



Lafayette Murdock / Emily Groom House
1903 North Cambridge Avenue
Historic Designation Study Report
December, 2012
January, 2013 Revised

**HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT
DECEMBER 2012
Revised January 2013**

I. NAME

Historic: Lafayette Murdock / Emily Groom House

Common Name: Emily Groom House

II. LOCATION

1903 North Cambridge Avenue

Legal Description - Tax Key No. 3550033000
CAMBRIDGE SUBD PART LOT 6 SEC 21 & LOTS
15-16 BLOCK 198 ROGER'S ADDN IN NE & SE ¼
SEC 21-7-22 BLOCK 242 LOT 3 & S 20' LOT 2

III. CLASSIFICATION

Site

IV. OWNER

Barry Alan Poltermann
1903 North Cambridge Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202

ALDERMAN Ald. Nik Kovac 2nd Aldermanic District

NOMINATOR Barry Alan Poltermann

V. YEAR BUILT

1879 (Tax Rolls 1874 through 1886)

ARCHITECT: Unknown

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

THE AREA

The Murdock / Groom House is located on the city's Lower East Side, just over a mile from the Central Business District. The neighborhood is predominantly residential with nearby Brady Street forming a modestly scaled commercial district that runs from west to east between Humboldt and Prospect Avenues and forms the southern boundary of Cambridge Avenue. The area historically has been a mix of mansions and working class cottages with distinctive boundaries between the economic classes. To the east Prospect Avenue was known as one of the city's premier residential thoroughfares with mansions lining the street from Juneau Avenue through to Summit Avenue. Prominent middle class and upper middle class residences were found to the west. Cambridge Avenue, once a mix of architect designed mansions and upper middle houses formed the dividing line between rich and poor. Immediately west was Warren Avenue, built up by Polish Immigrants. Houses there were smaller, more cottage like in

appearance and there were often two or more buildings per lot. Known today as East Village, this Polish enclave was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2004.

The houses constructed on this portion of Cambridge Avenue (south of Boylston Street) were mostly frame and fire insurance maps show that seven were clad in brick or stone. These were fairly sizable dwellings and were occupied by well-to-do families: Charles B. Manville whose firm would later merge with the Johns company and become the building products industry giant Johns Manville (number 909 later 285 later 1819); Harold S. Falk of the Falk Corporation (number 315 later 1869); Henry C. Quarles investments and securities (number 265 later 1763); Frederick C. Best vice-president of First Wisconsin Trust (number 285 later 1819). Kossuth Kent Kennan lived at Number 309 later 1859 North Cambridge. He was a prominent attorney who was famous for his early railroad cases as counsel for the Wisconsin Central Railroad. He was the originator of the Wisconsin Tax Commission and help to lay the foundation for modernizing Wisconsin's Tax System. His son, George F. Kennan (1904-2005) was "one of the giant figures in modern American diplomatic history. George Kennan was one of the authors of the "containment " doctrine that shaped American policy toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War era, and he served as ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1950 to 1953." ([Wisconsin Lawyer](http://www.wisbar.org/am/template.cfm?section=wisconsin_lawyer&template=/cm/conten), The Kennan Family online history at www.wisbar.org/am/template.cfm?section=wisconsin_lawyer&template=/cm/conten)

Changes to Cambridge Avenue began occurring in the 1920s when two apartment buildings, 1743 North Cambridge (George Zagel architect 1928) and 1755 North Cambridge (George Zagel architect, 1928), were built in response to the growing density of the neighborhood. Many of the prominent families began to relocate and the large houses were converted into apartments and rooming houses. Between 1959 and 1964 nine additional apartments were constructed on the sites of the grand old houses. Groom family history relates that the owner of 1903 North Cambridge (Emily Groom) and the owner next door at 1879 North Cambridge were both approached by developers but refused to sell the houses and see them get demolished for apartment buildings.

Description

The Murdoch/Groom house was built in 1879 at a time when Milwaukee was expanding rapidly and fine cream brick houses were being erected at a staggering rate. Nevertheless, relatively few houses of this design remain in Milwaukee today. Today the house is an outstanding structure in its lower east side neighborhood and catches the attention of passers-by.

The house is located on a 40-foot by 150-foot lot on the west side of Cambridge Avenue and is set back behind a grassy lawn and foundation plantings. To the north (right) is a lot and 1960s apartment building. To the south (left) is a twin brick veneered house.

The Murdock / Groom house is an exceptional 2-1/2- story, combination gable/hip roof, cream brick, Victorian Gothic style house that retains nearly all of its original character. The focal point of the front elevation facing east is an outstanding hip-roofed porch topped with iron cresting and trimmed with some of the most outstanding woodwork remaining for a house of this vintage and style in Milwaukee. The side elevations facing north and south are fenestrated with randomly placed double hung windows placed according to the needs of the interior. The rear elevation is simple in character with a few small double hung windows and an exit door over which is a modern hood.

All or nearly all windows are original to the house with the exception of the projecting three-bay window on the south elevation that appears to be of ca. 1910 vintage. Windows have segmental arches and three Gothic style windows with pointed profile can be found on the south and rear elevations. The original cream brick has been sensitively cleaned with the proper chemicals to bring out the butter-like color that is characteristic of the best of the remaining cream brick houses in Milwaukee. The house originally had a wood shingle roof according to fire insurance maps

from 1888 through 1926. Today the roof is topped with contemporary 3-tab asphalt shingles and the main chimney is a simple straight stack that appears to have been rebuilt within the last 30 years. The chimney originally would have had a corbelled top and possibly paneled sides which was typical of the era for a fine house.

Exceptional details of the house include the front windows which are trimmed with segmental-arched brick window heads, limestone sills and corbelled brick aprons beneath the sills. The apex of the front gable features a fine trefoil paneled gable ornament. While these features were once common in Milwaukee they now remain on only a few cream brick houses in Milwaukee. The front double doors, which are original to the house, are trimmed with elaborate bolection moldings which project significantly from the face of the door and add shadow and visual interest. This type of treatment seems to have generally passed out of favor by the mid 1880s.

