

## The Big Move

Mike Spock



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We are standing on a platform in the bright July sun facing a crowd gathered on the apron of an old wharf.

Captain Kangaroo and Bill Bulger share the honors with trustees and other dignitaries at the opening of our new home, a converted warehouse just across the Fort Point Channel from downtown. Bulger, the Massachusetts state senate president from South Boston and our advocate on Beacon Hill, is a passionate foe of “forced busing.” He welcomes The Children’s Museum, with its equally passionate commitment to integration and social justice, to his neighborhood. For all his political conservatism Bill loves

the museum. He is devoted to his kids and is proud of

## INTRODUCTION

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our relocation to Southie. It’s 1979 and something positive is happening to his strife-torn community, if the Wharf is somewhat separated from Southie’s residential core by a mile of old industrial buildings.

In the mid ’70s, on one of those miserable, gray, snowy Boston days, David Burnham, a museum trustee, had brought our attention to an abandoned wool warehouse. It was hard to imagine that any but the most adventurous families would ever set foot in this bleak industrial district. But the building was ruggedly handsome and adaptable, the location had promise, the price was right, and we had an inspiring model in the transformation of the once desolate Quincy Market and Boston waterfront.

With a partner, the Museum of Transportation (MOT) under the visionary direction of Duncan Smith, brought in to help fill the vast space and share the financial burden, we take the plunge. A committee meets every Thursday morning to keep the project on track. Parallel capital campaigns are launched. Cambridge Seven Associates (C7A) continues as our architects. The project is phased, and two ground floor bays are rented to McDonald’s. But progress stalls as the fundraising loses momentum.



The warehouse was a cavern of raw space almost equally distributed among well proportioned bays that fit neatly into a “6 x 6” plan. Conceived originally as shared by both museums, *City Slice*, below, ended up taking advantage of the building’s adaptability by using three floors of one bay for this experience.



opening downtown at Museum Wharf, sixteen years had elapsed. Even though this saga is a hymn to persistence and not moving prematurely, we still nearly lose it all. It is a cautionary tale that bears repeating in more detail.

Dan Prigmore, a strategic and practiced developer, is recruited as project manager. He massages the banks, finds a fish restaurant for another two bays, and talks some trustees into personally financing its fit-out, replaces our architects, and with the battle cry “Listen to the building, it’s trying to tell us what we can and can’t do!” gets the project moving again.

Somehow we bring it all off: raise and borrow more money, develop exhibits, keep our heads above water, minister to staff and board anxieties, and inter-institutional rivalries. The opening is a triumph. The Children’s Museum attendance increases nearly threefold. We have arrived in the big time!

Ominously, the Museum of Transportation begins to fall behind on its share of the utility and bond payments. Stretched to the limit ourselves, we have to step in to cover MOT’s bills or face having the electricity shut off, or even lose the building itself. The Museum of Transportation sells off some of its collection, retreats from its creditors—and us—and moves back to its original home at the Lars Anderson Carriage House in Brookline.

I spend the better part of the next year in the real estate business trying to find a tenant for MOT’s space, holding the bank sharks at bay, getting our lines of credit extended. A tenant deal surfaces and falls apart. Finally, The Computer Museum, backed by Digital Equipment Corporation, comes forward to pick up the pieces, and I go back, exhausted, relieved, and a lot wiser, to leading The Children’s Museum.

Atlas Terminal Stores was the last of the many sites we explored. From the first meeting in the early ’60s to plan a move out of our home in residential Jamaica Plain, until our

# The Big Move

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Planning how to use, fit out and fund our new home evolved from myriad individual and complex decisions—some profound and some microscopic—made on behalf of visitors, staff, the two directors, funders, the project committees, planners, and managers, MOT, TCM or the Museum Wharf complex, the city and national codes, the budget, expediency, convenience, compromise, equity, and as Dan Prigmore (the Museum Wharf project director) was fond of saying, “The building is always trying to tell us what to do, if we only would listen.” And among all of us at TCM trying to hang on to the essence of our largely intangible culture, “It does—or doesn’t—feel like us!”

—Mike Spock

## Part I MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

### Downtown Is Where the People Are

The museum was nearing its fiftieth birthday. My memory was that we first met in the spring (1963) to discuss a move downtown. The need seemed compelling—at least to me.

Boston is a radial city. Between Route 128 and the Central Artery, cross-connections were not straightforward. We needed to be at the hub, not partway out on one of the spokes of the city in Jamaica Plain.

In earlier years, the Boston region was a collection of villages. A spidery web of trails, rivers, roads, and eventually highways, ship and rail lines that kept goods and people on the move and left its mark on the region. Radiating in and out among farms, towns, cities, the harbor, and the world beyond, downtown is where the spokes of the wheel still come together—the hub of a regional transportation system.

In metropolitan areas that actually work, America tends to look to its downtowns as places where important common experiences happen and are shared with each other. Reminiscing fifty years later about the decision to pull up stakes and move to the waterfront, John Bok, who was chairman of the Museum Wharf Project Committee, bluntly observed in his Boston Stories interview (2006), “Downtown is where the people are. Jamaica Plain is where the people aren’t.”

But in Boston, a city of inward-turning neighborhoods, a welcoming museum also had to be on neutral turf where everyone could see that they had as much right to be there as anyone else.

So during the late ’60s and early ’70s, while the museum grew physically and programmatically, we were still marking time on the suburban edge of the city waiting for our chance, agreeing we had to move to the hub where everyone could see and feel that the museum was their museum. If we wanted to serve everyone, we needed to recognize both social and geographic realities.

But other realities were even more compelling. When I arrived at the museum in the fall of 1962, some

people in the community didn’t know who we were, nor did they understand much about our dreams for the future. In fact, in those early days we were only glass-cased exhibits, paper and pencil floor games, handling materials shared with visiting classes, rented school classroom exhibits, afterschool clubs, and a summer day camp. We were able to program the museum during school-year afternoons and on summer days with neighborhood kids, teachers and parents coming for ideas and resources. But the interactive exhibits that we eventually became famous for were still just ideas, not experiences. The Museum of Science was where the excitement was.

On the advice of our canny fundraising consultant, Robert J. Corcoran, we decided not to try to move the museum downtown, at least not yet. Instead, he suggested, maybe it would make sense to see what we could do with the help of a few adventurous foundations and federal agencies looking for ways to invest in some unconventional forms of learning, at least until we had achieved more examples to point to, sometime in the future.

### Facilities Committee Report (1965-66)

When the *What’s Inside?* exhibit (1964), the *MATCH Kits* curriculum units (1964-68), and the Validated Exhibit Project (1966-69) began to make small splashes on both the Boston and national scenes, it occurred to us that we still hadn’t really exploited all the working and learning spaces we could use in the Jamaica Plain museum that had potential for housing visitors, teachers, collections, and staff while we built momentum for a move downtown. Our old, formal buildings certainly lacked some of the specialized spaces that would support new interactive learning experiences.

A committee of board and staff began to work on a holding plan to maximize leftover spaces cheaply and creatively while we got well enough known to even think about taking the plunge into a capital campaign with the big guys. Thus, the Facilities Committee Report recommended “...a \$500,000 two-and-half year Development Program to adapt the museum’s existing plan to meet the demands of the next five to ten years.”

**Even while making the most of Jamaica Plain—staff loved working in our old-fashioned buildings, buying a sandwich and frappe at our neighborhood Brighams, and then walking around the gentle Jamaica Pond—we became even more certain that downtown was the place we had to be. It soon became clear that our old Jamaica Pond site would not work for us much longer: parking was already a problem for both neighbors and visitors, and we needed to grow so we could continue to remain financially self-sustaining.**

The pivotal idea was to convert the splendid but under-used 500-seat auditorium into a flexible space where we could accommodate public exhibits and programs and visitor support services (entry, shop, Johns) in one unconventional package. We would call it the Visitor Center, a place *for* somebody, not a place *about* something, thereby ducking responsibility of having to explain that it would not be a conventional hands-off museum experience. This plan freed up the old case-bound museum building (an elegant turn-of-the-century mansion) as a Materials Resource Center serving teachers, parents, community workers, and the offices, work and meeting spaces for the burgeoning staff, and our collections.

### Visitor Center (1968–79): A Holding Action

In those prehistoric times, even a half million dollars was not a trivial amount to come by, especially for something that would have a useful life of only five to ten years. Having taken on the obvious and almost no-cost fixes, our old suburban mansion was beginning to limit our vision of creating truly interactive learning experiences. So even though we had no funds in hand—cautious members of the board thought we better have all of the cash before we took the plunge—a tentative decision was made to get started with an architect. We chose Cambridge Seven Associates (C7A) to begin figuring out how we could make the Visitor Center happen.

C7A's Paul Dietrich and his colleague Andy Bartholomew, who became the project job captain, understood both the depth of our ambitions and the realities of our financial limitations. Accommodating both ends of this spectrum, they came up with a plan.

The Visitor Center was to be:

- simple (they suggested we leave the sloping floor in the seating area as is, choose a bolted-together post and beam structure to support floating multi-level platforms, and open up the fussy ceiling to reveal the gutsy roof trusses spanning the old seating area);
- cheap (they specified off-the-rack dimension lumber, painted plywood floors, hog wire fencing, and patched drywall);
- understandable to kids (all the parts came together like an Erector Set where everyone could see how everything was held together); and
- transparent to grownups (they could see where their kids were and watch them from across the central well of the old sloping seating area.)

Old features of the auditorium were to be used creatively.

- The stage was converted into a small amphitheater, The Sitaround.
- A dormered caretaker's apartment and old projection booth became *Grandmother's Attic*.
- Two performers dressing rooms in the basement were combined to welcome a demonstration Japanese Tea House rescued from a karate studio when the city seemed to forget it had been a formal gift from Kyoto, Boston's sister city,
  - Unexcavated space was to become a high-tech *Climate Chamber*.
  - And, we used most of the existing arcade, entrance, and restrooms pretty much as is.

Opening in the fall of 1968, the renovated auditorium ended up with about 7,000 square feet of public space. The Visitor Center, with all its new exhibits, was an immediate hit. Attendance soared. On rainy family days there was up to an hour's wait just to get in the door.

However, when the capital fundraising didn't bring in enough to cover the modest construction and exhibits costs, we had to borrow from our tiny endowment. We tried to comfort ourselves and our board by claiming the Visitor Center, with its vigorous growth in attendance, was an "investment" in our capacity to increase earned income and serve a broader public. *The Climate Chamber* and *Exhibit Garden* would have to wait for a future phase.

Over its eleven-year lifespan, the Visitor Center, an experimental laboratory, taught us many things about what a future downtown museum needed and could be. And in the meantime, we could point to the deeply engaged family and school and camp groups to illustrate an entirely new sort of museum learning experience.

## Part 2 DOWNTOWN

### Trolling for Sites

In 1961, Mayor John Collins brought Ed Logue in from New Haven to head up the new Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and preside over the planning and development of a revived downtown. Working against expectations, they turned their backs on the Second World War model of the wholesale clearance of America's decaying downtowns, and instead committed themselves to finding new uses for the handsome 18th and 19th century brick and granite commercial and wharf properties, bringing these underused and unappreciated urban buildings back to life. Thus we were

biased from the start toward picking an existing building that could be creatively recycled into a new home for The Children's Museum. "Adaptive reuse" became our mantra.

We explored many site and building combinations. Each was tempting but not exactly right: it was not really at the hub (Watertown Arsenal, Boston Navy Yard); it was everyone's idea of a trendy property for harbor-side housing (several old granite warehouses along the waterfront); someone else already wanted to develop it (Old City Hall); it would be years before it would become available (Charles Street Jail, reserved for expansion of Mass General Hospital); or parking would be a problem and probably too expensive to buy or renovate when expansion was eventually needed (First Corps Cadet Armory).

Although we didn't always agree on which sites were worth a second look, it turned out that there were places "that felt like us," and others that didn't. We began to settle on criteria that became a rough template we could hold up to sites worth considering.

