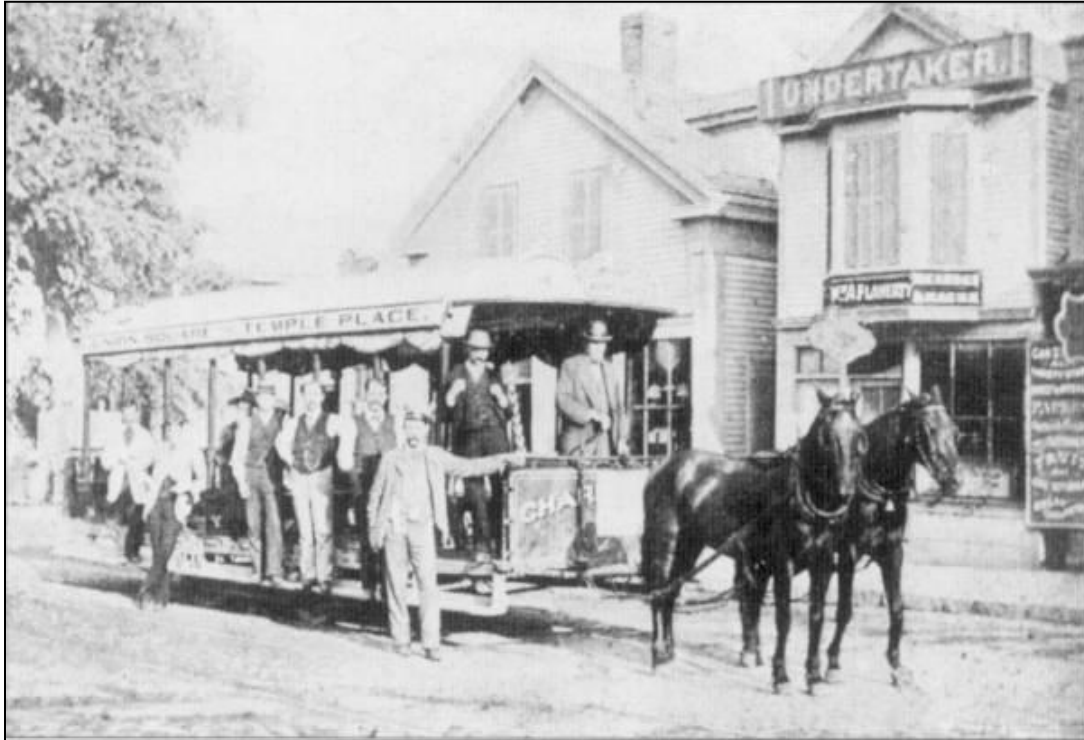


# “Trolley Transit Redux: Union Square Walking Tour”

Sunday, September 18, 2022; 2:00-4:00pm

Sponsored by the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission and the Somerville Arts Council

Researched and Led by Edward Gordon, Architectural Historian



Union Square has evolved as a commercial center due to its crossroads location and a host of innovations in transportation modes over the past three centuries, that continue through current times. From the horse drawn carts along Milk Row to markets in Charlestown and Boston in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, to the introduction of rail service during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and the appearance of the electric trolley through the Square around 1890, transportation has played a transformative role in shaping the look and fortunes of the Square. The extension of the MBTA’s Green Line to stations on Washington and Prospect Streets returns Union Square to its pivotal position as a major transit hub for Somerville. The transit stops enable its residents and businesses to be even more closely connected with Boston and other communities in the metropolitan area and serve as a vital economic boom for many. This walking tour will highlight some of that transportation history, as well as those older buildings which both architecturally and historically enhance the Square and its charm for both residents and visitors alike.

**Union Square** remains Somerville’s oldest and largest commercial district, located at the intersection of two seventeenth century roads: The Road to Newtowne (later Cambridge) and now called Washington Street, and Charlestown Lane or Milk Row (Somerville Avenue). Milk Row was part of a system of highways that Middlesex County farmers used to access the markets of Charlestown at City Square and Faneuil Hall Market in Boston. Prior to 1840 "market men" hauled horse drawn carts wagons full of fruits, vegetables, and dairy products along this historic transportation corridor which included Elm Street, Somerville Avenue and Washington Street. The Boston and Fitchburg Railroad was introduced in the mid-1830s through the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Commercial and residential development in and around Union Square grew with the introduction of railroad service to the area. During the period of 1835-1845, freight and passenger service was introduced to the area by the Boston and Lowell, and Fitchburg Railroads. In 1845 horsecar service was established between Union Square and Harvard Square in Cambridge, along Kirkland and Washington Streets. Additions to the streetcar line provided residents of the Union Square area with easy commuting service to Boston. The availability of fast, efficient, and dependable public transportation not only encouraged population growth, but also the development of industry along the Fitchburg Railroad/Somerville Avenue and Washington Street transportation corridors. Indeed, more than anything else, the introduction of the railroads and the rise of adjacent industry allowed the land 'Beyond the Neck' to break away from Charlestown in 1842 to become the independent town of Somerville.

