

8, 10 Putnam Street (circa 1852-53)

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



8, 10 Putnam Street



8, 10 Putnam Street

2016

Numbers 8, 10 Putnam Street is a three story double Greek Revival house. It is constructed of red brick with brownstone trimmings and has a granite faced basement, a pleasing surface planarity, and an unusually narrow main facade. Its halves are each only two bays wide and have side hall plans. The

basement has a partially below-grade center entrance, with a deep, arched opening. A steep flight of granite steps leads down to a very old multipanel front door. The basement level entrance opens into a 3 foot wide covered passageway which extends to the rear wall of the house, once terminating at steps leading into the ell of a T-shaped structure, that is no longer extant. Small square basement windows flank the basement entrance, at the front of the building. The building has a flat roof and a shallow step-corbel table. The sidewalls are devoid of openings and have star shaped tie rod ends.

Flights of five granite steps lead to open and recessed entrances. Although the original front doors have been replaced, the entrances retain multi-pane sidelights and transoms. There are badly weathered brownstone sills and lintels on the building's main façade.

The house overlooks the picturesque, crooked, narrow path of Putnam Street and a well-preserved late Georgian house at 5 Putnam Street. It is located at the edge of a bleak area of vacant lots, elevated expressway ramps etc.

Builder: Israel Waitt (?)

Original owner: Israel Waitt(?), Zenas C Howland

Numbers 8, 10 Putnam Street is architecturally significant as a double masonry Greek Revival house with an usually narrow main façade. Rather than the more typical six bay double house of mid-19th century, its main façade is only four bays wide, each half having only two bays. Evidently the main entrances open into the front parlors, or side halls and separate ground floor rooms are unusually narrow. This extreme narrowness may be accounted for by the fact that a small single-family house circa 1790s once stood on these premises. Particularly

noteworthy is this house's basement level with the heavy granite facing blocks, and flights of granite-block stairs leading to the first floor entrances. Unlike many mid-19th century masonry houses, these recessed entrances remain open and the front doors' multi pane sidelights and transoms are still intact. They have a well-crafted brickwork corbel table. Of particular interest, there is a central basement level entrance partially below street grade with well-worn granite steps reading down to a very old multipaneled door, possibly from a nearby late 18th century building(?). It opens into a 3 foot wide covered passageway leading to the rear of the house. Suffolk plan 4977:363 dated October 1, 1927 indicates that this passageway provided access to the street for the occupants of a T-shaped house which once abutted 8 and 10s' rear wall..

As previously mentioned, numbers eight and 10 appear to represent the second generation of houses on this site. Evidently the first house was built circa the 1790s. On November 12, 1790 Isaac Trask, a "truckman", purchased this lot from Barnabas Barker of Charlestown for \$333.33. (Was three Barker's lucky number?) At some later point, circa the early 19th century, Samuel Spring, a "painter and glazier" sold this lot "with the building thereon" to Israel Waitt, housewright. The present double house appears to have been built in the early 1850s rather than circa 1823. (Waitt's occupation holds out the possibility of a circa 1820s construction date.) The not always reliable McIntyre map of 1852 indicates that at that time (more like 1851 than 1852) no house occupied this site. Thus, numbers 8 and 10 probably date from circa 1852-53, when real estate speculator/distiller Zenas Howland purchased this property. On October 8, 1852, Zenas C Howland paid Joseph Waitt and Isaac Waitt, "rule makers", and Mary L Waitt, a single woman, \$1500 for this and this land "with the buildings thereon".

Middlesex grantee indexes for 1835-65 indicate that Howland put together an extensive real estate empire in the vicinity of City Square /Charlestown waterfront. Numbers 8 and 10 Putnam Street remained under Howland family ownership until as late as 1928. On February 10, 1928 Walter F Howland of Hutchinson, New Hampshire sold "parcel A" (8) to a Thomas Galvin. Parcel B (10) was sold to Helen E Josie.

Putnam Street dates to at least the 1790s and is described in a deed of 1799 as being 20 feet wide. Evidently this street was named for the battle of Bunker Hill hero Israel Putnam, although a Baron Putnam lived on or near near Putnam Street during the late 18th-early 19th century

Bibliography:

Maps 1818, 1852

Atlases-1868, 1875, 1885, 89th 2000 1901, Charles on
Charlestown/Boston directory's

Final Report-Phase 2 Archaeological Site Examination-Central
Artery, North Area

Middlesex deeds-129:536, 247:120, 601: 26

Suffolk deeds-4977:364, 371

Middlesex Plan-4977:363

*Digitized and edited, without change in content, from the scanned record in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, with the 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