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The Exploring Boston's Neighborhoods Series has been financed in part by a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and in part with funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, through the Massachusetts Historical Commission, Secretary of State William Francis Galvin, Chairman. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior. This program

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Additional funding provided by City of Boston, Department of Neighborhood Development/PFD.



## BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION

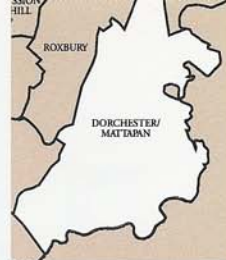
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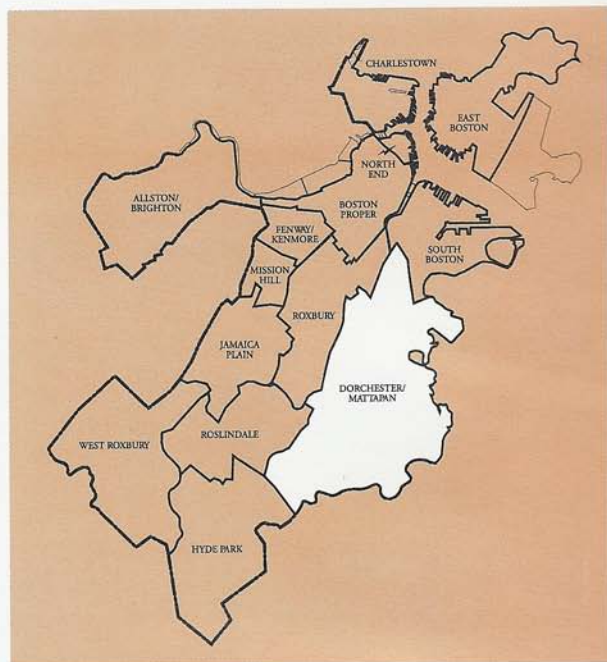
# DORCHESTER/ MATTAPAN

Exploring Boston's Neighborhoods



BOSTON LANDMARKS  
COMMISSION

**D**orchester 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.



Built before 1652, the Pierce House was enlarged in the 18th century. The result is its “duplex” appearance and the dramatic roof line sweeping down over the lean-to.

## 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 con-

tains 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

Wellesley Park is a curving street of late Queen Anne-style houses facing a central green. The setting is parklike even though the houselots are small.



## 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.

“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.

This view of the William Clapp House shows the decorative, bracketed Italianate-style porch, a later addition to the plainer Federal-style house.





## 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



**The Lithgow Building in Codman Square is typical of the multipurpose buildings constructed in Dorchester's civic centers at the turn of the century.**

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 buildings 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 dramatically. 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

## BOSTON LANDMARK

### The James Blake House



**E**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 earliest 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 construction methods are typical of the west of England, even though most early settlers were from the eastern part of the country.

In the 1890s, the Blake House was saved from demolition in a pioneering instance of historic preservation and moved a few hundred 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 information 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 Cifrino 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,

A focus in Peabody Square since 1909, this richly decorated standing clock was designed by architect William Downes Austin for the Howard Clock Company.



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 be-

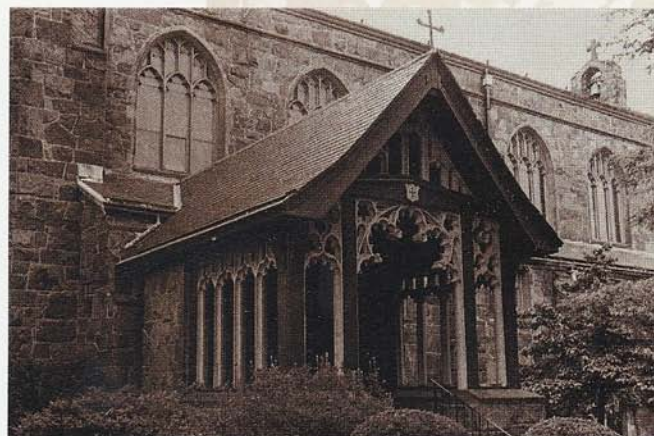


tween 1893 and 1929, was Ralph Adams Cram's first commission. Cram went on to design many churches in the Boston area and became nationally known for such works as the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. All Saints' shows the evolution of the Modern Gothic style, Cram's interpretation of English Gothic forms for contemporary use, which has influenced church,

tive 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



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 decora-



The intricate wooden tracery along the west porch of All Saints' Church contrasts with the rough-faced Quincy granite of the main building.





▶ 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.

also included a wool sizing mill, a gun powder mill, a paper mill, a snuff mill, and a saw mill.

### 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

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.

### 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.

▶ The main hospital building of the Mattapan Chronic Disease Hospital was built in two phases, in 1910 and 1928-30.

