

44 and 46 High St. (1850-1851)

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



44, 46 High Street

2015

Numbers 44 and 46 High Street a substantial Greek Revival double house constructed of red brick with granite and brownstone trimmings. The houses have low granite-faced basements. Each half possesses a side hall plan, with a two bay, three-story bow front and a flat entrance bay. Each of the

houses has a distinctive end wall profile, with linked chimneys. The garden wall of 44 has a first floor oriel window. To the rear is a two-story ell, reworked in the 1890s for clubhouse purposes, and abutting the ell's rear wall is an extensive modern two-story addition. The building's cornice table is composed of three brickwork segments, and it has a gable roof with linked chimneys.

Short flights of granite steps lead to paired entrances and the original unusual multipanel round-headed front doors are still intact on both houses. The entrances are enframed by Doric pilasters, (verging on engaged columns), and surmounted by entablatures. Above the entablatures are heavy deep-bracketed door hoods. The windows of the first floor main façade have brownstone pedimented lintels with tabs. The second and third floor windows have simple sills, and the second floor lintels have tabs. In general, the windows have 6/6 wood sash.

Flanking the front of the building is a hedge lined with an interesting wrought iron fence. The granite fence posts are still intact on the west side.

Architect: Joseph Robbins-rear annex, 1890s, (*Charlestown Enterprise*) April 30, 1892 page 1

Builder: John B Wilson, both 1850 and 1890s; Charles Wilson, 1850; Elisha Faunce, 1850-TT Sawyer, *Old Charlestown*

Original owner: Edward Lawrence-44, TT Sawyer-46

Flanked by attractive lawns and gardens, this stately masonry Greek Revival bow front duo provides a glimpse of the residences of two prominent well-to-do, mid to late 19th century Charlestown businessmen. Built circa 1850-1851, 44 and 46 High Street have significant historical associations with

Edward Lawrence, a furniture manufacturer, in number 44, and Timothy Thompson Sawyer, Mayor of Charlestown, ice dealer and local historian, in 46. These houses are the work of prolific Charlestown builder John B Wilson, who was active circa 1830s to early 1900s (see form 47, 49 Monument Avenue). During the late 19th century and early 20th century, 44 housed two important local social, civic organizations-the Charlestown Club, 1892-1906, and the Bunker Hill Council of the Knights of Columbus, 1907-?.

Architecturally, 44 and 46 High Street is a substantial well-crafted double Greek Revival house with bow fronts at the main façade. The bow fronts are extremely broad in the manner typical of 1840s/early 1850s Boston area bow fronts and much broader in comparison with the taller, narrower bow fronts of the late 1850s-60s. Bow front housing made a brief appearance in Charlestown in the early 1850s, e.g. at Monument Square, Laurel Street and Union Street, but did not enjoy the same widespread popularity as did the flat front. Particularly memorable is this duo's end wall profile with tall linked chimneys. By 1850 linked chimneys were a very retardataire Boston area structural feature.

Numbers 44 and 46's lot was carved from the old Dexter estate mansion house, around the corner at 14 Green Street (see form). Timothy T Sawyer in *Old Charlestown* recalled that the Lawrence house "had a well-kept lawn with the refreshing play of the fountain and with a fine display of beautiful flowers, skillfully arranged and faithfully cared for. In the fall of 1850 the foundations of the Lawrence and Sawyer houses were laid and in the summer of 1851 the owners moved into their new houses". Lawrence chose to live at 44 because it received the most sunlight. Sawyer preferred to live in 46 because of its proximity to a large tulip tree.

According to Sawyer, John B Wilson, Charles Wilson and Elisha Faunce were the contractors responsible for 44 and 46's construction. John B Wilson and Charles Wilson are perhaps best remembered as the builders of many of the houses bordering Monument Avenue (set out 1854/55). Numbers 44 and 46 High Street appear as T shaped, with a long rear ell, on the 1852 McIntyre map.

Number 44's original owner, Edward Lawrence, was a leading figure in Charlestown business and political circles. He was regionally known as a furniture manufacturer. Born in Harvard Massachusetts on June 21, 1810, he came to Charlestown in April 1825. He immediately became associated with the important Charlestown furniture manufacturing firm of Jacob Foster and Charles Foster, already in business for 30 years before Lawrence joined the company. In 1833 the firm of Foster, Lawrence Company contracted for the labor of convicts at the state prison, now the site of Bunker Hill Community College, and until the firm dissolved in 1856, continued to carry on its manufacturing business largely in its shops in the prison. In 1863, he retired from furniture manufacturing to devote his time to his duties as president of the Bunker Hill Bank. In addition he served six years as a member of Charlestown's Board of Aldermen (1851-56). In 1858 and 1859 he was a member of the House of Representatives from Charlestown. He died in his residence at 44 High Street on October 17, 1885. Mr. Lawrence built 36 and 38 High Street, next door, for his daughters in the early 1870s. (See form on 36, 38 High St.).

