THE HOUSE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

1871 - 1961 The Sisters of the Good Shepherd, an international Congregation of religious Sisters, was founded in 1835 by a young French woman, Rose Virginia Pelletier (Saint Mary Euphrasia).

In 1842, some of the Sisters came to the United States to open the first Good Shepherd community in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1867, five sisters were sent to Boston to establish a program for women in need. The Sisters opened the House of The Good Shepherd on Huntington Avenue in 1871 where they remained for 94 years serving women experiencing difficulty in family and society. In 1874 a new chapel was added and in 1885 they build a new brick building. In 1946 Archbishop Cushing purchased property on Jamaica Way, which helped the Sisters open two residences for women.

This reformatory and protectory for females by 1922 had served 4,152 females. It housed about 300 females at a time, which were divided in 3 groups: “The fallen women or girls who desire reform, the wayward girls who are placed here by parents or friends for preservation and the habitual drunkards. The Sisters provided instruction on basic academics, housework, needlework, dress making, etc. Reformed girls returned to their families or were placed with other families or at workrooms... Our system of instruction in honest labor removes the usual cause of relapses.”

The sisters, aided by the inmates, produced most of their food. The House of the Good Shepherd grounds had fruit trees, grape vines, vegetable beds, a green house and stables. They had four laborers in place, two horses, eight cows and a number of wagons. The complex was formed by 3 large buildings to house the inmates. “The houses are maintained largely by the revenue driven by the inmates, but we are largely dependent on the charity of the world.”

Portions of the original convent’s red brick wall were saved during the development of Mission Park and still remain in place to this date.


HOUSE OF GOOD SHEPHERD. Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922); May 2, 1892; pg. 8
The Making of Mission Park

1961 Harvard bought, for $1.5 million, the former site of the Convent of the Good Shepherd. The 10 acre site was turned into a parking lot. A year later Harvard and 3 affiliated teaching and research hospitals discussed building a research hospital south of Harvard Medical School, with Harvard acquiring additional properties.

1963 Without a master plan or provisions for relocating displaced tenants, Harvard sought to seize much of the land between Huntington Avenue, Francis Street and the Riverway by eminent domain. Organizing against Harvard for the first time, 4,000 Mission Hill residents marched on the State House to protest this plan.

1964 Harvard dropped the eminent domain plan and quietly started buying up the brick and wood frame houses along Francis Street and Fenwood Road. By 1969 Harvard had acquired 182 structures, spending $3 million.

1969 Harvard started evicting tenants, saying it intended to knock down the houses to make room for construction of the Affiliated Hospital Center. This was also the tumultuous heyday of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which led a series of fierce protests against Harvard. The youthful radicals joined forces with the Roxbury Tenants of Harvard (RTH), a feisty organization that was able to persuade Harvard to alter dramatically its plans for the neighborhood. The organization also sought to persuade Harvard to build “replacement” housing for residents forced to move because of institutional expansion. Thus was Mission Park conceived. Architect John Sharratt joined the Roxbury tenants and started working as community motivator and designer, crafting a proposal for the development.

1970 Harvard announces plans to construct the largest diesel-fired electrical generating plant in the United States smack in the heart of Mission Hill. MATEP, as it was called, would be used to provide power to the medical complex. The proposal was opposed by area residents, who came up with medical evidence suggesting emissions from the plant could cause cancer and other ailments. Harvard told the tenants group that funding for the housing project would be available only if MATEP was built. It persuaded the group to support the diesel plant; in return, the plant would provide free heat and air-conditioning to the Mission Park development.

Mission Park garage section. The 3 story car garage for 1,300 cars, was built under most of the RTH complex. It was designed to generate a steady revenue for maintenance and to fund community programs. John Sharratt and Associates.

