From Bow Street to Brickbottom: Union Square and Its Early Industrial Preeminence and Immigration

A Historic Walking Tour Led by Edward W. Gordon

September 2013

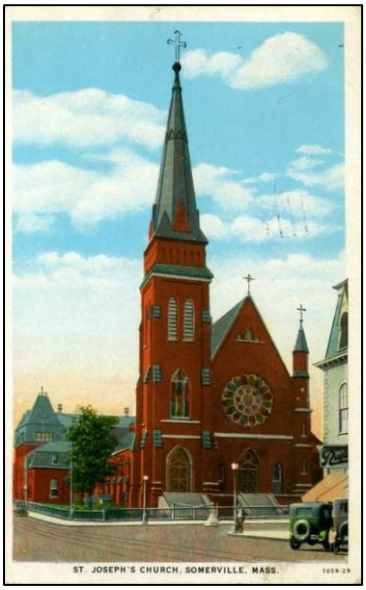
Union Square was becoming a hub of industry as early as 1820. The Middlesex Bleachery and Dye Works—currently the site of Conway Park on Somerville Avenue—was said to be the oldest textile finishing plant in the United States. The Square was initially called Sand Pit Square because its sand yielded a fine grade of silica used in glass making; it also yielded clay for brick making. In the mid-19th century the area witnessed rapid growth in several important industrial enterprises, such as the Union Glass Company and the American Tube Works, as well as numerous small woodworking shops, ice businesses, and both brick manufacturing and carriage-making concerns. By the late 19th century, the meatpacking industry was at its height, providing hundreds of jobs to immigrant newcomers. The success of these enterprises made Union Square an important contributor to the industrial prominence of Somerville well into the 20th century.

Union Square also became a major commercial center due to its location at an important crossroads in eastern Somerville. Its three major thoroughfares—Washington Street, Bow Street, and Somerville Avenue (formerly Charlestown Lane and Milk Row)—originated as 17th and 18th century trade routes. Middlesex County farm products were hauled through the Square to be sold at markets in Charlestown and Boston. Residential and commercial growth of the area was further spurred by the introduction of the first railroad lines near the Square during the 1830s and 1840s.

During the late 19th century, industrial expansion of Union Square required the creation of new land to accommodate additional factory buildings. Since the northern side of the Square was hilly and therefore better suited to residential than commercial construction, industrial development occurred mostly on the southern side, but not before the landscape was radically reworked. First, Miller's River had to be filled in, and eventually the river disappeared beneath the fill materials. As early as 1830, a new segment of old Milk Row (Somerville Avenue) was thrust across the filled-in marshland between Carlton and Washington Streets. Bow Street had originally been part of Somerville Avenue, but its path curved to avoid the wetlands. The Union Glass Works was established at Prospect Street and Webster Avenue in 1854, and further to the east, the North Packing and Provision Co., a meatpacking firm, built a complex on the East Cambridge–Somerville line in 1867. Following the introduction of several railroad lines, namely the Boston and Lowell Railroad (1835), the Fitchburg Railroad (late 1830s), and the Grand Junction Railroad (1854), Somerville products could be easily shipped from the factories to destinations much further afield.

The heart of Union Square, at the historic crossroads of Somerville Avenue, Bow Street, Washington Street, and Webster Street, is ringed by several noteworthy landmarks and is an ideal place to begin our historic walking tour.

The major landmark in Union Square is **St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church** at Washington and Webster Streets. Until St. Joseph's Church opened in 1870–74, Somerville's 2000 Catholics (mostly of Irish descent) were forced to walk considerable distances to worship in Charlestown and Cambridge. Land became available with the 1870 purchase of the Mayo estate, and architect James Murphy designed a new and much needed Victorian Gothic Church. Pastor Monsignor Christopher C. McGrath held the first services in 1871, and he presided over the congregation for the next 63years! Architecturally, St. Joseph's is a notable example of Victorian Gothic design. Sadly, the steeple of the church was removed in 1978 for fear that structural instability would cause it to collapse, and the Square lost a significant and very striking marker.



The **Eberle Building at 31–33 Somerville Avenue (1884)** is constructed in the Queen Anne style. Of note are its original and exemplary Victorian window surrounds. It was named for Phillip Eberle, a shoe dealer who lived next door at **34 Somerville Avenue**, in a house he constructed himself in the 1870s. Notable architectural elements include a steeply pitched and delightfully quirky mansard roof.

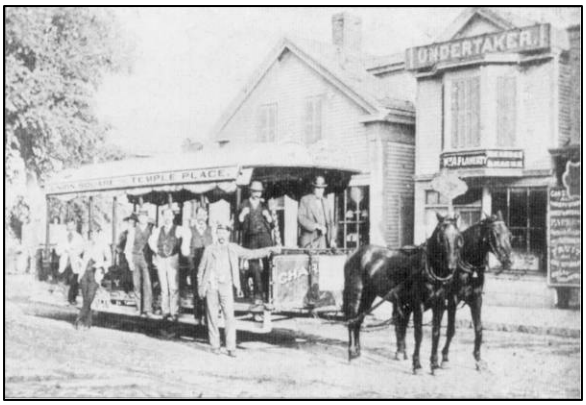
Presiding over the intersection of Bow Street and Somerville Avenue is the **Hill Building** at **38 Union Square**. Built ten years before the Eberle Building, the Hill Building was originally constructed as a four-story Second Empire commercial building by local real estate developer Ira Hill. who lived atop Prospect Hill at the northeast corner of Walnut and Boston Streets. Unfortunately, the top two floors, complete with paneled brick chimneys and a mansard roof, were removed in 1935, probably to reduce heating bills and real estate taxes or to avoid the threat of fire. Ira Hill also financed other Somerville development projects, including the Pythian Block (ca.1872) and the Warren Hotel (1872).