The few minor alterations to the exterior do not have a negative impact on the overall significance of the house. Historic photos and fire insurance maps show that an open terrace was located to the south of the covered porch in the early 20th century. This was probably a later addition since the stone foundation at the front is clearly meant to be seen and not covered. It is not known when the terrace was removed. As referenced above, the box bay was added sometime in the early 20th century but there are no permit records to document the exact year. Some of the original windows have been replaced but they fit the window openings.

A concrete drive is located on the north side of the house and leads to a front gabled garage that was built in 1983. This garage replaced an earlier, smaller one built in 1927. The garage sits on a portion of Lot 2 to the north, which was acquired sometime in the 20th century. Lot 2 and Lot 1 had been under one ownership since the 1870s so there was an ample space between the Murdoch / Groom House and their neighbor to the north. A wood privacy fence surrounds the back yard. The rear deck was built in the 1980s.

HISTORY OF 1903 NORTH CAMBRIDGE AVENUE

The lot occupied by 1903 North Cambridge Avenue was once part of a 129-acre tract owned by Joel Parker and his wife, Mary. An East Coast investor, Parker never lived in Wisconsin. Joel Parker (1795-1875) was born in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, and began the practice of law in 1816 in Keene, New Hampshire. He went on to become a chief justice of New Hampshire and spent his later years in Massachusetts where he was a professor at the Harvard Law School. (S. G. Griffin, *A History of the Town of Keene* (Keene, New Hampshire: Sentinel Printing Company, 1904), pp. 633-634) Parker began acquiring property in Milwaukee in 1847. The 1858 Walling Map (Milwaukee County Historical Society collection) shows that Parker's tract was irregular in shape and roughly bounded by today's Warren Avenue, Brady Street, Prospect Avenue, Kane Place, Newhall Avenue, North Avenue, and the Milwaukee River. (Abstract of title, 1741 North Farwell Avenue; H. F. Walling, *Map of the County of Milwaukee, Wisconsin* (New York: M. H. Tyler, 1858) The land was platted as the Cambridge Subdivision in 1868 and was probably named after the residence of Judge Parker in Massachusetts. (*Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 26, 1875, p. 8, col.1) The land remained undeveloped, however, until 1874 when the demand for residential property in this part of the city led to an auction of lots in the vicinity of the intersection of Brady Street and Farwell Avenue. In an article entitled "Extraordinary Success of the Auction Sale of Lots in Cambridge Subdivision," the *Milwaukee Sentinel* described the lively bidding on lots in Blocks 236, 237, 239, 240, 241, and 242 {the location of the house that is the subject of this nomination} and concluded that what "was thought a hazardous venture by many" turned out to be overwhelmingly successful. The article also reminisced about how a portion of the property was once part of the old Civil War Camp Sigel and later used as a baseball park. The baseball park's enclosure had been removed in 1871 and thereafter used by amateur players who had to share the grounds with roaming pigs and cows. ("Extraordinary Success of the Auction Sale of Lots in Cambridge Subdivision. The site of Camp Sigel and the Base-Ball Park Under the Hammer"; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 15, 1874, p. 8, col. 3; February 18, 1871, p. 4, col. 2; July 8, 1872, p. 4, col. 4; August 29, 1873, p. 8, col. 2)

The west side of Cambridge Avenue, Block 242, was platted as one long uninterrupted street from Brady Street to Boylston Street. Block 242 of Cambridge Subdivision consisted of 32 lots. Lot 1 (today's 1913 N. Cambridge, formerly 963 then 331) was at the north end of the subdivision, just north of where Kane Place terminates at Cambridge Avenue. Lots at this time were valued at \$600 and in the 1880s that value increased to \$800 with lots closest to Brady Street assessed at over \$1,000. Single family houses began being built in the block in the 1870s and continued through the turn of the Twentieth Century. North of 1913 N. Cambridge Avenue, the land was later subdivided as part of Cambridge Subdivision No. 2 and a series of duplexes were constructed north to Boylston Street between 1908 and the mid-1920s.

Tax rolls show Mr. McLaren owned all but three of the lots in 1875. Two of those, Lots 24 and 25 (Number 879 and 875), showed modest improvements of \$250 each, equivalent to a small one story frame cottage. These lots were closer to Brady Street. The Milwaukee Sentinel records that owners M. T. Massey and Harry/Ira Odell had built one story cottages on their lots for \$800 each and that the builder was E. Hertzler. (Milwaukee Sentinel. 1874 December 31, p. 2, col. 4) In 1876 Lots 20 and 21 (Number 893/269 and 889/265) were owned by Henry Bussey and a \$1500 improvement was constructed there. This improvement was documented in the Milwaukee Sentinel and indicated that James Douglas had prepared plans for a "neat cottage" for Mr. Bussey. (Milwaukee Sentinel 1875 December 4, p. 8, col. 2). In 1877 Lot 1 (formerly 963/331, today's 1913 N. Cambridge) showed an \$1800 improvement and the city directories show that Thomas B. Oliver, relative of Joseph B. Oliver who lived nearby, was the owner and occupant.

KNOWLES / MURDOCK OWNERSHIP

With four houses already on the block, George Knowles Sr. purchased Lots 3 and 4 around 1878 or early 1879. The 1879 tax rolls show improvements of \$3500 on each of the two parcels. These were the first brick houses on the block. Later years would see a handful masonry or partial masonry houses being built. The two houses were identical or virtually identical in form and detail. They apparently were given as wedding presents to his son George, Jr. and daughter Sophia and their respective spouses. George Knowles Sr. was shown as owner of these two properties into the 1880s.

George Knowles Sr. (May 18, 1822-November 27, 1894) was born in London, England in 1822 and with his parents came to America at the age of 12. They first settled in New York. George then moved to Wisconsin in the 1840s and took up farming. George relocated to Milwaukee in 1864 and worked as a grain commission merchant with offices in the Chamber of Commerce Building downtown. He was elected arbitrator of the Chamber of Commerce in 1872 and his purchase of 300,000 bushels of wheat was said to be the largest on record at that time. Newspaper accounts show him traveling to London, England to see his brother in 1879. Upon his return to the grain exchange on September 4, 1879, he was ushered "into the pit with hearty grips and cries of "Speech, speech"." This was the same year he commissioned the two houses on Cambridge Avenue for two of his children.

