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Front cover photos of The Court, south side, and the museum exterior, north side, courtesy of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION

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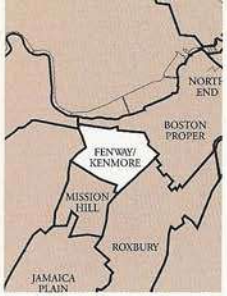
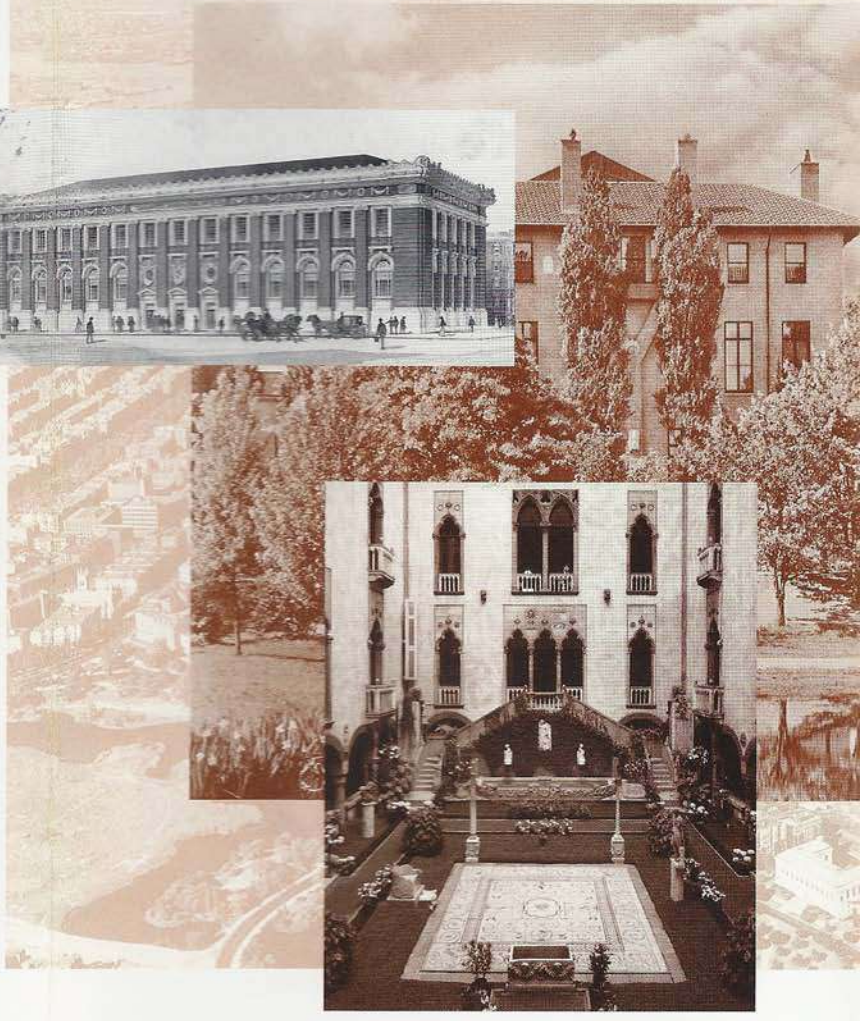


