

Henry Melendy House
81 Washington Avenue
Cambridge
Middlesex County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-IO27

HABS
MASS
9-CAME
28-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HENRY MELENDY HOUSE

HABS
MASS
9-CAMB

Location: 81 Washington Avenue, Cambridge, Middlesex County, 28-
Massachusetts

Present Owner
and Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. David McClelland

Present Use: Private residence

Statement of
Significance: The Melendy House is an ambitious Cambridge mansion,
one of twins, built on one of the highest lots in
the city. It is a good example of post-Civil War
mansard with a profusion of applied ornament and
is topped by a cupola.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: References are to Middlesex County Registry of Deeds.
 - 1870 Henry J. Melendy bought 14,000 square feet of land on Washington Avenue from D. Gilbert Dexter. Deed Book 1140, p. 129. The house ("unfinished") first appeared on city tax records in 1871, assessed to H. J. Melendy.
 - 1879 Reuben Arey acquired house and land after Melendy's default on mortgage to the Franklin Savings Bank. Deed Book 1525, p. 305.
 - 1884 Reuben Arey, through Herbert R. Denison, transferred title to Nellie L. Arey, his wife. Deed Book 1690, p. 287.
 - 1899 Land and buildings were conveyed to William Quinby. Deed Book 3758, p. 330.
 - 1899 William Quinby purchased two adjoining parcels to increase the size of the lot at 81 Washington Avenue. Deed Book 3758, pp. 331, 332.
 - 1908 Arthur E. Denison purchased the expanded lot and buildings. Deed Book 2738, p. 334.
 - 1909 Maud I. Emerson (wife of Robert L.) bought land and buildings. Deed Book 3758, p. 352.

- 1913 Nellie L. Quinby bought land and buildings from Robert L. Emerson. Deed Book 3848, p. 455.
- 1914 J. Walter May bought land and buildings. Deed Book 3926, p. 60.
- 1923 Wallace St. Clair Jones bought land and buildings. Deed Book 4935, p. 4.
- 1926 Wallace St. Clair Jones (husband of Ethel R. Jones) was registered as owner of the land. Land Reg. Book 127, p. 557.
- 1936 Transfer of title was made to Ethel R. Jones. Land Reg. Book 265, p. 381.
- 1951 Ethel R. Jones, through Flora E. Skinner, transferred ownership of buildings and the smaller lot of land (same conveyed in 1899, Deed Book 3758, p. 330) to herself and her husband. Land Reg. Book 480, p. 313.
- 1956 Transfer of title was made to David C. McClelland and Mary Warner McClelland. Land Reg. Book 376, p. 14.
2. Date of erection: 1871
3. Architect: Not known
4. Alterations and additions: References are to Building Permits:
- 1893 (4333) Two-story wood stable built with the architect, M. J. Brown and the builder, J. W. Gillespie.
- 1900 (8306) A wood addition enlarging the kitchen to the rear was built by W. Fillmore & Co.
- 1917 (17772) Alterations were made.
- 1940 (39962) Alterations and additional bathrooms were completed by Custance Bros., mechanic.
- 1957 (57565) An 1893 stable was converted into a single family dwelling with the contractor being Edward A. Cuetara.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The house was built for Henry J. Melendy who, with D. Gilbert Dexter, acquired the land at the top of Avon Hill in 1869 and was responsible for its subsequent development. Dexter's twin house, built next to Melendy's, burned in 1939.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Secondary and published sources:

Cambridge Chronicle, October 8, 1870.

Melendy House and twin house for Dexter to be built.

Rettig, Robert Bell. Guide to Cambridge Architecture:
Ten Walking Tours. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press,
1969.

Prepared by Susan E. Maycock
Survey Associate
June 20, 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Melendy House is a good example of a post-Civil War mansard dwelling with central pavilion. It is an ambitious mansion, one of twins, built on the highest lot in the city. The matching house burned c. 1939. This house shows the usual attempt to make a dwelling impressive by applying quantities of ornament. There are conservative design elements (brackets, round windows) which go back to the vernacular work of the 1850's.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. The house was altered about 1888. A section about twelve feet wide was added to the left rear of the house beyond the mansard. This enlarged the kitchen and created a new, longer master bedroom. At that time new mantels and overmantels were added in the left front parlor, dining room, and master bedroom, and a colored glass window was added in the master bedroom. Otherwise the interior has been little changed. On the north side of the house, the second-floor window that now corresponds to the interior bath is filled in, leaving the surrounding frame, and a new smaller one is added to the right.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The house is square, 40 feet x 40 feet (three bays with a central entrance pavilion), two stories, and has a mansard roof with cupola. The front porch is six feet, and the rear addition is over twelve feet.

