

Brookline Preservation Commission Demolition Application Report

Address: 36 Longwood Avenue

Petitioner: Charles Popkin, trustee for Rachel Popkin Trust

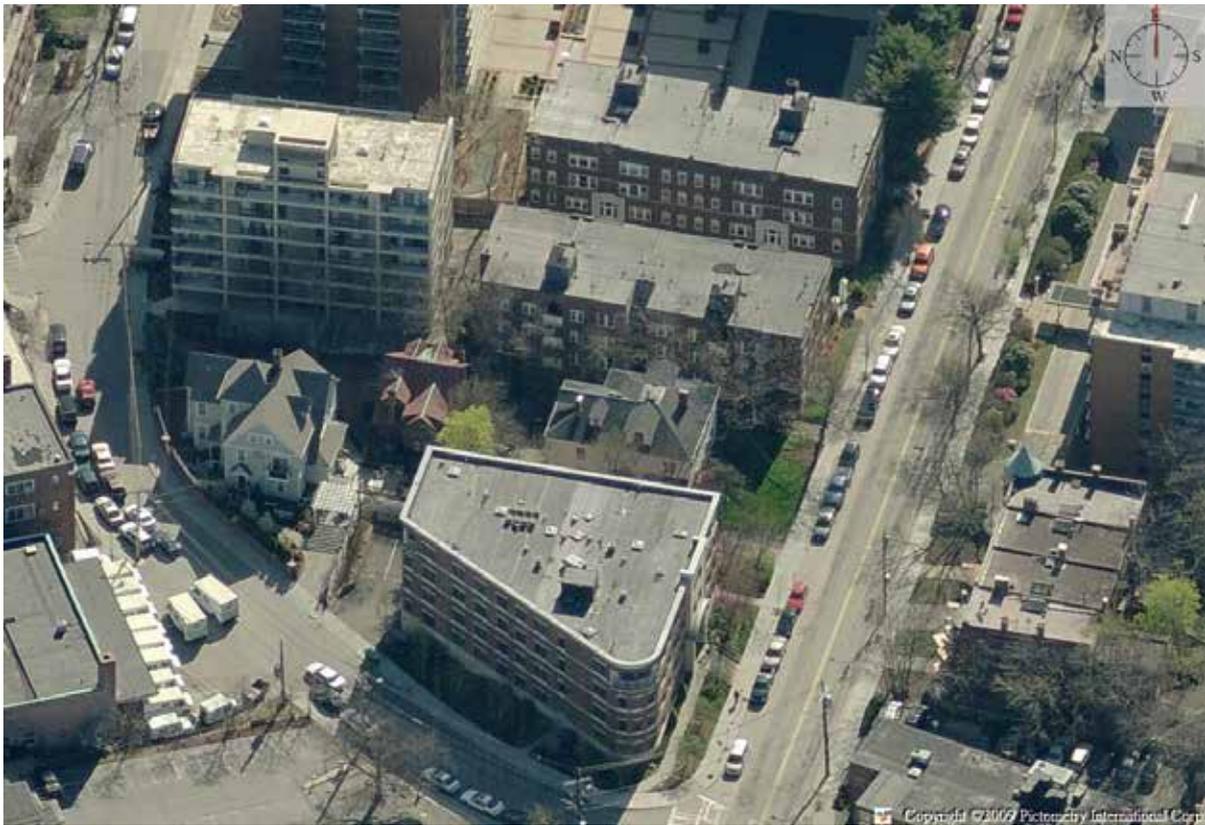
Building type: house

National Register Listing (if Applicable): n/a

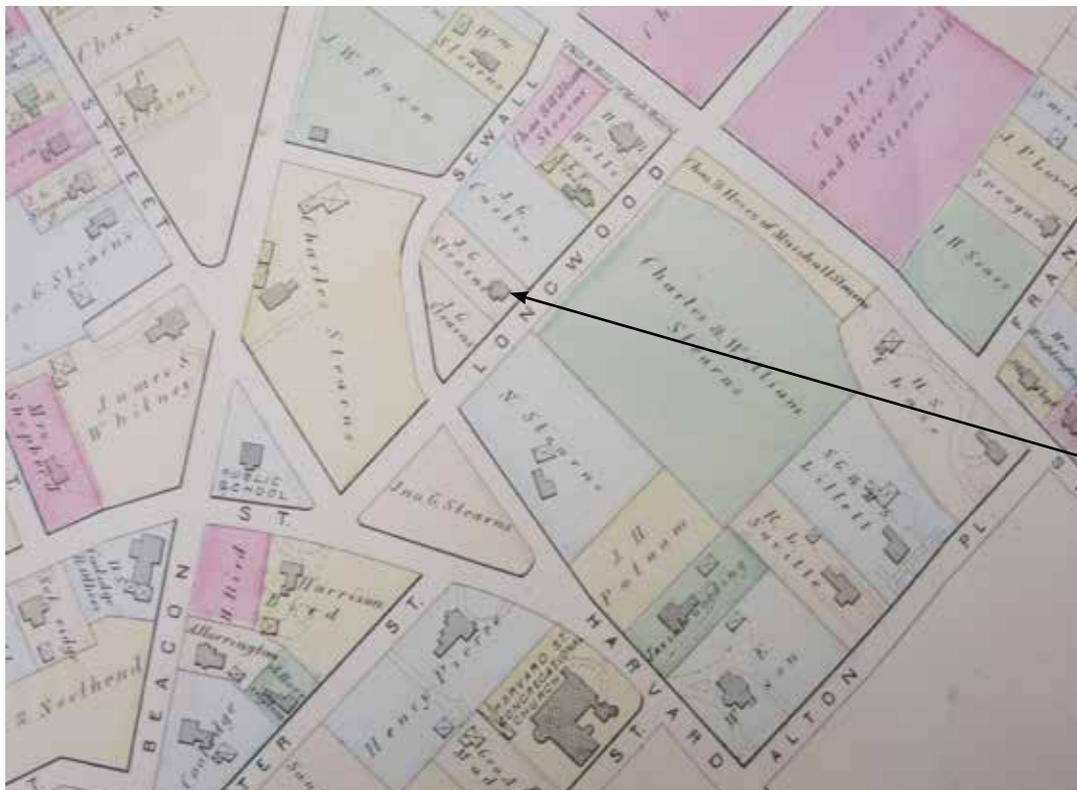


Historical/Architectural Significance:

The large house at 36 Longwood Avenue was built before 1860. It is one of three nineteenth-century houses remaining in the block defined by Longwood Avenue, Harvard, Sewall and St. Paul streets in the Coolidge Corner neighborhood. The house is the oldest of the three. Character-defining features include the foundation and the house's low setting on the land, and its hip roof with small gable dormers and brick chimneys. Considering the massing of the original section and the wide spacing between the windows, the style of the house is late Georgian in feeling, and appears to date to the early rather than middle decades of the nineteenth century.



In the 1860s and 70s the house was owned by the family of John Goddard Stearns (1843 - 1917), co-founder and partner of Peabody & Stearns Architects, one of the most influential architectural firms in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. The firm is renowned for the quality of its work and its prolific production over more than forty years of practice.



J.G. Stearns house in the 1874 atlas

More is know about the life of Robert Swain Peabody (1845-1917) than John Goddard Stearns, Jr., who was born in New York. His family moved to Brookline around 1860, where the extended Stearns family owned a large amount of land south of Beacon Street, along Sewall Avenue and St. Paul Street. By 1874 John Goddard Stearns, Sr. owned the house at 36 Longwood Avenue and two other nearby parcels of land that were small in comparison to his relatives' larger holdings nearby. In addition, he had a house on Pleasant Street, where his son John Goddard Junior also owned a house in the 1870s on a parcel of land subdivided from his father's property. After his education, John Goddard Jr. worked as a draftsman for Ware and Van Brunt for several years.

