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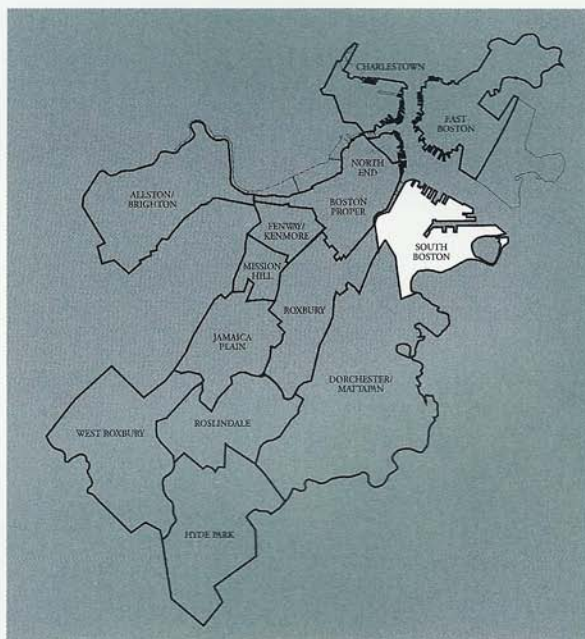
SOUTH BOSTON

Exploring Boston's Neighborhoods



BOSTON LANDMARKS
COMMISSION

South Boston's urban fabric tells the story of the 19th century – industrial development, housing for a growing population, and the community institutions that provided a focus in people's lives. Originally a peninsula known as Dorchester Neck that belonged to the independent



town of Dorchester, South Boston was annexed to Boston at the turn of the 19th century and linked to the city by a bridge. Enlarged by landfill, the peninsula grew according to a planned grid into a neighborhood of architecturally significant homes, churches, industrial buildings, and recreational facilities.



PLANNING A NEIGHBORHOOD

For most of Boston's first two centuries, South Boston was a remote peninsula connected to the town of Dorchester by a neck of land at Andrew Square. The area contained a few farms and was used primarily for grazing livestock until a group of Boston real estate developers saw its potential and acquired land there.

The developers were able to persuade the General Court of Massachusetts to annex the entire peninsula to Boston in 1804. The next year, they constructed a bridge offering the first direct link

to South Boston on the site of the current West Fourth Street bridge. Dorchester Avenue was laid out as a toll road at the same time.

Unlike most other Boston neighborhoods, South Boston was based on a planned urban design. The General Court had agreed to annexation on the condition that land be set aside for streets, a school, a meetinghouse, and a burying ground. The resulting street plan of 1805 established the current grid with its axes of Broadway and L Street, its regular blocks, and the institutions clustered at Independence Square.

BOSTON'S INDUSTRIAL ENGINE

South Boston had begun to grow rapidly by 1825, when technology enabled entrepreneurs to make use of its industrial potential. The coming of railroads to the area in 1845 and the industrial demands of the Civil War in the 1860s quickened the pace even more. Iron foundries, machine shops, shipyards, and refineries all fueled the economic engine – in fact, the South Boston Iron Works was once the largest foundry in the country.

The Boston Beer Company at 249 West 2nd Street is one of South Boston's early industrial buildings. A small brewery built in 1852, it was enlarged in 1874 and 1882 to reach its present size.

HOUSING A GROWING POPULATION

Industry brought such an influx of families to South Boston that, by 1855, it had more dwellings than any other ward in the city. The rich housing stock reflects decades of population growth as well as changing tastes and needs. Up to the time of the Civil War, most residents lived in single-family wood frame houses. After 1860, row-houses – both brick and

mix. In the 1930s, South Boston became the site of Old Colony Village on Old Colony Avenue, the first public housing project in the United States. Many styles appear in the residences of South Boston. Most often, architects and builders used revival styles that took their inspiration from a distant place or time, such as medieval France or Italy or Colonial America. Fashionable areas gradually developed throughout the neighborhood. Independence Square was begun in 1822 when the city purchased a tract of land containing institutions including a reformatory and hospital for the mentally ill. By the late 1850s, the city had dismantled the institutions, extended the street

grid, and begun to sell off land to private investors. At the close of the 1860s, Independence Square and the stretch of East Broadway between L and M streets was a desirable residential area, including fine houses such as the Harrison Loring House (see Boston Landmark panel).

Telegraph Hill was the site of the Dorchester Heights fortifications that were so instrumental in ending the occupation of Boston during the Revolutionary War. About 1852, the hill's easterly side was leveled and the current landscaped park was constructed, creating a catalyst for a housing boom in the fashionable styles of the 1860s and 70s.

COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

As people moved to South Boston, they wanted meaningful community institutions, particularly churches, close at hand. The open land also gave Roman Catholics the opportunity to develop their own institutions in then predominantly Protestant Boston.



frame – were widely built, often for rental or speculative sale. During the 1880s and 90s, two-family houses were popular, and by the turn of the century, triple deckers were the leading new housing type. In the 20th century, bungalows and apartment buildings were added to the

This Mansard-style house on Telegraph Hill's Thomas Park reflects the tastes of the post-Civil War era. The style takes its name from the sloping roof line, inspired by French architecture.



Courtesy of the Boston Redevelopment Authority

In the early 19th century, before the massive immigration from Ireland began, Boston's Catholic community was small, but it had a devoted, energetic leader in its first bishop, Jean-Louis Lefebvre de Cheverus. On the death of his colleague, Father François Antoine Matignon, in 1818, Bishop Cheverus built the St. Augustine Chapel as a burial site to honor his friend. The chapel and its cemetery, located on Dorchester Street between Tudor and West 6th, is now the oldest surviving Catholic church in Massachusetts and the second oldest in New England. The St. Augustine Chapel and its cemetery gave Boston's Irish residents the opportunity to conduct services, hold funerals and bury their dead in a Catholic cemetery, rather than using the various Protestant burying grounds in Boston. The chapel is also significant for its architecture.

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Built in 1905 for the Falvey Department Store family, this Colonial Revival-style house at 948 East Broadway incorporates design features borrowed from early American buildings.

BOSTON LANDMARK

Harrison Loring House



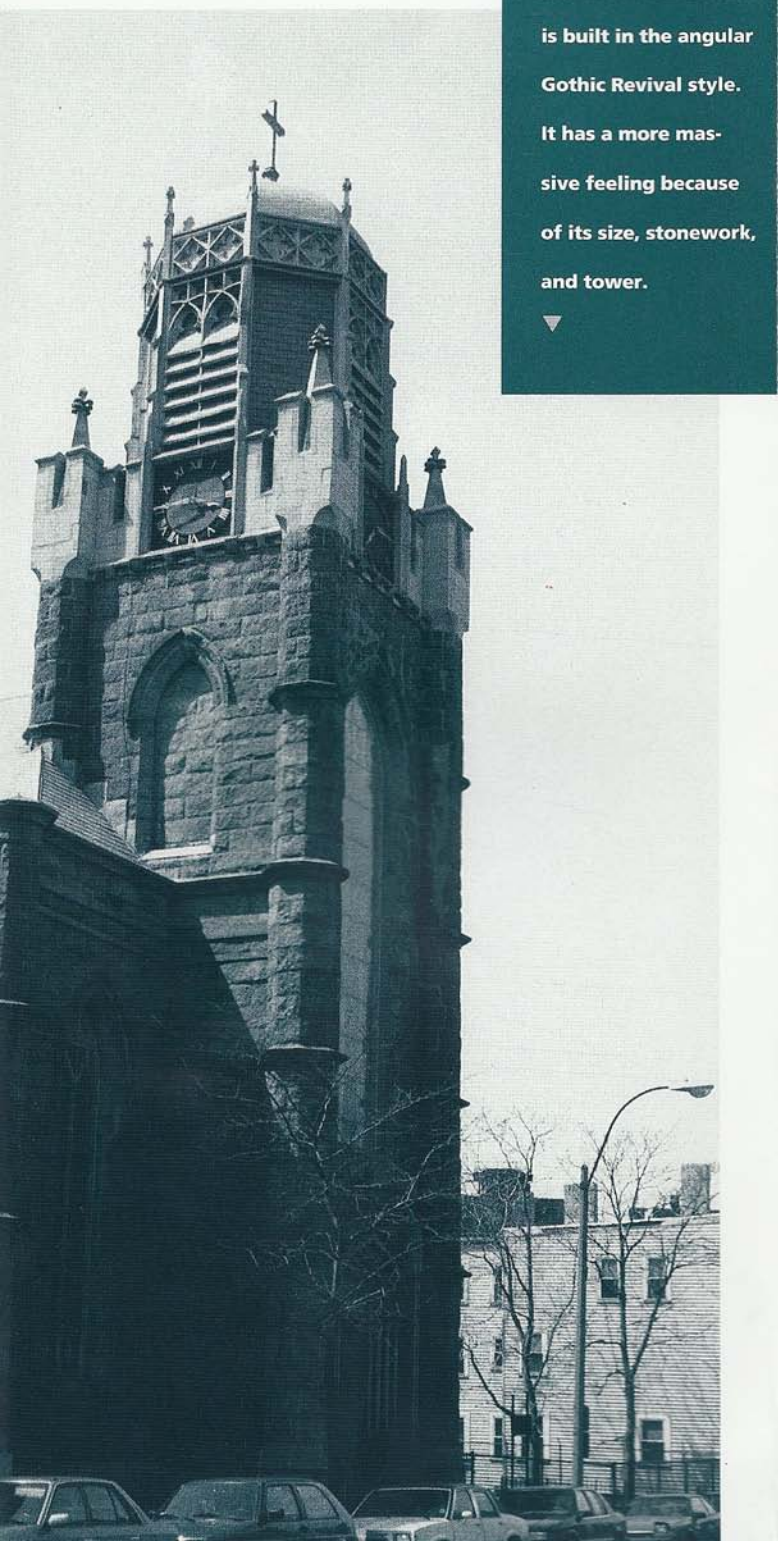
This city landmark was built by South Boston industrialist Harrison Loring in 1865. Facing Independence Square at 789 East Broadway, it has the harbor view and elegant detail a wealthy man could afford. The house is designed in the French Second Empire style, whose hallmarks include the Parisian-inspired mansard roof, symmetrical facade, and rich classical details.

