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BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION

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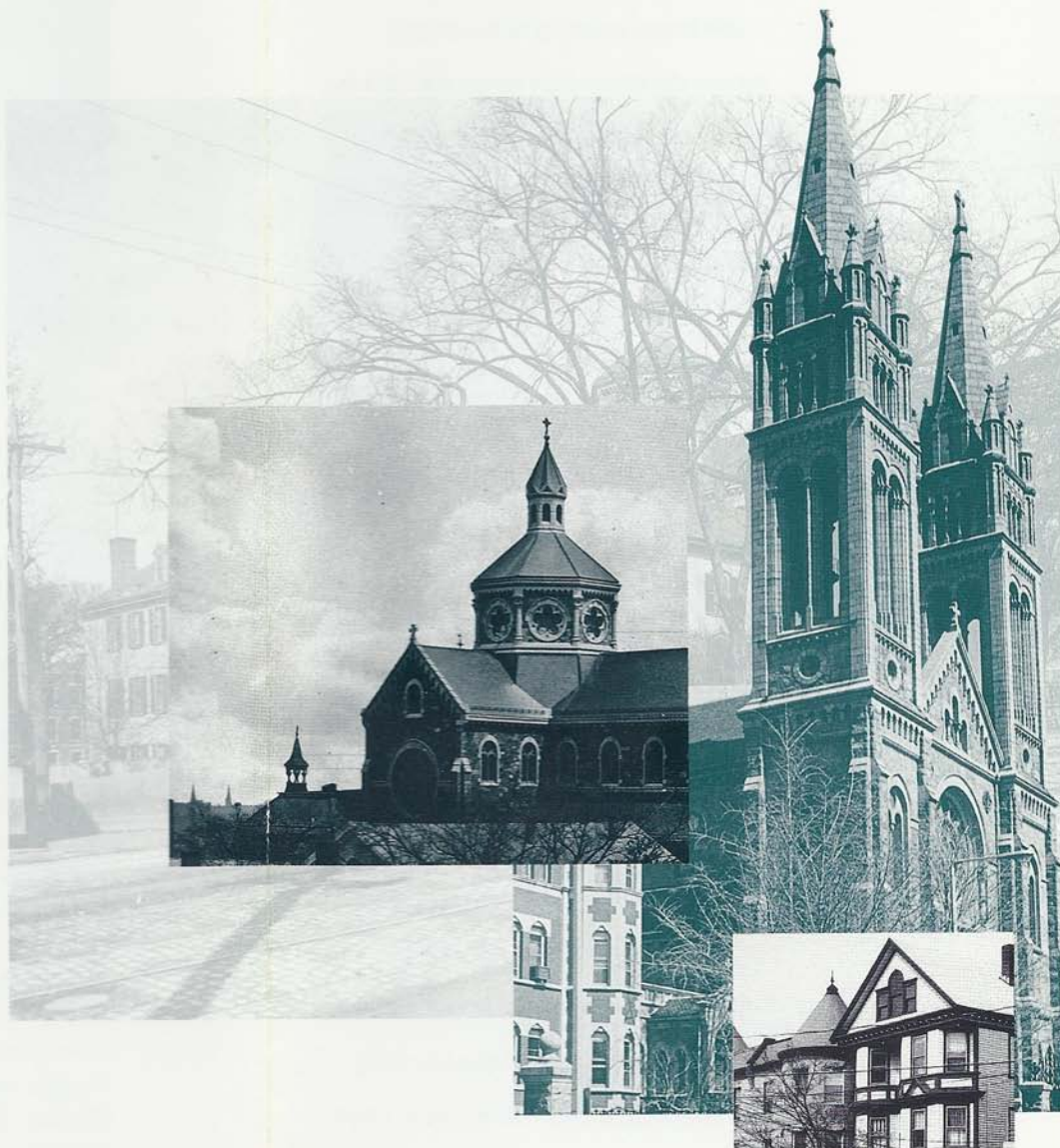


