

10-23
(May 1929)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

----- NATIONAL PARK

MAY 26, 1940.
FILE NO.
REGION ONE.

SPECIAL REPORT

To

CHIEF OF PLANNING

By

Ralph W. Emerson
Resident Architect
Branch of Plans and Design

IMPORTANT

Area reported on: Dorchester Heights

National Historic Site (proposed)

This file constitutes a part of the official records of the National Park Service and should not be separated or papers withdrawn without express authority of the official in charge.

All Files should be returned promptly to the File Room. Officials and employees will be held responsible for failure to observe these rules, which are necessary to protect the integrity of the official records.

ARNO B. CAMMERER,

Director.

May 24, 1940.

Report to the Regional Landscape Architect, Region One.
By Ralph W. Emerson, Resident Architect, Branch of Plans & Design.

Dorchester Heights National Historic Site (proposed)

A trip was made to Boston, Mass., on May 13, at the request of the Director, for the purpose of meeting with representatives of the South Boston Citizens Association, and to make a general survey of the physical characteristics of the site.

The site was visited on May 14, in company with Dr. Herman C. Bumpus of the Advisory Board, Coordinating Supt. Ronalds of Morristown National Historical Park, Supt. Small of Salem Maritime National Historic Site, and several members of the National Shrine Committee of the South Boston Citizens' Association.

The observations made at the time of my visit are presented briefly as follows:

General - The site, located on Dorchester Heights in South Boston, is an elliptical shaped plot of approximately five and one-half acres, bounded on all sides by private and/or public developments, and from all appearances, it is subjected to extremely heavy useage by the inhabitants of that section. It is known as Thomas Park, and maintenance of the area as a metropolitan park, is at present the responsibility of the City of Boston. South Boston High School is located on adjoining properties, in close proximity to the eastern boundary of the park, and on lands which were at one time the site of a city water reservoir (1849). There are no direct approaches to the park from that side.

Grounds - The WPA has been active in the recent development of the park. Work of improvement has been underway for the past two years, and about \$72,000 has been expended on the betterment of the grounds. New concrete steps and ramped approaches were constructed to make the grounds accessible to the city streets which border the park on three sides. The old asphalt paving was replaced by a new system of brushed concrete surfaced walks. Concrete gutters were provided to take care of the surface drainage along the walks, and a new sub-surface drainage system was designed and partially installed. Unfortunately, some of the new concrete work was placed in freezing weather and evidence of disintegration is now appearing in certain sections of the park.

The problem of erosion control was also given serious consideration in the WPA program. Concrete retaining walls were erected to reduce the steep slopes near the points of access on the perimeter of the park. Some grading was included, and in a few instances it was necessary to terrace the slopes which were subject to heavy surface erosion. This problem has

not been solved completely, and a considerable amount of additional would be required to eliminate the excessive grades of the existing slopes.

The existing ground cover is very spotty, with quite a number of barren areas, and the tree roots are exposed in practically every case. It would be necessary to re-grade and topsoil the entire area in order to assure the growth of a permanent grass cover. Shrubs of the low-growing type could be used to good advantage in the landscape treatment of the grounds.

The park is enclosed on three sides by an iron fence. This fence is in need of minor repairs and realignment, and its removal would not only contribute to the finished appearance of the grounds, but would also serve to facilitate the operations of maintenance.

The existing park benches are of the concrete frame and wood finish type. Most of the benches are in a bad state of repair, and should be replaced, as they are in constant use.

Structures - A memorial tower is located near the eastern boundary, and on the central axis of the park. It was erected by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1901, at an original cost of \$25,000, and commemorates the evacuation of Boston by the British in 1776.

The design of the memorial was selected through a competition in which eight architectural firms were invited to compete. The Boston firm of Peabody and Stearns was the successful competitor. The memorial was erected in accordance with their plans and a most pleasing effect was achieved. The influence of Sir Christopher Wren is strongly reflected in the composition and proportions of the design, and the memorial tower appears to be an early colonial steeple, when viewed from a distance with the base fore-shortened in the perspective.