Before we head east from the heart of the Square, observe the structure with the steeply pitched gable roof located just west of Phillip Eberle's building and house.

In contrast to the prominent location of St. Joseph's, **St. Thomas Episcopal Church** is largely hidden from view by trees and buildings. This one-and-a-half-story end-gable building was designed in the Gothic Revival style in 1870 by the construction firm of George Trefren & Son. The original board and batten siding on the support walls of the church's brick foundation is now covered with vinyl. The building started out as a rectangular hall measuring 25 feet by 70 feet. By 1897 a vestibule and spired tower enlivened the northwest corner. Between 1907 and 1913 the side aisles and chancel were added to the south end. The tower was taken down around 1930, and by then the vestibule on the Somerville Avenue (main) facade had achieved its present full length. The church's beginnings are rooted in St. John's Episcopal Church on Devens Street in Charlestown. The first pastor, George W. Durrell, presided over a congregation of 130 parishioners from 1870 to 1895. During the 1960s the congregation dissolved, and since then the building has housed a nursery school, Haitian and Hispanic religious communities, and different nonprofit agencies.

St. Thomas Church - 1960s

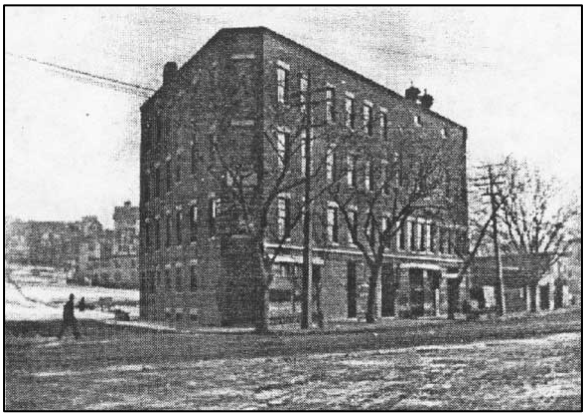
Continue eastward to the plaza in front of the Independent restaurant and consider several buildings that greatly contribute to the architectural and historical significance of today's Union Square.



The oldest building in Union Square is situated at the southeast corner of Webster Street and Somerville Avenue and currently houses the Mid-Nite Convenience Store. Built as a residence ca.1845, this wood-frame Greek Revival–style residence was extant when the Prince of Wales passed through Union Square on his way back to Boston after an 1859 visit to Harvard University. Although altered to suit a commercial purpose, several original features survive, including the returns on the gable ends, the well-defined corner boards, and the clapboard siding. Old photographs also depict the neighboring building, the Oasis, which is a larger Greek Revival–style building bordering its west wall. Built ca. 1850 and razed at an undetermined date, the beautiful two-and-a-half-story Oasis served as a grocery store and local meeting place.

Last Board of Selectmen in 1873, before the new City Charter adopted a Board of Alderrmen. Quincy A. Vinal is on the far right.

The building was originally part of the real estate portfolio of Robert Aldersey Vinal, who was a Prospect Hill real estate magnate, a grain dealer, and a notable politician. After the Civil War, Vinal Avenue and the adjacent house lots were subdivided to create a 100-lot development owned by the Vinal family. Although Robert Vinal's residence no longer exists, the home of his brother, Quincy Adams Vinal, still stands on Aldersey Street.



On the north side of Union Square is the **Stone Building (Barristers Hall) (1891) at 57–61 Union Square**. The eponym and original owner of the Stone Building was Jonathan Stone, a prominent carriage maker. He constructed the building on ancestral land to contain an Odd Fellows Hall, a large reception room, a ladies' parlor, a gentlemen's smoking room, and a coatroom. On an upper floor was a large banquet hall with a seating capacity of 300. The Stone Building also included four large stores, one of which was occupied by the Somerville Savings Bank. Frederick Stone, Jonathan's son, was the bank's first treasurer and held the position for 43 years. This much-altered structure of steel frame construction is faced with a brick curtain wall. This construction predates the first steel frame building in Boston, the Winthrop Building (at Washington and Water Streets), which was not built until three years later. Granite was used for the Stone Building's foundation and lintels, and most of the now-covered decorative details were originally concentrated on the first floor.

The Stone Building sits near the location of the pre–Revolutionary War Piper's Tavern, which served the busy Colonial crossroads now known as Union Square. On the east wall of the Stone Building is a colorful mural depicting George Washington reviewing the troops. It was created in 1994 by local artist Be Allen Sargent.

Located just to the east of the **Stone Building** is the **former Police Headquarters (1932)** at **70 Union Square**, built to replace the first police headquarters on Bow Street (1874). The architect of this handsome Renaissance and Georgian Revival building is not known. The structure housed an expanding police force of 150 officers and a constabulary when it was completed in 1932. In the mid-1980s, the City rehabilitated a former MBTA car barn at the eastern edge of the Square to serve as a joint headquarters for the police and fire departments. Concurrently the City sold this building to a private developer to adaptively reuse it for offices and an eatery on the lower level, the original location of the Elephant Walk Restaurant.

