



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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January 28, 2022

To: Members of the Historical Commission
 From: Eric Hill, Survey Director
 Re: L-142: Maria Baldwin House, 196 Prospect Street (1839), with 194 Prospect St.

The property at 196 Prospect Street, one half of a double house, is a National Historic Landmark known as the residence of prominent African-American educator Maria Baldwin (1856-1922). The other half of the house, 194 Prospect Street, was originally identical but now has been enlarged to contain three condominium units.

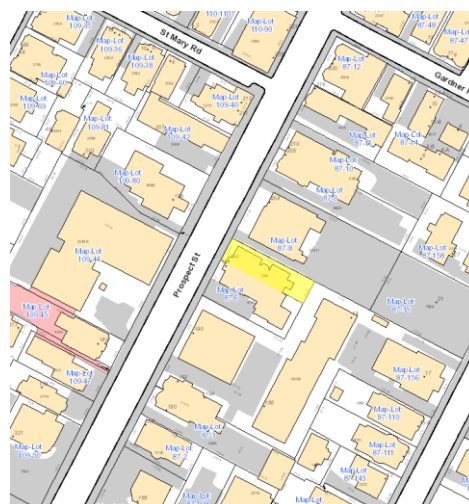
The Baldwin house was listed for sale on January 19, 2022. Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC) staff began receiving calls from prospective buyers, asking if there were any limitations to what could be done in terms of renovations to the property. Due to the local and national significance of the property, CHC staff is presenting this Landmark Evaluation Report for consideration by the Commission. While this landmark evaluation pertains to the northern half of the building, 196 Prospect Street, consideration should also be given to studying designation of the attached property at 194 Prospect Street.

Site

The Maria Baldwin House is located on the east side of Prospect Street, mid-block between Broadway to the south and Gardner Street to the north. This span of Prospect Street retains some mid-19th century housing, with some mid-20th century buildings. The property is outside of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District, which has its eastern boundary as Prospect Street.

The house is sited on a 2,881 square-foot lot in a Residence C-1 zoning district. The zoning allows multi-family construction with an FAR of 0.75 and a height limit of 35 feet. The 2022 assessed value for the land and building is \$1,064,200.

The attached property at 194 Prospect Street has been renovated and contains two units in the historic structure. In 2009, a concrete block service garage behind 194 Prospect Street was demolished and replaced with an addition which contains one condominium unit.



Zoning map showing 196 Prospect Street (high-lighted), 2022.



194 (right) and 196 (left) Prospect Street, January 2022.



194 (right) and 196 (left) Prospect Street, January 2022.

Architectural Description

The Maria Baldwin House at 196 Prospect Street is a well-preserved example of a Greek Revival, semi-detached residence in Cambridgeport. The house stands two-and-one-half stories tall and has a side-hall plan, with an original two-story kitchen ell at the rear. The house sits atop a raised brick foundation that has been painted. The roof is set with its ridge running parallel to the street and is joined at right angles by the ell roof. Originally the houses together had two chimneys placed symmetrically at the center hallways, but both have been removed. A chimney remains in the kitchen ell of the Baldwin House.

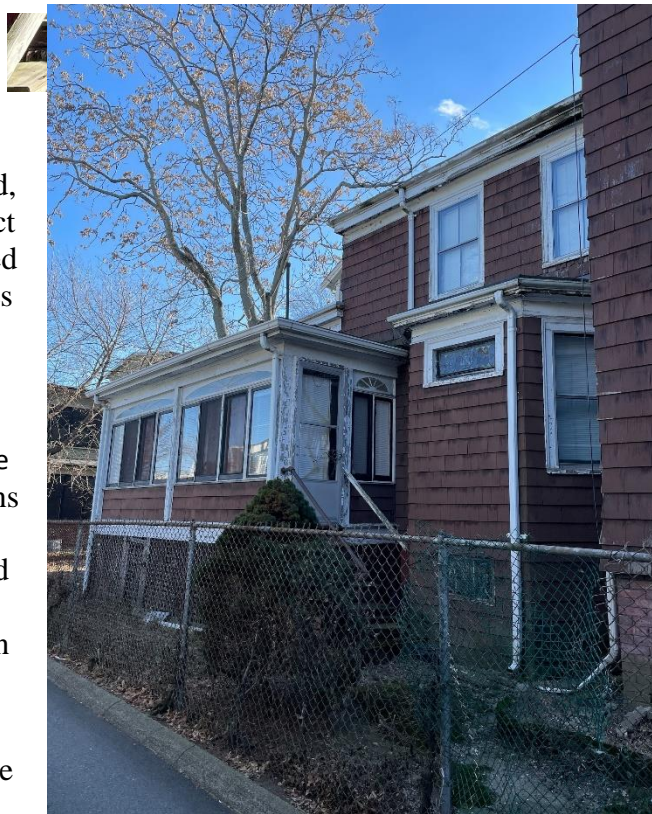
The facade of the Maria Baldwin House has three evenly spaced windows across the second story, while at the first floor there are two windows next to the entrance. All visible windows are wood, two-over-two sash windows. At the roofline of the facade and extending around the sides of the house is an entablature surmounted by a boxed cornice. At the gable end, it is combined with boxed eaves to give the effect of a pediment. The kitchen ell has an undecorated fascia surmounted by a boxed cornice at its eaves on the north and south walls only.

