

**William James House  
95 Irving Street  
Landmark Designation Study Report\*  
L-59**

Prepared by Sally Zimmerman, Preservation Planner  
Cambridge Historical Commission  
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#### Executive Summary

The William James House at 95 Irving Street was built in 1889 for the pre-eminent American philosopher and psychologist, William James, who lived there from 1889 to his death in 1910. James wrote all of the major works of his mature career there and it remained in his family for three generations. More generally, the house contributes significantly to an understanding of the city's long architectural, cultural and social history as a center of life and work for some of the country's leading intellectuals.

Architecturally, the William James House is individually significant as a well-preserved example of the Shingle Style of architecture, a work of the noted architect William Ralph Emerson, and an example of the collaboration between a skilled architect and an important client heavily engaged in the design process. The house is also significant as part of a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century neighborhood of considerable architectural and historical importance.

\*This report is prepared for the specific purpose of evaluating the William James House for landmark designation under Cambridge City Ordinance, 2.78, Article III; the material contained herein is solely intended to establish the significance of the William James House within the meaning of the applicable city ordinance.

## I. Location and Economic Status

### A. Address, Parcel Number and Zoning

The William James House is located at 95 Irving Street opposite the intersection of Farrar and Scott streets. The parcel is identified as lot 81 of map 146. The lot contains 16,824 square feet.

The property is zoned A-2, a single family residential zone that allows the conversion of single-family use to two-family use provided no change in the exterior design of the building takes place. In addition, an accessory apartment may be allowed in the A-2 zone by special permit of the Board of Zoning Appeal, provided a number of conditions are met. These include the following: 1) the building must predate 1940 and must not have been enlarged by more than 250 square feet of gross floor area since that date; 2) the dwelling must contain at least 3500 square feet of gross floor area; 3) the lot must contain at least 3000 square feet per dwelling unit; 4) the accessory apartment must not occupy more than 35% of the gross floor area of the principal dwelling; 5) the accessory apartment cannot increase the floor area beyond the allowable floor area ratio (FAR) for the zone and cannot increase an existing FAR violation.

Historically, the FAR of the William James House was approximately .36. This calculation, which is based on historic atlases, includes three habitable stories of space; it does not include all possible floor area in other areas, such as the basement or a fourth floor attic, both of which have spaces that meet the current height definition for floor area of 7'2". The floor area including those spaces may meet or possibly exceed the allowable .50 floor area for the zone. The building is also non-conforming as to height, exceeding the 35 foot height limit by 7 feet.

### B. Ownership and Occupancy

The building is owned by Robin Jill Ruge, J. Ruge Development LLC, who purchased the property in 1999. Ms. Ruge is undertaking alterations to create two condominium units in the building. The project is currently under construction and is anticipated to be completed and marketed early in 2001.

The building is unoccupied at the time of the report preparation. It was occupied in single-family use with an accessory apartment from the time of its construction until Ms. Ruge purchased the property. It is not clear at what point the accessory apartment was constructed in the house, however, it would seem to have been added, if not illegally, then informally. No special permit was ever sought for the addition of an accessory apartment, although the property's characteristics appear to meet the legal zoning requirements for the addition of such an apartment. Various 20<sup>th</sup>-century city directories consulted (1944, 1946, 1954, 1968, 1972) show only the record owners of the house residing there; no separate address or telephone was listed in the city directories for any other occupants.

Building permit records indicate that permits were issued in 1959 (“new kitchenette”), 1976 (“Kitchen renovations, bathroom remodel, wood frame tool shed in rear yard 10’ x 10’”), 1980 (“Repair – new footing and piers, new joist, framing, trim, install temporary bracing while work is in progress”), and 1984 (“Alter – stairs to the third floor through roof of the existing structure. Screen unfinished porch”).

The documentation in an abutters’ appeal on the project indicates that a studio apartment existed in the house by the 1980s (Weitzman, et. al. vs. Bersani, March 10, 2000). At that time, it was stated, the apartment had a kitchenette but no bathroom and no separate access; in 1984, a bathroom and separate access were installed. The appeal further stated that the utilities for the house were never separately metered.

The construction now being undertaken calls for the first two full floors to be used as a single unit, the attic, or fourth story, to be used as a second unit and the third floor to be split between both units.

### C. Area Description

The William James House stands in a cohesive neighborhood of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century residences historically known as Shady Hill and named after an 1806 mansion that stood in the neighborhood until 1956. The area is remarkably homogeneous historically and architecturally and is characterized by wide, tree-lined streets, expansive, architect-designed houses and large lots. In 1986, the neighborhood was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Shady Hill National Register District.