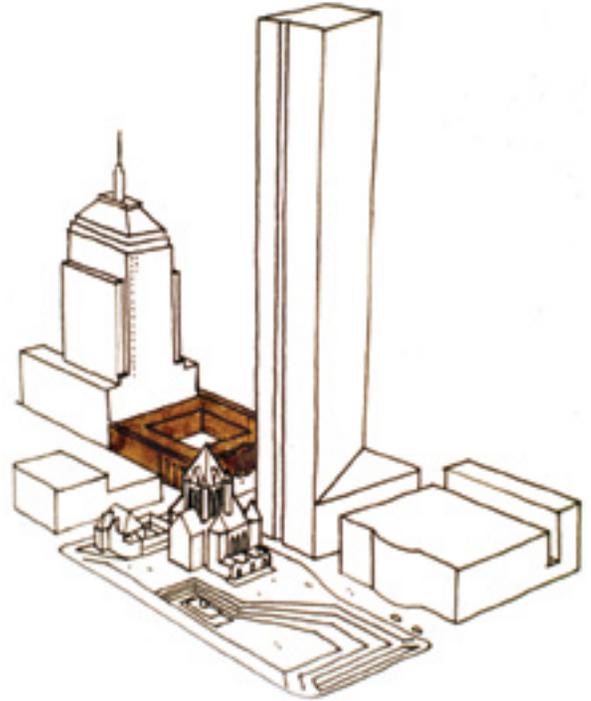
- It had to be downtown where rails and highways came together.
- It should be on neutral turf, not "owned" by anyone.
- Parcels without much real estate value were good, but could not be so spooky that timid visitors would stay away.
- Wonderful old building could be recycled and adapted to new uses.
- Where possible, the fabric of old street patterns should be preserved.
- Sharing space and services with related and compatible organizations might make sense.
- And again, it should feel like us.

Designing and constructing a brand new building from scratch had some appeal, but the process increases the chance of bringing new and unexpected problems to the table. On the other hand, starting with an existing but adaptable building would cut down on the number of bad decisions you are apt to make and might even cost less.

Even while making the most of Jamaica Plain—staff loved working in our old-fashioned buildings, buying a sandwich and frappe at our neighborhood Brigham's, and then walking around the gentle Jamaica Pond—we became even more certain that downtown was the place we had to be. It soon became clear that our old Jamaica Pond site would not work for us much longer: parking was already a problem for both neighbors and visitors, and we needed to grow so we could continue to remain financially self-sustaining.

### Hancock Pavilion (1972–73)

In the 1970s, the John Hancock Insurance Company got it into their heads to build a grand new head-



The John Hancock Insurance Company's plans for its enormous new Copley Square headquarters, second from the top, included the company's original building, seen both in the top photo and to scale as the brown square building in the middle photo, called for an I.M. Pei-designed skyscraper that would dwarf surrounding buildings including Boston's landmark Trinity Church. Ambitious plans for the interior, shared by The Children's Museum and two compatible organizations, fully utilized the seven-story, light-filled atrium.



A side slice of the proposed Hancock Pavilion shows the C7A design for The Children's Museum that distributes components among several floors. The Pavilion would be shared by Metropolitan Cultural Alliance partners, the Boston Center for Adult Education and the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

quarters across the street from their old office building on a parcel they owned in Copley Square. It would be the tallest, sexiest building in New England and bring notice and fame to the leaders of its corporation. They had hired the architectural firm of I.M. Pei, who came up with a stunning, sharp-edged, mirror-clad, rhomboid plan—cheek to jowl with H.H. Richardson's iconic Trinity Church. The new tower, by itself a very handsome building, was completely out of scale with its low-rise Back Bay neighbors and would dominate the square, Trinity Church, and the Boston skyline. Preservationists were outraged. Still, the insurance company had used its Boston namesake and headquarters from the very start. Even the mayor, Kevin White, with his deep commitment to the revival of post-war Boston without compromising the historic fabric of the city, was not about to let such a prestigious and gorgeous prize for the city (White was a modern architecture buff) slip through his hands.

After tough negotiations, the city agreed that Hancock and Pei could go ahead if they would tear down the older of the two original office buildings—not the taller one with the hokey weather beacon on the top—and set aside the open space as a public gathering space. On the face of it, that scheme seemed a bad compromise: there already was an open, but not well used park, Copley Square, and the new Pei tower (actually designed by his partner, Harry Cobb) would become unapproachable on windy days as was the case in most high-rise urban canyons. Cobb let it be known to Chandler Blackington, in charge of community relations within the second level of the Hancock leadership, that he had an interesting alternative in mind. If the right mix of nonprofit orga-

nizations could be induced to collaborate, the old office building scheduled to be sacrificed for the sake of civic reparation, could be recycled instead into an accessible and useful indoor public amenity.

Working hard on the creation of the new Metropolitan Cultural Alliance, some of us had been getting help from Blackington, known as Blacky, and others in rationalizing corporate giving among mid-rank cultural organizations. Blacky shared Cobb's vision with some of us as a possible tradeoff for Hancock messing with the scale of the Copley Square neighborhood. Here was Cobb's idea. The old nine-story building was built around a central elevator core. Bridges connected the core at each floor to an outer ring of offices. Cobb's plan would scoop out the elevators and bridges, leaving the outer square donut intact, and the vast seven-story atrium at the center would be crowned by an indoor hanging garden covered by an equally vast glass shell bathing all the interior floors in natural light. What did we think?

We thought it would be terrific!

The Massachusetts Horticultural Society (MHS), also looking for a new home, could develop and maintain a wonderful conservatory on the top floor. The Children's Museum could take off from the Jamaica Plain Visitor Center model and create a giant jungle gym of floating platforms for exhibits in the central atrium. The outer ring could become shared classrooms and workshops for the Boston Center for Adult Education (BCAE) and The Children's Museum's Resource Center. Jointly occupied by the three organizations would be a common library, collections storage, and offices. The ground and first floors, reserved for retail and a daycare

**Then the tower's individual panes of glass began to fall out—one by one—sailing in the wind like a kid's paper airplane. Many modern buildings during their shakedowns, had spells of structural or materials failures like this. But the problem kept getting worse, not better. Hancock had to put spotters on the ground around the base of tower to look up to see if they could catch sight of the next window about to take off. Plywood gradually took the place of the mirrored glass. It was painful to watch. Wags began to call it "the world's tallest plywood skyscraper." Blacky called to tell us that Hancock was putting the Pavilion on hold. It was too much for them to think about with all their glass popping out.**

center for kids of working parents, would underwrite the cost and services of maintaining what we all began to call the Hancock Pavilion.

It even seemed reasonable, at least to us, that Hancock should be responsible for owning, developing, and maintaining the Pavilion and the retail, and that the three Alliance members (MHS, BCAE and TCM) should provide the money (donated and earned) for outfitting, maintaining, and programming the exhibits, resources and specialized facilities. Everyone would win! The three Alliance members would get a spectacular but affordable home. The corporation would discharge their obligation to the city and turn a contentious liability into a feather in John Hancock's three-cornered hat. The city would have a self-supporting, year-round amenity for its citizens and visitors to enjoy. It seemed fair and doable. We could barely hide our excitement!

The mirrored tower of the new Hancock building, as it was being closed in, began to reflect the beautiful cloudscapes of the city rather competing with the historic architecture. In certain lighting the tower actually became invisible rather than an intrusion.

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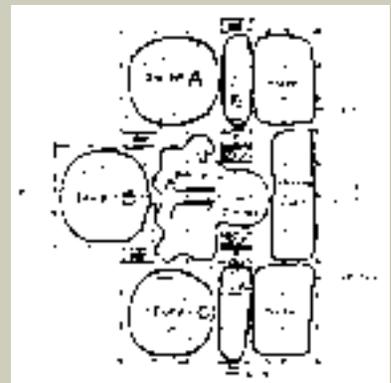
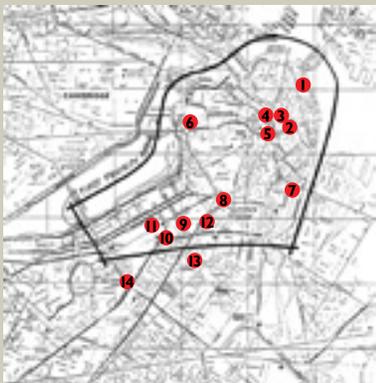
Blacky called to tell us that Hancock was putting the Pavilion on hold. It was too much for them to think about with all their glass popping out. He also inferred that the undisciplined façade had given Hancock time to worry about the inherent risks of getting into bed with not one but three underfinanced nonprofits. Would

the Alliance partners be strong enough to not end up as wards of the corporation? Initially my impulse was to go over Blacky's head and challenge Hancock and make a convincing case to his bosses directly, but I had to acknowledge that they probably had already made up their minds. Besides, at that moment, they had more pressing things competing for their attention than the exciting Hancock Pavilion. In fact they were probably craving less excitement, thank you! It made more sense for all of us to move on and create another opportunity instead.

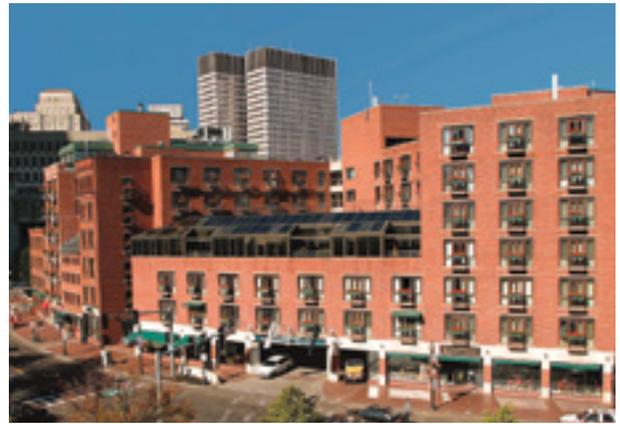
### Program Committee Report (1973) Template for a New Museum

So, a course change: we began to work with Chuck Redmon and John Stebbins, also at Cambridge Seven Associates, on a hypothetical plan that would meet our needs and, with maybe some new construction, could be combined with an existing building to make a whole museum. Guiding the process was a "Program Committee Report," which stated, "In [this report] we have tried to describe an economical and functional envelope to house the museum's core program on a compact downtown site..."

We came up with a museum model that had three distinct parts. The first was a multi-story loft space that could easily be divided up into subspaces for a variety of functions (imagine finding an unused New England cotton mill or an apartment building or a decommissioned hospital). The second was a large, clear-span, undifferentiated space (think of a theatre, like our old Jamaica Plain auditorium, or a big box retail store or a gymnasium). Tying these two spaces together would be a third element, a utility core housing stairways, elevators, HVAC systems, restrooms, electronic networks, collections storage, etc. (e.g. library stacks or the Pompidou Center or an underground airport baggage-handling system or an oil refinery.)



Cambridge Seven Associates gave us a template to evaluate possible sites. To be accessible to everyone, we had to be downtown, preferably within or near a designated "First Priority Area," above left, in which fourteen considered sites are marked. If we wanted to recycle an existing building, it should be adaptable to our basic needs, as outlined in above middle illustration. If we couldn't afford everything we wanted initially, the site should have room to grow, above right. If we wanted a place that felt like us, it shouldn't be too fancy.



Left, a street view of the Blackstone Block's prerenovated storefronts that ultimately became the home of the Bostonian Hotel, right. As we flirted with this site, pushcarts still hawked produce on weekends in front of butcher shops in what was the 18th century Haymarket. The block had access from the tunnels, expressways, subways, and parking. Around the corner was about to become the enormously successful Quincy Market. What a location! But adapting the old buildings would be expensive, and there was no room to grow.

Starting with one unit, say a derelict powerhouse, we could imagine it being converted into an open, multilevel exhibition hall, and, with the addition of the other two units (the loft spaces and the utility core), would complete a fully functioning museum. Or, we could start with an old 1920s grade school that would give us useful loft space to which, if we lucked out and it had a real gym, all that you would need to add was the specialized infrastructure (the utility core) to complete a new museum. But no single existing site would probably have all the features we would need to complete a "new" museum. Thus, this three-part model was just the template we needed to communicate among ourselves and with Cambridge Seven Associates to assess our options and resume trolling for another downtown site.

