



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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

Telephone: 617 349 4683 Fax: 617 349 3116 TTY: 617 349 6112

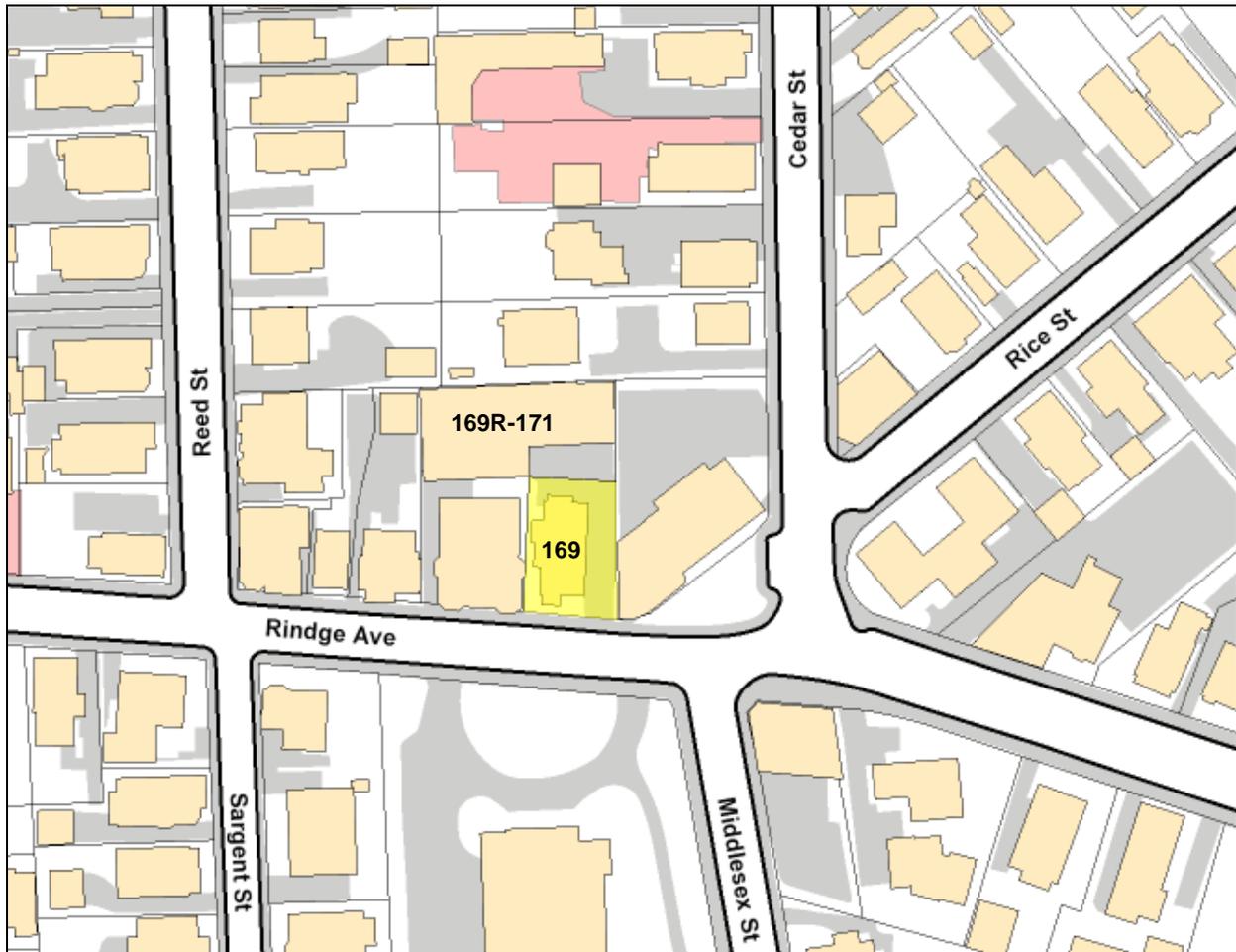
E-mail: histcomm@cambridgema.gov URL: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/Historic>



