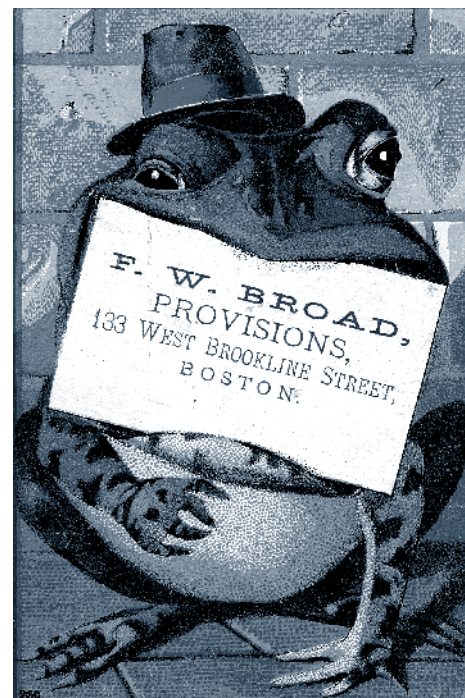


CARDS distributed by tradesmen or advertising cards were widely used in the nineteenth century to promote a wide variety of goods and services. All manner of products were advertised, from recently developed packaged food to patent medicines. The development of chromolithography in the mid-nineteenth century made it possible to use color, and collecting these colorful cards became quite a craze, peaking around 1890 when magazine advertising started to take over.



Trade Card, ca. 1877-1881. Recent Donation.

FW Broad was in business at 133 West Brookline from 1877 to 1881, and its proprietor, Frank Broad, lived in the South End at 123 Pembroke and later at 659 Tremont.

THE HISTORICAL Society has recently acquired a rare, nineteenth-century South End bottle. Embossed with the brewery name and address, the bottle is pale green and just seven inches high, with an applied blob top. Coburn Lang & Co. was on Worcester Street, between Tremont and Columbus, from 1864 to 1880. Charles T. Coburn and George W. Lang were listed as brewers in the city directories, and they employed a third brewer, the remarkably named Perley Marble. Coburn Lang & Co. produced its own line of ginger ale and bottled waters and was also a dealer and bottler of beer and cider.



Water or Ginger Ale Bottle, "Coburn Lang & Co. 100 Worcester Street, Boston," 1864-1880. SEHS Collection.

The South End Historical Society

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The South End Historical Society NEWSLETTER

532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02118-1402 — Vol. 34 No. 4, Winter 2006

The New York Streets

Rochester, Genesee, Oswego, Oneida, Seneca, Way, Mott, Lovering, Asylum, Davis, and Florence — these were the streets in the "New York Streets" neighborhood. They no longer exist. By 1957 this entire neighborhood was vacated to make way for urban renewal. The residents dispersed. The buildings were flattened. An entire neighborhood disappeared.

Fortunately we have written and oral histories of the New York streets. Both portray a lively, multiethnic, tightly packed place where home was a cold-water

continued page 2

Don't miss:
The Board of Directors
of
The South End
Historical Society
cordially invites you to

A Twelfth Night Holiday Reception

Welcoming our 2006
New Members

Wednesday, January 3, 2007
6:30 p.m. to
8:00 p.m.

The Dane House
532 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston

Refreshments will be served



Corner of Harrison Avenue and Florence Street, during the filming of *Six Bridges to Cross*, in 1955. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

The New York Streets

continued from page 1

flat. Life was lived in the neighborhood, much of it on the street.

In *The Promised Land*, Mary Antin, in a chapter aptly titled “My Kingdom in the Slums,” depicts a rich and colorful neighborhood:

“Mr. Casey, of the second floor, who was drunk whenever his wife was sober, gave me an insight into the psychology of the beer mug that would have added to the mental furniture of my most scholarly teacher. The bold-faced girls who passed the evening on the corner, in promiscuous flirtation with the cock-eyed youths of the neighborhood, unconsciously revealed to me the eternal secrets of adolescence. My neighbor of the third floor, who sat on the curb-stone with the scabby baby in her bedraggled lap, had things to say about the fine ladies who came in carriages to inspect the public bathhouse across the street that ought to be repeated in the lecture halls of every school of philanthropy.

