



The South End Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02118-1402 — Vol. 39 No.1, Winter 2011

Dr. Merrill Moore Psychiatrist and Poet

BY ALISON BARNET

In anticipation of celebrating the 45th Anniversary of the South End Historical Society in 2011, we are pleased to publish this profile of a prominent resident of the past by longtime South Ender and author Alison Barnet.

IN 1935, WHEN DR. MERRILL Moore arrived at Boston City Hospital for his post-graduate training in neurology and psychiatry, he was already the author of 25,000 sonnets. His record, according to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, was one hundred in four hours.¹

“[H]e does not compose them, he improvises them,” commented writer/editor Louis Untermeyer. “He dictates them to his wife, jots them down in shorthand between cases, [and] forms them driving home during pauses in traffic while the lights change from red to green.”² Although many of Dr. Moore’s poems were not, strictly speaking, sonnets, they were always fourteen lines.

The young Moore family — wife and two sons (soon



Merrill Moore, 1938

to be three sons and a daughter) — bought a house close to the hospital. “I do have many happy memories of our life at 39 East Springfield Street, between 1935 and 1940,” his widow, Ann Leslie Moore, an artist, wrote to me half a century later. She remembered several people on East Springfield Street, some of whom I’d heard about or

knew (adults to me, children when she lived there), and told stories about drinking home-made wine with the owners of an Italian market on Washington Street. Merrill Moore had wanted to start a food co-op on East Springfield Street, my former landlady had once told me. Despite the Depression, those were evidently good times in a family-oriented, ethnically mixed South End neighborhood.

“My husband was a lot more gregarious than I am,” wrote Mrs. Moore. Indeed, a

Boston Post reporter noted in 1935, “Nobody else of my acquaintance knows as many people as Merrill Moore. He is on terms with perfectly equal friendliness with janitors and college professors, with street sweepers and college presidents. He is one of those extraordinary people who have

continued page 2 ➤

Poem by
Moore

I Think That It Is Later
Than You Think

It is possibly later than you think,
It is likely later than you think,
It is usually later than you think,
It is somewhat later than you think,
It is considerably later than you think,
It is a whole lot later than you think,
It is sometimes later than you think,
It is a good deal later than you think,
It is always later than you think,
It is by all odds later than you think,
It is surely later than you think,
It is certainly later than you think,
It is definitely later than you think,
It is undoubtedly later

than you think . . .

Dr. Merrill Moore, *M: One Thousand
Autobiographical Sonnets, 1938*

↳ continued from page 1

**Dr. Merrill Moore
Psychiatrist and Poet**

a way of being always at the center of events. If an accident happens on the street, fate will have it that Merrill Moore should be passing.”³

Merrill Moore was born in Tennessee in 1903. His father, John Trotwood Moore, was Tennessee’s Poet Laureate. Merrill graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1924 and Vanderbilt Medical School four years later. While an undergraduate, he became a member of the then unknown group of poets called The Fugitives. “Another

continued page 3 ↳



39 East Springfield in 1972

Extravaganza King Is the Subject of Her Book

ALISON BARNET IS A longtime South Ender and the author of the book *Extravaganza King: Robert Barnet and Boston Musical Theater*. In her book, Alison discusses the life of her great-grandfather Robert Barnet, a successful Boston sugar merchant who wrote and produced musical theater productions. He became so well

known for his musical theater that the First Corps of Cadets hired him to stage productions to raise money to build the armory, known today as the Park Plaza Castle. The lavish productions gained Barnet the nickname “Extravaganza King” and became so popular that many of the shows traveled the country.