Bruce A. Irving, *Chair*, Susannah Barton Tobin, *Vice Chair*; Charles M. Sullivan, *Executive Director*
Joseph V. Ferrara, Chandra Harrington, Elizabeth Lyster, Caroline Shannon, Jo M. Solet, *Members*
Gavin W. Kleespies, Paula A. Paris, Kyle Sheffield, *Alternates*

Date: March 4, 2020
To: Members of the Historical Commission
From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner
Re: D-1549: 169 Rindge Avenue, Brosnahan House (1873)

An application for demolition of the house at 169 Rindge Avenue was received on February 11, 2020. The owners, Steven McNulty and Kate Berseth, were notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for March 5, 2020. A large concrete block garage is located at 169R-171 Rindge Ave. on the adjacent parcel, but it is not considered to be significant. Both lots are proposed to be re-developed for the construction of six townhouses on the combined L-shaped site.



169 Rindge Ave (highlighted in yellow).

Cambridge GIS, March 2020

Site

The building is located on the north side of Rindge Avenue, between Reed and Cedar streets in the Racecourse neighborhood of North Cambridge. It is a frame house on a concrete or parged-brick foundation. The current assessed value for the land and building is \$975,600. The structure is sited on a 3,900 square-foot lot (Map 192-Lot 158) in a Business A-1 zoning district. The Business A-1 district permits residential construction at the same density as a C-1 residential district (FAR of 0.75 and height up to 35 feet).

The proposal is for a total of six units on the combined 7,673 sf L-shaped lot. The site plan shows four detached units and two attached units with six off-street parking spaces, as required by zoning. The existing curb cut and driveway on the east side of the property would be retained.

Architectural Description

The house at 169 Rindge Avenue is a 2 1/2-story, front-gabled, side hall house with a 2-story ell and porches. The house is clad with cedar shingles. Most of the windows have been replaced but a 2-over-1 double-hung sash in the gable end, may be original.

Originally built in 1873, the house would have originally had wood clapboards, corner boards, and brackets at the eaves and entry porch. The original window trim and raking cornice remain intact.



169 Rindge Ave, 2015, Cambridge Assessing Department photo

Current Condition

The current condition of the exterior of the house is very good.



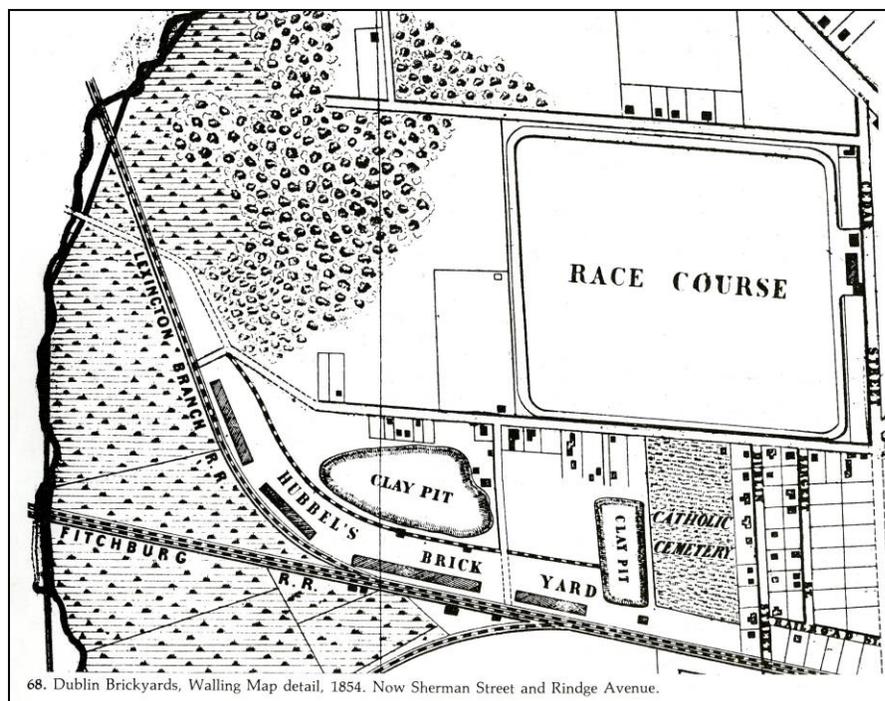
169 Rindge Ave, 2020, CHC staff photo

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. The one-mile track saw 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.