1970 March 20th, RTH and John Sharratt, of John Sharratt and Associates (JSA) the Mission Park architect, presented a report to Harvard addressing all aspects for the development of Mission Park, *The Relationship of Harvard University Medical School and Affiliated Institutions to the Neighboring Residential Community: Its Problems and a Solution* (Sharratt, 1970). JSA submitted a project design proposal including 3 towers for 628 apartments and rows of townhouse for 147 units, a community center, a school and on-street and underground parking.

1973 RTH had developed a full plan for housing and re-development of Mission Park. Harvard applied to HUD for funding. Harvard and RTH signed an agreement stating that RTH had to approve all plans for the development.

1974 The proposed number of units for the project rose from 800 to 864, then dropped to 774. The plans for the larger number of units were dropped due to inflation and prohibitive cost.

1975 October 17, Mission Park project construction starts. On October 8, 1975, the Boston Redevelopment Authority approved the Medical Area Total Energy Plant project.

1978 Spring, Mission Park construction was completed. The final project of a 27 floor tower, 3 midrise towers and 147 townhouse units included 391 one-bedroom, 228 two-bedroom, 128 three-bedroom, 28 four-bedroom units, and 1,300 car underground garage. All apartments are rent-subsidized for a mix of incomes and family sizes. RTH, Harvard, HUD, and private developers were involved in developing the $48.22 million project, with construction cost of $36.032 million.

Mission Park children August 5, 1973

Community organizing event

RTH Board members at Mission Park groundbreaking ceremony; Bob Parks at the podium. October 1975

2000 After years of negotiations RTH becomes the owner of Mission Park.

Mission Park town houses in the foreground

Mission Park swimming pool

RTH Community Center, built in 2014

2016 Construction completion of The Mosaic On The Riverway, located at 80 Fenwood Road. A new 10 story, mixed-income, 145 unit building owned by RTH, was developed in partnership with the City of Boston, RTH and Brigham and Women’s Hospital/Partner’s Healthcare; it includes 42 market rate condominiums and 43 affordable condominiums, 60 affordable rental apartments, 8,500SF for early education, a playground and underground parking. Total development cost $63 million.

80 Fenwood Road (2016)

Levinson tower

MISSION PARK
Aerial view of the Mission Park neighborhood

(RTH PROJECT UNDER CONSTRUCTION)

John Lopes, of the RTH Board of Directors, touring the construction site with board members.

Mike Lerner, RTH director during construction, overseeing cast in place columns for the Mission Park garage.

Community residents choosing shovels at the groundbreaking ceremony.

Students demonstrating at Harvard University en route to take over University Hall in April of 1969 (Times magazine)

**Harvard Students - Community Organizing**

**In the late 1960s** after Harvard University announced plans to evict the families and to demolish residential buildings, neighborhood residents, with the help of striking Harvard students Douglas Levinson, Jeanie Neville, Hayden Duggan and architect John Sharratt, organized the Roxbury Tenants of Harvard Association. They began meeting with Harvard officials to negotiate a way to preserve and improve the residential neighborhood. Three of the Mission Park buildings were named after these students.

**June 1969 to June 1970** Students Jeanie, Douglas, and Hayden organized and provided assistance to the residents. The students conducted a comprehensive neighborhood survey to show Harvard the residents’ perspective. Architect John Sharratt joined the effort helping organize the first meeting and suggested the idea of forming a resident’s organization. The students and Sharratt did a lot of the leg work on the neighborhood. “Jean did most of the canvassing and meeting people; I (Levinson) was partly involved in that and in getting John Sharratt and a lawyer involved to form RTH.” *(Phone interview with Douglas Levinson Dec. 2017)*

The students met Theresa Parks at her home; she was the first resident to agree to organize. Theresa invited her husband, Bob Parks. Bob worked in his family business building gas stations, he had no experience in community organizing but was angry about Harvard’s actions in the neighborhood. “We (the students) did what organizers do, provided support as group organizers and played a leadership role with hopes to getting the people to get together and take responsibility, to take it over themselves. On that summer, over a year later, it was pretty clear that things were not going to fall apart if I moved away.” *(Douglas Levinson 12-2017)*

The Affiliate Hospital Center (AHC) and the Fein committees of Harvard lacked community representation in their plans to redevelop the Convent site. Two thirds of 1st year Harvard medical students signed a petition against the development of AHF and housing demolition, thus forcing Harvard to reach out to tenants and appoint students to work on community organizing to help residents.