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MISSION HILL

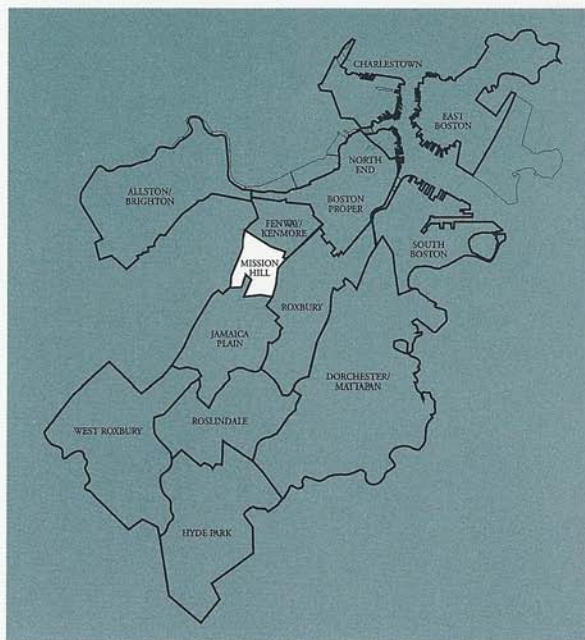
Exploring Boston's Neighborhoods



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COMMISSION

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ission Hill's name reflects two of the most important facets of the area. The neighborhood is built on historic Parker Hill, a rocky drumlin left behind by a prehistoric glacier. People began referring to the area as Mission Hill rather than Parker Hill after the construction of the Mission Church complex



at the end of the 19th century. Originally a section of the independent town of Roxbury, Mission Hill became part of Boston when Roxbury was annexed to the city in 1868. It has grown from a farming area into an ethnically diverse urban neighborhood with important religious, medical, and educational institutions.



EARLY DAYS ON PARKER HILL

The English colonists who settled Roxbury in 1630 established their town center at the present John Eliot Square. The Stony Brook, which today runs in a culvert along the Southwest Corridor, provided the water power for the town's earliest mills at the foot of Parker Hill near Roxbury Crossing. Early roads based on Native American trails crisscrossed the area: the first road to Brookline ran along Tremont Street and Huntington Avenue, while the road to Dedham skirted Parker Hill along Parker and Heath streets.

Until after the Revolutionary War, Parker Hill supported farms and large country estates of wealthy Boston families. The merchant John Parker occupied the summit of the hill and gave it his name. Industries began to cluster along the Stony Brook, including a rope manufactory and the town's first brewery – one of many that would line the Stony Brook by the end of the 19th century.

EARLY SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT

Parker Hill's rural landscape changed as citizens of Boston and Roxbury began to look for a new suburban life, with single-family houses and yards, away from the business and bustle of the city. Developments in transportation made Parker Hill an

The Hoxie House is designed in the Italianate style with characteristic round-arched windows and a square tower that recalls bell towers of the Italian countryside.

ideal suburban location. By the mid-1840s, the Boston and Providence Railroad had a stop at Roxbury Crossing, followed a decade later by the horsedrawn bus line from downtown Boston.

Builder-developers began cutting streets through Parker Hill's farmland and building suburban houses for commuters on Parker Hill Avenue, Hillside Street, and

Background photo of Coleman's Quarry, courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department

Allegheny Street. Following the taste of the time, the architectural styles of these houses were inspired by far-away places or times, often Italy or the Middle Ages.

An excellent example of these early suburban houses still stands at 135 Hillside Street. The Timothy Hoxie house was built in 1854 across Hillside Street from its present location. This free-standing Italianate villa offered the suburban ideal to the Hoxie family as they left Beacon Hill for Parker Hill.

LATER SUBURBANIZATION

The moving of the house following Timothy Hoxie's death in 1882 illustrates the story of later suburbanization in Mission Hill. As the 19th century progressed, more and more city dwellers, not all as affluent as Timothy Hoxie, flocked to the suburbs, creating a demand for more housing. As existing streets were extended and new streets cut

through, builders turned to multifamily in addition to single-family housing types. These new dwellings were constructed on much smaller building sites than the original lots in the area, which had averaged 20,000 square feet.

The carpenter-contractor John Cantwell, who lived in the Gothic Revival cottage still standing at 139 Hillside Street near the Hoxie House, purchased the villa after Hoxie's death. Cantwell moved the Hoxie House to its present site, probably so upper Sachem Street could be cut through. He also took advantage of the demand for housing by developing the three deckers on the adjacent lots along

Darling and Sachem streets. In the 1890s, Cantwell even subdivided the lot on which the Hoxie House now stands and built the three deckers at 17 and 19 Sachem Street.

