



City of Cambridge

Agenda Item Number Four

IN CITY COUNCIL

December 14, 1981

MAYOR DUEHAY

- WHEREAS: On November 5, 1981, the Historical Commission voted unanimously to recommend to the City Council that the property at 1626 Massachusetts Avenue be designated a landmark under Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the City Code; and
- WHEREAS: The effect of the landmark designation will be to prevent demolition or alteration of the building without review and a permit from the Historical Commission. However, at the owner's request the Historical Commission recommends that the designation specifically permit the construction of a new structure linking the house with the carriage barn, subject to the Commission's review; now therefore be it
- RESOLVED: That this City Council go on record approving the recommendation of the Historical Commission to designate the property located at 1626 Massachusetts Avenue as a landmark under Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the City Code.

In City Council December 14, 1981.
Adopted by the affirmative vote of 8 members.
Attest:- Paul E. Healy, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-



Cambridge Historical Commission

City Hall Annex, 57 Inman Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02139. 617/498-9040



Robert G. Neiley, *Chairman*; William B. King, *Vice Chairman*; Charles M. Sullivan, *Executive Director*.
Dwight H. Andrews; Arthur H. Brooks, Jr.; James F. Clapp, Jr.; Charles W. Eliot, 2d; Joseph G. Sakey; *Commission Members*.
John Lyons, Geneva T. Malenfant, Frances Pierce, *Alternates*.

December 10, 1981

To the Honorable, the City Council:

On November 5, the Historical Commission voted unanimously to recommend to the City Council that the property at 1626 Massachusetts Avenue be designated a landmark under Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the City Code.

The effect of the landmark designation will be to prevent demolition or alteration of the building without review and a permit from the Historical Commission. However, at the owner's request the Historical Commission recommends that the designation specifically permit the construction of a new structure linking the house with the carriage barn, subject to the Commission's review.

This recommendation is not opposed by the owner, the Park Street Church in Boston, and is strongly supported by the neighborhood. The Historical Commission therefore recommends that the City Council consider the designation favorably.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robert G. Neiley".

Robert G. Neiley
Chairman

Enclosure
RGN/pb

Proposed Motion Designating 1626 Massachusetts Avenue
as a Protected Landmark

MOVED: That the Sawin-Cobb-Wilson house, 1626 Massachusetts Avenue, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on November 5, 1981. The boundaries of this landmark designation are those of parcel 43, assessors plan 173. This designation is justified by the important associations of the house with historic persons, namely Nathaniel Sawin, Dr. Harriet Cobb and Dr. Perrin Wilson, by its relationship with the architectural and cultural history of the City through its location on nineteenth century North Avenue, and for its significance as an example of the Mansard style of architecture. This designation specifically permits construction of an enclosed walkway between the house and the carriage house on Langdon Street, under the condition that the review authority of the Historical Commission regarding any alteration or new construction visible from a public way will be unimpaired.

Cambridge Historical Commission
December 10, 1981

Proposed Landmark Designation
for the
Sawin-Cobb-Wilson House; 1626 Massachusetts Avenue

Cambridge Historical Commission
September 10, 1981

Case L-2: Landmark Designation Report

Sawin-Cobb-Wilson House; 1626 Massachusetts Avenue

I. Location

The Sawin-Cobb-Wilson House is located at 1626 Massachusetts Avenue in Old Cambridge on parcel 43, assessors plan 173. The 9,546 square foot house lot includes approximately 78 feet frontage on Massachusetts Avenue and 150 feet on Langdon Street on the southeast corner of these streets' intersection. A carriage house fronts on Langdon Street. Although similar mansions once lined Massachusetts Avenue, this house and 1627 Massachusetts Avenue are the only survivors from this period in the immediate vicinity. Four story brick apartment houses from the mid 1920's surround the house to the north and south. It is located in a residential C-2 zoning district and owned by the Trustees of the Park Street Church, One Park Street, Boston, Massachusetts.

II. Description

The Sawin-Cobb-Wilson House was constructed in 1868 by an unknown but highly skilled architect. The two story L-shaped house is set back on the deep lot which includes several mature deciduous trees and foundation plantings. The wood framed clapboarded structure is executed in the Mansard style. The main facade features an octagonal two story bay which is carried into the roofline and terminates in an octagonal bell-shaped roof pierced by a flat-arched dormer window. The bay is paneled and topped with small consoles on the first floor and larger brackets on the second floor which support a deep cornice. South of the bay are flat-arched sash windows supported by small

consoles and separated by a fascia which encircles the house. The facade then recedes to the rear ell where the original entrance was protected by a wrap-around porch. In the nineteenth century, this porch and the southern facade would have had a fairly unobscured view down Massachusetts Avenue and would have been clearly seen from the road. Thus this side facade was afforded special attention by the designer, who provided elaborate bracketed porch with Tuscan columns and a diagonal balustrade design.

