

**Landmark Designation Study Report**  
**William Dean Howells House**  
**41 Sacramento Street**



The William Dean Howells house in 1920.  
Source: *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 22, 1920

The William Dean Howells house at 41 Sacramento Street is an unusual Bracketed Italianate style dwelling built in 1857 by Charles F. McClure, a Boston dry goods trader and Cambridge resident, and sold by McClure the same year to Eben J. Loomis, a Cambridge "computer" or mathematician. In 1866 Charles Eliot Norton of Shady Hill arranged for the house to be sold to William Dean Howells, author and editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine. This was Howells' first home after relocating to New England in 1866, and he remained here until 1870 when he and his wife Elinor moved to 3 Berkeley Street. In many of his *Atlantic Monthly* articles, Howells described his Sacramento Street home and neighborhood, as well as the rich literary circle he found in Cambridge.

The property is significant under landmark criterion (1) for its association with Howells, a pre-eminent figure in American literary history of both local and national significance. The property meets criterion (2) as a rare example of its style in Cambridge and for its association with housewrights Joseph Littlefield and Ivory Estes. On July 2, 2009, the Cambridge Historical Commission voted unanimously to find that the property meets the criteria in the ordinance for landmark designation and to forward the report to the City Council with a positive recommendation for designation.

Report prepared by Charles M. Sullivan.  
Cambridge Historical Commission  
September 8, 2009

## I. Location and Planning Issues

### A. Address and Parcel Information

The property at 41 Sacramento Street is located on the north side of Sacramento Street, east of Oxford Street in the Agassiz neighborhood. The property has been on the market in recent months and inquiries have been made regarding the redevelopment potential of the site. Two structures, a house (1857) and a garage (ca. 1920), are located on the property. The site consists of a total of 4,297 square feet (Map 150/Parcel 134), a generously sized lot for this block. The total assessed value for the land and buildings according to the assessor's online database is \$768,100.

### B. Description

The William Dean Howells house is a three-bay, center-entrance Bracketed Italianate design of a type associated with housewrights Joseph Littlefield and Ivory Estes. The house substantially retains its architectural integrity with its original massing, low hipped roof, wide eaves, and many of its original windows and cornice details intact. The current three-part windows on the façade replaced the original double-hung windows. The later entrance vestibule features a significant Queen Anne style stained glass transom and sidelights. The ell, which projects beyond the side elevation on the west side, has been enlarged. The exterior is in fair condition, except where a disfiguring two-story porch was removed in 1998. The garage is in poor condition and is not considered significant.

The landscape of the property has been radically altered. While the house sits high above the street, as the designers intended, the berm that once hid the lower part of the foundation has been inappropriately removed. A double-width curb cut provides parking in the side yard, while the single story garage occupies the left rear corner of the property. The fruit trees and garden described by Howells have all disappeared.

### C. Use

The Howells house was built as a single-family residence in 1857. The building permit record (beginning in 1886) is inconclusive, but there were three families (one extended family and a tenant) living in the house in the early 1920s. The Cambridge Assessing Department listed it as a three-family house beginning in 1934 and continuing at least until 1984. Recent listings by Realtors describe it as a two-family house.

### D. Ownership and Occupancy

The ownership of 41 Sacramento Street is not entirely clear. Cambridge Assessor's records from 1938 until the present show the title holder as "McGillivray, John D. for life." However, census records indicate that John D. McGillivray was born about 1867; he disappeared from the city directories between 1961 and 1963 and is certainly deceased. Some assessor's records list the owner as John's wife, Mary McGillivray. Annie McGillivray, born about 1894 and probably John's daughter-in-law, is listed in the directories as a resident through 1972. A mortgage recorded at Middlesex South Registry of Deeds book 50946, page 434 indicates that the current owners are Elizabeth and Rachel Golden, as confirmed by a land

court decision (Case No. 06 MISC 317693 KCL). The City of Cambridge has held a tax title on the property for many years.

