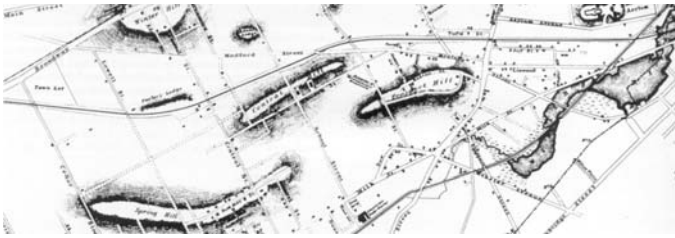


# “The Ins and Outs of Union Square” A Self-Guided Walking Tour

Led by Edward Gordon, President of the Victorian Society in America, New England Chapter

Sponsored by the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission and ArtsUnion with funding by the Massachusetts Cultural Council



1852 DRAPER MAP

The development of Somerville Avenue and the Fitchburg Line spurred many changes along the corridor.

## **Conway Park, 538-574 Somerville Avenue**

The current Conway Park is an expansion of a long-existing area that until the mid-1990s was situated next to a lead smelting operation. An acre of once-toxic grounds was reclaimed, thoroughly cleaned and transformed into basketball courts, an in-line hockey rink, and a community park featuring a tot-lot, multi-use athletic field, shaded seating and comfort stations. An extensive installation of interpretive signs and graphics in the park help local users appreciate the lively and surprising history of the site, as well as the City as a whole.



## **Middlesex Bleachery and Dye Works, Bleachery Court**

Somerville's earliest manufacturing industry, the Milk Row Bleachery and Dye Works, was constructed sometime around 1820. Its location on the Miller's River would have provided a source of water as well as a natural outlet for the firm's waste liquids. The company dyed the cotton and woolen yarn brought to them, and bleached and pressed cotton and linen goods. By 1822 the firm's agents were advertising the plant as "steam powered," one of the earliest instances of steam's advertised use in the area. As late as 1865, the annual value of its finished cloth was over \$1.3 million, which only the brass and copper tubes produced at the American Tube Works came close to matching.

After several reorganizations, the Middlesex Bleachery and Dye Works (as the company became known) continued its activities well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other allied textile industries were situated nearby in Ward II such as The Victoria Iron Works on Kent Street, which manufactured machinery for calico printers.

Before closing in 1936, the Works were said to be the oldest textile finishing plant in the United States.

## **Fitchburg Railroad**

In 1836 the Charlestown Branch (later the Fitchburg Railroad) was built between the Cities of Boston and Cambridge's Fresh Pond. Its route roughly paralleled Milk Row, now Somerville Avenue and the Miller's River, helping to create the corridor that subsequently attracted a variety of industries.

In 1843 the Fitchburg began passenger service that spurred residential development on the southern slopes of Prospect and Spring Hills.



Somerville Station at Park Street

## **Miller's River**

In addition to industry, such as the Bleachery and the Tube Works, slaughterhouses and packinghouses were established in the 1850s in close proximity to the Fitchburg Railroad and the Miller's River. Since various industries used the River as an outlet for waste, it was thoroughly polluted by the late 1860s.



1879 ELLIOTT MAP

By 1869, Somerville had begun to restrict industrial development near the river. Shortly thereafter, filling of the River began to be filled in with earth, some from the partial razing of Prospect Hill in 1874. By 1876, the Miller's River was completely covered up.

Automotive-related industries sprang up during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century along the major thoroughfares. Among them were the 1915 Jenney Gas Station on Bow Street and the 1935 Razzaboni Service Station at 508 Somerville Avenue.

### **St. Anthony of Padua Church, 12 Properzi Way (originally Vine Street)**

The church and its construction are the intertwined stories of the Italian Community's growth in Somerville and Father Nazareno Properzi. Italians were compelled to go into Boston to worship as they were unwelcome in the Irish Church of St. Joseph's in Union Square. Father Properzi said his first mass in Somerville on June 6, 1915 in a storefront on Somerville Avenue. In less than a year, he had purchased the land for the new church and broke ground a few months later. In addition to tending to his congregation, fund-raising and working on the design of the new church with the Cippolini brothers, he gave his services wherever needed, including as a carpenter, electrician, plumber, painter and decorator. Father Properzi served his church for 35 years until he passed away in 1960. In recent years this church has served a more diverse congregation.