Union Square was initially called "**Sand Pit Square**" because its sandy, clay pit-dotted areas yielded a fine grade of silica used in glass and brickmaking. It became a major commercial center due to its location at an important crossroads in eastern Somerville. The Square's major thoroughfares, Washington Street, Prospect Street and Somerville Avenue (formerly Charlestown Lane and Milk Row), originated as 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century trade routes. Union Square was also host to a Union Army recruitment station and an encampment of Union troops atop Prospect Hill. It served as a major recruitment center during the Civil War and became known as "**Liberty Pole Square**" after Somerville firemen erected a flagpole in the center of the Square. Its current name references the Union of northern states that fought the southern Confederate States of America during the Civil War.

Following the Civil War, Union Square evolved into a larger commercial center serving a rapidly growing community. In 1872 Somerville incorporated as a city, and between 1870 and 1920, its population increased sixfold – from 14,685 in 1870 to 93,091 by 1920! Contributing greatly to its population growth and commercial prosperity was the introduction of the electric trolley through the Square around 1890, and later the automobile trade contributed to the vitality of the area. The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the rise of industries south and west of the Square, such as the Union Glass Company and American Tube Works, as well as numerous small woodworking shops, ice businesses, carriage-making, and brick manufacturing concerns. The success of these enterprises insured that Union Square was an important contributor to the commercial prosperity of Somerville well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Over time waves of immigrants have called Union Square home, ranging from the Irish of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Italians, Greeks, and Portuguese. In more recent times members of the Brazilian, Haitian, and Hispanic communities have made it their home.

**Albert F. Argenziano School at 290 Washington Street** is an elementary school (kindergarten-8<sup>th</sup> grade) built in 2007 to replace another, known as the Lincoln Park Community School. The school was named for Dr. Albert F. Argenziano who was the Superintendent of Schools for over a decade (1993-2005). During his tenure he was responsible for many school rebuilding projects in Somerville.

The school benefits substantially from its location in the heart of Lincoln Park, which was completely redesigned and renovated to open in 2018 and is now considered to have some of the most unique and popular amenities of any urban park in the Boston area, including climbing structures, splash pads, a parkour station, a skatepark, a fenced-in dog area, and walking paths, in addition to multi-purpose open field space.

\* properties designated as part of a Local Historic District (LHD)

\*\*properties surveyed and deemed eligible for designation as part of an LHD

**Lincoln Park**, one of Somerville's oldest recreation areas, was planned as early as 1896. The park's lawns and walks were in place by 1900, although the small pond once located at its southwest corner was filled in during the transition from brick yard to public green space. Lincoln Park occupies the site of George Wyatt's brickyards which were called "Wyatt's Pitts" by local residents. George Wyatt lived nearby at 33 Beacon Street. The brick industry was a major component of Somerville's economy



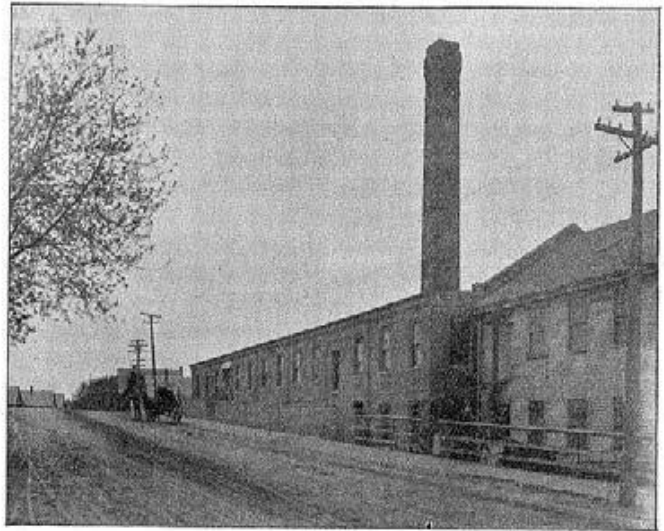
from 1820-1880. Somerville's soil was well-suited for brickmaking, and it was a commercial pursuit primarily conducted in parts of the City bordering waterways, such as the Miller's River (now completely filled-in) in eastern Somerville, and especially along the Mystic River. In addition, the Tufts brickyards once dominated the landscape west of Cedar Street.

