

# Bicycle Tour of Historic Somerville

May 31, 2009

## Somerville's Historic Houses of Worship

**START** –  
Somerville City Hall, 93 Highland Ave

Until 1870, when it was extended from Central Street to Davis Square, Highland Avenue was known as Church Street.

**A** – On the right is **125 Highland Ave**, currently the Iglesias de Restauración and the Masonic Hall. This unusual 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian Romanesque (“Lombard”) church was designed by noted Boston architect **Ralph Adams Cram** for the **First Universalist Church**. Built 1916-1923, when the congregation moved from West Somerville.



**B** – Across the street at **130 Highland Ave** sits the Richardsonian Romanesque building housing the Mission Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This striking granite structure by Hartwell and Richardson was the third building on Central Hill to house the **First Unitarian Church** of Somerville, and was built in 1894.

**C** – On the corner at **399 Medford St** and as we turn up Thurston St sits the parish complex of **St. Ann's Church** (Roman Catholic). The main church structure, on the corner, is a brick-and-granite Romanesque Revival building, built 1897-1899 to replace the former, stick-style church which burned in 1894. That first church was rebuilt (though highly altered) and became the parish hall. Also on the property are the Rectory, built 1885, the Convent (1923), and the School (1915-16).



**D (STOP)** – The Byzantine-styled synagogue at **201 Central St** is **Temple B'nai Brith**, built in 1919-1925. Its location was chosen to be convenient for the Jewish communities of both Somerville and Medford. The beautiful hand-carved mahogany ark in the sanctuary is one of the oldest in New England. It came from a temple in Boston's North End that was razed in 1915. Much of the interior woodwork is original.



**E** – Almost across the street from Temple B'nai Brith is the Vida Real church at **404 Broadway** (at the corner with Central). Formerly **Broadway Winter Hill Congregational**, this Shingle Style building by Hartwell and Richardson has a granite first story and was constructed in the 1890's. The Congregational Society's 1871 Gothic chapel still stands as the Church's west wing (not visible from Central Street).

**F** – On the right corner of Heath Street at **30 Temple St** is the home of the Evangelical Haitian Church of Somerville, originally built as the **Somerville Evangelical Association Church**. This building has been home to a number of uses over the years, including time as a martial arts studio.



**G** – Prominently sited on a triangular lot at **100 Temple St** is the former **St. Polycarp's Roman Catholic Church**, now the Missionary Church of the Haitian Community. This buff brick and cast stone Romanesque Revival church, designed by the important Boston architectural firm of O'Connell & Shaw, was built between 1927 and 1933 to accommodate local residents who had previously been part of the Parish of St. Ann. The sculptures over the entrance, shown at left, were unfortunately recently removed. The complex also contains a 1931 Colonial Revival rectory building, now home to the Just-A-Start program.



**H** – Facing Foss Park at **66 Fellsway West** is the stuccoed chapel-scale Gothic Revival styled **Christ Episcopal Church**. The smaller original church, at the back of the lot, was built in 1914, and today reads as an ell projecting from the larger sanctuary erected in 1926. The building is also home to Temple Adventiste du 7eme Jour Shekinah and Comunidad Batista Shalom Internacional de Somerville.



**I (STOP)** – At **25 Hathorn St** (on the corner of Arlington St) is **St. Benedict's Church**. This Roman Catholic church, built in 1911, is a Spanish Mission-style church with a central nave plan. The original stucco façade and a corner tower with an open belfry were removed in 1963, but the interior retains its original neoclassical features intact from 1911, and was recently renovated, restoring some of the original details. Also of note on the property, at 25 Arlington Street, is the 1934 neoclassical brick rectory building.

**J** – On the right approaching Pearl Street is the building known as **Grace Baptist Church** at **59 Cross St**. Now the home of the Iglesia Adventista de Septimo dia de Somerville and Eglise Baptiste Eben-Ezer, this brick Richardsonian Romanesque Revival building was built in 1892 to house the Perkins Street Baptist congregation. The contrasting stone string courses and other details help to create variety and interest.



