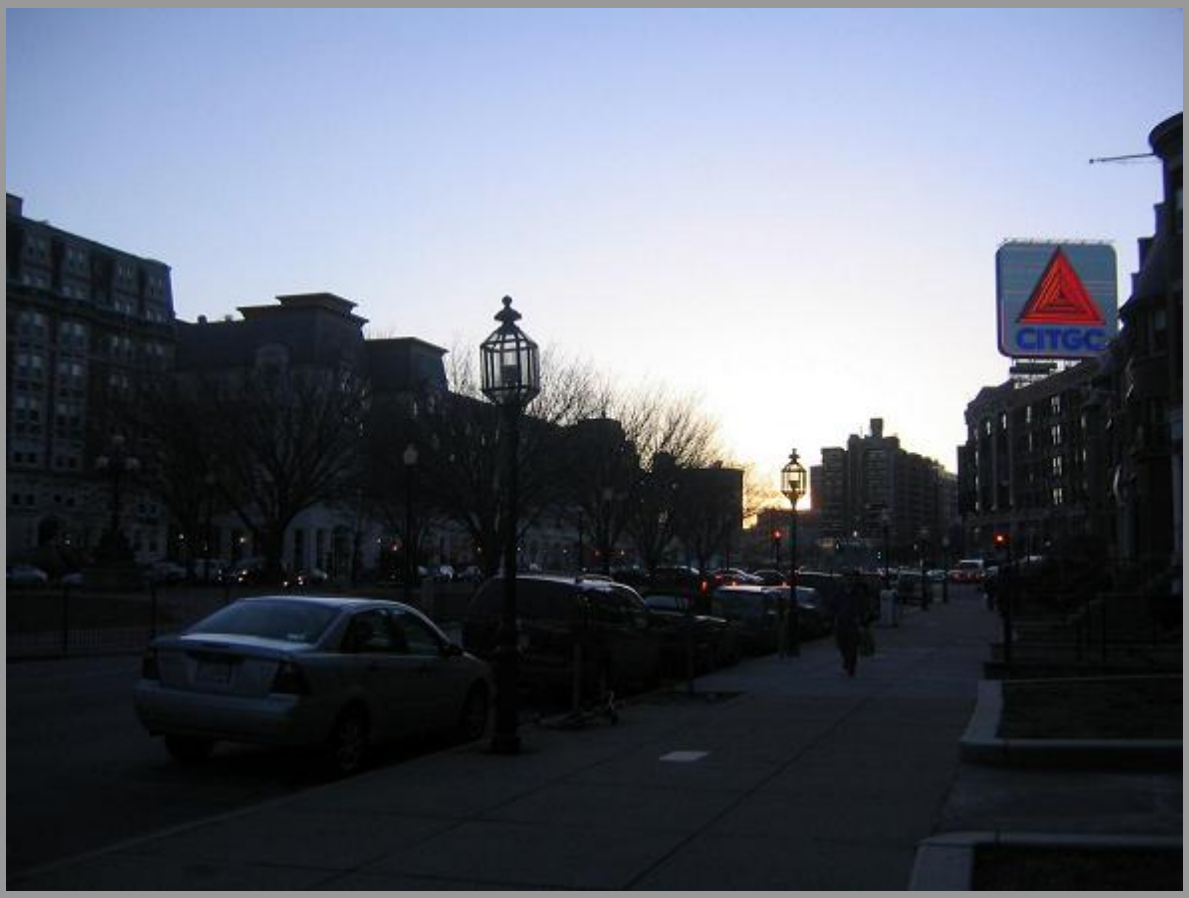
Kenmore Square



the site

natural processes

change over time

past, present, and future

4.211J/11.016J

the once + future city,
spring 2006

Shannon Turner

Shannon Turner

11.016

Prof. Anne Spirn

Assignment 1: Site Selection

Kenmore Square: A Site to be Discovered

As one can see as he or she walks along the freedom trail from Boston Common to the Bunker Hill Memorial, each landmark tells a story of an important event, a significant location, or a person who impacted Boston's growth. One great example of this growth is Quincy Market. In the early 17th century Quincy Market was originally on the shoreline of Boston and acted as a customs house.[1] Today, however, as one walks the freedom trail it's obvious that there have been changes. The Market isn't located on the water anymore and it's easy for tourists to overlook its past importance as a center for trade and culture. When I first visited Boston while choosing a university, I knew of the historical events of Boston, but I was unaware of the immense transformation that has occurred since the city's origins. Since learning about the city I have been amazed by its growth physically, with the help of land filling, and socially, with its varied communities, each with a different story, history, and culture.

The Boston site that I choose to focus on is Kenmore Square. Particularly, I plan to focus on the area outlined in red in Figure 1 and 2 below. The area is bordered on the north be the Charles River, and on the south by Fenway Park. On the east it is enclosed by Charlesgate and on the west by Brookline Avenue and Dartmouth Street, which is the beginning of the Boston University Campus. This area interests me for many reasons. First, I live in the area. I have never taken the time, though, not only to explore it, but also to try to understand its contents and history. I often walk out my door to explore the many other communities of Boston, but I have never really explored my own. Thus, the project is a great opportunity for me to gain insight into an area in which I spend so much time but know only minimally. Second, the area has a lot of diversity: from the residences that border the river, the beginning of the Boston University Campus, and the variety of ground floor restaurants to Fenway Park, and the nightclubs on Lansdowne Street, this small area has many interesting urban uses. Therefore as I focus on observing and researching this area I will gain a broad view of a many-faceted neighborhood, while also gaining an intimate knowledge of so many different urban elements that

exist there. Not only is this an active and diverse area serving multiple purposes, but it also is rich in history. I will learn on a number of levels about the many layers of Kenmore Square and its importance to the city.

There are also many questions that are raised initially about my site. One that I immediately think of is how does the interstate affect the areas on both sides? Do the sides respond differently to the interstate and how does each side respond to the other, if they even relate at all? Another question that I would like to examine is what exactly the composition of the site is. The analysis will require some observation skills to determine the site's overall uses and why they exist. The area has a variety of uses. I am really interested in learning about the form and function of uses. I am also interested in learning about the effects of a sports stadium located in the center of a city. Some other interesting characteristics of the area that inspire examination include Kenmore Square's interesting street pattern which probably relates to the curve in the Charles River and the presence of the Muddy River and the Fens. Also, there has been a lot of construction on Commonwealth Avenue in the last year, which surely has had some effect on the area. Finally, the area seems to have a large amount of bus traffic as well as a T subway stop; thus I would like to see the effects of the transportation system on the site. These are just some initial questions that I have begun to think about. I am sure that some are easily answered, and others will be far more complex requiring much deeper examination. As I focus my site exploration I am excited to learn about an area in Boston so close to me, but in many ways still so distant and unknown.

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[1] Howe, Jeffery, "Boston: History of the Landfills." 1996 <http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/bos_fill2.html>

[2] *Boston, MA* [map]. 2006. Scale undetermined; generated by Shannon Turner; using "Google Earth". (21 February 2006)

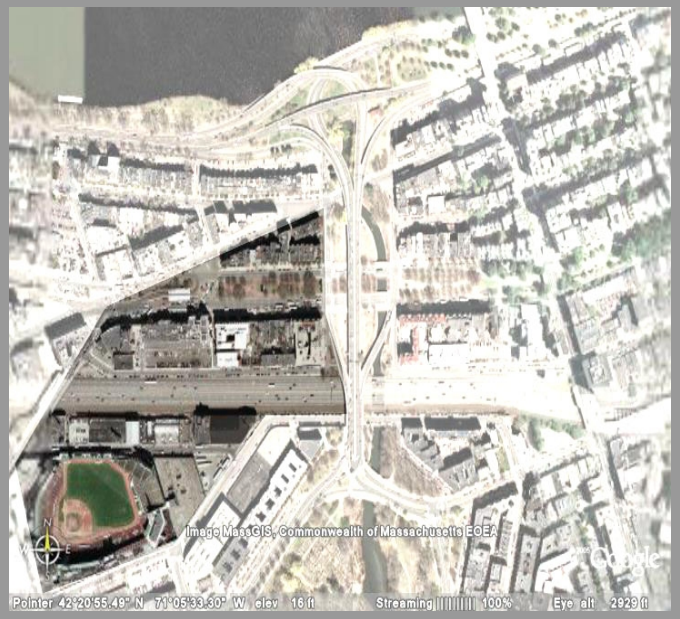

Figure 1: Kenmore Square Site[2]

Shannon Turner

11.016 Assignment 2

Your Site and Natural Process

Professor Anne Spirn

The Evolution of Kenmore Square

The development of Boston into what it is today has a vast history. From the original site, the Shawmut Peninsula, where Boston was founded, to the process of wharfing, where land was filled in between the built wharfs, to the overall filling, Boston has grown hundreds of acres from what it was in 1630. The growth process is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Growth of Boston[1]

From the first assignment of choosing a site, to actually analyzing the area, I have been able to define the sites borders and focus on a specific part of the cities history and natural form. While my site originally spanned approximately 10 blocks, which encompassed much of the center of Kenmore Square (Fig.2), I shifted my focus to the Eastern edge.

