

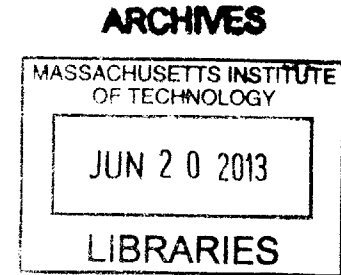
The Art of Cross-Writing in Grove Hall: Two Centuries of Form and Place-Making in a Boston Neighborhood

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Master in City Planning
at the
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
June 2013



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by Gilad Jaacov Rosenzweig

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ABSTRACT

The Boston neighborhood of Grove Hall is presently engaged in a period of urban revival. New civic, commercial and residential projects are starting to fill in empty lots and rejuvenate historic yet dilapidated structures.

Once the vibrant heart of the Jewish community, Grove Hall has for over half a century been an almost exclusively African-American and black immigrant neighborhood. The area experienced a complete demographic transition in the 1950s and 1960s, when the Jewish population moved to the suburbs of Boston. The incoming black community, the majority of whom were recent migrants from the American south, inherited a seventy-year old neighborhood, rich in historic architecture and form, but also ripe with problems of an aging infrastructure and housing stock. Moreover, the era of this transition was a turbulent period in U.S. political and social activity; white and black populations were deeply polarized as they laid separate spatial claim to neighborhoods across the country.

Within this context, the transition of Grove Hall had failed to transfer a successful urban environment to its next group of inhabitants. A long period of decline overcame the neighborhood, marked by the collapse of commercial activity, the loss of almost half its population, and the influx of a tiny yet strangling criminal element. Though it is often categorized as an 'inner-city' neighborhood, Grove Hall did not suffer the same fate as many similar districts in other U.S. cities. Its streets and houses were not destroyed for urban renewal, or ripped apart to create freeways; the original street pattern, and most of its classic buildings, survived years of decay.

Thus, instead of replacing urban form, there is evidence that Grove Hall is instead adding more to it, re-writing its physical space in a continuation of neighborhood evolution. Using the concept of cross-writing, a nineteenth century technique of writing multiple 'crossed' layers of a letter on one page to produce a greater piece of text, my research hypothesizes that previous, even latent, layers of good form overlain with new and engaging design, can produce successful urban space.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Annis Whitlow Sengupta for her dedication, guidance and outstanding commitment to this thesis. Our weekly discussions made the exploration into what was seemingly a common topic of interest always exciting. I would also like to thank Larry Vale for his great insight and interest in my work. His expertise on the contemporary American city, and on the ways to study it put me on the path of interesting research.

Thank you to the wonderful residents of Grove Hall, past and present, who shared their stories, their optimism, and their interest in my work. Through the people who live there now, or who once called it home, I developed a passion for the neighborhood.

Special thanks to Hal and Roz Lurie, and Hazel Bright, former residents of Grove Hall who sat long hours with me, fed me, and answered my many emails and phone calls. They were my greatest emissaries to Grove Hall of past.

Thank you to Arnie Abelow and Joseph Mulligan for their personal tours of Roxbury, pointing the way to every stone and building as we drove through almost every street in the neighborhood together.

Thank you to Paul Salopek, one of the great writers of people and history, who introduced me to the concept of cross-writing, and helped make the literary connections that built this thesis.

Thank you to all my classmates, who are a truly amazing and talented group of people.

Finally, a very special thank you to my treasured family; my children Mia and Lev, who stood by their dad so patiently and lovingly over the past few months, and most of all to my wife Dina, who supported my dream to return to graduate school, and who kept the light on and the tea hot through many long nights of writing.

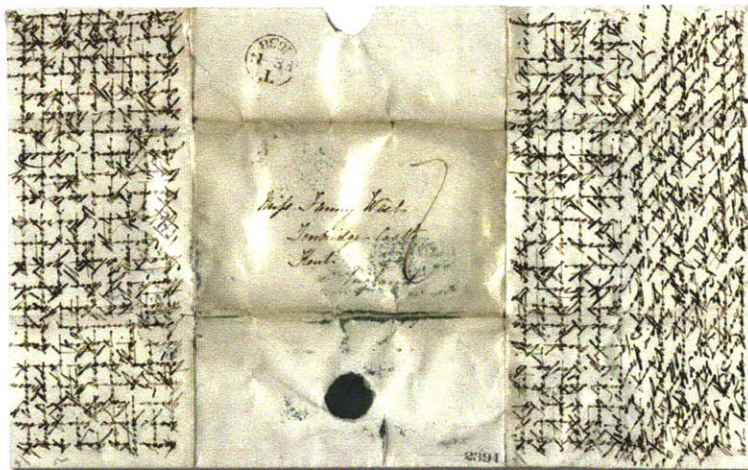


Grove Hall, Boston.

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Introduction

Cross-Writing



The technique of cross-writing was developed in nineteenth-century letter writing. The cost of mail was once charged per page sent, and to avoid additional expense, writers would maximize the amount written on every sheet of paper. At a certain point, this involved scribing a letter in such a way that multiple pages are written on one sheet. This was achieved by writing a letter in one direction, then turning the sheet ninety-degrees and continuing to write over the existing text. Sometimes even a third forty-five-degree layer was added.

A resulting single sheet of paper would include two or more “cross-written” pages. For the reader, an initial glance at the letter reveals an almost impossible code to decipher. Script (traditionally written on a forty-five degree angle) mixes to form shapes and patterns that are practically illegible. With intense effort, however, one learns to read one direction of text and blank out the conflicting one. This process of producing layers to construct a whole, while using precision effort to see only one of its parts is an art: the art of cross-writing.

On my first drive down Blue Hill Avenue through Grove Hall, an older neighborhood in the middle of Boston, I saw an African-American community, several uniquely designed buildings, a dense fabric of residential streets, fenced-in properties, and many, far too many, empty lots. I continued onward without stopping. On my second journey to the neighborhood, I saw a building inscribed with Jewish symbols – a synagogue – but with crosses affixed to its façade. I stopped. If this was a synagogue, then did Jews live here, in Grove Hall, the heart of the Boston’s African-American community? I had questions for this place.

There was apparently another layer of Grove Hall, hiding not far below the surface of its streets and beyond the brick and wooden facades of the buildings, that I sensed still existed in some capacity. Thus began an exploration of a neighborhood, of two communities, and several overlapping histories that cross-write Grove Hall.

The neighborhood is a reflection of its people, buildings and streets; the product of events and actions; the collection of historical layers crafted into a visual and sociological form that both defines and redefines space. The development of a neighborhood is a never-ending process spanning years, decades, centuries; each layer in time contributing a piece of physical form and social significance.

◀ Fig 0.1 “Letter written in the Cross-Writing format.” Bridgeman, F.L., 1837.

This thesis examines the hypothesis that the form of a neighborhood – as defined by its street configuration, architecture, and embedded historical and social meanings – remains a constant subtext of spatial identity for future generations. It questions to what extent does urban form impact the transition of neighborhoods, and to what degree does it record and reflect the communities it serves?

In Grove Hall, the basic outline of the neighborhood and its nascent form were largely in place by the end of the nineteenth century, before the majority of its first residents arrived. The Jewish community, stewards of the neighborhood for the next fifty years, built into this framework and largely completed the physical form by the mid-twentieth century. The subsequent period of transition between the Jewish and African-American communities coincided with many post-Second World War physical, political and social forces, including the continuation of the great migration of southern blacks to northern and western U.S. cities, the mid-century suburbanization and freeway building enterprise, the civil rights movement, and race riots. Against this backdrop, the urban form of Grove Hall was transformed – by the population transition that created a vacuum of social instability, and by the riots which physically destroyed the commercial center of the neighborhood. These two major events prompted the long-lasting reality, or perception of decay and danger which continue, in some form, to the present day.

This thesis will examine several planning and social initiatives that created an enduring imprint on the physical landscape of the neighborhood. This will include the impact of the streetcar and its subsequent disappearance, which left Blue Hill Avenue an over-sized and underserved transit corridor and inadvertently destined the land at the heart of Grove Hall to be deserted for decades. As well, the impact on the neighborhood by Franklin Park will be explored, from its design origins through the various programs that it supported, to the edge condition it presents.

After addressing the physical and social history of Grove Hall through the end of the twentieth century, Part Two of the thesis will then frame the current period of revival within the belief that it is made possible by the spatial foundation of Grove Hall. This is to say, good form and the essence of place it creates has an enduring capability to preserve a neighborhood through social upheaval and urban decay.

The neighborhoods surrounding Blue Hill Avenue underwent a complete ethnic and racial transition in the middle of the twentieth century. A series of Jewish neighborhoods transformed almost entirely into an African-American district. Grove Hall was the first of these neighborhoods to change and its transition was nearly absolute. Demographics changed drastically, but more importantly, the intrinsic qualities of the local urban form seemed to disintegrate. This thesis will examine this transition to explore why the strong elements of community space, public amenities and commercial infrastructure established during the first half of the twentieth century failed to transfer to the area's new inhabitants.

Grove Hall

The physical composition of the Boston neighborhood of Grove Hall will be examined; two centuries of design and development will be dissected in order to reveal the connections and processes that transgress time and demonstrate the power of good urban form.

Augmenting the physical qualities of space are the philosophical and social intentions associated with, or responsible for, the design of space. Although many urban locations are shaped through accidental circumstances where unplanned consequences produce form, the majority of urban form is made through calculated decisions, good or bad, visionary or haphazard. In Grove Hall, a small rural cum suburban cum urban neighborhood, we test these forms.

Grove Hall is a neighborhood straddling the surreptitious boundaries of Roxbury and Dorchester – two sections in the southern part of the City of Boston. Once independent towns, Roxbury and Dorchester have grown as a physically and socially integral part of the city since being annexed, in 1868 and 1871 respectively. Grove Hall is identified as the area centered about Blue Hill Avenue, Warren Street and Washington Street. Though not defined with any specific borders, the neighborhood is geographically within the 02121 zip code based at the 'Grove Hall post office', and is technically contained within five U.S. census tracts¹.

¹ U.S. Census tracts 820, 821, 901, 902, 903 (as of 2010)

Origins of this Thesis

This thesis resulted from a question of neighborhood identity. It emerged from research of the neighborhood, and specifically of the transition between the Jewish and black communities within it. Delving into the dynamics of population transition and the dramatic transfer of physical space from one group to another led to more specific questions about how the urban form of the neighborhood facilitated this process.

Suburbanization, white flight and racial segregation are commonly accepted as part of the inevitable course of urban American history in the mid-twentieth century. In Boston, these forces set forth actions that fueled the movement of over 70,000 Jewish residents and facilitated the transition of the neighborhoods adjoining Blue Hill Avenue to an almost exclusively African-American demographic. Many factors explain the transition of Blue Hill Avenue, including the demand for housing by the growing black population, bank lending policies and de facto racial segregation, and the upward mobility in the Jewish community that coincided with the draw to the suburbs (Gamm 1999; Levine and Harmon 1992; Clay 2012).

Jews, who had been very urban as a community nationwide, were suddenly amongst the most mobile ethnic groups within the white flight to the suburbs (Gamm 2013). Even though the Jewish community was physically entrenched in Grove Hall, with a range of synagogues, schools and cultural facilities, they were not bound to a parish system like the Catholics, nor did they have any sacred attachments to a local temple (Gamm 1999). Their center of community was constantly in motion, from the moment they arrived in Boston, through the present day.

The forces of change that fostered the eventual separation of the black and Jewish communities had the initial effect of bringing them together. Despite the factors that created separation, this thesis also finds the brief period during the transition of Grove Hall when African-Americans and Jews lived, worked, studied and played in the same place before a complete racial turnover swept through. Blacks and Jews shared Grove Hall; there were two sets of homeowners, two sets of storekeepers. They occupied and used the same public spaces, though not necessarily together nor for the same purpose. This overlapping of people in place is a unique interim piece of history that has been overshadowed by the end result of the transition period in which it occurred.

The public realm that tied the Jewish and black communities together was Blue Hill Avenue. The street is the central component of a corridor of settlement that extends from Downtown Boston through Roxbury and Dorchester, and that grew with the extension of streetcar lines. Jews came to Grove Hall at the top end of Blue Hill Avenue from other parts of Boston as early as 1900. Gradually they settled down the avenue as far as Mattapan. When the Jewish 'era' on Blue Hill Avenue ended, the community dispersed largely within socio-economic constraints. Wealthier residents moved to Brookline and Newton, many orthodox Jews moved to Brighton, and the majority of middle class residents continued along the Blue Hill Avenue trajectory into the suburbs of Canton, Stoughton, and Sharon².

Back at the northern end of the street, the incoming black community expanded southward from Lower Roxbury starting in the 1930s and in greater numbers fueled by the incoming southern migration in the 1940s, 50s and 60s.

The transition, when measured in simple census numbers, appears to be linear – one population replaced another and the neighborhood changed. On the ground, however, the dynamics were much more complex. The black and Jewish communities encountered each other throughout a lengthy transition period. Different people who had not lived together in the past were now accidental neighbors, their territory became shared space.

The demographic transition is now mostly associated with class and racial tension, however, there were several instances when the communities were adapting rather than reacting. The story of black children learning of the Holocaust from the tattoo on the grocer's arm, of political gatherings of Jews and blacks in triple-decker homes, and of a black woman who knew only of Kosher meat growing up highlight the more meaningful ways in which the two communities overlapped³.

How did Blue Hill Avenue exist as a Jewish and black neighborhood, as opposed to the two separate identities (Jewish then black) that are generally attributed to it? This piece of history is missing from the greater puzzle.

At the end of the transition, at some point in the 1960s, the Jewish community basically severed all physical and social connections with Grove Hall, even if they kept emotional ones strong. By the end of the transition, the organization of the neighborhood transfer could not be characterized as smooth. The black community encountered physical problems with

² The Jewish community moved to many other neighboring towns and suburbs in fewer numbers. The most significant Jewish communities (in terms of population) are mentioned in this text.

³ Carter, Marisa. Personal Interview, February 25, 2013.

the housing and institutional spaces they received, and did not take control of the commercial or social service sector of the neighborhood. A majority of businesses remained Jewish-owned even as the Jewish residents migrated outward. As well, many of the social services were provided within the Jewish community itself, and moved out with that population.

Jewish homes became black homes and synagogues were converted to churches, but the commercial and public space of Blue Hill Avenue did not become the heart or spine of the new black community. Rather, it would become a symbol of its troubles.

Several factors can help explain this failure, though none necessarily create a causal argument. Firstly, the demographic change was both cultural and socio-economic. Initially a middle and upper-middle class black population joined a Jewish population of similar income level (Gamm 1999, U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940), but with the increased Jewish emigration from Grove Hall in the 1950s and 60s, a larger lower-income black population with a great demand for housing arrived as well. Secondly, by 1965, 55% of the black population in Boston was southern-born, and generally from a rural and poor background⁴. This was for all practical purposes an immigrant community, even though it was an internal migration⁵. Finally, the speed and nature of the transition was not conducive to building a stable community. The Jewish neighborhood developed over many decades and several generations. The black community, the majority of which were newcomers to Boston, had within a decade took the reigns of a neighborhood, that although “physically complete” was not necessarily compatible with their culture, religion, or economic status. The neighborhood for all intents and purposes was built for a Jewish community; the space had to be reconfigured to a new society.

Lastly, Blue Hill Avenue as a transportation artery was experiencing great changes just as the demographic transition emerged. The streetcars were removed and replaced by trolley buses in 1949, and a heavy increase in automobile traffic from the southern suburbs converged in the area of Grove Hall as a result of the road network connecting the city outward in a radial form⁶. Small local businesses, geared for streetcar (and pedestrian) access, were not designed for automobiles. Many garages and gas stations were erected in the neighborhood, including the site of the original streetcar terminal of Grove Hall.

4 Dobbin et. al., 34.

5 Ibid., 40.

6 Warner, 1961; _____, 1978

The transition period was compounded with layers of social and physical interaction to create new neighborhoods in place of the old. The demographic transition of Blue Hill Avenue from Jewish to black, and the dramatic change in the use of urban form did not happen in a vacuum, nor did it occur overnight. It was a gradual process spanning decades, and culminating in a time of intense social change in American cities.

Blue Hill Avenue

Blue Hill Avenue was a peculiarly vibrant urban environment central to several Boston neighborhoods in the first half of the twentieth century. The commercial presence was sufficient for locals to never leave for, as one resident says, “everything you needed was on Blue Hill Avenue”⁷. All the food, drugstore supplies, clothing, and entertainment you needed was available in the neighborhood⁸.

From its twisting narrow start in Upper Roxbury and Grove Hall, to a broad one hundred and twenty foot wide boulevard along Franklin Park and the western edge of Dorchester, and finally into a village-like atmosphere in Mattapan, Blue Hill Avenue was uniquely identified as the heart and spine of Jewish Boston. The street, over four miles long, was essentially the community center and commercial zone for Boston’s Jewish community up to the 1960s⁹. The street featured Kosher butchers, bakeries and delicatessens, sometimes a synagogue, pool hall or cinema. On its sidewalks, children ventured for ice cream or sodas after school and played on corners while crowds waited for streetcars that rumbled down the center of the road.

Then, from the late 1960s onward, Blue Hill Avenue entered a wave of decline, and its neighborhoods, from Grove Hall in the north to Mattapan at the city’s southern border, became typical examples of urban decay amidst a shrinking population and great economic disinvestment. Even into the start of the twenty-first century, Blue Hill Avenue was still lined with scenes of abandonment, barren sidewalks and spaces devoid of almost any social gathering. It became a very busy thoroughfare, associated with social malaise, and laden with a troubled sense of identity to the residents who called it home.

7 Lurie, Hal. Personal Interview, 24 March 2013.

8 Ibid.

9 Gamm, 1999; Sarna, 1995.

Optimism

Recently, however, signs of interest and renewed investment by the city, residents, church and mosque leaders, community development corporations (CDCs), as well as local and regional private investors, are providing Grove Hall a new sense of optimism. A reversal to decades of abandonment and decay is currently taking place. In this process, new building construction, new public places, improved park space, and the return of cultural events are latching on to the historical urban form. The streets and buildings from the past are bearing witness to a new layer in the making of history in the neighborhood.

At first glance, Grove Hall appeared to me a troubled neighborhood and a neglected part of the city. However, over the course of my research, on my numerous walks along Blue Hill Avenue and its side streets, I discovered the businesses, the street conversations, the kids getting ice cream from the corner store, the fathers taking their sons to get haircuts at one of the dozen or so local barbers, the skateboard shop, the music from the local radio station blasting onto the street: a vibrant community. There is a similarity in the black scenes of 2013 to the Jewish nostalgia I hear of 1943.

The following chapters are presented through a set of select narratives that guide the reader through several stories and dimensions of the neighborhood. They compose a passage through two hundred years of formal development, through two communities (Jewish and black), through almost a dozen architectural styles, through social upheavals that dictated the course of mid-century American urban history (suburbanization, white flight, and the civil rights era), through the period of decline, and now one of revival.

The thesis is informed by several texts on the subject of Jewish and black migration and settlement in Boston (Gamm, 1999; Sarna, 1995; Edward, 1961; Dobbin et al., 1968), as well as books and articles discussing the phenomena of white flight, race riots, suburbanization and place identity (Aldrich, 1975; Fishman, 1961; Goering, 1978, Jackson, 1985; Pettigrew, 1969; South et. al., 1998). There was also in-depth research of street development, architectural styles and the design of Franklin Park, as I understood these particular issues to be most important in developing a theory of place specifically influenced by form in Grove Hall.

A series of “mapping vignettes” are presented in Chapter One to help explore the relationship and evolution of physical form within three important locations in the neighborhood (the ‘Grove Hall’ estate, the ‘Little’ estate, and the West End Street Railway site). These maps capture the process of development and help demonstrate its influence on street design, architecture and society within the neighborhood.

Finally, the work is based on ten months of neighborhood observations, interviews with over twenty residents and former residents, discussions with city officials, community development corporations and business owners. A more detailed discussion of the research methodology is presented in the Appendix.

Organization

This thesis is organized within a chronological history spanning two hundred years of construction, immigration, transition and neighborhood decline in Grove Hall (Part I - Foundations), and a review and analysis of the revival, or resurrection, of urban form since the end of the twentieth century (Part II - Revival).

Part I

Foundations

Chapter One, Follies in the Park: Puddingstone, Olmsted and the Suburbanization of Grove Hall examines the original development of the neighborhood, from the first roads to the first streetcars, and the transformation from rural land to suburban habitation.

Chapter Two, Mezuzahs and Soul Brothers: Jewish and African-American communities on Blue Hill Avenue studies the two major communities that call (or called) Grove Hall home. It reveals their relationships with the physical neighborhood, and the overlapping period they inhabited together in the mid-twentieth century.

Chapter Three, Plywood on the Corridor: The Abandonment of Blue Hill Avenue, starts at the end of the transition period between Jews and blacks, and covers three decades of economic and physical decline in the neighborhood.

1 Follies in the Park

Puddingstone, Olmsted and the Suburbanization of Grove Hall



Fig. 1.0 "The Hill: The Middle Class Comes to Roxbury, 1870"

What are those lone ones doing now,
The wife and the children sad?
Oh, they are in a terrible rout,
Screaming, and throwing their pudding about,
Acting as they were mad.
They flung it over to Roxbury hills,
They flung it over the plain,
And all over Milton and Dorchester too
Great lumps of pudding the giants threw;
They tumbled as thick as rain.

.

Giant and mammoth have passed away,
For ages have floated by;
The suet is hard as a marrow-bone,
And every plum is turned to a stone,
But there the puddings lie.
And if, some pleasant afternoon,
You'll ask me out to ride,
The whole of the story I will tell,
And you shall see where the puddings fell,
And pay for the punch beside.

from – “The Dorchester Giant” by Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1830

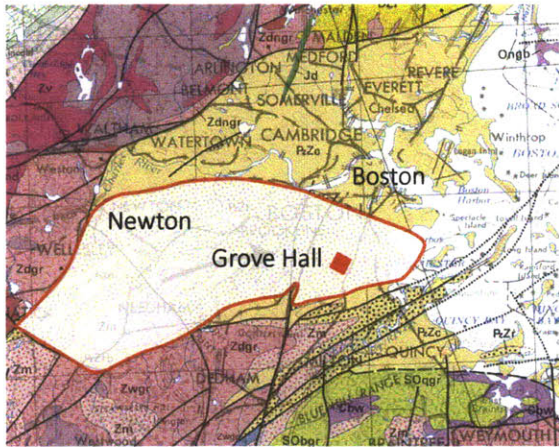


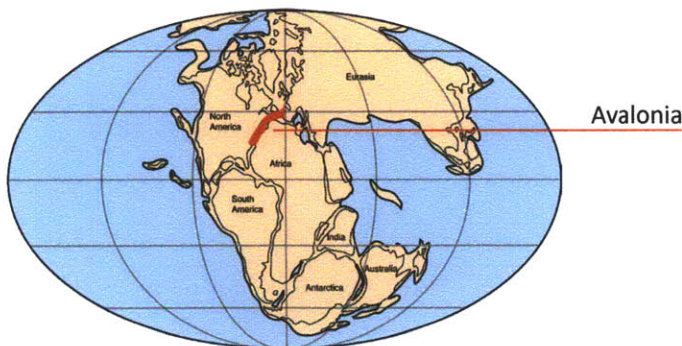
Fig 1.1. Boston-area geologic structure showing location of Puddingstone foundation.
Source: U.S. Geological Survey.

Puddingstones

The giant sedimentary stone formations found amongst the Queen Anne homes on Elm Hill Avenue, in purple and grey hued ledges perched above Seaver Street, and scattered about wild patches of Franklin Park are outcroppings of the ancient geological foundation of Roxbury.

“Puddingstone” is the popular term given to the conglomerate rock composed of pebbles, granite, boulders and quartz embedded in cement-like sandstone¹. The coining of the term is attributed to either Oliver Wendell Holmes or British geologists in the early nineteenth century, who likened the appearance of the rocks to “Christmas Pudding” – an English cake with mixed fruit pieces². The moniker is widely accepted in geological circles worldwide. Roxbury Puddingstone (the local variant) is found in areas south and west of Downtown Boston, and forms the bedrock for much of the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester and Jamaica Plain, as well as Brookline and part of Newton (fig 1.1).

Fig 1.2. Pangaea Continent.
Source: <http://www.glosgeotrust.org.uk>



1 Skehan, 1975.
2 Ibid.

The rock was formed over 500 million years ago during volcanic eruptions on Avalonia, a pre-historic island chain that moved by continental shift from its original location adjacent to ancient Africa to its current position in New England (fig 1.2). The Puddingstone typology, though not unique to Roxbury, is similar in composition to only a handful of places on the planet, including England and western Africa. Much of the rock now visible in Roxbury was exposed to the surface by glacial striations in the last ice age³. These produced open rock formations, exposed cliffs, and polished boulders strewn on the landscape.

In addition to the poetic and symbolic attributes of Roxbury Puddingstone (it is also the Massachusetts “state rock” and the origin for the naming of “Roxbury”⁴), the outcroppings served three major physical roles in the development and identity of Grove Hall. Firstly, its large mounds and cliffs created obstacles that determined the route of several roads including Seaver Street, Walnut Avenue and Blue Hill Avenue, where alignments and curves are clearly defined by the presence of the rock (fig 1.3). Secondly, although much of the bedrock in Grove Hall was paved over or built upon, many unique formations and boulders were too large to move or preserved for their majesty. They can be seen in places like Horatio Harris Park (fig. 1.4) and Puddingstone Park.



Fig 1.3. Puddingstone south of Seaver Street in Franklin Park. Photo by author.

Fig 1.4. Horatio Harris Park. Photo: Google Earth.



³ Hatch, 1991.

⁴ “Roxbury” is a deviation from the original name “Rocksbury” bestowed on the town in recognition of the many rocks on or under the surface.

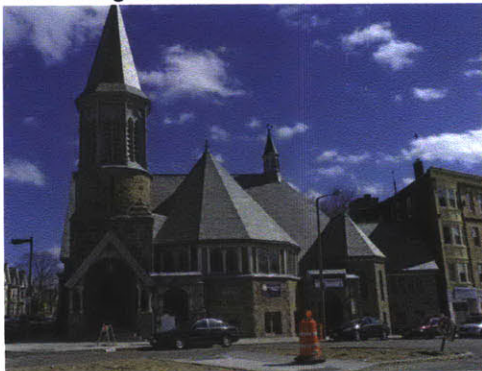


Fig 1.5. Abbotsford House, 300 Walnut Avenue, Roxbury. Photo by author.

