THE PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EAST BOSTON

by

MARIAN SCOTT MOFFETT
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Marian Scott Moffett

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ABSTRACT

East Boston, Massachusetts, was created by fill operations that joined five harbor islands across the main ship channel from Boston into a single mass of dry land. Development on the islands dates from 1833 when the East Boston Company, chartered by the State, graded the largest island, laid out streets, and began selling lots for vacation homes and industry. The next thirty years saw substantial increases in population and business activity as East Boston became a national center of shipbuilding; many of the famous clipper ships of the gold rush days were constructed on East Boston's wharves. With the passing of the clipper ships, however, the island's position as a leader in shipbuilding and a first-rate residential neighborhood also declined. Immigrants - Irish, Jewish, then Italian - displaced the original Yankee inhabitants; their large houses became multi-family dwellings while cheap three-decker wooden flats were erected to house the impoverished population. Industries utilizing unskilled or semi-skilled labor also appeared, replacing the woodworking crafts required for clipper construction.

Around the turn of the century, in response to growing concern over the Port of Boston's decline as a shipping center, plans for the revitalization and expansion of the existing facilities were proposed. East Boston then had the largest section of unused waterfront in the harbor, an area of flats and shoals on the southeast extending out into the sea, and it was onto these sunken lands that railroad and industrial piers were projected. The state actually acquired the flats in several purchases, beginning in 1899, yet it never appropriated money for the huge port projects. Thus these partially filled lands were still empty in 1922 when money was allocated for the construction of an airfield there, an airfield that has since grown to become the eighth busiest in the world, occupying an area nearly twice that of East Boston's original islands.
East Boston's physical development has in many respects paralleled that of other inner city neighborhoods in America, and the general decline of living conditions there is similar to other sections of Boston. The difference between East Boston and other areas, however, lies in several factors which had a lasting effect on development: physical isolation from the main land, large land ownership by outside groups, and long-term community neglect. City planning also had great impact on physical development - the initial layout of streets in 1833 was done in accordance with nineteenth century land speculator's ideal, the gridiron plan. Later plans shifted emphasis by creating havens for industry, shipping, commercial recreation, or urban redevelopers, but only in very recent times has planning been done in cooperation with and for the benefit of East Bostonians. The expansionist policies of Logan Airport have shaken East Boston out of its community apathy; opposition to the airport has fostered concern for other environmental questions as well, and awakened citizens of East Boston are now actively working for the resolution of serious problems there.

Thesis Supervisor: Julian Beinart
Title: Visiting Professor of Architecture
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INTRODUCTION

My first involvement with East Boston came during the spring of 1972 when I participated in an environmental design workshop studying re-use possibilities of the tract of waterfront land there now owned by the Massachusetts Port Authority. In the course of that semester, the class became aware of the major groups concerned with land use in East Boston: Massport, a state-created independent authority; the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the planning and redevelopment agency of Boston's city government; the East Boston Community Development Corporation, a federally-funded, community-based group, and the East Boston Recreation Master Planning Land Use Advisory Council, composed of volunteer representatives from all parts of East Boston. We also began to recognize the conflicting forces that are working there today in the continuing evolution of land use: the desire for new commercial development to provide employment opportunities and the need for additional recreation and open space lands; the expansion of airport and seaport facilities and the rejuvenation of older residential neighborhoods. These complex issues are complicated further when the emotional and symbolic nature of individual problems is considered.
While working on the waterfront project, evidence of vanished activities came to our attention. Crumbling concrete and corroded handrails marked what is locally known as "The Golden Stairs," a stepped walkway down from the top of Jeffries Point to the piers below that was once a route to work for men on their way to the shipyards and docks. Two boarded-up sets of granite arches and vacant lots in a line across Jeffries Point marked the ends and underground location of an old tunnel through the hill which had once been used by a narrow-gauge railroad connecting north shore communities via a ferry across the harbor to Boston. Intrigued by these remains, I began to ask how other sections of the community had changed physically over time; following through on this line of questioning has led eventually to this thesis on the physical development of East Boston.

Surprisingly, there has been no comprehensive historical study of East Boston in the last hundred years. The numerous histories of Boston largely ignore East Boston, referring only to shipbuilding activity there. Pieces of East Boston's story, covering limited periods of time and focusing on such diverse things as the Protestant churches or the municipal court, have been written, but not since 1858 has a history of East Boston been compiled. That year, General William H. Sumner published the first edition (revised 1869) of his hefty compendium about the island, covering in exhaustive detail the genealogies of his ancestry (who owned East Boston prior to 1830)
as well as chapters of Massachusetts military history. Rambling as the volume is, it is still an important document for the early development of the place.

It should be emphasized that this present study is by no means definitive for all aspects of East Boston's history. Limitations of time and energy have necessitated selectivity; I have tried to focus on the land use and physical environment as it has changed over time, partly because my previous experience has involved dealing with physical environments and partly because this concerned information documented in reports, books and maps to which I could easily gain access. Important accounts of political or social history, more detailed examinations of the individual neighborhoods and their buildings, and chronicles of life in East Boston from the records of residents there are still to be written, works which might be best accomplished by some present East Bostonians.

My chief resources came from the libraries of the City of Boston and MIT; official reports of the East Boston Company and city government being most fertile sources. Knowledgeable East Bostonians have also been most helpful in providing information, particularly that dealing with recent events. All maps in this study have been redrawn to the same scale from the originals; photographs and reproductions of old maps, which would have enriched the text
considerably, have reluctantly been omitted here because of copyright restrictions and printing costs. Future studies might well attempt to include these and also might investigate the resources of private collections of New England antiquities, city and state archives, and personal papers of East Boston residents and business concerns.

One other experience in East Boston that gave impetus to this study was a remark made last year at a community meeting that East Boston has "nothing to be proud of." In a region like the Boston metropolitan area, loaded with markers and memorials to its historic past, it is singular that East Boston has no declared historic landmarks and no stops along the Freedom Trail. I believe, however, that East Boston does indeed have a past to take pride in, and I hope this work will be a small acknowledgement of a recognition long overdue.
CHAPTER I. THE ORIGINAL HARBOR ISLANDS

The origins of the present East Boston were five islands lying in Boston harbor, across the main ship channel from Boston proper. Beginning in 1833 and extending until the present, hills were cut to fill the marshes, flats were dredged with hydraulic machinery, and additional material was brought in for fill as the separate land masses of Noddle's Island, Breed's Island, Governor's Island, Apple Island and Bird Island were connected with one another and extended out into what was once open sea.

Noddle's Island was the largest of the original five. It, along with the other four, was part of the grant made by King James I on 3 November 1620 to the Council of Plymouth, whereby the Council received all the lands "lying between forty and forth-eight degrees north latitude, and in length by all this breadth throughout the main land, from sea to sea."¹ The council of Plymouth, in turn, granted on 13 December 1622, to Captain Robert Gorges, the youngest son of Sir Ferdinando Gorges, and his heirs, "all that part of the main land in New England, commonly called and known by the name of Massachusetts, or by whatever name or names whatsoever called, with
all coasts and shores along the sea, for ten English miles, in a
straight line, towards the north-east, and thirty-one English miles,
after the same rate, into the main land, through all the breadth
aforesaid; together with all the islands so lying within three
miles of any part of the said land."\(^2\) Among Gorges' associates
were William Blackstone, the first settler on what is now Boston,
and Samuel Maverick, who was to be the first inhabitant of record
on Noddle's Island. Captain Gorges died in 1628 and his land passed
to his elder brother John, who in January 1629 gave to Sir William
Brereton, of Handforth, county Chester,

all the land in breadth lying from the east
side of Charles River to the easterly part
of the cape called Nahant, and all the lands
lying in length twenty miles north-east into
the main land, from the mouth of the said
Charles river, lying also in length twenty
miles east into the main land from the said
cape Nahant. Also two islands lying next
unto the shore between Nahant and Charles
River, the bigger called "Brereton" (Noddle's
Island), and the lesser "Susanna" (Breed's
Island).\(^3\)

Brereton himself, however, never visited the lands in the new world
thus given to him, even though he is said to have sent over several
families and servants to live on them. Neither his claim to the
land nor his names for the islands were recognized by the government
established by the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The reason for the name, Noodle's Island, remains obscure. The place
has never been known by any other name to settlers in the colony, yet
there is no record of anyone named Noddle having lived there or having owned the island. An early inhabitant of the colony, however, was one William Noddle, a freeman, whose death was recorded in Governor Winthrop's Journal of June, 1632: "One Noddle, an honest man of Salem, carrying wood in a canoe in the South river, was overturned and drowned." It is presumed that this was the same man who lent his name to the Island. Early colonial records show that in 1631 an order was passed forbidding anyone from grazing cattle, chopping wood, or raising slate from Noddle's Island, and in 1632 the exclusive privilege to catch fowl with nets was granted to John Perkins. The important notation about Noddle's Island, however, was made on 1 April 1633 when the Court of Assistants enacted that

Noddle's Ileland is granted to Mr. Small Mauack to enjoy to him & heires for ever Yeilding & payeing yearly att the Genrall Court to the Govnr, for the time being either a fatt weather a fatt hog or xls in money & shall give leave to Boston & Charles Town to fetch wood contynaully as their needs requires from the southerne pte of sd ileland.5

Maverick, an Episcopalian whose father was pastor of the first church in Dorchester, had lived previously at Winnisimmet (Chelsea), where he built the first permanent residence in the Boston area atop the hill where the Naval Hospital now stands. * There he gained the

* The "Maverick Manuscript" of 1660, now in the British Museum, states: Two miles South from Rumney Marsh on the North Side of Mistick River is Winnisime which though but a few houses on it, yet deserves to be mencond. One house yet standing there which is the Antientest house in the Massachusetts Government, a house which in the yeare 1625 I
the reputation for great hospitality to visiting gentlemen, entertaining in such a spirited style that he was reprimanded by the General Court for his "riotous method of living." He probably built a house on Noodle's Island in 1634, for in 1635 he sold the greater part of his holdings at Winnisimmet to Bellingham. In 1638 he added to his list of firsts by becoming one of the earliest slaveholders in Massachusetts, purchasing part of a cargo of negroes brought back from the Tortugas. Maverick's way of life and religion did not endear him to the Puritans who dominated the colony's affairs, yet his personable manner earned him their grudging tolerance. He was once arrested for harboring a fugitive from justice, managing to get off with only a suspended fine; he was a freeman even though he did not belong to the Congregational Church. In the 1640's, as troubles between the various settlements of Massachusetts Bay became more severe, the authorities' tolerance of Maverick waned. He and several others were jailed and fined for having petitioned the General Court to abolish the freeman's oath (which affirmed one's membership in the Congregational Church and entitled one to become a voting citizen of the colony) so that those of other religious persuasions might also become citizens; as a result of this injustice, Maverick sold his property on Noodle's Island to Captain George Briggs of Barbadoes on 26 July 1650 and returned to England, where he died in 1669.

fortified with a Pillizade and fflankers and gunnes both belowe and above in them which awed the Indians who at that time had a mind to Cutt off the English, They once faced it but receiveing a repulse never attempted it more although (as they now confesse) they repented it when about 2 years after they saw so many English come over.
Maverick's eldest son, Nathaniel, then purchased the island from Captain Briggs and immediately resold it to Colonel John Burch of Barbadoes. A lawsuit followed, with Samuel Maverick claiming that the conditions of sale had been violated, but the court decided in 1653 in favor of Colonel Burch. A succession of owners followed, with Burch selling it to Thomas Broughton's agents, Leader and Newbold, in 1656; Broughton, selling it to his creditors, Henry Shrimpton and Richard Cooke, of Boston, and Walter Price, of Salem; Sir Thomas Temple acquiring it after legal battles in 1667; and finally Colonel Samuel Shrimpton purchasing the island in 1670. Col. Shrimpton was a prominent Boston land speculator, owning in his time a good portion of Beacon Hill, and he built a summer home on Noodle's Island. In 1682 he obtained a release from the original levy of one fat hot or forty shillings by paying the Governor thirty pounds sterling.

Noodle's Island passed through the descendants of the Shrimpton family after Col. Shrimpton's death, resulting eventually in three owners: David S. Greenough, who owned one-half; Elizabeth Hyslop Sumner, who owned one-third; and David Hyslop, who owned one-sixth part. Jurisdiction of the Island was given to Boston on 7 December 1636, so that Noodle's Island became part of the City of Boston when it was chartered in 1822. One other early ruling that was later to become important was the 13 May 1640 decision that the flats to the ordinary low water mark were said to belong to the island.
The island Brereton called "Susanna" (after his daughter) was locally known as Hog Island. Joseph Russell, who owned it in the late 1700's, renamed it Belle Isle, and that designation continues as the name of the inlet running between the island, Winthrop and Revere. John Breed of Charlestown purchased the island after Russell's death and lived there "in a large one-story stone house of great length, built by himself." It remained in the Breed family for some time, thus coming to be known as Breed's Island. The chief feature of the island is a 150 foot hill, or grumlin, a geological formation found frequently in the Boston area as a result of glacial action in the last ice age.

Govenor's Island was granted by the colonists to John Winthrop on 3 April 1632:

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The island called Conant's island, with all the liberties and privileges of fishing and fowling, was demised to John Winthrop Esq. the present Gourn., and it was further agreed that the said John Winthrop for one & twenty yeares payeing yearly to the Gourn. the fifth parts of all such fruits & proffitts as shalbe yearly raysed out of the same, and the lease to be renewed from time to time vnto the heirs and assigns of the said John Winthrop, & the name of the said ileland was changed & is to be called Goun'rs Garden.  
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The Winthrop family retained possession of the island until 1808, when it was bought by the U.S. Government as the site for Fort Warren. That name was later transferred to the fort on George's Island, so the fort constructed on Governor's Island in the 1870's was named Fort Winthrop in honor of John.
Apple Island was a small wooded mound that originally belonged to the City of Boston. It became private property and was sold by Thomas Hutchinson to Estes Hatch in 1723; the Hatch estate sold it to James Mortimer of Boston in 1750. For a time it was used chiefly as a picnic and outing spot in the harbor until a Mr. Marsh built a house there after 1814; he continued to live there while searching for the legal owner, from whom he bought the island. March was buried there when he died in 1833, and his house burned in 1835. Thereafter the City repurchased the island in 1867, using it as a gravel pit.9

Bird Island, the last of the component pieces of dry land which became East Boston, actually disappeared early in the 1800's. It was once a wooded island with grassy marshes that were mowed annually; one account even related that it was used as a place of execution and burial of pirates.10 The name of the Island lives on in the shoals and flats that were left behind after it sank.