The triangular island at Washington Street and Somerville Avenue has long been occupied by a fire station. An Engine House was built on this site in the 1850s and later demolished to accommodate the present **Fire Station** in 1903–04. Walter T. Littlefield, the City's Commissioner of Buildings, provided its Georgian design, with a tower originally capped by an octagonal roof and colonial weathervane. Although the station's clock tower has since been reduced in height, the structure remains an important focal point within the Square and currently serves as the headquarters for Somerville Cable Access Television (SCATV).

Built in 1935, **the United States Post Office/Somerville Main Post Office** at **237 Washington Street** replaced a wood-framed Prospect Hill School House that had occupied this key intersection since at least the early 1850s. Architects Louis Adolph Simon and Maurice P. Mead provided the City of Somerville with an unusually fine example of a Colonial Revival post office building. Rising a single story from a granite block basement to a flat shingle-sheathed hip roof, its walls are laid up in Flemish bond brick with limestone trimmings. Ross Embrose Moffett (1888–1971), a key figure in the Provincetown Art Colony in the early 20th century, painted the lobby mural to depict a scene from the Revolutionary War era. The mural was made possible through funding from Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) and has become a defining feature of the building. The Federal Government decided to cease the building's operations as a post office in 2013, and it is expected to be sold to a private developer in the near future for adaptive reuse.

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 in that it accommodates a more commodious attic space than a standard hip roof and moreover allows 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 in cases where the original buildings were elevated to allow the insertion of commercial storefronts under original first stories. The person responsible for this alteration may have been George P. Walker, who was employed at the Warren Hotel that was once located in Union Square.

The Walker House faces the former MBTA Car Barn (1927), which was adapted for reuse as the **Somerville Police and Fire Department Building** during the mid-1980s. You can best see evidence of the original use via the bricked- in openings on the Merriam Street and Somerville Avenue sides; they allowed for ventilation of the car barn.

Directly across Merriam Street is a solid, restrained example of a late Victorian commercial/residential block that is symbolic of Somerville as it began a period of great expansion, both in terms of population and construction activity. This 1890s commercial-residential building at **210 Washington Street** currently houses the Lucky Spot Convenience Store. The building survives from the early days of the electric trolley that brought shoppers from all over Somerville and adjoining municipalities. Between 1890 and 1910, the city's population rose dramatically, nearly doubling in size. Among its early residents were John F. Wahlgren, a cabinetmaker; Henry P. Giles, a driver; Michael A. McCourt, a plumber; and John McCormack, a laborer.

Situated at the base of Prospect Hill, not far from the gambrel-roofed Walker House, is the **Samuel Holt House** at **197 Washington Street.** This cupola-topped Italianate residence, until recently occupied by the Cota Funeral Parlor, faces an unusually deep lawn. The semi-circular path of the front driveway appears to date to the mid-19th century. Samuel Holt, one of the earliest owners (if not the first owner-occupant), was a "teamster" and a "truckman" He commuted to work at Fifield, Richardson & Company on Chauncy Street in Boston, where he served on the board until he retired in 1895. Holt's widow, Mary, lived here until the early 1900s. The Holt House was converted to a funeral home during the 1930s. It is currently scheduled for demolition to accommodate a private housing development.

Before continuing eastward along Washington Street, pause to admire the handsome early 20th century commercial building at 157–161 Washington Street.

157–161 Washington Street is a well-detailed three-story brick building with a curved facade that is its most noteworthy feature. It originally overlooked the Medford Street–Washington Street intersection known as Central Square. Unfortunately, the Square was obliterated during the mid-1920s by the construction of the McGrath and O'Brien Highway. One of the first occupants of its commercial space was Charles F. Giles, who ran a grocery, provision, and meat market that had five delivery wagons and employed ten clerks. Giles lived in Union Square in the Richmond at 35 Bow Street.

From the building that once housed the Gillis Grocery, walk across Medford Street, under the McGrath and O'Brien Highway, and stop just before the railroad abutments that mark the western entrance to East Somerville.

Railroad Bridge and Stone Abutments Associated with the Boston and Lowell Railroad

Dating to the early-to-mid-1830s, the substantial stone abutments flanking either side of Washington Street are perhaps the most visible reminder that Brickbottom was essentially ironbound—bordered on the east by the iron railroad tracks of the Boston and Lowell Rail road and on the south by the tracks of the Fitchburg Railroad. Needless to say, the presence of these early railroads naturally triggered industrial development along the tracks and made commuting to Boston possible for the gentry who lived atop Prospect, Central, and Spring Hills.

From the northwest side of Washington Street, cross over to the intersection of Joy and Washington Streets.

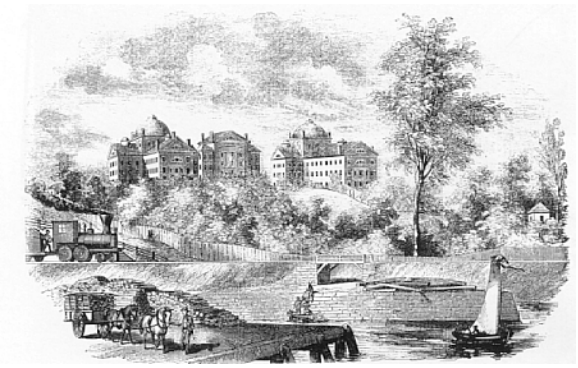
Brickbottom was initially constructed atop a former brickyard. Bricks for Beacon Hill and Charlestown residences were mass-produced here during the second quarter of the 19th century. Brickbottom represents an early example in Somerville of brickyards being discontinued in favor of more profitable residential development. Area streets existed on paper as early as the late 1850s, but by the 1860s the area was being transformed from a residential enclave of modest houses

(ca.1860–90) to a mix of residential and industrial uses (1890–-1950s) and then to a completely commercial-industrial area (after 1960).