Lastly, Puddingstone was used in the construction of a number of buildings, mansions, churches, fences and bridges in Roxbury and across the Boston area. Blocks were chiseled for walls and façades, spires and steps. Some notable examples in, or on the edge of Grove Hall include the Abbotsford House – now the Museum of the National Center for Afro-American Artists (NCAAA) on Walnut Avenue (fig. 1.5), the Roxbury Presbyterian Church on Warren Street (fig. 1.6), and the Tremont Street Methodist Church. Rock was either sourced directly on-site, or from one of the commercial quarries located in Roxbury⁵. During the construction boom of detached homes that dominated Grove Hall in the late nineteenth century, even as wood was the standard building material, Puddingstone was widely used for foundations, and is visible at the base of many homes.

On this rock foundation, several layers of road, rail and park space prepared the surface for the physical form that led Grove Hall into the twentieth century.

Fig 1.6. Roxbury Presbyterian Church
Photo: Google Earth



⁵ Quarries are recorded at Parker Hill in Roxbury (Puddingstone Park), in the Arnold Arboretum, and Nira Rock in Jamaica Plain (<http://www.nirarock.org>)

Roads

The evolution of street design and infrastructure in Grove Hall and Franklin Park, and the creation of three roads in particular, had a major influence on the speed and pattern of the development of the neighborhood.

The paths of these main arterial roads and the course of development they determined are responsible for the general organization of the built form in Grove Hall. In order of their construction they are (1) the Way to Braintree (also referred to as the road to Plymouth, or Quincy), (2) Brush Hill Turnpike, and (3) Seaver Street (figs. 1.8, 1.10, 1.13 on pages 27, 29, and 31). The location and subsequent intersections of these roads initiated and supported residential and commercial development, and determined future transportation routes, land use, density and identity.

The Way to Braintree and the Origins of Grove Hall

The first road to Braintree, Quincy and Plymouth was forged south from the village of Roxbury in 1663 along the high ridge line overlooking Dorchester Bay⁶. Its route can be traced to an adherence of topographic contours, and was calculated to reach the first narrowing on the Neponset River that was suitable for a bridge crossing (at the southern end of Dorchester.) This road became Warren Street in Roxbury and Washington Street⁷ in Dorchester (fig 1.8).

Over time, agricultural estates were located along the length of the road, including that of Thomas Kilby Jones⁸ on the border of Roxbury and Dorchester. The Jones estate was established in 1800, dotted with apple and pear orchards and a large mansion that commanded a clear view of Boston, the bays and the distant Blue Hills⁹. Following an old British tradition, the estate was given a formal name: “Grove Hall”¹⁰ (Fig 1.7).

Grove Hall engaged the design vernacular of many estates at the time, gently breaking from the British-dominated architecture embedded during the colonial period. Virginia and Lee McAlester (1994) survey the search for new styles in defining American architecture in their book on American houses. As they describe, the first move to design independence was a shift from the contemporary Georgian style to the “American Federalist style” at the end of the eighteenth century¹¹.

To achieve the new vernacular, local architects such as Charles Bullfinch made subtle changes and additions to Georgian form, creating pronounced exterior columns, reshaping rectangular chambers to oval, square and half-octagon, and adding the trademark ‘fanlight’ above entry doors¹².

Fig. 1.7. Grove Hall. Federalist (or Federal)-style mansion. Source: Boston Public Library.



6 Drake, 199.

7 There are four ‘Washington’ Streets in the City of Boston. To distinguish between them, their neighborhood is mentioned. In this thesis, ‘Washington Street’ refers to the street in Dorchester, between Blue Hill Avenue and Dorchester Avenue.

8 Thomas Kilby Jones was a Boston merchant who had purchased the land and established an eleven acre country estate.

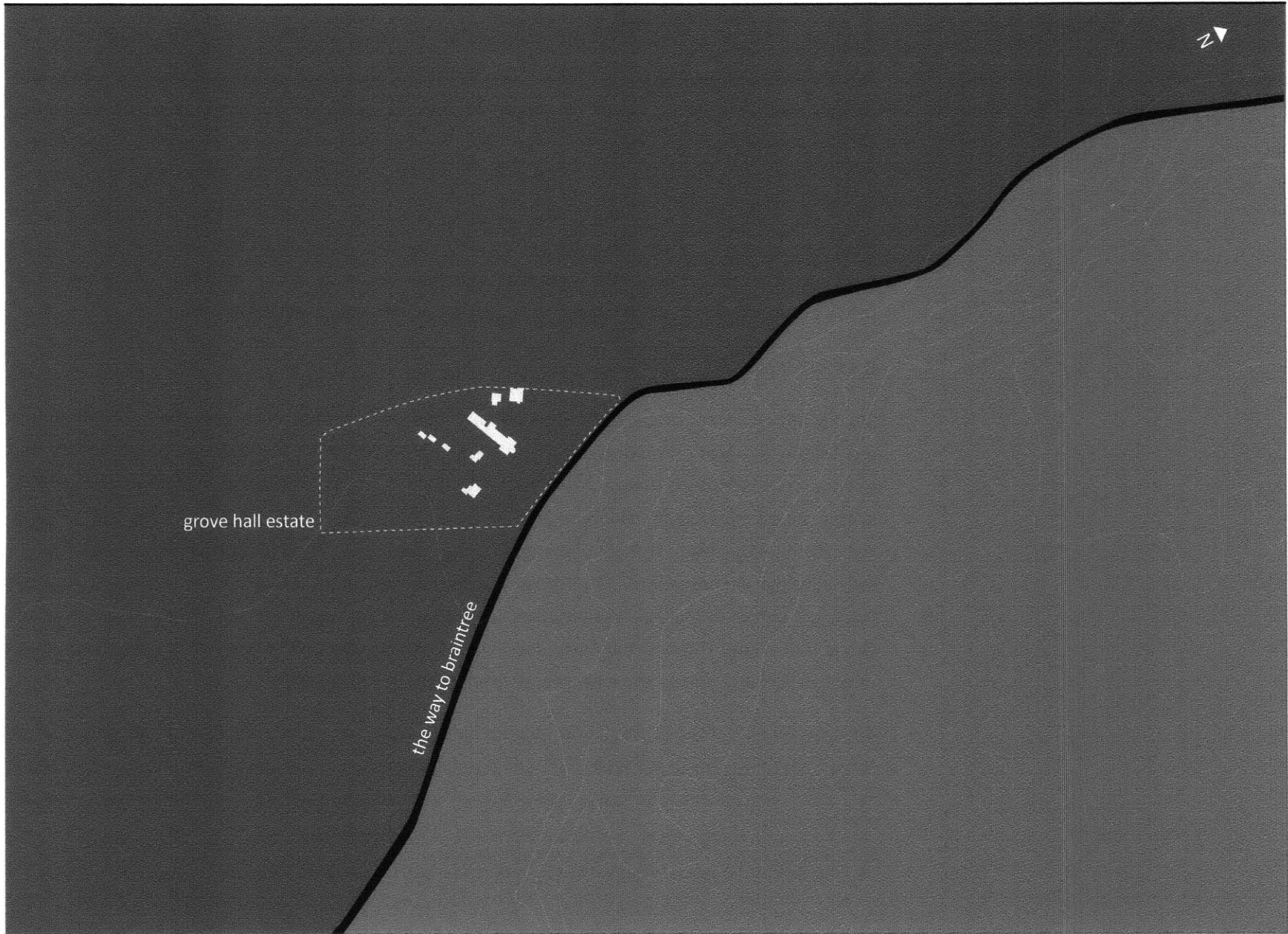
9 As per the view described by Boardman, 1874.

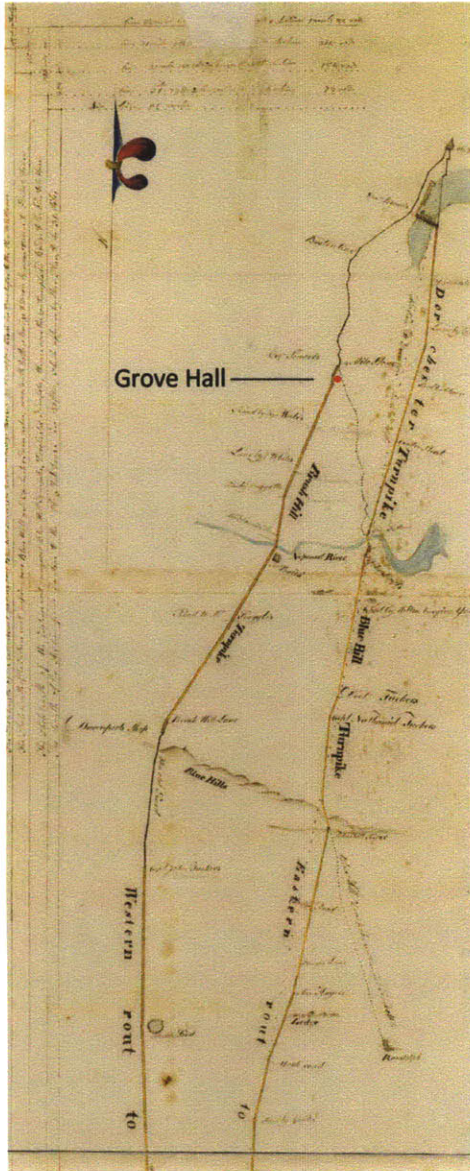
10 Drake, 222.

11 McAlester, 44.

12 Ibid.

Fig. 1.8. “The Way to Braintree”▶





The Grove Hall federal-style mansion faced the Way to Braintree and was centered on a grand semi-circular carriage path. It was not the largest estate in Roxbury, nor the oldest, but its manor stood as a prominent piece of architecture and, more importantly, the estate was a pivotal component in place-making and identity in the neighborhood that would bear its name. Although there are no physical remnants of the actual buildings of the old estate, the impact of Grove Hall was absorbed in the form of the roads that eventually surrounded and dissected it, and in the placement and design typology of the subsequent structures that were built over it. The continuation of the evolution of the Grove Hall estate is documented in Mapping Vignette no. 1 on pages 32-33.

Brush Hill Turnpike

Shortly after Grove Hall was established, a new road was planned to connect the towns of Canton and Milton with Boston *via Roxbury* (fig. 1.9, 1.10). The Brush Hill Turnpike was planned in 1805 and opened in 1809 forming the route of present-day Blue Hill Avenue¹³. Similar to other new roads built in this period, such as the Dedham and Dorchester Turnpikes, long segments were built towards their destinations using straight alignments rather than conforming to topography or with concern for hydrological constraints¹⁴. The Brush Hill Turnpike included a two-mile long straight segment from just above the village of Mattapan north to a junction with Warren Street, adjacent to the Grove Hall estate. The street axis was drawn just east of a large outcropping of Puddingstones south of Grove Hall and skirted the east side of Wellington Hill¹⁵ in Mattapan.

The original plan of the Brush Hill Turnpike included an extension along the Way to Braintree (Warren Street) north toward Lower Roxbury¹⁶. For economic reasons, the road stopped short, and ended at

¹³ Note that the former "Blue Hill Turnpike" built to the east of the Brush Hill Turnpike is present-day Randolph Avenue in the town of Milton; Wood, 117.

¹⁴ As illustrated in maps and plans for these roads in the early nineteenth century.

¹⁵ Wellington Hill is a drumlin – a rounded glacial landform created in the last ice age.

¹⁶ Whitney, Charles. Map of the Town of Roxbury. 1843; "Plan of Boston and Roxbury," 1867.

◀ Fig. 1.9. Kendall, Jonas. Manuscript of Brush Hill Turnpike, 1806.

Fig. 1.10. "Brush Hill Turnpike" (Blue Hill Avenue) ▶

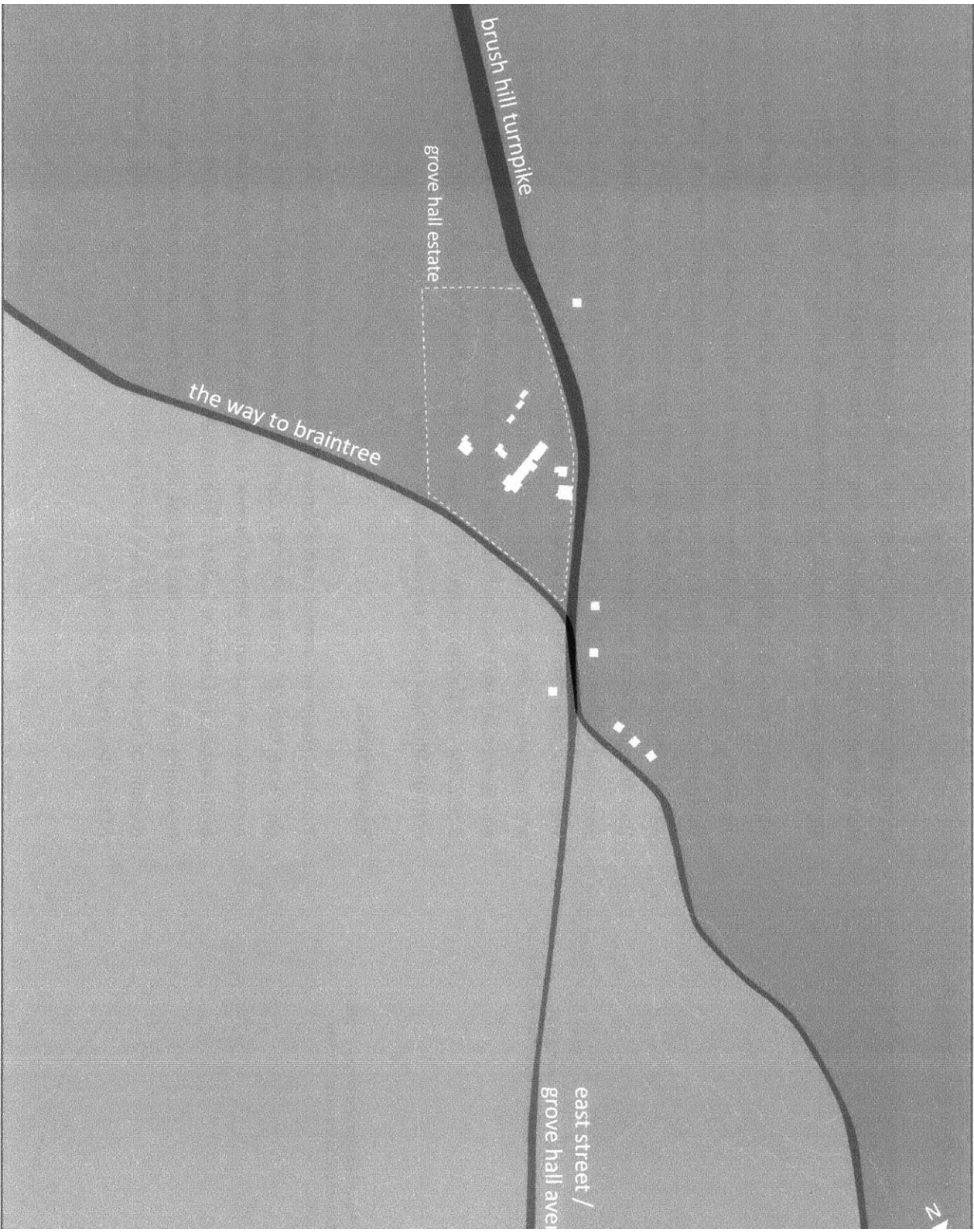




Fig. 1.11. Map of the Town of Roxbury, 1843.
Source: Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library.

Fig. 1.12. "Plan of Boston and Roxbury," 1867.
Source: Massachusetts Historical Society.



an intersection in Grove Hall. As early as 1843, an extension of the road was made north of Grove Hall to Dudley Street. Originally called "East Street", then "Grove Hall Avenue," the lower and upper segments were united as "Blue Hill Avenue" in the 1870s (fig. 1.11, 1.12).

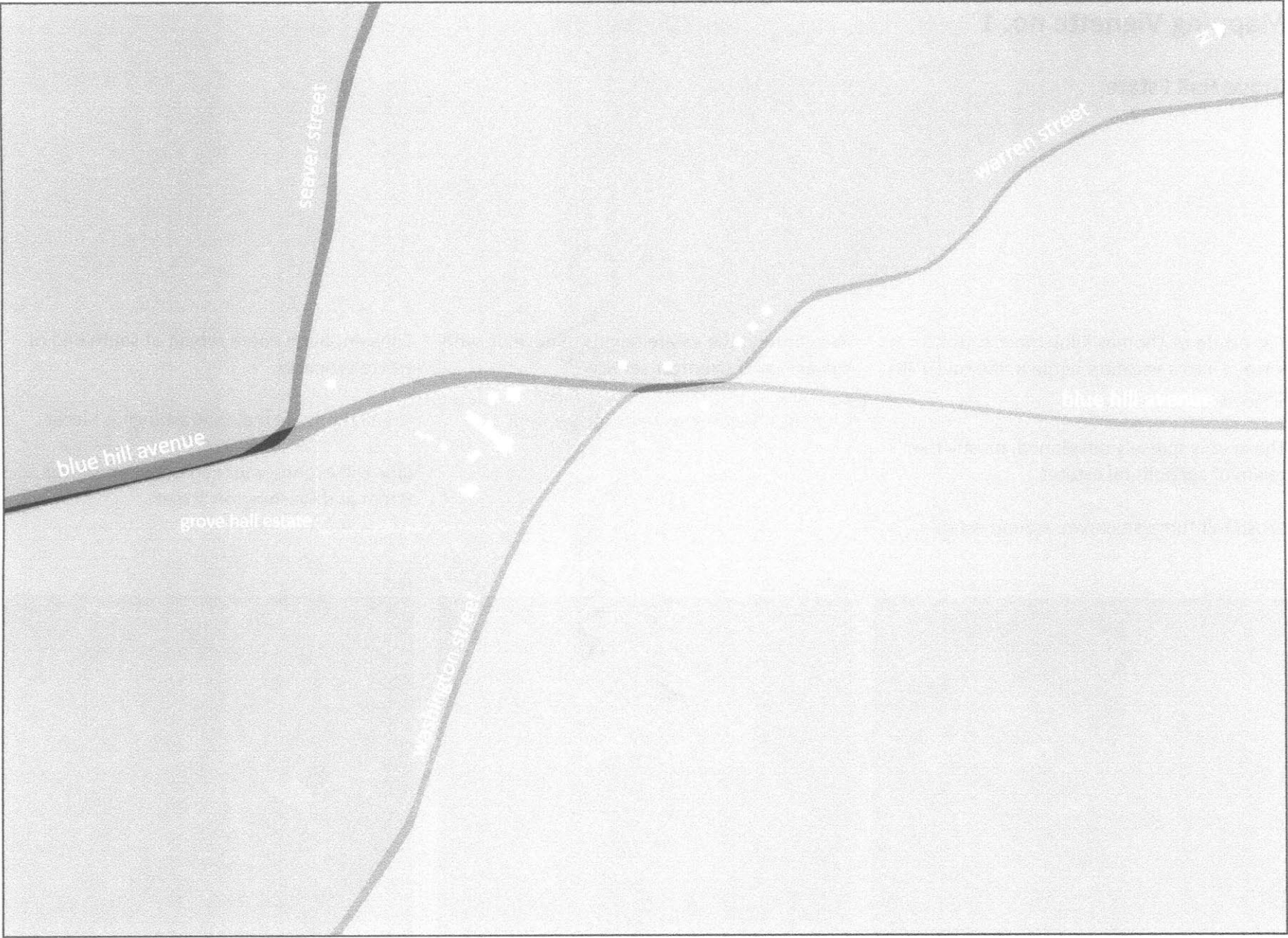
Importantly, there is a slight yet obvious curvature planned on the original road where it abuts the Grove Hall estate. This form results from the route avoiding two structures on the estate. Those structures were removed toward the end of the nineteenth century, and Blue Hill Avenue was widened onto estate land between 1887 and 1895, but the curvature of the road endured. This deviation from an intentional form in the street pattern exemplifies the way historical precedents influenced form in local street design. In stretching the correlative effects of this curve and the estate that formed it, the consequences of the accompanying historical development are traceable in the current gap in commercial space that exists between Washington Street and Seaver Street/Franklin Park. The Grove Hall estate affected development patterns for over a century, and though entirely destroyed by the 1930s, the residual effects of its presence and control still linger in the physical and social fabric.

Seaver Street

The third major influential road of Grove Hall was Seaver Street (fig. 1.13). Built as a path named the "Long Crouch" shortly after the completion of the Brush Hill Turnpike, it connected the area around Grove Hall with Walnut Avenue and eventually Egleston Square along the southern edge of the estate of Ebenezer Seaver¹⁷. The roadway skirted the northern edge of some of the larger Puddingstone formations found in the area. Seaver Street was a crucial component in the original division of Roxbury into separate towns and, as will be seen below, greatly influenced the future of land development in the area.

17 Drake, 223

Fig. 1.13. Seaver Street



Mapping Vignette no. 1

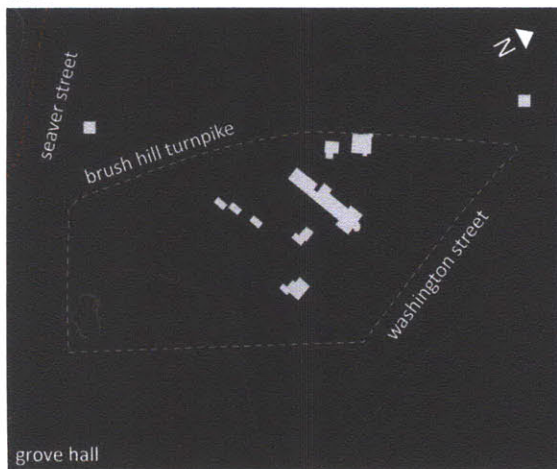
Grove Hall Estate

The estate of Thomas Kilby Jones is transformed into a vacation home in the mid-19th century

The area is sparsely developed, mostly the realm of agricultural estates

Brush Hill Turnpike curves around estate

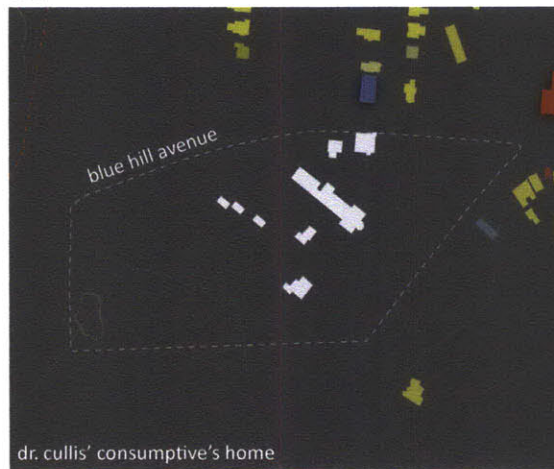
1850



Area around the estate begins to develop with the arrival of streetcar service

Churches built opposite estate grounds

1887

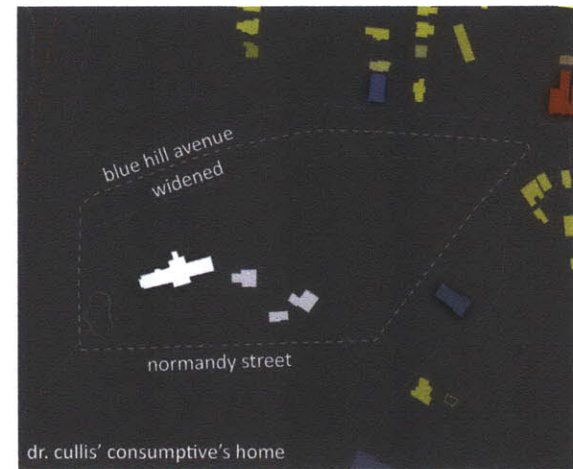


Consumptive's home rebuilt at south end of estate property

Fire Station erected on Washington Street

Blue Hill Avenue widened between Seaver Street and Washington Street

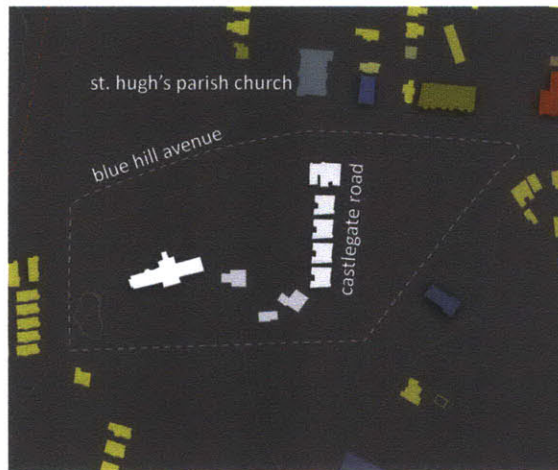
1899



First apartment blocks are built on Castlegate Road

new streets and houses begin to surround the estate

1906

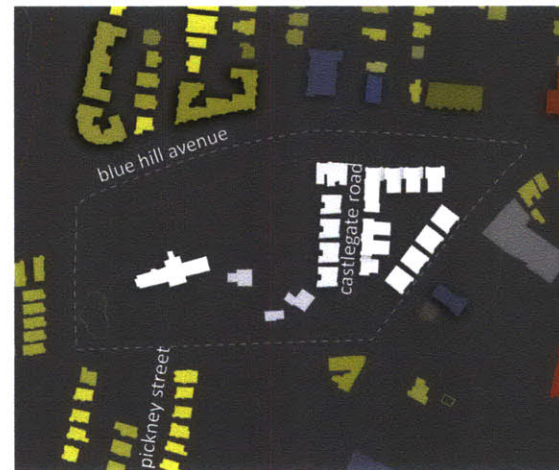


Apartment buildings continue to form the northern end of the former estate

Apartments define the Blue Hill Avenue street-wall

Housing continue to develop east Normandy Street

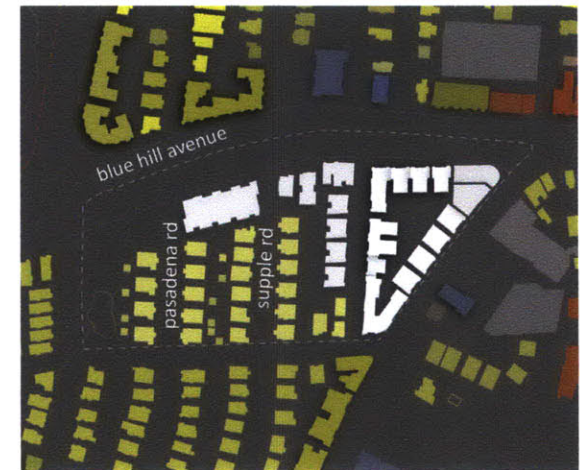
1918



All apartment building and retail buildings are completed on site

single family homes line Supple Road and Pasadena Road

1931



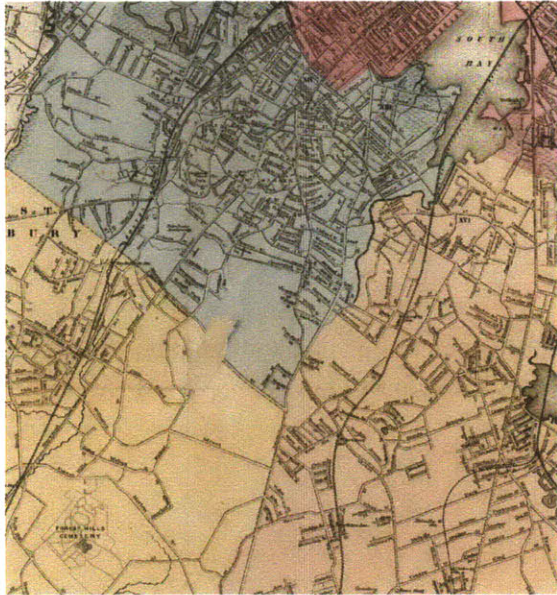


Fig. 1.14. Map of Boston (showing Roxbury, West Roxbury, Dorchester divisions), 1874.

