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Reviving Boston's Marketplace

by BENJAMIN THOMPSON AND JANE McC. THOMPSON

Bringing new life to Boston's Faneuil Hall Market requires a fine balance between historic restoration and urban vitality. The Rouse Company's development plan promises just that.

Famous Faneuil Hall and its three block-long market annexes — Quincy, North, and South Markets — stand at the exact center of Boston's urban core. The Mayor looks down on the Markets from New City Hall; motorists look down from the Southeast Expressway; workers look up as they hurry from nearby Haymarket to State Street and Government Center. Once the heart of harbor activity and the city's wholesale food industry, the Markets have been called one of the principal ornaments of America's Athens — indeed, its Agora. Yet for almost a decade the aging granite buildings have stood empty and neglected. Since the wholesale foodsellers moved on to a more sanitary suburb, the Markets have been active no longer, ornaments no

more. Looking down or looking up at these dilapidated landmarks, Bostonians over the years asked the questions that must haunt every historic building still standing: Could the market buildings serve some useful purpose in a renewed downtown? Should antiquated low-rise buildings continue to occupy six acres of prime city real estate? If renovation were physically feasible, what purposes would make it economically viable? What new patterns of self-sustaining use, serving the changing needs and conditions of the city, could be found to save the treasures of our architectural past?

This is the prologue to the complex story of the Faneuil Hall Markets project — the name now given to the three-block area built by Josiah Quincy in

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Quincy Markets in 1828, built on landfill brought directly to the edge of busy Boston harbor.

1825-26, as extensions of Bullfinch's Faneuil Hall (which remains under city management). It is a larger landmark redevelopment than most in the country so far, but the principles of its rescue and rehabilitation are those that must affect most such historic projects in the future.

Basically, the issue is this: Among the old buildings hereafter worth saving, very few will or should be museums. In seeking a realistic future life, an old structure that is historically, socially, or architecturally interesting cannot become economically invalid, forever dependent on grants and doles, on government and personal largesse. Adaptive uses must be found which intrinsically provide means — and motive — for continued use and maintenance. Almost inevitably, this means that the uses must be vital ones, geared not to “pure preservation” but to the dynamic urban needs of their communities. Buildings, to survive, must go on living.

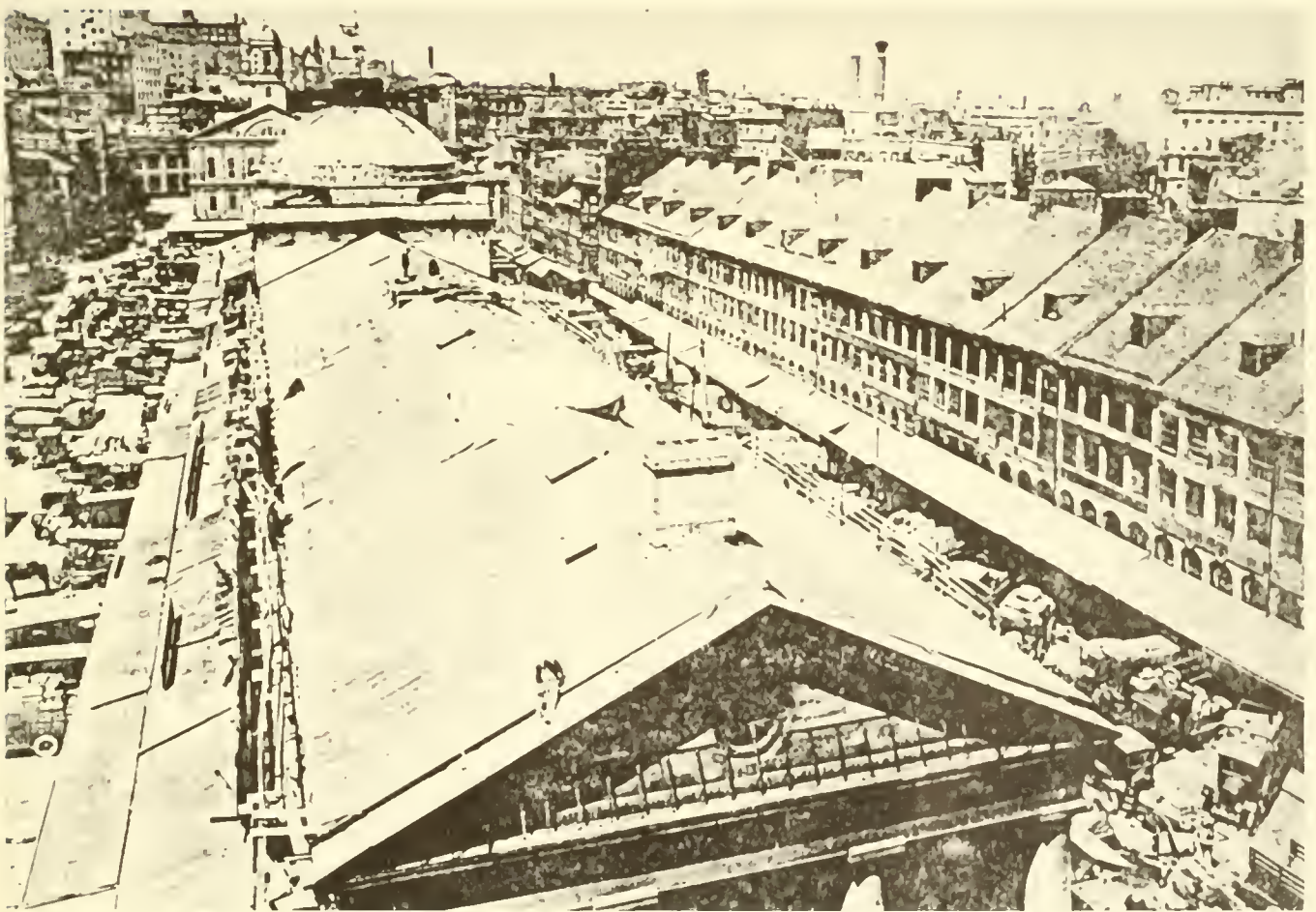
In other words, to preserve is imperative but it is not enough. It is only the first step, usually aimed at saving old buildings from the path of bulldozers —

