

21 Cordis Street (1805)

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

Number 21 Cordis Street is a stately Federal house constructed of Flemish bond brick, painted gray. The five by two bay main block has three stories. There is a side ell of two stories, with three by one bay, also of brick. To the rear of the side ell is a low one-story wooden ell. The main block is characterized by a boxy form with a center hall plan, planar wall surfaces, and a hip roof.



21 Cordis

2015

The center entrance is surmounted by a deeply recessed semicircular fan light; the arch of the fanlight is edged with header bricks. The front door is covered by a later multi-pane outer door. The Windows have shutters and 6/6 wood sash. At the third floor are small square windows. Both the main block and the ell are enclosed by hip roofs.

Note: 21 Cordis had two one-story ells and a two-story ell attached to the present wooden ell, as shown on the 1868 Sanborn Ins. Atlas, forming a U-shape.



21 Cordis entry detail

2015

Builder: Oliver Holden

Original owner: John Smith

Architecturally, 21 Cordis ranks among the finest examples of masonry Federal housing in Charlestown. Its main façade faces a narrow passageway known as Cordis Street Avenue. Particularly memorable are its boxy, typically Federal

proportions, the pleasing planarity of its Flemish bond brickwork surfaces and the crisp outline of its entrance's semicircular fan light. Shaded by an old tree, its main façade overlooking a shrub and picket fence-lined yard, this house stands with a narrow end wall facing Cordis Street.

Cordis Street was set out as early as 1799 over the pasture of Capt. Joseph Cordis. This row is a key component of its remarkable collection of masonry and wood frame houses dating from the first half of the 19th century. Indeed, Cordis Street's housing stock presents in microcosm the various phases of Charlestown's 19th century development.

Middlesex deeds indicate that 21 Cordis was built circa 1805, probably by Oliver Holden, a Charlestown merchant and builder. Born in Pepperell Massachusetts, Holden settled in Charlestown in 1787. For many years he lived in a substantial Federal house at the corner of Pearl and Wesley streets-now the location of the Oliver Holden School. Holden was responsible for the construction of a number of Federal houses in the Salem Hill section (High, Salem, Pearl Street etc.) Examples include 57 Bartlett Street, and possibly 100 High Street, which is very similar to 21 Cordis in terms of form, fenestration, etc. In addition, Holden was a Baptist preacher and composer of religious music, most notably the "Coronation Hymn".

In any event Holden sold 21 Cordis' lot to John Smith of Boston, a cabinetmaker, for \$1300 on 20 October 1804. By October 1806 a dwelling house is mentioned as being located here. At that time Smith sold 21 Cordis Street to Boston traders William Simons and Shepherd Simons for \$5000. The Simons owned the property until March 1812, when Jonathan Brooks of Bedford, a tanner, paid Simons \$3000 for this house. Brooks, in

turn, quickly sold the title to number 21 in April 1812 to Josiah Bemis of Charlestown, a "gentleman." By 1820 Bemis had moved to Quincy.

Number 21 Cordis has historical associations with Abraham Andrews, who purchased 21 Cordis from Bemis for \$1900 on 29 June 1820. Abraham Andrews, a "gentleman" was principal of several local schools including Town Hill School and the Dolan Street School. He was a teacher at a private academy located across the street from 21 Cordis. Andrews family members (including Abby M Andrews, a clerk at the Charlestown Five Cents Savings Bank, owned 21 Cordis until the late 19th century.

During the early 20th century this house was owned by Susan A. Getchell-this house is often referred to in guidebooks as the "Getchell house".