### **Blackstone Block (1973)**

Boston's Haymarket comes to life each Friday evening and Saturday morning—as it has for the last 150 years. In the 1970s, when we were looking for yet another downtown opportunity, the Haymarket was the exotic "garbage place" that our kids and I visited on deserted Sunday mornings after the produce pushcarts had been wheeled away and parked under the nearby Central Artery for another week, leaving their trash on the cobblestones for the city to clean up. Across the street from the famous old Durgin Park restaurant with its communal tables and surly waitresses, the Blackstone Block housed the more or less permanent meat market storefronts behind the lively Haymarket chaos of shouting pushcart vendors hawking fresh and cheap produce for weekend and next week's meals.

Before the Big Dig, Boston's billion-dollar megahighway project, but well into the Waterfront Redevelopment, the BRA had offered six adjoining properties in the Blackstone Block as a single development parcel.

Their idea was to preserve the snaggletooth profile of the old warehouses and the street-level meat market storefronts. After the Hancock debacle and following the Program Committee Report, we were still looking for downtown opportunities. In the abstract, the Blackstone Block parcel seemed like a possibility: it was about the right size; just around the corner from Quincy Market/Faneuil Hall Marketplace that was about to open (1976); parking was abundant; and it was serviced by several subway stops, Central Artery exits, and the harbor tunnels. Most importantly, maybe we had a chance to get it. Chuck Redmon was sent to scout it out.

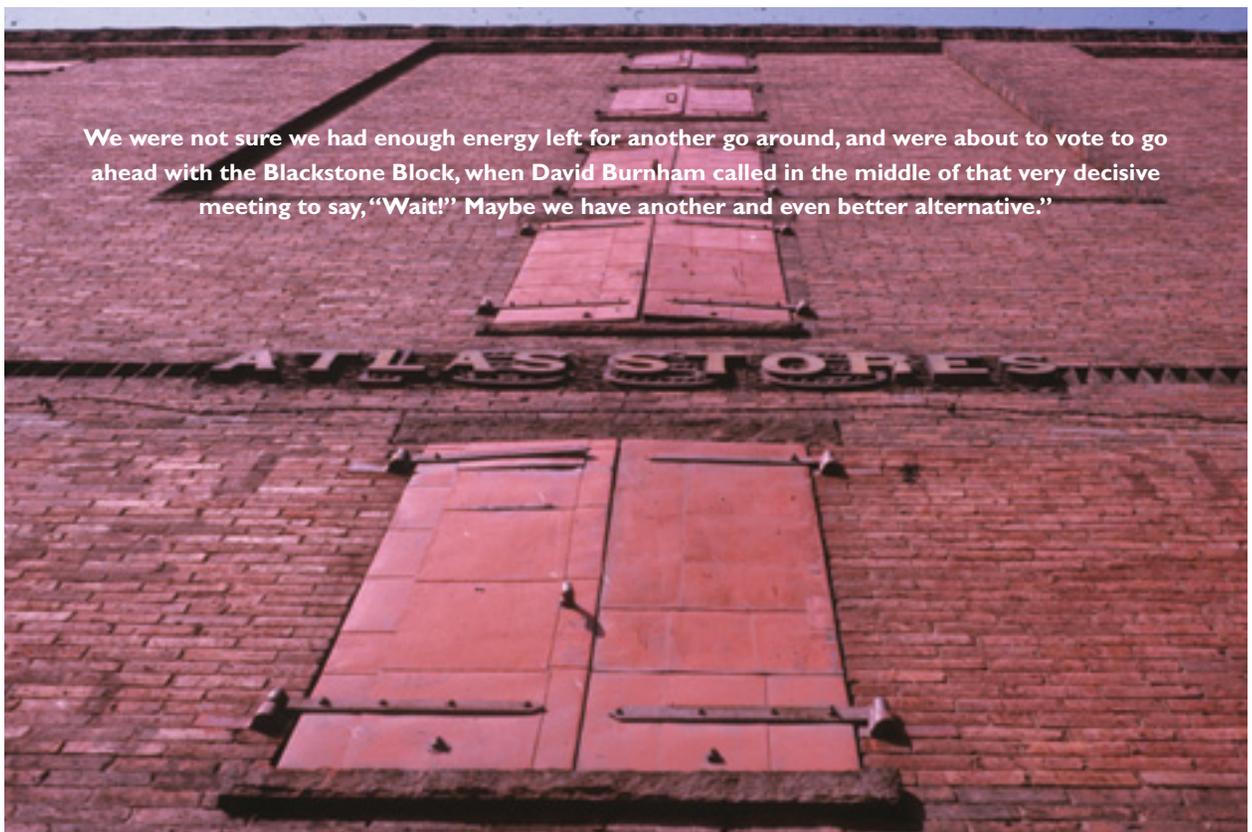
In a triumph of creative accommodation, Chuck and his team figured out a way to shoehorn our program into a combination of existing buildings and new construction while preserving the outline of the old buildings. In addition, the penetration of the facade would allow public access to the 18th century streetscape now serving as back alleys. But C7A's studies revealed two negative issues: 1) there was no room for future growth and 2) even if we got a great deal from the BRA, construction estimates were much more costly than we could probably afford.

Yet again, we walked away.

After a few years a developer picked up the parcel to build a small boutique hotel. As built, the new complex followed the massing of the original cluster of warehouses and storefronts called for in the BRA's request for proposals. What a kick to see the hotel façade now looking almost exactly the same as if the Children's Museum had gone ahead with the Blackstone Block Project!

### **Atlas Terminal Stores (1974) Another Collaboration?**

While we considered taking the plunge on the expensive Blackstone Block site, David Burnham sought



help from Stewart Pratt, a commercial real estate broker. Stewart took David to an abandoned wool warehouse on the Fort Point Channel. It looked promising.

We were not sure we had enough energy left to go another around, and were about to vote to go ahead with the Blackstone Block, when David Burnham called in the middle of that very decisive meeting to say, "Wait!" Maybe we have another and even better alternative.

The Atlas Terminal Stores was more than the children's museum could handle on its own. Our architectural program showed that we could comfortably use about 70,000 net square feet. The old warehouse had about 144,000 square feet. Either we needed to go into the real estate business or find a partner. The Hancock Pavilion experience suggested we could probably collaborate with one or two compatible, non-competitive partner(s).

Duncan Smith and I had worked together in the '60s developing packaging for the MATCH Box kits and an affordable storage system for the children's museum's significant artifact collections. Duncan and I, with our families of almost perfectly matched kids, were also friends living side by side in the woods of exurban Lincoln.

In the '70s, following a successful run as staff exhibition designer for the Museum of Fine Arts, Duncan was hired as director of the Antique Auto Museum in the Lars Anderson carriage house in Brookline. With boundless creativity and energy, Duncan's museum plan

conceived how a gorgeous and growing collection of vehicles and transportation-related artifacts, together with an inventive education program, could become a contemporary museum of social history. He saw the mission as documenting and interpreting the industrialization and urbanization of America through the lens of transportation. His team began to work on transforming the vintage auto clubhouse into a Museum of Transportation (MOT).

In fact, during our parallel site-hunting expeditions, Dunc got me to look with him at the vast collection of handsome industrial buildings and generous grounds that made up the decommissioned Watertown Arsenal. The Arsenal had been maintained in perfect shape by the Department of Defense (broken pains of glass immediately replaced, floors always waxed) right up to the moment it was turned over to the Watertown city fathers. Although the grounds offered plenty of space to drive visitors and vehicles around and wonderful places for MOT members to show off their collections in meets, it was not central enough to meet The Children's Museum site criteria. When the Fort Point Channel warehouse came into view I thought of Duncan as a possible collaborator. In a recent interview, Duncan recollects the start of our new venture:

In 1974...or '75, you called up and said, "Let's joint venture and work on the Boston waterfront."

At this moment, five years into my direc-

## Taking the Plunge | Mike Spock, David Burnham & Ben Schore

In the last two sites we studied, the economic and real estate issues turned out to be really daunting. In fact, we thought we had exhausted most of the good options and might end up for another decade in Jamaica Plain or settling for a site that compromised our fundamental criteria. David Burnham, then museum treasurer and board chair and today an organizational development consultant and long-term trustee, picks up the story in a recent interview:

We had clearly made the decision that we had to leave Jamaica Plain...and we had narrowed down to two possible choices: the Castle and the Blackstone Block. Both had very significant liabilities. We couldn't agree because we hadn't found the ideal site, but it was clear Mike was tired of the debate, and I was very unhappy with both places.

So David called Stewart Pratt, a commercial real estate broker who had a property that just might work. He thought David should give it a look. David continues:

...we got to this old warehouse. It was totally empty. We trudged up these crumbling stairs to the very top floor, and threw open the steel doors. I looked out, and it was snowing, and there was Boston right in front of me—the buildings and the lights—and I thought, "This is it." I said, "How much is it?" He said, "\$800,000." Wow!

The six story brick warehouse on the Fort Point Channel, announced in terracotta relief, "Atlas Terminal 1888."

... I went to that payphone and called Mike and said, "Don't buy the Blackstone Block. You have to see this..." The next day he came to see it.

Ben Schore, the board member who chaired the site review committee, takes up the story.

We had landed on the Blackstone Block as the site of the new museum. We were going to approve it at a meeting in my office. I don't remember who came racing into the room saying, "There is another site that we should look at, let's defer the (final) vote...and we can see the building from here.

... There was something about the building that really did appeal, even though we had to share it with some critters (rats). But it had good bones. It looked good... My firm had already been working on the [loans for the] renovation of Boston's Vendome Hotel. So we were very much in tune with reuse at that point.

David continues:

... You just knew when you walked into the old warehouse that there was all this space, and you could do anything you wanted with it. It wasn't a new building but it felt like the right thing for The Children's Museum. It felt like our culture would thrive there.

Relationships among members of the board, their relatives and business partners became crucial to the successful outcome of purchasing and developing this exciting piece of real estate.



Everyone involved in the Wharf Project carried this snapshot of their "new baby," the Atlas Terminal Stores warehouse, in their wallets.

Ben Shore now tells the story of how the Atlas Terminal Stores was purchased—in record time.

...the price had two parts: the sale price, and then if we closed by December 31, then only a few weeks away, we would not owe an additional amount of money—the real estate taxes for the current year. If we owned it one day into the next year, we owed the entire year's real estate taxes, which were considerable in Boston.

Stan, my mortgage banking company partner, knew Peter Damon, VP of Mortgages at the Charlestown Savings Bank. ... Stan called Peter and said, "Ben's going to come over."

Peter liked the whole idea. He thought The Children's Museum was great. Peter said, "I'll do it," and gave it to a beginner in the loan business, Paul Spees.

Paul got so excited about it—even more than Peter—that he actually marshaled a special loan committee meeting because they had to do the appraisal and all this other business, and close. We closed in maybe six or eight weeks, which is absolutely unbelievable. Paul now my next door neighbor in New Hampshire, never, ever forgot the experience.

We still have the iconic image of the old warehouse and its scruffy neighborhood seen from high up on the burgeoning financial district. The dirty early winter snow was piled up against the wharf's apron behind a row of lobster traps at the edge of the wooden apron, a small fleet of lobster boats tied up at the dock. Everyone—staff, board, bankers—got a wallet-size photo so they could take it out to show their "new baby."

Unlike the Blackstone Block and Hancock Pavilion, it was actually a site we could probably afford.

Looking across from the financial district towards South Boston, it was possible to convince ourselves that the old wool warehouse would be both visible and accessible from downtown. When we bought the wharf, the usual pioneers—artists, designers, art galleries—had already joined remnants of the wool, leather, and carbon black traders in their dark and dusty lofts.