Two major arterial streets, Beacon Street on the north and Kirkland Street on the east, define the north and east boundaries of the neighborhood, which is demarcated on the south by the Harvard Divinity School campus and on the west by a more densely developed neighborhood of two and three-family houses. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences occupies a 5.5 acre site on the northern edge of the neighborhood; the academy’s 1979 headquarters building (Kallman, McKinnell & Knowles) stands in landscaped, publicly-accessible grounds that are the remnant of what has been known as “Norton’s Woods” since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The neighborhood was developed from a subdivision plan of 1887-88 prepared by noted landscape architect, Charles Eliot. The plan included a typical Olmsted/Eliot type of curvilinear street pattern, which is evident in the manner in which Irving, Bryant and Scott streets wind through the neighborhood. Deed restrictions in the subdivision required substantial, single-family houses with large set-backs. The first houses were built in 1889 and within 20 years the neighborhood was virtually filled. Most of the houses in the neighborhood are in the Queen Anne, Shingle Style and Colonial Revival styles.

The neighborhood is something of a pass-through for traffic between Cambridge and Somerville but is generally very quiet, with well-maintained properties that have always

commanded the upper echelons of the real estate market. Recent market demands are causing additional increases in property values.

#### D. Planning Issues

Planning concerns relating to the William James House relate primarily to the current redevelopment of the property. A petition to study the William James House for landmark designation was received on January 28, 2000 from abutters and other citizens concerned about the development of the property. A public meeting was held to evaluate the petition, and the Cambridge Historical Commission voted to accept the petition for study. A confirmatory public hearing on the designation study was held on March 2 before the Cambridge Historical Commission.

The William James House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Shady Hill National Register district (5/19/1986). It was also documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1967.

The current project, which has been reviewed and approved through issuance of Certificates of Appropriateness by the Cambridge Historical Commission (see CHC case 1001, and attached certificates dated April 21, 2000, May 9, 2000 and July 7, 2000, appendix 1), included:

- 1) restoration of gable roofs to the three existing front dormers
- 2) construction of a covered porch with French doors on the south elevation
- 3) construction of a covered porch on the north elevation
- 4) repairs to the front porch
- 5) replacement of selected non-original sash to replicate original sash
- 6) removal of rear additions made in 1984
- 7) construction of a garage/deck addition at the rear (garage subsequently eliminated)
- 8) construction of an elevator headhouse
- 9) construction of a roof window at the rear
- 10) installation of skylights
- 11) construction of a detached 1-car garage (subsequently increased to 2-car)
- 12) landscaping.

On October 5, 2000, the Board of Zoning Appeal issued a variance for accessory building setbacks for construction of the detached garage. At the same time, the Board denied a dimensional requirement variance petition to allow an increase in the floor area for use of the basement. The project as approved by the Zoning Board and Historical Commission is proceeding toward completion.

As the current project has received all the necessary approvals, it is unlikely that any additional construction or alterations will take place in the near future. If the William James House is designated as a landmark, any future proposals for alteration of publicly-visible exterior architectural features would be subject to Historical Commission review and approval.

The William James House project highlights a larger planning concern for the neighborhood as a whole regarding the status and development potential of accessory apartments in the A-2 zone. The presence of an accessory apartment at the William James House and the current development to convert that apartment into a complete living unit demonstrates that other houses in the neighborhood, many of which can be assumed to have similar informal accessory apartments, may be exposed to similar development pressures in the future. It should be anticipated that the present trend to maximize developable space in existing houses will continue and that some intensification of use is likely to occur in the neighborhood as a result.

#### E. Map

## II. Description

### A. Type and Use

The William James House is a large, late 19<sup>th</sup>-century single family residence that was adapted with an accessory apartment use and is currently being renovated for two-family use. In use, the house is typical of large, 19<sup>th</sup>-century houses in Cambridge that were originally constructed for single-family occupancy and in which the zoning code has allowed and, at some times in the city's history, encouraged, the development of accessory apartment use.

The William James House appears to have been occupied solely in single-family use during the entire tenure of its ownership by the extended family of the original owner, William James, from 1889 to 1968. Records in the Cambridge assessors' office are unclear about whether any rooms in the house were rented and suggest that at times, one room in the 14-room house may have been rented. The house was owned by the President and Fellows of Harvard College from 1968 to 1981 and leased until 1979 to Chase Peterson, director of admissions and financial aid; the house was then leased, and ultimately sold in 1981, to William and Katherine Estes. Professor Estes taught in and was also chair of the psychology department. The most recent owner, Ms. Ruge, purchased the property in 1999, for development and as a possible residence for herself.

