



STAFF REPORT

Town of Wellesley - Planning Department

Application: DR-2019-69 – 65 High Ledge Avenue – Preservation Determination
Subject Property: 65 High Ledge Avenue (Assessor's Parcel ID # 203-47)
Applicant: Peter E. Gerard
Property Owner: Peter E. Gerard & Richard C. Gerard
Date: Report prepared 1/7/2020 for 1/14/2020 Historical Commission Meeting
Staff Contact: Dana Marks, Planner
Staff Recommendation: **Not Preferably Preserved**

APPLICATION OVERVIEW

On December 11, 2019, the Applicant submitted applications for Eligibility Notice and Preservation Determination indicating the intent to demolish, in its entirety, a building located on the property and used as a dwelling. An Eligibility Notice was issued on December 13, 2019 determining the subject building to be an Eligible Building. The Historical Commission will hold a public hearing on the application for a Preservation Determination on January 14, 2020.

DESCRIPTION

In consideration of the application for a full/complete demolition and in determining whether or not the dwelling should be deemed Preferably Preserved, it was determined that the original dwelling was constructed no later than 1924, when John M. Duffy granted to Mabel F. Dawkins "a certain parcel of land with the buildings thereon situated in said Wellesley," (Norfolk County Land Court, Certificate of Title No. 7200) indicating a building was present on the property at that time. This source proves that the dwelling at 65 High Ledge Avenue is indeed Eligible and subject to a Preservation Determination pursuant to Article 46C of the Wellesley Town Bylaws.

Based on the Town Assessor's Property Record, the wood frame dwelling at 65 High Ledge Avenue could have been built as early as 1899. As stated above, deed records indicate it could have been built no later than 1924. There are no building permits on file. The house is built in a simple vernacular style clad in brown wood shingle siding. It has a side gable roof and an enclosed front porch with an elevated central entry door.



Image via Assessor's Property Record Card.

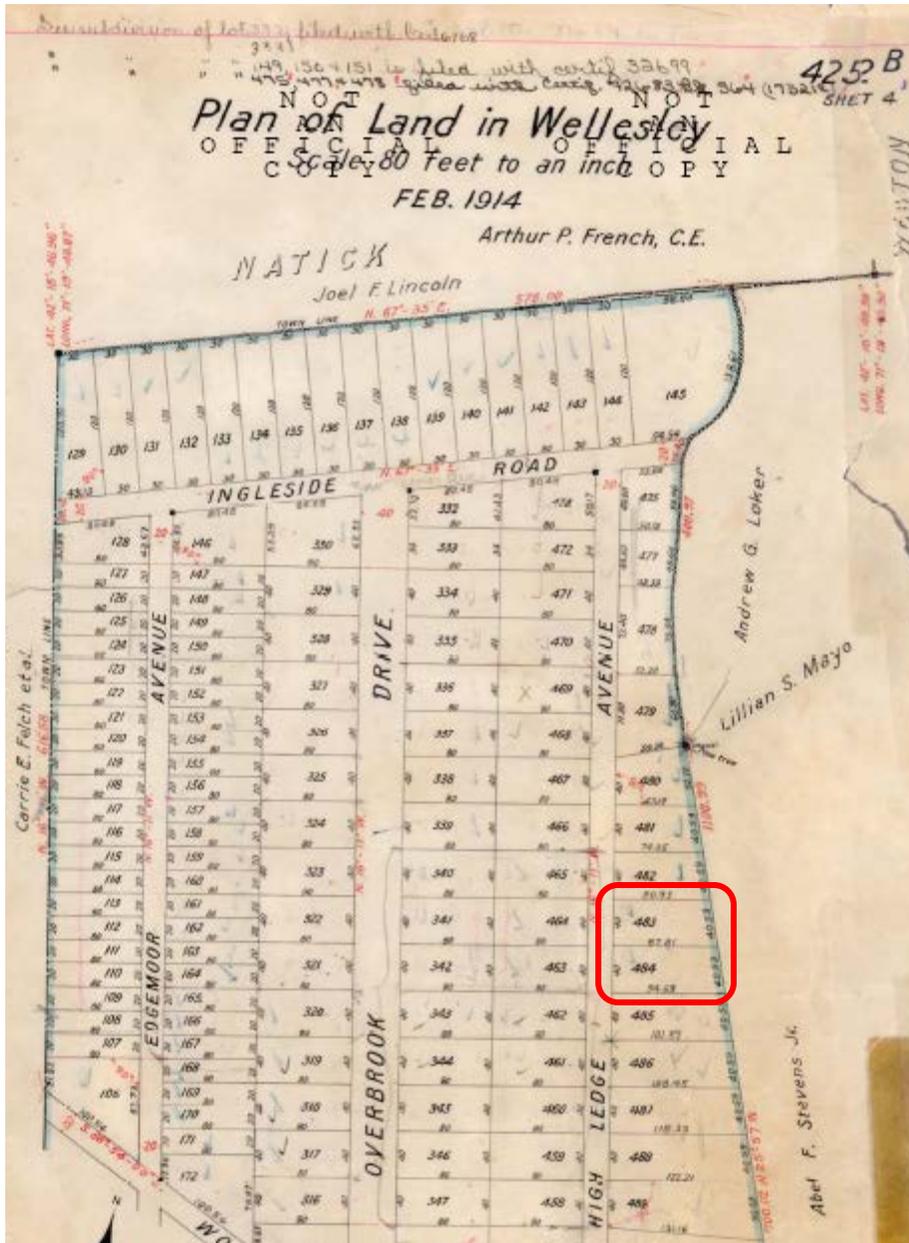
The area in which this dwelling is situated was once part of a large estate owned by Frederick Reed (Norfolk Land Court Registry District, Certificate of Title 2542), who moved to Wellesley from Washington, DC when he was appointed headmaster of the Boston Latin School. Reed's estate was known as "Overbrook," and was located in the northwest corner of the Town. Reed relocated to southern California and subdivided his estate, laying out streets named after its natural features.¹ John M. Duffy acquired Lots 483 and 484 within Overbrook Estates in 1922 (Norfolk County Land Court, Certificate of Title No. 5738). Mr. Duffy was the owner of the Boston Panama Hat Company for over 30 years and built a number of homes around Wellesley and Newton over 20 years.² This part of Town in the 1920s was developing quickly, as reported in the *Wellesley Townsman*:

