

24-34 Russell Street (1859)

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



22-34 Russell Street

1981

Numbers 24-34 Russell Street is an Italianate row of six wood frame houses. They have low brick basements, three bay main façades and side hall plans with paired entrances. They have flat roofs and a continuous bracketed cornice. The entrance enframements consist of Doric pilasters and bracketed door hoods projecting from entablatures.

Builder: Gilbert Williams

Original owner: Gilbert Williams



22-34 Russell Street

2016

Architecturally, 24-34 Russell Street is representative of a type of mid-19th century Charlestown row housing which is neither as substantial as the brick row houses of Bunker Hill, Baldwin, or Auburn Streets, or as modest as the wood cottage-scale rows of cul-de-sacs such as Crystal Place, Pearl Street, etc. These houses are solid examples of late 1850s wood frame Italianate row houses.

Their land was part of the extensive early-mid-19th century landholdings of Richard Sullivan, Sr and Richard Sullivan Jr. On May 4, 1859, Francis Cunningham, a clerk, of Milton (an associate of the Sullivans) sold number 24's land to Gilbert Williams, a carpenter, for "one dollar and other good and valuable considerations." Number 24's land is lot number 1 on Doane's plan of house lots drawn for Weston and Mason on April 28, 1859. This lot was also

"a portion of the lot numbered 27 on Alexander Wadsworth of Bunker Hill dated February 20, 1848."

Gilbert Williams figured prominently in Charlestown house construction during the mid-late 19th century. From 1845 until the 1860s he is listed as a carpenter. From the mid-1860s to approximately the mid-1880s he was partner with Sheldon Williams in a wood and coal dealership in Charlestown (199 Medford Street, 1866, 267 and 513 Main Street, 1870, 1880). By 1852 he lived on "Allston, corner Medford, near Elm." It would seem, from circa mid-1850s to the mid-1870s deeds, that Williams was working as a housewright as well as operating a wood and coal dealership. By 1880 Williams lived at 58 Elm Street. By 1890 he was the sole operator of a wood and coal dealership. His business was located at Malden Bridge and 267 Medford Street. By 1895 he had "removed to Malden."

Other examples of Gilbert Williams' work include the unusual octagonal-fronted houses at 17 and 19 Brighton Street, 1869, and the circa 1870 Mansard at 79 Pearl Street.

Williams sold 24's lot to James M Merrill of East Cambridge, a teamster, on July 15, 1859, for \$2500. This deed mentions a "partition wall" indicating that construction was well underway by then. No buildings were mentioned in the Cunningham-Williams deed of May 1859.

In 1875 owners of 24-32 Russell Street included James M Merrill, a foreman, 12 Mt. Washington Avenue, Boston-number 24; William B Fox, an "expressman," at number 26; Samuel R Burnall, occupation unlisted, at number 28; William Smith, occupation unlisted, at number 30, and George E Stanwood a cook, and later, George B Stanwood, at number 32.

By 1901 the owners included David S Tucker-number 24; G A and M A Fox-number 26; Jasser H Ryan-number 28; Patrick Boyd-number 30, and F W Caldwell-number 32.

Numbers 24-32 Russell Street's lots were part of Richard Sullivan Sr and Richard Sullivan Jr's extensive Charlestown landholdings, which they acquired in the early 1800s. Richard Sullivan Sr was the son of James Sullivan, who was Massachusetts governor in 1807 and president of the Middlesex Canal, whose southern terminus was nearby at Charlestown Neck. Richard Sr began buying up land in the vicinity of what is now a Sullivan Street in approximately 1805 from Oliver Holden. By 1818 he operated a large tavern, catering to the canal trade at what is now a Sullivan Square. In addition Richard Sr was a co-partner in the Middlesex Canal-related Boston and Concord Boating Company, which was founded in 1827. From the 1840s through the early 1870s Richard Sullivan Jr, in conjunction with business associate Francis Cunningham, was involved in selling off his father's real estate empire.

Russell Street was developed in several stages between the early 1800s and approximately 1860. It appears unlabeled on the 1818 map, running only from Pearl Street to Walker Street. It was later extended to Oak Street, approximately in the 1840s. By 1851 it terminated just beyond Oak Street, and was cut through to Auburn Street by the early circa 1860s.

Russell Street's streetscape reflects a relatively slow development over time with housing stock ranging from the late 1830s Greek Revival wood frame, to circa 1880s and 90s Italianate and Georgian Revival masonry apartment buildings. Numbers 24-32 Russell Street, built in 1859, fall roughly in the middle of this Street's development.

*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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