



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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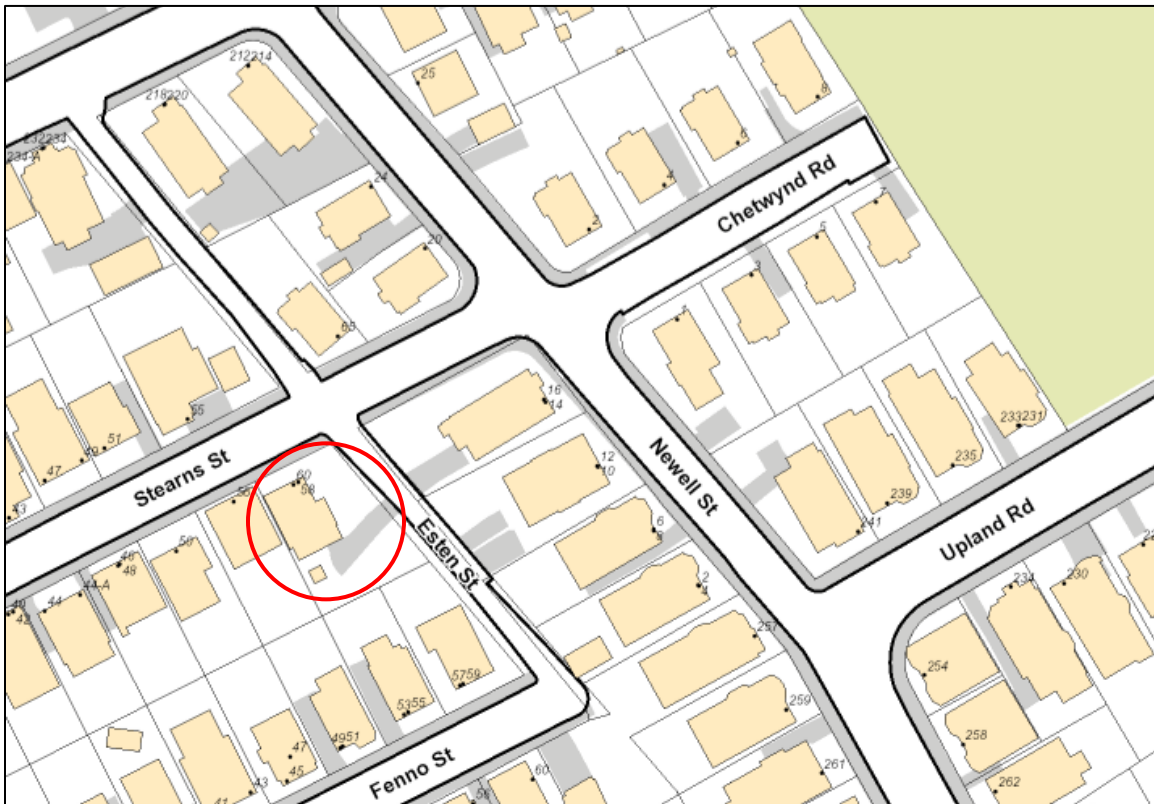
February 5, 2019

To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: D-1508: Parker house, 58-60 Stearns Street (1891)

An application to demolish the building at 58-60 Stearns Street was received on December 17, 2018. The applicant, Elizabeth Harper, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for February 7, 2018.

Site

The 2½-story dwelling is located on the southwest corner of Stearns and Esten streets. Stearns is a short street of only two and a half blocks between Garden and Newell streets and is bisected by Sherman Street. Esten Street is a narrow (18 feet wide) passageway, with no street-facing homes.



58-60 Stearns Street, Cambridge GIS, Assessor's map, February 2019.

The two-family house is sited on a 4,457 square foot lot in a Residential C-1 zoning district. This is a multi-family residential district, which permits an FAR of .75 and has a height limit of 35 feet. The assessed value of the land and building, according to the online assessor's property database, is \$1,227,700 (Map 205/Parcel 23). The house was purchased in July of 2018.

