Quincy's Market

John Quincy Jr.

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A Need for Renewal: Josiah Quincy Proposes a New Marketplace

The third American Quincy to bear the first name Josiah, the man who would bring order out of chaos in Boston’s congested and discordant market district, was born in a wealthy section of Boston (what is now the North End) on February 4, 1772. Three years later, just before the American Revolution began in earnest, tragedy struck his family. Both his father, Josiah “the Patriot” Quincy Jr., and his infant sister, Abigail, perished within days of each other—he of consumption aboard ship, she of smallpox. His grieving mother, Abigail Phillips Quincy, a woman known for her “sound judgment and great force of character,” immediately began to overindulge her maternal instincts in order to safeguard the health of her surviving child. She began to carry Josiah down to their basement kitchen each day at daybreak, where she submerged the three-year-old in a tub of frigid water pumped directly from the well. She believed this practice would invigorate his immune system and prolong his life. Whether or not she was correct, Josiah Quincy lived to the age of ninety-three.

Beginning in childhood, Josiah Quincy was constantly reminded of greatness that accompanied his family’s name. When he turned eight, his grandfather, Colonel Josiah Quincy, reminded the boy that he was already branded by the significant actions of his forebears. Colonel Quincy wrote, “Besides diligence and application when young, it is indispensably necessary to the forming of a distinguished career in public, that truth shall be the invariable object of your pursuit, and your end, the public good. These are the maxims of wisdom, which I have every reason to think your Great-Grandfather [Edmund], as well as your deceased Father [Josiah Jr.] strictly adher’d to. Though some of them were
remarkably distinguished, I indulge the pleasing hope, that by your assiduity and perseverance you will one day equal at least, if not surpass your predecessors in every respect.”

That dictate had also extended back to the surviving Josiah’s Puritan ancestor, Edmund Quincy, who had arrived in America in 1633 and who was descended from Saire William DeQuincey, Earl of Winchester, a surety baron and signatory of the Magna Carta in 1215, whose name was distinguished on that document by the family crest of “seven mascles conjoined.”

That Edmund Quincy came to America from Achurch in Northamptonshire, England, in the company of Reverend John Cotton in 1633. That same year Edmund Quincy was elected to the Great and General Court of Massachusetts as a representative. During these first years representatives such as Edmund laid the groundwork for the establishment of many laws and institutions for the Bay Colony. Among these actions was the creation of the first college at Newtowne (later renamed Cambridge). This school later became Harvard College. Representative Quincy was also appointed to a committee by the General Court to secure title to the remainder of the Boston peninsula for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. His role on this committee was to estimate the fair sum necessary to purchase most of Reverend William Blackstone’s land, which was situated on the south side of the Charles River mudflats. This forty-four-acre tract of rolling land was bought by the Puritan community for the appraised value of £30 sterling and kept open for common use. Boston Common is still there today, the oldest public park in America.

Representative Edmund Quincy’s passionate commitment to public service was part of many family stories handed down 135 years later to his great-great-great-grandson Josiah. At Harvard College, in 1790, Josiah graduated with first honors, the youngest boy in his class, and was chosen English Orator for his commencement, just as his father had been. Immediately after graduating, he began the study of law at the office of Judge William Tudor, a leading member of the Boston bar. Judge Tudor was impressed with Josiah Quincy’s competency. While Josiah was still apprenticing, Tudor left the young man in charge of his clients during one of the judge’s extended trips to Europe.

When Josiah completed his legal studies in the summer of 1793, he earned his second degree at Harvard, was again chosen to deliver the Masters’ Oration at commencement, and was admitted to the bar. The next year, he opened a small law office in Boston. In his first case, he successfully defended a runaway slave.
After the death of his friend Josiah “the Patriot” Quincy Jr., John Adams had taken a personal interest in young Josiah’s welfare. He too challenged the young man to go into public life. This was what Josiah’s own father had planned to do before his life was cut short, Adams told the young man. He should consider how, instead of aspiring to wealth in the private sector, Josiah could achieve much greater fulfillment through politics.

Adams apparently helped convince his young listener. Josiah could easily have made his way in life without much effort, given his lineage. He had always been taught to look backward, in a family tradition that came close to ancestor worship. But he decided to add his own name to those of the Quincys who had distinguished themselves. Like his father, and his father’s father, and his father’s father’s father, and on back to Saire William DeQuincey, he would go into political life to serve the public.

