



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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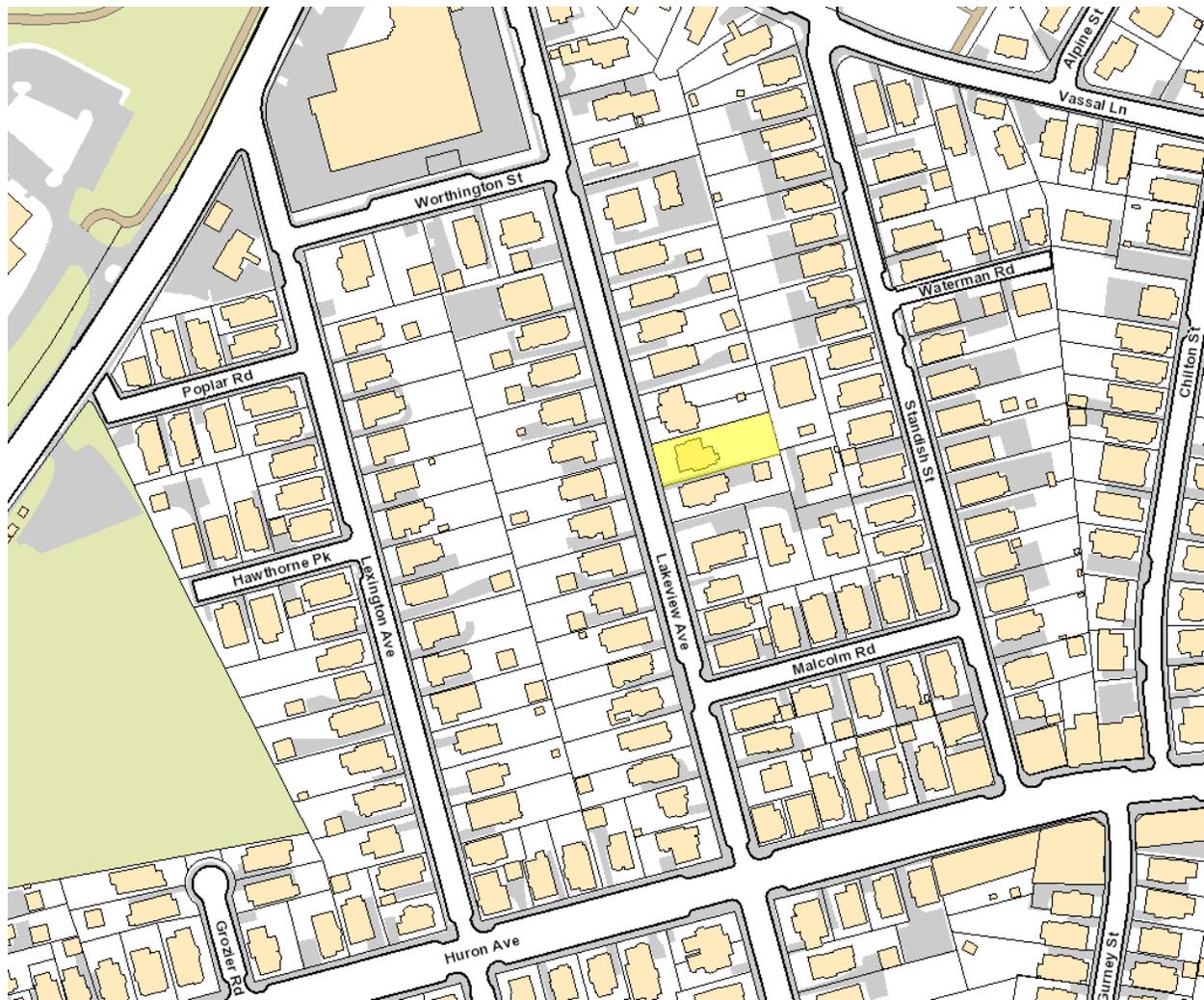
October 30, 2020

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Charles Sullivan

Re: D-1562: William Smith house, 207 Lake View Avenue

An application for demolition of the house at 207 Lake View Avenue was received on September 17, 2020. The owners, Sam Kachmar and Maggie Currier, were notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for November 5, 2020.