So after flirting with more than a dozen sites for more than a dozen years, and doing serious studies of three options, it seemed like the Fort Point warehouse might be the workable and affordable place for us.

torship of the MOT and about thirteen years into your directorship of the museum, TCM had established a reputation, was known to the foundation community and the public. It was an institution that was around seventy, eighty years old then. And it was a family-service, cultural agency—a place for mothers and fathers and kids. MOT, by comparison, had a virtually new program. Its old image was [an] antique car parking lot, and its new image was too new to be widely understood. We were so new, we had no endowment, no developed staff who had mastered the collections or performed the other staff functions in education, public relations, development, and so forth. So you guys were ahead of us.

We decided after a series of meetings that we would try and do Museum Wharf together. Our pitch was to admit [TCM is] faster, stronger, smarter, and richer, which was essentially true. To make the budget work, we had to have clarity between the directors about the process, the project, and the shared goals of this new thing called Museum Wharf.

The second issue was that the boards and staff had to agree on the project's budget and some way of maintaining the process of converting the whole warehouse into a museum space. Each museum had to be able to raise the funds necessary to accomplish the common

task, and also do its own integral development and fitting out. Each museum had to understand that the process of accomplishing the conversion would have to be kept on time and costs controlled, and that distractions for bent egos, loud voices, and side shows had to be kept within reason. And then, finally, when it was done, the project had to be the right fit for the institutions going forward.

Duncan and I were both pretty clear-eyed about the challenges and opportunities of a high-stakes project like Museum Wharf. Collaboration made sense. The personalities, experiences and world views of the two of us were not exactly parallel but seemed close enough to make a partnership work. We definitely spoke the same language. Duncan, more nimble, was a creative problem solver, had a charming and convincing way with words, and never saw a challenge that he couldn't see his way through. I was more deliberate, persistent, and good at hanging in there until we reached our goals. The Children's Museum had more than a decade's head start in getting things in place and a portfolio of projects we could point to and talk about. The Museum of Transportation was assembling a fantastic collection of very sexy vehicles that had both historic and economic value.

We agreed to see if we could convince our boards and find enough funding to buy the old wool warehouse. Chuck Redmon remembers what happened next:

...you formed an agreement to take it



on, which is a big risk for two boards to join resources. How much do you cover, how much do they cover? If something happens to one of you, what happens to the other one? It's sort of like a marriage, in a way. We were dealing with design, technical difficulties and obstacles, and you were dealing with financial and organizational relationship things at the same time. It was never dull in terms of the issues that came up. But this building proved to be immensely interesting. It brought to bear some of the ideas that we talked about early on with the Hancock building, the Blackstone, and all three of the other ones—being part of a larger venue...

**Part 3 | PLANNING THE PROJECT**

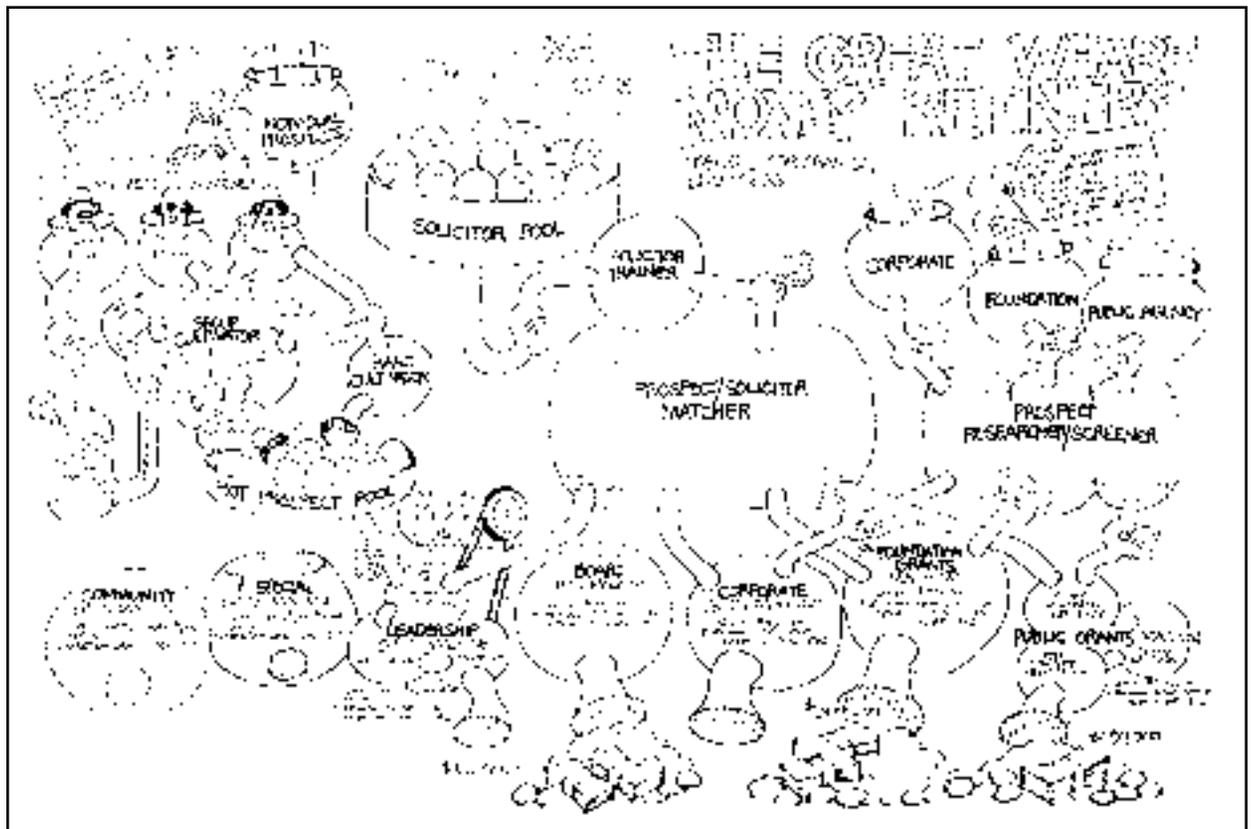
**Details, Decisions and Dollars**

While the site committee had been exploring locations, in preparation for the impending move, a program committee composed of staff and board had been meeting to select major exhibit/program themes based on collections, audience and the new museum's focus. Planning how to use, fit out and fund our new home involved myriad individual and complex decisions—some profound and some microscopic—made mindful of visitors, staff, the two directors, funders, the project



Board member Sue Jackson and Mike Spock lead a planning session on the wharf project.

committees, planners, and managers, MOT, TCM or the Museum Wharf complex, the city and national codes, the budget, expediency, convenience, compromise, equity. As Dan Prigmore (the Museum Wharf project director) was fond of saying “The building is always trying to tell us what to do, if we only would listen.” And among



Staff member Andy Merriell created this fundraising flow chart that pokes fun at the reality of this complex development effort.

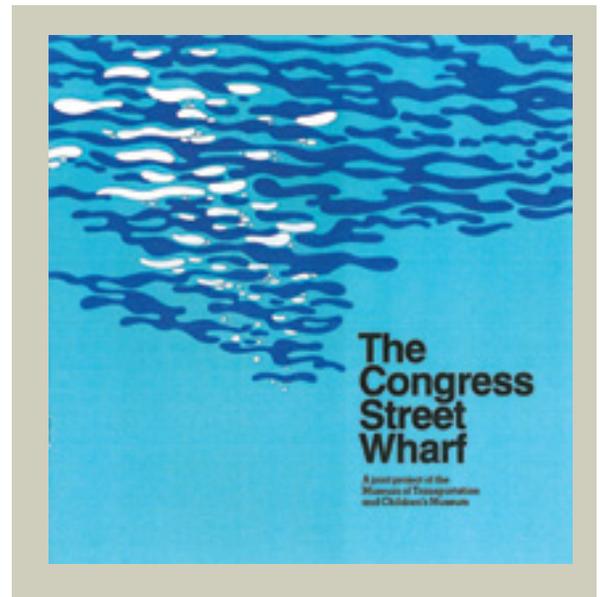
all of us at TCM trying to hang on to the essence of our largely intangible culture, “It does—or doesn’t—feel like us!” Following is a collection of stories that illustrate how and why some of these decisions were made.

### Now, Who’s Going to Raise the Money?

Although each museum agreed that it was responsible for its portion of getting Museum Wharf developed, for creating its exhibits and programs, and for covering its fundraising and operating costs, Duncan and I recognized that there were opportunities where we could collaborate: the temporary site offices, exhibits and party fundraising space, and the individual museum and Museum Wharf campaign brochures. Duncan recalls a pivotal moment in our fund raising education.

We [Duncan and Mike] went to a meeting of the Museum Directors Group at the Peabody Museum in Salem [that had] this wonderful director, Ernest Dodge. We were talking about fundraising, and we raised the question about, well, if you want to raise funds, what do you do? Hire a fundraising council?...And Ernest said, “No, unfortunately, if you want to raise money, you have to go and do it yourself. And if you don’t do it, if you’re not the engine for cultural fundraising for your institution, the money will not be raised.”

That was a moment for enlightenment. We drove back together from Salem like the shades had been lifted. Why we’d spent money having a fundraising council come in and organize the bedickens out of the project and



we still couldn’t get it to move. It couldn’t move because we weren’t driving it. And essentially from that day on, most of my job was fundraising. Which was...interesting. How do you run the institution, do the fundraising, and then manage architectural and construction campaigns? If you begin looking at what the tasks are for director, you can’t do three, so you’d better [at least] do one.”

Ernest Dodge was right. The staff and board would have to do the asking, of course, but one of the sensible things that cautious nonprofits also did, to see if they could actually raise the money for a big capital cam-

CAPITAL BUDGET			CAMPAIGN GOALS		
	TCM	MOT		TCM	MOT
Building	\$2,485,000	\$2,035,000	Board	\$ 700,000	\$ 700,000
Program	900,000	350,000	Individuals	875,000	700,000
Fund Raising	115,000	115,000	Corporations	350,000	250,000
	<b>\$3,500,000</b>	<b>\$2,500,000</b>	Foundations	875,000	500,000
			Public Funds	700,000	350,000
				<b>\$3,500,000</b>	<b>\$2,500,000</b>

**Above, right, the cover illustration of the Congree Street Wharf fund raising brochure, depicted a mingling of sun-dappled waters. The financial charts inside, shown here, detail where the money needed to come from and how it would be used.**

TCM The Children’s Museum MOT Museum of Transportation

## The Giant Elevator | Mike Spock, Duncan Smith, Kathy Murphy & Dan Prigmore

When Dan Prigmore took over the management of the project and its finances, he brought in his own architects, Dyer Brown, to complete working drawings and supervise the contracts. They took the Cambridge Seven Associates schematic plans pretty much as is, with one very important exception: the giant elevator designed to move the Museum of Transportation's vehicles from floor to floor and school-bus-loads of kids up to MOT would be enclosed in glass and relocated to the Fort Point Channel side of Museum Wharf. A bonus was that it afforded a spectacular view of Boston and the harbor that fit perfectly with Duncan Smith's dream. In Duncan's interview he describes his draw to the harbor:

...the museum had this enormous potential, not as an antique auto museum, but as a way of talking about technology and the evolution of American culture, using transportation, including cars, as metaphors for this process both developing and peopling this country. And most particularly in the context of Boston, because it has had every single important transportation system and social impact in our history. Every change has gone through the city, leaving its mark... [Looking] out the window at the Fort Point Channel, you can put your finger down almost anywhere and see the impact of commerce, transportation, and the impact of this history on people's lives. It's one of the things that makes Boston so uniquely rich...

It was all there: the Central Artery, South Station, Logan Airport, the railroad Fan Pier, lobstermen, warehouses, docks, bridges, tunnels, ferries, container ships, sailboats, cars, trucks, trains. It was Richard Scarry's Busytown. The giant elevator ride would be a too-good-to-be-missed interpretive opportunity and a terrific landmark for MOT. So relocating the elevator became key to Dan Prigmore's revised plan. But there were significant costs to that scheme as well, as Smith points out:

...as we began to fundraise for our old new building, we converted two ground-floor bays into temporary onsite project offices and a exhibition gallery where we invited prospects for lunch, cocktails or dinner....I remember at the end of one party everyone standing at the open [loading] door looking out, and all of a sudden a freight car came whizzing by on what we all assumed was a dead track.... It was a surprise.

