

MEETING MINUTES
MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

April 09, 2025

The Commission meeting was held remotely in a Zoom meeting starting at 1:00 PM

Chairman Rosenberry called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm. On behalf of Secretary Galvin, he welcomed the Commissioners. Chairman Rosenberry next addressed the visitors, thanking them for attending. For those individuals who may not have attended commission meetings in the past, Chairman Rosenberry explained the structure of the meeting and when in the process the visitors could address the commission. Chairman Rosenberry then took attendance to determine that a quorum was met.

The Chairman turned to the first item on the agenda, the approval of the **March 12, 2025 meeting minutes**. He called for a MOTION TO ACCEPT the minutes. A MOTION was made by Commissioner DeWitt and SECONDED by Commissioner M. Wilson. Hearing no questions or comments from the commission, the Chairman called the motion. The motion CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Chairman Rosenberry then turned to the next item on the agenda, the Local Historic District Preliminary Study Reports. The chairman first called for any recusals. Hearing none, he turned the meeting over to the Director of the Preservation Planning Division, Michael Steinitz.

Mr. Steinitz presented the study reports with a PowerPoint presentation. A copy of the presentation is on file with these minutes.

Old North Church and Campus, Boston

Mr. Steinitz presented the **Old North Church and Campus in Boston**. The City of Boston is proposing to landmark the Old North Church and Campus. The petition for this landmark was initiated in 2019 by petition of 10 registered voters led by Rev. Stephen T. Ayers, then Vicar at Old North Church and Executive Director of the Old North Foundation (now retired). The Boston Landmarks Commission accepted the petition for further study on May 14, 2021.

Located in Boston's North End neighborhood, with a general address of 193 Salem Street, the proposed landmark includes five buildings and several garden areas of the Old North Church complex occupying 13 assessors' parcels at 191-195 Salem Street, 21 Unity Street, Salem Court and Unity Court. All the parcels are owned by the Corporation of Christ Church in the City of Boston. The complex was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1961, and in 1966 it was both designated a Massachusetts Historic Landmark and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It is included in the Boston National Historical Park established in 1974.

With the exception of the Copps Hill Burial Ground to the northwest, there are no other designated properties in the immediate vicinity of the Old North Church complex. There is

presently no North End neighborhood National Register District, nor is there a protective North End landmark district. In 1983 the Boston City Council did refer a proposal to create a North End Historic District under Mass. General Laws Chapter 40C to the Boston Landmarks Commission for review. A study committee was formed in 1984, and a draft Study Report was prepared in 1986 and revised in 1987. The proposed boundaries of the North End Historic District if ever adopted, would include the Old North Church and Campus. Although not designated, historic properties on streets west and south of the Old North Church are well documented on MHC Area inventory forms prepared for the Boston Landmarks Commission in survey projects undertaken in the mid-1980s and again during 2014-2016.

Architecturally, the neighborhood around the Old North Church and Campus is densely built up with predominantly late 19th to early 20th century, 4 to 5 story brick apartment blocks with street level commercial space, particularly north and south along Salem Street. To the west Hull Street is typical of the narrow streets, and solid continuous brick street walls that characterize the neighborhood. The exception is Paul Revere Mall to the east, created in the 1930s to open up a vista between Old North and St. Stephen's Church on Hanover Street.

Construction on Christ Church took place from 1723 to 1740. As completed, the building was inspired by the forms of Christopher Wren's London churches, and Christ Church was the first building in the English colonies to assume the fully developed character of the Wren or Georgian type church, with a basilican plan with a front bell tower topped by a lofty spire, with the main entrance through the tower at one end of an oblong auditorium, longitudinal aisles separating box pews, and pulpit, communion table and cancel at the opposite end.

Its brick walls, laid in English bond, are pierced by two tiers of round arched windows. The projecting square tower has ox-eye windows with radiating muntins on the first and third stories of its north and south faces. The present spire is the third or fourth iteration, the first having been blown down in the Great Gale of 1804 and replaced by one generally attributed to Charles Bulfinch, which was taken down and partially rebuilt in 1848. This came down in Hurricane Carol in 1954 and was replaced by the current spire, meant to be a copy of the original.

The Campus includes two mid-19th century brick row houses. The well preserved **Church House** (on the right) at 193 Salem Street, built 1849-50, has a 3-1/2 story main block with a 2 story rear ell. Windows and main entry are capped by simple stone lintels and the entry has rectangular side lights and transom. It has served various purposes over time, including clergy housing, short-term housing for sailors, students and other visitors. Abutting it is the **Parish Office** at 195 Salem Street, also thought to be built in the 1840s based on its architectural features. Windows again are capped by stone lintels, and the main entry is a double-leafed arched paneled door. The cornice has decorative dentils, and there are single dormers on the front and rear facing roof slopes. The building was in residential use until the church purchased it in 1998 for use as offices, classrooms, a parish hall and choir room.

