

**College Avenue, Gateway to West Somerville – From Davis Square to the Medford Line
Sponsored by Somerville Historic Preservation Commission, with
Edward Gordon, President, NE Chapter of Victoria Society of America**



“Davis Square” was officially designated by the Board of Aldermen in 1883 and named for Person Davis (1819-1894), a grain dealer in the firm of Davis and Taylor in Boston. He moved to the area in 1850 and built his Italianate house (demolished in 1926) near the intersection of Elm St., Grove St, and Morrison Ave. Over time he presided over a ten-acre estate that encompassed much of present day Davis Square. Only one house is documented before then, circa 1800 at the location of the current West Branch Library. The square developed into a residential and commercial center by the end of the nineteenth century due to several factors. Improvements were made to area streets in the 1860’s when Elm St. was widened and was no longer simply an extension of Milk Row (now Somerville Avenue), and then Holland St. was laid out in 1870. Public transportation made the area more accessible. In 1856-57 horse car railway lines were extended along Mass. Ave. from Harvard Square to Arlington, in 1863 the Somerville Horse Railroad Company connected Union Square with West Somerville via extended tracks along Somerville Ave. and Elm St., and in 1871 the Lexington & Arlington Branch of the Boston & Maine Railroad extended steam rail service to Davis Square. These public improvements stimulated substantial commercial development in the 1870’s and 1880’s as well as rapid residential construction in the 1890’s through the early 20th century. Brick paving was introduced in Davis Square in 1900 and the area continued to be a vibrant commercial and transportation center until post World War II, with the exodus to the suburbs and the decline of urban centers throughout the nation. In 1984 public transit was extended to Davis Square via the Red Line subway, and the Square has once again become a vibrant and lively center for residents and businesses alike.



49-55 Davis Square – Somerville Theatre – 1912-1914

The Somerville Theatre/Hobbs Building was built from designs provided by the Boston firm of Funk & Wilcox. This was the first theatre built exclusively to showcase silent films and vaudeville shows. From 1915 to 1927, a mix of stage shows, vaudeville acts, operas, and movies were offered, and nationally recognized and lauded artists such as Busby Berkeley and Tallulah Bankhead performed here. This prominent and majestic building has evolved over the years, adapting to the entertainment preferences of the times. Designated as a historic building locally in 1989 and placed on the National Register in 1990, this led to a major facelift in the 1990’s, both inside and outside. Today the Theatre houses offices on the

upper floors, 4 new small-screen movie theatres, 2 in a converted bowling alley in the basement, a café storefront at street level, a fully restored entry lobby, and a new marquee. The theater regularly presents art-house, Hollywood, and vintage film series, as well as live concert performances. It won a Preservation Award from the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission in 1997 for its impressive rehabilitation and restoration work.

40 College Avenue – West Branch Library – 1909 Closely resembling a building by the well-known Renaissance architect Palladio, this library is a prime example of the Roman Revival style of the Beaux Arts period. The design by McLean & Wright, a Boston-based firm, was chosen from 35 submissions for the building. Andrew Carnegie, the Pittsburgh steel magnate, donated the entire \$25,000 for the library’s construction. It was part of his “Greek Temples of Learning” project, an investment he made in honor of his own access as a child to books, to which he credits his success. Sam Walter Foss, a renowned local poet and head librarian, was instrumental in securing this money for the new library for West Somerville. The city undertook extensive stabilization work on the exterior and selective restoration work on the interior in 2003-04 through a grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission. This project helped to recreate the building’s original turn of the century grandeur and architectural beauty.



After the Civil War, between 1870 and 1910, people increasingly chose to live in West Somerville where subdivided land was plentiful for new homes, both modest and substantial, and the commute to Boston for employment was very convenient by rail. College Avenue gradually became the spiritual center for these new residents as they constructed their places of worship along its length.



45 College Avenue – Third Universalist Church – 1884

This Stick Style building was one of a half-dozen churches that relocated after 1870 from eastern Somerville to College Avenue. Hosea B. Dennison, a member of the congregation, was both the architect and superintendent of the three-month project.

14 Hall Ave – Cornelius Warren House – 1895

This exceptional, well-maintained example of the Shingle Style was owned by Cornelius Warren, who operated a provisions business, and Charles W. Warren, bookkeeper. The pair was likely to be either brothers, or father and son.



14 Chapel Street – College Avenue Methodist Church – 1925

This Collegiate Gothic Church was designed by the Boston firm of Woodbury and Stewart. The education wing was named after Sam Walter Foss and is aptly called the “House by the Side of the Road” in honor of his best-known poem.

85 College Avenue was the home of Fred Stark Pearson during his honeymoon. Pearson was a professor at Tufts and founder of the Somerville Electric Company, as well as of several electric companies in South America and Europe. Pearson Avenue and Pearson Road, as well as streets in Barcelona, Spain, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil were named after him. He and his wife tragically died in 1915 on the sinking Lusitania.