The most prominent feature of the facade is its Ionic portico, which is set in front of the double entry and spans the entrances of both houses. The portico is supported by three fluted Ionic columns with plain pilasters and capitals. Above the columns and pilasters is an entablature with a boxed cornice. Both houses have multipaned wood doors in the Arts and Crafts style, likely added in the 1910s or 1920s.

In 1899 Louis Baldwin extended the ell with an 18' long one-story addition that probably became the kitchen. The Baldwins also added the three-sided bay window with a stained-glass "piano window" in 1900. These are the only alterations associated with Maria Baldwin's use of the home and may have been designed to facilitate the meetings and study sessions she held with activists and students. Later additions include a side porch from 1930 now enclosed with fanlight transoms above casement windows and a small extension for a bathroom. These are not considered



196 Prospect Street, entry detail.



View of 1899 addition 1900 bay window added by Louis F. Baldwin and enclosed porch by a later owner.

particularly significant, but the bay window and possibly the one story extension of the ell are important for their associations with Maria Baldwins and her public role.

While the front portion of 194 Prospect was restored to its original appearance in 2009, 196 still bears the wood shingles that were applied over its original clapboards in the 1930s. The Baldwin house suffers somewhat from deferred maintenance but is largely in recoverable condition. Both houses should be brought to the same level of repair and appearance and maintained so as to present a consistent appearance.



View of 1899 one-story Lewis F. Baldwin addition and bathroom and enclosed porch added by a later owner, facing Prospect Street.

The separately-owned property at 194 Prospect Street was redeveloped in 2009 into three condominium units. The main part of the original house was restored as Unit 1, while the ell was replaced with a new structure as Unit 2. A 1920s concrete block service garage in the rear was replaced by Unit 3. All three units are connected and share garage parking that takes advantage of the slightly sloping site.



194 Prospect Street

Google Streetview

History

Prospect Street was laid out in 1804 to connect Cambridgeport to the western part of Charlestown and Prospect Hill, its namesake. This section of Charlestown was incorporated as Somerville in 1842. Cambridgeport was declared a United States port of delivery in 1805. From this, two major thoroughfares, Broadway and Hampshire Street, connected the active port area to the inland towns, making Prospect Street a major artery northward. However, Cambridgeport failed to live up to its potential as a great commercial city, and subsequently evolved into a Boston-oriented commercial suburb, thanks in part to a boom in manufacturing activity there.

Like many towns in the Boston area, mid-to-late-nineteenth century industrialization changed the face of Cambridgeport. Street railway service, the elimination of bridge tolls, and the advent of the steam railroad all had an impact on industrial growth. With an abundance of cheap land and immigrant labor, along with better transportation, Cambridgeport became a popular destination for large industrial firms and skilled laborers, which centered east of Prospect Street, along the Broad Canal and Main Street toward Kendall Square. A population boom soon followed, adding an average of 10,000 new residents every ten years after 1855.

The lot at 194-196 Prospect Street was deeded in 1838 from Cyrus Page to Alvaro Blodgett, a carpenter who later served nine years as a City Councilor. Blodgett built the double house, which was taxed as unfinished property in 1839, and completed it later that year or in 1840. In 1842, he sold the house to Amory Houghton, who in 1847 deeded it to George O. Brastow (1811-1878), who rented it out. Brastow served in the Massachusetts legislature and was Somerville's first mayor.

By the 1870s, Hollis Danforth, a 'piano mover,' purchased the property and rented out 196 Prospect. Danforth sold the property in 1887 to Sarah L.W. Hemphill, who mortgaged it repeatedly and was frequently late paying property taxes.

Maria Louise Baldwin and her brother, Louis (Lewis) F. Baldwin, leased the house beginning in 1888. The two rented the property together until 1904, when Louis moved to 278 Harvard Street. Miss Baldwin remained alone at the house one more year until moving to Boston in 1905.

Maria L. Baldwin (1856-1922):

Maria Louise Baldwin was born on September 13, 1856, the oldest daughter of Peter L. and Mary E. Baldwin. Her father was of West Indian descent and worked as a mariner before being employed at a local post office as a mail carrier. Maria grew up in Cambridge in the immediate years after the Massachusetts legislature desegregated public schools throughout the state. She graduated from the Allston Grammar school and Cambridge High School in 1874. After high school, Maria immediately entered the Cambridge Training School to become a teacher, graduating a year later. She was hired as a substitute at the Training School in 1878, but from May until the close of the school year. struggled to find teaching opportunities and began to look outside of Cambridge.



Undated image of Maria Louise Baldwin, ca.1890, courtesy of Schlesinger Library

Maria Baldwin's first full-time teaching position was in Chestertown, Maryland, where she was employed for two years before moving back in 1881. She began teaching locally in 1881 at the Agassiz Elementary School, a well-regarded public school attended by the predominantly white children of Cambridge's academic and professional elite. Maria eventually taught all grades from first to seventh.

