



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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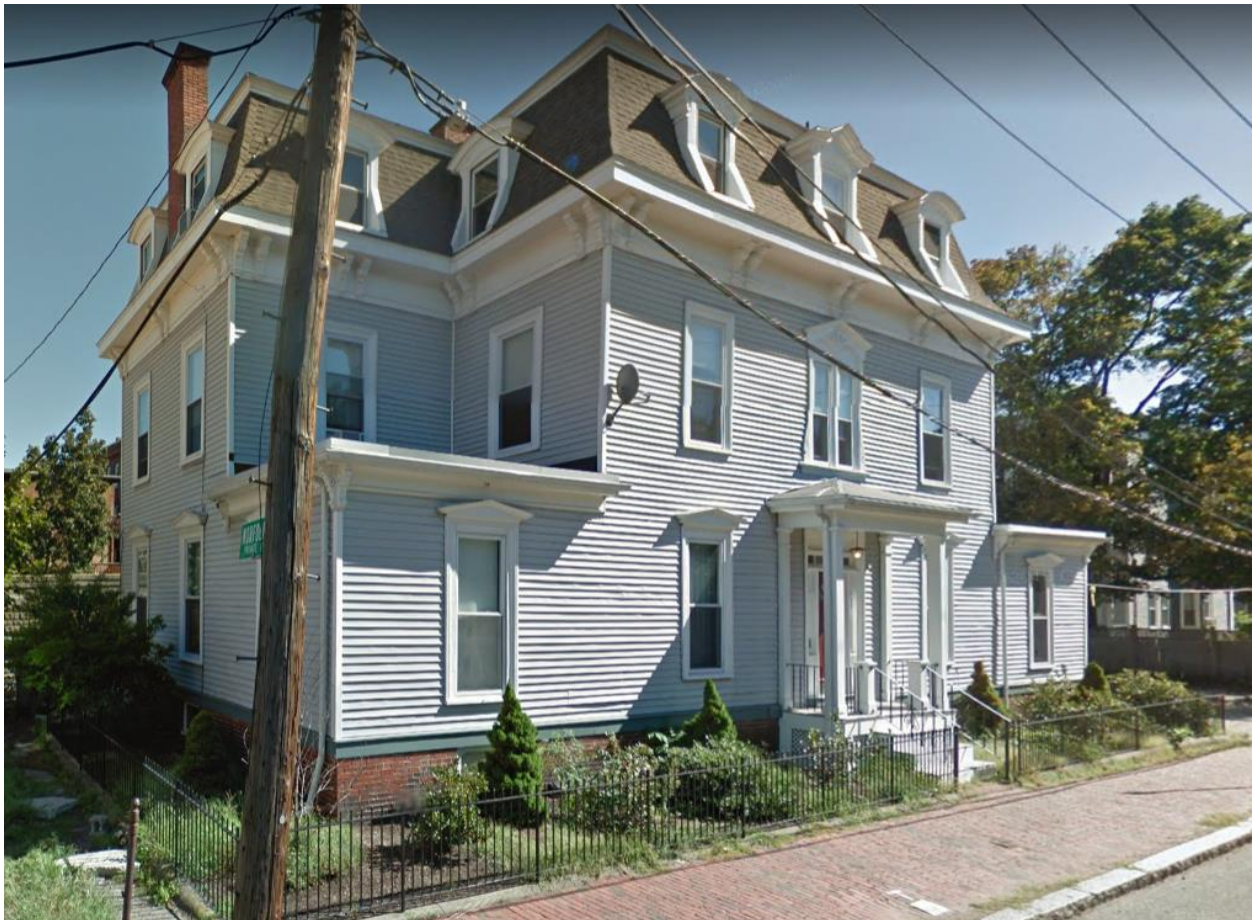
November 30, 2018

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Charles M. Sullivan, Executive Director