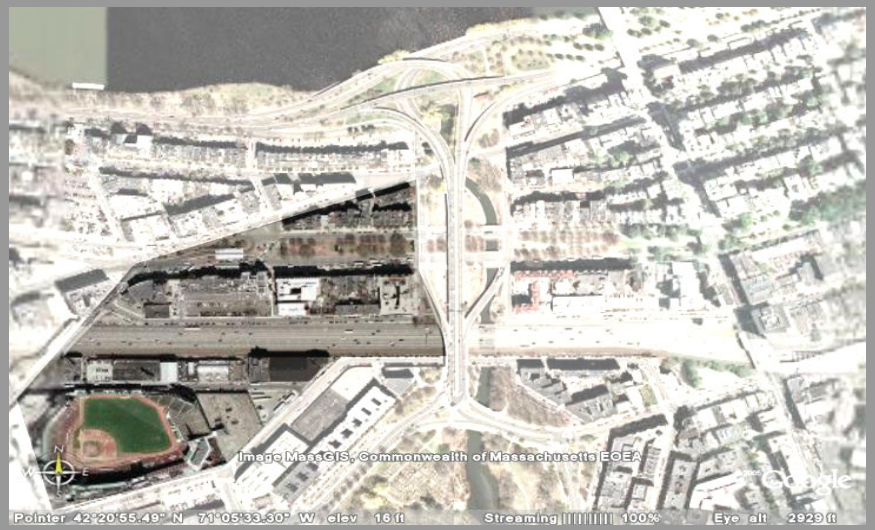

Figure 2: Old Kenmore Site

This is where the Fens starts and marks the beginning of Kenmore Square, and the site continues one block west towards the center of the square (Fig.3).

Figure 3: New Kenmore Site

By adapting the site I was able to gain a better appreciation and insight as to how the area began and how nature is involved in the city and its growth. As growth occurred throughout the years, it affected not only the landmass of Boston, but also its natural environment. As cities grow, buildings and roads are added, and parks and open space are incorporated. The air, water, and earth are all affected, as well as the life of the city's inhabitants. The relationships are apparent in the Kenmore Site.

By examining maps and changes that have transformed Boston, I was able to learn more about the history of how Kenmore Square developed and how it grew into the neighborhood that it is today. Specifically, maps from 1840-1908 helped me to gain insight into the area's development at various stages throughout that time. It's known that the whole area of my site was at one point under water. On the old maps, including an 1872 Prang L. & Co. map of Boston (Fig. 4), it can be seen how the railroad lines crossed the river flats and how the Mill Dam enclosed the area that today houses the Back Bay and Kenmore Square.

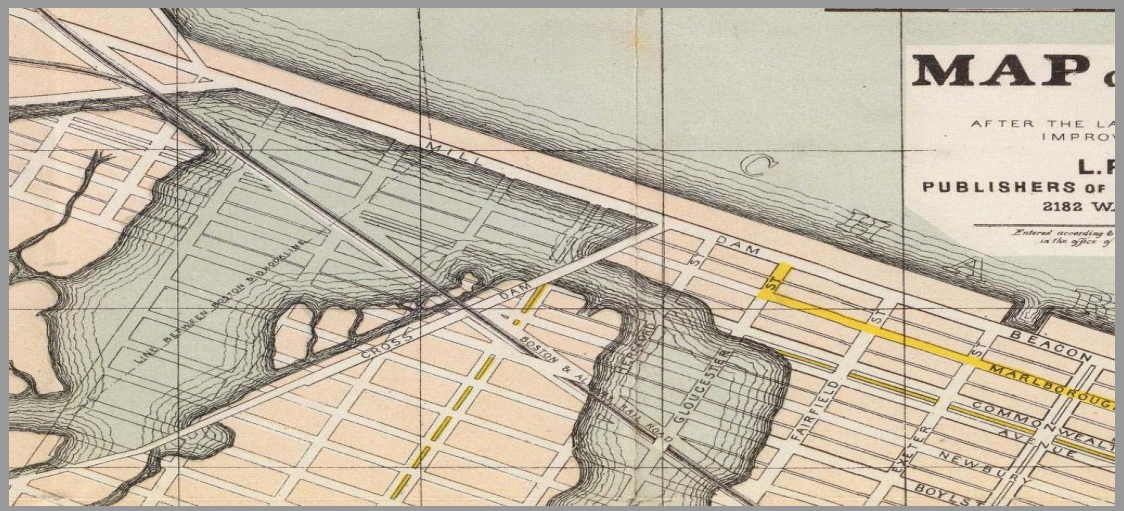

Figure 4: 1872 Prang L. & Co. Map of Boston[2]

The Mill Dam is very important to the growth of the Kenmore area. The Dam enclosed the space from the Public Gardens westward and the flats in the contained area were filled in. This line marks where Beacon Street is today; a main road that crosses through my site and intersects with other main roads right in the heart of the square. The best example

of its development, however, can be seen in the Prang. L. & Co. Pocket map of Boston. This map shows the development and growth occurring around 1872. The map illustrates the Back Bay fully developed, with the streets laid out. It then displays the Kenmore site-- designed, but still not fully filled and under water. The area that looks like the beginning of a new river was later filled in even more to produce what is there today: the Muddy River. Some of the river, though, was kept intact and winds through my site having a major influence on the development of the roads, and nature.

Over the years as the area was filled and adapted, the size of the Muddy River was scaled and manipulated. In the end it was formatted into a much smaller river that stands as the feeding point into The Fens Park. Although it is a very important contributing force to the well-know park space, at the location where it intersects with my site, the river is thoroughly neglected. Near the river there is some slight variation in elevation and slope near the riverbed. It appears as if it's designed to appear as if the river formed naturally and developed the slope. When one looks at the riverbed, though, the most apparent characteristic is the man-made bed out of stone (Fig.5), and that dispels the idea that the river was naturally forming.

Figure 5: Photo (1) of stone-lined river in Kenmore

In contrast, on the rest of the site the land is quite flat. Since the land was developed by humans, and there weren't any natural events or major weather conditions which affect the landscape, the topography is very uneventful.

The next important component of my site that was influenced by the development of the area is the street layout. As the Charles River curves and the Muddy River is introduced, the street layout abruptly changes. To the west of the Muddy River the streets follow the grid-like pattern, but as they cross over the streets collide (Fig 6).

Figure 6: Current Street Map of Kenmore Square

With Beacon Street following the path of the old Mill Dam site and Commonwealth Avenue following the path of the Charles River, the streetscape is greatly influenced by the natural environment. In terms of patterns this is described as a “break” by Grady Clay in Close Up: How to Read an American City. This is where the street direction changes and “it usually occurs…where the original gridiron of one settlement, or one early surveyor, clashes with an adjoining street. From this clash, there usually emerges a series of awkward, irregular, and angular street junctions along the fracture zone” (Clay 42). In some ways it’s difficult to see the beginning of this break because the location where the streets begin to converge is covered by the mass of highway ramps; the final convergence, however, is obvious as it is the center of Kenmore Square: An area marked by the famous neon Citgo sign, a place of life and energy, with many restaurants and shops, as well as the beginning of the Boston University Campus. In a later chapter Clay details this effect. He states, “high prices have always been paid for highly accessible sires, and the junction of two diagonal streets has been exploited for its accessibility for thousands of years” (50). Beacon Street supports much of the traffic coming out from downtown, runs through the whole Back Bay and collides with the streets in Kenmore Square. This is what has helped Kenmore Square evolve into the important junction that it is today. It’s a center of movement and travel with a MBTA stop and numerous bus lines located in the Square.

A final important characteristic that is apparent on most of the old urban maps is the train line that contains my site on the southern border. The Boston and Worcester Rail Road line originated in the downtown area and spanned out through the river flats (Fig. 7).