The demise of Somerville's brick-making industry was due to the higher value placed on land for house construction. Atlases of Somerville from the late 19th century indicate the Wyatt brickyards consisted of a long rectangular structure bordering the Washington Street edge of the property, and a line of contiguous chimneys and kilns just to the south of the shed. Clay pits took up the remaining land that extended south to Lincoln Parkway. In 1850 Wyatt's business had \$2,000 in capital and a work force of seven. By 1870 revenue had grown to \$20,000 and thirty men in his employ. Particularly impressive is that the yearly number of bricks made at his yard rose from 850 in 1850 to 2,500,000 by 1870! Wyatt continued manufacturing bricks into the 1880s.

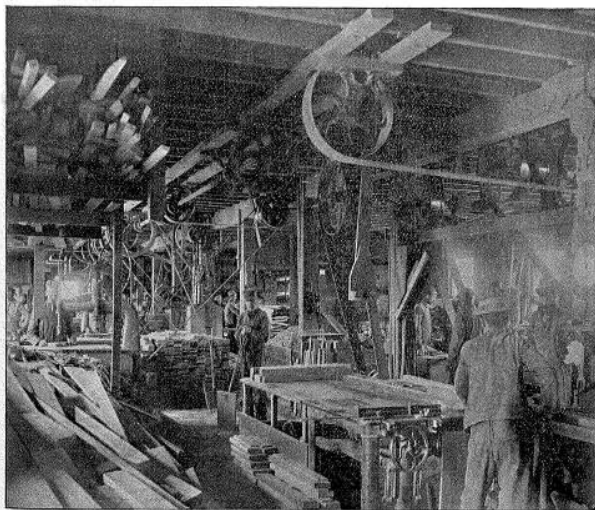
**Washington Street** was set out as early as the mid-1630s by the English surveyor Thomas Greaves. He was responsible for the semi-circular pattern of streets atop Harvard Hill in Charlestown and was granted an estate by King Charles I in what was called Greaves End, later Lechmere Point and now East Cambridge. In the beginning it was called the Road to Newtowne (later to be known as East Cambridge).

*From Lincoln Park walk across Washington Street and head east to its intersection with Hawkins Street to view a storied survivor from Somerville's late 1800s industrial past.*

**285 Washington Street**, corner of Hawkins Street, originally housed the **Eagle Shade Roller Company** (by ca.1880), but it is better known as the **I.H. Brown Moulding Company\*\*** building. I. H. Brown was typical of the carpentry and wood-working concerns that rose to the fore during the boom years of Cambridge and Somerville's expansion. The Brown Co. moved here in 1886 after a fire destroyed their headquarters in Cambridge. The company specialized in mouldings of all descriptions, in addition to window frames, sashes, drawer cases, and the like. One of the company's specialties was wooden exhibition cases for museums, including Harvard University's Agassiz Museum of Natural History. By 1928, its first floor was used for sawing and planing, the second floor for cabinet work, and the basement for planing and storage. The building currently houses a variety of smaller niche, cutting edge businesses.



I. H. BROWN & COMPANY'S MILL, WASHINGTON STREET.



*Next head east on Washington Street to the commercial heart of Union Square.*

Note the residences bordering Washington Street just east of Hawkins Street. The c.1870 Victorian residences on the north side provide a striking, vintage streetscape at one of Union Square's key western entrances. **269 Washington Street\*\*** is a fine example of the Mansard style, while **#273\*\*** is a well-preserved Italianate house with a side hall plan. The original owner of this house was John Ashley, a Boston lamp fixtures dealer. The wood-frame double house at **275-277 Washington Street** was originally more Italianate in appearance, but

later acquired a third story and a more Federal Revival sensibility during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the 1870s, John G. Smith, a superintendent at Metallic Art Works in East Cambridge, lived here.

*Before reaching the Union Square crossroads step into a driveway to view a largely forgotten house of worship that is visible only with concerted effort.*

In contrast to the prominence of St. Joseph's across the street, the former **St. Thomas Episcopal Church** has been largely forgotten, hidden from view by a tight cluster of trees, houses and commercial buildings. From the foot of the driveway at 269 Washington Street. (*see photo on next page*), one can glimpse part of its south wall. St. Thomas was designed in the Gothic Revival style (1870-1875) by the construction firm of

George Trefren & Son. It is a one-and-one-half story, end gable building with a brick foundation with board and batten siding currently masked by a vinyl coating. The building started out as a rectangular hall measuring 25 by 70 feet. By 1897 a vestibule and spire-surmounted tower enlivened the northwest corner. Between 1907 and 1913 the side aisles and chancel originally planned for the building were added to the south end. The tower was taken down around 1930, and by then, the vestibule on the main Somerville Avenue façade had achieved its present full length. The church roots began in St. John's Episcopal Church on Devens Street in Charlestown. George W. Durrell was the first pastor in Somerville, where he presided over a congregation of just over 130 parishioners from 1870-1895. During the 1960s, however, the congregation dissolved and the building has since housed a nursery school, Haitian and Hispanic religious groups, and non-profit agencies. It has recently been incorporated into a new housing development with 1<sup>st</sup> floor commercial that makes it even less recognizable as a former church.



