

CONNOLLY'S BAR
1184 TREMONT STREET, ROXBURY



Boston Landmarks Commission
Environment Department
City of Boston

Report on the Potential Designation of

CONNOLLY'S BAR
1184 Tremont Street, Roxbury, Massachusetts

as a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as amended

Approved by: Ellen J. Lipsey 7/11/97
Ellen J. Lipsey Date
Executive Director

Approved by: Alan Schwartz 7/11/97
Alan Schwartz Date
Chairman

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1.0 LOCATION OF PROPERTY

1.1 Address: 1184 Tremont Street, Roxbury

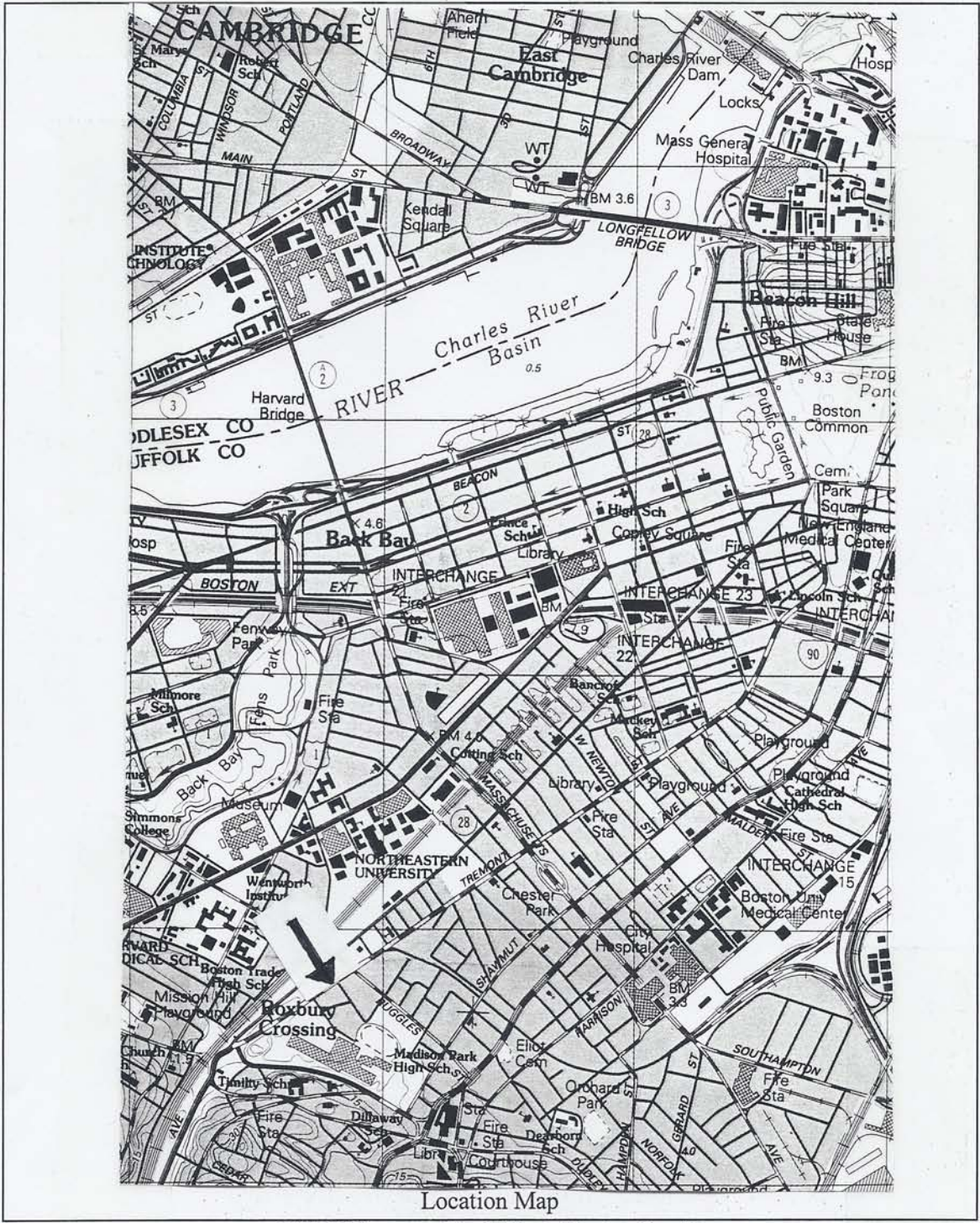
Assessor's Parcel Number: Ward 9, Parcel 2980-10.

1.2 Area in Which Property is Located:

This isolated Lower Roxbury structure stands near the intersection of Tremont and Whittier streets. It occupies the north-east corner of Parcel P-3, a 362,959 square foot lot largely cleared for redevelopment by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in the mid-1970s. The Whittier Street Health Center and a surface parking lot also share this parcel which is encircled by the following institutions: the Whittier Street housing development to the east; the Whittier Street Health Center to the south; the Madison Park Technical Vocational High School and Reggie Lewis Track Center to the west; and Boston's new Police Headquarters across Tremont Street to the north.

