

## 51 Old Rutherford Avenue (the Wiley house, ca. 1794)

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



51 Old Rutherford Avenue

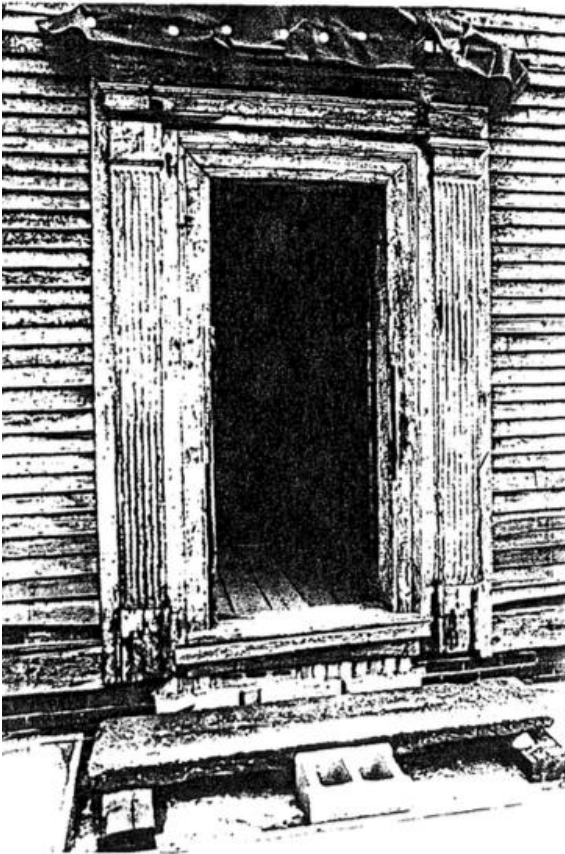
2015

The Wiley house is a late Georgian wood frame vernacular house, relatively substantial, clad with clapboards and enclosed by a recently rebuilt hip on hip roof. The house has been extensively and sensitively rebuilt. The main block rises two stories from a high rubblestone platform. A two-story ell projecting from the southwest corner of the main block was probably built in the mid-19th century. It has a high brick basement.

The framing of the center entrance is particularly noteworthy. It has fluted Doric pilasters and dentillated entablature with a triangular pediment, which was in process of restoration at the time of the survey.

The windows of the main block are fully enframed with double mitered upper corners and raised outer moldings. They have, after restoration, 6/6 wood sash. The ell's windows are more simply framed than those of the main block. There is a trio of gable-roofed dormers at the main façade. A substantial tall chimney rises from the rear roof slope.

The main box interior retains handsome well-detailed and well-crafted mantle, scroll detailing at the stairs, with dados mostly intact, etc.



Wiley House May 1987

Architect: Robert G Neilley-1986/87 (restoration)  
Builder: William Wiley  
Owner: William Wiley

The Wiley house was constructed circa 1794 and extensively rebuilt in 1986/87. It has the distinction of being the oldest structure still extant on town Hill-not counting certain Main Street buildings, e.g. the Warren Tavern (circa 1780, and the Benjamin Thompson house, 119 Main Street (circa 1790). The house is a contemporary of the John Hurd and John Larkin houses at 71 and 55 Main Street, respectively. It is a relatively substantial, well-executed example of late Georgian wood frame vernacular housing. It was built by and for William Wiley, a "carpenter". Wiley was evidently well acquainted with mid-18th century pattern books judging by this house's handsome pedimented entrance enframements, windows with double mitered upper corners, fireplace mantel, scroll detailing at stairs, etc. The hip on hip roof was completely rebuilt in 1986/87 from designs provided by Robert G Neilley, architect.

The house's lot was purchased by Dr. Isaac Rand from John Newell in 1741. Dr. Rand's daughter Margaret and her husband Nathaniel Austin inherited this land in 1790. Dr. Rand's probate records provide a well-detailed enumeration of his buildings but do not mention a building on this lot in 1790. Nathaniel Austin was a pewterer by trade and father of important early 19th century Charlestown lawyer/politician William Sawyer and General Nathaniel Austin, Middlesex County Sheriff and builder of the split stone-faced houses at 92 Main Street and 27 Harvard Square. In 1794 Margaret and Nathaniel Austin sold the house to William Wiley. The Austin/Wiley deed does not mention "the buildings thereon". William Wiley probably built this house shortly after purchasing its lot from the Austins. The Wiley family owned the house for 77 years.

The Charlestown Wileys were originally from Reading, Massachusetts. Their common ancestor was John Wiley who arrived in this country aboard the ship " Blossom" in 1768. Willam Wiley (original owner/builder of #45,now numbered 51) moved from Reading to Charlestown in 1786. He owned this house from 1794-1807-in that year he sold it to his brother John. In 1833 John Wiley (occupation?) died, and the house was inherited by his niece Hannah Wiley, daughter of William Wiley. She married Peter Wiley of Reading (a cousin?) at age 40. Peter Wiley was a sea captain. In 1833 the value of the Wiley house was \$3000.

Peter and Hannah mortgaged the house with the Warren Institute for Savings in 1847. Hannah Wiley owned it until her death; in 1871 it was sold to Lewis Peterson (occupation?).

The house had three owners at different times in 1873, including George Thomas, Lewis Peterson and Edwin H Darling. From 1873 to 1889 the house was owned by Timothy Callahan, a "letter carrier at P.O". It should be noted that it acquired its side ell at some point circa 1868-1875. The ell probably dates to the early years of the Callahan ownership. From 1889-1936 Timothy H Callahan owned this property.

Old Rutherford Avenue was originally called Bow Street. It is the outermost street of town hill's 17th-century system of streets. Thomas Graves, an engineer, who was commissioned by Massachusetts in 1641 to plan streets for the small colony, determined the layout of Charlestown in the vicinity of Town Hill. Although the residential settlement spread over the streets of the Town Hill and along Main Street (the major route across Charlestown Neck to Cambridge and the hinterlands), the main focus of the colony was at City Square, which was the seat of government and the market place and only a short

distance away from the busy waterfront. Bow Street received its present name on May 28, 1878. It was named in honor of Pres. Rutherford B Hayes-Charles Devens of nearby 30 Union Street was the US Atty. Gen. in Pres. Hayes cabinet.

Evidently this house's address-45 (51 by 2015) Old Rutherford Avenue is of relatively recent origin. During the 19th century it was numbered 1 Washington Terrace, opening onto a narrow cul-de-sac, which led to Washington Street, behind number 12 Washington Street. For many years 51 Old Rutherford was hidden from view by tenements bordering old Rutherford Avenue. Number 51 provides a physical link with Charlestown's post revolutionary war- late 18th century period of recovery. Charlestown was burned to the ground by the British in 1775, and did not fully recover from this conflagration for 20 or 30 years after the events of 1775/1776.

#### Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1852

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

BU student papers by? (On file at S.P.N.E.A.)

Middlesex deeds-42: 458, will-1890-1832, three; 116:482; 24,894 (will), 1156:621, 1250:146, 1250:148, 1219:321, 324

Suffolk-1905: 264, 5617-112

*Charlestown Enterprise*-September 13, 1919, P.3

\*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.

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