

16 Cordis Street (1804)

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



16 Cordis

1968

Number 16 Cordis Street is a Federal wood frame house with a five bay by two bay main block and an extensive L-shaped ell to the rear. The main block stands with its narrow two bay end wall facing Cordis Street, and the main façade faces southwest.

Originally clad with clapboards, it is now sheathed with clapboard scale aluminum siding. The building rests on a granite block foundation. Its edges are accented by narrow base and corner boards. To the rear is a long L-shaped ell. Wolcott Cutler said of this ell that "this ancient appearing ell set well back from Cordis Street on the end of house number 16, is so low studded that one can almost reach from the ground to close the blinds on the second story."

It has a center entrance, with enframements evidently altered, consisting of pilasters, multi-pane sidelights, (entablature? fan light? missing). The wooden window frames are intact with raised sills and raised outer moldings, and 6/6 sash. The third floor has typical Federal small square windows.



16 Cordis

5/15



16 Cordis rear ell

2016

Architecturally, 16 Cordis is significant as a good, straightforward example of boxy, narrow, end wall to street, center hall plan Federal housing. Although altered in terms of sheathing (and with some elements missing, including the entrance enframements), this house retains its original granite block basement, distinctive form, orientation to the street, and an unusually extensive rear ell, which might possibly predate this house (although deeds do not indicate structures on this site prior to 1804).

This house has significant historical associations with Charles Forster (or, variously, Foster), whose large furniture business "attracted wholesale orders from all parts of the country and supplied the "best room in almost every house in Charlestown". On July 13, 1804 Zabdiel B. Adams of

Charlestown, Esq. sold 16's lot to Amos Carlton, Charlestown, a housewright. By 1816 Amos Carlton had moved to Chelmsford, and on September 17, 1816 Carlton sold 16 Cordis to Gilbert Tufts of Charlestown, a "wharfinger". Tufts sold the house to Charles Forster for \$4100.00. It remained under Forster family ownership until as late as 1867.



On August 17, 1867 Ann R. Sanborn, wife of Daniel A. Sanborn of Brooklyn, New York, bought 16 Cordis for \$6000. Two years later the Sanborns sold 16 to Charles F. Byam on June 4, 1869, for \$7000. From 1869 until circa 1890, 16 Cordis was the property of Charles F Byam, who was the son of "match King" Ezekiel G Byam, and leading late 19th century Charlestown shoe dealer.

Born in South Chelmsford, Massachusetts in 1834, Charles F Byam worked for a short time in his father's friction match making business before branching out on his own to work as a retail shoe dealer. The success of this shoe business allowed him to buy up a number of Charlestown properties including his home of many years, 37 High Street (see form 29 - 41 High Street).

By 1892, 16 Cordis was owned as an investment property by another prominent late Charlestown figure-Alfred V Lincoln. Born in Andover, Massachusetts in 1852, Alfred V. Lincoln excelled as a dry goods dealer/salesman and real estate speculator. It was noted in the 1893 special edition of the *Charlestown Enterprise*, that "besides working for his firm Mr. Lincoln has dealt very considerably in real estate in Charlestown and is one of the district's largest taxpayers". He also purchased the Adams estate on Cordis Street (Hyde House, 32 Cordis Street)-"moving himself into the old house and erecting two large apartment houses on the vacant lot. He next purchased the Thompson estate at 26 Monument Square. Afterwards he obtained the Richard Frothingham property at 9 Monument Square, altered the building, and built "The Lincoln" beside it. It was noted in the *Charlestown Enterprise* that "he also bought the old Foster estate and 16 Cordis Street and built a three- flat house after refitting the old one. Then he purchased the Thompson property on the corner of Warren and Cordis Streets where he is now (1893) building six beautiful, substantial apartment houses. He also owns the apartment house at 12 and 14 Summer Street". Alfred V Lincoln was also involved in the refitting and alterations involved in the reopening of the Edward Lawrence house, at 44 High Street, as the Bunker Hill Council headquarters in 1907. Mr. Lincoln owned 16 Cordis until at least the 1910s.

Cordis Street was set out as early as 1799 over the pasturelands of Capt. Joseph Cordis of Main Street (see form 121-127 Main St.). The earliest houses on Cordis Street date to circa 1800-1810 (see forms on 32 Cordis Street and 21 Cordis Street Avenue). Cordis Street housing stock encompasses a wide range of styles, forms, materials etc. and represents in

microcosm, Charlestown's 19th century architectural land use development.

Note: Sawyer mentions that 16 Cordis' second owner, Gilbert W Tufts, was employed in the firm of Nathan Tufts and Company-"extensive tanners". Gilbert Tufts later moved to the Boston Highlands.

Bibliography:

Maps- 1818, 1852

Atlases-1865, 1875, 1885, 1892, 1901, 1911

Charlestown and directories-1834-74

Boston directories-post 1875

Middlesex Dean's-159:301, 218:216, 238:525, 269:488,
1061:316

"Charlestown citizens past and present"-Charles town
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Wolcott Cutler-slides of old Charlestown- v. Three

*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