

ANDERSON ELECTRIC COMPANY  
293 A Street  
Boston <sup>Suffolk</sup>  
~~Middlesex~~ County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1273

HABS  
MASS  
13-BOST,  
142-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service  
Northeast Region  
Philadelphia Support Office  
U.S. Custom House  
200 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
ANDERSON ELECTRIC COMPANY

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MASS  
13-BOST  
142-

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Location: 293 A Street, Boston, <sup>Suffolk</sup>~~Middlesex~~ County, Massachusetts.

UTM Coordinates: 19/330950/4690260  
U.S.G.S. Quad: Boston South, MA

**Present**

Owner: Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Highway Department, Ten Park Plaza, Boston, Massachusetts

**Present**

Use: The building is vacant and will soon be demolished.

**Significance:** The Anderson Electric Company building is considered a contributing structure in the Fort Point Channel National Register District, which has been determined eligible for the National Register. The building is associated with the Boston Wharf Company, developers of South Boston, and, therefore, with the industrial development of South Boston.

**PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

**A. Physical History:**

1. **Date of erection:** Original building: 1893. A city of Boston Building Permit dated April 21, 1893, indicates that a one-story brick machine shop was to be built. Deed research indicates that the building was completed by October 1893, built on land filled by the Boston Wharf Company. Addition: Architectural drawings dated May 13, 1918, indicate that a four-story addition was added to the building giving it its present configuration.
2. **Architect:** Original building: Morton D. Safford (1842-1921). Safford was the Boston Wharf Company's architect from 1887 until 1917, when he retired. During his tenure he designed virtually every building constructed by the company. Beyond his work for the Boston Wharf Company, little else is known about him.

Addition: Charles Hodgdon. Hodgdon, a Boston architect, designed the upper stories of the House of Bianchi in 1918. Again little is known about Hodgdon except for his address listings, under architect, in Boston City directories from 1896 through 1906. Although his drawings for this building have a Boston address, he was not listed in the 1918 directory.

In 1971, Lange and Lambert, Inc., an architectural firm then located in Boston, was hired to renovate the building for the House of Bianchi. A 1988 telephone listing indicates that the firm moved to Lexington, MA. Members of the firm have retired and are not available for comment at this time.

3. **Original and subsequent owners and occupants:** The building is located on Parcel 2746, Lot 293, Section 1, Block C, as designated by the City of Boston Tax Assessor. A full chain of title has been researched.

In April 1893, Boston Wharf Company sold a 29,510 square-foot lot to Albert and Johan M. Anderson, of the Anderson Electric Company. Anderson owned the property until September 1968 although they stayed in the building until 1969 when they sold it to the Slade Gorton Company, purveyors of frozen fish. From 1970 through 1971 the building was occupied by Slade Gorton (House of Bianchi, wedding dress manufacturers), and two small commercial enterprises. In June 1971, Slade Gorton sold the building to the House of Bianchi Company who was the primary tenant in the structure through 1992. In March 1992, the building was taken, by eminent domain, by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, to be demolished for the construction of the federally funded Central Artery/Tunnel project. House of Bianchi stayed in the building until December 31, 1992. The building has been empty since that time and is expected to be demolished in 1994.

4. **Builder, contractor, supplies:** Unknown.
5. **Original plans and construction:** The building is five stories tall with a full basement and is rectangular in shape except for a rectangular area on the north wall that extends the full height of the building and measures 5'-6" x 34'-0". The building has a flat roof topped by an elevator tower and two stair penthouses. The building is constructed with brick bearing walls and timber columns and beams. The facade contains decorative brickwork, limestone trim and arched openings.

Three sheets of architectural drawings, by architect Charles Hodgdon, dated May 13, 1918, have been found. These drawings contain the facade and a full set of elevations as well as foundation plans. The drawings not only show the planned expansion of the building but existing conditions of the earlier one-story building as well. Based on these drawings the addition was built as planned and the building has only minor changes.