The neighboring properties on Stearns Street have a variety of roof forms but are similar in overall scale and relationship to the street, with most being sited close to the sidewalk.



58-60 Stearns St., online photos, Zillow.com, downloaded 2/4/19.

Architectural Description

The building at 58-60 Stearns Street is a 2½-story side hall double house with a steeply-pitched gable roof, oriented gable end to the street. The façade is organized into three bays, with the two entry doors located at the left side of the front elevation. A full width front porch is supported by wrought iron columns. A cross gabled ell extends 5 feet toward Esten Street has a slightly lower ridge than the main roof. The rear elevation is a combination of enclosed sleeping porches and a rear entry vestibule/stair to the basement. A driveway is located at the back of the lot, accessed from Esten Street.

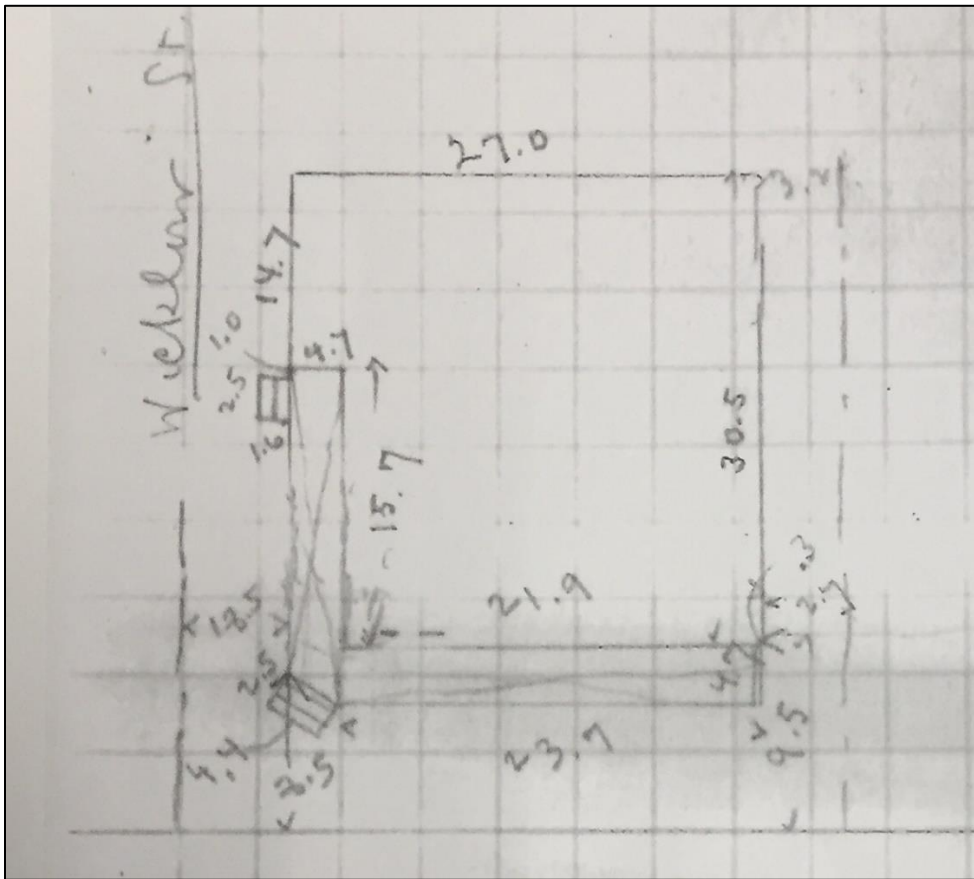
The Queen Anne style house is covered in white aluminum siding, which obscures its original cladding materials and detailing. Several other houses on the street, which were built during the same period of development, are covered with patterned shingles. Well maintained examples are seen at #41 and #43-45.



58-60 Stearns St., online photo, Zillow.com, downloaded 2/4/19.

The windows are mostly 1-over-1 replacement units but a few original 2-over-2 double hung sash windows remain. The doors are mid-twentieth century replacements. A low chain link fence extends across the front of the property and encloses the side and rear yards.

