

Boston's Washington Street:
Genesis of a Shopping District.

by

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This thesis traces the history of Washington Street as it was recorded in photographs. Both the history of the physical place and the history of documentary photography are discussed and the information that was learned from the study was applied in the production of a set of photographs that document the street in its present state. These photographs are also discussed and included in this thesis.

Thesis Supervisor: Stanford Anderson
Title: Professor of Architecture

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PURPOSE

This thesis is a study of the history of the development of Boston's downtown shopping street from the middle of the Nineteenth Century until the present time. The major tool employed in this study is the careful analysis of photographs made during the period under study. The period was chosen because of the fact that it covers all the years during which photographs were made which can be used as documentary material in connection with this particular place. The concept of "street" is used both as a physical place and a social phenomenon and information about both ideas can be gained from photographic evidence.

Washington Street was chosen as a focal point for this particular study for several reasons. First, it is presently undergoing major physical change in the heart of the shopping district and my previous work with the City Conservation League in its struggle to preserve a part of the street facade (which has since been demolished) caused many questions in my mind about how this new development can fit into the historical pattern that has produced the place as it now exists. It will be of interest to compare the changes that are proposed with those that have taken place since the camera has been able to record them.

A second reason is that Washington seems to be a very typical "Main Street". The techniques used to study it and the historical forces that shaped it

should be useful in gaining an understanding of downtown districts in many cities of the United States. The photographs are not taken from any sort of coherent collection made by a small number of photographers, but rather they form a varied collection of generally unrelated views taken by unknown or anonymous photographers. These are the type of photographs which are likely to be available to researchers studying any given area.

The third reason is a personal fascination with the place as it exists today and a desire to make a photographic documentation of some value to future historians. The careful study of old photographs and photographic methods has been very useful in heightening my own awareness of just what kind of photographs become worthwhile historical documents. Because so many photographers were involved in making the photographs, they offer a wealth of approaches to solving the basic photographic problem. I am photographing in 1976, however, and I bring to this work my own history and way of seeing. I am very much aware of basic differences in the way I see the world and the ways photographers today see their world when compared with the work of the earlier photographers. I am trying to learn from the earlier work but not trying to immitate it. It is my hope that my images, while being made for a documentary purpose, are also interresting and compelling photographs.

As a photographer, I have a basic trust in the photographic image. It is a

literal representation of visual reality. My trust, however, does not extend to the photographers. The camera can lie and usually does. One cannot look at a photograph and see reality. In order to begin to understand the information that is contained in a photograph, the viewer must be familiar with the physical process that is involved in making a photograph. The size of the film, lens, camera and print each have an effect on the image. The type of photo-sensitive medium also has implications in interpreting the photograph. Every step of the photographic process, in fact, has some effect upon how the photographic print can be used to supply information. Most of these technical influences can be deduced from the photographic print without much additional information. Some of them are so obvious that the viewer need not consciously consider them.

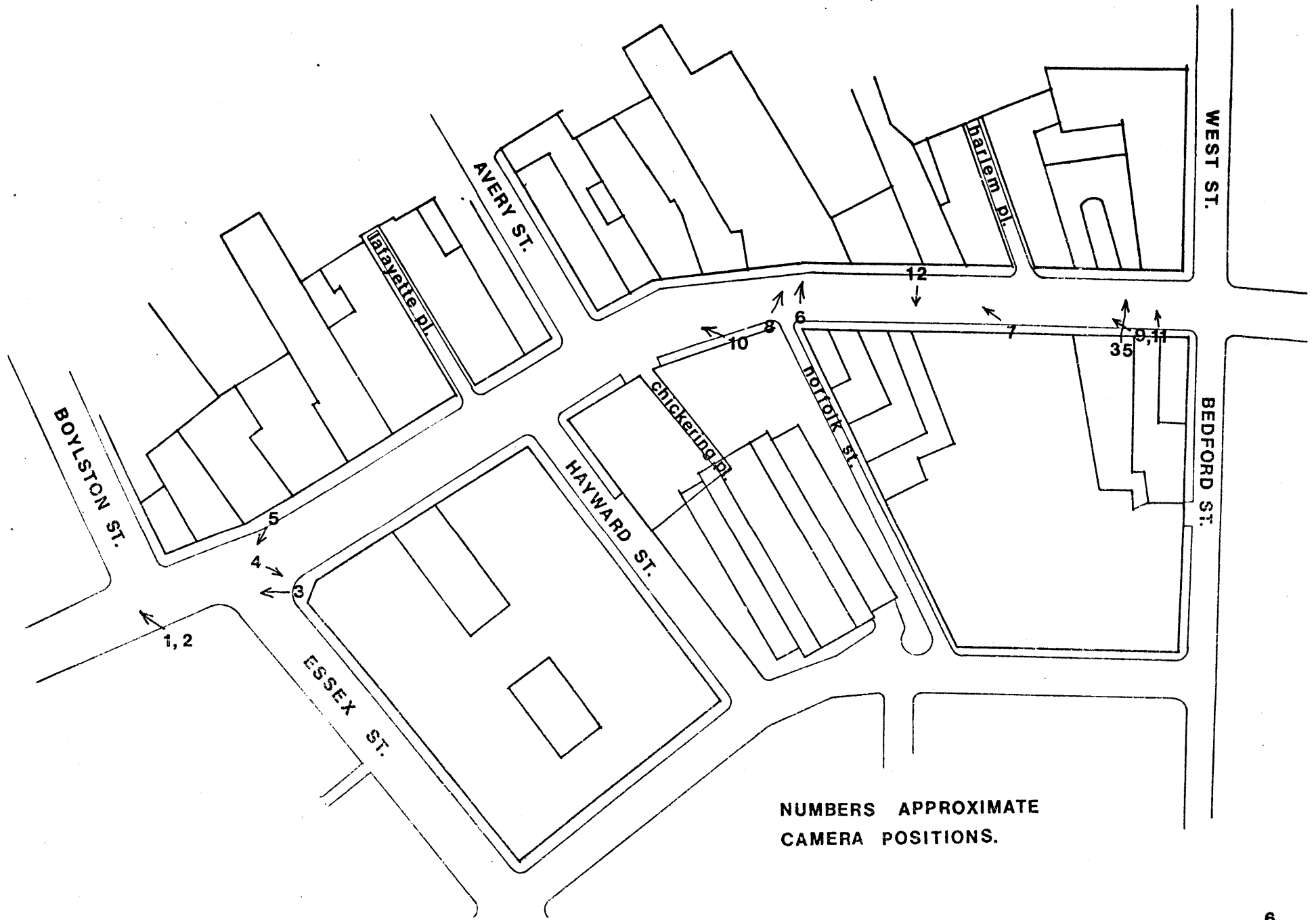
The influence of the photographer is a bit more difficult to begin to understand. Such questions as why the particular subject, viewpoint, time of day, instant in time and placement of the frame were chosen out of an infinite number of possibilities may have not been conscious decisions on the part of the photographer.

This thesis deals with the process of gaining information from photographs by applying both historical information from sources other than the photographs and my own experience in using the photographic medium. This thesis is a sort of extended photograph in that it is a description of a place during a specific period of time,

a period much longer than any single photograph could attempt to make sense out of. The non-photographic information was chosen to work with the photographs much like the penciled notes in the margins or on the backs of many old photographs. They are very different from more formal literary sources.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

The segment of Washington Street from Boylston/Essex Streets to State Street is discussed in the following pages. This entire segment has been broken into smaller units which are discussed individually over the entire span of years. Each group of photographs is followed by a discussion of that group. Concern ranges from the architectural development of the place to the progress of the developing photographic medium. My own photographs are used as an example of modern photographic technique and every attempt is made to explain my own attitudes and concern involved in making the photographs.



NUMBERS APPROXIMATE
CAMERA POSITIONS.



Fig. 1 Boylston Market, 1870 (Boston Public Library)



Fig. 2 Boylston Market, 1887 (Boston Public Library)



Fig. 3 Corner of Boylston Street 1976



Fig. 4 Wash. 7 Essex Sts. (B.P.L.)



Fig. 5 Washington and Essex Streets, 1976

Boylston/Essex Streets

This entire set of images deals with a street corner. The Boylston Market building was designed by Charles Bullfinch and constructed in 1809. It was part of a series of market buildings constructed by the city in an effort to control the growing number of street vendors who were creating a great deal of congestion in the downtown streets. The generous setback from Washington Street (Figs. 1 and 2) helped to give the building a monumental appearance but it also did much more. For one thing, it allowed the stairways on the front to get the main floor high enough to put some commercial space underneath and, in effect form a two level commercial front. There was also enough space on the sidewalk to allow very small scale vendors to set up tables and stands outdoors without causing congestion. It is good to compare this rich environment with the "shoppers' oasis" or possibly more accurately "desert island" that exists today (Fig. 3). The street has been moved for the sake of efficiency and the jog has been eliminated. The Boylston Market has long been removed and a much more mundane building has taken its place.

The undated photograph of the Boylston National Bank building (Fig. 4) was most likely made in the 1870's. The wires for the electric trolleys are not visible in the photograph and probably were not installed. The bank building was diagonally across from the Boylston Market. It presents a different approach to building a

commercial corner but the amenities provided at the street front are still generous. Awnings and entry vestibules offer protection from the weather and large areas of glass invite the public inside. Exterior stairs again allow the main floor to get above the street level and windows below the large display windows get light into the lower level. The display of hats on the right side of the building seems to be clustered around an entrance to the lower level. This is very similar to the goods on the sidewalk next to the Boylston Market. The exact location of the banking floor remains a mystery, the signs for both the bank and the Palace Clothing Store label the same doorways. All the display windows at the street level seem to display clothing.

The site of the Boylston National Bank is at the left in Fig. 5. This photograph shows quite well the general condition of this corner today. The neighborhood is shabby and proclaims itself as "Boston's entertainment center". Most of the windows at the street level and above have been blocked over. The Boylston National Bank was removed along with all the other buildings on the entire block to make way for the Washington-Essex Building, a large office building with stores and theatres at the street level.

The two photographs of the Boylston Market (Figs. 1 and 2) are interesting to compare. They were made from exactly the same camera position except that the 1870

view (Fig. 1) was made from a position one level higher than the 1887 view. They were made from the windows of the building in Fig. 5. Typical of a great number of early photographs, the sky in Fig. 1 has been painted out. One reason this was done is that the plates were very sensitive to blue light and the sky would usually come out pure white on the prints. The least imperfection in the emulsion, piece of dust, finger print, etc. would show up as a glaring spot on the finished print. Painting the plate with an opaque paint eliminated any imperfections and printed a clean sky. The technique is still used today in retouching plates and negatives used in photo-reproduction. These materials are also very sensitive to blue light.

What has been eliminated in this photograph, however is an electric power pole and its wires. The wires are visible where they pass in front of the steeple of the building. In this particular case, it appears that these details were eliminated because of an aesthetic choice. The photographer simply did not care for the unnecessary details cluttering up his picture. This attitude is consistent with his choice of lens and framing of the photograph which also exclude all but the central subject. Even the tower of the Y.M.C.A. building in the background has been dodged to make it less noticeable.

The second photographer had a very different attitude. He was as interested in the place as well as the building. His frame includes bits of other buildings, both

sides of Boylston Street and a piece of an awning at the lower left. In many ways this photograph is necessary to be able to understand the first. If one had to be chosen, this one provides much more information.

The Boylston National Bank photograph (Fig.4) is a good example of how a tighter cropped photograph can be used to an advantage. The little details such as the window displays and the signs become readable. A different type of information is coming out. This photograph needs a lot more non-photographic accompanying information in order to make it useful as a document, however.

In my photographs, the large format camera was used to an advantage because it can hold the small details even though a wide angle of view is taken in. The sign at the right in Fig.5 performs much the same role as the awning in Fig.2. It places the viewer into the scene. The long exposure time that I have used on most of my photographs is an attempt to record some of the movement in the street and show that it has a different kind of existence than the physical structures of the place. The still photograph is probably not the best way to describe this movement, but I am interested in learning just what the capabilities of this medium might be.



Fig. 6 Adams House Hotel, c. 1865 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 7 New Adams House 1885 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 8 New Adams House, n.d. (B.P.L.)



Fig. 9 Washington Street, Fr. corner of Bedford Street 1976



Fig. 10 Mercantile Savings Institution, n.d. (Boston Athēnaeum)



Fig. 11 West side of Washington Street near West Street 1976



Fig. 12 East side of Washington Street, n.d. (Boston Athenaeum)

Avery St. to West/Bedford Streets

The Sanborn map of 1868 indicates that this section of Washington Street was extremely varied in use. A jewelry factory, piano factory and hoop skirt factory are all indicated as occupying the same block as the Adams House Hotel and the fine Boston Theatre. A photograph made by Josiah Johnson Hawes (Fig.6) shows the Adams House about 1865. It was built in 1843 on the site of the Lamb Tavern, the stop for the first stagecoach run from Boston to Providence. The building looked a bit old fashioned even in 1865 although it appears in good repair. The hotel was obviously a prosperous one as the later photographs (Figs.7 and 8) show the elegant "New Adams House". The photograph of the entry gives an impression of a very expensive hotel in the best traditions of urban hotels. The arcaded front was so obviously a hotel that no sign was necessary to inform the public about the function of this building.

