Durham Street

A Brief History of Durham Street, Boston

The First Century
1885 - 1995

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At the beginning

Grover Cleveland was President of the United States. Orville and Wilbur Wright were teen-agers in Ohio. Henry Ford was turning twenty, and Durham Street was being built.* The building of Durham Street, like its co-events, occurred as the turn of the century was approaching; and more than the calendar was changing. It was a world in transition. Although not confined to technological advances, they were having the most impact. In 1886, while workmen assembled bricks and mortar on Durham Street, Bostonians got about town by either walking or using horse-drawn transportation. In three years, electric trolleys would be in service, and in just ten additional years, the first automobile would be available. In 1886, most people indoors used natural light or gas light to see what they were doing. Although Thomas Edison had perfected the incandescent bulb by 1879, a system of generators and wires to distribute electricity was just now getting underway in the late 1880s. The telephone was at a similar stage. By the 1880s, it was starting to be used in business, but a reliable system for connecting local calls was still being worked out, while long-distance dialing was about twenty years away.

These technological changes were dramatic enough, but other changes accompanying them were no less so. The buildings going up on Durham Street themselves represented a change in the way Bostonians thought about urban housing. While the town house was still favored, apartment living was gaining acceptance by middle-class families. There was even a change of thought about living in the city *at all*, for at this same time the surrounding suburbs were becoming more accessible.

It must have been an exciting time, especially for the first residents of Durham Street, as they set about unpacking in their new homes, being among the first in a whole new area of Boston, in a city that was literally changing under their feet. It probably was tinged with anxiety as well, as they looked about and saw that most of the adjacent streets still had no houses on them. How would it all unfold? They must have been reassured to see that some great Boston institutions had already made their home in the new area. In fact, it was institutions, both commercial and cultural, that would come to define the area at the turn of the century and be an influence even now as we ready ourselves to enter yet another century, the twenty-first. Let's step back a bit, though, to a time when Durham Street was still under water, still part of the tidal inlet called the Back Bay, and a booming Boston was looking for room to grow.

**Durham Street runs from 116 St. Botolph Street to the Southwest Corridor Park. The St. Botolph Street district is alternately considered part of the South End or the Back Bay, depending on your point of view. With a history and a character all its own, it is truly distinct from both the South End and the Back Bay, and deserves its own designation.*

Room to Grow

Boston in the 1850s was transforming itself. Its people were making more money and there were more *of* them than ever before. What Boston didn't have, and what it desperately needed, was more land. What had been a strategic advantage when it was founded in the early 17th century, was a handicap now. Boston in 1630 was a small, easily-defended peninsular. On a hilly spot of land, the colonists felt secure; they could control access to their small foot-hold in the New World. By 1850, however, with fewer fears of marauders, both foreign and domestic, Bostonians were concentrated on the business of making a living and prospering.

For the 200 years prior to 1850, Bostonians had made their living from the sea and from shipping. The livelihoods of most people revolved around Boston Harbor and its wharves. By 1850, Boston was growing as a financial and manufacturing center as well, and this economy was expanding the upper and middle classes who needed housing close to downtown, this still being the era of horse-drawn transportation.

Meanwhile, Boston's growth was creating pressure on existing land as well. Older residential areas were being taken over by commercial interests in the downtown area, while thousands of Irish immigrants were moving into Boston's North and West Ends. Over the years, Boston had expanded itself piecemeal by filling in along its shoreline, but this solution had run its course. The shipping lanes of Boston Harbor could be encroached upon no further.

The next best prospect for creating land was by expanding the narrow neck of land that connected Boston to the mainland. As early as the 1830's, both sides of what is now Washington Street were being filled in, creating the adjacent streets of Shawmut, Harrison and Tremont. This area, still close to downtown, was thought to be ideal for a residential district. This would become Boston's South End. Highly touted at the time, it did fulfill the aspirations ofthe middle class for a time but expectations ran high, and some Bostonians, especially upper-class families, sought something more; the need for more land went unabated.

By the late 1850s, when attention was drawn to the tidal waters of the Back Bay for possible landfill, it already became necessary to deal with the Bay for another, more pressing reason—health. Previous damning and improper location of drainage had made a cesspool of the Bay, creating a stench that was becoming intolerable. Filling it in was a daunting task though, it being an area of over 450 acres stretching from

the Charles River inland to near Columbus Avenue and from the Boston Common west to Kenmore Square (Figure 1). Such a fill was only remotely made possible by the recent invention of the steam shovel. The job was finally undertaken, beginning in 1857, with gravel transported by rail from nine-mile-distant Needham, Massachusetts.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owned most of the newly-created land, and from the start, its intention was to create a street plan of Parisian grandeur and attract the well-to-do. Arthur Gilman, who is credited with being the architect of this street plan, decided to avoid the English model followed in the South End. (With its unpredictable cross streets, repetitive row housing and burgeoning lodging-house population, the South End by the late 1860s was seen by some as a flawed design.) Prosperous Bostonians started building houses in the Back Bay almost block by block following the landfill, beginning at Arlington Street, in the early 1860s. This new residential district, with its central axis of Commonwealth Avenue, lived up to and even exceeded expectations at the time, becoming one ofthe most refined urban housing districts in the United States.

