

Historic House of the Month: The Hubbell and Warren Row Houses

By Nancy Hayford Kueny

By the mid-18th Century, Charlestown settled in 1629, had become a thriving seaport as well as a prosperous farming community with about 400 households. But that all changed on June 17, 1775. On June 16, the colonists became aware of British plans to gain control of Dorchester Heights to the south of Boston, and Charlestown to the north. Although the colonists had planned initially to defend Bunker Hill the town's highest hill, the plan changed and the earthen fortifications were established instead on Breeds Hill to be closer to Boston Harbor and Copp's Hill in the North End. There were approximately 2,200 Redcoats and 1,000 to 1,500 colonial militiamen fighting that day. The colonists, led by Col. William Prescott, made a determined effort and fought courageously, but eventually, after three assaults by the British the outnumbered Americans were forced to retreat across Charlestown Neck and into Cambridge. Even though the battle was lost, it was considered to be a turning point in the early days of the Revolution. It was a morale builder for the colonists, as they inflicted considerable harm to the superiorly trained and equipped British army, killing 200 and wounding 800 vs. 100 American deaths and 300 wounded. The battle lasted for approximately two hours. It was one of the bloodiest battles of the Revolution. 34-year-old General Joseph Warren, physician and Sons of Liberty leader, fought bravely that day as a volunteer among the militiamen, and he was killed during the final British assault. In my family, my third great-grandfather Nathaniel Hayford was stationed on Winter Hill in Somerville with a New Hampshire regiment during the battle. He was 19 at the time, spent five years fighting in the Revolution, and lived to be 96.

The town was, as is well known, subsequently burned by the British. By the 1780s, folks began to return and rebuild and by 1785, Charlestown was comprised of 279 buildings and a population of about 1000. The Peter Tufts map of 1818 details a substantial peninsular port town that must have been bustling with activity, with many streets recognizable to us as they exist today. The map depicts numerous wharves flanking both sides of the Charles River Bridge to Boston, a large, thriving Navy Yard, and the terminus of the Middlesex Canal near the Neck. In 1794 a monument to the heroic General Warren had been placed on the battlefield, but visitors became fewer and fewer. By the early 1800s, the Breeds Hill battlefield was predominately pastureland, gardens and orchards.

In the 1820s, several prominent residents and businessmen spearheaded by William Tudor became determined that the entire battlefield should be preserved. In 1823, Tudor and his cohorts including Daniel Webster, General Warren's nephew Dr. John Warren, George Ticknor and Edward Everett purchased James Russell's 2 ³/₄ acre pasture on Breeds Hill for \$1,250. In 1825, the Bunker Hill Monument Association was incorporated, and over time 15 acres of the battlefield were secured for the purpose of preserving it and building a commemorative monument. Solomon Willard was named architect for the project, and plans and work on the obelisk commenced. But financing the project proved to be very difficult, and work started and stopped several times. In order to raise the needed funding, the BHM Association eventually decided to sell all but the four acres surrounding the Monument itself for residential development. In 1839, the land was surveyed by Samuel Felton and George Parker, based on a prior layout of the Square and proposed building lots and streets conceived by Solomon Willard several years earlier. This plan was much more urban in concept than Charlestown was at that time. Charlestown was quite rural in the early 19th C, and homes and estates had been built on at least an acre of land. The proposed Monument Square smaller lots would garner more money

for the BHMA. Lots were sold to members as well as to developers. The historian Richard Frothingham (from an early Charlestown family and also a member of the BHMA) purchased the lot at 9A. The grading of the lots and creation of new streets took time, and the construction of the first two houses did not begin until 1847. The Bunker Hill Monument itself was completed in 1842. The lots on three sides of Monument Square were subject to deed restrictions requiring the homes to be masonry, and between 3 and 4 stories in height with 10 ft. setbacks from the street. Because the fourth side of the Square was actually High Street (shown on the 1818 Peter Tufts map) those lots were not under deed restriction. There are three frame homes on the High Street side of the Square: 47 and 47A, a Georgian structure that was moved to the Square, 38 and 39, also moved and modified, and 45 and 46, built in 1895. It took from 1847 until 1912 to complete all of the structures surrounding the Square. Monument Square appears much the same today, with the 221 foot granite obelisk at the center of the hill, surrounded by wide streets, 45 residences, the Charlestown Public Library (1912, now the Bunker Hill Museum) and Charlestown High School (1907, now condominiums). The plan also included the laying out of new streets such as Lexington and Concord, Laurel and Chestnut.

