

Winthrop Square/the Training Field (circa 1640, with major redevelopment 1872, 1919)

From Boston Landmark Commission's Charlestown Historic Resources Study 1981 (E. W. Gordon, Consultant)*:

Winthrop Square is a square of grass covered, tree shaded urban park crisscrossed by paths, containing a Civil War monument (1872) and a memorial to fallen American soldiers at Bunker (Breed's) Hill consisting of stone/bronze classical tablets. The square is enclosed by an iron fence with substantial Victorian granite gateposts at the entrances.

The historical significance of the Training Field, or Winthrop Square, is not only local to Charlestown. This open space is of great national significance because of its association with the battle of Bunker Hill. On June 17, 1775 much of the fighting between American patriots and British soldiers occurred on or near what is now Winthrop Square. Since being set out circa 1640, this roughly square, grass covered, tree shaded monument-adorned Park has served Charlestown citizens as a farm/pastureland, military drills/parade grounds, schoolyard, platform for political rallies, public ornament, children's playground and peaceful retreat, within a densely built-up urban environment.

Extensively altered over time, from wood fence-enclosed open field to urbane urban park, Winthrop Square's present appearance combines elements of its 1872 and 1919 redevelopment. Much of this open space's charm is dependent on its "frame" of late 18th century-20th century residential buildings. Each segment of this frame reflects a distinct phase of the evolution of Charlestown's a built environment. For example, the clapboard-clad, gambrel and hip-roofed late

Georgian and Federal houses of its Common Street border (between Adams and Park streets) provide a glimpse of a late 18th century/early 19th century residential quarter adjacent to a village green. The segment of Common Street between Park and Winthrop Street presents a vignette of an early 19th century schoolhouse (the Training Field School, built 1827), with Winthrop Square functioning visually as a schoolyard. The Adams Street side, with its elegant expanse of Greek Revival and Italianate masonry facades provides a very effective mid-19th-century backdrop for the very Victorian, Martin Millmore-designed Civil War Monument (1872). The Adams Street streetscape symbolizes Charlestown's mid-19th century transition from a semi-rural town of single-family detached wood frame dwellings to a city with block after block of well-executed masonry row housing. The Winthrop Street border of Winthrop Square underscores the wide range of architectural styles, forms, materials etc. encompassed within Charlestown's borders.

The Training Field is first alluded to in town records in 1648. By that time it was evidently a well-established public place, suggesting that it was set out as early as 1640- 11 years after the first English settlement. Winthrop Square was named in honor of early Charlestown settlement leader/governor John Winthrop. In 1641 the town voted to maintain the upper and west side of the "training place," indicating that this land was already being used for military purposes. Voluntary militia trained here from colonial times until well into the 19th century. The Training Field figured prominently in the parades of Civil War and Spanish-American War troops. Above all, part of the battle of Bunker Hill was fought here on June 17, 1775, resulting in the total destruction of properties of bordering the Training Field (and virtually everywhere else in Charlestown). Prior to 1775 a considerable part of the land around the

