

207-to 17 Main St. (1885)

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



207-217 Main Street

1981

Numbers 207-217 Main Street is a four story commercial and residential masonry-panel brick block characterized by planar wall surfaces, a flat roof, mostly intact cast iron storefront

enframements, brick-work paneled chimneys, and corbelled cornice. There are simple stone sills and lintels.

There are three storefronts on the ground floor and nine by three bay upper stories. The storefronts have cast iron Doric pilasters with fluting and egg and dart detail in evidence at numbers 207 and 217, as part of the storefronts' metal lintel "entablature". There has been considerable alteration in the storefronts, with modern commercial treatments.

The main façade's upper floors are divided visually into three vertical segments of three bays each. Square billet-work panels, flanking the three center windows at floors two and three, demarcate the segments. Truncated piers interspersed between three well-crafted corbelled cornice segments further divide the main façade vertically.

The Hathon Square façade has a pair of chimneys ornamented with square brickwork panels and limestone (?) banding.



207-217 Main Street

2015

Builder: George W Pope

Original owner: Aaron W Hook

The building is architecturally significant as the only extant panel-brick, mixed-use block in Charlestown. It is prominently sited at the corner of Main Street and Hathon Square. Also noteworthy are the wood frame Queen Anne structures to the rear, on Hathon Square, which also date to approximately 1885. Together with the houses facing Hathon Square, 207-217 Main Street is a major Charlestown commercial/residential development of the mid-1880s.

On the southeast corner of Main Street at Hathon Square was the late Georgian/Federal Samuel F B Morse house.

The building is the work of George W Pope (further research is needed on George W Pope). It has significant historical associations with Charlestown and Boston shoe dealer Aaron Hook, and was a product of what the *Charlestown Enterprise* called the "big building boom" of the mid-1880s. This building boom resulted in construction of "several creditable structures" financed by "shrewd investors" (local Charlestown citizens such as Aaron Hook).

The commercial and residential block at 207-217 Main Street was described in a *Charlestown Enterprise* article dated September 19, 1885: "one of the most noticeable structures now in the course of erection is that which presents such a bold and uncompromising front on Main Street, owned by Aaron Hook, a well known citizen of the district and one of Boston's most prominent boot and shoe dealers." The building was further described as "a brick block of three buildings, practically one, each of which has a frontage of 225 feet and a

depth of 34 feet with a wooden ell of 15 x 30 feet. The block has a total frontage of nearly 68 feet, is four stories high, and is arranged for three stores with dwellings overhead. It is now nearing completion and when finished will be creditable to the owner and the district. The builder is George W Pope."

In addition to 207-217 Main Street, Hook's development encompassed the Queen Anne multifamily housing at 68 and 70 Hathon Square. This building is described as "a three-story wooden building and ell with bay windows having a frontage of 20 feet on the square and a total depth of 71 feet. It is estimated by those who claim to be expert at such matters that Mr. Hook's enterprise represents fully \$23,000."

The 1868 atlas shows a large brick building on this site with an expansive L shaped rear ell. Hathon Square appears on the 1868 atlas labeled Main Street court. In a *Charlestown Enterprise* article dated November 28, 1896, page 1, entitled "On the north side, per picture of Main Street from Walker Street to the Harvard Church", it is noted that "where Aaron Hook's brick block is now situated was a brick house, the home of Thomas Cooper, a very well-known and respected citizen. Newell Hunting resided there for many years. A long time ago in the basement was S M Cutler's dry goods store. Both the 1875 and 1885 Charlestown atlases show this site labeled "Thomas Hooper estate."

Aaron Hook was a prominent mid-late 19th century Charlestown shoe dealer. Born in Chichester, New Hampshire on June 3, 1825, he was the son of Levitt and Sarah Prescott Hook. He initially worked as a farmer, turning to the mason's trade in 1843. He worked as an apprentice mason in Concord, New Hampshire during the mid-1840s. In 1848 he came to Boston and found employment in a shoe store as a salesman.

During the early 1850s he opened his own shoe store on Hanover Street, Boston. In 1873 he moved to a larger store at the corner of Hanover and Washington Streets. In 1886 he opened a similar store in Charlestown, evidently located in 207-217 Main Street. His sons were given control of the business in 1887. In 1889 he was back in Boston with a shop at 734 Washington Street. After a time he returned to Charlestown and "with his two sons-in-law, purchased the store of the late M Clarence Hall on Main Street."

For many years Aaron Hook resided at 47 Chestnut Street (see form). Hook's heirs owned 207-217 Main Street until at least 1911.

Bibliography:

Atlases-1868, 1875, 1885, 1892, 1901, 1911

City of Boston Buildings Department

Charlestown Enterprise, September 19, 1885; November 28, 1896, page 1

Charlestown Enterprise, "50th Anniversary of Bunker Hill Monument", special edition, biographical sketches

*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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