



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: January 26, 2024
To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Eric Hill, Survey Director
Re: D-1675: 315 Rindge Avenue, Dorey-Trant House (c.1850)

An application for demolition of the house at 315 Rindge Avenue was received on January 23, 2024. The owner, Anne Sirois, Trustee of the Barbara J. Trant Trust, was notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for February 1, 2024. The applicant proposes to clear the two structures on the lot – a single family worker's cottage and detached wooden garage for the construction of two townhouses on the site.



315 Rindge Avenue, CHC Photograph, 01/2024.



315 Rindge Avenue (highlighted in yellow).

Site

The Dorey-Trant House is located on the north side of Rindge Avenue, between Clifton Street to its east and City of Cambridge parks (Russell Field, McCrehan Memorial Pool Grounds, and Comeau Field) in the Racecourse neighborhood of North Cambridge. The lot is across Rindge Avenue from the newly redeveloped Jefferson Park Housing complex. The site at 315 Rindge Avenue includes two structures: a 1½-story wood-frame house and a detached, one-story two-car garage. The current assessed value for the land and building is \$714,100. The structure is sited on a 6,650-square-foot lot (Map 269, Lot 27) in a Residence B zoning district, which permits multi-family residential construction with a Floor-Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.5 and height up to 35 feet.

The applicant proposes a total of two residential units on the lot with the site plan showing two, semi-detached townhouses with garage parking within their footprint off Rindge Avenue. It appears that new curb cuts would be required for the project.

Architectural Description

The Dorey-Trant House is a 1½-story, L-shaped, cross-gabled workers cottage with a later one-story enclosed porch (1930). The porch is capped by a shallow hipped roof and is lined with double-hung windows. Another enclosed porch off the front of the house was removed during a more recent renovation. The house is clad with cedar shingles which are in poor condition. The original wooden clapboard siding is partially visible under the shingles. The steep gable roof is covered in asphalt shingles and is punctuated by small projecting dormers. It appears that all of the original windows have been replaced with the present one-over-one double-hung windows.

The house is sited close to Rindge Avenue with a minimal setback from the sidewalk and sits upon a slightly raised concrete block foundation. The entrances are located on the east-facing façade and are accessed via a set of concrete steps and wooden

deck. The property is enclosed by a chain link fence. A detached, garage structure is located in the rear yard and is not significant.



Dorey-Trant House, 315 Rindge Ave, 1972. Cambridge Historical Commission Survey Photograph.



Dorey-Trant House, 315 Rindge Avenue. CHC Photograph, 01/2024.

History

This area of North Cambridge is strongly associated with the development of the brick industry. The 1842 extension of the Charlestown Branch Railroad from the Miller's River to Fresh and Spy Ponds opened up North Cambridge for the brick industry as well as for suburban development.

The clay beds under the Alewife marshes constituted Cambridge's most abundant natural resource. While the railroad was built for the sole purpose of carrying ice from Fresh Pond to the wharves in Charlestown, local landowners immediately took advantage of it to strip their unproductive fields and open clay pits to supply Boston's insatiable demand for bricks.

Charlestown businessman Peter Hubbell was among the most enterprising of the early Cambridge brickmakers. He opened his first pit on the south side of Rindge Avenue in 1844 and by 1860 was making 15 million bricks a year in Cambridge and an equal amount in Medford. The Chronicle described his operations in 1857.

Brickmaking required a willing labor force, which was quickly supplied from the ranks of impoverished Irish immigrants. These men first boarded in local farmhouses, but soon created a demand for suburban lots on which to build and raise their families.