Next door to the Adams House was the Boston Theatre. It was described in the 1877 issue of Boston Illustrated as "...the largest regular place of amusement in New England, and in many respects, the finest." ¹ It was completed in 1854. This theatre still exists today although the theatre which once prided itself for having such a simple and conservative facade, now has one of the most garish facades in the city (Savoy, Fig.9)

The undated photograph (Fig.10) shows the row of buildings at the extreme left

in Fig.8. These buildings house small manufacturing concerns on the upper floors with stores at the street level. The ornate building at the left is also described in Boston Illustrated:

"The crookedness of Washington Street is not in all respects a disadvantage. It permits many fine buildings to be seen to better advantage than they would be if the street had been laid out in a straight line. In passing along the street, one of the most prominent buildings is the banking-house of the Mercantile Savings Institution. This is, however, an old building with a new front, and otherwise reconstructed. The new front is of veined marble, resting on three columns of highly polished Quincy granite. The elegant steps which give access to the basement and first story are of pure white marble..."²

This bank has made a two level street facade even more effectively than the Boylston National Bank. It really is not unreasonable that banks should develop their properties in this way. They are very concerned about receiving the highest return possible on their investments and doubling prime street frontage is a good way to do just that.

The modern photograph (Fig.11) records quite nicely the kind of ornateness that enriches the upper parts of the buildings on these blocks. Some remnants of the two level shopping street still survive but they are closing up. "Adult" movies are now all that is available in the old movie houses but the Adams House name still exists on a restaurant and lounge at a new address. The old Adams House still exists, but it is empty in its upper floors and houses pinball machines on the first floor.

Josiah Johnson Hawes was recognized at the time he was working as a very talented portrait photographer. His photograph of the Adams House (Fig.6) shows evidence of very careful workmanship. The circular shape was determined by the fact that he was using the entire coverage that his lens could provide. He used the circular format to compose his subject and he was very much aware of what effect placing that circular frame around a subject had on the printed image. The value of this photograph as a historical document is limited by that tightness of the frame. He did include enough of the adjoining buildings to make them identifiable but this photograph adds very little to our understanding of what the street was like. It is, however, the only photograph of the old Adams House that can be found and for this it is very valuable.

The 1885 photograph shows a whole different style of photography. The shutter speed was quick enough to stop some of the action in the street and a bit more of the surrounding environment is included.(Fig.7) The label that was printed right along with the rest of the print makes the date and location information extremely reliable.

The photograph of the entrance to the lobby (Fig.8) gives a much more intimate picture of the life of the place. It may even be a false image when it is compared with the previous photograph. It is, however, very difficult to imagine that this kind of scene could have existed in that location. The photograph shows that it did.

The view in Fig.10 is unusual among the photographs in this thesis because the

people on the street have posed for the photographer. The men on the steps of the bank building are all well dressed and seem to have been arranged in some sort of order. The men of Doe & Hunnewell have also gathered outside their store. This indicates that the photograph might have been commissioned by those businesses. If it was, the businessmen must have been awfully disappointed when they discovered how tiny they became in the finished photograph. This reproduction is deceiving, however, because the print that this was copied from was 11" by 14" and it appears to be a contact print. At that size, the men do become recognizable and the print is a very beautiful document of a whole part of the street.

In my own photograph (Fig.9) I was again taking advantage of the ability of the large format negative to hold detail while looking at a large piece of the street. The hopeless clutter is now more significant than the beautifully detailed facades. The photograph does have the ability of sorting out the complexity of the scene and making it manageable(Fig.11). The delivery wagons are in so many of the early photographs that we cease to find them noteworthy. In my photographs, I had to very consciously include them. The biggest problem with them is their sheer size. They tend to dominate the scene when they are allowed to intrude. This photograph is the most satisfying in this respect.

The photograph of number 542 Washington Street (Fig.12) was included in this thesis

because it has such clarity. The combination of the elegant clarity of both the cut stone of the building and the photographic print shows an idea of how far the medium can be pushed in its representation of visual fact. It celebrates craftsmanship as an end in itself.

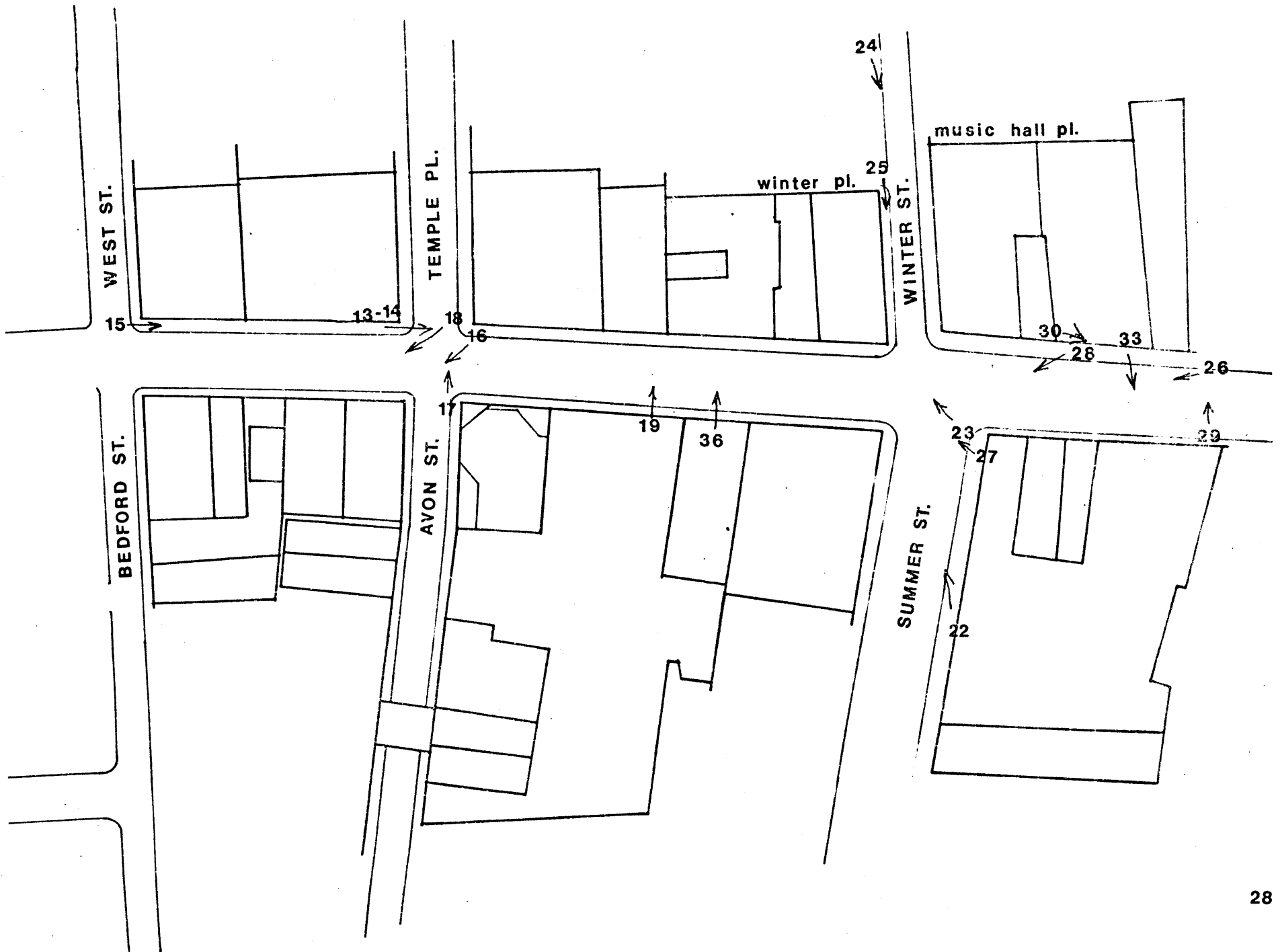




Fig. 13 Looking north from Temple Place, n.d. (Boston Athenaeum)

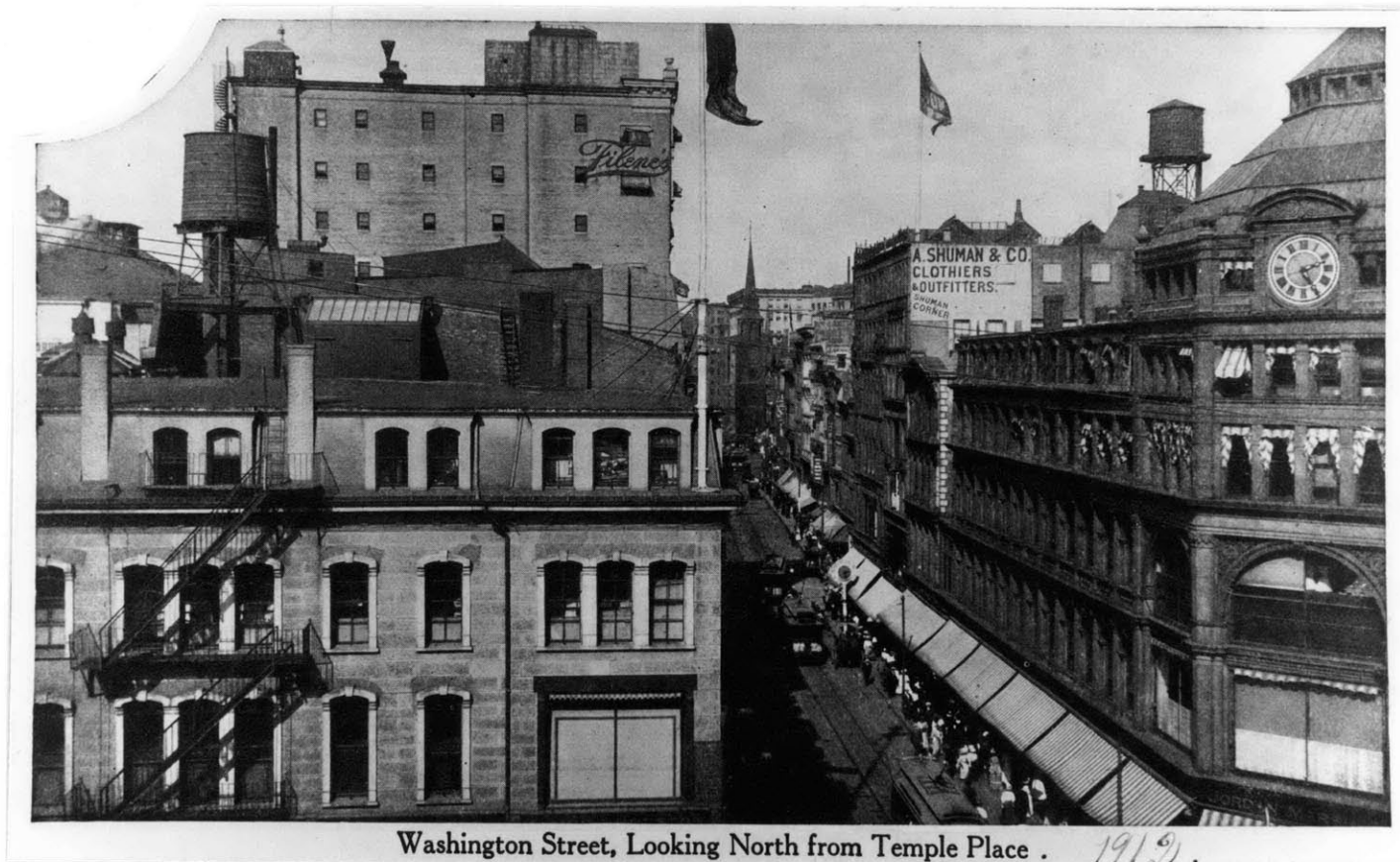


Fig. 14 1912 (Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 15 View from West Street c.1883 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 16 Corner of Avon Street, n.d. (Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 17 Temple Place, fr. Washington Street, 1885 (Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 18 Washingto Street, Corner of Temple Place 1976



Fig. 19 West side of Washington Street, south of Temple Place 1976

Temple Place/Avon Street

"The Busiest Corner on Boston's Busiest Street" was proudly proclaimed on a plaque attached to the James A. Houston clothing store on the corner of Washington Street and Temple Place. It fits in well with the American concept of glorifying the Biggest, Longest, Widest and other extremests, yet here it is saying something quite different. It marks a kind of social achievement. This is no built architectural wonder but a very human one. City officials have talked about solving the problem of congestion as long as there have been cities, but in this place that congestion became something special, something special, something to be experienced and enjoyed. (Fig. 13)

A pair of photographs made in 1912 from almost the same position on the street but from different levels give completely different impressions of the street. (Figs. 13 and 14) One comforting note is the response that the awnings make to the movement of the sun across the sky. The fact that someone had to go outside and crank the awnings up and down during the day represents a concern that the merchants had for the amenities that their storefronts could provide to the public space of the street.

The tower with the clock was part of an addition that Jordan, Marsh and Co. built in 1880. It imitated and extended their existing main store building which survived the Great Fire of 1872. A feature of the street that is quite beautifully shown in

a view made soon after the tower was completed (Fig.15) was the low building south of Avon Street which made the clock visible from the street for the entire block. Another view of the low building (Fig.16) reveals that it had as much architectural character as the new department store.

The difference in eave height here is due almost completely to an increase in floor to floor spacing in the newer buildings. Both have the same number of floors. The low ceiling height of the corner building also had a considerable effect on the street front. The second floor Cafe is at a height that is even with the awnings of the adjoining buildings and it became a real extension of the sidewalk edge. The "Restaurant" sign would fall well within a person's field of view as he crossed Avon Street. This building nicely solved the problem of displaying the business of a restaurant in gleaming show windows while preserving the privacy of the diners by cutting them off from the casual glance of people in the street.

These last two photographs are a good example of the problems of dating the photographs by using their style and condition. Fig.16 looks at first glance to be much older than the other. The Federal style buildings, the long exposure time and the faded condition of the print all give it a feeling of being very old. The one clue to its actual age is the presence of trolley wires in the center of the scene.

A view at street level looking up Temple Place (Fig. 17) was made in 1885. It could be considered a very ordinary picture, except for the man climbing the lamp post, but it does give a much more intimate sense of what it was like to be on the street on a warm afternoon. The visual effect of the two levels of signs and storefronts on the left seems complex but understandable to a pedestrian. Individual gestures and clothing are more visible in this photograph than in any of the previous ones.

