



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: April 27, 2018
To: Cambridge Historical Commission
From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: D-1484: 114 Clay Street (1870)

An application to demolish the house at 114 Clay Street was received on April 9, 2018. The applicants, Daniel & Janice Stamos, were notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for May 3, 2018.



114 Clay Street, CHC photo, 2018

Description and Current Condition

The structure is a 2-story, wood-frame dwelling located on the west side of Clay Street in the block between Harvey and Dudley streets. The lot measures 6,000 square-foot lot (Assessor's Map 190/Lot 63) and is located in a Residence B zoning district. The Residence B district permits two-family construction and has a height limit of 35 feet and a Floor Area Ratio of 0.50 (0.35 FAR for that portion of the lot exceeding 5,000).

The house sits close to the street and very near the abutting house at 118-120 Clay Street (1895). A curb cut and driveway are located to the south of the house. Tax records and early atlases indicate that the house was constructed in 1870. The oldest part of the house is oriented gable end to the street. It measures 16' wide by 30' deep. The front door was originally centered on the south elevation. By 1877, when the house was measured and sketched by a city engineer, there were barns and sheds that extended back another 63' to the west.

The exterior of the house is in fair to poor condition. A tarp covers the roof, and it appears very little maintenance has been done in several years. The owner proposes to construct two attached townhouses with garages. Plans and a description of proposed materials were filed with the application.

Architectural Description

The house at 114 Clay Street is a typical North Cambridge worker's cottage built in 1870. The original main block of the house is 2 stories high with a front-facing gable roof of moderate pitch that is covered with asphalt shingles. The house sits on high brick foundation that has been parged with concrete. Because of the high water table and in this neighborhood, raised basements were more practical than excavated basements. Brick was readily available and an affordable material, making it a common choice for the foundation walls of these modest structures. Another characteristic design feature of these workers cottages were a south facing front elevation and the chimneys and very few openings on the north (rear) elevation. One chimney remains on the north side of the original block of the house.

A cross-gabled 2-story ell was constructed on the south side by 1896. A one-story addition replaced the front porch and filled in the south side in 1936. Cedar shingles were applied on top of the original clapboards in 1936. The picture window was added in 1969 and the front wall of the house reinforced.

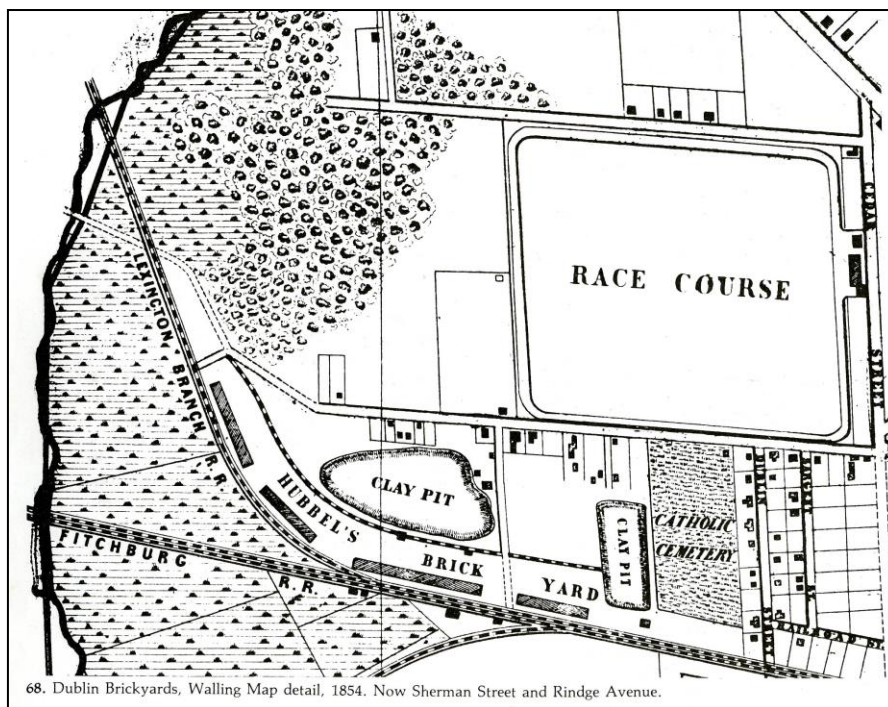


114 Clay Street, CHC photo, 2018

History

The 1842 extension of the Charlestown Branch Railroad from Miller's River to Fresh and Spy Ponds opened up North Cambridge for the brick industry and for suburban development. Several subdivisions were platted in the 1840s and early 1850s by owners of the brickyards to accommodate the mostly-Irish worker population.

