



The South End Historical Society NEWSLETTER

532 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02118-1402 — Vol. 35 No. 2, Summer

Save the date:

39th Annual South End House Tour

Saturday

October 20, 2007

10:00 a.m. to

5:00 p.m.



Summer in the South End: Sporting Activities

BY KAREN TENNEY



Playing, 511 Columbus Avenue, ca. 1930s. Photograph by Leslie Jones. Courtesy of Boston Public Library, Print Department.

It is summertime. Most everyone wants to be outside enjoying the fresh air, maybe playing a sport, certainly trying to stay cool. A hundred years ago it was summer in the city for most of the families in the South End. They mostly lived in cramped housing. There was no place on the shore to retreat to. The city streets and

the nearby waterfront became the places for kids to play and cool off. By the late 1890s more organized play and recreation were also to be found in the inner city, and there were the summer camps run by the various settlement houses in the South End offering youngsters a chance to spend several weeks or more in the country.

But let's back-track a bit and think

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Hitchcock family with bicycles, Union Park, ca. 1877. Boston Athenaeum.

Celebrating the 23rd Year of The South End Landmark District

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about the idea of “play” and recreating in the inner city. The importance of physical activity for those living in the inner city is not a new idea. As early as 1867 James Freeman Clarke, who was the pastor of the Church of the Disciples on West Brookline Street, was advocating the importance of recreation to protect youth from more sinful activities. The Reverend Charles A. Dickinson of the Berkeley Temple, in an article written in 1889 for the *Andover Review*, concluded that if sport and games could engage young men



Columbus Avenue Playground, early twentieth century. Courtesy of Boston Public Library, Print Department.

and keep them “from the streets and saloons” then every church should have a gymnasium and ball field.

But it was Edward Everett Hale, born in 1822, who led the charge on the importance of athletics and recreation for building good health and character (*Public Amusement for Poor and Rich*, Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Co., 1857). A group including Hale, Henry C. Wright, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson was known as the “Muscular Christians,” and they advocated sport and exercise as ideal recreation for urban dwellers.

Hale, a man of many talents including writer and

minister, served for a time as a minister at the South Congregational Church on Union Park Street and then as chaplain at Harvard. It was while at Harvard that he, in association with others, founded the Hale House settlement at 6 Garland Street. Functioning as neighborhood centers and offering social and educational services, the settlement houses were found throughout the South End. Others included Denison House at 93 Tyler Street, Lincoln House at 116–122 Shawmut, and the South End House (originally Andover House) founded by Robert A. Woods. Woods, who came to the South End in 1892, strongly believed in the importance of community and

saw the settlement houses as one way to bring a diverse ethnic and religious neighborhood together. And Woods, like Hale, concluded that sports and athletics were more desirable than billiard parlors and brothels. During the summer, several of the settlement houses offered summer camps.

SUMMER CAMP: CAMP HALE

Camp Hale was established in 1900 to serve the needs of the boys of the South End. The first camp was held on Onset Island in Buzzards Bay, the boys traveling by train and then boat to their destination. Daily activities included sailing, rowing, bathing, baseball, quoits, card games,

felling trees, and trips to the town of Onset. Fourteen boys attended the first session. The next year the camp moved to Squam Lake in New Hampshire, where it has remained to this day. Twenty-four boys attended camp in 1901, taking the train from North Station to Ashland, New Hampshire, where they debarked and hiked a mile to the steamboat “Kusump” for the trip down Little Squam to Squam Lake.

Camp Halers in the early years came primarily from Lincoln House and Hale House and also from the recreational programs at Holy Trinity Church, Our Lady of Pompeii, South Bay Union, and the South End Boys Club. For many of the South End boys this was their first time

out of the city.

Reading the reminiscences in the Camp Hale centennial book, one senses the extraordinary importance of this camp for South End boys. One camper, Chatta Anthony, who first went to Camp Hale in 1923, sold newspapers around Dover and Albany Street to raise the \$50 for ten weeks at camp. (The \$50 also included two pairs of knickers, two gray flannel shirts, two pairs of sneakers, and six pairs of black socks.) “Chatta once told his grandson, Bobby Nicholas, that when he was a camper he lived a wonderful life at Camp Hale and never wanted to leave. Once, he went so far as to hide up a tree, while the old mail boat, “Uncle Sam”, waited at the dock with all the other campers on board to start the trip for Boston....he was a bright lad, full of potential, but like many others in the South End, with few financial resources to take him beyond Grammar School and Commerce High School...” (*Camp Hale: A Century of Camping 1900–2000*, September 2000).

By 1952 Hale House had closed, followed by the closure of Lincoln House in 1964. Today United South End Settlements is the merger of South End House, Lincoln House, Hale House, and Harriet Tubman House. Camp Hale continues to flourish, operating out of the United South End Settlements, and last year had its largest enrollment to date.

Camp Hale was but one of the settlement house summer camps. There were several others including Camp Takahontay for girls run out of Lincoln House and Denison House’s Camp Denison in Georgetown.