“The grocer on Harrison Avenue.... Here was this poor grocer, conducting his business on the same perilous credit system which had driven my father out of Chelsea and Wheeler Street, supplying us with tea and sugar and strong butter, milk freely splashed from rusty cans, potent yeast, and bananas done to turn.... He knew without asking that my father had no regular employment, and that, consequently, it was risky to give us credit. Nevertheless he gave us credit by the week.... He never complained; nay, he even insisted on my mother’s taking almonds and raisins for a cake for the holidays.

“I have never had a livelier time than in the slums.... I must never forget that I came away from Dover Street with my hands full of riches.... My days in the slums were pregnant with possibilities.... I was an heir, on Dover Street,

awaiting maturity. I was a princess waiting to be led to the throne.”

Sixty years later in *Chain of Change* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), Mel King, a later resident of this neighborhood,



Detail of the New York Streets area. 1890 Bromley Atlas. SEHS Collection.

describes a similarly rich neighborhood:

“Let me tell you what I remember about the New York Streets from my childhood. Up and down Harrison Avenue there were shops and stores of all description and families who lived over them in apartments upstairs. On the corner of Seneca and Harrison there was an Armenians’ store with olives in barrels out front and a fish market next door. The next block over on the corner of Oneida was Leo Giuffre’s bakery, I think. There was a synagogue on Oswego. Bikofsky’s bakery was on the corner of Lovering and Harrison, and Saroka’s Drug Store, a block down on Davis Street. The only liquor store in the neighborhood was on the corner of Gloucester, Golden Liquor. On Dover Street the popcorn man would set up business. Across the street were Green-Freedman Bakery Co. and Derzowitz’s Deli.”

In recent conversations with former residents of the New York Streets, recollections are of a multicultural, multiethnic, lively neighborhood. And there is a nostalgia for the neighborliness of this neighborhood. Neighbors knew each other. The streets were narrow and everyone knew who lived across from them, beside them, below them, above them. No one had much but they helped each other out.

When she was five Gloria Ganno moved into a third floor coldwater flat on Florence Street. There were four rooms — three bedrooms and a fourth room serving as the kitchen/laundry room. There was a black, double soapstone sink in the kitchen. Half of the sink was used for the laundry, the other for dishes and general hygiene. Water was heated on a cast-iron stove with a gas burner. The laundry was hung between the houses — Gloria’s mother’s laundry being of particular interest to the local girls. She was a nightclub singer and her gowns were quite a novelty. The refrigerator was cooled with an ice block. A sign was put in the window indicating how much ice was needed, maybe a 20-cent block. The ice man also sold oil brought in five-gallon cans.

People paid in cash. No one had much money, and many big-ticket items, for example, a bedspread, were bought “on time” with the vendor stopping by on a weekly basis to col-



Tony Curtis hangs laundry on a Boston roof. Photo still from the film *Six Bridges to Cross*. Courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

lect. The requisite amount was set aside in envelopes.

When it came to shopping for groceries, there were pushcarts, green grocers and corner stores selling all manner of edibles. There was even a small chain food store, Kennedy’s, where one could buy staples. Clare Hayes has lived in the South End her entire life. She recounts that her mother shopped every Friday at Clinton’s Cash Market at the corner of Shawmut and Dover. Her mother would walk to the market, tell the grocer what she needed, and, after bagging her groceries, the grocer would drive her home.

Most children in the neighborhood went to the Andrews School through fourth grade and then on to Abraham Lincoln or the Quincy School on Tyler Street. After school kids could amuse themselves playing stickball on the narrow streets. There was good sledding on a hill where the Teradyne building now stands. Kids went swimming at the Dover Street Bridge or merely idled along the waterfront watching the tugs. A more organized activity was the marching band at the Holy Trinity Church. Father Carr organized the band. Anyone could play in it, and from all accounts it put on quite a performance.

For amusement The Columbia Theatre provided a few hours of cinematic entertainment. For 10 cents there were two movies, a cartoon and a newsreel. Afterwards there was a trip to the Liberty Spa for a banana split. There were in fact many places to get refreshment, including a variety of delis and many lunch counters. And there were bars, billiard halls, and dance halls.



Demolition of the New York Streets. Courtesy of The Bostonian Society/Old State House.

