Self-Guided Walking Tour

Architectural & Historical features of the Neighborhood around

Edward Everett Square

and the

Dorchester Historical Society
Many motorists drive along Boston Street and visit Edward Everett Square in the Dorchester section of Boston without knowledge of Dorchester or Edward Everett. This brief guide is being prepared by the Dorchester Historical Society to better explain Dorchester’s history and Edward Everett, as well as to commemorate his birthplace.

The arrow shows the birthplace of Edward Everett on a detail from the 1874 map.

Edward Everett (1794-1865) was a Dorchester-born U.S. Secretary of State, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Great Britain, Massachusetts Governor, Senator and Congressman, Harvard University President, theologian, historic preservationist and orator who was born adjacent to Edward Everett Square and Richardson Park. The neighborhood was anciently part of Allen’s Plain, the first-settled part of colonial Dorchester, founded in 1630. Dorchester’s first Meeting House, and school were once located nearby. This district has as its center the Blake House (or Blake-Clap House), the oldest colonial structure in the modern city of Boston. It stands in Richardson Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the founder of landscape architecture in America. The district as a whole includes a fine assortment of Colonial, French Second Empire, Colonial Revival, and transitional Queen Anne-Colonial Revival style buildings, as well as three different types of Dorchester Triple Deckers arranged around a pleasant 1 acre green space in the middle of Boston.¹

Edward Everett Square is located at the intersection of Cottage Street, Columbia Road, Boston Street and Massachusetts Avenue. Because Cottage and Columbia pass through the intersection, it is now a six-way intersection, perhaps the only such intersection in Boston. It began in Colonial days as a simple intersection of two roads, Cottage Street, and Boston Street, that then also led south (down what is now the

¹ Much of the material in this tour has been taken from material composed by John Goff when he studied the Blake House in 2005-2006 and from the neighborhood descriptions at the Boston Landmarks Commission
south part of Columbia Road) to and beyond the 17th century burial ground, located at the corner of Stoughton Street. By the time of the Revolution, it had developed an extra radial street (Columbia Road east) which then led to the shore and perhaps was also used as a military route to the “Castle” and George Washington’s fortifications at Dorchester Heights.

The intersection was called Five Corners before Massachusetts Avenue (originally East Chester Park) was built to the west in 1878 to connect with Boston’s Back Bay, and Cambridge. Because of the Cambridge connections after Mass. Ave. was built, some Dorchester residents (such as John Richardson, for whom Richardson Park was named) taught at Harvard, and commuted easily. Linking Franklin Park with the South Boston waterfront, Columbia Road was part of American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted's Emerald Necklace system of Boston parks. Introduced in the 1890s, his designs originally encompassed a landscaped-mediated park strip as well as planted areas bordering this thoroughfare, and the intersection was planned as rotary. The park-like character of this important artery was destroyed in the 1950s in favor of more traffic lanes. In 2006 the intersection is being re-constructed to include more green space and public art – a project the local neighborhood has planned in conjunction with city government over the last ten years.

Massachusetts Avenue, the longest avenue in the Commonwealth, stretches from Edward Everett Square through Boston and northwest to Lexington and Concord, where the American Revolution began. Military action in Massachusetts ended in the first big victory for the patriots when troops moved through Edward Everett Square to occupy Dorchester Heights, forcing the Evacuation of Boston by the British in March, 1776.

Conjectural appearance of James Blake House as it might have appeared when built in 1661. Illustration by John Goff.

Elder James Blake House

The Blake House or Blake Clap House, built in 1661, is Boston’s oldest house, a Boston Landmark, and a rare and excellent example of West Country English timber frame construction. It is a Colonial Landmark that inspired the design of many Colonial Revival Style buildings and details in the late 19th century. It was also occupied by George Washington’s troops during the Siege of Boston in 1775-1776 in the American Revolution.

One of the branches of the Mill Creek that fed Clapp’s mill pond led upstream to the original site of the Blake House, a 16+ acre home farm, where James Blake and his wife Elizabeth Clap and their descendants lived. When Massachusetts Avenue was constructed as East Chester Park in the late nineteenth century, the road cut off one corner of the remaining Blake House land with the result that the house now stood right at the edge of the new road.
The house is now located at the center of Richardson Park, a 1 acre trapezoidal park that was designed in the 1890s by Frederick Law Olmsted, the designer of Central Park in New York City, and an advocate of public parks linked by landscaped parkways, and streetcar lines. The house was moved with the use of horses to be a primary park focus in 1895-1896. It was formerly located 1200 feet away, to the west. When new in the mid-17th century, it was the mansion house of a very large farm that overlooked Mill Creek and the South Bay, to our west. Mill Creek (since filled in) was a salt water tidal creek that powered Clapp’s Tidal Grist Mill, developed by Roger Clap’s brother Edward Clap for the grinding of local Dorchester grain and Indian corn into flour. Roger Clap, who crossed on the MARY AND JOHN, was one of the original founders of Dorchester in 1630. His brother Edward Clap was the father of Elizabeth Clap Blake who became the “first lady” of the Blake House, after she married Elder James Blake, a prominent early Dorchester leader in the church. The Blake House is owned by the Dorchester Historical Society, furnished with historical exhibits, and open for public tours on the second Sunday of each month between 11:00 am and 4:00pm.