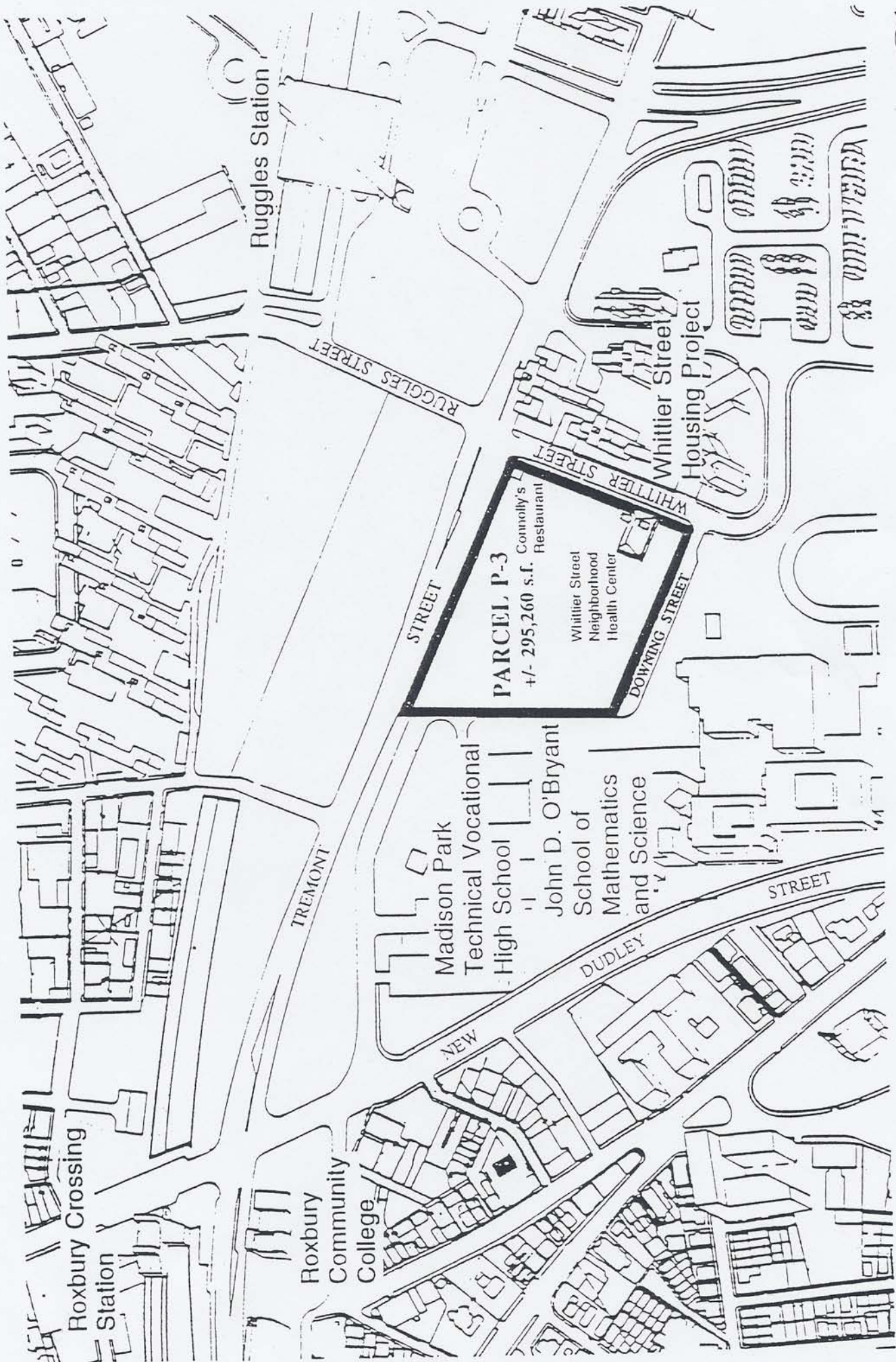
1.3 Map Showing Location:

Attached.



Location Map

USGS Topographical Map - Boston South
 1184 Tremont Street
 Roxbury, Massachusetts



Parcel P-3 • **AREA MAP** • Roxbury, MA

Not
To
Scale

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Type and Use

This Tremont Street property's dramatic transmutation over time has rendered unrecognizable its 1882 origins as a five-story tenement with ground-level retail space. Demolition of the upper four stories in 1959, under orders of the City's Building Inspector, reduced the structure to its present truncated form. Shortly after the 1933 repeal of prohibition, the building's commercial storefront was converted into a neighborhood bar known as "Murray's Cafe." From 1955 to the present, this address has been home to "Connolly's," a nightclub with live music entertainment.

2.2 Physical Description

This single-story fragment of an 1882 High Victorian Gothic tenement stands at the southwest corner of Tremont and Whittier streets in Lower Roxbury. The building's dramatic reduction from a five-story building to a single-story structure occurred in 1959. Under city orders to raze or repair this structurally-unstable building, owner James Connolly stripped the building of its architectural ornament and demolished the upper four floors.

This masonry relic has a rectangular footprint measuring thirty-by-sixty feet. Exposed brick party walls comprise the long east and west elevations; indentations on the east wall mark the location of two chimney bays. With the exception of a rear door, fenestration is confined to the Tremont Street facade.

