



The Historic Somerville Collection

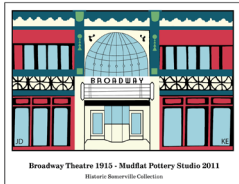
See why Somerville is Architecturally **Vintage-Cool!**



Adams-Magoun House 1783
Historic Somerville Collection

Adams-Magoun House^{LN} (circa 1783) | 438 Broadway

Sitting near the peak of Winter Hill and along a major road harkening back to the 18th century, this is one of the two oldest houses remaining in Somerville! Joseph Adams, a relative of the founding fathers, John and Sam Adams, built it as the seat of his 71-acre farm that extended as far back as the railroad tracks between Central and Lowell Streets. He passed the farm on to his daughter Sarah Anne and her husband John C. Magoun, the namesake for the nearby Magoun Square. Its interior was extensively remodeled and altered by subsequent owners, yet original features remain intact, such as some of the interior timber framing thought to be taken from the nearby Winter Hill Fort. Today, it's the last 18th century house still standing on the entire stretch of Broadway. It's an excellent architectural example of the Federal Style and a compelling reminder of Somerville's agrarian past.



Broadway Theatre 1915 - Mudflat Pottery Studio 2011
Historic Somerville Collection

Broadway Theatre - Mudflat Studios (1915) | 81 Broadway

Hurst's Broadway Theatre was constructed by the Somerville Home Building Association and comfortably housed an audience up to 1,850! A local newspaper noted that its large size and popularity was a factor in East Somerville's housing boom in the early 20th century. Like many movie theaters at the time, the building incorporated several stores throughout the 1920s and 30s, including a jeweler, a shoe store, a restaurant, a beauty shop, a confectioner, and a taxi company. When Arthur Viano purchased the theater in 1933 it became known as Viano's Broadway until its closure in the early 1980s. Following years of use as storage, the neglected building was renovated by its current owners in 2011 to house Mudflat Studios. As a non-profit organization it is dedicated to providing space and classes for adults and children to produce pottery and serving as an important resource for the East Somerville community as well as the wider Greater Boston region.



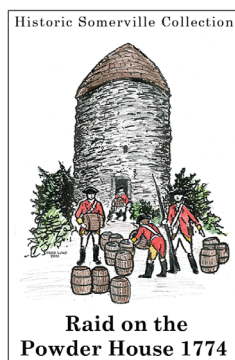
Milk Row Cemetery 1804
Historic Somerville Collection

Milk Row Cemetery (1804) & Civil War Monument^{LN} (1863) | 438 Somerville Avenue

Blink, and you might miss this site on the edge of Union Square, next to the bustling Market Basket grocery store and parking lot! It is the only pre-20th century burial grounds in Somerville. Its name derives from the former road that was a popular route for transporting products from local dairy farms. Samuel Tufts (part of the Tufts family associated with contemporary day Tufts University) donated a portion of his farmland to create this private burying place for Charlestown residents and their associates. Lots were typically 16 feet square, like the plot hosting the Civil War Monument. By the mid-1800's the town was burying all its paupers here, resulting in estimates of 1,800 persons residing in this compact $\frac{3}{4}$ acre site! The monument was erected in 1863 on land donated by innovator and locksmith Enoch Robinson who is also known for building the nearby iconic Round House (highlighted later). This 15-foot marble statue memorializes the sizable number of soldiers who enlisted from Somerville and later perished during the Civil War. The City took control of the grounds in 1892 and continues to enhance it based on a 2002 Preservation Master Plan. A Docent Program established in 2012 opens the locked gates during seasonal months via volunteers in period clothing who offer tours of the historic grounds.

^L - Designated as, or in a Local Historic District (LHD)

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Old Powder House within Nathan Tufts Park^{LN} (1704) | 850 Broadway

Perhaps the most unique adaptively reused structure in the City! It was originally built by Jean Maillet, a French Huguenot shipwright, as a windmill on top of Quarry Hill for nearby farmers in Arlington and Cambridge to ground their grain into meal. The structure was constructed of locally quarried stone with two-foot-thick walls! In 1747, the Province of Massachusetts bought it as a magazine for the British Army to store its gunpowder, and notably it became the largest repository in the New England region. Almost 30 years later, the British General Gage sent 260 soldiers up the Mystic River on September 1st, 1774, to transport the nearly 250 barrels of British gunpowder stored there to Castle William in Boston Harbor. The Massachusetts colonists were enraged, causing a great deal of anti-Tory sentiment and a mustering of 4,000 the very next day on Cambridge Common. The "Raid on the Powder House" became known as the spark that set off the American Revolution.