The modern view of this same corner looking south down Washington Street (Fig. 18) records a very different scene. The buildings on the left will all be demolished during the present redevelopment. The building at the extreme left occupies the site of the small gabled building with the Cafe. It would have been quite possible for Jordan Marsh and Co. to have preserved the tower and once again make it visible from the street since they now own all of the properties concerned. Unfortunately, the tower has fallen victim to the wrecker's ball.

A modern remnant of the two story store front, Richard's Shoes, emphasized the accessibility of the second floor by putting the ramp very prominently in the display windows.

A piece of the wall of the street around the corner from Richard's Shoes (Fig. 19) shows how other businesses have dealt with the problem of gaining the attention

of the pedestrian public. This block does not display nearly as many "for rent" signs as the previous one (Fig.11) and it presently forms a buffer zone between the movie theatres and the shopping area. This whole situation of incompatible uses trying to deny and avoid one another is very different from the neighborhood that existed here during the 1870's.

When two different photographers are confronted with basically the same photographic problem, the results are often quite different. Figs.13 and 14 are both views looking north from Temple Place and they are contemporary with one another. On first glance, it is not immediately apparent that they were made in the same place, they are so very different. The first photograph was very carefully seen and composed. The photographer has framed it in such a way that all the signs have been included at the edge without being truncated. He has waited for an instant to make his exposure when the action on the street has come to a natural pause so that most of the print is sharp and in focus. He let the ability of the camera to hold detail work to his advantage so that even though the people on the street form tiny images, they can be seen and absorbed by the viewer. Perhaps the most unusual aspect of this particular photograph is the position that the photographer was in when he made the exposure. A careful look shows that he was in a position directly over the curb about twenty feet in the air. (From other information it can be determined that no building existed at that location.)

The advantage that this position has in the finished picture is that it shows both sides of the street. The result is strikingly different from the usual views made from windows and much more informative. It gives a better feeling of the enclosed space that is the street.

Whoever made Fig.14 was concerned with the buildings and rooftops. The forms of the street itself are almost incidental. The use of the frame in this photograph is as careful as in the first. Again, the signs, the "busiest corner" plaque and the clock were carefully included. The total effect is not nearly as compelling, mostly because these things are not as important in this view. This photograph is valuable for its information about the rooftops and the tops of the buildings, but it does not have much to offer concerning the street.

The 1880's view (Fig.15) also takes advantage of the high vantage point above the curb. It was made from the corner of West Street, a full block south of the previous photographs. It does seem that there must have been something to climb on. The suggestion offered by the photographs themselves is seen in Figs.16 and 17. The light pole with the gas lamp would be sturdy enough and offer enough protruding hand grabs to attach a camera.

In 1885, a few photographers had begun to get their cameras down to the level of the street and make photographs which stopped the action. The sensitivity of the

plates that were available at that time and the mechanics of the large format camera itself still limited the speed of the shutters, but, by waiting for the proper moment, motion could be effectively stopped. The types of gestures, almost poses, that are seen in this photograph (Fig.17) are much different than those seen in some of the later photographs, especially those made with miniature cameras.

When I made the photograph of the west side of the street (Fig.19) I was more concerned with recording the detail of the rich building front than with the gestures of the people on the sidewalk. The blurs tend to separate the temporary images from the more permanent ones and force the viewer to deal with them in their dynamic sense. In addition, though, the blur is something that is purely photographic in origin and it is different enough from visual reality to serve as a constant reminder to the viewer that he is looking at a photographic image and not at the reality of the place. This photograph in particular deals with a very complex reality and in its very structure it offers a way to deal with, sort out and understand that that reality.

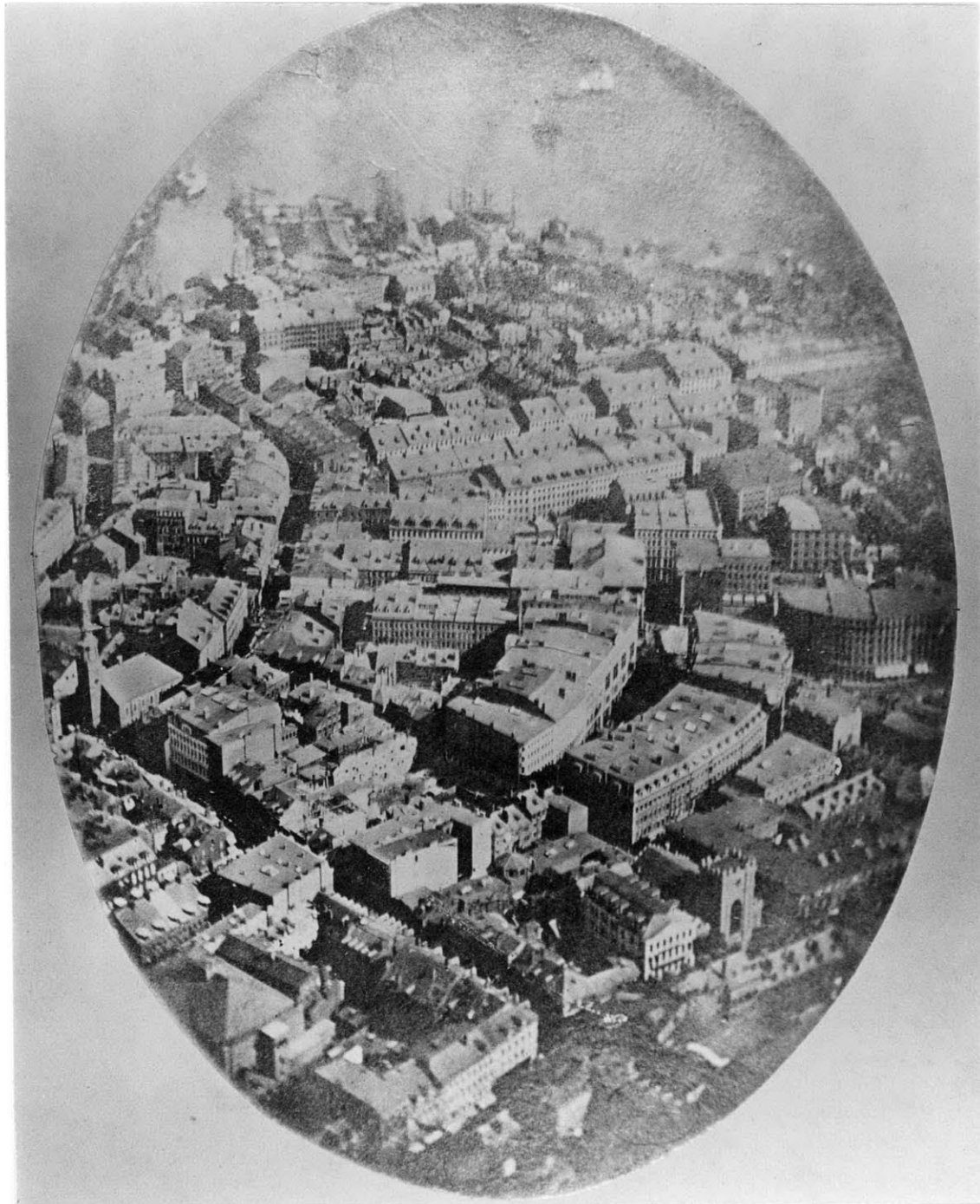


Fig. 20 Aerial view of commercial district, n.d. (B.P.L.)

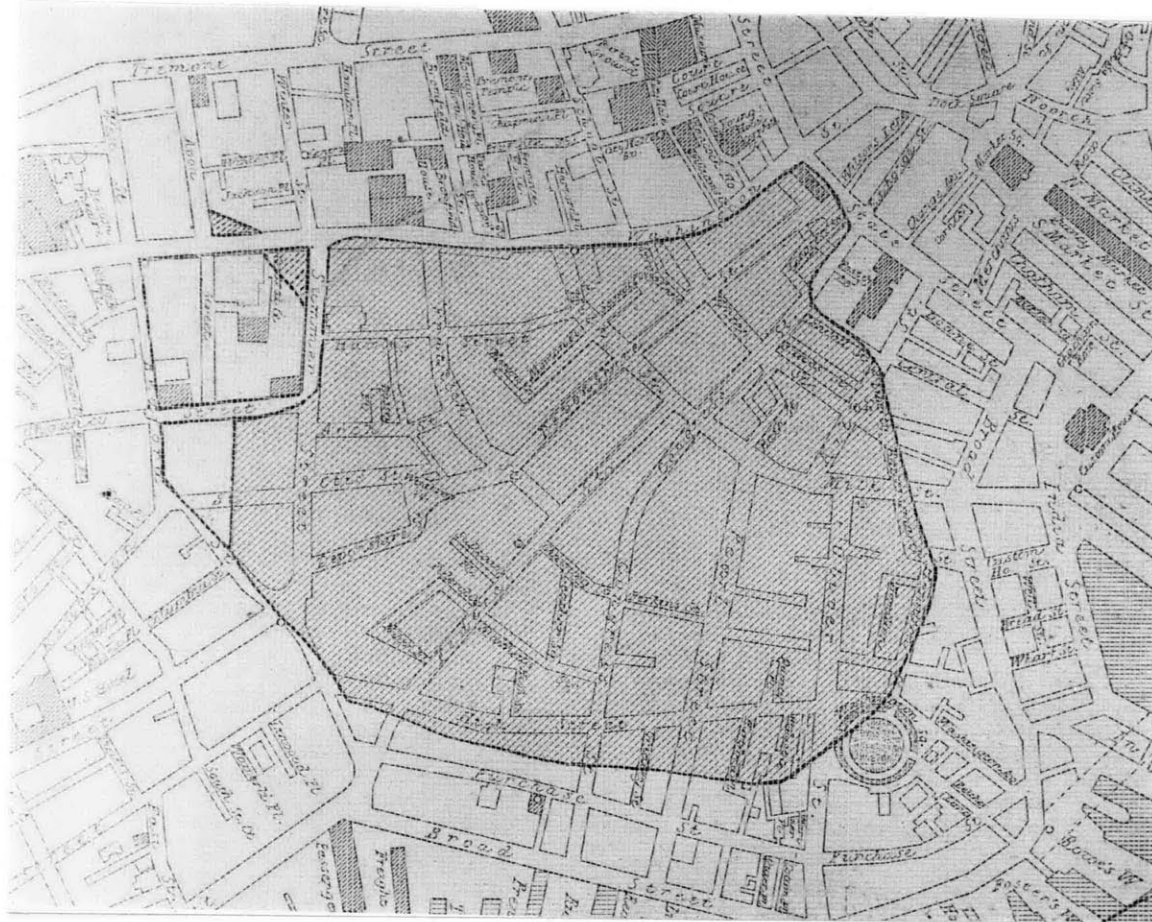


Fig. 21 Map of the Great Fire 1872

(B.P.L.)

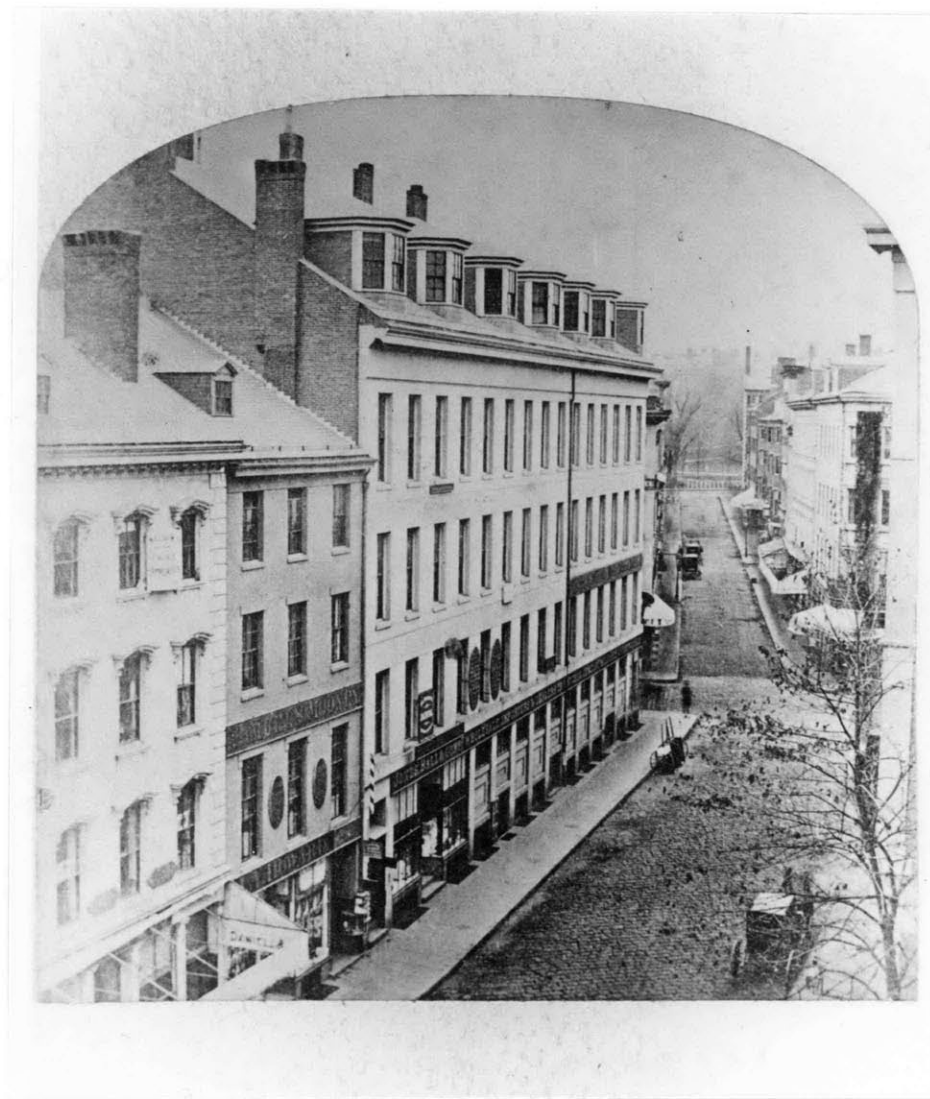


Fig. 22 Summer St. looking toward the Common 1867 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 23 Corner of Winter Street 1908 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 24 Winter Street looking toward Washington Street c.1908 (Boston Athenaeum) 46



Fig. 25 Winter Street looking toward Washington Street 1880 (Boston Athenaeum) 47



Fig. 26 Washington Street at Summer/Winter Streets 1925 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 27 Winter Street and Washington Street 1976



Fig. 28 Summer and Washington Streets 1976



Fig. 29 407 Washington Street 1976

Summer/Winter Streets

The aerial photograph (Fig.20) is a historical photograph in its own right as it was the first successful aerial photograph ever made in the United States. What is particularly fascinating about the existence of this photograph is that it was the only plate of the twelve that were exposed on that particular day in 1863 that produced a printable image and, as fate would have it, the area recorded coincides almost perfectly with the district that was to burn nine years later in the Great Fire of 1872. Washington Street is the diagonal which runs from the center left to the lower right. The church at the left is the Old South Meeting House which was saved from the fire and the one on the right was old Trinity Church. Destroyed in the fire, its parish built the New Trinity Church at Copley Square.

