



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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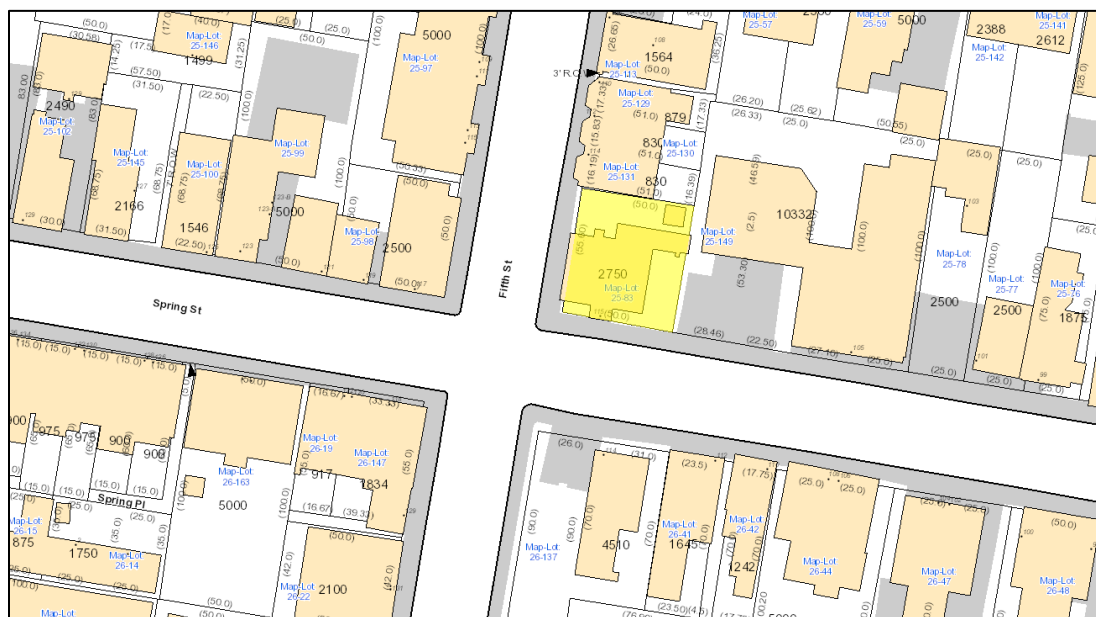
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Date: July 8, 2019  
To: Members of the Historical Commission  
From: Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner  
Re: D-1535: Frink-Watts House, 115 Spring Street (1826)

An application to demolish portions of the building at 115 Spring Street was made on May 9, 2019. The applicant, Cathy Wang, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for July 11, 2019.

### Site

The Frink-Watts house is located on the northeast corner of Spring and Fifth streets. The house is sited on a 2,749 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 \$937,100 (Map 25/Parcel 83). The property sold in April 2018 for a recorded price of \$1,015,000.



115 Spring Street

Cambridge GIS, 2019

A driveway is located on the north side of the house, accessed by a curb cut on Fifth Street. To the east of the subject property is the East End House, a two-story brick structure. Opposite 115 Spring are

residential buildings of 2.5 stories. To the north, are a group of three frame row houses, each two stories high. On the west side of Fifth Street, there are two three-story homes.



115 Spring Street

CHC staff photos, 7/9/19

### Architectural Description

The 1826 Frink-Watts house is a Federal-period, two-story, center-hall home with a side-facing gable roof. The façade is organized into five bays, with the entry door located in the middle. The front door and side lights are enclosed by a hip-roofed entry porch (a later alteration). The fenestration is symmetrical, with double hung sash, which originally had 6-over-6 lights but now are modern 1-over-1 replacement sash. The house sits on a fieldstone and brick foundation that accommodates for the changing grade along Fifth Street that slopes downhill from north to south.



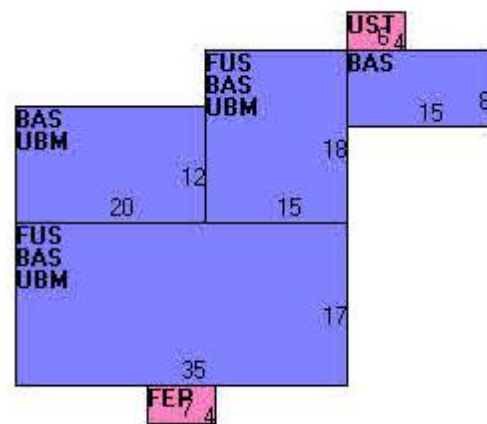


The walls are clad with wood clapboards. These were recently revealed when the asbestos shingle siding of 1969 was removed. The remaining trim is not elaborate and consist of corner boards of approximately 5" and a simple band molding around the windows. A raking cornice and short gable end returns are features of the two end walls. Federal houses in East Cambridge typically have very flat gable end walls, with little to no projection of the eaves. The front steps originally extended 6.5 feet toward the street but were turned to the side in 1935.