James Blake was a prominent man in the affairs of the town, holding some public office every year from 1658-1685. He was a selectman for thirteen years; and also served as rater, constable, deputy to the General Court, clerk of the writs, recorder and sergeant in the military company. He was deacon of the Church for fourteen years and was ruling elder for the same length of time. The Blake House is considered a “study house” for students of First Period architecture. This wood shingle clad, 5 b-ay x 1-bay, gable roofed house’s current appearance dates to a mid 1890s restoration by Dr. Clarence Blake and Dorchester architect Charles Hodgson.
The Russell School at 750 Columbia Road, Dorchester faces the Blake House in Richardson Park. It is a fine tripartite brick elementary school that was designed and built in the Colonial Revival Style in 1903 by architect James Mulcahy. The flat hip roofs, arcaded windows, and splayed window lintels with keystone ornaments were all purposefully borrowed from Federal Style American landmarks (designed by architects such as Samuel McIntire and Charles Bulfinch) to make a building uniquely appropriate to Massachusetts. The wrought ironwork over the front door is especially fine. The building was named to honor Massachusetts Governor William E. Russell, a Democrat from across the Charles River in Cambridge, who died in 1896.

Prior to the construction of the Russell School, the land here was reportedly wet and swampy. In Colonial times a cow is noted to have gotten stuck in the mud. Richard Mather, one of Dorchester’s most famous early Puritans and long-time minister to the First Parish Church, lived nearby. Increase Mather, his son, and Cotton Mather, his grandson continued the service of this family in the religious affairs of New
England. By the Federal Period, a large and handsome brick house was built near here that belonged to Richard Clapp, noted Dorchester brickmaker. The Clapps all descended from Roger Clap, and his relatives Edward, Nicholas, Nathaniel and Thomas.

Pond Street in front of the Blake House and opposite the school is named for the two ponds, one located where the intersecton is now and one by the Russell School and beyond.
Pleasant Street, originally called “Green Lane,” led from Savin Hill, where the company of Englishmen from the Mary and John landed on June 1, 1630, to the first meeting house, which stood on a small island of land on Allen's Plain, delineated by Pleasant, Pond and Cottage streets. The thatched structure was enlarged in 1634 by a window-lit loft. The meeting house was rebuilt in 1645 and was moved by oxen to Rocky Hill (Meeting House Hill) in approximately 1673. By the mid-late 18th century, the Pleasant Street north area was called Allen's Plain after William Allen whose house on Pleasant Street was destroyed in 1784.

#10 Pleasant Street (corner of Howes) is a full blown Greek Revival house that probably dates to the mid 1840s. The earliest readily accessible deed reference to this house appears in a Norfolk County deed dated April 10, 1855. At that time, Richard Uran of Dorchester sold "a certain lot of land with the buildings
thereon" to John B. S. Jackson of Boston for $6,198.00. Reference is made to the fact that Richard Uran purchased this "estate" from Peleg Sprague on November 13, 1824. (Norfolk Deeds Vol 75, p.13). Number 10 Pleasant Street’s appearance, however, suggests a construction date of the 1840s rather than 1820s. For many years it was owned by Dr. J.B. S. Jackson and his heirs. Prior to 1885, this house had a much larger lot that extended northward to East Cottage Street. Between 1894-98, this house acquired a larger rear ell and a rectangular stable at the rear of its lot. In 1898, Howes Street was a cul de sac off the west side of Dorchester Avenue and was not extended all the way to Pleasant Street until c.1905. Later owners included Mary G. Murphy and Frances A. and John W. Lane (1910's-30's).

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210/220 East Cottage Street.

The Italianate/Mansard style is scattered about this area with a substantial, stucco-covered double house of this mode at 210/220 Cottage Street adjacent to Richardson Park. Bostonians became particularly enthralled with French culture in and after the late 1840s, after new steamships provided trans-Atlantic passenger service. Between the 1850s and 1870s, French Second Empire style architecture emerged as a dominant American style. The key architectural feature is the two-slope upper roof on all 4 sides, called “Mansard” after the original French designer, Pierre Mansart. In and after the 1860s, Bostonians built Mansard or French Second Empire style landmarks in great numbers (including Boston’s Old City Hall), and Commonwealth Avenue was built as a French Style boulevard. This house on Cottage Street, probably built about 1870, is one of the surviving French Second Empire style houses in Dorchester.
6 Statue of Edward Everett

The statue of Edward Everett in Richardson Park was designed by William Wetmore Story of Salem in 1866 and was cast in Munich. It was set up in the Public Garden as a gift to the city from the citizens of Boston on November 18, 1867. The statue was moved from the Public Garden on June 24, 1910, and in 1911 it was taken to Dorchester at the urging of the Dorchester Historical Society. Set up on Dorchester Day, June 6th of that year in the traffic circle at Edward Everett Square, the statue lasted 20 years until it was toppled by motorists. It was removed February 28, 1931, was stored in the woodyard in Franklin Park, and was later rescued and placed in Richardson Park next to Edward Everett Square.