Now living on Pearl Street in Boston, Josiah was named to his first public office, Boston’s Town Orator, a position that had once been held by his distant cousin, John Quincy Adams. On Independence Day 1798, Josiah delivered a brilliant and stirring oration, marked by his youthful enthusiasm, that recounted the principal dangers to the liberties of the new country. “Think you Americans, that the spirits of our departed patriots and heroes, from amid the band of the perfect and just, look not down complacent on the events of our day? Yes, surely; and on their thrones [they] exult, ‘These are our children!’”

His address to the citizens of Boston from the balcony of the Old State House drew such tears from the audience and attracted so much attention that it was reprinted and distributed in pamphlet form in Philadelphia, then the seat of the federal government. In 1798 he was persuaded to join the conservative Federalist Party, which he saw as representing the American ideal of liberty. He remained an active member in this party until he died.

As a Federalist, Josiah first served in the Massachusetts State Senate, then was elected to Congress in 1804, where he served three two-year terms as a congressman. Upon returning to Massachusetts, he was twice elected Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, where he established himself as a leading authority on poverty in Massachusetts. By 1822, he was seated as a justice of the Suffolk Municipal Court by Governor John Brooks and had also been appointed by the General Court (the legislature) to chair a judiciary committee to investigate the causes and remedies of poverty in Massachusetts.

At a time when the defense of human rights was barely given consideration,
Josiah Quincy’s Pauperism Committee investigated the causes of pauperism in Boston and across Massachusetts. In 1820 the committee concluded that paupers could be classified into two separate groups: those who chose to be indigent and those who were destitute by reason of circumstance. Josiah Quincy concluded that if the “unworthy poor” were not distinguished from the “worthy poor,” the contamination would eventually corrupt society. Thus it was the duty of society, his report said, to differentiate between the “vicious poor” and the “virtuous poor” with regard to charitable intentions.

His investigation also emphasized the inhumanity of incarcerating honest citizens who had been victims of the economic depression—especially the children charged with petty theft—in the same jail with hardened criminals because there was only one city prison in Boston and one state prison in nearby Charlestown. At the time, anyone convicted of a crime (including pauperism) within the municipality, regardless of age, sex, color, status, or severity of the infraction, was confined at the Leverett Street jail.

When his report was accepted by the Boston selectmen in 1821, the town voted to establish a debtor’s prison in nearby South Boston, and also to replace the failing almshouse, or poorhouse. Although the House of Industry would not be ready to receive debtors to work off their debts for about another three years, Josiah Quincy’s efforts to make the public aware of human rights had already begun.

Judge Josiah Quincy’s committee report remained true to the convictions he had put into practice on the bench. He was known for giving uncharacteristically lenient sentences to those he saw as true victims of poverty, for he had seen it do little good to imprison a man, woman, or child for an extended term for petty crimes or debt. Yet, for the hardened criminal, he had no such sympathy. His report stated publicly that his principal concern was to protect society, not to rehabilitate the deviant at the expense of the taxpayer.

Local newspapers lauded Quincy’s actions and widely publicized his demands for judicial and social reforms. Aligning himself with the pauper’s cause not only added to his popularity but earned him the support of honest and hardworking citizens who were casualties of a depressed economy.

Politically, Josiah Quincy remained popular. His record as a concerned public servant and a vocal jurist who sincerely desired a better city led to his election as Boston’s second mayor on May 1, 1823. That same day he addressed the assembly at
Faneuil Hall, making two issues clear: He intended to immediately improve conditions around the new city his way, and he planned to remain in office indefinitely.\(^9\)

At fifty-one years of age the new mayor stood more than six feet tall—fiercely intense, spirited, sagacious, and eager to initiate the much needed urban reforms—in prime condition to take on the job.

Mayor Quincy quickly discovered, however, that the failures of the previous administration could not be “cured” solely by changing who sat as city’s chief executive. The office of mayor had been limited in power by the new city’s charter, which had retained too much of the out-of-date town government structure.

