

Exploring the Eastern Edge of Prospect Hill and Union Square

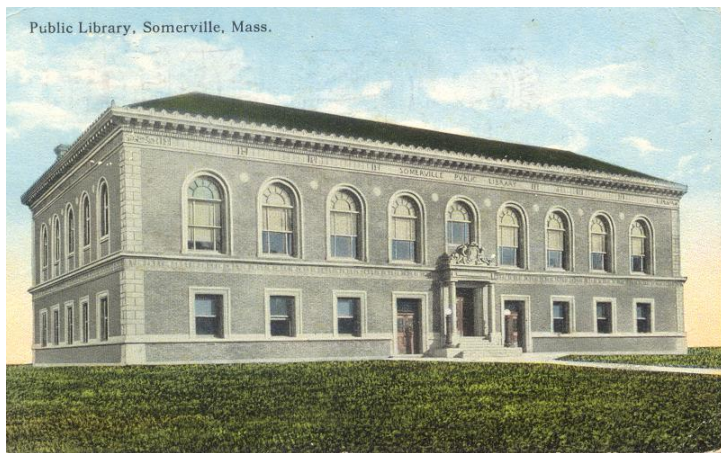
Tour researched & led by Ed Gordon, President of the Victorian Society in America, New England Chapter

Sunday, September 17, 2017

in celebration of Somerville's 175th Anniversary (1842-2017)

Co-sponsored by the Somerville Arts Council and the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission

This tour starts atop the eastern end of Central Hill, but quickly descends into the Prospect Hill neighborhood and then into Union Square proper via Boston Street to Washington Street. The route will focus on the Victorian houses of Prospect Hill, highlighting outstanding examples of carpentry, stained glass craftsmanship, and historic paint colors. The second portion of the tour will be on level land and concentrate on the east side of the Union Square Central Business District where a host of entrepreneurial businesses have been developing from the late 19th century to the present.



Somerville Central Library, 81 Highland Avenue, ca. 1914

Note that the **Somerville Public Library** at **79 Highland Avenue** looks remarkably like a cousin of the Boston Public Library at Copley Square. The architect of the Somerville Public Library, Edward Lippincott Tilton (1861-1933), early in his career, worked for the firm that designed the BPL-- McKim, Mead and White. Both libraries were designed to look like oversized Italian Renaissance palaces. Interestingly, the Somerville structure was one of thousands of American libraries funded by Andrew Carnegie, the famous steel magnate based in Pittsburgh, PA. As

a poor boy growing up in Scotland, with a strong academic bent, Carnegie was invited by a wealthy family to study in their private library. Carnegie, toward the end of his life, credited his business success to his early access to books. This central library is the eastern most of four institutional buildings set off by Central Park (created in the early 1870s) that rise from the northern edge of Central Hill.

Directly in front of the Library is the **Somerville Spanish War Monument** which commemorates the service of Somerville veterans in two separate turn-of-the-20th century armed conflicts, against Spain in both Cuba and the Philippines, as well as a third conflict in Asia. Although officially known as the China Relief Expedition, this conflict was referred to by western journalists as the Boxer Rebellion. This little known expression of American military power involved joining European allies to fight Chinese extremists who harassed foreign and Christian groups in China in 1900-1901.



Sculptor Raymond Averill Porter (1883-1949) designed the monument which has a 12' granite base topped by a 3-4' bronze eagle. Its side ledges showcase two bronze figures depicting a soldier and a sailor. Dedicated in December 1929, the casting of the bronze eagle and flanking figures is credited to T.F. McGann and Sons Company of Boston. Sculptor Porter was born in 1883 in Hermon, New York, but lived and worked in the early 1900s as a teacher and sculptor in Chicago, and thereafter in Chelmsford, Watertown and Boston, MA. At one point he taught at the Boston Museum School of Fine Art.

*Look to the southwest and southeast corners of Highland Avenue and Walnut Street to see well-preserved examples respectively of Colonial Revival and Mansard style architecture. Few could have predicted a bright future for **Highland Avenue** in the 1850s when it was little more than an unpaved path called Church Street that extended westward from*

Medford Street through undeveloped, upland pasture, and extended only as far as Central Street. Highland Avenue's prospects improved greatly as a thoroughfare of local importance during the early 1870s when the campus containing some of Somerville's finest civic buildings began to evolve within the City's first public green space, appropriately named Central Park. The municipal buildings, in turn, attracted residential construction along the length of Highland Avenue.

