

36-42 Mount Vernon St. (1901)

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



42, 40, 38, 36 Mount Vernon Street

2016

Numbers 36-42 Mount Vernon Street is a group of four, three-story, yellow brick, limestone (?) Trimmed, Georgian Revival three family residences. They have four bay main façades and side hall

plans. The row has a flat roof with a deep, very ornate galvanized iron cornice with a dentil course, an egg and dart course, and scroll brackets.

All except number 30 have the original multipaneled golden oak doors. These original doors have long oval glass panes, and swan's neck scroll and keystone treatments above. The entrances are adjacent to small, narrow windows with oversize keystones. The first floor windows have cornice-headed hood moldings. The second and third floor windows have wedge shaped Keystone arch lintels with egg and dark courses.



42 Mount Vernon Street

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Architect: Gilbert H Smith

Original owner: Simon Hurwitz

Built in 1901, 36-42 Mount Vernon Street is a very late addition to Mount Vernon Street's collection of mostly mid-19th-century houses. This group is a key component of the impressive, primarily masonry, "wall" of buildings which stretches from Mount Vernon Avenue southwestwardly down the slope of Breed's Hill. This group, or more specifically number 38, occupies the site of the old Ebenezer Breed house.

Architecturally, 36-42 Mount Vernon Street is a relatively rare Charlestown example of turn-of-the-century Georgian Revival masonry housing, in this case with three families per building. Since Charlestown was almost completely built up by circa 1870, it has very few examples of early 20th century residential buildings. This group is the work of architect Gilbert H Smith.

The 1818 Peter Tufts map shows the long, essentially rectangular Ebenezer Breed-owned lot adjacent to Adams Street, over which Mount Vernon Street and adjacent house lots were set out in 1846. In addition, Breed owned sizeable lots stretching from what is now Tremont Street to Bunker Hill Street. Timothy Sawyer, in *Old Charlestown*, tells us that the Breed house was "constructed of brick, standing not so far back from the street (Adams), but with a front lawn and surroundings much the same as the other estates. Opposite the dwelling house, on the other side of the roadway, was a greenhouse of very considerable proportions in which were grown grapes, peaches, apricots, and the most admired tender plants and flowers of the day. Outside the greenhouse, on the front part of the estate, hardy trees, shrubs and flowers were tastefully arranged and cultivated with interest and care". Evidently, the Breed house's main façade faced Adams Street. Sawyer noted that "the rear of the estate, in addition to convenient stable arrangements, consisted of an orchard and quite extensive fields stretching away to Bunker Hill Street. Among the objects of interest

about this place, at one time, was a pair of antelopes kept in an enclosure near the house.”

The Breeds, settling first in Lynn Massachusetts, were among the early settlers of Charlestown. Early Charlestown Breeds included several ship Masters, a distiller, a shoemaker and a tin plate worker. Ebenezer Breed, a merchant with "operations of considerable magnitude" conducted trade with England, the Mediterranean and the East Indies. It was noted in the *Charlestown enterprise*, June 29, 1889, that many Charlestown men from prominent families received their business education in his counting rooms" including George Adams Kettel, who lived on the neighboring Nathan Adams estate, now Chestnut Street and adjacent lots. Although Ebenezer Breed suffered business reverses during the 1840s, he retained the portion of his estate bordering Adams Street, including the site of 36-42 Mount Vernon Street. He died a poor man in 1850.

Later owners of the old Breed house included John Donnes, 1875, and Charles F Smith, a cashier at Continental National Bank, Summer Street, Boston. Smith owned the Breed house until circa 1901. In that year the house was demolished and 36-42 Mount Vernon Street were erected.

Gilbert H Smith was the architect responsible for this group's design. Smith, (the son of Charles F Smith?) Was evidently practicing architecture in the Boston area during the 1890s-early 1900s. Information in the BPL card file is sketchy regarding Gilbert H Smith's career. He was responsible for several three family buildings in Roxbury and Dorchester during the 1890s.

Early 1900s Boston Buildings Department information indicates that a Simon Hurwitz was this group's first owner. By 1911, this group's owners included John B and Teresa Livermore-numbers 36 and 38 (John B Livermore was a broker. He resided at 38), Rose McLaughlin-number 40, and Jenny S Kelley-42.

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1852

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

Boston Buildings Department-information

Timothy T Sawyer-*Old Charlestown*, pages 173-176

Charlestown Enterprise, May 18, 1889-"Some Old Estates", page 1;
and, June 29, 1889, "People of the Past"

*Digitized and edited, without change in content, from the scanned record in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, with the 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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