



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: January 28, 2021  
To: Members and Alternates of the Historical Commission  
From: Sarah Burks, Preservation Planner  
Re: Case D-1568: 46-50 Jay Street

### Current Conditions

An application to demolish the three-family house at 46-50 Jay Street was received on January 12, 2021. The owner, Janet Williams, on behalf of 50 Jay Redevelopment LLC, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for February 4, 2021.

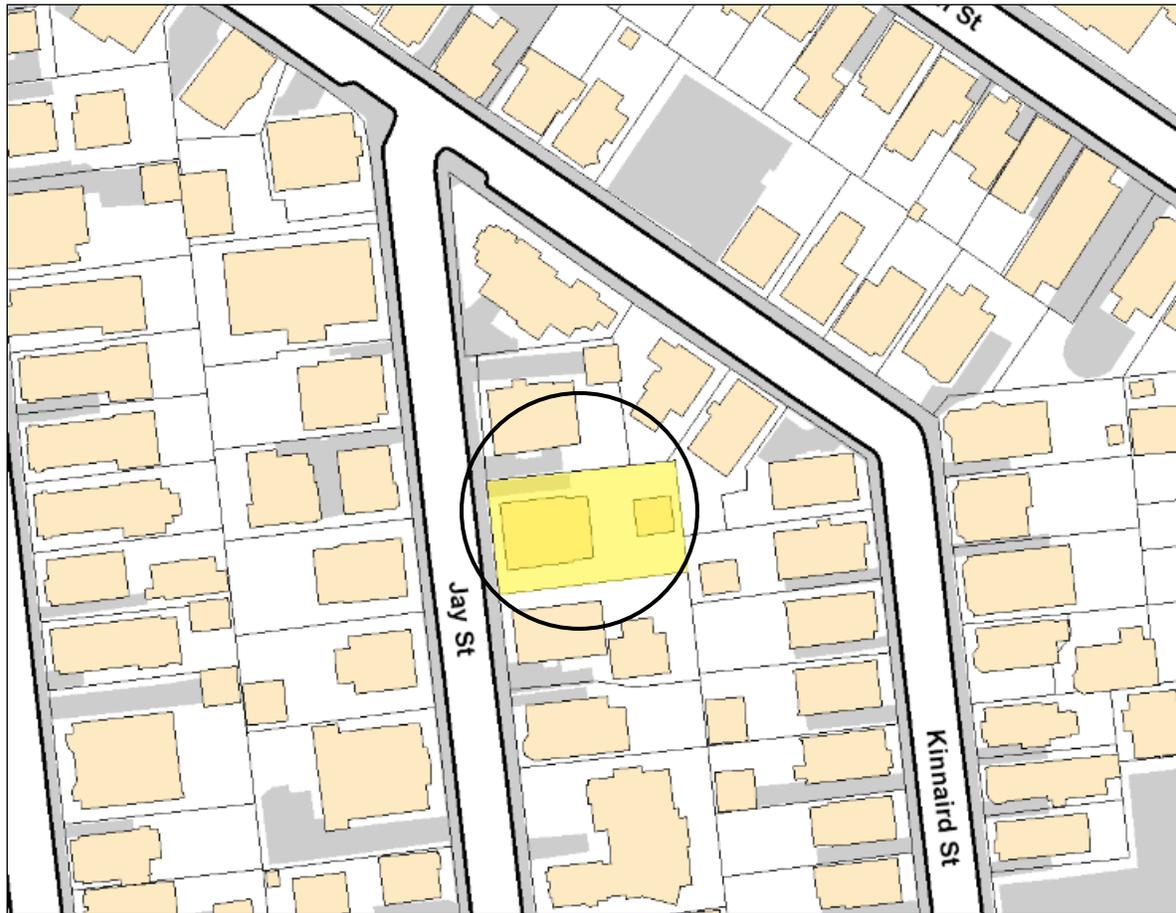


46-50 Jay Street

CHC staff photo, Jan. 2021

The house at 46-50 Jay Street occupies a 6,019 square-foot lot (123/22) on the east side of Jay Street, north of Western Avenue. The house is a three-story frame building on a brick foundation. The zoning is Residence C-1, a multi-family housing district with maximum of 29 units per acre. The regular FAR and height limits in this district are .75 and 35 feet,

though the zoning code has increased allowances for townhouse development. The assessed value of the land and building, according to the Assessing Database, was \$596,500 for the building, and \$1,063,100 for the land.



Locus map

Cambridge GIS

The front of the house is set back from the sidewalk by approximately 8', ranging even with other houses on this end of the block. The side setbacks are about 13.6 feet on each side. There is a curb cut on the north side of the house. A two-bay steel-frame garage built in 1925 stands in the back yard.

