



WalkBoston

Beacon Hill: South slope

Bowfronts, Belt Courses & Balustrades: The Architecture of Elegance in Federalist Boston
Sponsored by: WalkBoston and the Bostonian Society | Tour Leader: Ed Gordon

During the first quarter of the 19th century, Beacon Hill town houses designed by Charles Bulfinch, Asher Benjamin, and others exhibited influences derived from England, France, and even the Far East. Elements drawn from Ancient Egypt, Greek, and Roman sources enlivened the brick and brownstone-trimmed facades of the Hill's stylish mansions. Among the 20 stops on the walk will be historic houses on Beacon Street; Acorn Street, perhaps Boston's most picturesque; Louisburg Square with its British influence; and the former homes of 19th-century Boston mayors Harrison Gray Otis and John Phillips.

Orientation

Tour starts at the Bulfinch State House on Beacon Street opposite Park Street. Walk westward along Beacon Street as far as Joy Street.

The walk

- 1 Bulfinch State House – 1795-1798, Beacon Street, opposite Park Street. Architect Charles Bulfinch derived the State House's design from Somerset House, a building on the Thames River in London that he had seen on his grand tour of Europe during the mid-1780s. The gold dome was originally sheathed in copper supplied by Paul Revere from his foundry in Canton, MA.
- 2 Site of the Thomas Hancock House – 1737, Beacon St., west side of the State House. In 1737, wealthy merchant Thomas Hancock built a grand mansion on this site—the first building constructed entirely of stone in Boston. Inherited by his famous nephew, the patriot and MA governor, John Hancock, the house was torn down in 1863, but not until it was well-documented by architect Arthur Gilman.
- 3 Parkman House – 1825, 33 Beacon Street. Designed by prolific architect Cornelius Coolidge. From the 1850s until the early 1900s, this house was the residence of the family of Brahmin murder victim Dr. George Parkman. The trial of his murderer in 1849 was Boston's "trial of the century." Parkman's heirs left the City of Boston a 5 million dollar trust fund for the maintenance of the Boston Common.
- 4 Tudor Apartments – 1885-1887, 34 1/2 Beacon Street. Queen Anne/Romanesque late Victorian era apartment building constructed on the site of "Ice king" Frederick Tudor's mansion. *Turn left on to Joy Street, follow Joy Street to Mt. Vernon Street. Turn right on to Mt. Vernon Street.*
- 5 Nichols House – 55 Mt. Vernon Street. Built in 1804 as part of a multi-building development initiated by Mount Vernon Proprietor Jonathan Mason. This Bulfinch-designed residence was later the home of landscape architect and peace activist Rose Standish Nichols and is open to the public as a house museum. *From Mt. Vernon Street, turn left on to Walnut Street.*
- 6 John Callender House – 1802, 14 Walnut St. Early Mount Vernon Proprietor residence noteworthy for its flush board sheathing and side garden which is enclosed by a massive granite block wall dating to the 1830s. Later the residence of Ellery Sedgwick (1872-1960), poet/editor of Atlantic Monthly magazine. *From Walnut Street turn right on to Chestnut Street, walk westward to Willow Street.*
- 7 Swan Houses – 1804-1805, 13,15,17 Chestnut St. Built as wedding presents for the daughters of James and Hepzibah Swan. A deed stipulation capped development at the rear of these buildings at 13 feet, thus explaining the charming one-story dwellings (former stables) at 50, 56 and 60 Mt. Vernon St.
- 8 Former Boston University School of Theology – 1916, 27 Chestnut Street. Neo Gothic building erected as Robinson Chapel, part of Boston University's School of Theology.

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- ⑨ 29A Chestnut St. – 1799-1800, remodeled c.1818. Bulfinch designed town house retains side garden and purple window panes at bow front added around 1818 by owner Charles R. Codman. In 1865, 29A was the residence of actor Edwin Booth, brother of infamous Lincoln assassin John Wilkes Booth.
- ⑩ 48-60 Chestnut St. – 1824, Cornelius Coolidge architect and John Hubbard developer. Federal style row ranks among the most elegant on the Hill. Historian Francis Parkman lived at 50 Chestnut Street from 1865 to 1893. He was the author of highly regarded works, including *The Oregon Trail*, *History of the Conspiracy of Pontiac* and *France and England in the New World*. *Turn right on to Willow St., pausing at Acorn St. Continue northward on Willow and turn left on to Mt. Vernon St., pause at Louisburg Square.*
- ⑪ Acorn Street – late 1820s. Perhaps Boston’s most picturesque appearance. Modest red brick Federal style town houses designed by Cornelius Coolidge for shopkeepers, artisans and the like border narrow, cobblestone-paved way. On the north side of the street are brick walls that enclose some of the “Hidden Gardens of Beacon Hill.”
- ⑫ Louisburg Square – 1834-1847. Famed urban open space illustrates impact of British planning ideas. No. 10 was the residence of Louisa May Alcott from 1885-1888. No. 20 was the residence of Samuel Gray Ward, a representative for a London bank. In 1852, Ward married famous Swedish singer Jenny Lind in this house. The bride was given away by her manager and later famous circus impresario P.T. Barnum. Statues in oval park portray Aristedes the Just (southern end) and Christopher Columbus (northern end).
- ⑬ Residence/studio of sculptor Anne Whitney – c. 1830s, 92 Mt. Vernon Street. During the 1880s and 1890s, Anne Whitney (1821-1915) lived and worked in this Greek Revival residence. She created the statue of Samuel Adams at Faneuil Hall and the statue of Leif Erickson on the Commonwealth Mall at Charlesgate East. *Continue westward along Mt. Vernon St. and turn left on to West Cedar St.*
- ⑭ Residence of architect Asher Benjamin – 1833, 9 West Cedar St. Greek Revival town house designed by and for Asher Benjamin, architect of the Charles Street Meeting House and Old West Church. *From West Cedar St., turn right on to Chestnut St., left on to Charles St. and left on to Branch St.*
- ⑮ Branch Street stables – c. mid nineteenth century stables behind Beacon Street town houses. Branch Street, originally called Kitchen Street, was used as a service alley behind the grand residences of Beacon and Chestnut streets. *From Branch St. turn right on to Spruce St.*
- ⑯ Benedict Chambers Apartments – c.1870, 3 Spruce Street. Early Boston apartment building designed in the High Victorian Gothic style. *From Spruce St. turn left on to Beacon St., follow Beacon St. eastward to the Bulfinch State House.*
- ⑰ Third Harrison Gray Otis House – 1805-1806, 45 Beacon Street. Residence of Congressman, Boston Mayor and real estate mogul from 1806-1848. Widely regarded as Bulfinch’s most successful Federal style town house design.
- ⑱ David Sears Mansion/Somerset Club – 1819, 42-43 Beacon Street. Site of Painter John Singleton Copley’s residence. Built for entrepreneur David Sears from designs provided by Alexander Parris, architect of Quincy Market. The size of this granite house was doubled in 1832 and after the Civil War was converted into a private club.
- ⑲ Appleton-Parker Houses – 1819, 39 & 40 Beacon Street. Alexander Parris-Designed double town houses built for textile manufacturer Nathan Appleton and hotel magnate Daniel Parkman. Fanny Appleton was married here in 1843 to celebrated poet and Harvard professor Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
- ⑳ Mayor John Phillips House – 1804-1805, altered c.1830, 1 Walnut Street, corner of Beacon Street. Bulfinch-designed town house of John Phillips, first mayor after Boston’s incorporation as a city in 1822. *Return to Bulfinch State House.*