Aside from the chronicle of ownership changes there is little to record about the history of the islands from 1630 to 1830 but military events. During Queen Anne's War of the French and Indian Wars, the southeastern hill of Noodle's Island was used by the British fleet as an encampment prior to their planned invasion of Canada. The British troops, however, had difficulty obtaining provisions from the colonists, finding pilots for the St. Lawrence River, and preventing deserters from leaving the ranks, so after thirty-five days
days on Noddle's Island (23 June - 30 July 1711) they set sail for Canada. Disaster followed; the fleet lost eight or nine ships and a thousand men and thus left without completing its mission. The encampment site, now called Jeffries Point, became known as "Camp Hill."\(^{11}\)

At the beginning of the American Revolution, Noddle's Island and Hog Island were the scene of a series of conflicts between American and British forces that collectively has been termed by some the "second battle of the Revolution."\(^{12}\) Between the 27th and 30th of May, 1774, the British attempted to raid cattle foraging on the hills, so the colonists removed the animals and burned the entire land area on June 10th to destroy everything that had not been demolished by earlier fighting. After the British withdrawal from Boston in 1776, the heights of Jeffries Point were fortified in anticipation of the Redcoats' return, an eventuality that never materialized.

The War of 1812 caused yet another fort to be erected on Camp Hill, this one called Fort Strong in honor of the then governor of Massachusetts. It was built in seven weeks by volunteer labor from the citizens of Boston who worked under the supervision of the fort's designer, Loammi Baldwin. After the dedication 26 October 1814 the fort was guarded for five months but was never required for defense. The well dug to supply water for Fort Strong is said to be "under the sidewalk, some seventy-five feet from the northeast corner"\(^{13}\) of Brophy Park.
EAST BOSTON POPULATION GROWTH 1835-1970
A PLAN OF A SURVEY OF NODDLE’S ISLAND

Taken for David Greenough by William Taylor, 1801
CHAPTER II. THE BEGINNINGS OF DEVELOPMENT 1830-1840

With the exception of infrequent military activity, life at Noddle's Island was pastoral until 1833. For seventy years prior to that date the island was farmed by Henry Howell Williams and later by his son Thomas, under a lease arrangement from the property owners. A survey made in 1801 by William Taylor shows the chief improvements that had been made - a mansion house, a mill pond dam, and a wharf - the major hills comprising the upland: East Wood Island, Camp Hill, Smith Hill, West Head, and Upland Farm.

The transformation from pasture to urban community was brought about primarily through the efforts of one man, General William H. Sumner, who was a descendant of Col. Shrimpton and whose mother jointly owned Noddle's Island. As a youth Sumner enjoyed family excursions to the island and dreamed about owning it himself in order to develop it as a fashionable residential community. When the U.S. Government was searching for a site in Boston Harbor for the U.S. Navy Yard, the General tried to persuade officials to establish the Yard on Noodle's Island, and he very nearly succeeded. (Charlestown was selected instead.) When his mother died in 1810, Sumner's hopes of becoming
sole owner of the family share were set back as his sister inherited the island; Sumner did become the manager for her estate until he was able to find investors to join with him in forming the East Boston Company, which bought the entire island from its owners for $80,000.

The Company was incorporated by the State of Massachusetts on 25 March 1833, and from that date begins the real development of East Boston.*

At that time "Noddle's Island" stood isolated in Boston Harbor, without any approach to it from any direction except by water. It had been developed only by farming purposes, for a period of nearly two hundred years. The enterprise in the beginning was considered, by many of our shrewdest men, not only visionary but almost ridiculous. In fact some few gentlemen who had agreed to invest $1400 each in the enterprise, after visiting the Island declined to do so, saying that it would require an expenditure of $400,000, beside the purchase-money, before a lot of land could be sold. These gentlemen, however, lived to see that they had made a mistake; for, had they invested the $1400... they would have realized over $12,000 within the first three years.²

The Company had title to 663 acres, about 60% upland and 40% marsh, plus over 1250 acres of flats. Corporate stock was divided initially into 5,280 shares.

Oddly, General Sumner wanted to name it "North Boston" but was dissuaded by another gentleman who wished to reserve that name for the time when Charlestown would be annexed to the City of Boston.¹
The East Boston Company wasted no time in beginning development. Boston public officials were escorted to the island on 4 May 1833 so that they might select not more than four acres of land to be used for "school and engine-houses, burial-grounds, and other public purposes." Camp Hill, chosen first for subdivision because of its fine view out over the harbor and nearby land, was provided with named streets and Belmont Square prior to the end of May, and a prospectus was printed announcing the availability of land:

The subscribers being desirous of forming an association for the purchase of certain lots of land situated in the City of Boston, on the heights of Noddle's Island, to be called Belmont, and numbered from one to 58 on a plan which is hereto annexed, for the purpose of laying out and embellishing the same, and erecting pleasant summer residences thereon....

Lots cost ten cents a square foot, and particularly choice ones were auctioned; thirty people paid $5.00 each to subscribe to this first sale of land.

General Sumner's History of East Boston furnishes the reasoning behind the design of East Boston:

One of the first and most important subjects demanding the attention and action of the Company was the location of streets. The narrow and crooked streets of Boston were a continual and sufficient warning to the proprietors to lay out wide and straight streets on the Island before houses and stores were built, for in this way only could regularity and convenience be secured. The old parts of New York and Boston are most preplexing instances of
building according to individual fancy, without the slightest regard to appearance, system, or the prospective growth and consequent demands of a large city. A systematic arrangement of streets, squares, and lots on the Island would secure immediate advantages, and make provision for future wants, while at the same time such a course would eventually be the most profitable one for the Company. On the 6th of August (1833), an examination of the southern part of the Island was made with reference to the location of streets.

Smith's Hill was cut level to fill in the marsh area between it and Camp Hill, and the connected upland area was divided into three sections and laid out in streets under the direction of Samuel Lewis. The plan thus produced was accepted by the Company Directors in September, 1833.

Lewis was a company director who later became president of the East Boston Company. There is no record of his previous experience as a surveyor, engineer or planner, though it is probable that he had a background in speculative real estate development, for the plan he produced is typical of the layouts being then provided for nineteenth century American cities. Such plans are characterized primarily by their gridiron street patterns, and East Boston's is no exception: it is "systematic" to the extent possible with respect to the topography. The major axis is determined by Meridian Street, with a secondary spine formed by the railroad tracks. Streets in Section 1 are names for historic New England persons as well as some of the directors
of the East Boston Company; streets in Section 2 are named for major international ports; and streets in Section 3 carry the names of Revolutionary War battlefields (east to west) and noted generals from that war (north to south). The proposed water power company, which never materialized, is reminiscent of contemporary schemes in Boston to build dams across the Charles River and Back Bay to harness the tides; the Public Garden, which also never materialized, is an adornment in the manner of parks in the South End. There never seems to have been any doubt that the entire waterfront would be devoted to commercial or industrial purposes; this, as an inspection of East Boston will verify, is one aspect of the 1833 plan that was faithfully executed. Yet Lewis' plan for land use is only suggestive, not specific. As Mumford has commented about nineteenth century plans, "in street layout and land subdivision no attention was paid to the final use to which the land would be put; but the most meticulous efforts were made to safeguard its immediate use, namely, land-speculation." 6

Industrial development was not neglected. One of the first steps taken by the Company was to obtain the terminus of one of the several rail lines then being built in Boston, the Eastern Railroad, a regional line that served the north shore, eventually extending to Portland, Maine. Railroad companies at this time were the principal freight haulers in the country, shipping by sea as well as by rail. Accommodations for ships thus necessitated waterfront locations as terminals.
A sugar refinery, right adjacent to the railroad, was the first major manufacturer to locate at East Boston and it was soon followed by other establishments.

The policy of the Company in the beginning was to settle the Island as soon, and as fast, as possible; and for that purpose every inducement and encouragement was given to purchasers who would become residents, and also to all business men who would go on and make improvements there. Land speculators were not encouraged, or sought after. By adopting this policy, brilliant results were at once attained; for within two years from the organization of the Company, the sales of lands amounted to over $253,000, with which, a Ferry was established, the Maverick House was built, several principal streets were graded, and also the road through Chelsea, leading from the bridge to the Salem Turnpike, and other improvements, and still leaving in the Treasurer's hands (over and above their liabilities) about $78,000 of available funds, besides their real estate.

The eighty room Maverick House hotel, opened 27 May 1835, was constructed on the site of the farm mansion house and was intended to serve passengers on the Eastern Railroad, who would come to visit this fashionable shore resort. There is also some feeling that it was intended to persuade the Cunard Line to make East Boston their Boston area pier; in any event, "the climate of the island, and the beauty spot that Maverick Square became, lured many people from all parts of the Union to spend their summers there." By the end of 1835, the list of businesses in East Boston included the eight story sugar refinery, the Boyden Malleable Cast Iron and
Steel Company, Lamson's Bakery, a hair mattress factory, Pratt and Cushing's Marine Railway for small vessels, and the East Boston Timber Company, supplying white oak plank from Grand Island, Niagara River, New York, for shipbuilding. Wharves contained various industries, such as lumber yards, two mast and spar makers, fish packers, and a grindstone and plaster supplier. The East Boston Wharf Company was in the process of constructing a major wharf, "extending into the Channel 1250 feet and of breadth of 310 feet, with a dockage on each side of 100 feet. The side walls of this fine wharf are of solid granite, of an average thickness of seven feet, the space between filled up solid, with earth, and comprising a surface of over eight acres." A seventy-foot right-of-way (Lewis Street) was provided down the middle to the wharf for access to the ferry slip. At this time, too, the idea of a water power company had not been discarded; a company had filed for incorporation in order that a dam extending from West Wood Island to the end of Camp Hill might be constructed.

Despite the establishment of industries and the glowing statements of the East Boston Company, the population of Noddle's Island grew rather slowly. The first house was built in 1833 at the corner of Webster and Cottage streets by Guy Haynes, and by 1834 there were three families living on the Island. In 1835 the city census recorded the population as being 607 persons; an anonymous pamphlet listed fifty private houses, twenty stores and warehouses, and ten wharves, also commenting that "at Belmont and the beautiful and commanding
eminences in the Section No. 3, the most delightful situations are to be found for fillas and rural residences. In 1840 the Federal census counted 1455 residents in East Boston. Finer homes were located on the hills of Sections 1 (Jeffries Point) and 3 (Eagle Hill) while lower-lying Section 2 (Maverick Square and Paris Street) divided into smaller lots, contained more boarding houses and cheaper dwellings.

There were significant changes in store for East Boston, however, changes brought on by a combination of geography and external factors which would send the fledgling development into its golden age.
CHAPTER III. THE ERA OF THE CLIPPER SHIP 1840-1865

The sea which separated East Boston from the mainland was also the first source of wealth for the community. In the 1840's ocean-going ships, carrying the bulk of commercial trade both along the Atlantic coast and around the world, were mostly small, sail-driven craft (though some steam driven vessels were also in use.) Overland transportation was limited by bad roads and constrained by the strength of horses until railroad networks, begun around 1830, were constructed to link distant places for trade. In the meantime, ships of every kind were necessary to maintain the growing cities and manufacturing towns of New England. Increased numbers of ships required more wharves where they could be unloaded, and old Boston's waterfront had no more pier space. The empty shores of East Boston, however, were available, and the development of commercial shipping and ship building there provided the basis for dramatic population growth between 1840 and 1865. In May 1835, the first of thousands of ships unloaded at an East Boston pier, and on 8 October 1839, Samuel Hall's shipyard at the west end of Maverick Street launched the "Akbar," the first ship constructed in East Boston.¹
The Island received a substantial boost when in 1840 the Cunard Line established East Boston as its Boston terminal for sail and steam ships from Liverpool. This long anticipated event was significant: with regular service between the Island and England added to the existing rail connections to inland domestic communities, East Boston became an important center for shipping. Railroad terminals on East Boston's docks were an essential part of the freight shipping system: they were one of the few places along all of Boston's waterfront where cargo could be transferred directly from trains to ships. The Eastern Railroad was joined by the Grand Junction Railroad, a larger line with tracks throughout the Boston region connecting with other major lines that served New England's manufacturing centers. A draw bridge, built in 1855 by the East Boston Company, continued Meridian Street across Chelsea Creek to Chelsea, providing another link to the mainland. The East India and China trades flourished; packets arrived and departed regularly with mail for Europe; coastal vessels brought cotton and timber for the manufacturing establishments of New England as Boston became the leading port in the country.

The chronicle of East Boston's rise to preeminence in shipbuilding is beautifully illustrated by the life of Donald McKay, a Canadian native who came to be the country's most noted designer of clipper ships. After an apprenticeship and work experience with several ship yards in New York City, he came to Newburyport, Massachusetts where he
joined a shipbuilding partnership. The quality of his work there attracted the attention of Enoch Train, a wealthy Boston merchant in the South American and Baltic trades, who commissioned a packet, the "Joshua Bates," and was so pleased with the ship that he persuaded McKay to come to East Boston and establish a new and larger shipyard there. In 1844, at the age of 34, McKay opened his own yard at the water side of Border Street, between White and Eutaw streets; later he designed and built his house at 80 White Street (which is still standing). McKay's early ships were mostly packet vessels built for Enoch Train and others.

A radical change in the character of shipbuilding accompanied the discovery of gold in California in 1849. Suddenly, the prime objective was to get to San Francisco around the tip of South America as quickly as possible, and the graceful vessels known as clipper ships came into being. While Donald McKay cannot be called the inventor of the clipper ship (that distinction belonging to a New York ship builder), he certainly did more than any other man to refine the type into a high art. His first clipper, "Staghound," was launched in December 1850; it made the passage from New York to San Francisco in 112 days. In 1851 he built the most famous ship of all, the "Flying Cloud," which made the trip around Cape Horn in a record-breaking 89 days. Other memorable McKay clippers were the "Sovereign of the Seas," "Lightning," and the mammoth "Great Republic," built in 1853.
Experience has shown that the passage to California has been lengthened by the tremendous westerly gales in the vicinity of Cape Horn, and that to combat these gales successfully, vessels of greater size and power than any which had yet been built, were necessary. (McKay) accordingly designed the Great Republic, a ship of 4000 tons register,* and full 6000 tons stowage capacity, and had her built entirely upon his own account, and will sail her too. She is 325 feet long, 53 feet wide, and her whole depth is 39 feet.2

Sadly, the "Great Republic" never got to prove herself, as she burned in New York harbor while preparing for her maiden voyage.

