

## 74-86 Washington Street (1839)

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



74-86 Washington Street

1980s

Numbers 74-86 Washington Street is a seven-unit row of two story late Federal/Greek Revival houses constructed of red brick with granite trimmings. Each house has a granite-faced basement. The buildings culminate in a brickwork dentil course and a gable roof with tall chimneys. The row is characterized by planar masonry surfaces, side hall plans, and three bay main façades.

The entrances are open and recessed with pedimented (modified) entablatures composed of brownstone. There are short flights of granite steps within the recessed entries, and

the front doors are flanked by sidelights (one half solid, one half glass). The front doors of 74 and 76 are flanked by slender, fluted pilasters. The number of panes in the transoms varies, generally three or six. In general the windows have simple brownstone sills and lintels.



74-86 Washington Street, from Union Street

2015

**Builder:** George S. Adams (?), John W. Mulliken (and others)  
**Original owner:** Charlestown Wharf Co., John /w. Mulliken and others

Numbers 74-86 Washington Street is a remnant of a more extensive 12-unit row. (A three-unit infill at the Austin Street end of the row has similar scale and style) Although missing five of its units, 74-86 Washington's architectural significance is still considerable. It represents one of the earliest examples of extensive masonry row housing in Charlestown. Built in 1839, this row is a good example of well-crafted, pleasingly plain, masonry late Federal/Greek revival housing.

This group has significant historical associations with the Charlestown Wharf Company and the early 19th century developmental history of Lynde's Point. The row is the work of Charlestown housewright John W Mullican and almost certainly others-a deed chronology of every house in this row would probably bring to light the names of Masons, carpenters, stair builders etc.)

John W Mullican was active in Charlestown building trades from circa 1820s (?) -Early 1850s. In 1834 he is listed as a carpenter living at 3 Eden Street. By 1842 he is listed as a carpenter and partner in the firm of Goodridge and Mullican-at that time he lived at 11 Lawrence Street. By 1848 Mulliken is listed as a lumber dealer at Devens Wharf-his residence is listed as "Boxborough." In 1852, his last listing in Charlestown directory, he is referred to as a "carpenter and builder" living at 128 Main St., Charlestown. John W Mullican is credited with the double Greek revival house at 37, 39 Washington Street (along with George S Adams-both are referred to in deeds as "mechanics").

At the time of 74-86 Washington's completion, this group was practically waterfront property-Charles River Bay was located only a block to the south west of this group. This is difficult to

envison today since Washington is now well inland as the result of mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century landfill operations which have covered what was Charles River Bay and Millers River.

Numbers 74-86's lots were part of an ambitious 104-lot real estate development assembled by the Charlestown Wharf Company during the mid 1830s. T.T. Sawyer notes that "the Charlestown Wharf Company was incorporated March 31, 1836. They purchased nearly all the property along the shore of the river from the wharf to the state prison to Warren Bridge. A sea wall, built by them, extended along this whole line. Their purchase included the old shipyard, and all the upland bordering the side of Washington Street from Austin to Union Street. This land was laid out and sold for house lots.

The Charlestown Wharf Company land's pre 1835 history, briefly summarized, was characterized by Joseph Lynde family ownership during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and later (1790s) by Capt. Archibald McNeil ownership-it was McNeil who subdivided a 20 acre tract embracing what is now Washington Street, between Union Street and Devens Street as well as Old Rutherford Avenue, Union Street, etc. McNeil subdivided this area into house lots beginning circa 1798. The establishment of the state prison at Lynde's Point (circa 1800-1805) undoubtedly triggered more development in this area-which by the 1810s was connected to East Cambridge via the Craigie's Point or Prison Point bridge. During the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a soap and turpentine manufacturing company was established on Washington Street near the state prison.

Between circa 1810-1835, the Charlestown Wharf Company lands, including 74-86 Washington's lots, were owned by Josiah Barker. Barker established a shipyard in the vicinity of

Washington and Union streets during the 1810s. Barker built a large number of vessels at this shipyard. Henry H Edes in his memoir of Josiah Barker, gives a list of 38 vessels built by him in Charlestown. Josiah Barker was the Naval constructor stationed at the Charlestown Navy Yard for 34 years. Sawyer states that "his skill was shown in the models of many of the best ships ever built by the United States government". He came to Charlestown in 1799, from Pembroke, Massachusetts. For many years he lived on Wapping Street near the Navy Yard gates. He died in Charlestown on September 23, 1847.

Middlesex deeds and plans point to a construction date of circa 1839 for 74-86 Washington Street. Originally encompassing 12 brick houses, this group was described by Sawyer as "compact, convenient, pleasant dwelling places". Furthermore, "the occupants of these houses were such men and families as give a good name to towns and cities, and make their histories interesting and valuable". Sawyer notes that in 1848 this row's residents included: Isaac Sweetser, Jonathan V Fletcher, George S Adams (important Lynde's Point builder and mason who may well have built this row along with Mullican), Dexter Bowman, Zelda Bowman, George W Little, Edwin F Adams, Col. Seth J Thomas, Richard Baker Junior, Samuel Atherton, Deacon James Fosdick, George H Morris.

By 1875, David B Fox, a grocer, owned 74, Mrs. Thomas Tighe, a saloon keeper, owned 76, William H Cades, a "dyestuff broker" owned 78 and 80, J W Fletcher owned 82, Nathaniel Delano, a sail maker, owned 84 (he lived at 42 Richmond St. circa early 1870s), and an M.F. Stimson owned 86.

Owners in 1885 included Timothy Harrigan, a teamster-74, Mrs. Thomas Tighe-76, W Cades-80 and 82, William Denvir, a

tailor, 2 City Square-82, Maurice J McKenna, a grocer-84, and Dora Tomfohrde-86.

Owners in 1901 included: Catherine Harrigan-74, Nellie H Tighe-76, Patrick Doherty-84, and Dora Tomfohrde-86.

Note: during the 1840s and 50s number 76 was the home of Selwyn Z Bowman, a late 19th century Somerville political figure. His parents Zadock and Rosetta Cram Bowman were the original owners of 76. Selwyn Z. Bowman was born in Charlestown (presumably in 76 Washington) on May 10 1840. He was admitted to the Suffolk bar in 1863 and subsequently opened a law office in Boston. He served the city of Somerville as City Solicitor in 1872 through 1892 and represented the city in the legislature in 1870 and 1875, the County of Middlesex in the Senate of 1876 and 1877, and the fifth Congressional District in the 46th and 47th congresses in 1878-1881.

#### Bibliography:

Maps- 1818, 1852

Atlases-1868, 1875, 1885, 1842, 1901, 1911

Charlestown/Boston directories-19th century

Middlesex deeds-number 76:378:292, 385:409, 1051:103

T T Sawyer-*Old Charlestown*-pages 56-63, 68-71, 78-85

\*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

