



THE

# Fenway News

HYPERLOCAL NEWS FOR THE FENWAY, AUDUBON CIRCLE, KENMORE SQUARE, UPPER BACK BAY, PRUDENTIAL, LONGWOOD, AND MISSION HILL SINCE 1974 • VOLUME 50 NUMBER 2 • FEBRUARY 2 - MARCH 1, 2024

## National Braille Month and Boston's Place in History of Braille

BY MARY ANN BROGAN

As the world celebrated Braille Literacy Month in January, it is important to appreciate Louis Braille, who invented braille, and other men who made earlier contributions to this system.

Braille is a system of raised dots that form a code. The pattern of dots has come to represent letters and has transformed the lives of blind and low vision people of the past, and is used by some currently.

Louis Braille was born on Jan. 4, 1809 in Coupvray, France. He became blind at the age of three. He got his inspiration for the braille system from Charles Barbier, a retired artillery officer in Napoleon's Army who invented a note-taking system of embossed dots to represent sound. The idea was to be able to communicate military strategies by this touch code system. The Army was not interested and so Barbier brought his idea to the Royal Institute for Blind Youth, where

Braille was a student. Braille immediately saw the potential and worked for three years to improve Barbier's ideas.

Fast forward to Boston in 1901 when Francis Ierardi, a blind Italian immigrant living in New York convinced his parents to move to Boston so he could attend the Perkins School for the Blind. After graduating from Perkins, Ierardi became a social worker with the Massachusetts State Division of the Blind.

World War I led Ierardi to realize that there was no source of world news for blind people other than reliance on family and friends. In 1918, Ierardi began developing a braille newspaper. He secured the funding with the help of the MA Association for Promoting the Interests of the Adult Blind and other benefactors. The first issue of 200 copies on March 17, 1927 were stitched by hand, collated and rolled in paper by volunteers working through the night.

The demand was so great that it became

a national paper and even expanded to other English-speaking countries. At one point, the production of these papers occupied six buildings in Boston. In 1946, that National Braille Press (NBP) relocated to its current location at 88 St. Stephen Street in the Fenway. Ierardi kept the weekly paper going and continued his work with NBP until his death in 1970 when the weekly printing of the braille newspaper also stopped. Today, NBP continues the mission of bringing literacy to the blind and low vision persons around the world.

NBP acknowledges that braille has decreased in popularity. In 2009, when screen readers and other adaptive technologies were in earlier stages, they stated that "fewer than 10 percent of the 1.3 million people who are legally blind in the United States are Braille readers. Further, a mere 10 percent of blind children are learning it."

However, NBP promotes braille literacy and produces an array of materials for blind, low vision and blind deaf persons including books for children and adults, tests, airline safety guides, children's literacy programs and braille technology tools. One endearing example is a children's book that can be read by a seeing parent while the blind child follows along in braille.

NBP has a yearly contest called The Touch of Genius Award. The \$10,000 prize attracts contestants from all over the world to invent items that can benefit both blind and blind deaf persons. Judges will be reviewing contestant entries next week for the 2024 contest. NBP will also be represented in the Boston Marathon on April 15 and offers many other opportunities for people to support its mission. Please explore the website at [nbp.org](http://nbp.org).

*Mary Ann Brogan lives in the East Fens.*

## Avenue Queue...

In January, MBTA riders experienced a Green Line shutdown. From Jan. 3 through Jan. 12, and then again from Jan. 16 to Jan. 28, there were no trains between North Station and Babcock Street on the B Line, with all other train services suspended from North Station to Kenmore. Most significant for the *Fenway News*, the E line was shutdown between North Station and the end of the line at Heath Street.

According to the MBTA, the closures were necessary to do track work. In addition to free service on the 39 bus, shuttle buses ran near other Green Line stops.

Far right, commuters on Jan. 18 wait for Green Line shuttle buses outside Back Bay Station, a few blocks from Copley Station on the Green Line. There were shuttle buses

for each branch of the Green Line, with multiple MBTA staffers directing the lines of shuttle bus riders.

Right, the MBTA recently released a photo of upgrades to the Hynes Convention Center Station stairway completed during the shutdown.  
- Kelsey Bruun

PHOTO: KELSEY BRUUN

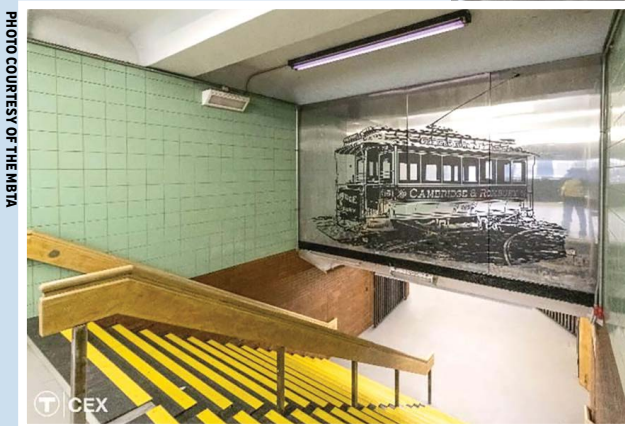


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MBTA

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PHOTO: LESLIE POND



Before the doors opened at 10 am on Martin Luther King Day (Jan. 15), hundreds of people stood in line to enter the MFA on a sunny morning with below-freezing temperature. The line extended from the Huntington Ave. entrance, turned the corner along Forsyth Way, rounded another corner onto The Fenway, and ended near Museum Rd. The Fenway Entrance, which had been open prior to the pandemic, remained closed.

A staff member greeting guests at the end of the line that day noted that its length was similar to the one for the MFA's Dale Chihuly exhibit [a few years ago]. Another staff person agreed that they should have opened the Fenway entrance.

Contacted by the *Fenway News* about the wait time, Karen Frasca, Director of Marketing and Communications, responded, "The MFA constantly evaluates the visitor experience and operational efficiencies at our entrance to identify attendance trends that would necessitate a long-term change to our current public entrances. With the overwhelmingly popular "Fashioned by Sargent" exhibition in its final day, and all tickets available in-person on a first-come-first-served basis for the show, the line for exhibition tickets as we prepared to open doors at 10 a.m. on the MLK holiday exceeded expectations. Once the museum opened, the line receded to a more typical size for recent free Open House events. We estimate that wait times were between 45 and 90 minutes. Generally, wait time for entry on an average weekend day is perhaps 15-20 minutes, with weekdays averaging approximately 5 minutes."

The MFA did not respond directly to a question about whether they are considering reopening the Fenway Entrance.

Hopefully, even with free admission for Boston Public School students and families starting in February, the wait times will remain more like an average weekend day. And even better, the MFA would reopen the Fenway Entrance.

- Leslie Pond and Alison Pultinas

# FENSVIEWS

## MA Takes Steps to Put Gas in the Past

BY JONATHAN COHN

Massachusetts voters in poll after poll show strong support for climate action. But a striking disconnect exists when it comes to climate policy in the Commonwealth: two-thirds of our in-state net electricity generation comes from natural gas, and more than half of households depend on gas for fuel. We want climate action, but we remain addicted to fossil fuels.

Massachusetts has a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 85 percent—and achieving “net zero” emissions—by 2050, and that will remain out of reach as long as we remain dependent on fossil fuels.

Fortunately, the state’s Department of Public Utilities now acknowledges this basic reality. Here’s the quick backstory.

In 2020, then-Attorney General Maura Healey asked the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) to investigate how electric utilities planned to meet the state’s climate goals while providing reliable service and protecting consumers from undue costs. Under

### GUEST OPINION

Republican Governor Charlie Baker, the DPU

enabled the companies themselves to choose the firm that would work on the investigation and subsequently shut climate advocates out of the process.

But with a new administration—and a lot of advocacy from climate policy experts and activists—came a different tune, and this December, the DPU under the Healey administration released a new regulatory framework that reflects the reality of climate science.

The DPU’s ruling (referred to as a docket) called for a significant increase in the use of electrified and decarbonized heating technologies and underscored that, to get there, we will need to stop locking in harmful and outdated fossil fuel infrastructure. Before any new pipeline can be approved, utility companies will now have to prove that alternatives—such as electrification, thermal networked systems, targeted energy efficiency—are too cost-prohibitive or not viable.

