

29-41 High St. (circa 1863-64, possibly a circa late 1850s)

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



29- 41 High Street

2015

Numbers 29-41 High Street is a substantial Italianate/Mansard row of three double, flat front, townhouses constructed of red brick with brownstone trimmings. The main façades of 29-39 have rusticated brownstone basements and two bays. Numbers 29 through 39 have deep cornices with scrollwork brackets, and the buildings are crowned by a low Mansard

roof. Some slates appear to be intact. There are pedimented double dormers, original on 29, 31 and 37.

Number 41 High Street was evidently identical to numbers 29-39 in terms of form, surface treatments, and Mansard roof configuration, but was altered at some point during the late 19th century by addition of a five level bow front with rock-faced rusticated brownstone. The bow front's construction resulted in the removal of the Mansard roof. The flat entrance bay retains its original stoop, entrance, and window enframements.

Flights of granite steps with curved shoulders lead to paired and recessed entrances with heavy brownstone enframements. There are angular pilasters at the sides of the entrances, and a center engaged Doric column, also angular. The Doric capital of the center column has an egg and dart course. The pilasters and engaged column have square panels at the midpoint, on three sides, and the panels have recessed circular forms that strike an Italianate note. The pilasters and column support a heavy entablature with a deep cornice. The recessed entries have well crafted wood paneling. Numbers 33, 35, and 39 have replacement front doors and enframements.

Particularly notable are ground floor window treatments. They are fully enframed with tabs at the sills and a pair of narrow round-headed windows set with a single hood composed of a center-flattened arch which flows downward into half arches at either side. All enframements are composed of brownstone. The second floor windows have sills with tabs and pedimented lintels with tabs and incised floral motifs. The windows of the third floor are simply enframed with sills and lintels with tabs. The windows have 1/1, and 2/2, sash.



37 High Street entry, window detail

2015

Architect: James H Rand- attributed

Builder: Amos Brown

Original owners: Amos Brown, James Damon

Together with the other well crafted mid-19th century wood frame and masonry residences bordering High Street between Cedar and School Streets, 29-41 High Street provides a good introduction to the mansions of Monument Square at the southeastern end of High Street. Built circa 1863/64, this substantial masonry row illustrates the comfortable life enjoyed by well-to-do Charlestown citizens in the 19th century before annexation to Boston in 1874. This row's unusually stylish, for Charlestown, design may have been provided by architect/resident James H Rand. Its rusticated basements are reminiscent of Rand's Italianate row houses at 18-24 Cordis Street, circa late 1860s. (See form for 18-24 Cordis for more information on Rand's career.

Numbers 29-40 were evidently built by Amos Brown, a carpenter, with a little help from former mason, wholesale marble dealer and long time resident of 31, Everett Torrey. For more information on Amos Brown, see form for 5-23 Cross Street.

Architecturally, 29-41 High Street are well-designed examples fairly substantial 1860s Italianate/Mansard housing. Evidently this block's design was not always held in highest regard. Sawyer notes in *Old Charlestown*, page 27 "that it has always been regretted that the façade of this block was left so severely plain, that the enjoyment of the neighborhood could not have been considered in the plan with a more tasteful front elevation, but the pleasant occupation of the block has compensated in great measure for its objectionable architecture".

This group has significant historical Association with several prominent mid-late 19th century Charlestown business and political figures including number 31's Everett Torrey, wholesale marble dealer (boding well for the possibility of high quality, high style marble mantles within); number 33's Benjamin F Stacy, a popular Charlestown apothecary and number 39's Charles F Byam, an important Charlestown shoe dealer. In addition, number 41 was part of the estate of Edward Lawrence, a prominent Charlestown furniture businessman and politician. During the 1890s and early 1900s, 35 High Street served as the rectory for the Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, at 62 High Street.

Built ca. 1863-64 (see Middlesex "plan of house lot belonging to A Brown, as surveyed by Thomas Doane and John Doane, September 1863"), this row represents the work of Amos

Brown, carpenter, with possible architectural design provided by James H Rand. Evidently Brown and James Damon of Ipswich, a "gentleman," were developers of this row. Brown and Damon had joined forces in the development of 5-23 Cross Street in 1863 (see form).