Cement-parged metal piers segregate the Tremont Street storefront into four asymmetrical bays. This facade is horizontally divided into three segments: a brick (and brick veneer) base; a mid-section of plywood spandrels and glass block; and an upper section of corrugated metal. The concrete, brick, and plywood are painted dark red. A deeply recessed entry, fronted by metal security grating, occupies the third bay.

The building's distinctive sign - reading: "*Connolly's*: LIQUORS ... COCKTAILS" - dates from 1960. This corrugated metal sign with neon lettering spans twenty-seven feet in width and five feet in height. The ghost profile of a martini glass motif is visible near the left corner; its neon tubing lost over time. A later illuminated sign with a "Bud Light" logo projects above the entry.

The interior plan consists of a large undivided space with a square-donut-shaped, Formica-topped bar (known to post-date 1969) near the entry and a dance floor at the rear. The rest-rooms and kitchen are aligned against 2/3s of the long eastern wall. The club's decor consists of plywood-paneled walls and an acoustic-tile ceiling. With the exception of autographed publicity photos of prominent jazz musicians, the decor does not retain any surfaces or distinctive features from the bar's period of jazz significance (i.e., 1955-1965).

A low chain-link fence encircles this large un-graded parcel which nature has slowly reclaimed. An unpaved parking lot is located behind the bar.



Tremont Street, Roxbury (facing west). Circa 1950.

1184 Tremont Street on left side (see Murray's Cafe sign).

Photo Credit: The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities



Tremont Street, Roxbury (facing west). 1997.
1184 Tremont Street on left side (see Bud Light sign).
Photo Credit: The Boston Landmarks Commission



Closer View of 1184 Tremont Street ("Murray's Cafe"). Circa 1950.
Photo Credit: The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities



1184 Tremont Street, Roxbury. 1997 photo.
Photo Credit: The Boston Landmarks Commission



Connolly's Tremont Street facade. 1997 photo.
Photo Credit: The Boston Landmarks Commission

3.0 SIGNIFICANCE

3.1 Historic Significance

The Mississippi River lays claim to the origins of jazz, an indigenous mixture of rag, folk, minstrel, and popular music first performed by riverboat bands in the 1910s. This musical expression took early root along the river's banks, most notably in New Orleans, but also in St. Louis and Kansas City. The 1918 New York appearance of New Orleans' premiere jazz ensemble, the "Original Dixieland Jazz Band," is frequently cited as the "birth of jazz."¹ National dissemination of this musical expression soon followed, popularized by phonograph recordings and nurtured in the nightclubs of New York and Chicago. Tagged the "Jazz Age," the 1920s was distinguished by the works of composers Jelly Roll Morton and Duke Ellington and soloists Louis Armstrong, Earl "Fatha" Hines, and Bix Beiderbecke.

Although New Englanders were formally introduced to the sounds of jazz in 1924 at Boston University's Jazz Symposium, this region did not display a true appreciation for this musical genre until the 1940s. Following Duke Ellington's 1943 Symphony Hall performance, "the capacity audience cheered the orchestra and its leader within an inch of their eardrums."² Boston's post-war jazz scene is credited to both the musical sensibilities of returning veterans and the avant-garde curriculum offered by Berklee School of Music. The first in the nation to offer courses in jazz theory and performance, Berklee attracted musically-gifted veterans, bankrolled by the GI Bill.

Further down Massachusetts Avenue, south of Berklee and Symphony Hall, a jazz district began to emerge. The intersection of Massachusetts and Columbus avenues, likened to New York City's 52nd Street, marked the epicenter of Boston's 1950s jazz scene. An impressive roster of local talent and jazz greats performed at nightclubs anchoring this major South End crossroads: the High Hat, Eddie LaVene's, the Wigwam (later Wally's Paradise), and the Savoy.

In 1955, the Savoy's successful owners, brothers Steve and Jim Connolly (1906-1984), sold their club, split the proceeds, and embarked on independent nightclub ventures. As a condition of sale, both agreed to establish their new clubs at a specified distance from the Savoy. Steve Connolly opened the "Blue Moon" on Washington Street, while Jim relocated to Roxbury Crossing, purchasing an Irish bar known as Murray's Cafe at 1184 Tremont Street. According to James Connolly, Jr., his father's association with the local jazz scene emanated not from his own musical taste but from those of his patrons: "jazz brought in business."

According to jazz historian and Berklee professor, Phil Wilson, "any jazz player raised in Boston cut his teeth at Connolly's." A noted trombonist himself, Wilson fondly recalls performing at this Tremont Street club. "With Connolly's you never knew who would join you on the bandstand." In describing this congenial yet professional atmosphere, Wilson borrowed Dizzy Gillespie's quote about a popular New York City

¹The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Vol. 9, p. 563.

²"Hub Concert by Ellington," Boston Post, 29 January 1943.

club, “Connolly’s was play not work.” While not as commercially renowned as the High Hat or George Wein’s Storyville, Connolly’s developed a loyal clientele of jazz musicians and enthusiasts. Its headliners, advertised on a painted sidewalk stand, ranged from noted soloists of the big-band era to rising talent of the “free jazz” generation. Wilson remembers the following musicians playing at Connolly’s: Chick Corea, a Chelsea native and Berklee graduate; Roger Calloway, a pianist best remembered for composing the theme song for “All in the Family;” John Nevs, bass; Herb Pomeroy; Keith Jarrett; and Berklee colleague Alan Dawson. During his long and prominent career, Dawson, a drummer, played with Lionel Hampton, Earl Hines, Dave Brubeck, Quincy Jones, and others.