A robust energy transition must also be an equitable one, and the DPU stressed the need to prioritize opportunities for residents of environmental justice communities to benefit from moving beyond gas and to create job opportunities in the clean energy workforce for gas industry workers and underserved communities.

To make this energy transition happen, the DPU also ordered

utilities to submit individual climate compliance plans every five years starting next year to show their progress.

The future of gas docket was a big win for climate advocates, both symbolically and practically. However, as the DPU document itself notes, it is “necessarily one step—not the first and certainly not the last,” and both legislative and executive action will be needed to advance the goals.

Although the docket raised the bar for when the DPU would approve new gas pipelines, it did not call for a ban on expanding gas infrastructure, a vital step to avoid the lock-in effect of unsustainable fossil fuels. Before the Legislature are a set of bills (S.2135 / H.3237) to put a two-year moratorium on gas infrastructure expansion to give the state time to develop a clear and equitable plan for transitioning to renewable energy. We still need that (and for more than just two years), and the Governor can also do that herself by executive action. *You should let her know that you think she should.*

Similarly, the Legislature is likely to pass a bill on the siting of new energy facilities (e.g. power plants). It is past time to correct the historic inequities that have led to the impacts of dirty energy siting being disproportionately borne by low-income communities and communities of color. Siting reform is also urgent to make sure that we can scale up the renewable energy needed to power a green economy. The bills (S.2113 / H.3187) would add environmental justice, public health, and climate change to the factors that the Energy Facilities Siting Board must consider in its deliberations and require community engagement prior to filing. State Senator Lydia Edwards (D-East Boston), who represents much of the East Fens, is a co-lead for the bill.

Our Legislature often loves to wait, but Mother Nature does not. We need to build on this recent progress and guarantee that Massachusetts makes a comprehensive commitment to moving beyond fossil fuels.

To learn more about the gas infrastructure moratorium bills, visit [malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S2135](http://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S2135). To advocate for the moratorium, call or email Governor Healey’s office: [mass.gov/orgs/governor-maura-healey-and-it-governor-kim-driscoll](http://mass.gov/orgs/governor-maura-healey-and-it-governor-kim-driscoll), and contact legislators during Mothers Out Front’s Climate Action Call on Feb. 6. See Calendar for details. For the siting reform bills, visit [malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S2113](http://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S2113).

*Jonathan Cohn is policy director for Progressive Mass and secretary of the Boston Ward 4 Democratic Committee. He lives in the East Fens.*

## Open Agassiz Road

### TO THE EDITOR:

Once again, the Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) is trying to sneak a major change into our neighborhood without any public notice or communication.

Remember the parking meter debacle during COVID, when DCR was going to put parking meters on the 100 percent residential section of Park Drive, and The Fenway, as well as other areas such as Revere Beach? Lots of public outcry blocked it, and Senator Will Brownsberger presented and got a bill passed saying that DCR must communicate with, and get approval from abutting neighborhoods, before making any such changes.

Frederick Law Olmsted was a master at designing urban parks that balanced the need for greenspace, pedestrian access, and vehicle traffic flow. Agassiz Road is a great example of that—a nice wide cut-through road with wide

ground settle. That doesn’t require months, especially after it had already been reopened! Even worse, during the recent very cold weather, it was completely ice covered, making it very dangerous for pedestrians. And, Parks Department, DCR, and emergency vehicles drive up on the sidewalk to get around the barrier—also dangerous!

DCR, come on. Open Agassiz Road!

**LISA SIMON**  
30-YEAR RESIDENT, WEST FENS

### TO THE EDITOR:

In a surprise to both the West Fenway and our elected officials, DCR has closed Agassiz Road without any community input or recommendations. Not only does this impact those of us in the immediate neighborhood, it also restricts important access for both the fire and police departments, creating a potentially dangerous situation.

The recent snowstorm left the road unplowed and left its sidewalks impassable because they were covered with ice, restricting access to the East Fenway for both shopping and those going to the local schools.

Another concern this decision raises would be the traffic following any events at Fenway Park, when the road is used as a vital exit. Its continued closure would then lead to major congestion on our neighborhood streets. Drivers would realize quickly that there was literally “no way out,” adding much frustration.

That DCR made this decision without consultation is very troubling, a reflection of both a lack of transparency and disregard for consequences. That the offices of State Senator Will Brownsberger and City Councilor Sharon Durkan were not informed reveals that this reflects more than just poor communication.

This decision needs to be reversed immediately, and the barricade needs to be removed as soon as possible. Further discussions about this can take place, but in the meantime, we all need to have Agassiz Road opened once again.

**CHARLES MARTEL**  
WEST FENS

## LETTERS

enough sidewalks able to handle even Fenway Park crowds, and easy access for bicyclists. It’s the most direct connection from the West to the East Fenway, very important for traffic flow and certainly for emergency vehicles. With all the construction on Boylston Street and up by Hemenway Street, it is especially important to keep Agassiz Road open right now.

The Muddy River Project had Agassiz Road closed only during work hours, which, knowing that it was temporary, was a tolerated inconvenience. And they repaved the road and fixed the sidewalks well before they cleared out—all good!

The road was open for a few weeks, and then DCR came in and put in a cement barrier with “Road Closed” on it, and...nothing. After many weeks, I contacted Boston Parks Commissioner Ryan Woods to ask what the story was, and he gave me the DCR contact information, and mentioned that DCR was thinking of closing it permanently to vehicle traffic! What?

Clearly, I want the road to stay open. It’s fine just the way it is. But, in any event, it should definitely be open while DCR presents any possible changes up for public debate.

They gave a very disingenuous excuse of closing the road with the barrier to let the

## THE Fenway News

Serving the Fenway, Kenmore Square, Audubon Circle, upper Back Bay, lower Roxbury, Prudential, Mission Hill, and Longwood since 1974

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### “Comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.”

The founders of The Fenway News adopted this motto to express their mission of exposing and opposing the dangers the neighborhood faced in the early 1970s: rampant arson, predatory landlords, and a destructive urban renewal plan. While the Fenway has changed since then, we remain committed to the spirit of identifying problems and making our neighborhood a better and safer place to live.

### > NEXT ISSUE <

Our next issue will appear on **Friday, March 1.**

> DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS <  
The deadline for letters, news items, and ads for our next issue is **Friday, February 23.**

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# FENS VIEWS

## Reflections on my first six months as your city councilor

### DEAR DISTRICT 8:

I just crossed the six-month mark as Boston City Councilor for District 8 (the Fenway, Kenmore, Audubon Circle, Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Mission Hill, and the West End), and I can honestly say that I love this job and the ability to help people reach, and work with local government to make a difference on the issues that matter most. The work my team and I have accomplished has both uncovered what more needs to be done and provided us with the motivation to tackle what is ahead! We know there is so much work to do, but as I reflect back on my first six months, there are three areas of the work I'm particularly proud of: providing exceptional constituent services, building relationships with community leaders, and pushing a legislative agenda

work in their honor.

Providing exceptional constituent services was central to both of my campaigns (yes, I ran for reelection in the middle of my first six months) and remains the guiding force of my office. Our office celebrates small wins every day. That's why when I get a missing brick complaint, a rat burrow concern, or a graffiti notification, the appropriate City department/staff are sure to hear from me or my staff within 24 hours (though we appreciate your patience when it takes 48)! My commitment to staying attuned and alert to constituent matters not only provides necessary repairs and improvements to elements of District 8 residents' daily lives, but also serves to build trust with those residents, and relationship with the important employees of the City of Boston. If you have ever called my office with a concern, I hope you can join me in giving a generous thank you to staff at the Public Works Department, Inspectional Services Department, Boston Transportation Department, and many more, who do this work in partnership with us!

I am also proud to have met with civic groups in every neighborhood in my District. I recognize that these groups are composed of community leaders who know their neighborhoods better and for longer than I do; therefore, maintaining a regular line of communication with civic leaders is essential! A special thank you to the Civic Leaders of our neighborhoods. The countless hours you dedicate to your community does not go unnoticed and provides such a benefit to your neighbors and our neighborhoods—from the green spaces we enjoy, to the way we travel about our neighborhoods safely, and importantly the spaces we provide to foster community.

