

231 Main St. (circa 1796 or Circa 1806?)

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



231 Main

ca. 1980's

Number 231 Main Street is a substantial Federal house with late 19th century rear additions. It originally had three stories and was later hoisted up on to a commercial ground floor. The ground floor is faced with various modern treatments and the walls of the upper floors are covered with synthetic siding. The

walls retain the original fenestration configuration with small square windows at the third story.

A missing segment of aluminum siding from the rear wall reveals old bricks-19th-century deeds indicate that the house was constructed of brick. The house is enclosed by a low hip roof. It is prominently sited on a corner lot opposite West School Street.



231 Main

2015

Builder: Oliver Holden?, James a Bolter/Shadrach Shattuck?
Original owner: Giles Richard?, James a Bolter?

Although presently situated on a circa late 19th century-early 20th century ground floor segment and covered with synthetic siding, this house retains its distinctive boxy Federal form, fenestration, and low hip roof. A gap in the rear wall siding reveals old brickwork indicating that at least one of its walls is of masonry construction. (Since restored, with first floor fenestration and Main Street center entry- see 2015 photograph.)

The house is part of the Salem Hill area's collection of detached masonry and wood frame Federal houses. Middlesex deeds point to possible construction dates of circa 1796-1797, or 1806. This house may represent the work of either Oliver Holden or James Bolter. On January 16, 1797 Oliver Holden sold "one house and land" for \$3400 to Giles Richard, merchant. It is difficult to determine if this rate involves the present house or earlier building(s).

Oliver Holden played a major role in the development of the area bounded by Elm, School, Main, Sullivan and Bunker Hill Streets. Born in Pepperell Massachusetts on September 18, 1765, he was a carpenter and joiner by trade. He settled in Charlestown in 1789. Sawyer notes that Holden was "very enterprising and at once after his arrival commenced the purchase of lots of land and the erection of buildings". Holden's Federal mansion was located on the site of the present Holden School on Pearl Street. In addition Holden was a state legislator, preacher, composer of religious music and the author of several books of music. He died in Charlestown on September 4, 1844.

Between the late 1790s and 1806 this property passed through a number of hands causing one to wonder if something as substantial as the present house was extant during this period. Owners during these years included David Green, William Larkin, merchant, Boston, Nathaniel J Cunningham, a Charlestown merchant, Wilkes Barber of Lunenburg and Isaiah and Ebenezer Andrews of Boston, booksellers.

On February 10, 1806 James Bolter of Boston, a housewright, purchased this property for \$2800. The possibility remains that Bolter may have constructed this house between February and November 1806-on 18 November 1806 Bolter sold the property for \$2600 to Shadrach Shattuck of Charlestown, a brick maker-the lot's boundaries are listed as 35 feet southwesterly on Main Street, northwesterly on a new Street 90 feet, northeasterly on a passageway 30'6" and southeasterly 90 feet on land of Isaac Wetherbee.

Shadrach Shattuck may have been involved in the house's construction. Shattuck owned this house until the early 1860s. Probate records of August 1829 indicate that Shadrach Shattuck bequeathed the house to his daughter, Eliza Scott. Later owners included Paschal Fiske, John McCloud, stove dealer, (1861-1864, post-1864, respectively).

This house is a survivor from the earliest phase of Salem Hill's residential development. The system of streets between Elm and Walker streets was set out circa 1790-1818. The construction of a Baptist church at the corner of Pearl and High streets in 1801 is indicative of the growing population and what had been a rural fringe of the more densely settled area closer to Boston. The completion of the Middlesex Canal in 1803, with its southern terminus at Charlestown Neck, and the construction of the state prison at nearby Prison Point in 1804-

1805 encouraged residential development, which was mostly substantial attached wood and masonry Federal houses, e.g. 100 High Street, 2, 4 Salem Street, etc.

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1883, 1839, 1848, 1851

Atlases-1875, 1885, 1892, 1901

Middlesex deeds-901: 247, 661:465, 591:258, 551:458, 171:11, 158:316, 152:379, 124:218

Souvenir of Charlestown and Bunker Hill Monument, published by the *Bunker Hill Times*, 1843-1893

Old Charlestown, Timothy T Sawyer (1902)

*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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