



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

831 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Fl., Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Telephone: 617 349 4683 TTY: 617 349 6112

E-mail: histcomm@cambridgema.gov URL: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/Historic>



Bruce A. Irving, *Chair*, Charles M. Sullivan, *Executive Director*

William Barry, Robert G. Crocker, Chandra Harrington, William B. King, Jo M. Solet, Susannah

Barton Tobin, *Members*

Joseph V. Ferrara, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

January 31, 2019

To: Members of the Historical Commission

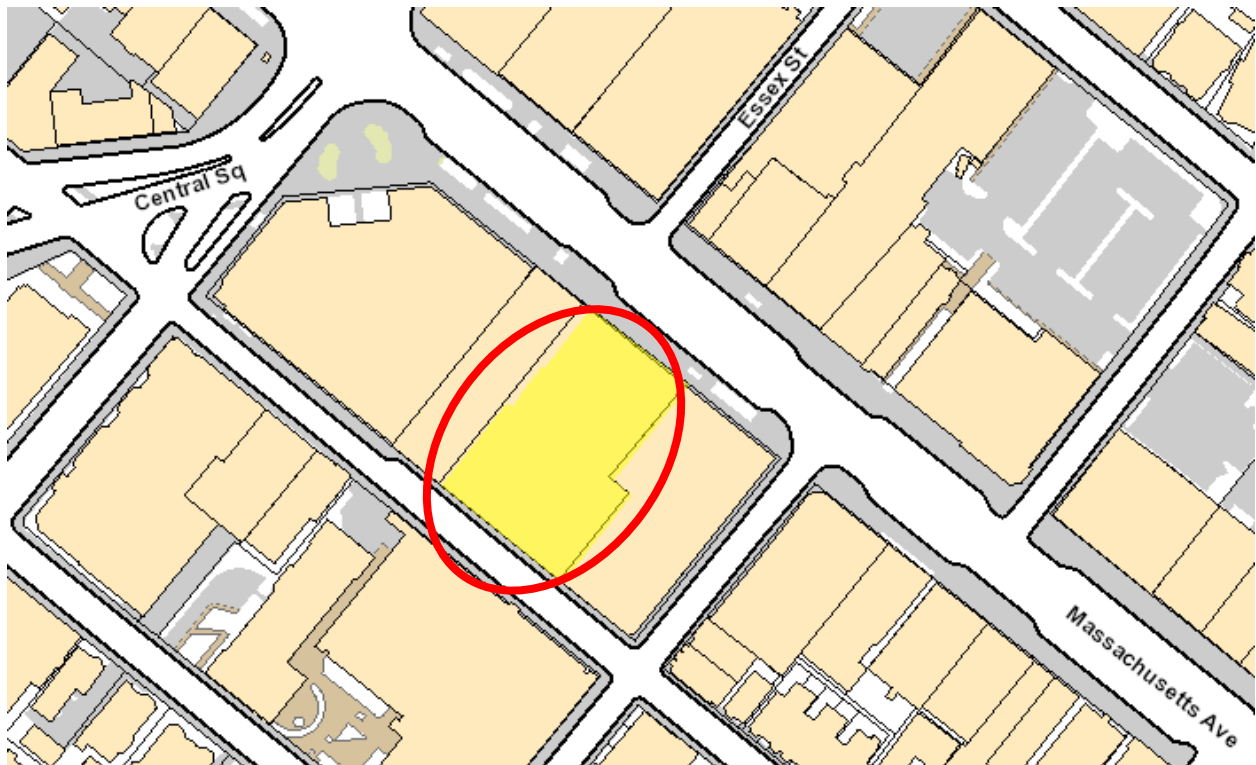
From: Charles Sullivan

Re: D-1513: 596-600 Massachusetts Avenue

An application to demolish a one-story commercial building at 596-600 Massachusetts Avenue was received on January 15, 2019. The applicant, Cifrino Mass Ave Realty LLC, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for February 7.

Site Description and Current Conditions

The building at 596-600 Massachusetts Avenue is located on the south side of the avenue west of the intersection with Pearl Street. The lot (map 106, parcel 124), which contains 21,262 square feet, contains three contiguous buildings, of which 596-600 occupies approximately 10,000 square feet. The zoning is Business B, modified by the Central Square Overlay District. The assessed value of the entire property is \$6,751,900, of which \$2.353 million represents the buildings.



Cambridge GIS, 2017

The three buildings on the property were built at different times. They consist of

- 596-600 Mass. Ave.: one-story retail store, constructed in 1902, new façade 1938
- 602-614 Mass. Ave.: one-story retail store, constructed in 1899, new façade 1939
- 269 Green Street: four story brick storage and bakery, built in 1897 and expanded in 1903

All three buildings have been unified at ground level for many years.



