

Brookline: Secret stairways & paths

Three hills in Brookline - Corey, Aspinwall and Fisher Hills - have innovative designs for pedestrians. These glaciated hills, separated by small streams, were the scene of rapid development following the construction of the Beacon Street Boulevard.

In 1887 Frederick Law Olmsted's design led to widening Beacon Street from 50 to 160 feet. Threading between the hills, the new boulevard gave such easy access to Boston that mansions



were built for wealthy families. On this stylish street, apartment hotels were added, each with a distinct, clubby atmosphere. Clusters of town houses fronted the new streets in the area. The hills were transformed.

Corey Hill was reshaped in 1890. Three parallel streets, called "terraces," followed the contours of the hill, one above the other. A radical feature was added—a walkway perpendicular to the hill's contours—from the

top of the hill to the streetcar line below. So steep was the hill that the walkway was a series of steps.

At Aspinwall Hill, Olmsted, hired to design roadways, included a public path to Beacon Street. He was fired for ignoring property lines and maximizing the use of natural contours of the land. A more politically astute designer modified and negotiated public paths along property lines.

Fisher Hill benefited from the full talents of Olmsted, hired in 1890 to design the layout and overall development following the natural topography. Many homes built between 1890 and 1920 on large Olmsted lots remain. A path [now lost] led down the hill to the rail station at Beaconsfield.

The walk

This walk involves climbing stairs, slopes and three hills. It starts at the clock near the Washington Square Green Line stop. Follow the north side of Beacon Street past Westbourne Terrace to Summit Path, just beyond 1600 Beacon Street.

① **Eben Jordan, Jr.'s mansion** – 1600 Beacon was the site of "Stonehurst," Jordan's home, built in 1890, and his home until his father died and he moved to Boston minding the family's department store, Jordan Marsh, and founding the New England Conservatory of Music.

② **Summit Path** – Jordan constructed this path for his residential development on Corey Hill, recognizing access needs of residents on the hill. The path climbs by steps and slopes from a streetcar stop on Beacon past three terraced streets to the very top of the hill.

③ **Corey Hilltop** – On Sundays in the mid-19th century, people climbed Corey Hill to view a famous rural panorama, stretching from the distant Monadnock and Wachusett Mountains to the harbor islands. The hilltop was said to be 4-6 degrees warmer in winter than the valley below, and cooler in summer. Corey Hill Park/Outlook, at the summit, was put in place in 1900.

④ **Summit Avenue** – Most of Corey Hill was rural until the late 19th century. Neighborhood children tobogganed down the hill. Gypsies camped in the fields every spring and fall. In the 1860s, Summit Avenue went from a rough path to a paved road, with "a plank walk laid out for pedestrians." The road went straight up the hill, defying contours.

⑤ **Taxpayer buildings** – Along Beacon at Summit, many of the buildings are one-story "taxpayer buildings." Built to house retail outlets serving nearby apartments, they provided income for landowners to pay taxes while awaiting the opportunity to build higher and more profitable buildings.

⑥ **Marion Path** – Connecting the Griggs Park community with the Beacon Street trolley line, this path is a gradual slope from Marion Street to the park. The path saves area residents many steps, as the nearby roads do not provide such direct access. The path also gives the Beacon Street residents ready access to the playground and the park.

⑦ **Griggs Park** – Surrounded by willows and virtually traffic-free and safe for pedestrians, this four-acre park serves as a quiet oasis in a densely built neighborhood. The narrow two-way roadway that surrounds the park encourages motorists to drive slowly and carefully. The park is a playground for all ages, with a water area with frogs and birds in the forested center of the park.

⑧ **Brandon Hall** – A 1904 apartment hotel on Beacon was called "the acme of the most practical, artistic, and beautifully furnished hotel of its kind" in "Boston's most fashionable suburb... with every means of transit within easy reach." It burned in 1946 but the transit station retained its name.

⑨ **Winthrop and Addington Paths** – Frederick Law Olmsted's 1880s plan for Aspinwall Hill showed a path directly from the top of the hill to the streetcar line, connecting via Fairbanks Street to Beacon. Through a modification of his design, the path was built in a combination of stairways and sloped pathways.

⑩ **Street names** – Streets on the hill - Colbourne, Claflin, Addington, and Winthrop - were named for early settlers. University Road was named for Boston University, a major land owner when the hill was developed. Two streets at the bottom of the hill honored abolitionists Lewis Tappan and William Lloyd Garrison.

⑪ **Aspinwall Hilltop** – In the large S-curve of Addington Road is a park named for Lotta Bradburn Schick, a former local school committee member. The 1945 park site was formerly occupied by the Estey house, a Bavarian-style castle/mansion perched at the top of the hill.

⑫ **Colbourne Path** – The curvilinear street layout at the top of Aspinwall Hill makes this short-cut a useful way to climb the hill.

⑬ **Rawson Path** – Another short-cut down the hillside, is a step-saver from Rawson Road to Gardner Road.

⑭ **Blake Park** – Houses were built in the Blake estate along Blake and Welland Road in the 1920s, with streets along original paths and landscape features of the 19th-century site. For the design of one of his 27 Colonial style houses here, Royal Barry Wills won the 1932 Better Homes in America competition.

⑮ **Sumner Road** – The Goddard mansion, an 1812 Federal house, was moved to this site from Route 9 in 1888.

⑯ **Longyear Mansion** – Built in Marquette, Michigan, this great stone mansion was dismantled and transported to Brookline and reconstructed on this site in the 1890s.

⑰ **Fisher Hilltop** – The abandoned reservoirs occupy the top of the hill - one with a pump house built in Romanesque style in 1887. A reservoir covered with earth lies across the street. Newbury Junior College occupies several large adjacent buildings.

⑱ **Lost path** – The ghostly outline of a pedestrian path appears on several old maps of Fisher Hill, connecting the intersection of Holland and Hyslop Roads to Buckminster Road and [via Cotswold Road] to the bottom of the hill.

⑲ **Beaconsfield Path** – At the base of Fisher Hill, this path leads to the MBTA Beaconsfield station, once a privately owned stop on the rail line. Between the rail station and Beacon Street was a 6-acre private park, a 200-room apartment-hotel, a casino/clubroom, a playground for children, a tennis court, a stable and an automobile garage.

⑳ **The Beaconsfield Terraces** – On both sides of the now-lost Beaconsfield hotel, groups of attached townhouses were constructed in the 1890s as part of a community focused on the Beaconsfield. Seven groups of attached townhouses were built as condominiums with full access to hotel facilities. The townhouses range in architectural styles from Flemish to French Chateau to Georgian Revival.

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