**K** – Adjacent to the railroad tracks at **138 Cross St** stands a building with an interesting story. Built originally in 1869 to house the First Universalist Church, the building has had a long and varied history as the Cross Street Orpheum theatre, and later Bennett Plumbing Supply, before becoming the Sanctuary Condominiums. The interior spaces of the lofts inside still hold echoes of the building's past.

**L** – A prominent feature of Union Square both visually and historically has been **St. Joseph's Church** at **264 Washington St / 13 Webster Ave**. Built in 1871-1874 in the Victorian Gothic style, the church was the first Roman Catholic church in Somerville. While at the time Roxbury Puddingstone would have typically been used for Boston churches, St. Joseph's was constructed of red brick and granite. Its steeple was removed in 1978.



**M** – Built in 1870, with a later addition in 1907-1913, **St. Thomas' Episcopal Church** at **300 Somerville Ave** is now the Foursquare Church after a time spent as the Walnut Street Center. This modest wooden Greek Revival church originally had board and batten siding and a steeple on the right side. Its street appearance has been greatly altered, but the interior nave with its exposed wooden trusses and Gothic, diamond pattern windows remains intact.

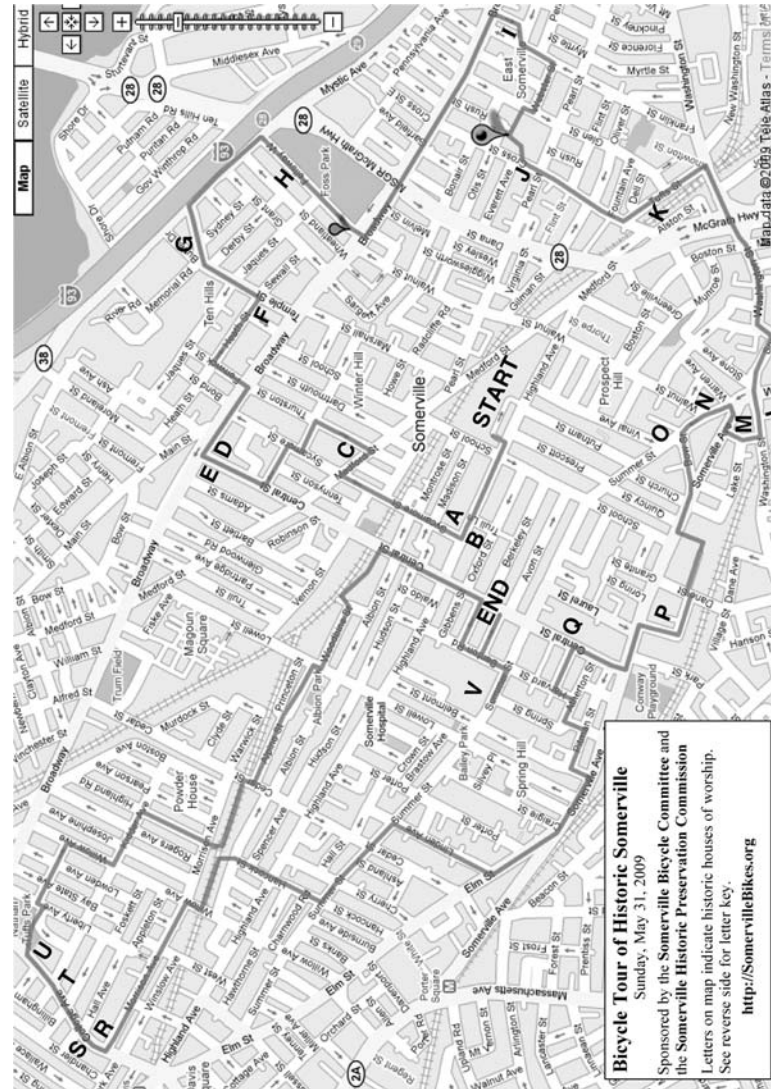


**N** – On the right at **17 Bow St** stands the Richardsonian Romanesque former **Prospect Hill Congregational Church**, now condos (interior, shown right). Built in 1887 and designed by Henry S. McKay, the building is part of the Bow Street Historic District. The congregation was founded by, among others, H.P. Hood, whose original dairy was located in Somerville, and John North, owner of North Packing Company in Cambridge.