A NEIGHBORHOOD OF MULTIFAMILY HOUSING

Although the neighborhood's initial growth spurt illustrated the suburban ideal of single-family houses, by the 1890s, Mission Hill began to have a more urban feeling as the result of a second, multifamily housing boom. Three deckers, a popular form of multifamily housing in turn-of-the-century Boston began to fill the upper slopes of Parker Hill. Calumet, Iroquois, and the other streets with Native American names, for example, were built up within a span of 10 years into a dense neighborhood of three deckers in the Queen Anne style that recalls English architecture of two centuries earlier.

The Queen Anne style is the most prevalent in Mission Hill because of the building boom that occurred when this style was at the height of its popularity.



Turn-of-the-century three deckers in the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles line many streets in Mission Hill.

Queen Anne architecture is seen throughout Mission Hill, in brick and stone row-houses and apartment blocks as well as wood frame three deckers.

In the 20th century, three deckers continued to be built in Mission Hill, along with some two-family bungalows. Older buildings were cleared in the 1940s and 50s for the Mission Hill and Mission Hill extension housing developments near Ruggles Street. The 1980s brought a new approach to affordable housing with the development of the Back of the Hill complex on Heath Street. Today, this diversely populated neighborhood retains a largely Victorian and turn-of-the-century feeling because of its historic housing stock, and residents continue to prize their commanding views of the city.

THE BREWING INDUSTRY

As early as the 1600s, industrial development had begun along the Stony Brook. The first brewery in the town of Roxbury was established at the foot of Parker Hill in the 1820s. By the 1870s, beer production had become the

BOSTON LANDMARK

Mission Hill Triangle Architectural Conservation District



Worthington Street Rowhouses

This historic district comprises 71 buildings in a triangular area bordered by Huntington Avenue and Tremont and Worthington streets. It is significant because it exemplifies the development of this urban neighborhood from the 1870s through the 1910s. The buildings of brick, brownstone, sandstone, and marble trace the changes from single-family housing to more modest three-family buildings and “modern” apartment hotels.

In 1871, developer George D. Cox began building single-family row houses resembling those in the Back Bay. By the early 1880s, Huntington Avenue was extended, bringing with it electric streetcar service that influ-

enced new housing types. The Helvetia, a distinctive apartment hotel, was constructed at 706-708 Huntington Avenue in 1884-1885; three-family houses were built in 1890 on Wigglesworth and Worthington streets; and the Georgian Revival apartment building known as the Esther (682 Huntington Avenue/142-148 Smith Street) was constructed in 1912.

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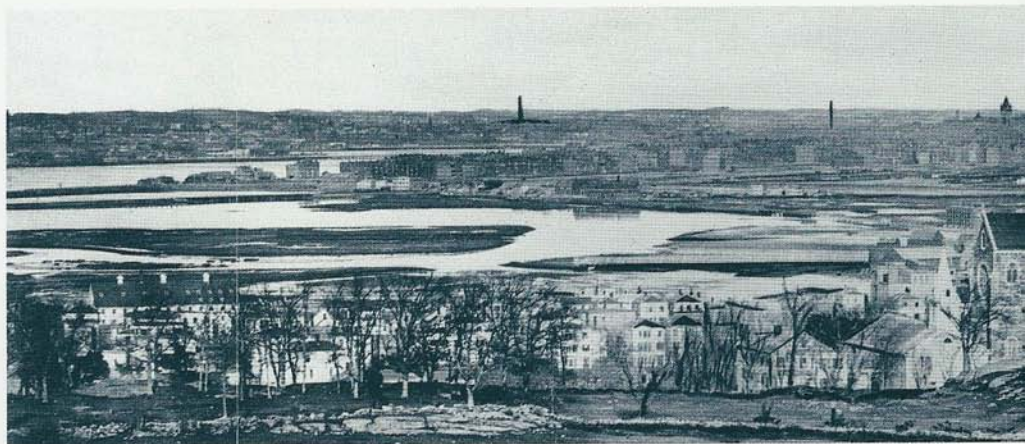
The American Brewing Company is the most finely decorated of Boston's remaining breweries, featuring a round corner bay, granite and terra cotta trim, and stained glass.

