

9- 15 Green Street (1917)

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



9- 15 Green Street

2015

Numbers 9-15 Green Street, The Boys Club of Boston, Inc. clubhouse, is a large U-shaped three-story building constructed of tapestry brick with cast stone trimmings with Jacobethan detail, e.g. spring blocks with figureheads. The seven bay main façade opens onto a courtyard flanked by wings. A shield/plaque above the side door reads "Bon Coeur".

Architect: O A (?) or Q A Thayer

Owner: Trustees of the Charlestown Boys Club

Sited across the street from the old Dexter mansion (see form on 14 Green St.), the Charlestown Boys Club, now the headquarters for Boys Club of Boston, Inc., was built in 1917. Its sprawling U-shaped form clings to the steep southwestern

slope of Breeds Hill. This building occupies the site of the old James Hunnewell house. Architecturally, this red brick and cast stone trimmed building represents a competent foray into the tapestry brick/Jacobethan style. The Boston 200 plaque (1975, Bicentennial) in this building reads "from a modest gymnasium and library over a grocery store at 402 Main Street, the Charlestown Boys Club grew into a leading community center for Boston's young people". Only 38 members belonged in the 1890s when the boys club opened. In addition to recreation it offered classes in woodworking, electricity, printing and other trades. Today the club is the headquarters of the Boys Club of Boston, Inc.

Construction began at some point in early 1917. The *Charlestown Enterprise* dated February 17, 1917 (entitled "Construction of new clubhouse") includes a drawing of the clubhouse by architect O A (or Q A) Thayer (Further research is needed on Thayer) as well as a brief description of the building, still in its planning stages. It was noted that "the plan for the boys club provides for a basement and subbasement and in the former will be constructed a large swimming pool and the heating system will be constructed in the subbasement." It was also noted that "directly over the swimming pool on the floor above will be located the gymnasium and auditorium and with stage seating capacity of 500. Bowling alleys and lavatories will also be located on the floor. A more detailed description of the boys club appeared in the *Charlestown Enterprise* upon this building's completion (December 8, 1917, page 1). It was noted that "the building's entrance is furnished in fumed oak... One of the most beautiful rooms in the building is the game room. The walls are of brick. There are tables and chairs for a large number of boys and over 150 games are kept in the game closet close by. A railing about 2 feet high surrounds the space devoted to the game room" it

was noted that "the library was the most expensive room in the club... Bookcases with movable shelves are built on the walls around the room and on one side is a beautiful fireplace around the top and sides of which is a burnt wood design of grass green and copper. On the top is spelled "bon Coeur" meaning good "good heart" or "good courage". "Bon Coeur " is the motto of the club. Directly opposite the library is the wireless telegraphy room ""The clubhouse also contains a meeting room, stenography room and gymnasium" which was "one of the largest and best equipped in new England."

The Charlestown Boys Club occupies the site of the old Hunnewell house. Built in 1817 by Joseph Thompson, this house was briefly the residence of Commodore Oliver H Perry, of war of 1812 Naval fame. More importantly it was the home of James Frothingham Hunnewell, merchant/shipper and locally/regionally important historian. Mr. Hunnewell's father acquired this house in 1831. James F Hunnewell was born here on July 3, 1832. He was engaged with his father in the shipping business, chiefly with foreign ports but especially with Honolulu. He was associated with numerous Charlestown/Boston social and civic clubs/organizations including Charlestown School Committee, St. Botolph Club, Club of Odd Volumes, Hawaii Club and the New England Historic Genealogical Society. He published a number of interesting historical works including *A Century of Town Life* (a history of Charlestown), in 1888, an indispensable source for understanding 18th and early 19th century lot ownership in Town Hill district as well as *Record of the First Church, Charlestown*, *The Historical Monuments of France*, *Civilization at the Hawaiian Islands*, and *England's Chronicle in Stone*.

Note: Frank S Mason, prominent early 20th century real estate agent and insurance agent was a leading figure in the establishment of the Charlestown Boys Club.

Bibliography:

Charlestown Enterprise, December 8, 1917, p. 1, "Imposing Structure for Boys Club House"

Charlestown Enterprise, Feb 17, 1917, "Construction of New Club House"

Charlestown Enterprise, special ed. June 17, 1893, "Charlestown Citizens Past and Present", p. 41

Charlestown Enterprise, March 1, 1902, p. 1, "James Hunnewell, Owner of the beautiful Residence on Green and Wood Streets"

*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