Cox Building
Boston Landmarks Commission Study Report

Petition #48, 1, 3, 5, 7 Dudley Street & 67, 69, 71 Bartlett Street, Boston
Report of the Boston Landmarks Commission

on the potential designation of the COX BUILDING

as a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975

Approved by

Executive Director

Date

Accepted by

Chairman

Date
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1.0 LOCATION OF THE PROPERTY

1.1 Address: 7, 5, 3, 1 Dudley Street; and 67, 69, 71 Bartlett Street, Roxbury. Ward 9. The assessors's parcel numbers 3282, 3283, 3284, 3285, 3286, 3287 and 3288.

1.2 Area in which the property is located:

The Cox Building (1870) stands at the convergence of Dudley and Bartlett streets where they meet at the eastern side of John Eliot Square, the historic crossroads of the Town of Roxbury. Across Dudley Street at the crown of the hill stands The First Church in Roxbury (1809) an outstanding example of a Federal Period meeting house. This church and its Victorian parish house (c.1870) have recently been restored under a grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior, through the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service and the Massachusetts Historical Commission. They form the centerpiece of the John Eliot Square District which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to the Cox Building the National Register includes a number of other notable structures adjacent to it. To the south stands the Spooner-Lambert House (1780) a fine five-bay hip-roofed Georgian house with massive interior chimneys and interesting additions in the Greek Revival style. Across Blanchard Street and facing the Square is the Hotel Eliot (1875) a four-story red brick structure with stone Gothic trim designed by J. H. Besarick. This building for many years set the standard for fine apartment housing in Roxbury. Adjacent to it is the five story red brick Marcus Garvey House, long known as the Norfolk House and a mecca for travelers passing through the Square.

To the north of the First Church, standing in its own extensive grounds, is the Dillaway House (1750-54) a fine, wood, gambrel-roofed house with many historic associations from the Revolutionary Period. Beyond the Dillaway House on the northeast side of The Square is Ionic Hall, (1800-1804) the earliest brick mansion in Roxbury, now a part of the Church of St. John, St. James, built behind it. Next to Ionic Hall and part of the church complex is a chapel of red brick and stone in Gothic style designed at the turn of the century by Boston's famed ecclesiastical architect, Ralph Adams Cram.
Although the buildings around John Eliot Square have suffered a period of neglect, there is abundant evidence of architectural and social revival in the area. A new apartment building next to the Marcus Garvey House is scheduled to start construction soon. The Dillaway House, though fire damaged, can, and hopefully will be, restored. The First Church has already been restored and repaired, and Ionic Hall has just recently been approved for Federally funded restoration. Plans for rehabilitation of the Cox Building, The Hotel Eliot and the Marcus Garvey House are presently being developed.

1.3 Map showing location:

Attached.
2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY

2.1 Type and Use

The Cox Building was erected in 1870 to provide several types of housing and commercial accommodations. The structure in plan is an open U-shape, this configuration resulting from building approximately thirty-nine feet deep along Bartlett and Dudley Streets and the arc connecting them at their convergence on John Eliot Square. Originally there appear to have been five one-family houses - three on Bartlett Street and two on Dudley Street - while the curved section had three stores at street level and three floors of hotel or rooming house accommodations above.

Each of the private houses had four floors plus a full height basement kitchen on the inner courtyard side, service access to the courtyard being provided from Bartlett Street. The house facades were done in the fashionable sandstone or brownstone of the day with classical pediments over the entrances and first floor windows. Window frames and sash are wood as is the bracketed cornice running continuously along the facades. Above the cornice is a slate mansard with recessed windows, and above the mansard a double-pitched roof running to a ridge and a simple eave with gutter on the straight brick rear wall. Front and rear chimneys occur at the brick party walls between houses. There are no fireplaces, heating from the start having been by stoves.

Interior finishes are relatively simple; softwood floors and stairs; walnut stair rails and doors; plain cornice mouldings in plaster. Small ornamental brackets in plaster terminate a few arched plaster openings in the Dudley Street houses. Original hardware included ornamental glass doorknobs.