Later modifications, probably introduced when the house was adapted for offices, brought the porch up to the front portion of the facade, allowing a second entrance to be inserted in the front. This section of the porch is clearly identifiable as it follows a more Neo-Classical style. The Tuscan columns flanking the porch entrance are faced with fluted pilasters which are further expressed by the protruding architrave sections above. This porch section is the width of the rear ell and joins the original porch near the ell.

The Langdon Street facade was altered c.1890 when two octagonal two-story bays were added, probably for additional space for offices. These bays follow the front bay closely in design, differing only in their termination slightly below the second story roofline and in minor changes of ornamentation. While they fail to add the sculptural interest that the front bay contributes to the composition, they provide depth to what otherwise would be a flat facade on Langdon Street. A side entrance to the rear is shielded by a hood supported by dropped-pendant brackets.

To the west is a wood framed clapboarded carriage house which also dates to the early 1890's. The two story structure is placed gable-end to the street and extends back 73 feet. The 30-foot front includes a wide center carriage entrance with a hay loft opening above. Six over six sash windows flank the entrance with a gable return to the west and a sloping salt-box type roofline to the east. This slope enabled a shingled dormer to be placed on the eastern roof while also allowing greater light and air for the rear of the house.

Four story brick apartment houses of about 1925 enclose the property to the north and south, but a contemporary of the Sawin-Cobb-Wilson House survives across the street at 1627 Massachusetts Avenue. This property, the Charles Saunders House, is a frame Mansard style residence dating from 1862 and was recorded by the Historic American Building Survey and nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. To the west on Langdon Street are frame single-family residences from the late nineteenth century which provide a low-scale relief from Massachusetts Avenue.

III. History of the Property

As one of the earliest thoroughfares in Newtowne, Massachusetts Avenue connected the county seat at Harvard Square to Middlesex County and points beyond. As Cambridge grew, settlement spread along the path of Massachusetts Avenue which was well serviced by the horsecar routes introduced in 1856. From the Fitchburg Railroad's passenger station in Porter Square south, the avenue (then known as North Avenue) was soon populated by Mansard-style residences. A view of North Avenue from c.1875 clearly illustrates this period of development. Streetcar tracks in

the foreground amidst the broad avenue are surrounded by spacious neatly fenced house lots for tall Mansard-style mansions. The Sawin-Cobb-Wilson House can be seen in its original milieu and with its original porch configuration.

The house's first owner, Nathaniel D. Sawin, purchased the lot in 1868 mindful of the deed restrictions that no building could be placed within 25 feet of North Avenue or 20 feet of Langdon Street. Sawin's country produce business in Boston assured him enough financial flexibility to secure a skilled artisan to design and construct this large free-standing house. Sawin served as a member of the Common Council of Cambridge from 1861-1862.

A later owner, Mrs. Harriet H. Cobb, purchased the house in the early 1890's and was responsible for the addition of the carriage house, side bays and porch alterations. As the second licensed woman doctor in Massachusetts she practiced medicine in offices in the house, and the remodelings were probably executed for this purpose. While Dr. Cobb owned the house it was used briefly as a Radcliffe dormitory and as housing for the Coast Guard during World War I.

Dr. Perrin T. Wilson began his practice in osteopathy in the house in 1919 when Dr. Cobb still owned the property, and purchased it in the mid 1920's. As president of the American Osteopathic Association, Dr. Wilson was a well known practitioner and Cambridge resident. He remained the owner until recently.

IV. Significance

A. Historical Associations

Because of the house's location and character, it has had a history of prominent Cambridge owners. Nathaniel Swain was an affluent merchant and an elected city official. Dr. Harriet Cobb was an important figure in nineteenth century medicine as one of the earliest female doctors. Dr. Perrin Wilson followed in the series of distinguished owners with his contributions to osteopathy. Thw Sawin-Cobb-Wilson House thus documents Cambridge professional and social history as it developed in the late nineteenth century.

As seen in the 1875 photograph, the house is one of the many mansions which once gave Massachusetts Avenue a distinctly affluent character. Few of these mansions remain, and this house and the Charles Saunders House directly opposite are two of the more significant survivors.

B. Architectural Significance

While the architect of the Sawin-Cobb-Wilson House is unknown, he was clearly a sophisticated designer adept at complex massing and skillful in the application of details. His finished product was described by Bainbridge Bunting as follows:

After 1870 the sequence of Mansard houses in Old Cambridge illustrates a breakdown of the academic tradition while designers were searching for greater flexibility of plan and originality of detail.... Good examples of the L-shaped plan (with a resulting complexity of shapes) are 1626 Massachusetts Avenue.... These designs employ a more extended front porch than heretofore found and place the main entrance inconspicuously at the intersection of the wings, a far cry from the blunt, axial frontality prized by earlier Mansard designers.

