

South boston city's role in the state history research paper

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South Boston today is a neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. It is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the U. S. As such, it played an important role in the history of the region; also, a number of important events took place here. In this paper, we will discuss the history of South Boston, starting from the very first arrival of the colonists, and ending with today; we will also stress the role that South Boston played in the history of the region and the state.

The history of the settlement that is today known as South Boston started as early as in 1630 when some Anglo-Saxon Protestants landed at a place that was called Mattapan by the Native Americans. The newcomers called the place a new name, Dorchester, after the town in England they came from (O'Connor 7). It was one of the first places in future Massachusetts to be occupied by colonists. They built a number of crude shacks and tents in the place, as well as a fort with a few cannons in order to be able to protect the settlement.

The local Native Americans were weakened by an epidemic that took place a few years earlier, so the colonists did not engage in wars with them.

However, having arrived in summer 1630, they could not plant crops and thus severely lacked food during the winter. On February 5, 1631, a vessel with a supply of food arrived from England; the occasion was celebrated, and this day became the first official Thanksgiving Day in Massachusetts. In 1633, a first official organ of representatives was elected in order to “ provide a permanent body of men” who enacted the settlers to be “ of full force and being to ye Inhabitants” (O'Connor 8).

The geographical peculiarities of the place – a peninsula was attached to Dorchester – allowed for easy grazing of animals. It was that peninsula that would later receive the name of South Boston. However, the newcomers called it the Dorchester Neck. In 1637 the access to the peninsula grazing lands was restricted to nearly 100 colonists who were the most prominent dwellers of the city; they were also made responsible for maintaining the place. During the greater part of the 17th century, these lands were reserved for these Dorchester families (O'Connor 9). Thus, for a number of years, the contemporary South Boston was used as grazing lands for cattle (Simonds 25).

It is stated that the first house was built on Dorchester Neck in 1673, by Captain Hepstill James Foster (“ South Boston” n. pag.). The next residential dwelling of the contemporary South Boston was built in 1680, by James Blake (“ South Boston” n. pag.). On the other hand, another author states that James Blake was the first one to build a house on Dorchester Neck and that it happened approximately in 1660 (Simonds 31). The number of residential dwellings on Dorchester Neck increased rather slowly. In 1700, three families lived on the peninsula; in 1750, five families inhabited the place, owning seven houses (“ South Boston” n. pag.). In 1770, nine residences belonging to twelve families were situated on Dorchester Neck (Simonds 31).

One of the most noteworthy events that happened in Dorchester Neck occurred in 1776; the place played an important role during the struggles of Americans against Britain in the American War of Independence. Prior to that, the town of Boston that was located nearby actively participated

against the tax policy adopted by the British government. In fact, Boston became the center of revolutionary activity before the American Revolutionary War. The settlers did not wish to pay taxes to Britain because no representatives of Britain were present in their local governments. Blatt states that “ the goals of the American Revolution, defined to a significant extent in Boston, included liberty, equality, and the claim that all should have a voice” (11).

The tension between London and Boston significantly increased. As a result, there were a number of landings of the British forces near Boston. In December 1773, the Boston Tea Party took place; members of the pro-colonists organization “ The Sons of Liberty” destroyed a whole shipment of tea that belonged to a British company in order to defy the Tea Act adopted by Britain. This eventually escalated into an armed conflict. In June 1775, English troops occupied the town of Boston. These soldiers were well-supplied with provisions from England by water. The residents of Dorchester Neck, being afraid of a possible British attack, left their places in 1775 and moved to Dorchester, deciding that it would be safer to stay there (“ South Boston” n. pag.).

In December 1775, Congress decided to attack the British troops in Boston regardless of the cost and passed a resolution that allowed General G. Washington to do so (Simonds 45-46). On March 2, 1776, the American forces started attacking Boston with artillery; the bombardment lasted for three nights in a row. Meanwhile, some American troops snuck onto Dorchester Neck and established two fortifications nearby, positioning

cannons there. These cannons allowed to threaten the British troops situated in Boston, their garrison on the nearby Castle Island, and their ships that were anchored nearby. This allowed the colonists to make the British forces yield; the colonists allowed them to leave Boston on their ships in exchange for a promise not to burn down Boston (O'Connor 12). Therefore, the strategic positions occupied by the colonists' troops near Dorchester Neck significantly assisted the Americans in winning the battle.