6. Alterations and additions:

- a. In 1918, four floors were added to the existing one story building which resulted in a substantially larger structure. The addition carefully replicated the massing, cornice and window details of the original building. During this renovation additional changes included:
  - ▶The construction of a centrally located elevator and roof penthouse.
  - ▶A centered entrance, which was used for the elevator, was added to the original building.
  - ▶A loading dock, on the north end of the original building, was added.
  - ▶A passageway on the second floor; east wall was sealed with concrete block. This led to structures behind the House of Bianchi and was used when the building was part of a complex of structures.
- b. An elevator and its shaft, shown on an 1899 map, were removed by 1923. The bottom two floors of the elevator shaft were used as passageways to the loading dock. This may well have been completed during the 1918 building campaign, as a result of adding the new elevator.
- c. A building permit indicates that in 1945, a steel bridge was added along the north wall to the second floor. This connected two buildings that Anderson Electric owned. The bridge was removed sometime after the 1940s when the other building was demolished.
- d. A building permit indicates that the large women's rest room and kitchen, located in the southeast corner of the second floor, were added in 1946.
- e. In 1971, the House of Bianchi Company, prior to moving into the building, hired architects to renovate the interior. The following alterations are based on their drawings and a field inspection:

- ▶ A single toilet and sink was added to existing bathrooms on all floors.
  - ▶ Existing heating and cooling system, designed by Carrier Weather Maker and Borg Warner York were replaced with two American Standard systems, one 8-ton, the other 10-ton.
  - ▶ A five-story spiral staircase, constructed after 1923 and located in the center of the building, was removed and the floor openings sealed.
  - ▶ All offices and some work areas on upper floors had simulated wooden paneling added.
  - ▶ While some of the offices on the first floor, according to an employee of Anderson Electric, had dropped acoustical ceilings, House of Bianchi added dropped acoustical ceilings to all floors.
- f. Skylights removed and sealed after 1971.
  - g. Elevator penthouse openings bricked up after 1971.
  - h. Metal trash chutes added to building on facade and south wall after 1971.
  - i. The center, first-floor entrance has a metal surround added to it. It is not known when this was added nor when the entrance was bricked up.
  - j. South stairway walls appear to have been sandblasted and a decorative slate floor laid on the street-level landing. Date unknown. Original doors in the south entrance were replaced with metal and glass doors.
  - k. A number of windows throughout the building have been sealed with brick, at unknown dates.

**B. Historical Context:**

The Anderson Electric Company building was built on land owned by the Boston Wharf Company, who was responsible for developing the tidal flats of South Boston. The company was chartered in 1836 by a group of ship owners with commercial interests in Central America and the Caribbean. In the 1830s and 1840s Boston Wharf concentrated on building wharfs, and then importing and exporting, and the building of wharves for their ships. These were constructed along Fort Point Channel between Dorchester Avenue and Granite Street.

In the late 1840s the company went into the sugar and molasses business, importing large quantities of these products and building bonded warehouses for these goods as well as selling land for a sugar refineries.

Competition and a declining storage business moved the company to enter the real estate business. They soon began to develop their extensive land holdings. From the 1860s through the turn of the twentieth century, Boston Wharf Company developed most of their land and constructed more than seventy-five, multi-story brick and stone factories, office buildings and warehouses. It was during this period that Anderson Electric Company building was constructed and that South Boston's industrial area gained its distinctive look of large brick warehouses.

Today the Boston Wharf Company is owned by Town & City Properties, a United Kingdom based real estate development company and Rose Associates, another real estate development company based in the United States. Boston Wharf Company deals only with real estate and development and although they have sold many of their structures they still manage a considerable amount of property in South Boston.

A Street was originally known as Granite Street and was the access street for many of the early wharves which terminated at the northern edge of the street. Renamed A street in 1868, the street was filled and extended in the 1890s. The majority of the structures on A Street were completed between 1910 and 1920 making the House of Bianchi one of the earliest buildings on the street.

