

Revere House Radio

Episode 23

Lathrop Place

Welcome to Revere House Radio, I'm your host, Adrienne Turnbull-Reilly. Since we launched this podcast, we've been sticking pretty close to home, as they say, with Paul Revere related content. Makes sense, given our museum's mission to interpret Revere for the general public. But also in our mission is to address "*historical issues and social history themes relevant to our site, our neighborhood, and Boston from the 17th through the early 20th century.*" So, what of the historical issues and social history that fall outside of Revere and his time period? Well, we've got that too. The Paul Revere Memorial Association actually owns and maintains three houses, not just one. I felt like it was time we give some love to the other buildings that visitors see and staff work in every day. I'm going to devote episodes to our other two buildings, Lathrop Place, and the Pierce-Hichborn House. Let's start with the one I work in every day, Lathrop Place, which is so named for the little alleyway that it faces. If you've ever been to our site, you may be more familiar with it as our visitor center. In this building, we house two exhibit spaces, a gift shop, classroom spaces, and staff offices. But it hasn't always been this way. In fact, for most of its life, it served as people's homes.

Built in 1835 on land that used to be owned by Paul Revere, 5, 6, 7, and 8 Lathrop Place were built as modest housing for working families by housewrights John Perkins and Jonathan Robinson. At the time, Lydia Loring owned the Revere House, and she sold off the backyard for \$4,245. Though identical to units 7 and 8 when first built, the Revere House only owns numbers 5 and 6 today, so I'll focus on what we can say about those specifically. When 5 and 6 were first constructed, they were two stories tall. Over the years the roofline was raised to include a third usable level. In those first few decades, 5 and 6 housed many people with many professions such as bookkeepers, painters, carpenters, riggers, fruit vendors, and masons. At this time, these occupants were mostly single men, or men saving enough money to bring the rest of their family over from other countries, renting place in Lathrop Place as part of a boarding house. Extremely dense, cramped housing was the rule of the day during this period. Families struggled to get by with parental income often augmented with older children's incomes as well. By the late 1800s, the make-up of the neighborhood started shifting more toward whole families, and we see this reflected in the occupants of 5 and 6 Lathrop Place.

While we think its early life was spent as a boarding house, there is evidence to suggest that around the turn of the 20th century, it was converted into single family units. Around 1895, the neighborhood was roughly split in thirds by Italian, Irish, and Jewish immigrants. By the 1920s, the neighborhood was mostly Italian. One can imagine the laundry drying on the lines on the roof, or children kicking balls around in the alley when they had free time. For many, home did not include running water, or if it did, not hot water. In the early 20th century, Boston built

bathhouses all around the city to supply residents with places to bathe and socialize. In 1916 there were 15 public bathhouses sprinkled around Boston. One such bathhouse, now known as the Nazarro Center, was probably utilized by the occupants of Lathrop Place and can still be seen on North Bennet Street today. And though the building itself was not impacted, certainly those living in Lathrop place would have heard about the horrific tragedy of the Molasses Flood in 1919.

Of course some of the dense, poorly built housing in this neighborhood had to do with prejudices that some felt toward their new neighbors. Boston didn't put forth a great effort to keep buildings safe or services available to the people living in the North End. Many of the people living in this neighborhood in the early 20th century were not citizens, and so weren't able to exercise their voices against a shoddily built molasses tank, for example. They were also targeted as likely suspects when other crimes took place, such as the murders of Frederick Parmenter and Alessandro Berardelli, for which Nicholas Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were convicted and executed. Their funeral was held in the North End at the Langone Funeral Home, which was attended by hundreds, if not thousands.

Despite certain struggles, those living in the North End of course found joy and contentment as well. We have oral history accounts of summer nights spent on the roofs with watermelon with someone playing the mandolin. Children would go to school, play, work, and help with chores around the house, such as shoveling horse manure into garden beds for fresh fruits and veggies! While we don't know exactly who, or how many, occupied Lathrop place every single year, we do know more about its mid-century occupants. From 1902 to 1970, the Bruni family, Pasquale and Maria, and later their son John lived in the house. John and his wife Louise later owned #5. In 1970 the owners of #6, the Sinopolis family, purchased #5 from the Bruni family and converted the whole building into one residence. We have been fortunate enough to have a handful of objects, photographs, and oral histories from those who lived in this building in the mid to late 20th century. These precious fragments from the past allow us to more genuinely interpret this building to the visiting public. And we strive to honor those who made their lives in this building and neighborhood with our restoration work.

In 2007, The Paul Revere Memorial Association was thrilled to acquire the building, as we had high hopes for restoring it and telling the stories of its occupants. After a 10 year process of raising funds and restoration work, the building opened to the public in December of 2016. I now have the privilege of working there every day. Sometimes, walking through the building alone, I wonder about the laughter, tears, meals shared, secrets whispered, hopes and fears of those who walked those floors before me. Being able to work in a place that people actually lived is a unique and special thing. Just like being inside the Revere House feels special, so too does being inside Lathrop Place. I hope that you will be able to visit this building when we can reopen it. Even if you can't, check out pictures of it on our website! I'll include the link in the show notes. I'll also include links to learn more about the Nazarro center and the great work that they're still doing today in the neighborhood. I hope you enjoyed learning a little bit about a different building from a different time period, one that is hugely important to Boston's culture today. Keep up with all our activities via our website, where you can sign up for our monthly newsletter and read our most recent blog posts. This has been Revere House Radio, and as always, thanks for listening!