



# Brookline Historical Society

Incorporated April 29, 1901

**Fall Meeting:** "A Social History of the Coolidge Corner Moviehouse", with speaker Heidi Gitelman and special guests.

**Date:** Sunday, October 30, 3 p.m. (please note time carefully).

**Place:** Coolidge Corner Branch Library, 31 Pleasant St., Brookline.

**All members and their guests are invited to attend**

***Slide talk presented to the Brookline Historical Society on June 12, 1988 by Greer Hardwicke, staff of the Brookline Historical Commission.***

The following list is an inventory of most of the historic structures owned by the Town of Brookline. The present town-owned buildings fall into several categories -- those which are service oriented and built for that specific use; historic buildings recycled for a different use; historic landscapes; historic buildings and historic landscapes. The high architectural quality of these properties reflects the town's long-standing commitment to community service. It is the Brookline Historical Commission's hope that the Historical Society and neighborhood groups will begin to think creatively about ways to preserve these important vestiges of the Town's history.

Let's begin by looking at buildings which have been lost--

The first Town Hall that was built as a civic building -- now known as Pierce Hall -- opened in 1824 as both a Town House and school. Designed by Thomas Sumner, the ground floor was used as classrooms, the upper floor was the site for Town Meetings. It is now the property of the First Parish Church.

The second Town Hall was a two-story wooden building, constructed in 1845. It was located on Washington Street, adjacent to the site of the present Town Hall, and reflected the shift of the town center from the Town Green area to the Village. Rooms in this building were used for the first High School, the Library and the police station.

The third Town Hall, a Victorian Gothic structure designed by S.J.F. Thayer (who also designed the Providence City Hall), was built in 1873 on the open space across from the present Town Hall. All that remains of this edifice are the bell, the stained glass windows now in the Town Hall lobby, and the Civil War Memorial tablets which were placed on the main stairway landing in 1884 and are now located at the flag site in front of Town Hall.

The Police Station of 1900 was designed by Julius Schweinfurth, a Brookline resident. This Neoclassical building replaced the old station which had been located in the 1845 Town House. The 1900 police station also contained the local court room. The Municipal Bathhouse, located on the site of the present swimming pool, was the first public bathhouse in the country. It replaced a more modest establishment which had been situated on Boylston Street, and it opened in 1883 with two bathing pools. The large pool contained two white marble staircases.

The original 1864 library was a brick and limestone Mansard building, designed by Louis Weissbein who also designed the old firehouse on Washington Street at High Street. Two separate additions by Fehmer & Page were added in 1889 and 1892 before the present library was built in 1909.

Several nineteenth century school buildings have been replaced -- the old Lawrence School on Francis Street, designed by Peabody & Stearns in 1874; the old Heath School by the same architects, the original High School, located on Prospect Street built in 1855 after the designs of J.F. Edwards and the old High School on Greenough Street with its large central tower which burned in the 1930's.

Other buildings that reflected the Town's commitment to service to the community were the Almshouse which opened May 1, 1883 on Newton Street near Grove Street and two hospitals, the Board of Health Hospital of 1883 and the Diphtheria Hospital of 1901.

The following is a list of the remaining historic properties belonging to the Town of Brookline.

## **HISTORIC LANDSCAPES**

### **Longwood Mall**

Longwood Mall with its magnificent copper beech trees was designed and built by David Sears, the developer of the Cottage Farm/Longwood area in the 1840's. This square and others designed by him were given to the Town in 1902

and 1903. They include Knyvet Square, Mason Square and Winthrop Square. Longwood Mall is an excellent case of public/private partnership. The Friends of Longwood Mall challenged the Town to contribute money for immediate improvements and an endowment maintenance fund -- the Friends were awarded a MHC preservation award for this innovative approach.

### **Linden Square and Linden Park**

These open spaces were designed by Alexander Wadsworth and Thomas Aspinwall Davis in 1844. The land had previously been an orchard belonging to Davis's family. Davis himself was a jeweler and lawyer who served as Mayor of Boston in 1844-5. He sold off lots at auction with restrictions on their use. Several of the Greek Revival houses and Davis's own Gothic Revival Cottage and two other Gothic cottages still stand. Linden Park was given to the Town in 1894 and Linden Square was bought in 1899. Both of these parks represent the picturesque design movement of the mid-nineteenth century.

### **Town Green**

The Town Green area was the original religious, political and social center of the Town. The first meeting house and school were built overlooking the grass triangle. It was here that Brookline's militia assembled to march to Concord and Lexington in 1776.

### **Philbrick Square**

This square was laid out by Samuel Philbrick's heirs after ideas suggested by Frederick Law Olmsted. Samuel Philbrick was a leading abolitionist and was responsible for the development of this section of Pill Hill. The square was sold to the Town in 1901.

