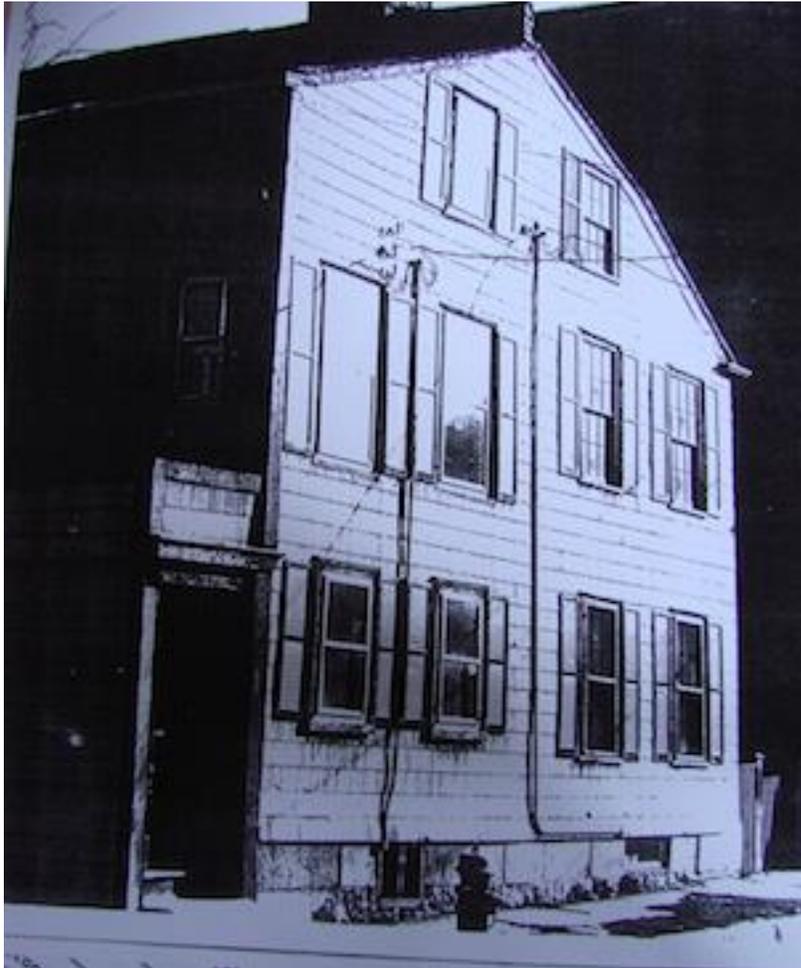


## **19, 21 Union Street (circa 1798-1810)**

From Boston Landmark Commission's Charlestown Historic Resources Study 1981\*:



**19, 21 Union**

**1975 (R. Severy)**

Numbers 19 and 21 Union Street is a late 18th/early 19th century two-story, wood frame Federal double house. The house has a granite block basement and a roof with a slanted gable slope (number 19) and one half gambrel (number 21). The gambrel profile of 21 is accentuated by relatively wide return eaves.

Its four bay end wall gable/gambrel faces Union Street. The building is defined by narrow baseboards and corner boards; a



19 Union

2015

narrow wood strip divides the four bay street-facing façade in half. It is currently (1981) clad with aluminum siding.

The entrance to 21 is located on a five bay main façade and is deeply recessed within an arch. Its front door is flanked by narrow sidelights, one half solid, one half glass, with attenuated leading. The front door is surmounted by an elegant elliptical fanlight. The entrance to number 19 is located on a later small one-story addition at the northeast wall. In general,

the windows are fully enframed with raised outer moldings and 6/6 wood sash.



21 Union

2015

Original owner: Jacob Forster (?)

Architecturally, 19 and 21 Union's roof configuration is unique within Charlestown, and probably within Boston as well. No.19 is enclosed by a ½ gable roof, while 21 is enclosed by a ½ gambrel roof. Evidently both halves represent the original roof configuration. According to Dura Winder, a former owner. The paneling and fireplace mantles in number 19 are identical to those of 21 indicating that 19 is not a later addition. Numbers 19 and 21 Union Street, based on information provided by Timothy T Sawyer in Old *Charlestown* (and to a lesser extent in Middlesex deed evidence) was built circa 1798-1810.

