



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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July 5, 2018

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Charles Sullivan

Re: D-1490: George E. Bridges house, 74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street (1893)

An application to demolish the house at 74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street was received on June 27, 2018. The applicant, 74 Oxford Street, LLC., was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for July 12. The owner intends to clear the site and construct four new detached structures containing five dwelling units.

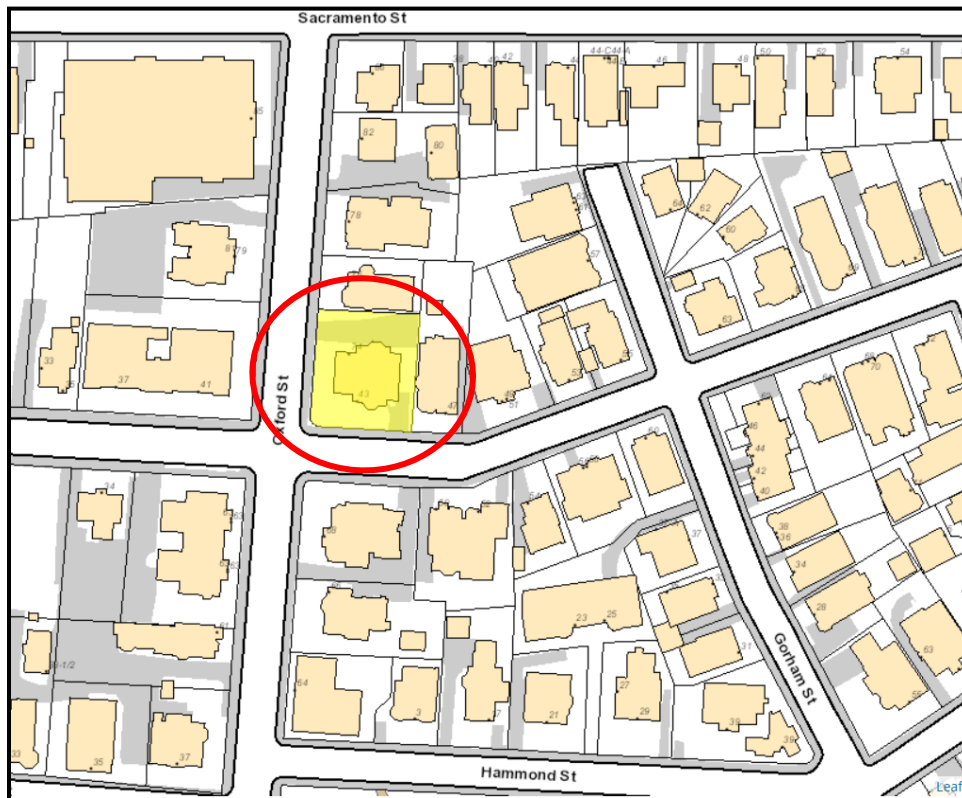
Site

The George E. Bridges house is located on the east side of Oxford Street at the corner of Wendell Street. It is sited on an 8,157 square-foot lot in a Residence C-1 district. This is a multi-family residential district, which permits an FAR of .75 and has a height limit of 35 feet. The assessed value of the property, according to the online assessor's property database, is \$3,300,000, with \$1,514,100 attributable to the building (Map 150/Parcel 125). The previous assessment in 2016 was \$1,847,400.



74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street. July 2018.

CHC photo



74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street.

Cambridge GIS, Assessor's map

The surrounding neighborhood is entirely residential. With the exception of a brick apartment building across Oxford Street all the surrounding properties are multi-family wood frame residences and well-kept dormitories of Lesley University. While the density is high, almost all the buildings have significant setbacks and open yards. The owner proposes to demolish the Bridges house and construct three single houses and one double house with off-street parking accessed from Oxford Street.



