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Roslindale Village Walk

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Exploring Roslindale Village

Hills and dales are the setting for the Victorian residential neighborhoods and the commerce comprising Roslindale Village. Once hilly farmland traced by rural roadways, Roslindale is now in the midst of the urban area. Generous green spaces, hills and narrow streets keep traffic from overwhelming most village thoroughfares, allowing quiet enclaves for daily life.

Roslindale was largely a rural area when annexed to Boston in 1874. The major thoroughfare was the Post Road (now Centre Street) between Boston and Dedham. Washington St. was laid out in 1804 as the Dedham Turnpike, with tolls paid along the way. Taft's Tavern stood on the turnpike at what became Roslindale Sq.

The Boston and Providence Railroad spurred Roslindale's development when the railroad branched toward Needham from Forest Hills in 1848. The station gave the area its first name: South Street Crossing. When the first postal district was established, the community became Roslindale, named by a local landowner for the town of Roslyn in Scotland.

Some say that a railroad disaster brought fame and sightseers to Roslindale. In 1887 the Bussey Bridge collapsed onto South St. north of Roslindale Center, under the great weight of a commuter train. The media headlined the event, and sightseers thronged, introducing them to Roslindale's country-like atmosphere.

To serve a growing population, trolleys reached Roslindale in 1896, traveling down Washington Street through Roslindale Center toward West Roxbury, followed by the Boston Elevated, extended to Forest Hills in 1909. Buses are now the principal access between Forest Hills and Roslindale Square. Commuter rail service to Boston, after a lapse, was restored in 1987.

Roslindale Village retains aspects of a small town and a relaxed lifestyle. In its compact, lively town center, retail outlets are mostly locally owned. It is a middle-of-the-road community—neither rich nor poor. Many ethnic communities have immigrated and call it home. It is diverse in housing types, where “doctors’ houses” mix with less grand structures. Most retain a lived-in look. It is a comfortable place.

The walk

This tour focuses on interesting buildings and historical crosscurrents and the present richly varied cultural heritage. It begins and ends at Roslindale Square.

1 Roslindale Square - Officially Irving Adams Square, named in honor of the first Massachusetts soldier to die in WWI, the square, formed by Poplar, South and Washington Streets, was lined with stores until it was cleared as a memorial park in 1919. Public buildings are concentrated along the south side of the square, where a view from Washington Street and Cummins Highway reveals a charming civic center.

2 Library - The Roslindale Branch Library is a low, domed building of the 1960s, with curved exterior walls following the street line, steel and glass window walls with a band of decorative tiles at the cornice line.

3 Municipal Building - A prominent local landmark, the Roslindale Municipal Building at the corner of Washington Street and Cummins Highway provides a central location for access to state and city services. The building, in Classical Revival style, was constructed in 1916. Across Cummins Highway is the Boston Elevated Railway power substation built in 1911.

4 Roslindale Congregational Church - An example of the Romanesque architecture popularized by H.H. Richardson. Designed by Boston architect James Murray and built in a cruciform plan, it has projecting bays, dormers, entrance porticos, and a high clocktower. Smooth shingles emphasize the curved walls around grouped windows.

5 Roslindale Baptist Church - The Roslindale Baptist Church dates from the 1880s. The high tower and exterior, with shingles and exposed framing, combine identifiable details of the Stick and Shingle styles.

6 Roslindale Methodist Church - The Methodist church is a newer building in the Georgian style.

7 Washington Irving School - This school, built in 1936 in a Classical Revival style, is distinguished by 3 entrance bays, each with rounded arches, and by the balustrade at the horizontal parapet topping the wall.

8 Johnswood Stairway - A narrow stairway leads over an abrupt hill next to Cummins Highway. Hill residents can walk directly to shopping or transit.

9 Sacred Heart Church - This prominent landmark can be seen from many parts of Roslindale. Catholics in Roslindale used a tent until the yellow-brick Victorian Gothic church was completed in 1895. The original tower was taken down in 1950 and replaced with a metallic tower. Near the church parish house is a stone grotto lined with flowers, holding a replica of Michelangelo's famed Pieta statue.

10 Brown Avenue - Here are homes in Folk styles, where modest details in the gables recall more lavish Victorian designs. Nearby homes are constructed in the Stick style, with exposed, decorative external timbers.

11 Oldest House - Hidden behind its neighbors, a pre-Revolution house at 266 Poplar Street dates to 1725. Originally a half-cape, the house was extended to the right of the entry in 1775. Windows in the earlier section were apparently enlarged at that time. The house was renovated in both the 19th c. and 20th c. with new windows and sidelights around the main entrance.

12 Eddy House - A stately home, set on a hill above Poplar Street, was once a residence of Mary Baker Eddy.

13 Roslindale High School - The former high school, built in 1926, was abandoned as a school and renovated for residential units in the 1980s. Stemming from the Classical Revival style then popular, large Corinthian columns loom at the entrance and brick pilasters outline the bays between windows. It is said there is a stone panel with the city insignia at the cornice line.

14 Florence Street - A row of Colonial Revival houses, built around the 1900s, are painted in bright colors and reflect eclectic designs with some Craftsman-style elements such as ornamental brackets at the cornice line.

15 Parkway Building - The 1928 Parkway Building represents the Art Deco style in a commercial building. Deco style elements include vertical spandrels that are capped with zigurat embattlements.

16 Corinth Street - A grouping of early 20th c. small shops in buildings lines this street, laid out in the 1880s, following the successful earlier commercial development on Poplar and South Streets. Recently, nearby Birch Street became a street of small boutiques.

17 The Roslindale Commuter Rail Station - Roslindale

station initially crossed South Street at grade, but was reconstructed with a narrow pedestrian underpass connecting the two portions of South Street.

18 The School of Modern Languages - The former Church of Our Savior resembles a 15th c. English country church, but with Modern Gothic touches in keeping a widespread church movement of the early 20th c.

19 Fairview Avenue - A steep street with a variety of handsome homes climbs toward the Arboretum.

20 Peter's Hill at the Arnold Arboretum - The large estate of Benjamin Bussey was bequeathed to Harvard University in 1842. In 1872 a bequest from James Arnold led to a “professorship of tree culture” and became the Arnold Arboretum. The heavily landscaped area is surmounted by an overlook from Peter's Hill, with a gorgeous view of Boston. Adjacent to the Arboretum is the site of the first meetinghouse on Walter Street, built in 1711; only the old burying ground remains at the site.

21 South Street - A pleasant collection of homes lines South Street. Midblock is the former Unitarian church, built in a combination of Arts & Crafts and Shingle styles. Next door is the former parish house, bearing elements of the Tudor style in its half-timbered façade.

22 Longfellow School - Built in 1897, Longfellow School was renovated for residences in the 1990's. The massive structure bears elements of a manor house with Renaissance & Classical Revival features at entries and windows, and steep pitched roofs with pointed dormers.

23 Fallon Field - This large park, baseball field, tennis court, and hockey arena, honors WWI hero J.T. Fallon.

24 Doctors' Row - On South St., just beyond the park, is a row of Colonial Revival and Craftsman style homes built between 1895 and 1906. These prominent buildings were built as prestigious homes for physicians.

25 Russian Orthodox Church of the Epiphany. This onion-dome church was built in 1975.

26 Alexander the Great Memorial - A small park honors him. The bust of Alexander on its pedestal was a gift to the City of Boston from the City of Athens, Greece.