Representing a fine example of the Colonial Revival style, **28 Highland Avenue** was built ca.1890-1891 as a home and office for a prominent physician. Its noteworthy features are concentrated at the main façade and lean toward the Federal Revival, which is a subset of the Colonial Revival style. American architects began to rediscover their country's 18th and early 19th century designs around the time of America's 100th anniversary as a free nation in 1876 and it became wildly popular during the 1890s. In fact, since that time the Colonial Revival has never gone out of style, and is still widely used in suburban residential subdivisions, supermarkets, banks and schools. The Colonial Revival features include an elliptical fanlight-surmounted front door, flanking two-story bowed walls, a Tuscan columned front porch, and pedimented dormers. Interestingly, this house is crowned by a roof that looks back to a configuration of a hip on a mansard roof, rather than a simple hip roof that is more widely seen atop Colonial Revival houses.



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The first resident of 28 Highland Avenue appears to be Alphonso Holland Carvill, a physician. According to Edward A. Samuels in Somerville Past and Present (1897), Dr. Carvill was born in 1843 in Lewiston, ME. His initial plan to become a preacher led to enrollment at the Maine State seminary from 1858-1861, but then his religious studies were trumped by attendance at the Edward Little Institute in Auburn, ME, in preparation for Tufts College in Somerville/Medford, graduating in 1866, and then from

Harvard Medical School in 1869. After a stint as a physician in Minnesota, he settled back in Somerville in 1873. In addition to his medical practice, he immersed himself in local politics, where he became prominent as part of a campaign to establish a hospital in Somerville. He served on the hospital's building committee, and once Somerville Hospital was completed, he served on its board of directors for many years. He also served for two unspecified years as the City of Somerville's chief physician. While his two children, Sewall Albert and Lizzie Maud, attended local public schools, he served on the Somerville School Committee. His civic involvement also extended to his interest in homeopathic medicine. He served as a board member of several Boston area homeopathic societies. After Dr. Carvill's death in 1930, his heirs owned the house until it was sold in 1946 and adapted for re-use as a multi-unit apartment building.

Next walk to the Mansard roofed house at the southeast corner of Highland Avenue before strolling down Walnut Street.



The house at **81 Walnut Street** was significantly and finely restored in 2010, earning it a Preservation Award from the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission in 2011. It is a solid example of a house crowned by what the newspapers of the day called “the modern French” or a mansard roof. This type of roof was introduced to America in 1847, initially in Boston's South End neighborhood. It is a double-pitched roof that provides more room than a gable-roofed attic, and in the more affluent households of the period, servants living quarters, and even billiard rooms, could be found within a mansard's distinctive volume. The Mansard style was particularly popular in the United States from 1850-1875, but remained as a preferred configuration at building sites well-removed from city centers until as late as the mid-1880s.

The earliest known example of a mansard roof is credited to Pierre Lescot who designed a mansard roof for a portion of the Louvre Museum in Paris around 1550. By the early 1600s, the architect Francois Mansart was busy constructing buildings crowned by this easy to identify roof type. During the mid-1800s and the reign of Napoleon III the mansard roof became popular in Paris, which influenced American architects studying abroad. They subsequently introduced this roof top to the United States. The word *Mansard* in Europe also means the attic (garret) space itself, not just the roof shape, and it is often used there to mean a gambrel roof.

The site of **81 Walnut Street** is part of a six lot subdivision developed, and probably constructed, by local carpenter David F. Hulsman. By the mid-1880s, a S. Rogers lived here, and by the early 1900s, the house had been subdivided into two units containing the homes of John E. Fletcher, book keeper, and Joseph B. Clements, a steward at the Boston Tavern. Later occupants included a carpenter and milk tester (1910); a machinist and a “horse man” for a fire station (1920), and then a rigger and a luncheonette worker (1930).

Walnut Street is one of eleven very old Colonial Era range ways or county roads that run from Franklin Street in East Somerville to North Street in West Somerville. The range ways facilitated the exportation of agricultural and dairy products from the farms of the interior to the markets of Charlestown, Cambridge and Boston via the east-west traffic arteries of Broadway and Milk Row (aka Somerville Avenue). At the beginning of the American Revolution in 1775-1776, Walnut Street was traversed by the soldiers of General Israel Putnam's patriotic army who built fortifications and set up encampments atop Central and Prospect Hills. The summit of Prospect Hill provided a platform with an optimal view of British occupied Boston. Walnut Street was largely devoid of houses until around 1850 when the Munroe, Vinal and Hill families began to develop the hill's summit and southern slope. In at least two cases, Irish families lived further to the east of Walnut Street on the north side of Prospect Hill.