### B. Physical Description

The William James House is a cedar-shingled, gambrel-roofed Colonial Revival house. It is generously-proportioned, with a large 3½-story main house (approximately 50' x 40') and a 2-story ell offset to the rear at the northwest corner. The house sits at the intersection of Farrar and Scott streets, facing northeast. It is sited at the west end of a large (16,199 square foot), level, slightly irregular lot which is planted with mature deciduous and evergreen trees. A driveway runs along the property line on the west side of the lot. A detached garage is being constructed at the rear of the lot on the west side.

The house is simple and symmetrical in design with boxy, rectilinear massing. Despite its simplicity, it incorporates a number of idiosyncratic elements that reveal elements of Queen Anne-style asymmetry as well as the functional requirements of the interior spaces. Window treatments on the façade, for example, vary by floor, with a paired window on the south side of the first floor, a three-part window on the north side, and individual windows on the second floor; likewise, the chimneys are slightly offset from one another. The fenestration on the south side of the house, facing the garden, was also somewhat varied, with a large three-part window at the southwest corner and a basket-arched window in the gable end. (The current plans call for construction of a side porch at the southwest corner, which would include removing the three-part window, installing French doors in its place, and adding a second-story deck with French doors above.)

The façade of the William James House is three bays wide with a center entrance and a flat-roofed projecting porch. The entrance contains a six-panel door with ornamental sidelights and a blind elliptical fan above. The porch, which has clustered Doric columns supporting a simple entablature, is topped by a wooden balustrade with ball finials on the corner posts. A casement window at the second-story center bay opens onto the deck of the porch roof. Three gable-roofed dormers pierce the lower slope of the gambrel roof, while the upper slope of roof is broken by an eyebrow dormer and a pair of chimneys. (The dormers were modified with shed roofs at some point in the house's history; these have been removed and the gable roofs reinstated.)

The side elevations, three bays deep, clearly reveal the size of the house, and fenestration delineates the three main floors. The south elevation, which originally contained a three-part window in the southwest corner lighting James' study, has been modified with the removal of that window and the introduction of French doors to a small porch which is yet to be constructed. A pair of windows in the wall above have been merged through the addition of French doors that will lead to a second-story deck above the planned porch.

The north side contains a small entry midway on the wall; its current appearance replicates the design of the original plans for the house. An oversized window was added on the north wall after 1910 to allow use of the third and fourth floors as a painting studio (the window may possibly have been added in 1933 when building permit records show a floor was reinforced, work that would have been needed when the third and fourth floors were merged at the north end for the studio). The window has since been removed and replaced with a basket-arched window to match the window on the south gable end.

The rear elevation has been the most altered, with what was originally a one-story gable-roofed ell enlarged over time with a screened porch and an exterior stairway to the upper floors; both of these have been removed in the current renovations and replaced with a two-story addition incorporating a second-floor deck. The asymmetry of the design was more evident on this lesser elevation, which originally included an angled bay window set into the corner of the ell and the main house on the ground floor (no longer extant), shed- and gable-roofed dormers on the lower slope of the gambrel roof, and a single chimney on the north side.

There are a variety of window sash throughout the house, including six-over-one, six-over-two, six-over-six, and eight-over-two double hung sash. The current renovation has retained and restored most of the original windows. The three-part windows, which have six-over-one sash, are capped with small, dentilled cornice hoods. Almost all of the windows originally had louvered blinds.

### C. Current Photographs

### III. History of the Property

#### A. Historic Development Patterns

##### 1. Deed History of the Property

William James purchased the land on which he built his house from the Norton family on March 1, 1889 (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, book 1896, page 7). The lot was identified as lot 13 on the subdivision plan filed by the Norton family for development of their estate two weeks previously on February 15, 1889 and contained 12,753 square feet. Like all of the lots in the Norton family development, the purchase was subject to restrictions as to the use and type of structures to be constructed on the property. The parcel was subsequently enlarged with small portions of several other adjoining lots, achieving its present 16,199 square foot size by 1917.

At the death of William James in 1910, the property passed first to William James' widow, Alice H. James (Middlesex County Registry of Probate, file #86184) and, on her death in 1922, in four shares to their children, Henry, William, Alexander and Margaret (Middlesex County Registry of Probate, file #138542). William James purchased his siblings' shares in the property in 1925 (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, book 4845, page 397). William James's sons, William, junior and John S. R., inherited the property from their father in 1961 (Middlesex County Registry of Probate, file #372276); William, junior, conveyed his share to his brother in 1962 (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, book 10168, page 379) and in 1968, John S. R. James sold the property to the President and Fellows of Harvard College (Middlesex South Registry of Deeds, book 11500, page 577).

