



ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

Charlestown Preservation Society

Email: info@CharlestownPreservation.org

Website: www.CharlestownPreservation.org

P.O. Box 290218

Charlestown, MA 02129

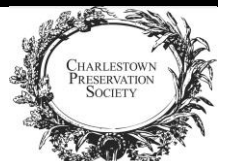


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TO OUR MEMBERSHIP

Historic preservation is more than just saving old buildings from the bulldozer. *Histories* and *cultural values* can be shared or silenced depending upon the preservation of places, monuments and landscapes. These places and monuments are the vessels that we use to connect with our past. More people visit historic places than read books on history. Preservation is an important tool that we use to both connect with and learn from our past, and also maintain a unique sense of place. The beauty of Historic Boston is that it is entirely different than Historic New York City, or Washington D.C. and Historic Charlestown is entirely unique from Historic Boston or the South End. Why is that? *Our neighborhood has a unique history that is different from other Boston neighborhoods, and that has contributed to our diversity in demographics and socio-economic make-up.*

Let's take a step back to learn from the history of the preservation movement in the United States as well as internationally so that we can hold onto best practices and also define what is important to us in today's context to preserve for generations to come.

Preservation in the United States has historically been focused primarily on the built environment – more specifically its architecture and “historic significance.” The mainstream American preservation movement remains focused on architecture – on saving what advocates consider beautiful and preventing the construction of what they consider “ugly.”

In the effort of confronting difficult histories and subjects, the foundation of the historic preservation movement has always been set by the cultural values of the day. In the late 1800's / early 1900's, unfortunately that was rooted in an exclusionary anti-immigrant sentiment which produced genealogical and historical societies that focused on banding together to preserve and promote the histories that glorified ancestral pedigrees that immigrants could not relate to.

In the middle of the 20th century, in response to the Civil Rights movement, Preservation shifted towards inclusivity and with new groups of preservationists seeking to save and interpret places important to people who had long been marginalized in American history including spaces related to the experiences of African Americans, Native Americans, women, and immigrants—groups long excluded from the more traditional histories captured by preservationists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Urban renewal also catalyzed preservation in the US in the 1960's and 1970's and the Charlestown Preservation Society splintered from the Charlestown Historical Society in 1967 in order to focus on preserving the town's buildings. The neighborhood was targeted as a “slum” having suffered greatly from disinvestment and “redlining” policies of the 1930's. The entirety of

Charlestown was rated “hazardous” due to the “infiltrations of Canadians”¹ and encroaching industry, and this rating prevented people from obtaining mortgages. Redlining was part of a systemic racist policy that greatly affected investment in neighborhoods, causing them to decline into concentrated poverty. Charlestown beat some of the odds – “a study released in 2018 found that 74 percent of neighborhoods that HOLC graded as high-risk or “hazardous” are low-to-moderate income neighborhoods today, while 64 percent of the neighborhoods graded “hazardous” are minority neighborhoods today.”² Another study, published in 2017, found that areas deemed high-risk by HOLC maps saw an increase in racial segregation over the next 30–35 years, as well as a long-run decline in home ownership, house values, and credit scores.³ The redlining and Hazardous designation for Charlestown directly contributed to the decline of the neighborhood, and the racial and socio-economic divide that persists today.

A renewed preservation movement of the 1960’s came in reaction to decades of massive urban renewal efforts and a wholesale dismissal of the past. Its ideology arose, as the New Yorker architecture critic Paul Goldberger has written, “as much out of fear of what would be built as out of love for what people were trying to preserve.” The preservation world built by our ancestors is deeply rooted in American’s cultural life and is supported by their laws and regulations. These cultural roots have changed over time, and therefore so should the preservation movement that it informs.

Preservation has too often focused on the appearance of new windows, the addition of solar panels and the color of a front door. We have too readily worked to protect the homes of wealthy people while allowing homes and neighborhoods of the working classes to be demolished, wiping away the layers of history that make places meaningful. Preservation has been concerned primarily with places of celebratory history, only recently has there been a push to preserve “difficult places” and their stories.

With that said, the Charlestown Preservation Society has changed over the last 50+ years to reflect what is important to the community. We are currently experiencing a cultural shift that begs for systemic change.