The adjacent buildings include a nearly identical residence at 52-56 Jay Street built by the same developer in 1887. Across the street are a couple of two-story double houses at 43-45 and 47-49 Jay, and two detached single-family condominiums at 51-53 Jay Street built in 2013. A Mansard cottage at 30 Jay that was moved on its lot to accommodate new townhouses pursuant to a demolition case in 2007 is nearby.

The exterior condition of 46-50 Jay Street is good. Some wood rot and deterioration at the gutter, window trim and porches is evident, but the house is not in a state of neglect or decay.



46-50 Jay Street

CHC staff photo (Jan. 2021)

### Description

The house 46-50 Jay Street is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century three-family residence designed by architect J. H. Webber in a nearly identical design as the house next door at 52-56 Jay Street. Each unit has its own entrance, with one at center front (48) and one at the center of each side elevation (46 and 50). Each elevation is organized into three bays with symmetrically placed windows. The windows and doors are modern replacements within the original openings. Hipped roof entry porches with Queen Anne-period turned porch posts are located at each entry. The house is clad with wood clapboards and flat corner boards. The roof is nearly flat, with a very minimal pitch to each side

Alterations have included the addition of wood shingle siding in 1936. The shingles were removed and new clapboards installed in 1986. The original window pattern was 2-over-2 double hung sash. They were replaced with 1-over-1 vinyl replacements in 1986. The band moldings and sills may have also been replaced at that time, as they are in poorer condition than the casings. A one-story rear porch was changed to a three-story enclosed stair and open deck in 1985.

### History

The Riverside neighborhood north of Western Avenue was developed in the 1860s on lands originally held by the Dana family. The Western Avenue Bridge was opened in 1824, but the area developed slowly. The ground was marshy and poorly drained. Development initially occurred along Green Street to the north and Pleasant Street to the east. The residential development of the area intensified after the Civil War, spurred by the continued



42-44, 46-50, 52-56 Jay Street

CHC staff photo (Jan. 2021)



43-45, 47-49, 51-53 Jay Street

CHC staff photo (Jan. 2021)



Jay Street aerial view, 2020

Nearmap.com

growth of the Riverside Press and the filling of the wetlands that fed the millpond where Hoyt Field is now located.

The lot now occupied by 46-50 Jay Street was initially part of a much larger group of lots on Kinnaird, Jay and Howard streets that was subdivided into 30 building lots between 1854 and 1873. George and Newell Chamberlain acquired about 15 lots on Howard and Jay streets, and in 1885 began to build houses for rent. The three-family houses at 46-50 and 52-56 Jay were designed by the same architect as the more numerous two-family houses on Jay and Howard streets-- John H. Webber.

George Chamberlain (1823-1895) and his brother Newell were natives of Westboro, Mass., who arrived in Cambridge in 1864. They lived in a double house at 5-7 River Street and operated a wholesale meat business at Quincy Market and a slaughterhouse in Brighton. Between 1871 and 1895 the brothers built at least two dozen tenement (rental) houses on nearby streets. George was an alderman in 1879-80, a state representative in 1882-87, and a founder of the Pilgrim Congregational Church (corner of Magazine and Cottage streets). "A brusque and combative man," of "fearless utterance and singleness of purpose," he was a vigorous leader of the No-License movement (*Cambridge Chronicle*, Sept. 14, 1895)

The Chamberlains' architect, John H. Webber (1820-1894), was a Maine native who worked as a housewright after he arrived in Cambridge about 1844. Beginning about 1855 he practiced as an architect, and designed numerous houses in Cambridgeport. Most of his commissions in the 1880s are residences in the fully developed Queen Anne style, so the Jay Street houses are something of an anomaly.

By 1894 the Chamberlains owned 22 houses and 13 vacant lots between Western Avenue and Kinnaird Street. Upon his death in 1895, George left the tenements on Jay Street to his daughters Sophia Caswell and Etta Kendall. By 1916, only one (59-61) remained in the

hands of an heir; the others were sold. Etta and her husband, James H. Kendall, sold 46-50 Jay Street to George Sullivan in 1902.

Sullivan lived in unit 50 and rented out the other two flats. By 1925, the property was owned by Thomas McDonald who erected a steel two-car garage at the back of the lot. McDonald lived in unit 46 and rented the other units. After his widow and daughter sold the house, it appears that all three units became rentals going forward.

### Recommendation

The Chamberlain tenement houses are significant as an uncharacteristic example of moderate-income housing of the 1880s. Their design lays outside the norms of vernacular housing in Cambridge, yet they seem to have successfully met the needs of their owners and tenants for over a century. The house at 46-50 Jay Street appears to be in good condition. The proposal is to demolish the rear half of the house and remodel the front half in a contemporary style to match a new construction two-family structure at the rear of the lot.

The staff recommends that the Commission hear testimony from the neighbors and carefully review the plans for the redevelopment before making a further determination.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services  
Adam Siegel, SGL Development