The abundance of wooden mansard roofs in the district which would later feed the **Great Fire** is also visible in this photograph. A map of the burned out district (Fig.21) shows the extent of the destruction. The entire side of Washington Street from Summer Street to the Old South Church was destroyed.

A view of Summer Street looking toward the Common (Fig.22) was made in 1867. It is the earliest street view of this area. It gives a glimpse of the era that was abruptly ended by the Great fire. The fragment of a building at the extreme right was old Trinity Church. All the buildings on the opposite side of the street were

destroyed in the fire. The district had been falling into disrepair as the large mercantile companies converted the older buildings for their needs. There were many types of problems as the modern city tried to operate in an eighteenth century setting.

A very elegant picture (Fig.23) was made in 1908 of the corner of Winter and Washington Streets. This building was Filene's Annex and it was profusely endowed with the flower boxes that were a company trademark around the turn of the century. Civic changes are evident from a comparison with earlier photographs. The gas lamps have been replaced by electric lights and the headhouse of the new Park Street Subway Station is visible at the end of Winter Street. The new subway line under Winter and Summer Streets was about ready to be opened and the wooden door in the front of Filene's is the only evidence that any change has been made. It would be interesting to see just how much disruption took place during the actual construction a few years earlier.

It is difficult to explain the absolute lack of any activity in the streets. There is no evidence of an extremely long exposure except by the blurred leaves in the flower boxes. The only possible explanation is that the photograph was made very early one hazy Sunday morning. The clock on the front of Stowell's jewelry store on winter street reads about 7:30, but that is the only clue to the emptiness.

One begins to wonder how the photographer could have avoided being swallowed up in the lifeless void.

A view from the opposite end of Winter Street (Fig.24) is undated but it is safe to assume that it is contemporary with the last one. The difference in the life of the street in these photographs is extreme. Here the same clock shows 2:00 on a cold day. The long streak of sunlight coming out of Winter Place and crossing the center of the photograph indicates that it was made in late fall or early spring. The lack of snow in the street and general cleanliness suggests that autumn would be the correct guess.

A very similar view made in 1880 (Fig.25) shows the effect of thirty years of physical changes yet the feeling of the street level has remained the same. The row of small buildings on the right has been replaced by Stowell's with the glass marquee over the sidewalk. The reason for the profusion of awnings on the left side of the street compared with the total lack on the right is a simple one. The right side is South and never receives direct sunlight. The glass marquee responds to the situation quite nicely by giving shelter from inclement weather without blocking the north light.

Photographs from the nineteen-twenties and thirties are rare in historical collections and it was particularly exciting to find this view made in 1925 (Fig. 26). Most of the buildings in this view existed until 1975 but the street, signs, cars and

and people are those of another era. Browning, King and Co. at the right was remodeled by I. J. Fox furriers but the building remains. The crowds pushing into the street are typical of today. The feeling of being in an urban space with high walls and lots of activity is well captured in this photograph. The street was too narrow for all the traffic it tried to carry yet this narrowness is what gave it a feeling and personality all its own.

A common entrance to this urban space is through the subway tunnel at the corner of Summer Street. The photograph made from the top of the stairs under Filene's canopy (Fig. 27) shows this arrival point and the first view of the street for many commuters. In making this photograph, the screen of poles and people was deliberately put in the foreground because they are very strong elements in that environment.

The main store of Jordan Marsh was extended to Summer Street. The building on the corner had "A. Shuman and Sons" painted on its end wall in the earlier photographs. (Fig.28) The ghost images of people darting in front of cars have a much more desperate feeling than those in the 1925 photograph. Art deco reached Washington Street in the 1930's when I. J. Fox renovated this storefront (Fig.29). The new look of the 1960's contributed the roll-down steel doors above the show windows and the steel mesh gate over the entry. The second story show windows are quite dirty and neglected and seem much more remote from the street than those south of West Street.

In the years that passed from 1867 to 1908, the tools of photography were vastly improved. The difference in quality between Figs.22 and 23 is one of the first things that is noticed by the viewer. What is interesting about this pair is how the technique used in the second is so similar to the first. T. E. Marr's signature is visible on the lower right of Fig.23. He was a highly respected photographer in the field of "art" photography, his series of photographs of Mrs. Gardiner's museum is stored at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. In that work he demonstrated a competent control of lighting and dramatic camera angles. This photograph could easily have come from such an understanding of the medium. It explains the reason that there are no people "cluttering up" this photograph. He has treated the buildings and the setting as large scale art objects and has been very conservative in his technique for recording them. He has employed a point of view that was understood in the early days of photography and was guaranteed to produce a successful photograph.

The anonymous photograph (Fig.24) was produced through a much less secure approach. The lens was opened up and does not provide much depth of field in order to make the shutter speed fast enough to freeze the action. This photograph is more representative of the state of the art of photography in 1908.

This kind of thinking lead directly to the kind of photograph we find in Fig.26. By 1925, good cameras were being produced in smaller sizes that could be carried about

and set up very quickly. Better film and smaller film sizes allowed the use of lenses of shorter focal lengths with greater depth of field. They reduced the need to stop the aperture down so far and thus allowed faster shutter speeds. In this photograph everything has changed. Gestures and expressions are a major concern. The place becomes only part of the whole image. The viewer is given a much more intimate idea of what it was like to be in the scene. The moment takes on much greater importance because it is what determines how a beautiful gesture like the one at the lower right can be recorded.

What I was dealing with in the three pictures of this corner (Figs.27-29) is more related to what photographers were doing in the 1880's. I would let the activities blur out while being careful to include enough figures at rest to tie down the blurs and make some sense out of them. This is very different from the way I would approach the same subject with a miniature camera. The actual structuring of the scene and juxtaposing of near and distant objects over the plane of the photograph has its origin in my experience of modern work. The extreme depth of field was used to make that kind of juxtaposition as powerful as possible.

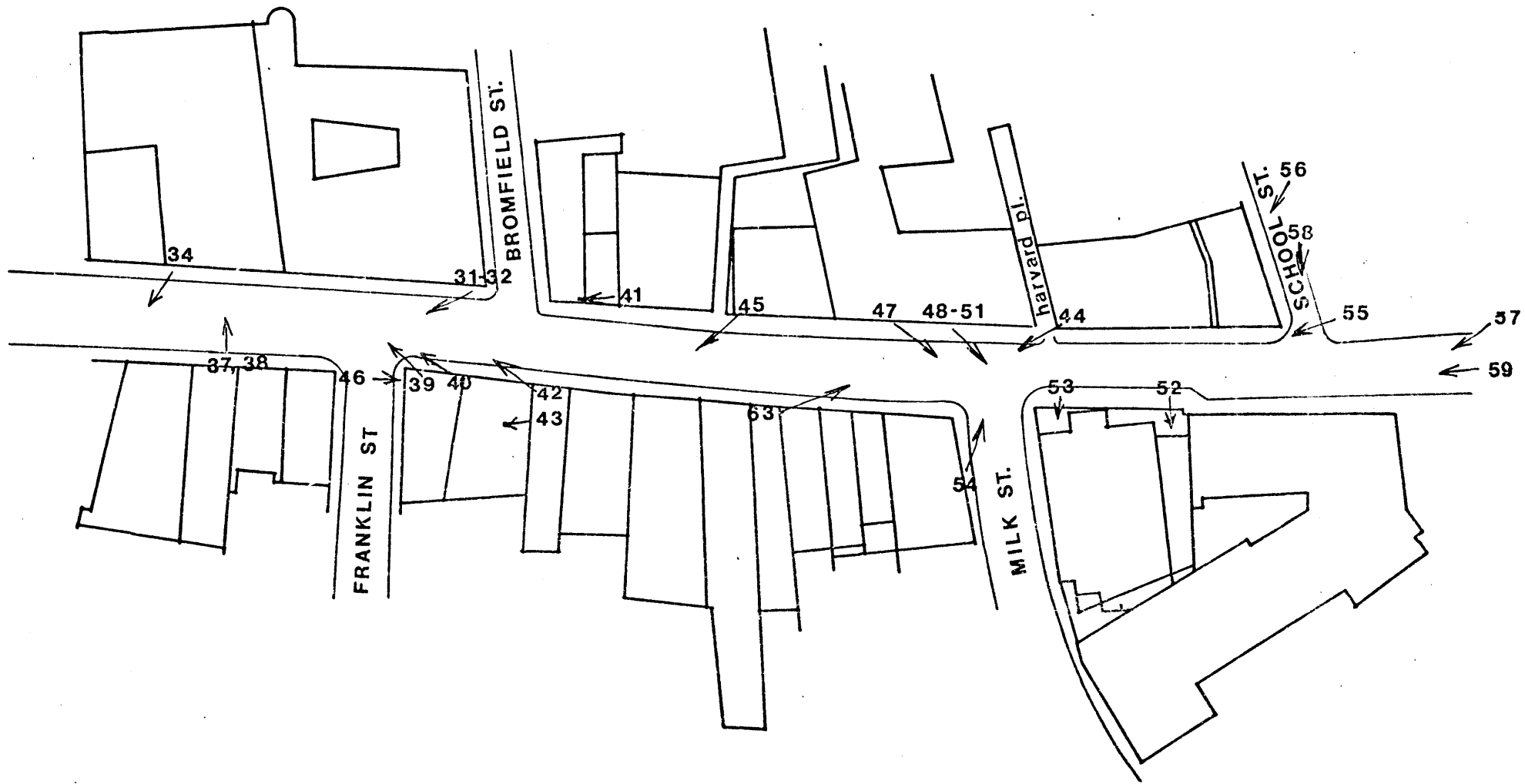




Fig. 30 From Winter Street looking north 1872 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 31 From Franklin Street looking south 1872 (B.P.L.)

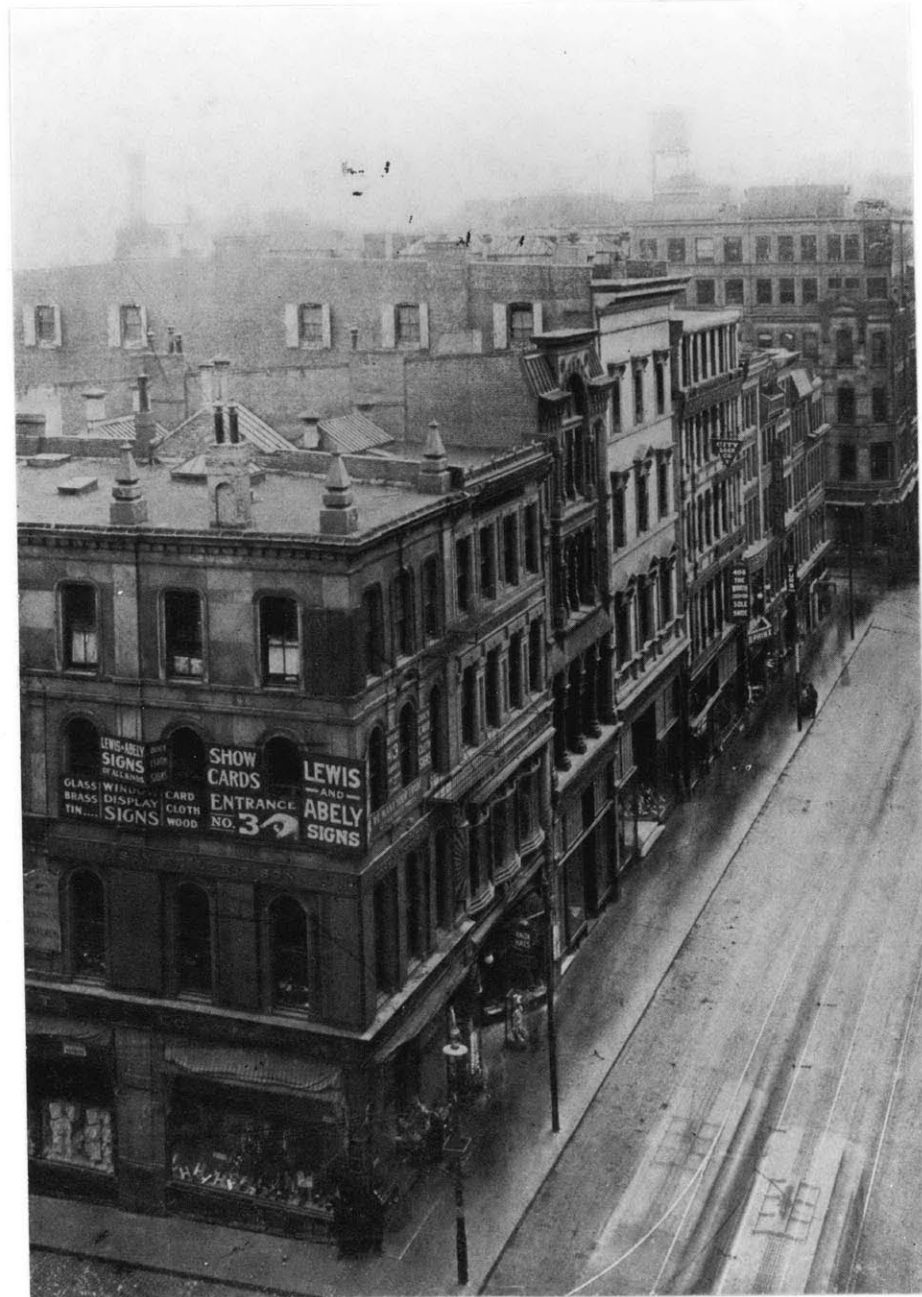


Fig. 32 From Franklin Street looking south, n.d. (Boston Athenaeum)