By the mid-1850s most available land near the brickyards on Kidder's Lane (now Rindge Avenue) had been platted for residential development. The only remaining large parcel was the Race Course, fifty acres of flat land west of Cedar Street bounded by Harvey Street on the north and Rindge Avenue on the south. Opened in 1837, the Race Course operated on a seasonal basis during the 1840s, catering to cattle drovers and Cambridge traders and hosting a variety of racing events, the most popular being horse trotting, which was a competition of the horses' endurance not just their speed. Transportation via omnibus was available from Harvard Square.



Detail of the Walling map of 1854, showing the location of the race course, later subdivided for residential development.

As the suburban population of North Cambridge grew, the Race Course area came increasingly under pressure for reuse. The flat land of the course was perfectly suited for residential development, and in 1855 owners Kidder and Reed divided the parcel into 275 house lots, the largest residential subdivision in North Cambridge. Five new north-south streets were created between Harvey Street and Rindge Avenue. From east to west, they were Reed, Montgomery, Clay, Jackson, and Clifton streets.

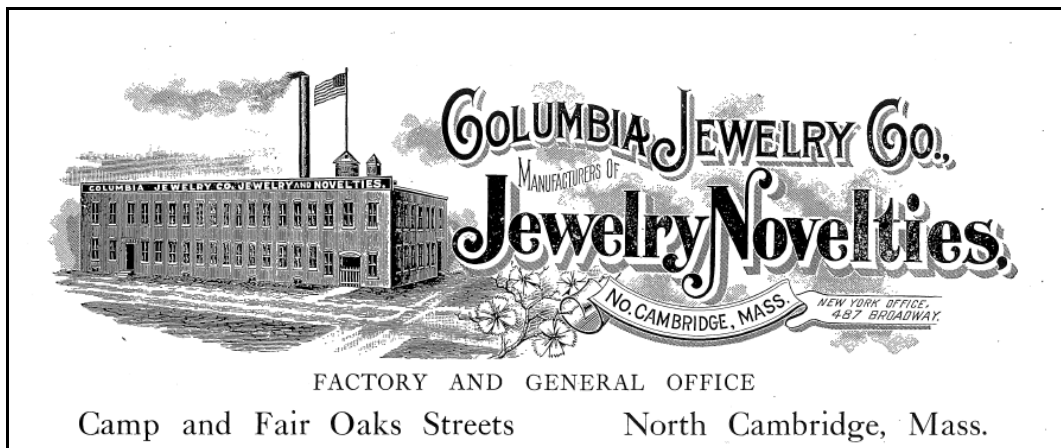
The house lots were first marketed to middle-class Irish in Boston and Charlestown, and half the lots were soon sold, but only three



buyers built houses. Kidder & Reed found a much more receptive market when they redirected sales toward Cambridge brickyard laborers. The areas closest to the brickyards were the first to be developed. The interior streets, such as Clay and Montgomery streets, remained sparsely populated until after the Civil War. A number of houses were built along Dudley Street when it was put through in 1870, but the Panic of 1873 abruptly terminated residential construction in the area. Another building boom occurred in the 1890s, when an influx of French Canadians arrived to work in the brickyards and other nearby industries.

Clay Street was part of Kidder and Reed's subdivision laid out in uniform 6000 square foot (50 x 120) lots. By 1873, only two houses had been built on this block of Clay Street. The earliest was 108 Clay, a five bay center entrance house constructed by owner Martin Moran in 1865. It was demolished in 1973 and replaced with two townhouses constructed in 1980-1981.

Martin Moran bought lots 162, 163, 164, and 165 of the Kidder & Reed subdivision. He built 114 Clay Street on lot 162 in 1870. Moran, a poultry dealer died in 1871. His two sons, Martin and Thomas, carried on the poultry business. The property was sold by Thomas Moran to Frank E. Viano in 1905. Frank Viano was an owner of the Columbia Jewelry Company, located on Camp Street. He resided on Day Street but may have purchased 114 Clay Street to rent to his employees, many of whom were Italian immigrants. Marco Coppi, a jewelry maker, purchased the house from Viano in 1924. The house remained in the Coppi family until 2008, when it was purchased by Daniel and Janice Stamos.



Advertisement for the Columbia Jewelry Co., Cambridge Directory, 1907.

Significance and Recommendation

The Moran House at 114 Clay Street is a characteristic example of a North Cambridge worker's cottage, the predominant nineteenth century house style of the Race Course subdivision. It is the staff recommendation that the Commission find the house significant in terms of Chapter 2.78.080 of the Municipal Code, for its important associations with the architectural and social history of the city, as well as for its architectural significance in terms of its period, style and method of building construction, both individually and in the context of the Race Course subdivision. The proposed new construction should be evaluated and public testimony heard before making a further determination.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services
Daniel & Janice Stamos