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1852

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

Charlestown directories-1834-1874

Boston directories-late 19th century

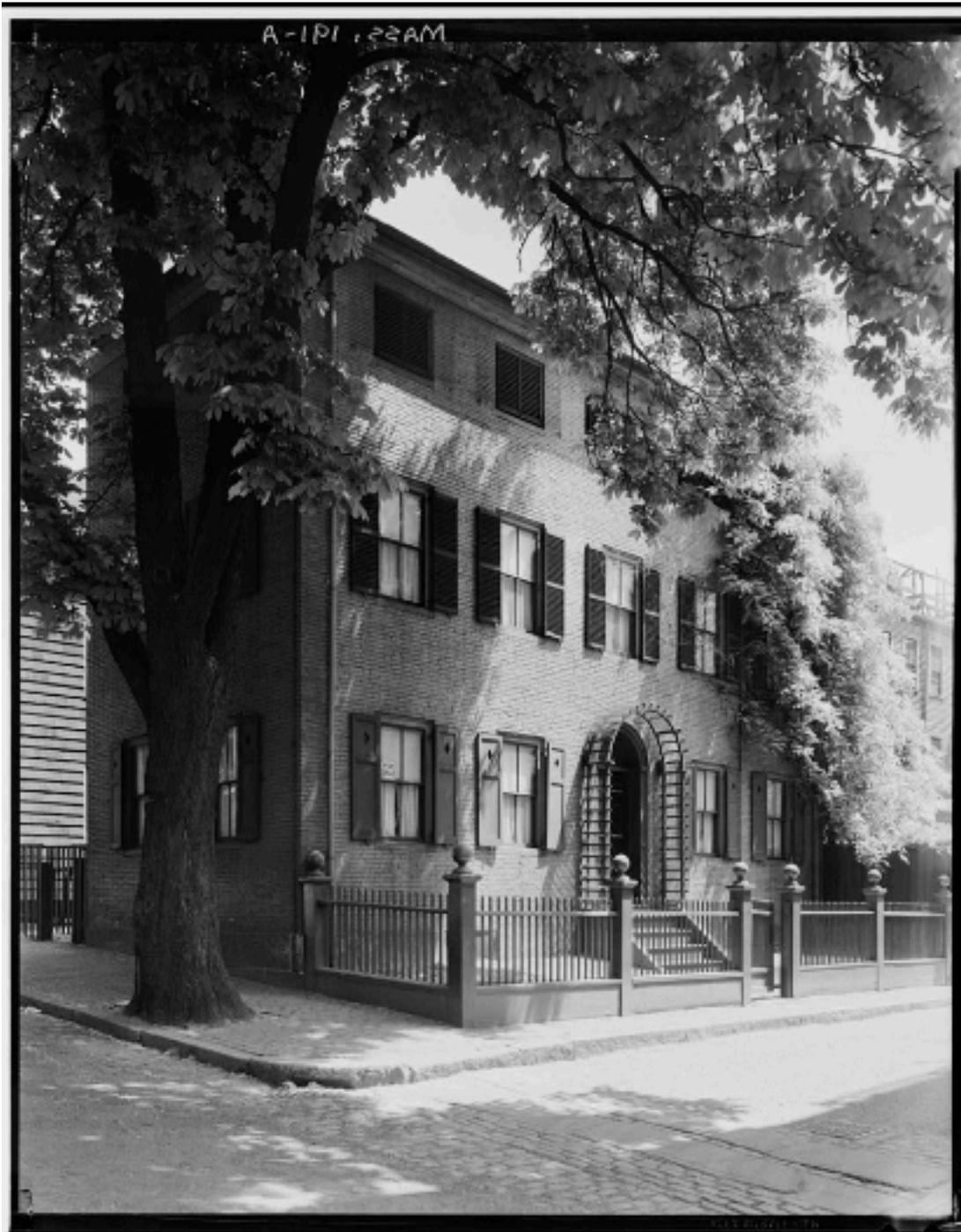
Middlesex deeds-163: 224, 170:478, 194:388, 390; 233:476

Suffolk deeds-1569: 215, 217

*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.