69 Walnut Street is the sixth and southern-most house in the David F. Hulsman development of Mansard style houses on the east side of Walnut Street. Built during the early 1870s, this group of Mansard style houses exhibit varying degrees of intactness, and in several cases their original forms are obscured by later additions. The ca.1890s Classical Revival verandah at 69 Walnut Street represents a welcome later addition that enlivens an otherwise standard Mansard style house. Early owners of this property include car agent of the Boston and Lowell Railroad, Michael T. Donohue (1874), merchant tailor B.J. Butman (1884), chemist Frederick Kitchen (early 1900s) and school administrator William O'Bear.

Built between 1860-1865, **67 Walnut Street** is a well preserved example of an Italianate house that provides evidence that houses were built in Somerville during the Civil War despite the turbulence and uncertainty of that era. The house does not appear on the McIntyre 1857 map of Somerville. Its earliest known owner is Abraham Folsom of Boston who is listed here by 1865, followed by owners, Lydia and Caleb Duxbury during the early 1870s, and Edwin Ireland as a resident beginning circa 1875. He was undoubtedly a descendant of the Ireland family of farmers who settled in Somerville well before the American Revolution.



Gracing the intersection of Walnut Street, Summit Avenue, and Boston Street, is a cluster of architecturally distinguished houses built during the second half of the 19th century. These stylish and substantial houses are situated at the summit of Prospect Hill which at 108 feet is the highest of Somerville's seven hills. Similar to the City's other hills, Prospect Hill is a drumlin composed of glacial materials piled up thousands of years ago in the wake of receding glaciers. The four houses at the Summit Avenue, Walnut Street and Boston Street intersection include:



The form of **91 Boston Street** was originally more severely rectangular. Its Greek Revival appearance has been enlivened by a two-story octagonal bay to the right of the Boston Street entrance, and also an encircling verandah and a Palladian window in the pedimented west gable that is reflective of the Colonial Revival style.

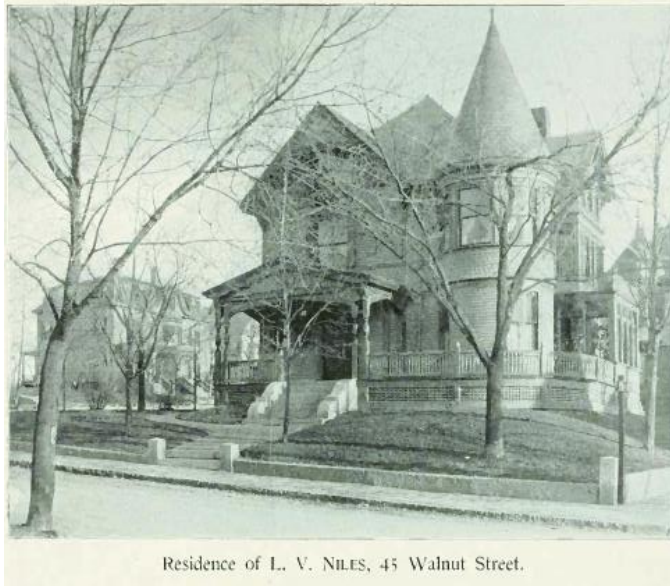
The George Simpson house at **48 Walnut Street** built ca.1870 is a stately Mansard residence that provides evidence of what the later Queen Anne architectural style was rebelling against --: self-contained geometric forms, detail confined to trim elements around doors and windows, the bulky massing of mansard roofs, and above all, a penchant for symmetry which can be seen in the fenestration of this house's first and second stories. Note the first story double doors (original?) and the second floor oriel window are flanked by single large and tripartite windows respectively.



48 Walnut Street

Around 1880, the formal, French-influenced design of **48 Walnut Street** became less desirable, replaced by the Queen Anne style, which represented a largely asymmetrical form, an eclectic mix of design influences, and the use of porches as outdoor living spaces. The style had little to do with Queen Anne who ruled England during the first decade of the 1700s, but rather it was a self-consciously picturesque style that recalled the 1690s and early 1700s period in British history when architectural design was in flux, encompassing a variety of influences, including Dutch, Baroque and the Renaissance –based early Georgian styles. During the 1860s, English architect Richard Norman Shaw brought back this turbulent period in design, and the Queen Anne style was introduced to the eastern United States by the late 1870s. The crossroads of Walnut, Boston and Summit Avenues boasts two of the most appealing towered Queen Anne houses in Somerville: **3 Summit Avenue/50 Walnut Street** and **45 Walnut Street**.

