

For Sale: A Piece of Combat Zone History
By Steve Adams | Banker & Tradesman Staff | Nov 2, 2022 |

For Sale: A Piece of Combat Zone History

By [Steve Adams](#) | Banker & Tradesman Staff | Nov 2, 2022 | [Reprints](#) | [Unlock Link](#) | [Print](#)



Image courtesy of Historic Boston Inc.

The 19th-century Hayden building in Boston's former Combat Zone was a seedy symbol of urban blight when Historic Boston Inc. purchased it in 1993.

Following a multi-year restoration project totaling nearly \$6 million, the nonprofit is preparing to sell the 681 Washington St. property, where luxury apartments now rent for up to \$4,000 a month.

"It's been a massive labor of love for the organization, largely because the building was in such bad shape at the time we acquired it at a fire sale," Historic Boston Executive Director Kathy Kottaridis said.

Originally built in 1875, the building's historical significance wasn't discovered for a full century. A sketch found in the files of Boston architecture firm Shepley Bulfinch revealed that it had been designed by renowned architect Henry Hobson Richardson, whose best known work is Trinity Church in Copley Square.

Historic Boston acquired the property in 1993, with plans to restore damage from decades of neglect and a series of fires.

"At the time, the Combat Zone was still pretty much alive, so the confidence of lenders and others in getting us the resources we needed to do a complete fitout were not forthcoming," Kottaridis said.

Over the decades, the four-block adult entertainment district declined and high-end residential developments such as the Kensington apartment tower made inroads into the neighborhood.

The Hayden building acquisition had also included a smaller neighboring building, which Historic Boston sold to Kensington Development, giving it a source of funds to begin the renovations of the Hayden building's upper floors into luxury rentals in 2014.

Four two-bedroom apartments that each occupy an entire floor are now leased, and ground-floor retail space that once housed a peep show has a new tenant in the Wig World shop, which relocated from Downtown Crossing.

A five-year hold period related to the use of historic tax credits has expired, and Historic Boston recently hired Hunneman Commercial Real Estate to market the property.

The property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and any significant changes are subject to review by the Boston Landmarks Commission. Historic Boston took the additional step of placing a preservation restriction on the property, which gives it the right to review changes proposed by the future owner.

The organization plans to use the sale's proceeds to pay down debt and update building systems at the Old Corner Bookstore in Downtown Crossing, its original project in 1960. The organization, which focuses on preservation projects that bring economic benefits to surrounding neighborhoods, relocated its headquarters from Roxbury to the 1718 structure in 2020.