Park Plaza Castle, Boston



↳ continued from page 2

member would bring to the meeting his small stint of poetry,” wrote poet/editor John Crowe Ransom, “but Moore would bring twenty, thirty, or fifty brand-new sonnets as his exhibit.”⁴

“Merrill Moore looks the part of both the poet and the earnest physician,” wrote a *Boston Post* reporter in 1935. “He is 32 years of age, six feet tall, not too thin, with a quiet bearing of the traditional Southern gentleman; sandy hair, inclined to red; a good listener, but with an earnestness of speech which is characteristic.”⁵

Moore’s first books of poetry were collections of poems from *The Fugitive* magazine: *The Noise That Time Makes* (1929) and *Six Sides to a Man* (1935), about which one reviewer wrote, “Merrill Moore’s *Six Sides to a Man* is the sort of book that touches off impassioned debate of the question, ‘Yes, but is it poetry?’” In 1938, Moore came out with a hefty volume called *M*, which stood, of course, for one thousand. If this wasn’t enough, Moore admitted it was “part of a larger work, still in progress” of 50,000 sonnets.⁶ Some critics later counted 100,000.

Moore was always in good intellectual company. Distinguished poets Louis Untermeyer, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and William Carlos Williams wrote introductions and epilogues for his books; famous artists Rockwell Kent and Edward Gorey illustrated them.

Moore’s subjects ranged from eels to afternoon naps to baths (“Water, what is water? What is soap?”) but didn’t seem to include the South End. It’s unlikely he meant the Washington Street El in “Streets in Dislocation, Stolid Snow...” but maybe he did.

On the snow-piles in the gutters of
Streets the Elevated ran above
And shook to their foundations momentarily [sic]
As if they quaked to fall apart and die.⁷

By the late 1930s, Moore was an assistant visiting neurologist and psychiatrist at City

continued page 6 ↳

2010 Annual Report

AS THE SOUTH END HISTORICAL SOCIETY continues its 44th year and I continue into my seventh year as its president, I wish to thank all of you, every member of the Society, for another year of participation and hard work. I also wish to thank our executive director Hope Shannon and the entire board of directors for their tireless efforts. The Society cannot perform its mission without their hard work and dedication, program planning and nighttime landmarks hearings. As I reflect on another year of economic uncertainty and the possibility of economic recovery, I am thankful that we remain fiscally strong. We continue to tighten our belts, but our ability to carry on the fight remains undeterred.

We appreciate that you have attended our programs and meetings and encouraged your friends and neighbors to do the same. Programs ranging from The Great Fire of Boston to a Victorian period Singing Duo broaden the depth of our understanding of the rich tradition of the South End that we champion.

We appreciate that you have participated in our fundraising efforts and have donated what you can. We are able once again to report a successful 42nd Annual House Tour in October. We will work diligently to reinvigorate the Annual Spring Event next May.

We appreciate that you have volunteered your time to our committees and projects. However, we must remain vigilant. While our continued presence at South End Landmarks Commission meetings has helped to preserve the rich fabric of the South End and has helped teach those around us about its economic and aesthetic value, the uncertainty of these times continues to create pressure to circumvent or ignore historically appropriate and sensitive solutions. We need to ask even more of your generosity.

I look forward to meeting with more of you this year at our functions, programs, and meetings. Thank you all again.

MICHAEL LEABMAN, PRESIDENT

Upcoming Events

JOIN US ON FEBRUARY 17 AT 6:30 P.M. AT 532 Massachusetts Avenue for "The Legacy of the Merchant Princes of Boston: The Philanthropy of the Nineteenth-Century Boston Brahmins," a presentation by Christopher Donohue. A light reception will follow. RSVP required. Please RSVP by calling (617) 536-4445 or emailing admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org.

42nd Annual House Tour Is a Tremendous Success

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO SUPPORTED OUR 42ND Annual House Tour. We exceeded our goal and could not have done it without your participation. Please visit our sponsors, listed on our website at www.southendhistoricalsociety.org/programs. A special thank you to Shambalai Landscapes for making our front garden look beautiful for the tour. They can be reached at (781) 894-1183, email: Shambalai.landscapes@verizon.net. A special thank you as well to C.A.D. Commonwealth Services, Inc. for painting our front stoop for the tour. They can be reached at (617) 795-7077.



