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Each passing day and month brought more Bostonians back to their homes, and in the ensuing years the seaport town drew a host of new faces. Seven months after the end of the siege, William Bant reported to John Hancock in Philadelphia that “Town Matters begin to wear a better face” since “many of the Inhabitants have lately returned.” Despite the shock of witnessing the destruction wrought by the occupation and siege, some felt relieved that matters were not worse. In writing to her husband in late March 1776, Abigail Adams noted the “abominable Ravages” committed upon Boston, but still believed that “the Town in General is left in a better state than we expected.” In order to determine the extent of the damage and the losses to the town’s people, “Sixty Persons”
were “chosen, as a Committee Five for each Ward,” to walk and survey the town. The men walked through narrow congested streets, along country lanes, past churches, taverns, docks, and shops. They passed closely set weatherboarded wooden buildings with shingled roofs, brick houses set on spacious lots, gardens, barns, and pastures. Many of the winding crooked streets and lanes they walked eventually found their way to the wharves and shipyards, the symbols of this seafaring commercial town. As the men looked in public buildings, knocked on doors, and stopped to talk to fellow townsmen, much of what they saw would have been recognizable to their fathers, grandfathers, and perhaps even great-grandfathers. Still retaining much of its seventeenth-century character more than a hundred years later, the community represented one of visual continuity with its past. Change to the built landscape was barely perceptible until the closing years of the 1790s.

Almost twenty years after the devastation of the Port Act and the siege had finally passed, one visitor to the bustling port was reminded of “an old-fashioned town in England.” In thinking about his homeland, he went on to liken Philadelphia to London, New York to Liverpool, and Boston to Bristol. The wider streets, the “houses better in style,” and the “broad footways” of New York “paved with a curb to separate them from the road” put him much more in mind of a city than did Boston, where many streets remained unpaved, simply “pitched with pebbles,” and only a “post and gutter” separating the footway from the roadway. During the winter season these narrow, poorly paved, dirt thoroughfares often became quagmires presenting many problems, especially when they were “rendered in some places almost impassable . . . by the large drifts of snow.” But overall, travelers commented favorably on Boston, despite its provincialism when compared to New York or Philadelphia. “We have been very much pleased with Boston [for] the situation is beautiful . . . the town is irregularly built but there
are many fine situations for gentlemans houses,” wrote Barbara Vaughn in a letter to a friend during her travels in 1785.7

Throughout its 150 years of existence Boston had grown organically, shaping itself to the natural topography with winding narrow streets and alleyways, having no particular plan or organization. At the time of settlement, the need for defense determined the community’s location on the peninsula. Rapid growth, almost seven thousand people between 1630 and 1690, played a role in fostering this irregular development. Seventeenth-century townsmen laid out the town based on “English precedent.” The absence of town planning and minimal innovation in building practices during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries created a town in the “late medieval tradition of the City of London.”8 The town existed for almost sixty years before inhabitants officially began naming the streets. Streets were known instead by such descriptions as “the High wayes from Jacob Eliots Barne to the fardest gate bye Roxsbery Towns end” or “The broad Street or Way from the Old Fortification on the Neck, leading into the Town as far as the late Deacon Eliot’s corner.” Finally in the late 1790s, inhabitants began to “conceive [that] the public convenience would be greatly promoted, by the placing of sign boards at the corners of the Streets, Lanes, Alleys, Courts & Squares.”9 As the town matured in the eighteenth century it retained this medieval ambience. Despite its position as a major port town in the Anglo-American community, limited geographical access fostered the community’s provincial qualities.

Boston stood on the Shawmut Peninsula, an irregularly shaped landmass of less than one thousand acres, “at the bottom of Massachusetts Bay,” joined to the mainland by a narrow isthmus referred to as “the Neck.” The nearly thirteen thousand Bostonians dwelling there in 1784 divided their peninsula into three geographic regions, the West End, South End, and North End, which collectively consisted of twelve wards. The distance from the town gate on the Neck to the most northerly point of the peninsula, the
Boston in 1789.

(*Boston City Directory, 1789, published by John Norman.*)
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North End district, was approximately two miles. At its widest point, from Barton’s Point east to Fort Hill, the peninsula’s breadth was approximately one and one-quarter miles.\textsuperscript{10}

Just beyond the Neck, the wharves that jutted from the land along the northern, eastern, and southern shoreline began at the southernmost point of the peninsula with Gibbons Wharf. On the western side lay Roxbury Flats, dry at low tide, and the Charles River. The South End comprised the largest area of land, from the old fortification gates on the Neck north to Mill Creek, which marked the beginning of the North End. It included Boston Common in the west and spread eastward to Fort Hill. On the western side of the peninsula, north of Boston Common, rose the three-domed mountain named Trimountain. From this topographic landmark west to the Charles River and north to the Mill Pond lay the West End, a rural area with relatively few dwellings during most of the eighteenth century. By comparison, the North End was the most densely packed region of the entire peninsula.\textsuperscript{11}

The north bank of Mill Creek marked the boundary to this district, which was accessible by two bridges, one on Middle Street and the other on Ann Street. Here, in the northeastern tip of the town, sat Copp’s Hill, from where one could command a view of Charlestown. Before the building of the Charles River Bridge in 1786 and the West Boston Bridge in 1793, the only access to Boston besides traveling by land across the Neck was by water. Both ferry services in the town, the Charlestown Ferry and the Winnisimmet Ferry, docked in the North End.

The twelve wards, which had existed since 1735, served municipal and civic purposes. The first division of the town into districts occurred during the 1630s by order of the General Court for the purpose of keeping a watch consisting of “a trainband, a constable, and a tithing-man.”\textsuperscript{12} In 1662 five wards existed, and by 1715 Boston’s inhabitants voted to divide their town into “Eight distinct Wards for purposes of inspection.” Finally in 1735 the townspeople
requested the Overseers of the Poor “to Divide the Town into Twelve Wards.” In 1630, the wards served the primary objective of military protection. Over time they took on greater importance as administrative divisions for such purposes as allocation of poor relief and fire engines, and assignment of police officers, tax assessors, and various other public officials whose job consisted of monitoring a specific ward. Wards 1 through 5 comprised the North End, Ward 7 the West End, and the remaining wards the South End. Within the South End Wards 6, 8, and the northernmost edge of 9 constituted the central business district of the town. What was the appearance and character of late-eighteenth-century Boston?

**Boston Neck**

Reaching the town of Boston by land before the building of the Charles River Bridge in 1786 meant crossing the swampy, mile-long, fifty-yard-wide isthmus that connected the peninsula to the mainland. All those seeking access to the town who did not arrive by oceangoing vessel made their way along this “bleak unpleasant road” or took the Charlestown ferry, which one traveler found “not a pleasant alternative.” Barbara Vaughn found this singular “way out of the city” by land the “one very unpleasing circumstance respecting Boston.” Boston Neck, “soggy at high tide and spray-blown in a storm,” could prove a fatal crossing during inclement weather. Violent “Winds and Waves” pounded the land and sometimes destroyed the roadway during winter storms. The land lay so low that spring tides washed across the rough road, preventing carriages from passing, and spring rains often forced horses pulling wagons and carriages to traverse the dangerous road knee deep in water. For over 150 years this dreary stretch of land in the South End had offered a less-than-welcome entrance to Boston. Except for cows grazing on portions of the marshland it was a deso-
Boston ward map in 1775.
(Rendered by Robert Richardson, 2004.)
late strip of ground, broken only by a few native trees, the town
gallows, and the old fortification.

