

**SOCIETY OF
ARCHITECTURAL
HISTORIANS**

22 December 2020

Ms. Valerie Birmingham
Preservation Planner
Brookline Preservation Commission
Brookline Town Hall
333 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02445
vbirmingham@brooklinema.gov
617-730-2089

Ms. Tina McCarthy
Preservation Planner
Brookline Preservation Commission
Brookline Town Hall
333 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02445
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617-730-2612

Re: Opposition to the proposed demolition of 25 Cottage Street, Brookline, MA

Dear Ms. Birmingham and McCarthy:

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) expresses strong opposition to the proposed demolition of 25 Cottage Street, located in Brookline, MA, the location of H.H. Richardson's home and office during his productive, final years of practice.

H.H. Richardson lived and worked at 25 Cottage Street from 1874 until his death in 1886, during which time he produced his most important work. Built ca. 1803, 25 Cottage Street is located near 99 Warren Street, where Frederick Law Olmsted established Fairsted, his residence and professional office, which has been justly recognized as a National Historic Landmark and a National Historic Site. The close relationship between these two extremely influential Americans cannot be underestimated and bears closely upon the significance of 25 Cottage Street. As Richardson's biographer Marianna Griswold Van Rensselaer noted, Richardson "was constantly turning to Olmsted for advice, even in cases where it seems as though it should have little practical bearing upon his design." It is our understanding that 25 Cottage St. has been purchased, and a demolition application filed to be heard at the Brookline Preservation Commission's meeting on December 29, 2020.

H.H. Richardson, Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright are recognized as the three American architects whose works most significantly shaped the direction of late 19th and early 20th century American architecture. Richardson's works, such as the Marshall Field Wholesale Store (Chicago, 1885–87), had a transformative impact upon the careers of Sullivan and Wright. His public buildings, including Trinity Church (Boston, 1878–86), the Winn Memorial Library (Woburn, MA, 1876–79), and the Thomas Crane Public Library (Quincy, MA, 1880–82), were remarkable architectural essays in the adaptation of the Romanesque to an American vernacular. While best known for his public buildings and monuments, Richardson also designed a small number of influential residences, such as the William Watts Sherman House (Newport, RI, 1874–76), the F.L. Ames Gate Lodge (North Easton, MA, 1880–81), and the John J. Glessner House (Chicago, 1885–87).

From 1874 until his death in 1886, Richardson not only lived in the house with his family, he used two rooms on the ground floor as his professional office and library. Richardson later constructed an attached drafting room, which has subsequently been demolished. After his death, his widow continued to rent the house until she was

able to purchase it in 1891. 25 Cottage Street remained in the Richardson family's ownership until 2000, when it was sold following the death of H. H. Richardson III. In subsequent years, there have been a series of efforts to secure the future of 25 Cottage Street and ensure its preservation, including efforts by the Committee to Save the H.H. Richardson House. In 2004 Preservation Massachusetts listed 25 Cottage Street on its Massachusetts Most Endangered Historic Resources List, Ten Most Endangered Historic Resources; in 2007 the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed it on their 11 Most Endangered Properties list.

The preservation of 25 Cottage Street is essential to an understanding of H.H. Richardson's life and work, and is in itself a rare surviving example of this type of dwelling. The Society of Architectural Historians strongly opposes the demolition of 25 Cottage Street, and asks that the full 18-month demolition delay be imposed, so that time may be used to seek alternatives that will result in the preservation of this landmark.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B_C_G' with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Bryan Clark Green, Ph.D., LEED AP BD+C
Chair, Society of Architectural Historians Heritage Conservation Committee

cc: Mr. Kenneth Breisch, Ph.D.; Mr. Jeffrey Cody, Ph.D.; Mr. Anthony Cohn, AIA; Mr. David Fixler, FAIA; Ms. Priya Jain, AIA; Mr. Theodore H. Prudon, Ph.D., FAIA, Ms. Pauline Saliga; Ms. Deborah Slaton; Ms. Victoria Young, Ph.D.; Members, SAH Heritage Conservation Committee; Mr. Elton Elperin, Chair, Mr. Richard Panciera, Vice Chair, Mr. James Batchelor, Ms. Wendy Ecker, Mr. David Jack, Mr. Peter Kleiner, and Mr. David King, members, Brookline Preservation Commission; Mr. Dennis De Witt, SAH New England Chapter.