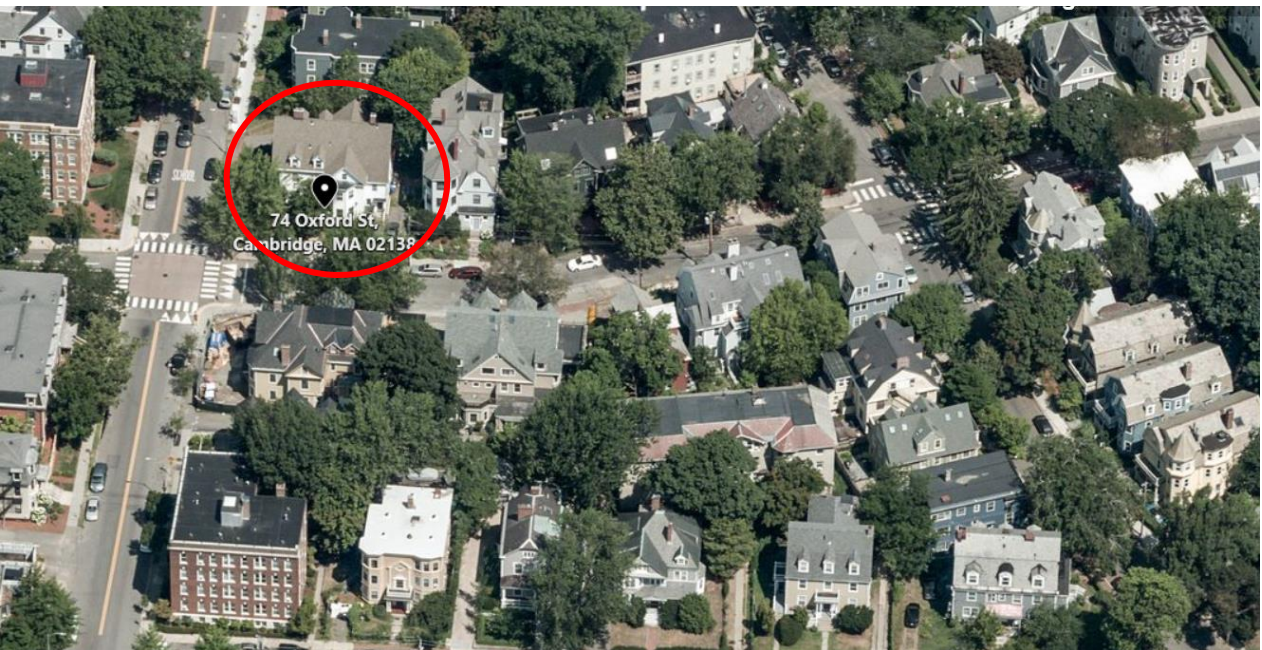
Oxford Street looking north, with 68 Oxford and 74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street. Photo 2018.

CHC



Oxford Street looking north from the corner of Mellen Street toward 43 Wendell Street. Photo 1941

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74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street context, ca. 2016.

Bing Maps

Description

The George E. Bridges house at 74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street is a large 2½-story, two-family Queen Anne style building with a gable roof built in 1893. The plan is symmetrical around a central party wall, with cross-gables and two dormers on each side and two projecting bays under a large gable facing Oxford Street. Most of the exterior is concealed by white vinyl siding installed in 1964, but the original brackets supporting the roof overhang, the porch columns, and the back door entrance canopies are still visible. The window sash, protected by aluminum storm windows,



appear to be original, as are all the exterior doors. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The foundation is brick over ledgestone. The house is set back from the corner with generous lawns on both frontages. Driveways north and south of the house offer parking for multiple cars. The Assessors rate the overall condition of the building as “fair.”

The house was built (and still presents) as a large two-family structure, divided down the middle with entrances on the left and right sides, but it was altered at some point to contain the owner’s unit and an apartment on

the south side and ten rooms for rent on the north side. According to the assessors it has a total living area of 5,584 sf (about 2,000 sf. on each of the first two floors and 1,500 on the third), and now contains ten apartments.



74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street, 1965

CHC photo



Front door, 74 Oxford Street, and back door, 43 Wendell Street, 2018

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The architect of the Bridges house was Alberto Haynes (1849-1926), a native of Waltham who practiced architecture in Watertown and Boston. Haynes began his career as a draftsman in the office of Shepard S. Woodcock (1824-1910), a prominent Boston architect who was responsible for 150 churches, 50 schools, and uncounted commercial blocks, industrial buildings, and residences. Haynes struck out on his own in the 1880s with an office in Watertown, and many of his commissions were carried out in that vicinity:

Alberto Haynes was an architect fully versed in the fashionable styles of his time. He was born in 1849 and designed a number of important [structures] outside of Watertown, including the South Acton Congregational Church, West Concord Union Church and the Revolutionary War Monument in Sudbury.

