



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: May 26, 2016

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner

Re: Case D-1399: Binney House, 86 School St. (1835-1836)

An application to demolish the Binney House at 86 School Street was received on May 10, 2016. The owner, Sam Azzam, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for June 2, 2016.

### Current Conditions

The Binney house occupies a 1,995 square-foot lot (75/127) on the south side of School Street, opposite Pine Street. This small lot measures only 35' wide by 57' deep. The house is a 1 ½-story frame building with a front facing gable roof. The zoning is Residence C-1, a multi-family housing district that requires 1,500 square feet per dwelling unit. The FAR and height limits in this district are 0.75 and 35 feet. The assessed value of the land and building, according to the Assessors database, is \$498,500 - \$96,600 for the house, and \$401,900 for the land. The property sold in August 2015 for \$510,000.



86 School St., 2016

Cambridge Assessing Dept.

The front of the house is set back from the sidewalk by 6'. The side setbacks range from 2' at the back of the left side to 14' on the right side at the driveway.

The house is in poor condition. It has not been maintained for years. The ell is open to the elements and intruders. The brick foundation deflects inward on the west side. The roofing shingles are at the end of their lifespan. There are areas of missing trim and siding allowing for water penetration.





86 School Street and environs

Cambridge GIS/Pictometry

### Description

The Binney House is a 1½-story wood frame workers cottage with a gable roof oriented with its end to the street. The center entrance is located on the flank side facing west. It is now organized into four bays but was probably originally a five-bay, center entrance plan. The house sits on a high basement foundation of approximately 4' in height. The rear shed addition was attached to an earlier ell ca. 1920 and was later enlarged. The main block of the house measures 15' wide by 30' deep. The chimney is located at the center of the house.

The house was covered with aluminum siding about asphalt siding in 1950 and asbestos shingles were layered over that in 1965. The foundation and the first floor on the front of the house have been covered with a faux stone siding material at an unknown date. The door casings are flat and the other trim detailing is covered by siding, but would typically include corner boards and an entablature.

The existing windows are 2-over-1 wood double hung sash, but would have originally been 6-over-6 double-hung sash, given the age of the house. A picture window on the first floor of the street elevation replaced two double hung windows. A small pediment covers the front door. The pressure treated porches are not original and are in very poor condition.

### History

The opening of the West Boston Bridge in 1793 opened up a new transportation option from Old Cambridge and points west to Boston. Formerly occupied by only four homesteads, Cambridgeport started to grow soon after the opening of the bridge. Main Street was built along a causeway to the bridge from Pelham's Island and Lafayette Square (where the earliest development in Cambridgeport took place). Taverns and stores were the first structures built

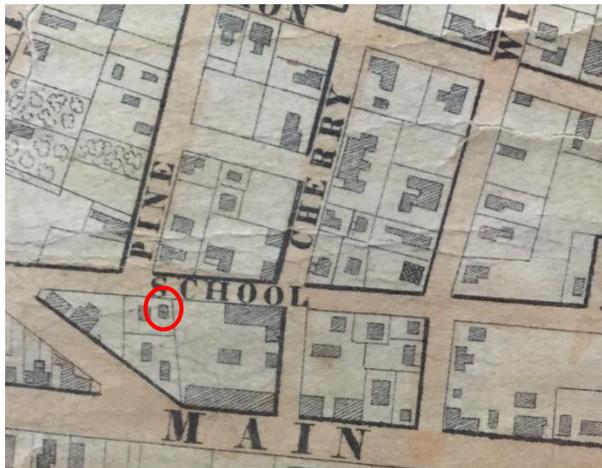
along Main Street. The commercial nature of the street continued through the nineteenth century, as it was a busy thoroughfare between Boston and Harvard Square.

The Old Cambridgeport residential neighborhood developed in and around Cherry and Pine streets during the first half of the nineteenth century. Some of Cambridgeport's oldest houses, dating to the Federal period, survive in this historic neighborhood including the Margaret Fuller House of 1806-07. The area's development then slowed due to economic troubles caused by the Embargo of 1807. The neighborhood's growth was in full swing again by the 1840s, when many of the Greek Revival style houses were constructed.

