



STAFF REPORT

Town of Wellesley - Planning Department

Application: DR-2020-32 – 41 Chestnut Street – Preservation Determination
Subject Property: 41 Chestnut Street (Assessor's Parcel ID # 84-47)
Applicant: 41 Chestnut Street LLC
Property Owner: 41 Chestnut Street LLC
Date: Report prepared 9/10/2020 for 9/15/2020 Historical Commission Meeting
Staff Contact: Dana Marks, Planner
Staff Recommendation: **Preferably Preserved**

APPLICATION OVERVIEW

On August 25, 2020, 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 August 27, 2020 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 September 15, 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 built no later than 1899, when it was reported in the *Wellesley Townsman* that Judge George White had built a house on Chestnut Street into which his family moved a few weeks after his death. Those reports prove that the dwelling at 41 Chestnut Street is indeed Eligible and subject to a Preservation Determination pursuant to Article 46C of the Wellesley Town Bylaws.

Known as the Judge George White House, 41 Chestnut Street is a large Georgian Revival structure located within the Old Cliff Estates on a lot covering over 1.5 acres. The main entrance is centrally located along the west-facing front façade underneath a portico supported by Corinthian columns. The symmetry of the front façade is emphasized by the central entry portico, Ionic pilasters, and a triangular protruding pediment interrupting the hipped roof with dormers on all four sides. A modillion cornice runs around the perimeter of the main structure.



Images via Assessor's Property Record (L) and MHC Inventory Form (R).

The Old Cliff Estates was developed by Albion R. Clapp, who transferred over 80,000 sq. ft. of land to Judge George White in 1897 and 1898 (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds; Book 818, Page 538; and Book 876, Page 59). Judge White built a house for his family at 41 Chestnut Street in 1899, however he died just weeks before he and his family were to move in. Judge White was the Judge of Norfolk County Probate Court for around 40 years.¹ Mrs. Frances M. E. White lived at 41 Chestnut Street until her death in 1930.²

In 1936 Mahlon E. Traylor acquired 41 Chestnut Street on 102,684 sq. ft. of land from Mary Hawthorne Bunker, Edward W. White, and Clarence Alfred Bunker, Trustees under the will of Frances M. E. White (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 2113, Page 352). The Traylor family undertook extensive renovations for their large family with six children,³ however no corresponding building permits are on file with the Building Department. Mahlon Traylor was associated with Massachusetts Distributors, Inc., a member of the Wellesley Country Club and the Maugus Club, and involved with the Wellesley Congregational Church.⁴

Following Mahlon Traylor's death in 1942, the Traylor family remained at 41 Chestnut Street until Mrs. Margaret H. Traylor sold the property in 1952 to Frederick E. and Charlotte E. Barry. (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 3099, Page 233). At this time the property was described at its present size of 73,548 sq. ft. Mr. Barry was associated with the Dennison Company.⁵ Mrs. Barry was involved with the Wellesley League of Women Voters and the Junior League of Boston.⁶

In 1966 John J. Kelley, Jr, and his wife Jane F. Kelley, acquired the property (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 4364, Page 85). The Kelleys' arrival on Chestnut Street was reported in the *Wellesley Townsman*: "July 7 was moving day for Mr. and Mrs. John J. Kelley, Jr., and their seven children who moved from 8 Deerfield road to 41 Chestnut street... Mr. Kelley is a restaurant operator with Howard Johnson."⁷

¹ Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory No. WEL.30, March 1975.

² E.W.F., "MRS. FRANCES M. E. WHITE," *Wellesley Townsman*, April 11, 1930, page 13.

³ Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory No. WEL.30, March 1975; *Wellesley Townsman*, March 5, 1939, page 2.

⁴ Mahlon E. Traylor Heads Inc. & Fin. Division Of Drive," *Wellesley Townsman*, December 30, 1938, page 1;

"Town Loses A Distinguished Citizen," *Wellesley Townsman*, March 12, 1942, page 1.

⁵ "Frederick Barry Promoted By Dennison Co." *Wellesley Townsman*, January 10, 1957.

⁶ "Junior League Holds Party For Husbands," *Wellesley Townsman*, December 7, 1961, page 25.

⁷ "Neighborhood News," *Wellesley Townsman*, July 14, 1966, page 6.

The Kelleys sold the property in 1970 to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 4660, Page 146). It was used as a residence for M.I.T. President Howard W. Johnson and his family.⁸ In 1973, M.I.T. sold the property to Francis A. Harrington, Jr. and Charlotte W. Harrington (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 4956, Page 309). Charlotte Harrington assumed sole ownership of the property in 1997 (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 11709, Page 636). In 2019, Charlotte transferred the property to the Charlotte W. Harrington Revocable Trust, with herself and Sumner B. Tilton, Jr. named as Trustees (Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 37038, Page 413). The current owner acquired the property earlier this year and is seeking a Preservation Determination.

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 Determination. 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 41 Chestnut Street **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, **is** (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.

With respect to standard (i), 41 Chestnut Street was built during the first phase of large-scale development within the Cliff Estates when new houses were prominently sited on large lots.⁹ Furthermore it was built by Judge George White, who was Judge of Norfolk County Probate Court for a number of years. Although he never lived there himself, having died before his family moved in, his wife Frances M. E. White lived there until her death in 1931.

⁸ Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory No. WEL.30, March 1975.

⁹ Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory No. WEL.U, May 1990.

With respect to standard (ii), 41 Chestnut Street is an intact example of Georgian Revival architecture within the Cliff Estates. While somewhat altered, its integrity has remained largely intact and lends itself the overall character of surrounding neighborhood.

Therefore, based upon the above, **Staff is of the opinion that the demolition of the subject building would be detrimental to the historical or architectural heritage of the Town and thus Staff recommends that the building should be deemed Preferably Preserved.**