When asked for an appraisal of Connolly’s historical significance, Vincent Haynes, Vice President of the Boston Jazz Society, remarked, “it was a principal force on the jazz scene while owned by Jim Connolly.”³ He further recounted, “Connolly’s house musician Jimmy Tyler was often joined by Ben Webster (1909-1973) and Stan Getz (1927-1991).”⁴ Webster and Getz were both acclaimed tenor sax musicians; Webster played for Duke Ellington in the early 1940s. Vincent Haynes is intimately familiar with Boston’s 1950s jazz scene, having covered it in his “On the Scene” arts column for the *Boston Chronicle*. A sampling of his articles on Connolly’s reflects a thriving club:

“Wow! That Jimmy Tyler/Sabby Lewis reunion stint at Jim Connolly’s provides some tasty entertainment nightly. (It’s a) popular spot thronged from bandstand to the door with Jimmy’s strong, racy saxophone sounds stirring up the excitement.”⁵

“Still turning out some of the best jazz in town are Hillary Rose and Dan Turner in their stay at Jim Connolly’s near the Crossing.”⁶

“Since the departure of Sarah McAwler and Milt Buckner, Hillary Rose’s compact sounds along with tenor Dan Turner has been luring listeners to Jim Connolly’s every weekend.”⁷

Fred Taylor, of Jazz Workshop fame, concurs, “Connolly’s was a major jazz club through the 1960s.”

David Connolly remembers his father’s pride upon installing the large neon sign which bears the family’s name. To the roster of musicians who performed at the club, he added rhythm and blues artists Lou Rawls and Joe Tex. When interviewed for this report, James Connolly, Jr. recalled his father booking noted jazz legends: Roy “Little Jazz” Eldrich (1911-1989), a trumpeter described as “the link between Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie;” trumpeter Charlie Shavers (1917-1971), “Tommy Dorsey’s cornerman;” freelance sax soloist Zoot Sims (1925-1985); trombonist Dicky Wells (1907-1985); and James Moody, tenor and alto sax soloist. While under Connolly family ownership, the club’s interior layout consisted of the “Stardust Lounge” at the

³April 1997 interview with Vincent Haynes.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Vincent Haynes, “On the Scene,” *Boston Chronicle*, 19 April 1958.

⁶Vincent Haynes, “On the Scene,” *Boston Chronicle*, 6 September 1958.

⁷Vincent Haynes, “On the Scene,” *Boston Chronicle*, 13 June 1959.

rear with a bar by the front entrance. The club's original bar was replaced with a circular bar in 1967; in turn replaced with the current open square bar.

As James Connolly, Sr.'s health began to decline, his son James assumed more responsibility for managing the club. With many South End clubs on the wane by the late 1960s, Connolly's primary competition dwindled to "Lennie's on the Turnpike," in Peabody and Boston's "Jazz Workshop," both of which James Jr. described as "classier than Connolly's." After suffering a stroke, James Sr. sold the business in 1972 to his son James M. Connolly, Jr.⁸ By this time Boston's jazz scene was moribund.

Connolly's history includes one great "Cinderella" story: the discovery of Roxbury native and percussion prodigy Tony Williams. This fairy tale is recounted in the liner notes on Jackie McLean's album *One Step Beyond* (1963):

In December 1962, I left New York for Boston to do a week at Connolly's. It was the week before Christmas, to be exact. Again it was a local rhythm section and again it was the rush to get in town early the first day to rehearse the section and get some originals set up. It was already dark when I arrived at the club.

When I hit the door, a young man gave me a hand with my bags. I thanked him and sat down to catch my breath. After a few minutes, the young man returned and informed me that the musicians were up by the band stand and waiting. Looking at this youngster again and thanking him once more, I assumed that he was a young jazz enthusiast waiting to listen to a band rehearsal before going home to his studies. At this point I stood up, and having no idea with whom I was going to play, I turned and asked the kid if he knew who the musicians were. He immediately answered "yes" with a certain look of excitement in his eyes. "Who's on bass?" I asked, "John Nevs" was the reply. "And on piano? "Ray Santizi."

What about the drums?" I inquired. "ME! - Tony Williams - and I am very happy to meet you, Jackie." "You?" I said with amazement and some doubt seasoned with a little worry all mixed together. "Damn - you'll have to excuse me, Tony, but you look so young! How old are you?" "Seventeen," he answered with a big, happy grin that I was to get to know very well in the weeks and months that followed. We had a lot of musical fun that week. The whole rhythm section was good. John Nevs and Tony had played together quite a bit, and in Tony I heard and felt a fresh inspiration that made me want to play."⁹

After his Connolly's debut, Williams was summoned to New York by McLean. While still seventeen, Williams joined Miles Davis, staying with him for six years and seventeen albums before establishing his own jazz-rock group, "Lifetime."