In the early 19th century, the Commonwealth began storing its gunpowder elsewhere and sold the land and buildings to Peter Tufts, a farmer, whose sons and descendants became grain merchants, brick manufacturers, and developers. One family member, Charles Tufts (born in 1781), was a substantial landowner who donated 20 acres to the Universalist Church to establish a college, to be known as Tufts College—now Tufts University— and founded near to this "Powder House Farm" in 1852. In the 1870s, the Powder House's thick stone walls were a perfect storehouse for George Emerson's nearby Pickle Factory! In 1892, the offspring of Nathan Tufts presented the Powder House and its surrounding farmland to the City of Somerville to create a park. In 2000 the City prepared a Plan for restoring the Nathan Tufts Park (popularly known by locals as "Powderhouse Park") to its original 1890's appearance. A series of historic objects were installed to symbolize each of the prior land uses. The project earned the City its first State-wide Preservation Award in 2004 from the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

The Old Powder House is very significant as one of the few remaining pre-Revolutionary War powder houses in the nation and quite possibly the only one built from stone. Volunteer docents dress in period clothing to lead tours during the seasonal months of May through October.



Prospect Hill Tower^L (1903) | Munroe Street

Climb atop Prospect Hill, just above the center of Union Square, to explore the Tower, Somerville's tallest iconic structure! Constructed at the turn of the 20th century of iron and stone, it stands four stories high. It commemorates the site where the first official flag of the United Colonies—the Grand Union Flag—was raised by General George Washington on January 1st, 1776. Parts of this Hill were leveled in the 19th century to fill in the polluted Miller's River and later Boston's Back Bay neighborhood. At 70 feet the Tower and the flag correspond to the original height of the flag flying high on the hill during the Revolutionary War when rebels engaged in a year-long siege of the City of Boston. During seasonal months, docent volunteers give tours in period clothing, and visitors can climb to the top to enjoy commanding views of Cambridge and Boston. In 2019 the City fully renovated the surrounding Park and installed new signage to provide informative history of the site.

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Rosebud Diner 1941
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Rosebud Diner^{LN} (circa 1941) | 381 Summer Street

Sitting on the eastern edge of Davis Square, this is the oldest of the three diners still standing in Somerville. The former steel railroad car was built for the Nichols and Perivolaris Families, and is reputed to be only one of seven Worcester Lunch Car semi-streamliners still extant in the U.S. The long-standing owners, since 1958, proudly agreed to its designation as a Local Historic District property (1989) and listing in the National Register (1999). Working with the City's Historic Preservation Commissions (SHPC) they restored many of its original exterior features, winning a SHPC Preservation Award in 1996. Then, after 40 years of the family's ownership, Evangelos "Galley" Nichols sold the Rosebud to Martin Bloom in 2013 who expanded its size and offerings and consolidated it with a rear building. He restored it further, winning a second Preservation Award from the SHPC nearly two decades later in 2016.



Enoch Robinson Round House 1856
Historic Somerville Collection

The Enoch Robinson Round House^{LN} (1856) | 36 Atherton Street

The round walls of the Enoch Robinson House (popularly known as the Round House) make it one of the most distinctive buildings in Somerville! Enoch Robinson was a Bostonian businessman and inventor best known for inventing a patented method of pressing glass into doorknobs in 1826. After establishing a locksmith business in 1839, Robinson moved to Somerville in 1847 and designed and built this residence for himself in 1856. Its Italianate, custom fit features include a decorative bracketed cornice and intricate window embellishments. All the rooms were laid out in round, oval, and radiating shapes, with the furniture to match. An interior glass dome complements its round exterior walls which are made of curved planks nailed one above the other.

The property later fell into substantial disrepair, was saved from demolition in the 1960's, and then was painstakingly restored, starting in 2007, both inside and outside, by the current owner, a local resident and general contractor. He earned a Preservation Award from the SHPC in 2019.



Somerville Armory 1903
Historic Somerville Collection

Somerville Armory (1903) | 191 Highland Avenue

This massive structure was designed by Boston architect George A. Moore to house the Somerville Light Infantry of the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia. Its castle-like appearance was typical of armories built at the turn of the 20th century. It was later commissioned by the Massachusetts National Guard, and then used for various government functions, including the local office for the 1980 National Census. In 2004 the State of Mass. declared it surplus property and sold it by auction under the auspices of the City of Somerville. Two brothers who owned a Cambridge restaurant and music club formed a development team to rehabilitate the dilapidated building and create a mix of uses. It initially housed a few artists live-work units, small office space for creative entrepreneurs, and a grand hall and balcony reserved for rental to community-focused events and classes, pop-up markets, and some private gatherings. An interior café serves as a community center that offers an area for musicians, dance classes, artist exhibits, and poetry readings. All ages can enjoy diverse cultural programming and gathering space throughout the day and evening hours, attracting folks from Somerville and the wider Boston metropolitan area. The City of Somerville purchased the building in 2021 to ensure it remains a community resource for decades to come!