(Map included for reference; a full-size map is available, and the full map and turn-by-turn cue sheet are available online at:

<http://www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/280441>  
<http://www.bikely.com/cuesheet/route/280441>



Sponsored by the **Somerville Bicycle Committee** and the **Somerville Historic Preservation Commission**. Thank you for joining us!

Thank you to those institutions who kindly allowed us in for a visit.



**O** – Also recently converted into condominiums, 1 **Summer St** was built as the **First Methodist Church**, begun in 1858 and completed in 1874. The building’s pointed arches and generally monochrome appearance place it as an early Gothic Revival style. Though begun at the beginning of that style’s period, it was finished after most such building had ceased elsewhere in the country. The steeple, which originally reached 90 feet, was removed after the hurricane of 1938. The

funds to erect the building were raised in part by Charles Taylor of the Boston Globe, who sold bricks for \$1 each to raise the funds. Between its use as a church and its current use as condos, the building was home to community organizations.



**P** – At the corner of Properzi Way and Somerville Ave (**8 Properzi Way**) is the **St. Anthony of Padua** (Roman Catholic) Church. The Church itself, built from 1916 to 1925, is a Romanesque Revival building in the Latin Cross tradition, and the parish has strong historical associations with Somerville’s early twentieth century Italians. Father Nazareno

Properzi (for whom the street is named) was sent from Italy in 1915 by the Scalabrinian Order to tend to Italian Catholics in Somerville. He reportedly assisted in the design of the church’s exterior elevations and its interior decoration. The architect, Andrew Cippolini, was local, and his brother, Benedict, was the sculptor responsible for the images of the Virgin Mary which flank the center entrance (sculpture photo by Karen Marlene Larsen).



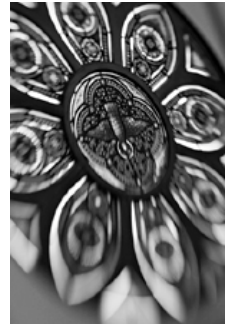
**Q** – Just as the route turns left off of Central Street, look uphill to the right to see the **Dormition of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church**, located at **29 Central St**. The Church’s sanctuary was originally built in 1922 as an Elk’s Club meeting hall, and achieved its present Byzantine Revival appearance around 1950. The modern education/office/community wing was built in 1965, and the masonry narthex that projects from the sanctuary’s south wall is from 1985-1990.

**R** – **45 College Ave**, at the corner of Morrison, is the first of a series of religious buildings along College Ave. Built as the **Third Universalist Church** in 1884, this Stick Style/Queen Anne building is unusual in its wood construction during a period when nearly all church buildings were made of stone or brick. The building is currently home to the Eglise Baptiste de la Bible.



**S** – Across College Ave at **64 College Ave/14 Chapel St** we see the **United Methodist Church**, prominently sited as the road curves. This English Collegiate Gothic building was constructed in 1925 of Weymouth granite. The massing of the building is positioned for maximum picturesque effect; particularly striking is the view from Chapel Street.

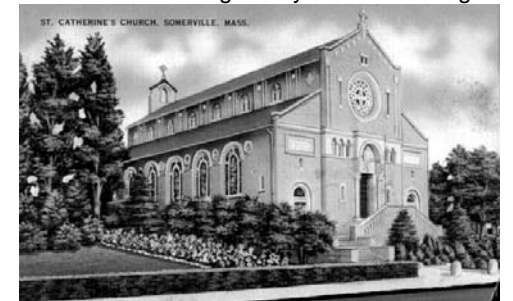
**T (STOP)** – Diagonally across from the Methodist Episcopal Church, at **89 College Ave**, the **First Church Somerville (Congregational/UCC)** is a prominently-sited, stuccoed Gothic Revival building. Constructed in 1912, the façade is dominated by the bold massing of the tower and the tall and broad end gable of the sanctuary. The colorful rose window (right, photo by Steve McFarland) in the south wall was removed from the predecessor Franklin Street Congregational Church in East Somerville (built 1867) and reinstalled at the College Ave church in 1965.