Connecting the brownstone houses on Dudley Street and those on Bartlett Street is a great curve, the center portion of the Cox Building, which terminates the block and faces John Eliot Square in majestic fashion. This curve is actually composed of six straight faces, each two bays wide, but otherwise matching the adjoining brownstones in height, number of floors and cornice and roof treatment. The difference is that this leading face of the block is built of pressed red brick with granite trim in the form of heavy lintels over the store fronts, window sills, slightly ornamented window lintels with simple brackets and quoins at the
changes in face angle of the facade. At street level the granite lintels - two per face - are supported by elegant cast iron fluted columns with full Corinthian capitals which remain largely complete. These columns stand on pedestals which vary in height to accommodate the changing sidewalk grade. Between the pedestals is wood storefront sill and wall construction below the display windows. There are three recessed storefront entrances each having a massive granite monolithic floor slab. Tall, glazed double doors with moulded panels serve the store entrances. At the northeast end of this great curved facade a similar recessed entrance with double doors serves the entrance stair hall to the upper floors of this section.

Between the second and third floors of the center bay facing John Eliot Square a brownstone cartouche bears in raised sculptured letters the words Cox Building and the date 1870.

2.3 Photographs:

Attached.
3.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY

3.1 Historic Associations

The Cox Building typifies the post-Civil War transformation of Roxbury from a rural area of farms and country estates to a more heavily populated but fashionable suburb of Boston. George D. Cox was a busy builder-developer of the time and he may even have planned the building himself since no record of an architect for it has been found.

The building was presumably put up for speculative and/or rental purposes since it is of similar character throughout and exhibits none of the individual touches which owners or tenants at the time of building probably would have required. The other nearby new buildings of the period such as the Hotel Eliot and the Norfolk House were built to serve the general public rather than individual owners.

The financial history of the Cox Building indicates that it may never have been very profitable. After purchasing the land for it from Theodore Otis in 1870 Cox secured a mortgage from Frederick A. Howard after construction. In November of 1870, however, the Home Savings Bank took over the mortgage of the central brick portion and by July 5, 1871 the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company had taken over the mortgage on the remaining portion. Five years later, however, the insurance company foreclosed, portion by portion, on the whole building.

In 1898 Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company sold the building to one Saimon Sirk, who held it only a year, re-selling it to Alfred Bowditch et. al. trustees in May of 1899. This ownership lasted for at least the next fifteen years, but by 1931 Edward Fitz et. al. trustees were listed as owners and it is inferable the building was simply rental property slipping into the decline which has afflicted this area of Roxbury until recent times. The present ownership by the City of Boston and inclusion of the Cox Building on the National Register make possible the revival of this important survivor from Roxbury's history.
3.2 Architectural Significance

The Cox Building is typical of the speculative-commercial construction which so rapidly filled the vacant areas in and around Boston in the decades following the Civil War. In design it reflects the influence of the French Second Empire style so well exemplified at a more sophisticated level in the Old Boston City Hall, the Old Post Office and the earlier mansions along Commonwealth Avenue. Its materials are the same: smooth pressed brick, brownstone facing, granite, cast iron, slate mansard roof and ornamented wood doors, windows and trim.

While the floor plans of the houses in the Cox Building are typical - front and rear outside rooms around an interior stair hall - the plan of the circular section is a quite unusual series of irregularly shaped rooms on a curving central corridor all worked out to accommodate the curved shape of the building. Rooms on the outside of the curve have an expansive, airy openness, while those facing the inner courtyard have a cramped, Dickensian picturesqueness.

While the Cox Building is in many ways fairly typical of its time it is quite extraordinary as an element of streetscape and as a perimeter structure defining one of the city's most significant and historic spaces, John Eliot Square. Its design is a bold and satisfying solution to the problem of terminating a triangular city block. Much less successful solutions to this problem can be found in a number of places in the City of Boston and elsewhere. The town of Southbridge, for example, has a very clumsy example in its Whitcomb Building which, though similar, shows what the Cox Building might have been with a less capable designer.

