

THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF COPLEY SQUARE

by

DOREVE NICHOLAEFF

B. Arch. University of the Witwatersrand
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Signature of Author
Department of Architecture
June 26, 1979

Certified by
David Friedman, Assistant Professor
of History and Architecture
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by
Professor Julian Beinart, Chairman
Departmental Committee for Graduate Students

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The area that in 1883 came to be known as Copley Square is located at the collision of two grids, the Back Bay and the South End, both built upon reclaimed land. The square was the product of many planning decisions made especially for the Back Bay, generating a rich physical accretion of heterogenous pieces built from the 1860's through the 1910's.

Originally the area of the Square inspired little confidence in its worth. As planned, it comprised many odd-shaped parcels of land and was situated farthest from the highest valued property within the Back Bay. Beginning in 1859, the City engineers and the "Committee of Associated Institutions" offered schemes for the Copley site as a form of civic center featuring, at various times, a park, a school, public library and museums.

Contemporaneous with the economic and social development of the site as a center of cultural and educational institutions was the unique process of its physical growth. Despite the formal similarity of the Copley Square area and a Back Bay block, they underwent different processes of development, which produced different architectural characters. The linear process of fill and build was associated with the stylistic consistency within a Back Bay block. In the Copley Square area construction began in the center of the block approximately five years before the corner lots were built on and for the first time within the Back Bay and South End grids public buildings occupied entire parcels of land. This particular pattern of development, in conjunction with the proposals of the two groups of men, began to shape the character of Copley Square.

Thesis Supervisor: David Friedman

Title: Assistant Professor of History and Architecture

In Memory of
Edwin

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INTRODUCTION

The area that in 1883 came to be known as Copley Square is located at the collision of the grid of the Back Bay and the grid of the South End. Both grids laid out on reclaimed land were planned in the mid-nineteenth century. The more important of these developments was the Back Bay which extended the land west of the Public Garden over the tidal flats of the Charles River Bay. Within this grid, land closest to the Garden, the River, and the main axis of the system, Commonwealth Avenue, had the highest value. The value of land decreased as it lay progressively farther from these three poles. In 1860 the area that was later to become Copley Square was situated as far from any of these advantageous areas as was possible.

Only to be named Copley Square in 1883, it began to stumble into shape when a group of business and professional men, and city planners started formulating ideas to enhance the market value and quality of the site for the benefit of the Commonwealth, who were part owners of this land. The first group formed an "association of gentlemen" in 1859, calling themselves "the Committee of Associated Institutions" for the purpose of establishing a Conservatory of Arts and Sciences. The second group, the city designers, proposed to reserve land in the Copley Square area for use as a public park. The work of both groups helped structure the collision as a unique square in whose neighborhood cultural, educational and religious institutions, commercial enterprises and high density apartment houses came to be concentrated.

The development process at the Copley Square area differed from the building pattern of the Back Bay and South end grids. As soon as the land was laid within these reclaimed territories, each owner built on his property. Both grids continued their fill toward the west, and their structures followed closely behind. This sequential pattern of fill and build meant that within any block, buildings dated from approximately the

same time, a circumstance that makes for architectural and stylistic consistency. At the Copley site, construction occurred only after all the land had been laid and structures were erected in piecemeal fashion so that they came to dot the boundaries of its area. The buildings that fronted the space later to be known as Copley Square appeared over a period of twenty-five years, a situation which resulted in stylistic and formal complexity.

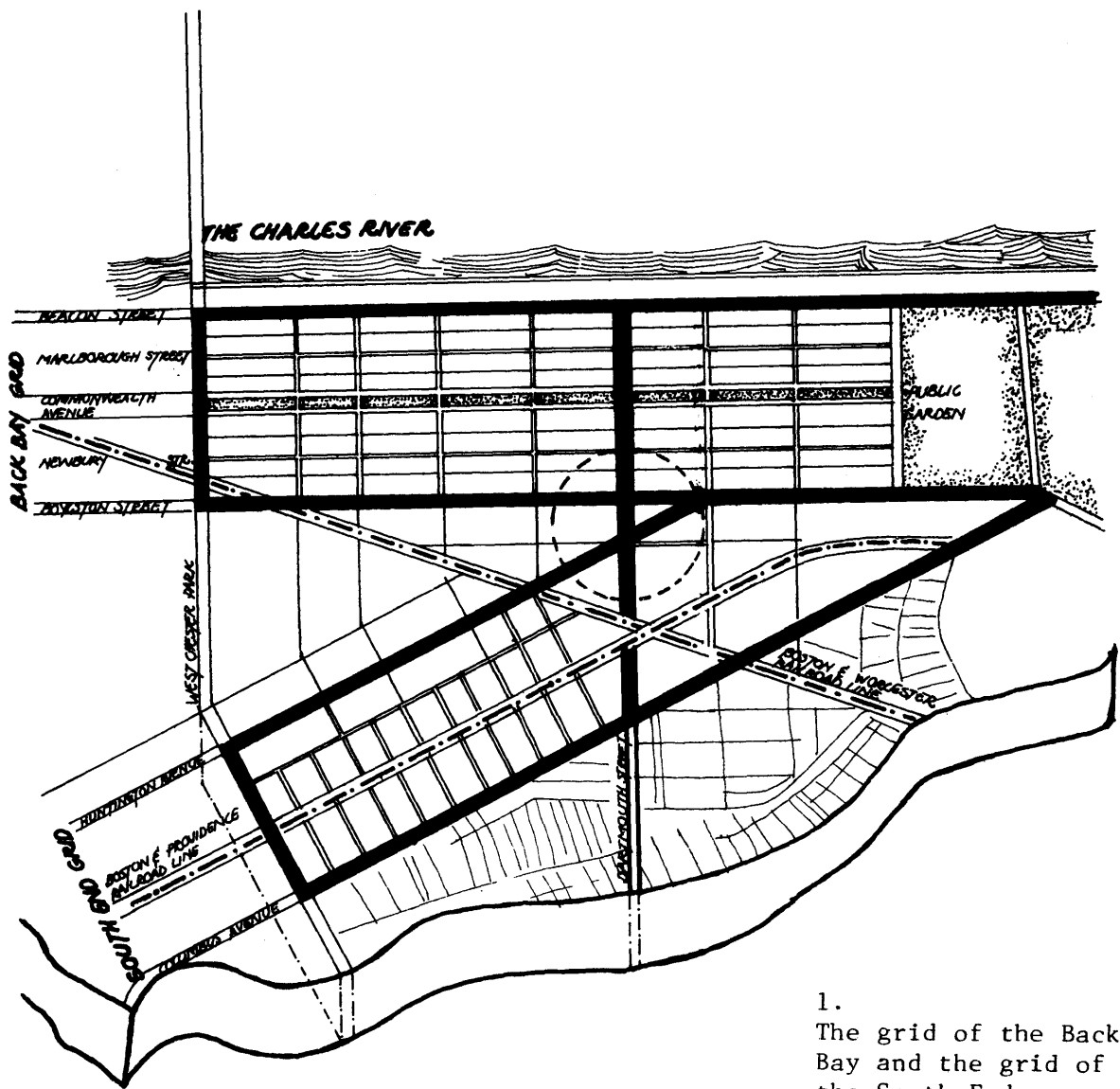
In the decade and a half after its creation, Copley Square was held to be a prominent civic space. Can this consideration be attributed to the execution of the planned civic improvements? To what extent did their execution realize the ideology proposed by the "Committee of Associated Institutions", and the map making of the city engineers and surveyors?

1.
THE COPLEY SQUARE SITE IN THE 1860'S

In 1860 both the quality of the Copley Square area and the value of its land were factors which determined whether this site was favorably disposed or not. Its physical form and character were structured by the configuration of the colliding grids of the Back Bay and South End. The value of its land was established by the nature of ownership there, and by its location relative to other sites within the two developments.

The land of the Back Bay approximates a rectangle which covers an area of about one hundred acres (figure 1). It is laid out in streets perpendicular to each other and is bounded on the east by the Public Garden; on the north by Beacon Street, beyond which were the lands of the Roxbury Mill-corporation, or of the parties to whom that company had sold; on the south by Boylston Street and the lands of the Boston Water Power Company; and on the east by West Chester Park, each of which were the lands owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and others. The principal of these streets, known as Commonwealth Avenue, divides the territory into two nearly equal parts, and its width is such as to admit a central island ornamented with grass, shrubbery and trees. This avenue follows the line of the Mill Dam which was constructed in 1814 and which exists today beneath the surface of Beacon Street. Parallel to the Broad Avenue too is a system of alleyways which bisect the depth of the blocks of the grid.

The trapezoidal geometry of the South End grid intersects the Back Bay and occupies a smaller area than the latter territory. The streets of the South End grid are at right angles to each other and its boundaries are: on the northwest, Huntington Avenue, on the southeast, Columbus Avenue, on the north, Boylston Street, and on the southwest, West Chester Park. The Boston Water Power Company owned most of the land within the trapezoid. Its two avenues, Huntington and Columbus, are the major axes of the system and they reach the Back Bay at the

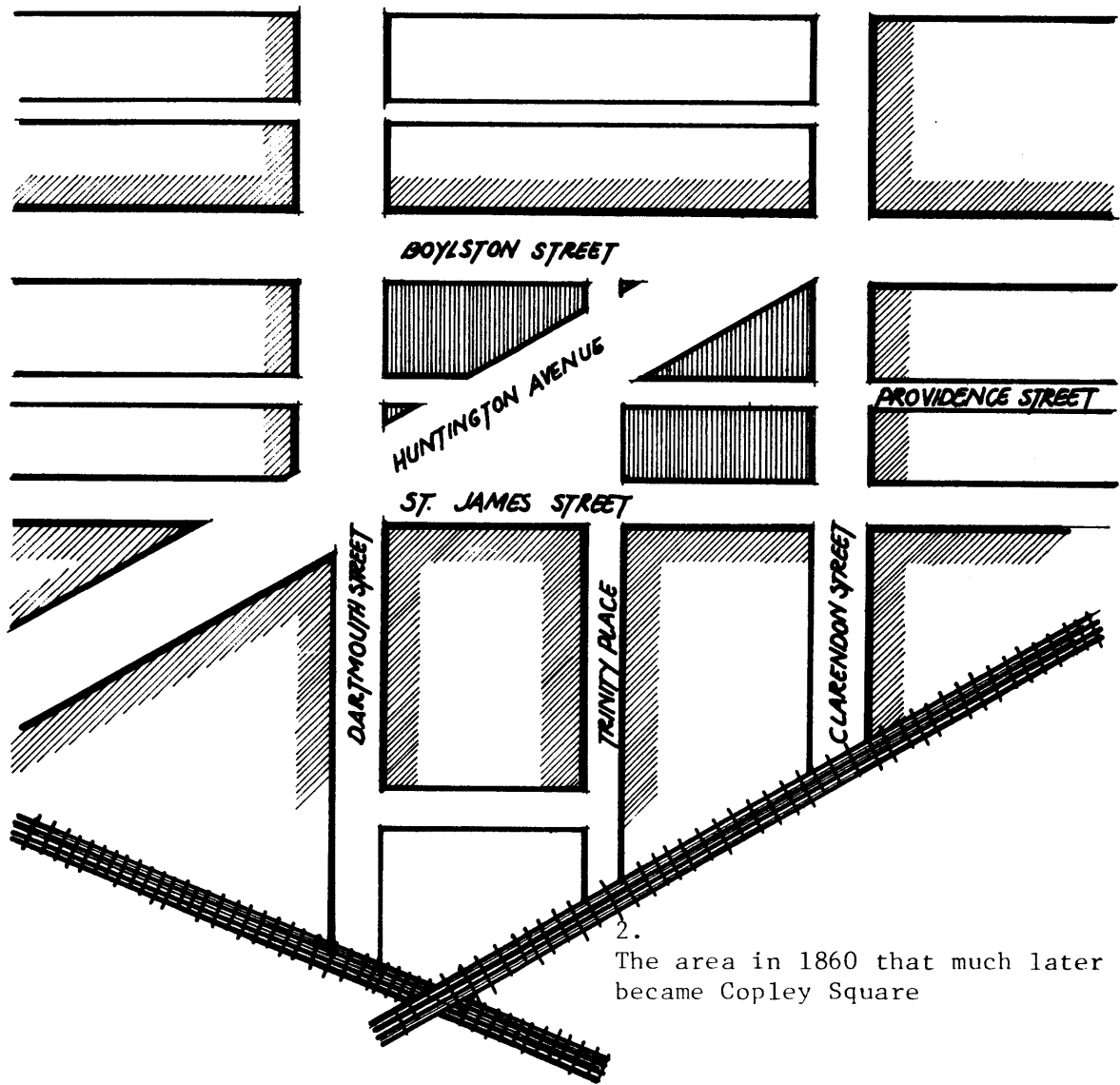


1.
The grid of the Back Bay and the grid of the South End

Copley Square Area and Park Square respectively. Both avenues were pre-figured by the Boston and Providence railroad line which runs midway between them and at a thirty degree angle relative to the Mill Dam. Incorporated in 1831 and opened two years later, this railroad line crosses the Boston and Worcester railway tracks within the South End grid and at Dartmouth Street. The blocks of land meet the line of the railroad tracks and avenues perpendicularly, whereas within the Back Bay, the blocks are parallel to the boundaries.

The two major and particular configurations which qualify the area within the rectangle and trapezoid, are superimposed at the Copley Square Site (figure 2). This is the territory bounded by Boylston, Clarendon and Dartmouth streets and St. James Avenue. Here too is collaged that part of the trapezoid which is north of the railroad tracks and which deviates from the typical South End pattern. This minor system parallels the Mill Dam and has a cross street, between Clarendon and Dartmouth Streets, called Trinity Place, which in the 1860's was planned to bisect Boylston Street. The space so formed, at the point of collision, was comprised of a Back Bay block bisected by an alleyway, Providence Street, penetrated also on its diagonal by Huntington Avenue, and further divided by Trinity Place. These streets and avenues passing through the Copley site were of diverse widths: Huntington Avenue was 100 feet wide, Trinity Place was 40 feet wide and Providence Street was a 25 feet passageway. This alley divided the ownership of land within the block so that its northern section belonged to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the southern part to the Boston Water Power Company.

What resulted was a number of pie-shaped pieces of land owned separately by two enterprises. The following were those pieces of the puzzle which were the property of the Commonwealth: a trapezoid bounded by Boylston, Dartmouth and Providence Streets, Huntington Avenue and Trinity Place; a triangle bounded by Boylston Street, Trinity Place and Huntington Avenue; and another triangle created by Clarendon and Providence Streets and Huntington Avenue. Those sections, belonging to the Boston Water Power Company were: a triangle formed by Providence and Dartmouth Streets and Huntington Avenue; the area between Huntington Avenue and St. James Avenue and Trinity Place; and a rectangle created by Clarendon and Providence Streets and Huntington Avenue.



2.
The area in 1860 that much later became Copley Square

It is evident that development of all these pieces, six in total, would have created a disjointed and incoherent environment. Had this configuration remained, the situation would have become even worse because ownership of land north and south of the alley, being by two bodies respectively, would most likely have resulted in those bodies imposing different and uncoordinated restrictions on the land.

Besides the configuration of the site creating the area's relative importance, the actual value for which the land there would sell, with respect to the different parts of the Back Bay and South End territory, was indicative of its condition for building. This value was dependent upon the important influences that gave the grids value as a whole, or affected the relative value of their parts.

By 1860, these influences could be classified as external and internal. The former were principally three, exclusive of the general and more essential fact, that the whole value of the territory derived from its proximity to the center of the city of Boston. These were: firstly, the Public Garden; secondly, the valuable improvements on the north side of Beacon Street and the extensive water-space of the Charles River Bay on the north; and thirdly, the character of Boylston Street, and the Water Power Company's lands in the South End grid, through which there was also a class of improvements in progress, but which strongly contrasted in value to those on Beacon Street.

The internal influences depended on the width of the streets and avenues, and the different degrees of their ornamentation. Commonwealth Avenue, dividing the combined territory of the Back Bay and that part of the South End situated north of the Boston and Worcester railroad tracks, into two nearly equal parts, influenced the two divisions equally; yet the lots in these divisions were not equally attractive for first-class residences, owing to the fact that the northern and southern external influences were by no means equal. Besides, the southern division exceeded in area the northern by the entire range of lots on the southerly side of Boylston Street. This range which encompassed the Copley Square site, was farther from the central avenue than any portion of the northern division, and was consequently less affected by its enhancing influence. Its value and by the same token that of the Copley area, was more liable to the influence of the cheap prices of the lots of the Boston Water Power Company which were south of Provi-

dence Street. The importance of these influences was reflected in the figures of the results of actual sales in this locality.¹

The whole territory of the Back Bay lands being of uniform grade, and with a single system of drainage, and lying in a symmetrical body, it would be fair to presume that the prices of lots would be uniform, were it not for the inequality of the affects of the internal and external influences.

To illustrate the estimated worth of the Copley area in 1860, the relative recorded average prices obtained from the sales of the land in its proximity are used to establish this data (appendix 1). Its value would be sixty-six percent less than the price of lands fronting Commonwealth Avenue, the Charles River and the Public Garden, and fifteen percent lower than the mean price of lands south of the avenue. It is therefore obvious that the Copley site inspired little confidence in the sale of its lots. The large variance in the cost of land here would also have created the dilemma as to whether the character of the environment would be influenced by the higher or lower land value.

The comparatively low market value together with the formal confusion of land parcels rendered the Copley area in the 1860's an unfavorable site within the Back Bay and the South End territory. The possible method to enhance its quality and value, and so increase the purchase price of the land, would be to establish an important urban element which by its nature would attract people to buy the lots at higher cost. Realizing this, two groups of men began to explore the potential of the Copley site and its surrounds.

Notes

1.

See: "The Estimate of the Financial Effect of the proposed reservation of Back Bay lands prepared for the Committee of Associated Institutions of Science and Art by M. D. Ross in January 1861" p.9. This document is located in the MIT Archives.

2.
PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE THE COPLEY SQUARE SITE IN THE 1860'S

In the mid-nineteenth century, the improvements which were planned to enhance the quality and increase the market value of the land at the Copley Square area, began to mould and influence its form and nature. These improvements were to be a conservatory of arts and sciences and a public park and square. The conservatory was proposed by the "Committee of Associated Institutions" which consisted of a number of business and professional men, while the formation of a public space at the Copley site was planned by a group of city engineers and surveyors. Whereas the efforts of the city employees were limited to map making, the work of the association of gentlemen was confined to conceptual planning and their ideas describing the nature of the conservatory appeared in three documents called Memorials.

The "Massachusetts Conservatory of Art and Science" was another name assigned to this informal group of men. It was created in 1859 in order to erect a conservatory of arts and sciences in Boston. Buildings for various societies devoted to Agriculture, Horticulture, Natural History, Mechanics, Manufactures, Commerce, the Fine Arts and Public Education were to constitute the conservatory. For the execution of this proposal a site had to be procured, and the time for land acquisition became ripe in 1859. The opportunity to apply for a plot of State land arose when the Governor of Massachusetts, Nathaniel Banks, in that year, stated in the annual message of the Legislature that land in the Back Bay would be granted for educational improvements so as "to keep the name of the Commonwealth for ever green in the memory of her children." And so the men of these societies responded to the Governor's offer. They petitioned the Legislature (in House Document No. 260) for a "reservation of State Land in the Back Bay for a Conservatory of Art and Science," and used the tactic that this scheme would benefit the State from an educational and financial point

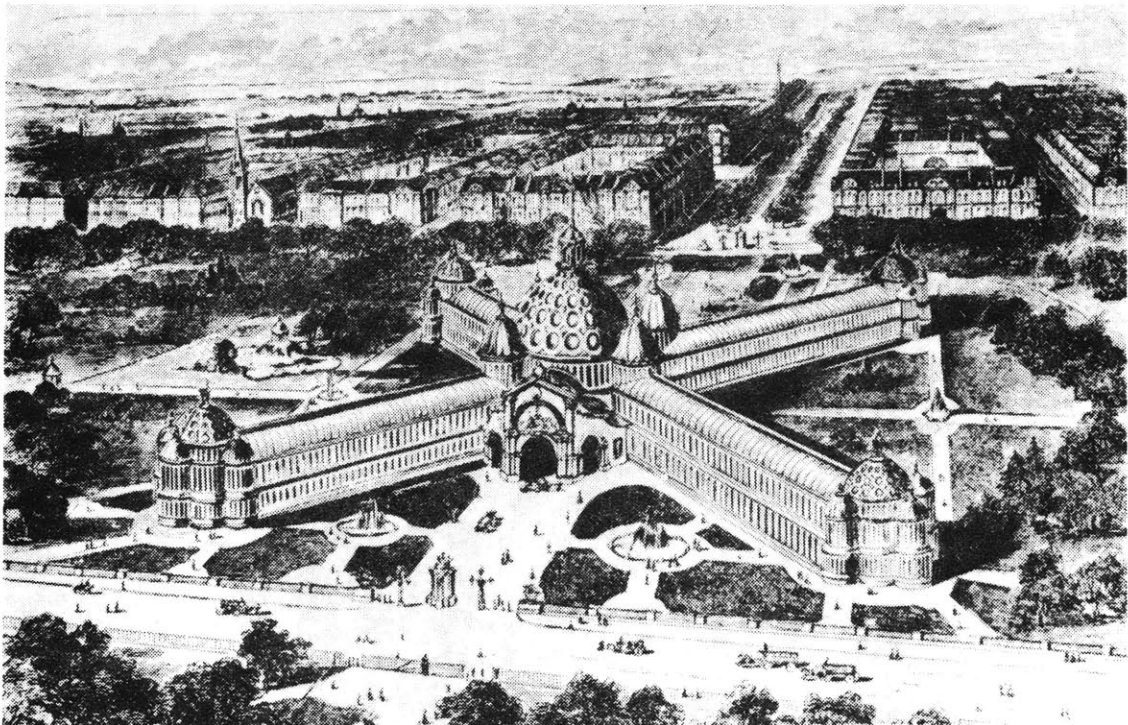
of view.

Before the request for land was made, the work of the association was not restricted to the formulation of the abstract ideas of the Conservatory. This is known from a letter written by William Barton Rogers, a member of the group. Rogers, the founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a society of the "Conservatory", on February 14, 1859, wrote that "... application will be made by the National History Society and other parties here, to induce the Legislature to set aside a large lot in the Back Bay improvement for the reception of a grand cruciform structure for the museum and libraries of the various societies and for a grand polytechnical depository."¹

The cruciform building, called the Massachusetts Conservatory of Art, Science and Historical Relics, was proposed by William Waud for the site of the Public Garden.² (figure 3). Fortunately, the Act of 1849, Chapter 210 blocked the way of its erection. This Act assured the future of the Public Garden by providing that no building save a City Hall might be constructed between Charles and Arlington Streets. By 1909, there were still proposals for a city hall on the site of the Public Garden. (In consequence, the Conservatory or State Institution was originally conceived as existing within a park environment).

The precedence for the form of an iron building set in a garden was established not only by the Crystal Palace in England, but also in South Kensington by the temporary iron buildings erected in 1856 to house the collection of works of art already assembled for educational purposes by the Department of Art and Science. Members of the "Associated Societies" expressed their interest in this Museum.³ In the same year that the Conservatory was proposed for the Public Garden in Boston, a portion of the South Kensington site was leased to the Royal Horticultural Society, who with government subsidies formed an elaborate garden, surrounded with architectural arcades and pavilions on three sides and a large iron conservatory on the fourth.

The notion of the park-complex which was a mid-nineteenth century environmental ideal is discussed in Albert Fein's article, "The American City: The Ideal and the Real".⁴ He states that the ideal of the public environment was incomplete without three interrelated concepts of history, science, and art, represented by museums, which were planned to be associated with the park, and that it was conceived



3.
The Massachusetts Conservatory of Art Science and Historical Relics
in the Public Garden (Whitehill, Boston: A Topographical History,
1968, p. 157)

of as a social totality. Olmsted and Vaux, who in 1858 designed Central Park, New York, first created the park, and then almost a decade later, the siting of the Museum of Art and Natural History followed. In South Kensington in 1858, the reverse situation occurred in that first the museum was erected and then the garden created. In Boston in 1859, the proposal for a Conservatory of Art and Science and Historical Relics, which was to be situated in the Public Garden, was originally conceived as an integral part of the park.

Although this cruciform building was not executed, the notions it embraced continued to be documented by the members of the "Conservatory of Art and Science." The members who were called memorialists recorded the ideas of the Committee in three Memorials, one in each of the following years, 1859, 1860 and 1861. These legal reports make it possible to trace the history of the nature of the Conservatory and the history of what portion of Back Bay lands came to be requested for the purpose of erecting the complex proposed by the associated societies.

The first Memorial pointed out that the real magnitude for a State Institution, in what initially may have seemed too extensive a scheme, consisted not in the creation of new organizations so much as in the novel aggregation of old ones.⁵ The memorialists believed there were advantages in establishing the societies in one locality, "to unite those which existed in widely separated places and to establish them in Boston, the capital, and in point of convenience of access nearer than any other point to the whole people of the State." For this reason they requested the Legislature to reserve from the sale of Back Bay lands four adjacent squares of land as divided on the Commissioner's plan and set them apart for a Conservatory of Art and Science. The memorialists called this land the Reservation and specified for it a variety of scientific and industrial institutions classified under four sections. It was proposed that each section should occupy one square of the reserved land. The object here was to locate kindred associations near each other so that they might receive mutual benefit from the aggregated collection. However, it was stressed that the "perfect individuality"⁶(p. 10) of each institution had to be retained and that each should confine its operations to a speciality.

The four sections were:

- Section 1 - Societies devoted to Agriculture, Horticulture and Pomology and which would display the collection of implements and models.
- Section 2 - Societies devoted to Natural History and Practical Geology and which would provide museums of specimens.
- Section 3 - Societies devoted to Mechanics, Manufactures, and Commerce.
- Section 4 - Societies devoted to Fine Arts and the History of the Human Race.

The Memorial stressed that by erecting buildings accommodating the various societies on certain open spaces, the value of unoccupied land would increase, this increase would be equal to the sum which the State would receive from the sale of the reserved portion. This land brought into the market at increased prices would secure a first class population in the Back Bay from the beginning. Unless some such plan were adopted, the memorialists reasoned that few persons would be likely to purchase land except in the immediate vicinity of the Public Garden.

Legal title to the land, it was suggested, ought not to be conveyed, but the fee should remain in the State, the institutions enjoying only a grant of land for their respective specific purposes. This portion of land would be subject to its reversion to the State, whenever the grantees ceased to use it for the objects specified in the grant.

Although the memorialists in 1859 requested a portion of Back Bay lands for the Conservatory, they failed to describe a particular site on which its building ought to be erected. They did, however, stress the advantage to the State, both from an educational and financial point of view, of establishing a State Institution in the Back Bay area on contiguous parcels of land. The benefit which the Commonwealth would derive from this proposal did not entice this body to grant land to the "Associated Societies".

With the failure of the Memorial of 1859, William Barton Rogers was requested by the members of the Committee to present another Memorial to the Legislature in 1860 and on behalf of the "Conservatory of Art and Science". He presented the case which coincided in its

general purport with the Memorial of 1859, but which came to embody additional ideas concerning the Conservatory and its proposed site.

In support of Rogers, were the petitions of the Boston Society of Natural History, the Boston Board of Trade, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics' Association, the New England Society. These societies were devoted to creating Polytechnic Institutions which would bring Science and Art into closer communion, and which would promote the scientific, educational and industrial interests of the Commonwealth.⁷

The Second Memorial was more specific about the area of land which it hoped the Legislature would assign to the "Conservatory of Art and Science". For this grant of land the Memorialists chose that section of the Back Bay territory which was described as the area "... between Boylston and Newbury; Berkeley and Exeter Streets, and a fraction next westerly". The reason for their choice was that "as well from its position and convenient shape as from the ample space it would offer for the several buildings now and later to be placed upon it, this area would be suited to the object in view." The Memorialists believed that there were many other associations which, in time would seek to place themselves on the same footing with the departments established first at the site, by asking for a share of the reserved land that had not yet been appropriated. They felt sure the time would come when not only the scientific, industrial and fine art associations, but all societies devoted to history, ethnography, literature and public education would be gathered within the same boundaries.³

It was evident that the plan to erect the Conservatory on land in the Back Bay contemplated "almost entirely popular and economic objectives,"⁹ yet the second legal report did not succeed in achieving its goals. Land was still not granted by the Commonwealth to the memorialists. The whole matter of the grant of land turned chiefly upon the question whether such grant by the State would or would not encroach upon prospective profits to be derived from the sale of adjoining territory. Such profits had already in 1859, been set apart by the Legislature for the benefit of the "school fund". When in 1860 the Memorial was put before the Committee on Education one can see why the principal opponent to the grant was the Secretary of the State Board of Education.¹⁰

After the failure of the second Memorial, Rogers did admit that the basis of the argument that the Conservatory's improvement would double the market value of the adjacent lots, and thus not take from the prospective school fund, was limited.¹¹ To prove this argument, he realized that the actual financial evidence in support ought to be presented to the Board of Education.

