

203 Savin Hill Avenue, Dorchester, MA 02125

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Dorchester Historical Society
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Questions to be answered:

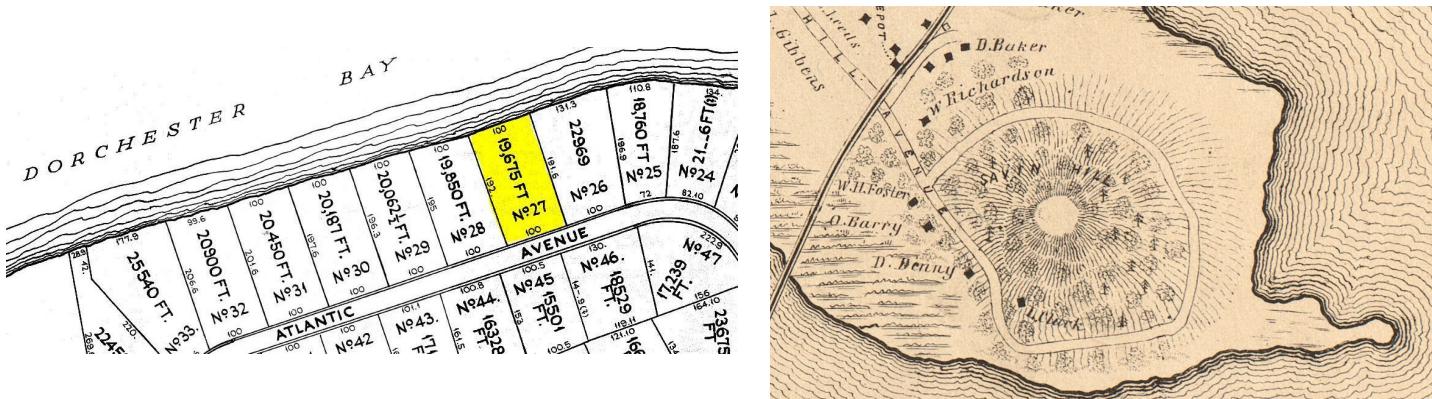
- What is known about the original owner?
- Did an architect design the house? If so, who was it and what is known about him/her?
- Who was the builder?
- Was the house part of a larger real estate development at the time it was built?



203 Savin Hill Avenue sits on the north side of Savin Hill, on the shores of Dorchester Bay. It was built at a time of substantial development in that part of Savin Hill, after the land had been subdivided in 1845. In 1845, the north side of Savin Hill was mostly undeveloped, with only a few larger estates located along the main roads. The 1850 Whiting map of Dorchester (shown on the next page) shows how few houses were located on that side of the hill, or as the modern-day residents refer to as Savin Hill “Over the Bridge (OTB).” The two largest landowners in the area were William F. Worthington and Edward Robinson; both were wealthy merchants in Boston.

When the land belonging to Worthington and Robinson was surveyed by Charles Whitney in 1845, the land where 203 Savin Hill Avenue would eventually be built was labeled “lot 27” (shown on the next page). At the time of the survey, the lot contained 19,675 square feet of land. Over the years, the lot would increase and decrease in size multiple times, but the

modern-day deeds still refer to the original “lot 27” on the Whitney plan of 1845. Today, the lot is less than half the size it once was. However, most of the transferring of the land occurred when one family owned lot 27: the Patten family.



The Patten family's appearance in Savin Hill first came in 1871 when Claudius B. Patten purchased land on Atlantic Avenue (today's Savin Hill Avenue). Claudius purchased 13,888 square feet of land from the heirs of William F. Worthington in 1871, and by 1872, he had built a house and a stable on the land. The City of Boston tax records (shown below) indicate that he was also living there; the house is addressed, today, as 219 Savin Hill Avenue.

1 Horse	1 Dog	Lot 27	Value \$1000	Claudius B Patten	10.000	13888	4000	6000
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Claudius was born in Kingston, New Hampshire in 1828 to Colcord and Maria (Fletcher) Patten; he moved to Boston as a teenager. In 1855, he married Mary Damon Perkins in Needham, MA. She was born in 1834, in Keene, New Hampshire, to Henry and Louisa (Dutton) Perkins. She was raised in New Hampshire, but by 1850 she was living with her family in Needham. She lived with her mother and father and her siblings; records show that she had at least five siblings who lived to adulthood. Her father, Henry, was the first cashier of the Western Railroad. Mary's parents both died when she was in her twenties, her mother in 1853 and her father only three years later, in 1856. When she married Claudius in 1855, it looks like they may have first lived in the home in Needham with her father and brothers, but by 1860 they had moved into a home of their own. They started their family in Needham; Henry was born in 1856 and Ellen in 1859. While living in Needham, Claudius was elected to the town's school committee in 1860, but by 1863, he had resigned and moved to Boston to take a job at a bank. When first settling in Boston, the Patten family lived in the South End; their daughter, Mary, was born in 1870, and her birth certificate indicates they were living on West Canton Street. However, by 1872, when their youngest child, William, was born, they were living on Atlantic Avenue in the newly annexed neighborhood of Dorchester.

