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### The Heritage Series: Setting the Scene

David L. Robbins

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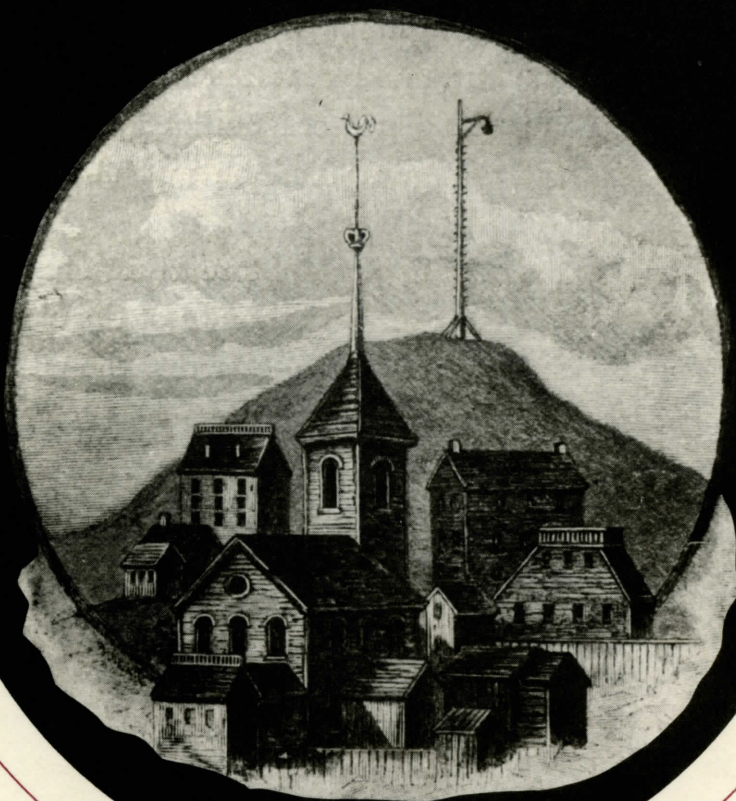
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The HERITAGE Series

# Setting The Scene

David L. Robbins



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## Acknowledgments

I gratefully acknowledge the aid, enthusiasm, and research assistance of the members of the Suffolk University History Society, and most particularly of Theodore E. Burke, Kathleen A. Chambers, Debra A. Joyce, William F. Murphy, Robert Swindlehurst, and Marjorie L. Wong. For his constant support and his invaluable editorial advice, I am deeply grateful to John C. Cavanagh, Chairman of the Department of History at Suffolk and a member of the Editorial Board of the Suffolk Heritage Project. For their energy, patience, and ingenuity, I am also under heavy obligation to the other members of the Editorial Board of the Heritage Project: Edward G. Hartmann, Ann D. Hughes, and Patricia I. Brown. Thomas A. Fulham, President of Suffolk University, and Vincent A. Fulmer, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, have been encouraging and helpful. William C. Amidon, Assistant Director of Development at Suffolk, is the godfather of this project; for his vision and his practicality, I am most thankful. Louis B. Connelly, Suffolk's Director of Public Relations, and James Rue, the designer of this pamphlet, have both provided timely help. And, finally, I owe especially large debts of gratitude to several institutions and groups for cooperation without which this research would have been impossible. They are the Beacon Hill Civic Association, the Boston Athenaeum, the Boston Public Library, the Massachusetts State House Library, the Suffolk University Archives, and the Suffolk University Libraries.

This essay is for Lynda.

# **Setting The Scene**

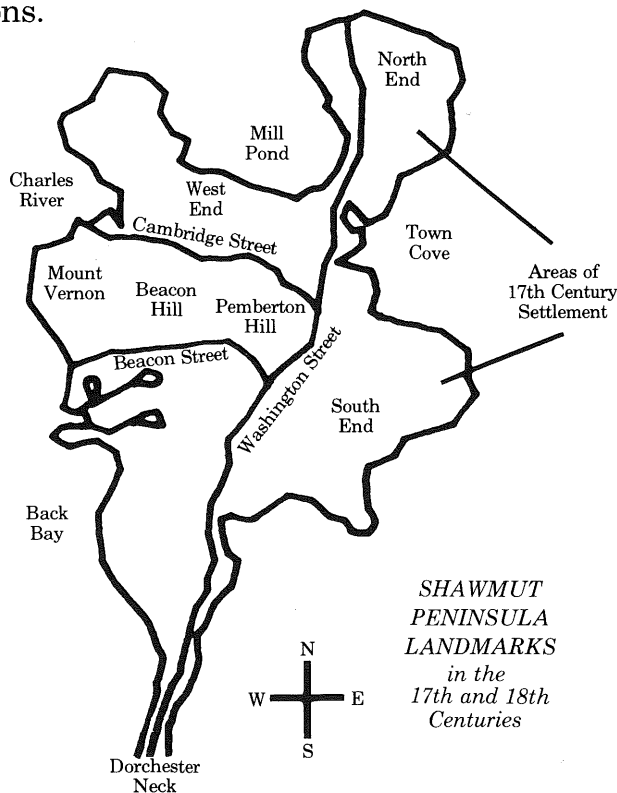
David L. Robbins

Suffolk University  
Beacon Hill, Boston, Massachusetts 02114  
1979

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Design and typography: James Rue Design  
Printing: The House of Offset

The aim of this pamphlet is to set the stage for those which will follow: to enlighten our readers about the early history and development of the neighborhood to which Gleason Archer first brought his Suffolk School of Law in 1907. The Temple Street, or Northeast Slope, area has long been the neglected stepchild of Beacon Hill; it has failed, until recently, to capture either attention or affection. The district's past has suffered from a similar neglect. In the Boston 200 *Official Bicentennial Guidebook*, Temple Street is one of the few Beacon Hill thoroughfares on which the compilers have not managed to place at least one historical landmark; and the area around it is ignored in their projected Beacon Hill walking trail.<sup>1</sup>

What follows, then, is an attempt to add a recovered past to a rediscovered present; to illuminate the origins and evolution of the Temple Street area and its successive populations.