The President and Fellows of Harvard College retained ownership of the house until 1981 when it was purchased by Professor William Estes and his wife Katherine. Professor Estes, a professor and former department chair of psychology, and his wife sold the house in 1999 to Robin Jill Ruge, after the President and Fellows of Harvard College declined to exercise a right of first refusal to purchase the property. Harvard's right of first refusal provision was included in the Estes' purchase of the property from the College in 1981. With regard to Harvard's decision to decline to purchase the property, a letter from Kathy Spiegelman of the Harvard Planning and Real Estate office stated: "it remains Harvard's position that the purchase of very expensive real estate is not an appropriate way for us to meet our academic space needs, nor realistically the housing needs of our faculty."

##### 2. Development History of Parcel and Surroundings

The William James House is part of the neighborhood known as Shady Hill and named after an 1806 mansion of that name which was demolished in 1956. The Shady Hill neighborhood developed out of a 90-acre estate that housed three generations of the Nortons from 1821 to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Charles Eliot Norton, the son of Andrews and Catherine Norton, for whom the estate was purchased as a wedding present, was the



most prominent; as Harvard's first lecturer in fine arts, he was a pedagogue and art historian of enormous influence in American intellectual history. The Norton family determined to develop part of their estate and the Shady Hill neighborhood was subdivided with restrictive covenants in 1889 and laid out with large house lots. The remainder of the estate gradually broke up after the death of Charles Eliot Norton in 1908.

Charles Eliot Norton's prominence and personal influence, the area's proximity to Harvard, and to an established residential neighborhood for Harvard academics on Kirkland Street (known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Professor's Row), combined to ensure that the Norton development would attract an elite group of buyers. From the start, these included prominent Boston professionals and a large contingent of Harvard professors.

The 1889 plan created Irving, Scott, Farrar and Holden streets and imposed strict constraints on the setbacks, type, and cost of houses to be built there. Within 20 years, the neighborhood was filled with substantial Colonial Revival and Queen Anne houses and even now the neighborhood retains much of its original appearance. While predominantly residential with single-family houses, the area contains a few non-residential and multi-family uses. These include the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, whose headquarters building (1979, Kallmann, McKinnell & Knowles) stands at 136 Irving Street in the remaining acres of Norton's Woods, the 1915 Shady Hill Square multi-family development, and the Holden Green married students' housing complex (1928, Kilham, Hopkins & Greeley).

The William James House was the home of the eminent American philosopher and psychologist, William James, from 1889 until his death in 1910. His widow, Alice Howe Gibbens James, lived there until her death in 1922 and it remained in James' family until 1968. James' grandson, William, junior, was a painter who converted the third and fourth floors to a studio.

After 1968, it was the home of Dean Chase Peterson, Harvard's director of admissions and financial aid, and later of Professor William Estes, a professor of psychology and a one-time chair of Harvard's psychology department.

Modifications have been made to the house over time. Building department records contain eight references to work permitted at the house, beginning in 1933, when a floor was reinforced, perhaps for the construction of William James, junior's painting studio. Other work has included: the removal of part of a chimney and installation of a window in 1945 (building permit 43961; another possible date for construction of the painting studio); alterations and installation of a new kitchenette in 1959 (building permit 58893); kitchen remodelling in 1961 (building permit 60909), installation of wood shingles in 1962 (building permit 61505); kitchen and bath renovations and construction of a 10' x 10' tool shed in 1976 (building permit 73864); exterior repairs in 1980 (building permit 77660); construction of exterior stairs and a screened porch in 1984 (building permit 82935); and the present major renovations of 1999 and 2000.

Like many houses in the neighborhood, the William James House had an accessory apartment; as the installation of the apartment was never legalized through issuance of the required special permit, it is not possible to determine when the apartment came into existence. During the 1940s, as war-time housing demands and a war-related population influx stressed Cambridge's housing stock, the zoning code was amended to allow the addition of accessory apartments in the city's largest single-family houses. In addition to increasing housing options, the amendments had the "preservative" quality of enhancing the economic viability of the large old houses by making more efficient use of the living space they provided. It is not known how many of the city's A-1 and A-2 zoned single-family houses contain informally-established accessory apartments, but the number is undoubtedly large.

