



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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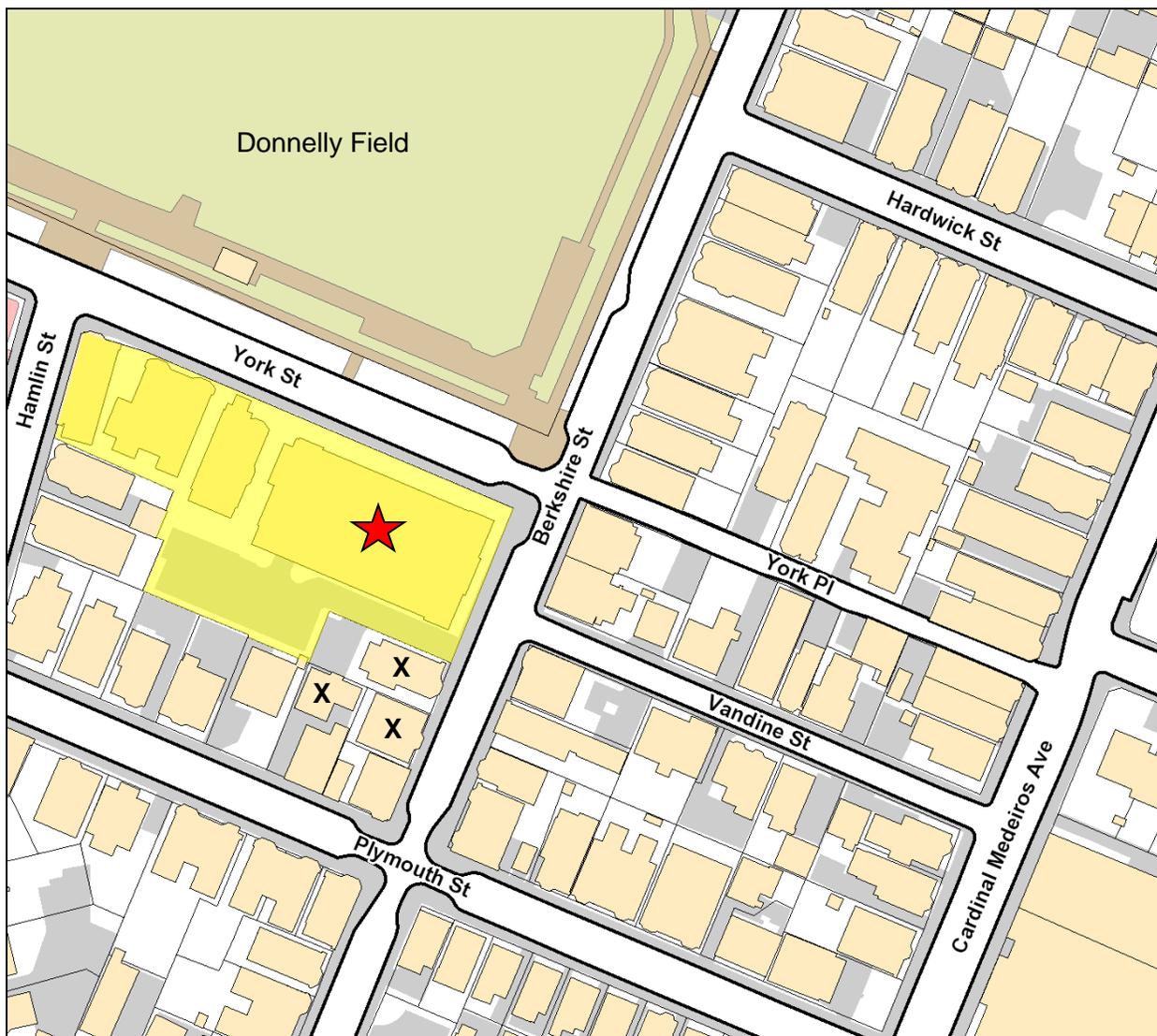
Date: January 27, 2017  
To: Cambridge Historical Commission  
From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner  
Re: D-1432: 50 York Street aka 39 Berkshire Street  
Formerly Saint Patrick's Church (1909)

An application to demolish the St. Patrick's Place affordable apartments, located in what was formerly St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, was received on January 18, 2017. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for February 2, 2017.

