

## Boston Landmarks Commission

Cited as one of Massachusetts' Ten Most Endangered Historic Resources in 2005 by Preservation Massachusetts, the future of the 180 year-old **JABEZ LEWIS FARMHOUSE** at 1090 Centre Street in Jamaica Plain should be protected by Boston Landmarks Commission designation. It is one of the few remaining links to Boston's rich agricultural history and a rare example in Boston of Federal Period farmhouse architecture.

Jabez Lewis was a farmer and victualler, a merchant who supplied the ships in Boston's busy, important harbor with food and provisions. He built his farmhouse sometime between 1822 (when he bought the land) and 1827 (when he died, leaving the house to his wife, Lucretia) beside the Boston Post Road in an area of farms, orchards, and pastures.

A beautiful two-story example of the two-chimneys-behind-the-ridge (kitchen ell) type of New England farmhouse, it has survived from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Federal Period on its original site with many of its distinctive features intact. These include six-over-six windows with original glass, interior pocket window shutters, a front door that has an elliptical fanlight and a decorative wooden surround with fluted pilasters and a delicately carved wood entablature, a central stairway, fireplace surrounds and mantels with restrained classical detailing, and 6-panel interior doors. However, there are signs of serious neglect and deterioration – water damage, a crumbling chimney, decaying gutters, missing shutters, and broken windows – as well as late 20<sup>th</sup> century alterations in the form of wall-to-wall carpeting, vinyl siding, and a screened porch with a corrugated metal roof added to the back of the building.

The antique farmhouse is currently owned by Harvard University and is located on the grounds of Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum. It antedates the Arboretum by 50 years. Long used as the residence of the superintendent of the Arboretum, it has stood vacant for the past decade. The Arnold Arboretum had planned to demolish the farmhouse to make room for a large garage and maintenance facility as part of its Institutional Master Plan, but changed its mind in November 2005 in response to strong community pressure and promised not to destroy the farmhouse. Still, it remains precariously vulnerable to "demolition by neglect" through damage by weather and animals, arson, and vandalism. Harvard University has refused to designate a constructive use for the building and has not made public any plan for its restoration and maintenance.

The historic significance of the building has been recognized on the national level, both as part of the Arnold Arboretum, which is a National Historic Site, the highest possible National Register designation, and in its own right. The Jabez Lewis Farmhouse was designated a National Historic Landmark and a National Register Individual Property in 1966. The Massachusetts Cultural Resources Information System lists only 10 farmhouses remaining in Boston from the Federal Period and the Jabez Lewis Farmhouse is one of two on the list that have National Historic Landmark status and one of three with National Register Individual Property status. On the state level, commenting on the Arboretum's Institutional Master Plan in a 2004 letter to the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the Massachusetts Historical Commission urged development of "explicit recommendations for the care and maintenance of the ca. 1820 house at 1090 Centre Street [the Lewis Farmhouse]." A listing in the National Register of Historic Places and the opinion of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, however, provide none of the guarantees and safeguards that designation by the Boston Landmarks Commission would.

Boston Landmarks Commission designation earlier this year of the Fowler-Clark Farm (built 1786-1806) in Mattapan set a precedent for protection of buildings that are significant links to an era when agriculture was a key component of Boston's economy. Like the Fowler-Clark Farm, the Jabez Lewis Farmhouse should receive Individual Landmark Designation under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975 so that all modifications and alterations to the property will be reviewed by the Commission and approved only if they meet specific standards and criteria.

The Jamaica Hills Association, which represents the neighborhood that abuts the site of the Jabez Lewis Farmhouse, has taken the lead in a campaign to save this valuable architectural resource. The neighborhood association has been actively supported by the Mayor of Boston, Thomas M. Menino, the Boston City Council (unanimous resolution on July 13, 2005), Representative Jeffrey Sanchez, and many historic preservation and neighborhood organizations. *The Boston Globe*, the *Jamaica Plain Gazette*, and the *JP Bulletin* have provided press coverage of the campaign to save the farmhouse. Collectively, the belief is that Harvard University, as owner of this property, has a responsibility to preserve it for future generations of Boston citizens.

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