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Somerville High School - Original Building (1895) | 81 Highland Avenue

The new Somerville High School commemorates its history while modernizing its architecture by preserving the original 1895 school and the front of the 1929 War Memorial Building. It is perched atop Central Hill in a prominent location between City Hall and the Somerville Central Public Library. Together they now form a campus easily accessible to both ends of the City and directly above the new Green Line Station at Gilman Square. Two 1929 additions—an auditorium and boiler plant—were demolished to reveal original architectural details, harking back to the turn of the 19th century, and to blend the old with the new. The school retains the Brune Field House (1986) and its comprehensive structure for both college-bound academics and career and technical education instruction (CTE). Plans are underway to convert the now stand alone 1895 building into an Annex to nearby City Hall.



Somerville Museum^{LN} (1897) | One Westwood Road

The Museum sits at the corner of Westwood Road and Central Street, at the eastern edge of the Westwood Road Historic District (1985) and plays a key role in the preservation of the community's rich history. In 1897, several of Somerville's cultural, municipal, and educational leaders (many of whom were descendants of the area's original colonial settlers) worked together to establish the Somerville Historical Society. Between 1925 and 1929, the Society constructed a two-story Federal Revival Museum building in Spring Hill to house its archives and collection of historical artifacts, and to serve as a meeting place for its members. The main exhibition hall contains a "Flying Double Staircase" designed by famed Boston architect Charles Bulfinch for the Joseph Barrell Mansion (later the MacLean Asylum) in 1792. The grand staircase was saved from demolition in 1892 by the Shaw Family of Wayland, installed in the building in the late 1940s, and remains a prominent feature in the central area of the Museum today!

In 1986, the Society changed its focus, seeking both to present and inspire arts and culture in Somerville, and celebrate its notable heritage. The current Somerville Museum offers rotating exhibits featuring the City's diverse cultures, musical and dramatic performances, and hands-on history learning projects, often in collaboration with the Somerville Public School Department. It has long been a popular meeting place for local organizations and private parties and following its current renovations (2019–2022) it will be universally accessible and welcoming to all members of the public. The Museum is a member-supported institution that proudly stands as the only cultural facility constructed by the community since its founding as a town in 1842!



Somerville Theatre^{LN} (1914) | 49-55 Davis Square

Located in the heart of Davis Square, the theatre is incorporated within the Hobbs Building that was erected in 1914 by Funk & Wilcox, a Boston architectural firm. The Neoclassical Revival building once also contained a cafe, bowling alley and billiards hall in the basement, 10 ground floor storefronts, office space, and the Hobbs Crystal Ballroom upstairs! The Theatre was designed for stage shows, vaudeville, opera, and the increasingly popular motion pictures. In 1915, weekly stock company performances were added, and during the first part of the 20th century, the Theatre became known for its prize nights, when it gave away dishware, appliances, and other merchandise to attract customers!

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Somerville Theatre (cont.)

Though the City used to boast fourteen theaters in different neighborhoods, the Somerville Theatre is the only one still operating as an independently owned movie theater. In the early 1990s, it was threatened with massive alterations aimed at carving up its interior for multiple small screens. Community opposition and listing in the National Register of Historic Places through the City ultimately persuaded the current owners to abandon their original proposal. Instead, they used federal historic tax credits to restore much of its exterior and interior features, including its large stage perfect as a venue for live concerts and performances. Their impressive efforts earned them a SHPC Preservation Award in 1997, and extensive regional acclaim! Closure mandated during COVID 19 prompted the same owners to undertake another major renovation, restoring the Crystal Ballroom and other interior historic features. It reopened fall of 2021.

Today, the Somerville Theatre remains a major draw to Davis Square and significantly benefits from its adjacency to a Red Line T stop, as well as numerous commercial, recreational, and residential properties, as well as nearby Tufts University.



West Branch Library^{LN} (1909) | 40 College Avenue

One of the best conserved examples in Somerville of the Colonial Revival style. Initially, the West Branch Library did not have a building of its own but operated out of a store in Davis Square. A \$25,000 grant from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation enabled the City to construct a new limestone and brick buff building in 1909 designed by the Boston architectural firm McLean and Wright building. Built during the tenure of Samuel Walter Foss' who was a local poet and civic leader, he inspired many innovations, including the introduction of open stacks, renewal by mail and telephone, and loaning books to other civic institutions, such as schools, churches and prisons.

The City has renovated and rehabilitated the building a few times over the years, with major stabilization and weatherproofing work on both the exterior and interior in the early 2000s. With the help of significant Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding in 2018-2021, the City undertook a major capital campaign to restore its striking decorative features, including fine woodwork and high ceilings, and to construct a new addition on the side for an ADA accessible entrance. The Children's section was moved from the basement to the second story, and an outdoor seating area was created in the rear for small public gatherings and programming.

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