

INTRODUCTION

The streetscape of any town reflects the history of the place, of what has happened over the years. Brookline has been singularly fortunate in the accidents of her development because she can claim buildings which comprise some of the richest and most varied domestic architecture in greater Boston, rivalled by few towns in America.

History, however, is humorous for the inauspicious name of Muddy River was first given to this settlement which initially served as Boston's cow pasture. Incorporated in 1705, Brookline shed its inglorious beginnings and soon became a community of substantial homes and country estates. While most of these homes from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are gone, those which remain are comfortably surrounded by elaborate and extensive residences from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for which the town is so famous. Less familiar from an historical viewpoint, however, is Brookline Village, an older section of the community and once the heart of town life. The tours describe and explore the six diverse neighborhoods of this area--each having its own identity, character, and history.



Aspinwall Homestead

Village little claim to architectural distinction solely due to age. Rather it has been the high architectural aspirations of both residents and town fathers which seem to have dis-

tinguished the community in each phase of her development. For example, the Edward Stanwood residence on High Street, designed in 1880 for this editor of the American Youth's Companion, is qualitatively as fine as its stylistic seventeenth century prototype. Though composed of different materials, stucco, brick, terra cotta and stone, it captures remarkably well the medieval spirit of the Queen Anne Revival which forms a large component of Brookline's architectural history.



Stanwood Residence

The prosperous century from incorporation through the early nineteenth century produced a series of elegant homes on the old roads which divided the agricultural holdings to the south and west of Brookline's Town Green. The stone Tappan-Philbrick and Sewall mansions of 1822 and 1823 were based on the classical architectural traditions emanating from Georgian England during the Federal period rather than upon the Medieval precedent of the Aspinwall House. Unlike most New England houses of the period, they were built of granite, a material which had just become available in Boston where it was used by Alexander Parris in St. Paul's Cathedral (1819) on the Boston Common and in the Quincy Markets (1822).

While these earliest Town buildings were classical in style, a different pattern of development emerged for architecture in Brookline Village which resulted from a two stage shift in location of the town center. First, construction of the Worcester Turnpike in 1806 transferred the commercial center from the old Town Green to the stagecoach stop on Washington Street, location of the famous Punch Bowl Tavern. Second, the advent of the railroad in 1848 brought another shift to the present village site at the junction of Harvard and Washington streets.

Although the Punch Bowl Tavern was razed in the early nineteenth century, the adjacent residential areas along lower Kent Street, Webster Place and Linden Street still have a number of Greek Revival and Italianate buildings from this era. Interspersed with post-Civil War structures, a little street like Webster Place maintains an amazing ambience in view of its central location. Kent and Linden streets similarly retain a residential tranquility in spite of nearby commercial activity. As was typical of so many New England communities in the 1825-1860 period, these homes were part of the Town's first stage of urbanization. Located near the Village center, homes were designed for prosperous businessmen who no longer earned their livelihood through agriculture. Like the Sewall and Tappan-Philbrick houses the buildings are box-like and classical, though smaller in scale, and often placed with the gable end to the street. Floor length and one story bay windows appear on many of these houses which are also distinguished by elegant millwork, columned porches, and classically decorated entablatures of exceptional quality.

E.F. Woodward's 1844 Map of Brookline was produced in the same year that the town fathers abandoned the old Town Hall for a new structure just north of Brookline Village on Washington Street. That map showed other landmarks of the area as well--the now-demolished Benjamin Davis house (c. 1760) which was later to give its name to Davis Avenue still stood to the west of the village on Washington Place and the newly constructed White House lay to the south. Soon White Place, a block-long, intimate street, which is masked almost entirely by the



1884 Map of Brookline

commercial buildings on Washington Street, would be developed on this property. It is interesting to note that the box-like, clap-board tradition of a substantial pre-Revolutionary structure such as the Benjamin Davis House is exemplified on a lesser scale with the White House a century later. This was then repeated in the smaller residences which were erected on White Place



