

54 Elm Street (1837-1838, altered 1850s)

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



54 Elm Street

2015

Number 54 Elm Street is a tall, three-story row house with a three bay main façade, a high brick basement and high entrance steps. The house was apparently built as a two-story

Greek Revival house, probably with a pedimented attic. A third floor with a bracketed wood cornice and a flat roof was added in the 1850s.

The entrance is enframed by Doric pilasters. It has a bracketed door hood with a deep cornice, beadwork on scrolls, and shell and scrollwork plaster Rococo Revival ornamentation. The windows are simply enframed.



54 Elm Street entry detail

2015

Builder: Moses P Worthen, Currier Barnard

Original owner: Moses P Worthen

Number 54 Elm Street appears to have been built as a two-story Greek Revival house, probably with a pedimented attic, in 1837-38. Close inspection of the entrance enframements reveals a bracketed Italianate door hood superimposed over a Greek Revival entablature. A well-molded shell and scrollwork plaster Rococo Revival ornamentation has been applied to the center of the entablature's bracketed hood. The curved

brackets, shell and scroll plaster ornamentation, as well as the third floor, were added circa 1850s in an attempt to "update" the building.

The house represents the work of Charlestown housewrights Moses P Worthen and Courier Barnard. (Worthen also built 29 Elm Street, a Greek revival wood frame, side hall plan house with brick sidewalls, built at about the same time as 54 Elm.) Currier Barnard practiced carpentry in Charlestown during the late 1830s-late 1840s. He lived at 45 Green Street during the 1840s.

On September 30, 1837, (Middlesex 368:185) Moses P Worthen paid Colbern Barrell, a ships carpenter, \$700 for 54 Elm's lot, with no buildings. The first mention of buildings on this site occurs in a deed dated October 23, 1838 (Middlesex 375:529). Moses P Worthen sold 54's lot and "the buildings thereon" to Ebenezer Weeman of Boston, a blacksmith, for \$1900. This deed notes that the premises "include the southerly cottage of two built by Currier Barnard and myself" (M P Hall). Moses P Hall was active in Charlestown building trades from circa 1835 to the early 1860s. During the 1840s he lived at "35 High, opposite Franklin, and at 189 Medford Street" during the 1850s and early 1860s. By 1866 his widow is listed at 81 Elm Street.

Ebenezer Weeman sold 54 Elm to his daughter, Lydia Ann Weeman, on June 8, 1840. She owned this property until June 1874, when she sold it to Charles Wistar Stevens for \$5000 (Middlesex 1217:285). Stevens was a physician with an office in 54 Elm. He owned this house until at least the 1890s.

Elm Street was part of a colonial highway system, which included the Salem Turnpike, Adams Street, High Street, and

Bunker Hill Street, skirting the edge of Breed's Hill. Elm Street has one of the most comprehensive collections of 19th century residential architecture in Charlestown, ranging from Federal (22, 24) to Georgian Revival (59, 61).

Bibliography:

Atlases-1875, 1885, 1892

Charlestown Directories-1834-74

Middlesex deeds-368:185, 375:529, 393:439, 1217:285

*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