R. Dinsmore

Photographs from the Historic American Buildings Survey,
Arthur C. Haskell, Photographer. 1935





Start of stairs

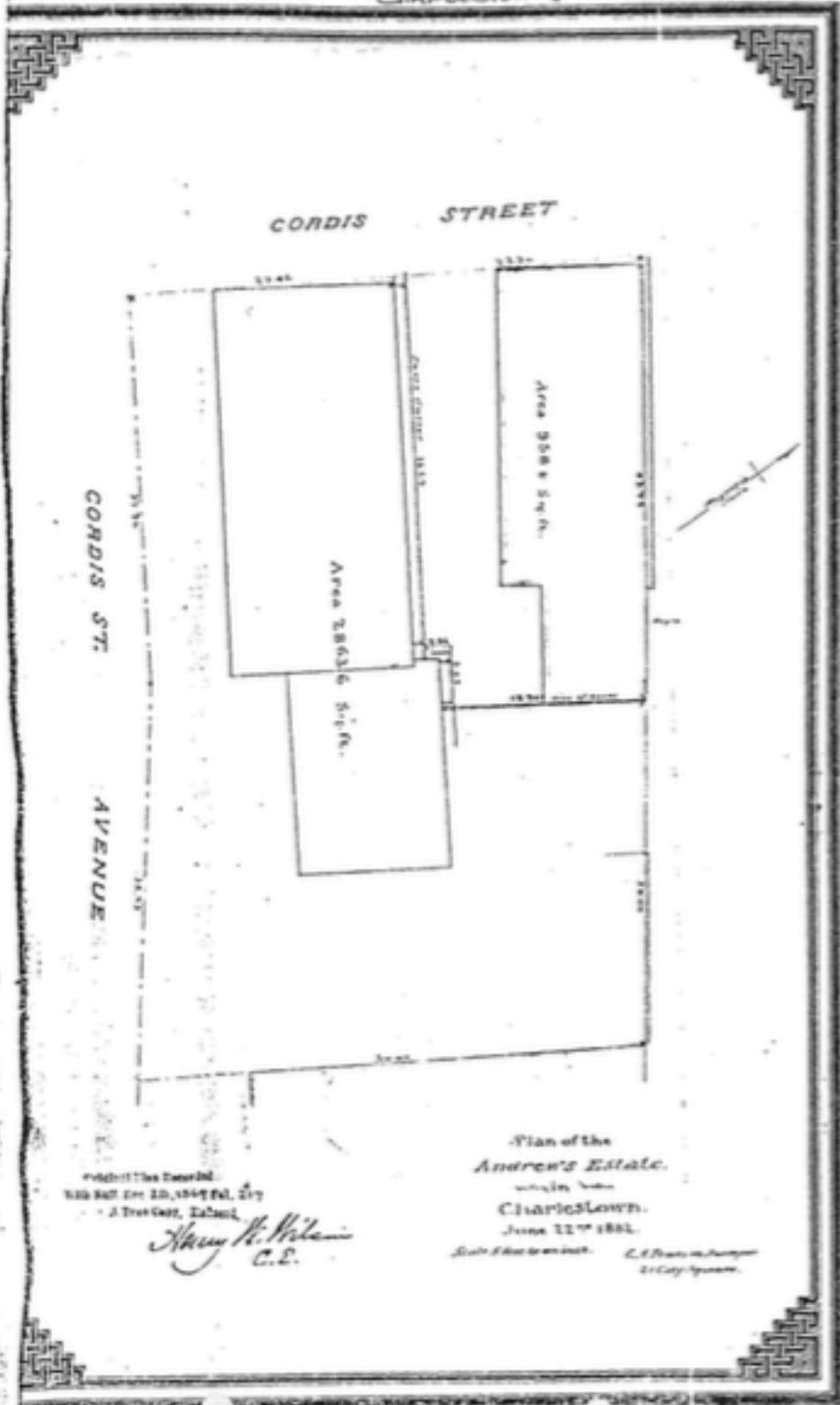


Dining room fireplace

RE: 21 CORDIS ST. - CHARLESTOWN

SUFFOLK 1569:217

C 0



Architect's Record
No. 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000

Harry H. Wilson
C.E.

Plan of the
Andrew's Estate.
Charlestown.
June 12th 1881.

Scale 1/4 inch = 10 feet. C. H. Brown & Son
City Squares.

1569-217-2-1512-100