CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: May 29, 2007

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Charles M. Sullivan, Executive Director
Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner

Re: D-1111: 38 RC Kelley Street

An application to demolish the house at 38 RC Kelley Street and construct a new building was received on April 9, 2007. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance and requested that the hearing on his application be scheduled for the May 31, 2007 meeting.

Site

The structure is located on the south side of Kelley Street, in the block between Huron Avenue and Donnell Street. It is a 1½-story, wood-shingled side hall house. This single-family workers cottage sits on a brick foundation. A curb cut and driveway are located on the east (left) side of the house. A large tree stump, carved into a chair in the popular Cambridge manner, is located in the front yard.

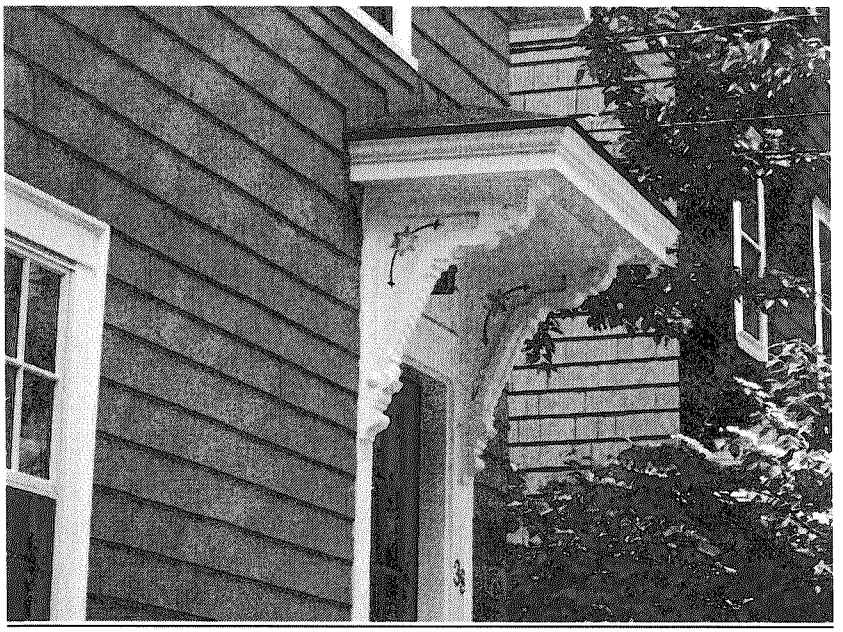
The structure is sited on a 4,736 square-foot lot (Map 229/Parcel 56). The zoning is Residence B, a two-family and townhouse zone that allows an FAR of .50 and a minimum of 2,500 square feet per dwelling unit. The height limit in this zone is 35 feet. Neighboring properties include the three-story condominium at 34-36 Kelley Street (which until 1989 was a 2-story twin of 30-32 Kelley Street) and a 2-story single-family house of 1888 at 44 Kelley Street. Across the street is a three-decker of 1897.

Architectural Description

The Bracketed Italianate workers cottage at 38 Kelley St. was constructed in 1876 by Patrick O'Brien. In plan, the house is an example of the popular gable roof, side hall residence with an ell on the south side of the main block of the house. The current footprint is consistent with the 1877 sketch of the house's footprint in the engineering department's house books. The house is positioned gable end toward the street. The four cross-gabled dormers on the east side, two on the ell and two on the main block, are unusual and are not thought to be original to the house's 1876 construction, but they are important features in the architectural evolution of the house.

North (front) and east sides of 38 Kelley St.

The front entrance is located on the right bay of the street-facing elevation. The door is covered by a hip-roofed hood, which is supported by handsome scrolled brackets decorated with a rope molding and jig-sawn stars. The fenestration on the façade is asymmetrical, perhaps the result of later alterations. The window placement is more regular on the side elevations. A side door and enclosed porch is located at the southeast corner of the ell at the back of the driveway.



Front entrance hood with incised brackets

Current Condition

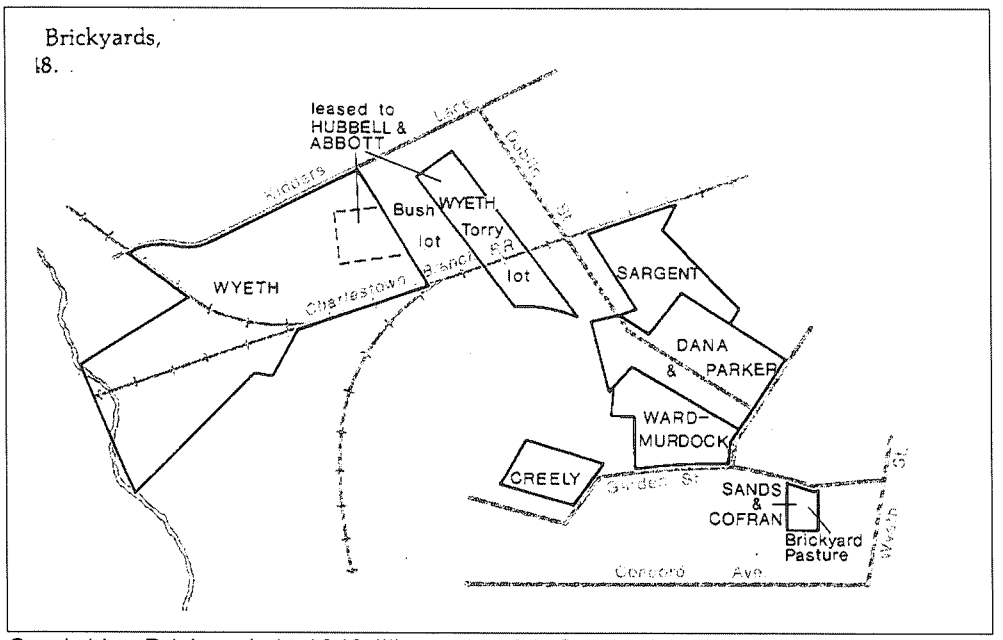
The current condition of the house from an exterior inspection appears to be good. The wood shingle cladding has been well maintained. The shingles were added in the twentieth century and cover the original clapboards. The asphalt roof shingles are reaching the point where they should be replaced. Windows and doors, though not original, are in good condition.

