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DORCHESTER / MATTAPAN
Exploring Boston’s Neighborhoods
Dorchester was founded by English settlers in 1630, a few months earlier than Boston, and it remained an independent town until 1870. Beginning as a web of farms, villages, and roads, Dorchester became the site of country estates in the 18th century and early suburban development in the pre-Civil War years. Later in the 19th century, the neighborhood became a "streetcar suburb" with varied kinds of housing and neighborhood centers at the early villages.

COUNTRYSIDE AND CROSSROADS

The English founders of Dorchester established their first settlement at Five Corners (now Edward Everett Square). Soon other villages grew up around Dorchester's hills, connected by early roads that have since become major transportation routes, such as Blue Hill and Dorchester avenues. This network of villages, roads, and outlying farms characterized the town for its first two centuries, and the old villages continue to be commercial and civic centers. Mattapan, the Native American name for Dorchester, was revived in the 19th century for the southwestern section of the neighborhood.

EVIDENCE OF EARLY DORCHESTER

In spite of centuries of growth and change, evidence of early Dorchester is still visible. In 1634, the four-year-old town established a burying ground at Stoughton Street and Columbia Road. Now an official Boston Landmark, the Dorchester North Burying Ground contains the graves of some of the town's original settlers and displays gravestone art of four centuries. The granite gateway, erected in 1912, is in the Egyptian Revival style.

Dorchester contains the two oldest houses in Boston—the Blake House in Edward Everett Square (see Boston Landmark panel) and the Pierce House at 24 Oakton Avenue. Built before 1652, the Pierce House was occupied by 11 generations of the same family.

Dorchester's architectural history continues near Edward Everett Square, with a pair of houses built for a father and son. (Open to the public; 265-7802.) The house at 199 Boston Street was built about 1765 for Lemuel Clapp, a tanner who served as a captain during the Revolutionary War. The house was renovated to its
conjectured original appearance in 1957, the same year it was moved 200 yards and set on a modern foundation. Next door is the William Clapp House, built in 1806 for Lemuel’s son, who was both a tanner and a farmer. The main part of the building, with its four corner chimneys and central gabled dormers, is an example of the post-Revolutionary Federal style. The Greek Revival-style rear wing and the bracketed Italianate open porch were added by succeeding generations, perhaps by the three sons of William Clapp, who cultivated many varieties of pears on the family farm. Clapp’s Favorite, first marketed in 1860, continues to be a popular variety today.

MEETINGHOUSES ON THE HILLS

Dorchester’s early meetinghouses were sited on hills, where they still dominate the neighborhood’s skyline. The oldest still standing is the 1805 Federal-style Second Church in Dorchester, at 300 Washington Street in Codman Square. The First Church in Dorchester is the fifth meetinghouse on Meetinghouse Hill and the seventh the congregation has inhabited since its formation in 1630. The current building was constructed in 1897 in the Federal Revival style to reflect the burned meetinghouse it replaced.

THE COMING OF THE RAILROAD

Change began in the country town with the coming of two railroad lines – the Boston & Providence in 1835 and the Old Colony in 1844. This new technology coincided with a new vision of “the good life,” and Americans who could afford to began to leave the city for the suburbs. As station stops were developed along Dorchester’s railroad lines, well-off city dwellers discovered they could attain the suburban ideal within commuting distance of Boston, and they began to build large houses at Ashmont Hill, Melville Avenue, Wellesley Park, Carruth Street, and Savin Hill in popular styles of the time. Many of these grand houses combine the decorative, romantic Queen Anne style with the plainer comfort of the Shingle style, featuring patterned shingling, towers, and windows of leaded glass. Remaining carriage houses show the expansiveness of the early suburban lots.

A STREETCAR SUBURB

In 1857, electric tram service began along Dorchester Avenue. Over the next 50 years, the neighborhood became a streetcar suburb, accessible to commuters of modest means. Dorchester gradually became a dense urban neighborhood, home to a widely diverse population, as it remains today. The three-decker, Boston’s contribution to multifamily housing, spread through the neighborhood. Small single-family houses, such as the official Boston Landmark at 97 Sawyer Avenue, were also built during the streetcar suburb era. Built in 1893, this house was owned by William Monroe Trotter, a nationally prominent African American who led the turn-of-the-century protest against racism as a speaker, writer, and publisher.
NEIGHBORHOOD
CENTERS
The crossroads villages of early Dorchester continue
to serve as the commercial
and civic centers of the community. Their architecture
reflects changes over the centuries, particularly growth of
the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Fields Corner,
for example, the Municipal Building at the intersection
of Adams and Arcadia streets
is the result of annexation
to Boston in 1870. Built in
1874 and probably designed
by City Architect George A.
Clough, the building is an
example of the angular High
Victorian Gothic style. Today
it contains offices.