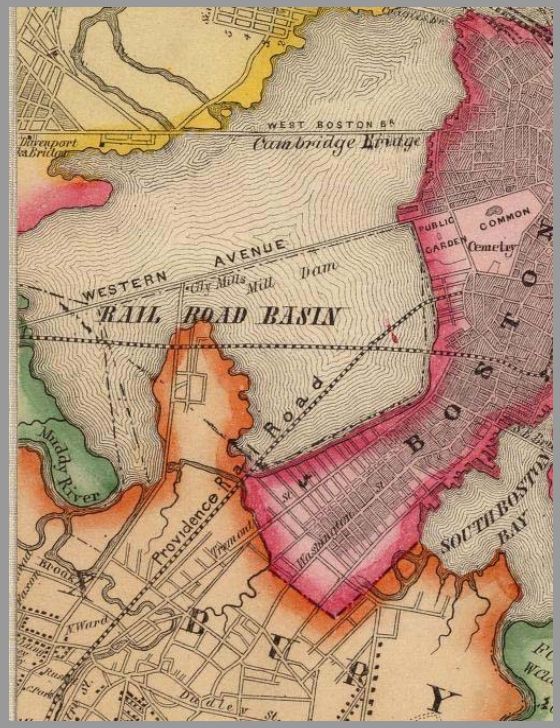

Figure 7: Hopkins 1874 Map of City with Railroad Lines[3]

Today the location of the line remains as an important influence on the area. While the rail line still exists and functions, it isn't as large as it was in the late 1800's. Today on part of the site where the many rail lines once existed, Interstate 90 occupies much of the space. The interstate is a major connector between downtown Boston and the outside suburbs. Having such a major highway cut through the city has affected the development of the surrounding neighborhoods. While Kenmore has its own atmosphere, it doesn't have much relation to the neighborhood on the other side of the highway. The highway truly divides the area. Not only is the highway and train path interesting in how it affects the growth of the neighborhood and its interaction with surrounding areas, but it also demonstrates how Boston has faced the problem of sprawl for some time. From observing the Sanborn Boston maps from 1887, 1897 and 1937, the Kenmore area wasn't developed until much later, after most of downtown Boston and the Back Bay had the housing and streets and built (Fig. 8-10).

Figure 8: 1897 Sanborn Map of Kenmore[4]

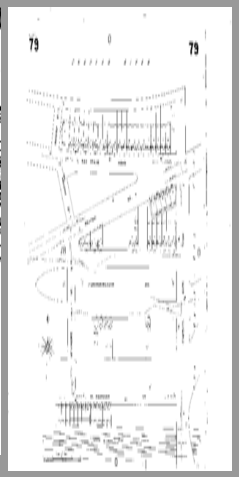

Figure 9: 1897 Sanborn Map detailing development[5]

Figure 10: 1932 Sanborn Map showing more development[6]

On the 1887 map the site isn't even documented, while on the 1897 map where Fenway Park currently sits, it states "This territory not built upon, will be added to Vol. 2 as improved." However, aided by train access the area developed and grew even though it was some distance from downtown. Today that growth further away from the core continues with the help of the interstate. As access increases to outlying areas the people continue to support sprawl. Overall, from analyzing the maps, it's obvious that the filling of the river flats, the old train lines and dam, and the design of The Fens Park all had a vast influence on the layout of my site and all of Kenmore square.

My site didn't have much pre-urban history, because it was developed to create urban space. Thus, the urban influence was always there. However, after recently exploring the site to see what natural factors existed, and how they are affected by the urban environment I was able to compare some of my observations of natural components to the details extracted from the maps. The two main natural influences that I examined were related to the trees and water. I also observed slight effects from the soil and sun.

It's often difficult to observe the natural environment in the winter when there isn't much life around. The winter conditions, however, proved beneficial when I examined the trees. During other times of the years, leaves on the trees and grass surrounding the bottom would have been a distraction. As is stated in James Elkins', How to Use Your Eyes, "it is possible to tell one tree from another in the winter by looking at the bark and the general shape of the tree" (22). The first observation I made was of a street tree on Beacon Street, with its small patch of dirt surrounded by the sea of concrete. At its base I observed an interesting characteristic that I had never noticed before, even though I pass by the tree every day. It appears as if many smaller trees are sprouting out of the base of the tree and growing around it (Fig. 11).

Figure 11: Photo (2) of new trees growing

I am not sure what is causing this, but it demonstrates that the tree isn't struggling to survive since it's so easy for other trees to grow with it. However, I feel there may be some natural process going on of which I am unaware. Another street tree that I observed was on Commonwealth Avenue. The tree was small and with the large full-grown trees of the Commonwealth Park in the background it appeared as if its growth was stunted or it was dying (Fig. 12).

Figure 12: Photo (3) of street tree and park tree

However, after closer observation I determined that it was actually just a young tree that hadn't developed yet, but also may never have the opportunity. As Anne Spirn states in The Granite Garden, "Street trees, therefore, eke out a marginal existence, their roots cramped between building and street foundations, threaded among water, gas, electric, and telephone lines, and encased in soil as dense as infertile concrete" (Spirn 175). She continued that, "Trees are planted in tiny pits. Pavement waterproofs the ground surface and permits neither air nor water to reach tree roots below" (176), which is the exact case for this tree. It'll be interesting to see how it adapts as the season changes and determine if it

will be able to survive. I saw another example of this constriction when observing a tree surrounded by bricks (Fig. 13).

Figure 13: Photo (4) Roots cracking sidewalk

The bricks are cracked because the roots are pushing up on them; they have no room to grow. A final interesting concept that I observed involved large trees planted outside of an apartment building on the corner of Commonwealth Avenue. The trees are beautiful, grand and also healthy. It's apparent that they have been there for a long time, so I wanted to understand why they have survived so successfully. As I analyzed the ground I noticed that under the top layer of mulch there was a plastic covering protecting the tree (Fig. 14).

Figure 14: Photo (5) Plastic protecting tree

This made me believe that the soil had a problem with drainage. If the plastic wasn't there the soil would probably become waterlogged and the trees would have been killed. I learned a lot from this observation about the soil and drainage in the area.

As I continued to examine the environment, the next feature that caught my attention was the large trees in the park surrounding the beginning of the Muddy River. It appeared as if the bark has a condition where it is disintegrating (Fig. 15, 16).

Figure 15: Photo (6) Tree Bark

Figure 16: Photo (7) Tree Bark

All of the large trees in this park have this characteristic; none of the other trees that I observed on my site, though, had problems. Thus I considered a few possible scenarios. One contributing factor could be related to the river that they surround. It's very dirty and polluted and as the water seeps through the soil it could have damaged the neighboring trees. Another cause that was considered is that one of the trees are diseased and passed the disease on to the surrounding trees, causing the disintegration of the bark. A final concept that I considered was poor drainage and lack of sunlight. The site is tucked under the highway overpass so it doesn't get much sunlight, but also the soil might not have a chance to sufficiently dry, thereby causing rotting. As I continued to observe the trees in the park I noticed another interesting sight: Lining the walkway are small baby evergreen trees. Most of these trees, though, were dead. This made me believe that either my assumption about the lack of sunlight, or pollutants in the water and soil was the problem. One interesting sight though, was that while almost all of the trees are dead, there were two that are alive. One had all of its needles and looked healthy. The other was alive, but knocked over (Fig. 17).

Figure 17: Photo (8) Live and dead evergreens lining walkway

There isn't much wind in the area so I think that a human or outside force knocked the tree over. But in terms of explaining why some were dead, and others alive, my best guess was that the two that are alive may have been getting more sunlight than the others, which would also dry the soil out around them and prevent them from drowning. It's still very possible that pollution could be a major contributing factor, though, because the park is enclosed by two major streets and covered by the highway, thus it's almost

impossible for pollutants from traffic to escape the area. As stated in The Granite Garden, “The toxicity of street side soils may not be as contaminated as those of old industrial dumps, but they are far more prevalent. The soil adjacent to a busy city street may contain thirty times the lead of a nonroadside soil in its upper five centimeters” (103).

Finally I observed part of the Commonwealth Avenue Park on my site. As I entered the park I observed all of the nature that it contains, however, one specific natural factor attracted my attention immediately. What looked like twigs on the ground all around the bases of the trees weren’t twigs, but actually their roots protruding through the dirt (Fig. 18, 19).

Figure 18: Photo (9) Exposed Roots

Figure 19: Photo (10) Exposed Roots

I was able to draw some conclusions about this observation. One was that there is a lack of space for the roots to grow underground, thus they are forced upwards and exposed. Another idea I contemplated is that there may be drainage issues and erosion could have removed much of the top soil. I believe that the influence is from lack of space because I noticed a large vent in the middle of the park for the subway below (Fig. 20).