¹ Mapping Inequality, Redlining in New Deal America. University of Richmond digital Scholarship Lab, Accessed June 29, 2020. <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/42.314/-71.168&city=boston-ma&area=D2&adview=full>

² Mitchell, Bruce. “HOLC redlining maps: The persistent structure of segregation and economic inequality” National Community Reinvestment Coalition. Accessed Jul 1, 2020 <https://ncrc.org/holc/>

³ Aaronson, Daniel. “The Effects of the 1930s HOLC “Redlining Maps”. FRB of Chicago Working Paper No. WP-2017-12.

As an all-volunteer organization we seek to be inclusive of every resident in our neighborhood, and have actively worked within the 02129 Neighbor Alliance to bring all residents and neighborhood groups into the mix, making sure that everyone is included in the planning process for Charlestown. In the process, I have personally benefited from new friendships and relationships with groups I may never have had the opportunity to cross paths with, and in return it has given me the opportunity to engage in conversations about Preservation and the legal and activist tools that we have to help solve some of the social and cultural issues that our neighborhood faces.

As we wrap up and summarize our preservation activities of the past year, we look to the future of preservation in Charlestown and are excited about our partnerships with neighborhood groups and joint programming that will dig deep into the 20th Century history of the neighborhood to learn from our history and shed light on how we got to the neighborhood we know and love today. That knowledge will guide the planning for the future of our neighborhood, define what we value, and help us to have the difficult conversations that will help our neighborhood heal and move forward together.

Strategic Highlights

The Charlestown Preservation Society is a 501c3 not for profit organization founded in 1967 to stop the destruction of the town's most historic buildings. Today, our mission is to preserve Charlestown's historic character by protecting our historic architecture and landscape, advocating for preservation, guiding responsible development and educating people about the unique character of our community.

Educate public about the unique character and history of our community

- Hosted a Historic Burial Ground Walking tour with the Charlestown Historical Society Oct 2019 and will repeat due to overwhelming demand!
- Planned biennial Historic Neighborhood House Tour (*Postponed to 2022*)
- Planned book talk with authors of 'Heroic: Concrete Architecture and the New Boston' in partnership with Friends of the BPL Charlestown Branch library (*Postponed to later date*)
- Planned book talk with Karilyn Crockett, author of 'People Before Highways: Boston Activists, and a New Movement for City Making' in partnership with Charlestown Historical Society. (*Postponed to later date.*) Sidenote, Crockett was recently appointed the position of Chief of Equity in Mayor Walsh's Cabinet.
- Added 17 Historic House Markers, and their accompanying building history to inventory.

Advocate for Preservation

- Added 2 new members to the Design Review Committee (DRC)
- Supported the Kennedy Center with their successful application for a Community Preservation Act grant of \$400,000 for a historically accurate new slate roof for their historic building!

Guide Responsible Development

- Led the advocacy effort for a comprehensive planning initiative for the Charlestown Neighborhood. Worked closely with State Representative Dan Ryan, Mayor Walsh and Councilor's Wu, Assaibi-George and Edwards. (*Commenced August 2019!*)
- Led the effort to create the 02129 Neighbor Alliance, an alliance of the neighborhood's organizations and resident groups. The mission of the alliance is "to ensure the entire community is involved in the development of Plan Charlestown so that the plan reflects the diversity, desires and needs of all our neighbors".⁴
- DRC reviewed many development projects, provided guidance to homeowners and negotiated significant changes proposed to historic buildings in Charlestown that contribute to the neighborhood's historic significance and charm.
- Worked closely with Councilor Edwards and the owners of a parcel on a proposal to erect an electronic billboard that would have negatively impacted the neighborhood. Successfully negotiated an alternate plan that eliminated the billboard, retained the existing parking use and allowed for appropriate income-generation and aesthetic improvements to the parcel.
- Secured commitments from the BPDA to pause development, planning or disbursement of city or BPDA owned parcels in Charlestown not currently in process until PLAN: Charlestown is complete. This includes the Community College Parking Lots, and Sullivan Square lots.