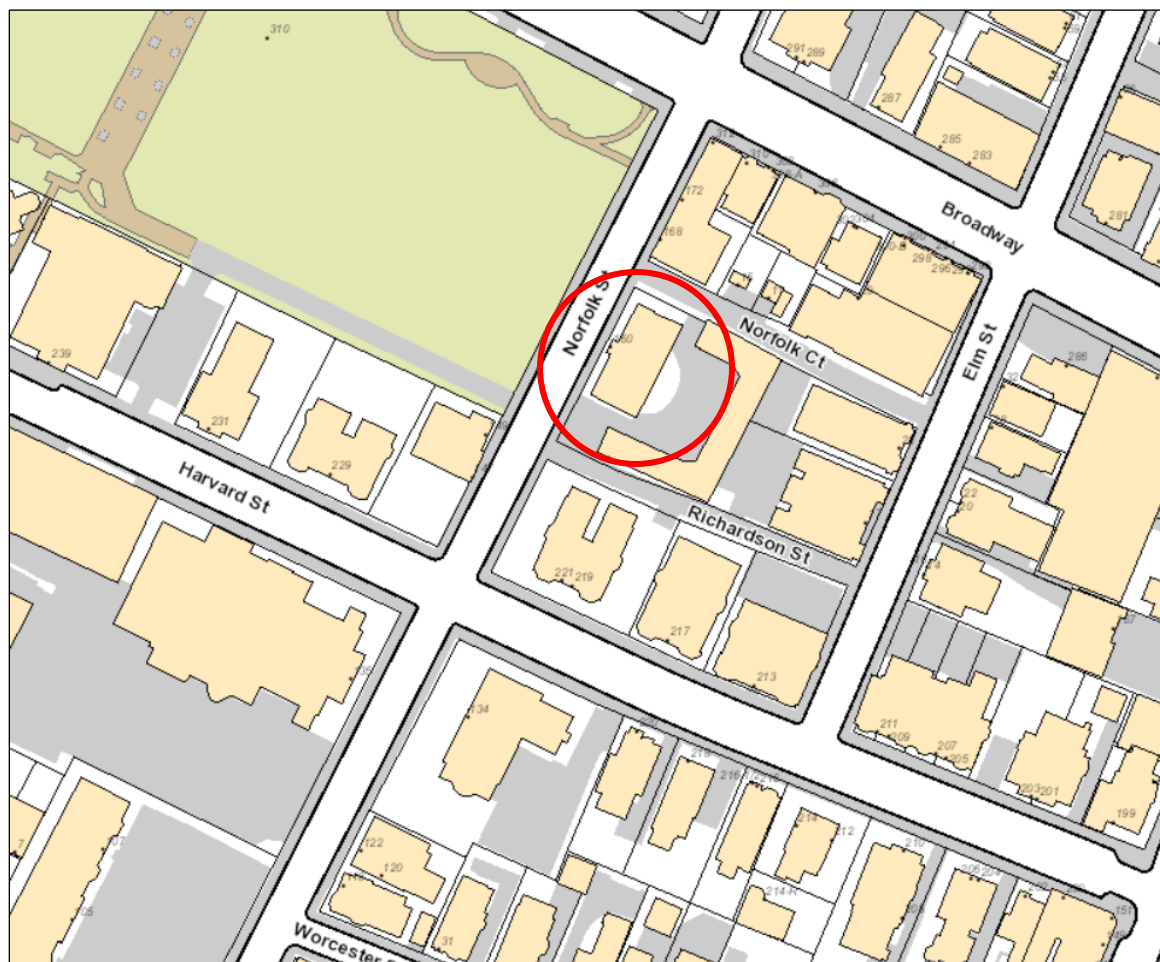
Re: D-1500: 156-160 Norfolk Street, Luke-Scully-Burns house (ca. 1855)

An application to demolish the Mansard roofs on the wings of the house at 156-160 Norfolk Street was received on November 13, 2018. The applicant, 160 Norfolk LLC, was notified of an initial determination of significance and a hearing scheduled for December 6.