### Site Condition and Context

The structure, a 3-story stucco building with a slate roof and concrete foundation, is located on the southwest corner of York and Berkshire, opposite Donnelly Field. It is situated with three other residential buildings on a combined lot of 32,535 square feet (Map 40/Parcel 243) in a Residence C-1 zone. The former church building built in 1909 was adaptively re-used for housing in 1991, permitted by the Board of Zoning Appeal with a Comprehensive Permit. The Comprehensive Permit decision of 1991 allowed a height of 47' and front yard setbacks of 13' from Berkshire and 15' from York. The permit allowed for 16 housing units with a density of 1,017 square feet per dwelling unit, a .98 FAR. These figures are for the development of the four buildings together on the lot. The other three buildings include two three-deckers at 26 and 40 York Street and a double three-decker at 28-30 York Street. There are 28 parking spaces in the development.

This densely developed Wellington-Harrington neighborhood suffered a devastating fire on December 3, 2016. The ten alarm blaze resulted in 18 damaged buildings, and over 150 displaced residents, but no loss of life. An investigation has pinpointed the start of the fire to discarded smoking materials at the house next door to Saint Patricks at 35-37 Berkshire Street, which was under renovation at the time. Three buildings were totally destroyed (25-27 and 35-37 Berkshire Street and 35 Plymouth Street). What remained of those buildings has already been removed. The southern half of the roof of Saint Patrick's caught fire. The slate roof on the south side of the main gable collapsed, taking with it much of the third floor framing. A secondary shed roof and a post and truss framing system support the clearstory wall and the main roof. The fire filled the cavity above the second floor ceiling in this shed roofed area causing extensive structural damage. Vast quantities of water was used to put out the fire, and the basement garage filled with water. The building has remained open to the weather. Additional information about the damage to the building and its structural condition is included in the application materials submitted by Just A Start.



Map of York, Berkshire, and Plymouth streets neighborhood where a massive fire damaged 18 buildings. Saint Patrick's is marked with a red star. The three residences marked "X" were destroyed and debris has been removed.

The neighboring properties in this block consist mostly of 2 and 3-story wooden multi-families that were constructed between 1889-1916. The one exception is a 2-story house at 37 Plymouth Street built in 1986.

### Architectural Description

The building was built as a 2-story church in 1909. It was designed in the Mission Style by architects Clough & Wardner and constructed by builders Mead, Mason Co. The church was built for economy and ease of maintenance using textured cement stucco on the walls and a gray slate roof. The main entrance faced Berkshire Street with three round-arched doorways, and two additional arched doorways were positioned at either end of the building facing York Street. The front doors are flanked by square pilasters and topped with a classical dentiled cornice. A large open bell tower and cross originally capped the front of the gable roof, but was later rebuilt in a simpler boxed manner. Wide eaves and exposed rafters are typical of the style. A beautiful stained glass quatrefoil window adorns the upper level of the façade. The original cost of construction was \$25,000 (b.p. 12,665) and the building was completed within nine months.

The interior of the church was organized with a basement for Sunday school classrooms and a chapel for weekday services. The main sanctuary was on the first floor and could

accommodate 1200 worshippers. A choir loft was located over the vestibule of the main entrance and an elliptical apse and two sacristies were at the opposite end. The center of the sanctuary was 40' high and lit by large arched windows at a clear story level. Two side aisles had a lower ceiling and were lit with small rectangular windows along the length of the building. The church was also fitted with electrical incandescent lighting fixtures by the Pettingell-Andrews Company.



St. Patrick's Church, ca. 1909

Historic New England photo.



St. Patrick's Church interior, ca. 1909

CHC, Paul Feloney Collection photo



St. Patrick's Church, Jan. 2017



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Several prominent Boston architectural firms designed churches for the Boston Archdiocese including Edward T.P. Graham and Maginnis & Walsh. Several designs were drawn up for St. Patrick's and the commission went to the firm of Clough & Wardner. George A. Clough was well known in Boston, having been appointed the first City Architect in 1874, a post he retained until 1883. While employed for Boston he designed such prominent buildings as the Latin and English High School, the Suffolk County Courthouse, and the Calf Pasture Pumping Station in Dorchester. Clough later opened his

own firm with Herbert Wardner. Together they completed projects including libraries, schools, and churches from Maine to Pennsylvania. Clough died at his home in Brookline in 1910, the year after St. Patrick's was built. He is buried in his hometown of Blue Hill, Maine.

The Mission style may seem an odd choice for a largely Irish American congregation, but it was a style that had worked its way eastward from California and the southwest all the way to New England. Though red slate or clay tile was considered for the roof of St. Patrick's the final selection was gray slate, perhaps considered a more suitable material for this area or perhaps because it was more easily available or less expensive. Popular between 1890-1920, the Mission Style was also selected for the Immaculate Conception Lithuanian Church on Windsor, built in 1910. There California Mission and Arts and Crafts elements were mixed with some features of traditional Lithuanian church architecture including the use of brick.

