

9-12 Adams Street (circa 1828)

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



9, 10, 11, and 12 Adams Street

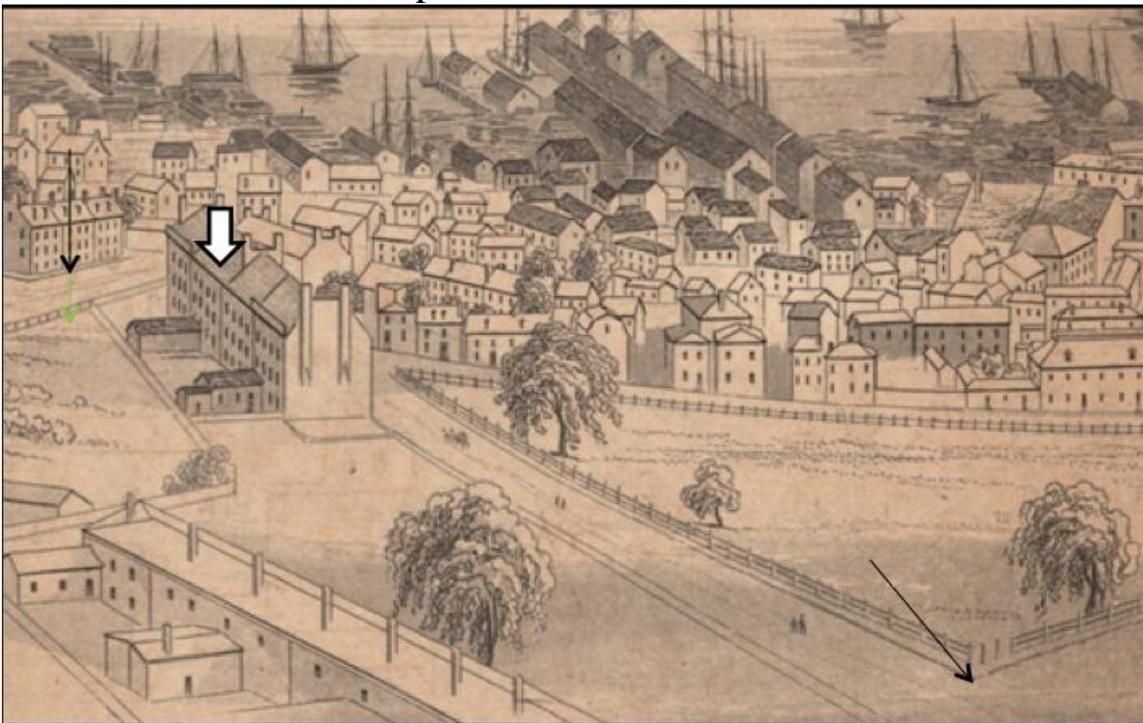
2015

Numbers 9-12 Adams Street is a group of four once identical row houses, built ca.1828. There have been extensive ca.1850s alterations to numbers 10 and 11; 9 and 12 are the most intact. Originally all four houses stood three stories tall and were enclosed by gable roofs. Presently numbers 10 and 11 are four stories tall and are enclosed by a flat roof. Their gables were removed in the 1850s(?). All four houses are characterized by a pleasing planarity, constructed of red brick with granite and brownstone trimmings, three-bay main façades, and granite-faced basements with basement doors partially below the grade of the street. All four houses culminate in shallow corbel tables, with numbers 10 and 11 exhibiting a deeper corbel middle segment, and 11 has a row of

dentils at its cornice. Number nine retains an original pair of pedimented dormers. Number 12 has a later double flat roof dormer.

They have side hall plans, and all entrances were originally open and recessed in the manner of number 12, with wood paneled entry walls. Numbers 9, 10 and 11 have later outer doors, enframements, and transoms. Eleven and 12 retain the original entrance lintel treatment, composed of a narrow brownstone band with wider rectangular midsection “tabs”. Number 10’s lintel has been modified into a simple rectangular form. Number 9 retains its tab but has acquired a cornice. Further research (map) is needed to confirm whether numbers 10 and 11 have been extensively rebuilt.

In general the windows have simple brownstone sills and lintels with 6/6 wood sash at number 10, and 1/1 Wood sash at numbers 9, 11 and 12. Numbers 10 and 11’s windows at the second and third levels do not line up those of number nine and 12.



Adams Street between Chestnut (lt. arrow) and Winthrop (rt. arrow) Streets. The block arrow at numbers 9-12.

