



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Historic Site
Massachusetts

John Fitzgerald Kennedy



John F. Kennedy delivers his Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961. Jacqueline Kennedy and Dwight D. Eisenhower are among those seated behind him.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

On May 29, 1917, John F. Kennedy was born in the master bedroom of this modest home in Brookline, Mass. The great grandson of Irish immigrants, and the second son of Joseph P. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, this bright, spirited boy was filled with promise—and destined for greatness.

Kennedy is remembered as the man who led the United States to a New Frontier: the youngest individual and first Catholic elected to the American Presidency, he molded a sweeping Civil Rights Bill, launched the Peace Corps, promoted the space race, and negotiated a Nuclear Test Ban treaty during the hottest years of the Cold War. Also memorable were his successes in promoting arts and education, confronting corporate power, and expanding health insurance and public welfare legislation.

As the witty and energetic “media President,” Kennedy inspired the nation with his eloquent speeches and endless drive. His wife, Jacqueline, embodied elegance and verve. Together they captured the heart and imagination of a new generation. When he challenged Americans to “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country,” they responded with enthusiasm and activism.

Behind that public career, behind the romance and mythology of what came to be known as “Camelot,” lay Jack Kennedy the private man. It was no coincidence that this son of a powerful, politically minded father, surrounded by bright and talented siblings, became an ambitious man, with a sense of family loyalty and commitment to public service. Nor was it surprising that his attentive, highly educated mother devel-

oped in Jack a quest for knowledge, an appreciation of history and the arts, and the willingness to accept the consequences of his deeds. Clearly, the character behind Kennedy’s public actions was influenced by his childhood in Brookline.

Though his life ended tragically on November 22, 1963, leaving the man and the vision in midstream, John F. Kennedy left an enduring legacy: “All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days . . . nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin. In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course.”

“Let the word go forth from this time and place . . . that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans.”

The Brookline Years

In 1914, when Rose and Joseph Kennedy moved into their first home at 83 Beals Street in Brookline, they were breaking—and making—tradition. Both members of this newly wedded couple were grandchildren of immigrants and children of politically prominent fathers who had risen through the ranks of Irish Catholic Boston.

While many young couples of their era settled into their parents’ home or a rented apartment, Joseph Kennedy insisted on owning a house in the largely middle class, street-car suburb of Brookline. Mrs. Kennedy later explained that her husband “had a strong need for privacy, for independence, for being able to choose the people he wanted to be with in close association.” She herself valued a healthful environment in which to raise her family, and recalled “a sense of openness in the neighborhood, with a vacant lot on one side of us and another

across the street, and fine big shade trees lining the sidewalks.” Both Kennedys appreciated that the Beals Street home, where they lived from 1914 to 1920, was close to playgrounds, a Catholic church, good schools, Coolidge Corner retail stores, and trolleys to Boston. When they outgrew the Beals Street house, the family moved just two blocks away to Abbottsford Road, where they lived until 1927.

Jack enjoyed many privileges while growing up in Brookline; but he also faced many challenges which helped to shape him. From his parents he learned loyalty to family, love of knowledge and reading, pride in his Irish Catholic heritage, and a desire for social acceptance and position. Witnessing the frustra-



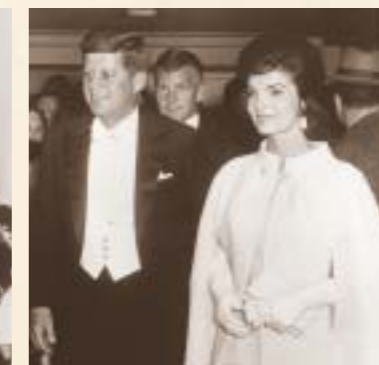
tions experienced by his mentally retarded sister, Rosemary, and grappling with his own childhood illnesses taught him the value of perseverance, determination, and compassion for others. And his older brother Joe—bright, competitive, and willful—challenged Jack to develop, master, and have confidence in his own strengths and talents.

Though he left Boston on his road to the White House, Kennedy fondly recalled his family’s ties to Massachusetts. “There is within each man a very special affection for the place of his birth,” he wrote. Later he said, “The enduring qualities of Massachusetts . . . are an indelible part of my life, my convictions, my view of the past, and my hopes for the future.”

“I believe the times demand new invention, innovation, imagination, decision. . . . My call is to the young in heart, regardless of age . . .”



Left to right: Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, 1927; Joseph P. Kennedy Sr., c.1914, one of the youngest bank presidents in the United States; Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. and John in 1925; John Kennedy as a member of the Dexter School football team, 1927. He and his brother Joe were teammates.



Left to right: John and Joe Jr. in Navy uniforms, Palm Beach, Fla., May 1942; “Coffee with the Kennedys,” a paid political program during John Kennedy’s senatorial campaign, 1952; the President and First Lady arrive at one of the numerous inaugural balls, January 20, 1961; JFK responds to questions during his November 20, 1962, press conference.

