




An urban neighborhood characterized by its diverse population and changing identity, Jamaica Plain is considered by many to be a microcosm of Boston, reflecting the city's trends in growth and decay. Unlike the North and West Ends, Jamaica Plain was not a part of Boston from the city's beginning. With its decision to join with Boston in the late nineteenth century, Jamaica Plain also distinguishes itself from autonomous streetcar suburbs like Cambridge and Somerville. Jamaica Plain therefore provides a case study of the history and development of an urban space that is geographically on the periphery and politically and economically part of the whole.




The story behind how Jamaica Plain got its name is up for debate, but the most commonly accepted version is that the original Puritan inhabitants gave the name to commemorate Oliver Cromwell's seizure of the island of Jamaica and the subsequent influx of rum and sugar. Originally a part of the town of Roxbury, the area was already being labeled the "Jamaica" section in the last decades of the seventeenth century. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the land in the Jamaica Plain area of Roxbury was used primarily for farming, but in the mid 1700s it began to be settled by wealthy Boston residents building country estates. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, however, the composition of Jamaica Plain society began to change as commuting upper-middle class professionals moved to Jamaica Plain, followed by groups of artisans, laborers, and various immigrant groups, beginning with the influx of Irish in the mid-nineteenth century.


Native American History This area was first occupied by the Massachusetts group from the Algonquin tribe. Skeletons and other artifacts have been found on the grounds of Arnold Arboretum, testifying to their presence. Reverend John Eliot, one of the founding members of the area that would become Jamaica Plain, was devoted to the cause of educating and converting the Indians. He was in the minority, however, in terms of his image of Native Americans, and the majority of the population had been decimated by poor treatment and disease by 1700.



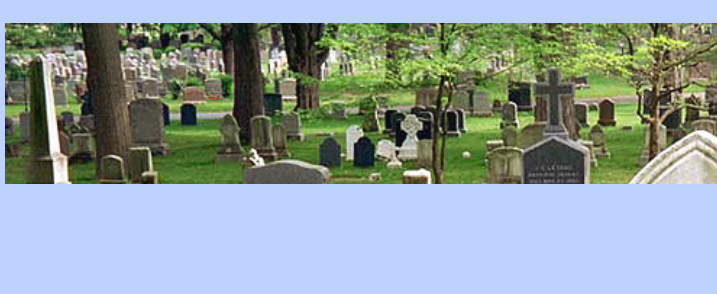
First Church (1769) The First Congregational Society of Jamaica Plain was founded in 1769 and played a major role in the community's early network of religious groups. While the church eventually joined with the Unitarian society in the 1830s and followed that organization's promotion of a liberal social ethos, the church maintained its elite status and was the chosen worship site for most of the neighborhood's leading families into the twentieth century. As such, the church reflects the sometimes uneasy negotiation between liberal values and daily practice that still enters into discussions about the contemporary neighborhood's desire for diversity and the concomitant process of gentrification.




Wald Academy (1827) With the population increasing in the Ponkside area of Jamaica Plain, private schools opened to cater to the population of the middle and upper-middle class. One of these was the Wald Academy, which Stephen Minot Wald opened operated from 1827 to 1857.



Forest Hills Cemetery (1848) The cemetery was created by Henry A. S. Dearborn, the mayor of Roxbury, the president of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, and the designer of Cambridge's Mount Auburn Cemetery, which opened in 1831. Combining graves, monuments, sculptures, and a carefully planned natural landscape, Forest Hills Cemetery offered an example of what landscape reformers saw as a potentially morally uplifting and rejuvenating experience of a rural space.




In 1862 a group of women doctors started the New England Hospital for Women and Children to counter the lack of opportunities for women in medicine at other institutions. The first hospital in the country to have a nursing school, the New England Hospital graduated America's first trained nurse in 1873 and the first African-American trained nurse in 1879. Only female physicians were allowed to work at the hospital and the patients served were all women and children.