#### D. Zoning

The property is zoned C-1, a multi-family residential zone with an FAR of .75 and a height limit of 35'. The zone allows for a variety of residential and institutional uses, including single, two-family and multi-family use as of right; transient tourist, townhouse, and congregate housing use with a special permit; and religious, healthcare, or educational uses under the Institutional Use Regulations.

The lot area would also allow two dwelling units on the property, but it is unclear whether parking and usable open space requirements could be met if all the allowable units were to be realized. Because of the placement of the structures on the lot, the property is substantially non-conforming as to the rear and side yard setbacks (on the garage side). Thus, any additional construction on the property would require zoning relief in the form of variances from the allowable dimensional requirements. However, the garage is not considered significant, and there would probably be little impediment to its demolition.

#### E. Area Description

The William Dean Howells house stands in a densely-built up section of the Agassiz neighborhood characterized by a mix of single-family and multi-family dwellings, including three-deckers and frame apartment blocks. The Agassiz neighborhood borders the Somerville city line in the north-central section of the city.

The house is located near the corner of Oxford Street, not far from the Baldwin School and the Oxford Street playground. The intersection of Sacramento and Oxford streets is a relatively heavily-trafficked location, as it mixes east-bound traffic from Massachusetts Avenue heading for Beacon Street in Somerville (two blocks east of the Howells house) with traffic moving north and south between Porter Square and Harvard Square along Oxford Street, a secondary artery that absorbs overflow traffic from Massachusetts Avenue.

The Howells house, a comparatively small building on a comparatively large lot, contrasts with its near neighbors, nearly all of which are later 19th-century single-family structures that fill their lots. Some of these have been converted to condominiums, but many are still rental properties, and the neighborhood has a comparatively high percentage of renters.

#### F. Planning Issues

Planning concerns for the William Dean Howells house relate primarily to its current transitional status. The building has suffered from deferred maintenance for many years, and the Cambridge Historical Commission voted to initiate landmark proceedings on August 7, 2008 after the staff received inquiries from real estate offices about the possible sale of the property, followed by inquiries from prospective developers seeking to raze the house. The Commission affirmed its vote at a public hearing held on September 4, 2008.

The allowable zoning requirements in the C-1 zone, deteriorated nature of the building, and Cambridge's strong housing market will continue to put pressure on the property to be devel-

oped as fully as possible. The landmark designation study has ensured the preservation of the property through the ownership transition. The current owners have not taken any steps to exploit the development potential of the site, but it is likely that future owners may wish to take advantage of any remaining capacity or to raze and replace the buildings.



Fig. 1. William Dean Howells house, 41 Sacramento Street and environs. Source: Aerial view from Microsoft Virtual Earth.