1914 World War I begins
Joseph P. Kennedy and Rose Fitzgerald marry and move to Brookline, Mass.

1917 John Fitzgerald Kennedy born at 83 Beals Street
1927 The Kennedys move to New York

1938 Joseph P. Kennedy becomes ambassador to Great Britain
1939 World War II begins

1940 John F. Kennedy graduates from Harvard College
1943 Japanese destroyer sinks PT109, patrol boat commanded by JFK

1946 JFK elected to Congress
1952 JFK elected to Senate

1953 JFK marries Jacqueline Lee Bouvier
1957 JFK’s *Profiles in Courage* awarded Pulitzer Prize

1960 JFK elected 35th President
1961 JFK signs bill establishing Peace Corps

1962 JFK urges U.S. to put a man on the moon
Cuban Missile Crisis
1963 JFK proposes sweeping Civil Rights Bill

JFK signs Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
JFK assassinated in Dallas, Texas

1969 Rose Kennedy dedicates John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site

PHOTO CREDITS: COVER, UPI/CORBIS; ROSE KENNEDY PORTRAIT, JOE JR. AND JOHN AS YOUNG BOYS, COURTESY JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY FOUNDATION; ROSE KENNEDY WITH CHILDREN (ABOVE), BACH-BACH STUDIO, BOSTON; ALL OTHER PHOTOS COURTESY JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY



Clockwise from top: John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site; Rose Kennedy at the dedication of the national historic site in 1969; John and Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. at the Beals Street home, 1919.

“We were very happy here and although we did not know about the days ahead, we were enthusiastic and optimistic about the future”

Rose Kennedy, 1969

Neighborhood Walking Tour

Rose and Joseph Kennedy began their life together in Brookline, Mass., where they joined their early hopes and ambitions to the promise of this vibrant and growing community. For 10 years these neighborhood streets linked the daily life of John Fitzgerald Kennedy to those of neighbors, friends, and schoolmates. Much of the Kennedy-era streetscape is preserved; the accompanying tour and map will guide you in the footsteps of a young boy whose future course encompassed the world. *Most sites are not open to the public; please be considerate of property and privacy.*

1 John F. Kennedy National Historic Site

83 Beals Street
Following their wedding in 1914, Rose and Joseph Kennedy made their first home in this modest, five-year-old Colonial Revival house. At that time, it was the last house on the lovely, sycamore-lined street. “Here,” Mrs. Kennedy later remembered, “we had light and air.” Four of their nine children were born while the Kennedys lived here—Joseph Jr., John (called “Jack”), Rosemary, and Kathleen. Like many Boston women of that era, Mrs. Kennedy preferred to deliver her children at home. In 1917 Jack was born in his parents’ second floor bedroom, “in the bed nearest the window, so the doctor would have proper light.”

Here the Kennedy children enjoyed family sing-alongs at the parlor piano, instructive discussions in the dining room, and nighttime book readings.

2 51 Abbottsford Road

Corner of Abbottsford & Naples
In 1920 the growing Kennedy

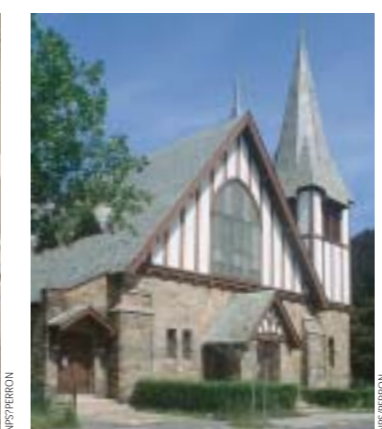
family moved to a more spacious home on Abbottsford Road, where they lived until 1927. It reflected Joseph Sr.’s successes as one of the nation’s youngest bank presidents, a shrewd investor in the stock market, and a pioneering producer in the motion picture industry. From the large wraparound porch, the Kennedy clan—which expanded to include Eunice, Patricia, and Robert—greeted friends, neighbors, and deliverymen passing by.

3 Saint Aidan’s Roman Catholic Church

207 Freeman Street
“On pleasant days, I took the children for walks,” Rose Kennedy recalled. “I wheeled one in a carriage and two or three toddled along with me. I made it a point each day to take them to church.” The church that Mrs. Kennedy and her children visited daily—and the place the family worshipped each Sunday—was Saint Aidan’s, built in 1911 by the prestigious Maginnis and Walsh architectural firm. Jack was baptized and served as altar boy here. A parishioner remembered him as



Nursery at the Beals Street home



Saint Aidan’s Roman Catholic Church

a delightfully irreverent child who would “roller skate up to the chapel door as fast as he could go, tear the skates off, run in, go to confession, come out, put the skates on, and off he’d go.”

4 Dexter School Site/Noble and Greenough Lower School

175 Freeman Street
Because Joseph Kennedy wanted his sons to associate with prominent families, he transferred both Joe Jr. and Jack from a public school to the Dexter School in 1924. The boys were the only Irish Catholics at this private, nonsectarian school, which prepared students for eminent colleges.