⁴ 02129 Neighbor Alliance. Accessed Jul 3, 2020 <https://02129neighboralliance.org/>

Financial Highlights

CPS holds a biennial Historic House Tour that serves as our primary funding source for the organization. Our 2020 House Tour was scheduled for September 18th but has been postponed until 2022 due to COVID-19. As such, revenues appear lower on non-tour years. Growth of other revenue sources as well as the addition of new revenue sources are a high priority for the organization through 2022.

Increase in Donations 2018-2019	13.5%
Increase in Secured Grants 2018-2019	60%
Increase in Historic House Marker Funds	97%

Looking Ahead

Educate public about the unique character and history of our community.

- Advertise, publicize and monetize our self-guided ‘Historic Neighborhood Walking Tour’ and work with the Bunker Hill Museum and local businesses to display printed brochures.
- Develop 2 new Self-Guided walking tours.
- Restore Preservation Award Program, adding a new marker award for outstanding preserved homes and new infill buildings.
- Research and documentation project on the history, process, and construction of Preservation Park in Thompson Square
- Host talks in partnership with other community groups about 19th and 20th Century Charlestown History. Topics could include:
 - Native / Indigenous History
 - Black soldier contributions to the battle of Bunker Hill
 - Abolitionists of Charlestown
 - Redlining
 - Urban Renewal
 - Bussing and the desegregation of the development
 - Opioid dependency, and the fight to overcome addiction and overdoses in our neighborhood
 - Hockey Legacy of Charlestown
- Review and research 20 Historic House Marker applications, and installed approved markers
Fall of 2020

- Honor prominent abolitionists such as George Luther Stearns⁵ who helped recruit and arm the 54th and 55th Regiments from Massachusetts, Established schools for African-American children and found jobs for their partens.
- Collaborate with Charlestown Historical Society (CHS) to identify ways to honor the 54th and 55th Massachusetts Infantry Regiments of the Civil War, both the infantry and their commanding officers (many of which were from abolitionist families.⁶
- Survey and inventory memorials, plaques and storyboards and identify locations for additions.

“We seek to be inclusive of every resident in our neighborhood, and have actively worked within the 02129 Neighbor Alliance to bring all residents and neighborhood groups into the mix, making sure that everyone is included in the planning process for Charlestown”.

Advocate for Preservation

- Create grant program for architectural surveys, a requirement for applications for Community Preservation Act grants.
- Research and document the development of Charlestown including individual building history.
- Add Building Inventory Forms to the Massachusetts Historic Commission’s database.
- Work with the City of Boston including the BPDA, Assessing and Inspectional Services Department to update the build dates on buildings in Charlestown.
- Amplify and re-activate the Protect Historic Charlestown committee.

Guide Responsible Development

- Produce the underpinnings of a Preservation Plan to incorporate into PLAN: Charlestown.
- Define and implement protections for our important historically significant buildings as well as our family-centric, walkable neighborhood.

⁵ George Luther Stearns. Wikipedia, Accessed Jul 1, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Luther_Stearns

⁶ Yared, Ephrem. Blackpast “55th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment (1863-1865) Accessed Jul 1, 2020 <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/55th-massachusetts-infantry-regiment-1863-1865/#:~:text=The%2054th%20was%20the%20first,which%20were%20of%20abolitionist%20families.>

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FINANCIAL SUMMARY



2020 Annual Meeting Financial Update

Revenue		2019	2018
Recurring Revenue			
	Membership & House Tours*	302	33,843
	Historic Markers	2,525	1,280
Periodic Revenue			
	Donations	420	370
Special Projects			
	Grants: Encore/Wynn Charlestown Community Fund	5,000	5,000
	Charlestown Firehouse	8,000	
Total Revenue		16,247	40,494
Expenses			
Organizational & Operational Expenses			
	TOTAL ORG & OPER EXPENSES	12,116	11,514
Strategic Projects			
	TOTAL STRATEGIC EXPENSES	13,383	28,103
TOTAL EXPENSES		25,499	39,618
Net Profit/(Loss)		(9,252)	876
Notes:			
* CPS holds a biennial Historic House Tour that serves as our primary funding source for our organization. Our next House Tour was scheduled for Fall 2020, but has been postponed until 2021 due to COVID-19. As such, revenues appear lower on non-tour years			