In a *Somerville Journal* article dated July 31, 1975, former Brickbottom resident Kevin Crowley defined the area's boundaries as Washington Street to the north, Swift's meatpacking plant to the east, the Cambridge city line to the south, and Union Square to the west. Today, as a result of highway construction, Brickbottom is generally understood to be bounded by Washington Street to the north, the former Boston and Lowell tracks to the east, the Cambridge city line to the south, and Linwood Street–McGrath and O'Brien Highway to the west. Mr. Crowley notes that "Brickbottom was the first residence in the U.S. for many new immigrants. It was where the Italian, Irish, Greeks, Canadians and many other nationalities (including Portuguese, Jews and Armenians) were represented and intermingled without prejudice or fear of each other." Many Brickbottom residents lived near their workplaces, coopers near barrel-making enterprises, meat packers near the meatpacking plants of Somerville and East Cambridge, restaurant workers and grocery clerks near their jobs on Linwood Street and Somerville Avenue.

Girl in Greek dress

We will talk more about Brickbottom's late-19th-to-mid-20th-century residents as we walk deeper into the area. Most of Brickbottom's streets are named for trees— Chestnut, Poplar, Linwood— which is ironic, given the present utilitarian appearance of the area. Tree names were undoubtedly chosen because the area was adjacent to the leafy, tree-shaded grounds of the former Joseph Barrel Mansion, which later became McLean Asylum. The noteworthy exceptions are Fitchburg Street, named for the railroad company that began freight service along the southern edge of Brickbottom during the late 1830s, and Joy Street.



Joy Street was named for Benjamin Joy, a son-in-law of the well-to-do Boston merchant Joseph Barrel. In 1794, Barrel hired Charles Bulfinch to design a grand mansion at the top of Cobble Hill in East Somerville. The mansion's expansive lawn swept down to Miller's River. Joy was George Washington's Consul to the Far East during the 1790s. After Joy returned from the U.S. Consulate in Calcutta, India, he settled at 29 Chestnut Street (1799) on Boston's Beacon Hill. In 1816, Massachusetts General Hospital purchased the Barrel estate to create an institutional complex for "the gracefully insane." McLean Asylum was among the first of its kind in the world where "lunatics" were treated with kindness rather than thrown into prisons along with common criminals. Over time, McLean's decidedly upper crust residents and their families undoubtedly became alarmed when the surrounding area became industrialized and host to substandard housing. In 1896, McLean Asylum was relocated to Trapelo Road in Belmont. Sadly, all that remains of the Barrel Mansion is Bulfinch's graceful double stairway, which is preserved in the Somerville Museum, which is located at the entry to the Westwood Road Historic District. Currently the former McLean Asylum area of Cobble Hill, now commonly called the Inner Belt Road area, is characterized by a modern office park. .

Proceed southward along Joy Street and stop at 86 and 66–68 Joy Street.

The long rectangular brick industrial building at **86 Joy Street** has been converted from its former industrial use to multiple artist studios. The nearby building at **66–68 Joy Street** was built in 1919 and served as the headquarters of the New England Baking Company until at least 1932. Thereafter the Hall Baking Company occupied the building until the 1940s. The building was one of 41 bakeries in Somerville in 1920. The site is located along the Boston and Lowell Railroad, on a large lot with 380 feet of frontage and a depth of 100 feet. The structure was designed by L. S. Beardsley of New York and constructed by the Fred T. Ley Company of Springfield for $85,000. Ley also designed federal post offices and a number of buildings at Fort Devens.

Leaving Joy Street, turn right at the intersection of Joy/Chestnut Street with Poplar Street to head west toward Linwood Street. We will pause there to discuss the ethnicity and job descriptions of residents of Joy, Chestnut, and Poplar Streets during the period 1915–40.

During the World War I era, the Brickbottom neighborhood was becoming less of an overwhelmingly Irish residential enclave and more of a community hosting families of numerous nationalities. By 1925, Joy/Chestnut Street was becoming a mixed residential and commercial area, while Poplar and Linwood Streets were still primarily residential. By the 1940s Joy/Chestnut Street was almost completely bordered by commercial concerns, while Poplar Street still had a recognizable residential look and Linwood Street was bordered by a mix of residences and commercial concerns.

Brickbottom, ca. 1925

According to the 1915 City Directory, **Joy Street** was predominantly a thoroughfare bordered by the homes of at least two dozen Irish families. The surnames of these families include Burns, Doherty, Foley, Lynch, Mulligan, and Walsh. Laborer is an occupation frequently associated with the Brickbottom Irish, but this job description was also associated with just about every nationality in the neighborhood. Irishmen living on Joy Street also worked as machinists and salesmen. Members of two Italian families, the Malatestas and the Cabanas, worked for a tonic manufactory and as a brakeman for an unnamed railroad. Heads of households that may have been Jewish included Alfred Shiner, employed as a laborer; George E. Wiseman, a baggage master; and Paul A. Neurer, no occupation listed. English or possibly Canadian families included Andersons, Austins, Coffins, Earls, Gerrys, Nelsons, and Wilmots. Albert W. Coffin is recorded as a brakeman, and an Armenian shoe repairman is also listed as living and working on Joy Street.