"Building in this section is quite active and before long the Overbrook section, especially will be quite thickly populated. Three new houses have just been erected, owned by John M. Duffy, Frank Duffy and Mr. Flanagan, respectively. John M. Duffy has already started the cellar of another new house on the corner of Highledge avenue, and Overbrook drive, and others have expressed their intention of building in the Spring."³

¹ "The odd story of the Spirit Fruit Society and the origins of Overbrook," *Wellesley Townsman*, January 22, 2015.

² "John M. Duffy Died on Friday," *Wellesley Townsman*, March 25, 1954, page 2.

³ "OVERBROOK NEWS," *Wellesley Townsman*, December 7, 1923, page 18.



Map depicting a portion of Reed's Overbrook estate. Lots 483 and 484 together make up the property known as 65 High Ledge Avenue, circled in red. (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Land Court Plan 4252^B)

Mabel Frances Dawkins acquired 65 High Ledge Avenue in 1924, where she resided with her husband Charles and family for five years (Norfolk County Land Court, Certificate of Title No. 7200). In 1929, the *Wellesley Townsman* reported, "Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dawkins and family of Highledge Avenue have moved to Texas, their former home, as the climate did not agree with Mr. Dawkins."⁴ Annie J. Duffy acquired the property in 1929 (Norfolk County Land Court, Certificate of Title No. 13818). John and Annie Duffy transferred the property to Alcie Harris in 1935, who later that year transferred it to Irving and Alice Perry (Norfolk County Land Court, Certificates of Title No. 18741 and No. 19211). Mr. and Mrs. Perry transferred the property back to Harris the following year in 1936 (Norfolk County Land Court, Certificate of Title No.

⁴ "OVERBROOK LOCALS," *Wellesley Townsman*, December 27, 1929, page 8.

19824). In 1941 Harris transferred the property to the Auburndale Co-operative Bank (Norfolk County Land Court, Certificate of Title No. 26072).

Peter J. and Helen T. Gerard purchased 65 High Ledge Avenue from the Bank in 1941 (Norfolk County Land Court, Document No. 86491-1). Peter J. Gerard was employed by the Babson Institute.⁵ Following Mr. Gerard's death, a new Certificate of Title was granted to Helen T. Gerard as the surviving owner of the property in 1970 (Norfolk County Land Court, Certificate of Title No. 89848). Mrs. Gerard passed away in 1973, and the following year a new Certificate of Title was issued to Richard C. Gerard based on the allowance of her will (Norfolk County Land Court, Certificate of Title No. 98817). The property remains in the Gerard family today.

PRESERVATION DETERMINATION STANDARDS

In consideration of a Preservation Determination for the building, the Historical Commission is to determine whether or not the building should be Preferably Preserved, a term defined as when a building, "the demolition of which that is proposed...would be detrimental to the historical or architectural heritage of the Town because such Building is (i) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the Town, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or the United States of America, (ii) historically or architecturally important by reason of period, style, method of building construction or association with a particular architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of Buildings, or (iii) located within one hundred fifty (150) feet of the boundary line of any federal or local historic district and contextually similar to the Buildings located in the adjacent federal or local historic district."

If the Commission determines that the Building should be Preferably Preserved, then no Demolition Permit with respect to such Building shall be issued until twelve (12) months after the date of the Preservation. Following such a determination, the Applicant may request a reduction in the length of the delay period through the Waiver Process.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff is of the opinion that the subject building at 65 High Ledge Avenue **is not** (i) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the Town, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or the United States of America, **is not** (ii) historically or architecturally important by reason of period, style, method of building construction or association with a particular architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of Buildings, and **is not** (iii) located within one hundred fifty (150) feet of the boundary line of any federal or local historic district and contextually similar to the Buildings located in the adjacent federal or local historic district.

Therefore, based upon the above, **Staff is of the opinion that the demolition of the subject building would not be detrimental to the historical or architectural heritage of the Town and thus Staff recommends that the building should not be deemed Preferably Preserved.**

⁵ "Institute Honors Veteran Employees," *Wellesley Townsman*, March 26, 1959, page 17.