Acting on this idea, a member of the Conservatory prepared an estimate of the financial effect¹² of the proposed Reservation of the Back Bay lands. In the Estimate of 1861, presented by Mathias D. Ross, there was proof for the soundness of the economic influence of the Conservatory building. He recorded the relative value of the filled Back Bay lands which by 1860 had been extended to Clarendon Street.¹³ He used the figures obtained from the actual sales of that year to forecast the value of the land requested by the memorialists and the adjacent territory if the Reservation was not to be built. For this he assumed the sale to be at the mean price of lots on ordinary streets. Those streets were Boylston, Newbury, Marlborough and St. James. He also proposed what the value of the lots fronting and to the west of the requested land would be, if the Reservation came to be built. For this he supposed the adjacent territory would sell for the same price as lots fronting Commonwealth Avenue, the Public Garden and the Charles River.

Both the minimum and maximum average for which these highest valued lands in the Back Bay sold in 1860, formed the basis of this last proposal. In the first instance where the sale of adjacent lots was founded on the minimum mean, Ross showed that the cost of the Reservation would be covered and there would be no gain for or loss to the State. Were the sale of the lots to the Reservation at the maximum average, its cost would be covered and exceeded. The amount of profit to the State would depend on the average assumed as the maximum value for these lands (appendix 2).

In 1861 the Estimate was attached to the third Memorial, which was a separate document. This Memorial was formulated by Rogers who also petitioned for a charter to incorporate the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a proposed department of the Conservatory. As a combined legal report it was presented to the Committee on Education of the Massachusetts Legislature.

The third Memorial designated the area of land the members of the "Conservatory" hoped would be reserved by the State for the buildings of each society. Rogers asked the State "to set apart and assign to the use of the Boston Society of Natural History and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology the first section of land lying west of Berkeley and between Newbury and Boylston Streets, extending to Clarendon Street, the former Society to occupy about 1/3 and the latter the remaining 2/3's of this section." He further asked that "the next section of land lying west of Clarendon Street in the same range be set apart for the use of the Horticultural Society, for ornamental planting and for the erection hereafter of structures suited to the wants of this Society and to the decoration of the grounds..."¹⁴

Rogers qualified this last statement by saying:

"...In regard to that portion of the petition of the memorialists which relates to the application of the Horticultural Society for the adjoining westerly square, the Committee unanimously came to the conclusion that there was no immediate urgency in their case; and as there is a doubt existing in some minds as to the propriety of making the grant, it was deemed advisable to discuss this branch of the petition, and leave it to future developments for legislative action, should it be desired."¹⁵

In addition to the financial benefit which the State would derive from the erection of the Conservatory of Art and Science on land in the Back Bay, was the obvious prestige this complex, the first of its kind in America, offered the City of Boston. These factors seemed to assure its immediate reception. Contrary to expectations, almost everything was against its success in 1860 when the Secretary of the State Board of Education strongly objected to the memorialists' request for a grant of land. The fulfilment of the aims of the Memorial was important too for the incorporation of two institutions, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Institute of Fine Arts. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology would be the first school in America in favor of practical education.

Not all could be disposed against such important plans to create a State Conservatory in Boston! Hope for its success was encouraged in 1861 when it commanded and excited much attention in New York.¹⁶

Ideas of the State Institution and the Technical Institute were extolled in the Tribune.¹⁷ Inspiration was so great that a similar plan on a grand scale was proposed for New York. This scheme was presented to the Legislature in Albany, in a bill asking for a charter and liberty to build in "the great Central Park" in connection with the zoological and botanical gardens, which were about to be instituted there.

Support of these ideas from the general public favored the eventual success of the third legal report. This Memorial presented in March, 1861 embodied the mature plan for a Conservatory of Art and Science and the realistic request for land. Finally, acting on the third Memorial, the Legislature granted that portion of land in the Back Bay for which the memorialists had petitioned. In the same session, immediately prior to this event, a charter was issued by the State to incorporate the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

For this new Institute, building plans were commenced at the same time as those for the Museum of Natural History. Both buildings came to occupy the reserved land between Boylston and Newbury, Berkeley and Clarendon Streets by 1864. The success of the Memorial meant that these buildings which represented two departments of the Conservatory and which were located at the corner of the area later to be known as Copley Square began to shape the State Institution and the Copley site.

The other form of improvement proposed to enhance the Copley area was the creation of a public space. Two types of public spaces were planned many years apart. The first proposal was for a public park. It was envisioned initially in 1860, at least two decades before the second form of civic space, a square, was designed. The nature of this park varied over a few years, when the method of connecting the Back Bay grid to then then unplanned South End territory was being proposed. Soon after the final means of the connection had been decided, the idea for creating the park was abandoned. Plans for an urban space in the area were postponed for twenty years.

The civic space proposed for the Copley site was planned by a group of engineers and surveyors who were gathered together under entirely different circumstances from those which governed the formation of the "Committee of Associated Institutions". The Committee members who hoped to achieve a specific goal remained as a group for

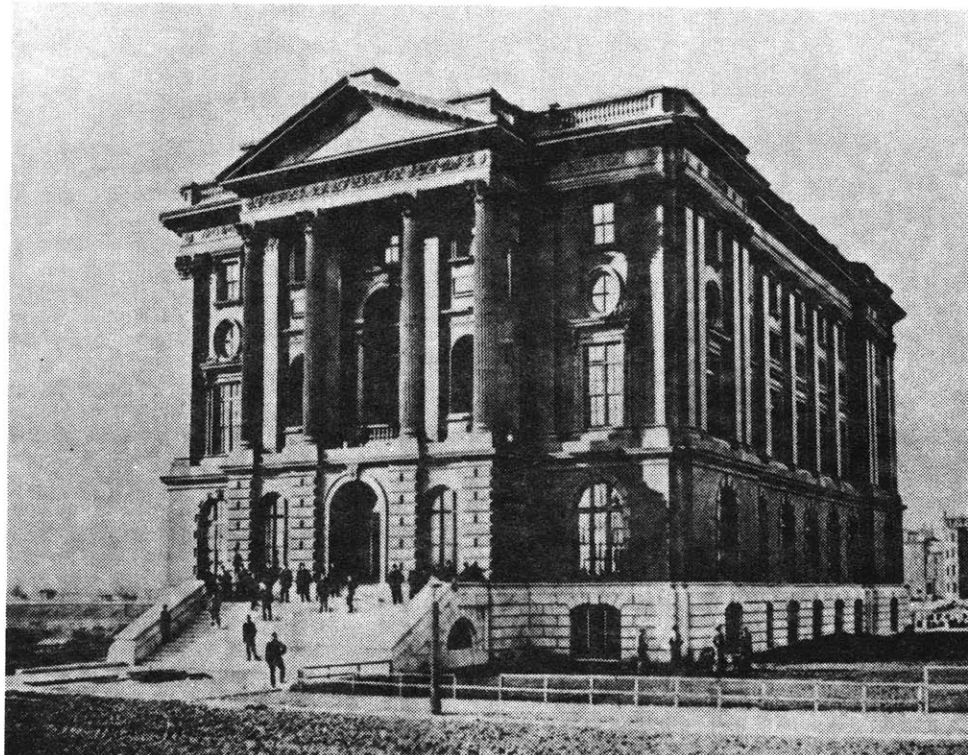
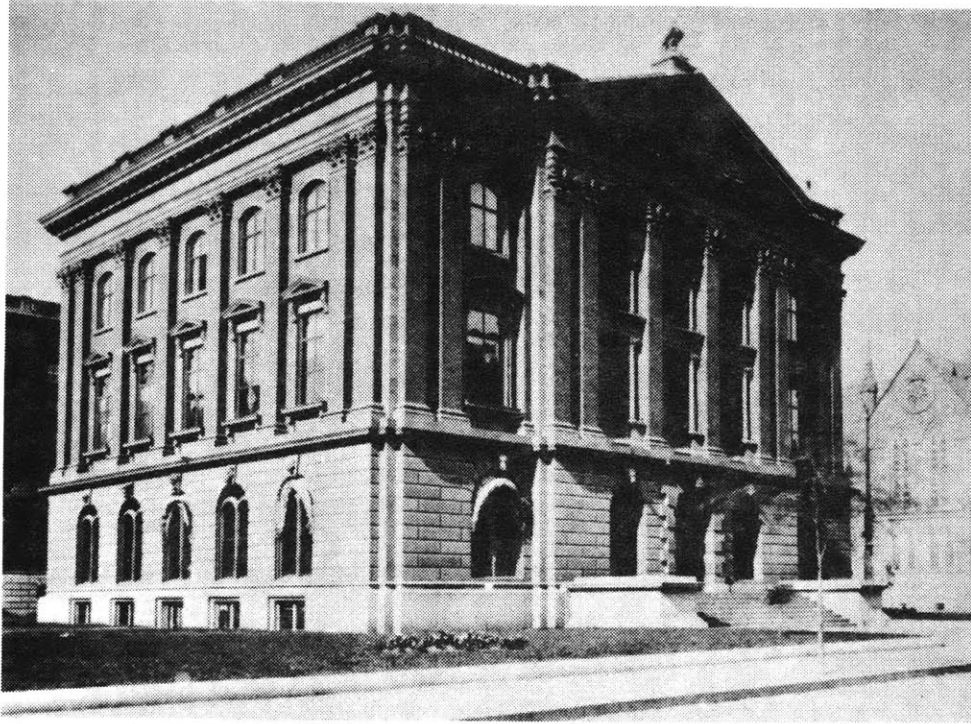
Two sections of the Conservatory of Art and Science

4.

The Museum of Natural History begun in 1862 and (Allan Forbes, Copley Square, 1941)
designed by W.G. Preston

5.

MIT begun in 1864 and also designed by Preston



a limited period of time until this aim was fulfilled. The engineers and surveyors were employed in a permanent capacity by the Municipal Corporation for whom they prepared plans of the City of Boston.

Their responsibility was limited to map making. They did not take part in the buying or selling of land or in the erection of public structures. Consequently they were only indirectly involved in the layout of the city of Boston. Confined to the design of urban elements which constitute a city plan, the engineers and surveyors essentially described the form of squares, streets and blocks. The formal solution of those elements would be moulded by the requirements of that area for which they prepared a plan.

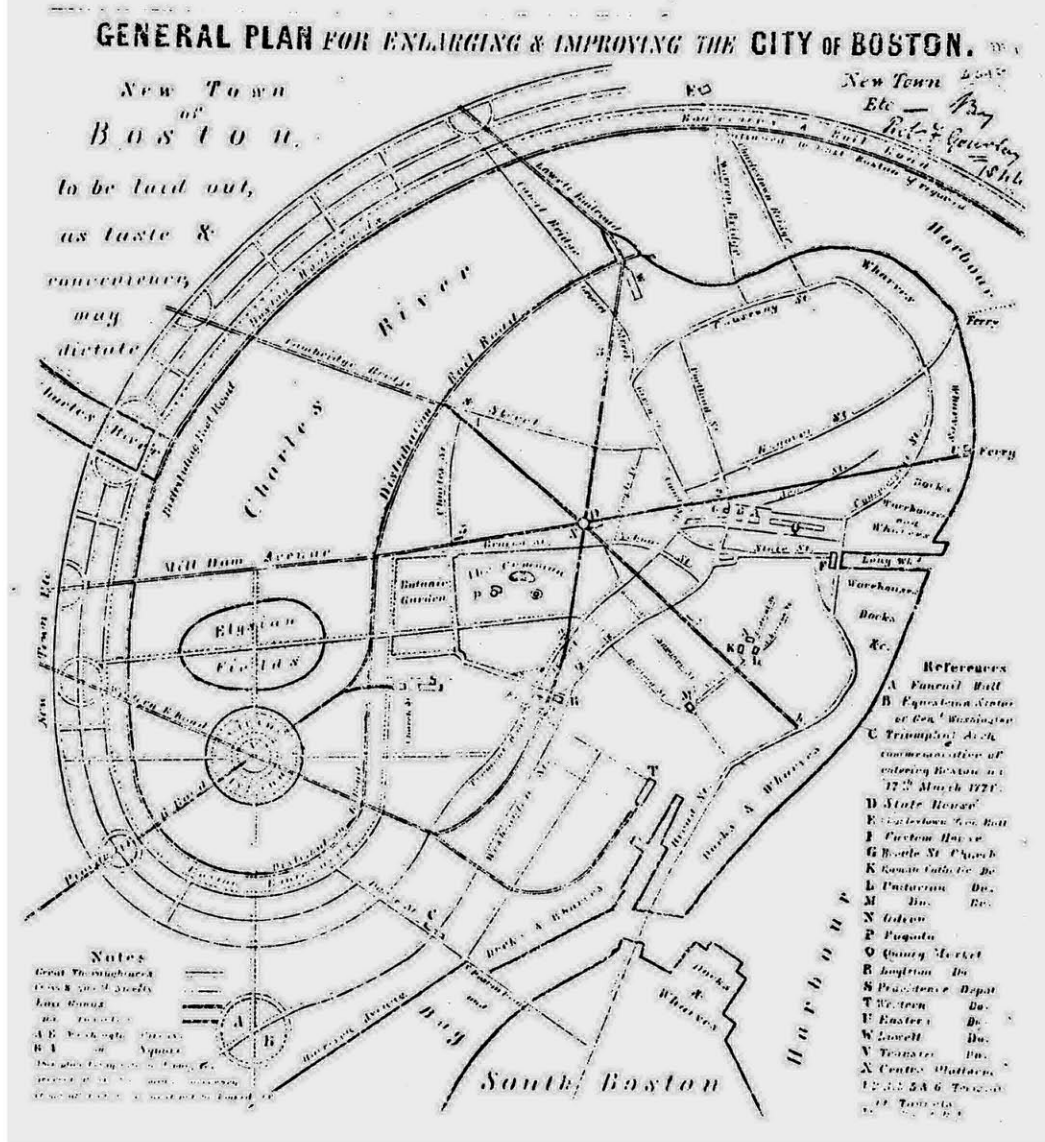
When these city engineers and surveyors came to work on the design of the Back Bay, their proposals for portions of that plan had to be consistent with the goals set out for its lands. This territory was initially conceived as a scheme for the civic improvement of the Charles River Bay. Recognizing the Copley area as a relatively unpropitious site by 1860, city engineers came to formulate a number of proposals to improve its quality for the benefit of the citizens.

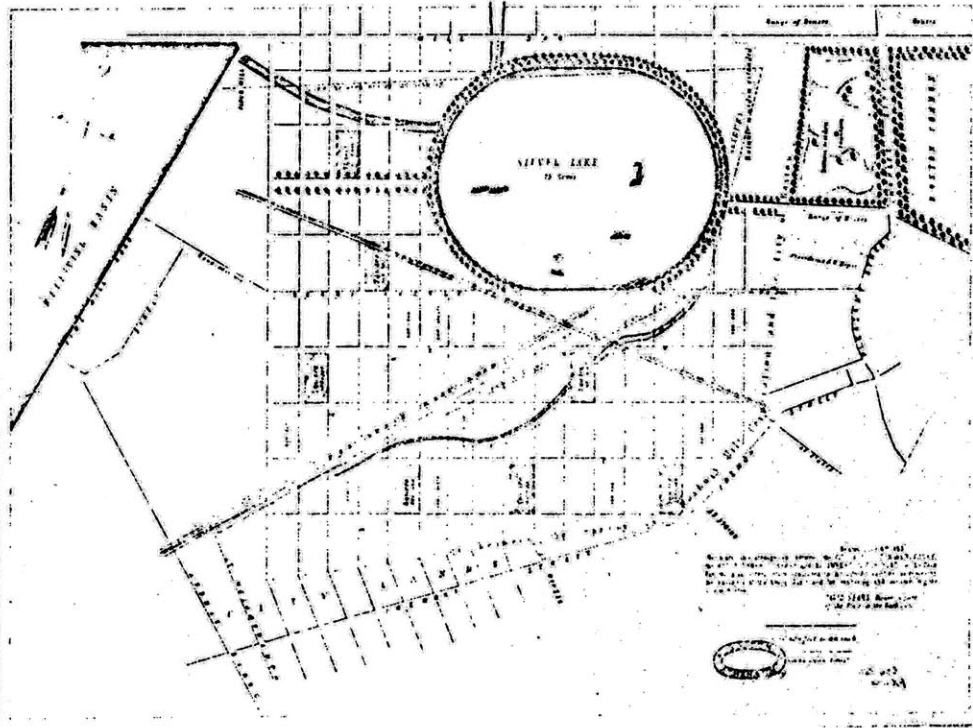
Prior to these proposals for civic improvement at the Copley area, there were two visionary schemes for the Back Bay in which the Copley intersection was delineated as a national square. One was imagined by Robert Fleming Gourlay in 1844 and the other by David Sears in 1848. Both men realized that something had to be done about the state of the Charles River Bay which was then a tidal flat.

Robert F. Gourlay's plan for the Back Bay development revealed an oval island, to be known as the Elysian fields, which centered on the future Copley Square (figure 6). Boylston Street ran across the bay, laterally bisecting the oval, while Dartmouth Street crossed the bay from the Mill Dam, vertically bisecting the Elysian field and then on to Circus Island at the intersection of the railroad lines.

The second scheme was planned by David Sears, who, like Gourlay, proposed an oval public space for the Bay Land (figure 7). However, in this scheme, the oval was a 75-acre "Silver Lake" which it was hoped would secure sanitary benefits of fresh air passing over salt water. Both Boylston and Dartmouth Streets were terminated by this lake, although their extension into the water would allow for their central crossing. The grid south of the lake ignored the Boston and Providence

6.
 Robert F. Gourlay's plan for the Back Bay development (Whitehill, Boston, A Topographical History, 1968, p. 146)





7.
David Sear's plan for the Back Bay development
(Whitehill, Boston: A Topographical History, 1968, p. 150)

The solutions of Gourlay and Sears established the precedent for the creation of an urban space at the intersection of Boylston and Dartmouth Streets, the center of the reclaimed land of the northern and southern territories. By the time land fill reached Clarendon Street in 1860, the first type of urban space to improve the quality of the Copley site was proposed by the city engineers and surveyors. This scheme for a park was called St. James Park. It was planned for the land which formed the southern boundary of the site and which was located south of St. James Street. Of all the land in the vicinity, the site for the proposed park had the lowest value. As it belonged to the Boston Power Water Company it would sell at fifteen percent less per square foot than the lots in the area which belonged to the Commonwealth. Land on Boylston Street which adjoined the northern boundary of the area later to become the square, was the property of the Commonwealth. No less important was its proximity to the intersection of the two railroad lines which subjected the site to noise and smoke pollution.

Within a period of four years the form of St. James park changed many times. Its size, shape, orientation and relative distance from other parks was different for each of the Back Bay plans of 1860, 1861 and 1863²⁰ (figures 8, 9 and 10). Metamorphosis of the park was contemporary with the petitions of the memorialists for a grant of State land in the vicinity of the proposed park. With the success of the third Memorial in 1861 and consequently the allocation of State land for the erection of the Conservatory, there was a change made to the proposed design of St. James park in the plan of that same year. With the construction of one department of the Conservatory in 1863, another scheme for the park at the Copley area was designed.

The plan of 1860 did not yet show an interface between the northern and southern lands. In this plan, Huntington Avenue later to form the northern boundary of the South End grid, did not intersect Boylston and Dartmouth Streets, and the land which would come to be reclaimed between that avenue and the Boston and Providence Railroad line had not been physically planned.

In 1860, land at the area had not been reserved for use by the other civic improvement proposed, the Conservatory of Art and Science. This is explained by the fact that the petition by members of the

"Conservatory" for a grant of land at the corner of and fronting it had failed in the same year.

The land there was however articulated by St. James Park. It was a narrow, isolated residential green similar to Union Park and Worcester Square in the South End. In 1860 the length of St. James Park was parallel to both Dartmouth and Berkeley Streets. These streets as the only connectors with the South End were important elements within the plan. Orientation of the park, influenced by the direction of both streets would seem to suggest the direction for the blocks of the area that had not been laid out. This would be in the same manner that Chester and Worcester Squares orient themselves within the street pattern of the South End.

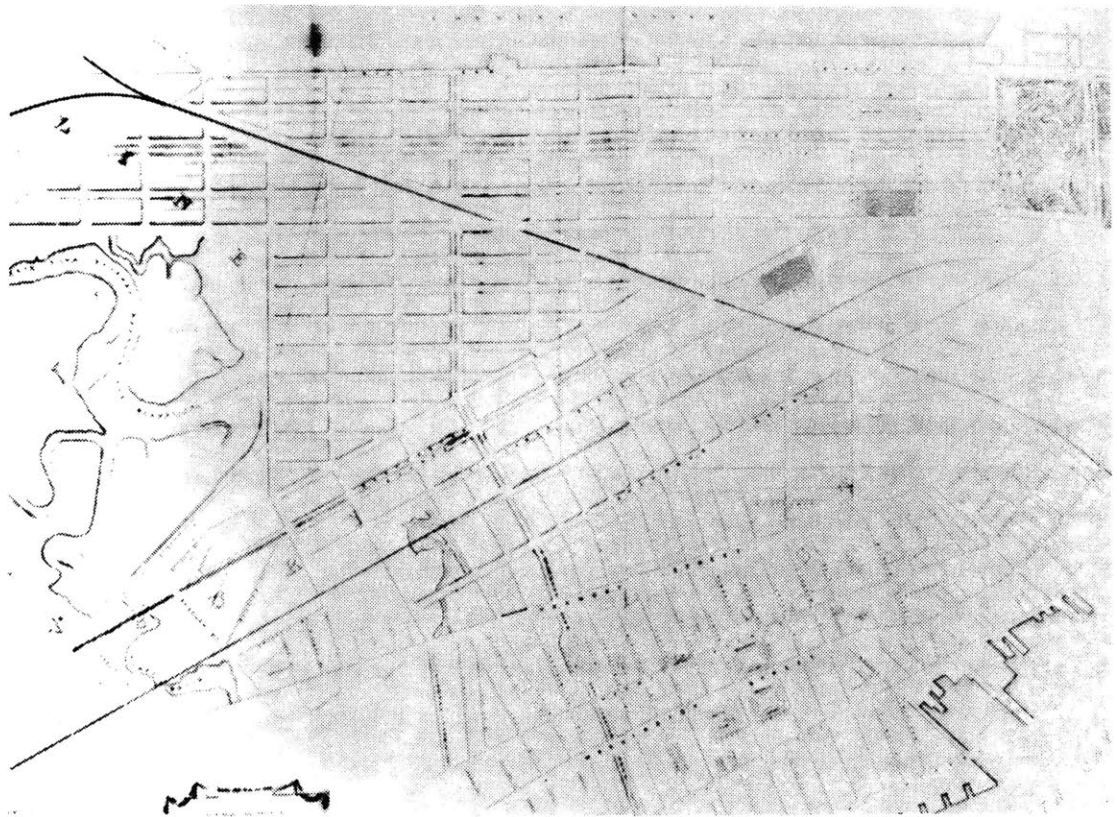
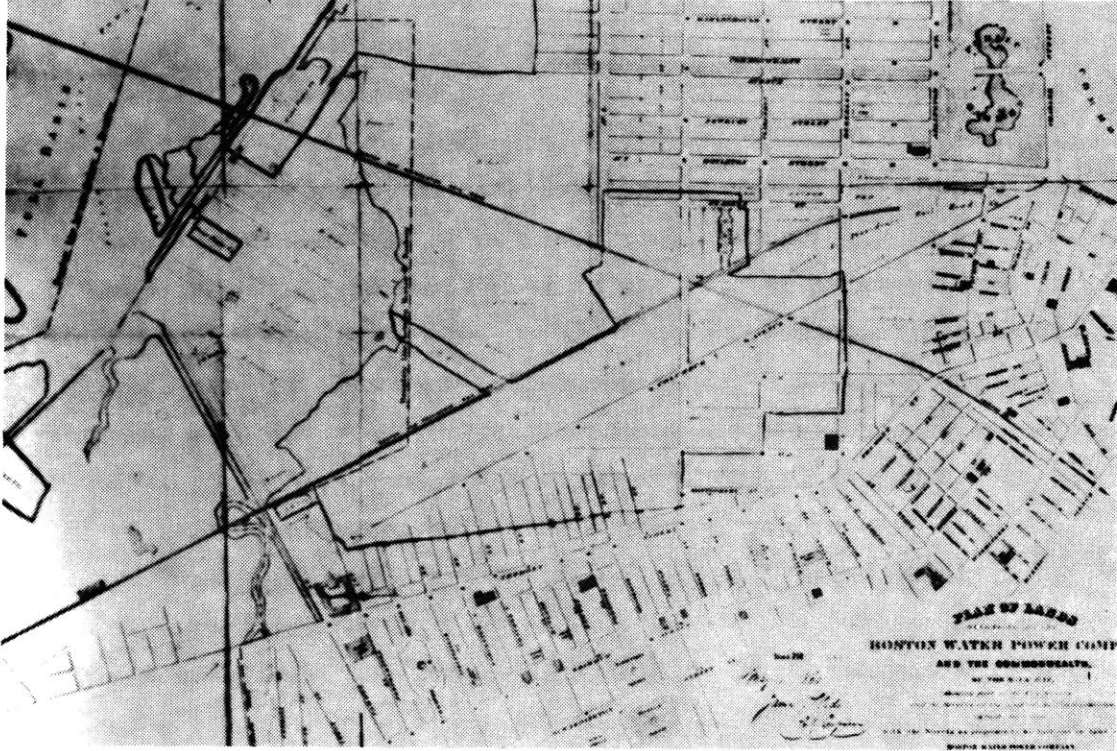
The Copley area in the plan of 1861 was still not the point of collision of the northern and southern territories. The city engineers mapped out this site as the area where the former grid was juxtaposed with the grid planned for the South End. The geometry of this latter portion of land, which lay at an angle with the Back Bay territory, followed the general pattern of the blocks of that territory. The angle was determined by the line of the Boston and Providence Railroad track. Parallel with this line too, was the section of the southern grid between St. James Street and Columbus Avenue and which had its own block configuration. This portion of land abutted that area of the South End land which met the Back Bay.

The form of the Copley area in the 1861 plan was the physical evidence of the eventual success in that year of the third Memorial. Once the land had been granted by the State for the purpose of erecting the buildings of two departments of the Conservatory, the block which was between Boylston and Newbury, Berkeley and Clarendon Streets in the plan of 1861, was shown as reserved. This Reservation was comprised of the proposed Museum of Natural History and the structure of the newly incorporated Institute of Technology which were set in a park. This block came to be called Institute Square.

