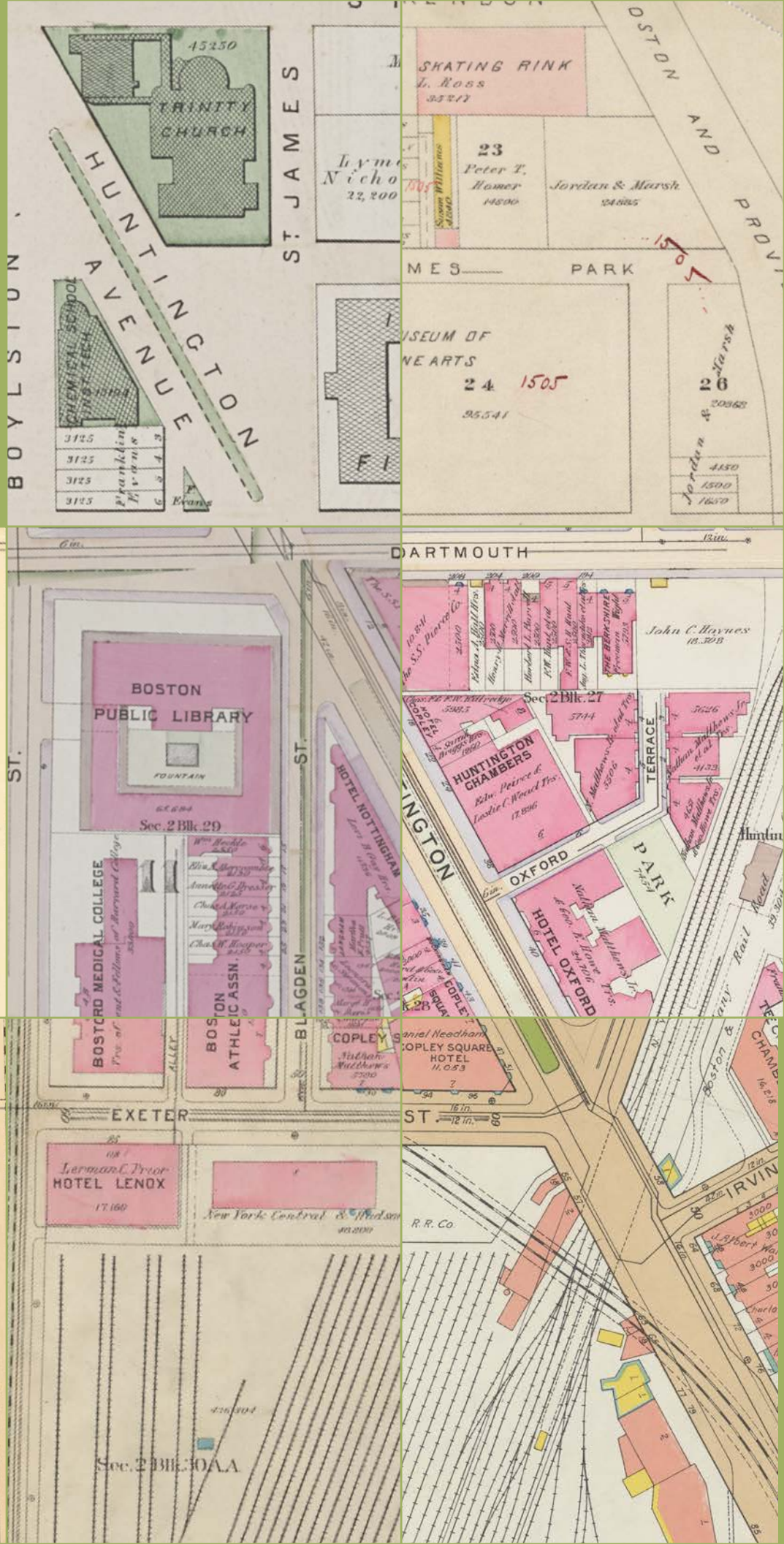


2023

ANNUAL REPORT



Norman B. Leventhal
Map & Education Center
at the Boston Public Library





To the members of our community:

In some large institutions, it’s easy to draw a sharp distinction between different divisions of the team: museum curators might be doing one thing, educators might be doing another, and the digital staff something else. Here at the Leventhal Center, it’s not just the fact that we have a small and tightly-connected team that keeps us from getting trapped in our own silos. It’s also the fact that we place great emphasis on ensuring that our activities fit together in a larger whole.