536 Massachusetts Avenue

South End Historical Society Officers And Board of Directors

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Maryellen Hassell, First Vice President	Paul Odelson, Meetings and Functions Chair
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The SEHS Newsletter is just one benefit of membership in the Society; a nonprofit organization dedicated to recognizing, preserving, and recording the historical buildings, monuments, parks, and artifacts of Boston's South End and through advocacy, outreach, documentation, and education to preserve them for future generations.

Individual membership is \$25 per year, Family/Dual memberships are \$40, and opportunities to support the Society at various levels including Supporting (\$100), Patron (\$150) and Benefactor (\$250) are also available.

The opinions expressed by the contributors to the newsletter are not necessarily those of the SEHS. Ideas for stories and manuscripts are welcome. Unsolicited manuscripts submitted for possible publication and not used will be returned if they are accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Those interested in reprinting articles must obtain written permission from the editor.

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www.southendhistoricalsociety.org

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Design & Production:
Emily Domurad and Paul L. Seier

Contributors: Alison Barnet

Welcome to our New Members

Keith Aleo	Mark and Karen Kangas
Scott Beane	Stuart and Monique Landucci
Sean Burke	Dennis and Patti Langel
Tonja and Carlton Conley	William and Catherine Maro
Larry Cristofari	Kelsey McDonough
Jennifer and Ian Deason	John Milligan and Robert Gravis
Peter DiBiao	Elaine Murphy
Ellen Dolnansky and Don Ingber	Ray Pohl and Lisa Botticelli
Peter Erichsen and David Palumb	Judson and Aliza Samuels
Evan Gallivan	Mark Strickland
Barrie and Jon Gollinger	Karen and Stuart Watson
Rachel Goodrich	Randa Wilkinson
Paul and Donna Grogan	Gilbert and Karen Winn
Gregory Hanselman	Jonathan Wheeler
John Iarussi and Albert Wright	

Membership Renewal

PLEASE SEND YOUR MEMBERSHIP renewals for the year January 1, 2011 — December 31, 2011. Yearly single memberships are \$25 and family/dual memberships are \$40. Additional opportunities to support the society are also available at the \$100 Supporting, \$150 Patron, and \$250 Benefactor levels. Please send cash or check to The South End Historical Society, 532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02118.

Cast Iron Questions?

NEED HELP RESTORING, repairing, or replacing your cast-iron fence?

The South End Historical Society can help. Please call or email the SEHS office at (617) 536-4445 or admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org for more information.

1972 Prints Now Available

PICTURES FROM THE South End Historical Society's 1972 survey of all extant buildings are available for purchase. The images are digitized and available in JPEG format at 300 dpi.

If you are interested in purchasing an image or if you require another format or resolution, please contact us at (617) 536-4445 or email us at admin@southendhistoricalsociety.org.

181 West Brookline Street, a part of our 2010 House Tour, photographed in 1972 as part of the South End Streets Survey



Renaissance revival style

↳ continued from page 3

Hospital (now Boston Medical Center), a private practice, which, incidentally, was run by local historian Douglass Shand-Tucci's mother. Among famous patients seen there were poet Robert Lowell — the Lowells were family friends — and the theater director Joshua Logan. Both bipolar, they led Moore on a merry chase, although at times it was hard to say whose behavior was more manic, patient or doctor.

In his autobiography, *Josh, My Up and Down, In and Out Life*, published in 1976,⁸ Logan paints a largely unflattering portrait of Moore, writing: "During the consultation hours, M would lope in and autograph one of his books with an elaborate inscription to me... I avoided reading them, but I couldn't avoid his reciting them to me, which he did constantly...."

"Gee, Merrill, that's remarkable. I've never been able to write a play that way. It takes me month and months...."

"I should have seen that he was my personal Keystone Kop," wrote Logan. "I wondered if I was making a mistake allowing him to get so close to me and to my family."⁹

After *Life* magazine did a long story on Logan in 1949, which mentioned Moore, Moore became something of a celebrity. It was said his new patients included Nobel laureate playwright Eugene O'Neill.