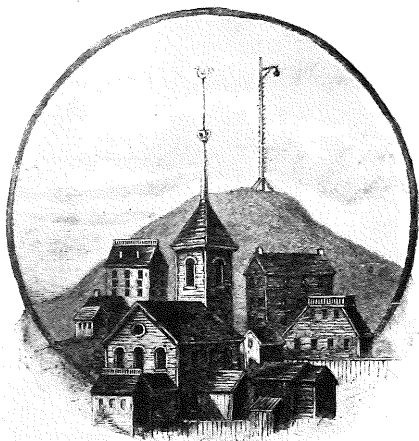


1. Boston 200, *Boston: The Official Bicentennial Guidebook* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), pp. 159-70.

## Setting The Scene

From its foundation in 1630 until early in the eighteenth century, Boston grew rapidly. Its growth, however, was confined mainly to the east coast of the Shawmut Peninsula, east of the present line of Washington Street. As the waterfront areas became characteristic of an expanding seaport, the western half of the peninsula – including the Common and the “Trimountain,” as it was called – remained rural and sparsely settled.

This “Trimountain,” from which Tremont Street takes its name, was a long ridge with three peaks, which ran east to west across the western half of the Shawmut Peninsula. All three peaks were much higher and more prominent than they are today. They were called, from east to west, Cotton (or Pemberton) Hill, Beacon Hill, and Mount Vernon. Cotton Hill was divided from Beacon Hill where Bowdoin Street now lies; Beacon Hill was separated from Mount Vernon along the present line of Joy Street. The central prominence was named for the beacon which had stood upon it since 1635 to warn the colonists of impending invasion.



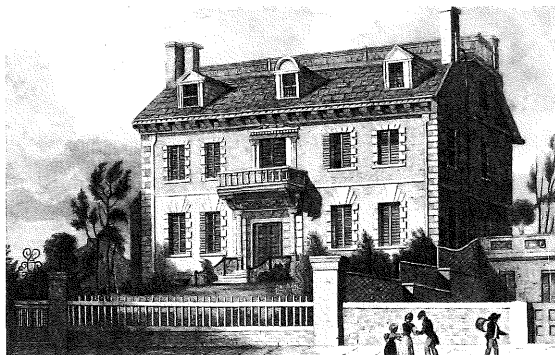
*The beacon, 1635-1789.*

The Trimountain formed a “hilly background” behind the town.<sup>2</sup> It served as upland pasture for the town’s cattle, and as a location for the long, narrow wooden sheds known as ropewalks. In them, hemp was twisted into the rope cordage so necessary to a seaport town. Smelling strongly of hot pitch, these ropewalks were relegated in Boston, as in any maritime community, to the outlying districts. Thus, in the seventeenth century, the Trimountain had only a tiny daytime population, almost none of which remained there after nightfall.

2. Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1968), p. 8.

Following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England, the commitment of the English government to colonial commerce grew steadily. Boston's maritime trade burgeoned, and the town's population rose from 7,000 in 1690 to 16,000 in 1740. By 1720, Boston was the largest town in British North America.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the early eighteenth century, the populated area of the city expanded westward, across the present line of Washington Street and toward the Trimountain. By the 1720's, the eastern blocks of Cambridge Street on the northern side of the Trimountain, and of Beacon Street on the south, were built up. Both thoroughfares, however, stopped abruptly at the town's rural outskirts. Beacon Street



*The Hancock House (1737-1863), first of the elegant residences constructed on the Trimountain. It faced Beacon Street from the south slope of Beacon Hill, near the current site of the State House.  
Courtesy of the Boston Athenæum.*

ended at the foot of Beacon Hill, and Cambridge Street terminated in a bowling green near what is today Bowdoin Square. Year by year, though, the increasing population resulted in extension of both streets. By 1733, Cambridge Street had reached the Charles River, while Beacon Street had been pushed west beyond the current site of the State House. The Hancock family constructed an impressive new residence on the Trimountain side of Beacon Street in 1737, just west of the present State House.<sup>4</sup>

Motivated by this extension, and by the possibility of turning their upland pastures to higher profit, many Trimountain landowners began to divide their fields into streets and housing lots, and to put the lots up for sale on the bull market of the 1730's. In 1737, the Tay family laid

3. All population figures are from Whitehill, *Boston*; for the growth of the city, see Bonner's maps (1722-69) and Whitehill's discussions based on them, pp. 22-46.

4. The Hancock house was not demolished until 1863.





The subdividers along Cambridge Street, however, were caught in an economic squeeze. From 1740 on, Boston's share of the colonial trade began to slip rapidly; by the 1750's, it was only the third largest port - and city - in the colonies, behind Philadelphia and New York. The developers of the 1730's had expected that Boston's population would continue to increase, but between 1740 and 1760 it actually fell by a thousand souls. The real estate market collapsed, and Trimountain land remained low in value.

Because of the deflated real estate values, the building of ropewalks proliferated between 1740 and 1790. One of these occupied the present site of the Donahue Building. Next to this ropewalk, the owner, Matthew Ridgeway, laid out Ridgeway Lane in 1769. Three other ropewalks lay west of Hancock Street, just north of present-day Pinckney Street, and Myrtle Street was constructed in the 1750's to allow access to them. Still another stretched down the east side of Hancock Street, south of what is today Derne Street.

While most of the remaining land continued to be used for pasture, one enterprising fellow, Thomas Hodson, in 1764 began to chop up his worthless subdivision on the south side of Derne Street for gravel and fill. Hodson's early assault on Beacon Hill initiated what was to become a common practice in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Of the few lots that were sold, several parcels went to solid families with a spirit of adventure; two of their wooden farmhouses, built in 1787 on Temple Street, were long the oldest surviving structures on Beacon Hill.<sup>8</sup> Toward the Charles River, however, Trimountain lots were purchased by "a mixed and more or less questionable sort of people": freed blacks, barbers, coachmen, waiters, musicians, laundresses, seamen, gamblers, tavernkeepers,

7. Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, p. 58; Thwing, *Crooked and Narrow Streets*, pp. 210-11. On this and the preceding lot information, Chamberlain is an invaluable source; on street names, Thwing is good, though not infallible; on Hodson, see Chamberlain, p. 31.

