

Walking Tour

photos by Linda Haas

OUR ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

Just Around the Corner

by Kate McManus



Student from David Colon's 5th grade class points out an architectural element from his list to Jeff Kotkin.

Estudiantes de la clase del 5º grado de David Colón señalan un elemento arquitectónico a Jeff Kotkin de la lista del maestro.

This month's walking tour was created by Jeff Kotkin of Historic Neighborhoods, a foundation whose mission is to broaden the understanding and appreciation of urban architecture and neighborhood heritage. Jeff is the Youth Programs Manager for JAC and will spend six Fridays this spring with a fifth-grade class from the Blackstone School talking to the kids about the history and architecture of their South End neighborhood. The program will consist of lectures, slide shows, a guest speaker, and the Neighborhood Walk (the next page). The project will culminate in the painting of a mural on a wall near the Blackstone cafeteria. The whole class will participate, and the mural will recreate the neighborhood as the kids see it.

This project is also taking place in four other elementary schools around Boston. Each school will present the material similarly, but will have different final art projects. In Charlestown, for example, fifth-graders at the Harvard-Kent School will be designing their "dream houses" based on the different types of architecture they have studied during the course of the project. At the Garfield School in Brighton, third-graders will design "Brighton-opoly," a game based on the board game Monopoly, where the object will be to collect the biggest variety of architectural styles.

According to Jeff, JAC is popular among students and teachers alike because it is different from anything they have done before. JAC takes something abstract, such as history or art, and makes it accessible, showing how the seemingly mundane might actually be an architectural gem. By making kids aware of the history and art around them, JAC lays a foundation for continued appreciation of our cities and neighborhoods. This helps to create a sense of community based on a shared appreciation of the neighborhood in which they live or go to school. This results in kids being proud of their neighborhoods, now and in the future. When they are adults maybe they'll think twice about moving to the suburbs. The kids of today will keep our cities of tomorrow vibrant and alive.

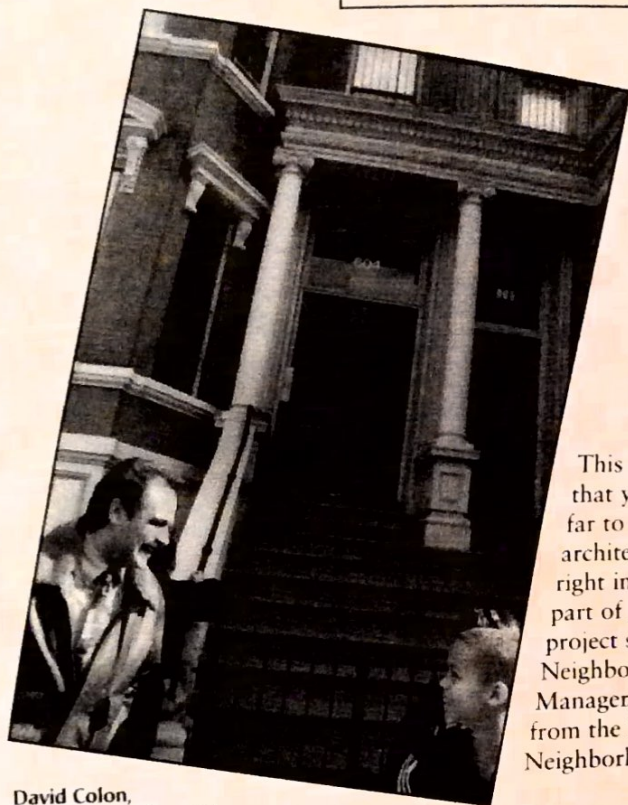
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For more information about JAC, please contact Historic Neighborhoods at 99 Bedford Street, Boston, MA 02111, (617) 426-1885, or at hnt@shore.net.

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Walking Tour

by Jeff Kotkin

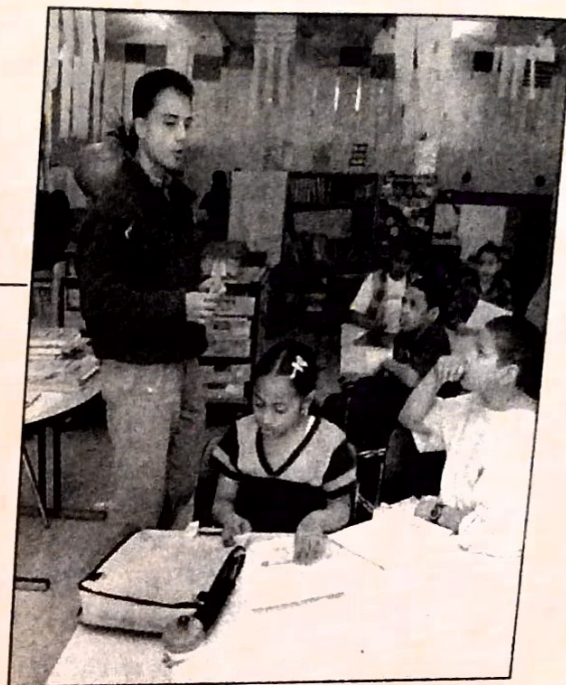


David Colon, 5th grade teacher at the Blackstone School, finds plenty to smile about with his students.