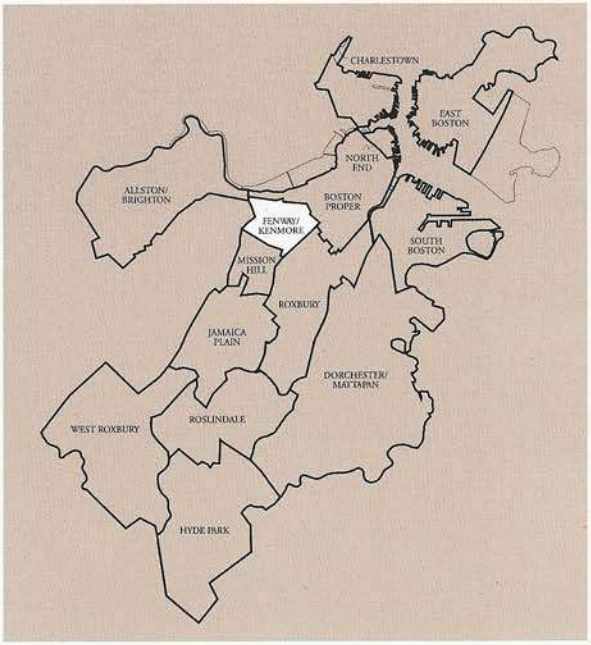
FENWAY/ KENMORE

Exploring Boston's Neighborhoods

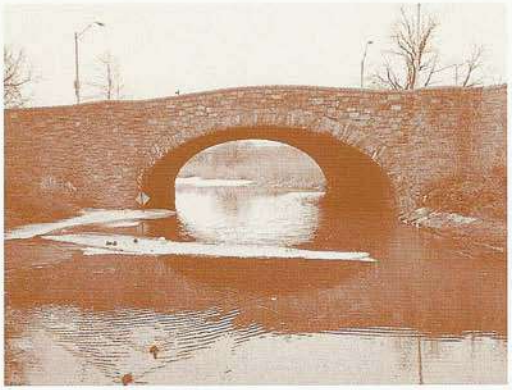


BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION

The Fenway/Kenmore neighborhood shows what can happen when a city has the opportunity to build a neighborhood quite literally from the ground up. In the 1870s, the City of Boston decided to fill the mud flats of the Charles River Basin to the west of the Back Bay. The neighborhood



that now occupies the filled land represents a vision of a fashionable urban district at the turn of the century, with townhouses and apartment buildings; major cultural, educational, and medical institutions; and a unique urban park. More than a century later, the Fenway/Kenmore area is still defined by these enduring places.



▲ **The Boylston Street Bridge crosses the Muddy River with a broad arch of Cape Ann granite. The bridge blends with its rustic surroundings, in keeping with Olmsted's park design.**

THE MAKING OF A PARK AND A NEIGHBORHOOD

In 1875, Boston established its Park Commission to create healthful recreational lands for the growing city. The Muddy River and the Stony Brook both drained into the Charles River Basin in the area of tidal marshland and mud flats located between Brookline and Boston. The Park Commission chose the plan designed by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted from several entries for a new park system. Olmsted's plan solved a major drainage and pollution problem caused by sewage and stagnant water while creating a chain of parks, now called the Emerald Necklace, that winds through Boston. Earth-moving and dredging operations reshaped the river and marshes to flush out the drainage system emptying into the Charles River.

The land was then replanted to look like a natural remnant of rural New England scenery. Olmsted chose the name Back Bay Fens from the British term for a low, marshy area.

This jewel of a park makes optimum use of its 113 acres. Olmsted's design incorporated a series of picturesque bridges and provided for passive recreation – and a bri-

dle path – so that neighborhood residents would have the largest possible amount of green space. Although the park remains an important urban amenity, its history also illustrates how a great design can be altered as needs and circumstances change. The salt marsh was lost after the Charles River Dam was built in 1910, preventing salt water from reaching the Fens. The park was largely redesigned in the more formal style of the 1920s and 30s by landscape architect Arthur Shurcliff, who oriented it toward the Museum of Fine Arts and added the Rose Garden and Clemente Field. Demands of increased automobile traffic and growth affected the entranceways to the park, most seriously at the Bowker Overpass. This connection of the Fenway to Storrow Drive at Charlesgate obscured the Boylston Street Bridge, designed by noted architect H.H. Richardson as the grand north entrance to the Fens. The south end of the park was altered, first by the replacement of the open-waterway at Brookline Avenue with underground conduits, and later by the paving of the area for the Sears Building parking lot.

The rough-cut granite of the 1894 Romanesque Revival Christian Science Church (right) contrasts with the smoothly dressed limestone of the 1906 Renaissance Revival extension.

Olmsted's design solution permitted Boston to grow around the Fens. In addition, landfill was added to the two peninsulas originally in the area – Gravelly Point, now the site of the Christian Science Church complex, and Sewall's Point, including the present Kenmore Square and Audubon Circle. Because of the dams and railroads across the Charles River Basin, the new neighborhood developed its own street grid. It also developed distinct areas – East Fens, West Fens, Kenmore Square, Audubon Circle, the Fenway, and Longwood – each with its own individual character.