By 1925 a great sea change had occurred along Joy Street as residents were now primarily Italian, and commercial concerns were clearly on the rise. Indeed, there are far fewer residential listings for Joy Street at the height of the Roaring Twenties: Attillio Izzi lived and worked as a grocer on the street, and Charles Malatesta may have owned and operated a Joy Street beverage company by 1925. Barrel dealers on Joy included Anderson Brothers and the Albano Romeo Company. Colbert Brothers sold coal on Joy Street, while the New England Bakery Company was extant by the mid-1920s. Not all the residents of Joy Street lived near their places of employment—Giuseppe Blogeone was a lab worker who may have been employed by M.I.T., and William Currie was a fireman. John G. Burns is listed as an operator—possibly of machinery.

By 1940, commercial concerns proliferated along Joy Street, and the remaining residents were primarily of Irish and Italian heritage. Joy Street businesses on the eve of World War II included Dispatcher's Café at 2 Joy Street near Washington Street, Richmond Carbonated Beverage Company, William G. Anderson Barrel dealers, Colbert and Easterbrook Coal Company, Knox Glass Bottle Company, Somerville Barrel Company, and Chapper and Rosen Barrels.

In 1915 **Chestnut Street**, like other streets in the area, was still overwhelmingly populated by Irish residents, with at least 16 Irish-named families. Surnames with roots in the Emerald Isle included Coughlin, Daly, McNamara, O'Keefe, and Sullivan. Again, laborer was a common job description for the Irish menfolk. William J. Mullen is listed as a cooper, so he undoubtedly worked in one of the area's numerous barrel-making manufactories. Italian family surnames included Zara (printers), Angelino (laborers), Parella, and Valasi. English and German families were headed by James Redmond, a blacksmith, and William C. Esler, a car inspector (railroad employee).

By 1925, both Irish and Italian families resided on Chestnut Street. Irish families, such as the Kileys and Gleasons, were employed by barrel-making companies, while James H. Coyle worked for the Somerville Fire Department. The breadwinners of Italian families included Antonio Liberti, carpenter; Enrico Marchi, Boston and Maine Railroad "section head"; and Joseph Parella, peddler. Chestnut Street was also host to Kolligan & Sons and the Shawmut Coal Companies.

By the early 1940s Irish, Italian, and a few Greek families lived on Chestnut Street, while commercial concerns included the Ryan Barrel Company, Somerville Fuel Company, and Chapper and Rosen Barrels.

Poplar Street - c.1925

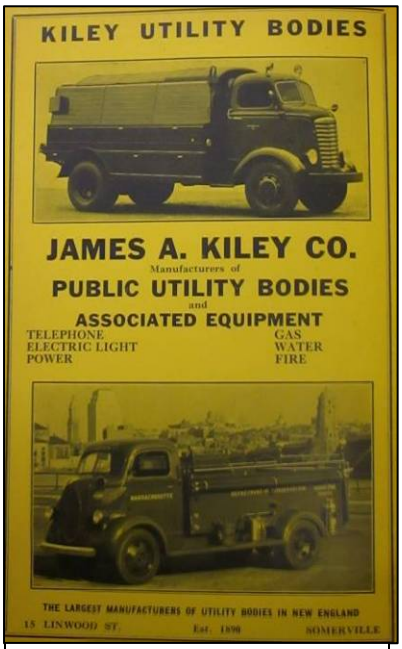
In 1915, **Poplar Street** was the residence of at least 14 Irish families, including the Aherns, Callahans, Donovans, Driscolls, Lyons, and more than a few McKennas. The first stirrings of a Greek presence are seen in a name such as Demas, while possibly German Jewish families were represented by Greenbergs, Shultzes, Nagles, and Wullochs. Italian surnames gleaned from the 1915 City Directory included Albani, Chighi, Maglozzi, Palma, and Silva. The Iberian Peninsula was represented by a Portuguese family headed by Joseph DeCosta and a Spanish family whose chief breadwinner was Joaquin Rodrigues. Poplar Street men toiled as grocers, drivers, rag dealers, junk purveyors, and especially laborers.

By 1925, Poplar Street families hailed from Greece, Ireland, Italy, and other European countries. Greek surnames included Courlotis, Harastis, Pinakas, Siminides, Simos, and Vlamos. One of the most well known members of the local Greek community was Charles Constantinopoulis, who operated the Greek American Market at 145 Somerville Avenue. Greek men toiled as tailors and lab workers. Irish surnames included Burke, Healey, McKenna, O'Connel, and Sullivan, and the men worked as laborers and teamsters. Italians were well represented in 1925 by DiReccos, GaJunios, Palliattas, and Rizzos, and their job descriptions included lab workers and barbers. The lone German on the street was Alexander C. Westhoff, a barrel maker.

By 1940, Greeks were the principal nationality in residence on Poplar Street. However, many Italian families, such as the Camilios, Daccones, GaJunos, and Tuccellis, resided alongside families of Greek heritage, such as the Dalakis, Listos, Mikaloros, and Rojakis families. In addition, Antonio Scalese's shoe repair business and the Smyrna Restaurant were located on Poplar Street.

At the western end of Poplar Street turn left and walk south along Linwood Street.