## B. Historic Photographs/Maps

## C. Bibliography

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Cambridge Historical Commission, survey files for 95 Irving Street, Shady Hill Estate

Cambridge Historical Commission, biographical files for William Ralph Emerson, the James Family

Cambridge Historical Commission, landmark petition file for case L-59, various correspondence relating to petition to landmark the William James House, various dates

Cambridge Historical Commission, application file for case 1001, various materials for Certificate of Appropriateness to alter 95 Irving Street, various dates

South Middlesex Registry of Deeds, records for 95 Irving Street

### 3. Other Records

City Directories, entries for William James, 1869-1889

personal communication with Jennifer Champa, Harvard Planning and Real Estate, regarding building jacket file at Harvard for 95 Irving Street, December 19, 2000

## IV. Significance of the Property

### A. Historical Significance

The historical significance of the William James House focuses wholly on the immense importance of William James (1842-1910) as a philosopher of international stature, one of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century's foremost intellects, and a pioneer in the fields of psychology and educational theory.

William James had the house at 95 Irving Street constructed for himself and his family in 1889 and lived there until his death 21 years later. His major work, The Principles of Psychology (1890), was written over a 12-year period preceding the construction of his house. All of his later work was written while James resided on Irving Street and it is this work that established his lasting influence in the fields of philosophy, psychology and educational theory. Among the works James published while resident on Irving Street are The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy (1897), Talks to Teachers on Psychology; And to Students on Some of Life's Ideals (1899), The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902), Pragmatism: A New Name for Old Ways of Thinking (1907), A Pluralistic Universe (1909), The Meaning of Truth (1909), and Some Problems in Philosophy (1911).

The Encyclopedia Britannica identifies James as “a leader of the philosophical movement of Pragmatism and of the psychological movement of functionalism.” Of his “Significance and influence”, it states:

In psychology, James's work is of course dated, but it is dated as is Galileo's in physics or Charles Darwin's in biology because it is the originaive matrix of the great variety of new developments that are the current vogue. In philosophy, his positive work is still prophetic. The world he argued for was soon reflected in the new physics . . . a world of events connected with one another by kinds of next-to-next relations, a world various, manifold, changeful, originating by chance, perpetuated by habits (that the scientists call laws), and transformed by breaks, spontaneities, and freedoms. In human nature, James believed, these visible traits of the world are equally manifest. The real specific event is the individual, whose intervention in history gives it in each case a new and unexpected turn.

Trained as a medical doctor (Harvard, 1869), although he never practiced, James enjoyed a long career at Harvard (1872 to 1907) teaching in a variety of subjects: anatomy, physiology, philosophy and psychology. He held numerous honorary degrees from universities around the world. Equally distinguished as a teacher and a writer, James moved easily within a wide circle of distinguished colleagues and acquaintances, both in the U.S. and abroad. His obituary in the Atlantic Monthly (December, 1910) concluded, “William James was a manly and a radiant being. Loving and loved, he made all men think, and helped many a doubting soul to feel a man's glow of hope and courage, each for his own work. This was a noble task.”

James's personal struggles to establish identity and life purpose formed an important basis for his writings. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "James lived his philosophy. It entered into the texture and rhythms of his rich and varied literary style. It determined his attitude toward scientifically-accepted therapies, . . . and repugnant ideals, such as militarism. It made him an anti-imperialist, a defender of the small, the variant, the unprecedented, the weak, wherever and whenever they appeared."

Before being invited to teach at Harvard, James tried a variety of careers, studied painting with William Morris Hunt and travelled on natural history expeditions to the Amazon and Brazil with the naturalist, Louis Agassiz. He later lectured at Stanford University as a visiting professor in 1906 and witnessed the San Francisco earthquake.

William James was the oldest son of Henry James, an important exponent of various spiritual movements, primarily Swedenborgianism, and a brother of the eminent novelist, Henry James. The family of the elder Henry lived in Cambridge from 1866 until the death of Alice James, the diarist and sister of Henry and James, in 1892, residing at 20 Quincy Street (demolished 1930). William James lived in Cambridge for more than 50 years, interrupted only by extended European visits that he made regularly throughout his life. After his marriage in 1878, William James rented houses at a variety of Old Cambridge addresses, including 11 Quincy Street (1882), 15 Appian Way (1884), and 18 Garden Street (1887) before building his own house. The James's also acquired a country house at Chocorua, New Hampshire in 1886.