PRESENCE OF INSTITUTIONS

The Fenway/Kenmore area was developed during an era of institution-building. At the turn of the 20th century, American cities were creating municipal park systems and public libraries, and private groups were establishing art museums and symphony orchestras housed in grand spaces. These institutions were a way for Americans to gain a sense of self, and to form the basis for a national culture rivalling those of Europe. In Boston, this trend was catalyzed by the Great Fire of 1872, which destroyed much of the downtown Boston. Existing institutions that needed to rebuild naturally looked to the Back Bay and the Fenway, where they could expand and modernize their facilities.

The exterior of Horticultural Hall is richly decorated with flower, plant, and fruit motifs appropriate to the headquarters and exhibition space of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

Courtesy of The Bostonian Society

▲ **This early view of Children's Hospital shows the neoclassical main building graced by cows from a farm on nearby Parker Hill.**

Cultural institutions tended to cluster in the East Fens, following the lead of the Christian Science Church, completed in 1894 on Massachusetts Avenue near Huntington.

Founded in 1881, the Boston Symphony Orchestra played for its first two decades in the Music Hall in downtown Boston, but the orchestra's founder envisioned a new hall which combined visual splendor and acoustical excellence. The distinguished New York architectural firm McKim, Mead & White had established a presence in Boston in the 1890s while working on the Boston Public Library in Copley Square and several buildings at Harvard. Architect Charles Follen McKim collaborated with Harvard scientist and acoustical expert Wallace Clement Sabine to design the first music hall ever to have rationally planned acoustics. McKim's building, completed in 1900 at Massachusetts and Huntington avenues, is designed in the Classical Revival style which his firm advanced at the turn of the century.

BOSTON LANDMARK

Sears Building

The Art Moderne-style Sears Building was completed in 1928 at the intersection of Brookline Avenue and Park Drive as a retail store and mail order facility for Sears, Roebuck & Company. Sears closed the facility in the mid-1980s, and it has since been the subject of several plans for redevelopment. Built of beige brick with a checkerboard pattern of lighter brick and stone trim, this was the last of 10 Sears mail order plants around the nation designed by Chicago architect George C. Nimmons. Its notable tower, the architect's solution to an insurance requirement for a raised water tank, adds the vertical emphasis that often marks the Art Moderne style. The Boston store's opening caused such excitement that the city put extra street cars into service to handle the crowds. The facility added 1,200 new jobs to the economy, the post office opened a parcel branch on site to handle the added volume, and the catalog sold New England-made goods to customers nationwide.

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.

Courtesy of The Bostonian Society

This 1923 view taken from Audubon Road shows blocks of apartment buildings bordering the Back Bay Fens – a 1920s vision of a fashionable urban district.

Across Massachusetts Avenue from Symphony Hall is Horticultural Hall, built in 1901 by the Boston firm of Wheelwright & Haven and designed to harmonize with its neighbor. The Baroque Revival-style hall is the home of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, which, like the symphony, moved to the Back Bay Fens from smaller quarters downtown. The building originally featured a large exhibition space for horticultural shows.

The firm of Wheelwright & Haven was responsible for numerous other building projects in Boston at the time, mostly in styles using classical features. Edmund Wheelwright had worked for neoclassicism's leading proponents, McKim, Mead & White, before starting his own firm. In the Back Bay Fens, Wheelwright & Haven also designed the Massachusetts Historical Society (1899) at 1154 Boylston Street, the New England Conservatory of Music (1903) at 290 Huntington Avenue, and the Boston Opera House (1908), which stood diagonally across Huntington Avenue from the conservatory at Opera Place until its demolition in 1958.

MEDICINE AND EDUCATION

Medical institutions were also attracted to the Fenway area. In 1906, Harvard Medical College constructed five new marble buildings designed in the Classical Revival style by Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge on Longwood Avenue at Avenue Louis Pasteur. Harvard sold some of its land to the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital (1912, designed by Codman and Despradelle at Huntington Avenue and Francis Street) and Children's Hospital (1914, designed by Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge, at 300 Longwood) so that medical students could have clinical training in hospitals near the school, an innovative idea at the turn of the century. Subsequently, many other medical institutions, including the Forsyth Dental Center (1914, designed by Edward T.P. Graham at 140 The Fenway), located in the area.