Linwood Street possessed by far the most residences of any streets in Brickbottom. These modest vernacular wooden houses were mostly occupied by Irish tenants during the World War I era; in fact, over 40 Irish families called Linwood Street home in 1915. Though considerably less numerous, there were also Italian, Portuguese, Jewish, Greek, Armenian, and possibly English or Canadian families represented on Linwood Street.



1939 City Directory

By 1925, the predominant nationality of residents on Linwood Street was overwhelmingly Greek rather than Irish, with a few Italian families also represented. By 1940, Linwood Street, due in part to its proximity to the McGrath and O'Brien Highway, had become increasingly commercial. Its businesses included Doherty Barrels, Dalakis Meats, Hellas-Athens Baking Company, Kaplanges Restaurant, Stephen Fardoulis Grocery, Jouvalakos Grocery, Raskanis Radios, Capital Salvage Used Machinery, Erythea Restaurant, and Linwood Café, as well as the Pharos Society and the Immanuel First Italian Baptist Church. In addition, Linwood Street's commercial enterprises included DiFraia Poultry Company, Papazogles Variety, Boston–Bangor Transportation Company, and such additional barrel companies as Carol Barrels, Sullivan Barrels, and Whitney Barrels. Of all the companies listed in 1940, only one survives: The James A. Kiley Company, which originally manufactured carriages and later truck bodies.

The James A. Kiley Wagon Shop at 5–9 Linwood Street, corner of Fitchburg Street, was built ca. 1896 for the purpose of manufacturing carriages and wagons. Architecturally, the buildings on Kiley's corner may be categorized as late-19th-century utilitarian. In 1900 the buildings consisted of the existing three-story frame wagon shop, a single-story wagon shed, and a small gable-roof wood-frame dwelling that is no longer extant.

Organized in Somerville in 1890, the company specialized in building grocers', express, provision, and peddlers' wagons. The Kileys also "promptly repaired all kinds of wagons." The Kiley Company was able to adapt to changing modes of transportation. When the company started, the horse was still the king it had been for years, but when motorized vehicles were introduced during the first quarter of the 20th century, the Kileys recognized that they had to "build all kinds of bodies for automobiles."

In the succeeding decades, the firm retained its prominence in both the painting and the construction of auto bodies. The *Somerville Journal* noted that the company had "one of the finest and most modern paint shops in the country." The choice to locate the Kiley complex at the corner of Linwood and Fitchburg Streets turned out to be very wise because by the late 1920s, the enormous A&P Distribution Center at 1 Fitchburg Street would use Kiley's services for the maintenance of their large fleet of trucks.

Making a bold statement at **1 Fitchburg Street** is the **A&P Company Distribution Complex/Brickbottom Artists Association.** The multibuilding A&P Distribution Center and Bakery is clearly a major landmark in the Brickbottom area because of the five-story height of its main building. It is situated on a triangular parcel bound by Fitchburg Street, the former Boston and Lowell (later Grand Junction) Railroad tracks, and the Fitchburg Railroad tracks.

The former A&P food distribution center was built in 1920–23 for the purpose of storing, producing, and distributing A&P food products to company stores throughout eastern Massachusetts. Founded in 1859 as the Great American Tea Company, this prosperous commercial concern was renamed ten years later as the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company. The contractor for the complex was the Turner Construction Company, which is still in business to this day and is well known for its use of reinforced concrete in building projects in the Boston area.

Between 1857 and the early 1900s, nine dwellings and three stables were built on the future site of the A&P food distribution center. Seven lots owned by the Boston and Lowell Railroad Company were located at the southern margins of the Brickbottom neighborhood, and Irish families named Cunningham, Kelley, McGaffrey and Crowley lived in houses built on these plots.

To understand how the A&P parcel evolved over time, one must see it within the broader context of the Brickbottom neighborhood. As noted earlier, the neighborhood was, in fact, multinational, with the Irish constituting a sizable percentage but with many families also of Portuguese, Italian, and Eastern European Jewish descent. In addition, the area holds a special place in the hearts of Greeks because Brickbottom's Greek families founded the Dormition of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church in 1916, first on Bow Street in Union Square and later in a multibuilding complex erected at 29 Central Street, on the south slope of Spring Hill.

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Brickbottom was an area of clay pits associated with brickmaking operations. Then, during the second half of the 19th into the early 20th centuries, various ethnic groups were drawn to Brickbottom due to its inexpensive rental housing and proximity to jobs in nearby factories as well as commercial concerns and industries in Union Square and its environs. In 1925, the Brickbottom neighborhood was bisected by the Northern Artery, later to become the McGrath Highway. Not surprisingly, the division created by this new transportation corridor hastened the transition of Brickbottom from a residential neighborhood to an area serving light industry and commercial businesses. One result of this change of use was the shift in Brickbottom's scale from one of modest, low-rise residences, primarily constructed of wood, to larger masonry buildings. Gradually, the neighborhood's housing stock was replaced by long rectangular structures constructed of brick, concrete, and metal in order to accommodate garages, warehouses, and light industrial uses, as in the two five-story warehouse and bakery components of the A&P complex. Then another shift occurred in April of 1988 when the former A&P complex was converted to a live-work cooperative targeted at artists seeking light and airy spaces with high ceilings, large windows, and distance from nearby residences so they could engage in their sometimes noisy artistic pursuits. Today over 100 artists are part of the complex, which is arguably still the largest artists cooperative in the United States.