7 Flagpole

The wooden flagpole installed in 1934 was struck by lightning in 2006. The replacement is made of fiberglass.
Funds for the Coppenhagen Fountain were donated to the City of Boston in 1911 through the will of Mehitable Calef Coppenhagen, who wanted to honor the memory of her parents and, by extension, all parents, with a suitable public memorial. She left $10,000 to the city, $5,000 of which was to be spent procuring a site and erecting a fountain—-for persons and animals—to drink from. The City accepted the money in 1915 and engaged the sculptor Albert Henry Atkins to build the memorial, which bears the inscription "In Memory of Beloved Parents." After years of use, the fountain fell into neglect, and it was no longer on site by 1960. In 1979, it was located in Franklin Park, where it was vandalized and left it in pieces. By 1992, it had been rebuilt and placed back in Richardson Park. It worked as a drinking fountain on and off again until a truck hit and badly damaged it. The fountain is again being refurbished.

19 Sumner Street. The Italianate style is most memorably represented by the mansion-scale residence at 19 Sumner Street. Built on a large scale similar to the Mill Street area houses of Harrison Square dating from the mid 19th century and situated on a low rise, this house is composed of a 3-bay x 2-bay main block with a rear ell. The ell exhibits a side porch which retains its fluted Ionic columns. Its 3-bay main facade features a center pavilion with heavy scrolled door hood, original multi panel front door set within a well
molded segmental arch, a pair of tall arched windows second level surrounded by an unusual, incised diamond shaped pattern. The front door is reached via a flight of granite steps. The main entrance is flanked by octagonal bays. The windows are fully enframed and exhibit cornice headed corbels. All that remains of the original cupola is its octagonal base. This house is situated on a still-ample lot. Summer Street, near East Cottage Street, is something of a repository for ornate Stick style houses with full blown examples at 18 and 22 Summer Street.

**Bronze Clap’s Favorite Pear**

William Clapp and his sons were involved in the hybridization of apples and pears, and the lands north of the Clapp House were cultivated as a fruit orchard as early as 1810. During the early 19th century, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society was supported by the local gentry of Dorchester and other Boston area towns. William Clapp and his sons, Lemuel, Frederick and Thaddeus, all joined the new society and submitted their fruits for the annual award ceremony. The creation of the "Clapp's Favorite Pear" in 1840 was a local marvel that proved profitable for the Clapps. The Clapp's Favorite Pear was the hybridization of the Flemish Beauty Pear and the Bartlett Pear. The fact that it was an early ripening pear made the fruit available in mid to late August, at a time when fruits were thought to have medicinal qualities and relatively short periods of shelf life. Several of the streets in the St Margaret's / Boston Street area were named for Clapp-developed pears including, Mount Vernon, Harvest, and Dorset streets.

**716 Columbia Road**

The large brown shingled building closest to the Edward Everett Birthplace marker at 716 Columbia Road, is an innovative multi-family dwelling that appears to have combined two Dorchester Triple Deckers in a triangular “flatiron” shaped plan to accommodate a curved urban street corner. With a semi-octagonal bay on the left, two semi-circular swell front bays, and classical porches, the building is a good mix of Shingle and Colonial Revival styles adapted to an innovative Triple Decker form.

**Edward Everett Birthplace historical marker**

Edward Everett’s birthplace: Edward Everett was born close to this site on April 11, 1794 in a large 18th century Georgian Style Colonial house with a Chinese style Federal period balustrade. The handsome mid-eighteenth-century house was demolished in 1898. The landmark originally built for Robert Oliver, a Loyalist, dominated the intersection now known as Edward Everett Square.
As early as the 1760s, the Robert Oliver House, a great 5-bay x 5-bay, quoin-edged and hip-roofed Georgian mansion stood at the northeast corner of Columbia Street (Columbia Road) and Boston Street. Oliver was a wealthy sugar plantation owner from the West Indies. Socially prominent and well-connected, Oliver was related to the Royalls of Medford and the Lechmeres of East Cambridge. The Olivers were Loyalists who returned to England during the Siege of Boston; after the Revolution, their estate was purchased by the Rev. Oliver Everett, who had been pastor of the New South Church in Boston. The American statesman, educator and diplomat, Edward Everett (1794-1865) was born in the Oliver House. After graduation from Harvard, Everett taught Greek and Latin at his alma mater. Everett's extraordinary oratorical skills propelled his career far beyond Harvard Yard. His most famous address, now almost forgotten, was the principal oration delivered at Gettysburg on the same occasion that called forth Abraham Lincoln's enduring Gettysburg Address. Over time, he served as a state senator and representative, as well as Congressman, Governor (1835-39) and Senator. He served as U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain from 1841-1845. Succeeding Josiah Quincy to the presidency of Harvard, Everett was president of Harvard College from 1846 to 1849. In any event, the Oliver-Everett house was purchased in 1830 by John Richardson who developed a garden on the Everett estate that became well-known in horticultural circles. His greatest success was the "Festiva Maxima", a "double white peony with a pink blush at its throat." By the late 19th century, this house was owned by Dr. William Stevens. Sadly, despite efforts by the Dorchester Historical Society and others, the Edward Everett House was demolished in 1908.

