The following *Powerpoint* presentation takes the place of the intended *i-movie*, yet it may eventually become an *i-movie* with preparatory training. I completed the work individually, and I plan on using this in an American History Class while discussing the Enlightenment philosophies that pervaded our Constitution and early search for a national identity. This also may serve as the opener to a Unit on Local Bostonian history, or even an introduction to a field trip into Boston to view our architectural heritage. I added content from our own trip into Boston, where we had the opportunity to see some exceptional and informative tours of the areas I describe in this presentation.

I would like my students to understand that leadership opportunities may come through valuing education and civic participation as Charles Bulfinch models for us. His ambition and care for detail developed out of civic duty, and his livelihood depended on Boston’s.

-MJB
Building up Boston

An Early Geographical and Architectural History of Boston and the Leaders that Designed the Course of that History

Created by Matthew J. Bach
Introduction

“Boston, which now appears to the casual visitor to be built upon a solid segment of the Massachusetts coast, was in the early seventeenth century a hilly peninsula, almost completely surrounded by water. To the geologist, whose sense of time is more spacious than that of a historian, the site of Boston has worn more aspects than can even be hinted at here.”

-the late Walter Muir Whitehill (former director of the Boston Athenæum, and resident of North Andover), from his book: *Boston: A Topographical History*
Primary Source: 1722 Bonner Map of Boston
Some Facts

- Boston’s first “Town House” was built between 1657-1711 on the site where the Old State House currently stands. This marked a shift for Boston- from a small colonial town to a more cosmopolitan and urban settlement.

- By 1722 the street names conspicuously emulated London’s, and architectural style was not far behind.

- After the Revolution: Boston grows by 360% to a population of 28,000 (New York was about 33,000 at the time) and sea trade reaches as far as Russia.

- 1790’s witness an increased effort towards improving inland transportation: roads, canals, and turnpikes unhindered by Boston’s topographical handicaps.

- Although the industrial leaders (Lowells, Jacksons, and Appletons) seek out quicker rivers (Merrimack rather than Charles) north of the city, they live and spend their money in Boston- hence Boston’s first Renaissance architectural tradition…
The Georgian Style: Bostonian Prosperity Chooses an European Expression

- Georgian Architecture emulates the Italian Renaissance work of Andrea Palladio and the interpretation of that work by Indigo Jones, an English architect of one generation later. Palladio’s treatise, *Four Books of Architecture*, instructed on the classical instruments of balance, harmony, and function; a necessary companion to the enlightenment philosophies that prodded Boston through the Revolution.
Elements of the Georgian Style

FRONT ELEVATION

Roof balustrade
Brick chimneys
Pedimented dormers
Roof - Hip, side gable or gambrel
Classical cornice - Usually with decorative dentils - molding
Clapboard siding or brick veneer
Pedimented doors with transom window
Pedimented windows
Double hung windows
Quoinied corners with brick
Raised foundation - Brick

CORNICE TREATMENT

Molding
Decorative cornice with dentil molding
Clapboard siding or brick veneer

WINDOWS

6 over 6 or 9 over 9
Window panes
Wide, shallow wood mantles

ENTRANCES

Triangular Door Pediment
Flat Door Pediment
Segmented Door Pediment
Early Boston Contributions

- Longfellow House, 1759-Vassel
- Province House, 1679-Sergeant
- Old State House, 1712-Unknown
- Old South Meeting House, 1729-Blanchard
- Faneuil Hall, 1742-Smibert
The Man Who Built Boston

- Charles Bulfinch 1763-1844
- Attended Harvard college
- “Grand Tour” of Europe 1785-87
  Inspired by Indigo Jones and Christopher Wren
- Becomes a Gentleman Architect, and the first American architect of great reputation
- Civically Active: Board of Health, Selectman - repeals law against plays in city, and then promptly designs and builds first Theatre
From a Gentleman Architect to a Public Servant