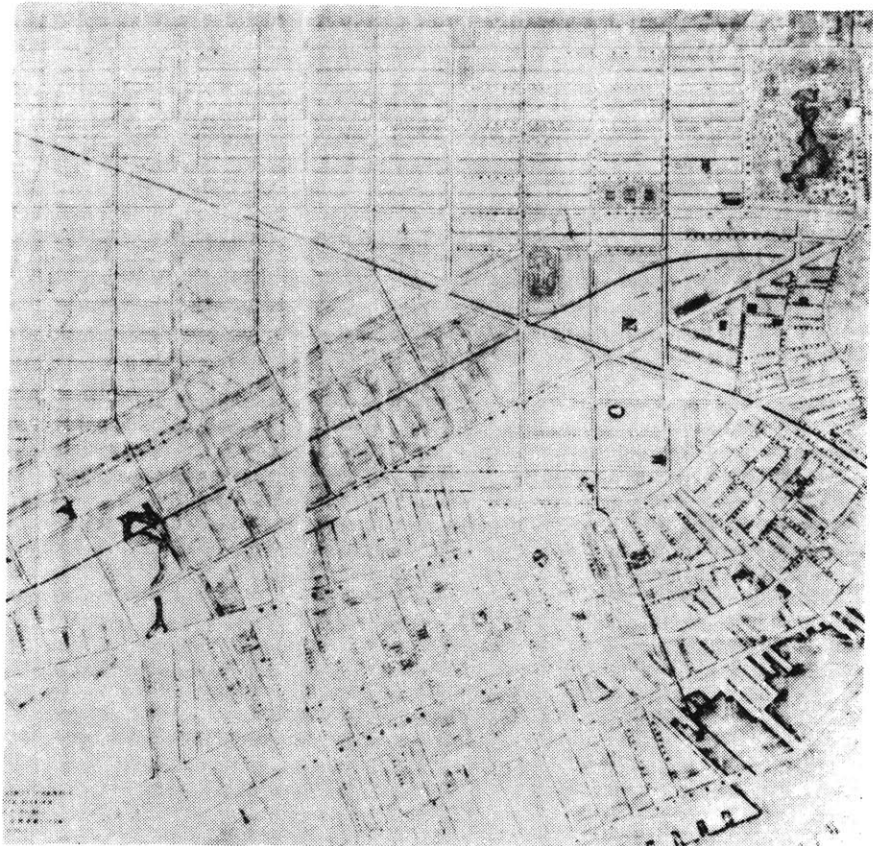
The concepts proposed for the Conservatory of Art and Science fitted well with the grid configuration. Its geometry easily accommodated the idea of having on the one hand separate sections which were to make up the State Institution and on the other integrated departments which were in close proximity to one another. The Conservatory was

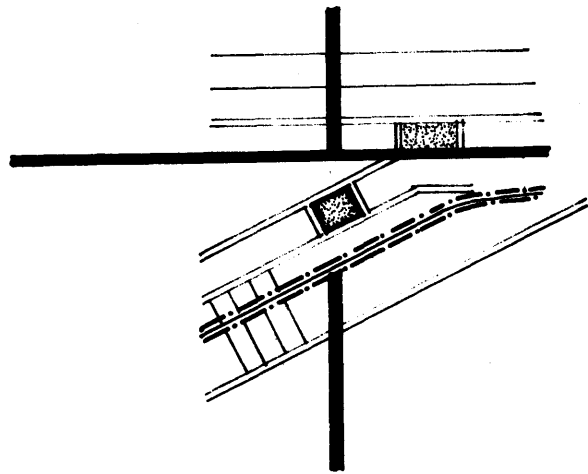
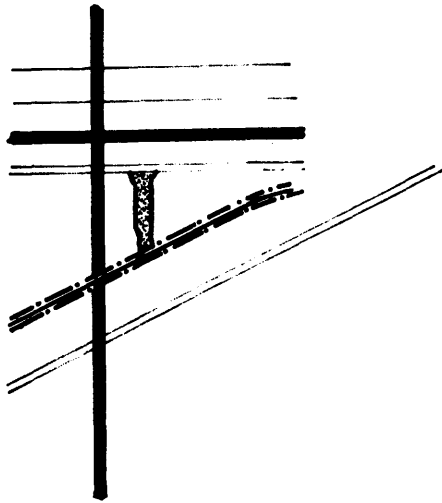
8. Plan for the Back Bay area in 1860, prepared by James Slade, city engineer (Bunting, Houses of Boston's Back Bay, p. 376)

9. Plan for the Back Bay area in 1861, prepared by H.M. Wightman, surveyor and James Slade, city engineer (ibid, p. 373)



10.
Detail of a plan for the Back Bay area in 1863, prepared by H.M. Wightman, surveyor (ibid, p. 379)

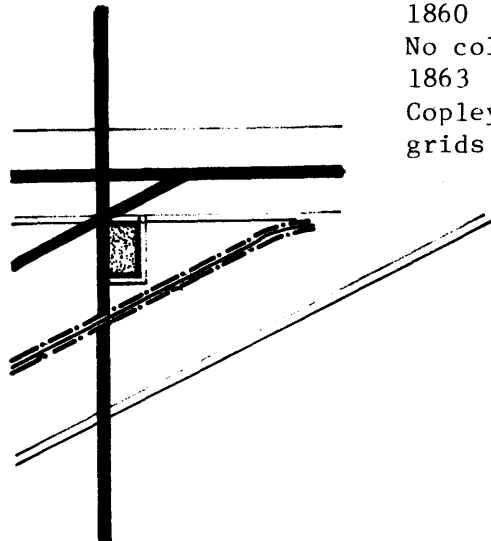




11.
A diagrammatic analysis of the proposed methods
of connecting the land of the Back Bay to the
land of the South End, in 1860, 1861 and 1863

1860 1861
No collision Two juxtaposed grids

1863
Copley Square at the collision of the two
grids



initially conceived as being comprised of four sections.²¹ By 1861 only two of these had been allocated land. They were "Section 2", the Society of Natural History, and "Section 3", the Institute of Technology. The 1st section, the Society of Horticulturalists, had not been assigned the square for which the memorialists had petitioned. They had requested the block west of Institute Square in order to erect Horticultural Hall. The 4th Section, was to be formed of societies devoted to the Fine Arts. The Institute of Fine Arts had not yet been incorporated and land had not come to be granted for its building.

In the vicinity of Institute Square, one block was reserved for use as a park. It was still called St. James Park and was considerably larger than its predecessor. Bounded by Huntington Avenue and St. James Street, it articulated the grid pattern between that avenue and that street. This park formed the structural pivot where the grid parallel to the Boston and Providence Railroad lines changed direction to follow the line of Boylston Street. Yet by interrupting the length of Dartmouth Street, it isolated the northern land from the south. Therefore the nature of St. James Park created the Copley area as the point which isolated the two juxtaposed grids.

Finally, in 1863, the Copley site had become the point of collision of the grids. In the plan of 1863 it was situated at the intersection of Boylston Street, Huntington Avenue and Dartmouth Street, which was reestablished as the important communication link between the two areas.

That year saw development at Institute Square. Construction had begun on one of its buildings, the Museum of Natural History. The land to the west of the square was still not reserved for the purpose of constructing Horticultural Hall. In fact its building came to be erected in 1864 on Tremont Street, between Bromfield and Bosworth Streets.²²

The plan of 1863 showed St. James Park reoriented toward Boylston Street. Its long axis paralleled Dartmouth Street thereby reinforcing its prominence. This was to be the final vision for a park at the southern boundary of the area that 20 years later was proposed as a square.

The park, the Conservatory buildings and the form of the two grids of the Back Bay and South End had come to shape the Copley area (figure 11). In 1860, the year of the failure of the second Memorial, the Copley area had not yet become a point of collision. In the following year when the form of the South End grid came to be planned, the grant of land made, and the nature of St. James Park altered, it became the point where the two grids were juxtaposed and where the area of these lands was separated. In 1863, when the configuration of the South End came to take its executed shape, construction began on a building of the Conservatory, and the form of the park adapted once more, the site finally became the point of collision of the 2 grids.

When in 1860 the connection between the two territories was still undecided the initial solution proposed for civic improvement of the area was a park and the buildings of the State Institution. By the time this connection became the point of collision in 1863, the plan for St. James Park had matured. In this scheme the park was to bound the area of the intersection on its south side. However this proposal was never carried out. It was to be the last scheme for a public park on the south of the area. In the following year the plan of J.B. Henck, a city engineer, showed the site of St. James Park to be assigned to the Institute of Fine Arts, a part of the "Conservatory of Art and Science".²³ The executed solution for the connection of the Back Bay grid and South End grid was their collision.²⁴ The result of this collision was the physical confusion there of the land parcels. It was twenty years before the final decision was made to improve the civic quality of this area by its creation as a Square in 1883.

The civic improvements proposed for the Copley Square site favored the realization of the initial aims of the Back Bay. This territory was intended to provide the maximum beauty consistent with profitability. In the first instance the design for a public park or square would enhance the quality of the site and in the second instance the ingenious scheme for a Conservatory situated there would profit the State. These improvements were directed toward creating at that area the fundamental interrelationship between urban design and architecture as an art, and planning and building as business ventures.

A measure of the success of the civic improvements proposed for the Copley area can be determined realistically by an analysis of the value of land and the quality of its urban surrounds. The price for which the land adjacent to and west of the Museum of Natural History and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology came to be sold is indicative of the influence this Reservation had on the value of land at the Copley area after 1864. The nature of development in the proximity of this site after 1883 establishes the effect the creation of the square had on the market value of the neighboring land. With this thought in mind, the actual price for which the land came to be sold, and the cost of erecting buildings on this land shall be traced in the description of the history of the development of the square.

Notes

1.

Mrs. William B. Rogers and William T. Sedgewick, eds., *Life and Letters of William Barton Rogers*, Vol. II (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1896), p. 12.

2.

Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 2nd ed., p. 158.

3.

See: *Life and Letters of William Barton Rogers*, p. 34.
Rogers wrote his brother, on May 29, 1860, "...while in London [can you] gather up all documents relating to the Kensington Museum, that in Jermyn Street, etc., which might be of assistance in digesting such a plan? You will do us a great service by sending me such as you collect."

4.

Albert Fein, "The American City: The Ideal and the Real," *The Rise of an American Architecture*, with an Introduction by Edgar Kaufmann (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), pp. 51-111.

5.

Life and Letters, p. 7.

6.

ibid., p. 10.

7.

ibid, pp. 420-422.

8.

ibid., p. 416

9.
ibid., pp. 19-20.
Roger's letter to his brother, January 30, 1860.
10.
ibid., p. 24.
11.
ibid., p. 29.
12.
"Financial estimate 1861".
13.
See the "Financial estimate" for more detail concerning the sale of lands in the Back Bay. The average price of lots, per square foot as obtained from the actual sales of 1860 were for lots fronting Commonwealth Avenue, Public Garden or the Charles River, \$2.87; and for lots fronting ordinary streets, Boylston, Newbury, Marlborough and St. James Streets, \$1.33 2/9.
14.
Life and Letters, p. 425.
15.
ibid., p. 421.
16.
ibid., p. 69.
Letter of February 18, 1861.
17.
ibid.
18.
Whitehill, A Topographical History, pp. 146-149.
19.
ibid., pp. 149-150.
20.
Bainbridge Bunting, *Houses of Boston's Back Bay: An Architectural History, 1840-1917* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1975), pp. 376, 377, 379.
21.
See detailed description of the "sections" of the Conservatory of Art and Science, p.13
22. Edwin M. Bacon, ed., *Bacon's Dictionary of Boston* (City, 1883). At the same time that the Conservatory of Art and Science was formed, the Horticultural Society sold their building on School Street. Rooms were then secured for the society on the corner of Washington and West Streets. When the memorialists failed to acquire the grant of land

for the purpose of erecting Horticultural Hall, the Society looked for land elsewhere. In 1863 the estate then known as Montgomery house was purchased and on August 18, 1864 the cornerstone of the second building was laid.

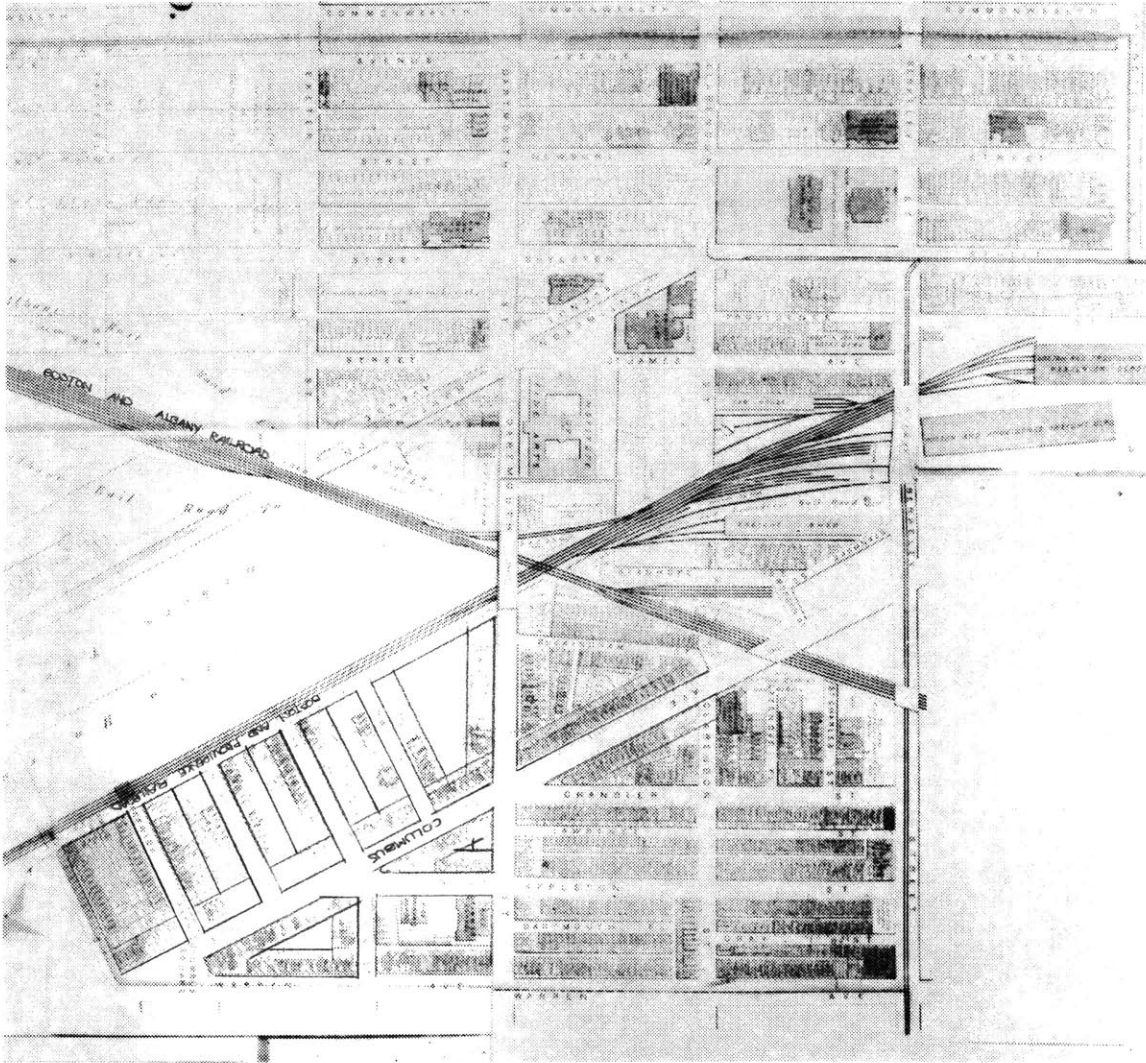
31

23.

Plan of December 9, 1864 by J. B. Henck, *Book of Deeds*, Lib 845, p. 139.

24.

See p.5 for description of the land parcels at the Copley Square area in 1863.



12.

Plan of the Back Bay, 1874, showing the direction of land fill. Notice the direction of blocks of the grid particularly those blocks fronting Columbus Avenue (Atlas of the County of Suffolk, Mass., 1874, Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, County Courthouse, Boston)

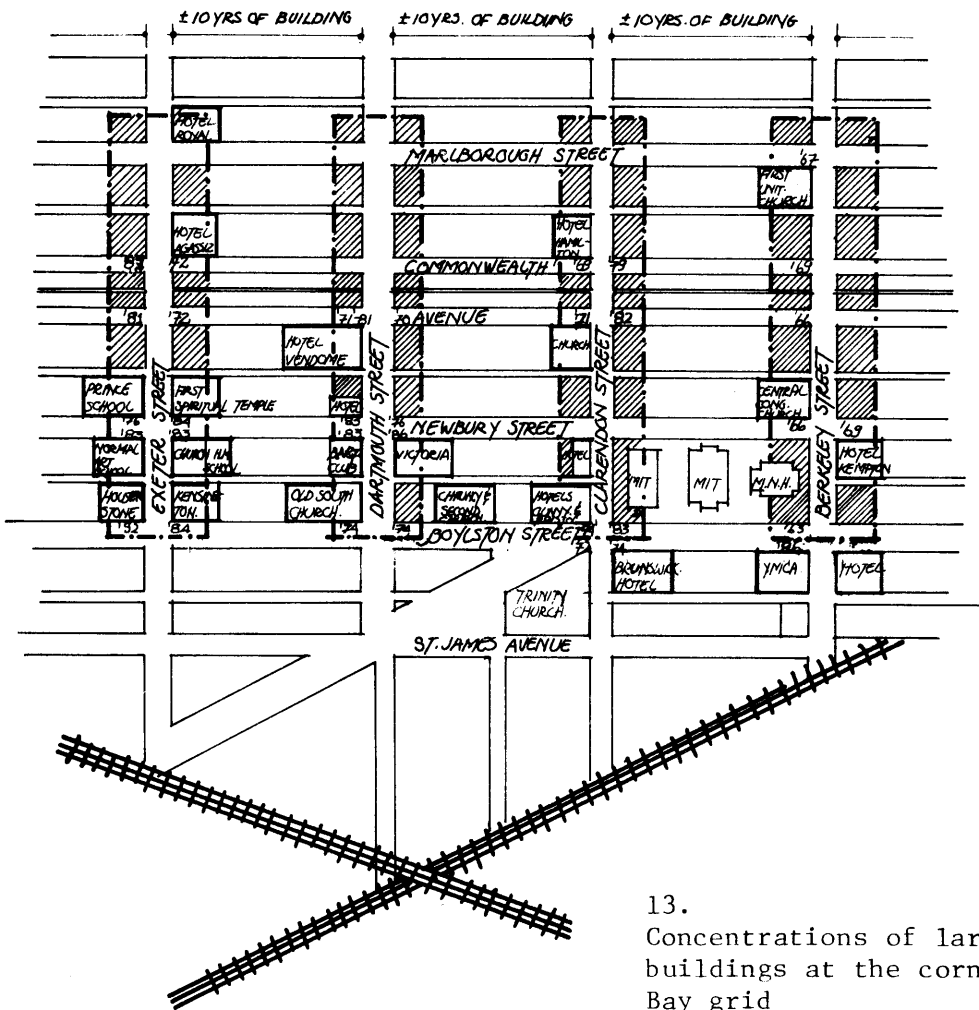
3.
THE COPLEY SQUARE AREA AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE BACK BAY,
1870-1880

Development at the Copley Square Area was unique within the Back Bay and South End grids. The building process and pattern there differed from those areas to which it bore physical and functional resemblance. Construction at the Copley site, which was structured as one of the two points where these grids met, and which was laid out as a typical Back Bay block, varied from that at the other area of intersection, Park Square, and from building within the Back Bay blocks.

Land filling operations within the Back Bay and South End were influenced by the geometrical nature of each grid. The layout of their blocks determined in which direction fill could proceed (figure 12). These blocks extended land along their length. Within all of the Back Bay their length is west-east and parallel to the main avenue, and within most of the South End grid, it is north-south and perpendicular to this area's long axis, with the exception of the blocks fronting Columbus Avenue whose lengths are parallel to that avenue.

As soon as the land was laid following the line of blocks, so each owner built on his property. This sequential pattern of fill and build also meant that within a block buildings dated from approximately the same time, a situation that promotes architectural and stylistic consistency. It meant too that as each grid continued land to its destination it not only imposed its physical form on that end point, but also portended the nature and character of its buildings following closely behind.

At the same time that the Back Bay continued fill from the Public Garden to the west, the South End grid extended the land northwest from Columbus Avenue, to focus on the Copley area in the 1870's, and so presage its future. Simultaneously too, that part of the South End grid whose blocks fronted Columbus Avenue proceeded fill operations from West Chester Park toward the northeast, to collide at Park Square



13.
 Concentrations of large-scale public buildings at the corners of the Back Bay grid
 North-south building from Marlboro to Boylston Streets occurred within approximately ten years
 East-west building within one block occurred in approximately ten years

(figure 13). Consequently both points of intersection developed together but under entirely different conditions.

Columbus Avenue, along which residences had developed, marched from the South End into the already established wholesale business quarter of Boston.¹ Before it could terminate at Park Square, the Boston and Providence Railroad Station, built in 1835, had to be removed as it barred the way of that avenue. It could not continue its path northerly beyond Berkeley Street until negotiations between the railroad company and the city had settled the issue of demolishing the station. Finally, in the latter part of 1871, the City decided to buy from the railroad company, the property necessary to carry out the extension of Columbus Avenue. By 1872, a new station designed by Peabody and Stearns already had been erected on the land to the northwest of the former site.

When Columbus Avenue eventually came to terminate at Park Square, that avenue imposed its broad and linear geometry on the "crooked" street pattern of the surrounding area. The "square" itself only a triangular "bit of green" was unimportant next to the new railroad building. The station became the focal point!

It had an excellent local business, serving a great number of towns in Norfolk and Bristol Counties by its main line and branches, and it also formed part of the popular Shore (all rail) and Stonington (rail and steamboat) lines in New York.² This district was the chief financial and commercial region, with courts, banks, newspapers, offices, theatres.³ Further, the railway structure was in close proximity to apartment hotels. The Pelham, the first apartment house to come to America in 1857 was located nearby at the corner of Boylston and Tremont Streets. Opposite it was the Hotel Boylston, built in 1870.

The design concept of this newly established building type, called family hotels or the "French flat" was for a single tenement to occupy the whole or part of a floor, instead of taking up several floors in a house.⁴ This meant that building of apartment hotels required more horizontal space than that for private houses. Therefore larger parcels of land were needed for their construction. The availability of such land within the built-up area was minimal.

Because there was a demand for these buildings which had become the favorite type of dwelling in Boston, when new land was created with the filling of the tidal flats of the Charles River, many apartment houses began to invade the Back Bay and South End grids.

Anticipated by the Pelham on Boylston Street, the apartment hotels that appeared in the South End were the Hotel Clarendon (1868) at the corner of Tremont and Berkeley Streets, St. Cloud Hotel (1869) at 565-569 Tremont Street; and in the Back Bay were the Hotel Hamilton (1869) at 260 Clarendon Street by Ware and Van Brunt, Hotel Kempton (1869) at 237 Berkeley Street and Hotel Agassiz (1872) at 191 Commonwealth Avenue by Weston and Rand.

By the mid-1870's the inhabitants of the South End and the Back Bay were attracted to the Park Square area where the new station had been built. Columbus Avenue from the South End and Boylston Street from the Back Bay were the routes to this region. The collision of that avenue and that street had effected there the creation of a new and important building, the Boston and Providence Railroad Station.

At the other point of connection of these two territories, however, filling operations provided new land for a whole new built environment. In the 1870's this site, the Copley area, came to be situated at the intersection of Boylston and Dartmouth Streets and the nature of buildings along them presaged the kind of environment-to-be. Boylston Street in the Back Bay was comprised of both institutional and apartment buildings. The public structures were the Museum of Natural History, MIT and a number of churches, and the apartment buildings were the Hotels Pelham, Boylston and Berkeley. Dartmouth Street from the South End extended residential and educational buildings toward the Copley site. In fact, by the end of this decade, a number of apartment houses and public buildings came to be gathered at the intersection of these streets.

This was not the only concentration of public and residential buildings within the Back Bay grid. Contemporary with it were a number of coagulations comprised of public buildings and apartment hotels⁵ located along the short axes of the grid. These north-south coagulations were typical within the Back Bay. Their nature was determined by both the configuration of blocks and the development process within the Back Bay grid.

The typical pattern was the linear focus of large-scale buildings along the length of the cross streets of the grid. There were two buildings for each block, one for the north corner and one for the south corner⁶ (figure 13). The higher value of land at the corner of the blocks relative to the sale price of lots within the center of the block motivated the consolidation of land parcels there for the erection of these large-scale buildings. They were the means to realize the value of land at the corners of the grid. Consolidation of land for these buildings was allowed on one condition: building codes imposed the restriction that the main elevation of the structure front the important street. This meant that the large-scale buildings oriented their principal facades toward the north or the south, so that they flanked the cross streets of the Back Bay.

The fact that the main streets and alleyways of the grid interrupted the north-south axis meant that corner buildings could only occupy the depth of the block from the street to the alley. This distance was only 100 feet! These structures could not extend their mass from corner to corner and seal the alley, which in the mid-nineteenth century was too important an element within the Back Bay to be abandoned. Because there were no shops in the area, and because the mode of living there dictated the need for domestic help, the alleys were the place within the center of the block where the house staff accepted deliveries from grocers, butchers, etc. Houses were located between the large-scale buildings and at the center of the block, upon the land which had the lower value. Both these large and small scale buildings turned their backs to the alley.

The resultant linear massing of buildings from Beacon to Boylston Streets was similar for both corners and central sections of each block. At most corner sites focal points were created by four large-scale buildings which fronted the main street. These foci articulated the linear coagulation from north to south. Likewise concentrations of houses were created along the north-south axis of the grid and not within the confines of the block itself.

The character of these concentrations came to be determined by the process of land fill. Because building followed closely behind fill which continued the north-south coagulation westward, the north-south structures developed at approximately the same time. Following the

construction of large buildings at the corners of a cross street, were the erection of residential buildings, creating the central mass between that cross street and the next one west of it. Subsequently the public buildings along the north-south axis of that western cross street developed. A typical linear coagulation of large-scale buildings and covering a distance of 1200 feet occurred over a period of about ten years.⁷ Within the same period of time the central focus of residences developed upon half that distance.⁸ North-south development was at twice the rate of east-west building and both were within a relatively short interval.

This meant that the linear focus structures situated along its entire length were architecturally quite consistent and were rendered in similar styles. As the grid extended the land a few blocks westward, the style of all buildings coagulated at the east would be essentially different from those concentrated at the west. Likewise the residences in the center of each block, between cross streets, generally revealed their similar character between the northern and southern boundaries of the Back Bay.

This sequential pattern of fill and build implied that it would continue its process until all the land was filled and all the buildings built within the Back Bay grid. In reality this did not occur! As with construction elsewhere in America, the Back Bay was affected by the state of general business conditions. After the financial crises of both 1873 and 1893, building activity at the areas where large-scale structures were gathered, with the exception of one concentrated area, declined considerably. The periods of decreased construction were: 1872-1876 and 1887-1899.⁹

Indeed, the exceptional area that saw building waves during the depressed times experienced prosperity within both periods of lesser activity. Building therefore continued there over an extended period of time, unlike building at the corners of the blocks which occurred within a decade. The general layout of this particular area was the same as a typical Back Bay block, but its concentrated development which occurred over twenty-five years, was different from the linear form of the area where large-scale buildings were focussed in the Back Bay.

The atypical area where monumental buildings were amassed in the Back Bay was the Copley area. Its structures were concentrated around a central space. The form of this space which developed over a long period of time, was affected by a major decision made for it in 1883. Because of this decision the particularity of the area within the structure of the Back Bay grid is qualified with reference to the formulation and execution of that decision. The history of the form of the Copley area is related in three stages. In the first stage the area is described before the issue for making a decision about space was raised, in the second step at the moment of the decision, and in the third after the decision was realized.

Notes

1.
Sanborn Insurance Atlas, 1868, Vol. 2.
2.
Boston Illustrated (Boston: Houghton, Osgood & Co., 1872), p. 42.
3.
Boston Illustrated, 1878 ed., p. 52.
4.
Bacon's Dictionary
5.
St. James Hotel (1867) on West Newton Street by M. M. Ballou was a commercial hotel in the South End.
The Hotel Vendome (1871) at the corner of Dartmouth Street and Commonwealth Avenue, in the Back Bay, was a commercial hotel which also catered to some permanent tenants.
6.
Information derived from the following Insurance Atlases:
Sanborn Insurance Atlas, Vol. 1, 1874;
Atlas of the County of Suffolk Massachusetts, Vol. 1, 1874;
Bromley Atlas of the City of Boston, 1889.
7.
See the dates of buildings in Bunting, *Houses of Boston's Back Bay*, Appendix, pp. 402-460.
Linear development of large-scale buildings along Dartmouth and Exeter Streets from the northern corners of Boylston to the southern corners of Marlborough Streets, covering a distance of 1200 feet occurred in a period of \pm ten years. This meant 120 feet were built in one year in the north-south direction.

8.

Central concentration of residences between Marlborough and Boylston Streets from Clarendon to Dartmouth Streets, covering a distance of 600 feet took place within ten years; and from Dartmouth to Exeter Streets, over the same distance occurred within the same time. This meant 60 feet were built in one year in the east-west direction.

9.

ibid., p. 5.