The **Northern Artery** (a.k.a. the **McGrath and O'Brien Highway**) was constructed in 1925. Named in recognition of two priests from Somerville and Cambridge, the highway was originally envisioned in the early 1900s as a carriageway that would facilitate the escape of city dwellers to the western and northern countrysides. By the time the highway was completed in the mid 1920s, the automobile ruled the roads, and the artery had become a much more ambitious project, with an elevated segment that effectively bisected the Brickbottom neighborhood—almost an entire block of the neighborhood was swept away during highway construction.

From Brickbottom head west toward the stairway leading to the sidewalk bordering McGrath and O'Brien Highway.

Going northward toward Somerville Avenue, note the bronze horse-head medallion in the concrete sidewalk. It is the symbol of Coleman Bros., a heavy-steel construction company, which is also known for its work in 1934 at Boston's Fenway Park and which was partially destroyed in a fire. Walking down the ramp toward Somerville Avenue, you can see the remains of the meatpacking industry once located along Medford Street and Somerville Avenue.

Meatpacking plant, 1905

The large lots seen along the Fitchburg line used to host numerous slaughter houses and meatpacking plants, such as the North Packing Plant, Squire's, New England Dressed Meat and Wool, and Boynton Yards. In September 1978 a fire in a vacant, five-story brick warehouse in the area spread easily throughout the building, as the floors were saturated with years of grease from the meatpacking industry.

From the McGrath and O'Brien Highway head west along Somerville Avenue.

The large area that now houses the Target and CW Price stores was once the New England Dressed Meat and Wool packing house. Numerous small poultry slaughterhouses were sprinkled throughout the area. Mayflower Poultry in East Cambridge is the last of these establishments. The neighborhood south of the Fitchburg line was predominantly Italian in the early parts of the 19th century. The photographer Lewis Hine took a number of photos that can be found in the archives of child labor at the Library of Congress. Families often augmented their income with piecework and small businesses that catered to the immigrant community.

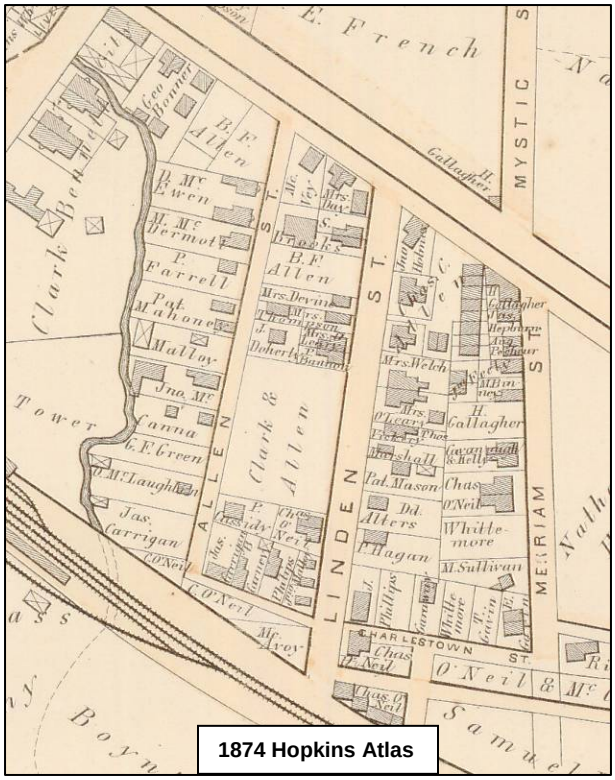
Cavicchio Family, Medford Street 1910

Situated at **216 Somerville Avenue**, opposite Rossmore Street, is the **Edward J. Llewellyn Building,** which was built in 1896. A noteworthy feature on the main facade of this commercial and residential building is its double-height oriel bay that projects above the ground floor storefront. A rectangular ornamental panel at the center of its third floor contains the vertical initials EJL, and a similar panel at the center of the second floor displays the date 1896. The original storefront on the first floor remains intact. Before the purchase of this lot in 1895, by Edward and Margaret Llewellyn, it had been part of Nathan Tufts's real estate empire. Llewellyn immigrated to Massachusetts from Ireland in 1867. By 1900 he is listed in census records as a painter, and his wife, Margaret, as a grocer, although apparently her store was not at 216 Somerville Avenue. Beginning in 1897, this commercial space was occupied by John Sweeney's grocery store. Sweeney and his family lived in one of the building's apartments. The second apartment was occupied by William Hood, a watchman in East Cambridge. Around 1925, John Sweeney's son Thomas took over his family's grocery business and remained here until at least 1945.

Next door at **218–218B Somerville Avenue** is a handsome 1926 two-story commercial block designed in the Colonial Revival style, complete with boldly rendered ribbon and swag ornamentation. The ground floor storefronts were occupied by members of Union Square's Italian community, including 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.

Cross Merriam Street to notice the low-rise painted brick and concrete block commercial building at 224 Somerville Avenue.

Built during the early 1930s, the **Barnes & Walsh Company Building (ca. 1933)** at **224 Somerville Avenue** is a concrete and brick commercial structure with more than its fair share of aesthetic appeal for such a utilitarian building. Here the concrete walls suggest formal rustication, while the stepped parapet has a Deco sensibility. The Barnes & Walsh Auto Body Repair Shop has been located in this building since at least 1940.



