

89, 91 Pearl Street (circa 1845-46)

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



91, 89 Pearl Street

1980s



91, 89 Pearl Street

2016

Numbers 89 and 91 Pearl Street is an interesting wood frame, wood shingle-clad double Greek Revival house with Gothic revival elements. These include highly unusual, steeply pitched street-facing pedimented gables with pointed arch attic windows. The corners are defined by Doric pilasters, and a

Doric pilaster in the center of the main façade visually divides the main facade into three bays for each half. The house has an open front porch, and the original porch columns, which were probably fluted and Doric, have been replaced.

Apparently the entrance enframements of 91 have been altered. Originally these paired entrances were enframed by a single broad pediment. Number 89's enframements represent one half of the original entrance treatment. The windows are fully enframed, with pedimented lintels, and have 1/1 and 2/1 wood sash. There are signs of alterations on the first floor, e.g. a tripartite window at 89.

Builder: Sheldon Williams

Original owner: Sheldon Williams

Numbers 89 and 91 Pearl Street date to the earliest days of Pearl Street's development during the mid-1840s.

Architecturally, this property is significant as a highly unusual design approach to the circa 1845 Charlestown double house. Here the main façade is treated as a temple front with three pilasters (columns) but with twin pedimented attics rather than the more typical single pedimented attic. In addition, the carpenter has alluded to the Gothic Revival vernacular style with the steep pitch of the twin gables and the pointed arch attic windows. This house is relatively substantial in comparison to the 1840s wood frame Greek Revival houses elsewhere in the survey area.

This property's lot was purchased from Charles Pierce, of Charlestown, a mason, by Sheldon Williams, a housewright, on August 15, 1845 for \$824.58. Number 89 and 91 represent lot 16 on "a plan of lots on Bunker Hill surveyed by George a Parker, June 1844". Evidently 89 and 91 are the work of

Sheldon Williams. He was active in Charlestown building trades from circa 1845 until circa 1880. In his first directory listing, in 1845, he is described as a "carpenter" and lived on School Street. By 1848 he is listed as living at what is now 91 Pearl Street. By 1860 he was still living at 91 Pearl Street but his trade is listed as "mahogany and veneer sawing", 10 Front Street, in Somerville. By 1866 Sheldon Williams was in partnership with Gilbert Williams in a wood and coal dealership. Gilbert Williams also started out as a carpenter. By the 1860s he owned considerable landholdings, particularly in the Charlestown neck area (see form on 17, 19 Brighton Street.). Sheldon Williams lived at 91 until at least the mid-1870s.

During the 1880s, a Sarah Buffum of Bristol, Tennessee, owned 91 Pearl Street. On June 30, 1892, Sarah Buffum sold 91 to John Harrington (Suffolk deeds 2069:283). During the 1900s and 1910s a Robert F Miller owned 91 Pearl Street.

Further research is needed on the early ownership of 89 Pearl Street. Sheldon Williams probably rented this half of the house to a family member until circa 1855. The 1856 Charlestown directory indicates that 89 Pearl Street was the home of Charles T Mullet, a harness maker. He lived here until as late as 1901.

The section of Bunker Hill between Bunker Hill Street and Medford Street from Elm to Short Street was upland pasture until the mid-1840s. By that time population pressures in Boston, due primarily to the coming wave of European immigrants, caused many middle class families to look beyond the Shawmut Peninsula for housing.

Bibliography:

Maps-1818, 1833, 1839, 1848, 1851
Atlases-1875, 1885, 1892, 1901
Charlestown directories: 1834-1874
Suffolk deed-2069:283

*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.

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