

The 44-50 Monument Avenue (ca. 1855)

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



44- 50 Monument Avenue

5/15

Numbers 44-46 and 48-50 Monument Avenue are two pairs of similarly rendered three story flat front masonry Italianate row houses. They have granite basements and each has three bays, with a side entrance. Each has a flat roof with a bracketed cornice; 44 and 46 have dentils beneath the brackets. The two pairs of houses are separated by a narrow alley.

They have recessed entries, with wooden hoods which support oriel windows. The oriels are faced with wood, except for that of 46, which is lined with copper. They have apron panels and dentilated cornices. All have simple brownstone sills and, in general, the windows have 1/1 wood sash.

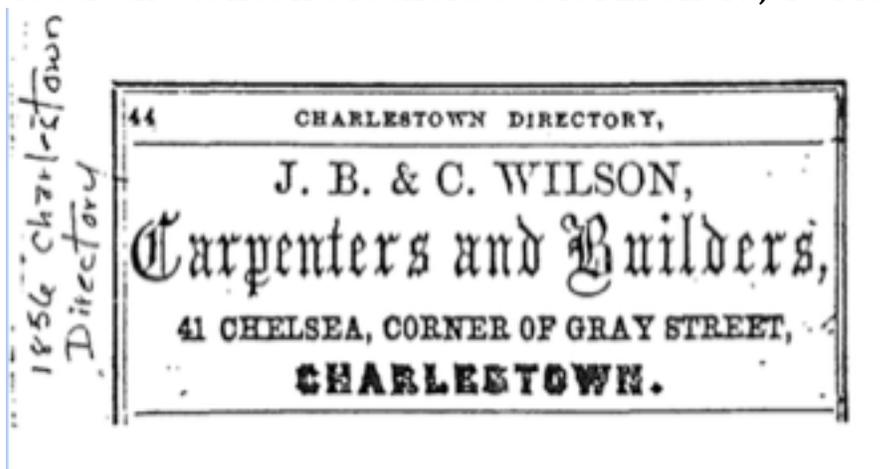


Entry, oriel, 48 Monument Avenue

Builder: John B Wilson and Charles Wilson

Original owner: John B Wilson and Charles Wilson

Built in 1855, this group of four Italianate row houses is a key component in Monument Avenue's western "wall" of 19th century masonry row houses. They date from the initial phase of Monument Avenue's development. Architecturally these houses represent well-crafted examples of the type of buildings constructed by John B Wilson and his brother Charles Wilson during the mid-19th century. (For more information about the Wilson brothers see form on 47, 49 Monument Ave.).



Numbers 48-50 Monument Avenue has significant historical associations with several leading mid-late 19th century Charlestown businessman, including clothing and wool rags dealer Isidor J Klaus in 44, William Darton, a housewright and caulker in 46, Nelson Bartlett, treasurer of the Boston Ice Company, in 48, and Thomas R B Edmonds, "drain pipe manufacturer", in 50.

Judging by 46's deed chronology this group was built by prolific mid-19th-century Charlestown housewrights John B Wilson and Charles Wilson. On 12 June 1855 the Wilsons bought 44-50's house lots from Isaac Kendall of Charlestown.

Evidentially 46 remained under Wilson family ownership until 1861. During the 1860s, 46's owners included John P Barnard, a "stabler", James Brown, a "victualor", and (1867 1885) William Darton, a "shipwright and caulker". During the 1850s and 1860s number 46's deeds carried the stipulation that "no buildings shall be erected thereon except brick dwelling houses not less than 2 1/2 stories in height with suitable outbuildings".

Further research is needed to determine post-Wilson owners during the 1850s., for numbers 44, 48, and 50. During the 1870s and 80s number 44 was owned by Isidore J Klaus, a clothing dealer and owner of much real estate in late 19th century Charlestown.

Nelson Bartlett of 48 was an important late 19th century Charlestown businessman. According to the *Charlestown enterprise*, at the time of his death in November 1907 he was "Charlestown's foremost citizen". He was born in Sandstead, Québec, the son of Colin B and Sarah Brown Bartlett. He came to Boston in 1846 and in 1851 settled in Charlestown. For many years he was the treasurer of the Boston Ice Company. In addition, he was for seven years a director for the Warren Institute for Savings and the Bunker Hill National Bank. Before Charlestown became part of Boston, Bartlett was for two years a member of the board of aldermen. He was also a director of the Middlesex Street Railway. In 1879, his son, Frank J Bartlett became connected with ____ Company, becoming treasurer in 1893.