### History

Cambridge's first Roman Catholic church, St. John's, was built on Fourth (now Sciarappa) street near Otis in 1842. Until that time, Cambridge Catholics had to go to either the cathedral in Boston or St. Mary's Church in Charlestown to attend mass. In 1873, Father John O'Brien, the pastor of St. John's, began a campaign for a new church. The cornerstone for Sacred Heart Church was laid in 1874, and the church was formally consecrated in 1883. St. John's continued in use for church-related activities after Sacred Heart opened but was demolished in 1934. The St. John's site is now a playground with a granite marker indicating its history and significance. Sacred Heart was the largest and most expensive church in East Cambridge. Its congregation remained primarily Irish until the 1890s, but the growing numbers of Polish, Portuguese, and Italian immigrants created new demands on the parish. At this time, new churches and fraternal clubs and societies were encouraged that could provide worship space and leadership to the various immigrant groups that wished to preserve their national traditions. St. Francis of Assisi, for example, was founded and staffed by the Franciscan order.

In May of 1908 Archbishop William H. O'Connell divided the Sacred Heart parish in Cambridge. All Cambridgeport residents west of the railroad tracks were assigned to this new parish named St. Patrick's. Rev. Lawrence W. Slattery was assigned to be the first parish priest of St. Patrick's. He came to Cambridge from Georgetown, Mass. Having also served churches in Woburn and Hopkinton. Father Slattery was charged with raising a building for his parishioners, a task which he accomplished in record time. A site was chosen at near Cambridge Field (now called Donnelly Field) at the corner of Berkshire and York streets. Services for St. Patrick's were temporarily held at St. Anthony's, a Portuguese Catholic church only two blocks away at 239 Portland Street (now called Cardinal Medeiros Avenue). The building permit for St. Patrick's was pulled in February and the dedication of the completed church took place at the end of October. Archbishop O'Connell presided at the dedication. In his remarks he conveyed his preference for smaller parishes which were better able to serve the needs of the parishioners and smaller buildings that would not require a church to carry a mortgage for many years.

The rectory was constructed in 1908 at 40 York Street. Father Slattery celebrated his twenty-fifth anniversary of priesthood in 1910. He was born in South Boston, graduated at age 14 from the English High School, studied at Holy Cross College and Georgetown University, then completed his theology studies in Aix, France. He remained at St. Patrick's for only four years then was assigned to St. Joseph's Church in the West End of Boston in 1912. He was replaced at St. Patrick's by Rev. John A. Butler of South Weymouth. Butler had attended school in Cambridge in the St. Mary's parish as a boy. He was ordained in 1892 after completing his theological studies at St. John's seminary in Brighton.

One of the biggest events of the church's early history was the funeral of Marine Corporal Daniel A. Haggerty, who was the first U. S. soldier to die during the invasion of the port city of Veracruz, Mexico on April 21, 1914. The funeral included a procession from the Armory on Massachusetts Avenue to St. Patrick's Church. Father Butler gave the eulogy to a packed audience. The funeral procession then continued on to the Cambridge Cemetery with thousands of onlookers lining the streets.

In 1945 a missionary society took up residence at St. Patrick's. The Mission Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity established a Settlement House at 28-30 York Street called Croagh Patrick. The nuns of this mission lived on the third floor of the double three-decker and the first floor was altered to accommodate a meeting hall. The society focused their service to the poor and worked toward the preservation of the faith in these underserved communities. (Grady, Mary Rita. *Journeying Together: Congregations of Women and Men Religious in the Archdiocese of Boston 1808-2008*. Archdiocese of Boston, 2008.) Some in the neighborhood still refer to the church complex as Croagh Patrick, the name of which comes from a pilgrimage site in County Mayo, Ireland.

The Archdiocese of Boston closed St. Patrick's Church in 1989, one of the earliest such closings in the Archdiocese. The Archdiocese sold the property with its four buildings to Just A Start for use as affordable housing. The Board of Zoning Appeal approved a comprehensive permit in 1991 for the adaptive use of the church building for 16 affordable units and for another 16 affordable units in the other three buildings. The architectural firm of Hammer, Kiefer & Todd designed the project. Two new floors were added inside the church as part of the residential conversion, and the basement was re-used for a parking garage. The fenestration of the lower floors was altered in order to light the new floor levels, but the characteristic features of the Mission Style church were retained.



### Significance and Recommendation

It is the staff recommendation that the building at 50 York Street be found significant as a fine example of church design of the early twentieth century in the Mission Style and for its important associations with the social history of the city's Roman Catholic population living and worshipping in Cambridge.

The Commission should hear testimony from the non-profit owner, residents, and neighbors before making a further determination.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services Department  
Robert MacArthur, Just A Start