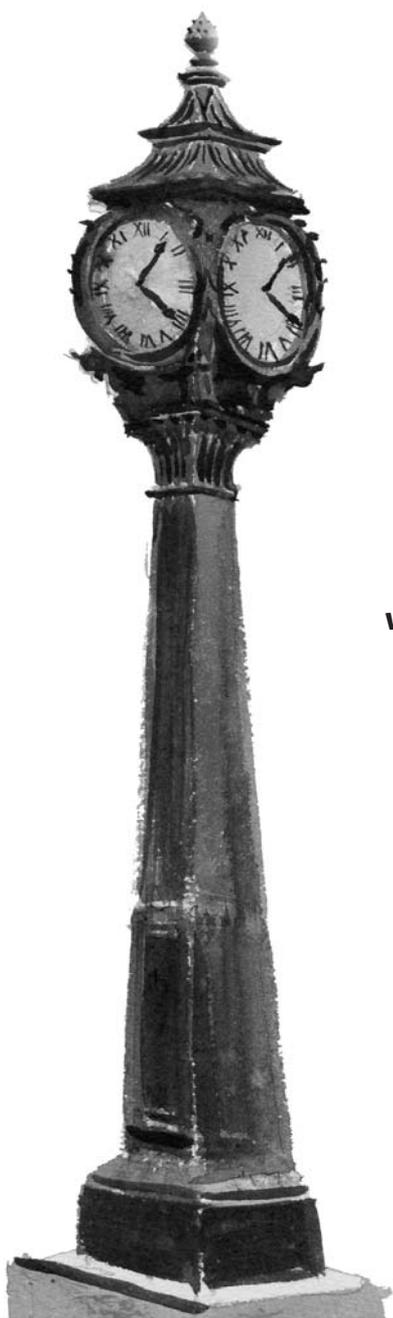


The Clock in _____

PEABODY SQUARE

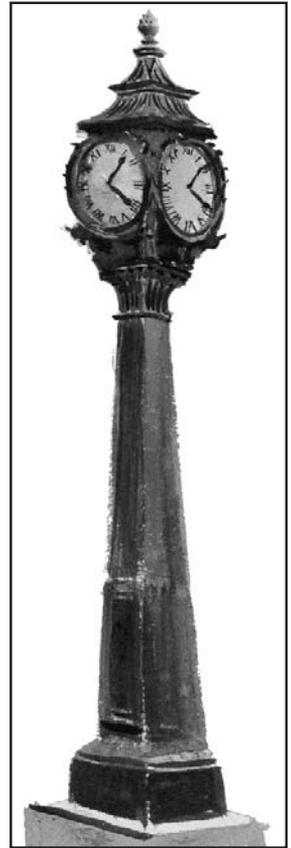
Ashmont



**On the occasion of the
Welcome Home Ceremony, May 31, 2003,
for the newly restored Monument Clock
in Peabody Square, Dorchester**

Foreword

The celebration of the re-installation of the Peabody Square Clock offers an opportunity to reflect on Dorchester's history. Through the story of the clock — how it came to be here, how the park in which it stands was created, how it was manufactured, how it has stood for decades telling the hours as Dorchester life continues — we can see the story of our community. The clock, like many features of the urban landscape that have stood for many years, has become a part of the place in which we live. A sense of place, our place, helps to ground our thoughts, to provide a starting point for where we are going. Our community's history can inspire us by providing a perspective on the course of our own lives. Recognizing and embracing and caring for the symbols of our place can reward us; these symbols can inform and educate and entertain. They make Dorchester *Dorchester*.



