



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Shary Page Berg, Joseph V. Ferrara, Susannah Barton Tobin, *Alternates*

July 1, 2016

To: Members of the Cambridge Historical Commission

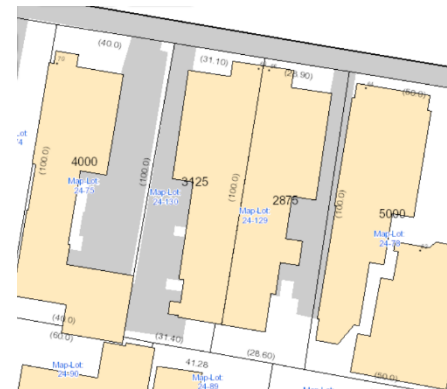
From: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director

Re: L-118: Jones-Hall houses, 66-68 Otis Street

On June 2, 2016, the Historical Commission voted to hold a public hearing on July 7 to consider instituting a landmarks designation study for the property at 66-68 Otis Street.

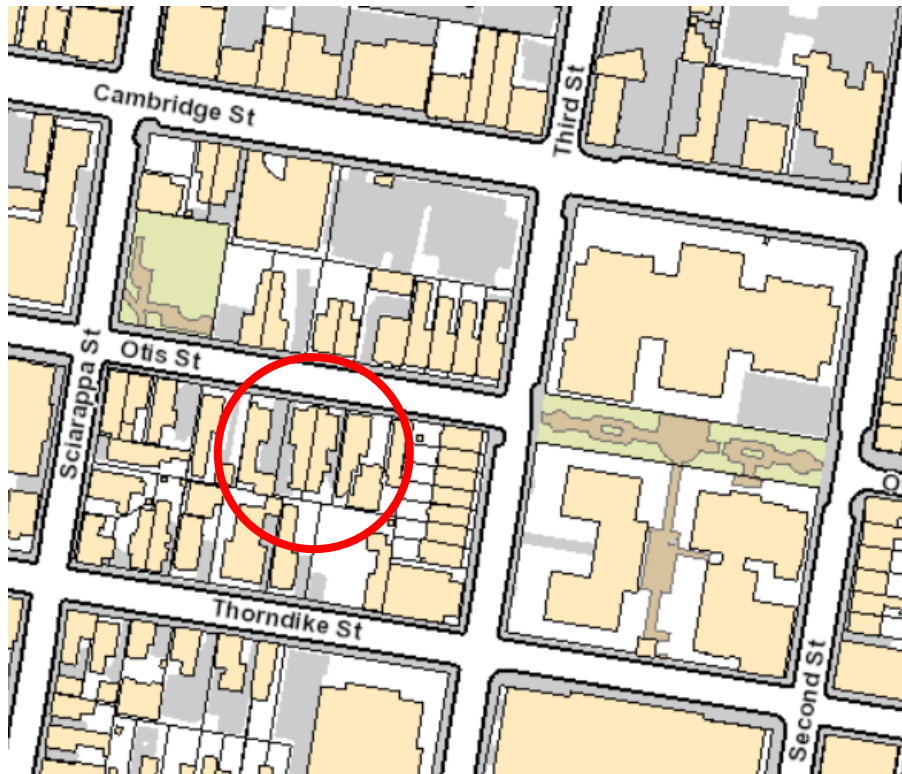
Description

The Jones-Hall houses at 66-68 Otis Street occupy two lots (24-129 and 24-130) totaling 6,000 square feet on the south side of Otis between Third and Sciarappa streets. The zoning is Residence C-1, a multi-family district with a height limit of 35' and a requirement of 1,500 square feet of lot area per dwelling unit. The current buildings are non-conforming due to limited setbacks. The combined assessed value in 2015 was \$1.82 million, of which \$1.14 million was attributed to the building. Both were originally single-family houses; number 66 also had an apartment and was rated as a two-family. The Jones-Hall houses comprise a contributing building in the East Cambridge National Register District.



66-68 Otis Street, 2015 Assessor's photo

The Jones-Hall houses comprise a gable-roofed 2½-story Greek Revival-style two-family house with a cross gable containing paired center entrances and six bays across the front façade. While the house lost most of its ornamentation when asbestos siding was applied in the mid-20th century, until recently it retained its original windows and some original sash. An ongoing renovation has resulted in a loss of the old windows and a reorganization of the facade. Only the paired entries in the frontispiece retain their original integrity.