BACK IN THE CITY

Boston had the Common, but as early as 1869 the city tried to close the space to baseball play, restricting boys’ sports to only a small area. Finding the space inadequate, residents presented the city council with a petition signed by 2,000 residents and stating that the approximately 30,000 young men represented were unable to afford expensive recreations, nor the time to go to the outskirts of the city to obtain exercise. This was the start of the “playground” movement. As one councilor pointed out, it would be wise to create play areas for boys “who would otherwise be back in the slums, or perhaps saloons, and other places qualifying themselves to be criminals, and entailing expense upon the city in reforming them.” (*City Council Proceedings*, May 10, 1877). So in 1877 \$2,780 was appropriated for “playgrounds for boys in the several sections of the city.”

Expenditure on playgrounds grew to \$180,000 in 1897. Mayor Quincy in an 1897 address stated “I know no direction in which the expenditure of a few hundred thousand dollars will do more for

the community through the healthful development of its children than by the judicious provision of properly located and equipped playgrounds.” By 1915 the city had 100 tennis courts, 3 toboggan slides, 8 beaches, 12 bathhouses, 9 gymnasiums and 40 playgrounds, including at least one playground and two bathhouses in the South End.

Playgrounds and summer camps in no way replaced stickball, handball, and other games played in the streets. Kahlil Gibran, longtime resident of West Canton Street, remembers playing handball on Tyler Street where he recalls being admonished for “shaking up all the crockery.” Ever the innovator, he also recounts making scooters for his buddies out of an orange crate on top of two-by-fours nailed to four-wheel roller skates from Morgan Memorial. (Kahlil also made model planes from raw balsa wood and was known as the “mad bomber.”) To cool off there were always the pool rooms with their dark rooms and ceiling fans. To help others cool off, he and a friend ran a “snow cone” business, selling shaved ice flavored with rose water.

BATHHOUSES

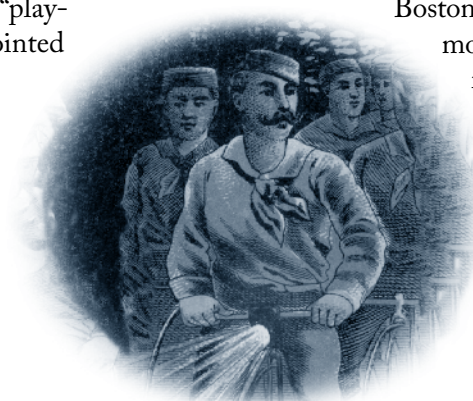
There were two public “bathing places” in the South End at the Dover Street Bridge. These were essentially “floating swimming baths” owned and operated by the city from June 1 through September 1. One was for men and the other for women. Hours for the men were 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays and 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. Sundays. The women’s bathhouse opened an hour later and closed an hour earlier.

A much fancier bathing/swimming facility exclusively for women and children was to be found at 42–56 St. Botolph Street. The Allen Gymnasium, Turkish Baths, and Swimming School was advertised in the 1898 Boston Directory as offering “a large, handsome swimming plunge.” Its hours were 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily except Sunday. Mary E. Allen was the proprietor.

BICYCLES

The bicycling craze swept the country in the mid-1890s and Boston was not immune. By 1895 there were more than 500 biking clubs and four million riders in the country. And even Victorian women could engage in this sport, riding on bikes that featured a “drop” frame. First came the boneshaker in 1868. In 1869 a velocipede riding school opened in the basement of a building owned by W.P. Sargent & Co. at 155 Tremont Street. It was fifteen laps to a half-mile. Demand was high, and this was one of many indoor riding schools in the city, including the Waverly Bicycle Riding School located in the Cyclorama building at 541 Tremont Street.

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Columbia Bicycle trade card, advertised by the Pope Manufacturing Company, ca. 1880s. Boston Athenaeum.

By the 1890s bikes were available everywhere. The 1898 *Boston Directory* lists 48 bicycle vendors, many at South End addresses. Pope not only sold bicycles but he also began manufacturing them. The Pope Manufacturing Co. at 223 Columbus Avenue advertised a variety of bikes including the Columbia, Hartford, Spalding, Rambler, and American.

In 1876 the bike was “the ordinary,” with its large front wheel and tiny rear wheel. Dangerous and uncontrollable, it was expensive at \$100. By the 1890s, when the biking craze peaked, the safety bicycle, with its equal-sized pneumatic tires, chain gear, and coaster brakes, had taken over. In 1878 Albert A. Pope organized the Boston Bicycle Club. Pope promoted the sport, and bike riding became popular not only for its recreational value but also as a cheap and fast way to get to work.



Grand Pavilion, South End Grounds, ca. 1887–1894. Courtesy of Boston Public Library, Print Department.

