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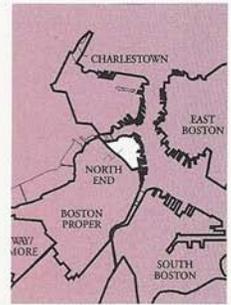


BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION

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NORTH END

Exploring Boston's Neighborhoods



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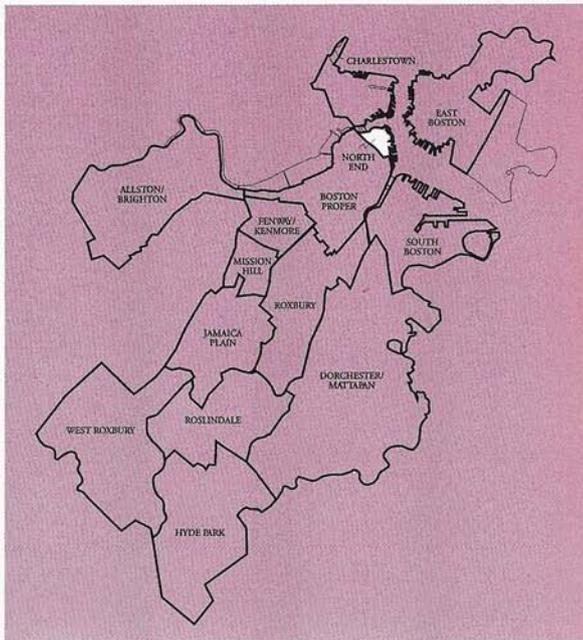


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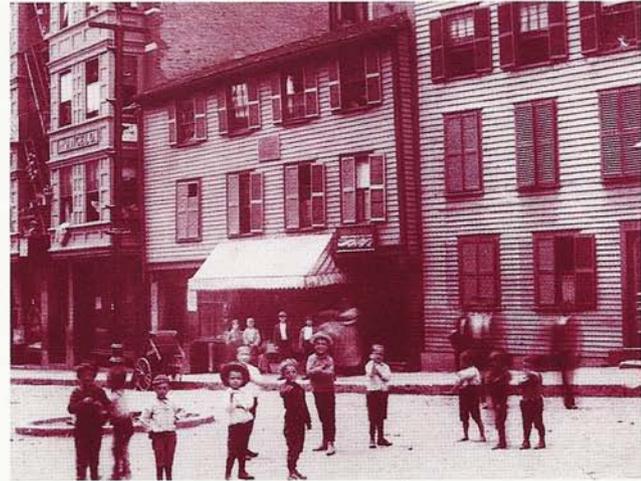


T

he North End's name describes its position at the northernmost point of the Shawmut Peninsula. Established in the 17th century, the North End contains some of Boston's oldest streets. The North End's waterfront developed early as a center of shipping and trade, and Boston merchants built fine



houses around North Square. During the 19th century, the neighborhood became a center of immigrant life in Boston, home to Irish, then to Polish and Russian Jewish families. Today, its narrow streets lined with red brick buildings are a backdrop for Italian-American life.



THE EARLY NORTH END

When English colonists founded Boston in 1630, the North End was much smaller than it is today – roughly bounded by the present Salem, Commercial, and North streets. It included a tidal inlet, which was developed into a mill pond for early industries. Gradually, the area was filled to create more land. One of the largest projects was the creation of a causeway, and later a dam, across the inlet, parallel to present-day Causeway Street.

MERCHANTS BUILD HOMES AND WHARVES

The first Bostonians attracted to the North End were merchants. They purchased waterfront land, built houses and warehouses, and enlarged their property

by constructing wharves into the harbor. The center of the 17th-century North End was North Square, the location of the Paul Revere House. (Open to the public; 523-2338.) This wood frame structure was built in 1680, long before the birth of the Revolutionary War patriot who later owned it. This is the only frame house of its period remaining in the central part of the city. Like the Revere House, most early buildings were wood frame, but disastrous fires in 1676 and 1679 encouraged rebuilding in the red brick that has been the hallmark of the North End ever since.

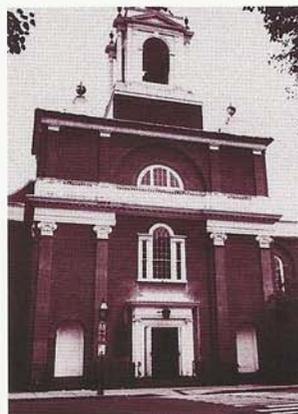
Other early developments in the North End included the Second Church of Boston (there had been only one meetinghouse prior to this time, located near State Street), founded in 1650 at North Square. A few years later, part of Copp's Hill

The Revere House
(with awning)
changed over time.
This photo shows it
in 1890, before its
1908 restoration to
a conjectural 17th-
century appearance.