The brick fortification, with a “deep ditch on the side next [to] the Neck,” had two gates, one for foot passengers and one for car­riages. First built soon “after the settlement of the town,” the fortification initially afforded protection from “any sudden attack by the Indians.” After hostilities ceased, it fell into disrepair and was not rebuilt until 1710, when a “more substantial” wall of “stone and brick, with a breast work of earth and proper gates” was completed. In 1760 the town again repaired and enlarged the “Fortification Gates.”

The fortifications built by the British during their occupa­tion of Boston in 1775–1776 added further defensive structures to the narrow strip of land. Eventually the gates fell into disrepair and finally the town destroyed the remaining ruins.

The town government found profitable uses for the Neck’s des­erted stretch of low-lying marshlands. Before the 1790s, with a few exceptions, the town used it primarily as grazing land. At different times inhabitants offered proposals for use of the Neck to town officials, as did Hugh Floyd and Jonathan Hall in 1763 when they made a request to rent the land for making “Brick and Tyle.” But the selectmen rejected the proposal as not being “for the benefit of the Town.” The Neck, therefore, remained grazing land for another eleven years until town officials made use of the area during the economically and politically trying decade of the 1770s. Following the Boston Port Act in 1774, the Committee of Ways and Means selected the site to “lay out a Brick Yard” to employ the needy in “the making of Bricks” to raise funds for the purchase of food and other necessities.

The town leased land on the Neck to Bostonians and nonresi­dents as a way of generating revenue. During the late 1770s two men from Newton rented marshy pastures for grazing animals. Captain Fellow, a Boston resident, leased some of the town land for “Bull Pasture” during the early 1780s. Outside the city gates on
Boston Neck.
(Map by L. A. Chisholm, in Annie H. Thwing, *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston*, Boston, 1920.)
the southeast side of the Neck, two townsmen held a ninety-nine-year lease on a piece of land where the selectmen permitted them to build a small house and a wharf, as long as they also built and kept in good repair a seawall to help protect the Neck.\(^{24}\) However, officials disallowed other uses. When a resident of Westman inquired as to renting some of this town grazing land to “build a Dwelling House and a Coopers Shop,” the selectmen refused.\(^{25}\) Excluding the rented land, the selectmen permitted only town cattle on the Neck. Joshua Sever, caretaker of town lands, had the responsibility of enforcing this order, a difficult assignment.\(^{26}\) The Roxbury cows were no respecters of borders, and they liked Boston Common. Finally in 1784 the selectmen appointed a man “to stand upon the Neck and prevent the Cows coming from Roxbury into the Commons of this Town.”\(^{27}\)

Individuals trespassing on the Neck, either by tearing up the ground, leaving “Incumbrances or Nuisances” there, or firing guns, faced prosecution. Despite the 1786 renewal of a town bylaw dating back to 1713 that carried the punishment of a twenty-shilling fine and seizure of the firearms, unlawful use of “guns or pistols” on the Neck continued.\(^{28}\) This illegal sport flourished during the warm summer months. The law forbade the shooting of firearms throughout the entire town because of the obvious dangers to inhabitants, but the distant proximity of the Neck to the densely settled parts of town made it a place where an offender risked less chance of detection. In an attempt to ensure enforcement, the selectmen hired various men to patrol the area, but eventually ordered constable Shubael Hews to “notice and inform” them of offenders. Problems persisted as long as the Neck remained desolate and virtually uninhabited.\(^{29}\)

**The South End**

Walking northward from Boston Neck in the direction of the Back Bay, one passed through sparsely inhabited countryside before
reaching Boston Common, “a pleasant green field, with a gradual ascent from the seashore, till it ends in Beacon Hill.” On the Common’s forty-five acres cows grazed, children played, and residents strolled on warm summer evenings beneath the avenues of trees planted along the eastern periphery called the Mall. One female traveler in 1785 found the Mall to be “the best on the continent.” From here was a “pleasing prospect” of the Charles River, which bordered the bottom side of the Common, and “hills” rising “gradually on the western side.”

The town permitted residents to graze cows on this public land for a small fee, which went to support the upkeep of the town bulls. Carriages, chaises, carts, and horses frequently cut across the Common, and sometimes even the burying ground on the southern side, “to the detriment of the Land & diminishing of the feed.” Finally the selectmen determined to fence both the burying ground and the Common, and place rails around the trees. In a contemporary print rendered in approximately 1800, Tremont Street Mall has the appearance of a country lane, with trees and fencing lining the left side of the road, marking the entrance to the Common. The scales located on the Common for farmers to bring their cartloads of hay for weighing, the grazing cows, wooden fences, dirt roads, scattered dwellings, taverns, and shops “gave a bucolic air to the region.”

From the late 1780s onward the South End received increased attention from town officials and inhabitants. Townspeople made attempts to turn the causeway leading onto the Neck into a highway of sorts by planting trees on the sides of the road. In 1789, Bostonians named this entryway into the town Washington Street in honor of the route President Washington traveled during his visit to the town. Beyond the former site of the old fortification, Washington became Orange Street, the main thoroughfare across much of the peninsula. It continued to traverse the peninsula first as New-
The South End.
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bury, then Marlborough, then Cornhill, finally ending at the central location of Dock Square.

To further incorporate the South End into the town proper, the town meeting voted in March 1788 to rename streets and assign names to those that were unidentified. For example, the road formerly referred to as running "from Orange Street Westerly by Mrs. Inches House and crossing Nassau Street to Pleasant Street" now became Eliots Street. Town officials assigned street names to nine roads intersecting with the main thoroughfare, Orange Street. The identification of these and other unnamed streets was an instrumental component in the development of the South End that would begin by the turn of the century.

Between 1789 and 1794 the town divided the land on either side of Orange Street into parcels and began selling them to those interested in building "dwelling houses and stores on each side of the street." Although townspeople gradually erected buildings, the neighborhood still offered an unobstructed view "across open fields to the Back Bay in the west, and to the harbor in the east." The region was dotted with horse pastures, grazing cows, and almost two hundred barns. One such residence was that of John Waldo, a merchant of some means, who lived on Newbury Street near the Lamb Tavern. His property consisted of a house "with a large commodious Shop . . . Store, large Garden [and] Barn." Taverners often had barns on their property for stabling a traveler's horse while he or she partook of the establishment's food, drink, and in some cases, lodging.

In October 1783 Levi Pease and his partner Reuben Sykes opened a business at the sign of the "Coach and Horse," near the corner of Winter and Common Streets. From here they ran "two convenient wagons" between Boston and Hartford on the Upper Boston Post Road. Soon they offered a one-day line to Worcester, and by the early 1790s, Levi Pease's Boston-New York Stage rumbled along the main thoroughfare of the town three days a week.
during the summer months. Passengers arrived in New York in only three and one-half days at the price of four cents per mile. For the “genteel” passenger Pease offered a coach “in which but four inside passengers will be admitted, with smart, good Horses, and experienced careful drivers.” For those wanting a cheaper but less “genteel” journey, Pease continued to run his “Old Line” to New York for three and one-half cents per mile. By the 1790s travelers could depart from Boston six days a week for any number of destinations.

The traveler or the inhabitant seeking the company of friends or a place to transact business might visit one of the taverns in the South End. Many public houses stood along the Orange–Newbury thoroughfare, it being the main route into and out of town. These included the Lamb, the Washington, the Swan, the Grand Turk, and the George taverns. On Beach Street, which ran between Orange and Wainer’s Wharf on the east side of the peninsula, stood the White Horse tavern, known as a “Negro House.” Offering some of the cheapest housing in town, the Fort Hill area where the “Negro House” stood, was home to a number of black Bostonians. At the White Horse they might gather and drink their rum to ward off the chill of a cold December day or find refreshment on a hot summer afternoon.