On June 5, 1909, the Dorchester Historical Society worked with the City of Boston to place an Edward Everett Birthplace marker near the old house site. In 1925, a view was published to show how the Oliver-Everett House looked in the 18th century when the roads were still dirt, and Dorchester’s farmers used them to drive their cattle to coastal pastures. Everett was best remembered locally for having helped to save Mount Vernon, President Washington’s Estate.

The new Columbia Road parkway during and after its construction became lined with a relatively new residential building type: the three decker; few Dorchester sections offer a better opportunity to study the turn-of-the-century phase of three-decker development. Particularly noteworthy for their fine designs and ample set backs from the street are the three-deckers located along Columbia Road, built from the 1890s to the 19teens. Three deckers were also built on the side yards of pre-1890 houses in this area.
John McCormack (1891-1990), attorney, legislator and U.S. Speaker of the House, considered one of the 500 most influential figures of the 20th century, lived at 726 Columbia Road. A Boston native, McCormack served as a Democrat in the U.S. Congress for over 40 years, from 1928 to 1970, and was Speaker of the House, considered the second most powerful position in the national government, from 1962 to 1970. It was recalled that “His skills as a politician and statesman made him an influential figure with respect to committee selection and the shaping of legislation…In the mid-1960's, McCormack helped pass through the House a large volume of domestic legislation, including the "Great Society" anti-poverty bills.”

The Dorchester Atheneum noted McCormack resided at Edward Everett Square as an adult, and that his 1940s leadership in Congress was important in drafting the New Deal Reforms of the Roosevelt administration. Also, “In 1958 he sponsored the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the agency that put the first man on the moon [1969].” From 1962-1970 he was Speaker of the House and earned the nickname the "fighting Irishman from Boston” because of his feisty, tenacious personality.” In Boston, McCormack’s name graces both the State Office Building at One Ashburton Place, (Government Center) and the John W. McCormack Post Office and Court House near Post Office Square. In Washington DC, McCormack’s legacy is perpetuated on John McCormack Road.

This 2-1/2 story hip roofed house expresses the Colonial Revival style strongest in its hip roof. It is also distinguished with a fine pedimented dormer window with 3 windows in the front hip, and foliated brackets supporting the main roof cornice. A diamond pattern design accents the front dormer pediment. Like most of its neighbors, it reads as a two part, swell-front wood framed house. The right half of the front facade swells out modestly, while the left half, flat, expresses a complementary curve shape in an arched portico over

During the late 1890s, the introduction of the Columbia Road Parkway radically changed St. Margaret's / Boston Street and adjoining areas. Columbia Road's construction cut through the William Andrews estate and resulted in the construction of Roseclair Street during the late 1890s; Roseclair Street runs parallel to and follows the great bend in Columbia Road as it sweeps past the St. Margaret's Roman Catholic Church complex. As early as 1894, Roseclair Street is shown on the atlas of that year as a proposed street named Compton Street.

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Roseclair Street. The Andrews estate bordered Dorchester Avenue between East Cottage and Mount Vernon Streets, before the coming of the Columbia Road Parkway. Also carved from the William T. Andrews estate, Roseclair Street is noteworthy for several well-sited c. late 1890s ensembles of two family housing, including the Queen Anne trio at 70; 72; 74 Roseclair Street and the towered, mirror image houses at 61 and 63 Roseclair Street. In 1898, 70 and 72 Roseclair Street were owned by John P. Leahy, probably the lawyer listed at 24 Thornley Street. 74 Roseclair Street was owned by Timothy Lellard, a member of the Police force at Station 9. By the Depression era the occupants of these houses included Thomas C. Mahon, chauffer, and Andrew Slavin, carrier (70); Frederick E. Miller, insurance agent and Mrs. Sarah A. Shea (72); William Tooze, painter, John W. Ochs, watchman and Joseph Ochs, floor layer (74).

