

22-36 Soley Street (1867-1869)

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



22-36 Soley Street

2015

Numbers 22-36 Soley Street is a red brick, granite, and brownstone trimmed row of eight Mansard houses. Each has two stories and a granite basement. The main façades have

three bays and side hall plans. There are bracketed cornices and the buildings have straight-sided Mansard roofs with slate shingles, mostly intact. Each has a single and a double dormer with segmented roof caps.

They have tall entrances, originally open and recessed, now with outer doors and transoms (probably late 19th century) on numbers 36, 34, 30, at 28 and 24. Granite steps lead to the front doors. The entry walls have well crafted wood paneling. The windows have a simple brownstone sills and lintels and 2/2 wood sash.

Architect: James H Rand

Original owner: James H Rand

This handsome row of red brick, granite, and stone-trimmed Mansard houses strikes a decidedly urban, and urbane, note on a street of primarily moderately scaled mid-19th century wood frame vernacular dwellings. They may be categorized within the Mansard style by virtue of their distinctive roof configuration- their deep-bracketed cornices are an Italianate feature. Otherwise, the main façades are extremely plain.

This row may represent the work of Charlestown architect James H Rand. Middlesex deeds indicate that he was 22-36 Soley's original owner/developer (and probably designer) during the late 1860s. James H Rand was active in Charlestown/Boston architectural practice from circa 1862 to the mid-1880s. Frustratingly little is known about Rand's career. He is the only mid-19th century Charlestown-based architect who has come to light during the course of this survey. Had he not moved to Boston during the early 1870s, he would have undoubtedly been included in late 19th century

"Charlestown enterprise and Charlestown news" biographical articles. In 1860 he lived at 31 Monument Square. By 1866 he lived at 22 Union Street and by 1872 he had an office at 18 Exchange Street, Boston (his house, at 18 Cordis Street, Charlestown). He is listed in early 1880s Boston directories at 77 Warren Street, Charlestown. He is not listed in the 1890 Boston directory.

Mr. Rand is credited with the design of the Winthrop (later Frothingham) School and the Bunker Hill School (1866, see form on 68 Baldwin Street). Evidently he was responsible for several wood frame houses including 3, 4, 5 and 6 Salem Street Avenue. He almost certainly designed the high style Italianate row at 18-24 Cordis Street. His Boston work included two early 1880s apartment buildings on Rutland Street, South End, known as "The Garfield" and "Rand".

Middlesex deeds and atlases indicate that 22-36 Soley Street was built in two phases-28-36 were built circa 1867-1868, while 22-26 were built circa 1868-69. Evidently Rand acquired this tract from Michael Hittinger in 1867. Rand/Hittinger deeds mention a rolling mill that was located in this property (Further research needed on Hittinger, the rolling mill, etc.). The Hittinger/Rand deed also mentions that the property sale did not include the "steam engine, machinery, fixtures, brick and stone work belonging thereto".

This group's owners in 1870 (almost certainly the original post- Rand owners) included Francis E Whitcomb, an expressman, Fitchburg Railroad-number 22, J L Blackmer, a painter-number 24, Mary Keane- number 26, Alfred Johnson-variously listed as a clerk, 12 City Hall Avenue "and dining saloon"- number 28, Isaac R Hadwen, postal clerk-number 30,

Louise J Bigelow-number 32, Nancy Haley-numbers 34 and 36 (?).

By 1892 this group's owners included: A Nickerson-number 22, A M Putnam- number 24, Mary Ed Lansbee -number 26, F Grimes-number 28, L Anderson-number 30, D Schwab-number 32, A J Hadley-number 34, -number 36?

By 1911 owners included Thomas Nolan-number 22, J C Desmond-number 24, Mary Doherty-number 26, Nelly McArdle-number 28, C Doherty-number 30, J A McGlinchey-number 32, Owen Doherty-number 34, MA Mitchell (grandparent of Anthony Mitchell Sammarco, present director of the Dorchester Historical Society), number 36 (?).

Soley Street was originally known as Henley's Lane. It was set out circa 1790s and originally had a much more crooked path than it has today- evidently its path was straightened out in 1850. There was a Soley's Lane, located somewhere in this vicinity, mentioned in the record dated November 14, 1782. The Soley name appears in the records of colonial times and the burial lot of the family is in the old burial ground on Phipps Street. Soley Street was named after John Soley, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons of Massachusetts. He lived in an elegant mansion on the site of the Army and Navy YMCA at City Square (demolished, now site of Paul Revere Park). He was prominent in King Solomon's Lodge of Charlestown. His son John Soley Junior was with the US Navy and was the first commander of the Massachusetts Naval brigade.

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1852

Panoramic View of Bunker Hill-1848

Middlesex deeds-number 32: 1011:311, 1081:394; number
26:1061:109, 1011:110, 561:54, 521:412
Charlestown directories-1860s, 1870s
Charlestown enterprise-September 13, 1919 page 3

*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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