Later, as the construction loan was about to be closed, Kathy Murphy, a young lawyer working in John Bok's office (and a future member of TCM's board) was assembling the loan documentation, including the property survey, which had arrived at the very last minute. She recalls:

I remember, getting the survey, finally, and running over to the law firm [where the closing was awaiting this final document]...with it and unfolding the survey and finding out that the elevator was going to land right on top of the railroad track. We had to stop everything and figure out how we were going to get the permission of the railroad because it turned out that railroad line, the spur track, had not been abandoned. It was still an active line.

We had to find somebody to deal with us putting an elevator on the railroad track....John Carberry [a member of MOT's board] and Duncan Smith were instrumental in tracking down this guy from Conrail in a bar in South Boston and getting him to focus on it enough so that we ended up negotiating a lease of the spur track and the railroad's easement, a lease to Wharf Museum, Inc., to use that spur track so that we could put the big elevator right on top of it.

Duncan picks up the story from here, adding slightly different details, but essentially arriving at the same outcome.

...this was a very serious problem....a railroad right-of-way is an act of God and you can't terminate or interfere with it....When we bought this building there was a functioning right-of-way through here which was compromised by the fact that there was no connection at the other end of the railroad yards onto the main track. It had been cut.

...we discovered that [the] head of Conrail's real estate department in New York was a Greek gentleman, an old and dear friend of Nick's [Contos] of the [No Name] restaurant....At some point Nick bought this piece of junk castoff railroad land from him and then sold it for millions to the [proposed third harbor] tunnel right-of-way gang.

We all went down to Nick's and explained our problem with the elevator, the right-of-way and the dead trackage. The guy took a set of building plans back to New York, and had the people in his office redraw the railroad right-of-way across our property in such a way that the elevator was not on the right-of-way. You know the way H.O. model tracks can snake around, make[ing] these impossible turns? The right-of-way in front of this building comes up to the elevator, makes a sharp right turn, goes out, makes a sharp left turn, goes by the elevator and makes a sharp right turn, comes back to the building and goes out to the street. The plan was filed and approved by Conrail, which was the end of this guy across the street who was threatening to sue us. Anyway, the right-of-way drawing was hilarious...

Finally, Dan Prigmore completes the story:

...[in the plan] we had put the elevator outside the building...and were fully committed to that program.... The adjacent property [with rights to use the same track that ran across our property] was owned by one of the most difficult human beings on this earth.... we finally made contact and did a deal. Essentially the argument was we had joint rights to it. "Some day you're going to want to do something. And if you're impossible now, I guarantee you in perpetuity there will be impossibility on the other side. This costs you nothing and you should do it." And we got it done...

Once again, that was the level of complexity we had to deal with and the depth of the relationships we had to call on to get of the pieces of Museum Wharf done.

paign, was to ask fundraising counsel to do a feasibility study. The Children's Museum did a feasibility study in the mid '60s when we were first considering a move downtown, but backed away when Bob Corcoran, our fundraising council, reported that we wouldn't be able to pull it off. Instead, we made do with the renovation of the auditorium/Visitor Center for the next decade.

The Children's Museum did a feasibility study again with Bob Corcoran on the Museum Wharf project, and found out that if we did most of the right things, and solicited most of the right people, and stuck to our reasonable goal (\$3,500,000) that we could now, almost a decade later, probably pull it off. The Museum of Transportation didn't conduct a feasibility study to test the receptivity of its potential donors. Instead, MOT made an intelligent guess (\$2,500,000) focusing primarily on their museum's needs, not on their board and the local foundations' readiness.

### The Old Warehouse Had Good Bones

The Atlas Terminal Stores, built in 1888, was an unadorned brick warehouse overlooking Fort Point Channel. Board member and real estate developer Ben Shore had commented on its "good bones" structural integrity. It also had an abundance of space: plenty of room to grow before you had to construct any new space. If nothing else, Museum Wharf would become a model of inexpensive adaptability. Our architects described it as a "giant chest of drawers." Only the handles were missing.

The stark simplicity of this empty shell of a building turned out to be one of its greatest assets. Everything was visible, therefore, there were few surprises. (Except one, the "abandoned" railroad right of way, a working siding that serviced the apron in front of the wool warehouse—but more about that development later.) The predictable regularity of the 6 floors x 6 bays = 36-bay grid made it possible to play musical chairs in assigning and later reassigning functions to bays and floors.

In 19th century cities, with inadequate fire departments and justly worried about conflagrations, the brick "party walls" provided separation so wool bales and other stores that might catch fire wouldn't spread flames to neighboring bays. There were few penetrations between the bays. Reminiscent of barn haylofts, each bay, front and back, had giant loading doors. Remnants of simple cranes with block and tackles, used to move cargo off boats tied up at the wharf or to and from wagons and boxcars on the rail siding cutting across the property, remained. The small windows, together with the loading doors, gave warehousemen just enough light to see what they were doing before electrical service came to the bleak neighborhood. Wood or coal stoves had been moved from floor to floor and from chimney to chimney as needed to give comfort to warehousemen working in bitter weather.

Less desirable structural issues also became visible.

## In an earthquake Boston would behave like Jello | Chuck Redmon



The old warehouse that everybody loved when you walked in the doors....giant timbers and brick walls. It felt good—a friendly place. And if the structural code people had their way you would have lost the character of the building.

So the idea was very simple. On the top of all the floors we put two pieces of plywood, one running this way and one running that way. That created what was called a "diaphragm." And then tie rods were drawn across the building, through the wall, and fastened with star bolts (pictured below).

It was very, very interesting, very economical, and very elegant solution.



Anchored on wooden pilings driven into the landfilled harbor muck, Boston was built on reclaimed land was vulnerable to rare but strong earthquakes and could not be counted on to support an unreinforced building like ours. Welcoming school groups and families to our converted warehouse would have to be made safe from the danger of collapsing bricks and pan-caking floors by being brought up to modern earthquake codes.

## Feeding Our Public, Our Bond Holders, Our Ambition

When we began to sell the idea of the old wool warehouse as the new home for The Children's Museum and the Museum of Transportation to the city, the banks, and other funders, the discussion always turned to how we might increase our chances of survival and prosperity by offering space to retail and food operations. We thought our answer was straightforward and convincing: we would lease space to eating establishments that would serve our visitors and the few folks working and living in the neighborhood, and we would even offer to pay fees in lieu of taxes to the city, with other rentals helping cover the service on the tax exempt bonds, which we would soon be applying for. We had some encouraging discussions with McDonalds at their Oak Park, Illinois, headquarters about opening a company-owned store

in our property. If McDonalds found our plans for the Congress Street Wharf (which we first called our newly acquired wool warehouse) convincing and the prospects for the revival of the Fort Point Channel promising, it seemed also to offer reassurance to the banks, other funders, and the city. After all, McDonalds was famous as the shrewdest site-picker in the country! Conforming to McDonalds reputation for driving extraordinarily hard bargains, we were not to get much rent from the lease until they had generated an unrealistically high percentage of sales.

We had also had reassuring conversations in Oak Park about using other-than-plastic furnishings, and even the menu, before the deal was signed. We discussed turning the kitchen, storage areas, and walk-in refrigerators into exhibits. Kids could see where food came from, and how it was grown and processed. But when they turned the project over to their real estate people, law-

## The Project Committee: Bok, Butterfield, Schore, Smith, Spock & Stebbins What Made It Work

John Bok, a very public-spirited lawyer who had been involved with many other *pro bono* civic projects including the startup of the Metropolitan Cultural Alliance, chaired the committee that was trying to get Museum Wharf off the ground. We met weekly at his office—very early in the morning—for more than three years. Staff, board, architects, and managers remember the Project Committee as one of the reasons that Museum Wharf actually happened. Several participants described the workings of those meetings in later interviews:

...the meetings [included] key people at The Children's Museum, the Museum of Transportation, the lawyers, the architects and eventually the project managers and sometimes others. There were maybe fifteen or twenty of us in the room. I was there first as the campaign assistant to get up to speed. Chaired by John Bok, these complicated meetings began at 7:00 a.m. every Thursday morning....I took good notes and it was really useful for me in understanding how to work on the [fundraising] campaign itself.... (Anne Butterfield)

...It was a chance for all the principal actors to come together and solve problems, straighten out schedules, and anticipate future issues that had to be dealt with in a timely way. The meetings were over in an hour.

...Everyone was heard. Problems were aired. I don't recall any time in that meeting process where people's personal agendas colored their behavior in the meeting or the process by which the group came to a consensus. And it was consensus-driven. People would pretty well agree what needs to be done and whatever the mechanism was to accomplish it. (Duncan Smith)

...the Project Committee was very important in allowing both museums to feel as though they had a say in the process....

...John Bok had a very clear series of objectives. He was very analytical. Once he zeroed in on an issue or subject he would bring it to closure, which doesn't happen many times. You need that type of leadership in a nonprofit, but it has to be even-handed. (John Stebbins)

...It was brilliant. The meetings were conducted without fanfare, and everybody showed [up] that needed to show. Nine times out of ten those meetings were done quickly, effectively, and efficiently and set the tone for the week. If you're doing a real estate project, you need to have a rhythm to your process so that people get a sense that on every [Thursday] morning [they're] going to come and do whatever [needs to be done that day]. I'd been in enough projects where that was a problem. We worked quite hard at making sure that the people who were interested in the project and wanted to do something got a chance to be heard and talk to each other....(Ben Schore)

7:00 a.m. on Thursdays. We joked that since we never missed a Thursday meeting, and since we met so early in the morning, perhaps we could even meet on Thanksgiving Day and be back home in time for completing last minute preparations for Thanksgiving dinner.

...The thing that happened—and always happens if you've got good people who like each other—they talk to each other and they have a good time. We made that happen. We were very lucky. (John Bok)



**Delivering the Milk:** A forty-foot wooden milk bottle—restored and now ready to serve frozen yogurt—was just the lunch-time attraction needed to add life to the dingy wool warehouses and dusty commodity broker’s offices on the Fort Point Channel. The bottle arrived by barge nudged up the harbor by a tugboat in full water salute. It appeared on the front page of the *Boston Globe* and on the evening news, along with the opening of the new McDonalds many months before construction on the new museum began. The bottle became the landmark of Museum Wharf and a directional sign for the two museums. The hilarious tale told by John Sloan and others of the “Odyssey of the Sanky bottle” and its rescue by the CEO of the Rough and Ready Underwear Company, the Hood Dairy, Jack Shaughnessey and his crane deserve a look. (See Media Section of the Big Move Chapter on the Boston Stories website.)

yers, designer, contractors, and the store operator, they couldn’t be bothered. They didn’t even acknowledge that those discussions had been held. The opportunity to try something new and exciting was lost. But, we had too many things that were pressing against us to spend much time getting all the players to live up to their agreements.

However, the staff was dismayed. Jonathan Hyde, head of public relations from the lead up to the move downtown and after and who wasn’t your standard marketer by any means, remembers in his interview:

I remember a big issue around McDonald’s. Some very, very strong opinions. The pragmatists said, “this is popular with kids” vs. the people who were horrified at the prospect. I’m not aware of how that decision finally got made. But the pragmatists won.

...Museum Wharf was a so-called mixed-use development. It was going to [have] two museums and we needed to have as much energy—noise, activity, pedestrian stuff—as we could possibly generate. That wasn’t as easy

to achieve as we’d all imagined. The museum generated that kind of traffic between nine and five, but after that, the whole place kind of shut down. We were the only game in town. There just wasn’t much pedestrian traffic down there at the time. I had a larger game to play. It wasn’t just one museum, it was two museums *and* restaurants. It was a development that was more than the sum of the parts...

But McDonalds wasn’t the most disappointing or frustrating commercial collaboration. Our real estate broker found a new chain of Mexican restaurants that was interested in a couple of the wharf’s additional first floor bays. It sounded like a good match. But it turned out their logo depicted about the most egregious stereotype of a peasant dozing under an enormous sombrero! So we said goodbye to them.

