

234 Moulton Street (1894)

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



234 Moulton Street, the William H Kent School 1980s

The William H Kent School is a T-shaped red brick, stone trimmed primary school. It is an interesting rare blend of Georgian Revival and Gothic Revival styles. The building is characterized by planar masonry surfaces, highly symmetrical nine bay main façade, and five bay sidewalls. A stone sill course visually separates first and second floors and heightens the building's horizontal orientation. The building is crowned by a low hip roof.

Its center entrance is set off by a pointed brickwork arch, and the second floor windows on the main façade and sidewalls have

semicircular transoms set within their pointed brick work arches, echoing the shape of the main entrance.



234 Moulton Street

2016

Architect: Edmund M Wheelwright

Builder: John S Jacobs and Low

Original owner: City of Boston

The Kent School, together with the Saint Catherine of Siena complex, forms a handsome late 19th century group of buildings at Hayes Square. They are remnants of the old Hayes Square neighborhood. To the rear of the church and school there is now an extensive 1940s housing complex.

The William H Kent School is architecturally significant as a rare example of a late 19th century Boston area primary school which blends Georgian Revival form and symmetry with Gothic Revival arches over the main entrance and second floor windows. Built in 1894, it was named in honor of William Henry Kent, president of the Mill Owners Insurance Company, and mayor of Charlestown in 1870 - 1872.

The William H Kent School represents the work of the well-known Boston architect Edmund March Wheelwright (1854-8/15/1912). For many years he practiced under the firm name Wheelwright and Haven. Born and educated in Roxbury Massachusetts, Wheelwright graduated from Harvard in 1876. From 1876 through 1881 he studied architecture at M I T and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He was initially employed as a draftsman with the Boston firm of Peabody and Stearns. Later he worked with McKim, Mead and White, and for a short time with E P Treadwell in Albany.

In 1885 he started his own practice in Boston. In 1890 he entered into partnership with Parkman B Haven. During the '90s Edward A Hoyt became the third member of Wheelwright, Haven and Hoyt. Mr. Wheelwright served as Boston's city architect from 1891 to 1895, and in this capacity designed the School. He was also responsible for the Benjamin F Tweedy School at Sullivan Square and the Margaret Fuller School in Jamaica Plain. In addition, as city architect he was engaged in designing a number of public schools, hospitals, firehouses, and police stations, in all of them maintaining a high standard of municipal architecture. He was responsible for the design of the subway entrance on the Common at the corner of Park Street, new buildings at the Boston City Hospital, the Mechanics Arts High School, and buildings for the Agassiz, Andrews, Bowdoin, and Cudworth Schools.

Wheelwright was known for the eclectic nature of his work, both in terms of styles and building types. He is credited with the design of horticultural Hall, 1900, New England Conservatory of music, 1903, Massachusetts historical Society on Boylston Street, and the Harvard Lampoon building on Mount Auburn Street in Cambridge. In 1900 he was appointed designer and chief engineer in charge of the "Salt and Pepper", or Longfellow Bridge across the Charles River between Boston and Cambridge. He was the author of a book entitled *School Architecture*, in 1900.

The William H Kent School was built by John S Jacobs and Low. This firm was located at 166 Devonshire Street, Boston. (See application for permission to build, March 15, 1894, Boston buildings department).

William Henry Kent was born in Duxbury Massachusetts on March 21, 1823, and died in Charlestown on February 7, 1889. His father was William Vinall Kent, of Boston. William Kent grew up in the West End section of Boston, on Staniford Street. He was initially employed in the lumber business. In 1859 he and his family bought a house on Monument Square in Charlestown. In 1873 he accepted the presidency of the Mill Owners Fire Insurance Company. Mr. Kent was an alderman in Charlestown for five years and mayor for three years, 1870-1872. He was, for 14 years, director of the Middlesex Railroad Company. He was very active in Charlestown Masonic activities; it was said that his Masonic record is "one replete with usefulness, devotion, and honor".

The William H Kent School is still being used for educational purposes. Along with the St. Catherine of Siena Roman Catholic church complex, it provides a glimpse of late 19th century Hayes Square.

Bibliography:

Atlases-1885, 1892, 1901

Boston buildings department records

Charlestown Enterprise, Special Edition June 1893, "Charlestown Citizens Past and Present."

Biographical Dictionary of American Architects, 1970, Henry F Withey and Elsie Radburn Withey

*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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