At the first full Council Meeting of the year, I was proud to file a number of items that received enthusiastic support from my Council colleagues. I can already tell that the new Council body has joined with a collaborative spirit and a motivation

## LETTERS

Before I dive in, it's important I mention the essential role of community leaders and civic organizations in the successes we have achieved as well as the objectives we are aiming for. I'm working on issues that District 8 residents have been advocating for for a long time. The residents of District 8 deserve an enormous acknowledgement for their advocacy—thank you for pushing the ball forward on so many things before I was here, and the partnership that continues! Also, a big thank you to my predecessor, Kenzie Bok, who approached this work with such urgency and accountability to neighbors. Finally, I'd like to pay particular tribute to three leaders we lost this year: Fenway CDC organizing committee member and volunteer for my campaign, Robert Mann; Ed Burke, who did so much, but I'll remember him as someone who sought for decades to restore the Muddy River, which is now coming to fruition; and John Bookston, who was a tireless advocate for affordable housing and member of the Fenway Civic Association. We continue this

reflective of District 8 priorities.



Mayor Michelle Wu swears in Sharon Durkan as District 8 City Councilor on Aug. 15

PHOTO: BENJAMIN CHENG

to achieve tangible results! I am so grateful for this energy to be directed towards the legislation I filed at our first Council Meeting, including hearings to evaluate: 1) the Mental Health resources available to City workers 2) expansion of the City's curbside compost collection 3) renewed attention to immediate and meaningful sanitation solutions to address the combined trash and rats problems neighborhoods all across the City are dealing with and 4) the creation of a last mile and late night bus service to fill the gap in MBTA service. Exploring these issues with a specific lens of what matters to our District and neighbors, gives me the tools to ensure that quality of life for Bostonians is at the top of my, and the City of Boston's, ambitious agenda. Serving as Chair of the Planning and Development Committee and the COVID-19 Recovery Committee in addition to serving

alongside Councilor Breadon as Vice Chair of the PILOT Committee are important assignment placements that will allow me to meaningfully move my legislative agenda forward.

District 8 residents serve as a critical compass steering the work of my office, and will continue to be that compass for my first two-year term. So if there is a pothole you pass every morning or a big picture policy you'd like to see the City address, my team and I would like to hear from you (I look forward to introducing you to them soon)! I trust the residents of my district to uplift matters that will improve their communities, and I hope they can come to trust me to deliver, as best I can, on those improvements. It's an honor to serve you, District 8!

SHARON DURKAN  
BOSTON CITY COUNCILOR, DISTRICT 8

### IN MEMORIAM

#### Osla Case

COMPILED BY RUTH KHOWAIS

East Fenway resident Osla Flavia (de-Figueiredo) Case died on Dec. 5. She was known for her kindness, compassion, and gentle strength.

Osla was born in 1940 in Zanzibar, Tanzania where she spent part of her youth before she moved with her family to Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania and later to Nairobi, Kenya. In 1963 she moved to the United States to pursue her education.

Osla graduated from Mount Saint Mary College in Hooksett, NH in 1967 with a BA in Business and from Northeastern University in 1984 with a MSc in Information Systems. Osla held several positions in business and systems analysis. Employers included the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce and local government agencies.

Osla and her husband Bob Case traveled widely and became interested in revolving loan funds in poor areas. With trips to her ancestral home in India, the need for agricultural renewal became apparent to Osla, and agriculture in India and Central America became an important focus. Osla and Bob treasured the two-week



Permaculture Design course they took in Nicaragua in their seventies, living in a treehouse on the side of a volcano.

"Her legacy of kindness, generosity, gentle strength, and vision—both through her spiritual and active commitments—will live on. Both Osla and Bob have been an inspiration in

our lives, as they have been for many others—at home, neighborhood, and the world. And they continue to be so," wrote neighbors Rosie, Ashok, and Sajed Kamal.

Osla is survived by her husband Bob William Case; children Alex and Fabiola; grandchildren Briana, Matthew, and Tiah; great grandchildren Alexander and Michaea; and siblings Edna, Xavier, Teresa, Joe, and Myrtle. She was preceded in death by her granddaughter Darah.

A visiting hour was held at St. Cecilia's Church on Dec. 18 followed by a funeral mass. Donations in her memory may be made to Empowerment International, c/o Kathy Adams, Visto Canterra Lane, Albuquerque, NM 87114.

Ruth Khowais lives in the West Fens.

### IN MEMORIAM

#### Robert Mann

COMPILED BY RUTH KHOWAIS

Robert Mann, an East Fenway resident and member of the Fenway CDC, died suddenly on Dec. 18.

Bob was born in Buffalo, New York in 1952. He attended Bishop Turner High School in Buffalo and then St. Bonaventure University in New York, graduating in 1974. Bob started his career in the computer industry working for IBM in Poughkeepsie, New York. He moved to Boston in 1982 and settled on Gainsborough Street. He worked for several computer companies as a performance engineer, most recently at Kforce in Boston.

Bob was an active and dedicated member of St. Cecilia Parish, volunteering as a lector at masses. He was also very active in the Ward 4 Democratic committee and logged in long hours canvassing the Fenway



neighborhood. Bob could always be counted on to show up for rallies, house parties, and organizing meetings for progressive candidates and causes.

"We all lost a real gentleman!" said Bob Binney, Ward 5 Democratic Committee Chair.

"His courteousness and generosity were remarkable. He will be deeply missed," said Carol Lasky from the Ward 4 Democratic Committee.

Bob was an avid Boston sports fan, and was a proud Boston Red Sox and New England Patriots season ticket holder.

Bob leaves his brother, Richard Mann of Redondo Beach, California. A visiting hour was held at St. Cecilia's Church on Dec. 21 followed by a funeral mass. Burial will take place in St. Adalbert Cemetery in Cheektowaga, New York.

Ruth Khowais lives in the West Fens.

# For Whom the Bells Tolls: The Case of the Japanese Temple Bell and its Boston Cousin

BY ED BALLO

Crossing over the small pedestrian bridge behind the Museum of Fine Arts at Forsyth Way, it's hard not to remark upon a curiously shaped bell on a granite pedestal. This is the oldest object in the Back Bay Fens.

Cast in 1675, this bell once adorned the Manpukuji Temple in Sendai, Japan. The temple was founded in 1661 by the Buddhist Chinese monk Yinyuan Longqi during the Ming Dynasty. Sendai is the largest city in the Tohoku region of the country on the main island of Honshu and is 230 miles northeast of Tokyo. It's a relatively modern city, as it was founded around 1600 by Date Masamune, one of the most powerful lords in feudal Japan. If the name of Sendai

After the Japanese surrender in WWII, the U.S. military found a scrapyard with a cache of bells that had been destined for a similar fate. Capt. Marion Kelley of the USS Boston brought this particular bell back and presented it to the city of Boston. As for the rest of the salvaged bells, the U.S. Department of State spent years researching the rightful owners and began returning them as diplomatic



Above: Temple Bell, Sendai; Right: USS Boston Bell



PHOTOS: ED BALLO

gestures. When they finally got to the Sendai bell in 1953, a Japanese group called the Temple Believers offered to allow this bell to remain in Boston "as a symbol of friendship and bond of peace."

The USS Boston has an unexpected connection to a second bell, displayed elsewhere in the city. Built at the Fore River Shipyard in Quincy and launched in August 1942, she was the sixth ship to bear the name of our city. As an interesting side note, during its heyday, Fore River also built vessels for navies other than the United States, such as Japan, Argentina, and the United Kingdom.

The USS Boston operated in the Pacific theatre during World War II and took part in, or supported action in the Marianas Islands, Guam, the Philippines, and Okinawa.

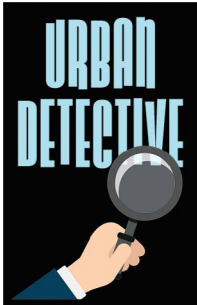
Following the surrender of Japan, Boston remained on occupation duty until February 1946. She was de-commissioned in 1946 then re-commissioned and converted to carry guided missiles in 1952. The process of extending the life of WWII ships was a Navy program called Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization, better known as FRAM. However, due to the rapid advancement of technology, the USS Boston's missiles were rendered obsolete in just 12 years.