Secession of West Roxbury and the Seaver Street Frontier

In 1851, the Town of West Roxbury, which included the villages of Jamaica Plain, Roslindale and old West Roxbury, “separated itself from its parent city of Roxbury” in an attempt to “preserve its former rural character against the coming of modern municipal life¹⁸” (fig. 1.14).

The eastern segment of the new border between Roxbury and West Roxbury was drawn on Seaver Street. This line effectively created a physical limit to development at the time, and to a degree prompted that very development into action. Beginning in the late 1860s, the rural estates north of Seaver Street, including the Williams, Reed, Weld and Seaver estates, were systematically subdivided into residential side streets and individual private lots¹⁹. A haphazard patchwork of roads was drawn over the fields and wooded hills²⁰. The development of detached homes generally started in the north closer to the urban area at Dudley Square and spread south toward Seaver Street.

Fig. 1.15. “Map of West Roxbury [Franklin] Park”, 1876.



18 Lower Roxbury, centered around Dudley Street, was by the 1850s a well-developed sub-center to Boston. Dense population, and growing commerce and manufacturing enterprises were poised to generate sprawl south into the rural highlands of Roxbury; Warner 1978, 42.

19 Plan of Boston and Roxbury, 1867; Atlas of the County of Suffolk, MA, Vol. 2, Roxbury, Plate H, 1873.

20 As per the description of the area in Boardman, 5-6. Drake, 1878

The transition from rural agricultural estates to tracts of suburban homes did not progress in a linear pattern. Some streets such as Wayne, Schuyler and Maple preceded development closer to the city (fig 1.15). Old estates were subdivided and housing was developed incrementally over the span of years, sometimes decades. During this time the owners (or their heirs) continued to live in the original manors or in new homes on portions of the former estates²¹. In the 1870s, there emerged a scattered pattern of Queen Anne (fig. 1.16) and Second Empire (fig 1.17-1.18) style homes amidst vast apple orchards and arrays of greenhouses. The rural landscape of Grove Hall with its fruit strewn wooded hills lay directly in the path of nineteenth century suburbanization.

²¹ The Seaver estate included the land between Blue Hill Avenue and Elm Hill Avenue, Georgia Street and Seaver Street. By 1895, the area was subdivided into 94 separate lots, with all large parcels, and many smaller ones owned by the members of the Parker family, heirs of Ebenezer Seaver. (sources: Atlas of the County of Suffolk, MA, Vol. 2, Plate H, 1873; Bromley Atlas, Plate 39, 1895)

Fig 1.16. Queen Anne

Streets like Warren, Humboldt, Howland, Crawford, Maple and Waumbeck were an experimental building ground for the 'Queen Anne' style. A free-form Victorian variation, the Queen Anne typically included playful roof lines, rounded corner bays, wrap-around porches, turrets, balconies and careful attention to color applied with customized design and details for the wealthier new residents (McAlester, 164-165). This style was short-lived, but used profusely in Grove Hall, Roxbury and throughout the region between 1870 and 1890 (Ibid). Photo: Howland Street, by Author



Fig. 1.17. Second Empire

The Second Empire, Victorian era style imported from Paris. It is characterized by mansard roofs and protruding bays and porticos (McAlester, 136-137). It was employed in the Boston area for homes, civic structures and apartment buildings, including many in Grove Hall such as the Highland Street Railway Terminal building, and this house on Warren Street. Photo: Google Earth.



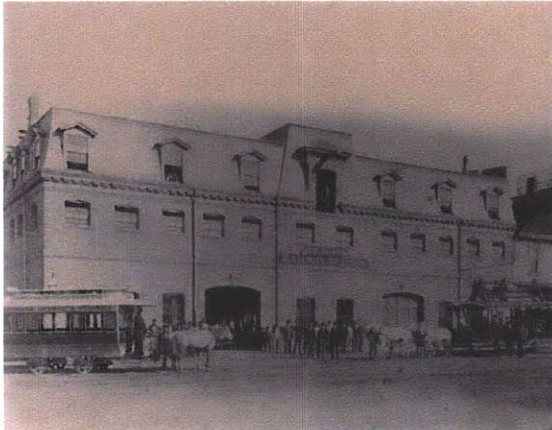


Fig. 1.18 Highland Streetcar Terminal, Grove Hall, 1881.
Source: Sammarco 2007, 51.

Fig. 1.19 “Old Little Estate, Warren St., Roxbury”, 1885 (approx). Source: Boston Public Library/Folsom, Augustine H. (photographer). 10 Nov 2010. Online Collection. Flickr. 12 April 2013.



Arrival of the Streetcar and the Subdivision of the Little Estate

Arguably, the greatest determinant for the location of urban and suburban growth in the Boston area in the final decades of the nineteenth century was the accessibility provided by the new streetcar system²². Sam Bass Warner’s “Streetcar Suburbs (2nd Ed.)” (1978) provides a comprehensive history of development in Roxbury and Dorchester including many descriptions specifically of Grove Hall²³. The first streetcar route into Grove Hall was operated by the Highland Street Railway Company (HSR) on Warren Street in 1872²⁴. The route originally terminated in Grove Hall, but was extended to Four Corners in Dorchester by 1873²⁵. The streetcars prompted wide-scale construction of middle-class suburban homes²⁶. By 1880, between the roads, streetcars and new home construction, the physical framework of the neighborhood was forming.

The incorporators of the HSR included the owners of local estates who would seemingly benefit from the development of their land. Mr. Samuel Little was the treasurer of the HSR²⁷. Little’s estate was located between Warren Street and Blue Hill Avenue, below Gaston Street (fig. 1.19). The first streetcar line on Warren Street passed directly in front of the estate. Aaron White and Patrick Maguire first developed single family homes on their land north of Little, with the creation of Gaston and Carlisle streets. The owner of the estate neighboring to the south was Theodore F. Tillinghast, whose land included would become Brunswick and Intervale Streets.

22 Warner, 1978.

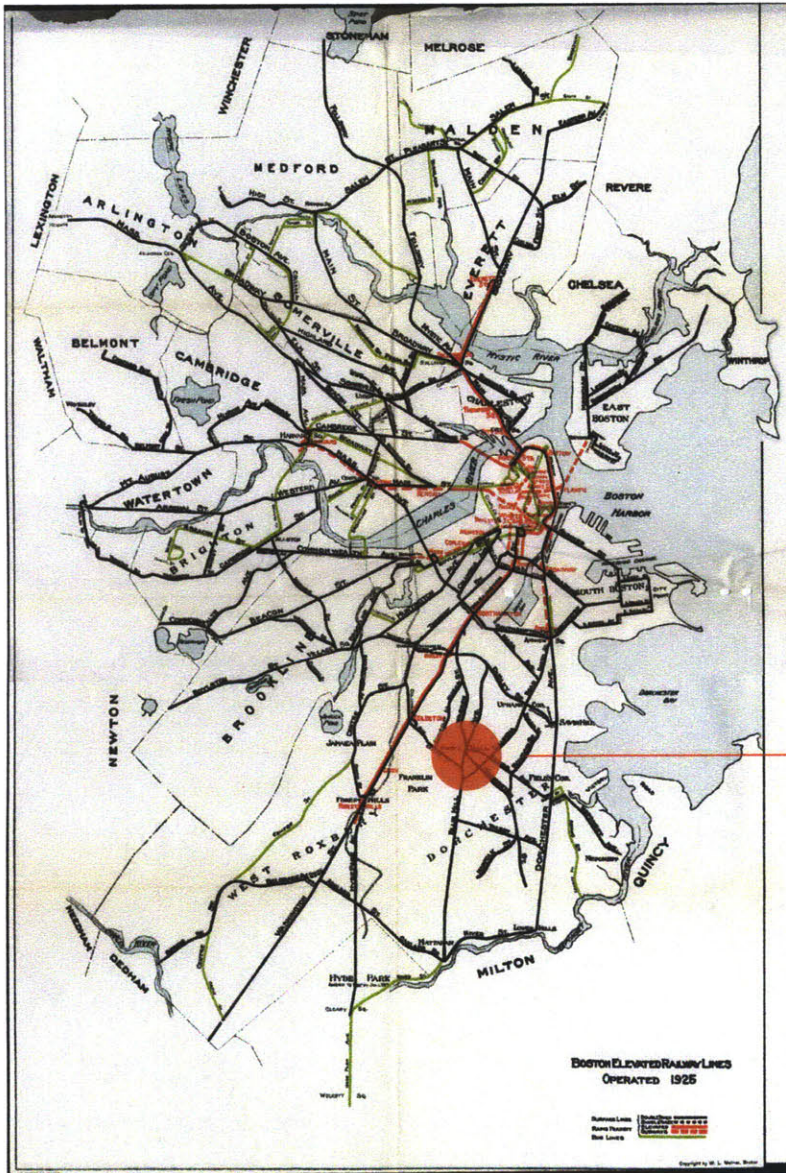
23 Ibid.

24 The Highland Street Railway operated the first line to Grove Hall from Boston via Dudley Square. It added additional lines on Columbus Ave., Dudley Street and Blue Hill Avenue. Mass. Board of Railroad Commissioners (1874): 140.

25 Atlas of the Country of Suffolk, MA, Roxbury, Plate H, 1873.

26 Warner 1978, 49.

27 Mass. Board of Railroad Commissioners (1887): 338.



Grove Hall

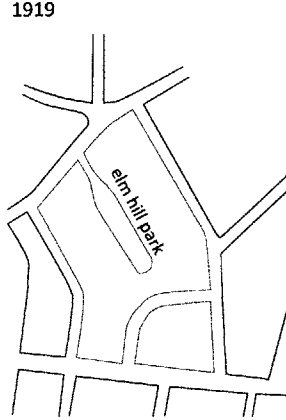
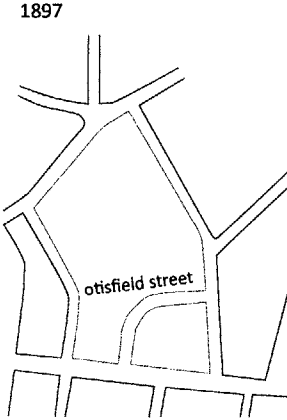
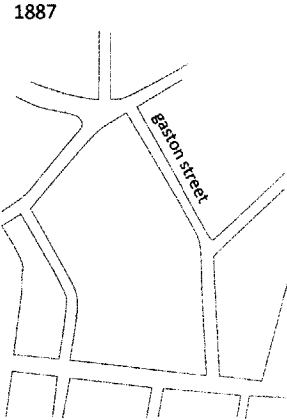
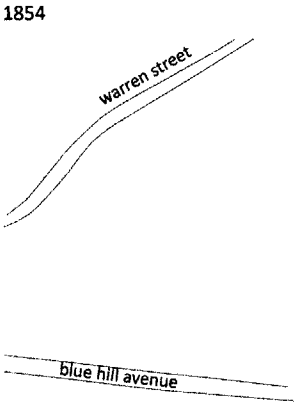
◀ Fig. 1.20. Boston Elevated Railway Lines, 1925.

Fig. 1.21. Streetcar on Blue Hill Ave. looking north at Washington St., 1932
Source: Sammarco 2007, 55.



Mapping Vignette no. 2

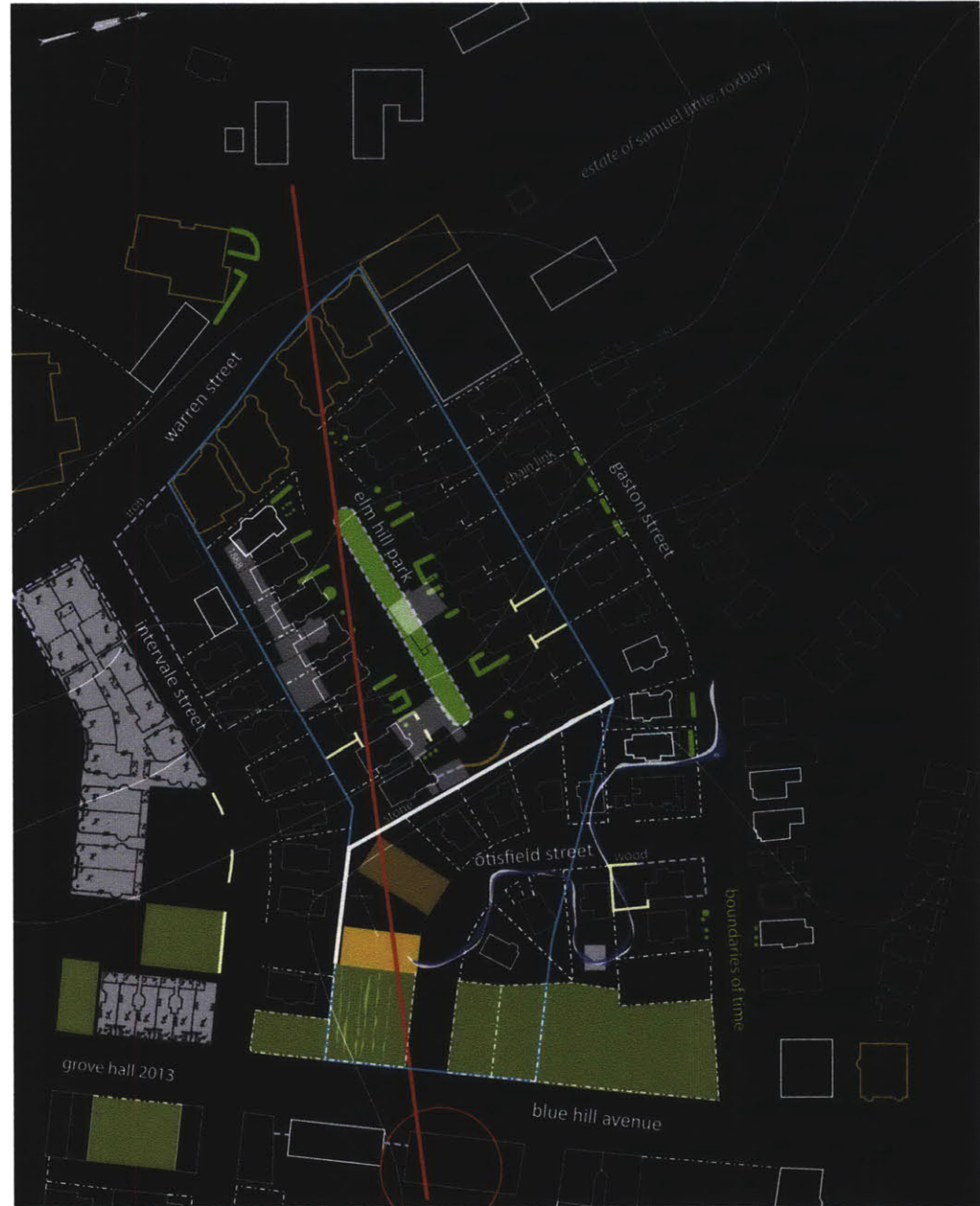
Samuel Little Estate: Elm Hill Park and Otisfield Street



The estate of Samuel Little was subdivided multiple times leaving a trace of its history in the street patterns of Otisfield Street, Gaston Street, Intervale Street and Elm Hill Park.

The location of buildings and fences, separation of typology and of fate were all determined by the unplanned nature of this site.

This vignette is an abstract rendering of past and present forms, but attempts, through mapping across time, to make sense of the boundaries that exist in Grove Hall today.



Consequences of Development Patterns

No structured plan was engaged in the creation of the neighborhood form. The order and pattern of development derived from the former estate boundaries and the timing by which the owners decided to sell their land. In many cases, land speculators, or the estate owners themselves, bought or reserved parcels and delayed their development for years while homes were erected on adjacent properties. By enduring a lapse in development, Grove Hall was subject to an array of different architectural styles, often on the same block.

Annexation

Roxbury was annexed by the City of Boston in 1868, at which point Seaver Street became part of the new southern border of the larger city.

In 1874, West Roxbury was annexed as well, ending its hope of evading urbanization. However, in the twenty years that Seaver Street provided a boundary to West Roxbury, it managed to curtail the subdivision of properties and prevent housing development on the south side of the street. This action in effect had a major consequence on the future of open space planning in Boston. Under the leadership of Mayor Samuel C. Cobb, the significantly enlarged City of Boston determined there was an urgent need for the creation of park space. The “Boston Parks Commission” was created by the Municipal Park Act of 1875 and charged with establishing a master plan for new civic park space in the city²⁸.

As the innermost sections of the city were already developed or under development, new parks were generally planned for newly annexed areas. The Boston Parks Commission engaged Frederick Law Olmsted as their consultant. Having recently designed Prospect Park in Brooklyn and Central Park in Manhattan²⁹, Olmsted was the preeminent public park designer of the time. He returned with a general plan for a ring of parks along the western edge of Roxbury³⁰, Jamaica Plain and across West Roxbury. The “Emerald Necklace” was conceived³¹ – a contiguous series of parks beginning at Commonwealth

28 “Boston Park Act”, Acts of 1875, Chapter 185.

29 Prospect Park was designed in 1867 and Central Park in 1857, and both still in the long process of construction when the design of his Boston parks began.

30 The western part of Roxbury at the time of annexation included part of the present-day Back Bay (considered a central Boston neighborhood). The former boundary ran between Gloucester and Hereford Streets.

31 The Back Bay was a filled in expansion of Boston, begun in 1857.

Avenue in the Back Bay, meandering toward the Arnold Arboretum³² and culminating in a new 527-acre city park near Grove Hall³³ (fig. 1.22).

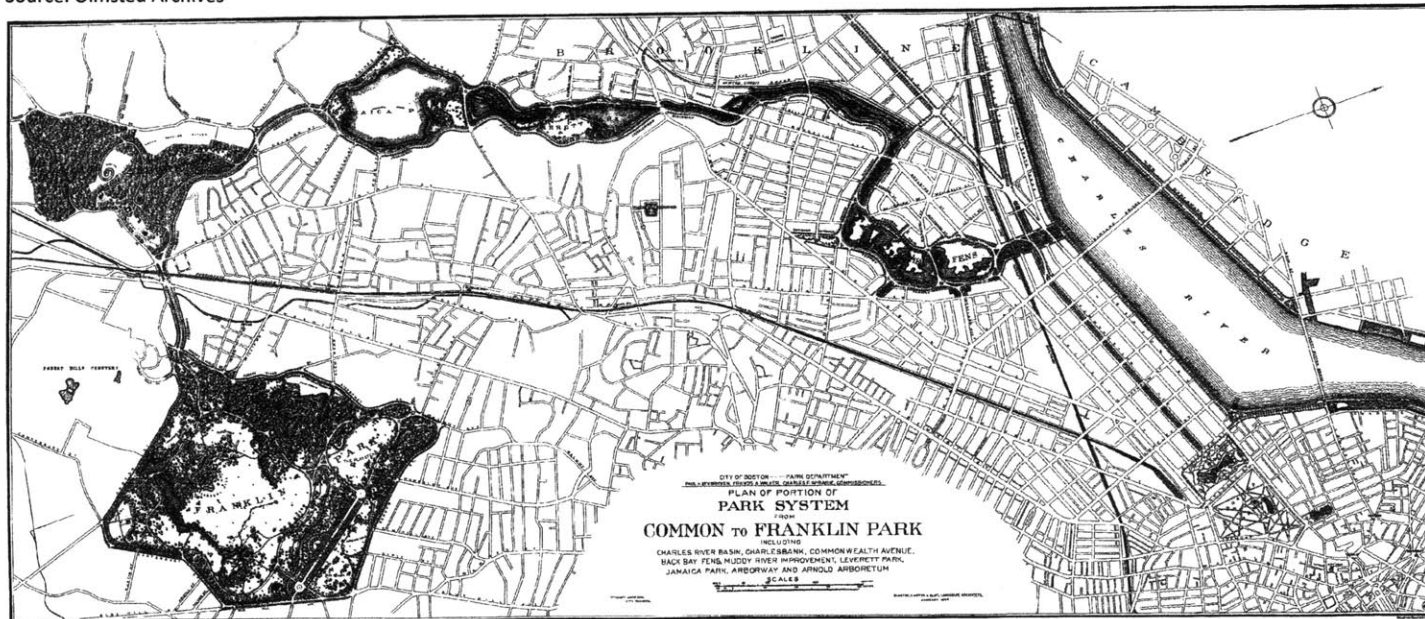
Seaver Street, the former southern boundary of Roxbury, then of Boston, was now employed to define the northern border of “Franklin Park”. The effort made through the secession of West Roxbury to preserve rural land³⁴ would be marginally realized in the location of Olmsted’s new park.

32 The Arboretum, owned by Harvard University, was created in 1872 by F.L. Olmsted, and subsequently incorporated in the Emerald Necklace.

33 The original necklace also included a “Dorchesterway” boulevard connecting Franklin Park to South Boston, but was never built.

34 The goal of West Roxbury’s secession and of Olmsted original design for Franklin Park was to preserve rural landscapes as they existed at the time.

Fig. 1.22. Emerald Necklace, 1875
Source: Olmsted Archives





Franklin Park

The great open vistas of Roxbury and Dorchester seen by Oliver Wendell Holmes almost two centuries ago, are now mostly incorporated into the dense development of the city of Boston. However, one significant remnant of the old landscape (though physically altered from its natural state) exists in Franklin Park (fig 1.23).

Cynthia Zaitzevsky (1982), in her historic volume “Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System,” chronicles the planning process and construction of Franklin Park and the Emerald Necklace, including discussion of Olmsted’s visions and philosophies. Zaitzevsky describes the efforts Olmsted made toward preserving rural qualities in the park, and in creating a place of refuge from the “ills of urban life” that were growing with the city.

“A man’s eyes cannot be as much occupied as they are in large cities by artificial things, or by natural things seen under obviously artificial conditions, without a harmful effect, first on his mental and nervous system and ultimately on his entire constitutional organization.”

- Frederick Law Olmsted (“in Notes on the Plan of Franklin Park and Related Manners”)

(Olmsted, 42)

Puddingstones and park

There is a powerful relationship between Puddingstones, Franklin Park and the development of the Grove Hall neighborhood. Franklin Park, opened in 1885, helped frame the emerging ‘streetcar suburb’ in Grove Hall by providing a solid boundary for the neighborhood as well as a degree of physical orientation. The social and cultural demands of the surrounding communities influenced the programming, design and evolution of the park. Within this period, Puddingstones were in part a physical determinant and in part a natural inspiration for both neighborhood and park; providing physical building blocks and a unique visual identity. Many boulders are exposed throughout the park, and Puddingstone was used to make fences, steps, gateway arches and even some buildings.

◀ Fig. 1.23 Frederick Law Olmsted, “General Plan of Franklin Park”, 1885.
Source: Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library



Fig. 1.24. Ninety-Nine Steps, Franklin Park

Source: Franklin Park Coalition

Fig. 1.25. Schoolmaster's Hill, Franklin Park

Source: Franklin Park Coalition



Olmsted instilled poetic meaning in the place-making of Franklin Park. In the “Ninety-Nine Steps,” and “Schoolmaster’s Hill³⁵” for instance, he designed meandering pathways and classical ascents to engage the participant in a voyage to nature (figs. 1.24, 1.25). His philosophy of being immersed in nature and escaping – even temporarily – from urban living, led Olmsted in attempting the design of an overtly rural setting. The encroaching suburban development of Grove Hall, however, placed competing programmatic requirements on the park.

Although bordered by many neighborhoods in Dorchester, Mattapan, and Jamaica Plain, the most historically symbiotic relationship of the park lay with the Roxbury neighborhood of Grove Hall. Franklin Park and Grove Hall developed in tandem from 1885 through the early 1900s. The design of the park responded to this neighborhood with a set of programs and formal spaces absent on other edges. Olmsted treated the Grove Hall side of Franklin Park in a completely different manner. Adjacent to the Seaver Street edge, an urban “ante-park” was designed in contrast to the “country” or non programmed³⁶ sides touching other neighborhoods³⁷.

Essentially two parks were created in one, a dichotomy that would endure much friction over the course of the park’s history. The suburban, eventually urban, reality surrounding the park failed to adhere to Olmsted’s theory of rural escapism. Additional demands were put on the expansive park grounds, and elements of the “country” side eroded after the opening of the park. This included, but was not limited to, the creation of the golf course, and the entry of vehicles to the park grounds.

In the “ante-park”, Olmsted designed the “Playstead” – a sporting ground specifically for children, a playground, an informal zoo (with only native “hardy” animals), and a grand public space called “The Greeting”³⁸

35 Named in honor of Ralph Waldo Emerson who lived in a house formerly located in the park (Franklin Park Coalition, 1980, 2)

36 Olmsted’s original design included non-programmed spaces, but a large golf course was then built near the Dorchester and Mattapan edges.

37 Zaitzevsky, 1982

38 Ibid; Boston Park Commissioners, 1910

The Greeting

Olmsted's "Greeting" included a grass and sand-bedded promenade lined with Elm trees, roughly half a mile in length; a setting for residents to gather, stroll, enjoy performances of music and play into the night³⁹. Its design was comparable in both scale and form to Rotten Row in London⁴⁰ – the great bridle path of Hyde Park. Though integral to Olmsted's final plan, construction of the original Greeting was constantly delayed, and eventually shelved by the City in 1900⁴¹.

The grand promenade design was not completely lost, however, as the landscape architect Arthur Shurcliff, a disciple and former employee of Olmsted, used basically the exact location and geometry of the Greeting for the design of the new zoo grounds that opened in 1912 (fig 1.26). A few adjustments were made: the promenade was narrowed, and in addition to the planting of Elm trees, the promenade was lined with animal pavilions⁴². The zoo and Greeting were open free and unfenced to the public. For the local community and for those arriving by streetcar, the formal grounds offered a great year-round civic space. The zoo and the Greeting were in essence the face of Franklin Park at Grove Hall; their future would, in turn, be influential on the neighborhood, and vice versa.

39 Zaitzevsky,

40 As per Boston City Council debate about funding its construction in the city council (Boston 1900 Documents, vol 4)

41 Ibid

42 Boston Park Commissioners, 1910; Animals were arranged in pavilion-like buildings, such as the pagoda-style bird house (see fig.1.27)



Fig. 1.26 Comparison of Olmsted Plan and actual layout of the "Greeting" and the zoo.