4.
DEVELOPMENT OF THE COPLEY SQUARE AREA
THE FIRST STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT, 1870-1880

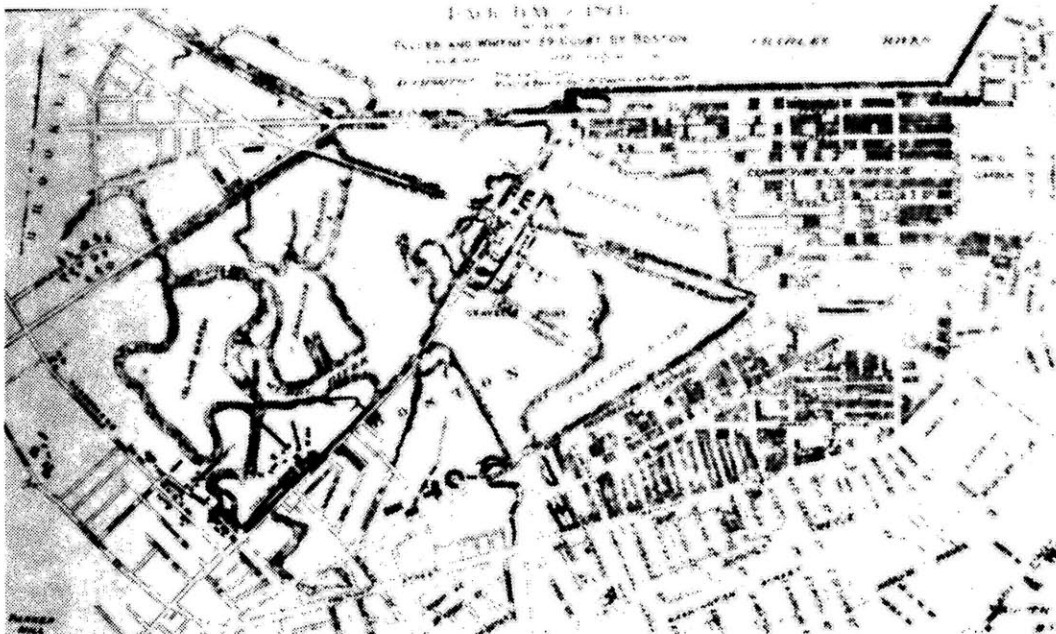
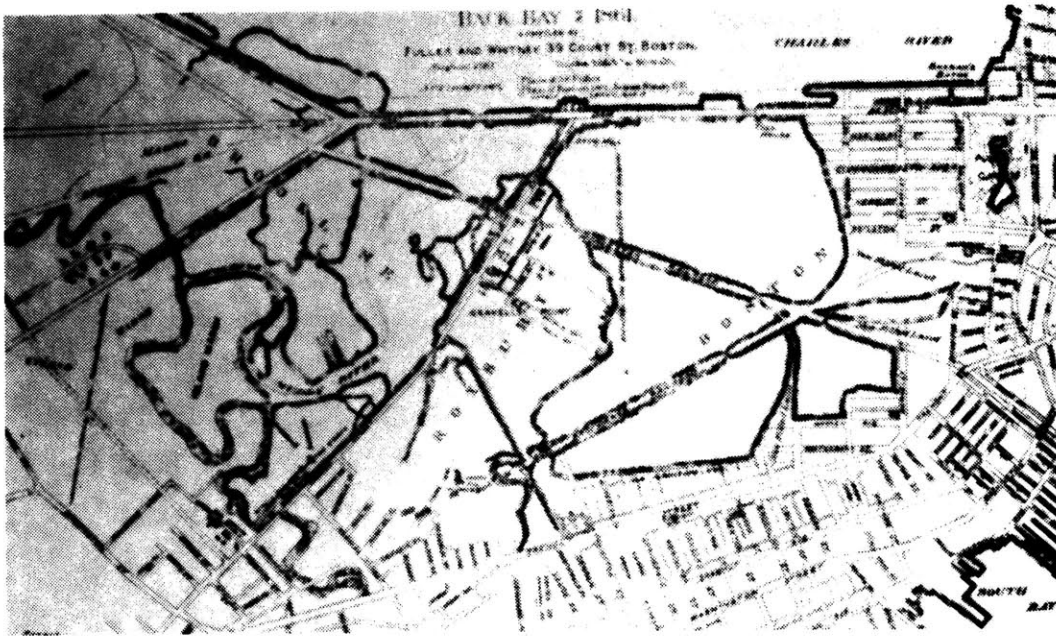
When the land fill of the Back Bay and South End met at the Copley site in 1870, the sequential process of fill and build was abandoned. Only after all the land was available did building begin there and then in piecemeal fashion. Within this decade construction was in two waves. The first took place during the decreased building activity period, 1872-1876, when only public buildings dotted the north, east and south sides surrounding the vacant area of land (figure 16).

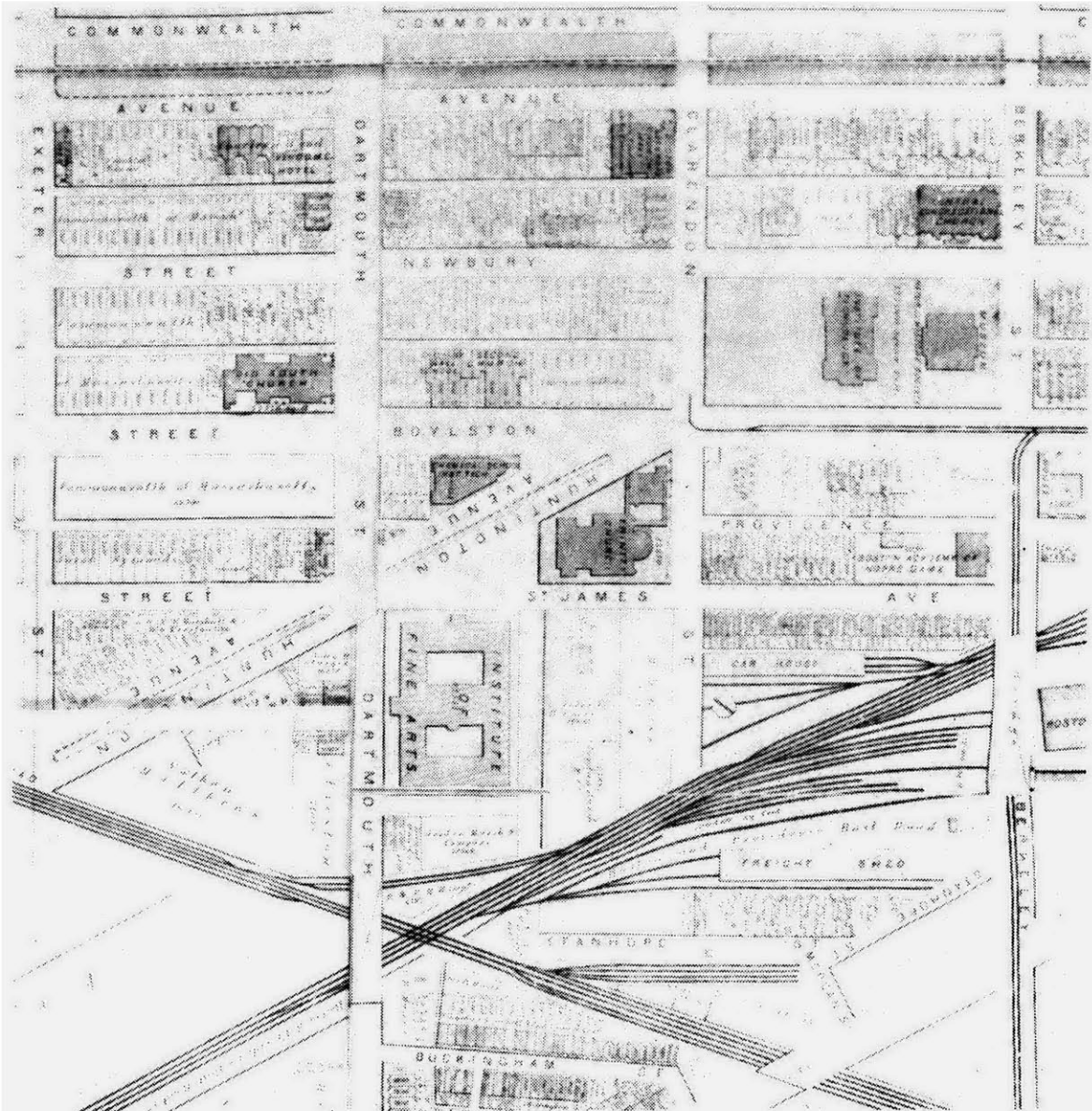
The first of these public structures built at the site was the Museum of Fine Arts (1870-1876). It was planned for that parcel of land situated south of the area (figure 17). Initially this land had the lowest value of all the lots in the vicinity and inspired little confidence in its relative worth.¹ The principal motive for the building of the Museum was to increase the value of its land, just as its predecessor, St. James Park, was planned to do.

Before land fill reached the Copley Area, the memorialist who had prepared the Financial Estimate of 1861 for the Back Bay lands, Mr. M. D. Ross, determined the future for the fill planned north of the intersection of the railway lines. In the first half of this decade he urged the Boston Water Power Company, the owners of this parcel of land, to convey it to the City in trust to be used for an Institute of Art or a Square. Mr. Ross persuaded members of that Company that the construction of the Museum would increase the purchase price of their land in its proximity. He swayed the outcome of their decision by describing the benefit the public would derive from the erection of the Museum of Fine Arts in the neighborhood of the Museum of Natural History and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As part of the extensive plan of the Conservatory, Fine Arts was associated with the progress of higher and more humane culture of the community. Its

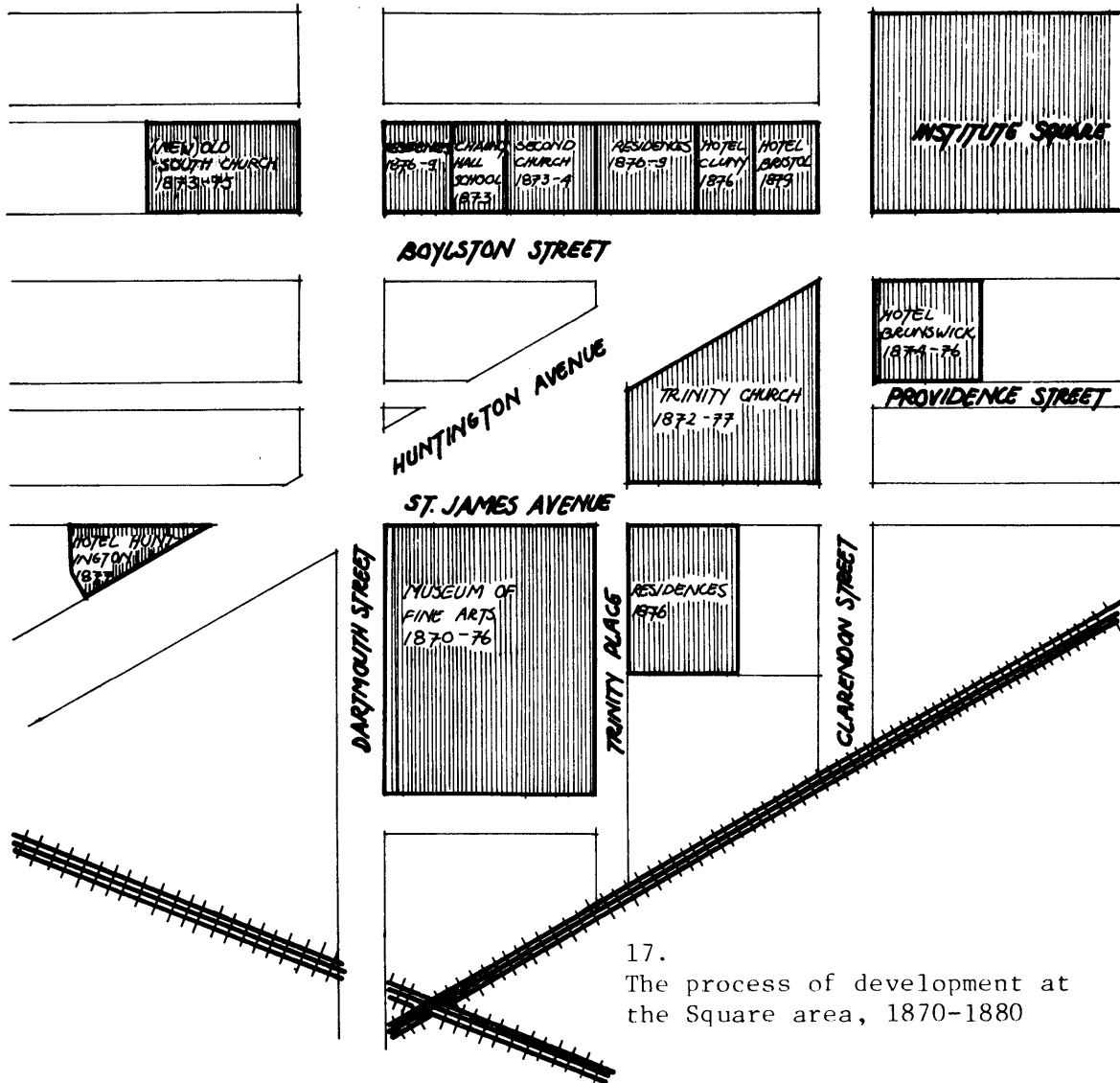
14.
The Back Bay in 1861 (Whitehill, Boston: A Topographical History, p. 158)

15.
The Back Bay in 1871 (ibid., p. 159)





16.
 Detail of the plan of the Back Bay showing the Copley Square area in
 1874 (Atlas of the County of Suffolk, Mass., 1874, Suffolk County
 Registry of Deeds, County Courthouse, Boston)



17.
The process of development at
the Square area, 1870-1880

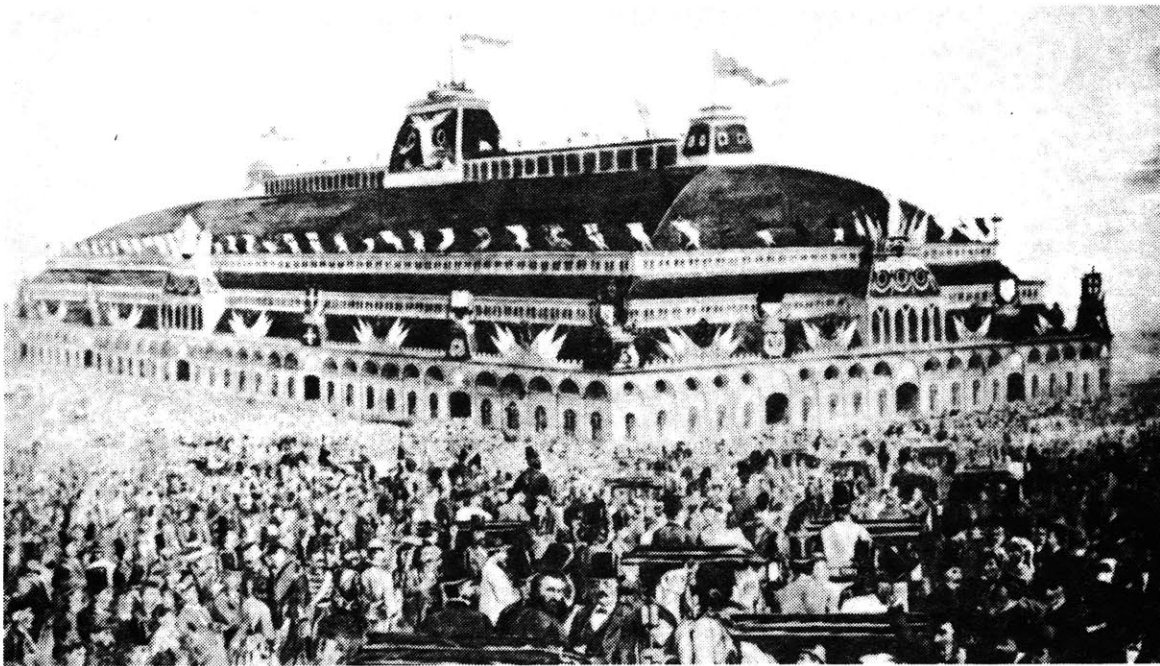
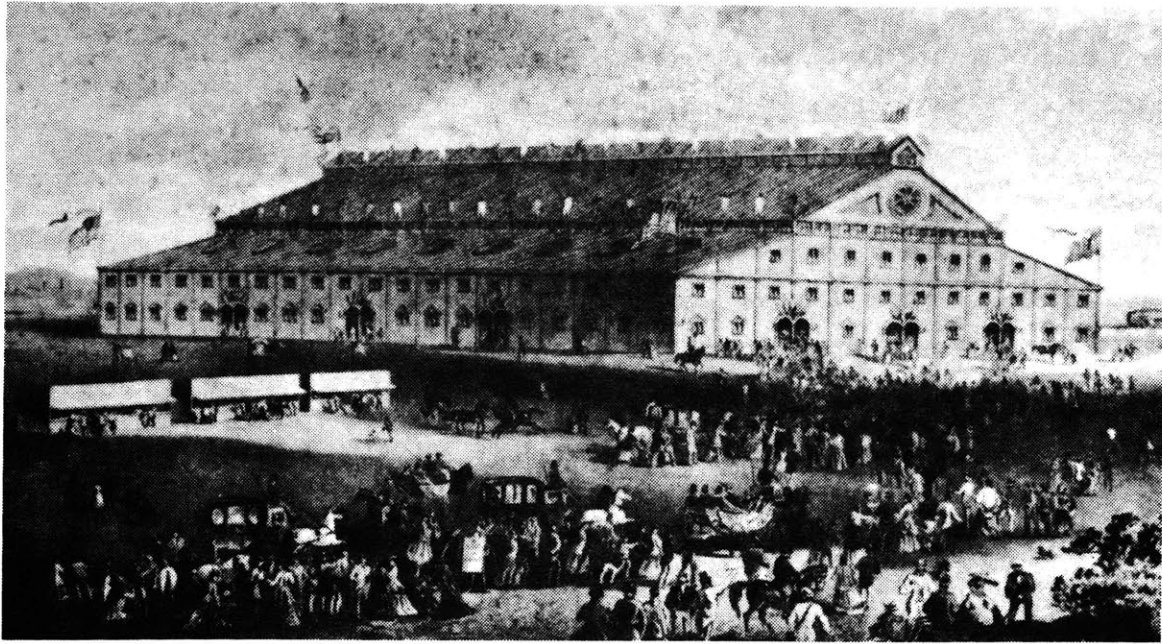
cultivation was to be regarded as a "necessary" supplement, in every wise system of education, to the teachings of practical science and the more purely logical exercises of thought.

As early as 1864 the success of the idea proposed by Ross became apparent when, in a plan of that portion of the Back Bay, the land of the former St. James Park was designated as the land for the "Institute of Fine Arts."² This proposal was officiated on 22nd December 1865 when the Boston Water Power Company granted that piece of land bounded by Dartmouth, Stuart and St. James Streets and Trinity Place to the city to be held until a charter was issued incorporating such an Institute.

Five years passed before the Massachusetts Legislature issued an Act incorporating the Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts. Already in the previous year the land reserved for the building to house the Fine Arts was available for the envisioned improvement and it was not left fallow during this period. In June 1869, a temporary coliseum, in which a National Peace Jubilee was held, was erected there. Its presence was short-lived when in 1870 the moment for building the Museum was ripe. A grant of land had been set aside. Funds were available and collections of artworks needed to be housed.

Following a competition, the design for the new Museum was awarded on December 10, 1870 to Sturgis and Brigham. The building was opened on July 3, 1876. The length of the proposed building was predetermined by the long axis of the lot, which paralleled Dartmouth Street. Just as a corner building of the Back Bay grid oriented its main elevation to the more important street, so the principal facade of the Museum was initially designed to front Dartmouth Street, the communication link between the Back Bay and South End. As completed, the Museum was one lateral half of the symmetrical design facing that street, and presented its flank to St. James Street and the Copley site. The main elevation never came to be completed.

The facade fronting the site became the important one for that building. By 1878 the character of that elevation lent itself to describing a civic space, and so anticipated the idea for a square there. In fact, the author of the 1878 edition of *Boston Illustrated*, described the location of the Museum of Fine Arts as being on Art Square. He knew that the initial design for the building had not been

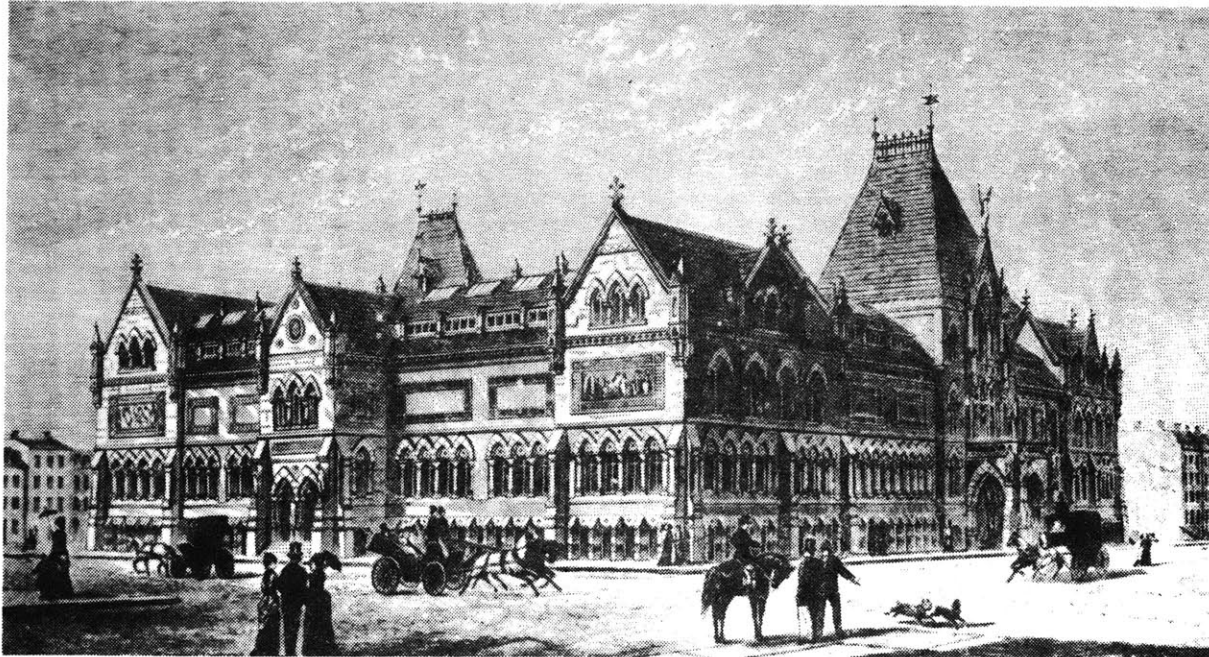


18.
The Peace Jubilee Coliseum, 1869, built on the site of the Museum of Fine Arts (Allan Forbes, Copley Square, 1941)

19.
The Peace Jubilee Coliseum, 1872, built south of the site of the Museum of Fine Arts (*ibid.*)

20.

The proposed design for the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston Illustrated,
1878, p. 42e)

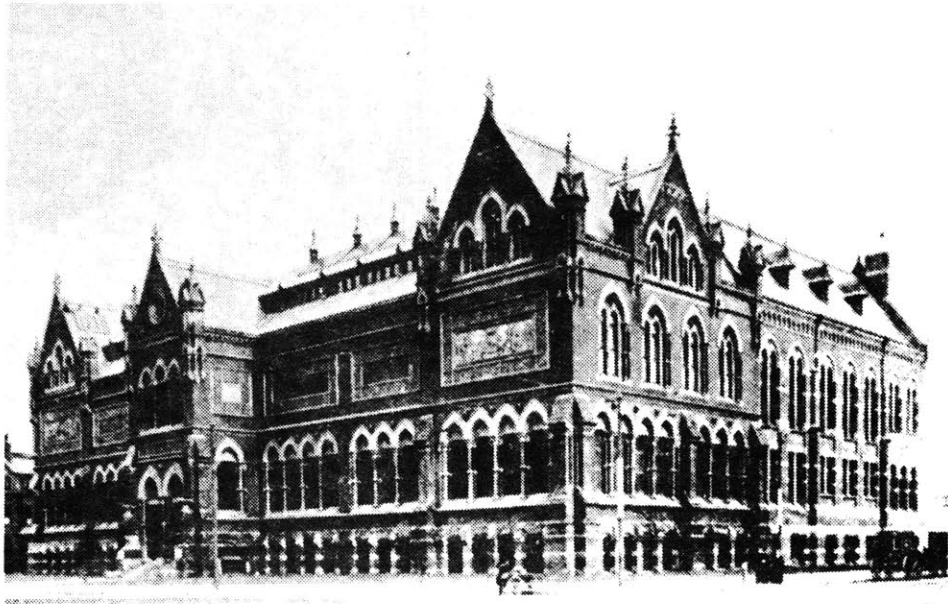
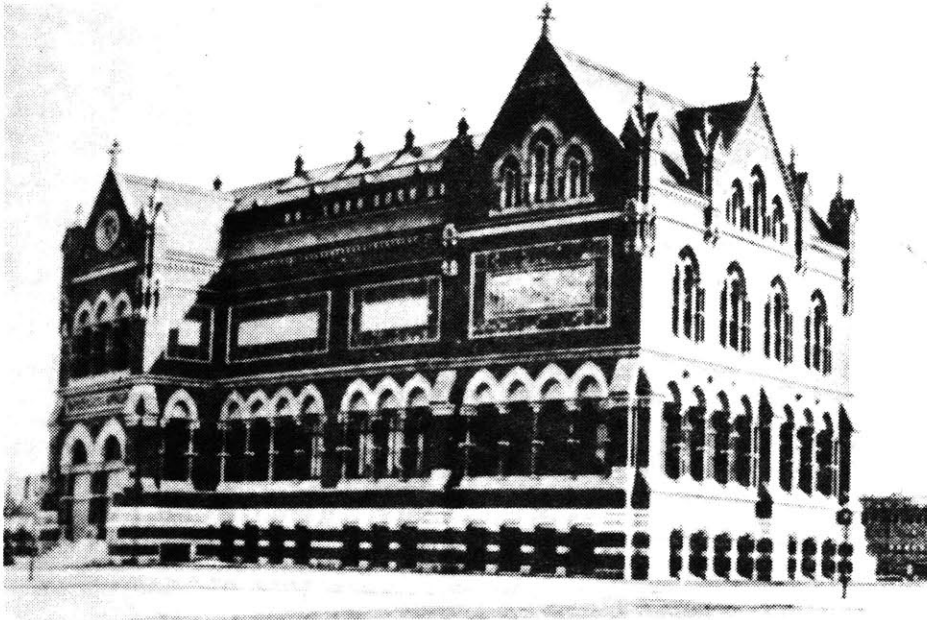


21.

The Museum of Fine Arts showing the west wing upon Copley Square area and opened to the public in 1876 (Forbes, Copley Square, 1941)

22.