THE TOAST OF PRE- REVOLUTIONARY BOSTON

During the 18th century, North Square became the most fashionable residential area in Boston. Although the grandest houses no longer stand, two brick town-houses of the period still grace the North End – the Moses Pierce-Hichborn House in North Square and the Ebenezer Clough House at 21 Unity Street.

The North End building most closely associated with Boston's Revolutionary history is Christ Church (commonly known as Old North Church) at 193 Salem Street, which still houses an Episcopal congregation. (Open to the public; 523-6676.) Here, sexton Robert Newman hung the lantern signal for Paul Revere's ride on April 18, 1775. But Christ Church has



also earned a place in Boston history for its architecture. Built in 1723, it is the oldest church building surviving in the city. Its early Georgian style is a local adaptation of the London churches designed by Christopher Wren after that city's great fire of 1666.

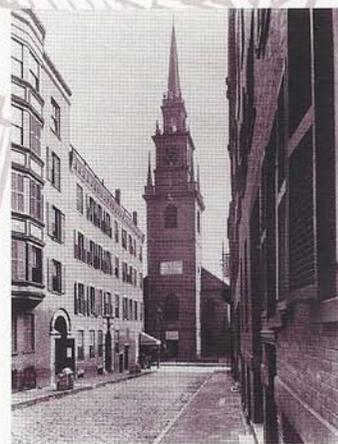
AFTER THE REVOLUTION

Following the Revolution, wealthy merchants were attracted by new residential enclaves, leaving the North End a neighborhood of small merchants, tradespeople, and artisans. Many of the North End's large houses were subdivided as rental properties, and others were torn down to make way for row housing. The waterfront district around North Street was soon filled with dance halls, taverns, and gambling rooms, supported by the booming shipping and mercantile trade. More reputable accommodations and pastimes for sailors were also estab-

lished, and two such buildings remain in North Square. The Seaman's Bethel, now Sacred Heart Church (8 North Square), was built in 1833 in the Federal style. The Mariner's House at 11 North Square (1847) is a Greek Revival-style sailors' boarding house.

New construction in the Federal period included New North Church, now St. Stephen's, on Hanover Street.

◀
The red brick St. Stephen's Church
combines some
Italian Renaissance
elements with
the more traditional
meetinghouse style.



Courtesy of The Bostonian Society

◀
The design of Christ Church (1723)
recalls fashionable
London churches of
a generation earlier.

Built in 1804 as a Congregational church, it is the only remaining church in Boston by the renowned local architect Charles Bulfinch. In 1862, the church was sold to the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston and renamed, reflecting the changed ethnic and religious character of the North End. Today, St. Stephen's is an active Roman Catholic parish.

WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT

Commercial areas along the North End's waterfront were enlarged by landfill. The top of Beacon Hill, cut down for residential development, was used to fill the North End's Mill Pond, and new streets were laid out.

On the other side of the neighborhood, Commercial, Fulton, and Richmond streets developed rapidly from the 1830s through the 1860s, partly as a result of the spec-

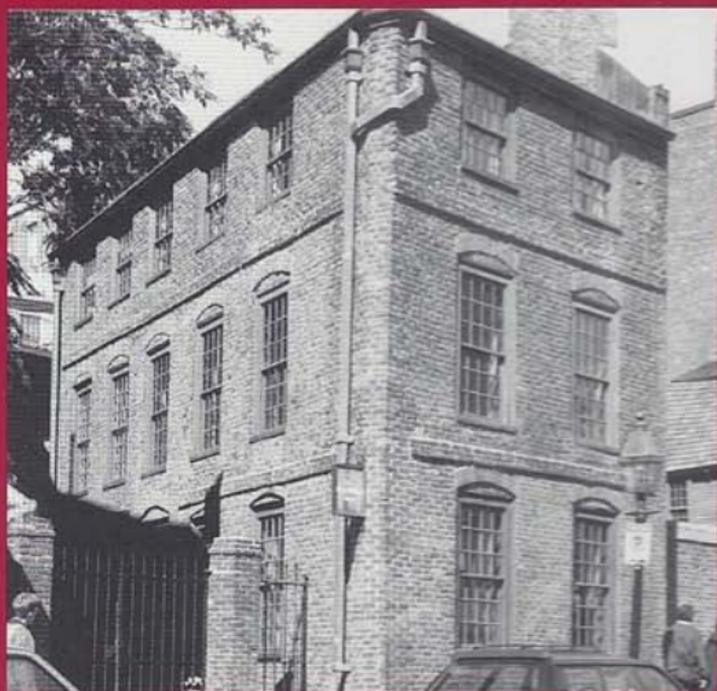
ular success of nearby Quincy Market, constructed in the 1820s. Row buildings which housed the various businesses necessary to the growing Port of Boston still form a remarkably cohesive 19th-century commercial streetscape. The earlier buildings in the district were built in the 1830s and 1840s of brick with granite posts and lintels framing the ground floor display windows. This is one of the first uses of mass-produced stone for post-and-lintel construction, a technological innovation of the 1830s.

