

Westabee
Post-walk interview

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We started, facing the John Hancock Bldg., which was certainly the most noticeable landmark, except that directly in front of it was a late 19th Cent. affair with a great deal of garrish glass work on it. Then we turned left, walked down what was essentially a fairly high class shopping area -- a rather diverse area in terms of its buildings -- The shops looked well but the area itself seemed to be almost mixed in architecture, buildings which were of different periods, different proportions, a broken building line in certain areas.

^{space}
We then came to the Common which was an almost delightful relief from the street itself, except that the buildings along the Commons on the right again gave this very diverse effect, almost as if they didn't belong in that type of an area. This is the 5th Ave. of Boston; one thinks it's a very poor second to 5th Ave.

^B Then we turned left, past the Kings Chapel -- no, that isn't it -- the Unitarian Arlington St. Church. That was a striking building, brownstone weathered through age, but with still a great deal of charm. Again, it seemed to be a very well proportioned building. The view across the Common, looking toward Beacon St., a most pleasant one. I think those houses, even at a distance, on Beacon St., looked very classical in their simplicity, sense of well-being.

^C
I got an impression of the skyline of Boston on the other side of the Common. Again, it seemed to be one of buildings sticking out at random, no particular pattern, like more of a jumble than the downtown area of a major city, the exception here again being the ^B Park St. Church. I have an affinity for N. E. architecture, particularly these churches.

We then . . . we went around a street (I don't remember the name of the street), went up another essentially shopping area. I recall here the sidewalks seemed to be the major point of interest or the thing that struck one most. It was a sidewalk which was in rather poor condition, extended for a great distance before the eye. Buildings where they were of the same design, the same type, on the right, were the most noticeable. This type of building was not at all unpleasant to look at. However, being interspersed with new structures and structures for which obviously no set pattern had been fixed, it gave another impression of strangeness. Some of the buildings were in rather poor condition, for upper stories had been allowed to fall into disrepair, while the ground floor ~~walk~~^{had} rather attractive shops but only on the ground floor. Here, again, one had the impression that perhaps this huge expanse of sidewalk could have been effective from the design point of view if it had not been broken by the occasional ^{poor} garden ~~forage~~ which was still allowed to exist. Either it should have been all gardens or no gardens. There was, of course, a noticeable absence of ^{poor} trees here which makes one notice the buildings far more, perhaps puts them in a poorer light than they otherwise would have been.

We then came to a corner, turned left, approaching the original spot from where we started. On the right, the ladies' fashion ^{store} which had once been a museum. I thought this was a rather unique idea; perhaps ~~it~~ a typically Boston idea. This type of building in most any other downtown area would have been eliminated long ago for something much more functional.

^{space} ^{SF}
We then turned right down an alley, a very disreputable looking alley, fire escapes hanging out of the sky. The only thing that seemed to save the alley, was the fact that silhouetted in both far ends were huge open spaces-- at one end the Common, at the other end this wide street with the ^{space} garden around the museum. The alley was a rather unpleasant sight, somewhat in contrast with the attractive shops which were on the other side, an extreme between the facade and what's behind it.

We then left the alley, walked across the street into the Common. Here one felt as if this was a totally different world. You could hear the street sounds, the city itself, but it was much more muffled, and yet you were only a short distance from the street and the traffic. Perhaps I should say - to go back again -- particularly this ^{space} parking lot which was facing this huge apartment building and bordered by the alley on the other side. This, I thought, gave a very poor affect, the parking lot placed obviously between or in a line of buildings in which the middle buildings had been eliminated. There was the outline of the framework or skeleton of these buildings on the walls, and yet these cars put in the middle again produced a very unattractive view.

Returning to the Common, we walked through this for a bit, saw figure skating, the skyline of Boston in the distance. There was an absence of trees in contrast to some other city parks that I've noticed. I think in this case it was a rather good idea because trees would only serve to reduce the area visibility and the affect of vastness which this Common gives. For, in fact, it's probably not very large.

(People?) One type, of course, which struck me immediately was the fellow in the alley who was stealing the garbage. A very disreputable figure, prototype of a beggar. This was in marked contrast to some of the women I recall noticing on the main fashion street, dressed in furs and rather expensive looking clothes. Other than that the people as such seemed to have escaped notice. I would say that the people I saw on this main street, where the good shops were, appeared to fit into their surroundings, again the tramp fitted into his, being in this very disreputable alley, although the two are a very short distance from each other. Very noticeable in the Common were the people skating, children.