The Museum of Fine Arts showing the completed front on Copley Square area and opened in 1879 (Courtesy Print Department, Boston Public Library)

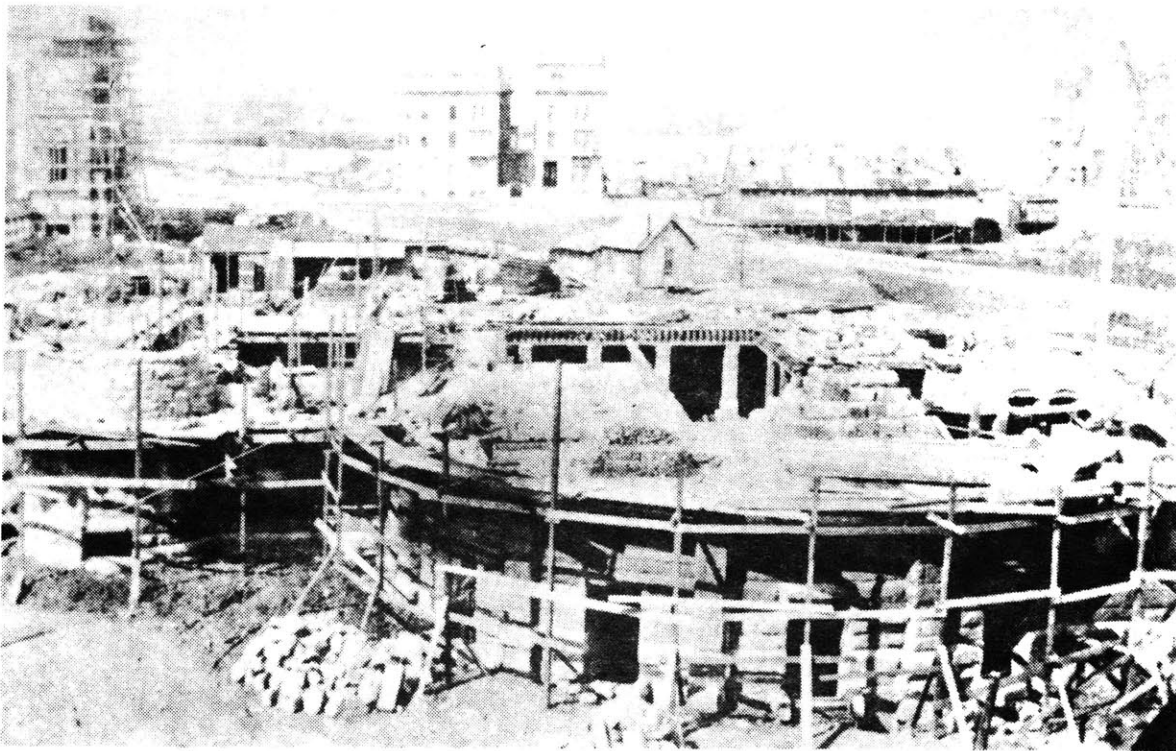
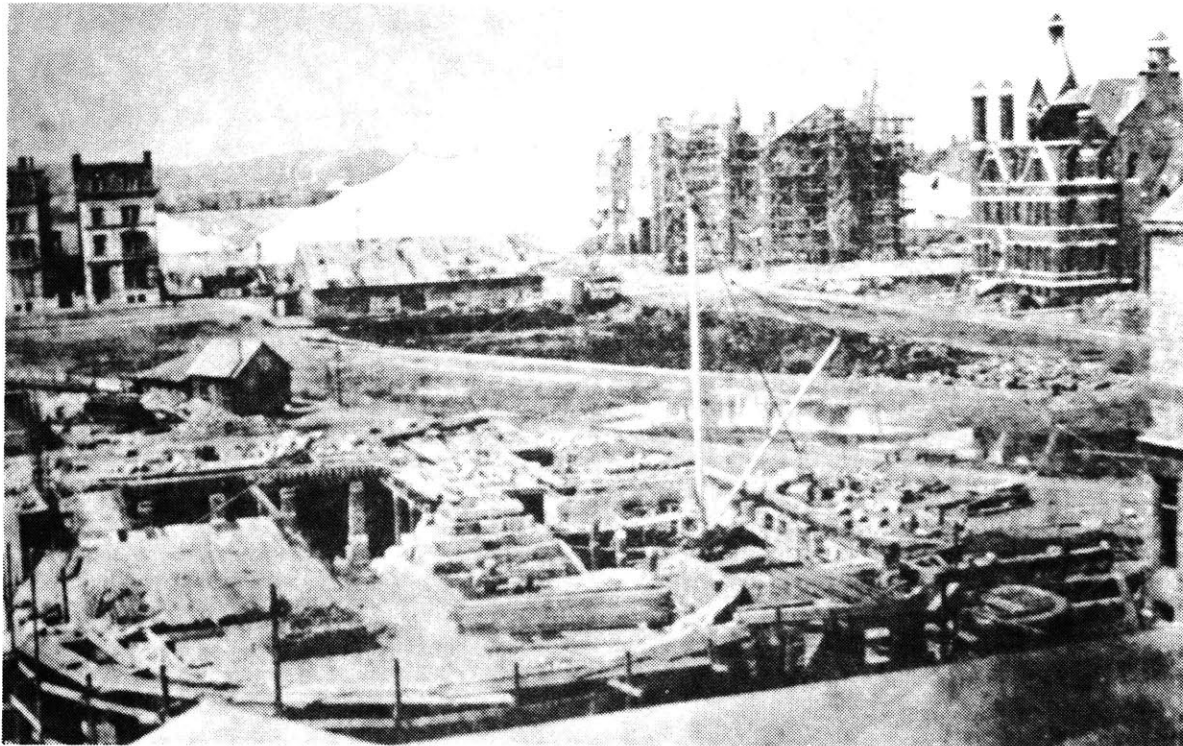


completed but was unaware that that facade directed to the urban area, was not intended as the main elevation. He said: "The main front is already finished, and faces Art Square, with a projecting portico in the centre, enriched with polished marble columns. The right wing is adorned with a great bas-relief representing Art receiving the tributes of all nations; and the left wing is to have a companion piece, illustrating the union of Art and Industry."³

Trinity Church (1872-1877) was the second large-scale building planned for the site. For the first time within the Back Bay a single building came to occupy an entire parcel of land. Its structure was proposed for the area's eastern wedge bounded by Huntington Avenue, St. James and Clarendon Streets. For its creation, the alley, Providence Street, between Clarendon Street and Huntington Avenue had to be sealed. This alley was 25 feet wide and exceeded by 9 feet the typical passageway punctuating the Back Bay blocks. Had it remained as initially planned the two pieces of land it connected would have become islands within a sea of streets. Under these circumstances Trinity Church might have become the example to set the precedent for the erection of buildings on the other wedges of land within the square area.

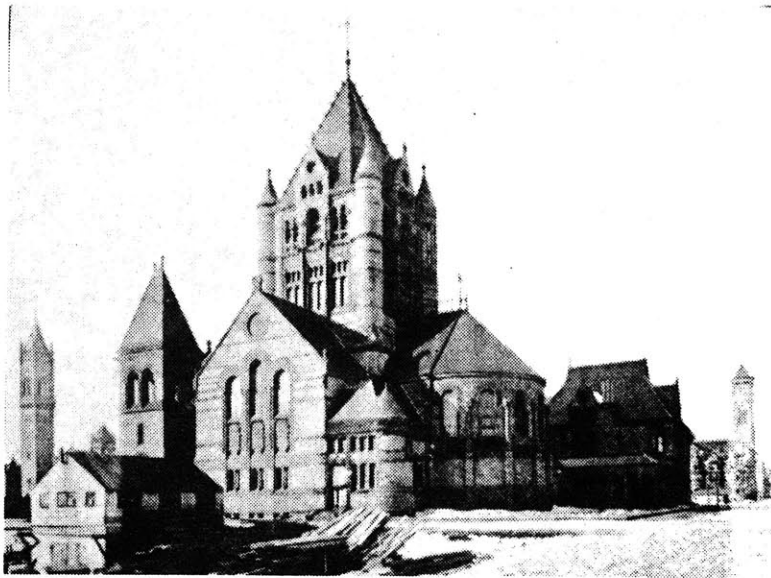
The consolidation of the site for Trinity Church was within a 6 month period. The rectangular piece of land, bounded by Providence, Clarendon and St. James Streets and Huntington Avenue, and having an area of 24,800 square feet was purchased on June 1, 1872 by the Congregation of the Church. The land was chosen after a year of searching for an appropriate site. The decision to move from the original location was made in December 1870, before the great fire of Boston in 1872. This decision was effected because the surrounding area had been invaded by commercial enterprise. A competition was initiated for the design of Trinity Church on this rectangle. H. H. Richardson was awarded the commission based on his design for that portion of land.

In June 1872, the triangular section covering 14,687½ square feet, bounded by Huntington Avenue and Providence and Clarendon Streets was bought from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by Frank D. Evans, a member of the congregation. In the same month it was sold to Trinity Church and consolidated with the rectangular piece.



23.
Construction of Trinity Church and the Copley Square area, 1874
(Whitehill, "Back Bay Churches and Public Buildings," Proceedings of the Bostonian Society, 1958)

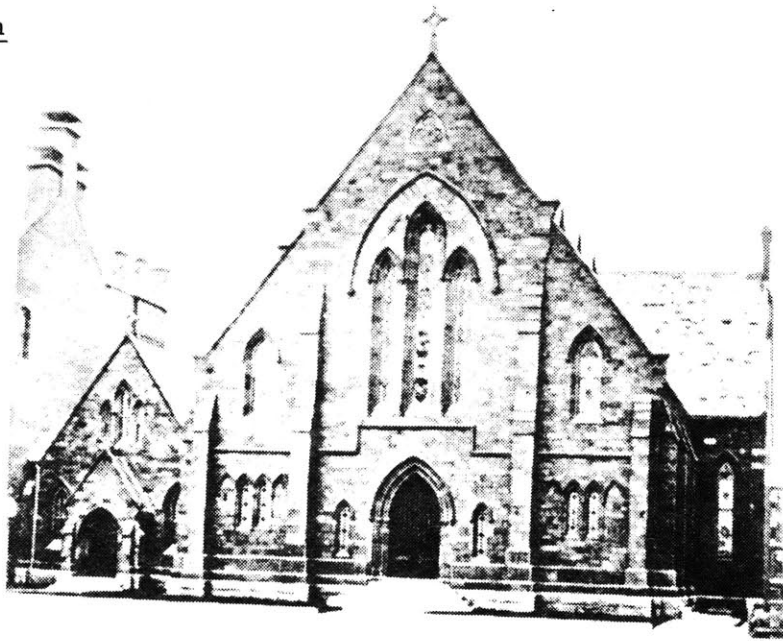
24.
Construction of Trinity Church looking toward the residence of Samuel N. Brown (ibid.)



25.
Trinity Church, view from Clarendon Street
(Forbes, Copley Square, 1941)



26.
Chauncy Hall School on
Boylston Street (Boston
Illustrated, 1878,
p. 48)



27.
Second Church on Boylston Street
(Forbes, Copley Square, 1941)

The form of the consolidated land resulted in it being surrounded by three streets. This meant that a building designed for it ought to celebrate three important facades, one to each street. Richardson recognized the physical implications imposed by this consolidated piece of land. His idea for solving the problem of a three-sided building was to incorporate a prominent central feature, which would belong equally to each front of the building.⁴ This feature he envisaged as the tower to the Church. Rather than putting it on any one corner, where from at least one side it would be nearly out of sight, and thus an inconvenient and unnecessary addition, he proposed that it become the main element.

The consolidation of land meant too that the building closed the vista to Providence Street. Consequently Trinity Church presented a continuous and important front to the urban space situated at the intersection of the northern and southern territories. The area bounded by Boylston and Dartmouth Streets, St. James Avenue and Trinity Place then came to approximate a square.

A third piece of development, comprised of two public buildings, was located on the north side of Boylston Street. Its central position was different from the typical siting of public buildings on the corners of the Back Bay blocks. For the first time in this territory two individual large-scale structures were built side by side and along the east-west axis of the grid.

Chauncy Hall School (1873) and the Second Church (1873-1875) constructed simultaneously, formed this development whose buildings were designed by different architects. The School was planned by A. C. Martin and the Church by N. J. Bradlee. Both were relatively small buildings,⁵ the School extending over three Back Bay lots and the Church over five, but presented themselves as one combined and complex facade to the area of the Copley site.

One can imagine this elevation as a continuous wall moving back and forth with respect to the urban space it fronted. The wall was partially created by the symmetrical facade of the Second Church situated to the fore on Boylston Street and belieing its asymmetrical background. This backdrop then connected itself to the flank of Chauncy Hall School only to jut back toward the street and front the area once again. Their connection eased the transition between the

different forms of the buildings.

By the end of the decade, the School, as one of the oldest and most celebrated private schools in Boston,⁶ enhanced the value of the area in the City. Many of the students who graduated from the school then attended the neighboring Institute of Technology.⁷ It is fair to presume that the building of the School was influenced by the location of MIT, and that the governing body of the School wished it to be "gathered within the same boundaries" as the Conservatory of Art and Science.

Contemporary with the development of that built piece of the Chauncy Hall School and the Second Church, and located on the north side of the Copley area, was the construction of another church at the northwest corner of the site. The structure of the (New) Old South Church (1873-1875) celebrated its position at the intersection of the two important streets, Boylston and Dartmouth. Its architects, Cummings and Sears, designed the wall of the crossing of nave and transept as being similarly disposed to both streets. The outer vestibule too enhanced the intersection by projecting an arched corner toward it. One arch was an entrance driveway for carriages.

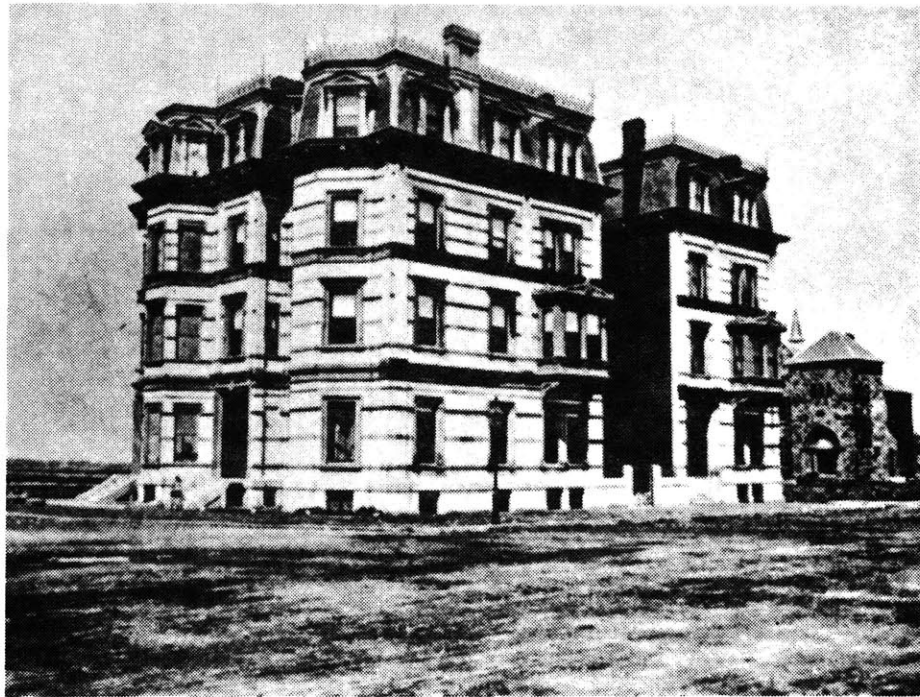
There was one exception to the construction of public buildings only at the Copley site during the first phase of development. In 1872 a private residence for Samuel N. Brown was established at the corner of Dartmouth and St. James Streets.⁸ Although the long axis of this house was on the former street, its entrance fronted St. James. Consequently this building turned away from the urban space.

By 1876 within a period of three years, five public buildings found their place at the Copley area. Concentrated as pieces within an arm surrounding a central space these buildings were, on the north, Chauncy Hall School (1873), the Second Church (1873-74), and the (New) Old South Church (1873-75); on the east, Trinity Church (1872-77); and on the south, the Museum of Fine Arts (1870-76).

Within the next four years, this enclosing arm came to be entirely filled in with buildings. Its filling coincided with the period of increased construction in the Back Bay (1876-1887). The second wave of development at the Copley site was confined to the erection only of residential buildings (figure 14).



28.
(New) Old South Church at the north-west corner of
the Copley site (King, King's "How to See Boston,"
1883, p. 147)



29.
The residence of Samuel N. Brown looking toward Dartmouth Street (Forbes, Copley Square, 1941)

The pieces of land to be filled in with buildings were on the north side of the Copley area. They were comprised mostly of consolidated parcels of land.⁹ Their consolidation anticipated the development of the newly established apartment type house there.

The Hotels Cluny¹⁰ and Bristol were the two apartment hotels erected for the northeast corner of the Copley area. As a piece of development in the Back Bay their building was extraordinary! Three years after the Hotel Cluny¹¹ had been established, its neighbor the Hotel Bristol was built in 1879 at the intersection of Boylston and Clarendon Streets. Creation of the corner hotel after its neighbor differed from the sequence of building within each Back Bay block, whose eastern extremities were initially built. For the first time within this area, two apartment houses were built adjacent to one another. The fact too that their long axes were perpendicular to the important street, Boylston Street, reinforced their particularity. During their building, single family brownstone dwellings came to nestle between the special pieces of development, Chauncy Hall School and Second Church, and the Hotels Cluny and Bristol. And so, in 1879 the north side to the area was completed.

Creation of the Hotel Huntington¹² in 1877 at the south-west corner of the Copley area, and at the intersection of Dartmouth Street and Huntington Avenue, portended the nature of the development of that avenue for the next year tens. In 1878 it was a "noble boulevard" fronting which were, as yet, no buildings, and it stretched away to the south-west for nearly a mile.¹³

By 1880, and after a decade of development, large-scale structures were amassed at the Copley site. Their coagulation was comprised of educational, cultural and religious organizations, and apartment hotels. Included in their mass were a number of single-family residences. By their nature, these buildings formed an enclosing arm to the area of the Copley site, an arm that envisaged a future role for it.

On the south was the Museum of Fine Arts, whose flank on St. James Avenue worthily sustained its unexpected role as a principal facade fronting an urban space.¹⁴ The central tower and mass of Trinity Church created the eastern focus. Development on the north presented to the area a continuous and complex wall, punctuated by two particular developments. The New Old South Church celebrated the north-east

corner of the site. One structure only turned away from the urban space. It was the Samuel N. Brown residence located at the southwest corner.

The urban area so formed was held to be an important place in Boston: "...the triangular space is made one of the architectural centers of the city by the contiguity of Trinity Church, the Museum of Fine Arts, the New Old South Church, and other new buildings."¹⁵

The triangular space, or Art Square as it had been called, formed a corner at the intersection of Dartmouth and Boylston Streets. Dartmouth Street was the typical north-south linear coagulation of large-scale buildings established in the Back Bay. Boylston Street had become the linear focus of public buildings along the west-east axis of the Back Bay grid. Their development as twin centers of interest anticipated the future importance the triangular corner came to command after 1880.

Before the erection of buildings at the Copley corner, the actual cost of land fronting Boylston Street was indicative of the importance of that street and the influence the Conservatory of Art and Science had on the value of that land. The cost of the two parcels purchased in 1872 for the building of Trinity Church, are examples which show the increase in the actual sale of land relative to the price for which the land was supposed to sell in that year (appendix 3). The selling price of the triangular parcel of land, whose apex was located at Boylston Street, had increased more than twofold. The rectangular land fronting St. James Avenue had become nearly four times more valuable. Figures from both these sales approximated the average cost of land on Commonwealth Avenue for 1872.

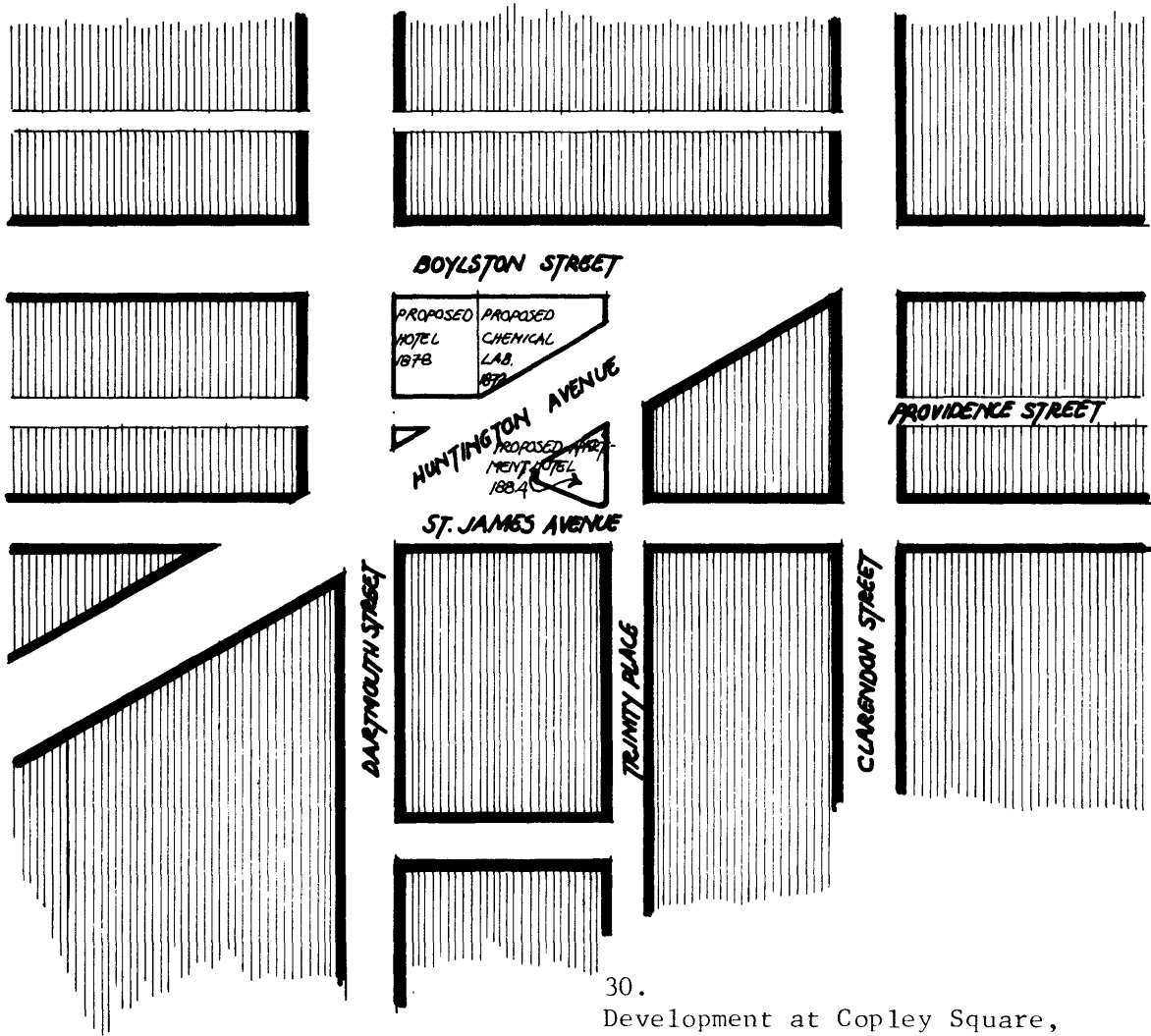
The relative influence of both Boylston Street and Commonwealth Avenue was the same ten years later. This is proven by an analysis of the value in 1881 of two similar buildings, one on the corner of Commonwealth Avenue and Dartmouth Street, and the other on the corner of Boylston Street and Clarendon Street. The first structure was the Hotel Vendome, built in 1871 and enlarged in 1881. The second was the Hotel Brunswick, built in 1874-1876. Both buildings were situated on like parcels of land, the Vendome covered an area of 240 feet by 125 feet and the Brunswick 224 feet by 125 feet. Their main facades fronted Commonwealth Avenue and Boylston Street respectively.

Considered prominent commercial hotels, they attracted many distinguished visitors.¹⁶ The cost of erecting each of these two buildings was the same, \$1,000,000. This represented the relative value of the streets on which the Vendome and Brunswick were located. 59

No less important an influence on the shape and quality of the Copley site, than the actual development surrounding it, were the proposals for its interior space. Located at the intersection of the two grids, its form was comprised of a number of disjointed wedges of land (figure 30). By the mid-1870's, each section belonged to a different enterprise, that is two institutions, one corporation, an individual and the Commonwealth (figure 16). With a single exception, which constituted only one percent of the square area,¹⁷ all interior parcels of land had a building designed for them. There were proposals for both public buildings and high density dwellings.

The most significant of these was the scheme for a Chemical Institute. Outlined as a plan in the 1874 map of the City of Boston,¹⁸ it was located on the trapezoidal land lying at the intersection of Boylston Street and Huntington Avenue and covering an area of 13,194 square feet. Originally this site had belonged to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, but in 1872 the members of the corporation of MIT petitioned for this land to be granted them for the building of a Chemical Laboratory. The need for this structure arose when, with the increase in the number of students in that year, the lack of working space for executing chemical experiments was reinforced.¹⁹

The laboratories were initially planned to be incorporated in the building proposed by Professor Ware for the corner of Boylston and Clarendon Streets on Institute Square. Large funds were necessary for the erection of this monumental structure to be in architectural harmony with the existing building east of it.²⁰ The President of the Institute, Professor Walker, at the corporation meeting of December 27, 1872, deemed such a large scale proposal unnecessary for that time and consequently its plans were shelved. The issue then raised at that meeting was how the impending need for Chemistry Laboratories could be alleviated. The President proposed that only a small building of moderate cost should be built to house the chemistry equipment and to provide additional working space. He believed it ought to be a separate



30.
Development at Copley Square,
1880-1885

building, for which a relatively small piece of land would suffice. It was decided to retain the whole western portion of the Institute land for the future erection of the large-scale building. The problem for the Committee members then became where to build the Chemical Institute.

Its land had to be a grant and so the members were faced with securing from the Commonwealth a site in the vicinity of the Copley area. Most of the adjacent territory already had either been allotted or sold by the State to other organizations. The only land available nearby, was an odd-shaped piece diagonally opposite the existing MIT building. Its ownership, location and size benefitted the idea for a small chemistry building.

Consequently, a 'Committee of Seven' was appointed to undertake the whole subject of a separate building for chemistry and present it to the Legislature in written form. Three months later the reserved land was granted to the Institute. The Act of April 9, 1873 granting additional land to the Institute included certain conditions. In the first instance, MIT had the perpetual right to occupy and control free of rent and charge by the Commonwealth, the land on which the Chemistry Laboratory was to be built. This was subject to the regulations relative to the Commonwealth land on the south side of Boylston Street. The land was to be reserved from sale for ever. In the second instance, if MIT used land for any purpose other than the Chemical Laboratory, the Commonwealth would take possession of the land.

After the land had been granted, the plans and estimates for the proposed new building were formulated and presented to the Committee members.²¹ The Estimate was far in excess of the sum contemplated for the building, and the situation was further aggravated by the depression of 1873, when money was not readily available. Plans to erect the Chemical Laboratory could not proceed.

This delay in building allowed for a two-year incubation period when the original idea of civic improvement conceived for this area came to the fore once again. Interest was expressed in creating a public Square on the consolidated parcel of land to be comprised of the trapezoid belonging to MIT and the abutting privately owned rectangle. The idea was proposed by the same two groups of men who were initially set on enhancing the quality of the site in the 1860's.

The first group were the members of the Committee of MIT, a constituent of the former "Conservatory of Art and Science", which had been disbanded as an association as soon as the purpose to secure land for the erection of its representative societies had been fulfilled. In 1875 the Committee members of the Institute thought that a public square there would be a great ornament to the City, and were amenable to its execution on the exchange of their trapezoidal land for another lot suited to the erection of the Chemistry Building.²²

The second group interested in the improvement of the area, were the Park Commissioners of the City of Boston.²³ On June 9, 1875, the City Clerk acted on their behalf and sent a letter to the Institute in relation to the authority granted by the State to release to the City the trapezoidal land which was held by the Institute so that a public square could be created thereon.²⁴

In view of the retraction of Institute land by the State and the then extreme lack of chemical laboratory space, the Institute in the following year erected for this purpose a temporary structure adjacent to the existing building. Even after all its efforts, the City did not act on the June letter and the idea for a park was set aside. In fact, all seemed against the creation of an urban space on the trapezoidal land when the Institute of Technology was given the right in 1879 to retain possession of it and a building was proposed once again. The second structure for this land was designed by Mr. Dabney who was asked to negotiate contracts for its erection. Furthermore, on the other part of the land upon which the park was envisaged a building was planned in 1878. This land, a rectangle, measuring 100 feet by 125 feet belonged to Franklin Evans, and was located at the intersection of Boylston and Dartmouth, the two important streets in the area. The erection of the envisioned apartment hotel²⁵ there would result in establishing it as a prominent structure for the area.²⁶

Ground for a third building proposed for an interior parcel of the Copley land, was broken in 1884. This triangle south of Providence Street originally belonged to the Boston Water Power Company, but in 1883 was sold to become privately owned. The structure for this wedge east of Huntington Avenue was to be an apartment house, and, located directly opposite the Trinity Church door, it masked both the

Development on the odd-shaped portion of land allotted each of the three schemes would make for a physically unfavorable environment. Buildings upon the wedges would result in fragmented urban form, not to mention the ingenuous design required for planning a structure on such an odd site. The proposed Chemical Institute truly represented the difficulty the land created. This building had a peculiar outline, and one which rendered its remaining area "left-over-land."