David Colón, maestro del 5º grado en la Escuela Blackstone tiene motivos para sonreír con sus estudiantes.

Jeff Kotkin prepares students in the classroom for the walking tour.

Jeff Kotkin prepara a los estudiantes en el salón de clases para la gira a pie.



This month's walking tour proves that you don't have to travel too far to see historical and architectural wonders. They are right in your own neighborhood. As part of Just Around the Corner, a project sponsored by Historic Neighborhoods, Jeff Kotkin, Program Manager, takes a group of fifth-graders from the Blackstone School on a Neighborhood Walk in the South End.

1. The Blackstone School (380 Shawmut Avenue) will be the first stop on the walk. The school was finished in 1976 by Don Stull Associates. It is an industrial style building designed to withstand the pressures of having hundreds of children running in and out around every day. The building is comprised mostly of masonry, rust-colored metal, sheets of windows and concrete blocks, conjuring up images of the South End's industrial past. The windows facing Shawmut Avenue form courtyards, and are sparsely planted with trees to help the eye transition from street to building. Geometric shapes are cut out of the freestanding walls, offering a clue as to what goes on inside the building. A playground is around back, protected by the building and facing Blackstone Square. Inside, in addition to music rooms, a community clinic, a media and science center, the Blackstone offers recreational and educational programs for neighborhood residents of all ages.
2. The next stop is Villa Victoria, or "Victory Village" on West Dedham Street. The "Village" is the result of a local community group's struggle to resist relocation and urban renewal in their neighborhood. Designed by John Sharratt Associates between 1969-1982, this colorful development was created with Puerto

Rican culture in mind. It includes a plaza, recreation space, social services, and private gardens. There are affordable row house units above shops as well as a combination elderly and handicapped accessible tower. The Caribbean-inspired colors, individual entrances and many children living here make for a tightly-knit community.

3. Making a right on to Tremont Street, we will continue to the corner of Union Park Square and look across to the St. Cloud Hotel. Nathaniel J. Bradlee, designer of many of the South End's row houses, looked to France for inspiration on this 1870 project. It was originally built as a "French flat," an elegant apartment hotel, although it only served this purpose for fourteen years. There would have been two flats on each floor, while the top mansarded floor served as servants' quarters. By using projecting bays, marble facing, pyramidal towers, and arched windows, Bradlee hoped to make a statement of beauty and refinement that would attract wealthy families looking for a low-maintenance home in a fashionable Boston neighborhood. Through the years, the St. Cloud has served as home to the New England Conservatory of Music, Franklin House for non-working girls, senior housing, artists' space, and shops.
4. Another right from Tremont, and we will encounter Union Park Square, one of the most welcoming living spaces in Boston. In 1851, Boston's City Engineer laid out the space, and various individuals developed it over the next decade. While there are many architectural treasures here, our short walk through the square will focus on some of the details of the buildings. We will examine decorative scrollwork, iron work on railings and fences, keystone faces carved above some of the entryways, cornices and decorated bays. Elements such as color, texture, height, material, landscape, and shape make Union Park Square an ideal place to study the influence of London's 18th century residential parks on 19th century Boston.

5. The final stop on our walk is the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, on the corner of Washington Street and Union Park Square. When completed in 1875, it was the largest Catholic church in the United States, equaling Westminster Abbey in size. Already standing 120 feet high, there were plans to top the towers with spires that would have raised its height to over 300 feet, but they never were added. Patrick Keely, a native of Ireland, designed the Gothic Revival Style structure, using Roxbury puddingstone, a locally acquired stone that adds texture and color to buildings. The church also contains the largest and earliest collection of stained glass windows in New England, many of which relate dramatic Biblical stories in great detail. Walking around inside is the best way to appreciate the grand size and scale of this cathedral, so rare in church architecture of the United States.

Picking out architectural elements on the St. Cloud.

Señalando elementos arquitectónicos en la St. Cloud.



Students get a feel for Roxbury Puddingstone at Cathedral of the Holy Cross.

Estudiantes frota la piedra de Roxbury Puddingstone en la Catedral de La Santa Cruz.



As you can see, there are many variations and styles of architecture in the South End, dating from the early 19th century right up to the late 20th century. You don't have to travel far to see them - they are just around the corner.