Thomas R B Edmands, of 50, was President of Thomas R B Edmands and Company, a manufacturer of drain pipes.

By the early 1900s, this group's owners included E J Jennings at 44, A Steinberg at 46, Francis M Gammons and 48, and William F Murphy at 50.

Monument Avenue's early-mid-1850s development, in terms of city planning, is of national as well as local significance. The development of Monument Avenue circa 1852-1855 may be seen as a harbinger of the city beautiful movement of the late 19th/early 20th century (e.g. development of Boston's Back Bay). Monument Avenue's mid-19th century development was an extension of the Bunker Hill Monument Association's development of Monument Square and vicinity during the 1830s-40s. The laying out of Monument Avenue and adjacent house lots was a very conscious attempt on the part of concerned Charlestown citizens and B H M A members to upgrade the appearance of their community.

Monument Avenue and adjacent house lots were set out over the last tract of mostly vacant land between Warren, Main, and High Streets circa 1855. Correspondence between Mayor Richard Frothingham Jr and the Bunker Hill Monument Association in 1852-53 indicates that the portion of this tract near High Street was covered by a cluster of undistinguished wood frame buildings grouped around a cul-de-sac. The opening of Monument Avenue would necessitate "the removal of seven dwelling houses and the taking of nearly 23,000 feet of land".

According to mayor Frothingham, the benefits of the creation of Monument Avenue would be to:

1. Offer the most desirable place of residence,
2. to add greatly to the amount of taxable property, and
3. to make a beautiful Avenue to the Monument.

Furthermore, Frothingham asserted that "it will become one of the most desirous places of residence that can be selected in the city... Land situated like this is calculated to invite the erection of a class of buildings both valuable and ornamental". Frothingham went on to state that it was the city's duty to lay out Monument Avenue from the point of view of safety as well as ornament. George Washington Warren, president of the Bunker Hill Monument Association, stated in a letter dated February 8, 1853 that Monument Avenue should be extended from Warren "to Main Street and should be wider than originally proposed. Warren stated that "by this improvement... The Monument will front the center of the street so as to be seen from both of the sides, and the Avenue will be of a proper width, both sufficient to accommodate the private public travel and also to furnish the most central and most crowded part of the city a spacious channel for the circulation of air by thus connecting Monument Square with Main Street. Monument Avenue, so laid out, will not only be a great ornament to the city, worthy of the name which the city Council have given it but also as a work of great utility and public advantage".

The proposal to lay out Monument Avenue was sweetened by the Bunker Hill Monument Association's offer to the city of the sum of \$600 annually for 15 consecutive years beginning on July 1, 1854, provided that the city Council agreed to lay out the street as proposed within one year from 17 June and "will open it for public use within two years from the day last named". The city had only to assume the cost of the interest for a few years, and in any event the city's payments should be reimbursed by the increase of taxable property. In 1854 the city and the B H M A refined Monument Avenue's plan by moving it 15 feet further to the west, leaving 5 feet of land on the easterly side for the adjacent house lots. Isaac Kendall and

Alfred Carlton were the principal land owners directly involved in the development of Monument Avenue.

Perhaps George Washington Warren of 7 Monument Square was the B H M A member most closely associated with the Monument Avenue project. He was a lawyer and later judge of the Municipal Court of Charlestown. For many years he was president of the Bunker Hill Monument Association. During the late 1860s Warren unsuccessfully advocated the development of Park Street in a manner which would have been reminiscent of Monument Avenue. Warren's Park Street plan would have once again used the Bunker Hill Monument as a focal point but would have involved cutting Park street's path through the old Training Field/Winthrop square. Fortunately Park Street was never laid out in such a fashion. Today Monument Avenue with its handsome expanses of flat front masonry Italianate row houses continues to serve as an attractive Gateway to the Bunker Hill Monument.

Bibliography:

Maps- 1818, 1852

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

Panoramic View, 1848

Middlesex deeds- 711:339, 911:339, 981:583

Charlestown Directories- 1854- 74

Charlestown Enterprise May 8, 1909, p 4

Correspondence between Mayor Richard Fotheringham and the BHMA, 1852-4, Massachusetts Historical Society

Middlesex Plans, book 15, plan 29; book 5, plan 30

*Digitized and edited, without change in content, from the scanned record in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, with the 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