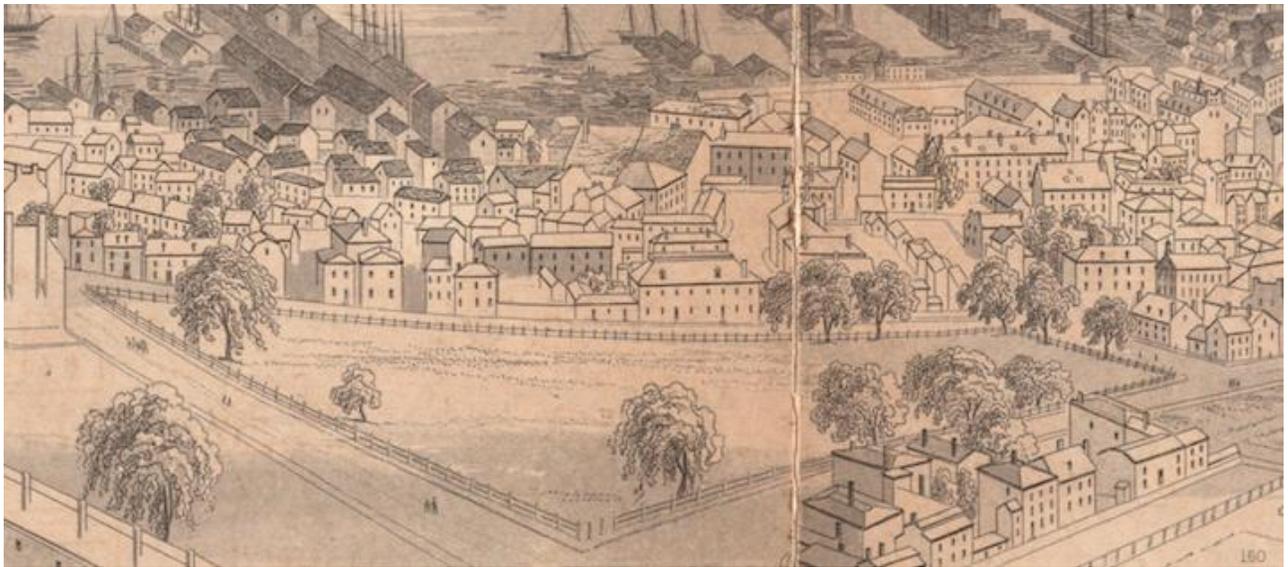
Training Field was used for some sort of farming. On the eve of the revolution, the Training Field was bordered by the "mowing lot" of Isaiah Edes, "Dizer's pasture," and Peter Edes' lands (afterwards the site of an alms house-demolished during the 1820s-now the site of Wallace court). In addition, lots belonging to Richard Devens and Samuel Henley bordered the Training Field.

Evidently the Training Field was never referred to as a "common", although its colonial appearance, with its rough wood fence-enclosed open field probably conveyed something of the image of a New England common. During the 18th and 19th centuries there was an open space in Charlestown referred to as a common. This space was located at Sullivan Square, within the so-called "Neck Village." (This common is sometimes referred to in old records as "the Stinted Common").

In 1827 the Training Field School was erected at the Common/Winthrop Street corner of the Training Field. This building is still extant at 3 Common Street-it was moved to its present site in 1847. In that year Charlestown city fathers deemed this schoolhouse to be "the needless destroyer of the symmetry of the park". The removal of the Training Field Schoolhouse was a harbinger of future changes, which would transform the Training Field from a semi-rural open field to an elegant cast iron fence-enclosed urban park by the 1870s. The wood fence-enclosed open field shown in the 1848 Panoramic View of Bunker Hill "was evidently crisscrossed by paths by 1852 (see the 1852 McIntyre map).

The name Winthrop Square evidently dates to the 1870s but has never fully supplanted the old Training Field appellation. As early as 1836 Training Field Street was renamed Winthrop

Street, but the Training Field name was used to refer to both street and open space until as late as the early 1900s). Until as late as the 1840s, the Training Field was part of an area still on the fringes of the principal residential sections, which were located at Town Hill and along the waterfront.



Mallory Panoramic View, 1848

During the late 18th century/early 19th century fairly extensive house construction occurred along and behind the segment of Common Street between Adams and Park Streets, which was set out in 1868. House construction along Common Street's other segment, and along Winthrop Street, was much more sporadic. It was begun on the Adams Street side of the training field circa the 1830s and intensified during the 1850s. The Adams Street masonry townhouses are slightly less grand contemporaries of the late 1840s/early 1850s mansions bordering nearby Monument Square.

During the mid-1860s the Training Field's existence was briefly threatened by the grand city planning visions of prominent Charlestown citizen George Washington Warren. Warren was a lawyer/jurist, the first mayor of Charlestown,

president of the influential Bunker Hill Monument Association, and resident of 7 Monument Square. He advocated the development of a broad thoroughfare to be called Park Avenue, which would stretch from City Square to Monument Square, providing a dramatic approach to the Bunker Hill Monument, as its major focal point. Warren, evidently enamored of French boulevards of Napoleon III's Paris (not to mention Boston's own Commonwealth Avenue), hoped to introduce "up to date" city planning to Charlestown. He most certainly hoped to fashion Park Avenue in the image of Monument Avenue—a thoroughfare leading to the Bunker Hill Monument from Main Street, set out in 1854/55. Fortunately for the physical and historical integrity of the Training Field, this proposal was never set out. This thoroughfare would have cut a broad swath through this venerable open space.