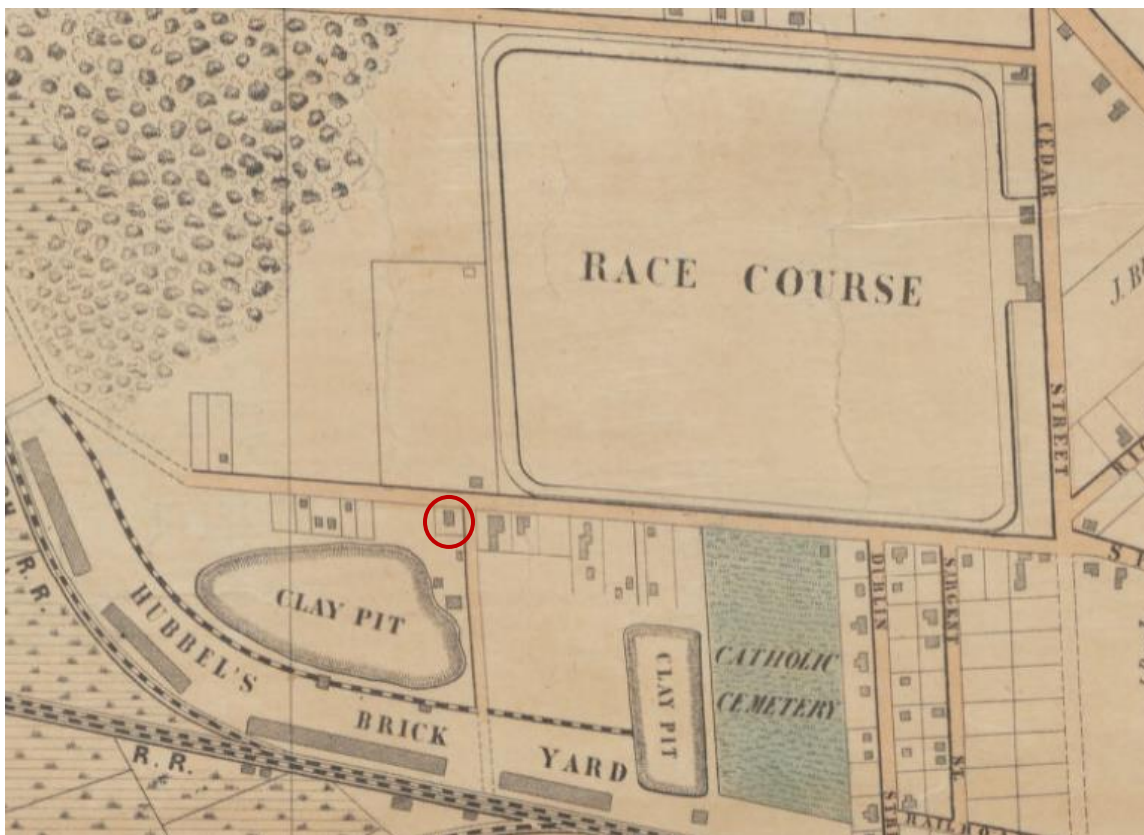
Several subdivisions were platted in the 1840s and early 1850s by owners of the brickyards to accommodate the mostly Irish worker population. By the mid-1850s most available land near the brickyards on Kidder's Lane (now Rindge Avenue) had been platted for residential development. The only remaining 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. The one-mile track saw a variety of events, the most popular being horse trotting, which was a competition of endurance, not just speed. Transportation via omnibus was available from Harvard Square.

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.

THE EXTENSIVE BRICK MAKING ESTABLISHMENT of Mr. Peter Hubbell in North Cambridge is the largest of the kind in this country. It gives employment to about two hundred and fifty men from the first of April to the middle of October. When in full operation it manufactures on an average 187,000 bricks per day, or about *twenty four millions* during the season! The wood used in burning this immense quantity is the best Nova Scotia, and amounts to over three thousand cords. The clay is taken from a pit, which is about forty feet deep. It is raised in a car on an inclined plane by steam power, when it is taken on a railroad track to the several pits where it is made into bricks. The clay is all worked by steam power, which requires a second steam engine, and shafting which reaches about a quarter of a mile. A very large outlay of capital has been made; and every thing about the establishment is reduced to a perfect system. The place is well worth a visit.

Cambridge Chronicle, June 6, 1857

The house now located at 315 Rindge Avenue was built by or for Peter Dorey, a Canadian-born laborer who relocated to Cambridge, marrying Ellen M Nyhan of Ireland in 1852. The house was built before their marriage and was originally located on the south side of Rindge Avenue (then Kidder's Lane). The 1855 Massachusetts State Census lists four residents in the house: Peter Dorey (26, laborer); Ellen Dorey (23); Ellen Dorey (2); and Michael Nyhan (70, laborer).



Detail of the Walling map of 1854. Rindge Avenue is the southern boundary of the racecourse. The Dorey-Trant House house now located at 315 Rindge Avenue is circled, before its move across the street in 1867.