The house at 95 Irving Street stood within a few blocks of James's father's house and the science classroom buildings of Harvard College. It was also on the edge of the Old Cambridge neighborhood where James had lived for more than 20 years. His eagerness to build his home in the Shady Hill neighborhood can be inferred from the rapidity with which James proceeded with building plans for 95 Irving Street: the building permit for the house (#1575) was issued on February 18, only three days after the Norton subdivision plan was filed at the Registry of Deeds and two weeks before James actually purchased the house lot. The family moved in before the construction was fully completed.

James' obituary makes clear the importance of his home:

From the beginning of their married life in Cambridge, Mr. and Mrs. James showed a hospitality which made them a marvel to their friends. In season and out, all were made welcome. . . What his home was to others, to him it was more, a thousand-fold. Every one who watched him saw clearly that he owed a distinct portion of his steady growth in tranquillity and power of accomplishment to the home influences – intellectual, physical, and moral – that formed the main background of his life.

## B. Architectural Significance

The William James House is architecturally significant as the work of William Ralph Emerson (1833-1918), a Boston architect of the first rank who is best known for his

Shingle Style designs, a number of which survive across New England but especially on the Maine coast. Emerson, a distant cousin of Ralph Waldo Emerson, trained in the office of Boston architect Jonathan Preston, was a charter member of the Boston Society of Architects, and practiced architecture from 1862 to 1909.

Emerson designed nine houses in Cambridge, although one was never constructed (H. M. Saville House, Concord Avenue) and one has been demolished (F. R. Richards House, 3 Channing Place, 1895-1935). Still standing are: John Allyn House, 11 Berkeley Street, 1886; Lucy Dexter House, 76 Sparks Street, 1886-87; Robert Davis House, 110 Irving Street, 1889; Roland Thaxter House, 7 Scott Street, 1891; Mrs. F. R. Richards House, 182 Brattle Street, 1895; J. Gray House, 12 Walker Street, 1901. Three of Emerson's designs are in the Shady Hill neighborhood: 95 and 110 Irving Street and 7 Scott Street.

Emerson's residential designs are often shingled with classically-derived Colonial Revival details, as Emerson was an early and fervent proponent of preserving New England's 18<sup>th</sup>-century vernacular architecture. Emerson was one of a number of architects whose designs were codified by Vincent J. Scully, Jr., in The Shingle Style and the Stick Style: Architectural Theory and Design from Richardson to the Origins of Wright (1955), a seminal work which defined the style as a distinct design movement. Roger Reed, author of A Delight to All Who Know It: The Maine Summer Cottages of William R. Emerson (1990), describes him:

Emerson was best known for his innovative work in the Shingle Style, which derived from vernacular architecture of the Colonial period. The most common motif that Emerson employed on his houses was a large gambrel roof which, when covered with shingles, blended with the shingled walls in a way that avoided the rigid distinctions between walls and roof that was inevitable with a hip or gable roof. Similarly, the wings on Shingle Style houses were designed to appear as if they grew out the main block of a building in an organic fashion. The inspiration for this was, of course, vernacular farm houses which were typically enlarged over a period of time.

Of Emerson's Cambridge houses, 11 Berkeley Street, 110 Irving Street, and 76 Sparks Street might be called the most representative of his designs. All incorporate a more elaborate roof plan and massing than 95 Irving Street, and a rangy, additive appearance that characterizes many of Emerson's designs in other towns such as Milton, Massachusetts, where Emerson's own house also still stands. The William James House is somewhat exceptional in its very simple massing, but evidence suggests that William James had considerable input and that the house's design primarily reflects James' thinking and requirements, with the architect employed mainly in a technical capacity.

A set of plans and elevations for the house found in the house by the Estes (phone message of 11/7/81) and cited in a letter from J. S. R. James to Eleanor Pearson of the Historical Commission staff (October 3, 1967) shows many of the major features as built, but others that vary. Changes in such details as the front door design, dormers (shed not gabled), gable end windows, and chimney placement probably reflect James' design ideas. Despite this input, the house design shares recognizable similarities with other

Emerson houses in Cambridge, notably 7 Scott Street and 12 Walker Street, both of which have been altered, but which have simple, rectilinear footprints.

In the simplicity of its form, the William James House anticipates the Colonial Revival style of architecture, which by the end of the 1890s had swept away the organic quirks and asymmetries of the Shingle Style in favor of a more rigid symmetry of plan. The house at 95 Irving Street provides unusual evidence of the design collaboration between an architect and client, a process made all the more exceptional by the stature of the collaborators, James and Emerson.