In 1893 the Boston Wharf Company sold a parcel of land to Albert and Johan M. Anderson of Anderson Electric Company. The brothers, using the Wharf Company architect, Morton D. Safford, built a one-story machine shop. Deed and other research does not indicate that the Anderson brothers were required by the Boston Wharf Company to use their architect, but they certainly must have been aware of Safford.

Anderson Electric Company was founded in Boston, in 1877, by Albert Anderson, a Norwegian immigrant who founded a small locksmith shop. By 1886 he had a partner and a small machine shop, Anderson & Solomons. Two years later he was on his own but soon formed the Albert & J.M Anderson company with his brothers, Martin and Johan. City directories indicate that from the 1870s through 1893, Anderson moved many times and at one time the company was operating at three different locations.

In the 1880s, Anderson quickly grasped the importance of electricity and guided his business to making products for the electric light and power industry. Working with electric streetcars, Anderson pioneered and patented the steel trolley pole (earlier connecting poles were fashioned out of wood), trolley wheels that made electrical

contact and a hanger device for supporting electrical trolley wires. The company also developed an insulating system for wires. They soon began to make various types of switches and circuit breakers and connectors and strongly positioned themselves as "manufacturers of electrical railway equipment, light and power specialists," a position they have held to this day.

Needing to have his growing company under one roof, Anderson moved to A Street. Soon after his building was completed, he advertised in an 1894 Boston City Directory: "Albert & J.M. Anderson, Heavy and Light Machine Work by contract or by the hour. We offer the benefit of wide experience in the design and construction of Special Machinery and [sic] advantages of one of the best equipped Machine shops in Boston."

Although only the Anderson Electric Company building is being documented, Anderson soon built a large complex of buildings to house his expanding machine works. In addition to buildings to the rear of the A Street building, the company also took over a brewery, just to the north of 293 A Street.

During World War I the company manufactured ammunition casings for the army as well as for the navy and the British Government. After the war, Anderson opened an office in London selling electrical switching, connector and insulating equipment. During the 1920s the company began to make switches for the telephone industry, a product which they still make today. An additional product of note are portable receptacles, electrical switches that can be placed anywhere and are often used in factories and shipyards where hundreds of outlets are often needed.

Up until the 1950s, the company was a family run enterprise and the majority of employees were Scandinavians. By the mid-1960s however, non-family members began to run the company and it was renamed Anderson Power Products. In an effort to modernize production and have all activities on one floor, the South Boston complex was sold and the company moved to their present location in Brighton, MA. The building they occupy today is a large, one-story Butler-type building. Today the firm still makes electrical switches and connectors which are used in the mining, railroad and aircraft industries. These are manufactured in Brighton, MA and Ireland.

Within a year of Anderson Electric moving from A Street, the building was occupied by the House of Bianchi, manufacturers of wedding gowns, headpieces and bridesmaid dresses. In 1953, Columba Bianchi began a small company in Cambridge, MA, which manufactured wedding dresses. In 1960 Mrs. Bianchi founded the House of Bianchi, and moved her greatly expanded business to Summer Street in Boston.

As was the Anderson Electric Company, House of Bianchi was a family-owned and -run business and in 1968, Phyllis Lange, Mrs. Bianchi's daughter, became President of the Company, and Mrs. Bianchi, Vice President. Many of their employees, most of whom are stitchers, have been with the company for thirty years. In 1969, to accommodate their growing business, the company moved to A Street and filled the entire five floors with their wedding dress business.

The company is a leader in the manufacture of wedding dresses and accessories and is positioned in the moderate to high end of the industry with gowns selling from \$800 to \$5,000. Their garments are sold through wholesalers throughout the United States.