207 Lake View Avenue (highlighted in yellow).

Cambridge GIS, Sept. 2020

Site

The William Smith house is located on the east side of Lake View Avenue between Malcolm Road and Vassall Lane (Assessors Map 234/25). The structure is sited on a 8,999 square-foot lot in a Residence B zoning district. The zoning allows one and two-family construction with an FAR of 0.5 and a height limit of 35 feet. The total assessed value of the property is \$1,554,400; the house accounts for \$381,000 land of this amount. The owners reside in the existing house and wish to replace it with a new single-family residence.



207 Lake View Avenue,

Assessing Department photo.

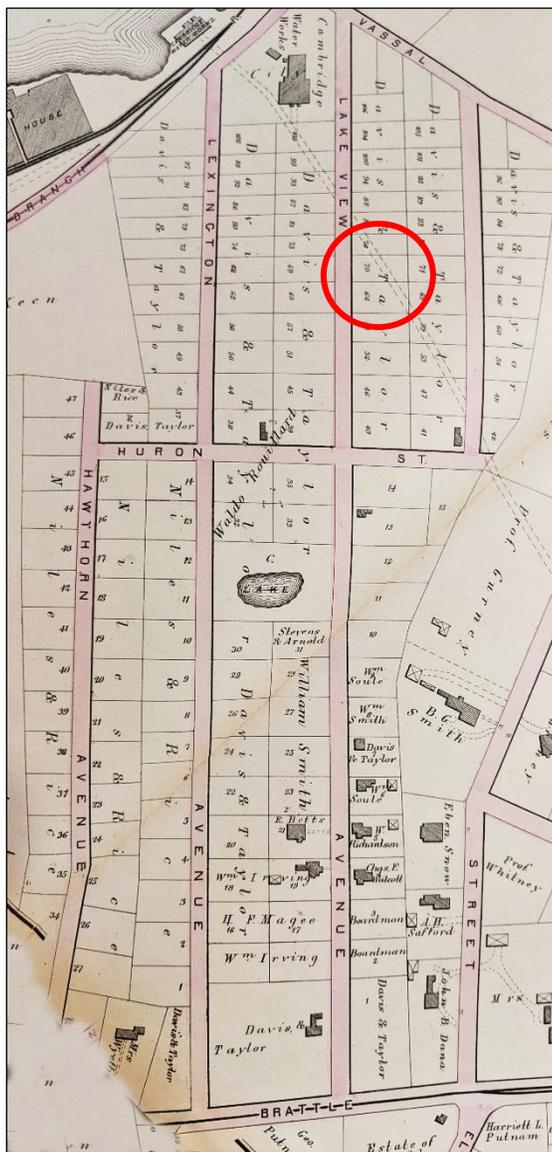
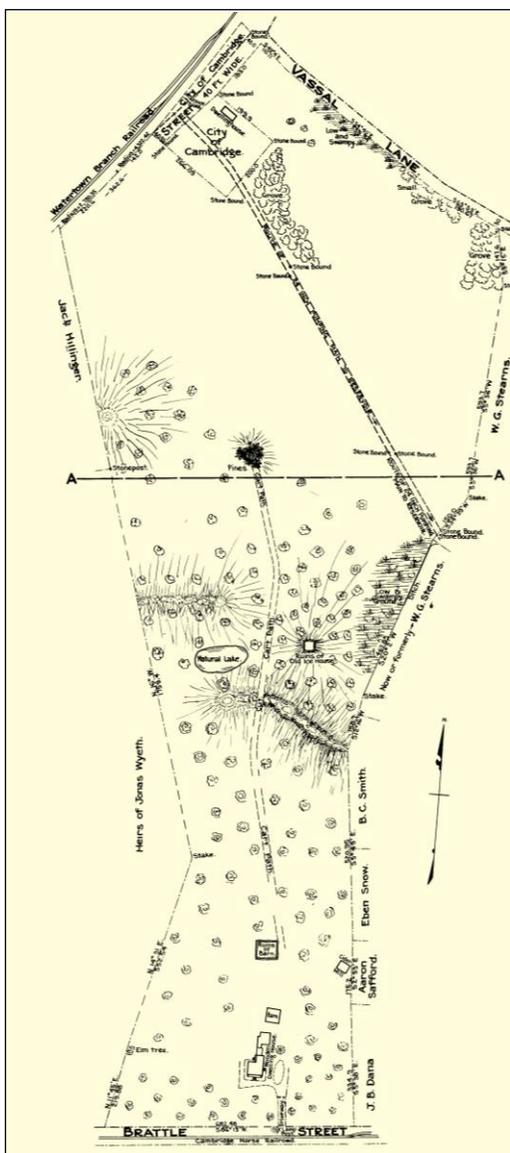
Description