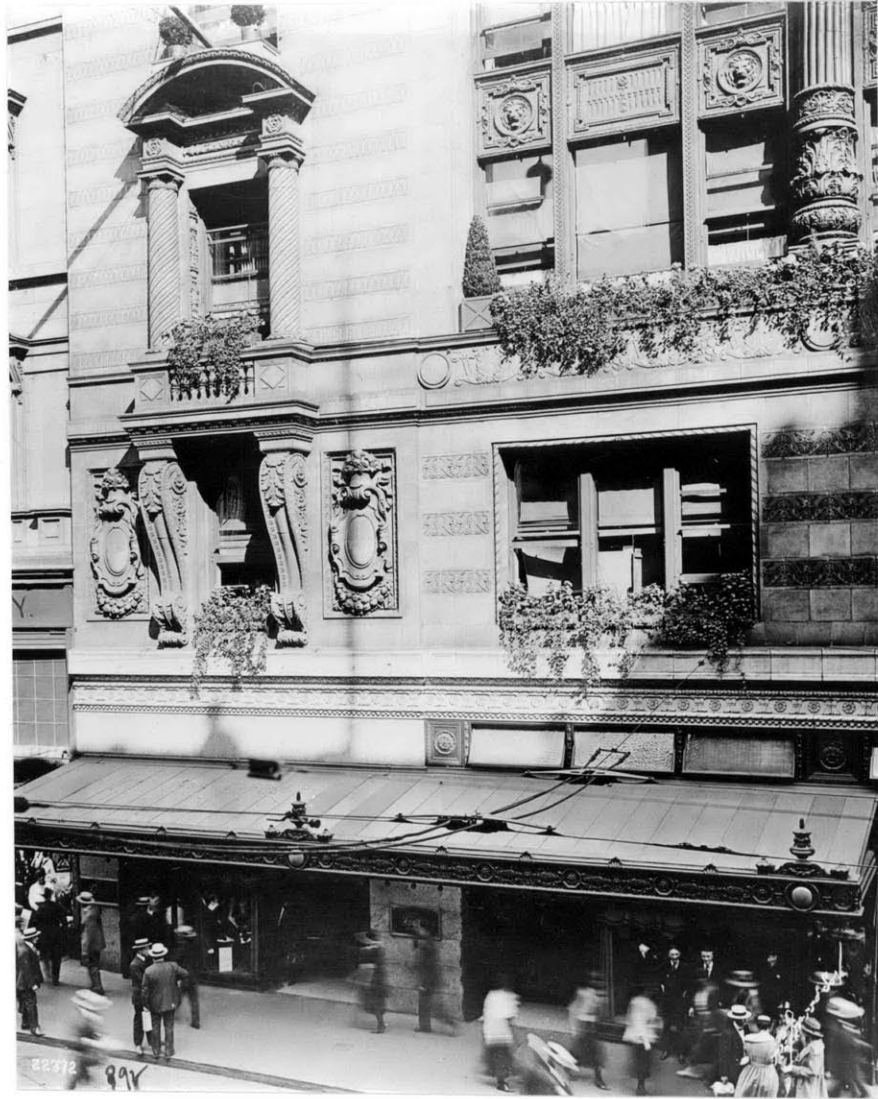


Fig. 33 Filene's Store 1915

(B.P.L.)



Fig. 34 Filene's Store 1976



Fig. 35 Ames Building c.1885 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 36 The Dexter Building 465 Washington Street, n.d. (B.P.L.)

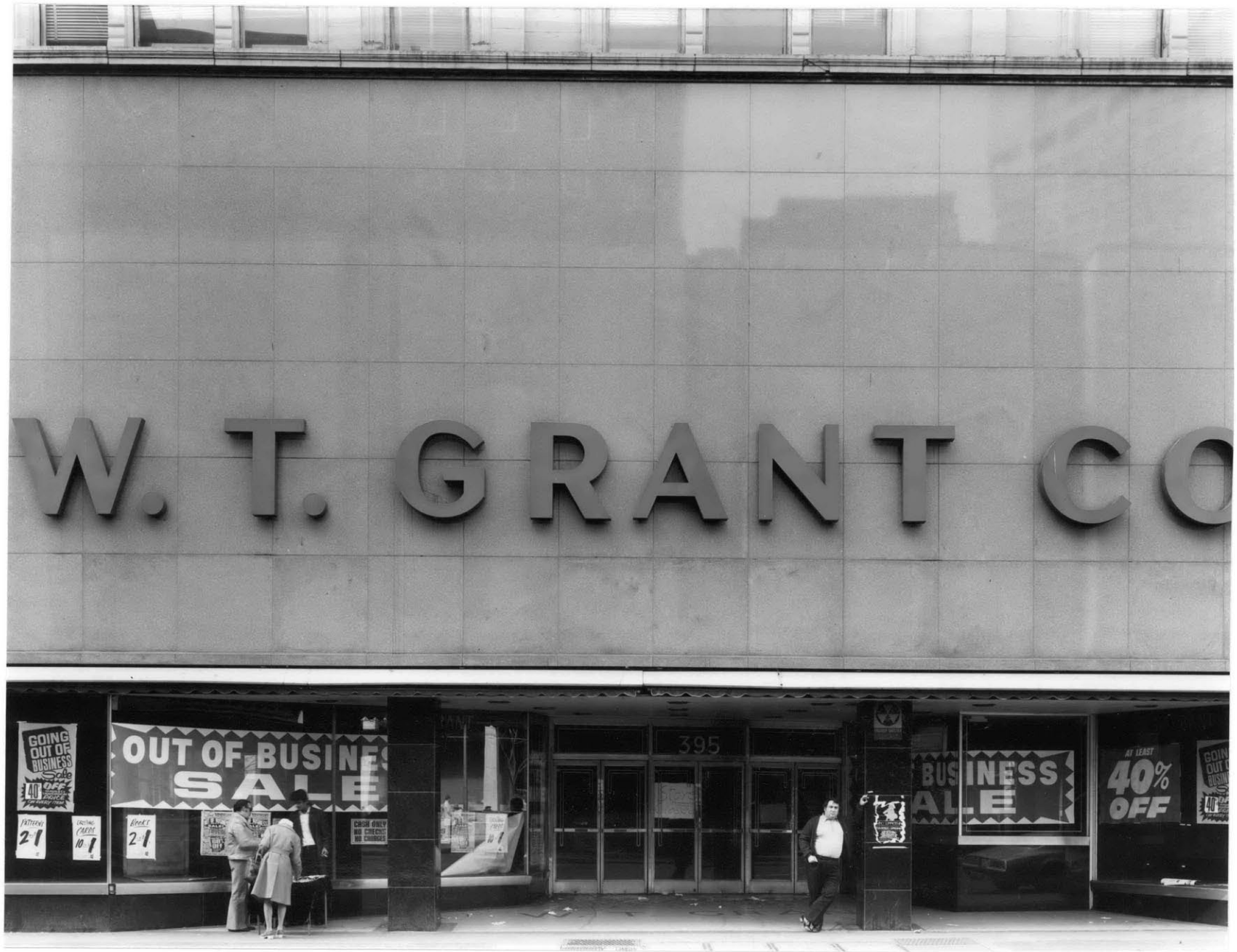


Fig. 37 Bankrupt W.T. Grant Co. 1976



Fig. 38 Marlboro Building 1882 (B.P.L.)

Building Facades; Temple Place to Bromfield Street

The Great Fire of 1872 was for Boston, urban renewal on a scale that was seldom attempted anywhere until the 1950's. The heart of the wholesale commercial district was totally wiped out. The last remnants of residential and small scale commercial structures were wiped out. The way that the district was rebuilt is interesting now that we have had a chance to look back and evaluate the massive projects of the 1960's.

Two photographs made soon after the fire (Figs.30 and 31) show very well how total the destruction of the east side of Washington Street really was. The facade near the center of both photographs was the remains of the Maccular, Parker and Co. clothing factory and retail store. The second picture shows heavy timbers preventing its collapse. A photograph made about 1890 (Fig. 32) gives strong evidence that the facade was preserved and incorporated into the new building. A close inspection of all three photographs shows them to be identical above the first floor level. Purely photographic evidence cannot solve this case, however, but a publication by the company in 1912 solves this dilemma:

"...This was the ediface which was destroyed, with most of its contents, in the Great Fire of November 9, 1872. The present building was rebuilt upon substantially the same plan as the one destroyed, but with some modifications and improvements" 3

This presents a lesson in how this was a very different process than modern

clear swath urban renewal. There was a genuine feeling of loss for what was destroyed and serious attempts were made to build it back as it was "with some modifications and improvements".

The facade of the Macular, Parker and Co. building lasted until 1974 when it was demolished to make room for the new Filene's addition (Fig. 34). There is no need for a value judgement to accompany that photograph.

Filene's new main store was completed in 1913 and a 1915 photograph (Fig. 33) shows the flower boxes in evidence in every window of the facade. A reference to an article in "Architectural Record" titled Filene's Window Boxes Disapproved and Banned by City is indexed under the wrong date and it certainly could produce interesting reading if it could be located. At the extreme left in this photograph can clearly be seen the facade of Macular, Parker and Co. This building and all the others on the entire block were eventually annexed by Filene's and Co.

The camera position just above the first floor level was used to good advantage in this photograph. It tends to equalize the rendering of the people on the sidewalk and the upper parts of the building, allowing neither to dominate the scene. It is much more difficult to achieve this kind of balance when the viewpoint is the street level. Both of these points of view can produce valid historical documents and each offers particular documentary insights.

Some photographers believe that a photograph of a beautiful piece of architecture will automatically produce an interesting photograph. This is not necessarily so as this set of three photographs will show. H.H. Richardson designed a mercantile building for the F.L. Ames Co. This undated photograph of the facade (Fig. 35) shows very little about the building other than the decorative details. It is actually a pretty boring picture.

The Dexter building was a much lesser celebrated architectural concoction located in the next block south. This photograph (Fig. 36) is a whole lot richer in telling the viewer about the place. What is at first glance a close-cropped detail shot is more fully appreciated when we realize that the reflections in the windows show a bridge over an alley which separated the Jordan Marsh store from Shuman and sons next door. When Jordan Marsh took over the entire block, the alley was closed in, roofed over and made part of the interior of the store. The photographer was probably standing on that bridge making the picture. He was definitely back in the alley as a corner of the molding from the Jordan Marsh Store is visible at the upper left. The two men in the window are also essential to the success of this photograph.

As a very direct application of this way of seeing, my photograph of the now bankrupt W.T. Grant Co. (Fig. 37) is offered as an example. This photograph should be compared with Fig. 38 as they were both made of the same building.



Fig. 39 Washington Building, south of Bromfield Street 1860 (Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 40 View from Bromfield Street looking north (Bostonian Society)



Fig. 41 View from Bromfield Street 1875 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 42 West side, looking south from Bromfield Street 1976



Fig. 43 The Shoppers' Park, corner of Franklin Street 1976

Franklin/Bromfield Streets

This area continues the commercial character of the street and reference to the 1868 Sanborn Map indicates that, except for the Marlboro Hotel, it was mostly stores and light manufacturing at that time. The earliest photograph of this area (Fig.39) made in 1860 shows the Washington building in the center on the site of the present Washington building. The Marlboro Hotel is beyond.

Seven years later, Josiah Johnson Hawes made a photograph from approximately the same vantage point (Fig.40). The small dormered building on the right has been replaced with a building of exaggerated floor heights. They are even more generous than the Washington building which had completely dwarfed its neighbors. The storefront at the street level has very tall windows (notice the tiny figure of a man standing in front of them) and no attempt was made to put in any awnings over the sidewalk. The building becomes almost a caricature of a typical American hardware store that has been blown up almost twice life size and installed on this site. The photograph begins to be discomfiting once you see the little man and begin to notice the exaggerated detailing of the facade.

In the background of the 1867 view, the rest of the buildings on the block keep a lower profile and this is more clearly seen in the photograph made on Bunker Hill day, 1875 (Fig.41). It is a shame that no earlier photographs of the left

side of the street could be found. All of the buildings in the 1875 photograph were constructed after the Great Fire. The size difference between the two sides of the street, except for the Washington Building and its neighbor, give a good impression of the effects of the rebuilding.

The photograph that I made from a higher level but similar location as the two earlier photographs (Fig.42) shows how all of the buildings on the block have been replaced one at a time retaining the original lot divisions. The W.T. Grant store occupies the Marlboro Building on the site of the Marlboro Hotel. The Jewelers' Building on the corner was built as part of the adjoining building, but it rests on its own lot and is differentiated in the facade from the adjoining building.