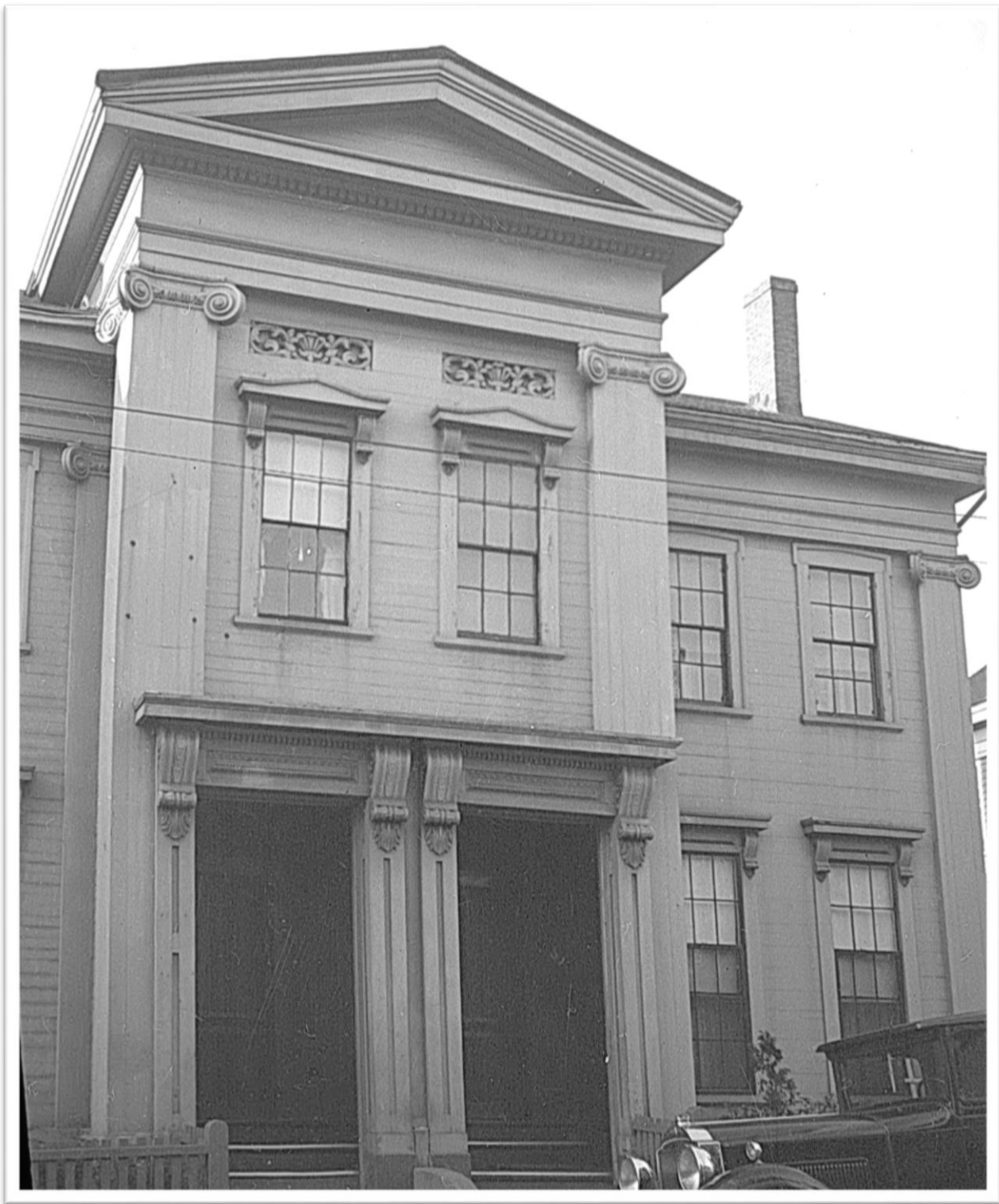


Cambridge Assessing Department

Description and Significance

The Jones-Hall houses were described by Susan Maycock in the Cambridge Historical Commission's 1988 publication, *East Cambridge*:

The best example of the exterior use of [ornament] in East Cambridge is 66-68 Otis Street, which has elaborate moulded consoles on the entrance porch and windows. As originally built in 1846-47 by William Hall, a lumber dealer, and Andrew Jones, a mason, this T-shaped house was the most elaborate double Greek Revival house in East Cambridge, combining both unusual ornament and stock Greek Revival elements. Ornamentation was concentrated on the projecting entrance bay, which has monumental two-story corner pilasters with Ionic capitals and is surmounted by a Classical entablature and pediment; the ends of the house display the same treatment with corner pilasters and pediments. The second-story windows on the entrance bay had the most elaborate detail, with pedimented caps supported by consoles and decorated rectangular panels above, while the second-floor windows on the main part of the house had simpler pediments. The long first-floor windows had projecting mouldings supported by similar decorative consoles. This moulded material lasted for a century, proving that it was durable, but the facade of the house was unfortunately stripped of much of its original decoration in the 1940s and covered with siding; only the recessed entrance, with paneled pilasters, decorative consoles, pediments, and entablatures, remains as evidence of the house's former glory. (pp. 105-106)



66-68 Otis Street, 1938

Roger Gilman photo, CHC

Circumstances of the Proposed Landmark Study

The circumstances that brought this matter before the Commission are described in the minutes of its June 4, 2016 meeting:

Mr. Sullivan reported that the 1846 double house had been covered with asbestos siding for many years. It had originally had Ionic capitals, window hoods, cast iron ventilators, and recessed entryway. The new owner had made several modifications including removal of the siding down to the sheathing and replacement with new, removal of the decorative ventilators, and resizing of some windows. The original entrance hood, recessed entranceway with paneling and side and transom lights (original doors not extant) and the pedimented cornice still existed. A stop-work order had been issued by Inspectional Services because there were questions about whether the project was in compliance with zoning. The proposed plans were to add two more entry doors to the front for a total of four residential units, which would substantially change the character of the house and result in the loss of original features. The glass in the sidelights and transom lights was original and was patterned with flowers, a popular design of the period, made locally in East Cambridge. He had met with the owner and recommended that he preserve the entry, move the new doors to an interior vestibule, and the top pediment detail. The owner had submitted a new plan consistent with those recommendations. It would be dependent on the interior vestibule being approved by ISD. He recommended that the petition be accepted, the landmark study started, and a public hearing on the matter to be scheduled for July 7. ...

Mr. Irving moved to accept the petition, initiate the study, and schedule a hearing for July 7. Dr. Solet seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

The vote immediately placed exterior alterations under the jurisdiction of the Historical Commission for up to a year, or until June 2017.

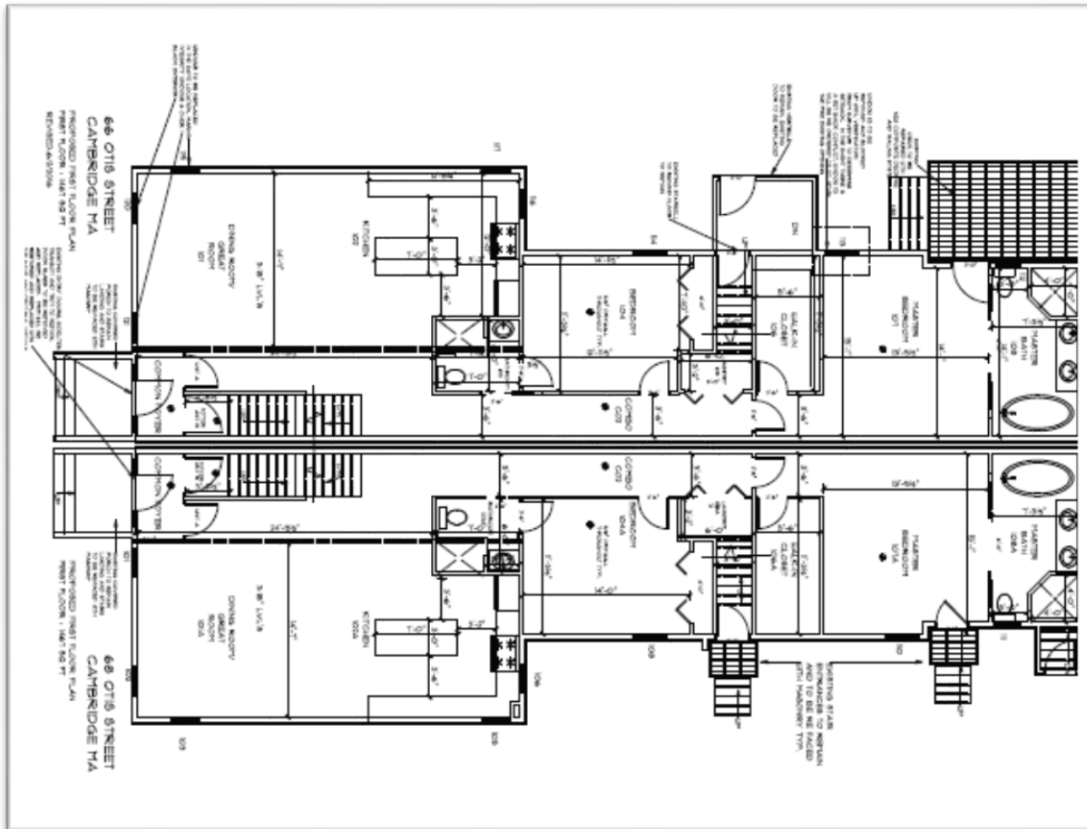


During construction, before stop-work order



Door surround to be preserved

Once the stop-work order was in place the developer agreed to preserve the decorative sidelights and transom, paneling, and all other details of both entrances, and to not install windows in the frieze on the third floor. The two new entries on each side would be placed behind the existing front doors, rather than replacing them. The two existing doors themselves, which are not historic, will be replaced with new doors in an appropriate pattern, and the vinyl floors in the entries would be replaced with bluestone. Also, the developer agreed to delete two proposed basement windows in the front foundation.



Revised plans showing entry to be restored

ISD approved the revised plans and lifted the stop-work order. Because the developer agreed to restore the remaining original features of the exterior and abandoned plans for any further exterior changes I did not require him to file an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to resume work. More recently, I approved a minor change in the detailing of the granite foundation.

Recommendation

I recommend that the Commission confirm its vote of June 4 that initiated the landmark designation study for 66-68 Otis Street.