THE FORCE BEHIND MISSION PARK:
ROBERT (BOB) AND THERESA PARKS

Bob was born in Jamaica Plain, near Mission Hill; he graduated from Boston College and flew an L-19 reconnaissance plane for the Army at the end of the Korean war, his flying techniques are still in use. Theresa, was born in Our Lady of Lourdes Parish In Jamaica Plain. She grew up in the Mission Main housing development on Huntington Avenue. In that tightly knit community where there were more than one generation living in most apartments to afford rent.

Bob and Theresa got married in 1956 and had 4 children. Theresa and Bob lived with her parents in the projects on Huntington Avenue, in an apartment above Spa’s Drugstore. “We had no money but we didn’t know we were poor, when you don’t have money you don’t worry about it.” Theresa worked at Shea’s Laundromat where she requested unclaimed clothes and on dollar days she would go to Filene’s and buy clothes to donate to neighbors in need. Bob joined his father in the family business after returning from the Army, selling and maintaining equipment for gas stations. In 1978 Bob sold the family business and became the property manager for MassPort Authority; an administrator by day and a community organizer by night.

These life experiences came in handy when they started organizing their neighbors against Harvard’s plans to demolish housing in their neighborhood.

Resident partners:

The Flynn Kitchen was named after an elderly couple who were very active advocating for the making of Mission Park.

The Mission Park Library and Computer Learning Center was named after Betty Powers, one of the founding board members. Betty, a native of Panama, worked to ensure the multicultural community of Mission Park had a voice.

Theresa became the director for senior services. “Since then, I’ve continued to live, work, and organize in Mission Hill. I work in the senior center at the Flynn House in Mission Park organizing activities, trips, bingo, and weekly chat meetings for seniors. I still pressure management from time to time to meet residents’ needs and continue to hold flea markets to provide special treasures to my neighbors. Having taken part in the development of Mission Park was a great honor, and Bob and I loved every minute of the challenge.”

Ever since that summer evening in 1968 when Theresa met with Harvard students over a cup of tea in her kitchen, she has been an integral part of the Mission Park community, working to ensure that it remains affordable, multicultural, inclusive, and a place where residents of all ages take first shot at getting available jobs in the neighborhood. For Theresa getting Bob involved was easy as they both cherished their tightly knit community “where the sense of family went beyond each apartment.” Both believed strongly in doing whatever it took to help tenants in all aspects of neighborhood life, in particular keeping a roof over their heads and helping the seniors.

“My mother taught us we have to fight for our rights, so I told the students I will go out and start organizing; they asked if I was a community organizer. I said ‘I’ll be whatever you want me to be, but people need to know about Harvard’s plans to demolish our homes’.” Bob and Theresa used every opportunity to reach out to neighbors to invite them to get involved. They reached out to people on their way to work and by organizing picnics and talent shows for the kids in their back yard, and by coordinating luncheons with the hospitals, for tenants to have discussions with Harvard officials about their housing needs.

Theresa did most of the door to door outreach canvassing the neighborhood along with Jean Neville and Douglas Levinson. Bob worked on the logistics side, negotiating with Harvard, the hospitals, and local City officials and teaming up with John Sharratt to craft the proposal to make a pitch to local and Federal housing agencies to fund Mission Park. Bob was instrumental in creating the RTH board of directors.

Source: Series of interviews with Theresa Parks, December 2017 – April 2018, with the assistance of Laura Adams, Director of RTH Senior Services. Photographs courtesy of Theresa Parks, MassPort and MIT’s John Sharratt archives.