There are major formal similarities. Though, the original plan has several connections to the park perimeter that do not exist today. As well, the path system in Olmsted's plan was strictly for walking or riding (cars had not even been invented). Sources: Olmsted Archives; Google Earth.

Fig. 1.27. Bird House, Franklin Park



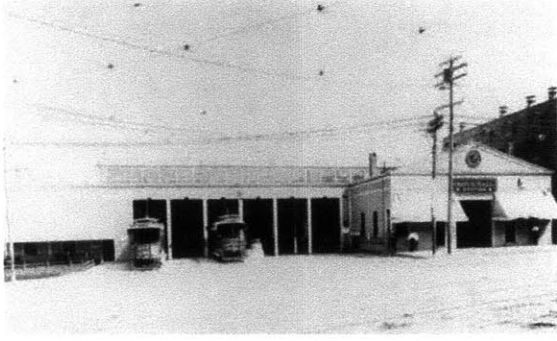


Fig. 1.28. West End Street Railways, Grove Hall Car House.
Source: Boston Public Library. Online Collection.
Flickr. 27 Feb 2013.

By virtue of the accessibility they provided with the streetcar network⁴³, Blue Hill Avenue and Seaver Street had a mutually constructive association with Franklin Park, though their individual formal relationships would differ greatly. In time, businesses would flourish on Blue Hill Avenue, and make the street into a social and commercial extension of the park and of Grove Hall. On Seaver Street, a high-end residential enclave would evolve. Their intersection, near the apex of the Greeting, became a formally bifurcated corner of Franklin Park. Adding to the complexity of this corner was the great puddingstone barrier on the park side, and the lingering history of the Grove Hall estate diagonally across from it.

The Streetcar Terminal at Grove Hall

The original Highland Street Railway streetcar barn on Blue Hill Avenue occupied a modest, yet stately, second empire building between Geneva Avenue and Centre Avenue (later Central Avenue.) The HSR merged with the Middlesex Railroad in 1886, and the following year with the West End Street Railway Company (WESR), which became the operator of most streetcars in the city.

By this time, the streetcar network was expanding in Roxbury and Dorchester, including a new line on Blue Hill Avenue from Dudley Street to Franklin Park. The WESR enlarged the depot into a major terminal including a streetcar storage and maintenance facility, a passenger waiting room and a horse stable (until electrification was complete)⁴⁴. Houses built along Central and Geneva Avenues in the 1860s and 1870s were demolished as the properties were acquired by the streetcar company⁴⁵.

43 By 1901, Streetcar lines were operating on both Blue Hill Avenue and Seaver Street. In addition, the Columbia Road Streetcar terminated at Blue Hill Avenue at the park entrance, and the Humboldt Avenue Line ended in a loop on the south side of Seaver Street.

44 Bromley 1889, 1904

45 Ibid

The emerging Grove Hall transportation hub and commercial node acquired a new scale. The block between Stanwood Street, Geneva Avenue, Normandy Street and Blue Hill Avenue became one large six acre site, the largest lot in Grove Hall, and one that would have a rippling effect on the neighborhood for over a century. As early as 1905, the West End Streetcar Company erected a maintenance shed that occupied almost half of the super-block; this was the largest building in Grove Hall, at the time, and ever since.

The effect that the West End Street Railway's consolidation of land had on Grove Hall was two-pronged. At first, the strength of the streetcar facility, and the adjacent commercial and residential development it spawned created the dense heart of the neighborhood. However, as we shall see in Mapping Vignette no. 3, the eventual dismantling of the streetcar system created a large vacancy in the middle of Grove Hall.

Mapping Vignette no. 3

The West End Street Railway Company

Several commercial and streetcar-support industries open adjacent to the streetcar yards

The West End Street Railway takes over the former facilities of the Highland Street Railway straddling Central Avenue

Business expands around the 'center' of Grove Hall

Residential construction approaches the site from the north

The streetcar facilities expand over majority of site, removing Central Avenue

The streetcar facilities shrink

The former train shed on Blue Hill Avenue is converted to a car dealership

Filling station opens in centre of streetcar activity

A new single storey commercial strip is opened on Blue Hill Avenue

1887



1904



1931



Geneva Avenue businesses begin to recede

Streetcar facilities removed from site

Site largely converted to parking and storage space

Commercial space abandoned on Geneva Avenue

Site is mostly abandoned, or with dillapidated structures

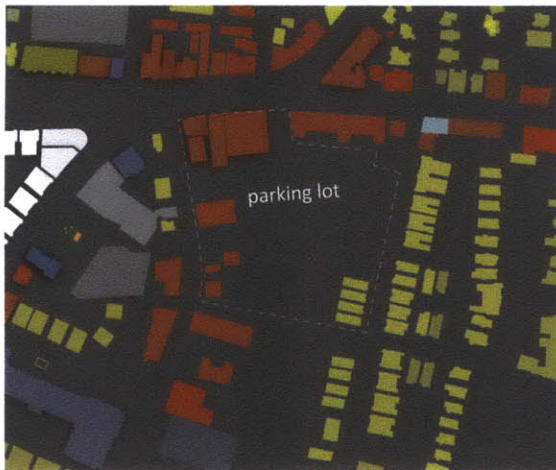
Grove Hall's Mecca is built on the 6-acre site. Site is built-up, but form does not solidify the Geneva Avenue or Crawford Street edges

New library and community center opened on Geneva Avenue.

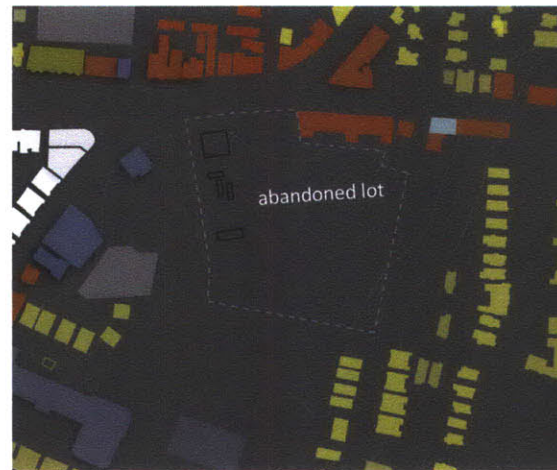
Conversation between various formal elements trying to take shape.

Mecca's suburban form stands out in neighborhood

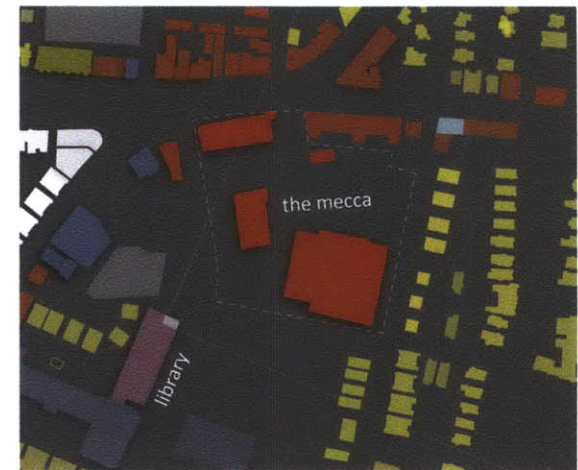
1950



1985



2013



The Seaver Street façade

As described earlier, the formal characteristics of Blue Hill Avenue and Seaver Street along the edge of Franklin Park were extremely different. A commercial district and social scene developed on Blue Hill Avenue as early as 1910, and by the 1930s, the bustling street was supported by a theatre, bowling alleys, roller rinks, drugstores, restaurants and pool halls providing indoor social activities to complement the park. Commercial activity from Grove Hall to Franklin Park and down to Mattapan was geared to Blue Hill Avenue.

On Seaver Street, however, an almost exclusively residential typology emerged. Prior to the First World War, most lots on Seaver Street were either undeveloped or supported large private homes of the former estate heirs⁴⁸. On Seaver, and the streets north of it, an enclave of the wealthier economic class created a 'sub-neighborhood' within Grove Hall known as Elm Hill. Starting with Elm Hill Avenue, Wayne and Maple Streets, and eventually on Brookledge, Hutchings, Ruthven and Homestead Streets, large, often ornate homes were erected. These streets were distinct from others in Grove Hall in that they occupied a slightly higher elevation, and had greater proximity to Franklin Park. These qualities added a premium to Elm Hill, and eventually attracted the wealthier echelon of the communities that settled there.

The value of the park was especially reflected in the development on Seaver Street itself. As location instilled a greater importance on the potential of real estate, speculation of properties on Seaver Street and adjacent blocks resulted in a slower and more incremental release of land for construction⁴⁹. Thus while most streets in Grove Hall were built-up by

48 Bromley Atlas. Drake

49 Warner 1978, 53



132-148 Seaver Street, 1928
Saul Moffie Architect

154-162 Seaver Street "Lincoln Apartments", 1928
Saul Moffie Architect

the start of the First World War, some, including almost all of Seaver Street, were undeveloped or ‘underdeveloped’. In the 1920s, the construction of over a dozen Beaux-Arts and Regency style apartment buildings with impressive architectural detailing and large balconies overlooking the great park transformed Seaver Street (Fig. 1.29). “This was Boston’s Central Park West.”⁵⁰

Park Side

Opposite these new elegant apartments, the porous park edge on Seaver Street provided several pathways to visitors and open views toward the zoo grounds and beyond. Seaver Street through the 1940s had a narrower right of way for automobiles, and a streetcar reservation abutted the park edge⁵¹. The physical accessibility and aesthetic relationship between park and community was much more welcoming than after several mid-century changes were made in the park design and street configuration. Those changes, including the fencing of the entire zoo grounds, the widening of the roadway, and removal of the streetcar fundamentally changed the character of the street and the entire neighborhood.

50 Abelow, Arnie. Personal Interview, August. 27, 2012.

51 Bromley Atlas 1931 Boston. Plate 30



Fig. 1.29 Seaver Street Panoramic View. Photos: Google Earth.

Holway Apartments,
Boston Housing Authority

Mishkan Tefila, 1925
Krokyn, Browne & Rosenstein Architects

Nazing Court, 1929
Saul Moffie Architect

The neighborhood that grew out of the intersections of historic roads, a formidable nineteenth century estate, a streetcar line and a park was in solid form at the edge of Roxbury and Dorchester by 1930. Grove Hall was densely settled yet not overcrowded, highly accessible, supported with great public amenities including park space and a thriving commercial district. It was a prime urban neighborhood in Boston.

The physical context of Grove Hall was evaluated in this chapter, and the connections between form and place-making were noted. In the following chapter, the social layers of the neighborhood are added, from the first Yankee suburbanites, to the Jewish influx of the early twentieth century to the entry of the African-American community fifty years later. The relationship of these communities, and their relationship with the urban form introduced in this chapter will be overlain, and their ability to adapt or failure to conform to new or existing physical environments will be examined.

The creation of Grove Hall involved a complexity in cartographic writing. Its physical form changed from a rural to suburban and then urban typology and along the way produced peculiar anomalies and substantial barriers for the future, as will be seen in the forthcoming chapters.

2

Mezuzahs and Soul Brothers

Jewish and African-American Migration in Grove Hall



Roxbury School, 1943.

The Mezuzah



Jews are instructed in the Torah to place a mezuzah on the gateposts of their homes (Deuteronomy 6:9). The mezuzah is an encased parchment containing a biblical prayer. Beyond the religious obligation embodied in its very placement, the mezuzah has evolved into a symbolic visual identification of Jewish homes, institutions and businesses. Most Jews, religious or secular, place a mezuzah on the upper part of their right-hand doorposts, starting with the front door, and, depending on various traditions or individual degree of piety, on up to every door or passageway on their property.

The obligation to put a mezuzah on a doorpost derives from the biblical story of God’s instruction to demarcate the homes of Jews in Egypt prior to their exodus from that land over 2500 years ago. Jews placed the blood of sacrificial lambs on doorposts to “identify” Jewish occupied homes, and allow the ‘spirit of death’ to pass over those homes during the last of the ten plagues rendered upon Pharaoh (Exodus 12:22)¹. The blood was temporary, but in time the mezuzah emerged as a permanent sign to announce to God and the world that the occupant of the demarcated space is Jewish.

In Grove Hall by the 1930s, the doorposts of most stores and homes bore a mezuzah. In a concert of territorial marking, the collective assembly of mezuzahs came to identify not only individual Jewish homes or businesses, but the ethnicity of the entire neighborhood.

Jewish Grove Hall

The internal migration of the Boston Jewish community is well documented in several texts (Gamm 1999; Ginsberg 1975; Levine and Harmon 1992; Sarna 1995; Vale 2002). However, the mutual association of urban design and the Jewish community in Boston, and specifically in the neighborhood of Grove Hall, needs further analysis and dissemination for the current planning discourse.

¹ These events are celebrated in the Jewish holiday of Passover.

Jews first moved to Grove Hall around 1900. Many came straight from ships arriving from czarist Russia, but most were transplanted from other parts of Boston (either earlier immigrants themselves or second or third generation Americans). Before arriving in Grove Hall, the first sizable Jewish community in Boston originally settled in the old South End² in the mid 1800s³. Starting in the 1880s, a large-scale immigration of Russian Jews entered the city, joining the existing Jewish population in the Old South End, and establishing new communities in the North and West Ends, Chelsea and other areas north of Boston⁴. In the same period, the older, more established community started to move into the 'new' South End. This segment of Jewish community became a more significant part of the Boston population, in number, economic status, and in their participation in society and professional circles. Coinciding with the entry to the South End, a degree of upward mobility began to elevate the economic status of many individuals and of this part of community as a whole.

In the dense quarters of the Downtown wards, where the majority of the Jewish community settled prior to 1900, small ghetto-like atmospheres emerged on Pleasant (now Stuart) Street in the old South End, Salem Street in the North End and Leverett Street in the West End. In 1895, 6200 Jews lived along Salem Street in the North End, almost equal to the Italian population. A similar number lived in the West End⁵. The population density of these neighborhoods rose tremendously as immigration supplied thousands of new residents (Jewish and other). With the threat of over-crowding, pressure mounted in the late nineteenth century to expand the Jewish presence in the South End. This internal pressure, and continued immigration would quickly lead to the saturation of that neighborhood as well, sparking the outward migration of the Jewish community from the South End into Roxbury and Grove Hall.

2 The Old South End is the present-day "Theatre District", south of Boston Common, and north of the "new" South End.

3 Sarna, 51.

4 Sarna, 72.

5 Ibid., 72-73.



Fig. 2.1, Columbus Avenue Synagogue

Adath Israel (the Columbus Avenue Synagogue) is now an A.M.E. church, but its facade is still dominated by an 8-foot star of David, a lasting trace of the fluid Jewish community that once lived in the South End.

Photo: Google Earth.

Synagogues Bridge the Communities

Many new synagogues opened across the city in the late 1800s, most small and practically unidentifiable as temples from the outside⁶. In the South End, as the Jewish migration replaced many of the earlier Yankee Protestant residents, several churches were converted into synagogues⁷. This pattern began even earlier in the Downtown wards, and would continue to repeat, and rebound, to the present day.

In 1885, the South End community erected the city's largest synagogue to date, Congregation Adath Israel (the Columbus Avenue Synagogue⁸). While other synagogues were typically located within tenements, halls or former churches, this new building stood with grand stature on the Boston streetscape⁹. Adath Israel played an important part in the symbolic structure of the community, and was an expression of its new socio-economic strength; it marked a place for the Jewish community within a gentile city¹⁰. The dominant feature of Adath Israel is a pair of towering steeples – similar if not identical to those found on local churches. Without a definitive American synagogue architecture to follow, its identity as a Jewish temple relied on German synagogue precedents¹¹, and more palpably, with the placement of visual symbols and inscriptions (fig 2.1).

In Boston, over the coming decades, synagogue design took its cue from Adath Israel. New synagogues were endowed with stars of David, verses of the old testament, and rose over streetscapes with bold façades. They were a sign to their community and to the whole city that Jews were part of the neighborhood.

6 Ibid., 175

7 Ibid.

8 In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, synagogues in Boston, and throughout the United States, were colloquially referred to as "Streetname Shul (temple or synagogue)" and established very local "sub-communities" with these "communal signposts" (Sarna: 183).

9 Ibid., 176.

10 Ibid.

11 The architect, Louis Weissbein, based his design for Adath Israel on the Bavarian round-arched-style-Rundbogenstil (Sarna, 176)

Community in Motion

As living conditions started to deteriorate in the increasingly congested South End, along Harrison and Shawmut Streets, and in the New York Streets¹², those with the financial means initiated the move to new neighborhoods in Roxbury and Dorchester, starting with Grove Hall, in the first few years of the twentieth century¹³.

This move involved a considerable geographical leap at the time – almost two miles separated the South End and the new subdivisions of Grove Hall – but the migrating community sought improvements in housing, less congested neighborhoods, and land to build new Jewish institutions including synagogues and schools. Although it started with wealthier pioneers, within a few years a broad cross-section of the Jewish community moved to Grove Hall.

When the Jews arrived, the existing population were mostly Yankee¹⁴. The community was supported with a number of churches, a large park and easy access to the city by streetcar. The original non-Jewish community would be almost completely replaced by the incoming Jewish migration within twenty years¹⁵. Boston's Jews inherited the outline of a neighborhood and would be instrumental in completing the physical form of Grove Hall.

The opportunity for growth in Grove Hall and down the Blue Hill Avenue corridor meant the Jewish community could occupy a much larger area of the city than in the South End, and exponentially more than in the North or West Ends. Located at the edge of mostly rural Dorchester, Grove Hall at the time represented one of the physical horizons for expansion in Boston, not just the relocation to another city neighborhood. Grove Hall in the early twentieth century had open land and prospects. In addition to housing, an opportunity emerged to establish a new self-sufficient neighborhood, with synagogues, schools, bakeries, community centers, social halls and local businesses.

12 A sub-neighborhood that once existed in the eastern side of the South End with streets named after cities in upstate New York. The neighborhood was destroyed in the first demolition of the wave of Urban Renewal that struck Boston in the 1950s and 1960s.

13 Sarna, 76.

14 Based on a survey of names and place of origin within census data for 1900, and owner information in the Bromley Atlas 1895.

15 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1900, 1920 (long form data including names, place of birth, place of parents birth, language spoken)

Suburban to Urban

The movement of the Jewish community to Grove Hall, and the impending construction of multi-family homes, apartment buildings and the many businesses and institutions that supported them completely changed the spatial characteristics of the neighborhood; the original suburban plan was steadily urbanized in the 1910s and 1920s. Building typologies applied in the South End and Back Bay (central urban areas) were applied in Grove Hall at a similar scale (though with a lower density). Beaux Arts and commercial style edifices were built on Blue Hill Avenue, Warren Street, Washington Street and Seaver Street, above the streetcar routes. Apartment buildings were built up to property lines, three- and four-storey buildings crowded the main intersection at Blue Hill Avenue and Washington and Warren Streets, and a long strip of commercial businesses emerged on Blue Hill Avenue.

At Seaver Street, the “natural” break of Franklin Park became more apparent as many low-rise apartment buildings crowded the street/park edge. These buildings also penetrated into many side-streets of the neighborhood, hitherto the realm of single-family houses. This was largely the case in the area west of Blue Hill Avenue and north of Franklin Park, on Elm Hill Avenue, Maple, Sonoma, Georgia and Cheney streets. This change in typology within the neighborhood had a great impact on the former suburban street form, and planted the seed for future socio-economic friction as a divide emerged between home-owners and apartment renters.

The Continuously Migrating Jewish Community

Once the initial core of settlement was established in Grove Hall, the Jewish community of Boston quickly spread into neighboring Dorchester and consolidated along the entire Blue Hill Avenue corridor – from Grove Hall to Mattapan (fig. 2.2). The population was initially supplemented by the tail end of immigration from Russia and Eastern Europe, but after the First World War, immigration policies tightened, and the influx of new members in the community was sharply constrained. The community stabilized in the post-World War I era, and census figures for Grove Hall and the Blue Hill Avenue corridor show a sustained and overwhelmingly Jewish population through the 1940s¹⁶. The perception of relative stability, however, is countered by Gamm (1999) in his argument that the Jewish population had always continued

16 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1920, 1930, 1940

to migrate outward (mainly to Mattapan and Brookline), and that the cessation of further in-migration at the 'start' of the community's territory (Grove Hall) led to the population vacuum that would hasten the transition of the neighborhood demographic.

Further supporting this continuous migration pattern and overall physical instability in the Jewish community is a report by Benjamin Rosen (1921) for the Federated Jewish Charities, in which he predicted the location of the "center" of the Jewish population for the emerging generation. Rosen concluded that Morton Street and Blue Hill Avenue (almost two miles south of Grove Hall) would contain the most Jews within a one-mile radius by 1930. Roxbury (Grove Hall), he claims, was saturated, and the potential for new growth, better and more affordable housing, less congestion and better living conditions for Jews lied in the direction of Mattapan. The physical impact of this report was fundamental, as it was used to determine the location for the construction of a new Jewish community building.

Before the community expanded further down Blue Hill Avenue, however, it established a major stronghold in Grove Hall, culturally and architecturally. The first physical cornerstone of the community was a grand architectural monument. In 1900 Congregation Adath Jeshurun became the first Jewish congregation to assemble in Grove Hall, meeting in a small wooden former church on Lawrence Street until moving six years later into the Blue Hill Avenue Synagogue¹⁷.

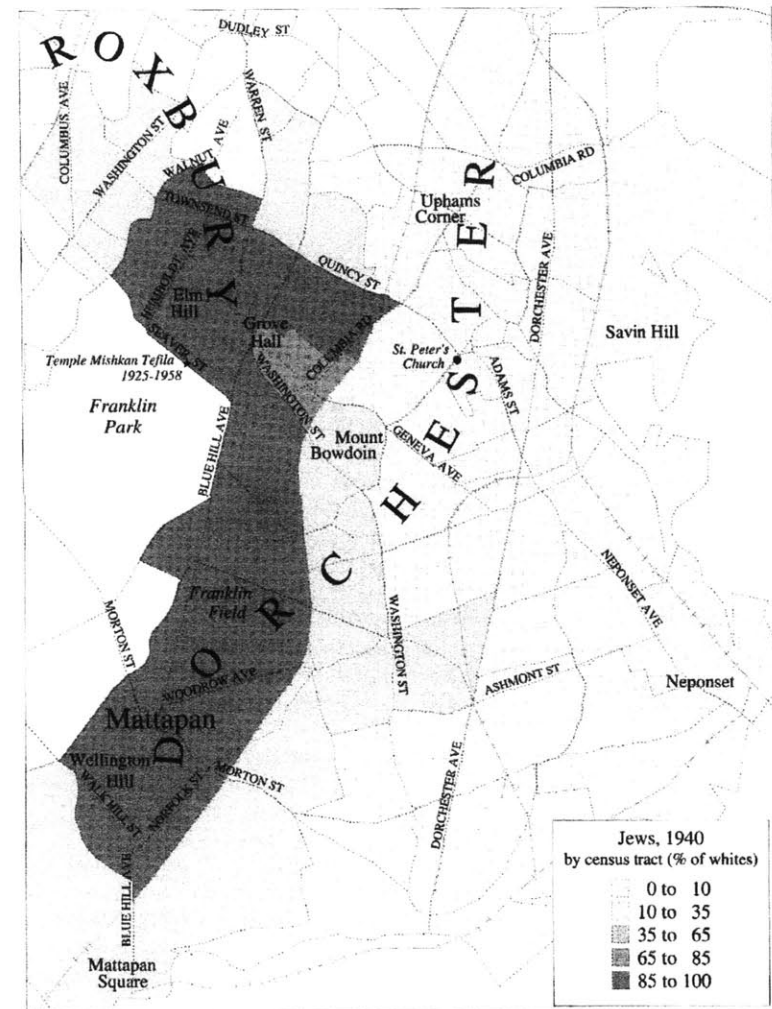


Fig. 2.2, Map of Jewish settlement in Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, 1940
Source: Gamm, Gerald. *Urban Exodus* (1999) p. 12.

17 See detailed description in Chapter Four



Fig. 2.3. Adath Jeshurun (The Blue Hill Avenue Synagogue)
Photo by author.

The Blue Hill Avenue Synagogue

Jacob Krokyn, a Harvard architecture student (and son of one of the congregation founders), is credited with the design of Adath Jeshurun (the Blue Hill Avenue Synagogue). Built in 1906, it must have commanded the skyline of the neighborhood with its towering stairwells topped with copper domes (fig. 2.3). The design was unique for Boston, though heavily influenced both by the round-arched-style of the Columbus Avenue Synagogue¹⁸, and by a few experimental Moorish-influenced synagogues in New York City¹⁹. The combination of eastern motifs and Romanesque order created an architectural novelty in a neighborhood comprised mostly of various Victorian-style houses²⁰.

The Blue Hill Avenue Synagogue introduced an early flair of urban multiculturalism into the image of the neighborhood. It also joined a line of dozens of architectural styles and variations that were employed in Grove Hall, developing a complex historical mosaic, and precluding the domination of any one formal architectural identity. In contrast, other Boston neighborhoods such as Beacon Hill, Back Bay, Charlestown, and even many parts of Roxbury and Dorchester, developed a much more homogenous image.

The synagogue was built up to the property line, with no outdoor space for its congregants, aside from a narrow pair of staircases. This condition was common amongst synagogues in the older parts of Boston, but in Grove Hall and its suburban context of modest setbacks, a precedent and opportunity to step back from the street existed. The Jewish community that built Adath Jeshurun came from the denser parts of Boston²¹, and the arrangement of space and buildings reminiscent

¹⁸ Sarna, 187.

¹⁹ The inspiration for Adath Jeshurun is traced to Congregation Shaarei Tefilah on 160 W 82nd Street in Manhattan. That synagogue (now a Ukrainian Orthodox Church) has the exact front staircase design and arched portico design. Further exploration by this author revealed that a second New York synagogue, Beit HaMidrash HaGadol, formerly a church in the Lower East Side (and now vacant) was used as a model for Shaarei Tefilah, and has an identical mid-section composition as Adath Jeshurun. Adath is a hybrid of the two.

²⁰ The unique design of the synagogue and its preservation over a century were sufficient to allow it to be added to the National Register of Historic Place in 1999. (<http://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/ma/Suffolk/state2.html>:April 9, 2013)

²¹ Mostly from the South End. Sarna, 186

of those areas ideally made sense to the transplanted residents. As such, the urban form of the city was superimposed on the streetcar suburb. Future synagogues in Grove Hall, Dorchester and Mattapan, tended to allocate more space to forecourts, gardens, grand staircases, and courtyards and generally created exterior gathering spaces for the community. Though, the first synagogue in these new quarters still instilled a nineteenth century urban doctrine.

