

ROXBURY LANDING SITE
HISTORIC MARKER
DEDICATION



FEBRUARY 27, 1998

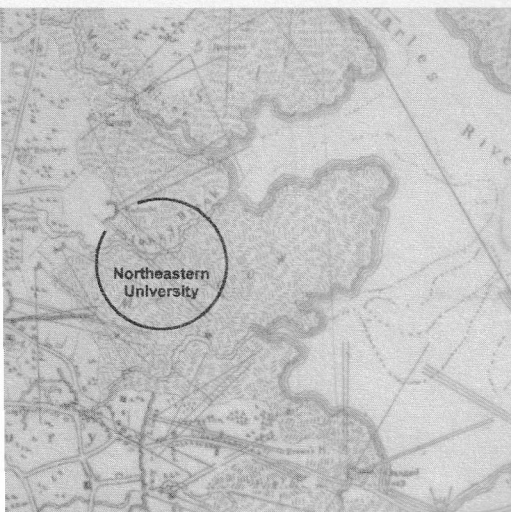
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SITE

When the first Europeans arrived in the early 1630s, Boston was a much smaller, hilly peninsula, connected by a narrow neck of land to the area that would soon become the town of Roxbury.

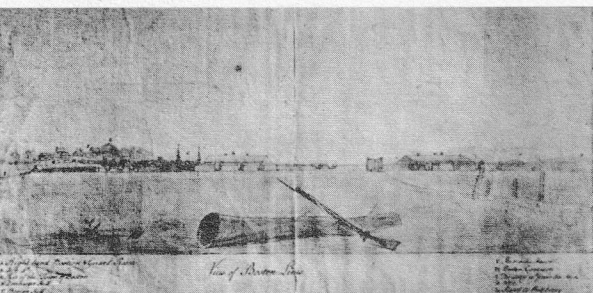
Roxbury's settlers were a more homogeneous group than those who settled the rest of New England—many coming from Nasing, a rural village in Essex County about twenty miles from London, in search of religious freedom. They quickly discovered their new home offered “good ground for corne and meadow for cattle.”

These settlers were industrious and enterprising. Many were farmers skilled in handicraft. They planted orchards and gardens, grazed their cattle in the salt meadows, and cut salt hay for winter fodder. Dams constructed along the meandering Stony Brook furnished power for grist, fulling, and malting mills.

In 1658, John Pierpont erected a tidal mill near what is now the intersection of Ruggles and Parker streets. A town boat landing was also close by (in fact, Parker Street was known as the “Way to the Landing Place and the Tide Mill” when it was laid out in 1730).



CONTEMPORARY GRAPHIC BASED ON
“A PLAN OF BOSTON IN NEW ENGLAND
WITH ITS ENVIRONS,” BY HENRY
PELHAM, 1777. COURTESY OF THE
HARVARD UNIVERSITY MAP
COLLECTION.



"VIEW OF BOSTON LINES."
COURTESY OF THE BOSTONIAN
SOCIETY.

In 1775, during the British occupation of Boston, General George Washington ordered the construction of a ring of forts, batteries, and redoubts around the peninsula to keep enemy troops from invading the countryside. A redoubt defended by Colonel Joseph Read of Uxbridge and his men protected the Roxbury landing.

In more peaceful times, salt was made at the "Salt Pans" near the town landing. Saltworks built by General Joseph Palmer were in successful operation until his sudden death, in 1788. By 1792, several establishments at the town landing, including one owned by Ralph Smith, handled the packing of provisions or the manufacture of soap and candles, which were then transported by boat to market.

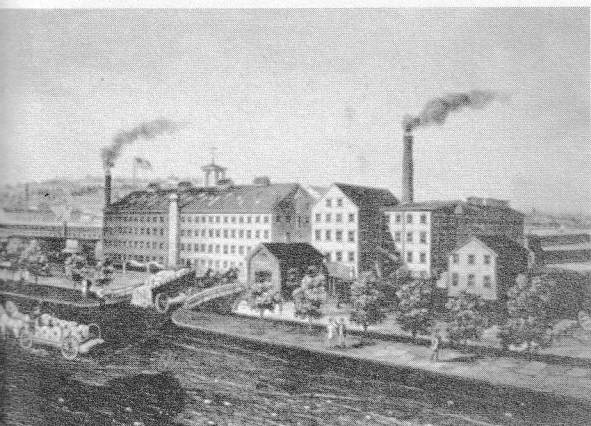
Benjamin Sewall, a successful merchant who also built and owned ships, formed a partnership with Moses Day to establish a cordage works on Parker Street in 1834. This former marshland had been converted to industrial uses by the construction of the Boston and Roxbury Mill Dam, an 1821 project that provided power for many industries and eliminated the passage to the harbor from the Roxbury Landing site.

Although Sewall provided investment capital and management expertise, the firm's success was largely attributed to Day, an inventor who revolutionized the manufacture of cordage. Together, they built Boston's largest cordage works and developed Parker Hill to create housing for their workers.

Ironically, the Sewall and Day Cordage Company was established in the midst of an economic depression that devastated Boston's mercantile trade. In 1834, most of the 152 vessels registered in the port of Boston were "unemployed, hauled up, and dismantled." Only Day's invention of a mechanical hemp spinner allowed the firm to survive.

The clipper-ship era, however, ushered in the golden age of cordage, due to the amount of rigging required to outfit a standard sailing vessel. This prosperity was sustained throughout the Civil War, when the U.S. Navy, unable to keep up with military demands, signed contracts with private cordage firms. After the war, the cordage market was largely comprised of rope for power transmission and oil drilling, and binder twine for household use.

In 1887, the Sewall and Day Cordage Company relocated to Allston, probably because burgeoning residential development in the newly filled Back Bay and Frederick Law Olmsted's creation of parkland in the Fens were causing real estate values to soar.



SEWALL AND DAY CORDAGE
COMPANY, CIRCA 1850. DRAWN
BY J. P. NEWELL. COURTESY OF
THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY.

PROGRAM FOR THE DEDICATION
OF THE ROXBURY LANDING SITE HISTORIC MARKER

Opening Remarks John A. Martin, Vice President for Business,
Northeastern University, and President,
Emerald Necklace Conservancy

Welcome Richard M. Freeland, President,
Northeastern University

*Presentation of the
Historic Marker* William B. Tyler, President,
The Bostonian Society

*Unveiling of the
Historic Marker* Richard M. Freeland and William B. Tyler

*Speaking on
Historic Significance* William M. Fowler Jr., Director,
Massachusetts Historical Society

*Representing the
Roxbury Community* Hon. Byron Rushing,
Massachusetts House of Representatives

Closing Remarks John A. Martin

THE TEXT OF THE HISTORIC
MARKER AT THE ROXBURY
LANDING SITE

This was one of the two public boat-landing sites that served the town of Roxbury in colonial times. In 1658, John Pierpont built a tidal mill here at the point where the Stony Brook emptied into the tidal basin. During the Revolution, George Washington directed the residents to build a redoubt (an earthen fortification) to protect the landing from the British.

In 1821, the great Mill Dam Project was built to furnish power from tidal mills for a variety of industries. The Sewall and Day Cordage Mill was built here in 1834, becoming the largest manufacturer of rope used in maritime trades.