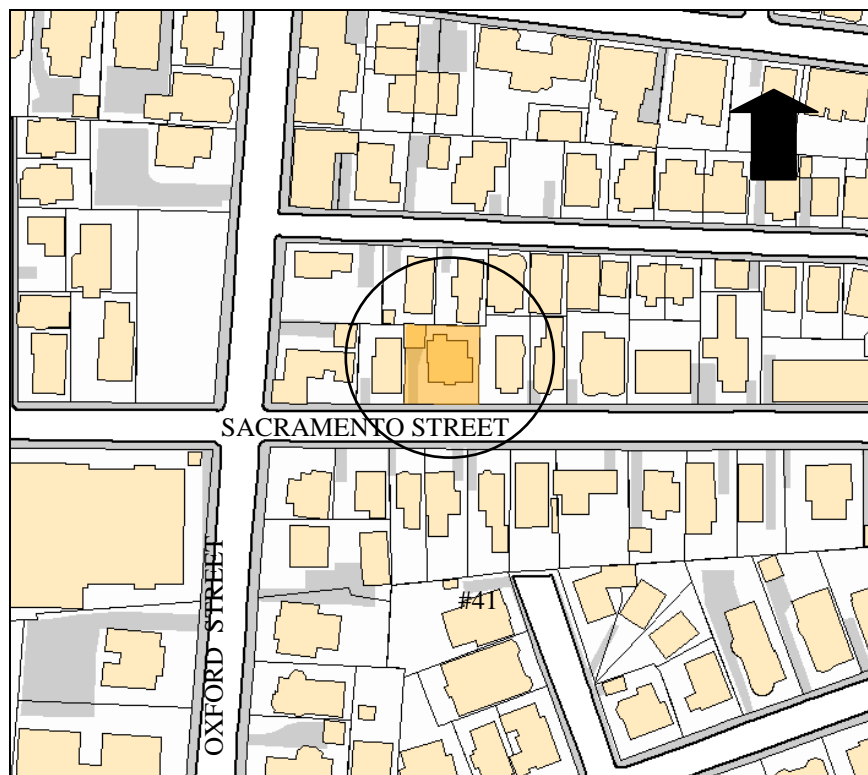


Fig. 2. Neighborhood property map and context. Source: Cambridge GIS.

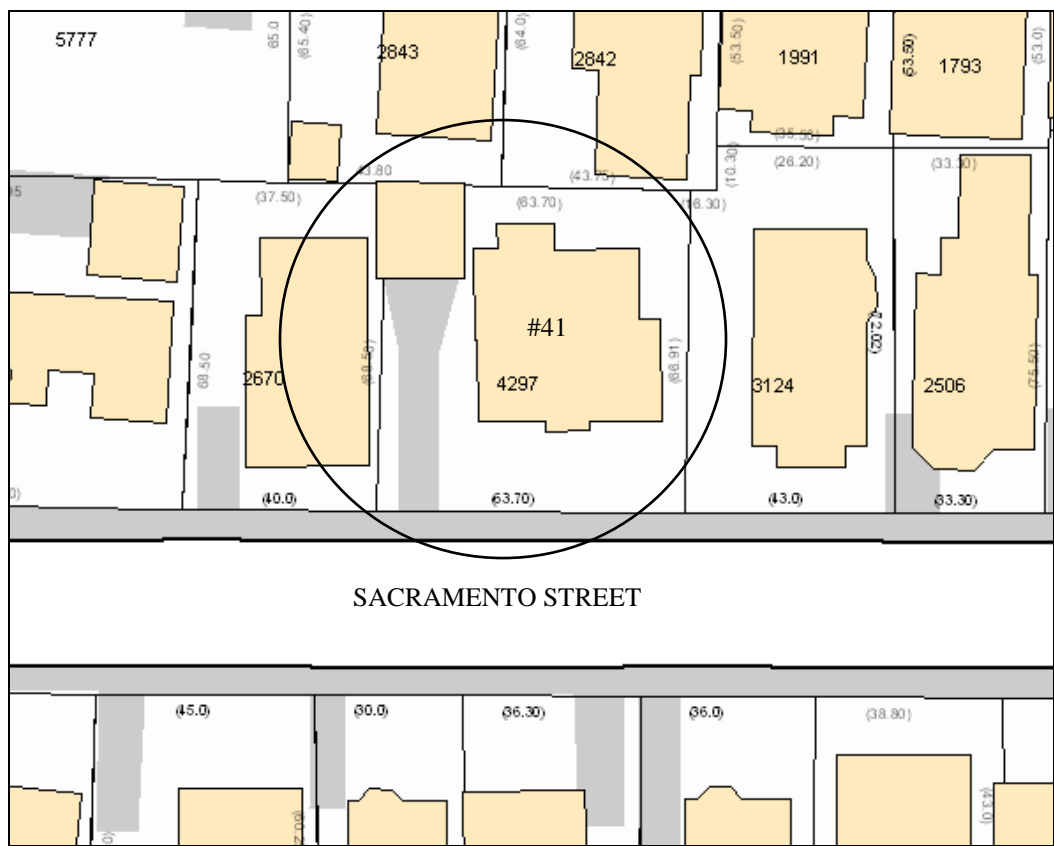


Fig. 3. Detail of Assessor's Map 150 / Parcel 134. Source: City of Cambridge GIS.

## C. Current Photographs



Fig. 4. 41 Sacramento Street, front (south) elevation, June 2009.  
Photo by Charles Sullivan.



Fig 5. 41 Sacramento Street, front (south) elevation, June 2009.  
Photo by Charles Sullivan.