It wasn't until 1873 when the land that would become the St. Botolph Street neighborhood was filled in, and it became clear that the entire land mass that was once the watery Back Bay would not be developed under one cohesive street plan. Idealists envisioned the Back Bay cross streets of Fairfield, Gloucester and Hereford running from Beacon Street all the way to Columbus Avenue, even though existing railroad tracks crisscrossed the area and did so since the 1830s.

In addition to these physical obstacles, there were political ones as well. Boston politicians, as always, bristled at having to share power with the Commonwealth over the control of the city and were uncooperative when it came to planning the layout of the new land. In fact, the city sold a triangular parcel of land — roughly the site on which the Prudential Center now sits — to the Boston and Albany Railroad for a railyard. This railyard effectively split the newly filled-in land into two distinct areas — the Back Bay and the St. Botolph Street areas. The railyard remained for nearly 100 years, until 1960, when the land was sold to the Prudential Insurance Company.

A *Street is Born*

The St. Botolph Street neighborhood was destined to develop separately from the Back Bay, and because of economic reasons, a bit later as well. Even though Boston was growing, the Panic of 1873 caused a depression in real estate that lasted through the late 1870s. Faced with this depression, The Trustees of Huntington Avenue Lands, which was established to sell the filled land, intentionally withheld selling parcels with the goal of getting the best prices, to ensure that land went to at least middle-class buyers.

St. Botolph Street from West Newton Street to Massachusetts Avenue was laid out in 1880. Apparently, English place or peerage names were used to name the streets of Albermarle, Blackwood, Cumberland and Durham. Except for their obvious alphabetical order and that they are London street names as well, no other explanation exists for why these names were chosen. St. Botolph, of course, was chosen to honor Boston's namesake— Boston, England. St.Botolph is a well-known religious icon of that town.

St. Botolph Street from West Newton Street to Harcourt Street was laid out later, in 1882. Except for Garrison Street, which was named to honor abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, no documentation exists for the naming of these streets either. A final street, Irvington Street, was laid out in 1884 and ran parallel to Harcourt Street. Irvington Street lasted until the 1960s when it was removed and all its buildings demolished to make way for the Massachusetts Turnpike extension.

The Buildings

Durham Street lots were among the first to sell and be developed, perhaps because of its proximity to West Newton Street and Huntington Avenue. The even-numbered side of Durham Street sold as a parcel that included #230 to #250 W. Newton Street. It sold for $14,600 and was bought by Mr. Ivory Bean in October, 1881. This side of Durham was designed by the father-and-son team of architects, William and Joseph Richards and was completed by 1883. The sale of the odd-numbered side occurred a few years later, in May 1886. Mr. George Nason bought this lot for $20,739. Land sales obviously were doing better, since this lot is half the size of what Mr. Bean bought in 1881, and it cost $6,000 more.

George Nason was a real estate broker and auctioneer. A Civil War veteran — probably enlisting from his home town of Franklin, Massachusetts — he was wounded twice, escaped enemy capture, and served two stints before being mustered out in North Carolina in 1865. He lived in North Carolina and Florida, participated in various building projects, and oversaw the construction of both a 7-mile railroad and a canal in Florida. Returning to Boston in 1878, he resumed his real estate interests and also operated as a Notary Public and a Justice of the Peace for many years. Mr. Nason hired Mr. Frederick (Fred) Pope as architect to design the Durham block, Nos.3-15* and construction began in August, 1886.

Fred Pope is known mostly from the buildings that he has left behind, for few other records about him exist. He designed the Copley Square Hotel at the end of Exeter Street in 1891. He was also responsible for the first storage warehouse in New England, the Metropolitan Storage Warehouse on Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge. Many of his buildings on Huntington Avenue and Columbus Avenue have been demolished, but blocks on Beacon Street, among others, remain. Looking at #303 to #329 and #351-355 Beacon Street reveals a no-frills approach. Pope followed the styles of the period, probably in every case within a confined budget. The buildings are plain, without great distinction. The Durham block, however, does have an appeal in its simplicity of ornamentation, being in the Panel-Brick Style accompanied by Romanesque door-way arches. The Durham block, being speculative housing for the middle class, probably suited Mr. Pope's stock and trade. He was an ambitious architect; it was said that he made and lost three separate fortunes in his career. He died in Cambridge in 1927, at age 88.