Things became even more problematic when the Mexican restaurant was replaced by a fish restaurant to be called Trawlers. The proposed owner/operators, who had small successes with eateries in both Albany and on

**We loved the idea that visitors and staff would be wowed and informed by the same view of all the merging transportation routes that first wowed David Burnham and Stewart Pratt on that snowy December afternoon when they pushed open the rusty doors to view the panorama of downtown and the harbor...**

**But all the traffic, exhaust, dust, and salt spray meant we were about to enter into an intense pollution hot spot well before EPA got ahead of cleaning up the atmosphere of downtown and the harbor.**

**As real museum people taking care of real museum artifacts knew, exposing collections to light and other environmental challenges was a no-no, especially in the renovation of the old warehouse building that was about to become a real and modern museum building!**

Martha's Vineyard, now wanted to try their luck on the Boston waterfront. To convince us they meant business, they chartered a converted World War II passenger plane, and flying just above the south shore cranberry bogs, brought some of us to Edgartown for a meal at their second restaurant. Their plan was appealing except they had no funding for fitting-out the place. They needed an investor for the kitchen equipment and the front-of-the-store furnishings. Without additional funding it was not a go. And by then, the banks that were about to sell our bonds had talked themselves into the idea that the only thing that would complete this mixed-use development was, of all things, yet another restaurant! (We already had McDonalds and the giant Hood milk bottle.) Dan Prigmore, who was by then completing the Museum Wharf investment package, went among members of both museum boards asking some of them to join him in investing \$10,000 each to help get Trawlers open. But, as if they had never operated a restaurant before, when Trawlers opened, the food arrived late and was indifferent. Besides, nobody came! They quickly closed.

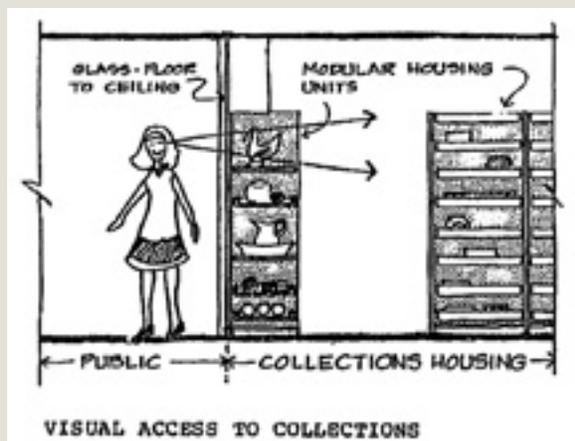
So both sets of trustees that had been strong-armed into stepping up to put the restaurant financing in place (in turn to make the banks and bond holders feel comfortable taking risks on Wharf construction and long-term financing) had to eat their investment instead of what was on the Trawler's menu.

A succession of seafood places on barges and boats came and went over the next few years, and depending on the tides, blocked our views, or not, of the harbor. Without exception, they were not in the least memorable. But our earliest arrival at Museum Wharf, the Giant Milk Bottle, remained an unqualified lunchtime success!

### Changing Tables & Family Restrooms

Taking our cue from the wonderfully consistent National Park Visitor Centers, (they always clustered restrooms, the information desk, an introductory slideshow, and educational exhibits, all equally visible and accessible from the path from the parking lot to the front door) we also decided that every Museum Wharf floor had to have both women and men's restrooms, not hidden away in the museum's basement. (Besides, we were reminded during high tide in an approaching hurricane that our building didn't have a basement!) And we also insisted that every restroom—including every men's room—had to have a baby-changing table (there were none on the market then; we had to design and build our own.) No one was going to have to change a diaper on the restroom floor. And another thing we thought up: instead of space consumed by not very busy handicapped accessible stalls, (as required by the new national codes) every floor was to have a spacious and separate unisex

## Study Storage: from Drawing Board to Reality



The Native American Study Storage department tread the line between proper archival preservation of artifacts and controlled access to objects as part of a teaching collection.

family restroom with wide doors, high fixtures, grab bars, and their own changing tables. We could find no precedents to point to, so we had to convince the building department that this unconventional arrangement was a reasonable substitute for what were then becoming universal handicapped stalls and fixtures. Everyone admitted that our idea had some currency when we reminded building department fathers, who had at some point subjected their daughters to being taken into men's public restrooms. When we tried them out for the first time at Museum Wharf, mothers also applauded the fact that the new family restrooms would offer some privacy if they wanted to nurse their babies as well! We had fun designing the new icons and changing tables, and family restrooms soon became a universally expected public accommodation.

### **Renovation Survey (1978) Keeping People & Stuff Happy**

We loved the idea that visitors and staff would be wowed and informed by the same view of all the merging transportation routes that first wowed David Burnham and Stewart Pratt on that snowy December afternoon when they pushed open the rusty doors to view the panorama of downtown and the harbor with planes taking off and landing at Logan Airport, tracks of the Fan Pier loaded with freight cars, Central Artery traffic diving under South Station, commuter ferries arriving from the South Shore, container ships and tankers heading into their East Boston terminals, the small fleet of lobster boats, at that moment still tied up to our dock, and the now unmanned Fort Point Channel bridges. Dunc pointed out, in his effort to bring those bridges back to life, that in our quarter-mile of the channel we had examples of each of the three types of operating bridges: lift, swing, bascule—a gallery of all of the 19th century bridge designs.

But all the traffic, exhaust, dust, and salt spray meant we were about to enter into an intense pollution hot spot well before EPA got ahead of cleaning up the atmosphere of downtown and the harbor.

As real museum people taking care of real museum artifacts knew, exposing collections to light and other environmental challenges was a no-no, especially in the renovation of the old warehouse building that was about to become a real and modern museum building! The fact that both The Children's Museum (and more recently the Museum of Transportation) were becoming famous for their hands-on exhibits and programs didn't get us off the hook. We thought the conflict between preserving the windows, with their splendid views, and taking care of our wonderful collections could not be avoided. And the windows were only one of the collections housing issues that had to be addressed. A 1970 report of the American Association of Museums' Accreditation Visiting Committee reported that "the collections of the

## Museum Wharf in the News

We began to get a fair amount of national publicity while we were still in Jamaica Plain. Beyond the Boston syndicated *Bozo Show*, it included appearances on *Dick Cavett*, *CBS Morning News*, and *Dinah Shore*.

After the move to the waterfront there were articles in professional journals, national magazines, local press and planning reports. Below are links to a sampling of articles that appeared after the move and later and are now available in the Archive:

[Museum Profiles: MOT & TCM.pdf](#)  
(*Technology & Conservation*, 1979)

[A Slice of the City in Cross Section.pdf](#)  
(*AIA Journal*, 1979)

[Adaptive Reuse, A Joint Venture: Museum Wharf.pdf](#)  
(*Museum News*, 1980)

[Boston Children's Museum.pdf](#)  
(Catalog, 1981-1983)

[A Boston museum where kids can cavort at will.pdf](#)  
(*Smithsonian Magazine*, 1981)

[Making Fun Work.pdf](#)  
(Raytheon, 1984)

[Museum Wharf Waterfront Development.pdf](#)  
(McMillan addition proposal, 1989)

[Renewed Museums Revisited.pdf](#)  
(*Museum News*, 1993)

[Growing Pains at The Children's Museum.pdf](#)  
(*Boston Globe*, 1995)

[Program and Concept Design Report.pdf](#)  
(C7A addition, 2004)

[Going With the Flow.pdf](#)  
(*Boston Globe*, 2007)



institution [TCM] are extremely fine; the scope of the collection in terms of potential program contributions is outstanding; the recordkeeping is of a very high order.”

Under a National Endowment of the Arts Utilization of Collections grant, C7A's John Stebbins organized a study of the criteria and strategies we might adopt and the costs we might bear in housing our treasures at Museum Wharf.

In an effort to preserve these extraordinary resources and make them available for exhibition, educational programs, and scholarly research, The Children's Museum invested four years in the late '60s and early '70s and more than \$70,000 in a major analysis and recataloging of its cultural collections, some 30,000 objects.

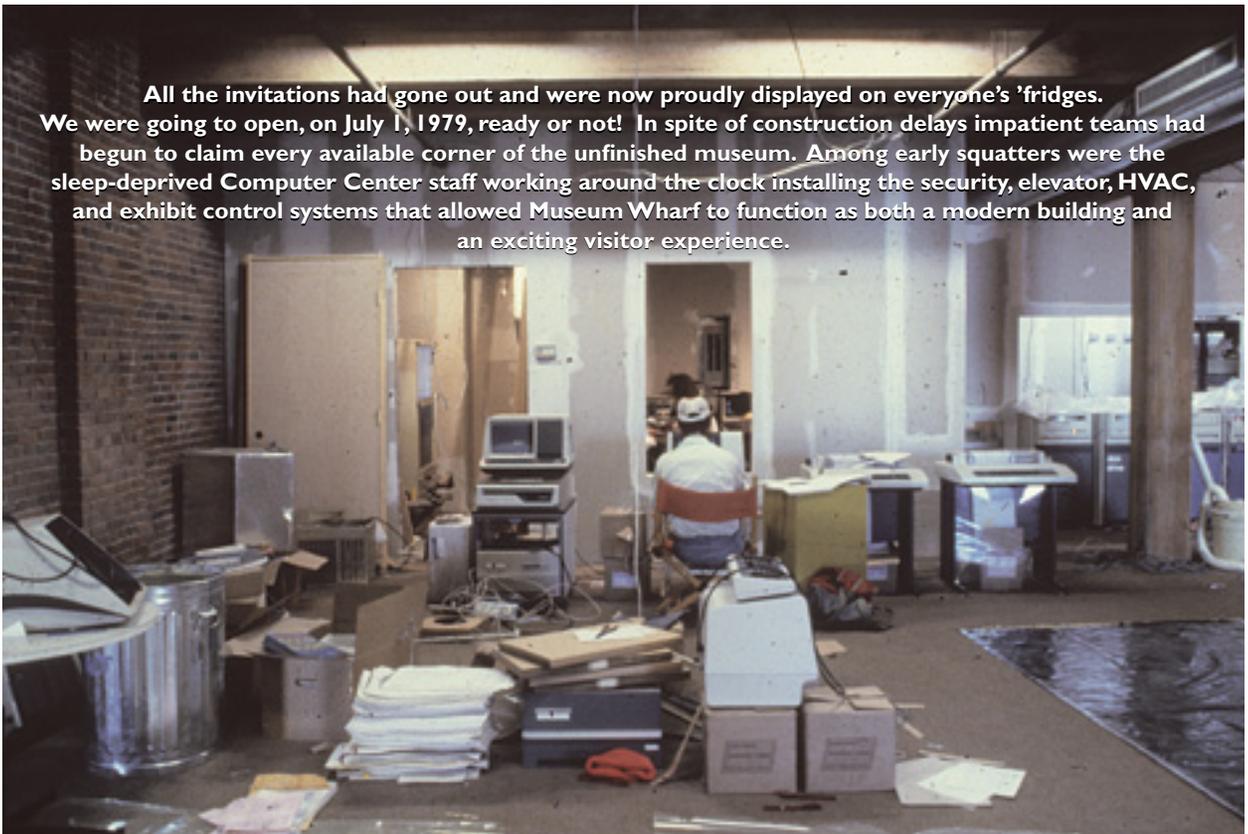
The Museum of Transportation has only begun the task of accessioning, cataloging and documenting its collections since 1970.

The objective of this study is to provide the museums [TCM & MOT] the necessary planning guidelines and technical criteria for developing a collections conservation program at their new building headquarters, the Congress Street Wharf. The renovation of the building, the housing and usage of collections, and the operational procedures for program/exhibit development will be studied, and recommendations will be generated to provide

a conservation policy that maximizes the interface between these three key areas.”