## II. History of the Parcel and its Surroundings

In the 17th century there were several farms on the east side of Massachusetts Avenue on long, narrow lots running back to the Pine Swamp or to the Charlestown line. There were no grand estates and few fine houses; for two hundred years, it was a country road, used mainly by the residents of outlying towns to bring their produce to market or to reach the county seat, until the Charlestown Branch Railroad built a station at Porter Square in 1842. Suddenly, Boston was only twenty minutes away, and Massachusetts Avenue became desirable for suburban development. The construction of the Harvard Branch Railroad in 1849 raised hopes for the rapid development of the southern part of the neighborhood. North of Wendell Street, the triangle formed by the avenue and the town boundary was occupied by several farms that came into the ownership of the extended Frost and Cooper families in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These farms were never completely consolidated, however, and when they were subdivided in the 19<sup>th</sup> century each subdivision had a distinct identity that is discernable today.

Both the Frosts and the Coopers were descended from the earliest European settlers, having arrived before 1636. With such a long history as neighbors, it is no surprise that the families intermarried repeatedly, and that the more numerous Frosts gradually absorbed the Coopers and their holdings. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ebenezer Frost and the descendants of his brother Edmund acquired much of the present Agassiz neighborhood through marriage and purchase. Within a few generations the Frost family controlled all the fields between Wendell Street and Porter Square as well as much of Avon Hill.

James Frost, Jr., a tinsmith worker, occupied the southerly seven acres of the homestead until his death in 1825. His land was the first Frost property to be acquired by speculators, but neither the location nor the shape of the tract, 271 feet wide on the avenue and over a quarter of a mile deep, were advantageous, and many years passed before it was developed. Frost's executor put the entire property, with "the old house and the old shed," on the market in 1826 (Middlesex Deeds 269-464). The first to take up the game was George Meacham, an associate of North Cambridge hotelier Zachariah Porter. Meacham sold the property to James Read, a stableman in the village, almost doubling his investment in two and a half years. Read probably pastured his horses there, because he kept it fifteen years before selling it in 1841 to Jonas Wyeth 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Charles F. McClure, who purchased the James Frost, Jr. homestead from Wyeth in 1850, was a returned Forty-niner. McClure recognized that the only feasible way to develop the property was to lay out a single street over its entire length, but he needed an outlet and at least one cross street to make it practical. He obtained a right of way to Beacon Street from James Friel of Somerville and exchanged land with John Gorham Palfrey to gain access to Carver Street and the Harvard Branch Railroad platform. James Dana agreed to replat some of his lots on Wendell Street to extend Oxford Street another block. With these agreements in place, McClure hired William A. Mason in 1851 to lay out thirty-three generous lots ranging from 7,300 to 15,500 square feet along a rather narrow forty-foot wide way that he named Sacramento Street to commemorate his experience in the gold rush. McClure soon realized that Mason's 100-foot-wide lots were impractical; over time, the street developed with more conventional lots 50' or 75' wide.

McClure himself constructed the first house in his subdivision at 20 Sacramento Street in 1852 and almost immediately sold it to Almon Abbott, superintendent of a brickyard in North Cambridge. The elaborate Italianate mansion showcased the promoter's aspirations for the street, but McClure was still assessed for 17 unsold lots a year later. East of Oxford Street, the only early houses (apart from one house in Palfrey's subdivision) date from 1857, after McClure replatted the street into affordable 60' lots. Thomas Pickhall, a sail maker, built a "cottage home" at 46 Sacramento, and McClure himself – surely desperate by now – borrowed \$1,500 from his infant daughter to put up a house at 41 Sacramento that he sold on completion to Eben Loomis, a "computer" or practical mathematician (Cambridge Assessors' Records, May 16, 1857; City Directories, 1857-65).