The William Smith house at 207 Lake View Avenue is a 2 ½ -story building with an L-shaped plan, with one gable facing the street and two others of equal size on the left and right sides. Windows have 2+2 sash and are surmounted by projecting hoods, except for the arched windows in the gables. On the ground floor the street-facing gable has a bay window, while a covered porch supported by three square bracketed columns surrounds the entrance. On the second floor the inside corner of the L surrounds the base of a tower, the top of which has been removed. The

ell is two stories high and one bay wide, with a flat roof. The walls are covered with stucco, but the window casings, cornice brackets, and porch remain exposed. Except for the stucco and the removal of the tower, the building appears to have retained its original appearance with few alterations. It is currently occupied and appears to be in good condition overall.

History

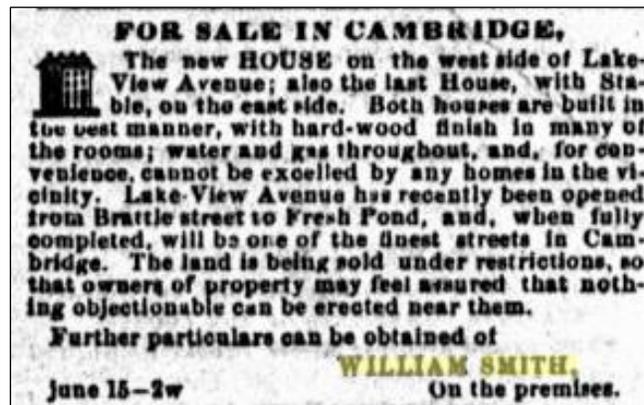
The land later traversed by Lake View Avenue was part of a farm that Joshua Coolidge purchased in 1816 that stretched from Brattle Street to Fresh Pond. In 1832, Coolidge divided the property between his sons Joshua Jr. and Josiah; the latter acquired his brother's share in 1839. Josiah Coolidge sold the property in 1870 to developers Persis Davis, T. Alfred Taylor, and Reuben Demmon of Somerville and Boston. The partners platted a subdivision in 1871 that ignored the natural topography, creating thirty-five 15,000 square foot house lots along Lake View and Lexington avenues between Brattle Street and Huron Avenue, and seventy 6,000 square foot lots north of Huron along Lexington, Lake View and Standish streets.



The Coolidge farm in 1870 (left) and as surveyed into house lots, 1873; 207 Lake View Avenue location circled.

CHC collections.

The first to put up houses on Lake View Avenue was William Smith, the favored builder of Davis, Taylor and Demmon. Smith was born in Nova Scotia in 1837 and worked as a carpenter and builder in Roxbury, eventually operating from an office in downtown Boston. His first known project in Cambridge was in 1868, but in 1871 he began a relationship with the Lake View Avenue developers that produced 18 houses on that street by 1880. During this period he was initially listed as a builder, but as early as 1880 he reported his occupation to the U.S. Census as “real estate.” In this joint capacity he acquired lots from the development partners, built houses as demand warranted, and sold them when he could.