8. The farm houses, located at 44 and 46 Temple Street, were demolished in 1952; see Boston Historic Conservation Committee (W.M. Whitehill, Chairman), *Beacon Hill: the North Slope* (Boston: By the Committee, 1963), pp.11-12, and Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, pp. 236-39.

pimps, and harlots.<sup>9</sup> The last-named plied their trade on the slopes of what is now decorously known as Mount Vernon – a bowdlerized version of the original name, Mount Whoredom.

The slump of the mid-eighteenth century left Boston with a stable population and a stagnant economy, in which artisans and merchants were concerned mainly with meeting local demand. The impact of this recession kept the city from expanding its geographical limits of 1740. In the mid-eighteenth century, compared to New York, Boston was a “small town”; it was a city built, in contrast



*The eighteenth-century farmhouses which stood at 44 and 46 Temple Street from 1787 until 1952.*

to other leading cities in the colonies, mainly of wood, not brick.<sup>10</sup> Despite the great expectations of the landowners, the Trimountain remained undeveloped. Most of it, especially the Beacon Hill area, retained its rural aspect until the end of the century. Throughout this period, the rocky ridge was popularly considered to be either a “torrent of vice” or a backwater, depending on the viewpoint.<sup>11</sup>

## Brahmins

After the end of the Revolution, however, there was an increase in commercial activity. Encouraged by new opportunities and enterprises, and by the fortunes to be made from them, more people came to Boston. In the forty years following the Revolution, the city’s population more

9. Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, p. 215.

10. Eliza Susan Morton (later Mrs. Josiah Quincy), 1795, quoted in Whitehill, *Boston*, p. 52.

11. Thomas Bulfinch, 1815, quoted in Whitehill, *Boston*, p. 70.

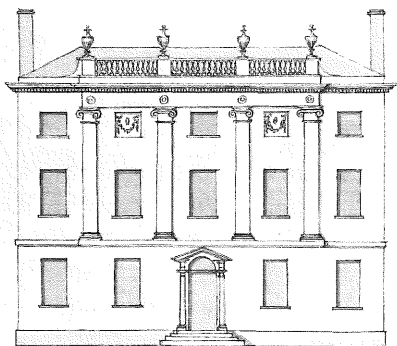
than tripled, from 18,000 in 1790 to 60,000 in 1825. The geographical expansion that had marked the early years of the eighteenth century resumed in the early years of the nineteenth. Property on the Trimountain, off both Cambridge Street to the north and Beacon Street to the south, reverted to pre-slump values, which continued to rise. For those who were tired of the crowded old city east of Washington Street, and could afford the move, the slopes of the Trimountain offered rural living that was convenient to town.

In 1793 the completion of the West Boston Bridge, from the end of Cambridge Street across the Charles River to Cambridge, made Cambridge Street the most direct route to Harvard College and the west.<sup>12</sup> Well-to-do merchant families began to regard the open land along the Cambridge Street extension with favor. The young architect Charles Bulfinch (whose family had lived since 1724 in

the outlying area of Cambridge Street, later known as Bowdoin Square) provided prosperous Bostonians with brick houses worthy of New York, Philadelphia, or even London. Beginning in the early 1790's, Bulfinch, followed by a number of other architects, built a series of fine homes

along Cambridge Street. The most notable Bulfinch creations were the first Harrison Gray Otis

house (1796) across from the Temple-Hancock block, and the Joseph Coolidge mansion (1792) between Temple and Bowdoin Streets, with gardens running up the east side of Temple Street. The old West Church, erected on Cambridge Street in 1737, was elegantly rebuilt in 1806 by Asher Benjamin; and construction of Massachusetts



*The Coolidge mansion was built by Thomas Bulfinch in 1792, on the block of Cambridge Street between Temple and Bowdoin Streets. The Coolidge gardens extended along the east side of Temple Street.*

*Courtesy of the Boston Athenaeum.*

12. Today, the Longfellow Bridge occupies the former site of the West Boston Bridge.

General Hospital was begun in 1817, from a design by Bulfinch.<sup>13</sup>

While Bulfinch and his patrons were building up Cambridge Street, the Massachusetts General Court made a decision which added greater incentive, and value, to that development. In the early 1790's, the legislators of the Commonwealth approved a plan to move the State House out of downtown Boston and to the still relatively inexpensive rural land on the Trimountain. They purchased a site for the new State House from the Hancock estate on Beacon Hill, not far from the former location of the beacon. Work on the building was begun in 1795 and completed by 1798.

Even before work had begun, however, a well-informed group of real estate speculators, calling themselves the Mount Vernon Proprietors, was buying up the land which abutted the State House site on the Beacon Street side of the Trimountain. They acquired for development purposes the entire south slope of Mount Vernon, and what remained of the south slope of Beacon Hill. Streets and lots were laid out along the previously untouched slope; these included the present Mount Vernon and Pinckney Streets. In the process, the crest of Mount Vernon was shorn of about sixty feet of earth.

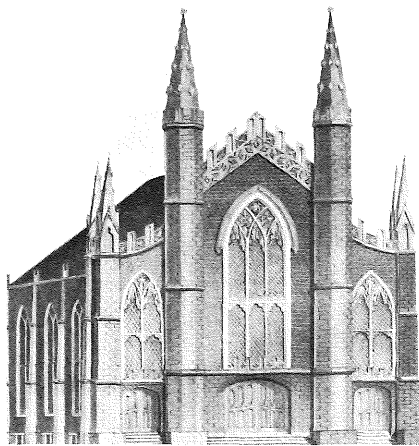
By 1800, the attraction of the new State House resulted in Bulfinch's receiving a number of commissions to build along the south slope; the most influential of these was a move by the Harrison Gray Otis family to the new development in 1800. The area opened by the Mount Vernon Proprietors proved attractive to well-to-do Boston families for the next forty years, and new building along both the Cambridge Street and Beacon Street slopes proceeded apace.

