

40 Washington Street (circa 1804)

From Boston Landmark Commission's Charlestown Historic Resources Study 1981*:



40 Washington St. 1971 (R. Severy)



40 Washington Street

1980s

Number 40 Washington Street is a three-story wood frame Federal house with a south facing, five bay main façade, and narrow two bay end walls facing Washington and Lynde streets. The house is enclosed by a low hip roof with a deep, well molded cornice. It was recently re-clad with clapboard and has evidently been extensively rebuilt. Narrow corner boards accent its boxy form.

The main façade's center entrance is flanked by simple pilasters and is surmounted by a semicircular fanlight. Above the fanlight is a dentilated cornice. The windows are simply enframed with raised outer moldings and have 6/6 wood sash. Typically Federal are the small square windows at the third floor.



40 Washington Street

2015

Original owner: James Warren

Overlooking an attractive tree shaded yard, 40 Washington St. is one of the oldest survivors from the initial early 19th century residential development of Lynde's, or Prison, Point. Although extensively rebuilt, this house retains its distinctive Federal boxy rectangular three-story form, fenestration and entrance enframements.



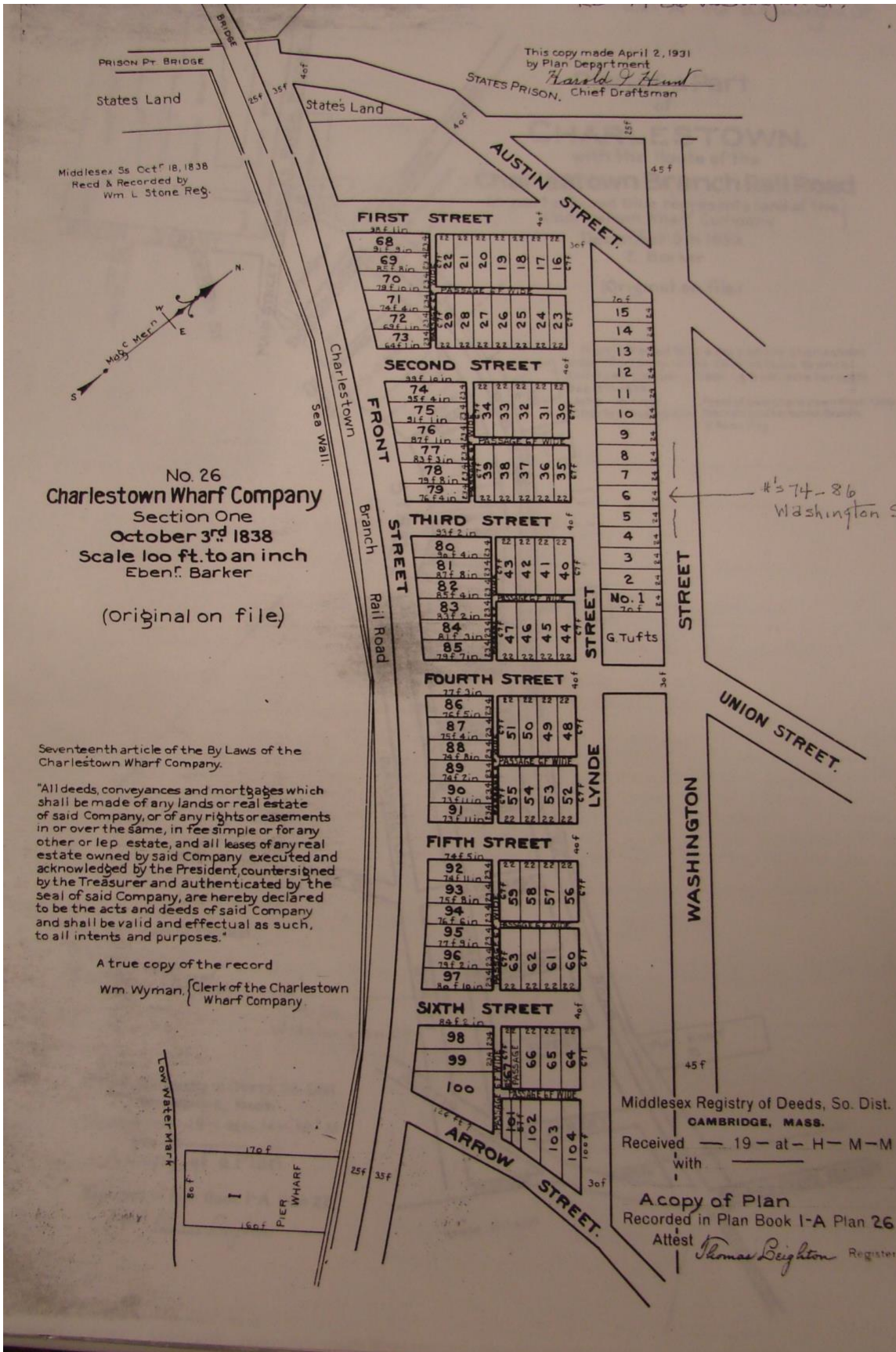
40 Washington Street, entry detail

1980s

This house has significant historical association with important Boston/Charlestown rope walk owner and real estate speculator Capt. Archibald McNeill. It was built circa 1804.