The interior of the house is outside the scope of authority for landmark designation but the principal rooms of the first and second floor have been preserved. Several significant spaces, most notably William James's library on the first floor, have also been retained in the current renovations.

## V. Relationship to Criteria

### A. Article III, Chapter 2.78.180 a.

The enabling ordinance for landmarks states:

The Historical Commission by majority vote may recommend for designation as a landmark any property within the City being or containing a place, structure, feature or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of its period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures . . .

### B. Relationship of Property to Criteria

The William James House meets criterion (1) of the enabling ordinance for its important associations with an historic person, William James, and with the broad architectural, cultural, and social history of the City and the Commonwealth, and meets criterion (2) for its architectural significance, in terms of its period, style and associations with a famous architect, William Ralph Emerson, both by itself and in the context of the Shady Hill neighborhood.

The house at 95 Irving Street was built in 1889 for the pre-eminent American philosopher and psychologist, William James, who lived there from 1889 to his death in 1910. James wrote all of the major works of his mature career there and it remained in his family for three generations. Even after 100 years, James's stature as a prominent philosopher and the great influence of his work on intellectual history remain undiminished. More generally, the house contributes significantly to an understanding of the city's long architectural, cultural and social history as a center of life and work for some of the country's leading intellectuals.

Architecturally, the William James House is individually significant as a well-preserved example of the Shingle Style of architecture, a work of the noted architect William Ralph Emerson, and an example of the collaboration between a skilled architect and an important client heavily engaged in the design process. The house is also significant as part of a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century neighborhood of considerable architectural and historical importance.



## VI. Recommendations

### A. Article III, Chapter 2.78.140

The purpose of landmark designation is contained in the enabling ordinance, which is to:

preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of . . . site and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; [and] to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such . . . structures . . .

### B. Preservation Options

Preservation of the William James House has been the subject of an effort on the part of interested academics and individuals in the fields of philosophy and psychology to prevent alterations to the interior and exterior features of the house and, in recognition of James's importance, to retain the property, either in museum or Harvard university ownership, as William James knew it. The only means of achieving that goal would have been at the time of the property's sale by the Estes and if they, or an intermediary buyer, had been willing to place restrictive easements against the alteration of the exterior and significant interiors.

The possibility of the current owner donating a preservation easement on portions of the exterior and interior of the house remains open, but as the project to create two condominium units in the house nears completion, it is unlikely that any further work on the house will be undertaken in the near future. Long-term preservation of significant interior features cannot be accomplished at this time through the city's landmark designation process.

Preservation easements may be donated to the Historical Commission or another qualified historic preservation organization under Chapter 184 of the Massachusetts General Laws. An easement is a "non-possessory right to control what happens to buildings or land owned by others." It is voluntarily conveyed by the property owner to an entity, such as the Historical Commission, which holds the right and enforces the terms. To be effective, the easement must protect the publicly visible features of the property from alteration without the Commission's prior review. It may also be drafted to allow specific development opportunities to take place or to protect significant interior features.

Donation of an easement encourages private investment in significant buildings with no corresponding expenditure of public funds. Under Internal Revenue Service regulations, the value of an easement on a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places may be taken as a charitable deduction on personal income taxes. The value of an

easement is calculated by taking the difference between “before” and “after” appraisals of the property. However, the rules for charitable contribution deductions for preservation easements are very technical. Any property owner considering the donation of an easement should consult a qualified tax consultant relative to the specific circumstances.

Preservation easements protect significant property in a similar manner to landmarking, that is, through review and approval of the Historical Commission and issuance of a certificate of appropriateness or hardship for any proposed repairs or alterations that affect protected portions of the property. Unlike landmarking, a preservation easement may have certain financial benefits for an owner and can address the protection of significant interior features.

The property is located in an area which would qualify either as a local historic district under Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws or as a neighborhood conservation district under city ordinance. Either of these options, if pursued, would likely require that publicly-visible alterations be approved by a preservation commission prior to being made. Landmark designation has the benefit of assuring that that protection will take place immediately upon City Council action to designate, with no delays for the further study that district designation would require.

Designation of the William James House as a landmark would establish a process wherein “the Historical Commission . . . shall review all construction, demolition or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features, other than color,” of the landmark. Chapter 2.78.210 states, “No building permit for alteration of an exterior architectural feature of a landmark . . . and no demolition permit for demolition or removal of a landmark . . . shall be issued by the City or any department thereof until the certificate required by this article has been issued by the Historical Commission . . .”