Mayor Quincy refused to be called by the title Chief Administrative and Executive Officer unless he could be such in reality. This meant, he was sure, that he had to interpret the city charter as having meant to give the mayor enough executive power to bring all five municipal boards under his control. He “regarded the duties of the executive officer [to include acting] absolutely and exclusively with the character and interests of the city [at heart], studying and undertaking all its rights, whether affecting property, or liberty, or power, and the maintaining [of] them, not merely with the zeal of official station, but with the pertinacious spirit of private interest. The honor, happiness, dignity, safety, and prosperity of the city, the development of its resources, its expenditures, and police, should be the perpetual object of his purpose, and labor of his thought.”\(^{10}\) By assuming responsibility for all vital health and safety issues he could then ensure “that all negligence, carelessness, and positive violations of duty be prosecuted and punished.”\(^{11}\)

Mayor Josiah Quincy, therefore, appointed himself chairman ex officio of every executive committee serving under each of the five municipal boards. By centralizing this splintered municipal authority, he hoped to eliminate individual posturing and give one controlling voice to all decisions. He thereby instilled a new sense of leadership over this city of 45,000 inhabitants, who had endured decades of decay owing to the boards’ squabbling over power and blame. This was only the beginning of his new method of governing the city.

When Mayor Quincy learned that four of the boards had complete autonomy in spending tax dollars, he wrote an ordinance that made two major changes: It established the office of Auditor of Accounts, which instituted a new system of financial controls. And it compelled each board to request appropriations from the City Council, where only the mayor and the city treasurer could authorize funds.
Naturally, this ordinance caused dissatisfaction among the members of the socially prominent boards and their elite executive committees.

During his first formal session with the City Council, Mayor Quincy announced that he intended to foster civic pride among the citizens of Boston. He would make Boston a cleaner, healthier, and safer place by first improving the sanitary conditions around the city. Henceforth, he proclaimed, all livestock (fowl, swine, cattle, etc.) being brought into the city that normally would be taken to Market Square would be restricted to Boston Common until the animals were sold or slaughtered. Exemptions would exist for residents, who were allowed to keep cows pastured at Boston Common or near their homes, and for horses, which, at the time, were the only means of transportation. The pronouncement also promised that all streets would be cleaned and household garbage would be collected and disposed of on a regular basis. “In the whole sphere of municipal duties, there are none more important than those which relate to the removal of those substances whose exhalations injuriously affect the air. A pure atmosphere is to a city what a good conscience is to an individual, a perpetual source of comfort, tranquility, and self-respect.”

Prior to 1822, the Board of Health had jurisdiction over Boston’s streets but only to the point of quarantining infectious diseases and servicing various public health needs. The board relied upon scavengers and country farmers to eliminate filth by carting away household waste and animal droppings to use or sell as fertilizer or as feed for swine. The practice of retrieving manure from Boston’s streets and selling it back to the suburban farmers was a highly lucrative business, but it had not kept the streets clean. The streets remained especially contaminated during the hot summer months, the height of farming season, and the time of year when disease spread most quickly from refuse in the streets.

In order to accomplish his promised cleaning of the streets, Mayor Quincy’s first step was to accuse the Board of Health of being incompetent and of catering to its patronage rather than protecting the public’s welfare. He executed an ordinance that banned tossing household garbage and human waste into the streets. Then the mayor claimed that the health of the city should be managed by a professional who would be directly accountable to the mayor’s office. So he created the new office of city marshal to act as chief health officer and to oversee the duties of the city’s constables, who would enforce the new laws.

Under the this new structure the city made rapid progress. The requirement of
city livestock owners and farmers entering the city limits to restrict their animals to
Boston Common left the streets manageable. Teams of sweepers were hired to purge
every street, lane, court, and alley—as well as every dock, wharf, bulkhead, and
quay—of accumulated debris for the first time in two centuries. A fleet of wagons
and teams of horses were purchased by the city; then laborers were hired to remove
the heaps of refuse. Quickly, piles of debris that had accumulated over the years were
carted away; the nearest property owner, or owners, was billed for the expense of the
removal. Within a month the city streets were cleaned of three thousand tons of
accumulated sweepings and a dump was established at the far corner of Boston
Common.\textsuperscript{14}

To pay for this endeavor, Mayor Quincy sold most of the manure back to the
city-owned farms. They were charged by the ton and anyone caught collecting
manure gratis from Boston Common or the streets was fined. Both scavengers and
farmers had to obtain a license to haul away debris if it was unsorted—that is, mixed
with material that could be used as fertilizer. The whole expense of Boston’s first
street-cleaning effort paid for itself by the end of 1823.