BASEBALL PARK

Between 1871–1914 the South End was home to a professional baseball park. Located at Columbus Avenue and Walpole Street, it was known as the Boston Base Ball Grounds, the South End Grounds, Walpole Street Grounds, the Union Baseball Grounds, and the Boston National League Baseball Park. The grandstand built in 1871 was demolished in 1887 for a new structure which was called the Grand Pavilion, with its double-decker grandstand and twin turrets. This grandstand was destroyed in

the Great Roxbury Fire of 1894 (in fact, the conflagration likely started under the Grand Pavilion) but a new stadium was erected in ten weeks. The team name changed several times; the first was the Boston Red Stockings, followed by the Boston Red Caps, the Beaneaters, the Doves, the Rustlers, and finally the Braves (now the Atlanta Braves). The Red Stockings dominated the first pro baseball league, winning four straight championships from 1872 to 1875. The franchise moved out of the South End in 1914, and left Boston for Milwaukee in 1953. Left

field was 250 feet and left-center field 445 feet. The stands seated 6,800.

Across the tracks from the South End Grounds, along Huntington Avenue, the newly formed American League built its stadium in 1901 for the Boston Americans, who later became the Pilgrims, then the Boston Red Sox. It was at this stadium that the first World Series game was played in 1903. The Huntington Avenue grounds were demolished in 1912 when the Red Sox moved to newly built Fenway Park. 📷

BY MATT STROBEL

Starting in the early 1870s, the city began requiring builders to obtain permits for all new buildings. The Building Department was established in 1871, and building acts were passed in 1871 and 1872. Following the 1872 fire, more stringent codes were passed in 1873 as part of the plan to build a safer city. The Inspectional Services Department is now the custodian of these records, and Boston is the first major city in the country to make building department records available on-line. Go to www.cityofboston.gov/isd, click on "Building Permit Search" and put in the street address; street number and street name have separate fields. There are some tricks: for example, for a Union Park address, type in "union pk"; for Union Park Street use "union park"; for streets or avenues, type in just the proper name, "tremont" or "columbus," for example.

Building permits list the architect, builder, building materials and type of building. The majority of the South End was built before permits were required, but building was still very active in the later 1870s, on Columbus Avenue and its side streets, for example. (The SEHS has date of construction and the name of early owners for most houses built before 1874. This information is not currently available on-line.) Permits for alterations and additions were recorded with the city, but only infrequently before about 1900. Included in the Inspectional Services records are accident reports, complaints, and other correspondence to and from building owners. Was my building ever a tenement house? When were my windows replaced? Has there ever been a fire in my house? Did they get a permit for that work? Search the permits to find out.

Building permits provide easy access to information about a building's history. For example, the curious passerby would notice the very unusual brickwork as well as the



590 Columbus Avenue, ca. 1971. South End Historical Society Collection.

delicately carved brownstone door lintels on a row of buildings at 586 to 592 Columbus Avenue; the panels appear to have been modeled on chess pieces. The original permit does not mention chess, but it does show that architect Russell Phillips designed the row in 1888, each with three apartments and a store on the ground floor. Also of interest on the permit is that the building was heated by "open fireplaces and stoves," not what you might expect for late nineteenth-century apartment buildings. Popular architectural styles at the time were the Queen Anne, Stick and Shingle, and these buildings reflect that influence. Phillips also designed a similar row of apartment buildings, though without the chess theme, at 6 to 18 Clarendon Street, built in 1889.

These documents often go beyond bricks and mortar to offer a glimpse at everyday life. It's surprisingly common to come across reports of fatal accidents or suicides, most of which were related to gas leaks. On April 6, 1925, a gas leak in the apartment house at 99 East Canton Street was reported by the building's janitor: "Philip O'Malley came out of Suite #1 where he lived, and notified Mrs. Frotman in Suite #3 that the gas was leaking. She got Mr. Rich the janitor, he went in and found the valve on a radiant fire heater open, also the key on the kitchen pendant cock, he shut them off and notified the police, they removed both to the City Hospital where Philip O'Malley was found dead, his mother Annie is still living. She is in the City Hospital yet." ❧



Crossing Tremont Street, at the intersection of Dover (now East Berkeley), ca. 1890s. These buildings were demolished in the 1960s; the building on the corner was Magullion's Liquor Store from the 1880s into the early twentieth century. South End Historical Society Collection.



Tremont Street, looking toward downtown, ca. 1890s. Magullion's is the first building on the right. South End Historical Society Collection.

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Editor's Note

Matt Strobel, executive director of the South End Historical Society, is leaving at the end of July. His keen interest in the history of the people and places of the South End has offered new insights and knowledge about the neighborhood. Personally, I would like to thank him for his invaluable contributions, guidance, and advice in helping me with the SEHS newsletters these past two years.



Waverley Bicycle Riding School, Cyclorama building, 541 Tremont Street, ca. 1890s. (South End Historical Society Collection.) Built in 1884, the building was designed to exhibit the Cyclorama of the Battle of Gettysburg. The castle entrance pictured here was removed ca. 1900 and replaced with the addition that still survives; extensive remodeling of that addition took place in the early 1920s. After featuring other cyclorama displays, the building was used for a wide range of sporting activities, including boxing and cycling. Painted on the right hand side: "Waverley Bicycles: Like Buying Gold Dollars at 85¢".



From the 1920s until the 1960s, the Cyclorama was home to the Boston Flower Exchange wholesale market and has been occupied by the Boston Center for the Arts since the early 1970s.



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