Later generations of the Hill family who pioneered living atop Prospect Hill built the double towered Queen Anne house in 1888 at **3 Summit Avenue/50 Walnut Street**. Amazingly each unit contained twelve rooms, including spacious reception halls, a bath, and a laundry! The picturesque features on the façade of this house include turned porch posts, clapboards with an overlay of Stick Style vertical and horizontal boards, bands of scalloped shaped shingles, ornamental terra cotta chimney tiles, and a corner tower with a steeply pitched conical roof cap.



Residence of L. V. NILES, 45 Walnut Street.

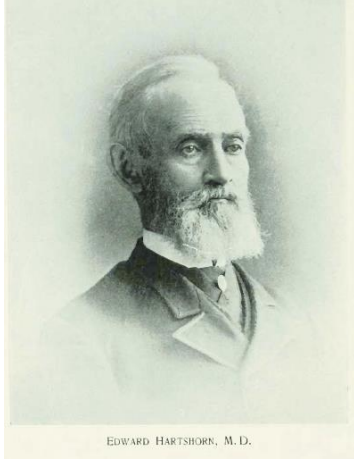
Diagonally across the street from the Hills' double house is **45 Walnut Street** which is an even more sumptuously rendered Queen Anne house of grocer Louisville Niles. Built in 1890, its restless form exhibits all types of projections, including a generously proportioned front porch, square bays, an angled attic oriel window, and a curved corner tower with a candle snuffer roof cap. Notable surface fabric includes clapboards, scalloped shingles, Medieval board and batten woodwork at the main façade's attic gable, and scallop-shaped slate roof tiles. The Niles house replaced an earlier substantial residence whose T-shaped foot print is shown on the 1874 Atlas owned by Mrs. Henry Bradshaw. All that remains of the old Bradshaw house are the block, granite elements of the front steps.

At the corner of Walnut and Boston Streets, turn onto Boston Street and head eastward. Together with Munroe Street on the south side of this hilltop, these streets form an elongated and elliptical configuration that is depicted on the 1852 Martin Draper Map of Somerville. While strolling down Boston Street pause to view the Queen Anne residence of Frank Marden.

Built in 1891-1892 for Frank Marden, a "wholesale oils salesman", **83 Boston Street** is noteworthy for the turned posts on the front porch's supporting round arches and a broad, pedimented porch roof, its alternating bands of square and scalloped shingles, a three story corner tower with a slate shingle clad conical roof cap supported by a substantial copper finial. Above all, this house possesses a porte-cochere or covered carriageway often seen as a sign of genteel living where family and guests could exit a horse drawn carriage protected from the elements by the porte-cochere's roof. Visible on the north side of this overhand is a ca.1920s concrete block garage with a broad, steeply pitched pyramidal roof cap. The lot was originally the east lawn of the Mansard style house next door to the west that was owned by the Jacob L. Hollander family during the late 19th century. Mr. Hollander was a cap manufacturer with a business located on Province Court in Boston.



83 Boston Street ca. 1946



EDWARD HARTSHORN, M. D.

Built during the early 1900s, the design of **78 Boston Street** blends Colonial Revival symmetry with such elements as clustered porch columns with the Craftsman Style's emphasis on horizontality of form, rustic wood shingle sheathing, and deep eaves. The upper sash of the dormer windows are also enlivened by diamond shaped sash. This house was once the residence of the Kelleys and the Hoods, of Hood Milk fame, and was built in the back yard of a Munroe Street house owned by a Dr. Hartshorn. The Hoods, through dint of hard work, built a milk business around 1850 with a fleet of horse drawn milk wagons from a small dairy farm atop Spring Hill to a complex of buildings in Charlestown, off Old Rutherford Avenue in the mid- 20th century.

Best evidence suggests that most of the families living atop Prospect Hill during the mid-1800s were of English ancestry. Here and there Irish families of more limited means were able to establish a foot hold atop this historic hill top. John Duggan, for example of 71-73 Boston Street, was a Massachusetts born citizen who apparently did well as a farmer and later as a realtor, judging from the size of the parcels he owned in the Prospect Hill neighborhood. Although this Greek Revival vernacular, double house has been altered by later additions and modern siding, enough clues remain to hint at its relatively early age, including its tall, twin brick chimneys. By the 1870s, Duggan's business is listed as real estate, and he had moved into the Greek Revival/Italianate House at 3 Boston Street, seen later in the tour.

