

## 27 Harvard Square (circa 1799)

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



27Harvard Square

2015

Number 27 Harvard Square is a modestly scaled two-story Federal house faced with outer Brewster Island split stone. It has a side hall plan, and a well-worn granite step leads to a multi-paneled front door, which is flanked by simple vertical posts. The building has a gable roof with a diminutive off-center hip roofed dormer.

The front door is surmounted by a three-pane transom and simple granite lintel. The windows have 9/6 wood sash.

The house faces a small playground atop historic town Hill and is the centerpiece of a trio of early 19th century dwellings of modest scale and great charm.

Builder: unknown

Original owner: Nathaniel Austin

Built in 1799, 27 Harvard Square is the centerpiece of a trio of early 19th-century houses bordering the northeastern side of Harvard Square. It includes number 2 Henley Street at the corner of Harvard Square. The house is part of a quartet of charming, modestly scaled dwellings, which provide a glimpse of semi-rural village scale Charlestown before extensive mid-19th century urbanization. This house's first owner was Nathaniel Austin. The Austin family figured prominently in three centuries of Charlestown history. Richard Austin, the ancestor of Charlestown and Boston Austins, came to Charlestown from England at some point prior to 1659. His name appears on the list of free men in the town in 1677. Richard's son Ebenezer was real estate rich- among his estates were warehouses and wharves bequeathed to his son, the second Ebenezer. The second Ebenezer was the father of Nathaniel, a pewterer by trade. He also accumulated extensive real estate holdings. His sons included Gen. Nathaniel Austin as

well as Isaac, William, and David. His daughter's were Margaret, wife of Isaac Brooks of Medford and Mary, wife of Dr. Samuel Adams.

Gen. Nathaniel Austin was active in local/state politics from the 1810s-1830s. He was well known on both local and state levels. He represented the town in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1812, 1831, and 1838, and he was a member of the Governor's Counsel in 1836. He won a seat in the state legislature by one vote in 1812-defeating his brother William, a Democrat. Nathaniel Austin represented the Federalist Party. In addition, Nathaniel Austin held the office of Brigadier General of the Third Division, Massachusetts Militia, between 1815 and 1820 and was a High Sheriff of Middlesex County from 1840-1832. It was Gen. Austin who, as sheriff, carried out the sentence of death for Mike Martin, alias Capt. Lightfoot-"the last of the Highwaymen" or "masked men on horseback". Martin, a fugitive from Ireland, was eventually hung for the robbery of major John Brady on the Medford Turnpike. Gen. Austin was for many years and advocate and worker for toll-free bridges. According to Timothy Thompson Sawyer, Gen. Austin "had strong natural powers, was gifted in speech, and was always looked upon as an earnest, honest man...he was never married and for many years spent much time in the old exchange newsroom under the Bunker Hill Bank in the square" (i.e.City Square).

Number 27 Harvard Square's split stone facing materials were quarried at the Austin-owned Outer Brewster Island in Boston harbor. Outer Brewster Island is the most easterly of all the Harbor Islands, encompassing 17.5 acres-it is the largest



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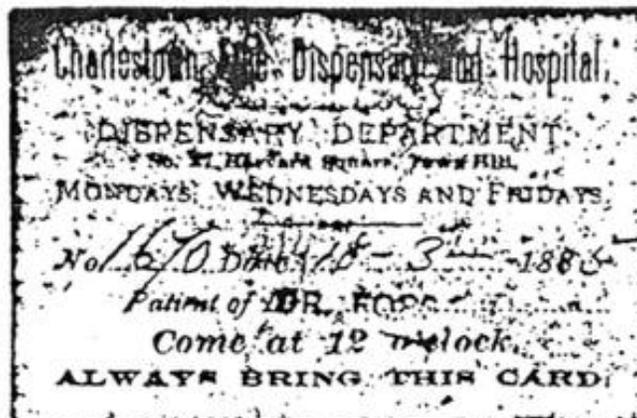
outcrop of solid rock in the harbor. This treeless island, dubbed "the home of the East wind," was purchased by Nathaniel Austin in 1799. Austin established a quarry on the island and had plans to build an artificial harbor-the quarry was not a profitable business venture, owing in part to its remote location.

In addition to number 27 Harvard Square, General Austin built number 92 Main Street (Austin block), the *Bunker Hill Aurora* office, with this island's granite. When the Warren Bridge was macadamized a portion of the stone used was brought from Outer Brewster Island. Gen. Austin later turned to raising sheep and harvesting of small hay crop on Outer Brewster but neither of these enterprises was economically viable.

No. 27 Harvard Square evidently operated as a healthcare facility from 1814 until at least 1885, known as the Charlestown Free Dispensary. It may have been founded to

-CMA 80-A1

Dispensary ticket



Charlestown Free Dispensary & Hospital,  
27 Harvard Square, Town Hill.

Numbered 1670, dated March 18, 1885,  
Stamped by Dr. Forster. (see CMA-282 II & 12)

FROM - Wolcott Cutler's slides of Old Charlestown  
vol. I.

care for wounded servicemen during the war of 1812. By the late 19th century it seems to have been operated as a walk-in clinic evidenced by a dispensary ticket dated 10/1885 listing Mondays Wednesdays and Fridays after 12 PM as dispensary visitation days.

Number 27 remained under Austin family ownership until as late as circa 1880. During the mid-19th century it owned by Henry D. Austin. He was a son of William Austin, Gen. Nathaniel Austin's brother and political opponent. Henry D. Austin was a graduate of Harvard in 1839. According to T T Sawyer, H.D. Austin "will be remembered for his active interest and ownership in Charlestown real estate". He was a lawyer by

profession. From circa 1880 until at least the early 1900s, 27 Harvard Square was owned by John S. G. Whiting, a physician.

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1852

Atlases-1818, 1875, 1885, 1892, 19 or one, 19

Panoramic view from Bunker Hill Monument, 1848, R Mallory

JF Hunnewell-*A Century of Town Life*, 1888, page 118

TT Sawyer- *Old Charlestown*, 216-to 227

*Charlestown Enterprise*, March 22, 1890, page 1

*All about Boston Harbor Islands*, Emily and David Kales

\*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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