Davis House



White Place

The adjacent commercial center in the village first developed in the 1860s and 1870s. Here through the energetic promotional schemes of John Panter, Reuben Chace, James Rooney and Charles Holtzer an exceptional number of fine Panel Brick style commercial buildings were constructed in a short period of time. The intricately articulated masonry with its recessed panels and cast iron columns survives today, making this concentration of Panel Brick architecture unique in metropolitan Boston. Fortunately, this brickwork was not limited only to the commercial district. During the 1870s and 1880s a large number of residences whose roots lay with this Panel Brick style were built in the Emerson Garden, Aspinwall, and Pill Hill neighborhoods

Back Bay, laid out in the 1850s by Arthur Gilman, soon became a showplace of Second Empire style homes as did the Boston City Hall which was also designed by Gilman with his partner Gridley J.F. Bryant. Featured in these endeavors was the French mansard roof, a form which became ubiquitous in America in the following decades and was soon reflected in Brookline Village. The Colonnade in the commercial district, the collection of Second Empire style houses

on Perry Street, and the intriguing cul-de-sac of Tabor Place are all fine vernacular examples of this stylistic influence

While these areas immediately adjacent to the village center were still thriving, the Brookline affinity for architectural excellence reached its peak in Pill Hill. This area had already emerged as an intellectual nucleus of abolitionists and liberals by 1862 when Edward Philbrick designed the Swedenborgian Church with William Ware. Ware soon after won the competition for Memorial Hall at Harvard University and founded America's first school of architecture at MIT in 1866

It is not generally recognized this area of Brookline served as the residence for an unprecedented number of major architects in the post-Civil War era when Boston was at the zenith of her intellectual and architectural prestige in America. Those who did not themselves live in Brookline appear to have been busy, nonetheless, designing homes in the area. In this latter group were the previously mentioned Ware and Van Brunt, William Ralph Emerson, designer of the Boston Art Club (1881) and master of the Shingle style, Hartwell and Richardson, architects of the Spiritualist Temple (now the Exeter Street Theater), and Colonial Revivalist Arthur Little. Their work was augmented by others, including one of H.H. Richardson's pupils Herbert Jacques, Joseph Chandler, the second head of the architecture school at MIT, and Julius Schweinfurth who worked for the well-known architectural firm of Peabody and Stearns.

Residents near Pill Hill were Edward C. Cabot, founding President of the Boston Society of Architects, and John Hubbard Sturgis, designer of the former Museum of Fine Arts at Copley Square. H.H. Richardson lived and had offices on Warren Street from 1872 when he won the competition for Trinity Church, Copley Square, to his death in 1886. Also living along Warren Street in the eighties was Frederick Law Olmsted, the father of landscape architecture in America. This famous landscape architect was only one representative of the strong Massachusetts horticultural circle. For as Olmsted laid out the Boston Park system and the Jamaica Way, his friend Charles Sprague Sargent developed Brookline's Sargent estates and a third friend Hollis Hunnewell laid out extensive parks in Wellesley. It was Hunnewell's son Henry Sargent Hunnewell who designed the Women's Free Hospital (1895) which, in turn, was landscaped with assistance from Charles Sprague Sargent.

However, the greatest single architectural contribution to Pill Hill was made by Robert Swain Peabody, principal in the prestigious firm of Peabody and Stearns. Although Peabody designed his own home and a number of others here, he is best remembered today as the architect of the Custom House Tower, one of Boston's best known landmarks.

The walking tours which follow will allow you to witness the architectural legacy of the Village's diverse neighborhoods, each waiting to be

enjoyed and appreciated through closer examination. It has been a great pleasure to work with the staff of the Brookline Planning Department who has written the following tours, and with others doing research through the Brookline Historical Commission, many of whom have been students in my courses at the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard over the past six years, enjoying and rediscovering Brookline.

Margaret Henderson Floyd

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IMPORTANT

The properties discussed in this series of walking tours have been selected for various reasons, including architectural detailing, historical quality, or simply the fact that the property is a good representative of a particular style.

Since many properties included in this guide are private residences, please do not trespass on private property. The buildings and houses are to be viewed from the public streets and sidewalks only.