As urban fabric, then, the Cox Building is highly important, and indeed irreplaceable since in its form, volume, materials and colors it exemplifies the history and architecture of its community and relates harmoniously to neighboring structures and the spaces around it.
3.3 Relationship to the Criteria for Landmark Designation

The Cox Building meets the criteria for Landmark designation established by Section 4 of Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975 by (a) being included in The National Register of Historic Places as provided in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and (b) by being a structure representative of architectural design and craftsmanship which embodies distinctive characteristics of a type inherently valuable for study of a period, style, method of construction and development. It represents an important and special example of the cultural history of the City of Boston and as an essential part of the John Eliot Square District, it has state, regional and national significance which qualifies it for "Landmark" status.
4.0 ECONOMIC STATUS

The Cox Building is presently vacant and is owned by the City of Boston. Its assessed value is $19,700, the building being identified as Ward 9, parcel numbers 3282, 3283, 3284, 3285, 3286, 3287 and 3288.
5.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

5.1 Relationship to Current Zoning

The Cox Building is in an L-1 Zone (Local business district, maximum FAR of 1).

Change of use to residential would mean meeting open space requirements of the nearest residential zone.

Allowable Uses
- Residential (all types)
- School
- Hospital
- Religious
- Public service
- Small retail
- Restaurant
- Offices (except wholesalers)
- Service establishments (if small)

Conditional Uses
- Lodging or Boarding House (but not hotel)
- Other Institutional
- Large retail
- Vehicular storage and service

5.2 Current Planning Issues

John Eliot Square, once a thriving local commercial area, is now almost completely void of retail facilities. The development potential of the Dudley Terminal area to the east and the Southwest Corridor to the west has suggested a revision in the historic function of John Eliot Square, as a commercial center. Residential development in the square has been proposed as an appropriate complement to current and planned commercial development to the west and east, private and public investment in residential structures in the entire Highland Park neighborhood, and planned public improvements for the square by the Boston Redevelopment Authority. The southern portion of John Eliot Square has already been revamped as a part of the Campus High Urban Renewal Area. The northern part of the square will be the recipient of capital improvements within the next two years.

The future of the Cox building has been clouded for the past few years due to a lack of sufficient public funds to bring the building up to zero market value and thereby attract developers. The input of State and City funds at this time has generated essential developer interest.
Alternative uses for the structure have been discussed and are currently being reviewed as part of a feasibility study for the building. Community sentiment appears to favor a mixed residential and commercial use which would reinforce the existing and planned institutional uses in the Square including The First Church of Roxbury and the Museum of Afro-American History.
6.0 ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

6.1 Alternatives

The Landmarks Commission has several designation categories that could be applicable to the Cox Building. The Commission can designate the property as a Landmark, as a Landmark District, or as an Architectural Conservation District. Any of these designations carries design controls specific to the designated property.

Because the property was developed as a unit by George D. Cox, is a clearly defined and identifiable unit in the streetscape, and served a single function as residential/commercial property, it should be considered for Landmark designation even if a larger district is designated in the future.

In spite of the clear eligibility of this property for designation, the Commission may find reasons and choose not to designate the property.

6.2 Impact of Alternatives

Failure to give Landmark status to the Cox Building might well signify to other City agencies and to the general public that it is not considered to be noteworthy and valuable, thus encouraging steps leading to demolition and consequent loss to the Community.

Designation as part of a Landmark district or an architectural conservation district would, as previously stated, appear to be inappropriate and would also not afford the degree of public control and protection which the present status of the Cox Building requires.
It is recommended that the Cox Building be designated as a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975. The standards and criteria for administering the regulatory functions provided for in Chapter 772 are attached.
8.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

"Mary Warren" chapter Daughters of the Revolution in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, GLIMPSES OF EARLY ROXBURY, 1905.


DRAKE, S. A., TOWN OF ROXBURY Alfred Mudge & Son. 1878.