Later changes were made with respect for the earlier design; the original detailing was repeated on the later side bays and

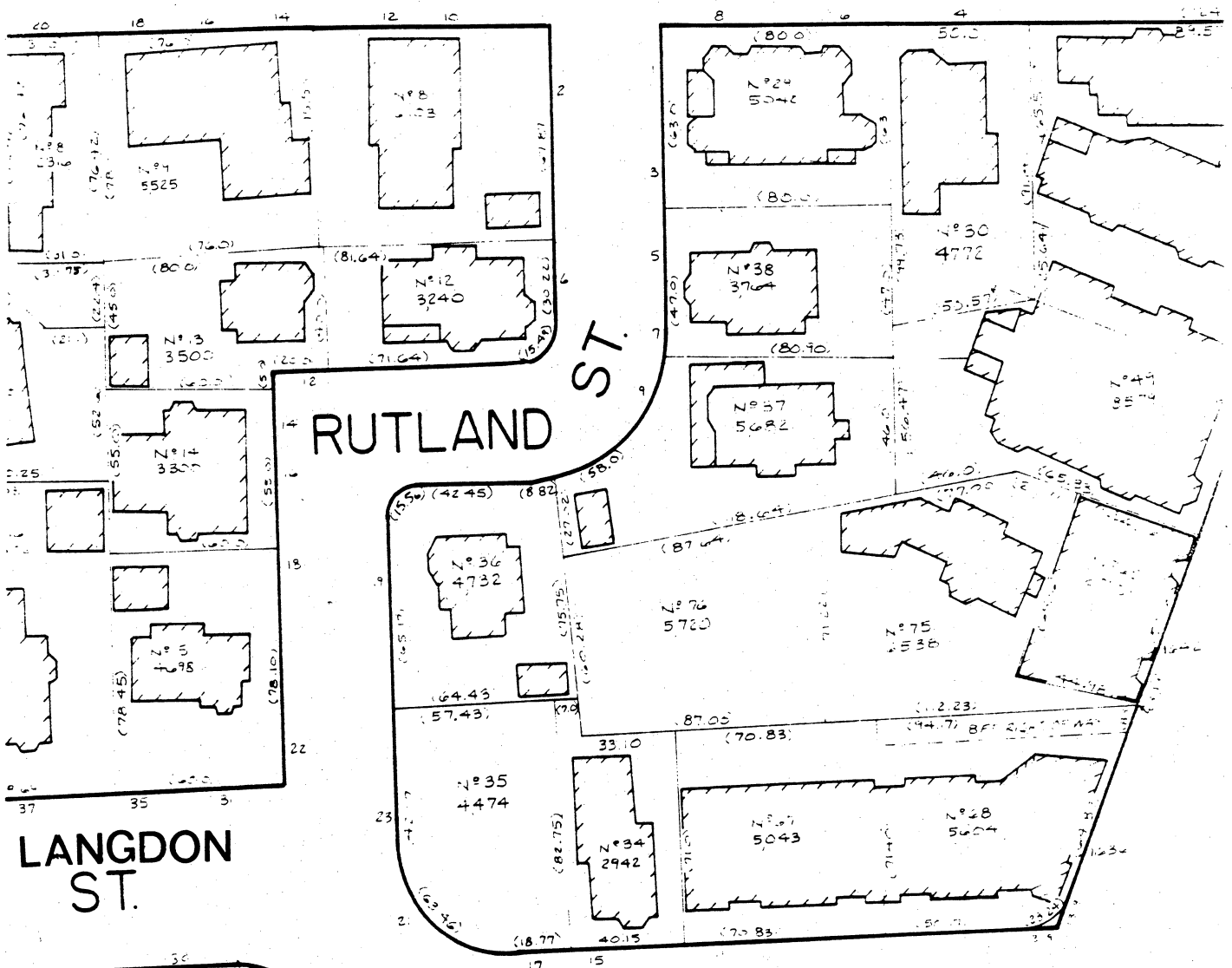
similar columns were employed when the porch was extended. The maintenance of the deep house lot and carriage house enhance the property and make it a landmark along Massachusetts Avenue and on Langdon Street.