As part of the Central Artery/Tunnel Project, the House of Bianchi building is to be demolished. Because of this, the House of Bianchi Company has relocated to a large, modern facility in Malden, MA.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General statement:

1. **Architectural character:** Although the building was constructed in two phases, it is a typical industrial building of the late nineteenth century, built using slow burn, i.e. heavy timber construction with masonry bearing walls.
2. **Condition of fabric:** Overall, the building is in good condition. There are cracks along the north side of facade, including some mortar loss. In December 1993, the north end of the basement, first and second floors were water damaged due to burst sprinkler pipes.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The building is five stories high with a full basement and is mostly rectangular with an 13-bay facade. The building is 119'-0" x 62'-0" with an area along the north wall that extends beyond the block of the building by about 5' and is about 34' long. The basement level extends about 10' above street grade resulting in an elevated first floor.
2. **Foundations:** Rough cut, ashlar granite on wood piles which extend through fill to hard pan.
3. **Walls:** Exterior walls are 18", red brick bearing walls laid in six-course common bond. The facade is symmetrically arranged in a mirror image that

radiates from the center bay. The center bay extends slightly from the building facade. Rear and side walls are devoid of detailing except for brick arches over windows and brick sills. The facade contains limestone sills and cornices with dentils and brackets. Much of the decorative work appears in entrance arches and is executed in brick, cut and laid in a repeating pattern of cut brick corner ends.

4. **Structural system, framing:** The building is constructed using masonry bearing walls and slow burn, i.e. heavy timbers, construction, a common practice in mill buildings constructed throughout the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was built with large, open floors which could be easily subdivided for a variety of purposes with many windows in all the walls to provide light and air.

Framing consists of four rows of wood columns. Basement through fourth floor columns are 11'-1/2" x 11'-1/2"; and fifth floor columns are 9" square, all spaced about 10 feet on center. These are joined with cast iron straps to 12" x 16" wood beams. Wood tongue and groove floors are supported by 6" x 14" wood joists (roof joists are 10" x 14" and 4" x 12") evenly spaced about every 12 inches. The basement is 10'-6" high; the first floor is 12'-6"; the second floor is 11'-4"; the third floor is 11'-5"; the fourth floor is 11'-6"; and the fifth floor slopes from 12'-3" at the west wall to 10'-0" at the east wall.

5. **Chimneys:** Four brick chimneys are evenly spaced along the east wall.

6. **Openings:**

- a. **Doorways and doors:** The building has four openings on the facade. Beginning at the north end of the building:

- ▶ **Loading Bay:** This is composed of a brick-relieving arch which is corbeled at the spring line. The bay contains a recessed, metal garage door. Granite bumpers protect the opening.

- ▶ **North doorway and doors:** This arched opening is trimmed with a three-part molding of cut brick corner ends laid to form a repeating pattern. The same detail is carried into the spring line as well. Below this on each side of the doorway, is a blind molded brick panel. Brick pilasters complete the doorway. The door surround is molded wood and contains original recessed double wood doors, each of which contain three rectangular molded topped by a frosted square light. An arched light above the door has 293 A Street painted on it. The door lights and arched light are covered with metal grills.

►Center doorway and doors: The doorway is set in a bay that slightly projects from the building facade. The doorway, topped by a transom, has a plain metal surround. The door has been replaced with a metal roll-up door and the transom sealed with brick. Above the transom is an inverted U-shaped, brick panel which frames a square eight-light single sash, wood window covered with a metal grill. Above the window is a rectangular recess which originally held a sign "Anderson Electric." Above this is the first floor limestone cornice which projects above the doorway. The cornice is integrated into the doorway design and has stylized dentils above the doorway. Two large limestone brackets project from the cornice. They have scrolled sides and their front surfaces contain a classical spiral design ending in lion heads with flowing manes.

►South doorway and door: This doorway is identical to the north doorway. The paneled door surround has been removed, as has the original door, which has been replaced with a metal frame and glass door. Above the door is a metal panel and a single light of arched glass. A plain metal surround, which articulates the transom was added to the doorway.

