

## 32 Cordis Street (1801-1802)

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



32 Cordis

2015

Number 32 Cordis Street is a stately Federal wood frame mansion with a five bay by two bay main block and contiguous two and one story ells on the north side. Its narrow south wall faces Cordis Street. The main block has three stories and a granite block basement. It has a well crafted projecting wood cornice and a low hip roof.

A center entrance opens onto a raised platform with short flights of steps at the sides. Particularly noteworthy is the front door's elegant enframing including a semicircular fan light with moldings exhibiting a delicate pattern of incised lines and floral motifs. Flanking the front door are fluted Doric pilasters, which support a blocked and cornice-headed entablature. The windows are fully enframed, with raised outer moldings and have 6/6 wood sash. The house has typically Federal small square windows at the third level.



32 Cordis entry detail 2015

Original owner: Francis Hyde

Number 32 Cordis is located on the steep slope of Breed's Hill and faces an ample tree-shaded yard. The yard is bordered by a rusticated wall with cast-iron fence along Cordis Street. Entry to the yard and house is through a gate with tall mid- 19th century gateposts, which support a vintage cast iron arch with a lantern at the center.

This house, with its ells and ample garden, provides a remarkably unspoiled glimpse of the home of an early 19th century Charlestown businessman-a soap and candle manufacturer. This stately house, built circa 1801/1802 ranks among the finest examples of detached center entrance wood frame Federal houses in Charlestown, and for that matter, in the Boston area. It is a key component in Cordis Street's remarkable collection of early mid 19th century residences.

Distinguished owner-occupants of this house have included Francis Hyde, a soap and candle manufacturer (1801/1802-1827), Nathan "father" Webb, a teacher, Boston politician and storekeeper (1827-1854), Edwin F Adams, a merchant (1858-1888), Alfred V Lincoln, a salesman, and his daughter Florence Lincoln, a playwright (1837-1938).

Number 32 Cordis is one of the oldest residences on Cordis Street. Cordis Street was set out over the pasture of Capt. Joseph Cordis as early as 1799, and number 32 was built for Francis Hyde circa 1801-1802. The Hydies were extensively involved in the manufacture of soap and candles; their brick factory building was located on the present Warren Street site of St. Mary's R C Church. In a town famous for its elaborate and often exotic gardens, including the gardens of the Dexter estate on Green Street and Isaac Mead's the "the Vineyard" on Eden Street, Mr. Hyde's Cordis Street garden was renowned for its

great charm. Originally this garden stretched southwestward along Cordis Street almost to Warren Street. Hyde's garden was filled with apple and cherry trees and became a bird sanctuary of sorts with bluebirds, yellow warblers, thrushes, rare scarlet tanagers, cuckoos and wood cocks.

On May 7, 1827 (Middlesex 274:19 P1) Franklin Hyde of Baltimore sold in this property to Nathan Webb, Esq. of Boston. Mr. Webb had been a teacher, a Boston selectmen and assessor, a Hanover Street, Boston storekeeper, and a follower of Dr. Lyman Beecher. He retired to the old Hyde house at age 60. Local people referred to him as "father Webb". After his death in 1854, the property passed to his son-in-law Edwin F Adams. Adams did not actually own this house outright until he purchased it in October 1858 for \$8400 from Edward Lawrence, trustee of the Webb estate. (See plan of late Nathan Webb's estate-surveyed by the Doanes, March 15, 1858).

The house was owned by the Adams family until October 18, 1887. At that time it was purchased by Alfred V Lincoln, a salesman. His daughter Florence was a playwright, who studied in the Harvard workshop of George Baker, in 1911. She wrote the prize-winning play "End of the Bridge" which played at the Castle Square Theater in Boston for over 100 performances and "later played at San Francisco to crowded houses". The Lincoln family owned this house until the late 1930s.

Note: this house was shorn of a large portion of its garden during the late 19th century to accommodate numbers 24 and 26 Cordis Street, and possibly 18-22 Cordis as well.

Bibliography:  
Map-Tufts map of 1818

Atlases-1868, 1875, 1885, 1892, 1901, 19...  
 Charlestown/Boston directories-19th century  
 Middlesex deeds-274: 191, 791:424, 425, 801:443  
 Suffolk deeds-1794: 181  
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 T Sawyer's *History of Charlestown*-1901

\*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

Photographs from the Historic American Buildings Survey  
 Frank O. Branzetti, Photographer Jan. 23, 1941



32 Cordis Street

1941



32 Cordis Street, Entry detail

1941



32 Cordis Street, gateway

1941



32 Cordis Street, REAR WINDOW ON STAIR LANDING



32 Cordis Street, MANTEL, EAST ROOM, 2nd. FLOOR



32 Cordis Street, MANTEL, EAST ROOM, 3rd. FLOOR