The building boom on the Trimountain offered opportunities to the middle and artisan classes as well as to the affluent. Some successful builders - artisans as well as

13. The Bulfinch Building at Massachusetts General Hospital still stands: there, in an amphitheater known today as the Ether Dome, the first public demonstration of the use of ether in a surgical operation was performed on October 16, 1846.

architects - used their profits to buy land in the West End (the area north of Cambridge Street) and on the north slope of the Trimountain, adjacent to the Mount Vernon Proprietors' tract.<sup>14</sup> There they constructed sturdy houses, most in wood, a few in brick or stone. On Temple, Hancock, and other north slope streets, successful craftsmen lived side by side with the professional and commercial classes. All of them were drawn by the lure of new housing, more open land, and a quieter residential neighborhood than that which they had left.

The once rural slopes of Beacon Hill were steadily built up: first the less fashionable north, then the south. They were "tolerably, but not densely" inhabited in 1814; but, within thirty years, settlement was thick, with vacant land in short supply.<sup>15</sup> By the 1820's, the growing pressure of a "respectable" population had forced the city to clean up the prostitution on the isolated northwest slope of



*Grace Church (later the First Methodist Church), which occupied the present site of the Donahue Building from 1835 until 1965. Courtesy of the Boston Athenaeum.*

"Mount Whoredom." Grace Episcopal Church (later the First Methodist Church), built in the fashionable Gothic Revival style, was opened on Temple Street in 1835 to serve a genteel Beacon Hill and West End congregation. The Church of the Advent, also Episcopal, was established in the West End in 1844; it moved to near Bowdoin Square in 1847 in order to bring the religious principles of the Oxford Movement to the same socially exclusive constituency addressed by Grace Church. The Trinitarian

Congregationalist Church was also drawn to the Northeast Slope by the increasing number of "proper" inhabitants. Since 1809, the Park Street Church had been the

14. Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, p. 216; Whitehill, *Boston*, provides valuable information on the shearing of the peaks.

15. Boston Historic Conservation Committee (henceforth B.H.C.C.), *North Slope*, p. 4.

nearest Trinitarian rival to the Unitarian Congregationalists in the West Church. However, in 1831, under the charge of Lyman Beecher, the Trinitarians opened the building on Bowdoin Street which now houses the Church of St. John the Evangelist.<sup>16</sup> During his brief pastorate there, Beecher lived on Temple Street, in one of the eighteenth-century farmhouses referred to earlier. In this house – located in what is now the St. John's Church parking lot – the Reverend Mr. Beecher received regular letters and visits from his illustrious children, Harriet (author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) and Henry Ward Beecher. Nearby, at 20 Hancock Street, lived Senator Charles Sumner; like the Beechers, he was noted for his anti-slavery activities.

Several other anti-slavery luminaries also lived in the neighborhood: Julia Ward Howe, at 32 Mount Vernon Street; and Bronson Alcott, with his daughter Louisa May (author of *Little Women*), at 20 Pinckney Street. More perplexing in his attitudes, but still a key player in the anti-slavery drama, was Daniel Webster, whose home was at 57 Mount Vernon Street. The Northeast Slope was a hot-bed of abolitionist activity, containing a strong black community which dated from the eighteenth century. The city's first black school was built in the 1830's on Joy Street, and several Underground Railroad "stations" were to be found in the immediate area. In Smith Court, off Joy Street, stands the African Meeting House, built in 1806 and now the Museum of Afro-American History. Here William Lloyd Garrison held the first meeting of the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832<sup>17</sup>

The last beacon had been blown down in 1789; it was replaced the following year by a Bulfinch monument to the heroes of the Revolution. But in response to the grow-

16. Another aspect of the neighborhood's movement toward respectability was the rebuilding of the Athenaeum (founded 1807) in 1847-49 at 10½ Beacon Street. On the Northeast Slope churches and their religious rivalries, see the chapters on Boston's religious communities in the nineteenth century in Volume III of Justin Winsor, ed., *The Memorial History of Boston*, 4 volumes (Boston: James P. Osgood, 1881); on the Bowdoin Street Church, see Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, 2 volumes, ed. Barbara M. Cross (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1961), Volume II, pp. 171-84, and A. McVoy McIntyre, *Beacon Hill: A Walking Tour* (Boston: Beacon Hill Civic Association, 1975), p. 107.

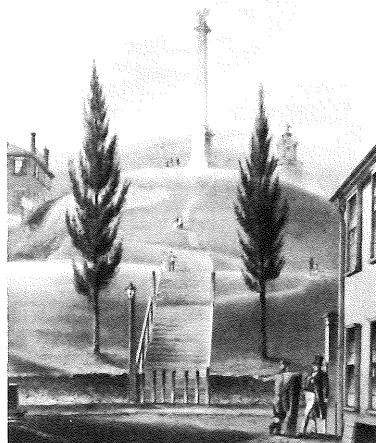
17. On the activities of the abolitionist party, see the chapter in Volume III of Winsor, ed., *Memorial History*; and on their residences, see Boston 200, *Bicentennial Guidebook*, pp. 164-70.

ing demand for space on the Trimountain, Bulfinch's monument at the top of Beacon Hill was torn down in 1811. The land on which it stood was sold, and the wooden stairs leading up to the former monument site from the top of Temple Street were dismantled. The crest of Beacon Hill was lowered some sixty feet to make it more suitable for building; the removed earth was used to fill the Mill Pond for land development, just as the top of Mount Vernon had previously been used to fill the Charles riverfront.

In 1820, Temple Street was extended across Derne Street. After crossing Derne, Temple Street continued straight up and over the lowered top of Beacon Hill, to an intersection with Mount Vernon Street. The first Boston English High School was built on the west side of the Temple Street extension in 1820, facing Derne Street.

Pemberton Hill, the only remaining peak of the Trimountain, was leveled in 1835, partly to fill the land where North Station now stands and partly to make way for a block-development of the area where the peak had stood. It was at the time the sole surviving "unimproved" district of the Trimountain. However, within a decade, Pemberton Square had been built on the site, and Ashburton Place had been cut through to connect it with Bowdoin Street.