William Dean Howells, the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, lived at number 41 from 1866 until 1870. Howells described the neighborhood in *Suburban Sketches*, a series of articles published in 1872, in which he disguised Cambridge as "Charlesbridge" and Sacramento as "Benicia." Howell's first impressions were not entirely favorable:

It was on a morning of the lovely New England May that we left the horse-car, and, spreading our umbrellas, walked down the street to our new home in [Cambridge] ... Here and there in the vacant lots abandoned hoop-skirts defied decay; and near the half-finished wooden houses, empty mortar-beds, and bits of lath and slate strewn over the scarred and mutilated ground, added their interest to the scene. A shaggy drift hung upon the trees before our own house (which had been built some years earlier), while its swollen eaves wept silently and incessantly upon the embankments lifting its base several feet above the common level (11).

As summer came, Howells grew to appreciate the seclusion of his new home.

We were living in the country with the conveniences and luxuries of the city about us. ... The neighborhood was in all things a frontier between city and country. The horse-cars ... went by the head of our street ... while two minutes walk would take us into a wood so wild and thick that no roof was visible through the trees. We learned ... to know the voices of the cows pastured in the vacant lots, and ... to distinguish the different whistles of the locomotives passing on the neighboring railroad. ... All around us carpenters were at work building new houses ... (12-14).

When Howells left the neighborhood in 1870, he reported that

Many of the vacant lots abutting on Benicia and the intersecting streets flourished up, during the four years we knew it, into fresh-painted wooden houses, and the time came to be when one might have looked in vain for the abandoned hoop-skirts which used to decorate the desirable building-sites. The lessening pasturage also reduced the herds which formerly fed in the vicinity, and at last we caught the tinkle of cow-bells only as the cattle were driven past to remoter meadows (242).

Because of the breakdown of the original subdivision plan and the failure of McClure and his successors to enact setback and use restrictions, late 19<sup>th</sup>-century development on Sacramento Street was somewhat haphazard, giving it a more heterogeneous character than its neighbors. The opening of a streetcar line on Beacon Street in 1886 made the area attractive to tradesmen and factory workers in Kendall Square, and the vacant lots filled up with some of

the densest residential housing in Cambridge. The last major construction on the street occurred in 1912-13, when Cambridge real estate man Charles S. Bishop, put up four Mission Revival style three-deckers and an apartment building called "El Pueblo." The area declined after World War II, and in 1962 most of the Agassiz neighborhood was rezoned for high-density housing with no height limit. Harvard University acquired many houses on Sacramento and Garfield streets for a student housing complex similar to Peabody Terrace, a threat that remained until the city downzoned the area in 1974.

### III. Significance of the Property

The Bracketed Italianate style house at 41 Sacramento Street is significant both for its architecture as a rare Cambridge example of a sub-type of the Italianate style and for its association with William Dean Howells, author and editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine. This was Howell's first home after relocating to New England in 1866, and he remained here until he moved to 3 Berkeley Street in 1870. Howells's literary images of his home and neighborhood, as well as the rich literary circle he found here, are some of the earliest and most complete descriptions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century urbanization of Cambridge.

#### A. Historical Significance

William Dean Howells, a pre-eminent figure in 19<sup>th</sup> century American literature, was born in Ohio in 1837. Howells's father was an itinerant printer, and his first employment was as a compositor and journalist. The young man had literary ambitions, and on a July 1860 visit to Boston impressed James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and, most importantly, publisher James T. Fields. Returning to Columbus, where he was a political reporter at the state house, he was asked to prepare a campaign biography for Abraham Lincoln. Howells parlayed this assignment into an appointment as American Consul in Venice in 1862-65. While there he married Elinor Mead of Brattleboro, Vermont, and on their return he published *Venetian Life* (1866), a popular travelogue. Fields hired him as assistant editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine, where he became editor in 1871. This was a commanding position in American literature, as Howells was responsible for hiring authors, reviewing books, and writing criticism for the country's most influential periodical. Howells became fast friends with his contemporaries Mark Twain and Henry James, and mentored younger writers such as Bret Hart, Hamlin Garland, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Stephen Crane. His own works, which introduced realism and social commentary into American literature, included over fifty novels and innumerable articles, plays, and book reviews.