Figure 20: Photo (11) Subway Vent

If the subway is that close to the park then I would guess that there isn’t much depth of soil. My assumptions were supported by a discussion in The Granite Garden which states,

“Trees on a plaza may face even worse conditions than those on streets. Most plazas are not built over soil, but are actually the roofs of basements or subways, and plaza trees are therefore usually planted in pots, either sunken or raised” (178). Another observation that was made in the park is how dense the soil is near the walkways (Fig. 21).

Figure 21: Photo (12) Compacted Soil

It is compacted and wet and had a lot of larger pebbles mixed in; it almost appears as if it is concrete which reminded me of the discussion that we had in class of the Berlin wall and the compacted soil at the Washington monument. I was amazed to later find a description of this case in The Granite Garden: “Not only contamination but compaction of city soils deprives the city of resources. The density of city soils is one of the primary reasons for the demise of trees in city parks and streets, and one of the least recognized” (105). The observations that I noted of the compacted soil around the base of trees in the Commonwealth Park was later supported by another detail in The Granite Garden. It’s stated, “As on Commonwealth Avenue, street trees frequently die from too much water rather than too little. The soil around tree roots can become water logged, a paradox caused by compacted subsoil and modern methods of tree planting” (177). In areas where the sun could come through the trees there was evidence of life and growth in between the cracks of the bricks, while in areas closer to the trees and in the shade there was no apparent life (Fig. 22, 23).

Figure 22: Photo (13) Growth in-between bricks

Figure 23: Photo (14) Lack of Growth

While looking back at the observations that I made on my sight in relation to the trees and soil I was amazed by how much insight I gained. Many of the assumptions that I made were reinforced by statements in The Granite Garden and discussions in class. I also was able to appreciate doing the exploration in winter, as I stumbled upon many situations I wouldn't have discovered otherwise.

The final natural aspect I observed was the beginning of the River in the park. The Muddy River had a major influence on the development of the area, but at my site's location the river is lacking life and energy. It always appears as a polluted puddle in the middle of a maze of highways exchanges and ramps. For this natural component, the season actually made it more difficult to observe its relationship to the area (Fig. 24).

Figure 24: Photo (15) River surrounded by highways

I wasn't able to understand how the river flows and if tides occur because it was frozen and unmoving. I was, however, able to draw an assumption from the layout of the park. The riverbed was lined with stones, which I would guess are there to contain the water and also to prevent erosion of the bed. It was also difficult to observe animal life because the river was frozen and there was no other life around. I was unable to tell if there wasn't any life because of the time of the year or because of pollution and other natural influences. Overall the area was desolate and depressing. While slightly upstream the beauty of the Muddy River is apparent; at my site, though, this natural haven is lacking. Not only is the natural environment of soil and water negatively affected on my site, but with three park spaces in the small site area the lack of design for human use and interaction is obvious. Each space is surrounded by major roads that have so much traffic they are difficult to cross; two are also covered on top by a highway overpass. This doesn't create an ideal sitting area, as no sunlight can enter, and the pollution is contained. Anne Spirn states, "Schools, houses, sitting area, and playgrounds should be set back beyond the polluted zone, more than 150 feet from the street edge whenever possible, and separated from the roadway by belts of tree, which should be spaces far enough apart to permit the movement of air under their canopies" (72). What is very interesting is that on my small site there are three open spaces and none conform to this notion. Out of the three parks the most user-friendly park is the Commonwealth Avenue Park. With the large trees it provides a lot of shade and comfort, however it is seldom used. It seems that the trees may provide too much shade making the park uncomfortable and thus unusable. I even observed a tree that appears to be rotting (Fig. 25**)** and has a moisture spot,

enhancing the idea that the lack of sunlight getting through to the ground level makes the space feel dark and damp.

Figure 25: Photo (16) Wet, Rotting Tree

Overall there are many changes that can be adapted to help replenish the natural environment and guarantee the continuing life on the site. In terms of the trees, Spirn detailed how the city tried to implement a large project to provide irrigation for the trees in Kenmore Square; in the end, though, they only caused more damage to the trees roots and almost killed them. While the city needs to make sure that the trees in the Park have enough room to grow, in terms of street trees more help is needed. Possibly implementing a plan similar to the one where homogeneous soil was introduced as well as irrigation rings around the base of the trees, rather then more concrete and impenetrable surfaces would help the issue. The city needs to make sure that they maintain the open areas, but also they must provide the necessary upkeep so the trees can survive. The parks are truly beneficial to the environmental life of the city. “The cost of continuing to neglect plants in the inner-city landscape is tangible and far-reaching: the intensification of the worst aspects of city climate; increased energy demands; reduced absorption of air pollutants; increased flooding; degraded water quality; and in residential areas, depressed property values” (183). This statement details it all. If nothing is done and the parks are neglected, while everything else continues to be built up, more pollutants will remain in the air and natural life will continue to diminish. As is stated about part of my site,

“Today the Emerald Necklace is fragmented and tarnished, its parkways sliced by expressway ramps, its bridle paths and promenades converted to car lanes, its parks in decay… Pedestrians must dash across rushing traffic to reach the remaining, narrow islands with trees. The earlier link between Commonwealth Avenue and the Back Bay Fens is now an expressway ramp” (173).

We have the necessary resources and knowledge to improve the natural structure of the city; however the emphasis on continued building will cause the natural environment to suffer so much that it may be irreversible. From a piece of land that was a flooded plain, to the fully developed site that it is today, we still need to make sure that we respect the life that exists today. It’s pleasing to see the success of life such as the large trees that span the Commonwealth Park, but also difficult to see how they struggle to stay alive, with their roots exposed and concrete like soil surrounding them. By making small changes and using the research that already exists about ways to improve common

urban nature issues not only can we benefit the urban environment, but we can also benefit our lives and health. The trees do more than provide shade: they clean the air and cause solar energy to be reflected. In allowing a breeze and airflow to exist it enables that pollutants leave the air. Making slight changes will be better for us all.

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[5]Sanborn Perris Map Co. "Insurance Maps of Boston Massachusetts, Vol.2 1897 Sheet 79." 1897. Online image. Digital Sanborn Maps. 7 March 2006. <http://sanborn.umi.com/sanborn/image/download/pdf/ma/reel05/3693/00265/Boston+1895-1900vol.2%2C1897%2C+Sheet+79.pdf>

[6]Sanborn Perris Map Co. "Insurance Maps of Boston Massachusetts, Vol.2 1937 Sheet 238." 1937. Online image. Digital Sanborn Maps. 7 March 2006. <http://sanborn.umi.com/sanborn/image/download/pdf/ma/reel07/3693/00190/Boston+1908-1938vol.2%2C1937%28North%29%2C+Sheet+238.pdf>

Figures

Numbered Site Map of Photos and Observations

Park Locations on Kenmore Site

Kenmore Square

Shannon Turner

Home




Shannon Turner

11.016 Assignment #3

Professor Anne Spirn

The Growth and Change of Kenmore Square

Boston is well known for the changes that occurred during the 1800's when much of the Back Bay and Kenmore Square area was created by the filling in of the Mill Dam. While this was the beginning of life for these locations over the next 150 years many other events contributed to the growth of Kenmore Square, affecting how it functions and what it looks like today. Various factors relating to transportation, education, and urban growth contributed to changes in the area. By examining maps and paintings throughout the history of the site, the details as to its evolution are exposed. These clues are often overlooked, yet without the aid of maps, old photographs and paintings the details could be forgotten forever.

Today we know that the Kenmore square is a center for transportation, with major bus lines and a MBTA stop located in the square. It's also surrounded with residences, commercial businesses and Boston University. While it's interesting to observe the city form as it is today, understanding the past allows one to comprehend how those forms came to exist. How often does one know what used to occupy the building he lives in, or how and why it developed where it is?

The Influence of Transportation

One image that details the city's growth is a painting of the newly filled in Back Bay in 1850. At this time the filling is so recent that much of the land is still vacant and waiting to be developed; however the beginning development of the Back Bay and the spreading of the population is apparent (Figure 1).