Acknowledgements

We thank the City of Boston and Mayor Thomas M. Menino for seeing this important project through. We appreciate the City's commitment and the support of the Edward Ingersoll Browne Fund and the City's Neighborhood Improvements through Capital Expenditures (N.I.C.E.) Program. Several individuals who worked on the project deserve special mention for their unstinting efforts over the course of many months. 1. John Dalzell who coordinated the process from the city's end; 2. Rick and

Linda Balzer of The Balzer Family Clockworks, whose commitment to craftsmanship resulted in an extraordinary restoration; 3. Rosanne Foley whose interest and support has, among other things, resulted in this pamphlet; 4. Jeffrey Gonyeau, an Ashmont Hill resident and the community's representative who coordinated communication on the restoration process and who dogged the project from beginning to end. Funds from the Peabody Square Centennial Committee are accepted gratefully to establish a maintenance fund.

One of the goals of the Dorchester Historical Society is to preserve and tell the story of our past. We delight in the Welcome Home Ceremony, an opportunity to present the story of the Peabody Square Clock to a new generation of Dorchester residents.

Earl Taylor, President
Dorchester Historical Society

The Peabody Square Monument Clock

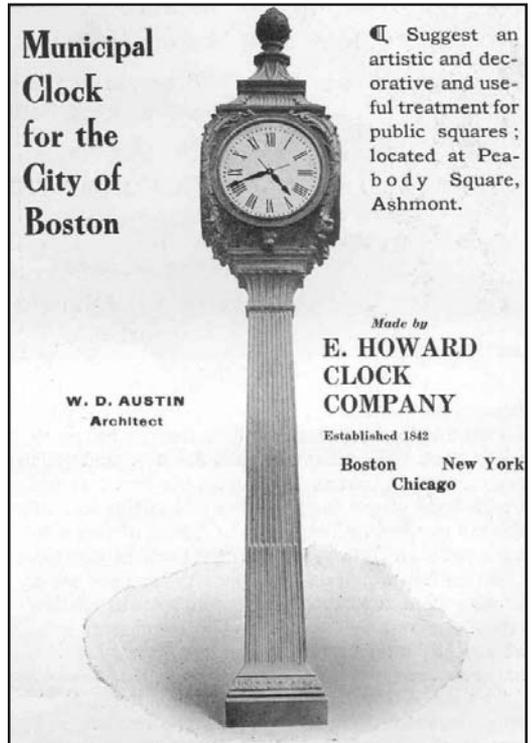
May 31, 2003

The monument clock in Peabody Square today keeps time exactly as it did when erected 93 years ago, by weight-driven, pendulum-regulated, hand-wound clockworks.

This four dial post clock is unique in several ways. Purchased by the City of Boston and erected on city-owned parkland, it was intended to serve as a public enhancement and to provide a useful civic amenity. Fabricated in Roxbury by the renowned E. Howard Clock

Company, the clock is also exceptional as the only architect-designed clock in the city.

Thanks to a community-supported and City-funded restoration, this neighborhood focal point serves again the purpose for which it was erected in 1910—adorning the Ashmont neighborhood and providing the time to residents and passersby. In celebration of its restoration, the Dorchester Historical Society is pleased to publish this brief history of one of Boston's most elaborate pieces of street furniture.

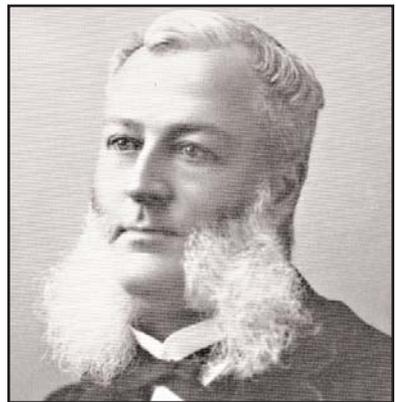


Peabody Square, Dorchester

Peabody Square is located in the Ashmont section of Dorchester at the intersection of Dorchester Avenue, Ashmont Street, and Talbot Avenue. The Square has been a bustling commerce and transportation hub since the second half of the nineteenth century. Its edges are distinguished by several elegant buildings including, starting to the south and working counterclockwise:

- The Peabody, 195 Ashmont Street, 1895, a fine Tudor-style brick apartment building designed by architect Edwin J. Lewis, Jr.
- All Saints' Episcopal Church, 1892-1894, the first church designed by Ralph Adams Cram, America's preeminent gothic revival church architect
- Ashmont Fire House, 1895, designed by Edmund M. Wheelwright
- Hotel Argyle, 1888-1892, built as a stylish residential hotel with shop fronts on the ground floor
- O'Brien's Market, 1884, an exuberant Queen Anne style shop building designed by W. Whitney Lewis

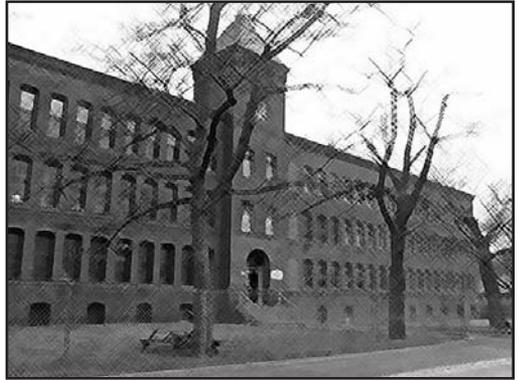
The locale was named Peabody Square in 1893 by the Boston City Council to honor Colonel Oliver Peabody (1834-1896). Peabody, a founder of Kidder, Peabody & Co., and his wife Mary Lothrop Peabody were major benefactors of All Saints Church and built the Peabody apartment building to complement the church architecturally and to help shelter it from busy Dorchester



Avenue. Peabody also donated the land in the center of the Square for use as a park. Originally an elegant circular green, over time traffic demands—including trolleys that rumbled along Talbot and Dorchester Avenues heading to Codman Square and into Boston—resulted in its reconfiguration into its current triangular shape. Francis H. Peabody erected the oval granite drinking trough—with accommodations for people as well as for horses—in 1899 in memory of his brother, the Colonel, who had done so much to shape the neighborhood.

The Clock's Commissioning and Design

The majority of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century street clocks were installed by business owners in front of their establishments, often with their company's name prominently emblazoned on the clock faces. As such, these timepieces not only afforded those without wristwatches



the ability to check the time, but also served as highly visible advertising for the sponsoring business. The Peabody Square Clock appears to be unique among the historic street clocks in Boston in that it was the City itself that erected the clock purely for civic purposes.

In a letter to the Boston Art Commission dated May 14, 1909, G.W. Morrison, Superintendent of Public Buildings, wrote: “Acting on instructions of His Honor Mayor Hibbard, I am contemplating installing a twelve foot, four dial, post clock in the public square, known as Peabody Square, junction of Dorchester and Talbot Avenues, Ashmont. Each dial

is to be thirty inches in diameter... The enclosed blueprint shows the design of clock to be used and I respectfully request the approval of the Art Commission.”

By July 1909 the clock’s designer, architect William Downer Austin, had completed full-sized drawings of the clock. According to a memo from the Art Commission to the Mayor’s Office, the E. Howard Clock Co. considered adopting his design as a standard for future city clocks. The Peabody Square clock is, however, the only example known to have been produced. At the Art Commission’s October 4, 1909, meeting, Mr. Austin’s perspective sketch was examined and his design was unanimously approved. In August of 1910, it was reported that “the clock tower at Peabody Square had been put in place.”

While not much is known of William Downer Austin, who lived from 1856 to 1943, he was a member of the Boston Architectural Club and the Boston Society of Architects, and designed schools, hospitals and other public buildings. In the 1930s he designed the Administration Building at East Boston (now Logan) Airport.

The E. Howard Clock Company

Edward Howard (1813-1904) was apprenticed at an early age to Aaron Willard, Jr., of the famous Willard clockmaking family. By 1840, Howard had built his own factory in nearby Roxbury, where he manufactured high-grade wall clocks, sewing machines, fire engines, precision balances, and, by 1843, tower clocks.

Over the next forty years, Howard expanded his business, building the first American watchmaking factory and meeting with varying degrees of financial success. In 1882, Howard sold his personal interest in the com-

pany and retired. The firm retained the Howard name and remained dedicated to its founder's high standards and reputation for quality.