The porch originally wrapped around the corner to meet the ell on the Esten Street side. The front steps were located at the corner. This configuration is visible in the engineering department's house book 27, page 6 drawn in 1893. Other alterations to the house include the reconfigure and enclosure of porches at the back of the house and application of aluminum siding, replacement of many windows and doors. But overall, the plan remains much as it was originally.



Engineer's sketch of the exterior dimensions of 58-60 Stearns St., House book 27/page 6. 5/19/1893. The porch with corner steps at the bottom left is shown in this view.

The proposed replacement project is a new two-family passive house with wood clapboards and trim and a standing seam metal roof. The design incorporates a pastiche of traditional stylistic elements, including arched divided-light windows, tapered porch columns, eave brackets, and a large brick center chimney.

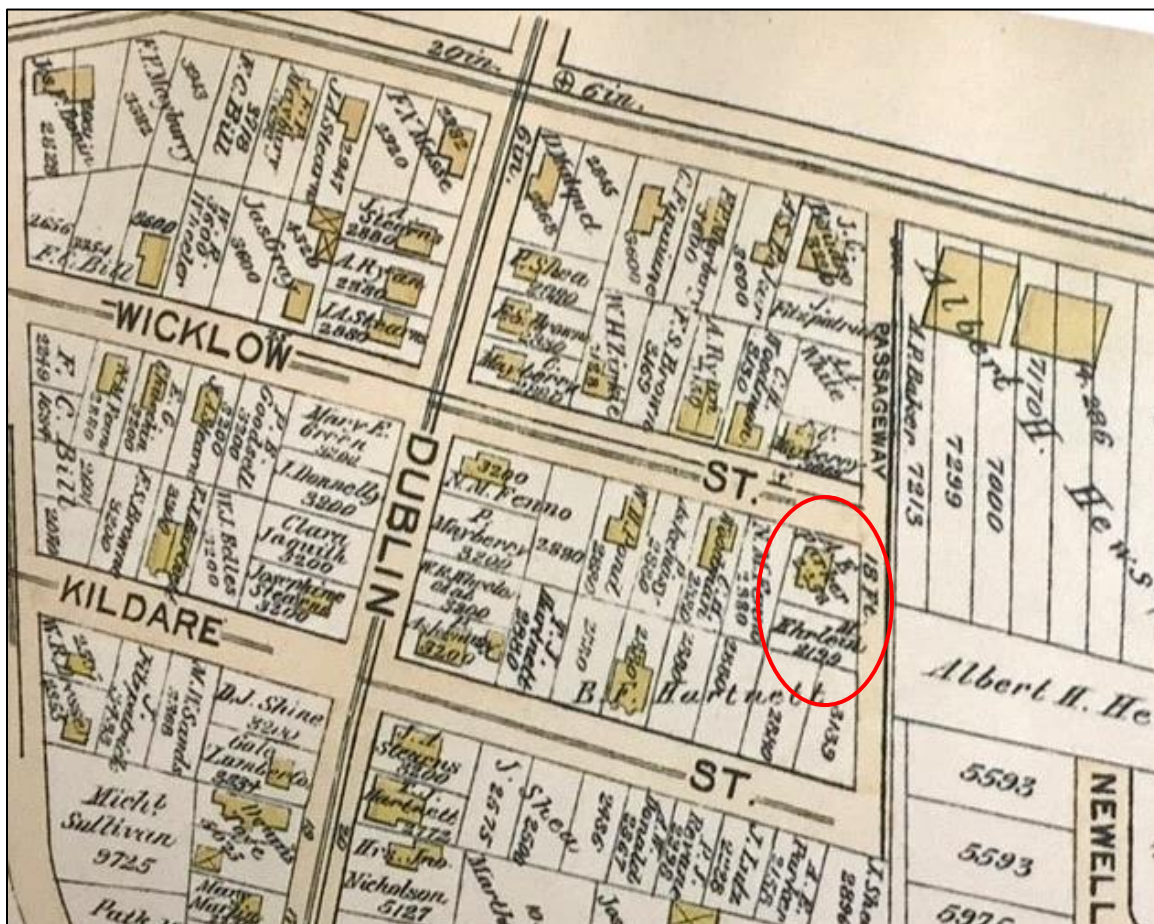


58-60 Stearns St., online photo of rear sleeping porch and addition, Zillow.com, downloaded 2/4/19.

