

38 Mead Street (1840)

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



38 Mead Street

1981

Number 38 Mead Street is a multi-segmented Greek Revival house with a rear ell, and a stable. It has a rubble stone foundation and a narrow three bay façade. The house has a gable roof with return eaves.

The entrance has simple pilasters and entablature. The windows are simply enframed and have 2/2 wood sash on the first floor and 6/6 on second floor and attic.

The rear ell abuts a stable, whose original entrance was apparently altered although one of two stable doors has a Greek anthemion motif. The stable has a hayloft door on the second level and a broad gable with larger multi pane windows.



38 Mead Street

2015



Stable door detail

Builder: Thomas Greenleaf

Original owner: Ruth Rose Foster (Mrs. Gideon Foster)

Built in 1840, 38 Mead Street is of interest primarily for its unusual multi-segmented form. This Greek Revival wood frame vernacular house retains its rear ell and mid-19th century stable. Much of Russell Street's charm is dependent on the existence of this house, as well as number 31 Oak Street. In addition, an interesting dialogue exists between 38 and 39 Mead Street, its Greek Revival/Mansard neighbor across the street.

Built in March-June 1840, 38 Mead's land is part of the Isaac Mead estate. Famous for its experimental gardens, most notably "the Vineyard", which featured rare and beautiful plants. According to Timothy T Walker, the Mead estate was in its "best condition" from 1890-1832 and encompassed the area which includes Main, Eden, Mead, Russell and Oak Streets. The Isaac Mead house, built circa 1800 by Richard Frothingham, stood at the northwest corner of Eden and Main Streets. Above the house "on the upper line of the estate" stood a "stable, with

its end to the street and fronting the stable yard which was enclosed by a fence and a gate on Eden Street, and a row of ____ For carriages running from the stable to the house".

Isaac Mead was one of Charlestown's most successful early 19th century Morocco dressers. He had several factories at "the neck" and elsewhere with a store in North Market, Boston. He conducted a profitable trade in sheep and goatskins. For many years he was prominent in the affairs of Charlestown. He was one of the founders of the First Universalist Society and was one of the first members of the Board of Directors of the Bunker Hill Bank and was on the Board of Trustees of the Warren Institute for Savings. In addition, he was a member of the Hunters Club. Isaac's wife, Alice, was "an amicable, interesting woman and an efficient helper in the benevolent work of her time". She was among the original subscribers to organize the Female Benevolent Society in Charlestown.

Mrs. Mead sold 38's lot to Thomas Greenleaf, a carpenter, circa 1838 (see plan of lots and streets of Isaac Mead by T Larkin, June 1833). Greenleaf, along with Richard Frothingham sold this lot to John Melvin, Charlestown trader, on 2 March 1840 for \$460 (394:?). This deed does not mention buildings-the first mention of buildings on this site occurs in a deed between Melvin and Ruth Rose, widow, 29 July 1840 (395:206). Mrs. Rose paid Melvin \$1800 for this house. Mead Street is mentioned in this deed as "a new street".

Thomas Greenleaf was undoubtedly 38's builder. He was a native of Newburyport Massachusetts but spent most of his life in Charlestown. Sawyer states that Greenleaf at one time "had some connection with the Middlesex Canal, but afterwards engaged in the lumber trade. As early as 1834 he is listed in the Charlestown directory as a carpenter and surveyor based on