The spacious grounds of the early homes gave way, as time went by, to solid blocks of brick row houses. Such buildings came to characterize growing areas of Beacon Hill, Mount Vernon, and Pemberton Hill. The increased demand for Beacon Hill land contributed, in 1843, to breaking up the grounds of the old Coolidge mansion at the northern end of Temple Street. In that location, there

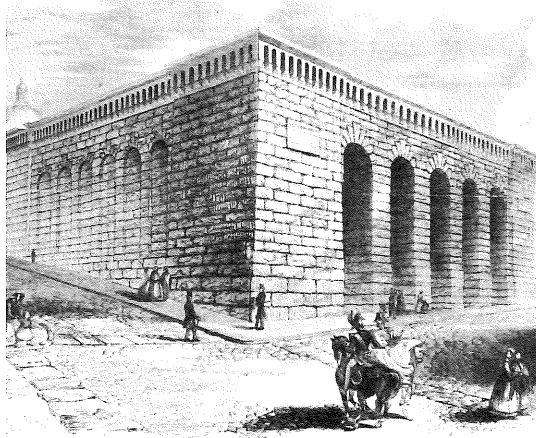


*The Bulfinch monument on the former site of the beacon, and the wooden stairs leading up to it, in 1811, just before both were torn down in the leveling of Beacon Hill for real estate development. The view is from the top of Temple Street. Courtesy of the Boston Athenaeum.*

was erected on the east side of Temple Street a block of brick row houses which still stands.<sup>18</sup>

## Change

Temple Street was, like most of Beacon Hill, still part of the most fashionable neighborhood in Boston in the 1840's. Nonetheless, residents were becoming discontented with the increasingly cramped surroundings. Many old families were also dismayed when, late in the decade, the city began work on a cavernous granite reservoir atop Beacon Hill, west of the Temple Street extension. And from the 1850's on, increasing commercial use of Cambridge Street brought more noise and bustle – along with an unwanted social element, the tradesman – to an already crowded district. Faced with all this, many unhappy inhabitants of Beacon Hill chose to move into more spacious homes in newly opened areas: the Back Bay for the very well-off, the South End for those of more moderate means.<sup>19</sup>



*The Beacon Hill Reservoir, 1846-1885. It was situated where the north wing of the State House now stands. Courtesy of the Boston Athenaeum.*

Increased crowding on Beacon Hill was no figment of nostalgic imaginations. Boston's population had grown from the 60,000 of 1825 to 135,000 in 1850; by 1875, the number of inhabitants was 340,000, six times what it had been a half-century earlier. Much of this increase was caused by large, then tidal, waves of immigration: from

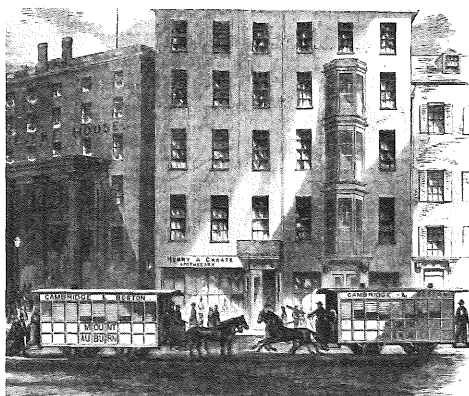
18. B.H.C.C., *North Slope*, pp. 4, 12; Whitehill, *Boston*, pp. 110-11; on the extension of Temple Street, see Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, p. 28.

19. Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants 1790-1880*, revised and enlarged edition (New York: Atheneum, 1977), pp. 94-98.



Ireland in the 1840's and 1850's; from Eastern Europe (primarily Polish and Russian Jews) during the '70's and '80's; and from Italy at the century's end.

These immigrants were first confined to the Fort Hill and North End areas. Street railways, however, began operating in Boston in 1855; and as the railway network expanded, so did the possibilities which it opened to Boston's immigrants. Access to this network would allow many members of immigrant families to travel quickly and inexpensively to places of employment far beyond their previous range. Several lines ran through the West End, including one along Cambridge Street; Bowdoin Square was the terminus for the Cambridge Street line, and a number of others terminated at Scollay Square.



*The street railway (horse car) line which ran from Bowdoin Square to Cambridge along Cambridge Street. This view was taken in Bowdoin Square in 1856. Courtesy of the Boston Athenaeum.*

From 1860 on, one ethnic group after another surged out of its original enclaves and into the West End. Some members of each group even settled on the north slope of Beacon Hill. A few of the new residents sought an outlet for their hard-earned capital; many wanted better housing; but most came in search of convenient and economical public transportation. Whatever the reasons for it, however, the influx of these "new" people helped to encourage the flight of Trimountain families to the developing neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city.<sup>20</sup>

For the same reasons that were causing the old residents to leave, newly affluent and socially ambitious families chose not to move to Beacon Hill. Consequently, rents

20. Peter Roger Knights, *The Plain People of Boston 1830-60* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Wisconsin, 1969), p. 59; on the Beacon Hill Reservoir, see Carl Seaburg, *Boston Observed* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 293-94, and Winsor, ed., *Memorial History*, Vol. IV, p. 483; on both the reservoir and the earlier discussion of ropewalks, see McIntyre, *Beacon Hill*, pp. 105-06.

and property values on the Trimountain began to fall. Speculators, or less socially acceptable families, took advantage of the situation; and their presence in increasing numbers drove other old families to depart. As this exodus increased, many who provided services for the well-to-do also decided to move; thus the neighborhood was opened to a new population and a changing economy.