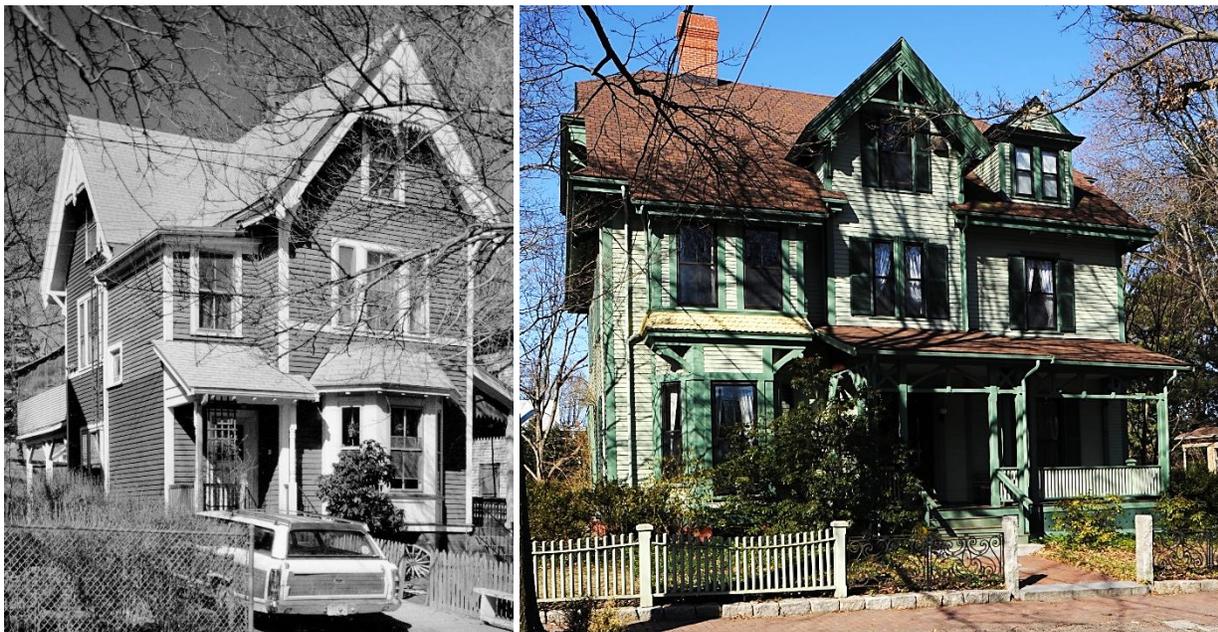
Cambridge Chronicle, June 15, 1872

Smith initially put up a pair of blocky Second Empire houses at 68 and 87 Lake View in 1871, but the unadorned Mansard style was no longer fashionable and he soon transitioned to smaller houses with Mansard roofs and Italianate details, such as 94 and 104 Lake View. Finally abandoning Mansard roofs, his subsequent projects explored varieties of gabled roofs, as in the Italianate style as at 112 Lake View (1875), and then in the emerging Queen Anne at 173 and 174 Lake View (1875) and finally in the Eastlake style at 128 Lake View (1880).



87 Lake View Ave. and 97 Lake View Ave. (both 1871), William Smith, builder

Assessors photos, 2015



124 Lake View Ave. (1875) and 128 Lake View Ave. (1880), William Harris, builder CHC photos, 1975- and 2014

A subset of Smith's houses included picturesque towered versions that were especially popular in this decade. The earliest at 94 Lake View (1875) is a one-story Mansard with a two-story tower; 107 Lake View (1878) is a larger version. The house at 207 incorporated a tower and was designed entirely in the Italianate style. The house at 78 Lake View (1879) is the last of this type, with corbels and heavy dentilled cornices on the tower as well on as the house itself, while the porch exhibits turned columns in the Queen Anne style.

