

276-280 Bunker Hill Street (circa 1855)

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



276-280 Bunker Hill Street

1968

Numbers 276-280 Bunker Hill Street is a trio of elegant, high style Italianate masonry row houses, covered with a thin layer of stucco (possibly original treatment), with brickwork showing through. They have three bay main façades, side hall plans, and low granite basements. The houses have flat roofs and deep cornices with large paired brackets (? Also cast iron).

The entrances are recessed and have bracketed door hoods; there are later-added outer doors and transoms. The windows

have stone sills and cast iron lintels with delicate decorative detail, and 1/1 wood sash.



276-280 Bunker Hill Street

2015

Builder: Charles P Brooke; 276-S P Adams; 278-William Seavey

Original owner: 280-James Brown

These houses are part of Bunker Hill Street's remarkably unspoiled mid-19th century streetscape. Perhaps only Tremont Street in the South End conveys as intact and clear a picture of 19th century Boston area base housing on a major avenue unmarred by vacant lots. Architecturally, these stucco-covered masonry Italianate row houses rank among the more substantial and elegant examples of mid-19th century row housing in Charlestown. Particularly noteworthy are its well-detailed cast iron window lintels. The use of cast iron for surface elements on a Charlestown row house (not to mention Boston town houses in general) is unusual, in and of itself.



280 Bunker Hill Street second floor lintel detail 2015



280 Bunker Hill Street third floor lintel detail 2015

Judging by Middlesex plans and deeds, as well as Boston directories, this group dates to circa 1855-1856. Their lots appear on a Doane plan of 1855 (280's land appears as lot #78). Buildings are mentioned as being extant on this property in a deed dated June 28, 1858 (741:303). At that time Charles P Brooke, of Charlestown, a plasterer, paid Richard Sullivan Jr of Boston, a merchant, \$1532.70 for 276 Bunker Hill Street's lot.

For many years these row houses were associated with three Boston fish dealers: Simeon T Adams- 276, William Seavey- 278, and James Brown, 280. It is not clear as to when Sullivan or Wellington sold 276- 280 to Simeon P Adams (276), William Seavey (278), and James Brown (280). Charlestown directories indicate that Seavey and Brown were at 278 and 280, respectively, by 1856, indicating a construction date of circa 1855-56. Simeon P Adams is listed here by 1860. He did not purchase 280 until March 29, 1864, when he bought it from John Q A Griffin (901:85).

In any event, 276-280 apparently represents the craftsmanship of Charles P Brooke. He is variously listed as a mason or plasterer from 1840 until the early 1890s. He is listed as a mason, at the corner of Green and Bartlett Streets in 1842 and is described as a plasterer at 9 Eden Street in 1845. By 1848 he had moved to 40 Green Street. Brooke lived on Green Street until the mid-1850s. By 1860 he lived at 192 Bunker Hill Street and worked at 2 Warren Street. From circa 1861 until the early 1890s, he lived at 26 Eden Street. He is listed as a plasterer as late as 1890. He is not listed in the 1901 directory.

S P Adams owned number 276 until at least 1875. By the early 1900s and Eliza J Hartin lived there.

The Seavey family owned 278 until mid-1880s. By 1901 Sullivan, Niles, et al owned this house.

The Brown family owned 280 until at least the early 1890s. By the early 1900s it belonged to a John Harvey.

These houses are perched high on the southern edge of Bunker Hill and possess spectacular views of Boston and Cambridge from their rear windows. The basements are considerably below the grade of Bunker Hill Street. Their house lots were part of the extensive land holdings of Richard Sullivan Sr and Richard Sullivan Jr. During the early 1800s Richard Sr purchased several large parcels of land in the vicinity of Sullivan Street, (originally called Greaves or Graves Street, laid out circa 1805), from Oliver Holden. Sullivan's purchase stretched from Main Street to Bunker Hill Street. Richard Sr was the son of James Sullivan, who was governor of Massachusetts in 1807, and president of the Middlesex Canal Company. It was the Sullivan family's Middlesex Canal connection that apparently introduced them to Charlestown real estate speculation. The southern terminus of the canal was located at Charlestown Neck, near Sullivan Square, linking the Boston area with the Merrimack River and vicinity.

Richard Sullivan, Sr, who was born in 1779 in Groton Massachusetts, purchased land in the Brighton-Parker-Perkins streets section of Charleston in addition to the Salem Street area. By 1818 he operated a large tavern at Sullivan Square (named for either James or Richard Sr in 1848). By 1827 he was a co-partner in the Middlesex Canal-related Boston and Concord Boating Company. During the 1840s to the 1870s Richard Sullivan Jr, a Boston based "commercial merchant" living at Mount Vernon Street on Beacon Hill, was involved in selling off his father's real estate empire. Numbers 276-280

Bunker Hill streets lots were sold off at midpoint in this land liquidation process. Bunker Hill Street dates to at least the mid-18th century and probably existed as a path at a much earlier date.

*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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