harbingers of dubious public or private “progress.” In the case of the Faneuil Hall Markets, saving the structures from mass clearance, scheduled for the new Government Center in the 1960's, was a fortuitous rescue. It came about from policies that evolved late in the administration of Edward Logue, head of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, when it acquired the North and South blocks for demolition — which was what “urban renewal” was all about in the last decade.

Everyone intuitively loved the market area as a very special place, even the planners who assumed it would have to make way for a daring new master plan. Even as it reeked of litter, the area also exuded memories of fresh eggs and aging mutton, gleaming cheeses and succulent chops; of predawn bustle and the compelling frenzy of keeping a city well fed. After much soul-searching and pressure from local citizens and architects, the BRA saw the value of trying to preserve the complex. Studies were made in 1967-68; in 1969 federal money was granted to encourage a future developer to take on this bizarre



Quincy Building after upper story fire in 1971. photo: Allen McCullough

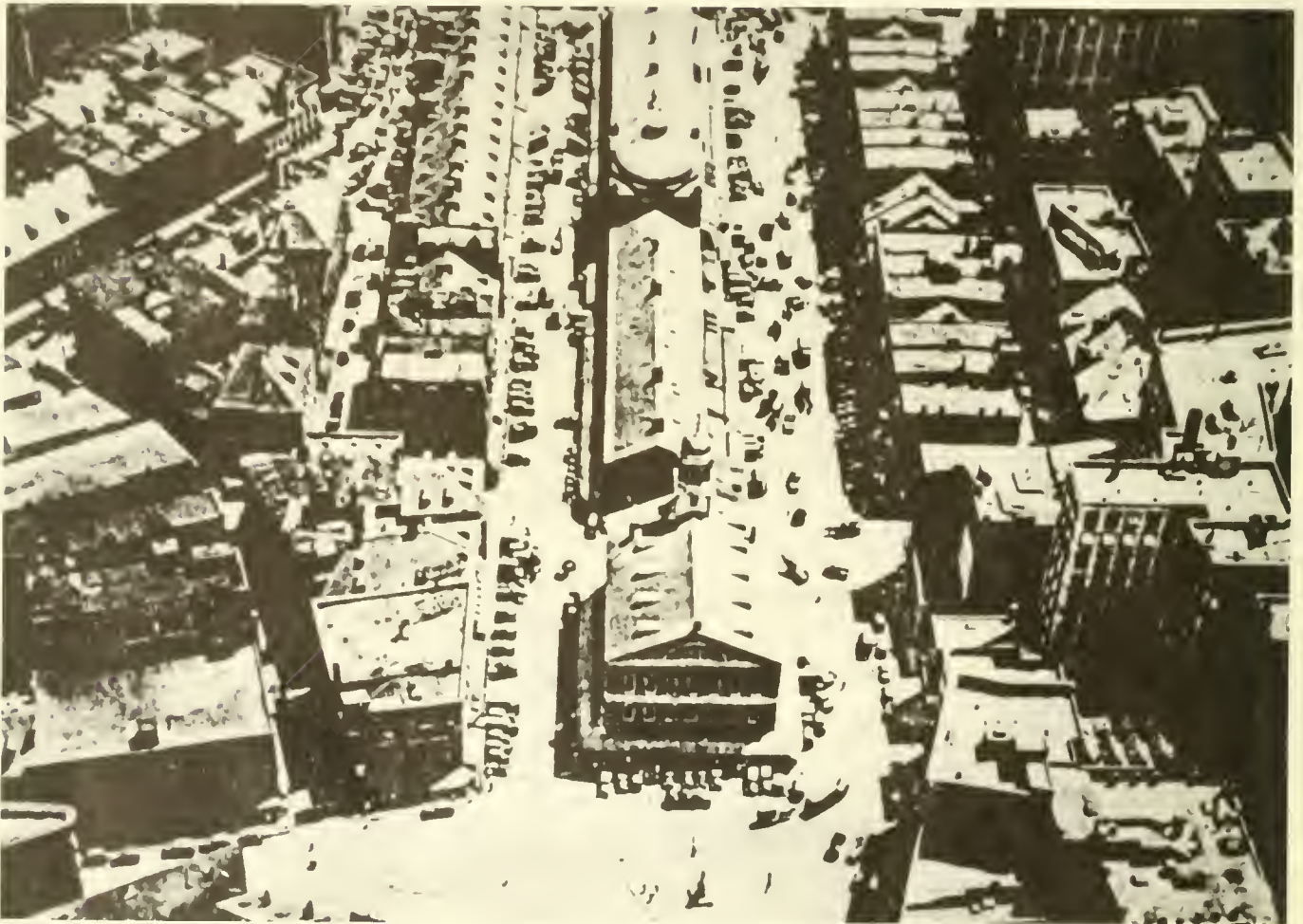


Roof of Quincy Building, Faneuil Hall Markets, as it looked in 1925, a century after its opening.

project, by subsidizing the abnormal expense of repairing worn granite and slate to a condition compatible with the surviving whole.

But what then? Who would and could make business sense of this rambling, atypical 400,000 square feet of space? The Quincy Building, built by Mayor Quincy as the city market, was a 535-foot-long open arcade which would be spoiled by normal subdivision. The two adjacent blocks, following the scheme of Quincy's architect, Alexander Parris, were 45 individual units each privately built by merchants as warehouses and offices. How could so much space in such small units be put to a viable new purpose, not just as an architectural museum but as a source of needed revenue for the city and pleasure for its populace?

The remaining story of locating a suitable developer, one who could meet all the requisites for handling this sophisticated urban project, reads like an Ian Fleming script. 1970: Redevelopment specifications were issued, and bids entered by developers; while decisions were delayed by personnel changes, fires attacked the empty buildings. One of the three bidders, a young developer, was finally chosen (July 1971) under deadline stipulations which, given the legal complications of multiple property ownership, proved impossible to meet. The developer was dismissed (January 1972) and the BRA petitioned for the use of HUD restoration funds to begin its own work on the exteriors. Funds finally granted, exterior work was begun on North and South blocks (Fall 1972), as a second devel-