That integrative approach has been on full display this year, exemplified by our *Building Blocks* exhibition. This gallery exhibition was built atop the extensive digital humanities work that created Atlascope—a groundbreaking digital tool which was recently awarded by the Boston Preservation Alliance. From the map content found in Atlascope, curatorial and exhibition design staff created a vibrant, engaging in-person exhibition that invited visitors to find their own paths into the stories of urban atlases. Our K-12 team curated the story of Florida Ruffin Ridley that ran through the exhibition and formed the basis for a summer teacher program on Black women’s activism in the early twentieth century. Some of the scholars in our first cohort of digital publication fellows extended the urban atlases into conversations covering new topics and geographies, while our first Designer-in-Residence took creative inspiration from the atlases. And, finally, students and members of the public have been taking advantage of Atlascope’s new user-facing features, adding annotations and scripting digital stories of their own.

While *Building Blocks* might have been a particularly extraordinary example of the possibilities that come from working simultaneously with digital tools, in-person exhibitions, and educational programming, we’re bringing these skills together across all of our programs and initiatives. One of the reasons we can do this is because of you and your support. Whether you support us with your expertise and interests, with your partnerships and institutional connections, or as a donor, we hope that you’ll see in everything that we do the reflection not just of our small and talented staff, but of our large and committed community of supporters.



Garrett Dash Nelson
Garrett Dash Nelson
President and Head Curator

Dear friends:

When we write our Annual Report, it is not only an opportunity to think back on the past year, but also to think forward on where we want to go. We emerged from the shadows of the pandemic with an enthusiastic staff, fully engaged in delivering on our mission to inspire curiosity and learning about geography, to provide access to our collections and resources, and to support educational programs at all levels. A highlight of the past year was our exhibition *Building Blocks*, which provided an opportunity to explore the intricacies of everyday history, combining our map collections with photographs and materials from the BPL and other institutions. The exhibition brought to life the ongoing work done in the digital realm with Atlascope, which allows users to see for themselves how the community has changed over the past century and a half.

We continue our commitment to bring people together again this year with our recently opened exhibition *Getting Around Town: Four Centuries of Mapping Boston in Transit*. In the year ahead, we’ll continue to leverage digital tools to improve access to the Center’s resources, building on what you saw last year with the unveiling of Atlascope 2.0. As you’ll see from a glance at our biweekly email newsletter, our team is constantly producing timely and interesting insights into our collections, lectures, exhibitions and activities. We are very pleased to have a continuing engagement with the BPL and to help build and support the Library’s strategic initiatives.

We are very grateful for your continued support of the Center and its activities. The Leventhal Center exists not only to support your needs and interests but to connect you with other people from all walks of life who share a commitment to a broader public understanding of maps and geography. I look forward to working with our community as we develop and grow.



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Charles L. Cooney
Chair, Board of Directors

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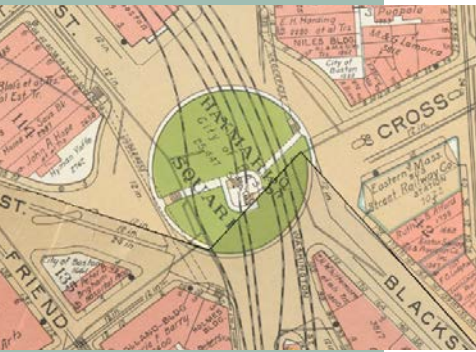
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- Garrett Dash Nelson, *President & Head Curator*
- Rachel Sharer, *Development Coordinator*
- Ian Spangler, *Assistant Curator of Digital & Participatory Cartography*