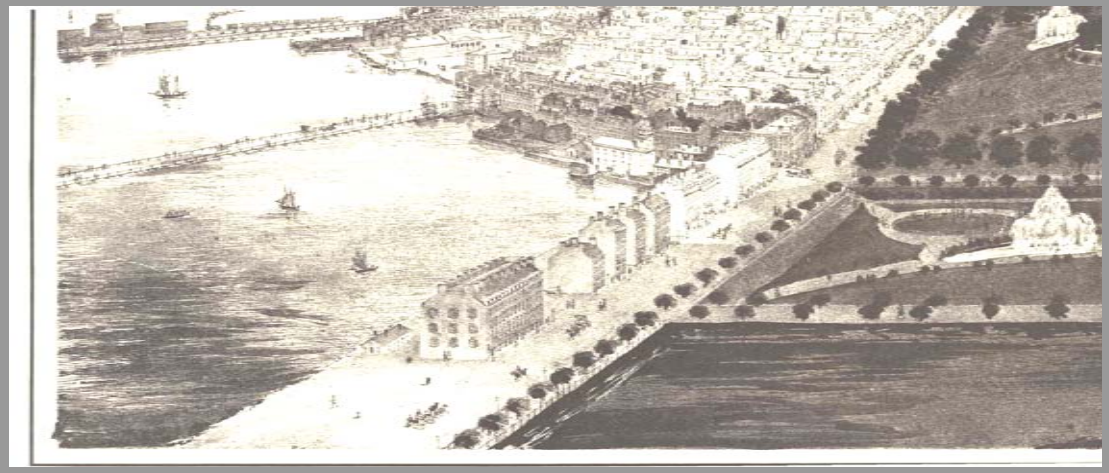

Figure 1: Birds Eye View of Boston 1850 *3*

Horse drawn carriages line the street where they carried residents to new, large mansions. By 1835 a new mode of transportation was introduced to Boston that combined the functions of the previous lighter carriages and heavier stagecoaches, which were used for longer distances. The omnibus, as it was known, was introduced by Abraham Brower. As Kenneth Jackson states in the Crabgrass Frontier, “The typical pattern was for a city government to grant a private company an exclusive franchise to operate coaches along an existing street. In return, the company agreed to maintain certain standards of service. (34)” The introduction of this transport system in the city allowed the wealthy to develop houses on the outskirts of the downtown area where the new land was being developed. This growth and dispersion of the population would only increase with the introduction of new technologies.

The transportation lines soon played a major role in the development of Kenmore Square. Train lines influenced the street layout as they became the major roadways that contributed to the square’s characteristics. Old maps, including an 1872 Prang L. & Co. map of Boston (Fig. 2), illustrate how the railroad lines crossed the river flats and how the Mill Dam enclosed the area that is the Back Bay and Kenmore Square.

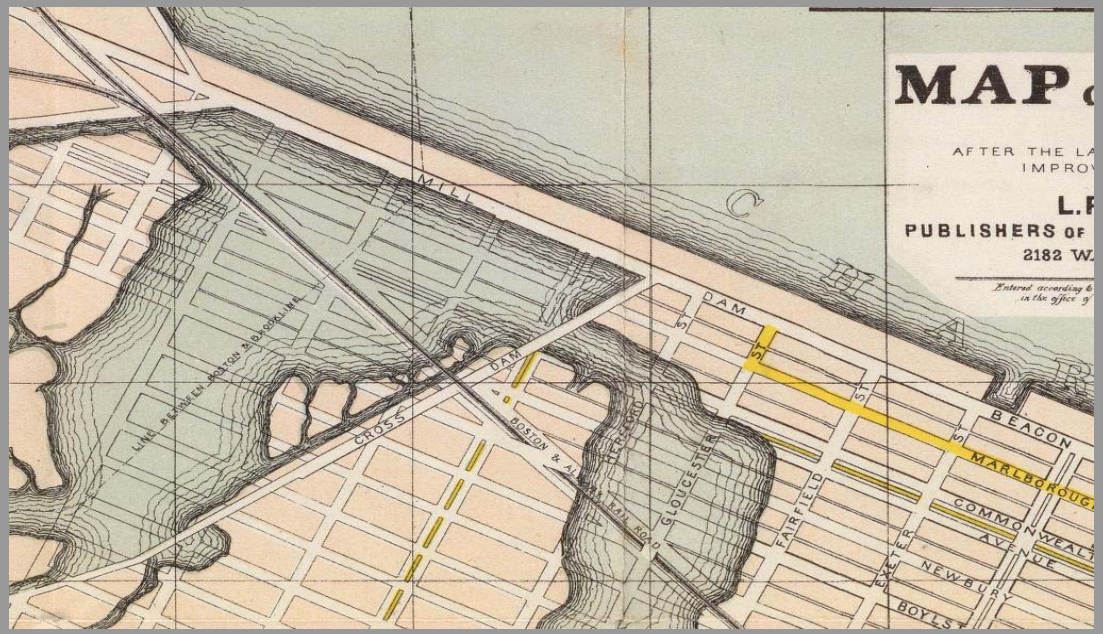

Figure 2: Prang L. & Co. 1872 Map of Boston

The Dam enclosed the space from the Public Gardens westward and the flats in the contained area were filled in. This line marks where Beacon Street is today; a main road that crosses through the site and intersects with other main roads right in the heart of the square. This map illustrates the development and growth occurring around 1872. The map illustrates the Back Bay fully developed, with the streets laid out. It then displays the Kenmore site-- designed, but still not fully filled, with portions under water. The area that looks like the beginning of a new river was later filled in even more to produce what is there today: the Muddy River and the Fens Park.

By 1880 most of the filling was completed. The beginning of the Kenmore area can be seen lined with trees at the top of Figure 3.

Figure 3: View of Boston 1880

Also, the gradual development of houses westward up Beacon Street is apparent. Now with the aid of the omnibus the residents continued to mover further and further away from the downtown core.

“Between 1815 and 1875, America’s largest cities underwent a dramatic spatial change. The introduction of the steam ferry, the omnibus, the commuter railroad, the horsecar, the elevated railroad and the cable car gave additional impetus to an exodus that would turn cities “inside out” and inaugurate a new patter of suburban affluence and center despair. (20)” By examining maps published by the Boston Street Railway Association and consulting Jackson’s description of the growth of the railway, we can better understand this inside out phenomenon. Jackson states, “The very rapid adoption of the steam railroad in the United States after 1830 led to the suspicion that placing the omnibus on iron rails and iron wheels would vastly improve service… In Boston, the horsecar lines tended to extend real-estate development in the same direction as the earlier omnibus. (40)” Figures 4-8 fully support this idea of growth. The images show the rail

lines from 1887, 1907, 1915, and 1939.