What had happened to the initial idea for civic improvement, conceived in the 1860's, to enhance the quality of the area?

Notes

1.
See Chapter 1, p.103 for the value of land at the Copley area.
2.
Book of Deeds, Lib. 856, p. 139.
3.
Boston Illustrated, 1878 ed., p. 52.
4.
H.H. Richardson, "A description of Trinity Church," p. 13.
5.
Boston Illustrated, 1878 ed., p. 42c.
Second Church was described as "a neat little Brownstone Church".
6.
Boston Illustrated, 1872 ed., p. 49.
7.
ibid.
8.
In the map of 1874: to the west of Dartmouth Street, St. James is a street, whereas to the east it is an avenue.
9.
In 1874, 3 lots of land at the corner of Boylston and Dartmouth Streets and to the west of Chauncy Hall School belonged to Charles A. Wood; apart from one lot adjacent to the Second Church, Thomas Gaffield owned seven parcels fronting Boylston Street; and the next three lots east of this were owned by James T. Eldredge.
10.
Douglas Shand Tucci, *Built in Boston: City and Suburb, 1800-1950* (Boston:

Little, Brown & Company, 1978), p. 104.

The Cluny is described by Tucci as an example of the apartment-type house. "The second floor suite offered a reception area of fine contiguous rooms, four of them (reception room, parlor, library and dining room) off a central hall with coat room and water closet - and a fifth (a smoking room) off the dining room. There were also seven bedrooms and two full bathrooms with kitchen and service areas. All this and fifteen closets on one floor!"

11.

The Hotel Cluny, owned by W. H. Newman and designed by J. R. Putnam occupied the three eastern lots previously owned by Gaffield. The Hotel Bristol occupied the three lots of land, originally owned by J. T. Eldredge but in 1879 belonged to J. C. Ropes et al. Jrs.

12.

Hotel Huntington, designed by George F. Meacham for owner, Mr. Levi B. Gay.

13.

Boston Illustrated, 1878 ed., p. 42c.

14.

Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin, VII (Boston, April 1909), p. 14.

15.

American Architect and Building News, Vol. 4 (August 3, 1878).

16.

Bacon's Dictionary.

17.

The triangle formed by Providence and Dartmouth Streets and Huntington Avenue, with an area of 746.8 square feet. This land was granted by the Boston Water Power Company to the Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts in 1878.

18.

An outline for the building appears in the *Atlas of the County of Suffolk, Massachusetts*, Vol. 1, 1874. Even though it merely reflects the shape of the block, it seems to be influenced more by the form of the plan for Trinity Church than the existing building of MIT.

19.

Annual Report of the President and Secretary of the Institute: The President's Report 1871-77 and the Secretary's Report 1872-73.

20.

The Institute's Government Records. Minutes of Meetings of the Corporation Members. Meeting of December 27, 1872.

21.

ibid., September 3, 1873.

22.

ibid., February 10, 1875.

23.

The Park Commission Act was passed by the Legislature in 1875.

24.

From Minutes of Meeting of February 10, 1875.

25.

Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin, p. 14.

26.

Atlas of the County of Suffolk, 1874.

On examining the area of the land bounded by Huntington and St. James Avenues, Trinity Place and Dartmouth Street, a smaller "square" could result from the facades of MIT Chemical Laboratory and the proposed hotel, Trinity Church, the Museum of Fine Arts and Samuel N. Brown's residence, all of which enclose it.

27.

Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin, p. 14.

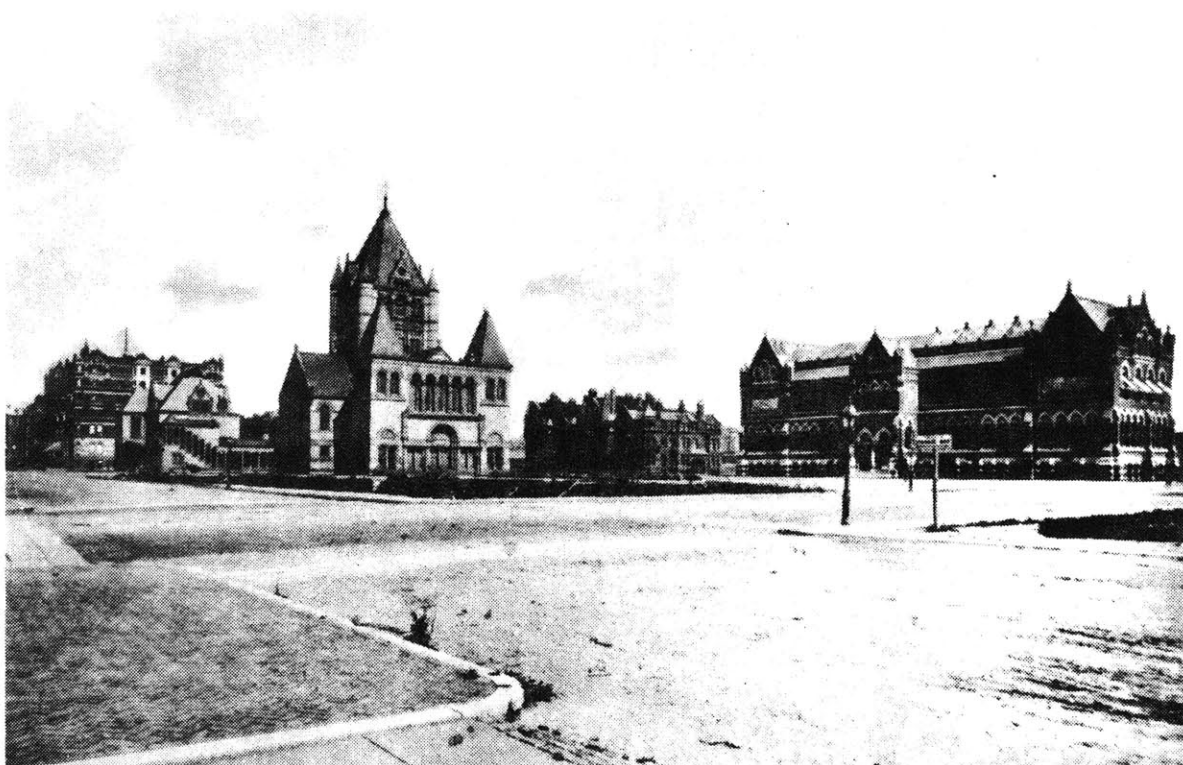
THE DECISION TO IMPROVE THE AREA, 1880-1885

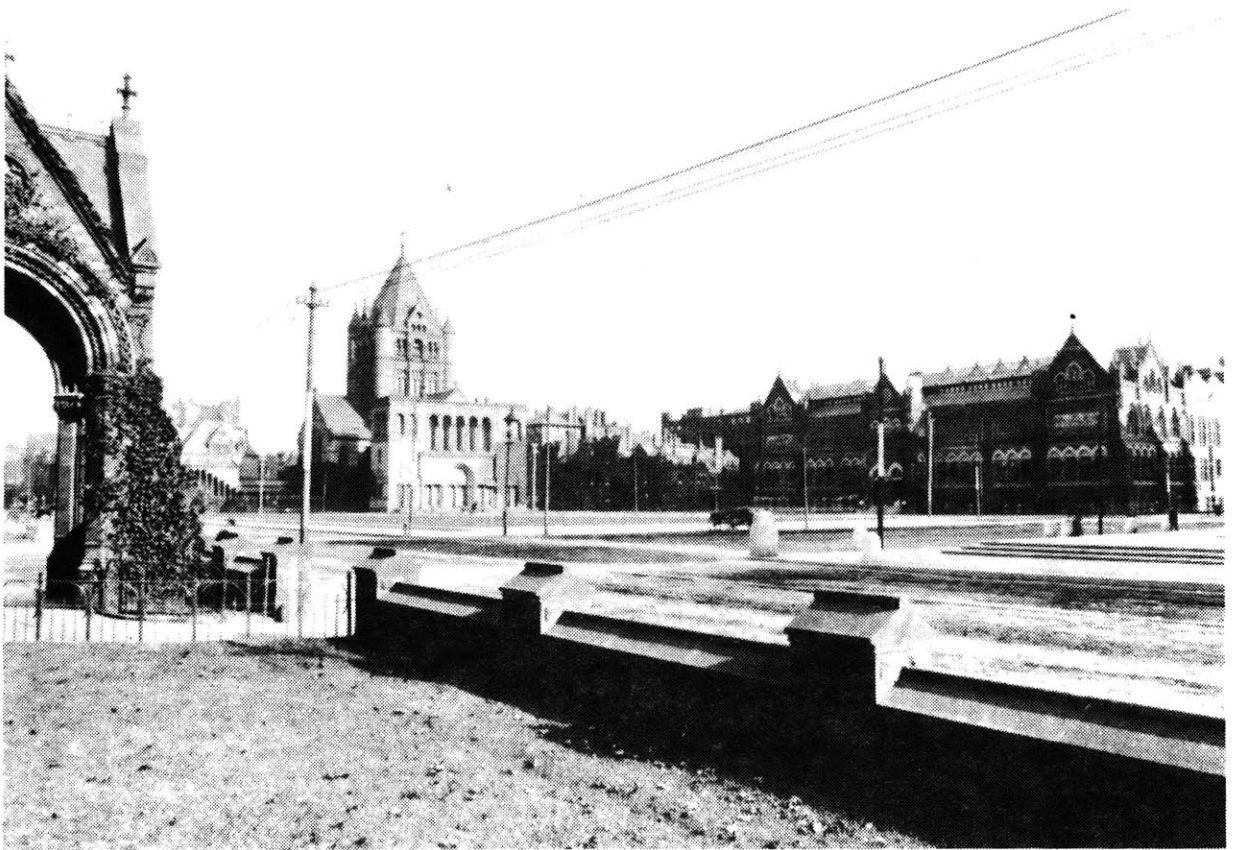
The relative value of the Copley area by 1880 was determined by the number of important buildings which surrounded it. The construction there of the Conservatory of Art and Science, one kind of improvement, had promoted the sale of land in its vicinity and at increased prices. Its members, by their involvement in acquiring grants of land from the State for the buildings of the Conservatory, were directly responsible for shaping the form of the area. A number of them too had purchased large parcels of land in the vicinity.¹ Unable to take part in the extensive buying and selling of land, the role of the city engineers and surveyors had been relegated to mapmaking and consequently the execution of their ideas for civic improvement had been limited. Their plans for a park to enhance the quality of the area had come to be neglected.

When it was finally decided that the method of connection of the two grids was to be their intersection, the park initially planned for the south of that point had been displaced by the Museum of Fine Arts and it was not planned elsewhere. With no park in the vicinity and the area of land fragmented into small pieces, what would seem to suggest itself as the place where the notion of creating an urban space could be explored. This particular area of land was to wait a decade before interest was expressed in it becoming a civic place.

In 1875 both the Park Commissioners of the City of Boston and the members of the Institute showed some concern in the future of the Copley area as a park. The land they believed ought to be designated as a park was that portion west of Huntington Avenue and at the corner of Boylston and Dartmouth Streets. The time for enhancing the quality of land was nigh and by the 1880's it had become ripe.

31.
Copley Square, circa 1880 (Courtesy Print Department, Boston
Public Library)





32.
View of Trinity Church without the western towers and the Old
South Church at the north-west corner of the Square
(Courtesy Print Department, Boston Public Library)

Prominent structures fronted the vacant site on three sides, their elevations formed continuous facades to that area and it approximated a square. Furthermore, the Trustees of the Boston Public Library had been granted land west of it for the new library building. In 1880 the grant was only for that portion situated at the south-west corner of Boylston and Dartmouth Streets. It was only two years later, after the Trustees of the Harvard Medical School had agreed to seal the alley, and the Legislature had empowered the City to take the land fronting St. James Street, that the western portion came to form a continuous boundary fronting the disjointed triangle situated west of Huntington Avenue.

Acting on these incentives, the City began to acquire the pieces of the interior land of the square area. Acquisition was in two stages within a period of two years. First the more significant portion, located at the corner of Boylston and Dartmouth Streets and west of Huntington Avenue and comprised of four pieces, was bought from each owner. On the same day, July 27, 1882, the following pieces were granted the city:² the trapezoid by MIT at a cost of \$30,000 and other valuable and adequate considerations;³ the rectangle by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for \$43,515.62; the triangle by the Trustees of the Museum of Fine Arts for \$1.00; and the land of the alleyway by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for \$1.00. The City then possessed the consolidated triangular land west of Huntington Avenue and in 1883 named this portion Copley Square.

No attention had yet been given by the City to that other portion of the Copley area which was east of Huntington Avenue. In fact, land was conveyed by the Boston Water Power Company for private ownership to Mr. Whitney for \$25,000 on February 1, 1883. On this land an apartment hotel was planned consistent with the intense development in 1883-1884 of this building type at the southwest corner of the Copley area and located on Huntington Avenue.

The future of this triangle suddenly became important to the City in 1885. As the proposed structure fronted Trinity Church, it would undoubtedly destroy the value of that building which was voted the most beautiful in America in that year. Immediately the Municipal Corporation acted, and for \$30,000 purchased the portion of land east of Huntington Avenue, to spare the facades of Trinity Church and the Museum

of Fine Arts. And so it was that Copley Square came to approximate a square space bisected on its diagonal by that Avenue.

Even the naming of the Square and the partial consolidation of land there did not ensure that the physical conditions of the interior spaces would become more than just two triangles. What it did provide, however, was an open area onto which the future Boston Public Library could front. The name was important also in crystallizing the particularity of the area as the focus of prominent structures. Owners of buildings in the vicinity capitalized too on the locality to boost the relative value of their structures, such as apartment hotels and commercial enterprises.

Notes

1.

Atlas of County of Suffolk, 1874.

Mr. Mathias D. Ross, a member of the Conservatory of Art and Science, was also a committee member of MIT and a trustee of the Museum of Fine Arts. He owned a large parcel of land South of St. James Avenue and fronting Clarendon Street.

Lyman Nichols was a member of the Society of Architects between 1874 and 1885 and he owned land adjacent to that belonging to Ross. The Nichols land was located at the corner of St. James Avenue and Trinity Place.

2.

Book of Deeds, Grantee book. City of Boston.

3.

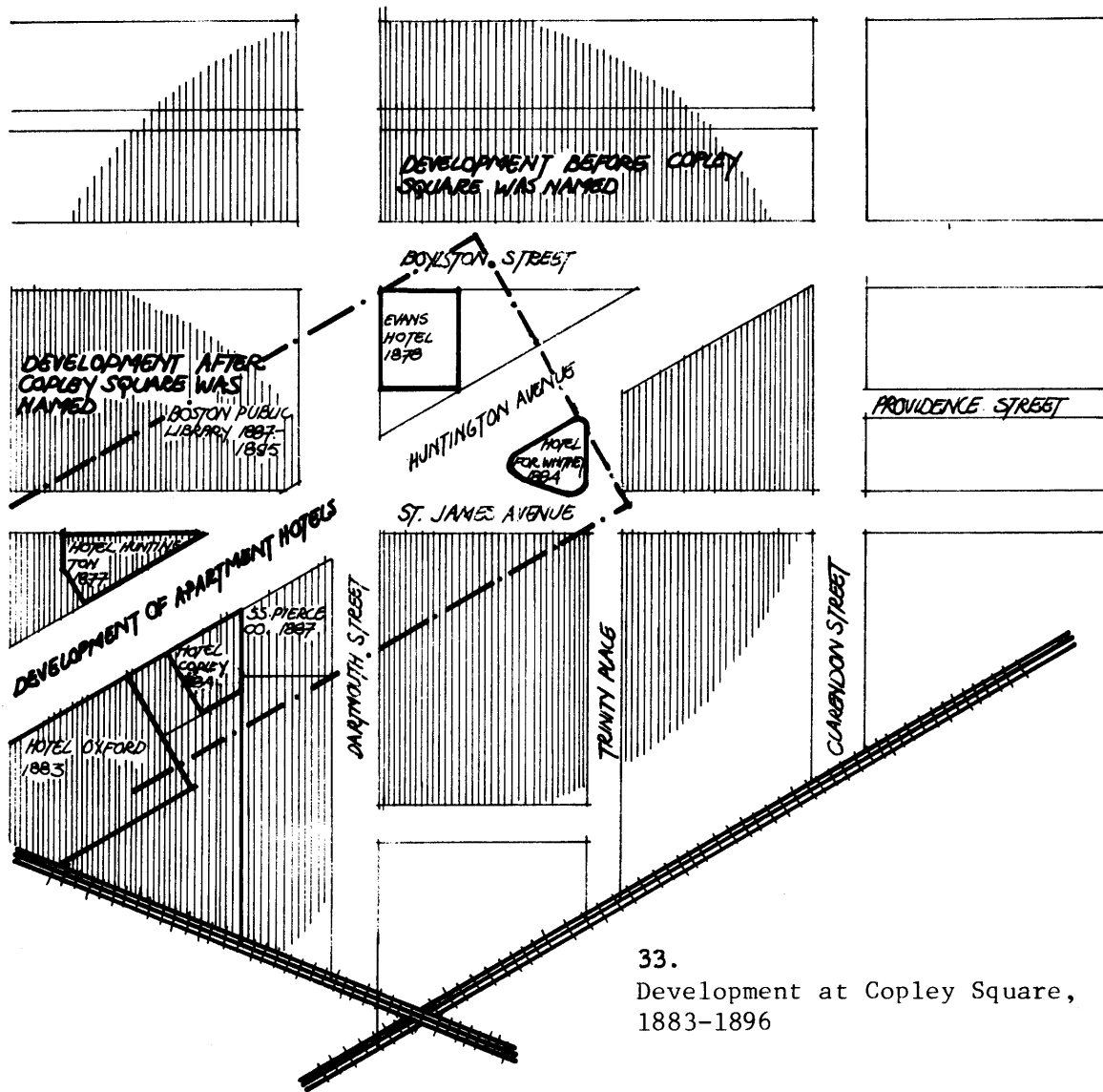
The decision of that Municipal Corporation to take the trapezoid meant that a site for the permanent erection of the Chemical Laboratory had to be sought once again by the Corporation members of MIT. With funds available and the pressing need generally for more building space, the Committee members commended the proposal to erect a structure, including space for the Chemistry Laboratory on the western portion of Institute Square. This ediface was designed by Carl Fehmer and built in 1883. Although contemporary with the naming of the Square, the form of this solution was dictated by the Back Bay grid and in no way acknowledged the significance of that public space diagonally opposite.

THE THIRD STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT, 1883-1896

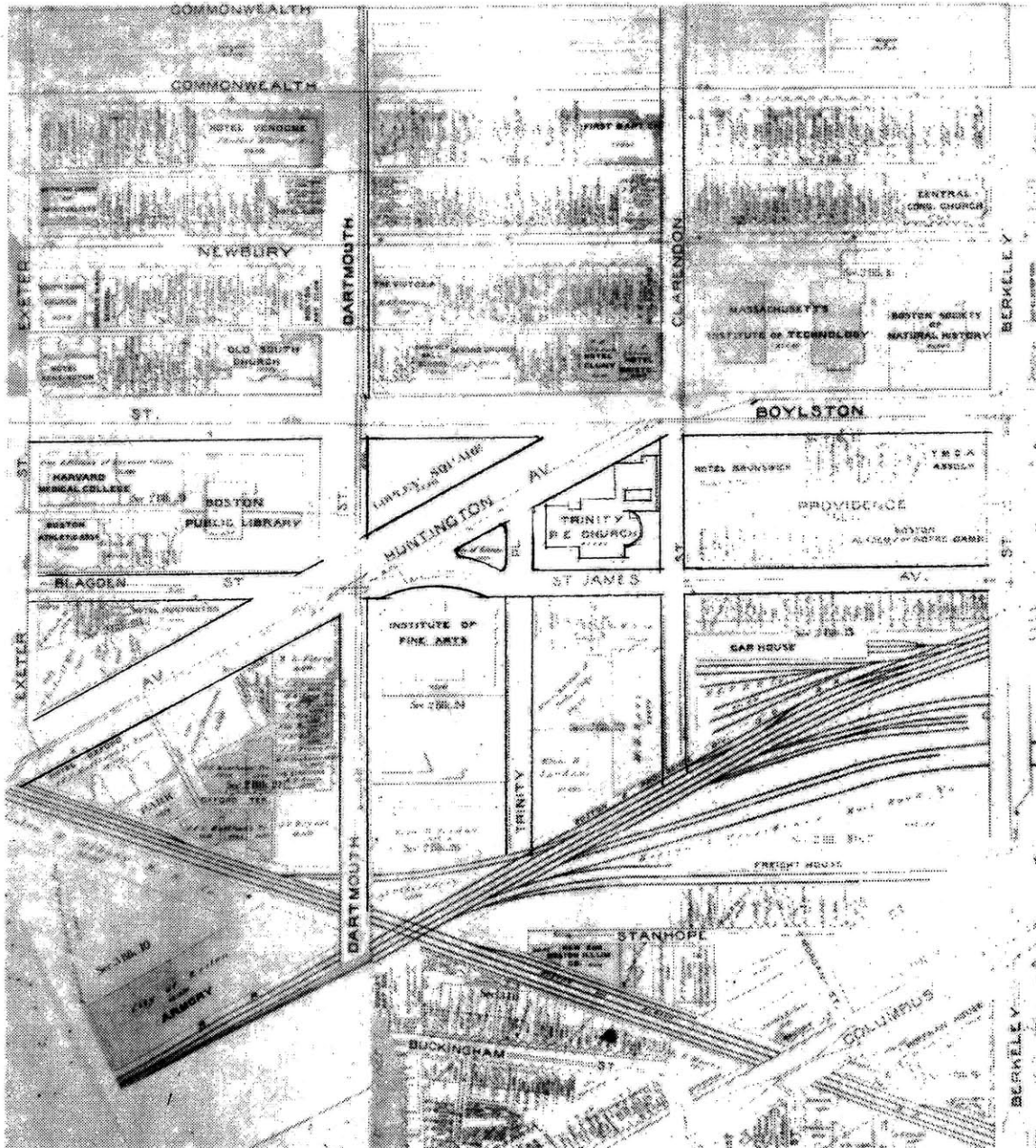
When the Square was named, the construction process still followed the particular piecemeal pattern already established for the Copley site. It proceeded until the Square came to be completed on all its sides and at each of its corners. Building proceeded again in two phases. The first took place during the period of increased activity from 1876-1887. This phase was confined to the erection mainly of apartment hotels that came to be located as one piece of development on a corner of the Square (figure 33).

The number of this residential building type appearing in the area was instrumental in establishing the nature of the avenue which these structures fronted. They were planned along Huntington Avenue between Clarendon and Exeter Streets and upon the triangular wedges of land, the result of the grid intersection. Two apartment hotels were proposed for those triangles west of Huntington Avenue. They were the Hotel Huntington at the corner of Blagden Street and the Hotel for Mr. Evans at the south-east corner of Boylston and Dartmouth Streets. Designed in 1877-1878, they anticipated the future intense development of such hotels in the neighborhood. With the increased interest in the Evans land becoming a portion of an urban space, only the Huntington came to be realized.

The remaining triangular lots fronting the avenue remained vacant for six years until Copley Square was named when a wave of apartment buildings were constructed. Three of these structures were planned in 1883-1884 for the eastern lots fronting that avenue. They were the Hotel Oxford at the corner of Exeter Street, the Hotel Copley opposite the Huntington and the Hotel proposed for Mr. Whitney at the corner of St. James Avenue. Fortunately, when the City decided to make Copley Square approximate a square area, plans to build the Whitney Hotel had to be abandoned.



33.
Development at Copley Square,
1883-1896



34.
 Detail plan of the Back Bay showing Copley Square and its surrounds in
 1890 (Bromley's Atlas of the City of Boston, 1890, Suffolk County,
 County Courthouse, Boston)



35.
Dartmouth Street, looking toward
the north-west corner of Copley
Square, c.a. 1885, showing the
facades of the New Old South
Church and the Boston Art Club
(D.S. Tucci, Built in Boston,
1978, p. 50)

36.
The S.S. Pierce Co. at the south-
west corner of Copley Square
(Tucci, *ibid*, p. 54)



The Hotels Huntington, Copley and Oxford were considered in 1885 to be the finest in Boston and thus attracted only Social Registered citizens.¹ Located along Huntington Avenue, these apartments were prestigious. The intersection of the avenue and the other important streets at the Square reinforced the prominence of that urban space by the focussed position of the hotels at the south-west corner.

Contemporary with their development were a number of other expensive hotels built in the vicinity so that by 1890 apartment houses had come to surround the Square.² To the north-west were the Hotels Vendome, Aubry and Victoria; to the north the Hotels Cluny, Bristol and Brunswick; to the south-east the Ludlow; and to the south-west the Hotels Huntington, Copley and Oxford. The fact that these hotels attracted mostly Social Registered dwellers suggested the income level of clientele to which a commercial enterprise to be established at Copley Square might cater.

Indeed, Wallace Pierce, who in 1884 had recognized the importance of locating a branch of his company at the corner of Scollay Square, in the Court House and City Hall Districts, acknowledged the significance of building the S.S. Pierce Company at Copley Square. At the end of the building boom in 1887, Pierce, who owned the only lot available at the corner of Huntington Avenue and Dartmouth Street had it developed for commercial activity. This building extended its influence on the area beyond trade, for besides the store upon the ground floor, it contained one of the finest halls in the City and a large number of offices.

The S.S. Pierce Company was the first commercial enterprise located at the Copley Square area in the 1890's. Built at the end of the construction wave, it did not come to attract business activity to the area until the economy improved ten years later. This boom period promoted the property owners on Boylston Street to petition for and receive release from the clauses prohibiting commerce on that street.³

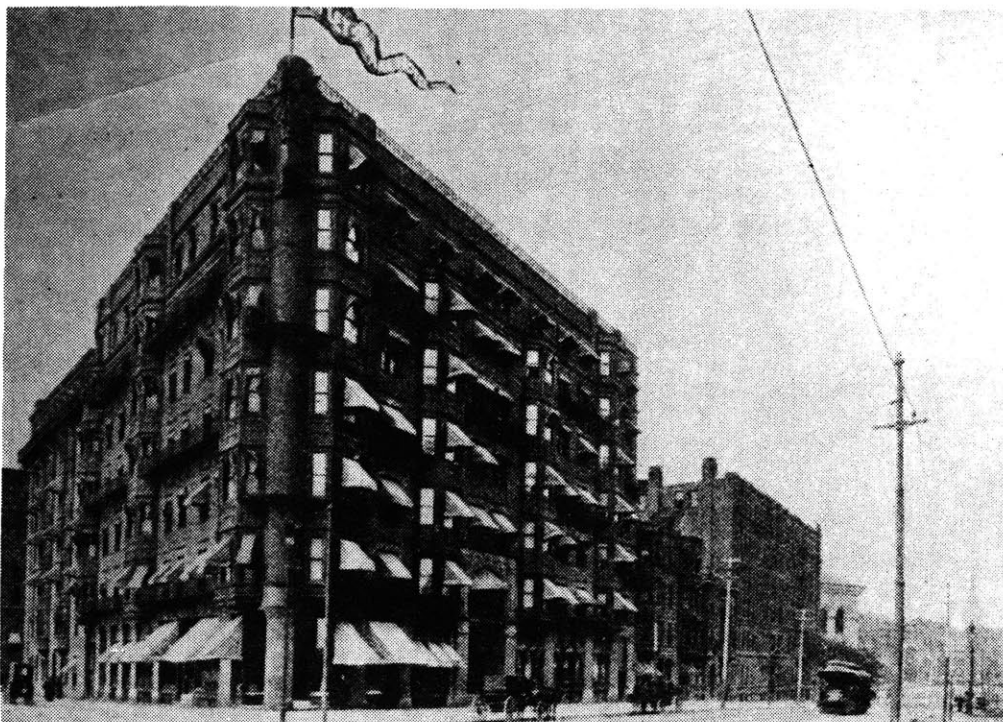
Although commercial invasion at the Square had to wait a decade, construction still continued there during the general recession. Just as institutions were built during the decreased activity period in the first half of the 1870's, so the erection of the Boston Public Library on Dartmouth Street proceeded at a time when no confidence was inspired in building. Its execution meant that the fourth side of the Square would finally come to be defined. As the new facade to the Square, the

Library would have to become part of the surrounding building mass which was the result of the extended period of development. When Mr. McKim, of the firm McKim, Mead and White was engaged in the design, he had the task of integrating his proposal with the almost twenty years of building, celebrating a multiplicity of style.