The Blue Hill Avenue Vernacular and Jewish Real Estate Dynamics.

The Jewish migration to Grove Hall greatly affected the real estate dynamics of the neighborhood. The initial upper-income community was followed by a larger middle- and lower-income population. Density levels increased as apartment buildings were erected on dozens of streets. As well, the development of commercial space effectively only began with the arrival of the Jewish community. Along Blue Hill Avenue, from Washington Street north to Quincy Street, and up to Dudley Street, a major commercial district emerged. Many new buildings, primarily in the contemporary 'commercial-style' were built (see fig 2.4), but a specific vernacular also emerged along Blue Hill Avenue. In front of the previously built two and three-storey detached homes set back about twenty-five feet from the street, a near continuous band of single-storey wood-frame retail spaces were added (see fig. 2.5). The appearance of this typology in Grove Hall was unique to Blue Hill Avenue, although instances of it occurred in other places in the Boston area²².

Density

The single- and double-family home typology that characterized the bulk of Grove Hall architecture in 1900 was insufficient for the demand that accompanied the streetcar network expansion and Jewish migration. Moreover, apart from residences, the only other buildings in the neighborhood at this point were a few one-storey businesses on Blue Hill Avenue at the corner of Georgia and Cheney Streets, the West End Street Railway streetcar terminal (see Mapping Vignette no.

²² Evidence of this typology was seen by the author in parts of Cambridge and Somerville, and along Dorchester Avenue in Boston.



Fig. 2.4. Commercial style buildings adjacent to the Blue Hill Avenue Synagogue. Source: Google Earth



Fig. 2.5. Blue Hill Avenue vernacular Source: Google Earth



Fig. 2.6. Mishkan Tefila (The Seaver Street Synagogue).
Now the United House of Prayer Apostolic Church.

Photo by author.

3 in Chapter One) and three churches (Baptist, Universalist, and Union)²³. The Jewish migration introduced a large demand for schools, civic buildings and social services, as well as community-specific needs, such as synagogues, yeshivas, and places for the production and handling of ‘Jewish’ food, such as bakeries and Kosher butchers.

Warner addressed this in “Streetcar Suburbs” (1978), noting that the low density housing stock “was unsuited to the newcomer’s needs and capabilities. The structures often had to be divided to keep each family’s rent bill small. The high densities created by this process of conversion destroyed the land plans and facilities of the old suburb.”²⁴ On Blue Hill Avenue, between Seaver Street and Wayne Street, the low-rise walk-up apartment block in Grove Hall was born in the 1890s, but in the 1920s developers extensively took heed of the demand by the Jewish community. The neighborhood was filling up with the near complete exodus of Jews from the North, South and West Ends of Boston²⁵.

Mishkan Tefila

Mishkan Tefila, the Seaver Street Synagogue, occupied the white stone Greek Revival monolith structure perched above Seaver Street opposite Franklin Park (fig. 2.6). It was built in a time of opulence, and for a community in growth:

“throughout the interwar heyday of the second generation Jewish community, Mishkan Tefila was the dominant institutional presence in Roxbury, due in no small part to the imposing synagogue-center edifice.”²⁶

23 Source: Bromley Maps 1895, Sanborn Maps 1899

24 Warner: 1978, 12.

25 Ibid, 115; Rosen, 12.

26 Sarna, 193.

This building commanded not just the attention of the Jewish community of Grove Hall, but of the entire city. Within the vision of Jacob Krokyn²⁷, the Jewish architect of Mishkan Tefila, was the aspiration to create a building for the community, and of the community; for the Jews in the city and for the American city:

“The building will be an expression of modern American architecture, a striking symbol to the world of our harmony with American culture and traditions.”²⁸

To claim that Greek Revival architecture was harmonious with American culture in 1925 was questionable, but the significance of creating such a dominant façade, with a large forecourt and staircase facing the largest park in the City of Boston cannot be understated. The friezes and stained glass windows were etched with Jewish symbols and biblical references, and again, similar to the Columbus Avenue Synagogue, the façade became a billboard and source of identity for the community: “NOT BY MIGHT NOR BY POWER BUT BY MY SPRIT SAITH THE LORD”²⁹

Mishkan Tefila was not just a synagogue. Together with the other great synagogue of Grove Hall, Adath Jeshurun, it served the community as a synagogue-center: a school, community forum, banquet hall, and a gathering place for members and non-members. The richness of the architecture and identity incorporated in the façade or space in front of these buildings, created an important element of community form.

There was an effort to supply the amenities needed for a more permanent Jewish community³⁰; the synagogue had to respond to an evolving membership base. The Jewish community in Boston and throughout the country was assimilating into American culture and new world traditions; the adherence to old-world shtetl religion and tradition was being tested³¹. The youth had to

27 Krokyn was a partner of Krokyn, Browne and Rosenstein, architects of the synagogue.

28 Jacob Krokyn, as quoted in Sarna, 192.

29 Engraved scripture still visible on the East and West facades of the building.

30 Sarna, 187.

31 Glick, 1982; Motley, 2011.

be provided with physical places that would help maintain their connection to Judaism, if not religiously then at least culturally. Hebrew schools, Jewish sports clubs and youth organizations were established in buildings around Grove Hall³².

During and after the First World War, many new synagogues and community buildings were established in Dorchester neighborhoods beyond Grove Hall. A younger generation was moving further out; Grove Hall had within just a decade already established itself as the 'older section' of the community³³. Cheaper and often larger homes, the streetcar and rail lines, and an expanding Jewish community were available south of Grove Hall. Moreover, as described earlier through Benjamin Rosen's calculations, the community was in the process of continued migration; the Jewish future was beyond Grove Hall.

The Jewish community extended over a long strip of the city and covered a large geographic area, prompting the emergence of new sub-centers of Jewish life. The Blue Hill/Morton Street intersection and the area around Franklin Field eventually became the geographic center of the community leaving Grove Hall at the edge of other non-Jewish Roxbury neighborhoods, a crucial factor leading to the major demographic transition starting in the 1940s.

Owing to its more central (city) location and its longer history, Grove Hall remained a more physically urban component of the Jewish community. The density of its commercial district, the mobility provided by the streetcar and the chance to still interact with other cultures (at least nearby), were some of the distinct features that Grove Hall possessed in contrast to the other Jewish neighborhoods in the city. This fact, however, helped foster a spatial and cultural disconnect from Grove Hall as the larger Jewish community adopted an overtly suburban identity in the second half of the twentieth century.

32 The Young Man's Hebrew Association (YMHA) was located on Humboldt Avenue, Jewish schools were erected next to Mishkan Tefila, on Elm Hill Avenue and Intervale Street.

33 Sarna, 189.

The Jewish Park

Mishkan Tefila, “served to symbolize the connection between the Jewish community and Franklin Park.”³⁴ The synagogue was in fact the center of the new Seaver Street façade introduced in Chapter One. The formal importance of its position opposite the park gave it an element of power, and incorporated the park into the Jewish community. This was the park where Orthodox Jews performed Tashlich³⁵ services, where Jewish children played ball, Jewish fathers (and some mothers) played golf, where families picnicked and young couples courted. Hal and Roz Lurie were one of these couples from Grove Hall who went to the park almost every weekend.

Hal and Roz

When they first started dating, Hal attended Roxbury Memorial High School on Townsend Street, Roz went to Jeremiah E. Burke³⁶. The “Burke,” as it is called by students (past and present), was among the last great structures added to Grove Hall before the stagnation of the mid-century set in (fig. 2.7). The elegant art deco school rises dramatically over a recessed courtyard on Washington Street, steps down from the fire station.

Hal’s family used to live on Blue Hill Avenue, just north of Warren Street. “We did all our shopping on Blue Hill . . . my Mom went to the butcher for the kosher chickens, and I would reach into the pickle barrels right there on the street.”

On a typical date, Roz recounts, Hal would walk over from his apartment on Olney Street past the bagel factory on Erie Street (he can still smell it), and pick Roz up at her two-family home amongst the Queen Annes of Wolcott Street. They would walk or take the streetcar to the theatre where the films may have been different, but always followed by a visit to the drugstore for an



Fig. 2.7. Jeremiah E. Burke High School.

Photo by author.

³⁴ Hoagland, 5

³⁵ Tashlich is a ceremony performed during the Jewish New Year, where sins of the previous year are symbolically cast off through bread or other food in a body of water. In Franklin Park, Scarboro Pond served this purpose.

³⁶ In the 1940s, many schools in Boston were still separated for girls and boys



Fig. 2.8. Rose Garden

Source: Boston Public Library, photo archives.

ice cream or soda, and a walk through the park to the Rose Garden (fig. 2.8). The Rose Garden was another component of Franklin Park not planned by Olmsted. It was built at the far end of the Greeting (the zoo version made in 1912), near Elm Hill Avenue and Seaver Street, decorated with sculptures and fountains and enclosed within a tall wood-trellis and stone fence. The garden stood as a symbol of pride for the community and the entire city, until demolished to make room for an expansion of the zoo in 1978.

In 1949, a few years after finishing high school, Hal and Roz were married. The wedding was held at the Aperion Plaza banquet hall, located about halfway between their schools, on Warren Street. The Aperion witnessed the celebrations of many Jews in Grove Hall. It was the premier banquet facility in the neighborhood – kosher and operated by the Beit HaMidrash orthodox synagogue on Crawford Street. It was designed in 1927 by Eisenberg and Feer Architects in the Colonial Revival style that typified their work³⁷ (fig. 2.9).

Hal and Roz grew up in the era when everything you needed was within walking distance of Blue Hill Avenue. All the food, groceries, baked goods, hardware, and clothes; it was also where you met your spouse, and where you got married.

Fig. 2.9. Aperion Plaza Banquet Hall

Photo by author.



As newlyweds, Hal and Roz needed a place to live, and although they grew up in Grove Hall, the young couple was content with moving down Blue Hill Avenue to Mattapan, where the rents were lower, and there was “a bit more space.” Then, three years later, in 1952, Hal and Roz moved to the distant suburb of Sharon. They did not speculate that they were the sign of things to come; they could not imagine that Grove Hall, and the Blue Hill Avenue corridor would not continue to be Jewish. They moved for a very simple reason Roz says, they “wanted a nice home that we could afford, with a backyard.” The important dynamic revealed here, is that for Hal and Roz, and thousands of other young Jewish couples, there was not a push to leave in the 1950s, there was

³⁷ Eisenberg and Feer designed several apartment buildings in the city, and the “Sunset Lodge” (1932), a vacation hotel in Sharon registered with the MA Historical Commission (http://www.townofsharon.net/public_documents/SharonMA_WebDocs/Survey%20Forms/SHA_81&82_Community%20Center%20Drive_1.pdf)

a pull to new mid-century suburbia.

Sponsoring that pull, however, were two major governmental tools, the creation of major road infrastructure and the availability of inexpensive loans for new home buyers, especially veterans, through the GI Bill and the Federal Housing Act of 1949³⁸. These factors helped underwrite the suburban enterprise. Hal Lurie was in the military for two years, and eligible for the favorable housing loans. As they looked for a place to buy a home and start a family, Hal and Roz found both economic opportunity and a sense of solace in the suburbs.

Sharon, in 1950, was a small Protestant New England town of around 4,800 people³⁹ fourteen miles from Grove Hall down Blue Hill Avenue. The Luries were among almost 5,000 Jews who moved there from Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan in the 1950s, more than doubling the population and completely changing its ethnic composition. The similarity to Grove Hall circa 1900 is striking.

White (Jewish) Flight from Grove Hall

The concept of “white flight” that eventually took form in Grove Hall was preceded by the opportunities that whites (Jews in this case) had in location selection, and that blacks (as will be discussed below) did not. The ability to improve living conditions, even if it meant moving from your established neighborhood, advanced in the American psyche in the 1950s and 1960s (though it was a concept as old as the nation itself.) Places like Sharon were affordable, and a conglomerated area including the towns of Stoughton, Canton and Randolph emerged as the destination for the majority of Roxbury and Dorchester Jewry in these decades. Those who could afford the housing, often moved to more expensive suburbs like Brookline or Newton, and the more orthodox segment of the population generally moved to Brighton. In general, there was adherence to the trajectory of Blue Hill Avenue, which remained a physical, or perhaps, metaphysical connection to the old neighborhood.

38 Jackson, 225.

39 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1950

Mishkan Tefila Moves to Newton

In the same year Hal and Roz left for Sharon, the Mishkan Tefila congregation moved to Newton. This was the first synagogue to leave Grove Hall. Many of the upper- and upper-middle income families who made up a high percentage of Mishkan Tefila's membership were among the first to move from the Elm Hill section of Grove Hall to the more homogenous upper- and upper-middle class parts of Brookline and Newton. When over half their members no longer lived in the neighborhood, the temple decided to follow their membership. For several years, the Seaver Street Synagogue continued to operate as a temple for the ultra-orthodox Lubavitch sect, but by the mid-1960s, this group had left for Brighton and the future of the building, which was then poorly maintained for over a decade was in limbo.

The congregations moved out their torah scrolls, but left the stars of David, menorahs and other symbols and phrases engraved in the walls of the buildings that would no longer serve as a synagogue.

The exodus of the Jewish community from Elm Hill, and then all of Grove Hall continued throughout the 1950s. By 1960, the white (mostly Jewish) population of the neighborhood was less than 50%, compared to 94% in 1950⁴⁰. The neighborhood was transitioning to the African-American community.

40 U.S. Bureau of the Census 1950, 1960.

African-Americans in Boston

African-Americans have lived in Boston since early Colonial days, many as slaves, and from the early 1800s mostly as freemen. In the antebellum period, the Boston black community was amongst the leaders of the abolitionist movement, with figures like Lewis Hayden. In the period after the Civil War and the emancipation of southern slaves, a “sizeable contingent” of southern blacks migrated to Boston, doubling the black population between 1865 and 1880. These newcomers arrived to a city with a lower degree of discrimination and fewer “barriers of access”⁴¹.

The larger community established relatively strong roots and advances in local society, achieving desegregation in schools, and even attaining positions in public office and academia⁴². The first concentrated black community in Boston lived in the North End, but resettled on the north slope of Beacon Hill around 1800. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the community migrated in most part to the West End and South End, and then early in the twentieth century, entered Lower Roxbury, which has served as the cultural hub of the community for over a century.

Stagnated Rise of the Black Community

As noted, the original Boston black community had achieved significant advancements in local society including access to institutions, business, and political circles in “a stage of florescence” after the Civil war⁴³. Some even forged their entry into the upper echelons of Brahmin⁴⁴ society, and included prominent Harvard scholars and alumni such as W.E.B. DuBois and James Munro Trotter, whose early civil rights campaigns led to the creation of the NAACP⁴⁵.

By 1910, however, an era that hindered further advancement fell upon the community just as it was aspiring for greater status in the city⁴⁶. Instead of participating in the collective gains of the wider civic community, blacks had to contend with the challenge presented by the immigration of various white European groups, including Irish, Jews, and Italians,

41 Handlin, 212.

42 Lewis Hayden, a former slave from Kentucky lived in Boston as a prominent member of the abolitionist movement. Locally, he led the desegregation of schools in Boston, and after the Civil War, was the first black elected to the Massachusetts legislature. Robboy, 1973.

43 Cromwell, 197.

44 “Brahmin” was the term used to describe the elite class of Boston - traditionally families with old English roots, and ties to land-holdings and local industry.

45 Cromwell, 196.

46 Ibid., 197.

who were able to advance in political and professional circles ahead of blacks. The start of southern-born migration and the arrival of foreign-born black immigrants, combined with the rise of Irish political control, and the strength in numbers of various European immigrant groups, diminished the improved socio-economic status of Boston blacks⁴⁷. The socio-economic landscape of black Boston was ruptured, for whereas the center of black “professional, business, and cultural leadership for the United States . . . is now in other areas . . . it previously was in Boston”⁴⁸.

The Great Migration

In the twentieth century, the American black population embarked on the “Great Migration,” a relocation of over six million blacks from the rural South, to the cities in the northern and western United States. Between the First and Second World Wars over 1.5 million people moved nationwide and, after World War Two and through the end of the 1960s, an additional five million people continued the migration, reshaping and redefining cities including Boston. Between 1940 and 1960 alone, the black population in the City of Boston increased by over 166% from 23,679 to 63,165 residents⁴⁹, with most migrants arriving from North Carolina and Virginia, although people from other states and the West Indies came as well. In 1950, the black community settled in a few distinct neighborhoods, the South End, Lower Roxbury near Dudley Square, and a section of Upper Roxbury around Humboldt Avenue and Townsend Street, just west of Grove Hall. The latter was the home of the wealthier segment of the community. In Grove Hall, a black community also had a notable presence in the area of Warren Street north of Crawford Street⁵⁰.

The population by 1960 was more a migrant community as opposed to a Boston-born one. This change, as well as the decline in economic standing due to the influx of Southern migrants who were usually poorer and less equipped with local knowledge, and the racist restrictions (legal or not⁵¹) that controlled the settlement of blacks in the Boston region, were responsible for the creation of the black ghetto of Boston in Roxbury (Dobbin et. al 1968; Edwards et. al. 1961).

47 Ibid., 198.

48 Ibid.

49 U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940, 1960

50 The black population in Census Tract U6A (821) in 1950 numbered 1377, or 25% of the total. U.S. Bureau of the Census (1950)

51 Restrictive covenants, allowing the official exclusion of people by race were only ruled unconstitutional and illegal by the Supreme Court in 1948. Vose, 1959.

The Black Community Arrives in Grove Hall

New blacks arriving in Boston after 1950 were ironically faced with a housing shortage even as the population of the city was dropping precipitously⁵². Black migrants were confined to select neighborhoods that essentially allowed them to move in⁵³. In the City of Boston, this was Lower Roxbury, and the South End. The neighboring cities of Cambridge and Medford also had established black communities, but those areas were generally less accessible economically to new residents.

The black community entered Grove Hall in the 1940s. Middle- and upper-middle- class families from Boston, as well as new immigrants from the West Indies, led the move south on Warren Street. Reviewing long form census block data from 1940 reveals a street-by-street settlement pattern of blacks starting at the top of Grove Hall. Streets near the intersection of Quincy and Warren Streets had a significantly higher percentage of blacks listed as residents than streets further south. In general, the 1950 census reveals that 25% of the northwestern section (census tract U6A) of Grove Hall was black. The next tract south, U6B was only 2% black by comparison.

The further expansion of the black community was severely constricted by entrenched ethnic communities that did not welcome the new group⁵⁴. South Boston, many neighborhoods in Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, and West Roxbury were not open to the black community⁵⁵. Most suburban areas were also considered unfriendly to black settlement. Based on these geographic constrictions, pressure mounted on the one direction open for the black community to grow: into Grove Hall and the Blue Hill Corridor –the Jewish area of the city⁵⁶.

The power of real estate and economics, according to MIT Professor Philip Clay (2012) was so strong that a transition had to occur. “People simply needed housing . . . the market dynamics didn’t care about the community.”

52 City of Boston population dropped from 801,444 (1950) to 697,197 (1960). U.S. Bureau of the Census 1950, 1960.

53 Vose, 56.

54 Gamm, 1996.

55 Ibid.

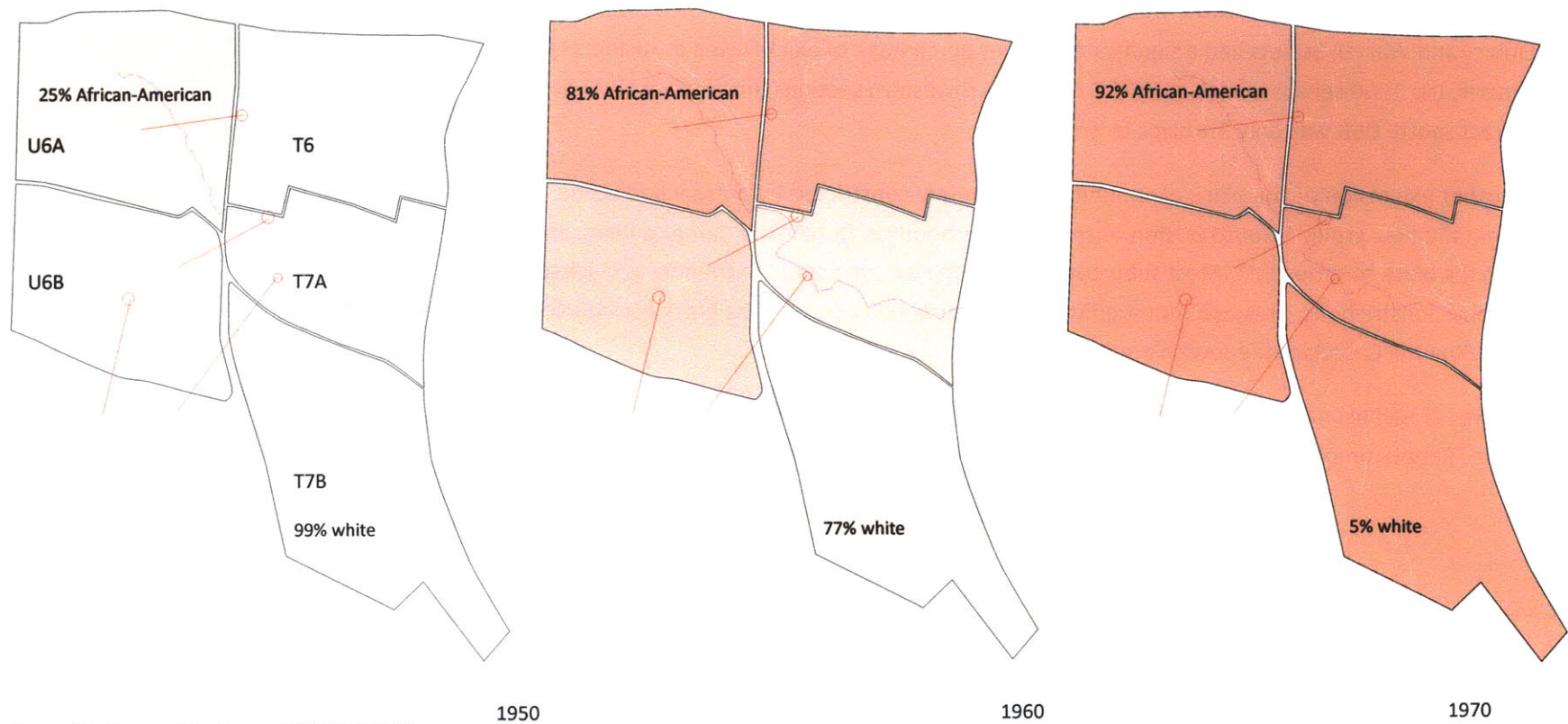
56 Ibid.

Fig 2.10 Time of Transition

The African-American community in Roxbury grew tremendously in the post World War Two era. Middle and upper-middle class families began to move to Grove Hall in the 1940s, along Warren Street.

By 1960, Grove Hall demographics had absorbed the northern area into black Roxbury. The highest income Elm Hill section was evenly mixed between Jewish and African-American families, but a steady outflow of Jews from this area made additional housing available for blacks.

By 1970, Grove Hall was a solid African-American neighborhood. In less than 20 years, the entire ethnic/racial character of the area changed completely.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1950, 1960, 1970

The Tipping Point

There was no recorded Jewish resistance to the incoming black community in Grove Hall (no protests, violence, or campaigns,) however, the actual willingness of Jews to live next to black neighbors diminished as the number of black families on their street increased (Gamm 1999; Ginsburg 1975; Levine and Harmon 1992). The tipping point theory coined by Morton Grodzins (1957), and advanced by Thomas Schelling (1971) and George Galster (1996) identifies the fact that a certain percentage of residents of a different race (specifically black residents) in a street or neighborhood, creates a point that causes the racial balance of that location to move toward complete demographic change. Grodzins also hypothesizes that the population shift, once started, cannot be reversed. Schelling examined many cases of demographic change toward the end of the transition period of urban centers in the United States (in the mid to late 1960s), and essentially confirmed Grodzin's hypothesis.

No precise percentage or absolute number for the tipping point was ever calculated, but Schelling's models provide insight on the methodology employed by both whites and blacks in the decision making that led to de facto segregation between the races in U.S. cities. The models were used to prove that blacks and whites made choices based on future expectations and on perceptions felt at their very immediate proximity. One black family on the street might represent a few percent of the overall population, but for the white family living next door, the feeling was that it was much higher. Furthermore, even though individual neighborly interactions with blacks could be positive for the white residents, the actual decision to move was not based on the individuals who lived next door, but on global perceptions of the entire black community⁵⁷.

Push or Pull

The literature on racial transition and the census data almost seem to conflict with the arguments by Gerald Gamm and the testimony of people like Hal and Roz Lurie. The answer to whether Grove Hall's demographic change was a product of push or pull points to balance of both. The initial pull of the Jewish community to Mattapan and the suburbs created the space for the black migration into the neighborhood. Gamm purports that the Jewish community began a process of suburbanization as early as the 1920s, and with increased speed starting in the 1940s and through the 1960s, with

⁵⁷ Schelling, 1971; Ginsburg, 1975.

the outward migration creating a vacuum of space for the next group, in this case the black community. Furthermore, Gamm contends that the neighboring Irish community in Dorchester was territorially connected to their neighborhood because of the structure of the Catholic parish system⁵⁸.

Levine and Harmon (1992) in “Death of an American Jewish Community” are more suspicious of the motives that may have pushed the Jewish community out of Boston in the same period, such as the “fear of living in a black community,” and the “blockbusting⁵⁹” efforts of realtors who exploited those fears. Harmon and Levine further speculate that a consortium of regional banks outlined the Jewish neighborhood of Boston, from Grove Hall to Mattapan, as the prime area for mortgages to new black homeowners. One can draw a combined set of conclusions as to the exact formula that led the Jewish community out of Boston.

In any case, the Jewish community, when it did move, took a physical part of Grove Hall with it as well. The community needed its synagogues and schools, kosher food and community halls within close proximity of where they lived. The racial transition did not just change the population, it changed the functions of the urban space, often in dramatic fashion.

Grove Hall was for a brief period a mixed community. Blacks and Jews lived on the same streets, even in the same buildings. Children attended the same schools, but social interaction was minimal as religious and cultural differences were not easily overcome⁶⁰. Some groups and individuals tried to bridge the divide between Jews and blacks. The Freedom House, a community group run by Muriel and Otto Snowden, worked to advance the status of the black community through interaction with the global population in Boston, including the Jewish community. Since

58 Catholic churches are divided with strict geography (ordained by the Vatican). Church members must live with the specified parish boundaries.

59 Blockbusting was realtor technique that involved manipulation of fear and propaganda to convince one group to leave an area because of the impending arrival of a new group.