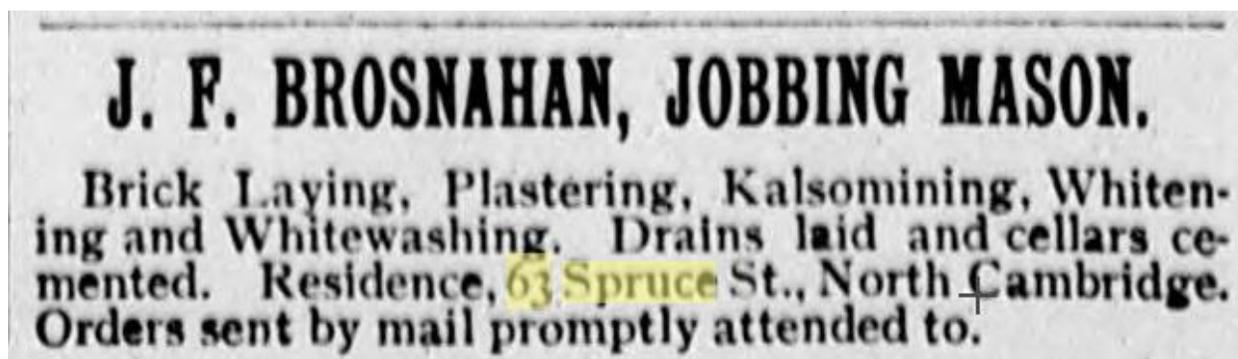
As the suburban population of North Cambridge grew, the Race Course area came increasingly under pressure for reuse. The flat land of the course was perfectly suited for residential development, and in 1855 owners Kidder and Reed divided the parcel into 275 house lots, the largest residential subdivision 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.



Detail of the Walling map of 1854. Rindge Avenue is the southern boundary of the race course.

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 Reed 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 industries. Tract houses filled in the remaining empty lots on the site of the old Poorhouse between Cedar and Reed streets near Harvey Street, and on small courts.

John Brosnahan immigrated to the U.S. from Ireland as a young child in 1852. He married Ellen A. Phelan in Cambridge in 1873 and purchased the house at 169 Rindge Avenue (then 63 Spruce Street) from Patrick White. Brosnahan owned his own business as a mason and advertised his services in the local papers.



Advertisement for J. F. Brosnahan's masonry business. *Cambridge Tribune* 6 October 1888.

The next owners were John and Julia Coleman, also Irish immigrants. They raised five sons and three daughters at 169 Rindge Avenue, one of whom became a priest. The house passed down to their children Jeremiah F. Coleman, a butcher, and Catherine

E. Coleman Dudley. Catherine was married to Edward L. Dudley, a teamster. The Dudley family occupied the home into the 1930s. Their sons and daughters worked as clerk, telephone operator, driver, bookkeeper, and stenographer. Catherine Dudley built the front porch on the house in 1924.

Omer and Loretta Poirier, purchased the property by 1941. Omer had a moving business and made several alterations to the property. A kitchen and bedroom were added in 1941. At the same time, the house was clad in cedar shingles. A wood garage and stable at the back of the property were replaced in 1946 by a masonry garage to house up to 10 trucks. This required zoning relief from the Board of Zoning Appeal.

A later owner of the property, Edward G. Bellis, ran several times for City Council. He was an employee of the state, as was his wife Dorothy.

Significance and Recommendation

The house at 169 Rindge Avenue is significant for its relationship to the Race Course neighborhood and its Irish and French immigrant populations, demonstrating the house's associations with the broad cultural, economic and social history of Cambridge. It is the staff recommendation that the structure be found significant for this reasons.

The house is in good condition and could be incorporated into a redevelopment plan for the rest of the site. The Commission should hear the applicant's presentation and public testimony before making any further determination.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services Commissioner
James J. Rafferty, Esq., for the applicant