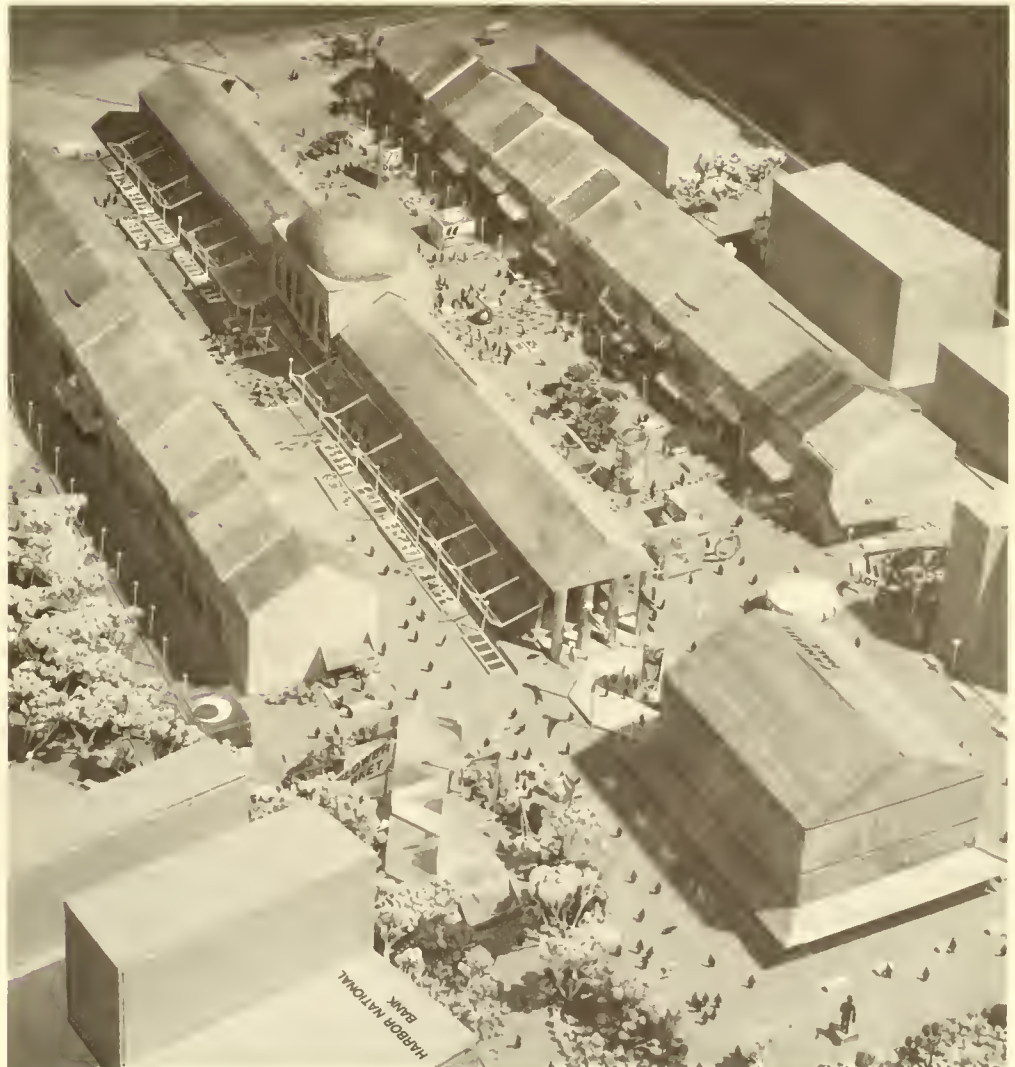


Market area, before removal of buildings originally occupying Dock Square.