- Bulfinch wagered large investment on a development plan for Franklin Place titled the Tontine Crescent.
- He did not procure the investors needed, and despite being head of the Board of Selectmen and Police Superintendent he had to spend a month in Debtor’s jail in 1811 for insolvency.
- His architectural career becomes his livelihood and he therefore is prolific in Boston’s transformation to a world class architectural metropolis.
“Although Charles Bulfinch may have been a poor businessman, he was as an imaginative architect as he was a devoted public servant. Boston owes him a unique debt for his skill in transforming an eighteenth-century town into a nineteenth-century city.” – Walter Muir Whitehill

State House: 1795-1797- Bulfinch refines the Georgian style in America
Changing the Face of Boston: More than Just Building up Architecture

Primary Source: Cutting Down Beacon Hill

Bulfinch's tenure as Selectman, his private development company, the Mt. Vernon Proprietors, leveled the western peak of the Tri-Mountain area above the Common in anticipation of widening the neck that connected Boston to Roxbury.

By 1807 the Mill Proprietors and Boston's citizenry reached an agreement for filling in the Mill Pond and developing it based on Bulfinch's plans.

Fill was brought from Beacon Hill, although the rights to the gravel were in dispute at the time.
The landscape of Constant Flux

• By 1842 the “neck” begins to vanish into the former Back Bay
• Copp’s Hill is dug out and Mill Pond disappears
• Wharfs are built up and improved
• Many new bridges over the Charles

A. Willard and J.W. Barber
Engraving

Fig. 53. Trains crossing the Back Bay in 1844
In contrast to the Bonner Map of 1722, the Mill Pond has notably shrunk, while also being spanned, along with the Back Bay, by a web of rail bridges. The wharfs have also been extended and the space between them filled in in some instances.
As Boston Expanded, so Did Bulfinch’s Portfolio

First Harrison Grey Otis House, 1796- note the Palladian window

Second Otis House, 1800- note the hipped roof and changing size of fenestration to create the illusion of height

MA General Hospital, 1818, the skylight allowed natural illumination, and the building itself is an essay on Classical temple symmetry.

Faneuil Hall, 1806- Bulfinch expanded on the original structure.

...and numerous other-existent or lost- in Boston, Cambridge, and New England.
“When Charles Bulfinch was once asked if he should train up any of his children in his own profession, he replied that he did not think there was much left for them to do… When one recalls that in addition to the entire streets, public buildings, and churches [he had designed], he had built in Boston five banks, four insurance offices, two hospitals, and three schools, one cannot blame him for wondering what was left for his successors.” – Walter Muir Whitehill

Bulfinch was appointed head architect of the US Capital in 1818-successor to Benjamin Latrobe-and Bulfinch completed the wings and dome seen here-not disimilar to the MA State House design he is so well-regarded for.
Bulfinch did, however, inspire architects to carry on with the Classical/Renaissance identity of Boston…

- Quincy Market, 1826- Alexander Parris
- Tremont Street Theatre, 1827- Isaiah Rogers
- Louisburg Square, 1826- SP Fuller (A nod to the row house community of Bulfinch’s Tontine Crescent)
Beyond Bulfinch

- Most scholars agree that Boston did not veer from Bulfinch’s stylistic direction until mid-nineteenth century when architects such as Upjohn, Ware, Van Brunt, and Richardson ushered in a Gothic compendium to Boston’s architectural identity.

- Today Boston continues to dialogue with the past- and Bulfinch- with every new addition. Even architects who designed buildings in modernist idioms- such as Rudolph’s State Health complex or McKinnell, Kallmann and Knowles’ City Hall- have suggested a distant relationship to Bulfinch’s State House.
Suggested Further Reading

- AIA Guide to Boston, by Susan and Michael Southworth
- Boston: A Century of Progress, by Anthony Mitchell Sammarco
- Boston: A Topographical History, by Walter Muir Whitehill & Lawrence W. Kennedy
- Built in Boston: City and Suburb, 1800-2000, by Douglas Shand-Tucci
- Lost Boston, by Jane Holtz Kay