The proposal calls for a new 2-½ story, front gabled house, approximately 31' high, 23' wide, and 39' long. The building would have wood clapboard siding, two-over-two double-hung windows, one gabled dormer, and a center entrance on the east elevation. The new building would be set back an additional few feet from the west side property line.

History

The 1842 extension of the Charlestown Branch Railroad from Miller's River to Fresh and Spy Ponds opened up Northwest Cambridge for the brick industry and for suburban development. Several subdivisions were platted by the owners of the brickyards for the mostly-Irish worker population. Many of the brickyard workers built cottages near the clay pits. In other cases, abandoned clay pits from which the resource had been exhausted, were filled and subdivided for residential development.

In 1845, Samuel Cofran and John Sands moved their brickmaking operations from the Charles River to the 18th-century Brickyard Pasture on Garden Street in 1845. Orrin and Tierney Streets now occupy the site of the Cofran and Sands clay pit. Samuel Cofran sold his interest in the business to his partner, John Sands, in 1852. Sands bought the Ward family's brickyard on the other side of Garden Street (now St. Peter's Field) in 1863 and closed the Brickyard Pasture operation in 1866.



Cambridge Brickyards in 1848 (Illustration 34, Cambridge Historical Commission, *Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge: Northwest Cambridge*).

Asa Murdock, a Cambridgeport trader, subdivided some of the land around the Sands and Cofran brickyard, while the brickyards were still in operation. "Murdock's subdivisions were the first to incorporate house lots for brickyard laborers, creating a miniature village in which workers homes were set behind those of the brickyard owners." (*Northwest Cambridge*, 51). Murdock also purchased part of the Hill estate along Concord Avenue and divided the it into five large lots. Behind it, Murdock divided the land into smaller lots around the Sands and Cofran brickyard and laid out the lots along Donnell and Tuttle (R.C. Kelley) streets in 1851 and 1852. Irish laborers purchased Murdock's lots on Donnell Street and along the north side of Kelley Street in the mid 1850s and

built up a small village of workers cottages. The lots on the south side of Kelley Street were originally part of the larger parcels facing Concord Avenue. The end toward Huron Avenue began to be subdivided in the 1870s, but the rest of this side of the street was not subdivided until the 1920s.

38 R.C. Kelley Street was first recorded by the City Engineer in November 1877, shortly after it had been constructed by Patrick O'Brien in 1876. O'Brien, who had been born in Ireland about 1813, was listed in the city directories in the 1870s as a contractor and a gardener at Mount Auburn Cemetery who lived nearby on Huron Avenue. At about the same time, O'Brien also built a four-unit row house on an adjoining property at the corner of Concord and Huron, where the gas station is now located.

Meanwhile, the future owner of the house, James F. Kelly (or Kelley) was living in 1880 in the household of Jeffrey O'Brien, who was also a gardener, having married O'Brien's daughter Nellie. In 1884 Patrick O'Brien sold 38 R.C. Kelley Street to James Kelly. Kelly was employed as a carpenter. The Kellys lived in the house until 1894, when they moved to Madison Street.

The workers cottage would have originally had a simple gable roof form. The cross-gabled dormers are most likely the work of Kelly ca. 1885. No building permit exists for the alteration because building permits were not issued before 1886. Kelly was taxed for a second apartment in the building in 1887 (Christoper Hail, *Cambridge Buildings and Architects*, p. 868). The dormers increased the livable square footage on the second floor and distinguished the house visually from others in the neighborhood.

Kelly evidently sold the house to Dr. Thomas E. Cunningham, a physician in Central Square, who rented it to James I. Smith, a housepainter and carpenter, until Smith moved across the street about 1912. The house was then acquired by Patrick J. Lynch, a motorman, and in about 1923 by Samuel J. McLean, an engineer.

The name of the street was originally Tuttle, but was changed after World War II to honor Robert C. Kelley, a naval reservist killed in action. Robert C. Kelley's family lived on nearby Sherman Street.

<u>Significance and Recommendation</u>

38 Kelley Street is an unusual example of a low-gabled Bracketed Italianate side hall workers cottage with a finely detailed bracketed entrance. The addition of four cross-gabled dormers is a significant alteration from the 1880s. The house is architecturally significant for its period and style and is the only example of its type that has been identified.

The proposed new house is taller than the existing house, but the scale and orientation are comparable to others on the street. The block exhibits an eclectic mix of historic houses with modern additions and alterations as well as examples of recent construction. The Commission should hear testimony from the neighbors and review the plans for replacement construction before making a further determination.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, ISD
Timothy Hawk
Richard C. Tremaglio

38 R. C. Kelley Street, The Sanborn Map Co., 2002