

David Crane

Page 1

(Done during a walk)

Recording will be the subjective field trip from the intersection of Mass. Avenue and Commonwealth to China Town. January 26th, Crane.

If I had to describe the intersection of Commonwealth and Mass. Avenue for a stranger I think the chief characteristic would be that here there is a very, very broad intersecting street of Mass. Avenue, with Commonwealth passing under in an underpass. Commonwealth has this tremendous median strip with trees, in the wintertime quite lacy in feeling. It is the only really pleasant part of this upper end of Mass. Avenue for me. There are four different views offered by the four different directions from this spot. None of these is strongly distinguished from any other of the paths, but each one is distinguished from all others in some subtle respect. For instance the two alternate directions on Commonwealth Avenue differ in that in one direction there is a sign of a big Cities Service, a round sign in the sky line, and in the other direction towards the Common there is no such advertisement. Also the trees are perhaps thicker towards the Common. As for the other two paths of alternates along Mass. Avenue, in one direction is a slope up and a view of M.I.T. dome. In the other way, if one were to get out in the traffic stream he would see the green roof of Symphony Hall, but none of these are really strong differentiations that give this point a sense of direction. Other than these four main views from the intersection, I suppose that any one person would have smaller points depending on his familiarity with the spot to differentiate one side of the point from another. For instance for me, the sign of the \_\_\_\_\_ Lounge on the corner toward Symphony Hall, and away from the Common, is a point which has always given me a sense of direction here. Of course, the buildings differ from side to side of the point here but unless one were very familiar with the area, it is improbable that he could place the side on which any given building would be. It occurs to me at this point to think of the alternate directions that I might follow in order to go to China Town. I think the one which is simplest for me is that of going down Mass. Avenue to Boylston, make a left turn until I get to Clarendon Street, and then a right to Stuart, then from Stuart I would continue down until it runs into Kneeland Street, and there to China Town, however, I can just as well follow Commonwealth Avenue down to Clarendon, and Clarendon down to Stuart Street. I think that I will follow the latter because ~~emotionally~~ I get more pleasure from this trip along Commonwealth Avenue. I think very often this is a choice I would make between two alternate routes which may not differ too much in length, I would choose the more pleasant.

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Now on the east side of the intersection and going down Commonwealth Avenue on the South sidewalk, I am surprised to see ahead of me what looks to me to be the Customs House Tower. I never would have expected to find it on this tangent. This view of the tower is invisible when you stand in the middle of the median strip because it is blocked by the trees. I know that I have quite a distance to walk to Clarendon Street because I know that the streets are lettered A, B, C, from the other end of Commonwealth Avenue, this part of Back Bay has very little differentiation with respect to the side streets. At Hereford Street and Commonwealth I look down my right and see what must be Boylston Street and the railroad yards behind. I know that Back Bay must end very quickly on my right. Looking to my left I don't see a view of the river but I know that it is over there. At all of these side streets it would be interesting to see some feature that I associate with the opposite bank of the Charles that would give me the sense ----- the end of my view to the left. It is certainly easy enough to know and to be assured that one is on Commonwealth Avenue when he wishes to be. It is characterized chiefly by it's very broad median strip and the trees in between, and by the difference from other Back Bay Streets in that buildings are a little bit less regular with more whitish and limestonish buildings in this area.

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As one proceeds and looks down to the left or to the right, he has the impression of things which are not easily seen. For instance to my left here at Gloucester Street, I see smoke stacks and I immediately think of Cambridge because this is one of the impressions that I have of Cambridge, that it is largely industrial, dirty. To my right I see some big

billboards and then what looks to be a hole beyond, and then much further on beyond buildings. This suggests to me the railroad yard, although I cannot see the tracks. A very familiar path, such as Commonwealth is for me, it is somewhat hard to have new impressions, but there are recurring impressions. For instance, I just saw a mail man go into what looked like a very plush lobby to deliver mail, and once again I thought of Commonwealth as the home of the rich. The impression of the railroad over to my right is the same at Fairfield Street. Again a sign, a hole, and buildings beyond.

Now, over to my left in the block between Fairfield and Exeter Street, I see a limestone building with pillared porticos in front, which seems out of place here. I have never noticed it before. It has none of the gabled roof, it has a ballustrade at the top which suggests something of the baroque, or the late renaissance period. For several blocks now there has been another building besides the Customs House Tower ahead of me. It has no name or any character as far as I am concerned, but it does look like the financial district. It is a wedding cake skyscraper with long tall slits which must be stacked up windows. Looks to be smooth and uninteresting from this distance.