Peter Dorey was employed as a brickmaker at Hubbell's Brickyard and built the house on land adjacent to the clay pits that he leased from Hubbell. In 1857, a Boston Herald article (reprinted in the New York Times) detailed a landslide at Peter Hubbell's brick yards, where portions of a 40' deep pit collapsed, destroying several houses and barns. The Dorey House was said to have been left projecting over the edge of the 40' deep pit and appears to have been relocated after the collapse. The Cambridge Chronicle accused the Boston papers of sensationalizing the event, which may be why Dorey's house remained in place until 1867-68

Destructive Land-Slide in North Cambridge, Mass.

From the Boston Herald, June 1.

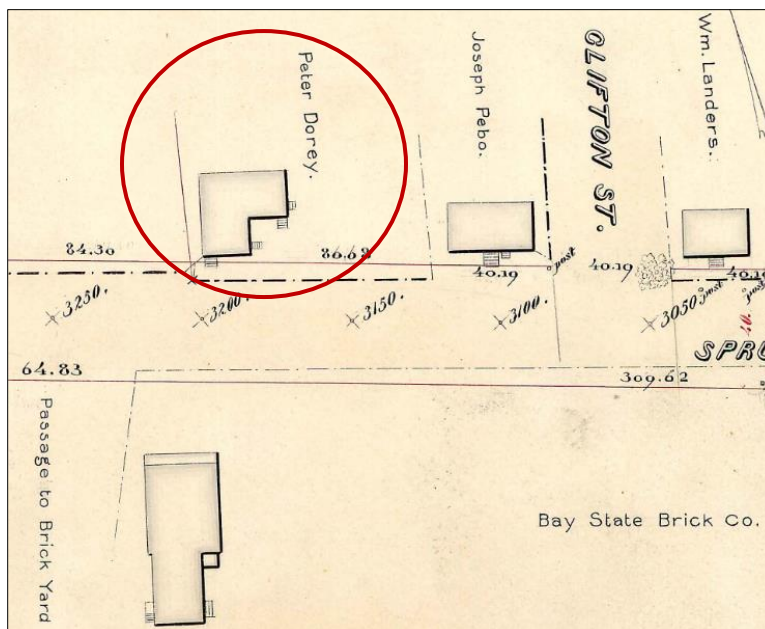
A land-slide, involving the loss of a considerable amount of property, occurred at the brick-yards in North Cambridge, about a half a mile from PORTER'S Hotel, on Friday afternoon. For a long time past the workmen in the brick-yard of Mr. PETER HURRELL have been engaged in a pit a short distance east of the Fitchburg Railroad. This pit is about forty feet deep, and covers an area of several acres. From the continued excavations, the land on the eastern side of the pit had been undermined to such an extent that during the heavy shower, Friday afternoon, a large mass of earth, on which was situated a barn and several outbuildings, gave way and was precipitated into the pit. About an acre and a half of the land was thus displaced.

These houses were occupied by the following persons and their families: Patrick Delaney, John Smith, Peter Dorey, Michael Mahoney, Patrick Kelliber, and John Foley. One end of DOREY'S house is left projecting over the pit, and it is feared that it will share the same fate as the barn should there come another heavy rain.

The six families occupying the houses nearest the pit have removed from them. The damage by the land-slide is estimated at about \$5,000. The property damaged was owned, in the greater part, by the occupants.

New York Daily Times article reprinted from the Boston Herald, June 1, 1857.

The Dorey House was relocated to the north side of the street in 1867-8 to allow the Bay State Brick Company to expand. By the 1870 Census, Peter and Ellen Dorey had eight children, ranging from one year old to sixteen. In 1878 the Doreys relocated to East Bridgewater, Massachusetts and sold their Cambridge property to William P. Fowler.



Dorey House as drawn in a 1870 survey by the Cambridge City Engineer for Spruce Street widening. The City Council awarded Dorey \$50 damages for the part of his lot taken to widen the Street.

Significance and Recommendation

The Dorey-Trant House at 315 Rindge Avenue is significant for its relationship to the brick industry of North Cambridge and the working-class immigrant population of the Race Course neighborhood. The house has strong associations with the broad cultural, economic and social history of Cambridge. The staff recommends that the structure be found significant for these reasons.

cc: Anne L. Sirois, Owner
Peter McLaughlin, Cambridge Inspectional Services