Heating and ventilating engineers R. G. Vanderweil, working on the designs for the Wharf's mechanical systems, came up with a solution for keeping the interior environment of the building and the visitors, collections, and staff happy while saving energy. Recognizing that there would be wide variations in the climatic demands of each museum's activities: sweaty kids clambering down the City Slice Manhole would be a net source of heat, staff at their desks overlooking the Channel but hoping to feel comfortable on winter days, would be calling for more heat, while curators, watching out for their collections would have to pay attention that the seasonal swings in humidity were gentle enough to not damage the cells of wood and leather artifacts. So they suggested we capitalize on the fact that the building was already divided into thirty-six modular bays and explore equally modular solutions for energy conservation. The decision was to give each bay its own heat pump to handle these varying demands and use the building-wide water circulating system to distribute and deliver—or get rid of—heat where it was or was not needed. If one of the heat pumps failed there was enough buffering from the other thirty-five bays to keep a failed bay within our targeted range of humidity and temperature until it was repaired. Distributing air from the heat pump throughout each bay was a simple matter of using two parallel ducts hung along the beams from the ceiling.

**All the invitations had gone out and were now proudly displayed on everyone's 'fridges. We were going to open, on July 1, 1979, ready or not! In spite of construction delays impatient teams had begun to claim every available corner of the unfinished museum. Among early squatters were the sleep-deprived Computer Center staff working around the clock installing the security, elevator, HVAC, and exhibit control systems that allowed Museum Wharf to function as both a modern building and an exciting visitor experience.**





Signs to Museum Wharf hung around town by Mike Spock.

### Putting Up Signs

We had come to that point in the Wharf Project where everyone sensed trouble coming. The museum team was working into the night on the last stages of the massive exhibit installation, trying to work around the desperately late building contractors. The opening was bearing down on us. The big decisions had long since been made; celebratory invitations were stuck to our friends' and supporters' refrigerator doors. As always, there were a few fundraising calls to be followed up but I was too distracted to be of much help. I was a loose cannon. From past experience, everyone knew that I was apt to show up with suggestions of last-minute changes that, however insightful, were at the very least terribly distracting. Ruefully, D&P staff called my unhelpful observations, "being Spocked." Elaine and Janet knew that if they didn't give me something to do I would be part of the problem, not part of the solution. (Later I learned to offer my input only in rigidly circumscribed ways and moments.)

For a week I joined the crew of administrators, who, each evening after their real work was done, cleaned glass and installed case stops (moldings that held case glass in place), but there were too many of us, and I saw we would soon run out of work. I had another idea: no one was available to install the directional signs that would direct people to Museum Wharf with the soon to

be iconic milk bottle we had moved to the front of the handsome but anonymous cliff facade of the wool warehouse. I was pretty handy. I spent a year when I dropped out of Antioch learning how to be an apprentice cabinet-maker. Maybe that was how I could make myself useful without driving the real workers to distraction.

I mapped the routes from the expressway exits and downtown corners to our site, figuring how to assign right, left, and straight-ahead arrows to the stock of 100 reflectorized aluminum signs. I loaded my beat-up station wagon with tools, brackets and bolts, rolls of stainless steel strapping, and an extension ladder, and headed for the most remote signpost on my route where I could begin to learn the sign-hanging trade. It took a few clumsy starts until I figured how to juggle the tools, hardware and sign twenty feet in the air before I hit my stride. Working after midnight with my flashers on kept me away from heavy traffic and curious cops (I had decided there were too many agencies and too little time to get all the permissions in place). I almost got away with it until two cops called me down from my ladder high up on the Central Artery asking to see if I had permission from the MDC (Metropolitan District Commission). A few weeks later a half dozen of the signs were delivered to my office without comment but all the others remained, unchallenged.

Of course, some of the lampposts I had tagged were old, wooden, and shaky. My most vivid memory was being up on one these less than steady perches at 2 a.m. in the Combat Zone, when the street life was at its peak, trying to warn drunks from becoming tangled in the coil of strapping lying at the base of my ladder. It gave me great satisfaction to pick out the gorgeous signs as I commuted each day to work until they disappeared gradually, I hoped, to the dormitory walls of Boston college students or in a heap in accidents with wandering cars. I couldn't have been more happily and innocently employed in the lead up to the museum opening.

## Part 4 OPENING & LIVING EVER AFTER

### We Opened (1979)

There were celebratory parties for each category of stakeholders: a donors party, a professional colleagues party, a workers party, each with its own invitations. The most touching were the families of the construction workers who proudly brought their kids and parents so they could see the parts of the building that they had built themselves. By the opening, the initial tension between the union workers and the D&P staff (some of which were women) had pretty much evaporated. Each side now openly demonstrated mutual respect at their skill and hard work. The parties were celebrations for everyone!

Both museums opened with great fanfare on a gorgeous weekend day, July 1st. Captain Kangaroo acted as

## Engine Failure at MOT | Duncan Smith

Mike and I worked very well on most issues. The TCM staff was larger, had better resources, and was able to accomplish more tasks related to a project with greater ease than the MOT team, but we felt that we had to keep pace. Still, there was good sharing and helping; we felt that we were moving forward together.

The second issue was creating project advancement. We all agreed that this was a singular success. The project was very well staffed by a good team from both boards...And the final cost per square foot for the project was very low, which is a testimony to this management.

The third issue was that both museums would have the funding mechanisms in place to be able to raise the funds for the project's common expenses, and also for their own institution. This is where MOT got caught—we were not able to keep up with TCM and were not able to keep enough money flowing in a timely way into the project. In retrospect, at the project meetings where the two boards sat down together, it might have been helpful if The Children's Museum board had been more demanding of the MOT board—in effect, “show us your money”—and motivating the MOT board to develop its capacity to be a viable partner. Both boards behaved so nicely to each other that some of these hard questions that might have been asked were not. That was too bad. Because the MOT board, if pushed hard enough, might have said, “Well, we aren't big enough yet to do this.” Or they might have said, “We will do it” and they would have put the money on the table. And the fundraising game would have had a much different psychological foundation. Who knows?

In any event, we had some memorable moments in the history of the project. I assumed that once a bank had agreed to loan construction financing, which, I will add, at 20% would have been cheaper to charge to Mastercard or Visa, the addition of a \$300,000 fee as a kind of goodwill gesture was a bit much. These hits were hard. We had another one when the MOT's exhibition lighting fund was purloined by our construction manager to meet other pressing needs. And then there was the question of the elevator foundation costs, which were astronomically higher than estimated. The elevator broke down two months before the opening and we had to do everything except carry antique cars up the stairs. We got the elevator back four weeks before the opening, just in time to finish the installation. But it cost a lot of money in overtime labor costs. Then there was the earthquake proofing that cost us our wood floors. Financing was a problem. MOT really had to bail the boat on a day-to-day basis.

master of ceremony for the Children's Museum. A few weeks later Mister Rogers paid us a visit, too. Jonathan Hyde, who had organized their appearances as part of marketing the new location (and who was sweating the daily numbers for the first full year) couldn't resist calling attention to his completely different memories of the contrasting styles of the two guest celebrities: one completely self-absorbed and the other completely engaged—one on one—with each kid.

### ...Then What Happened?

Everyone was exhausted! All the pent-up, neglected issues that were put aside so as not to interfere with the round-the-clock work of getting ready for the opening were finally let loose. Pride turned into a sour postpartum depression. While we were learning how to run our spanking new museum we had to turn our emotional attention to long-neglected staff needs. Rather than yet another distraction, it seemed like just exactly the thing to do! Elaine Heumann Gurian, in a wonderful chapter in her book *Institutional Trauma* talks in detail about the reality of a big of move like ours.

Although MOT was not expecting to match the crowds that The Children's Museum attracted, they had budgeted enough income that they hoped would allow them to break even. But soon, not only were they not making their numbers, they were having trouble with cash flow and began to miss payments on their share of the monthly Museum Wharf bond and utility payments and the shared payroll—including the federal withholding taxes.

In the financial agreements for Museum Wharf, Inc., TCM and MOT were “tenants-in-common,” which meant that if the Museum of Transportation was in trouble, The Children's Museum would be in trouble. We would have to double down and make good on the joint bills on each other's organizations. We had a line of credit for our operation budget designed to smooth out cash flow, but, at the Museum Wharf burn rate, the line would only last a few months. And our partners had stopped answering our questions about how they were doing. Duncan Smith recalls:

The Children's Museum did better, behaved more responsibly, and had a more sensible program. The Wharf project was bigger than MOT's resources. For our museum partner, the project was a great success and opened a whole new set of windows to be part of the whole community and to grow. For MOT, it did not work out that way. We went back to carriage house in Brookline and carried on our original activities without delusions about larger philosophical issues of urban growth and technology. MOT was probably too new and too small and not developed enough as an

**We had worked for years exquisitely fine-tuning our downtown operating budgets to make sure we were not overly optimistic in our attendance projections—and therefore in our income projections—and of course unrealistically low in our cost projections....But we certainly didn't budget a two-times Museum Wharf operating cost, and we had to figure out a way to meet those really scary and unanticipated bills before we had to use our operating lines of credit and the good will of our bond holders.**

institution to pull off a project of this scale. It was exciting. A lot of people worked hard. And I'm sorry to say a lot of people were hurt by the crash. To them I would say, 'I'm sorry I did it to you.' And to the world I would say, 'Well, it was worth trying...'

### My Year in Real Estate

The implication for us when MOT began to fall behind was that we would be in trouble with both the bondholders and the Feds unless The Children's Museum moved in and covered MOT's bets. Of course we were stretched thin in just meeting our own obligations. There was a clause in the bond agreement that if either of us took a hike, even if the other was more current

in their bond payments, both would be in default. If the bond holders chose to, they could call in their loan bonds, and we would probably have to sell Museum Wharf. At least MOT could return to the Lars Anderson carriage house, but of course we had already sold our old home, which at that very moment was under construction as high-end condos. After more than sixteen years of careful planning, site selection, money raising, delayed gratification, the move, and huge amounts of hard work, we were in danger of becoming homeless.

In the near panic of envisioning selling their collection, moving, or even possibly going out of business, MOT's board, staff, and Duncan became evasive and part of the problem rather than our collaborators and part of the solution. It was hard to get straightforward answers.

## The Year-One Benchmark | Mike Spock & Jonathan Hyde

Phyl O'Connell, the managers, and board had worked for years fine-tuning our downtown operating budgets to make sure we would not be over-optimistic in our attendance—and therefore in our income—projections. Now it was Jonathan Hyde's turn, as the person in charge of filling the museum after it opened, to become comfortable with those projections.

...we analyzed other museums that had either done major expansions or had moved... The first year of that expansional move established the benchmark, and we should expect museum attendance to sort of trail off somewhat and then pick back up simply because you can't sustain that intense level of marketing and public relations forever...I was very aware that that first year would establish for a long period of time a visitation benchmark for the museum. And of course, the museum's economic model bases a lot of the finan-

cial budgeting around visitation.

...I have these two numbers embedded...in my brain—from 170,000 visitors in Jamaica Plain to half a million visitors in Museum Wharf. That number was established before I came....

The goal wasn't coming out of thin air. It was based on a lot of analysis before Jonathan had to deal with it.

...When I saw that—big gulp. Are you kidding me? But I decided that questioning it wasn't going to be productive, that it was better to just do my utmost to get there....

So in terms of that benchmark, my crude goal was to get every man, woman, child, dog and cat through the place in the first year. That was clearly the mission. We actually missed it, as I remember, by a day. It was a year and a day when we got the 500,000.





Viewed from the Congress Street bridge crossing Fort Point Channel is the recently opened museum in 1979.

Even before MOT imploded, our associate director Phyl O’Connell, all of the division managers, a succession of board treasurers, and our banks had their realistic concerns as well. We had worked for years exquisitely fine-tuning our downtown operating budgets to make sure we were not overly optimistic in our attendance projections—and therefore in our income projections—and of course unrealistically low in our cost projections. We even budgeted, for the first time in many years, a small but significant deficit to account for the fact that we probably needed to overstaff a little until we had at least a year under our belts. The deficit gave us time (and money) to solve unexpected problems while we figured out workarounds that would bring the budget back into balance in the first downtown year, plus one. But we certainly didn’t budget a two-times Museum Wharf operating cost, and we had to figure out a way to meet those really scary and unanticipated bills before we had to use our operating lines of credit and the good will of our bond holders.