Even though the USS Boston saw action in Vietnam, by 1970 she was showing her age and was de-commissioned again. Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy

attempted to save the ship and have it moved to the Boston waterfront, but these plans never came to fruition. Scrapping was completed by 1976.

All that remains of the USS Boston today is the ship's bell, located on the pier in Charlestown, not far from the USS Constitution. Thus, our two bells, cast continents and centuries apart, now find themselves forever linked.

*Ed Ballo lives in the West Fens. His periodic "Urban Detective" column presents small bites of local history to help decipher the city around you and enhance your appreciation of it.*



rings a bell (pun intended), it was the closest major city to the epicenter of the earthquake on March 11, 2011. While the tremors did not cause major damage in the city center, the tsunami inundated the city's coastal outskirts and damaged the Fukushima Power Station some 50 miles distant.

During World War II, the Japanese government compelled its citizens to donate metals to be melted down and turned into artillery and ammunition, and temple bells were no exception. While melting down temple bells seemed a bit shocking to this detective, further research revealed that bells from the Edo period (1615-1868) were regarded as so commonplace by the government that they became appropriate targets for recycling into war munitions. As a result, a vast number of bells from this period have disappeared, making the bell in the Fenway a rare survivor indeed!

## Updates About Boston Public Schools

BY ALISON PULTINAS

In her State of the City speech, Mayor Michelle Wu announced that Boston Public School students and up to three family members now have free admission to the city's major museums. The policy is for the first and second Sundays of every month, beginning Feb. 3.

In the State of the City, Mayor Wu also announced the expansion of the Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers high school with the \$37.8 million Bloomberg Philanthropies award and a renewed partnership

with MGH Brigham. At a Jan. 17 press conference on the expansion, EMK school leader Dr. Caren Walker Gregory said this will double the number of 9th through 12th grade students over the next five years. What this means for the current two campus programs and whether a new facility might be built in the future has not been shared yet.

There is continued opposition to the Mayor's plan to move the John O'Bryant High School to West Roxbury. O'Bryant students and faculty regularly testify at the Boston School Committee biweekly meetings

explaining their concerns. For many of the speakers, keeping the school in Roxbury, close to the Longwood area where students have internships and dual enrollment at local colleges, is the priority. Recently, local architect David Lee was invited by O'Bryant advocates to suggest alternatives for how Madison Park High School and the O'Bryant could expand with vertical additions to the current buildings. BPS capital planning staff also attended his presentation.

Boston's long-term school facilities plan, legally required by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, was released in January. It was summarized by School Committee member Brandon Cardet-Hernandez as a "plan to plan." The promise is a slow rollout of closures

and mergers beginning next spring. In-person workshops are scheduled for February and March. [boston.gov/education/green-new-deal-boston-public-schools](http://boston.gov/education/green-new-deal-boston-public-schools).

Registration for the 2024 to 2025 school year began in January. For students entering K0, K1, K2, or grades 6, 7, or 8, priority registration closes Feb. 9. Round 2 for all other grades opens on Feb. 12. [Bostonpublicschools.org/register](http://Bostonpublicschools.org/register).

Bonnie McBride, teacher librarian at Fenway High School, received the 2023 Massachusetts School Library Association's Massachusetts Super Librarian Award. She was previously recognized in 2018 with the organization's President's Award for new librarians.

*Alison Pultinas lives in Mission Hill.*

### Fenway High School Basketball

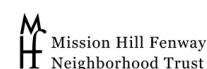


Fenway Panthers player senior Daniel Amado in the air at the Fenway High School versus Charlestown game on Jan. 22 at the Dearborn STEM Academy gym. The Panthers lost 90-44. The rosters for Fenway High School's varsity boys and girls basketball teams include players from the Dearborn STEM Academy. Boston Public Schools Athletics uses a cooperative system to offer additional opportunities for students in smaller schools to share sports teams. The regular winter season ends with city basketball championships at Madison Park High School on Feb. 22. Game time has not yet been announced.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GEOFFREY WALKER, PHOTOGRAPHER; JOE ALLEN

## MISSION HILL FENWAY NEIGHBORHOOD TRUST

We invite proposals from organizations seeking funding for projects and programs intended to serve residents of the Mission Hill and Fenway neighborhoods. Please visit [www.missionhillfenwaynt.org](http://www.missionhillfenwaynt.org) to access the on-line application.



**DEADLINE:** Submit your proposal no later than 5pm on March 31, 2024. Please email [HELLO@MISSIONHILLFENWAYNT.ORG](mailto:HELLO@MISSIONHILLFENWAYNT.ORG) with any questions.

## @ THE CENTER

The Fenway Community Center is open six days a week. Visit [fenwaycommunitycenter.org](http://fenwaycommunitycenter.org) for details.

- Sat, Feb. 10, 17, & 24, 12pm: Movement Matters, a dance inspired exercise class with the Boston Conservatory
- Mon, Feb. 12, 6pm: Community Safety with Boston Police Department D-4
- Mon, Feb. 26, 6pm: Fenway Speaker Series with Kaji Aso Studios

## SENIOR EVENTS

To attend, RSVP to Tracey or Sara at (617) 536-7154. For information, visit [operationpeaceboston.org](http://operationpeaceboston.org). Events this month all take place at the Peterborough Senior Center.

- Tue, Feb 6, 12pm: MOVIE SCREENING, "Dirty Dancing"
- Wed, Feb 7, 21, & 28, 11:45am: ORAL HISTORY PROJECT with Northeastern University students-partnership with Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly
- Wed, Feb 7, 21, & 28, 1pm: TECH CAFE with Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly
- Thu, Feb 15, 12pm: BREAKFAST on the Senior Center! Enjoy a delicious sandwich from Bennett's Sandwich Shop.

## CORRECTION

In our January issue, the PILOT piece stated that \$60.8 million dollars of PILOT funds have gone unpaid since the program began. This number is out of date and has grown to \$195 million.

## NEWSLINES

### **Community Preservation Act Applications**

There is a final hearing for the 2023 Community Preservation Act applications with the appointed review committee on Feb. 12 at 6pm. The committee will vote on the slate of affordable housing, historic preservation, open space, and recreation applications. Then, they will send their recommendations to the City Council. The committee held eight public meetings between mid-November and Jan. 22.

There were only two applications from Fenway organizations. Ruggles Baptist Church resubmitted their request for needed repairs to their 1914 exterior façade. Previously, they asked for \$600,000 in 2022 and \$500,000 in 2023 but did not make the final rounds.

The Boston Symphony Orchestra applied for \$101,750 to restore two large upper arched windows, which, according to BSO archivist Bridget Carr, have been boarded with plywood since World War II.

### **Samuels Parking Lot Permit Extended**

On Jan. 18, the Zoning Board of Appeals subcommittee approved Samuels & Associates' application for a three-year extension for their 43-car parking lot at Jersey and Boylston streets. The permitted use now ends on Dec. 18, 2026. This lot is in front of the Our Fathers restaurant, which is located in the former garage that housed the original Tasty Burger (owned by the same management).

The Boston Transportation Department submitted a memo to the Board asking that 50 percent of the spaces be sized for compact cars along with the standard request for a clearly-worded sign displaying the licensee's name and contact information, the lot's legal capacity, and the fees for parking.

### **Charlesbank Barbed Wire on the Way Out**

A future win for the public realm—at the January Community Alliance of Mission Hill meeting, Charlesbank Co-op board member Toni Komst recently announced that her board voted to remove the extensive barbed wire along the fence bordering the Cooperative's garage on St. Alphonsus Street.

Unknown is whether the barbed wire was part of the original 1961 plan for the high rise, or if it is left over from the 1970s era when fear of crime was pervasive in the neighborhood.

Now there is enough capacity available in the garage that semi-permanent banners, advertising monthly parking for the public, wave on the lawn facing Longwood and Huntington Avenues.

### **Robert Burns Statue in Local Media**

The Back Bay Fens' Robert Burns Statue received not one, but two, shoutouts from local media programs that featured celebrations to honor the Scottish bard's 265th birthday on Jan. 25, also known as Burns Night. WGBH's "Curiosity Desk" with Edgar B. Herwick III and "Under The Radar with Callie Crossley" mention the wandering statue's history. According to Herwick, "There's more statues of him in America than any American writer."