Throughout the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the Temple Street area retained a mixed, if changing, population. A number of conservative families, perhaps heartened by the close proximity of the State House and by the separation from the North End, remained in the area to stem the encroachment of the boardinghouse, the speculator, and the small merchant. Such resistance continued far longer, and was more effective, in this district than in any neighborhood of the West End.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a changing population, demanding low-priced apartments, brought with it a new building boom. Unlike the



*The Northeast Slope as an immigrant neighborhood: These are the buildings located at the corner of Temple and Derne Streets in 1920, just before their demolition to make room for the Archer Building.*

construction spurt of the early nineteenth century, however, this boom produced mainly apartment houses; indeed, it produced the majority of the tenements which are today so widespread on the Cambridge Street side of the Trimountain. The continuing resistance of the Temple Street area to this trend is evidenced by the fact that, of all the north slope streets, Temple, Hancock, and Bowdoin have the fewest of these tenement houses.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, during the last quarter of the nineteenth cen-

21. B.H.C.C., *North Slope*, p. 5; on what follows (including the store fronts), see *North Slope*, p. 12.

tury and the first quarter of the twentieth, the neighborhood was clearly in transition from one-family residences to lodging houses, tenements, and small retail businesses.

The change from an upper middle to a lower middle class neighborhood became more evident with each passing year. A number of houses on Temple Street had store fronts added to them. Many homes fell into decay, either through their owners' neglect or despite their efforts. Grace Episcopal Church on Temple Street was abandoned to the Methodists in 1864. In 1863, the Bowdoin Street Church shut its doors. Into that deserted Trinitarian Congregationalist structure, the Episcopal Church of the Advent moved, for temporary refuge from the growing congestion and hurly-burly of the Bowdoin Square area. By 1868, however, construction had begun on a new building for the Advent congregation on Brimmer Street, well away from the West End. With the completion of the new structure in 1883, the Bowdoin Street Church renounced its pretensions to social and religious fashionability. It remained in Anglo-Catholic hands, but was transformed into a mission church for the English-based Cowley Fathers, who still occupy the premises. Finally, in 1892, the old West Church (Unitarian Congregationalist) closed, for lack of a congregation.<sup>22</sup>



*The Corner of Temple and Derne Streets, where the Archer Building now stands, in 1898. The view is from the newly-built stone stairs to the State House grounds. The spires of the First Methodist Church (formerly Grace Church) can be seen in the background.*

22. During this same period, however, a Catholic Church (St. Joseph's, opened 1862) was constructed in the West End near Cambridge Street. The congregation, drawn from the new Irish and, later, Italian residents, increased steadily throughout the last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. St. Joseph's Church stands today, immediately behind Charles River Plaza, having survived the destruction of the West End in the early 1960's.

In 1888, the entire upper part of Temple Street, above Derne, was cleared; it was then incorporated into the State House grounds for the building of an Annex, the foundation stone of which was supplied by the Beacon Hill Reservoir. A stone staircase, still traversed daily by Suffolk students, was built to give access to the new State House grounds from what was left of Temple Street. A replica of Bulfinch's 1790 monument was erected on the new grounds in 1898. The walkway at the top of the newly-built stone staircase from Temple Street cut through the exact location of Bulfinch's original monument, which had been set up where the old beacon had once stood. Rather than move the sidewalk or the stairs, it was decided to place the new monument slightly to the east of the original, where it now stands. At its erection, the monument adorned a park; today, it is defaced by a parking lot.<sup>23</sup>

## Law School

The Northeast Slope in the early twentieth century was in every sense a mixed neighborhood. It had close ties to the West End, that legendary settling basin of nationalities left by the successive crests of immigrant floods out of the North End. Martin Lomasney, the greatest of the ward bosses, ran the West End, and at his side James Michael Curley learned the political trade.<sup>24</sup>

On the edge of this ethnic tidal basin, and touched only by the highest tides of immigration, lay the Temple Street (Northeast Slope) area. Near to the West End, it was also an easy walk from the legal and political centers of Boston and Massachusetts. The expanded State House, the new Suffolk County Court House in Pemberton Square, and the City Hall on School Street were all close by. Although many daytime occupants of this governmental and judicial center had withdrawn to the Back

23. The monument discussion is based on Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, p. 29. The replacement of the monument had been voted in 1865, but was not carried out until 1898; the new monument incorporated Bulfinch's original eagle and tablets, which had been stored in a State House garret since the removal of the first monument in 1811.

24. Boston 200, *Bicentennial Guidebook*, pp. 32-35.

Bay by 1900, a few still inhabited Beacon Hill. Most of these, it is true, lived in the Mount Vernon Proprietors' Development on the south slope, but a few hardy outcroppings of the political stratum had escaped erosion by the tides of immigration on the Northeast Slope. All around them, however, property values were falling, and the neighborhood was filling with people who had fled European shores in search of the American dream.

Concern about how that dream could be realized was on the minds of many Americans. The turn of the twentieth century saw the inauguration of the "Progressive Era." The "Progressives" were a varied collection of reformers with numerous foci for their reformist activities; they seemed, however, to hold one belief in common. They saw themselves as "true" Americans, ardent disciples of the gospel of hard work and self-help, who were caught between two very dangerous forces. One was the flood of immigrants coming to these shores, with unrealistic expectations of success in the New World, but with very little of the training or skills needed to function in American society. The other was what the Progressives saw as the sinister rich: economic, political, and social monopolists who were organizing to exclude new entrants from their ranks, and conspiring against freedom of competition and equality of opportunity in American life.

Ignorant and frustrated immigrants, the Progressives warned, could easily be made dupes, either by socialist demagogues or by monopolistic interests. In both cases, the "true" Americans would be the real victims. As a preventative, the Progressives aimed to educate the immigrants. This would enable many of the new arrivals to understand the basic values of American life, and would provide them with skills that might allow some of them to get ahead. Immigrant families would thus have it demonstrated to them that the self-help ethic they were being asked to accept was based on fact. The Progressives believed that once acculturated in this manner, the immigrants would naturally turn against both socialists and monopolists; they could then be readily enlisted under the Progressive banner and the leadership of the "true" Americans.

Gleason Archer, a law student at Boston University in 1905, was much influenced by this Progressive strain in American thought. He came from a Maine Yankee family, and while still in law school he began to offer tutoring in law to men from immigrant families. Upon his graduation and admission to the Bar in 1906, Archer opened an evening law school at his home in Roxbury to "serve ambitious young men who are obliged to work for a living while studying law."<sup>25</sup> But if Archer's school was to succeed, a new location was necessary which would suit both his purpose and his constituency.