Archives Researched

Bostonian Society
Roxbury Historical Society
Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities
The Boston Athenaeum
Boston Public Library
New England Deposit Library

Public Records

Registry of Deeds of Suffolk County

Atlas

Roxbury Atlas 1889
Roxbury Atlas 1890
Roxbury Atlas 1895
Roxbury Atlas 1915
Roxbury Atlas 1931
9.0 BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION - STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

9.1 Introductory Statement on Standards and Criteria to be Used in Evaluating Applications for Certificates

Per Sections 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the enabling statute (Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975 of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts) Standards and Criteria must be adopted for each Landmark Designation which shall be applied by the Commission in evaluating proposed changes to the property. Before a Certificate of Design Approval or Certificate of the Exemption can be issued for such changes, the changes must be reviewed by the Commission with regard to their conformance to the purposes of the statute.

The Standards and Criteria established thus note those features which must be conserved and/or enhanced to maintain the viability of the Landmark Designation. The intent of these guidelines is to help local officials, designers, and individual property owners to identify the characteristics that have led to designation, and thus to identify the limitation to the changes that can be made to them. It should be emphasized that conformance to the Standards and Criteria alone does not necessarily insure approval, nor are they absolute, but any request for variance from them must demonstrate the reasons for, and advantages gained by, such variance. The Commission's Certificate of Design Approval is only granted after careful review of each application and public hearing, in accordance with the statute.

As intended by the statute a wide variety of buildings and features are included within the area open to Landmark Designation, and an equally wide range exists in the latitude allowed for change. Some properties of truly exceptional architectural and/or historical value will permit only the most minor modifications, while for some others the Commission encourages changes and additions with a contemporary approach, consistent with the properties' existing features and changed uses.

In general, the intent of the Standards and Criteria is to preserve existing qualities that cause designation of a property; however, in some cases they have been so structured as to encourage the removal of additions that have lessened the integrity of the property.
Introductory Statement on Standards and Criteria

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It is recognized that changes will be required in designated properties for a wide variety of reasons, not all of which are under the complete control of the Commission or the owners. Primary examples are:

a) Building code conformance and safety requirements.

b) Changes necessitated by the introduction of modern mechanical and electrical systems.

c) Changes due to proposed new uses of a property.

The response to these requirements may, in some cases, present conflicts with the Standards and Criteria for a particular property. The Commission's evaluation of an application will be based upon the degree to which such changes are in harmony with the character of the property.

In some cases, priorities have been assigned within the Standards and Criteria as an aid to property owners in identifying the most critical design features.

The Standards and Criteria have been divided into two levels: (1) those general ones that are common to almost all landmark designations (with three different categories for buildings, building interiors and landscape features); and (2) those specific ones that apply to each particular property that is designated. In every case the Specific Standard and Criteria for a particular property shall take precedence over the General ones if there is a conflict.
9.2 General Standards and Criteria

A. APPROACH

1. The design approach to the property should begin with the premise that the features of historical and architectural significance described within the Study Report must be preserved. In general this will minimize the exterior alterations that will be allowed.

2. Changes and additions to the property and its environment which have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected. ("Later integral features" shall be the term used to convey this concept.)

3. Deteriorated material or architectural features, whenever possible, should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.

4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of original or later integral features.

5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. The use of imitation replacement materials is generally discouraged.

6. New additions or alterations should not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the property and should be compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the property and its environment.

7. Contemporary design is encouraged for new additions; thus, they must not necessarily be imitative of an earlier style or period.
8. New additions or alterations should be done in such a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property would be unimpaired.

9. Priority shall be given to those portions of the property which are visible from public ways or which it can be reasonably inferred may be in the future.

10. Color will be considered as part of specific standards and criteria that apply to a particular property.

B. EXTERIOR WALLS

1. MASONRY

1. Retain whenever possible, original masonry and mortar.

2. Duplicate original mortar in composition, color, texture, joint size, joint profile and method of application.

3. Repair and replace deteriorated masonry with material which matches as closely as possible.

4. When necessary to clean masonry, use gentlest method possible. Do not sandblast. Doing so changes the visual quality of the material and accelerates deterioration. Test patches should always be carried out well in advance of cleaning (including exposure to all seasons if possible).