Timothy Thompson Sawyer, original owner of number 46 High Street, was also an important local businessman, with worldwide business connections, Mayor of Charlestown and

local historian and author of *Old Charlestown*, in 1902. He was born in Charlestown January 7, 1817. He was the son of William and Susanna (Thompson) Sawyer. He was initially engaged in the hardware and ship chandlery business of his uncle, Thomas M Thompson, in Merchants Row, Boston. From 1842 to 1844 he was a partner in the hardware store of Sawyer and Frothingham (John D). In 1845 he entered into partnership with Gage, Hittinger and company, a business engaged in the wharfage and ice business. Sawyer's company shipped ice to a number of exotic, worldwide destinations including the West Indies, American south, Rio de Janeiro, and Calcutta, India. In addition, Mr. Sawyer served as Mayor of Charlestown in 1855, 1856, and 1857 and was chairman of the School Committee from 1855-1864. In 1857 he was a representative in the legislature and in 1858 he was elected to the state Senate. From 1860 until Charlestown's annexation to Boston on January 1, 1874, he served as president of the Charlestown Public library. In 1880 he became the president of the Warren Institution for Savings. In addition he was an officer and or member of a staggering number of social, civic, historical organizations. He was the author of *Old Charlestown* in 1902-an invaluable source for understanding of Charlestown's 19th century development as well as providing colorful vignettes of local figures.

In the spring of 1892, Lawrence's heirs sold 44 to the Charlestown Club, for the purpose of establishing headquarters for this popular social club. The Charlestown Club purchased the Lawrence house for just under \$20,000 and allocated \$8000 for alterations and furnishing. The club went ahead with plans to put an addition on the rear of the house, incorporating the original ell?- (This is not clear), with bowling alleys of regulation length, a billiard hall on the ground floor and an audience hall 100 x 40' on the street floor. In addition a

veranda, 36 x 16' was added to the westerly side of the building. The architect for these additions and alterations was Joseph Robbins, with contract for work performed by 44 and 46 High Street's original builder John B Wilson, with assistance from A V Lincoln and E D Robbins.

On August 13, 1892, it was noted in the *Charlestown Enterprise* that the Charlestown Club's new headquarters were nearing completion. It was noted that "handsome floors have been laid, the decorations are completed and the furniture will soon be installed in place". Evidently the transformation from private residence to clubhouse was a success, with the minor exception of the fountain in the yard, which "does not throw a Florida water stream". The rear annex had not yet been completed at the time of the club's September 1892 opening.

By February 1895, a new billiard room had been constructed in the rear of the building. It was noted in the *Charlestown Enterprise* that "instead of being a second story to the building already containing the bowling alleys, the new building was built over and entirely independent of the bowling alley building. The floors of the new structure rest on steel beams 15 feet deep and 42 feet long and weigh 80 pounds to the running foot. These beams rest on iron columns outside of the bowling alley building and the columns rest on brick piers. This method gives strength to the structure far beyond the requirements of the building to be used for such a purpose. The billiard room is 40 feet long and 31 feet wide and 14 feet high and is lighted by 16 windows". In addition it contained four tables and was lighted by "a massive pane of French plate glass." It was also noted that "the ceiling of the billiard room is divided into six panels of equal size by heavy beams furnished in quartered oak and giving an exceedingly rich and solid effect in the room. The coloring of the panels in the ceiling is of warm buff with a

fresco border in a light olive green. The sidewalls are finished in oil in a warm rich tone of terra-cotta with a frieze in dark olive green laid on flat. All the interior finish is quartered oak. The floors are of carefully selected maple making an excellent floor for dancing." It was noted in the *Charlestown Enterprise* that "on the wall of the hall opposite the main entrance is a heavy frame of quartered oak designed by one of the members of the club, Charles Eastman, an architect. It is a Gothic structure in three sections and is intended for an ornamental stained glass window, which is being made for the club by Reading, Baird and Company, well-known painters of glass. In the center of the window will appear the seal of the club in appropriate colors." The cost of these "latest improvements" was \$5000.

The Charlestown Club evidently sold 44 High Street to the Bunker Hill Council of the Knights of Columbus in circa 1906 or 1907. It was noted in a *Charlestown Enterprise* story, August 10, 1907, page 1, that the clubhouse was to be reopened on September 1, 1907. Under Bunker Hill Council leadership both house and grounds were restored by the Knights of Columbus and workmen. The interior of number 44 in 1907 was described as follows: "on the first floor is the large double parlor and billiard room with living room in the rear and beyond that is at the extension in which there is a large hall, high studded and with windows on the four sides, underneath is the bowling alley in which there are three alleys of the Providence make with ample room for seating spectators." The second floor contained a library and three card rooms. The third floor had one large room extending almost the entire depth of the house. The attic was a janitor's apartment.

After a fire number 44 was truncated to 2 stories. In the 1980s, the floors were reconstructed when the Knights of Columbus sold the structure for condominiums.

Bibliography:

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*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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