In the span of over one hundred years that these photographs document, very little has changed in the way that the street front is used and the way that it is constructed. The changes have been made in the uses and construction of the upper parts of the buildings. The other photograph from the same vantage point (Fig.43) shows the shoppers' park, a development sponsored by the Filene's Co. which adjoins it. The parcel of land was made vacant when the city acquired enough land to move the end of Franklin Street so that it lines up with Bromfield Street and improves the traffic flow pattern. This was done in the mid 1960's. The idea

for this sort of thing has its roots in the setbacks that are occasionally found which break the tight pattern of the street edge. One example was the open space in front of the old Boylston market.(Figs.1-3) This park is a lot more successful than the one at Boylston Street and the one at School Street (Fig.56) because one side of it adjoins a building while the other two parks are islands surrounded by traffic.

This does represent a new philosophy for future development of the street. Filene's store has a single entrance at the corner and much of the street edge is polished stone. The actual activity of shopping now takes place mostly inside in an area that is totally controlled by the store. The whole idea of a shopping street with a variety of entrepreneurs competing for the attention of possible customers is undergoing change. This approach considers the street simply as an accessway to get people and stock in and out of the area. The direct entrances from the subway station help to reinforce this kind of approach.

The earliest photographs of this set (Figs.39 and 40) point out some more differences in the way photographers see. The earlier photograph was made by an anonymous photographer and it is noteworthy primarily because of its early date. Hawes' photograph shows a great deal more care in setting up. The angle of view and the circular frame were chosen to work together and produce a striking visual **pattern.**

The windows at the upper right fit very handsomely inside the frame. The time of day was not at all arbitrary. The morning sunlight highlights the detail in the facade. It also was a time of day when the street was not so very busy. The exposure here was very long. The ghostly image at the right is apparently an awning that was cranked down as the picture was being made.

The Bunker Hill parade makes a kind of portrait of the street. The photographer was there to observe the event and the result is not unlike the sort of pictures that are in family albums where the intention is to record a birthday, wedding or Christmas celebration, but years later the background takes on an importance that is greater than the idea for making the photograph.

In my own process of making a record of the place, some of the same concerns were present. Fig.42 was made without any specific attempt to imitate the camera angle of the early photographs. Both photographs were made at mid-morning and this lighting seems successful. I would have preferred the shadow areas to have a bit more detail. My main concern was to work from a vantage point that was up above the street level and see what possibilities it would offer.

The one photograph that began to make sense out of the shoppers' park is from even higher than the previous view (Fig.43).



Fig. 44 East side, south from Milk Street c. 1860 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 45 East side, south of Franklin Street 1875 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 46 Corner of Franklin Street looking north 1976

Franklin Street to Milk Street

If I thought that photographs needed titles, this set of three could be labeled "Before the Fire", "After the Fire", and "After the Urban Renewal". The date on the earliest photograph (Fig.44) is 1853. That is probably incorrect as the records show that P. Fowle and Sons put up their new iron building in 1856. The quality, size and mounting board are almost identical with Fig.39, so that is why I have assumed this later date to be the correct one. My titles, however, are a bit misleading. Most of the buildings in this photograph had been replaced at the time of the fire. The first Boston Transcript building looked similar to the one that exists today. It is visible in the aerial view (Fig. 20) and it occupied the site just beyond Widdifield and Co. In this photograph. Engravings that were published at the time of the fire showed a row of taller buildings on this block. Unfortunately no photograph could be found to show what these buildings looked like.

The commercial blocks in this earliest photograph were probably the first structures on this block that were built specifically as stores. They would have replaced residential lots as the need for more market space grew and Washington Street, being the major thoroughfare to Roxbury and the surrounding towns, was offered the best opportunities for attracting business.

J. W. Black had his camera up on the roof to record the Bunker Hill Day festiv-

ities in 1875 but before the parade began he made this view of the opposite side of the street.(Fig.45) The long white building with the arched windows was a second Washington Building. It was almost directly across the street from the other with the same name. At times it is referred to as the "Washington Block". Whatever the actual name, it was a very well thought of building:

"... The material is gray granite and the front is designed in a very tasteful and dignified way. The improvement of this part of Washington Street since the fire is very marked." 4

For all the taste and dignity that went into the design of the Washington Block, very little was expended in the construction of its replacement (Fig.46). The new Woolworth building is quite utilitarian. The upper five levels are a parking garage, offices occupy the third level and Woolworth's department store occupies the first two floors and basement. The wide covered sidewalk is used by the store in the warm months to expand selling space and try to give it some of the feeling of an old-fashioned market place. The wide sidewalk ends at the brick wall with "CVS" painted on it so it really can't be used as a sidewalk and that is why it feels natural for the store to set up outdoor stands there. One real problem is that the depth from the street front is so great that it gets awfully dark under there. Its a lot different from being under a canvas awning with the

sun shining on the top of it.

The two earlier photographs again show the effect of fifteen years of improvements in photographic materials but the approach of the photographer to the basic problem does not show **much** change in attitude. The Modern photograph is quite different from the other two. The viewpoint is down on the street. Individual people are more important to what this photograph is about. The one similarity is its attempt to balance the whole photograph, not letting any one part dominate the scene. In this case, I am trying to contain the elements in some way. It is not a strong image but I still find it interesting because of how important it has made the pidgeon at the lower left.



Fig. 47 Old South Church 1872 (Boston Athenaeum)



OLD SOUTH MEETING HOUSE, WITH THE POSTOFFICE ADDITION.

Made by the United States Government after the Great Fire in 1872.

Fig. 48 c. 1873

(Boston Athenaeum)

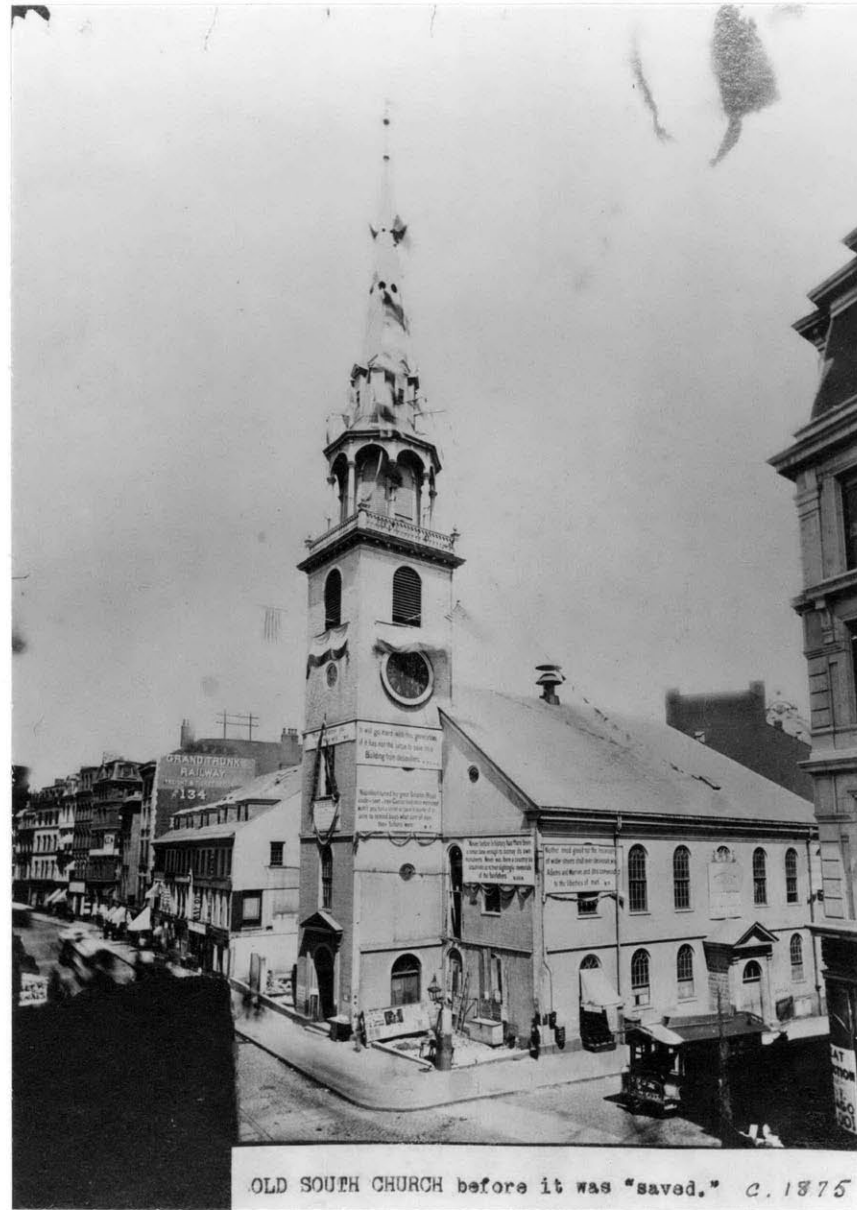


Fig: 49

(Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 50 c.1880

(Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 51 1905

(Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 52 North side of Old South Church 1976



Fig. 53 Southwest corner of Old South Church 1976



Fig. 54 Washington Street, across from the Old South Church c.1870
(Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 55 Looking south from School Street 1885 (Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 56 School and Milk Streets 1976



Fig. 57 Old South fr. Newspaper Row 1865 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 58 End of School Street c.1860

(Holman's Print Shop Inc.)



Fig. 59 Old South Church from Water Street 1976

The Old South Meeting House

The history of the Old South Meeting House is a long and colorful one that is intertwined with the history of Boston since colonial days. The part of that history that this section deals with is what has been recorded by the camera. A series of five photographs from very similar vantage points record the visual history of the church from 1872 until 1905 (Figs. 47-51).

At the front corners of the Old South Church, there is a small square plot of ground formed by the base of the tower. The most significant changes happen on these tiny plots of land and it seems that there has been considerable disagreement over the years about just how to make the best possible use of them.

The earliest picture from this group (Fig.47) shows the church after it had been heroically saved from the Great Fire. At that time, substantial brick walls made a very strong statement about who had control of that space. The photograph is not really clear, but there seems to be a similar wall on the opposite side of the tower. At that time, the large iron lantern hung from the corner post of the fence.

The new Post Office was under construction at the time of the fire and the old Post Office was destroyed so the government needed a large space to house a temporary Post Office. (Note the bare rafters of the new Post Office under construction beyond the Old South's roof in Fig.47) Some windows were added on top of the brick

walls and the additions (Fig.48) gave the government enough space to house the main Post Office. They really did not improve the appearance of the building in the slightest.

When the new Post Office was finished, the Old South became a museum once again. There was not a lot of money to pay for upkeep and its days as a Post Office wore hard on the building so that it fell into disrepair. Demolition was about to begin when this photograph (Fig.49) was made. There was much argument in the city about the prudence of spending money to preserve an old building, but when a group from the city of Chicago attempted to buy the building in order to move it and set it up again in Chicago, the funds appeared and the old landmark was saved.

The 1880 view (Fig.50) shows how the church looked after it had been restored to its original condition. The stone corner post of the fence still survived but now it had been replaced by an open iron fence. Vines were beginning to crawl up the walls and the fence seems to enclose some sort of garden. By 1905, the vines thoroughly covered the building and there seems to be a patch of lawn inside the iron fence. The low commercial block beyond has been replaced by the Old South Building, a large office structure. Not only the buildings, but also the street has been widened to accommodate an extra lane of traffic. Attached to the Milk Street side of the church is a row of awnings which shelter a row of what appear to be fruit

stands or outdoor lunch counters. There was a real spirit of the church being a municipal institution just like the first market building that was put up in Dock Square early in the eighteenth century.

The two modern views of the corners of the Old South (Figs.52 and 53) show how this leftover space is used today. The north side has been opened up by the entrance to the subway. A news stand and a few telephone booths have managed to claim a bit of the leftover space. On the other corner (Fig.53) the street has been widened so that the old corner post had to be removed and the lantern has been rehung on the corner of the building. The flower seller has found a spot to set up his stand but it is extremely temporary. The building no longer encourages this sort of thing by its form and the only differentiation between the sidewalk and the little courtyard is a row of sailor coursing in the pattern of the brick pavers. The whole area has been sterilized.

The view of the opposite side of Washington Street was made before the Great Fire but it is difficult to give it a specific date. (Fig.54) The Chelsea Dye House is one of the few wooden buildings that appears in any of these old photographs. What makes this picture particularly interesting is the fact that it was made in the wintertime. Wagon wheels have been removed and runners applied to supply transportation. The awnings have been removed and put away.

A remarkably beautiful photograph looking past the Old South and on up the street was made in 1885. (Fig.55) This is one photograph in which the rats' nest of electric wires shows quite well. Putting the wires up on the roofs kept the street itself uncluttered, unlike many other cities where there was room to erect telephone poles. The street level in this picture looks very inviting even though it is almost unoccupied. The physical character of the place has a very human quality.

The relocation of the end of School Street allows a view that was impossible until the 1960's. The modern building on the right is the Boston Five Cents Savings Bank and it is one of the few structures in the district that successfully compliments the quality of the older architecture.(Fig.56)

This block (Fig.57) was the first block in Boston built specifically as a commercial block set the style for most of the first development of Washington Street as a retail shopping street. It was razed to allow the Old South Building to be built in 1904. When the photograph was made in 1865, the upper floors were occupied by small print shops, bookbinders and such. These uses were different from the clothing manufacturing that was going on in the blocks to the south. The small print shops probably hung on longer at this location and that is why the type of buildings typical of the 1870's and 1880's never were built there. By 1904, modern office buildings had

already been built and both the Old South Building and the neighboring Winthrop Building are of much larger scale than any that were built in this district during the nineteenth century.