### **Women's Beanpot**

On Jan. 23, Northeastern University's women's hockey team prevailed 2-1 over Boston University's to win the 45th Women's Beanpot Championship, the first to be played at TD Garden. Also for the first time, the Beanpot media presence included an all-female broadcast team and a woman-led production team.

### **Carlton Street Footbridge Project Wins Award**

The Carlton Street Footbridge rehabilitation project was named a Silver Award winner of the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) of Massachusetts' 2024 Engineering Excellence Awards competition. The footbridge provides access between the Riverway section of the Emerald Necklace and Brookline. Built in 1894 and closed from 1976 in disrepair, it was reopened last year after decades of advocacy and recent rehabilitation.

### **Funny Fenwickians**

"Funny Fenwickians" Carol Lasky and her son Colin Mills have put Boston on the map as the 2023 "funniest, cleverest, and wittiest" city in the U.S., according to the New Yorker Cartoon Caption Contest results on Wordsbelow.app. Boston has the most combined Finalist (8) and Winner (1) counts, all from Carol and Colin. And according to the New Yorker Cartoon Caption Contest Podcast, Carol is "the most winningest New Yorker Caption Contest Finalist in 2023 and any single year in the history of the contest" and Colin is "the second place most winningest in any single year in the history of the contest." Both are featured in a 90-minute interview; listen at [open.spotify.com/episode/41LTyvW139abhspXYO6tQf](https://open.spotify.com/episode/41LTyvW139abhspXYO6tQf).

## Northeastern City and Community Engagement

### 2024 Community Wellness Series

# Financial Literacy Workshop

Free!

March 11th  
March 18th

6:00-7:30pm

Northeastern Crossing  
1175 Tremont St,  
Roxbury, MA



ENGAGE EDUCATE EMPOWER

Register Below!



[communityengagement@northeastern.edu](mailto:communityengagement@northeastern.edu)



[communityengagement.northeastern.edu](mailto:communityengagement.northeastern.edu)



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# The Arts

## 295 Huntington & Black Arts in the Twenties and Thirties

BY ALISON BARNET

### MAUD CUNEY-HARE

In 1927, Maud Cuney-Hare founded the nonprofit community-based Allied Arts Centre in a room at the Gainsboro Building—that’s how it was spelled. It was “created to discover musical, literary and dramatic talent and arouse interest in the artistic capabilities of African American youth” (Anthony Neal).

Black-oriented concerts, lectures and classes in music, dance, and voice were held there, including a “Little Theatre,” which offered opportunity to children of any race. Hare was not a fan of ragtime or jazz, preferring the classical traditions in which she had been trained.

The South End’s League of Women for Community Service was a major supporter—Hare had originally set up a Little Theatre and musical arts program there. Her intent also was not just to present the arts but to attack segregation. In 1907, she was one of the first women to join the Niagara Movement, predecessor to the NAACP.

Born in Texas in 1874 to well-off, mixed-race parents, her father a civil rights leader, Maud Cuney came to Boston at age 16 to study piano at the New England Conservatory, then in the South End. (It moved to Huntington Avenue in 1902.)

She faced discrimination when white girls demanded that NEC evict her and another Black student from the dorm. It became a cause célèbre when W. E. B. DuBois became involved (they became longtime friends and once engaged). She was able to stay and, after graduating in 1895, she attended the Lowell Institute at Harvard and taught in Texas for a few years.

When she returned to Boston, she married her second husband, William Parker Hare, in 1904, thereby taking the name Maud Cuney-Hare. They moved to 43 Sheridan Street in JP—their home now on the JP Women’s History Walk—where she lived until her death in 1936.

In addition to being a pianist, lecturer, composer, Black music historian and musicologist, Hare was a playwright—she produced several plays, including her “Antar of Araby”— and a folklorist who became interested in the music of other cultures, especially Creole. She and baritone singer William Howard Richardson toured together for 20 years, specializing in Black and Creole music. In 1930, during tough times for theatre, Hare closed Allied Arts. Her “Negro Musicians and Their Music” was published soon after her death in 1936.

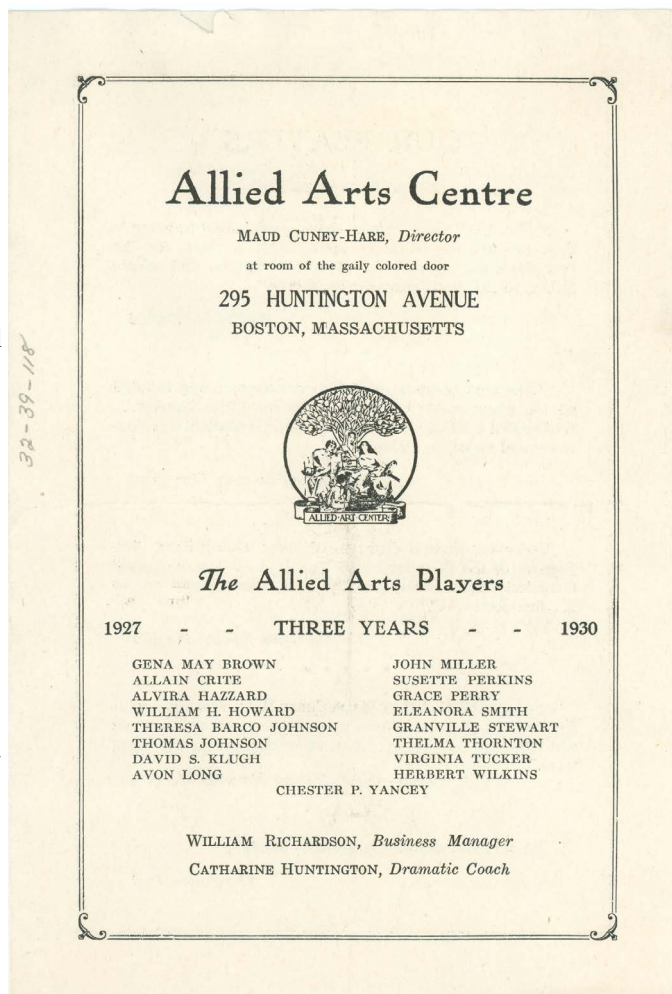


IMAGE COURTESY OF UMASS AMHERST LIBRARY

**Allied Arts Centre Leaflet, from W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Research Center, UMass Amherst Libraries.**

### STANLEY BROWN'S DANCE STUDIO

Stanley Brown (1902-1977) was often referred to as “the revered dance teacher.” Born in the Bahamas, he first practiced jazz dancing in Harlem. Soon after coming to Boston in 1929, he opened the Stanley Brown Studio in the Gainsboro Building and later established studios nearby at 136 and 169 Mass. Ave. The 1940s and 1950s was the era of Mass. Ave. dance studios. Young South End men, especially, went to the Stanley Brown Dance Studio when it was at 136 Mass. Ave., near today’s Berklee College (yesterday’s Sherry-Biltmore Hotel). There was also the Uptown School of Dancing at 330, the Mary Hunter dancing school at 340A, and Mildred Davenport’s South End studios.

Many master tap dancers got their start with Stanley Brown: Sugar Ray Robinson, Cab Calloway, Diana Ross, Jimmy Slyde, Dianne Walker, Preston Sandiford—the list goes on. The saying went, “If you didn’t study from Stanley Brown, you hadn’t studied tap dance, not in Boston, anyway.” Lavish costumes and props were his hallmark. Bojangles Robinson was no stranger to his studios. In 1976, following a tap revival show at New England Life Hall, Brown brought tap dancer Leon Collins on as one of his instructors. Collins, who opened a studio at the Piano Factory in the South End, was inducted into the Tap Dance Hall of Fame in 2007.

### RALF MESHACK COLEMAN

Actor Ralf Meshack Coleman (1898-1976) became part of Black Boston’s “Little Theatre” movement led by Maud Cuney-Hare at her Allied Arts Centre. Originally from Newark, New Jersey, he had studied theatre at Harvard and Emerson early in the 1920s and participated in literary events at the South End’s Women’s Service Club—he lived next door, and one of his first productions was held there. He would take the leading role of the king in Hare’s second production of “Antar” but left Hare’s studio to form the Boston Players (“Broadway Bound”). In the 1930s, he was named head

of the Negro Unit of the Federal Theatre Project and executive director of The Negro Repertory Theatre of Boston. In 1975, Mayor Kevin White awarded him the title “Dean of Boston Black Theatre.”