Clipper ships enjoyed prosperity during the 1850's, when they earned huge profits for their owners. Even after the nation's gold fever subsided, when there was no longer a horde of fortune seekers eager to get to California, clippers continued in service until they met their end in fire or storms at sea. They transported mail, immigrants from Europe, coffee from Rio de Janiero, naval stores to Europe, U.S. cotton to Europe and New England, iron and coal from Europe, earthenware from England, and Chinese coolies to South American gauno pits, to name a few of the cargos handled. McKay's yard built 31 clippers, along with 16 packets, 16 traders, several schooners, 2 sloops-of-war for the Navy, war boats during the Civil War, and 4 steam vessels.3 His last clipper, "Glory of the Seas," was launched in November 1869, and his yard closed in 1875 after refitting the schooner "America."

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* By comparison, the "Flying Cloud" was of 1700 tons register.
Along with the McKay yard in East Boston were dozens of related naval industries. Daniel Kelly opened his shipyard in 1848; and the floating docks, marine railways, plank and lumber yards, foundries, spar makers, ship painters, sail makers and riggers lofts which lined the waterfront provided the craftsmen needed to construct and completely outfit wooden sailing ships. With justice, it was claimed that there was "no place in the United States or New England where there were so many requisities and provisions for shipbuilding" as were to be found in East Boston.

(Cunard Lines) Wharf, Grand Junction Railroad depot, Edwards Holman and Co., and miscellaneous undeveloped private frontages at the end of Jeffries Point.

A sample listing of some business cards from the East Boston Directory of 1849 gives a picture of the commercial community:

- Abner Smith, Dealer in West India Goods, also, Boots, Shoes, Provisions, etc. Central Square. "Goods at the lowest Cash prices."
- G. M. Burnham and Co. Shipwrights and Caulkers, Sumner Street, (Weeks' Wharf) near the Railway. Blocks suitable to haul on Vessels of any size, to Repair or Paint.
- Daniel Francis, Cooper and Brass Founder, Ship and Machine Castings, of all kinds, executed with dispatch. Sumner Street, near the Railroad crossing.
- Joseph Robbins, Dealer in Wood, Coal and Bark, also Lime and Sand, Cunningham's Wharf, Sumner St., opposite Border St.
- A. Dunbar, Jr. Dealer in Straw Bonnets, Ribbons, Artificial Flowers, Dress Caps, and Millinery and Fancy Goods, No. 2 Sumner Street, opposite the Church. Bonnets made to order; also, Bleached, Pressed and Altered, in the most approved style.
- Sam'l Ritchie and Co. Dealers in Dry Goods, "Ritchie Block" Sumner Street. We keep an excellent assortment of Dress Goods, Shawls, of all kinds, Irish and Scotch linens, table cloths, all sizes, Cloths, Doeskins and Satinetts, Hosiery, Kid, Silk and Thread Gloves, Laces and Edgings, Ribbons, Fringes, Gimps and Buttons, and the Best Variety of Trimmings and Fancy Articles in East Boston, All of which, with Goods from Auction every few days, we will sell at our usual very low prices. Agents for the sale of English Patent Roofing Felt.
George H. Plummer, Dealer in Choice Family Groceries, of every variety, Corner of Maverick Square and Sumner Street, (under the Church). "Goods delivered to any part of the island."

Erastus S. Holden, Apothecary, Corner of Sumner and Lewis Streets, Respectfully informs his friends and the public that he has constantly on hand a complete assortment of Drugs, Medicines, Chemicals, Perfumery, &c.

W. A. Noyes, Painter, Blazier and Paper-Hanger, and dealer in choice paper hangings, No. 14 Lewis, corner of Webster Street.

Samuel Q. Shackford, Carpenter, Orleans Street, near Maverick Street. "All orders promptly attended to."

Crosby and Gibson, Dealers in Hard and Soft Coal, Wood, Hay &c. Ferry Wharf, near the Ferry.

John K. Carr, manufacturer of Pumps and Blocks, Brown and Lovell's Wharf, opposite London Street. Also, repairing done to order.

Ivory Harlow, Manufacturer of Fashionable Boots and Shoes, Meridian, corner of Havre St., under the Methodist Church. Water Proof Boots made to order. Boots and Shoes neatly repaired.

Washburn and Phillips, Dealers in Wood, Coal, Lime, Sand, Hay and Brick, Foot of Sumner Street, next Wharf to Weeks'.

Edwin Bailey, Architect and Builder, Webster Street, near the Railroad.

Hugh Ormsby, Brown and Fancy Bread Baker, Rear of Sumner, near Cottage Street.

Wm. M. Prior, Portrait Painter, Trenton Street, near Meridian Street, 3rd Section.

R. L. Hinckley, M. D. Surgeon and Physician, Office, Maverick Block, Maverick Square.6

East Boston's preeminence in the construction of wooden sailing ships was brief, as the future of transoceanic shipping was to be in steam-ships with metal hulls. Even the invention of the clipper ships, which had given wooden ships an extension on life, could not insure a future for fragile wooden craft against the competition of sturdier,
larger and more reliable steamships. George A. Stone built East
Boston's first iron-hulled steamship in 1857, but the construction
of metal boats never became an East Boston speciality in the way
clipper construction had been. Ship repair facilities, like Sectional
Dock and Railway, Simpson's Dry Docks, and D. D. Kelly's Marine
Railway, prospered, and East Boston wharves continued to bustle
with cargo from all over the world. In 1860 the Grand Junction
Railroad wharves received:

- 32 ships and 1 barque from the East Indies
- 1 ship and 1 barque from Russia
- 15 ships and 17 barques from South (cotton)
- 13 brigs and 119 schooners from coastal routes
carrying coal, wood, timber, lumber and bricks
- 92 other vessels with assorted cargos. 7

With business and industrial concerns thus expanding, it is not
surprising to find that the resident population also increased. In
1840 the federal census recorded only 1455 residents on Noddle's
Island; by 1865 their numbers had risen to 20,572, representing a
mix of native Americans, Canadians and Irish immigrants. Massachusetts
had maintained fairly strict immigration regulations until 1849,
when they were abandoned primarily for economic reasons. New
England's expanding manufacturing concerns needed a large pool of
workers, more than could be supplied by the existing population,
and thousands of laborers were also demanded for construction jobs,
like the filling of Back Bay, the building of piers, and extending
the railroad systems. Severe economic deprivation, crop failures,
and political upheavals in Europe forced many there to leave the
Old World and seek their fortunes elsewhere; beginning with the Irish
potato famine in 1848-49 and the Revolutions of 1848 in several other
countries on the continent, these dispossessed people came to the
United States by the thousands, swelling the populations of east
coast cities like Boston.

Canadians, particularly those with crafts or woodworking skills,
found employment in the marine industries along the waterfront, and
they account for much of the population increase during the 1840's.
Irish immigrants, who worked on pier construction crews and as
stevedores, came to East Boston in large numbers in the 1850's;
the 1855 census showed that 23% of East Boston's inhabitants were
born in Ireland. Housing for factory workers and single men was
built near Maverick Square, while one and two family houses pre-
dominated on Jeffries Point and Eagle Hill. By 1860 there were
2055 houses in East Boston, an increase of over 1500 from the
number in 1845.

A sense of community began to develop as the resident population
grew, resulting in the formation of educational, religious, civic,
and cultural organizations. The East Boston Company in 1835 built
"a commodious School-House, which [was] also used as a place of
public worship" at the corner of Paris and Hotel (now Henry) streets,
and in 1837 the Lyman School was built at the corner of Meridian
and Wesley (now Emmons) streets, on the site of the present municipal court. By 1848 there were fifteen small primary schools in East Boston, each with one teacher, while the Lyman School had 282 boys in five classes and 346 girls in four classes, under the supervision of eleven teachers. The Report of the Visiting Committee for that year presents an image of conditions at Lyman:

This excellent and well situated house, provided with ample recitation rooms and good blackboards, accommodates two schools [one for boys, one for girls] which struck the Committee as entirely and uniformly satisfactory, in every particular. They confess, however, that they know not how much they ought to allow for the effect produced on their minds by the exquisite neatness and order which shine in every thing in the school, and the beautiful relation which subsists between the teachers and pupils, and the masters and assistants. The materials are very various and changing, and therefore poor; the average attendance being only 80 or 85 per cent. This, however, is the only unfortunate particular in the condition of the school. Every thing else is most propitious. Each master has his own pupils, always with him, and has complete control over them. There is no conflict of authority; no defeat of the good influences of the morning by the contrary influences of the afternoon; no loss of time from the unequal distribution of study; no perverted arrangements from the clash of irreconcilable opinions concerning scholars, formed by different persons taking partial views of their character. ... This school has a valuable library of about sixty volumes, purchased at the suggestion and expense of the generous citizen in honor of whom the school had its name.10

By 1860, the East Boston Company's Annual Report could boast: "In regard to Schools, East Boston stands unrivalled - having three
large Grammar and five Primary School-houses, built of brick, besides
four Primary Schools which are held in private buildings hired for
that purpose. The total number of teachers in the above is 66, and
of scholars 3,250."\(^{11}\)

Paralleling this development of schools was the creation of churches
in East Boston. Actually there had been a church group on the island
long before the East Boston Company existed, for around 1668 a group
of Baptists sought refuge there from the intolerance of the Congre-
gationalist Massachusetts Bay Colony. Church services were held in
a member's house, and they called themselves the "Church of Jesus
Christ worshipping at Noddle's Island in New England."\(^{12}\) It would
be over 150 years before Baptists again worshipped on Noddle's Island,
so the distinction of being the first church in East Boston during
"modern" times belongs to the Maverick Congregational Church, which
organized 3 May 1836 as the "First Congregational Church in East
Boston." Their original chapel was built in 1836, and a larger
church was constructed in 1837 on a lot at the corner of Maverick
and Havre streets, donated by the East Boston Company. By 1845, they
dedicated a still larger church on the corner of Summer Street and
Maverick Square.

The founding of a Congregational church was followed two years later
by the creation of the East Boston Universalist Parish, which built
in 1843 on the corner of Webster and Orleans streets. The Meridian
Street Methodist Episcopal Church, organized in 1839, built first on the corner of Meridian and Paris streets and moved in 1847 to a larger brick edifice on the corner of Meridian, Havre and Decatur streets. In 1843 the Baptists returned to East Boston when the group that became the Central Square Baptist Church met in a rented hall on Lewis Street. They built a chapel in the Winthrop Block in 1849 and moved to a structure of their own on Meridian Street near Central Square in 1855. The first Irish Catholic Church, the Church of St. Nicholas, opened 25 February 1844 in the former Congregational Church on Maverick and Havre streets. St. John's Episcopal Church was organized in 1845; it erected several buildings for worship in the vicinity of Maverick Square, the largest in 1855 on Paris Street between Gove and Emmons. The Unitarian Society in East Boston was also founded in 1845, and it, too, moved frequently during its early years, occupying first the old Universalist Church on Webster Street, then in 1852 building a new structure on the corner of Maverick and Bremen streets. The same old Universalist Church was next used by Presbyterians, who met there in 1853 until their own church on Meridian was completed in the following year. Saratoga Street Methodist Episcopal Church became the ninth church in East Boston when, in 1853, it was created as an outgrowth of Meridian Street Methodist; the Saratoga Street Church building was dedicated in 1865.13

In addition to the churches, there were other organizations that contributed to the cultural life of the community. The Sumner Street
Library Association had its own building, housing a collection of over 1500 volumes and containing a lecture hall and reading room.\textsuperscript{14}

Hundreds of trees were planted along the city's streets from about 1845 to 1865 by members of the Tree Association; isolated specimens may still be seen in some residential area.\textsuperscript{15} Volunteer fire companies were organized to protect the growing residential neighborhoods from conflagration: Maverick Engine Co. No. 11 (Paris Street); Protection Engine Co. No. 4 (Paris Street); Old North Engine Company No. 19 (Eagle Hill); and Hero Hook and Ladder Co. No. 2 (corner Meridian and Emmons) are all listed in 1849. Police protection by the City of Boston was extended in 1854 when Division 7 was established and assigned, with 4 men and a captain, to East Boston.

During this period the East Boston Company was busy selling island property and making improvements there. The large public garden in Eagle Hill, indicated on the Lewis Plan of 1833, disappeared from the 1844 version of the map; the land was by then subdivided into streets and lots and offered for sale.

In 1841, the Company adopted a new policy,--that of making, from time to time, Land Dividends -- that is, dividing off a quantity of the lands among its own Stockholders, in order to encourage improvements, and more rapidly settle the Island. Thinking that the Stockholder, holding a fee in the land received in payment for his dividend, would be likely to improve the Same, to make it a source of income, or to sell it to others, who would improve it, and consequently be the means of adding to the growth of the Island in population, and also increasing the value of the remainder of the Company's property.\textsuperscript{16}
Although two such land dividends were announced, they were not notably successful. Many of the stockholders did not wish to own real estate on Noddle's Island, and their objections forced the Company to discontinue its land dividend policy. It cannot be determined how many, if any, of the East Boston Company's stockholders ever lived in East Boston; only two of the Board of Directors, Benjamin Lamson and A. A. Wellington, are listed in the 1849 Directory, both living on Webster Street. General Sumner himself does not seem to have lived in his development, despite his repeated recitations to others of the beauty and delight to be had in East Boston.

One fundamental improvement the Company made was to arrange for a plentiful supply of water. Early development got along by using wells; in 1835 it was written that "every part of East-Boston abounds with fine water, seldom requiring the shafts of the wells, excepting on the hills, to be sunk to a greater depth than fifteen feet. Even on the summit of Belmont, in Section No. 1, the shaft of the well is only 52 feet in depth." Wells could not suffice for long, however, as development required more certain sources than wells could provide. In 1848 a proposal was made to the Water Commissioners of Boston to supply East Boston with Water from Long Pond, carrying it across the harbor to the island in cast iron pipes. The Company noted that "the project appears not only perfectly feasible, but the offer to accomplish it, is at reasonable expense." The expense must have become unreasonable, though, for by 1850 East Boston was
supplied instead with Cochituate water, and a reservoir on top of Eagle Hill (where the High School now stands) was then built as a water storage facility.