Continue eastward on Boston Street to pass by the nicely detailed Queen Anne residence at **65 Boston Street** built ca.1890-1895. The original owner appears to be William Y. Wadleigh who made a name for himself as a successful wholesale grocer with a shop known as Wadleigh, Andrews & Co. on Chatham Street in Boston. Born in Sunapee, New Hampshire in 1854, Wadleigh initially worked as a farmer and banker in Newport, New Hampshire. The Wadleighs lived here from around 1895 until at least the early 1930s.

From here turn briefly south to Bigelow Street, originally called High Street, and now a visible dividing line between the larger house lots typically westward to Walnut Street and the smaller lots on this south eastern section of Prospect Hill. By the 1890s, the larger lots ranged from 9,000 to nearly 30,000 square feet. With some exceptions most parcels had been reduced since the mid-1800s by at least half to accommodate the construction of houses for family members. Southeast of Bigelow Street, the house lots are smaller because developers like W. H. Thompson drew up subdivisions in the 1870s and 1880s that were seemingly intent on maximizing their profit through the sale of smaller, 4-to-5,000 square foot lots.

Following extensive restoration work that was recognized by a Preservation Award in 2009, **2 Bigelow Street** is now a very well-preserved example of a design that blends elements of the Stick and Queen Anne styles. It was built in 1886 for Boston paint dealer Henry A. Robbins by an important Boston area contractor named Ivory Bean. Bean began his career in Brookline, MA during the 1850s working for the prominent Lawrence family. By the early 1880s he played an important role as a contractor for many houses on St. Botolph Street in Boston. By the mid-1880s he was one of many builders working atop Prospect Hill and other parts of Somerville.

*Return to Boston Street and look northward from the intersection of Boston and Greenville Streets, to look at the clapboard-clad Italianate **19 Greenville Street**. It was purchased from John Duggan ca.1850 by an Irish house painter, Joseph Q. Twombly. Masterfully restored and earning a Director's Award in 1999, the 2.5 story main block rises to a side gable roof whose attic is illuminated by an oculus window at*

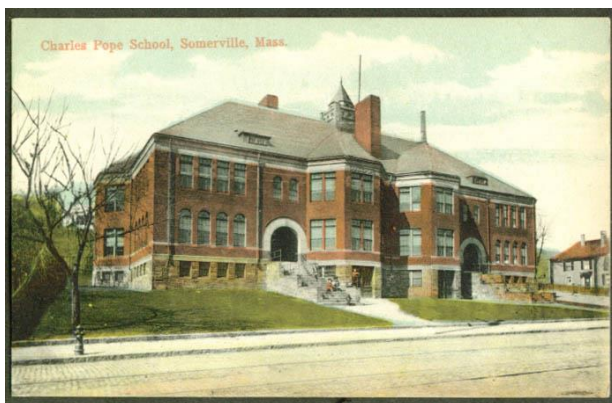
each end. The 1.5 story rear addition looks like a separate, yet connected cottage that may represent the first segment of the house to be completed.

Back on Boston Street, notice the Queen Anne house at **48 Boston Street**, built ca. early 1880s. Although its asymmetrical massing is currently sheathed in asphalt shingles, the main body of the house is appropriately painted dark green and the encircling multi-colored posts on the verandah distract attention from the loss of its original clapboards and shingles. The lot was part of W. H. Thompson's mostly undeveloped multi-lot tract east of Bigelow Street. Extant by 1884, its earliest identifiable owner is William B. Oliver, steward. By 1910 the house had been subdivided into two units occupied by Bradford Baker, carpenter, and Clifford T. Richard, clerk. By 1930 residents of this house included Jennie Trumbull, widow and Joseph Albani, an Italian barber.

During the late 1800s Somerville was overwhelmingly a city of wooden buildings. **5 Prospect Hill Street**, however, is a rare example of a brick, free-standing Queen Anne residence, built in 1886. Not surprisingly, its original owner, Richard A. Hines was a mason who apparently was well-versed in the use of terra cotta ornamentation, as seen in the string course between the first and second stories which is composed of small terra cotta and white stone elements. Also notice the mid-sized circular window to the right of the front door, and the intersecting gables that strike Carpenter Gothic and Stick Style notes as seen in their barge boards and king posts. Over time, this house was home to members of the building trades, including carpenters, plumbers, and electricians.