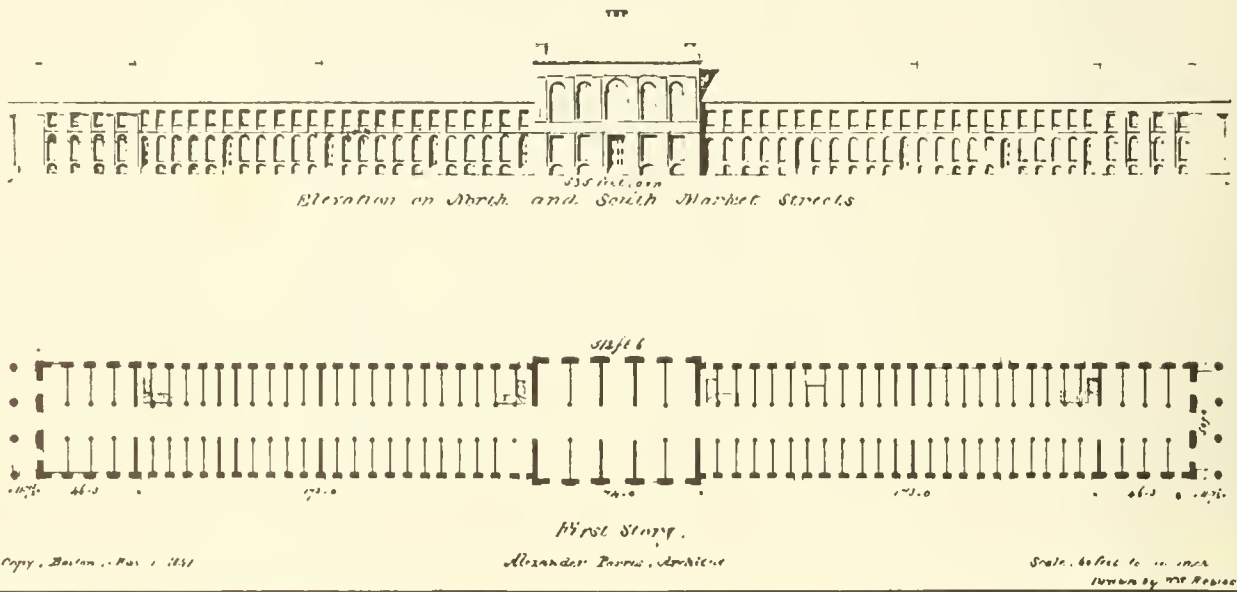
Familiar cheese vendor of the Quincy Building will remain as part of the revitalized open bazaar-like food market.

photo: Allen McCullough



Architect's model of Faneuil Hall Markets area with Dock Square as a pedestrian park and central flower market. North and South Streets are also closed to traffic. (Benjamin Thompson & Associates.)

Quincy Market, Boston, Mass. U. S. A.



Floor Plan of Quincy Building by Alexander Parris, 1825, showing layout of inner arcade.

oper was being considered. Finally selected, for its unique combination of commercial, financial and urban planning expertise, was the Rouse Company of Columbia, Md., in March 1973. From the time of the BRA studies to the Rouse Company's designation — six years — estimated costs of the project had doubled, from 10 million to 20 million dollars.

As architects and planners for both the first and final developer, Benjamin Thompson and Associates have been actively involved in the evolution and testing of ideas to make this project an economic as well as historic reality. Through a series of hard decisions, we have faced issues that have helped the developer determine his ability to keep these valued buildings in our urban heritage, helping to achieve a delicate balance between the demands of history and high finance.

First decision: A concept of building utilization. The key to our initial 1970 proposal was to maintain the open Quincy Building *as a market* — a full-scale downtown food center offering all manner of victuals in individual retail concessions; not only meat (the honest Boston beef for which the area is famous) but fish, produce, daily goods, cheeses and wines would be sold in colorful bazaar-like abun-

dance. The indoor street would be kept; the personal merchant-to-customer contact would be kept. A chance to expand the food center with ready-to-eat offerings was found by opening up the entire lower level as a Market Cafeteria with international food specialties. The whole market area would again vibrate with the abundance and vitality, the communal sense of festivity and human contact, that has historically made the marketplace a magnetic focus in cities everywhere. In retrospect, retaining the market as a food market seems an obvious idea, but at the time it was quite outside the conventions and expertise of most retail developers. It was not a preservationist but an urbanistic concept, defying the supermarket syndrome and chain-store credo, to again make marketing a social and esthetic experience within the city. Three years ago, no qualified developer in the East had done that.

This went along with another sweeping idea that was contrary to the usual approach of mass leasing to major institutional tenants, with heavy emphasis on office use. This three-block area would be designed, leased and operated as a single marketplace with *maximum* retail space on three levels, assuring a full range of shops, restaurants and enter-



photos: Allen McCullough

South canopy along Quincy Building. Remaining food vendors will become part of the new market.



Model of Quincy Building "indoor street" of individual food stalls: a major restaurant will be located under the dome, looking down on the Rotunda lobby.



In 1891, horse-drawn wagons were part of the lively confusion of North Market Street. In the automotive age, the streets deteriorated into parking lots, leading to the decision to close streets to traffic.

tainment integrally balanced to provide the complete *mix* of activities that comprises a healthy downtown. Again, a true (not imitated) Agora, where numerous small businesses mingle and compete. The idea, as one critic put it, eschews glittering restoration for some of the chaos of true historic continuity and honest Boston beef. Genuine sounds of human enjoyment in a place of genuine character.