*Alison Barnet lives in the South End.*

## Digging Further Back in the Building’s History

BY ALISON PULTINAS

Here is more of the hidden story of 295 Huntington Ave., the four-story 1886 brick building at the corner of Gainsborough Street. To say the building has an interesting history would be putting it lightly. An authentic example of adaptive reuse, it was originally constructed as Albert Murdock’s Free Surgical Hospital for Women.

Murdock was a manufacturer. His Liquid Food Company was the Ensure protein shake of its time and advertised in respected medical journals. Locals Daniel Appleton and Harris Stephenson were the hospital architects. When the building was constructed, Children’s Hospital had just opened their own large facility next to Symphony Hall, although their tenure on Huntington was short.

The Murdock hospital was a charitable enterprise established to promote the value of his Liquid Food product in preparing women for surgery and recovery after operations. For unknown reasons, the hospital closed in just four years. Murdock then converted the rooms to a residential hotel, “The Bartol.” Quickly after the hotel opening, the first floor facing Huntington Avenue was converted to retail space. He died in 1912. His will states that the formula for Liquid Food was to be left with a Mrs. A.M. Lydston.

The corner retail location—now Symphony Market—was a drugstore for decades. Huntington Wine & Spirits opened in 1936. The dry cleaners next door closed in 2023. The last owners were Michael and Penny Antonaros. A predecessor to the Pavement Coffeehouse on Gainsborough was another coffee shop, Espresso Royale. The Hayes Bickford Lunchroom, with

elegant art deco-style black glass entrances on Huntington and Gainsborough, outlasted later restaurants but closed by 1970.

The varied occupants on the upper floors in the last century are a historic record of educational and cultural uses that reflect the Avenue of the Arts back story. They were not institutions, but private enterprises. Adults and children had a choice of voice lessons, dance classes and performances, intimate jazz concerts, an accordion school, and more. In 1942, Leonard Bernstein even taught piano and “musical analysis” in a studio space reportedly paid for by his businessman father.

There were classrooms for educational tenants: Northeastern College Annex, The Modern School of Costume and Design, New England School of Art, and one oddly named the School for Plastics. Multiple organizations and businesses—martial arts studios, offices for religious organizations alongside union headquarters, the local branch of the World Socialist Party, and various music related businesses—occupied the upper floors. Of the 12 apartments on the fourth floor, several remained rent controlled until 1994.

Most intriguing were two generously sized halls on the second and third floors used for public performances beginning in the 1920s. A Boston Globe story from 1923 describes Mayor James Michael Curley halting plans for a dance marathon at 295 Huntington.

Dance teacher Hans Wiener opened his third-floor theater in 1939. Modern dance pioneers Miriam Winslow and Gus Solomons were among his pupils. Advertised as the Hans Wiener Studio Hall, dancers and musicians performed at ticketed events on Friday and Saturdays.

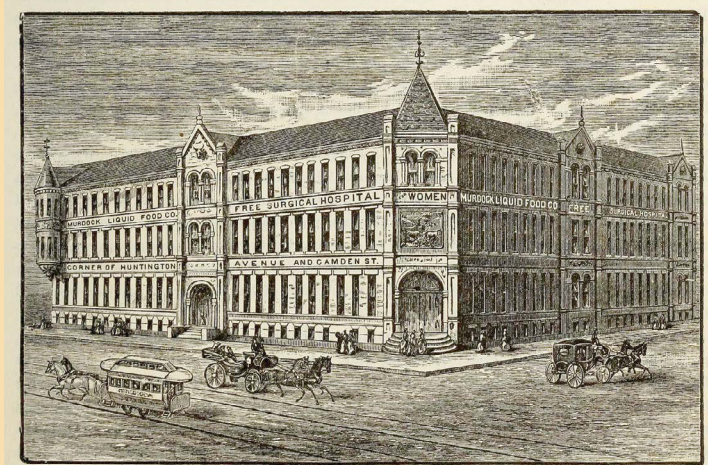
The space was later permitted for an assembly hall for the Johannes Kelpious Lodge of the Ancient and Mystical Order in the 1960s.

And on the second-floor, musician and teacher Reid Jorgensen.

Jr. managed Studio 203 from 1976 to 1991. According to his 2022 obituary, it was “a magnet for players seeking practice, recording and performance space.” Cathy Lee promoted Studio Red Top there—jazz concerts and workshops led by women musicians.

Steve Rubin, owner of Huntington Wine and Spirits, remembers the late 1970s as a difficult time for the block. With the assistance of federal funds, MassDOT widened Huntington Avenue and ill-advisedly laid down the now-hazardous brick sidewalks. Rosalind Pollan, writing for the Boston Landmarks Commission’s 1984 Fenway / Kenmore survey, described the ground floor as “unfortunately altered with poorly designed first floor stores and modernized entries.” The beautiful arched entrances in the historic photos had disappeared.

The Isenberg family real estate firm was the property’s landlords for more than 50 years until they sold 295 Huntington to New England Conservatory (NEC) in September 1981. Ironically, zoning variances were needed for educational uses because of the change in ownership from a commercial building to an



**Albert Murdock’s Free Surgical Hospital for Women at 295 Huntington Ave.**

IMAGE: LEADING MANUFACTURERS AND MERCHANTS OF BOSTON, PUBLISHED 1885, PAGE 83

institution.

The 2016 sale to TENEALLC was a needed windfall for NEC, but then came mass evictions of the small businesses and nonprofits on the upper floors. Neighbors remember instrument repair shops and buying sheet music in the building. Flutemakers Powell Flute, there for over 40 years, presciently left in 2014.

The intentional vacancies in 2016 raised speculations, and the recent marketing for available office space has led some to ask what the investors are planning.

The incorporation paperwork and the annual reports filed with the Secretary of State’s office do not reveal TENEALLC’s identity, but there are clues. Attorney Allan Caggiano’s office and NCP Management Services are listed. Their addresses show up with other properties owned by billionaire venture capitalist Dr. Gerald Chan. Chan is a partner with Fenway developer Samuels & Associates in Dorchester’s Dot Block. Could 295 Huntington be on their horizon next?

*Alison Pultinas lives in Mission Hill.*

# The Arts

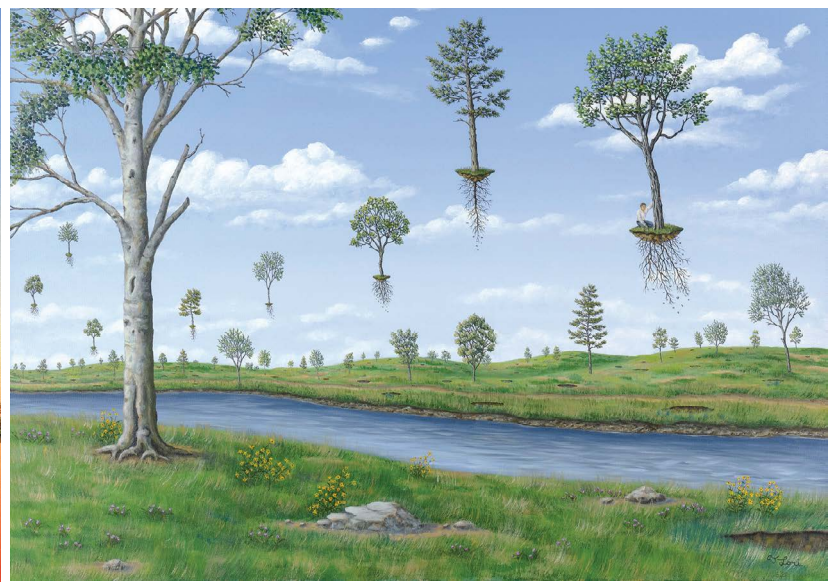
## Love for Nature Sparks C.J. Lori's "Trees Leaving" Series

BY LESLIE POND

For many of us, trees and plants are mostly a backdrop to our day-to-day lives. If you're like me, you may not know the names of most flora that you walk by every day. Not so for artist C.J. Lori, whose passion for trees shines through in her paintings and in conversation. We sat down in her home/studio recently for a wide-ranging discussion about her influences, motivations, and

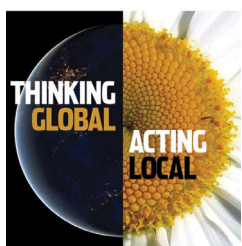


C. J. Lori's "Emigres," oil on canvas, 24 x 30, 2022



C. J. Lori's "Take Me With You," oil on canvas, 30x40, 2018

IMAGES COURTESY OF C.J. LORI



"Trees Leaving" series; the trees in our community; space exploration; climate-oriented art; and more.