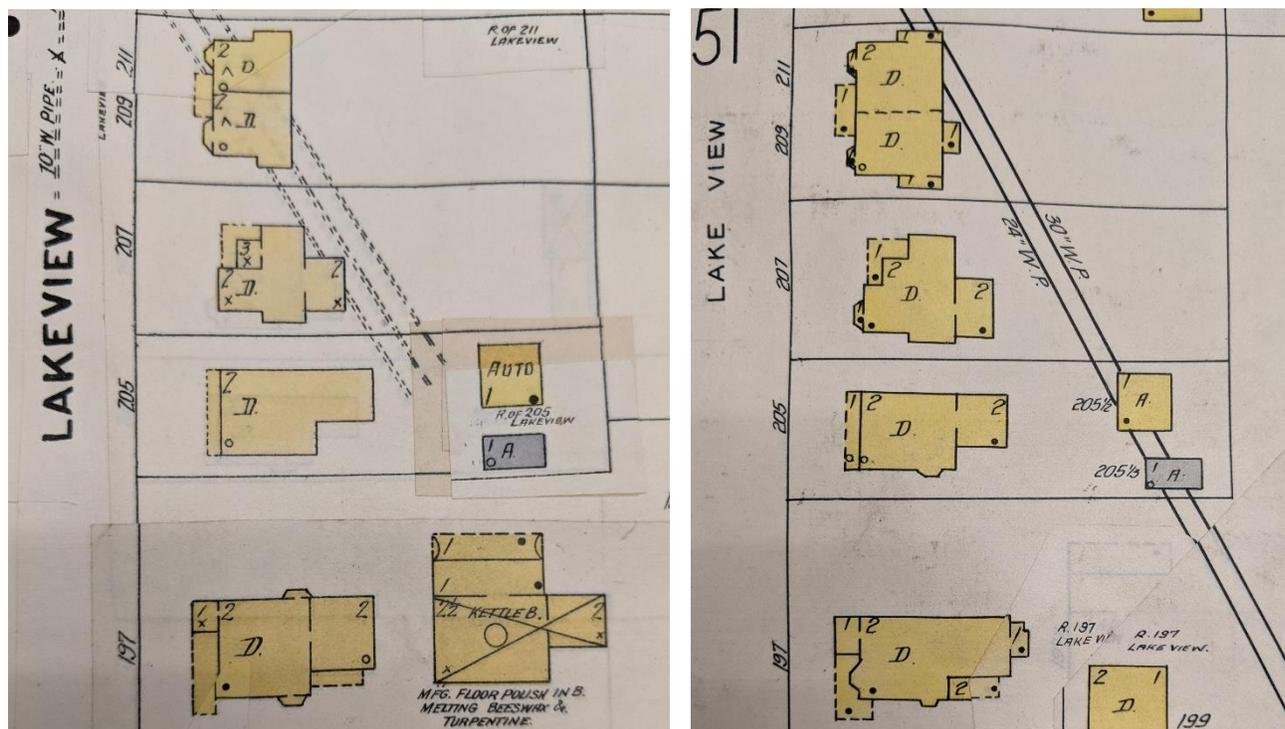


94 Lake View Ave (1875) and 78 Lake View Ave (1879), William Harris, builder CHC photos, 2014 and 1965



207 Lake View Ave. (1874-75), William Smith, builder. The square mass at the intersection of the gables is the base of a tower that was removed about 1930. CHC photo, 2020

At 207 Lake View the tower was removed about 1930, at about the time that the house received a coat of cement stucco. The existence of the tower and the approximate date of loss is demonstrated in Sanborn Insurance Co. maps updated in 1929 and the subsequent edition of 1935.