About the cover
The cover of this year’s Annual Report reflects the Leventhal Center staff’s investment and time spent improving Atlascope. The composite image shows eight views of Back Bay, spanning nearly 65 years of urban change. Over the past year, we’ve released a new and improved Atlascope tool and added additional layers that cover new towns and cities across Massachusetts. In the next few years, we will be working to georeference maps from our collection as well as partner institutions with the goal of providing full coverage for Massachusetts.

- Top Row (l-r)**
Hopkins 1874, Bromley 1883
- Middle Row (l-r)**
Bromley 1888, Bromley 1898, Bromley 1902
- Bottom Row (l-r)**
Bromley 1917, Bromley 1928, Bromley 1938



EXHIBITIONS & COLLECTIONS

It was a busy year, as our team opened our new permanent exhibition and two rotating exhibits, while also finding new and creative ways to continue adding material to the collections.

Exhibition Updates

In December 2022, we bid farewell to *More or Less in Common: Environment and Justice in the Human Landscape*. Before the end of its run, we were able to work with local artists Sophie Weston Chien and Amanda Ugorji to create a “pop-up” exhibition of their original textile map series, *Soft City*, which depicts historically Black neighborhoods of Greater Boston. In total, over 42,000 visitors explored *More or Less in Common*, many of whom commented on the exhibition’s eye-opening visual approach towards environmental justice issues in Boston and beyond, and the encouragement to think about climate equity in their own locales.

In January 2023, we opened two new exhibitions: *Building Blocks: Boston Stories From Urban Atlases*, and *Becoming Boston: Eight Moments in the Geography of a Changing City*. *Becoming Boston* is a permanent exhibition that traces the changing spatial forms of the place we now call Boston through eight distinct geographical moments.

Building Blocks—curated by Exhibition Curatorial Fellow and urban historian Laura Lee Schmidt, and supported by a Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) Regional Grant through Waynesburg University—focused on the stories found in the Center’s extensive collection of fire insurance atlases from the 1850s to the 1950s. These urban atlases, alongside other maps, photographs, and historical ephemera, lead us into a conversation about urban change at the micro scale, looking at buildings and details that can’t be found on other maps.

Building Blocks was popular with visitors because of its pairing of micro-narratives about place-based history with questions about property ownership, genealogy,

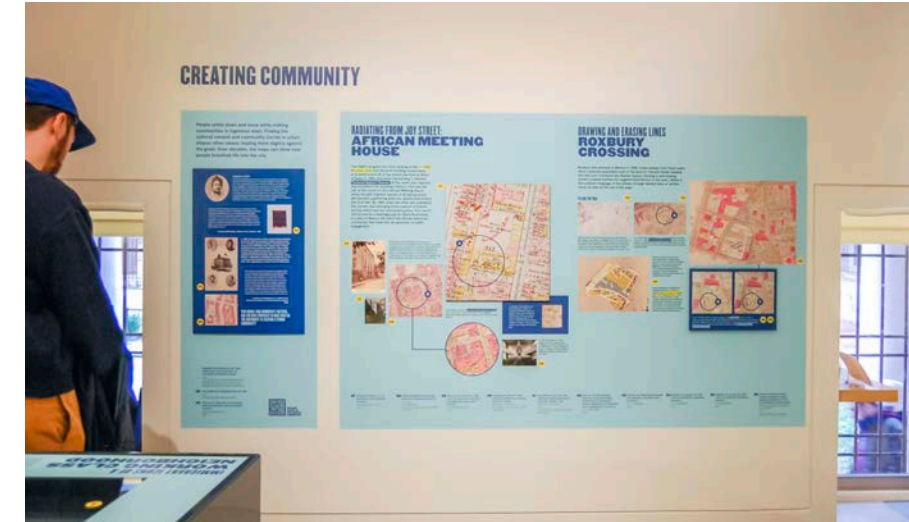
and material transformation. Exhibition highlights included stories about local neighborhoods written by three BPS students who served as Teen Curators, as well as the narrative biography of Florida Ruffin Ridley, an important Black Bostonian from the turn of the century—a story which emphasized what is obscured or missing in the maps. In its seven-month run, *Building Blocks* saw almost 40,000 visitors and inspired countless connections into Boston history for many viewers. Some of the best visitor interactions in the gallery involved anecdotes about neighborhoods, street names, and personal stories about how Boston has changed over time.

