

## 14-20 Chestnut Street (circa late 1840s-early 1860s)

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



14-18, and 20 Chestnut Street 2015

Numbers 14-18 Chestnut Street are identical flat front, two-story Greek Revival row houses with side hall plans and three bay main façades. They have low granite-faced basements and deeply recessed entrances. The entrances have simple, wide brownstone lintels and the windows have simple brownstone sills and lintels. The houses have gable roofs with shallow corbel tables, and pairs of pedimented dormers.

Number 20 is a three-story flat front townhouse constructed of red brick with granite-faced basement and the simple brownstone sills and lintels. It has a deeply recessed entrance. There is a dentilated cornice and a flat roof.

Original owner: Caleb Pierce heirs?, Ira Foster?

The mid-19th century brick row houses of Chestnut Street, between Adams Street and Lowney Way provide an introduction to a remarkably intact Training Field/Winthrop Square and upper Chestnut and Mount Vernon Street district. To the south east of these rows is a bleak area of vacant lots and an elevated highway.

Together with the row houses across the street at 15-21 Chestnut, 14-20 Chestnut Street forms a discrete enclave of red brick granite/brownstone trimmed residences with Greek Revival stylistic elements. These groups are bounded by the bleak area of vacant lots and elevated highway ramps to the south and the essentially intact mid-19th century Winthrop Square, Chestnut, and Mount Vernon Street district to the north/northeast.

Architecturally, 14-20 Chestnut are solid, straightforward, extremely plain examples of mid-19th century masonry Greek Revival middle/upper-middle class housing.

The date of construction for the trio of houses at 14, 16, and 18 Chestnut, and 20 Chestnut, is difficult to pinpoint via deeds. Further research is needed to untangle the complicated web of probate records and the relation to the Caleb Pierce and Ira Foster Estates (circa 1840s-1860). Neither the elaborate panoramic view of Charlestown/Boston, of 1848, nor the not always accurate McIntyre map of 1852 presents a clear picture of buildings on these lots. The 1852 McIntyre map does show that Mechanics Row, now Elwood Street, originally ran from Putnam Street to intersect with Chestnut Street. Mechanics Row/Elwood Street is now a cul-de-sac, and evidently number 20 covers the portion of Mechanics (now Elwood) Street which intersected with Chestnut Street. Middlesex deeds for these properties "dead end" at points during the early-1860s-with possibilities for further progression backwards in time depending on the unraveling of individual ownership within large estates.

Richard T Southard, a "builder", purchased 14 Chestnut from Catherine E Stoddard of Stoughton Massachusetts on August 11, 1864. Buildings are mentioned in the Southard/Stoddard deed.

Thomas Cunningham purchased 16 from the first Universalist Society on September 23, 1864 for \$4000. This lot was part of the Caleb Pierce estate (see Middlesex probate court records, October 9, 1860). Cunningham was a "boilermaker".

Further research is needed on number 18. Number 20 was sold by Ira Foster, etc., of Dorchester Massachusetts on July 31, 1866 for \$5000 to Isaac Baker, Charlestown, West India goods dealer.

By 1885 this group's owners included K T Stoddard-14, heirs of T Cunningham-16, Mary Murphy-18, and George B Thomas-20.

Lower Chestnut Street, between Adams and Lowney Way, has a development history that is separate from that of upper Chestnut Street. Upper Chestnut Street had been part of the Nathan Adams (later George Adams Kettel) estate. Upper Chestnut Street started out as a lane leading northward, up Breeds Hill to the George Adams Kettel house, once opposite 50 Chestnut Street. Kettel subdivided his estate into house lots as early as 1840.

Lower Chestnut Street, on the other hand, existed as a street as early as 1818 (see Tufts map). At that time it was called Shippey Street. During the 1830s and early 1840s it was called Townsend Street in honor of Samuel Townsend whose wooden house stood at the corner of Adams and Townsend, now Chestnut, Street. Until the late 1840s, the Townsend house was the only house in lower Chestnut Street. This house was surrounded by horse chestnut trees, hence the name Chestnut Street. All the rest of Townsend's land was "fenced and used as a garden".

#### Bibliography:

Maps- 1818, 1852

Atlases-1868, 1875, 1885

Panoramic View from Bunker Hill Monument- R M Mallory, 1848

Middlesex Deeds-#14- 911:97, #16-911:251, #18- ?, #20-971:332

*Old Charlestown*, T T Sawyer, pp 171-176

\*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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