



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
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HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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**STEP 1: DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE  
STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 129 Boston Avenue

**Case:** HPC.DMO 2020.27

**Applicant:** Eamon Fee

**Owner:** David Galvin

**Proposal:** *Demolish principal structure.*

**HPC Meeting Date:** February 16, 2021



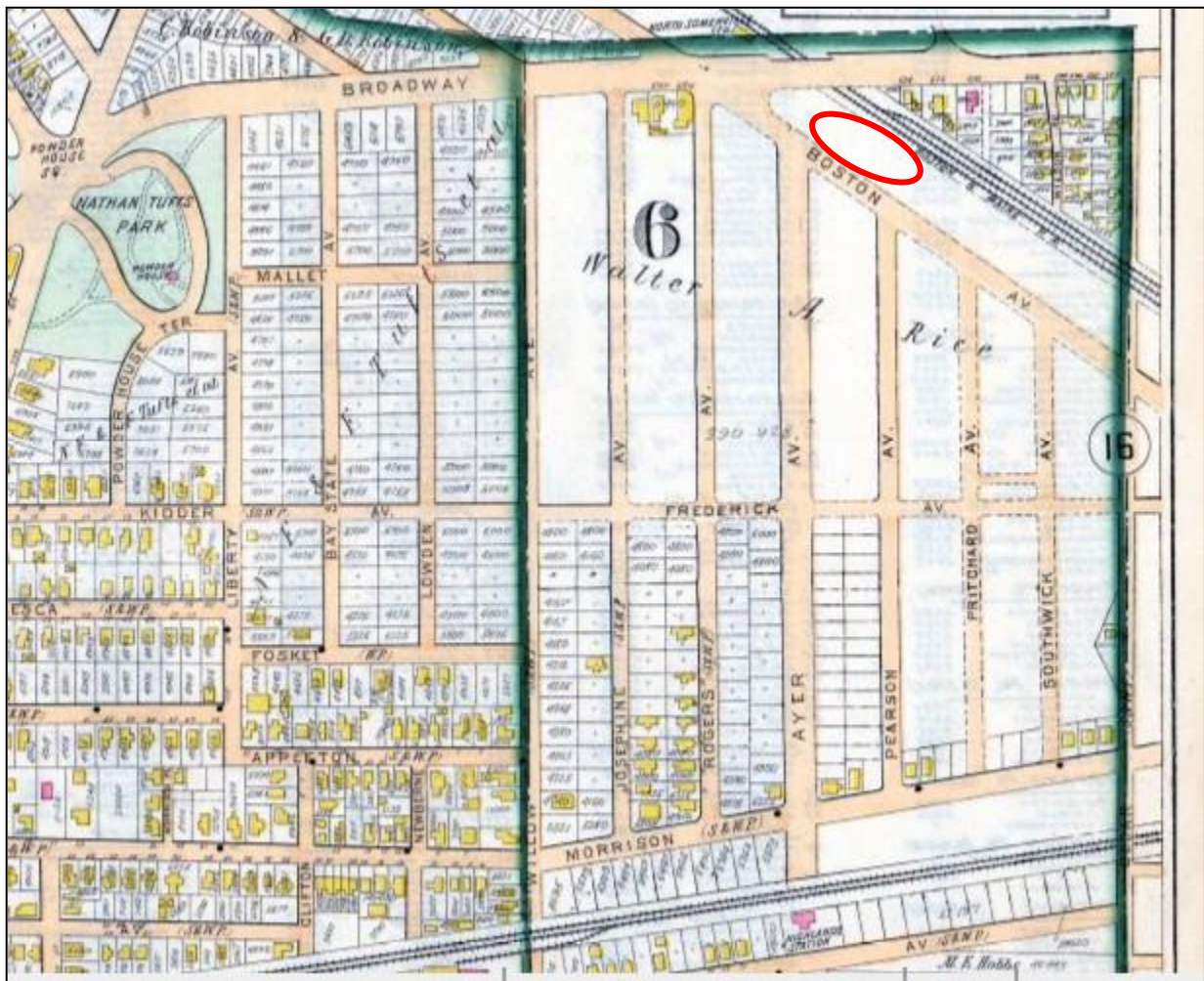
## I. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

**Historical Context:** 129 Boston Avenue is located near the heart of Ball Square sited between the cross streets of Pearson Avenue and Josephine Avenue. The rear of the property abuts an active railroad track. Abutting the property to the right is another Dutch Colonial Revival whose main massing is identical to that of 129 Boston.

This area of the City was late to develop. A portion of Plate 017 from the 1900 Sanborn map shows the area where 129 Boston Avenue is located devoid of development and land platting. While streets were laid out, parcels had not yet been platted. Walter Rice owned a significant tract of land opposite this portion of Boston Avenue and had laid out several streets in preparation for development (note that Josephine Avenue was then known as “Ayer”). It is possible that he also owned the large swath of open land on which 129 Boston and other residential structures were later built.

129 Boston Avenue is a classic, modest, single-family Colonial Revival in the gambrel style. Its side gambrel roof with long shed dormer and center entry was the predominant form the gambrel took in the 1920s and 1930s. The 1920-1940 build date of this house fits the time period when this house form reached its height of popularity.

*Below: portion of 1900 Sanborn map, plate 017. General location of 129 Boston Avenue circled in red.*





Scant information has been found to-date regarding this property. According to deed research, the empty parcel on which this house was later built was known in 1921 as “Lot 3” and was purchased by Joshua W. Knowles at that time.

