

397- 399 Main Street (1859)

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



E. side of Main Street N. of Oak Street, March 9, 1900, Boston PWD

Numbers 397 and 399 Main Street are two red brick, granite trimmed Italianate row houses with low granite basements and front steps. The houses have a flat roof and the main façades have bracketed cornices. They have octagonal bays from basement to third floor, flat entrance bays, and deep-bracketed wooden door hoods.

The Windows have a lintels composed of two rows of header bricks and have 1/1 replacement sash.

Builder: Charles W Wellington

Architecturally, 397 and 399 Main Street are of interest as early Boston area examples of octagonal-front row houses. The flat front row house was the dominant row house type in



Charlestown during the last half of the 19th century. The bow front, popular in the South End during the 1850s and 1860s, was rarely built in Charlestown during this time. The octagonal front was also relatively rare in Charlestown and did not win widespread favor in the Boston area until the 1870s. Numbers 397 and 399 were built with octagonal fronts as early as 1859.

Numbers 397 and 399 were originally part of a four-unit row. The interior stairs, flooring, etc. represent the works of CW

Wellington, a carpenter. He was active in Charlestown building trades from circa 1845 to circa 1875. He is first listed in the Charlestown directories in 1845, occupation, carpenter, no address listed. By 1852 he lived at 2 Irving Place. He is listed as a carpenter at this address until the mid-1860s. By 1868, his business was located at 6 Mill Street. By this time he was a resident of Cambridge. In 1874 he worked at "rear, 151 Medford". Other examples of Wellington's work include 5-15 Auburn Street (very similar to 397 and 399 Main), 1-3 Auburn, 17-21 Auburn, and 46-60 Baldwin.

On April 16, 1859, C W Wellington paid James Hall of Charlestown, a silk dyer, \$3349 for 397 and 399's lots. (Middlesex deeds 811:90). Buildings occupied this lot by November 1859. At that time Wellington sold 399's lot to Henry Upham, editor and publisher (Middlesex deeds 821:366:). Upham sold 399's lot and the buildings thereon to Isaac L Miles of Chelsea, a merchant, for \$2000 on May 9, 1860.

Later owners of 399 included Eunice Maria Adams of Roxbury, 1860s, and Samuel D Sawin (late 1860s). By 1870 Ezekiel Byam, a match manufacturer, and L E DeWolf, a merchant tailor, 265 Main (form 265-271 Main Street), owned 397 and 399, respectively. Ezekiel Byam was the son of "the pioneer of match manufacturers" E G Byam, Sr. E G Byam, Jr was born in South Chelmsford Massachusetts August 29, 1828. His father was the senior partner of Byam, Carlton and company.

Byam, Sr made matches in 1835 and 1836 and was the first to obtain a right for manufacture of the American friction matches. At that time, a bunch containing only 104 matches was sold for \$.25. He eventually succeeded in reducing the price to less than one cent for more than 300. E G Byam, junior entered his father's business circa 1840 and moved to

Charlestown in 1849. He became a member of the firm of Byam, Carlton and company in 1872. He sold out to the Diamond Match Company in 1880. He retired from business in 1889. He was also director of the National Security Bank and also of several other corporations. For 14 years he lived on the corner of Main and Auburn streets, later moving to number 5 Monument Square, where he lived for 19 years. In December 1891 he left Charlestown for Bay State Road, Back Bay Boston, "where he has a beautiful residence". E.G. Byam Jr was a member of the Bunker Hill Baptist Society and Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association.

By 1885, 397 was owned by A P Holbrook while C Sullivan owned 399. By 1901 Margaret F McCall owned 397 and Catherine E Sullivan owned 399.

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1833, 1839, 1848, 1851

Atlases-1875, 1885, 1892, 1901

Charles town directories-1834-1874

Middlesex deeds

"Souvenir of Charlestown", published by the Bunker Hill times, 1893

*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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