

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.

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.

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 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-median 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 reconstructed 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.

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, probably dates to the early 18th century; it was essentially rebuilt in 1765 in the Georgian style. 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.

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 were 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.

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 was 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 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. Each of William Clapp's sons, Thaddeus, Frederick and Lemuel, 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.

Dorchester Historical Society
www.DorchesterHistoricalSociety.org