160 Norfolk Street

Google Streetview photo



156-160 Norfolk Street

Cambridge GIS, Oct. 2017



160 Norfolk Street, with Sennott Park in foreground

Cambridge GIS

The Luke-Scully-Burns house is located on the east side of Norfolk Street between Harvard Street and Broadway. The 2017 assessed value for the land and building is \$2,330,400. The structure is sited on a 12,734 square-foot lot in an C-1 residential district. The zoning allows residential construction with an FAR of 0.75 and a height limit of 35 feet. A minimum of 1200 square feet of lot area is required per dwelling unit. The structure shares the lot with an extensive range of garages constructed in 1924 which are not considered significant.

The owner proposes to demolish the garages and construct residences in their place. Removal of the second floors and Mansard roofs of the Luke-Scully-Burns house is necessary to reduce the overall FAR of the existing and proposed buildings in the site.

The immediate neighborhood consists of small early 19<sup>th</sup> century houses except for St. Mary's Church and rectory nearby. The site faces Sennott Park, formerly Broadway Common, the largest public open space in Cambridgeport.

### Description

The Luke-Scully-Burns house is a Second Empire style residence built about 1855 and extended on each side in 1871. It is a 2½ story, Mansard roof structure with a center entrance facing Norfolk Street. The sharply concave roof is supported by a heavy cornice with paired brackets. The windows feature pediments and original trim, although the sash have been replaced. The front door is flanked by sidelights and a transom and protected by a porch that may not be original. The main block of the house, three bays wide with a center entrance, is flanked by full-height recessed wings with the same Mansard configuration. On the first floor, the recesses are occupied by one-story extensions that display the same pedimented window decoration.



156-160 Norfolk Street, 1965

CHC photo

The original clapboards are covered by aluminum siding, but much of the original trim remains. The Assessors rate the overall condition as “average.”

### History

The neighborhood in which the Luke-Scully-Burns house is located began to grow in the second stage of Cambridgeport’s development, and by the 1840s became one of the most prestigious neighborhoods in the new section of the city. Harvard Street was opened from Main Street west in 1801 and extended to Quincy Street in 1808. Prospect Street was laid out by Middlesex County in 1804 and Essex Street and Norfolk Street soon followed. The Town of Cambridge acquired the lot at the corner of Harvard and Norfolk and constructed a Town Hall in 1831. Elijah Luke, a wealthy hay and grain dealer, built a house next door at 121 Norfolk Street in 1846, but it was destroyed in 1853 by the fire that burned the Town Hall.<sup>1</sup> The City moved into the Athenaeum building in Central Square and sold the empty lot to St. Mary’s parish, which built the present church in 1866.

Elijah Luke built a new house on the site of his old one in 1855, and in 1868 sold it to Rev. Thomas Scully, pastor of St. Mary’s, for use as a rectory. Fr. Scully added the wings at some point between 1875 and 1886; the one-story extensions appeared in 1890 and may originally have been screened porches. In both cases the builders were careful to mimic the details of the original Second Empire design. Scully was far from the only priest serving his parish; St. Mary’s operated several schools, a recreation center, and a college, and the additional space was needed to house the male staff.



St. Mary’s Church, ca. 1900, with rectory at left

CHC

<sup>1</sup> Luke’s brick warehouse at 139 Main Street has been a Cambridge landmark since about 1985.

St. Mary's constructed a new rectory in 1923-24 and sold the old building to John C. Burns, who moved it to its present site in 1924 and built the garages that surround it today. Burns presumably found the open first floor plan advantageous for his busy funeral home, which operated out of the house until it moved to Broadway about 1940. Since that time the house has been occupied by apartments.

The Luke-Scully-Burns house is uniquely suited to its present site facing Sennott Park. Serendipitously, the wings occupy an extensive frontage and provide a fine visual termination to the view across the park.

### Significance and Recommendation

The significance of the Luke-Scully-Burns house lies in its architecture and its associations with Elijah Luke and Fr. Thomas Scully. Though covered with aluminum siding, the house retains its unique character as a former residence and institutional building. Removal of the Mansard roofs of the wings would not only degrade the house but damage the setting of Sennott Park.

I recommend that the Commission find the structure significant and preferably preserved in the context of the proposed plan.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services Commissioner  
William Senné, 160 Norfolk LLC