Knowles was described as "venerable" and also as a retiring person who disliked publicity. He retired from the Chamber of Commerce on January 1, 1891. He was in poor health during his last year and died at his Cass Street home on November 27, 1894 at the age of 72. Funeral services were at the home and the burial was private, in keeping with the family's dislike of attention. (Milwaukee Sentinel 1872 April 2, p. 4, col. 6; 1873 September 6, p. 8, col. 1; 1879 May 19, p. 5 col. 2, May 22, p. 8, col. 4, August 29, p. 2, col. 4, September 5, p. 8, col. 3, "George Knowles Is Dead. A Once Familiar Figure on 'Change Passed Away Last Evening." November 28, 1894 p. 3, col.2; November 29, 1894; 35th Annual Report of the Milwaukee Grain & Stock Exchange / 35th Annual Report of the Trade and Commerce of Milwaukee for the year ending December 31, 1892, and the fiscal year of the Chamber of Commerce, ending April 3d 1893, Milwaukee (Evening Wisconsin Company, 1893) accessed on line January 4, 2012)

George Knowles' widow Louise eventually moved to an apartment on Prospect Avenue and died on Saturday May 30, 1908 at the age of 76. The funeral services were held at George Jr.'s house. He was by then living on Marietta Avenue. Interment was at Forest Home Cemetery. (Milwaukee Sentinel Sunday May 31, 1908 p. 6 col. 1; Milwaukee City Directories)

Known children of George Knowles Sr. included Francis A. (Frank), Charles, George Jr., Sheridan, Richard H., Sophia and Jennie. A James Knowles, listed as working in the grain and wool business independent of the rest of the family, may also have been a son or brother to George Knowles Sr. The Knowles family lived for many years at 495 Cass Street (between Wells Street and Kilbourn Avenue, the 800 block). George Knowles Sr. and his wife did not live on Cambridge Avenue so the story passed down in the Groom family is not accurate on this point.

Son George Knowles Jr. married Mary Black in 1877 and had six children. Another child was living with the family later and was of unknown parentage. See the study report on the George Knowles, Jr. House, 1879 North Cambridge, for additional information.

Sophia Knowles married Lafayette Murdock (May 25, 1848 – August 29, 1892) at the First Baptist Church in Milwaukee on August 21, 1876. Sophia was born in Randolph, Wisconsin in 1852 during the period when her father was pursuing farming. Her husband Lafayette Murdock had a varied career. He was born in 1848 to Stephen and Catherine Murdock and the U. S. Census shows him at Waukesha (1850), Iowa (1860), and Platteville (1870). On the marriage certificate, his place of residency is listed as Detroit, Michigan and his occupation is insurance agent. He and Sophia settled in Milwaukee in 1878. It may have been to reunite Sophia with her family or it might have been due to Murdock's father Stephen. There were Murdocks involved in the spice business in Milwaukee. A Charles A. Murdock was one of the partners in Jewett & Sherman (later Jewett, Sherman & Co.) and Stephen is listed in their employ in 1880.

Lafayette Murdock may have had medical problems or had a condition that prevented him from long term employment. He went into business as a yeast manufacturer with Albert T. Clinton and Dewitt C. Clinton as Clinton Brothers & Murdock. They were located on today's South 4th Street. This enterprise lasted two years and Murdock went into the grocery business with Job Daniels as Murdock & Daniels on Mason Street. This partnership dissolved after one year and in 1881 and 1882 he formed a new partnership with James Knowles as Knowles & Murdock, grain dealers out of offices on Oregon Street. Beginning in 1883 city directories show Lafayette as working for his father-in-law George Knowles Sr. at the Chamber of Commerce Building. Some later years showed him without an occupation.

Lafayette and Sophia had a number of children. Eva was born in 1877 and died a year later. Four sons were born in the Cambridge Avenue house: Sidney (1879); Lindsay (1881); Gilbert Edward (1883) and Raymond (1885). Also living at the Cambridge Avenue house was relative Fred J. Murdock (1879-1882) and then father Stephen Murdock from 1881 through 1887.

Lafayette and Sophia decided to move west, possibly due to LaFayette's health, and the Cambridge Avenue house was sold to the Groom family in 1891. Lafayette Murdock died in Colorado on August 29, 1892 and was ultimately buried back in Milwaukee at Forest Home Cemetery. (Milwaukee Sentinel August 30, 1892 p.3 col.4 and August 31, 1892)

Sophia Knowles Murdock made her way to California and census records, passport information and news stories indicate that she settled in Los Angeles. She made the local news when the Milwaukee Sentinel reported on September 20, 1910 that she and her other siblings were among the heirs of a \$2, 255,000 estate left by a Knowles cousin in England. In 1913 Sophia traveled to England with her son Gilbert with whom she lived in Los Angeles. The following year there is passport information that indicates she traveled to Japan. She may even have traveled to Russia but the documents are not clear. Her house in California is still extant (4219

N. Figueroa Street) and is Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument # 778 (Declared June 29, 2004) In addition, it is a contributing building to the Highland Park Historic Preservation Overlay Zone. The house was designed by German native George Voelkel and features shaped gables. (Information accessed at <http://hihistorian4hire.com/murdock.html>)

Sophia's son Gilbert Murdock was known as a painter and poet. In 1913 he had offices at 515 Loan & Trust Building in Los Angeles and is listed in a Who's who directory as having studied art and letters in Paris, Florence and Munich. He was the author of various poems, a novel The Valley o' Dreams, the opera Antinous, and the play The Odalisque. (Who's who in the Pacific Northwest: A Compilation of authentic biographical sketches of citizens of Southern California and Arizona. Los Angeles: Times-Mirror Print. & Binding House, 1913, p. 272. accessed on line at <http://www.sfgenealogy.com>)