### **Olmsted Park/Riverway**

This part of Brookline was originally a dank marsh and river. In the 1880's, Boston and Brookline hired Frederick Law Olmsted to make sanitary improvements on the waterway. The project became part of a magnificent park system known as the Emerald Necklace which provided a sanctuary for an increasingly urbanized metropolis. It is now being restored under the auspices of a state restoration program. The masterplan is being refined and work has begun on the stone bridges off Netherlands Road. Before the state program was established, neighborhood groups, such as the Friends of Leverett Pond, worked to improve this important landscape.

### **Reservoir**

The Reservoir was built in 1848 as part of the Cochituate water supply for the city of Boston. It was sold to Brookline in 1903. There were plans to put a housing development on the site, but neighbors, including John Olmsted, Amy Lowell and John White raised money to assist

the Town in buying it and retaining it as a public park. At present, the granite blocks which line the Reservoir are slipping and need repair. The Town applied for a State Preservation grant, but was rejected. There are two structures connected with the Reservoir. One is the Classical Revival gatehouse at the corner of Boylston and Warren Streets.

### **CEMETERIES**

#### **Old Burying Ground**

Established in 1717 on land bought from Samuel Clark, the cemetery was redesigned in the picturesque style in the 1840's under the supervision of a committee headed by Samuel Philbrick. New walks were laid out, the stone wall was constructed and the entrance was moved to the present location. It contains many eighteenth century slate headstones and nineteenth century marble ones which are vulnerable to vandalism and the devastating effects of acid rain.

#### **Walnut Hills**

Walnut Hills was built when it became evident that the Walnut Street cemetery was not large enough for the growing town. It was designed in 1874 by the landscape architects Ernest Bowditch & Franklin Copeland and was completed in 1875. The receiving tomb was built in 1901, designed by A.W. Longfellow. Guy Lowell designed c. 1901 the stable, the sheds and the superintendent's house and in 1905, the gateway. Many prominent local citizens are buried here -- Henry Hobson Richardson, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Julius Schweinfurth, Charles S. Sargent, and George Foster Shepley.

### **FIRE HOUSES**

#### **Washington Street Firehouse**

The oldest standing firehouse is the one on Washington Street opposite the Town Hall. It was designed by Charles Kirby (the architect of the original Town Stable) in 1871. It was actually two buildings designed to look like one. There was originally a tower in the rear. This structure housed the police lock-up as well as the hose and steam fire company. Its present appearance reflects the changes necessitated by modern demands -- the one story addition and the enlargement of the doors to accommodate bigger equipment.

#### **Route 9 and High Street**

This 1908 Renaissance Revival building replaced an earlier brick Mansard structure constructed in 1871 after the designs of Louis Weissbein, the architect of the original Public Library. The architects of the present building were Freeman, Funk & Wilcox.



**Brookline treasures:** (l-r) the 1900 police station, now gone; fire station at 665 Washington St.; Eliot recreation center.

### 665 Washington Street

This station with its Flemish gable design is unique in Brookline. It was designed by G. Fred Crosby in 1898. Like the station across from the Town Hall, its doors have been modified for more modern apparatus.

### Monmouth Street

This brick structure, now the Brookline Arts Center, was originally the Chemical Fire House built in 1886 (Peabody & Stearns). Originally, it shared the site with the old wooden Longwood School which was moved to make room for the new fire station. Its adaptive re-use is an example of a successful solution to re-using old spaces. State preservation funds were obtained for its restoration and it is now leased and used as an Arts Center.

### Town Garage

The Town Garage was built in two stages -- the right side was constructed in 1874 and was designed by Charles Kirby. It contained sixteen stalls and one box stall. The left side was built in 1898 in the Colonial Revival style after the designs of Peabody & Stearns. The new addition had twenty eight stalls, two box stalls and a grain storage area. The old building was remodeled to hold the superintendent's office and the carriage room. The old wooden Sewall School was moved to this lot in 1890. In 1899, the brick sheds in the rear were constructed.

## SCHOOLS

### Putterham

This wooden schoolhouse is the oldest in the Town of Brookline. It was built in 1768 with additions completed in 1855 and 1870. Originally located on Newton Street (on the same lot as the Almshouse, the hospitals and the pumping station), the Town moved it to Larz Anderson Park in 1966. It ceased to be a school in 1922, but was used in the 1930's and 1940's as a Catholic Church and a Synagogue. Although the Town owns it, the Historical Society maintains the interior and is in charge of opening it to the public.

### Pierce Primary

There have been several school buildings with this name during the past century. The present school consists of an 1855 primary school designed by J. F. Edwards which was enlarged in 1903.

### Baldwin

This Colonial Revival school was designed by the architectural firm Kilham & Hopkins in 1927. Kilham was a resident of Brookline and served on the Planning Board until 1921.

### Lincoln Primary

On the site of the Lincoln Primary School stands one of Brookline's most architecturally significant houses, the Hill-Kennard-Ogden House. It was designed and built in 1843-44 by Gridley F. Bryant, an illustrious mid-nineteenth century architect who was responsible for the Old Boston City Hall. It is a fine example of the Greek Revival style and contains elements of the Regency style. The Colonial Revival carriage house was built in 1910. Since 1927 it has been a school building. Initially part of the Park School, it now belongs to the Brookline School Department and is leased to several educational groups. Any new plans to rebuild on this site need to be sensitive to these historic structures and their site.