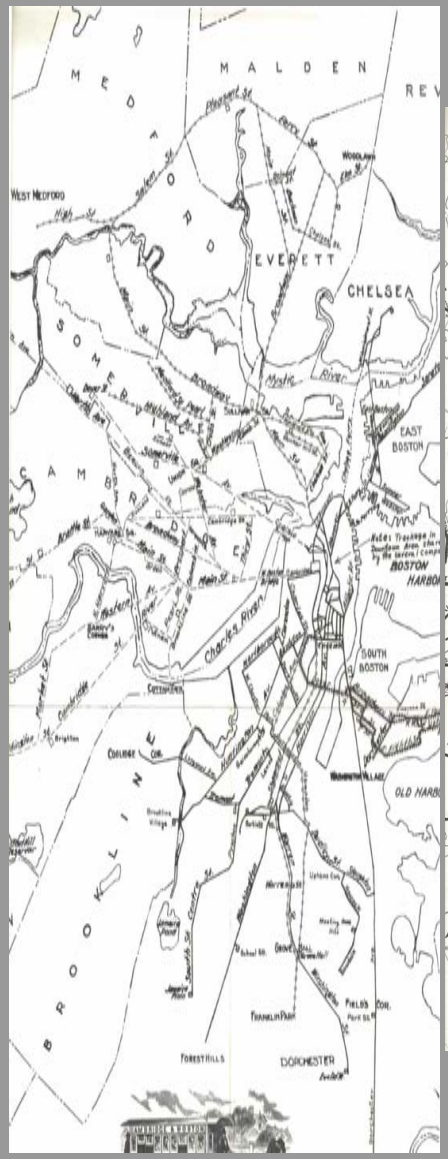

Figure 4: Tracks of the Four Street Railways 1887

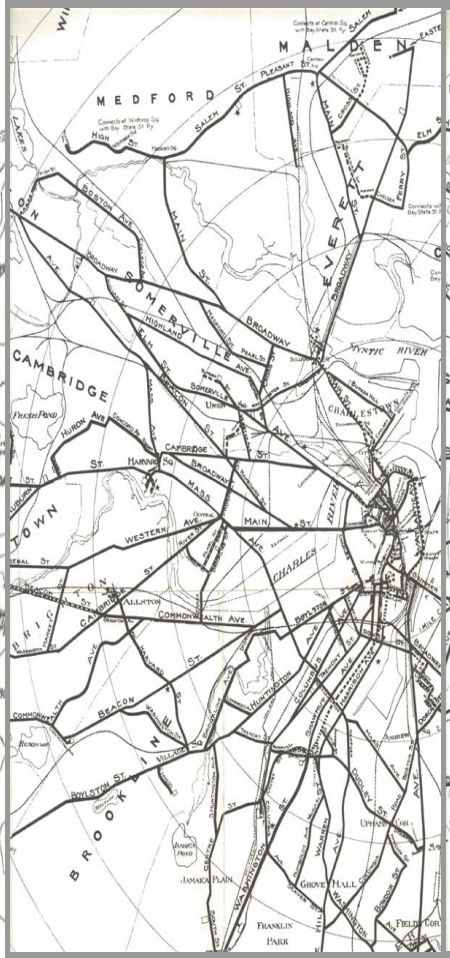

Figure 5: Map of the Elevated Rail Yard 1907

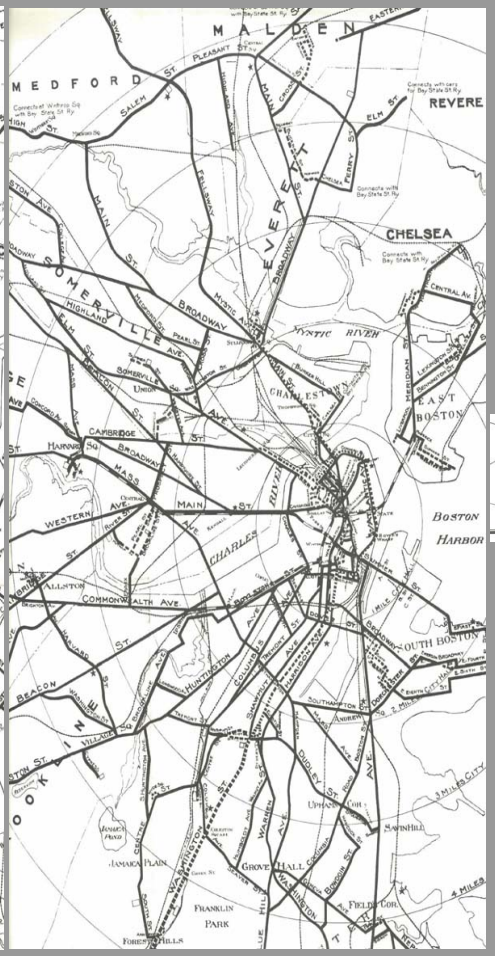

Figure 6: Boston Elevated Rail Yard 1915

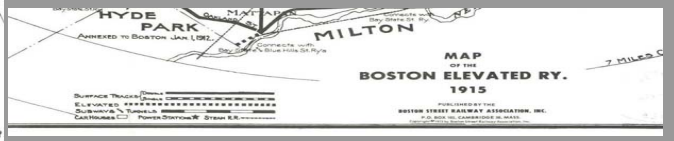

Figure 7: Boston Elevated RY. Legend

Figure 8: Boston Elevated RY. 1939

In 1887 the site was still too new to accommodate a rail line; however, by 1907 not only did a double track extend to Commonwealth Avenue, but they continued to outlying suburbs. By 1939 an elevated railway carried passengers to the Kenmore Square area. By this point the transportation changes had greatly influenced the growth of the area and another aspect of Kenmore Square; the development of the buildings.

Urban Growth in Kenmore Square

When the wealthy began to move away from the density of downtown, they developed extravagant homes to support their lifestyles. As Jackson states, “Utilizing both private carriages and public omnibuses, the aristocracy was a transforming the small villages to the west into fashionable places of residence (43).” By investigating the Sanborn fire maps from the time that building development in the Kenmore area grew substantially in a short period. Also, the buildings use provides interesting background details to the Kenmore Square area. From the maps in 1897 it’s easy to see that as you move away from the already developed downtown and Back Bay area the density of homes decreases drastically. On the far west edge of the area it is occupied by three brownstone dwellings (Figure 9).

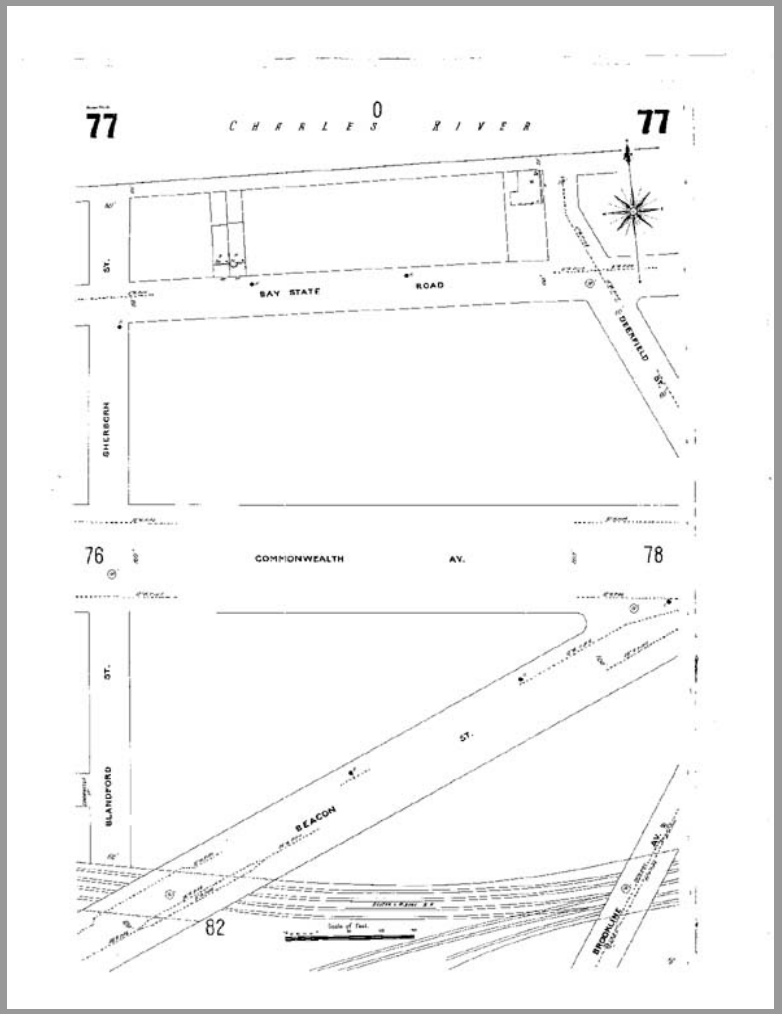

Figure 9: 1897 Sanborn Kenmore Map, 3 dwellings

However, as we examine Figure 10 at the edge of the site, there are places where rows of houses were developed with greater density.

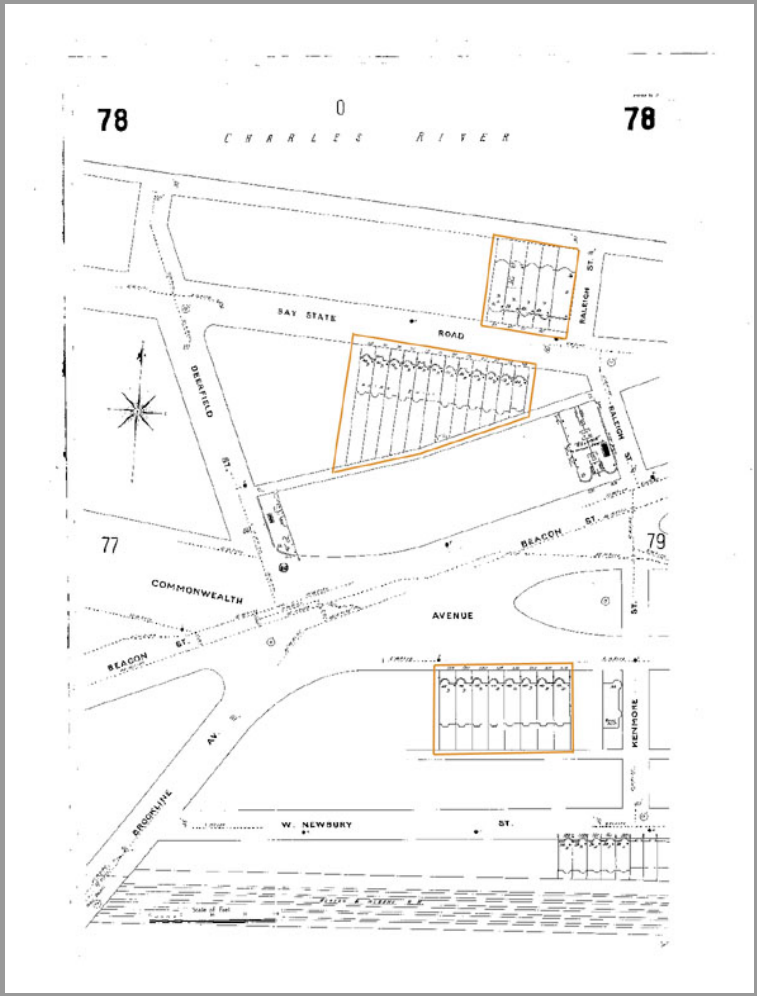

Figure 10: 1897 Sanborn Kenmore Map, Groups of Dwellings

Even further east there is more evidence of higher growth in the area (Figure 11).