These are the only exterior doorways in the building.

- b. **Windows:** Windows in the facade are generally paired and have brick arches, limestone sills, wood frames, with one-over-one and two-over-two lights. Windows in the center, or elevator bay, and in the stair towers are single with flat brick arches, limestone sills, wood surrounds and one-over-one lights. The fifth floor window in the south stair tower is a small circular fixed light window in a wood surround. Although the May 1918 drawings specify "lower sash of all windows of this front to be ribbed glass," there is no evidence that this was done. Rear and side wall windows have brick arches and sills, with mostly wood frame. Again, the 1918 drawings specify metal frame for all side and rear windows while only some of the frames are metal and most are wood. The original window sash contains twelve-over-twelve lights. Some of these have been replaced with nine-over-nine, six-over-six, and one-over-one lights. A few windows have been replaced with metal factory sash windows with clouded wired glass. These are 12 lights with moveable sash on the bottom tier.

7. **Roof:**

- a. **Shape, covering:** The roof is flat and slopes down toward the rear or east side of the building. It is covered with tar and gravel.
- b. **Cornice:** Because this building was built in two phases it has two cornices which are identical and one of the most distinctive features of the building. They run the full length of the facade and are limestone. They are composed of a plain molding with stylized dentils and brackets. Single brackets frame the two end bays of the building and the center bay is defined by paired brackets.
- c. **Elevator penthouse:** The penthouse is a square, red-brick structure with a hipped roof and exposed rafter ends. Four arched openings (one on each wall) containing windows and a door, have been sealed. This structure is centered on the facade.
- d. **Skylights:** Seven skylights were originally built but have since had their lights removed and been sealed.

C. **Description of Interior:**

1. **Floor plans:** All the floors, including the basement, were originally built as open space to customize according to use. At present the spaces remain as they were for the House of Bianchi Company. The basement was used for storage, shipping, and maintenance. The first floor contained administrative offices, showrooms, computers, designer's offices and workrooms and fitting and pattern-makers rooms. The second floor contained the stitching department. On the third floor was the bridesmaid's department, the bridal cutting department, dye rooms and pattern storage. Bridesmaid cutting was located on the fourth floor and the lace preparation area on the fifth floor.

After the four-story addition was added by the Anderson Electric Company, they used the basement for receiving and storage; the first floor for offices and shipping; the second floor for connector assembly; the third floor for switcher assembly and mechanical press work; the fourth floor contained lathes and the tool room and the fifth floor was used for more switch assembly work and time switches assembly.

A set of 1971 floor plans are attached. With the exception of a number of changes in the basement, the building is almost identical to these plans. The changes undertaken since then are mostly minor and consist of rearrangement of office space and interior partitions. A set of 1992 floor plans are included as well and show how the building was used until it was vacated.

2. **Stairways:** The north stairway contains a dog-leg stair which is interrupted on the second floor with a short hallway which moves the remaining stairway north. This staircase is wood with tongue and groove risers, treads and landings (the first floor landing is covered with asphalt tile). There is a wood rail with simple square balusters, a molded newel post cap and a dropped turned pendent at each landing. The stair appears to be intact as built. The south stairway contains a dog-leg stair with cast metal risers, treads and landings which have been painted black. The newel post is also cast metal, and like the risers, contains a molded panel detail. Balusters are a metal spiral design. The entry level floor has been covered in colored slate. A small door leads to a storage area under the first floor stairs. Walls in both stairways are painted brick.
3. **Flooring:** The basement floor is concrete. Original upper floors are 6"-0"-wide tongue and groove, running north to south. All cutting and sewing floors are covered with synthetic tiles while most of the offices are carpeted with synthetic wall to wall carpet. Tiles and carpeting appear to be about twenty years old.
4. **Wall and ceiling finish:** Exterior walls, which are brick, are mostly painted white or green. Interior partitions were made of plywood and 2" x 4"s and some offices were divided with metal partitions. A glass- and aluminum-framed wall partitions off the main office space. Wood interior partitions are sheathed in simulated wooden paneling in colors ranging from "oak" to "dark walnut."