Two rear ells and a side wing expand the house to the north and east. Only minor changes to their configuration have been made since 1874 including closing the narrow gap between the two ells and adding a picture window on the east wing. They were not well constructed and are not considered significant portions of the house. The applicant intends to reconstruct them on the same footprint.



115 Spring St., 1873 Hopkins Atlas, Mrs. C. M. Watts, owner.



Assessor's sketch of existing building footprint.

The applicant has cited the low floor-to-ceiling heights as the reason to raise the roof by two feet and to alter the placement of the second-floor. The second-floor windows are proposed to be lifted by a comparable amount, retaining the relationship of the window headers to the eave line. Significant structural problems do require substantial repair, but the main block of the house appears to be recoverable. The initial approach was to lift the house from its foundation but concerns about the structural integrity led the proponents to change course and propose to add the extra height at the top of the second-floor walls and to reconstruct the roof.



Southeast corner, showing rot of the corner post and sill. East side wing visible in background.



Ells on the northside of house.

Houses of this period were typically of heavy post and beam framing. The wall surfaces between the framing members consist of studs and non-structural insulating materials between the studs. Lathe was nailed to the studs to support the plaster interior walls.

A house of similar scale and style is located at 136 Thorndike Street. It dates to 1834 and was renovated in 2010-2011.



136 Thorndike St. (1834) Photos from: <https://www.redfin.com/MA/Cambridge/136-Thorndike-St-02141/home/1552611>

## History

East Cambridge originated as a speculative real estate development at the beginning of the 19th century. A grid of streets was laid out on the salt-marsh island known as Lechmere's Point, and residential construction began near the top of the hill along Otis and Thorndike Streets. Early industry developed along the Miller's River north of East Cambridge, and the marshes south and west of the neighborhood remained undeveloped until after the Civil War.

Much of the development of East Cambridge was undertaken by corporations and trusts, rather than individuals. Andrew Craigie, the speculator who conceived of East Cambridge and who secretly purchased much of the Lechmere estate, soon organized the Lechmere Point Corporation as a means of attracting other investors. The expense of filling large tracts of marsh land and building streets and utilities was beyond the resources of most individuals, and companies such as the Canal Bridge Corporation and the Cambridge Wharf Company undertook these projects with varying success in the first half of the 19th century.

Spring Street was laid out in 1811 between Second and Sixth streets. The lot on which the house at 115 Spring Street now stands was part of Lot 72 on the 1811 "A Plan of Lechmere Point" by Peter Tufts, Jr. The block bounded by Spring, Fifth, Thorndike, and Fourth streets was initially divided into only four 20,000 square foot lots on the 1811 plan. By 1824, on another Tufts plan, "A Plan of Cambridgeport Parish," the block was divided into smaller lots of 5,000 square feet. Lot 190 of this plan was situated at the northeast corner of Spring and Fifth streets.

Henry Frink, a veteran of the War of 1812, purchased Lot 190 from William Payne in 1824. He set to work building his house and was taxed for the completed house and a brickyard on the north half of his property (now 110-114 Fifth Streets) from 1826 through 1828. Frink and his wife Maria Griswold married in 1825 in Cambridge. He died in Ogden, NY in 1847 and as his widow she received benefits from his military service. They had four children, the oldest son being listed as a machinist in the 1850 census.

Several ownership changes took place before the property passed to Lawrence B. Watts in 1852. Watts was the assistant engineer of the Fire Department in 1850. According to city directories, he also manufactured rulers and levels on Bridge Street. Watts was born in 1811, married Catherine M. Clarke, and died in 1860. He served on the building committee of St. John's, the first Roman Catholic church in Cambridge which was built at the corner of Otis and Fourth streets in 1842. Lawrence and Catherine had two children: Lawrence B., Junior who died in childhood and Lucy M. Watts. After her mother's death in 1877, Lucy inherited the property. She was employed at the coffin factory on Bridge Street and made burial robes. She also supplemented her income by renting a portion of the house to the Ashland Stevens family. Stevens was a night watchman at a market in Boston. Lucy Watts willed the property to her cousin Ellen M. Gorman.

The property was owned by several families in the twentieth century including Kotlewskiki, Dec, Szostak, and Pilarski. The Pilarski family owned the property from 1973 until 2018. Edward J. Pilarski was a supervisor at New England Telephone and a member of the Human Services Commission. He and his wife Kathy had several children. The couple divorced, and Kathy remained at the Spring Street house. She worked for the school department and became a foster parent to children with special needs.

### Significance and Recommendation

I recommend that the house at 115 Spring Street be found significant for its associations with the early residential development of East Cambridge by the Lechmere Point Corporation, its associations with the broad architectural, economic and social history of the city, and as an early example of a wooden Federal-style house. The Commission should hear testimony from the applicants and neighbors and review the plans for partial demolition, reconstruction and alterations before making a further determination.

cc: Cathy Wang