In Watertown, he worked with the Watertown Land Company designing homes in their residential developments. On Russell Avenue, he designed #90 in the Queen Anne style and a few years later the Colonial Revival homes at #43 and #50 Bailey Road. His other buildings similarly illustrate Haynes' versatility, with Rational Revival homes on Bates Road, commercial buildings in Watertown Square, a municipal fire station on Main Street and additions to two churches along Mount Auburn Street: all in different styles (David J. Russo, "Architectural History of Watertown, Massachusetts")

Haynes designed only a handful of houses in Cambridge, but one of them at 25-27 Walker Street is almost a duplicate of 74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street. Built for real estate developer Thomas Stearns in the same year, 1893, 25-27 Walker Street displays its original clapboard siding, dentil cornice, and columned porticos; it lacks only the paired dormers on each side of the main gable.



25-27 Walker Street (1893, Alberto Haynes, architect). Photo 2018

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25 Walker Street, front door and porch detail

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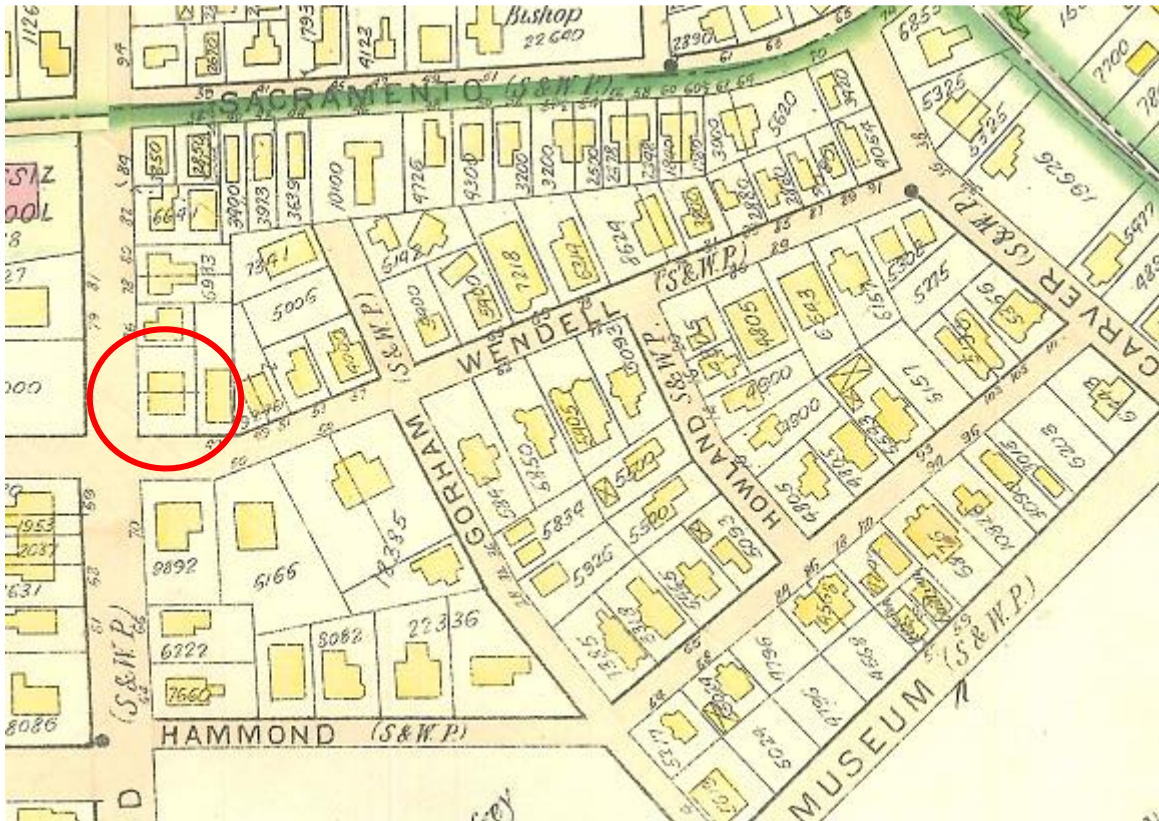
History

The Bridges house occupies a prominent corner in John Gorham Palfrey's 1849 subdivision of his estate, "Hazelwood." Palfrey bought 12 acres of fields and meadows from Edward Everett in 1831 when he was appointed Dean of the Harvard Divinity School. Palfrey thought that the construction of the Harvard Branch Railroad in 1849 would make his estate a gold mine, but he was sorely disappointed. As described in *Building Old Cambridge: Architecture and Development* (pp. 321-325), he gave up his seat in Congress to oversee its development, but despite construction of a platform for passengers at Carver Street he only sold four lots by the time the railroad closed in 1854. Over the next nine years he sold only nine more lots, while other developers' streets closer to the car line on Massachusetts Avenue filled up quickly.