### **Tyler Street/Tower Court**

Named for Maclean Hospital Superintendent Columbus Tyler, this street was extant by 1852. In 1873, Tower Court was set out on the north side of Tyler Street. This residential cul-de-sac was named for Levi Tower, a stationer on Devonshire Street in Boston. He lived in Somerville on Park Street near the Fitchburg Railroad. The three Bucknam brothers, Davis P., James A., and William E. were masons who owned the seven Italianate vernacular houses shown bordering Tower Court in 1874. All of the brothers lived in houses bordering Tyler Street and Tyler Court. By the early 1900s, families of Irish, English and French heritage lived on the Court. Seven out of the twelve people listed on Tower Court in 1910 are listed as lab workers, while the remaining heads of households included a tube moulder, driver, teamster and two widows. Tower Court illustrates the tendency of persons employed in the same occupation to live side by side around the cul-de sacs located within the industrial corridor located between Milk Row and the Fitchburg Railroad.

### **Ames Envelope**

Distressed by the fact that envelopes coming through the registered mail division were so poorly made that they would tear or disintegrate during processing, John W. Fitzgerald, a Boston postal worker, founded Ames Safety Envelope in 1919. Using \$500 of his own money to begin the firm, Fitzgerald and his wife with her two aunts folded and glued the initial product. The company now makes a wide range of specialized envelopes. Their business uses over 350,000 square feet of space and employs over 500 people in a range of fields that is continually expanding. They also provide their employees with on-site training, day-care, and ESL classes as well as have a cafeteria and a gymnasium. The firm is also known for its generous support of numerous local charities.

### **American Tube Works**

The American Tube Works Company, located on Somerville Avenue at Dane Street was incorporated in March of 1852 for the purpose of manufacturing seamless brass and copper tubes. The firm had obtained exclusive right to manufacture "Green's Patent brass tubes," patented in England four years earlier. Freeborn Adams, a South Boston machinist, invented similar equipment to produce seamless copper tubes and was the first director of plant operations. American Tube was the first company in the U.S. to produce seamless boiler tubes for locomotive, marine, and stationary engines in addition to tubes and piping for a variety of other purposes. Since the manufacturing process was unpatented, it was kept a closely guarded secret. Its products were exported to all corners of the world for over half a century.

The company appears to have been immediately successful, employing 175 men (second only to the Union Glass Works) and by 1875, produced \$1.2 million worth of brass and copper tubing. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the company expanded and rebuilt the complex to include four large drawing mills, rolling mill, foundry, and pattern and blacksmith shops, all arranged around three sides of the relatively tiny Milk Row Cemetery. Today, separate firms are housed in the seven brick buildings of the complex on Somerville Avenue that still remain.

Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone

American Tube Works closed in the 1930s, and this cluster of buildings was used by the H.P. Hood Company as part of their egg department. The oldest current existing building standing is the machine and pattern shop to the rear of the Cemetery. The boiler house on Dane Street has recently been converted to office use.



*438r Somerville Avenue, oldest remaining portion of the American Tube Works*

The Lake Street portion of the American Tube Works complex consists of two principal buildings: a three-story brick structure and a long one-story brick building. These buildings are now home to the H.D. Chasen Company, a third generation industrial supply company originally founded in 1946 by Henry Chasen, a mechanical engineer.

When Henry started the business just after WWII, he recognized the need for excellent customer service, hard-to-find industrial items, and engineering advice for special applications. These three building blocks are still the foundation of the family business now run by Harvey and Allan Chasen.

### **Somerville Avenue Residences**

The Ireland-Dane House at 461 Somerville Avenue is the oldest house still standing on Somerville Avenue. Recent research indicates that the building may have been constructed between 1791 and 1805 for Jonathan Ireland. The interior retains its original fireplace mantles of Federal and Georgian Styles.