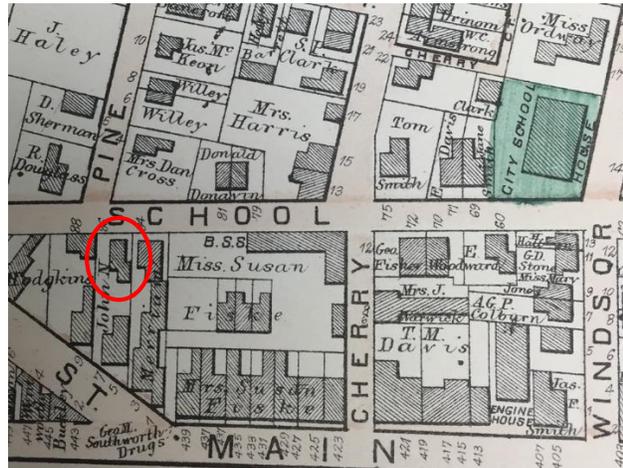
School Street was laid out in 1803 and was so named because of the Boardman School of 1802 at the corner of Windsor and School streets. Andrew Boardman, who donated the site for the school, was an important figure in the early nineteenth century development of Cambridgeport. His family's farm was one of the four homesteads in this part of Cambridge before 1793. The buildings that developed along School Street straddled the commercial and industrial nature of Main Street, the canals, and the river and the established residential neighborhood just north of School Street. The street still reflects this dividing line between the commercial, institutional, and business developments along busy Main Street and the quieter residential streets of the Old Cambridgeport neighborhood.



86 School Street, front (west) elevation with shingled 1-story shed addition visible at rear, 2016



1854 Walling Map of Cambridge



1873 Hopkins Atlas of Cambridge

The site of 86 School Street (circled in red) was part of a larger lot that extended south to Austin Street (Bishop Allen Drive). A house was already present on the Austin Street frontage in 1835 when the property was jointly purchased by Moses Binney and Mary Binney Merriam (widow of William Merriam). Mary Merriam was taxed in 1836 for the property which then had three houses on it. Mary Merriam lived in the older house fronting Austin Street (#3) while Moses Binney lived in the workers cottage at 86 School Street. He was a leather dresser (also called a “morocco dresser” in the city directories referring to a goat skin leather or a special process for finishing leather). Moses may have located here due to the proximity to the Teele, Howe & Co. Bacon Works on nearby State Street.

Moses was born in Cambridge in 1796 and married Elizabeth Perham in 1838. Moses and Mary divided the property in 1844 and Mary retained the house on the southern half on Austin Street and Moses retained the house on School Street. He built a second house in 1844 at 84 School Street (demolished 1964). Moses ran into financial difficulties and his property was sold at auction in 1850, the same year that Mary Merriam died. Moses and Elizabeth Binney moved to Gore Street near the Squires meat processing factory and then to Somerville. John N. Merriam, was listed as the owner of 86 School Street on the 1873 atlas. He was a manager at Squires and lived on Magazine Street.



86 (left) and 88 (right) School Street, 2016



86 School Street, east (rear) side, 2016

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Later owners and residents of 86 School Street included baker Joseph G. Ball, (ca. 1875-1916), widow Jennie Brown, baker Peter Likos, chauffer John Desautels, and most recently Virginia Demers.

The Rush Zion AME Church was constructed in 1888 in the Queen Anne style at 82 School Street. An historically black congregation, the church has been an important cultural institution in this diverse neighborhood for over a hundred years.

### Significance and Recommendation

The Binney House is a modest center hall Greek Revival period workers cottage and significant for its associations with the second phase of development in Cambridgeport in the 1830s and 1840s and for its associations with the Moses Binney family, its first residents. The house still retains some characteristic architectural features including its high brick foundation, center entrance, and center chimney though later alterations and a general lack of maintenance has been detrimental to the building's condition and appearance.

I recommend that the Commission review the proposed plans for new construction and hear public testimony from the neighbors before making a further determination.

cc: Sam Azzam, owner  
Ranjit Singanayagam, ISD