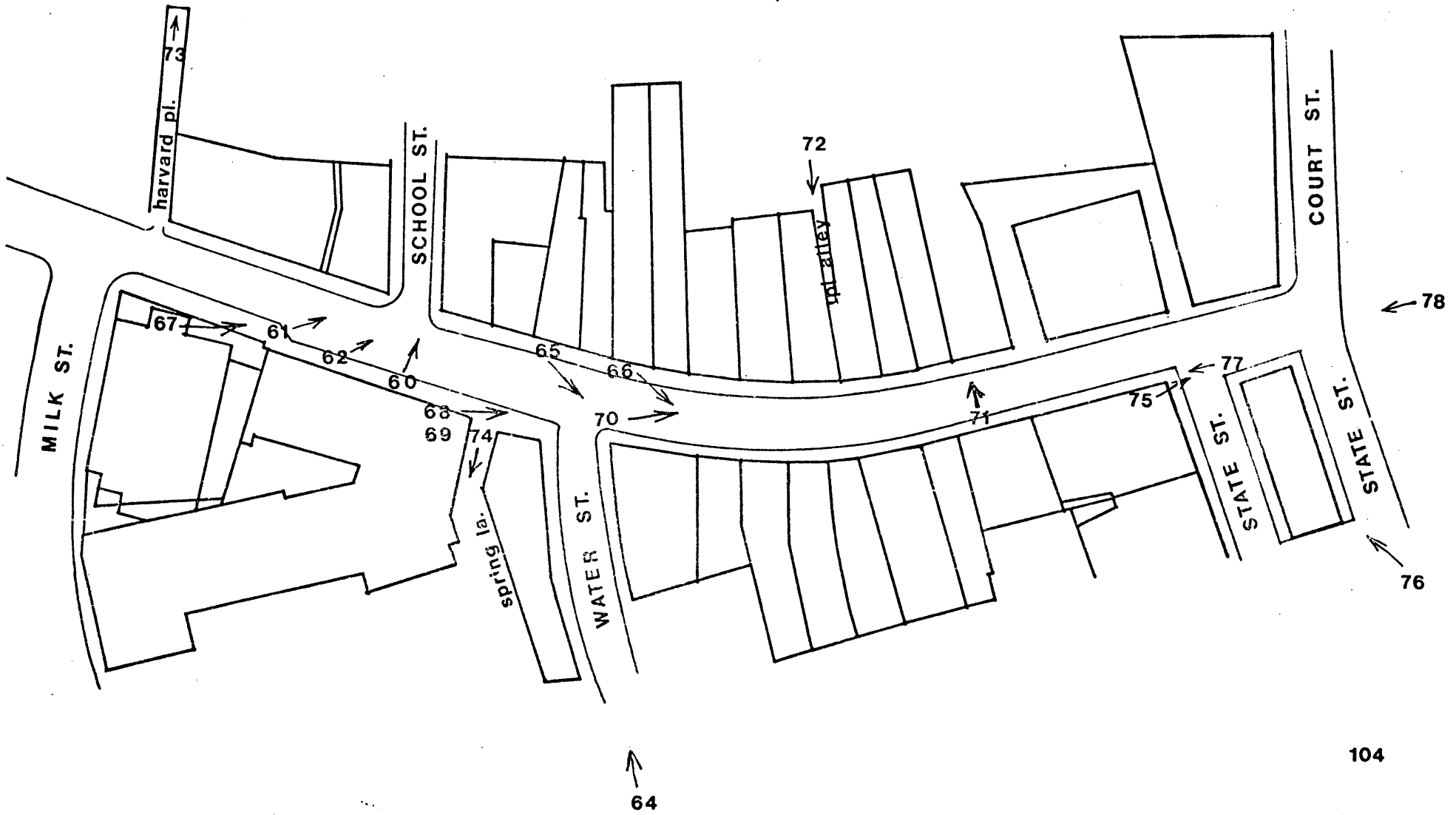
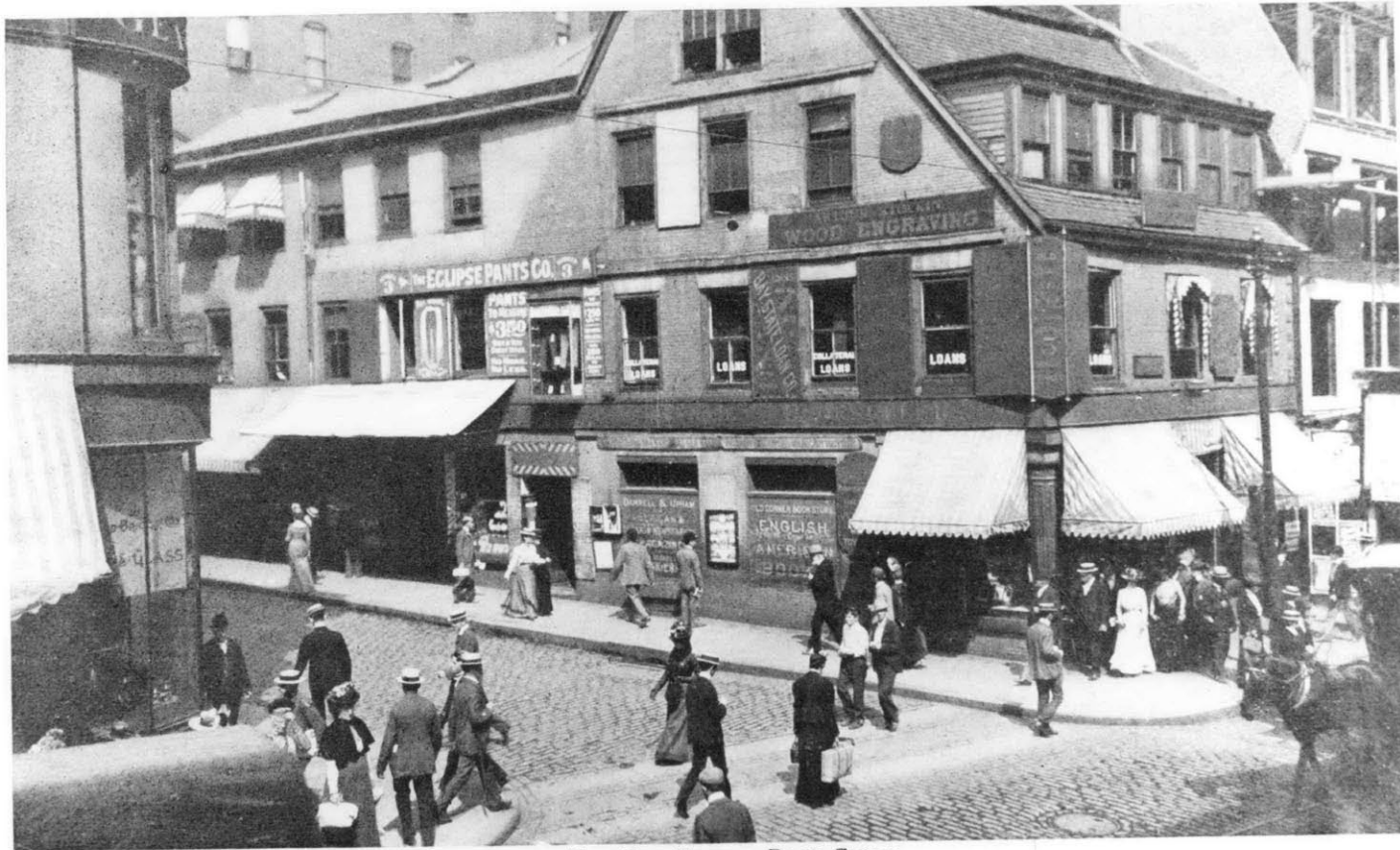




Fig. 60 Old Corner Book Store 1865 (B.P.L.)



THE OLD CORNER BOOK STORE

Fig. 61 c.1912

(Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 62 Old Corner Book Store c.1965



Fig. 63 Old Corner Book Store 1976

Old Corner Book Store

The four views that were chosen to show the life of the Old Corner Book Store on the corner of School and Washington Streets (Figs.60-63) are representative examples of the progress of the photographic process as well as fine records of the life of the building.

The earliest of these was made by Josiah Johnson Hawes around 1865 (Fig.60). It is consistent with the other work he did at the time. The image is carefully controlled in every respect, the placement of the frame is formal and conscious. The wide angle of view emphasizes the bookstore in the foreground. The extremely long exposure time produces a quiet, reverent sort of image.

By 1912, book illustrators began to look for photographs that recorded more of the life of the place. The people in this photograph (Fig.61) at least show that it was inhabited. The angle of view, however, is still from one level above the sidewalk and the figures in the photograph are treated very much like decoration. The photograph has been much more tightly framed in an attempt to make the viewer more intimately involved with the scene.

After another half century of people using and learning about the medium, the street level view had become an almost standard photographic technique.(Fig.62) Its primary advantage is speed. The camera is very quickly set up (usually hand held)

and the photographer is concerned with the moment that he captures. It produces a much more intimate visual image where the viewer is urged to think more about the process of making the photograph as well as the image that is produced.

Since that photograph was made, another ten years of learning and seeing has passed. My photograph(Fig.63) was also made from the street level but it is very different in what it is about. The setting of the building, the way huge new buildings have completely dwarfed it is important to understanding what it is like. People are allowed to get close to the camera and a bit of ambiguity is introduced by the wall on the right. Again, the large format holds detail even when the image of the building has become small in the print. Probably the most significant thing to understand is that this photograph is a very personal one. The idiosyncrasies of my own way of seeing have been exaggerated so that this photograph is as much about me as it is about the place that I photographed. This, I think, is a great part of the new understanding of photography in the 1960's and '70's.



Fig. 64 Water St. toward Washington St. 1870 (B.P.L.)

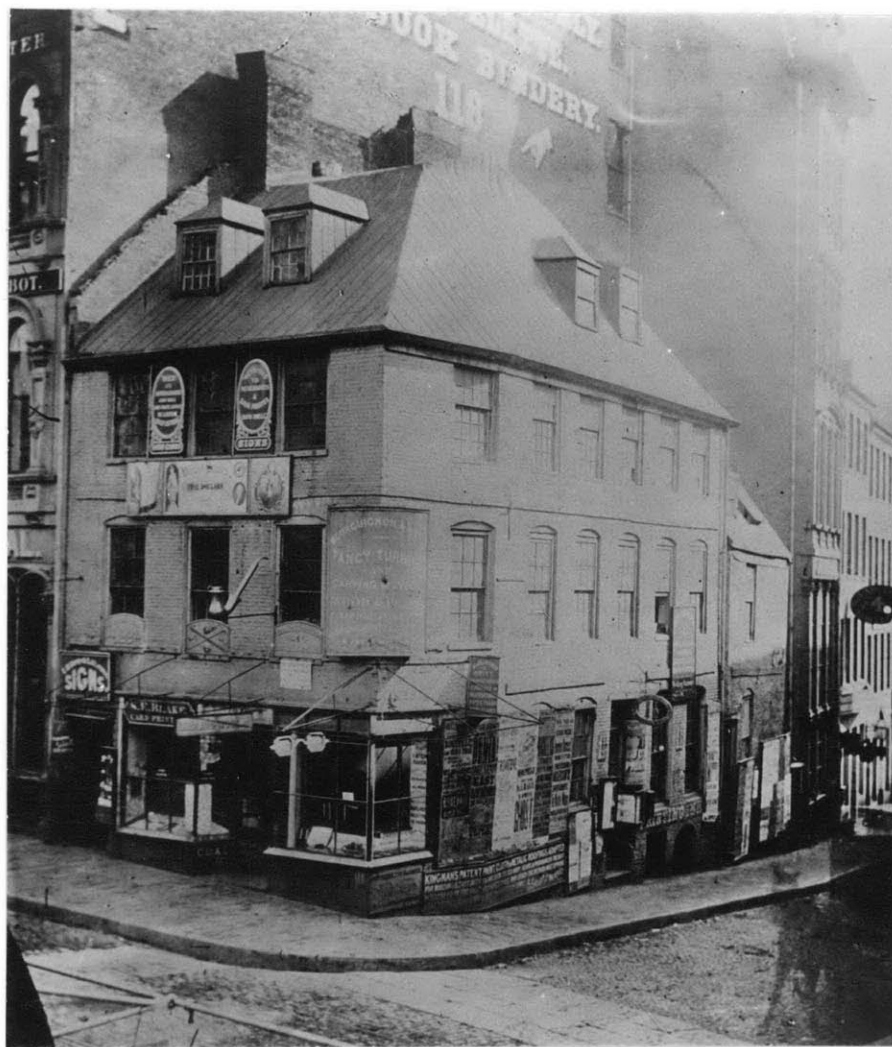


Fig. 65 Corner of Water Street 1860's (B.P.L.)



Fig. 66 Newspaper Row, 1870's (B.P.L.)

