

CHARLESTOWN REMEMBERS BILL LAMB

Bill Lamb had many hats and wore them all – tan knit, wide brimmed and tennis – as he walked the streets of town. In the four decades I knew Bill I don't think I ever saw him drive. He absorbed the streetscapes, the high-style buildings, the proud worker's cottages and commodious tenements, all in patterns set centuries ago.

Bill saw Charlestown with x-ray vision and knew what was authentic and might be replaceable but still please the buildings' owners. Bill's architectural training enabled his understanding of our dense and varied character.

This translated into his own private practice (my rear el benefited from his redesign) and his role as neighborhood advocate in every circumstance possible.

Little-known is his cheerleading for the tiny single-family dwellings that have housed Charlestown families since the mid-1800's along new streets laid out on pastureland.

Bill and Carol were a team of can-do Charlestown residents. They lent their talents and voices to make Charlestown better for the coming centuries.

~ Judith McDonough is the former executive director of the Boston Landmarks Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission.



Preservation Park pre-construction with Bill Lamb, Jeffrey Schiff (artist) and Professor Paul Tucker

Charlestown has lost an important advocate and neighbor with the passing of Bill Lamb. His down-to-earth manner and willingness to find solutions to difficult design problems were critical in bringing improved projects to fruition.

I first saw Bill's calm resolve during the Big Dig when he participated in the "Scheme Z" Charles River Crossing debate. It was named Scheme Z because it was the 26th proposal by highway planners and the 26th letter of the alphabet, and it brought on the ire of residents and businesses alike.

It was also called the "Spaghetti Transit Solution" because of the negative impacts on Charlestown of the many ramps, huge structures, barriers, noise and pollution. Instead Bill saw the opportunity to create a bridge that allowed the connection of the Charles River Parks to Boston Harbor and a smaller, more elegant series of ramps and barriers.

To say that Bill had vision and the long view is an understatement. He sat through endless meetings with highway designers, city planners, and business and community leaders. And his persistence, thoughtful suggestions and advocacy resulted in a better solution. New parks were created as well as the Leonard Zakim Bunker Hill Bridge, an icon of 21st century Boston and a source of pride to Charlestown.

Bill spent endless volunteer hours working for the betterment of his community while establishing his own successful architectural practice. I can personally attest to his handling of difficult clients: he redesigned my kitchen with a wonderful end result, helping me to see the potential instead of the limitations of a difficult space.

Bill and his wife Carol are part of the fabric of Charlestown. Their work made Charlestown a more attractive and livable neighborhood. Yet I am sure Bill would tell us all "There is so much more to do."

~ Antonia Pollak is the former Director of the Boston Preservation Alliance and the City of Boston Environment Department, and former Commissioner of the Boston Parks and Recreation Department.

On hearing of Bill's tragic loss, my thoughts went to his wife Carol and his family. Then I thought of Charlestown and its loss, for Bill was totally dedicated to our community.

Let me tell you one story. It was a cold winter day thirty years ago when my partner Dan Kovacevic and I received an urgent call from Bill. He had noticed a problem in the drawings for the City Square tunnel then under construction: one of the tunnel's exhaust towers was to be built right on the corner of City Square, obstructing the view of cars turning off the square.

We made our way through the cold and slush to the project engineers' office and worked for hours to reposition the tower. I'm not sure if this saved lives. But I do know that it stopped accidents.

Bill was a thoughtful leader who achieved positive changes for Charlestown. He was also a true gentleman, and he always respected what I said. That was not always the case for a woman in the 1970's.

Bill's gift to Charlestown will be seen throughout our community for many generations. He was a true talent and a gift to Charlestown.

~ Annette Tecce is a member of the Design Review Committee and a former Governor of the Friends of City Square Park and member of the North Area Task Force, and former President CPS.

"I knew Bill personally, and I also am very grateful for his important architectural and civic contributions to Charlestown. We in the neighborhood will miss him enormously."

*~ Maura Healey,
Massachusetts Attorney General*

Bill Lamb was a home creator. He renovated our 1860s Greek Revival home, and his sensitivity to the history of the house was reflected everywhere.

He created a sun-filled kitchen that opened onto the back garden, added working fireplaces, designed a beautiful library for our many books, and expanded the bathrooms. At the same time he made sure we kept the original doors, woodwork, marble surrounds and mantels. He got the broken dumb waiter to function. And he educated us on architectural history, sometimes pushing us in his ever-gentle way.

In the end he created a lovely home that made us feel we were going back through history. Our children could roller blade from the back garden through the kitchen and play intense ice hockey games in that same garden in winter while we were warm inside, watching them through the wall of windows.

We recently left this house after 35 years. But for us and our children it will always be home.

~ Jane Philippi is the former president of the Charlestown Preservation Society.



City Square Park Committee celebrating opening Bill Lamb, Tom Slaman, Annette Tecce and Ken Stone

"The way I remember Bill was his calm personality when facing individuals on the other side of the debate. He was extremely polite. Second, Bill knew how the city worked and often knew the history behind a decision and the back story. He also knew when to compromise on one issue to improve our position on another issue."

~ H. David Hennessey, Charlestown resident and CPS Board Member