Across Washington Street to the south is an interesting collection of late Victorian Era buildings. The Second Empire **William H. Burt House** (1874) at **264 Washington Street** is noteworthy for its formal center pavilion



which rises to a pyramidal mansard roof. Next door at **272 Washington Street** is the former **St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Parochial School** built in 1890 and then converted to residential use during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Initially Somerville's sizable population of 2,000 Catholics were forced to walk considerable distances to worship in churches in Charlestown and Cambridge. Over time, however, many of the Irish, Italian, and Portuguese immigrants who worked in area factories were able to worship in this church. Subsequently, the Mayo estate was purchased on January 20, 1870, and architect James Murphy designed a brand-new church for local Catholics that opened in 1874.

This **St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church**,\* situated at the intersection of **Washington and Webster Streets**, is an excellent example of the Gothic Revival Style favored for churches at the time. Note the lancet (pointed) arches atop doorways and windows, a hallmark of the Gothic and Gothic Revival Style. In addition, the buttresses that project from the walls and tower, as well as the rose/wheel window in the front gable of the church, strike decidedly Gothic Revival notes. The building is constructed in a traditional cathedral form, with a high central nave illuminated by the windows lined along the upper portion of the roof below its ridge (clerestory). The flanking side aisles are illuminated by paired arched windows.



In 1871 the pastor Monsignor Christopher C. McGrath held the first services in the lower church, and then he presided over the congregation for the next sixty-three years! He and another priest are the namesakes for the McGrath and O'Brien Highway (originally the Northern Artery), possibly the only traffic artery in the U.S. named after priests! Sadly, the steeple of the church was taken down in 1978 for fear of structural instability.

Situated across Washington Street from St. Joseph's is a modern low rise commercial block that was once the site of the Gothic Revival **Masonic Block** (1869), the first major commercial block in the Square. Its meeting hall provided a venue for Catholic worship services during the early 1870s. Look northeastward into the square to appreciate several key 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings.



Although drastically altered by a mid-1970s modernization, the **Stone Building** (also known as **Barrister's Hall**) at **57-61 Union Square** retains its original form and prominent corner site. For many years this building housed the Somerville Savings Bank. It was built in 1891 at the behest of Jonathan Stone, the bank's treasurer. Stone's family had deep roots in Somerville—with the first Stones settling in Somerville well before the American Revolution. During the early 1990s, Be Sargent Allen, a well-known Somerville artist and then resident, painted the mural on the east side of the building, to commemorate the First Raising of the Grand Union Flag on Prospect Hill in 1776.

The wood-frame **Robert A. Vinal House** at **15 Union Square** is the sole survivor of the earliest residential development in Union Square when numerous wood Greek Revival residences bordered this crossroad. Vinal, a grain dealer operating in the Square, built the circa 1845 Greek Revival house as a rental property. This modest house was later converted to commercial uses and is now widely appreciated as the Mid-Nite Convenient. Robert A. and his brother John Quincy Adams Vinal owned over 100 house lots on Prospect Hill! The naming of Vinal Avenue as a prominent street on the Hill is evidence of their family's significance in the area. Old photographs also show a much larger Greek Revival building with an end gable on the west side of the #15 building now known as "The Oasis." It once housed a grocery store and was a popular meeting place for the town's residents.

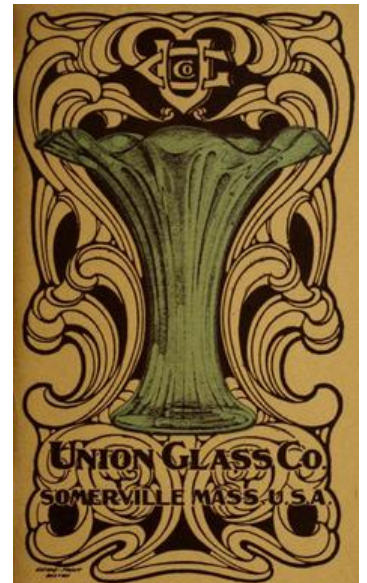
The **Fitchburg Railroad** was incorporated March 3, 1842, to run from Boston to Fitchburg. Construction began on May 20th, and the first section to Waltham (which included Somerville) opened on December 20, 1843. The line reached Fitchburg in March of 1845. More than any other single factor, the Fitchburg line, like the Boston and Lowell Railroad of the 1830s, triggered Somerville's mid-1800s rise as an industrial power house.