When the Pattens moved to Savin Hill in the 1870s, they may have chosen the location because of their affection for the sea. Newspaper articles indicate the family's adventures in yachting and their involvement with the boating community. Newspapers from the 1870s and 1880s show Claudius's participation in regattas and yachting ventures; he owned a boat named

"Cora." In 1875, Claudius was elected as the first president of the Savin Hill Beach Association. The organization's objectives were "regulation of the boating and bathing interests on the beautiful shores of Savin Hill, and also the supervision of the new Savin Hill wharf." The Savin Hill Beach Association was the founding body of the Savin Hill Yacht Club, and it was officially resolved into a yacht club in 1888.

The Boston tax record on the previous page lists Claudius's occupation simply as "cashier," but in reality, he was a well-respected member of the banking community in Boston. In the nineteenth century, the word cashier indicated a more executive position than it might indicate today. He began his career in banking at the Suffolk National Bank in Boston, where he eventually rose to the position of assistant cashier. In 1867, he resigned from that position to accept a new position as the cashier of the State National Bank, a position he held until his death. While working in the banking industry, he gave a number of lectures on banking topics, especially at the Boston Young Men's Christian Union. He had also published a book, *England, as Seen by an American Banker, Notes of a Pedestrian Tour*, and at the time of his death, he had been working on another book, *Practical Banking in New York*. Unfortunately, Claudius would not live long enough to see the book in print.

In the last few years of his life, Claudius experienced a bout of ill health. His doctors attributed his illness to overwork and fatigue, and they suggested he take a cruise to Europe in hopes that the trip would clear his mind. He left with his brother, Dr. I. Bartlett Patten, and as the story goes, he returned from the trip a few months later in much better health and with a restored exuberance for life. However, not long after, in April of 1886, his health had deteriorated again, and as he had done before, he left on a ship bound for Europe. However, this time he returned only a few weeks later with no change in his health. Tragically, on May 22, 1886, Claudius's apparent depression ended with his death when he was struck by a train nearing the Savin Hill station on the Old Colony Railroad. There were varying reports surrounding the circumstances of his death and whether or not it was an accident or intentional, but in the end, the final cause of death was ruled a suicide. When he died, Claudius left his wife, Mary, and their four adult children: Henry, Ellen, Mary, and William.

When Claudius died, his will indicated that he was leaving all of his property, in a trust, to Mary and three of his children; Claudius said that Henry was more than capable of providing for

SAVIN HILL BEACH ASSOCIATION.—At a very full meeting held Thursday evening, the following gentlemen were chosen officers of this organization: President, C. B. Patten; Secretary and Treasurer, George S. Chase; Trustees, the President of the Association and Messrs Charles Nowell and Bigelow Morse. The objects of this Association are the regulation of the boating and bathing interests on the beautiful shores of Savin Hill, and also the supervision of the new Savin Hill wharf.

Boston Aug. 20. 1885. I give and bequeath all my property both real and personal to my wife to be by her held in trust for my children Ellen, Mary & William — my wife to have the income of said property during her life, using same for benefit of herself & the children I have named. I make this disposition of my property because my dear son Henry is amply able to take care of himself while those named in this document are not so well situated, & I hereby appoint Amos W. Stetson my executor.
Witness. C. B. Patten.

himself (see above). In fact, Henry had already built his own house for his growing family only a few doors down at 205 Savin Hill Avenue. This trust included the property at 219 Savin Hill Avenue, which Mary decided to sell in October of 1886. Claudius had purchased land near Henry's house a few years earlier, and it seems that Mary used the money from the sale of the property to build a new house on that lot. The new house was next to Henry's house and would be addressed as 203 Savin Hill Avenue.

With this evidence, suffice to say that Mary Damon (Perkins) Patten, the wife of Claudius Patten, was the first owner of the house at 203 Savin Hill Avenue. Unfortunately, the original building permit for the house at 203 Savin Hill Avenue does not appear to have survived the test of time. This document would have provided the name of the architect, as well as the name of the builder. However, at some point the Boston Public Library indexed a series of building inspectors' volumes that were compiled by the Building Department of the City of Boston and which contained the building inspectors' sign-offs on all buildings for which permits were issued in the City of Boston.