Lori is a self-

taught painter who lives in Brookline, near Audubon Circle. She started drawing in her tween years, with pen and ink, and nature has been a constant theme in her artwork from the beginning. "I grew up loving animals a lot...and I find it hard to ignore nature," she says.

Since 2005, Lori has created "Trees Leaving," a signature series with close to 80 oil paintings and counting. "When I do a series of paintings, usually I have five maybe, but not this many...I find that there's always new places for them to leave," she says. "It's all about wanting other people to see what I see, the way I see it, and the trees are a big part of it."

Originally inspired by a tree-impooverished agricultural landscape in southern France and René Magritte's surrealist paintings of floating men in bowler hats, Lori's paintings show trees soaring into the atmosphere. For Lori, "Trees are people...and basically we are the

trees, so I try to make some of my trees anthropomorphic."

Some of Lori's favorite trees show up in her paintings. The airborne tree with three trunks in "Sic Transit Birch" lived on the Brookline side of the Muddy River, between the Carlton Street Footbridge and Park Drive. "I painted it so many times because I just have a thing for it," says Lori. The traditional phrase "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi" (thus passes away the glory of the world) and an episode of the 1990s sci-fi TV series "Babylon 5" inspired the painting's title.

In "Take Me With You," a large American beech tree, which also lived along the Muddy River, remains firmly rooted as a constellation of trees takes flight from a verdant landscape. With one of these trees is a human, kneeling and holding onto its trunk. A comment from a viewer of Lori's paintings at an art reception, not long after the 2016 U.S. election, inspired the painting.

That both trees have since died adds to the poignant, spiritual, and rather alarming effect of seeing trees leave our earth. The paintings become memorials to fallen trees. Lori says, "I've lived here since 1979, and I've painted so many trees that don't exist anymore." Yet for Lori, "It's all about trying to synthesize the horror and the beauty, the hope and the despair. It's always about

trying to embrace the multiplicity of reality." In their places, Lori has seen young birch and beech trees take root.

Lori's experience in France sparked her concern about the damage that humans cause on our planet, from clear-cutting old-growth trees to animal and plant species going extinct, and the impact of climate change on people. Her painting "Émigrés" is a metaphor for those who have to flee their homes due to climate change. (The maple tree on the left is another favorite that Lori has painted many times. It continues to reside along the Muddy, near the place of her favorite birch.)

Lori has also advocated for tree preservation. "Brookline passed a law so that you can't just willy-nilly cut down trees on your property anymore. That's something I was pushing for," Lori says.

Lori is a member of two climate change-oriented artists' groups, Shared Habitat Earth (SHE) and inspiring Change for the Climate Crisis (i3C); both groups frequently exhibit at venues in the Boston area and beyond. "Each is run by a woman with a strong vision," says Lori. "It is always meaningful and energizing to connect with other artists whose work confronts issues akin to my own. Adding to that is the excitement of the variety of styles, media, and methods used to create the work."

"And both groups do a good job of bringing climate change to a human level: here's what you can do in your home, here's what you can plant, here's who you can write to."

"I do believe that art can catalyze people to take action," Lori emphasizes. "Shared Habitat Earth had an exhibition where two large paintings with lush green backgrounds were covered with many photos of drought. Viewers were encouraged to remove a drought photo and write on the back one thing they would do to help the environment. Plenty of reference materials were offered to help them select something. I saw several folks very excited by the process and the simple idea that we can all make a difference."

"The i3C Artists group has given away native plants for people to put in their gardens and are doing it again this spring. In conjunction with the shows, i3C offers workshops for creating art from recycled materials. Art can really help change people's thinking and actions."

To learn more about Lori's artwork and current exhibits, visit [cjlori.com](http://cjlori.com). For Shared Habitat Earth exhibits and events, visit [sharedhabitatearth.org](http://sharedhabitatearth.org). For the i3C Artists group, visit [i3cartists.com](http://i3cartists.com).

Leslie Pond lives in the West Fens.

## On Building a Queer Republic: TTO Comes into its Own

BY MARY ANN BROGAN

The Theatre Offensive (TTO) is Boston's premiere artistic organization for LGBTQ artistry and performance. The organization is currently expanding to a new space, which will take it to new heights when the buildout is completed in 2025.

TTO has grown from the fruits of its storied history as the gay men's guerilla troupe, also known as United Fruit Company. In the 1970s, San Francisco's Theatre Rhinoceros—the first queer theater in our national landscape—was founded. United Fruit Company and gay men's guerilla troupe was not far behind. Establishment of their youth program, True Colors: Out Youth Theatre followed shortly and is now in its 30th year.

TTO's mission statement and values speak to the importance of transforming our national perspective on gay rights and opportunities so all can find a place within the community where they live to express themselves and tell their stories. As Giselle Byrd, the new executive director of TTO expressed so eloquently, the new art center is a "beautiful reclaiming for community and safe haven for folks in their artistry."

For the new building at 1270 Boylston St., development company Scape USA proposed

the inclusion of Boylston Black Box, a 13,000 square foot performing space in the location that previously housed Machine and Ramrod, which provided creative space for the Boston queer community, as well as the Baseball Tavern.

The new venue will feature a 150-seat theater along with performance spaces in the community room and a lobby for small performances and gatherings. These new spaces will house True Colors, Queer Family Series programming, touring performances through the National Performance Network, and the opportunity for artists and community groups to rent space at below market rates.

TTO will partner with the New England Foundation for the Arts so artists from across New England can find a welcoming space to perform their programs.

This venue is important on many levels. Some longtime LGBTQ residents in Boston have felt that the queer community of Boston is part of a disappearing city where LGBTQ cultural spaces are being erased. The Boylston Black Box will bring needed stability and tourism to an ever-changing landscape of the West Fens. The projected budget for the new theater venue and TTO programming is \$20 million. So far, they have raised \$11 million. Fundraising activities are in full gear and

include an upcoming age 13+ Queer Prom on Feb. 18 at Tenderoni's Fenway from 6pm to 9pm. There will be a prom court featuring prominent members of the Boston LGBTQ community, music, and performances. Advanced tickets are required and several tiers

of ticketing are available.

To find the invitation or other information about TTO, please check out their website at [thetheateroffensive.org](http://thetheateroffensive.org).

Mary Ann Brogan lives in the East Fens.



A rendering of a TTO catwalk in the new venue.

RENDERING COURTESY OF EPSTEIN JOSLIN + PICARDY ARCHITECTS

# The Arts

## BACK IN THE USSR

BY JOHN ENGSTROM

When was the last time you heard belly laughter billow through Symphony Hall—a venue not always connected with intentional humor? If you were there on Thursday, Jan. 27, you saw and heard a bang-up rendition of “Lady Macbeth of Mtensk” (1932) a justly celebrated tragicomic opera by one of the 20th century’s most brilliant, original and envelope-pushing composers, Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975).

The opera is an irretrievably bleak study of a cruel society that oppresses women and workers and allows for all manner of inequity and violence. Everything is set to music of exhilarating, violent and at times hilarious eclecticism. And it opened to wild audience and critical acclaim in two cities in the USSR, Leningrad and Moscow, in 1934. Over the next few years, it played successfully in Buenos Aires, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, London, Stockholm, and Zurich.

But Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, with a group of important government officials, attended a performance in Moscow on Jan. 26, 1936. They sat through the first three acts but left at intermission without speaking to anyone. Shostakovich, present at the performance, was “white as a sheet.” Two days later, an editorial appeared in the Soviet

journal Pravda that attacked Shostakovich’s creation under the headline “Muddle Instead of Music.”