In the 1930s the company relocated to Waltham, Massachusetts. Production of smaller clocks ceased by 1958, and Howard produced its last tower clock in 1964. After a series of financial setbacks, in 1980 the then owner attempted to blow up the factory building, but the company survived and relocated yet again, this time to Hanover, Massachusetts. In 1993 the company moved out of the Boston area altogether to Wisconsin.

Edward Howard was a resident of Ashmont Hill in Dorchester, living in an elegant apartment building at 708 Washington Street, a few blocks west of Peabody Square. Howard passed away in 1904 prior to the manufacture and installation of the Peabody Square clock, but his legacy lives on in the extremely high level of craftsmanship his company put into the Peabody Square and other street clocks they installed in Boston and in cities around the country.

In addition to other street clocks (including those on West Broadway in South Boston, at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Huntington Avenue near Symphony Hall, and at 439 Boylston Street in the Back Bay), prominent Howard clocks survive today in a number of landmark Boston buildings, still displaying the time to thousands every day. The iconic clocks at South Station and in the Boston Custom House tower are just two examples.

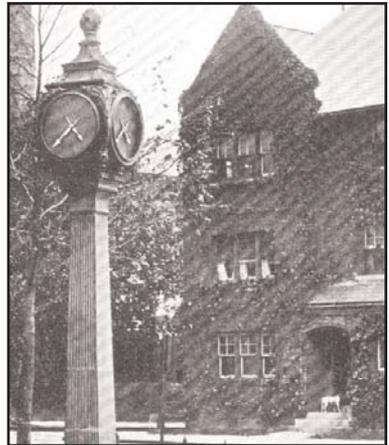
Description of the Peabody Square Clock

The clock at Peabody Square is a tower clock, or post clock. Typically such clocks have only two faces, are more simply-decorated, and are much smaller in scale than the Peabody Square clock. The clock's height is

presently about 21', as it is now mounted atop a newly constructed granite plinth. The clock's square fluted pillar base is made of cast iron, as are most portions of the ornamentation on the four-sided head, including the pineapple finial. The clock's head, which supports the four faces, was originally constructed of wood, but was recreated in more durable cast metal in the recent restoration. The four clock faces are made of white milk glass with hand-painted Roman numerals, and the four sets of hands are hand-carved wood. The dogs heads mounted under each clock face have been cast in bronze to replace the severely deteriorated wooden originals.

The clock is run by a "size zero" clock movement housed in the base of the square pillar. A short pendulum swings back and forth at one second intervals, driving a series of gears which transfer the movement up the post via a drive shaft to the hands on all four faces. A 132-lb lead counterweight is attached by a steel cable to the main gear. The weight is raised by hand crank every week, to help offset the effect of gravity which otherwise would eventually slow and stop the pendulum's swing. In addition to winding by means of a small hand-crank, other regular maintenance tasks involve cleaning and oiling key points in the clock mechanism, adjusting the hands for loss or gain of time, and to accommodate daylight savings time.

There is conflicting evidence about the original appearance of the clock, and the recent restoration takes into account evidence from the clock itself as well as the restorer's knowledge of typical E. Howard manufacturing conventions. For example, an undated image of the clock in the official program of the Dorchester Day celebration of June 7, 1913, depicts it with white faces with black numerals. However, several historic photographs of



Peabody Square—including postcard photographs dating from just after the clock was installed (between 1910-12) and from 1923—appear to show it *in situ* with black faces and lighter-colored hands and numerals. Although this evidence is contradictory, the recently installed milk glass dials with black numerals allow for improved readability of the faces and accommodate the added benefit of new internal illumination.

Historic photos such as those mentioned above show the clock to be rather dark in color. Underneath the beige and gray scheme applied in the 1980s, earlier layers of paint on the clock case show that it was painted both green and black at various times—typical colors for most Howard street clocks. Today the clock is painted a deep glossy green with subtle gold highlighting.