The Rouse Company plans, which are now moving toward an April 1975 opening, carry these concepts to the realm of exciting reality. With courage and determination in the face of rising costs and a shrinking time schedule, the developer is challenged — precisely by the critical inner city location — to make the market the busiest and most important in the country.

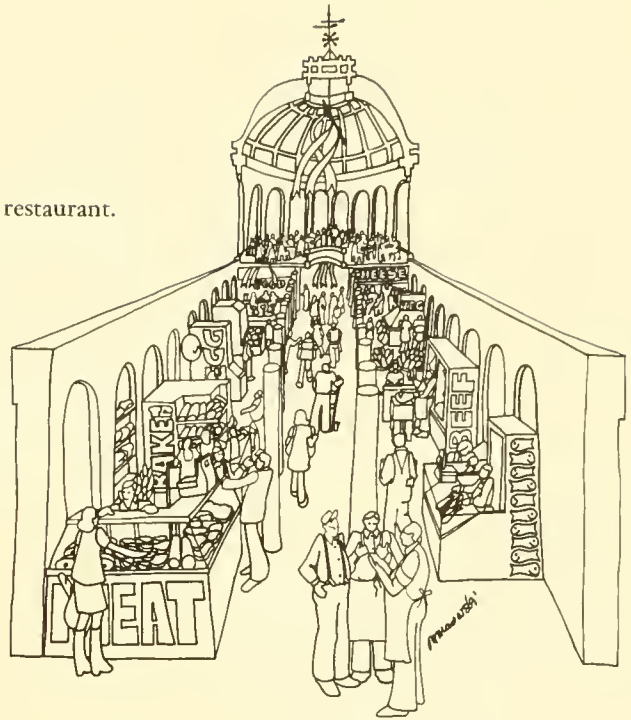
Plans call for a marketplace that will be a center of year-round and 'round-the-clock activity. Circulation flows through traffic-free streets of cobblestone, with trees, benches, kiosks, play areas, and information centers laid out to make the whole area

agreeable for shopping, resting, eating, or people-watching. Flanking the long Quincy Building, under protective canopies, there will be a mixture of retail stalls, cafes, and eateries, with tables in the streets in good weather.