5. Avoid applying waterproofing or water repellent coating to masonry, unless required to solve a specific problem. Such coatings can accelerate deterioration.

6. In general, do not paint masonry surfaces. Painting masonry surfaces will be considered only when there is documentary evidence that this treatment was used at some point in the history of the property.
II NON-MASONRY

1. Retain and repair original or later integral material whenever possible.

2. Retain and repair, when necessary, deteriorated material with material that matches.

C. ROOFS

1. Preserve the integrity of the original or later integral roof shape.

2. Retain original roof covering whenever possible.

3. Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material which matches the old in composition, size shape, color, texture, and installation detail.

4. Preserve architectural features which give the roof its character, such as cornices, gutters, iron filigree, cupolas, dormers, brackets.

D. WINDOWS AND DOORS

1. Retain original and later integral door and window openings where they exist. Do not enlarge or reduce door and window openings for the purpose of fitting stock window sash or doors, or air conditioners.

2. Whenever possible, repair and retain original or later integral window elements such as sash, lintels, sills, architraves, glass, shutters and other decorations and hardware. When replacement of materials or elements is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.

3. On some properties consideration will be given to changing from the original window details to other expressions such as to a minimal anonymous treatment by the use of a single light, when consideration of cost, energy conservation or appropriateness override the desire for historical accuracy. In such cases, consideration must be given to the resulting effect on the interior as well as the exterior of the building.
E. PORCHES, STEPS AND EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

1. Retain and repair porches and steps that are original or later integral features including such items as railings, balusters, columns, posts, brackets, roofs, ironwork, benches, fountains, statues and decorative items.

F. SIGNS, MARQUEES AND AWNINGS

1. Signs, marquees and awnings integral to the building ornamentation or architectural detailing shall be retained and repaired where necessary.

2. New signs, marquees and awnings shall not detract from the essential form of the building nor obscure its architectural features.

3. New signs, marquees and awnings shall be of a size and material compatible with the building and its current use.

4. Signs, marquees and awnings applied to the building shall be applied in such a way that they could be removed without damaging the building.

5. All signs added to the building shall be part of one system of design, or reflect a design concept appropriate to the communication intent.

6. Lettering forms or typeface will be evaluated for the specific use intended, but generally shall either be contemporary or relate to the period of the building or its later integral features.

7. Lighting of signs will be evaluated for the specific use intended, but generally illumination of a sign shall not dominate illumination of the building.

8. The foregoing not withstanding, signs are viewed as the most appropriate vehicle for imaginative and creative expression, especially in structures being reused for purposes different from the original, and it is not the Commission's intent to stifle a creative approach to signage.
G PENTHOUSES

1. The objective of preserving the integrity of the original or later integral roof shape shall provide the basic criteria in judging whether a penthouse can be added to a roof. Height of a building, prominence of roof form, and visibility shall govern whether a penthouse will be approved.

2. Minimizing or eliminating the visual impact of the penthouse is the general objective and the following guidelines shall be followed:
   a) Location shall be selected where the penthouse is not visible from the street or adjacent buildings; setbacks shall be utilized.
   b) Overall height or other dimensions shall be kept to a point where the penthouse is not seen from the street or adjacent buildings.
   c) Exterior treatment shall relate to the materials, color and texture of the building or to other materials integral to the period and character of the building, typically used for appendages.
   d) Openings in a penthouse shall relate to the building in proportion, type and size of opening, wherever visually apparent.

H LANDSCAPE FEATURES

1. The general intent is to preserve the existing or later integral landscape features that enhance the landmark property.

2. It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has a character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the landmark and its newer surroundings.
3. The existing landforms of the site shall not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the landmark or site. Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the landmark.