A certificate of appropriateness, hardship or non-applicability is issued by the Historical Commission depending on the nature of the alteration or construction proposed for the landmark. Applications for certificates of appropriateness or hardship are reviewed by the Commission at a public hearing, with 14 days notice provided to affected parties by legal notice and first class mail. The staff issues certificates of non-applicability administratively. The intent of the review process is to prevent “developments incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance or the distinctive character of the landmark” (2.78.220) The designation report may be drafted to allow specific development opportunities to take place.

### C. Staff Recommendation

It is the staff recommendation that the Historical Commission recommend the William James House to the City Council for designation as a landmark. It is the further recommendation that donation of an easement be pursued with the owner and that consideration should be given to protecting significant aspects of the original interior, particularly the principal rooms, including William James’ study, of the first two floors.

## VII. Standards and Criteria

### A. Introduction

Under Article III, the Historical Commission is charged with reviewing any construction, demolition or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features (other than color) of a landmark. This report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics that led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, the exterior architectural features described in this report should be preserved and/or enhanced in any proposed alteration or construction that affects those features of the landmark. The standards following in paragraphs B and C of this section provide specific guidelines for the treatment of the landmark described in this report.

### B. General Standards and Criteria

Subject to review and approval of exterior architectural features under the terms of this report, the following standards shall apply:

1. Significant historic and architectural features of the landmark shall be preserved.
2. Changes and additions to the landmark, which have taken place over time, are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced.
4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and appearance. The use of imitation replacement materials is discouraged.
6. The surface cleaning of a landmark shall be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.
7. New additions shall not destroy significant exterior architectural features and shall not be incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment.
8. New additions should be done in a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark should be unimpaired.

### C. Suggested Review Guidelines

#### 1. Site

- a. Retain the open, landscaped character of the south side yard; disallow construction of any permanent structures that would diminish or destroy the appearance of the south side yard as a landscaped amenity of the house
- b. Remove an inappropriate solid, six-foot board fence that currently runs along Irving Street enclosing the south side yard; replace with a fence allowing at least partial

views into the yard from the street and in a design compatible with the period and style of the house

c. Retain, or replace in kind, a carriage-step block of white marble that is installed in the street curb directly in front of the front entrance and directly aligned with the front entrance

## 2. Current Conditions

a. Front (east) elevation: Maintain as shown in James family album photograph on file at Houghton Library (see attached)

b. South elevation: The two principal elevations, from a public visibility standpoint, are the façade and the south elevation. As it is currently being constructed, the south elevation includes the addition of a side porch, French doors, and a second-story deck which diminish the original character of the house as it existed during William James's occupancy. The porch occupies the location of the principal window lighting the library on the ground floor, a three-part sash like that which appears on the north corner of the first floor of the façade. Given the significance of the library to the history of the house and its associations with William James, consideration should be given to reinstating the south elevation to be consistent with its appearance during William James's occupancy and as shown in a photograph of 1890-91 from the Henry Rand Collection, Southwest Harbor, Maine (see attached)

c. Rear (west) elevation: As the least visible elevation of the house, the west elevation can more readily accommodate modifications from the original appearance of the house. Consideration should be given to retaining the original library window opening. The original footprint of the ell should be maintained insofar as possible.

d. North elevation: Consideration should be given to retaining all fenestration and entrances as they appear in plans approved as part of the certificates issued in case 1001.

## VIII. Proposed Order

### ORDERED:

That the William James House, 95 Irving Street, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 2.78.180 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on \_\_\_\_\_ . The premises so designated are defined as parcel 81 of assessor's map 146 and recorded in book 13783, page 105 of the South Middlesex Registry of Deeds.

This designation is justified by the important associations of the William James House with the pre-eminent philosopher William James (1842-1910), who built the house in 1889 for himself and resided there for the rest of his life, producing the major works of his career while resident at 95 Irving Street; as the home of James' family for three generations and one of a number of distinguished houses in the Shady Hill neighborhood, the William James House is further associated with the broad architectural, cultural, and social history of the City, which has long been a center of life and work for some of the country's leading intellectuals; the house also possesses architectural significance as a well-preserved Shingle Style house by noted Boston architect William Ralph Emerson, and for its contributions to the Shady Hill neighborhood, an intact late 19<sup>th</sup>-century residential enclave of architecturally-important residences.

The effect of this designation shall be that no construction activity can take place within the designated area, and no action can be taken affecting the appearance of 95 Irving Street, that would in either case be visible from a public way, without review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability, as the case may be. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the landmark designation report, and by Section VII, Standards and Criteria, of the landmark designation report, and by the applicable sections of Article 2.78.