Bowdoin Square, the birthplace of Charles Bulfinch (1763-1844), is now a busy intersection at Bowdoin St., Cambridge St., and New Chardon St. in downtown Boston, but in the 18th and 19th centuries it was a charming residential neighborhood, with country roads and large pastures. Known as an aristocratic neighborhood in the Bay Colony, Bowdoin Square was home to the Bulfinch Mansion, which included stables and four acres of land. During Charles Bulfinch's lifetime the Bay Colony would be dramatically changed, a change he had a large hand in as Boston's first city planner. Bulfinch's Federal Style, an architectural style which is characterized by columns and arches in the classical style with modest, simplified ornament. The Federal Style was popular through the nineteenth century in American architecture, and it can be observed in many government buildings today. Bulfinch, also the Architect of the Capitol, made an indelible mark on the neighborhood of his childhood and the development of the nation after independence.

Charles Bulfinch comes from a long line of successful Bulfinches in the Bay Colony. His father and grandfather, both named Thomas, were prominent physicians, both educated in Europe, and well known in Boston. The earliest Bulfinch recorded as a resident of the colony was Adino Bulfinch, a Boston Merchant and great grandfather of Charles. Adino built the Bulfinch mansion which Bulfinch lived in as a child. His mother, Susan Apthorp was the daughter of Boston's richest family, very intelligent and highly respected by all her children and acquaintances, Susan had eight children only three of whom survived into adulthood. Introduced to architecture at a young age and primed for political office by his modestly wealthy and cultured family, evidence of his early interest in architecture is found in a penned drawing of two columns by the ten year old Bulfinch. Aside from the crude sketch, what we know of Bulfinch's childhood is gleaned from the social and political atmosphere created by the Revolutionary War, and the dawn of a new Republic. The young Charles Bulfinch, unschooled from the revolution, watched the Battle of Bunker Hill from his rooftop in Bowdoin Square.

After the evacuation Bulfinch was reenrolled in Boston Latin School, from which he graduated and went on to Harvard College. Although Bulfinch was interested in Physics, his father insisted on placing him in the Counting Room of Joseph Barrell, a close family friend and influential Boston merchant, owned ships commissioned by the government as privateers during the Revolutionary War and was elected to the board of the first Bank of the United States in 1792. Bulfinch spent most of his time in Barrell's employment refurbishing Barrell's house, his own home and several others which were dilapidated as a consequence of the revolution. Soon after Bulfinch took a tour of Europe, funded by a gift from his late uncle, which exposed Bulfinch to the cosmopolitan architecture of Europe's cities between 1785 and 1787. After returning from Europe Bulfinch spent a year in leisure funded by his investment in Joseph Barrell's scheme, the Columbia Expedition, inspired by the tale of Captain Cook's third voyage, Joseph Barrell and a number of others including Thomas and Charles Bulfinch financed a voyage to trade furs in China. In what would be a very influential move for the future of trade relations in Boston, Joseph Barrell built the Columbia Rediviva, the first American ship to circumnavigate the globe. The Columbia Expedition also led to the expansion of Colonial land on the Northwest coast of the United States.

Bulfinch married Hannah Apthorp, his cousin, on November 20, 1788. A long and happy marriage.

Children - Thomas Bulfinch (author of Bulfinch's Mythology) and Stephen Greenleaf Bulfinch Unitarian clergyman and author