Boston's jazz culture crested in the 1950s. At its height, patrons had their pick of venues: Symphony Hall's "Jazz at the Philharmonic" series; the Metropolitan (now Wang) Theater's big band extravaganzas; the annual "Globe Jazz Festival" at the Hynes Auditorium; not to mention George Wein's jazz weekend at Fenway Park (August 21-

⁸Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Book 8558, page 664., 15 August 1972.

⁹Liner notes, Jackie McLean's album, *One Step Beyond*, 1963.

23, 1959). The city also boasted more than a dozen jazz clubs, prominent among these: the Wig Wam (the present site of Wally's); Morley's; the High Hat (destroyed by fire in 1959); Storyville; Estelle's; Wally's Cafe; Jim Mellon's Shanty Lounge; Eddie La Vene's; the Pioneer Club; the Savoy; Stables/Jazz Workshop; Blinstrub's (burned down in 1968); and Connolly's. Only three of these clubs survive and are in operation today: Wally's Cafe, Estelle's, and Connolly's.

With the mid-1960s tumult of urban renewal and civil unrest, the dwindling legion of jazz patrons were lured to suburban clubs, such as "Lennie's on the Turnpike" in Peabody and "Sandy's Jazz Revival" in Beverly. In a 1969 interview, Junior Cook, a noted tenor saxophonist, remarked, "the Boston scene has been too quiet, the gigs too scarce for all local musicians." The waning popularity of jazz is frequently attributed to the rise of Rock music. Some jazz musicians harbored resentment against the Beatles, claiming the "Fab Four" robbed them of their livelihood. By the late '60s, Boston's jazz club scene was moribund, its players migrating to the more appreciative audiences of Scandinavia and the Far East.

Jazz critic Grover Sales described the 1970s as the "dog days of jazz."¹⁰ As evidence of this national stolidity, Sales commented,

"Erroll Garner, a round-the-block draw in the concert halls of Europe, could not fill a now-defunct 350-seat club in San Francisco. Dizzy Gillespie could not get booked into the same club without sharing a bizarre double bill with the Jefferson Airplane."¹¹

Despite the club scene's demise, larger venues such as Symphony Hall and the Berklee Performance Theater continued to book jazz musicians. Within the past decade, the local jazz scene has revived, as seen by renewed interest in Cambridge clubs such as Ryle's and the Regattabar. For Boston, this reawakening appears to focus on talent showcased at Wally's Cafe on Massachusetts Avenue.

¹⁰Grover Sales, *Jazz: America's Classical Music*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), p. 201.

¹¹*Ibid.*

3.2 Architectural Significance

Connolly's Bar is housed in the single-story remnant of a five-story High Victorian Gothic tenement. Built in 1882, by speculative developer William H. Wallace as a four-family tenement with ground-level retail space, it shared a party wall with the five-story masonry building of contemporaneous date to the left (1180 Tremont). A narrow alley segregated it from the three-story, c. 1870 frame building to the right (1186 Tremont). 1184 Tremont Street was constructed as a five-story brick building with an asymmetrically fenestrated three-bay facade. Shallow brick piers rose from projecting buttress elements situated above the store-front. These piers divided the upper stories into two asymmetrical vertical sections: one a single-bay in width; and the other two bays in width. The single-bay section was capped by a gabled parapet. Period details included: round-headed windows; Italianate window labels; and brownstone bands at each story.

The ground level was divided into four bays: three bays for retail space, with a private tenement entry in the outer-left bay. The retail facade exhibited the common storefront arrangement of a recessed center entry flanked by tall plate-glass windows. This storefront was framed by cast-iron piers with paneled wood kick-plates along the base.

Substantially altered over time, today's Connolly's possesses little in the way of historic architectural fabric. After purchasing the building in 1955, owner James Connolly ceased renting the upper stories due to hazardous conditions. The building's structural problems were extensively documented on Building Inspector's "complaint forms" filed over a two year period (1958-59). The final complaint dated May 20, 1958 read:

"The building situated at 1184 Tremont Street...being unsafe so as to endanger life, is therefore a common nuisance, and you are hereby notified forthwith to remove the cause of danger and abate the nuisance. [The building was cited for:] bulge in rear wall; fracture front wall; cracked lintels; chimneys in need of repair, in danger of falling; bricks on parapet wall loose and in danger of falling; conditions are unsafe and dangerous. To remedy this condition, a permit must be secured from the Building Department and conditions corrected or building razed."

Connolly attempted to appease the City Inspector by sealing off the stairs to the upper levels in February of 1959. Following the issuance of additional "repair or raze" orders, Connolly complied by demolishing the upper four stories in July of 1959. It is important to note that this partial demolition was unrelated to the urban renewal activities of the subsequent decade.

Perhaps as a demonstration of perseverance, Connolly commissioned a large neon sign bearing his name (27 feet long and five feet high) to grace the newly truncated building. This distinctive sign was installed in the winter of 1960.

The building's original 1882 storefront has been substantially altered; its plate-glass window openings have been filled in with a variety of disparate materials: brick, plywood, stucco, and glass block. The storefront appeared well-preserved in a 1950s photograph. Building documents also indicate Connolly repaired the plate-glass storefront in 1955.