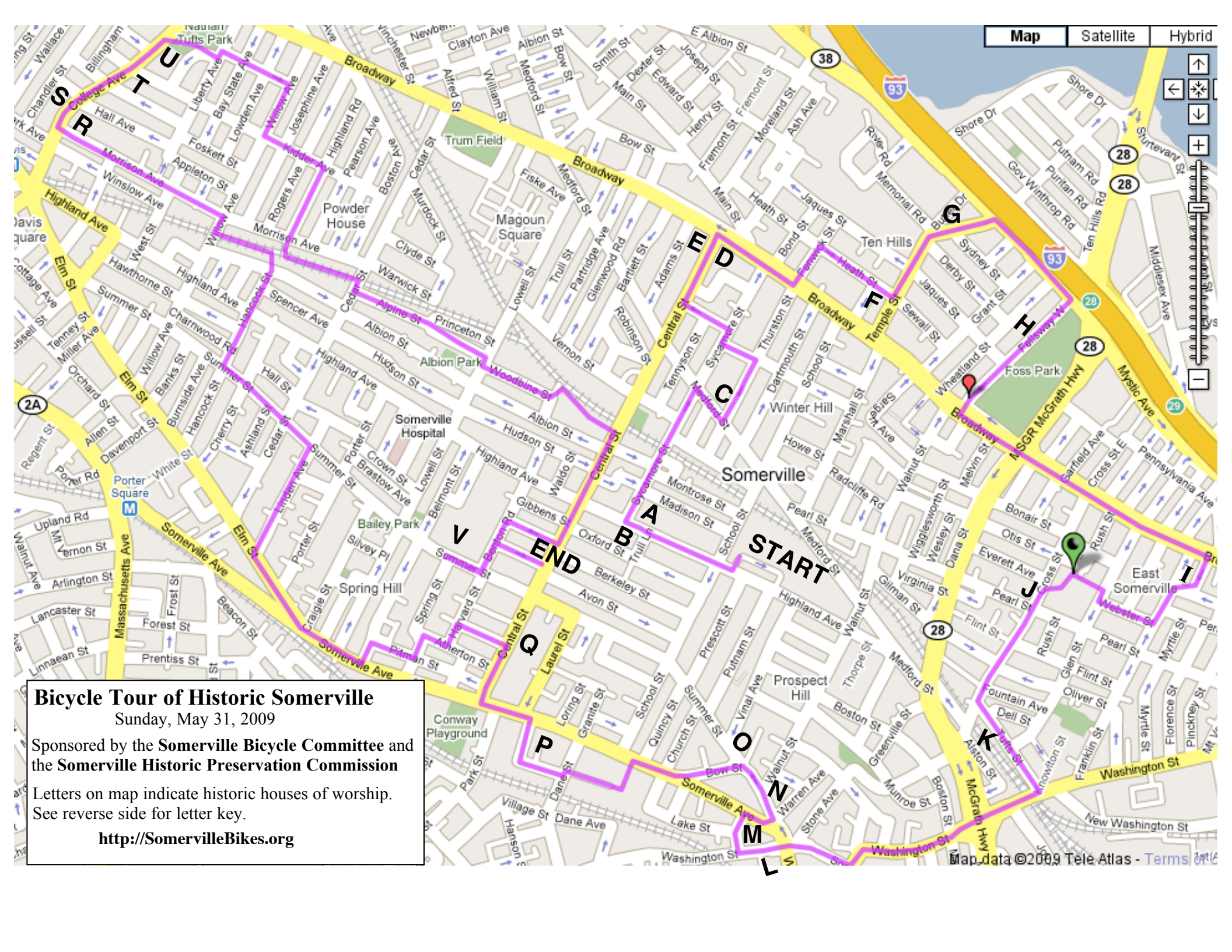
**U** – While its history as a religious building is not immediately obvious, keep an eye out for the Queen Anne residential building at **113 College Ave**. Originally built in 1901-2 as the residence of Pastor J. V. Garten from the West Somerville Baptist Church, the house in 1968 became a major national focus for an alternative Jewish religious movement. **Havurat Shalom** was at one point said to be the most famous Havurah (literally, fellowship – a synagogue community with no rabbi, no congregational bureaucracy, and no formal