William and Elinor Howells were only 28 when they arrived in Cambridge, and their enthusiasm for their new house was palpable. Elinor wrote about camping out on their first night, and borrowing cutlery from the neighbors. Henry James and Charles Eliot Norton visited, President Eliot called to see if Howells would give a lecture, and "Longfellow ... asked particularly where we live" (E.M. Howells, 99). William described their situation:

On the first day of May, 1866, we went out to Cambridge and began to live in a house which we owned in fee if not in deed, and which was none the less valuable for being covered with mortgages. Physically, it was a carpenter's box, of a sort which is readily imagined by the Anglo-American genius for ugliness, but which it is not so easy to impart a just conception of. A trim hedge of arbor-vitae tried to hide it from the world in front, and a tall board fence behind; the little lot was well planted (perhaps too well

planted) with pears, grapes, and currants, and there was a small open space which I lost no time in digging up for a kitchen-garden. On one side of us were the open fields; on the other a brief line of neighbor-houses; across the street before us was a grove of stately oaks .... We were really in a poor suburb of a suburb; but such is the fascination of ownership, even the ownership of a fully mortgaged property, that we calculated the latitude and longitude of the whole earth from the spot we called ours. ... We even prized the architecture of our little box, though we had but so lately lived in a Gothic palace on the Grand Canal in Venice, and were not uncritical of beauty in the possessions of others. Positive beauty we could not have honestly said we thought our cottage had as a whole, though we might have held out for something of the kind in the brackets of turned wood under its eaves. But we were richly content with it; and with life in Cambridge, as it began to open itself to us, we were infinitely more than content. This life, so refined, so intelligent, so gracefully simple, I do not suppose has anywhere else had its parallel (*Literary Friends*, 178-179).

Howells wrote several articles about his Cambridge experiences for *The Atlantic Monthly* and collected them in *Suburban Sketches*, which he published in 1871. Before Howells, there was little discussion in fiction about the enormous social changes of the period. Howells described in vivid terms the effects of Irish immigration on Cambridge. On a walk from his home to the Irish brickyard settlement on Sherman Street, known as Dublin, he saw “more than one token of the encroachment of the Celtic army, which had here and there invested a Yankee house with besieging shanties on every side. ... Where the Celt sets his foot, there the Yankee ... rarely, if ever, returns. The place remains to the intruder and his heirs forever” (*Suburban Sketches*, 71).

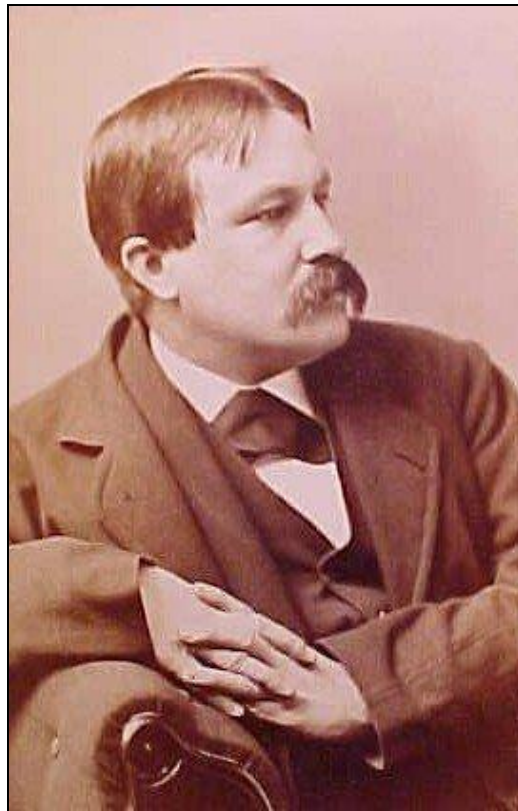


Fig. 6. William Dean Howells about 1870. Source: Wikipedia

It was apparently the construction of a double house across the street and the arrival of a large Irish family that caused William and Elinor to leave Sacramento Street. In 1870 they rented a much larger house at 3 Berkeley Street, and in 1872 built a house, partly designed by Elinor, at 37 Concord Avenue. Six years later, the growing family moved to Redtop on Belmont Hill, designed for them by Elinor's brother William, a partner in the New York firm of McKim, Mead & White. This was somehow unsatisfactory, and the Howells family moved to Boston, and then to New York. They returned to Cambridge several times, however, staying one summer in a house overlooking Fresh Pond and later on Mount Auburn Street when their son John Mead Howells was at Harvard.

