

57 Bartlett Street (1804)

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

Number 57 Bartlett Street is a substantial three-story Federal style house with brick sidewalls. The main and rear facades were originally clapboards, and are presently clad with aluminum siding. It has a distinctive square boxy form with narrow corner boards, and a low hip roof. The five bay main facade is highly symmetrical, with a center entrance. A pair of chimneys projects from the centers of the sidewalls.

The windows are simply enframed and have 6/6 wood sash; there are small square windows on the third level of the two-bay sidewalls. There have been changes to fenestration on the first floor School Street wall.



57 Bartlett Street

ca. 1980s

Builder: Robert Miller, housewright; Benjamin Wait, brickmaker; Oliver Holden (?) carpenter
Original owner: Robert Miller/Benjamin Wait

Architecturally, 57 Bartlett Street is significant as an important Charlestown example of a Federal style residence. Built circa 1804, this house is characterized by a distinctive boxy, unmistakably Federal, form, complete with a highly symmetrical main facade and brick sidewalls with small square third floor windows. It has synthetic siding on the main facade, applied in a manner suggestive of "real" clapboards. It has a flat roof. Charlestown has the greatest number of Federal buildings in Boston, with the exception of Beacon Hill, and outranks even Beacon Hill in the number of detached Federal style houses still extant. This house is part of Salem Hill's collection of relatively substantial 1790s and early 1800s Federal style houses.



57 Bartlett

2015

In a Middlesex County deed signed February 25, 1804 (165:138), Oliver Holden, a Charlestown merchant, sold 57's lot (actually two contiguous lots) to Robert Miller, "of Boston, a housewright" and Benjamin Wait, a Charlestown brick maker, for \$850. During the late 18th-early 19th centuries, Oliver Holden was extremely active in Charlestown real estate speculation. He assembled a large tract of land roughly bounded by Elm, High, Sullivan and Bunker Hill Streets. Born in Pepperell Massachusetts, September 18, 1765, Holden came to Charlestown in 1788 and worked as a carpenter, dryer, merchant, and real estate speculator. His mansion was located on Pearl Street at the site of the present Oliver Holden School. Holden may have played a role in 57's construction, perhaps constructing its stairs, flooring, etc.

In any event, 57 Bartlett almost certainly represents the work of Robert Miller, a Boston housewright. He was active in Boston building trades from circa 1780s or earlier, until 1821. He is listed in Boston's first directory, in 1789. During the early 1800s he worked as a carpenter on Prince Street, Boston. By 1810, his work was based on Mill Pond Street, Boston, and he lived at 19 Prince Street. In 1820 he lived in North Square and is listed as a housewright for the last time in 1821 (house, Fleet Street).

Benjamin Wait, early co-owner and eventually sole owner of 57 is less easy to trace. The first Charlestown directories were not published until 1834. The Holden/Miller/Wait transaction refers to "two lots situated on a hill a few rods easterly of the Baptist Meeting House" (7, and 9 Pearl Street, site of the Salem Apartments). Bartlett and School (or Alfred, the old name for this section of School) Streets are described as "new streets". By August 17, 1818, David Wait, acting as administrator of Benjamin Wait's estate sold 57 to a Jesse Hall. During

approximately 1810-early 1820s, Hall sold 57 back to David Wait, who, in turn sold it to Abner Toy, a Braintree stonecutter, for \$2500 on February 11, 1823 (246:419). The Wait/Toy deed mentions "the lot of land with a large three story dwelling house thereon located on Salem Hill". Toy, in turn, quickly sold 57 to John McFisk, "Atty. at Law" on March 20, 1823 (247:371). McFisk sold it to Enoch Cook, "Morocco leather manufacturers" on June 19, 1823. It is not clear if Cook actually lived here or held it as an investment property. Enoch Cook was one of Charlestown's leading early 19th century Morocco dressers. In addition he was a wool dealer with a business near the entrance to Water Street, in Charlestown. His store featured a carved sign in the shape of a ram, complete with real horns.

Eliza Jones, a Cook heir, owned this house until the early 1840s. Owners during the years 1842-43 included a Gilbert Collamore and William J Farnsworth, a hair cutter. The latter sold it to John B Caldwell, a painter (also, builder) on September 4, 1844 (448:251), for \$3000. Caldwell died circa 1847-48 (see Middlesex probate record date is 1848, 287404). His probate records refer to 57 Bartlett Street as "one wooden house and land, corner Bartlett and School Streets, valued at \$4400. Caldwell also owned three wooden buildings on the south side of Medford Street, at Pearl, number 2 Pearl Street Place (see BLC form), two houses at Payson Place and Elm Street, and a wooden house on the west side of Pleasant Street at number 16. In addition he owned part of 16 Cordis Street and one shop on Jones Street. The total value of Caldwell's real estate was \$17,700 and his personal estate total \$827.90, including one buggy, one sleigh, one harness bells and buffalo robe. Number 57 Bartlett Street was held under a guardianship for two minor children, Susan A Fisher and Susan M Atherton by Bernard Fisher. Fisher and Atherton, Caldwell's heirs,

became full owners of 57 in 1866. Susan A Fisher owned the house until at least the early 1900s.

Late 19th century atlases indicate that an ell was attached to the side of the house closest to Elm Street. In addition an L shaped wooden shed/stable was located to the rear of the house.

Bibliography:

Maps- 1818, 1833, 1835, 1848, 1851

Atlases- 1875, 1885, 1892, 1901

Charlestown directories-1834-1874

Boston directories-1789, 1821

Middlesex deeds- 165:138, 231:84, 246:419, 251:406

Old Charlestown, T T Sawyer, 1902

*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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