As altered, Connolly's Bar exhibits neither exceptional craftsmanship nor a distinctive architectural style. Its current appearance dates from the 1959 partial demolition, the 1960 signage installation, and subsequent alterations for which building permits were not issued. A minor fire in January 1963 caused damage to the roof and ceiling, but did not compromise the building's structural integrity. Post-1963 building permits issued for this address were for the application of stucco to the left lateral wall (May, 1990), and the issuance of a permit to do gas fitting (March 1994). The neon sign with corrugated metal background is in a state of disrepair; its martini glass motif lost and its lettering partially obscured by a projecting "Bud Light" sign.

The interior consists of a large undivided space with a square-donut-shaped, Formica-topped bar near the entry and a dance floor at the rear. The rest-rooms and kitchen are aligned against 2/3s of the long western wall. The interior plaster finishes dating from the bar's period of jazz significance (1955-1965), as described by James Connolly, Jr., were undistinguished. Moreover if they survive they are concealed beneath plywood paneling and acoustic-tile ceiling. The bar is furnished with generic chairs and tables.

In addition to losing its historic fabric, the structure has lost its urban context and setting. Between 1880 and 1960, Tremont Street was a vibrant commercial corridor served by surface-rail transportation. 1950s photos reveal a masonry streetscape of three- to five-story buildings with ground-level retail activity. Urban renewal activities and transportation initiatives associated with the extension of Interstate-95 led to the demolition of this Roxbury Crossing commercial artery. The two buildings to either side of Connolly's, 1180 and 1186 Tremont Street, were demolished by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in 1977 and 1973, respectively.

3.3 Relationship to Criteria for Landmark Designation

The local jazz constituency, including the Boston Jazz Society, jazz musicians, arts reporters, and Berklee School of Music faculty, deems Connolly's "a significant club in the history of jazz." Connolly's Bar meets the criteria for Landmark designation found in section four of Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975 as amended, under the following criteria:

- B. *as a structure identified prominently with an important aspect of the cultural and social history of the city, the commonwealth, and the New England region*** – specifically as an influential Boston nightclub where prominent musicians from the Big Band era (1940s) and aspiring local talent gathered, performed, and influenced each other's music and ultimately the evolution of jazz history.

- C. *as a structure associated significantly with the lives of outstanding historic personages***, -- specifically: drummer Tony Williams (b. 1945), composer and alto saxophonist Jackie McLean (b. 1932), Roy "Little Jazz" Eldrich (1911-1989), a trumpeter described as "the link between Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie;" trumpeter Charlie Shavers (1917-1971); freelance sax soloist Zoot Sims (1925-1985); trombonist Dicky Wells (1907-1985); Ben Webster (1909-1973); and Stan Getz (1927-1991).

4.0 ECONOMIC STATUS

4.1 Current Assessed Value

After 1975, the individual parcel assessment information for 1184 Tremont Street was subsumed into the valuation for a large tract owned by the Boston Redevelopment Authority. This large parcel at the corner of New Dudley and Tremont streets encompassed more than one million square feet of land. After 1991, this tract was subdivided, with the building at 1184 Tremont Street now occupying a 362,959 square foot lot, known as Parcel P-3. According to the City of Boston Assessor's records, Parcel P-3 has a total assessed value of \$3,056,000.00. This figure only reflects the value of the land; no value is recorded for the building at 1184 Tremont Street.

4.2 Current Ownership

Parcel P-3 is owned by the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

1184 Tremont Street is rented by: Mr. Fred Hamlett, Sr., Connolly's Inc., 1184 Tremont Street, Roxbury, MA 02119. Mr. Hamlett, Sr. is a "tenant at will" of the Boston Redevelopment Authority; current rent is \$477.00 per month.

5.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

5.1 Background

The Roxbury Crossing segment of Tremont Street, was first developed in the 1870s on land created by filling in the last vestiges of a once vast expanse of salt marsh, known as “Roxbury Flats.” Tremont Street, the second major artery after Washington Street to connect Boston to Roxbury, opened in 1832. This lone causeway traversed the flats running parallel to and north of Washington Street. By the mid-1860s, this section of the marsh was filled, neatly laid out, and primed for development.

Roxbury Crossing gained prominence as a transportation nexus, marked by the intersection of surface trolleys, commuter rail lines, and Tremont Street. By the turn of the century, Tremont Street had grown into a vibrant thoroughfare lined with masonry commercial blocks with ground-level retail space. The five-story brick tenement erected at 1184 Tremont Street was consistent with this development pattern.

Although commercially vital through the early 1960s, this stretch of Tremont Street was targeted for widespread demolition in the early 1970s. The north side of Tremont Street was to be cleared for the extension of Interstate-95 into Boston. While the south-side of the street, including 1184 Tremont, was slated for demolition under the “Campus High School Urban Renewal Area” project (plan filed at the Suffolk Registry of Deeds on 2 April 1970).

On the first of November 1976, the Boston Redevelopment Authority took the property at 1184 Tremont Street by eminent domain. This taking represented one of the final acts of Boston’s urban renewal era. In January 1975, the Community Development Act passed, eliminating categorical Federal funding for the Urban Renewal Model Cities program. This stanching the flow of urban renewal grants to the Boston Redevelopment Authority, forcing dramatic staff cut backs and derailing projects. All urban renewal projects were terminated in 1976.