The Central District

North of Fort Hill lay the busiest part of the South End, the Central District. Here the main market, local government offices, and the hive of business activity were concentrated. The atmosphere of the Central District was decidedly urban compared to the rural stretches of the rest of the South End. In Ward 9, on the northeast corner of Boston Common, sat the almshouse, workhouse, bride-well, and the town granary. Close by on the corner of School and Tremont Streets stood King’s Chapel, the town’s first Anglican church, founded in 1688. After the Revolution, King’s became the
town's first Unitarian church. Within several blocks, on Marlborough and Milk Streets, stood Old South Meeting House, the place where Samuel Adams and the Sons of Liberty often rallied Bostonians in the cause against Parliament. Walking north on Marlborough, which became Cornhill, led one directly into the more crowded "downtown" area of Dock Square and Faneuil Hall. Here was the center of commercial and administrative activity. The seat of municipal government, known as the State House, stood in this part of town, as did the prison, the courthouse, and the principal shops and businesses.48

Private individuals owned each of Boston's wharves, the proprietors appointing "a wharfinger to collect the dockage and wharfage, and superintend all matters relative to the wharf."49 Of the dozens of wharves resting on their weathered pilings, none had quite the distinction of Long Wharf, where "the principal navigation of the town" took place. Those disembarking from their ships met with a magnificent view as they gazed along State Street, formerly King Street.50 At the top of the street clearly visible for all visitors and residents to see stood the symbol of government power, the State House. Before the Revolution this had been the Provincial House, the seat of British colonial authority in Boston. Wooden shops and warehouses lined the length of the north side of Long Wharf, which extended more than seventeen hundred feet into the harbor. The town issued annual licenses to a certain number of townsmen and women to run retail businesses where shoppers could purchase a variety of goods on the wharf including Madeira wine, West India rum, fresh lemons, figs, gunpowder, snuff, linens, cordage, and canvas.51

The town almost lost Long Wharf in the autumn of 1780 when a fire broke out early one afternoon. Fortunately, the high tide, help from the inhabitants, and the hasty response of Engine Number Five prevented the "raging Flames" from consuming the entire structure. The conflagration did destroy warehouses, the Commis-
The Central District.
(Map by L. A. Chisholm, in Annie H. Thwing, *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston*, Boston, 1920.)
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sary, stores, and several other buildings at a considerable financial loss. The looting that followed the fire made matters worse. Although the wharf proprietors struggled to get back on their feet, Long Wharf soon became, as before, one of the most frequented parts of town.

Proceeding back up State Street from Long Wharf, one passed shops, taverns, and inns. Just off the Long Wharf at Kilby and State, the weary traveler could find lodging at the Bunch of Grapes Tavern. At two o’clock in the afternoon the proprietor served a meal of “salmon, veal, beef, mutton, fowl, ham, roots, pudding, and ... Madeira” at a “long table covered with dishes, and plates” for lodgers and local inhabitants seeking a midday dinner. The close proximity of Bunch of Grapes to the main wharf meant a diverse and interesting clientele. One English visitor noted dining with several French immigrants, a Philadelphian, and a man from Newburyport, among others. The Bunch of Grapes also served as an important gathering place for business meetings, auctions, and organizational affairs such as the annual meeting of the “Members of the Society of the Cincinnati” on July 4. If the Bunch of Grapes did not appeal to the traveler, he might visit the American, formerly the British, Coffee-House “at the sign of the Golden Eagle.” Many of Boston’s merchants gathered here, where between the hours of “seven to ten in the morning, and from five to eight in the evening” the proprietor Daniel Jones served coffee.

Before the building of the Charles River Bridge stagecoaches ran from the bustling center of town across Boston Neck taking passengers to the North Shore of Massachusetts and New Hampshire. For the cost of six dollars, travelers could journey to Portsmouth within two days on John Greenleaf’s stagecoach, which departed from Catherine Gray’s boardinghouse, next door to the American Coffee-House. Jonathan Plummer, who operated a stage line from Boston to Newburyport, also departed from Catherine Gray’s establishment. By the 1790s, when travel was eased some-
what by the Charles River Bridge, stagecoaches also departed town by an alternate route through the North End. Greenleaf and Plummer now had competition from John Staver’s Portsmouth and Boston Stage, which departed from the American Coffee-House at least twice a week and arrived in Portsmouth in only one day for the bargain price of only four dollars. Thus Stavers undercut Greenleaf by two dollars in cost and one day in travel time. As the number of stage lines increased so did the competition, evidenced by the advertising of “Careful Drivers, good Horses,” best rates, and even which line drove the best New England roads.57

In 1794, State Street was a broad, eight-hundred-foot-long avenue. Depicted in that year as the “most noted and spacious street” in Boston it stood in stark contrast to a large number of other streets and lanes in town.58 It “affords a picturesque scene” where “everything [is] charming to the eye and gratifying to the imagination,” noted one admirer.59 In an engraving of the Old State House printed in *Massachusetts Magazine* in 1793, the viewer looks down State Street toward Long Wharf from Cornhill. The street is a rush of activity evidenced by the carriages, chaises, carts, people on horseback, and pedestrians moving about. Three-story brick Georgian row-buildings neatly line the street, with open, ground-floor windows tempting passersby with a grand assortment of goods for sale including English imports, calicoes, broadcloth, hats, ribbons, teas, wines, silks, gauzes, and countless other merchandise.60 On the corner across from the State House, Nicholas Bowes sold an “elegant Assortment of Stationary” and a wide variety of books.61 Occupants used these buildings as “dwelling houses, publick offices, warehouses, and auction offices.”62 Private space and public space merged amid the bustle of domestic activity and business enterprise combined under one roof.

State Street also offered the inhabitant and visitor a scene of stark contrast to the busy world of commerce. Here, as on Boston Common, the local and state governments might choose to exhibit
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those convicted of crimes by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts. Before being “confined to hard labour on Castle-Island” in Boston harbor, fourteen men convicted of various crimes in the spring of 1791 each received punishments “for the purpose of discipline,” as they were “offenders against the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth.” For “housebreaking and theft” two men had “both cheeks” branded, others received whippings ranging from twenty to thirty-nine stripes and varied amounts of time “on the gallows.” The town’s “large whipping post, painted red” also stood centrally located in a “conspicuous” position on State Street, “under the windows of a great writing-school.” Here the general public witnessed a variety of punishments, although hangings were restricted to the gallows on “Boston Neck.” Such scenes may have disturbed some, but as part of eighteenth-century life they were considered by others the normal events of any given day, perhaps even providing a moment’s entertainment.63

North of State Street, Dock Square and Faneuil Hall served as central gathering places for business, social, and political activity. The town used the upstairs of Faneuil Hall for a variety of events from the entertaining of foreign dignitaries to the exercising of the light infantry on Wednesday evenings. Five hundred guests gathered there in 1778 to greet the Count d’Estaing and enjoy an evening of “magnificent entertainment,” and in 1784 the merchants used the hall to give Lafayette a dinner.64 With far less pomp and circumstance, Mr. Vandale once used the hall to “deliver an oration in French to his Pupils.”65 All uses of the hall required prior permission of the selectmen, who occupied a chamber on the same floor as the public hall. The tax assessors kept their office above the selectmen’s chamber. Defaced by the British during the winter of occupation in 1775 and 1776, Faneuil Hall was soon restored to its original stature by the town.66

The ground floor of Faneuil Hall served as a public market for butchers, and close by in Dock Square was a general market. Under
the supervision of the selectmen, the Clerk of the Market carefully monitored both. In these markets inhabitants purchased pork, beef, mutton, poultry, fresh seafood, vegetables from West Boston gardens, and dairy products. Each day people from the rural areas surrounding Boston and the South End drove their carts to market along the main thoroughfare (Orange to Newbury to Cornhill). The heavily loaded carts and trucks rolled through the dirt and gravel streets chased by barking dogs and children, and tearing up the pavement to the dismay of town officials. Sometimes peddlers made their way to Dock Square but quickly found themselves run off by the Clerk. Town law did not permit "Sellers of Small Wares in a pedling way" to do business at Dock Square.