Inaugural Designer-in-Residence

In April, we welcomed Andy Woodruff as the Leventhal Center’s first-ever Designer-in-Residence. Andy’s month-long residency focused on creating new additions to the collection inspired by the visual character and historic details in the urban atlas collection. Andy worked to reinterpret the idea of “risk” that was shown in those original atlases and update it for a contemporary audience by depict threats due to climate change. He also created striking data visualizations examining change over time in the atlases.

New Acquisitions

In FY 2023, we added 89 individual items to our collection, plus nearly 1,000 distinct items that were acquired as part of two significant archival collections. New materials range from the seventeenth century to the present, with a particular focus this year on Massachusetts outside of Boston and twentieth-century materials. Our collections are now easily requestable in the online Aeon system, making it more convenient than ever to set up a time to request maps in person.



“Very well presented, easy to understand—we need more exhibits like this!”

“Insightful! New resident, so much to learn about the city.”

“Former geography major—very educational and well designed! Balance of maps and faces appreciated.”

Quotes from gallery visitors



Opposite Page Top Row

Left, Right: Patrons explore the Leventhal Center gallery during *Building Blocks*.

Middle Row

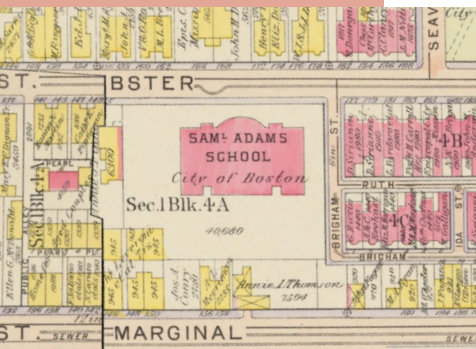
Left: Patrons look at maps in the newly-installed permanent exhibition, *Becoming Boston*.

Right: Patrons explore Sophie Weston Chien & Amanda Ugorji’s *Soft City* textile maps as part of the *More or Less in Common* pop-up exhibition.

Bottom Row

Left: Inaugural Designer-in-Residence Andy Woodruff created this modern-day flood risk map in the style of the fire insurance risk maps found in *Atlascope*.

Right: Excerpt of a ca. 1912 bird’s eye view of Canobie Lake Park in Salem, N.H., published by the George H. Walker Co., one of the many new acquisitions to our permanent collection this year.



K-12 EDUCATION & TEACHER TRAINING

Our work during the past school year built upon our core activities of direct classroom service with students and outreach to teachers to create meaningful opportunities for growth and exploration.

K-12 School Programs

The Leventhal Center worked with a variety of schools over the course of the year, from Map Mondays at Boston's Haley K-8 school to students researching Boston's changing geography and immigration over time at the John D. O'Bryant School. Our education team even visited every 3rd and 4th grade class in the Stoughton Public Schools to teach our programs "Mapping the American Revolution" and "People Shape the Land/ The Land Shapes the People."

GIS in K-12

K-12 launched a new 6-week program this year through the Private Industry Council (PIC) for Boston high school students. This program, *Geospatial Mapping*, is part of our larger initiative around introducing geographic information science (GIS) skills to students. Participants learned how to map data in a GIS platform, met people working in the field, learned about college programs focused on GIS, and created maps to tell a geospatial story about transportation in Boston. These data-driven maps, interpreted through perspectives chosen by the students, are displayed in our gallery as part the current exhibition *Getting Around Town*.