Cambridge GIS/CONNECTExplorer, 2014

The replacement project will consist of a six-story mixed-use building with stores on the ground floor on both Massachusetts Avenue and Green Street. The four-story bakery building will be restored and adaptively reused for offices; a new stair and elevator tower will join the two.

History

The buildings in question – one to be demolished, one to be restored, and one to remain in its current use and configuration – are historically associated with the Manhattan Market, a major retailer in early 20th century Cambridge.

The Manhattan Market was developed by Arthur H. Smith (1861-1943), a native of England who learned the retail trade in New York City. Mr. Smith was proprietor of the Pleasant Street Market in Cambridgeport when in 1891 he purchased a 6,500 square foot lot east of the Prospect House Hotel in Central Square, along with a right-of-way between Massachusetts Avenue and Green Street and a small frame building dating to the late 18th century. Smith announced plans to erect a two-story brick building designed by George Fogerty that would have a market on the first floor and rooms for clerks on the second.

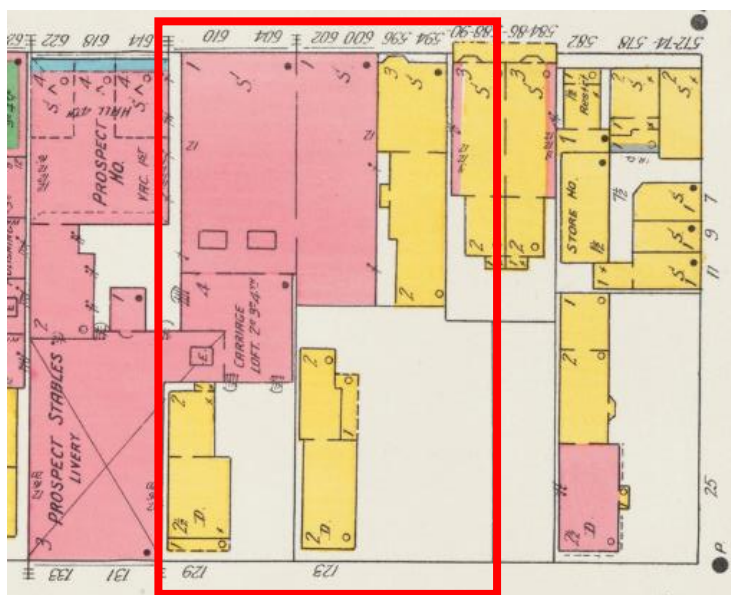
The enterprise would be named the Manhattan Market after “the great Manhattan Market on 125th Street [in] Harlem” *Cambridge Chronicle*, Jan. 31, 1891).¹



The first Manhattan Market 1895 Cambridge Directory

Probably due to the Panic of 1893 Smith did not actually open the Manhattan Market until 1895, when it occupied a one-story building at 602-614 Massachusetts Avenue next to the Prospect House with about 4,100 feet of selling space; the front was described as having been designed “in the latest New York style with four doors between two display windows” (*Chronicle*, August 10, 1895). In 1897 Smith began construction of a four-story brick building behind his store on Green Street next to the Prospect House stables; the structure would be an addition to both in that the first floor would provide storage for the market while the upper floors would be available to the stable for storage of carriages and tack (but not horses). With this improvement the market extended 135’ back toward Green Street and delivery vehicles were diverted away from the avenue frontage.

In 1899 Smith announced plans to build a second story and connect his building over the right-of-way to the Prospect House, but this did not occur. Instead, in 1901 he took over a two-year-old building at 596-600 Massachusetts Avenue designed by Cambridge architect H.D. Joll for the Pratt Brothers, dealers in fruit. Smith demolished the partition between them, and Pratt thereafter managed the fruit department of the Manhattan Market. A year later in 1902 Smith announced plans to build an addition behind the former fruit store, enlarging the store to 20,000 square feet and giving his premises 120’ of frontage on Green Street. This area was to be used for shipping and receiving and a bakery. A year after that the four-story brick structure was extended back to Green Street.



1900 Sanborn Atlas

Smith incorporated the business as the Manhattan Market Co. in 1900 and opened several other stores in the Boston area. The Cambridge store operated as a cooperative, with separate departments selling meat and produce, fruit, vegetables, canned and bottled goods, baked goods, confectioneries, kitchen furnishings, and music and musical instruments (complete with a piano where customers could try out the sheet music). A lunch counter at the back was open all day. According the long-time resident Suzanne Green (b. 1912) it was not a supermarket in the modern sense:

¹ The original Manhattan Market opened in 1872 in a 200’ by 900’ structure that occupied an entire city block between 34th and 35th streets and 11th and 12th avenues in Manhattan; it was planned to contain 1,000 to 1,200 stalls for retail and wholesale dealers in meat and produce. The building opened in 1880 and was destroyed by fire three months later. The reference to a market on 125th Street could not be substantiated, but Smith’s father operated a market somewhere in New York.