**The street was re-numbered in 1904, eliminating No.13. #1 Durham Street , originally a two-family building, was built in 1885. The architect was George F. Loring and the builder, Peter Graffani.*

The most striking difference between the two sides of Durham Street is that they are twe different kinds of housing — the even-numbered side are town houses, the odd-numbered side are apartment buildings. Just as Durham Street was being built, Bostonians were changing their thinking about urban housing. Up till then, the attached English town house was the predominant abode for city living. This housing style began changing as early as 1857, when the first apartment building in the United States was built in Boston at the corner of Tremont and Boylston streets. Called the Hotel Pelham, it served both permanent residents and travelers. The Hotel Pelham was revolutionary in that it had living quarters entirely on one floor. This concept is considered French, hence the alternate term "French-flat" for these dwellings. Apparently Parisians were the first to see the practicality of stacked, one-floor housing in a growing, congested city. The French-flat idea was indeed popular; the Boston Street Directory listed 108 such buildings in 1878, but by 1890 there were 500. They were called "Hotels", even those which housed permanent residents. Mr.Nason thought they were a good investment, and that is what he built.

The Durham block Nos.3-15 was completed in March 1887, and the word went out in a Boston Globe advertisement on March 12 of that year (Figure 2). The rents of $37.50 to $50.00 a month seem to fit the value of the property. Mr. Nason borrowed the money to build The Durham. Records at the Registry of Deeds fail to identify exactly what financial transactions took place, but he did sell the block in March of 1887 to Mr. George W. Wiswell. The price was $85,000 and "other valuable considerations" which were not listed. Not much else can be learned about the first owner, Mr. Wiswell. His occupation is listed simply as "Patents". He owned "The Durham" block for nine years until his death in 1896.

The newspaper advertisement pointed out some of the amenities of the buildings. Steam heat, via radiators, and full baths were original. Gas provided the lighting since electricity was not yet in wide-spread use. Electric wiring probably didn't get installed until the early 1900s. Kitchen stoves were coal-fired, hence the mention of storage bins in the basement. By today's standards, the floor plan is awkward, but it accomplished the desired light and air ventilation in every room.

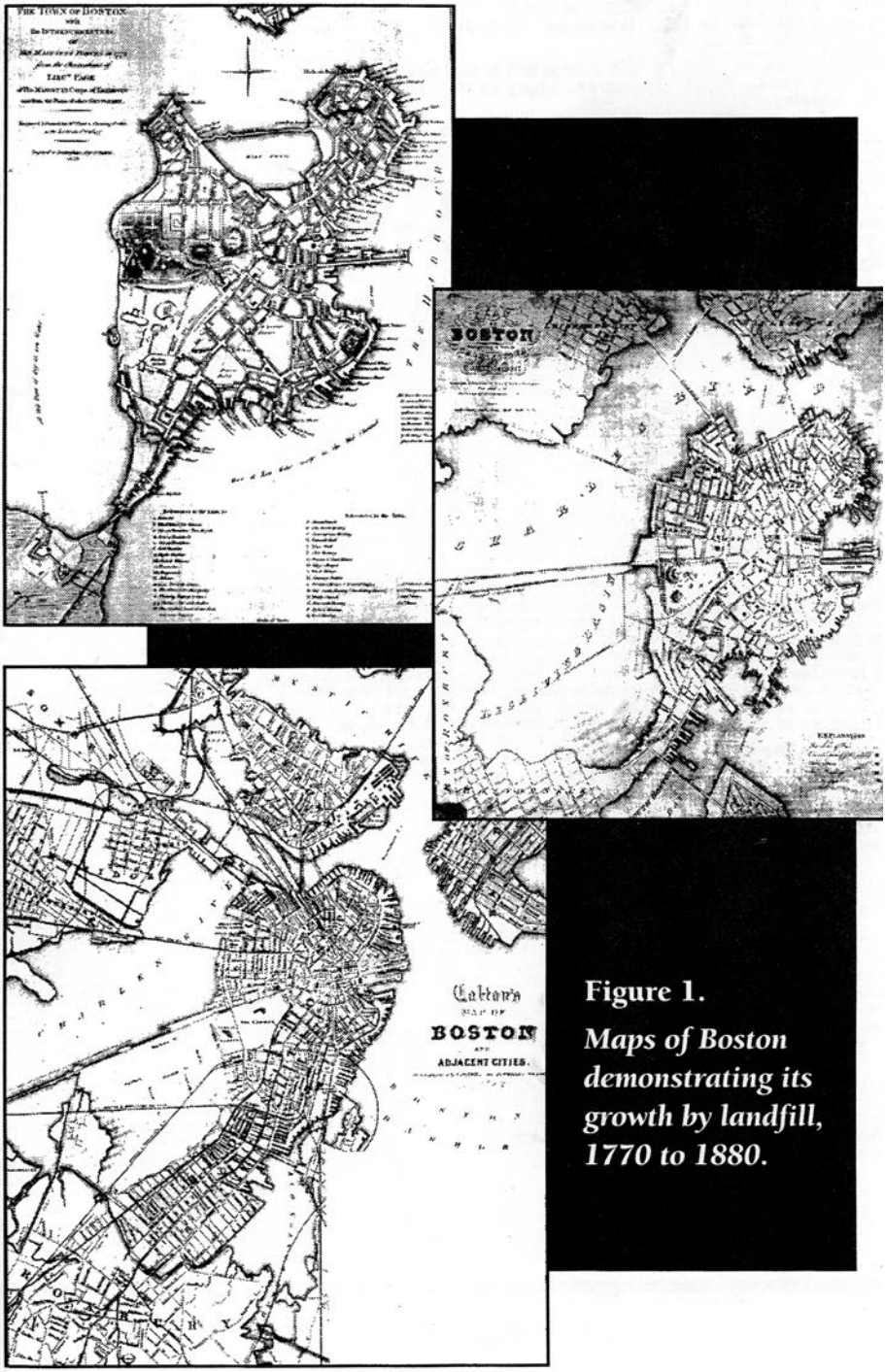

Figure 1.