During the 1790s, Capt. Archibald McNeil purchased much of Lynde's point (later Prison Point) from the widow of Joseph Lynde. A fire that destroyed his ropewalks in the High and Pearl streets section of Boston precipitated Capt. McNeil's move to Charlestown from Boston. Capt. McNeil built ropewalks along the lower side of Lynde Street, overlooking the waters of the Charles River Bay (before extensive late 19th century landfill). The 20 or more acres of land purchased by Capt. McNeil included what is now Washington Street, that part of Rutherford Avenue formerly called Richmond Street, and portions of Bow (now Devens), Union and Austin streets. McNeil's mansion was located near Washington Place (off Washington street's northeast side) and faced Bow Street. It was surrounded by a large area of land, green fields, and pastures. By 1803, McNeil's land was thought to be too valuable for a single estate. The land was laid out into streets and lots and sold to prominent Charlestown families-including the Devens, Goodwin, Tufts, Sweetser, Forster, Frothingham, Edmands, Warren, Baker, Harris, Wiley and Kendall families. Timothy T Sawyer states that "Washington Street very soon became one of the pleasantest for residences, and its desirability for this purpose was maintained for more than half a century, at least".

In addition to lots for residential development, Capt. McNeil sold land for the purpose of establishing a state prison (now site of Bunker Hill Community College) and shipyard. Undoubtedly, residential development within McNeil's tract was spurred on by the completion of the Middlesex Canal (1803)-terminating not far away at the old Mill Pond (now Essex Street and vicinity).



This copy made April 2, 1931
by Plan Department
Harold P. Hunt
Chief Draftsman

Middlesex Ss Oct 18, 1838
Recd & Recorded by
Wm L Stone Reg.

No 26
Charlestown Wharf Company
Section One
October 3rd 1838
Scale 100 ft. to an inch
Eben. Barker

(Original on file)

Seventeenth article of the By Laws of the
Charlestown Wharf Company.

"All deeds, conveyances and mortgages which shall be made of any lands or real estate of said Company, or of any rights or easements in or over the same, in fee simple or for any other or less estate, and all leases of any real estate owned by said Company executed and acknowledged by the President, countersigned by the Treasurer and authenticated by the seal of said Company, are hereby declared to be the acts and deeds of said Company and shall be valid and effectual as such, to all intents and purposes."

A true copy of the record
Wm. Wyman, { Clerk of the Charlestown Wharf Company.

Middlesex Registry of Deeds, So. Dist.
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Received 19 - at - H - M - M
with

A copy of Plan
Recorded in Plan Book I-A Plan 26

Attest *Thomas Beighton* Register

#s 74-86
Washington S

Number 40 Washington Street is a survivor from the earliest phase of Capt. McNeil's development. Its original owner was James Warren, a cordwainer. On 8 March 1804 James Warren paid Capt. McNeil \$800 for 40 Washington's lot. The McNeil/Warren deed (Middlesex 155:511) describes Lynde Street as "a new street, which is to be laid out". Number 40 Washington's lot is referred to as number five (on what plan?). Presumably 40 Washington was built during the spring/summer of 1804.

Warren owned this property for over 15 years, selling it to Chester Adams, a Charlestown "gentleman" for \$2500.00. The house was purchased by John Call, a "gentleman", in January 1833 for \$3100.00 (Middlesex deed 320:82). By 1853, Amos Brown owned this property. Brown was a prolific Charlestown carpenter/builder, active in local building trades from circa the early 1850s until approximately 1910. (See form on 4-10 Mystic Street for more information on Amos Brown. He was the builder of 5-21 Cross Street and 29-41 High Street (both 1863). Brown family members owned this house until as late as 1888-at that time it passed to Boston widow, Lydia Easter (1823:559, Suffolk).

Late 19th century atlases indicate that this house has been shorn of its pre -1868 L-shaped rear ell. This ell was constructed of wood and had a two-story segment abutting the main block's Lynde Street wall as well as two other contiguous one-story segments. Originally this house's rear wall overlooked Capt. McNeil's ropewalks and the waters of the Charles River basin, less than a block away.

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1852

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

Charlestown/Boston directories, 19th century
MHC Charlestown Reconnaissance survey
T T Sawyer-*Old Charlestown* pages 56-59
Middlesex deeds-155:511, 232:434, 320:82, 661:169
Suffolk deeds-1377: 191, 1931:209

*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