In 1798 Capt. Archibald McNeill began to sell off house lots on a 20 acre tract at Lynde's Point (embracing the area roughly bounded by Devens Street, Old Rutherford Ave., Main Street, Austin Street and Lynde Street.) It is probable that numbers 19 and 21 date to circa 1803/04-at that time Lynde's Point was subdivided into streets and adjacent house lots.

Capt. McNeil came to Charlestown circa mid-1790s-after his ropewalks had burned at what is now High and Pearl Streets in Boston. He subsequently built ropewalks along Charles River Bay, just to the southwest of Washington Street (see 1818 Peter Tufts map). The McNeil house stood near the center of the block bounded by Washington, Union, old Rutherford, and Devens Street. Numbers 19 and 21's lot was part of "a large area of land, green fields and pastures." Between 1799 and 1806 McNeil's land was sold to leading Charlestown families including members of the Devens, Goodwin, Tufts, Sweetser, Forster, Frothingham, Edmands, Warren, Baker, Harris, Wiley

and Kendall clans. Numbers 19 and 21 were built for Jacob Forster (sometimes spelled Foster).

Jacob Forster came to Charlestown in 1786 from Berwick, Maine. Forster had purchased the lot of land on the west corner of Main and Union streets in 1793-on this lot he erected a large wooden building, which was used in part as a furniture store. He was heavily involved in real estate speculation during the early 1800s-particularly 1803/1804. This house was evidently standing by 1810, as of the former owner (Dura Winder) found newspapers dating to 1810 in the walls of the house.

Number 21 Union remained under Forster family ownership until 1841-at that time Charles Forster, cabinet manufacturer, sold 21 to Sarah V Waldo, a "widow" for \$1000. The Forster/Waldo deed mentions Rebecca Damon as an abutter. On 15 July 1851 the executors of Sarah V. Waldo's estate sold 21 to William Lawrence of Charlestown, a cabinetmaker. Lawrence paid the Waldo executors \$2644.81. This deed mentions a brick wall as dividing the two segments of the house. Mary D Lawrence, widow of William, sold 21 to Charles Perry of Charlestown, a "funeral undertaker" for \$3500. Mr. Perry was the highest bidder for this house at a public auction held on December 10, 1855. The Perrys owned the house for almost 15 years. On December 16, 1869 Charles A. Perry of Shutesbury, Massachusetts sold 21 to Sergio P Smith (? Occupation), for \$4000.00. On April 21, 1870 Smith sold 21 to a Mrs. Damon for \$3650.00. By 1875 Fred B.F. Piper of Boston (? Occupation) owned this house. Piper in turn sold 21 to Francis Breen on June 20, 1887. Later owners of 21 included Minnie M. Rowland, wife of Townsend E Rowland, an employee of "the employment office". On October 8, 1895 the Rowlands sold the

gambrel roofed segment to John C Hill and Rebecca S Hill of Boston. The Hills owned this until at least 1911.

Evidently 19 Union was owned by a Rebecca Damon during the 1830s and 1840s. By 1875, 19 was owned by the James Harris estate. Later owners included J. C. and R. S. Hill (by 1901) and a Daniel T. Mahoney (by 1911).

This house once faced the Charlestown Female Seminary-said to have been the first boarding school for girls in the state. According to the Charlestown Directory of 1833 "the location of the Seminary is a favorable one, the buildings are situated on Union and Lawrence streets, consisting of one of Grecian architecture 80' x 36', and another two-story building connected with the former". The Union Street façade of the Seminary was dominated by an ionic columned portico and broad pedimented entablature.

Note: Jacob Forster evidently occupied a position of considerable importance within Boston/Charlestown cabinetmaking circles of the late 18th/early 19th centuries. In 1803 the following notice appeared in the *Colombian Sentinel*: "to cabinet makers-the masters of shops in Boston and vicinity are invited to meet at the Green Dragon Tavern on July 4 at 5 PM on business of great importance... J Forster, clerk of Boston Association of Cabinet Makers. Forster's Cabinet Makers Association in 1803 was yet another step in institutionalizing the needs of one economic group".

#### Bibliography:

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21 Union staircase

2015

\*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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