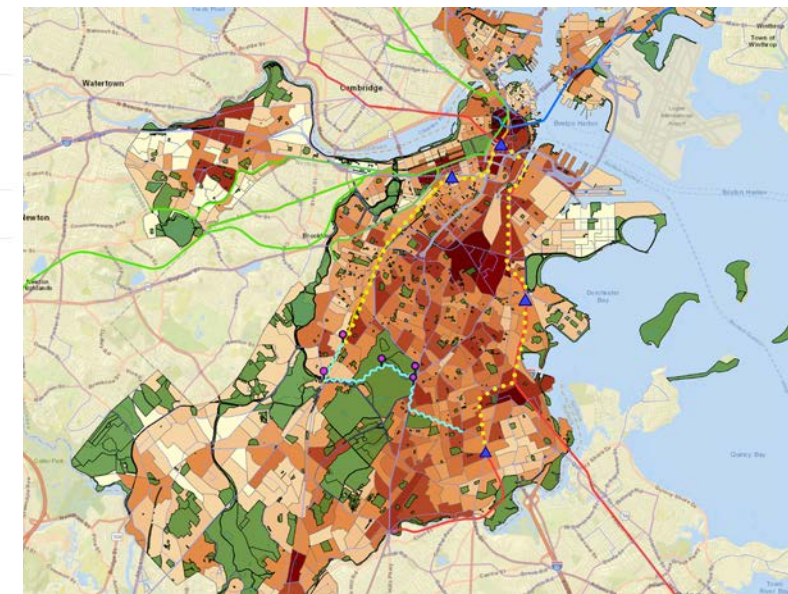
Carolyn A. Lynch Teacher Fellows

The Center welcomed eight teachers this summer as 2023 Carolyn A. Lynch Teacher Fellows. This year's cohort represented schools from Boston, Acton-Boxborough, Weston, Somerville, and Providence, RI. Fellows wrote lessons that integrated maps in a variety of ways, from teaching about private property using maps of shoreline access to 4th grade mini-units that investigate how maps represent the world and how they can be used to explore personal identity.

Professional Development

The Center offered a wide range of professional development opportunities for educators over the course of the year. Our K-12 education team explored creating mapping exercises for students and communities to be used in undergraduate education design classes at the Earl Center for Learning and Innovation at Boston University. During the school year, we offered a series of one-hour virtual "Small Bites" workshops that highlight the Center's lessons and approaches to teaching with maps and give educators resources they can teach right away. In July 2023, the Center hosted a group of teachers for a three-day professional development workshop entitled "Lifting as we Climb: Black Women's Activism in Turn-of-the-20th-Century Boston." This workshop was connected to the Center's *Building Blocks* exhibition and funded by a Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Eastern Region grant. Teachers in this workshop explored the life of Florida Ruffin Ridley, an activist and author living and working in Boston during the period depicted in the urban atlases. Teachers explored maps and other collections held by the Boston Public Library, and developed strategies to bring these sources and content into the classroom.

Additionally, the K-12 Education team led two community gatherings focused on modern-day Black Boston, featuring several residents who shared personal stories about their lives and experiences growing up Black in Roxbury. Their narratives connected living memory and living history with the themes and ideas raised through exhibition narrative related to Florida Ruffin Ridley.



"All parts [of the fellowship] were meaningful. My three favorites were: 1) looking closely at maps, texts and materials as a group and really spending time with them, and 2) learning from African American women scholars about the history and particular women activists that I had not known about, and 3) the focus on place, and maps as a generative historical material and an important one for a focus on historical exclusion."

"I know more because of this training, which will make it easier for me to teach Boston history with a more complete narrative; I am much more familiar with the BPL map library and archives and I'm full of ideas for how to weave those resources into my classroom; you modeled a bunch of great teaching protocols—geographic scavenger hunts, artifact exploration, image sorting, discussion interrogating an art work/ memorial, build a memorial—that I will likely borrow in my teaching."