The structure was built entirely of Georgia marble, and the overall height of the tower, from the platform of the base to the tip of the weather vane, is stated to be 115 feet. The main shaft of the memorial is approximately 18 feet square at the base. The stonework was repointed recently, and with the possible exception of minor defacements, the exterior of the structure is in fairly good condition.

The tower has been closed to the public for some time, and the condition of the interior indicates that continued maintenance was neglected. The unglazed openings in the lantern motif at the top of the structure invites entrance and the memorial has become somewhat of a pigeon sanctuary. The interior of the structure is unfinished, and it would be necessary to clean and paint all of the interior surfaces before the memorial tower is opened for public visitation.

An open stairway(metal) leads from the entrance to an observation platform at the level of the balcony openings, and then a small circular type of stairway(metal) continues to the level of the offset above. Both levels are observation points, and a good view of Dorchester Bay is offered from either level. The lower stairway is in need of certain repairs, such as the replacement of handrails and the like, and both stairways should be thoroughly cleaned and refinished.

A small glass enclosed booth is located at the bottom of the stairs near the entrance to the tower.

There are no facilities now provided for heating or lighting the interior of the structure.

Markers - A small monument was erected on Dorchester Heights in 1877, the year following the Centennial Celebration of the Evacuation of Boston. This marker is of ornamental granite, about 6 feet high with a 3 by 5 foot base. It is located near the base, on the north side of the memorial tower, and carries a different inscription on each of its two polished faces.

Another small marker was placed on the site in 1927. This is one of the series of markers which were erected to designate the route of General Henry Knox and are commonly referred to as "Knox Markers". It is located near the base, and to the south of the memorial tower, and consists of a blue granite slab upon which is mounted a small bronze plaque.

.....

A copy of this narrative on the architectural and landscape architectural aspects of the proposal was presented conjointly with Coordinating Superintendent Ronald's report to the Director.

.....

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph W. Emerson
Resident Architect

cc: Chief of Planning.



VIEW NO.1
(See General Plan)

**Looking toward the memorial tower from the eastern boundary
of Thomas Park.**



VIEW NO.2
(See General Plan)

A typical ramped approach to Thomas Park.

This is a detailed architectural site plan for South Boston High School. The plan is oriented with the school's main entrance at the top. The central feature is a large, semi-circular auditorium with tiered seating. To the left of the auditorium is a large rectangular building, likely the gymnasium. The plan shows various streets including National St, Thomas St, and Old Harbor St. There are numerous annotations for construction details, such as 'New Concrete Walk & Driveway', 'New Concrete Wall & Driveway', and 'New Concrete Wall & Driveway'. A scale bar at the bottom indicates a scale of 1" = 50'. The plan also shows the location of the school relative to the city of Boston and the harbor.

SOUTH BOSTON HIGH SCHOOL

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

51

52

53

54

55

56

57

58

59

60

61

62

63

64

65

66

67

68

69

70

71

72

73

74

75

76

77

78

79

80

81

82

83

84

85

86

87

88

89

90

91

92

93

94

95

96

97

98

99

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

112

113

114

115

116

117

118

119

120

121

122

123

124

125

126

127

128

129

130

131

132

133

134

135

136

137

138

139

140

141

142

143

144

145

146

147

148

149

150

151

152

153

154

155

156

157

158

159

160

161

162

163

164

165

166

167

168

169

170

171

172

173

174

175

176

177

178

179

180

181

182

183

184

185

186

187

188

189

190

191

192

193

194

195

196

197

198

199

200

201

202

203

204

205

206

207

208

209

210

211

212

213

214

215

216

217

218

219

220

221

222

223

224

225

226

227

228

229

230

231

232

233

234

235

236

237

238

239

240

241

242

243

244

245

246

247

248

249

250

251

252

253

254

255

256

257

258

259

260

261

262

263

264

265

266

267

268

269

270

271

272

273

274

275

276

277

278

279

280

281

282

283

284

285

286

287

288

289

290

291

292

293

294

295

296

297

298

299

300

301

302

303

304

305

306

307

3

CITY OF BOSTON PARK DEPT.
THOMAS PARK
A 200' Oak 200-1928

GENERAL PLAN OF THOMAS PARK



VIEW NO.3
(See General Plan)

Terraced treatment of slope and typical entrance steps.