

7-23 Harvard Street (1835-36)

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



7- 23 Harvard Street

1981

Numbers 7- 23 Harvard Street is a handsome row of nine three story late Federal/Greek Revival houses, whose façades follow the curving path of Harvard Street.



23, 21 Harvard Street

2015

The buildings are of red brick, granite, and brownstone materials, with low granite basements, three bay main façades and side hall plans. The cornices are composed of two rows of angled bricks. The buildings are enclosed by gable roofs with one gable roofed dormer per building, except in the case of number 19, which has a fourth floor addition with a flat roof. Number 23's Harvard Square sidewall has tall linked chimneys and four bays, and a small round arched window just below the second floor. Numbers 7, 13, and 21's second floors have tall windows and ornamental cast iron balconies with Chinese fretwork and Greek key motifs.



21, 19, 17 Harvard Street

2015

Each house has a recessed and open entrance with well-crafted wood paneling still intact. The outer entrance enframements consist of brownstone Doric pilasters and heavy cornice-headed entablatures. Granite steps lead to the front doors, which are flanked by multi-pane sidelights and surmounted by transoms. In general, the houses have simple brownstone sills and lintels and 6/6 wood sash.



21 Harvard Street balcony detail

2015

Architect: Alexander Parris (?)

Original owners: Lemuel Stetson-number seven, G. Stanley-number nine, Josiah Reed-number 11, Eben Barker-number 13, William Henry-number 15, Shadrach Varney-number 17, James Hunnewell-numbers 19 and 23, Josiah Barker-number 21

Numbers 7-23 Harvard Street are of major significance in Charlestown architectural history. Built in 1835-36, this group of late Federal/Greek Revival townhouses was the most extensive masonry row that had yet been built in the town, predating Dexter Row (1836), and the Union Block at 112-116 Main Street (1837). (Numbers 9-12 Adams Street, 1828-29 is evidently the oldest masonry row in Charlestown.) This Harvard Street row was a harbinger of the intensive 1840s-50s building boom which was to transform Charlestown from a semi-rural town of mostly wood frame dwellings to a more urban city with many masonry rows of considerable substance. Numbers 7-23 Harvard is one of Charlestown's most memorable early 19th Century streetscapes. Its "wall" of

chastely rendered masonry façades follows Harvard Street's curving path from Harvard Square southward down Town Hill to City Square. The group's severely plain, planar surface is relieved by iron second-floor ornamental banding featuring Chinese fretwork and Greek key motifs.

Over time many prominent Charlestown citizens have lived in this block, including its developers/supervisors of construction (?) Shadrach Varney, James Hunnewell, (a merchant and father of historian James F. Hunnewell), and, investment property and shipyard owner and real estate developer Josiah Barker. The early history of this area is also bound to that of the old First Parish Church on top of Town Hill. Numbers 7-23 Harvard was built on land formerly owned by the Church.

James F Hunnewell notes that "when the old parsonage lands were sold the Parish Land Company was formed and on that tract was built (1835-36) a block of nine brick houses, three stories, with granite basements, brownstone doorway frames and pitched roofs. They were not detached like the old houses and were the largest of their kind that had yet been raised in the town". Shadrach Varney, master smith at the Charlestown Navy Yard and developer/superintendent of construction of the six-unit Dexter Row (1836) was primarily responsible for 7-23 Harvard's development. (See form on Dexter Row). Numbers 7-23 were undoubtedly architect designed-Alexander Parris and/or George Minot Dexter-both working at the Navy Yard along with Varney during the 1830s- are likely candidates for authorship of this row.

This group may, in a sense, represent the product of the rebuilding fever that gripped Charlestown after the fire of August 1835. The fire leveled much of nearby City Square and the waterfront, and an extensive rebuilding campaign complete

with wider streets and service alleys followed the conflagration. Although 7-23 were not located near the “burnt district”, the trustees of the First Parish Church evidently realized that the time was right to build. Prior to 1835, Harvard Street (called Town Hill Street until 1835) was bordered by late 18th/early 19th century masonry and wood frame detached houses surrounded by ample gardens. Town Hill still had a semi rural village scale quality, thus 7-23 Harvard introduced a more sophisticated urban building form to Town Hill. The second chapter in town Hill’s urbanization would occur during the late 1850s with Moses A. Dow’s development of masonry, Mansard houses at 18-24 and 34-38 Harvard Street and 1-4 Harvard Place.

This group’s original owners included Lemuel Stetson at number 7 (nearest the municipal building at city Square), G Stanley at number 9, Justin Reed-number 11, Eben Barker-number 13, William Henry-15, Shadrach Varney-17, James Hunnewell-19, 23, Josiah Barker-21.

In 1875, owners included Edward Knight “Coal and wood, Lockwood’s wharf” -number 7, Francis H Hull (occupation?)-Number 9, Eben Callamore (occupation?)-Number 11, Sally Barker, wife of Ebenezer Barker, County Commissioner-number 13, Gideon B Richmond, superintendent of Tucker Manufacturing Company-number 15, and F Goldsmith (occupation?)-Number 17, Freeman Russell, “produce dealer”, 19 merchants Row, Boston-number 19, Horatio Wellington, “coal and wood”, East Cambridge-number 21 and Diana Hooton, number 23.

For 51 years, Edward F Barker was a resident of 13 Harvard Street. He was born in Charlestown on April 14, 1840, and after attending local public schools, Phillips Academy, and Chauncy

Hall School, he worked as a clerk to A. Sprague and company, remaining there until 1851 when he joined the Navy as a captain's clerk. From 1863-1866 he served as Assistant Paymaster in the Navy. He served under Adm. Farragut at Mobile. During the late 1860s and early 1870s he was again employed with A. Sprague and Company, and in January, 1876 was appointed Superintendent of the Delivery Division. He was a member of the Loyal Legion and a director of the Bunker Hill Monument Association. After living at 13 Harvard for 51 years, Mr. Barker moved to 56 Buckingham Street in Cambridge, in 1891.

Horatio Wellington, number 21's owner in 1875, was born in Lexington Massachusetts on September 6, 1817. He was a descendent of the Wellingtons who settled in Watertown, Massachusetts and later Waltham and Lexington Massachusetts during the 17th century. He was the son of Nehemiah and Nancy Stearns Wellington. He came to Charlestown in 1849 and during the 1850s he worked in the milk business started by his father with brothers Jonah C. and Joseph A. Wellington. At some point circa late 1850s or 60s he purchased a coal yard in East Cambridge. From 1872-1884 this firm was known as Horatio Wellington and Company. He served as a Charlestown City Councilman from 1861-1866 and was an alderman in 1871. Horatio Wellington lived at 56 Monument Ave. during the last years of his life.

By 1892 this group's owners included Eliz. H Knight-number 7, L. Leonard -number 9, Mary E. Goldsmith-number 17, F.W. Russell-number 19, Rose Sullivan-number 21 and Thomas Kean-number 23.

By the early 1900's, owners (based on 1901 Atlas) included Ann Curran-number 7, L Leonard-number 9, Emily C Roberts-

number 11, U N Doherty-number 13, Rose Sullivan-number 21 and Thomas Kean- number 23.

Bibliography:

Maps, 1818, 1852

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*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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