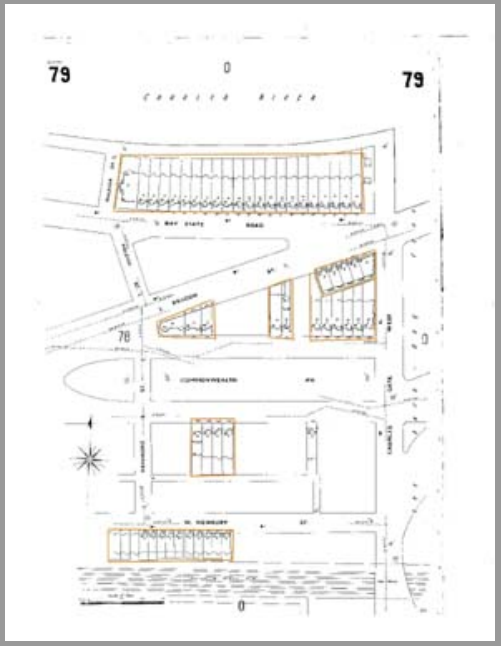

Figure 11: 1897 Sanborn Kenmore Map, More Dwellings

The first block west of the Muddy River on Baystate road is fully developed with brownstones, and Commonwealth Avenue has a number of housing units as well.

Within a few years the site is fully developed with very few gaps in the streets: a distinguished community had emerged. The Sanborn maps from 1937 reveal many interesting characteristics (Figure 12).

Figure 12: 1937 Sanborn Kenmore Map

Many of the new buildings as well as ones that were originally slated to be dwellings now were occupied by doctor's offices. With the increased housing units and population of the area, as well as its access to numerous transportation lines and its proximity to the Lahey clinic, Kenmore square became a center for medical treatment. The Lahey clinic was at the forefront of medicine and occupied 605 Commonwealth Avenue.[2] Not only was there a disproportionately large number of doctors offices, but interestingly the area also contained many car garages as well as the Peerless Auto Sales and Services building. Having an automotive building right in the middle of the square said a lot about the time and the area. By 1937 the automobile was becoming more prevalent, "American automobile registrations climbed from one million in 1913 to ten million in 1923…by 1927 when the American total had risen to twenty-six million, the United States was building about 85 percent of the world's automobiles, and there was one motor vehicle for every five people in the country (162)." Thus, an area that was a center for transportation, commuters, and upper class residents would be an ideal location for car showrooms.

While previous structures evolved and adapted over the years, a final new structure was introduced in the 1960's: a bus terminal located in the center of the square. The large structure helped direct the bus lines and was a main center point for many of the routes. This demonstrated the continuing demand of the site as a major transportation hub even after many years of change and development. There was also a major change from the many doctors' offices, to more stores and residences. As new medical centers grew in at other locations in the city, and more people had moved to further outlying suburbs, the concentrated demand for specific doctors decreased.

Educational Influence

Another interesting aspect at the time was the initial influence of the institutions. With the building of the BU men's dormitory and fraternity houses the universities were influencing the development not only of buildings but also of the community. As the students begin to occupy the area, they needed stores to accommodate their demands. It's apparent that the universities were beginning to claim what space they could for future development.

The final changes in the use of the area are later seen in the 1974 Sanborn maps (Figure 14).

Figure 14: 1974 Sanborn Kenmore Map

While many of the building structures didn't change with the 35 year period, their uses changed. As there was less demand for the apartment hotels, one was adapted into a college, while another was converted into apartments, and a third into a BU dormitory. Not only does this demonstrate that there was less of a demand for that particular apartment style of housing, it also demonstrates the increased demand for education at the time, as two of the three buildings were for educational use.

Hotel Apartments

A final interesting characteristic of Kenmore Square in 1937 are the large number of hotels that occupy the area at the time. I first stumbled upon this when examining a 1938 street map which details six hotels (Figure 13).

Figure 13: 1938 Cram Street Map Of Greater Boston

After examining the descriptions, I was still somewhat confused about their use. While the buildings are detailed as hotels, there is smaller text that states their function as apartments and hotels. This detail was clarified for me when Professor Warner described how they were hotel apartments that were common to the area at the time and had common dining rooms, and other amenities. They appealed to residents who had money but not too much, because they provided them with the opportunity to have a nice place to live while not having all of their money tied up in a mortgage. Thus, the maps provide us with insight into the many diverse uses of the area at such an influential time.

Conclusion

While the maps and photographs are useful to track changes over time, they are also very useful to assist one to understand what was influencing the area, and why those changes occurred. Today, many of the remnants of the change are apparent, from the major old hotel structures, which today are apartment buildings and a home for senior citizens, to the influence of the universities. As one walks through my site, flags from the fraternities with their large Greek letters flap in the breeze, while numerous other buildings are stamped with red plaques that symbolizes their use as a Boston University building. There is also the new Hotel Commonwealth building that takes up an entire block in the heart of the square, with upper floors full of hotel rooms, and shops and restaurants on the ground floor. As one looks at its exterior it's apparent that it's a brand new building, trying to add new life into the area. It incorporates fancy restaurants with sidewalk cafes, and bars that become night time hot spots. The new businesses demonstrate a new demand of travelers and visitors to the area. Not only are there attractions for the upper class and the working class at this new center, but there is still the apparent appeal for students with a new 7-11. There are also, a Dunkin Donuts, McDonalds, and Pizzeria Uno within a few feet of each other. In terms of the influence of the automobile, from the large windows of the Barnes and Noble bookstore, which reminds us of its old use as a car showroom, to the demolition of the bus terminal, it's apparent that the age of the automobile still has a major influence, as new traffic patterns are being implemented around the constant construction. Without recordings from old maps and photographs all of the past history that influenced this change could've been lost, and unknown.

From the filling of Boston, to the introduction of brownstones, to growth assisted by new transportation methods, the development of Kenmore Square was affected by a variety of factors. With the location of the Mill Dam and the Rail lines, Kenmore Square was formed as a transportation hub because of the way the Beacon Street collided with other roadways, including Commonwealth Avenue, to form a square. As technology developed transport went from horse drawn carriages, to the omnibus, to the railways, to the automobile, all allowing wealthy residents to reach Kenmore square and develop their homes and business. The site's form made it a center. With that development arose new changes including hotel apartments, universities and new storefronts, to the changes that make Kendall Square what it is today.

Works Cited

Jackson, Kenneth T. Crabgrass Frontier, The Suburbanization of the United States. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

[2]Lahey History, Celebrating 80 Years of Service. 2005. 8 April 2005. <http://www.lahey.org/About/LaheyHistory.asp>




Shannon Turner

11.016 Assignment 4

Professor Anne Spirn

Remnants of the Past, and the Vision of the Future

Cities are always changing. In Boston, the history of change through many different time periods is very evident. Many changes occurred as Boston grew through the filling of riverbeds and development followed. As buildings and streets were added the function of the area was determined. Over time these functions changed as the economy fluctuated and new technologies were introduced. As new demands arise, buildings, roads, and other components of the neighborhood are adapted. Traces of the past remain, however, to remind us of the importance of other times. In Kenmore Square time has led to a variety of changes in the use of buildings and the roads. Many small remnants allow us to see that past and picture what the area used to be like, as well as help us predict future changes.

Kenmore square is home to many hotel apartment buildings. What were in the past hotel apartments, places where people could have nice apartments without a large investment, today have become apartment buildings and dormitories. These structures have distinctive features that allow one to understand their past uses. Their large size accommodates the community style of living, where there are common hallways and lobbies (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Large Hotel Apartment Structure. Today it is a BU dorm. The Sheraton can be seen engraved over the door, a trace of the past.

This is very different from the brownstones that are so common in Boston with only a few apartments per building and less residents. The hotel buildings also often have awnings with the name of the past hotel printed on them or engraved into the stone directly over the door entrance (Figures 2-5).

Figure 2: The name Charlesview engraved over the doorway.

Figure 3: The name Westgate engraved over the doorway.

Figure 4: The Wadsworth sign.

