

16 Common Street (circa 1805)/, 19 Putnam Street (ca. 1795)

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



16 Common Street

ca. 1985

Number 16 Common street is a Federal house with a two-story, six bay main block, a one story, three bay by one bay ell on its east side, and a two-story rear ell. The main block and ells are clapboard-clad and edges are defined by narrow corner boards. The main block's narrow northeast wall is constructed of brick. The main façade, which has Federal proportions, faces the old training field. It has a hip roof with a distinctive dentilated cornice. The side ell is enclosed by a gable roof.

The front door is of batten type, with simple Doric pilasters and cornice-headed entablature. In general the windows are fully enframed and have 12/12 wood sash.



16 Common Street

2015



16 Common Street cornice detail



19 Putnam St.

ca 1985



19 Putnam St.

2015

Number 19 Putnam Street is a five bay by two bay wood frame clapboard clad building, with edges defined by narrow base and corner boards. The entrance enframingent is much altered and is at the center of the main (Putnam Street) façade. The windows are simply enframed and contain 1/1 replacement sash covered by aluminum storm windows. This house may have originally included the three bays to the right of the present entrance to 16 Common Street. Number 19 Putnam faces the narrow brick end wall of the Federal 14 Common Street as well as the winding path of Putnam Street.

Numbers 19 and 16, together with 14 Common Street, form a vignette of late 18th/early 19th century Charlestown, and constitute one of Charlestown's most memorable late 18th/early 19th century streetscapes. These houses with their distinctly late Georgian/Federal form elements etc. provide the old Training Field with a charming village-scale backdrop.

Architecturally, 19 Putnam/16 Common suggest a two-stage development- my (E W G) guess is that number 19 (built first, circa 1795 according to Middlesex deeds) originally included the three bays to the right of number 16's main entrance- the original, and street entrance, to number 19 being located at what is now number 16's first bay, nearest 19. This first bay is currently devoid of either door or window openings. This would have given number 19 more of a traditional late Georgian five bay by five bay form. The entrance bay of number 16, together with the two bays to the left of its entrance, were erected circa 1805. This "addition" clearly possesses Federal proportions, with a fairly narrow brick end wall. In fact the 1848 Mallory Panoramic view of Charlestown/Boston clearly shows the building's Common Street façade as more clearly unified than it is today, with symmetrical fenestration. Here, doors appear at number 16's present "first bay" as well as its present fourth bay. An interior inspection of number 19 Putnam and 16 Common would undoubtedly shed light on the matter of the "missing" door on the Common Street façade of 16/19. The Mallory view also indicates that 16's side ell was extant by 1848.

The story of 19 Putnam Street begins with Aaron Putnam's sale of number 19 Putnam, and part of 16 Common's house lot on December 18, 1794 to Daniel Carter, "carpenter" (Putnam is described as "Esq."). The Putnam/Carter deed refers to the lot as "house lot" -no buildings are mentioned in the deed. The property's Mechanics Row (Elwood Street) boundary was 20 feet. Putnam Street is mentioned as a 60 feet boundary, but evidently not yet laid out. The Training Field boundary measured 40 feet. John Carter Jr sold 19 Putnam to Thomas Robbins of Charlestown, an "inn holder" on March 13, 1804. At that time John Carter Jr was living in Malden Massachusetts. The Training Field boundary is listed as 14 1/2 feet!

Evidently Thomas Robbins was responsible for establishing the Salem Turnpike hotel at the Common/Putnam Street corner. This hotel provided lodgings for travelers using the Salem Turnpike. Extending to Charlestown by 1802, the Salem Turnpike linked the Boston area with Salem and other North shore communities. In Charlestown, the Salem Turnpike followed the path of Chelsea and Henley Streets, terminating at City Square. It would have been a simple matter for the Turnpike travelers to veer off to the right from the Salem Turnpike to Adams Street and continue on to the Salem Turnpike Hotel at Common/Putnam streets. The construction of 16 Common Street in 1804 (evidently meaning the segment which included the first three bays beyond the brick end wall of what is now 16 Common) suggests that the hotel was a success and needed to expand in order to accommodate more guests. Further research is needed to flesh out the story of the Salem Turnpike Hotel. Charlestown histories do not indicate the time frame of 19 Putnam /16 Common's use as a hotel. Charlestown directories were not published until the early 1830s-by that time numbers 19 and 16 had ceased being used for lodging).