231 to 247 Boston Street

Despite this neighborhood’s proximity to Boston where masonry row housing is common, the only example of this type of construction in this area is the red brick Queen Anne row numbered 231 to 247 Boston Street.

Mayhew Street is an important repository for simple, minimally ornamented Late Federal / Greek Revival dwellings. Set out as a cul-de-sac named Clapp Place as early as 1830, Mayhew Street's north side is built-up with wooden 1830s and 40s dwellings which are characterized by distinctive, horizontally massed structural components consisting of a main block and one or two lateral wings.
This street provides a fascinating opportunity to study a suburban subdivision that pre-dates the introduction of the railroad to Dorchester by more than a decade. Clapp Place seems to have been developed as a compound for the family and friends of the William Clapps. Its early residents were engaged primarily in agricultural pursuits. The first house on Mayhew Street was probably the William Channing Clapp House at 8 Mayhew Street. Mayhew Street a.k.a. Clapp Place evidently started out as a driveway leading to the William Channing Clapp farm house, which remained under Clapp ownership until at least the early 1900s. By 1850, nine houses bordered this dirt-covered country lane. 31 Mayhew Street is an Italianate house owned by A.H. Clapp during the late 19th century; 32 Mayhew Street, a sparsely ornamented Greek Revival house owned by Alfred H. Clapp and his heirs until the early 20th century; 38 Mayhew Street was occupied by Frederick Weiss who married Mary Clapp, daughter of Richard and granddaughter of Lemuel, from the 1860s until at least the turn-of-the-century; from at least the 1850s until the early 1900s, 42 Mayhew Street was owned by William Blake Trask. His family operated the Trask Pottery Co. at Commercial Point and he married Mary’s sister Rebecca. A carpenter y trade, further research may show that he was involved as a builder in the development of Mt Vernon Street c.1870. He was for many years active in the New England Historical Genealogical Society and the Dorchester Historical Society. During the early 1900s he lived in the Capt. Lemuel Clap House, the early 18th century house that is part of the Dorchester Historical Society property.

The school buildings at 11 Mayhew Street began as the convent (1914) for St. Margaret’s Church and the second parochial grammar school (1923), known as St. Rita’s School. The school later became Msgr Ryan High School, while the whole complex became the Boston Collegiate Charter School in 2004.
The building at 221-223 Boston Street is another survivor from the mid-nineteenth century. This double Greek Revival house was owned but not occupied by Charles O. Dillaway of South Boston and James Buckner, machinist and resident of Dorchester Avenue, near Crescent Avenue. By 1894, Martha Clapp, widow of Frederick and daughter-in-law of William Clapp, the tanner who built 195 Boston Street in 1806, lived here. Martha Clapp owned this house until the early 1900s. By 1933 Mary and John R. Furfey lived in 221 while Harold G. Mitten, Lieutenant Division 4, resided in 223.

St. Margaret Street (originally Orchard Street), like Harvest Street, was cut through the former Clapp orchards during the 1890s. 50 St. Margaret's Street is related to Mayhew's development judging by its massing and Greek Revival characteristics. By 1874, Mary C. Weiss (Mary Clapp, daughter of Richard), of 38 Mayhew owned this house. The 1874 Atlas shows that access to this house was gained via a narrow way labeled “court,” which ran from Mt. Vernon Street and now survives as an alley. This house was surrounded on three sides by the William T. Andrews estate and on the west side by the heirs of Richard Clapp. The Weiss family owned this house until at least the turn-of-the-century. By the Depression era, Anthony J. Cannatta, janitor of the John Marshall School lived here.

Mt. Vernon Street was developed c. 1870 over part of the Clapp orchard and was a harbinger of more intensive street construction. The setting out of Mt. Vernon Street coincided with the annexation of Dorchester to Boston, an event that triggered Dorchester-wide housing development, only to be curtailed by the Financial Panic of 1873. Mt. Vernon Street has an important collection of early 1870s Italianate / Mansard residences, including 8 Mt. Vernon Street, which is a ca. 1870 double house whose ample side yard and carriage house survive to illustrate the character of this street's initial development, and 57 Mt. Vernon Street, which is a charming Italianate / Mansard cottage built in the early 1870s that retains its bracketed door hood and polygonal bay at the main facade.

Few Dorchester sections offer a better opportunity to study the turn-of-the-century phase of three-decker development than the St. Margaret's / Boston Street area. For example, the handsome three-decker duo at 31 and 33 Mt. Vernon Street near Dorchester Avenue was built by W.T. Henderson in 1906 for Margaret E. Holland from designs provided by William Duff. Arthur Krim notes that Duff often worked with W.H. Besarick on three-deckers. Examples of their work are said to extend from Jones Hill to Melville Avenue.

