

Jamaica Plain

GET AWAY FOR THE WEEKEND - OR THE WEEK **Deals**

Boston Deals
from **boston.com**

SUBSCRIBE NOW Click here for deals YOU want.

- home
- news
- events
- discussions
- search
- GO

< Back to front page

Text size - +

JAMAICA PLAIN

Regular programming eyed for long-unused Curley House in JP

Posted by Matt Rocheleau June 22, 2011 01:12 PM

E-mail | Print | Comments ()

- Recommend
- Tweet 5
- Share 77
- E-mail



(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

The Curley House dining room has an intricately-detailed ceiling and walls.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

After two decades of being nearly completely empty and unused, officials hope to soon breathe life back into “the house with the shamrock shutters” that the legendary Massachusetts politician James Michael Curley had built and called home for 41 years.

Situated in Jamaica Plain’s residential Pondsides neighborhood off the Jamaica way and overlooking Boston’s largest freshwater body, the two-and-a-half story, red-brick mansion constructed in 1915 was purchased by the city in 1988 to keep the historic one-acre estate preserved.

(To see photos inside the James Michael Curley House, [click here.](#))

Curley lived in the 18-room, Georgian Revival-style home from when it was built until two years before his death at age 83. In 1956, he sold the house for \$60,000 to the Society of Oblate Fathers for Missions Among the Poor, which

Connect to Jamaica Plain



Connect to Your Town Jamaica Plain on Facebook

Like

You like Your Town Jamaica Plain · Admin



Follow @JPUpdate on Twitter

Follow

Click here to follow Your Town Jamaica Plain on Twitter.

ADVERTISEMENT

JAMAICA PLAIN REAL ESTATE »

142

Homes for sale

40

Rentals available

27

Open houses this week

1

New listings this week

SPECIAL ADVERTISING DIRECTORY

CAMP GUIDE »



A camp for every kid!

Adventure, sports, theater, music, arts or technology—find the perfect camp for your child at boston.com/campguide.

ADVERTISEMENT

used it as a novitiate and a regional headquarters.



(Robert P. Burke / 1978)

The home's shamrock shutters.

When the city purchased the property in a last-minute deal more than three decades later for \$1.5 million, officials proposed possibly converting it into an “immigrant museum and intercultural center,” according to [Globe archives](#). That has not happened. And, despite being open to rent for both private and public functions, few events have ever been held at the home, likely due to a lack of marketing about the space’s availability, officials said.

But, a nonprofit corporation formed and led by Curley’s stepson, Richard J. Dennis Sr., hopes to begin adding regular programming, including educational, culture and history-related activities and house tours this coming fall. Eventually officials envision the home that became a city-designated landmark in 1989 will have its own interactive exhibits chronicling

Curley’s legacy and the history of Bay State politics.

The friends group, established about one year ago and led by officers and a 10-member governing board, will hold a community meeting Monday to discuss their programming ideas and hear feedback from the neighboring community.

“It’s a magnificent house. The inside is beautiful,” said Dennis, president and treasurer of The Friends of the Michael James Curley House, who lived in a second-floor bedroom in the home for over a decade from age 11 until he married in 1949. He continued to visit the residence regularly for several more years until his parents moved out.

“It was very comfortable and quite a magical place to grow up. James Michael was always very busy,” recalled Dennis by phone Monday, the eve of his 86th birthday.

He said putting the home to more use will create a new resource that, in addition to free, public offerings, Dennis hopes can also add ways to generate revenue to alleviate the cost the city currently pays to upkeep the property.

Two years ago, the Boston Finance Commission, an independent, governor-appointed fiscal watchdog group, [issued a report](#) listing the city’s ownership of the Curley House as a waste of money. City officials with knowledge of the figures were not immediately available this week to discuss the home’s most up-to-date average upkeep cost.

But, a [review by WHDH-TV last summer](#) found around that over a three-year period ending in 2009 around \$300,000 -- nearly \$250,000 of which came from a charitable trust on the mansion -- was spent on the home.

“The general purpose is to have the house used more actively for general public access and educational purposes ... and to get it more prominent as a historic monument,” Dennis

Jamaica Plain Headlines »

- [Family ends search, awaits contact from missing Jamaica Plain mom](#) (3 days ago)
- [Jamaica Plain woman still missing but believed to be OK](#) (4 days ago)
- [Jamaica Plain woman, Amber DeVoe, still missing; past sightings unconfirmed](#) (6/30)
- [Neighborhood group recommends community benefits from Whole Foods](#) (6/29)

Also From Jamaica Plain

HI-LO TO WHOLE FOODS



Recent changes in JP

AFTERMATH



Pizzeria sees continued support

JAMAICA PLAIN HISTORY



Inn, founded by brewers, quenched local thirst

NIGHTLIFE



A night out in Jamaica Plain

Flyerboard

POST FLYER
VIEW ALL

Local advertising by PaperG

said. "It's sitting there more like a granite monument than a house that could be hosting activities."

While some years were busier than others, he said the home averaged between around six and one dozen events annually since the city purchased the home. There was the occasional wedding to the more common, but still very infrequent, public meeting.

The house across from Jamaica Pond has been "well-maintained physically" by the city, "but it does not get the attention it deserves as an historic monument," he said. "The hope is to have it have a bigger imprint in Boston's history."

Dennis said the programming's structure and how many events the house may host are not finalized yet, but he said, "We hope to make it lively."

He hopes the home and its future offerings will be a draw to area schoolchildren, college students and history-hungry adults and tourists.

"The historic part is easy enough. Just open the doors," he said chuckling.

The city currently assesses the tax-exempt property's worth at \$1.8 million -- \$1 million of which is the land value alone.