Harrison Loring owned and operated one of the first South Boston shipyards to manufacture iron steamships and their machinery. Loring began as an apprentice to a steam engine builder and took advantage of a rapidly developing technology to make his fortune. He opened his own machine and boiler

shop in South Boston in 1847, when he was 25. By 1860, he was building not only machinery but steamships themselves at City Point Works, the large manufacturing site he established on East First Street. Loring supplied the government with many ships, and his yard prospered and enabled him to build his fine house, which remains privately owned.

As an official Boston Landmark, this building is protected from changes that would adversely affect its historic character. For information on designating local landmark buildings and districts, please contact the Boston Landmarks Commission at 635-3850.

Like St. Augustine Chapel, the Church of SS. Peter and Paul is built in the angular Gothic Revival style. It has a more massive feeling because of its size, stonework, and tower.



A red brick structure, it is designed in the Gothic Revival style. From its beginnings as a small funeral chapel for Father Matignon, St. Augustine's was enlarged and dedicated as a parish church in 1831.

By 1840, the chapel could no longer serve the needs of the growing community, so the diocese commissioned Boston architect Gridley J. F. Bryant to design a new church to accommodate the entire parish of South Boston. Completed in 1844, the Church of SS. Peter and Paul (45 West Broadway) is built of Quincy granite with a copper-domed bell and clock tower. The church was heavily damaged by fire in 1848, and the reconstructed building was dedicated in 1853. Today, SS. Peter and Paul still serves a thriving congregation.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

As South Boston's residents also needed commercial services, new business areas were developed, particularly along West Broadway. In the later 19th century, large business blocks replaced smaller stores. One of the most notable is the Monks Building at 366 West Broadway/328 E Street.



The Monks Building captures the essence of the High Victorian Gothic style with its decorative alternation of dark brick and light stone and its steeply gabled roof of multicolored slate.

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The pointed-arch windows and steeply pitched roof of the St. Augustine Chapel are characteristics of the Gothic Revival style.

OPENING UP THE WATERFRONT

In the late 19th century, people began to have more leisure time for organized recreation. The waterfront along the south side of South Boston's peninsula had not been developed for industry, making the stretch from the current Columbia Park to Castle Island a prime area for new recreational uses. The landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of Boston's Emerald Necklace of park land running from Boston Common to Franklin Park, sought to continue the city's open space to the South Boston shore. The Strandway (now William J. Day Boulevard), completed in 1896, winds along the shore to Marine Park at Castle Island, passing four impressive yacht clubs, each built in a revival style in 1899. Also on this stretch is the L Street Bath House (1931), an Art Deco-style building famous for its association with Mayor James

Built in 1873 in the decorative High Victorian Gothic style, this elaborate brick building was designed by Boston architect Alexander R. Estey for Monks & Co., a flour and grain dealer. By 1900, the Mattapan Deposit and Trust Company also had its offices here. The street level housed retail stores.

Background photo, view from Castle Island, courtesy of The Bostonian Society



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Michael Curley and for its year-around swimmers, the L Street Brownies.

At both ends of the waterfront are areas of great military significance. On the west, above Thomas Park, rises the Dorchester Heights Monument. Dedicated in 1902, the monument marks the site where in 1776 the American colonists under General George Washington bombarded the British fleet and ended the eight-year occupation of Boston. The monument, designed by prominent Boston architects Peabody and Stearns and built of white Georgia marble, rises 115 feet from the summit of the hill.

At the far eastern end of the marine district lies Fort Independence. This site on Castle Island, now attached to the mainland, was first fortified in 1634 by the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It played a prominent role in the Revolutionary War. In 1798, Massachusetts turned the fort over to the federal government, and some military activity occurred there

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The building now standing on Castle Island is the fourth fort on this site. It was constructed about 1809 in a pentagon shape with five gun bastions and was extensively repaired in 1851.

as late as World War II. The island was attached to the mainland by a bridge and later a causeway. In 1962, the federal government returned the fort to the Commonwealth for use as an historic monument.