Dropped ceilings on all floors, including the basement, were added in 1971. These consist of an aluminum frame with white acoustical panel and fluorescent light panels. Above these are exposed joists and wood floors from the floors above.

5. **Openings:**
  - a. **Doorways and doors:** Doors to offices are hollow-core wood doors. Every stair opening has a steel fire door.
  - b. **Windows:** There is not interior trim on any of the window openings. Many of the windows in the building have been covered with simulated wooden paneling, plywood or fabric to keep sun away from fabrics.

6. **Mechanical equipment:**

- a. **Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:** The building is heated with gas using a furnace and tank in basement. Each floor contains two sheet-metal blowers used for heating and cooling.
- b. **Lighting:** All lighting is florescent. Safety lighting, consisting of bulbs enclosed in fireproof glass and steel were installed in the dye and spray rooms. No original lighting fixtures remain.
- c. **Plumbing:** Plumbing runs along the front of the building with a bathroom located on each floor near the elevator. An additional bathroom and a kitchen are located in the southeast corner of the second floor. Water was also piped to the dye and spray rooms on the west wall of the third floor. A Sewer outlet is directly below bathroom line on west facade. Fire sprinklers throughout.
- d. **Elevator:** An elevator is located along the front facade in the center of the building. An elevator has been in this location since 1918. A 1971 drawing labels it a freight elevator although its interior is covered with orange metal panels with chrome trim. It is in a steel cage and electrically powered.

7. **Original furnishings:** Little remains from the House of Bianchi Company operations. There are a few pattern bins and cutting tables on the upper floors. All are roughly constructed and built of 2" x 4"s and plywood. Metal office partitions remain on the first floor. A brick and steel safe on the first floor is the only remaining item from the Anderson Electric years. Time clocks, now removed, were located in the same location on each floor. In 1992 the Commonwealth completed a room-by-room inventory (written and photographic) of the building before the House of Bianchi company moved out.

D. **Site:**

The building is located mid-block on A Street and faces west. It is in an area of large brick loft buildings which contain a variety of light industrial businesses including frozen fish dealers, furniture dealers, printers, photographic businesses and offices for corporations, architects and engineers. A few of the buildings have been converted into artists lofts.

Directly south of 293 A Street is an empty lot used for parking. On the buildings east and north sides are a group of low-rise brick buildings which house the Slade Gorton frozen fish business. At one time 293 A Street was part of this complex.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. **Architectural drawings:** Three sheets of drawings, facade and side and rear elevations, for the 1918 four-floor addition are housed at the Anderson Power Company, Brighton, MA. A complete set of existing condition drawings dated 1971 are available on microfiche at Inspectional Services, City of Boston, MA.