2. Foundations: There are rough gray granite slabs with flush joints to the grade. Some are about two feet six inches tall and many are six feet long. Inside there is brick to grade with stone rubble walls below.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Flush siding on front is an imitation of drafted masonry; there is clapboard elsewhere painted tawny yellow. Shutters are slate gray.
4. Structural system, framing: Stud wall. The cellar has brick interior support walls and pillars.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: A front porch is over the entrance and a balustraded terrace across the facade. The side (south) entrance has wooden steps; the rear porch is new. Front porch has four gray granite steps.
6. Chimneys: Three: one is on each side of the house between front and rear rooms; and one runs up through the kitchen on the south side.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Double entrance doors have three panels with an upper panel of glass. There are two sets of entrance doors. The south entry has a heavy hood with large brackets.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Windows are double hung and two-over-two with the first floor ones being more elaborate. All windows are framed with pediments and volute bases with an incised design. Second floor windows have molded trim and caps. Trim is only on the side elevation. Shutters are on the four main front windows but there are no side shutters. Twin arched double hung, one-over-one, windows are over the entry. A skylight is in the roof over the rear stairs.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The mansard roof with a straight profile projects beyond the face of the walls. Octagonal shaped slate is on the lower slope and rectangular on upper. A heavy cornice is between slopes of the roof.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Three-ply brackets are at the cornice with a simple jugged spiral.

- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Dormers have pediments and a cut-out jig pattern applied to the fascia. A large square cupola has each face pedimented with three arched windows below. The finial with a concave roof-base supports a large ball. An elaborate Italianate canopy is over the second-story central pavilion windows.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The house has a central hall plan and is two rooms deep. The central hall is separated into front and back sections. A side hall on the first floor is to the left. The right parlor is deeper (20'), than the left (15'). The second floor has four bedrooms with intervening closets and baths plus a small sitting room in the pavilion over the entrance (east end of upper hall). The third floor is similar to the second. The attic is reached through a trap door in the ceiling of the bathroom on south side.

The rear section of the house, comprising first-floor kitchen and laundry rooms, and the second-floor main bedroom has been extended beyond the original cubic form of the house.

2. Stairways: Two stairs: The front is a traditional curved design, making a quarter turn at the top. A large eight inch square newel has a galleried top. The rear stair has three runs.
3. Flooring: A later hardwood floor with a parquet border is on first and second floors.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls have no paneling or wainscoting. Original plaster ceiling medallions are in place on first floor. Cupola has lath and plaster which is almost one-half inch thick, with large amounts of horse hair.
5. Doorways and doors: Double doors from hall to parlors have been removed and wooden fretwork screens added above. Four-panel doors are used elsewhere.
6. Decorative features and trim: White marble mantels in right parlor and left front bedroom are both later additions and are now painted and grained. An 1888 mantel with carved panels above has been added in the left parlor, dining room, and rear left bedroom. This bedroom is the most elaborate: the fireplace has an Ionic order and egg-and-dart molding; and the area below the mantel shelf (held up by three brackets) is decorated with relief tiles, originally green and cream, now painted black. The central medallion shows a profile of Shakespeare (?) and the rectangular panels on either side have putti. On vertical side panels are two more heads in roundels, Dante on the right and unidenti-

fiable figure to the left. The fireback is rococo, cast iron. The hearth is green tile with celtic interlace. Wainscoting is throughout the room and windows and doors are enframed with Ionic pilasters and a frieze. Front left parlor also has an elaborate fireplace probably of the same date: the fireback is of three panels with scenes of indians and the following text: (left): "Chareya made fire/ / housed it safe with/ [next line buried in cement]. (center): Race over? see there.../ what a monstrous cat/ [next line obliterated]. (right): But the Cahrocs Declared/ That fire should be free/ / [next line buried in cement].

7. Lighting: Original fixtures
8. Heating: Two furnaces supply hot air on the first and second floors and hot water on all three floors.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General setting and orientation: The front faces north-east. The house is on highest point of ground in Cambridge.
2. Outbuildings: A good 1893 carriage house was converted into a dwelling in 1957.
3. Landscaping and walks, enclosures: A U-shaped drive is in front of the house; the drive to the left side of the house has a dry stone retaining wall capped with granite slabs, one of which measures c. 12' x 6" x 15". Two concrete urns four-and-a-half feet tall stand on this wall opposite the side entrance. The grounds are generally spacious. Around the front steps are planters made of granite paving blocks that might have come from the drive.

Prepared by Bainbridge Bunting
Survey Director and
Daniel D. Reiff
Survey Associate
October 12, 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a cooperative project between the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC), Albert B. Wolfe, Chairman, and the Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service. The project followed a previous one conducted during the summer of 1964 under the same auspices and was initiated in September 1967 and completed in June 1969. It was under the general direction of Robert Bell Rettig, Associate Survey Director of the CHC, and James C. Massey, Chief, HABS. Miss Susan Maycock, CHC Survey Associate and graduate student in architectural history at Boston University, was responsible

for the historical data; the architectural data were written by Daniel D. Reiff, CHC Survey Associate who was at that time a Harvard University doctoral candidate in the Department of Fine Arts; and the photographs were taken by George M. Cushing, Boston. Certain data were supplied by Dr. Bainbridge Bunting, CHC Survey Director and Professor of Art and Architectural History at the University of New Mexico.