Incorporation into Boston (1874) The 1874 vote to incorporate West Roxbury with Boston was a triumph for a coalition made up of business owners, commuters, and the local working class. By joining with Boston, Jamaica Plain and other parts of West Roxbury would gain essential elements of an urban infrastructure, including a proper sewage system and better access to transportation. Many residents of Boston were also in favor of the incorporation, as can be seen in a February 18th, 1873 piece in the Boston Daily Globe. The anonymous writer argues that "the sentiment of Boston is very largely in favor of the project, not only upon its own intrinsic merits, but as an integral part of a comprehensive plan whereby the city may reclaim its own, and gather back to its own fold the large overflow of wealth and population which its increased property and restricted limits have poured forth into the adjacent territory." The writer goes on to gently admonish the landowners opposed to the incorporation, claiming that "The cautious spirit of conservatism of these wealthy proprietors is commendable, but they must not push it too far, lest they obstruct their own welfare as well as the interest of their less fortunate fellow-townsmen."


Adams Nerve Asylum (1880) The Adams Nerve Asylum opened in 1880 on the edge of the Arnold Arboretum. Seth Adams of Newton had bequeathed money for an institution that would serve Massachusetts residents with nervous disorders. An 1887 article in the Boston Daily Globe harkens back to the restorative atmosphere of the asylum, and thereby mentions a medical treatment—electric shock therapy—as introduced as an aside, effectively masking the more disturbing aspects of the practice. The reporter writes: "Talking of electricity reminds us of the afore-mentioned battery-room. Here the bright brass discs of a big electric battery glister under a great glass case and hanging from the walls of the room are all sorts of queer apparatus for driving the lazy blood into new life. This is where you get 'points' and have your hair combed by electricity till you present the appearance of a very 'trefal' porcupine." (Mary Norton Bradford, "Adams Nerve Asylum," Boston Daily Globe, April 18, 1887. Reprinted on the Jamaica Plain Historical Society)




Electrified Streetcars (1889) When the West End Street Railway Company began to electrify its cars in 1889, the accessibility of outlying neighborhoods improved dramatically. By the 1890s, streetcars to downtown Boston left Jamaica Plain every 3 minutes during rush hour for a fare. Unsurprisingly the population of Jamaica Plain almost tripled between 1880 and 1900, going from 12,810 to 32,750.




Faulkner Hospital (1900) Faulkner Hospital was founded in 1900 by George Faulkner, a local physician who had been involved for over 20 years with the Jamaica Plain Dispensary, a charitable organization that provided free health care to the area's poor. Faulkner Hospital was the institutional manifestation of this philanthropic urge.




Heath Street Housing (1939) Heath Street Housing Development was one of Boston's early public housing projects. As Richard Heath writes in his history of the development on the Jamaica Plain Historical Society website, "Heath Street was the first self contained community Jamaica Plain had ever seen. In keeping with one of the main ideologies of housing reformers of the New Deal Era, public housing was developed as a planned community. [Heath Street] had its own hearing plant, maintenance facility, management office, community rooms, playground as well as play spaces in front of the apartment door, sitting areas and a small town common for gardeners and more passive use at the rear of the development. Parking areas and pedestrian walkways were clearly separated; for mothers with children it was one of the safest places to live in Jamaica Plain because there was no motor vehicle traffic in front of any building."





Factories (1830s and 1840s) The Story Brook on the eastern side of Jamaica Plain provided the running water that was necessary to many industries, and various factories and enterprises began to spring up along it during the early and mid 1800s. Several chemical factories established themselves there in the 1830s, and by the 1840s the area also had a tannery, a brewery, and an iron foundry. The Brookside industrial zone developed after 1837 with a leather factory, a soap plant, and another chemical factory. This manufacturing legacy continued into the later decades of the nineteenth century. In 1878 the inventor and manufacturer Benjamin Franklin Sturtevant built the largest fan manufacturing plant in the world in the center of Jamaica Plain. The factory thrived into the twentieth century, though it eventually moved to Hyde Park.



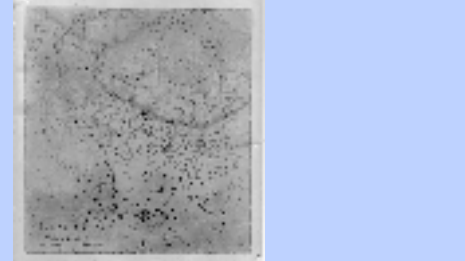
"The Hourlies" In 1826 hourly stages began to run a route from Jamaica Plain to Roxbury to Boston, providing a means of public transportation into the city center. Only costing 25¢, the "hourlies" were even more widely used once the stages were upgraded to large omnibus coaches. This was just the beginning of public transportation in Jamaica Plain. In 1839, in response to demands by local residents, the Boston and Providence Railroad began providing a special car for the riders from Jamaica Plain into Boston who used a discounted daily round-trip ticket. In 1857 the West Roxbury Railroad laid streetcar tracks all down Centre Street and the fare into Boston was reduced to 10¢. This made Jamaica Plain ever more accessible for the growing groups of immigrants, especially the Irish, who made up more than 20% of the neighborhood's heads of households by the mid-nineteenth century.