The New York Streets

continued from page 3

One of the memorable highlights for the neighborhood was the 1955 filming of "Six Bridges to Cross" starring Tony Curtis and George Nader as well as Sal Mineo in his film debut. Curtis, in his autobiography, wrote of the movie, "I had to do a publicity tour to promote it, and there was a lot of craziness." The title song for the movie was written by Henry Mancini and performed by Sammy Davis Jr., who had himself spent time in the South End as a youth. The film is based on *Anatomy of a Crime* by Joseph Dineen, about a Boston-based crook and the 1950 Brinks robbery. Considered the 'crime of the century,' the robbery was committed by seven men dressed in peacoats and wearing Halloween masks. They walked away with \$2.7 million in cash, checks, money orders, and other securities. Only \$57,000 was ever recovered, found in 1956 behind a panel in a South End mason's office on Tremont Street.

Gloria Ganno recalls that her friend Sandra on Florence Street was approached by a member of the film crew. "Hey, kid, you got a clean house? Mr. Curtis needs a place to change his costume." Mr. Curtis not only changed his costume in Sandra's house but he also sat down for coffee and muffins just baked by Sandra's mother.

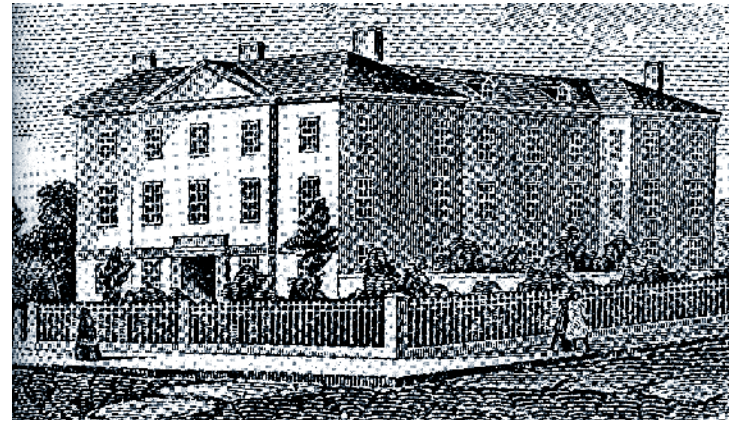
But Mayor John B. Hynes, born in the South End to Irish immigrant parents, had a vision to reconstruct Boston, to revitalize its neighborhoods, to bring in business. "New York Streets was Boston's first redevelopment project.... The New York Streets was the city's first effort to assemble enough land for private industry to build efficient, modern structures.... This is the classic partnership of city officials and private interests aimed at improving the economic base of



Mayor John B. Hynes operates controls of a wrecking crane on Seneca Street, September 23, 1955. Courtesy of Boston Public Library, Print Department.

the city." ("Boston Renewed," Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, January, 1964.) People in the neighborhood were just told they had to move. People scattered. The buildings were vacated, and then flattened by the wrecking ball.

BOSTON FEMALE ASYLUM



Boston Female Asylum. Courtesy of Boston Athenaeum.

The Boston Female Asylum was founded in 1800 with the purpose of "relieving, instructing, employing, and assisting" needy young girls. The Asylum's by-laws required all directors and active members to be women, and it was the first charity in Boston founded and administered solely by women. The Asylum was also the city's first non-profit devoted exclusively to the aid of children. The headquarters and group home of the Asylum moved to the South End after a new building was built in 1844. Isaiah Rogers, a major architect, was chosen to design the building, and the cornerstone was laid June 25, 1844. A metal box containing an inscribed silver plate and an 1844 coin was placed underneath the cornerstone. The booklet *Reminiscences of the Boston Female Asylum*, printed the same year, describes Rogers's design as "not aiming at elegance, but perfectly safe, commodious, and respectable." It appears that the Asylum had tremendous public support from the start, and included Abigail Adams in its membership. In 1844, the fundraising drive for the new building garnered eleven donations of at least \$1000. In 1850, the Asylum was home to nearly 100 girls, and the staff included a governess, a matron, two teachers, an assistant, a cook and a seamstress. At the age of 14, residents were indentured to families "in the country" and, in exchange, the host family agreed to pay the young woman twenty dollars upon turning 17, thirty dollars at age 18, and to "send her away with an outfit suitable to her age" upon completion of service. In the 1890s, according to the annual report, the "surroundings of the house on Washington Street had become unsuitable," the building was put up for sale and by 1906 girls of all ages had been placed in homes. By 1910 the Asylum building was sold and soon demolished; the administrative offices had moved to Boylston Street, and the name was changed to the Boston

Society for the Care of Girls. Vestiges of the Female Asylum can still be seen today: The Home for Little Wanderers traces its roots to the Asylum's founding over 200 years ago.

THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH ST. STEPHEN'S OUR LADY OF POMPEII, FLORENCE STREET



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in 1892. Courtesy of Historic New England.

This Florence Street church was organized in 1843 and built as an Episcopal Church and originally named The Church of the Messiah. It was noted in 1869 for making its church seats available to everyone, meaning people did not have to pay to attend church. In the 1890s it became St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, and eventually Our Lady of Pompeii, an Italian Catholic Church. According to *The City Wilderness* (Boston:

Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1899), St. Stephen's focused on improving the prospects of the laboring class, and in addition ran St. Stephen's Rescue Mission, which offered work and accommodations to "men trying to reform."

THE INDUSTRIAL TEMPORARY HOME BOSTON INDUSTRIAL HOME 17 DAVIS STREET

This organization was chartered in 1877 "to furnish temporary lodging and food for destitute persons of both sexes, who are willing to work. Those parties who contribute certain sums to this institution are given tickets entitling the bearer to meals or lodging, on condition of working a specified time in payment of same." Such work included laundry work, sewing, wood-sawing and manual labor. (*King's Handbook of Boston*, 1878.)

GRAND MUSEUM - GRAND DIME MUSEUM - GRAND THEATRE AND NATATORIUM - GRAND THEATRE 1138 WASHINGTON STREET

Built in 1855, the building at 1138 Washington Street was initially Williams Market. Thirty-three years later it became Hooley's Theatre. By the turn of the century it was the Grand Theatre and Natatorium. The Natators (a group of 'lady swimmers') performed a water show several times

a day. The week of October 26, 1891 Miss Ethel Tucker is advertised performing in "Myrtle Ferns." By 1898 it was the Grand Theatre. A September 11, 1898 program features Mlle. Zittella, Ella Anderson, The Old Lina and Vani, Grundy, Murray and Grundy, and Bohee and Hammond. When the theater was refurbished, the drop curtain featured a scene of the bridge in the Public Garden. There were two performances at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. and prices ranged from 10 cents to 25 cents for orchestra seats.



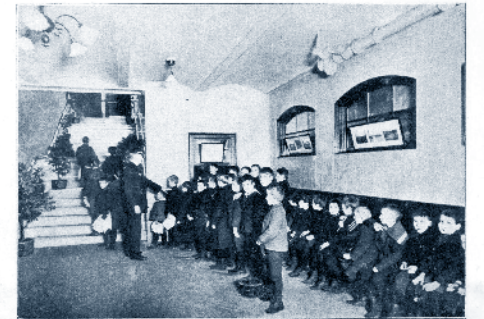
Williams Market, corner of Dover Street, now East Berkeley Street, ca. 1860s. Courtesy of Boston Athenaeum.

DOVER STREET BATHS 249 DOVER STREET

In 1896 the City of Boston purchased land at 249 Dover Street for the construction of Boston's first bathhouse. As noted in the *Boston Herald*

on the occasion of the bathhouse opening, "The inauguration of winter bath-houses for the free use of the people is something of a novelty in any city in this country." In 1866 the city had built fourteen "floating" baths operating only during the summer months.

The renowned firm of Peabody and Stearns was hired to design the bathhouse. It opened in 1898 — an elegant three-story building with rusticated granite first floor, brick with terra cotta trim on the second and third floors, and a decorative iron cornice. There were separate entrances for the men and women leading into separate waiting rooms graciously detailed with mosaic floors and pink Knoxville



Dover Street Baths, ca. 1900. Open Collections Program. Courtesy of Harvard University Library, Social Museum Collection, Fogg Art Museum.



Dover Street Baths, 249 Dover Street, ca. 1963. Courtesy of The Bostonian Society/Old State House. Robert Bayard Severy photograph collection.