The **Union Glass Works** was probably the largest and most significant of Somerville industries that came to the fore during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Founded in 1854 by brothers Amory and Francis Houghton, their factory was located at 2 Webster Avenue. Union Glass grew quickly because of the demand for its wide variety of glass lighting fixtures. Although no factory structures remain, the Union Glass complex is well-documented, in part because of the Houghton's involvement in the founding of Corning Glass in 1851. Around 1860, the company moved to Williamsburg in Brooklyn, New York, and by 1868 it had established its headquarters in Corning, New York where it is viewed as an off shoot of the glass companies of East Cambridge and Somerville.

When Amory Houghton organized Union Glass, he wished to make it clear that he supported the anti-slavery movement, hence the name Union Glass Company. It is possible that Amory's chosen name for the company influenced the re-naming of the commercial district to the north from the prosaic "Sand Pit Square" to the decidedly patriotic moniker of "Union Square."

The Houghton's specialty was using flint (lead). By then this type of glass making was becoming nearly as prominent as window and bottle factories, which had previously dominated the U.S. industry. With several buildings for mixing, melting, blowing, grinding, and storage, the plant took full advantage of its wide street (Webster Avenue) with ready access to rail transportation. The factory employed two nine-pot furnaces, whose parallel chimneys reached more than a hundred feet skyward. Each clay pot, or crucible, could hold over three thousand pounds of molten glass. The crown furnaces were fired directly by coal fuel and took natural air draft from below. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the company employed roughly 200 workers, many of them immigrants from Italy, Sweden, England, and elsewhere.



*Union Glass Co. catalogue cover, ca. 1911.*

Union Glass produced a wide range of glass products, adapting to shifting fashions and economic conditions. Initially, it manufactured doorknobs, lamps and lamp trimmings, bottles, windows, lenses, and tableware. Railroad lanterns were also a significant source of revenue, as railroad workers would use lantern hand-signals to communicate with the engineer. One of the most famous objects created by Union Glass was a giant 150-pound punch bowl that was commissioned by Tiffany and Co. A team of 15 men spent 110 days meticulously cutting it for a display in Tiffany's New York showroom with a \$3,000 price tag, which adjusted for inflation would be about \$77,000! During

the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Union Glass won acclaim for its high-quality art glass products which peaked during the tenure of Julian deCordova, a merchant and investor of Jamaican heritage. Under his leadership the company survived the tumultuous 1880's and stayed in Somerville, while most glass-making ventures were moving west for cheaper fuel and resources. Union Glass remained in business through the mid-1920s.

*From the intersecting head of Webster Avenue and Prospect Street pause to look east at the first major new development in the Union Square area that is directly tied to the resumption of public transit to the area, with a new stop on the Green Line Extension (GLX).*

*The first Boston and Fitchburg rail line stations with passenger service were located at Webster Avenue near Prospect Street, and at the foot of Kent Street off Somerville Avenue. Neither are now visible.*



**20-50 Prospect Street** is a \$2 billion development on a 15-acre parcel that extends from the new GLX Union Station to Somerville Avenue. This 25-story tower with an adjoining mid-rise building dominates the previously low density streetscape. The project incorporates 450 apartment units, including 20% designated as permanently affordable, as well as amenity space, a 271-space parking garage, and ground floor retail.



A Green Line trolley breaks a ribbon during the grand opening of the MBTA's Green Line Extension at the Lechmere station on March 21, 2022 as it heads from Cambridge into Union Square in Somerville, MA.

(Staff Photo by Nancy Lane/MediaNews Group/Boston Herald)

*From here turn left from Prospect Street onto Emerson Street to step back in time to an area that was settled as far back as the mid-1850s.*



The Emerson/Everett triangular area is a refreshing oasis of mostly mid-19<sup>th</sup> century residences hemmed in by heavily traveled thoroughfares leading into Union Square, including Webster Avenue on the west, Somerville Avenue on the north, and Prospect Street on the east. The enduring compact neighborhood encompasses at least four houses dating back to the 1850s, with the remaining half dozen or so residences harking back to the period of 1860-1890. Prior to the mid-1850s, the area was covered by wetlands associated with the Miller's River. Land-making activities for residential construction were spurred on, no doubt, by the development of nearby industries such as Union Glass. The newly created solid ground became host to residential construction.