Each section had a separate counter ... with a salesman behind it. Some were along the walls and some in islands on the floor. The salesman ... was told, when your turn came, what you wanted, he assembled the items, wrote the prices on a brown bag, added them up, bagged the items. [Then] you paid, and off you went to the next counter

In 1909 Smith retained the firm of Newhall & Blevins to design a unified front with eight doors leading to a vestibule. The firm was then engaged in remodeling the Prospect House with a new terra-cotta façade, and both buildings appeared to share a common cornice. Whatever the improvement, however, Smith lost the vast sign that overwhelmed the old façade but included the memorable tag line, “An ideal pure food department store.”.



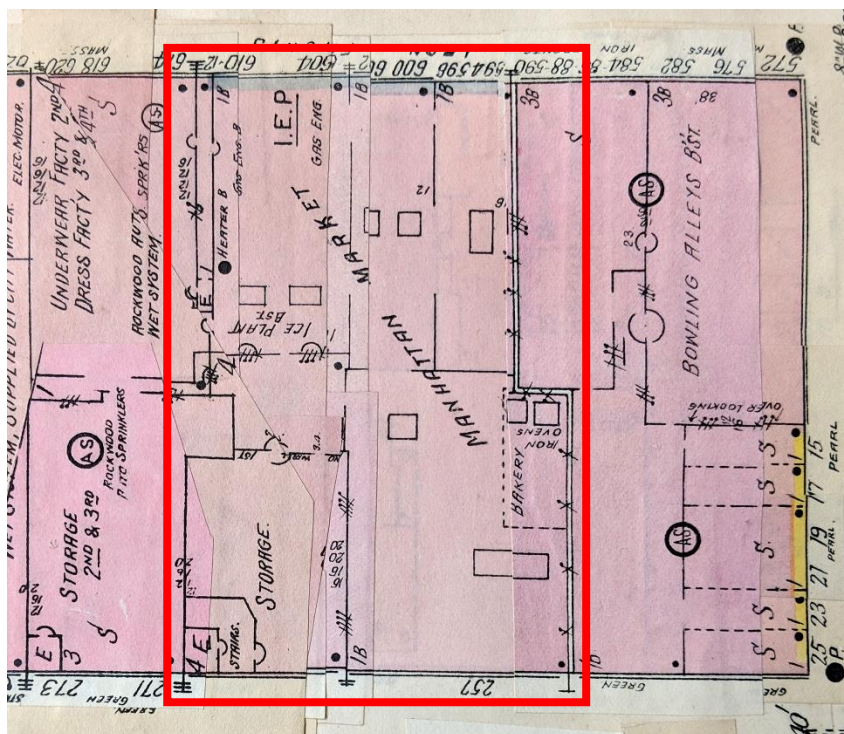
Manhattan Market, 1909

BERy Collection, Historic New England



Manhattan Market, 1910, with new façade by Newhall & Blevins BERy Collection, CHC

The Manhattan Market Co. under Arthur Smith continued much as before, until in 1928 he organized a new chain of “at least 100 five and ten cent grocery stores in Boston and vicinity within the next year” (Chronicle, May 25, 1928). These were apparently branded Serv Ur-Self Stores; seventeen were opened



1900 Sanborn, updated to 1929

Foods, Inc.

The Manhattan Market operated in the combined buildings until 1938, when the former Pratt Brothers store at 596-600 Massachusetts Avenue was leased to the Waldorf Restaurant chain and walled off from the market. At the same time, the Manhattan announced a renovation of its store.

Description

The separate facades at 596-600 and 602-614 Massachusetts Avenue were designed in 1938 and 1939, respectively, for the Waldorf Cafeteria chain and the Manhattan Market. While the facades resemble some of those designed by Cambridge architect William L. Galvin in Brattle Square, the one at 596-602 was designed by John M. Gray and the one at 602-612 by Sumner Schein. Both facades consist of cast stone panels that incorporate decorative designs that were hidden by a later storefront associated with the Purity Supreme Market. Both facades were exposed and restored in 2001; the uniform sign band below the parapet and the aluminum storefronts were installed at that time.



