



Upham's Corner, Dorchester, circa 1900. The building on the right is still standing, now occupied by a dance studio and several small storefronts on the ground floor. The building in the center (to the left of the Columbia Square building) is now gone, as are those in the left foreground of the photo, which stood where the Shawmut Bank branch now stands. Note the wires for the trolley, which extended down Dudley St. to the right as well as down Stoughton St. to the left.

### The Upham in Upham's Corner

## Amos Upham was a humble grocer; his son became one of Boston's richest citizens

by Anthony Sammarco

**A**fter the annexation of Dorchester to the City of Boston in 1870, the area known as "Upham's Corner" became much less of a country crossroad and more of an urban commercial district. The houses and small wood framed buildings gave way to large, commercial buildings that transformed the area into a thriving shopping district.

he was twice elected to the Common Council" said an 1891 article. His interests in the town, and his obvious wealth led him to replace the old store with a one story brick structure that would later be enlarged to four stories with the first use of electricity in Dorchester being recorded in the "Upham Building." This impressive commercial block was designed by John A. Fox (AIA) in 1884, and created

Upham's Corner was named for Amos Upham, who kept a general store at the corner of Dudley and Boston (now Columbia Road) Streets. The store, with living space above, served the needs of area residents but "as far back as 1830, Upham's Corner was very sparsely settled and where then were half a dozen houses, there are now hundreds. Cattle grazed in the pastures of farms nearby, where now there are houses and streets." Upham had moved from Sudbury and married Abigail Humphreys in 1819. They were the parents of numerous children, among them James Humphreys Upham.

J.H. Upham began in the family business in 1834, serving in many capacities until 1842 when he was made a partner of his father's grocery store. As "A.&J.H. Upham Company", they provided teas, coffees, and cocoa to the neighborhood, as well as pots, pans and buckets. A general store had to keep a ready supply of all necessities, even though Dorchester's population was fewer than 6,000 residents in 1842. Continuing in business, the store became a fixture to the crossroads of the area, and as in many Dorchester squares where a merchant kept a general store, the area was renamed "Upham's Corner" as had "Field's Corner, Glover's Corner and Baker's Corner (now Codman Square)" been named for the merchant in their respective areas.

JAMES HUMPHREY UPHAM WAS A concerned citizen, as well as a successful merchant. He was "Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, of the Overseers of the Poor, and the Surveyor of Highways, a member of the School Committee and Assessor for four years. He was twice elected to represent his town in the General Court, and when Dorchester was annexed to the City of Boston

an urban aspect to Upham's Corner. Seen to the right of the Upham Building in the accompanying photograph was Winthrop Hall, a theatre and assembly hall that would later be remodeled into the former Dorchester Savings Bank. On the left was the five story "Northwood", a residential apartment building on what is now the site of the Shawmut Bank. As the area became less residential, commercial and multi-family apartment buildings, most of them of impressive design, began to be built along Dudley Street and the new Columbia Road, which was laid out in the 1890's linking the Strandway in South Boston to Franklin Park.

UPHAM WAS INSTRUMENTAL in influencing his fellow residents that to annex the town to Boston would be a positive thing. As Chairman of the Selectmen of Dorchester, he offered numerous reasons to allow the annexation, and once accomplished, set about to develop much of his land into income-generating property.

By the time of his death in 1891, J.H. Upham was one of the wealthiest residents of Dorchester and could boast of having increased his father's business ten fold by his death. In his obituary, it was said that there "is probably no larger business in the Dorchester district than theirs." The firm of J.H. Upham & Company "has increased until now the firm has a trade extending over a radius of two miles, having four routes." Though the Upham family no longer operates the business in the square named for their ancestor, Upham's Corner is still a thriving commercial district that attracts Dorchesterites on a daily basis.

*Anthony Sammarco's award-winning history columns are a regular feature of Dorchester Community News.*