Maps of Boston demonstrating its growth by landfill, 1770 to 1880.

Boston Daily Globe.

BOSTON, SATURDAY MORNING, MARCH 12, 1887.—EIGHT PAGES.

TENEMENT—To let, in Somerville, close to Inman sq. E. TOBIN, 19 Tremont row. 3t* mh10

TENEMENTS and houses at Atlantic, No... Quincy. Apply at 18 Kneeland st., 3 to... d8...

TENEMENT to let, of ... der; rent $7 per mo... son av.

TENEM... per...

...ington st. SSu*

...pleasantly located ten... all on one floor; 2 minutes ...steam cars; rent $14 per month. SAVAGE, 83 Court st., cor. Cornhill. 3t mh10

FAMILY HOTELS.

THE DURHAM—Nos. 3 to 15, now being finished on Durham st., near the corner of West Newton st. and Huntington av., contains 28 suites of 6 rooms and bath each, with storeroom and coal bin in basement; rents from $450 to $600 per year, including steam heat; these prices are from 25 to 40 per cent. below the prices formerly charged for similar suites, and are unquestionably the most desirable suites in the city at the above prices; open fireplaces and all modern improvements; papered and decorated; perfect system of sanitary plumbing and drainage; the objections common in apartment houses of dark and middle rooms, lighted and ventilated by air shafts, with dark halls, are dispensed with; every room, including bathroom, is open to outside light and air, making all wholesome and cheerful; ready for occupancy now. Full particulars and terms obtained of the janitor at the houses. Sud10t* mh6

HOTELS Austin and Norfolk, corner Austin and Norfolk sts., Cambridgeport; elegant flats of 5 rooms and bath; all light, with improvements. Apply to owner, next door. d8u4t* mh10

HOTEL HAYWARD, 44 E. Chester pk.—To let, very desirable suite of 6 rooms and bath, with good cellar accommodations; modern improvements and perfect drainage. Apply on premises daily from 1.30 to 2 p. m. d8u10t mh8

HOTEL BALDWIN, 396 Northampton st.—To let, 2 excellent suites, Nos. 33 and 46, with bath-rooms; open, light, sunny, and in perfect repair. Apply to janitor. Sud10t* mh6

WINTER RESORT—Grove House, Vineland, N. J.; fine climate; attractive house; send for circular. WS3t* d1

BOARD AND ROOMS.

BEAVER PL.—Cor. Tremont st., opp. Richwood House, 2 handsomely furnished square rooms, will separate them; also single rooms; clean and quiet; furnace heat.

...ness of the Holy F... sonal com... nals ... 4...

WANTED—A ... scissors shar... large inducement... no postals. P. H. ...

YOUNG man, ... sires a partne... Boston; about $... ness," care CHAR... ington st.

BILLIARD ... best make. ...

BEEDING ... Cornhill.

CHEAP lumb... planks, framin... with weights and ... store doors and ... 114 Shawmut av.

COSTUMES f... the opera "Fat... new and elegant fa... etc. C. W. GLIDD...

CAT—For sale, ... cat, 1 year old. ... tail; extra large. ... Box 993, Rockland

FOR SALE—... quarts, 14 wh... years, 4 quarts, 16 ... right, sound and ... 9 years, 10 qua... a valuable cow but... careful handling; ... prices for beef. ... Fulton st., Boston.

FOR SALE—... variety of seco... descriptions and p... been carefully re... stalment plan if ... 81 Bowker st., Bos...

FOR SALE—... been used but ... cues, balls, cue an... perfect order. Ad... 2, 45 No. Market st...

FOR SALE—... billiard tables ...

...ts, Berwick pk., Shaw... Bradford sts. H. L. ...st. SSuTThSSu* mh11

...bargain to close an es... at Hyde Park, and ...t Point Shirley. H. L. ...st. SSu*

...Newton, Holyoke, Ap... ntgomery, W. Canton, ...: many others. F. H. ...n st. SSu*

...purchase a nice brick ...s in good location for ...d. H. L. MARCY ...

...st Bo... ...

...SSu* ...

...ew, 7 rooms, 7300 ... $200 down, balance ...AN, 3 State st. SSu ...

...buy, a house in Boston ...e about $4000 to $6000. ...ice. 1t* ...

