

28 Harvard Street (circa 1858-59)

From Boston Landmark Commission's Charlestown Historic Resources Study 1981 (E. W. Gordon, Consultant)*, with addendum from the Massachusetts Historical Survey.**



28 Harvard Street

2015



28 Harvard Street entry detail

2015



Cornice detail



28 Harvard Street Rococo Revival rail

Number 28 Harvard Street is a mansion scale, three story Italianate/Mansard three bay by three bay house. It is constructed of red brick with granite and brownstone trimmings and has a rusticated granite-block basement and a side hall plan. The house has a dentillated and bracketed cornice and a distinctive Mansard roof. In the main roof slope are two dormers with segmental keystone cornices.

Six granite steps with shoulders and cylindrical newel posts lead to a slightly recessed entrance. A rococo revival cast iron railing is still intact on the stoop. Brownstone entrance enframements consist of paneled brownstone pilasters with dentillated entablature, curved edging at corners of the entablature underside, and heavy acanthus leaf-decorated console brackets (badly weathered in spots), which support the cornice/door hood. Multi-panel Victorian double entrance doors are intact. All but one cornice-headed brownstone lintel have completely weathered away on the main façade-only lintels to left of the entrance are intact. The windows have brownstone sills and 6/6 replacement sash.

Original owner: Moses A. Dow

Situated near the top of Town (now Harvard) Hill, this house is a key component in Harvard Street's collection of stylish, well-crafted circa 1835-1860 townhouses. The architectural and historical significance of the 28 Harvard Street is threefold. First it is an important early Charlestown example of Mansard houses built circa 1858-59. This house is among the very few mid-19th century mansion scale residences located outside of Monument Square and immediate vicinity. Thirdly this house was the home of well-to-do mid-19th century Charlestown magazine publisher/real estate tycoon Moses A Dow (1810-1886), publisher of the Waverly Magazine, developer of substantial commercial blocks in Charlestown and Stoneham, Massachusetts, and transformer of Town Hill from rundown neighborhood to elite enclave. He lived at 28 Harvard from circa 1858-1886.

Architecturally, 28 Harvard is a grand summation of the townhouse architecture embodied in the Dow- developed residences at 1-4 Harvard Place, 18-24, 36-38 Harvard Street, and 5 Washington Street. Number 28 is much wider and deeper than the above-mentioned town houses. Its ornamentation is more lavish than that of the others, with entrance enframements consisting of paneled pilasters, dentillated entablature and above all, the acanthus leaf-ornamented console brackets of the door hood. Unfortunately weathering has adversely affected the porous brownstone trimmings. Most of the brownstone cornice-headed lintels are no longer extant.

No. 28 Harvard has significant historical associations with Moses A Dow. Born in Littleton, New Hampshire, May 27, 1810, Dow came to Boston in 1829. He began as a journeyman printer-evidently life provided lessons in perseverance as he

failed eight times, before age 40 in businesses related to job and newspaper printing. In 1850 while engaged as a journeyman printer on the Boston Daily Traveler, he conceived the project of starting the Waverly Magazine. Five or six years after its founding, the Waverley Magazine was a success but not before Dow lost money on the project. He prepared the Waverly Magazine's copy and did the editorial work at home in the evenings. Number 28 Harvard Street, built at a cost of \$25,000 (comparable in price to the mansion-scale brownstone house blocks in Boston's South end during the mid-1850s), is symbolic of Dow's hard earned success in the magazine business and shrewd real estate investments.

It was Dow who single-handedly up-graded Harvard Hill from a decaying residential backwater to a fashionable neighborhood. Regarding Harvard Street's late 1850s urban renaissance, Dow was praised for his "faith and confidence in Charlestown as an abiding place". Number 28 Harvard was built near the site of the old wood frame Matthew Bridge house, which was demolished circa 1858 to make way for Dow's residential development. (Bridge's brick mansion, 16 Harvard St., covers what was once the lower portion of the Bridge garden). Over time Dow's real estate investments became very large-perhaps his crowning development achievement was the Waverly House. Built in 1865 at City Square at the site of the now demolished Army Navy YMCA, the Waverly House was a combination publishing house and hotel.

Evidently Dow's real estate ventures were far-flung. He built a large block of stores (known as the Dow Building) in Stoneham Massachusetts circa late 1860s (?). He also built the Central House in that town. Mr. Dow was briefly involved in politics. He was a member of the state senate in 1867 but declined reelection and also vetoed a run for mayor of Charlestown.

