



Acorn Street on Beacon Hill – one of the last true cobblestoned streets

Boston's Famous Cobblestones

Boston is noted for its cobblestone streets, but, truth be told, most of them are not made of cobblestones. How could this happen? Well, a “cob” in Old English was a rounded mass or lump. Boston’s soil was loaded with these “cobs”, so it was natural we would do whatever we had to do to get rid of as many as possible – from building stone walls to ballast in ships to, you guessed it, paving material. To put many together roughly was to “cobble”. This begat “cobblestone” paving. Many of Old Boston’s streets were made with these “cobblestones”, exactly as we took them out of the ground. This led to many uneven surfaces, broken wheels, and, of course, massive complaints.

The problems with the irregular features of the cobblestones led to the creation in the 19th century of “setts”, which were granite stones cut into more or less regularly-shaped rectangles and made the street paving surface much more even. “Setts” became the standard for Boston streets during the 1800’s. However, guidebooks have continued to call these new-fangled paving blocks “cobblestones” as well, but now you know that this is not correct.

The only place that TRUE cobblestones are still around in any significant quantity is up in Beacon Hill. Their most famous location is on **Acorn Street**, which is one of the most photographed parts in the city. But you’ll also see them in some of the worn-down exposed areas of **Louisburg Square** and close by on a few driveways along **Mount Vernon Street**. **Acorn Street** runs between Willow and West Cedar Streets. Willow Street continues on to Louisburg Square. You can then turn right on Mount Vernon Streets and see some of the cobblestone driveways on the left. If you’re staying in the **XV Beacon Hotel** or the **Beacon Hill Hotel**, you’ll have a ring-side room to the cobs.

“Setts” can be found forming the famous circle commemorating the Boston Massacre in front of the Old State House (intersection of Congress and State Streets). There are also several spots with setts around Faneuil Hall (Congress Street) and North Square in the North end (in front of the Paul Revere House’s on North Street). The only remaining street with setts is historic Marshall Street by the Union Oyster House.