To his detractors,\textsuperscript{15} Mayor Quincy claimed that paying for his initial goal of
cleaning the streets by reselling the refuse had not been planned. The city, he
asserted, was not in the business of profiting, but rather of taking back control of its
public streets. He pointed out that “[f]or the first time, on any general scale destined
for universal application, the broom was used upon the streets. On seeing this novel
spectacle, of files of sweepers, an old and common adage [i.e., sweeping out of office;
cleaning up government] was often applied to the new administration of city affairs;
in good humor by some, in a sarcastic spirit by others.”\textsuperscript{16}

He also pointed out that, in less than a year, he had successfully justified to
Bostonians his claims that the inefficiency of the Board of Health was part of what
had been holding back the city from an efficient system. He was not the first to
point this out: Prior to Boston’s incorporation as a city, the Board of Health had
been accused of such corruption that the General Court had added a provision to
the city charter that allowed the elimination of this board if the mayor found a legiti-
mate reason. Mayor Quincy used this provision to abolish the Board of Health and
place all of its duties under the city marshal. This new law enforcement officer
became responsible for Boston’s health needs, which included keeping the streets
perpetually clean and using constables to enforce the ordinances. The first city mar-
shal he appointed, who also was to oversee the constables, was Benjamin Pollard, a Harvard graduate and a Boston lawyer.

The mayor also attacked the lack of maintenance of the city’s sewers. He said they were not being well managed where they were at the time, in the hands of private enterprise, so he brought the entire drainage system under the city’s control, overseen by the city marshal (Pollard). For the first time, the neglected sewers were all scoured, unplugged, flushed clear, and restored to flow as designed. This completely eliminated the all-too-prevalent problem of mosquito-breeding stagnant water lying above the sewer drains, especially around the market district. Not surprisingly, Boston’s disease and death rates began to decline steadily.

The mayor did not hesitate, either, to undermine yet another board—the Surveyors of Highways, who were responsible for street maintenance. As executive officer of the city, he appointed a superintendent of the streets and gave him jurisdiction over the Board of Surveyors. The superintendent then marshaled gangs of laborers to work nightly at repairing the streets. This was easily done if they waited until after the newly instituted ten o’clock curfew.

By these two gestures, Mayor Quincy furthered the cleanup of Boston’s streets. He also gained more needed control over much of the city’s governing structure.

Josiah Quincy had learned from his mother the importance of discipline in maintaining good health. As an adult he equated such discipline with high morals, orderliness, and self-respect. He became known for his precise grooming, his gentlemanly behavior, and his cultivated appearance. So, while serving as mayor, unlike many gentlemen of the era, Josiah Quincy arose each day long before the rooster crowed. He spent some time rigorously performing his own form of calisthenics and then plunged into an outside coldwater “air-bath.” He then shaved, cleaned his teeth, dressed in the day’s clean clothes, powdered his hair, and breakfasted. After gulping a mugful of extra-strong black tea and eating beef and eggs with a greased biscuit for breakfast, he donned his greatcoat (a long caped overcoat) and was out the door by five o’clock, ready to depart on horseback.

At this early hour he was often seen galloping through each quarter of the city, conducting his daily inspection of every street in Boston and either making a checklist of things that needed to be corrected or following up on the state of previously
noted problems. In Quincy’s Boston, begging was prohibited, vagrancy was banned, and loitering of any kind was forbidden. Soon it became commonplace to observe the mayor apprehending and delivering anyone he considered to be a deviant to the Police Court or to Leverett Street Jail. If property owners cluttered the sidewalks in front of their shops, they would soon receive notice from the city marshal ordering that “they cause said street to be cleared in front of their respective estates forthwith.” Upon a second infraction, the mayor personally issued a fine to those who stood in violation.

This hands-on approach to running the city improved the city’s physical look. For some citizens, though, such incessant vigilance was unwelcome; it was labeled “officiousness” and “intermeddling.”

At his office in Faneuil Hall Mayor Quincy listened to complaints and concerns from individual citizens, who lined up every morning for their turn to be heard. The remainder of his day was spent in long sessions with the City Council or chairing the executive board committees.

Some evenings he gave formal dinner parties for such luminaries as Daniel Webster, the captain and officers of the USS Constitution (which was anchored in Boston Harbor), and relatives of the Adams, Hancock, and Phillips families. Other evenings he held executive committee meetings by the fireplace at his home, where his wife, Eliza Susan, graciously received his guests. Occasionally, he would accompany his family to the theater, especially when Shakespeare was being performed.