...3 acres building prop... ...d, near station, in a ...5 miles out, aqueduct ..., first-class neighbor... ...in the prettiest part of ...ingle house lots for the ...w, as it is to settle an ...d Post Office sq. 1t* ...

...sale, house of 8 rooms, ...t $11 monthly. HALE ... 1t* ...

...50-acre farm; cuts 15 ...s and horse; good wood ...asture; 10-room house; ...all in good repair; high ...ighborhood; milk sold ...ULLOCK Franklin, or ...rald building. 1t* ...

...of 175 acres; good land, ...50 head cattle; plenty ...est varieties; number ...on Charles river and ...tioned buildings; less ...ill be sold for less than ...tate. JAMES GRAY, d8u3t* mh11 ...

Large estate, well lo... houses; all rented to ...; easy terms; vacant ...and Power st.; price, ...Dorchester and Second ...NALD, 209 Wash. st. ...

...o. 42 Barton st., near ...3300 ft. land; price ...ERSON, 86 Court st. ...

Figure 3. *Mechanics Hall, NE corner of W. Newton St. and Huntington Ave., 1906.*

Figure 4. *New England Manufacturers Inst., SE corner of W. Newton St. and Huntington Ave., c. 1883*

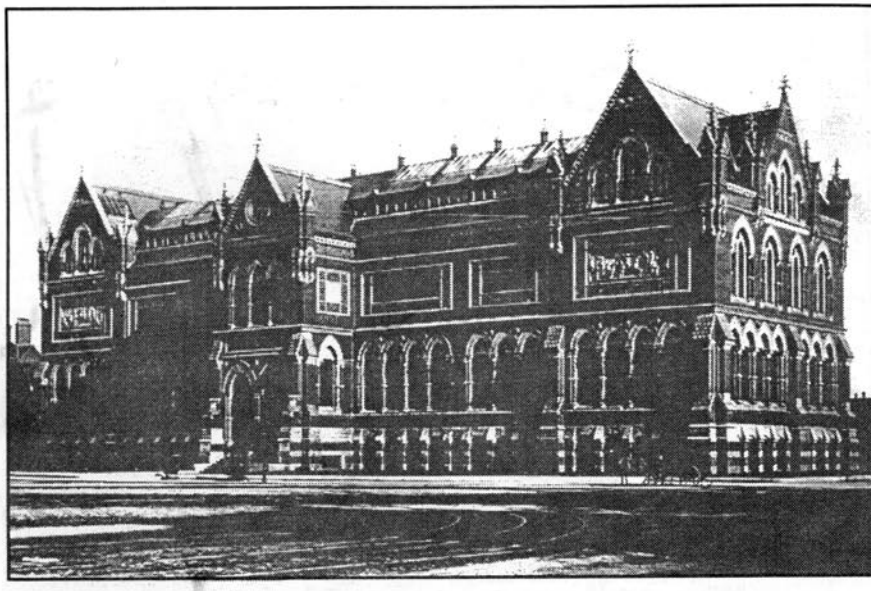

Figure 5. *Museum of Fine Arts, Copley Square, c. 1879.*

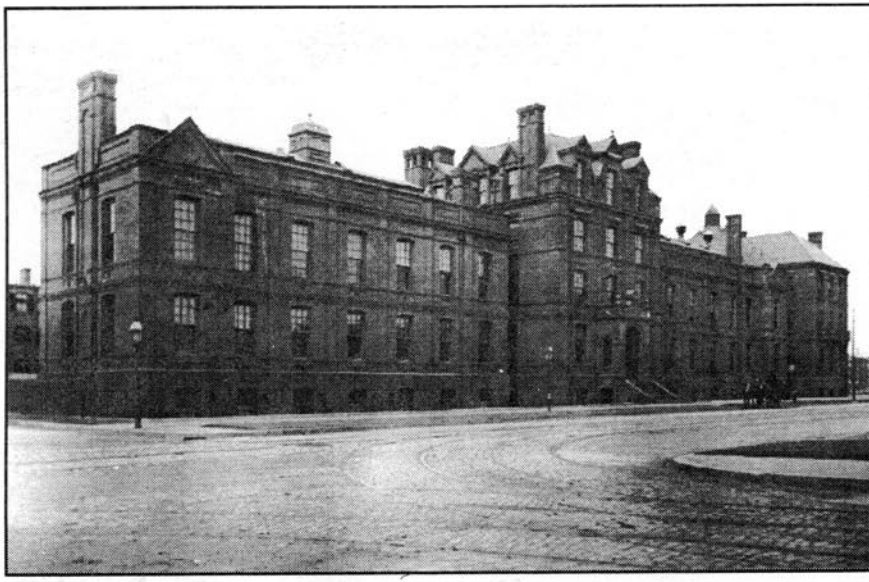

Figure 6. *Children's Hospital, Huntington Ave., 1893.*

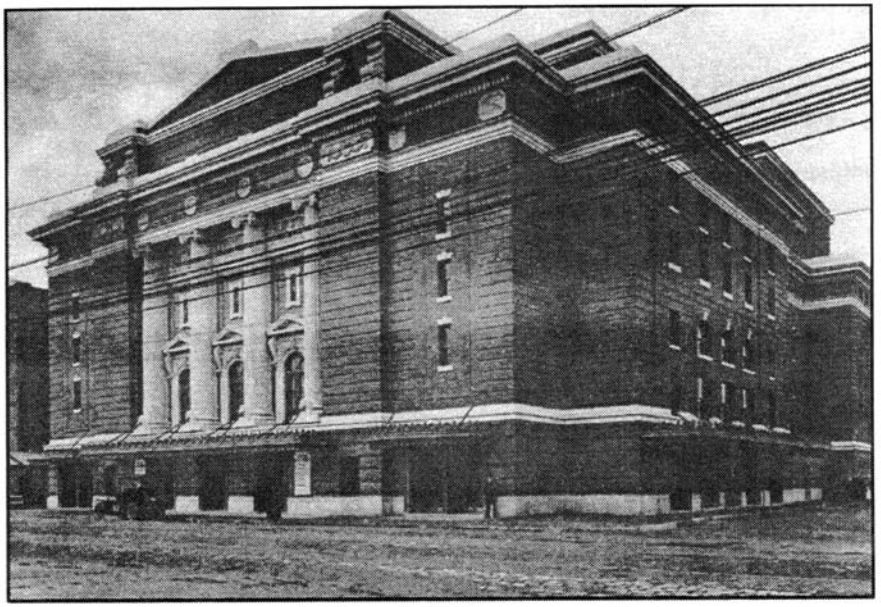

Figure 7. *Boston Opera House, Huntington Ave., c.1910.*

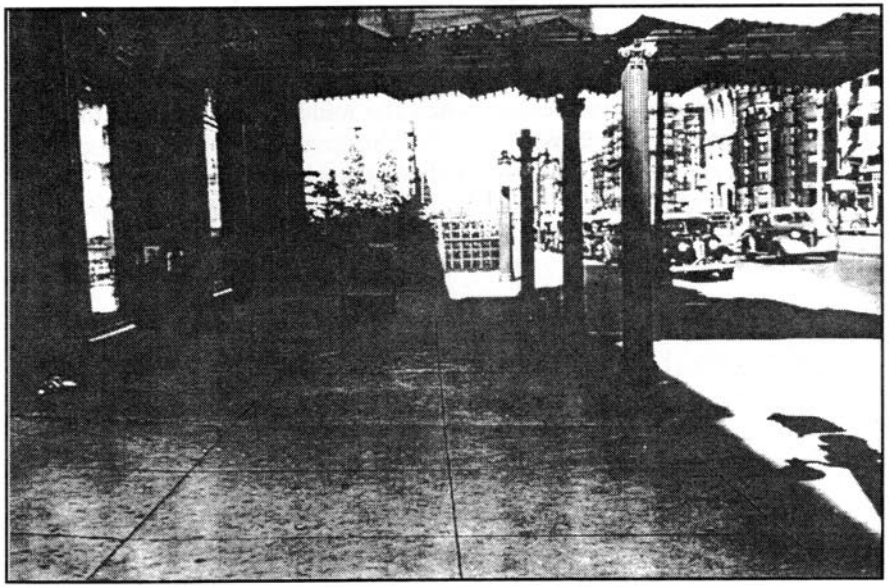

Figure 8. *Uptown Theatre (formerly the St. James), Huntington Ave., c. 1930.*

The Residents