Directly opposite this site was the French Romanesque mass of H.H. Richardson's Trinity Church, complete with the 211 foot Salamancan Tower; on the south, the red-brick and marble-stripped Ruskin-Italian Museum; at the south-east corner, the picturesque mass of the S.S. Pierce and the Hotel Huntington; on the north-west, the almost continuous face of the Italian Gothic New Old South Church with its 248 foot campanile and of the Queen Anne Boston Art Club; on the north, the wall of the English Gothic Second Church and of the picturesque Chauncy Hall School, set within a block of brownstone houses; and on the north-east corner, the classical MIT building.

In response to the three-sided Revivalist facades fronting the Square, one rendered as the Romanesque mass, the other two styled in the Gothic or the picturesque, McKim created a horizontal building, classical in nature, light in color and simple in outline. Completed twenty-five years after the first building was planned for the area, it enclosed the Square and not only enriched the style of the architectural and urban dialogue at the interface, but also reinforced the importance of that focus of the two grids. By facing Dartmouth Street, it enhanced too the significance of that street which had been relegated a lesser role than that initially conceived for it when the executed design of the Museum of Fine Arts faced St. James Avenue. Likewise, when the Library came to be constructed it displaced the Samuel N. Brown residence, the other building that turned away from Dartmouth Street.

The role that was attributed to Dartmouth at the connection of the north and south grids, can be assessed by an analysis of the value of similar structures located on the streets with which it intersected. Apartment hotels, the strong building force during this period (1876-1890) were located on all of the three intersections, on Boylston and Dartmouth Streets and on Huntington Avenue. The regular hotel rates of these buildings was indicative of the relative worth of those streets within the Back Bay (appendix 4). Of the three, Huntington Avenue, although its apartment hotels were considered of the finest in Boston,



37.
Copley Square Hotel on Huntington Avenue and south of the Square
(King, King's "How to See Boston," 1895, p. 154)

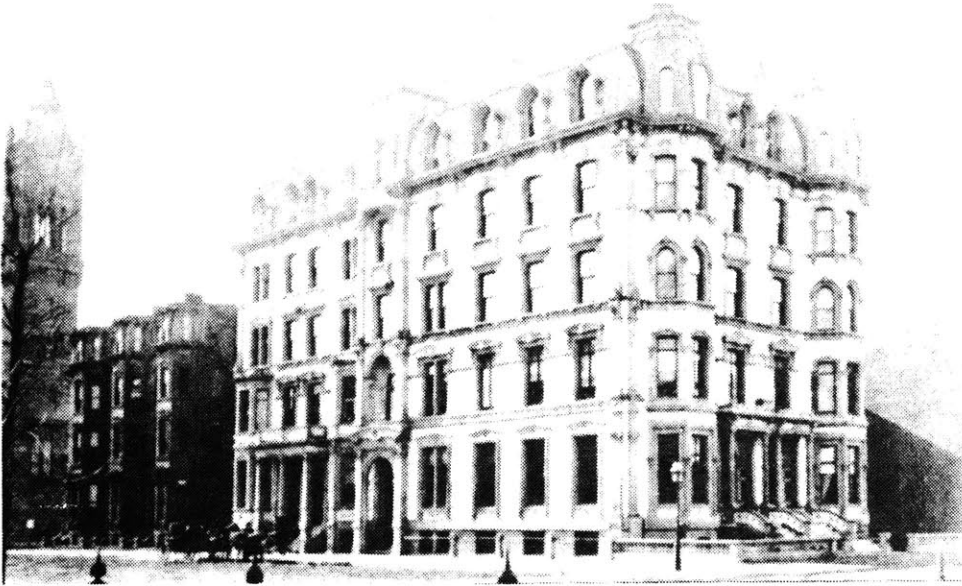
38.
Hotel Brunswick, on the south-east corner of Boylston and
Clarendon Streets, and east of the Square (ibid., p. 141)

39.

Hotel Vendome, 1871, on the corner of Commonwealth Avenue and Dartmouth Street, and north of Copley Square (Forbes, Copley Square, 1941)

40.

Hotel Vendome showing the addition of 1881 (King, King's "How to see Boston," 1895, p. 151)



had the least value. Boylston Street no longer had the same worth as ten years earlier, when its value was on a par with Commonwealth Avenue. Considered as significant as the Broad Avenue, Dartmouth had become the most important place.

After twenty-five years of building at Copley Square, from the conception of the Museum of Fine Arts to the completion of the Boston Public Library, Dartmouth had come to be re-established as the important street in the area. Its intersections with the two other influential streets of the Back Bay shaped the nature of the form of the structures that came to be focused there.

Where they cut each other, these streets provided many corners whose value determined the erection of large-scale buildings thereon, just as the corners of the blocks within the Back Bay came to be massed with such structures. With only four corners at the intersections within the grid, and the relatively short depth of the block between the main street and the alley, these large buildings formed linear concentrations along the north-south areas. Had the alleys not been sealed at the Copley site, three of these typical concentrations, one along each of the three streets, might have been interwoven. In fact, with the passageway sealed, three atypical linear coagulations resulted, and by their intersection created a built zone radially focussed.

Although Copley Square was structured as a Back Bay block, the process of development of its radial concentration was piecemeal. Construction there continued for one and a half decades more than that within the Back Bay block where it occurred only in the boom. Building operations at the Square, however, proceeded during both the periods of depression and prosperity, erection of public structures being confined to decreased activity and of residential to increased activity.

At the intersection of three important streets, these structures could be considered as occupying only corner sites. It follows then that the pattern of development established for the typical block, with only two corners and a central section, would be different. Indeed this was not the case. For both areas, first large-scale buildings were erected, then residences and finally more large buildings. Within the

radial configuration of development these pieces initially dotted and then filled in the surrounds to form an enclosing arm located at the north-east of the square. Additional pieces came to complete the circumference on the south-west approximately a decade later. The resultant sequence of construction being east-west was consistent with the grid extension for the building of a Back Bay block.

East-west development was at the same rate for the typical block as for the Copley area, both creating sixty feet of building in one year.⁴ Covering the same length of land as the north-south coagulations⁵ and developed at half their rate, the buildings enclosing the square heralded a multiplicity of styles and architectural forms whereas those within the typical block were similarly fashioned.⁶

This meant that the number of building styles at the interface was the product of the piecemeal development of the radial concentration which was formed by public buildings. It is not surprising then that the creation of the enclosing arms of the square being in two distinct pieces, and in two distinct stages, proclaimed two stylistic solutions represented by the most significant public structure of each stage. One was Trinity Church, located on the eastern arm and erected during the first stage, before the square was named, and the other was the Boston Public Library, on the western arm and constructed during the second stage, after the square was named. Representing different ideologies and confronting each other at the end of the 19th century, they provoked much public debate as to which was more important, this particularly since in 1885 Trinity Church had been rated the most beautiful building in America and to top it all its quality was being enhanced by the redesign of the facade it presented toward the civic space!

Notes

1.

Bacon's Dictionary.

2.

Hotel Oxford at the corner of Huntington Avenue and Exeter Street
Built 1883

Architects: Snell and Gregerson

Hotel Copley near the corner of Huntington Avenue and Dartmouth Street
Built 1884

Architect: Fred Pope

Hotel Aubry on Dartmouth Street

Built 1886

Architects: W.G. Preston and A.C. Fauld

Hotel Kensington at the corner of Boylston and Exeter Streets

Built 1884

Architect: J.L. Faxon

The Victoria (commercial hotel) at the corner of Dartmouth and Newbury Streets

Built 1886

Architect: J.L. Faxon

Hotel Ludlow at the corner of St. James Avenue and Clarendon Street

Built 1888

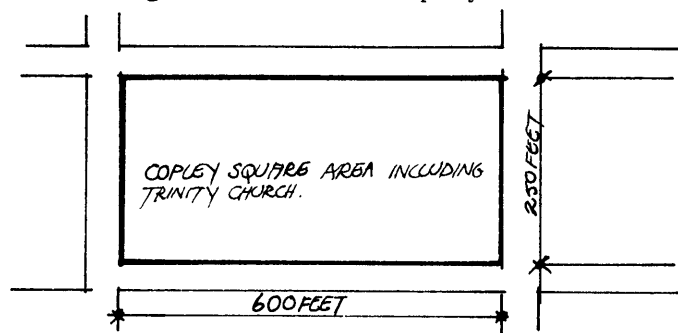
Architect: Walker & Best.

3.

Bunting, *Houses of Boston's Back Bay*, p. 483.

4.

Building rate for the Copley area:



$$\begin{aligned} \text{NET LENGTH OF BUILDING} &= 2(600) + 2(250) \text{ FT.} \\ &= 1200 + 500 \text{ FT.} \\ &= 1700 \text{ FT.} \end{aligned}$$

OVER 25 YRS, 1700 FT BUILT.

IN ONE YEAR, 68 FEET OF BUILDING WERE COVERED

BUILDING RATE FOR ONE BLOCK IN THE EAST-WEST DIRECTION WAS 60 FT, PER YEAR.

5.

North-south building covering 1200 feet was in a period of ten years (from Marlborough to Boylston Streets). Therefore the rate of building was 120 feet/year.

6.

Total length from Beacon to Boylston Streets for north-south coagulation is 1600 feet.

5.
COPLEY SQUARE, A PROMINENT PLACE IN URBAN AMERICA,
1885-1900

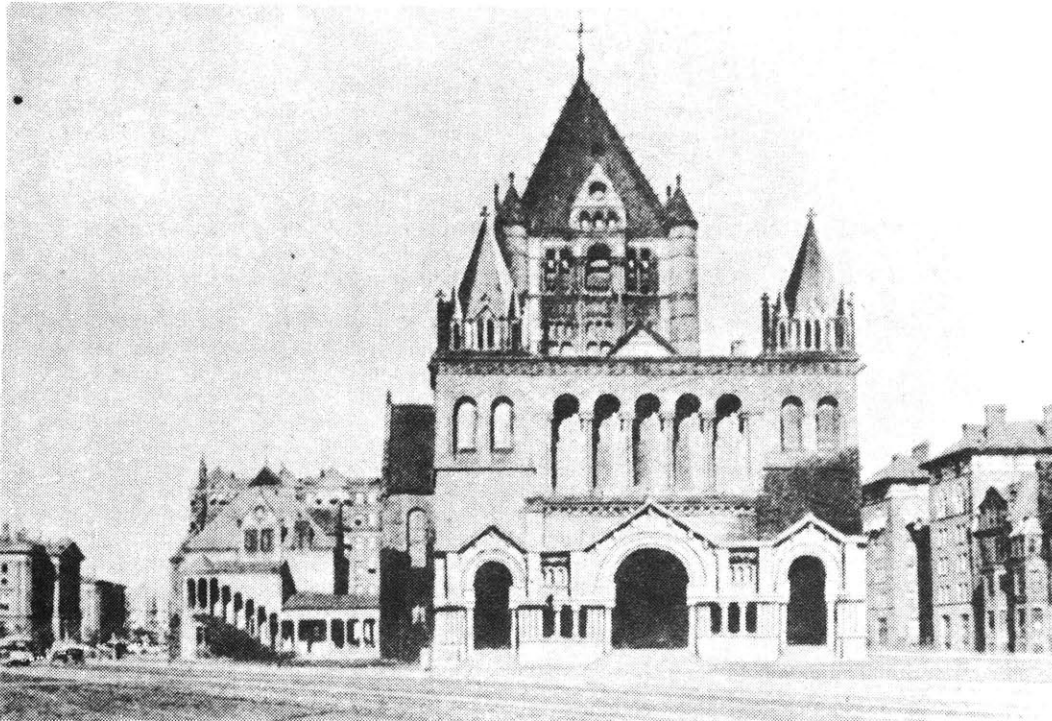
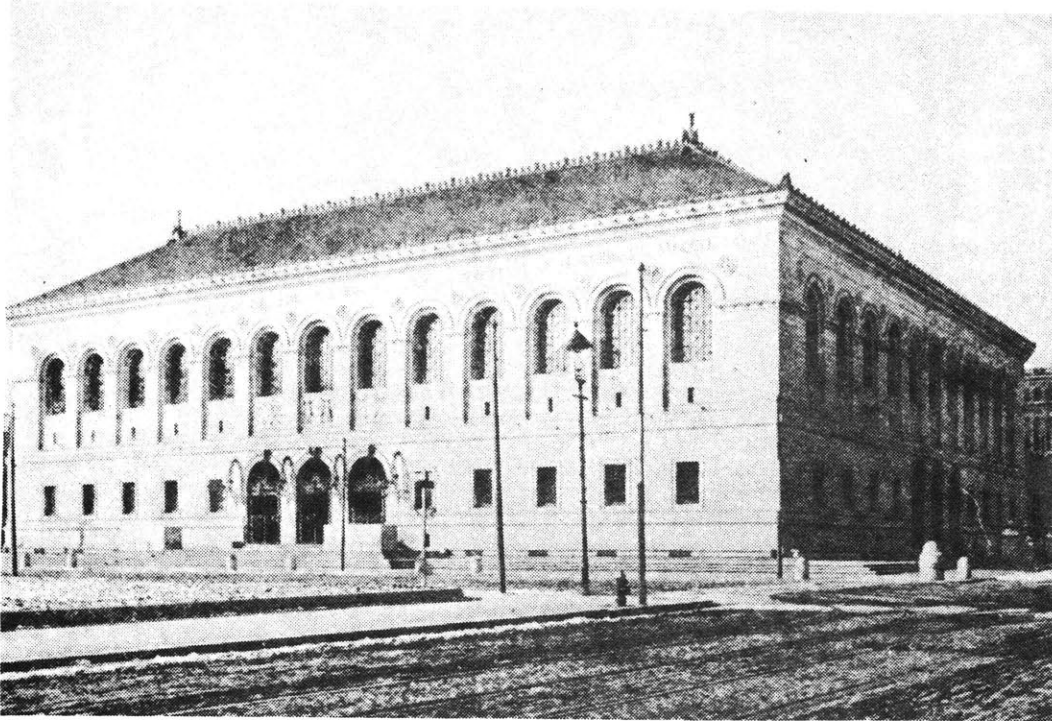
In the decade and a half after its creation the prominence of Copley Square was only partially attributed to the location there of the two buildings which were exciting debate throughout the country. Indeed, discussion of its surrounding buildings was also not limited to the stylistic solutions they represented. On the issue of the strict enforcement of building laws at the Square, a controversy concerning the height of one of its structures came to be recorded in a number of architectural magazines. On the lighter side of things too, Copley Square was the advertized address owners of commercial and private enterprise in the neighborhood used to entice people to visit their buildings. These sometimes were claimed to have their advantage in being situated at the very center of the most aristocratic part of the famous Back Bay, convenient to the railroad stations, electric car service, trading centers and places of amusement.

Attracting many people within its boundaries and providing two important public structures, which represented different styles and ideologies, the Square provided the place for discussion about architectural fashion in 1900. Although completed for more than two decades, the addition of the towers and porch to the western facade of the one ediface, Trinity Church,¹ in 1894-1897 meant that a new front was directed to the Square. Construction on the other, the Boston Public Library, finished in 1896, meant too that this building presented a contemporary solution for its facade toward that urban space. Both structures orienting current and significant elevations to the Square were placed on a similar footing for debate.

The decision as to which of these was more beautiful, was to be swayed when, with the increased consciousness of people after the American victories in the Spanish-American war, it was believed that a building ought to be the symbol of political or social value of



41.
Copley Square at the time of construction of the Boston Public Library,
c.a. 1890 (Courtesy Bostonian Society)



42.

The Boston Public Library, completed in 1896 and forming the west facade to the Square (Courtesy Print Department, Boston Public Library)

43.

View of Trinity Church showing the addition of the western towers and porch in 1898 (ibid.)



44.

Westminster Chambers at the South-east corner of Copley Square, c.a. 1900 (Rotch Library, Visual Collections, MIT)

Imperial America. Celebrating symmetry and regularity as the solution to the facade on Dartmouth Street, the Library envisioned a future role for itself as such a symbol for the nation. In fact it came to be rated more significant than Trinity Church, and was voted the second most beautiful building in America, while Trinity Church had slipped to third place. The measure of these opinions could to some degree be related to the comparative value of the streets fronting the two buildings. Boylston Street and Huntington Avenue both surrounded Trinity Church and were of lesser worth than Dartmouth Street onto which the Boston Public Library faced. This street, along which was located the second most beautiful building in America, proclaimed for itself a position in the Back Bay and in the country.

Considered a national space, the strict enforcement of building codes was demanded and deemed necessary for good design, so that when a structure facing the Square exceeded the height restrictions, this inevitably led to objections. In many volumes of the "American Architect and Building News" both the question of its height and the general question of laws pertaining to height restriction for Copley Square became main issues for discussion.

In 1879 when Westminster Chambers² was constructed at the southeast corner of the Square and between the Museum of Fine Arts and Trinity Church, opposition to its height, which exceeded the restricted limit of 90 feet by 6 feet, came from the Trustees of the Museum. The additional height of the structure casting shadows onto the glass skylights of that building, rendered it difficult to view art works located beneath the lights. The hostility of this institution did not last long for as soon as land was purchased for its new site in December 1899 the Trustees of the Museum withdrew from the case. This matter, however, continued to be debated by both the City of Boston and other individuals who were concerned about the quality of the buildings fronting the Square.

The editors of the American Architect and Building News introduced related issues concerning the height of Westminster Chambers at Copley Square.³ In June 1901 the point was raised as to the law under the original conditions being of questionable equitableness. This was explained in an article in the "Brickbuilder" which appeared two years later and it reads:

"...In some respects the Boston building law is one of the best in the country, but in its application, unfortunately, discriminations have been made regarding the height of buildings in certain portions of the City, so that about Copley Square, for example, the buildings on the site of Westminster Chambers cannot be carried as high by ten feet as buildings directly across the Square."⁴

The other subjects raised concerned the responsibility of the Municipal Corporation, whose employees were involved in creating those laws, for allowing the completion of Westminster Chambers, and also the course of action to be followed by that Corporation.

What was proposed for the building was that either the entire upper storey be moved or the height reduced so that it would have little commercial value. The latter plan was adopted entailing the removal of 4 feet of cornice and 2 feet of roof so that a roof garden came to be provided for the building. The resultant damages were very high and upon the decision of the Supreme Court, fell upon the City of Boston.

By the turn of the century, Copley Square, as an institutional, religious, educational, high density residential and commercial center, attracted many people and it is not surprising that it also became a node of public transportation in Boston. At the Square itself, street cars ran along Huntington Avenue and diagonally bisected its area. There too, an elaborate station of the Boylston Street Subway, opening on Boylston Street, was built in the space directly adjoining the Boston Public Library and the New Old South Church.⁵

Trinity Place, one block to the south of the Square, led directly to the New York Central Trinity Place Station, where all outgoing trains stopped. At Huntington Avenue and Irvington Street, one block south west of the Square, was the Huntington Avenue Station of the same line, where all inward-bound trains stopped. Dartmouth Street was the route to the Back Bay Station of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad, one block south of the Square, the stopping place for all trains in both directions.⁶

With deep concern for the good design of surrounding buildings, and the importance they commanded, compounded by the relatively high value of land at Copley Square, the initial idea for civic improvement, as proposed by the men of the "Conservatory of Art and Science" had

come to be realized. Forming a significant enclosure to the urban space the buildings attracted people there and this resulted in the increased flow of vehicular traffic along Huntington Avenue further adding to the disjointed nature of the two triangular "bits of green". Their condition was even worse than at Park Square where at least an effort had been made to improve the green by the placement of a statue within. So with two triangular pieces of land, covered with mangy lawn, what had happened to the ideals of the mapmakers for enhancing the quality of the area? Was the step of naming that space sufficient to satisfy their original goals for civic improvement?

Notes

1.

Theodore Stebbins, "Richardson and Trinity Church: The Education of a Building," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. XXVII, Number 4, (December 1968), p. 296.

Stebbins is not specific about the dates when the cappings to the original towers were removed. He says it was between 1878-1886. This includes the period when the Boston Public Library had been granted land from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1880-1883; when the City acquired land in front of the Church, 1883-1885; and when in 1883-1885 Richardson worked on a project for "finishing" Trinity Church. In these drawings he had included for the first time a full western porch and had heightened the western towers which were to be connected by a colonnade. It is a matter of conjecture then that the removal of these structures might have been closer to the naming of the Square and thus to 1884 rather than to 1878.

2.

Westminster Chambers was erected on previously built land. Its structures required the demolition of existing buildings and the consolidation of land parcels extending from Trinity Place to the Hotel Ludlow on St. James Avenue. This building, designed by H.A. Creiger and constructed in 1899, abutted the property of MIT. This Institution began to acquire land at Trinity Place from 1888 until all the land south of the alleyway and bounded by Stanhope and Clarendon Streets and Trinity Place came into its possession.

Henry B. Williams, who owned the land on which Westminster Chambers was built, had established himself as an owner of various apartment and commercial hotels in the Copley Square vicinity. In Bromley's *Insurance Atlas* 1895, the Hotels Brunswick and Kensington were in his possession as were two parcels of land at the corner of Clarendon Street and St. James Avenue, south of the Hotel Brunswick. In 1899, Williams owned land on the Westminster site in piecemeal fashion -- the corner site and a lot three parcels west of the corner and east of the Ludlow. This land between his corner site and the Ludlow was consolidated and became the location for Westminster Chambers. Clearly

Williams recognized the prime position of this site for the development of the well established apartment-type house in the area.

89

3.

American Architect and Building News, (June 5, 1901), p. 47.

4.

Brickbuilder, Vol. 12 (May, 1903), p. 106.

5.

Edwin M. Bacon, *Boston: A Guide Book*, (The Athenaeum Press, 1903), p. 85.

6.

ibid.

6.
PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE THE SQUARE AREA, 1892-1912

The acquisition by the City of the wedges of land within the Copley Area in 1883-1885, ensured for it only a future of no building. All the efforts in naming the Square seemed naught to those people concerned for the quality of the landscape, when it remained merely as two grass covered triangles, surrounded by car tracks on busy streets. The space had to wait a decade until its fourth facade was well under way, before interest in the area prompted its design as a civic square.

In 1892 William Rotch Ware urged the Boston Society of Architects to consider the proper treatment of the two pieces of land. For the next two years this was to be the subject for discussion at the Society's meetings, and particularly since the Metropolitan Park Commission wished to create public squares for Boston.¹ Furthermore, with the general state of economy and the resultant ebb in building, time could be devoted to the formulation of visionary schemes for the area. The result was that various solutions of sunken gardens, grass and trees, ornamental planting, statuary and fountains were proposed in 1895 by eminent architects. The fact that none were realized did not mean they were the last of the designs for the area. Indeed, they were only the beginning!

With the completion of the Boston Public Library in the following year, the general interest in the design of civic spaces and the economic recession, it was no coincidence that in 1897 an article appeared in which discussion was devoted to the character and form of Copley Square, in order to outline ideas for its future. The article reads:

"Copley Square, in Boston, is just now greatly attracting the attention of those interested in municipal improvement. Although, like nearly all Boston "squares", it is at present really a compound polygon, it is distinguished by being traversed by three important streets, through

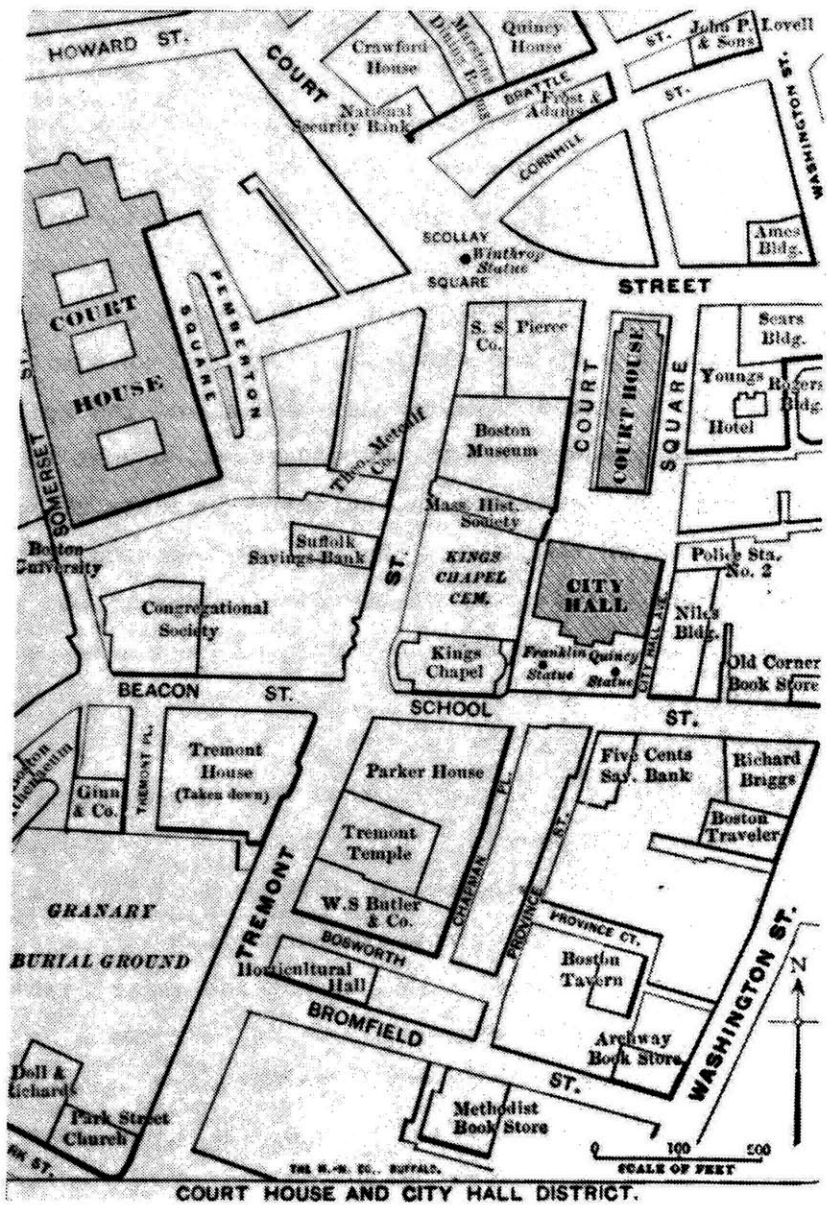
each of which many thousands of people are transported every day by several lines of electric-cars; and it is impossible to doubt that, before many years, it will become a very important business center - probably the most important in the city, next to the area about the intersection of State and Congress Streets."²

What is meant by "Square".

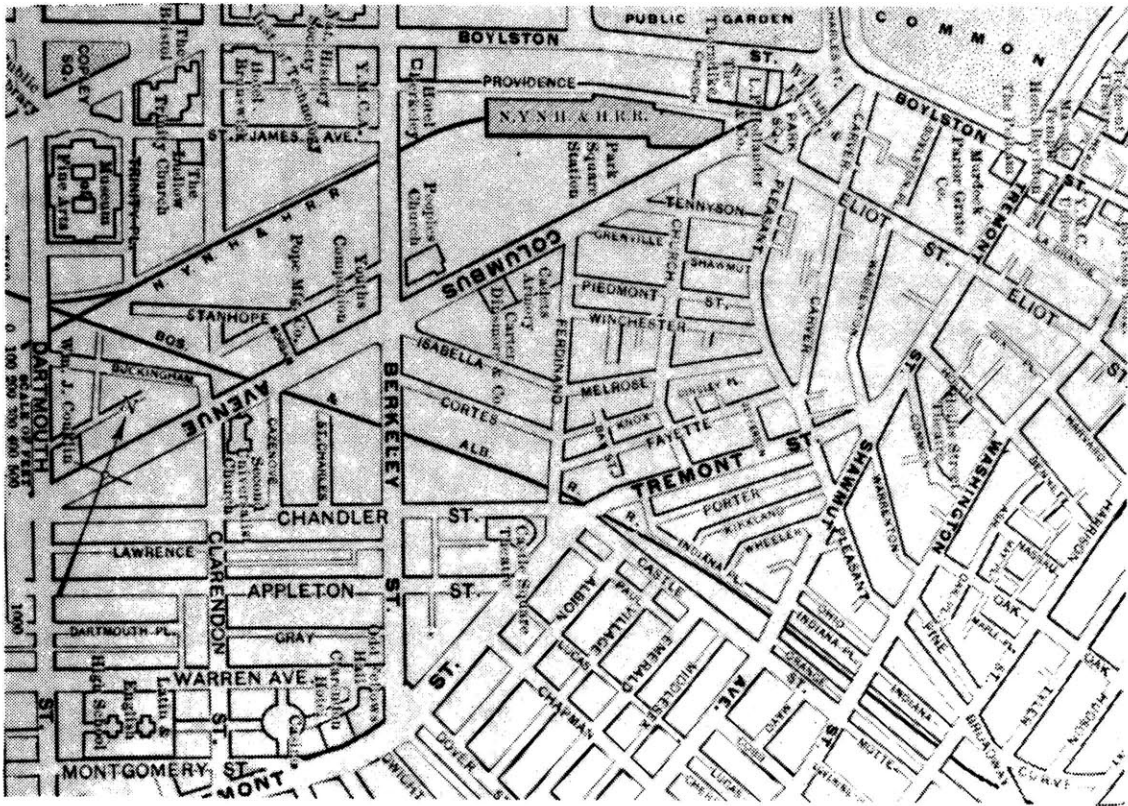
At this time there seemed to be two types of squares in the City.

