

20 Albion Place (1840-1842)

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



20 Albion Place

2015

Number 20 Albion Place is a substantial Greek Revival house with a southwest-facing Tuscan porch. Four fluted columns rise two stories to a heavy projecting entablature, which is incorporated into the roof slope. The corners are boldly accented with heavy, wide Doric pilasters. Two ells are located at the rear and side, giving the house an overall L-shaped configuration.

The main entrance is on the street-facing gable end, which is three bays wide. The front door retains a Doric pilaster but the entablature is missing. The windows are simply enframed with 2/2 wood sash. The four bay porch side's windows are slightly taller than those on the end wall gable.

Builder: Aaron Clark and Enos Varney

Original owner: Aaron Clark and Enos Varney

The significance of 20 Albion Place is threefold. First and foremost it is architecturally significant as the only Charlestown example of a Greek Revival house with a monumental side porch. Secondly, it has important historical associations with Elias Crafts Jr, a prominent mid-19th century Charlestown druggist. For many years his apothecary shop, "Crafts Corner", at the junction of Main and Warren Streets, opposite Austin Street, was a well-known local landmark. Thirdly, 20 Albion Place provides an unspoiled glimpse of a substantial, detached early 1840s Charlestown homestead, before intensive 1850s and 1860s urbanizing, via row house construction.

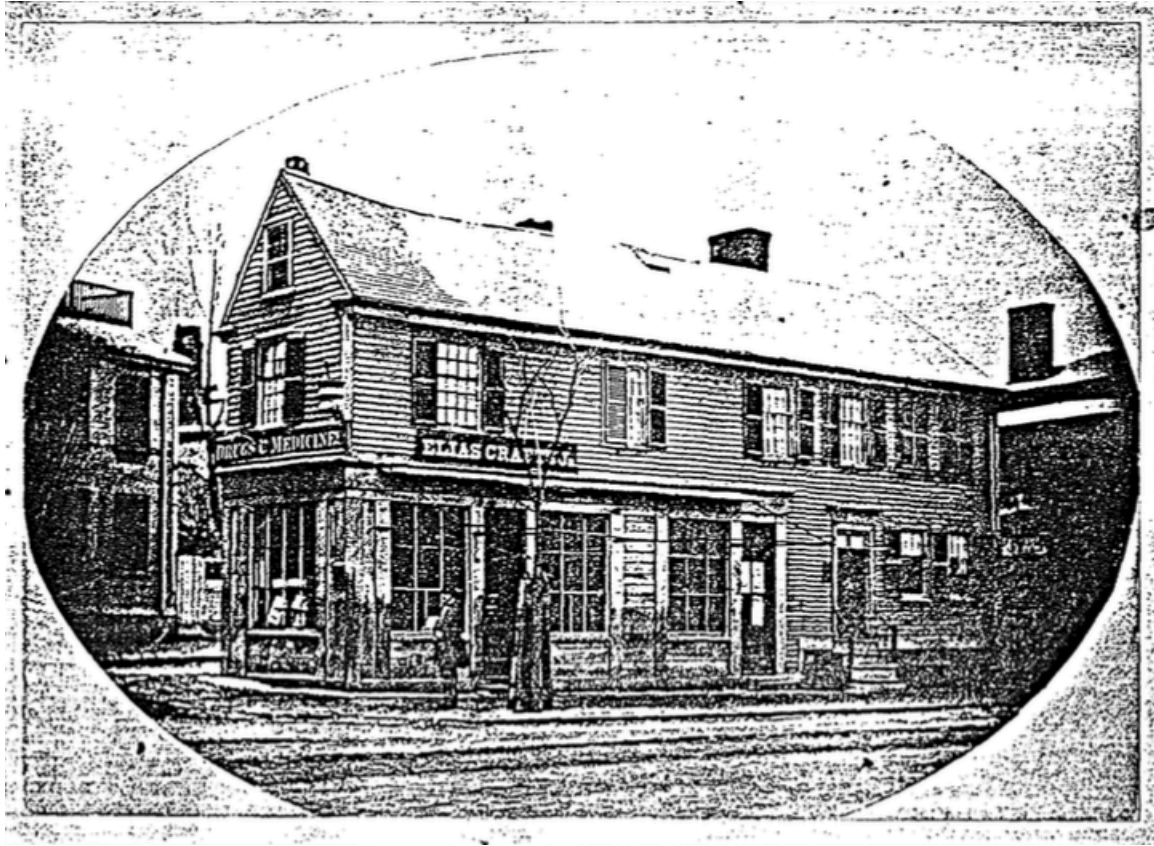
Number 20 Albion Place was built at some point between 1840 and 1842. On January 1, 1840, Jordan Johnson, trader, sold number 20's lot to Aaron Clark and Enos Varney, carpenters, for \$466. (Middlesex 390:350 and 400:4). Evidently, Clark and

