13 Adams Street (circa 1874)

From Boston Landmark Commission's Charlestown Historic Resources Study 1981 (E. W. Gordon, Consultant)*:

13 Adams Street   2015

Number 13 Adams Street is a three story Mansard townhouse with a granite-faced basement. It has a side hall plan and a three bay, flat front, main façade constructed of brick with badly weathered brownstone trimmings. The building is enclosed by a steep, straight-sided mansard roof with slate shingles, mostly intact. The main façade and roof slope have a pair of pedimented dormers.

Later altered door and entrance enframements cover a once open and recessed entrance. A wood oriel projects from the center of the second floor, presently covered with aluminum siding. The windows have simple sills and lintels of brownstone and 2/2 wood sash.

Original owner: James Armstrong

Number 13 Adams' main façade, along with the sidewall of number 22 Chestnut Street, follows the sweeping curve of Adams Street. They are key components of the "wall" of flat front masonry mid-19th century townhouses lining Adams Street from Winthrop Street to Chestnut Street and represent a late addition to this wall of mostly circa 1850s townhouses. Architecturally, these houses represent solid if somewhat weathered examples of late 1860s/early 1870s Mansard style masonry housing built for an "upscale" clientele. Number 13 Adams evidently was built at the same time as 22 Chestnut and its flat front blends harmoniously with those of the ca.-1850s flat fronted neighbors.

These houses have significant historical associations with Commodore James Armstrong of the United States Navy. Armstrong, described by T T Sawyer as possessing an "official dignity", evidently owned 13 Adams and 22 Chestnut's lots for many years. (Armstrong apparently lived elsewhere on Adams

Street.) These houses were seemingly built after his death in circa late 1860s.

James Armstrong purchased these lots from Lot Marriam Jr of Charlestown, a "housewright" on December 28, 1838. Lot Marriam Jr had purchased these lots from Martha Lawrence, "widow" circa mid-1830s-the Lawrence/Marriam deed mentions that "a small dwelling house" stood on this land. The Lawrence property had been carved from "the mansion house estate" of Nathan Adams-the Lawrence/Marriam deed mentions "the lane or street leading to the mansion house"-this lane represents the nucleus of Chestnut Street.

In any event, the Mallory panoramic view of Charlestown and Boston clearly indicates that in 1848 the only houses standing on Adams Street across from the old training field were numbers 9-12 Adams Street. Number 13 Adams Street and 22 Chestnut Street's land is shown as vacant (not even showing the "small house" mentioned in the 1838 deed). The James Armstrong estate is listed among numbers 12 (?), 13 and 22 in 1875 [these houses do not appear in the 1868 Sanborn Insurance atlas but do appear on the 1875 Beers Atlas of Charlestown).

By 1885 an H W Bartleman owned 22 Chestnut Street while a Mary Crowninshield owned 13 Adams Street. By the 1890s Harriet W Bartleman was still the owner of 22 Chestnut while and Elizabeth Putnam owned 13 Adams.

Note: it was noted in the *Charlestown Enterprise* April 24, 1886 page 1 under "real estate," that "on Thursday, the Commodore Armstrong estate, 13 Adams Street, was sold for $6300 to James J Costello of Monument Square, who purchased the

property for investment. The price obtained is very low as the estate is assessed for $7300."

Bibliography:
Maps- 1818, 1852
Atlases-1868, 1874, 1892, 1901, 1911
T. T. Sawyer- *Old Charlestown* p. 469
Middlesex deeds- #13, 2-338:104, 377:478
Suffolk deeds- 1483:247

*Digitized and edited, without change in content, from the scanned record in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, with the addition of current photographs. In the case of houses that have been altered since the survey, these photographs may not entirely correspond to the architectural description. If earlier photographs of suitable quality are available, these have been included.

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