

Discover Rich Heritage in Roxbury

By Mary Albon

Founded by the Puritans in 1630, Roxbury is one of Boston's oldest neighborhoods, yet its place in the city's history is often overlooked by locals and tourists alike.

Discover Roxbury, a nonprofit community group, has assembled two self-guided Roxbury Heritage Walks show – casing the neighborhood's history and diversity. I chose the longer, 3-mile route, which spans Roxbury's entire history, from the Eliot Burial Ground, established in 1630, on one end, to the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center, opened in 2006, on the other.

In between, I encountered Revolutionary War landmarks, prominent abolitionists' homes, historic churches, contemporary murals and an array of sites linked to the neighborhood's immigrant and African-American heritage. The walk led me past handsome brick and brownstone rowhouses with flower-filled gardens, elegant Victorians and sober Colonials surrounded by lush lawns and several of Boston's few surviving 19th-century Greek Revival mansions.

From Highland Park atop Fort Hill, I admired the view over Boston and the Cochituate Standpipe, a fanciful Gothic Revival water tower whose form reminded me of the Islamic Center's minaret. The water tower stands on the site of Roxbury High Fort, which defended Boston during the 1775-76 British siege.

Some of my favorite Roxbury spots weren't on the map, like the flourishing community garden near Highland Park, the faded 1920s tuxedo ad on the back of a commercial building and El Plantanero Tropical Foods, specializing in African and Caribbean comestibles.

Haley House Bakery Café in Dudley Square was a congenial place for lunch, offering healthy meals as well as a bakery-training program for people from the community. The café was abuzz with local businesspeople, high school kids and writers tapping away on laptops, taking advantage of the free WiFi. My sandwich, stuffed with tender chunks of zesty jerked chicken and melted cheese, was delicious. I'm sure to return when I visit Roxbury Open Studios on Oct. 3 to 4.

For information, visit www.discoverroxbury.org.



The Boston Youth Fund supported Roxbury's Millennium Mural.

➔ BACK TO HORIZONS MAIN PAGE