The Greek Revival house at 437 Somerville Avenue is one of the oldest and best-preserved pre-Civil War houses along Somerville Avenue, as it does not appear on nineteenth or early twentieth century maps, and was probably moved to the site.

In 1851, the double house at 439-441R Somerville Avenue was probably the residence of Robert Hollingsworth, a Boston letter carrier. It was later owned by George W. Ireland, a prominent realtor (ca. 1874).

The Mansard rowhouses across from the Market Basket site were once considered to be the latest style when constructed in the 1870's for middleclass commuters into Boston.

### **Milk Row Cemetery**

The first and only pre-20<sup>th</sup> century burial ground in Somerville, the Milk Row Cemetery was created in 1804 on land sold by Samuel Tufts to Timothy Tufts and others. Several members of the Tufts, Stone, and Rand Families are buried here. A Civil War monument reported to be the first in the nation erected by citizens in 1863 to honor soldiers who died in the Civil War was raised on a plot donated by Enoch Robinson, eminent inventor and designer of Somerville's notable Round House. It was used infrequently after 1842 upon the opening of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge.

This historic Cemetery has recently received significant local attention with 2 State grants: a 2002 Preservation Master Plan through DCR; and Phase I in 2006 through a Massachusetts Historical Commission. Grave markers were conserved and the Civil War Monument was reset. The iron fences will be repaired and replaced where necessary. Somerville's first school stood at the eastern corner of the lot from 1796 until 1849.

### **58-68 Bow Street – The Drouet Block Building – 1898**

After architect Aaron Gould finished *The Richmond*, Union Square real estate developer E. Charles Drouet hired him again to design yet another residential-commercial mixed use building. Unlike his design for *The*

[www.ci.somerville.ma.us/historicpreservation](http://www.ci.somerville.ma.us/historicpreservation)

*Richmond*, Mr. Gould dispensed with the Queen Anne Style and this building reflected the growing popularity of the Classical Revival styles in architecture at the turn-of-the-century. Gould once again employed the High Renaissance Revival Style of the *Richmond* on the *Drouet Block Building*, with pedimented third floor windows and the use of classical order columns. Note the arched porch opening at the front façade of the building, also reminiscent of the Renaissance Revival Style.

#### **69 Bow Street - Jenney Gas Station – ca. 1915**

This beautifully preserved, Colonial Revival Style gas station is one of the earliest in Somerville.



#### **50 Bow Street – Old Bow Street Police Station - 1874**

This former police station, designed by architect G.H. Clough was one of the first projects of the newly chartered City of Somerville was to erect. The entrance arch and use of contrasting colors (red brick and light granite) indicate a High Victorian Gothic Style. Some Second Empire Style influences can be seen in the string-coursed granite sills on the second floor and the now-disassembled mansard roof that once formed a fourth story. The brick is articulated as pilasters at the corners and at intervals. Some corbelling and detailed brickwork can be seen below the eaves.

An 1883 Somerville directory lists seven physicians in residence on the south side of Bow Street, from the Hill Building to the old Police Station. The doctors included William A. Bell, one of the most successful and the son of Dr. Luther V. Bell, the famous Civil War surgeon, Alphonso H. Carvill, John F. Couch (who is said to have officiated at the birth of more Somerville Children than any other physician), W.W. Dow, Thomas Durrell, Emory L. White, and Edson Whitman, eye specialist. Without any telephones, the proximity of the doctor's homes helped ensure that a physician was always available in case of accidents or other emergencies. Several of the doctors were also charter members of a committee formed by the Somerville Medical Society to help raise funds for Somerville Hospital. Somerville also had several woman physicians in the late 1890s, including Dr. Anne Taylor Cole, Dr. Emma J. Peasley, and Dr. Eugenie M. Phillips.

#### **46 Bow Street – E.C. Mann House – ca. 1870**

This building is an eclectic and delightful assemblage of late eighteenth century parts. The basic plan is a front gable bracketed cottage, to which a bay window is added on the left side of the first floor. Two gabled dormers are placed symmetrically on each side of the roof. On the front gable a real explosion has taken place (perhaps these are additions added over time).

