

17-19 Brighton Street (circa 1869)

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



17 Brighton Street

1980s



17 Brighton Street

2016

Numbers 17 and 19 Brighton Street are highly unusual wood frame Italianate/Mansard houses. The outlines of their plans appear on atlases to have a bottle shape. The segments closest to the street are treated as large octagonal bays attached to rectangular 2 ½ story rear segments. The main façades have projecting porches, now enclosed, though originally open, with paneled Doric pilasters, arched bracing, and a deep cornice. The octagonal segments have fully enframed windows, 2/2

wood sash, and fascia boards. The houses have Mansard roofs echoing their octagonal form.



19 Brighton Street

2016

Builder: Gilbert Williams
Original owner: Gilbert Williams

These houses are part of Brighton Street's collection of circa 1840s-1870s wood frame, mostly altered, Greek Revival, Italianate, and Mansard vernacular houses. This pair is the most intact of five originally identical Italianate mansard houses (11-19 Brighton St.). Architecturally, these modest wood frame houses are unique within the Boston area in terms of their form. Their main façades are treated as one large octagonal Bay attached to a more conventional rectangular segment to the rear. On late 19th century atlases, 11-19 Brighton Street's configurations convey the appearance of flattened out milk bottles. Only 17 and 19 retain their original distinctive shape. The others have been altered to exhibit totally rectangular plans.

These houses' lots were once part of Richard Sullivan Sr and Richard Sullivan Jr's extensive land holdings. His father, James Sullivan, who was governor of Massachusetts in 1807, and was president of the Middlesex Canal Company, evidently introduced Richard Sullivan Sr to Charlestown real estate speculation. The canal, completed in 1803, linked the Merrimack Valley with Boston and the Charles River; its terminus was at Charlestown Neck. Richard Sullivan Sr bought numerous parcels of land in the vicinity of Sullivan Street and in what is now Sullivan Square, where he owned a tavern/hotel which catered to the canal trade.

Richard Sullivan (presumably Sr) acquired 11-19 Brighton Street's lots by as early as September 11, 1811. This land remained undeveloped as late as 1868. The Brighton/Perkins/Parker Streets area was surveyed and formally set out the 1840s. On December 9, 1868, Richard Sullivan Jr sold 11-19's lots to Gilbert Williams, a coal dealer, carpenter and real estate speculator, for \$4600. This parcel included lot 63 and parts of lots numbered 59, 61, 64, and 65 on

an Alexander Wadsworth plan dated June 16 1858. The sale of these lots over occurred during the final phase of the breakup of the Sullivan family's extensive real estate holdings in Charlestown.

The houses at 11-19 Brighton, built ca. 1869, are the work of Gilbert Williams, who was active in Charlestown building trades from about 1845 to 1870. In 1845 he boarded on School Street; by 1860 his carpenter shop was located at 12 Sullivan Street. From the 1850s to early 1870s he lived at 79 Pearl Street. After 1870 he was a partner in a coal and wood dealership, located at 267 Medford Street. He lived at 58 Elm Street from 1874 until his death in the early 1890s.

During the 1880s a Francis G Richards owned the 11-19 Brighton Street houses. Although the Sullivan/Williams deed (1041:501) had stipulated that no Irish would be allowed to live here (!), happily, a Miles Muldoon is listed as owner by the early 1900s.

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1833, 1839, 1848, 1851
Charlestown directories-1834/74, and post 1875 directories
The old Middlesex Canal, Mary S Clark, 1974.

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