## B. Architectural Significance

While the Greek Revival was the dominant style in Cambridge in the 1840s, the Italianate style had largely succeeded it by the early 1850s. In vernacular buildings, the temple-fronted (or at least the pedimented, gable-end-to-street version) Greek Revival style was particularly well adapted to the new side-hall floor plan, in which the entrance at one side of the front elevation led directly to the stairs running up the side of the house. This plan became ubiquitous in Cambridge; it was adapted to all vernacular styles, and appeared in three-deckers as late as the 1920s.

The Italianate style was based on Tuscan precedents, characterized by low, hip roofed square towers, symmetrical facades, arched openings, and bracketed overhangs. As interpreted by American architects, Italianate massing was completely different from the Greek temple-fronted ideal, as at 5 Berkeley Street (1852) and 15 Berkeley Street (1863). More commonly, carpenters adapted the Italianate vocabulary to the prevailing side-hall plan, retaining the gable-end, side-hall plan, and applying arched openings and bracketed overhangs.

The William Dean Howells house represents a different approach to the Italianate style, one that attempted to retain the symmetrical façade typical of Tuscan architecture by adopting the center entrance plan of 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian houses. The low, hip roof represents the similar roofs of Tuscan towered dwellings. This approach was developed by two housewrights, Joseph Littlefield and Ivory Estes, who are known to have built two similar houses in Cambridge in 1856 that were the prototype for four other houses built by others in 1857:

46 Trowbridge Street	1856	Estes & Littlefield
48 Trowbridge Street	1856	Estes & Littlefield
27 Cogswell Avenue	1857	S. L. Willard
37 Cogswell Avenue	1857	S. L. Willard
41 Sacramento Street	1857	(?)
98 Trowbridge Street	1857	J. Staples

Estes and Littlefield were originally from Bangor, and arrived in Cambridge shortly before beginning work on Trowbridge Street. It is not known whether they imported this version of the Italianate style from Maine, or adapted it from some other source.



Fig. 7. 27 Cogswell Avenue, 1857. S. L. Willard, builder

This type of plan was soon replaced by the emerging Mansard style, which first appeared in Cambridge about 1854. The Mansard roof was both stylish and practical. Stylistically, it was associated with the Second French Empire and the redevelopment of Paris by Barton Hausmann; from a practical point of view, it allowed the cramped space below a gable roof to be enlarged at little additional expense and with no detriment to the traditional proportions of a façade. This innovation quickly supplanted Estes and Littlefield's 'pure' Italianate design; although center-entrance, two-story-plus Mansards with Italianate detailing appeared in the 1860s, they cannot be linked to Estes and Littlefield. (More than one architectural historian has erroneously assumed that the low hip roofs of Estes and Littlefield's houses marked the absence of a Mansard roof, perhaps burned off and not replaced.)

The William Dean Howells house substantially retains its architectural integrity with its original massing, low hipped roof, wide eaves, and many of its original windows and cornice details intact. The three-part windows on the façade are replacements of the original double-hung windows. The later entrance vestibule features a significant Queen Anne style stained glass transom and sidelights. The ell, which projects beyond the side elevation on the west side, was incrementally enlarged beginning in 1920.

The landscape of the property has been radically altered. While the house sits high above the street, as the designers intended, the berm that once hid the lower part of the foundation was inappropriately removed c. 1933. A double-width curb cut provides parking in the side yard, while the single story garage occupies the left rear corner of the property. There is no trace of the fruit trees and garden described by Howells.

## 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 Dean Howells house is significant under landmark criterion (1) for its association with Howells, a pre-eminent figure in American literary history of both local and national significance. The property meets criterion (2) as a rare example of its style in Cambridge and for its association with housewrights Joseph Littlefield and Ivory Estes.