The market rapidly filled up with stalls, people, carts, horses, and refuse—waste from live animals, as well as dead animals, discarded produce, and human garbage. The visual, auditory, and olfactory senses were no doubt overwhelmed by day's end, especially during the hot months of summer. The selectmen controlled the size of the market through the rental of a specific number of stalls. Those desiring to sell in the market had to apply to the selectmen and wait for an available stall. In 1775 the town planned to fill in the dock to make room "for the Standing of Horses Hacks of those Country People, who bring Provisions for sale to the Market." Landfill in this area eliminated the need for the old swing bridge.

Despite town regulation of stalls and hawkers, the marketplace continued to present problems. Overcrowding created the major problem on market days. In 1783 a "Committee Appointed to devise the Necessary Means of removing the disorders of the market and other Nuisances" presented a lengthy report to those convened at the March 25 town meeting. They recommended that specific "places be Assigned for the different Markets for Wood, Hay, &c." as the area "contiguous to Faneuil Hall" was "for the great market of Flesh" and "Vegetables." The committee suggested that the town select a town officer whose sole responsibility would be en-
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forcement of the “Laws and Orders of the Town . . . as they respect the Marketts.” The report called upon the town’s scavengers to deal with the filth in the market streets, which, if not removed, would “contribute to produce the Most fatal disorders among the Inhabitants.” Since the “Carts, Teams, Sleds, Sleighs, Waggons & Horses” daily presented a threat to the “Lives and Limbs” of all townspeople visiting the market, the committee recommended that the laws to keep the streets clear of such standing traffic be enforced and designated parking areas be established. Stopping in the street on the way to market to sell one’s meat, vegetables, or other articles, or blocking the streets resulted in a fine. The town proceeded to approve these and all other recommendations made in the committee’s report, but the problems did not abate for long as the appearance of complaints in the newspapers and town records attests.72

Adding to the din and congestion of the market area, the Dock Square shops, houses, taverns, and inns stood around the periphery of the open-air market. The shops offered as varied an assortment of goods as any in town, including “Iron hollow Ware” at John Kennedy’s store, English goods at Nathaniel Greenough’s, and wines “at the lowest prices” at Joshua Blanchard Jr.’s shop.73 Of twenty-five people known to have received licenses between 1776 and 1786 permitting them to do business in Dock Square (not including stall licenses), sixteen had a license to sell spirits, either as a retailer, innholder, or taverner.74 Residents sometimes used their houses as taverns or inns.75 A common house style was a two-story wood or brick structure consisting of a kitchen and a small front room on the bottom floor with chambers on the floor above.76 These homes served well for bottom-floor shops with living quarters above renting to one or more families.

Leaving Dock Square and walking north along Union Street one passed the Green Dragon Tavern and the Union Coffee-House, “a House of Entertainment,” that accommodated “Gentlemen, in large and small parties; fire-clubs, and other societies,” who

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would “find plenty of Room; Dinners; Suppers, . . . [and] Good attendance.” Both the local businessman and the traveler could find a “constant supply of best London Porter, English Cheese and Oysters” at this busy downtown establishment. At the north end of Union Street and to the right on Hanover one short block led to the Mill Bridge. Here, Hanover became Middle Street and the boundary between the South End and North End.

THE NORTH END

From the Central District one entered the North End over one of two small bridges that crossed a manmade creek running between the harbor and the Mill Pond. Both of the town gristmills, the North Mill and the one at Mill Bridge, sat here. Three major thoroughfares traversed the North End. The first, Back Street and Prince Street ran along the western edge of the district connecting the Mill Pond and the foot of Copp’s Hill, where one could command an excellent view of the Charles River. Atop Copp’s Hill lay the town’s North Burial Ground, where such Boston notables as Cotton Mather rested. Prince Street led directly to the Charlestown Ferry and, after 1786, the Charles River Bridge. In 1789 the town widened this thoroughfare to accommodate the additional bridge traffic. The second thoroughfare ran through the center of the district beginning with Middle Street. On the eastern side of the district the third major thoroughfare wrapped itself around the perimeter of the North End along the wharves. This was Fish Street which became Ship, Lynn, and then Ferry. Shops and houses crowded along these streets, with the exception of Lynn Street, where “great desolation” had occurred during “the time of the Late war.” The town decided, in 1787, to widen Lynn Street from the Globe Tavern, which stood on the corner of Lynn and North, as far as Ferry Way on the west side of the peninsula to better accommodate traffic.
Before the building of the Charles River Bridge in 1785–1786, departure from the north end of the peninsula depended upon the Charlestown Ferry across the Charles River and the Winnisimmet Ferry across the Mystick River to the Marblehead and Salem Road. After the building of the bridge, only the Winnisimmet Ferry remained a necessity. Ferryman Joseph Oliver held a twelve-year lease from the town, to whom he paid a small monthly fee for the privilege of running the ferry, as long as he maintained it in good repair. The boat passage across the water to the beginning of the Marblehead and Salem Road took about twenty minutes in fair weather, leaving the traveler with approximately a sixteen-mile ride through rugged country to Salem.

The Charles River Bridge spanned 1,053 feet over the river to connect Boston to Charlestown. “Six feet walkways” extended on either side of a center road for carriages, carts, and horses, and at night forty lamps lit the structure. While building the bridge the town repaired Prince Street, laying out a “proper street” from the bridge to the Winnisimmet Ferry and building a stone seawall, 470 feet in length, along Ferry Street between the ferry house and Goodings Wharf. The completion of the bridge, and the accompanying changes, in June 1786 brought cause for a great celebration with parades, great fanfare, and public entertainments. These major points of departure from, and arrival to, the peninsula, the Charlestown Ferry and later the Charles River Bridge, and the Winnisimmet Ferry, made the North End a heavily traveled area.

The five North End wards consisted of a clutter of shipyards, shops, warehouses, and closely situated houses and garden plots clustered along a maze of crooked streets mixed with the elegant and spacious homes of many of the former Loyalist elite who fled with the British in 1776. Their departure from the district left a vacuum that was not filled by the new monied families coming into Boston who preferred other parts of town “as the tides of fashion turned southward and westward.” As late as the 1780s the area still
The North End.
(Map by L. A. Chisholm, in Annie H. Thwing, *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston*, Boston, 1920.)
housed some of Boston's leading citizens, but by the middle of the 1790s they, too, began to move to the South End and, particularly, the West End. 84

The North End was the most densely populated region of the peninsula. Although it comprised less than 25 percent of the peninsula, eleven of the town's eighteen churches stood here. By comparison to the South End, the North End was so congested with buildings in certain neighborhoods that at points sunlight was barely visible through the overhanging roofs and upper floors of buildings. In the crowded neighborhood markets sellers found little room to "stand by their produce" and buyers [were] unable to "find room to . . . pass each other." 85 Occasionally gardens punctuated the closely set buildings, and open areas such as North Square and Copp's Hill also provided space amid the congestion of predominantly late-Elizabethan architecture.

