

## 17-19 Ellwood Street (circa late 1820s-early 1830s)

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



17, 19 Ellwood Street

2015

Numbers 17 and 19 Ellwood Street is a two-story double Federal house constructed of red brick. Both halves are characterized by planar wall surfaces, with seven rows of stretcher breaks for every row of header bricks, with two small square windows at the basement levels. Each half has a three bay main façade with a side hall plan, and there are paired entrances. The building has a gable roof with one pedimented gable-roofed dormer per half.

The entrances were originally open and recessed with graceful semicircular arches edged with header bricks. They are presently covered with late 19th century (?) outer doors and multi-pane transoms. A multi-pane transom of the inner door is visible behind 17's outer door. In general, the windows are slightly recessed within the masonry wall and have raised outer moldings with 6/6 wood sash on 17, and late 19th century 2/2 wood sash on 19.

Original owner: Ira Foster (?)

Tucked away in a cul-de-sac off Putnam Street and parallel to Common Street and the Training Field, 17 and 19 Ellwood Street rank among Charlestown's most charming "hidden" architectural treasures. Judging by its form and stylistic elements this well preserved double Federal house dates to the late 1820s/1830s. The building's brick work consists of seven rows of stretcher bricks for every row of header bricks, in other words not a Flemish bond, making the late 1820s/early 30s a very believable date for this house. The building is a contemporary of 9, 11, and 13 Union Street, 27, 29 Washington Street, and 26, 28 Adams Street. All were built circa late

1820s/early 1830s in the late Federal style, and exhibit distinctive header brick arches.

Numbers 17 -19 Ellwood Street is difficult to date via deeds. Evidently it was part of the extensive real estate holdings of Ira and Catherine Foster (with the possible early ownership by Kenneth Pierce). Middlesex grantee indexes contain many listings for Ira Foster during the first half of the 19th century. A similar situation exists for 19's principle 19th century owners- Caleb Pierce and Duncan Bradford. Further deed research is needed to unravel the pre-late 1860s histories of 17 and 19 Ellwood Street.

Numbers 17-19 Ellwood was originally known as 6-8 Mechanics Street. A careful study of the 1834 Charlestown directories might reveal the owners and or tenants of 6- 8 Mechanics Street. Another approach might be to study the probate records of Ira Foster and Caleb Pierce. In 1834 a William Barnes, a painter, is listed at 2 mechanics Street, while a Noah Butts, engineer, lived at number 4.

Ellwood Street appears on the 1818 Peter Tufts map, labeled Mechanics Court. This cul-de-sac was probably set out circa early 1800s, its development triggered in part by the establishment of the Charlestown Navy Yard in 1800 and opening of the Salem Turnpike (1803) which encompassed Common Street and Adams Street. (During the early 19th century a large percentage of the Training Field area's residents were employed at the Charlestown Navy Yard as blacksmiths, shipwrights, or chandlers.) The 1852 McIntyre map shows that Mechanics Row, now Ellwood Street then ran from Putnam Street to intersect with Chestnut Street. Evidently 20 Chestnut Street covers the portion of Mechanics Row that intersected with Chestnut Street.

Number 17 Ellwood was sold to Michael Sullivan on 29 July 1867 after many (?) years of ownership by Ira Foster and his heirs. He owned 17 from 1867 until the early 1900s. He is listed in 1860s/70s Charlestown directories as a "laborer." Duncan Bradford, owner of 19 during the 1870s/80s is listed as a "notary and real estate" (agent).

Perhaps 17 Ellwood's most intriguing owner was the painter and world traveler Edmund Quincy. An article in the *Boston Globe* on June 8, 1931 by A J Philpott describes Mr. Quincy as "primarily an explorer, one who goes into the byways of Europe hunting for things old and artistic. When he began to paint during his student years in Boston he acquired the habit of wandering around in the old Boston streets and alleyways hunting for subjects. His first great discovery after he explored Beacon Hill was Charlestown." Evidently Edmund Quincy owned 17 Elmwood during the 1930s and 1940s. Further research is needed on Mr. Quincy's career as a painter. According to Cutler (volume 4, *Slides of Old Charlestown*, B P L) Quincy's wife fashioned one of 17's rooms "after a Normandy cottage of the 18th century that may be seen in the Dieppe Museum in France." In the dining room the Quincys added a border of Dutch tiles to the original mantle. The dining room, during the Quincys ownership contained a view of Bruges, Belgium, painted by Edmund Quincy. Evidently the backyard was well landscaped by the Quincys. The tiles in the backyard's walkway came from the old Waverly House at City Square. In addition, a woodshed of considerable age was (is?) Located in 17's backyard.

#### Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1852

Atlases- 1868, 1875, 1885, 1892, 9001, 1911

Charlestown/Boston directories-19th century  
Middlesex deeds-number 17:1001:358, 367; number 19-  
Suffolk deeds-3187:410, 408

\*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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