Figure 5: The awning of the Braemore building.

They are very distinctive from the surrounding brownstones. As I made observations on my site, I discovered that one existed next door to where I live even though I hadn't made the connection in the past. After I had recognized the common theme of awnings on old hotel apartment buildings I noticed that the Lister building also had awnings over the doorways (Figure 6).

Figure 6: The awnings of the Lister building.

I wondered if it was a past hotel apartment and returned to the maps to confirm my hypothesis. While the 1937 Sanborn maps don't detail the building as "Hotel Lister," it has similar shading to the other hotel apartment buildings and similar structural characteristics. Thus by observing the awning I was able to better understand the past use of the building. Today, of these remaining structures, three are apartment buildings, one is a Boston University dormitory, and the other is a low income-housing center for the elderly. It's obvious that their large size allows them to harbor a community, which is ideal for a dormitory. In relation to apartment buildings, it's also very similar to how city living exists in other cities. Thus the past use and design has helped the transition to its uses today.

One trace that is very uncommon to see in an area where rows of brick dwellings line the street, is one of the original structures built on the site. It's a brick building that is more of a house, than a dwelling, reminding the observer of the past growth of the area (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Individual brick house on its own property.

Kenmore Square wasn't always a busy center. After the filling occurred, groups of dwellings began to appear on the site, however, this house was placed on the far corner of the street, overlooking the river and secluded from all of the development around. This is a great remnant of the past. The location of the house in Kenmore was far enough from downtown at the time that the area was mostly undeveloped, and the development that did occur took the form of a detached home, with a large amount of property surrounding it. It's almost a vision of the future suburbs. It was on the outskirts, built around 1897, thus it could've only be reached by a horse car and therefore was most likely a home for the wealthier. At the time it could've been a clue of what was yet to come with suburbanization. As it became easier to travel further away from the downtown core with the introduction of new modes of transportation such of the automobile, this style of home was all that existed on the outskirts of the city. People wanted their own property and space, with a yard and a driveway; this is fully exemplified by this house in Kenmore Square.

` Another remnant of the past can be seen on the façade of Miles Standish Hall. The past storefronts that once existed on the eastern edge of the triangular block are memorialized by the blank wall of concrete that lines the ground level of the building. As one makes a closer observation it's apparent that the building has been adapted from the discoloration and changes to the surface of the building (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Discoloration on the wall which once house the storefront windows.

The places which were once occupied by the windows of the shops were filled in with concrete. This discoloration motivated me to explore the building in depth even more, and I found similar traces of past use on the outside of the neighboring building that once housed the offices of the Lumber Mutual Fire Insurance Companies. The ground floor was windowless, and there is one large window different from all of the rest (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Window that was one the entrance to the Mutual Fire Insurance Companies.

It is raised a few feet off of the ground and larger with an arched top. I was able to infer that this was once the entrance to the building, and as it was later converted into dorm rooms its function became obsolete.

Some of the major traces can be seen through the buildings. In the past, medical offices had a major influence on the area, and very few obvious traces of that past exist today. Today Kenmore square isn't the best location for a medical office as most of the larger hospitals are much further away. Thus the idea that they even exist in the area is a large enough clue as to the past (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Dentist office still located in the area today.

There are plaques imbedded in walls of buildings that present the names of past doctors in the area (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Plaque detailing dentists in the building.

As much as the signage details past use, I feel that the traces of this past use could be better observed by examining the internal layout and structure of the buildings that have since been converted. It would be interesting to see if one could infer where the waiting room would've been or the examination room by exploring the insides of these buildings. Over time most of these medical offices have been turned into apartment buildings, dorms, and fraternity houses. This also shows the influence of education on Kenmore Square. As more schools took over the existing space the buildings were adapted to accommodate the universities.

An example of the adaptation of old offices into educational buildings can be seen on Baystate Road. To create a fraternity house two buildings were combined. The main trace of past use is an obsolete stairway leading up to the front door (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Obselete doorway and stairwell.

The buildings look like any other cluster of brownstones; however there is a larger plot of land outside the front. This difference is because the buildings use was adapted. What were once separate buildings are now combined. The smaller buildings that were used as office space weren't large enough to accommodate the communal living common to the universities today. Thus the middle doorway has become obsolete. It's apparent that it isn't used because there isn't a walkway leading up to it and the grass on the lawn isn't dead or trampled from people walking over it. The educational influence can also be seen by the large variety of universities in the area. They exist in Kenmore because it is a center for transportation, so for the smaller commuter schools students can easily access them. As one walks around this is apparent from the large presence of Boston University, to smaller scale centers such as a sign for the New England School of Photography and the Boston Language Institute (Figure 13, 14).

Figure 13: New England School of Photography

Figure 14: Boston Language Institute

Although I have lived in the area for 4 years, I never realized the variety of educational facilities in Kenmore Square.

One of the most surprising facilities is the Art Institute of Boston. It's tucked behind much of the new development, hidden from the view of Commonwealth Avenue (Figure 15).

Figure 15: The Art Institute of Boston

The Art Institutes seclusion led me to another major observation as to past use on the site. While examining the 1937 Sanborn map I noticed that there was a post office across from the street that currently houses the Art Institute. I wanted to see what the building was being used for today, however to my surprise the building doesn't exist at all anymore. Actually, the whole block doesn't exist anymore. I already knew that the rail lines existed on the edge of my site, but as the use of the automobile became more demanding the lines were changed into a roadway. Later many of the original buildings on the edge of Newbury Street were torn down to accommodate the highway (Figure 16).

Figure 16: The interstate occupying the site where the old post office and other buildings once were.

The elimination of a whole block to accommodate the interstate continues to emphasize the importance of transportation and influence automobiles in the area, as well as the whole city. While the traces from the past are apparent, the visions for the future are beginning to emerge as well.

One of the more entertaining traces from the past may not say too much about the area, but about past history. A bright sign stating “fallout shelter” was affixed to the outside of the building, reminding us of the past concerns and the precautions that were taken (Figure 17).


Figure 17: Fallout Shelter sign

While that was in the past, it’s apparent that there is change occurring currently. The most obvious change is the ongoing construction in the middle of Commonwealth Avenue. In the middle of the street a large bus station occupied much of the road, however today it is completely gone (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Construction on Commonwealth Avenue where the Bus Center used to be located.

Has the city designed a more efficient way to manage the buses or is the use of Kenmore Square changing? The roads still merge in the center and the Kenmore T stop and many bus stops are located there, thus I believe that Kenmore Square will be a commuting center for time to come. The change appears to be more of a sign of gentrification in the area. By removing the large eyesore that housed the buses, and moving the routes to the side of the street, the whole square is opened up. With the construction came new benches at the bus stops, as well as a remolded T station, with green mosaic tiles lining the stairwell. It's a sign that they are trying to appeal to a new crowd of people, the upper class.

The new change and redevelopment is also apparent in the large structure that occupies an entire block of my site: The Hotel Commonwealth. This structure appeals again, to the upper class with its expensive seafood restaurant and other amenities (Figure 19).


Figure 20: Hotel Commonwealth and the new shops on the ground level.

As one looks at its exterior it's apparent that it's a brand new building, trying to add new life into the area. It incorporates fancy restaurants with sidewalk cafes, and bars that become night time hot spots. The project appears to be a success as the restaurant is always occupied with people having brunch or a late night drink of martinis, but it's still a major change from the past uses of the area. The new businesses demonstrate a new demand of travelers and visitors to the area. Not only are there attractions for the upper class and the working class at this new center, but there is still the apparent appeal for students with a new 7-11. There are also a Dunkin Donuts, McDonalds, and Pizzeria Uno within a few feet of each other.

Kenmore Square has gone from underwater, to a place once on the outside edge of the city, to a large commuter center, to a major educational center, and now to this new future of gentrification and redevelopment. Today, many of the hints and

traces of the past still exist, from the major old hotel structures with the awnings printed with the past names, to the adaptation of doctors' offices into housing for the surrounding universities, to the expansion of the highway to accommodate the increased demand of the automobile. As one walks through my site today, flags from the fraternities with their large Greek letters flap in the breeze, while numerous other buildings are stamped with red plaques that symbolize their use as a Boston University building, showing the continuing educational presence. In terms of the influence of the automobile, from the large windows of the Barnes and Noble bookstore, which reminds us of its old use as a car showroom, to the demolition of the bus terminal, it's clear that the age of the automobile still has a major influence, especially as new traffic patterns are being implemented around the constant construction. While the future of Kenmore Square is one of gentrification and redevelopment, and changes will occur, traces of past uses will always be there to let people know how the area was used at other periods of time.