Durham Street initially attracted the people it set out to — middle-class Bostonians. In the initial period of 1887-1900, the Boston Street Directory and the Census show that occupations of Durham Street residents were varied. Among them were a: merchant, manufacturer, wool dealer, salesman, broker, doctor, dentist, lawyer, engineer, musician, artist and reverend. Most were families. Of 37 households on the street, as many as 10 had servants, and a few had lodgers. The period of 1900-1920 saw a difference, though; the number of households with servants dropped to five in 1910 and then to three by 1920. By 1910, three of the town houses had converted to lodging houses and by 1920, a *majority* of households took in at least one lodger. Most lodgers were ambitious people making their way in a growing city, and it was not uncommon to house a lodger.

Taking in lodgers, though, indicated a need to augment one's income and by 1920, a list of Durham Street occupations reflected this. Among those listed are: proprietor, salesman, railroad porter, railroad conductor, bookkeeper, auto-garage owner, manager, machinist, carpenter, window cleaner, teacher, artist, musician, actress and stage hand. Many Durham Street residents by 1920 could be considered lower middle class which, according to Sam Warner in his book "Streetcar Suburbs", represented about 20-30% of Boston' s population at that time.

The St. Botolph Street district was indeed changing by the 1920s; it was becoming a lodging-house district. The South End underwent a similar transition years earlier when the middle class left, but for a different reason. The Panic of 1873 had finalized a tumble in real estate values in the South End that scared off its middle-class residents. The St. Botolph Street district lost its middle-class residents to the lure of the suburbs. This decline occurred within a mere 25 years after the St. Botolph district was built.