Emerson Street from its intersection with Everett Street is lined with modest houses with various architectural elements that nod to the Greek Revival and/or Italianate design styles. In one instance a front entrance is set off by sidelights and a rectangular transom (2 Emerson Street), while typically Italianate brackets and a center gable are in evidence at 3 Emerson Street. By the early 1870s, residents of Emerson Street included the Nathaniel Dennet family at **3 Emerson Street**. He was a foreman at the nearby Union Glass Company and was the head of a family that included Alex H. Dennet, paper hanger, and Theodore D. Dennet, machinist at the Union Glass Company. Dennet's neighbors during the 1870s included East Cambridge barber Antonio E. Bram (**4 Emerson Street**), James F. Guthrie, engineer (**6 Emerson Street**) and James E. O'Neil, bookkeeper at the Bay State Glass Company (**8 Emerson Street**).

By the early 1870s the residents of Everett/Emerson Streets included an iron worker, painter, cabinet maker, engineer, barber, gas fitter, and three carpenters, including **Samuel Tuttle** who was the original owner of **14 Everett Street**.<sup>\*</sup> The Tuttle House story begins in September of 1856, when Mr. Tuttle paid Prospect Hill real estate developer Robert Vinal just over \$1000 for the lot and "the building there on." Tuttle may have been the carpenter responsible for building this charming Italianate, center-gable house that was designated in ~ 2010 as a single-building Local Historic District, as part of phase 1 of the City's major community-wide surveying and outreach effort from 2007-10. The LHD is expected to expand over time.



14 Everett Street (1856)\*

*The tour route continues a half block eastward to Prospect Street where it turns left and continues to the intersection of Somerville Avenue, Prospect and Washington Streets. This vantage point affords a good view of the former Union Square Garage and the old Union Square Fire Station.*

**Union Square Garage (1914) at 267-271 Somerville Avenue** is the earliest known and surviving auto-related building in the Union Square area. Measuring approximately 113 feet wide by 50 feet deep, the structure occupies the entire lot. Two of the three center bays are still extant with ca.1960 overhead doors. The rhythmic repetition of segmental-arched bays at the second story strikes an old fashioned, late 19th century note, while the 16 segmental arched windows underscore the horizontal massing of the building. The Union Square Garage first appears in the City Directory in 1915 at 269 Somerville Avenue, along with 18 other automobile garages in Somerville.

Bordered by Washington Street and Somerville Avenue, an Engine House has been located on this site since the 1850s. The old fire house was demolished to accommodate the present **Fire Station** which was constructed in 1903–04. Walter T. Littlefield, the City’s Commissioner of Buildings, provided its Georgian design, with a tower originally capped by an octagonal roof and colonial weathervane.



Although the station's clock tower has since been reduced in height, the structure remains an important focal point within the Square and currently serves as the headquarters for the Somerville Media Center (the former and City's original cable office known as SCATV).



Built in 1935, the **United States Post Office/Somerville Main Post Office\*** at **237 Washington Street** replaced the wood-framed Prospect Hill School House at this key intersection since at least the early 1850s. Architects Louis Adolph Simon and Maurice P. Mead provided the City of Somerville with an unusually fine example of a Colonial Revival post office building. Rising a single story from a granite block basement to a flat shingle-sheathed hip roof, its walls are laid up in Flemish bond brick with limestone trimmings.

Ross Embrose Moffett (1888–1971), a key figure in the Provincetown Art Colony in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, painted the lobby mural to depict a scene (see photo on next page) that recalled the patriotism of **James Miller**, who was killed during a skirmish with the British on their Retreat from Lexington on April 19, 1775. He is reputed to have said to his sons that “I am too old to run but not to fight” as the British made their way around Prospect Hill toward Charlestown. The mural was made possible through funding from Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration (WPA) and has become a defining feature of the building. The Federal Government decided to cease the building’s operations as a post office in 2013, and it was sold to a private developer in 2014 for adaptive reuse. It is protected as an Local Historic District (LHD) which is expected to expand in the future, to include other commercial buildings in Union Square.



1930s WPA mural depicts the humiliating retreat of the British on Washington Street, then in Charlestown.

*From the Post Office walk east toward a residence with a distinctive double-pitched or gambrel roof.*

The oldest structural component of the gambrel-roof house at **215 Washington Street\*** dates to the mid-1700s. The gambrel roof's double pitched configuration was highly practical as snow slid right off and did not accumulate. Members of the Shedd family were its original owners. Around 1860, this house was drastically altered by George P. Walker who raised the original 1.5 story house onto a new first floor and added a substantial rear ell. George P. Walker was an employee of Union Square's Warren Hotel (razed). This type of house expansion was not uncommon in New England towns but was more typically practiced in cases where the original buildings were elevated, to allow the insertion of commercial storefronts under the original first stories. Arguably, the **Shedd-Walker House** is the most historically significant structure bordering Union Square because of its status as a "witness house"—meaning a house that witnessed the British Red Coats' nearly 20-mile retreat from Concord back to Boston on April 19, 1776.