The 1848 R.P. Mallory Panoramic View from Bunker Hill Monument shows this group with a gable roof with linked chimneys. Long, one story wings project from the rear walls of numbers 9 and 12—all four buildings are shown as being three stories tall. Numbers 9 and 12 provide evidence of this group's original Greek Revival appearance. Numbers 10 and 11 have acquired a more Italianate sensibility via the added height of a fourth floor, deeper cornice table and flat roofs.

Builder: Samuel Corlifs(?), Corleys(?), “brick layer” and /or Jehiel Smith, “housewright”

Original owners:

#’s 9,10 (?), #11 Samuel C. Hunt (?), #12 Jehiel Smith (?)

Built circa 1828 (with extensive circa 1850s alteration to numbers 10, 11), 9-12 Adams Street evidentially represents the earliest substantial (more than two stories tall) group of masonry town houses in Charlestown. These houses predate the better-known mid-1830s masonry row at 7-23 Harvard Street, Dexter Row, and the Union Block at 112- 116 Main Street, by almost 10 years.

Until the early 1850s these houses were surrounded by open pasture land, striking a distinctively urban note in a semi rural setting. They are easy to overlook as a group because of alterations to form (addition of flat roofed fourth floors to numbers 10, 11) and the realities of context. They are integral components within the “wall” of flat fronted masonry townhouses, which sweeps, without interruption along Adams Street from Winthrop Street to Chestnut Street. Along with the other houses of this "wall," Numbers 9-12 provides a handsome backdrop for the Training Field/Winthrop Square.

The deed chronologies of numbers 11 and 12 suggest a construction date of circa 1828 for this group. This group's land

was part of a six-lot tract known as "the Poor House lots". (See Middlesex plan book 1; Middlesex deed book 276/End-surveyed by B. Badger-1828-June.) It is not clear as to whether Charlestown's Alms House ever stood on these lots-local histories suggest it was located at the corner of Adams and Winthrop Streets.

Middlesex deeds indicate that this group was built by Samuel Corlifs (?), or Corleys (?), a "bricklayer" and/or Jehiel Smith, a "housewright". Neither Corlifs nor Smith is listed in 1830s/40s Charlestown directories. Corlifs and Smith may have been the original owners of this group. Jehiel Smith purchased the entire six-lot tract on October 19, 1827 from a William Sawyer of Charlestown, a merchant. Smith paid Sawyer \$3105 for the entire tract. Number 12 Adams St. was owned by Smith's widow Sarah until 1835. Corlifs sold number 11 Adams to Samuel C Hunt, a trader, on 3 June 1829. Corlifs is listed as a "bricklayer". Hunt owned number 11 until circa 1835.

Further research is needed to determine number 9 and 10's original or at least 1830s owners. For many years number 10 Adams was owned by Penniah F. Howland, possibly the wife of Zenas Holland, distiller and major mid-19th century Charlestown real estate owner in the vicinity of Navy yard). Penniah F Howland owned number 10 until circa 1895. During the early 1900s, number 10 was owned by Jacob Foss' heirs.

For many years number 9 Adams Street was owned by James Hunnewell and James F Hunnewell (merchant and merchant/historian, respectively, of Green street). Number 9 was owned by the Hunnewell family until circa 1915. By 1922 an Elizabeth M McIntyre owned number 9.

Number 11 Adams street's post-Samuel C Hunt owners included a Samuel Payson (mid-1830s), Nathan A. Prentice, "gentlemen",

later of Andover Massachusetts-1840s, James G. Foster of Charlestown, "gentlemen"-1850s/early 60s, and James Hunnewell/J.F. Hunnewell, 1864-8 1895. By 1911 a Bernard Givens owned number 11.

Number 12 Adams post-Smith owners included Benjamin R. Knox of Lowell, Massachusetts 1835-36, Robert Knox, "U.S. Navy" 1836-circa 1870, Knox's estate-1870s, A and E Knox-circa 1880s, with Knox family ownership ending with M E Knox circa 1895. During the early 1900s Bridget E Tansey lived here.

Adams Street was "the old way from the training field to the "dam pasture"-it was part of a colonial period highway which linked the Training Field and the vicinity of Bunker Hill Street via Adams Street, High Street, and Elm Street. Adams Street is said to have been named for the Quincy Massachusetts family of presidents but it may also have been named for Nathan Adams, whose mansion house stood near Adams Street, on a lane which later became Chestnut Street.

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1852

Panoramic view of Charlestown, (R. Mallory -1848)

Atlases- 1868, 1875, 1885, 1892, 1901, 1911

Charlestown/Boston Directories- 19th c.

Middlesex Deeds- #9- 1101:87.

#10-?

#11-294:12, 363:459, 511:104,891:171,901:182

#12- 278:469,317:10,339:119, 357:307

Charlestown Ledger August 30, 1919, p.3, "Deserved Honor Given the Name"

*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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