Dow died in June 1886. At the time of his death his estate was appraised at \$893,845.78- of this \$454,000 was comprised of real estate with \$439,845.78 described as "personal estate".

From the late 1880s until the early 1900s 28 Harvard Street was owned by Joseph H Cotton, an executor of the Dow estate. By 1911, Dow's daughter Mary D Scott owned 28. Mary D Scott, wife of Rev. George Scott, and Emma Jane Cutter, wife of Leonard F Cutter, inherited the bulk of Dow's real estate.

Harvard Street in the earliest days was known as Town Hill Street. Town Hill, circumscribed by Harvard Street, City Square and Main Street was variously called Burial Hill and Windmill Hill during colonial times. Town Hill Street's name was changed to Harvard Street in November 1836. All the Harvard's-the Street, Place and Square, were named for Rev. John Harvard, founder of Harvard College and pastor of Town Hill's First Church.

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1852

Atlases-1868, 1875, 1885, 1892, 1901, 1911

Charlestown enterprise-special edition June 1893-"Charlestown citizens past and present"-bio sketch of Moses a Dow

Hunnewell-*A Century of Town Life*

*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.

R. Dinsmore

****Massachusetts Historical Survey****Recorded by**

Pauline Chase-Harrell, Katy Hax Holmes

Boston Affiliates, Inc.

August - October, 2005

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Moses A. Dow House is a stately brick, Italianate Style residence, which rises four stories above a raised granite foundation and is three bays in width. Standing mid-block on Harvard Street's southern slope, this house is one of the anchors in the Town Hill Historic District. A flared mansard roof tops the east and west facades; the north and south facades have brick parapet walls. The south facade, where two large interior brick chimneys are symmetrically placed, overlooks the driveway leading west to a parking area for the buildings' residents. The north wall of this building adjoins the neighboring row house and extends further west, becoming partially visible from Harvard Place.

Wooden modillions in need of paint, above a row of brick dentils on a raised brick bandcourse, trim the east and west facade rooflines in the Italianate Style and wrap partially around the south facade. A wooden cornice, also in need of paint, has wooden dentils and trims the south parapet wall. Many of the wooden dentils are missing. The north wall has no roof trim. Two wooden, articulated segmental arched dormers with keystones are symmetrically placed on the east front roof, each containing single metal replacement sash windows with false muntins. On the rear west facade, two symmetrically placed shed dormers with

composite shingle siding have single replacement sash windows with false muntins. Between these rear dormers, wooden stairs on the roof ascend from the roof edge to a modern roof deck with a wooden balustrade installed in 1987.

A two and a half story, shed roofed brick ell, constructed sometime after the original block, but probably in the 19th century, extends from the west facade. A one story three car brick garage, constructed in 1926 extends from the west side of the ell.

Windows on all four facades of the house have metal sash replacements, and all lintels have been replaced in kind. Brick patching is evident around windows on the east, south, and west facades, and five second-story window openings on the east and south facades were reduced in size in 1936, with brick infill and replacement brownstone lintels evident above the current windows. Brick infill above second story windows on the rear west facade indicate these windows were also reduced in size. Projecting brownstone sills with scrolled drops trim all windows on the front east facade. Windows on the remainder of the house and the brick ell have simple, slightly raised, brownstone sills with no drops.

Six granite steps with granite strings ending at rounded granite newel posts, the orb-shaped tops no longer extant, ascend to a shallowly recessed, wooden paneled entranceway and original, double wooden paneled doors. The planar style of the steps is reminiscent of the earlier Greek Revival or Granite School, while the doorway is Italianate. Each door has a vertical, rectangular pane, skirted with a single row of wooden pyramidal trim over raised panels below, and bears a brass plaque with the name Moses A. Dow, 1860, in its center. Scrolled cast iron railings similar to those found in the South End, one of which is original to this house and one constructed of salvaged parts, are mounted on the granite strings. Grooved markings in the newel posts and post holes in the granite strings, however, indicate that railings were an original feature. The painted brownstone entranceway consists of a

Decorated Style arch supported by paneled pilasters beneath a flat architrave hood with dentil trim and flanking brackets bearing an acanthus leaf ornamentation, which shows evidence of spalling but is still partially evident. A modern overhead lantern illuminates the entranceway.