Other notable structures in the Square are located on Washington and Merriam Streets., and. The **MBTA Car Barn** (1927) on the south side of Washington Street is characterized by a modern, late 20<sup>th</sup> century brick and concrete structure which was added to the MBTA car barn built in 1927. It encompasses a portion of Somerville's Police and Fire Departments. The original use is best evident within the bricked-in openings of the Merriam Street and Somerville Avenue sides of the car barn.

Another large property of historic interest is the commercial /residential block at Washington and Merriam Streets, known as the **Hannah J. Allen Building (1890)\*\* at 208-208A Washington Street**. Hannah J. Allen was born in Massachusetts in 1822. She married Channey Booth in 1848, and by 1850 they resided at the McLean Asylum for the Insane that was once located in the Cobble Hill section of East Somerville. Mr. Booth was a physician at the Asylum until his death in 1860. Ten years later, Hannah married Benjamin Allen, a merchant from New Hampshire who invested in Somerville real estate. The Allens were wealthy enough to have an Irish servant girl board with them. **210 Washington Street** was one of Mr. Allen's properties, a Queen Anne commercial/residential building designed to house two stores and six residential units. The Allen Building's earliest known commercial tenants were Henry Freitag who operated a bakery, while the other store contained Decio Biondi's grocery store by 1924. Some Somerville residents may still remember the Rossmore Cafe which occupied both storefronts during the 1940s.

The Allen building, plus the commercial/residential block at **157 Washington Street**, built ca 1890-99 with distinctive curved red brick and brownstone trim, were apparently located to take advantage of the

electric trolley introduced to Somerville in 1890. This new form of public transit resulted in a great wave of building construction as nearly half of Somerville's housing stock was built between 1890 and 1910. The electric trolley brought throngs of shoppers and workers to the area, encouraging the construction of many multi- purpose masonry buildings.

*Continue eastward for a brief view of historic properties in what is known as East Somerville.*

Built ca.1790, the **Samuel Ireland House\*** at **117 Washington Street** is one of the oldest houses on the former “Milk Row.” Encompassing Washington Street, Somerville Avenue, and Elm Street, Milk Row was part of a pre-early 1800s system of roads that dairy and agricultural farmers used to access the markets of Charlestown and Boston, especially with the opening of the Warren Bridge.in 1786. The Ireland House is a wood, cottage-scale residence of late Georgian vernacular style. Its main five bay facade reflects the original arrangement of a front door flanked by pairs of windows. It was built by Samuel Ireland, a farmer and son of Jonathan Ireland, an early settler of what was then part of Charlestown. The house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 and is protected as an LHD.



**Buddy's Truck Stop Diner (now simply Buddy's)** at **113 Washington Street** is a genuine East Somerville landmark. Built in 1929, it was moved here from Leominster, MA in 1951, and built right into a vintage railroad dining car. Beginning in 1966, the diner was owned for many years by the John Barrett family. Despite a very small kitchen and staff, Buddy's has an extensive menu and has been an enduring breakfast spot for locals far and wide for over seventy years.

*Before walking across Washington Street to view the soon-to-open new Washington GLX transit station, consider what was once the western part of a great Federal period country estate.*



In 1792, the summit of the no longer extant Cobble Hill became host to the Joseph Barrell Mansion. Wealthy Boston merchant Joseph Barrell sited his mansion to take full advantage of views of the Miller's River, which is no longer a visible water feature. His elegant brick mansion was designed by none other than Charles Bulfinch, a former employee of Barrells before he embarked on a career in architectural design. Arguably he was the person who almost single-handedly transformed Boston from

a provincial town of wooden buildings to a more sophisticated municipality of masonry buildings. Among Bulfinch's many accomplishments was his design for the Massachusetts State House. The Joseph Barrell Mansion ca.1900.

The mansion later evolved to be the first building to house McLean's Asylum (1817-1896). In 1816, Massachusetts General Hospital purchased the estate to create an institutional complex for "the gracefully insane" (as described by *Boston Globe* columnist Alex Beam in his history of the same name). McLean's Asylum was among the first of its kind in the world where "lunatics" were treated with kindness rather than thrown into prisons where they were forced to share cells with common criminals. McLean's housed decidedly upper crust patients.

By the late 1800s, these genteel folks and their families undoubtedly became alarmed when the surrounding area became increasingly industrialized and surrounded by substandard housing. As a result, McLean's Asylum decided to move in 1896 to leafy grounds bordering Trapelo Road in suburban Belmont. All that remains of the Barrell Mansion today is **Bulfinch's** graceful **double stairway** that is showcased in the central room of the **Somerville Museum\*** on Westwood Road in Spring Hill.