Although the volume that should contain the building inspector's report for 203 Savin Hill Avenue could not be located, what does exist is the index card from the BPL showing that there was a house on Savin Hill Avenue inspected in 1887. The house was owned by a "Mrs. C. B. Patten."

Further evidence to prove that **203 Savin Hill Avenue was completed in 1887** comes from the tax records. The 1886 record shows vacant land on part of lot 27; Henry is shown living on the other part of the lot. The record for the following year, 1887, shows that the Mary D. Patten Trustees owned the other part of lot 27 and "house by self" indicates that the owner, Mary D. Patten, lived in the house (women were not recorded on the personal tax page since they couldn't vote and did not have to pay a poll tax).

1886:

Vacant Land					
Henry G. Patten 30, 1 Savin Hill Ave. Clerk					

1887:

No. by Self.					
Vacant Land					
Passageway					
Henry G. Patten 31, 1 Savin Hill Ave.					

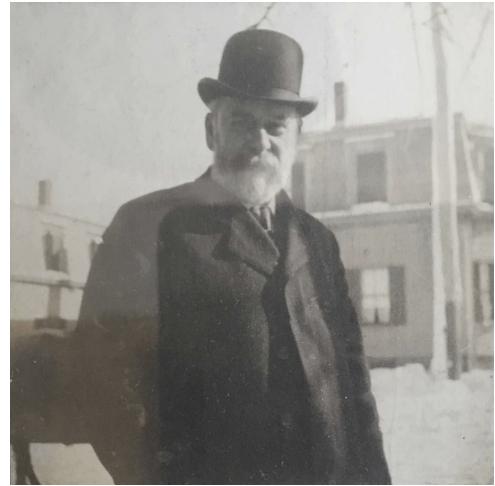
Final evidence that the house was completed in 1887 comes from a tiny newspaper clipping in the *Dorchester Beacon* on November 6, 1886. Under the "Permits to Build" section announcing building permits that had been granted in Dorchester, Mrs. C.B. Patten was

H. B. Oakman for Mrs. C. B. Patten, on Savin Hill Ave., near Gram-pion way, two, pitch roof, two-story, wood dwellings.

approved for two, pitch roof, two-story dwellings. Since there was only one Mrs. C.B. Patten who owned property on Savin Hill Avenue at the time, this article has to

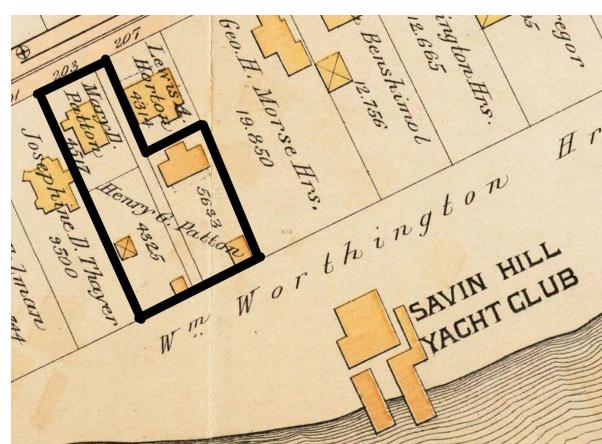
reference 203 Savin Hill Avenue as well as, presumably, what would become 207 Savin Hill Avenue. As mentioned previously, Henry had already built a house at 205 Savin Hill Avenue. In addition to confirming the year of construction, this article also gives us the name of the builder - H.B. Oakman.

The newspaper article almost certainly made a small error when publishing their building permits notice, as no "H.B." Oakman was listed as a builder in Boston in 1886. However, there was an "H.P." Oakman who was a prolific builder of Dorchester houses. Henry Philips Oakman (right) was born in Marshfield, MA, in 1831. In 1852, he married Arethusa Hatch in Marshfield and they started their family there. When the Civil War began, Henry volunteered to fight for the Union and joined company K of the 38th Massachusetts Regiment. He was involved in the siege at Port Hudson in Louisiana, where he was injured and subsequently discharged in 1863. After his military service, the Oakmans moved, first to Milton for a short time, then to the Neponset section of Dorchester, where they lived for the rest of their lives on the street bearing their name - Oakman Street. In addition to being a builder and carpenter, Henry held a number of other jobs, too, including as assessor, as selectman (in Marshfield), as postman, and as justice of the peace. At the time of his retirement, he was working as the president and director of the Guardian Co-operative Bank. Three of Henry's sons also became carpenters - Elmer, Arthur, and George - so it seems likely that they may have worked together with their father. Newspaper articles indicate that Henry's name was attached to many building permits in Dorchester at the end of the nineteenth century.