A single, modern, metal sliding basement window centered in the rusticated granite foundation, located to the left of the entrance, overlooks a narrow landscaped garden of shrubbery contained behind a granite curb. Stone pavers line this basement window at si II level. A painted, period cast iron fence in a pattern often used with the scrolled railings in the South End appears to match the original anchor points in this curbing exactly, and is probably very similar to the original in this location. It includes a metal gate, which opens onto a set of granite stairs descending to a wooden paneled, basement-level door. A chamfered granite lintel over this entrance blends seamlessly with the rusticated granite foundation, suggesting this is an original feature.

The brick, south facade of the main house is four stories in height from basement level, which is not delineated on this side and is four bays wide. Two central bays in the facade contain four levels of windows which are graduated in size and have replacement brownstone lintels. The second story windows once were the longest on this facade but were shortened in 1936. The left-center bay contains a stacked column of replacement 1/1 sash windows with false muntins, while the right-center bay contains windows only on the first and fourth stories, a seemingly original configuration. The left side of the south facade is windowless, while the right side near the southeast corner has a single stacked column of windows on the first, second and third stories. A nicely landscaped border garden, containing a decorative wooden lamppost and a section of cast iron fencing, lines the foundation of the south wall behind granite curbing. A square granite block on the southwest corner of the south facade is the south end of a

chamfered granite lintel over the west side basement entrance.

The brick, north facade, visible from Harvard Place, rises four stories from basement level and extends two bays further west than its neighboring building to the north. This predominantly windowless facade rises to a parapet roof with no trim, with single replacement, 1/1 sash windows on the second and third stories, the second story window slightly longer. A vertical line of mortar extending the length of this facade in the right bay appears to indicate an area of replaced brick at the northwest corner of the building.

The rear west facade of the main house rises three stories above the raised basement to a composite shingled flared mansard roof and is three bays in width, with evenly ranked windows on every level. Brick dentil trim on a raised brick band course trims the mansard roofline beneath the two shed dormers. Between the second and third bays a narrow exterior chimney rises to roof level. Fire escape stairs ascend the rear west facade from the second story up to the wooden stairway on the roof leading to the deck. At the southwest corner of this west facade, granite steps descend to a wooden paneled door set within a simple wooden frame beneath the chamfered granite lintel. A modern, wooden fenced enclosure with sliding doors stands to the left of this basement entrance.

The rear brick ell rises two stories over a raised basement and extends four bays west from the left rear bay of the main house. The shallow shed roof of the ell slopes south toward the parking area and is trimmed with a single row of brick dentils over a raised brick band course. Evenly ranked replacement 1/1 windows with false muntins and wooden shutters, flush brownstone lintels and brownstone sills are found in three of the four bays, with the single-door entrance and an eight-pane transom housed in the second bay. No brick patching is evident around windows on the south facade of the brick ell, but mortar patching and brick header trim are evident over the second story window on its west facade.

A modern copper arch with exposed metal supports caps this entrance, which opens onto a modern, raised granite stoop and six granite steps with open brick supports and modern railings. Modern light fixtures flank the entrance. The granite foundation of the ell holds two basement windows, one beneath the left bay, and the other between the third and fourth bays. Both have modern sliding glass windows beneath flush brownstone lintels. From the left side of the stoop, a metal stairway leads to a modern patio behind a painted wooden balustrade on the roof of the garage. From this patio, another metal stairway ascends the single-bay, west facade of the ell to a second story window with a brownstone lintel, and wraps around to the south forming a second story balcony. This balcony connects to the fire escape stairs on the west facade of the main house, and to the wooden stairway on the roof.

The single-story, brick, three car garage adjoins, and is positioned slightly forward from, the west facade of the brick ell and is three long bays in width. A thin raised brick band course trims the flat roofline. Three overhead garage doors set into squared openings with simple wooden frames face south over the parking area. The rear wall of a neighboring residence adjoins this garage on the west side.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Prior to 1835, Harvard Street, then called Town Hill Street, was bordered by late 18th/early 19th c. masonry and wood frame detached houses surrounded by ample gardens, and Town Hill still had a semi-rural, village-scale quality. After the fire of August 1835 leveled much of nearby City Square and the waterfront, however, Charlestown was gripped by a re-building fever, and an extensive rebuilding campaign, complete with wider streets and service alleys followed the conflagration. Although their land on Town Hill Street was not located near the "Burnt District", the trustees of the First Parish Church evidently realized that the time was right to convert their land holdings to cash.