District 6 City Councilor Matt O'Malley helped arrange next week's meeting and friends group presentation that will be held at the house at 350 the Jamaica way on June 27 at 7 p.m.

"This is an opportunity for us to really explore and discuss ways to open the Curley House to more people," said O'Malley, who lives a few blocks from the house. "It's fitting that the home to a man known as 'the people's mayor' is open to the public, to the people of Boston."

The friends group is comprised of Curley descendants, local historians, the home's current manager and real estate experts. The organization is collaborating with an events planner who specializes in historic properties.

An [old Boston Landmarks Commission review](#) of the property includes excerpts from the 1976 book, "I'd Do It Again" in which Curley writes of the home, "parting was sweet sorrow in many respects, for my wife and I not only moved out of the house with the shamrock shutters ... but I also parted with some dear old friends -- 1,500 books in my personal library. Many of them are rare, and many others are autographed with personal messages from the authors."

He continues later in the book, "The house on the Jamaica way will always have memories for me. Memories of the children who were born there and of my first wife and my children who died there. Memories of the hundreds of thousands of picturesque characters and distinguished guests, memories of defeats and victories."



(Globe Archives)
Richard Dennis (2nd, left) with James Curley & family.

Family ends search, awaits contact from missing Jamaica Plain mom <http://bo.st/poyoyP> 2 days ago

Family ends search, awaits contact from missing Jamaica Plain mom - [@Boston_Police](#) [@BostonUpdate](#) [@universalhub](#) - <http://bo.st/poyoyP> 2 days ago

RT [@bospublicmarket](#): Ready for a Boston Public Market! [@mayortommenino](#) [@JPGazette](#) <http://t.co/3oktZIW> 2 days ago

Congrats to the team! RT [@jpgazette](#): Girls soccer team wins RAYS cup <http://bit.ly/rfr6u> 2 days ago

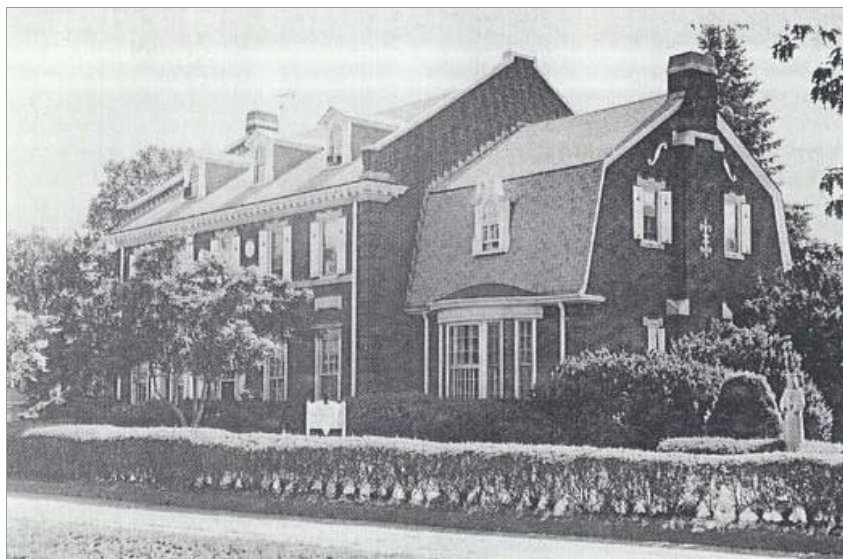
[Follow other Boston.com Tweets](#) | [What is Twitter?](#)

The famed official competed in 33 political campaigns during his career, which lasted over 50 years. The Irish descendant served four terms as Boston's mayor, four as a U.S. Congressman and one as the state's governor.

Dennis remembered how in the late 1980s, a then-Hyde Park City Councilor named Thomas M. Menino helped lead a movement to preserve the Curley House, which has its windows flanked by distinctive wooden shutters that have the shamrock-shaped cut outs. As a show of support, pins were made for the campaign to save the home that read "Shutter the thought."

The slogan meant "shutter the thought that this should be sold or torn down or tuned into condos," explained Dennis. "This house is proof that you can be Irish and succeed here. That's why the shutters were always very important. The shamrocks mean a lot."

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.



(Robert P. Burke, Boston Landmarks Commission, June, 1978)

A photo of the Curley mansion in 1978.

Recommend Tweet 5 Share77 E-mail

Previous entry Next entry

MORE FROM BOSTON.COM

- Pentagon chief Panetta on first Afghanistan visit (World News)
4 men charged with raping NYC girl for 8 years (National news)
Toddler falls 10 stories, caught by woman (World News)
Body found at Wayland town beach (Local News)
Business strip revived 4 years after deadly fire; permanent memorial eyed (Your Town)
Bruins forward closely followed at Allston boxing club he trains at (Your Town)

MORE FROM THE WEB

- 7 Exercises for Low-Back Pain (Lifescrypt.com)
9 Things You Must Know to Get Out of Debt Successfully. (CareOne)
\$1.2 million mansion for \$10K? (BankRate.com)
Are You an ADHD Adult? (Lifescrypt.com)
Credit Cards, Just Say No: One woman's journey out of debt. (CareOne)
100 Great Spaces - Part 1 (Architectural Digest)

[Sponsored links]



READER COMMENTS »

[View reader comments \(\) »](#) [Comment on this story »](#)

[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Events](#) | [Schools](#) | [Sports](#) | [Discussions](#) | [Marketplace](#)

[Contact Us](#) | [Contact Boston.com](#) | [Contact The Boston Globe](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Help](#) | [Advertise](#) | © 2011 NY Times Co.

**GRAB A QUICK OIL
CHANGE OR CAR WASH Deals**

Boston Deals
from [boston.com](#)

SUBSCRIBE NOW

Click here for deals **YOU** want.