History

The area north and west of Reservoir, Observatory, and Avon hills represent the backslope of the glacial moraine that surrounds Fresh Pond and its marshes. The low lying lands down the backslope remained isolated during the mid nineteenth century. The only through road was the Concord Turnpike that linked Cambridge with the agricultural towns to the west. Vassal Lane, Garden Street and Raymond Street connected Old Cambridge to the marshes. Ownership of the backslope was divided among the Brattle Street estates and Cambridge farmers. The dividing line was Vassal Lane, a social boundary that persisted well into the twentieth century.

With no access to public transportation, subdivision and development were slow to take off in this part of Cambridge. A street railroad line was planned in the mid 1880s for Concord Avenue, Walden Street, Sherman Street, and Rindge Avenue back to the existing line on Massachusetts Avenue in North Cambridge. This prospect was enough to spur subdivision on Orrin and Winslow streets on the abandoned Cofran & Sands brickyard. This street railroad was never built but the area continued to develop based on the need for working class housing near other still operating clay pits and brick yards. Wicklow and Kildare streets were laid out in 1891 and named for counties in Ireland.



1894 Bromley Atlas. The two lots that now make up the property at 58-60 Stearns (originally Wicklow) Street are visible at the southwest corner of the unnamed passageway (now Esten Street).

By the 1894 an electric trolley line through the backslope area began operation. It started at Craigie Street running up Concord Avenue and turning west on Huron Avenue, joining the Mt. Auburn Street line at the cemetery. This transportation improvement spurred additional development of the backslope neighborhood. Wicklow and Kildare streets were renamed in 1896 as Stearns and Fenno for a property owner, Josephine Stearns and a builder James Fenno. The name changes might also indicate a shift in marketing of the properties from Irish laborers to a commuting middle-class.

A large parcel of land formerly owned by Horace Saunders, brother of Cambridge mayor George Saunders was subdivided in 1891 for Wicklow and Kildare streets. The plan was drawn by engineer William Bradford for John N. Wheeler and others. The existing property at 58-60 Stearns Street was originally two lots (24 and 25) separately owned for a short time before being combined. The front parcel facing Stearns was purchased by Edward J. and Alice E. Parker in 1891. Edward was the builder as well as an owner but there is no record of him building other homes or residing in Cambridge. The back lot, facing Esten, was never built on and the two lots were soon combined by Maria Ehrlein.

Early residents of the house included Arthur H. Major, a freight clerk for the railroad and Thomas Enright, a laborer. The property later was owned by Timothy O'Donovan, who lived at 55 Stearns Street and ran a shipping business. O'Donovan sold the property to Thomas and Annie Nolan in 1923. The Nolans sold the property to Albert and Lillian Laronde in 1935. The Laronde family descendants retained ownership of the property until July 2018 when it was purchased by Betsy Harper, the current owner. Albert Laronde.

Additional information about the Laronde family has been supplied by a neighbor, Heddi Seibel:

In 1935 Albert J. LaRonde and his wife Lillian (McAdoo) both from the neighboring Fenno Street, purchased 58-60 Stearns. There, they raised two children Albert Jr. (Buddy) a member of the United States navy and a Korean War veteran and Lois who became a Dominican nun. Buddy married his Cambridge elementary school sweetheart and they moved to Connecticut after his service for the USN. Sister Lois LaRonde and extended LaRonde and McAdoo family lived in the house until 2018 when the property was sold.

Significance and Recommendation

I recommend that the Queen Anne double house at 58-60 Stearns Street be found significant for its association with the Wicklow/Kildare street subdivision, an early development in the Backslope area of Cambridge and for its associations with the broad architectural, economic and social history of Cambridge.

The Commission should hear testimony from the applicants and neighbors and review the plans for replacement construction before making a further determination.

cc: Betsy Harper