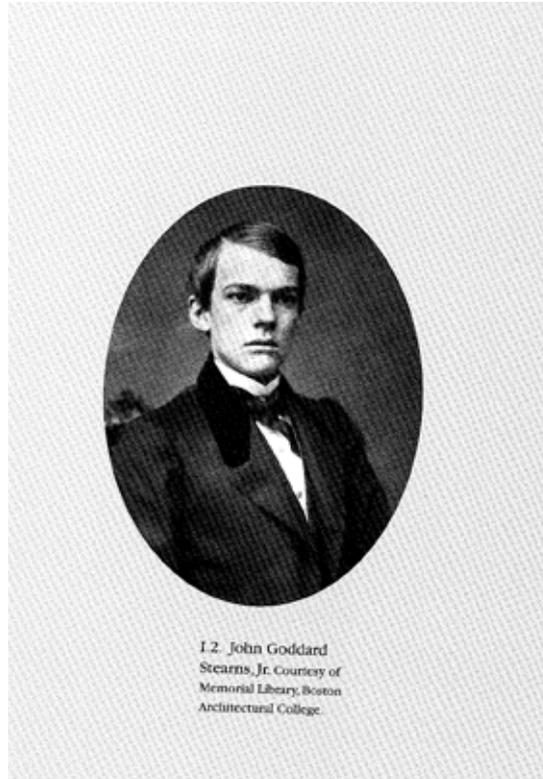
In 1870 Peabody and Stearns opened their architectural offices on Devonshire Road in Boston. Peabody was more involved with aesthetics and the design work of the firm, while Stearns was concerned with business side and in the field. During the time of the firm's practice, architects continued the convention of serving as superintendents at sites where their designs were executed, thereby ensuring the quality of materials, workmanship and finished product expected by their clients.

The tower atop the Customs House and the Exchange Building are among the landmarks designed by the firm in Boston. Renowned today for their designs of estate houses and cottages, they also produced an extensive portfolio of commercial, educational and church buildings. In Brookline, Peabody and Stearns designed several schools, including the old Lawrence, old Runkle and Pierce Primary, St. Mary's Church, and more than twenty residences.

Stearns lived on Pleasant Street for most of his adult life in two houses, both on Pleasant Street and both no longer extant. One of them was built in 1898 on the site of the Coolidge Corner branch library building.



*streetview from
the east*



John Goddard Stearns Jr

The house at 36 Longwood Avenue meets the following criteria for an initial determination of significance:

- c. The building is associated with one or more significant historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the Town or Commonwealth; and
- d. The building is historically or architecturally significant in terms of its period, style, method of construction, or its association with a significant architect or builder, either by itself or as part of a group.

The house retains its integrity in terms of its location, setting, design, workmanship, feeling and association. It is one of a few nineteenth-century houses remaining in the surrounding neighborhood. Some historic materials, such as siding, trim and windows have been altered, obscured or removed. Further research is needed to evaluate the significance of the house in association with the life of John Goddard Stearns, Jr. and the Stearns family.