In 1907, the Suffolk School of Law, as Archer called it, was moved to a neighborhood perfectly adapted to its aims and prospective students, a setting which has played a key role in its continuing growth.<sup>26</sup> Close on one side were the legal and political centers for the state and city; close on another was the West End, a key concentration point of Archer's immigrant constituency; between the two lay an area easily accessible from the trolley termini at Scollay Square and Park Street, or from North Station. Here, in border territory – an area of strategic location, but of low rents and property values – Archer chose to locate his school

A coalition of educational vested interests ridiculed the Law School, and steadily opposed its growth. Progressive that he was, Archer had expected such "sinister" opposition, and he denounced it as "the Educational Octopus," adapting his term from Frank Norris's anti-monopolistic Progressive novel of 1901.<sup>27</sup> In spite of the "Octopus," the

25. Suffolk Law School *Bulletin*, 1936, p.11

26. The school had been Archer's Evening Law School in 1906-07; but from the time it became clear that a move into downtown Boston would be necessary, Archer had begun to cast about for a new name. He rejected "Boston Law School" as being too easily confused with Boston University Law School; but he gave active consideration to a number of other names such as Bay State, Massachusetts, Atlantic, New England, and Suffolk. Good Yankee and "true" (Anglo-Saxon) American that he was, Archer chose Suffolk as the "most appropriate of all." "To be sure," he said, "it was the name of a county in Massachusetts, but it was also an old English name derived from the more ancient 'South-folk.'" It was also "alliterative, clear cut, and sonorous." From the summer of 1907 on, Archer's Evening Law School became the Suffolk School of Law. Gleason L. Archer, *Building A School* (Boston: By the Author, 1919), p. 59.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Suffolk School of Law expanded rapidly, outgrowing first one home and then another.

Archer was careful, however, to keep each successive location for his school within the border zone. The first in-town location for the School had been in Archer's law offices at 53 Tremont Street, the present site of the Beacon Hill Theater. Classes were held there from 1907 until 1909, when Archer moved them to the Tremont Temple. In 1914, rising registrations necessitated a third relocation. Although he would have preferred Pemberton Square, in the shadow of the Suffolk County Court House, Archer had to content himself with a building at 45 Mount Vernon Street, near the Julia Ward Howe and Daniel Webster homes. Archer's law classes remained at 45 Mount Vernon Street - today the home of Suffolk University's College of Business Administration - until 1921; but, once again, despite his having built an Annex in 1915, the demand for the educational services which he offered outgrew the space available.

Under the pressure of increasing enrollments after World War I, the Suffolk Law School (so renamed in 1914, when it was chartered to grant degrees) was forced to remove to larger quarters; it was transferred to the current site of the Archer Building, on the corner of Derne and Temple Streets. Archer particularly liked the situation, immediately behind the State House, just on the fringe of the West End, and within walking distance of the inexpensive public transportation which carried the members of many immigrant families to and from the nearer suburbs. Here, in a location perfectly suited to its mission, he built a permanent home for his school.

The neighborhood in which Archer chose to build was, as we have seen, a mixture of many elements. By 1920, the immigrant population had come to outnumber the "native" group even on the Northeast Slope. Predominant among the ethnic groups in the Temple Street area were Eastern European Jews, with an admixture of Italians, Poles, and Irish. The black population had virtually deserted the Northeast Slope for the South End by this time;

the African Meeting House in Smith Court had been converted into a synagogue.

In addition to the immigrant communities with their tenement housing and small storefronts, however, there existed another element: a substantial population of law students and law clerks inhabited the Northeast Slope during the early part of the twentieth century. Students from the nearby law offices, and from several of the new law schools, rented rooms on Beacon Hill. Clerks and officials from the Suffolk County Court House, as well as young lawyers with practices recently opened in the area, did likewise.

The new Court House had been opened in 1893 in Pemberton Square. Around it clustered law offices; Tremont and State Streets were particularly favored locations. Boston's commercial expansion during the nineteenth century had created opportunities in business and government for men with general legal knowledge, as well as for practicing attorneys. The traditional preparation for a law career was for the aspirant to apprentice himself in the office of an established firm.

By 1870, increased demand, as well as the growing extent and specialization of legal knowledge, was rendering the old system inadequate. It still functioned in Gleason Archer's time, but with each year it required a larger supplement from newly-founded law schools. These new schools offered formal classes to much larger groups than could ever be accommodated to read law at firms, and by 1920 they were rapidly superseding the old system.

Harvard Law School was the only such institution in the Boston area from its foundation in 1817 until 1872, when the Boston University Law School was opened on Beacon Hill. After that time, growing demand made the schools multiply with comparative rapidity. The YMCA (later Northeastern) Law School was founded in 1898; the Suffolk School of Law followed in 1906; and the Portia Law School -- for women -- was established in 1908.<sup>28</sup>



Gleason Archer's law school operated only on a part-time basis. There were no day classes until 1924, and even then the day classes met only several hours a day, three days a week. This schedule made Suffolk an ideal place to study law for working men from the immigrant communities of Boston and the near suburbs: they could usually manage the time necessary for class attendance and for study while retaining full-time jobs.

Since Suffolk had no full-time students until 1943, it required in the earlier period no full-time faculty. Lawyers could be invited to come over from their nearby offices to teach for several hours three times a week. Because of the minimal time and energy required of the faculty, their remuneration could be kept correspondingly small. Thus, tuition could be held down to a cost which the school's immigrant constituency could afford.

Governor Calvin Coolidge laid the cornerstone of what is today the Archer Building, at 20 Derne Street, in 1920, and work on the structure was completed a year later. An Annex was added at 51 Temple Street in 1924; and in the same year Archer had a giant sign - which proclaimed "Suffolk Law School" - placed on top of his new building, as a gesture of defiance against the "Educational Octopus."<sup>29</sup>

## University

In 1927, an Alumni Clubhouse was installed at 73 Hancock Street, where it remained until 1937. A College of Liberal Arts was opened in 1934, and in the following

28. Everett C. Marston, *Origins and Development of Northeastern University* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1961), pp. 1-25; Edward R. Speare, *Interesting Happenings in Boston University's History* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1957), pp. 37-39. While they were both law students at Boston University, Gleason and Hiram Archer shared a room on Myrtle Street. It probably should be mentioned -- if only for the sake of symmetry -- that the Boston College Law School was founded in 1929.