GROOM FAMILY OWNERSHIP / EMILY GROOM

Second owner John Groom (1848-1935) also was of English ancestry like Sophia Knowles Murdock. John's father Thomas emigrated to America from Birmingham, England in 1831 and eventually set up a successful stationers/office supply business in Boston that was in operation over 50 years. John's mother was Emily Lambert Parker (1807-1888). One of his sisters was named Emily as well (1838-1889). The American Grooms kept close ties to their English relatives and made frequent trips abroad. The English relatives likewise traveled to the states. (Emily Parker Groom 1875-1975, pages 4-7)

John Groom was well traveled and accompanied his father to England, to Paris and to other destinations in Europe. John was the baby of the family and was "a bit of a maverick." He loved sailing and horses and traveled a good deal in his younger years. (Emily Parker Groom 1875-1975, pages 9-10)

John Groom found himself in Wisconsin in 1868-1869 and acquired a 123-acre farm and began to build a home and barn on what is now Highway 151. The solid brick structure with stone foundation and Vermont granite was said to be modeled after the family's Massachusetts home. Photos of the mansard-roofed house and barn are extant. John and his neighbor laid out a half mile race-track and John was said to keep fast horses and fast company. John fell in love with his stonemason's daughter Anna Pirie, an excellent horse woman. John then left the area due to financial difficulties and had to sell his house. His adventures took him to Australia, to the Bradley Lumber Company where he worked in Wisconsin, to climbing in the Rockies, and working on the railroad. After becoming very ill, possibly with polio, he was left with a "useless arm and a lame leg." (Emily Parker Groom 1875-1975, p. 10-12)

In 1873 John returned to Sun Prairie and married Anna Pirie. Her practicality, thriftiness and good organizational skills were an important foil to John's impractical nature. The couple moved to Massachusetts and John showed little temperament for the family business or other steady occupation and he received financial help from his father. He is known to have taken care of the horses at the Gleason farm in Wayland, Massachusetts. At his father's death in 1888, John's inheritance was put into a trust for safekeeping. It is rumored that John took the Keely Cure, the 19th century equivalent to Alcoholics Anonymous. (Emily Parker Groom 1875-1975, p. 10-17)

John and Anna Groom had six children, four of whom were born in Massachusetts. Their daughter Emily Parker, named after John's mother and sister, was the eldest and born in 1875.

The Grooms moved to Milwaukee in 1880. It is not clear what prompted the move, especially since Milwaukee's German culture was greatly different from their New England surroundings, but Anna Pirie Groom had family in Wisconsin. Her sister Margaret Pirie Shockley lived in Boscobel, on the Wisconsin River and it is known that the Grooms visited there often.

The Grooms lived at various locations before settling down on Cambridge Avenue in 1891: 217 Wisconsin Avenue(1880); 529 Cass Street (1881); and 254 Farwell Avenue (1882-1890). John is occasionally shown with the occupation of "lumber" but city directories show him without an occupation most of the time. Grandchildren remember him as a semi-invalid who spent a lot of time on a chaise lounge in the study at the back of the house. The Groom family story that a hearbroken Mrs. Louise Knowles wanted to sell 1903 North Cambridge because her daughter moved to California is only partially true. Louise and George Knowles Sr. lived on Cass Street and not next door to their daughter. Their daughter Sophia and her family did indeed occupy 1903 North Cambridge Avenue and left Wisconsin. During their trek west, Lafayette Murdock died in 1892 in Colorado and was buried in Forest Home Cemetery. Sophia went on to a full life of travel and live in Los Angeles.

Interestingly, John Groom's name does not appear as the owner in the tax rolls for the Cambridge Avenue property, at least for a number of years. C. L. Hutchins is shown as the owner. Charles Lewis Hutchins (1838-1920) was a noted Episcopal minister in Massachusetts who edited The Parish Choir from 1874 until shortly before his death. Hutchins married John's sister Mary Groom. It seems likely that the Groom family back east was monitoring the estate of Thomas Groom who died in 1888. Knowing that John Groom did not have a good head for finances, the Cambridge Street house was put in Hutchins' name to ensure John's family would not lose the property. (Charles Lewis Hutchins 1838-1920. Biographical information accessed on line at www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/h/u/t/hutchins_cl.htm)

EMILY GROOM

Emily Groom was 18 when the family moved to Cambridge Avenue. This would be her home for 82 years. Emily was in some ways like her father, high spirited and rebellious and often reprimanded for her willfulness. Her early education included attending a pioneer kindergarten at Miss Ogden's School, Saturday morning art lessons at the home of Miss Alida Goodwin, a drawing teacher from South Division High School, and attending All Saints Cathedral Institute. The Institute was the place for families with Anglo-English heritage and different from the both the public schools and the German institutions. Emily subsequently enrolled at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1895 and studied there through graduation on June 16, 1899. Her instruction included art education as well as painting. She then spent a year at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School where Edmund Tarbell and Frank Benson were her instructors. It was during this period that Emily became attracted to watercolor, the medium with which she is most identified.

Emily's sister Mary attended Milwaukee Downer College and it is possible this connection led to a job as art instructor there for Emily in 1901. College president Ellen Sabin asked Emily to join the faculty and while there Emily set up the art department and began instructing teachers since art education was being introduced into the public schools. She remained there until 1917 with some time off in 1907-1908 to explore Europe and visit relatives in England. While in England she studied for some months with Frank Brangwyn who had once worked for William Morris. She returned home at the outbreak of World War I. She then left teaching to pursue painting full time. She did not resume teaching at Downer until 1935. Emily did, however, teach part time at the Layton School of Art from 1927 through 1943.

Emily came into the art world at a time when it was expanding the opportunities for single women to support themselves and provided the chance to have meaningful work that did not involve the drudgeries of industrial labor. Art was seen as a way to better one's life and develop an appreciation for things outside the everyday. Art was being taught in regular public schools and specialized art schools were opened. Art and art exhibitions were being critiqued by newspapers and an expanding number of periodicals like never before. Art was being made accessible to all. Artist colonies were being established in places like Woodstock, New York and California so that artists could congregate, learn from masters and each other and promote exhibitions. Designers were changing painting, sculpture, ceramics, textiles and even book

printing and many of the artists were women. Emily was the product of an upper middle class home but was no dilettante; she approached her work with professionalism and determination. Her interesting personality and “push and go” (as one person called it) led her to a life rich with many clients and fellow artists.