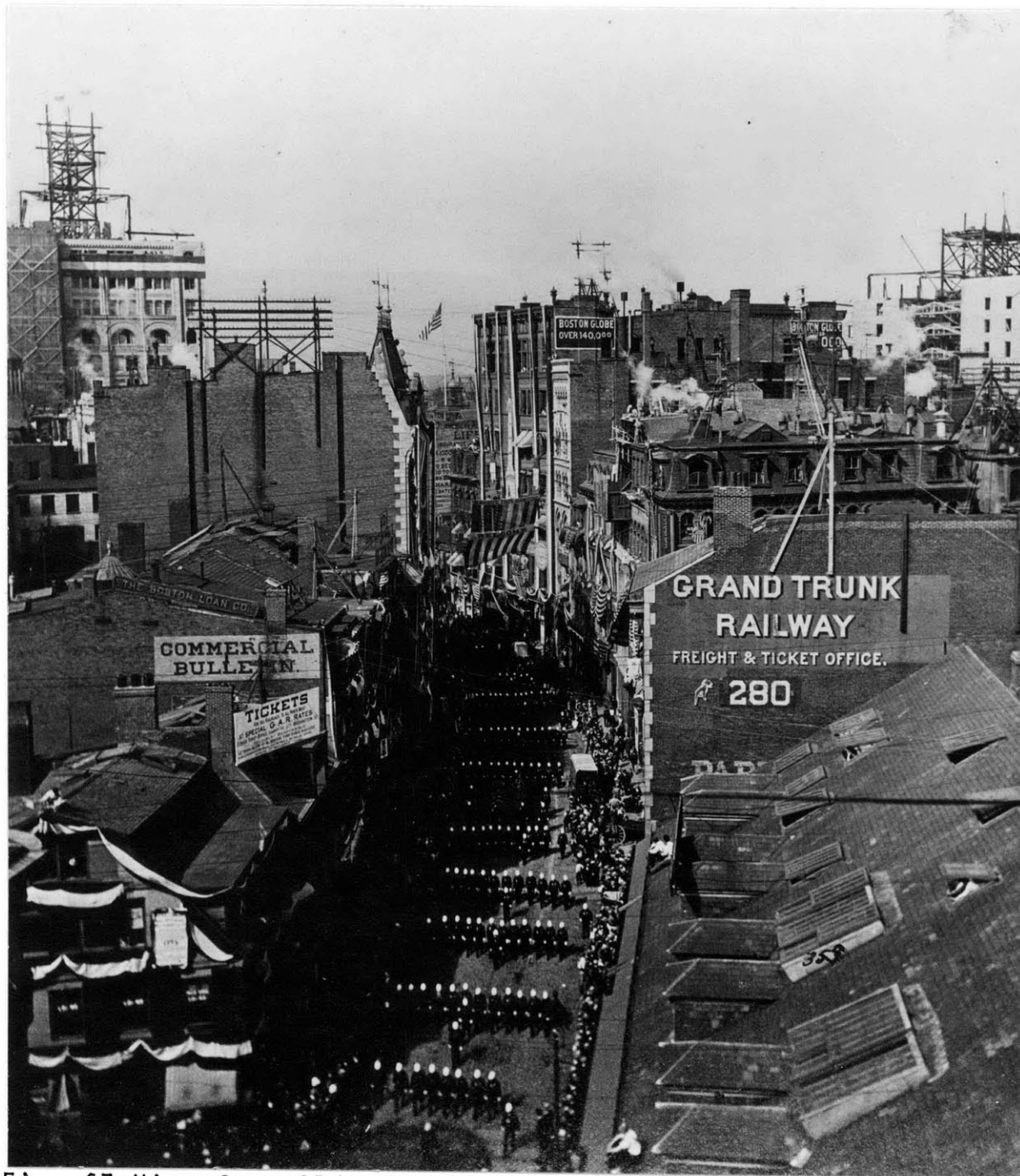


Fig. 67 View from Old South Church, 1875 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 68 Newspaper Row, 1878 (Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 69 Newspaper Row 1895 (Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 70 Site of Newspaper Row 1976



Fig. 71 Pi Alley Cinema and the Boston Company Building 1976

Newspaper Row

Another look at the Sanborn Map of 1868 shows that at that time, the block from State Street to School street was dominated by print shops. The photographs indicate that the buildings in between the printing plants housed the offices of most of Boston's newspapers. The only remnant today is the almost symbolic office of the Boston Globe that occupies the restored Old Corner Book Store. Much of the block today is a parking lot and it faces a parking garage on the opposite side of the street.

Newspaper row is in the distance in this view up Water St. (Fig.64) from 1870. The types of businesses that grew up in the neighborhood of Newspaper Row are visible in this picture, many of them directly related to the newspaper publishing business. The street details in this picture show some of the care that went into the construction of this kind of street. Large cut stone forms smooth crosswalks through the cobblestone pavers. The sidewalk on the right goes up a set of stairs to make it into a sort of loading dock for the businesses as the street winds uphill toward Washington Street. This photograph clearly shows these details that can only be speculated about from the photographs made from higher vantage points.

On the corner of Water Street and Washington Street was this tiny print shop building. This view was dated 1860's but no evidence is available to give it a more

specific date. The building seems to have outlasted most of its contemporaries but the 1870's view (Fig.66) shows its replacement, the Erie Railroad office on the right. A meager attempt was made in this building to give street access to offices on the second floor but it is not nearly as successful as the earlier examples that have been discussed.

Another view from Bunker Hill Day 1875 (Fig.67) was made from the steeple of the Old South Church. It shows quite clearly the deep narrow street formed by the new newspaper offices. The mansard roof of the Erie Railroad building is visible just beyond the Grand Trunk Railway office. The view from 1878 (Fig.68) gives an idea of what the place could be like on a busy weekday. It is amazing that life could exist under these conditions. Life did take place, though, and Newspaper Row was a municipal institution.

If the previous photograph showed congestion, I'm not sure how to describe this later photograph (Fig.69). The best description, which I assume applies to this photograph, was published in 1920:

" Boston has not lost capacity for enthusiasm, cities, like men, need that; but Boston shows enthusiasm in a typically quiet way. I have seen Washington Street, in the business center, jammed solid for several blocks with a crowd estimated by the police as numbering from twenty-five to forty thousand, which absolutely stopped traffic, and all these people had gathered to watch the score-boards of several newspaper offices that are close together there; for the Boston club was playing for the league championship in old Philadelphia. The streets were packed to capacity

within sight of the boards, and the windows and roofs were crowded with decorous, neat, well-tailored, well dressed, self-restrained men, every one with his shoes polished and his hat on straight. It was a very proper crowd. Many of the men were ready to yell if an announcement were extremely favorable, but even then they would not yell very loud. The business men and office clerks of the city had given up an entire business afternoon to follow in packed decorousness the record of a baseball game." 5

In this instance both the photograph and the paragraph are equal in their description of the place. The photograph supplies the nouns and adjectives while the written word discusses the event.

My own photographs of the same district are not about a particular event other than the event of making the photographs. Fig.70 was made from almost the same vantage point as the previous two. The place is now just the "End of Washington Street". The excitement of Newspaper Row is as missing as the era of word of mouth journalism and the telegraph is gone. What has replaced it is a parking garage with some stores and a movie theatre underneath, more functionalism. The only comforting part of the photograph is the quiet elegance of the Richardsonian Ames Building in the center. It was Boston's first skyscraper and it is too bad that most of those which followed it could not be as elegant. It was under construction in the background of Fig.67.

The abruptness of the joint between two buildings along a street is a discomfoting

lesson that certainly should have been learned by now. (Fig. 71) These two buildings were under construction at the same time but somehow, they never realized that they were on the same street. This kind of rebuilding has nothing at all to do with what took place a century earlier after the Great Fire. It is mostly just plain stupid.



Fig. 72 Pi Alley n.d. (B.P.L.)

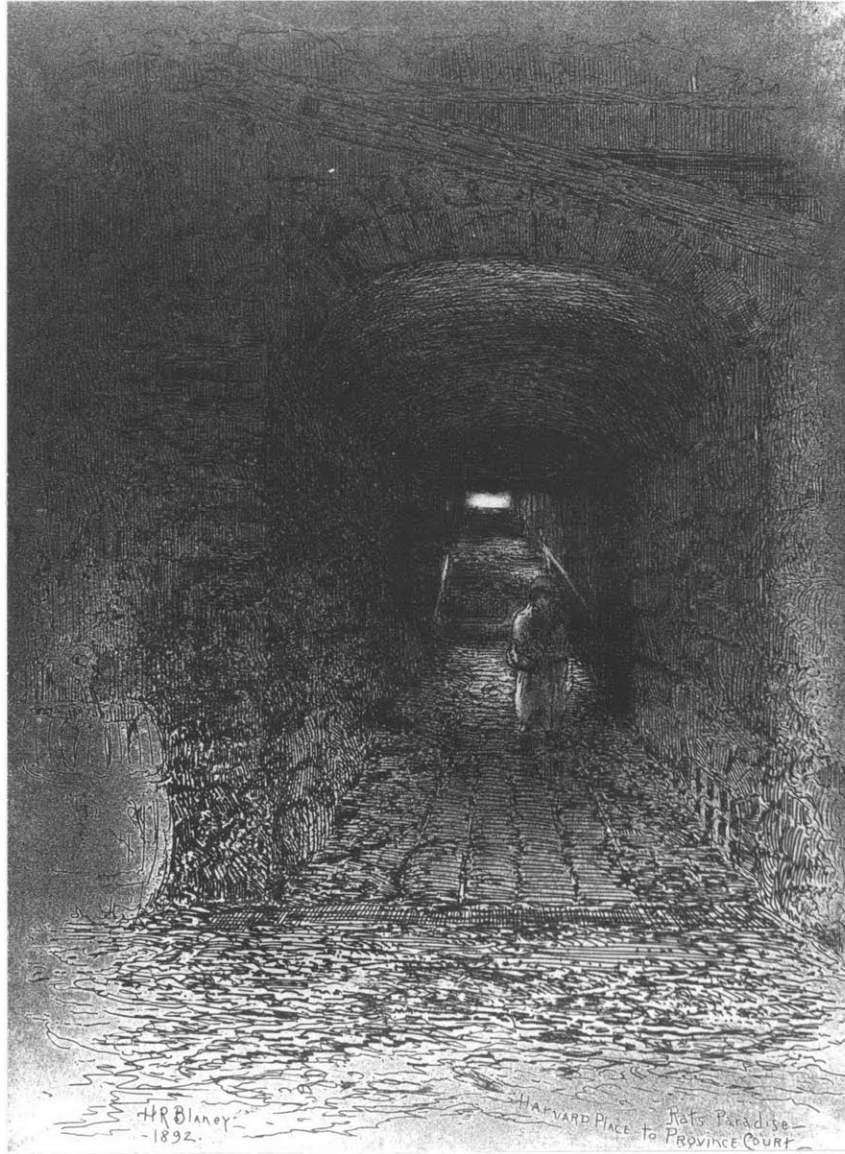


Fig. 73 Haryard Place 1892 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 74 Spring Lane from Washington Street 1976

Alleys of Newspaper Row

There are many alley ways that feed onto Washington Street, but three of them are a bit more colorful than the others. Williams Court became known as Pi Alley, tradition tells us, because lazy printshop help used to dump their trays of used type out the windows to avoid having to sort them back into the type trays. It was interesting (Fig.72) because it connected City Hall with Newspaper Row and it was very heavily used. It became a popular lunch spot during the heyday of Newspaper Row and remained active into the twentieth century. The man in the doorway on the right certainly emphasizes the sinister quality of this photograph.

The etching of Harvard Place (Fig. 73) is the only non-photograph included in this report. It very powerfully illustrates the limitations of the camera and the photographic medium. A camera could not possibly have recorded this place with the level of clarity that is present here. The artist may have changed the scene a bit to make it please him but photographs lie too. This document can be trusted as much as any photograph, it alone does not prove anything.

My photograph was made in Spring Lane, the site of Boston's first fresh water spring. (Fig. 74) The Hole in The Wall sandwich shop does a brisk lunchtime business and it preserves a kind of tight little place that Pi Alley once was. The exposure time was about fifteen seconds and the ghost image is a man buying a sandwich. This

photograph is not nearly as successful as I hoped it would be. It does, however, faithfully record the extreme vertical character of the place and a bit of the details of the walls.



Fig. 75 Corner of Court St. n.d. (Boston Athenaeum)



Fig. 76 (B.P.L.)



Fig. 77 The Corner of State Street and Washington Street 1976



Fig. 78 Washington Mall and the end of Washington Street 1976

The End of Washington Street

Before the massive urban renewal of Government Center in the 1960's, Washington Street continued one more block into Adams Square and was extended on to North Station. Today, however, this is the end of the street. Washington Mall continues a pedestrian path into Government Center and the new City Hall. Automobile traffic turns left onto Court Street and around the whole new pedestrian only area of the city. No judgements will be made in this study about the wisdom of severing Boston's traditional Main Street. That would involve a detailed study of this whole district before and after the massive changes. My study ends at the intersection of Court, State and Washington Streets.

A view from the 1890's shows the completed Ames Building and its site (Fig.75). Even though it is of a totally different scale from the rest of the buildings on the block, it fits in well with them. This building is detailed to match its huge size and the result is much different from the out of scale enlargement that was discussed in Fig. 40. The Sears building on the left has been expanded upward as a sort of answer to the Ames Building. The result is a very clumsy one by comparison.

The nation's centennial was being celebrated and the Old State House was quite properly decorated (Fig.76) for the occasion. The pre-addition Sears Building is visible in the right rear of this photograph. The Old State house was a third

historical building on the street that was saved from demolition and preserved. In 1876, several businesses occupied the building and a mansard had been added to expand the space on the third floor. The building gradually fell into disrepair and then was restored in the late 1940's. This restoration is just now being completed as the Bostonian Society moves back into their quarters on the second floor after an extensive renovation. A subway station now occupies the ground floor of the building and its exterior appearance is very similar to what it was when it was originally built.

The two photographs of this corner (Figs.77 and 78) give a last view up Newspaper Row and an idea of what the end of the street is like. The old State House and the Ames Building provide a very elegant setting at this end of the street. The open space here provides a relief from the dark narrow part of Court Street that leads off to the right. The effect would be even more dramatic if the left side of Washington Street wasn't a parking lot.

FOOTNOTES

1. Boston Illustrated, Boston, 1878 p.69
2. Boston Illustrated, Boston, 1878 p.80
3. History of the Macullar, Parker Co., Boston, 1913 (unnumbered pages)
4. Boston Illustrated, Boston, 1878 p.84
5. The Book of Boston, Philadelphia, 1920 p.124

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NOTES ON THE PHOTOGRAPHS

My photographs were made with a Cambo 4x5 view camera. Ilford FP4 (ASA 125) film was used almost exclusively. The prints were made on Kodak Polycontrast RC enlarging paper using filters both for contrast control and for reducing the speed of the paper.

All of the copy photographs were made with a Mamiya $2\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ camera using Ilford FP4 or Kodak Panatomic-X Professional film. The fine-grained Panatomic-X was far superior in this application. A variety of papers and several toners were used to give the effect of the multitude of tonalities found in the original prints.