James M. Connolly, Jr. was the owner of record at the time of the taking, although the club was managed by Winnie Halford, Connolly’s longtime waitress. The Boston Redevelopment Authority granted Halford’s request to continue operating the club at this location. After acquiring the business from James Connolly, Jr., Halford sold it to Leona and Mike Dixon. The Dixons in turn sold the business in 1991 to the current operator, Fredrick R. Hamlett, Sr. Mr. Hamlett occupies 1184 Tremont Street as a “tenant at will” of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (hereafter “the BRA”).

Following the demise of urban renewal, the BRA cleared the former “Campus High Urban Renewal Area” site for development. All of the structures acquired by eminent domain, except 1184 Tremont Street and the Whittier Street Neighborhood Health Center, were demolished by 1980. This large BRA tract, encompassing 1,094,663 square feet, was partially developed with the Madison Park Technical Vocational High School, the John D. O’Bryant School of Mathematics and Science, and more recently the Reggie Lewis Track Center. The remaining undeveloped portion, known as Parcel P-3, encompasses 362,959 square feet at the corner of Tremont and Whittier streets.

In 1992, the BRA awarded tentative development rights of Parcel P-3 to Ruggles Plaza Associates for construction of a health center and supermarket. After this development option expired, the BRA considered subdividing Parcel P-3 into two distinct sections: one for a health center developer (Parcel P-3X); and the other for commercial development (Parcel P-3). Under current plans, Parcel P-3X, at the corner of Tremont and Whittier streets is targeted for a new community health center, while the larger section is reserved for commercial development.

5.2 Current Planning Issues

On May 15, 1996, the BRA voted to grant tentative designation rights to redevelop Parcel P-3X to the Whittier Street Neighborhood Health Clinic (a partnership between Whittier Street Health Center and Madison Park Development Corporation). This one-acre parcel, at the southwest corner of Tremont and Whittier streets, was intended for construction of the new Whittier Street Health Clinic.

Connolly's proprietor, Fred Hamlett, Sr. was notified that the proposed development necessitated demolition of the building at 1184 Tremont Street. In a letter dated September 9, 1996, the BRA extended Hamlett "full relocation services and benefits to help you accomplish the relocation with as little inconvenience as possible." Business relocation consultant, Isidore D'Orsi, was retained by the BRA to assist Hamlett through this process. The relocation was anticipated to take no longer than six months.

On December 16, 1996, the BRA formally notified Hamlett that he had one hundred and twenty (120) days to vacate the premises. Between October 1996 and March 1997, the D'Orsi firm alerted Hamlett of the availability of three nightclubs and several vacant commercial properties situated within half a mile of 1184 Tremont Street. Mr. Hamlett and his representatives chose not to engage in the relocation process. The BRA's relocation deadline expired on April 16, 1997. According to the BRA, Mr. Hamlett has three options: 1.) accept a one-time liquidation payment; 2.) accept the relocation assistance and moving expenses; 3.) face eviction.

In a recent development, the Whittier Street Health Clinic announced their intention to vacate their Whittier Street building and relocate the clinic to the bottom two floors of the former Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles Headquarters at Ruggles Center (1135 Tremont Street). This leasing arrangement has yet to be finalized. The Ruggles Center location will apparently accommodate all of the clinic's spatial requirements. This relocation is scheduled for Fall of 1997. As of this report's publication, the Whittier Street Neighborhood Health Clinic retains tentative development rights for Parcel P-3X. These rights are eligible for renewal in the Fall of 1997.

5.3 Current Zoning

Parcel P-3 is situated in a "Greater Roxbury Economic Development Area." Current zoning for this parcel allows for commercial uses with a FAR of 2.0 and a height limit of 65 feet.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

6.1 Alternatives available to the Boston Landmarks Commission:

A. Individual Landmark Designation

Connolly's Bar represents a designation challenge, in that it is a culturally-significant place which does not retain architecturally- or historically-significant fabric on either its interior or exterior. The Boston Landmarks Commission's enabling legislature does not specify *architectural integrity* as a criteria for designation, although it presumes the resource "under study" possesses physical characteristics that require preservation. The Commission has three designation options.

1. The Commission could adopt standards and criteria to preserve the building's footprint and masonry envelope in its current condition. As the building does not possess any architecturally- or historically-significant features or fabric, the designation intent would be to preserve the "volume of space" where culturally-significant events occurred. This designation would address: all four exterior elevations and the roof.
2. The Commission could identify the building's signature "Connolly's" neon sign as a "Specified Feature." This sign is the only architectural feature known to date from the building's period of historic significance (i.e., 1955-1965). The "Specified Feature" would then be subject to specific design review standards and criteria. Note: the Commission cannot require the neon sign be returned to working condition if inoperable at the time of designation.
3. The Commission could designate Connolly's Bar a "Commemorative Boston Landmark." Commemorative designation would mark a departure from the Commission's traditional role of developing and enforcing standards and criteria to govern future alterations. To date, the Commission has conferred "commemorative" designation on only one resource, the Great House Archaeological Site at City Square, Charlestown. The City Square designation was accompanied by standards and criteria which allowed the Commission:
1.) to ensure accurate interpretation of the site's historical and archaeological resources in regard to the proposed park design; and 2.) to protect the commemorative element of the completed park.