#### **39-49 Bow Street – Crescent Row – 1900**

This Federal Revival apartment block is built to conform to the curve of the street in a crescent shape, somewhat reminiscent of Charles Bulfinch's curved Tontine Crescent that was architecturally revolutionary and once stood in Downtown Crossing.

#### **1 Summer Street & Bow – First United Methodist Church – 1858-74**

Construction of this gothic Revival Style church started in 1858, was interrupted by the Civil War, and ended in 1874. The 90-foot polychromatic slate steeple that originally completed the east tower of the façade was heavily damaged in the great hurricane of 1938 and was subsequently removed.

#### **33-37 – Bow Street – The Richmond – 1892**

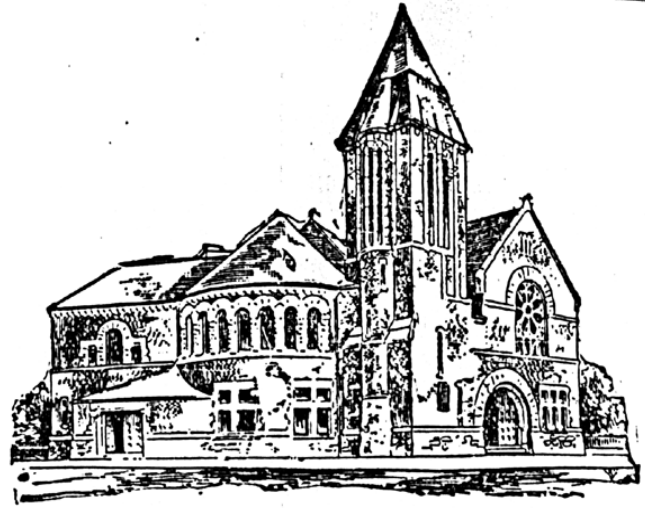
This residential building was designed by architect Aaron Gould in an electric Queen Anne/Renaissance Revival Style for Union Square developer E. Charles Drouet. The building was recently rehabilitated for residential use and received preservation awards from the Somerville

Historic Preservation Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission in 1997.

#### **26 Bow Street – Lambert/ Bell Residence – ca. 1869**

This combined Stick Style residence and doctor's office is one of six remaining from the nineteenth century "Doctor's Row".

#### **17 Bow Street - Prospect Hill Congregational Church - 1887**



PROSPECT-HILL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

The Prospect Hill Congregational Church was founded by Somerville dairyman H. P. Hood and other local businessmen. Architect Henry Squarebridge McKay designed this church in the new and most desired architectural style of the time - Romanesque Revival - made popular by pioneer Boston architect Henry Hobson Richardson. Richardson designed the Trinity Church in Copley Square. The church was renovated in the 1980s as condominiums.

#### **15 Bow Street - Somerville National Bank- ca. 1915**

The architectural firm of Gay and Proctor designed this early 20<sup>th</sup> century bank building in the Neo-Classical Revival Style, that helped convey an image of conservatism, authority, and time- tested financial wisdom for which banks to this day still like to project to their has managed to retain to its original function.

#### **Union Square**

Union Square, the oldest and largest commercial district in Somerville, is located at the intersection of two 17<sup>th</sup> century roads, The Road to Newtowne and Milk Row. The Road to Newtowne (now Washington Street) was a main route between Charlestown and Cambridge, and the Milk Row (present-day Somerville Avenue), served as the road to the farms and dairies in the western portion of the Neck. Sandy soils deposited by the nearby Miller's and Mystic Rivers gave the area its first name, Sandpit Square. It was changed to Union Square during the Civil War.

After the Civil War, prosperous merchants built imposing three- and four-story brick buildings with commercial space on the ground floor and offices and meeting halls on the upper floors. These commercial enterprises served local residents and workers of the factories cropping up along the rail lines and rivers east of the Square. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century development replaced some of the older structures and spread out from the square along Somerville Avenue, Bow and Washington Streets.