As with the South End, the neighborhoods in Wards 1 through 5 of the North End were visually eclectic. In the same area one might find two-story Georgian brick buildings graced with many windows, two-story wooden dwellings built in the Postmedieval English style, and simple one-story wooden dwellings whose few windows barely admitted light. The dark two-story wooden houses sometimes had steeply pitched roofs and an overhanging second story typical of seventeenth-century domestic architecture, making them heavy in appearance. Interspersed among these diverse structures were blacksmith shops, bake houses, distilleries, and the occasional barn. Domestic space and business space often overlapped in dwellings that housed a family and a shop or tavern. Benjamin Goodwin owned a two-story house in Ward 1, with an adjoining one-story wooden bake house. James Kirkwood's house had "one shop adjoining for soap works." In Back Street, Ward 4, close to the Mill Pond, sat a "distill-house" with a large, adjoining double house that had four rooms to a floor, a convenient shop, and "Accommodations for two Families." 86
After the Revolution the exodus of the elite out of the North End, once "the court end of town," led to the loss of the region's "former prestige" and created the "unquestionable evidence of decay and unpopularity." Neither the Clark-Frankland mansion on North Square nor the splendid home of former governor Thomas Hutchinson remained as prestigious residences. Increasingly, these five wards housed some of Boston's more poverty stricken. "Willon's lane, Exchange lane, and Fitch's alley—through Fore Street as far as Winnisimmet ferry" were dark, stench-ridden places, according to one critic. Still, inhabitants of middling rank, and not just the poor and destitute, continued to call the North End home during the years prior to the massive influx of immigrants in the nineteenth century that would permanently transform Boston's North End.

The West End

Like the South End, the West End remained sparsely settled throughout most of the eighteenth century. In 1784 the area had only one meetinghouse, the West Church, or Lynde Street Meeting House, and relatively few residents compared to the other areas of the peninsula. Slightly fewer than two hundred heads of household lived in Ward 7, which comprised the entire West End, compared to more than eleven hundred in the North End, and eighteen hundred in the South End. The main businesses were the ropewalks set on the far edge of the ward against the Back Bay. Unlike the South End, the West End was isolated from the main flow of traffic across the peninsula. The area would remain pastoral for some years to come. Even when the town constructed the new State House between 1796 and 1798, the stately, neoclassical structure gazed out over cows grazing on Boston Common.

On the side of Beacon Hill overlooking the Common prior to the 1780s were a few elegant homes of the Boston elite like Han-
The West End.
(Map by L. A. Chisholm, in Annie H. Thwing, *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston*, Boston, 1920.)
cock and Faneuil, and the land and farms of John Singleton Copley. The Bromfield home was an impressive, three-story Georgian structure with “three steep flights of stone steps ascending from Beacon Street to the front of the mansion.” In the terraced gardens, full of flowers and fruit trees, stood an elevated summer house that “commanded a panoramic view of the harbor and environs.”

The West End was “a very pleasant and healthy part of the town” where one found “plenty of agreeable inland breezes” and protection “from the easterly winds.” Consequently, inhabitants visited the area “for air and pastime” and their general “health.” These pleasing circumstances also appealed to prosperous merchants, especially the new elite emerging after the Revolution. It was in the 1790s that the area began to develop, as homes built around Beacon Hill created a genteel world separate from the distasteful aspects of the growing town.

In 1795 the Mount Vernon Proprietors purchased the property of John Singleton Copley, which lay northwest of the Common, bordering on the Charles River, for the purpose of erecting stately residences. Impressed with the vision and designs of Charles Bulfinch, the newcomers built an array of neoclassical homes displaying his architectural innovations. The houses here, noted one visitor, differed from those in other areas of town in that they were “all neat and elegant, (of brick) with handsome entrances and door cases, and a flight of steps.” Another commentator noted how the “eye rests with pleasure on fine airy buildings, interspersed with delightful gardens.” The acquisition of the Copley estate, the “largest land transaction” in Boston to date, marked the many changes that lay ahead, such as the leveling of Trimountain that began in 1799. Compared to the North End, the Southern and Western regions remained sparsely settled until the 1790s, when rapid population increase began to slowly transform the two regions.
At the outbreak of the American Revolution the majority of Bostonians still clustered in the same areas of the peninsula occupied for the preceding 150 years. The twelve wards varied in population density and growth rate. During the last two decades of the century town records show on average 243 heads of household living in Ward 5 of the North End. Ward 11 in the South End showed 273 for the same period. Yet, Ward 5 was considerably smaller in area than Ward 11, making it more congested. Further adding to the overall congestion of the North End relative to the remainder of the town was the fact that the number of heads of household in Wards 1 and 2 doubled over the twenty-year period. These two North End wards were among the smallest in the town. Observations made by contemporaries speak to this pattern of growth for the region. In 1784, out of 3,265 heads of household, 35 percent (1,151) lived in the North End, 9 percent (297) lived in the West End, 22 percent (702) lived in the Central District, and 34 percent in the South End. The largest region of the peninsula, the South End, contained approximately the same percentage of heads of household as did the smaller North End.

Besides the arrival of new faces in Boston, extensive intramobility from ward to ward continually reshaped the demographic picture in each part of town. Of 1,227 heads of household tracked between 1784 and 1794, approximately 40 percent of those who had resided in Boston for at least four consecutive years had relocated within the town one or more times during that period and a handful three or more times. Laborers exhibited the lowest rate of persistence in any given ward and the highest rate of intramobility. More than 50 percent of the laborers had relocated within the community at least once (89 percent of the total number of laborers had lived in Boston for less than four years). Difficulty finding work, low pay, and poor housing certainly had a role in the frequent turnover. By contrast, housewrights had the highest persistence level among all occupational groups. Only 2 percent relocated within the
community during the decade between 1784 and 1794. Between the two extremes of the high rate of persistence found among housewrights and low rate of persistence found among laborers ranged other occupational categories. The average persistence level of all other occupational groups was 35 percent. Clearly for a large number of Bostonians the postwar years involved at least one change of residence within the community.98

By 1799 the distribution of the population throughout the peninsula showed signs of change. Compared to the rest of Boston, the North End remained a densely settled area while the South End, with more than 42 percent of the town’s heads of household, represented the fastest-growing region of the peninsula. The number of “new houses” and “half-finished” residences recorded by the Ward 12 assessor in 1799 attests to this development and suggests the pattern of rapid growth in the southern end of the peninsula that would unfold in the new century.99

Throughout Boston, neighborhoods were eclectic and dynamic in their composition. Although economic distinctions may have long separated Bostonians into different social groupings, the town lacked the segregated neighborhoods that would come to mark the nineteenth century. Residency patterns did not reflect sharply demarcated economic and racial divisions. Homes frequently served as places of work, and mixed land-use patterns often meant that shops, houses, distilleries, blacksmiths, shipyards, and the like could be found in the same neighborhood.100

Fort Hill, a low-rent area housing a number of poor blacks and whites, was visually, socially, and economically different from the more prestigious northwest side of Boston Common, but this did not exclude within each of those areas neighborhoods, streets, and blocks that were dynamically integrated. Throughout the town in each of the wards the wealthy merchant, the artisan, the common laborer, Bostonians both black and white, lived in close quarters. Walking along Lynn Street as it hugged the northernmost perime-
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ter of the peninsula in the North End, one passed the dwellings of Benjamin Gooding, Thomas Harris, David Cobbet, Samuel Ash, and Andrew Leach: a grocer, blacksmith, cooper, journeyman truckman, and wealthy merchant, respectively. Within a few doors lived poor laborers and fishermen. In 1799 Leach, who owned a store downtown on State Street and a wharf, was in the process of building a “Large New H[ouse],” a contrast to some of his neighbors who lived in only one room or part of a dwelling. At the far end of the peninsula in Ward 12, the mason Nicholas Pierce had a new house under construction on Beach Street. His neighbors included white journeymen, black laborers, a sea captain who also had a “large new House,” and two wealthy merchants who dealt in West India goods.