With Mary's new house on lot 27, there was a Patten family compound on Savin Hill

Avenue. This new location also allowed the Pattens to stay close to the water; they added a passageway to the beach in their lot divisions. This would prove to be extremely convenient for Henry when the Savin Hill Yacht Club built its new clubhouse on the beach in 1890, as shown by the 1894 atlas (left). Henry was elected treasurer of the yacht club in 1890. In fact, the roof of 203 Savin Hill Avenue can be seen from the photograph on the following page, taken shortly after the completion of the clubhouse.



Mary lived in the house at 203 Savin Hill Avenue until her death, and she made sure of that when she sold the house to her daughters, Ellen and Mary. In the 1905 deed, she added the clause: "And subject to my occupancy of the house and premises during my life, free of rent." Mary passed away on February 13, 1912, at the age of 77; the cause was given as "chronic Bright's Disease" (kidney disease). Ellen and Mary also lived in the house until their deaths, after which it was sold to their nephews and

eventually to their great nephew, David Chapman Patten. A member of the Patten family owned the house until 1956.

Note: Although a Patten family genealogy is beyond the scope of this report, it would be a topic of further research to determine if there is a relationship between this Patten family and the Patten family for which Patten's Cove is named. Nathaniel Patten, who lived in Savin Hill in the 1600s, is said to be the namesake for the small cove that is mere blocks away from 203 Savin Hill Avenue.



Title search:

Date	Grantee	Grantor	Book/Page	Notes
8/1/1996	John J. McColgan and Donna Blythe-McColgan	Judith H. Whitney	20757/263	Lot 27
5/30/1984 (not recorded until 3/18/1992)	Judith H. Whitney	J. Alan Whitney	17354/249	
8/22/1979	J. Alan Whitney and Judith H. Whitney	Esther B. McDevitt	9237/336	"Together with a strip of land five feet wide lying upon said Avenue is to be kept open forever as a sidewalk." "Subject to and with the benefit of rights of way or easement of records, so far as in force and applicable, including passageway"
7/5/1956	Joseph J. and Esther B. McDevitt	Anastasia B. Rowan	8276/370	
7/2/1956	Anastasia B. Rowan	David C. Patten	7163/566	
7/16/1951	David C. Patten	Henry C. Patten and Ernest B. Patten	6673/583	
		Estate of Ellen L. Patten (Suffolk County Probate #309246) Estate of William F. Patten (Plymouth County Probate #57324)		
10/18/1905	Mary L. Patten and Ellen L. Patten	Mary D. Patten	3614/432	"Together with a strip of land five feet in width which is to be forever kept open as a sidewalk, lying upon the said Avenue the whole width of the premises. Subject to and with the rights in a passageway running from said Avenue to the beach as laid out and specified in the deeds of Claudius B. Patten to G.R. Chapman and to Henry G. Patten for the benefit of the premises and the residents of said Lot 27 of which passage a strip of land five feet in width adjoining land now of said Henry G. Patten, and land of Lewis A. Horton forms a part." "And subject to my occupancy of the house and premises during my life, free

				of rent."
2/18/1893	Mary D. Patten	Henry G. Patten	2112/607	"Subject to and with rights in said passageway"
10/26/1886	Henry G. Patten	George R. Chapman	1746/604	
12/20/1884	George R. Chapman	Claudius B. Patten	1662/371	"part of lot 27" 9947 square feet
11/8/1884	Claudius B. Patten	Sarah Grant	1662/289	"Including a strip for sidewalk to be forever kept open five feet in width running the whole length of said lot 27 on Atlantic Avenue."

Attachments:

1. Charles Whitney, Norfolk County Registry of Deeds, plan 678, book 15

References

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- City of Boston Archives. Tax records. Collection 2100.004.
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- City of Boston. Election Department. Lists of residents: <https://guides.bpl.org/residentslists>.
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- "Henry G. Patten," *The Boston Globe*, September 6, 1929, p. 12.
- Marquis, Albert Nelson. 1915. Who's who in New England a biographical dictionary of leading living men and women of the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. Chicago: A.N. Marquis & Co. <http://books.google.com/books?id=5jk1AAAAIAAJ>.
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- "Savin Hill Club Elects Officers," *The Boston Globe*, January 10, 1890, p. 2.
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