The **Ebenezer Clough House** at 21 Unity Street was built between 1711 and 1715 as a two-story brick dwelling with a gambrel roof, and enlarged to three stories in the early 19th century. First and second story windows have splayed brick jack arch windows with projecting keystones on

the first story. It is one of the few surviving early 18th century houses in Boston, notable for its decorative brick work. Ebenezer Clough was a speculative builder and mason who worked on the construction of Christ Church. The building was occupied as a tenement until the church acquired it in 1958. More than 40,000 artifacts spanning 300 years were recovered during archaeological investigations here in 2016.

The Romanesque style **St Francis of Assisi Chapel**, located just south of the church, was completed in 1918 to designs of architect R. Clipston Sturgis. The projecting front pavilion has an open pediment above an ox-eye window. At the entry marble columns with Corinthian capitals stand atop carved stone lions. Atop the capitals are religious figures carved in stone niches that meet the triangular pediment above the recessed arched entrance. The side elevations of the chapel contain semicircular arched windows that echo those on Old North. The chapel was used by a small population of North End Italian Protestants, and was operated by the Episcopal City Mission. Old North Church formally acquired the building in 1955 for use as a gift shop and small museum.

The **terraces, walkways and gardens** of the campus mostly date to the 1930s. The brick paving, walls and commemorative markers relate to the Colonial Revival design of the adjacent Paul Revere Mall, and are significant as work of landscape architects Arthur Shurcliff and his son Sidney Shurcliff.

Christ Church was founded in 1723 as the second Church of England congregation in Boston. Subscribers to the new church included planters in Antigua and Barbados, and Francis Nicholson, governor of South Carolina and former lieutenant governor of the Dominion of New England. Additional funds were raised by selling pews to wealthy merchants. A print of St. James Church, Westminster, built 1687-1689 and designed by Christopher Wren, may have been among the sources for the design. The construction of this building of an enormous scale for 18th century colonial America was a great undertaking, requiring great quantities of timber from Maine and bricks from Medford. Notable interior features included a three-tiered pulpit, Boston's second organ, and a crypt for interring burials under the church, the first in Boston. A multi-stage steeple, with a bell turret, balustrades, obelisks, urns, compass windows, quoins, pilasters, blinds, keystones, and a slender tapering spire surmounted by a weathervane, was constructed in 1740. At 191 feet, it was the tallest spire in British North America. It was so well known that it attracted a professional acrobat, who climbed it in 1756 and flew off it on ropes. In 1745 the church added a peal of eight monumental bells. Cast in England and weighing over 5000 pounds, they were the first such ringing peal of bells in the British American colonies and a further symbol of the exceptional wealth and status of this Anglican congregation in Puritan Boston. As the first fully realized expression of a colonial American church modelled on the London churches of Christopher Wren, Christ Church exerted a great influence on the subsequent ecclesiastic architecture in New England.

During the 18th century Black and Indigenous people often attended services here, and were frequently baptized and admitted as members, even as seating at services remained segregated well into the 19th century. Recent research has begun to uncover stories about specific individual

Black and Indigenous congregants, as discussed in the Study Report, as well as the ties that the church from its origins had to slavery and the slave trade.

In the period of British occupation of Boston leading up to the revolution, both Patriots and Tories were members of the Old North parish, but it was the patriot sexton, Robert Newman and a vestryman, John Pulling, Jr. who displayed lanterns in the upper levels of the steeple on the night of April 18, 1775, to alert the Committee of Safety in Charlestown to dispatch riders to notify the surrounding towns that British troops were on their way to Lexington and Concord, and thus giving Old North Church its legendary place in American History.

Even before it was immortalized in Longfellow's 1861 poem, Paul Revere's Ride, the church had attracted public interest as a historic landmark associated with the War for Independence. This led by the early 20th century to an ambitious restoration of the interior of the church, completed in 1912, including the reconstruction of its box pews, to recreate its colonial-era appearance. Rehabilitation efforts also extended to the immediate setting of the church, through the removal of adjacent wooden tenements and brick apartment buildings, culminating in the completion in 1934 of the Paul Revere Mall, opening up a vista to Hanover Street to the east, and establishing the brick courtyards, gardens and terraces that characterize the Old North Church Campus today. The property is jointly stewarded by the non-profit Old North Illuminated and the Christ Church congregation, which continues to hold weekly services, while as a site on the Freedom Trail, Old North receives about a half million visitors every year.