## VI. Recommendations

### A. Purpose of Designation

Article III, Chapter 2.78.140 states the purpose of landmark designation:

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 . . . sites 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

Landmark designation or donation of a preservation restriction are the only two options for the permanent long-term protection and preservation of the William Dean Howells house. While the house may be eligible for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places, National Register listing alone would not permanently protect and preserve the building. Moving the building or demolishing significant portions of it would trigger the Historical Commission's review under the citywide demolition delay ordinance, but this provision of Ch. 2.78 provides only a delay mechanism and is not as strong a protection as landmark designation. No plans are underway for historic district or neighborhood conservation district study in the area surrounding the property.

### C. Staff Recommendation

For the reasons stated, it is the staff opinion that the property at 41 Sacramento Street is eligible for landmark designation under criterion (1) for its associations with Howells, an important figure in Cambridge history, and under criterion (2) for its architectural significance in terms of the period and style of the house. The staff recommends that the Commission vote to recommend that the City Council designate the property as a protected landmark under Article III, Chapter 2.78.

### VII. Standards and Criteria

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 designated landmark. This section of the 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 A and B of this section provide guidelines for the treatment of the landmark described in this report.

#### A. 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 should 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 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 generally discouraged.
6. The surface cleaning of a landmark should be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.
7. Additions should not destroy significant exterior architectural features and should not be incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment.
8. Additions should be designed in a way that, if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.

## B. Suggested Review Guidelines

1. The first goal of a renovation of the William Dean Howells house should be to restore the front part to its period of greatest significance, notwithstanding the General Standards and Criteria provision that “changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood.” Under normal circumstances, “changes may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.” In this case, the house has been altered in so many inappropriate ways that its significance has been greatly diminished.
2. Proposals to construct any remaining allowable square footage on the site should be evaluated in terms of a) the significance of the building on its current site and b) aspects of the development proposal that may enhance the building and/or provide significant public benefit. The design of any new construction should be sympathetic in massing and materials. The house should not be lowered below its original height above grade (approximately five feet).
3. The exterior finishes of the house should be considered significant artifacts of its history and protected to the extent possible from diminution or loss. Exterior materials should be preserved insofar as practicable. Special care should be taken to protect and maintain the cornice, brackets, window hoods, and trim.
4. Consideration should be given to removal of the vestibule and reconstruction of the original bracketed entrance, perhaps incorporating the stained glass into the transom and sidelights.
5. Window placement and location is a critical element of the architectural character of the house. The south facade is particularly sensitive in this regard and the inappropriate three-part windows should be replaced with double-hung windows to match the originals. Existing sash should be maintained. Storm windows may be installed without review in conformance with current Commission guidelines. Introduction of new window openings should be discouraged.
6. Although interior features are not subject to the jurisdiction of the Cambridge Historical Commission, the owner should be encouraged to preserve original materials and detailing.
7. The original relationship of the house to its landscape should be re-established by restoring the berm around the lower part of the foundation. The curb cut should be narrowed and parking resited and minimized. Care should be taken to maintain the open, landscaped character of the yard immediately in front of the house and the side yards.
8. The garage is not a significant structure, but may represent irreplaceable space for a future owner. Appropriate alterations and adaptive reuse should be considered.

## VIII. Proposed Order

### ORDERED:

That the William Dean Howells house, 41 Sacramento 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 July 2, 2009. The premises so designated is the land defined as parcel 134 on assessor's map 150 and the building thereon and the premises described in a mortgage recorded in deed book 50946, page 434 of the South Middlesex Registry of Deeds.

This designation is justified by the important historical and architectural associations the property has with the American author and literary critic William Dean Howells, and as a rare example of the vernacular Italianate style of architecture associated with Cambridge housewrights Joseph Littlefield and Ivory Estes.

The effect of this designation shall be that review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability shall be required before any construction activity can take place within the designated premises or any action can be taken affecting the appearance of the premises, that would in either case be visible from a public way. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the final landmark designation report, dated September 8, 2009, with respect to the designated premises, by Section VII, Standards and Criteria of said report, and by the applicable sections of Chapter 2.78, Article III, of the Cambridge Municipal Code.

## X. Bibliography

### 1. General Sources

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