The St. Botolph Street district was born just as Boston was on the threshold of major changes in transportation and communication. With the development of the electric trolley in 1889, and in the early 1900s, the automobile, as well as the telephone, there was less pressure on Bostonians to live in town. With the additional promise of"open spaces", the surrounding suburbs were attracting middle-class families at the turn of the century.

The economic status ofthe residents ofDurham and neighboring streets was significant in the development of the St. Botolph Street district. The district was not elegant, or as architectural-historian Douglass Shand-Tucci put it, "it was respectable but certainly not fashionable." Yet the district was close to some major cultural, educational, recreational and medical institutions, as well as large hotels and small businesses. The proximity of such diversity, to a neighborhood that was the turf of neither the rich nor the poor, made the St. Botolph district unique. It explains why it was respectable but also why it was known as a Bohemian enclave in the early years ofthe twentieth century.

Some of these institutions adjacent to the St. Botolph Street district that existed at the turn of the century still exist, although some have re-located, and others have died away entirely. They were a source of culture, entertainment, knowledge and even health. They lent a cosmopolitan air to the district and sustained it in the more difficult years that were to follow the 1920s. At the corner of West Newton Street and Huntington Avenue, for example, was the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association Building (Mechanics Hall) built in 1881 (Figure 3). Large exhibitions were held here attracting thousands of people, especially exhibits displaying new products and technologies — an intriguing place for this generation of Bostonians who were yet dreaming about having electric lights and a telephone at home. Mechanics Hall also frequently had concerts, opera and other events. It was the largest hall in the city and contained one of the finest organs in the city as well.

Almost directly across the street from Mechanics Hall and built the same year was another large hall — The New England Manufacturers Institute (Figure 4). It only survived a few years due to a fire, but it had room for exhibitions, as well as a billiards room, a roller-skating rink, a bicycle track, a shooting-gallery and a large bowling alley. It also had a restaurant.

In nearby Copley Square, which was more of a cultural center then than it is now, was the Boston Public Library, which opened in 1895. Across the square was the first Museum of Fine Arts which opened in 1876 (Figure 5). Just off the square was the Museum of Natural History, opened in 1864 and the Rogers Building, part of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which held popular lectures. In this day before television and even radio, attending lectures was a popular diversion. (M.I.T., though it's been in Cambridge since 1916, was founded in Boston in 1865, and had its campus near Copley Square.)

For physical fitness there were many outlets. The Boston Athletic Association (B.A.A.) had complete indoor athletic facilities at their complex near Copley Square. The B.A.A., now mostly known as organizers of the Boston Marathon, also had outdoor facilities for track and field on Irvington Street in the 1900s*. The YMCA was a neighbor even then, but further away at Berkeley and Boylston streets. For women and children there was the Allen Gymnasium on the corner of St. Botolph Street and Garrison Street. It opened in 1887 and was the first of its kind— serving women— in the country. A Turkish Bath operated from the 1890s to the 1920s on St. Botolph Street near The Allen Gymnasium.

**Irvindon Street, now defunct, ran off lower St. Botolph Street.*

For spectator sports there was the Boston Arena, which opened in 1910 on St. Botolph Street near Massachusetts Avenue. This building now functions as Northeastern's Matthews Arena, and the main venue then, as now, was ice hockey. Boston Arena, which could seat 5000 people, preceded the Boston Garden by 20 years.

Also in the area around the St. Botolph Street neighborhood was a growing medical center. Harvard Medical School was located in Copley Square from 1883 to 1906, on the site where the Boston Public library addition now stands. The Massachusetts College of Pharmacy had its start on Garrison Street in 1887 and remained for 30 years, until 1918, when it moved to Longwood Avenue.

Huntington Avenue, when first laid out, was a vast area of open space whose country-like setting attracted hospitals. Among the first was Children's Hospital which opened on Huntington Avenue, near Gainsborough Street in 1882 (Figure 6). Just across Gainsborough Street was the Hospital for Women which opened in 1883. The Children's Hospital outgrew its space and moved to Longwood Avenue in 1914, and its building was inexplicably demolished in 1920. The building that housed the Hospital for Women, which moved by 1905, still stands though.

Beginning in 1900, the area around St. Botolph Street grew as a music center. The Boston Symphony Orchestra, which was founded in 1881, bought land on Huntington Avenue and built Symphony Hall at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue in 1900. It was designed by McKim, Mead and White, the designers of The Boston Public Library. The New England Conservatory, which had been in the South End since 1867, moved to Huntington Avenue in 1902. Its famous Jordan Hall was added in 1904. Jordan Hall was named for its benefactor, Eben D. Jordon, son of the founder of the Jordan Marsh Company (bought by Macy's in 1995). The philanthropic Jordan was also responsible for The Boston Opera House on Huntington Avenue diagonally across from the Conservatory; it was built in 1909 (Figure7). The building survived until 1958, when it was demolished to make room for Northeastern University.