In all probability, **3 Boston Street** is the house shown on the 1852 Martin Draper map of Somerville near the corner of Boston and Washington Streets. Obscured by later structural alterations and modern siding, clues to its ca. 1850 origins lie in the broad, pedimented Greek Revival attic of its southeastern façade, as well as the bracketed Italianate door hood on the Boston Street façade. From ca. 1870 until the early 20th century this house was the home of Irish immigrant John Duggan who started out in the double Greek Revival house at 71-73 Boston Street and later apparently made a comfortable living as a realtor.

From 3 Boston Street look across the street to the opposite corner.



Until recently this was the site of two successive elementary schools named after Charles G. Pope School, the seventh Mayor of Somerville. Pope was a teacher, lawyer and politician who served as a member and President of the Somerville Board of Aldermen. Built circa 1890, the first Pope School was an impressive stone building whose design acknowledged Romanesque Revival and Queen Anne influences. It was demolished in 1956 to be replaced by a more modern elementary school in 1957. The building was altered significantly overtime, declared surplus by the City in 1980, and subsequently re-used as a Boys and Girls Club starting in 1981. It too was demolished in 2014 to accommodate another urgent community need -- affordable housing. The Somerville Community Corporation, a well-established local community development organization, won the bid to be the developer. Relying upon a host of government subsidies and creative financing, the SCC now rents 35 residential units for qualifying low- and moderate income households.



From Boston Street turn left onto Washington Street, which together with Somerville Avenue, once formed a historic highway extending from 'Charlestown Neck' to what is now called Massachusetts Avenue in Porter Square, Cambridge. Dairy and agricultural products heading from the farms of Concord and Lexington followed Massachusetts Ave to Porter Square, veering northeast on the Milk Row (now known as Somerville Avenue), to reach their destinations in the markets of Charlestown and Boston.

On the north side of Washington Street, at the corner of Medford Street, look southeastward toward the McGrath and O'Brien Highway, that was originally known as the Northern Artery when it was set out during the mid-1920s. It linked northeast Somerville with Boston, and is possibly the only highway in the United States named after two local priests, Monsignor McGrath who officiated at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Union Square, and Monsignor O'Brien from Church of the Sacred Heart in East Cambridge. Beyond the elevated highway is a future stop on the Green Line Extension, to be known as East Somerville, to distinguish it from the Washington Street stop in downtown Boston.



MBTA map depicting the six stops associated with the extension of the Green Line (GLX), starting from a relocated Lechmere station in East Cambridge.

*Cross over to the south side of Washington Street to pause briefly at the ca. early 1890s commercial/residential block at **157 Washington Street**. The distinctive curved red brick and brownstone trimmed façade of this building presides over the busy intersection of Medford and Washington Streets. Built between 1890 and 1895, it serves as a reminder that its existence is owed to the electric trolley introduced in 1890, bringing throngs of shoppers and workers to the area, and prompting the construction of multi-purpose masonry buildings. It also stands as a flagship building marking the eastern entry to Union Square.*

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 brick-making. It became a major commercial center as a result of its location at an important crossroad in eastern Somerville, with three major thoroughfares originating as the area's 17th and 18th century trade routes --Washington Street, Bow Street and Somerville Avenue (formerly known as Charlestown Lane and Milk Row). The first railroad lines south of the Square were introduced during the 1830s and 1840s, further spurring residential and commercial growth in the area. Between the 1850s and the 1920s, meat packing companies, including J.P. Squire, Charles North, and New England Dressed Meat and Wool, to the south and east of Somerville Avenue employed hundreds of workers, many of whom lived along the side streets in the area between Washington and Charlestown Streets.

From Washington and Medford Street, walk south to the intersection of Medford with Somerville Avenue.

Conveniently situated next to the McGrath and O'Brien Highway, the auto body shop at **181 Somerville Avenue** traces its origins to 1927, when it was first called the Northern Artery Filling Station. This commercial building is enhanced by a Colonial Revival cupola and a gable pediment. It marks the beginning of a proliferation of independent gas stations, separate from private parking garage facilities, throughout the country, and signifies how entrenched automobile use had become. Automobile traffic was introduced to Union Square in the early 20th century, and vehicular circulation has significantly influenced the area's subsequent development. The later construction of Route 28 at the east end of the district linked this area of Somerville to Cambridge and Medford.