View of the Proposed Avenue to the Monument



During the early 1870s the Training field acquired a new, more urbane identity with the installation of a handsome granite Civil War monument and the erection of an ornamental cast iron fence around the entire square. Designed by Boston sculptor Martin Millmore (1844-1881), the Soldiers and Sailors Civil War Monument replaced a three tiered cast iron fountain which was removed to the common at Sullivan Square (circa 1871). Millmore was among the first sculptors in the United States to create Civil War memorial sculpture. He is credited with "establishing the prototype of the countless monuments to those who fought and died to preserve the union." Composed of Hallowell, Maine granite, Winthrop Square's Civil War monument consists of a tall cornice-headed plinth with four panels bearing inscriptions. Surmounting the plinth is a low platform which supports three figures: the principal, central (female) figure is 10 feet in height and represents America crowning two male figures representing the Army and Navy (clad in uniforms of the period, all executed in granite).



IN HONOR
OF
THE MEN OF CHARLESTOWN
WHO FOUGHT IN THE WAR OF 1861
FOR THE
PRESERVATION OF THE UNION
AS ERECTED BY THE CITY
A.D. 1872.

Born in Ireland in 1844, Martin Millmore came to Boston with his family in 1851. He studied for four years with Boston sculptor Thomas Ball, creator of the equestrian statue of Washington in Boston's public garden. Millmore's early acclaim was tied to his three colossal figures entitled "Ceres," "Flora" and "Pomona," commissioned by Horticultural Hall of Boston. Following the success of Horticultural Hall and the departure of Thomas Ball for an extended visit to Italy (1863) Millmore became Boston's leading sculptor. Important portrait commissions of the 1860s included Charles Sumner, George Ticknor, Wendell Phillips, Daniel Webster and Abraham Lincoln. For most of his career Millmore worked in partnership with his brother Joseph Milmore. Martin conceived the designs and modeled them in plaster while Joseph translated them into stone. Martin Millmore's reputation, however is inextricably bound to his Civil War monuments. His Civil War Memorial sculptures at Forest Hills Cemetery, Roxbury (1865) and Claremont New Hampshire (1869) were among the first of their type in the US. Other important examples of his work include the Civil War sphinx monument at Mount Auburn Cemetery, the memorial column on Boston Common (1870) and the statue of Revolutionary war hero John Glover at Marblehead Massachusetts (1875). Martin Millmore is remembered for his "good honest construction, adequate modeling and above all, a sense of the monumental in line and mass." The American sculptor Daniel Chester French said of Millmore that he was "a picturesque figure, somewhat of the Edwin Booth type, with long dark hair and large dark eyes. He affected the artistic wearing of a broad brimmed soft black hat and a cloak. His appearance was striking and he knew it."

Late 19th century additions to Winthrop Square included the two large pedimented stone and bronze plaques at the

Adams/Winthrop Street entrance. Installed in 1889 and displaying Classical Revival characteristics (e.g. broad pediments) these plaques memorialize American soldiers killed June 17, 1775 at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

Winthrop Square's present appearance dates largely to 1919. In that year the square's late 19th century path configuration was considerably altered, permanent seats with concrete backs were installed, new iron fences were erected and the drinking fountain was transferred from outside the Common/Park Street entrance to directly in front of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. The improvements in 1919 included the re-sodding of the entire grounds and the cleaning and repointing of the soldiers and sailors Monument. The most major change was the reduction of the square's five entrances to only three (see "Charlestown enterprise" illustration). The declared purpose of the changes wrought by the city parks and recreation department was "to make the Training Field a recreation center for adults and not a playground for children." The total appropriation for Winthrop Square's post World War I improvements was \$16,000.

Today the Training Field/Winthrop Square, steeped in three centuries of the American experience, both peaceful and turbulent, ranks among the more memorable urban open spaces in America. Much of the unique character of this "outdoor room" is inextricably bound to the intimate human scale of a relatively small open space within a densely settled urban environment, with its "frame" of modestly scaled wood frame and masonry residences dating from the late 18th to the early 20th century. The looming monumental form of the nearby Egyptian Revival obelisk memorializing the battle of Bunker Hill adds further to the allure of the old Training Field.

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*Digitized and edited, without change in content, from the scanned record in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, with the addition of current photographs. In the case of houses that have been altered since the survey, these photographs may not entirely correspond to the architectural description. If earlier photographs of suitable quality are available, these have been included.

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