Prior to the early 1860s, 29-41 High Street's site had been part of the garden and front lawn of the Capt. Benjamin Swift house (see T T Sawyer, *Old Charlestown*, pages 24-27 for detailed description of the Swift house ownership, appearance, etc.). Sawyer mentions that the Swift house, built circa 1800, had "a flat roof and was not unlike the Dexter house (see form on 14 Green Street) and other square houses of the time, except that it had two small wings." Swift's garden terraced down to a stone wall and beautiful trees bordering High Street.

Post-Brown/Damon owners of this row evidently included Thomas English-41 and Everett Torrey-31. Further work is needed to determine post-Brown/Damon owners of the 1860s. By 1875 this row's owners included the heirs of E F Adams-29, Everett Torrey-31, Edward Lawrence, the furniture dealer, who was a resident of 44 high Street- 33 (?), O L Gillett-35, Warren Shelburne-37, W E S K(?)itton-39 And Thomas English-41.

By 1885 This Group Owners Included Abram Downs of Abram P Downs and Company (O B Wentworth) Provisions, 40 1/2 Merchant Row-29, Everett Torrey of Everett Torrey and Company, wholesale marble dealers, -31, Benjamin Frank Seavey (Stacey?), an apothecary, 4 Bank Building, Thompson Square-33, Harris S Bean of Conant and Bean, fruit and produce, 84 and 86 Faneuil Hall Market and cellar-35, Charles F Byam and Company (MC Hall), "boots and shoes", 77 Main St.-39, Edward Lawrence, furniture dealer, retired, 41.

Everett Torrey, the owner/occupant of 31 High Street from 1864 until at least 1911 was born in Scituate, May 27, 1828. From 1844-1852 he worked in Boston as a mason and builder. He then engaged in the wholesale marble business under the firm name of Torrey and Company, 69 Beverley St. He represented wards two and three in the legislatures of 1862 and 1863.

Benjamin Frank Stacey (Seavey?) was owner/occupant of 33 ca.1880-90, and his heirs owned this house until at least 1911. B F Stacey was born in Gloucester circa 1836. At an early age he came to Boston as an apprentice in the drug business of C H Atwood, at Green and Leverett Streets. For a time he lived in the south but returned to Massachusetts after an attack of yellow fever. He became a resident of Charlestown in 1859. Initially employed at Dr. Bartlett's drugstore on Elm Street, he opened a store of his own at Tufts and Vine Streets, in Hayes Square. Evidently Stacey was one of the first commercial occupants of the High Victorian Gothic Charlestown Five Cents Savings Bank at Thompson Square, setting up shop there in 1876. For many years he was active in the affairs of the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy as secretary, trustee, and president. He was a member of a staggering number of charitable, social, civic and religious organizations (see page 66, "Charlestown Citizens, Past and Present", *Charlestown enterprise*, special edition, 1893).

During the 1880s Charles F Byam owned 37 High Street. He was born in South Chelmsford Massachusetts, July 2, 1834 and was the son of "match king" Ezekiel Byam, the pioneer of friction match manufacturers. Charles F Byam started out in the match business with his father but turned instead to the

retail shoe business. He built up a very substantial retail and jobbing trade.

Number 35 High Street was purchased for use as a rectory by Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, on 62 High Street. It was purchased for the church by Captain and Mrs. JB Thomas and "refitted" at a cost of \$2500. Rev. E M Taylor and family were its first residents. Evidently 35 was sold by Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church at some point during the early 1900s.

By 1911, this group's owners included E A Stowell et al-29, Everett Torrey-31, Emily a Stacey-33, H L Burcham-35 Charles F Byam-37, Francis P Downey-39 and Alice G Horan (?) -41.

Note: Research update-E F Adams-29's 1860s owner is listed as a merchant (216 State Street, Boston) in Charlestown directories. O L Gillett-35's owner in 1875 was a cigar manufacturer at 21 1/2 City Square and 72 Washington Street, Boston. Number 39's 1875 owner, William E Skilton, is listed as being in the "shoe findings" business at 145 Friend Street, Boston. The 1860 directory indicates that Thomas S English, Major, US Marines, lived at 41 High Street some 3-4 years before the date of construction indicated by deeds and plans. Thus further research may indicate that this row was built earlier than 1863-64.

Bibliography:

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

Boston directories

Middlesex deeds- #41- 911:38

Middlesex plans

T T Sawyer, *Old Charlestown*, 1902

Charlestown Enterprise special edition 1893, "Charlestown Citizens Past and Present"

Charlestown Enterprise November 8, 1890, "Trinity Parsonage",
p. 1
Panoramic View-1848

*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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