Sundays were reserved for God and family. He attended the service at Arlington Street Church. Then he managed family affairs and had dinner with his wife and seven children at their home on the corner of Hamilton Place and Tremont Street, overlooking Boston Common. Known for never wasting a precious minute, Mayor Quincy also worked on Sundays when time permitted. He sometimes managed to squeeze in his early morning rounds on Sundays, as well as preparing his schedule for the following week and conducting committee meetings.

Affixed to his desk at Faneuil Hall he kept a reminder that the way to glory is justice. It was an epigraph written by Cicero: Praeclare Socrates hanc viam ad gloriam proximam et quasi compendiariam dicebat esse; si quis id aget, ut, qualis haberri vellet, tales esset. Quodsi qui simulatione et inani ostentatione et ficto non modo sermonem, sed etiam voluit stabilem se gloriem consequi posse rentur, vehementer errant. Or, “Socrates used to express
it so admirably, ‘The nearest way to glory—and a shortcut, as it were—is to strive to be what you wish to be thought to be.’ For if anyone thinks he can win lasting glory by pretense, by empty show, by hypocritical talk and looks, he is very much mistaken.”

As his responsibilities grew, so did Mayor Quincy’s pace. One morning while inspecting the city at daybreak he was apprehended by a night watchman for racing his horse and endangering the public within the city limits. He was then arraigned at the Police Court and two witnesses testified to his speeding. When the watchmen learned his identity and prepared to immediately release him, he insisted that they carry out their investigation to make sure that no risk to pedestrians had occurred. He pleaded “Not guilty” but stood willing that judgment should be entered against him and the appropriate fines imposed, “to show that no individual could be placed above the law.”

With so many urban problems still awaiting reform, Mayor Quincy focused his attention upon Market Square. He couldn’t help noticing, whenever he gazed eastward from his Faneuil Hall office window, the collection of colonial-era structures crammed together. And the docks beyond! “Effluvia,” he called the polluted harbor waters and the horrible odor that hung over Market Square, “noxious effluvia.”

He recognized the adverse effect the newly enacted city ordinance had upon wagon and pushcart vendors and, by extension, upon Boston’s merchants. He knew the farmers and vendors hadn’t had enough space even before the ordinance, and he wanted to provide it to them as soon as possible. He was convinced that the only way to do so was to repair the entire market district and expand it, widening streets in the process. The whole city would benefit, he thought. Commerce would have room to grow, Boston’s waterfront would be less unsightly, and the city would present a more dignified face to those arriving by sea, a major means of approach to Boston.

Josiah Quincy had no idea, at first, that his proposals would face such steadfast opposition—not only from prominent citizens but from members of the City Council and the state legislature as well. Although it was widely acknowledged that Market Square was desperately in need of renewal, no one else was willing to jeopardize his standing in the community for such a radical idea. Why, nothing on this scale had ever been done before, or even contemplated! And these were not the times to take on financial risk.
Mayor Quincy did not look at the risk; he saw only the future results of the expansion—new jobs, an established location for marketing, a new legitimacy given to wagon and pushcart merchants, and a city that had enough faith in itself to do what had to be done. He wrote of his determination to see it through: “It is not the natural brilliancy of wit and the flashes of imagination (which, by the world, is denominated genius) that are, in my opinion, to be envied. It is firmness of nerve—that strength of mind which capacitakes us for intense application and hard, laborious attention—which is the soil where every laurel and every virtue is cultivated with success.” He was determined to see it through.
He knew that the best way to go about realizing a grand plan was to first get the approval of the City Council, and also of most of Boston’s citizens, and then introduce changes to the plan gradually. Boston’s history of decision making, especially in regard to the market district, showed that it did not easily differentiate between progress and lunacy. Idealism, it sometimes seemed to say, was left to fools and madmen. Therefore, Mayor Quincy decided to introduce his solution in phases.

When he was elected, Josiah Quincy had defined his position as mayor before the City Council by stating that he “promised nothing except a laborious fulfillment of every known duty, a prudent exercise of every invested power, and a disposition shrinking from no official responsibility.” He displayed this last quality in the courage it took to present his first phase of revitalizing the market district. He addressed the City Council and said that the pushcart peddlers and wagon vendors needed space to sell their wares. He asked that the City Council approve funds to purchase private properties to provide land to begin expanding Market Square. Hoping to allay fears, he cited nearby India Wharf as a prime example of successful waterfront renewal.