1874 Hopkins Atlas

During the late 19th century Allen Street and vicinity were heavily Irish, judging by listings in the Somerville Directories from the late 1860s to the mid-1880s. In 1869, Allen Street's McDermotts, Mahans, and McKanna's were employed as glassblowers and laborers. Some Allen Street residents, however, were probably not Irish, including Terrence Campbell, a laborer; Fred Thomsen, a watchman probably working the night shift in a nearby factory; Fred A. S. Lewis, a tinsmith; and John C. Rowe, a carpenter.

By 1881, many heads of household had Irish surnames, such as the McLaughlin, Kerrigan, Carrigan, and McVey, whose job descriptions included laborer, brakeman, and teamster. Others, possibly not of Irish heritage, were James Jennings, mason; Nicholas P. Wadden, boot and shoe dealer; and George Reid, "brass foundry." By 1884, the Kerrigans had been joined on Allen Street by neighbors named Patrick A. Quinn, teamster; J. Allen Flanders, railroad clerk; Thomas Galvin, laborer; and J.F. Robbins, hack driver.

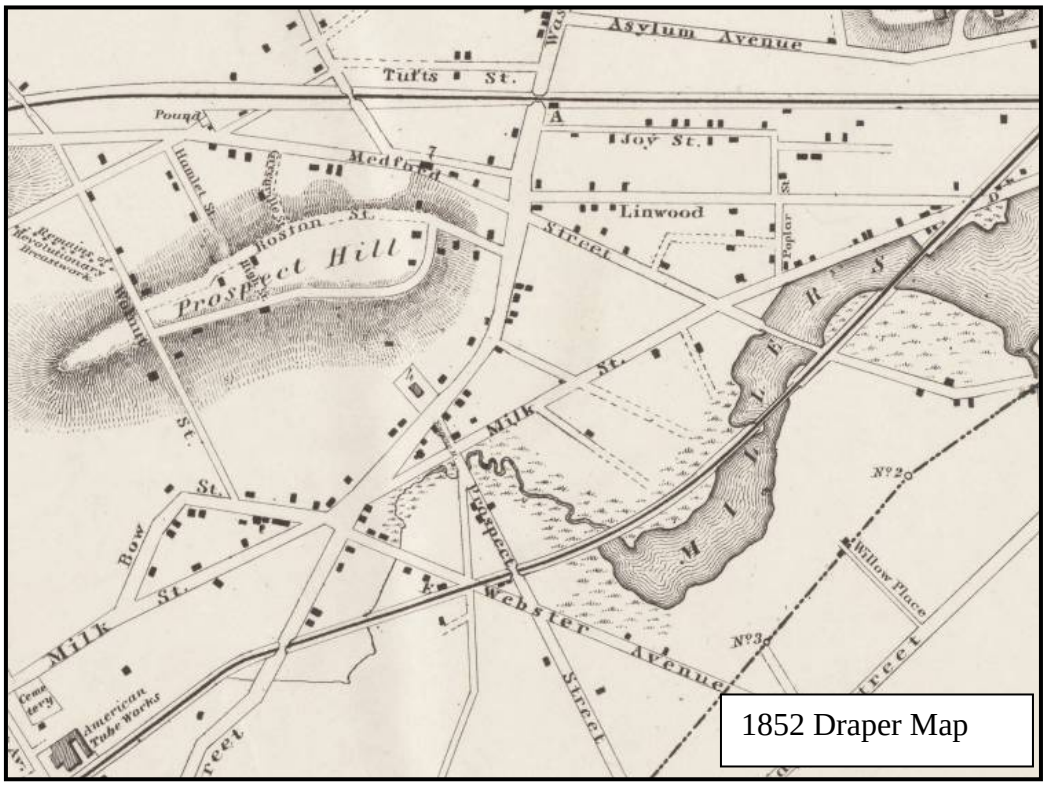
Further research might also show that a similar pattern of immigration occurred on Allen Street as within the Brickbottom area, with families from Europe and Canada joining the Irish families, beginning in the early 1900s.

Since as early as the 1910s, the segment of Somerville Avenue between the highway and Prospect Street has been home to businesses associated with the early Automobile Age in the Boston area. Proximity to a major traffic artery had everything to do with businesses such as the **Union Square Garage** at **267–271 Somerville Avenue** setting up shop in 1914. The utilitarian brick building was apparently intentionally built as a storage facility for automobiles. According to the 1915 City Directory it was one of 19 automobile garages in Somerville. Today the company has the distinction of being the oldest known extant auto-related building in the Union Square area.

At the intersection of Prospect Street and Somerville Avenue, pause to consider the Union Glass Company, which was located to the south at the crossroads of Prospect Street and Webster Avenue.

Organized in 1854, Union Glass specialized in the manufacture of flint glass products, including tableware, lamps, globes, and shades. For its first two decades it was the town's largest industrial employer. At the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 the company's exhibit featured a 150-pound punch bowl that was reportedly the largest piece of glass ever made. The Union Glass Company remained in business until as late as 1924.

Union Glass Showroom, ca. 1890.



1852 Draper Map

This brochure was produced by the staff of the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission on the basis of research presented by architectural historian Edward W. Gordon in the fall of 2013. The tour and brochure were undertaken as part of the ArtsUnion Project, which is an initiative shepherded by the Somerville Arts Council and funded by the Mass Cultural Council and the City of Somerville to electrify Union Square.

Established in 1985, the Historic Preservation Commission 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 at 617-625-6600, ext. 2500, or www.somervillema.gov/historicpreservation

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