Further deed work at Middlesex Registry is needed to determine 19 Putnam's ownership from 1804-1852. It would appear that a James De Blois was 19's owner for most of that period. By 1852 he was living in Woburn. In that year he sold 19 to James A Sutton for \$2000. James A Sutton is variously listed in mid-19th century Charlestown directories as a

"pump and block maker" in 1845, then living at 3 Mechanic (now Elwood) Street, "block maker, navy yard" 1854, "house 19 Putnam Street, and "cabinetmaker," 1870.

During the 1880s and 1890s William H Long owned 19 Putnam (see form on 261-271 Main Street for information on Long). During the early 20th century this house's owners included A.M. and G.M. Long (1901) and a Charles Sweeney (1911).

Regarding 16 Common Street's deed chronology, on March 19, 1805, Hubbard Carr of Charlestown, a "Morocco leather dresser" sold 16's lot to Josiah Gurney of Charlestown, a "shipwright," for \$600-the lot was bounded 24 feet northwesterly by the Training Field and southeast by 24 feet on Mechanics Row (Elwood Street). Number 16 Common Street may represent the work of Josiah Gurney; he may have transferred his ship carpentry skills to dry land to build 16 Common. Middlesex deeds do not indicate that Thomas Robbins, the "inn holder" and owner of 19 Putnam was ever the owner of 16 Common, although the possibility remains that Robbins and Gurney were co-owners of the hotel. In any event, David S Ingersoll, a merchant, owned 16 Common circa 1806-1808. He sold 16 to Matthew Rice of Charlestown, a "mariner" on November 8, 1808 for \$1075.

For many years Matthew Rice was the foreman of the joiners department at the Charlestown Navy Yard-it was Rice who repaired the USS Constitution before it occupied "the new drydock". Matthew Rice was born in Boston's North End on January 14, 1802. He came to Charlestown in 1808 and attended public school in the old schoolhouse on Town Hill-he later attended Mr. Brown's Academy on Cordis Street. In 1817 he was apprenticed to Caleb Pierce, who was a master joiner at the Navy Yard. He was soon appointed foreman under Mr. Pierce in that department and had charge of framing and finishing some of the largest buildings at the station, including the rope walk, two "ship houses", three timber sheds, dwelling houses and other buildings. He was also engaged in finishing off a large number of vessels built and repaired at the yard, including the USS

Constitution. In April 1836 Rice was appointed inspector of timber, serving the government in that capacity for 18 years. T T Sawyer, late 19th century early 20 century Charlestown historian held Rice in very high regard, noting that "Mr. Rice was an abler, stronger man than is generally known, and the community in which he lived it did not always in times past appreciate fully the value of his services. He was a modest man, whose aim was higher than popular applause. What was before him was accuracy, completeness, thoroughness in whatever he had to do, and his thought and perseverance was ever equal to success". Rice moved to number 38 Bartlett Street in 1875, retaining ownership of 16 Common Street. Rice's heirs owned 16 Common until the early 1890s. Number 16 Common's early 20th century owner was Charles Logue.

Bibliography:

Maps- 1818, 1852

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

R Mallory –Panoramic View, 1868

Middlesex deeds- #19- 118:201, 128:34, 157:39, 591:149, Suffolk-1426:172

#16- 161:279, 190:105, 179:424, Suffolk- 1426:272

TT Sawyer- *Old Charlestown* pp. 139-40

Charlestown Directories- 1834-74

*Digitized and edited, without change in content, from the scanned record in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, and with 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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