The first two homes to be built on the Square (1846-47) were the double, highly styled Greek Revival row homes at 6-7 Monument Square at the corner of Chestnut Street. The significant features of these homes include the double bow fronted largely symmetrical façade; long first floor windows crowned with pediments, a wide brownstone cornice, and linked tall chimneys. The homes have very elegant ironwork including an ornate fence, narrow balconies, and an intricately ornamented railing on the granite entry stairs. No. 7 is topped with an octagonal cupola.





No. 7 was the home of George Washington Warren, a descendant of General Joseph Warren, martyr of the battle. He was the son of Deacon Isaac Warren who lived in a frame house on Bow Street (no longer extant) on Town Hill. G.W. Warren graduated from Harvard College in 1830. He was Mayor of Charlestown from 1847-1850, Director of the Charlestown Gas Company, a Trustee of the Warren Institute of Savings, a state legislator and a judge of the Municipal Court for over 25 years. It must have given him great pride to live on what was once the battlefield where his ancestor fought so bravely, making the ultimate sacrifice.

No. 6 was the residence of **Peter Hubbell**, who moved to Charlestown from New York State when the Charlestown Branch Railroad was established to carry ice from Spy and Fresh Ponds in Cambridge to the Charlestown waterfront where it was loaded onto sailing ships. Ice was a very valuable commodity at that time. In New York State, **Mr. Hubbell's** business had been brickmaking, and here he established the Bay State Brick Company. He was an energetic and vigorous man who traveled by the railroad to Cambridge daily to visit his brickworks. He had a habit of jumping off the train before it had fully stopped at the platform, and as a result, one day he lost a leg. According to the town historian Timothy Sawyer, this loss apparently did not slow him down at all. **Hubbell** was also president of the Charlestown Gas Company and a member of St John's Episcopal Church.

Sources: Old Charlestown (Timothy Sawyer), A Century of Town Life (James Frothingham Hunnewell), Department of the Interior National Registry Nomination Documents: Monument Square Historic District, Boston Landmarks Commission Survey: 6 & 7 Mon Square, History.com, MyRevolutionaryWar.com.

A walk through the center of the mill complex in Cambridge begs the question: "Where did all these bricks come from?" The answer: Cambridge (probably). Brickworks developed next to the Boston-to-Fitchburg railroad line in the mid-1800s and were still being worked as late as the 1950s. Here, with local clay and immigrant Irish labor, a number of brick companies were each turning out 50,000-100,000 bricks per day. Logic suggests our town's bricks came from those brickworks.

The major ingredients in a brick recipe are roughly three-parts clay to one-part sand. Small amounts of iron oxide are added to increase hardness, with the side effect of causing the red color. North Cambridge east of Fresh Pond had extensive clay deposits, courtesy of the Ice Age. Some of the excavation pits were 60-feet to 80-feet deep. Wood or coal to fire the bricks would have come in on the railroad. Finished bricks went out the same way.

The classic "soft mud" method called for clay, sand and other ingredients to be mixed in a horse-powered (later steam engine powered) pug mill. Wood-framed moulds for six bricks would be set on a table. These were wetted and sprinkled with sand to keep the brick from sticking. The raw brick mix was shaped, pressed into the mould, the top scraped level and the bricks then dumped out onto a drying bed of sand. Fresh bricks were air-dried for several days, then kiln-fired in a process that gradually took the bricks up to a temperature of 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit. Brick makers pressed their company name or symbol into the brick as a means of branding, because buyers wanted assurance of known quality. Today's brickworks use a drier mix and extrude a continuous brick-thick sheet, which is then sliced into bricks. These rarely bear a maker's mark.

Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth (1802-1856) was instrumental in extending the railroad to Cambridge in order to expedite the export of ice. In 1844 he bought into the Cambridge brick industry, then brought in skilled brick maker [Peter Hubbell](#) to build a large, mechanized brickworks. This became the Bay State Brick Company, in turn incorporated into the multi-state [New England Brick Company](#). Their bricks were stamped "NEBCo." Bricks so marked date as far back as the early 1900s.

The immigrant Irish - many driven to the Americas by the famine of 1845-1852, were labor for all of these enterprises. Irishmen dug canals, built the railroads, cut ice in winter and made brick the rest of the year. North Cambridge was dubbed "Little Dublin" and "New Ireland."