At Dexter, Joe Jr. excelled in academics. Though Jack did well in history and English, his strengths were sports and leadership; by age nine, he was quarterback and captain of the Dexter football team, on which Joe also played. When the Kennedy boys were hassled for being Irish or Catholic, Joe often responded with fists, while Jack stayed on the sidelines, quietly betting marbles that his brother would win the fight.

5 Coolidge Corner

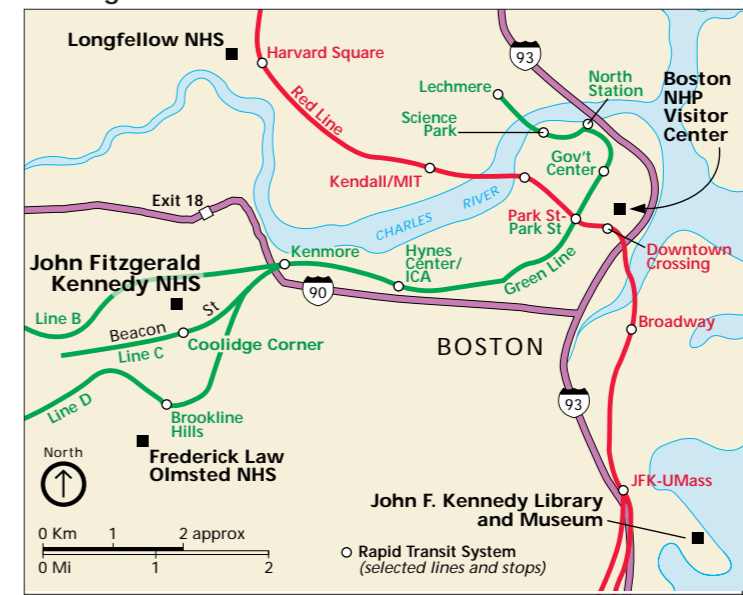
Corner of Beacon & Harvard
Coolidge Corner was a retail hub of Brookline and a frequent destination of the Kennedy family. With “one child in his kiddy car and . . . one or two others on each side,” Rose Kennedy would sally forth to shop at the Five and Dime, the bank, or the 1898 S.S. Pierce building. Here, the Beacon Street rail and electric trolley lines helped connect this typical streetcar suburb to downtown Boston, where much of the Kennedys’ social, cultural, and political life was centered.

6 Edward Devotion School

347 Harvard Street
Jack attended the Edward Devotion School through the third grade. The school, named for an early benefactor of Brookline’s public schools, was known for academic excellence. Jack was an acknowledged daydreamer; at age six, he ran home to warn his mother that his teacher was coming to discuss his idleness. Jack’s defense: “You know, I’m getting on all right, and if you study too much, you’re liable to go crazy.”



Getting to Brookline



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About Your Visit

Gift to the American People

The Kennedys moved from 83 Beals Street in 1920. In 1961 the town of Brookline placed a commemorative plaque in front of the house; in 1965 the house was designated a National Historic Landmark. The following year Rose Kennedy chose to memorialize her son and his contributions by preserving his birthplace and boyhood home. The Kennedy family repurchased the house and Rose Kennedy enlisted a decorator, Robert Luddington of the prestigious Jordan Marsh retail store, to help restore and redecorate the home to its 1917 appearance. Working from her remembrances, Mrs. Kennedy and Mr. Luddington assembled household furnishings, photographs, and significant mementos, which were then placed in the principal rooms of the house. Rose Kennedy recorded her personal reminiscences of family life in the house, and these evocative audiotapes are used today as part of the visitor tour.

The Kennedy family donated the house to the National Park Service as a “gift . . . to the American people,” and the site was opened to the public in 1969.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. It is open seasonally, Wednesday through Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Call or visit the park’s website for current hours of operation. Tour tickets and publications are available in the basement level visitor center. An admission fee is charged for persons over 16.

How to Reach the Site

By Subway: Take the Green Line (“C”—Cleveland Circle) trolley to the Coolidge Corner stop. Walk four blocks north along Harvard Street, turn right onto Beals Street, and continue to #83. **From I-90/Massachusetts Turnpike:** At Exit 18 (Allston/Cambridge), use the Allston/Brighton exit ramp, merge onto Cambridge Street, and proceed one mile. At the fourth traffic light, turn left onto Harvard Street for about one mile. Turn left onto Beals Street and continue to #83.

Accessibility

The site is located in a residential area with limited street parking. Watch for traffic on neighborhood roadways. Use of stairs is necessary to access the basement visitor center and the historic rooms of the birthplace. No wheelchair access is available to visitors at this time.

For More Information

John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site
83 Beals Street
Brookline, MA 02446
617-566-7937
www.nps.gov/jofi
Visit www.nps.gov to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America’s communities.

John F. Kennedy Library and Museum

Continue exploring President Kennedy’s life, leadership, and legacy at this presidential archive located at Columbia Point in Boston. For information about programs and collections, call toll free 1-866-JFK-1960 or visit www.jfklibrary.org.