Emily Groom entered her first major exhibition in 1904 at the Tenth Annual Exhibition of the Art Students League of Chicago at the Chicago Art Institute. Between 1916 and 1920 alone she exhibited 18 times winning praise and the Art Institute Medal of Honor in 1920. Emily continued to show her paintings across the Midwest and east coast for the rest of her life garnering praise for her fresh approach to watercolor. She joined a number of art organizations: Chicago Gallery Association, Concord Art Society, Wisconsin Painters & Sculptors (a charter member), The Society of Western Artists, The New York Water Color Club, The Philadelphia Water Color Club, American Watercolor Society, National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, and Artists Equity. Emily was the co-founder of the Wisconsin Watercolor Society in 1952. The list of her co-exhibitors is impressive: Gaetano Busalacchi, Susan Cressy, William Schuchardt, Francesco Spicuzza, Raymond Stelzner, Dudley Crafts Watson, Richard Lorenz, Gustave Moeller, George Raab, Childe Hassam, and Winslow Homer.

The themes in Emily’s work reflected the people and places she encountered through her life. She sketched refugees during World War I, painted landscapes, buildings, maritime scenes, clouds, cityscapes of Milwaukee and flowers. She was known to prefer plein air painting and worked outside even during the winter months. She did not follow the successive trends in 20th century art so there are no abstract or non-representational works in her body of work.

The 1920s were a time of expanded exhibitions and experimentation for Emily and a time during which she garnered much recognition. She briefly had a studio in the Third Ward on Jefferson Street but worked a great deal from her cottage “Windover” in Genesee. This cottage was an Aladdin pre-fab to which an addition and indoor plumbing were added in 1922. Purchased with her devoted sister Mary the two spent time gardening, tending their orchard, canning their harvest and painting. Her neighbors included local architect Richard “Dick” Phillip who lived about a half mile from the Genesee cottage. They shared organic farming tips before the practice became popular. Emily was also friends with architect Will Schuchardt who designed the addition to her studio as well as actors Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne who summered nearby at Ten Chimneys. She gave Alfred some art lessons.

The Great Depression ushered in a period of shrinking pool of clients and diminishing numbers of exhibitions. The arts were considered frivolous in the face of joblessness and starving families. Emily Groom continued to paint and participated in the federal projects that sought to keep artists employed during these years. She also joined other Milwaukee artists in the Artists Union of Chicago to support major Midwest exhibits, create art programs in all public schools and encourage WPA involvement.

Emily’s finances were strained during this time. She derived some income from the family’s business in Boston (with which her brother was involved) but it was experiencing difficulties. Her beloved sister Mary was diagnosed with cancer in 1932. Her father John Groom passed away in 1935 at the age of 87. Her mother died in 1939. In 1935 Emily received a commission from her friend Richard Phillip to paint six tondels or rondels of lotus blossoms for the newly remodeled Lotus Room of the Plankinton Hotel. Phillip may have seen this as a way to help out his friend. The Plankinton Hotel (1913) which replaced the original, was demolished for the Grand Avenue Mall in the 1980s. Emily resumed teaching at Milwaukee Downer College at the age of 60 and her Tuesday morning Ladies Extension classes became an institution.

Despite the trying years, Emily Groom remained a professional artist and was able to support herself by the sale of her works or through teaching. She also had the produce from her one acre studio property and lived off what she could can and preserve. Housekeeper Bertha Eichmeier took care of the day-to-day both on Cambridge Avenue and at the studio. Emily

Groom was lucky enough to have well-to-do patrons who were also friends like Alice Chapman, who made her trips possible. Organizations like the Woman's Club also provided support. Emily socialized with many of her patrons, a far cry from the modest upbringing she had experienced.

The post war years saw a rebound of interest in the arts but much was made of newcomers who believed in abstract expressionism and non representational art. Emily was old school by then, and continued her landscapes and flower paintings, teaching and encouraging new generations. She even used her Cambridge Avenue house as a gallery so that emerging artists could establish a clientele.

Emily Groom continued to live at 1903 North Cambridge until her death in 1975. The house remained in its original condition with the exception of a box bay added to the south elevation sometime in the early 20th century. A garage was added as well in the 1920s.

The most detailed account of Emily's life is the report Emily Parker Groom Wisconsin Artist 1875-1975 prepared by the daughters of Samuel and Helen Groom: Helen Groom Johnston, Elizabeth Groom, and Mary Groom Poser, (no date). Much of the above information about Emily Groom was taken from this biography.

LATER OWNERS

After Emily Groom's death the house has changed hands a number of times. Anthony Killa, an interior designer had the house for several years and altered some of the interior doors. In 1978 Richard J. Raasch and James Cliff (manager of product development for Hal Leonard Publishing Company) acquired the property and remodeled the kitchen and added a wood deck in the rear. James Cliff also built the current garage to the north of the property in 1983. Architect Mark Pfaller II owned the house from 1984 to 1994. Barbara Nestingen purchased the house in April of 1994. She remodeled the powder room, bathroom, and kitchen and lightened up the house, adding chandeliers she purchased in the Washington D. C. area. She also combined two small bedrooms to create a master suite. She reported in an interview for GM Today Homes (no date) that the woodwork had already been painted by the time she acquired the house. She cleaned the exterior brick and put period appropriate cresting on the house and porch. Current occupant Barry Poltermann has owned the house since 2007. (Judy Wood, "A woman's home. "Old friend" hails from vintage era". GM Today. Accessed at <http://www.gmtoday.com/features/home/homestory100.asp> ; Lois Hagen, "Finally he found his dream home." Milwaukee Journal. Sunday July 13, 1980)

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Murdock / Groom house is significant both for its architecture and its history.