(Sounds?) Yes, the sound of automobiles, continuous din of automobiles, horns blowing, engines. Not so much from the people themselves. Perhaps they were making but it couldn't be heard above the noise of the street itself. No other sound that particularly struck my attention. Of course, there may have been but when one is used to this kind of thing it doesn't stand out.

(Smells?) Again, I can't remember any particular smells. It was a cold day, so the sense of smell was deadened and smells don't carry as far. I did notice belching smoke from the chimneys; you don't smell it as much but you can see it.

(Features of buildings?) I was impressed by the John Hancock bldg. which I thought was extremely well proportioned and a very attractive building by itself, although in marked contrast to the area in which it was placed, and the fact that it made the older buildings, the late 19th century type, look very unattractive even though these had large glass surfaces. They were also in great disrepair, ~~and looked~~ as though they hadn't been painted for a long time obviously and needed a great deal of metal and brick work. I was struck by the fact that the churches we saw were all made of various kinds of stone. Then this building with this huge thing sticking up on Commonwealth Ave., after the interview that we noticed, was the only unattractive thing.

(Signs?) There is an apparent lack of commercial advertising in the center of the city where you see it. It isn't particularly nice advertising or the kind of thing one expects to see. Across the Common was a red neon sign with a clock on it. I don't recall any particularly noticeable amount of advertising. You didn't see huge billboards which you do in some cities, particularly New York City. Advertising in the shops, themselves, in the windows where it is expected was not particularly noticeable.

(Sidewalk or streets?) Streets were hard to notice because of the large numbers of automobiles, so there was no way of getting an impression of the street as such other than the fact that there was a huge artery of parking and moving autos. Sidewalks were in very poor condition, particularly where you had these very wide sidewalks with huge expanses of space before you. Lack of pattern in the sidewalk, lack of an attractive sidewalk

which was very noticeable. (What sidewalks made of?) Concrete. (All the way around?) Yes, except, of course, the alley which was asphalt.

(Street furniture?) Parking meters ^{SF} was one thing I noticed. . . Nothing that's really inherent to a sidewalk. A few gardens ^T sticking out on this one street was a very noticeable feature. Gates around _____ The usual street ^{SF} lamps.

(Traffic?) No, other than it was heavy.

(This section all one area?) Yes, I would say there was unity in its purpose, anyway. There wasn't one in architecture, not in that sense. But in the use to which it was put, there seemed to be unity -- fairly fashionable shopping district, ladies' shops, clothing. (Character) Yes, but not the same character as, for example, the area a few blocks over. It was the kind of thing where you had the impression it had once been a good residential area which had been converted and rebuilt to a slight extent. The result was a rather unattractive mixture of buildings. I get the impression that it really doesn't produce enough income to warrant rebuilding these old houses or tearing down this entire area but having to use what's there, it being the most desirable location for this kind of activity.

(Ordered mixture?) Coherence only in the type of shops, I didn't notice any marked differences. You didn't see any penny arcades, for example. The kind of shops were all clothes and fairly expensive shops, the art galleries and that sort of thing. In that sense there was unity. In the way the buildings looked, it gave the impression as if somebody climbed.

(Where would you fit this area in your conception of Boston?) The one thing that is very characteristic is Bonwit Teller's which had this museum. This was a typical Boston thing, one would expect, using a museum for a ladies' shop. Again, it's disappointing in terms of one's preconceived notions of Boston, where one would expect this kind of area to have more form and fashion than it actually does. One would expect the buildings to be constructed more to the functions to which they are put. But, on the other hand, it does have a certain unity. The fact that they are using the older buildings seems to make the area fit into a general age of the city; Boston, I consider, an older city in terms of its arch. than most any other modern American city. Perhaps the contrast is best drawn between this area and the architectural unity and beauty that one finds on Beacon St. and Louisberg Sq. Some of the buildings may be of the same age, perhaps of the same type, and yet the fact that they're not used for the same purpose and not in good repair is quite apparent.

(Do you use this area much?) Not too much, no.

(You felt at ease?) Yes, quite at ease. (No excitement?) No, not at all. Here again, the fact ^{is} that there are wide sidewalks, the buildings are generally low, the streets are wide, you can see in many directions for quite some distance, and of course the sun was out, too.

(Would you change it?) Yes, I would modernize the area with modern architecture, more modern than the John Hancock bldg. I ~~raise~~ wouldn't raise the building heights too much; I would keep a more or less uniform height. I'm not sure what it ^{along this main street,} would look like when I got through. I certainly would eliminate the large gaps in the buildings that one notices/ particularly along the Common. I would certainly try to do something with the Statler Hotel; I'm not sure what.