For the majority of people in the eighteenth century, houses were generally small. Domestic living arrangements were frequently cramped, and the presence of a wide variety of people in a dwelling that might also serve as a place of business afforded little privacy. On average 1.6 heads of household lived in each “dwelling-house and tenement” in Boston in 1784. In addition to the heads of household there were the family members and perhaps others. The “domestic unit” or family could be quite diverse, including a husband, wife, children, servants, apprentices, journeymen, or in-laws. The composition of the household was also fluid, changing at any given time depending on births, deaths, marriages, and the arrival or departure of kin, servants, or other workers such as apprentices. In some instances a household consisted of only one parent, such as a widow, or a single adult, male or female, who might live alone or with a sibling, relative, or friend. Nuclear family size varied, with families consisting of as many as twelve children, although five to six appears to have been the average. Extended family groupings combined with live-in employees could make a household quite large. Samuel Parkman presided over a household of twenty-two family members, eleven of whom were his children.
Multiple households in single dwellings created numerous types of living arrangements. Edward Holyoke, a scribe, shared half of a house with two pewterers, John Skinner and his son. The laborer John Spear shared a house with six other men. Laborers, coopers, tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, or a variety of other artisans, either alone or with their families or friends, occupied part of a house, such as one room, "1 end," the "back end," "front end," or a "chamber." John Fillebrown, owner of an "India goods" store with Thomas Williams, occupied one half of a house with his wife and eight children. William Parkman, a poor cooper with seven children, dwelt in one end of a shared residence. Down the road from Parkman journeyman shoemaker William Silvester lived in one room with the elderly mother for whom he cared.

Some individuals resided in a boarding establishment. Widows, single men, and families with available space in their homes took in boarders. Between 1785 and 1795 more than thirty widowed and single women operated boardinghouses in town, such as Widow Snow, who offered room and board to ladies only. Between 1795 and 1799, the number of people listing their occupation as the keeper of a boardinghouse increased by one-third. Many more residents kept boarders, although they did not list themselves as operating a boardinghouse, as with Mary Lobb, who kept "no Boarders only 2 French Priests." No doubt the increase reflected the demand for housing among the growing population. Besides offering an economical and perhaps efficient way to live, especially if one was single, boardinghouses could provide company for those who did not wish to live alone. When Lemuel Cravath's wife Catherine died, he became a boarder in the home of another family. The proprietors ranged as widely in their financial status as their boarders did. Boarding was not simply an inexpensive living arrangement for those unable to afford any other domestic arrangement. Residence in boardinghouses was a popular living arrangement, as demonstrated by their large number of occupants.

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Homeowners and tenants frequently divided their place of residence into home and shop, or work area. A two-story wood or brick tenement with "two rooms on a floor" provided an excellent arrangement for an artisan or shopkeeper and his family. Either the upstairs or back room served as a residence, with the shop occupying a downstairs front room facing the street. The residence of shopkeeper Joseph Crocker and his family of eight also served as Crocker's place of business. Tallow chandler James Raymer lived in a "large dwelling-house" that included a shop fronting on Marlborough Street in Ward 8. A hatter and his family lived next door to Raymer, in "a small tenament" also partly used as a shop. 109

The lack of distinct, racially separated neighborhoods during the 1780s and 1790s meant that white and black Bostonians found themselves not only living side by side but also at times sharing living space. The neighbors next door to Prince Patterson and Thomas Williams, two black property owners living on Unity Street in the North End in 1799, included a number of poor white laborers but also a founder of comfortable means who owned his residence and shop. Next to Peter Dalton's "Elegant House" on Water Street in the South End three black laborers shared "a small tenement." Living quarters for black Bostonians, as for white, varied, including "one room," a "chamber," a "small tenement" "1 End," or the "upper" part of a house. As with a large number of white Bostonians, living conditions could prove cramped. The poorest inhabitants suffered the most, such as the four men living in the South End's Fort Hill area described by the assessor as "Blacks as poor as the Devil." These four men and their families totaled nineteen individuals living in a single house. Such circumstances were conducive to the spread of disease, especially during epidemics. Despite similarities between their living situations and those of white Bostonians, most black residents lived in the poorer areas of town such as Fort Hill in the South End, the waterfront
regions of the North End, and by the 1790s parts of the West End.\textsuperscript{110}

By the 1790s the West End was becoming home to an increasing number of black Bostonians, although some had lived there since the 1760s. The town’s black population had declined throughout most of the second half of the eighteenth century, but it began to increase once more during the 1790s. These men, women, and children experienced some of the most significant changes of any Bostonians during the late eighteenth century, for by 1783 the Quock Walker court case, and its resulting decision handed down by Chief Justice Cushing, ended slavery in Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{111}

Black Bostonians at the close of the eighteenth century demonstrated as much mobility as their white neighbors, moving from ward to ward and region to region with some frequency. Fifty-six-year-old Prince Sutton, who lived in the South End in 1780, relocated to the West End, once again moving back to the South End by 1786. Individuals sometimes left town, returned, and settled in one ward only to shortly move to another. John Brown was “gone in the country” in 1784. When he came back to Boston he settled in the West End, but at some point between 1791 and 1794 moved to the South End, where he could still be found in 1799 working as a ropemaker and a laborer. In 1784 Newport Davis resided in the West End, but later moved to the South End, where he shared living quarters with Nebo Fairfield in the early 1790s, and then in 1795 went to sea.\textsuperscript{112}

At least one-half of the black population changed their place of residence during the 1780s and 1790s, with some moving from ward to ward two or three times. At one point or another 10 percent left Boston entirely, heading for “the country,” the sea, or other states and countries, as did James Titus, who headed to New York in 1784, and William Gregory, who left for England the same year. This was a highly mobile community motivated by any number
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of circumstances, including emancipation, work, and the desire to improve one’s residence or find more affordable housing.113

By 1790 the African-American population in Boston surpassed that of any other town in Massachusetts as men and women from rural areas and other regions drifted toward the seaport seeking work. By 1800 the number reached 1,174 persons, creating the nucleus of the town’s substantial and politically active nineteenth-century antebellum black community centered in the West End.114 In the closing few years of the eighteenth century this move to the West End was in its early stages. Between 1784 and 1800 the African-American population in Boston was dispersed throughout the town, with the South End consistently housing the majority of the population.115 In 1794 approximately 60 percent of black Bostonians lived in the southern wards compared to 20 percent in the West End. Fort Hill in the South End was a popular area, most likely because here could be found some of the city’s cheapest housing.116 Although five years later, in 1799, the beginning of the shift to the West End was evident, with more than 35 percent of black households located there, the South End still held approximately 60 percent of Boston’s African-American heads of household.117

The West End probably drew some African-Americans in the late eighteenth century because of domestic work opportunities in the homes of Boston’s white elite. Those domestic service opportunities were limited in number before 1800 as the West End had still not fully developed as the central location for Boston’s wealthy upper class. In fact, as late as 1799, 80 percent of those African-Americans reported as servants by the town’s assessors lived in the South End, not the West End, and of those individuals most were in Ward 12 in the southernmost region of the peninsula.118

The South End also housed a large number of the second-largest African-American occupational group, laborers. Although the building of the State House on Beacon Hill and the new almshouse and workhouse in the western reaches of Ward 7 could pro-
vide employment, the building boom in the South End probably offered a greater number of opportunities for laborers. In turn, the evidence suggests that this rapid development of the South End after the mid-1790s and the influx of white residents ultimately disrupted black settlement in the area as a result of increased rents and raised property prices, thus acting as a push factor in African-American movement to the West End. Simultaneously the development of a black community in the West End in the closing few years of the century acted as a pull factor that would increase in intensity by the nineteenth century.