Harvest Street, like St. Margaret Street to the south, was cut through the former Clapp orchards during the 1890s and is lined with a diverse collection of Queen Anne, Colonial Revival and three-decker housing. Particularly noteworthy is the William H. Besarick-designed Roger Clapp School at 35 Harvest Street, built on land given to the city by the Clapp family. Besarick, together with builder William Duff built fine examples of three-decker houses from Jones Hill to Melville Park.
180 to 196 Boston Street

Situated on the east side of Boston Street, opposite the William Clapp House, 180 to 196 Boston Street stands a tract that was part of the Henry Humphrey's holdings in 1874. Remaining undeveloped and owned by the Humphreys and Clapp familys throughout the 1880s, this parcel contained the first St. Margaret's Church by 1894. This wooden church structure was replaced by the present group of three-deckers by 1910 numbered 180-196 Boston Street.

Site of Revolutionary War Redoubt

In the 17th century, Dorchester residents used what is now South Boston as a cow pasture, because Boston Street through the marshes was the only means of entrance and exit. The cows could be left on the peninsula with only a youngster to guard the causeway. In 1775 Dorchester citizens, who were fearful of an attack from the British who commanded Castle Island and occupied Boston proper, built a fortification across Boston Street to protect against British invasion, and the cow pasture became something of a no-man’s land. The redoubt, made of wood and dirt, crossed Boston Street at the point where Harvest and Boston Streets intersect. If you walk along
Harvest Street, you will see a drop off in the land in the backyards along the south side of the street. This natural formation would have been incorporated into the redoubt and is surely part of the reason this location was chosen.

Lemuel Clap House and William Clap House

Boston Street is the route that Washington’s army followed in March of 1776 to fortify Dorchester Heights on the Cow Pasture peninsula in a single night. A train of three hundred and sixty teams of horses or “mostly yoked oxen,” was gathered from all the towns and villages around, together with teamsters, hostlers, farriers, and ox-drivers. Barns and sheds were assigned, and hay, oats, and fodder was furnished. The required loads were apportioned off for each team. Schedules were worked out for the timing and number of trips that would be necessary: all in all, a tremendous undertaking in military organization and logistics, yet particularly suited to the ways and means of the enterprising villagers round about. We can picture the dark spectacle of lumbering oxen plodding by, dragging their overloaded carts and vans with creaking wagon wheels that rumbled over the rutted, half-frozen roadway. Around them, we would see a shadowy press of soldiers, indistinctly silhouetted in the moonlight, or with their taut faces lit up by lanterns as they passed the house door. Over their shoulders they would be carrying shovels, pick-axes, crow-bars, or other tools in addition to their muskets. Overhead, we would trace the fiery missiles criss-crossing the sky, while the framework of the house itself would shudder with the crash of cannon, and shake at the bursting of shells. All in all, it would present a drama never to be forgotten, of a new nation surging forward in the night to meet its destiny.

Boston Street, one of the oldest thoroughfares in the area, has historic resources that span a considerable sweep of time, representing a diverse collection of housing types - both in terms of form and style. Boston Street was part of a system of roads that dated back to the mid-17th century. It was originally known as "the Causeway" or the "way to the Great Neck" (originally part of Dorchester, now South Boston, also called the Cow Pasture). It was called the Causeway because its route passed over the marshland of Little Neck, an area bounded by South Cove on the west and Old Harbor (Pleasure Bay) on the east. Boston Street was linked with Columbia Street, now Columbia Road, which in turn, was connected with Stoughton and Hancock Streets. Enterprise Street, which extends northwestward from Boston Street alongside the Dorchester Historical Society property, is a new name for an early street called Willow Court which led to the Clapp family's grist mill and the marsh land associated with South Cove (South Bay).

This area has significant historical associations with the Clapp family who were tanners and gentlemen farmers and spinster descendants in this area from 1630 to the mid-20th century. Two historic house museums operated by the Dorchester Historical Society located at #195 (The William Clapp House on the right) and #199 Boston Street (The Lemuel Clap House) provide a physical link with this prominent family.

Captain Lemuel Clap and his son William Clapp who lived in the historic houses now maintained by the Dorchester Historical Society were descended from Nicholas Clap who married his cousin Sarah, Roger’s sister. Part of the Lemuel Clap House, which, since 1957, shares the same lot as the William Clap House, is said to date to 1665 but architectural historian Elizabeth Amadon and others think this house was essentially rebuilt in 1765. Lemuel Clapp was a tanner by trade, and his house was located about 300 feet down Enterprise Street (formerly Willow Court) on the right as you proceed from Boston Street; his tanyard was located across the street on the left side of Willow Court. Lemuel also served as a Captain during the Revolutionary War, and in the early part of the war some of his men were stationed in the house.