B. **Early views:** None have been located.

C. **Interviews:** Earl Olson, Employee of Anderson Power Company since May 1942. Interviewed February 14, 1994.

D. **Bibliography:**

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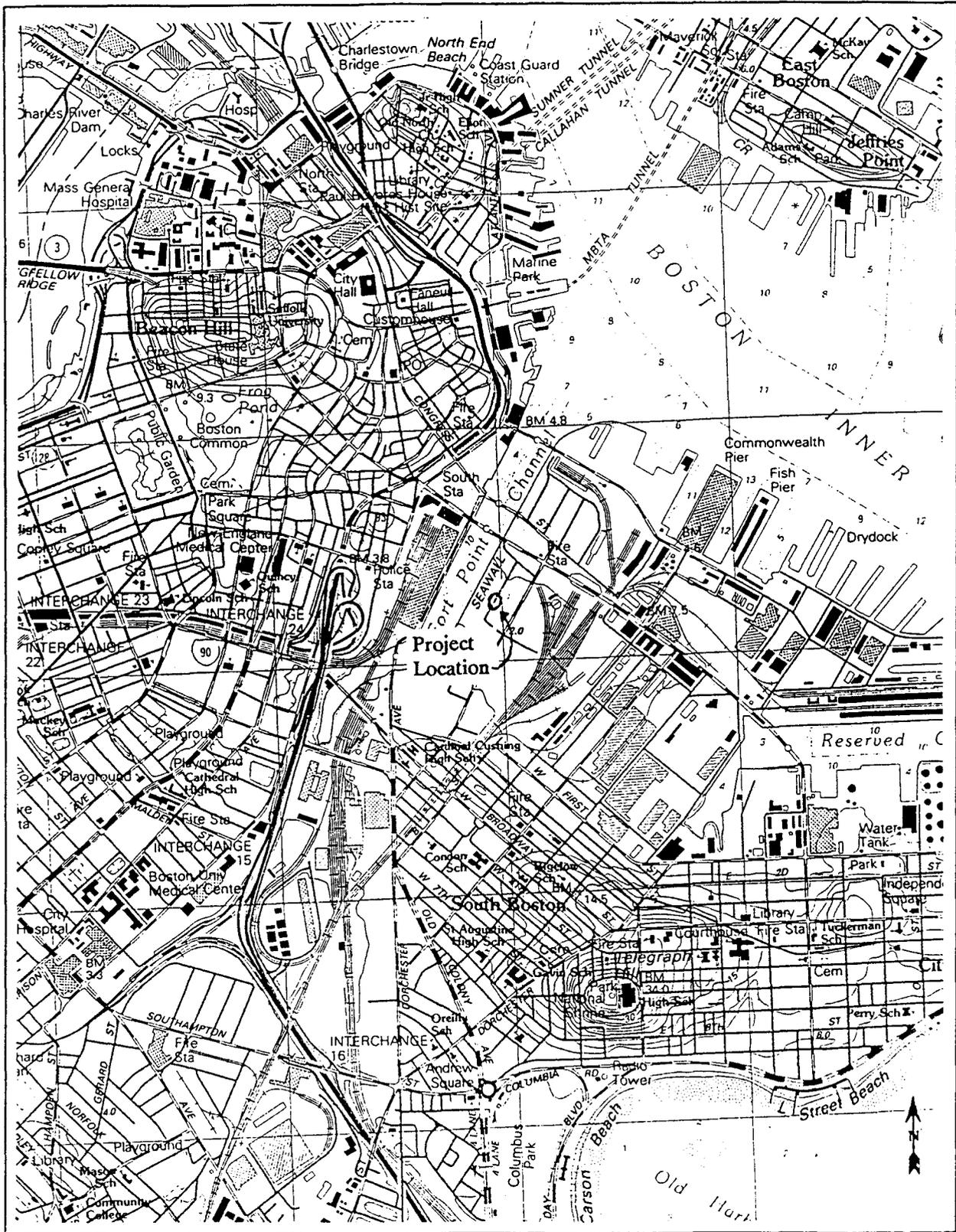
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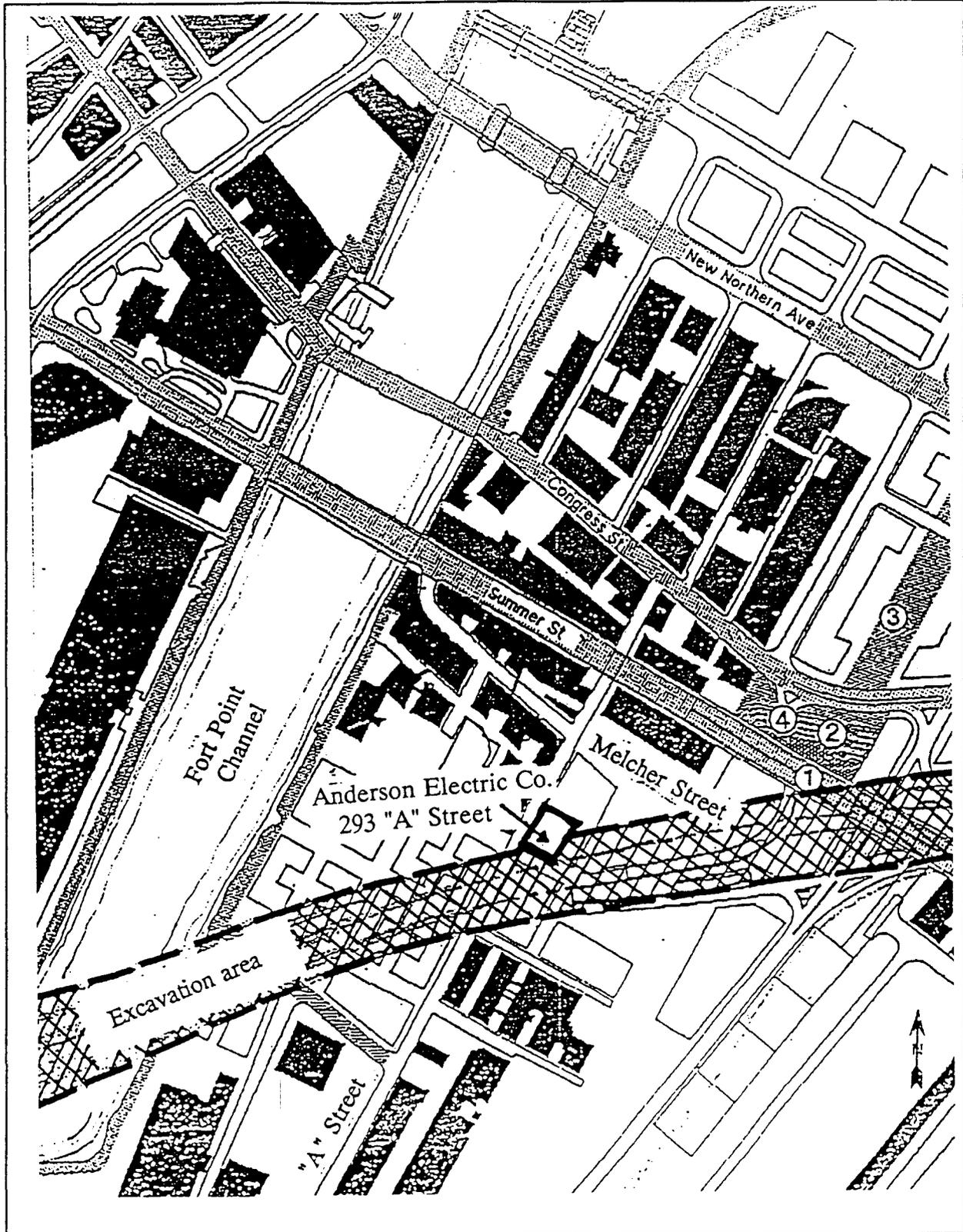
E. **Supplemental Material:** 1918 addition plans from Anderson Power Company; 1971 existing conditions drawings from Inspectional Services, City of Boston.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation was undertaken as part of the mitigation program for the Central Artery/Tunnel Project, Boston, Massachusetts, detailed under a Memorandum of Agreement between the Massachusetts Highway Department, the Federal Highways Program, the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Boston Landmarks Commission. The documentation package is part of the Central Artery/Tunnel Construction Package Number R01A1 - I90 South Boston Building Demolition. The engineer/section designer for this contract is HDR Engineering, Inc. represented by Anson Courtright, architect. The architect is Barrientos & Associates, Inc. represented by Peter Baker, architect. Project manager and historian was Jane Carolan, Consultant in History and Architectural History and project photographer was Martin Stupich, photographer. Report production was completed by Connie Brown.



Topographic map showing location of Anderson Electric Company.



Project area.