60 Abelow, Arnie. Personal interview, 27 August 2012.

1952⁶¹ they ran interracial dialogues and holiday events from their building on Crawford Street in the heart of Grove Hall. The efforts by the Freedom House, and later by other groups such as the Mattapan Organization⁶² were unsuccessful in uniting Jews and blacks, and convincing residents to overpower the forces of separation. In the end, people belonged to separate social clubs and played in separate youth centers, they prayed apart, and lived in distinct circles.

Transition

As black families moved into homes across Grove Hall, the mezuzah gradually disappeared from doorposts, and the identity of a Jewish neighborhood languished. The transition of Grove Hall seemingly passed a tipping point in the 1950s, and in hindsight, the separation of Jews and blacks was inevitable almost from the start. The sixties began with what would appear to be a peaceful transition from a Jewish community to a black community.

African-Americans were, by all accounts, following the same path to Grove Hall that Jews had engaged decades earlier. They were in part relocated from other parts of Boston, and in part a migrant or immigrant community, just as Jews were fifty to sixty years before. They were also a mixed-income community spanning all demographics. The black community inherited an established and practically 'complete' neighborhood⁶³, whereas the Jewish community was still building Grove Hall when they arrived. This, however, proved to be troublesome rather than beneficial, for the black community was constrained within an arrangement of form and society that they did not create and one that was aging.

Hazel Bright and the Pull to Roxbury

Hazel Bright represents a minority of African-Americans in Roxbury who arrived in the 1950s from another part of metropolitan Boston. Hazel Bright moved in 1954 with her mother and sisters from Cambridge, MA, where her family lived for four generations. "My great-grandfather was a freed slave," begins the eight-two year old retired writer, playwright and literature professor⁶⁴.

61 The Freedom House was founded in 1949. In 1952, they moved into a building on Crawford Street, and in 1961 built a new building after fire destroyed the original a year earlier.

62 The Mattapan Organization was founded by the Jewish Community Council in 1967, in a final effort to stop the exodus of Mattapan Jews (the last community on the Blue Hill corridor). The group tried to unite black, Jewish and Catholic residents in the area, but closed by 1969. Gamm, 268-270.

63 Complete, in terms of infrastructure (roads, transit, utilities), commercial space, schools, parks etc...

64 Hazel Bright. Personal Interview, Jan 30, 2013.

Filling the void in Grove Hall left by Jewish residents like Hal and Roz Lurie, Bright carried on the story of the neighborhood where the Luries had left it. Good memories fill the nostalgic prose that she uses to share the stories of the early days of black Grove Hall.

Growing up, Bright always wanted to live in Roxbury. While still in Cambridge, she came every Sunday to Uncle Frank and Uncle John's homes on Humboldt Avenue, reading the collection of black newspapers⁶⁵, then going "down Dudley", to the center of black life in the city. "That was the place to be". The Guardian⁶⁶ was sold in the drugstores, children got their first "afros" at Bo Nubians barber shop, and southern soul food restaurants were everywhere. To be in an urban setting where everyone was black, where her culture dominated with pride, was the pull to Roxbury.

The closest she could get to the center of Roxbury was Grove Hall, and even though Hazel's first house was on Fayston Street (and technically in Dorchester⁶⁷), she lived in Roxbury! Fayston and the blocks east of Blue Hill Avenue were very Jewish when she arrived, but almost completely black by 1960⁶⁸. She remembers walking down Blue Hill Avenue, buying kosher meat, and drifting from one bakery smell to another, and like Hal Lurie, she also has fond memories of the pickle barrels.

Into the early 1960s the neighborhood was alive, "everyone had a garden." When she moved out of her Mother's house and into her first home on Woodcliff Street, a few blocks north of Quincy, her first purchase was a tree. "We went to the Arboretum, and bought a Jade Madus for \$15." On the first day she planted it Bright placed a pillowcase around the small tree to protect it from the violent thunderstorm that struck all of Boston that night.

65 All the large black centers in the northern U.S. supported a black-owned and oriented newspaper. The New York Amsterdam News, Baltimore, Washington, and more. In Boston, the Guardian was the premier paper through XXXX. The Bay State Banner began publication in XXX and is still the paper of the black community in Boston.

66 Black Newspaper started by James Munroe Trotter in 1901, and last printed in the 1950s.

67 The old border between Roxbury and Dorchester ran parallel to Blue Hill Avenue on the east side, but has no political relevance today. City wards, census tracts and postal designations have blurred the border, though many locals refer to Blue Hill Avenue itself as the definitive line between the greater neighborhoods.

68 Bright, Hazel. Personal Interview, 2013; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1950, 1960:Census Tract T6 had a black population of 315 in 1950 (5%) and 4036 in 1960 (81%).

Bright expresses the spirit of a growing new community in those first years of the transition, a place “well located, full of good people, a place to raise children.” The City of Boston was also aware of this, as plainly and innocently stated in a report prepared for the urban renewal project that lingered on the horizon of Grove Hall:

*“As it was a Jewish community before them, now it is a Negro community, and as such there has come to be a certain feeling of common destiny, of being part of a neighborhood with significance.”*⁶⁹ – BRA, 1962

Just the same, the report proposed massive physical changes to the area. This will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Hazel Bright and the thousands of new black residents inherited an order of space in Grove Hall but also had to adopt to the existing structure. The community was faced with the task of adjusting to an existing ethnic neighborhood⁷⁰. Under these circumstances, the black community was less influential on the form of the neighborhood as they (for the most part) did not construct their own amenities or community spaces, and the structure they received was in need of maintenance and upgrading.

Pride in the Grove Hall Black Community

Among the greater connections the black community made, was in taking stewardship of Franklin park. Black families went to the zoo on weekends, picnicked in the fields and glens, their fathers would golf⁷¹, and their children and youth played in Olmsted’s “Playstead” and playground near Humboldt Avenue.

Images of the transition, however, were often difficult, as exemplified in the former Mishkan Tefila synagogue, which by 1967 was deteriorated and basically abandoned. The Jewish community could not take the building with them, and the grand former temple would have to find a new function within the new neighborhood context.

Elma Lewis, a community activist, and a leader and promotor of arts education in the Boston black community saw in Mishkan Tefila a perfect fit for her School of Fine Arts. She needed a big space to replace the converted house on

69 BRA 1962, 44-45.

70 The struggles of neighborhood adjustment for ethnic groups is discussed in Stanley Lieberson’s book “Ethnic Patterns in American Cities.” Lieberson, 1963.

71 Carter, Marisa. Personal Interview, 25 February 2013.

Howland Street that was used to bring children into the world of dance, painting, sculpture and music. In 1967, her organization received the Mishkan Tefila synagogue “as a gift from the Jewish community”^{72, 73}.

Hazel Bright, deeply involved in drama and the arts herself, knew Elma Lewis well. “When she moved into that building across from the park, it became our building” she says with the delight. The black community was now the owner of one of the great buildings in their neighborhood, but it was a building that needed repair and Elma Lewis wasn’t prepared for that. Mishkan Tefila was put to use as an art school, but slowly reached a point of physical hardship, mirroring the neighborhood itself.

Lewis had earlier made an impact in the neighborhood when, in 1966, she founded the “Playhouse in the Park”, a summer stage in the “Overlook” in Franklin Park that brought music and plays to the black community, and exposed black musicians to the city. For the next twelve years, great talent like Duke Ellington, James Brown, and the Jackson Five, all performed in Franklin Park.

“Three and four thousand people would show up and be all over the hillside. Arthur Feidler brought the Boston Pops out there and did a performance, two performances out there. We had no trouble attracting anybody.”⁷⁴

– Elma Lewis.

The efforts of the community, the culture inside the buildings and outside in the park was not enough to curb the declining maintenance that maligned the great old buildings, and the stoic park. Moreover, the physical condition of the neighborhood was associated with the new community. By the mid 1960s, the park was considered to belong to the black community, “rather than to the city as a whole.”⁷⁵

72 The exact transaction is reported to have been a \$1 sale from the Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) to Elma Lewis. The CJP having assumed the debt of the building as well.

73 Oral history interview with Elma Lewis.

74 Ibid.

75 Zaitzevsky, 79.

Transition on Blue Hill Avenue

Unlike Mishkan Tefila, which moved before many of its congregants, the synagogues on or adjacent to Blue Hill Avenue only relocated, or closed, when the very last members remained, or after they were gone. Shaarei Tfilo on Otisfield Street closed in 1961 and Adath Jeshurun in 1967.

Even as the Jewish residents left, the majority of stores on Blue Hill Avenue were still Jewish-owned. Some managed to become not just Jewish institutions, but neighborhood institutions. A few businesses, namely Carl and Eddie's Meats, Kasanof's Bakery and Segal's Cafeteria successfully acculturated to the black community. Almost all the others however, would not survive the 1960s.

The black community had to convert synagogues to churches, delis to soul food restaurants, and a Jewish neighborhood with fifty years of history, into a black neighborhood. They had to do this with an aging infrastructure, and in a decade that slowly turned from the optimism of Dr. Martin Luther King's speech at the march on Washington, to the despair following his assassination in Memphis. The urban form inherited by the black community in Grove Hall was in need of repair and investment; the streets were broken, the park and zoo poorly maintained, and the housing stock, much of it from the Victorian period, had leaking roofs, cracking walls and antiquated electric wiring. However, the area was bestowed with abandonment and instead of repairs, the residences and urban amenities would continue on a path of decline.

1967 Riots

Asking Hazel Bright what was the defining moment of change in Grove Hall – when did this neighborhood full of spirit and great memories for Jews and blacks alike embark on a fundamental change of course, and head toward the troubled reality which Grove Hall became, her answer is quick and direct, “the riots.”

It will be shown, however, that the perception of the riots, including that held by Bright, blurred the actual causes of decline in Grove Hall. In a sense, the riots (one in 1967, and another in 1968), were concentrated actions that were easier to gauge than gradual change. They accelerated history, and like the tipping point discussed before, made the inevitable irreversible. But they in themselves were not the cause of decline.

The modern era of urban race riots in U.S. cities began in 1963 and continued throughout the decade. This was an era of national political upheaval instigated by the anti-war and civil rights movements. Discontent in poorer African-American inner-city communities amidst racial injustices and segregation grew large. Civil disturbances erupted in cities across the nation, sparked by a confluence of issues based largely on “unmet expectations” for improvements in social status and living conditions⁷⁶.

*“Because of racial discrimination, blacks lived isolated from the white community in the poorest areas of cities, lacking in jobs, decent schools, or normal opportunities for advancement. The blacks who participated in the resulting riots protested the conditions of ghetto life.”*⁷⁷ (Jack Tager, “Boston Riots”, 2001)

At the national level, distrust between mostly white police forces and young African-American men often manifested into violence and spurred uncontrolled riots and the rule of mob mentality took to the streets⁷⁸. The riots increased in severity and frequency in 1967⁷⁹, with major disturbances, looting and fires in Newark, Detroit, Cleveland and over a hundred other locations. Fire and destruction targeted ‘inner-city’ neighborhoods throughout the summer⁸⁰.

The first race riot in Boston began from a small nonviolent sit-in on the afternoon of June 2, 1967. The location of the ensuing riot that early summer evening was in the center of Grove Hall.

Though this was only a majority black neighborhood for less than a decade, the significance of Grove Hall within the black community had been firmly established. Moreover, as opposed to Dudley Square which had black residents and mostly black businesses, Grove Hall was still a point of contact between black residents and white (Jewish) storeowners.

The riot began as a result of a standoff between police and a crowd gathered outside the City of Boston Public Welfare Building, where a group “Mothers for Adequate Welfare” (MAW) staged a sit-in to protest “ill-treatment by the bureaucracy”, the “insults they suffered” and lack of control of their situation. They chained shut the doors of the four-storey building at

76 Carter, 1990.

77 Tager, 176.

78 Carter 1986; Carter 1990.

79 There were 158 separate riots recorded in 1967, in comparison to 53 in 1966 and 11 in 1965. 1967 also incurred the highest number of deaths (83). 1968 was the climax of the riot period however, in terms of incidents, arrests and damage. Collins and Margo 2007.

80 Tager2001; Collins and Margo 2007.

517 Blue Hill Avenue, one of only a few mid-century modernist buildings that dotted Grove Hall⁸¹ (fig. 2.11), trapping fifty-eight city employees in the building⁸². Before negotiations could begin, the police stormed the building. Outside, a crowd gathered, and when rumors spread of police brutality inside the building, a riot ensued⁸³. Businesses were attacked over “fifteen blocks of Blue Hill Avenue.”⁸⁴ It was not only an attack on private property, but on the public realm as well. The angry occupation of the streets entrenched a sense that Blue Hill Avenue belonged to the black community.

De-facto (or even enforced) racial segregation was not new to Boston, but now instead of just blacks being unwelcome in communities like South Boston, whites, and specifically those within the Jewish community felt more uncomfortable in what was until recently their neighborhood. The exodus of Jewish residents from Grove Hall essentially ended before the riots of 1967, but an accelerated flight of Jews from neighboring Dorchester and Mattapan communities took place after the riots⁸⁵.

Many Jewish-owned businesses still remained in Grove Hall. Most small stores on Blue Hill Avenue could not simply move, as they were not able to sell their current business for a fair price, nor was there necessarily a place for them in the new Jewish neighborhoods. In addition, many owners were older and not ready for the upheaval involved in starting a business over, and many had no resources to do anything but continue with their basic operations.⁸⁶

The 1967 riot was not nearly as destructive as those in other cities, but it still made an impact on the economy and public realm of Grove Hall, even if not overnight. Only six businesses in the



Fig. 2.11. City of Boston Public Welfare Building (now the Mother Caroline Academy), 517 Blue Hill Avenue. Photo: Google Earth.

81 The City of Boston Welfare Building (now the Mother Caroline Academy and Education Center) replaced the former Grove Hall Universalist Church erected in the 1840s. The Prince Hall Mason Lodge on Washington Street is the only other architectural remnant of the mid-century modernist period in Grove Hall.

82 Tager, 179.

83 There are differing accounts as to how the violence began, whether by protester or Police action. Tager 2001; Fuerbringer and Milbauer, “Roxbury, Quiet in Past, Finally Breaks into Riot; Why did Violence Occur?” Harvard Crimson. June 15, 1967.

84 Tager, 182.

85 Levine and Harmon, 1992.

86 Poor, 22,69-71.

Grove Hall “shopping district” on Blue Hill Avenue closed in the two months following the 1967 riot⁸⁷. Blacks and Jews continued to shop on Blue Hill Avenue, but business was affected. Seven more businesses would close in the following eight months, and those businesses that continued stopped operating at dark due to fear of danger in the neighborhood (either by the business owners or its clientele)⁸⁸.

Prior to the riots there were also business closures, but of 322 firms operating in the district in 1966, only 37 (11.4%) were vacant⁸⁹.

The rioting not just affected businesses, but also the vitality of the surrounding community. The effect of the riots on businesses and property values in specific riot-struck tracts on a national basis was substantiated in a study of cities (including Boston) by Collins and Margo (2007). The average (nationwide) riot-induced loss to residential property was calculated to be approximately 10%. In the Grove Hall census tracts, however, the loss was more significant. Adjusted to inflation, total residential property values dropped an average of 18.4% from 1960-1970.⁹⁰

Soul Brothers

On the night of the riot in Boston, people took to Blue Hill Avenue between Seaver Street and Dudley Street. Stores were attacked, windows broken, merchandise looted, and a few set ablaze⁹¹. Amidst the chaos and destruction, there was an attempt to demarcate the Avenue. In Grove Hall, like in black neighborhoods across the country, black business owners placed signs or wrote on their store windows: “Soul Brother”. This was a sign to ‘pass over’ the business, and separate the violence and anger between races. Where the mezuzah could not help, the “Soul Brother” sign may (fig. 2.12).

87 Ibid., 33, 69.

88 Ibid., 71

89 Ibid., 18, 68.

90 Calculated for Boston census tracts T6, T7A, T7B, U6A and U6B (1960 and 1970 U.S. population census). These five tracts were in the location of the riots in 1967 and 1968.

91 Friedman, Elliott, Boston Globe, “Grove Hall Closed After Dark”. June 4, 1967; Bright, Hazel. Personal Interview, 30 Jan. 2013.

The physical environment suffered the brunt of anger, of social injustice and the inability of communities to relate in a common space. It wasn't the black neighborhood that was attacked, it was the urban form and elements of 'non-black' society that was.

The mezuzah and the soul brother were used to identify place, to capture urban form within the realm of two distinct communities. For over a century, Jews and African-Americans have applied their identity on Grove Hall, but it is the identity of Grove Hall that perseveres in the end.



Fig. 2.12. "Soul Brother" sign in Chicago.

Similar to signs used in the Boston riots (Tager, 2001)

3 Plywood on the Corridor The Abandonment of Blue Hill Avenue



June 1967

In the summer of 1967, as riots were still raging across U.S. cities, the Johnson administration established the Kerner Commission to investigate the causes of the civil disturbances engulfing the country, and find solutions for preventing them in the future¹. The commission's report, published February 29, 1968, placed the majority of the onus on two societal conditions:

"(1) The existence of de facto segregation was just as significant as de jure segregation; and

*(2) racial oppression assumes distinct and reinforcing forms in the context of urban ghettos that are segregated from the larger society."*²

Prior to the implementation of any commission recommendations, and barely a month after the release of the report, the most lethal riots of the decade took to the streets of over one hundred U.S. cities.

April 4, 1968

In the hours after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the evening of April 4, 1968, riots erupted nationwide. Washington DC, Newark, and Detroit, were near war-zones, where fires and violence wreaked havoc for several days. In Boston, anger returned to Grove Hall³, but only on the following day, April 5, did rioting take place. By most accounts, the destruction and violence in Boston were minimal, yet lasting, with a total of seven stores burned, and many more looted⁴. The riot of Grove Hall, however, did not come near the intensity of the flames that felled city blocks in Washington and Newark. The riot on Friday began with the assembly of protesters in the courtyard in front of the Burke High School on Washington Street. There, flags were burned and a mob grew and swelled over to Blue Hill Avenue. Already deteriorated and more vacant since the 1967 riot, Grove Hall was dealt a final blow, even if the actual hit was relatively weak.

1 Galster, 185.

2 Ibid.

3 Demonstrations began in Grove Hall, Dudley Station, and Boston Common, but violence and destruction were mostly contained to Grove Hall, with some damage in Dudley and the South End (Tager).

4 Riot description are derived from the Tager book and newspaper articles from the period: Taylor, Boston Globe Apr. 7, 1968.

In the months following the 1968 riot, a major empirical and investigative study was performed by Riva Poor for the Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), Inc⁵. The study surveyed the white business owners after the riots to determine the problems they faced, and their prospects for the future. Though many businesses closed (over 38 between the April 1968 riots and August of the same year⁶) or were actively gearing to close, the actual “violence of the riots alone does not entirely account for the closures”⁷.

5 ABCD is a non-profit organization in Boston working for the alleviation of local poverty. www.bostonabcd.org

6 Poor, 3.

7 Poor, 69

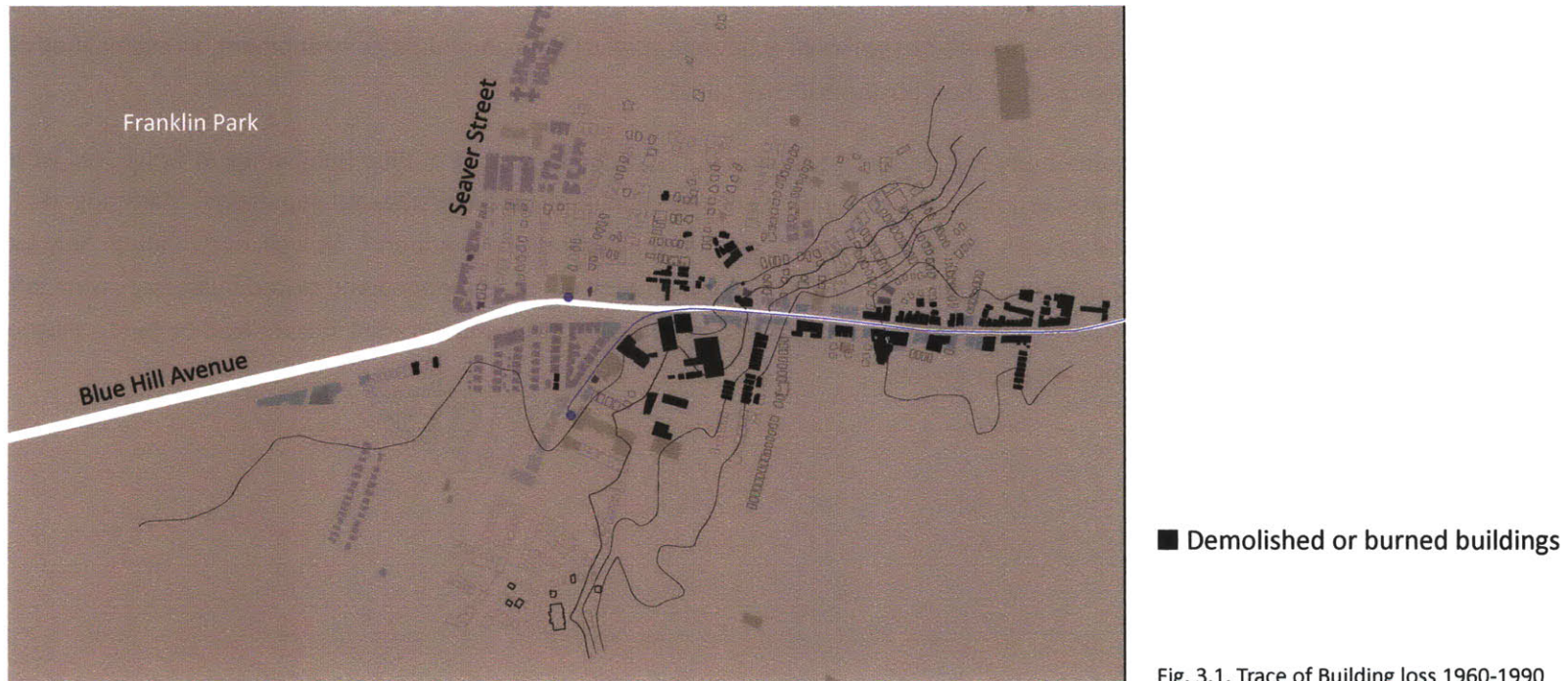


Fig. 3.1. Trace of Building loss 1960-1990

Poor argues that sensitizing factors, such as fear, receipt of threats, age of the owner, or distance of the owner from the business commonly led to most decisions to close, whereas major damage or the economic ability to abandon a business were the decisive factors that caused more immediate closure.⁸

Importantly, 90% of the white business owners surveyed said the business opportunities “would have been good in the area if the riots had not occurred.”⁹ There was an element of hope, but the alternative history of Grove Hall without a riot, or without the death of Martin Luther King are impossible to know.

The fact that owners were now living farther from their businesses on Blue Hill Avenue contrasts the original urban model employed in Grove Hall. Jewish business owners would traditionally have lived in the Jewish neighborhood (including Grove Hall, or the Blue Hill Avenue corridor). As Grove Hall and most of the corridor were no longer “Jewish” by the time of the 1968 riots, a physical disconnect of ownership evolved. The business owners were no longer of the community, and their vested interests were more oriented to personal economic survival than community development, as exemplified in their overwhelming interest to close their business if they could.

Similarly, the new black community was underrepresented in the shopping district of Blue Hill Avenue in Grove Hall with only 30% ownership of businesses, though forming the outstanding majority of the residential population. Many businesses that remained open, did so with plywood instead of glass in their storefront windows¹⁰. As well, even though only six businesses were reported to have burned in the 1968 riots, buildings of many abandoned and closed businesses were left unmaintained and dozens either burned or were destroyed in following years and decades. Vacant land began to plague Blue Hill Avenue and several adjacent streets.

8 Ibid., 70.

9 Ibid., 38.

10 Ibid., 68.

The 1968 riot effectively closed a chapter on Blue Hill Avenue, and the identity of the street would long be in the shadow of one night of moderate violence. Though the residential transition was already almost over in Grove Hall, many of the residents interviewed for this thesis speak of the riot of 1968 as the pivotal date marking total change in Grove Hall.

Hazel Bright expressed simply that “after the riots, whites stopped coming to Grove Hall”¹¹

Aftermath

The commercial spine of Grove Hall was decimated. Spatially, this manifested in the loss of single-storey commercial strips, as well as the unique building typology on Blue Hill Avenue, the single storey storefront addition (in front of older homes) described in Chapter Two. These buildings were located along the length of Blue Hill Avenue north of Brunswick Street, and almost completely disappeared after the 1960s. The majority of the lots (including the houses and flats behind the stores) became vacant, the buildings either burned or were demolished. Of over 30 buildings that matched this type before the riots, only 4 remain standing today¹².

This subtraction of physical form from the neighborhood changed the visual landscape, and created a vacuum for vice, fear and suspicion. The identity of the riot was replaced with an identity of vacancy, and a sense of disillusionment. Aside from the physical loss, the functions (formal and informal) were lost as well. Many of the stores, bakeries, restaurants and drug stores were neighborhood institutions, and in addition to the economic effect, the neighborhood also lost the many agoras of the community.

Some businesses from the former Jewish community remained in operation, including Segal’s Cafeteria, the last historic Jewish establishment to close in Grove Hall in 1995¹³. The restaurant at the corner of Blue Hill Avenue and Georgia Street served coffee and breakfast to morning commuters for decades.

11 Bright, Hazel. Personal Interview, 30 January 2013

12 137, 167, 240, 318-320 Blue Hill Avenue (source: visual survey by author – March 2013)

13 WGBH “Grove Hall Revitalization Program”. WGBH Video Archive. 20 Sept 1988.

Included in the dearth of commercial space was the absence of important neighborhood staples, including a bank, many food vendors and all drugstores. Some black-owned restaurants, record shops, and hairdressers maintained a presence, but there was also the entry of less desirable businesses for a healthy neighborhood: multiple liquor stores, and the supply of check-cashing facilities instead of regular banking establishments, that provided a more costly and less productive service to the public.

Boston may have initially escaped a major riot, but the eventual socio-economic aftermath and physical deterioration was similar to other more 'hard-hit' cities. This deterioration produced the same net affect as immediate destruction, it just required more time. However, in contrast to the hard-hit cities (such as Detroit), most historical structures survived the riot era, and land vacancy was limited to segments of streets, not vast city blocks. The urban form of Grove Hall survived the riots and its decades-long aftermath partly because destruction targeted specific structures, mostly post-1900 wooden commercial structures. Most stone and brick buildings, and even the older Queen Anne and Second Empire wooden houses, persevered, even if seriously deteriorated.