When I saw the sign for Exeter Street in the distance, I thought immediately of the Exeter theater, which is one of my favorite places, even before I got to the street and actually saw the theater. Off to my left I saw a white apartment looking building and I thought immediately of the Eastgate apartment in Cambridge. Ahead of me now I see a white richly friezed and ornamented structure which I know to be the Hotel Vendome. It is distinguished by a red candy striped awning in front. This is one of the few particular buildings on Commonwealth itself that I remember. Beyond it I see a spire, of square style with a red tile roof on top. This I know is at Dartmouth Street, where I turn towards Copley Square. Just crossing Dartmouth I realize that my spire is still ahead of me about half a block, but I do know that I have used it in the past as a prompter to turn at Dartmouth. At any time when I cross Dartmouth I immediately think of Copley Square, and of Back Bay Station beyond.

As I cross the street, I see the old S.S. Pierce building, a little bit of the Public Library facade, and a green copper dome over the church on the west side of the square. One doesn't sense from Commonwealth the impact of the spacial change in Copley Square but he immediately thinks of it. At Clarendon Street I think the significant point is that here we have the tower of which I have spoken before. This is the interesting feature of this point although head, just before turning to my right, I might rely on the view of a row house which goes up about three floors beyond the height of the consistent height of the block between Clarendon and Berkeley over to the north side of Commonwealth. Also at this point, if one were to look down Clarendon towards Copley Square, he would see the limestone facade which must be part of the John Hancock complex as well as the Brunswick Ale sign silhouetted in the sky, but the chief distinguishing feature at our level would be the sign of the First Baptist Church and following up to the tower.

Turning right now onto Clarendon Street. Here at Clarendon and Boylston Street, I realize for the first time that Copley Square actually comes up to Clarendon. I have always thought of Clarendon running down one block behind the Square, but I notice now that the street space where Huntington and Boylston intersect is so wide it is actually a continuation of the space. Trinity Church is actually a free standing building in the middle of the space. The space is so easily identified in direction and in character to a stranger, primarily because it is one of the few large spaces in Boston. In direction it is differentiated by the view of the Public Library also to my right. Trinity Church almost dead ahead of me behind which I will pass in a minute. Then looking down Boylston Street to the nice spire of the church that I always think of as the Other Church in Copley Square. A little bit beyond the view of the Trinity Church as you look down the sight line of Huntington Avenue there is the view of the Sheraton Plaza and beyond the old S. S. Pierce. Clarendon Street itself is not strongly distinguished from any other cross street for me. It's chief claim

*Copley identity & differentiation*

to distinction is that it passes through Copley Square or gives the view of Copley Square. Down to my left, looking down Boylston Street, I sense for the first time the Common. Up until now the median of Commonwealth Avenue has been confused with the Common itself, but now looking to the left I notice the trees which belong to the Common. I no longer see the Customs House Tower or the other building which was beside it, but I sense the financial district by the rise of some skyscrapers beyond, but mostly they are small buildings, and sort of cubistly stacked up on top of each other.

I know that Stuart Street is not far away when I see John Hancock almost directly on my left <sup>spaces</sup> now. It is an awful building, has absolutely no face. It looks so short here in comparison to the sense or impression one has of great great height, but it is so squat. I am always very much confused by the many loose spaces in this area. I can't distinguish one from another as far as its location, as well as the fact that I can't distinguish one side of John Hancock from another. Here I see the sign for Stuart Street which is the only way that I know to turn at this point. In the future I suppose I will remember that I will turn at the far end of John Hancock as I proceed down Clarendon Street, but other than this, Stuart Street has no distinguishing character for me. Looking directly ahead on Clarendon just before turning, I see a red mottled spire which I associate in character with the South End - the South End that I like. Also I see the lacy trees a little bit lower down and know that that is my favorite part.

Turning left now on Stuart Street on the north side, I have the sense of exactly paralleling the direction I was following on Commonwealth Avenue. I see now the difference between the Berkeley and the Clarendon facades of the John Hancock, and also that the tower of John Hancock is on Berkeley Street. The Berkeley Street side is even more hideous than the Clarendon Street side, which is much plainer and much simpler. Walking along Stuart Street it is amazing how depressing this experience is in relation to Commonwealth. Here where we are just as close to a facade, and the facades may not be too much taller, but so simple and undetailed. This is an area I would like to whisk through in an automobile - it's much quicker.