Transportation service provided from the start by the East Boston Company consisted of the running of a ferry which connected the island with Boston proper, begun in 1833. The ferry was an essential line to the mainland, yet providing the service did not prove profitable, and the Company sold the operation in 1835 to "certain associates." In 1836 the Eastern Rail Road Company (many of whose directors interlocked with the East Boston Company) purchased all the ferry stock for $57,000, and in 1842 the East Boston Company bought its way back into the ferry company and became co-owner with the railroad. By 1848 the entire operation consisted of three old boats and badly out of repair drops, slips and tanks at either end of the run; all of this was valued at only $30,000. Service, too, was poor, necessitating inordinate delays for those crossing the harbor, yet no competitive ferry could be established due to protective covenants insisted on by the East Boston Company that were binding on all waterfront property. With clever maneuvering, however, these restrictions were evaded by a group of East Bostonians (including Donald McKay) who, in 1853, obtained from the City a charter to operate an opposition ferry service, the People's Ferry Company. Their service originated from a wharf at the corner of New Street and Sumner Street; within five years they had cut the East Boston
Ferry Company's revenues by 75%. But there was not enough harbor crossing traffic to make both concerns profitable, so both began looking to Boston city government for operating subsidies. After much debate, the city purchased the landings of both companies in 1859; in 1864 the People's Ferry sold its boats and franchise, and eventually the East Boston Ferry Company provided the service from both locations. The ferry issue was not yet resolved, and it would surface later in the debate over free ferries.
CHAPTER IV. THE IRISH YEARS 1865-1885

The conclusion of the Civil War was also the end of East Boston's preeminence as a shipbuilding center. Though the waterfront was by no means idle, the vigorous activity which had characterized the previous quarter century now had waned. Donald McKay, whose brilliant career symbolized the glory of the clipper ship era, also symbolized its decline: he reluctantly closed his ship yard in 1875 because there was no more work to be done and moved his family to a farm in Hamilton, Massachusetts. Five years later, he died, "almost in poverty."  

Donald McKay was not the only East Bostonian to leave.

When the era of the clipper ships ended, the skilled native craftsmen who had come largely from the shore towns of New England looked elsewhere for their opportunities. They were replaced by cheap immigrant labor for the operation of railroads, freight yards and piers for trans-Atlantic shipping. As the population changed, the large estates and middle class homes were sold to land speculators who remodeled the houses to hold several families or replaced them with three story frame row houses. The immigrant population was largely Irish by nationality and adhered to the Roman Catholic Church. By the 1880's the Irish population had supplied most of the leading citizens of East Boston who exerted a controlling influence in local politics, law, medicine and business."
The rate of population increase slowed considerably – from 20,572 in 1865, the number of residents increased moderately to 29,280 by 1885, with Irish immigrants accounting for most of the difference. Smaller numbers of Canadians, Germans, and Russians also moved in during this time, replacing Yankee families going elsewhere.

The character of this population shift was more significant than the amount of change, however, for it established the basis for physical conditions which exist today. East Boston changed, gradually but decisively, from a development of single family homes to an area of multi-family housing in flats and tenements; it would never again be advertised as a place for "villas and rural residences." Several factors seem to account for this transformation, one being the beginning of the decline of the waterfront's worth and importance, a slump that continues to this day. The advent of steamships and the completion of rail networks across the west left Boston detached from the mainstream of freight transportation. New York and Chicago became the centers of shipping, and Boston lacked access routes which would allow it to compete or share in the action there. Locally, suburbs to the west of Boston were made available to wealthier townspeople seeking new homesites; streetcar lines made commuting possible, and the filling of Back Bay (1857-94) created new land for fashionable townhouses closer in to Boston. Though good lots were still available in East Boston for a fraction of the cost of Back Bay land ($0.25 a
square foot in East Boston as compared to an average of $3.21 a square foot in Back Bay), the prestige and convenience of western neighborhoods overcame the ferry ride and economic advantage of East Boston. Another factor in East Boston's decline was the animosity bordering on hatred that proper Bostonians felt for the immigrant Irish, whom they shunned as neighbors. Cheap housing and employment opportunities attracted Irishmen to East Boston; once there, their presence effectively repelled any Brahmins who might have considered moving there themselves.

Building activity on the island leveled off, "and while new forms of manufactures came in, and certain among the early established industries grew, industrially the island little more than held its own." Shipping and ship repair continued to occupy the waterfront, with the Boston, Revere Beach and Lynn Railroad, a horse-drawn narrow gauge line serving commuters and beach excursioners, being an addition to Jeffries Point. By 1880 horse-drawn street cars traveled up and down Meridian Street, the only paved thoroughfare in town, making a loop onto Sumner Street at Maverick Square in order to serve the north ferry landing.

Ferry connections to Boston continued to be an issue. The East Boston Ferry Company, now operating both the south and north (formerly People's) ferries, drew increasing complaints from residents about the inadequate level of service; the Company responded by claiming the operation was constantly losing money. Boston City Councilmen
were most reluctant to take over the Ferry Company's franchise, but in April 1870, they finally purchased the boats. The issue did not remain settled long, however, for in 1877 pressures from East Bostonians wanting toll-less ferry service resulted in the passage of a Free Ferry Ordinance by the Aldermen. Arguments in favor of the proposal centered around the fact that the City had, at considerable expense, constructed free bridges between South Boston and Boston proper; why, then, should the residents of East Boston, who paid taxes that helped build the South Boston bridges, not receive free transportation access to Boston also? A ruling that a ferry is not a bridge finally had to be made by the State Supreme Court in 1878 before the dispute over the ordinance could be settled and tolls once more be collected for the ferry ride to East Boston. Twice again, in 1879 and 1887, the free ferry question arose in the Massachusetts Legislature, but both times the issue was rejected. The toll for passengers and wagons was in effect until the ferry service was discontinued in 1950.

During this time, City Hall did enact legislation that was to be far more significant to East Boston than a free ferry ride. Debate and serious proposals for the creation of a parks system in Boston were begun, discussions which would lead eventually to the establishment of Wood Island Park. In 1876 the Parks Commissioners recommended the formation of a local park of about 76 acres on West Wood Island, then
a bare, unimproved hill, used as a pasture, surrounded at its base by marsh and flats. Its highest elevation is about forty feet above the sea, from which there is an extensive view of the outer harbor and islands, the adjacent parts of the city, and the heights of Breed's Hill. The flats, which form a part of the location, extend to the channel, having six feet of water at low tide. The inner slope of the hill is injured by the deep cutting of the Revere Beach Railroad, and will be bridged at points for convenience and safety. Though a somewhat exposed situation, the higher grounds can, by a proper disposition of plantations, be ornamented with foliage, and made into an attractive pleasure-ground. Its situation for playgrounds and promenades is the most convenient one possible for the citizens of East Boston for many years to come. It will be approached on the north from Chelsea Street, by Prescott Street, and by various streets on the east and west. 6

The city assessor valued the land, owned entirely by the East Boston Company, at $64,300 for 30 acres of marsh, 13 acres of upland, and 33 acres of flats. 7 Other parks being proposed at this same time included Franklin Park, the Charles River Esplanade, and most of the present series of Metropolitan District Commission reservations. The City Council, however, was not at all sure that a sizable outlay for parks was necessary or desirable at this time. One alderman summed up the case against parks in an 1877 speech to the Council:

I see, and I want others to see, that Boston will not suffer if her park grounds, simply as park grounds, are not increased for a quarter century. I see no justification for the assertion that the public park grounds of Boston are inadequate to a city of our
rank. The assertion is made only by comparison. What if New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago have larger parks than we? Do we of necessity need what they need? Do we, with East Boston and South Boston jutting out into the sea, and with our Charles and Mystic Rivers on the north, and our Neponset River on the south, need parks as much as they do? ... Boston is no pent-up city, without breathing space. Her surroundings wonderfully meet the needs of her people.

How easy it is to see short-sightedness retrospectively. The thinking of this gentleman, and other like him, delayed but did not destroy Boston's parks movement. More will be said about it later.

Educational facilities of East Boston were increased by three new schools: Commodore Barry, on the corner of Sumner and Lamson, built in 1868; Theodore Lyman, relocated to the corner of Paris and Gove in 1869 and rebuilt in 1871; and a primary school on Princeton Street, constructed in 1874. The old Lyman School was remodeled in 1874 to house the newly-established Municipal Court for the East Boston district on the first floor; the East Boston Branch of the Boston Public Library (the first free branch library in the United States) on the second floor; and the East Boston High School's assembly room on the third, with six classrooms and two laboratories in an attached building.

The one Catholic and eight Protestant churches existing by 1865 were joined by two more Catholic parishes and one new Baptist Church.
The Church of St. Nicholas became the Most Holy Redeemer Church, building a large granite church on the corner of London and Maverick; Sacred Heart Church was built on the corner of Brooks and Paris Streets; and Our Lady of the Assumption Church, on Sumner Street at Belmont Square, were all constructed to serve the growing number of Irish residents. They all soon had parochial schools associated with each church. Part of the congregation of Central Square Baptist broke away in 1878 to form Trinity Baptist Church, which began construction of its own building on Trenton Street near Meridian in 1879. In 1874 the Maverick Congregational Church's building at the corner of Liverpool and Central Square was dedicated, joining the Universalist Church that had been in Central Square since 1866. The Unitarians built a new church in 1878 on Havre Street between Maverick and Decatur, and the Presbyterians built their present church one block away, on London Street, in 1870.

By 1880 development had begun on Breed's Island, which was still an island, being connected only by two bridges to East Boston and one bridge across Belle Island Inlet to Revere. The Boston Land Company owned the entire island as well as the flats beyond it which are now part of Revere, and in 1880 they published a map of their property showing essentially the street layout that exists on Orient Heights today. Street names, however, were in most cases different: Waldemar was then Blue Hill Avenue; Faywood was Farrington Street; Montmorenci
and Beechwood were collectively named Lafayette Street. The present Bayswater area was laid out in quite a different street pattern than the one that was eventually built, and the flats that are now Suffolk Downs were gridded off into rectangular blocks.
LAND USE 1915

- Residential
- Institutional
  - School
  - Church
- Open Space
- Industrial
- Ferry
- Railroad
- Commercial
CHAPTER V. IMMIGRATION DOUBLES THE POPULATION 1885-1915

After two decades of slow-to-moderate growth, East Boston went through three decades of unprecedented increase which swiftly more than doubled the population. In 1885, the Massachusetts census recorded 29,280 inhabitants in East Boston; by 1915, the count had risen to 62,377, over 20,000 more than live there at present. Immigration from overseas accounted largely for the overwhelming increases, at first Russian and German Jews, then Italians displaced the Irish community. Physical improvements, too, assisted in making East Boston attractive to more people: land fill operations behind Jeffries Point made additional land for tenement construction; the opening of the subway tunnel under the harbor in 1905 relieved citizens of total dependence on the sometimes irregular ferry service for transportation to and from Boston; new industries provided jobs for more workers; and the energetic development of Breed's Island provided variety in the housing market with its offering of more expensive, single family homes on a spectacular hill.

The Jewish community, composed largely of Russian immigrants, grew in force during the 1890's; the first synagogue in East Boston was
opened in 1892. From their first settlement on Jeffries Point, the community spread to Porter and Chelsea Streets, and after the Chelsea fire in 1908, "the more prosperous Jewish families moved to that community to occupy the new brick housing." An observer in 1915 wrote:

> As tailors, small storekeepers, traders, junk dealers, and industrial workers, [the Jews] have been largely seekers of low rents. The character of the Jewish section has not been kept up; it is much in need of repairs, due in part to the slackness and indifference of the occupants who still remain, and in part to the neglect on the part of the landlords to keep the buildings in repair. Conditions are bad also because most of the buildings were poorly built at the start, cheap wooden structures put up by Jewish speculative builders who were primarily interested in cheap construction and cheap sales.  

It was said that East Boston had the largest single settlement of Jewish people in New England in 1905.  

Closely following the influx of Jewish immigrants were the Italians who came to East Boston in great numbers starting about 1905. From a report in 1915:

> Attracted by the low rentals, pleasant open spaces and sunny gardens on Jeffries Hill, the Italians began ten years ago to cross from the North End and to but or build with a view to establishing permanent homes in East Boston. They have increased greatly in numbers and now form an important factor in the community, where they bid fair to spread over much of the territory in the future. They have found cheap land and agreeable living conditions and appear to be contented to make their homes permanent,
and they seem to thrive even in the most crowded sections. As builders the Italians prefer masonry to which they have been accustomed, and they construct buildings of a better and more permanent character than those of speculative Jewish builders. Italians have replaced the Jews at Jeffries Point, with a center at Cottage and Maverick streets. They have spread into Chelsea Street nearby and are building onto the newly-filled marsh areas. They have formed a colony on the eastern slope of Eagle Hill and another on Breed's Hill.4

Irish families remained in considerable number in East Boston, primarily at Eagle Hill and Paris Street, but their former dominance was overcome by the sheer numbers of non-Irish newcomers. In 1914 a survey by the Massachusetts Bible Society recorded 68% of the inhabitants were Roman Catholic, 19% were Protestant, 11% Jewish, and 2% were either Greek Orthodox, Chinese, Armenian, or belonged to no church.5

Public school construction advanced considerably with schools being built in all sections of East Boston to serve the increased population. In the thirty years from 1885 to 1915, nine public schools were erected as well as several parochial ones. The East Boston branch of the Boston Public Library moved to its present structure in 1914 and another branch on Webster Street in Jeffries Point was open.

Religious organizations from outside East Boston came into the community to provide social service programs. St. Mary's House and Church for Sailors, established by Phillips Brooks of Trinity
Church, Boston, moved to 120 Marginal Street in 1888 to offer its ministry to transient seamen until 1943. St. Mary's also served as a temporary home, providing reading and game rooms, showers, and free foreign money exchange. Settlement houses in the strongly immigrant areas began operations at this time: Good Will House, which started as a Congregational Church project in the North End, moved to East Boston to a former house at 177 Webster Street. Trinity House, originally a project of Trinity Church, Boston, located in the South End, likewise came to East Boston and made its home in an old house on Eagle Hill. From its original programs in health and child care, designed to serve working mothers, Trinity House has over the years evolved into a community recreation center for children and adults.

Other civic institutions expanded to accommodate the increased population. By 1890 there were six fire stations distributed throughout the community; in that year the police department also acquired a new two-story frame building with space for a wagon, an ambulance, five horses, patrolmen's barracks, and a hayloft. The East Boston Emergency Hospital, located on Porter Street near Central Square, opened in 1908. A water tower with masonry base and wood frame top, constructed at the corner of Orient Avenue and Tower Street, provided the necessary pressure for service in the Orient Heights district. Part of the marshy area behind Addison and Saratoga streets and the Boston and Albany tracks was turned into
a tidal storage basin, dubbed Orient Lake, by the construction in 1905 of a reinforced concrete wall parallel to the tracks.

