



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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May 28, 2026

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Eric Hill, Survey Director

Re: Case D-1826: Robert and William Clark Double House, 178-180 Elm Street North, by John Driscoll on behalf of Mario Bussolati.

A demolition permit application demolish the existing residence and detached former stable at 178-180 Elm Street North was received on May 8, 2026. The owner was notified of an initial determination of significance by the Executive Director of the Cambridge Historical Commission, and a public hearing was scheduled for June 18, 2026.



Robert and William Clark Double House, 178-180 Elm Street N

CHC



## Site

The Robert and William Clark Double House occupies a 7,910 square foot lot at the corner of Elm Street and Miller Avenue in North Cambridge. This stretch of Elm Street serves as the boundary between Cambridge and Somerville, with Cambridge on the west (even) side and Somerville on the east (odd) side. The property is located in a C-1 residential zoning district that allows single- to multi-family dwellings up to four stories (or 45' in height) as of right. Since the lot size exceeds 5,000 square feet, a project with an affordable housing component could be six stories (74'). The minimum front yard setback for C-1 zone is ten feet, and the minimum side and rear yard setbacks are five feet.

## Architectural Description

Built in 1892, the Robert and William Clark Double House is an example of a Queen Anne style double house with symmetrical plan. The design is dominated by two, two-story rounded corner towers capped with conical roofs that tie into the main hip roof. A dormer with hip roof is centered on the façade and is entirely clad with asphalt shingles, along with the remainder of the roof. Two entrances on the front façade are sheltered by a raised porch with pent roof supported by square posts. A majority of the building is covered with horizontally laid vinyl siding except for the two-story rounded towers which are clad in vertically laid vinyl siding that flare over the first-floor windows. Many of the double-hung windows are 1-over-1, vinyl replacement windows, but a few 2-over-1 wood windows remain with aluminum storm windows.



178-180 Elm Street North



CHC, 2026

The side and rear elevations are plainer than the primary façade. At the roof, a hipped dormer with chimney is centered on each elevation. Additional entrances are located on each side elevation along with a one-story rounded bay that appear to be original to the design of the residence.



178-180 Elm Street North

CHC, 2026



178-180 Elm Street North, west (side) and rear elevations

CHC, 2026



178-180 Elm Street North, rear stable

CHC, 2026

Behind the residence, the one-story stable that fronts Miller Avenue also dates to 1892. The stable is rectangular in plan with a gable roof and narrow chimney on the west slope. The Miller Avenue façade is altered with the original carriage doorways enclosed by vertically laid boards. A small, square hay door remains in the gable. The east-facing elevation retains the original pedestrian door and shingled frieze band.



178-180 Elm Street North

CHC, 1972

## History

Prior to the coming of the railroad in the mid-1840s, North Cambridge was largely farmland. Large swathes of land on both sides of North (Massachusetts) Avenue were owned by members of the Watson family, thereby giving the area the appellation of Watson's Plain. These large landholders generally farmed their parcels for their own sustenance. Several colonial-era taverns were scattered along North Avenue until the late nineteenth century. Prior to 1845, Elm Street was known as Milk Row due to the abundance of dairy farms on Tufts family land on the east side of the street. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the dairy industry had gravitated towards outlying towns for their richer topsoil for grazing.

The opening of the Fitchburg Railroad's Porter Station in 1842 and the introduction of omnibus service along North Avenue provided the impetus for the platting and sale of plots in the district, but development only picked up after the Civil War, when the area experienced a building boom. This change was precipitated in part by the introduction of horse railroads, which were a compromise between the unreliable horse-driven omnibuses and trains that ran on the Fitchburg Railroad and the Lexington & Arlington Branch of the Boston & Lowell (1870).