The group of nine late Federal/Greek Revival townhouse at #7-23 Harvard Street developed by Shadrach Varney in 1835-36 on land formerly owned by the First Parish Church was the most extensive masonry row that had yet been built in Charlestown, and introduced a more sophisticated urban building form to Town Hill. The second phase of Town Hill's urbanization occurred during the late 1850's with Moses Dow's development of mansard masonry houses on Harvard Street and Harvard Place.

During the late 1850's Moses A. Dow, publisher of Waverly Magazine, developed an enclave of elegant Italianate Mansard townhouses, which included 1-4 Harvard Place, 18-24, 34-38, and his own house at 28 Harvard Street. Dow's residential enclave was called a "courageous project for the improvement of Charlestown property," and he was credited by a newspaper reporter as having transformed Harvard Street from "an undesirable locality to a select neighborhood." His contributions to the area did not stop here, however; in c. 1865, he erected the Waverly House, a large and elegant masonry Second Empire hotel/magazine publishing house, at City Square. He was also the founder of the Dow Academy in New Hampshire.

Born in Littleton, New Hampshire, in 1810, Dow learned the printer's trade in Haverhill, New Hampshire. He became foreman in his brother's printing shop in Boston in 1829 and in 1840 established his own job office. In 1850 he began publication of the "Waverly Magazine," in which he published all the contributions of fiction and poetry submitted by schoolgirls and other young writers. He began with no capital, printed without discrimination the articles of amateur authors, and was successful from the beginning. Finding many readers among the friends of his numerous contributors, the magazine obtained a wide circulation among "young people of scanty education and immature taste" in the factory towns of New England and throughout the western states, for many years boasting a circulation of 50,000 copies. At

one point, he engaged an editor of taste and experience, who rejected many of the submissions; but the circulation immediately fell off, and the paper was restored to its original basis. Before the Civil War his income from the paper had reached \$60,000 a year; it was at this point that he began his real estate ventures. He died in Charlestown in 1886.

Before age 40, Dow had failed eight times in businesses related to job and newspaper printing. In 1850, while engaged as a journeyman printer on the Boston Daily Traveler, he conceived the project of starting the Waverly Magazine. He prepared the magazine's copy and did the editorial work at home in the evenings. Built at a cost of \$25,000, comparable to mansion scale houses then being built on major parks in the South End, 28 Harvard Street. is symbolic of Dow's hard won success. It ranks among the very few mid 19th century houses built on major parks in the South End, and owned several of the other houses he had built until his death in 1886. These homes were later owned by Dow estate trustees and Dow's daughters Emma J. Cutter and Mary D. Scott.

By 1922, 28 Harvard Street was owned by Calogero La Cascia, who filed for a permit to place a fire escape on the rear. apparently as part of a conversion of the building to 5 family apartments. Calogero and Rose LaCascia and their son Leo, born in 1924, lived in the first floor unit, and in 1926, he was granted permission to "locate a three-car garage of the first class between 20 and 50 feet from tenement house at 28 Harvard," although, given the proximity of the garage to the ell, which is of 19th century construction, these measurements were probably from the main block of the house. The La Cascia family continued to live in and work on the house for many years, shortening five front windows of the house in 1936, and adding more fire escapes in 1951.

Leo and his brother inherited the building in 1978 when their mother died. In 1987, Leo and Chuck Lacasia and Carl Rubin sought various permits for a major renovation of the five

apartments, and the addition of a roof deck. In 1988, ownership had transferred to Carl & Mark Rubin, C & M Realty. By 2000, the owner was the Moses A Dow Condo Trust.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Boston City Directories at State Library, Special Collections Department.^[1] Boston Inspectional Services Department, Permit Files. www.cityofboston.gov/isdl/default.asp.^[1] Boston Landmarks Commission, Building Information Form: 28 Harvard Street, Charlestown, Massachusetts. 1986.^[1] Boston Landmarks Commission, Charlestown, Project Completion Report, 1990.^[1] United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service



Street façade at ground



Street façade at ground



Rear at ground



Rear garage



Rear and Ell



Ell entry