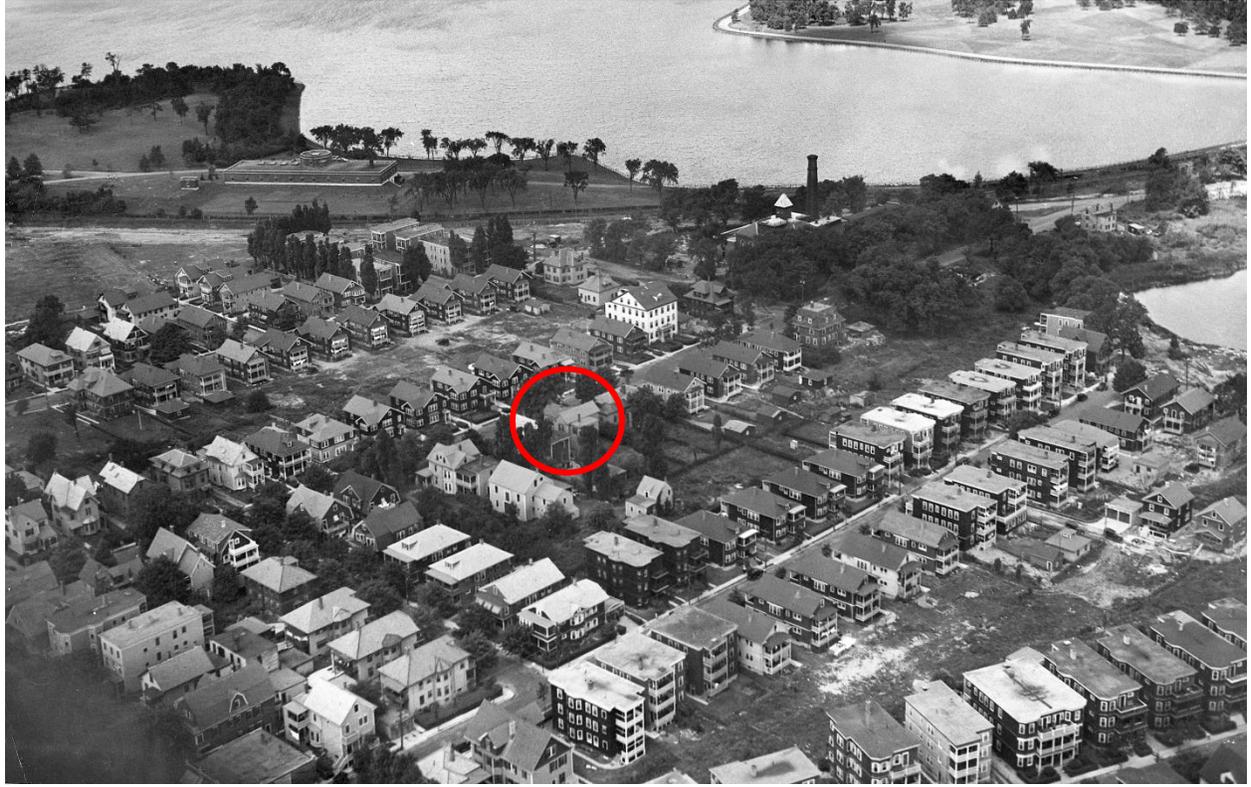
Sanborn Insurance Co., 1900 (1929) and 1934 editions. The presence of the tower is demoted by the numeral “3” in the 1900 edition and “2” in 1934. CHC collections



Bird's eye view of Lake View Avenue, 1877

Leventhal Map Collection, Boston Public Li-

While the large lots close to the horse car line of Brattle Street sold well, the prospects for the remoter portions of the subdivision were not promising. The smaller lots beyond Huron Avenue were much less desirable because of their distance from the car line on Brattle Street and because



The Lexington, Lake View, and Standish area in 1929, showing the final build-out of the 1871 subdivision plan. 207 Lake View is circled.

CHC collections

the land was on the low-lying margins of Fresh Pond. The lots were sold subject to restrictions imposed by the developers that no structures (except porches and the like) could be built closer than 25' from the street, and that houses must cost at least \$2,500. On the other hand, the deeds allowed the 12,000 square foot lots to be subdivided into two still-generous lots, and that each of the smaller lots could accommodate a stable as well as a house. The Fresh Pond Station on the Watertown Branch of the Fitchburg Railroad was nearby, offering some convenience to Boston commuters, but Huron Avenue was not extended to Concord Avenue until about 1890 and the only other access was via Vassall Lane, an ancient cartway that was probably impassible at some seasons. Nonetheless Smith built 207 Lake View in 1874 or 1875 and 205 Lake View in 1875. By 1877 there were only eight houses on outer Lake View; the remaining lots and almost all the lots on Standish Street were not developed until the mid-1920s.

The early occupancy of 207 Lake View is unclear. The relatively elaborate design (compared to the quite plain house Smith built next door at 205) and the proximity to the railroad station may mean that Smith intended it for his own use. In 1880 Smith put up the much more spacious house for himself at 128 Lake View, and in 1885 he sold 207 to a couple from Boston. Inexplicably, the property changed hands five times in the next two years, until in 1890 James G. Richardson and his wife Nancy purchased the land and buildings for \$3,000.



