

41-45 Chestnut Street (circa 1852-1857)

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



45, 43, 41 Chestnut Street

2015



Lintel (#45), and entry (#43) detail, 2015

Numbers 41-45 Chestnut Street is a trio of well-designed, well-executed Italianate town houses. The houses have granite-faced basements, flat roofs with deep-bracketed cast iron cornices, three bay main facades, and side hall plans.

The entrances are deeply recessed with granite steps leading to the front doors. The entry walls have a well-crafted wood paneling. The entrances are flanked by paneled pilasters. Deep-bracketed cast iron door hoods support projecting wood oriel windows, which interrupt the planarity of the red brick main

façade. The windows have weathered brownstone sills, ornate segmental-headed cast-iron lintels, and 1/1 wood sash.

Builder: John B and Charles Wilson (with Isaac C Cushing?)

Original owner: John B and Charles Wilson (?)

This attractive masonry trio of Italianate townhouses, built circa 1852-1857, is part of Chestnut Street's rich inventory of mid-19th century luxury housing. These houses are identical to those diagonally across the street at numbers 28-34 Chestnut Street. Architecturally, this trio ranks among the more ornate examples of mid-19th century Charlestown Italianate housing. They are among only a half dozen or so in Charlestown which possess cast iron elements, such as bracketed door hoods, lintels, and bracketed cornices.

They are the work of prolific mid-19th century Charlestown housewrights John B Wilson and Charles Wilson, with possible collaboration of Isaac Cushing.

John B Wilson enjoyed a long and highly successful career in Charlestown building trades from circa early 1830s to the early 1900s. He worked in partnership with his brother Charles Wilson until Charles' death in 1860. J B and Charles Wilson were responsible for the construction of the majority of houses bordering Monument Avenue, in circa mid--late 1850s. These included the Lawrence/Sawyer house at 44-46 High Street, in 1850, and the Bunker Hill School, 1845, predecessor to the current schoolhouse of 1866 on Baldwin Street.

Isaac C Cushing was active as a mason in Charlestown (and later in Somerville?) From circa 1840-1860 (see form on numbers 1-3 Tremont Street).

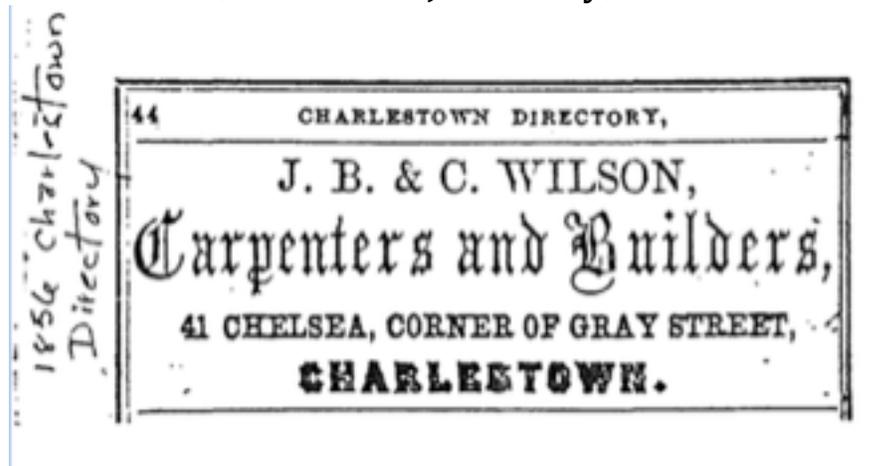
This trio's lots were carved from the old Nathan Adams/George A Kettel estate. This estate was subdivided beginning circa 1840 and was a contemporary of the other two important Breed's Hill developments- Mount Vernon Street (former Ebenezer breed estate), and the Bunker Hill Monument Association's 115 lot tract. The Adams/Kettel driveway (off Adams Street) was the nucleus of the present Chestnut Street. The Adams/Kettel mansion was located next door to 41-45 Chestnut, on the site of the presently abandoned Bunker Hill Post #26.

Evidentially all three lots were purchased by Michael Hittinger, a blacksmith, from George A Kettel on January 1, 1847 for \$2903. The 1852 McIntyre map does not show buildings on this site. Buildings are first mentioned in the deed of April 30, 1858. At that time Mary E Fairbanks of Charlestown, a widow, paid Nahum Chapin \$7650 for 45 Chestnut Street. It should be noted that that the Kettel/Hittinger deed carried the following restriction: "that the houses are to correspond in value and appearance with the two brick dwelling houses recently erected opposite these premises on the land of Tinslar and Pook" (see form on 42, 44 Chestnut Street). In 1875, 45 was owned by a Charles Fairbanks and, during the 1890s, by Rufus Holman.

In April 1859, Edward Lawrence, prominent Charlestown furniture manufacturer/politician purchased 43 from John B and Charles Wilson for \$7000, evidently as an investment property. Lawrence, in turn, sold 43 to George Cutter in May 1864. Cutter owned 43 until circa the late 1870s. Another owner of 43 during the late 19th century was Freeman Emery, in the 1880s-90s. Emery was involved in one of the Boston area's first commercial telephone line systems in the late

1870s, in Charlestown, in association with a fish dealership in Boston (see form on 28-34 Chestnut Street)

Further research is needed on the number 41's deed chronology. Its owners have included Edward F Devans, 1875 A M Devans, 1885, and J Maloney, 1892.



Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1852

Atlases-1868, 1875, 1885, 1892

Middlesex Deeds

Mallory panoramic view of Charlestown/Boston, 1848

*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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