The Mercantile Wharf Building, which occupies the entire block surrounded by Commercial, Mercantile, Richmond, and Cross streets, is a massive, five-story granite



Using a building technique that originated in Boston, these post-and-lintel-framed shop windows are a forerunner of today's commercial display windows.

THE MOSES PIERCE- HICHBORN HOUSE

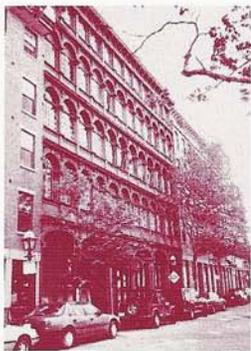


Courtesy of The Bostonian Society

The Moses Pierce-Hichborn House, built sometime between 1680 and 1710, is the earliest brick townhouse remaining anywhere in New England. Although now unique, it was once typical of the many brick dwellings that replaced wooden houses lost in the devastating fire of 1676.

The bricks in this house are laid in a pattern called English bond (alternating rows of stretchers and headers, or long and short ends of the bricks). This pattern is useful in dating the house, because it is known to have gone out of style in Boston shortly after 1700. On the front of the house and the side facing North Square are decorative, projecting bands

of brick known as belt courses that mark the floor levels of the second and third stories. The double front door is decorated by a brick arch, as are the first and second story windows. Moses Pierce was a glazier, an artisan who sets glass into window frames, and it is tempting to think that he must have been proud of the windows in his fine townhouse. Pierce made the best use of the sun's light and heat by orienting his house to face south, with only one small window in the rear north wall, which contains the building's two chimneys. The house is now a museum. (Open to the public; 523-2338.)



◀
The McLauthlin Building, built about 1864 at 120-1/2 Fulton Street, is the earliest remaining cast-iron front building in New England, and probably the best example of its type north of New York.

warehouse. Built in 1856, it was designed by prominent Boston architect Gridley J. F. Bryant, who adapted the popular Renaissance Revival style to commercial use. The building's storefronts are defined by the horizontal and vertical bands of stonework that echo the post-and-lintel construction of the earlier row buildings. Directly across Commercial Street is the Commercial Block, which was built the year after Mercantile Wharf, and reproduces many of its features on a smaller scale.

A CENTURY OF IMMIGRANTS

Throughout the 19th century, waves of immigrants populated the North End, from England, Germany, and Ireland. After the mid-century Irish potato famine, the numbers of Irish increased so rapidly that, by 1855, nearly half of North Enders were Irish-born. In the 1870s came a large influx of Polish and Russian Jews. Italian immigration began in the 1870s,

and by 1920, 90% of the neighborhood's residents were of Italian heritage.

During this period of immigration, private organizations helped immigrants learn the economic and social skills they would need in their new country. In 1884, socially prominent Boston women purchased the North Bennet Street School for training poor and immigrant women in vocational skills. The school remains in operation today, training artisans in traditional skilled crafts.

Copp's Hill Terrace, located between Copp's Hill Burying Ground and Commercial Street, was built to mitigate the crowded urban conditions of the North End. As the Boston park system was developed in the 1870s, no provisions were made for a park in the North End, but by the 1890s, local politician

John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald (the father of Rose Kennedy) secured the funds for the park, built between 1897 and 1913. Landscape architect Charles Eliot designed it as a spot where residents of crowded tenements could relax and enjoy fresh air and harbor views. Eliot constructed the stone-terraced park on a steep, narrow hillside where British troops fired on the colonists during the Battle of Bunker Hill. The original plan called for a bridge linking the terrace to the waterfront across the street (now North End Park).



THE NORTH END IN THE 20TH CENTURY

During the 20th century, the urban atmosphere of the North End has been disrupted by major construction projects, including the Sumner and Callahan tunnels in the 1930s and 1960s and the elevated Central Artery in the

1950s. With the depression of the Central Artery, plans are underway to reconnect the North End to downtown Boston through streets, pedestrian walkways, and parks.

Perhaps some of the new open space will be as intensively used as Paul Revere Mall, also known as the Prado. This park was created in 1933 by landscape architect Arthur Shurcliff. Running between Hanover and Unity streets, it provides a link between the architectural monuments of St. Stephen's Church and Christ Church. This paved and tree-lined urban space creates a sense of "breathing room" enjoyed by North End residents and visitors alike.

◀
The North Bennet Street School, at 37-39 North Bennet Street, was built in 1874 in the French Second Empire style noted for its distinctive mansard roofline.