

1, 2 Laurel Street (circa 1852-1853)

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



1, 2 Laurel Street

2015

Numbers 1 and 2 Laurel Street is an elegant three-story double Italianate bow front townhouse. Constructed of red brick with brownstone trimmings, it has a granite-faced basement, and a deep-bracketed cast-iron cornice and a flat roof. Each half possesses a two bay bow front and a flat entrance bay, with a side hall plan. The side walls have three bays.

Paired entrances have front doors flanked by wooden Doric pilasters, surmounted by a single pane transom. The front door of number 2 is Victorian and multipaneled with two long arched glass panes. Number 1's front door is a ca. turn of the century replacement with a long oval glass pane at the center. Outer entrance enframements consist of brownstone Doric pilasters and entablature. Above the entrances are heavy bracketed brownstone hoods.

Opening on to the tops of the door hoods are tall arched double windows with heavy cornice-headed brownstone enframements. Tall windows of the second floor bows are cornice-headed and open onto cast iron balconies, which were originally just ornate ornamental cast iron banding with no floor. In general the windows feature simple brownstone sills and lintels, and 4/4 wood sash.

Builder: Peter Hubbell, "brick manufacturer"

Original owner: # one (?), # two John B M Fifield (?)

Architecturally, 1 and 2 Laurel St. rank among the more elegant examples of mid-19th century masonry Charlestown row housing. Implicit in this house's design and scale is the message that people of taste and considerable means reside behind the gracefully curved bow front façade. Much of this double house's charm depends on its smooth red brick

surfaces, well executed, if weathered, brownstone enframements, tall second-floor windows, ornate ornamental cast iron railings and deep-bracketed cast iron cornice. Together with 18-22 Cedar, facing Laurel Street, 1 and 2 Laurel form an attractive, intimate enclave of red brick bow front Italianate row houses.

Historically, 1, 2 Laurel's land was part of the Bunker Hill Monument Association's 115-lot tract, developed beginning in 1839. Their lots appear as lots six and seven on the plan of the Bunker Hill Monument Association's land. Lots within this 115-lot tract were auctioned off beginning in 1839 with initial residential development occurring along Lexington, Monument and Concord streets. The houses adjacent to these streets were of a modest scale and were constructed of wood. Numbers 1 and 2 Laurel's beginnings are more closely linked to those of the substantial masonry mansion scale houses of Monument Square. House construction along Monument Square began in 1847 and the monument itself was completed in 1842.

Middlesex deeds suggest that brick manufacturer Peter Hubbell may have supplied the bricks for 1, 2 Laurel's construction. John B M Fifield, a furniture dealer, seems to have taken out a mortgage with Hubbell on this property in July 1853. Further research is needed to determine the owners of the property before Fifield. The deed work for both 1 and 2 Laurel during the 1850s is very murky. The 1852 McIntyre map, however clearly indicates that 1 and 2 Laurel were not extant at that time.

During the 1860s and 70s number 2 was owned by Nicholas G Childs, a chemist. He evidently owned but never occupied this property, living instead nearby at 3 Cedar Street. Child's heirs

owned number 2 until circa 1905. By 1911 a Michael W Collins owned this property.

Number 1's deed chronology indicates the John B M Fifield may have also owned number 1 during the 1850s. During the early 1860s it seems to have been owned by the Blackstone Bank and Christopher Rynes. On June 23, 1863 Rynes sold it to Francis P Hale, a solicitor of patents, 30 Kilby St., Boston. The Rynes/Hale deed mentions that Hale had the right to "maintain the eave and cornice and other projections and to swing the blinds over the land adjoining the southeasterly side of said granted premises" Later owners included Annie Haley (?) Hale (?) in the 1880s to the early 1900s and M F Sullivan, in 1911.

Bibliography:

Maps 1818, 1852

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

Charlestown/Boston directories

Middlesex deeds-#1-771:415, 881:638; #2-611:379, 375; 821:404; 881:643

*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.

R. Dinsmore