Another section of the waterfront had been improved some years earlier and turned into Wood Island Park. In 1887 over 100 trees were planted along Neptune Road, and the abutments for bridging the Boston, Revere Beach and Lynn Railroad were completed in anticipation of the park itself. The sale of land by the East Boston Company was made in 1891, and work continued for several years on the construction of "the most complete outdoor gymnasium in this country" with a field house, bath house, playing fields, walks and trees. The successful growing of trees on the island was a minor triumph: the ground had been treeless for so long, and the site was so exposed to extremes of sun, water, and wind that many believed reforestation efforts would certainly fail. With careful planting, however, the trees survived and grew, and the 1898 Park Commissioners Report stated:

By completion of the walks, Wood Island was, last season, much more available and was more generally appreciated by the public, the playgrounds were in great demand for games of base ball, cricket, tennis and football, while the walks and beach were patronized by large numbers. When the trees are grown sufficiently to give shade to the grassy slopes, from which fine views are obtained of the island-dotted harbor, the full benefit to East Boston of this charming breathing space will be still more appreciated.
Even in those days maintenance seems to have been a tough problem, for a report only fourteen years later found "a more or less marked effect of shabbiness and neglect about this park which is perhaps unavoidable, owing to insufficient appropriations."\textsuperscript{10} The playing field, shrubbery and field house were all cited as being particularly in need of attention; an addition to the field house was faulted for being "in an indifferent and inharmonious style, leading to the inference that a different or no architect was employed; ... vines should (be planted to) cover the incongruous addition to this building."\textsuperscript{11}

Wood Island Park was the only major public facility built in East Boston from 1885 to 1915. The city purchased a site at the base of Orient Heights in 1909 to be used as a playground, and the Orient Heights Yacht Club, despite a serious fire in 1901, opened in 1902 to provide one of few opportunities for water-related recreation.

The Metropolitan Improvements Plan of 1909 noted that:

East Boston is deficient in playgrounds. Wood Island Park, although large in extent, is too far removed from the settled portions of the city to be available for playground purposes. Additional playgrounds should be provided, somewhat as follows: enlarge Decatur Street playground to Maverick Street. A playground should also be provided near the junction of Putnam and Frankfort streets, on the waterfront at Central Square, and in the vicinity of Byron Street.\textsuperscript{12}
The East Boston Company was busy during the 1890's with fill operations. By now, almost all of their original dry land had been sold and in an effort to sell even more, they began extensive filling in of the flats and marshlands to which they still had title. Excess earth from the back side of Eagle Hill (around Falcon Street) was cut and used to fill both the area around Island Street (now Neptune Road) and the area between Maverick, Cottage, Porter and Orleans streets. The City assisted with this fill by dumping cinders and ashes there as well; the marshy area north of Addison Street was likewise used as a dump.

The Boston Land Company was energetically selling lots on Orient Heights. Though the Heights has been available for sale since the 1880's, there has been no rush to purchase real estate there, and only a few houses had been built on the southern slope by 1893. In 1894, the Company sent out 50,000 copies of a large colored map of the Heights to attract buyers to a auction held the second week in June. Under the large headline "Secure a Home - Stop Paying Rent," widows, orphans, poor people, speculators, as well as ordinary citizens were encouraged to attend; cooperative banks would be on hand to arrange financing; and special paragraphs in Italian, Swedish, German and French extended the sales pitch to those who did not read English. The auction was moderately successful, netting $21,448.78 in sales for north slope lots, 13 thus providing for more people to move eventually to Breed's Island.
The final bidder for Orient Heights, however, proved to be the East Boston Company, for in 1911 they bought all the remaining land in Orient Heights from the Boston Land Company, and they managed to sell almost all of the remaining lots there by the end of that year. The Bayswater area, known as Shay's Hill, was sold as one piece early in 1912 to a developer who subsequently laid out the streets, installed sewers, and sold lots for "better homes." Between 1911 and 1912, the lots on newly-filled Neptune Road were also quickly sold for house construction.

Commercial and industrial development increased after the turn of the century, responding to the presence of people seeking work at low wages, but the waterfront continued its general decline begun in the 1870's, with the railroad docks now having the major share of business. East Boston's Mystic River frontage paralleling Border Street was described in 1909:

On the East Boston Shore of the Mystic River, formerly occupied chiefly by ship yards, the uses are now largely miscellaneous; as a whole, not at all such as a deep-water frontage upon an unobstructed channel would naturally invite. There are some large and admirable equipped coal yards, and the shipbuilding industry survives in the shape of an important plant (the Atlantic Works) now devoted mainly to ship repairing -- a service in constant demand in a great port.... Both for the more immediate uses of foreign commerce and of the coastwise trade this waterfront with the present ramshackle and antiquated arrangements [should be] replaced by modern docks and wharves.
Industries on the waterfront included lumber yards, shipwrights and outfitters, dredging companies, and freight haulers.

Inland, the situation was brighter; the chief industries by 1910 consisted of foundries, boilermakers, and machine shops; garment and shoe manufacturing; and a new cotton mill (the Maverick Mills). By 1912, there was an additional factory for the manufacture of safety razors, and land had been sold to General Electric for a lamp plant and to Mead-Morrison Manufacturing for a coal handling machinery plant. These new industries employed a large percentage of low and unskilled workers, and several even offered employment to women, who had never before had jobs outside the home available in East Boston. This departure was a concern to social workers:

A community with proper regard for its own well-being will discourage low-grade industries and offer every inducement for the establishment of factories of a superior sort, that type of life based on a living wage may be assured. With the coming of the new industries, East Boston is leaving behind its early high level and committing itself to a perilous way. There can be no doubt that the present tendency, if continued, will leave the island a slum from which neither civic change nor private philanthropy will be able to release it.16

Police records for 1913 showed in East Boston about 6,200 unskilled workers, 6,000 skilled workers, 2,900 clerical workers, 150 business or professional men, and 500 unemployed or retired people.17
Something though had to be done about the waterfront's decline. Not only in East Boston, but throughout the entire Boston Harbor, the outmoded port facilities were a cause for major concern. Without overall control or an organized plan for the port, cargo tonnage was diminishing as business went elsewhere. In 1894, upon the insistence of the East Boston Company, the Massachusetts Legislature established a three man board of inquiry to investigate the possibility of public ownership and control of the wharves and docks of Boston, as well as the possibility of public ownership of all the flats not presently belonging to the city or state. Massachusetts law had previously declared that all undeveloped flats in the Commonwealth were the property of the state, but the East Boston Company was able to obtain exemption from this ruling by virtue of the 1640 proclamation which specifically stated all flats to the ordinary low water mark belonged to Noddle's Island. As owners of the island, they were owners of the flats; and since no one else had expressed interest in purchasing them, the Company was quite cheerful in 1895 when it was recommended that all remaining tidal flats should be acquired by one public agency for a major harbor development. "To the East Boston water front alone can we look for future development of such new areas of deep water wharves and docks as are needed for the monster steamships now engaged in the transatlantic service." 18 In 1897 the Harbor and Land Commissioners began negotiations for a portion of the flats at Jeffries Point, but their offer of about eleven cents a square foot was
declined as too low a price. The legislature assisted the Commis-
sioners that year, however, by passing Chapter 486 of the Acts of
1897, which authorized the Board to take certain flats upon the
east side

of East Boston for the Commonwealth. A taking
was made October 28, 1898, in conformity with
the provisions of this act of all the flats
belonging to the company lying between Jeffries
Point and Wood Island Park and extending north-
westerly from the United States Pier Head Line
to a line parallel therewith and fifteen
hundred feet distant therefrom.19

Payment for the lands thus taken was to be determined by settlement
in court of a claim for damages filed by the East Boston Company.

The claim for damages will consist practically
of three items: first, the value of the
flats actually taken; secondly, the damages
sustained by, that is the diminished value
of, the exterior flats reaching Apple Island
Channel by reason of their having been cut
off from access to the shore; and thirdly,
the damage to or diminution in Value of the
interior land and flats of the Company due
to their being cut off from access to the
harbor.20

Actual settlement of this claim took years; the suit dragged on for
one reason or another until 1914.

In the meantime, the Harbor Commissioners began to project seaport
developments onto the flats so that they would have a thoroughly
reasoned plan of action ready if and when the Legislature got
around to making appropriations for implementation. Plans for
seaport development of necessity had to encompass rail networks
and highway location, however, so the problem of port decline spurred an early plan for the metropolitan district, published in 1909 by the Massachusetts Commission on Metropolitan Improvements. There, the condition of the port of Boston was succinctly stated: "No one versed in sound construction can visit the dock terminals of Boston without realizing that they are in the main the product of haphazard and patchwork policy, -- largely unworthy of the port, and unsafe for present and prospective passenger and freight business." 21 After examining the existing highway, railroad, and seaport conditions of the metropolitan area, the plan proposed a major industrial center for the East Boston flats.

We find on the flats between East Boston and Winthrop, north of Wood Island Park, an area that is susceptible of most satisfactory ultimate development as a manufacturing district. A tentative layout is indicated on the drawing as well as a secondary development on the northerly half of the peninsula of new pier frontage, the southerly half of which becomes an extension of the present Boston and Albany terminal. The ultimate development suggested provides for the maintenance of open water off Wood Island Park to the Winthrop shore, thus continuing a desirable feature of the park. 22

The plan also called for the construction of a circumferential railway to run the entire length of Border and Condor streets, connecting with both the Grand Junction and Boston and Albany lines. Advantages of the plan as proposed were: the proximity to existing rail connections, which could easily be extended to serve the flats area; the existing East Boston labor pool, which would
be housed in "model tenements" on the upland; and the convenient connection to Boston which could be made via the Boston, Revere Beach and Lynn Railroad if that narrow gauge line were converted to standard gauge, electrified, and extended with a tunnel under the harbor to Boston proper. The chief disadvantage foreseen was the necessity of dredging a channel nearly three miles long out to the deep water of President Roads in order that ships might reach the proposed docks. No mention was made of the possible detrimental effect such a massive installation might have on the recreational quality of Wood Island Park on the residential neighborhoods of East Boston and Winthrop.

Some contemporary improvements on the railroad piers were applauded by the port planners. The Boston and Albany tracks and piers had been leased a few years before to the New York Central Railroad on the provision that the B&A would undertake extensive improvements upon the property. They were called upon to build more than they had bargained for, though, as a disastrous fire seriously damaged the existing warehouses and docks. More spacious piers were built as replacements, and the one million bushel grain elevator erected at that time, instead of being wood frame, was built of fire resistant materials. The Metropolitan Improvements Commission noted: "It is evidently the intention of the railroad to make this new construction slow burning, - a step of some novelty and marking an advance in dock building in Boston.""
Residents of East Boston benefitted immensely from two transportation improvements made around the turn of the century. The first was an early example of community pressure successfully combatting formidable opposition: the railroads were made to abolish the grade crossings of their tracks and city streets. Change did not happen overnight, however; an 1894 report summarized the situation to date:

The people of East Boston, through the Citizen's Trade Association, have been at work for twenty years seeking relief from the Chinese Well of railroad tracks which runs through the center part of that city. As far back as 1874, the City Council, through Mayor Cobb, petitioned the Legislature for the passage of an act changing the location of the Eastern and Boston and Albany Railroad Corporations. ...(The bill was killed in the Senate by the railroad lobby.) In 1892, the Rapid Transit Commission...reported for relocation of the railroad tracks in East Boston, and submitted a plan showing how it might be done.24

Neither this nor any other plan was adopted for another ten years.

The East Boston Company, recognizing the potential for improving the value of its own lands, joined in the fight for grade separated crossings; and as it reported in 1903, when the railroads were finally ordered into action:

Ten years ago this company, realizing that these crossings were a serious menace to life and safety and an impediment to the growth of this part of the city, took an active part in the effort in securing the abolition of grade crossings along the one and one-half mile of track occupied by the Boston and Albany and the Boston and Maine Railroad companies in East Boston, so as to permit the residents thereof to
cross in safety, and to bring into commercial 
use the large and valuable area of upland, 
marsh and flats lying to the eastward of 
the railroad and belonging to this company. 
... This plan provides for a depression of 
the Boston and Albany tracks, and the raising 
of Sumner, Maverick, Porter, Prescott, 
Saratoga, Bremen and Curtis streets. A 
footbridge is provided over Webster Street, 
and a part of Marginal and Clyde streets 
is discontinued.25

Under the terms of the agreement, the railroads were to pay 50% of 
the cost, the State of Massachusetts to pay 30%, and the City of 
Boston, the remaining 20% of the estimated one million dollars 
which would be required to eliminate the dangerous intersections. 
Work was completed within the next two years.

The other transportation breakthrough also materialized in 1905; 
a rapid transit tunnel under the harbor was completed, ending East 
Boston's total dependence on the ferry service; it too, was the 
achievement of years of talk. As far back as 1868 plans had been 
discussed for a bridge to East Boston, and the Army Corps of Engineers 
had then advised the construction of a tunnel instead. In 1892 the 
Boston City Engineer reported on a tunnel with a 27 foot roadway and 
a maximum grade of 4%; the City sought permission from the Legislature 
to borrow outside its debt limit the money necessary to build the 
proposal. Delay after delay followed, and the entire project had to 
wait until the Supreme Judicial Court authorized the Rapid Transit 
Commission to construct the tunnel and link it with surface street 
railways. By 1900, work on the $2.7 million dollar project had
begun and was progressing at the rate of five feet a day. The Boston terminus was at the bottom of State Street (now Aquarium station):

The construction of importance is the station opening near the junction of State Street and Atlantic Avenue. The three massive walls that rise from a depth of sixty feet to within about eighteen inches of the street surface are the finest specimens of concrete work to be found in New England.26

Tunnel work was completed late in 1904, but it was not until 1905 that Atlantic station was finished; in that first year over ten million people utilized the tunnel, while over seven million continued to ride the ferry.27 By 1914, seventeen million people a year were riding rapid transit from East Boston; twenty million traveled via the Boston, Revere Beach and Lynn Railroad; and six million crossed the harbor on the public ferries.28

East Boston still lacked a tunnel or bridge suitable for handling freight shipments. The Boston Transit Commission in 1908 proposed a teaming tunnel, with elevators (not inclines) at either end; the Transit Commission and the Board of Railroad Commissioners restudied the problem in 1909. These two groups again considered the question in 1911, this time investigating the possibility of a bridge since it was felt that animal power would soon be replaced by widespread use of mechanical power and the design of a tunnel should wait until motor vehicles were more common. In 1920, another joint board, this one composed of the Division of Waterways
and Public Lands of the Department of Public Works and the Boston Transit Authority, advocated the construction of a tunnel for motorized transportation only, and in 1925 preliminary plans for a suspension bridge across the harbor were published; nothing came of any of these studies.\(^{29}\) It would be another decade before a vehicular tunnel would be provided to connect Boston and East Boston.