The anonymous critic trashed the opera from head to foot and pronounced it unfit to be regarded as art for the people. He bemoaned a “dissonant and confused stream of sound,” “singing replaced by screaming,” “music [that] quacks, hoots, pants, and gasps.” In short, he dismissed the very elements that make the score so great.

Stalin’s public repudiation of “Lady Macbeth” ended the opera’s career in the USSR, wrecked Shostakovich’s projected trilogy of operas about women, and almost derailed his ability to compose.

One of the salient features of this historic opera’s devastating libretto—by the composer in collaboration with Russian dramatist Alexander Preis (who also did libretto-writer service for Shostakovich’s previous opera “The Nose”), based on a story by Nikolai Leskov—is a vein of critique and nose-thumbing against industrial capitalism, the police state and bourgeois marriage.

Here’s a crude synopsis of the unfolding disaster. An unhappily married young woman takes up with a suitor, they murder the bullying husband and run off, then he runs off with another woman and she kills again, this time herself. The music and opera end with a cosmic bang from the

huge orchestra: The total effect is somewhere between a raucous comic strip, an avant-garde symphony, and an Expressionist nightmare.

The tone and trajectory of the film noir-ish story are dark as pitch. But everything lurid or unsettling that happens (and there’s a lot of both) is lightened by a dry, deadpan humor in both text and score.

The dry humor piles up pretty fast. When Katerina Ismailova, the protagonist, poisons her bludgeoning creep of a husband to death with tainted mushrooms, a priest asks her about the manner of his death. Without missing a beat, she deadpans: “He’d eaten mushrooms at night. A lot of people die after eating them.”

Andris Nelsons kept the breathless action of the opera moving fast without missing a beat or a nuance. It was clear that he embraced the musical idiom, wild eclecticism, symphonic genius and earthy humor of Shostakovich. The famous orchestra was in stupendous form.

And what a treasure box of a score: classical forms clash with circus and dance rhythms, Vienna waltz variations, marching drum-beats, heraldic trumpets, folk songs, a violin obbligato and a brassy instrumental interlude depicting the act of sexual congress as a series of farts and “explicit” trombone slides.

For the BSO concert of “Lady Macbeth,” Nelsons had top-ranking opera soloists at his disposal. Leading the large cast as Katerina was Latvian soprano Kristine Opolais, a singer of Verdi and Puccini who provided golden, luminous tone that sometimes lacked a bit of dramatic punch (compared to some heavier-voiced Russian exponents of the part) but sounded glorious in the many lyrical passages.

Another special stand-out was Austrian bass Gunther Groissbeck as Katerina’s crass father-in-law and later the character’s ghost (in one of Shostakovich’s Shakespeare touches). His sound today is massive and gleaming, and he brought skilled, subtle operatic acting to the stage of Symphony Hall. Tenors Brenden Gunnell as Katerina’s lover and Peter Hoare as her bullying husband contributed solid support. Under conductor James Burton, the Tanglewood Festival Chorus was in soaring form.

The BSO performances of “Lady Macbeth of Mtensk” on Jan. 27 and 29 were recorded by Deutsche Grammophon as one of the last installments of Nelsons’ decade-long project of recording Shostakovich’s music, including symphonies and cello concertos. On the evidence of Thursday night, the opera recording looks good to be a classic.

*John Engstrom lives in the West Fens.*

## February

### CALENDAR

Now - Sun, 2/11

The exhibition **THE ALCHEMY OF ART AND PLAY** at the Piano Craft Gallery aims to illuminate the dynamic interplay between art and play, showcasing how artists leverage experimentation with various mediums and a playful mindset to transform those materials into captivating and thought-provoking artwork. 793 Tremont St. Info at [pianocraftgallery.com/piano-craft-gallery-2022-23/the-alchemy-of-art-and-play](http://pianocraftgallery.com/piano-craft-gallery-2022-23/the-alchemy-of-art-and-play).

Now - Thu, 2/9

The BPL’s **SPECIAL COLLECTIONS SAMPLER: BLACK HISTORY MONTH** showcases the works of Black authors, artists, and creators. Select items by Black creators will be available for walk-in viewing and use in the Special Collections Reading Room for the month of February on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 9:30am to 4:30pm. No appointment or reservation required. BPL Central Library in Copley Square. Learn more at [bpl.bibliocommons.com/events/65b403b0eb28943d00828488](http://bpl.bibliocommons.com/events/65b403b0eb28943d00828488).

Sun, 2/4

National Medal of Arts winner soprano Renée Fleming and acclaimed pianist Inon Barnatan present the Boston premiere of a program inspired by Fleming’s 2022 Grammy Award-winning album **VOICE OF NATURE: THE ANTHROPOCENE**. The performance explores nature as both inspiration to and victim of humanity. For the second half, a National Geographic Society video of the creatures, plants, and landscapes of our planet accompanies musical selections by Handel, Rachmaninoff, and contemporary composers. Symphony Hall. 5pm. For tickets, visit [celebrityseries.org/productions/renee-fleming-soprano](http://celebrityseries.org/productions/renee-fleming-soprano).

Tue, 2/6

Join Mothers Out Front Massachusetts for this month’s **CLIMATE ACTION CALL: “PUSHING FORWARD WITH THE TRANSITION OFF GAS.”** The MA

Department of Public Utilities recent order called for protecting ratepayer dollars from gas expansion projects and supporting electrification and efficiency technologies. Learn about the plans for decommissioning our aging natural gas heating system and take action to make sure our legislators know we need them to pass our legislative priorities for a future without gas. 12pm. RSVP at [secure.everyaction.com/hS0oDgSCRU6AxY5Mkba\\_zw2?emci=6fa1b8c2-73bc-ee11-b660-002248223197&emdi=6f26b98c-74bc-ee11-b660-002248223197&ceid=2926701](http://secure.everyaction.com/hS0oDgSCRU6AxY5Mkba_zw2?emci=6fa1b8c2-73bc-ee11-b660-002248223197&emdi=6f26b98c-74bc-ee11-b660-002248223197&ceid=2926701) to receive the Zoom link.

Wed, 2/14

Longwood is hosting a free **OUTDOOR ICE SCULPTURE STROLL** (alt. weather date: 2/15). Sculptures will be placed across 15 locations in the district, transforming it into a winter wonderland. Come out, see live demonstrations, explore the district, and make the most of the cold. Visit [bit.ly/longwood\\_stroll](http://bit.ly/longwood_stroll) for an interactive map.

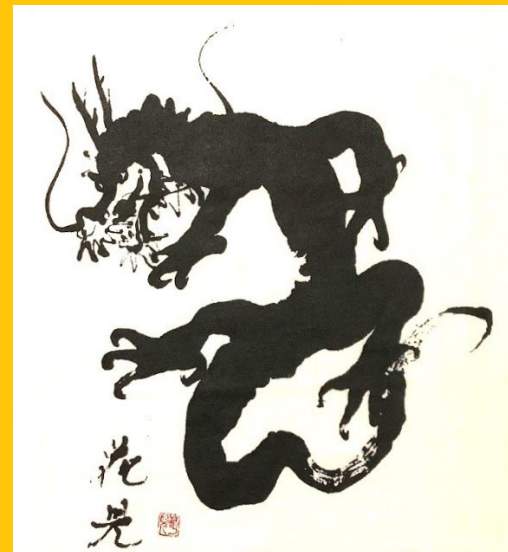
Thu, 2/22

**FINDING RELIABLE HEALTH INFORMATION ONLINE.** In this workshop, you will learn trusted resources for health information, such as Medline Plus and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The BPL will also discuss considerations for evaluating health information you may find online when searching on Google. This workshop is taught by librarians and the information discussed in this workshop is not meant to replace advice from medical professionals. Please consult your doctor for health-related questions. Register at [bpl.bibliocommons.com/events/65adc4fa46e59233004ffb94](http://bpl.bibliocommons.com/events/65adc4fa46e59233004ffb94).

Sat, 2/24

The Boston Ward 4 Democratic Committee will be conducting its **ANNUAL CAUCUS** on Saturday, 1:30pm at Union Church (485 Columbus Avenue). The public is invited to this election of delegates to the state party convention. Doors open at 1pm.

## KAJI ASO STUDIO INSTITUTE FOR THE ARTS



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