Beyond the Riots

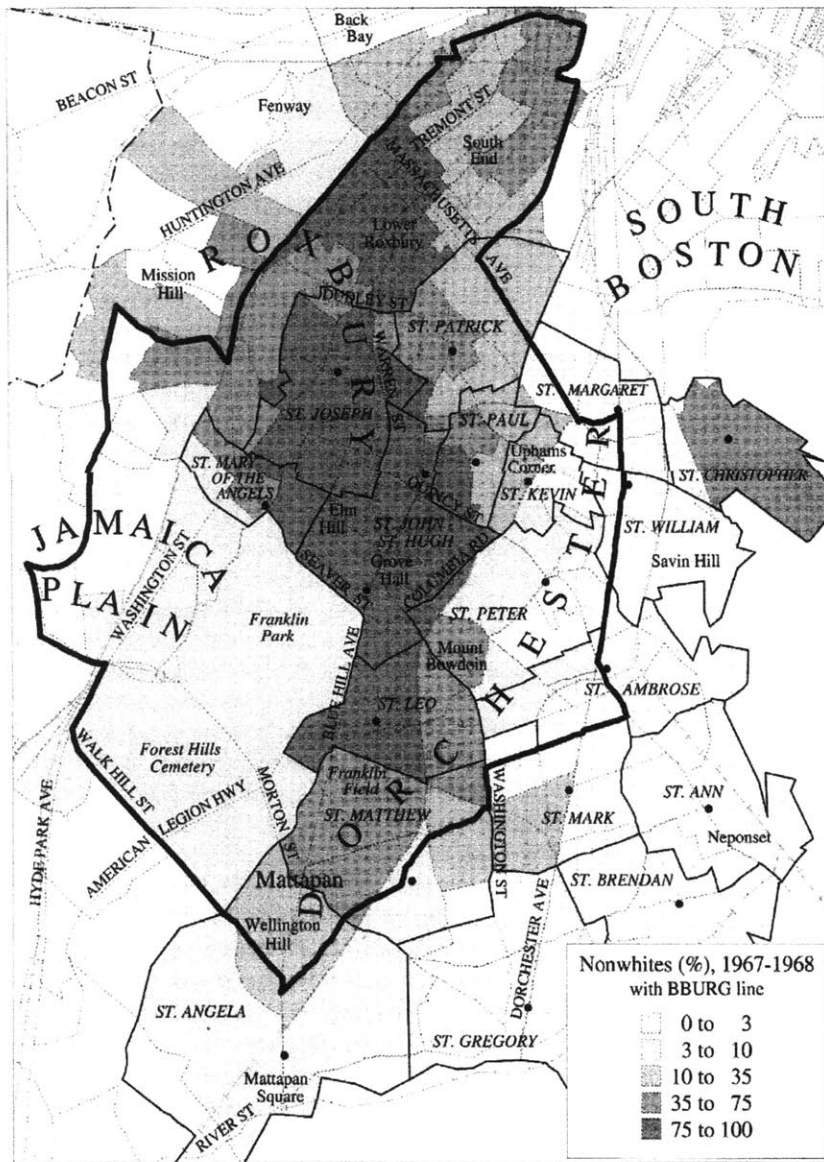
The riots were a major piece of the decline of the neighborhood, however, spuriously connected to them was a combination of demographic, social, and policy level failures that helped lead Grove Hall into three decades of decline.

Population Decline

Long before 1968, the population of Grove Hall was declining rapidly. Between 1950 and 1960, the population shrunk by 15% from 29,310 to 25,022 within the five census tracts used by the City to define Grove Hall¹⁴. From 1960 to 1970, the population fell an additional 15% to 21,184: A loss of over 8,000 residents or 28% in twenty years. In general, Boston was suffering from a shrinking population during this period, but in comparison lost only 20% of its overall population during the same time period. Population in Grove Hall continued to fall in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, to a low of 16,771 in 2000 (almost half the amount of people who lived in the exact same area in 1950.)

The 1970s and 1980s were characterized by spiraling economic decline and a definitive lack of investment by the public and private sectors. The original urban form built from the nineteenth century through the 1950s was not adapting to the changing urban conditions in Grove Hall.

¹⁴ Census Tracts: 082000, 082100, 090100, 090200, 090300; Prior to 2000 (respectively): 820, 821, 901, 902, 903; Prior to 1970 (respectively): U6A, U6B, T7B, T7A, T6. Census Tracts, although renumbered twice, retained their geographic size and boundaries for all years compared in this paper.



Inner-City Mortgage Crisis and “BBURG”

In a failed effort to enact equality, new federal mortgage rules in 1968 provided easily accessible funds for middle- and lower-income African-Americans to purchase homes. These mortgages quickly created a micro financial crisis that severely damaged the neighborhoods of the communities they were supposed to help. People were financially over extended by banking policies that operated out of market norms.

Locally, some of these loans were provided through a consortium of Boston financial organizations called the Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group (BBURG). BBURG issued the loans, often 100% mortgages, fully backed-up with federal guarantees. Theories supported by Levine and Harmon (1992) and others, suggest that BBURG colluded to only provide mortgages to blacks within a particular zone that included Roxbury, the Blue Hill Avenue corridor and Mattapan, essentially targeting the Jewish section of the city for settlement by blacks. This theory is refuted by Gerald Gamm (1999), who argues that the majority of homes of exiting Jewish residents were already sold or on the market, and that the Jewish community was naturally suburbanizing, creating a vacuum for black migration.

Fig. 3.2. Nonwhite Population 1967-68 and BBURG line
Source: Gerald Gamm, Urban Exodus (1999), p.46

The Cost of Old Homes

The loans, BBURG or other, were quite often unsustainable and the foreclosure rate in Grove Hall and the Blue Hill Avenue corridor was high. Many black residents were faced with mortgage payments they could not afford after a few years, and were also usually burdened with major house repairs and maintenance costs they had not originally factored. The homes and apartments inherited by the black community in Grove Hall were 50-75 years old, many wooden, and with leaking roofs, old and dangerous electrical wiring, poor insulation and defunct appliances. Although originally the homes were built at a respectable level of quality for middle-class ownership or tenancy, the same homes after half a century or more, needed renovations. In contrast, the outgoing Jewish population had largely moved into newer suburban housing stock, gaining years in the 'life of a home.'

Homeowners, by the hundreds, were forced to 'walk away' from homes. Abandoned houses and apartments filled the neighborhood, joining the hundreds of commercial properties.

Street Deterioration

As businesses failed along Blue Hill Avenue, and the population continued to drop, the streetscape fell victim to its surroundings. Moreover, the streetcar from the first half of the century was removed in 1949, and the trolley bus that replaced it gone by 1965. In their stead, noisy and polluting diesel buses filled the streets and neighborhood air.

Rising car ownership, and the automobile-oriented suburbs added a lot of traffic to Blue Hill Avenue, Seaver Street, Warren Street, and on the routes traversing Franklin Park¹⁵. Blue Hill Avenue became a busy commuter thoroughfare starting in the 1960s. Traffic and speed created a dangerous and unhealthy automobile environment with deteriorated road and sidewalk conditions¹⁶. It also created a system to pass through the neighborhood, and bypass the declining businesses as well.

The City of Boston spent years trying to solve the problem that was the Blue Hill Avenue Corridor. The City of Boston Plan of 1977 best described the scene about ten years after the riots:

“Blue Hill Avenue is today probably the most striking physical personification of the many economic ills besetting Boston’s low to moderate-income population; it is a four-mile stretch of roadway characterized by boarded storefronts, abandoned multi-family housing, and all-too-visible expanses of vacant land.”¹⁷

15 The circuit roads in Franklin Park were originally off-limits to cars, but opened in the 1930s to cross traffic.

16 BRA (1977), I-12

17 Ibid., I-2



“The small, obsolete streetcar-oriented stores along Dudley Street and Blue Hill Avenue are unable to compete with newer auto-oriented shopping facilities recently constructed along major streets in Roxbury and Dorchester. Abandonment, commercial disinvestment, and ensuing problems along these major streets have been major causes of residential disinvestment.”¹⁸

Though a landscaped median was built as a result of the 1977 improvement plan, the overall right-of-way is wide, providing excess off-peak capacity in the roadway, and creating an inhospitable landscape for pedestrians¹⁹.

Rise of Uncivil Society

In the evolving landscape of Grove Hall, one that was characterized by physical decline, negative elements of society began to emerge. A rogue society that capitalized on the drug trade, and took to street gangs in pockets of cities across the nations, attached itself to the weakened form of Grove Hall, perpetuating its decline for many years.

“At the positive end . . . are members of the “civil class,” whose attitudes and behaviors are based on the assumption that the individual good, and hence the neighborhood good, is enhanced by submitting to social norms. At the other extreme are members of the “uncivil class.” Their behavior and attitudes reflect no acceptance of norms beyond those imperfectly specified by civil and criminal law.”²⁰

18 Ibid., 1-9.

20 BRA, 1977.

20 Clay, 1979, 37-38.

Fig. 3.3. Panoramic view of Blue Hill Avenue between Intervale and Gaston Streets. 2012. Google Earth.



Though only constituting a small number of people, the rise of the uncivil class as described by Philip Clay (1979), managed to physically and socially control life in Grove Hall starting in the 1970s and reaching a peak in the early 1990s. Under a wave of crime and fear that street gangs infused on the neighborhood, the basic improvements to physical form that were prescribed in the 1977 Boston Plan, and in others that followed, were rendered unsuccessful.

Gangs²¹

The culmination of disinvestment, abandonment, poverty and despair resulted in the worst elements of uncivil society gaining control of the community. Present in various ethnic communities in Boston since the nineteenth century, the youth gang element in the impoverished neighborhoods became a serious threat to society in the 1980s. Coinciding with the crack cocaine epidemic which struck the nation, gangs in Roxbury and Dorchester territorialized the neighborhoods, generated cyclical street wars, and fueled rampant drug use that cascaded into supportive crimes including burglary, muggings and prostitution. Blue Hill Avenue, and the surrounding blocks provided the empty lots and buildings that became the space that supported this abject system. Drug dens sprouted in old homes on many side streets and in abandoned apartments. On the northern end of Blue Hill Avenue near Dudley Street, a prostitution district emerged²².

The street gangs in Boston were much smaller than in other cities²³. Their territory usually consisted of a segment of a street, a block, or a housing project. Dozens of gangs evolved, often forming alliances, but mostly operating as small units. Drugs were crucial to their existence at the start, but then the battle between gangs became a reason for the violence itself.²⁴

21 Gang models and descriptions are referenced in past tense in order to discuss the situation that existed in the 1980s and early 1990s. Gangs are still in existence, and continue to be a negative influence in Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, but with different organizational structures, and as per crime reports, with much less intensity than in the past.

22 WGBH: Blue Hill Avenue: If a Street Could Speak”, Documentary 2010.

23 Braga and Kennedy:2002, 271-272.

24 Ibid., 272

By the late 1980s, Grove Hall was the scene of epidemic gun violence amongst youth²⁵. Kids and youth, regardless of whether they were in a gang (and 98% weren't), were associated with one whether they chose to be or not, explains Arthur Collins, a local resident. Collins, now a conflict resolution mediator in the Boston Public Schools grew up, and still lives in Grove Hall.

"I wasn't in a gang, but I was associated with the one on my street, because that is where I lived."²⁶

Collins recounts how you needed "a pass" to enter streets. Through other affiliations such as family ties or schools, passes were attained. But very often, fighting or being physically assaulted was part of getting around in the neighborhood landscape. "Everyone knows who you are, no matter what street you go to" Collins says, referring to the larger Roxbury-North Dorchester-Mattapan area of the city.

This compartmentalization of the neighborhood destroyed elements of collective protection usually offered at the neighborhood level. By reducing safety zones to streets or even buildings, the norms of street life were lost. The identity of a street in Roxbury and Dorchester was in many cases synonymous with the identity of the gang that occupied it. The gangs primarily affected adolescent men, but young women and children were caught up in the violence too. The danger of attack or crossfire on the street, and the risk of burglary in the home permeated the entire neighborhood.

In his book "Social Construction of Communities", Gerald Suttles (1972) describes the cognitive maps that society uses to analyze urban areas. People use these maps to "regulate spatial movement to avoid conflict between antagonistic groups."²⁷ Grove Hall youth developed a very complex cognitive map, but one that was needed for survival.

25 Ibid.

26 Collins, Arthur. Personal Interview. April 2013

27 Suttle,22



Fig. 3.4. Sonoma Street. Source: Google Earth.

Gang Territory in Grove Hall

Though widely distributed across the neighborhood, gangs actually did not exist on the majority of streets in Grove Hall. Some streets that did have gang associations (and often still do) included Sonoma Street, Intervale Street, Humboldt Avenue and Castlegate Road. These streets all had a form or identity characterized by higher densities, apartment blocks, and a high proportion of rental properties (in some cases 100%)²⁸. The differences in the socio-economic levels of residents between these streets and ones almost immediately adjacent to them, but not gang-associated (such as Elm Hill Park, Ruthven Street, and Supple Road) were stark.

Beyond their home territory, gang violence also crossed into key intersections and streets, like Blue Hill Avenue, and into public spaces such as Franklin Park²⁹. The main streets and the park became a confluence of gang activity, and made public passage undesirable or unsafe, especially at night. Walking to a store or bus stop became a functional, and possibly dangerous, act, rather than an engagement in the norms of regular social interaction. In this sense, the gangs stole the public space away from the neighborhood.

Sonoma Street

Sonoma Street is a treeless block of four storey brick apartment buildings between Maple Street and Elm Hill Avenue (fig. 3.4). Though it was a dense setting with many “eyes on the street”, the interaction of building and street when under the authority of a gang prevented the element of security from being effective.

Former resident, Phyllis S., explains the scene on Sonoma Street when she lived there in the 1980s, at the height of the crack and heroin epidemic.

²⁸ Based on author’s survey of rental properties on the street.

²⁹ Collins, Arthur. Personal Interview. April 2013

“I would look down and see dozens of bodies lying on the street. They were lined up for heroin. On the rooftops, they [the gangs] would have lookouts, and when they saw the cops, they had signals: Whooo whooo and wave their hands. And all the bodies would disappear. A few seconds later the cops were gone and they were back sticking in their needles.”³⁰

Reaching bottom

When Gail Snowden, daughter of Freedom House founders Muriel and Otto Snowden, visited her father at their old family home on Supple Road in the early 1990s, she realized the situation was out of control. It was the “bottom” she felt, when she entered a convenience store on Blue Hill Avenue, and not only the clerk and cash were behind bullet proof glass, but all the merchandise as well. Against her father’s wishes, she decided he had to move³¹. This was a sad coda to the lifetime investment of Otto Snowden, and the passion he and his wife had put into creating a better society for the black community in Grove Hall.

Shortly after Otto Snowden, a fifty year resident of Grove Hall moved out, the City of Boston, community leaders and clergy decided to step in to try to end the violence and fear that strangled the neighborhood. The persona that Grove Hall and Blue Hill Avenue embodied after years of neglect and abandonment, and by the control by the small uncivil class manifested in the street gangs was ready for change. After decades of vacancy, a shrinking population, crime, gang control, and an identity still associated with the riots of the late-Sixties, Grove Hall was still physically intact. But it needed to be rescued.

30 Interview with Phyllis S., April 2013.

31 Snowden, Gail. Personal Interview, Feb. 22, 2013.

Part II

Revival

“The writing of histories is not simply a matter of holding a mirror up to the past and reporting on what is reflected back. It is always a representation, a textual reconstruction of the past rather than a direct reflection of it.”

Leonie Sandercock (2003), p.40

Part One of this thesis produced a textual and graphical reconstruction of the history of Grove Hall. The buildings, people, and events of the first two hundred years in the making of the neighborhood were recounted and choreographed within the parameters of urban form and social adaptation.

Among multiple layers of built form – including streets, railways, parks, houses of worship, businesses and homes - the process of neighborhood construction was interspersed with unique communities, social movements, and a series of external forces.

The first de facto completion of form-making in Grove Hall occurred around the mid-twentieth century. It was then followed by decades of lost form and the emergence of negative space. The commercial spine of the neighborhood, Blue Hill Avenue, was especially afflicted by the social events and subsequent economic hardships that led to its near-abandonment. Crime, poverty, and the almost complete disinvestment by private interests left Grove Hall a very troubled place. By many accounts, it was considered, or perceived to be, the center of urban decline in Boston¹.

Beginning in the 1990s, community members, clergy, neighborhood development groups and the City of Boston staged a combined effort to reverse the effects of decades of decline. Starting with a targeted initiative to reduce rampant crime and recover the streets from the gangs that took them hostage, the turnaround led to a period of construction and renovation across several sectors throughout the neighborhood.

¹ Crime rates for 1990 rank Roxbury's B-2 Police District at the top of murder and aggravated assault statistics in the City of Boston. Many newspaper articles in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as interview reports, refer to the dismal era of gang and drug violence which reigned specifically in Grove Hall during this period.

Part Two of this thesis will focus on this resurrection of urban form currently under way in Grove Hall. It begins with Chapter Four: Road to Revival: Repairing a Neighborhood – a review of the social processes and various plans and organizations that enabled the physical revival to occur. It will specifically highlight the major undertaking done to reduce crime.

Chapter Five: To Mecca and beyond, will then analyze several projects, public and private, that have recently changed the landscape of Grove Hall. Two projects in particular will be reviewed more intensely: “The Mecca” – a retail plaza on the site of the former streetcar maintenance yard, and the new library and community center on Geneva Avenue. These projects have been instrumental in fostering the current momentum of improvement, investment, and beautification in Grove Hall.

Finally, while this thesis acknowledges the importance of new construction and investment in the community, an argument will be made for a more engaging use of built form and the public realm in future neighborhood projects. The rich collection of architectural form and social history in Grove Hall, as presented in the first two chapters, is a resource that needs to be engaged more intensely in the continued resurrection of the neighborhood.

4

The Road to Revival Repairing a Neighborhood



Fig. 4.0. Prayer Room Pentecostal Church of Faith / Congregation Tikvas Israel, Dorchester. Photo by author.

In the past twenty years major efforts have been made to rejuvenate Grove Hall by developing new housing units, improving streetscapes, adding sources of employment, and reintroducing retail space. Empty lots, blight, and dangerous corners are slowly giving way to new construction and welcome rejuvenation. As a new era of economic and population growth enters the neighborhood, there is a renewed sense of identification with the physical form and history that created it. The process is still faced with major challenges including violence that refuses to be extinguished and socio-economic struggles that inhibit the growth potential of many residents.

Enabling the resurrection of Grove Hall is a social revival orchestrated by an array of community groups and the City of Boston. Without this ongoing work, the physical construction in the neighborhood would not have been possible.

Seeds of Change

New buildings in Grove Hall are the product of decades of work and negotiation. From their very genesis through permitting, resident approval and financing, the processes were long and arduous; the projects of today have their start in the programs and ideas of the past. City planners and community organizers have been working since the 1960s on efforts to renew, rebuild and finally revive the neighborhood.

From the Shadow of Urban Renewal

The urban character of Grove Hall is fortunate to have escaped the destruction of urban renewal that came to its doorstep in the 1960s. The efforts of place-making currently under way would likely have been impossible had the plans of demolition and neighborhood reconstruction spread further within the Roxbury and North Dorchester renewal area (fig. 4.1, 4.2). The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) targeted an 1800-acre section of the city for the first urban renewal project since the failure of the West End operation². The plan was originally centered on Washington Park, the neighborhood to the northwest of Warren and Townsend Streets, but quickly expanded to most of Roxbury including Grove Hall. It involved the destruction of dilapidated buildings (up to 25% of the aging housing stock) and the construction of new roads and public housing. While streets such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard bulldozed through hundreds of homes just north of Quincy and Townsend Streets, and housing blocks and shopping plazas filled the void created by their demolition, Grove Hall itself was largely untouched.

Remarkably, the approach to neighborhood revival initiated by the City of Boston in the 1990s and continuing through the twenty-first century draws many similarities to the mission of the renewal plans of the 1960s. Both acknowledge the need for new community and shopping facilities, improved street lighting and landscaping, the rehabilitation of sound buildings, and the provision of new affordable housing. All of these elements, found within the guidelines of the 1965 Renewal plan

² BRA: Roxbury-North Dorchester Urban Renewal Area. "General Neighborhood Renewal Plan": 1965

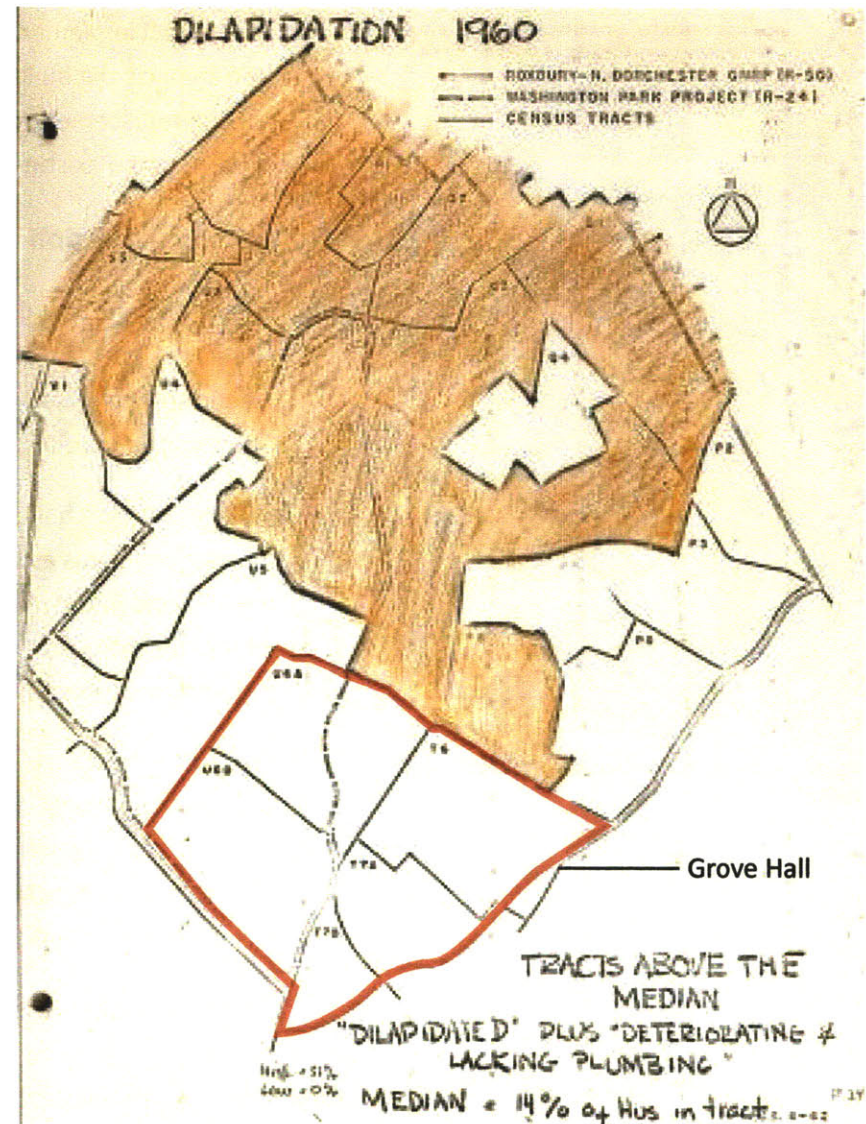


Fig. 4.1

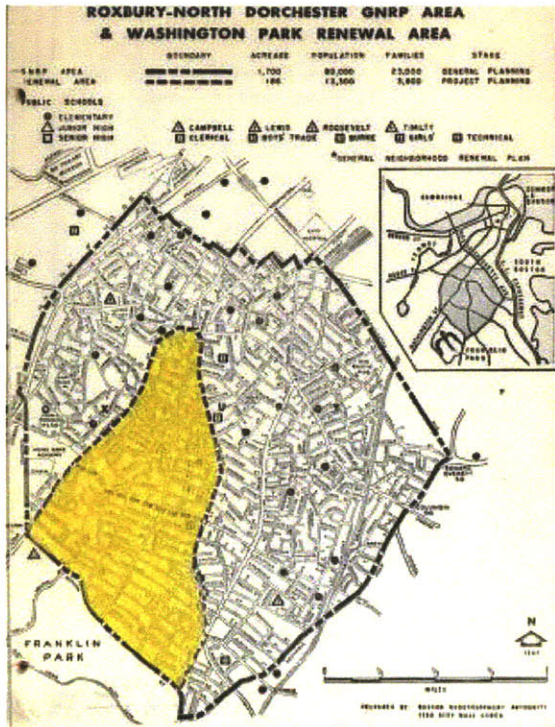


Fig. 4.2. Roxbury-North Dorchester Renewal Area. BRA (1965)

were in fact implemented in the recent period of revival³. The major difference is that the current plan involves the building and addition of important public (and private) space on the landscape, not the replacement of the landscape itself. New buildings and the restoration of old ones are enhancing the existing form, not erasing it.

Community Action

Community groups, organizers and activists have always existed in Grove Hall. Jewish charities and social services once supported the neighborhood, followed by organizations such as the Freedom House (discussed in previous chapters) and the Urban League, which worked to improve economic and social conditions for the black community.

As Roxbury, Dorchester and other parts of Boston declined drastically in the 1970s, and serious housing problems arose, several Community Development Corporations (CDCs) were created to procure and invest in housing and community building in the poorer sections of the city. By the 1980s, the CDCs emerged as the main vehicle for addressing neighborhood housing needs, and replacing a dependence on public housing.⁴

The CDCs operating in or near Grove Hall include: New Vision Community Development Corporation; Neighborhood Development Corporation of Grove Hall; Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation; Madison Park Development Corporation; Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation; and Urban Edge. All operate housing units within, or in the immediate vicinity of Grove Hall.

They are credited with the construction of many projects, including several affordable housing buildings, residential infill, and commercial space in the area. In addition, some CDCs, including Urban Edge and Dorchester Bay, were involved in taking over and rescuing several rental buildings

³ BRA 1965, 14-29,15-29

⁴ Keyes, 18.

that were in major disrepair, including the block at the corner of Washington Street and Columbia Avenue⁵.

A steady increase in public and private level support from the late-1980s onward started to influence a change in the flow of investment, and the stemming of decline, even if not yet producing solid economic improvements. Population loss began to stabilize in the 1990s⁶, and in Franklin Park, major infrastructure and zoo improvements were initiated. For the first time, a large assembly of public and private partners were involved or dedicated to improvements in Grove Hall, including the City of Boston, State of Massachusetts, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), CDCs, banks, and local philanthropies such as the Boston Foundation, the Hyams Foundation and the Riley Foundation⁷.

City of Boston

Outgoing Boston Mayor Thomas Menino is also credited with the change in Grove Hall, in addition to other neighborhoods in Roxbury. Joseph Mulligan, Deputy Director of Capital Construction for the City of Boston, describes the great economic and emotional investment that Menino has made. "Investing and reshaping the inner city were his goals"⁸, or as the Mayor himself states: "The revitalization of the Blue Hill Avenue corridor and the Grove Hall neighborhood has been one of my administration's top priorities,"⁹ Mayor Thomas Menino

5 Von Hoffman, 96.

6 Grove Hall's population in 1990 was 17,127; dropping only 2% in 2000 to 16,771 and then increasing by 6% in 2010 to 17,823 (the first population increase since 1940). U.S. Bureau of the Census.