Cambridge was the first community in the Boston area to adopt a streetcar system. Chartered in 1853, the Cambridge Railroad Company operated services along North (Massachusetts) Avenue by 1856. Meanwhile, the Middlesex Horse Railroad (est. 1856, opened 1858) laid tracks along Elm Street; the Somerville Horse Railroad company was created in 1857 to receive this franchise, which then passed to the Union Railroad in the early 1870s. Conveying 5,000 passengers daily at a fixed five-cent fare, the Cambridge Railroad facilitated the settlement of white-collar bookkeepers, salesmen, and tradesman in North Cambridge who worked in downtown Boston.

In 1887, the West End Street Railway took over the horse railroad lines that converged at Meacham and Elm streets; electric trolleys were introduced on North Avenue two years later. Inexpensive transport enabled working families to relocate to the "suburbs" while continuing to labor in the city. The increased demand spurred the development of two- and three-family homes in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including 178-180 Elm Street, the topic of this report.



Elm Street area, bird's eye view in 1877. Approximate location of 178-180 Elm St N circled.



Elm Street area, Bromley Atlas map. 178-180 Elm St N circled. 1894



Elm Street N Streetscape. L-R: 174 and 176 Elm (both 1892), 178-180 (1892), and 182 (1894) CHC, 2026



Elm Street N Streetscape, looking east from the corner of Miller Avenue Google Streetview, 2024

The Robert and William Clark Double House was built in 1892 for brothers Robert Harry Clark (1862-1916) and William Thomas Clark (1855-1923), both provision dealers with the firm Clark & Hickey. The brothers hired local builder Walter Sewell to design and construct the building, which was completed by 1893. Robert lived alone in one side, while William resided in the other side with his wife, Sarah, and daughter, Maude. The brothers sold the property in 1901 to Carl Robert Weitze and moved to Brookline.



Clark Family, c.1890. Robert (back row, left) and William (back row, second from right) Ancestry.com

Carl Robert Weitze (1831-1918) was born in Germany and settled in Boston in the 1850s. He moved to East Cambridge and established himself as a sausage maker, maintaining shops in East Cambridge and Eliot Street in Boston. Carl and his wife, Geneva, a music teacher, lived at 156

Thorndike Street with their family and maintained this property on Elm Street in North Cambridge as a rental property for supplemental income. The former two-family residence was converted to a six-unit apartment sometime during or soon after Weitze's ownership. After his death in 1918, the property was acquired by Harry B. Stearns, a salesman with the Cambridge Electric Light Company who resided at 28 Blake Street, renting apartments at 178-180 Elm Street North to tenants. The most recent owner, Mario Bussolati (1932-2024), purchased 178-180 Elm Street North in 1957. Mario was born to Italian parents and attended Cambridge Public Schools, later enlisting in the U.S. Army, where he served in the Korean War. Mr. Bussolati owned and resided in a unit in the building at 178-180 Elm Street North until his death in 2024.

The adjoining three-deckers at 174 and 176 Elm Street share a remarkable stylistic similarity to the Clark house. These were constructed as investment properties by Charles F. Shourds, a feather-duster manufacturer in Boston who resided on Roseland Street. Constructed to the same mirror-image plans, the buildings exhibit elaborate paneling on full-height bay windows that are capped by hexagonal turrets and false gables on their flat roofs. These exceptional buildings are the work of builder Charles F. Weldon (1837-1898), who worked for most of his career in Boston before moving to Cambridge in 1887, where he was credited with only five houses. It is reasonable to assume that some of the exterior details of the Weldon houses were replicated on 178-180 Elm Street next door.

#### Significance and Recommendation

The Robert and William Clark Double House at 178-180 Elm Street North is individually significant as a characteristic double Queen Anne house built during a period of suburbanization of North Cambridge. It is also significant in the context of the Elm Street streetscape of nearby Queen Anne Style turreted three-deckers. The Executive Director has previously found the stable to be "not significant" for the purposes of the demolition permit review ordinance.

Staff recommends that the Commission hear testimony from the public and review the plans for the redevelopment before making a further determination.

cc: Peter McLaughlin, Inspectional Services Department Commissioner  
John Driscoll