From Medford Street continue westward on Somerville Avenue. Interestingly, the segment of this thoroughfare from Medford Street to Carlton Street was originally set out in 1830 over filled-in wetlands associated with the no longer visible Miller's River which was located one long block to the south of this route. Originally Bow Street, on the west side of Union Square, was part of Somerville Ave/Milk Row and, indeed, its name derives from its bowed shape which was purposely set out this way to avoid the marshy areas to the south.

Note the small, unassuming stucco-parged building on the right at **203-205 Somerville Avenue** (circa 1920). Originally housing the Trinity Italian Presbyterian Church, the congregation has since joined the Clarendon Hill Presbyterian Church in West Somerville. This gable-roofed, chapel-scale ecclesiastical building was later home to a succession of Italian churches between the late 1920s and early 1940s, including the Chiesa Evangelic Italian Church. The interior does not appear to retain evidence of its original church uses.

Now look at **217 Somerville Avenue**, on the opposite corner of Rossmore Street. It is a much altered building dedicated in 1923 to house the Sleeping Virgin Greek Orthodox Church, later named the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox. It first appears on the 1933–1934 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map as the Hellenic Orthodox Church. The first Greek Orthodox Church in Somerville was located at 5 Bow Street, with services held in a rented hall. An increase in Greek immigrants settling in Somerville led the community to construct a proper Greek Orthodox Church. The building was dedicated in 1923 and designed by Boston architect William A. Dykeman (1872–1949), a Boston architect with a home in the Winter Hill neighborhood of Somerville. He also designed numerous single-family and

apartment dwellings in the greater Boston area, including a group of single-family homes for developer Jason S. Bailey in West Roxbury.

Following World War II, the church became too small to accommodate the growing congregation, and by 1948, the congregation had left the building. It was acquired circa 1950 by the American Legion Post 447 who took possession and clad the building with vinyl siding and altered the fenestration.

The siting of these two buildings is reflective of the proximity of the two immigrant groups who attended services at these churches and lived nearby, especially in the Brickbottom neighborhood on the east side of the McGrath and O'Brien Highway. They were clustered around Union Square to be near the industrial concerns located on the south side of the Square that provided a great deal of employment opportunities.

Although the buildings on Somerville Avenue west of Medford Street are greatly altered, one can find a sampling of intact, contiguous properties of considerable historic design interest. Their surviving features attest to the area's turn-of-the 20th century prosperity. One streetscape notable for historic protection for future generations encompasses **216** and **218/218B-222 Somerville Avenue**.



The main façade of the tall and narrow masonry commercial/residential block known as the Edward J. Llewellyn, at **216 Somerville Avenue (1896)**, is dominated by a broad, full-length three-story oriel bay, comprised of galvanized iron. This massive projection features the initials E.J.L. 1896 on one of its ornamental panels which stands for Edward J. Llewellyn.

Edward J. Llewellyn and his wife Margaret constructed the building at **216 Somerville Avenue** from about 1895 to 1896. The small mixed-use block with a single storefront on the ground floor and two apartments above appears on the 1895 Bromley map (labeled Margaret Llewellyn), but the panel on the building indicates that it was completed in 1896. By that time, wood-frame houses occupied many of the lots on the block, and the Llewellyn Building was one of the few masonry structures in the area with a rare cast-iron facade.

Llewellyn immigrated to Massachusetts from Ireland in 1867. The 1900 census lists him as a painter and his wife, Margaret, as a grocer, presumably operating out of the ground-floor storefront at their residence on Somerville Avenue. Another Irish immigrant, John Sweeney, owned a grocery store two doors down, at 212 Somerville Avenue, in 1900. By 1911, City Directories indicate that Sweeney had moved his store and residence to the Llewellyn Building, where he continued to operate the grocery store through ca. 1925. His son Thomas then took it over through at least 1945. The 1950, 1956, and 1960 City Phone Books indicate that the storefront was vacant for many years after Sweeney closed the grocery store.

Next door at **218-218B Somerville Avenue** is a handsome two-story commercial block built in 1926 in the Colonial Revival style, complete with boldly rendered ribbon and swag ornamentation. The ground floor storefronts were occupied by Rafaele D. Vasta's fish store and Salvatore Ciano's grocery. Early occupants of this building include Rafaele Campostoso, meat cutter, Salvatore Nardella, meat worker, and

Anthony Douglas, waiter. This property is clearly tied to the early Italian community in Union Square, with two of the occupants working for the meat packing industry long associated with this part of Somerville.