Roger Clap, born in England in 1609, came to Dorchester on the Mary and John in 1630 and subsequently married Johanna Ford in 1633. They lived in this area until he became Captain of the Castle (Fort William on Castle Island in Boston Harbor) in 1665. His Memoirs describe the settlement of Dorchester in 1630.
Roger Clap and Nicholas Clap were the immigrant progenitors of nearly all the Clap and Clapp families in the United States. The story of the Clap/Clapp family in Dorchester reveals many details of the history of the town and of Dorchester’s agricultural heritage.

Roger Clap arrived in the New World in 1630 on the ship Mary and John, the first of the Winthrop Fleet to make landing in the New World.
Roger and his fellow countrymen from England’s western counties settled an area with good pasturage for their cattle, later to be named Dorchester. Roger and his brother Edward and cousin Nicholas, who both arrived in 1633, owned land near the South Bay.

Nicholas Clap arrived from Dorset, England, in 1633. He followed his cousin Roger, who had come with the original Dorchester settlers in 1630. Like most early settlers, Nicholas was granted parcels of land scattered all over the district. Each parcel filled a different agricultural need. The communal cow pasture was located on “Dorchester Neck” (now South Boston). Meadow lots on the south marsh (today’s South Bay Mall) provided marsh hay to feed livestock and reeds for thatch. The family had timber lots in Stoughton (then part of Dorchester) and South Boston.
The Clapp’s colonial enterprises were strung along Willow Court. The court (now partially Enterprise Street) was named for five massive willow trees that lined the road. The street was nestled between the “causeway road to the little neck” (now Boston Street to Andrew Square) and another road that skirted the swampy marshes of the south bay. The Clapp’s gristmill was at the water’s edge, while William’s tanning yard anchored the upper end of the road near Boston Street. Captain Lemuel Clap’s House (William’s boyhood home lay between the two.

Lemuel died in 1819 and two unmarried daughters continued to live the house. In 1872, the last of Lemuel’s daughters, Miss Catherine Clap died at the age of 90; title passed to her nephews Frederick and Lemuel, and the house was occupied by Captain Lemuel’s great-granddaughter Rebecca (granddaughter of his son Richard) and her husband, William Blake Trask in the late 19th century. Trask investigated the history of this venerable structure and to the degree that was possible at the time helped to preserve it. The Dorchester Historical Society acquired the property at 195 Boston Street including both houses and their land from Frank Lemuel Clapp in 1946. Due to the march of progress, the city needed land for a business street, and the Lemuel Clap House stood in the way of widening Willow Court to create Enterprise Street. The Society sold most of the frontage on Willow Court and moved the historic house in 1957 or 1958 to its present location just to the left of the William Clapp House.

The Lemuel Clap House is a two-story, wood frame, gambrel-roof building. The plan is that of an L. The main block is a five bays, single pile dwelling and the left rear ell is three bays wide by one bay deep. A one-story, gable-roof service addition forms a continuation of the ell. The building contains two brick chimneys, one situated in the right rear of the main block, the other located in the center of the ell. The roof trim of the SE and SW elevations is a boxed cornice and decorated frieze. The raking trim consists of fascia board. This house’s SE, SW and NE elevations are covered with clapboard, while the remaining elevations are covered with wood shingles. The center entry exhibits a six-paneled door which is surmounted by a simple pediment with pilasters while the eight-paneled central door of the SW elevation has a simple pediment. Three early twelve over twelve pane windows are still intact. The building stands on a poured concrete foundation with full basement, having been moved approximately 200 feet southeast of its original location in 1957.

Roger Clap’s Memoirs, one of the narratives of the original planters of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, are often cited by historians for information about the early settlements. After starting in America as a farmer, Roger became Captain of the Castle, the fortification commanding Boston Harbor.
Roger, Nicholas and Edward owned a tidal gristmill on the mouth of Mill Brook Creek at its entrance into the South Bay, approximately where the Super Stop & Shop building is today. The mill pond was fed both by the creek and by the rise of the tide in the Bay. When the tide was at its full, gates to the mill pond were closed. When the tide fell, a sluiceway could be opened for water to propel the movement of the mill wheel.

In the colonial period the mill dam connected Clapp’s Point at the mill to Black Point on the Roxbury side of the South Cove or South Bay, creating a mill pond that covered about an acre of land. The dam was made of sawn wood planks driven into the mud of the marshland with earth piled up against the wooden wall. Pieces were recovered when the south Bay was last dredged for navigation improvement before 1910. Probably on the west end of the dam was a low end, called a spillway. In the middle, there would have been a pair of large swinging wooden tide gates, and the Clap’s Mill stood on the east end. The mill would have been powered by an undershot waterwheel, connected to hand hewn wood shafts and wooden gears. The pond was fed by Mill Creek as well as by the tide. When the tide had reached its full, the gates were closed to trap the water to be used to run the wheel when the tide ebbed. The spillway let out excess water if the creek was especially active.
In the eighteenth century Lemuel Clap added tanning to the family enterprises. Other family members began tanning in more Dorchester locations, including Elisha Clap who came into possession of the Blake House and its lands, where he operated.