A cluster of historic build-
ings marks Codman Square.
The Second Church has
stood since 1805, and a town
hall was added in 1816. At
the turn of the 20th century,
development increased dra-
matically. In 1899 came the

Lithgow Building. This
Renaissance Revival-style
structure, built to house a
store on the ground floor,
offices on the second, and a
Masonic hall on the third,
was designed by Joseph T.
Greene, a local architect and
prominent Mason. In 1900,
Dorchester High School
(now converted to housing)
was constructed in the
Renaissance Revival style
to the design of the noted
Boston architectural firm
of Hartwell, Richardson &
Dyer. The 1816 town hall
dward Everett Square is the
site of the house built circa
1650 for James Blake, who
emigrated to Dorchester as a
child with his parents in the
1630s, married in 1651, and
became a leading citizen of
Dorchester. One of the earli-
est structures still standing
in New England, this house
has a typical floor plan of its
time—two stories plus an
attic with one main room on
each side of a central chimney
and smaller rooms behind.
The house was built by
English-born carpenters, and
many construction details
remain visible on the interior
in spite of renovations over
the centuries. The construc-
tion methods are typical of
the west of England, even
though most early settlers
were from the eastern part
of the country.

BOSTON LANDMARK
The James Blake House

In the 1890s, the Blake
House was saved from
demolition in a pioneering
instance of historic preser-
vation and moved a few hun-
dred yards from its original
location to its present site in
Richardson Park. (Open to
the public: 265-7802.)

As an official Boston
Landmark, this building is
protected from changes that
would adversely affect its
historic character. For infor-
mination on designating local
landmark buildings and
districts, please contact the
Boston Landmarks
Commission at 635-3850.
was replaced in 1904 by the Municipal Building. Designed by City Architect Charles Bateman, this Georgian Revival-style building later served as a branch library; it now houses public health services.

Upham’s Corner, at the intersection of Columbia Road and Stoughton Street, was named for Amos Upham’s store, dating from about 1800. More than a century later, the prototype of the modern supermarket took shape at the Upham’s Corner Market (600 Columbia Road). The three connected brick and limestone buildings, built between 1920 and 1926, each combine elements of the Jacobean and Classical Revival styles. Here, the Italian immigrant Ciffrino brothers introduced one-stop shopping, expanding their fruit and vegetable store to include meats, staples, dairy products, and eventually a delicatessen, bakery, cafeteria, newsstand, soda fountain, and shoe repair shop. The Cifrinos pioneered a single check-out point and created a parking lot in anticipation of mass automobile traffic.

**SUBURBAN CHURCHES**

Suburban Dorchester was dotted with churches in a variety of popular styles. The Church of the Holy Spirit, on River Street at Cummins Highway in Mattapan, was built about 1886 in the Jacobethan Revival style that recalls rural English parish churches of earlier centuries. Constructed of Roxbury puddingstone, the church has half-timbered gables, a louvered wooden tower, and stained glass windows.

All Saints’ Church in Peabody Square, built between 1893 and 1929, was Ralph Adams Cram’s first commission. Cram went on to design many churches in the Boston area and became nationally known for such works as the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. All Saints’ shows the evolution of the Modern Gothic style, Cram’s interpretation of English Gothic forms for contemporary use, which has influenced church, school, and public buildings across the U.S. Built of Quincy granite faced with sandstone, the structure comprises the main church and tower, two small side chapels, a cloister, and an attached parish house.

St. Margaret’s Church, at Columbia Road and Dorchester Avenue, was built between 1899 and 1904. The Romanesque-style brick building, designed by Keeley and Houghton, is distinguished by its corner tower, rounded arches, and decorative terra cotta tiles. The church complex includes a rectory and a later school.

**INDUSTRY IN DORCHESTER**

Lower Mills, the only rapids on the lower Neponset River, was recognized early as an excellent source of water power. By 1634, Israel Stoughton operated a grist mill here, and by the middle of the 18th century, the area
The Pierce Mill was built in 1872 in the mansard-roofed, Second Empire style. This 1910 photo shows employees thronging from the mill into Pierce Square.

Nathaniel J. Bradlee designed the Steam Mill (now a wing of the Pierce Mill) in 1868, and the successors of his firm continued to work for Baker Chocolate through the construction of the Forbes Mill in 1911. In 1927, Baker Chocolate was acquired by General Foods Corporation, and in 1965, operations were moved out of state. The Baker complex is now occupied by a mix of residential, commercial, and light industrial uses.

CHOCOLATE CITY
The Walter Baker Chocolate Company began in 1765, when Dr. James Baker, a Harvard-educated minister with entrepreneurial leanings, set up a business grinding cocoa beans. The business flourished under the leadership of generations of Bakers and their relations. Success brought with it a major building program that resulted in the current complex at Lower Mills, built by a group of related architectural firms. Noted Boston architect

DORCHESTER POTTERY
Industrial development also occurred in other sections of Dorchester. One of the most well-known concerns was the Dorchester Pottery Works, which operated from 1896 until 1979 on Victory Road. Until the 1930s, the pottery made only commercial and industrial products. It then began to make well-designed tablewares, which have since become collectors' items, in part because the firm continued to use a hand-craft technology — the massive coal-and-wood-fired beehive kiln it employed until 1965. Today, the kiln building is an official Boston Landmark and the only surviving structure of the Dorchester Pottery Works.

BOSTON INSTITUTIONS
Columbia Point contains a unique structure, Boston's first sewage pumping station. The Calf Pasture Pumping Station, designed by City Architect George A. Clough, opened in 1884 on the former grazing land that gives the building its name. The design incorporates both the Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival styles, and its technology made it a model for sanitation nationwide. Plans are underway for reuse of the building by the University of Massachusetts, whose nearby Boston campus was built in the 1970s.

Another unusual City-owned institution is the Mattapan Chronic Disease Hospital, built on the grounds of the former Conness estate off River Street. The original mid-19th-century farmhouse still stands on the grounds.