Quotes from 2023 Teacher Fellows



**Opposite Page
Top Row**

Left: Visitors explore maps from the collection as part of a “From the Vault” collections showing.

Right: LMEC staff members Ian Spangler and Lynn Brown accept the 2023 Preservation Achievement Award from Boston Preservation Alliance for the Leventhal Center’s work on Atlascope.

Middle Row

Left: A screenshot of a digital publication produced by Small Grant for Digital Publication recipient Nathan Braccio.

Right: Attendees listen at a “Neighborhood by Map” event at the East Boston Branch of the Boston Public Library.

Bottom Row

Middle: A screenshot of the Allmaps interface to georeference maps from the LMEC collections.

Right: The new Atlascope interface is shown being used by a patron on a mobile device on the steps of the Central Library.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS & RESEARCH

In expanding the reach of the Center and the collections, we’ve worked to create compelling events, valuable research tools, and programs that help support research projects and extend the collections.

Public Programs & Events

This past year, we held over 65 public programs and events for thousands of attendees both virtually and in-person. Programming related to *Building Blocks* focused on personal experiences and stories of Boston, both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the modern day. In addition to in-person talks and regular gallery tours, we held a series of virtual lunchtime talks that featured authors and scholars speaking on a variety of exhibition themes, from exploring the childhood experience in early twentieth century New England to the rise of public dining and restaurants in Boston.

The team partnered with BPL branch libraries and local historical groups to present in the ongoing “Neighborhood by Map” series that uses maps, urban atlases, and other primary sources to explore the historic geography of different Boston neighborhoods, including Lower Mills, East Boston, the West End, and Jamaica Plain.

Finally, our bi-monthly “From the Vault” series—where staff curate objects from the collection around a particular theme—has become a favorite for LMEC enthusiasts and first-time gallery visitors as well. “From the Vault” events have been curated by various members of staff, summer interns and fellows, and guest curators. The events have covered topics ranging from railroad routes and birds eye view maps, to unique objects like mechanical maps and globes.

Expanding Atlascope

In January 2023, we launched the newest version of our Atlascope digital discovery tool, which includes many technical improvements as well as key new features, including spatial searches of the BPL’s historic photo collections, guided tours, user annotations, and more. In the spring, a team

of staff and interns began using Allmaps to georeference additional atlas layers in Boston and surrounding towns, with the long-term goal of expanding Atlascope to cover all of Massachusetts.

As of fall 2023, Atlascope features 114 atlas layers covering 15 towns, including Lynn, Hull, Marblehead, Salem, and more. In May, the Boston Preservation Alliance named Atlascope as the recipient of a 2023 Preservation Achievement Award.

NEH Digital Humanities Grant

In August, the Leventhal Center received a National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Advancement Grant to support the development of Allmaps, an open-source georeferencing system. The success of this project will enable map-holding institutions across the world to integrate georeferencing with their digital collections in a cost-effective, scalable manner. This project will be developed over the course of three years in partnership with Allmaps developer Bert Spaan and the American Geographic Society Library (AGSL) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