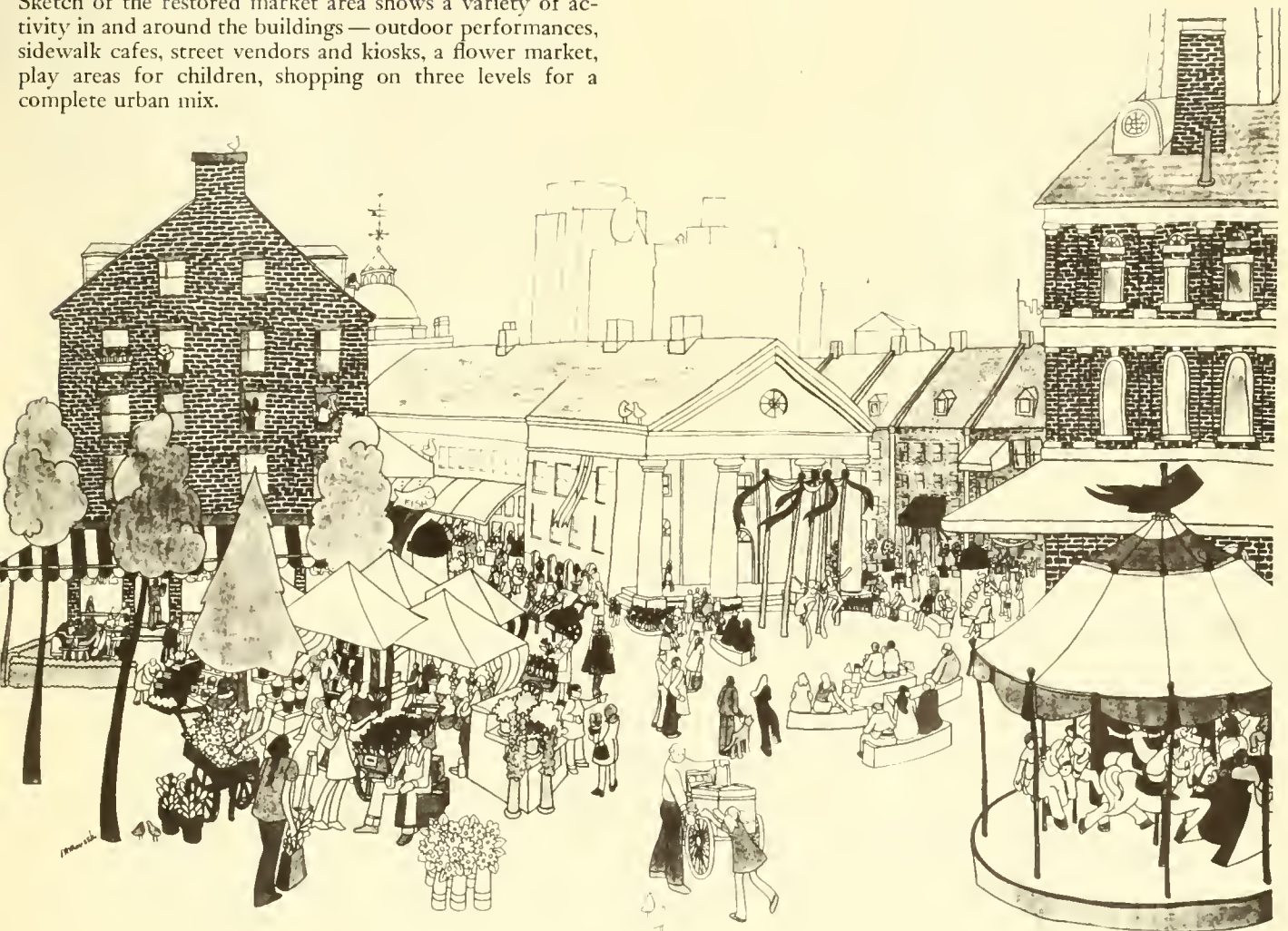
The Quincy dome, the major architectural feature of the design, will become a special focal space in the new plan. By creating openings through both floors to the roof of the dome (revealed at last as a later sub-ceiling is taken away) a "rotunda" will be created as a Great Room and gathering place; here people can congregate, and enjoy glimpses of activity on all levels. On the second floor a major Bicentennial Exhibition will be presented throughout the *Boston 200* celebration of 1975-76. Under the dome itself, on balconies around the circular openings, a restaurant will overlook the markets below, giving an intensity of use that will make this area the crossroads of the marketplace.