Lemuel expanded his home in 1765 to accommodate his family, and in rebuilding it, he changed its appearance to reflect the Georgian style of the day. The earlier house has been rumored to have belonged to Roger Clap, but if so, the old house has been lost within Lemuel’s re-construction.

The colonial militia had played a vital role in protecting the town. Captain Lemuel Clap’s Company served at Dorchester Heights during the British evacuation of Boston in the Revolution.
The family extended its landholdings eastward toward Dorchester Avenue. Lemuel’s son Richard built a house on the site on Columbia Road that is now the home of the Russell School. At one time in early life he was engaged pretty extensively in brick-making. His bricks were used to construct both his own house and that of his brother William Clapp.

William Clapp, who had built up the family business into the largest tannery in Dorchester, built the Federal-style building at 195 Boston Street in 1806. Although the house built of brick, the east and north sides of the house were sheathed in clapboard, and painted, as was the fashion. Although often called a farmhouse, the Clapp House is essentially a large free-standing city home, emulating the fine brick homes that were being built along Washington Street in the South End and on Beacon Hill at this time. The William Clapp House at 195 Boston Street (1806) provides physical evidence of a tanner and gentleman farmer's Federal mansion house estate. It was built by local carpenter Samuel Everett on land deeded to William Clapp by his father Lemuel. Only two years earlier, Dorchester Avenue, located one block to the east, had been cut through this area as a turnpike or toll road linking Dorchester Lower Mills with Boston.
The William Clapp House is a two-story, hip roof building. It has a square plan facing SE to Boston Street, five bays wide by five bays deep with a later rear two-story, gable roof, wood frame, wing and lean-to. The main building contains four brick corner chimneys and central gable dormers on the SE and NW elevations. The SW and NW elevations of the main building are common bond brick. The SE and NE elevations and all elevations of the rear wing are clapboard. The windows of the main block are sash type with six over six arrangement. Those of the SE and NE elevations have moulded trim and slipsills. The main entrance consists of an open porch and vestibule with double doors containing large translucent upper panels. The SW elevation has a central recessed single door and fanlight facing a large concrete terrace. The building stands on a stone block foundation. Additionally, a large one-story, gable roof, wood frame, rectangular barn is located on this property.

The symmetrical arrangement of windows, the hipped roof, and the siting on a small rise are all typical of high-style Federal homes.

Upwardly-mobile families like the Clapps, educated their sons to be part of a growing professional class and prepared their daughters to be the wives of such young men.

The Clapp House was spacious, but it quickly filled to overflowing. Elizabeth bore nine children between 1808 and 1821. Two died in infancy, but seven lived at least into their teens. It was common to lose children to childhood diseases or accidents, and Elizabeth must have felt extremely lucky to have the majority of her children remain health. Sadly, the three youngest – Rebecca aged 21, James aged 19, and Alexander aged 17 – died within four day’s of each other when typhoid swept through Dorchester in 1838. It was a devastating blow to the family.

About this time, young Lemuel, who was engaged to be married, supervised the addition of a new kitchen and servant wing onto the rear of the house.

Butter and cheese were processed in the basement of the “new wing” added to the William Clapp House in the 1830s. After the milking was done, dairymaids separated the butter from the raw cream using an efficient paddle churn. The butter was salted, put up in wooden tubs and stored in an insulated tin-lined cooler until it was sent to market. Cheese was aged in the same cellar room.

The Clapps were among a number of farmers in Dorchester and Roxbury experimenting with improved varieties of vegetables and fruits. From Frederick’s diary of 1847-51, we know that the family cultivated potatoes, beets, beans, rutabagas and corn. These were well-established staple crops and not particularly innovative. The real interest of the brothers was in cultivating new varieties of fruit trees, especially pears. They also grew plums, strawberries, currants, and many other types of berries. They became very successful, even shipping plants to Europe.
Each of William Clapp’s sons contributed to the success of the fruit business. Thaddeus, who had studied at Harvard College, was the scientist. He experimented with many hybrids, published his findings in scientific farming journals and earned a reputation in horticultural circles. According to family tradition, Lemuel had the honor of planting the first Clap Favorite Pear seed. He seems to have been the manager of the business, setting wages, hiring workers and keeping accounts.

Frederick was the real farmer of the team. He could be found haying, planting crops, improving root cellars and tending animals. He even cultivated a peach orchard. However New England farms declined after the Civil War, and the business declined. By 1884, Frederick’s son Edward Blake Clapp, a florist, had transformed the farm into a local nursery complex focusing on green-house cultivated flowers while his cousin William Channing Clapp maintained a small dairy.

The Dorchester Historical Society acquired the Clap/Clapp houses in the 1940s from Frank Lemuel Clapp, whose wife had died earlier. Frank was a loyal supporter of the Dorchester Historical Society and remained as caretaker until his death in the 1950s.