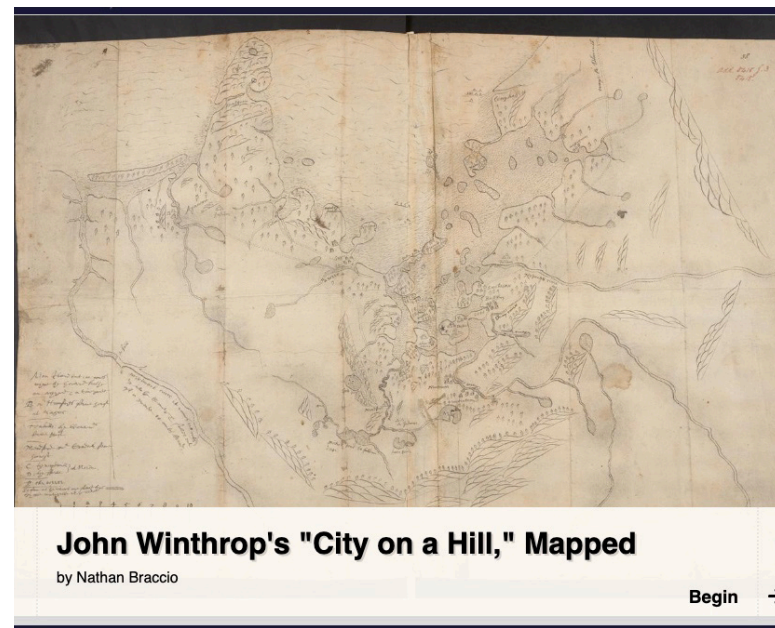
Inaugural Small Grants Cohort

2023 was the inaugural year of our Small Grants for Early Career Digital Publications program, which offers scholars a stipend and technical support for a digital publication on a cartographic or geographic topic using the Center’s collections. Assistant Curator Ian Spangler worked with six small grants projects, focusing on a diverse range of topics and time periods, from uncovering Black residences in Cambridge from 1790-1820 and mapping Boston’s Little Syria in the South End, through urban renewal and community engagement in 1960s Boston and in San Francisco’s Chinatown.



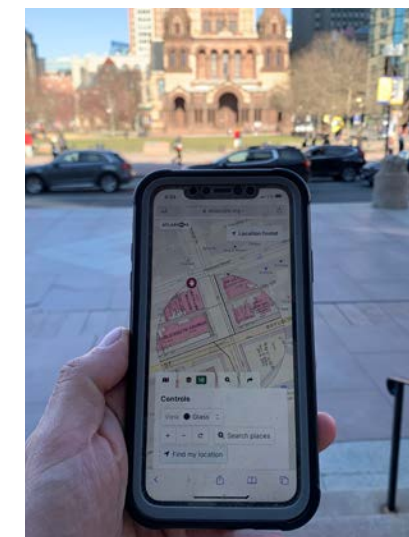
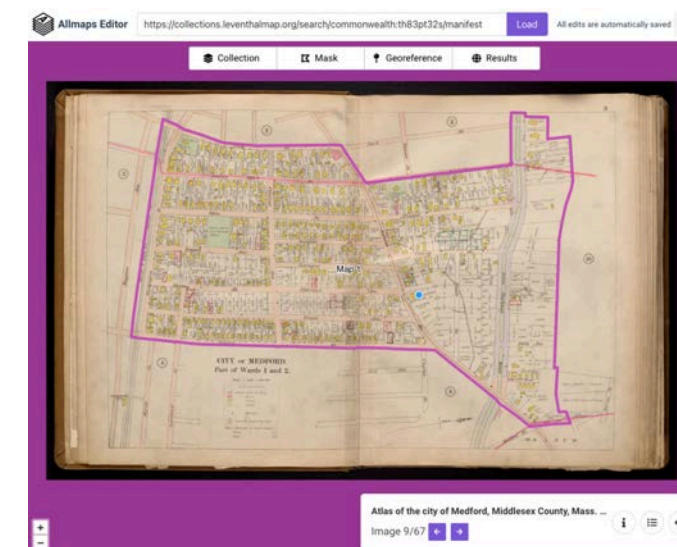
“Atlascope is a gamechanger for exploring history.”

Alison Frazee,
Boston Preservation
Alliance



“Please allow me to thank you again for just a wonderful, wonderful class for the environmental law class. It means so much to learn as young lawyers for them to see the actual evidence of what they will work with and to help them with a sense of motivation for how much good can be done with their work. You all do a terrific job at your own work. We should all do so well.”