Along North and South blocks, retail activity will be organized into zones bringing together shops of

Cutaway of the Quincy arcade and Dome restaurant.



Sketch of the restored market area shows a variety of activity in and around the buildings — outdoor performances, sidewalk cafes, street vendors and kiosks, a flower market, play areas for children, shopping on three levels for a complete urban mix.



similar emphasis or character. There will be, for instance, a group of "discovery" and fine craft shops, and an area for special imports representing the best work of Greece, Ireland, Mexico, Iran, India, Finland, and other countries. There will be quality shops for men and women, as well as casual clothing; housewares, sporting and marine goods, galleries, and antiques. Under consideration is an Antiques Bazaar occupying a large segment of one block, with many exhibit stalls in an intimate arrangement created by opening up buildings into a continuous multi-level arcade.

Rejecting the mass-production mentality of most American commercial areas, emphasis in the Faneuil Hall markets will be on high quality and unique character in varied price ranges. The developer will bring together enterprises that are native, owner-managed, and distinctly appropriate to the needs of Boston's own large consumer constituency of residents, business, and government employees. Thus the true spirit of the restoration will emerge by making this area once again a thriving, colorful city market with people as the center of the action.

Preservation, in the words of Ada Louise Huxtable, is finding ways to keep those buildings that provide the city's character and continuity; and of incorporating them into its living mainstream—original buildings on original sites that remember, *but do not re-enact*, an earlier time and a different way of life. At Faneuil Hall Markets, there will be no historical play-acting, no costumed atmosphere, no phony olde period pieces. These would only confuse and devalue authenticity. All that is usable and real will be kept and used, without denying the flow of the past into the present and the evolving future.



Blending of styles in the market area: Quincy Building (1825), Faneuil Hall tower (1742), New England Merchants Bank (1970).

As the noises and smells of today's eateries mingle with memories of wagons in the streets, so the flavor of past styles blends with today's need to build, try, change, and adjust. The market will be a genuine place—neither historic nor modern but simply the continuation of a special place in the city—to the extent that its physical form continues to grow tastefully out of genuine urban commerce that is answering honest human needs.





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