88 College Avenue – Charles H. Lockhardt House - 1889-1890

An outstanding example of the towered-Queen Anne style, this house still retains its stable, which won a Preservation Award from the Historic Preservation Commission in 2005 for its exterior restoration and conversion to an artist’s studio. The first owner occupant was Charles H. Lockhardt, a Somerville undertaker.

89 College Avenue – West Somerville Congregational Church - 1912-1915

Built from designs provided by Reid & McAlpine of Tremont Street, Boston, this church illustrates the popularity of stucco as a building material in America during the 1910s and 1920s.





113 College Avenue - Havurat Shalom – 1901-1902

This house was built as a parsonage for a Baptist pastor, J. Vanor Garten. After several changes of ownership, the house became the center for an alternative Jewish religious movement in the late 1960s. It remains a thriving community center for many Jewish families in the area today.

The **Powderhouse Square** area was originally owned by members of the Tufts family. Tufts College (now University) was first established in 1852, and its buildings were primarily situated at the crest of the hill and along Professors' Row, with its grounds forming the western side of the Square. The eastern edge started to develop after the Tufts family donated the parkland to the City in 1895. Tufts heirs sold off the northern portion to Charles Robinson and other builders. Development of the area accelerated with the laying out of **Powderhouse Boulevard** in 1899.



**151 College Avenue – Dartnell Winward/
House/Beta Kappa House/Sigma Omega Psi House – 1897**

149 College Avenue – David S. Knowles House – 1897
H.W.P. Colson, a prominent real estate agent and builder of numerous houses on Spring Hill and probably the Powderhouse neighborhood as well, constructed both of these houses. Interestingly he built #151 College in the Colonial Revival Style, and #149 in the Shingle Style. #149 College was built as and remains a 2-family house, while #151 began as a single-family home, evolved into a fraternity house in the 1920s, and then more recently became a two-family residence.



9 Warner Street – Weinheimer-Murphy House - 1905-1906

This residence is an eclectic blend of Shingle, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles. The first owner, John Weinheimer, moved from Summit Avenue on Prospect Hill to this home in West Somerville. The second family of owners, the Michael F. Murphys', lived here for over 30 years.



66 Bromfield Road – Hammond-Howard House – 1908

This two-family house blends elements from the Queen Anne, Shingle And Colonial Revival styles. It is an unusually intact and well-detailed example of its type. A succession of salesmen lived here during the first half of the 20th Century.

16 Dearborn Road – Samuel Mendum House –1894

Built in 1894 this is the oldest house in the residential area between Powderhouse Circle and the Medford border. The original owner was Samuel W. Mendum, a Boston lawyer. By 1910, a Tufts professor, Frederick D. Lambert, lived here, and he was followed by a John M. Higgins, salesman, and his wife in 1920. It has evolved over time from a single-family home to administrative offices for Tufts University.



31-33 Pearson Road - Moir-Auerbach House – 1905

Built by local contractor Andrew R. Lewis, this house is the best preserved of 11 nearly identical two-family houses. The earliest occupants were George Moir, buyer and Bernard Auerbach, clerk. Other residents over time were a tailor, a diamond cutter, and a foreman carpenter.

5 Pearson Road – Charles I. Teague House – 1902

This is an unusually fine example of a Queen Anne/ Colonial Revival style two-family home. Charles I. Teague, the first occupant, was a steam gauge worker.



773 Broadway – Lewis-Mansfield Currier House – 1904

This house is a key component in one of Somerville's most significant streetscapes. Local builder Andrew R. Lewis blended Queen Anne, Colonial Revival & Shingle style elements with unusual Stick Style clipped gables to form a unique structure.

Nathan Tufts Park (1895), Field House (1935), and Powder House (1703)

An icon of the City the well-loved Powder House was actually built and used as a windmill from 1704-1747. It was bought from a French Huguenot refugee by the Province of Massachusetts and next used as a place to store gunpowder—first for the British Army and then for the Colonial Militia. In 1774, General Gage infamously stole all of the gunpowder in the structure, an event that sparked the American Revolution. The Tufts family later bought the land, thus explaining the official name of the parkland. In the 1870s, a pickle and condiment company used the thick stone structure to store its aptly named "Old Powder House Brand" pickles. In 1892 the Tufts family sold the land to the City of Somerville for \$1 for use as a park. In 1935-36, as part of a WPA Project, the Field House was built using stones



from the recently demolished Highland Railroad Station on Lexington Avenue. Used by the City for many purposes it is now available for public use by petition. Since 1975 the Park and its structures have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. After the City undertook extensive rehabilitation and restoration work from 2001-2005, Nathan Tufts Park (locally a.k.a. Powderhouse Park) has been honored with two awards: a "2004 Preservation Award" from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and a "2005 Olmsted Award" from Preservation MASS for outstanding leadership in Landscape Preservation.

29 Powderhouse Terrace – Zebedee E. Cliff House – 1900

Zebedee Cliff was an Alderman and later a Mayor of the City. A carpenter turned developer he has been credited with undertaking over \$2 million worth of construction in Somerville before his death in 1934.