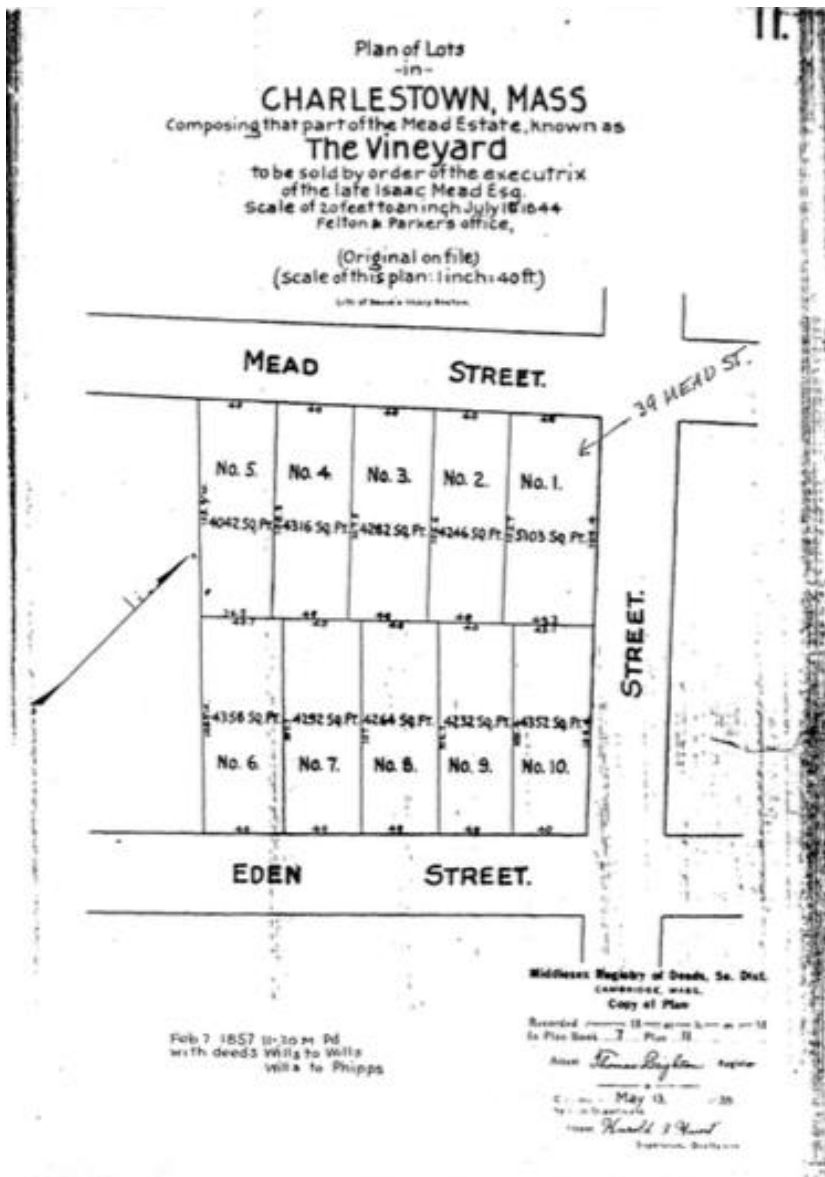
Mill Street. By 1842 he was the proprietor of Thomas Greenleaf and Company (E Ward), wood and lumber, Neck village, _Oak Street. In 1856 his occupation is listed as lumber. From 1856 to circa 1885 he lived at 26 Adams Street, Charlestown. In 1860 his occupation is listed as "assessor". Greenleaf was active in the affairs of the town and later in city of Charlestown, serving as selectman, assessor and clerk of the Overseers of the Poor.

In any event, Ruth Rose (later Ruth Foster) was the original owner of this house. The executor of her estate, George W Little, sold 38 at auction on April 11, 1869 to Franklin S Lane for \$6000. Mr. Lane was a milkman. He owned 38 Mead Street until at least the early 1900s. The stable, still extant, is shown on late 19th and early 20th century atlases beginning in 1875.

This house represents the earliest phase of the residential development of the Isaac Mead estate. The Isaac Mead house, built for Richard Frothingham circa early 1800s, stood at the new corner of Eden and Main streets. This house was "a handsome, well proportioned building surrounded by ornamental shrubs and trees, many of them evergreens, and some uncommonly fine larches". Behind Mead's house and stables were fruit and flower gardens. Particularly noteworthy was the garden at the corner of Eden and Russell streets, site of 35-45 Eden, and 58-72 Russell Street. This garden was nationally known by horticulturalist as "the vineyard." It was laid out and later cultivated by David Haggerston, gardener and one of the pioneers of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, later gardener of the John P Cushing estate in Watertown Massachusetts. The vineyard was an experimental garden "devoted almost exclusively to the testing of foreign varieties of the grape in the open ground". It was in Mead's vineyard that Keen's seedling strawberry was introduced from

Europe. In addition, this garden featured a greenhouse with a fine collection of Camelias.

Note: Charlestown directories do not list an occupation for this house's first owner- Ruth Rose Foster's husband, Gideon Foster



Bibliography:
Atlases-1875, 1885, 1892, 1901
Charles town of directories-1834-1874

Old Charlestown, Historical, Biographical Reminiscences-
Timothy T Walker

*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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