

## 59 Warren Street (1871)

From Boston Landmark Commission's Charlestown Historic Resources Study 1981\*:



59 Warren Street.

2015

Number 59 Warren Street is a very unusual three story red brick townhouse with high Victorian Gothic and Mansard

elements. It has a highly plastic form. A salient feature of the main façade is a three-segment setback: a bow front, an entrance bay and an ell. It has a low granite faced basement. The house has a corbelled cornice and hip-on-straight-sided mansard roof, which retains its slate shingles but is missing the cast iron cresting referred to in the A.I.A. Boston guide. Particularly noteworthy are the Gothic dormers of the warren and Soley Street façades e.g. the triangular shaped dormer and tall attic window above the bow front, flanked by polychromatic brickwork and surmounted by a steeply pitched Gable roof. Noteworthy features on the Soley Street façade include the second-floor oriel with large support brackets underneath.

The stepped back entrance bay has a flight of granite stairs leading to a deeply recessed entrance. Late 19th century double multipanel front doors are still intact. To the left of the entrance at the second floor is a Gothicized oriel supported by five wooden curvilinear braces. The oriel's base consists of a saw tooth course and wooden panels containing recessed trefoil motifs-these panels are carried over the length of the entrance bay. Slender colonnettes are interspersed between the oriel's four long narrow windows. The oriel is capped by a pyramidal roof. The A. I. A. guide to Boston refers to this oriel as a bartizan-a term more usually associated with fortress structures. In general the windows have 2/2 wood sash and simple white stone sill and lintel bands, with the exception of the keystone lintels of the bow's second floor.

Builder: Robert R Wiley

Original owner: Robert R Wiley



Number 59 is part of Warren Street's remarkable collection of late 18th-late 19th century buildings. Warren Street is said to be the oldest street in Charlestown, dating to at least 1638 and formerly called "Back Street." At first glance 59 Warren, with its striking form and the Gothic elements, appears to be the rectory of St. Mary's Church. Indeed, this townhouse, together

with St. Mary's Church and parochial school (55 and 49 Warren, respectively) form a memorable streetscape. Number 59 Warren, in fact, predates the other buildings by several decades and was built as a private residence by and for master mason Robert R Wiley (1828-1903).

Architecturally, this house's design is unique within the Boston area. At 59 Warren, Wiley has married the traditional Federal-derived bow or swell front with an irregular "step back" form, Gothicized elements and hip-on-mansard roof. This step back main façade is somewhat reminiscent of the late 1850s/early 1860s row house group at the edges of Chester Square in Boston's South End. Accentuating this distinctive effect is the second floor Gothicized oriel at the entrance bay's corner, and particularly noteworthy is the juxtaposition of a traditional bow front with a Gothic dormer directly above. This triangular dormer strikes an architectural note as eccentric as the Egyptian pylon form dormers of Beacon Hill's 57 Hancock St. (circa 1875)

Robert R Wiley was born in Charlestown on March 4, 1828. He was the son of Aaron and Lydia Rich Wiley. He attended the Training Field School. In terms of residency, he lived a somewhat nomadic life within a small section of Charlestown—as a child he lived on Winthrop Street in a house located on what is now part of the St. Mary's Parochial School lot. After his marriage in 1849 he built the two wood frame Italianate dwelling houses between St. Mary's rear wall and the fire station (see form on 30, 32 Winthrop). During the 1860s he lived at 17 Soley. He moved into 59 Warren in 1871. By the early 1880s he was living in the wood frame dwelling at the corner of Soley Street and Monument Square. He spent the last years of his life at 18 Soley Street.

Wiley was initially employed in a provisions store and then worked as a mason, apprenticed to H B Faunce. He worked as a journeyman until 1850. In that year he founded the firm of Cushing and Wiley. By the 1860s he was working alone as a mason/builder/contractor. On May 1, 1871 he paid Kendall Hailey \$3900 for 59 Warren' lot, and built this house. (The 1868 Atlas shows a two-story wood frame predecessor house; see Middlesex deed 1159:504-"the buildings thereon" probably refers to this two-story wooden house, that was either moved or taken down. Also, \$3900 would seem to be too low a price for the present house by 1870s standards) By 1885, John E Maynard "the Bowdoin Square livery man" owned 59 Warren. He is listed in the 1885 Boston directory as "Revere stable, 4 Bowdoin Square, house 59 Warren Street". By 1892 a John Wall (occupation?) owned this property.

In addition to this house's historical associations with Robert R Wiley, an early 20th century owner was Charlestown teamster/contractor/politician Patrick O'Riordan, who owned 59 Warren during the early 1900's. Patrick O'Riordan was a native of Lawrence Massachusetts. He moved to Richmond Virginia in 1850. During his six-year stay in Richmond he worked as a shipper in a large wholesale house. He returned to Charlestown in 1857 and became an employee of the Navy Yard. In 1860, with only one horse, he began a career as a teamster and contractor. By the mid-1880s he was one of the leading contractors in Boston, with stables on Dorchester Ave., South Boston and Chelsea Street, in Charlestown. He enjoyed "constant employment for 160 horses". In 1887 he had 150 horses and 300 men employed in one big job-the widening of Beacon Street for the West End Land Company (see narrative history, Fenway B L C survey project-also Audubon Circle write-up). O'Riordan was responsible for construction of the Dorchester Bay main sewer, referred to in the *Charlestown*

*Enterprise* as "the most stupendous work of its kind ever accomplished in New England". He was also responsible for the South Boston and Beacon Street sewers. Interestingly, it was Patrick O'Riordan and employees that put into place the fluted portion of the Soldiers Monument on the Boston Common-a task thought impossible because of the stone's great weight. In addition, all of the blacksmith, wheelwright, carpenter, horseshoeing and harness making were performed in Patrick O'Riordan's own shops. By 1887 the monthly expenses for his business was \$37,000. Mr. O'Riordan was also a successful real estate speculator, owning a number of investment properties in Charlestown. In addition, he owned farms outside the city in Tewksbury, Canton, Wilmington, Woburn, Winchester, Lexington and Concord.

Bibliography:

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

Charlestown business directories-1834-1874

Boston business directories-1875-1910

Middlesex deeds-701: 292, 1871, May 2

*Charlestown enterprise*, January 24, 1903, page 1, Robert R Wiley obituary

*Charlestown enterprise/Charlestown news*, September 3, 1887, page 1 "our self made men".

*A.I.A. guide to Boston*, Susan and Michael Southworth, 1984

\*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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