India Wharf had been a collection of streets and small independent piers that extended into the harbor from India Street, most of them holding ramshackle warehouses and wooden shanties until 1807. Then, in an ambitious commercial project, a private group of investors converted the property into an efficient wharf system. Designed by architect Charles Bulfinch, India Wharf was extended to 980 feet into the harbor, its streets were widened, and its dilapidated structures were replaced with thirty-two, five-story brick warehouses. Since its redevelopment, India Wharf had engaged ships from India, China, Russia, and the Mediterranean sea trades. In 1823, when Mayor Quincy used it as an example to his Council, it was still considered Bulfinch’s most outstanding success and perhaps even the most lucrative maritime venture ever in Boston.

The City Council was not easily persuaded by Mayor Quincy’s presentation of his ideas. After much debate the Council appropriated a mere $15,000 for the most obvious need—a new vegetable market to replace the Shambles adjacent to Faneuil Hall. When the new market was completed, the slaughter and sale of meat would be restricted to the stalls inside Faneuil Hall’s first floor.

Although Mayor Quincy was disappointed by the limited scope of this makeshift resolution, he did not object to the Council’s measure. He waited until he
had a better argument to present them, and he did not initiate the approved small-scale improvement.

A month later, Mayor Quincy readdressed the issue. He informed the City Council that he envisioned a more ambitious scheme. The logical solution to the lack of space in the market district was to do more than replace one pseudobuilding. They needed to widen streets and extend the district seaward, he said, by filling in

_Dock Square, Market Square, Roe Buck Passage, Faneuil Hall (labeled Market House), and the Shambles (labeled Vegetable Market). Reprinted from Hale’s Atlas, 1819._

_Courtesy of the Bostonian Society/Old State House._
the shore and creating more land. This would maintain the market area’s link to its historic waterfront, and it would provide more land for pushcart and wagon vendors, which was sorely needed. He emphasized that if the project was careful to meet the needs of Boston’s citizens, the future benefits would almost guarantee that the city’s financial well-being was safeguarded. It would then be a straightforward process to convince voters that the expenditures were justified.

His argument continued with specifics on how to explain this substantial development. The city had not spent much of the taxes it had collected while Mayor Phillips had been in office. It was in a good financial position, therefore, to secure the necessary funds from City Bank. An expanded new market district around the already approved new vegetable market would allow more vendors into the same area, and thereby generate competition. This, in turn, would reduce consumer prices.

He noted that the circumstances were favorable for purchasing distressed property at lower prices. He pointed out that the owners of neighboring properties at Long Wharf and the North End would realize an appreciation of value by the formation of new streets—especially if the problems of Roe Buck Passage were finally corrected. It was paramount, however, that the city purchase every private property necessary within the scope of his proposed public works project to ensure success. He concluded by reasoning that $15,000 was insufficient to initiate such a project and petitioned the City Council for additional funds.

Although the City Council denied the additional funds, the mayor was authorized to investigate the possibility of assembling waterfront parcels for future purchase. As part of this implied approval of Mayor Quincy’s concept, the City Council assigned the public works project a name: the Extension of Faneuil Hall Market.

Immediately, Mayor Quincy formed an executive committee for the project, naming himself chairman. He appointed seven members from the Common Council and three from the Board of Aldermen and named the new group the City Council Committee on the Extension of Faneuil Hall. The committee was also referred to as the Market Committee. One of its prominent members was an alderman who was noted for being an excellent architect and author, Asher (or Ashur) Benjamin. He would soon play a pivotal role in the extension project.

Asher Benjamin had grown up in the Connecticut River Valley, where he became a housewright’s apprentice. In 1797 he published The Country Builder’s Assistant, based upon his experience of working with Charles Bulfinch. It was the first
suggests Quincy's Market

builder's handbook authored by an American citizen. In 1803 he arrived in Boston and settled in the West End, which was a growing neighborhood on the backside of Beacon Hill. Three years later he penned his second book, *The American Builder's Companion*, which became a standard reference for many tradesmen. In 1808 he designed and oversaw the construction of the Boston Coffee Exchange Building, a structure that rose seven stories and was capped by a distinctive dome. When Mayor Quincy asked him to help design the new market district, Benjamin began work on a master plan for the new vegetable market, widened streets, and the reconstruction of the Town Dock. He worked under the mayor's direction and was assisted by surveyor Stephen T. Fuller and, in an advisory capacity, another renowned architect, Alexander Parris.