The Cambridge Avenue house is an excellent example of the Victorian Gothic style and retains excellent architectural integrity. The Victorian Gothic style was popular in Milwaukee mostly in the 1870s through very early 1880s when it was replaced in popularity by the fanciful Queen Anne. This neighborhood was developing when the Victorian Gothic style was most popular. Many have been lost through inappropriate remodeling or demolition. This house has all of its major features intact and informs our knowledge about the style and upper middle class housing from that period. The gable ornament, hooded windows, two over two windows, elaborate porch and original double doors are classic Italianate but when gothic detail is added to the gable and porch and roofline, it is often referred to as Victorian Gothic. The house's twin next door has undergone some alteration due to more changes in ownership over the years but is likewise in excellent condition. Research on the architect of the houses is ongoing. It is known that James Douglas designed so many houses in the area that it was nicknamed "Douglasville" and he may have been the architect here although Edward Townsend Mix also had clients in this area.

The house is also significant for its association with Wisconsin artist Emily Groom. Emily Groom was a notable painter, primarily known for her watercolors, and lived at this house for 82 years. Her achievements are lengthy and she was active until her death at the age of 100. She created the art department at Milwaukee Downer College and taught at the Layton School of Art. She exhibited nationally and was written up by numerous art critics who appreciated her spontaneity and handling of the water color medium. She exhibited in shows with the likes of Winslow Homer. She assisted Federal arts projects during the Great Depression. She used her house on Cambridge Avenue as a gallery to help upcoming artists find an audience. Her works are in many collections both private and public, the Milwaukee Art Museum for example. Although her studio was in Genesee her roots were at the Cambridge Avenue house where she took care of her parents until their deaths and where she entertained patrons and other artists.

VIII. THE ARCHITECT

The architect has not yet been identified for the Murdock / Groom House. Research is ongoing.

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IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Murdock / Groom House be given historic designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Site as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-3 and e-5 and e-9 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 320-21(3) of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

e-3 Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the city of Milwaukee

Rationale: The house at 1903 North Cambridge Avenue was the home of noted Wisconsin artist Emily Groom for over 80 years. She was an art educator, teaching at the Layton School of Arts and founding the art department at Milwaukee Downer College (now part of Lawrence University) and inspired generations of artists throughout the 20th century, Emily Groom painted and exhibited throughout the United States and received recognition in the form of prizes and favorable reviews. She was co-founder of the Wisconsin Watercolor Society in 1952 and belonged to numerous art associations. She socialized with patrons at her Cambridge Avenue home and also used the home as a gallery for emerging artists so that they could develop a clientele. Emily Groom's work is housed in many collections, both public and private, throughout the country.

e-5. Its embodiment of the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen.

Rationale: The Murdock / Groom House is an excellent example of the hybrid designs being produced in the 1870s that joined the form of the Italianate with its combination hip/gable roof, segmental arched windows and window hoods, with the pointed Gothic windows in the rear and side gable, and the Gothic detailing of the cresting, gable ornament and pierced and incised details on the chamfered porch posts. This form is often referred to as Victorian Gothic and examples in Milwaukee can only be found in 1870s and very early 1880s. The Murdock / Groom house retains its architectural integrity and stands out in a neighborhood that has seen a lot of demolitions and insensitive remodeling.

e-9 Its unique location as a singular physical characteristic which represents an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the city of Milwaukee

Rationale: The Murdock / Groom is a striking building in its Lower East Side neighborhood and attracts attention due to its architectural integrity. The fact that it has a twin next door adds to the mystique as to why these houses were constructed.

Preservation Guidelines for the Murdock / Groom House

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding the historic designation of the Murdock / Groom House at 1903 North Cambridge Avenue. The intent of the commission is to preserve the historic, existing exterior features of the building. The gabled garage was constructed in 1983 and is non-contributing to the historic character of the house. It replaced a smaller garage built in the 1920s.

Building maintenance and restoration must follow accepted preservation practices as outlined below. Any exterior changes including tuckpointing but exclusive of routine painting will require a certificate of appropriateness. Most certificates are issued on a staff-approved basis and only major new construction or alteration requests typically will go before the Historic Preservation commission. The Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions.

A. Roofs

Retain the roof shape. The installation of skylights where they would be visible from the street are not permitted as they would have a negative impact on the building. Skylights however may be added to roof slopes if they are not visible from the street or public right of way. No changes can be made to the roof shape which would alter the building height, the roofline or its pitch. Locate mechanical systems and vents on portions of the roof not visible at all from the public right of way and paint them out to minimize impact. If the building gets re-roofed, consultation with historic preservation staff is required to review and approve the new roofing material, flashing, and gutters. The minimum standard for re-roofing is a 3-tab asphalt shingle. Very light colors or very dark colors such as black are not permitted. Architectural shingles are permitted, but they must resemble wood shingles which were original to the house. Use of these materials is on a case-by-case basis as some of the products are not compatible with Victorian-era houses. Any new gutters should be of the half-round style as they function and look best on a house with crown moldings on the eaves. Should a satellite dish be installed it should be placed where it is not visible from the street, preferably at the rear, southwest corner of the house. The chimney at the south side of the roof should be retained although it appears to have been rebuilt at some time in the past. No rooftop construction or addition is allowed, as this would have a negative impact on the historic character and proportions of the building. The construction of other rooftop features requires review by Historic Preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick or stone must not be painted or covered. Painting masonry is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date. Covering masonry with other materials (wood, sheet metal, vinyl siding, etc.) is not allowed.
- b. Re-point defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, hardness, texture, joint finish and joint width. See the masonry chapters in the books, As Good As New or Good For Business for explanations on why the use of a proper mortar mix is crucial to making lasting repairs that will not contribute to new deterioration of the masonry. A house of the 1870s was built with lime mortar and that is only type of mortar that should be used for any

necessary patching or replacement work. Using much harder, contemporary Portland cement mortar will not make a lasting repair and can damage the historic brick and stone. Replaced mortar joints should be tooled to match the style of the original. Do not use mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before starting any re-pointing.