Since the 1833 plan of Samuel Lewis, East Boston had been allowed to grow when and as market conditions dictated; houses, factories or whatever were built without reference to an overall framework, and by 1915 the need for more organized planning was felt. George Gibbs, Jr., Special Investigator for the City Planning Board, prepared "A Survey and Comprehensive Plan" for East Boston which assessed the present situation and recommended some major changes. These recommendations can be grouped into three categories: industrial, railroad and port development; traffic-oriented street improvements; and recreation and park facilities.

Gibbs' proposal for the waterfront was a hybrid of several plans that had been advanced by the Metropolitan Improvements Commission and the Port Directors during the last decade. He observed:

> The entire boundary of East Boston lies along salt water and can be developed for commercial or other purposes in a way to profit by waterfront advantages. The improvement of the waterfront has already been extended to include much of the south, west and north shores of Noddle's Island, two-thirds of
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 1915

CHARLESTOWN

BOSTON

Residential
Institutional
Open Space
Industrial
Railroad
Commercial

scale in feet
0 1600 3200 4800

north
the shore being already established for commercial and industrial purposes, while the east side is as yet practically unimproved. Breed's Island shores are as yet undeveloped and are of limited value, as they are approached by a relatively narrow and shallow channel that would be costly to improve, and as they lie fairly remote from the city harbor activities. The shores of Breed's Island have been reserved for commercial purposes by the owners, the East Boston Company, and most of the remaining shores of Noddle's Island are now being considered for a large waterfront development under state, city and private initiative. The state must in the near future determine upon a plan to develop the great area of flats and frontage now largely under state control.30

The plan Gibbs advocated elaborates on the 1909 Metropolitan Improvements design, with more warehouses and fewer piers provided at the expense of Wood Island Park's shoreline. A freight railroad extension and tunnel harbor crossing to South Boston were also proposed to provide a direct connection to freight operations there, and generous sites for industrial development were laid out with good access to these rail lines.

Transit and street improvements necessary to serve this vast development on the flats were devised as well, the most prominent of these being centered around Maverick Square. Under Gibbs' plan, the Square would be enlarged to Orleans Street and would serve as a rapid transit terminal for an extension of the subway under Meridian Street to Chelsea and along a new diagonal street to the
Boston Revere Beach and Lynn Railroad; a terminal for the teaming tunnel under the harbor; and a market place beneath an arcaded building constructed over the Boston and Albany tracks. Diagonal streets radiating from this transportation hub would extend to the Marginal Street piers and to the revised recreational development to the east. Various other streets would be widened or extended across new land.

The recreation proposals of Gibbs' scheme are a response to East Boston's chronic dearth of parks and playgrounds. Aside from Wood Island Park, the two largest green spots in East Boston were the two cemeteries which, as Gibbs noted, "form valuable open spaces for light and air and possible vegetation to break the monotony of the buildings, but under the present system of crowding in heterogeneous collections of memorial stones, they do not tend toward beauty and are hardly available except as burial places." Gibbs believed that Wood Island Park occupied land that was far more valuable for industrial uses; he sought to preserve and extend the desirable recreational features of Wood Island by sacrificing its present waterfront to industry, building instead a larger facility with a Fens-like tidal pool; playing fields, boat house and dock, bath house, swimming beach and miscellaneous parklands that would extend from the base of Jeffries Point to the present Bayswater area. This major park development would also serve as a buffer zone between the residential sections and the huge port complex projected for the flats; Gibbs even thought about the boundary between the two:
As protection against the noise and the undesirable view of the large area designed for use of freight yards east of the park, a row of tall warehouses or freight houses along the proposed extension of Jeffries Street would doubtless be of much value, and the need for such buildings should be urged upon the Board of Port Directors. The presence of the great freight yards may become a serious detriment to the park if steam engines are continued in use, but it seems fair to suppose that by the time the yards are developed other means of locomotion will be adopted, and then the presence of so large an area of comparatively open space may prove advantageous rather than objectionable.32

Other smaller parks were also proposed: a public waterfront pier and mini-park at Central Square, where the North Ferry, combined with the Chelsea Ferry, could dock; a new park in the center of Eagle Square; and another in the intersection of Bennington, Saratoga, and Breman Streets; a beach at the northwest corner of Border and Condor streets; conversion of the Eagle Hill Reservoir, which was already becoming an obsolete portion of the water system, into a local park; closing off a portion of Paris Street and landscaping it with trees and play equipment; new playgrounds for Pope Street, the flats behind the Jewish Cemetery, the top of Orient Heights, the west edge of Orient Heights, Austin Street; a recreation pier at the north end of Eagle Hill; and a larger development on Governor's Island.

Governor's Island is now owned by the United States but is loaned to the Boston Parks and Recreation Department. It is barren and desolate, and of little use to the city in its present condition. If attached to East Boston as proposed in the port development, it can be made a fairly useful park, but as it is necessarily isolated and far removed
from any possible residential district, it might well be made a national marine reservation, to be used in part by the United States, and in part as a quasi public park space.  

Apple Island was also listed as a potential recreation area, though no specific plans were made for its utilization.
CHAPTER VI. POPULATION STABILIZATION AND PHYSICAL DECAY 1915-1940

During the years from 1915 to 1940, East Boston had its greatest number of inhabitants, going from 62,377 in 1915 to a peak of 64,069 in 1925, then declining to 56,928 in 1940, only slightly more people than lived there in 1910. These fluctuations correspond roughly to the changes experienced over the same time by the whole of Boston, yet East Boston began to lose population before the city total declined. Immigration to the United States, which reached its maximum, was reduced considerably by World War I, then rose once again briefly in the 1920's before quota restrictions became law in 1926.

Limits on immigration had long been sought by a Boston-based group, the Immigration Restriction League. The Irish who arrived in the 1840's and 1850's were disliked by the native Yankees for their religious beliefs and alien culture; they at least, though, were not too dissimilar from the predominantly English racial stock of most New Englanders, and the Irish also spoke English. As immigration increased in the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, the kind of people arriving on ships from Europe shifted. From Irish and Northern
Europeans, it changed to Russians, Poles and Italians who looked, acted and spoke in ways quite foreign to the upper-class Yankees, and a number of them began to feel threatened by the sheer numbers of newcomers. In the 1880's three Harvard graduates banded together to seek legal means of curbing this rapid influx of people, and they formed the Immigration Restriction League. Their mission attracted widespread support, both financial and influential, from leading New England business, governmental and professional men of English descent. One of the League's champions, Senator Lodge of Massachusetts, summed up its attitude in an 1896 speech before Congress in which he argued for a literacy test to limit immigration.

The illiteracy test will bear most heavily upon the Italians, Russians, Poles, Hungarians, Greeks and Asians, and very lightly, or not at all, upon English-speaking emigrants or Germans, Scandinavians, and French. In other words, the races most affected by the literacy test are those whose emigration to this country has begun within the last twenty years and swelled rapidly to enormous proportions, raced with which the English-speaking people have never hitherto assimilated, and who are most alien to the great body of the people of the United States.... The races which would suffer most seriously by exclusion under the proposed bill furnish the immigrants who do not go to the West or South, where immigration is needed but who remain on the Atlantic Seaboard, where immigration is not needed and where their presence is most injurious and undesirable.1

In Lodge's view, not only were these foreigners the chief inhabitants of big city slums, but also they were responsible for lowering the American worker's standard of living, posing a severe threat to
United States society:

Statistics show that the change in the race character of our immigration has been accompanied by a corresponding decline in its quality. The number of skilled mechanics and of persons trained to some occupation or pursuit has fallen off, while the number of those without occupation or training ... has risen in our recent immigration to enormous proportions. This low, unskilled labor is the most deadly enemy of the American wage earner, and does more than anything else toward lowering his wages and forcing down his standard of living... The injury of unrestricted to American wages is bad enough, but the danger which this immigration threatens to the quality of our citizenship is far worse.... Russians, Hungarians, Poles, Bohemians, Italians, Greeks, and even Asiatics, whose immigration to America was almost unknown twenty years ago, have during the last twenty years poured in, in steadily increasing numbers, until now they nearly equal the immigration of those races kindred in blood or speech, or both, by whom the United States has hitherto been built up and the American people formed.2

Such impassioned arguments as these struck a sympathetic note with many legislators, and in 1897 Congress passed a literacy test act, only to have it vetoed by President Cleveland, who dismissed arguments for immigration restrictions by reminding Congress: "It is said ... that the quality of recent immigration is undesirable. The time is quite within recent memory when the same thing was said of immigrants, who, with their descendants, are now numbered among our best citizens."3
The desire for controls, however, could not be permanently denied, and in 1926 quotas were established to restrict most non-European immigration. By the 1930's the effect of restrictions could be seen in inner city neighborhoods, like East Boston, which had served as way stations along the road to prosperity for many immigrants; the successful continued to move out to suburban communities, but they were no longer replaced by more recent arrivals from the North End. There was no need for additional housing and with the Depression there was no money to build any or to repair existing structures. An observer in 1935 reported that "large portions of the present residential area is (sic) in the worst squalid condition.... The three story wooden tenement type is predominant, built in congested rows with the usual view of unsightly rear balconies used as service areas. The living conditions are therefore far from satisfactory, a large part of the population being housed in these tenements." 4

By 1940 one out of six dwelling units in East Boston was classified as being in need of major repairs; only one out of every three dwelling units had a private bath. The census also showed that nearly two-thirds of the homes were built before 1900 and nearly all built since 1920 were constructed in the Orient Heights or Day Square neighborhoods. Jeffries Point was the most overcrowded section in all of Boston; while the area east of Porter, Maverick and Orleans streets had a density of 471.7 persons per acre, compared
to an average density of 203.4 for East Boston and 94.5 for the whole of Boston. 5

There was some physical progress made in other areas, however. The much-studied and long-awaited harbor crossing connecting Boston and East Boston finally materialized with the construction of a $19 million vehicular tunnel in 1931-34. Named for General Sumner, founder of the East Boston Company, it was opened 101 years after he began the development of Noddle's Island. On the East Boston side, the tunnel surfaced between London and Havre streets, just one block from Central Square; at the Boston end, it came up at the market area. Though the ferry continued in service, its importance as a transportation link diminished considerably.

A larger project shaped up on the flats behind Jeffries Point, the site the state began acquiring in 1898. More flats were purchased in 1915, and fill operations began to create an area of dry land behind the constructed bulkheads. Upon the urging of the Boston Chamber of Commerce, the State Legislature in 1922 enacted a bill, "authorizing the construction of an airfield on the reclaimed flats at East Boston (appropriating) for that purpose $35,000 which subsequently was supplemented by $15,000 raised by the Chamber from individuals who believed in the future of commercial aviation." 6 These gentlemen were not idle speculators; airplanes had proven themselves as reliable transportation devices in World War I, so
it was only a matter of time before the non-military uses of aircraft would be exploited. Thanks to Massachusetts' lack of initiative in building port facilities in East Boston, the partially filled flats there were conveniently available when the state began to think about airport construction. By the summer of 1923, the field was ready for use; it featured two landing strips, 1500 feet by 200 feet, and three corrugated metal hangars on 189 acres of land. In 1928 the City of Boston acquired a twenty year lease from the state, and the Parks department operated the field as Boston Municipal Airport.* Under city administration there came into being masonry hangars, aprons, access roads, boundary lights and a pretentious terminal building; the city expended over $1.5 million for improvements, and the state relocated the National Guard hangar there. In 1930 Boston Municipal was said to be one of the finest fields on the Atlantic Coast.

Scheduled passenger service began in 1929, when Colonial Airlines, flying Ford Tri-Motor planes, offered two round-trips daily between Boston and New York. Colonial was succeeded in 1935 by American Airlines; their expanded service had eight round trips daily between Boston and New York, with intermediate stops at Hartford and New

* The East Boston Company, after 95 years of existence, also ended in 1928. Its scant remaining lands in East Boston and Revere were bought out by the Boston Port Development Company.
Haven. At the same time, National Airways was flying to points north: Manchester, Concord, White River Junction, Montpelier, Burlington, Portland, Bangor, and Bar Harbor.  

Other waterfront businesses were about the same as in 1915: Bethlehem Dry Docks and the Boston and Albany docks (with Cunard and Leyland Lines transatlantic piers) on the south; coal yards, lumber yards and such on the west edge; and ship repair, some manufacturing and oil storage along Chelsea Creek on the north. The pattern of small local stores at intersections of streets in residential sections was firmly established; these scattered shopping outlets supplemented the main shopping district from Maverick Square to Central Square along Meridian Street. A new commercial venture on the flats of East Boston and Revere, behind Orient Heights, began in the late 1930's: Suffolk Downs Race Track, one of the first horse tracks in Massachusetts.

Civic facilities expanded only slightly. One new fire station was built in 1924 on Jeffries Point, bringing the total number of stations to five, plus one fire engine boat docked near the ferry. The city-operated George R. White Health Unit at the corner of Emmons and Parris Street, was opened in 1925, and there was a privately-owned hospital run on White Street by Dr. James H. Strong. A new branch of the Boston Public Library on Barnes Street provided library services for the Orient Heights Section.
Public schools increased in number. A large new high school was built on the site of the Reservoir atop Eagle Hill in 1925, and three other new schools were built; Daniel Webster, and Donald McKay in the Paris Street region. Wood Island Park was renamed World War Memorial Park. Recreation facilities, however, did not increase although the need for them remained great, particularly for younger children's playgrounds.

This need is especially strong in that area lying north of Saratoga Street (Eagle Hill) where solid blocks of wooden houses occupy practically the entire area. The playgrounds for the old children are better distributed, there being three well placed in the district.