The relative isolation of the southern reaches of the South End may have appealed to black Bostonians who found themselves treated with disrespect and frequently ostracized from white institutions. Prince Hall advised fellow black men and women “to bear up under the daily insults we meet on the streets of Boston.” The restrictions that the white community placed upon black Bostonians manifested themselves in a variety of ways. It took three petitions over a four-year period just to secure the permission to have “one of their Colour . . . [act] as an Undertaker at the Funerals of the Blacks” and to break ground in one of the burying places. It was not until 1792 that the selectmen finally permitted Boston’s African-American community to “take care of the Funerals” of their own, and “have the care of burying the Blacks.” To help pay funeral expenses and “provide aid for widows and children,” forty-two black citizens in 1796 founded the African Humane Society. Many self-help mutual aid societies of a similar type would become popular among Americans during the nineteenth century.

Besides establishing a means to care for women and children fallen upon hard times, the town’s black inhabitants also took it upon themselves to establish a place of worship after not finding equal reception in most of the city’s white churches. In 1789 a number of individuals collectively applied to the selectmen for the “use of Faneuil Hall . . . to accommodate them in hearing an African
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Preacher, lately arrived with a good recommendation." The selectmen granted the use of the hall for one weekday afternoon, with the stipulation that the meeting take place during daylight hours so "that no opportunity may be given rude Fellows to make a disturbance." Shortly thereafter, a "group of respectable inhabitants" once again petitioned the selectmen for use of the hall one day a week "for the purpose of public worship." This petition proved unsuccessful, but through persistence black inhabitants secured permission to use Mr. Vinal's school "for public worship, on the Afternoons of the Lords Day." The limitations encountered in finding a place to worship freely no doubt led to the building of the African Baptist Church in the West End by 1805.

Experiencing similar discrimination in the Boston school system, seven years earlier, in 1798, the small West End community, with the assistance of some white Bostonians, had established "a separate school for their children in the house of Primus Hall." Rapid growth in the student body led the school to relocate to the basement of the newly completed Baptist Church on Belknap. Institutions such as the church, the school, and the African Humane Society offered a strong sense of community in the face of hostility and discrimination. Accordingly these institutions could serve as a pull factor in drawing more black men and women and their families to the West End. By the nineteenth century the lower slope of the Hill would come to house Boston's "largest black enclave," living "in a world far removed from the wealth and power just a few blocks away."

Summarizing the circumstances for Bostonians as a whole, a far higher number of unskilled workers, whether black or white, lived in shared domicile arrangements as compared to skilled tradesmen, shopkeepers, and merchants. Artisans, midsize shopkeepers, and some professional men along with their families did live in shared housing but in fewer numbers. Merchants fared best. Many of them lived in houses assessed at considerable value, and many also owned
shops, stores, and carriages. Distillers, successful master artisans, a few tavern keepers, lawyers, and widows shared this fortunate position. Living arrangements comprised a diverse and complex web of familial and nonfamilial organization, maximizing the use of space and affording little or no privacy.

The relatively close proximity of certain trade and manufacturing enterprises further added to the heterogeneity and complex spatial pattern of neighborhoods. In theory "Common Nuisances" such as slaughterhouses, distilleries, or ropewalks were relegated to the less settled areas of the peninsula, but in reality this was not the case. This was particularly true as the population increased and began to spread into more sparsely settled areas. On Frog Lane, adjacent to the Common Burying Ground, sat the Duck Manufactory with its "Spinning Shed, . . . 1 Store, . . . and 3 Small Shops." Distilleries operated in all three South End wards.

The town government did attempt to regulate businesses that proved dangerous or inappropriate for certain parts of town. In this they followed the 1692 law passed by the Massachusetts General Court "for the prevention of Common Nuisances arising by Slaughter-Houses, Still-Houses, &c. Tallow-Chandlers, and Curriers." The act specified that the selectmen of "market Towns in the Province, with two or more Justices of the Peace, dwelling in the Town" had the responsibility of assigning places in the town where these men might "practice their respective trades and mysteries." Those engaged in their trades in any part of the town not assigned for that purpose were subject to fines. The 1692 act remained on the law books throughout the eighteenth century and appeared in the 1785 publication of the town's bylaws.

In 1784, when Oliver Vose began construction of a slaughterhouse in Pleasant Street, which ran from the west side of the Common south into Orange Street in Ward 12, Robert Hews complained to the selectmen. Vose was advised by the selectmen that he
had not received approval for such a structure and was to stop build-
ing or face “the penalty of the Law.”\textsuperscript{128} By contrast, the selectmen
approved Edward Curtis’s building a slaughterhouse on the deso-
late Neck in 1791, “on condition that in case it should prove disa-
greeable or offensive to the Neighbours or Inhabitants passing there,
that . . . he shall remove or discontinue” it.\textsuperscript{129}

The same year, when a fire consumed ropewalks that sat on
Boston Common, the town took the opportunity to relegate rope-
walks to the farthest distance possible and improve the Common.
They received “A Peice of Marsh Land and Flats at the Bottom of
the Common” that included Fox Hill on the very westerly edge of
the Common. The condition for accepting this land included an
agreement by the owners of the ropewalks that they would never
build their rope factories in any other part of town, and that on the
new land no more than six ropewalks would ever be built. Further-
more, the structures were to “be Placed at the Southerly End of the
said granted Lands . . . [and] not be more than One Story in
height,” and each structure built of “brick & Covered with
Slates.”\textsuperscript{130} In this manner, town officials and residents managed to
have a degree of control over the type of structures and businesses
that appeared in various neighborhoods.

During the eighteenth century, the peninsula’s geographic lim-
itations, combined with the growing population that was slowly
spread across it, contributed to the close proximity of “Common
Nuisances” and residential areas.\textsuperscript{131} The grand architectural accom-
plishments of Bulfinch and the numerous new homes being built in
the town stood nose to nose with more humble structures, and al-
most all occupants encountered at least some, if not most, of the
same problems. Streets and lanes were frequently narrow, unpaved,
and full of “dirt and dung.” In walking from Long Wharf or State
Street to the market at Dock Square one could pass through “nau-
seous alleys,” just a turning away from main thoroughfares like
Cornhill where adjoining brick buildings lined wide streets. Even
on the wider streets that boasted handsome brick structures and finer business establishments, the carriages, carts, hackneys, horses, dogs, roaming hogs, and uncovered wells could put one's life at risk. The spatial expansion of the town to the west and south meant that the almshouse and workhouse on the northeast side of Boston Common now stood in close proximity to the elite Beacon Hill neighborhood and the Central District. That they were in a terrible state of disrepair made matters worse for those concerned about the inmates.132

A growing number of inhabitants in the 1790s began to raise the issue of relocating the town's almhouse, workhouse, and asylum for the "disorderly and insane." Rebuilt in 1682 after having burned down, the almshouse was the oldest of these structures. A two-story brick building, it housed the town's "aged and infirm poor." Bostonians erected the workhouse, a 120-foot, two-story brick building, in 1738 "for the reception of vagrants and idle and dissolute persons of both sexes" and the small bridewell in 1765 with a bequest from Thomas Hancock.133 As the town grew, and the number of destitute increased, the buildings became inadequate. This had most likely been true for years but finally came to the attention of the community as people became more conscious of the structures, the location of which increasingly placed them in the center of public activity. By the turn of the nineteenth century the town had moved all three institutions to more remote locations on the peninsula.