*From the Joy Street MBTA entrance turn right to walk under the railroad bridge, and then turn left onto Joy Street. The GLX runs parallel to the Boston and Lowell Railroad tracks.*

The Boston & Lowell is the oldest railroad line in the Boston area having been chartered in the early 1830s and then opened for passengers in 1835. It is situated here in a formerly industrial area on the border with Charlestown, a neighborhood of Boston. The area is known as Brickbottom due to its sandy, silica rich soil which figured so importantly in Somerville's brick industry. Its streets, Joy, Poplar, and Linwood, were once lined with houses occupied by different waves of immigrant groups from Ireland, Italy, and Greece, working in the nearby factories that once was a tight knit, working class community of multi nationalities. Joy Street was named for Joseph Barrell's son in law,

Benjamin Joy, who served as a diplomat for President George Washington with Asia as his purview! Fast forwarding to the 1920s, Brickbottom was becoming a commercial and light industrial district—as seen at 86 Joy Street.

**86 Joy Street**, aka the Joy **Street Artist Studios** is an expansive masonry facility built in 1919 for \$85,000 for the New England Baking Company. Located along the Boston and Lowell railroad, the building was designed by L. S. Beardsley of New York and constructed by the Fred T. Ley Company of Springfield who also built the United States Post Office and several buildings at Fort Devens. The structure was originally designed with a concrete driveway encompassing the whole length of the facade to facilitate the loading of teams, and incorporated special siding in the rear for railroad car access. New England was one of 41 bakeries located in Somerville in 1920, causing wholesale bakeries to appear as a whole separate heading in City directories by 1927. New England Bakery was one of three listed, and they stayed in the building until at least 1933. In the 1930s and 1940s the building was occupied by the Hall Baking Company, and some fondly recall it as the **Happy Home Bakery**, which would greet you at the door with a basket of goodies. It is currently home to a wide diversity of artist work studios who treasure its wide-open spaces with large windows bringing in natural daylight to pursue their passions. [www.joystreetstudios.com/](http://www.joystreetstudios.com/)

*From 86 Joy Street head southwest on Poplar Street and turn left onto Linwood Street. On the way to Brickbottom, pass by the James A. Kiley Company at 15 Linwood Street. Currently a “final-stage manufacturer of Terex Telelect, Terex Hi-Ranger Aerial Devices and Terex Digger Derricks. This fourth generation company was founded on this site in 1890 as the maker of horse-drawn wagons.*

Fitchburg Street was set out in 1857 on the first solid ground just north of Miller’s River before the river was completely filled in by the early 1900s. The street provided a clear boundary between the cities of Somerville and Cambridge. The residences on the site beginning in the 1870s were demolished in the early 1920s to accommodate a new distribution plant.

**One Fitchburg Street** is a multi-building commercial complex built between 1920 and 1923 to serve as a distribution center for the food products of the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P) supermarket chain. The complex sits on a triangular land parcel of 90,525 square feet that was one of the first and largest adaptive reuse projects begun in the City in the 1980’s, and finally opened in 1988, primarily as a cooperative for the Brickbottom Artist Association. The Atlantic and Pacific Company chose to purchase the parcel because of its proximity to railroads and the soon-to-be built McGrath and O’Brien Highway that would enable A&P’s fleet of motorized trucks to transport stored and baked goods to their early supermarkets.

Architecturally the A&P complex satisfies Criteria C of the National Register of Historic Places as a relatively rare, first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century food distribution center. It was constructed by the Turner Construction Company for its various parts to function together like a well-oiled machine. Its iconic form represents a stream lined version of the Commercial Style originally associated with Chicago’s late 19<sup>th</sup> century steel frame skyscrapers, as well as the reinforced concrete, high rise buildings erected during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The complex was designed to keep up with the demand for food products sold at the far-flung stores of the A&P chain, so the grocery warehouse provided space for the temporary storage and canning of many food products. Baked goods were also produced and stored within the on-site bakery. The A&P food distribution plant was operational until the 1970s.

Today, the complex boasts nearly 150 spaces, converted from a cooperative to individual condominiums, each of a unique size, shape, and design. They serve as both residences and work space for the owners who include both professional artists and those associated with other creative pursuits.

October 27, 2022 - November 20, 2022



Thank you for participating in this walking tour and for your interest in local history!

For additional walking or bicycle tour brochures, or other local history resources, go to [www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/historic-events-and-education](http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/historic-events-and-education)

Questions or comments may be sent to the staff of the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission within the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development via [bwilson@somervillema.gov](mailto:bwilson@somervillema.gov) or [historic@somervillema.gov](mailto:historic@somervillema.gov)