The Trawlers Restaurant closed its doors, leaving the ten members of our two boards, who had been willing to invest \$10,000 apiece in the fish restaurant, holding the bag and two bays on the first floor vacant.

I was now in the real estate business—big time. With an office space rental broker, we put the top two floors and two bays on the first floor on the market. Months passed without a nibble until an engineering

firm made an offer to lease one floor. But since we had no capacity to finance bringing the space up to first class office standards (we had already mortgaged our future in buying and renovating our museums) the terms the engineers were prepared to offer were so onerous (low rent, endless opportunities to renew their lease) that we would never get either the space back or much help in meeting the bond payments. I brought the deal to Ben Schore, a member of our board that had spent his life making money in commercial real estate. What would Ben do in these circumstances? He said that personally he would walk away from bad deals like this, as he had done more than once in his own business, but in this case he could not feel comfortable offering the same advice to a nonprofit like The Children’s Museum. The situations were just not comparable. When, in the our interview, I recalled a memory of his answer from thirty years earlier, he said,

If they [the engineers] had come back and offered us something that was fair, I would have said, “Mike, I think we should do it.” But as a real estate developer, you don’t make a deal as ludicrous as that was. If it were my property, the answer is no. But I can’t see a not-for-profit institution going out of business. I was trying to encourage you to say no, as hard as it was, because we were building up debt. I felt very

**We certainly would be pioneers in this scruffy neighborhood. Dan Prigmore reminded us that our old wool warehouse and all the remaining but marginal waterfront properties had almost no value. We could easily afford the price.**

strongly that you were the leader and you would be the one that would have to pay for the decision. The decision could not be mine.

We said no to the engineers. After a nail-biting, lost-sleep year, the new Computer Museum, with backing from the Digital Equipment Corporation, eventually picked up the unclaimed space and took their share of servicing the Museum Wharf bonds and operating costs for the next decade and a half. Eventually the Computer Museum and its collection moved to Silicon Valley, the Museum of Science absorbed the hands-on exhibits, and then sold its interest in Museum Wharf to The Children’s Museum. Taking its pick of the remaining bays while renting the top floors as an operating endowment, the Children’s Museum, for the first time, could begin to plan for an expansion beyond the original warehouse shell.

**Part 5 LOOKING BACK**

**How Did It Work Out?**

Trying to tell the story of this very complex, sixteen-year-long search for a new location that would begin the transformation of The Children’s Museum into the thriving landmark institution it is today has not been easy. Like the bricks in the building, each step in the process is made up of stories of its own, complete with compelling characters, plot twists, and nail-biting tension. And this period is but one in the museum’s 100-year life. The following summary of “the big move” tracks the key questions—both answered and unanswered.

• *Was It the Right Location?*

Although just outside the target area of our study, our old wool warehouse could be seen across the channel from downtown, was a short walk from the MBTA Red Line (the Boston subway) and was just off the Central Artery by car. Stewart Pratt pointed out there would be plenty of parking. But some of us would always miss the comfortable ambience of the Jamaica Pond life.

The mostly deserted Fort Point Channel docks, rail sidings, and warehouses were more than a little frightening. You could easily imagine Marlon Brando saying to his mob-boss brother in *On the Waterfront*, “I could have been a contenda’.” But the arrival of the giant Hood milk bottle sparked some life to this desolate site.

We certainly would be pioneers in this scruffy neighborhood. Dan Prigmore reminded us that our old wool warehouse and all the remaining but marginal waterfront properties had almost no value. We could easily afford the price.

Finally, since the waterfront was built on pilings in a landfill—and Boston was an earthquake zone, as demonstrated in the 1755 Cape Ann tremor when steeples and chimneys tumbled into the streets—we had lots of

**The Giant Chest of Drawers**

Expansion			Expansion	
Museum of Transportation	Shared		The Children’s Museum	
Retail			Retail	

1976: The Wharf as proposed in original campaign brochure.

		MOT	MOT	MOT	MOT
MOT	MOT	MOT	MOT	MOT	MOT
					TCM
	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM
Retail	Retail	Shared	Shared Retail	Shared Retail	Retail

1979: On opening day, the museums occupied these bays.

TCM	TCM	TCM			TCM
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM
Retail	TCM	TCM	TCM Retail	TCM Retail	Retail

1980: MOT leaves; TCM seeks new partner or tenant.

CM/DEC	CM/DEC	CM/DEC	CM/DEC	CM/DEC	CM/DEC
CM/DEC	CM/DEC	CM/DEC	CM/DEC	CM/DEC	CM/DEC
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM
TCM	CM/DEC	TCM	TCM Retail	TCM Retail	Retail

1983: CM/DEC buy a share of Museum Wharf from TCM.

Rental	Rental	Rental	Rental	Rental	Rental
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	Rental	Rental
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM
TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM	TCM Retail	Retail

2000: Museum of Science sells its interest back to TCM.

The history of a converted wool warehouse that became a home for The Children’s Museum. Over the years, the giant chest of drawers, with its thirty-six nearly identical bays, turned out to be an adaptable and affordable museum building. (See “The Giant Chest of Drawers” animated by Andy Merriell in the Media section.)

**Key: Chest of Drawers**

Rental – Support Income

TCM – The Children’s Museum

Retail – Shops & Restaurants

CM/DEC – Computer Museum/Digital Equipment Corp.

MOT – Museum of Transportation

Shared – Services & Experiences

Expansion – Future Growth



**During the weeks-long opening celebration, there were parties for each category of stakeholders: a donors party, a professional colleagues party, a workers party, each with its own invitation. The most touching were the families of the construction workers who proudly brought their kids and parents so they could see the parts of the building that they had built themselves.**

company figuring out how to deal with the new and tougher seismic codes.

Thirty years later, after the trauma of the Big Dig (Boston's multi-billion dollar mega-highway project), The Children's Museum is conveniently connected to the expressways, tunnels, bridges, the new MBTA Silver Line, the airport, the convention center and its hotels. The center of gravity has moved far enough for Museum Wharf to now be thought of as sitting right in the heart of downtown.

- *Was It the Right Building?*

Our 1888, six-story, red brick and yellow pine timber warehouse was a handsome, adaptable space, a reassuring and comfortable environment to develop and work with. If we had to move downtown, it still felt like us! It was dubbed by Cambridge Seven Associates as a "Giant Chest of Drawers."

It was an empty shell. Almost every bay was identical to every other bay. There were few unpleasant surprises. The regularity of the thirty-six bays suggested a flexible matrix of separately developable or re-developable spaces as our needs and the world changed.

But, however we cut it, money would be tight. We had to use all our creative juices in planning and be tough-minded in developing only the absolute minimum of the things we had to have to open two usable museums. Phasing would be a necessity. Collaboration would be critical.

Our structural engineers solved the earthquake

challenge with a creatively simple solution of a plywood membrane and tie rods. They were very strategic in where they allowed holes to be punched in the brick party walls and floors to open up circulation and create an integrated building.

The giant loading doors that opened each bay framed spectacular views of downtown and the harbor without compromising either the exhibit lighting levels or subjecting the collections to direct sunlight.

Assigning each bay a separately controlled heat pump allowed us to save energy and accommodate the demands of energetic kids and the less active grown-ups while buffering the seasonal swings in humidity needed for the collection.

- *Was the Timing Right?*

We certainly could not have pulled off a big move much earlier! Boston had its hands full developing the more obvious downtown and its neighboring waterfront. We took our time (16 years), had fun looking at many sites, and ultimately studied three options in depth before settling on the Atlas Terminal Stores.

While we cooled our heels in Jamaica Plain, we took advantage of the Visitor Center as a laboratory where we worked on many things we needed to plan the move and create the exhibits, programs, and resources for a new home. By the time we were ready to move we had proved our point and run out of room.

However, as Duncan Smith candidly observed, the Museum of Transportation was at least a decade behind

## What We Lost Moving from Jamaica Plain | Bill Mayhew

...We lost the sense—even within the staff—of functioning like a family, largely due to the mass of work and the context in which we were now situated. It's hard to have the same mental framework when you're sitting in the middle of a warehouse as opposed to when you're sitting across the street from Jamaica Pond. The stress level went way up, and I think the rewards of working at the museum went way down. I remember in the early years I worked seven days a week and it was no skin off my back whatsoever. It was completely natural. After we got downtown and through the charrette of getting into

the building, the emotional high of the grand opening and settled into day-to-day operations, things began to change. I lost the sense of commitment to a mission that we once had. In December of 1980, three of us left at the same time. The museum had a wonderful going-away party for us, and I still have the souvenir book from that event. This is one of my heirlooms.

—MIT dropout and technology pioneer Bill Mayhew created the museum's "management by spreadsheet," an innovative project management system that enabled individual departments to lead their own teams.



Mike Spock, lower left, and crew take a break from working on *Playspace* just before the opening of Museum Wharf. Although everyone here looked happy enough, the exhausting pace of work at both locations (for financial reasons, the Jamaica Plain museum remained open on its regular schedule to nearly opening day on the Wharf) and the postponed attention to both personal and organizational agendas took their toll after the opening.

us in preparing for their move. The timing was not ideal for them, and that put our collaboration and its financial equity in doubt.

Looking to recycle an existing building, but realistic that no single option would likely fit all of our needs, we worked out a schema with C7A that would encourage us to develop our new home in stages, adding other elements later when we could afford them and when the need would once again become acute.

It was gratifying, when thirty years after the move

to the wharf, and even after an abortive try to create a new front porch for Museum Wharf designed by Frank Gehry, the museum again hired C7A who returned to their original Program Committee Study (1973) and designed and built the missing parts that we couldn't initially afford.

- *Was it the Right Partnership?*

It was a generous building with, we thought, room to spare for two museums. If The Children's Museum had decided to take the entire building and rent or

**I relished taking risks and trying out new things, but we were extraordinarily cautious in projecting attendance at our new home. We estimated that we might be two and half times busier than we were in Jamaica Plain. We began doing the calculations years before and made sure that we hit our marks.**



Under the directorship of Lou Casagrande (1994–2009), the museum raised the money and finally gained title to the entire Wharf. Board and staff, joined by a returning team from C7A, then planned and opened the new wing of The Children's Museum in 2007, thirty-five years after the 1973 Program Committee Report that established a template for a more fully developed downtown museum.

land-bank the rest of the space, that seemed unnecessarily greedy, not part of our collaborative culture. But after another decade, that was where we ended up.

In many ways, the choice of the Museum of Transportation was a pretty good fit. Duncan and I were friends and neighbors. MOT matched our creativity, energy, and ambition. However, their culture and ramp up were not the same as ours, and in the tougher moments of our collaboration it was not a particularly comfortable match.

When MOT had to give up the ghost and retreat back to the Lars Anderson carriage house, the parting was painful and left us to clean up the after them. Subsequently, the Computer Museum arrangement was more like a real estate agreement than a partnership, but it allowed us at least to survive the earlier breakup.

- *Was it the Right Project?*

Buying and developing the empty shell and apron of the Atlas Warehouse, and finishing 80 percent of the building, including all vertical circulation, HVAC systems, and restrooms, came in at less than \$50/square

foot. In the 1970s, that was the cost of a cheap suburban big box store, and as least half the cost of a “real” museum.

The project team did it by paying strict attention to costs, being creative and hard-nosed about making compromises that didn't affect the ultimate architectural program. Dan Prigmore was fond of reminding us that “the building was trying to tell us what we could or couldn't do, if we would just listen!”

I relished taking risks and trying out new things, but we were extraordinarily cautious in projecting attendance at our new home. We estimated that we might be two and half times busier than we were in Jamaica Plain. We began doing the calculations years before and made sure that we hit our marks.

We conceded that we would need to overstaff so we would have a cushion to work out details that couldn't be anticipate ahead of time until we had a full year's experience operating in our new home. After this small deficit, in subsequent years we could realistically count on returning to a balanced budget. And we did!

**Thirty years later, after the trauma of the Big Dig (Boston's multi-billion dollar mega-highway project), The Children's Museum is now conveniently connected to the expressways, tunnels, bridges, the new MBTA Silver Line, the airport, the convention center and its hotels.**

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