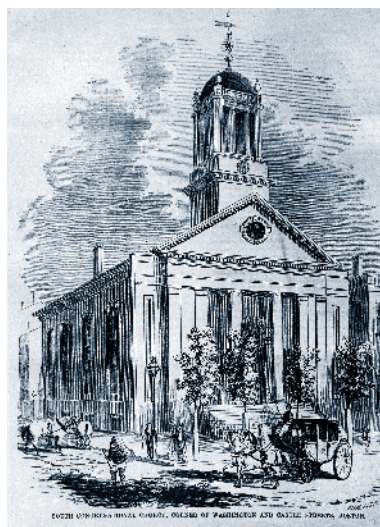
The New York Streets

☞ continued from page 5

marble walls. Two marble staircases led to the second floor where there were 30 showers and 3 bathtubs for the men and 11 showers and 6 bathtubs for the women. There was a two-bedroom apartment on the third floor, presumably for the superintendent. In the basement there was a laundry open to all for a modest cost. While the baths were free, one did pay one cent for towel and soap.

The Dover Street Baths survived into the 1960s; the land on which it stood is now on the grounds of Pine Street Inn.

THE COLUMBIA THEATRE 978 WASHINGTON STREET



South Congregational Church, corner of Washington and Castle (later Motte) Streets. From Gleason's Pictorial, August 20, 1853. Courtesy of Richard O. Card.



Columbia Theatre, ca. 1897. From the book Boston, Massachusetts, 1897.

In 1828 the Unitarian South Congregational Church was built at the corner of Castle and Washington Streets. When the parish moved to a new location on Union Park Street, the building served the Catholic community while the Cathedral of the Holy Cross was under construction. In 1891 the building was remodeled as a theater. Its redesign was Moorish in style, with detailed tile work at its entrance. Named the Columbia Theatre, the space provided a venue for both live theater and vaudeville. By 1939 it had become a "last run" movie house, and was demolished in 1957.

ANDREWS SCHOOL GENESEEE STREET

Most children in the New York Streets neighborhood went to the Andrews School through fourth grade. The school was built in 1896 and replaced an earlier school on the same site.



Andrews School, built 1896, photograph before 1929. Courtesy of the City of Boston Archives.

WELLS MEMORIAL TRADE CENTER 989 WASHINGTON STREET

According to the 1883 edition of the *King's Dictionary of Boston*, the center was established as a Christian charity in memory of the late Reverend E. M. P. Wells to promote the welfare of the workingman by furnishing reading rooms, libraries, instruction, and whatever else may contribute to their physiology and moral wellbeing. In the building there were classrooms, committee rooms, halls for lectures and "entertainments," a billiard room, a reading room, smoking room, and gymnasium. On the lower floor there was a "casino" which served as a coffee house. Activities at the club included debating, dramatic singing, and drawing classes. Wells Memorial had nearly 2000 members and is described in *The City Wilderness* as "the oldest and most important centre of social activity in the South End" and "the chief centre of working class interests in Boston."

WHAT'S LEFT?

When the city took possession of the New York Streets in 1955, nearly every building in the interior of the district was demolished. The only building still standing today is the former R. H. White Storehouse on Traveler (formerly Troy) Street, built in 1905 and designed by Peabody & Stearns. In 1897 the firm had designed a five-story stable building for the R. H. White Company, which stood next to the storehouse. Clad almost completely in sheet metal, with the whale mural on the side facing the highway, the eight-story building bears no indication it was designed by a major architectural firm. A self-storage facility, the 103-foot tall building was the Summerfield Furniture showroom and warehouse in the 1960s and '70s.

Calendar

- January 3 Twelfth Night Celebration
Wednesday, January 3
6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- February date to be announced
African American
History in Boston
With guest speaker
Representative
Byron Rushing
- April 5 Mass Transit in Boston's
South End, 150 Years of
Progressive Public
Transportation
With guest speaker
Bradley Clarke
- May Spring Ball
- June Annual Meeting

Another interesting survivor is an industrial building at 237 Albany Street, now a plumbing supply business. Built before 1867, it originally had a mansard roof. The 1867 Sanborn Insurance map shows the building was occupied by a tanner, currier, and leather rolling business. In 1885, it housed a currier, J.R. Furbush, and by 1895 Whittemore Bros. & Co. used the building for "shoe dressing" and the production



Commercial building, 237 Albany Street, Built ca. 1860(?). SEHS photo.

and bottling of ink. In 1909 the Carter Ink Co. used it as a storehouse, and by 1951 the building had lost its top floor and mansard roof.

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