Eliot School (1876) The Eliot School is the fourth oldest school in the United States, an early manifestation of the Jamaica Plain community's focus on education. The school was founded in 1876, and in 1889 the Reverend John Eliot donated seventy-five acres of land near Jamaica Pond for the campus. This gift was dependent on the school admitting children of all races, including African American and Native American. The school functioned as a primary school until 1840, when it became the high school, eventually moving locations. In 1970s the Eliot School separated from the city high school and, in the building pictured above (built in 1852), began offering classes in arts and manual skills. The school continues to offer these arts-based courses today.




Separation from Roxbury (1851) In 1851 the large property holders in Jamaica Plain instigated the separation of the Town of West Roxbury (of which Jamaica Plain was a part) from the City of Roxbury. This secession was spurred by wealthy residents' wish to avoid paying taxes that would go to services for community members with less income. The new Town of West Roxbury followed a policy of slow growth that was designed to keep taxes low and make the area attractive to owners of country-style estates. As Jamaica Plain grew over the next twenty years, the lack of money for public services began to cause problems, especially with regard to water supply, garbage collection, the police force, and the public schools.




Arnold Arboretum (1872) The first of the urban arboretum parks in the United States, the Arnold Arboretum was created on the Benjamin Bussey estate after John Arnold, a New Bedford merchant, bequeathed money to Harvard University for the study of horticulture and agriculture. In 1882 the first president of the Arboretum, Charles Sprague Sargent, brokered a deal with the city to include it in the chain of parks that would become known as the Emerald Necklace. Sargent was not interested, however, in making the Arboretum an integral part of the Jamaica Plain neighborhood, and he did little to encourage the surrounding community to see it as a place to use and enjoy.




Footlight Club (1877) In 1877 the Footlight Club theater was organized as an elite club that performed plays and music in the community. It was one of many clubs that sprang up in the late nineteenth century as a way to maintain and strengthen neighborhood ties and provide entertainment and education for select groups. Another famous Jamaica Plain based institution was the Tuesday Club, an all-women's group founded in 1896.




Franklin Park (1886) Designed by Olmstead to be the Central Park of Boston, Franklin Park (like Forest Hills Cemetery) was supposed to uplift the public and reform the working classes through exposure to the open air, light, and natural scenery. Despite Olmstead's desire for the park to be a quiet space that promoted reflection, the community soon began to use the space for sports and other active recreation.



Jamaica Pond (1892) When Jamaica Pond was incorporated into the Olmstead-designed park system in 1892, it was the last link in the Emerald Necklace. In order to create the landscaped walking paths that ringed the pond, the Boston parks system had to acquire the land around it and tear down the remaining grand summer homes that had clustered along its banks. While the pond had been considered a place of recreation since the mid-eighteenth century, drawing ice skaters and boaters from all over the city, it had also been the site of a Jamaica Plain industry—the Jamaica Pond Ice Company. One of the city's arguments for appropriating the land around the pond was, in fact, to protect the beauty of the area by keeping the industry away.



Elevated Rail Approved (1904) While the elevated rail might seem to be an unquestioned improvement in transportation access for Jamaica Plain residents, the proposal was fought with vigor by most Jamaica Plain residents because of the shadow that the line would cast all down Washington Street. Despite a concerted and unified neighborhood effort, the residents of Roslindale and West Roxbury won the fight and the plan for an elevated rail was approved in 1904 and built by 1909. Jamaica Plain at first did not benefit at all from this new form of transportation because the stop at Green Street was only added in 1912 (after further neighborhood protest). The elevated rail controversy disrupts the narrative of more transportation options equating desired progress. Jamaica Plain's protest against the building did, however, help forge stronger ties between a diverse and often fragmented community.



Route of I-95 Blocked (1968) Jamaica Plain residents were successful in their second attempt to block a transportation project that threatened to cut a swath through the neighborhood. After years of being a neighborhood with a declining sense of a community identity, Jamaica Plain reassessed itself and successfully protested the building of I-95 through the area.