permanent structure) in America. Despite the community’s low emphasis on permanence, the house continues to be the home of the Havurat Shalom community.

**V (STOP)** – Located at **179 Summer St**, the **Church of St. Catherine of Genoa** was built from 1907 to 1916. Designed by Charles Donagh Maginnis, one of the leading Catholic architects in America and an Irish immigrant, this is widely considered the finest example of his work, and has been described as “one of the most beautiful churches in America.”



**END** - Somerville Museum, One Westwood Road – Thanks again to the Museum for their hospitality. Come in and see the exhibit of the recent Historic Preservation Awards!



## Bicycle Tour of Historic Somerville

Sunday, May 31, 2009

Sponsored by the **Somerville Bicycle Committee** and the **Somerville Historic Preservation Commission**

Letters on map indicate historic houses of worship.  
See reverse side for letter key.

<http://SomervilleBikes.org>

## **Bicycle Tour of Historic Somerville - May 31, 2009**

Somerville's Historic Houses of Worship

**START** - Somerville City Hall, 93 Highland Ave

**A** - 125 Highland Ave- Masonic Hall and Iglesias de Restauración - formerly First Universalist Church

**B** - 130 Highland Ave - Mission Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ, formerly First Unitarian Church

**C** - 399 Medford St - St. Ann's Church (Roman Catholic) and Rectory

**D** - 201 Central St - Temple B'nai Brith (Jewish)

**E** - 404 Broadway - Vida Real church, formerly Broadway Winter Hill Congregational

**F** - 30 Temple St - Evangelical Haitian Church of Somerville, originally Somerville Evangelical Association Church (and later a martial arts studio)

**G** - 100 Temple St - Missionary Church of the Haitian Community, formerly St Polycarp's (Roman Catholic)

**H** - 66 Fellsway West - Christ Episcopal Church (also Temple Adventiste du 7eme Jour Shekinah and Comunidad Batista Shalom International de Somerville)

**I** - 25 Hathorn St - St. Benedict's (Roman Catholic)

**J** - 59 Cross St - Iglesia Adventista de Septimo dia de Somerville, and Eglise Baptiste Eben-Ezer; originally Perkins Street Baptist Church

**K** - 138 Cross St - former First Universalist Church, later Cross Street Orpheum theatre, later Bennett Plumbing Supply, now Sanctuary Condominiums

**L** - 264 Washington St / 13 Webster Ave - St. Joseph's (Roman Catholic)

**M** - 300 Somerville Ave - Foursquare Church, originally St. Thomas' Episcopal Church (and later Walnut Street Center)

**N** - 17 Bow St - former Prospect Hill Congregational Church, now condos

**O** - 1 Summer St - former First Methodist Church, now condos

**P** - 8 Properzi Way - St. Anthony of Padua (Roman Catholic)

**Q** - 29 Central St - Dormition of the Virgin Mary (Greek Orthodox)

**R** - 45 College Ave - Eglise Baptiste de la Bible, formerly Third Universalist Church

**S** - 64 College Ave - United Methodist Church

**T** - 89 College Ave - First Church Somerville (Congregational/UCC)

**U** - 113 College Ave - Havurat Shalom (Jewish)

**V** - 179 Summer St - St. Catherine of Genoa (Roman Catholic)

**END** - Somerville Museum, One Westwood Road

A complete turn-by-turn cue sheet is online at <http://www.bikely.com/cuesheet/route/280441>