection found no other similar markings. Because the house has been unoccupied for so long, has been altered for storage use and is full of plumbing and heating inventory, it is extremely difficult to provide additional details regarding interior finishes. There are fragments of wallpapers of many eras but all are in poor condition. The wallpaper is located primarily at 26 Prospect Street.

The dwelling at 30 Prospect Street was originally constructed as a single-family house but served as a two-family for many years. The first floor is currently filled with plumbing and heating salvaged materials, while the upstairs is in residential use. The house displays a sidehall plan and the front stairs have a knobbed, turned newel post consistent with the Queen Anne era. The interior includes fluted moldings at the window and door openings with cornerblocks. The top floor has been renovated for residential use and the framing is obscured behind plaster ceilings.

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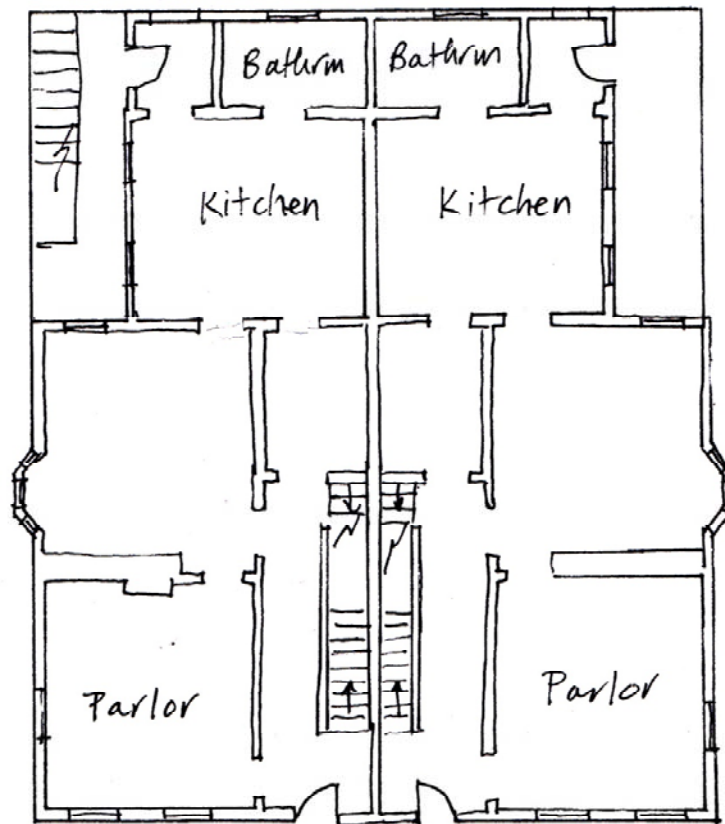
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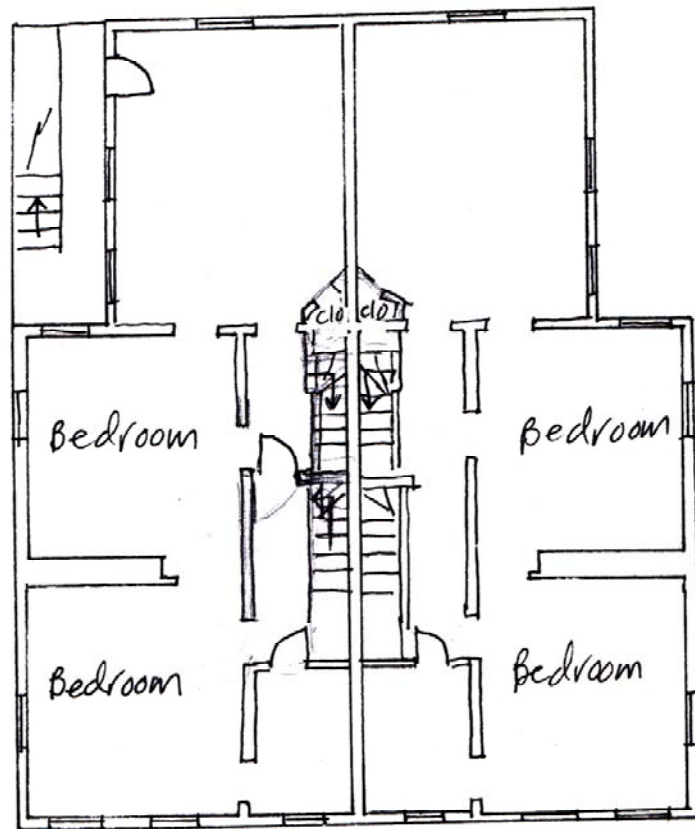
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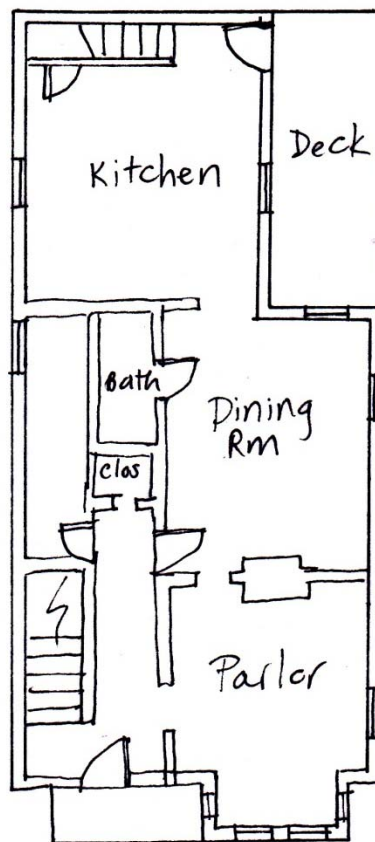
Sketch Plan
26-28 Prospect Street
(First Floor)



**Sketch Plan
26-28 Prospect Street
(Second Floor)**



**Sketch Plan
30 Prospect Street
(First Floor)**



**Sketch Plan
30 Prospect Street
(Second Floor)**

