

## **An introduction to the Historic Boston Fire Alarm Directory**

The Historic Fire Alarm Box Directory project began in February, 1983 when the late fire historian and author William Werner created a condensed version of his detailed record of Boston Fire Alarm Boxes. The 1983 list included every box existing at that time and listed the number, prior numbers, and the date the location was established. This current version has been updated to include the location and includes every street box existing in 2008 but omits the master boxes. In most cases where the box location or designation have been changed, the previous location as given in the official BFD 1947 box location book is written on the line below the current location. Fire Alarm boxes discontinued prior to 2008 are not included in the directory, but some, using the 1947 location, are included at the bottom of each page as foot notes. The BFHS thanks Eliot Belin for the use of his Fire Alarm Box list which can be found in his Fire website (See our Links page).

Each page of the directory contains one series of box numbers. The first column gives the box number and the second column gives all of the prior numbers assigned to that box since it was established. The location column gives the location of the box as currently used by the Boston Fire Department. If there has been a significant change in location or designation in the last fifty years, the old location is given on the line below the current location and is taken from the Fire Alarm Box Location Book issued in December, 1947. The last column gives the date the fire box was established. If the box has been moved to a new location or the neighborhood has been redeveloped, the date the box was changed is used. If the box designation has changed because of a change in street name, or the box was moved to a different location at the same intersection, the original establish date is used. There are footnotes on each page which give a general idea of the history of the numbering series used in each neighborhood. Also included in the footnotes is a list of Fire alarm boxes which have been discontinued prior to 2008 using the location from the 1947 Box location book.

The City of Boston has used three different systems for numbering its Fire Alarm Boxes. When the Fire Alarm system started on April 28, 1852, the "District and Station" method was used. The City was divided into seven alarm districts and each district had boxes starting with the number one and going up from there. For example, a box number would be listed as District 1, Station 7. These numbers are shown in the prior number column as "1/7". This method was changed in 1864 when a straight number system was adopted using one, two, or three digit numbers. One and two digit numbers were assigned to the City Proper, numbers in the low one hundreds were assigned to South Boston, and the numbers above 150 were assigned to East Boston. When Roxbury was annexed in 1868, the two hundred numbers were assigned to that area. The three hundred series boxes were assigned to Dorchester and so forth. As the city grew and more boxes were added, the Fire Alarm office began running out of numbers. There were several cases in the City Proper where the same number was assigned to different locations and these were known as duplicate numbers. Some of these numbers are listed in the directory and are shown as "9 Dup". To solve this problem, a whole new system using four digit numbers was introduced in 1913 using number series assigned to specific areas. The twelve hundred boxes were located in the North End and Waterfront, the thirteen hundred boxes in the West End and Beacon Hill and so forth. This system remains in use to this day. More detailed information for each district can be found in the foot notes on individual pages.