Professor visiting the Leventhal Center for a class tour





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We're grateful to all those who have made our work possible this past year. We especially thank the Boston Public Library and Boston Public Library Fund, along with our other major funders, for their support.



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“The Center brings history to life in a new and engaging way. Maps document the concrete contours of history in a way that words rarely do and may lead us to reshape narratives. For example, I use Atlascope in my research regularly—seeing which properties adjoin others, where buildings were situated, what order they were built in—to see history in a way I would otherwise miss.”

“I believe the historical & current analysis of Metro-Boston land-use can help a focus on inequity and lead to addressing that inequity.”

“I support the Center to help preserve historic map collections, support spatial analysis research, and inspire and educate students.”

“I’ve found the educational events fun and informative.”

“Your website has provided many useful tools that I use in the classroom.”

“I have a love for maps, geography, and history and it makes me feel good to support your efforts.”
“Maps are a way of seeing data and the world, and the outreach programs by the Leventhal Center really prioritize democratizing those ways of seeing.”

“We are delighted to read the updates from the center. We are also amazed at all your initiatives and activities and want to be fully supportive of all you and your colleagues are doing.”

Quotes from LMEC donors

Want to help us continue expanding our impact? Consider donating to our end-of-year campaign!

Visit leventhalmap.org/donate or use the QR code below to make your gift now





Norman B. Leventhal
Map & Education Center
at the Boston Public Library

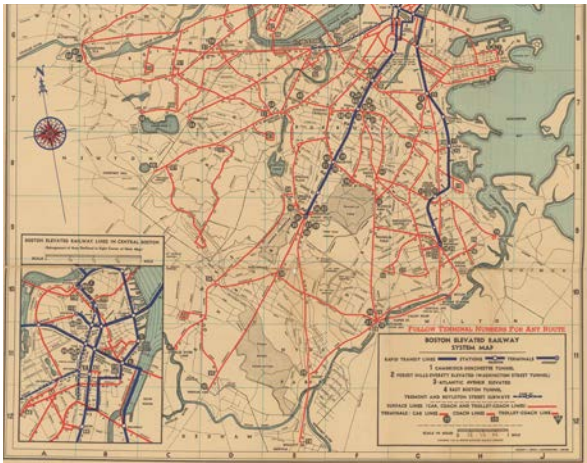
700 Boylston Street
Boston, MA 02116

617.859.2387

leventhalmap.org

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR



Our newest exhibition, *Getting Around Town: Mapping Four Centuries of Boston in Transit*, is on display until April 27, 2024

How do Bostonians get from here to there in a city full of trains, trolleys, ferries, and more? Whether in the familiar colored lines of today's MBTA map or the complicated timetables of long-vanished omnibus routes, maps have long been an indispensable instrument for getting around town. This exhibition features an extraordinary collection of transit maps dating from the seventeenth century to the present, and invites questions about how people have moved around the city in the past, present, and future. Public events during the exhibition will encourage visitors to engage with issues of mobility and transportation justice in the present day.

Guest curated by Steven Beaucher, author of *Boston in Transit* and owner of WardMaps



Beginning in May 2024, *Heaven & Earth: The Blue Maps of China* will be on display in the LMEC Gallery

In the early decades of nineteenth-century China, two series of large-format maps, one terrestrial and one celestial, were printed in the city of Suzhou. They were printed as eight loose sheets using Prussian blue, the first large scale use of this pigment in East Asia, in the unusual manner of a rubbing from a stone-stele, resulting in most of the paper appearing in bright blue. The terrestrial maps present the realm of the Qing Empire (1644–1911) and selected surrounding regions. The four extant editions of the celestial maps, dated to 1822 and 1826, present a planisphere of all the known stars and extensive descriptions of known celestial bodies and their related celestial mechanics. This exhibition considers these two maps in the contexts of their production, consumption, and functions revealing them as unique in the global history of mapmaking.

Guest curated by Dr. Richard Pegg, Director and Curator of the MacLean Collection