... There are several small open spaces, rather sparsely planted and a small undeveloped reservation on Orient Heights.11

East Boston's religious community underwent a period of considerable change. By 1935 there were sixteen Protestant churches, eight Roman Catholic churches, and two Jewish synagogues, but the Protestant churches were not nearly as strong as their numbers would indicate. Quite a few of these were immigrant-oriented congregations, offering services in the native tongue of the immigrants, and not surprisingly, most were Italian: Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Lazarus were both Italian Roman Catholic; the Italian Congregational Church, Immanuel Italian Luthern, and St. Paul's Italian Methodist served Protestant immigrants. There was also St. John the Baptist Church for Portugese Roman Catholics; and Our Savior's Norwegian Lutheran for Scandinavian immigrants and seamen. Several of the non-Catholic churches, faced with vastly diminished congregations and dwindling
coffers, sold their large church buildings and moved to smaller quarters, combined with another church, or disappeared altogether. All Soul's Universalist moved from Central Square up to White Street; Saratoga Street Methodist and Meridian Street Methodist reunited to form Union Methodist Church, leaving the large 800 seat Saratoga Street church to St. Paul's Italian Methodist; Congregation Beth David Synagogue on Paris Court, along with a Hebrew School on Chelsea Street, had closed by 1940. Social Services for transients or residents were provided by the Lutheran Seamen's Home, at 9-11 Henry Street; the Methodist Home for Immigrant Girls, on Marginal Street; and the Immigrants Home at 109-111 Webster Street, as well as the existing St. Mary's House and Chapel on Marginal.
CHAPTER VII. THE RECENT PAST 1940-1972

The chronicle of East Boston's development over the last thirty-two years can be summarized in two words: Logan Airport. During this period, when population was declining and physical deterioration advancing, the airfield that was Boston Municipal passed back into State control, changed its name, and embarked on a period of expansion as the demand for air transportation grew until it reached the size it has today, comprising about two-thirds of the land area of East Boston.

In 1940, though, it was still Boston Municipal, an adequate, well-equipped airfield that was not exceptional for the time.

By 1941, Boston had come to a full realization that its airport, by reason of its geographic location, offered all the possibilities of an international air capital. Thus, seven years before the City of Boston's lease was due to expire, the Legislature directed the transfer of the Airport to the Massachusetts Department of Public Works for expansion and development. Under the terms of the transfer, the City was reimbursed for its participation in the development.1

Boston received over a million dollars for the improvements it had made while the Airport was under its control. With the State now
in charge, the tempo of construction and expansion increased dramatically. The last two existing harbor islands near East Boston, Govenor's Island and Apple Island, were acquired; Fort Winthrop was demolished (a stone from it is now incorporated in the wall of Logan's terminal buildings) and the considerable hill of Govenor's Island was leveled for fill material. Bulkheads were built defining the outlines of the new airport land, and rocks and earth from miles away were trucked in in huge loads; more fill was pumped by hydraulic machinery from the harbor floor. By 1948 the Airport had over 2000 acres of land, most of it man-made through the expenditure of nearly $50 million. Longer, wider concrete runways were poured and new terminal facilities were planned. Boston Municipal Airport was no more; the name was changed to the General Edward Lawrence Logan International Airport.

A by-product of all this construction activity was mounting debts and operational expenses; as the Chamber of Commerce described it, "the Airport was mired in a morass of red ink. Here were all the potentialities of a truly great air dome; here was the opportunity for Boston to regain some of its navigational supremacy it had lost on the high seas." Setting the precedent for ten years in the future, the decision was made in 1948 to shift jurisdiction of Logan from the Department of Public Works to a State Airport Management Board. The new board consisted of five men, who served for no pay, chosen for being "outstanding civic leaders, successful
in their own right, whose collective professional and business acumen must eventually remove the Airport from the shoulders of the taxpayer." The system worked. Within three years, there was no longer an annual deficit but rather a new profit of nearly $100,000. Glowing reports hailed Logan as "a cornerstone to the welfare and prosperity available to the entire region."4

The growth rate slowed but did not cease during the 1950's. Expensive new hangars and terminals were erected, and the approach light pier extending out into the harbor was built and equipped with high intensity lights. Another management change was contemplated in 1957; the Legislature appointed a special task force to study the feasibility of creating a governing Authority to supervise the operation of Logan Airport, all activities of the Port of Boston Commission, the Mystic River Bridge and the Sumner Tunnel. A majority of the committee reported favorably for the creation of such a unified authority, although the actual legislation did not adhere strictly to these recommendations. In 1958, the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority was given responsibility for the Sumner Tunnel and ordered to begin immediately on the construction of a parallel tube; and in 1959 the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport) was created and given jurisdiction over the Mystic River Bridge, the seaport facilities, and Logan International Airport. Massport, set up as a semi-autonomous public authority with power to improve and
maintain the facilities under its control, was to reimburse the Commonwealth and the Mystic River Bridge Authority for the developments thus acquired from them, using revenues generated by the airport, bridge and seaport.

In 1949-50 a freeway exchange at the airport entrance, intended to become a link in the now-abandoned inner belt system, was completed, and additional construction in the 1960's extended the East Boston Expressway through the center of the community on to Revere and beyond, providing good connections for North Shore residents to the Sumner Tunnel. The second harbor tunnel, a two-lane vehicular tube names the Callahan tunnel, opened for traffic on Veteran's Day 1961, made it easier than ever to travel by car to the airport, now in a state of enlargement. Runways were extended and widened, more terminal buildings, hangars and parking structures were built, fill operations around the edges continued, and a 26 story control tower rose to survey the expanding domain. Traffic into the airport has increased many times over: from 3.5 million passengers in 1962, the count rose to over 10 million passengers in 1972, making Logan the world's eighth busiest airport.

The mention of Massport elicits strong feelings, especially from the people of East Boston who watched it grow and now wonder where it will stop. On the one hand, Massport is to be commended for its efficient promotion and management of the airport's operations,
even though the Authority is not a totally beneficient organization. It has balked (with legal dodges) at compensating the State for the facilities it acquired and now runs; by using toll revenues from the bridge as bond surety, it has gained a top credit rating from investment brokers but has denied (probably forever) the possibility that the Mystic River Bridge will ever become free, as indeed it was intended to become after the original construction bonds were paid off. Massport has also proved to be a haughty, difficult neighbor, concealing plans for expansion and remaining aloof and unreasonable at times when it could act otherwise. It comes as no surprise that residents of East Boston now regard the Port's every move with utmost suspicion and distrust.

Real friction between the community and the airport stems from about 1967, when noisy jet aircraft came into general use. Propeller-driven craft were a nuisance, but their engine noise and exhaust emissions were trivial compared to the ear-shattering sounds that jets create. In the summer of 1967 a petition to the Governor, the U. S. Senators representing Massachusetts, and the Secretary of the Department of Transportation was signed by over 18,000 people from

* The possibility that Massport would act precisely as it now is was raised in the Minority Report of the 1957 Commission. This minority opposed the amalgamation of bridge, tunnel, seaport and airport into one Authority and raised specific objection to the "give-away" of these facilities, whose loss to the State would represent far more than the amount of compensation to be paid for them. Using toll revenues generated by the Mystic River Bridge to finance Construction at Logan was also thoroughly condemned.\(^5\)
East Boston, Winthrop and Revere; they were requesting some controls on noise and pollution from Logan. Senator Edward Kennedy held a hearing on airport-generated noise in February 1968, which spurred some acoustical investigation of the problem by experts and some noise abatement procedures for the airport by operations administration. During the next year or so, Logan attempted to hold down the noise by modifying approach and take-off regulations, shifting runway usage when possible, prohibiting night maintenance run-ups on jet engines, and restricting training flights. In the summer of 1968, however, the residents of East Boston stages a "baby carriage blockade" on Maverick Street, halting the trucks loaded with fill for the Bird Island Flats area; drivers were thereafter instructed to drive slowly (15 mph) and quietly, avoiding ear-grating gear shifts. Massport has since constructed an access road across its own property to take trucks off East Boston streets.

Technology has assisted with pollution control efforts. The aircraft manufacturers have developed quieter engines and roomier planes so that fewer craft are required to transport more people; emissions controls can reduce both visible and invisible jet exhausts. All this improvement still leaves East Boston a noisy place and does nothing to allay the resident's fears of a plane crash as the big silver birds swoop low over houses and schools during take-offs and landings. Those sections of town in direct alignment with major
runways are within noise zones that make them unacceptable for residential land use. Noise levels are determined by the Noise Exposure Forecast (NEF) which measures "the noisiness of a single aircraft sound, related to individual subjective response." It is computed by taking the effective perceived noise level and adding factors for frequency of occurrence, time of day, and aircraft track and profile. The resulting NEF value has implications for land use: a NEF under 30 is not considered harmful for any use, although hospitals, schools, churches and other places of assembly may require acoustical insulation; a NEF between 30 and 40 makes an area not desirable for uninsulated schools, residences and places of assembly; a NEF over 40 denotes places acceptable only for outdoor recreation, selected commercial and some industrial uses. Most all of East Boston lies within the 30-40 NEF contour, with sizable sections in the over 40 range.7

Airport expansion caused changes in the recreation facilities of East Boston, changes that resulted from Logan's acquisition of Wood Island Park in 1966. This move had been contemplated since the end of World War II; an observer in 1947 noted that: "World War Memorial Park and play field, taken over by the Army during the war and since unused because of its immanent (sic) incorporation into the airport, is badly deteriorated. Limited use is planned for this summer."8 Facilities then in the 86 acre park included tennis courts, baseball
diamonds, volleyball and basketball courts, a running track and football field, bath house, field house, a bandshell, picnic areas, walks and trees. It was proposed to replace all of this with two smaller parks, one to be built between the airport access roads which would have a 15,000 seat stadium, tennis and bocci courts, a swimming pool, two baseball diamonds, a quarter-mile track and football fields, field house and children's play areas; the other park to be a 34 acre beach and playfield near Orient Heights, which could only be constructed if pollution from sewerage outlets could be controlled. During the 1950's these two parks were indeed built, and in 1966 Wood Island Park disappeared into a runway extension. The actual taking of the Park was a severe psychological blow to East Boston; the two "replacement" parks were considered by no one to be equivalent to the lost Wood Island Park. Community outrage at the airport for destroying the athletic facilities and well-used country park grounds that were on Wood Island continues to this day. Wood Island has become symbolic of Massport's power to destroy the residential areas of East Boston.

Logan's recent expansion and the advent of jet airplanes have done nothing to enhance the residential desireability of East Boston, but the population had already begun to decline before airport usage switched into high gear. East Boston had 56,928 inhabitants in 1940; that number had dropped to 39,800 by 1970. There has been virtually no new residential construction aside from the Maverick Federal
Housing, 414 apartments built in 1942 between New, Maverick, Sumner, and Havre Streets, and the Orient Heights Public Housing, 354 family units built in 1955 on the north edge of the hill. Many houses in every neighborhood except Day Square and Orient Heights were well below average city standards. The City Planning Department in 1950 classified 375 acres (almost one half) of East Boston in need of renewal and 360 acres in need of selective replacement and repairs; only South Boston and Roxbury were considered to have more acreage in need or renewal. The 1950 Federal census of housing reported 45.5% of Jeffries Point units to be substandard (no private bath, no running water and/or dilapidated condition), while 77.2% of dwelling units in areas east of Porter and Maverick streets were similarly classified. 10

The situation had not improved much by 1961. The Boston Redevelopment Authority's General Neighborhood Renewal Plan that year surveyed all sections of East Boston except Day Square and Orient Heights and found only 2.1% of the residential structures in satisfactory condition, 48.3% needed minor repairs, 39.6 needed major repairs, and 10% were classified as dilapidated. The report, published in 1965, estimated that 9,000 of the existing 9,500 dwelling units in the General Neighborhood Renewal Plan area needed rehabilitation. 11 Industrial and commercial buildings were hardly better preserved; the same GNRP survey judged fewer than 10% of commercial buildings and less than 5% of industrial structures to be in good condition.
Decreased population meant reduced demand for public schools; this, combined with a shift toward parochial schooling for Catholic children, allowed the city to sell some public school buildings it no longer needed. In the 1940's, the Paul Jones School became Don Bosco Trade School for Boys, a parochial institution; Good Will House acquired the former Plummer School on Jeffries Point; and a primary school on Princeton Street became first a VFW post, then a rest home. One school, Curtis Guild, was expanded, and another on Orient Heights was built new, Bradley Elementary, constructed in 1958 to accommodate the increased number of children from the nearby housing project. A study by the BRA and the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1962 recommended abandonment by 1970 of the Joseph Barnes (1901), Chapman (1900), John Cheverus (1909), Theodore Lyman (1871), and Philip Sheridan (1914) schools because of their inadequate facilities or poor condition; plans are now well underway for construction of the Barnes Replacement School on the waterfront, but the other schools remain in use.

The Don Orione Brothers, a Catholic fraternal order, began their complex of buildings atop Orient Heights in 1953; they have since expanded with a large shrine to Our Lady and a chapel as well as their modern retirement home. The parochial schools and Catholic churches have continued as strong community forces while the Protestant and Jewish congregations have struggles to stay alive. Most of the
immigrant-oriented institutions changed their functions or disappeared completely: the Methodist Home for Immigrant Girls and St. Mary's House and Chapel for Sailors became social centers during World War II, as did the large Maverick Congregational Church building at Central Square; Our Savior's Norwegian Lutheran Church became Our Savior's American Lutheran Church. All Soul's Universalist Church ceased to exist and their building on White Street was acquired by the Baptists, who moved from Trenton Street. Evangelical denominations moved into other church buildings or built anew: the East Boston Gospel Hall on Putnam Street; the First Pentecostal Holiness Church of East Boston in the former Swedish Lutheran Church on Saratoga; and the Central Assembly of God on Bennington in the former Immanuel Italian Lutheran building. Two other sites of former Protestant church buildings can still be seen on Eagle Hill; the former Italian Methodist Church site is now a bowling alley and the old Trenton Street Baptist site is a vacant warehouse. The final remains of the Jewish community which had lived in East Boston continued to worship at Congregation Ohel Jacob Synagogue on Paris Street (until it burned early in 1973) "in order to maintain burial rights in Montvale Cemetery at Woburn."¹²

The last seven years have seen a rebirth of civic organizations advocating for all East Bostonians. Recognition of serious community needs for schools, parks and housing, along with growing concern over Logan's expansion, caused the Most Holy Redeemer Parish Council
to begin pushing city and state officials for cooperation in addressing these long-standing problems. Bureaucratic response to their appeals was hardly noticeable at first, though persistence on the part of the Parish Council and changed political administrations in city hall and the statehouse led to some breakthroughs with Parks and Recreation in 1968: a portable swimming pool was provided that summer and serious work begun for a permanent swimming facility. The East Boston Recreation Advisory Council, created in September 1968 to serve as the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Council, appealed for the acquisition of waterfront properties for parks, and one parcel at the foot of Jeffries Point was taken by eminent domain in 1969. The Mayor broke ground in 1970 for the year-round indoor-outdoor swimming pool on Paris Street.¹³

Church groups, school committees, neighborhood civic associations and community-wide organizations have worked jointly to accomplish the many improvements needed in East Boston. Mayor White has been cooperative and support has come from the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Boston Redevelopment Authority. East Boston now has a city planner and urban designer assigned to work with their community groups; assistance has also been given by students from Harvard University, Wellesley College, and MIT. At the community's request, an East Bostonian, Father Albert J. Sallese, was appointed by Governor Sargent to Massport's seven man Board of Directors; the U. S. Office of Economic Opportunity has funded the
East Boston Community Development Corporation to undertake development for the community's benefit. The East Boston Little City Hall, staffed by local residents, has not only brought official services closer to the area but also served as spokesman on issues facing the entire community.