The Square's most ambitious development occurred immediately after the Civil War, when a number of well-detailed, three- and four-story wood and brick building blocks were constructed. These replaced residential-scale structures like the extant Mid-Nite Convenience Store that is the sole survivor of this development period. Most of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century structures have been demolished or had portions of their upper floors removed, greatly diminishing the effect of a cohesive square encircled by Victorian Gothic and Queen Anne style structures.

#### **31-34 Union Square - Eberle Building- ca. 1884**

Another of the multi-purpose business and social hall structures built in the Square during the last half of the nineteenth century; the Eberle Building features a decorative brick cornice of typical Queen Anne Style architecture. Mr. Philip Eberle built the structure to house his shoe store

and other commercial ventures, while creating a large social hall capable of holding 800 people on the third floor. Note the brick pilasters that, in combination with the large windows (particularly on the third floor), emphasize the verticality of the façade. The pilasters serve as additional structural supports that enable the building to enjoy such large window openings, thereby providing much-needed natural light to the third-floor social hall at a time when man-made lighting left much to be desired.



*Hill Building at the junction of Bow Street and Somerville Avenue – 1915*

### 38 Union Square - Hill Building- 1874

Built ten years before the Eberle Building, the Hill Building was originally constructed as a four-story Second Empire Style commercial building by local real estate developer Ira Hill. Unfortunately, the top two floors, complete with paneled brick chimneys and a mansard roof, were removed in 1935, either to reduce heating bills and real estate taxes, or to avoid the threat of fire. Ira Hill also financed the Pythian Block (ca.1872) and the Warren Hotel (1872).

### 57-61 Union Square - Stone Building (Barristers Hall) - 1891.

This much-altered structure is of steel-frame construction faced with a brick curtain wall. Granite was used for the foundation and lintels, and most of the now-covered detailed originally concentrated on the first floor. The building sits near the site of pre-Revolutionary War *Piper's Tavern*, which served the busy Colonial crossroads now known as Union Square.

The Stone building, erected in 1891 by carriage-maker Jonathan Stone, was built on the family's ancestral land. It included the new Oddfellows Hall (the old one was located in the Warren Hotel), a two-story hall occupying half of the third floor. It housed a large reception room, a ladies' parlor, a smoking room, and a coatroom. On the upper floor was



*Stone Bank Building, photograph by Frederic Stone, 1894.*

a large banquet hall capable of seating three hundred people. The Stone building also included four large stores, one of which, on the corner of Stone Avenue, was occupied by the Somerville Savings Bank.

Frederic Stone, Jonathan's son was the Bank's first treasurer and served in that capacity for forty-three years.

### Union Square Fire Station - 1903-04

Architect Walter Littlefield designed this distinctive fire station to be a mixture of popular Italian Renaissance Style, with its powerful granite



keystones, and the Colonial Revival Style used extensively in buildings at the time.

### 14 Union Square - The Oasis (Razed) – ca. 1850

The Oasis was once a beautiful Greek Revival Style structure of two-and-a-half stories. It served as a grocery store and local meeting place. The building once stood next to the Mid-Nite Convenience Store building and it was quite a landmark in the Square. In 1852, the first horse drawn streetcar in the Boston area ran between Union and Harvard Squares. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Union Square area was also a central point for streetcar and rail transport serving Boston workers who lived in Somerville.

*The Oasis, ca. 1850. Photograph ca. 1873. Razed*



### 15 Union Square - Mid-Nite Convenience Store-c.1845

This gable-ended Greek Revival Style house is the oldest remaining building in the Square. Although the building has been altered to suit a commercial purpose, notice the returns on the gable end, the well-defined corner boards, and the clapboards that remain on the structural elements typical of the Greek Revival Style. The house was originally owned by Robert Aldersey Vinal, a grain dealer operating in the Square, who eventually became a leading political figure of his day. He owned and sold-off for development much of the present-day Prospect Hill neighborhood. He also built the first multi-purpose building in the Square in 1852, Franklin Hall, which served as his grain and grocery store and housed a post office and large social hall.

