

14 Common Street (1806)

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



14 Common

2015

Number 14 Common Street, the “Arnold Mansion” is a substantial, stylish early 1800s Federal wood frame house with a three-story, five bay by one bay main block, a rectangular rear ell and two, two-story side ells. The1868 Sanborn Atlas does not show the main block’s rectangular rear ell, indicating that it dates from circa 1868-75. The walls at the Putnam Street side of the main block and at the southwest wall of the first side ell (with a gable roof) are composed of brick. The main block’s edges are crisply defined by baseboards, corner Doric pilasters, and fascia boards- all of narrow proportions. All components are clad with cupboards. The main block is enclosed by a low hip roof with chimneys at the narrow end walls.

A center entrance opens onto a well-worn granite step with two foot scrapers of cast iron. A multipanelled front door is flanked by slender Doric pilasters, solid sidelights and it taller Doric pilasters. Over the front door is a semicircular fan light with well-crafted enframements. The entrance is surmounted by a deep door hood (original) with well milled "shoulders" with curious cast-iron floral brackets (20th century?), and a cornice headed roof.

The windows are fully enframed with 6/6 sash. There are small square windows at the third floor.



14 Common St. entry

Original owner: John Tapley

Architecturally, 14 Common is significant as a substantial relatively stylish (vis-à-vis entrance enframements, corner Doric pilasters, and above all proportions of the main block) example of early 19th century (ca. 1806) Charlestown Federal frame vernacular housing.

This house has significant historical associations with John Tapley, its original owner. He was a master workman or contractor at the Charlestown Navy Yard (specializing in ironwork. John Tapley was responsible for repairs on the Constitution (old Ironsides) at some point during the war of 1812-15. From 1835 until at least the early 1920s, members of the William Arnold/Caleb H S Arnold families owned 14 Common Street. William Arnold was a shoemaker and Caleb H S Arnold was a "trader" who owned a "finding store".

Number 14 Common Street was probably built shortly after John Tapley paid Benjamin Teel of Boston, a baker, \$70 for this house lot. According to T T Sawyer, John Tapley "was a blacksmith by trade and it has always been understood that the shoeing of a yoke of oxen by him was the first day's work done in the Charlestown Navy Yard after its purchase by the US government. Later on he had much to do with the ironwork in the Navy yard as master workmen or contractor... Tapley's wharf, which was a part of the old Mardlin shipyard, as well as several of the wharves in the vicinity, was occupied for some years principally for the repair of vessels, building of boats and so forth, and his part in it was to look after the ironwork. A portion of Tapley's wharf was used as a landing place for small vessels bringing wood, lumber, hay, lime and bricks from the state of Maine. In addition, Sawyer described Tapley's house at 14 Common as being "among the few that still retain the appearance of the former time". By the late 1820s Mr. Tapley had moved from Charlestown to "a small farm on the Milk Row Road, outside the neck, which had formally been a part of the large farm of Samuel Tufts, Mrs. Tapley's father, and it was on this small farm that the pack of hounds used by the fox hunters... were kept for some years." According to Sawyer, Tapley and his sons were avid fox hunters and sportsmen, stating that "they were especially well posted as to the

habits and movements of birds... They also knew how much fire was needed to get the best flavor from these birds, and a meal from their table after a successful shooting was toothsome and relishing".

From 1827 to 1835, Ruben Hunt of Charlestown, a morocco dealer, owned 14 Common. He sold it to William Arnold, a shoemaker, for \$3500. By June 1849, Caleb H S Arnold of Charlestown, a trader, owned this house. He is listed in the 1848 Charlestown directory as owning (?) A "finding store" and living at 11 Lawrence Street. Arnold's heirs owned 14 Common until at least the early 1920s.

The area bordering the Training Field's southeastern edge was developed as a residential quarter between circa 1795-1810-the area's development was triggered in part by the construction of the Charlestown Navy Yard and the completion of the Salem Turnpike to City Square in 1802. In June 1775 Charlestown was burned to the ground by the British forces-the late 18th/early 19th century houses bordering Common, Mechanics Row (Elwood Street), Putnam Street, etc. provide evidence of Charlestown's post revolutionary war recovery-a recovery that was not fully realized for 20 or 30 years after the revolution.

Number 14 Common Street is situated at the corner of Common and Park Streets. Park Street's extension from Warren Street to Common Street was not set out until 1868. During the early 19th century Common Street, then, as now, turned northwestward just beyond 14 Common Street, extending to Winthrop Street (then called Training Field Street). The Training Field dates at least from 1640 and over time and has served as a community grazing area, militia drill grounds, battlefield (June 17, 1775), platform for political rallies, playground, and ornamental park. (See form on Training Field/Winthrop Square).

Bibliography:

Maps--1888, 1852

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

"Panoramic View from the Bunker Hill Monument"-by R Mallory,
1848

Charlestown directories-1834-1874

TT Sawyer-*Old Charlestown*-pp. 378-379

Middlesex deeds-169: 40, 299:264, 399:216, 541:275

"*Charlestown enterprise*" April 27, 1895, page 1-"John Tapley"

*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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