B. Denial of Individual Landmark Designation

The Commission retains the option of not designating Connolly's Bar as a Landmark.

C. National Register Listing

In order to qualify for listing on the National Register, a resource must be both significant and retain integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Failing to meet these standards of integrity, Connolly's does not qualify for listing on the National Register.

D. Memorandum of Agreement

Option One

The Commission could recommend the owner (i.e., the Boston Redevelopment Authority) mitigate the loss of Connolly's Bar by stipulating that a historic interpretation component be incorporated into all future Request for Proposals for the development of Parcel P-3. The mitigation package for the demolition of 110-120 Tremont Street (i.e., site of new Suffolk University Law School) provides a model for incorporating "displays of historical interest" into a proposed development.

Option Two

The Commission could recommend the owner (i.e., the Boston Redevelopment Authority) consider a preservation plan for the "Connolly's" neon sign. The plan would address restoration of the sign and appropriate venues for its display and interpretation. The CITGO sign Landmark petition case of 1983 established a precedent for voluntarily refurbishment of historic commercial signage.

6.2 Impact of Alternatives

A. Individual Landmark Designation

Landmark designation represents the City's highest honor and is therefore restricted to cultural resources of outstanding architectural and/or historical significance. Landmark designation under Chapter 772 has traditionally required review of physical changes to the distinguishing architectural features of the property, in accordance with standards and criteria adopted as part of the designation.

1. Designation of the building's exterior walls and roof would require the Commission to review physical changes to these elements in accordance with standards and criteria adopted as part of the designation. These standards would preserve the structure's current form, features, and materials. Although the building's single-story form is known to date from 1959, the facade's materials (i.e., plywood, glass block, metal security grating, and brick veneer) can not be confirmed to date from Connolly's period of historic significance (1955-1965).
2. Identification of the "Connolly's" neon sign as a "Specified Feature" would require the Commission to review future changes to the sign in accordance with standards and criteria adopted as part of the designation. The neon sign is currently inoperable; it would require substantial repairs to restore it to its 1960s appearance. The Commission has no legal authority to require the sign be returned to working condition if inoperable at the time of designation. Additionally, if designated, the Commission would be liable for: 1.) tracking the sign if moved from its current location; 2.) ensuring its preservation; and 3.) monitoring its condition if placed in storage.

A precedent for rejecting designation of commercial signage was established by the Commission in regard to the CITGO sign Landmark petition. In its 1983 decision, the Commission determined that the CITGO sign met the criteria for Landmark designation, but chose not to designate, finding that "to force the

owner to maintain the CITGO sign, to pay rent for its space, taxes and other permits to operate it is an unreasonable burden.”¹²

3. Commemorative designation of Connolly’s Bar would recognize the historic significance of the property, but would not impose standards and criteria to govern future alterations. It would mark a distinct departure from past Commission decisions by establishing a precedent for commemorating locations where significant events happened but where the distinguishing physical fabric associated with the event no longer survived.

B. Denial of Individual Landmark Designation

Without Landmark designation, the City would be unable to offer protection to the building’s physical fabric, or extend preservation guidance to present and future owners.

C. National Register Listing

Not viable. Connolly’s Bar does not meet integrity requirements associated with National Register criteria.

D. Memorandum of Agreement

Option One

The Commission could work with the Boston Redevelopment Authority, to ensure that Connolly’s Bar, its associations with jazz legends and Roxbury’s history, is acknowledged and celebrated through an appropriate audio or interpretive display. The agreement would stipulate inclusion of a public interpretive component in future development plans for Parcel P-3.

Additionally, the research associated with this study report confirms the significance of the intersection of Massachusetts and Columbus avenues in the South End in terms of the history of Boston’s Jazz Era. The Commission could suggest the Boston Jazz Society work with the South End Landmarks Commission and the City’s Office of Cultural Affairs to investigate an appropriate way to commemorate the historic and cultural significance of this location.

Option Two

The 1960 neon advertisement is the sole authentic remnant from the club’s period of historic significance. Restoration and maintenance of this sign can only be achieved through owner consent and voluntary investment. The Commission could recommend the owner consider refurbishing the sign in order to commemorate the performances and history associated with the Connolly’s era. If retention on site is not feasible, the Boston Redevelopment Authority should arrange for the sign’s disposition with an appropriate non-profit organization, preferably one with associations to music, Roxbury, or Boston history.

¹²Restoration and maintenance costs associated with refurbishing the CITGO sign were estimated at \$300,000.00 in 1983.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission finds that Connolly's Bar does meet the criteria for Landmark designation as found in section four of Chapter 772, Acts of 1975, as amended, for reasons cited in Section 3.3 of this report.

Due to lack of architecturally- or historically-significant fabric, the staff withholds recommendation to designate Connolly's Bar as a Landmark. Instead, staff recommends a Memorandum of Agreement between the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the Boston Landmarks Commission stipulating that future development of Parcel P-3 include a public interpretive element celebrating Connolly's Bar and its important associations to the history of Jazz.

The "Connolly's" neon sign is preferably preserved on site. If retention on site is not feasible, the Boston Redevelopment Authority should arrange for the sign's disposition with an appropriate non-profit organization, preferably one with associations to music, Roxbury, or Boston history.

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