After the peace treaty was signed in 1783, the life in Boston and the surrounding territories gradually came back to normal. Many families that had left Dorchester Neck during the war returned to their houses, and the peninsula again became a peaceful grazing land that people would also visit for a picnic. For some time, it served only these purposes, and nothing indicated that anything would change. However, it was noted that the peninsula's location, open space, fresh air, etc. made it a good place for providing medical care. As a result, in 1792, a hospital was opened on Dorchester Neck in order to treat patients who suffered from smallpox, a disease the epidemics of which caused much trouble and grief. From that time, the peninsula gradually became, " among other things, a favorite location for schools, hospitals, homes, asylums, workhouses, poorhouses and institutions of all kinds" (O'Connor 15). It is important to note that these institutions played a significant role in the history of the region. In addition, the peninsula started being perceived as a land that could bring much profit if properly developed.

Meanwhile, the town of Boston also grew in population and size, and in 1800, its population reached approximately 25, 000 people. In 1804, some prosperous Bostonians made an official petition in order to annex Dorchester Neck and include it in Boston. The residents of the peninsula protested; they were offered monetary compensation but rejected it. Still, they were unable to prevent the peninsula from being annexed, and on March 6, 1804, the General Court made a decision to include it in Boston. From that time, Dorchester Neck would be called South Boston. The people who lived on the peninsula lost their lands and received no compensation as a result (O'Connor 16-17).

After the inclusion in Boston, the area started developing quickly. The future streets were planned; they were to be built in a grid-like pattern. In 1805, the South Bridge was built in order to connect the peninsula and Boston. In 1810, a worshipping house was built, for the locals, naturally for their time, desired to have one at hand; during the early 1800s, a variety of religious churches and denominations established their own worshipping houses in South Boston (O'Connor 21-22). In 1811, a glass factory was founded in the area. In 1809, a Cyrus Alger's Iron Foundry was established; it would provide the U. S. with cannonballs in the War of 1812 (" South Boston" n. pag.; O'Connor 25-27). Importantly, this factory would become the core of the industry of South Boston. Moreover, by 1850, it was one of the biggest foundries in the country, playing a significant role not only in Massachusetts but also in the U. S. as a whole; many guns and cannons produced in the USA were first produced in Cyrus Alger's plants.

Further, in 1822, a shipyard was built on the peninsula, whereas in 1826, the Boston Beer Company was founded. In the 1820-1830s, numerous schools and churches were built. In 1825, the mayor Josiah Quincy established a home for the poor, an asylum for the mentally ill, a prison, and a juvenile detention house (many school students of that time developed bad behavioral habits, in part because the school curriculum was very poor and dull) in South Boston; it is stated that this series of institutions made the locals feel as if the area was the “ dumping ground of the city” (“ South Boston” n. pag.; O’Connor 25-27, 31-32). The latter fact also indicated the rising sense of political identity among the middle-class residents of South Bay; in 1847, they sent a “ Memorial” to the Boston’s mayor, complaining about these establishments (O’Connor 31-32).

In the 19th century, immigrants from other countries than England also arrived in Boston and the surrounding settlements. Before the American War of Independence in 1775-1783, the immigrants were often unwelcome in the community due to bias, including severe religious prejudice. Therefore, they usually assimilated and adopted the faith that was popular in the local community, for followers of a wrong church were often subjected to numerous restrictions and limitations. However, after the War, the attitude gradually changed to a more tolerant one. As it was noted, in the early 19th century, worshiping houses of various churches were opened in Boston (O’Connor 33-34).

The immigrants arriving in Boston were usually poor and hard-working; they were mostly unable to pay for their passage to America, so they promised to

work off the cost of transportation when they arrived in New England.

However, upon their arrival at Boston, they found that it was hard to find a job; it also put them at odds with the local population. They were often viewed as “degrading elements” that would end up in prisons and poorhouses, which would increase taxes and decrease the morale of the city. However, as the city developed and numerous factories were opened there, the immigrants found it a good perspective to move to South Boston and work in a factory there.

In 1830-1840, many new Irish immigrants arrived in Boston, adding to the workforce for the growing industry. In fact, it is stated that rather little evidence is present that the new immigrants were not accepted in the local community (O'Connor 33-38, 42). By the mid-1850s the population of the Irish immigrants increased to approximately 1/3 of the population of the city; in the mentioned 1847 “Memorial,” the “better class of immigrants” was mentioned, which makes it clear that the origin of the Irish immigrants at that point mattered much less to the leaders of South Boston than their class status (O'Connor 55-56). Noteworthy, Boston, South Boston in particular, became an important place where a number of religious movements could co-exist together.