Between August and November 1823, Josiah Quincy personally met with every property owner between State and Ann Streets. To each owner he conveyed the message that the city intended to purchase private property in order to provide land for wider roads, a new vegetable market, and adequate vending space for wagon and pushcart merchants. His efforts focused on thirty properties that, taken together, covered 127,000 square feet. These included land and buildings, private passageways, and wharves and wharf rights. (Legal wharf rights—or licensed tideland—were products of laws created by the General Court during the 1640s that gave explicit permission to waterfront property owners to build on or to fill harbor land that fell between the high and low watermarks. Harbor land beyond the low watermark belonged to the Commonwealth.)

In 1823 there were five principal wharves between State Street and the North End's Ann Street that extended seaward from Faneuil Hall: David Spear's/Greene Wharf; Bray's Wharf; Nathan Spear's Wharf; Codman's Wharf, and the Town Dock (actually a wharf). These wharves had assorted structures built upon them, most of which were leased to tenants. Initially, Mayor Quincy focused upon the vicinity around Bray's, Nathan Spear's, and Codman's Wharves, together with the Town Dock, as the area of expansion. He commented, "[I]t was evidently for the interest of them all that the plan contemplated should succeed, and not be defeated, or post-

*COURTESY OF THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY/OLD STATE HOUSE.*
poned, by the erection of the vegetable market.” Some of the owners simply refused to sell, citing the loss of rental income from long-term leases they held. Others were more than willing to negotiate because their properties were in utter ruin. Mayor Quincy shrewdly used the $15,000 budget “as an argument to influence those proprietors to be more moderate in their [sale price] demands.” Much of his bargaining had the effect intended. The mayor entered into conditional contracts, far below what some considered “fair price,” that would prevent an owner from increasing his demands should the city proceed with the extension project and their former property become more valuable.

Mayor Quincy reasoned that “fair price” consisted of the appraised value of a property based upon its physical condition and the rental income that existed at the time of the appraisal. But many property owners saw this public works project as an opportunity to inflate the value of their property. They spoke of “fair price” as including the loss of years of future income. And they pointed out that some of their existing long-term contracts with renters of their properties could not be broken.

On December 10, 1823, the Market Committee transmitted three options to those owners who wouldn’t sell to the city for the project: to combine their properties into common stock offerings, to have their properties valued by independent appraisers, or to establish their own reasonable price and accept the city’s reasonable counteroffer. They were given ten days to respond.

By December 20 there was no response that accepted combining the properties into common stock or selling their properties by appraisement. Several of the proprietors, however, expressed their willingness to set their own price—at extremely high prices. The others refused to sell at all, declaring that they had other related business interests around the city that would be harmed by the development. They therefore would neither enter into price negotiation nor discuss the subject any further. In response, Mayor Quincy flatly withdrew the proposals.

Despite this, in less than six months Josiah Quincy held conditional contracts for purchasing most of the properties needed to extend Market Square eastward for half the sum of the owners’ initial asking prices. He had negotiated the prices down from a high of about $800,000 to $400,000. These conditional contracts held by the city stipulated “payment of a specified sum by the City of Boston, on or before May 1824 [in exchange for] full title and warranty.”

Throughout the time of the mayor’s negotiations, Asher Benjamin and sur-
veyor Stephen Fuller were designing and redesigning new building concepts and street layouts under the mayor’s supervision, in an effort to maximize space as much as possible and lessen the time needed to finalize the plans after the expected go-ahead was given.

On December 29, 1823, the Market Committee reported to City Council that the prices demanded by some remaining owners were too high and the lack of cooperation by others rendered it impossible to proceed with negotiations. The Committee was now convinced, though, it reported, that the extension project could proceed without jeopardizing the city’s investment. To do so, the powers of eminent domain might have to be exercised.

At that time, the city could use eminent domain to take private property only for road purposes, not for a public building project. In response, the City Council said they would be prepared to appeal to the state legislature for “such an extension of the powers of the Surveyors of Highways, as may enable the city to become possessed of such estates in the vicinity of Faneuil Hall Market as the said Surveyors may deem it expedient for the city to possess for the public use, under such limitations, restrictions, and provisions, as the Constitution enjoins, and as regard for the interests of the public, and respect for the rights of individuals shall dictate.”