Educational institutions were also drawn to the Back Bay Fens. Among the earliest was Simmons College, whose main building (1904) at 300 The Fenway, designed by the prominent Boston firm Peabody & Stearns in the Classical Revival style, overlooks the Fens. Neighboring Emmanuel College (400 The Fenway) was founded as a convent and academy. Its Modern Gothic main building by Maginnis and Walsh, architects for many of Boston's Roman Catholic institutions, was completed in 1916. In 1922, the Boston Latin School, the oldest public school in the U.S. (founded in 1635), moved to a new home in the Fenway. The school continues to be housed in the Georgian Revival building by James McLaughlin at 78 Avenue Louis Pasteur.

LIVING IN THE FENWAY

When the Fenway/Kenmore area was first planned, developers envisioned a district of single-family townhouses. To a certain extent, this type of building occurred in the earliest-developed enclaves. More modest rowhouses like those on St. Germain Street were also being built at this time on speculation. But the future of housing in the neighborhood was in apartment buildings and hotels constructed in a rich profu-

The modernism of the Fenway Studios Building distinguishes it from the many neoclassical buildings built in Boston at the turn of the century.

Courtesy of The Bostonian Society

An overflow crowd at Fenway Park in 1934. Fenway Park and Tiger Stadium in Detroit, the two oldest stadiums in major league baseball, opened on the same day in April, 1912!

sion of decorative revival styles. Among the many examples are the Inverness (1898) at 857 Beacon Street; the Hotel Buckminster (about 1900), which dominates the intersection of Beacon Street and Brookline Avenue in Kenmore Square; the Carlton Hotel (1902) at 1138 Boylston Street; the Charlesview (about 1910) at 536 Commonwealth Avenue; and the row of yellow brick apartment buildings from the early 1920s along Park Drive between Queensberry and Kilmarnock streets.

Specialized housing is found at the Fenway Studios Building at 30 Ipswich Street, constructed in 1906 as studios and living spaces for artists. Designed by Boston architects Parker & Thomas, the building was conceived of and funded by Eben Jordan, the founder of Jordan Marsh Company and a patron of the arts. Unaltered since it was built, Fenway Studios is a rare Boston example of the Arts and Crafts style, a functional aesthetic more popular in the Midwest and West than in Boston. The studio spaces were modeled after the ateliers of Paris. Fenway Studios remains today, as it has always been, the home and workplace of practicing artists.

By far the most distinctive and famous house ever built in the neighborhood was Fenway Court at 280 The Fenway (1902), now the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. (Open to the public; 566-1401.) A wealthy widow known for her support of Boston's cultural and civic life, Mrs. Gardner commissioned architect Willard T. Sears to design a home for herself and her art collection. The interior sets off the unique collection of art works and is centered on a plant-filled courtyard reminiscent of the Doges' Palace in Venice.

RECREATION FOR AN URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

The bridle path in Olmsted's Back Bay Fens beckoned equestrians. It provided the impetus for the Jacobethan-style New Riding Club (1892) at 52 Hemenway Street, designed by the architect of the Gardner Museum, and the Riding School (1900) at 145-151 Ipswich Street, designed by Wheelwright & Haven, the firm responsible for so many of the Fenway's institutional buildings.

Perhaps Boston's most famous recreational facility, Fenway Park (24 Yawkey Way) first opened its doors for the 1912 season. With its Tapestry Brick exterior, this is one of the oldest stadiums in major league baseball, and it is the only one with a single deck. Of the same period and style is the YMCA (completed 1913) at 312-320 Huntington Avenue, by architects Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge.

CAR CULTURE

At 648-660 Beacon Street in Kenmore Square stand three large structures once home to the Peerless Motor Car Company. Built during a boom in the area following the opening of Fenway Park, these concrete and cast stone buildings were designed by the Boston firm of Andrews, Jacques & Rantoul. In 1916 Peerless installed a lighted sign atop 660 Beacon Street. Since 1965, the spectacular and rare animated neon Citgo sign has enlivened the same space.