Varney were responsible for this house's construction. Clark was active in local building in the 1830s and 1840s. Enos Varney's carpentry work spanned circa 1830s-mid-1870s. Aaron Clark is listed in the 1834 Charlestown directory as a Morocco dresser, 15 Pleasant Street. In 1842 Aaron Clark II and Enos Varney are listed together as carpenters. Both lived at Albion Court (old name for Albion Place), presumably at number 20. By 1845, Clark and Varney were still living at Albion Place. The former's work address is listed as rear, 185 Main Street and the latter's as G Walker wharf.

In 1846, Clark sold number 20 to Varney (477:186) for \$2000. The Clark-Varney deed mentions that "said premises comprise one lot and a part of another on a plan by B Badger, February 11, 1837". By 1852, Aaron Clark II is listed as "surveyor of lumber", 25 Century Square, house 4 Albion Court. Enos Varney owned the house until June 15, 1849 (541:207), when he sold it to Lowell L Hinds, Boston leather dealer. In 1848 Hinds lived at 11 Lexington Street. During the 1850s and early 1860s he is listed as a "shoe and leather dealer, Boston, house 70 Albion Court). On February 27, 1863, Hinds sold this property to Elizabeth Crafts, wife of Elias Crafts.

Elias Crafts was a popular Charlestown figure during the mid-19th century. His apothecary shop at Main and Warren Streets was an informal gathering place for townsfolk. Crafts first opened shop in the old Boylston house on "Crafts' Corner" in 1828. Sawyer notes that the Boylston house was probably the first wood frame house built in Charlestown after the battle of Bunker Hill. A house on this site owned by Mrs. Mercy Boylston had been burned on the day of the battle. In any event, Crafts' shop was described as "an old wooden building, two stories with pitched roof. In one end of the lower story of this building, looking directly up Main Street, was a store, the windows of

which were ornamented with bottles and jars of fanciful shape, filled with highly colored water of various shades, attractive in the daylight and made doubly so after dark by lights reflected



Crafts Corner

upon them for the purpose. Projecting from the corner of the building, on an iron frame above the windows was a good-sized gilded mortar and pestle. This was the apothecary store of Dr. Elias Crafts, Jr."

In 1869 the City Council of Charlestown passed an order to cut off this corner and enlarge the public square. To accomplish this, the Boylston Club on Crafts Corner was destroyed.

Elias Crafts, Jr was born in Newton, Massachusetts, January 31, 1807. His parents came to Charlestown in 1809. In April 1821,

he started to learn the druggist business with Dr. Samuel Kidder. On August 18, 1828 he opened "a store well-stocked with medicines and fancy goods at Crafts' corner" in 1857 he open a wholesale store at 148 Commercial Street, Boston, selling out his Charlestown store to Charles N. Chase.

Mr. Crafts was also the treasurer of many organizations including the Universalist Church. From 1833 to 1873 he was a member of the volunteer fire department and for nearly 40 years a member of Washington Engine Company number 5. He married Elizabeth Hunnewell of Charlestown. Crafts lived at 20 Albion Place with his unmarried children until circa 1895. By 1901 a George Crafts *et al* owned this property.

Albion Place, originally Albion Court, is one of the earliest streets southwest of Wall Street. It may predate 1830 and was probably improved as the driveway for 20 Albion Place. Today, Albion Place is a cul-de-sac lined with a half dozen or so interesting 1840s houses.

Note: Albion Place and adjoining lots were apparently part of the Edes estate during the early 19th century (see 1818 map).

*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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