Civic action has proved effective in bringing about radical re-design of a private waterfront housing project, encouraging the refurnishing of existing parks, defeating an airport proposal for parallel runway construction, advocating for additional playgrounds, getting a new community school designed to suit the neighborhood's needs, setting design criteria for 300 units of elderly and family housing at Maverick Square. This list of accomplishments will doubtless be extended as present projects, like lobbying for relief from airport noise and expansionist programs, conversion of scattered vacant lots into mini-parks, and establishing a continuous chain of public facilities and walks around the entire waterfront, become realities.

Long years of neglect have left serious scars in East Boston, and the fight to overcome physical decay and community apathy is by no means won. Complex problems of land use have yet to be resolved, the most important being centered around Logan Airport and its auxiliary facilities: warehouses, oil storage tanks and pipelines, parking structures, and the third harbor crossing. The fate of the last salt water marsh in the city of Boston, lying on either
side of Belle Island Inlet, and the future of the old Boston and
Albany docks depend in part on how far the Port will be permitted
to go in pursuing its unbounded plans for off-shore oil depots
and containerized freight developments. The most capable leadership,
backed up by general community support, will be needed to insure
that East Boston will survive as a home for 40,000 people.
CHAPTER VIII SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

East Boston's physical development generally fits the pattern of inner city neighborhoods of older United States cities. What were originally single family houses became multi-family dwellings as newcomers to city life, either from rural communities or from foreign lands, moved in and became urban Americans: what were initially choice industrial sites lost their importance as the demands of industry shifted. Densely built structures declined in quality as they got older, becoming increasingly inadequate. One has only to examine South Boston, Charlestown, or Chelsea to see the same process evident in East Boston working there with similar results.

A look back on the last 140 years of development in East Boston, however, reveals several recurring sets of issues in addition to the common inner city phenomena which have confronted the community almost from the start. The responses at various times to these issues have been quite different, yet the fundamental core of the problems remains largely unchanged, and it is reasonable to assume that their effect on community development will continue in the future.
The first set of issues centers around the presence of a large tract of land under the control of an absentee landlord. A geographic quirk, the existence of considerable acres of flats lying off the southeast edge of Noddle's Island, combined with the scarcity of land near the heart of Boston, insured that eventually those flats would be filled and used. The East Boston Company, who first obtained title to them by citing the 1640 decision that declared all flats to the ordinary low water mark were part of the island, saw the potential there for creating a large area of dry land, yet they never undertook the fill operations necessary to make useable acreage. When the State of Massachusetts wanted to purchase the flats in 1899, it was a relief to the East Boston Company to find a buyer for this soggy ground; the Company has sold virtually all of its other real estate in East Boston and had lost its original vigor for undertaking development long before it expired in 1928. Massachusetts, however, was also not energetic in converting its acquisitions into port facilities, even though the Port Directors evolved elaborate and monstrous proposals showing how the land could be used. The Port of Boston might be losing business to other costal metropolitan areas, but there were more pressing obligations for the state to pursue than rescuing faltering docks and piers in Boston harbor.

Thus the flats lay virtually unchanged until 1922 when the Boston Chamber of Commerce began agitating for construction of an airfield.
Site selection centered immediately on the East Boston flats, the largest state-owned parcel convenient to downtown, and runway construction commenced as soon as fill could be dumped. The cost of filling the flats eliminated private concerns from the job; only the state or federal government could muster the sustaining resources necessary to complete the project. It seems quite likely that, had the airport not been located there, something else equally large and obnoxious would have appeared instead, although this thought scarcely makes Logan International less objectionable. East Boston's geographic location made some vast undertaking on the flats inevitable.

The second set of issues stems from the isolation of East Boston from the mainland and particularly from Boston proper. Though in fact it is now attached to Revere on the north edge, it is still virtually an island and transportation is still a major obstacle. Harbor crossings, from the 1833 ferry service to the Boston Transportation Planning Review's 1972 proposal for a third traffic tunnel, have been lively issues for both the residential and business communities. In the mid-nineteenth century, one ferry meant inadequate service and two ferries meant operating deficits; the subway tunnel in 1904 finally relieved total dependence on the ferry boats, but it came too late to make East Boston's attractiveness as a residential community competitive with other Boston suburbs that had become accessible via streetcar decades earlier. Similarly, the 1934
Summer Tunnel for automobiles came too long after the need for such a facility was felt, and the 1961 opening of the Callahan Tunnel probably made the residential quality of East Boston worse. The island has become Boston's doormat for cars and airplanes; the tunnels are of more benefit to airport-related traffic, North Shore commuters, tourists bound for northern New England or Canada, and horse and dog racing enthusiasts than to East Bostonians, and it comes as no surprise that the residential community overwhelmingly opposes any third harbor crossing.

Yet some additional links to Boston seem needed. Even with two vehicular tunnels and a subway connection to Boston proper, in addition to the two bridges to Chelsea and roads to Revere, East Boston is still isolated. The ferries no longer exist, and there is real community fear of being trapped on the island in the event of a catastrophe, such as a fire in the oil storage tanks or a plane crash into residential sections, for even now, the tunnels get closed off during major fires in East Boston. Such disasters aside, the limited access to Boston is a substantial headache for the 88% of employed East Bostonians who must leave the island daily in order to get to work; half-hour traffic tie-ups at the tunnel mouths during rush periods are not uncommon, and the ancient subway line is frequently fickle. Travelers are at the mercy of mechanical devices; one could not walk from East Boston to Boston in 1833 any more than one could in 1973. The problems of isolation remain.
The third set of issues affecting the physical environment is socially oriented: East Boston has been the home of a succession of ethnic groups, each scorning the following group, and the community's physical fabric has suffered as a result. New England Yankees, the original settlers, left when the Irish came; the Irish population began to evacuate when Jewish immigrants from Poland and Russia arrived; and Italians, who came soon after the Jewish groups, finally inherited East Boston and remain the dominant group there today. Since social institutions did not carry over from one immigrant group to another, too many years past when no one seemed to care for the well-being of all the community. The immigrants lacked political clout that would have insured adequate city services; their housing standards were set by tenement landlords or cheap builders after a quick dollar; and the near-starvation wages paid to them for long hours of toil kept most East Bostonians poor. Severe unemployment during the Great Depression did not help the situation, either, and the net effect of all of this was general neglect for buildings and community facilities. Only in recent years has the slide towards dilapidation been attacked by concerned citizens, who have joined together in various organizations to speak, most of the time, with one voice to governmental authorities and take an active part in preparing for East Boston's future.
Perhaps the most interesting pattern of issues that comes from a look at East Boston's physical development is the shift in attitudes of planners who worked on schemes for the community's design. Some have claimed that East Boston has the distinction of being the nation's second planned urban community (after Washington, D.C.), and this may well be true. The Lewis Plan of 1833 established the basic gridiron configuration of streets that exist today, even if proposals like the water power company never materialized. Although credit for the all-pervasive wooden three-decker houses must go to a later period, the wide and straight streets were intended from the start. These comments on gridiron plans seem particularly appropriate to East Boston:

> Although the gridiron plan had the same relation to natural conditions and fundamental social needs as a paper constitution has to the living customs of a people, the simplicity of the gridiron plan won the heart of the pioneer. Its rectangular blocks formed parcels of land which he could sell by the front foot and gamble with as if he were playing cards, and deeds of transfer could be drawn up hastily with the same formula for each plot; moreover, the least competent surveyor, without thought or knowledge, could project the growth of New Eden's streets and avenues into an interminable future.¹

The East Boston Company's real plan for Noddle's Island, however, was simpler than Lewis' plot would indicate; they simply wanted to make money, and any use, no matter what kind, that would bring in money from a land sale was by definition in accordance with their plan of East Boston. Unprofitable uses, like recreational space, were dealt with by omitting them entirely: the original Public Garden vanished.
from the maps before it was ever built, leaving the cemetary and the centers of Belmont, Maverick and Central Squares as the sole open areas given to the community.

The 1909 Metropolitan Improvements Plan did little better in most respects. Rather than planning in order to line their own pockets, the Metropolitan planners claimed to plan for the benefit of the entire metropolitan region, all done at the expense of people living in East Boston. Not only was East Boston to be saddled with a mammoth industrial/port complex, complete with rail switching yards, but a circumferential railway around the whole waterfront was also advocated for the expedition of freight shipments. Efficient handling of freight, it seems, was the paramount objective of the Metropolitan planners, in accordance with their conception of the ideal city:

That the city had any other purpose than to attract trade, to increase land values, and to grow is something that, if it uneasily entered the mind of an occasional Whitman, never exercised any hold upon the minds of his countrymen. For them, the place where the great city stands is the place of stretched wharves, and markets, and ships bringing goods from the ends of the earth; that, and nothing else.²

An effort to bring about improvement in the quality of life in East Boston is discernable in the 1915 plan of Mr. Gibbs of the Boston Planning Department. Though his design includes an even larger development of the flats than did the Metropolitan scheme, there is the beginning of concern for the residents. The acute shortage
of recreational facilities is tackled head-on with the provision of numerous scattered playfields and a major park proposal, positioned as a buffer between the industrial complex on the flats and the existing residential neighborhoods. Whether the community most needed a meandering tidal pool and the rather formal playing fields that Gibbs detailed is open to question; the fact remains that he responded boldly and directly to a problem which others had only diagnosed, and it is unfortunate that such a recreation area does not exist there today.

The proposal of a MIT planning student's thesis, done in 1935, is chronologically the next plan for East Boston, but the thinking behind it harkens back to the Metropolitan Improvements era. After making an analysis of all the difficulties then facing East Bostonians, including poor housing, inadequate parks, and crowded conditions, Mr. Waferling proposed to address them all with a massive Coney Island type recreational beach development on the flats where Suffolk Downs is now situated. In a disturbing non sequitur, he was going to solve substandard local conditions with a regional recreational facility located at considerable distance from almost all of the existing population of East Boston. It is a pity that his design drawing that accompany his text are inaccessibly shelved somewhere in the Institute's storage rooms.
Modern efforts, dating from after the second World War, have had to deal with an East Boston still unaffected by advance planning; until then the Lewis plan was the only one which had been implemented at all. In 1950 the physical condition of several sections of Boston, including East Boston, was indicated by the General Renewal Plan as being seriously substandard; this plan also singled out the West End as a prime candidate for urban renewal. The renewal programs which were subsequently inflicted on the South End, Roxbury, and Charlestown all have their roots in this document, making it just luck that East Boston escaped a similar fate. The 1965 East Boston General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, devised by the BRA, received a negative reception from community residents, who had learned to be wary of the BRA bulldozer from the experiences other sections of the city had had with urban renewal. They and others began to demand alternatives to the total destruction of sizeable chunks of neighborhoods in order to rescue them from urban blight, and planners began to find other ways of combatting physical decay.

Since the late 1960's East Boston has been involved in a community-oriented planning process in cooperation with the BRA, which has undergone a significant shift in attitude. For the first time ever, planning is being undertaken for the benefit of residents there, and decisions are being made with the participation of the population that will be affected by the results. It is too soon to record great changes in the condition of East Boston as an outcome of
neighborhood planning, and it may well be that the chief characteristic of this kind of planning will be that there is no spectacular, overnight progress, but rather a slow, steady movement towards a revitalized East Boston. If the present close relations between the community and city government agencies continue, and if the initial victories won so far are an indication of the type of activity that can be anticipated in the future, then the prospects for an end to the neglect of East Boston have never been better.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter I


2 Ibid., pp. 43-44.

3 Ibid., p. 44.

4 Ibid., p. 46.


7 Sumner, p. 44.

8 Stark, p. 44.

9 Ibid., pp. 54-55.

10 Ibid., p. 43.

11 Sumner, pp. 314-49.

12 Ibid., pp. 367-83.

13 Ibid., p. 419.

Chapter II. The Beginnings of Development 1830-1840

1 Sumner, p. 449.

Chapter III. The Era of the Clipper Ship 1840-1865


2 [Duncan McLean], "A Description of the Largest Ship in the World, the new clipper Great Republic, of Boston" (Boston: Eastburn's Press, 1853), pp. 5-6.


5 Robert H. Eddy, "Plan of East Boston, showing the Land and Water Lots sold and unsold, also all Buildings and other Improvements" (Boston: Tappan and Bradford's Lithography, 1851).
Chapter IV. The Irish Years 1865-1885


4 Woods and Kennedy, p. 188.


7 City of Boston, Department of Parks, "Fourth Report of the Board of Commissioners" (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1876), p. 25.

8 Boston City Council, *Public Parks in the City of Boston: A Compilation of Papers, Reports and Arguments relating to the Subject* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1880), p. 117.


10 Nicholls, p. 51.

11 Whitman and Breck, "Plan of Boston Land Co.'s Land in Boston and Revere" (Boston: The Heliotype Printing Co., 1880)

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Chapter V. Immigration Doubles the Population 1885 - 1915

1 Villaume, p. 8.


3 Villaume, p. 8.

4 Gibbs, p. 58.

5 Ibid., p. 59.

7 City of Boston, Annual Report of the Executive Department of the City of Boston for the Year 1890 (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, City Printers, 1891), pp. 6-8.


10 [Olmsted Brothers], "Report on Boston Parks" (Boston, 1912?), pp. 89-90.

11 Ibid., p. 91.


15 Metropolitan, p. 303.

16 Woods and Kennedy, pp. 189-190.

17 Gibbs, p. 60.

18 East Boston Company, 1896 Report, p. 3.


20 Ibid., p. 7.

21 Metropolitan, p. 161.

22 Ibid., p. 143.

23 Ibid., pp. 160-61.
Chapter VI  Population Stabilization and Physical Decay 1915-1940


2 Ibid., pp. 195-6

3 Ibid., p. 199.


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1 Chamber of Commerce, np.
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5 General Court, pp. 40-50.
7 Ibid., pp 8-9
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9 Ibid., p. 53.
10 United Community Services of Metropolitan Boston, Research Division "Neighborhoods of Boston Ranked for Selected Factors" (Boston, 1953), np.
11 Boston Redevelopment Authority, East Boston General Neighborhood Renewal Plan (Boston, May 1965), pp. 2-4 - 2-5.
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13 Edith G. DeAngelis, "Rebirth of East Boston" (East Boston, 1971), pp 1-3.

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2 Ibid., p. 81.
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