The Moores left the South



Boston City Hospital main facade, late nineteenth century

End in 1940, moving into their waterfront summer cottage in the Squantum section of Quincy, which they gradually expanded into a twenty-three room, year-round home with a doctor's office suite downstairs. His oldest son Adam, also a doctor, lived in the house and practiced family medicine there into the late 1990s. Longtime South End resident Ron Geddes grew up two houses from the Moores, and he remembers Merrill Moore fondly. When Ron's brother came down with spinal meningitis, Moore saved his life.

Leaving behind filing cabinets full of poems, Merrill Moore died of cancer in 1957; he was only 54.

PHOTO CREDIT: HENRY W. WELLS, *Poet and Psychiatrist Merrill Moore, M.D., A Critical Portrait*, 1955

FOOTNOTES

¹ *Journal of the American Medical Association*, July 13, 1935.

² Louis Untermeyer, *Sewanee Review*, January 1935.

³ Andrew F. Donnell, "Man is Fact and Woman is Guess," *Boston Post*, February 10, 1935 (in *Six Sides to a Man*, 1935).

⁴ John Crowe Ransom, Foreword to *The Noise That Times Makes*, 1929, p. ix.

⁵ Andrew F. Donnell, "Man is Fact and Woman is Guess," *Boston Post*, February 10, 1935 (in *Six Sides to a Man*, 1935).

⁶ Merrill Moore, "Statement," *M*, 1938.

⁷ "Streets in Dislocation, Stolid Snow ...," *M*, p. 552.

⁸ Joshua Logan, *Josh: My Up and Down, In and Out Life*, 1976, p. 167.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 299.

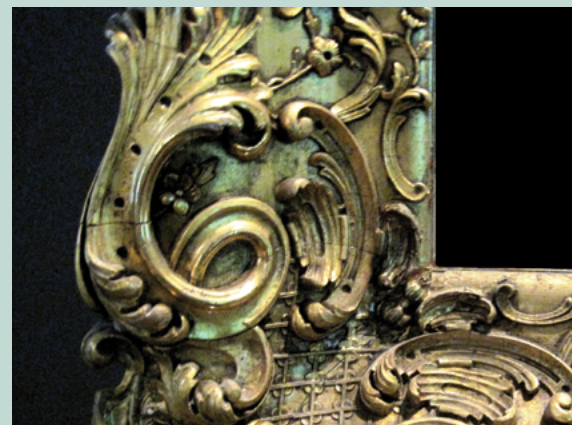
SEHS Thanks Members

THE SOUTH END HISTORICAL SOCIETY EXTENDS A special thanks to longtime members John Neale and Dr. Stephen Boswell. They recently bequeathed a legacy gift to the SEHS, helping to assure that our work continues and benefits future generations.



Dr. Stephen Boswell and John Neale

PAUL HAYES and Curt Fishman kindly donated a large framed mirror to the SEHS. It originally housed a picture and hung at the Warren Avenue Baptist Church. After a fire at the church in 1967, Paul and Curt rescued the frame from the building and refitted it with a mirror. The city tore the building down shortly after the fire. The site is now the home of Hayes Park. Thank you, Paul and Curt.



Hayes frame

Kahlil Gibran at work on the chandelier he designed for the opening of the Exhibition of New England Art at the Cyclorama, 1971

JEAN GIBRAN, A SOUTH END resident for fifty-two years, has generously donated an album containing reviews, articles, and statements about Kahlil Gibran, her late husband, an internationally known painter, sculptor, and craftsman. He was cousin to the poet, Gibran Kahlil Gibran, who immigrated to the South End with his family in 1895. Both Gibrans lived in what is now Chinatown and attended the Abraham Lincoln School. After his graduation from The English High, then on Warren Avenue, the sculptor attended Museum School and lived at 15 Fayette Street in Bay Village before moving to West Canton Street. His work graces several Boston sites, including Hayes Park where "West Canton Street Child" has presided over the center circular garden since 1992.





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