Mary C. Richardson. Ancestry.com

The Richardsons were an anomalous African family in a white suburb. Both Richardsons were born in Virginia, John in Loudon County in 1830 and Nancy Carr in Richmond in 1839. The 1850 census recorded the Carrs as white, but with mulatto neighbors; after her marriage to James later censuses recorded them and their children as Black or mulatto. John and Nancy married in Richmond in 1853, and their first child was born in Boston in 1854. In 1860 they were living in Charlestown, where James worked as a laborer. When they first appeared in Cambridge in 1865, they were living in the Lower Port and John was working variously as a porter, a tobacconist, and a dealer in barrels. The Lower Port neighborhood where the Richardsons lived at 15 Hastings Street was the oldest and densest minority neighborhood in Cambridge; their sparsely settled new neighborhood on outer Lake View was white, and their new neighbors were mostly tradesmen and small businessmen.

James Richardson died in 1897 at age 65. In her lifetime Nancy Richardson bore 14 children. In 1900 all six of her surviving adult children were living with her on Lake View Avenue, along with the husband of her youngest daughter and their three children. The adults included a dress-maker, a seamstress, a teamster, and a barber, but this was not enough to sustain the household and Nancy defaulted on the mortgage in 1902. The family broke up and Nancy lived with various children in Cambridgeport until her death in 1915.

The Richardson's house was then acquired by Charles Butcher, a near neighbor at 197 Lake View.¹ Butcher established the Butcher Polish Company in a building behind his house in 1880, and at the time of his death was noted as "the first big manufacturer of floor and furniture polishes in this country" (*Cambridge Tribune*, Dec. 30, 1916). Butcher owned the property at least through 1916 and maintained it as a rental. Among his tenants were Henry Moore and his daughter Mabel, who in 1905 married a Japanese national, Okichi Murata. Murata had come to America in 1891 to prepare for Harvard, but after a few years at Philips Exeter and Rindge Tech his father's business failed and he was unable to enroll. The Muratas lived at 207 until 1913, when Henry Moore moved to New Jersey to work at a chemical manufacturer. The Muratas moved to Boston, where Okichi sold Japanese crafts and worked as a decorator.



Okichi Murata. *Boston Globe*, Oct. 15, 1903



Capt. William H. Ginty. *Cambridge Sentinel*, Sept. 30, 1933

The Moores and Muratas were succeeded by Richard Jacobi, who moved his family from Ohio while his daughter Eva attended Simmons College, from which she graduated in 1916, and Thomas Dansie, steward of Harvard's Iriquois Club and his wife and six children. In 1923 Cambridge police officer William B. Ginty and his wife Margaret moved from Cambridgeport and occupied the house for the next thirty-five years. Ginty joined his father on the force in 1903 and was promoted to sergeant in 1917, lieutenant in 1919, and captain in 1929, becoming one of four captains in the department before he retired in 1943. Ginty died in 1958, and his wife lived on at the house until she about 1961. They were succeeded by William H. Brown, an architect on the staff of the Harvard Medical School. Brown took a job at Rutgers in 1966; his wife, Anne Aubrey Brown, remained at 207 Lake View. The Brown family sold the property to the current owners in 2019.

Significance and Recommendation

The house at 207 Lake View Avenue is significant for its architecture; for its associations with William Smith, the builders of many houses on Lake View Avenue; and for its associations with the Richardson, Moore, and Ginty families. The staff recommends that the structure be found significant for these reasons.

The house is in good condition and could be rehabilitated. The applicants will explain their reasons for the requested demolition and construction of a replacement structure. That presentation, as well as any public testimony should be heard before making any further determinations.

cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services Commissioner
Sam Kachmar and Maggie Currier, owners

¹ Because of some problem with the title Butcher petitioned the Land Court for adjudication in 1903. Land Court titles are not currently available for researchers, so the further deed history of the property could not be traced.