John G. Palfrey's estate in 1854 and 1873

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Palfrey Estate in 1900

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John Gorham Palfrey died in 1881. Development of the Hazelwood estate began in earnest the next year when his son John, a West Point-educated veteran of the Civil War, inherited the property; coincidentally, a new car line opened on Beacon Street in Somerville, providing easy access to Kendall Square and Boston. Palfrey replatted the subdivision, eased restrictions, and opened Museum Street on the old railroad grade.

Palfrey sold eighty lots over the next five years [after 1889], so the neighborhood could at last be described as a “fast growing locality” (*Cambridge Tribune*, Sept. 24, 1892). Many of the new houses were substantial two- or four family residences. At 2–4 Gorham Street, for example, Howard F. Peak, a roofing contractor, put up an “old fashioned kind of double house with brick wall between. Each side has ten rooms and a bath and each side has a tower on the corner, an open fireplace in the sitting room, slated roof, electric gas fixtures and the usual modern appliances” (*ibid.*, Apr. 6, 1895).

The house that Maine native George E. Bridges built at 74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street fit this pattern quite precisely. By 1893 Bridges was 41 years old and well-established in his career as roadmaster for the Cambridge Railroad, where he started as a horsecar conductor in 1880. When the Boston Elevated Railway consolidated control of all local street railways in 1894 Bridges was appointed roadmaster of Division Seven, with responsibility for all the car lines passing through Cambridge and surrounding towns. He and his wife Mellie lived at 43 Wendell Street until a year before his death in 1915; they had no children, but usually accommodated a lodger. They rented the other side to a succession of tenants of whom the most prominent were John Maier, a Lutheran minister, and the Misses Pray, formerly of Melrose, who operated a kindergarten in 1912.

George’s widow sold the property in 1916 to Lester Graves, who a year later sold it to North Cambridge florist John McKenzie. McKenzie and his widow, Annie, rented both sides until her death in 1952. The next owner, Bernard J. Flannery, a Cambridge High School administrator who never married, lived in one apartment at 43 Wendell and rented out the rest of the building. Flannery’s heirs controlled the property from his death in 1970 at least until 2010, when they converted their ownership into the real estate trust that sold to the current owners in 2016.

For about ten years 74 Oxford was occupied by Rebecca Keyes, a widow who rented rooms to students and others; as the Depression took hold she expanded into real estate and insurance but apparently soon went under. The proximity of the property to Harvard University attracted many students; during a fire in 1933 the fourteen residents who were evacuated included six students at the

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Very Attractive, Sunny, Six-Room Heated Apartment on first floor; separate front door with porch; near two car lines; reasonable.

Law School. The tenants included four women, five men, and three married couples. By this time the Cambridge Assessors listed the property as having ten rooms for rent on the 74 Oxford side and two apartments on the Wendell side. About three dozen wedding announcements in the 1930s and '40s mentioned these addresses. The rooming house operation apparently changed little over the years; the 1968 directory listed five tenants at 74 and four, along with owner Bernard Flannery, at 43. The applicant claims that the building presently contains six apartments; the Assessors list ten.

Significance and Recommendation

The George E. Bridges house is an architecturally significant and highly visible structure on the former Palfrey estate. This part of Cambridge is distinctive for the consistency of its residential architecture, as it was almost entirely built up in less than a decade. The neighborhood has seen few demolitions in the past several decades, and with the exception of some recent infill remains substantially intact as it was developed in the late 19th century.

I recommend that the building at 74 Oxford/43 Wendell Street be found significant for its associations with the social, economic, and architectural development of the Palfrey estate and the Agassiz neighborhood, and as a significant example of the work of architect Alberto Haynes.

The Commission should hear testimony from the applicants and neighbors and review the plans for replacement construction before making a further determination.

cc: William Senné