- c. The brick exterior has already been cleaned and brick appears to be in excellent condition. Further cleaning is not recommended at this time, however in the future should masonry cleaning be necessary it should be done only with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting or high pressure water blasting or the use of other abrasive materials (baking soda, nut shells, dry ice, etc.) on limestone, pressed brick or cream brick surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. The use of accepted chemical products to clean masonry is allowed and a test panel is required before general commencement of the work. Work should be done by experienced individuals as the chemical cleaning process can have a negative impact on the masonry. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before any cleaning would begin.
- d. Repair or replace deteriorated masonry with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. The use of EIFS (exterior insulation and finish systems) which is synthetic stucco is not permitted. Consultation with historic preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness is required before attempting work on the masonry
- e. The chimney, which was rebuilt at some point in the twentieth century could be rebuilt in a corbelled brick design in cream brick according to historic photographs.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Do not remove architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance. The front porch and box bay on the south elevation are important features to be retained. Historic photos show an open terrace to the left or south of the front porch that no longer exists. Reproducing this terrace is not mandatory and it is not known if this feature was original to the house, but it does appear on relatively early fire insurance maps. However, should the owner want to build a new terrace in the footprint of the original sometime in the future, historic preservation staff will assist in the design.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Covering wood or metal with aluminum or vinyl or other substitute material is not permitted. Spot replacement or spot repair of any deteriorated elements is encouraged rather than complete removal and replication. Structural wood epoxies are suggested for the lasting repair of damaged or decays areas of wood trim. Any new elements

must replicate the pattern, dimension, spacing and material of the originals.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore them to the original condition. Do not make additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Do not change the size or configuration of the original window panes or sash. Use storm windows or protective glazing which have glazing configurations similar to the prime windows and which obscure the prime windows as little as possible. The use of structural wood epoxies is strongly encouraged to repair any minor damage or decay to wood windows.
2. Most of the windows currently visible on the building appear to be original two-over-two sash. In the event any windows need to be replaced, they must match the original design and materials (wood) of the originals. New glass must match the size of the historic glass. Do not fill in or cover openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block or concrete block. Glass block is permitted in basement windows on the rear elevation where they are not visible from the street. Do not use modern style window units, such as horizontal sliding sash or casements, in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building.

Any original windows on the building must be retained and repaired if at all possible. Vinyl, vinyl clad, metal, and metal-clad or fiberglass prime window units are not permitted. Wood combination/storm screen units or fixed storm windows that fit the shape of the original opening are permitted. The house currently has two-over-two storms that match the prime windows. A few windows have been replaced and feature one-over-one sash. The front double-leaf doors with etched glass lights are original and are to be retained. Any replacement doors on other elevations must be appropriate to the historic period of the building and based on historic photographic evidence. Any changes to doors and windows, including installation of new doors and windows, require consultation with Historic Preservation staff and a Certificate of Appropriateness.

3. Steel bar security doors and window guards are generally not allowed where they are visible from the street. If permitted, the doors or grates must be of the simplest design and installed so as to be as unobtrusive as possible. A Certificate of Appropriateness is required for this type of installation.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the existing historic trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. A replacement feature must match the original member in terms of scale, design, color and appearance. Existing historic trim, located at the gable ends, front porch, box bay, corbels, must not be removed unless it is for the purpose of repair. Spot repair is preferable to wholesale replacement of details. Wood epoxy repair is often highly desirable for

permanently repairing smaller areas of decay or damage to wood trim. Consultation with Historic Preservation staff is required before any changes or repairs are made to the building.

E. Additions

No additions will be permitted on the front and side elevations as this would greatly alter the character of the building. Any rear addition requires the approval of the Commission. Ideally an addition should either compliment or have a neutral effect upon the historic character of the building. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of window proportion and placement, building height, roof configuration, scale, design, color, and materials. Additions must be smaller than the original building and not obscure the historic building.

F. Signs/Exterior Lighting

The installation of any permanent exterior sign or light fixture on the front of the building or its lawn shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign or light with the historic and architectural character of the building. Consultation with Historic Preservation staff is required to assist in the selection of exterior fixtures. Plastic internally illuminated box signs with a completely acrylic face are not permitted.

G. Site Features

New plant materials, paving, fencing, on the front elevation shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building. Should a new fence be built in the future examples of appropriate fencing can be found in As Good As New and Living With History. There is currently a rear deck. Any new deck installation requires a Certificate of Appropriateness. No retaining wall is permitted along the front of the property. Consultation with Historic Preservation staff is required before starting any work that would involve the landscape features, parking, walkways, or driveway. The existing garage was constructed in 1983 and was not designed to coordinate with the house. Future replacement would be acceptable, should the owner so choose, and the historic preservation staff would assist with the design/selection of the new structure. Victorian front yard landscaping was traditionally very simple and the raised limestone foundation was allowed to be seen rather than covered by shrubs. The front lawn may have once featured a raised flower mound and perhaps a specimen planting. That does not mean to limit today's landscaping to those parameters but they are desirable in terms of maintaining the historic character of this architecturally significant house.

H. Guidelines for New Construction

It is important that new construction be designed to be as sympathetic as possible with the character of the structure. Small-scale accessory structures, like a gazebo, garage or fountain, may be permitted depending on their size, scale and form and the property's ability to accommodate such a structure. Any request to construct a new garage would be subject to review for code compliance and appropriate design and would require a Certificate of Appropriateness.

1. Site work

New construction must respect the historic site and location of the building. It should be accomplished so as to maintain the appearance of the building

from the street as a freestanding structure. Any new construction would be located to the rear since the lot lines and character defining features of the house would prevent any construction at the side elevations.

2. Scale

Overall building height and bulk, the expression of major building divisions including foundation, body and roof, and individual building components, such as overhangs and fenestration that are in close proximity to a historic building must be compatible to and sympathetic with the design of the building. New construction is to be smaller in size and shorter in height than the historic building.

3. Form

The massing of the new construction must be compatible with the goal of maintaining the integrity of the building as a freestanding structure.

4. Materials

The building materials which are visible from the public right-of-way and in close proximity to the historic building should be compatible with the colors, textures, proportions, and combinations of cladding materials used on the historic building. The physical composition of the materials may be different from that of the historic materials, but the same appearance should be maintained and materials not available when the building was constructed should be avoided.