## RECREATION

### Lynch Recreation Center

This brick building was designed by Peabody & Stearns in 1887 as the Winthrop School. It stands on one of the two properties bought by the Town in 1871 for recreational purposes, the first such purchase in the country (The other site was the Cypress Street Playground). It has since been converted to a recreation center.

### Eliot

Eliot Recreation Center is the last remaining structure of the original Rivers School. The Rivers School was founded in 1915 by Robert Wheaton Rivers. Rivers was one of the first people in New England to employ the principles of the "open air school" for the purposes of good health. The first

school building was a little bungalow without heat. This building was used by the Rivers School for recreational purposes and was designed by Putnam & Cox in 1918. In 1945, all of the other school structures were demolished except this one. The Town bought it and the surrounding land for playground use. The Rivers School moved to a site on Hammond Street, now the Soule Recreation Center, and is now located in Weston.

### **Soule**

The Soule Recreation Center is located in the carriage house built for John C. Wright by Chapman, Frazer & Bliss in 1897. The main house burned in 1963. Before the Town bought the property in 1961, it had been the site of the Rivers School from 1940. It now houses Recreation Department staff and several private schools. The original gardener's cottage, built in 1908, adjoins the lot, but is privately owned.

### **Putterham Golf Course**

The golf course is on the property originally known as the Putterham meadows. The Town bought the original sixty-two acres in 1899. The clubhouse was designed by Kilham & Hopkins.

### **Larz Anderson**

Larz Anderson Park became a Town property when the land was bequeathed to the Town in 1949. In the eighteenth century, this hill was called Goddard Heights and was used to watch British troop movements during the Revolutionary War. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it belonged to William F. Weld who built his house atop the hill. His grandson, William F. Weld, II, tore down his grandfather's house and commissioned a large mansion to be built on its site. Edmund Wheelwright, the Boston city architect, designed the main house, the carriage house and \*9 Newton Street. The large field below the house was used as a polo field, one of the earliest in New England. In the late 1890's, Weld's cousin, Isabel Perkins Anderson (wife of the diplomat Larz Anderson), inherited the property. She and her husband hired Little & Brown to enlarge the house and to build the temple at the lagoon's edge. They also employed the landscape architect, Charles Platt, to design a series of magnificent gardens around the house. She left the property to Brookline upon her death in 1949. The house was torn down in the 1960's and the gardens have been replaced by a skating rink.

### **Properties within the Park:**

#### **55 Newton**

This Italianate house, built c. 1850, became part of the Weld estate.

#### **9 Newton**

Built in 1889, \*9 Newton Street was designed by Wheelwright & Haven for the Weld estate and probably housed employees. It was originally a wooden building.

### **Avon**

This Arts & Crafts style house was built by the Welds c. 1900.

### **Carriage House**

The Carriage House was part of the Weld estate designed by Edmund Wheelwright. Constructed in the 1880's, it was modeled after the Chateau de Chaumont in France. The Museum of Transportation leases the property from the Town. The Museum has begun a major restoration project to maintain the structure's integrity and should be given much support in this effort.

### **21 Newton Street**

This is the oldest residence on the property. It was built between 1772-1796 and is known as the Widow Harris house.

### **LIBRARY**

In 1909, the present library was built from plans by architect R. Clipston Sturgis to replace the original 1864 structure. The brown stains on the front show one problem of maintaining older buildings -- this is a result of using corrosive metal to prevent birds from nesting in the eaves.

### **DEVOTION HOUSE**

The Georgian style Devotion House was built c. 1740 by Solomon Hill, the adopted son of Edward Devotion, Jr.. An addition was put on sometime between 1745 and 1800. In the nineteenth century, this property was called Babcock's Farm. In 1891, the Town bought the land and the house for school purposes. The Devotion Grammar and Primary schools were located here as well as a small town stable and an 1892 fire house. Edward Devotion, Sr. had left a legacy to the Town to be used for school purposes and it was fitting that the schools on this site have been named in his honor. Soon after the purchase in 1891, the Town hired William G. Preston to repair the old house. New wiring and plumbing were added, but as much of the original woodwork as possible was saved. The old clapboards were replaced, but the original nails were reused. At a 1898 Town Meeting, the Georgian house was officially named the Edward Devotion House. Around 1910, a group called the Devotion House Associates was formed to support its restoration and maintenance. In 1911, the Selectmen put the house into the hands of the Brookline Historical Society. The Society continues to operate it as a historic house under the management of the resident curators, James and Helen McIntosh. The house has many problems that need attention -- among them -- sinking floors, leaks, roof damage, and rotting windows. The Town has performed minor repairs, but the house's survival depends on consistent maintenance.

These properties, spanning more than two centuries of Brookline's history, reflect the vitality of its civic institutions. They are an important ingredient in the community's evolution and should be maintained and treasured.