V. Relationship to Criteria for Landmark Designation

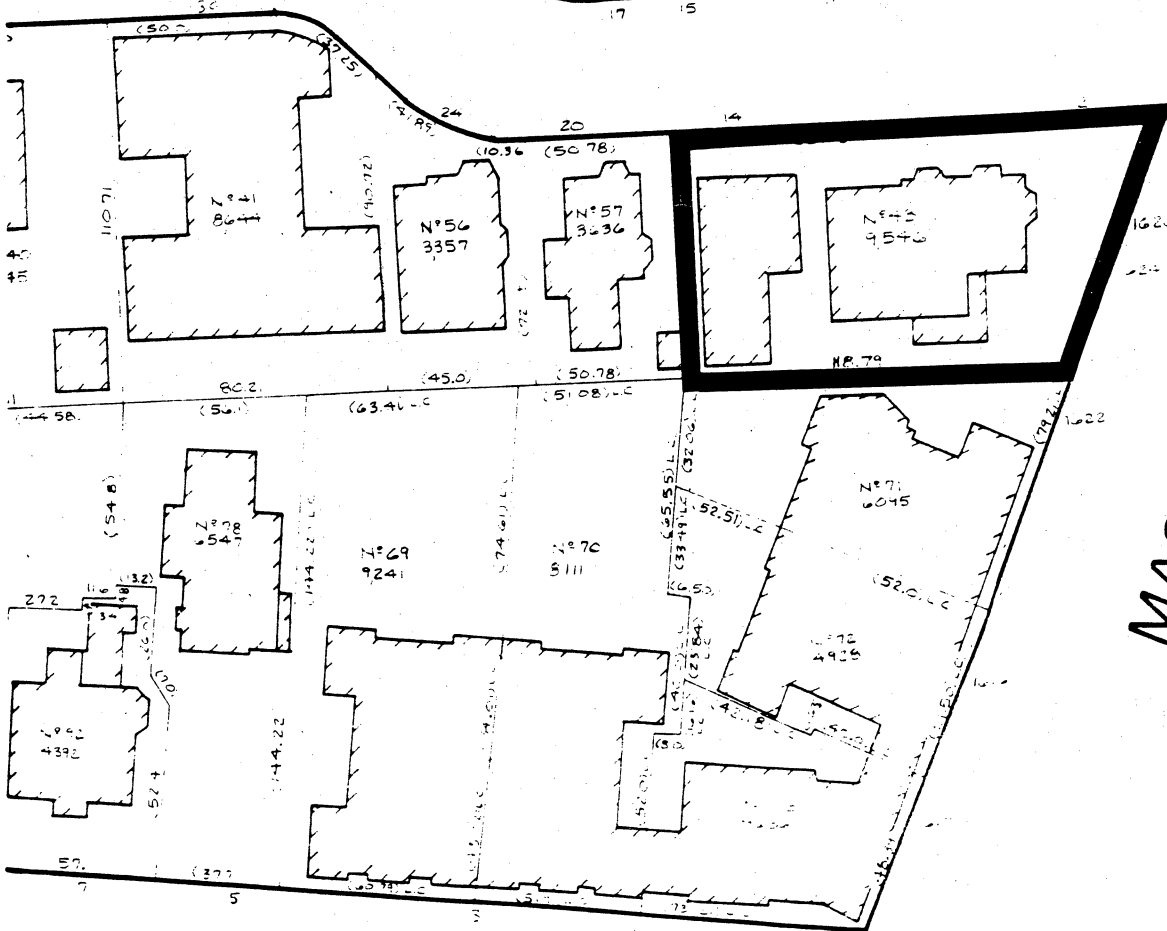
The Sawin-Cobb-Wilson House and carriage house meet the criteria for designation as a landmark under paragraph 4 of the ordinance governing establishment of neighborhood conservation districts and protected landmarks. Its use by Nathaniel Sawin, Dr. Harriet Cobb and Dr. Wilson qualify it as "a structure... importantly associated with one or more historic persons...(and) with the cultural, political...(or) social history of the City." Its fine detailing and prominent location along Massachusetts Avenue further qualify it in relation to the architectural and social history of the City.

SHEPARD

ST.



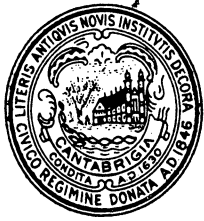
LANGDON
ST.



MASSACHUSETTS



ST.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139
Tel. 498-9011

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

December 14, 1981

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Enclosed please find copy of a communication from the Cambridge Historical Commission recommending to the City Council that the property at 1626 Massachusetts Avenue be designated a landmark under Chapter Two, Article XVI, Section 2-147(k) of the City Code.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mbf
Enc.

Agenda Item Number Four

S-675

Re: Recommendation from the Historical Commission that the property at 1626 Massachusetts Avenue be designated a landmark.

In City Council,

December 14, 1981

12/14/81

CR

Daniel Adornitz

Truman