In 1889, Miss Baldwin was appointed as Principal of the Agassiz School. It was that year that she and her brother Louis moved to 196 Prospect Street, one-and-a-half miles away from her place of work. Previous to moving to 196 Prospect Street, Maria lived at 41 Clark Street (razed in 1937 for Newtowne Court). When offered the position of Principal of the Agassiz School, she initially hesitated to accept because she did not feel adequate or worthy of the role. Upon further urging by the School Committee, she accepted the position on the condition that if the committee was ever unsatisfied with her work as principal she would return to her earlier position as a teacher.

In 1915, the original Agassiz School was replaced with a more substantial building. Before the new school opened, Maria Baldwin was named Master of the Agassiz School. Upon this promotion, Maria became one of only two women in Cambridge, and the only African American in New England, to hold that position. To keep up with her field she took courses at Harvard and other

institutions and taught courses in the summer for teachers at Hampton Institute in Virginia and the Institute for Colored Youth in Cheyney, Penn.

The respect in which Miss Baldwin was held was exhibited by her association with many well-known educators and intellectuals. Among them were Edward Everett Hale, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Julia Ward Howe, William Monroe Trotter, and Archibald Grimke. Charles W. Eliot, the President of Harvard University, was also among her friends and often referred to her as not only one of the most charming of his acquaintances but also the best teacher in New England. Miss Baldwin also devoted much of her time advancing educational opportunities for Black students outside of primary school. From her home at 196 Prospect Street, she held weekly study classes for Black students attending Harvard, including W.E.B. Du Bois. The 1899 addition to the house was possibly constructed for this purpose.

Maria Baldwin lived at 196 Prospect Street from 1889-1905, when she moved to the Franklin Square House on East Newton Street in Boston's South End. In Boston, Maria and a group of prominent black women from the greater Boston area helped organize the League of Women for Community Service, Inc. at 558 Massachusetts Ave. in 1918. She also was a member of the Council of the Robert Gould Shaw House Association, the Boston Ethical Society, and the Twentieth Century Club of Boston and served as secretary of the Boston Banneker Club, a scholarly literary society organized in 1875.

In the 1890s, Baldwin co-founded the nationally influential and innovative Woman's Era Club. She worked alongside the club's other founding mothers: Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Eliza Gardner, Arianna Sparrow, and Florida Ruffin Ridley. While inspired by Ida B. Wells' 1892 speaking tour of eyewitness testimonials of lynchings in Memphis, Tenn., the Club members focused on what they considered their generation's obligation to work for all African American causes: the anti-lynching movement, voting rights for women, and education and employment opportunities.

Although Miss Baldwin remained active in her final years her health eventually failed her. In 1922, she died from a heart attack at age 66, while speaking on behalf of the Robert Gould Shaw House at the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston.

The Maria Baldwin house was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976 and is listed as such on the National Register of Historic Places. A commemorative marker detailing Baldwin's life and accomplishments was installed at the Agassiz School in 1993 as part of the Cambridge African American Heritage Trail. On May 21st, 2002, the Cambridge School Committee unanimously voted to rename the new Agassiz School, built in 1994, the Maria L. Baldwin School in honor of the much-beloved educator and activist. More recently, the City Council unanimously passed a policy order on August 2, 2021, renaming the Agassiz neighborhood after her.

Landmark Criteria and Goals

Landmarks are enacted by the City Council upon recommendation of the Historical Commission. The Commission commences a landmark designation study process by its own initiative or by voting to accept a petition of ten registered voters.

The criteria provided in the ordinance outlines eligible properties as:

any property within the city being or containing a place, structure, feature, or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or

architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures... (2.78.180.A)

The purpose of landmark designation is described in the ordinance, which was enacted to, preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of neighborhoods, sites and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such neighborhoods, areas, or structures; and by furthering these purposes to promote the public welfare by making the city a more desirable place in which to live and work. (2.78.140)

Relationship to Criteria

Staff considers that the Maria Baldwin House 196 Prospect Street meets criterion (1) for its important associations “with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the City or the Commonwealth” as the long-time residence of Maria Baldwin, a nationally prominent educator and activist. The property can also be considered to meet criterion (2) as architecturally significant in terms of its period and style within the context of the streetscape of extant mid-19th century homes along Prospect Street.

Staff Recommendations

The Maria Baldwin House is an important example of a semi-detached Greek Revival House in Cambridge. Its primary significance derives from its connections to Maria L. Baldwin, who resided at the home between 1889 and 1905, educating and conducting meetings from the residence until she relocated to Boston.

The Commission should also consider initiating a designation for 194 Prospect Street, which is the other half of the double house. Loss or inappropriate remodeling of this structure would seriously detract from the significance of the Baldwin house. During the designation study consideration should be given to excluding or minimizing jurisdiction over units 2 and 3, structures that were added in 2009 when unit 1 was restored to its original condition.

cc: Linda Papaforti, Owner
North Star Group, Listing Agent
Laer Realty Partners, Listing Agent