A good example of an older building being adaptively reused for a totally new use is **40 Merriam Street**, which has been converted to a popular watering hole, the **Bantam Cider Company** (www.bantamcider.com). Their industrial-style taproom offers a variety of craft ciders produced on the premises from freshly pressed, seasonal New England apples. Launched in 2014, the idea for the company idea came from a family tradition of winemaking. They see their mission as being part of a creative process that changes the way people experience cider, and to play an active role in the community.

Bantam Cider is contiguous with the now vacant automobile body shop which was originally known as the **Barnes and Walsh Company Building, 224 Somerville Avenue, built circa 1933**. Despite being a utilitarian building, this concrete and brick commercial structure, constructed during the early 1930s, has substantial aesthetic appeal. The concrete walls suggest formal rustication, while the curving, stepped parapet has a Art Deco sensibility.



Cross Somerville Avenue and head north on Merriam Street. Maps from the 19th century indicate that this section of Merriam between Washington Street and Somerville Avenue was originally called Mystic Street, while the Merriam name was at first confined to the segment between Somerville Avenue and Charlestown Street.

Next walk to the former MBTA Car Barn (1927) which was converted in the early 1980's to house a portion of Somerville's Police and Fire Departments. Its original use is best seen at the bricked-in openings on the sides facing Merriam Street and Somerville Avenue.

Cross Washington Street and go slightly westward to view a remarkable survival from the 18th century.

The William P. Walker House at 215 Washington Street is the most architecturally significant residence within the Union Square area by virtue of its prominent siting, notable architectural elements, and distinctive L-shaped gambrel-roofed volume. The house's second story and attic date from the mid-1700s, making its gambrel roof appropriate to the period when this type of roof was popular (ca.1700–80), rather than an example of a mid-1800s revival of a Colonial roof type. A gambrel roof is highly practical as it accommodates a more commodious attic space than a standard hip roof and allows for little snow accumulation.



A new first story was constructed in 1860 without demolishing its original. This type of house expansion was not uncommon in New England towns, but was more typically practiced where the original buildings were elevated to allow the insertion of commercial storefronts under the original first story. George P. Walker, employed at the Warren Hotel once located in Union Square, may have made the alterations.

*Return eastward, and notice the stone marker commemorating the bravery and patriotism of **James Miller**, who was killed during a skirmish with the British on their Retreat from Lexington on April 19, 1775. As the British made their way around Prospect Hill toward Charlestown, he is reputed to have said to his sons that "I am too old to run but not to fight." Inside the Post Office there is a poignant representation of the event on the wall.*



This painting depicts a skirmish between the British Red Coats and patriotic local citizens at the base of Prospect Hill on April 19, 1775. Ross Moffett's iconic mural, created as part of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) grant in 1937, resides within the lobby of Somerville's once Main, but now shuttered United States Post Office building.

The final stop is the **Hannah Allen Block** at the southeast corner of Merriam and Washington Streets. Hannah J. Allen was born in Massachusetts in 1822. She married Channey Booth in 1848, and by 1850 they resided at McLean Asylum for the Insane 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. The Allens apparently lived in a no longer extant residence at the southwest corner of Munroe and Boston Streets on the eastern slope of Prospect Hill. One of Mr. Allen's properties was 210 Washington Street, built to house two stores and six residential units. The earliest known commercial tenants were Henry Freitag who operated a bakery, while the other use by 1924 was Decio Biondi's grocery store. Some Somerville residents may still remember the Rossmore Cafe which occupied both storefronts during the 1940s. Allen apparently built this Queen Anne structure to take advantage of the new electric trolley service to Somerville in 1890. This transportation development resulted in a great wave of building construction with nearly half of Somerville's housing stock built between 1890 and 1910.

Thank you for participating in this tour! Since this area that is very much in transition, expect more changes to come, bringing Somerville into a new age, with multi-faceted development, yet still respectful and appreciative of its architectural and creative manufacturing heritage.

This brochure was produced by the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission, in concert with Edward Gordon, historical researcher and tour leader, as part of the 2017 ArtsUnion Grant Program. The program is designed to boost the cultural economic development of Union Square, Somerville. Managed by the Somerville Arts Council, ArtsUnion works in collaboration with numerous local organizations, artists, businesses, and community members to spark community-wide excitement about the Square, and create new economic opportunities for local artists. ArtsUnion is funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council and its John and Abigail Adams Art Program.

Established in 1985, the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (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 materials as part of its public outreach and educational mission. Its Staff can be reached via www.somervillema.gov/historicpreservation or 617-625-6600, extension 2500.

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