**Washington Street & Union Square - St. Joseph's Catholic Church – 1871 -74. Architect: James Murphy**

This is the first Catholic Church in Somerville and the mother church of Catholicism in the City.



The church is an excellent example of the Gothic Revival Style favored for churches at the time. Note the lancet (pointed) arches, a hallmark of the Gothic and Gothic Revival Style, used for doorways and windows, the Gothic buttress elements along the walls and tower, and the Gothic rose/wheel window in the front gable of the church. 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) and flanking side aisles illuminated by the paired arched windows. This form originated in ancient Roman Basilicas, or court buildings, and early Christians adopted it as their own, usually with the addition of towers, steeples and other modifications, as Christianity became an accepted religion in the Roman Empire. The steeple of the church was damaged by the Hurricane of 1938, and unfortunately was later removed. Monsignor McGrath was the priest here for 62 years!

steeples and other modifications, as Christianity became an accepted religion in the Roman Empire. The steeple of the church was damaged by the Hurricane of 1938, and unfortunately was later removed. Monsignor McGrath was the priest here for 62 years!

**Prospect Street at Webster Avenue - Union Glass Company**

Amory and Francis Houghton founded the Union Glass Works in 1854, and for nearly two decades was Somerville's largest industrial employer. It was originally an offshoot of the larger New England Glass Company in East Cambridge. By the early twentieth century, the high cost of fuel and raw materials made competition with the newer Midwestern plants increasingly difficult. The firm remained in operation until 1924, long after all other Boston-area firms had closed or moved away.

Row housing for workers was erected nearby on the north side of Glass Works Court, roughly the location of present-day Columbia Street. All of this housing has since been razed.

**Prospect Street at Webster Avenue - Somerville Electric Light Company**

The Somerville Electric Light Company was a medium-size, investor-owned company with a brief but very productive and successful life for seventeen years, from 1886 to 1903. The company was founded to illuminate the streets of Somerville and introduce electricity into people's homes.



The first electricity contract in Somerville was awarded in June 1887 to furnish 50 arc lights for one year at \$.37 per night, each night until 1:00 A.M. The notion of keeping the street lamps on all night came later.

*Somerville Journal, January 1, 1887*

**Everett Street/Newton Street – 1850s**

Less than a block from Union Square, this neighborhood evolved during the mid-nineteenth century when brickyards, slaughterhouses and the Union Glass Company were among the industries located near the Square. Residents of the neighborhood worked primarily in the building trades and in small businesses. 14 Everett was home from the 1850s to the 1870s to the Tuttle family who were carpenters. In the early 1910s, the Smyth family took up residence. According to local lore, Mary F. Smyth was a bootlegger and is related to the current resident.



*Union Square Station*

**Resources:** Beyond the Neck: The Architecture and Development of Somerville (updated in 1990) and Form B surveys prepared for the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the websites of the existing businesses. Maps: 1852 Draper, 1874 Hopkins, 1876 City of Somerville, 1895 Bromley, and 1939 Sanborn. Photographs of the train station are courtesy of the Walker Transportation Collection, Beverly Historical Society and all other photographs are drawn from the collection of the Somerville Museum and the City's Historic Preservation Staff. Research done by the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC) Staff, Kristi Chase, Brandon Wilson and (former Staff) Eric Breitreutz; Gil Cooke; Evelyn Battinelli of the Somerville Museum, Dora St. Martin and John Alan Roderick.

Established in 1985, the SHPC administers historic districts, advises homeowners, provides historic and technical information and is an arm of City government. The Commission also sponsors events and develops programs and written material as part of its public outreach and educational mission. It can be reached via 617.625.6600 ext. 2500 or [www.ci.somerville.ma.us/historicpreservation](http://www.ci.somerville.ma.us/historicpreservation).

This Brochure was created by the SHPC Staff in collaboration with the Somerville Museum and the ArtsUnion Project, a Somerville Arts Council initiative. ArtsUnion is a project designed to boost the cultural economic development of Union Square, Somerville. Over time, the project will strengthen the regional identity and long-term appeal of the area. ArtsUnion is funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council and its John and Abigail Adams Arts Program.