

HISTORIC BOSTON COMMON



Boston Common Etching, 1860 Courtesy of *Digital Commonwealth*



Old Elm, Boston Common, 1855 Courtesy of *Digital Commonwealth*



Boston Common with Snow, ca 1855 Courtesy of *Digital Commonwealth*



The Boston Common Wood Engraving, 1858 Courtesy of *Digital Commonwealth*



Reds Demonstrate on Boston Common, March 6, 1930 Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection



Coasting on the Boston Common, December 1930 Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection



Cow grazing on Boston Common near Park Street Church, June 16, 1924 Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection



Marble Contest on Boston Common, 1924 Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection



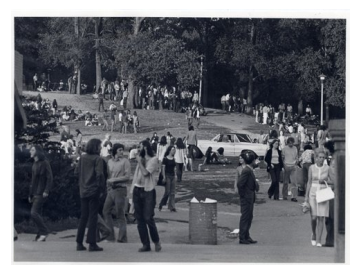
Boys in Frog Pond, 1934 to 1956 Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection



West Point Cadets, October 18, 1930 Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection



Squirrel - Boston Common, 1917 to 1934 Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection



Boston Common, circa 1970 Courtesy of the Boston Landmarks Commission Image Collection, City of Boston Archives, Boston



COVERING HISTORY

Learn more about the history that shaped the Boston Common

Pre-Fifteenth Century

- Evidence shows early human use of the Shawmut peninsula (portions of the Common's footprint today) for at least 7,000 years prior to 1600.

Multi-Purpose Common (1600 – 1720)

- William Blaxton arrived in Massachusetts in 1623 and acquired 800 acres of land which included the Shwamut peninsula where his house was built.
- Blaxton sold most of his 800-acres to the Puritans from the Massachusetts Bay Company led by Governor John Winthrop who had arrived in 1629, reserving his house lot and the 50 acres for himself.
- In 1634, Blaxton sold the remainder of his land to the Puritans, receiving six shillings or more from each shareholder to purchase the land for the Common.
- In 1646 Governor John Winthrop issued a proclamation that granted exclusive use of the Common to the inhabitants of the town and restricted the number of cows on the Common to 70.
- Beginning around 1709, the British built military earthworks at the western edge of the Common along the mudflats of the Charles River.

Civic and Military Landscape (1720 – 1810)

- The first planned recreational space began in the 1720s, Tremont Mall, which established a pedestrian thoroughfare precedent for the rest of the Common



BOSTON COMMON MASTER PLAN

- September of 1768, British soldiers landed in Boston to suppress the rebellion. British troops were stationed on the Common during the Revolutionary War and built fortifications which existed until the early 19th century.

The Central Burying Ground was established.

- In 1769 the Selectmen appointed a Committee to consider "the preservation of the Common."
- March of 1770 British soldiers fired on a crowd in front of the Town House near Tremont Street, in what came to be known as the Boston Massacre, killing five men.
- By 1803 Charles Street had become the new western boundary of the Common.

The Common becomes a Park (1810 – 1890)

- Utilitarian uses of the Common were prohibited on the Common in 1822.
- When Boston became a city in 1822, the city charter reaffirmed that the Common must be held intact except by majority vote of the citizens of Boston, which protected it from sale or lease.
- Under Josiah Quincy, who became mayor in 1823, the construction of a safer, healthier, more beautiful community became important. One of his early projects was tree planting on the Common.
- In 1830 Mayor Harrison Gray Otis banned cows from the Common, transitioning the landscape from utilitarian to public park. The ground was re-graded within a few years, around 600 trees were planted, and new tree lined paths such as Brimmer and Oliver Wendell Holmes were established.
- In 1848, a new municipal water line was run from central Massachusetts to Boston and the jet of water at the Frog Pond became a symbol of modern Boston.
- Concern for the Common's trees led to a tree inventory in 1851.
- 1876 storm felled the Great Elm.



- The Soldiers and Sailors Monument, by Martin Milmore, was erected honor veterans of the Civil War.

on Massacre Memorial, also known as the Crispus near Tremont Street was erected in 1888.

Twentieth Century Challenges (1890 – 1950)

- In the late 1890s the destruction and subsequent restoration of the grounds from the subway construction gave rise to the Boston Common Society, a group of civic-minded citizens that would lobby for the Common's continued care.
- In 1910 the firm of Olmsted Brothers, successor to the firm of Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., was hired to evaluate problems on the Common and develop recommendations.
- In World War I the parade ground was used for military drilling and ceremonies. Along Tremont Street, extensive Victory Gardens were planted and adjoining food cottages were built.
- 1920s the Deer Park Maintenance Facilities were built.
- In the late 1920s Dutch elm disease arrived in the eastern United States and destroyed almost all the elm trees in the Common.

Revitalization of the Common (1950 – present)

- The underground garage, with four kiosk entrances on the Common, was completed in 1961.
- In 1965 Martin Luther King spoke on the Common against school segregation.
- During the late 1960s and early 1970s the Common hosted massive public protests and rallies.
- In August 1970 the non-profit organization, Friends of the Public Garden, was formed for the Public Garden, but the group's focus soon expanded to include the Common.



- A 1972 study of the Common and Public Garden was commissioned in order to document needs and costs of restoration.

mon was listed on the National Register of Historic Places
became a Boston City Landmark in 1977, and was included in
Historic Landmark District in 1987.

- In 1979 Pope John Paul II visited the Common and spoke to an audience estimated to be 400,000 people.
- An initiative to increase public safety on the Common and other historic parks in the city spurred the establishment of the Boston Park Rangers in 1982.
- The Boston Common Management Plan of 1991, updated in 1996, was the first comprehensive plan developed to address the deteriorated state of the Common.
- In 1995, the city constructed an expanded facility at the Frog Pond and leased it to the Boston Common Frog Pond Foundation.
- In 2002, the 1970s era Tadpole Playground was redesigned.

(The above historic information was pulled directly from the 2016 Boston Common Cultural Landscape Report.)

Help us expand on this timeline with your own historic accounts, photographs, articles, newspaper clippings etc.

Please share your piece of Boston Common history below -

Name (optional)

First Name

Last Name