The 1920 federal census shows that Knowles is a resident of Ward 7 on North Street and is the head of his household, living with his mother, sister, nephew, and a “housekeeper”, likely a boarder. His mother and sister are both widowed, his mother doesn’t work, and his sister is a bookkeeper in the real estate industry.

Joshua listed as 31 years old, single, and has attended school, can read, write, and speak English. Joshua Knowles’ occupation is listed as “Building Contractor”. Given that he purchased “Lot 3”, the future 129 Boston Avenue, it is highly possible that he is the builder of this house. Key outtakes from this census page appear below:

Knowles Joshua W.	Head?	0	W	7	31	M
Plinnie J	Mother			7	65	W
Mrs Fayden Sarah R	Sister			7	38	W
Daniel R	Nephew			24	14	M
Maunt Florence M	Housekeeper			7	37	W

Contractor	Building
none	
Book-keeper	Real Estate
none	
Housekeeper	Private Family

Joshua Knowles’ World War I draft registration card was also discovered. At the time, four years prior to the purchase of 129 Boston Avenue, he was also living on North Street in Somerville.

Form 1-7511 REGISTRATION CARD 299 No. 460

1 Name in full: JOSHUA WILLIAM KNOWLES Age in yrs: 29

2 Home address: 18 NORTH Somerville, Mass.

3 Date of birth: SEPTEMBER 20 1884

4 Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which): NATURAL BORN CITIZEN

5 Where were you born: TAURO, MASS, U.S.A.

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?

7 What is your present trade, occupation, etc., or office? BUILDER 7

8 By whom employed? JOSHUA WILLIAM KNOWLES, PROPRIETOR - SOMERVILLE

9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which): MOTHER

10 Married or single (which): SINGLE Race (specify which): CAUCASIAN

11 What military service have you had? Rank: NONE branch: \_\_\_\_\_ years: \_\_\_\_\_ Nation or State: \_\_\_\_\_

12 Do you claim exemption from draft, specify grounds: YES, DEPENDENT & BUSINESS

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

Joshua William Knowles  
(Signature of registrant)

20-5-19. A  
REGISTRAR'S REPORT

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? MEDIUM Slender, medium, or stout (which)? MEDIUM

2 Color of eyes? BLUE Color of hair? BROWN Bald? No

3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? No

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

Eugene J. Quinn  
(Signature of Registrar)

4 WARD 7  
Precinct \_\_\_\_\_  
City or County: SOMERVILLE  
State: MASSACHUSETTS JUN 5 1917  
(Date of Registration)

By the time the 1930 federal census was taken, Joshua Knowles was living in Arlington, MA with his wife, Margaret, and his occupation is listed as a real estate agent.

## II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Please see the section immediately below which discusses location, design, materials and any alterations as the same information would be written here, just in longer form.

*The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.*

The period of relevance for the house begins 1921-1940.

- a. Location: The structure is in its original location.
- b. Design: Colonial Revival. Side gambrel roof with non-flared eaves and a long shed dormer. Two stories.
  - First story front façade is three bays wide – one-over-one double-hung windows flank either side of the center entry door. Decorative shutters
  - Second story front façade presents a long shed dormer with two, evenly-spaced one-over-one double-hung windows. Decorative shutters.
  - Front façade presents a covered front porch (later addition) with posts and metal rails, front entry steps.
  - Left- and right- side elevations present two evenly-spaced, one-over-one double-hung windows on the first story and a single, one-over-one double-hung window centered below the gambrel peak on the second story. Decorative shutters. The rear corner of the left elevation presents an exterior stairwell.
  - Rear elevation presents matching dormer to front.
  - White picket-style fence with gate runs the length of the frontage and wraps to the left and right of the front yard.
  - Asphalt shingle roof
- c. Materials: Vinyl siding. Cement block foundation. Poured concrete front porch, wood porch decking, metal railings. Replacement windows, likely vinyl. Metal storm door. Possibly wood front door. Shutter material unknown but likely vinyl or plastic. Metal gutter system. Brick front entry steps.
- d. Alterations: vinyl siding; replacement windows; vinyl/plastic shutters; non-original front porch; later roof covering, decking, and metal railing.

Evaluation of Integrity: 129 Boston Avenue retains the original form, massing and design of the Colonial Revival gambrel that it was intended to be.

### **III. FINDINGS**

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either **(i) importantly associated with people, events or history** and/or **(ii) historically or architecturally significant**. The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) must make these findings. The portions of the Demolition Review Ordinance (DRO) related to these findings are included below:*

#### **A. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION**

*Importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.*

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the structure at 129 Boston Avenue meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the structure at 129 Boston Avenue does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “i”.

#### **B. HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

*The findings for historical and/or architectural significance of a historic property address the period, style, method of building construction and association with a reputed architect or builder of the subject property, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, and therefore it is in the public interest to be preserved or rehabilitated rather than to be demolished.*

1. The HPC must make a finding as to whether or not the structure at 129 Boston Avenue meets any of the criteria stated above.
2. The HPC must specifically state why the structure at 129 Boston Avenue does or does not meet the threshold for historic significance under finding “ii”.

### **IV. VOTE**

When bringing the matter to a vote, the HPC must include the reasons why the structure at 129 Boston Avenue is or is not “historically significant”.