By early 1824 Boston’s citizens were still strongly divided on whether the cost of the extension project would cripple the city if it proceeded. Public sentiment had been voiced to the point where the mayor said that “the whole subject should be laid out before the inhabitants of the city for their sanction.” It seemed too big an issue to decide only through their elected officials. And he needed to know, before proceeding any further, whether the general public was opposed to the project. The newly incorporated City of Boston returned to its political roots, therefore, and proceeded with a town meeting.

On January 16, 1824, concerned Bostonians convened at Faneuil Hall to hear the mayor’s preliminary proposal for enlarging Market Square. At this town meeting, Asher Benjamin unveiled a three-dimensional model of a master plan. Displayed was a long one-story building flanked by two equally long buildings, each of which would be three and a half stories high. All three buildings extended eastward from Faneuil Hall, on land that would exist after more of the harbor was filled in. The buildings would be surrounded by a new system of streets. Mayor Quincy still called the one-story central building a new vegetable market, and he said that its “centre
... was to coincide with the centre of Faneuil Hall." It would be a single-story structure about 50 feet wide and 420 feet long, which brought the total square footage to about 21,000—over three times the size of the building the City Council had approved the previous June and more than four times the size of the Shambles. The new market would have a roof supported by a double row of heavy wooden columns. There were no sides, no doors or windows, no protection from the elements other than the roof. Flanking the vegetable market would be two long buildings, which would look like warehouses and hold merchant stores. On each side of the center building, between it and the flanking warehouse/stores building, would be a broad avenue 65 feet wide. On the far side of each warehouse/stores building there would be another access street, each 50 feet wide. The warehouse buildings would be 55 feet wide and about the same length as the vegetable market. They would be built with common brick reminiscent of the row-house-style warehouses at nearby India Wharf.

The immediate reaction of the citizens was predictable. Instead of viewing this as the biggest single development in the history of Boston, one that would solve the market district’s space problem for years to come, they deemed it an impractical dream, which they “opprobriously denominated 'the mammoth project of the Mayor.'” The amount of debt it would take to build was even more intimidating than the project’s size. People said it would lay the foundation of a city debt “which neither the present inhabitants of Boston, nor their prosperity, would be able to pay.” To this latter objection Mayor Quincy responded, “[D]ebt is no more an object of terror than a sword. Both are very dangerous in the hands of fools and madmen. Both are very safe, innocent, and useful in the hands of the wise and prudent. In the case of Faneuil Hall Market, what possible object of rational apprehension can there be in a debt created for the purpose of purchasing a tract of territory wholly within the control of the city authorities?” His clear argument did not win him instant support.

Many people felt that such an ambitious development was better left to private enterprise, which, they said, was more adept at such construction than public officials. Others denied that a new vegetable market was even wanted.

Josiah Quincy was not deterred. He rebutted by pointing out that Market Square was becoming so overburdened by the rapidly increasing population that it was embarrassingly inconvenient. To be useful, any improvement must be essential,
extensive, and permanent. He ran through numbers, demonstrating how the cost of new market facilities would be justified by the increasing annual rental income the city would receive from these buildings. And widening Roe Buck Passage and creating new streets, he emphasized, would favorably change the value of nearby privately owned real estate.

His ideas were not received passively.

During the town meeting’s heated debate, Mayor Quincy narrowed all concerns down to two questions: whether the extension project should proceed under the guidance of city government (rather than by private enterprise), and whether the City Council should apply to the state legislature for an extension of its powers of eminent domain.

Ultimately, the mayor’s rebuttal was effective enough to carry the proposal forward. The majority of those attending the town meeting voted in the affirmative on both questions. “A reconsideration of the vote was moved, but it was negated and the motion was disallowed. The Hall and galleries were full, and it was attended by some gentlemen opposed to the subject, that the actions had been carried three to one.”

The vote in the mayor’s favor did not keep local newspapers from criticizing the decision. The New England Palladium denounced the public works project as fiscally irresponsible. The Boston Patriot declared that Mayor Quincy’s proposals would inflate Boston’s residential real estate market to the point where the poor would be squeezed from affordable housing. Other critics insisted that the scale of development would alter the essential character of Boston at the expense of small businessmen, established small shops, and independent merchants. So far-reaching were Quincy’s ideals that some ridiculed his proposal as “Quincy’s Folly.”