Preservation History

“These sentinels of time do provide a useful public service literally every hour of the day and night”—from Order for Landmarking Vintage Clocks..., Boston City Council, July 23, 1980.

In 1980, after 70 years of service, the Peabody Square clock was in need of restoration. The City of Boston’s Parks Department had been in charge of keeping the clock in working order, but by the late 1970s regular maintenance had fallen victim to budget cuts. In addition to suffering damage—both inadvertent from inappropriate maintenance techniques and by intentional vandalism—sometime in the mid 1970’s Parks Department engineers removed portions of the clock’s movement to install an electric motor to drive the gears. This turned out to be a short-term solution to keeping the clock running, as the motor failed completely by the late-1990s, leaving the clock frozen at ten past one for years.

In the early 1980s the City began to recognize the historic and practical value of its street clocks. In November 1983 the Boston Landmarks Commission designated the Peabody Square clock and four others as City of Boston Landmarks. After this designation, the Boston Art Commission secured funds through the Edward Ingersoll Browne Fund and other sources to repair several street clocks, including the Peabody Square clock. In 1985 the E. Howard Clock Co. was paid \$2,500 “to repair and clean movement and restore head” of the Peabody Square clock.

Due to both water infiltration into the clock through the leaky wooden head and a lack of consistent maintenance, by the mid 1990’s the clock had stopped running and was again in need of major repair. In 1999, local residents founded the Friends of the Peabody Square Clock to advocate for its refurbishment. They discovered that there was already an effort underway by the City of Boston, supported by Mayor Thomas M. Menino, to restore the clock. With funds from the Edward Ingersoll Browne Fund and from the City’s Neighborhood Improvements through Capital Expenditures (N.I.C.E.) Program, the City hired the Balzer Family Clockworks of Freeport, Maine, to perform a comprehensive restoration of the Peabody Square clock as well as of the older and less elaborate clock on West Broadway in South Boston.

The Balzer Family Clockworks discovered that the wooden head had deteriorated beyond repair and needed to be replaced. They re-fabricated this and much of the damaged wooden ornamentation out of cast metal—a more durable material and, quite possibly, the original preference of the E. Howard Company, had the budget for the clock been bigger. (The remains of the original wooden head and fragments of deteriorated ornamentation were saved and are now stored at the Dorchester Historical Society.) The existing clock faces were black-painted plywood and were clearly not original. The Balzers made and installed new white milk glass faces with hand-painted numerals and replaced the clouded plexiglass cov-

ers with clear tempered glass. All of the reused cast iron elements—including the massive fluted column base—were stripped of paint and repainted with a durable, deep green epoxy paint. The elaborate, applied decorative elements, including the cast iron pineapple—the symbol of hospitality—which caps the head of the case, received subtle gold detailing.

Believing strongly that the historic, weight-driven movements are superior to electric motor driven movements, the Balzers convinced City officials that the clockworks should be restored to their original purely mechanical action. They removed the electric motor and manufactured several new gears and other components to replace original elements of the works that had been removed when the motor was installed. The clock is now wound once a week by neighborhood residents.

Conclusion

Standing beautifully restored, reliably keeping time, and faithfully tended by the community, the Peabody Square Clock is a commanding presence in Peabody Square. Even the unfortunate intrusion of the forest of modern traffic signals that now regulates the thousands of cars that pass through the Square each day cannot overpower the clock's authoritative yet graceful beauty. Now complemented by a beautifully re-landscaped garden (funded by another generous gift from the Browne Fund), the clock and Peabody Square have regained their place as an elegant focal point of the Ashmont neighborhood of Dorchester.

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List of Illustrations

Cover, Watercolor, Vincent Crotty, 2003

Photo of clock from 1913 Dorchester Day Program

Col. Oliver Peabody, from All Saints book

Modern Photo of Howard Factory, from
<http://www.squillante.com/ward3/watches/howwatchphoto1.html>

View of Peabody Square ca. 1910, from All Saints book

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