Chickering and Sons, the piano manufacturers on Tremont Street in the South End, decided to build a concert hall for chamber music in 1901. They chose Huntington Avenue next door to another Boston institution that had recently arrived in 1900, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue. Chickering Hall featured chamber music for only ten years, when it was converted to The St. James Theatre in 1911. The St. James booked vaudeville acts and the first silent movies, and it certainly brought a flair for the Rialto to the St. Botolph Street area (Figure 8)

The building changed again in 1929, to the Uptown Theatre when it became a movie theatre. It was taken down in 1968 to make way for the Christian Science Church expansion. With the many musicians associated with these institutions, the Musicians' Mutual Relief Society located itself at 56 St. Botolph Street in 1913. The Society renovated the building that had been the Allen Gymnasium which had operated for 25 years. The Musicians Society evolved into Boston Musicians Association Local 9-535 and remained on St. Botolph Street for 75 years, until 1988. This same building is now residential housing.

There were a number of hotels in the area, mostly serving permanent residents. Two of the largest were the Hotel Oxford and the Hotel Nottingham, both on Huntington Avenue. A third, Technology Chambers (for bachelors), was on Irvington Street. At the turn of the century it was less common for single young people, as well as retirees, to live alone in a town house or an apartment; they instead lived in these large hotels, especially if they were upper or middle class. A list of the occupations of these local hotel residents shows a largely professional clientele. The Hotel Oxford, until the 1920s, boasted some residents listed in Boston's Social Register.

Finally, the St. Botolph Street neighborhood was home to some small businesses and light industry, nearly all located off of lower St. Botolph Street and many dealing in the arts and crafts. Harcourt (Book) Bindery and Connick's Stain Glass Studio were among them. Although not related to these businesses but certainly an influence were the St. Botolph Studios at #20-32 St. Botolph Street. These studios were the home of many artists, dating from the early 1890s until at least the 1940s, helping ensure the neighborhood's Bohemian flavor in those early years.

The Next 40 Years

The story of the St. Botolph Street district from the 1920s through the 1960s can be told briefly. Like the rest of Boston, the district fell into an economic Rip-Van-Winkle doze. The Great Depression, two World Wars and a pervasive attitude among the middle class that cities were for immigrants, transients and malcontents, all contributed to Boston's in-town residential housing decline. In the mid-1930s, things were so bad that four of the town houses on Durham Street stood vacant while a bank owned The Durham block Nos.3-17 because no buyer could be found. Incredibly, in 1954, when The Durham block was sold as separate buildings, they commanded a price just barely their original value in 1887, selling for about $11,000 each.

This long, economic sleep lasted until the 1960s, when things started to turn around. For the St. Botolph Street district, this was signaled by the construction of the Prudential Center, completed in 1964. The Pru became a stimulus to what had been a moribund Boston economy; it also replaced a railyard that was both an eyesore and a barrier between the Back Bay and the St. Botolph Street districts.

Growth was slow but steady in the next twenty years with two projects defining the progress. These were Copley Place, built in the early 1980s, and The Southwest Corridor Park, completed in 1989. Copley Place created a cosmopolitan atmosphere in a public space that had been absent from the area for a long, long time. The Corridor Park had a dynamic effect for two reasons; it finally silenced the railroad, built in the 1830s, that had rumbled through the neighborhood since its inception; The Corridor Park further knitted together the borders or the South End and the St. Botolph Street neighborhoods.

Coming Full Circle

The St. Botolph Street district in the 1990s resembles its first years now more than ever. With its unique combination of a middle-class neighborhood alongside large commercial and cultural institutions, there is a pleasant, cosmopolitan landscape once more.

That the St. Botolph Street district was born into a world in transition is also more apparent now as well. The towering buildings of the Prudential Center, Copley Place and the Christian Science Church seem to dwarf the three and four story buildings that define the district. If St. Botolph Street had started out just ten years later, large apartment buildings of six or more stories would probably predominate, and the district would look more like the Fenway area, which was developed after the 1890s; by then, the large apartment building became the most practical use of space in the central city.

One can reflect endlessly though, good and bad, on what might have been. What exists today is a neighborhood with a character and a history all its own, with unique access to some of Boston's best commercial and cultural attractions. If it seems that these same attractions sometimes congest and overshadow the neighborhood— well, it is somehow fitting after all, for they have been as much a part of the founding history of St. Botolph Street as the brick and mortar of which it is made.

Bibliographical Sources

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A discussion of architectural styles in turn-of-the-century Boston can be found in *Houses ofBoston's Back Bay, An Architectural History 1830-1917* by Bainbridge Bunting (Cambridge, London 1967).

The workings of the Huntington Land Trustees can be found in the *Statement of the Trustees.* Boston, Rockwell & Churchil (1879-93).

All photographs, except the Opera House, appear courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

Children's Hospital, Huntington Avenue. Photo by Baldwin Coolidge, 1893.
Mechanics Hall. Photo by Nathaniel Stebbins, 1906.
Museum of Fine Arts, Copley Square.
Uptown Theatre, Huntington Avenue.