In the upcoming Civil War, the community of South Boston was much more inclined to support the Union. The Irish immigrants took their chance to show their loyalty to their new country by joining the army or working in military factories. In 1861, local Irish leaders formed two volunteer military units who actively participated in numerous battles, many of them severe and bloody,

and won recognition on the battlefield and the admiration of their community. Their contribution to the military efforts of the Union was valuable (O'Connor 55, 57-58).

In fact, it should be stressed that the war with its need in the working industry made South Boston a more prosperous neighborhood, as well as transformed it into an Irish-Catholic area which became a noteworthy part of the city. The number of Protestant churches decreased, whereas the number of Catholic churches rose significantly (O'Connor 63-64).

Still, the Irish immigrants from South Boston fought not in order to free the black slaves. In fact, it is stated that the Boston Irish were convinced that Lincoln betrayed the poor white people of the U. S. by adopting abolitionism (O'Connor 57-58). In addition, poor people, including many of the immigrants, felt even more betrayed due to the conscription laws that allowed the rich to send someone else instead of them to join the army or to pay \$300 to avoid going to the army at all. Thus, in the summer of 1863, in New York City, a mob comprised mainly of Irish workers who started a violent riot against the police and the rich that lasted for three days and ended with attacking black people. A riot also broke out in Boston, a city where the population was Irish by one-third, but it finished rather quickly, no significant damage was caused, and no racist violence was reported against the black people (O'Connor 58-61).

It is also noteworthy that in the first half of the 19th century, up to 1860-1870s, most immigrants who came to the U. S. originated from northern and

central Europe, from countries such as England, Ireland, Germany, etc. Because these people were often rather similar in their worldview to the already existing population, they quickly integrated into their new community. However, in the 1880-1890s, many immigrants started arriving from eastern and southern Europe, from countries such as Greece, Italy, the Balkan countries, Russia, Poland, etc. Clearly, a share of them arrived in Massachusetts. It was much harder for these immigrants to be assimilated into their new community (O'Connor 69-70). In South Boston, their share also significantly increased; by 1910, a large number of Lithuanians, Italians, and Poles moved into the peninsula. Despite the fact that no numerous conflicts were observed, the atmosphere of intolerance grew. It would play an important role in the future history of the area.

During the First World War, Boston played a significant role in the American military involvement in the events of the war. The U. S. joined the war only in April 1917, and the war lasted until November 1918. However, the government built an American Army base near Boston in 1917. Because of this, the city played an important role in the war, being the headquarters of the naval and military operations of New England, as well as the main port which served ships coming to and from England. It is also noteworthy that Boston Harbor was mined so as to defend the city against hostile submarines ("South Boston" n. pag.).

The rate of development of Boston, and South Boston with it, significantly decreased during the years of the Great Depression. That happened to numerous towns and cities in Massachusetts, a state that suffered from

economic problems for some time before the Depression started. Many of the factories located in Boston, South Boston in particular, relocated in order to find cheaper labor. The decline in manufacturing led to the lowering levels of population in the industrial areas, South Boston being one of them. By the 1950s, the industry of the city of Boston was in a serious decline (“ History of Boston, Massachusetts” n. pag.).

South Boston, apparently, did not play a very significant role in the events of World War II. However, a number of racial conflicts arose in Boston during the war and later. For instance, during the war, there was a wave of anti-Semitic violence. In October 1943, numerous gangs comprised mainly of Irish Catholics vandalized Jewish places (such as synagogues, homes, and shops), and attacked Jews in the streets; the police, also consisting mostly of Irish Catholics, did not often intervene (Norwood 233). In 1974, racial problems escalated again, when it was ruled out by the court that desegregation was to take place. Bostonians protested against the forced busing and used violence to “ prove” their position (“ South Boston” n. pag.).

The city began recovering economically in the second half of the 20th century thanks to the diversification of the banking and investment spheres, as well as tourism and hi-tech industries (“ South Boston” n. pag.; “ History of Boston, Massachusetts” n. pag.). Nowadays, the city's economy has revived; it is centered on such areas as education, hi-tech (biotechnology in particular), and medicine.

To sum up, South Boston, initially being used as grazing lands, grew into a powerful industrial area; it also was a residential district for immigrants, and one of the most religiously diverse places in the region in the 19th century. The place is connected to a number of historically important events, such as the American Revolution and the Civil War. In the 20th century, the place's development slowed, and it became infamous for racial prejudice. However, today South Boston is an important residential area for the rather diverse population, and a part of an industrial city, the capital of the state.

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