In the first instance there was the square created by the intersecting streets of downtown Boston. These were irregular squares and frequently had a central wedge-shaped piece of land on which buildings were erected. These 'pieces' might have been covered with grass or decorated with statuary and fountains and surrounding them were religious, commercial and residential buildings. Scollay Square was an example of this "square" (figure 45). It was, in fact, the most irregular of triangles, for two of the sides were in Court Street and the third in Tremont Row. It was the central plaza from which many carriage-routes diverged. "An English visitor said that the view south from Scollay Square was one of the most picturesque street scenes in the world. In the driveways, a vast tangle of cars and wagons; on the sidewalks, animated currents of many phases of human life; and on the sides, the old pitch-roofed brick houses, the long triple-balconied front of the Boston Museum, the green trees of the burial-ground, the dark low tower of King's Chapel, and the lofty white marble pile of the Parker House. The view from the square down Court Street is not less impressive, with the quaint old State House."³

The first owner of Scollay Square was Edward Bendall, whom the Puritans drove away and then part of the land came to David Yale, founder of Yale College. In 1795 most of the square was covered by a wedge-shaped "heap of ramshackle buildings," the chief of which belonged to Wm. Scollay, of a Scottish family from the Orkney Islands. Scollay's building was torn down in 1871, leaving the present great triangular open space, which was bordered by busy retail stores, hotels, restaurants and museums. The S.S. Pierce Company had a branch at a corner of the square in 1884.



45.
 Scollay Square in 1895 (King, King's "How to see Boston, 1895, p. 86)



46.
Park Square (ibid., p. 186)

Another example of the irregular "square" type was Park Square, the square whose focus, the Boston and Providence Railroad Station, was developed contemporary with the first stage of institutional building at the Copley site. When, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Boston and Providence Railroad line was redirected to South Station and its route was changed at the Back Bay Station, the function of Park Square as a node of communication came to be absorbed by Copley Square and Dartmouth Street. The result was that the Boston and Providence depot was no longer needed as the focus at Park Square. Consequently, this triangle only transcended its characteristic nature as a bit of green, located at an intersection of streets, for just over two decades.

The second square type in Boston was the regular, right-angled square in the center of which was a planted piece of ground surrounded by residential buildings. Franklin and Blackstone Squares were examples of this kind. Franklin Square was "at the South End, on the east side of Washington Street, opposite Blackstone Square, a pleasant small park containing 195,205 square feet each with grown trees affording a refreshing shade in summer, a fountain in the center of the grounds, and broad winding paths."⁴ This square, with Blackstone Square, were laid out in 1849. The location of both these squares dates back to the original plan for the Necklands by the Boston Selectmen in 1801. As Chairman of the Selectmen, Charles Bulfinch was thought to have been the major contributor to the plan which included straight, right-angled streets and large blocks with an oval planted park as the focal point of the new district. This plan represented an early attempt to break from the organic and curvilinear street pattern characteristic of old Boston.

Certain characteristics of the second square type bore some relation to the New England Commons which were established to provide plots for the town ministers. This land was transformed into the town commons around which varying religious and civic buildings were structured giving each open space a unique character. These plots could either be regular or irregular and many of the New England greens and squares were open-ended as at Cohasset and Ipswich. These squares were seldom geometrically square, although they frequently achieved a sense of rectangular space by the location of buildings and trees there.

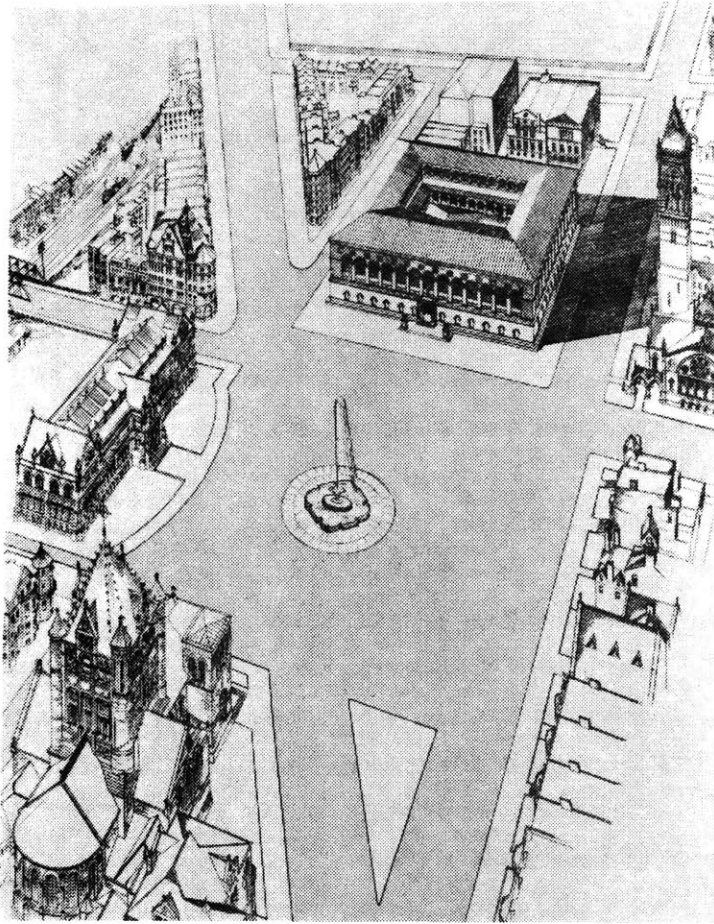
The great squares at New Haven and Cleveland were centrally located and historically always important both as town centers and as sites for important structures.

Copley Square, as the location of significant structures, began to suggest itself in the nature of the traditions of the New England Commons; of a "regular square" bounded by Dartmouth and Boylston Streets, St. James Avenue and Trinity Place; and of an intersection square created by three important intersecting streets, Huntington Avenue, Dartmouth and Boylston Streets, and by two superimposed grids.

The article in *American Architect and Building News* of 1897 continues:

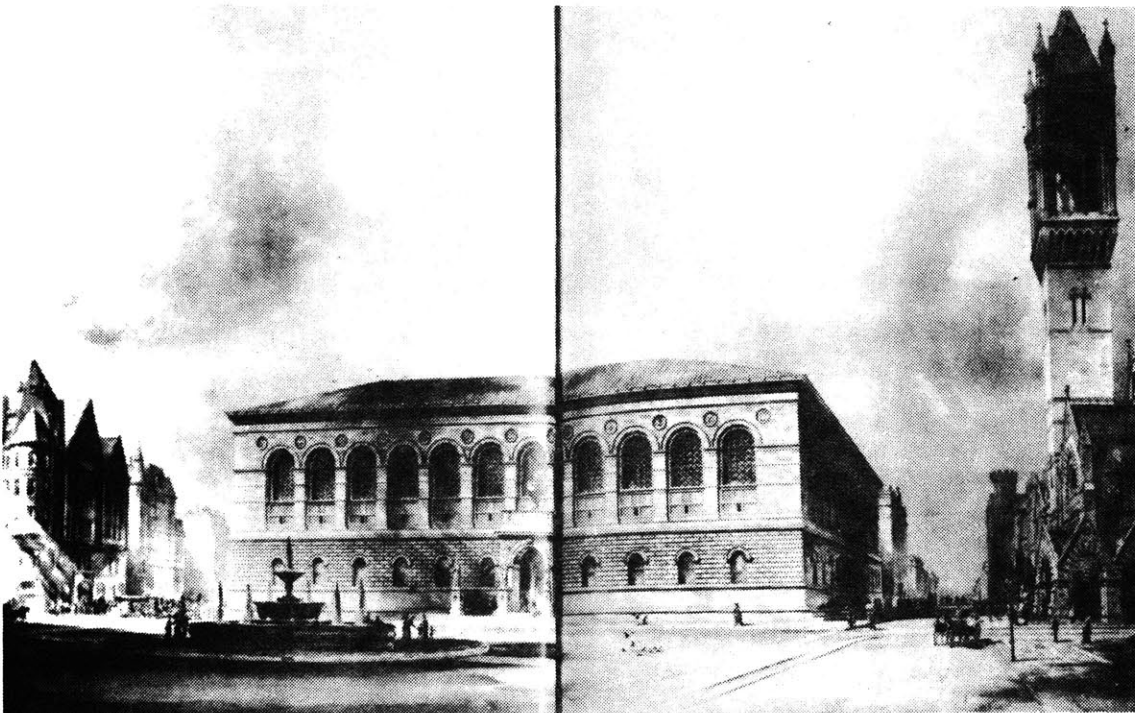
"...The present condition of the square, as an object of artistic interest, is simply lamentable. Two bare grass-plots, left, as it were, by an oversight, between the intersecting streets, constitute the ornamental portion of the area, and the appearance of the five buildings which surround it, including the Museum of Fine Arts, the Boston Public Library, Trinity Church, and the New Old South Church, is sadly marred by the lines of Huntington Avenue, which cuts diagonally across the foreground to all of them."⁵

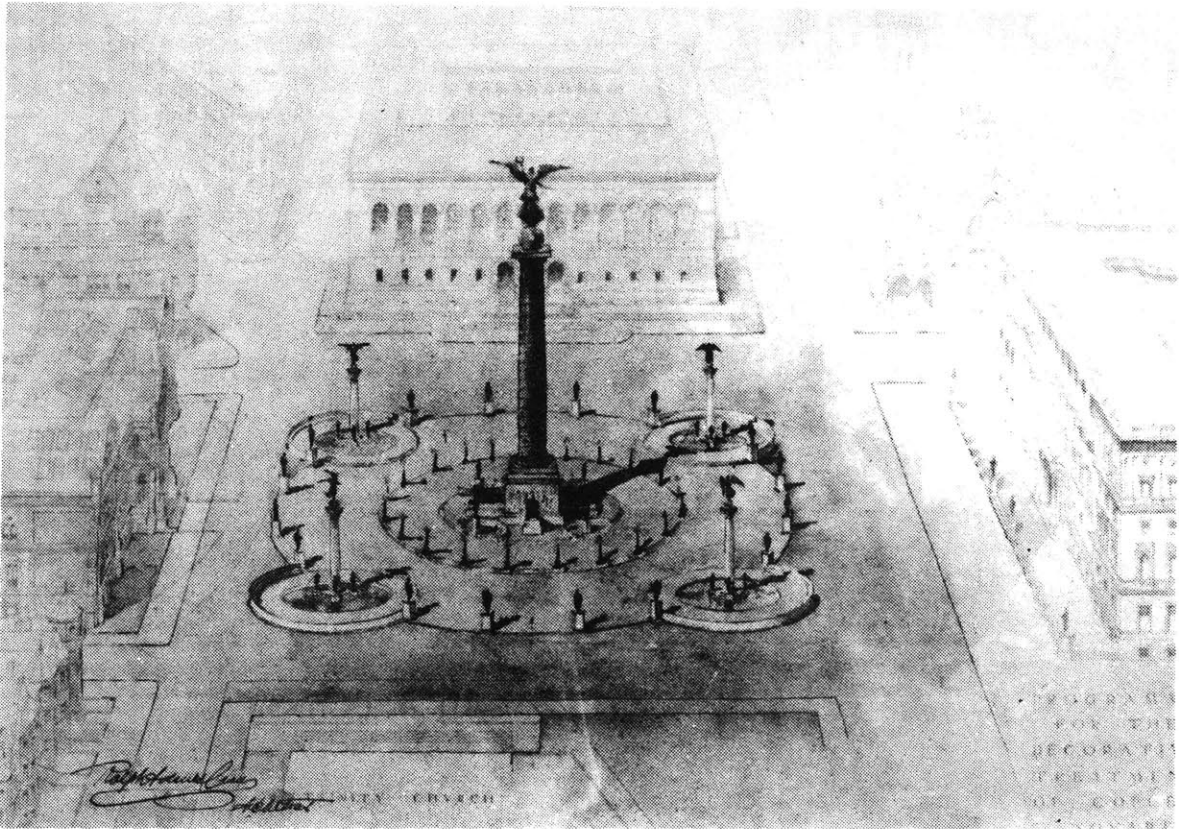
Recognition of the negative conditions and of the unexploited potential of the square prompted the discussion of two plans suggested for remedying the area. Either of these plans could be carried out independently of the other, since they were in no sense antagonistic of one another, the later scheme merely supplementing and adding new force to the elements of the original one. The earlier of these proposed the restoration of the "square" to a rectangular form by suppressing that part of Huntington Avenue which crossed the Square diagonally, and directing the Huntington Avenue traffic into the streets - widened for the purpose - on which the important buildings in the square then fronted. This plan would give a symmetrical space between the Public Library and Trinity Church, which could be treated in various ways, but which the Boston Society of Architects hoped might in the future be laid out as a sunken garden, after the Italian style. The later plan proposed to add value to Copley Square by introducing another broad avenue having its entrance into Copley Square at the south-east corner in such a way as to balance precisely Hunting-



47.
Charles McKim's Scheme
for Copley Square c.a.
1890 (Courtesy Print Dept.
Boston Public Library)

48.
McKim's vision for the
Square c.a. 1890
(Whitehill, "Back Bay,
Charles and Public
Buildings," Proceedings
of the Bostonian Society,
1958)



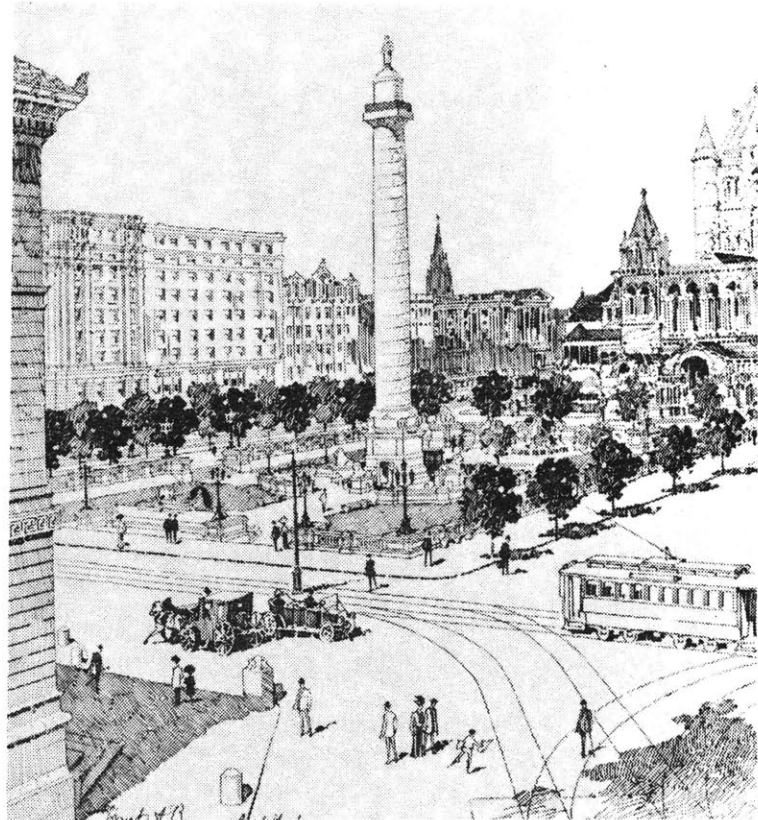


49.

Ralph Adams Cram described his design for Copley Square c.a. 1895, "as a central circle and a sort of Trojan's column in the center."

(Cram, My Life in Architecture, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1936).

Photo: Courtesy Print Department, Boston Public Library.



50.
Frank Bourne's proposal for Copley Square, 1912
(Courtesy Print Department, Boston Public
Library)

ton Avenue on the other side, thus restoring symmetry to the square by doubling the feature which then rendered it unsymmetrical. A street in that direction would furnish a short and very desirable connection between the upper part of Washington Street and the street-railway systems diverging from Copley Square, and would make it possible to connect the latter, through Pleasant Street and Broadway, directly with the South Boston systems.⁶

These designs expressed great interest both in the purpose and the form of the Square. As a piece of civic landscape their space was not intersected by vehicular traffic and as classical solutions their nature was determined by the principles of geometry and symmetry. The idea proposed by the Boston Society of Architects, that the Italian Style be emulated, only partially contributed to the stylistic solutions envisioned by Mr. McKim in the early 1890's, by Cram in the latter half of the decade and by Bourne in 1912. Indeed, it was the classical rendering of the fourth facade to the Square, and also the increasing favor of this style in America that shaped the fantasy for Copley Square for the next twelve years.

Notes

1.

The Park Act, partly initiated by Charles William Eliot and forming a permanent Metropolitan Park Commission, was passed on June 3, 1893. Eliot in his work for the Commission expressed interest in creating for Boston a system of parks composed of five area types, one of which was the public square.

2.

American Architect and Building News, Vol. LVII (September 18, 1897), p. 93.

3.

Moses King, ed., *King's "How to See Boston," A Practical Guide and an Artistic Souvenir*, (Boston: Moses King, 1895), p. 85.

4.

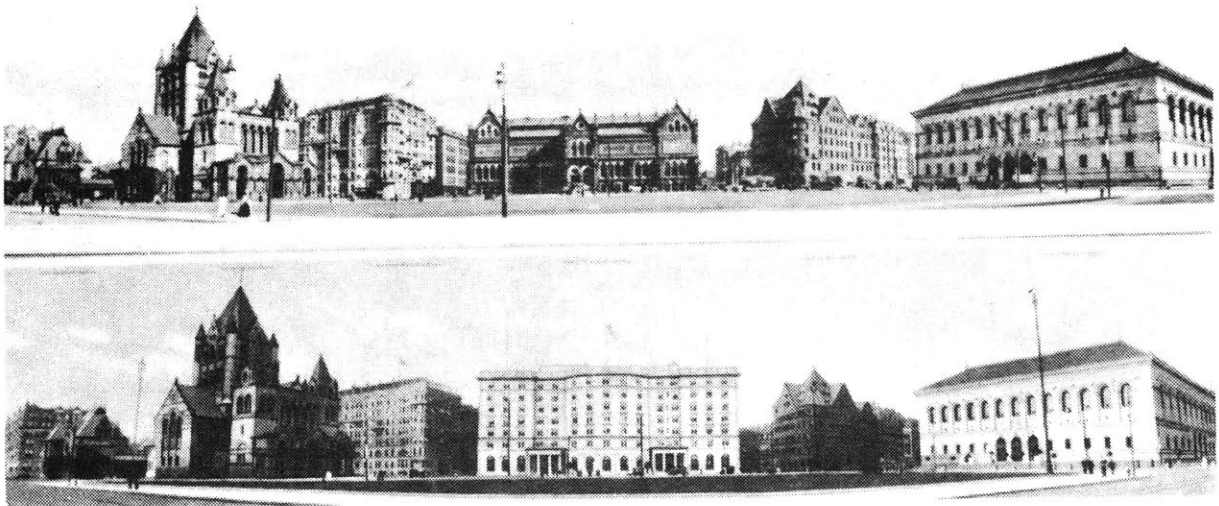
Bacon's Dictionary.

5.

American Architect and Building News, (September 18, 1897), p. 94.

6.

ibid.



51.
View of Copley Square, showing the Museum of Fine Arts in the upper section of the photo and the Copley Plaza Hotel built on its site in 1912 in the lower section of the photo (Courtesy Print Department, Boston Public Library)

7.
COPLEY SQUARE IN 1912

The two civic improvements that were conceived in the 1860's to enhance the quality and increase the market value of the most unfavorable site within the Back Bay, the Copley Square area, undoubtedly influenced the shape it had taken by 1912. The initial goal of the "Committee of Associated Institutions" was to establish a Conservatory of Art and Science to increase the relative worth of the site, and in so doing to promote educational and civic improvement for the benefit of the Commonwealth. Although it was an ideology, and not a physical plan, the involvement of the members, both professional and business men, in the acquisition of grants of land and in the buying and selling of land, had made them more directly responsible for the form of the area than the second group, the City employees. The engineers and surveyors of that Municipal Corporation were unable to take part in the erection of public structures and were merely attributed the task of laying out the plan of the area as an urban square at the intersection of the northern and southern grids.

Not all the buildings proposed to constitute the four departments of the Conservatory of Art and Science were built at the Copley Square area. Two of its structures, Horticultural Hall and the Mechanics Building, were erected along Huntington Avenue, almost a mile away from the Square. Failure of one of the goals of the Conservatory to establish all the buildings of the State Institution in one location was offset by its success as a financial scheme to raise the market value of the land at the Copley site. The erection in the 1860's and 1870's of three departments of the Conservatory, MIT, the Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Fine Arts, in close proximity to each other, enriched the worth of the Square and attracted affiliated associations. As predicted in the Financial Estimate of 1861, the resultant value of land situated south of Commonwealth Avenue and west of the Public Garden, came to

approximate the value of that Avenue and the Park. This increase in the value of land acted as the profit motive to build high density apartment hotels, catering to people of upper income, those of moderate means inhabiting the South End grid. By attracting only Social Registered citizens to live at the Square, the democratic plan of the Conservatory with its philanthropic ideals, intended for the benefit of all, became in its application a money-making mechanism.

Another factor contributing to the success of the "Associated Institutions" in shaping Copley Square, was that the ideology of the Conservatory was proposed by many men and was not the aggrandized vision of one man at one moment. Instead, as realized, it became the rich accretion of buildings developed over an extended period of time. Furthermore, it was these buildings which were the identifying features of Copley Square, not the civic space itself.

Appendix 1

"Financial Estimate of 1861", pp. 10-14

By this time many filled lots had been purchased between Arlington and Clarendon Streets and their sale value formed the basis for the schedule below of prices forecasted in the Estimates of 1861.

The actual average prices for which land was sold per square foot:

For lots fronting Commonwealth Avenue, the Public Garden and the Charles River (p. 10)	\$2.87
For land north of the Broad Avenue -		
on Marlborough Street (p. 12)	\$1.43
on Beacon Street (p. 10)	<u>\$2.87</u>
		\$4.30
	Average price	\$2.15 \$2.15
For land south of the Broad Avenue (p. 13)	\$1.13½
The budgeted prices for which land at the Copley site would sell per square foot:		
on Boylston Street, the State land (p.11)	\$1.16 2/3	
on St. James Street, the Boston Water Power Company lands (p. 11)	<u>\$0.75</u>	
		\$1.91 2/3
	Average price	\$0.95 5/6 . . . \$0.96*

Therefore the ratio of the value of the Copley site to the Avenue site is 33 1/3/100
and to the south of the avenue is. 85/100
The ratio of the Boston Water Power Co. lands to the state lands is 64/100

* This figure does not appear in the Estimate of 1861. It has been calculated for comparative purposes.

Summary of the three cases presented in the Estimate

Case 1. A minimum average price per square foot for lots was assumed.
 The cost of lots fronting Commonwealth Avenue,
 Public Garden or Charles River was \$2.33
 The cost of lots fronting ordinary streets was . . . \$1.30

Assuming the plan for the Reservation was not
 proceeded with and all land set aside for this
 purpose including the adjacent side lots were
 sold at \$1.30 per foot.

Calculated value realized: 505,256 ft at \$1.30 . \$656,832.80

Assuming the plan for the Reservation was
 proceeded with and land retained for this
 purpose, and the adjacent side-lots sold
 for the same minimum average price as the
 lots fronting Commonwealth Avenue.

Calculated Value realized: 259,752 ft at \$2.33 . \$605,222.16

Assuming the lots at the West End of the
 Reservation were sold at \$2.30 per ft

Calculated Value realized: 22,439 ft at \$2.30 .. \$51,610.64

Total Realized: \$656,832.80

i.e. showing no gain or loss to the State.

Case 2. An average price per square foot for lots
 was assumed.
 The cost of lots fronting Commonwealth Avenue,
 Public Garden or Charles River was \$2.87
 The cost of lots fronting ordinary streets was . . . \$1.33 2/9

Assuming the proposed Reservation built on
 land on ordinary streets.

Calculated Value of property: 245,504 ft at \$1.33 2/9
 \$327,065.88

Calculated Value of the lots fronting but
 not including the end lots: 259,752 ft at \$1.33 2/9
\$346,647.38

Total value of the two squares . . . \$673,113.26

Assuming the lots fronting the Reservation
 were sold at the average price of lots on
 Commonwealth Avenue, Public Garden (as
 obtained from actual sales in 1860)

Value realized . . . 259,752 ft at \$2.87 ... \$745,488.24

i.e. Net gain of \$72,374.98 (without including the
 end lots on the west)

Case 3. Assuming the maximum average for the sale of land adjacent to the proposed territory to be \$3.01 3/4, the profit derived would be nearly \$80,000. This profit shown in cases 2 and 3 does not include the value of the sale of lots to the west of the Reservation, whose sale would still increase this excess.

Appendix 3

The average price obtained from the actual sale of lands was recorded by Bainbridge Bunting, *Houses of Boston's Back Bay*, p. 368.

The land per square foot was sold in 1860 for \$1.70
 in 1865 for \$2.39
 in 1870 for \$2.80
 in 1879 for \$3.14
 in 1886 for \$4.35

Therefore the average increase in price from 1860-1870 was 60%.
 In 1860 land fronting the following streets sold per square foot for: In 1870, allowing for 60% increase in price, by deduction these lots would sell per square foot for:

Boylston Street . . . \$1.375	\$2.20
Commonwealth Avenue \$2.87	\$4.59
St. James Street . . \$0.75	\$1.20

In 1872 the triangle of Trinity Church measured 14,700 square feet and sold for \$72,030.50. The price per square foot was \$4.90

This price of \$4.90 closely approximated the value of lots fronting Commonwealth Avenue . . \$4.59

Yet allowing for 60% increase, based on 1860 prices, this land fronting Boylston Street, should have sold for \$2.20

In 1872 the rectangle of Trinity Church measured 24,800 square feet and sold for \$105,000. The price per square foot was \$4.23

This price of \$4.23 closely approximated the value of lots fronting Commonwealth Avenue . . \$4.59

Yet allowing for 60% increase, this land which fronted St. James Street would have sold for . . . \$1.20

The following rates of apartment hotels are from two guidebooks written in the first decade of 1900:

Edwin M. Bacon, *Boston, A Guide Book* (The Athenaeum Press, 1903), p. viii, and Dr. Walter L. Burrage, ed., *A Guide Book of Boston for Physicians*, prepared for the fifty-seventh annual session of the American Medical Association (Boston: Marymount Press, 1906), pp. 161-162.

	European Plan Rates	American Plan Rates
Along Huntington Avenue		
The Copley Square Hotel	\$1.00 and upward	
Hotel Nottingham or the former Hotel Huntington (ownership had not changed hands, and the building was not altered in any way)	\$1.00 and upward	
Hotel Oxford	\$1.00 and upward	\$2.50 and upward

The European plan rate was 60 percent less than the American plan rate on this avenue.

	European Plan Rates	American Plan Rates
Along Boylston Street		
Hotel Brunswick	\$1.50 and upward	\$4.00 and upward
Hotel Lenox	\$1.50 and upward	

The European plan rate was 62½ percent less than the American plan rate on this street.

	European Plan Rates	American Plan Rates
Along Dartmouth Street		
The Victoria	\$2.00 and upward	
Assuming the increase of 60 percent for the American plan rate for this hotel would be		\$5.00 and upward
Along Commonwealth Avenue, rates on the American plan were		\$5.00 and upward