Recommendations of the Boston Landmarks Commission Staff:

Because of its significance for its association with important events and persons associated with the opening of the American Revolution, as the oldest surviving house of worship in Boston, as a notable and influential example of English Baroque ecclesiastical architecture in colonial-era Massachusetts, for its role in the religious history of colonial New England, as one of three surviving church buildings in Boston with extensive connections to enslaved and free Black people during the 18th century, and for its early and prominent role in heritage tourism and heritage conservation, BLC staff recommends that the Old North Church and Campus be designated as a Boston Landmark.

Recommendations of the Massachusetts Historical Commission Staff:

MHC staff recommends acknowledging receipt of the Landmark Study Report for the Old North Church and Campus and providing the following advisory recommendations and comments:

The Massachusetts Historical Commission concurs with the recommendations of the Boston Landmarks Commission staff.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission encourages the Boston Landmarks Commission to continue to pursue the protection of additional significant historic and architectural properties in the North End neighborhood through a local historic district or districts.

Chairman Rosenberry then called for a MOTION TO ACCEPT the MHC staff recommendations on the Landmark Study Report for the **Old North Church and Campus in Boston.** A

MOTION was made by Commissioner McDowell and SECONDED by Commissioner DeWitt. The Chair called for questions or comments from the commission. The Chair recognized Commissioner DeWitt who said he has two comments, first he was surprised not to see the famous photograph of the steeple blowing over during hurricane Carroll, then the other looking at the aerial view, and nearby recreation center that was almost lost to a proposal to modernize, that it really is astonishing that the North End doesn't have historic district preservation at this point. Hearing no other questions or comments from the commission, the Chairman called for questions or comments from the public. Hearing none, he moved the motion. The motion CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

This concluded the voting. Chairman Rosenberry then turned to the next item on the agenda, the **Executive Director's Report**. He then recognized Brona Simon, Executive Director.

Ms. Simon began by giving an update on the MHC's federal funding for the current, FY2025 federal fiscal year, which runs until September 30, 2025, and which had been under a continuing resolution. The allocations from the Historic Preservation Fund for SHPOs was approved by Congress and the President at the same amount - level funding - as FY24, which is very good news, because there is still a lot of examination and scrutiny of federal programs by the current Administration. She had no other updates on the status of federal historic preservation programs. The National Register staff appears to continue to be in full force, given the number of nominations approved by the Commission over the past several meetings that have been listed in the National Register.

She then announced that the next Commission meeting will take place on June 11th as there is no meeting in May. The June 11th meeting will include the MPPF Round 31 selection of grant awards that will be voted on at the meeting. It will also include a number of National Register nominations, for which a voting quorum will also be needed. Through the Chair, she indicated that Commissioner volunteers will be needed to serve on the MPPF subcommittee meeting in the morning of June 11th before the full Commission meeting, to review staff recommendations for the awards. The subcommittee will report its recommendations to the full Commission meeting in the afternoon for votes on the recommended awards. The June 11th subcommittee and full Commission meetings will be virtual meetings. Commissioners DeWitt, McDowell and Wheeler volunteered to serve on the MPPF subcommittee. Ms. Simon thanked the Commissioners for volunteering, and wished all the Commissioners a happy Preservation Month in May.

That concluded the Executive Director's report.

The Chair then called for any new business. Hearing none, the Chairman then informed the Commissioners on the resolution of the remote meeting provisions. The legislature passed Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025, which extended the remote meeting authorization, which had been set to sunset on March 31st of this year, but is now extended to June 30, 2027. So now there is a bit more leeway to continue meeting in this fashion. He said it's likely that the Legislature will be revisiting this in a year or so.

The Chair then called for a MOTION to adjourn. A MOTION was made by Commissioner McCurdy and SECONDED by Commissioner Wheeler. The MOTION CARRIED, and the meeting adjourned at 1:29pm.

Commissioners Present

John Rosenberry

Dennis DeWitt

Michael McDowell

Charles Sullivan

James McCurdy

Susan Ceccacci

Patrice Kish

Heather Wilson

Mark Wilson

Ashley Stolba

Anne Pride

Ryan Wheeler

Derek Heidemann

Kellie Carter Jackson

Staff Present

Brona Simon

Michael Steinitz

Ben Haley

Peter Stott

Paul Holtz

Nancy Alexson

Shari Perry-Wallace

Liz King

Robin Fordham

A TRUE COPY ATTEST

Respectfully submitted,

Shirley Brown