7 *Ibid.*, 109.

8 Mulligan, Joseph. Personal Interview, March 6, 2013.

9 Menino, Thomas. Press release, March 26, 2003. Dept. of Neighborhood Development. City of Boston.

Children and Seniors

There is concern among many residents and organizations about the two segments of the population that need the most care in the community. Gail Snowden, now the director of the Freedom House, worries that even with all the work being done in the neighborhood, the state of the school is so dire, that when given the chance to move, people will seek a better place for their children¹⁰. Roxbury's history of schooling issues is mired in old politics (the 1970s bussing crisis) and current performance records (Burke High School has the second-lowest general testing results in the city).

Jorge Martinez, from Project R.I.G.H.T., however, argues that there plenty of smart students in the neighborhood, lots of kids on the honor roll. "If you are looking for them, you can find them!" He stresses the need to make the community and the city more aware of the potential that already exists in Grove Hall¹¹.

At the other end of the age spectrum, many elderly in the neighborhood are in need of assisted housing. "People are going outside [Roxbury and] Dorchester, to Milton and Randolph. We need to keep those people [elderly citizens] here in the community"¹². No elderly facilities have yet been built in Grove Hall, but at the Prince Hall Mason lodge on Washington Street, efforts are being made to develop a senior's home on the site of the old Coca-Cola bottling plant that it owns¹³. Overall, efforts to assist and promote all sectors of society are needed in the neighborhood. Beforehand, however, the greatest problem that faced Grove Hall needed to be resolved.

10 Snowden, Gail. Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

11 Martinez, Jorge. Telephone Interview. 19 March 2013.

12 Providence, Beulah (Executive Director of the Caribbean Foundation – charity for elderly assistance). Personal Interview. 4 February 2013.

13 Downes, Tim (Treasurer of the Prince Hall Freemason Lodge). Personal Interview. 25 February 2013.

Ceasefire

As described in Chapter Three, Grove Hall as a physical space was overrun with violence by the early 1990s. The streets were practically unusable as public space. Before the implementation of the revival of form, the most basic elements of the public realm had to be reclaimed, and the fear that engulfed the neighborhood removed.

In the early-mid 1990s, the City of Boston and the Boston Police Department established a task force, combined with an academic initiative (supported by the National Institute of Justice and the Harvard Kennedy School) as well as the participation of federal agencies, to crack down and remove the most violent gang criminals from the streets of Grove Hall and neighboring communities¹⁴. “Operation Ceasefire: The Boston Gun Project” was a targeted and research-assisted approach that resulted in a sharp reduction in homicides.

Citywide, the murder rate dropped from a peak of 152 murders in 1990, to a low of 35 in 1998, the lowest figure since 1961. The outstanding majority of murders and serious crimes took place in Roxbury and North Dorchester, thus this citywide improvement mostly reflects these neighborhoods¹⁵.

The change brought about from the drastic reduction in criminal activity created a paradigm shift in Grove Hall. As Alexander Von Hoffman, the Senior Research Fellow at the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University summarized, the “reign of terror has ended, and the neighborhoods are born anew.”¹⁶

Project R.I.G.H.T.

In the spirit of Operation Ceasefire, but actually preceding it by several years, was Project R.I.G.H.T. (Rebuild and Improve Grove Hall Together). The neighborhood organization was founded in 1991 to help combat youth violence and work toward economic stabilization in the neighborhood. Project R.I.G.H.T now works with dozens of local resident associations and with other local groups to attain civic improvements, in addition to raising awareness of continued violence. Since 1996, a bimonthly Peace Walk is held in Grove Hall, around the evening rush hour period, to gather residents in the streets

¹⁴ Von Hoffman, 103-105.

¹⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹⁶ Ibid.

to demand an end to violence, but more importantly, for the community to take control of the streets.

Bridging between community safety and community building, Project R.I.G.H.T. has also been a crucial member in prompting the construction of the new Grove Hall library and community center (discussed in Chapter Five.) The organization's executive director, Jorge Martinez, explains that the "community wants to live here . . . Blue Hill Avenue is the heart and soul of the community." In order for this to happen, safety and opportunity, education and hope have to exist in the neighborhood.¹⁷

¹⁷ Martinez, Jorge, Telephone Interview, March 19, 2013.



5 To Mecca and Beyond

Resurrection of Urban Form



Fig. 5.0. Grove Hall's Mecca shopping plaza. 2013. Photo by author.

Grove Hall's Mecca

From the 1950s to the 1990s, the site of the "Grove Hall's Mecca" shopping plaza (the Mecca) was a mostly abandoned five-acre parcel; a lasting remnant of the streetcar network that once fueled the neighborhood. In Mapping Vignette no. 3 (in Chapter One), the consolidation of the site from individual properties was presented. This assembly of land created the largest parcel in Grove Hall, which had a major influence on the formal organization of what is essentially the center of the neighborhood.

Even before the streetcar facility moved out of Grove Hall, a car dealership had already taken up space in the original Highland Street Railway building facing Blue Hill Avenue in the 1930s. By 1950, most buildings from the old streetcar yard were torn down, and a large parking lot and gas station occupied the lot. By the 1990s, the remaining buildings on the site had all been abandoned, and the entire premises were in a terrible state¹. This characterized the heart of Grove Hall.

With the lack of a formal square, common or village center in Grove Hall, the center of the neighborhood is by default considered to be the long intersection of Warren Street, Blue Hill Avenue, and Washington Street. This is in fact where the neighborhood started, where the streetcar spread out in five directions. Apart from the small streetcar passenger terminal, however, there was never an organized public space at this intersection. Instead, the community developed several informal public gathering places inside or in front of key neighborhood buildings including the synagogues and churches, the Aperion, Burke High School, Prince Hall, and even the corner drugstores. Additionally, Franklin Park's presence helped make up for the lack of a traditional urban space.

¹ Morrison, Virginia. Telephone Interview, 30 March 2013

The lack of a square in this New England neighborhood can be attributed to several functions of its history. Firstly, Grove Hall developed long after colonial times when commons and squares were part of the basic land pattern. Secondly, at the time it was originally built-up, the neighborhood was designated a “suburb”, and not necessarily expected to support the “urban” functions that were a streetcar ride away. Lastly, the presence of Franklin Park was expected to take on the functions of community gathering.

At the end of the twentieth century, Grove Hall was an urban neighborhood in economic despair and absent of most commercial and cultural urban amenities. As a neighborhood, it also lacked a center for the community.

The great park at the edge of Grove Hall was largely impenetrable due to the location of the zoo, and often considered too dangerous to use. Moreover, the loss of free access to the formerly open grounds of the zoo, and the demolition of the Rose Garden in Franklin Park eliminated important community spaces that were essential to this neighborhood. Thus, when the Mecca opened in 2001, it represented more than just an economic investment, it would reinvigorate the heart of the neighborhood left vacant for decades, and create a new public place for the community.

Spatially, however, the Mecca represents a suburban model that is not conducive with the urban context of Grove Hall (fig. 5.1, 5.2). It provides the much needed supermarket and drugstore, as well as a coffee and donut shop, clothing store and full service bank, but within the



Fig. 5.1. Grove Hall's Mecca. Entrance from Blue Hill Avenue. Photo by author.



Fig. 5.2. Grove Hall's Mecca. Photo by author.

framework of a parking lot and peripheral buffer zone (except on the Blue Hill Avenue frontage.)

The project is a joint effort of the Neighborhood Development Corporation of Grove Hall (NDCGH) (the property owner) and the City's Department of Neighborhood Development. As well, through NDCGH, there is a unique third participant in the project. Muhammed's Mosque No. 11, the local Nation of Islam (NOI) mosque has been a fixture in Grove Hall since 1957, and located at the corner of Washington Street and Blue Hill Avenue since the early 1980s (fig. 5.3). From that location, at the center of the neighborhood, the NOI has made an effort to exude influence in the community.

Sister Virginia and the Nation of Islam

The idea of locating a center called the "Mecca" in a formerly Jewish neighborhood, and currently a majority Christian one, is quite symbolic and emblematic of the political/social control that the NOI is attempting in Grove Hall. The Executive Director of the NDCGH is Virginia Morrison (known to all as Sister Virginia). Sister Virginia, also a treasurer at the mosque, is a life-long resident of Grove Hall and Roxbury, and has been dedicated to the economic improvement of the area for decades. She is regarded as the main force behind the Mecca development.

Beyond the Mecca, the NOI and the small Muslim community has had additional influence on local businesses, in that some restaurants have decided to only offer Halal meat.

Though the congregation is associated with controversial politics and theology at the national level, in Grove Hall, the NOI has been engaged in community improvements, from helping individuals to building community infrastructure. The mosque taught young men discipline and lessons in courteousness, like how to properly shake hands and address others; they filled the void for many youth without male figures at home².

² Collins, Arthur. Personal Interview, March 30, 2013

“The Nation of Islam is the reason I am doing what I do,” admits Sister Virginia. “Who else would build a mall and call it ‘Mecca’ or a mini-mall and call it ‘Unity Plaza? The mosque is making people culturally aware, as well as developing economic power for our people.” Morrison is responsible for naming the mall “Grove Hall’s Mecca”, creating a cultural link to the Nation of Islam, but with the intention of identifying with the entire black community³. Whether the general public makes the association with the mosque is unclear. The fact that “mecca” is now a contemporary word for “center of interest,” may actually make the name quite apt for Grove Hall, and actually mask the meaning intended by the lead developer.

The success of the Mecca is represented in a dichotomy where positive development and the need for urban space are both outcomes. The project has provided major economic and social benefits, including jobs for local residents, and revenue-generating businesses keeping money within the neighborhood, and identified the center for community activity. The form and function of the Mecca, however, is not a community-building example. For although traditional shopping districts, including the one that once existed on Blue Hill Avenue, do create urban centers, spawn agora-like spaces, and perform as interesting public realms, the form of the suburban shopping plaza does not.

Though, the story of Andres, a sixteen-year old student who recently took part in an afternoon arts program run by Urbano - a local organization connecting artists and city youth - highlights the unlikely function that the Mecca produces in lieu of other public spaces. Andres, like other participants in the semester-long after school program, was given the task of taking his colleagues into his neighborhood, and to the place that he felt could best represent it. Andres, from Grove Hall, wanted to go to Franklin Park, but as it was getting too late in the day, and he worried about safety, he took the group to the produce aisle in the supermarket of the Mecca.⁴



Fig. 5.3. Muhammed's Mosque No. 11. Photo by author.

³ Shabazz, Saeed. “Boston mosque rebuilds, develops and revives poor neighborhoods,” *The Final Call*. July 26, 2004.

⁴ Horn, Riva, Urbano artist. Personal Interview. 6 March 2013.



Fig. 5.5. United House of Prayer

The Restoration of Mishkan Tefila

Perhaps no other building in Grove Hall can best represent a private institutional revival than the former Mishkan Tefila temple on Seaver Street. After Elma Lewis took ownership of the former synagogue in 1967, the maintenance costs required to upkeep the building became steadily unsustainable for her fine arts school. The building decayed, and by the 1980s was left abandoned, surrounded by “wild grass, six-foot-tall weeds, and trees” and “its interior completely gutted”⁵.

In 1998, the United House of Prayer, an Apostolic Church based in Washington DC, purchased the building and brilliantly restored the structure (fig. 5.5). Polished white stones, new stained glass windows, lush landscaping and a lavish wood-soaked interior have returned this temple to a beautiful form. The menorahs and biblical script remain engraved in the friezes, and the great park continues to sprawl on the other side of the street. In a sense, the original composition of architect Jacob Krokyn still exists. Mishkan Tefila has returned to the glory it must have exuded when it first opened almost a century ago.

⁵ Gamm, 287.

Return of the Playhouse

Continuing the trajectory of revival across the street to Franklin Park brings us back to the stage of the “Overlook” and the return of the Playhouse in the Park after a twenty-two year hiatus (fig. 5.6, 5.7). Elma Lewis’ original summer music festival ended in 1977, symbolic of the state of the neighborhood, and the waning support from the greater region, that could no longer support the once the once storied stage of the Boston black community.

Since 2009, under the joint auspices of the Franklin Park Coalition (a community group representing all neighborhoods that border the park), the National Center of Afro-American Artists, and the City of Boston’s Parks Department and ParkARTS, the Playhouse supports weekly concerts all summer.

As well, the black community has more commitments in the park. Every June, the “Juneteenth” celebration (commemorating the end of slavery in the confederacy) is held in Franklin Park in unison with the Roxbury Homecoming (fig. 5.8). The homecoming is a gathering of residents past and present who lived in Roxbury (the African-American community), demonstrating the continuing bond with this section of the city.

All these gatherings in the park create, at least for a few summer months, a strong public realm for Grove Hall. Unfortunately, due to the design of the park edge (as discussed in Chapter One), the spillover from the park to the neighborhood is minimal, and the commercial center of Grove Hall is detached from the great activities that take place at Franklin Park, including the Playhouse, the homecoming, the zoo, and the visits by other city residents on a daily basis. The opportunity calls, but form prevents the successful integration of park and neighborhood.

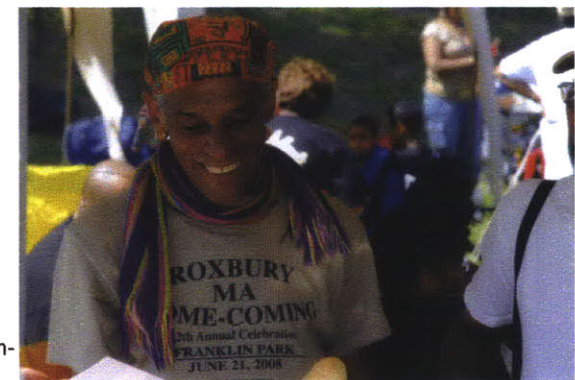
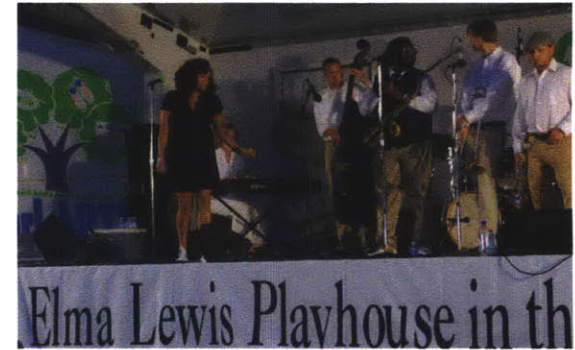


Fig. 5.6.-5.7 (top and center). Playhouse in the Park. 2010. Photos by Franklin Park Coalition.

Fig. 5.8 (bottom). Juneteenth Celebration / Roxbury Homecoming, 2008. Photo by Roxbury Home Coming Committee Inc.



Fig. 5.9. Grove Hall Branch Library, interior photo by author.

Grove Hall Branch Library and Community Center

The latest major addition to the Grove Hall landscape is the new library and community center on Geneva Avenue. This building, apart from providing crucial services in culture and education, is also the first piece of exemplary architecture built in the neighborhood in decades. The contemporary design, layered in transparency, color, and modern materials, is a formal symbol of today's community. It is the contribution of the current generation to a century-and-half-old architectural landscape.

Inside, the books and media represent the culture of the local community, and the many ethnicities that also now connect to Grove Hall as a center. The library has a special place in a community. It is the window to the world beyond the neighborhood, found in the literature and journals, film and music that fill its shelves and computers. It is also the window to the community. This is a meeting place for other residents and other cultures to enter the world of Grove Hall. The building is more than a symbol, it is the representative of the community.

From a second floor reading room overlooking the neighborhood below, the view includes the Mecca, Adath Jeshurun, the empty lots on Blue Hill Avenue, lined up triple-deckers on Stanwood Street, and the skyline of Boston beyond. This perspective on the neighborhood from a public space never existed before in Grove Hall. It is a perspective that allows us to experience the many layers of urban form as one composition. As we add to this composition, Grove Hall will continue to come alive, as will the aspirations and memories, new and old, of all its residents.



5.10 Grove Hall Branch Library, Geneva Avenue.
Photo by author.

It is imperative that design and the careful application of form be used to enhance the urban experience in Grove Hall. The renewal techniques that focus on the restoration of ailing civic infrastructure, the filling in of land vacancy, and the addition of important community needs must be combined with the articulation of form, both at the architectural and urban scales, in order to foster a neighborhood that will lead the city, not just follow it.

Grove Hall is in the unique position to advance with its community building endeavor within the framework of a strong, albeit latent, spatial form. Its history of modern settlement, architecture and social movements still punctuate the landscape after years of neglect and embody important tools toward its future success.

The revival of Grove Hall is happening without the signs of gentrification that typically join the reclamation of urban quarters in many U.S. cities, including Boston. Although housing prices have increased considerably (in line with the entire region), there is no influx of higher-income earners replacing existing residents. This is partially due to a high supply of rental units, a considerable amount of affordable housing units (mostly built in the past ten years), but also to the fact that the neighborhood is not centrally located on a transit line, and most importantly, that it still suffers from negative perceptions based on lingering crime and poverty.

Though the area around it is changing dramatically with significant immigration from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and other Caribbean nations particularly in Mattapan and Upham's corner, Grove Hall has still retained a majority African-American population and identity. This is reinforced by the presence of several institutions and the historical bond that this community still has with Roxbury.

There is ample opportunity in Grove Hall to create a unique public realm based on the rich architectural and social foundations that already exist. Many empty lots and dilapidated structures still fill the neighborhood, and will likely be the subject of reconstruction in the near future. Instead of just investing in individual pieces, however, the community and the City need to address the complete public realm of Grove Hall. This plan should be rooted in the formal and social history of the area demonstrated in this thesis.

Three primary nodes and edges are key to the public realm in Grove Hall today, just as they have been since the neighborhood first emerged in the late nineteenth century.

The confluence of Blue Hill Avenue, Washington Street and Warren Street is the center of Grove Hall. In its present form, anchored by the Mecca and dissected by roads with high traffic volumes at almost all times, public use of this area is relegated primarily to functional commuting and basic shopping. The creation of pedestrian-friendly spaces, and a form-based street wall to enclose this large intersection can work in tandem with new commercial activity that is slowly entering the area. This can create the missing 'square' of Grove Hall, where one should have always have existed.

Secondly, the Seaver Street edge of Franklin Park has evolved dramatically from the original design and function that Olmsted instilled in it. Grove Hall is adjacent to the park, but for the most part, cut off from it. The fenced-off area of the zoo and the busy thoroughfare that developed on Seaver Street has made a permanent and imposing divide between neighborhood and park.

The softening of this edge needs to be addressed, as does the main approach between the center of Grove Hall and the park along Blue Hill Avenue. This stretch of road, the result of early twentieth century development patterns exposed in this thesis, has disconnected the commercial node of the neighborhood from its greatest cultural amenity. The combined power of both places would dramatically strengthen each. The fact that most of the park is fenced in the direction of Grove Hall, due in large part to the location of the zoo, is a difficult obstacle to deal with, yet a new approach to the park perimeter, around the zoo itself, connecting the neighborhood in a more coherent manner should be attempted.

Lastly, the section of Blue Hill Avenue between Warren Street and Quincy Street, once the commercial hub of the neighborhood, is essentially its real heart. Whereas the Mecca is a functional anchor, and the library a cultural foundation, this stretch of Blue Hill Avenue is embedded within the community, both physically and in spirit. This is where the smells of the bakeries once filled the air, and the tastes of the delis enticed the residents, Jewish and black. This is where the sounds of the cantor and the songs of the gospel leak out of the historical temples. This is where the anger of the late 1960s and the deep abandonment of the 1980s stood strong. Blue Hill Avenue is where the community will be revived. Each new store and home, restaurant and barber will resurrect the sounds and smells of Grove Hall. The new buildings emerging on this strip must be diligently cognizant of the importance of each brick on its wall, each door and window to the street outside. They are all part of the cross-writing of Grove Hall.

Appendix

Methodology

The bulk of material and knowledge used in the development of this thesis is the result of dozens of interviews and interactions I had with current and former residents of Grove Hall. Through colleagues and acquaintances, I was introduced to several people who once lived in the neighborhood.

My first tour of Grove Hall was with Arnie Abelow, who calls himself the “last Jew of Dorchester.” Abelow has worked in the area every day for over forty years as a public defender in the Dorchester and Roxbury courts. A former resident of Grove Hall and Mattapan, he moved his family to Stoughton in the early 1960s. Through his eyes, I saw the physical space of the neighborhood come alive with the stories and people of the past. He ignited my curiosity in Grove Hall.

I had a series of encounters with Jewish and African-Americans alike, hearing the perspectives and sense of nostalgia from the two communities who shared the neighborhood over time. The black community of course still lives in Grove Hall, however, their neighborhood has changed drastically over the past fifty years, and interviews with people who experienced the area in different decades produced a wider picture of the reality there.

On my own, I visited Grove Hall on dozens of occasions. I wandered the streets, shopped at the Mecca, ate at the restaurants, attended church services, participated in community meetings, and went to the library for a poetry reading. I discovered the community by immersing myself into both regular and special events.

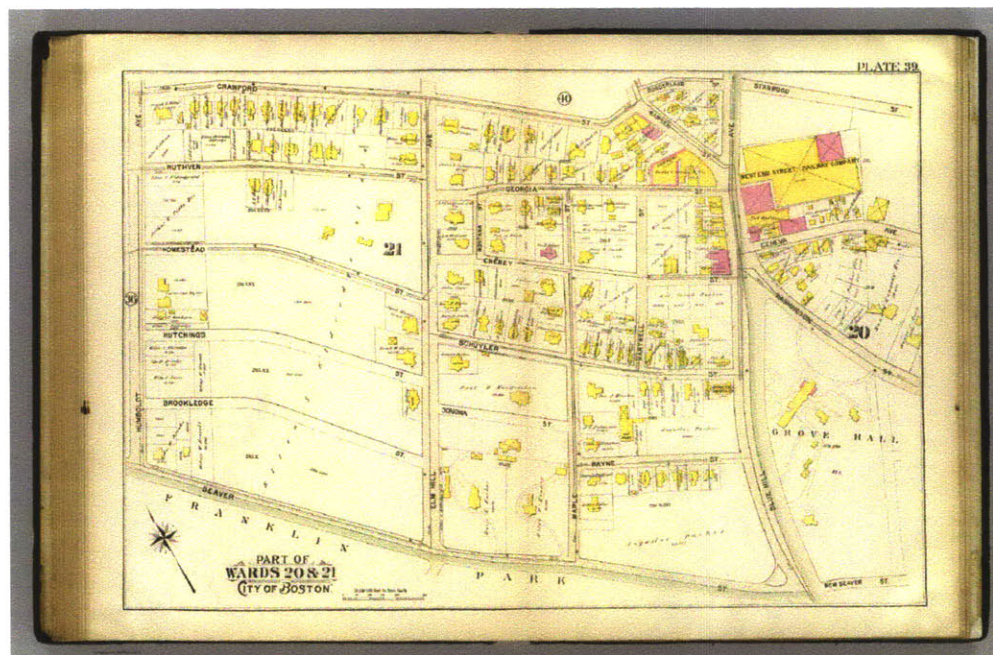
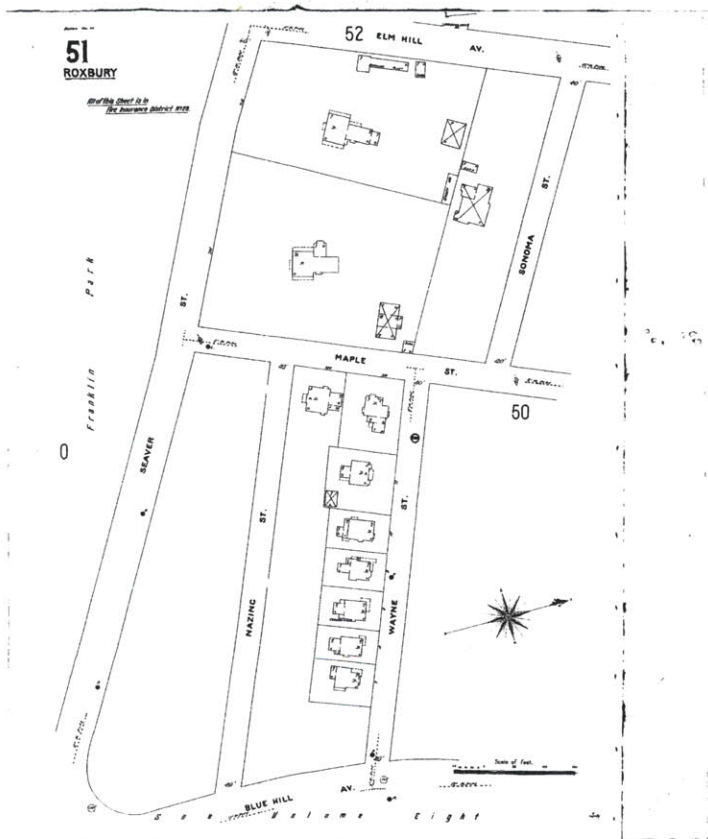
As I first began my research, it was clear to most people that I did not live in the neighborhood. Beyond the fact that I was Caucasian in a neighborhood with almost no white population, I also exuded the body language of someone who was observing a place, not experiencing it. After several visits, however, without the need to photograph, and with a better knowledge of my surroundings, I felt more comfortable navigating the streets and sidewalks, and felt less embodied as an outsider.

Then, once coming to the neighborhood with my children in tow and stopping local residents to ask some questions, their first question for me was if I was new to the neighborhood myself. This welcoming proposition, and the fact that I could be a new member of this community, was a great revelation. It taught me to dismiss prior assumptions, specifically that this is a neighborhood that I could only observe or analyze, but not ever be a part of.

Grove Hall is well documented. Several books provided crucial historical accounts of the neighborhood, most important among them were Sam Bass Warner's *Streetcar Suburbs*, Gerald Gamm's *Urban Exodus*, and the *Sarna's Jews of Boston*. I was able to corroborate the events and scenes described in these and other books in my visits to the neighborhood, or in discussing them with the people I spoke with.

My mapping vignettes and the research work involved in understanding the history of development and formal patterns in Grove Hall was made primarily with the help of Sanborn Maps and the Bromley Atlas between 1887 and 1951. In addition, supplemental information from additional maps both before and after these dates and imagery from Google Earth was used.

Finally, many historical photographs helped me visualize the past. These were provided by image collections of the Boston Public Library, MIT Dome, and in books by Anthony Sammarco.



Historic maps like the Sanborn Atlas (left) and the Bromley Atlas (right) provided information to trace development between 1887 and 1951, with regular increments.

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