5. Should a new garage be constructed in place of the contemporary one on the site today, it should be a structure that is compatible with the Victorian Gothic style of the house. It can be an all wood frame structure and should generally appear as a carriage barn which would have been a typical companion structure for a house of t vintage and size. Taller sidewalls, usually 10 feet are required.

I. Guidelines for Demolition

Although demolition is not encouraged and is generally not permissible, there may be instances when demolition may be acceptable if approved by the Historic Preservation Commission. The following guidelines, with those found in subsection 9(h) of the ordinance, shall be taken into consideration by the Commission when reviewing demolition requests.

1. Condition

Demolition requests may be granted when it can be clearly demonstrated that the condition of a building or a portion thereof is such that it constitutes an immediate threat to health and safety and is beyond hope of repair. This would generally be in case of a major fire or a natural catastrophe.

2. Importance

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is of historical or architectural significance or displays a quality of material and craftsmanship that does not exist in other structures in the area. The

existing garage, for example would likely meet the guidelines for demolition. The house, on the other hand, is largely original on the exterior and is of prime architectural importance.

3. Location

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building or portion of it contributes to the neighborhood and the general street appearance and has a positive effect on other buildings in the area.

4. Potential for Restoration

Consideration will be given to whether or not the building is beyond economically feasible repair.

5. Additions

Consideration will be given to whether or not the proposed demolition is a later addition that is not in keeping with the original design of the structure or does not contribute to its character. On the Murdock/Groom house there is really no part of the house that would be a candidate for demolition based on this criterion.

Emily Parker Groom House
1903 N. Cambridge Avenue

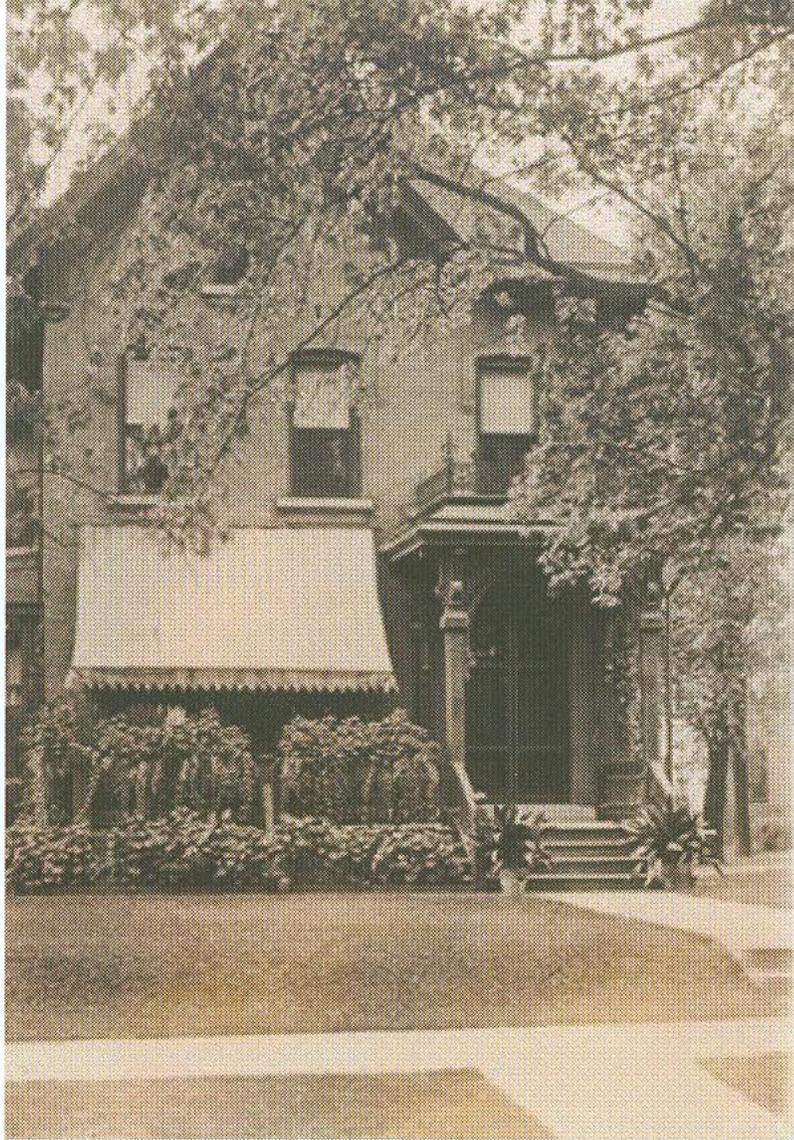


Proposed Historic Property

0 75 150 300 Feet



City of Milwaukee 11-13-12
144048.mxd, RTW



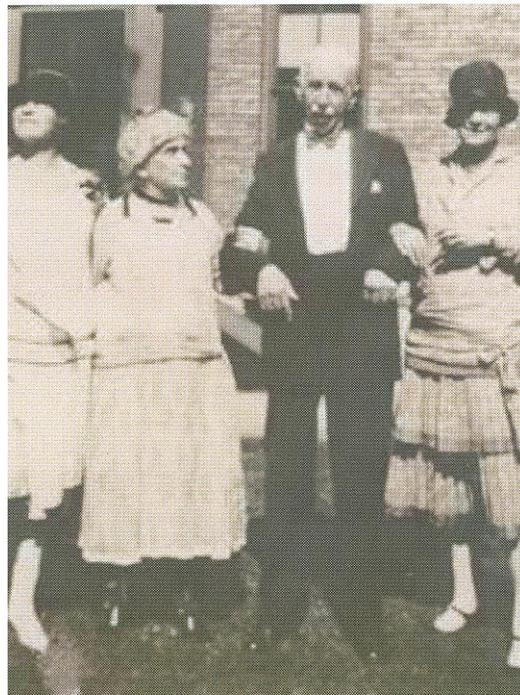
1903 NORTH CAMBRIDGE C. 1900



SOPHIA KNOWLES MURDOCK



EMILY GROOM AS YOUNG WOMAN



GROOM FAMILY ON CAMBRIDGE AVENUE



EMILY GROOM IN FRONT OF 1903 N. CAMBRIDGE