4. Original layout and materials of the walks, steps, and paved areas should be maintained. Consideration will be given to alterations if it can be shown that better site circulation is necessary and that the alterations will improve this without altering the integrity of the landmark.

5. Existing healthy plant materials should be maintained as long as possible. New plant materials should be added on a schedule that will assure a continuity in the original landscape design and its later adaptations.

6. Maintenance of, removal of, and additions to plant materials should consider maintaining existing vistas of the landmark.

I EXTERIOR LIGHTING

1. There are three aspects of lighting related to the exterior of the building:

   a) Lighting fixtures as appurtenances to the building or elements of architectural ornamentation.

   b) Quality of illumination on building exterior.

   c) Interior lighting as seen from the exterior.

2. Wherever integral to the building, original lighting fixtures shall be retained. Supplementary illumination may be added where appropriate to the current use of the building.

3. New lighting shall conform to any of the following approaches as appropriate to the building and to the current or projected use:

   a) Accurate representation of the original period, based on physical or documentary evidence.

   b) Retention or restoration of fixtures which date from an interim installation and which are considered to be appropriate to the building and use.
c) New lighting fixtures which are contemporary in design and which illuminate the exterior of the building in a way which renders it visible at night and compatible with its environment.

4. If a fixture is to be replaced, the new exterior lighting shall be located where intended in the original design. If supplementary lighting is added, the new location shall fulfill the functional intent of the current use without obscuring the building form or architectural detailing.

5. Interior lighting shall only be reviewed when its character has a significant effect on the exterior of the building; that is, when the view of the illuminated fixtures themselves, or the quality and color of the light they produce, is clearly visible through the exterior fenestration.

J. REMOVAL OF LATER ADDITIONS AND ALTERATIONS

1. Each property will be separately studied to determine if later additions and alterations can, or should, be removed. It is not possible to provide one general guideline.

2. Factors that will be considered include:

a) Compatibility with the original property's integrity in scale, materials and character.

b) Historic association with the property.

c) Quality in the design and execution of the addition.

d) Functional usefulness.
10.0 SPECIFIC STANDARDS AND CRITERIA
COX BUILDING
JOHN ELIOT SQUARE, ROXBURY

A. GENERAL

1. Massing and details of the building shall be preserved.

2. The interior courtyard may be landscaped in non-original form.

3. Slate sidewalks surrounding the building may be repaired, re-set or replaced in kind as required to maintain original appearance.

B. MASONRY

1. Rear brick wall shall be re-built or repaired as required keeping original window and door openings. Fire escapes may be removed.

2. Brickwork and granite work generally may be repaired and re-pointed using original mortar color, mix and joint detail.

3. Brick chimneys may be re-pointed where existing and re-built where missing.

4. Brownstone may have loose scaling removed and be patched and repaired as required to restore and maintain original condition.

C. CAST IRON

Cast iron shall be stripped of paint and rust, repaired and re-painted with proper rust-inhibitive primer and finish coats.

D. DOORS, WINDOWS AND FRAMES

1. Existing interior doors where possible may be repaired and retained. Matching salvaged doors may replace those that are irreparably damaged or missing.

2. Windows, frames and trim may be repaired or replaced with copies. Windows may be double-hung 2/2 with double glazing.
3. Store fronts may be re-constructed in original form as nearly as practicable.

4. Wood cornice may be repaired and reconstructed to original appearance.

E. ROOF

1. Slate mansard roofs, sheet metal facing and flashing, gutters and rain leaders may be replaced in original form.

2. Snow Guards may be retained.

3. Asphalt sheet roofing may be repaired and retained.

F. INTERIORS

Interior partition arrangement, stairs and finishes may be altered freely to accommodate viable contemporary use of the building.

G. GENERAL

1. No window air conditioning units will be allowed on the street facades.

2. No exterior antennae will be allowed. Antennae may be contained in attic spaces.

3. Store or office signs, if any, may be painted on glass windows or on flat sign boards no higher than the granite lintels above the store fronts.

4. Paint colors may be uniform throughout and shall be appropriate to the original period of the building.