William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

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SECRETARY GALVIN TO PRESENT 2014 HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD TO FIRST PARISH CHURCH IN DORCHESTER, BOSTON

Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin, Chairman of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, announces the selection of the First Parish Church in Dorchester, Boston, to receive a 2014 Massachusetts Historical Commission Historic Preservation Award.

"The Massachusetts Historical Commission is proud to recognize the extraordinary accomplishments of this year's awardees," said Secretary Galvin. "The projects the Commission is recognizing this year are particularly diverse and represent the many creative ways that significant historic resources are being preserved across the Commonwealth. The extensive restoration of First Parish Church has ensured the building's continued use as a vital civic and cultural center, as a place of worship, and as an indispensable resource for Dorchester residents."

The First Parish Church in Dorchester is the sixth meetinghouse erected by its congregation since 1630, and the fifth building to stand at this location on Meetinghouse Hill. The current building was constructed after the previous one was destroyed by fire in 1896. The Boston-based architectural firm of Cabot, Everett and Mead designed the church in the Colonial Revival style, closely modeling it on the previous church building. Today, First Parish Church serves a diverse Dorchester neighborhood, hosting an average of 200 community users per week, providing meeting space for various neighborhood organizations, and collaborating with educators, healthcare providers, and other local groups to combat hunger and violence.

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Prior to the comprehensive rehabilitation of First Parish Church, the building retained most of its original exterior and interior material and details. However, the church faced the challenges of addressing years of deferred maintenance and sensitively restoring its character-defining features. In 2006, Historic Boston Incorporated provided a grant for a study for restoring the church's steeple. That same year, the two top lantern sections of the steeple were removed, having become a threat to safety due to severe deterioration. The congregation restored the remaining belfry portion of the steeple and made it watertight to preserve it until funds were available to restore the lantern sections, and in 2009, they began planning for long-term repairs to the entire building.

With the assistance of an emergency Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund grant, the church first addressed immediate needs by repairing and restoring many roof-related features, including previously unsafe chimneys. Major rehabilitation of the entire structure, completed in 2013, included repair, replacement, and restoration of deteriorated exterior wood elements and clapboard siding; stripping multiple layers of lead paint and repainting all wood elements; and structural repair and reinforcement. For two semesters, students from the North Bennet Street School's Preservation Carpentry program used traditional woodworking techniques to restore 25 sanctuary windows and the lantern sections of the steeple. The restored steeple was hoisted into place and reinstalled on August 6, 2013.

This is the 36th year of MHC's Preservation Awards program. Projects are considered annually for awards in the categories of Rehabilitation and Restoration, Adaptive Reuse, Education and Outreach, Archaeology, Stewardship, and Landscape Preservation. Individuals are considered in the categories of Individual Lifetime Achievement and Local Preservationist. Secretary Galvin serves as the chair of the 17-member Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Secretary Galvin will present the awards at an afternoon ceremony on May 16, 2014, at the Massachusetts Archives Building at 220 Morrissey Blvd., Dorchester. The First Parish Church in Dorchester, Boston, is one of 10 projects, individuals, and organizations to be honored.

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