596-600 Massachusetts Avenue (left), 602-614 Massachusetts Avenue (right) Google Street view

within a year, including one directly across the street in Central Square. Smith retired from active management of the Manhattan Market and formed United Markets, Inc. in 1929. He and his son Wesley remained took over the Big Bear Market in Medford in 1935.

United Markets, Inc. operated stores in Dorchester, Quincy, and downtown Boston. The Manhattan Market continued to operate under its original name until 1949, when United was taken over by Elm Farm Foods, which had 40 markets in three New England states. The Elm Farm store became a Supreme Market in 1967 and was re-branded as a Purity Supreme Market in 1968 when the Supreme chain merged with Purity

The façade of 596-602 Massachusetts Avenue incorporates a band of alternating red stripes and green panels, colors that were associated with the Waldorf chain of cafeterias that proliferated around Boston in the 1920s and '30s. Waldorf and its competitor, Hayes Bickfords, operated dozens of cafeterias in this period.² The Chronicle described the new Waldorf in Central Square in glowing terms:

This new restaurant was decorated by the Battisti Studios of New York, and may be termed “gorgeous” in every respect. The walls, in brilliant reds and yellows, the long mural painting opposite the serving counter, and the novel lighting effects lend an effect that is at the same time startling, yet pleasing. It is a new note in restaurant decoration for Cambridge.

The seating capacity of this new Waldorf is 210 guests. The dining room is large and airy, with plenty of elbow room anywhere in the restaurant. ... The tables are formica topped, in keeping with the entire color scheme. The chairs are of aluminum with red leather backs. On the walls are round amber-colored mirrors. At the rear of the store is a series of lighting effects upon mirrors which adds to the beauty of the restaurant. (Dec. 29, 1938)



Architect John M. Gray practiced in Boston from 1923 to 1957, primarily designing public buildings and schools for the archdiocese. His only Cambridge projects were a Hayes-Bickfords restaurant in Kendall Square (1926) and the Magazine Beach bathhouse and swimming pool (1950), but he designed several firehouses and schools in Boston. Edoardo G. Battisti was a theatrical designer who designed movie theaters in the Art Deco style; examples are located in Brooklyn, N.Y. and Norwalk, Ohio.

Jurisdiction

The buildings at 596-614 Massachusetts Avenue are contributing structures in the Central Square National Register District. Cambridge’s Central Square Overlay District contains special zoning provisions

² In 1941 Waldorf had three locations in Cambridge and Hayes Bickfords had four.

for contributing structures that call upon the Planning Board to meet certain standards for issuance of permits. Among these are provisions that encourage the preservation of contributing buildings:

20.305 *Standards for Issuance of Special Permits.* In addition to the general standards for the issuance of a special permit found in Section 10.40 of the Zoning Ordinance, the special permit granting authority shall in addition make the following findings:

1. The proposed development is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Central Square Action Plan:

- encourage responsible and orderly development;
- strengthen the retail base to more completely serve the needs of the neighborhoods;
- preserve the Square's cultural diversity;
- create active people oriented spaces;
- improve the physical, and visual environment;
- provide retail establishments that serve people of diverse economic and social groups who live in the surrounding neighborhoods;
- encourage the development of new mixed income housing; and
- promote compatible retail adjacent to residential uses.

2. The building and site designs are consistent with "Urban Design Plan for Central Square" as outlined in the "Central Square Action Plan" and the "Central Square Development Guidelines";

3. The building and site designs adequately screen the parking provided and are sensitive to the contributing buildings in the vicinity;

4. *No National Register or contributing building is demolished or so altered as to terminate or preclude its designation as a National Register or contributing building; and*

5. *No National Register or contributing building has been demolished or altered so as to terminate or preclude its designation within the five (5) years preceding the application.*

However, the protection for contributing buildings will be waived if the Commission finds the building not preferably preserved:

20.303.3 *National Register and Contributing Buildings.* ...a building shall no longer be considered a contributing building ... if, upon application for a demolition permit, the Cambridge Historical Commission shall determine the building not to be a preferably preserved significant building as defined in the City of Cambridge Demolition Ordinance.

If the project is allowed to proceed design review will be undertaken by the Planning Board. Community Development Department staff will bear primary responsibility for design review, and CHC staff will participate in the discussion.

Recommendation

The former Manhattan Market and Waldorf Restaurant represents a significant period in the history of Central Square as Cambridge's downtown. The Art Deco design of the façade reflects aspirations toward modernity at the end of the Great Depression, and along with the adjoining Manhattan Market is the only example of this style in the National Register district.

I recommend that the structure be found significant for the reasons stated above, and that the Commission entertain testimony about the proposed replacement project before making a further determination.

Cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, ISD
Suzannah Bigolin, CDD
James Rafferty, Esq.