main industry in Mission Hill, and many breweries lined the Stony Brook. These breweries were often owned and operated by German immigrant master brewers and their families. Brewery buildings can still be seen along the Stony Brook Valley, including the Eblana Brewery (1886) at 123-125 Heath Street and the American Brewing Company (1891-92) at 249A Heath Street, both in the Queen Anne style, and the Renaissance Revival Roxbury Brewing Company (1896) at 31 Heath Street.

PARKER HILL BECOMES MISSION HILL

The families who owned and staffed the Stony Brook breweries included many Roman Catholics, prompting Boston's Catholic church leadership to invite the largely

German order of the Sons of St. Alphonsus (Redemptorists) to establish a mission in the neighborhood in 1869. From this beginning grew the complex of buildings that defines the neighborhood today. The mission was made a parish in 1883, and in 1954 Pope Pius XII elevated it to basilica status.



Now officially named the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the Mission Church, as it is more commonly known, was built from 1876 to 1878. It is designed in the round-arched Romanesque Revival style and constructed in Roxbury puddingstone quarried literally next door, on the site of the current Mission Hill

1890s. A massive renovation of the interior in 1894-96 added the Carrara marble high altar and communion rail, the pews and confessionals, and the stained glass. The distinctive towers were added in 1910 by the Swiss-German architect Frank Joseph Untersee, who practiced in Boston.

Playground. Its architects were Schickel and Ditmars of New York, specialists in church design, and, like the Redemptorist Fathers, of German heritage.

The church became known as "The Lourdes in the Land of the Puritans" because of the shrine's reputation for miraculous cures. The congregation grew rapidly, becoming predominantly Irish and numbering more than 9,000 by the early

This view of the Mission Church was taken about 1878, just after the building was completed and more than 30 years before the towers were added.

THE MISSION CHURCH COMPLEX

The complex contains several other significant buildings. The convent (1888-89, with third floor added 1901), on the corner of Smith and St. Alphonsus streets, is a Queen Anne-style brick building with terra cotta trim. The parish school, nearby on Smith Street, was also built



Courtesy of The Bostonian Society

in 1888-89; it combines elements of the Italianate and Queen Anne styles in Roxbury puddingstone and red brick with granite trim. St. Alphonsus Hall (1898), also on Smith Street, was designed by Frank Joseph Untersee as a young men's community center. Its well-equipped interior featured such amenities as a theater seating more than 1,000, five bowling alleys, and 200 lockers. This Roxbury puddingstone building is, like the church, an example of the Romanesque Revival style. The final building in the complex is the rectory, built in 1903 on the corner of Tremont and St. Alphonsus streets. It stands on the site of a farmhouse the Redemptionist Fathers used as their first rectory and of the wooden building they constructed as a temporary church in 1871. Possibly designed by Frank Joseph Untersee, the late Romanesque Revival rectory is decorative, with a granite base and brick and limestone upper floors.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the 20th century, many institutions added to the social and architectural variety of Mission Hill. Wentworth Institute at 360 Ruggles Street (1911 and 1916), by architects Kilham and Hopkins, interprets the Neo-Classical style in



decorative Tapestry Brick construction. Prominent medical institutions include the Georgian Revival Robert Breck Brigham Hospital (1912-14) at 125 Parker Hill Avenue and the Jacobethan style Nurses' Residence of the New England Baptist Hospital (1923-1940) at 220 Fisher Avenue.

The Greek Orthodox Cathedral of New England (520 Parker Street) combines Renaissance and Classical elements with Byzantine details. Designed in 1923 by architect Hachadoor S. Demoorjian, the cathedral has a symmetrical plan and is constructed of buff brick with limestone trim. The interior shows the influence of renowned church architect Ralph Adams Cram, who also designed the Mission Hill Branch Library (1931) on Tremont near Burney Street.

▲
Mission Hill's library
is a brick and stone
Jacobethan-style
building that features
an arched entrance
under a panel with
the carved seal of
the City of Boston.