In 1794 the town discussed "procuring better accommodations for the Town Poor in the Alms House," but townsmen determined within the year that the only solution would be "erecting new buildings." The committee assigned to research the situation recommended to the town meeting on May 21, 1795, construction of new facilities at Barton's Point, "on the north side of Leverett street" at the extreme north corner of Ward 7, adjacent to the Charles River. This location represented the most desolate region of the West End. The buildings, with their disturbing noises, odors,
and inmates’ cries to passersby through iron gates, would be re­moved from sight, earshot, and smell, an important consideration since Centry and Beacon were the main streets connecting the newly developing wealthy district in the West End with the Central District. In order to acquire the land at Barton’s Point, the commit­tee recommended the selling of house lots owned by the town “op­posite the Mall,” which ran along the east side of Boston Common, in addition to the land where the present almshouse and workhouse stood. Sale of these lands by the town would prevent “burthening the Inhabitants with a tax.” The proposal “Passed in the affirmative unanimously.”

Citizens voiced concerns in the 1790s over the seemingly endless problems the town faced. They spoke out about widening the streets, creating a police force, maintaining a cleaner city, and a host of other municipal issues and proposed projects. The constant flow of carts into the town brought dirt and increased traffic con­gestion. “There is more dirt and dung brought into Boston, by teams from the country in one day, than in New-York in one year,” complained “A Bostonian” in a local newspaper. Another con­cerned Bostonian informed his fellow townsmen that in this “time of rapid improvements” the town seriously needed a new major thoroughfare in the central business district. State Street alone was insufficient.

By 1796, traffic congestion had become such a serious problem that after numerous complaints the selectmen passed a bylaw regul­ating hackney carriages. The law required licensing of all persons providing carriage transportation services. The selectmen estab­lished “stands” at different locations around town where passengers could hire a carriage. Hackneys were numbered and fines issued to those blocking traffic, operating without a license, or not clearly displaying their assigned number on the side of their carriage. Still, alleyways “designed for foot traffic” became throughways for car­riages, leading one group of citizens to propose that the town “put
up posts to stop carriage use” in such unsuitable places. Around Union Street and “in the vicinity of the Market,” carts, carriages, horses, and cattle blocked the streets, preventing townspeople from “a free passage to their . . . stores & dwellings and . . . their customers from that free & safe access which invites & facilitates business.”137 Besides the problems of traffic and insufficient, poorly laid out roads, there was the question of where within the developed areas of town to erect more public and private buildings or, for that matter, where to bury the dead.

By the middle of the 1790s the “two central burying places” in Boston, the Common and King’s Chapel, had reached capacity. One Bostonian asked, where can we find room “to bury our dead out of our sight?”138 Even the common practice of reopening graves to add more bodies no longer provided adequate space as the ground had been “turned over an hundred times.” Under these circumstances the town meeting acknowledged that they must find “some suitable place or places of deposit for the Dead” and elected a committee to investigate the matter. The town physicians with whom the committee consulted informed them of the inherent dangers of overcrowded grave sites around so many dwellings and the possibilities of spreading disease from the practice of opening graves. It was also pointed out by one inhabitant that the continual reopening of burial sites to add more bodies showed little respect for either the dead or the living, who might attend a funeral of a family member only to see the bones of their father lying beside the grave to make space for the newly deceased. Finally town leaders forbade any more burials at the central burial grounds. “If the town had not voted to bury no more” in the two central burial grounds, one citizen wryly noted, “the dead would.” Only the South Burying Ground, which was a distance from the town center, remained open. As inclement weather might prevent the transportation of the deceased to that part of the peninsula, town officials ordered a “Vault” erected at the Chapel grounds for “temporary deposit” of
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cases. \textsuperscript{139} The lack of adequate burial grounds was exacerbated by rapid population growth and continued to present a problem into the early nineteenth century, when the town began to use sites outside Boston.

Bostonians sometimes experienced frustration as they struggled to expand within the framework of settlement patterns established more than one hundred years earlier. The irregularity of the town’s street plan reflected what one resident referred to as the lack of foresight on the part of the town fathers. Unlike Philadelphia’s William Penn, who this townsman believed had great vision, the “pious ancestors” of Boston had not laid the town out “upon a regular plan with open squares and streets at right angels,” which in turn would have allowed “wider streets and much more land” on which “to build.” This lack of foresight, he alleged, now contributed to the town’s growing “evils.” \textsuperscript{140} Among other things such “evils” included the dangers of walking at night through the narrow, winding, unlit streets; inadequate housing; and the danger of disease and epidemic due to overcrowding and numerous sanitation problems. One inhabitant proposed specific municipal improvements: “widening and straitening of streets, opening squares, and new streets to communicate with older ones, . . . planting trees and grass plots, and placing wells or pumps in several streets.” Such changes would promote the “general welfare” of the town’s citizens and the beauty of Boston. \textsuperscript{141} To accomplish this he proposed that an accurate plan be made of the city depicting every “street, lane, alley, and crevice.” This being done, the residents could see precisely where all the open ground lay in the town, and the exact size of each lot in “acres, feet, &c.” \textsuperscript{142} Such an undertaking would then enable townsmen to wisely determine the best use for this land rather than letting it lie idle. Land would become available for housing and public buildings, the poor would not be homeless, crime rates would decrease, and disease, if not prevented, could be controlled, he claimed. The numerous municipal projects associ-
ated with the grid, improved lighting, better use of space, a drive for order and organization, all were part of the republican desire to “conquer space” and control the environment. The belief in the grid’s ability to accomplish this reflects the “near-mystical qualities” the plan acquired during the early republic.\textsuperscript{143}

Other visions for Boston included those held by Charles Bulfinch. After a Grand Tour in Europe, Bulfinch brimmed with ideas of how to transform the architecturally provincial town into a European-style neoclassical city. He began his architectural enterprises in the West End with houses designed and built during the early 1790s for several of Boston’s prominent citizens. Boston’s first theater, a stately neoclassical structure, and the magnificent neoclassical State House that graced Beacon Hill and overlooked the Mall and Common soon followed. In the South End around the corner from the Boston, or Federal Street, Theater stood Bulfinch’s Tontine Crescent, which consisted of sixteen “handsome dwelling houses, extending four hundred and eighty feet in length.” These three-story-high, neoclassical dwellings boasted the Ionic order on their exterior and curved around a three-hundred-foot grass common complete with many shade trees. “We may anticipate,” noted one booster, that upon completion the Tontine Crescent would be “a favorite part of the town, and in some degree its boast.”\textsuperscript{144} Charles Bulfinch soon proved to be the individual who could imagine and create the urban landscape sought by the new elite. Elegant homes on spacious lots, gardens, parks, promenades with fountains and shade trees, and elegant public buildings represented in Bulfinch’s mind a livable urban environment, or what James Machor identifies as the Enlightenment’s “pastoral city.”\textsuperscript{145}

The building schemes of Boston’s wealthy citizens did not appeal to all inhabitants. Speculations such as the Tontine Crescent and the Boston Theater, which according to some had “the system of Deviltry” accompanying them, drew criticism. The “poor laboring men” did not necessarily benefit from the plans of these “Ty-
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rants,” for mechanics sometimes remained unpaid until the wealthy realized their profits.\textsuperscript{146} As the elite went about “ornamenting and beautifying the town,” one irate mechanic wondered what the tradesmen gained. But other day-to-day concerns ultimately drew more attention.

As the town’s population climbed to 18,000 in 1790 and then to 25,000 in 1800, the challenges of urban growth manifested themselves in numerous ways. Population growth presented sanitation problems from an accumulation of street refuse with an inadequate removal system and the increasing number of privies and sewers overflowing into the roads and contaminating wells. Crowded streets and the building of unapproved structures raised the danger of fire. Crime concerned a number of citizens who believed that the community lacked an adequate number of constables. Regulating the local market and addressing the need for more market space, additional schools, and the enforcement of the town’s bylaws were just a few of the seemingly insurmountable problems that required constant attention. As the community rebuilt itself following the siege and coped with a plethora of difficulties in the face of war and postwar economic hardship, Bostonians turned repeatedly to their town meeting and elected town leaders as a means to create the well-ordered town.