At the intersection of Arlington, Stuart and Columbus Avenue, I am struck by the stone castle like structure here. It's a fake but it's a great relief after most of these other things which have absolutely length with anything that I hold dear. This particular fake reminds me of pleasant experiences in Italy. Looking off to my left off Arlington Street I sense the Common and I immediately think of Arlington running along one side of the Common. Looking ahead of me I don't know which of two forks to take. Stuart Street, I suppose, goes to my right and Columbus Avenue cuts across my path to the left, but it is very confusing at this point and there is really very little distinction between the two alternatives. I do have the sense of wanting to get down to my right because I know from a mental map that Stuart and then Kneeland curve off to my right in order to reach China town. So I go straight, avoiding my possible half left turn on Columbus, following instead Stuart Street which I begin to recognize now by the garages, the many kinds of garages which I know to be associated with the theater district. I suppose in the future I might distinguish this point of decision between Columbus and Stuart Street by the small poor looking little parks formed in the middle of the Y shape, with it's little mechanistic bronze structure in a concrete circle, and the little trees and bushes cut off and looking very straggly. This sculpture is of a woman holding a little cup or vase sitting about 10 or 12 feet off the ground level.

The sign of the Elliott Street garage and all of the many garages and parking lots along this part of Stuart Street recall for me the problems that I have in going to the theatre and finding parking, and this, I think, is probably the way I would distinguish Stuart Street or to give assurance to a stranger that he was in the right spot. Also the sign for the \_\_\_\_\_ theater and perhaps beyond the Colonial theater. The Union Oyster House, Stuart Street branch, sign ahead of me is another familiar point on this trip. Along Stuart Street

I know perfectly well that I am on the right road, but for a stranger I would have to describe the sequence of things, small things like the sign of the Elliott Street garage, the Oyster House, and the Town House Lounge, none of which I would know the exact order in which they might be seen. Going on further, I am beginning to lose the sense of direction as Stuart Street begins to curve and a number of other streets come in at angles, and then ahead of me I see the Tremont Street sign and immediately think of the Common, and over to my left. I still do not have too good a sense of direction except by reference to my mental map and by reference to the direction I was going on Commonwealth. I know now that I am turning around to the right or to the southeast from the direction I was following on Commonwealth. At Tremont street the garage and parking lot character of Stuart Street changes, and there begin to appear a number of small shops, restaurants, and so forth. This area - I see the sign of Jacob Wirtz, which is another familiar spot for me. There doesn't seem to be any consistency of the type of commercial land use along here except that it is all second rate and is mostly of small size. Ahead is the intersection of Washington Street and I immediately identify it by its many vertical signs, vertical lettering, and many variegated colors. I immediately think of Jordans and Filene's which I know to be on this street. The slope to my left tells me that this goes to Jordans and Filenes even if I were not aware of how I had come into this street. The slope of course goes on to more and more tall buildings whereas the slope to my right gives alternately to a view of small buildings. I hadn't thought about the strong dominance of vertical signs and vertical lettering on Washington Street, but this certainly was a very easy and quick identification for me this time. I don't know why this verticality of the lettering should be true here unless it is that the street is narrow and there are more restrictions against encroachments over the sidewalk.

Now on Kneeland Street. I don't know exactly when I came into Kneeland but it might have been at Washington Street, or perhaps at Tremont. I see now a sign pointing to New England Medical Center and I know that I am right at China Town. I connect these two things automatically. Then just ahead of me I see that concrete neo-Chinese building with the green pagoda on the top and this for me symbolizes the beginning of China Town. Now I see my first sign of the \_\_\_\_\_ lights at Kneeland and Harrison Avenue. These signs of the \_\_\_\_\_ as well as the other Chinese signs suggest China Town for me.

Now, looking down my left at Kneeland and Tyler Street, this is really the heart of China Town with the Lotus Inn, the Lantern House, and chinese food. The color of one building is sort of an orange, and quite striking with green pagodas. I see the signs and the jumble. Kneeland Street itself doesn't have so much of this, it's off to the left mostly, and maybe to the right. I now see the sign that the neo-Chinese building I saw is the Chinese Merchants Association building. At Kneeland and Hudson Street I feel like I am getting to the end of the China Town section because ahead of me I see the Railway Express Agency, which means South Station for me. Also I remember this sign "Boston Button and Display Company" which is in pink, white, and yellow, to the left or east.

This is the end of the trip from Mass. Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue to intersection to China Town.

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