29. The sign remained until 1937, when it was replaced with one which read "Suffolk University." That one stayed in place until 1946. Archer also had a plan in 1920 to pay for the new building partially out of revenues obtained by showing motion pictures in the school auditorium during the day. When that plan proved less lucrative than hoped for, daytime classes were inaugurated in 1924.

year classes were transferred to 59 Hancock Street, on the southwest corner of Hancock and Myrtle Streets. In 1937 the College of Liberal Arts returned to the University (Archer) Building, which had been remodeled and expanded from four to six stories. Meanwhile, a Graduate School of Law, a College of Journalism, and a College of Business Administration had been founded, in 1935, 1936, and 1937, respectively.

The various branches of Archer's school were incorporated as Suffolk University in 1937. The divisions of the new University were established on the model of the Law School; each offered an evening school education to working men (and women, after 1934), especially to first and second generation immigrants. Students from the West End, and from immigrant families in the near suburbs who could now afford to commute to central Boston, formed an ideal constituency for the University. And, with the exception of the war years between 1942 and 1945, growth in all divisions of the University continued steadily, due in large measure to the healthy symbiosis between the University and the community it was designed to serve.

Beginning in the late 1950's that symbiosis was seriously disrupted, as the Boston Redevelopment Authority undertook the West End Renewal Project. This much criticized effort at "urban renewal" destroyed the West End north of Cambridge Street and exiled its population. Soon, all that was left of the West End was a small fringe area on the north slope of Beacon Hill. Almost simultaneously, the B.R.A. began to destroy old Scollay Square, to make room for the new Government Center. The character of the surrounding area was changing rapidly and drastically, and both Suffolk University and the Northeast Slope community were forced to develop plans that would allow them to escape the fate of the neighborhood to which they had been so closely allied.

Especially over the past decade, there has been a growing effort at community cooperation for rehabilitation of the Northeast Slope area. A number of houses on Temple

Street and on adjoining streets have been completely remodeled; the old store fronts have been removed from many buildings; and the old West Church has been restored to religious use. During the same period, Suffolk University has begun to recruit and to attract a more suburban constituency. Much of this constituency is made up of the second and third generations of immigrant families who, through the exertions and good fortune of the first generations, have been able to leave the inner city and the contiguous suburbs for the more middle class suburbs. For the most part, they are no longer people on the outside of the American dream looking in, but people living that dream. As Boston's immigrant families have been assimilated into American life -- often with Suffolk's help -- both the mission of the University and the kind of people it serves are undergoing changes.

Drawing on this new, middle class pool of students, the University has grown extensively over the past ten years. In 1966, the Frank J. Donahue (Law School) Building was constructed at 41 Temple Street, on the site of the old First Methodist Church just north of the original University Building; the Methodists had removed to the West Church in 1962. The new building was named for Judge Donahue, a long-serving Trustee and former Treasurer of the University.

With the transfer of the Law School, the College of Liberal Arts took over most of the old University Building; it was promptly renamed the Archer Building, in honor of the founder and his brother Hiram, a faculty member and Law School trustee from the early history of the institution. The Ridgeway Lane (Student Activities) Building, at 148 Cambridge Street, was added in 1969. In 1972, the College of Business Administration reoccupied the original Beacon Hill location of the Law School at 45-47 Mount Vernon Street, displacing the New England School of Law (formerly the Portia Law School). The current home of the Suffolk Admissions Office, at 56 Temple Street, has been used for University offices since 1971; from 1975 on, most of the University's other administrative departments have been housed at 100 Charles River Plaza.

The John E. Fenton Building, which provides space for much of the College of Liberal Arts, was constructed in 1975 at 32 Derne Street, on the site of the old Wright and Potter printing plant. The new building was named to commemorate Judge Fenton, late Chairman of the Board and fifth President of the University. The Ashburton Place Building (built for the City Club in 1913, and acquired by the University from the United Way of Massachusetts Bay in 1978) is a twelve-story structure in the shadow of the Suffolk County Court House, very near the Pemberton Square site Archer had wanted for his law school in 1914. This newest addition represents the latest, and perhaps most ambitious, effort of the University to adapt itself to its changing environment and mission. During this decade of growth, Suffolk has brought a new student element into a neighborhood already characterized by its heterogeneity, with the usual problems and rewards of adjustment on both sides.

So extensive has been the expansion of the University over this period, that it has at times been viewed as a rival, and not as a partner in development, by the surrounding Northeast Slope community. Much has recently been done, however, to restore the traditional cooperation between the University and other residents of the neighborhood. University facilities and classes, for example, have been made accessible to many local inhabitants, and a close working relationship has been established with the Museum of Afro-American History. But the most successful and promising example of cooperation between the University and the community is the creation of the Temple Plaza, which was opened in 1977. This pedestrian street and mall runs the length of Temple Street, providing residents of the area with an urban park, and the University with its first semblance of an outdoor campus. Inclusion in the Beacon Hill Historic District rapidly followed the opening of the Temple Plaza; this recognition as a historical landmark is doubly important, in that it will protect the Temple Street area from the kind of "renewal" that destroyed the West End north of Cambridge Street – a fate long feared by Northeast Slope community organizers.<sup>30</sup>

These achievements stand as models both of neighborhood self-help in urban regeneration, and of enlightened cooperation between town and gown. They bode well for a maintenance of the good relationship between Suffolk University and the surrounding neighborhood, long made possible through the University's pursuit of the mission assigned to it by Gleason Archer: community service.

30. The General Court of Massachusetts created the Historic Beacon Hill District by Chapter 616 of the Acts of 1955, which also set up the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission as a watchdog group for the District. The area included in the Historic District has been expanded several times by acts of the General Court.

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